



*Insight to a
Revolution*

ferggus

Prologue:

I am a total piece of shit

*"Thou shalt not kill. When he said that he was of course only talking about True Christians.... Believe in Him and thou shalt be saved: from the great Prophet Paul, to the **Corinthians Ch.7: V13**. Who went on to say 'To lieth man with man is an abomination of the Devil and any man that commits this Sin will join him in Eternal Hell.' **Corinthians Ch.6: V9**. By that He meant, as we have always taught, that it is our Christian duty to kill homosexuals. And the more of them that we kill the closer we will come to God's side when we join Him in Heaven."*

Pastor Stan raises his arms and hangs His head. It is a pose familiar to his devoted congregation - a less than subtle imitation of Jesus on the Cross. But one that the young women in his congregation hang lax legged for. As one the faithful scream at the top of their voices, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Kill the faggots! Kill the faggots!" Pastor Stan's deep voice booms out of the speakers: "Amen!"

Elijah listens with bulging eyes and mouth open; a long drop of spittle hangs from his lower lip. At the end of His sermon Elijah jumps to his feet and applauds Pastor Stan's speech so enthusiastically that the Pastor Himself comments on it. Elijah, who's never before been spoken to directly by Pastor Stan, turns bright red and is so excited he's unable to speak for several minutes, only stuttering unintelligibly when anyone talks to him. In awe he tells himself, "Can't speak? Talkin in Tongues? Them is Signs!" Leaving the church he has convinced himself that he, Elijah, is an instrument of God. And therefore absolved for the actions he has committed himself to ever since he first heard about the march.

That afternoon, in the adjoining county, a large LGBT rally is taking place to protest against the escalating violence against the gay community in the region. In turn a counter demonstration has been sponsored by the local Evangelical Churches, in coordination with a national White Supremacist group. Which irony the local newspaper has been quick to highlight, with reference to a series of recent exposes providing evidence that this group has a proportion of gay members ten times the national population. For Joe Average it has got to the pass that everyone in Boss Boys is assumed to have signed up in order to conceal their homosexuality. Of course the last refuge, when exposure is only a closet door away, remains within the cloisters of the Military and Police.

It's turned out to be another blistering hot summer day. The cotton is visibly wilting and everyone is complaining that the harvest, for the seventh year running, is going to be a disaster. Predictably the LGBT community has been fingered the culprit by Red Neck Farmer - the unnatural weather conditions a Retribution on their Perversion. By midday in Market Square, the still heat has reduced the Soldiers of The Salvation Army to an almost mummified state as they patter out the fake concern they use to vacuum up the detritus of humanity. That scraping that forms the nucleus of their flock. Poor souls sunk so low that The Answer has been reduced to only two options. Suicide. Or crutching onto a religion which has had its valuable message of Love obscured behind filmy gauzes of fairy stories and superstition. In other words a Complete Crock of Shit, a.k.a. the Doctrine of the Christian Church.

The usually morguely uneventful Market Square - any local youth found in it would be assumed to be retained there under extreme duress - has rebranded itself into a battleground of epic scale. Over the previous week anyone caught by Boss Boys putting up posters advertising the LGBT rally have been summarily judged, juried, convicted and punished. All of which takes no more than five minutes, by which time the victim resembles Human Punchbag. Five are dead; twenty seven in critical condition.

The LGBT demonstrators are marching in front of the county courthouse. Only an hour into their protest they have a wilted look about them, slowed to a snail pace shuffle while desultorily waving exclamation laden placards demanding a more robust police response to the **'More than 100% !! Increase !!'** in violence against the gay community. Clearly the passers by have greater concerns than the spate of sadistic murders of gay men, and their ritual branding with a crucifix. Because the protesters are universally ignored by the local community. Those holding placards calling for drivers to "*Honk if you're with us!*" are met with silence and stony faced disinterest. In fact as the morning progresses it's as if a wall has gradually erected around them, until they are entirely invisible to the good folk of the town. Invisible that is until in the early afternoon, when a heavily armed Boss Boys mob flood all the roads leading into Market Square.

The baseball bat wielding mob outnumber the demonstrators by at least 3:1. They comprise entirely gorillas the sort of build you'd expect to find in the Defense Line of a football team. By contrast the protesters are an equal mix of men and women aging in range from teen to the geriatric. A massacre appears the only possible outcome and yet Pig - as the lynch mob tear through the protesters with feral, sadistic savagery - makes no attempt to intervene. Occasionally he passes casual comment into his radio. When the posse does finally arrive in numbers

capable of restoring order the worst violence in the county's history since the Race Riots is all but over.

