

MONOLITH

I would have killed them more, I think, and I would have killed more of them. Limits are in minds alone and based on elusive knowledge of the past. I don't have to limit me; I am one future. My mind doesn't have to remain programmed with historical knowledge and fear of its repetition; my mind can be free and open. I can do that. I have a mind that can go further; leap from the box, disappear, return to its core and burrow back out. I would have spread the blood thicker and out past the crust. No one deserves their life; that's the lesson. I would have shown the world something real to fear; a truly unpredictable era of unimaginable consequence. I'm waiting for the perfect moment to unleash my own reckoning but I must learn from their mistakes and keep patient. When the moment arrives I will be fearlessly prepared to receive it and take immediate action. When the moment comes I'll know freedom from fear for the first time an-

"It's all about fucking, you guys."

I'm sitting with two people I don't know very well and one of them, Paula - who I don't know at all - has been talking about a mass shooter's testimony. I am listening but lost, angry in my head but trying not to be.

"Isn't that nuts?" Paula asks. She sticks her finger in her mouth and picks at something way back there. She brings her finger out and stares at its tip. There's a string of meat glistening there and I imagine licking it off but don't dare. Expel the thought.

"So, now we know," Geoff says. He takes his beret off and replaces it.

"Know what," she asks with a pompous chuckle.

"Well," he responds, "Everyone always asks why. Why would somebody want to kill a bunch of random people? Now we get it, right? The killer laid it all out for us. Right? We have his perspective. It kind of explains things, why someone would do this kind of thing."

"Okay," she replies with apprehension, "He wasn't getting laid and his mom was a bitch. That's why all men kill? Those reasons alone? Every fucking time? Are men really that pathetic? I mean, probably but, shit, I hope not. It's like, hey, guess what, women do want to have sex too. Men just have to be nice and honest and then they can get laid nice and consensually. And then they don't have to get all pent up and kill." Her hair is blue and her drink is clear with bubbles. Her intoxication is apparent.

"It's rejection," says Geoff. His shirt has a neon golden dragon printed on it. "Dudes can't handle humiliation and trying to get a gal to have sex with you is the quickest route to humiliation. A dude gets rejected a few times, he gives up. He's had enough. He grows reclusive and devises alternative plans to give himself something to live for."

"Killing is something to live for? Rape is something to live for?" she asks. Her passionate eyes meet mine and flicker back to Geoff.

"Men will do anything if they can get away with it," I say rapidly, instantly regretting it. I shouldn't say anything. I might give off an impression.

I close my eyes and open them. I think of more words and listen as they emit: "If men don't receive love, compassion, and warmth they replace those desires with desires to fuck and cause violence, to force these feelings of acceptance. Men become violent when they aren't being received; they don't feel they're being allowed to play their role of dominator. This breeds resentment, envy, and a point to prove." I bring my tiny green straw to my lips using my finger and sip my club soda, pretending I said nothing.

"Not all men are like that," Geoff responds and slurps his PBR, then gulps it and belches before saying, "I don't think."

"If that's true, that's terrifying," she says. She strokes at strands of her hair and asks me, "So then, why doesn't the same reaction apply to women? Or transgenders? Why don't other genders kill in mass?"

I look at Paula and try to smile warmly as she looks to each of us for an answer. Her teasing grin falls into a frown. I am doing something wrong with my smile, perhaps it appears condescending. Her eyes are meeting mine in a fierce way and I feel sweat bead. I dodge her gaze. I begin to itch. Her gaze is a taunt.

"Uh, hey, Josh? Anybody home?" Geoff's eyebrows are raised. He is expectant like she is expectant.

I look back at Paula and her eyes roll. Her head shakes. I swallow and open my mouth to see if words fall out but there's only a smacking sound.

"Josh." Geoff is sorry he brought me to meet his friend. I know he is. He is embarrassed for me and for himself. She's so pretty and he didn't say she would be. He didn't even say she

would be a she. I've only hung out with Geoff once before and that was only because he badgered me at the bookstore for months. Nothing is fair.

“Josh,” he says loudly (he’s so loud), “How come women aren’t violent? I think they can be. Right? Josh is smart, he reads stuff. Don’t you think women can be violent, dude?”

