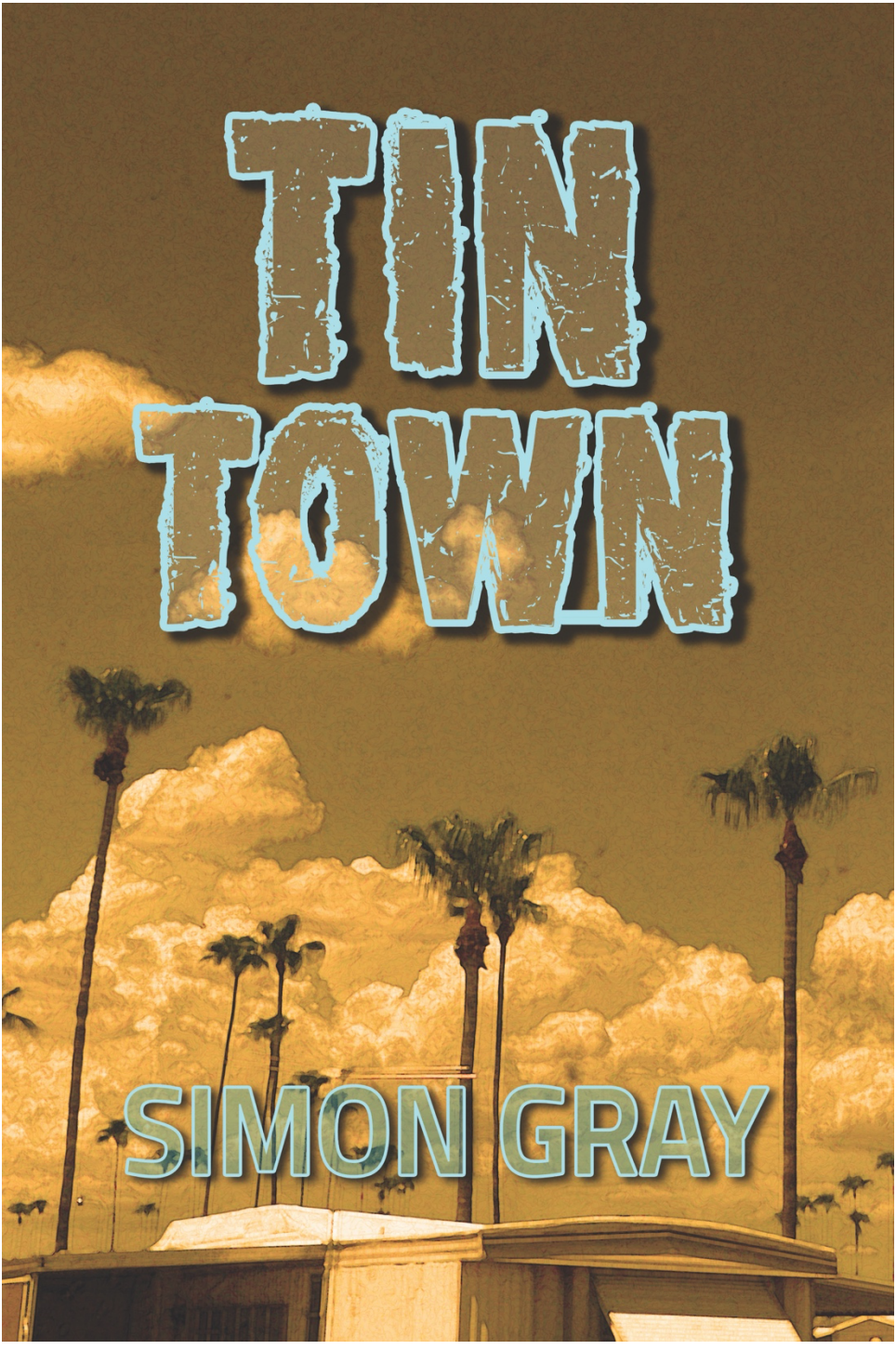

TIN
TOWN
SIMON GRAY

TIN TOWN

Simon Gray

This is a work of fiction.
Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.
Except, of course, human behavior is very real.
So, there's that.

ISBN-10: 0-9744912-2-5
ISBN-13: 978-0-9744912-2-6



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Heading east out of Phoenix Arizona...

Apache Boulevard shoots straight as an arrow through Tempe, Mesa and Apache Junction.

In Mesa, it's called Main Street. As it crosses into Apache Junction, it's called Apache Trail. And it runs to the foot of the Superstition Mountains.

In the town of Apache Junction, Apache Trail splits. One branch snakes northeast, and climbs up into the Superstitions. The other branch runs southeast, as Old West Highway. It continues along the foot of the mountains for a while. Then it also snakes up into the hills.

Apache Junction is about as far east as you can go, and still be considered part of the sprawling metropolis of Phoenix and its suburbs.

In the wild west days of the Arizona Territory, this was about as far into the mountains as white people would dare to venture.

The Superstitions were crawling with Apache Indians.

Unless you were one of the few daring prospectors, blinded by the promise of gold, this was the end of the trail.

Today, if you drive straight along Apache Boulevard, Main Street and then Apache Trail, and you don't turn northeast or southeast at the junction, you will drive right into the front gate of the Trail's End Mobile Ranch.



The Trail's End

Tuesday 8:18 a.m.

They're back again.

This time there's seven.
Two on the left-hand side, and five on the right.
And now, three new ones fly in. And three of them that were already there, get startled and fly away.

Why does one bird get startled and fly away when another bird, perched ten inches away from it, doesn't get startled, and doesn't fly away?

They're sitting on the old UHF antenna attached to Smart Woman's trailer. It's the classic metal skeleton fingers antenna that everyone had when I was growing up.

The birds seem to like the antenna. Is it because the size of the metal tubes? Are they the perfect circumference for their little tiny feet to wrap around? A larger bird, and its claws would overwrap, a smaller bird, and its claws might not reach all the way around.

Important questions.

Who am I kidding? Who gives a rat's pink ass if the circumference of an old UHF antenna is the perfect size for a specific kind of bird to wrap its little feet around? Who? Nobody! That's who!

Well… Maybe the birds care…

Mind your own business. Get back to work!

I live at the foot of the beautiful Superstition mountains. But the view out the small window of my addition, where I sit writing this, is looking west towards the vast sea of concrete and humanity that is Phoenix and the Valley of the Sun.

I can only see the Superstitions out of my small bedroom window when I wake up. Or catch glimpses out of my even smaller bathroom window above my head when I'm showering.

As I sit in the addition and look out of my small window to the world, these birds are my only entertainment.

Not that I need entertaining, more like—I need something to shift my focus to shut my brain off. So, the writing will come easier.

So, I go on Google Earth and look at the trailer park—sorry—'Mobile Ranch' from a bird's eye view.

The Trail's End Mobile Ranch was built at the end of the 1950's.

It is snugly nestled in the junction of where Apache Trail splits. Literally in the crotch of Apache Junction.

There are 300 sun battered aluminum mobile homes here. In various stages of decay.

Tin Town.

Our tin can homes radiate outward in neat tidy rows from the Trail's End clubhouse. Which backs up onto a nine-hole golf course.

The golf course, clubhouse, trailers and most of the residents are all approximately the same age.

The manager told me that back in the swinging 1960's, the Trail's End was a shiny happy place. Full of promise. Bronzed beauties, wearing polka dot bikinis and perfect smiles, danced and swilled martinis by the pool. Frank Sinatra crooned from the radio on the poolside bar. Fat T-bone steaks sizzled on the grill. Sleek glossy golf carts cruised down the golf course, piloted by well-toned smartly dressed young men.

Yeah.

It ain't like that no more.

On Google Earth you can see the regularly spaced rows of trailers, with their white coated roofs. Laid out like the bleached rib bones of some giant prehistoric mammal. Something big, that died here eons ago. All of its flesh picked clean by the desert animals. Its ghostly

skeleton, all that remains in a somber testament to the relentless power of the Arizona sun and the Sonoran Desert.

All of us here are bound together in a slow decaying orbit around eventual extinction.

This is, literally, the end of the trail for all of us.

Some of us live here because trailers are dirt cheap. And we're poor.

Some residents retired here long ago. They're living out their last days in the golden sunshine of Arizona.

The infrastructure in the park is disintegrating. There are constant plumbing and electrical failures because the pipes and wires are so old.

The grass and shrubs on the golf course are brown most of the year. The management can't afford the water bill. The course is only green during the monsoon season in late summer.

The withered thin brown stick-like residents blend in with the withered thin brown sticks of vegetation. All of us dry, dusty, and cracked with age.

All of us trying to survive, day to day, inside the bleached-out bones of some dead dinosaur.

Well…

Isn't that a pleasant thought?

My electric kettle just shut off. I must go and make myself a big mug of PG Tips.

Living the Dream

Wednesday 5:38 a.m.

If I was stranded on a desert island, the two things I would want to have with me would be PG Tips and San Pellegrino.

The Pellegrino is obvious. You can't drink sea water without a getting the salt out of it first. Pain in the ass. *Not* going to build a desalination plant. *Not*. So what? I'm lazy. Get over it. Just give me a bottle of something I can open and drink *right now*. But, it's also the vibe of the bottle.

I have sat and drank San Pellegrino at a street cafe in Rome, in the shadow of the Colosseum. I have sat and drank San Pellegrino on the beach at Pua'ena Point on the north shore of Oahu. When I surfed out the last wave of 1999, and surfed in the first wave of 2000. A bunch of strangers, bare ass naked on our boards, bonfires on the beach. And I drank San Pellegrino.

See what I mean? It's the vibe. It's all vibe. Well, it's mostly vibe, I actually like the mineral taste of San Pellegrino over any other bottled water.

So, there's that.

Where was I—

Oh yeah, back to the important thing: PG Tips.

Yes, this would be a little trickier to work out on a desert island. Boiling water. Having fresh cold milk to put in it. OK, OK. But just forget

about all the monkey business that has to go into it. Just fast forward to the moment: Sitting on the beach as the sun rises. All by myself. Almost Johnny Depp like when he gets marooned in Pirates of the Caribbean. Except instead of having rum buried, I have PG Tips. Oh, yeah, and a solar powered tea kettle. And a cow?

Never mind!

Stay with the image. OK, here we go…

Winston lifts his gaze from the tidal pool at his feet, and lets the warmth of the rising sun wash across his face. He wraps his hands around his steaming mug of PG Tips, as the amber morning light wraps around the bark of the palm trees. The palm's lush green fronds, like broad flat hands, dip slowly. The long flat fingers dangling playfully in the breeze. And every time they dip, a transparent coat of rosy morning sun ripples across the green.

Delicate waves lap soothingly over his toes. The pungent trade winds from the south tousle his long, but amazing looking hair. Amazing, because he has no soap or brush, and yet he still looks like a GQ model. Winston lifts his delicious mug of PG Tips to his lips, and drinks deeply. Ahh… Gone are the days of sweltering in the Arizona heat. Far away now, is that horrible tin can home. That mouse infested sardine can home. Now he is free! Free to live! Free to be happy again!

He lifts his mug of delicious tea to his lips again—just as the clanking behemoth of a recycling truck lurches around the corner, and squeals to a stop.

Wait?! What!?!?

Coitus interruptus.

That'll kill a moment, won't it?

I mean, if I drove a recycling truck for the town of Apache Junction, I would have to get up at like—what? Four in the morning?

Do they seriously think people like being roused out of their sleep at this ungodly hour?

I really am all over the place this morning.
I'm avoiding.

Roland goes to see Tom, to get help relating to Olivia.
That's what I am trying to write.
Roland goes to see Tom.

I'm trying to ghostwrite a book.

I'm working with a lady who's been writing this book about Irish people. She showed me what she had, and I thought, hey, what the hell. This could be fun. So, I'm writing some dialogue for her characters.

I'm not getting paid for this. I'm doing it on the off chance that we will sell a few copies, and I might be able to make enough off this thing to buy a bottle of real whisky. And maybe a nice cigar.

Beyond that, I really have no great expectations.

But it does give me something to occupy my mind while I wait to hear if Social Security is going to approve my application for Disability Benefits.

DISABILITY REPORT - ADULT
Form SSA-3368-BK

NAME: *Winston Smith*
ADRESS: *Lot 27, Trail's End Mobile Ranch, Apache Junction, AZ*
D.O.B.: *Sept 14 1956*
Page 7
SECTION 3 -REMARKS

(Use this section to add any information you did not have space for in other parts of the form.)

Dear Social Security,

I hate my body.

I used to say that it hated me.

But now I see that I was living in denial of my own true feelings.

I just hate being a human being.

This whole mortal flesh/bag of bones and blood thing is an ill-conceived concept. It's fraught with hidden flaws that eventually crop up and severely impact our 'Golden Years'.

I used to be a painter.

I liked painting.

I constantly met new people and got paid to make their lives a little bit brighter. More cheerful. A fresh new coat. It was very rewarding work.

It also wore out my frail assemblage of bones and muscles.

Some days I can't walk very well. I stumble. I fall into things.

I can't carry anything heavier than twelve pack.

I don't sleep well because my legs cramp throughout the night. It wakes me up and I have to stand and put pressure on my legs to stop the cramping.

If I don't get this Disability Benefit, I'm probably going to have to go live in a cardboard box under a bridge. And become another statistic.

Do you really want that on your conscience?

Please. Give me the money.

I've been having problems with my WIFI.

When I moved into the trailer, I bought a new modem and router and set them up.

Everything worked great for a couple of months. Then it started to take longer and longer for my computer to connect to the internet. I would open network preferences and run diagnostics. I could see that it had connected through the router, but was stalled at ISP.

So, I reset the router and the modem I changed the SSID on the router and the passcode. And it worked like new again. For a few days.

Now it's messing up again.

It's like it stalls, just before connecting to the provider.

Eventually it does go through. In a few seconds. Sometimes, a few minutes.

It's like it's waiting for someone, somewhere, to throw a switch and allow me to connect through.

Weird.

The birds are all gone now. And I have finished my tea, and effectively pissed away twenty minutes.

OK. Roland goes to see Tom, to get help relating to Olivia.

Oh, screw it. I'm going to get a bowl of cereal.

Big Winner

Wednesday 7:07 a.m.

That's better.
Now I'm going to check the Mega Millions.

It's only like, thirty million this time. But hey, that's thirty million more than I had yesterday. Right?

I like to watch the video of the lottery drawing online. Because then, if I win, it will be with a little more pageantry and flourish. Rather than handing in my ticket at the Circle K on the corner. And watching the facial expression of the teenager behind the counter go from surprise and joy, to plotting my death so he can steal my ticket.

The 'live' drawing has a soundtrack. And colored lights, and a sexy woman. Oh, sorry. I mean a *very intelligent*, and probably *emotionally and spiritually* balanced woman. Who just might have a Doctorate in Microbiology for all I know. Except that right now, she's wearing a Frederick's of Hollywood type of gown. With a plunging neckline, and slits all the way up to her waist. The perfectly round and symmetrical globes of her breasts mostly exposed.

She flips the lever and catches the first ball:
'Forty-two!'

Shit!

So, I guess I am not going to swing over to Scottsdale Mercedes this afternoon, and pick out my shiny new car.

Well that just buggers all of my afternoon plans.

And look at these people. I mean seriously. This well-dressed smiling guy with the long slender microphone. And perfect rows of white teeth. He's probably got buckets of money. At least enough to live on. Nice modest house in the suburbs. Matching stainless steel appliances and granite counter tops. Refrigerator and pantry full of food. No mice in the walls.

And look at her. I'll bet she lives in a fabulous loft with sweeping panoramic views. And her boyfriend is an investment banker who drives a Cadillac Escalade. And has a penis that is just the right girth and length to fill her completely without stretching. Well maybe just a little, but that's OK.

They don't live in a tin can. *They* don't live in a 1965 mobile home that's worth about a thousand dollars. That I paid four thousand dollars for. And they have *jobs*. *They* aren't desperately trying to get disability because they have nerve root impingement. (Provable by MRI). *They* didn't have to spend the first three months in their wonderful new tin can home, tearing out two walls and a ceiling. Trying to find and block all the entrances that the mice were using to get into the trailer. No!

Oh, screw it. I'm going to have a shower and go work on my bamboo planters. And hope that my neighbor doesn't toddle across the street again and tell me I'm doing it all wrong.

Pure Irish

Thursday 6:48 pm.

OK, now there are four. Two on the left and two on the right. The ones on the left are about eight inches apart. And the ones on the right—

Stop it! Stop it! Stop it! Get back to work!

I don't want to ghostwrite today.

I want to work on my own book. This book.

It taunts me.

It peeks out, from the folder labeled 'Tin Town', on my desktop.

It sticks out its tongue at me. It sticks its thumbs in its ears and wags its fingers: *"Nah, nah, nah, nah, you could be over here writing things like, dibble, dabble, smooper smoo. But yer not! How's it going over there? In that other folder, huh? Having fun with Roland?"*

My neighbor from around the corner was walking early this morning when I stepped out my front door with my tea.

I call her Colleen.

I used to call her Delusionia, but I think Colleen is a much better fit. And besides, she would *really, really, really love it* if she were actually called Colleen.

Definition: ***colleen*** *- noun*
1. an Irish word for girl
2. an Irish girl
Word Origin: from Irish Gaelic 'cailín'
- a girl, a young unmarried woman.

"Good morning neighbor, I see you're out with your morning tea as usual. I've already had my tea. You know it's just what we Irish do!" (big smile).

Yeah, except, I was born in England. Not Ireland.
Which I have told you. Several times.

See, Colleen is 'Disney Irish'.

She grew up in the great wide American Midwest with a father who told them that their family was Irish. Apparently, the whole family has red hair. And—well—let's just start there.

Red hair came into the UK from Scandinavia.

Vikings. Right?

Those fierce little bastards who sailed across the North Sea in those little boats. And walked across the UK. Killing the men, raping the women, and changing the gene pool. And they ended up in western Ireland and Scotland. Where they laid about for a few hundred years making lots of little red headed babies.

I'm talking Eric the Red. Right? 'The Red'.

But:

Red hair did not originate in Scandinavia.

It originated in central Asia.

Yes, that's right. As in Chinese people.

There are Chinese mummies with long flowing red hair. Perfectly preserved.

Chinese.

Mutations in the melanocortin 1 receptor (MC1R) gene lead to red or auburn hair. More pheomelanin than eumelanin in the skin. The pale skin of red-headed people produces vitamin D more efficiently from the low levels of sunlight. This strengthens their bones and makes women more likely to survive pregnancy and childbirth.

It's great, yes, it's great to be a red headed woman.

It's awesome. They're beautiful.

But they are not all *Irish*.

That's the point.

So, Colleen came by to tell me that we have a new president.

"Did you hear that?" she asks.

No Colleen, I live under a rock and have no eyes or ears.

Colleen and The Mayor *do not* get along at all.

That would be Jacob J. Smoodelheimer the Third.

'Jake'.

I call him The Mayor.

The Mayor of Tin Town.

The Mayor of all of us here, livin in our tin can homes.

The Mayor lives catty-corner to me, with his wife, who has cancer. They live in the double-wide with all the white plastic diagonal lattice panels all over the front.

It's one of the five trailers I can see from my little window.

He and his wife have lived there for donkey's years. They ain't got shit: money/teeth/hair…

Everyone in the park who drinks beer, leaves their cans for The Mayor in plastic bags at the end of their driveways. And every night, he goes cruising around on his adult tricycle, collecting cans. He has a large plastic trash can strapped to the ass end of his bike. He wheels over and swings the bags into the can behind him. Then cycles back home.

I can hear him over there at night, crushing cans. He uses a small sledge hammer. I don't know why. But, when he mashes the cans, it makes a very unique sound: like brittle dinosaur bones snapping under an advancing glacier.

Anyway, The Mayor wheeled by last night, to give me his perspective on the recent presidential election.

"I know why people voted for him," he grins, "they was votin for 'anything else'. That's why."

"Anything other than—"

"Business as usual. We're all sick and tired of it. Career politicians, same old bullshit, over and over. You give 'em a choice between that, and anything else… '*Anything else*' is gonna win."

"Regardless of the person?"

"Oh, it don't matter if it's an actual person, or a steaming pile of dog shit. People gonna vote for it, just because it's something else."

"Your Honor, it's really none of my— "

"We wasn't *allowed* to cast a vote of no confidence," he rolls right over me, "not allowed to reject the entire ballot. Send them back to find *all new candidates*, was we? We ain't got that goddamn freedom in the land of the free."

I don't respond. I just hand him my white plastic grocery bag full of cans, "Here's my contribution to the cause."

He shakes his head, "At least the bullshittin is done. We can all get back to what we was a-doing before."

He cycles off on his nightly quest.

What was I a-doing?

Oh yeah, Colleen.

One time, she was talking to me about her 'Irish' heritage. She told me: "My daughters and I have kilts made with our family tartan."

"*Family* tartan? I don't believe there are 'family' tartans in Ireland. I think you may be confused with Scotland."

"No, silly," she flapped her hand at me, "*Irish* tartan from my *Irish* family."

My father is Scottish.

We can trace his family back to 1735 in one graveyard. His family has a tartan. Scottish families have *family* tartans. Irish families have *county* tartans. That is, all the families from a specific county claim that *county's* tartan as theirs.

"What's your Irish family name?" I asked her.

"Devine," she beamed. "Like the movie. You know… 'Waking Ned Devine'? What else? I mean look at me, right? Aren't I just divine?"

I smiled appropriately. "What *county* did your ancestors come from?"

"Donegal."

"And what *pattern* is your 'family' tartan?"

"Donegal."

"So, you have the *county* tartan Donegal for your *family* tartan. Like all the other families in County Donegal. Because in Ireland, families wear *county* tartans. They don't have specific unique *family* tartans."

"Poor silly Winston. You're from there, and I have to explain it to you. We have a *family* tartan."

"Yes, your *family* tartan is the *county* tartan of County Donegal. *Every* family in County Donegal has the *same* tartan as your family."

"No, they don't! *God* you're so *slow*! It's really very simple, it's our *family* tartan: Donegal."

"Of course, it's your *family* tartan. It's *every* family's tartan in County Donegal."

"No, it's not! It's ours! It's our *family* tartan."

"Then why is it called 'Donegal' after the county, and not 'Devine' after your family?"

She smiled at me and shook her head, "You just can't admit when you're wrong can you?"

I'm not a violent man. I don't hit people. I think it's childish. And I see absolutely no gain in it.

But, dammit Colleen…

So, Colleen, the 'Irish-American' has actually been to Ireland.

Once.

For 6 days.

So, she knows all about it.

Certainly, more than me. It appears.

But Colleen is not 'Irish-American'.

Because, an 'Irish-American' would be someone who was born in Ireland, then emigrates to America. So, if you're born in America, and your Aunt Rosemary tells you that you have Irish ancestors, and you book a trip to Ireland to go see the land of your ancestors… Then that would make you 'American-Irish', right? I mean, since you weren't born there.

So, Colleen went to Ireland. Like so many of these 'American-Irish'. Off they go. Off they go to Ireland.

And when they get there, they saunter about the place as though it was 'Irish World' at Disneyland.

They look at all the quaint 'Irish' things. And they say, "Top O' the mornin' to ya," to the embarrassed Irish people. Who nod and smile and skittle away as fast as possible.

And then these 'American-Irish'—well—they buy a little book of Celtic Mythology. At a little out-of-the-way bookstore that they just 'found' when they turned down a back street.

Yes, they buy a book on ancient myths of 'Old-e Ireland-e'. And they take their book, (that was written in Australia, by a man whose grandmother told him he was Irish, because he has red hair, so his ancestors might actually be from Denmark. Or China.) And they take said book, (which was printed in Sri Lanka), to the nearest pub. But only if it looks like a traditional Old-e 'Irish-e' pub. Like the ones they saw on the Travel Channel. And not a clean, new modern place. Where Irish people actually go.

To have a drink to get away from the tourists.

So, they take their book and they go and have a little sit down. And a pint of Guinness. And they take a selfie and post it on Facebook: *"Look! That's me, in a real traditional Old-e Irish-e pub, having a Guinness. And reading a book about old Celtic myths! God! I am so Irish!"*

And they make sure that they turn the glass towards the camera so everyone can see that it actually has a Guinness logo on the side. Otherwise, the picture could have been taken in some dump in Hoboken.

Which is all good and fine, until their friend Rachel points out that those glasses are all over the place. Even the Applebee's in Des Moines, Iowa serves Guinness in a Guinness glass, fer crying out loud.

But never mind that! They were there!

They have the plane ticket to prove it!

Pecking Order

Friday 7:04 a.m.

No birds yet.

But the sun is up.

It's gleaming off Smart Woman's aluminum awning across the street.

It is actually a pleasant moment. With the rows of palm trees disappearing into the distance.

I'm sitting outside with my tea.

Grumpy comes walking up with Snack, her tiny dog. She looks at the boxes I made out of the pallets, with the bamboo sticking out of them.

"Well, that's different," she scrunches up her nose.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it's different."

I didn't ask you 'what did you just say', I asked you, 'what did you mean by what you just said.'

Grumpy is from Wisconsin. I've heard other people from Wisconsin say *'that's different'*.

Heard it often. Still not sure what it means.

Does she not like my planters, but won't say that to avoid conflict?
Or—
Does she like my planters but can't allow herself to get too excited about them?

So, 'different' is a safe neutral position to take.
The non-emotional response.

Grumpy toddles off, tugging Snack along behind her.

Back to my quiet cup of tea.

Now the birds are starting to show up.

There's eight of them. All flew in together, and all sitting on the right-hand side.

Do they choose sides when they're landing?
Do they think: *'Oh, everyone's over there. So, I'll go over there too.'*
Or is there a few who go: *'I'm not going over there with that bunch! Screw them, I'll go sit over there on the left!'*

Is this clump of eight all one family? Are they all females gathering on the antenna and munching bugs? And yammering on about whatever female birds on antennas munching bugs yammer on about?

Or, is this like the Coffee Casa on Apache Trail? Where ordinary boring individuals clump in the early morning, presenting themselves as amazingly interesting/intellectuals/writers. Lugging in laptops and swilling their decaf soy lattes in the hopes of snagging a sex partner?

"You might enjoy my latest manuscript. Perhaps we could go back to my place, and rub our cloaca together?"

'European-Americans'

Sunday 8:12 a.m.

I was thinking about the Irish-American thing last night. Is there any other country that does this?

I mean, if you were born in Pakistan, but your parents immigrated from America, do they call you American-Pakistani?

If you were born in Brazil, but your ancestors emigrated from Britain, does the Brazilian government refer to you as 'English-Brazilian'?

Is there any other country that does this? That divides up its own people according to their ancestral origins? And names them as being in specific groups that have official government classifications?

And by that, I mean - *'Engage in institutionalized racism'*?

Because that is exactly what it is.

Think about this: We have 'African-Americans' and 'Asian-Americans'.

Why is there no classification of 'European-Americans', or 'White-Americans'?

Why would every other race and nationality get a specific classification, except the white Americans of European descent? Unless, of course, the white Americans of European descent felt like they were superior to everyone else, and didn't need a specific classification?

Or—just the simplest of all classifications—the one that usually appears at the top of the list on official government forms: 'White'.

To my mind, this flies right in the face of the concept of a 'United' States. And the trouble it causes has been pretty obvious over the decades.

America was started by the British in 1607. The first lasting English settlement was made at Jamestown, Virginia. John Smith, John Rolfe and a few other greedy bastards made it profitable by planting tobacco.

The Pilgrims and the Puritans, and the colony on Rhode Island: all English. And yes, there were others from other countries that settled here/stole land/killed natives/stole natural resources. The Dutch, the French, the Germans, and so on. But, at the end of the 'Colonial' period, America won its independence from: Great Britain.

So, the English started America. The *first* concept. And owned and operated it for about a hundred years. Until it was surrendered to the Americans: The bastard sons and daughters of the bastard English.

Now here's the thing: The British are bastards.

Assholes. The world's biggest egotistical assholes. And they have a lot to atone for. Just ask the people of any country they have helped/conquered/owned/occupied/robbed blind.

And, the British, have always thought that their country was better than any other country in the world.

In what way?

In *all* ways!

Which is the mentality they passed onto their bastard sons and daughters: The Americans.

And then, when the bastard sons and daughters of England rebelled against their parents, (like angry rebellious teenagers do), and they won their freedom, they added their second mentality: We're free!

And so, the two defining qualities of these brand new 'Americans' became: "We're free!" and, "We're better than everyone else!"

Fast forward 241 years or so, and you still have a small percentage of angry 'Merkans', with the emotional maturity of teenagers, screaming: "We're free!" And, "We're better than everyone else!"

(Another thought)

When I lived in Cornwall, I met a lad named Nick. He owns a moving company. I used to go down the pub on Saturday nights to have a chat and a bevvy with Nick. We both had busy lives. So, Saturday night was really the only time we could count on seeing each other, and catching up.

Well, Nick had this friend named Sam. And every Saturday, for a year, Sam would show up too. And Sam would stand about, sipping on his pint of Carling, presenting himself to any and all females present, as a viable option for mating. This availability was advertised by his bright green football shirt.

Obviously, he thought it was his 'pull' shirt.

In the year that I lived there, I never saw Sam pull. But every time I did see Sam: At least once a week. For 52 weeks. He was *always* wearing that bright green shirt.

And so, I ask you this: If I, as a heterosexual man, who is stereotypically *not* supposed to notice fashion, *not* supposed to notice, for instance, what shirt a person wears *every* Saturday night to the same pub—and yet—I *do* notice it…

Do you think that said females in said pub, that Sam was presenting himself to, *every* Saturday night…? Do you think *they* noticed?

Oh, hell yeah!

"Well Minge, here we are again. Saturday night at the pub. And there's 'Sad Sam', as usual. In his bright green football shirt. The poor sad wanker."

"I know Fanny. Is he mental or what? I mean who would shag that?"

My point is this: At some time, in our broad trajectory through our lives, we need to look at what the hell we are actually doing. And ask ourselves, honestly: *"Is this working for me?"*

More Important Things

Sunday 7:32 a.m.

OK, I have just about had it with this WIFI thing.

I found a new AirPort card on eBay, and bought it and put it in my computer. Thinking it was the computer's fault that it has problems connecting to the net.

I have two computers. Two iMacs. One 21 inch and one 27 inch. Both of them are older computers, that I got for next to nothing. And I have been slowly replacing parts on them as they break. So, basically, two Frankenstein computers—Frankenputers. But only the 21 inch one is working right now. The other one sits in a box, waiting for a new hard drive. And a couple of other things I can't remember.

So, I got a new AirPort card for the 21-inch Frankenputer.

And yeah, it worked great for a few days. Just like new. Just like the first couple of months after I moved in.

And now it's back to being slow to connect.

Wtf?

Whatever. I can't waste any more time or money on this shit.

I need to write.

I need to make some damn money here. Somehow.

The goal here is to stay moderately drunk until I die.
That requires a steady income.

It's for medicinal purposes.
Really.

I need to medicate myself to soften the blow of all the 'wisdom' that gets thrown at me by my neighbors/the grocery store checkout lady/anyone else I make the fatal mistake of opening up to/standing too close to/hovering too long in the wrong spot.

I hate that shit.

Here's the thing about wisdom:

Axiom:
You have to <u>have</u> wisdom,
in order to share it.

Like yesterday:

Trying to extract myself from a mindless/going nowhere fast conversation with Colleen, my exit line was: "Well, see you later. I need to go home now and try to figure out what I'm going to do if I don't get disability."

"Well, you know…" she smiles. "God doesn't give us anything we can't handle."

WTF?

There are at least six things askew in that statement:

First - That's not wisdom. That's personal religious beliefs.

Second - The existence of a universal God is negated by the existence so many *different kinds* of religious beliefs.

Third - You are taking my reality, and filtering it through *your personal beliefs*. And then expecting me to accept your *filtered version* of my reality, over *my own actual reality*.

Fourth - Are you trying to tell me that God gave my aunt ovarian cancer because he knew that my uncle could handle watching her waste away and die?

Fifth - Are you trying to tell me that God made me disabled because he knew I could handle it? Or that God had a hand in making them deny my claim on the first go round, because he thinks I can handle that?

Sixth - What the hell? What the actual hell?

I should just keep my damn mouth shut.

Especially around Colleen.

Any time I tell her something, she incorrectly assumes that I am asking for her advice.

What is up with that?

And then, I'm not allowed to point out *her* behavior, because she will see that as *me* being rude to *her*.

The truth is, if anyone listens to Colleen for like eleven seconds, you realize that she's mentally slow.

Why would anyone ask a mentally slow person for *any* advice?

But we aren't allowed to point that out either.

Because it might hurt their feelings.

Instead, we are supposed to force ourselves to listen to their 'advice'. And allow them to insult our intelligence.

Because that is the 'polite' thing to do.

Screw that.

Screw every small tiny piece of that shit.

Anywho, I have more important things to think about.

I'm trying to find the right voice for the Irish book.

A voice that can explain to the reader what the character is thinking and feeling. And in doing so, try to direct how the reader should feel about the character, in that moment.

I don't want to step outside the characters. Be a fly on the wall, and explain to the reader what's going on. And how the reader should feel about it.

To me, that insults the reader's intelligence.

If you're an 18 to 45-year-old college educated woman, which is the largest demographic of novel readers in the country, and the demographic that I am trying—desperately—to write this damn romance novel/best-seller/'Irish' dumpster fire for. Then I don't want to insult your intelligence.

I want to stay inside the characters, and show you how they are thinking from the inside. And when *they* realize things.

I don't want to narrate, or try to direct your thoughts or feelings about the characters. I want you to make up your own mind. Feel how *you* want to feel about them.

Realize what *they* realize, *when* they realize it.

But…

Maybe the book needs to appeal to the Disney movie watching/pulp romance novel reading/Bud Lite/NasCar/recliner sofa

crowd, who kinda need to have things shoved in their face or they might miss them. Hmmm.

That's a little too close to 'Merkansplaining' for me.

'Merkansplaining' is the same thing as 'Mansplaining', but with an international flair:

Definition:
*'**Merkansplaining**:*
When a 'Merkan' tries to splain,
to everyone else in the world,
something,
that everyone else in the world,
already comprehends better
than the Merkan does.

It's talking down to your reader.

But it's absolutely necessary if your reader is simple-minded. They *might* miss the connection. You *have* to dumb it down for them.

A lot of people go to Disney movies. A lot of people read romance novels.

(Note to self: Google which is the larger percentage of readers.)

But ultimately, it is an issue of *perception*. Specifically, the reader's *rate of perception.*

If you're college educated, and in the work force, and have some life experience, (Basically been screwed over/talked down to/fought back/lied to/cheated on/got revenge, etc.), then I think, that your *rate of*

perception will be quick. And that means that you might prefer the slow reveal. So, you can do your own figuring out. Feel like you are part of the evolution of the story.

But…

If more stupid people buy books than intelligent people… I'm sorry, I mean if more people *whose rate of perception is slow*, buy books than people *whose rate of perception is quick*… Then sorry… I'm gonna have to dumb it down and take the cash.

Did I tell you?
The goal here is to stay moderately drunk until I die.

That requires a steady income.

The Dude

Tuesday 4:42 PM

"Show me, Mister Winston. Show me," The Dude is pushing me out of the way so he can look at the computer screen.

The Dude doesn't have internet in his tin can. He has an old laptop. He totes it over to the clubhouse, when he wants to look something up. And uses the free internet.

The Dude doesn't have much to his name, really.

But he does have an open mind.

Which makes him great to hang out with.

We're sitting by the windows in the Arizona room, on the back side of the old clubhouse. The router in the clubhouse is ancient. You get the best signal if you basically sit right under the damn thing.

"Lemmee lookit here," he squints his eyes at the page I have open.

The Dude doesn't really look much like Jeff Bridges. But, if you met him, you would call him 'The Dude' right away. He just has that Big Lebowski manner about himself. And, he often wears a flannel bathrobe over his T-shirt and shorts. And flip-flops.

Which is his exact attire today.

I don't know if The Dude has ever seen 'The Big Lebowski'. Or, if he even knows who Jeff Bridges is.

I keep dropping lines from the movie every once in a while, like: 'That rug really pulled the room together'. And, 'The Chinaman is not the issue.' But he doesn't respond.

The thing is: His mannerisms are so 'Dudish'. The way he swings his head around and gives you that semi-vacant stare. It's truly uncanny.

It's the real 'Dude' in real life.

I call him 'Dude'. But I don't think he realizes why.

"So, what is this?" he's scanning the screen.

"This is the Urban Dictionary, Dude. And this is the page on 'Merkans."

"Oh yeah. 'Cause you were gonna explain."

"Now this is insulting and derogatory. But this is what the term actually means."

"OK. OK. So," he reads aloud, "Merkan: Derogatory term for a citizen of the United States of America. Sometimes spelled 'm-e-r-c-a-n'. Quote, 'Your average merkan is about as intelligent as a brick.'"

He snorts, "Ha! I love it"

"You're not offended?"

"Fuck no," He continues to read, "Merkan, a super patriotic American, at least 1/4 Borg, Sith, or Romulan."

"Borg. That's my favorite analogy. Hive mentality."

"So, Mister Winston," his head bobs up and down excitedly, "when you're talking about 'Merkans', you're basically talking about the knuckle draggers?"

"Some might say ignorant, or uneducated…"

He snorts again, "No, it's perfect. That super patriotic pile of booger eaters. Ha! Merka for the Merkans."

"When I talk about Merkans, Dude, I'm talking about a very small percentage of Americans. I'm not talking about *all* Americans. Because it's obvious that the majority of American citizens, are *not* simple-minded."

"Right, right, right…"

"We have a similar small percentage of simple-minded people in the UK. In fact, probably in every country."

He turns to me, leaning on his hands on the table, "Because, Mister Winston, the majority of Americans, are like the majority of people in any country. We stand around slack-jawed and stupefied, and watch a handful of simple-minded asswipes, act like they represent the *entire* country."

I couldn't have put it better myself.

"They do not," The Dude wags his finger.

"I agree, Dude."

"And that's the truth," he straightens up, squinting at the screen. "The Lithuanian-pig-dog-monkey-fuckin' truth."

Oh Brother

Tuesday 6:14 a.m.

OK. No birds right now.

PG Tips in hand.

Today I'm going to write wonderful, lovely stuff.

I am going to write how Elsa reveals her self-doubts to Olivia. And how this makes it easier for Olivia to relate to her. Ergo: They get to bond.

OK.

Here we go.

OK.

I got nothing.

But I did go to see the Ben Affleck movie, 'The Accountant'.

Which brings me back to the subject of rates of perception. So, I'm watching the movie. And it's Ben and Jon Bernthal. Who is playing the other killer/security guy/revenge getter/hard ass. And about a third of the way into it, I start to think that Jon is probably Ben Affleck's character's brother. We kept seeing these flashbacks of the two brothers training together as kids. Then we never hear anything more about the other brother.

Then, about halfway through the movie, Jon Bernthal's character shoots at Ben Affleck in the dark. Because he can't see who he is.

In my head, I'm saying, *It's your own damn brother, dude. And neither of you realize it!*

Later in the movie, there's a big fight scene. Ben is attacking a house and killing guys left and right. Jon's character has been hired to protect the guy inside the house. I'm watching him watch Ben move around on the security screens, and I'm going, *It's your own brother, fer cryin out loud already. It's your damn brother. Don't kill him!*

So, as the scene progresses to where Ben and Jon's characters finally recognize each other—This is what happens:

Jon and Ben enter a room. Guns drawn. Ready to kill each other. But they don't. They look at each other. Jon says to Ben, "So, how have you been?"

There are 4 older couples in the movie theatre with me. It's a matinee and pretty empty.

A woman behind me whispers to her partner, "Wait. Is that his brother?"

Blah, blah, blah, more dialog, more dialog.

Jon says, "It's your fault our dad got killed!"

The guy down the row from me whispers, "Oh it's his brother!"

Blah, blah, blah, more dialog.

Ben says, "Of course I thought about you in the last ten years, you're my brother."

Another woman in the back of the theatre just blurts out, "Oh, he's his brother."

And the guy on the other side of me goes, "It's his brother."

Oh brother.

I might need to dumb down the Irish book.

The Experience

Tuesday 2:32 p.m.

Screw .mobi. To hell with .epub.

Electronic book publishing is still in its infancy.
That's obvious.

Right now, the people who manufacture electronic readers are forcing writers to surrender some editorial control, if they want their book to be read on these manufacturer's devices.

You have to let your book be read in the fonts that the manufacturers chose. And, you have no control over what any individual page looks like.

This is ass-backwards.

Electronic readers would not exist if people did not want to read books.

Books would not exist if authors didn't write them.
Authors drive the entire market.
Not electronics manufacturers.

I want to publish in .pdf format.
That's what you're reading right now.

Because the fonts are *my choice of fonts*. And the pages lay out exactly as *I want them to lay out*.

I, the author, am taking you on a journey.

I don't need an electronics manufacturer to redraw my road map.

I decide what my pages looks like. I choose the fonts and sizes and placement of paragraphs. But mostly, I decide how a page looks.

That's very important to me.

Let me explain why this is important:

Remember when Panavision cameras first came out? And the first wide screens? But all the TVs were still CRT monitors with a 4:3 ratio. This means the picture was 4 units wide and 3 units high.

But Panavision films were like 2.20:1 ratio.

Which meant, when those movies were presented on TV, they had to pan around the screen to keep the action centered in a 4:3 ratio frame.

So, there was all this extra peripheral stuff on the sides that you didn't get to see.

And the directors were pissed: *"You re-filmed my film!"*

Sometimes characters were out of frame talking and you couldn't see them. Or, what the characters were talking about was out of frame. It was a major failure!

Who thought that was a good idea?

Then they did letterbox, to try to fix the problem.

But that made the films smaller and harder to see.

Then they started making TVs with a 16:9 ratio and filming in the same ratio. Now everybody's back in love again.

Problem solved.

Well.

I want to fast forward to the moment when Samsung or Apple or Amazon or Barnes & Noble, or anydamnbody doesn't dictate how the pages of *my* book look to the reader.

I want final reading rights.

A songwriter can get final editing rights on a song.

A director can get final editing rights on a movie.

Why can't I get final reading rights on my book?

So that it looks the same on whatever device you read it on?

This is my point.

A movie looks the same on every electronic device that it is viewed on. And you can pause, fast forward, adjust the volume, etc.

The same recording of the same song sounds the same on every device it's heard on.

Why can't a book look the same
on every device it's read on?

The sentences and paragraphs stay
in the same visual condition.
The reader can zoom in and out on a page.
And rotate the device from landscape to portrait,
and it will still maintain the integrity of the page.

Imagine watching a movie on your iPad and there's a scene where two characters are talking about a mountain and pointing at it.

But you don't get to see the mountain, you just get to see the two characters talking.

Your iPad is deciding it's too much for it to show at once, so it creates another scene after the conversation where all you get to see is the mountain.

Directors would be screaming.

And what if a movie theatre, before showing a film, shortened all the edits between the scenes. And also cut out all of the pauses in the dialog between the characters:

sothatonecharacter'slinesranrightintothenextcharacter'slines

And they did this, because the *movie theatre* has decided, *the movie theatre has decided:* That's the format that *they* want to show the film in.

I'm just saying.

Currently if you use any electronic publishing format for a book, you can zoom and rotate and change font and size. But it changes the way that the *entire page looks*.

So the lines don't end where the author might have wanted them to end.

And the spaces between the lines…

The spaces that provide…

Pause.

Are left lying on the editing room floor.

And what idiot invented this *justified text* nonsense anyway?

What anal dork thought this was a good idea? *Let your peas touch your mashed potatoes, you anally retentive little child. It's not going to kill you!*

As I said before, I published this book in PDF format.

The reason I only want to publish my book in PDF format, is so that the page integrity is maintained.

Get it together people! This ain't brain surgery!!!

Make all devices display the pages of the book the same.
Exactly as the author intended.

Reading a book is an experience.
Watching a movie is an experience.
Listening to music is an experience.

The visual appearance of the page is an integral part of the reading experience. Here, I'll show you.

This is a screen shot of a page from the book I'm ghostwriting:

Gone

Watertown, Mass.
October, 1979

He is gone.

Irrevocably, irretrievably, and forever. Gone.
And here, today, against everything that is fair and reasonable, they will bury him.

Here.

The dark brick walls of the Mount Auburn Catholic Cemetery echo the whisper, "*Here.*"

"*Not... There.*"

Olivia Kistner raises her eyes behind her veil, her gaze fixed to the east. Past these regimented walls, with all their bricks in neat ordered rows; over the Charles, weaving through the autumn chimney smoke rising from Beacon Hill, east, east, northeast, as crows fly, winging above Logan International and away, across the wide green Atlantic to...

Ireland.

Home.

Where Tom Gannon's mortal remains should be laid to rest.

See what I mean?

The pages have a landscape; hills and valleys, *a pacing in the spacing*, so to speak. You can almost hear the cold hollow wind whipping through the empty spaces between the sentences.

You lose all of that when you force a format onto the stream of words.

You rewrite my book.

Plus…

You're standing there in the airport bookstore, getting ready to board your flight to Cozumel. You're scanning the covers of novels, because you didn't have time to stop at Barnes & Noble and get reading material for the trip. You pick up a novel and quickly scan the first page. You need to take it all in. At that moment.

And I, as a writer, I need to make you want to turn the page and see what comes next.

I need to pull you in. Put a tiny dab of chocolate on the tip of your tongue, and make you want to buy the book, to get the rest of it.

I just think, that an eBook needs to give you the same experience. That's alls I'm sayin'.

So. Did it work? Did you want to turn the page after seeing the first page of the book?

Do you want more?

This is the last page of the first chapter:

Goodbye

Father Matthew Ronan waits until everyone else has left.

Softly, he approaches the grave.

"Tomo," he catches his breath. "Oh my friend. I'm not ready for this. Look at us two, now then. A long way from home, lad. I am going to miss you, that's plain."

He rolls out a long sigh, which rises from deep inside him. His eyes welling over, his shoulders shaking, he whispers, "Thanks for standing by me, when no one else did."

Again, look at the pacing. The huge empty space around the small clustered paragraph. The loneliness of that paragraph. Like a single solitary figure crouching by a grave.

With all that blankness after it.

Echoing the feelings of the character who is speaking. And the reality of the moment.

I, the writer, want a huge blank space after this little section.

I don't want you to see what's coming up next.

That's the point.

I want to freeze you in this moment.

Reading is a visual experience.

As much as it is a learning or entertaining experience.

Let's say that you're a mom who has stolen away from the kids for a minute, so you can take a dump. And you always leave whatever book you're currently reading on the back of the toilet so you can pick it up where you left off. If you have five minutes, then, being able to leaf through a few pages and see if you have time to read a whole section is very important.

If you cannot see an overview of what is coming up, then you may or may not have time to read a section. In the time that it takes you to have your shit, and then get back to the kitchen, before your kids crawl into the oven to see if the cookies are done yet.

A writer has to think about their reader!

And *their* needs.

And a printed book affords you the opportunity to do that. You can thumb a few pages and say, *oh, this section is only two pages long, I'll just get this section read.*

But swiping through pages on an eReader… Well…
It's just not the same thing.

The industry has to wake up. And meet the needs of their customers!

Perhaps you just want to squeeze in a couple of pages before you lay down and go to sleep. Because you've got a long day at work tomorrow.

With a paperback, that's easy to do. If your eReader page looked like the paperback page: full of landscape, spacing around the text and ragged ended sentences, giving you plenty of stopping points, it would also be easy to do.

And so you can lay down and go to sleep.

Well now, dear Reader, the power is in *your* hands.

You can decide *not* to turn the page and continue reading. Or you can bargain with yourself: '*I'll just read the rest of the burial section. I'll catch up on my sleep in the car on the way to work. I mean the thing practically drives itself anyway. And isn't that really what the cruise control is for?*'

But, if you were reading this in .mobi or .epub format on an eReader, and the lines are compressed together, and the text is justified, and spacing has been eliminated, and you try to get an overview, and you slide the pages, and the dialog and action continues, and you see the beginning of the next section, and you slide a couple more, and it goes on, and you say: '*Damn it, this is no good! Now I've seen the first sentence of the next section. And I have to keep going. It's almost eleven, and I have to get some sleep. I can't be up all-night reading this!*'

See? See?

You have lost your control of your reading experience!

And I, the author, have lost creative control of the experience I am offering you.

All because some DorkMeisterSnoof who works for an electronics company decided how *my* book should look on *his* devices.

And so, you go to sleep frustrated.

You get no sense of completion, because you couldn't plan!

You couldn't plan your two pages because the damn electronic thingy is so awkward to see what's coming up.

Awkward *to get an overview of a single chapter*. To be able to judge how much you have time to read.

And so, you lose interest in the 'Irish' book. And you could give a damn about Tom dying. And your friend Sally asks you how you like the book she recommended. And you say, it's OK. Because you don't want to offend her, because she really liked it. But what you really want to say is, that it made you feel frustrated. Because the damn electronic thingy won't let you plan how much you read. Because all the pages run together. And you can't get an overview.

And maybe you don't like the author, because you think it's all their fault.

But it's not! It's the fault of whatever company or whichever group of people invented/designed/decided/dictated/forced whatever electronic publishing standards were going to be.

And, in doing so have screwed the writers right out of their creative control of their creations *across all devices*.

Across *all* devices.

The visual is important!

It's soooooooo important.

But there are other issues as well.

The server asks you if you want more tea. And you look up to respond. And then when you look back down… Well…

When you lose your place reading a printed book, you scan the words. But, more importantly, you scan the landscape of the sentences printed on the paper. They are your signposts. They direct you to where you stopped: '*I was past that big paragraph and just before that short quote.*'

But, with an .epub or .mobi file…

Well, it's just a stream of bloody words across the screen.

And justified text is boring as well.

Ragged right text is what you are reading right now.

It is natural/organic/honest.

Even WikiBooks will tell you, *"Ragged right text improves retention. I.e., if you want readers to remember what you wrote, and especially to return and find items they'd read earlier. Just as readers recognize words by their shape, they also remember ideas by the shape of the paragraph."*

And what kind of block-headed writer would *not* want you to retain what you just read?

Here. You try it: Read this next page, and stop anywhere. Then come back after a few minutes to pick it back up. And see, just see, if it is not the landscape of the page, as a whole, that directs you to where you stopped.

New Scotland

Halifax, Nova Scotia 1939

"America ye be settin' yer sights on eh?"

Despite the shock of white hair that stands straight up on his head, Paddy is a barrel chested muscular man who can hoist and throw a bale better than anyone else on the ship. At just under five foot tall, he cuts an elfish figure. But his broad smile and sparkling eyes are what you see first.

He had waddled aboard when they docked in New Scotland. His seaman's hat perched at a comical angle on his head, strolling up the gangway in Halifax like he was taking a leisurely walk in a park.

And now he sits, with Tom and Paul, smoking his ever present pipe, and regarding them with a critical eye.

"And just what would a couple of ne'er-do-wells like yourselves be wantin' in America?"

"A new start," says Paul directly. "A chance."

"Oh aye. Well me lad, you're not the first Irish to think of that," he winks.

"We have heard stories though," ventures Tom, "from our kin. About the Irish in America. Maybe it was no better than dying from starvation in your own village. What's it like now, then Paddy?"

"Well, well," the stevedore rubs his muscular arms and looks around the deck. Then he lights his pipe.

"It's not the prison it was a few years back mind," he nods, "when the Americans were terrified these red headed Irish devils were going to take over their country."

"You never seen such a fear of immigrants, lads.

"They're swarming over our borders!

"They won't embrace our culture. They keep clinging to their own beliefs.

"They're forcing their religion onto us!

"They're going to force their way of life onto us!

"It's the end of America!"

"Honestly lads, the goings on and on. You'd have thought we were holding knives to their throats. All we wanted was a chance to live. Same as you, now. All we had was death and famine back home. To see the wee ones starvin' for the smallest crumb. It killed ya. Who could watch it. Panic, disease, starving people. And no hope in sight. What in God's holy name could we do but try a desperate path? Or let the death take us where we stood. We scrapped, we bribed, we stole. We even

Did it work?

Do you see what I mean?

It was easy to get right back to the place where you stopped reading.

Wasn't it?

This is the experience I want you, the reader, to have.

However, you read my book.

The *same* experience, regardless of the whatever electronic thingy you are reading it on.

Is that really, really too much to ask?

OK, now I will stop faffing about, and get off my soap box and let you finish reading about Paddy.

killed, just to get on a boat. Very much like this one, boys. And take that long trip. A one way journey. A gamble... On something better. Something. Anything. Thousands of us. No going back. Ireland was dying. If not dead already.

"But... America, well..." his face goes blank. "'No Irish Need Apply' signs everywhere. All those scowling faces calling you 'Paddy' and 'Mick'. Regardless of what your true name actually was! You wanted to punch them up. Smack that look off their damn faces. But ye daren't! An Irishman in jail in America... Well, most of them never made it to jail ya see. Never seen the inside of a courtroom. Into the 'Paddy Wagon' you go. I seen them lads. Terrified faces they were, peering out between the bars as the cart rolls away. We heard the stories... Down to the Docks wit ya. Clubbed on the head and bunged into the river. Every day bodies floating. No one cared. Just a bunch of dead Micks. Who gives a rat's pink arsehole for that lot!"

Paddy pauses to relight his pipe.

"Honestly, we were treated worse than the Negroes from the south. But *now* boys, *now*... Well that's a horse of another color indeed."

This is what I need to hear, Tom says to himself, *what it is like now, you damned old man, don't tease us.*

"Well," he begins slowly, "they were scared we would take over boys." He leans in and whispers in a low conspiratorial voice, "and by the blood of the saints, *we have!*

"Now you take your Boston for example... You've never seen so many Irish. We own shops, we are policemen, We own our own houses. We're drivin' the trolly cars!

"And you know what lads? One of those red headed devils of an immigrant became mayor of Boston proper. Mayor! Hugh O'Brien, a proud son. Who's your poor, ignorant, undisciplined louts now then! Mayor! Oh and the things he done... Widened the streets. Built us parks and libraries. Cut down on the taxes. And got the Irish into every nook and cranny of the government.

"Take over? Damn right!"

Paddy leans back and pulls out his oilskin tobacco pouch. He takes his time packing his pipe. Watching the boys, now silent. Their eyes darting around, trying to digest what he had just told them.

"I took the name, lads," he says slowly, "Paddy. It's not what me Mam named me. Been so long now, don't rightly remember me real name. But if they want to call me 'Paddy', to put me down, for being Irish, and being proud, well then that's fine by me. I am Irish, and I am proud. And old Paddy, and all of us Paddys and Micks, will be here long after they, and all their hatred and fear, has long been dead."

National Insecurity

Wednesday 2:46 p.m.

"Afternoon, Your Honor," I wave my hand. "How's your day going?"

"Oh, just fine and dandy."

The Mayor has just wandered out of the clubhouse. He's probably been watching the news on the big flat screen TV.

He heads over and plunks down in a chair, at the patio table near the edge of the pool.

One of the best things about this trailer park—sorry—Mobile Home Community—is its pool. They just re-plastered it a couple of months before I moved in. It's clean and sparking, and the perfect place to be this afternoon. I try to get in it at least once a day, because it feels so good on my legs.

His Honor fishes his pack of smokes out of his shirt pocket. He lights one up with a ceremonial flourish of his big chrome Zippo lighter. Flipping the lid closed with a metallic snap. He leans back and blows a smoke ring upwards towards the gently waving fronds of the palm trees above us.

A scowling, hunched over old man I haven't met yet, wobbles out of the clubhouse. He obviously has some kind of problem with his legs, because he moves in uneven rapid jerks. He hobbles over to the table where The Mayor is sitting, and pulls out his pack of smokes too.

I move over to the edge of the pool and, wipe my face off with my towel.

"Oscar, you met the new guy yet?" The Mayor asks Scowling Man.

I reach out my hand, "Howdy, my name's Winston— "

Oscar just grunts at me with an angry expression.

