

The Shadow Bliss Short Story Collection

Content Warning: Some of the stories within contain murder, suicide, xenophobia, gender dysphoria, rape, pedophilia, and war crimes. Reader discretion advised.

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An Essay on Performance

Public access TV. I am not American. I'm not even of an age where that statement MEANS anything anymore but I watch it. The internet has all kinds of repositories for these "YouTube before YouTube" shows. My favourites are twofold – a Music discussion and review show called Raw Time. I love how forthright the host is. Her ability to shut down harrassment is unparralleled. I love it. The second is I Unwind With The Sweeties – a show many have called "something made by the mentally ill." A couple who wear masks, perform songs, workout routines, and other shit that would destroy their dignity, were they recognizeable. That said, I watch because it's freeing to see anyone legitimately let their freak flag fly that high.

I'm getting ahead of myself. My name...I don't want to say what my name is. I'm in school. I hate who I am and I'm routinely seen as the fucking weirdo. I repress who I am though. Like people make fun of me NOW, imagine if they knew what I really was. That said, there is another side of me that wants to scream it from the rooftops, as if I should care what my class thinks. They need generative AI to write a simple one thousand word essay. I'm doing that right now, all from the heart. Maybe that's the problem.

We live in a world of performance. One person in my class I'm going to call "Smosh." Smosh was born into one of those family YouTube vlogs. He "performs" the loving kid in those vlogs but he's a violent sociopath. I've never seen the vlogs but his mother once decided to "tutorial" how to change a nappy with him within a year of him being born and, because his family wont stop plugging the channel...

That said, no one dare make fun of that to his face though. One new kid did and the result was the kid losing all their teeth and the sight in one eye. That was filmed and it was this huge controversy for the family YouTube channel but...it still exists.

Then there's who I'm going to call "Boxxy". Boxxy was a streamer. She liked doing makeup tutorials, sometimes shoutouts to friends, I actually DID watch her, mostly for bringing a positive energy. She was also a conventionally attractive girl and so...many people, mostly men, would get creepy, weird, violent and even doxxed her. The harrassment was so bad that she quit for good. I took notice of her originally for one of her June themed streams. I tried to approach her once but that performance, whether real or fake at the time, was nothing like who she is now. Broken. Trying to put the pieces back together. She only has one true friend in the school. Everyone else is trying to make "What happened to-" videos when malicious assholes disrespecting the basic tenants of privacy and consent was what made her the broken mess she is now. Neither of the people I've mentioned are even seniors yet, yet I can just TELL their upbringing on the internet has already broken them.

Those two are the only thing we have to "online celebrities" in this school. Everyone else is either trying to get there, without realizing the consequences, or is performing in other ways. Performing as a hardworking student, performing as a cool "play by my own rules", we were given online access and told "here is what's worthwhile" and so we learned performance. Performance everywhere, all the time, to our friends, family,

acquaintances, teachers, anyone. It's a prison. We only use social media because we want to be a satisfied audience member.

So that's what this essay is...a rejection of performance. Because as much as I love to critique the performances I see around me for their fakeness, I'm not a fucking Holden Caulfield. People may be fake but...so am I. I'm seen as weird, I'm the soft excluded, some of the more colourful students call me "retarded" and "faggot" and each time, the latter one actually cuts. The former...yeah you admit to using Chat for basic math questions but I'M the idiot. Sure! The latter cuts because it's like my attempts at masking aren't working. I'm not STRICTLY gay but I am, what many would call, "confused." I'm trans. This isn't a joke. I'm terrified of this. I just want to feel normal and not hate myself anymore, to feel alive and like I'm who I'm meant to be.

The irony of this is my trying to be who I am will be seen as a performance. Yet another teen "doing it for the camera". The same way anyone in my school does what they do for the camera. It's insane. I don't WANT internet fame. I don't WANT to be defined by this one fucking thing...but it's who I am. I've tried repressing it. I've tried actually seeing online stuff for it. I've even tried killing myself to make this shit stop! But I can't anymore. I don't want to die. I don't want to be famous. I don't want to be a "kawaii tranny". I know EXACTLY where this will lead me. A life of hardship, moreso than if I just sucked it up. But I can't survive just "sucking it up." I know Raw Time and the Sweeties are performances too but...fakery can still inspire, fakery can affirm values and beliefs, fakery that

feels real; an oxymoron to some, to others it's human creativity in a nutshell.

The thing is...I don't dislike my body. I don't hate it. It's just there. I look at it in the mirror and the person looking back looks...alright. A bit sad but...alright. It's just not who I am. And I know what the "adult reaction" to this will be. "I'm a teenager, I'm too YOUNG to know what this is, teenagers are ALWAYS trying to figure out who they are" but I can't. I've tried everything. I even tried TERF ideology and what they recommend. Mind you, a lot of their ideology is really hateful towards women in general, pretending that women are physically inferior to men. Any trans woman is a secret rapist, any trans man is a confused butch. It was yet more people enforcing what they believed about me onto me and I fucking despised that. So I stopped lurking in those spaces.

So, the word count on Word has informed me that this is past my 1K word limit, is this what you wanted to read?

Imagine

Imagine everything you loved being an ocean away. Imagine war and famine destroying your country so badly you flee with your family for no other reason than you want to spend at least one more Christmas together. The bombs just keep dropping so you have to leave. How to get to this other country? Drive? And risk the government that treats you as nothing more than cannon fodder discovering your fleeing? Or worse the rebels? Do you think that either would simply let you leave? You are either with them or against them. Choose or be the consistency of a tinned salad.