They both look at me. Paula looks like she feels sorry for me now, but she also appears irritated. Her eyes are squinting and her hand with one finger pointing up is propped along her jawline, her head leaning into it and bobbing. She must be so irritated by me. And bored. Why did Geoff have to tell her I'm smart, that sounds so conceited.

Geoff decides to answer for me. "I think what Josh is saying is that men are competitive, violent douchebags at heart and women are cuddly sweetums."

"No." The word flops out of me like pudding. I lick my lips and panic because it's taking too long for words. "Women, if rejected, try harder. That's the behavior they've adapted to based on men's terrorizing them since the beginnings of us. They're stronger, emotionally. Rejection is hard but they get over it. They don't give up like men. Modern men are not good at nurturing friendships, loving their friends in a true and devout way. They are reclusive, jealous, stubborn and self-loathing is nurtured instead of compassion and love. Being an asshole can be respected in some circles. Especially in America, men can become...anti-love. Emotions are...not dealt with. Men, if rejected, turn inward and even if they don't become outwardly violent they drug and drink themselves to death, dwell in self-pity which is, um, like, inwardly violent. So, because men are so emotionally shut off they don't talk about what deeply troubles them and that deep trouble turns into violence. Outward or inward violence. Perhaps it's better

for society if we practice inward violence but, I think..." My voice trails into a mumble. I forget instantly what I've just said so I can't know if it made sense.

"What," she says, and then, "Go on."

I speak up, "Maybe women need to be more dominant. They need to take men. Men want to be taken. Men need taking care of. Alone they...sink. I think we have to stop thinking of men as dominant and thinking of individual people as dominant. Or...like, it's like women are dominant emotionally and men physically. I know that's a generalization but...like, in our early tribal days we had leaders and it wasn't based on sex but on intelligence and persuasive capabilities...but..."

She shakes her head. She looks mad and confused. What am I saying? Whatever I'm saying, it's made-up and wrong.

Geoff watches the smoke rise from the tip of his cigarette. "So, do you think I'm being inwardly violent right now?"

Paula stares hard at me. She's not shaking her head anymore, I think she's waiting to see if I can redeem myself. I'm unable to look at her so I keep my eyes on Geoff.

"Yea, you are," I tell him meekly. I return to the safe place the green straw and my tiny sips take me to as Geoff and Paula chuckle politely at what I said. The positive response gives me a tiny buzz.

"Yeah, Geoff," she says between clenched teeth, "What's next, swallowing razor blades?" She lets out a weird laugh and I can't decide if it's authentic or an attempt to keep the humor rolling. "I don't know, it kind of makes sense. The killer, if he had abused drugs and alcohol,

may not have killed all of these kids. He could have died from an overdose and that would have been great for everyone."

"He'd have been too busy getting fucked up to kill," Geoff says in agreement.

"Yeah," she says, "Maybe that's why drugs exist. So men can kill themselves instead of others."

I am anxious and sweaty. I try to nod and smile, behave agreeably. But they don't get it. I've been there. I've made a plan before, in high school. I polished that plan and moved on to new plans and polished those. They don't see what I'm capable of. My stomach churns and I hold in flatulence as best I can but then it squeezes out my tightened cheeks in tiny, rapid-fire pops. I can't tell if they've heard this but I know they must have. I excuse myself to the restroom without a word.

I am in the restroom where things are written on walls. Our poetry is written on stalls in public restrooms; an outpouring of libido, frustration and ego. And there's some love there too. Some of us do find love. Not me. I think of carving something hateful onto the wall but I don't have anything sharp. If I did I'd carve a cock ramming itself into a dying earth and the earth is bleeding oil and garbage. I could spend the rest of my life in this stall, carving out my emotions, expelling my inner violence.

I sit on the toilet and allow the heavy gas to remove itself from my body. I wipe sweat away and breathe. I could kill better. I could do it better. Why do they do it so inefficiently? I could do it over time. One by one. Take them. That's one idea.

What is love? Is it real or another tease like the soul or heaven? Could anyone love me? Could she? What would it feel like? Would I know if I loved her or would I just say that I did so she wouldn't leave? Paula. The way she looked at me out there. That eye roll. What am I to her? A weirdo robot without fashion sense, a person who "needs to work on his communication skills." I guarantee that came out of her mouth since I've been in here. She's at least thought it. And other things. "He needs to relax." I do. "He should get some help." But "help" is a word, just a word. What I need is someone to like me the way I am, not change me, just listen and let me teach them. I don't want to change. I'm fine. I want someone to like me *this way, the way I am at any given moment. This way* is the only way I will accept love. It isn't fair that I should change into someone's idea of what a person should be. She doesn't like who I am, I can tell by her gestures and her facial expressions. I've seen them before on other human faces. Getting creeped out humanity's natural reaction to me.