"Never mind old Oscar," The Mayor winks. "Oscar the Grouch, that's what we call him."

Oscar grunts at The Mayor.

"So, what's going on in the world today, Your Honor?"

"We gotta build that goddamn wall," blurts Oscar.

The Mayor was about to respond to me, but he turns to Oscar instead. His mouth still open, cigarette dangling, "Ain't nobody gonna build no goddamn wall."

"Oh, he's gonna build it," snorts Oscar, lighting his smoke.

The Mayor shakes his head, "A wall don't fix the problem."

"Bull shit!" spits Oscar. "If you believe that lib-tard fake news CNN!"

"Oh, come on now, Oscar," The Mayor chuckles at him.

"Them goddamn terrorists, they're swarming over the border! That's what happens when you let a fucking nigger into the White House! Let's all his Muslim friends come in. Forcing their religion onto us. Forcing Sharia law onto us. It's the end of America!"

My jaw drops open. I am dumfounded.

"Oscar, Oscar, Oscar," The Mayor motions with his hand, "calm down. You'll give yourself a heart attack. Ain't nobody forcing Sharia Law onto you."

"Fuck that," Oscar fumes. "There's places in Detroit where you can't even *go* anymore. The police put up fences and let them take over. They can't stop It. The F.B.I. can't get in there. Nobody can. They got their own little Mecca in there. Thousands of radical Muslims, armed to the teeth, and that fuckin nigger let them do it!"

I just stare at him open mouthed.

I am always so shocked when I run into this mentality. I can't do like The Mayor and just laugh at them. I am paralyzed with dis-belief, that someone can be that delusional. And I am reluctant to confront them, because I don't know if they are psychotic or not. And how many guns they have in their trailer.

"We gotta build that goddamn wall! Goddamn ISIS streaming across them fuckin wide-open borders," Oscar spreads his hands wide.

"The number of Border Patrol agents has doubled in the last—" The Mayor begins.

"There *ain't* no Border Patrol no more!" he spits back. "That fuckin nigger let them all go!"

His Honor scratches his head, "You think Obama took all the Border Patrol people *off* the border?"

"I don't think. I *know*!" his eyes flare.

"How do you *know*, Oscar?"

"My brother-in-law lives down past Safford, and he ain't seen one border patrol truck in years."

The Mayor laughs, "Oscar, Safford is over a hundred miles from the border—"

Oscar cuts him off, "You'll be laughing out the other side of your face, when them ISIS come in your trailer and cut your goddamn head off!"

Oscar starts to hobble away from us.

"Oh, for crying out loud," The Mayor groans.

"And you can't fight back," shouts Oscar from the corner, "cause them fuckin Libtards took away your goddamn guns!"

And with that he hobbles away as fast as he can possibly move.

"Don't pay him any mind, mi amigo," His Honor turns to me. "Did you see he wears a belt *and* suspenders?"

"Yeah. What's up with that?"

"You reckon he might have some insecurity issues?"

Bruised Apples

Friday 7:14 a.m.

I have come to the realization that living in a trailer is not conducive to getting laid.

Unless you meet someone who *also* lives in a trailer.

Preferably, someone who lives in *another* park.

Humping your own neighbors can cause a whole bucket of problems.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying I'm any kind of Casanova, but I have actually had a couple of experiences with women who are 'Oh-My-God-You-Are-So-Beautiful-That-I-Can't-Believe-That-I-Get-To-Put-My-Penis-Inside-Of-You-Beautiful'. But those were occasions where I was lucky/in the right place/they were desperate, or, in the words of Paul Simon, 'I guess she thought I was alright. Alright in a sort of limited way for an off night.'

As I said, I was born in England. We British are socialized to typically hook up with 'Well-I-Guess-This-Is-Probably-What-I-Deserve' types of partners.

It's in our blood.

It's in our DNA.

I mean lookit: It's 1940, and the Luftwaffe is hurling down bombs on our heads. We are all queuing up very politely, in a neat orderly ration line to get our one apple. And you get handed one that's a bit bruised.

Well, you aren't going to say, "Hey, hang on, this one is a bit bruised. Give me another."

Oh hell no.

You are going to do the proper 'British' thing, and suck up your disappointment.

You swallow your true feelings, and put on a brave face. You have to shame yourself. Because if you don't, everyone else in the line will do it to you.

You take your bruised apple, plaster a typically weak chinned British smile on your face, and mumble to the person behind you as you shuffle off, "No bother, it probably tastes just fine on the inside."

We are still living in war mentality.

But, when you look at the history of the British Isles, we have been living in war mentality for thousands of years.

Since the last ice age, some 10,000 years ago, the people who inhabited the British Isles have been constantly invaded/assimilated/conquered/had their gene pool changed.

The Caledonians, the first brave souls to settle what is now Scotland, were of Germanic origin. They were big warrior types with red hair. The Silures, the original squatters in what is now South Wales, had curly hair and olive skin, linking them to what is now Portugal and Spain. And the people living on the jutting butt cheeks of England, that rounded smiling ass winking across the water at the Netherlands, well those people seem to resemble the Gauls of western Europe.

A Mulligan stew of DNA to begin with.
But it gets better.

Then the Romans marched in. They killed a bunch of men, raped a bunch of women, and changed the gene pool. They ate everything edible, burned the rest, and got ready to march off to the west, when they realized…
There was a big ass ocean in front of them.

So, they changed their minds and decided to hang about for a while longer. And kill some more men, rape some more women, continue to change the gene pool and eat everything that was edible.
And so, they hung about for 350 years.

Gradually, the Romans dwindled down to nothing/buggered off/moved on. And the Picts, moved downward from the North, killing men, raping women, changing the gene pool and eating everything edible.

So, the Britons invited the Anglo-Saxons to come over and help them. The Anglo-Saxons kicked the Picts asses. Then they turned on the Britons: killing men, raping women, changing the gene pool, and eating everything edible.

And then: The Vikings invaded from Denmark.
And what did they do?

They killed a bunch of men, raped a bunch of women, changed the gene pool, ate everything edible, and marched off to the west. Where they realized…
There was a big ass ocean in front of them.

So, they milled about Ireland for a while. Leaving a bunch of red-headed babies that eventually spawned into future generations of American-Irish who celebrate their 'Irishness' because of their red hair and their 'pure' Irish blood.

And then:

The Normans came splashing across the English Channel from Northern France. Well, they kicked some Danish ass, and took over the country.

And killed some men, raped some women, changed the gene pool, and ate everything edible.

My point is this:

The British are the biggest 'mutt' race in history. We are the bastards of bastards of bastards of bastards.

We have big bony Roman noses, pale sickly Scandinavian skin, crumbling snaggled Romanian gypsy teeth.

The women are horse faced Germanic breeding stock, and the men look like 'Beaker', the Muppet from Sesame Street.

Not 'beautiful' people.

Typically.

Except for Diana.

And she was amazing.

And look at Charles: Married to the most beautiful English woman that was ever born, and who would he rather be with? Sturdy Camilla. With all of her equine attributes.

See what I mean? Did he say to himself, *'Well Diana is amazing, but Camilla is really much closer to* ***what I probably actually deserve.*** *So, I'm going to dump Diana. And bugger off to be with who I truly believe that I should be with. And be grateful for that.'*

It's war rationing mentality.

Still.

Everyone sacked us, raped our mothers and ate all the apples that didn't have bruises.

So, you should feel *grateful* to have a bruised apple.

You should be very damn *glad* that there's any goddamn apples left at all!

Shame on you!

And, since the Vikings, (and everyone else), have chosen/raped/abducted all the best-looking ones from the village, just be glad that you have *anyone* left to hook up with.

Just be glad!

You ungrateful sap!

Man.

That was a tangent.

But anyway, this trailer thing…

So, there you are, at the sports bar/American-Irish pub/karaoke night, puking behind the dumpsters, and you meet someone.

And you invite them back to your place. And they follow you in their own car. (Just in case you turn out to be a serial killer).

And then…

There is that moment. That look.

"Oh. So. *This* is where you live?"

"Umm. Yeah."

(Yawn), "Golly gee, is that what time it is? Wow! I am suddenly *so tired*! What was I thinking? I have to get up early to help my aunt braid some eels in the morning. So, I'm just going to go on home then. So. Well. Nice to meet you, and stuff… (forced smile).

(Hasty exit stage left.)

Enquiring Minds

Wednesday 7:41 a.m.

Ten! Ten birds!
Now eleven. Twelve!
Big doings goin on over at the antenna club.

And…
Now they all scatter.

Smart woman just drove into her driveway.

I haven't seen her in about a week. Which is not unusual, she stays inside most of the time, and keeps 100% to herself.

Which is why I call her Smart Woman.

She doesn't sit outside in the morning with her breakfast bevvy of choice. She does no gardening or faffing about with exterior decorating and such. She doesn't sit outside in the cool of the evening and watch the sun setting with a glass of wine. Oh no, no, no!

Because she has no interest/need/desire to sit outside. As a potential target for simple-minded people to stop by and puke up their simple-mindedness all over her.

Like some of us other damn fools do.

She has no need to invite extra drama into her life.

Smart woman.

So, she just pulled into her driveway at 6:14 in the morning.

Was this woman up at 5 a.m. and just ran out for Half & Half?

Or is this a drive of shame?

Was she out all last night doing the snoofer snoo with a paramour?

Enquiring minds want to know.

It's just jealousy really. I wish I had a paramour to do the snoofer snoo with.

Tongues Are Waggin

Friday 11:18 a.m.

The two most popular topics of conversation in Tin Town are:

1. Somebody else's medical conditions*:*
"Have you seen Shirley lately?"
"She's been in the hospital. It's her diabetes again."
"Poor old thing. I'll go see her, and take her some fudge."
And:
2. Politics.

Most of the people here are old/falling apart/living on Social Security/on Medicare. So, they have tons of time and nothing to do.

And everyone—OK, most of them—are really compelled to tell me their political opinions. It's an obsession.

The Mayor rolls up on his bike, "Mornin mi amigo."

"Morning, Your Honor?"

"Three hundred and six. Not much of a fuckin 'democracy', huh? Three hundred and six electors shoved this crazy dick up our asses."

"Your Honor, it's none of my business—"

"Problem is, he's a limp old dick," he chuckles. "all's we'll end up getting, is a lick and a promise."

A couple of ladies just cruised by in their golf cart at the absolute wrong moment. They caught the end of his spiel. You shoulda seen the look on *their* faces.

I live in a fish bowl.

I can just raise my head from the screen and look out the small window and see right into four other people's lives.

We are right up on each other's tits in this park.

Which, unfortunately, means that we notice stuff we probably shouldn't.

But hey, if I wasn't such a Nosey Parker then I would have nothing to write about. Now would I?

And you, the reader, would probably be spending this time in a more constructive way. Like shaving your tongue. Or trying to figure out why Dunkin Donuts doesn't make their donuts *and* donut holes at the same time by punching them out of the middles. Instead of doing two runs of the same batter through two different sets of molds. Using twice the energy to fire the ovens.

Or, why no one has ever invented band-aids for black people.

That last one was an idea I had many years ago.

The idea was that there would be a display set up in pharmacies, with a linear chart of skin tones. It would span from 'Transparent', (for Norwegians), through rosy pinks and dusky olives, to 'Sudanese'. And you would put your arm next to the chart, and see which tone matches

your skin. And then select a box of band-aids with the corresponding skin tone number.

"Oh, look, Kristi, I'm a number 12, 'Light Olive'. But I was born in North Dakota!"

Now watch Band-Aid steal this idea and make a billion dollars off it. And then try to claim it was their own idea.

Assholes.

Piss and Moan

Thursday 10:12 a.m.

Across the street, next to the Canadians, live an older Hispanic couple.

They were both born and raised in Apache Junction.

Someone told me their parents crossed the border from Mexico to work in the citrus groves in Mesa. Back when Sunkist was in its heyday.

Piss and Moan are not their real names. Of course.

Just the names I have given them so I won't get sued.

After all, this is a work of fiction. Right?

The way that Piss and Moan communicate, is they start with an incorrect assumption. Then, they make a negative judgement based on that incorrect assumption. Then, they start the conversation from there.

So, they're already two levels into the conversation before they even open their mouths.

And then, you or I, as the target of this conversation, look at them with a puzzled expression. As we try to work backwards to figure out what the hell this person is talking about.

And, in that pause, they see us as being mentally slower than them. Since we didn't respond immediately.

Axiom:
When you are simple-minded,
everything is simple.

Of course it is. It's all you are capable of.

If you are only capable of black or white thinking, then you will mistakenly believe that everything is black or white.

You cannot think outside the capacity of your own brain.

You will constantly run reality through your black or white filter, and make judgements accordingly. Thinking, in your delusion, that you are the smartest person on earth.

Unfortunately, you are going to look pretty stupid to people with fully functioning brains.

So, there's that.

Anywho, I told Piss, I was going to rake the pebbles around my trailer into patterns with a Zen rake. Like a giant Zen Garden. Then a couple days later he comes over and tells me, "I was thinking about a fence for you to build to keep the cats out of your sand."

Sand? What the hell is this guy talking about.

"Sand?" I narrow my eyes.

He smiles, because he just confirmed for himself that I had not thought of a way to keep the cats out of my sand. He gets his brief feeling of one-upmanship at my expense.

"I built a little fence," he swaggers, "to keep cats from shitting in the sand when I was laying the patio blocks. Because they just see it as a

big pile of kitty litter. Yeah, what I was thinking was…" and he starts to wave his hands around, gesturing all over my front yard as he sketches out a solution for me.

Piss, Piss, hey, Earth to Piss.

"What sand? I'm not putting *sand* in my yard."

"Well, you said that you're doing a Zen Garden. And a real Zen Garden is made with sand."

(See what I mean: Incorrect assumption.)

"And most people don't realize you need to keep the cats out."

(Negative judgement: 'Most people'. Me, obviously, being one of them, not as smart as him, and don't realize I would need a fence to keep cats out.)

"I'm not putting sand in my yard. Like I said, I'm just raking the pebbles that are already there."

"Well, that's not a Zen Garden. A *real* Zen Garden has sand…"

So now he needs to force his incorrect assumption to somehow look correct. So, he doesn't look like he made a mistake. He needs to maintain his brief feeling of one-upmanship in any way that he can.

It doesn't matter *what I actually said*.

In his mind, he wins anyway. Because of black or white thinking, he is always going to imagine that he is right.

Especially if he is wrong.

And, just to be accurate, a 'real' Zen Garden is traditionally made with gravel. Not sand.

Wikipedia:

'Gravel is usually used in Zen Gardens, rather than sand, because it is less disturbed by rain and wind.'

Typically, decomposed or crushed granite.

I'm just saying.

Anyway, none of this matters now because it's plainly obvious to him that I'm so stupid that I never realized that in order to do a '*real*' Zen

Garden, I *have to* put sand in it. So, he's way ahead of me. And I'm the stupid one.

So, his denial is protected, his one-upmanship attained, and off he goes.

Piss, Piss, I'm just going to rake the damn pebbles that are there, fer chrissake.

From this point on, he can stand across the street, and gossip with his Canadian neighbors: "I tried to help him. I tried to tell him how to do a real Zen Garden. But he didn't listen…"

He can work that one-upmanship moment for the rest of his life.

Which, if you are simple-minded, you *have* to do.

It's a compensation.

These people need to put other people down, in order to make themselves feel like they are mentally quicker. This helps them compensate for a constant nagging feeling that they are actually mentally *slower* than other people.

Stoop shouldered, knuckle dragging, as The Dude puts it.

Neanderthal *slow*.

These are primitive *survival* instincts.

Survival.

Definition of One-upmanship:
the attempt to use a conversation,
judgement, or social situation
to extract a brief personal feeling of being
mentally quicker than someone else.
Basically,
to put someone else down
to feel good about yourself.

Fixed It

Tuesday 12:02 pm.

I'm standing in line at the Junction Supermart waiting to pay for my half-gallon of 'whisky' in a plastic bottle.

And the lady in front of me reaches over and grabs one of those plastic grocery dividers. You know, the ones that you put on the conveyor belt, between your groceries? To let the cashier know whose groceries are whose?

But when she sets it down, it reads: *"See what's hot right now - in our Deli!".*

Except the words are upside down.

I see her look at it.

The conveyor belt is moving slowly, and the cashier has just started to check her groceries.

Then she looks at me.

Then the woman reaches for the divider—and rolls it over.

I'm thinking to myself: *Who cares? It wasn't bothering me.*

None the less, she tried to fix the upside-down message.

Except now it reads: *'Sweets for the sweet - in our Bakery!'*

And those words are *also* upside down.

And I think to myself: *She should have flipped it long ways. Then it would have been right side up.*

Just then—her hand hovers over the divider.

Now I'm thinking: *This is waaaaaaaaay too much attention being paid to a plastic grocery divider, Holy Crapoly.*

And then…

She picks up the divider, and puts it back in the groove on the side of the conveyor belt. And then grabs another one—whose words are the right way up—and places that between her groceries and my plastic bottle of 'whisky'.

Then she smiles at me.

Like: '*There. I've fixed that. We can all get on with our day now.*'

And I smile back at her.

Like: *'Here, let me just pour you a nice glass of 'whisky'.*"

Addicts

Tuesday 3:02 pm.

Glass of 'whisky' in hand.
Sitting on the porch.
All's right with the world.

So what if it's early. Fuck you.
I'm having a shitty day.

The Mayor is out on his daily rounds looking for cans.
He pulls up and stops next to the porch.
"Winston, you gotta watch out for them ones over there," he gestures towards Piss and Moan's trailer. "They ain't the sharpest peanuts in the turd."
"I seem to have found that out the hard way, Your Honor."
He fishes out a smoke from shirt pocket.

"That guy seems a little savant to me, Your Honor."
He squints at me.
"I mean, he is obsessed about getting his brief feelings of one-upmanship…"

"Up?" He flicks open his shiny Zippo lighter.

"What I mean is, that he needs to put me down, to feel better about himself."

"Oh, he does that. They *both* do that."

"It's one-upmanship."

'And, how does *that* work, exactly?"

"Well, people do it all the time, but most of us don't even see it, because it slides by so quick. And it happens so much that we think it's normal."

"You don't say," he lights his smoke.

I can tell by the look in his eyes that he's trying to wrap his mind around what I'm saying. The good thing is, he hasn't dismissed me. And, he's still standing here. So there's that.

I push on, "Most of us don't even realize it's happening."

"You don't say," he scratches his stubble.

"Well, like our friends over there. It's usually just a simple passing comment. Like: 'You gotta use sand if you're gonna make a *real* Zen Garden.'"

"Zen garden?" he frowns.

I tell him about my plan to rake the pebbles. And then I tell him about the exchange I had with Piss.

"Is that what he said to you? What the Samuel P. Diddlyfuck does *he* know about a *real* Zen Garden?"

"That's the point. The ones who do the one-upmanship thing, are never experts on anything. But they're compelled to try to pretend that they know more about *everything* than *you* do."

"Oh, that's *them* two all right," he points with his chin.

"They're addicts, Your Honor. They gotta have that steady morphine drip, of moments where they feel like they're mentally quicker than someone else."

"Addicts. Yeah. I recon that's the word."

"But the reason they need to do that, is to try to compensate for a nagging awareness that they're actually *mentally slower* than other people."

"I just always called them people dickheads."

"But that might mean that they're doing it deliberately. Like they're *aware* of what they're doing."

"You don't think they *know*, mi amigo?"

"Oh, hell no. I think they're medicating themselves with their own behavior. Because, if you call them on it, they get all defensive and angry. Their emotional reaction gives them away."

"And you don't think, that they're even *aware* of what they're doin?"

I shake my head. "It's denial protection, If they were *aware*, then they wouldn't be in denial."

"You don't say," he rubs his stubble.

"Attaching emotional content to a logistical situation. It's denial protection. It's subconscious. Knee-jerk reaction."

"A gistical?" he squints.

"Attaching *emotional* content to a *logistical* situation."

Still squinting.

"Having an emotional reaction, where a logical reaction is needed. You know? Crying instead of thinking—"

He cuts me off, waving his hand, "Like them lame ass congressmen. Whining and crying like a baby when you call them on their shit."

"Pretty much anyone. Not just—"

"Winston," he cuts me off, "you talk like a college fella. You been to college?"

"Oh yeah. I've got a Master's degree."

"Figures. That's the problem. You done intimidated our little friend over there. All's he's got, is a degree in fake news!"

"Well, this 'fake news' is just another form of one-upmanship."

"How's that?"

"These television and radio programs—they have hosts—who give their opinions about recent news items. They don't report *news stories*. They report their own *personal opinions* about other people's behavior."

"That's right on the goddamn head, college boy."

"They're *opinion* shows. Not *news* shows. But their behavior is like Junior High School all over again. He said this, and she said that. And I don't like him, blah, blah, blah. Scowling adolescents, wearing suits. Trying desperately to look and sound grown up."

He laughs, "You a pretty smart sumbitch, ain't you?"

"Just paying attention. Anyway, these hosts lie and distort the news, to protect their delusions that they're right, and other people are wrong. And they gotta keep doin it, because it doesn't matter how many 'news stories' they produce about someone, they can't actually change that person's behavior."

"Can't change shit! Just a bunch a hot air."

"But now they're stuck, Your Honor. They gotta keep ramping it up. Force the situation. Scowling and crying 'Socialist/Communist/Nazi/devil worship/lesbian/terrorist/eats kittens for breakfast/whatever'… Just to try to extract their brief feeling that they're mentally quicker than the person they're trying to hit."

"And what yer sayin is that they gotta keep doin it every day, because it never—"

"They gotta say the same shit over and over, because little drips of one-upmanship only last a few seconds. Then they gotta do it again."

"That's a buncha bullshit."

"It's an addiction, Your Honor. These people are addicted to one-upmanship. And so are their viewers. Look at who watches that stuff."

He turns towards Piss and Moan's trailer. The big flat screen TV is clearly visible through the kitchen windows.

"Addicts…" he mutters, watching the flickering screen.

"All medicating together."

"Gettin their daily fix."

He arches his back and tugs on his cap, "Well, mister college boy, I gotta skedaddle. The missus will think I'm in a ditch somewhere."

"I don't believe I've ever met your wife, Your Honor."

"No. No. She ain't walkin so good these days. She don't come out too much. I gotta go fetch her medicine for her."

He reaches into the front basket of his bike and pulls a bottle of brandy halfway out to show me the label. "Just like the doctor ordered", he winks.

"I see she has the same doctor that I do."

"You ever been married, college boy?"

"Yeah. Once. For a little while."

"Didn't work so good, huh?"

"Well, Your Honor… It's like when you're going on a vacation, and you book yourself a hotel. And it's called 'Beach' Hotel, and it's on 'Beach' Road."

"Yeah?"

"And you get there, and the hotel is nowhere near the beach. In fact, you can't even see the beach from the hotel."

"Not following you…"

"Well, that was my marriage in a nutshell."

"Sorry I asked, mi amigo. But I'm glad you're here with us now," he pats my arm.

The Steady Stream

Tuesday 4:04 p.m.

The Mayor has cycled off. I was just about to go in the trailer and make another cup of tea. Then I see Piss ambling across the road towards me.

When he walks, he sort of leans forward. And hunches over a little. Age and constant gravity have bent his back. As he walks, he swings his head from side to side.

Maybe he's scanning for radical Islamic terrorists? Who might be crouching in the darkness between the trailers? Who knows?

To me, at this moment, he actually looks like that poor sad bear at the Como Zoo.

The bear just stood in its pen, looking at the people, and swinging its head from side to side. Then it started banging its head into the wall. It bloodied up its ears and they got infected. They eventually had to put it down.

"Howdy neighbor," Piss partially raises his hand in a half wave.

"Hey, man," I wave back. "How's it going?"

Shit, shit, I forgot!! I have to remind myself to never ask that. But every time I just keep forgetting.

"Well," he drawls, "if you really want to know…"

No, I don't. No, I don't. No, I don't.

"Saw you out here with Jake. You know he collects cans. Like for cash, not like for collecting. But like for recycling. That's how he makes his money. I give him all my cans, usually on Tuesdays. 'Cause I get my 24 pack from Robert's—Robert's Liquor on Winchester Street? You know? On Friday. Just in time for the weekend. And then by Tuesday—usually by Tuesday—although some weeks it's maybe Monday, or you never know, we might just have a crazy weekend! Ha, ha, ha…"

Shoot me. Someone please just shoot me.

"Yeah, yeah, (Piss), I give him my cans too," I try to stop his rambling flow of interweaving thoughts.

"Saw you guys were looking at my kitchen. You know I'm gonna bump out that front wall so I can get a dishwasher in the kitchen, because our hands are getting pretty torn up from washing dishes."

He holds up his free hand, so I can see that he wasn't lying. I guess that's why he held it up. His other hand is clenched tightly around his usual can of Modelo.

"Because the wall tapers in towards the bottom like that, so you can see," He gestures towards the trailer, moving his hand in a downward tapering motion, to illustrate exactly what he means by tapering downwards.

"So, there's no room to fit a dishwasher in. I mean there's room at the top, you know, at the counter level. But with that taper, (he makes the motion again), there's no room at the bottom of the wall, so I gotta push the wall out, so there'll be room. But I gotta take out that cedar fence between our trailers first, 'cause it's in the way of the first responders. They gotta be able to run between the trailers if there's a fire, and the city code says, they gotta be able to get between the trailers, but that's OK, 'cause I can take that down any time, any time, then I can get my kitchen bumped out, so I can get a dishwasher in there, I got all the stuff I need. I got all the hardware and screws and

stuff, you know if you ever need any screws or bolts or anything, I have jars and jars of them, you know my clients give me this stuff all the time, so I got lots of hardware, screws—bolts—nuts for the bolts—hinges—cabinet pulls… When I get the kitchen bumped out I'm gonna hafta look at what I'm gonna do with the cabinets, 'cause I painted them but they're gonna need new doors maybe, if I change the layout around too much, but I can't change it too much, because the dishwasher needs to be next to the sink, so I can't really move the sink, well I could, if I was gonna crawl around underneath the trailer, and then of course, I'd hafta redo all the drains, I mean I could do it, it's just Schedule 40 stuff, nothing too difficult, as long as you get the half a bubble slope to the drain pipe, you know, the half a bubble drop to the drain pipe cause you gotta do it according to code, I like to do things right you know, I mean there's no sense in doing it twice, if you do it right the first time, I fixed Hazel's drain over there in your trailer, you know the Hazel, the woman who owned your trailer before you, she still works at Mobile Home Universe down on Signal Butte, if you ever need anything, they have a huge lot in the back with all trailer parts - Awnings. Doors. Windows. Steps. She did all the work herself, then her husband got cancer and he died, but she did all the work herself you know, on that trailer, kept it really clean, really really clean, all the time, she was cleaning and doing stuff, I try to keep things clean, but you know, I don't have time 'cause I changed out a couple water heaters last week, and a buncha stuff, so I don't get much time to clean, ha, ha, ha. And (Moan) you know, she can't do much 'cause her hands are all red and cracked from doing dishes because we can't fit a dishwasher into our kitchen because the trailer slopes downward like that, so I gotta bump out the trailer, so I can get a dishwasher in, but I gotta take that cedar fence down first, because the first responders…"

Fake News

Friday 5:07 p.m.

Four ibuprofen later.

Thankfully, Piss ran out of oxygen. Or beer. Or something to talk about.

Yeah. Like that would ever happen.

I collapse into my chair on the side of the trailer. Out of sight. The lady on channel 14 says will be a glorious sunset.

The Mayor wheels back up.

He stops his tricycle and leans his arms across the handlebars, "Now Winston, do you think them people who owns them networks know that the guys they're hiring are doing that upmanshit?"

"Your Honor," I wearily rub my forehead, "the people who own those networks *deliberately* hire people who are addicted to one-upmanship. Because they know, that they will drive viewership. Those hosts are basically being exploited *because of their addiction*. So that a handful of rich people, can get richer."

He tilts his head up gives a big belly laugh, "Of course! Them network owners are laughing all the way to the bank!"

"Upmanshit? Your Honor that's perfect!"

"They know. Don't they—them owners—they know exactly who's watching their shit, don't they? And who they need to have sitting in front of that camera."

"It's all about money, Your Honor."

"Just a-raking it in," he runs his hand through his hair.

"You know who owns that network? Don't you?"

"Ain't it that fella from Australia?"

"Same guy. Same guy who prints those tabloids you see at the checkout counter over at Junction Supermart."

"That 'News of the World' guy? That shit? Water cures cancer—Obama is an alien—*that* type of shit?"

"Exactly. Tabloid sensationalized nonsense. Just to make money. Well, that," I point at Piss and Moan's trailer, "is the *television* version."

"Shit! Your right!" He looks down and kicks at the pebbles with his toe.

"It's tabloid TV, Your Honor. Problem is, most of the people who watch it think it's the truth."

"Son of a bitch!" He kicks some more pebbles. "That little motherfucker."

"To him, it's just business. He's making a fortune."

"A handful of super smart guys, just a-rakin in the money from a whole buncha dumb bastards."

"I don't think the owners of those networks are smart. They just know how to *use* people. They use people to make a lot of money for themselves."

"A whole lot of money."

"Were you just down at the clubhouse?" I ask. "Watching the news?"

"Yeah." He swings off his bike and comes over to the porch. He puts one foot on the bottom step, and fishes his pack of smokes out of his shirt pocket.

"Buncha fake news," he waves his hand. "Buncha lying shits."

He lights up a smoke.

"Since people started pointing out this 'fake news', the people who are making up the fake news, are getting pegged to the wall. So, they try to flip it around."

"They need to get their upmanshit back!" he shakes his finger.

"Exactly. They try to claim that *everyone else* is making up fake news. But *their* stories are real."

Suddenly he turns his head and peers down the road towards the clubhouse. With an alarmed look on his face, he scurries towards his bike.

"Later gator."

I turn and look down the road.

Her comes Colleen, just a strollin along.

Can this day get any better?

Bandwidth

Wednesday 3:44 pm.

My friend Ray is an amazing guy.

His rate of perception is faster than any other human being I've ever met. And his depth of perception is astounding.

He's a software developer.

I've watched him scan a page of code and trim it, rewrite it, make it better, faster and smaller in less than a minute.

The man blows my mind.

Anywho.

He recommended I do this online test to check my internet connection. To see if it's slow. And how much traffic there is on the same feed from the nearest cable distribution point.

My connection was average. Not bad, not great.

Probably about as good as it is going to get for this neck of the woods. Out here in Tin Town, we're a little behind the technological frontline. Most of my neighbors here '*Don't do the email*'.

Seriously. They think that makes them look smarter than all the obviously stupid people who '*Do the email.*'

It kinda has the opposite result.

Ray says the internet provider won't update the equipment in areas where they have so few subscribers. It's not worth the expense to them.

Anyway, so I have a shitty internet connection and weak signal. So, I guess that's just that.

Whatever.

I just need my emails. And to google stuff, for the book I'm trying to ghostwrite. Like Irish terms of endearment: Tá mo chroí istigh ionat.

That means 'my heart is within you'. That's what Tom is going to say to Kate on their wedding day. I'll put it back in later I think. Maybe when he dies.

The Exact Same Piece

Friday 7:36 a.m.

Tea in hand.
One bird. Sat right in the middle of the antenna.

Right!

Here we go.

Tom's death scene.

Straight through.

No stopping now.

Bugger.

Couldn't sleep last night. Legs were cramping too bad. So, I was surfing around. Came across something about the Dunning–Kruger effect.

Wikipedia says: The Dunning–Kruger effect is a cognitive bias in which low-ability individuals suffer from illusory superiority, mistakenly assessing their ability as much higher than it really is.

Basically, if you are simple-minded, you cannot know that you are simple-minded.

Because…

If you are missing a piece of your brain,
you cannot realize that you are missing a piece of your brain.
Because the piece that you are missing,
is the exact same piece,
that would tell you,
that you are missing a piece of your brain.

It's all so very clear, when you think about it.

Well…

It's clear for those who *can* think about it.

Close and Personal

Tuesday 5:12 p.m.

I was sitting outside the other night, having a 'whisky' and a cigar. And my neighbor, Blinkin, who lives around the corner, goes by in her minivan and waves.

I put the word: 'whisky', in quotes, in the attempt to impress upon you, the reader, a reality that the Junction Supermart doesn't seem to comprehend: A plastic half-gallon bottle of brown colored liquid, with a label that reads: (in fine print) *'Contains at least 28% whisky',* and sells for $12.99 a bottle, is not Whisky.

It's 'Whisky'.

In quotes.

Anyway.

Blinkin parks and walks back around to where I'm sitting.

I call her Blinkin because she is a pale older white woman who stays in her trailer and never sees the sun. She's spindly, and a little bit knock-kneed. Every time I see her, she looks like a White Tail Deer, standing paralyzed, blinking in the headlights of an oncoming bus. Completely unable to move.

"Howdy neighbor," I wave.

But, Blinkin doesn't offer any kind of greeting.

Instead, she launches into a conversation, that apparently is already under way inside her head, "People change. None of us are like we were years ago. Why can't everyone just accept that?"

"I'm fine. Thank you for asking. Sounds to me like you're trying to convince yourself of something?"

After a little more chat, it finally becomes clear that she's trying to talk herself into believing that it was OK that she voted for someone who confessed to sexually assaulting women.

Especially since she claims to be an extremist—sorry—*Evangelical* Christian.

Blinkin only gets her news from Christian television shows.

She tells me, that they have stories on there, that the other networks don't even cover.

I'm quite sure that's absolutely true.

But, the reason why other networks don't cover those stories, is probably *not* the reason she's thinking it is.

So, once we had stumbled through/moved on/given up on her ability to rationalize her vote, she starts Merkansplaining to me about Christianity and the United States, "The United States has always been a Christian nation," she declares, with a stern expression.

"That's not factual. We all learned that in Civics Class in high school."

Her head snaps back quickly, "The founding fathers believed on the bible."

"The Founding Fathers, specifically and deliberately sought to separate church from state. Do you *not* remember that phrase?"

She does. It's obvious.

I pull out my phone and google *'founding fathers and Christianity'*.

Blinkin is babbling on about how everyone in her church knows the truth, and if only people would open themselves to Jesus.

"John Adams," I read aloud: "*The Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion*."

Blinking.

"James Madison," I continue: "*The civil government functions with complete success by the total separation of the Church from the State*."

"You can't trust that!" She dismisses my phone with a wave of her thin pale hand. "They just put that stuff on there to make trouble."

"Who's 'they'? Who puts what stuff—"

She cuts me off, "I trust in Jesus!"

"Who," I try again, "puts what stuff—"

She cuts me off again. "I have a close, personal relationship with Jesus."

How would that actually work?

"OK—so—close—and personal. So, you guys are like—what? Fucking?"

Well, 'Ol Blinkin goes off on a right tangent about blasphemy, and God will condemn me, and so forth and what not. And when she pauses to breathe, I lean in, and whisper: "So, just '*friends*' then?" And I give her a little conspiratorial wink. *Your secret is safe with me: You're just 'friends.' Not fucking at all. Honestly.*

She sits there blinking. Right over her head.

Then, Blinkin blurts out, "I believe Jesus is Lord."

"Lord? Lord of who?"

"Lord of all of us!"

"So, you don't believe that Vishnu is Lord?"

"Who?" Her eyes skitter around.

"Vishnu. You know, one of the three Supreme beings that make up the Hindu trinity?"

She shakes her head dismissively.

"Because," I point towards the setting sun, "just about eight thousand miles that-a-way, there are over a billion people, who believe that Vishnu is Lord. Along with Brahma and Shiva. Are they wrong?"

Blinking.

"Are you telling me, that *you*, sitting here in your little trailer park in Apache Junction, Arizona—that *you* know better than one billion people in another country—that you know who the *true* Lord is, and *all* of them are wrong? Is that what you're saying?"

From the wide-eyed stare on her small face I can see that she has not considered this.

"They," I point again, "can say the same thing about you."

She tries to shift focus, leaning towards me, carefully enunciating each word, just in case I have difficulty hearing, or don't understand English, and tells me again: "I—have—a—close—personal—relationship—with—Jesus—Christ."

"You've fallen for the oldest con on earth," I tell her, "The 'Promise of Spiritual Connection'. Every religion in the world tries to claim, that they have a direct connection to whatever made the entire universe. But none of them have any proof."

She scowls at me like I am the devil or something.

"Every religion in the world," I continue, "has their own document that makes them believe they are right, and everyone else is wrong."

She shakes her head dismissively. As though, if she shakes it hard enough, this reality might magically disappear.

"My dear lady, you've been suckered in by extremist Christians. Because you're scared of dying. And, you're clutching at *anything,* that gives you hope and promise, that there's something after this life."

Still shaking her head.

"Religions," I smile, "are nothing more than ritualized panics about death."

Her eyes flit around.

I relight my cigar. "It's not your fault. You've been sold a fantasy. A dumbed down, easily digestible, happy meal of beliefs."

I sip my 'whisky', and watch the thoughts chase around behind her eyes, like cats after their own tails.

"Well—I mean—God says…" She rubs her thin pale hands together.

"Let me ask you this: How do you know, that it's Jesus of Nazareth, that you have this personal relationship with?"

"He talks to me."

"And exactly how does he talk to you?"

"It's a still small voice that I hear."

The 'still small voice'. Are we seriously still tossing this phrase around?

"Inside your head? Not out loud?"

"Yes."

"You do realize that hearing voices inside your head is a sign of mental illness?"

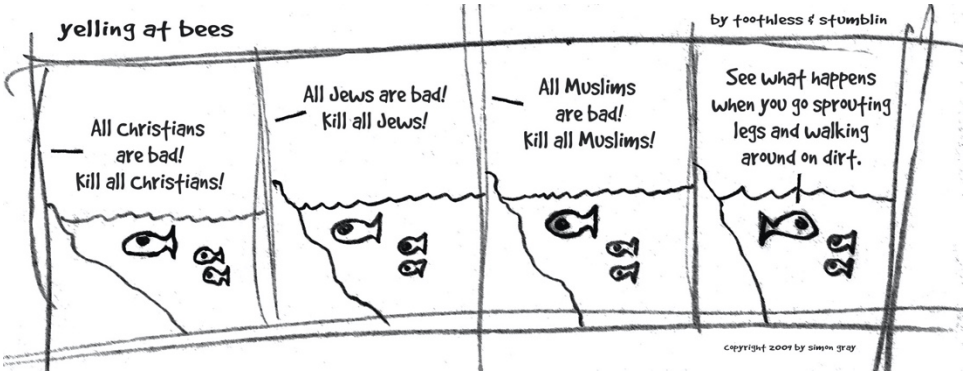
"You're wrong! It's Jesus!"

"And when Jesus of Nazareth talks to you, does he tell you that he's proud of you for inventing a religion in his name? And using it to shame and terrorize others into believing what you believe?"

Blinkin looks at me as though I was from Mars.

"Because, dear lady, I would bet, that Jesus of Nazareth would probably say that you missed his whole message of love and acceptance. And his whole purpose for being on earth."

Silence. Cats chasing tails.


yelling at bees
by toothless & stumblin
All Christians are bad! Kill all Christians!
All Jews are bad! Kill all Jews!
All Muslims are bad! Kill all Muslims!
See what happens when you go sprouting legs and walking around on dirt.
copyright 2009 by simon gray

Patching the Cracks

Tuesday 5:32 p.m.

The Dude and I have a shitty job today.

It's my fault really.

He saw me doing a little patching on my trailer roof. I guess he assumed that I knew what the hell I was doing, and asked me to look at his roof.

I didn't know how to patch a trailer roof. I googled that shit.

This is my first tin can home. I've got a big fat learning curve going on here.

But I checked out a few videos on YouTube. I watched a couple of other bright sparks demonstrate how to patch holes in a trailer roof. So, I got the roofing sealant and the mesh, and did it myself.

I sure as hell can't afford to hire anyone.

Problem is:

Now, I have exposed myself as being up on a tin can roof looking like I might know what the hell I'm doing.

Should have patched mine at night. When nobody could see me up there.

Anyway. Here I am. And up we go, onto The Dude's roof. With our white elastomeric roofing cement and our roll of mesh tape.

"Mister Winston," The Dude is already sweating and it's not even 7am, "I sure as hell appreciate this my friend."

"Yeah man. Let's see what we can do."

The Dude's roof has a long crack, running down most of the southern side of the trailer. It was half-assed patched with tar at one point. But they just painted over the crack. They didn't brush anything under the flapping edges. To try to glue it down. So, of course, that didn't fix shit.

He showed me a long water stain that runs along the joint between the ceiling and the wall, through his living room, kitchen and back hall.

At that point, I knew exactly what the problem was.

This was the same thing I saw on the YouTube video.

Now, here we are, staring down at the long flapping tear in the mobile home roof.

"Lookit here." The Dude is pointing to a big dollop of caulk, coiled on top of the crack. "Asswipe! I paid that guy a hundred bucks, man! He said 'Oh I'm gonna caulk all that shit down tight man. Be good as new'. Ass bastard!"

It looked like the guy had just pumped half of a tube of caulk in a coil, and left it. Didn't bother to smooth it down. Or try to get some inside the crack or underneath the flaps. Nope. Just piled it up, like long stringy turd on top of the crack.

"You paid a hundred bucks for this?"

The Dude looks pretty pissed.

I open up the can of the white roofing cement, and start slathering it under the loose flaps.

"Let's talk about something else," he huffs. "Before I go looking for that piece of shit, and frag his ass."

I press a short length of mesh into the line of white cement. Then I brush over it with another thick coat of the cement.

He squats down on the aluminum roof, making it crinkle and pop as he does. "You know that prefrontal thing, that you were sayin the other day. That cortex thing?"

"What about it?" I pull off another piece of mesh tape and cut it to length.

"How does someone who's got that prefrontal thing get elected into the gov? That's what I don't get."

"Because, to some of people, blurting out the first thing that pops into your head, is seen as being decisive and aggressive."

"That's horse shit."

"Never admitting you're wrong, Dude, is also seen as a sign of strength."

"Well… News Flash!" he waves his arms, "News Flash… Havin a fragged brain ain't no sign of strength!"

"Exactly. If you can't admit your own behavior, that's not a sign of strength. That's a sign of weakness. Mental weakness."

"See? It's always the opposite, with those guys. Isn't it?"

I am not the neatest person with this goopy roofing cement. It's on my pants. It's up my arm. It's on my shoes.

"Cut me a piece of that mesh, would ya?" I point at the scissors. "Oh about three feet long."

The Dude unrolls the roll of mesh, and measures out three feet, with way too much surgical precision.

I'm sitting waiting, with goopy white shit dripping off my brush. But, the view of the Superstitions from here is great. So I don't mind.

He finally hands me the piece of mesh and I cement it down.

I lean back on my ankles and look at what we've done so far.

Looking good. Almost like the YouTube video.

I move the bucket of cement a little further down the roof.

The Dude has already measured out and cut the next piece of mesh.

Good. Let's get this shit done.

"Another piece of mesh…" I hold out my hand.

He measures out another piece.

I take the mesh and press it into the goopy cement.

"So, Mister Winston, you sayin' that's the reduced capacity thing? The cortex thing? Them politicos can't be accountable for their own behavior?"

I pause for a minute, "Well, now, you tell me. You read *Cavemen With Cellphones*. So, people with Hunting, Inventor, Worker, Gathering or Nurturing Instinct have no problem answering those questions. They can admit when they're wrong. Not difficult to do."

"Oh hell no. I don't have *any* problem saying: 'Oh shit, sorry, that wasn't right'. Oh… OK. So I got it. So, it's only those who's acting out of *Warrior* Instinct, that can't admit."

"Ask yourself this," I point the brush at him. "How many people do you know, that cannot admit when they make a mistake? I'm sure you know one. Maybe two?"

He wags his head from side to side, like he's mentally counting people he knows that fit this description.

"It's a small number isn't it, Dude? But those few, really and truly cannot admit when they screw up."

He looks pensively at the roll of mesh and the scissors in his hands. Finally, he slowly and carefully cuts another piece of mesh and hands it to me. "Yeah. So, that makes sense. This election thing."

"What's that Dude?"

He leans back and looks up into the cloudless Arizona sky. "The booger eaters. Who can't admit they're wrong. Who want to push their fraged opinions, on the whole damn country. All of them."

"You can't assume an absolute," I point my brush at him. "You can't assume that *all* the people who vote for liars have underdeveloped prefrontal cortices."

He scowls at me.

"Some people vote for one person, because they are voting against their opponent. And some people vote for someone because they want to move away from the two-party system."

He laughs, "That's what we got, alright."

"Well," I shake my brush in the air, "as Lao Tzu tells us: The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Even if it's a bad step, a painful step, or a step in another wrong direction."

"OK. OK, Mister Winston, so I'm not talking about *all* the people who vote. I'm talking about the hardcore, the knuckle draggers, the racist, homophobic. That will *always* vote for liars. The Unders. Right? Unders?"

"The obvious demographic of people who suffer from underdeveloped prefrontal cortices? Is that who you're talking about, Dude?"

"That's the ass bastards," he jabs his finger in the air.

I pause, and sit back on the tin roof, rubbing my cramping leg, "You do realize, that some people might vote for liars, because they're trying to protect their own denial?"

"Say what?" he squints.

"They're voting— "

"To protect their own denial," he cuts me off. "Got it, got it."

I scooch a little further down the roof, and start to slather the white goo on some more of the cracked roofing.

"Almost done now, my friend," I rub my aching leg.

"Mister Winston, are anyone gonna to do anything about those people?"

"Do what, Dude? Round them up? Lock them away?"

He stares down at the scissors in his hand.

He pushes a few more three-foot sections of mesh towards me. He has been absent-mindedly cutting them this whole time.

It's way more than we need.

"We're good, man," I hold my hand up to stop him from cutting more.

'Oh. Yeah," he realizes what he's done and sets down the scissors.

I go back to slathering goo, "You know, those guys, spitting and screaming, red faced, at debates and giving speeches."

"Yeah, there's a bunch of them types."

"It's like they're trying to terrorize people into voting for them."

"Yeah."

"And these TV hosts, day after day, trying to influence the opinions of American citizens."

"What about them?"

"Technically, is that the definition of a domestic terrorist?"

"Might be. Could be," he scowls.

I shift my weight to my other leg, "It's like it's a competition. Vote for the guy who's gonna force the most personal opinions onto the people."

"That's all they do. Anyway," he snorts.

"Regardless of which party they belong to."

He looks at me puzzled.

Then he looks down at the roof, "Yeah I reckon that's true too."

We're done.

We sit back on the tin roof, and look at the crack, now completely sealed up and ready for the monsoon season.

"Frag this." He stands up and heads for the ladder, "It's Miller time."

The Other Definition

Tuesday 6:24 p.m.

I pause at the top of the ladder and look out over the vast sprawling Valley of the Sun. I can see the tall buildings in downtown Phoenix through the ever-present low hanging yellow smog of car exhaust.

The lady in the trailer across the street comes out of her front door, and waves her hanky at me.

"Hello… Young man…"

"Hiya," I wave back.

"Can you look at my roof too? And see if it needs patching?"

I look up at her roof.

It's covered in asphalt shingles.

She lives in one of the newer trailers. It has a pitched roof, built out of wooden trusses, covered with plywood and shingles. Not like the rest of us. Living in these beat up old tin cans, with their thin tin roofs.

I wonder if she realizes that.

You never know with some of these older Tin Towners.

"But you have shingles…" I smile.

She gets this horrible look on her face.

"Well!" she spits, wrapping her robe tightly around her, and scowling at me. "It's not like they're contagious!"

And she flings herself back into her trailer, slamming the door.

It takes me a few seconds to realize what just happened.

Two Teaspoons Short

Saturday 3:35 p.m.

"Apparently," I point to the computer screen, "our prefrontal cortex is the last part of our brain to fully develop. Usually by our mid-twenties."

"But, Mister Winston, you're saying that—that some people—that cortex thing *never* develops."

"I'm not the one who's saying it," I point to the screen.

"Lemme see," The Dude pushes me out of the way so he can get in front of the computer screen.

He reads out loud: "Our prefrontal cortex—yeah cortex—that's the shit—carries out the executive—executive? Uh, blah, blah, executive functions of the brain. Determines right from wrong. Makes us see the bigger picture. OK. So?"

He takes a swig of his beer.

I point further down on the screen.

"Also," he resumes reading, "the prefrontal cortex is involved in repressing social—socially inappropriate behaviors. Many people who are incarcerated, socio—sociopathic or suffering from mental illness,

often have reduced prefrontal cortex—cortices! And lack the normal number of new—new—nee-oo-ral connections in this area."

He scowls at the screen.

I click on another link and he reads aloud, "Newvo—neuro—scientist Stephen Fleming, Professor Gerry—Ger—Geraint Rees and a team of UK researchers, have found that people with more gray and white matter micro-structures, in a particular area of the prefrontal cortex—that's the shit. Tended to be more introspective, or better at evaluating their own performance."

His head bobs excitedly, "A specific region of the brain, appears to be larger in individuals, who are good—who are good at turning their thoughts inward, and reflecting upon their decisions."

"And here's another one," I click on the bookmark.

He reads: "In August of two-thousand and four, Darin Dougherty, M.D., an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School—Harvard goddamn Medical School, Mister Winston—uh—submitted a study, reported in the volume sixty-one number eight, of the archives of general psychiatry…"

He pauses to take a swig from his long neck Miller High Life.

"In this study," he reads, "when the subjects started getting angry, blood flow increases in the left prefrontal cortex. See, Mister Winston, prefrontal thing. In the left blah blah—were significantly greater in healthy control—control? Uh—subjects than in subjects who were prone to anger."

He looks up, puzzled, for a moment.

Then shrugs his shoulders.

"The ventral area," he resumes, "of the prefrontal cortex, is known to be crusa—crucial for constraining impulsive outbursts. Oh, hell yeah.

Persons with a predisposition to anger and aggression, have been found to have decreased—see decreased— decreased activity in this brain area. Decreased."

"Basically," I tap the screen, "they're saying that there's not enough blood flowing to their brains."

He straightens up, "Hey, Mister Winston, have you ever looked at someone, and said to yourself: 'What the hell is wrong with this guy? Is he just not getting enough blood to his brain?'"

"Oh, hell yeah, Dude. And it may have been true."

"I've said it," he beams. "I've said it right to their face, 'Hey buddy! Are you just not gettin enough blood to your brain, or what?'"

"It makes them act angry all the time."

"Like these stupid politicos. Always angry. Angry 'bout immigrants. Angry 'bout having to be polite to people. Angry when you call them on their *own* shit."

"You might say— "

"I watched that whole campaign bullshit," he rolls on, "Just angry shit. No practical—no sensible ways to fix shit. No rational—just a buncha knee-jerk angry shit. Like pissed off kids."

"Perhaps— "I begin again.

"When they answer questions 'bout their plans and policies, they just say the first thing that pops into their head. It's obvious! Making shit up as they went."

"Lots of people believe that they are so smart, that the first thing that pops into their head, is going to be the right thing to do."

The Dude spreads his hands apart, in his typical 'Dude' stance, "It's like part of their brain is damaged."

"Now, read this," I click on another link.

He leans in and reads, "At the November nineteen-ninety-nine annual meeting of the society for new row—neu-ro-science, Asa Berg—

wall—Bergvall and her colleagues presented findings on their study of violent offenders."

He pauses as I scroll the page.

"The brains of the violent offenders," he reads, "performed normally in every task, except—in every task except the one which taps prefrontal function. See, prefrontal. In that, said Bergvall, It was as if they were retarded."

He looks at me.

"Retarded," he smirks. "She said 'retarded'."

I take a swig of my beer.

"They had an impaired ability," he resumes reading, "to shift their attention—oh—to shift their attention in order to view the world in a different way. A function that is—that is linked to the lateral prefrontal cortex."

"Obviously," I tap the screen, "none of our public servants are murderers or violent criminals. But some of them do seem to stub their toes on morally and socially acceptable decisions. And, they have an impaired ability to shift their attention in order to view the world in a different way."

"Not missing enough cortex thing, Mister Winston, to be a *murderer*. But just enough, to be an *asshole*!"

"Exactly."

The Dude leans back and tilts his chin up, "Not missing enough to be a murderer…"

"But just enough to be an asshole."

We both look at each other and laugh.

It's a giddy laugh. Like two weary miners, who just struck gold.

Look at this one," I click on another bookmark, and read aloud: "In one recent study, scientists examined 21 people with antisocial

personality disorder—a condition that characterizes many convicted criminals—those with this disorder typically have no regard for right and wrong. They may often violate the law, and the rights of others, according to the Mayo Clinic.

"Brain scans of the antisocial people, compared with a control group of individuals without any mental disorders, showed an average of eighteen percent reduction in the volume of the brain's middle frontal gyrus. Nine percent reduction in the volume of the orbital frontal gyrus. Two sections in the brain's frontal lobe."

"Frontal lobe…" he repeats.

"Here. One last one."

He reads: "University of Southern California cycle—p-sycho-pathologist Adrian Raine documented prefrontal damage in people anti—huh? Oh, with Antisocial Personality Disorder. His article in Archives General Psychiatry, February two-thousand, blah, blah—oh. Here: 'Antisocial men had eleven to fourteen percent less brain tissue volume in their prefrontal cortex. See! Cortex thing. Uh—compared to normal males. Deficit of two teaspoon's worth."

"But the prefrontal cortex doesn't have to be damaged, Dude. It just might not fully develop."

"It's the same shit, man. It's the same shit."

"The outcome is the same, Dude. The behaviors are identical."

He aims his finger at me, like it was a pistol, and he clicks his finger like he was pulling the trigger. "That's the point, Mister Winston. That's the damn point. The *behaviors* are identical. Lithuanian-pig-dog-monkey-fucking identical."

"So now you see," I shut down the browser.

"Oh, I see," he arches his back, stiff from bending over to look at the screen. "All those booger eaters. They's all a couple teaspoons short of a full brain!"

It's Physical

Sunday 6:52 a.m.

We had a rain storm last night.

It woke me up and I tossed and turned, and couldn't get back to sleep.

The wind whipped in, and blew down some pallet wood that I had leaned up against the side of the trailer.

The rain started about midnight and steady piddled until almost dawn.

I'm sitting out front now with my steaming mug of PG Tips.

Last Beer Mike drives by and scowls at me.

I can smell the cinnamon buns coming out of the oven of the bakery over at the Supermart. Across Old West Highway.

The Canadians wander down their driveway in their bathrobes, to survey the potential wind damage in their front yard. And, to smoke their first cigarette of the day.

I didn't suffer any damage.

I drink my tea. And watch a slow lazy parade of bright pink Bougainvillea petals, pirouetting across the pebbles in front of my

trailer. They blew down the street last night, from the large bush in front of number 202.

The skies are still grey.

It might rain some more.

Last night, when I couldn't sleep, I got up, and did what I usually do—I surfed around on my slow-ass internet.

It seems that others have looked into this mutated brain thing too.

Neurologist Joseph Babinski called this condition: **Anosognosia**

From Wikipedia:

Anosognosia (/æˌnɒsɒgˈnoʊziə/, /æˌnɒsɒgˈnoʊʒə/; from Ancient Greek ἀ- a-, "without", νόσος nosos, "disease" and γνῶσις gnōsis, "knowledge") is viewed as a deficit of self-awareness, a condition in which a person who suffers certain disability, seems unaware of the existence of his or her disability.

It was first named by the neurologist Joseph Babinski in 1914. Anosognosia results from physiological damage on brain structures. Typically, to the parietal lobe. Or a diffuse lesion on the fronto-temporal-parietal area in the right hemisphere.

Physiological damage.

He's saying it's a *physical defect* in the brain.

Which would be detectable with a brain scan.

A scan of the frontal lobe.

This also sounds a lot like the Dunning-Kruger effect, the *"cognitive bias in which low-ability individuals suffer from illusory superiority, mistakenly assessing their ability as much higher than it really is"*.

Basically: some people think they are smarter than everyone one else when it is clearly obvious that they are mentally slower.

