

MY HUMAN LIFE

Looking at the time always means the same thing.

I am hiding from nothing inside a curio shop in a tiny room. I am looking at trinkets but not noticing what they are. It might be several minutes before I actually think about what I am looking at. The image is in black and white but there are no people in it so, to me, the image does not fully exist. It immediately vanishes from my mind. I try on a ten-gallon hat without thinking and immediately search the room to see if the proprietor or anyone else is catching me with the hat on. One of them is.

I spin around, remove the hat and set it back on its shelf. My face is burning. I pick up an object and spin it in my hands, quickly. I'm sweating a little. My hooded sweatshirt suddenly feels very restrictive. I wasn't trying on hats. Are they still watching me? I wasn't doing it. I itch my arm, my neck, my back and head in rapid succession. I watch flakes of skin and other pieces of me float across a bolt of sunlight. Did they see that? Did they see all that came off of me, all that I am flaking away?

I turn. There is no one. Who was that person? Boy or girl? I don't even know if I found them attractive. Their eyes met mine. Our eyes met and I turned and they left my view. What made them leave? The dandruff? The trying on of the hat? Where is my offense?

I look down at my pants. They are elastic-waist pajama pants. They have skulls on them with little crossbones underneath the skulls. They don't match my

oversized neon green and orange hooded sweatshirt. I feel overweight looking down at myself but how much is over the weight I should be? How do people figure these things out? The clothes are just baggy. I didn't think about them before putting them on. I don't even remember which day I put them on. I think about my body inside of the clothes. I can't picture it. I rarely look.

The proprietor is holding onto my backpack. She asked for it when I came in, very friendly. My backpack has things in it I want at all times. There is nothing in my backpack I don't constantly crave. A few beef jerky sticks. Two energy drinks. A salty, powdered chip of some variety. Mini cigars. All of the things I want and the things I want to do. There is also a lot of trash in my backpack. The shells of the stuff I am made up of. I am living a life. I am beginning to wonder what that means.

I don't know how long I've been here. I look around. No one is here. I take my phone out. I look at the time. I've been inside the curio shop twenty-three minutes. I don't even remember how or why I came in here. When does one leave a curio shop once one has entered a curio shop? I'm thinking too much. This happens. I become paralyzed and ask myself all of the questions. Maybe I'm asking the wrong person.

I have two dollars in change jangling in my pajama pants. Nothing in this curio shop costs less than that. I will not be making a purchase today. The two dollars are for the bus home. Or I could walk but that would take an hour. In my other pocket is my cell phone. It's not fancy. I don't get the internet or anything. Or maybe I do. I don't use it if I do. What is, ultimately, the internet? I pull it out again to relieve my mind from the present moment and find myself in another moment

almost as stressful and just as present. My sister wants me to get her drugs on my way home. I put the phone away, pretending I never saw the text.

At my apartment I have another energy drink in the fridge but Gale probably drank it but I have one under my bed next to another bag of chips next to empty bags of chips and empty energy drink cans. Gale is the name of my sister on disability. She gets the apartment free plus food stamps so neither of us has to work. I go out just to be out but Gale never leaves unless she has to do something to keep her disability. I get her opium from someone whose pussy she licks for opium. I don't know why she doesn't just get the opium while she's licking the pussy. I think it's a weird set up. My sister licks the pussy and then I go later that day to score the drug? Why? Seems inefficient. My sister's gay but we don't talk about it. I couldn't care less. Well, I could. I don't know what any of it means. I'm pretty easy going.

It's kind of gross at home and my tolerance is high. Sometimes I wake up and smell things unpleasant. I walk out of my bedroom and step on chips in the carpet. I piss in a soiled toilet. There's usually one of Gale's turds floating in it. Gale's bed is the foldout couch in the living room and when I walk in there she's usually asleep. She likes to sleep in. The couch smells like artificial cheese flavoring and sweat. The TV is permanently on. We both believe in God because our parents taught us to believe but I don't know what God's plans are with us. He works mysteriously, I guess, but this is it? He seems like an excuse. It's not like we've ever gone to church, just heard about Him on television and movies. I never used to be this skeptical. My

sister never used to gross me out before. I guess we have it good compared to other countries?