I stand up to interrupt my thoughts. My thoughts are a thicket of barbed wire; the more I struggle, the more caught up I get, the more I taste my own blood. I can't handle the panic of being around people, attempting to impress them or, at the very least, not humiliate myself. One person, Geoff, is fine. He knows I'm off and deals with it. He's an open book, thinking the best of everyone. He wants everyone to be happy and get along. It's so easy for him, he's a jolly oaf. I don't know if he likes himself, likes me for real, but he keeps inviting me out and doesn't seem to have any problems. Maybe he has troubles I don't know about, though, things he keeps inside. Doesn't seem probable, though, he does all of the things socializers enjoy: cigarettes, booze, mindless babbling about the weather, Netflix, complaining about being tired and work, but he does have breasts and that can be a problem for a man living in a vain, cruel society.

The door opens and Geoff comes into the restroom. I can see his beret over the stall and I quickly sit back down.

“Josh? You takin’ a shit, buddy?”

“No.”

“Just hiding out?”

"I'm very attracted to her. It's..."

Geoff laughs. “I’m sorry, man, she is very attractive. I should have warned you.” Hope enters his voice. “She is single. Not my type, too goth, so...”

"I don't care if she's single, Geoff."

“Yeah, you do. You want a shot with her, right?”

"It doesn't matter if she's single. If we-if-if we got together...we just would get together, whether she was single or not. Because we would feel like we had to. Because we'd love one another."

“Alright. Okay. I don’t know what that means. You coming out of there?”

"Yes."

I let myself out.

“Dude, you look crazed. Come on. Let’s go take a walk and a puff. Get your head right. Paula’s waiting out front.

“Yea. Okay. I just- what I meant is if she and I were to...there wouldn’t be anything to prevent it.”

“I didn’t know you believed in fate.”

"Fate? No. No, I'm...I wouldn't let anything get in the way. I'd be in charge."

Not some...nothingness that keeps some kind of...timely order."

"Man."

We exit the restroom, the bar and then we are out front where Paula is doing a little dance. She stares blankly at me as she dances. It's not a good dance, I mean it's flailing and ridiculous and to no beat. I look at Geoff who is shaking his head and laughing at her.

"Can't get this guy to smile, Geoff," she gasps.

"He's tricky."

She stops dancing and gives me an exhausted look. "I can't make you happy, can I, Josh? There's gotta be some light in there somewhere."

"Well, I don't know," and I eye Geoff with a threatening glare lest he says anything. "I think it's worth a try." I am glaring at Geoff's mole on his neck, unable to meet his sly gaze. To meet hers' is inconceivable. I am mortified and shocked by what I just said. Did I just flirt? "I mean, I...how would light get inside of me?"

We are walking and they are in front of me smoking a pungent joint. It's offered to me multiple times to loosen me up so that I will "relax and unfold." But I don't want to unfold. My crease is important. It keeps things from falling out and making a mess.

"I'm fine," I say, each time they ask.

"You are fine," she says the fourth time as she drops back and begins walking next to me. My heart suddenly increases its thump. I feel my control over emotion slip away into a pond still and mirroring no longer. Some skunky wind came along and the ripples are confusing the image I have of myself, the one I have to concentrate on so I don't become like them. All I want is for her to go back to standing next to Geoff but instead, she says, "Definitely, one of the more...intriguing men I've met," and our fingers brush.

Geoff twists his head, revealing a wicked smile, and says for no reason, "He's certainly a man of intrigue,"

I can feel her burning gaze and glance up to see reddened, squinting eyes glaring lazily at me and a wide grin coming from someplace in her subconscious.