And David Dunning recognizes the similarities in their research. He calls it— *"the Anosognosia of everyday life"*.

"If you're incompetent, you can't know you're incompetent.
[T]he skills you need to produce a right answer,
are exactly the skills you need to recognize what a right answer is."

Wikipedia continues:

Anosognosia -

"The physical defect that causes anosognosia, distinguishes the condition from denial, which is a psychological defense mechanism.

But there have been attempts at a unified explanation.

Because, both Anosognosia and denial are almost always connected with damage in the right hemisphere. Split-brain research suggests that this asymmetry points to a neurological answer."

In other words, there is a physical defect that causes this behavior.

And that physical defect is detectable with a brain scan.

Maybe we need to start scanning people.

For example: People who want to run for public office…

Snowbirds

Tuesday 6:04 a.m.

Red and blue streaks running to the north behind the palm trees this morning.

The air is still. Not a breeze.

I sip my PG Tips.

There is a whole weird thing going on with these snowbirds.

Here, in Arizona we have seasonal visitors. About half of the trailers in this park are owned by people who live in Canada, Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, South Dakota and Michigan. Pretty much anywhere that you would like to not spend the winter.

Hence the term, 'snowbirds'.

They fly south.

They buy a cheap trailer in AZ and they 'winter' in Apache Junction.

I moved into the park last May. Met the managers, got a welcome package, with all the rules and regulations.

Someone prints off calendars of the monthly activities and leaves a pile of them on the corner of the table in the clubhouse.

I usually pick one up on Saturday mornings when I go for Saturday Morning Coffee.

It's a pleasant affair. Have a blueberry bear's claw and a cup of perked with your fellow Tin Towners.

But since the 'Seasonal Visitors' started rolling in, things have gotten a little weird.

Saturday morning. I show up for coffee as usual, and there is a whole bunch more people here. And there is some really old fella, on an oxygen tank, talking into a microphone. He has to pause and breathe every few words.

Then, he reads the same calendar that we all have in our hands. And can easily read for ourselves. Then he reads a couple of jokes out of Reader's Digest. Then he puts down the mic and starts coming around to the tables.

He waddles up to me, "I see you're a newcomer. Welcome to our park."

"You're a little late," I smile, "I moved in back in May. You just got here. I should be welcoming *you*!"

"I don't spend the summers here," he frowns. "Too hot. Well, I just wanted to welcome you."

"I see. So even though I moved in in May, I'm technically/officially/not actually here until you arrive in November, and officially welcome me?"

"I'm just trying to welcome you to our park," he sounds a little testy.

"*Your* park? Oh, I didn't realize that you were the owner."

"I don't *own* the park," he sneers.

"Oh, I see, so you rent here. Like me. Both *renters*. Exactly the same."

He looks like he is trying to think of something to say.

"Oh," I continue, "except for one small difference: I live here *full time*."

"I've been coming here for *twelve years*," getting angry now.

"So, you're saying that makes you better than me?"

"A lot of us have been here for *a long time*."

"Not *full* time."

"A—*long*—time," he speaks slowly, carefully enunciating each word, just in case I have difficulty hearing, or don't understand English, and then tries to walk away quickly.

"So, you're saying that I'm not as good as you, because I live here *full time*?"

"I'm saying welcome to our *community*," he musters an awkward forced smile.

"But I've been a part of the *community* since May…"

He walks away.

Sunday afternoon.

Two women I have not seen before, pull up to my trailer in their golf cart.

They hop out with big smiles, "Welcome to our park".

And they hand me the same welcome pack I got when I moved in. With all the rules and regulations. And *another* calendar of the monthly activities.

"You're a little late, I smile back. "I moved in back in May. You just got here. I should be welcoming you!"

"Oh, we don't spend the summers here. Too hot. We just want to welcome you to our community."

"But I've been a *part of the community* since May…"

The Mice

Monday 2:06 p.m.

I'm standing in the street, talking to the couple from North Dakota.

I call them Hear No/Speak No.

She does all the talking.

That's why I call him Speak No.

I think he was raised on a sugar beet farm. Way out on the flat lands, up near the Canadian border. I don't think he had much contact with strangers during the formative years of his life.

He's a little awkward around people he doesn't know.

He just stands there, like a lump of wood. With a pained expression on his face. And he looks at me, like I have dragons growing out of my ears or something. His wife handles all communication.

I think she grew up in the city. Some booming metropolis like Minot.

She always has a plastered-on smile.

And always tries to focus on the positive.

That's what she's saying right now: "I just always try to focus on the positive…"

That's why I call her Hear No.

Blinkin comes out to join us.

I haven't seen or talked to her since our 'personal relationship with Jesus' chit chat.

I'm talking to Hear No/Speak No about what I had to do to get the mice out of my trailer, when I first moved in.

"Oh," Blinkin interrupts, "there were no mice in that trailer. I knew the lady who lived there before. Hazel. And she kept it very clean."

"Oh, yes," I reply, "there were many mice in there. Living in the walls. I had to tear the walls out, and a ceiling."

"No. There were no mice," Blinkin is trying to sound just as sure as she can possibly sound.

I look at her puzzled.

Then I get it.

Blinkin needs me to be wrong about the mice, because if I am right about one thing, then I might be right about something else.

Namely, her religious beliefs.

So, in her small head, I need to be wrong about anything and everything. Otherwise, the whole foundation of *her* life gets shaky.

She might be believing in a lie.

This behavior is called: 'If one, then all.'

It's another form of denial protection.

"Yes," I smile at her, "The trailer was *very clean* when I bought it. *And*, there were mice in the walls and ceiling."

Hear No/Speak No are mumbling goodbye, and pulling away quickly. North Dakotans don't do conflict.

"Then you must have brought them with you!" Blinkin declares.

"Brought them with me? Oh, that is desperate. Like I would deliberately pack boxes of mice from my old house and release them here just to criticize the former owner about mice—"

"Yes!" she blurts.

"Are you mentally ill? My exterminator can confirm this. He helped me pull the paneling off the wall between the bedrooms. We found years of nests. Generations of mouse poop. Almost 2 inches deep, where they were getting in."

"I don't believe you," she snorts. "I just know that Hazel kept it very clean."

"Yes, it was. Very clean. *And* very mice infested."

"I think you're making it up!"

"You can ask my exterminator, next time he comes over."

"He'll probably lie," she sticks out her chin. "Just for your sake."

"And why would he do that?" And why would I lie about such a thing? What are you thinking that I gain from saying there were mice in the trailer, if there weren't?"

Her eyes flit around, "All I know is, she kept that trailer *very clean*."

She leans towards me when she says "Very clean". And she enunciates each word as though I was hard of hearing. Or don't understand English.

The she strides quickly back to her tin can before I can reply.

I forgot that I still had that one mouse skeleton. We found it in the wall, almost perfectly intact. I saved it in a box.

I should have shown her that.

Nah.

She would probably declare that God deliberately made that skeleton, and put it in the wall.

Just to test her faith.

Like he does with fossils.

Antisocial

Sunday 8:32 a.m.

Witness Protection Man just pulled back in his drive way.

While he was gone, I snuck over to have a little nosey about. He has black plastic covering the inside of his front windows.

He rarely ever leaves. I don't know if he bought that trailer, or if he's renting it. But ever since he moved in, he stays inside. He only comes out to throw away trash. And a few times a week he drives somewhere, briefly. Probably to get groceries.

He never says hello to anyone. Never waves. Or even a short perfunctory nod my way. He certainly doesn't walk across the street, hand outstretched, in a gesture of trust and friendship. And introduce himself. Oh no. Not this guy…

What the hell is he doing in there?

In the afternoons and evenings, he is in the back of his trailer, up against the block wall. You can hear his TV/stereo/whatever turned way up.

These rooms in these trailers are like ten-foot square.

So, if he's sitting on a chair or sofa say, eight feet away from the TV…

And he *still* can't hear it?

I can hear it on my front porch.

I mean, if you just want to stay inside your trailer and drink shots of Fireball, and masturbate to the Playboy channel, then that's your business.

But black plastic?

What the hell is he doing in there?

And there goes Blinkin, off to refresh her delusions.

I mean, off to church.

Need Help

Monday 2:44 pm.

Nothing.
No birds, no words.
Just a big fat blank.

So, I almost called my neighbor 'Piss' to his face. I ran into him in the hardware store. In the fasteners aisle. It almost just tumbled right out of my mouth, "Hey P—"

This book is going to cause me problems.

I rode the scooter to the hardware store, to get a little wind in my face and cool off.

I have an Italian scooter. An Aprilia Scarabeo 150. It is sweetness on two wheels. A little twist and go. I got it in trade for some painting work I did for a rich guy a few years back.

It's like the happiest thing in my life sometimes.

I ride it whenever I can, because my legs hang down and rest on the foot pads. Which is a lot easier on my pinched nerves, than having to lift my foot in midair and press on the brake pedal in the car.

Some days, the cramping is just too much. And I can't drive.

So, I take the scooter whenever I can.

Like today.

On the way back, I have to stop at the traffic light on the corner by the drug store. And the homeless veteran is there again.

He's holding up his piece of cardboard:

Homeless Vet
Need help
God Bless

I'm right at the front of the line and waiting to turn right. I'm like, eight feet away from him. And he's working me with the sad eyes.

I hate this shit.

I don't have any money to give him. I'm trying to get disability fer chrisake.

Don't look at me buddy. I need help too.

I gas the scooter and slide around the corner.

In my rear-view mirror, I see him giving me the finger. I guess God doesn't bless, unless you give this guy some money.

If my old neighbor Todd were here, he would have told the guy, "Hey, dude, it ain't my job to compensate for a broken government."

Todd used to tell me, "If Lockheed Martin and Boeing can make billions off us risking our lives, then the least they could do is spend a little bit of those billions taking care of us when we get home."

Todd was in the Air Force for twenty some years. He was always telling me that the war on terror is a growth business. With zero regulation and a robust future, "It ain't no coalition of the *willing*, dude, it's a coalition of the *billing*."

Todd owns a lot of guns. A Lot.

Once, he told me that he owns a gun that can blow a hole in a reinforced concrete wall.

"Why would you need that?" I looked at him puzzled.

"For protection."

I guess he's afraid a reinforced concrete wall might try to attack him some day.

Veteran's Day

Saturday 1:22 p.m.

I'm skipping the Veterans Day celebration at the clubhouse. Instead, I'm sitting with the Mayor of Tin Town, and drinking a can.

His Honor was in Vietnam, or the 'Stupid War', as he calls it.

"We got a lot of soldiers in our family, mi amigo. My great grandpapppy was in the War of Northern Aggression."

I have heard this term before. From my friends that grew up in the South.

"The Great Republic of Texas," he drawls, waving his can of beer in salute, "seceded from the United of States along with all the other slave states. Not too proud about the slave part, I gotta say. When I was a-growin up, most of my friends were black. Mind you, that was just about a hundred years later. Hell, my first girlfriend was black. Beautiful girl."

"My first girlfriend was black too."

He smiles, "Well, the powers that be in Washington D.C… Well, they decided that we were not allowed to withdraw from the United of States. So, they had to come down south, and force us all back in it."

He drains his can, and points it at me questioningly.

"Oh, yes sir, Your Honor. I'll have another."

He scuttles into his trailer and comes back with a couple of cold ones.

"Most people don't know, mi amigo, the whole damn thing started because tobacco and cotton from the south was being shipped north to the mills and warehouses. And they would ship it to England and France."

"I remember that from high school."

"So, the South was a-gettin itself set up to sell that stuff to England and France directly. They could buy it cheaper gettin it straight from the fields. And we'd all be gettin nice and rich. Instead of the middlemen up north. Well then, the northern mills and warehouses was a-gettin cut out of the deal. They couldn't make any money offa us. And them Northern fellas, well… They didn't like that so much, you see?"

He pauses and takes a sip off his can.

"So ol' Abe Lincoln got his army to march on down here, and whip all us ignorant bastards back into submission. All's so they could get their fair piece of the action back at the mills and warehouses in New England."

He taps his finger rhythmically on the side of his can.

"But, ol' 'Honest Abe' made out like he was givin freedom to the black folks. Not about protecting the profits of them Northern companies. He wont so damn honest 'bout that, wuz he."

"Why does this sound so familiar?" I shake my head.

"Because mi amigo, that's how we do things in the United of States. We're always starting wars to protect the profits of companies. But we always sell it to the people as us givin freedom to somebody. That's an easier sell. Ain't nobody gonna go halfway around the world and die for the profits of some company."

He waves his hand towards the clubhouse. "Veteran's Day. Look at them. Celebratin' the Great and Wonderful United of States. Some

bullshit by people who ain't know shit about the truth of the situation. Killing people to protect profits ain't nothin' to celebrate, mi amigo. Nothin' to celebrate."

One time, His Honor told me about how he went to one of those little 'celebrations', years ago, and had his first face to face with Blinkin.

"Stupid old woman, throwin her Jesus shit around. 'God bless you', she says, 'for your service'. Really, I say? God bless me for being forced to go into someone else's country, and kill a bunch a strangers, who never threatened us?"

This is why Blinkin doesn't like him, I guess.

He said he looked around the room, "Have any of you morons ever actually *read* the damn bible?"

Dead silence in the clubhouse.

"Love thy neighbor as thyself, assholes."

Another time I was sharing cans with The Mayor, and he told me about his son. Wanted to serve his country, be like his dad. The Mayor was against it from the start. He told him, "I *was forced* to go, you don't *need* to go."

But Jake Junior went.

He went, but he never came back.

What I mean is, as The Mayor tells it, "His body came back, just as alive as you or me, but Jake Junior was gone. We never saw him agin."

Jake Junior went to Iraq and Afghanistan. After his second tour, the letters home got fewer and fewer.

The Mayor told me that Jake Junior started talking about all the money that was being made from having the military in these countries.

All the defense contractors who were reeling in billions just to provide laundry service and meals.

Well, Jake Junior wrote in his letters, that he was starting to think that the only reason they were there, was so these companies could make money.

Jake Junior wrote, that the Iraqi people he met were as nice as they could be. Brought him food and patted him on the back, thanking him for liberating them from Ol' Hussain.

They loved the Americans.

Jake Junior heard that some British soldiers put on Iraqi men's clothes, and shot up a police station. To create the illusion of insurgency.

The next day, he was ordered to go knocking down the doors of the village. And arresting people on suspicion of shooting up a police station.

Jake Junior had to arrest the same family that had brought him food.

The Mayor said that Jake Junior talked about the betrayal in their eyes. And how he couldn't look at them.

Well, needless to say, Jake Junior's brain had trouble absorbing this.

He was trapped in an impossible situation.

If he said anything, he would be threatened with court martial as a traitor. You're not allowed to betray the corps.

One of his platoon buddies snapped one night, and left his guard post. He wandered into a nearby group of houses. He broke down the doors and killed six innocent people. Including two children. Then he sucked on the end of his own pistol and blew his skull all over the wall.

Jake couldn't make any of that fit into his head either.

Apparently, Jake Junior was supposed to get some kind of medal. But during the ceremony, he went off, yelling that the war was a lie. He yelled about killing people so that rich guys in America could get richer. "Is that what the medal is for?" he screamed.

They didn't give him the medal. The Mayor told me; they gave him a 488: Unsuitability General Discharge Separation.

That was close to the last time Jake Junior ever spoke.

Four months after he came home, he went out into the Sonoran Desert and sucked on his own pistol.

It took the sheriff's department three weeks to find his body.

By then it was picked over by birds. He was barely recognizable.

"So, I told all them 'good Christian folks' down at the clubhouse, on Veteran's Day, don't tell me 'Thank You for your service'. Cause you don't know shit."

Upmanshit

Thursday 11:24 AM.

I'm trying to write this damn book.
Not *this* book.
That's easy.

This damn *Irish* book, about Irish people. Catholic Irish people. Growing up in Galway, and coming to America in the 1930's.

Here's the problem: I'm not Irish.
I'm not Catholic.
I've never been to Galway.
And it isn't the 1930's.

So…

Apart from that, it's going very well.
Swimmingly well.
Excellent.
Brilliant.

Not.

So, I'm looking at the birds again.
And now, they all just buggered off.

So, now I'm looking at nothing.

Having a hard time focusing.
My mind keeps wandering back to one-upmanshit.
It's probably because I can see Piss and Moan's trailer from the little window in my addition, where I sit writing.
And, I can see their big flat screen flicker all the way over here.
And I'm watching these big talking heads on the screen.
Heads in boxes.
All giving their very important personal opinions about this and that, and who the hell cares what else.

And then Ray texted me about lunch.
So, we met up at Massive Hamburgers.

"How many elected officials," I ask him between bites, "do you think, truly believe that they are mentally quicker than the people they're supposed to be representing?"
"Like, all of them. Right?"
"And, what percentage of laws are written, to try to force people to think and or act in a certain way?"
"Like 100%?" he smirks. "What's your point?"

I put down my massive hamburger and fold my arms.
"Public servants. Servants. Who are supposed to serve us."
"Yeah?"

"But a public servant, is the only servant job, where the one who is supposed to be serving, appears to have power over the one who is

paying them to 'serve' them. Isn't that bizarre? The servants have power over the masters?"

"Servants my ass," snorts Ray.

I resume trying to ingest my massive hamburger.

"It's all one-upmanship," he says. "It's always one-upmanship."

"And, isn't one-upmanship *the actual basis* of our foreign policy too?"

"Valid."

I set my hamburger down because it is falling apart in my hands, "Last night, I was watching this news story about the G8, or the G7, or the G20, or whatever the hell they're calling it now—and here's all these grown-ups, standing around in nice looking suits, shaking hands and looking very pleased with themselves."

"The smug bastards club," he smiles.

I try to fold up the torn bun, and get the bits of my burger and trimmings into some tidy bundle, so I can get it into my mouth without it going down the front of my shirt, "Exactly. And I'm thinking to myself: This whole concept of the G whatever—it's based on the assumption that the leaders of a few nations think *that they know better* than the leaders of other nations, how those other nations should be run."

"Obviously."

"They toss out their opinions like they think they're being helpful. But in reality, they're just being insulting."

"Insulting," He grins, "because they're assuming that those other people don't know how to manage their own country."

"Exactly. Because, in order to be helpful, you actually have to help someone. Talking down to someone, isn't helpful."

"Valid."

"The G member nations are trying to project themselves as being wiser than other nations. It's one-upmanshit, because they're not wiser."

"Upmanshit?" asks Ray with a smirk. "That's funny."

"That's what The Mayor calls it."

"That's really funny. "Dimcaps pullin upmanshit. You've got your own language evolving there."

"Yeah," I laugh. "I guess I do."

"But, yeah. You're right. It's not helpful."

"No, it's not helpful. These G nations have huge debt. They keep taking away their own freedoms, and causing retaliation against themselves. They've got broken dysfunctional governments."

"Can't manage their own shit, but wanna tell someone else how to manage *their* shit."

"Exactly. It's just one-upmanship on a global level."

"That's exactly what it is."

"The behavior is identical, Ray. Whether it's Piss trying to talk down to me, or the UK trying to talk down to Iraq."

"The situations *are* different. But the *behavior* is identical."

"What a stupid species."

I pull a piece of paper out of my pocket, "Here, I was writing this down to put it in the book."

"The 'Tin Town' book?"

"Yeah. Here. These are the kinds of conflicts going on right now. OK. First—an Under trying to gain a feeling of one-upmanship over someone else."

"All the time. All day long."

"Next—an Under trying to gain a feeling of one-upmanship over a *small* demographic of people."

"You mean, like—like if your asshole boss puts all his employees down because he feels intimidated that they know his business better than him?"

"That sounded like the voice of experience. OK. Then—an Under trying to gain a feeling of one-upmanship over a *large* demographic of people."

Ray leans back and looks up at the ceiling. "You mean like an evangelical congressman trying to force some shit on gay people."

"Sure. Last, an Under, who is the head of a country, trying to gain a feeling of one-upmanship over another country."

"Of course. What's your point?"

"What do all of these conflicts have in common?"

Ray shakes his head, "Same upmanshit."

I push back from the remnants of my massive hamburger and look over Ray's shoulder at the people walking by on the sidewalk, "So, Ray—I get this stuff. And you get this stuff. But it seems to me, that only a small percentage of the general population gets this stuff."

"So?"

"If it's only a few of us who have this awareness, then it makes me wonder. Are we the crest of the next wave of evolution of our species? Or the tail end of the last one?"

He ponders that for a moment, thoughtfully chewing a mouthful of the dripping burger. Takes a swallow of his Mr. Pibb and then interlaces his fingers together and leans forward on his elbows.

"I see it this way—every tribe has one or two medicine men. Always have. We can't all be medicine men. Who's gonna kill the cow? And who's gonna cook the burgers?"

"Ha! I like that—medicine men. I can live with that."

Spare the Rod

Friday 11:12 AM.

"Ya gotta spank your kids," says Annie. "Especially the boys."

Annie lives in 108. Just around the corner.
She's from California.
Her daughter Daisy, is in Tin Town to visit her mom.

I met Annie the first week I moved in.
She speaks her mind. And, as she says, don't give a good goddamn who thinks what about it.

They both just came rolling up, Annie on her scooter, and Daisy strolling along next to her.

I'm sitting outside again, with a piping hot cuppa. Hoping I'm not too obvious to Piss and Moan. They're also friends with Annie. She tries to maintain a level of cordiality with all of her Tin Town neighbors.

Unless, of course, you're a dick.

"Moms used to have power," Annie pulls out a water bottle.
"We gave it away when we made it illegal to hit your kids,"
Daisy plunks down in the other chair next to me.

"Oh, I understand *why* we did it. We did it to stop child abuse. Great idea. Didn't work."

Daisy has two little ones of her own.

"Now, all you're supposed to do is threaten." Annie takes a long cool drink.

It's already heating up out here.

"Threats don't work," Daisy looks at her mom. "And your kids know it. They know they can get away with a lot more than we used to be able to get away with."

"Spare the rod, and spoil the child," recites Annie.

"I spank my son," Daisy looks at me. "He ain't gonna be one of those boys you see in the news: 'The rape culture'. He ain't gonna be no asshole. Not *my* boy."

"I spanked my kids," Annie wipes her brow with her bandanna.

"Didn't do us any harm, Winston. Hell, she would swing out and clout us around the ear hole, if we were misbehavin."

Annie shakes her bandanna, "My grandma used to say, if you can't be anything else, you might as well be polite."

"If you can't say anything nice, then shut the hell up," laughs Daisy.

We all laugh.

I remember that too.

"Mind your own business," says Annie. "We all had that beat into us back in them days."

"Don't be a 'Nosey Parker'", Daisy sticks her nose up for emphasis.

"Don't interrupt people when they're talking," I chime in.

"Yeah," Daisy leans back in her chair, "that's them talk show guys.

Them politicians. Just talk right over top of other people, no manners at all. If I ever did like they do, I'd get smacked across the back of the head, and sent to bed without dinner."

"It's a different world," Annie wipes her forehead again. "I grew up in the seventies. We burned our bras. We got 'liberated', whatever the hell that was supposed to mean. Just meant guys were staring at our nipples. Made ourselves sex objects. Who's gonna take you seriously after that?"

Daisy giggles into the back of her hand, "It's so true."

"And then, we took away the only real power we ever had," Annie shifts in her chair, "the power to discipline our own kids."

"Messed up," says Daisy. "Look at the problems we got. Problems we'd never have if them misbehaving men, had gotten spanked by their moms."

"I believe that, Daisy."

"Screw all that stuff," Daisy waves her arm, "women need to reclaim their power! Spank your damn kids. Teach them who's boss. Don't be raising no assholes. Fix that crap early on!"

"Especially boys," I join in, "Because boys need to grow up respecting the power and authority of women. They gotta feel the physical consequences of acting like a dick, so they learn that *there are consequences*. And that they hurt."

Daisy looks at me sideways, "Wish you'd tell my husband that."

"Well, Daisy, it seems to me—if you don't start there, then women will *never* get equal pay. Or stop men from treating them like sex objects."

Annie is looking wide eyed at her daughter, and making motions with her head.

Not sure what's going on there.

"Back when I was painting houses," I sit up straighter in my chair and arch my aching back, "I can't tell you the number of times I heard

the same thing. I had this one client, Rose, and she told me that she believes that generations of weak wimpy mothers, has resulted in generations of bullies and assholes."

"That's what I'm talking about," Annie points her water bottle at me.

"Generations of men who never learned their manners," I scootch around in my chair, trying to find a more comfortable position. "Because, when they misbehaved as children, their mothers didn't smack them across the ear and say: 'Where's your damn manners!'"

"Yeah, and now," laughs Daisy, "we got grown men, who don't even know the difference between 'manners' and 'political correctness'. How stupid can you be?"

"How do you grow up so ignorant?" I shrug my shoulders. "How do you grow up, your whole life, and never learn to play nicely with the other children? Simple. You have a mother who never took you over her knee, and spanked some manners into you."

"That's all gone down the shitter now," Annie shakes her head.

I lean forward in my chair, "Mind your own business was considered being polite."

"Ain't no polite now," Daisy makes a dismissive wave with her hand.

I stretch my legs out in front of me, and rub my cramping calf muscle, "If you tried to encourage people to go back to minding their own business, then a lot of them would have no reason to get out bed in the morning."

Daisy half laughs and snorts at the same time.

"Seriously, you guys—a lot of media outlets would go out of business. Because they wouldn't have any content to

report/print/spread/spew. And the average conversation in the street would change dramatically."

Annie snarks, "You got that right."

"We *need* to mind other people's business," I lean back and look at Daisy, "because our *own* business is so messed up."

"Yeah. But we can't admit that shit," Daisy stares off into the distance.

We sit and listen to a siren wail down Tomahawk Road on the other side of the wall.

The difference:

Manners: *(noun) -*

- The prevailing customs, ways of living, and habits of a people.

- A person's outward bearing; way of speaking to, and treating others.

Political Correctness: *(adjective) -*

1. Marked by, or adhering to, a typically progressive orthodoxy, on issues involving: ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or ecology.

Name That Denial

(intro music)

*(announcer voice over) "Welcome, everybody, to America's favorite television game show… **Name That Denial!**"*

(live audience applause)

(announcer) "Watch as our contestants try to protect their own denial! And our panel tries to figure out which denial protection mechanisms they are using!"

(announcer) "And here's our host… Alex Treebark!"

(cheers and whistles)

(music out)

Alex: "Hello everybody, and welcome to today's show! Our returning champion Robert is here. But first, let's meet our two new panel members."

(music under)

*Alex: "First we have a medical billing agent from Schenectady, New York. Please give a big **Name That Denial** welcome to Peggy!"*

(applause)

*Alex: "Welcome Peggy, welcome, welcome. And our next panel member is a mechanic from Baton Rouge Louisiana. Please give a big **Name That Denial** welcome to Wayne!"*

(applause)

(music out)

Alex: "You have all been briefed on how the show works before we went on the air, so let's get right to it. I know our audience is excited to get started with: ***Name That Denial****"*

(applause and whistles)

Alex: "OK, OK. Let's get started. Everyone please welcome our first contestant. She's an accountant from Rhode Island. Please put your hands together for Darlene!"

(applause)

(music under)

(Darlene enters and waves, then goes to the podium center stage, facing the panel)

(music out)

Alex: "Welcome, Darlene. Welcome to the show."

Darlene: "Thanks Alex."

Alex: "Darlene, you are a mother of two?"

Darlene: "That's right Alex. And my husband Trent is here with me today."

Alex: "Let's all say Hi to Trent. Where is he? Oh, there he is. Hi Trent and welcome to the show."

(Trent waves and sits back down)

Alex: "OK, Darlene, let's get started. Panel members—fingers on buzzers.

Question One: Darlene, your neighbor Mary says that you cheated on your husband. Is that true Darlene? We will start the clock now."

(clock ticking)

Darlene: (quickly glances at audience and blurts) "<u>Mary</u> cheated on <u>her</u> husband! She had sex with a teenage boy who cuts her grass!"

(Robert's, Peggy's and Wayne's buzzers sound)

Alex: "Robert! You were first on the buzzer."

Robert: "Um, yes Alex, I'm going to say that Darlene is using the 'Simple Flip.'"

(bells ringing)

Alex: "That's correct! Robert is first out of the gate, and gets the first one right away!"

(applause)

Alex: "Robert, will you please read the full definition of the Denial Mechanism he used, from the big board?"

Robert: "It's usually the third most popular form of denial, where we simply take what you just said, and try to flip it back on to you."

Alex: "That's correct Robert! And is there—"

(Peggy's buzzer cuts him off)

Alex: "Yes, Peggy?"

Peggy: "Alex, isn't Darlene also using 'Attack the Messenger to Avoid the Message' with her remark about the boy who cuts the grass?"

Alex: "That's correct Peggy! For the bonus points, and you steal the win from Robert! Well done!"

(Robert shakes his head, and snaps his fingers.)

Alex: "And Peggy, will you please read the full Denial Mechanism she's using?"

Peggy: "Sure Alex. Darlene is using the fourth most popular Denial Protection Mechanism: Questioning your credibility. If we can make it look like you can't be trusted as a messenger, then we can dismiss your message."

Alex: "Perfect Peggy, and what—"

(Alex stops because Trent is shouting at Darlene from the audience, and Darlene is shouting back.)

(Wayne's buzzer sounds)

Alex: "Wayne on the buzzer now."

Wayne: "Yes Alex, by trying to shout over Darlene, Trent is using the second most popular form of denial protection: 'Talking Over Top of You'."

Alex: "That's correct Wayne! Most commonly used by the media and in political arenas, 'Talking over Top—"

(Peggy's buzzer interrupts Alex)

Alex: "Peggy?"

Peggy: "Darlene just yelled at Trent "You never pay attention to me, you're always working. If she says 'never' and 'always', isn't that 'Assumption of An Absolute'? Number five denial?"

Wayne: (Pushing buzzer repeatedly) "Alex, Alex, Darlene just yelled 'So you think I am supposed to just sit around and wait until you to feel like having sex?' Isn't that 'Justification by Comparison to an Opposite'?"

Alex: "That's correct Wayne!"

(Sound of gunshot.)

(Robert's buzzer)

Alex: "Robert?"

Robert: "Well, Alex, since Trent just shot Darlene, I believe that's number seven and number eight denial mechanisms together: 'Try to Silence You' and 'Kill you'."

Alex: "That's correct Robert! And you take the steal from Wayne and Peggy! Once again our reigning champion has swept the field and claimed the lead!"

(cheering and applause, as music plays)

*(announcer voice over) "**Name That Denial** is brought to you by the fine folks over at Kuchakokov Self-Defense Technologies, and by The International Association of Psychotherapy."*

(voice over) "Hello everybody, I'm your host, Alex Treebark. For those of you who want to play along at home, here's the list of the denial protection mechanisms, that today's contestants are referring to. Listed by order of popularity. Enjoy!"

8 Ways We Protect Our Denial -

1 - Ignore you.

The simplest and easiest defense mechanism.

What you are saying or doing is making us uncomfortable, because it is making us aware of our own failure. Or pointing out that we have made a mistake. And so, we try to pretend that you don't exist, that we cannot see or hear you.

It looks very childish, and for good reason: only a child would believe that if they can't physically hear you, then that means what you are saying is wrong.

2 - Talk over top of you.

A staple mechanism for people in the media in recent years.

Hosts have guests on their shows, who they disagree with. And then they talk over top of their guests as they try to answer the host's questions. Hosts will also ask other questions while their guests are trying to answer the first question. And they will also comment as their guests attempt to figure out which question, they are supposed to be answering.

This is a way to make the other person look scatterbrained and not worth listening to.

In reality, it makes the host look like a jerk. But it does protect the host from hearing something that threatens their denial. Which is the point.

3 - The Simple Flip.

We simply take what you said, and flip it back onto you.

This is instinctive Warrior caveman behavior, where words are seen as weapons. For example: if you say, "You're acting immature", we will immediately respond, "**You're** acting immature!".

The word "immature" pegged us. It hurt us because we know it's true. But we can't admit that. So, we pick the word up, like it was a spear, and try to throw it back at you. This is a primitive knee-jerk instinctive response.

We accuse you of doing the exact behavior that **we** are doing. Because, in the cognitive part of our brains, we know that this behavior must be exposed. But, since we lack introspection, we cannot attach it to ourselves. Therefore, **you** become the target.

4 - Attack the messenger to avoid the message.

We question your credibility.

If we can make it look like you can't be trusted as a messenger, then we can dismiss your message.

Even if your message is something that other credible people have said before. The fact that you are saying it now, coupled with the fact that you are **not a credible messenger**, means that **what** you are saying is wrong. And **anyone, and everyone** who says it is wrong.

This mechanism can also be used by focusing on **how** you're talking rather than on **what** you're saying.

If you stumble over your words, (possibly because we are talking over top of you!), we will pick on you about **that**: "Well, look, you can't even **talk**, so why would anyone listen to **you**?!"

- Mocking, is a variation of this mechanism. And a very popular way to attack a messenger. We simply repeat what you said, in a childish voice.

- Another way to attack the messenger is to pick apart **what** you're saying. We try to find one small piece of it that we can prove is wrong. If we can make it seem that **one part** of what you're saying is wrong, then in our mind that means **everything** you're saying is wrong.

This mechanism is called: '**If one, then all**', and piggybacks '**Attack the Messenger**', to the next mechanism: '**Assumption of An Absolute**'.

5 - Assumption of an absolute.

"So, you're saying that **all** people **always**…"

This behavior usually shows that we're getting pretty desperate in finding ways to shut you up. If we can make it look like you're assuming some kind of absolute, then that means you're crazy, and not to be trusted.

All, always, never, none, only, every, etc.

Those of us trying to protect our denial will use these absolutes **ourselves**, and see no problem with it. But we will accuse **you** of assuming an absolute, as proof that there is something wrong with **you**.

And it doesn't even matter if you actually **say** an absolute or not. We are so driven to protect our denial, that we will **imagine** that we heard you say it, even if you didn't.

This usually goes hand in hand with another behavior: '**Attaching Emotional Content to a Logistical Situation**'.

When confronted with a logistical situation, such as choosing a movie, or what to have for dinner, we respond with an emotionally charged response: "You **never** like anything that I like! We **always** have to do what you want!"

This behavior is easy to spot, as the most commonly attached emotions are fear and anger. And, usually disproportionate to the situation.

6 - Justification by comparison to an opposite extreme.

Our Warrior Instinct makes us see the world in terms of black/white.

We only see two choices:

My way, (which obviously is the right way),

and any other way, (which is obviously the wrong way).

There is no possibility of a third way to handle a situation.

The way to handle anything is my way. Which is usually the first idea that pops into my head.

And, if you question me, then I will defend it by comparing it to some opposite extreme that is **so obviously wrong**, that my way **looks right** by comparison.

If you're only capable of black or white thinking,

then it doesn't mean you're always right.

It means that you're only capable of black or white thinking.

7 - Try to silence you.

"No one's forcing you live here!"

The 'Love it or leave it' defense.

If I can force you to leave, and go somewhere else, then I don't have to hear you anymore. And my denial will be protected.

Or, I could just punch you in the face, and then you'll be quiet.

But somehow, some way, I need to shut you up.

Physical violence is how our Warrior Instinct tries to protect our denial. It's stoop-shouldered grunting Neanderthal behavior. And it's still popular with modern 'Advanced' humans.

But, assaulting someone doesn't make you right, and them wrong.

8 - Kill you.

It sounds extreme, but it happens every day.

Our Warrior Instinct acts out of extreme beliefs, and an extreme view of reality: Black/white. Friend/foe.

Dead men cannot contradict you.

If you do something that you know is going to cause you to face consequences, and someone else has the power to make you face those consequences, then you're going to want to kill them.

Then, you won't have to face those consequences.

Or so you believe.

But it doesn’t work, because **you** still know what you’ve done.

Always Loyal

Monday 9:42 AM.

There are Grackles on the roof.

The skittering and scratching of their claws is loud on the aluminum awning above our heads, as The Dude and I sip our coffee.

It sounds like there are two of them, fighting over something.

The Dude picks up a broom and bangs the end of it up onto the awning, "Hey you bastards! Go fight somewhere else!"

We hear the Grackles take off.

"Damn, those bastards are loud," he scowls.

"Really loud."

"Lithuanian-pig-dog-monkey-fuckin' loud!"

I grin as I sip my coffee.

"More coffee?" He gets up and walks into his kitchen without waiting for my reply. He returns and fills my cup without even asking.

I notice a blue baseball style hat hanging on the coatrack next to the trailer door. It's pretty well worn and faded. It's embroidered with 'VMO-2' on the front.

"Isn't that like the Magnum P.I. hat?" I gesture towards it.

"Yeah— 'cept he weren't there. And I was."

From the look on his face, I immediately wish I hadn't said anything.

We sit in awkward silence for a moment.

The Dude stares into his coffee cup, like he's trying to read something floating in the coffee.

"Cherry Deuce," he mumbles.

I keep my mouth shut. I am afraid I may have pissed him off.

"It's like in that book, thing," he says finally. "Cavemen With Cellphones. The Warrior Instinct thing, man. You know? Forcing—you know?"

He looks up at me.

"Jesus," he shakes his head, "We go walking into someone else's country—kill a buncha people—I mean—there's consequences, man. Consequences."

I'm relieved I didn't cause a problem by mentioning the hat. But it has seemed to change his mood pretty dramatically. He's usually so gregarious and laughing. With that big 'Dudish' grin.

Now, he looks very serious.

"None of that shit works anyway, man. Alls it does is create problems for other people. People who got nothing to do with the original thing. You get what I mean, man?"

"Yeah, man, I get that."

"See, that's the problem, Mister Winston. Soldiers see consequences, man. They feel them."

He has a weird look in his eyes, "I know you're pals with Jake…"

"The Mayor?"

"Mayor, ha!" he laughs. "Yeah. I can see that. That fits." Then his stare went serious again. "So, then you know about Jake Junior, right?"

"Yeah, Dude."

"When you're a soldier, well, you gotta live with what you've done, man. You gotta live with the fact that you killed somebody. Somebody, that *someone else* wanted dead, man. *Someone else* told you, that this guy hadda die. This guy didn't threaten *you*, man. *You* went halfway across the goddamn world, walked into *his* backyard and shot *him*."

I really wish I hadn't even mentioned the hat now.

"But you can't think that way, man," he shakes his finger. "You ain't allowed to think that way. And, you *damn sure* can't say it out loud."

Now he looks more scared than angry.

"That's why them vets kill themselves, Mister Winston. They're the ones who carry that guilt. Not the politicians. It's like that movie—Brando thing— 'You're an errand boy, sent by grocery clerks' shit."

"Oh yeah. I remember that. Apocalypse Now."

"PTSD ain't no *medical* condition." He shakes his head slowly from side to side. "It's awareness. It's this goddamn—awareness—of the *reality*, of the situation, man."

His expression is dead flat. He looks at me unblinking. There is something in his look. Something dark. I feel myself involuntarily shiver.

"*You* know what you did," he says slowly. "And, what you *did*, messes with your core. You can't swallow that guilt. Shit, man—you can't swallow that shit. It tears you apart."

He takes a big swig of his coffee, then carefully sets the cup down on the table. Looks down at his rough calloused hands, and rubs them together as though he was washing them, "It's the guilt."

He stares out the dirty side window of the trailer, "You're *not* allowed to talk about it. If you do, then you're guilty of betrayal. Semper Fi, motherfucker. Always loyal."

He looks down at his hands again, rubbing them more vigorously.

"You ain't allowed to feel no sympathy for the guy you shot. He's the damn enemy. Who said so? Because *we* goddamn well said so! You gotta protect the denial, man. It's loyalty. *You don't have no choice!*"

He's getting very animated now. I don't know if it's the caffeine kicking in, or I have tapped into something I seriously should have left the hell alone.

The Dude gets up and paces back and forth. Hands on his hips, squinting out the windows of the Arizona room.

"You get trapped. It's a dead end, man. No way out."

He takes a deep breath and blows it out slowly.

He looks down at his feet, and kicks at the carpet, "You end up, hiking out, a few clicks into the Sonoran Desert, and sucking on the end of your service revolver. That's when the denial ends."

I just look at him. I want to say something, but I really can't come up with a single word.

Silence fills the room. Only broken by the quail calling to each other under the orange tree outside the window.

"I can't watch it, Mister Winston."

He takes a deep breath and blows it out slowly, "I see these guys—on the TV—missing legs—sayin they gave their leg for *freedom*—"

He stands up suddenly and grabs his coffee cup. His hand shakes like he has Parkinson's. He walks quickly into his kitchen.

Two Wrongs

Thursday 10:32 AM.

"Death threats?" Ray is lying under the kitchen sink.

Ray came over to help me put a new faucet in the kitchen. The old one is probably original—from 1965. It's a little rusted underneath and loose in the handle. I'm just scared I might come home some day and there's water gushing out of the damn thing. Flooding the trailer and ruining all my stuff.

I found a nice faucet on Craigslist for cheap. And we are going to get this situation fixed.

Then we are gonna go to 'Massive Hamburgers' and get—well—some massive hamburgers.

"Why would you threaten to kill someone?" he asks. "Especially when the whole situation has *nothing* to do with you?"

We have the BBC news on as we work, and there is a story about an MP being attacked at a campaign event. Apparently, people had taken to social media and expressed their outrage over this. One woman posted that it is a sad day indeed when someone tries to hurt you because they disagree with you.

And, another user responded to that post that she should be killed for posting that.

"It is bizarre. Denial protection?" I feed the hoses of the new faucet into the hole in the sink and push the base of the faucet down into a circle of plumber's putty.

Ray is wrapping Teflon tape on the threads of the valves, "Killing her doesn't negate her opinion. It's already been posted."

"Exactly, Ray. But what the hell does he *gain* if she dies? What does he *personally* gain?"

He starts tightening the water lines onto the valves.

"Diminished capacity in his cortex?" I hold the flashlight on the valve as he checks for leaks. "Compels him to want her dead because he disagrees with her?"

Ray scoots out from under the sink, "She posted that it's not OK to attack someone because you disagree with their opinion, and he responds by attacking her because he disagrees with her opinion."

"See? That's the whole point," I clean the extra putty away from the faucet base.

"Dimcaps," Ray smirks, "they can't see it. If you gotta kill me, to stop yourself from realizing that what I'm saying is true—then you've lost already."

"Obviously," Ray is putting away the tools. "If you threaten to kill me, then you're admitting that I am telling the truth. A truth, that you cannot bear to hear. So much so, that you have to kill me, to try to make it go away."

"But the truth never goes away."

"Never. That shit will ring around inside their head, until they do the only thing they *can* do to stop themselves from hearing it."

"What's that?"

"Kill *themselves*."

Every Level

Wednesday 9:17 AM.

I can't even look at the Irish book today.

I'm just too distracted.

I need to write the wedding scene.
And the sex scene.
But I'm just staring out the window, drumming my fingers.

I just want to write this damn thing and sell it and retire. Take the money. Take the damn money.

But it's getting harder to write.

So, I take a trip to Mal-Mart.

Oh, I don't need to buy anything. I just like to go there and look at the people. The tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free…

They should seriously put the poem from the Statue of Liberty, over the doors of every Mal-Mart:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
And I shall roll back my prices,
To ridiculously low levels,
So that all can buy new socks,
For $2.49 for six pairs (Size 6-11)!"

Mal-Mart is an amazing place.

It is the pinnacle, the epitome of American business.

Because it provides what all consumers desire.

The tired can find a comfortable mattress, a mattress topper, sheets and pillow cases, a personal MP3/CD Player with FM Radio, and a CD of soothing restful Nature Sounds to sleep to.

Or they can buy a case of Monster or Red Bull and wake the hell up.

The poor can find the lowest prices on everything they need, every day! With Megacenters open 24 hours! How wonderful is that!

The huddled masses can find outer wear at 25 to 30% off, through Labor Day weekend. They don't have to huddle any more. Or, if they really want to huddle, they can find soap and deodorant and perfume and cologne, and every kind of personal hygiene product know to God and man. They can huddle as close as they damn well like.

Those yearning to breathe free can get Breathe Right nasal strips: A box of 44 for only $20! They can also get their allergy prescriptions filled, at a price that beats every other chain drug store!

But you don't have to be wretched refuse. Or even come from a teeming shore. Oh, hell no!

You can buy fake yoga clothes, designed for someone who wants to look like someone who does yoga, without actually having to *do* the yoga.

And you can buy cookies.

But not just cookies, you can buy cookies at all stages of their creation. Because Mal-Mart caters to *all* levels of laziness. Including your *particular* level of laziness.

It's what they do.

You can buy flour and sugar and eggs and butter and baking soda and vanilla extract and a bowl and a mixer and a cookie sheet. And then drive home, and mix the dough, and plop it out onto the cookie sheet. And let them bake for 8 - 10 minutes. And then eat sugar cookies.

Or, if you just have too much going on, and you can't stand around mixing all those bothersome dry ingredients, you can buy a box of dry cookie mix and butter and eggs. And then drive home, and use your own damn bowl and mixer and cookie sheet. And mix up the dough and plop it out onto the cookie sheet. And let them bake for 8 - 10 minutes. And then eat sugar cookies.

Or, if you just can't be bothered mixing *any* damn ingredients, you can by a roll of pre-mixed cookie dough, in the refrigerated section. And drive home, and cut the roll into individual cookies. And place them on your own damn cookie sheet. And let them bake for 8 - 10 minutes. And then eat sugar cookies.

Or, if you don't have time to stand around all freaking day, cutting up a damn tube of dough into rounds, (and who really does, after all?), you can buy a bag with individual rounds of pre-mixed dough already properly sized and cut out. And then you can drive home, and

then place them on your own damn cookie sheet. Pop the sheet into the oven. Let them bake for 8 - 10 minutes. And then eat sugar cookies.

Or, you can even buy a throw away baking sheet that comes in a box about the size and shape of a pizza box, with the damn cookie dough rounds already cut and placed evenly on the sheet. Drive home, pop the sheet into the oven. Let them bake for 8 - 10 minutes. And then eat sugar cookies.

Or, if you want someone else to bake the damn things for you too, then you can just buy a damn bag of cookies. Eat half of the damn things while you're shopping, and eat the other half in the car on your way home. And be done with it.

Or, to hell with *anybody* baking *any* damn thing, just give me a tub of freaking raw dough and I'll eat it all in the damn parking lot.

To hell with all of you.

Mal-Mart is smart.
They have you met at every level of laziness.

It is just a question of: "How damn lazy are you"?

Connected Devices

Thursday 3:18 AM.

I couldn't sleep. I was getting ideas about the wedding scene, so I got up to start writing.

When I woke up my computer from its sleep, the screen flashed. Like there was an image of the actual screen, that was covering the whole screen. And as soon as I woke the screen up, this image quickly peeled off to the left, really quick.

Maybe it didn't. Maybe I imagined it. Maybe I'm just woozy, or still half asleep.

So, I opened up the software that Ray told me to download, and I checked the connection. And there was the list of connected devices.

There was my iMac, my phone, and a third device, with the id of: CYX and a bunch of numbers.

Someone is stealing my WIFI!

So, I reset the router and modem, like he showed me. I changed the SSID name to 'agency.access'. Maybe that will scare the bastard.

And I put in a new passcode. A really difficult one that had numbers, and upper- and lower-case letters and punctuation marks too.

Like this:

C>72aP9<tk(H20zNe

Try hacking into that shit, asshole!

Sirocco

Friday 5:18 PM.

I met another 'Winter Visitor' last night.

I was walking past Piss and Moan's place, and there was this woman, sitting outside with them, and talking.

Piss gestured for me to come over.

There was no real way I could see getting out of it. So, I walked over.

Piss handed me a can, and Moan waved hello. The woman turned and smiled at me and kept right on talking.

Fair enough. I thought to myself, *she will finish this thought, and then we can all be introduced.*

*S*o, I stood there and sipped my can.

But she went on. And on.

I finished my can. Moan got up and went in their trailer and came back with more cans. She handed me one, and I opened it and sipped away. And the woman kept talking.

And then I finished that can.

I looked at my phone, about 45 minutes had passed.

I had to get back to my trailer and check on an email. So, I mouthed, "I have to go," to Piss. And tapped my wrist, as if there was a watch there.

He waved bye, and mouthed something.

Moan waved bye.

The woman waved bye.

I walked back to my trailer.

I had stood there for 45 minutes.

And said nothing.

Piss and Moan had said nothing.

This woman had talked, non-stop, for 45 minutes.

45 minutes.

No break, not even seeming to need to breathe.

And Piss and Moan just sat there, hanging on her every word. Never interrupting, just nodding and grunting in agreement.

And she wasn't the least bit interesting. Just droned on in a slightly husky smoked-too-many-cigarettes voice. Without inflection, emphasis or modulation. Like a dry dusty hot wind.

And what, you might ask, was she talking about?

It was a string of related topics that began with her old boyfriend who used to live in her trailer with her. Then, her neighbor back in Minnesota who may not be able to come down this year due to a viral infection. Then, the former managers of the park. The difference in the price of gas along her trip down. Someone who used to live here years ago and died. And maybe a few other side tangents thrown in that I can't remember now, but the point was: she talked for 45 minutes straight.

Here's the thing: I was born in Britain. I grew up there. I learned manners. And so, I, unfortunately, expect other people *also* learned some manners.

If that had been *me* talking, I would have paused and shook hands. And done introductions, when someone new joined the group.

And then resumed the conversation.

But I walked up, and stood there long enough to drink two cans. She never asked me my name or told me hers. And Piss and Moan didn't introduce us either.

As I was leaving, she was talking about the old person who died. Specifically, how they never joined in with the community. Or made an effort to meet any of their neighbors.

Since I never learned this woman's name, I call her Sirocco.

A Mission from God

Tuesday 6:27 PM.

Guitar Dan is sitting with me, sharing a fairly drinkable bottle of red, and helping me celebrate my new front porch.

I used all the big lumber from the pallets and scabbed together a porch that is just big enough to comfortably seat about 2 people.

Guitar Dan lives two lots down from Piss and Moan, on the other side of the Canadians.

He rebuilds guitars that he buys off eBay and sells them to supplement his income.

"So, Dan, my question is who came first? Extremist Christians or Extremist Muslims."

"Extremist?" He laughs. "That sounds just about right."

He sips and ponders for a moment, "Well, if any of our lovely neighbors were awake during their high school world history class, I think they might remember a little thing called The Crusades."

"Christian martyrs, wading 'knee-deep in the blood of Muslims', is the phrase I remember."

"That's the story. My daddy was a Southern Baptist preacher. Hell-fire and brimstone kind. He always used to go on about Peter the Hermit."

"Peter the Hermit?"

"Yeah, he was pretty much, the first evangelical preacher, back in the Middle Ages. Bible thumping, all dramatic."

"You mean, attaching emotional content to logistical situations?"

"Uh—yeah. You could say that. So, Peter the Hermit led the 'People's Crusade' to take Jerusalem away from the Muslims. Apparently, he had some letter that just dropped out of heaven, telling the Christians to take Jerusalem because the apocalypse was coming."

"Letter just dropped out of heaven? And they believed him?"

"Same old same old. He whipped up a bunch of poor, hungry, ignorant fools and gave them a reason to live. Same shit is happening right now."

"True that."

"So, the Pope, at the time, funds old Peter the Hermit. And he whips up around fifteen thousand angry, illiterate, and well-armed followers. And they proceed to march from France to Jerusalem. Well. None of these people ever been to Jerusalem before. They don't know what it looks like or how far away it is. So, every big city they come to, they think it's Jerusalem. And they start killing people left and right. Turns out they were killing Jews. In Germany."

"What a fiasco!"

"Just typical dumb human behavior."

"How do you know all this?"

"I went to the seminary for a couple of years."

"You wanted to be a priest?"

"Thought so. My *dad* thought so. Let's be clear about that."

"So, what happened?"

"Dropped out. So much shame and guilt in Christianity. I'd had enough of that in my life. So, I started looking at all the other major religions of the world. Found The Tao. Never looked back."

"Wow," I say, pouring him another glass.

"So, anyway," he continues, "these pilgrims, these Christian soldiers ended up killing about a third of all the Jews in Germany and Northern France."

"Cheese and rice!"

"It gets worse. So now he's gathered about forty thousand crusaders. And they march on down into Hungary. And in Belgrade there was a disagreement over the price of a pair of shoes in the marketplace. Well, this escalated to the point of the crusaders going crazy and killing a few thousand people in the city. The remaining citizens fled for their lives. And the crusaders pillaged and burned the city."

"What the hell?"

"Great story huh?" Dan smiles. "Cluster fuck. All this death and destruction, and not one Muslim killed yet. And no Jerusalem taken!"

"It's like the US invasion of the Middle East, Dan. Thousands killed, towns burned, and no weapons of mass destruction found."

"Same old same old. So, anyway, this army of forty thousand is marching along, without food or supplies because no one planned this thing. They were making it up as they went along. So, in Serbia, they get into a fight over food and burn a mill down. And the local garrison comes out to stop the fight, and ends up killing off about ten thousand crusaders."

"And they still haven't gotten to Jerusalem?"

"Oh hell no. They'd just barely crossed into Turkey. So, there were Italian and French and German crusaders joining them. And there were disagreements between the leaders of the groups. And the Germans

and Italians split off. And they started taking over towns, pillaging for food, killing the locals, and pretty much doing whatever they felt like doing."

"Because they were on a mission from God."

"Because they were on a mission from God. And, by the way, Peter sort of lost it here. He got left in the dust. So, he gets the slam-dunky-fuck out of there and heads back to see the Pope. To get more supplies.

"Well, this brave bunch of crusaders, now down to about twenty thousand, well they go a-marching along with a sword in their hand, and God on their shoulder. And they enter a narrow valley on the road through Turkey, and the Turkish army slaughtered the crap out of them. The end."

"Never made it to Jerusalem?"

"Nope."

"But, what about the 'wading in blood up to their knees?"

"That was three years later, the First Crusade. And Ol' Peter the Hermit was back again. Giving fiery speeches in the Garden of Gethsemane, whipping them all up into an anti-Muslim fever. Still took them everything they had to breach the walls. But when they did, it was carnage like no one has ever seen. The slaughter at the Temple of Solomon was the wading in blood up to their knees. Temple at the Mount was feet stained with blood to their ankles. Not one woman or child was spared."

"Unbelievable."

"Shock and awe, motherfucker, shock and awe. Piles of dead bodies, stinking in the heat. They stacked them up into pyramids and burned them. Burned down the Jewish synagogue with the Jews still in it. Hell of a mess."

"So, then they got hold of Jerusalem?"

"Well, for a while. But the Sultan got it back. And there was a Second Crusade that failed. And a Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth—"

"Oh, for cryin out loud."

Dan runs his hand through his hair, "There was still another two hundred years of Christians crusading against Muslims, establishing and taking over Crusader States in the Levant."

"The Levant? As in 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant'?"

"One in the same. Just the latest incarnation."

"But ISIS is a real threat."

"Yeah. But they got marketed to appear to be more of a threat than they actually are."

"Marketed?"

"Marketing," he smiles. "We gotta have an enemy—a big enemy. One that's gonna take a long time and lots of military spending to kill off. Hence, the need to radicalize Americans to fear *all* Muslims."

"Most people see that the other way around, Dan."

"Of course, they do. Because we have our own Peter the Hermits preaching to us, and whipping us up into a frenzy. Members of congress, governors, mayors, generals, newspapers, blog sites, TV and radio, even the average person on the street. Our own neighbors here, all whipped up into an anti-Muslim fever, without having all the facts."

"But ISIS can't *invade* us and take over the country. They don't even have the capacity to create their own stupid caliphate, or whatever. Because they don't have the resources to pull it off."

"Doesn't matter, man. The important thing is to dangle that carrot, to have the *appearance* of a threat. The *specter* of a horrible enemy."

"Peter the Hermits."

"We will never conquer terrorism, because we keep creating terrorists."

"We're not allowed to say that, Dan."