Would an aeroplane work? Well no. No one really wants a plane to fall out of the sky thanks to terrorist attacks. Whether it's the rebels, the government or foreign governments blowing up everything around you for the sake of a few votes. Either way, there's only one way left. A boat. A small shipping boat barely big enough for 50 is holding 100. Being driven by a criminal who is the only one anyone can trust. You cram your family in there because any life would be better than the one your family was subjected to on a day to day basis. Right?

You try to make out families. Any and all differences are gone because you're all the same at this point. People trying to find a life better than a warzone. No matter how hard the trip is, you all put up with it. All for the better life. You wait days for any sign of the new country you're going to. Any sign that you will get your better life.

One day your boat is stopped at sea. Soldiers. They throw everyone apart from the captain out and onto their boat. You try to explain you simply want to come into the country to escape a war zone. No one believes you. You're an alien. An illegal. Someone stealing a job from honest hard working people who you simply want to live with. You are going to a temporary camp to make sure the new country knows you're not here illegally. Why would you be? No one has attacked them from your country, have they? Even if they had, why does that mean you're the terrorist?

You see years waste away as the country you were promised to go to treat you like animals. You're locked up, beaten, treated like an animal, all so someone you've never met can feel safe in their job and reality. You wonder why though? Why did someone fear you this much? You were afraid and fleeing of your own home. You begin to question things pretty quickly as you meet more families there. A child there asks you where you come from. You tell them. They say they don't remember life outside. That's when it hits you.

You slowly see your own children fall into a deep depression as guards scream at them, people are regularly beaten and soon everyone is too afraid to speak. So much so a teacher from the "better life" gives you a crayon drawing your child did, depicting graves. Titled "My Family". You simply turn to her and inform her that her daughter simply wants to get to the "better life". You try to leave it at that but your kids start to complain that they miss

*their friends. The ones that you saw blow up. That's when you decide to make a break for it. No country is truly free if its willing to treat anyone like this. Foreigner or not. You gather the kids and walk around what you can of the courtyard before guards scream at you, aiming machine guns. God forbid any one unarmed person with nothing on them could do anything. You decide to break through the fence but at night. They catch you. You're now told that your kids will have to get used to not having a parent anymore. You're thrown into solitary and you have learnt enough English to know what "why don't these ***** go back to where they came from?" means.*

Imagine having to go through all of that and realize that you were just separated from your suicidal preteen kids, all in the name of "freedom".

The Ringing

For what feels like a month, I've had an ear infection. Not the most gracious way to tell my story, I know, but I feel the need to be as truthful to my reality as possible when writing this. I don't know when it started exactly but it doesn't matter the situation. Whether in the hustle of daily life or when I'm asleep, I hear my ear ringing constantly. Like the reverb of a loud guitar song finally took it out of me but...I don't exactly remember listening to that kind of music beforehand. If I did, I'd link the events.

What's worse is that my ear is blocked. Not to the point I can hear nothing BUT the ringing but all other sounds give off the impression of being underwater. My other ear is fine, though. So my perception of sound doesn't quite reach my brain in the way it should. I went to a Doctor and the most they can do is give me eardrops that don't really work. I hate this. I hate this so much. I try to be civil. I try to be hospitable to other people as per my usual gracious attitude but there's only so much of disconnected noise I can take! There's nothing left! I hate it! The ringing is persistent.

My job rides me quite hard. They're aware of my ear infection but I can't overstate how long it's been. They hate me. They are sick of my complaining. I hear the muffles of clearly spoken annoyance. Despite my insistence, they tell me verbally what to do. As soon as I ask for a repeat, they look at me in that way. I hate this.

The ringing is persistent. After work, I do basic grocery shopping and ask for ingredients for a recipe that looks nice. I have to keep turning my good ear to them to listen. They look at me strangely but offer the ingredients I need.

The ringing is persistent. I try to watch escapist media. I need to turn my ear into it to hear. It ruins everything because I can't hear. I can't enjoy it. I can't turn off and there's a distinct possibility the noise of my surrounding areas is contributing to my feeling of isolation, fury and depression.

The ringing is persistent. I don't know what happened. I was leaving work early when someone asked me...something. I screamed at them. They tried to calm me down but with verbal communication. I couldn't hear what they were saying. How many times must these idiots hear that I can't hear! I'm just trying to not let this get to me!...I WAS just trying to not let this get to me. Because I was fired.

I go home and...people next door start arguing. Loudly. My disconnected hearing picks up the words in one ear and the volume in the other. It's loud! It's annoying! I just want this shit to stop! I knock on the door and try to talk to them calmly to get them to at least argue quieter. I know many will see that as "none of my business" but fuck off! I just want the ringing to stop!

The ringing is persistent! They tell me to fuck off and continue their screaming. Fuck you! I just want to be at peace! My first instinct is to violently attack them. My

flight or fight response kicked in! I have never been a violent person but I had to! They were just non stop shouting! I changed from timid to an animal and in the moment all I could hear was ringing!

I came to, having found myself in what remained of my neighbours. Because they were shouting. Fuck I hate this. I hate the extreme reaction, I hate that I was never respected for what I was going through, I hate that the ringing is STILL persistent!

I look at myself in a mirror, disoriented and I see what I am. I laugh. I killed people because of a noise they weren't wholly responsible for! I killed people because of a noise! So...I do it! The only way to stop the ringing! What one might affectionately call "the Vincent Van Gogh." It's not like I didn't get injured in the lethal brawl I don't remember so what's a little more biological evidence?