I pick up an old razor but don't really look at it and put it back down. I itch everywhere, probably time for a shower. I don't really want to go home. It's hot. I need to get out of here. I walk into another room and see the person who saw me in the hat so I turn back into the room I was just in. The curio shop has a few different rooms. I feel depressed. I don't want to leave this room until the person who saw me in the hat leaves the shop but there's no way to know if they've left or not. I try to listen. God, I'm really depressed. I say the prayer I always say:

Lord God I trust in your goodness and mercy

I am sorry for all of the wrong I have done

I am sorry for all of the good I have not done

I want to love you with all of my heart amen.

I pretend it soothes me and pretend I feel better under God's loving eye or thumb or whatever he loves us with.

What now? I feel a pressing on my bladder, or do I? Probably. It's coming, if not now, soon. I wish there was a way of looking out of this room without someone seeing me, either the proprietor or the person who saw me in the hat who I now know is a girl and not just a girl but one I find attractive. Anyone would. She's designed that way. I can hear chatting. I don't know how to chat. What do I say?

How do I know the other person wants to hear it? I'm sweating and itching and I do feel it now, the bladder pressure. It's no longer a hypothesis.

I try to look at things in the room but it's just such a small room, a closet really, and there are only so many places to look. A few glass shelves on three brown walls with various 'vintage items.' There's an old rocking chair in the corner with a dirty old doll sitting in it, staring at me with one eye and one socket. These are the things I am able to occupy myself with until the pretty girl leaves. And I can only look at the things across the room from me or they'll see me pass by the doorway. Not that they don't know that I'm in here. What's wrong with me, I should be able to go out there, get my bag and leave, right? Isn't that something people are doing all of the time without thinking about it? Without worrying about it, incessantly? They won't give me a second thought once I'm gone. I'm staring at items too closely, crammed against them to avoid some part of me being seen.

I hear a bell jangle. She's gone, thank you, Lord. And then a male voice. No. Another person, she's not gone at all. We just added another track to the mix. He'll probably come into this room and see my face two centimeters from an old Pez dispenser. He'll probably hit me, like knock me into something so it breaks and I get yelled at. Like in school when someone would come up from behind and shove. What am I doing? I can't stop itching. I itch and watch the dander drift. My DNA is everywhere in this room. I am becoming a part of this room.

I can't make out what the voices are saying. The male voice is deep and loud. Booming. It intimidates me. My voice is weak and small and most people can't hear me. They tell me I'm mumbling but I actually don't want them to understand me. If

they don't understand, they can think I said something smart. Or at least not think I said something dumb. They can think they're the dumb one because they can't understand me. The male voice is nearing.

I spin around awkwardly and the man is in the room with me.

"Oh, excuse me. Sorry," he says confidently. "Didn't realize someone was in here. How's it goin'?"

I pretend nothing is happening. He turns and looks at things, humming nothing. I ease myself out of the room.

"Oh, hey, I didn't mean to cramp your style. I can look elsewhere until you're finished. Whoa. Creepy doll."

How? How is this person so confident? He looks my age. He is wearing a corduroy jacket, shiny brown shoes and blue jeans. How does he know how to dress like that?

"It's okay, I don't need to be..." I mumble.

"Alrighty. By the way, you may want to do a quick mirror check. You've got some gloop on your lip."

I rub my lips quickly, ferociously. I look down at my hand. I see dried clumps of purple saliva. What does that mean? Doesn't matter. Things are going from the worst to worse. I have to get out.

The attractive girl is standing at the register, chatting with the proprietor. I stand behind her in line. She is wearing spandex pants and running shoes. She is constantly moving, twisting her foot on the wood floor and pulling her foot up to her butt for a stretch. She's a runner. What if I ran? But I hate running. Everyone could

see me. Maybe I could run in place in my room. But my sister would ask what I was doing. She would ask if I was masturbating and embarrass me. But embarrass me in front of whom? Her? Why do I feel embarrassed around someone who embarrasses me when no one else is around?

“Do you need help? Are you all ready?” the proprietor asks.

The attractive runner looks at me. Her eyes move down and up. She resumes her stretching and handles an object for sale.

“I need my bag,” I mumble.

“Oh, yeah, sure. Nothing caught your fancy?”

She gets me my bag and I take it in a harsh manner I don’t mean to take it in.

“I’ve got enough shit.”

I feel bad answering like I do, so negatively, but I don’t know how to fix it. How am I supposed to know what my voice is going to sound like when I speak? How does one even answer a question like, ‘Nothing catch your fancy?’ It doesn’t even seem like something anyone should say. I hope that I mumbled enough that she didn’t understand my answer.

“No worries,” she responds, “I know how you feel.”