In a well orchestrated move, the LGBT activists have been surrounded on three sides and forced back against the only just repainted white frontage of the county courthouse. This soon resembles one of those rag wash effect walls, with the blood of the protesters smeared over it. The violence with which the mob attack them can best be described as a frenzy. Their purpose appears to be to extinguish the entirety of this oppressed fragment of society, on which at this moment the sum of their corrosive hatred is concentrated. As the baseball bats continue to rain down the pile of crumpled bodies rises, and the number still standing, backs pressed to the blood slicked wall, diminishes until there remains only a single, wide spaced line trapped in front of the courthouse. Blades flash in the sunlight but given the effectiveness of the bat wielding monsters at the vanguard of the attack, these weapons appear superfluous. Though in fact when the body count is tallied all the fatalities are found to have copious stab wounds. Whether this or blunt trauma is the ultimate cause of death is never examined, as there appears no one in Authority with even the most detached interest in how the lives of these innocents ended. "There was provocation on both sides..."

While this slaughter is still in full swing, down one of the now empty side streets leading to Market Square Sian, one of a small group of Pro Choice Activists, is involved in a vocal and at times physical confrontation with members of Pastor Stan's congregation. The former is demanding the reopening of the last abortion clinic in the county. The latter are hysterically opposed to it. Victory was theirs several months previously and as one of them cogently put it, "It'll reopen when hell freezes over y'all." It's unclear why she's debating the Christians, when it had become almost immediately apparent that between the three of them they could muster no more than a lone brain cell. Can produce nothing more than a zomboid repetition of Pastor Stan's vile hate speech – when they don't sound like chattering primates. Sian had switched off at the point they'd started arguing that we exists as soon as.... What was it? Something – the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost? – entered the body of the fetus. *Entered where for god's sake?* had met with blank expression. And finally given up altogether (*Why, oh fucking why, did I ever start?* she berates herself) when they start up the Damned to Hell mumbo jumbo. But she does, temporarily, lose it when (*the fucking, stupid arrogance of them!*) they promise, in suddenly syrupy, condescending manner, promise they will never give up trying to save her Soul. Which somehow reminds Sian of an experience in her youth when a friend had been practicing newly acquired water life saving skills on

her. On her back and locked in a powerful neck hold she'd spent most of the time 'being rescued' with her head under the water and as a consequence had nearly drowned.

With attention rapidly fading from The Brain Cell Trio, it's at this point that Sian becomes aware of the desperate pleas for help from the LGBT protesters at the county courthouse no more than a hundred metres away. With a picture in her mind (which is replaced by one ten times more horrific when confronted with the actuality) Sian runs as fast as she can towards the noise. On reaching The Square she comes to a screeching halt, gasps and, straight out of a cartoon, her mouth drops wide open. The scene of violence: it is a literal bloodbath with the steps leading down from the courthouse dripping in red. The lumps of wood, now slick with blood and glistening in the bright afternoon sunlight, are still being energetically wielded, slamming down with sickening crunch onto unprotected head and torso. It is just so unreal to her – previously so unimaginable that one human – *we are supposed to be at the top of the evolutionary tree for fuck's sake* – could do this to another. It does occur to her, in fact thereafter becomes an *idée fixe*, that humans are in fact very far down the chain. *Physical supremacy is no indication of advancement*. Imagining the whole Universe, the realisation strikes her very hard - sends shivers down her back – that primitive species will as a rule dominate the peace loving, advanced one.

For several slow as a lifetime seconds Sian is caught by uncertainty, but then she notices over in one corner of the square a circle of men, and within it two teenage girls. She dashes in their direction – still having the disturbingly ethereal feeling of being in a cartoon as she does so – the whole time screaming at the top of her voice for them to stop. On reaching them, and as she tries ineffectually to push through the wall of thickset bodies, she hears one of the men roar menacingly at the girls - who are naked from the waist down - to finger each other and kiss. He smashes their faces together when they momentarily hesitate. After this he yells at one to get down on her knees. Complying he then pushes her face into the others Sex: "Lick her out cunt." After a few seconds he pushes her aside and juts bloody fingers into the standing girl. Raises them aloft: "Look! Fucking dripping for it!" A fist smashes into the side of the one on her knees. Her face is already badly bruised - in fact so swollen around the eyes she can barely see. When trying to follow the Sadist's instructions, she gropes for her friend as if blind.

Sian, without any thought for her own safety, takes several steps back and then throws herself at the black wall of men. Surprisingly at her first attempt a narrow gap forms. She keeps pushing forward, each time forcing a gap just enough