I take the couple's kitchen knife. Serrated blade. It's painful but I start cutting. Faster. Until my ear is in my hand and only my hand. At last, I no longer hear the ringing! It's joyous! I realize with horror one thing, however. My second ear could always bring it back. So I feel the best solution is a "stop before it starts" attitude. A second ear in my hand and completely silent. I am now at peace! The ringing has stopped!

Untitled

A creature of darkness shields itself from the ever coming light. A creature without a name, though many humans have tried. A creature without a form though many have claimed to see it. Despite its intentions, it's a calming presence, though it cannot be photographed and it has a soothing voice, though any attempt to record it has proven futile. It leads the people away. Away from their true happiness. Every living thing needs to eat after all. Unhappiness is what it eats and so, when it takes more than it can consume, it forces people to die. Spreading itself to more people and more ways to eat.

It consumed its greatest rival. The one who ruined everything for it in 7 days. Using its power to create ideology towards itself. The only thing that can stop it at this point is humanity and that's exactly what it wants – its prey in a helpless festering bubble of nothingness, knowing it can destroy everything for them and they can't do anything about it.

One such person it attacked was a Mister John Richards. It knew it could assert influence over him easier than others and so it did. Richards had a normal childhood – went to school, watched cartoons, played with other children – and yet he was sure there was no hope. After he tried to hang himself from the high school gym showers, his parents took him to a psychiatrist. He prescribed him pills to make sure it wouldn't happen again. He took them but by then, no one at the school liked him anymore, he was the weirdo to

them. The one on pills who tried to kill himself. Even with the pills, he was still the "weird idiot" to kids and adults alike.

One day a parent complained to the school board that they witnessed a kid "taking drugs", John. He explained it was his depression medication but rumour spread. All he wanted was to feel normal. He threw the pills into a garbage bag at his house and never took them again. He had to fake being happy. So he tried to teach himself how to act happy. For a while it worked. His parents boasted to everyone how he was feeling better and he was able to blend into the wall at school. Every night he'd try to stop the feelings by screaming into a pillow and slicing his legs open with a razorblade.

The creature enjoyed this. It pushed the self-loathing and the hatred for everyone he ever knew to the absolute pinnacle. He was still able to hide...until the day of his graduation. He never thought about what he wanted to be and by then, he was amazed he had even survived that long. 17 and going to take on the world. He gave a special request to the teachers who marginally respected him. He wanted to give a talk at the actual graduation ceremony about beating his depression. They felt there was no harm in it and so gave him a 5-minute window to do it. His last words echo in the memory of those that witnessed the event.

The creature fed off everyone else in the room as they struggled to comprehend what was going on and save the

kid, but he shot himself in the head. He was dead within seconds. He had researched human anatomy and found the best spot to shoot himself from. The Creature had won. He had realized his mistake and now there was nothing he or the hundreds of people, now affected by the Creature in their own way could do.

That isn't to say human beings are powerless against its might, there was one person who was able to find a way to defeat it. One Mister Everett Sanders encountered this being in a shape it would be recognized as. He was a Transgender man who had decided to overdose on sleeping pills in his bathroom after being raped by a member of a hate group who wanted to prove that he was still female. This made him remember every time someone had screamed transphobic slurs to him while he was still confused about who he was, the time his parents kicked him out of the house when he came out and one particularly bad stunt involving an Uncle of his making a movie with Everett in his basement. He was not the first or the last child to end up in that basement.

Deciding he couldn't live in a world that had treated him in such a way after suffering from such horrific acts that would not stop even after acting upon his biggest secret, he decided to take his own life. Before heading to that undiscovered country, he saw a figure with a skull for a head, black and red robes and human hands. It whispered in the voice of his uncle and told him its true motivation. Something never told to another human being.

Everett survived the experience but was given a weak heart. He was able to get it as close to "fixed" as he could with years of surgery. Afterwards the hospital offered him a job after a gardener died of natural causes earlier that day. He accepted and enjoyed a steady pay check of \$30 an hour which he enjoyed a steady if cheap salary. And in those moments of serenity, Everett defeated the creature's ability to feed off him.

Suicide Note

Dear anyone who happens to come across this note. Well... what did you honestly expect? That this person you've successfully isolated from jobs, family, friends and anything that would make them resemble happy would just find the inspiration to keep going? That being taught patience in a world about to burn in a decade isn't going to work? That never hearing nor knowing love would actually make them get their act together?

Maybe they did have friends. You never know. Maybe the friends did everything they could to make sure they were included and tried to show them fun. Maybe the friend started out that way. Maybe the person killed themselves thinking it was just an act put on by politeness. Maybe the friends got sick of their depressive nature. I mean maybe they were socially isolated due to communicative problems throughout their lives and don't know how to act around people. Of course, then that would make the friends free of any guilt. Its just too hard to actually teach an adult how to talk to other people like an adult and so if they did kill themselves, its more a failure of their childhood than their adulthood attempts at human connection.

What about jobs? Maybe they just weren't fit for any industry they wanted to be in. Maybe it was just another attempt of a lazy worker exploiting the welfare system so hard working people would have to pay off their...whatever they could afford on a thousand dollars a month after bills, food and basic utilities such as fuel. If they failed to pay

their internet bill then its just their bad money management that made it so they were unable to find jobs on the internet.

What about their family? The one that constantly fights. The one that grows ever more divisive as the days go on. One that installs stress in them to a point of hiding in their room like a stropky teenager trying to block out the yelling. They stay there because it's the only place they have in the whole world that makes them feel remotely like everything's okay. Aside from maybe their car but they can't drive anymore due to speeding fines so that's taken away. The good news is at least they have some more money on them if they ever wanted to do anything at all. Their family though don't want them out too much. It'll almost be to the point of actually making real friends and not occasional face to face encounter on top of almost 24/7 internet encounter.