"We call *other* people terrorists, while we terrorize our own people."

"You keep talking like that you'll bring the spooks out of the shadows. They'll come along in their black Suburbans and whisk you away for interrogation."

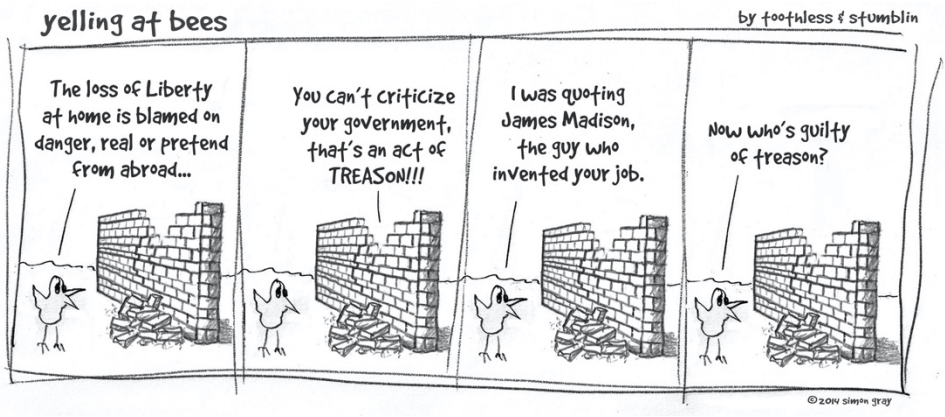
"Which will simply prove that I'm right."

"It's your funeral. But why do you think we cling to these fears?"

"It's biological. I think it's our fear center, in our brains. Some of us live in constant fear of the unknown. Because there's no way for us to predict where or when the next retaliation is going to happen. So, our best option is to try to radicalize those around us, so we don't have to face this fear alone."

Fear Centre.

Apart from being a fairly good name for a high-school metal band, it stuck in my head in a not-so-comfortable way.


yelling at bees
by toothless & stumblin
The loss of Liberty at home is blamed on danger, real or pretend from abroad...
You can't criticize your government, that's an act of TREASON!!!
I was quoting James Madison, the guy who invented your job.
Now who's guilty of treason?
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Can't Even Wave?

Tuesday 3:42 pm.

Seriously tired of this slow assed internet connection.

So, I pulled out my old 27-inch iMac.

It needed a new hard drive, and the screen connection cable needed to be soldered.

So, I got it all fixed up and set next to the other iMac.

Frankenputer 27 lives again!

And, it connects just fine to the internet. Not an issue.

So that's fine. I'll just use this one to write on and research on. And the other one for email or whatever.

It's all good.

I walked around outside this afternoon to pull weeds. Witness Protection Man came out and got in his car, and drove off. It was awkward. He could have simply just raised his head, just turned slightly, maybe waved. I wouldn't have tried to force a conversation.

That's fine. I don't care if you want to be antisocial. But couldn't you at least acknowledge that I am standing here, approximately 40 feet away from you?

What the hell?

It was almost like he was deliberately trying not to look at me.

What a dick.

Fear Centre

Thursday 10:16 AM.

Tea in hand.
One bird.

Clear.
68 degrees.
Wind from the East at 2 miles per hour.
Humidity 16%.

I can't write this book.

Not this one. The Irish one.

It's not me. It's not my voice. My 'authentic' voice.

I read a blurb online from an editor at Doubleday Publishing, and she said you have to write what you know. And write with your 'authentic' voice.

I don't got no 'authentic' Irish-Catholic/1930's/immigrant voice.

I'm gonna have to walk away.

Besides…

Tin Town is taking all of my attention.

I am now waist deep into writing about the goings on in the scenic Trail's End Mobile Ranch. I need to ride this wave and see where it goes.

Surfing the wave of humanity through the bleached-out bones of a dead dinosaur.

Mobile Ranch. Mobile. Ha! These tin cans may have been mobile when they dragged them in here, and they may be mobile when they drag them out. But in the meantime… They ain't goin nowhere.

Dan's conversation is still ringing in my head this morning.

So, I'm googling:

"The Amygdala, or 'Fear Centre' in the brain has evolved to detect dangers around us and direct our responses."

On some medical sites, I find papers written by specialists that explain that a deformed Amygdala will cause us to imagine enemies where they don't exist. It makes us think and talk in absolutes; 'If one, then all'.

And it keeps us in a state of constant anxiety.

Imagine enemies where they don't exist.

The Five Burner Stainless Steel Gas Range

Monday 9:11 AM.

Piss is pissing, and Moan is moaning.

Piss works part time as a handyman, doing repairs on people's trailers.

These old tin cans need a lot of maintenance.

Last week, he said, he replaced 2 hot water heaters.

He does good work. He is very skilled, and does a good job at whatever he does.

He also likes to complain about how much work he has.

He likes to complain, because he likes to feel needed.

And why not.

I mean, all of us want to feel needed, don't we?

Piss and Moan have cyclical conversations.

They talk about the same topics over and over.

A few times, I've heard him slam the people who live at the Sunsetter Vacation RV Resort.

"It's says 'vacation' resort," he sneers, "right there on the sign. You're not supposed to live there full time."

Even though he lives in a trailer park full time.

It's his little one-upmanship over the people who hire him and pay him money to fix things that break in their tin cans.

It's one of his favorite topics.

So far, I have been able to chart about 37 specific topics.

Another one of them, is the five-burner stainless steel gas range.

When I moved into my tin can, the oven didn't work, and the cooktop was on its last legs. So, I kept my eyes on Craigslist, and after a couple of weeks of watching, I saw a gas range exactly like what I was looking for.

I wanted a nice stainless steel one. With the long fifth burner in the middle, and the drop-in cast-iron griddle that you can make pancakes on.

And I saw a couple, but they were way too much money for me. I kept watching.

Then one came up. It looked brand new. And, it was selling for only $250. I jumped on it. Big time.

Drove 45 minutes out to the east valley and bought it.

Guitar Dan helped me carry it in. And I modified the cabinets to make room for it, and fired it up. And life has been groovy ever since.

So…

A few days later, I told Piss I got a new range.

And he goes: "Yeah, but I want to get the stainless steel one, the one with five burners, with the long fifth burner in the middle and the drop in cast iron griddle so you can make pancakes—'cause that's the right one to get, 'cause the drop in griddle you can cook pancakes, I guess you could do bacon or steaks but it might spatter a lot, so you would want to have some kinda guard to stop the spatter—'cause that's

the only one to get—we been talking about getting one of those for a few years, but I gotta bump out the kitchen -"

"Yes, yes! That's the one I got!" I interrupt his rambling. "The stainless steel one. The five burners with the long fifth burner in the middle and the drop-in griddle so you can cook pancakes. And it only cost me $250. And the lady that sold it to me never used it because she was afraid of the gas. And she used her microwave all the time instead. And she had the original receipt from about a year ago, and it was a $745 range!"

I could see the frustration in his eyes.

I had already got the range he wants to get. The *exact* one. The *right* range to get. The *only* range to get.

And I did it *before* he could tell me which range was the right range to get. The only range to get.

Damn me! How dare I do that!

But here's the thing I have come to realize about Piss and Moan: They don't need to actually *buy* the new gas range; they just need to talk about which one they are *eventually* going to get. And since they are *eventually* going to get the nice stainless steel one with the fifth long burner in the middle and the drop-in cast-iron griddle so they could make pancakes, they had already locked up that little piece of one-upmanship. Because they had already figured out which range is *obviously the best range that any sensible person should get*. That means that Piss and Moan are already better than everyone else, because they know exactly which is the right range to get. The only range to get.

So, they win.

Regardless of if, or when, they ever get said range.

But he still goes through his whole spiel about the gas range with the fifth burner. Even when he is around me. As if he doesn't know that I already have that exact range.

I guess, when you only have 37 cards in your deck, you can't give one up too easily.

SD and LBH

Saturday 5:32 pm.

Startled Deer and Latino Bob Hope are walking by.
They are a Hispanic couple from Michigan.

Startled Deer always looks a little wide-eyed. Like she's getting used to wearing contact lenses. Or, maybe someone whacked her in the back of the head with a board.

And she never blinks. Never.

To me, she looks like a deer caught in the headlights. Hence the moniker SD.

Latino Bob Hope walks with a swagger, and carries a putter around with him. He swings this putter for punctuation when he talks.

Kind of like how Johnny Carson used to deliver a punchline on the Tonight Show, years ago.

His whole schtick seems to be presenting himself as having just flown in from somewhere exotic, and just jumped up on stage to rattle off some humorous anecdotes. Then he swings his putter, and walks off to a round of applause.

Which seems to only happen in his head.

Indeed, every time I see him, he treats me like I'm his audience.

Anywho.

So, SD and LBH are walking up to me, and he's swinging his putter, and her eyes are darting around—wide open. And they see me sitting in my patio chair enjoying a glass of 'whisky' and watching the sunset. So, they stop to chat.

"Didn't see you at coffee this morning," scolds SD.

"That's correct. Because I wasn't there."

"Well, you should come some time," she scowls, "be a part of the community."

SD and LBH just got here a week ago. They're seasonal visitors. The last time they were here was March. Nine months ago.

Ever since I moved in last May, I have gone to Saturday morning coffee, about 75% of the time, (excluding the times I decided to write instead/drank too much the night before/didn't feel like showering and shaving/just said screw it, I'll go next week).

So. For the last seven months I have a much better track record of going to morning coffee than they do.

But they wouldn't know this.

Because they weren't even here.

Not only coffee, but I have attended most of the activities on the calendar for the last seven months.

So yes, I am a 'part of the community'.

Here's the point: **Mind Your Own Business.**

There is a significant percentage of human beings, who seem compelled to mind other people's business.

Like SD and LBH.

- They haven't been here for the last nine months.
- They go to their first Saturday morning coffee and don't see me there.
- They make an incorrect assumption that I don't go to **any** Saturday morning coffee functions. *(If one, then all.)*
- Then, they make a negative judgement about me based on this incorrect assumption.
- The negative judgement being that I am not trying hard enough to be 'part of the community'.

So:

- Didn't mind their own business.
- Made an incorrect assumption.
- Made a negative judgement based on their incorrect assumption.
- Initiated a conversation from that point.

This behavior is pandemic in our species.

But, how in the hell does noticing this stuff help me in any way?

It doesn't.

Definitely Locked

Tuesday 4:28 pm.

I've been gone all afternoon, at a doctor's appointment.

When I left, I left the air conditioning on and the bedroom doors open to circulate the air. And when I came home, the second bedroom door was closed.

All the way. Latched.

No, it wasn't gravity. My trailer is old, yes, but it slopes the other way. So the door swings all the way open.

What's more, the air vent blows towards the door. It actually blows the door open, bumping it gently against the wall. When the air is on, it makes a rhythmic bump. Like a very small drum, in a regular rhythm. I listen to it as I write.

No. For that door to be closed and latched, someone actually needs to close it.

Now. Locks. I bought all new locks when I moved in. I have the only keys.

Two of the three doors have deadbolts on the inside that can only be slid shut from the inside. And they are always slid shut.

The main front door is tight to lock. You have to pull it hard to turn the key. And I just had to pull it hard to unlock it. So, it was definitely locked.

Am I losing my mind?
Wtf?

Walks Like a Duck

Wednesday 6:14 pm.

Moan is walking up to us, "We have a new President now. Everyone just needs to get over it and pull together."

"Oh yeah?" The Mayor replies. "And is that what you told yourself when Obama got elected?"

"Oh, hell no," she sneers. "He's a Muslim, and not even an American. I mean, come on…"

The Mayor and I were standing in the street, chatting.
And well within view of Piss and Moan's trailer.
Big mistake. As I keep realizing.

Sure enough, within a few minutes, Moan came sauntering out. Clutching her usual Modelo and cigarette.

And the first thing out of her mouth is not '*Hello*'. Not '*What's happening?*' Not even '*Nice night out tonight, huh?*' Nope. She has just torn herself away from her steady morphine drip of opinion news. And come outside to say something to someone. Anyone. Anyone who will listen.

She really wants to say something to the whole country.

She wants to make a political speech.

And we just happened to be the closest available audience.

Lucky, lucky us.

"Everyone needs to get on board now," she pushes on with her speech, "and let him make us great again."

"Fuck that," The Mayor scowls, "he's a moron."

Her eyes are dark with anger. I'm half expecting her to reach out and smack him.

"You have to respect him!" she spits. "He's the President."

"And did you respect the last President!"

"The last president was a Muslim!" she barks.

"You got proof of that?" he stares her down.

"If it walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck…" she waves her hand dismissively.

This 'Walks Like a Duck' thing gets a lot of use around here.

Essentially: If something walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it's a duck.

What a simple-minded childish bit of nonsense!

I jump into the conversation, perhaps a mistake.

"Good evening," I smile, "yes, it is a nice night, isn't it?"

She tries to smirk, but it comes out as a scowl instead. The 'Moan Scowl'. It's her trademark. Her 'resting bitch face'.

"Sounds like you are justifying your own opinion."

She leans in, and speaks slowly, enunciating each word carefully, as though I was hard of hearing, or can't understand English: "If—it—walks—like-a—duck—and—quacks—like—a—duck."

"But, that's your own personal opinion," I continue, "you're deciding that someone walks like a duck and quacks like a duck."

"It's fact!" she blurts.

"It's your opinion. You're pretending that it's a fact. Opinions aren't facts."

Her head snaps backwards like someone had just shoved a hot stinky turd under her nose, "You don't know what the hell you're talking about."

She scowls.

"Sounds like he does," chortles The Mayor.

Moan turns away from us and walks quickly towards her trailer, "You don't know what the *hell* you're talking about," she repeats over her shoulder, waving her hand dismissively in the air.

"Then why you gotta run away?" he laughs.

Debbie Downer

Wednesday 11:18 PM.

I have another one: "Everything looks like a nail to me, and all I have is a hammer."

In my old neighborhood, there was a woman who also used the 'Walks Like a Duck' line. But she was also very fond of throwing around this 'Hammer' rationale.

I used to have happy hour in my garage. In the evening I would park my car outside and open the garage door. I had a work table on wheels that I would roll out, and a few bar stools. The neighbors would drop by and sit around and have a bevvy at the end of the day.

Well, this woman we all called Debbie Downer would stroll over occasionally, and grace us with her presence.

Really, she was just looking for an audience.

Like Moan, she needed to give speeches and tell people what her opinions are. She needed to find a captive audience.

We were an easy target.

One time there were a few people at happy hour when she rolled up. And she got into a squawk with another neighbor of mine I

call Mustang. He lives on the other side of the golf course. He was retired, and restored vintage Ford Mustangs as a hobby.

So, anyway, Debbie Downer comes waddling up to the table, and the conversation pauses, as we all turn to look at her.

"How's it going?" she looked around at all of us.

"Not bad," replied Mustang. "How are you?"

"Well, I'd be a whole lot better if I wasn't being forced to support five million illegal Mexicans livin in my country."

"Who's forcing you?" he squints at her.

The rest of us had heard all this before. So we just keep our mouths shut. Usually she'd ramble for a while, then realize no one was interested in her rambling. And then she'd slink quietly away.

But Mustang hadn't heard her speeches yet.

She smirks, "Them damn Libtards. Don't you watch the news?"

"OK… So, you need to beat on Liberals and Mexicans. Anyone else you care to hit while you're at it?"

"Well, all I have is a hammer, and everything looks like a nail."

"That's your explanation? That all you can see are nails? People you need to hit?"

She scrunches up her face, just like Moan does. Like someone had shoved a hot stinky turd under her nose.

"Perhaps," he grins, "you might benefit from some professional counseling to explore why you only see people you need to hit."

"Whatever," she snorts.

"And, to get some more social interaction tools in your emotional toolbox than just a hammer."

You should have seen the look on her face.

All of us at the table were trying to stifle our giggles.
Debbie huffed and stuck out her chin. And strode quickly away.

"Emotional toolbox?" I turn to Mustang.
"I used to work in mental health before I retired. You know, working on cars is a hell of a lot easier than working on people."

Wired

Saturday 4:14 pm.

Ray came over, to help me set up a few things.

He hid a small camera in the bookshelf of the extension room where I write. And he has it WIFI linked to his house to some hard disc thing. He also set up a VPN on my Macs. And did some stuff with proxies and DNS servers.

He's so damn smart, I just watch him in amazement.

I was born on Sept 14th 1956.

The same day that IBM released the first computer with a hard drive: the IBM 305 RAMAC. The machine weighed about one ton and measured about 16 square feet. It was created by IBM employee Reynold Johnson and his research team. The hard drive stored about 5 megabytes of data. Users could immediately retrieve the data they needed, without the use of punch cards.

That's where I start with this whole computer thing.

A dinosaur. A one-ton computer with a 5mb hard drive.

So, yeah. Ray just blows my mind.

"OK, Winston. If anyone messes with you now, I'm gonna see it."

"Maybe I'm just paranoid. Or imagining things. But it is freaking me out."

"No worries, man. I got you covered. Let's just let it run and see if there's anything there. Cool?"

"Cool."

Eeyore

Wednesday 10:12 AM.

"Whacha doin'?"

Eeyore has crept up behind me.

I call him Eeyore, because he's so negative. And his conversations tend to start negative, and then go downhill from there.

So, I'm working my pallet wood planters. I'm putting the bamboo sticks in them, when he creeps up behind me.

"Whacha doin?"

"I'm putting these bamboo sticks in these boxes I made out of pallets."

"Well… If the office lets you do that."

"What do you mean," I asked.

"Well, they probably won't let you do that."

"Why not?"

"Well, the wind blowing bamboo all over the park."

"No, No, No, I'm putting Mexican Beach Pebbles in to hold it."

"Well, I guess that might hold them. But we'll see what the office says."

I just shook my head.

"Are you going to paint them?"

Wtf? Why would I paint over the natural patina of the pallet wood?

That's kinda the whole point. Otherwise, I could have just made them out of any damn wood and painted them.

He's a little slow.

And he talks with that low slow Eeyore type of voice too.

And his ears are pretty big for his head size.

And he's bald. Which makes his ears stick out all the more.

So. Anyway. Eeyore.

Years ago, I used to work with a guy who also led with negatives. You tell him something, and the first thing he thinks of is why it's a bad idea, or won't work. He would get so bogged down with that stuff, that you couldn't start anything until he had gone through all the negatives, and figured out whether or not you should actually be doing this at all.

There was a lot of wasted time on those jobs.

Him walking around thinking about all the negatives. Me standing holding a ladder, ready to go to work.

And jack shit getting accomplished.

So, anyway, the office ladies drove by the next morning, and looked at the bamboo in my planters. And what did they say?

"Cool! I like that!"

"Way to upscale the park, nice!"

Another time Eeyore crept up behind me was when I sold my shed.

There was a wooden storage shed next to the trailer when I bought it.

It was taking up half of the space under the awning. Space that I wanted for a bigger work area to work on the pallets.

So, I put the shed on Craigslist.

Nice kid called me up. Just what he was looking for. Came over with his dad and took it apart. Put it in a truck and hauled it away. Good deal.

And just as they're pulling away… Eeyore rides up on his scooter.
"Whacha doin?"
"Just sold my shed."
"Did you check with the office? They might not let you sell it."
Cheese and rice!
"And why would the office not want me to sell my shed?"
"I don't know. I'm not the office."

What is truly unbelievable to me about this exchange is that, in *his* mind, his rationale makes sense.

So, I try to move on, introduce a more positive topic.

"Yes," I tell him, "I'm going to enclose part of this awning here and build a proper workshop. With double doors on this side, so I can move tools and materials in and out."
"You gotta get a permit."
"A permit?"
"Yeah, but the office probably won't let you build it anyway."
Oh, what fresh hell is this?

"There was a guy," Eeyore drones, "who wanted to build a shop on the side of his trailer, and the office said he had to get a permit. So, he went to the city, and they said they don't give permits for mobile home parks."

So, you can't do it without a permit, and you can't get a permit.

Dead end. No hope.
Might as well slash my wrists.
Oh well, it was a good life.
Bugger.

So, I just let the conversation hang. Screw it.

But he doesn't leave.
"If you need some help, I got tools. Lots of tools. I got saws. Got a table saw. Drills, hammer…"

"Oh yeah?" I lean on my table saw and push my hammer and circular saw across the top of it, watching his eyes.
No recognition.

Help? Help doing what? Building a coffin for myself because I'm going to kill myself because the 'office' won't let me build a workshop?

But seriously, can you imagine, Eeyore right next to you all day long?
'Helping'?

No thank you.

Cheap Red Night

Friday, 7:32 pm.

It's cheap red night.
Dan and I decided to make it an official thing.

So, every Friday night there's a party on the porch. Organized around a flimsy concept of sampling all of the cheap red wines that are available to us in the sprawling, international cross-road of taste and culture that is Apache Junction.
Our quest is to find the cheapest one that's still drinkable.

Junction Supermart usually has a few for $4.99 a bottle. And I have a Junction card. Every time I use it, I get points towards a discount on gas at their pumps. Sometimes it's like 20 cents off per gallon.
Cheap wine and cheap gas. Yee hah!

Anyway.
It's cheap red night.

"So, Dan, tell me about the seminary."
"Not much to tell my man. Been there, done that. End of the trail."
"You said you went because your dad wanted you to."

"Yeah. Well, I didn't really have no plans growing up. You know? Never really thought about the whole, 'whacha gonna do for a livin' kinda thing. Just never thought about it."

"Too busy living in the moment?"

"Oh, hell yeah. Gettin laid. Riding dirt bikes. You know. Regular shit."

"So, seminary didn't offer you anything?"

"Don't get me wrong, my man. I learned a lot there. It was eye opening."

"So, you were there like—two years?"

"Just about. Just about two, and I pulled the plug."

"Why?"

He sighs, straightens himself up in his chair, and fixes his gaze on the Superstitions: "Religious beliefs are not spiritual truths, my man."

I sit quietly waiting for him to continue.

"You become so focused on learning and practicing your religious beliefs, that you forget about the higher purpose." He turns to face me, "To achieve full awareness and acceptance of all things."

"That's heavy, Dan."

"That's the truth, man. Christianity learned nothing from all the religions that came before it. Acceptance and unconditional love. Jesus knew that. He practiced and preached it."

"He wasn't the only one."

"Oh hell no. Lots of spiritual leaders preach acceptance and unconditional love."

I pour him another glass, "Seems to me Dan, that 'Organized Christianity' focuses on practicing judgement and condemnation."

"And yet, they quote Jesus. Cheers, my man," he raises his glass.

"Cheers, mate," I raise mine.

"But Jesus is counterbalanced by a black or white judgmental father. Kinda leaves Christians confused. What are we supposed to practice? Jesus offers total acceptance. His father offers judgement."

"Yeah. I see what you're getting at."

"And then there is this whole 'made in the image of god' shit. But if you look around, most of the people I see are assholes and idiots."

"Ha! Don't sugar coat it, Dan, give it to me straight."

"Anyway—that, my man, is the shifting sand that religion was built on. Which is why I left the seminary."

"So, what did The Tao offer you?"

"A closer truth. A deeper insight into true spirituality and less about rigid beliefs. But even The Tao has it's pitfalls."

"Yeah, because I hear you slinging around a few judgments yourself, from time to time."

"I'm only human too. It's a path, not a destination."

"Nice image."

Cheap Red Night has become an opportunity for me to pick Dan's brain. I think there is a lot in there that I want to hear. He never disappoints. And, I think he likes the opportunity himself.

"I think we're supposed to take the path through the woods," he continues. "And come out on the other side. At least that's what I believe. But some paths just go round and round. And *never* come out of the woods."

"That sounds like a song lyric to me."

"Write it, my man. Write it."

I sip my wine, "This is fairly drinkable, actually."

"Yeah. Where's it from?"

"I don't know—Iowa? Nebraska?"

"Bum-Fuck Egypt?" he grins.

I look at the bottle, "California."

"It's a big state. Could be junk grapes left over from a decent winery."

I look up at the palm trees rustling above us in the cool evening breeze.

"You know anything about 12 step programs?" He breaks my reverie.

"Not much. Know what they are. Basically."

"Those two drunk guys who started Alcoholics Anonymous blindly stumbled into a great spiritual truth."

"You saying that we have alcohol to thank for opening our eyes to the spiritual truth?"

"In a way. In a way."

"Well, here's to AA," I raise my glass.

He grins and raises his, "Cheers."

"So, what truth did those guys stumble onto, Dan?"

"Acceptance. The whole deal with AA is to accept that you have no power over alcohol. That way you find the strength to avoid it."

"But even those guys fall off the wagon."

"Of course, they do. Of course, they do. We're all human beings, my man. We're evolving. That's the point. We learn and grow. It's a path, not a destination."

"It's a path."

"The main reason why those AA guys fall off the wagon is because they don't look at the cause of their drinking. What memories are they trying to numb? What feelings are they trying to escape from?"

"Yeah. My friend Jan talks about that too. A lot of them say that alcoholism is a genetic disorder. Or that other people drive you to it."

"That's the easy way out. You never look at your denial."

"Exactly, Winston. Because some of them give up alcohol and start obsessing over other things: fitness, sports, gambling, eating. It's a coping mechanism. They drop one mechanism and pick up another. Addiction is addiction. The big question is: Why do you need *any* coping mechanism?"

"And they can't look at that."

"Oh hell no. Because then they might have to talk about something they don't want to talk about. Like what happened to them as a child."

"See, my friend Jan talks about this too. She's a counsellor."

"So, she knows, Winston. Spiritual growth is hard. It's difficult. That's why so few people attempt it. It ain't easy. We like easy. Human beings are inherently lazy. We don't do difficult."

"You got that right, buddy."

"But even spiritual growth is no bed of roses," he points up at the moon coming up over the horizon. "Spiritual growth is like the moon, my man. It's beautiful and glowing and calling to ya. But you try and go there. It's a long, difficult, potentially life-threatening journey. And when you get there, it's a cold lonely desolate place. And there's nothing to eat."

"So, is it worth the trip?"

"I think so. Today at least."

"What about tomorrow?"

"All I need is 51% on any given day. And I'm in."

"51%? Perfect."

"Winston, you know those cartoons where people climb a mountain to ask a hermit about the meaning of life?"

"Yeah, man."

"Why is the most spiritually aware person in the world sitting all alone on the top of a mountain?"

"Good question, Dan. Good damn question."

Victim Eyes

Wednesday 8:32 AM.

My old neighbor Jan just texted me:

Jan: *Some congressman on tv. Victim eyes*
Me: *What?*
Jan: *Victim eyes. Looking around nervously. Head down. Apprehensive. Usually scowling*
Me: *Yeah, noticed that. Usually scowling*
Jan: *I think emotionally abused as kids. Beat down. Told they were stupid*
Me: *You can see that?*
Jan: *Just like the kids I see at the clinic*
Me: *Victim eyes huh?*
Jan: *They need help. Stop projecting their victimization on everyone else*
Me: *No victim*
Jan: *They were. When kids. Still looking for validation*
Me*: Who can?*
Jan*: Counseling. Need to resolve their victimization or they will project it onto everyone else for rest of their life*
Me*: Everyone paying attention to them. Still not enough?*
Jan: *Never will be. Have to resolve this at its cause*

Me: *Of course*
Jan: *Anyway, chat more on Sat. Rick is grilling chicken*
Me: *Yummers!*

Idiots and Bastards

Saturday 11:14 AM.

The British are bastards. They're not idiots.
Here's the difference between an idiot and a bastard.

An idiot invades a country. He kills a bunch of people, inspiring hatred towards himself and his own country. Thereby creating generations of people who will try to make him pay for what he did.

When he invades, he spends billions destroying infrastructure: bridges, roads, power plants, etc.

Then he claims ownership of your natural resources.

Then he spends billions rebuilding the infrastructure he just destroyed. Because he needs it to harvest, process and export your natural resources.

Then he brags about what a great businessman he is.

And then he buggers off home. And tries to figure out how to bail himself out of the immense debt he has brought upon himself, from invading countries, destroying and rebuilding infrastructure, and fighting the enemies that he has created.

A bastard shows up in your country in a little boat. He puts his arm around your shoulder and says, "See all this stuff here? You and I are

going to harvest, process and export this, and we're both going to make billions".

"Oh, and I'm also going to teach you how to speak the English language. And how to make a decent cup of tea."

Then, he makes your country pay to build the infrastructure he needs to harvest, process and export your natural resources.

Then he works generation after generation of your own countrymen to the death. Making them do the actual work of harvesting, processing and exporting your natural resources.

Then he forgets to pay you your share of the profits. Instead, he points to all the wonderful new infrastructure you have.

That you didn't have before he came.

Which you paid for.

And how your life is obviously so much better, now that you can speak English. And make a decent cup of tea.

Then he pats himself on the back, and buggers off home. And sits around counting all his money.

Keeper of the Sack

Thursday 6:26 pm.

The sun is sliding down between the tall palms, and the Mayor and I are watching it as we have a can.

Last Beer Mike drives by and glowers at me.

The Mayor looks over at Piss and Moan's trailer. You can see their big flat screen perfectly through their front windows. Even from across the street.

Someone on the screen is pointing their finger and talking in an angry looking manner.

"Your Honor, you're absolutely right about the failure of the two-party system. It never could represent the diverse needs and wants, of such a huge population."

"Them two parties are the same, mi amigo. In all the wrong ways. They both got taken over by rich greedy sons of bitches. They all wanna write laws so they can make money. And, they both try to tell us that they represent the workin man. But none of them, got a candidate *that is a workin man*."

"Time for something new?"

"It's time for the Labor Party, mi amigo."

"Labor party?"

"To hell with conservative or liberal. Both failures. And 'progressive', 'nationalist', 'Libertarian', 'Green', 'Family', or whatever other dumbass fantasy you're trying to make a party outta."

He pauses for a sip.

"Because them parties are about *a fantasy*, you follow me? And fantasies ain't always the same in everybody's mind."

"That's true."

"And fantasies, can be twisted into forcing shit onto people. So somebody can make money."

"Yeah, you got that right."

"If we gotta tolerate these damn political parties, then them parties should be about actual people. Not fantasies."

"You mean actual *physical* demographics of people? And not *philosophical* demographics of people? Right?"

"Exactly, Mister College Boy," he smirks at me.

I smirk back at him, "Parties should represent *actual needs*?"

"Exactly. Not fantasies and opinions. Because ain't that what these damn political platforms are? Fantasies and opinions?"

I can't disagree with that.

"So," I ask, "what would be a more *practical* demographical division? In your mind?"

"Well, the thing, that's most obvious to me, is them who work for a living, and them who make money off them who work for a living."

"Wait. Those who work for a living, and those who—"

"Thems who make money off thems who work for a living. That's your true party split in America."

"Hmmm…"

"And them who work for a living, should belong to the Labor Party of the United of States."

"Not Democrat? Because it used to be Democrat-Farm-Labor."

"In their name only. They all got corrupted by rich guys getting in the driver's seat."

I won't argue with that.

"We gotta stop the greed, mi amigo. In the United of States, we define greed, as freedom. And that shit has to stop."

"Greed, is freedom…"

"The freedom to be as greedy as you want. Regardless of how it screws anyone else."

"In a nutshell, Your Honor."

"Lookit, the ones who whine and complain about regulations are the ones who get proven, time after time, to be the biggest abusers of people and resources. And then, they whine and complain that their freedom is being taken away. Damn right it is. Your freedom to be abusive assholes *should* be taken away!"

Again, I am left wondering why the Mayor is not a regular on CNN.

At that moment I see Moan walking towards us clutching her Modelo, and holding it out in front of her like it was a torch.

"You're wrong," she snaps as she approaches.

"What's that?" he squints.

"You're wrong. Both of you," she has a fixed angry stare. "Fifty-eight percent of Americans said they'd vote for him all over again."

She stops and takes a defiant stance, legs spread, hand on hip. And takes a big gulp of her beer.

"Good evening. Yes, it is a beautiful sunset, isn't it?" I smile.

She twists her face into a knot, glaring at me, "Got a problem with your hearing? Fifty-eight percent."

"Why do you need to force us to listen to your opinion?" I ask.

"I'm not forcing," she sneers, pointing her chin at me, "just having a normal conversation."

"No, you're forcing us to listen to your opinion and daring us to contradict you."

"You don't know shit."

"And then you insult me. This seems to be more about boosting your ego."

"It's a fact," she leans in scowling, "fifty-eight percent."

"And now you're trying to steer the focus back onto your opinion, and get the focus off your own behavior."

"It's a fact! Retard! You just can't handle the truth!" she shouts in all caps.

"And now you're back to insulting me. Which seems to be your goal. To try to convince yourself that you're smarter than someone else. Why do you need to do that?"

"It's a fact," she scowls more, "and I am smarter. Smarter than you!" she turns and stalks away, chin up.

"Why do you need to hurt someone else to feel good about yourself?"

"Retard," she throws up her middle finger over her shoulder.

"Was that some upmanshit shit?" The Mayor turns to me.

"An attempt."

"Think it worked for her? Seems to me, that you blocked that one pretty good."

"Yeah, she's gonna need another couple of hours of opinion shows to rebuild her denial now."

He laughs.

"She's a feisty one."

"Oh she's the keeper of the sack over there," he smirks. "She'll let her husband borrow a ball every now and then if he needs to. But she carries em most of the time."

I can't help but laugh. The image of Piss begging Moan to let him use one of his own balls…

That's just too good for words.

Basic Minimum Qualifications

Sunday 11:30 AM.

"We *should* be registering Unders," Rick turns the chicken on the grill. "Not Muslims."

I'm hanging out with my old neighbors, Jan and Rick.
They live across the street from my old house, on the corner.

I used to have a great house.
It was nice. Three bedrooms, two baths, two car garage. On a big lot. Next to a golf course. With a thirty-six-thousand-gallon diving pool in the back yard.
Back when I could work. And had money.
Then I lost it all.
I can't look at it as I drive by.

But I have kept the friends I made there.
We get together whenever we can.

Rick bastes the chicken, as it sizzles, "There *are* people trying to take over our country. But they ain't Muslims."
Jan carries out a bowl of fresh vegetables and sets them on the table, "We've been reading the concept stuff that you emailed us."

"Cool," I sit down at the table.

"You think it's a physical mutation?" Jan starts slicing tomatoes, "an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex?"

"Unders," chuckles Rick, as he closes the grill lid.

"These behaviors appear to be the same," I swing around in the patio chair to face her, "regardless of race, sex, nationality, or wealth. They're only capable of black or white thinking. They attach emotional content to logistical situations. They justify by comparison to an opposite extreme. They assume absolutes—all, always, never, none, every—"

"I think there's something else you might want to include in your book, "Jan starts slicing cucumbers.

"Yeah? What you texted me about?"

"Yeah," she sets down the knife and looks at me. "A lot of this behavior could also be the result of being neglected or abused as a child."

Jan is a counsellor. Up on the Navajo Nation, where she was born.

"We see this in the kids who come into our clinic," she starts slicing again. "These kids carrying around unresolved anger, and fear. If they don't get help, it just grows. And they project it onto innocent people. They never stop acting like victims."

"Self-Victimization at the hands of others," adds Rick.

"Everyone who comes in front of them," Jan starts peeling carrots, "gets cast into the role of someone who could be abusing them. It's a subconscious reaction. At some level, they know they need to resolve what happened. But the way they try to resolve it never works. Their best thinking doesn't work. They don't get it resolved, because it has to be resolved at the source. With their original abuser."

"One in six. Right?" Rick looks at Jan.

Jan nods, "One in six children are victims of abuse or neglect."

"Cheese and rice. I had no idea it was that many."

"People don't like to talk about it. It makes them uncomfortable."

"Makes them have to look at *themselves*," Rick opens up the grill again.

Vegetables are all chopped now, so Jan mixes the salad in a big wooden bowl. "We still don't have an open national dialogue about the damage it's causing. Or how it threatens our security."

"None of our lovely congressmen have the balls to speak up," sneers Rick. "Because their corporate sponsors can't make any money from talking about child abuse."

We divvy up the salad onto our plates, and pass around the dressing.

"Most of the salad came from our garden," Jan points over to the raised beds by the wall.

"Yeah, the lettuce got a little bit chewed on by the rabbits. So, I had to raise the fence," Rick passes me the corn.

"I think it's perfect," I smile. "Thanks so much for inviting me."

"It's great to see you," smiles Jan. "We can't just walk across the street any more, and have happy hour in the garage. Like we used to."

"Yeah, I miss that."

"We miss you, man," Rick pats my shoulder.

Four pieces of perfectly barbecued chicken, two ears of corn, and a small mountain of potato salad later—Rick passes out cigars. We all light up and sit looking out over the golf course.

Two golf carts loaded with drunk golfers and bags of clubs rattle past us on the fairway. They lurch along and wave.

We wave and smile.

We watch a flock of ducks fly in and land on the neatly trimmed green.

The golfers are gone now. The greenskeeper is locking the chain across the golf cart path.

I'm savoring this moment. "It's great to be talking to you guys again. There are so few people that I can have a real conversation with."

"Ain't that the truth," Rick stretches out in his chair.

Failure to Launch

Sunday 11:42 AM.

Finally got a good look at Failure's mom.

She's cute.

She's probably about my age, so that means that Failure is probably in his early forties.

Failure to Launch, and his mom live on the other side of the laundry room from me. I can just see the front of their tin can.

Failure lives with his mom. And drives a bright red BMW.

Piss says he's a carpet salesman.

He walks their dog, (I'm pretty sure it's his mom's), every evening, after he gets home from work. He always takes the same path: around the laundry, right, then left, and back around past the truck driver sisters and Colleen.

And he always does it *without* a shirt on.

Always.

Like, *"Man I am so glad to get home and not have to wear a shirt anymore. Now I'm going to take the dog out and show all the neighbors my bare chest. Just in case they forgot what it looks like since last night's viewing."*

Which would be something. If he was an attractive man.

But…

Let me put it this way:

Remember Sad Sam and his 'pull shirt' back in the UK?

Well, Failure would have triggered *even less* of a response from Minge and Fanny.

Zero. Nada. Negative.

Failure looks like the bastard son of a greasy haired Italian organ grinder. And his monkey.

Which is weird, because his mom is a flaxen-haired cutie pie.

She's cute.

But there I go again, smooping on a neighbor.

Just gets lonely sometimes. Know what I mean?

And then there is that damn full moon smiling down at me…

How Much?

Monday 10:11 AM.

So, here's my question…

How long has our species been stumbling around this planet, toothless and knuckle dragging, and reacting out of undeveloped frontal lobes?

Listening to our deformed amygdalae?

Or venting our unresolved anger and fear from being abused as children?

How much of the history of our species, our religions, our forms of government, the structure of our societies, the major events in our evolution…

How much of this is the result of mental illness?

And how much is the result of transference?

Trying to punish others in the attempt to punish whoever abused you as a child?

I just texted Jan:

Me: 1 in 6? really?

Jan: Statistics are from reported cases. Most cases go unreported.

Me: Yeah, because it feels the like real number is higher.

Jan: Denial. Or terrorized by their abusers and kept quiet.

Me: See that makes sense now.

Jan: There's also copycat behavior.

Me: Copycat?

Jan: Kids who weren't abused. But mimic behavior because they think that's how they're supposed to act. Peer pressure.

Me: Cheese and rice. This stuff is everywhere. How do we sort this out?

Jan: What I do for a living.

Me: Oh yeah. Right.

Jan: Difference is obvious.

Jan: Ones who were abused are emotionally screaming. Sometimes out loud too. Children scream when their needs aren't being met. They can't tell you what their real needs are.

Me: It's childish behavior.

Jan: But you can't respond to that. It won't help.

Me: What does?

Jan: Listen to their words. Whatever is in front of them right now. Whatever brought up their original pain.

Me: That what you listen to?

Jan: Listen to their pain. And understand where it came from.

Immigrant Mentality

Tuesday 8:13 AM.

17 visitors at the avian Coffee Casa on top of Smart Woman's trailer this morning.

It's about 52 Fahrenheit out so they look a little hunched over and clustered against the morning chill.

They actually look very much like a huddled mass.
Teeming wretched refuse pecking at the mites, that are biting them under their wings.

Imagine this:

It's 1847, and you live in Ireland.
There's nothing to eat.
Nothing.
The Great Famine is well under way, and if that won't kill you, then the typhus might.

What are you going to do?

You beg, borrow, scrape, steal, whatever you have to do to get the money for a one-way ticket to America.

A one-way ticket.

Think about that.

No going back. Nothing to go back to.

Whatever America is, it has to be better than what we left.

Two generations later, you still believe that America is better than any other country. Of course, you do. It's what you've heard your whole life. It is part of the fabric which makes up the country at this point. It's taught, celebrated, and institutionalized.

"God bless America!"

Not, "God bless *all* of God's people wherever they happened to be born on God's green earth."

Oh no, no, no, we can't have that!

It has to be "God bless *America*", because we believe that America is better than any other country. It's God's favorite.

And that, is Immigrant Mentality.

The United States exists because immigrants risked everything to travel across the ocean with their hopes and dreams. English, French, Swedish, Norwegians, Dutch, Belgians, Austrians, Czechs, Germans, Italians, Greeks, Portuguese, Swiss, Estonians, and Bulgarians. The Finnish, the Spanish, the Irish, the Scottish, the Welsh, the Danish, and the Poles. Lithuanians, Romanians, Hungarians, Ukrainians, Russians, Arabs, Indians, Pakistani, Chinese, Japanese, Israeli, Turkish, Africans, Polynesians…

They left behind family and history, because they believed they could have a better life in the new world.

Generations later, we still believe that life in Europe has to be worse, in our minds, than what we have built here. Consequently, we often boast that *everything* we have in the United States is better than anything anywhere else.

We can see this in small things, like a hot dog stand that advertises 'The World's Best Hot Dog!' This is not a factual claim based on an unbiased assessment of all the hot dogs sold in the world. And some small stand in Chicago was deemed to sell the best by an international panel of impartial judges.

There are many hot dog stands in America that claim to have 'The World's Best!' They can't all be the 'World's Best!' This is just a boast made by the grandchild of someone who was taught that everything American is better, simply because it's made in America. And since our claim cannot be proven, our Immigrant Mentality has turned our pride into arrogance.

How many years did we hold the 'World' Series of Baseball, while the United States was the only country in the World competing in it?

If our family escaped from living under a tyrannical government back in Europe, and now we live free, we may boast that we are *more* free than anyone else on the earth. And that people in other countries *wish* they lived in the United States. And had the freedoms that we have.

We may not even know what life is like today, back in Europe. We don't care. We're Americans now.

We may not even be able to list what freedoms we have, that people in countries like Switzerland, Norway, and Sweden don't have.

Doesn't matter.

Our Immigrant Mentality is absolute, it sees only black or white. In our minds, everywhere that *isn't* the Unites States, sucks. The United States is the best place to live in the whole wide world!

Our Immigrant Mentality keeps us frozen in 1783.

On September 3, 1783, the Treaty of Paris was signed, formally recognizing the United States as a free and independent nation.

But we still talk about our freedom, as though it could be taken away at any moment.

Are we delusional?

Are we imagining that the British ships never actually sailed all the way back to England after the defeat at Yorktown?

Are we imagining that they have been ghosting around in the mid-Atlantic all this time? Waiting? Just waiting for the opportunity to sail back into our ports, and force us back into being colonies again?

What the hell is wrong with us?

Why are we so scared of losing our freedom?

The only way we can lose our freedom, is for another country to invade the US and take control of the government.

Who, do we suppose is going to invade us?

What nation is prepared, right now, to *invade* the United States?

To roll tanks down the streets, and blow up our houses? To fly helicopters over government buildings, and force our public servants to surrender?

None.

What country has the resources, the money, and the manpower to occupy *the entire United States*? And take over the entire government?

None.

We, are the only ones taking away our freedom.

We take it away from ourselves by listening to our irrational fears.

And Jan is right.

Irrational fears come from being abused as a child.

If you were abused as a child, someone *did* take away your freedom: Your freedom to have a happy healthy childhood.

And you had no power to stop them.

There *was* a bad person lurking in the shadows that had the power to hurt you.

That was all real. Very real.

And if you don't get professional help to deal with those irrational childhood fears, you will drag them around with you for the rest of your life.

And project them onto people who *don't* threaten your freedom.

People who *don't* have the power to take your freedom away.

Keep Calm and Lie

Friday 7:16 AM.

Rain today.

I really like it when it rains in the desert.

Maybe because it does it so infrequently, that it seems more special.

All last night it was blowing through, and raining off and on.

I got up, and made a hot cup of tea. I went out to sit under the awning and listen to it rain in the dark. And smell the desert open up and drink it in.

I have often taken the day off, if I woke up and it was raining. Kind of like the Arizona version of a 'snow day'.

Being self-employed had its good points.

Except for one: I hated my boss.

Do you know what that asshole would say to me every morning?

"Get up and go to work you lazy ass!"

To hell with him. Glad I never have to work for that asshole again!

So now I sit here in front of the Frankenputer.

Staring at words.

And not even one lady on the antenna today.
*sighs

I got a DM on Facebook from a cousin back in the UK.

My God the British are the biggest bunch of pissy children.
I think they hold the world trophy for being the most emotionally shut down and repressed demographic of human beings on earth.

For example: Look at the most popular meme to come out of the UK:

"Keep calm. And carry on."

This was the government's official response to terrorist attacks.

Essentially: ***"Don't let your emotions out. And pretend like nothing is happening."***

Not: ***"Let's all talk openly about what we are feeling, and try to heal each other. And then look at what we did to cause this."***
Oh no, no, no, no, no!
There'll be none of that!

My cousin was bellyaching about his brother who had said something that upset him. A lot.

Let me explain about this 'You Upset me' thing, because this is one of the signature 'Great British Emotional Shut-Down Devices' ever invented.

If someone says something, or does something,

and you have an emotional reaction to it,
then you throw this 'upset' phrase at them.

It doesn't matter if what they said was ***true***, and we are feeling ***'upset'*** because you held a mirror to our face…

Oh, no, no, no! ***We don't even look at that!***

We immediately redirect the whole situation in a different direction—***away from ourselves***—by boldly declaring that ***you*** have done something bad by ***'upsetting me.'***

You are the ***asshole***.

And I am the ***victim***!

This is a deliberate dead end.

The assumption is this: If I say that you '***upset***' me, then you '***upset***' me. And that's that. No ***discussion***. No ***explanation***.

And the expectation is: That ***you have to apologize to me***.

You are convicted, beyond question, of being guilty.

Just by me declaring that you '***upset***' me.

I don't have to explain ***how*** you 'upset' me. Or what ***actual feelings*** you triggered.

This is the closest that British people can come
to talking about their feelings,
without actually talking about their feelings.

The reality here:

No one is responsible for anyone else's feelings.

We are all responsible for our own.

That's what's called ***maturity***. You know, being an '***adult***'?

But not in the UK.

They sling this 'upset' thing around when they need to shut down a situation or conversation. And force their one-upmanship.

Being 'upset' is never to be questioned.

And, if you don't know ***why*** you have 'upset' them, then they will launch the second most popular Great British Emotional Shut-Down Device:

'Leave It at That':
"Well, if you don't know what you said/did to upset me,
then we will just have to leave it at that."

In this way, they double their one-upmanship, because they have exposed you as being so mentally slow, that you can't even see your own behavior. Which designates you as twice as defective, in their eyes.

Amazing, isn't it?

And all they really have to do, is simply talk about their feelings.
But no no, there'll be none of that!
We don't do 'feelings' in the UK.

But here's the bigger picture:
We react the strongest to the thing which pegs us the hardest.

My Warrior Instinct sees you holding me accountable for my own behavior, as though you were throwing a spear at me.
That spear, apparently stuck. It hit meat.
As a Warrior, I need to pull it out, and throw it back at you.

And, most importantly: Pretend that it didn't stick in me.

This is instinctive primitive caveman behavior.

It's denial.

We spend our whole lives hiding behind self-built walls that insulate us from owning/feeling/talking about our real feelings. We are the kings and queens of denial. We know how to shut down our emotions better than anyone else.

It is our royal legacy that we have passed on to the Merkans.

And this whole thing about being 'Upset'?

Another cousin of mine told me, "You don't understand, that's just how we say it in the UK."

"No. It's not that I don't *understand* that denial is the norm. It's that I don't *accept* that denial is the norm."

Awareness

Sunday 7:52 a.m.

On November 24th, 1971, a man who identified himself as 'Dan Cooper' boarded a domestic flight from Portland, Oregon to Seattle, Washington. He had a bomb in his carry on. Or something that looked like a real bomb. He hijacked the plane, and demanded a huge sum of money. Then he parachuted out of the plane with the cash. D.B. Cooper was never found.

I'm writing this in 2016.

45years ago, we did not have the awareness that we needed to screen carry-on luggage on airplanes.

Imagine that.

There were 15 more copycat hijackings, similar to D.B. Cooper's.

All were unsuccessful.

But still, each hijacker carried on board handguns, shotguns, fake grenades and even a submachine gun.

*Because we weren't **aware** that we should be screening carry-on bags to make sure people weren't carrying weapons onto a flight.*

Of course, this is unthinkable today.

Awareness.

On August 26, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment became part of the U. S. Constitution that gave women the right to vote.

97 years ago, a lot of people, in the United States, did not believe that women should have the right to vote.

This is unthinkable today.

In February of 1870, 29 states ratified the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. It prohibited federal and state governments from denying a citizen the right to vote based on that citizen's race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

147 years ago, a lot of people didn't think that black people, especially former slaves, should be allowed to vote.

Apart from being an obvious attempt by white people to protect themselves from feeling the consequences of slavery, this is also an unthinkable situation today.

Awareness.

In 1806, Thomas Jefferson served tomatoes, he had grown at Monticello, at the President's House for dinner. Today, this would not raise an eyebrow. But, in 1806, most people thought tomatoes were poisonous. And, that you could die from eating them.

Now, we know better.

Awareness.

On April 12th, 1633, the physicist and astronomer Galileo Galilei, was ordered to turn himself in to the Holy Office. To begin trial for holding the belief that the Earth revolves around the Sun.

That belief was deemed heretical by the Catholic Church.

This is unthinkable today.

Awareness.

In 1492, when Columbus sailed the ocean blue… He had a hard time getting sailors to sail with him because most people thought that the earth was flat, and that you could sail off the edge of it.

Awareness.

Christopher Columbus was considered crazy for wanting to sail towards the edge of the earth.

Galileo was considered crazy for believing the Earth revolves around the Sun. He spent the rest of his life on house arrest and was banned from ever speaking about it again.

It took 300 years for the church to admit that Galileo was right.

We now sterilize surgical instruments, so people don't die from being operated on. Now, we cannot imagine ever *not* doing this.

We have forced building codes into the laws to make our homes safer. We have safety standards for automobiles, basic minimal standards that every manufacturer has to meet before they can sell their cars. And, in many places, yearly inspections to make sure those vehicles are still safe, year after year.

We apply this logic to so many areas of our lives.

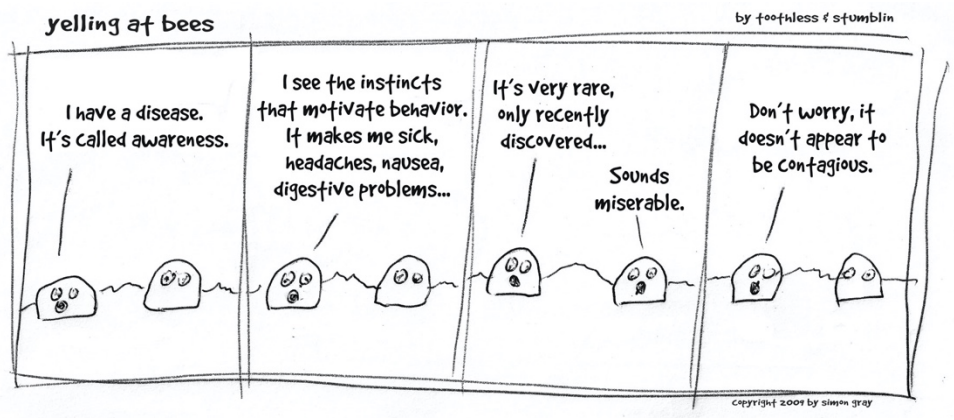
Just not to the most important jobs in our countries.

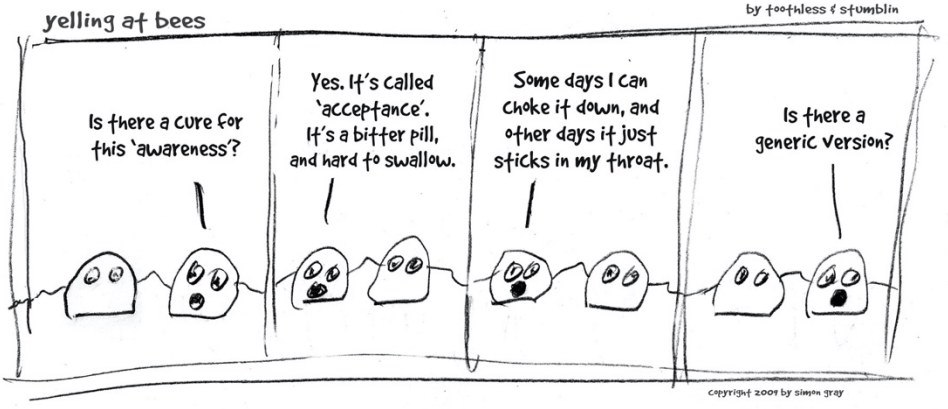
Just not to the most important jobs in our countries.

How many years will it take us?

How many years into the future, will human beings look back at us, and say, "Can you believe they never demanded a brain scan or psychological evaluation for their candidates, for public office? That they actually allowed mentally ill people, simple-minded people, emotionally damaged people, psychologically impaired people, to hold public offices, and make decisions that affected the lives of millions?"

"What the hell? Did they just not have any awareness?"


yelling at bees
by toothless & stumblin
I have a disease. It's called awareness.
I see the instincts that motivate behavior. It makes me sick, headaches, nausea, digestive problems...
It's very rare, only recently discovered...
Sounds miserable.
Don't worry, it doesn't appear to be contagious.
copyright 2004 by simon gray


yelling at bees
by toothless & stumblin
Is there a cure for this 'awareness'?
Yes. It's called 'acceptance'. It's a bitter pill, and hard to swallow.
Some days I can choke it down, and other days it just sticks in my throat.
Is there a generic version?
copyright 2009 by simon gray

Hitting

Monday 9:28 a.m.

"Are you calling me a liar?!"
He was all tensed up. Clenching his fists.
Like he was getting ready to hit me.

Hit me.
Physically assault me, over a choice of tile.

Let me explain.
It was a few years back, and I was working as interior designer on a restaurant. The general contractor was working with us to get tile for the restrooms. He said he had some left over from another job and would give us a great deal on it to save some money. So, he promised to deliver a sample to us for approval.
Fine.
Sample never showed up.
No one approved the tile.
It was a few days later when the owners and I realized that the tile was already about halfway installed. They had snuck in and rushed the thing, without approval.

We called the contractor in.

"You never sent us a sample. None of us approved it."

"I showed you a sample! You approved it!"

"No, no, no," we all shook our heads, "none of us approved that tile."

That's when he went all tensed up and clenched his fists.

"Are you calling me a liar?!"

Calling him a liar.

He was trying to shift attention.

Because, obviously, me calling him a liar would be something bad that I was doing to him.

And that takes the attention off the bad thing that he was doing to us.

"No. I'm not 'calling you a liar'. I'm saying that none of us approved the tile sample."

The owners were backing up. They seriously thought this guy was going to hit me.

But, here's my point:

Firmly fixed inside his mind was the instinctive reasoning that if he hit me, at that moment, that *that* would solve the problem.

He would be right. I would be wrong. And that would be the end of it.

We really are just about the dumbest species ever.

Hitting.

Hitting each other, with our hands.

When we're 5 years old, we would hit each other. If you take the ball that I want to play with, I might hit you. And I would get disciplined.

We were told that it's wrong and bad to hit people.