for her to squeeze through. Until she suddenly bursts through, and finds herself in the ring with the two girls and The Ugly orchestrating their abuse. She runs at him – his T shirt reads *'All women are just Cunts'* – and jumps on his back. He spins round and, as if no more than a child, throws her off. Attention suddenly shifts onto Sian. At first there's screams of "Get her doing the others! Get them all fucking!" But then someone spots Sian's T shirt with **Pro Choice** emblazoned across it. "Shut the fuck up. Fuuuuck up!" screams the Mob leader. "You're one of those fucking Baby killers!" He grabs Sian's long mane of blonde hair and snaps her head back and screams in her face, "You know what we do to Baby Killers around here?" In the background the chant has already gone up, "Rape the Baby Killer! Rape the Baby Killer!" A few Boss Boys get pushed forward into the circle and are egged on; lots of laughter, joking, teasing. A surreal madness, it's as if they're engaged in nothing more than a school yard game. Eventually, to much laughter, Elijah - that scrawny, youth bedeviled by Pastor Stan's twisted rhetoric - somehow ends up in the middle. With sparse, straw colored hair, a narrow ratlike face, small eyes and a vindictive, calculating expression, he advances, at first uncertainly, on Sian. By now two men hold her down, legs spread wide apart, naked from the waist down. "Go fuck her Weed! Let the Virgin fuck the Whore!" The Weed grimaces when he hears the name calling – hasn't he heard it all his life? – but he can't keep his eyes off Sian's nakedness. The tuft of blond hair at the join of her legs; her hips bucking in futile attempt to escape. A tongue runs over thin, dry lips, exposing two long front teeth. Despite his obvious desire, as the jeers and catcalls get increasingly personal and more hurtful, a look of intense hatred settles on his face.

All of a sudden his eyes go completely blank. He no longer hears the crowd, even when he strips off his soiled clothes to reveal an almost childlike penis and the mocking becomes intensely cruel. Oblivious, he dives on top of Sian, knocking the wind out of her so that as he grunts and pushes himself into her she's still trying to recover her breath. Less than a minute in someone, themselves aroused by Sian's naked beauty, tries to push Elijah off. Snarling and with surprising strength he shoves them back and, out of nowhere a blade flashes in their face. After that as his skinny, pimply ass pumps up and down there's only jeers, accompanied by a general call for Sian to "Moan you fucking bitch! The first real fuck you ever had Chick Lover!" A baseball bat smashes down on her thigh. She screams at the initial shock, then moans at the throbbing pain. Boss Boys laugh when someone shouts, "There you go Weed, she's fucking loving it. You're the fucking Man, Weed." The chant goes up, in time with his inexpert humping. Elijah's hips jerk faster and faster until, with a girlish shriek, he gives a final thrust

and collapses onto Sian. For a few seconds Elijah lies quite still on her, lost in post coital daze. But then, as the taunts continue, he becomes once again aware of his surroundings. All of it so familiar - the catcalls and jeers at the size of his penis, his ugliness, his pathetic physique - heard so many times to him it's a soundtrack of his life. Gradually his expression resumes the look of violent hatred, and his body stiffens until he's a wood board on the woman's body.

Awkwardly, like a badly functioning robot, he pushes himself up off Sian and stares down at her with a fixed, sadistic expression. In fact he can barely see her through the mist of hatred: she could be anyone. The mouth opens, revealing the long teeth dripping saliva, and screams something completely inarticulate. An expression of all the pain contained within his tiny, once (so impossible to picture it now) entirely innocent, frame. At the same moment he raises one hand - the blade flashes in the sunlight. Everyone in the circle sees it and in that moment time stops. The crowd of men cry alarm and warning. Sian's innocence, her unaffected beauty, contrasted with the satanic evil compressed into the shriveled, ugly body reaches somewhere into all of them. But it's one of the girls, long forgotten, that is the only one to act. As the arm comes down - in slow motion, seared forever on all their minds - she dives across Sian's body and with a sickening crunch the long blade drives up to the hilt into her back.

There are only two people in the world: Sian and Alex. Their faces only a few centimetres apart, life slowly dissipates out of Alex's once arrestingly blue eyes - that particular shade of aqua you'll only find in waters lapping the remotest, unpolluted beaches of some Pacific Islands. Blood from her mouth drops onto Sian's face and into her mouth. She wants to scream out but is held, conscious of the finality of the moment. She takes Alex's head in her hands and gently pulls her down until their lips touch. She kisses her gently, then more passionately as she feels Alex's body get heavier. She whispers, "Die knowing you're loved." She strokes the side of her face, "Don't worry, we're a species apart from them." As Alex becomes increasingly unresponsive she chokes up, struggling to finish what she desperately wants to say - it seems the most important thing she's ever done. "We will win Love....Love." She keeps whispering as she feels her body sag, the life end, "Love.... Love.... Love...."

Three months later Sian has a dream. In it The Weed is in front of a massed, adoring, cheering crowd that hangs onto every one of the spew of hate filled words. From time to time the same terrifying expression she'd seen just before he'd tried to kill her suffuses his face. Though in the crowd, some distance from him, she can clearly see the look of insane hatred. It's clear his mind is completely

broken. Too late, in *The Believers* the self loathing - all the pain from the constant destruction of his self esteem - has found an outward turn. The anger and hostility is something physical – a mist that makes everything around him opaque, indefinite. The morning after this dream, though already knowing the result, Sian goes to the doctor and the worst is confirmed. In a daze she leaves the surgery, taking no notice of where she goes. Eventually, realising she's lost, she looks around for a familiar landmark. But what she sees sends a shiver down her back. Her hand goes to her mouth and she screams loudly – a cry for the Soul of Woman.