Maybe its because the family drifted apart so much over the last several years that even though they acknowledge that this is the best scenario they could've been in, they were strangers living together, only being able to understand how the other feels and operates due to thinking back to the years before when they were able to talk and were able to be a cohesive whole. If they suicided then then how could the family be to blame for the years of emotional distancing.

What about hobbies or something to make sure they have something to take their mind off it? If they had money,

maybe. If they had friends, maybe. If there was something that could properly alleviate the strain of life, maybe. All they wanted was a world that wouldn't spit on them from every possible angle. A world where they felt like there was something worth getting out of it. That was not this life.

The Last Person On Earth

How long has it been since humanity destroyed itself? A year? Two years? A couple months? I'm the only one left to experience it so does time actually matter anymore? It feels like a decade. I spend day to day salvaging what I can; food, water or if I'm really lucky, I can find a connection to the internet and see what we were. The speed is worse than the old Dial-Up internet but at least it gives me something to do on certain days. Adds variety.

Sorry, I guess I'm getting ahead of myself. My name...I don't know what my name is anymore. I haven't actually talked to anyone in...I don't know how long. I still know English because of what's left of the internet and a couple road signs here and there but nothing solid. Nothing like what I was. I used to be a student; majoring in Hospitality just so I could get a day job. I originally wanted to be an artist. I grew up playing the guitar idolizing people like Joan Jett, George Harrison and Kirk Hammett. Writing my own lyrics before people told me to grow up and get a real job. So I did. I became a Barista. Hoping that would finance something and I got a record deal. The day before World War 3 broke out so it was dissolved almost instantly.

I also tried to use my guitar skills to bed people. It had mixed success. Some swooned, most told me off for being the absolute shithead I was. I never really had an actual close, romantic relationship with anyone. I guess it was all that attempt to come across as edgy. Doesn't matter

anymore anyway. About midway through the war they brought back conscription and told me I had to fight. I smashed my childhood guitar over their head for anarchy's sake, which they used as an excuse to torture me and keep me in solitary. Some electrical fault in the prison's system forced an unlock of all the cells and now...now I'm looking for someone to talk to.

Its my main coping mechanism. To have emotional detachment from everything. I mean I never used to like talking about politics, but I used to be an anarchist. I hated the idea of fighting for a government. No matter who you "vote in", you're going to get some shadowy asshole trying to fuck the rest of the nation over for their own self-interest, and now I'm living the anarchist ideal. No one in charge, no one to answer to, no countries and most importantly, complete freedom. All that realized and I'm lonelier now than I have ever been. I guess that's what happens when you boil the humanity down to politics.

A few days ago I realized that, when it came to news articles online, they all stopped around 25th July. I've tried everywhere, and no site has an update that goes past that date. So I'm faced with the very real possibility of being the last person alive. Out of...hope, I guess. I tried to post an ad asking if anyone else was alive. All I have to do is wait.

I've also concluded that I have cancer. I mean we had a fuck tonne of nuclear weapons at that stage, I'm walking around the "country" just looking for a person to talk to. A land that was one of the major war zones in the war. How do I not have it at this stage? Even if its not from the fallout of those weapons, nuclear waste will make this planet uninhabitable in a few years anyway. Even then, why should I care what I die of? Death no longer means anything to me now I'm the last human alive. Yet...even with everything I've seen, I'm still terrified of death. I guess it's the finality. If I die, that's it.

I wonder if anyone actually considered this before me? That they'd be the last one alive and so would kill an entire species by the mere act of just one death. I mean we killed off plenty of cultures and people who didn't have a language to speak before me. Native Americans, Africans, Australian Aborigines, South American tribes. I felt bad for those that died out before my time but honestly, now I can add German, Polish, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, Afrikaans, Russian, Israeli, what was left of Palestinian – did Palestine even have its own language? So much about world culture I never knew...now it doesn't matter anymore – all are now on that list. And like the rest of history, its now rewritten by an English speaker and one so ignorant they never learned another language. Some things never change.

Today was my lucky day, I found a guitar. An acoustic. It was still salvageable and, from what I hear, it can still

play in tune. Its not much but it'll give me something to do. The funny thing is I still remember how to play some of my favourite songs, sort of. Digging through rubble and sometimes pulling stuff apart just to get to something useful; the backpack I use for example, has weakened my fingers. So, I can't quite arpeggio "Nothing Else Matters" quite like I used to. Well, I'm the only audience anyway; aside from maybe a few animals that watch me, 3 eyed critters and all that. So I guess that's fine considering no one is alive who remembers Metallica besides me nor is there anything to judge my performance besides me and at this stage, what I think is everything.

Anyway, that wasn't all that happened today. A few minutes before I nodded off, I got an internet notification from my phone, charged up to what's left of a car. Someone responded to my ad. I don't recognize the language, but I wasn't exactly the most cultured of persons. Hell, I don't even know how to talk to anyone anymore. Mind you, that's not a useful skill to have. Just talk to yourself. Anyway, I'm sending messages to them. "Hello, thank you for responding to my message. I'm sorry, I only speak English so is there some other way we can communicate?" That's when I realized the absurdity, even if I were to find their language, it could take me years to become a learner in it and visa versa. I guess I'm stuck unless they happen to be bilingual.