But, by the time we're teenagers, hitting becomes our go-to means of conflict resolution. It's encouraged by our peers.

"Kick his ass!"

"Beat the crap out of him!"

We make movies and television shows that demonstrate the benefits of hitting people. And the scripts revolve around some conflict being resolved by hitting people.

John Wayne, Jason Stratham, Bruce Lee, Jean Claude Van Damme, Dolph Lundgren, Vin Diesel, and Chuck Norris, all hit other people as a means of conflict resolution.

"Look, Chuck Norris just kicked that guy in the face. And now that guy isn't getting back up again. That means Chuck Norris wins! He's right, and the other guy is wrong."

We have video games in which you can pretend to be someone else, and hit people. Even kill them. Without suffering any consequences.

We've invented sporting events that are based on hitting people.

From the choreographed pantomime of Professional Wrestling, to professional boxing. And now, we have the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Where two opponents are put in a cage and they use mixed martial arts skills to literally beat the crap out of each other.

This is so ingrained in us as a species.

It's in our DNA.

We glorify hitting.

We praise it.

We hold it up as though 'Good Hitting' was some kind of high standard to be achieved.

And, we have developed ways to hit others, without running the risk of getting hit ourselves.

This mentality starts in the school playground. Where a bully gets a couple of his friends to hold your arms behind your back. He can hit you, without having to risk getting hit himself.

This is the true coward's way to hit.

As an adult, you hire lawyers to hit someone by suing them. This is basically paying other adults to hold someone's arms behind their back, as you financially sucker punch them.

A government creates an agency, whose job is, to hold your arms behind your back, while the elected representatives financially sucker punch you. Their hands never get dirty. And they insulate themselves from ever feeling the consequences of their own actions.

And, we also have created weapons for hitting other people: firearms, explosives and missiles.

We can now hit someone from a safe distance, and never put ourselves in harm's way. We can stand out of arm's reach and shoot someone.

We can sit in a comfortable office, and order someone else to drop a bomb on someone we have never seen. And kill them.

All without getting our hands dirty, or having to bear any consequences.

The whole time, bragging about how brave and tough we are.

The whole time finding ways to hit other humans without getting hit ourselves.

Our bravery is actually cowardice.

If we truly were brave, we would fight wars very differently.

The two leaders, the actual persons who cannot get along, would go into a cage, and hit each other.

Instead of sending thousands of innocent people, to hit each other, and destroy homes/schools/roads/infrastructure.

Or, as a species, we might all just grow the hell up.
And stop hitting each other.

Just a thought.

OS2020

Tuesday 8:21 AM.

I'm being pulled.
I'm being torn.

I have so much work to do. On the Irish book.
And then there's the Tin Town book.
The one you're reading now.

And now, as though I don't have enough to work on, I have decided to start another project.

I'm calling it 'OS2020'.

A universal upgrade for the operating systems of governments.

I know what you're thinking: Who the hell does this clown think he is, fer cryin out loud. Mister genius/know it all/ smarter than everyone else?

I'm calling it OS2020, but not because I think human beings are capable of changing their whole outlook on how we manage our countries in the next 4 years. Ha! Dream on!

No. I mean it's more like twenty-twenty vision.

And here's the gist of it:

There are two things that we could do that would dramatically change the stability of our countries:

First, we need to prevent people who are dragging around unresolved anger from being abused as kids, from getting on ballots. Some kind of psychological screening process.

Second, we need to prevent people with underdeveloped prefrontal cortices from getting on ballots. Some kind of physical scan.

Of course, one major thing that needs to happen before we do either of these, we need to get our egos out of our own way.

Is that possible?

Doubtful.

But what has become obvious to me in the course of these recent conversations, and all the late-night scrolling around the interwebs, is that our egos are our greatest enemy.

Our egos destroy democracies and create dictatorships.

And any enterprise born out of ego, and dedicated to that ego, will eventually perish because of that ego.

All these discussions with those around me are gelling into something that I feel I need to get down in black and white.

Just because.

Well, it's early days yet. Maybe this will go nowhere. Like the Band-Aids for black people.

But it feels good to script out the thoughts my friends are giving me.

But first—PG Tips!

Eight. Not Two.

Saturday 11:14 a.m.

The Dude and I are scavenging pallets.

It's Sunday afternoon. We are cruising in The Dude's pickup truck in the alleys behind the Industrial Park. Next to the Red Mountain Freeway.

There's usually a bunch of pallets tossed out in these alleys. We've always been lucky here.

The Dude taps his hand rhythmically on the gear shift lever, "Hey, Mister Winston… Answer me this…"

"Fire away."

He stares down the alleyway through the dirty windshield, "You know that thing that people do… When you pull out in front of someone on the road, and they have to slow down for you? And then, as soon as they can, they gotta pass you. And then they gotta speed up, to get themselves to the place *where they feel like they might have been*, if you hadn't pulled out in front of them? And slowed them down? You know that shit?"

"Oh, yeah. I do know *that* shit."

"Well, let me ask you something," he squints. "What's up with that shit?"

"It's like they have to erase your presence in their day. Like it never even happened."

"Is that the Warrior Instinct thing?"

"I think that's exactly what it is."

We haven't seen any pallets yet.

"Pull down here," I point, "past the machine shop."

He guides the pickup into the next alley.

"I been thinking, Mister Winston, and it ain't true," The Dude slows down to look behind a dumpster. "That whole 'Fight or Flight' thing, man. It ain't true."

"What're you talking about?" I'm scanning the alley.

"Well, I read that book you gave me, you know, the 'Cavemen With Cellphones' thing…"

The Dude is one of the few people who has actually read the whole book. And can talk about it intelligently. So, I always enjoy his company.

Plus, he has a pickup. Very handy for snarfing pallets.

It's an old Ford from the 70's. But it runs pretty good.

"And it got me thinkin," he scratches his stubbled jaw, "There ain't only *two ways* to act in a situation. I mean, if you take the whole 'Warrior Instinct' thing… Then 'Fight or Flight' is the Warrior's way of seeing stuff. Because all they can see is black or white, right or wrong. It's always a choice of *two*."

"OK."

"But," he wags his finger, "there are *eight* instincts things. Right? Hunting, Worker, Warrior…"

"Gathering, Inventor, Nurturing, Attraction, and Mating," I finish.

"Right. Right. So… I'm thinking there's gotta be *eight* different ways to respond to a situation. Like *eight*, man. Not *two*."

"Eight. You're right, Dude. There must be at least—" I'm a little distracted. We just saw a pile of four nice fat pallets leaned against a fence.

He pulls the truck next to them.

We scan for private property signs. None.

We look for security cameras, and 'No Trespassing' signs. None.

Fair game.

"These here pallets, be ours!" He jumps out, pulling on his gloves.

We carefully lift and stack the pallets in the back of the truck.

It's kinda like pirates, pillaging the landscape. But we know that the people who work in the shops along here deliberately leave these pallets in the alley. Knowing full well, that someone like us, will come along and snarf them. So they don't have to worry about getting rid of them themselves.

We climb back in the truck.

"So, if we've got eight instincts, Mister Winston, and we get into some kinda shit with someone, 'bout this or that. And the whole Warrior Instinct thing is gonna deal with it, then it ain't gonna work. Because it's only using the one instinct thing. Like trying to force shit. Right?"

We pull back into the alley.

"Of course." I resume scanning. "Our Warrior Instinct sees any other choice as 'flight', or run away. Which it would see as being a coward. Which is obviously wrong, and bad."

"Right. Right. Right."

"Pull down there," I point. "Behind the body shop."

He slows down the pickup as we bounce over a speed bump.

"And, like our whole Worker Instinct thing," he continues, "Well that would make us curl into a ball, and wait for it all to be over."

"Of course it would, Dude. You're right. Our Worker Instinct doesn't make waves. It rolls with the flow. Well spotted, my friend."

He grins, "So then the whole Hunting Instinct thing would do like, negotiating. Right? I mean, facts, data, and proof thing."

"Yes. That's right. It's the one that *would* make us negotiate."

"So, lookit—we already got four different ways to deal with shit: fight, run away, curl into a ball, and negotiate." He holds up four fingers as evidence.

"Negotiate. Dude, you're on to it. And that one's so obvious."

"But the Warriors are gonna say they tried negotiating. That shit don't work!" He flings his arm up. "But I'm saying no. You didn't try *negotiating*. You tried *forcing*. And that's the shit that don't work."

"Because Warriors use force to get their needs met."

"And forcing is forcing, man," he wags his finger. "Don't matter if you do it with a treaty or a gun."

"That's right. Forcing is *not* negotiating. Warriors don't compromise, because they need to feel like they won. They can't imagine a result where everybody wins."

"Which means, Mister Winston," he wags his finger at me, "that they can't be doing the 'negotiating' shit. They can't resolve shit."

"Obviously."

"Dead obvious, Mister Winston."

"Totally obvious, Dude."

"Hey, lookit there," He pulls quickly to the side of the alley.

There are two small pallets, and they are covered with plywood.

"You don't want them lots—do ya?" he looks at me. "With the plywood thing?"

"Yeah, Dude. I'm thinking I could make a couple of foot stools out of them for my front porch. Rest my hurting legs."

"Oh. Right on."

We hop out.

We wedge them in with the others, and climb back inside to resume our quest.

"And so," he continues, "the next one would be the Inventor Instinct thing I guess."

"Well, let's see now… Inventor Instinct would look at the bigger picture. Try to imagine a resolution that satisfies everyone. Because Inventor Instinct would look at the situations that caused the conflict in the first place."

"See!" he jabs his finger. "Now that's what I'm talking about."

I turn and look at him.

He stops the truck, and turns to me with both hands stretched out, palms up. And a Big Lebowski grin on his face, "We ain't using the right people," he slowly, waves his hands like he's conducting an orchestra. "With the right instincts things—to resolve—our conflicts."

"You're right, Dude."

"It's obvious. It's totally fuckin obvious."

"To you and me, Dude. To you and me."

"There's so much—Mister Winston—so much shit—that, like, man—like the shit that we do—like every fucking day, man—like every little—small—thing—and it's all this fucking instinct shit."

He turns and puts his hands back on the steering wheel. And squints down the alley through the dirty windshield.

"We're gonna fail. We're gonna keep on failing, aren't we, Mister Winston? I mean—until—until—unless—we get hold of them instincts things."

"Oh yeah."

He puts the old Ford in gear, and slowly pulls back into the alley, "How long you figure that's gonna take, Mister Winston?"

Frozen

Monday 8:42 a.m.

Jan just texted me:

Jan: *US newest kid on block, only had country for 241 years. Can't acknowledge our brilliant new concept of country just as corruptible and flawed as every other concept in world*

Me: *Can't admit*

Jan: *We're only human*

Me: *Seems so childish*

Jan: *It is childish. Because some act the age they were when the abuse started. Emotional development freezes at that age. They can't help it*

Me: Frozen?

Jan: Developmentally frozen at that age until their feelings are resolved. We can't move forward

Me: *Whole country needs counseling*

Jan: *Species*

The Feudal System

Saturday 6:11 AM.

The woodpecker is back.

It hasn't been around for over a week.

It usually shows up just after dawn and starts wailing away on the aluminum vent pipe that sticks out of the top of my trailer.

My 'Mobile Home Community' has over 100 very tall palm trees. I can look out my little window onto the world and count at least forty right in front of me.

At the tops of those trees, where the bark peels back and falls off, there is a veritable smorgasbord of insects—spiders, ants, scorpions and whatnot.

I often see woodpeckers up there munching away.

There are two doing it right now as I write this.

So, my question is: Is my little friend the woodpecker just not getting enough aluminum in its diet?

Is it getting bored chomping the same old bugs every day?

Is it sharpening its beak on my vent pipe?

Or has it decided to be my alarm clock?

When the woodpecker woke me up, I was having a vivid dream.

Actually, it was more like a film. And I could see the script:

FADE IN:

INT. AN OLD INN - FULL SHOT - NIGHT

A fire is crackling in a large fireplace. In front of the fire is a small table.
On one side of the table sits Queen ELIZABETH the First, of England in her bright red wig and full regalia. Sitting across from her is JAMES Madison, the American 'Father of the Constitution'. They are nursing tankards of ale.
Between them on the table are 3 silver candlesticks with candles burning in them.

ELIZABETH
All governments become Feudal Systems.

JAMES
Wait. What?

ELIZABETH
All of them.

JAMES
And just what do you mean by that?

ELIZABETH
No matter if it's a dictatorship, a democracy, a monarchy, a commonwealth, a republic, an oligarchy, a theocracy, socialism, communism or totalitarianism. All government structures atrophy into Feudal Systems.

JAMES
Your Majesty, I most strongly disagree.

ELIZABETH moves the 3 candlesticks into a line between them on the table as she talks.

ELIZABETH
Consider this, Mister Madison.
A country consists of three things: A physical area of land, the people who live there, and some form of unifying government.

JAMES
Well, obviously.

ELIZABETH
It's the job of the government to convince the people that these three are inseparable.

JAMES
But land and people are constant.

JAMES moves the end candlestick away from the other two.

It is the forms of government, that change.

ELIZABETH
Yes, and throughout history, monarchies have been the longest running and most stable form of government. Because the monarchs owned the land that the people were living on.

ELIZABETH moves the centre candlestick next to the one he separated.

(continuing) Land and government are bound together.

JAMES
But monarchs have been overthrown, and their land taken away.

JAMES moves the centre candlestick back.

ELIZABETH
Indeed, Mister Madison. As we both well know.

JAMES
Because the people reject this forcing and start to see the government as being separable from the people and the land. The way that the colonies rejected Great Britain.

ELIZABETH
Absolutely. And, desperate to maintain control, the government will take away the freedoms of the people to question their own government. Eventually resorting to turning weapons on their own people, in order to force the land, people and government to stay together.

JAMES
But now, we have a Democratic Republic! The newest and best form of government that was ever invented!

ELIZABETH
Oh, it's new all right. It's the newest twist, on an old standard.

JAMES
(defensively)
And just what do you mean by that?

ELIZABETH
Mr. Madison, you see the bigger picture. And you are trying to create something that will give your people a voice in their own government.

JAMES
Yes. A government by the people.

ELIZABETH
Giving the people a voice in their own government can, however, become a vehicle for some to use that government to force their own personal opinions and fantasies onto all the people.

JAMES' head jerks back.

ELIZABETH
Because some of us believe that our voice is the only one that should be heard. We believe that we know better than other people, how those other people should be thinking and acting.

JAMES rubs his chin thoughtfully as he prepares his response.

ELIZABETH
Forcing our own personal opinions and fantasies onto the people and the land, actually takes away the people's voice. And turns the government into a dictatorship.

JAMES
(indignant)
Your Majesty, republics are not dictatorships!

ELIZABETH
They can become dictatorships, is what I'm saying.

JAMES grunts and takes a swig of his ale.

ELIZABETH
The biggest selling point of a representative democracy, is free elections. The promise that you can elect a representative who will represent your needs and wants.

JAMES
Exactly! Free elections are good!

ELIZABETH
Not if the person you voted for doesn't get elected. Then your needs and wants will not be represented.

JAMES
But that's just—I mean it's a rule by the majority.

ELIZABETH
Exactly. Which means, that at any given time, in these forms of government, the needs and wants of a significant percentage of the population are not being represented at all. Simply because, the person they voted for, the person who shares those needs and wants, now has no voice in the lawmaking process.

JAMES
Well—all representatives are supposed to—

ELIZABETH
(cuts him off)
At any given time, in any given democracy, perhaps half of the citizens of that nation, have no representation in their government. The half that does have the voice, are dictating to the others.

JAMES leans in speaking slowly, and enunciating each word, as though ELIZABETH is hard of hearing, or doesn't understand English.

JAMES
It's <u>majority</u> rule. It's what the <u>majority</u> of the people want.

ELIZABETH
That's exactly my point. And so, the minority, which can be as much as forty-nine percent of the population, have no voice in their own government.

JAMES
(defensively)
Majority rule.

ELIZABETH
And what if this fifty-one percent majority have been lied to, or deliberately misled?

JAMES
Well—I mean—that's—

ELIZABETH
And the people are forced to choose from a small number of candidates, who may be lying, incompetent or otherwise completely unqualified? And the people have to choose between the lesser of two evils? And lie to themselves that they are not having to choose between the lesser of two evils?

JAMES
You can't assume—

ELIZABETH
(smirks)
And that's how democracies can become dictatorships.

JAMES drums his fingers on the table. The fire crackles.

ELIZABETH
As elections swing from party to party, the government becomes a place where some of the representatives of some of the people, get to force their own personal opinions and fantasies onto all of the people. And then, when the other party achieves a majority, they try to undo what the other party has done, and force their own personal opinions and fantasies onto all the people.

JAMES exhales slowly.

ELIZABETH
Your beautiful concept of a government gets dumbed down by the worst of human behaviour, into a juvenile pissing contest. A chain of rotating mini-dictatorships, swinging like a pendulum between one political party and the other.

JAMES sighs and looks at ELIZABETH.

ELIZABETH
This is why republics collapse, and democracies fail, because they are built on a fantasy that all of the people are being represented. The blindness and denial about the reality of the situation, makes them unstable.

JAMES
I concede, there is some truth in what you say.

ELIZABETH
How the candidates get chosen is a juvenile pissing contest. The primaries are a juvenile pissing contest. The elections are a juvenile pissing contest. Then they get into congress, and have nothing but one juvenile pissing contest after another over what they're going to force onto all the people. And, when they interact with other countries, they have more juvenile pissing contests.

JAMES
That's an awful lot of pissing.

ELIZABETH
Yes, and it all seems to trickle down onto 'We The People'.

JAMES
(Pensively)
Trickle down—

ELIZABETH
And you and I both know, my dear Mister Madison, that the first and most important job of any government, is to take care of the people.

JAMES
That's why I set ours up the way I did. With representatives to take care of the people.

ELIZABETH
Sadly, these representatives often abuse the power they are given, by forcing their own personal definition onto the phrase 'take care of'.

JAMES
I imagined that the representatives would think like me. That they would be honorable. Show integrity.

ELIZABETH
Yes Well. This is the problem isn't it. You can't control who gets elected, and how they will behave. It's your, what do you call it, 'American Dream', where any one can grow up to be President of a Member of Congress, or a Supreme Court Justice.

JAMES
That's the promise. The hope. The thing that separates our government from centuries of monarchy of Europe. Anyone can become President! That's a good thing.

ELIZABETH
Yes. And the bad thing is, that anyone can become President. Even those who are completely incompetent, emotionally damaged, or otherwise totally unsuited for the job.

JAMES
(Looking into his tankard)
I will concur, my own thoughts were that requirements for candidates did need a little more refining.

ELIZABETH
And, in the meantime, We The People are suffering from situations where one person, or a small group of people can take over your republic, hold it hostage, or force their own beliefs onto all of the people.

JAMES
We simply did not have the time to think through every possible scenario. And put protections in place to prevent these situations. That was the main purpose of the amendments to the Constitution.

ELIZABETH
And, unfortunately, even those can be driven towards one opinion, and against the will of the majority of the people.

JAMES
But, (he shakes his finger at her), you are forgetting one very important aspect of our republic.

ELIZABETH
Oh? And what's that?

JAMES arranges the 3 candlesticks into a triangle.

JAMES
We set it up as three equal branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. All three are independent. But they have powers they can use to ensure that the other branches are not misusing their power.

JAMES leans back smiling.

JAMES
(continuing)
It's called checks and balances.

ELIZABETH pulls all 3 candlesticks close to herself.

ELIZABETH
(Leaning forward and smiling back at him)
Except, when one political party holds the power in all three branches at the same time, my dear Mr. Madison. Then there are no checks or balances going on. That's called a party dictatorship.

(JAMES scowls and rubs his chin.)

ELIZABETH
A small group of wealthy people, can easily manipulate representatives and parties. They pump money into the system to make sure that a party dictatorship will happen.

JAMES
Yes. We discussed this possibility at great lengths. Individuals financially supporting the elections of certain candidates. Who then force legislation through, that financially benefits their sponsors.

ELIZABETH
And that's how democracies become corporate dictatorships. And the only thing that changes on election day, is which corporations get to do the dictating.

JAMES
(Drumming his fingers again)
Soooo…

ELIZABETH
And while we are on the subject of these three branches…

ELIZABETH holds one candlestick up off the table and tilts it at several angles, examining it closely.

JAMES
Which branch are you referring to?

ELIZABETH
The judicial. This Supreme Court business.

JAMES
What of it?

ELIZABETH
A curious concept. Purportedly a small group of the wisest people in the country. Who will decide for all, many important decrees about how they shall live.

JAMES
Well, it's—

ELIZABETH
A ridiculous concept. At best. A fantasy.

JAMES
(Angrily.)
Now look here!

ELIZABETH
Make no mistake, my dear Madison, I admire your ambition. I respect your intelligence. You

firmly believe that an honest and virtuous character is essential for those who hold these government positions. I applaud your heightened sense of honor and commitment. There is so very little of it in our species.

JAMES
Thank you madame.

ELIZABETH
Which is the whole point: Where do you find these rare human beings to be these Supreme Judges? Are they selected by an independent quorum of the smartest people in your country? Put forward for their long track record of impartiality and loyalty to the people. Chosen by We The People?

JAMES
(Defiantly)
They are nominated by the President.

ELIZABETH
And, of course, all Presidents are men of honor and integrity. Virtuous men with loyalty only to all of We The People. Without any bias towards any political party ideology or agenda. Or their own ideology or agenda?

JAMES
The appointees are chosen specifically for their—

ELIZABETH
(Cuts him off.)
Commitment to push a political party's platform? Or a specific set of beliefs onto all The People.

JAMES
No! No! They are chosen for their fairness. Their insight. Their— (Running out of steam, he glances furtively around as he tries to think.)

ELIZABETH
Well—no bother. If they make biased decisions then We The People can simply vote them out. Right?

JAMES
Absolutely not! They have lifetime appointments.

ELIZABETH
Lifetime? So, We The People have no voice in who becomes a Supreme Court Justice. No control over them once appointed. No way to hold any of them accountable for their decisions? No way to remove them from power. And must be subjected to their opinions for a lifetime?

JAMES
It insures a consistency and stability of the law.

ELIZABETH
It insures the consistent forcing of opinions onto all of We The People. You call it that don't you? The Supreme Court hands down 'opinions'. Often just by a majority of one person. So, you have five people forcing their 'opinions' onto hundreds of millions of people. Exactly what part of a republic or democracy is that?

JAMES
Now see here Madame! I will not be lectured to by a royal dictator!

ELIZABETH
Queen, my dear Mister Madison. I am a queen in a Constitutional Monarchy. I have no capacity to dictate anything. My point is: you did not give your people a mechanism to hold their elected officials accountable. There is no mechanism to control their employees. The people they pay to do their business.

JAMES
(Angrily)
We have checks and balances.

ELIZABETH
Which can be manipulated by those in power. Mister Madison, the people need a mechanism outside of the government. The government has checks and balances. But the people have no

checks and balances. If you want to give your people a voice in their own government, and they should have it, then the best way is to give them power over it. So, their voice is heard.

JAMES
(scowling)
I don't think that's called for.

ELIZABETH
In every other part of society, when someone is hired to do a job, if they fail to perform to the satisfaction of those who hire them, they can be fired. Immediately. And removed from the position. Immediately. Only with the most important jobs in your country do you not have that option.

JAMES
Well they can vote them out...

ELIZABETH
Not Supreme Court Justices. But, yes. The other two branches. But not immediately. They have to wait. For years. And watch someone damage and weaken their country. And have no power to stop them. If any business had that policy, they'd be out of business quickly. No. You only save that one damaging scenario for your most important jobs.

JAMES scowls.

ELIZABETH
A mechanism, my dear Mister Madison. A mechanism that is outside of government control. That the people themselves have the power, and only them. And it cannot be taken away—what is your word? Yes. Inalienable. Incapable of being alienated, surrendered, or transferred. The inalienable power to remove misbehaving employees. Like every other business on earth.

JAMES
Well, but that would be—

ELIZABETH
The people exercising their will in their own democracy?

JAMES
(smirking)
You didn't have that mechanism in your own government.

ELIZABETH
Absolutely not. Not in any monarchy. The only way to remove a misbehaving government figure was to kill them. And there was plenty of that. This is why, my dear Sir, I can see this all too clearly. You have the unique opportunity to learn from history. To craft a system that doesn't rely on killing people to hold a country together.

JAMES
Our brave new experiment is the most—

ELIZABETH
(Cuts him off) My dear Mister Madison, your brave new experiment has suffered the same fate as every other form of government. Because all governments, eventually, break down into the Feudal System.

JAMES
Yeah. About that…

ELIZABETH
In the old days, countries used to be run by the monarchs who owned the land. They had the most money and therefore the most power. They were at the top.

JAMES
Obviously.

ELIZABETH
Below them were a small number of nobles and knights who swore loyalty to the monarch. And, in exchange, they received favours. They were at the middle level.

JAMES
Of course.

ELIZABETH
And below them was the bulk of the population: the peasants. The people who generated the wealth of those above them. This is the bottom level. That's the Feudal System.

JAMES
Yes, but in the United States, the Congress, The President and The Supreme Court govern by their combined power and authority.

ELIZABETH
So, they are supposed to be the top?

JAMES
Well, yes. Well, no. It was my idea, that the true top—the true rulers of the United States—are supposed to be the people. You know, 'We the people', 'By the people', 'For the people'.

ELIZABETH
But they are not. Are they? The government has more power over the people than the people have over the government. So, the government is the top. But it's also possible that the true rulers of the country could be a small number of wealthy individuals, who use their wealth to direct, manipulate and force the Congress, the President and the Supreme Court. For their own personal gain.

JAMES
I suppose you could say that's possible.

ELIZABETH
Or one political party that holds the power in all three and forces its will onto all of your people.

JAMES glares at her tight-lipped.

ELIZABETH
A small number of people who hold the most power and wealth at the top. Below them, a layer of nobles and knights. In your case: some members of Congress, the President perhaps, Supreme Court justices, state Governors, members of state Congresses, state Supreme Court justices. Who swear loyalty in exchange

for favours. That's the middle. And below them, the bulk of the population: the people who generate the wealth of those above them. And are forced to pay taxes. They're at the bottom level.

JAMES drums his fingers on the table.

ELIZABETH
That, my dear Mister Madison, is the Feudal System.

JAMES turns and stares intently into the fire.

ELIZABETH
All forms of government eventually degenerate into the same situation, where the richest people have power over everyone else.

JAMES pokes at the fire.

ELIZABETH
It used to be wealthy kings. We still have kings. In some countries our kings are still one person. In some countries our kings are a body of elected representatives. In some countries our kings are the richest one percent of the population.

JAMES
You think the pattern is the same? But our structure is vastly different.

ELIZABETH
Currency, my dear Mister Madison, is the absolute ruler of all.

JAMES
My dear lady, you appear to have made an incorrect assumption. We did not intend to create a democracy. We created a democratic republic.

ELIZABETH
(Smirks) And please explain the difference?

JAMES
We only sought to give the people a voice in their government. Not to give them power over it.

ELIZABETH
Just a voice. No active participation.

JAMES
Anyone can run for public office, madame. That's the freedom that we created.

ELIZABETH
But they don't stand a chance to get elected unless they have a lot of money to spend on their campaign. So, you cleverly excluded the bulk of the population from holding office.

JAMES
(Sticks out his chin trying to look confident.)
The structure of our republic ensures that the wisest and most educated would always guide the people. The people have a voice, yes. They get to choose which of the wisest they want in certain roles.

ELIZABETH
But they are choosing from a limited menu.

JAMES
You have to control who is on that menu. You can't have incompetent and ignorant people in such important roles.

ELIZABETH
But you do have incompetent and ignorant people getting elected to those important roles. Any old white man who has a lot of money and rich friends. No one is policing that menu.

JAMES
(Huffs)
The wisest and most educated will always guide the people.

ELIZABETH
And just where are these 'wisest and most educated' in today's political environment?

JAMES scowls

ELIZABETH
They seem to be invisible in the election process. Where are they?

JAMES pokes at the fire aggressively and does not answer.

ELIZABETH
It seems to me, my dear Mister Madison, that it is just a support system for capitalism. Nothing less and nothing more.

JAMES
(Speaks slowly, enunciating each word separately, as though ELIZABETH is hard of hearing or doesn't understand English)
It's—a—democratic—republic.

ELIZABETH
You traded being ruled by a king for being ruled by a small group of kings. Essentially, the richest old white men in the country. It's the Feudal System.

The Tin Town Feudal System

Tuesday 3:46 p.m.

I was sitting outside, thinking about this feudal system thing.

Here, in Tin Town, we have the same feudal system. Just on a much smaller scale:

1. A physical area of **land** - The trailer park.
2. The **people** who live there - The tenants paying lot rent.
3. Some form of unifying **government** - The owners and managers.

Tin Town is like the old school feudal system. Our 'King' is the owners. The second level of 'Lords and Nobles', are the managers. And all the rest of us are the 'Peasants'. Coughing up our rent every month to the wealthy king.

In this case, the **government** and the **land** are absolutely tied together. But these new owners, are the third owners, in as many years. And these new managers, are the third set in five years.

But none the less, for all us Tin Town peasants, the structure is very basic: *You pay the man, or you get booted out.*

Enter our 'Democracy', our 'Voice Of The People'.

Sirocco is a member of an organization called MoHo: a Mobile Home Owner's Organization.

They are supposed to represent the Tin Towners in matters between themselves and the owners/managers. They lobby local government over landlord/tenant laws. And they stand as a liaison in case of problems.

But, since only a small percentage of Tin Towners are paying members of MoHo, then all of people's needs are not being represented.

Again.

So, I went to one of their meetings, to see if I wanted to join.

I saw a table full of scowling people, ready to pounce on any issue. Ready to use their collective angst to try to force something out of the owner/managers.

Except that, for the entire meeting, all they talked about was how there were no issues that needed to be acted on. That the new owners and managers were actually doing a great job, and showed that they really cared about the tenants.

Which made me wonder: *What makes these people want to be board members to begin with?*

Lithuanian-Pig-Dog-Monkey

Monday 10:43 a.m.

"I was watching the BBC feed last night from the UK," I lay back against the side of the pool and look up at the clear blue sky.

"Anything interesting?"

"Some politician flipping out about immigrants, Dude. Makes me wonder if someone hurt this guy, when he was a kid?"

"The abuse thing, again?" The Dude ducks under, and then quickly surfaces. Shaking his head like a shaggy dog.

"I wonder. Because nobody grows a ball of anger and fear inside themselves deliberately. And fear doesn't grow by accident."

He reaches into the Styrofoam cooler and pulls out a cold can of Miller High Life.

I look up at the security camera on the back wall of the clubhouse.

The Dude has turned the camera away from the pool and onto the putting green.

As usual.

Two things we are not supposed to be doing in the pool, is smoking and drinking alcohol.

But, hey, if the wind blew the camera…

"Projecting your own dysfunction onto other people, is a national disease in the UK. At epic proportions."

"Pretty well ramped up here too," he dunks back under the water, and re-surfaces again, shaking the water off his hair and beard.

"Think about this," I look up at the palms. "It's obvious, that the UK has caused every bit of terrorism, that it has ever suffered."

"How so?"

"You can start with the Sykes–Picot Agreement, Dude. During World War One, the English and the French drew lines on a map, and carved up the Middle East for themselves."

"They did what?" he looks at me incredulously.

"Yeah, Dude. Pissed off generations of angry people, who *still retaliate* against them for destroying their countries."

"They fucking did what?" he looks at me incredulously.

"I'll show you on the computer. The French and the British drew up a new map of the Middle East and gave themselves control over a bunch of other people's countries."

"Ass fuck!" he throws his middle finger up in the air.

"And then, years later, the Unites States decided to jump into this mess and try to get a piece of that pie for themselves. And made themselves *another* target for retaliation in the process."

"Real goddamn smart," he shakes his head.

"And, of course, this retaliation, is labeled as terrorism. It's not called what it actually is: *Retaliation*."

"Because," he shakes his finger, "cain't none of these assholes admit that they caused it, right?"

I finish my can and toss it back in the cooler, "What we do as individuals, we also do as countries."

"What we do as individuals…" The Dude raises his hand like he's voting on something. "Man, you gotta write this shit *down*, man."

"I am, I am, Dude."

I fish around in the half-melted ice until I find another one, pull it out and open it.

"So, anyway… They talk about this retaliation as though it comes out of nowhere. And we: the British, French, and Americans… We're some kinda innocent victims who did nothing to cause it."

"That's that denial thing," The Dude squats down in the pool until it's up to his neck.

I squat down too, so we both look like two disconnected heads bobbing on the water.

"But the consequences of Sykes-Picot, Dude… The destruction it's caused, now manifests as millions of displaced people. Migrants, who turn to the countries *that made them migrants*. And what do they get?"

"Rejected."

"By a bunch of frightened adult children, Dude. Who have their own emotional baggage, and unresolved shit eating away at them."

"Asswipes," he scowls.

"These are the people who are supposedly going to *fix* the problems that their predecessors created?" I shake my head, and then dunk under the cool water.

When I come up, The Dude has hoisted himself out of the pool, and is pulling the plastic holder off another six pack. "If you cain't admit that your own country *caused this migrant crisis*—then you cain't fix this migrant crisis."

"Exactly."

"Winston, you gotta write this thing *down*, man."

"I am. I was writing this last night, which why it's on my mind, Dude."

He sits pensive for a moment.

"What do we do about the fuck ups? These crazy politicians making a bad thing worse. And just fuckin up a whole lotta innocent peeps just trying to have a life?"

"I think we need to bring back the best and simplest way to deal with them: banishment."

"Banishment? Throw them out?"

"The punishment should be so horrible, and the consequences so devastating, that people would think twice before they risked it. Right now, our punishments aren't effective. And, if you're rich enough, you can get away with all kinds of stuff."

"Yeah, you got that right."

"Here's the thing, Dude, our punishments are unequal. They're full of loopholes. And, we have people deciding punishments who shouldn't even have that job."

"So, like the court system."

"Yeah, they got serious problems. So, we need some other body separate from them, that holds everyone accountable."

"I'm likin this."

"We need a wall of protection. A quorum. A council. An assembly of ordinary citizens. "

"Power to the people!"

"And they decide: Is this person capable of living among the rest of us? Without trying to abuse or hurt people."

"Like a citizen's squad? Yeah… But wouldn't the people elected to that be just as fucked up as our courts or congress now? Wouldn't that just get as corrupt as anything else?"

"Yes. It could. Which is why the members should be drafted not elected."

"Drafted."

"Of course. And by a random algorithm that makes sure the membership accurately represents a cross section of society. fifty-one percent women, twelve percent black, thirty percent under forty-five years old—like that."

"And what do these people do? Exactly?"

"Let's say some real estate developer pulls some strings and gets hold of people's property. How he does it is all legal and everything. But it fucks some people out of their homes. Because they get forced to take pennies on the dollar and they have to move."

"Yeah so?"

"And the courts say it's legal. Too bad. So those people could take this situation to this people's council and ask for help."

"Outside of the law—"

"Yeah. But Dude, if the laws are written to favor the rich, and judges can be bought, and attorneys can pull loopholes in the courtroom—then how honest are the courts?"

"OK, OK. So, then what?"

"So, this people's council looks into this guy. Maybe he does this a lot. Making a bunch of money off other people's misery. So they can vote to banish him. Strip him of his assets and citizenship, and kick him out of the country."

"OK. So *real* justice. Not *fake* justice."

"Exactly, Dude. The courts decide what is legal. The people decide what is justice. Because the whole problem now is, the court's version of justice can be manipulated by the wealthy, or clever attorneys."

"Right. Right. Right. Justice. *Real* justice."

"You can't have one body, like the legal system, deciding what is both legal *and* what is justice. Because it often becomes a conflict of

interest. And, most importantly, the people need a way to hold their own legal system accountable."

"So this citizen's council can banish anyone? Lawyers, judges—Congress—Presidents?"

"Anyone. Even other council members. If you can't get along with your fellow human beings, then you can't stay here."

"Play nicely with the other children, or out you gotta go."

"Strip them of their citizenship. Seize their assets, and boot them out. The same we would do for any other domestic terrorist."

"Domestic terrorists?"

"Isn't that exactly what they are?"

He scratches his chin and squints up at the sun.

"It's just a concept right now, Dude. It needs work."

The Dude pops open another, "You seriously think this would ever happen?"

"The people need to demand it. Then it'll happen. Like women and black people getting the right to vote."

He slides back into the pool and dunks under. Then he surfaces and shakes his shaggy mane, "You're right. You're right, man. Like the people demanded the right to vote. They just hadda do it."

"Exactly."

"This shit is the truth. It's the Lithuanian-pig-dog-monkey-fuckin truth!"

"What's with that 'Lithuanian thing, you're always saying, Dude? What you got against Lithuania?"

He chuckles, "I ain't got shit against Lithuania. My grandparents were Lithuanian. Emigrated to the US when the coup d'état thing

happened in the 1920's. And that was some messed up shit, man. You wanna talk about some human behavior—"

"Tell me, Dude. I'm all ears."

He leans back against the side of the pool, "The military forced in this right-wing conservative nationalist party. Because the people were sick and tired of the Christian Democratic party. Because they were a corrupt buncha bastards. One of them was in cahoots with Russia over some business deals."

"Forcing nationalism? In cahoots with the Russians? This is starting to sound way to familiar," I shake my head.

"Ain't nothin' new under the sun, my man," he spreads his hands. "Ain't nothin' new under the sun."

"We are more alike than we are different, Dude."

"Oh, you don't know the half of it, man. My granddaddy used to talk about this shit all the time. Buncha assholes and idiots fucked the whole country. They hadda leave. One guy was buying cheaper pig fat from Germany, and fuckin the Lithuanian farmers out of their income."

"Hence the pig-fuckin thing."

"Lithuanian pig-fuckin," he shakes his finger. "Some guy smiped a buncha money out of the state treasury into his own bank account."

"What the hell?" I dip down in the water again, up to my shoulders.

"Monkey business, man. Monkey business."

"Hence the monkey thing."

"They tried to elect some guys. One guy served for one day," he holds up one finger.

I had no idea about this.

"Next guy served for a few hours. Another guy fled the country. Another guy tried to act like he was President. But nobody would officially recognize him. Buncha guys got executed. Palace guards shot them down in the street like rabid dogs."

"Hence the dog thing."

He slides back down into the water, "Dictatorship went on another 14 years. Nationalists outlawed all other political parties. Then the Soviet Union came in and took the place over. Like they were doin somebody a favor."

"What a mess!" I shake my head.

"A Lithuanian-pig-dog-monkey-fuckin mess," he slides under the water.

God Bless America

Monday 4:16 p.m.

The cool winds off the Pacific are not strong enough today to get over the Laguna Mountains. And so, we swelter in the Valley of The Sun.

What little wind there is, creeps up hot and dry from the south. It hits the Superstitions and stops dead. It hovers around us as a cloud full of dirt and dust picked up from a hundred miles of desert.

The Mayor and I are sitting under the awning, on the north side of my trailer. With a fan on our faces, trying to stay cool.

A large black lifted pickup truck roars by. It has huge wheels and tires. The truck is jacked up so high, a 3-step ladder is mounted below the door, so the driver can climb in.

(Compensation for not getting enough attention as a child?)

Two large American flags flap wildly from poles attached behind the cab. The truck belches clouds of black diesel smoke. The exhaust pipes roar over the percussive thudding from a subwoofer.

(Notice me! Notice me! Notice me!!!!)

His Honor watches this one car parade and shakes his head.

He turns back towards me, and resumes what he was saying before the truck rumbled up: "If we go callin every act of violence a 'terror' attack, we're gonna wear the damn word out."

He runs his hand through what's left of his thin white hair.

"All these loudmouth politicos, and whatnot—so proud, so strong. Saying: '*We will not be terrorized! We will not bow to terrorism!*' Stupid turds. It don't matter how loud you are, or how mean-faced you look. Calling it an 'act of terror' means that *you acknowledge its purpose*. Ya dumb shits."

He looks down at his cigarette and rolls it between his fingers, "I tell you this, mi amigo—until we get someone, who's got the damn balls to say the word '*retaliation*' into a camera—"

"They can't say it, Your Honor. Not yet. At least."

"Until we get someone," he continues, "who's got enough damn brains, to tell the difference between an act of terrorism and an act of *retaliation*."

He takes a long drag, and blows out the smoke slowly.

The cloud of smoke hovers for a split second, and then is quickly whisked away by a gust of hot air.

His Honor stands and puts his hand on my shoulder, "We're gonna keep causing that shit to continue."

The jacked-up pickup truck roars back around the corner and rumbles towards the clubhouse. Black exhaust billowing and American flags flapping through the smoke.

The Mayor shakes his head as he watches it pass, "God bless America, mi amigo."

Dog Shit

Thursday 8:25 a.m.

Dog Shit might kill me.
So, if I get killed, I will tell you why I died, and who did it.

I'll start at the beginning.

Dog Shit is a snow bird.
He showed up here for the season, about two weeks ago. He was going around with two other people, and putting up the Christmas lights on the palm trees.

They have a metal eye bolt screwed into the tree, way up high, and a rope looped through it. They tie the string of lights on the rope and pull them up to the eye. And then they walk around the tree wrapping the lights in a spiral until they get to the bottom. Then they plug them in wherever they can find an outlet.
It's how all the parks around here do Christmas lights.

So, I hear someone walking around my trailer. I look out and see this guy dragging an extension cord. I go out and meet all three people. We engage in polite chit chat while they're wrapping the lights. The chit-chat evolves into talk about the pallet wall around my front door.

At this point Dog Shit tells me about a wall he had done in *his* trailer. Which, he tells me, is obviously better than mine, because he wood-burned the edges of his boards.

Side notes:

-The Christmas lights wrapping took place about 10am on a Tuesday, and he was drinking a beer.

- He sneered at my pallet wall. He deliberately put me, and my wall down in front of two other people.

I call this guy Dog Shit. And I'll tell you why.

Last week I was writing. It was early in the morning, as usual. And I heard someone crunch over the gravel next to the back of my trailer. Then I hear the lid of my trash bin lift and drop. We have those rolling black plastic trash bins. And big blue recycle bins. Mine are stored on a concrete slab next to my addition. My 'office'. The small room attached to the back of my trailer, that I write in.

The walls on my tin can are thin. On the outside, there's a layer of wavy pressed aluminum glued to a two by three. Inside, the two by three is covered with cardboard, and thin cheap paneling. You can hear right through the walls. From where I sit to write, if I could reach right through the wall, I would be less than six feet away from the trash bin. So, yes, I can very easily hear the trash bin lid open and close.

So, I hear someone walk up to my trash bin and open and close the lid. I stood up and looked out the window.

Who is going through my trash?

And I see Dog Shit, with his little dog on a leash. He's walking over the gravel away from my trailer. His head is turned, and he's sneering as he looks at my pallet wood around my front door.

So, I go outside and look in my trash bin. There is a wad of toilet paper with some dog shit wrapped inside.

So basically, he's walking his dog in the morning, and the dog must have taken a shit. And he had brought some toilet paper along, just in case. And he picked up the shit, like you're supposed to do, and he needed somewhere to throw it away. And my trash bin was the closest. So that's where he put it.

And I'll bet you, that if question him, that will be his prepared answer.

First of all - Everyone else I see in the park, who has a dog and walks it, also carries a small plastic bag to put their dog's shit in. So they can take it back to their own trailer and throw it away.

Second - I would never walk up to someone else's trailer and throw my dog's shit in their trash can. That's their private property. This guy doesn't appear to understand boundaries.

Third - And this is the clincher: It was the sneer on his face as he walked away. He sneered at my pallet wall. Obviously and definitely sneered.

Fourth - He just did the exact same thing again. This morning. Six days later.

Dog shit wrapped in toilet paper, in my trash bin. Sneering as he walks away.

Now.

His trailer is on the other side of the park.

His dog is pretty old. So, he's probably been walking this dog for several years. He knows it's pattern.

Here are my conclusions:

1. Perhaps, in the usual course of the digestive pattern of the dog, that it's walk just *happens to time out* where the dog needs to have a shit at the same approximate time each day. And, at the same distance into its walk. Which, just by coincidence happens to be somewhere near my trailer? But, if this was true, he would know this. And he would bring a bag to carry the poop back home to his own trash bin. Unless, he thinks it's all right to throw your dog's shit into someone else's trash bin. He brought toilet paper. Why not a bag?

2. The dog could be shitting somewhere else along the walk. Maybe he's *deliberately* saving the shit for me? Maybe he's even bringing it from home?

So, here's what I did: I moved the trash and recycle bins into my covered patio. Which has a locking screen door. Now he can't get at them.

And I'll be watching. Just to see what happens next.

Will he ramp it up?

Will he confront me? Try to tell me that it's wrong to move my trash cans? Maybe because they will attract roaches and mice and rats and stuff into my trailer? *(I mean, perhaps he will try to act like a concerned neighbor. Just being helpful. You know, like any helpful neighbor might tell you such a thing.)* The only problem with this logic is, that now the cans are slightly more than *ten feet away* from the trailer. So, they are actually further away. So, I have actually *lessened* the chance of bugs and vermin being drawn *closer* to my trailer.

Regardless, if he starts this conversation, he is showing his hand: *Why is the placement of my trash bins of any concern to him?*

Unless he is pissed off because I stopped him from being able to put his dog's shit in my bin.

In my life, I have learned that the best way to deal with toddlers is to move things out of their reach.

Will he try to get in the locked patio door? Because he can see the bin through the screen? Tantalizingly just out of reach?

Will he switch to some other method of trying to put me down in order to extract a brief feeling of one-upmanship at my expense?

Will this escalate?

So, if it does—and I am killed—his name is Eric—and he lives in trailer 92.

Corporate Chameleons

Monday 7:32 AM.

Sipping my tea on the front porch.

Grumpy wanders up with Snack, "I hear you went to that MoHo meeting."

"I checked it out."

"Whatcha think?"

"Not for me," I shake my head.

'Yeah, that nonsense ain't for me either. I don't need to sit in no more meetings. I used to work for a bank. Had all I care to have of that nonsense. Got my retirement and got the hell out."

"You worked for a bank?"

"Loan officer. NorWest bank up in Duluth, Minnesota. Had just about enough of those meetings."

Snack is pawing at my leg. So, I rub her little head.

We occasionally get coyotes wandering through the Trail's End. They come down out of the Superstitions looking for food. Snack would be exactly that: A snack. She looks up at me with her sad little eyes. Like she can hear my thoughts.

"Yeah, I had enough of them corporate chameleons," Grumpy rolls on.

"Chameleons?"

"Lizards. Color-changing lizards. That's what I called them. Send around these memos. New words we all gotta start using. Can't say 'contact' any more. Gotta say 'reached out'. Buncha crap. C-R-A-P, crap."

"I wondered where that started."

"Corporate America, Winston. Biggest buncha color-changing lizards you ever saw."

"So, they told you to use the phrase 'reaching out' instead of 'contacting'?"

"Said it makes them look like they care about their clients. 'Reaching out' makes it sound personal. Like they're concerned about you. Concerned about your *damn money*. *Their* profit. Definitely concerned about *that*."

"Cheese and rice."

"Called it the New 'Sincerity'. I called it the New Bullshit."

"New Sincerity. Ha! More like corporate shapeshifting."

"Bullshit. Trying to make out like they'd reinvented sincerity. Like they had the patent on it."

"That's insane."

"Buncha corporate nonsense, if you ask me. But nobody did. So, there you go."

"Did you guys actually change the way you contacted your clients? Or, 'reached out' to them? Did you 'reach out' more?"

"Hell no. It was all the same. Just new words. We didn't contact them any more than we used to. The only difference was, we spammed their emails more. And we put them on more mailing lists they didn't ask to be on."

"But you can opt out of those lists, right?"

"Oh yeah. But we wouldn't tell you that up front. Just automatically add your ass to the lists, and let you figure out how to opt out yourself. *After* you started getting spam and phone calls."

"That's the fine print that no body reads."

"At the bottom of every loan app I processed. You'd get on those lists whether you got the loan or not."

"That can't be legal."

"Legal as an eagle. Right there, at the bottom of the page: Agrees to receive correspondence from us, or any of our associates."

"Associates. Nice open-ended word."

"Exactly."

"So, they start saying 'reach out' in corporate America, and the next thing you know it's part of the national dialogue. Everyone is using it."

"Lizards. Color-changing lizards."

"Well that just shows how a handful of rich people can change the whole general public by trying to boost *their own* image."

"Made me sick to be a part of it. Like I say, I got my retirement and I got the hell out."

"I had no idea."

"Nobody does. Unless you worked in it. They pulled all kinds of shenanigans. We had these board meetings. Department mandated. Whole lotta nothing. They'd send around the agenda days ahead. One time, instead of topics, they had 'Talking Points.' I went into the Vice President's office, 'What the hell is a 'Talking Point'? She goes, 'We're upgrading our operations. It's part of polishing our brand.' And I go, 'So these are the topics of the next meeting?' And she goes, 'These are the 'Talking Points' of our next meeting. And I go, 'But half of these 'Talking Points' are exactly the same ongoing *topics* we've been discussing for months.' And she goes, 'These are our *Talking Points*.' Smiling at me. Repeating herself. Like talking to a goddamn parrot. But you can't push it. You get fired."

I'm thinking two things: Number One - Grumpy was probably really good at her job. I can't see anyone getting a loan from her. Unless your

financials were really really clean. Squeaky clean. And, Two - What a load of horse crap is this?

"What the hell is a 'Talking Point', Winston? Sounds like something a five-year-old would make up."

"That is some messed up shit."

"Anyway," she tugs at Snack's leash. "You not married, are you Winston?"

"No."

"Didn't think so. Got a girlfriend?"

"No."

"Well, you're a good-looking man. We should go to the casino sometime. Have some fun." She attempts a thin weak smile.

I'm sure my jaw dropped. I have no idea how to respond.

She scuttles away in the awkward silence.

Bitch Session

Wednesday 7:43 AM.

Six ladies just landed.

I think they're ladies, because of how gracefully they landed.

And they all tried to land on one side of the antenna. When it dipped under their weight, one flitted to the other side. And then another, and then another. And then the antenna was all balanced out

7:52 am.
All hunkered down and sleeping, I think.
They pull in their necks and hunch up like they are sleeping.
Is that what this is? A little group sleep-in?

7:58 am.
Now 14 of them. I'm thinking it is the same ones who do this every morning. Are birds creatures of habit, like humans? Is this morning nap time for this family/group of birds?

8:04 am.
Cheese and rice! Now there are tons of them there! All trying to land.

36! 37! And the antenna is bowing under the weight. Now some have to drop to the roof of Smart Woman's trailer. Oops! Now one of them saw something to eat and—there goes about half of them. The others are holding down the fort.

8:13 AM.
All gone.
8:23 a.m.
20 back now.
24/20/29/22/21/23. They keep landing and taking off again.
Busy as bees on the ol' antenna.

Just looked them up: Mourning Doves.
That's what they are.

Wikipedia says: The mourning dove (*Zenaida Macroura*) is a member of the dove family, *Columbidae*. The bird is also known as the American mourning dove or the rain dove. And, erroneously, as the turtle dove.

Apparently, Mourning Doves' nests are woven together by the female. With materials collected by the male. The male supervises the construction. While standing on the back of the female, as she works.

I can't imagine that is helpful to the process. In any way.

But it makes me wonder—about species—where the males act like polished knobs? Is it in their DNA?

Anyway. Now I think I know what's going on.

Why these birds gather together in the morning on this antenna. And, exactly what they're saying to each other.

It's a morning bitch session:

"So he brings me these thin little sticks, and I'm like, 'What? You couldn't find anything thicker?' And he's like, 'Just work with them. Weave that shit in there.' And I'm like, 'Get off my back.'"

Is It Genetic?

Monday 11:33 a.m.

Prader-Willi syndrome (PWS) is a rare genetic disorder in which seven genes (or some subset thereof) on chromosome 15 (q11-13) are deleted or unexpressed on the paternal chromosome.

Genetic abnormalities in chromosome 15 disrupt the normal functioning of the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus regulates many basic processes, including appetite.

People who suffer from PWS
*tend to exhibit **identical** behaviors.*
Regardless of where in the world they are born,
or their race or sex.

These behaviors include compulsive overeating, temper tantrums, violent outbursts, stealing, lying, and obsessive/compulsive behavior.

They also have a tendency to be argumentative, oppositional, rigid, manipulative, possessive, and stubborn.

Prader-Willi Syndrome proves
*that **behavior** can be caused by our DNA.*

So, basically, a tiny, tiny mutation on one of the chromosomes in your DNA, and wham! You're born with predictable behaviors that you cannot stop doing for the rest of your life.

Bear with me here.

There are also other genetic disorders, that produce predictable identical behaviors. In any and every person who has that disorder. Such as Down and Williams syndromes.

So… Think about this:

People who act primarily out of Warrior Instinct tend to exhibit identical behaviors.

Regardless of where in the world they are born, or their race or sex.

These behaviors include:

- Black or white thinking,
- Forcing others to meet their needs,
- Attaching emotional content to logistical situations,
- Awkwardness with intimacy,
- And fear of others who don't think and act like they do.

They also have a tendency to be irresponsible, deceitful, territorial, argumentative, and often physically violent.

They show a lack of emotional depth or remorse. And an almost total lack of guilt.

Is there a mutation in a particular chromosome
that causes underdevelopment in the prefrontal cortex
causing a percentage of humans to be born
acting primarily out of Warrior Instinct?

Is acting like a polished knob genetic?

How much of our behavior is the result of genetic mutations?

And, the bigger question: Is this normal?

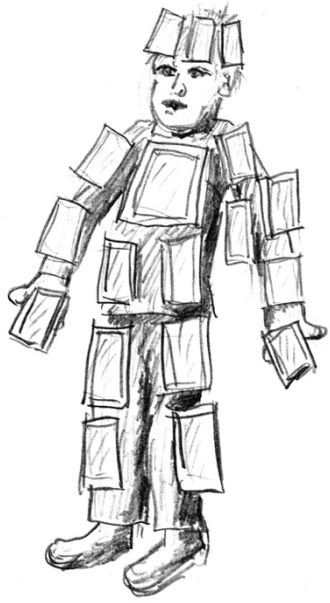
Is this exactly what is *supposed* to happen?

Look at an ant colony. They have a complex social organization, and specialized members. Each one does a different job to keep the whole colony alive and growing. It is the same with bee hives. Are we more like the ants and the bees than we are different?

Does this explain why we don't have villages where there are 200 plumbers, and no one wants to be a barber?

Is there a random, yet consistent,
mutation of our DNA,
that ensures that there will always be a balance
of the eight Instincts,
within our entire species?

So that, within all of our local groupings, we have consistent percentages of humans acting out of all eight instincts. The consistent percentages that we need, to get the jobs done that need to get done. In order for us to survive in our human hives?



The Little Boy Who Was Covered In Mirrors

(A children's story)

~ o ~

Once upon a time,
there was a little boy who was covered in mirrors.

People could see themselves in the mirrors.

Some people liked what they saw, and smiled at the boy.

Some people were frightened by what they saw in the mirrors.
And so, they scuttled away quickly.

Some people could only see the mirrors,
but not the boy underneath.

Some people could not see very clearly.
So, they asked the boy to help them to clean the mirrors.
So that they could see themselves better.

Some people did not like what they saw.

And so, they tried to break the mirrors.
So they wouldn't have to see themselves anymore.

These people were constantly hitting the boy.
Trying to break the mirrors.

Some of them beat him up pretty bad.

~ ° ~

The boy asked his friends to help him.

They told him to get rid of the mirrors.
They told him it was all his fault.
They thought they were being 'helpful'.

They were not very good friends after all.

They were uncomfortable with how they looked in the mirrors.

~ ° ~

The little boy felt all alone.

And defective.

~ ° ~

And then, one day,
the little boy met another little boy.
Who was also covered in mirrors.