Across the road is the same park she'd seen in the dream. The same enthusiastic crowd a hundred deep forming a semi circle in front of a high rock outcrop set in a small woodland of pine trees. On the rock stands *The Weed*: it's not him, though there's something indefinably similar in the speaker. She'd recognised immediately the face of her brother, superimposed on *The Weed*'s features: a face more rounded, the hair dark and with a thick wave. Gone are the small rat eyes and long teeth. But otherwise it is *The Weed* – in the puny body and the high pitched voice. But most of all in the screaming of vitriolic hatred – against every ostracized minority that is so easily made the scapegoat. So easily vilified; so easy to caricature into something dangerous and threatening. He, the target of so much ridicule for as long as she can remember, and had tried so hard to defend him from, is able in a few words to explode a lava of contained hatred over them.

Clutching her belly and with the Soul of Woman crying out, Sian releases a howl of pain and sinks to her knees. On the sidewalk passersby give her a wide berth as, shoulders heaving, she sobs great tears, trying to exorcise the pain. After five minutes a cop - called by a driver concerned at Sian's distress – crosses the road, at the same time calling out to her. Sian, eyes completely blank, gets to her feet and staring straight ahead walks into the path of a bus speeding down the otherwise empty street.

As the policeman approaches Sian's awkwardly twisted body, it gradually becomes translucent and transforms into a thin smoke trail which twists up into the early evening sky. At the same time three bearded old men, who'd appeared at the moment of her death, rise up into the sky at her side. A half hour later, when the detective investigating the accident asks for a witness statement from him, the cop that failed to save Sian breaks down. A little girl pushes herself to the front of the small crowd and tells the detective that "when she floated away she was smiling. She looked a bit sad though, as if she didn't really want to leave." Suddenly the little girl's face lights up: "She's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen." In a breathless voice, "Like an angel."

SECTION ONE

Just another Day in Asia

The two friends, one a recently qualified teacher, the other an IT Programmer (though friends always refer to him as The Poet) have been travelling around Asia together for six months. Niall has seen exactly the same as Tina, but their interpretation of it is completely different. On a conventional Traveling Odyssey (can one call something conventional an Odyssey? Fuck it, let's!), he's out to enjoy the festivals, the beaches, the Night Life, and so turns a blind eye to all that Tina is outraged by.

Keeping a watchful eye on their scooter parked out front of the bar, the pair are enjoying ice cold beers at what has become THEIR bar, in this city so like all the other Asian cities they've stayed in for a few days before making another beaten track escape. Tina is in full rant, "But look! The old man that fell off his bike – it was obvious he was dying and he was calling out for help. People saw him, looked at him – but then with complete indifference they drove on."

Niall counters, "Sure, isn't that how it works over here? Blame Confucius apparently: you only have to care for your immediate family. There's no real malice involved, they're just not your responsibility. Even when something really, really bad happens – and it happens all the fucking time from what I read – they don't make the obvious connection. I remember there was this young girl in China somewhere, no more than a toddler, and she was on the side of the road. Feck, I don't know why she was there! Anyway, a minivan runs into her – you see it on the CCTV footage which is right there and records the whole fucking thing. Sure he stops! Gets out even. But to check the fucking van! Then gets back in and drives off. You see the back wheels hump over the little body. After that she's still moving but you can tell she's badly injured, rolling from side to side, unable to get up. And people walk straight past her. A few even fucking step straight over the poor thing. And then she gets run over again. And again. Five times! in all. People are right there watching it and yet don't do anything to help her. In the end one of her family find her. Yeah, feck, what do you expect, of course she died!"

With tear filled eyes Tina responds, "But us not stopping, doesn't that make us as bad as them?" Niall looks at her for a moment with incredulity and points at the scooter, "You saw what happened to us. It's different, we're foreigners, they still see us as an ATM." Tina shakes her head, "I don't agree, we could have helped without going all the way." Niall laughs, "The feck how? What do you mean, Jesus, you really think you had a choice back there? There was no one in sight but as

soon as we stopped to help the old fella there was a dozen people demanding we take him to the hospital and pay for it.” Fire comes into Tina’s eyes, “I told you we could have done it – it wouldn’t have cost that much.” Niall shakes his head in disbelief, “How do you know it would have ended there? We might have been blamed. Seriously, feck, you don’t know - jail, anything.” Tina looks up, remembering what had started as a basic humanitarian action and turned into them being chased across town by an angry mob.