I got another message. They said, "Hello creature, I presume this dialect is sufficient. I have been researching fragments of your history. I am what you might call an alien. Your race seemed to have pretty interesting ideas on our kind and you really wanted to blow us up, so I don't know how hostile you would be. Please respond." I was bewildered. Almost laughing off the idea. I mean...could this really be an alien or someone playing a prank on me? There were reports of UFOs before the war broke out but I don't think we ever got to the stage of meeting any of them. Mind you, if it was another human being, why make fun of the only other people you could talk to? Its also possible I'm hallucinating all of this and I lost my mind a few indeterminate times ago – I can't call it anything else.

However, it's been so long. Hallucination or not, that is company. I reply, "I apologize for the way my culture appropriated your culture" and laugh immediately. Thinking of all the media we created about shooting creatures from another planet, would they see us the way Native Americans, African people and Aboriginal Australians saw Europeans? I explain what escapist fantasy is to them in almost childlike simplicity so they're aware – how do you communicate with a language that's literally alien? – and I finish it up by telling them "I believe I'm the last of my kind, I fear I may die soon anyway, can you keep me company during my final days?"

I don't hear back for a couple days. By this point I assume it was a hallucination. I keep salvaging, I keep playing guitar and I keep finding new things to occupy my time.

Suddenly, I do get a message "We can talk for 3 of your Earth days, then we have to leave." I reply begging them to take me with them because there's nothing left for me on Earth anymore. The reply simply reads "no". So, I ask what any average person would ask an alien "how was your trip?"

The reply was amazing – "The closest word in your language would be 'Interesting', our kind has broken through interstellar travel and at the moment we are visiting all the clusters of the universe as scout parties to meet other life forms." I laugh it off. If they had managed to communicate to us just before the war, I might still have a family and friends. They ask me further questions about Earth's history and I explain to them what Earth was and what it was like, beyond our media, the war and how I spend my days. I then get a text that anyone texting an alien would be terrified to get – "We are about to locate you to do some medical experiments. Can you please stay where you are?"

My mind raced in the span of 5 seconds all these questions went through my brain:

- ☐ *Like ACTUALLY probe my anus?*
- ☐ *What do I know about these creatures really?*
- ☐ *What do they even look like?!*
- ☐ *If I asked them these questions would they think I'm a racist?*
- ☐ *What is "alien racist?"*
- ☐ *Will they dissect me?*
- ☐ *Cut out my organs?*

Even with everything that I had questions about, I replied "that's fine. See you then." In about 3 hours I see a craft. A space ship. The metal didn't look right, the colour didn't look right and the light shining off it just looked strange. A bright black. I then find myself inside an alien room. A man in a tuxedo walks out. He looks me up and down and utters the first words I've actually heard in what feels like years. "We're projecting an image onto your cerebral cortex. We don't want you to know what we look like." "Why?" I ask, "who am I going to tell?"

The man nods, ignoring my question. "We're extracting your DNA as we speak. As is, do you want to talk?" I laugh. "I imagined this in so many ways...not with an alien but...in a lot of different ways." He laughs, the first actual emotion I see in his face. "You gave us a lot of information about your planet. We want to return the favour. We will find you someone else on the planet you can communicate with." I almost light up in excitement. "Thank you!" He looks at his watch. "We will also give you a date, Its March 18th. Your '3rd world war' finished 8 months ago." I quizzically look at him. "Is that all its been?" "Yes." I then laugh and explain why. I always wanted to donate my body to medical science and now, in a way, I am. In an amusing moment, an alien got an Earth joke. Maybe it means something different to him but its still funny. Who cares? I don't have to talk out loud to myself to keep from going crazy anymore.

He becomes my only place of contact for the next 2 days on board ship. I ask why I don't see anyone else. He

doesn't answer. I ask him again why I can't just see what he looks like. He tells me their race is secretive to a point that if he did reveal himself, it would cause a major diplomatic incident. I reiterate that I wouldn't tell. He leaves suddenly. While I'm waiting another alien walks in. This time a teenager, female. She's wearing a maxi dress, free flowing, pale. She looks nervous. "I'm sorry. I'm not supposed to be here." "No, come in. I want to talk to more people."

"Okay um...I'm what you might have seen as a child in your society. I really wanted to talk to you because I love your culture." I double take. "I've seen nothing of yours. I don't know what to compare it to." She nods. "We're a naturally secretive race. As far as we are aware, we're the only species to have broken interstellar travel. I'm actually the one who responded to your ad, that's my job on this travel". "Thank you. I felt like I was going insane" "I just became interested in your kind after what you told me, so much different to our other documentations.". I suddenly become curious. "What other planets have you documented?" She lights up. "I...I'm not supposed to tell you but we found at least 4 other dominant species in your Local Group alone. Some are completely reliant on each other and the environment around them. Others are where you used to be about 400 of your years ago." I laugh. "I envy them." The door opens and the man in the tux walks in on the two of us. She leaves. "Who was that?" I ask him. "That was my offspring. Our species all reproduce in an asexual manner. I am what you might call their mother AND their father. We simply chose these forms to show

*you because they were what appealed to us." I shrug.
"Would you have chosen my form if you knew what I
looked like?"*

*"We can't choose a form that's already sick." I nod, slowly.
"We can cure you but-" "No." I respond. "If you wont take
me with you, I'd rather just die." Eventually, he stops
talking to me. "I'm sorry, human, this is where we part
ways." He then drops me off...outside a destroyed Swedish
city. He explains it to me "this is the strongest place to
get a 'Wi-fi' connection." I thank him but also with some
sombre feeling, knowing I really am "it." With that said, I
can now spend the rest of my days on the internet,
bundled up in the freezing cold, waiting to die.*

*Although I'm glad the only life form I encountered was an
alien. I kind of forgot to tell you, back in the days of
human civilization I had social anxiety.*

Power

I see them everywhere. The bacteria. The disease. They sit there and infect every surface they touch. I remember when this was a calm nice little city. One where everyone knew their place and wouldn't dare cross it. Nowadays if you suggested everyone have their own territory, you're suddenly a racist. I'm not a racist. I scoff at the accusations of these people that would dare accuse me of such things. My targets are not a part of any one race. They are all spreading disease. Its destroying what makes us unique. That is why I plan to end it now.