"What do you do?" he asked the other little boy.
"When they hit you? When they try to break the mirrors?"

"I turn my body," said the other little boy,
"So that the sun reflects right into their eyes."

"But doesn't that hurt their eyes?"

"Burns their retinas right out," he smiled.
"Because fuck 'em."

"Yeah, right," agreed the little boy. "Fuck 'em."

~ ° ~

And the two little boys,
who were covered in mirrors,
were the best of friends from that time on.

The End

Remove the Threat

Friday 4:43 pm.

The Zenaida Macrouras are back. In full force.

They clump together on the antenna, and hunch their shoulders against the wind. It's cold. And they've been there, off and on, for the whole day. Usually they're here in the morning, and then gone. But today, they've been clumping well into the afternoon.

They stick together.

They started me thinking about the United Nations.

More specifically, exactly what are they 'united' about?

From their own webpage:

Article 1

The Purposes of the United Nations are:

"To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the ***prevention and removal of threats to the peace****, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace."*

Not doing a very good job are they? I mean the *'prevention and removal of threats to the peace'* part.

To me, this doesn't seem all that complicated to do.

After all, it is a very small percentage of humans who cause most of the problems in the world.

Just take them out of power, and things will improve quickly.

But that would require a shift in thinking.

Just imagine: If the United Nations had UKSF or SEAL teams, and they went into countries and extracted dictators/ministers/presidents/judges/governors/members of congress…

Basically, any public servant who is mentally ill.

Or doesn't have a fully developed prefrontal cortex.

Or is using the power of their office to resolve unresolved issues from being abused as a child.

These people are the true terrorists.

The real threats to freedom and security.

Anyone who is trying to force their own personal beliefs and fantasies onto a whole country.

Extract them.

Don't kill them. That just makes them a martyr.

Just stop them.

Remove the threat to the peace.

Put them in a safe place where they can't hurt anyone else. And get them the help they need.

To me this is so obvious.

I shouldn't even have to write this.

It's ridiculous that we aren't doing this already.

Hey, United Nations… Grow some damn testicles!

Don't stand around pontificating with your thumbs up your asses.

How much more of this shit do we have to tolerate?

Remember these guys?

Ne Win - Burma - *Forced his own personal beliefs and fantasies onto his whole country.*

Taking advice from numerologists and astrologers, he changed the currency to denominations of 45 and 90. Because he believed that multiples of nine were lucky numbers. Thousands of people lost their

life savings as bank notes in 50 and 100 denominations became worthless. It crippled Burma's economy.

*If he had been extracted **before** he crashed his own country…*

Enver Hoxha - Albania - *Forced his own personal beliefs and fantasies onto his whole country.*

Ruled for 41 years. Outlawed beards and typewriters. Ran his country like a maximum-security labour camp. Private property was seized, landowners killed, and religious institutions closed. He was jealous of people smarter than him. Over 100,000 Albanians were imprisoned, sent to internment camps or executed. A paranoid, psychopathic, mass-murdering tyrant. He destroyed his country, and made it the third poorest in the world.

If he had been removed and institutionalized, then none of that would have happened.

Nicolae Ceausescu - Romania - *Forced his own personal beliefs and fantasies onto his whole country.*

Bankrupted his country, building up his own ego. Called himself a genius. Suffered from grandiose delusions. Made himself a scepter to hold like he was a monarch. Built an enormous palace in the middle of the most historical part of town. In the process he destroyed 19 churches, six synagogues and 30,000 homes. The project was ambitious to the point of stupidity. It cost Romania $10 billion.

Meanwhile his people starved, had basic foods rationed, and were tortured and imprisoned for speaking out against him.

Mao Zedong - China - *Forced his own personal beliefs and fantasies onto his whole country.*

His broad sweeping ideas and programs were enormous failures that caused decades of problems for the whole country. His disastrous fantasies led to poor harvests, famine and the deaths of millions.

He was intimidated by intelligent people. He closed universities. Professors and students were sent to the countryside to be 're-educated' through physical labor. Over a million people died and the country's cultural heritage was decimated. His 'Cultural Revolution' was a war against smart people. Basically, an attempt to make himself feel like he was mentally quicker than people who were mentally quicker than him.

Basically, hurting other people to feel good about himself.

The rest of the world stood by and watched as one man forced his entire country to satisfy his need for one-upmanship.

And just think:

How many millions of lives could have been spared, if someone had extracted **Adolf Hitler** *before* he invaded Poland?

Wasn't the subjugation, enslavement and slaughter of millions of Jews, in reality an enormous desperate attempt by a very small number of people, to hurt an **entire demographic** to feel good about themselves?

How many countries had their villages, fields and roads bombed and burned? How many economies were collapsed; families torn apart; businesses destroyed; infrastructure decimated? How much misery and suffering did the world have to tolerate just because no one had the goddamn balls to take this emotionally crippled man out of the driver's seat?

Adolf Hitler forced his own personal beliefs and fantasies onto his whole country. And then tried to force them onto the entire world.

How many of these leaders were abused or neglected as children?

This behavior is obvious.
The question is: When does it stop?

At what point will the United Nations start stepping in and removing individuals who try to force their own personal beliefs and fantasies onto their whole countries?

The United Nations spends most of its time/effort/money on the backside. Cleaning up the messes left by these people.

If the UN spent more time ***on the front end****—removing mentally ill and emotionally damaged people to begin with—there would be little to nothing to clean up later.*

And millions of people would not lose their homes/jobs/lives in the process.

Just extract them.
Remove the threat to the peace.

It's not complicated.
It's just common sense.

Firewall

Friday, 7:54 pm

It's cheap red night again.

"Well, Winston… What's on the menu for tonight, my man?"

I pull the bottle up and present it like a trophy, "For tonight's adventure, we have a fine Mendosa Argentinian Malbec."

"Supermart?"

"Yeah man."

"$4.99?"

"Don't you know it."

"Well, well now… Don't that look fancy." He takes the bottle from me and turns it around and around. "This label looks like a silver concho belt. Seriously? Argentina? That's where it made?"

"Probably mass produced in Paris Texas. For all we know."

"Who cares. Give me the opener."

And so, it begins. We pour out full even glasses and raise them up to the light. We make all the appropriate oohs and aahs as we pretend that we know what we are doing.

"Nice legs," Dan tips his glass from side to side.

"You say that about every one of them."

"Yeah? Well, you say 'nice body' about every one of them."

"Yeah. I guess. Who cares? Let's drink wine. Cheers!"

We clink glasses and take a swallow.

"So, Dan, finish your thought…"

"I was just saying that all jobs in government should be civil servant jobs. No opportunity for *anyone* to inject their own opinions and fantasies onto the whole country. They're all bean counters. Not visionaries."

"Good plan. It's time, my wine swilling friend, that the people got a little more control over their own public servants."

"Yeah. But how you gonna do that?" he squints.

"Set up a quorum. A body of ordinary citizens that hold everyone accountable."

"And exactly how, are you thinking, that would work?"

"Draft them. From the general population. Use a random algorithm that would choose members according to actual physical demographics of the people. Like fifty-one percent female and twelve percent black, etcetera."

"Sure, sure…"

"They can refuse the draft, and we pick another one. They serve one calendar year. Employers have to hold their jobs for them."

"But what do they actually do?"

"They decide one thing only: Is this person engaging in behavior that is abusive towards, or damaging to their neighbors. Basically: Can you play nicely with the other children? If two-thirds majority of the quorum says no, then they have the power to strip that person of their citizenship, seize their property and banish them immediately and permanently from the country."

"Whoa! Permanent banishment? That's a little harsh don't you think?"

"Harsh? If you run a Ponzi scheme and fuck a bunch of people out of their pensions and life savings? And you have a fancy attorney that gets you off? Hell no. Banish the bastard."

"Yeah, yeah. I hear that."

"Make the punishment so horrible, that no one will do the crime."

"Yeah, our punishments are iffish. Especially if you're rich."

"My point exactly."

"But they could also kick out congressmen? Corrupt bastards pushing legislation to make money for their donors?"

"Hell yeah."

"So really, Winston, you're talking about a firewall for the people."

"Firewall. I like it. Good image."

I pick up my phone a type a note to myself - *Firewall*.

"We should also separate money from power," I continue. "The Dude is right. That seems blatantly obvious."

"You talk to *him* about this?"

"Oh yeah, Dan. We have great discussions."

"I had no idea. Guess I've never really spent much time talking with the neighbors."

"Well, and for a good reason. Lots of them are gun-toting bible-thumping children with unresolved emotional issues."

He laughs, "You get right to the fucking core, don't you Winston."

"What the hell. I'm not here to protect anyone's denial."

He laughs.

"Yeah, The Mayor, The Dude and I have great discussions about all of this. A couple of days ago, over at the Legion, we were talking about how our Representatives who write bills, should have no access, or influence over how the people's money gets spent."

"Seriously? At the Legion? And nobody shot you."

"Oh, it's mostly Vietnam vets. And they have no delusions about reality."

"I had no idea."

"I think that when they were forced to put their lives on the line, they saw the real reasons behind the invasion. And how stupid the whole thing was. And what a massive failure it was from the start."

"I just figured they were all gung-ho."

"You'd be surprised, Dan. It was The Mayor who brought up the idea that we should separate the power in our governments."

"By 'Mayor', you mean Jake?"

"Yeah. I call him The Mayor. The Mayor of Tin Town. All of us living here in our little tin can homes."

"Hah! Tin Town. Perfect. I love it. Livin in Tin Town. Much better name than the 'Trail's End Mobile Ranch'. I mean what the fuck is a 'mobile ranch'?"

"Exactly. Tin Town."

"I love it. So, what else do you enlightened few talk about?"

"Well, we were sketching out on paper napkins at the bar. And we came up with three divisions. There should be people who propose and write bills. And then there should be other people who vote on those bills. And then there should be different people who manage the money. Separate."

"Yeah. Separate. Exactly. Separate that shit."

He grabs the bottle and refills our glasses.

"And The Dude and I were talking about how we should upgrade our governments. I mean, we upgrade our phones, our software, our insurance coverage. But we don't upgrade our governments. The most important systems in our lives."

"Oh fuck no. We just stick new people into the same old system, thinking that's all the upgrading we need to do."

"So, the question is: How many more decades are we going to keep doing this, Dan. before we finally accept the reality that it doesn't work?"

"Maybe forever?"

"It was The Mayor who said that. That governments should be updated periodically. Because knowledge and awareness aren't static."

"Really? Jake? Texas Tech guy? Texas said that? He said static?"

"Well, I'm paraphrasing a little. He has all the thoughts in there. Just sometimes doesn't have the actual vocabulary to pull them off."

"Probably because he went to Texas public schools."

"Basically, his thrust was that our governing, and life defining systems should accurately reflect our latest and most comprehensive knowledge and awareness. That's my words for his thoughts."

"Ol Texas Tech. I'm speechless. Who knew?"

"Still waters, Dan. Still waters."

At that point two scowling ladies walk by the trailer. One of them points to us and mumbles something to her friend.

"You got a problem?" Dan shouts at them.

"You shouldn't drink so much," she barks.

"And you should mind your own business." Dan smirks.

"I'm just trying to be helpful," she scowls.

"Sticking your nose in someone else's business isn't helpful. It's rude."

"*You're* being rude," she fires back.

Dan laughs, "Me holding you accountable for your own rude behavior does not constitute *me* being rude to *you*. It constitutes me holding *you* accountable for *your* rude behavior."

"That's rude," she flares.

"Then mind your own business," he shouts back. "Remember the manners your mother taught you."

"Leave my mother out of this!"

"Then do what she taught you, mind your own business."

She mutters something to her scowling friend, and gives us a dismissive wave with her hand.

"Bitch," he mutters under his breath.

"What the wrong with these people? Everyone forgotten their manners?"

"Seems like it, doesn't it?"

Transference

Wednesday 5:52 p.m.

I got a whole spiral ham from the food shelf. A whole ham!
So, I invited Rick and Jan over to the trailer to have some.
She's bringing vegetables.

"Jan has more stuff for your concept," Rick starts making drinks.

Jan puts the silverware on the table. "There was this detective in the precinct where my brother used to work. And he had the biggest conviction record in the department. But my brother says, that he used to make up what he *thought* happened. And then pressure people into confessing to it."

"And they didn't even do it," Rick sits back down across from me and pours us both some more iced tea.

"What the?" I shake my head.

"He had such a high rate of convictions," she continues, "because he was forcing people into confessing to things they didn't do. My brother said, it was like he was obsessed with punishing people."

"Even if it's the wrong person?"

"He didn't care. Someone had to get punished. He'd pick the most available target."

"Those people go to jail. Get criminal records. For life!"

"And nobody in the department said anything?"

"My brother tried," she shrugs. "But their chief was the same way. I guess, he told him to mind his own business."

"The chief liked it," Rick gets up and goes back to the grill. "Because this guy's conviction rate made the department look good."

"Guys, that's so wrong."

"So, I look at this guy," Jan sets the bowl in the middle of the table, "and I try to assess him like he was one of the kids I work with. I start looking at why he's doing this behavior? What's the payoff for him? And the best answer I can come up with is that he's driven to punish people to compensate for what was done to him. I mean, it makes no rational sense to force the wrong people to be punished for something they didn't do. But, as a child, maybe he was forced to bear consequences that *he* didn't deserve. Like the emotional or physical pain of being abused. He needs to flip that scenario around. This is why he does this. At least, that's *my* opinion."

"But that just perpetuates the abuse, Jan. Now he becomes the abuser."

"It does, Winston. But he's not trying to be an abuser. He's trying to resolve the feelings of being abused. He perceives these people who commit these crimes as being abusers. And transfers all the anger he feels towards *his* abuser onto the people in front of him. He's punishing them to get back at his own abuser."

"But that doesn't work. Does it?"

"Of course not. Never does."

The ham is almost ready. Just the smell is making my mouth water.

Jan sits down and takes a sip of her tea, and then laces her fingers together, and looks at me.

"Let me give you another example. I got assigned by the court to assess a teenager who has a history of reckless and illegal motorcycle racing. He deliberately flies right past the cops to get them to chase him. Then he zooms through alleyways to get away."

"Doesn't he ever get caught?"

"Sometimes, yes. He's had his licensed suspended, bikes confiscated, done jail time. Soon as he's out, he's on another bike taunting the cops."

"What does he gain from all that nonsense."

"Not nonsense to him. If he outruns them, he wins. And that makes him feel good for a little while. But then he needs to do it again."

"Like one-upmanship."

"Exactly."

She lays her hands down flat on the table, "But this one-upmanship is the attempt to win against his original abuser. In our sessions it became clear that he was emotionally abused by his father. Called him a failure. Said he could never do anything right. Told him constantly that he was a loser. Never be a winner."

"Jesus."

"He needs to resolve that with his dad. But that's not going to happen. Because his dad is dead. He *can't* resolve it with him. Which is why he can't stop. He needs to constantly set up situations where he can feel like he wins against someone. Anyone. *Especially*, an authority figure."

"OK, I can see that."

"His behavior is motivated by abuse. Not an underdeveloped cortex."

"Got it. I see what you mean."

"Think about this," she looks at me. "What if someone who was abused like he was, used all that anger and determination to get a law degree? To find legal ways to punish other people. Just to feel like he wins. Just to boost his own battered ego. What if he was so good at this, that it gets him elected to congress? Or he becomes a general in the military? And uses the power of his office to constantly fight against other people. Obsessed with winning?"

"Well, we'd have a gridlocked congress and endless wars."

"Exactly."

"Fuck!"

"Transference creates dictators, Winston. Millions of angry abused children standing behind one very vocal abused child. They vote for *him* because they are voting for someone who will punish *their* abusers."

"Oh, now I see the bigger picture."

"Transference is transference. They give it away with their own behavior. Constantly projecting themselves as victims while they are abusive towards other people. There is only one thing that causes that behavior. Childhood abuse."

"Holy fuck."

"So yes, we should be vetting for this. Before we let someone run for office, become a policeman, become a general—"

"Host talk shows, or own a gun," Rick pulls the ham out of the oven.

"Wow," I shake my head, "this is a lot. But, yeah, this needs to be a part of OS2020."

As A Condition of Citizenship

Wednesday 4:43 pm.

Annie just wheeled up on her mobility scooter.

She had to go to the emergency room again yesterday, and they were going to keep her overnight. But she stabilized, and they let her go home.

Annie has low blood pressure.
Really low.
Like her heart could just squeak to a stop at any moment.

Despite this, she is the most animated, and the easiest to talk to, of all my fellow Tin Towners.
She wants to move back to California, to live near her daughter Daisy.

Annie is on disability. She told me; the hardest part was having to wait 2 years in order to get any Medicare coverage.
"And these geniuses that we have in Congress," she snarks, "these A-holes who are millionaires. And I paid for *their* medical coverage out of my taxes for 42 years. And now they want to cut *my* Medicare coverage, so they can have more money to fight wars."

"It's bullshit, Annie."

"And Daisy—out in California? She makes too much money to get free, or reduced cost health insurance. But she can't afford the premiums."

She shakes her head, "So, she has to pay a fine, when she pays her taxes. Because she can't afford to pay for health insurance. And she *still* has no health coverage. Who dreamed up all this crap anyway?"

Annie was referring to the 'Individual Mandate' clause, in the Affordable Care Act.

Basically, if you *can afford* to buy health insurance, then you *have to* buy health insurance. Or pay a fine for *not* buying health insurance.

And, it is the government that determines, whether or not you can afford to buy health insurance.

That's the 'Individual Mandate' clause.

This clause has gone back and forth.

Some federal judges declared it unconstitutional, some declared it constitutional.

So, what the law says, is that every citizen is forced to purchase a product from a privately-owned company. As a condition of their citizenship.

*As a **condition** of their citizenship.*

Or be forced to pay a fine for *not* purchasing it.

Here's my point:

The Individual Mandate in the Affordable Care Act was presented as an either/or situation.

Black or white.

Simple-minded.

Either, people have to be forced to buy their own health insurance -

Or, these people will use hospitals and clinics for free.

Because they *can't be turned away by law if they have no insurance*.

And then the cost of their health care is paid for by people who *have* health insurance. Their premiums go up to compensate for the uninsured. And hospitals raise their prices to cover for the free services they are providing.

See the black or white?

At any time during that debate, did anyone ask, "What is *another way* that we could stop this freeloading? *Without* forcing people to buy a product from a privately-owned company? As a condition of their citizenship?

Is there a third option? A fourth? Or a fifth?

Have we really exhausted all possible solutions to this situation? Or did we just let the insurance companies ramrod a bill through congress in order to guarantee themselves income?

This legislation was forced through, because it was presented as being the *only* sensible and logical choice of *two options*.

'Justification by comparison to an opposite extreme.'

How many other bills have been forced through using this either/or logic? Like, most of them?

There is no mention, in the Constitution, of forcing 'We The People' to purchase a product from a privately-owned company.

And, yet, both main parties keep tossing out this bullshit cover story/bullshit justification/bullshit: 'We want to guarantee health care for all people.'

News Flash: Health Insurance is not the same thing as Health Care.

Forcing people to purchase *health insurance*, is not the same thing as *providing them with health care*.

And, as far as forcing citizens to purchase a product from a privately-owned company, as a condition of citizenship…

The Founding Fathers are probably spinning in their graves.

Survival of the Fittest

Saturday 10:12 a.m.

The Mayor, The Dude and I are draining the pot.

Everyone else has left after Saturday morning coffee. It's just us three now in the clubhouse. The diehards. Finishing off the coffee and the pastries.

The big flat screen is on. The Dude is staring at it intently, his brow furrowed, his mouth open.

"What's grabbed a hold of your dick?" snarks the Mayor.

The Dude jerks his head quickly back towards us. Mouth still gaping open, "It ain't right."

"What ain't right?" the Mayor and I both look up at the flat screen.

There's some survival program on. Some guy gets dropped down in the middle of nowhere, and he has to find his way out.

"Survival of the fittest," The Dude looks back at the screen.

"What about it?" snaps the Mayor.

"It' ain't right. It ain't survival of the fittest."

"What do you mean, Dude?" I look back at him.

"It's a fantasy, man,"

"So?" His Honor shrugs.

The Dude opens his hands wide in his usual manner. "Survival of the fittest, is a fantasy. Made up by our Warrior Instinct. To justify hitting."

I am once again surprised and impressed by his bursts into lucidity. "That's brilliant Dude."

"Warrior Instinct?" the Mayor squints at him.

"Ya gotta read the book, man," The Dude waves his hands.

"I ain't got time to read no damn book," the Mayor waves him off.

"You're right Dude," I interrupt, "It's not survival of the physically strongest, because the majority of humans are overweight and don't exercise."

"What the Samuel P. Diddlyfuck are you two clowns babbling about?" the Mayor squints.

"See? See?" The Dude is bouncing up and down in his chair.

"The ones who survive are not the fittest," I'm trying to follow his train of thought. "There's lots who have survived that don't exercise. Human beings, as a species, have no history of exercising for the purpose of building muscles. Building muscles was a side effect of hunting and fighting. And hunters and fighters aren't the only ones who survive. I get what you mean."

"Yeah, Mister Winston, but that ain't the main thing…"

"Indigenous tribes, Dude? That who you're talking about?"

"Y'all two peas in a pod with that instinct crap," The Mayor smirks.

"Ya gotta read the book, man," The Dude leans in towards The Mayor. "Ya gotta read the goddamn book."

His Honor jerks his head back.

"So, what exactly do you mean, Dude?"

"It ain't survival of the fittest," he shakes his head from side to side. "The strongest. The healthiest. None of it. Look Man… We don't kill off the sickest 10 percent. We don't kill everyone over 80."

"Oh, fuck no," His Honor jumps in, "We spend a whole lotta moolah keepin' the sickest and the oldest alive."

"Because people make money off it," The Dude points his finger at The Mayor.

"No—this is right," I chime in. "The ones who act primarily out of Nurturing Instinct don't purge our species of the weakest sickest members. They bend over backwards trying to help them."

"See? That's what I'm saying," The Dude makes an emphatic downward stab in the air with his hand.

"For that matter, Dude," I raise both of my hands mimicking his 'Dude' pose, "It's not survival of the most intelligent, either."

He looks at me with a furrowed brow.

"Because the most intelligent, sit around with their thumbs up their butts and watch mentally deficient and emotionally damaged humans, take over the most powerful roles in our countries."

"Yeah," the Mayor leans in, "And that ain't too goddamn intelligent."

"They don't create intelligent ways," I continue, "to stop that from happening. Or ways to remove those people. There's no intelligence in it."

The Dude looks back up at the screen.

"They don't stop that shit," the Mayor points his bony finger.

"It's random, man," The Dude shakes his head rapidly. "It's random. That's what I'm sayin. It's survival of the random. Not the damn fittest."

We both sit and look at him.

"I get what you're saying, Dude. Random," I nod slowly.

He's right. It is random.

"Random," he spreads his hands again. "Total fucking random. Not fittest."

I am nodding, digesting, "Disease and sickness take a random sample of the population: old, young, sick, healthy, male and female. Warfare and acts of violence kill a random sample of human beings. You're right."

"It's random, man," the Dude leans back and folds his arms. With a big Cheshire Cat grin on his face.

He figured it out.

"You been hanging around our friend Winston here too much," the Mayor smirks at The Dude. "You startin' to talk like a college boy too."

Frames of Reference

Monday 9:06 a.m.

Last Beer Mike has a bumper sticker on his car that reads:
"Guns Save Lives".

He doesn't talk to me anymore. Doesn't even wave.
It's all because I asked him about his bumper sticker.

"How do guns save lives?" I asked him.
"If someone breaks into my house, I can protect myself. Duh!"
"By killing them?"
"They broke into my house. That's their tough luck."
"So, in that instance, a gun would *take* a life. Wouldn't it?"
"Save *my* life. What? You don't think we should be killing terrorists?" he glowered. "You think we should just lay down and let them kill us?"
"So, your bumper sticker should read: '*My* guns save *my* life, by taking *other people's* lives.'"

He leaned in, and spat out each word slowly and emphatically. Like I was hard of hearing, or didn't understand English. "Guns—*save*—lives."

"No, they don't," I replied. And I leaned in, and enunciated each word slowly and emphatically. Like he was hard of hearing, or didn't understand English. "Guns—*take*—lives."

"Well, if you love the terrorists so much, then maybe we should send you over there. So we can blow you up with them!"

Behold the power of black or white thinking.

We see a lot of this thinking on bumper stickers.

The simple-minded need these short phrases to explain their beliefs. They need life to be dumbed down to black or white choices. In order for them to feel intelligent.

Otherwise, they stick out like sore thumbs.

Apparently, these bumper stickers are not so much statements of 'This is what I believe', as they are attempts to force everyone who reads them, to believe what the owner of the car believes.

That doesn't seem to be working.

The first time I met Last Beer Mike was a couple of weeks after I moved into Tin Town.

I went for a dip in the pool. He was sitting under the awning with a woman I had seen at Saturday coffee.

After my dip, I sauntered over, drying my hair with my towel. I plopped down in an empty chair at their table.

"Hi, " I extended my hand, "Winston. I just moved in."

"I'm Mike," he shook my hand. "And this is Hanna."

She flashed a brief smile, and kept sucking on her cigarette.

Last Beer reached into the cooler at his feet, and pulled out a beer.

As he cracked it open, he turned to Hanna, "See, this is the last beer I have."

Incorrect assumption.

"I just wanted to introduce myself," I try to cover his awkward incorrect assumption. "Not trying to mooch a beer."

Last Beer scowls at me. So, I rise to go.

"Where did you move here from?" Hanna tries to smooth over the now-obvious turd-on-the-table.

"Minnesota."

"I was in Minnesota once," blurts Last Beer. "They have bad food there."

He scrunches up his face, like he has a bad taste in his mouth.

"Oh," I ask, "did you live there?"

"Oh, hell no! I'd *never* live there! I was driving through. Going to California. We stopped for lunch. It was awful!"

So. All of Minnesota is bad because of the one lunch he had at one restaurant in Minnesota.

If one, then all.

Assumption of an absolute.

He has a frame of reference.

I have noticed this amongst the simple-minded.

They form frames of reference to process information. Then they can assign that information into black or white piles. In other words: In order to process new information, they need to attach it to a reference point they already have.

So, they quickly flip through their database of reference points, and pull out the closest one.

It goes like this:

Search word: Experience attached to search word : Judgement.

For Last Beer Mike, it was:

Minnesota: The Bad Lunch I Had There: Everything About Minnesota = Bad

You can almost hear their prefrontal cortices crunch, as they hit their own brick walls.

Once I was dating this woman named Kelly.

I introduced her to a friend of mine.

He starts singing, "Kelly, Kelly, Kelly, Kelly."

We both look at him puzzled.

He smirks, "That song. From Cheers."

We shake our heads.

He leans in close, as though we're hard of hearing. And pronounces each word carefully, as though we don't understand English, "That song that Woody sang on 'Cheers'…"

"What does that have to do with me?" asks Kelly.

"You know," he looks perturbed at having to explain. "Kelly, Kelly, Kelly, Kelly," over-pronouncing her name. As though she has difficulty hearing.

He had a frame of reference.

And boy oh boy, do these simple-minded peeps need to have their frames of reference validated!

What a lot of tiresome and pointless work.

French = Bad

Monday 10:22 a.m.

Wait.

I have an even better one:

Back when I had money, and work, I used to drink at this bar called Skipper's.

One of the regulars there was Craig.

In 2003, the bar owners stopped serving Grey Goose vodka.

Because it came from France.

And France refused to support the invasion of Iraq.

Many of the regulars at Skipper's were anti-France.

Including Craig.

I made the mistake, one day, of trying to point out, that when the US won its independence from England, it was the French who sent supplies and soldiers. And ships to fight on the side of the Americans.

Luckily, for the colonists, the only people who hated the British more than *they* did, were the French.

The French wanted trade agreements with the new country. And they wanted to kick Britain's ass. And gain naval dominance in the world.

So, the French, voluntarily, fought and died next to colonists.

The colonies won their freedom *because* of the French.

At the Battlefield Park in Yorktown, Virginia, there is a diorama. It shows 7,000 to 8,000 French soldiers fighting and dying next to 8,000 colonial troops. Together they forced the surrender of Lord Cornwallis.

This was the actual moment that the US won its independence.

There were also 29 French warships involved in the victory at Yorktown, the colonies having no navy of their own.

In fact, I pointed out to Craig, that the French love the Americans so much that they gave them a statue: The Statue of Liberty.

Proudly standing in New York harbor, she is a symbol of how much the French admired and respected the Americans' bravery.

So, I don't see what possible gain there is for any one, from not serving French made vodka at Skipper's.

Just because France, along with 54 other countries, including Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Greece, Brazil, Canada, China, India, Switzerland, Mexico and Russia, didn't think that invading Iraq was the right thing to do.

For whatever reason.

Well.

Ol' Craig tensed up.

Glaring into his beer, and clenching his fists, he blurts, "The French fucked up my teeth!"

Wtf?

Exactly.

Here's the breakdown:

- Craig grew up in Louisiana.
- Louisiana has a lot of natives who descended from the French. Who settled there when the territory was owned by France.
- Apparently, Craig had gone to a dentist, who was of French heritage.
- Apparently, the dentist wasn't very good, and fucked up Craig's teeth.

So, in Craig's mind: French = bad.

If I challenge his logic about them not supporting the invasion of Iraq, then he needs to find other proof that: French = bad.

But the teeth thing?

That's a stretch.

That's a desperate attempt to force a frame of reference.

Almost as far as deliberately not selling French made vodka. Just to punish the French for not supporting the invasion of Iraq.

And, I'm sure—quite sure, that the lack of sales of Grey Goose vodka at Skipper's, has had a deep and profound impact on the French economy.

That'll teach those damn Frenchies to support our invasions!

Some other fun things that happened around that same time:

- Some restaurants renamed their French Fries as 'Freedom Fries'.

- Some restaurants renamed their French Toast as 'Liberty Toast.'

Get it? Liberty.
Just like that statue.
The Statue of Liberty. A memorial to freedom.
The statue that the **French** gave to America.

Nationalism

Thursday 2:28 pm.

"It's victims fighting with other victims," Guitar Dan is gluing a new fretboard on the neck of a guitar he just got on eBay.

I'm trying to hold the headstock while he wraps a big rubber band around the neck. The band will hold the rosewood fretboard evenly all the way down the neck.

He's had a few cups of coffee this morning. He's pretty twitchy today, "I've been looking at all this Nationalism lately."

"Yeah?" I'm trying to hold onto the neck but he keeps twisting it.

The big rubber band keeps slipping from his grip. He's getting frustrated, because the glue is getting squeezed out the sides, "This shit going on in Europe. I'm seeing it all over. It's the same shit. "

"The anti-migrant stuff?"

"Yeah. They got this same shit going on in France, Germany, the UK, Netherlands. Same as here."

"Oh yeah?" I'm trying to focus on holding the neck.

"These right-wing parties saying the same shit: 'Get these foreigner's the slam-dunky-fuck out of my country.' Callin it Nationalism."

"Yeah. Nationalism…"

He looks pretty angry. But it might be the guitar neck.

Or, the coffee.

I think he likes being angry. I think he gets energy from it.

For being a Taoist, he's angry a lot.

"So, I'm looking at the manifestos of these Nationalist parties," he says, "Netherlands, Germany, wherever… They're saying the same things."

He's got the rubber band in place now. Our teamwork has paid off.

We have wrestled the demon guitar neck into submission. And successfully mated it with its new fretboard.

He lays the neck ceremoniously on an old towel spread out on his work bench.

Dan finishes his coffee in one big gulp.

He leans on his arms on the workbench and looks at me, "It's all the same shit. They don't want these foreigners in their country. Sucking off social programs. Stealing jobs."

"Well, the migrant crisis— "

"Never should have happened. These migrants are trying to get into countries that are currently bombing the shit out of the migrants' home country. Countries that used to *own* the migrant's home country. Until they stole all the natural resources, worked the people to death, trashed the place, and left."

"Well. Yeah. But they can't acknowledge that."

"You want some more coffee?"

I shake my head.

Dan goes into his kitchen to pour himself another cup. I can hear his African Grey parrot, Taco, whistle at him.

"Taco," Dan sings out.

"Taco," squawks Taco.

When he comes back in the workshop, he looks a little calmer, "What these Nationalist parties *should* be saying is: 'Stop all these rich assholes and corporations from going into other people's countries. Making them hate us. Inspiring terrorism. Just so they can make a few dollars."

"Pretty obvious, isn't it," I sit down on a shop stool.

"If they were *serious* about protecting their country, they wouldn't be kicking out migrants. They'd be kicking out the rich bastards that caused this whole mess."

He sits down on another stool, "The EU was set up by a bunch of rich guys, so they could get richer. But it's failing."

"Yeah, it's buggered."

"They set it up, to eliminate financial borders, my man. To avoid import tax, and make more profits. And they sold the concept to the people of Europe, saying that everyone will be able to get more stuff, for cheaper."

"Cheaper *quality* goods, though."

"Absolutely. But the other thing it did—when they opened the borders—it sent starving people with no jobs, streaming into countries that were better off than them," he spreads his hands like The Dude does.

"Of course."

"But who'd blame them? Their own countries are trashed. No work."

"And the migrants coming in, Dan, piss off the locals. Of course it does. Foreigners taking their jobs, working for less, driving down wages. That's gonna piss off anybody."

"But the geniuses who invented the EU don't care about that."

"Oh hell no. They're too busy looking at how much money they're making."

"For hundreds of years," he looks at me, "we've had rich guys going into other people's countries and setting up businesses. Making a bunch of money off whatever was there: tobacco, corn, cotton, sugar, salt, tea. Whatever. Eventually, oil."

"Yeah… So…"

"Then these guys, use that money to influence governments."

"And that's where it goes in the shitter?"

"Of course. Because they invade other people's countries. Under bullshit rationalizations about 'helping people' and giving them freedom and democracy."

"It's bullshit."

"Yeah, it's bullshit," he continues, "because invading has never actually resulted in helping people. Has it? Or giving them freedom or democracy. It's *always* resulted in creating terrorism and migrants. Every damn time."

"So, what this got to do with the Nationalists?"

"So, this Nationalism—this obsession to throw out all non-nationals—is the knee-jerk response of people who've been victimized by the whole process."

"Victimized?"

"It's victims fighting other victims."

"How do you figure that?"

"The migrants are victims because their countries have been decimated. And the people of the country that is doing the decimating are victims. Because the migrants are swarming into *their* country, and impacting *their* lives and *their* economies."

"OK, so…"

"And the ones who've *caused* these situations, never feel the consequences of their own behavior."

"The ones who— "

"The companies," he interrupts me, "the people, the politicians who force the laws to help the rich guys get richer. The guys who are making money off decimating the migrants' country. *They* get away with it."

"And the *people* pay the price. The people on *both* sides."

"Exactly. Victims fighting with other victims."

"OK, I' see what you're saying."

Taco squawks from the kitchen again, "Taco."

"Taco," Dan sings out.

"If these Nationalists," he continues, "seriously wanna get migrants out of *their own* country, then they gotta get their *business interests* the slam-dunky-fuck out of *the migrants'* countries."

"I see exactly what you're saying."

"If these Nationalists really want to fix the problems, then they gotta help out the migrants' homelands. So *they don't have to migrate*."

"Fix the *cause*, you're saying. Not the *symptom*."

"Do something about all the rich assholes that keep *creating* migrants," he throws his hands up.

"How they gonna do that, Dan? None of these Nationalist candidates are talking about what you're talking about here."

"I know. I know," he shakes his head. "And the outsider candidates, are only getting attention because people want change."

"Yeah. Any change. Even if it's worse…"

"And the same old politicians, keep saying they're gonna change this or that, but they don't. They just facilitate more shit to continue. They got rich people backing their campaigns, to make damn sure it *does* continue."

"Right. So, *anybody*, who doesn't look and act like the usual typical politician, is gonna get attention. Because people want change."

We sip our coffee.

"Dan, these 'outsider' candidates aren't gonna change shit either."

"Oh, hell no," he waves his arm, "Voting for some rich businessman who makes money from business deals in other people's countries, isn't gonna get them the results they want. Someone who's part of the problem, can't be part of the solution."

"Pretty much."

"Plus, voting for people like Le Pen, was pointless. She wasn't talking about stopping rich French guys from forcing business deals in other people's countries."

"Oh hell no."

"No. None of them are talking about how to stop *causing* terrorism. How to stop *causing* this migrant crisis."

Taco calls again from the kitchen, "Taco."

"Taco," replies Dan.

My coffee has gone cold.

"It's just one incorrect assumption after another," I mumble, mostly to myself.

"What's that?"

"Well—I mean—I'm just looking at all this stuff you're talking about—and so much of it seems to be based on incorrect assumptions made from the very beginning."

"What stuff?"

"Lots of it, Dan. All Muslims hate all Americans. All immigrants are terrorists. Nobody is protecting our borders. All that shit."

"Oh, yeah, that shit."

"And then they defend their incorrect assumption with another one. Like—if you tell them that they're making an incorrect assumption, then they will make another one and say that *you* must be a terrorist too. It's just a series of incorrect assumptions all based on the first one. Rapidly getting further and further away from the truth."

"Well. Yeah. I mean… But…" He trails off.

"So, after talking to my friend Jan, and getting some awareness from her about how being abused as a child can drive your behavior as an adult… Well, let's say your dad called you stupid. Ridiculed you. Laughed at you in front of your friends. Called you an idiot. So, you grow up with this constant need to convince yourself that he was wrong."

"Starting to sound like *my* childhood," he exhales.

"So, as an adult, you hear someone on some news program saying all Muslims hate all Americans. And you start saying it because you think it has to be true if some guy on a TV news show said it. And there are memes about it all over Facebook."

"Yeah?"

"Well, you wouldn't be able to admit that you repeated something that might not be true. Because that would mean that you made a mistake. Which means your dad was right—you are stupid. And there's no way in hell you're gonna let him be right."

He nods vigorously, "So you aggressively defend your incorrect assumption. Yeah. Yeah. That makes my head hurt to think about."

"Sorry man."

"No, no—it's just that—well—I guess I never looked at that connection. So, I mean, if you factor that into the mix, Winston—so you basically have a bunch of abused children—in every country—growing up with the same anger—making the same incorrect assumptions about—each other?"

"Which might explain why their manifestos are similar and they are all saying the same things. It's *possible*. It's a *possible* explanation."

"Man, you're a kill-joy, man. You just take all the fun right outta slammin stupid people for being stupid. Now I gotta feel sorry for them?"

"No, hell no. Everyone is accountable for their own behavior. I'm just trying to figure out human behavior. That's all."

"Yeah. Big hill to climb, my man."

"You know, Dan, we're always able to find reasons to hate and fear each other. Reasons to kill each other."

"What're you saying?" he squints.

"We just have difficulty finding reasons to love each other. To accept each other."

"True."

"Well, I'm thinking, maybe the human species has a built-in self-destruct mechanism. We're constantly doing shit that is damaging and destructive."

"Yeah, yeah. I see that."

"Well, maybe that's the point. Maybe we're *supposed* to self-destruct. After we've done whatever it was that we were created to do."

"Hmmm…" he looks at me, his eyes flitting around.

"Just what I'm starting to wonder, these days."

Taco squawks again, "Taco."

"Taco," replies Dan.

The Dead and Dying

Tuesday 6:38 a.m.

One lone little bird on Smart Woman's antenna.
Not a Zenaida Macroura.
Not a mourning dove.
Just a lone little weird looking bird. All by itself.
And it's sat there for over forty-five minutes now.
I don't think it's moved.

Is it dead?

Someone else just died in Tin Town.

That makes seven since I moved in back in May.

An older couple took an overdose of pain pills together, and died back in June. They'd just had enough. They'd decided it was time to go.

Getting old sucks.

I can respect that.

Another old guy basically drank himself to death a few weeks later. At least that's what I was told. Not sure how you actually drink yourself to death… Unless you drown in whisky.

Which really doesn't sound all that unpleasant. If you ask me.

But nobody has. So, there's that.

And then we had another guy, 79, suffering from dementia, running down the street. Hands waving in the air. No weapon. The cops pulled up next to him, and he looked confused and frightened, and ran away from them. So, they followed him back to his trailer. Where he apparently fell/was pushed, and had a heart attack in the process, and died.

No one was charged with anything.

Four cops had him down on the ground. One cop had his hand on the back of the guy's head, and was pushing his face into the asphalt. Another had his knee in the guys back. And was yelling at him, "Stop resisting!"

They were arresting him for resisting arrest.

Looked to me like he was resisting being physically assaulted.

Looked to me like he was resisting having his face ground into the asphalt. And someone's knee crushing his spine.

Are you *not* supposed to resist that?

And, technically, don't you have to arrest someone for something *first*? *Before* they can *resist being arrested* for it? And *then* you can arrest them for resisting arrest?

I mean, how do you arrest someone for resisting something you never charged them with?

This is how the conversation went:
Cop: "You're under arrest."
Guy: "For what?"
Cop: (Grabbing the guy's arms) "Resisting arrest!"
Guy: "What did I do?"
Cop: "Stop resisting!"
Guy: "You're breaking my arm! Stop breaking my arm!"
Cop: "Stop resisting!!"

The guy was not resisting arrest.
He was resisting being physically assaulted by a police officer.
An officer who never charged him with anything. Except resisting arrest. *After* he started to physically assault the guy.

Don't seem quite right to me.

It's against the law to physically assault someone.
So why are police allowed to do it?

If you have to break the law, in order to enforce the law, then you don't know what you're doing. And you need to be fired. And be replaced by someone who *does* know how to enforce the law, *without* breaking it.

Anyway.
I went to Sat Morning coffee today.
Mistake.

I had such a good time last week, with The Mayor and The Dude. And our little board meeting about survival of the fittest. And the

subsequent hashing over instincts and cold ones at the Legion. I was kinda hoping for a replay.

Wrong.

First thing they do is have a prayer for the guy who just died.

(I'm not supposed to have an issue with this, I know. I'm just supposed to let it slide. But I can't.)

So, the guy leading the coffee just launches into a prayer asking God to take care of the dead guy. Or something along those lines.

A Christian prayer.

Assuming that everyone in the room will be all right with him expecting all of us to join in a Christian ritual.

Just assumed.

What if some people in the park are Sikhs? Or Jainists? Or Ojibwe? Or Maori? Or even— (horrors! dare I think it—MUSLIMS?)

Oh, the very thought of it!!!

Anyway.

I don't understand this whole prayer thing.

I mean, if you're a Christian, then you believe that your god has a plan for your life. That this god is all seeing and all knowing. And that this god knows better than you do, what you should have. And how things should go…

Why are you praying?

Why are you asking this god to do something, or help someone, or intervene in a situation, and make it go the way that *you* want it to go?

I mean, either you believe your god is wiser than you, or you don't.

Right?

And while we're on the subject of death…

There seems to be a belief around the Trail's End that dying is some kind of failure.

Like you didn't try hard enough to live.

Is this something that has crept into our belief system because of the drug companies? Or hospitals or insurance? Or anyone else who makes an obscene amount of money trying to keep people alive at all costs?

I don't see this in Europe.

And I don't see this all over this country either.

Certainly not among the native population or the Hispanics.

Just us pale sickly gullible white folk.

OS2020

Wednesday 10:18 a.m.

It's really shaping up nicely.

With all the banter I have been having in recent days, there is a strong concept developing here.

And I've been listening to these internet radio stations in Europe. They seem a little more open minded, and less angry than my neighbors. Maybe, if I get something halfway intelligent sounding, I'll give them a jingle and see what their listeners have to say.

Who knows?

Denial

Friday 2:23 pm.

The Mayor is up on his soapbox again, "In a hundred years, mi amigo, people are gonna talk about why the Great United of States collapsed. And, it ain't gonna be because of bad politicians, or bad laws, or greed."

He pauses to puff his cigarette, and looks off to the west, where thin cirrus clouds are swirling in delicate filaments behind the tall palm trees.

"It's gonna be, 'cause so many people saw something was wrong. And nobody did a damn thing about it."

He stubs out his cigarette, "Alls we did," he sighs, "was pretend that there was nothing wrong."

"Yeah, but, Your Honor, denial has been part of the fabric of this country since day one. I mean: How white Europeans stole the land; How we slaughtered the natives; How we trapped black Africans and brought them here to be our slaves."

He's furiously puffing away on his cigarette.

"It's the same thing in the UK."

"What's that?"

"Protecting our denial seems to be more important than protecting our national security."

"That's a mouthful, college boy. But I cain't say I disagree."

We both look up at the palm trees, dipping and swaying over the shiny aluminum roofs of Tin Town.

"At least, in the UK—most of Europe, actually, there are people loudly telling the truth. I just don't hear much of that here."

He leans down, and in a low voice he says, "That's 'cause tellin' the truth 'round here, mi amigo, just might get you shot."

A shiver runs through me. Something in his eyes. He's right. But, until this moment, I had not considered any real threat to myself. I have been treating my neighbors as amusing. Entertaining. But now the reality is flooding in around me. I am surrounded by people who don't like me. People who see me as a threat to their own denial. People who have guns.

He just smacked me in the face with my own denial.

The Mayor waddles over to his bike, pulls on his dusty Texas Tech hat, "Well, there ain't a goddamn thing I can do about it. So, I'm gonna go watch some football."

He waves over his head as he pushes off towards the clubhouse.

Blue Solo Cup

Saturday 11:18 a.m.

Blue Solo Cup is at it again.

Usually, by noon every day, she's out on her driveway. Blue plastic Solo cup clutched in a death grip in her hand. Yammering away at someone only she can see. Lunging and barking at anyone who passes by.

Blue Solo Cup lives next to The Mayor.
Her trailer has had a 'For Sale' sign on it since I moved in.
It's a big double wide, with picture windows and a double carport.

Blue Solo Cup gets lots of sun.
It's hard to tell how old she is because she's tanned and sinewed like a piece of beef jerky. She sits in a folding chair at the edge of her carport. Her trademark blue plastic Solo cup in hand. Baking in the sun.

She has some kind of disability. Because when she walks, she bends slightly forward at the waist. One of her hips seems to push up a little. Her left arm is also not very straight. And when she puts her hand on her hip, her wrist turns at an unusual angle.

I don't know anything about her. But every time I see her, careening around her carport, I wonder who she is. And what her life is all about.

But as I sit here drumming my fingers waiting for my disability to get approved, I don't really have much else to focus on.

OK. How about this:

Blue Solo Cup

by Winston Smith

Nadine opens the kitchen cupboard above the coffee maker. She pulls a bright blue plastic cup from the neatly stacked column of cups on the shelf.

"Sherm, you getting up yet?" she calls out.

She sets the cup down on the boomerang Formica countertop. She opens the freezer and slides out an aluminum ice tray. Holding the tray steady, she pulls up on the handle. A few large cubes pop out. She drops four into her cup and, replaces the ice tray in the freezer. Grabbing a plastic bottle of whisky by its neck, she drags it out from beside the toaster. And fills the cup about half full.

"I'm pouring fluffies, Sherm. You need a cup yet?"

Back in the old days, they used to drink Crown Royal. They all did. Back before…

Now, it's all she can do to squeeze enough out of her disability check to keep herself lubricated, with the cheapest whisky that Junction Supermart sells.

$12.99 for half a gallon.

'Prestige'.

What a joke of a name for shit whisky in a plastic bottle.

Nadine screws the top back on the bottle and slides it back into its place next to the toaster. Then, she takes the damp rag that is draped over the faucet, and proceeds to wipe down the formica counter top.

"Clean as you go," she recites, "then there's less to clean."

Nadine opens the top drawer next to the stove and pulls out a roll of blue masking tape. She tears off a short piece, and sticks it to the front of her blouse. Then puts the rest of the roll back in the drawer.

She picks up her cup, and slides open the trailer's glass patio door.

Nadine pauses, and takes a big swig from her cup.

"You coming out Sherm?"

She shuffles, and pivots out the trailer door, dragging her stiff left leg behind her as she moves.

"Sherm, it's another day in paradise out here. You should come out."

Nadine negotiates her way down the two steps, and then pauses to look straight up. She spins around in a circle, "And seldom was heard…"

She shuffles down the side of the trailer, stopping at the big picture window. Pulling the piece of masking tape off her blouse, she tapes down the flapping bottom of the 'For Sale' sign on the window.

She takes another swig from her cup.

"Why don't nobody want to buy this place, Sherm? Dang I wish we could just get out of here."

Nadine shuffles to the end of her carport. She slumps down into the folding chair, and gazes up at the Superstitions.

"Remember Sherm?" Nadine rattles the ice cubes against the side of her cup. "Remember when we would go up to Show Low? And all the tall

pines trees… And the wind would come in the car windows, and blow all our troubles away?"

Nadine leans back in the chair and lets the Arizona sun bake her face. Her skin is dry and brown and cracked with lines. Like the Sonoran Desert around her.

She lets out a long sigh.

Setting her cup down on the hot asphalt next to her, she pushes up the short sleeves of her blouse. And rolls up the legs of her shorts.

"Let the sunshine in."

The traffic is loud on the other side of the wall.

You can hear a subwoofer in someone's vehicle thud-thud-thudding for blocks. Getting louder and louder, until it passes the park. And then, thud-thud-thudding as it slowly fades into the distance.

But Nadine pays it no mind.

She takes a long swig from her cup.

A white plastic grocery bag, blown by the breeze, makes a slow journey across the bare dirt lot next to her. Nadine watches it move. It catches a little gust of wind, pirouettes for a second, and then deflates and lays down. And then, catches another little gust, and drifts a few more feet. Dipping, gliding and collapsing, like the ghost of a ballerina that keeps running out of energy.

"When you coming home?" she whispers to the bag.

Suddenly, her head snaps right as she sees someone walking by on the road.

"There's that damn man that never picks up his dog shit, Sherm."

Nadine swings her chair around, "I'm gonna tell the office," she yells. Wagging her finger at the man walking the dog. "Then you'll see."

"Awww, shut up. You drunk old cow," the man waves her off.

"You spossed to pick up yer shit," she snaps. "Everybody spossed to pick up their shit! Office says…"

The man just waves her off and keeps walking.

"Did you see that Sherm? Did you see how that asshole talked to me? You should go kick his ass."

Nadine takes a swig from her cup, "Yeah, you're probably right. He ain't worth the trouble."

Nadine lays back and closes her eyes.

Mourning doves are clumping together and coo-cooing on an antenna four trailers away. Small gusts of a breeze rustle the fronds of the tall palm trees above her.

Nadine takes another swig.

"Oh Sherm. When you coming home, Sherm?"

Nadine drains her cup. Tipping the bottom up, she bounces the ice cubes against her upper lip. Trying to release whatever last sip is trapped behind them.

She hoists herself up, and negotiates her way back into the kitchen.

When she comes back out, her neighbor Gerry is just squeaking up on his three-wheeled bike, with another load of aluminum cans.

"He still ain't pickin up shit," Nadine slurs at him, waving her hand all around. "Dere's shit all over."

Gerry waves politely, and rushes to get inside his trailer.

Nadine leans against the thin metal uprights that hold the awning above her carport. Her bad hip cocked up and out like it's trying to escape. She puts her left hand on her hip, with her wrist turned backwards. Her fingers splay out unnaturally wide, and point in all directions. Her elbow sticks straight out, at a right angle. She looks half human - half cricket.

But, that's just the way her body is now. Since…

The truck driver sisters, who live in number 169, cruise by, and slow down to wave.

"Dere's shit all over again!" Nadine shouts. "Shit everywhere!" she gestures, almost spilling her drink.

The sisters frown and slide on past.

"Sherm, you better sit down and take it easy. You never know when you've had too much. I'm always the responsible one."

The new renters in 162, directly across from Nadine, come out of their trailer. They pause when they see her, then quickly race to get in their car.

Nadine waves to them.

They wave politely, with forced smiles.

They've only been here for 2 weeks.

"I'm the responsible one," Nadine yells towards them. "Always the responsible one."

They smile awkwardly, as they back out of their driveway. Staring sadly at their nice new patio seating. Every day, for the first week they moved in, they were out there. Stretched out in their comfy new wicker club chairs, laughing and talking. Swilling ice cubes in their cocktail tumblers.

For the last week though—as nice as the weather has been—they haven't been sitting out much. Staying inside their trailer instead.

Out of striking distance.

Nadine careens across the carport towards their car as they pass. It almost looks like she's running towards the car. The guy swerves away with an alarmed look on his face.

"Responsible," Nadine repeats. "Always the responsible one!" She waves her arm wide.

Nadine plops down in the folding chair, "That guy is a shitty driver, Sherm. Did you see him swerving all over the place?"

She takes a big draw on her blue plastic cup.

"He's like you, when you've had a couple fluffies."

Nadine turns her face back towards the sun.

"I had to drive, Sherm, I had less to drink than you."

Her head lolls from side to side.

"You didn't even have to go to the hospital. You were fine. You just walked away."

She looks down at her thin brown, beef jerky legs, "I'm the one who got banged up. I protected you. You were fine."

She takes another swallow, "I'm the responsible one. Like always."

Nadine rises out of the chair, just as Georgia walks by, with Nibblet, her small dog.

Georgia manages a weak smile, but Nibblet runs right up to Nadine and starts licking her bare ankles.

"He just forgot where he lives," slurs Nadine.

"It's the coconut oil," Georgia points.

"He just got out of the car, and walked away," Nadine swings her arm out.

"It's the smell," says Georgia. "She likes the smell."

"It was the shock," Nadine teeters like she's going to fall forward. "He just forgot where he lives."

Georgia pulls Nibblet back sharply on her leash, "You need to sit down, Nadine."

"He'll be back," mutters Nadine, swaying from side to side.

"Before you fall down," snaps Georgia. She tugs Nibblet away and down the road.

"Soon as he remembers where he lives," Nadine collapses into the chair.

She pushes back and raises her face towards the baking hot Arizona sun.

"Remember, Sherm? Remember? The tall pine trees? And we would roll down the windows, and the wind would come in? And it would blow all our troubles away…"

Party in Your Pants

Saturday 3:48 pm.

"I'm telling ya, Mister Winston, Half-Price Saturday at Goodwill, is the double top-secret hook-up spot."

The Dude and I are walking into the Goodwill store on Apache Trail.

Country music is pumping over the crackly speakers in the ceiling, and the place is hopping. Lines at the registers are five and six people deep. Women are shoving carts into each other, between the aisles of clothes, trying to elbow out the competition. And the lines at the dressing rooms are six deep also.

"It's a party, Mister Winston," The Dude is dipping and grooving down the aisle. "It's a full-on party!"

All they need here is a frozen daiquiri bar and it would be a full-on party.

We head to the back of the store, to the rows of drapes and comforters and sheets. I'm looking for some cheap curtains to hang at the west end of my tin can to cut the sun a little.

Back in the back, standing in the aisles of drapes, there are women who don't want to wait for a dressing room. They're trying on clothes in mid-aisle. Hoping the rows of heavy drapes will hide them.

I discover this the awkward way.

I walk past the end of the aisle, and surprise a woman who's bent over, pulling up a pair of shorts.

"Oooops! Sorry!"

She winks at me, and wiggles her ass a little. But, she's also about seventy-something, and her underpants are almost as big as Texas. So, she didn't seem too concerned that I had caught her in flagrante delicto.

Seems like, during Half Price Saturdays, social customs get a little bit looser. In the spirit of things.

And… She did wiggle her ass at me…

I think I'll come back and look for curtains another day.

And let these ladies have their privacy.

The Dude heads us over to the racks of men's shirts, and starts zeroing in on the Hawaiian looking ones.

"Daddy needs some new babe magnets," he says, looking around to see if he is getting any glances from the females of the species.

I start thumbing through the shirts too, and pull out a nice looking blue one in a Hawaiian style print, with turtles all over it.

A short thin white-haired lady in bright pink yoga pants, raises her eyes at me, as she sees me hold the shirt up to my chest.

"That looked like an open invitation to me, Mister Winston," The Dude winks.