In a second they’re surrounded. All screaming at them for money. Lucky Tina stayed on the scooter and Niall had jumped on the back and yelled at her to get going. After that it had been a mad chase down unfamiliar streets, at least eight bikes chasing them. At one point they’d seen a cop and stopped but he’d only tried to arrest them and after that there were nine in the posse. After a dozen near misses Tina starts to slow down and yells over her shoulder, “I can’t do this any more, we’re going to get killed. It’s just a matter of time. I want to stop and pay them. Give them everything we’ve got.” Niall screams back, “Keep going! We’ve got our credit cards – I’ve heard about it, they force you to max out your card. Fuck them! Come on, you’re doing great, keep going.” Reluctantly Tina opens up the throttle - just as the cop comes abreast of them and starts flailing at Niall with his baton. But their bike’s faster, and they get ahead, flying again.

More narrow, winding streets, some almost completely blocked. By now Tina has become adept at weaving in and out between the moving cars, though there’s been several near misses when one pulls out leaving barely the narrowest gap to squeeze through. And if it’s not them it’s bikes, kids, old ladies, or dogs that bound into the middle of the road barking furiously. That’s the terrifying thing, trying to keep up speed when there’s no way of predicting what’s going to happen ahead of you. It can be literally anything. Something you’d never imagine anyone doing. Like just before when they’d almost skidded off as a bike dawdling along on the right kerb pulls straight across in front of her, the rider never once looking back. A few streets on from that and two kids on a powerful bike, engine screaming, fly across the intersection, so fast they’re a blur. The size of the thing, the speed, anyone they’d hit would have been killed instantly. Tina feels a warped satisfaction but then instant guilt when Niall tells her that just down the cross street a car had pulled out and they’d slammed into it. It’s endless – the possibility of another insanity around every corner.

Still the bikes are chasing them - a yoyo of them slowly gaining distance, nearly close enough to run into the scooter, or someone to hit them, and then she has to drive dangerously fast to widen the gap. But now, after about twenty

minutes of this she finds she can't get away. She's getting tired, or they're getting more reckless in their determination to catch them. Suddenly two of them break away from the rest and speed past her. Those behind start to pull out wide. It's clear they intend to surround them and force them to stop. Fortunately by now they've reached the more familiar tourist district and are on the straight, wide and relatively empty river front road. The early morning sun is glittering off the water of The Mekong – that river so polluted you'd die if you swallowed a mouthful. And full of the floating carcasses of animals so bloated they're unrecognisable. And yet somehow, especially at this time of day, it still manages to look arrestingly beautiful. Glittering as it snakes through the city then pulls away to the horizon. Down here Tina's more confident and she's not afraid to open it right up. They speed ahead of them, out front again.

Niall is still shouting instructions on how to get back to their fleapit of a hotel but Tina has other ideas. Ahead, where the main road takes a sharp turn away from the river, is the best hotel in the city, a Raffles. Ignoring Niall's directions she makes a beeline for it – weaving through the light traffic, evading the kamikaze attempts of the bikers to run into her, and accelerating when she can. The posse, led by the cop (a week's wages worth of bribes his incentive), is almost on them. But they're still a nose in front, still a chance to make it - the wide entrance to the grounds of the glamorous international hotel, their sanctuary, just up ahead. Suddenly the same two bikes, more powerful than all the others, accelerate ahead of the pack. Almost immediately they're alongside and closing in at her sides. Tina full opens the throttle, "Jesus, please!" she screams, "We've only fifty metres to go!"

Seeing the servants dressed in plush red and gold livery gliding across the manicured gardens, the place has an unreal, dreamlike quality - the hotel a kind of shangri la palace rising out of the garbage dump of a city. But they're not there yet. Just then Tina's grabbed by both passengers on the big bikes and at the same time they jam on their brakes. Niall tries but is unable to break their grip on her. They're all so preoccupied that none of them notice the danger ahead, until someone behind yells a warning. Tina can see what's going to happen and she yells at Niall. They both lean hard in at the same moment as the bike on their left tries to ram them out of the way. It bounces off the scooter and smashes into the wall. The other one is still trying to pull Tina off but Niall manages to wrest her free. But along with the other they still follow them up the long, sweeping driveway that winds through the lush green lawns towards the pillared entrance to the hotel.

Glancing in her mirror Tina sees the the policeman suddenly puts on a spurt, at the same time pulling something out of a holster. Her heart skips a beat: for a second it looked like a gun. Still a hundred metres from the building, she opens the throttle up again but he's closing fast and next moment there's a loud crack and Niall slumps against her back. Holding him up with one arm she skids and almost crashes into a massive, human sized, clay pot with pink bougainvillea spilling over its sides. Swerving from side to side across the courtyard, at any moment she's sure they're going to come off. A crowd has formed by the time she finally comes to a skidding halt at the hotel steps. With Niall still groggy, throwing the scooter down she half drags him inside. The mob try to follow but several wall like guards block their path. There's a few tense minutes as the angry, gesticulating policeman argues with the guards but in the end they're forced to leave. One of them then comes over to Niall and Tina and reassures them, "Don't worry, they won't be waiting outside. Every part of the city is controlled by gangs and the one chasing you is a long way from their territory."