Does she, this older gypsy woman? Does she know what I’ve been going through? Could it be she has known this entire time everything I was doing and thinking? My face burns. I have to get out.

I turn and walk toward out of the curio shop as fast as I can. I push on the door when I’m supposed to pull. I frantically switch my method and pull and hit my face with the door. I cry out in pain, impulsively. That with the sound of the door

with the bell on it hitting my face, I rush out into the sun. I can feel my face burning and I think about a teacher who once told me to take a deep breath so I do that now but I'm interrupted. I hear the door open behind and the attractive runner is asking if I'm okay.

"I saw you hit your face. I was like, poor guy."

I look at her. She's probably married to some rich guy.

"Are you okay?"

She places her hand on my arm and I step back, caught off guard. I'm not worth being touched by you, I think. Her hand comes down.

"I'm fine."

"Your lips bleeding."

I rub my lip and look at the blood on my hand. Without thinking, I lick it. I look at the attractive runner and she looks as uncomfortable as I always feel. I feel bad for her.

"Take care of yourself, okay?" She places her hand on my arm again. "Deep breaths."

I watch her run away. I suddenly feel okay. I can't wait to get home and masturbate. But I have to piss. I have to piss so badly. The more I think about it the more I have to. I start walking. The day is good and the day is nice. Thinking about things besides peeing. Thinking about other things. There's an Arby's up here I'll piss in. Everything will be fine.

I go inside the Arby's and feel instantly at home. The cool air, the smell of french fries, butter and meat make me swoon a little. I head toward the restroom.

My heart breaks. The door is locked and has a sign on it, 'For Customers Only,' and I want to cry because I am not a customer. I leave the restaurant and keep walking, faster. I have to go so bad. I should have just spent my bus money on some fries and become a customer. I can walk home. For the exercise. Fuck. But then I would have had to ask for the bathroom key and everyone would know that I was going to the bathroom and if the bathroom were a mess I'd have to clean it so the next person to use it wouldn't think I made a mess.

I've had it with myself and I know there are no restaurants coming up but there is a crazy guy coming up. He's my age and talking to himself. He's dressed like he just walked out of church, forest green polo tucked into khakis. He's on a drug. I've never done a drug so I don't know which. I don't even know why people do drugs. The guy stops and says something toward a fire hydrant.

Enough becomes enough. I walk into a grassy area with light tree coverage next to the parking lot of a dental office. I walk through it all and up to the wall, making sure I'm as blocked by trees and posts as I can be. God, I have to piss so badly it hurts. Before I even take my penis out it's pissing. I've got piss on my pajama pants and don't give a fuck about it. I just go as fast as I can, feeling so anxious about someone catching me at this moment, knowing someone will and I won't be able to stop until I'm done. When someone does it almost doesn't register and I ignore it. I have to finish and I do. I turn around and the crazy guy is right there, chortling.

"Damn, dog, you just piss wherever you like. I respect that."

"Huh?"

“Dude, you know what would happen if I pissed like that on a fucking dentist’s wall and shit? All out in the open and shit? My ass would be in jail, dude. No more fro yo. You gotta be grateful you’re white, dude. That’s all I’m sayin’. Hey-hey, you got any change, man? I been like, being kept down, dog. Twenty fuckin’ interviews I had last month, dude. Not even a fuckin’ call-back to say I got the job or not, dude. You know what that’s like? That’s like a surgeon going into the fridge to see if they got a new heart for you and never coming back and you die. That’s why I gotta get high this month so I can go out next month for twenty fuckin’ more bullshit interviews. If a year goes by I’ll be hooked on this shit and livin’ on the street eatin’ some bitch kid’s stank ass fro yo juice. Fuck this country, man. You gotta job?”

“Uh. Like, no. Like, I saw Arby’s is hiring.”

He puts his hand on my chest and I back away.

“Don’t back away from me, motherfucker. I got morals. I got empathy. So, you think I can support my babies working at fucking Arby’s, dog? That shit’s for high school kiddies. Shit, I worked at Burger King in high school. They don’t pay you shit to live. You know that. I need an apartment, man. I’m being real with you, dog. I can’t live with moms no more. I graduated high school, dude. I can’t afford no college. You see this shit?”

The guy pulls a pipe out of a khaki pocket. He considers it. I don’t know what to do. Am I supposed to just stand here? He’s just staring at the pipe and I’m looking at it too because it’s there and he’s holding it up. Do I take it? He lights it, looking cross-eyed at it. He sucks in a huge hit. He looks intensely at me, square in

the eye, as he holds the hit in. And then he's shaking and swooning, closing his eyes and hugging himself as he blows the rank smoke into my face.