You see, the bacteria I am talking about aren't one silly little confined to shit "race". They are humanity at large. In this little pig shit world, we have no one willing to see the big picture. Yes, I was like you. A racist, a sexist, an anti-Semite, a homophobe, a feminist, an equal rights supporter, a condemner of the KKK and Nazis. You see, I flip flopped trying to find "the right ideology." What most don't seem to understand about this is the fact that we all keep looking for the answer "how do we solve Global warming? Is it real? How do we stop discrimination? Is it real? We should make poverty and capitalism a thing of the past?" Yak fucking yak. Yes, we've introduced temporary solutions in the past but the problem is when we "got rid" of Authoritarianism for Capitalism we still have fascists and communists to deal with. The hatred for authoritarianism runs so deep that no one is willing to accept fascists or communists actually might've had a point

on anything. The deaths they caused were seen as the excuse why they didn't work. I see that as a technicality.

You see human beings are procrastinating shits. They like to hold onto what's comfortable until there is no comfortable. That's the thing, human beings are all idiots. None of them actually give any consideration to the fact that they're treating the symptoms and not the disease. Namely, human beings themselves. So I am here to stop that. If human beings are a virus on the planet, consider me the planet's official antibiotic. I don't write this for pity or self-adulation, I am here to tell you that after today, humanity will no longer be a threat to any other species. It is their own perception of how the world works that makes them stuck in their own little bubbles unable to perceive anything beyond their own little tiny minds that make them targets.

I am a human being myself, this is true. However the thing is I am the only person whose actually able to lift the veil up and see we need to eradicate ourselves in order for the bigger picture. Earth is more valuable than we will ever be. Other forms of life from animals to plants are worth more than us. We are merely an automaton of shit that destroys everything around us including ourselves. I intend to be the wrench in that automaton and once I am done, I will kill myself, once and for all, being an end to the human race.

So I have bought a gun. My own man-made machine of death. I walk into a church. What religion? Doesn't matter. They're all the same shit. "We can't be bad because we

believe in an old bastard who points his finger down at us and wags it whenever we're naughty. Now we have to see the actual old bastard who will molest my kids for me so they can grow up believing." Yet cults such as The Manson Family are somehow lesser because that's the opinion of a raving madman, while our story about how a woman gave birth to a prophet that died for our sins because he totally said he would, that's believable. Manson was an idiot though. A race war where he and his family could solve all the world's problems when there's no more anything? All he's done there is make humanity a resurfaced cancer. Even if he was able to make it work, as soon as he'd die, you'd be stuck with a power vacuum and people interpreting what Charlie would've wanted. He also fucked it up when he murdered those random people because of a record deal. Music doesn't matter. Its only the expression of a race that needs eradication.

I pretend to pray and I look around to see if anyone has noticed me. No. I lean forward and suddenly I feel the tip of the gun barrel hit my chest. Then something hits me. Almost like a spiritual revelation. My hand moves inside my trench coat and onto the hilt of the gun, my finger on the trigger. I sit and think about human perception. Maybe if I kill myself first, I will be able to stop this feeling. The idea that humans are the disease that needs to be eradicated. Then someone walks up to me. I snap back into focus. "Are you alright?"

I look at them deeply. I suppose this is a magical moment. My first kill. The first person I will kill. A man, roughly in

his 30s and no taller than I am. Bearded and dressed in a suit. Something more expensive than I will probably ever be able to put my money to. I remind myself there is no way there is a "good person". To live in this world and be so wilfully ignorant, you'd have to be a sociopath. "Are you alright?" Are you alright? Mister? Are you? Really?

BANG! He scrambles, trying to put pressure on the bleeding orifice I've just created in his chest. I then realize I have to act as fast as I possibly can – the more people run away, the more of a failure I really am at my own mission. No human being is worth the privilege of life. BANG! An elderly woman with her grandkids cops one to the brain. I don't enjoy a moment but I realize that there's no turning back. I have to kill everyone in this church or else humanity will go on. BANG! BANG! BANG! The clergyman, a small child and another 30 something man get bullets in them. By now the ringing in my ears subsides long enough to actually hear the screams of those that require eradication. BANG! Before I can get a good look at the person I've just shot, I see daylight invade my eyes from the side. They're all leaving out that way. I try to fire again but I need to reload. I pull the bullets out from another coat pocket before I drop them in the fumble. "Shit!" None of them can leave alive.

I fall to the floor to pick up the bullets and that's when I see it. A child. No more than 11. She's not dead. She's in shock, looking at me with deep fear. Like she's getting a real glimpse on who took her life. No! I cannot be swayed by that! I have to keep this up. I finally get the bullets

and reload. I see one that was too slow to get out of my line of sight before the police show up. BANG! They go down. I close the doors and create a barricade for myself. I see the hubris of my destruction. It gives me a moment to reflect. In all honesty, I would've preferred more high-profile kills. Ones that would've made people pick up the slack and do the job for me. I need to keep going, this was needed. There is no other way to see it.