At the bar, holding up the cheap plastic helmet Niall laughs, "For feck's sake, the thing almost split in two. That bastard with his cosh nearly did me in." Looking at it again Niall suddenly turns green. The two friends glance at the battered looking bright orange scooter and then at each other. Silent for a few seconds but then burst out laughing. People start to stare as they continue, getting a little hysterical even, but the beers by now have kicked in and the laughter soon turns to rueful sniggers and shaking heads. A few minutes silence and beer gazing, then Niall reflects, "Feck, it could have been a tonne worse though, hey." But then, wanting to turn the subject, he recalls the story Tina had been telling about Sian, and says to her, "You know, I think I read that story somewhere. But I don't remember that bullshit at the end." Tina says emphatically, "It's not bullshit; it's true. I was there." Niall's eyes narrow in disbelief, but Tina stares back at him unblinking. Eyes widen for a second, then he shrugs, "Oooh, the little girl, yeah?" Tina just smiles enigmatically. Silently sipping beers and watching a hectic world go by, Niall has almost forgotten what they were talking about when Tina says, "You're right, here there's usually no malice in their indifference, but with them it's so deliberately cruel. And calculated. I sometimes wonder what their big picture is."

A few minutes later the friends are distracted by the sight of a burgundy red Rolls Royce which almost completely fills the road. Almost – scooters still stream past in that hectic, never ending flow. "The inequality is something to see, isn't it?" Tina says. "Do you remember that grand house just down the road, and either

side of it dozens of corrugated metal huts propping each other up. The kids running around in squalor. And there between them that mansion gives just a glimpse of itself above the high concrete wall. The party – all those Mercedes, Range Rovers, Porches. The heavy rosewood gates silently sliding open to reveal the magic garden. Exotic Japanese trees. Color splashed over them by orchids of every color. The ivy frontage looked straight out of The Hamptons, or an English mansion.” Niall interjects, “Yeah, and all that fecking fur and jewelry on those dog ugly monsters of women that no makeup, no clothes, no fecking surgery could conceal their cold emptiness. The ruthlessness of them. Every fecking one of them.”

Tina nods then looks down; almost talking to herself she says, “The thing that strikes me is the deference to money you see here. As soon as they start flinging it about, everyone from the rungs below are over them like they’re royalty. You saw it there – the slum dwellers. Not angry at this disgusting display of wealth. Their only thought is to get their hand out. Can’t they see it’s their money those horrible people have stolen from them? Starting with their land, the only capital they ever had. Forced to sell at the end of a gun. For nothing compared to what the middle man gets for it from the Chinese developer.” Niall’s heard it before and he rolls his eyes. Seeing this from Niall, Tina will usually change the subject, but this time she persists, “Come on, it’s everywhere! That’s the thing, it’s not just in the walled off gated communities, it’s everywhere here. Starting at the bottom with the street seller pushing a cart full of worthless Chinese plastic crap or trays of fly covered shellfish. How many times have you seen him struggling along in the heat with a line of expensive cars stuck behind him having to crawl along at his pace because there’s no room to get round him for the jam of traffic coming the other way.” Her voice cracks as she goes on, “A little higher up you’ve got someone that’s trodden on a few heads and owns a corner restaurant. Earns enough from it to pay for a low quality private school for his kids. What chance will they have when they come up against the kids of the Super Rich taught from day one that to rule is their birthright? You know that quote? *‘Boys at Eton are taught to impose themselves on the world with effortless superiority.’* True for these too. And it starts with the pampering they receive at home as The Golden Child, and continues at school because they’re The Client. Where they’re taught to an international standard and can expect to score a place at a World Top Twenty University. Their whole life ridden on the back of the 99%. Their luxury funded by them. To live in poverty. A meaningless life of animal survival.

Niall has never hidden his disinterest in this favorite of Tina’s pet rants. He’d once tried feigning sleep but having his balls squeezed painfully hard had been

warning enough against trying that tactic again. Tina gives an innocent smile, “OK, so it’s terrible here. Do you think it’ll ever be as bad in The West? The US? The UK? Europe?” Niall sits bolt upright like he’s been cattle prodded, “Of course! What the fecking, feck are you talking about!” But then he sees the sly grin and laughs, “OK you got me. You know what I think - the old Divide and Rule Strategy their default. Works every time. And just as well here by the look. You’d think by now we’d have worked out we were being played by them, wouldn’t you?”

Tina asks, “Who’s the ‘Them’ you’re talking about?”

Devil's Utopia: Divide and Rule

"We're standing here to remember it's exactly one year from that momentous day – most folks here would probably say infamous – when the era of the driverless car started. Little did we realise it then. That it would be the tipping point. When the neoliberal elite would finally reveal its hand. What WE should have been wise to. But were too short sighted to see. That they no longer needed to place value in human capital. Marx's model is out of date, there's only Capital now: Labor no longer in the equation. Since then it's been a domino effect."

Someone in the crowd yells, "Yeah, don't we know it! Once all vehicles on the road had to be AI controlled."