"This is how I deal with depression. Can't afford no health insurance. I have severe bi-polar disorder, motherfucker. My ass gets so sad I can't get out of bed for weeks. I got no one to talk to about it, man. No help. No anti-depression pills. I gotta smoke crack, man, and I hate this shit. It turns me into a maniac, dog. I don't want to be seen as a maniac. I got no problems being moral and good and shit. But then I gotta smoke this crack shit to feel better and I feel fucking maniacal, dog. I got no chances. I say motherfucker too much and my babies way too young to be around that vulgar shit. I'm an artist, man, like a real artist, man, but I got no chances, man. No one gives me any chances."

The guy is crying. I feel so uncomfortable. I don't know what to say or do. My heart is thumping in my ears. Does he think I can help him? I feel bad he is so frustrated with his life but it doesn't sound bad, he has a mom at least. I consider things and decide I need to make a move if I can't say anything. I mean, I can say something but I'm afraid of how it will sound. I reach in my bag and pull two mini cigars, one for me and one for him.

"Here, man."

He looks at me, confused, before taking the offering from my sweaty hand.

"Yeah, you alright, man. What's your name?"

"Greg."

"What up, man, I'm Timothy."

We shake hands and he tries to do another maneuver with our hands that I had no idea about. And then another. And a few more.

“No, like this, dog.”

He shows me how to do it and we practice a few times. Once we get it down it feels pretty cool. He pulls out a lighter and we start smoking right there next to the dentist’s parking lot.

“See, rich folk? They’re mirrors of us, dog. Rich folk, they smoke. They smoke crack. They got all the other drugs too but they ain’t happy. They had to do fucked up shit, be evil and shit to get their money. Not care about others but themselves. Unless they had money to begin with. Then they get the drugs without satisfaction of earning they shit and so they get sad. Gotta go to fancy-ass rehab and shit. Blame they moms and dads. Don’t take no responsibility. See, I take responsibility. I get satisfaction when I do get a job and can buy food for moms. I don’t blame nobody for my depression. I got a chemical imbalance.”

“I get depressed too. And anxious. I have panic attacks.”

Suddenly I feel light-headed, like something went away.

“How come you ain’t got no job, dude?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know. Shit. Your mom not teach you about satisfaction and responsibility?”

“My mom died when I was three. My sister raised me. She says we don’t have to work ‘cuz she’s on disability.”

“Not only disability, but money for raising your ass too. Damn, dog, your shit’s fucked up. Hey, what you good at, dog? Hey Greg, what you like to do?”

“Nothing, really.”

“Well, motherfucker, that’s probs ‘cuz you ain’t tried shit. I’m a muralist. I can paint all of humanity’s ills and glories on a wall and you won’t know what you were looking at ‘cuz the shit be metaphorical but you’d feel it. Like, all the planets lined up and a star at the end with no empathy, no conscience. Third from the sun is the heart of our solar system, the one who cares because we’ve developed caring. We’ve become the only thing around who gives a shit. In your heart, Greg, I can make you feel it what all this shit means. I just need a chance.”

“Why don’t you just start painting on a wall somewhere?”

“You know how much paint costs, motherfucker? You know what it’s like going to buy paint and trying to get them scared, skinny white boys or fat, old racist white men to unlock the goddamned paint cage? You don’t know, Greg. You can’t.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Not your problem, dog, not your problem. You got plenty of your own. Greg. I’m gonna hit it. Thanks for the smoke and do me a favor. Find some shit your good at. Try a bunch of shit out. We all good at something, even if that shit’s weird, that’s fucking evolution.”

“Okay, Timothy.”

We do the handshake thing again and he ruffles my hair, roughly.

“I got your back, dog. Peace out!”

He runs off like a crazy guy, bopping his head and swaying down the sidewalk. So confident. Where does it come from? The crack, I guess. I don't know. I pull out my phone and see the text from Gale again and another one telling me I'd better answer her. I do. She tells me to get her the opium. She texts that it's already paid for. I don't ask how.

I look at the time. Lots of it. I begin walking toward the address. I've been there before. I pull out an energy drink for the walk and take drags from my mini-cigar. I feel better, kind of cool. When I get there and she asks this time, I think I'll get high. I feel like I'm ready to feel what it's all about, what it means. I look at the time again. Again, bored I guess, I look at the time.