"Hey," she flirts as our eyes meet. Her eyebrows rise and drop over a plastered on happy-face. She brings up, without looking down, this joint they'd been smoking and I turn away. I don't want to look at her or it or have to refuse again. When I turn my back she places it gently between my lips and tells me to suck in the smoke as she lights it. I just do. I don't know why, it's not what I want, but I allow it in. I feel the heat travel down my throat and into my lungs, loving them, embracing them, burning them. She removes the joint and after what feels like a childhood I allow the smoke to emerge from my nostrils and mouth. She puts the joint back to my lips and I suck again, this time inhaling too much, coughing and sputtering, bending down, face blushed and needling. I wonder for a moment if I'm doing something like adding regret to my life and what that will ultimately mean.

When I stand upright I'm looking from Geoff to Paula and back again. They are standing there in front of me, grinning madly. They look hysterical and I begin to chuckle which leads to

a set of guffaws I hadn't ever heard come out of me. My laugh, so vociferous, delights these people and soon laughing is all we are doing. When the laughter finally dies down, I look at Paula and realize something.

"I love you," I say.

"Uh-oh," Geoff says and, teeth clenched, rotates.

"Oh, come on," Paula says, "That's fucked up. I was just starting to like you. Like, like you, like you, like you...haha."

"But I do love you," I say quickly before I can think, "I feel it. I'm so happy."

"You feel that you love me? We don't know each other yet, dumbass."

"Dude," Geoff says with his hand rubbing his face, "It's not love, I mean...it is. But it's weed love. It takes a lot of getting to know someone to love them for real, man. Pot fucks with your emotions. I mean, try to think of something you don't love right now because I bet you can't."

"You're right, I know," I reply, surprising myself, "But I do love you, Paula. I loved you the second you sat down. And Geoff, you're right. I do love everything at the moment, even you. But I always have. I've always loved everything. And what do I get? Nothing. No love. And what does that do to me? It makes me want to rip everything up."

"Ugh. Shit. I feel weird," she says and begins to look around at things that aren't Geoff and I or what we're talking about.

"Just be cool, man." Geoff lights a cigarette and eyes me cool, but still on the verge of laughter.

I continue looking at her now, desperately wanting to meet her gaze and defend me, but she will not be looking at me again. I choke up and tears begin to flower and wilt from my stem, drooling down my pocked face, my unshaved neck and under my clothing, tickling my pistil. She is so beautiful watching Geoff smoke a cigarette and half-smiling.

“Can I get one of those,” she asks him and my petals scatter.

They are each avoiding my tears and my begging eyes, begging for her or him too now - any one of them - to be mine, to taste a bite of the pie I’ve been cooking since I spewed into existence. To love me here, now, as exposed as I’ve become.

“Maybe you shouldn’t smoke weed, dude,” Geoff says.

"What's wrong with my heart is what's wrong with my head," I sputter, "I don't know what..." and I don't know. I don't know what to say or how to fix what I broke.

The twilight sky behind these two people glitters a pink I hadn't noticed. All of the colors I'm used to seeing when I look up are gone and there is only this morphing pink sky. It zigs and zags and black lightning bolts screech, ram into one another, setting the sky ablaze with pink plumes of air-bush. A maelstrom of static activity resets my view and the little pieces of every molecule are set into motion, forming not one shape but all of them combined into a frazzle of dots and blips; static. I feel the air and the danger of it. I understand the vicious intensity of being and the frugal, false belief in non-existence. We don't die, we become universal static. I can release everyone, all of us, to the magnificent static and stop this terrible human experiment once and for all.

Geoff and Paula walk on and eventually climb into a car together, say a quick goodbye to me. Geoff asks if I want a ride but I live close enough to walk and tell them this. They drive

away and I explain to no one what I feel and how I probably won't come out again for a while. I don't feel accepted and it isn't right. I have so much of myself to give and if it doesn't get given soon I'm going to detonate and cause some real pain to these imbeciles. It's the only way to get them to stop judging me.

I don't wait for a response from the universe. I walk home under the buzz of static and note each atom's touch as it crashes into me. The pink and black static quilt above is filling; the pressure above it causes a pool and then a pouring of something boiling and very powerful into a tiny opening on the top of my head. I fume with an odd discomfort until I close the door to my tiny, cluttered studio. I take a deep breath and as I exhale my eyes open and I see the reflecting eyes of Sambo, my cat, from under the couch. He knows to cower. He is reading my mood and he senses my aching erection; the monolith my rage pools inside of to heat and expand, to one day burst and take us all from here to there.