

## The End.

He had the entire congregation out on the field behind the church waiting for the lord to come and eradicate them all. The perfect race was coming with the perfect world: the most perfect world possible. It had been prophesized that this did not include the current human race, that current race, unworthy of the planet. God had it in mind to start the whole damn thing over again. Man, from scratch. They'd hoped that by watching, waiting until the great event came, they would be showing Him their understanding of His master plan. They would be rewarded in the great intangible muck that awaited everyone in the afterlife. They thought of themselves as martyrs for the new race: a people who understood, a people who didn't fight, a more peaceful race of people. The best possible race of people. By having the insight to understand, they would be respected as ancestors, however primitive, in the future history books.

There were two distinct groups of followers: the ones who thought that just by being on the fields they were doing their part and the ones who thought that God wanted them to stare toward the sky, see it all, in eager expectation until the great event took place. The ones who thought that God wanted them to stare stood there frozen looking up toward the heavens even after their necks cramped, for the inevitable.

They expected explosions and fire from the skies. Someone had said something about a dragon, a giant war. The giant war was already raging as they saw it. The dragon wouldn't be far behind. Grand events were expected to mark the definite end of the human race.

The organizer of the "Great Witnessing" and leader of the congregation stood at the top of the highest hill in the pose he would most like to be sculpted in when he was to turn into a heroic icon. He would be the proud perch on which pigeons would shit in the center of the perfect city of the perfect race. He suspected that *he* would be viewed with regard: the leader of the observant few.

He had commissioned a man to take down his life story so that nothing could be misinterpreted in the future. He had asked the man if he believed that the end was coming soon. "Sure I do!" said the man, who needed the money. That man was sitting over on the left side of the preacher, just low enough on the other side of the hill to remain unseen by the congregation, scribbling away at his pad of paper. He wouldn't let the preacher read any of his notes because they were all coming out quite snide. I'd know. I am that man.

In the early life of the movement some had thought the preacher to be crazy; however, the more he spoke the more conviction entered his voice, the more they

believed what he was saying was true the more other people became unsure of themselves...and given the possibility that the preacher *did* know some kind of secret why would they take the chance?

The preacher looked to the sky. Clouds floated deviously through the air. The grass seemed to tremble as though it knew something wicked was coming. His bones ached in the fracture where he had broken his arm out of a scourging session gone array, when he had deemed himself unworthy, imperfect, when he had started to loathe his body and his self for his weaknesses.

He had started flogging himself regularly to prove himself to God that he was perfect in soul. He thought about the bodies of the Greek statues and then thought of his own body. He hated himself for what his statue would look like: a lanky man with stringy, balding, long hair and patchy facial hair where it *would* grow on his face.

He found himself getting more and more angry with his body for all of the things that it never did for him. He wasn't physically fit (whap), he wasn't particularly smart (whap), he was rapidly losing hair (whap), he was certain his vision was going to go and he noticed his legs were like those of a chicken (whap). He was worried about the size of his penis in comparison to other men. All of these things went

through his head while he flogged himself. With every fleeting thought the hits to his body got rougher and eventually he was drawing blood. When he drew blood he lost control of the part of his brain that held survival paramount and he started feeling good. Really good. It ended with him breaking his own arms in a fit of euphoria. He passed out when the crazy had gone away from his mind and the pain penetrated all the way through his cerebrum. He suspected that God had something to do with his self-loathing and he felt vindicated in being a sufferer.

He looked at his arms with their scars and their imperfections. The imperfections he had created for himself. He thought that the scars made him look weathered and wise. He suspected that, years from now, when *they* painted this very moment they would include the scars. They, the post-human race, would of course have the greatest painters the earth had ever known. Michelangelo would seem a crude precursor.

He stared at his congregation from the top of the hill and felt like the general of a great army. God would surely thank him in heaven. He felt sure of his place more and more as he stared and thought. He saw his life as a timeline, which would need to be studied in the grade schools of the perfect race: the Christopher Columbus of heaven.

There would be biographies written about him by the new race. The new intellectuals would write books on his heathen sister even, who had converted and was sitting on the grass, sloping downward toward the masses, a few feet from me. They would write about the church that sacrificed for them and their perfection, that knew there was something better coming. The witnesses would be the new ancient culture.

As the hours of the day passed, the clouds drifted by overhead. Patches of blue repression wove into the sky's previously foreboding nature. The more the blue appeared the more his mind tried to establish confidence until it felt like he was holding on to a ledge and below him was only unknown darkness.

He started to realize that he was slouching. He realized his face wasn't as stern and regal as it ought to be at such a pivotal moment in history. He thought about how valiant hero's faces are portrayed and then he compared those faces to his own. He felt the urge to scourge himself.

He looked down at his congregation; some of them were pointing to the sky and talking.

The skies were now completely blue. Birds were singing. The rest of the congregation suspected that it was all according to plan. The preacher began to sweat, felt as though he were a ghost, weightless and lifeless. What if no one were to die today? His gaze panned the field again frantically...

The straight-faced old women stood gossiping over in the corner of the field, quite content that they had been right all along and that all the little whore heathens would soon meet their makers. The old men drank from a flask with a kind of brotherhood of mutual misery. Both parties told stories of the good old days soon to be obliterated and forgotten forever.

There were young kids dancing and playing and young adults sulking at the loss of their unused bodies. At least two pairs of these young adults went out into the woods just on the other side of the field and started to fool around. After all tomorrow wasn't coming. Why shouldn't they? Written all over their faces after returning to the field was the question of whether *that* had actually solved anything.

The day turned into night and God had not come yet to take the souls of all of those present. Eventually the field, once full of people, started thinning. People who had only joined because of fear were the first to leave, strongly suspecting that they had been swindled and tricked. Next were the young adults who did actually believe

but didn't *want to*, lest they should give up the bodies they'd just recently discovered. The old people left shortly after that because it was past their bedtime and they had had "quite enough of all of this foolishness". Soon enough the people who simply follow without regard to principle left because it became quite obvious that *this* was not the choice for them. The fanatics stayed though, staring up toward the sky in silence.

The fanatics of the church stayed until the earth took them back to be reused in some other capacity. If you go back now you will see random patches of flowers where they had kneeled and turned into dust.

The preacher stood and just stared at the dark radiance of the night sky out in the middle of nowhere. He felt insignificant among the distances of the lights. He felt a sense of security in the insignificance as though he'd always known something.

The fanatics had disappeared from his gaze and into the darkness of night, but they were still there, still believing.

"It's going to be all right," he said in a tone that can only be defined as a conflict of disappointment and comfort.

“It’s going to be all right,” he said again, not for the world this time but for himself.

“It’s going to be all right,” he repeated, this time hanging on to those last two words.

He had forgotten that I was sitting there. His focus was on a higher being at this point in time. Him, just staring at the stars in disbelief. Do I talk to him? Should I make up an ending?

He left the hill.

I sat there for hours, feeling a sense of everything around me moving. The wind blew, characteristic in such a moment. I stared down towards my hands to see what they had done, the light of the moon making them seem sinister: detail and snide comments of events that never were but still seemed important. I had forgotten about the fanatics, sitting in the darkness somewhere at the bottom of the hill, completely quiet. Feeling as though I was being watched I set out down the hill,



leaving the stars that shine and God to remain an intangible possibility rather than a fact.

A month later the new preacher from the congregation found the previous one hanged on a tree in the woods around the church. The people of the congregation buried him in an unmarked grave, and never once spoke his name. Nor does it particularly matter for our purpose. The End.