Indeed, as she moves away, the lady does a half turn. And glances back at me with a very pleasant look on her face.

And, she does look very nice in her yoga pants. So, there's that.

"Who knows," smiles The Dude, "could be just what you need for that disability thing. She might be a rich old babe."

I chuckle at him, and shrug it off.

"A nurse with a purse, Mister Winston. A sweet old grandma to keep you in the manner to which you'd like to be accustomed."

She's cute. But she's like—easily—20 years older than me?

He sees me considering it.

"That's the thing about old ladies, Mister Winston," The Dude spreads his hands wide, in his traditional 'Dudish' gesture. "They don't tell, they don't swell, and they're grateful as hell!"

He turns back to the rack.

Sometimes The Dude can be a little too 'Junior High School' for my taste. But he's always entertaining.

Yoga Pants is probably married.

Although, there are lots of widows in these trailer parks around here.

I remember a conversation I had with Todd's wife, one time.

Remember Todd? The one with all the guns?

Yeah, well, one time his wife, Marie, was walking past my old house with her dog. She was poured into a pair of tightly fitting yoga pants.

Well, we were chit-chatting about this and that and she caught me checking out her ass.

"Thanks," she smiled. "I'll take the compliment."

"What are you talking about," I tried to act all innocent.

"You were checking out my ass. Thanks. I'll take the compliment," she winked.

I blushed, I guess.

She waved her hand dismissively, "Don't worry about it. It's the closest us married chicks can get to fooling around with someone, without actually fooling around with them."

"Seriously?"

"You know Todd. He'd kill us both. I can't do shit. But I can shake that ass." She gave it a little wiggle. "And watch them watching."

"Oh, I see."

"I go to Coffee Casa in these pants. Just to watch them drool."

"You go there after yoga?"

"Oh, hell no, I don't do no yoga," she laughed. "A room full of women? Who's gonna look at my ass in there? I ain't no lesbian!"

"So, it's all unrequited attraction?"

She looked at me puzzled.

"You never act on it?" I asked. "Just enjoy the attention?"

"I *love* the attention," she beamed.

"And that's enough for you?"

"Well, neighbor, when it's not enough—well—that's why God invented vodka. Especially Van Gogh Double Espresso Vodka."

"Van Gogh Double Espresso…"

"It's like your first beverage of the day, and your last beverage of the day. All rolled into one!"

The Dude has chosen a handful of appropriate shirts and we are making our way towards the registers.

I keep glancing around for Yoga Pants lady.

Nowhere to be seen.

"Dude, let's stop over at that liquor store on Tomahawk. I suddenly have a hankering for vodka."

Hive Collapse

Sunday 1:15 pm.

"I long for a place completely devoid of human activity," Dan stares wistfully out the front window of his tin can.

Guitar Dan has made a big pot of spaghetti and invited me over to eat. To thank me for helping him redo the electrical wiring in his shed. Now he can use it as a second workshop.

"And I know there are such places," he continues, "but I would also need internet and a grocery store. Oh yeah, and a flush toilet."

"So, not devoid of *all* human activity. Just most of it? The annoying stuff. Right?"

"Exactly."

"Dan, this spaghetti is right on the mark. Perfect. Delicious."

"Thanks, my man. And thanks for helping me."

"Yeah man. So why do you want to get away from human activity?"

"The empire is collapsing. The smart guys, economists and what-not, have been telling us for years. We're in 'hive collapse' mode. I wanna get the hell out of here before it does."

"You think this new guy is bringing it down?"

"Oh hell no. He's just the tip of the iceberg. Look at the millions of people who intentionally voted for him. That's where that problem begins. The millions of people who think that someone *like him* should be allowed in power. That's where that problem starts."

"Hmm…"

"The hive collapsing is all due to the delusions of empire, my man. The US is blindly stumbling down the same path that others have trod before: The Persian Empire, The Roman Empire, The Caliphate… Arab Empire, the Mongol Empire, British Empire…"

"You know your history, Dan."

"Those who don't remember are doomed to repeat. Anyway, all these empires collapsed because of the same thing: They were unsustainable."

"Couldn't afford it?"

"Bankrupted them. Didn't have the leadership to manage it. Didn't have the military to force it to stay together."

"Seriously?"

"Empires are unsustainable. You start forcing the people in your country to pay more and more to sustain your military overseas, and you end up bankrupting your own county. You collapse your own economy. Then you gotta give up your conquests, and retreat to save your country."

"We don't have the money?"

"Oh hell no. The US is thirty trillion dollars overdrawn on their own checking account. And their solution is to keep raising the debt ceiling to go further in the red? It's insanity. A few years ago, we passed the point where it is impossible for us to ever repay that debt."

"Ever?"

"Ever. Accounts receivable and accounts payable can never balance due to the interest accruing."

"Does anybody know this?"

"Every accountant and economist worth his salt has been saying this for years. Nobody's listening."

"That's our great denial kicking in again."

"It's the greatest thing about this country, my man."

I'm stuffing hot spaghetti into my mouth.

"Anyway," he resumes eating, "I'd just like to get the hell out before the shit starts collapsing around me."

"How soon you think that's gonna happen?"

He offers me a plate of garlic toast, "Bread?"

"Thanks man."

"Do you remember a couple years ago when Standard and Poor downgraded the credit rating of the US?"

"Yeah, I think I saw that on the news."

"And then that story sort of disappeared? Never heard any more?"

"Did they get their credit rating back?"

"Oh hell no. World Bank stepped in and told them they couldn't downgrade the credit rating. Financial markets would tumble. World economy would crash. Too many people own our debt. China being the biggest. You can't downgrade our credit worthiness."

"So, they just, what? Lied?"

"Got to. No choice. But think about that—the whole world economy is running on a lie that the US is financially stable."

"You can't be thirty trillion dollars overdrawn and be considered financially stable. I'm no accountant or economist, but even I can see that."

"So now I'll ask you: How soon is the hive gonna collapse?"

"Well…"

"Exactly. It's a runaway train with a cracked boiler on a limited track."

"That's depressing."

"Tell me about it."

"Taco", Taco calls from his roost.

"Taco" Dan sings out.

"But, Dan, aren't social programs the biggest drain on our budget? At least that's what I hear."

"Says the man desperately trying to get Disability," he smirks.

"Yeah. This whole scenario sucks. All the way around."

"But the thing is, Winston, people like you and I *deserve* that help. We paid in, man. For years."

"That's right. And then these millionaire congressmen stand up there and slam us with this phrase 'Entitlements', Like, maybe we aren't *entitled* to what we've earned."

"I hate that attitude."

"More denial."

"Big denial. That idiot Regan stole trillions from social security to fund his Iran contra shit. And never put it back. None of the Republicans have even tried to put it back. Or admit they took it in the first place. So, calling it 'entitlements' is just a way for them to white-wash their guilt about stealing the money. If they can make it look like we didn't deserve it, then it doesn't matter that they took it. See?

Holy fuck! Is this true?

"Look it up, man, look it up. The Social Security Amendments of 1983. One fucked up pile of shit."

"While we're forced to pay their salaries. Yeah, yeah. I've heard it all a million times before. But here's the truth about that whole deal—it's the *job* of the Congress to *find* ways to make damn sure those programs *are* funded. That's their job description. Not to find ways to *cut our benefits.* And funnel that money into paying for *more* military to maintain our global empire. They don't understand their jobs."

"That's true. They don't understand their jobs."

"Or, don't want to do them because their corporate sponsors can't make any money off paying Social Security and Disability. There's no profit there."

"Yeah. All outgoing. No incoming."

"And the sad, pathetic part of it is—you and I man—we got no way to stop this shit."

"Damn it," I mutter into my plate of spaghetti.

"And that is why, my man, I want to get the slam-dunky-fuck out of here before this dumpster catches on fire."

Demand It

Tuesday 6:38 a.m.

"So, Jan, how do you tell the difference? I mean, between someone who has an underdeveloped brain, and someone who was abused as a child? Just by looking at their behavior?"

Sitting out back of their house again, watching the sun slide down between the tall palms.

"If you were abused," Jan begins, "your behavior will give it away. If you were neglected, you'll crave attention. If you were emotionally abused, you'll constantly put other people down. To feel good about yourself."

"I understand that."

"If you were physically abused, you'll physically fight back. If you were sexually abused, you'll see enemies lurking in the shadows. People who want to hurt you. You're always on guard. Never trusting. You'd be easily sucked into conspiracy theories. And sensationalized news stories about people getting away with things they shouldn't be getting away with."

"Yeah, this makes sense."

Jan looks down at her empty glass, "But you have to be able to see it. Unfortunately, in the mental health profession, there are also problems."

"Yeah. Listen to this," Rick points with his eyes at Jan.

Jan gets up and pours herself another glass of tea, "If you're a mental health professional, then you're trained to help people. But unless you were also abused as a child, you can't understand how they feel day to day. Just looking at their behavior, you can misdiagnose it as something else."

"That happens?" I look at her.

"Behaviors can be similar, but have different causes. If all you have is the theories and models that you learned in school, you can miss subtle clues about the origin of a particular behavior. You need to see past the behavior. Past the classifications. You need to read the pain in their eyes."

She sits back down and picks up her cigar.

"Jan knows her stuff," Rick leans back in his chair.

"I was seeing a girl who was anorexic," she continues. "She was trying to make herself unattractive, so her step-father wouldn't want to rape her again. She was trying to make herself so small that she could disappear. You can't treat her for anorexia, and not deal with the source of her behavior. She didn't have low self-esteem. She wasn't a victim of artificial standards of beauty imposed onto her by society. Her behavior was a response to being raped."

"And nobody caught that?"

"You would think so, wouldn't you? This girl had been in counseling for two years. Never got to talk about the rape. The girl told me, every time she would bring it up, her psych would dismiss it or minimize it."

"Why?"

"We see this now and then. Some people get into mental health careers to escape their own pain. If they see people every day who have worse problems than them, then they don't feel so defective. It's another form of compensation. Perhaps her psych was raped and couldn't deal with it."

"Transference is transference," Rick repeats.

"We had a counsellor in our office," Jan turns to me, "who told all his clients that they were alcoholics. Regardless of what issue they came in with. A year later, he went into rehab. Turned out *he* was an alcoholic. He used his job to project his own problems onto other people to avoid dealing with them."

"That's horrible."

"I know. I just feel so sad for the poor people who came to him for help."

"Which brings us back to elected officials," Rick leans forward. "We need to get this shit sorted out."

"Yes, we do," Jan rattles the ice in her glass. "We need to identify the ones who are too emotionally damaged to hold office. And get them help."

"Yeah, but counseling is never gonna help the Unders," Rick shakes his head. "It ain't gonna grow the rest of your brain."

"Seems to me, guys, that the best thing we can do to identify *them*. And somehow block them from running for office."

"Agreed," Jan taps the ash off her cigar. "The very *least* we should require of someone in public service, at *any* level, is that they have a fully developed brain. And no unresolved emotional issues."

"The very *least*," echoes Rick.

"These are important jobs," Jan looks at both of us.

"I agree, you guys. We don't need *extreme* vetting. We need *appropriate* vetting."

"*Appropriate* vetting. Perfect!" Rick chortles. "Exactly."

Jan sighs "Most countries have no way to hold their public servants accountable. The only way you can stop them from screwing things up is to *not* vote for them again. But what if *all* of your choices of candidates are people with issues?"

"You're screwed," Rick waves his hand.

"We just gotta demand it," I break the silence.

"What're you saying?" Jan looks at me.

"Demand that every elected public servant submit to a brain scan. Demand that they undergo psychological evaluation."

"How you gonna do that?" she narrows her eyes.

"Say it loud. Say it often. Demand it. Embarrass them."

"Think that would work?" Rick looks at me sideways.

"Of course it will. It's worked before."

"Rick, he's right," Jan puts her hand on his arm. "Like same-sex marriage. Right? Remember? The people made it happen by demanding it."

Rick nods, "Women's right to vote—black people getting the right to vote. People demanded it. That's why it happened."

I nod. "The government didn't decide, out of the clear blue sky to legalize same sex marriage. It came from grass roots movements in every state."

"That's right," Jan leans back. "The people forced the government to change how they wanted them to change."

"We can do this the same way," I lean back in my chair.

"Might work… Might work," Rick looks out over the golf course.

"No candidate," I continue, "is required to prove that they are mentally and emotionally stable enough to hold the job."

"It's actually insane that we *don't* do this," Jan frowns.

"The most important jobs in our country, you guys—the jobs which involve making decisions that affect the lives and deaths of millions of people, their safety and security—is mental health a basic minimum qualification?"

"Mental health is *not* a basic minimum qualification," Rick points with his cigar.

Jan turns to face me. "We gotta demand it. Publicly embarrass them. Twitter the crap out of them."

"I can already see the memes in my head," Rick chuckles.

"Oh hell yeah," I chuckle, "Facebook would be on fire."

"I know how they're gonna respond," Jan snuffs out her cigar. "The guilty ones won't do it. They'll identify themselves by refusing. They won't be able to control their own responses."

"Yeah, I can see that happening," sighs Rick.

"They'll act like they have nothing to hide," she leans back and stretches. "They'll say that they'll get tested, and then they won't. They'll lie, cheat. They'll submit somebody else's brain scan in place of theirs. They'll bribe doctors to lie for them."

The light is fading slowly into reds and yellows over Phoenix. The birds have gotten quieter. The breeze is starting to pick up.

"Hopefully," Jan sighs, "the truth will come out."

We sit in silence watching the red sun slip away.

As I leave, my head is swimming with thoughts. Rick and Jan have spelled out major chunks of what I have been scribbling down while I sit at the Frankenputer.

I cannot wait until I get home and write this stuff down.

Home.
I weakly glance at my old house as I leave.
It breaks my heart. I loved that house.
I loved this neighborhood. My neighbors. My pool.
Fuck.
And now—home is shitty little tin can.
Shitty, shitty, shitty.

Tell the Truth

Wednesday 9:45 a.m.

Why was Jesus killed?

Why did the Romans kill Jesus?

Did they kill him because he pointed out their abusive behavior? And they couldn't own up to it? So, they had to shut him up?

Why did Judas betray him?
Was Judas a polished knob?
Was Jesus a little boy who was covered in mirrors?
Did Judas see himself in the mirrors, and need to try to break them?

Jesus didn't die for anyone's sins.
Obviously.
That's a fantasy.
Human beings made that up, to legitimize shaming, guilting and terrorizing people into joining their religions.

Jesus was killed to protect the Romans' denial.
They had to shut him up.

Jesus held up mirrors to their faces.

He held them accountable for *their own* behavior.

They had to kill him.

But they didn't do it quickly. They mocked him first. Paraded him around. Tortured him. Made a public spectacle out of him.

A desperate attempt at one-upmanship.

Never realizing that by doing all this, they were admitting their own failure. And, actually making him a martyr in the process.

If Blinkin actually had the ability to communicate with dead people, like some psychics do, then Jesus would have told her this.

But Blinkin made up her 'personal relationship' with Jesus Christ. Because she's old and afraid of dying. She wants desperately to believe that there's something more, after this physical life.

Her fear makes her lie.

And, by claiming that she has some special relationship with a mystical figure, she gets *her* brief feeling of one-upmanship.

But, in the process, Blinkin and all the other extremist Christians have totally missed the point.

And, they've missed the opportunity.

If they truly followed the lead of Jesus, then their mission on earth would be: **To expose denial wherever they found it.**

Wherever they found it.

Even, and especially, if they find it inside themselves.

Their true calling would be to stand up to lying, corrupt and murdering leaders all over the earth.

The cross would be a symbol of truth, not sacrifice or guilt.

Christians have missed the message.

If they truly followed Jesus, they would storm the gates of lies and deception. And force everyone to tell the truth.

That's what he did.

But, instead, Christianity got taken over by people in denial, who use it to do the opposite.

*To **protect** their own denial.*

If you want to call yourself a 'Christian', then the very least you can do is act like Christ did.

Do the things that he did.

Follow his example, and expose denial wherever you find it.

Love, support and help all human beings, to live free from denial, delusions and fantasies.

Well… That felt good to put all that down in words.

And now, PG Tips!

Balance

Friday 8:48 a.m.

We've gone full on Junior High School now in Tin Town.

Apparently, Edmund the Canadian, who lives next door to Guitar Dan, has been running his table saw relentlessly. And his saw is right next to Dan's trailer. Under his bedroom window.

Edmund makes birdhouses as a hobby, and tries to sell them at the Apache Junction Swap Meet.

Apparently, Dan complained to the managers about the noise from Edmund's saw. The managers stepped in and shut Edmund down.

So now, just like back in Junior High School, we have people who are not talking to each other.

Now, there is 'us' and 'them'.

And tonight, the 'cool kids' are having a party.

Edmund and Francine, his wife, and Last Beer Mike, and Piss and Moan, are all laughing and sloshing away. Sitting on green plastic chairs in the driveway next to Edmund's trailer. Edmund is standing out in the

street, slurring in a loud mocking voice: "He said I'm running my table saw too loud. Poor little whiner." And all of them laughing at Dan.

Did none of these people learn how to play nicely with the other children when they were young?

So now—since Dan is hanging out with *me* on *my* porch—now I'm one of the 'bad ones' too.

Guilt by association.

And the cool kids don't talk to me anymore.

It would be impossible for me to slow my brain down enough to comprehend their justification.

I might actually need to have brain surgery, in order to think like they do.

You know: Have part of my frontal lobe removed?

So here we sit. Dan and I. The 'bad' ones.

Sipping our wine, and glancing over at the giggle gaggle of geese getting drunk at Edmund's trailer.

"Winston, I gotta tell you something else, too… You gotta be real careful with all that awareness you keep trying to force. Nature sides with the assholes and idiots. You realized that yet?"

"Hmmm… Dan I— "

"You get so busy believing in what you *want* to have happen that you aren't looking at what *actually* happens. Are we safer? As a species, are we safer than we were 50 years ago? 20 years ago? Are economies getting better and better? Has warfare decreased or increased? Do we all get along better and better as the years go by? Or worse and worse?"

He gestures towards the gaggle.

"You go around trying to force accountability and truth, you're gonna attract an equal and opposite amount irresponsibility and lies

into *your own* life. All things happen in balance my man. That's the biggest spiritual truth there is in this life."

"Yeah. I guess I believe that… I just never…"

"You see these twinkly new age idiots cleansing their homes with sage and crystals, and dribbling on about balance. Gotta balance your life, they tell ya. How am I supposed to do that, you ask? Reject all negative energy, they'll tell ya. Only focus on the positive. If these spiritually balanced soccer moms could drag themselves away from their Facebook feed for two seconds, and take a good look at the Yin-Yang symbol bumper sticker on their Mercedes SUV, they'd realize that balance means equal parts of both positive *and* negative energy. And, at the center of each half, is a little bit of the *opposite* one."

"That's right, Dan."

"You can't reject half of reality, Buckaroo. You gotta embrace all of it. Good *and* bad. Right *and* wrong. Positive *and* negative. You go trying to 'balance' your life with all positives, you're gonna end up with a lopsided life. It don't work. That horse won't run. You just cling to your denial trying not to look at all the negative shit you're manifesting into *your own* life."

"*I'm* manifesting?"

"It's like a magnet, Winston. You go trying to generate a whole bunch of positive energy into your life, you're also gonna attract an equal amount of negative energy. All things happen in balance."

"Is that a Taoist thing, Dan?"

"That's the law of physics, my friend, for each action there is an equal and equal opposite reaction."

"Oh. Right, right. I remember that from my school days."

Once again, Dan reminds me of how much I value his insight.

And, once again, I come away from one of our conversations with an uneasy feeling at the pit of my gut.

The Happy Meal of Spirituality

Tuesday 6:38 a.m.

The air is pungent this morning, with the smell of burning mesquite and creosote.

There's a brush fire along the Salt River, just above the dam.

I'm cutting a hole in a trailer door for a new Tin Towner.

I call her RC.

RC is a petite smiley talkative lady. She has a small dog, and I'm putting a doggy flap in her back door so it can get in and out.

I think RC likes me.

In that special way that females of our species often like the males of our species.

When she introduced herself, she told me: "I'm Lois. Like Lois Lane? You know, Superman's girlfriend? Do you have a girlfriend? Are you married? Do you want a girlfriend? Do you wanna be married?"

"Ummm. Wow. Such a lot of questions. Um."

She finds other things for me to do: take down a shelf she doesn't want, put up a vertical blind, and so forth.

And the whole time I'm doing these chores, she's having a running commentary: *"Now where did I put those batteries. Oh, here they are. And where are you from? Oh, you have a nice big drill. So much nicer than my little drill. And are you married? How long have you lived here? Now we're putting up the light. Do you want to get married? Should I try to find some other screws for that? Oh wait, here's the screws that came with it. Do you want to go to lunch after this?"*

Non-stop.

So: RC for Running Commentary.

And, of course, as it always does in Tin Town, the conversation turns to medical conditions.

She tells me about her main ailments.

Like many Tin Towners, she has dark red patches up both arms from being on blood thinners and having blood drawn for tests.

In the spirit of community bonding, I tell her a little bit about my nerve root impingement and crumbly bone density.

"I had pain in my back for years," she tells me. "And I went to see this Doctor Thomas, and he gave me a shot. No more pain! It's like a miracle. You should go see him."

"Yeah… Um… I don't actually have any pain. I have numbness."

"Well, you should go anyway."

I am so sick and tired of this.

Knowing nothing about my physical condition, nothing about my pathology, nothing about who I've seen, or what I've done… Never seeing my MRIs, having no medical degree or experience… Some total stranger is going to recommend to me some medical treatment. Based on what?

An incorrect assumption that I have not researched my conditions enough? And any and all possible treatments?

Some delusion that the first thing that pops into her head is going to be something my doctors haven't thought of or tried?

I would say this is an American thing, because I see it a lot in the US. Not so much in the UK. And rarely anywhere else I've traveled.

In the UK, people whisper behind your back. They tell *themselves* that they know better than you do, what you should do. And then they smugly congratulating themselves on being wiser than you.

In the US they tell you to your face. Under the guise of being helpful.

But, it's not an American thing.

Because: RC does it.

Eeyore does it.

Piss does it.

Colleen does it.

But:

Ray doesn't do it.

Annie doesn't do it.

The Mayor doesn't do it.

Grumpy doesn't do it.

Dan doesn't do it.

The Dude doesn't do it.

Rick and Jan don't do it.

So… Is this an instinctive thing?

Nurturing Instinct?

"Well, you know," RC brings me out of my thoughts, "You always have Jesus."

Oh great. Perfect.

"I'm guessing that's your frame of reference?" I point to the obviously well-worn bible on the table.

"That's my rock. My salvation."

"Your crutch. Your fantasy."

RC looks at me like I have monkeys flying out of my ears.

I lean against the kitchen counter, "You do realize that the bible is just a collection of stories? And that Christianity is a fantasy that has been fabricated out of those stories. By people who want to believe the stories are real."

"I believe they're real!" she stiffens her back.

"So?"

"So, they're real!"

"Just because you believe it?"

"Lots of people believe it. Millions of people believe it!"

The safety in numbers defense.

I shake my head, "If everyone on earth believed that they were real, that would still not make them real. It would simply make them something that everyone on earth *believes* is real."

"That makes them real," she sets her jaw.

"Six hundred years ago, lots of people thought that the earth was flat. And that you could sail off the edge of it. And not too long ago lots of people believed that women and black people were too stupid to vote. And *they* were wrong too."

"That's different," she spits. "This is God!"

"This is fantasy. Just like a flat earth."

"I believe in God!" Hands on hips. Chin pointed up and to the left.

I can almost see the sun glinting off her Joan of Arc armor. Her battle standards pounding in the wind on either side of her.

"That just means you're gullible," I reply.

"You're crazy," she scowls.

"Crazy? Because I don't share your beliefs?"

"You're wrong."

"You *need* to judge me as wrong, because your frame of reference there, makes you judge everything as wrong or right, good or evil."

"That's all there is, is good or evil."

"Good and evil are two sides of the same coin. One doesn't exist without the other. God is pointless without the Devil. What is there to be saved from?"

"The bible is the word of God," she is speaking slowly and clearly now, as though I have difficulty hearing, or don't understand English.

"No, it's not. It's the words of men."

"They were *inspired* by God."

"No. They were inspired by greed and power."

"I *believe* they were inspired by God!"

"And now we are back to your fantasy that if you believe something, then that means it's true."

"The bible is *all* I need," she waves her hand dismissively.

"Regurgitating memorized stories, and phrases is not spiritual growth."

"I have read the good book every day, for all my life!" Armor glinting. Battle flags pounding.

"But you've done no *work*. You've done *no spiritual search* by yourself. You took the easy way out. You swallowed the Micky D's Happy Meal of Spirituality."

Her head snaps back.

"You go to church and get all filled up," I continue, "then, a little while later, you're hungry again. Because there's no substance to what

you just swallowed. And so, you gotta keep going back to church. And reading the same book, over and over again. Trying to maintain that feeling of being full. Like a compulsive overeater."

She won't look at me now, "You don't know *what* you're talking about."

"I know that it's not your fault. You've been lied to. The bible was never written to be the basis for a religion. You're not supposed to take it *literally*."

"The bible is the truth!"

"It's a bunch of simple stories and parables. All cobbled together, in the deliberate attempt to manufacture proof that a fantasy is not a fantasy."

She shakes her head quickly from side to side.

She's obviously uncomfortable with this conversation, and trying to bury herself in her cleaning.

"Well, I just know what I know," she snaps. "And that's all I need!"

Why do I even bother?
Sometimes you can't even lead a horse to water.

I pack up my tools and carry them out to the car.

And I'm guessing: She probably doesn't want to marry me anymore.

Re-Define the Job

Thursday 7:26 a.m.

"Mornin, mi amigo," the Mayor is on his bike collecting cans.

I salute him from my vantage point on my small porch, where I sit with a big mug of tea. "And a very good morning to you too, Your Honor."

He wheels up to the porch, on his adult tricycle. Rubbermaid trash can bouncing and rattling with his aluminum booty. He lays his arms across the handlebars.

His thin, white, almost non-existent hair whips around in the warm morning breeze.

"I hear you're writin' a book."

He probably got an earful about it from The Dude.

Since our little soirée over at the Legion, when we were telling his Honor about the Cavemen with Cellphones book, I realized something. The Mayor's cataracts seriously interfere with his ability to read. Probably why he was so adamant about 'I don't have time to read no damn book'. He's embarrassed. Poor guy. And just like the rest of us broken down withered brown sticks here at the Trail's End: too damn broke ass to afford surgery.

"Well, I'm writing some stuff down, Your Honor. But I have no delusions about it. If this book makes me a dime, I'll be surprised."

"Heard it's all about our wonderful and illustrious representational government."

"Sort of. Among other things."

"You know, mi amigo, I have always wondered, since I was a votin age… How in the Samuel J. Fuckinhell, do so many idiots get on ballots?"

I laugh. "I hear you, Your Honor, I mean it's not like they all have to send in their resumes. And then Human Resources looks through them for someone with the best education, background, and the most practical experience."

"Oh, hell no," he shakes his head. "That would make too much sense."

"It's basically a juvenile pissing contest, Your Honor."

"That's exactly what it is, mi amigo."

His Honor swings his leg over and gets off his bike. He leans against the handlebars, "Here's the other thing—when somebody gets elected—to my mind, that means they gotta serve *all* the people. Not just the ones what voted for them."

"Yes, I think so too."

"If'n you don't represent *all* the people," he gestures with his hands, "then to my mind, that's a betrayal of trust. That's an act of treason."

He stares at me wide eyed for dramatic effect.

"I agree, Your Honor." I sip my tea.

"It's a few bad apples," he looks around at the trailers across from us. "You know, I watch a lot of news. Hell, I look at the news from all over.

England news, Germany news… Hell, I even lookit that Russian news sometimes. And you know what I see?"

"What do you see, Your Honor?"

"In every country, people are workin their asses off. Every day. Buildin their lives. Payin taxes. Doin their bit. Know what I mean? Every country."

I think he's done. But just as I open my mouth, he continues, "And then, we turn around, and hand off the most important jobs, to stupid, arrogant, know-it-alls. And they trash all our hard work!"

"You're right, Your Honor. They bugger all the stuff we've worked hard to build."

"And there's no consequences for *them*."

"*How* these people get these jobs is just wrong."

"And stupid," he jeers. "Just stupid!"

"If you wanna become a shipping manager for a company," I lean forward in my chair, "to manage what stuff goes into which boxes. And which boxes go onto which trucks. And which trucks go the which destinations—you have to show more qualifications, than you need to show to be president of most countries in the world."

"It's stupid, mi amigo. True! Damn true! *And* stupid!"

"And some of these unqualified people, Your Honor, can end up with their fingers on buttons to launch nuclear weapons."

He just stands there, shaking his head vigorously.

"The other thing that we don't do," I continue, "is periodic reviews. If, after a year, say—the management reviews your work, and it looks like you're not doin the job, then you can get fired. We don't do that with elected officials."

"Oh hell no," he sneers. "That would make too much sense!"

"If you're a shipping manager," I continue, "and you don't show the ability to get the right things in the right boxes and on the right trucks—you can get fired within your first year."

"Three months!" he points his finger, "probation. Standard."

I nod, "But elected officials? Oh hell no. They get to stumble along, being really bad at their job, until their time is up. They can be impeached if they break the law. But if they crash the economy, or incite terrorism, or cause jobs to be lost, we just have to put up with them. That would never happen in a business."

"It's bullshit!" He spits into the street.

"We don't do periodical reviews," I shrug my shoulders.

"None of us bright spark 'intelligent' human beings thought to put *that shit* into our constitutions. Did we?" he snarks.

"And the people in power," I continue, "aren't gonna to put it in now. They're gonna cover their own asses at any cost. They're gonna insulate themselves from being evaluated, and possibly removed."

"You got that shit right."

"And we the people have no way to change that."

"No way," he agrees. "All's you can do is vote 'em out."

"Next time, Your Honor. We gotta wait until the *next* election, to vote them out. That's all our public servants will allow us to do. Meanwhile, we have to put up with them for a full term and watch them bugger god-knows-what."

He looks at me silently, his eyes moving rapidly.

"But that's what I keep tellin ya," he blurts. "These candidates—what if none of them is worth votin for?"

"What if *all* of our choices of candidates are mentally, or emotionally not stable enough for the job? Who the hell do we vote for then?"

"That's my damn point," he points his finger.

"I hear you."

"It seems to me," he grins, "and I ain't no smart assed college boy, or nothin—that we gotta find a way to re-define the job of 'representative'. So that no matter *who* gets the job, they cain't force their own personal opinion into the government."

"That would be ideal."

"Maybe you could put some of that shit into your book, mi amigo."

"Good idea, Your Honor."

He climbs back onto his bike. "I mean seriously, haven't 'We the People' had just about enough of these goddamn juvenile pissing contests already?"

And, with that, he waves his hand in the air, and pushes off towards the clubhouse.

We Shall See

Saturday 7:43 a.m.

Well, that's that.

Finally got OS2020 into a nice polished document and just emailed it to an internet radio station in Belgium.

The host, Georges, seems like an open-minded person, and some of the guests he has on the show are saying things pretty close to what my thoughts are. So… We shall see.

We shall see.

It Ain't 1783

Friday 7:18 pm.

Daisy is back.

She and her mom came by a little while ago and stopped to chit chat.

It was nice to see her again.

Now I'm sitting here on the porch, enjoying the cool evening air, and having a celebratory 'whisky' to celebrate finishing OS2020.

Daisy saunters back around the corner, by herself, and up to the porch with a grin on her face, "You looked like you were having such a nice time, I thought I'd come join ya."

"Absolutely," I stand up and gesture to the other chair.

"You gonna offer a girl a drink?" she grins.

"Step into the bar and let's see what we've got," I push the door open and she follows me in.

"A bit sparse at the moment," I scan the fridge. "Whisky or red wine."

"I'll have what you're having," she smiles.

I go about getting a glass and ice. She looks at my scrawled notes scattered across the kitchen table.

"What were you writing today?"

"I was working on a piece about who should vote on laws."

I hand her a glass of 'whisky' on ice.

"Interesting. You must tell me all about it," she beams.

I gesture to the front door, and we walk out and sit down on the chairs on the porch.

"It seems to me," I cradle my glass, "that if we could do one thing—to stop the deadlock and corruption in our countries—it would be to let the people vote on laws."

"Not our elected representatives."

"Right."

"Hmmm…"

"There's absolutely no logical reason to let this system of 'representation' continue. I mean, the people who started our countries—the people who wrote our constitutions—had absolutely no way of knowing what kinds of communication technologies we would eventually create."

"Yeah. Internet, television, radio, smart phones."

"Exactly. Everyone has the ability to vote on their own behalf."

"We do! We can vote for ourselves!"

"Yes. And everyone has the *right* to vote on which laws they will, or will not force themselves to live under."

"So, you're saying—*We* write the laws?" She looks at me.

"No. No. Our 'representatives' continue to propose and write legislation. But the people *themselves*, and *only* the people, vote on that legislation."

"Smart. Then everyone's vote is equal."

"Exactly."

"And all them lobbyists bribing congressmen…"

"Would be out of work."

"Brilliant," she beams at me.

"How are you going to lobby and bribe all *the registered voters*?"

"You can't," she waves dismissively. "That shit's over."

"So how exactly would this work?" she swishes the ice in her glass.

"Our representatives continue to propose and write legislation. Then they provide us with the full text of every bill, online, on public broadcasting…"

"Like a separate government TV channel?"

"Yeah. Maybe it scrolls bills all day and night so you can read them."

"In the libraries? Something for the blind? Like maybe a toll-free number, so they can listen to the bill being read?"

"Absolutely. By *all available* media and technology."

"This is brilliant, Winston. I mean, more people voted on their phones and online for American Idol, than voted in the last presidential election."

"Exactly my point. If we make it easy and convenient for people to vote, then more people will do it. And Thomas Jefferson's dream of citizens actively engaged in their own government, finally becomes a reality."

"You're really like a smart guy—aren't you?" she grins.

"Just observant, really. I mean you got this immediately. Right? It's not a difficult concept. Anyone might think of this."

She grins, and looks at me over the rim of her glass.

"So, they write the bills and post them, Daisy. We vote. They collect and count our votes. And then it's law or not."

"It's just so obvious," She rocks back and forth.

"Back in 1783, all the farmers in one area of Virginia couldn't vote on bills in Washington. So, they chose one guy. And he got on a horse and rode up to Washington to vote *for* them. That was a *privilege* they trusted him with."

"Yeah, well, it ain't 1783 no more."

"No. Exactly. We can vote for ourselves."

I look down at my glass. Ice has melted.

I look up at her, "Refill?"

"Let's go inside," she stands up and follows me in, closing the door behind her.

I open the freezer to get more ice.

"So… Mr. Smart Guy…" she purrs behind me, "Do you really want another drink right now? Or maybe wait until… Later?"

I turn, and she's undoing the top button on her shirt.

"I thought you were married?" I stammer.

"I don't see no husband," she coos, moving towards me.

Makeyouhurlaquin

Monday 11:18 a.m.

Speaking of pale sickly gullible white folks, what the hell is the point of drug commercials?

There's lots of them. On local tv channels it seems like every third commercial is for some drug of some kind.

And the message is the same: "Ask your doctor if you should be on this medicine."

Like your doctor might not know that this medicine is available. And probably hasn't considered prescribing it for you. Because they don't watch tv.

Right.

I know a woman who is a drug rep for a major pharmaceutical company. She knew every doctor in her area. It was her job description to know them. And repeatedly call on them to suggest prescribing the medications her company made. She would buy their whole office staff lunches and bring them coffee and such.

Drug reps constantly make these doctors aware of all medications available. Including the competition's medications. And why they suck and why their medications are better.

It's called sales.

I heard her talking to some other drug reps one time about this approach where they were instructed to tell a doctor, "You're so smart, you should be one of our thought leaders."

Thought leaders? Sounds like a phrase an uneducated teenager might make up. Basically, someone who leads other people's thoughts? A doctor who tells other doctors which medicine to prescribe because they are so wise that they know better than these other doctors what they should be prescribing?

Seriously? How desperate is that to push your product.

So, yeah. Your doctor is well aware of every drug there is available. Painfully aware. A target of the industry.

I learned that a good sales rep actually tracks which medications a certain doctor is prescribing and how often. Isn't that an invasion of privacy?

But let's look at the effect these drug commercials have on the average person. The ads are telling people that they are wiser than their own doctors. That they know more about what drug they should be taking than their doctor does.

Because they watch tv.

Is this really the right thing for pharmaceutical manufactures to be doing? Empowering patients to not trust their own doctor?

Bigger picture: Is this where the 'alternative medicine' movement gets its motivation?

"You are smarter than your doctor. You know better than your doctor which medicine you should be taking."

From there it's an easy jump to: "If I'm smarter than my doctor, then maybe I should try some other forms of treatment. Like ancient treatments that people did thousands of years ago. Herbs. Natural medicine. Mind/body medicine. Acupuncture. Frequency balancing. TENS machines. Infrared Light Therapy. Integrated medicine or integrative medicine. Holistic medicine. New Age medicine."

Anything other than your doctor prescribing pharmaceuticals.

From Wikipedia:

"Alternative medicine refers to practices that aim to achieve the healing effects of conventional medicine, but that typically lack biological plausibility, testability, repeatability, or supporting evidence of effectiveness. Unlike modern medicine, which employs the scientific method to test plausible therapies by way of responsible and ethical clinical trials, producing repeatable evidence of either effect or of no effect, alternative therapies do not originate from using scientific methods, but instead rely on testimonials, anecdotes, religion, tradition, superstition, belief in supernatural "energies", pseudoscience, errors in reasoning, propaganda, fraud, or other unscientific sources."

Is telling people they're smarter than their doctor actually driving them away from the products they are trying to sell?

Do the drug companies even think about this?

Because it's not logical to think you know more about what medication you should be taking because you saw a TV ad.

Is this where the anti-vaccination movement was born?

(music up)

(happy people smiling and dancing in unison)

(voice over): Ask your doctor about Makeyouhurlaquin. To see if it's right for you. Look at all these happy dancing people. They take it, and they are happy and dancing. Don't you want to be happy and dancing?

(spoken very quickly): Some possible side effects are nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, shortness of breath, temporary or permanent loss of taste, temporary or permanent loss of hearing, temporary or permanent loss of vision, temporary or permanent loss of balance, temporary or permanent loss of teeth or hair. Worsening symptoms. Cancer, heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, fatigue, delusions, uncontrollable anger, rash, open sores, involuntary muscle movements, slurring of speech, paralysis and death.

Don't take Makeyouhurlaquin if you are allergic to it. Which you won't know until after you take it, at which time it will be too late, and you will die.

Don't take Makeyouhurlaquin if you are taking any other medicine for any other condition. Or, if you are pregnant, might become pregnant, know someone who is pregnant, or live within 5 miles of someone who is pregnant.

You too can be a happy dancing person, just like these people. Ask your doctor today! Because your doctor is probably dumber than you and doesn't watch TV.

(music out)

The Cedar Fence

Tuesday 4:12 pm.

Quail are the goofiest looking birds on the planet.

They run along with their little topknots bobbing on their heads, making little noises like: "Oh dear, there's a human being! Oh, he might kill me! Oh dear! Must run. Must run. Oh dear."

Just goofy.

I'm standing out in the street.

Quail are running by me all freaked out to be so close to a human being. Squeaking their little noises as the scurry past.

"If you're so freaked out," I tell them, "then why don't you scurry past on the *other* side of the street? You know—*Away* from the scary human?"

Stupid quail.

We've had three days of rain and strong winds. Some stuff got blown around all over.

I'm checking to make sure my bamboo in my pallet boxes is still neatly arranged. And didn't get blown out away.

It's fine.

It's all wedged in place with black Mexican beach pebbles. It's not going anywhere.

I shouldn't stand out in the street like this.

I make myself an open target.

Sure as shit, here comes Piss. Shuffling over. Head down and swinging from side to side. Like a mental patient checking out the hallway on his ward, "Howdy neighbor."

"Oh hey, (Piss), how's it going?" *Shit! Forgot again! Please don't tell me.*

"I was thinking about your pallet boxes and stuff that you built there. And—uh—you know there's some things…"

"Oh yeah?" *Here it comes…*

"You know pallets are heat treated, and they got an IPPC logo on them that's got an 'HT' stamp to show that they've been heat treated. The IPPC logo is for International Plant Protection Convention, 'cause pallets that are shipped internationally, 'cause they're required to be made of a material that don't carry invasive insect species, or plant diseases through different countries. So, the IPPC standards, a pallet can't be made of raw wood that hasn't been treated, so all pallets are treated. That's what the 'HT' stamp means so that you know if it hasn't been treated with Methyl Bromide for fumigation, like they used to, that would have an 'MB' stamp, or 'DB' to say it's been debarked. 'Cause that's for international shipping, 'cause there are international laws you know, about what you can and can't ship from country to country, and so the wood has to be fumigated so that bugs and stuff don't travel to other countries and then start an infestation in Singapore or something with a bug from Norway, because they would have problems—"

"Yeah, yeah," I interrupt, *Cheese and rice, this guy is like Forrest Gump with this steady stream of consciousness.*

"Did you notice," I continue, "how I used the pieces of the pallets with the IPPC logo on the outside corners so people can see that I don't use any that have been treated with Methyl Bromide?"

"Yeah I saw the logo, that's why I checked," he picks his ramble back up, "Cause you *don't* want to use the 'MB' stamped, the Methyl Bromide, Methyl Bromide fumigation, 'cause it's a pretty strong pesticide, that's been linked to health problems and ozone layer depletion—and—and—they use it to treat the wood to kill invasive species, like pine beetles, because, you know—if someone got a sliver, you know, a wood sliver in their finger from one of your pallet boxes, and then they got sick from the chemicals, then you know you could get sued and they'd be really sick, might be a bad thing."

Cheese and rice, Piss, do you just sit around all day thinking of the worst-case scenario? Is that the motivating force in your life?

"Yes, yes," I try to stop his stream of conscious rambling, "That's why I *don't* use any pallets with the 'MB' stamp, I only use the 'HT' ones, the heat treated—"

"Well, that's what I'm saying," he rolls along over top of me without pausing, "is that you *don't* want to use the 'MB' ones because someone could get sick, but I suppose if maybe you painted them, that might seal in the chemicals in the wood, if you painted your pallet boxes, then you would probably be OK, for someone not getting a splinter in their finger. I have a bunch of paint in all different colors that I get from clients, that's left over, you know, like if they paint their kitchens or something, and have extra paint they don't want, if you wanted to pick out a color, I have some nice colors, I'd just give you the paint, Well—except for the can of the terra cotta color, because we were

going to use that in our kitchen, but I would give you any of the other colors you might want to paint your pallets…"

"Yeah…" I run my hand through my hair and look at his vacant stare as he babbles on. I seriously think this guy is missing part of his brain.

"Yeah, 'cause, we're gonna paint the kitchen, once we get the wall pushed out, you know 'cause I gotta push out that front wall of my trailer," he turns and gestures towards the front wall of his trailer, *(Just in case I didn't know where the front wall of his trailer is),* "Gotta move it out about six inches so I can get a dish washer in my kitchen, because (Moan's) hands are all red and cracked from doing dishes, and I already have the shut off valve to put in, to feed the dishwasher, and when I put the new laminate floor in I left room for the…"

Oh, cheese and rice.

Are we gonna hear about the stainless-steel gas stove with the fifth long burner in the middle that you can drop in the flat griddle for cooking pancakes, again too?

But—you know what?

It's a bad thing to admit. But I bait him.

I can't help it.

It's like dangling a piece of yarn in front of a cat.

And the piece of yarn I'm gonna dangle today? The cedar fence between his trailer and Blinkin's.

Here's the deal, the cedar fence was put in by the previous owner of Blinkin's trailer. Apparently, he was into man-spreading, and pushed the absolute limits of his lot size. He put this fence all the way down the property line, from the street to the cinder block wall behind the trailers.

And, as Piss will tell you, over and over: It violates Apache Junction City Fire Code. The firemen need to run between the trailers with hoses. You can't have fences that may block them from being able to maneuver around and between the trailers when trying to control a blaze.

As I have said, we are right up on each other's tits in this park. A fence like that is totally gonna be in the way of firefighters trying to get to the back of the trailer.

In fact, this fence, and a couple of other fire violations, is why the previous owner said: "Screw this place, I'm moving!" And sold his trailer to Blinkin.

He sounds like he was a real polished knob.

Glad I didn't meet him.

And glad he's not my neighbor.

But. Anyway.

"Hey (Piss), I thought you were gonna take out that cedar fence between your trailers?"

"Well, I can take it out anytime," he replies.

I have changed directions on him right in the middle of long stream of consciousness about pushing out his front wall so he can put a dishwasher in his kitchen.

"Uh," he recovers, "yeah, 'cause the first responders need access to the backs of all the trailers, 'cause the fire code, and the Fire Marshall said—"

I interrupt him again, "Remember when we were havin' beers that time, and I was leaning on that fence? And I got that splinter in my hand? And you said that wood was treated, so I might need a tetanus shot. And I said you were gonna pull it down anyway. So, you probably didn't need to worry about whether or not to sand it and seal it in the

meantime. Like, to stop someone from possibly getting a splinter from it?"

"Yeah…" he's scanning my face to see if I'm jerking him around, "'Cause the first responders need to have access to the backs of all the trailers."

"And you were gonna pull that fence down, right?" I look at him.

"Yeah— 'cause it's in the way of the first responders…" he starts.

"And *when,* did you say, that you were gonna pull that fence down?"

"Well… he shuffles from foot to foot, "I mean… I can take it down any time…"

"Sure, sure," I continue, "But *when* did you *first* tell me that you were gonna pull that down? That was like nine months ago? Ten months?"

"Well…" he shuffles again, "Last week I hadda change a hot water heater, and tomorrow I got appointments… And stuff…"

"So anytime now, you're telling me? Really? Any time now, and it'll be down? Right? Like *way in advance* of when the first responders might need to run through there with a hose. *Way in advance* of that. Right? And of course, there's really no point in sanding the fence or sealing it to stop someone else from getting splinters. 'Cause you're gonna take that thing down like *any time now*. Right? Like *any time*?"

"Well…" he stares at the fence, "'Cause like I say, I hadda change a hot water heater, and tomorrow I got appointments…"

Utopian Not Dystopian

Wednesday 7:43 a.m.

When people write about the future, the words they use are dystopian and apocalyptic. Why? Why is the general consensus that the future is going to be devastation and ruin? Why?

What if, in the future, after we have fucked ourselves out of our own stability and safety, we finally start doing things to prevent ourselves from doing that again?

What about a positive view of the future?

Star Trek certainly was.

It wasn't dystopian or apocalyptic.

It was better. Unity. Spreading peace and inclusion.

And, yes, there were a few bad races, but they certainly were not the dominant power.

I'm just saying, it's possible.

It's just as possible that we create a better, stronger, more stable, hopeful and positive future.

On the Radio

Friday 12:18 PM

So—
This is pretty exciting.
I sent my manuscript off to a radio show in Belgium.
And I got a response!
And they had me call in, and—

Well, here— I'll just play the tape:

"This is Radio Safe Net, Belgium. Good morning. This is Georges Lemaître. Talking with Mr. Winston Smith. He's a writer. Originally from the UK. And now living in sunny Arizona. Good morning, Winston."

"Good morning, Georges from Apache Junction."

"Winston sent me an email with a manuscript. OS2020. It's a concept, right? Are you comfortable with that term Winston?"

"Sure, concept. Option."

"So, Winston sent me this OS2020 and the first time I read it I thought, 'Who is this guy and what is this crazy fiction?' Sorry Winston, just being honest here."

"Yes, no worries. That's a pretty common first reaction."

"So, I started reading sections of OS2020 on air, and the response has been incredible. I put it up on our website as a free download, and

today, let's see, yes. Today we have passed two thousand downloads! Two thousand!"

"That's amazing. It's nice to find receptive ears."

"So, Winston, for those of our listeners who have not had a chance to look at your manuscript, give us an overview."

"Absolutely. OS2020 changes two important parts of our government: First, who qualifies to get on a ballot, and second, how to immediately remove elected officials if they fail us."

"OK. So, first—qualifications?"

"The people we have in elected public offices are chosen by a junior-high school style popularity contest."

"I would agree with that."

"We have the least number of qualifications for the most important jobs in the country. There's no experience in anything required. And not even a civics test to see if you know how the government actually works."

"That's true! Sad, but true."

"Georges, if you want to get hired as a shipping manager for a company, you have to show more qualifications than you need to show to be president of most countries in the world."

"I never thought about that."

"Second: we don't do periodic reviews. If, after a year, the management reviews your work, and it looks like you're not doing the job, then you can get fired. We don't do that with elected politicians. Members of Congress, Ministers or Members of Parliament. Or even mayors, or governors, or judges."

"You're right. They do that in every job. Even mine."

"If you're a shipping manager, and you don't show the ability to get the right things on the right trucks then you can get fired within your first year. Or, at the end of a standard probationary period. Say, 3 months."

"Exactly!"

"But elected politicians? Oh hell no. They get to stumble along, being really bad at their job, until their time is up. We can remove them if

they break the law. But their party won't vote to remove them. So, they get to stay in office. And if they crash the economy, or incite terrorism, we just have to put up with them. That would never happen in a business."

"None of us 'intelligent' human beings thought to put periodical reviews into our constitutions. Did we?"

"And the people in power aren't gonna to put it in now. They're gonna cover their own asses at any cost. They're gonna insulate themselves from being evaluated, and possibly removed."

"You got that right."

"And we the people have no way to change that."

"No way. All you can do is vote them out."

"Next time. We've got to wait until the next election, to vote them out. Meanwhile, we have to put up with them for a full term and watch them bugger god-knows-what."

"So, Winston, what's the answer?"

"Two things. First, we need to change the way we hire public servants. At a minimum. Put out a call for resumes. Reject applicants who have no experience or education that would qualify them."

"Yeah, it's easy to just say you're qualified and get on a ballot these days."

"And, apparently, the angrier you get at people who claim you aren't qualified, the more likely you are to attract the attention of angry adults who were abused, and their vote can elect you."

"Not based on qualifications, just by acting angry and arrogant."

"Sadly, it's what passes for strength and confidence these days." "No kidding."

"The more important the job, the higher the bar must be set. That's just common sense. You need more qualifications to get hired as a janitor at a high school than you need to run for president or a member of congress."

"That is very true. Sad, but true."

"But most importantly, we need a mechanism." "Mechanism?"

"That's the second part. A mechanism to immediately remove these public servants if they threaten the safety and security of the people, the economy or the country."

"And how do we do that? What is your 'mechanism'?"

"I call it The Firewall."

"Oh, right, right, right. The quorum of average citizens."

"Yes. Let the people have a mechanism to shut down destructive behavior before it causes serious or permanent damage."

"A Firewall."

"It's a mechanism. A mechanism we don't have right now."

Misdiagnose

Monday 2:16 PM

Texting with my old neighbor Jan:

Me: *Another mass shooting! School kids!*
Jan: *saw that on news last night. So tragic*
Me: *When is somebody gonna do something!!*
Jan: *Wrong people dealing with it*
Me: *They say it's not guns its mental illness*
Jan*: They're right*
Me*: What?!*
Jan*: The mental illness of people who would rather kill someone than get counseling*
Me*: That's true*
Jan*: The mental illness of politicians who do nothing to control guns*
Me*: Ur right*
Jan: The mental illness of gun manufacturers who have no conscience
Me*: Ur right ur right*
Jan: *Nobody says unresolved anger from being abused*
Me: *Never hear those words*
Jan: *Why?*
Me: *Yes! Why?*

Jan*: A few reasons. Politicians getting kickbacks for not toughening gun regs*

Me*: yes*

Jan*: News reporters have no idea what they are looking at.*

Me*: True true*

Jan: *Misdiagnose. Psychiatrists don't know what they're looking at*

Me:?

Jan*: Who knows more about the behavior of adults who were abused as children? Adults who were actually abused as children? Or people who study adults who were abused as children?*

Me*: Ur right. As usual. Did you see that talk show host slamming the kids who survived the shooting? WTF?!?!*

Jan*: Once again. Same thing*

Me*:? What same? Why is she smacking down people who have been victimized?*

Jan*: Because nobody else gets to be a victim. What happened to her is the most important thing. She is the victim. Everyone has to pay attention to her so she can get resolution. Nobody else gets to steal the attention*

Me: *Sick really sick*

Jan*: There's plenty of help available...*

Mixed Signals

Thursday 1:46 PM

"Well, hello there, you."
It's Sirocco.

I didn't see her until I pushed open the laundry room door.

"Well, Winston, where have you been hiding yourself?" she purrs, stepping towards me and grinning a big Cheshire Cat grin.

Sirocco?
She's looking at me like I'm a hot lunch.

I stutter and stammer about laundry, almost dropping my basket in the process.

She takes my basket from me, and gives me a wink. She turns around and bends over right in front of me. Presenting her shapely ass, sheathed in black leggings, as she places my laundry basket next to hers by the washers.

I can easily see her leopard print thong underwear through her leggings.

Boring hot wind Sirocco?!?!

I mean, don't get me wrong, her ass is magnificent. I guess I never got a good look at her before. Because she was sitting down the whole time, when I first met her. But she's easily ten years older than me. Granted, age is a lot less of an issue when you're over sixty. But still.

Sirocco?!?!

And, she's holding the pose for waaaay longer than she needs to. Just to set down my basket.

She knows exactly what she's doing. Presenting.

Sirocco stands back up and turns. Stepping towards me she places her hand flat on my chest. "You shouldn't be such a stranger," she purrs.

"Mister Winston!" The door flings open and The Dude sweeps into the room with a basket of clothes. Some of them tumbling to the floor as he enters.

Sirocco immediately pulls away and crosses over to the dryers.

"Hey man," he sniggers, "you banging babes in the laundry now?" He winks at Sirocco.

She huffs and sticks out her chin. Then she grabs her basket of clothes and quickly swishes out of the laundry room.

The Dude stops and looks at me. Then he looks out the open laundry room door at Sirocco's curvy ass wiggling in her leggings. As she strides away towards her trailer. "Did I just mess something up, man?"

"I don't know," I hear myself say. "I really don't know."

"Hey man," he starts stuffing handfuls of clothes into a washer. "I can't stop thinking about what we was talking about the other day, man."

"Oh. Uh. Huh?" I watch Sirocco disappear around the edge of her trailer. And just as she did, she glances back at the laundry room.

Was that a smile? Did she see me? What the hell?

"We made a big mistake, Mister Winston." The Dude is dumping clouds of powdered detergent into the dispenser. Way more than necessary.

"We allowed someone to become President," he jingles in his pocket for quarters, "who should never have been allowed to become President."

He spills his change on the floor. I bend over to help him pick it up.

"Because," he continues, "we don't got nothing in the laws to stop that shit from happening."

He looks at me right in the face, "I hope we figure this out now. And stop this shit. Before he really screws up."

The Dude feeds quarters into the machine and punches the button. The machine squeals to life and starts filling with water.

He leans back on the machine, takes off his baseball cap, and runs his fingers through his shaggy mane.

I'm still trying to process the almost—whatever—that just almost happened with Sirocco.

The Dude looks around the empty laundry room, then pulls out a smoke and lights up.

"When I was In-Country," he lowers his voice, "they were sending in these 90-day wonders. Second lieutenants. The men called em 'Butter

Bars'. And these bastards had twelve weeks of OCS. I mean, think about it. They take some college kid and give him twelve weeks of basic, then ship him In-Country, and put him in charge of a buncha men?"

He pauses to take a puff from his smoke. And looks around to make sure no one else is within hearing distance.

"Them OC's didn't know squat about what was going on," he continues. "They had no idea. They'd start barking orders just to look like they knew what they was doin. But they didn't know *squat*."

He looks around again.

"So, these OC's were givin' orders, that the boys knew were the wrong thing to do. They were gonna get the whole platoon wasted."