"As I said: dominoes. As they're laid off the unemployed auto workers moved into the only jobs available to them - lower paid, less secure. Warehousing. Laborer. Commission only sales. And they were the lucky ones. The rest of us never work again."

*"Boo fucking hoo!" shouts a heckler standing at the front of a hustling, dangerous looking crowd of men who, if their views weren't already clear to the Consumers, carry large banners. The one held by the man beside the heckler is typical: **We're Workers! Get a fucking job! and another WE pay taxes! Pay YOUR share!** The confrontation between the two groups of marchers is taking place in a park adjacent to The Chicago Stock Exchange. The rally is one of over a hundred taking place all over the USA that have been organised by welfare groups demanding action (which has been derisive to date) over the unprecedented breakdown of the labor market. It started out a month earlier as a peaceful march by ten thousand Consumers through Portland. Some are not even in their twenties yet but all of them are without prospect of ever finding employment because the number of jobs created by the flood of AI into every sector of industry is dwarfed by the redundancies. While the mainstream media, that mouthpiece of the neoliberal elite, continue to spruik fake stories of the opportunities automation will produce, internet news outlets have finally woken up and are reporting the facts that have been staring them in the face for years. For the creation of one job in the IT sector there are a thousand made unemployed. The maths is that simple.*

The march had a surprisingly festive feel about it, with many suburbanites coming out to cheer them on as they passed through their neighborhood. They too finally having seen the writing on the wall. Too late the doomsdayers are saying. But the mood changed when, in the public park, they came up against The Workers counter rally which not surprisingly - since there are now 75% unemployed to 25% employed - is a considerably smaller affair. However, they make up for their lack of number with an aggressive arrogance typified by The Heckler, the leader of them, shouting, "We're the fucking ones keeping the engine fucking running. Useless Class - be grateful for any handout you get from us." And another, in response to a question from an AI reporter on the scene, "Why should our taxes keep going up? We're the only ones doing the fucking work!"

*Held by the front row of the Consumer crowd there's a long banner which carries a short and very simple message: **It's not our fault!** In front of them, on a small makeshift stage across from the playground, the organisers of the rally are headed by The Sage. An old man now, in his youth he was a firebrand, who mellowed considerably once he came to realise how little he knew about what really mattered. Tall, thin, but with a healthy physique and seemingly boundless energy, the lion's mane of long white hair makes him stand out in any crowd. He is a speaker in great demand for his prophetic appreciation of how the dramatic and frightening changes in communities will play out. Frightening because work has been central to most people's lives, and they have yet no idea with what to replace it with.*

For the present between the two groups there's a No Man's Land of about twenty metres. Ludlow, the leader of the Workers, a middle manager from one of the largest IT conglomerates in the state, is an unprepossessing looking individual: overweight, middle aged, white male. Of average height, his shirt stretches tight across a belly that precedes him by some distance. He blinks with bulging, frog like eyes normally concealed behind thick spectacles. He shouts across the divide at the leaders of the Consumer rally, "You're all lazy scroungers - any fucking excuse not to work. Can't find a job?" he scoffs. "Give me a fucking break: we're all flat out and got a hundred unfilled vacancies. Business has never been better!"

The Sage gets down off the stage and walks slowly up to Ludlow. A lapel microphone on his coat broadcasts the conversation through speakers nearby. His voice is deep and full of warmth. "It's not your fault. But it's not ours either. For most of us, we no longer have anything to offer industry. When machines came along it was alright because jobs were created that required our intellect. But AI - like machines that were able to do a hundred times more physical work than humans - are able to perform decision making and the repetitive tasks of the

intellect thousands of times faster than the human brain. So there's nothing else for us to offer, except creativity and few jobs require that. And the handful of jobs and tasks not yet automated.... Yes it is brother. Don't believe what the government is saying. Why? Because it's propaganda designed to pass the buck.... Facts? Jobs in the IT sector account for less than 1.5% of the global workforce. So when you strip out industries that employ 20, 30% of the working population the AI jobs can't replace them. There's a billion people going to come onto the labor market in the next decade. And economists from the government admit only three hundred million jobs will be created. Yes friend, that is a fact. Out of their own mouths." Ludlow sneers derisively, "Well, there you go buddy, three hundred million jobs are up for grabs – go and fucking get one."

"What about the other seven hundred million who will never work? Look, it was the responsibility of industry leaders and government. They knew exactly what the effects of automation would be and they should have prepared society for this unprecedented situation. And it could have been a win/win for everyone. But what's their solution? Screw down welfare in the decade before AI kicked in. That way they minimise expectation of workers made redundant by AI.... No brother.... Friend, it's not the same. With the introduction of every new automated production line, office, warehouse, supermarket, industry's profits immediately jump by the amount they don't have to pay workers anymore. Sure, sure, there's a capital cost, but that's a one off. How is that fair? How is that our fault? Solution? That's easy: industry pays a healthy automation tax and we have a more equitable pay structure...."