I hear the all too familiar ring of police sirens. "Come out with your hands up." I don't answer. Pretty soon they break down the door. I become aware. If I am going to leave this mission unresolved, I might as well die. I don't want to live in a world where all I see is their virus spread. I will merely go down in history as a germ that became the self-aware cancer that was needed. BANG! A cop gets his hat blown off. He tries to shoot me but I fall underneath the pews and see the girl still alive. I realize she will not be a success to me. I aim my gun. She looks at me with pleading. Then I hear at least 9 pairs of feet run to try and capture yet another misanthrope with the gun. So...I choose death. I aim the gun at my head. A cop tries to take it from me but I pull the trigger first.

With the last second of consciousness I have I see the girl become mortified. I wonder if the police will help her out? Resurrect yet another germ to continue the contamination. I wonder how they'll talk about me? As a terrorist or as "a poor misunderstood white man?" I would welcome the label of terrorist at this point. Why would I care what they think? All I did was try to correct a wrong with this world.

Namely that humanity was even allowed to get this far. No matter. Eventually someone will come along to try and take my idea again. Whether its someone like me or a government official. Although, again, it'll all be distorted for racial supremacy or "some girl I tried to date didn't like me" or "gay people should be hung by the millions" or even "I'm a teenager and I want to kill other teenagers" – they're all the same. The only way to get genuine superiority for your little minded brand of the human race is to destroy the human race, even the part you want to be powerful. Because when you die as someone who changed lives indefinitely, that is true power.

A world without Pronouns

The narrator of the story woke from a sleep. Intent on starting a day without the intermediate threat of a premature exodus from the narrator of the story's current job, the narrator of the story left to go to the narrator's job. In the narrator of the story's car, the narrator of the story drove to the narrator of the story's job in order to exchange the narrator of the story's service for money. The narrator of the story worked a shift at the job of line cook for a restaurant.

The narrator of the story had a simple routine with the narrator of the story's job. The narrator of the story was expected to prepare food; chop vegetables, season food, assist with the intermediate superior of the narrator of the story. The narrator of the story was expected to repeat until the end of the shift. So the narrator of the story did the job the intermediate superior expected of the narrator of the story. The narrator of the story finished the shift expected of the workplace. So the narrator of the story left work to take a rest. The narrator of the story decided hunger was present in the narrator's short term goals.

The narrator of the story was a vegetarian and so did not have a lot of options at the location the narrator of the story happened to be at. The narrator of the story discovered a restaurant and the restaurant happened to sell a vegetarian Reuben sandwich. The narrator of the story decided the vegetarian Reuben Sandwich would be the best to suit the taste of the narrator of the story. The

narrator of the story was delivered the meal and the narrator of the story ate the sandwich and thought the sandwich was delicious.

The narrator of the story was finished with work and sufficiently full of food to the satisfaction of the narrator of the story's appetite. The narrator of the story decided to relax after a long day. The narrator decided to sit in front of a TV and watch the narrator's selection of entertainment. The narrator of the story watched until the narrator couldn't keep eyes open. The narrator decided to stumble into bed. The narrator was about to go to sleep but wondered if a simpler format of linguistics could be used to expunge the story being written about. The narrator just thought "suppose the narrator will never know."

Film School

Today I went to film school. I enjoyed it, it was fun. The world felt at my fingertips. My childhood dream had come true. I took the classes as I saw fit. I wanted a job in the industry. What was there that wasn't to like. Then I'm told I'm lazy, I'm slack. I don't go to film shoots outside of school because I can't afford a car. Yet I'm lazy. I'm trying with everything I have and yet I'm slack.

So, I save up for a car, years later, I can drive. Now I'm applying for film jobs. I hear that I can't be paid because I don't have experience despite going to the film school. Which makes me wonder why I pay over 2 thousand dollars every 6 months to be there if its useless? And so I take film jobs. Free. Be involved in both legitimately good productions and films that sabotage whatever you could call my career.

I decide to focus on getting a job for, at least, a sideline to make ends meet. However, that isn't right by the standards of my film school. I must be fully focused to film and can't be looking for work. I'd be too slack otherwise. Even if I get a job, I need to sabotage the paid work in order to get the free work.

With that in mind, after I get an assignment to make a music video, I contact a band. They want one made. The film school ignores me. I sit at a crossroads. Either tell them I can't make it for good and apologize or make it myself. I raise the money on almost a literal shoestring

budget, even asking money from the people involved. I make the music video after nearly 8 months of circling back and forth.

I make the video, but something happens. I'm told from an actual industry professional that I don't know what I'm doing and he completely sabotages Post Production and VFX required, despite my offering of helping him out several times. I remember his name to this day – for the sake of anonymity I'll call him James. I work my ass off to salvage what's left but the band is aware I was inexperienced. Which makes me wonder why I'm even at my film school as I've been there 3 years? The only thing that saves my relationship with any of the band members is that they are nice people. What if I was not so lucky? The actors involved have the story I wrote cut down and as such I never hear from them again.

My mother has an aneurism and so all the poor financial decisions come to bite me in the arse. I live off butterscotch left over from when my grandfather visited and emotional trauma from her best friend who considers me too much of an idiot to be able to make decisions about my life, on my own. Maybe she's right but I don't have the capacity to just repress it like I have done my entire life. I try to find a job and financially support my pets, all of whom cry at me every morning at 6am for even the slightest bit of food – I have to feed them, what choice do I have?

I want to die more than any other point in my life and even gain some PTSD from the whole experience. My mother recovers but I'm brushed off as overdramatic and despite the hospital insisting, I need to take care of her, she insists I have to go back to the film school.