He puffs again, and looks around nervously. "So, I heard that some of these boys let the brakes off a tank at night. Let it roll down over the OC's tent while he was asleep."

He taps the ash off his smoke onto the floor, "I guess they figured, better him, than the whole platoon."

He looks around nervously again, "Towards the end of the war, the Army figured the deal out, right? I mean it was like a buncha OC's got fragged. So, the higher highers started listening to the boys who were In-Country, and stopped sending in these OC's. And they made up some new regs so that no gung-ho, dinky dau college kid could come in there and waste an entire platoon. Just because they didn't know what the hell they was doin!"

Out of the corner of my eye, I can see Sirocco hovering at the corner of her trailer. Looking at the laundry room door.

The Dude starts strutting along in front of the row of washers. "I mean, we cain't have no amateurs doin shit. I mean, we get some amateur in gov… And he don't like somebody, like Mr. Kim Dinky Dong,

and he decides to push the button? Man, we gotta have a way to stop that shit, man."

I'm listening to him. I'm trying to. But I'm still a little distracted.

Sirocco has vanished again. So, I turn my full attention to The Dude.

He grinds out his cigarette on the clean linoleum floor.

"Look, man—if some elected guy has got that prefrontal thing—is there anyone who has the power take that guy out of office? I mean, if they realized, like some elected guy, is doin shit that messes with national security?"

"Good question."

The Dude fishes another cigarette out of his pack. "Just because they got the jobs they got," he lights his smoke, "don't mean they can't have the prefrontal thing. Right?"

"Oh, absolutely."

"I'm just sayin if it's an *elected* guy—are they immune?"

I glance back out the door. No Sirocco.

"But Dude, what if their specific mental or emotional problem *is exactly why* they got elected/appointed/selected/hired in the first place?"

"See! See!" he jabs his finger in the air.

"Because they perceive enemies where they don't exist. And, they terrorize millions of people with their own delusions. And present themselves as the *only one* who can fix the problem."

"Well, Mister Winston," he laughs, "that's like most of the politicians in the last 50 years. Right?"

I look out the door again, "But, Dude," I turn back towards him. "If you *could* take that guy out of office—won't the people who voted for *him,* just vote another one in?"

He looks down at his cigarette and rolls the filter between his fingers, "Mister Winston, we gotta get a lot more intelligent. Don't we?"

"Or," I point my finger in the air, "or acknowledge that we are deliberately dumbing ourselves down to the level of comprehension of the mentally slowest ones of our species. And, embrace the consequences of that behavior."

He snorts, "Yeah, boy, we're doin that dumbing down thing, all right."

"But, without either the realization or the acceptance," I reply.

He looks over my shoulder, staring at the cement block wall behind me. A million miles away.

"We're fucked," he whispers.

I look out the window again.

And we both stand there. Surrounded by the rhythmic churning of the washers and dryers.

God is an Asshole

Friday, 7:13 pm.

"God is an asshole."

"Whoa, Dan—that's a pretty harsh— "

"Think about it. His whole schtick is, 'Praise me, do what I say or I will torture you in hell forever.' That is some fucked up asshole behavior."

"Well, I mean—"

"Look at the evidence, man. Look at the character of the God described in the Old Testament. He creates human beings. And then constantly tests their allegiance to him. Setting them up to fail, then punishing them for failing."

"Yeah, that's the setup."

"If this God is all-knowing, then he knows that they will fail. He knew that Adam and Eve would be tempted. So, he created human beings to be playthings for him. To use and abuse at his own amusement. Look at Sodom and Gomorra. Since this god is all-knowing, then he knew human beings could act like this. So, he set them up. And then takes great pleasure in torturing them for eternity."

"I see your point."

"That's not love. That's abuse."

"You are not wrong."

"God is an asshole."

"Wow. I guess I never—"

"And, guess what, my wine swilling compadre?"

"What?"

"Problem is, God being an asshole was a hard sell for those who were trying to promote and grow their religion."

"Oh, hell yeah."

"So, they attached the New Testament to the old. The New Testament and the Old Testament do not belong together. They are two very different belief systems. But they tried to use the character of Jesus to whitewash the abusive asshole nature of God and make him more salable."

"Easier sell?"

"It was a marketing ploy. A very popular one still in use today by manufacturers and politicians."

"Nothing new under the sun."

"Nothing new under the sun."

Dan fills our glasses again, "Anyway, Jesus is presented as the shiny happy face of God. Look at his beautiful son who cares about you and washes the feet of beggars and feeds the poor. Don't you love God now? How could you possibly not want to serve and worship the deity who created such a beautiful son?"

"That's some slick marketing."

"But, as usual, not the whole story."

"True, true.""

"They conveniently leave out the part about how he created this beautiful son."

"The Virgin Mary."

"Yeah. Raping an innocent virgin and telling her that she is special and blessed for being raped and forced to bear his son."

"Blessed for being raped and used."

"Another philosophy born out of this myth and propagated by its followers."

"Huh?"

"Raping women means you are giving them a gift. They are lucky you chose them."

"That is so fucked up."

"This is where it started."

Once again, listening to Dan is expanding my mind. It actually hurts. Or, that might be the three 'whiskys' I had before he came over with the wine.

"So," Dan looks up towards the ochre sun gently slippin down behind the Santa Rosa Mountains, "This God created us in his image. An asshole. So, when we act like assholes, we are just following the way of God. Doing his will. Convenient. Isn't it?"

"Assholes!"

It just occurred to me, this spawning by force is eerily similar to the concept in that movie Alien with Sigourney Weaver. Is this where those writers got the idea?

Ain't nothing new under the sun.

Alien was a great visual experience. From the little spawn erupting from John chest to perhaps the sexiest fight scene on film with Sigourney wrangling the alien into the eject position in her white cotton underpants. Both strokes of genius in my book.

But I digress.

I wonder when Daisy is coming back to see her mother again?

Anyway, Christianity…

So, Dan went on to say, look at the behavior of these so-called Christians.

Ain't nothing Christ-like about it.

For starters, they compulsively lie. And then lie again to cover up and defend their lying.

It ain't about Jesus. It's all about their egos.

Their damaged egos, to be precise.

Once again.

Ego is the driving force in much of human behavior.

They wrap themselves in this cloak of power and authority because they have Jesus and God on their side so they are way better than all the rest of us, poor miserable ignorant and obviously stupid humans. No one can dare question their behavior because they are right. Always. Because they have God on their side.

That's what it's about—being right. And feeling like they are smarter than other people.

And who would need to do this on a daily basis?

People who suffered abuse as children and people who are painfully aware of their underdeveloped prefrontal cortices. And, aware that they are mentally slower that those around them.

So much of this behavior ends up in the same place.

The same damn place.

More Fun with Snowbirds

Saturday 7:48 a.m.

Grumpy said there was nobody at coffee last week.
And I've seen several snowbirds pack up and leave lately.
So, I was thinking it might be safe to go back to coffee again.
Wrong.

First, I bump into Hear No Speak No. They're coming out of their trailer just as I'm passing it. Obviously, they're walking to coffee too.

"I think we're probably headed for the same place," I smile. Trying to start off on a light note.

"And how are you today?" Hear No asks.

"Oh, fine, just fine."

"Well," she angles her head, "going to be getting a lot hotter now."

Yeah. Because that's what it does in Arizona.
As summer approaches.
It gets hotter.

I just smile awkwardly.

"And," she continues, "will be a lot quieter with all of us gone." And the tone, the inflection of her voice was like: *Aren't you going to miss us? Aren't you going to be sorry when all of us are gone?*

"Oh, I actually prefer the quiet," I reply.

They both look at me awkwardly.

Well, so I get to coffee, and there's still a bunch of people there. And the whole kindergarten table set up is still in place.

So, I grab a cup of coffee. And, as I do, I see Marvin.

Marvin is a snowbird from Wyoming.

His special super hero magic power? He makes the plastic name tags for all the residents.

He made one for me back in November when he first got here.

It's a whole thing with these name tags.

Everybody at Saturday coffee has to have a name tag.

Or Marvin will socially embarrass you if you don't have one.

So. Silly me. I forgot my name tag.

"Hiya!" Marvin shakes my hand, a little too forcefully, "Winston? Isn't it? Winston?" He turns to the guy next to him, "I couldn't tell, because he doesn't have his name tag on! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Hello, Marvin. Yes. I forgot it."

"Well, don't worry," he pats me on the back, "we'll still let you have some coffee. Ha, ha, ha, ha! Some of us remember that you're a resident! Ha, ha!"

I get my coffee and scurry away to sit at the table with Annie and Grumpy.

Annie is being her usual smiley flirty self. Grumpy tells me that she bought a new window blind, and asks if I would please hang it for her. She probably wants to get me alone so she can ask me out to the casino again. Without any of our neighbors hearing her.

Marvin starts talking behind me, "Can I have everyone's attention, please. Can I get everyone's attention?"

I turn to look at him as Grumpy stops in mid-sentence.

Marvin looks right at me, "If we can get Winston to stop talking for a minute. Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

I shake my head, and turn back to Grumpy.

And then he launches into a prayer.

A Christian prayer.

I am totally living in the wrong country.
Definitely the wrong community.
This whole assumption of Christianity thing.
Like nobody even thinks to bother to check?

After he's done, he starts calling up the tables, one by one. And we all line up and file past the table to get our donut. Like good little kindergarteners.

And when I get back to the table, there's a new couple, that I haven't met yet, just sitting down.

The woman smiles, "Are you new here? We haven't seen you at coffee?"

"Not new," I reply. "I've lived here for almost a year now. I haven't been to Saturday coffee for a while, because of my schedule."

"Oh. Well," she beams. "Welcome to the community!"

I pause in mid-bite, and put my donut down. "I've been a part of *the community* for almost a year."

"Well," now she looks uncomfortable, "welcome anyway."

Why do I do this to myself?

Why don't I just move the hell away from here?
Somewhere where there aren't snowbirds.
Or Christians.
Or guns.
Or shrunken prefrontal cortices.
Or emotionally damaged adult children.

And just where would that be?
The moon?

Upgrade The Operating System

Sunday 3:46 PM

"Can we do this?" I ask, really just thinking out loud. "Can human beings invent an incorruptible governmental system?"

The Dude stops sawing for a moment and looks up towards the horizon. As though the answer might be written there in the skies.

He just shakes his head from side to side.

"Is it possible, Dude? To structure the management of a country, in such a way, as to prevent simple-minded, or mentally or emotionally troubled people, from seizing control? And using the power of the office to try to resolve their own personal unresolved shit?"

The Dude's eyes grow wide. He looks back down at the pallet he's working on, and fires up the battery powered reciprocating saw. He neatly slices through the nails holding the last three boards to the pallet. Then he sets the saw down, and begins stacking the boards in a pile.

We've scavenged another five pallets. We're gonna use them to cover the rigid foam insulation on the exterior wall of The Dude's Arizona Room.

"It's about management," I continue.

"How's that?"

"How we choose our managers, Dude. And how we manage our managers."

"Based on which instinct thing they act out of?"

"Exactly. We gotta keep personal opinions and fantasies, out of the mix, when writing laws."

"Well, then, Mister Winston, then we gotta change what a 'Representative' is. That's the first thing."

"Change the job description?"

"Exactly."

I run my hand through my hair.

"You know," I'm thinking out loud, "we don't need politicians anymore. We certainly don't need political parties."

"Managers," he replies. "Your word. Managers. Nuts and bolts. Just do the job you been given."

"I know. It's so obvious. We don't need to keep electing people who want to reinvent the *concept of the country*, every few years. We already have a concept. It's clearly spelled out in our founding documents."

"They come in," The Dude spreads his hands wide, "and force their opinion of what *they think* this country should be. Then, we elect someone else, who tries to undo all that shit, and force *their* opinion of what *they* think this country should be."

"It's stupid, Dude. It's really, really stupid. I mean, is this the best we can do? As a species? Is this the best we can come up with?"

The Dude is shaking his head rapidly from side to side, "We don't need 'visionaries'. We don't need every Tom, Dick and Mary to keep reinventing the damn country all the damn time."

"And just who the hell are these 'visionaries' any way, Dude? And what makes them so perfect for the job? I mean… Is there some group, some task force… Whose job it is, to search through all the people in the country, and find the best ones suited for the highest jobs?"

"Oh, hell's bells no, Mister Winston. There ain't no task force."

"There's nobody scouring the country, Dude. Looking for the most intelligent people to run for public office. The most competent. The most qualified. That's *not* how we choose our candidates."

He shakes his shaggy head, squinting out the dirty Arizona room windows, "Oh hell no," he snorts. "Oh, hell's bells no."

"In the UK," I tell him, "you can become Prime Minister just because you've been hanging around in the party longer than anyone else."

"What kind of bullshit is that? They don't even get voted on by the people?"

"Oh hell no."

"Just being the one whose been in the party the longest doesn't qualify you for shit," The Dude shakes his head. "What genius thought that was some kind of a good idea?"

"Someone a long time ago."

"Well," he leans towards me. "Maybe they need to update that shit."

"Agreed."

The Dude reaches for his water jug. It's heating up out here.

He finishes stacking the boards and counting our booty, "Thirty-eight. Thirty-eight nice ones. Not a bad haul."

We can start putting up the boards tomorrow, when it's cool in the morning again.

"So, this brings me back to my original question, Dude: Can human beings invent an incorruptible governmental system?"

"Mister Winston, all governments get corrupted. All of them. Because all of them make the same mistake."

"And what's that?"

"They let the people who make decisions also handle the money."

"That's right. And they also give themselves the power to force the people to give them more and more money."

"Mister Winston. You're gonna have to make it pretty simple. So that even the simple-minded ones can't screw it up."

"Dumb it down?" That's what you're saying?"

"Democracy for Dummies kinda thing."

"Yeah, but, that whole 'This for Dummies' and 'That for Dummies' is already a big thing. I mean, those guys might sue me for using the phrase."

"Yeah. True," The Dude squints in the sharp morning light. "What about… What's your word? 'DimCaps'? Like, 'Democracy for DimCaps' kinda thing?"

"You don't think that might insult a few peeps? Chase them away?"

"Fuck em. Wake up and smell the damn coffee," he snorts.

"How to Form a More Perfect Union?"

"Too 'Abe Lincoln', for me," he shakes his head. "How to Organize A Government, So That Unders Can't Screw It Up."

"How to Organize a Government, So *Nobody* Can Screw It Up!"

Both of us fix our eyes on our pile of boards.

"Idiot Proof Democracy," I offer.

"Gettin closer. Gettin closer…"

"Blueprint for an Incorruptible Democracy?" I venture.

"Too 'PhD' sounding. Not very fun."

"An upgrade. Some kind of upgrade," I stare at the boards.

"What' that thing when you clean up your computer?" The Dude looks at me. "That fragging thing?"

"Defragging Democracy?"

"I'm likin' that one!"

I shake my head, "Trying to make it less corruptible, not less fragmented."

"There's something there, though," he stares right through me, as the thoughts chase around behind his eyes. "Yer getting close."

"How's about: 'Anti-Virus for Democracy'? Your government has become infected!"

He laughs, "That's a good one." He shakes his finger in the air, and takes a big swig from his water jug.

"It's just," I begin, "It's just—it's like—if only we could upgrade the operating system of our country—like we upgrade the operating system of our computer."

The Dude stares at the dirty windows of his Arizona room. His mouth open. Lost in thought, "That's—"

The silence hangs over us like the wide palm fronds casting their shadows on the side of his tin can.

After a few moments I snap out of my reverie.

I stand, and stretch my aching leg, "I'm all done for today I think."

The Dude waves at me, “Stay strong, my brother.”
“You too, my brother.”

I pick up my reciprocating saw, and head back to my own tin can.

The Biggest Threat

Monday 8:32 a.m.

I could have been shot.

So, I'm in line at the Coffee Casa, and it's moving slow. And then I'm next. And this guy walks around the corner, right in front of me, and the rest of the people waiting, and goes up and starts placing his order.

He didn't even glance at us.

"That's fine," I say in a loud voice. "Just go ahead and butt in line in front of us. Because none of us are waiting to order, or anything…"

He doesn't hear me.

So, I tap him on the shoulder.

"Excuse me. All of us were waiting to order. There is a line."

He turns, and I gesture to the seven people behind me.

And he finally realizes he has butted in line.

The expression on his face flickered on guilt, for a fraction of a second, and then immediately turned to anger.

"Well step up then!" he spits angrily, and steps aside. Like he's doing me a favor.

"Thank you," I step forward.

"You were standing against the wall," he snorts, gesturing with his hand.

"No. You just weren't paying attention."

"You were standing by the wall, like you had already ordered!"

"No. You're making an incorrect assumption."

"You're wrong!" he jabs his finger at me.

"You didn't notice any of us," I gesture again to the seven people in line behind me. "You just butted right in."

"They weren't there!" he waves his hand dismissively.

Someone behind me snorts.

He scowls at them.

"No. *You* don't get to be angry at *me*," I reply quietly, "because *you* made a mistake."

He jams his finger in my face, "I didn't *make* a mistake."

The manager moves up to the counter, "Can you gentlemen please take this outside?"

"Outside?" I look at her, "There's nothing to 'take outside'. This guy butted in line and I pointed it out to him. The end."

She turns to angry man, "Sir can I please ask you to join the line, and we will be happy to serve you."

"Fuck you!" he bellows. "I ain't buying anything from you!"

He storms off around the corner.

I pay for my coffee.

So. Basically. He got angry at me, because I made him aware that he had made a mistake.

Then he gets angry at Coffee Casa for taking my side, and punishes them by not buying anything from them.

Which I'm quite sure will have absolutely no effect on their bottom line, or ability to stay in business.

All because he couldn't just say, "Oh, I'm sorry, I wasn't paying attention." Like all the rest of us would have no problem saying.

But it wasn't over yet.

He's back. Leaning in and jabbing his finger again, "You're an asshole! And if you don't like that, you can step outside."

"Oh, for crying out loud," some guy behind me bellows.

"Is the heat baking your brain?" another guy joins in.

I just shake my head, "No. I'm not going to let you physically assault *me* because *you* made a mistake."

"I didn't *make a mistake*!" the guy screams and storms out the door.

I pick up my coffee and turn to go.

The guy who said, 'Oh for crying out loud,' nods at me.

"He wanted to hit me," I shrug, "because he wasn't paying attention."

Three other people are shaking their heads.

Here's the thing: In the United States, that interaction could have escalated to the point where he might have shot me.

That is not far-fetched, or an exaggeration.

As I'm leaving, an older gentleman grabs my arm, as I reach for the door. "Give it a minute… Look out the windows. Make sure he's not waiting for you out there. With a gun."

I look. And sure enough, the guy is standing by his pickup with his hand on his hip—holster? Scowling at the door.

I shiver.

Forget about ISIS/terrorists/Muslims/immigrants or Mexicans.

The biggest threat to *my* life is some average regular white American, who cannot admit when he makes a simple mistake.

Are we spending any small portion of our enormous ***defense*** budget on protecting me from being killed by some average white American who cannot admit when he makes a mistake?

So far, in 2017, over 10,000 people have been murdered with a gun.
In 2016 it was 14,925.
In 2015 it was 13,463.
In 2014 it was 11,472.
That's an average of 35 people a day. And increasing.

How many were killed by someone who could not admit they made a mistake?

It's Ego

Friday 2:30 pm.

It's ego.

It's all ego.
Isn't it?

Everything we say and do is said and done to make us feel good about ourselves.

Boost our own egos.

Even the so-called 'selfless' acts.

There really is no such thing.

"I just went out of my way to do something kind for someone else with no reward for myself. Aren't I great? I'm so selfless."

Because the reward is, how we boost our own ego by doing this 'selfless' act.

We think we are better than everyone else based on what country we were born in. Or which part of what country. Or which town in that part. Or which neighborhood in that town. Or which income bracket we are in. Or which ethnic group we are from. Or which sex we

are. Or how old we are. Or any number of stupid piddly-ass shitty comparisons we can throw out at another human being to put them down to feel good about ourselves.

It's all fucking ego!

Our whole species is driven by our own fucking egos.

It is our own greatest enemy.

Because it makes us miserable and always needing to boost ourselves more.

Raking the Pebbles

Thursday 1:10 pm.

I finally made a Zen rake, to rake the pebbles in my front yard.
Today's the day.
Screw you, Piss. I'm gonna rake my pebbles.

And, as I start to rake, it's looking better than I hoped.
It's totally transforming the vibe in the front yard.
And I'm loving it.
And it's looking freaking sweet!

And my neighbor who lives directly across from me comes out.
The woman who I used to call 'Smart Woman'.

"Hello," I wave. "How's it going?"
"That looks like a lot of work," she scrunches up her nose.
"It's as much work as it is."
"Makes me wanna come over there and…" she lifts her foot and moves it around as though she was kicking the pebbles, to mess up my freshly raked rows of lines, "and mess it up!"

Seriously?

I just stand and look at her blankly.

She isn't smiling or laughing.

She's serious.

*Your first thought? Your **very first** thought, is that you want to mess it up?*

*To **destroy** it, even as I'm still creating it? Why?*

*Why is this your **very first** thought?*

Now, I know why you don't come out of your trailer.

Now, I know why you don't interact with the other residents.

Because you're a—

You are no longer 'Smart Woman'.

You are now jhew lun dou. (Chinese for 'pig cock scrotum'.)

Next, another neighbor, walking her dogs, "That's a lot of work! Well, we'll see how long it lasts, before someone walks all over it!"

And then:

Eeyore slides up on his scooter, "Wacha doin?" with his big sad Eeyore eyes and his big ears sticking out.

"Raking the pebbles."

"Oh," he casts his eyes over the scene. "Making it look inviting for the dogs to come up on it and have a poop?"

I look at him and sigh.

"Well," he drones, "someone will probably come along and mess it all up, as soon as you get it done, anyway."

Is this an Arizona thing?

Is this an American thing?

Is this a white European descendant thing?

Is this a Western Hemisphere thing?

Is this a personal dysfunction on the part of a specific percentage of all human being's thing?

This need to destroy something, if it looks like it is important to someone else?

What the jhew lun dou is up with that shit?

Commit Die

Sunday 2:39 p.m.

"The FBI want to talk to you," Moan stabs her bony finger at me.

"The FBI?"

"You don't know who the FBI is? You that fucking stupid?"

Jesus. She is really ramped up today.

I smirk, "Why did they tell you that and not me— "

"You're a terrorist!" she spits, "and a pedophile! Probably a Muslim!"

My god Moan.

Is this an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex angrily scowling at me?

"You'll be in Gitmo by tomorrow! No, tonight! Sit on your doorstep with your hands out ready to be cuffed!"

She turns abruptly and storms away.

"Why do you need to hurt other people," I ask to her back, "to feel good about yourself?"

She turns, her eyes burning red, "You need to commit die!"

And off she goes.

I want to respond. But this time—with that look in her eyes—and the stuff Dan told me about the guns—and my recent encounter at Coffee Casa—I just shudder. A wave of cold runs over my whole body.

I look around at the trailer park.

And I truly feel afraid for my life.

Idiot

Monday 6:32 a.m.

I am an idiot.

I was provoking/taunting/questioning/holding a mirror in the face of an angry person who was thirty yards away from her brand-new assault rifle. And, I'm sure that she would say, daring her to use it.

I really am an idiot.

I stand there, chuckling to myself about how ridiculous her behavior is, poking fun at her, but smiling all the time and congratulating myself on being smarter than her, and driving her, yes, driving her to escalate.

It's obvious. The reality has finally seeped through my standard issue British wall of ego and assumed superiority, to the rational part, the animal brain, that is now screaming in my head: "Are you trying to make her shoot you?!?! Idiot!!"

But why do I have to babysit her mental state?

Why does she get to put me down/hurt me/ridicule me, and I cannot hold her accountable?

Because she will kill me if I do.

No sleep last night.
Tossed and turned. Then finally got up.

I want to go out and sit on my little front porch with a nice steaming mug of PG Tips. And watch the day awake.
But I am truly scared.
Thoughts are swirling around inside my head.

I sit in the dark at the kitchen table.
Shaking.
All the window coverings closed.

Victims

Tuesday 1:32 a.m.

What if Moan doesn't have an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex. What if she was abused as a child?

Her father put her down.
Laughed at her. Told her that she was stupid.
Kids learn by example, right?
Putting other people down to feel good about herself.
Because that what was done to her.

Maybe.
It's the best explanation.

There's nothing rational or sensible about her behavior.
And her outbursts are emotional. Raw emotion. Usually, angry.
How can someone be that angry all the time?
What causes it?
She tries to blame me. But she starts it. She instigates conflict.
She walks up to me and spouts something she heard someone else say and dares me to question it.
Who does that? Who needs to do that on a regular basis?

Only someone who is trying to get revenge, justice, something for being treated like shit as a kid.

She demands attention.

She expects strangers to validate her self-worth, to get what she didn't get as a child.

But I know other people who act like that. Some of them very successful and rich. So maybe, what you do with that ball of anger makes the difference?

Moan marinates in her anger, puking it up over whoever is in front of her at any given time.

But other people go into jobs where competing with others gets them rewarded, promoted, wealthy.

I know 2 salesmen who are very aggressive, and they have the Moan scowl too. Even though they are making boucoup bucks.

It makes sense. Always fighting for one-upmanship.

This is why they are successful at business.

Their addictive need to put other people down drives them to force other people to get the bad end of a deal.

They win.

This is how they get back at their fathers.

In their heads at least.

Basically, abused children make 'good' businessmen.

And, since making a lot of money is seen as some kind of indicator of a 'successful' or 'good' person, then this means, in their mind, that they are right. And their original abuser was wrong.

But… It doesn't matter how many business deals they 'win', or how many people they put down or screw over, or cheat or force, it's never enough.

Because they have not put down or forced their abuser.
They have not resolved their core issue at its origin.

As Dan says: You haven't fixed the cause.

I poured myself a glass of 'whisky'.
But it just sits on the table in front of me.
Nothing can distract me from this.

And this scowling and shouting shit—
Her father probably scowled and shouted at her.
That's where she learned it.
And she had to do what he said.
He would probably hit her if she refused.

If that's what she witnessed on a constant basis, during the formative years of her life, then of course she's going to believe that behavior will work for her the same way.
Obviously.
But she's not her father, and I am not her when she was a child.
That's the only time that behavior worked.
So, when she does it…
It just looks ridiculous.
That's why I mock her.

But I missed it. I was too busy laughing at her and trying to poke fun at her, that I didn't realize she doesn't know any other way to act.

She is exactly what she is. That won't change. I'm poking a hornet's nest and shaming them for getting pissed off.

But Moan won't sting me.

She'll shoot me.

It's the Same

Wednesday 6:18 a.m.

The sun is up.
Bright golden light washes across the front windows of the trailers across the street.

There are two birds fighting over the antenna.
A big black one and a little brown one.
They keep trying to chase each other away.
They've been at it for the last half-hour.

King of the hill.

See there—
We are more like the other animals than we are different.

Abused victims living from moment to moment of brief feelings of one-upmanship.
Like birds fighting over a seat on an antenna.
Fighting over nothing.
The opportunity to sit on a stupid 1960's antenna on a busted-up tin can?

And all of us humans, us intelligent animals, the top of the evolutionary ladder, doing exactly the same behavior.

All trying to get our brief feeling of one-upmanship.

It's desperate.

Endless.

These brief feelings don't resolve our anger and fear.

But we can't see that this is the wrong way to fix it.

We can't be wrong!

Because that means our father was right.

I'm trying to tell Moan that she's wrong.

But she can't admit it.

Because that means her father was right.

Her desperate need to prove to herself that she's right, would drive her to attack anyone who tries to tell her that she's wrong about anything.

That's universal.

Like wanting to physically assault someone because they point out that you butted in line in front of them to get a cup of coffee.

They puke their anger onto a stranger because they're in denial they were abused. Or they haven't realized it yet.

Of course! Of course!

When I try to point out her behavior, then, in her eyes, I am acting just like her father.

Fuck!

Of course.

I become a stand-in for him and she pukes up all her unresolved anger at him all over me.

Of course!

Jan is right.

It makes sense.

It sucks, yes.

It's horrible, threatening and possibly deadly situation but now I understand that rage. That burn in her eyes.

She doesn't see me.

She sees him.

Fuck.

I'm going back to bed.

Still can't sleep.

My mind just won't shut up.

If Moan learned this behavior from her father, because that's what he did to her, then where did her father learn it?

From his father?

And he learned it from his father?

Shit.

This is generational.

A whole family continually passing down abuse from generation to generation creating new abusers every time they reproduce.

No wonder.

No wonder there are so many of them all walking around scowling and barking.

All doing the same behavior.

Exactly the same behavior.

Millions of them.

Millions.

Jesus.

Where does it stop?

Someone is pounding on my front door.
I mean pounding.
Like really loud and insistent.

I'm scared to get up and answer it.
I lie paralyzed in bed and pull the sheets tightly under my chin.

Toolbox

Thursday 7:22 PM

Texting with Jan:

Me: *They act like assholes to you and when you make them aware of it they act like victims. wtf?*

Jan: *Of course*

Me: *?*

Jan: *It's the only two roles they know how to play*

Me: *Roles?*

Jan*: When they were a kid, they were victimized by their abuser who acted like an asshole to them. These are the two main roles they witnessed in their formative years*

Jan: *If they can't get their needs met by playing one role then all they can do is try the other one. Limited tools in their toolbox*

Me: *Toolbox. I heard another counselor use that term before*

Jan*: It's a good way to visualize it.*

Me*: Ok. I get that. It just doesn't make any sense that's all*

Jan: *Of course not it's not logical behavior*

Me: *No it's illogical*

Jan: *As another older and wiser counselor once told me don't go chasing after logic where it doesn't exist*

Not Enough

Friday 8:14 a.m.

The trailer park is quiet.

Like horror film quiet, just before someone gets their head cut off.

I cautiously peer out the side window of the second bedroom at my front door. No threatening letters. No angry message brushed onto the wall with red paint. No burnt cross or effigy dangling from the porch roof. Dood.

Last Beer Mike just drove past.

He's added another bumper sticker: **Build the Wall!**

He's still trying to tell other people how to think and act.

Anti-immigrant fear.

Fear of Mexicans.

Based on the ridiculous assumption that all Mexicans are bad evil people who want to hurt them.

Imagining enemies where they don't exist.

So, it appears that ol' Last Beer might have also been abused as a kid. And this whole wall building business is born out of the fear he felt when he was abused. When someone did do bad things to him. His original abuser really did exist. And no one stopped them.

Is this whole anti-immigrant movement driven by people who were abused as kids? People who haven't gotten any counselling to deal with their unresolved anger and fear?

Because, to me, it sure looks like it.

They puke up their fear onto whoever: Arabic people, black people, white people, indigenous, straight, gay, transgender, Christians, Muslims - Anyone who is different from them.

Because putting down one person at a time doesn't medicate their pain. For long.

They need to ramp it up. Like an addict. They need bigger fixes.

They start projecting their victimization onto whole demographics of people.

And, if someone questions them about this, they will attack them.

If someone tells them that they're wrong to hate and fear all Muslims, in their head they hear: "Your feelings are wrong".

What they hear, is this person telling them that they're not entitled to their anger and fear. That they're not a victim.

Of course they are a victim! Or were when they were kids.

Their anger and fear are not being validated.

So, they lash out.

Shouting at people. Threatening them. Assaulting them.

The lights just flickered on in Piss and Moan's kitchen. And the big flat screen flickers on too.

A nice big bowl of crispy denial for breakfast.

I can see them clearly through the front windows.

Both of them standing in their bathrobes, faces glued to the TV.

Like moths to the flame.

It makes sense.

If these angry abused children are loud enough and angry enough, then other angry frightened adult children will flock around them.

We recognize the same pain in each other's eyes.

These others look to them for hope.

Hope to get back at their own abusers.

They need to get their validation too.

This can get an angry abused person hired to host an opinion show. Or elected to a public office. Where they can make policies and laws to punish whole demographics of people. And this will hush that voice in their head that they are stupid and worthless, and will never amount to anything.

Because then they can say: "See… I'm an elected public official! And all these people agree with me. I can't possibly be worthless! I can't possibly be stupid!"

But even that is not enough.

They could have the whole world looking at them and listening to them, and it will still not be enough.

Because it's not their abuser listening to them.

It is not their abuser saying, "I was wrong. You're not stupid. You're not worthless."

And their abuser's voice is the only one that matters.

The Veil Lifts

Saturday 5:32 a.m.

I am jerked out of my sleep by the sound of a large engine being fired up.

Finally got a little sleep and could have gotten more but this loud noise woke me up.

I wipe my eyes and peek out the front window.

The jacked up black pickup truck suddenly roars around the corner and rips me away from my thoughts. It belches and snorts as it heads for the entrance to the park.

The two American flags flap wildly from the poles in the back. Billowing through the dark diesel smoke.

Like flags on a battlefield.

Pounding in the wind as the cannons roar.

A parade of one.

I was having weird dreams that I can't even remember now.

This loud behemoth growling past draws my thoughts back to what I was thinking about when I laid down: this childhood fear.

This stupid huge loud truck.

Desperately trying to project an image of someone who is not afraid. Right?

A loud bold angry declaration: *"I will never be abused again!"*

Sending a loud message to everyone around them that they are not afraid. They are powerful.

It's compensation. Or, at least, an attempt.

Same as the people who are not in the military dressing like they are in the military and strutting around with a huge gun. An angry scowling message: *"You may have hurt me once, but you'll never hurt me again! I will shoot you!"*

I feel like a veil has been lifted.

I just needed to get my own cockiness—my own bullshit—my own ego—let's be honest about this, Winston—out of the way.

Of course!

I put the kettle on and sit at the kitchen table.

All the conversations I have been having are slotting together into a bigger picture.

These wounded children.

Abused kids in adult bodies.

Desperately trying to live with the shit that they were dealt.

And nothing but anger and fear to drive them on.

I glance out the window at Piss and Moan's tin can and I can see the big flat screen in their kitchen clearly.

Some guy in a suit is scowling and barking.

Now there are two of them, scowling and barking at each other.

That's why she watches it.

That's why.

If she sees people on a popular TV show scowling and barking then she is getting validation that it's the right behavior.

Of course!

Millions.

Millions of scowling barking people watching daily as someone in some kind of authority position scowls and barks like they do.

They are all wounded.

All of them.

That's the bond.

Millions of wounded children scowling and barking together like their fathers did.

Jesus. It's an epidemic.

But what I don't understand is: if they are so wrong, and it's completely obvious to everyone that what they are doing is bad and destructive—Why do they keep winning?

How are they able to take over entire countries?

Why don't the majority of humans, who are not deficient or damaged stop them. Easily?

Why aren't they laughed out of the room?

Is the earth helping them win?

Is this what the earth wants?

My god.

Just reading over what I have written in the last few days.

I sound like Donald Crowhurst in his logbook from his strange last voyage.

Am I losing my mind?

Screening

Saturday 2:14 p.m.

I was trying to sleep but thoughts are chasing around in my head.

And then, I was jerked out of them by the pounding on the door again. Loud. I mean, really loud.

It might just be The Dude.

But no.

He'd call out.

Maybe.

I don't really know.

And I'm not going to go peek to see.

I can't sleep. I can't sleep, I can't sleep, I can't sleep.

These thoughts—this stuff swirling around—it's overwhelming.

Finally get up to make a cup of tea and I glance out of the kitchen window.

My neighbors are milling about in the street.

The Mayor just cycled by on his way somewhere.

Life goes on.

Spooks

Saturday 7:16 p.m.

Can't sleep. Again.
My thoughts keep me awake.

What if Dan is right?
What if I'm *not* supposed to figure this stuff out?
What if I'm *not* supposed to have this awareness?
What if the earth deliberately made human beings to be abusive towards each other? And deliberately produces a certain percentage of us with underdeveloped prefrontal cortices so that we will do the job she created us to do: To help her melt her polar ice packs? So she can enter the next phase of her own life.
And then kill ourselves off, when our job is done.

That would mean that ***I am the genetic mutation***.
I, and everyone else who has this awareness, are the evolutionary mistake. Or unintended by-product.

And what if Dan is right about our whole species being a hive?

Would that mean that we have hive mentality?

If one human bee challenges the awareness of the whole hive, would our hive mentality sense this? And send warrior bees to swarm the dangerous individual? Like the Borg from Star Trek?

Does this explain Moan, and Last Beer Mike and the others swarming around me scowling and barking?

I used to have a Twitter account.

It was pretty lame.

Basically, just me re-posting cartoons from Yelling at Bees.

And one day I got a notice from Twitter that I had a new follower. And I took a look at this follower, and it's a woman whose Twitter page says she's an interior designer in San Diego.

So, I googled her name. And yes, there *is* a woman by that name who *is* an interior designer in San Diego.

Just not the *same* woman.

The google search gave me *her* Twitter page: Different picture, different followers, different people that she follows.

Which told me one thing.

My follower was a spook.

An elaborate Twitter page with many posts about interior design. Nothing to show why she would be interested in my posts.

No personal message to me, like, "Love these!" or "So true!", or even "I'll kill you!" Nothing.

What's more, the people she follows, and the people who follow her, were an odd assortment. None of them involved in interior design, construction, real estate, nothing related. Many of them were Chinese and Malaysian who appeared to not write or read English.

It was a very elaborate fake Twitter account.

But definitely fake.

So.

I started thinking. Are they going to come for me? And drag me off to the Gulag?

Insidious

Sunday 3:40 a.m.

I snuck outside and made a mad dash to the mailbox.
I really need to stop cowering inside my trailer.
But…

I thought this would be a great time to get my mail and avoid any interaction with anybody.

Just as I was closing my mailbox and getting ready to dash back a voice came out of the dark: "Ahoy stranger, been hiding out from us?"

It's Admiral Numbnuts.

I call him that because he's struts about the place like he's stonking around the poop deck scanning the horizon for land.

And he always says 'Ahoy'.
Maybe he is ex-Navy?
Probably just full of himself.

Dammit!
And there I go again.
Putting down someone else to feel good about myself.
This shit is insidious.
It's in our DNA, I think. Our blood streams.
As a species.

Oh, the mailbox encounter?

I just quickly fake coughed a few times loudly into my hand and waved him off like I was very sick.

And dashed back to the safety of my tin can.

They're Back

Sunday 6:12 a.m.

So, Ray came over and set up a VPN, and a proxy. And something with DNS. And reset a few things on my network preferences. He also said that he 'flashed' the router. Whatever that means. And set it up with third-party firmware.

Sometimes I just wish I knew half of what he knows about this stuff.

That was two weeks ago.

Ray has been collecting stuff off the camera he installed. And he says he has some logs from the VPN, that show exactly what is going on.

Well. It's starting to get light outside.
Looks like another glorious day in the Valley of The Sun.
The orange glow is wrapping around the palm trees.

The ladies are back.
Four on the left, three in the middle and one on the right.

Witness Protection Man is standing at the end of his driveway and looking right at me.

So, you *do* see me over here after all, you anti-social asshole.
What the hell is up with this guy?

Now, he's gesturing at someone I can't see.

Someone is crunching on the gravel below my window.
Is Dog Shit back?
That little motherfucker.

I'm gonna go outside and give that bastard a piece of

What the Earth Needs

"Good morning. This is Radio Safe Net, Belgium with your host Georges Lemaître. Winston Smith, perhaps our most popular guest here, has been missing for some time. We now have reason to believe that he may have been abducted. He is feared dead. This is horrible news. Tragic. And a great loss. Today, in his honor, we are replaying his last appearance on our show. Winston, wherever you are, we hope you are okay. And that you return to us safe and soon."

"The earth doesn't make mistakes."

"Winston, are you saying the earth makes us abuse our own kids?"
"I think so, Georges. It's the only plausible explanation."
"Why?"
"Because it produces a constant percentage of humans who act out of anger and fear. And not care who they hurt or what they break."
"This sounds crazy. And you also say that the earth mutates our DNA so that a bunch of us have brains that don't fully develop?"
"Absolutely."
"And you think that's intentional?"
"Because it produces a constant percentage of humans who are easily conned and will rally behind the abused ones."
"Conned? How are they conned?"
"Anger is mistaken for passion. Or strength."
"Hmm... OK. I can see that."
"And this many people supporting the angry ones makes them believe that they're right. It drives them on."

"Winston—I mean, really. This is crazy crazy stuff."

"Is it? Or is it the actual truth."

"Hmm... Well, it will certainly generate some interesting responses from our listeners. So, OK Winston, why do you think the earth does this?"

"Because this is what the earth needs."

"What the earth needs?"

"The earth needs it's atmosphere to change."

"Change? How? Oh—by burning fossil fuels?"

"Exactly. The earth created a species to develop technology that would change its atmosphere. So it can move into the next phase of its life."

"We're just pawns on the earth's chessboard?"

"Of course. It's against our survival instincts to damage our own environment. But we keep doing it. Why?"

"Because we're stupid?"

"No, Georges. Because the earth in charge of our species. Not us."

"Hmm..."

"When angry and diminished people get into positions of power, what are the two things they tend to focus on?"

"What?"

"Increasing the production of fossil fuels and shutting down education."

"Yes. That's right. So, I understand about the fossil fuels, but why tamper with education?"

"They want to dumb down everyone to their level."

"So they don't feel so stupid?"

"So no one questions their behavior. Knowledge is power."

"And expose their lies."

"Lying is in our DNA. To destroy our own atmosphere and feel right in doing it, we must be capable of unlimited denial. That is the species she created us to be."

"Winston, in case you didn't notice, we are at the top of the evolutionary ladder. The superior species."

"We're not superior. We're dependent on the earth to survive. We can't be superior to something that we're dependent upon."

"Crazy. Still crazy stuff. But I see where you're going."

"This is what we were designed to do."

"Do what, kill ourselves off?"

"No. Change the atmosphere. Whether or not we kill ourselves off in the process, is up to us."

"So, we do have a choice?"

"We are the architects of our own misery. But if we want to survive, then some things need to change. If we can get our egos out of the way long enough to change them."

OS2020

Winston Smith

OS**2020** provides a framework for an Operating System that is by the people, for the people and of the people.

It installs levels of security which block the influence of:
- Political parties.
- Corporate corruption.
- Individual personal opinions and fantasies.

OS2020

A cross-platform upgrade for all Operating Systems.

The OS**2020** update improves the stability, compatibility, and security of your country.

This update:

- Removes 'representational' voting.
- Returns voting power to the users.
- Performs brain scans and psychological tests on all current public servants, to identify substandard components.
- Cleans out corrupt files.
- Fixes an issue that allowed corporate lobbying to infect the operating system.
- Resolves several administrative flaws.

- Installation on older systems may be slower.
- Some features may not be available for all Unions or areas.
- Upgrading your Operating System is optional, and voluntary.
- Not upgrading your Operating System can leave your Union open to attacks and corruption of vital systems.

OS **2020 Operating System** is built on three modules:

Admin

The Operating System of the nation is administered by:

- **The Firewall**
- **The Trust**
- **The People**

Utilities

Mainframe operations, maintenance and security are provided by:

- **The Stewards**
- **The Shield**
- **The Screen**
- **The Guard**

National Assets

Monetary and physical assets of the country are managed by:

- **Council of Advisors**
- **Council of Accountants**

The Firewall

The Firewall is a council of ordinary citizens, who identify faulty or malicious components. They have the power to immediately and permanently banish anyone.

Membership:

- The Firewall shall consist of 51 members.
- Members are drafted from the list of all registered voters.
- Members are drafted to serve one-year terms.
- Drafted members have the right to refuse the appointment.
- Members must have held citizenship for the last seven consecutive years.
- Firewall total membership must accurately reflect the demographics of the Union.
- Members are drawn by a random lottery, generated by an algorithm that chooses potential candidates, based on current demographics of the Union.

For example:
51% of Firewall Members should be women.
19% of Firewall Members should be Hispanic.
15% of Firewall Members should be over 65 years old.
Etc.

All drafted Firewall Members
shall undergo vetting and approval by The Screen.

Including,
- A **mandated brain scan** to determine if they have an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex.
- A **series of psychological tests** to determine if they are carrying unresolved anger or fear from being abused as a child.

Purpose

⦿ The Firewall is the **executive administrative** body of the Union.

⦿ All other modules report directly to, and are administered by, The Firewall.

⦿ All Firewall business and hearings are broadcast live, and made available to all of the citizens by all available media.

⦿ The Firewall investigates individual citizens, and groups of citizens, to determine if these people are unwilling or unable to peaceably coexist with their fellow citizens.

⦿ If the Firewall decides that these citizens are not capable of coexisting, then the Firewall can immediately and permanently banish them from the Union.

○ Any person in the Union can be brought before the Firewall.

○ Any elected public servant, civil servant, or appointed official can be brought before the Firewall to answer to charges.

○ Any sitting member of the Firewall can be brought before the Firewall, and can be removed by a two-thirds majority vote of the sitting members.

○ The Firewall can demand that an individual or entity makes amends according to a specific time frame. If those amends are not made within that time frame, then banishment shall proceed.

The Firewall investigates situations such as a possible betrayal of the public trust:

○ The behavior of an individual, or group of individuals having a negative impact on their fellow citizens.

○ A citizen or group of citizens, avoiding being held accountable for their actions because of the privileges of wealth, race, class or gender.

○ An individual or entity manipulating the legal system to profit materially, or to take someone else's property.

The Firewall investigates situations where justice may not have been delivered. Even if the situation has passed through the courts.

○ The Firewall does not replace the current legal system or courts.

○ The Firewall does not hear criminal cases.

○ The Firewall does not decide guilt or innocence in personal crimes, property crimes, inchoate crimes, or statutory crimes.

Examples

○ **If an entity, (such as a bank)**, deliberately and knowingly betrays the trust of the public who use their services, the customers of that bank, can bring that issue to the Firewall. Even if the officers of that bank, have been tried in a court of law, the Firewall can decide whether or not those officers should be allowed to coexist with their fellow citizens anymore. The Firewall has the authority to seize the assets of

those officers, and to distribute them equally to the affected people, and then to immediately and permanently banish these officers from the Union. This guarantees that those who break the public trust, will be punished for doing so, without the guilty being able to use legal loopholes, or their wealth and position to escape accountability.

○ **Workers in a factory** can present a case of poor or dangerous work conditions, and the Firewall can order the factory owner to change conditions, according to a specific time frame, or face banishment

○ **An individual** who lost their home to another individual or entity, through legal swindle, land grabbing, or other deliberate manipulation of the legal process, can present their situation to the Firewall.

○ **A woman, or group of women** who work the same jobs as the men in the same companies, but are paid less than their male counterparts, can petition the Firewall to investigate.

○ **An Indigenous tribe** can ask the Firewall to judge a situation involving trespass or destruction of their sovereign lands.

○ **A group of citizens** can ask the Firewall to judge a situation in which they feel they are being targeted with hate crimes.

○ **A group of citizens** can ask the Firewall to judge a situation where a media personality uses disinformation and/or lies to terrorize the general public, and sway their opinions.

Levels of Firewalls

⊙ **Town, city or regional Firewalls** handle situations and individuals that impact their town, city or region. Any situation or individual that impacts a greater area is passed up to the next level.

⊙ **State, province or district Firewalls** handle situations and individuals that are passed up to them by the local Firewalls.

⊙ **Union Firewall** handles situations and individuals that impact the whole Union. They handle situations and individuals that are passed up to them from the state, province or district level.

⊙ **The International Firewall** handles situations and individuals that impact the species as a whole.

○ The International Firewall weighs whether or not an individual has compromised, threatened or harmed the whole species.
○ The International Firewall is the only body with the ultimate authority to terminate the life of any individual that threatens or harms the species.

Crimes against the species include, but are not limited to:
○ Engaging in behavior that is destructive to air, water or land.
○ Engaging in behavior that causes, or attempts to cause political or regime changes in another country.
○ Using fear to manipulate public opinion.

The Trust

Purpose

○ The Trust is a panel of judges, who serve to advise The Firewall and the people, on the legalities of cases that The Firewall is investigating, and on the legalities of issues that affect the entire population.

○ The Trust replaces a Supreme Court.

○ The Trust reports directly to the Firewall.

Membership

○ The members of The Trust are elected by majority vote of the people.

○ The members of The Trust are barred from any political party affiliation.

○ The members of The Trust are elected to serve four-year terms, unless they voluntarily resign, or are removed by the Firewall.

○ The members of The Trust are evaluated every twelve months by the Firewall, and can be removed at any time by majority vote of the sitting Firewall members.

The People

The people are the absolute authority.
They are the owners and masters of the Union.

○ All legislation is approved or rejected by a two-thirds majority vote of the registered voters.

○ Registered voters are the only ones who have the power to vote on legislation.

Utilities

Mainframe operations, maintenance and security are provided by:

- The Stewards
- The Shield
- The Screen
- The Guard

The Stewards

A utility that serves the people by taking their proposals for legislation, authoring that legislation, presenting it to the whole population to be voted on, and maintaining records of all the people's business.

Purpose

- The job of a Steward is to gather input from the people of their district as to what their needs and wants are.
- Stewards hold regular open meetings to gather input from the citizens in their constituencies.
- These open meetings are the user interface for the citizens to present their needs, wants, ideas and feedback.
- Stewards then present this input to the whole Body of Stewards.
- The Body of Stewards looks for similarities in the needs of all the constituencies. The Body then composes legislation that meets the combined needs, wants and ideas of all citizens of the Union.
- One issue - One bill. Only one issue may be the subject of a bill. Issues cannot be combined.
- No Steward can propose a bill, on an issue, without documented evidence that their constituents requested action on that exact issue.

○ Stewards must present every bill to the Council of Advisors in Asset Management, to determine how the bill may be funded, and/or may provide a revenue stream.

○ Once approved by the Council of Advisors, the Body of Stewards shall be responsible for making all bills available, in a timely manner, through any and all media available, to every citizen in the country, so that the citizens can vote on them.

○ All Stewards must represent the needs and wants of the voters in their district, equally and fairly. All Stewards are therefore banned from holding any party affiliation, promoting or following any party platform.

○ The performance of all Stewards shall be reviewed once every twelve months, by survey of the citizens in their respective districts, at which time, the citizens in their respective district, may replace any Steward by a majority vote.

Membership

○ There shall be one Steward from each district. The size of each district, the number of people that each Steward represents, shall be decided by majority vote of the citizens.

○ Each Steward shall be elected by majority vote in their home district.

○ A 'majority vote' shall be two-thirds of total votes cast.

○ If no candidate receives a two-thirds majority, then the vote shall be considered a 'Vote of No Confidence'. The ballot is rejected, and all new candidates must be presented.

○ Stewards are banned from voting on legislation.

○ All candidates for a Steward position, must undergo approval by the Firewall and The Shield. Candidates must undergo a mandated brain scan, and a series of psychological tests, to determine if they are mentally and emotionally stable enough to handle the job.

The Shield

The Shield is charged with providing security, intelligence gathering, investigation and protection of the people from corrupt components.

The Shield is accountable only to the Firewall.

The Shield is divided into two offices:
IO - (Internal Office)
EO - (External Office)

○ The Internal Office operates within the physical confines of the country. It handles all matters of security including the detection and removal of threats to the people.

○ The External Office operates outside of the physical confines of the country. It handles the monitoring and control of banished components.

○ The heads of both Offices are promoted from within.

○ Every person who works for The Shield can be summoned to the Firewall, and can be banished by the Firewall.

○ The details of every action by The Shield, including banishments, shall be publicly reported and available to all the people.

○ There shall be no secrets kept from the people. To withhold, delay, cover up, obfuscate or otherwise manipulate information to keep it from the general population is an act of treason, punishable by immediate and permanent banishment from the country.

Banishment

The Shield is responsible for the physical banishment of citizens, as directed by the Firewall.

- Upon decree by the Firewall, the Internal Office immediately:
  - Seizes all the assets of the banished person,
  - Physically removes them from the country.
- All information on the banished person is handed over to The External Office for continued surveillance. All banished persons are permanently forbidden to re-enter the country.

The Screen

The Screen is an autonomous agency, that operates under the oversight of the Firewall only.

- The Screen performs brain scans of potential candidates for public service jobs.
- The Screen conducts psychological exams, to determine emotional and mental health of candidates for public service jobs.
- All brain scans and psychological tests are performed by a team of licensed practicing mental health professionals, and witnessed by members of the Firewall.
- Members of The Screen are drafted by random lottery to serve one-year terms.
- All draftees have the right to refuse appointment.
- All draftees are required to undergo mandatory brain scans and psychological examinations themselves by The Screen.
- Any employee of The Screen that lies, or manipulates the results of a brain scan or psychological test, shall be immediately and permanently banished from the country.

The Guard

The Guard is the collective body of all armed, combat and defensive forces that operate within the territorial boundaries of the Union.

- The Guard is directed by, and answerable to The Firewall.
- Only the Firewall can declare war.
- Any armed combat must be approved by two-thirds majority vote of all voters.
- The Guard are collectively and individually prohibited by International Agreement from conducting any defensive or aggressive operations outside of the territorial boundaries of the Union.

All citizens are equal under the same laws. Any and all personnel employed in the protection of the nation - all military personnel; officers and enlisted; all police; all judges - can be brought before the Firewall, and can be stripped of their assets, and permanently banished.

National Assets

The Assets of the Union are:
- **Monetary** - The wealth and debt of the Union.
- **Physical -** The land, water and air.

Asset Management is provided by:
The Council of Advisors
The Council of Accountants

The Council of Advisors

- The Council of Advisors reports directly and only to the Firewall.
- The Council of Advisors shall present, to the people their observations, and recommendations, in regards to the economic and physical health of the Union. They shall make their research and opinions available to all citizens through all available and future media.
- The Council of Advisors shall research, and advise the people, The Firewall and the Council of Accountants, on economic choices, trends and potentials.
- The Council of Advisors shall research, and advise the people, The Firewall and the Council of Accountants, on issues and recommendations for the safe management of the physical resources of the Union.
- All decisions regarding the use, protection and management of the monetary and physical assets of the Union are proposed by the Firewall, and approved or rejected by a two-thirds majority vote of the registered voters.

The Council of Accountants

○ The Council of Accountants reports directly to the Firewall.

○ The Council of Accountants is solely responsible for all accounts receivable and payable for the country.

○ The Council of Accountants is solely responsible for balancing the budget.

○ The Council of Accountants reviews all legislation, before it is put out for vote by the people, to determine if there is funding available for the bill. Any bill that does not fit into the existing budget, shall be sent back for revision.

Membership

○ The Council of Advisors, and The Council of Accountants, shall be chosen by two-thirds vote of the people.

○ All candidates for these Councils shall apply for these jobs through The Screen. They will be put through a strict vetting of requirements on their education and experience. Candidates will be required to undergo mandated brain scans. And, a series of psychological tests, to determine if they are mentally and emotionally stable enough to handle the job.

○ All members of both Councils are barred from holding any party affiliation, promoting or following any party platform. Displaying party loyalty of any kind, is grounds for immediate dismissal.

○ The performance of all members of both Councils shall be reviewed once every twelve months, at which time, the citizens, may remove a Council member by majority popular vote.

○ Any attempt to tamper with, or to influence Asset Management, or attempt to influence the people's vote for members of the Councils, shall be considered an act of treason.

The Prime Representative

○ The Prime Representative is appointed by election of the majority of popular vote by all registered voters.

○ The Prime Representative position, replaces the job of President, or Prime Minister, or any other such single executive role.

○ The Prime Representative holds no executive, legislative, political, or legal power of any kind. They are barred from voting.

○ The Prime Representative is charged with representing the people of the nation to other nations.

○ The Prime Representative shall provide regular state of the Union addresses to summarize all of the activity of The Utilities to the people.

○ Since they have no alliances or allegiance to any other department, the Prime Representative is free to speak their mind honestly about how the modules are functioning. They are free to point out the behavior of any other individual in the Operating System, and will suffer no penalties for being a whistleblower. They serve as watchdog and voice for the people.

The Trail's End



Four on the left, three in the middle and one on the right.