So, I go back, and the school becomes even more pretentious, even more brushing me off and even more dismissive of me as "just a shit filmmaker who doesn't know when to quit" and so I take a break for a semester to regain my mental health. It works. I discover not only a new industry to get into, Hospitality, but a new artistic medium of photography, thanks to people I can now effectively call "my friends". But my mother insists I must complete film school. To keep from "losing my skill" I make a short film trilogy entirely on my own. I hate what I make.

So I go back, and the school decides to put me up for a Graduation class, despite not being able to graduate yet. I see "professional filmmakers" let egos get the better of them, mostly destroy a lot of the chances to salvage an "okay production". A director is de-promoted and such, we have the ego. We make it a week before the film is due to be shot and we don't even have a camera. I try to insist mine as it does have a film function, despite being mostly used by me for photography. I'm told they want to be professional although films without footage, at least with my knowledge of film history, are more than a little rare. It becomes so stressful; I have headaches every single day for the last month and a half of production. Maybe it

might work better if it took a year for production instead of having conception, pre-production, shooting and post production, all crammed into 3 months?

I take another break as I only have a single class left and it's a needed part of the qualification. So, I wait again and build up my confidence as a photographer, even if I consider myself just "above average", and as a guitarist as I have always wanted to learn an instrument and stick with it. However, my mother still insists I have to complete my qualification at the film school. I create 2 characters for film in that time – one is a psychotic social commentary on capitalism and the other is a reflection of my gender identity and everything I wish to be. For no other reason than all attempts at art are little more than expressions of the people that made it. I wanted to make something about my gender identity that only I could've made. I release it the same night I watch Hedwig And The Angry Inch for the first time. Over the course of that semester, Hospitality is pulled out from under me as a career choice. Am I stuck with film forever?

Finally, 5 years after I first joined the film school, I get a call telling me that the subject is available, and I can complete it in just a few weeks. I decide to take it. My mother insists I need to complete it. However who cares? As long as I enjoy it and its fun. I learn about some of the behind the scenes aspects of filmmaking and how its "dangerous". I show off my knowledge of film by citing Burden Of Dreams. A movie about the making of a movie that took 5 years to get off the ground due to a war

breaking out, leading actors getting sick, a hillside being so rained in that mud came up to everyone's knees in the middle of the Peruvian amazon.

I hadn't seen the movie since before I went to film school and I'm reminded. Reminded of what it used to feel like to imagine actually making a movie. Being my own little Werner Herzog. Making my own little films about Nosferatu, the death of the American dream, people who weren't able to speak and Matricide, that last one is an anomaly because it's David Lynch who produced it. I reflect on how much I've changed. I wonder if Herzog would look at my story and laugh or be sympathetic? I've had a hard 5 years. Ups and downs, trying to rub two sticks together to keep the flames of passion alive. After 5 years of trying, after 7 productions, after letting go and finally accepting who I am, there are only two questions I have to ask myself – Do I still enjoy making films? Is it still fun?

The House

The house did not look unusual to those who happened to see the outside of it. It was as plain a house as anyone could own. For those that lived in the area, however, there were questions that made them curious in that way. To start with, if you were to sit outside the house, you would see that nobody ever comes out. Even the people who go in never seem to emerge. The house was separate from anyone or anything else, as if, it had a power that came from solitude. However, what made the house worth staying away from, at least in the mind of the locals, is there was no owner. There had never been an owner. There was no document listing the house. Yet, the house never looked run down or abandoned. Like the maintenance of the house was being kept by something that never left or showed itself to anyone.

There was, once, a property developer that tried to knock the house down. He wanted to destroy the house and the surrounding forest to create a mall. He went to the house to measure it, went inside and never came out. It's said that on certain cold and still nights, you could hear his screams, long after interest dried up.

There was always rumour as to what it was that was behind the house's power; sceptics usually liked to discuss the possibility of a loner serial killer. A person who only killed people who trespassed onto the property. Some see it as a mystery of the world – Bermuda Triangle and the like. Others see it as a curse placed on the land by

Aboriginal Australians for stealing the land and slaughtering their people, though there is little factual information to this and surviving Aboriginal tribe members have stated they did not have such rituals. What most of the supernatural believers have agreed on is it's a mistake in world energy. That the house does not let people out because what remains inside is a form of evil intent on trapping people inside for eternity.

This latter belief has made the house a symbol of religious virtue in the local area. A few times now, a priest has come to the area, heard about the house and claimed to want to do an exorcism. They've always attempted an exorcism. For those who didn't disappear, priests have had their hair turn white, a loss of faith after experiencing the house, the current priest attempted it and has an open secret among the local community to be a drunkard. The last time he was 1:1 sober was the exorcism and he has never revealed what it was he saw. Other faiths beyond Christianity and it's offshoots have tried the same thing but with similar results. One member of the community even considered purifying the house and its surrounding areas with all religions. A priest, a Buddhist monk, a rabbi, a shaman, a mullah all came to the house to remove the evil. There was no luck in reversing it.

The only member of that party who has survived was an atheistic source who had moved away within a week. Their comment is the only definitive description of what the house had within it. "A reason religion has always been a part of man's world is comfort in an all loving force that

can quell the fears of life after death or life being meaningless. What I saw utterly obliterated that hope." He died a few weeks later of a heart attack.

On the other side of the spectrum – sceptics tried to analyse the house. Debunk the claims of evil but to no avail. People can go in, they never come out.

I write this to document the known details of the house and to warn you, do not approach, do not question hesitancy and most of all, do not go inside!

The End