"Equitable pay structure huh?" Ludlow turns his back on The Sage and shouts to the crowd of already jeering workers, "Yeah, we've heard that before, and that's why we're here today. More taxes on us. More. And more! When is it ever going to stop? And who gets the fucking money?" He gestures over his shoulder, "We know what they fucking are, don't we? The Useless fucking Class." The Sage says quietly, but his voice booms out of the speakers, drowning out Ludlow, "You should be taxed until everyone is on the same wage. Look at Norway – The Nordic Model – it's worked for nearly a hundred years and they're the happiest people in the world." He knows by saying this he's waving a red rag to an already very angry bull but the Sage doesn't hesitate, "In the end it gets down to this: for human civilisation to be sustainable workers and non workers need to be paid the same. We're demanding an across the board wage the same for everyone of \$100 per hour. We've said it from the start. Nothing else will fix this mess the First Class have deliberately engineered."

Perhaps it had always been the signal, because almost immediately as one The Workers charge at The Consumers. Weapons appear from deep pockets – baseball bats; sand filled coshes. A few metal pipes glint dully in the weak sunlight. But it comes as no surprise to them. For the Consumer marchers it was a matter only of, when? They've agreed not to retaliate however brutal the attack. And it is brutal. Line after line of Consumers crumple at the feet of the Workers as they beat, kick and punch their way through the pacific, silent body. Soon the grass is turned a dull red. But the action of The Workers should not be unexpected. Is only further confirmation – how much more is needed? - that we, mankind, have taken only an unmeasurably small step out of the cave.

It should also come as no surprise that as the protest turns violent the police make no attempt to protect The Consumers. Unchallenged, as the butchery continues, gangs more dangerously armed than The Workers start to appear. Knives and machetes work their way through the helpless fallen, hacking and stabbing indiscriminately. And while at last the police take action – pulling the most violent out of the fray and marching them away – footage later emerges of them down out of sight side streets chatting cordially the vigilante attackers before freeing them. The savage violence and failure to charge the culprits is a horror played out any time Consumers try to stand up and demand a fair deal. An investigative journalist uncovers that the most violent gangs are directed by plain clothed police. Ringleaders, inciting them to a brutality even these fascist thugs would have otherwise balked at.

Now, as the heat of the violence starts to wane, The Worker's leader Ludlow can be seen purposefully walking along the long line of Consumer walking wounded who are waiting for treatment by a small band of overworked medics. At one point he turns to the edifice sized man at his side who has the look, build and manner of The Minder and, laughing, he points someone. Ludlow, overflowing with an assurity of superiority - this is a man who's never tasted such power, such unequivocal victory before - then saunters up to The Sage, whose mane of white hair is matted with blood, and shouts at him loud enough for all around to hear, "Listen to me you fucking commie cunt," his eyes still blaze with the adrenalin of violent rage, "You are The Useless Class." Sticks a finger in The Sage's chest. "You will get whatever you deserve." He turns to The Minder who nods stupidly, "Since they don't fucking work that shouldn't be too much." Snorts, "Fucking hundred bucks an hour. Fucking joking." Guffaws, "A hundred fucking pesos for you cunts." The Minder grunts noncommittally, lost by the sudden tangle into international finance.

Niall- The Poet – wrote this short story about Ludlow and The Sage while on the Asia trip. And he can easily picture his prediction coming true if the neoliberal Elite isn't forced to change direction and make modern life more equitable. We're all in fact capable of quite accurate prediction of how the future will turn out - ours, society - if we'll only draw back and view the world from a distance, objectively. The Observer, not distracted by the emotive tug on the heart sleeve; or the Neolithic red herring of arguments. And not be persuaded, against logic, merely by the arrogance of their conviction. They, the Ludlows, who think they know everything when in fact possess a bare pin head's worth of meaningful knowledge about the Universe. Where we all fit within it, and how we may create a sustainable future for subsequent generations of sentient beings. Clarity of The Big Picture is an essential for the gain of real wisdom. And if not won, a guarantee of our doom. Mankind's extinction.

The two of them, Niall and Tina, are discussing the predictions in his story, "You see how it works? Divide and Rule. Get us all fighting amongst ourselves while The Robber Barons run off with the loot. Feck, they've been using the same ruse for a thousand years – look at Ireland – and we're still falling for it." Tina looks confused, "But surely, if it gets as bad as you say it will – the majority being forced to live on a pittance, knowing they'll never work again, and seeing the few Workers pulling further and further away from them – surely in the end there's going to be something like a civil war?"

Niall nods ruefully, "Yeah, you're getting it. The question is not if, but just how deadly it's going to be. But don't worry, they've thought of that. People have been talking about western democracies starting to resemble the Police States of the old communist regimes. But yeh know, things have gone a way, way further than that. I mean, for a start they didn't have CCTV on every street corner. And the internet being the way most of us communicate. Real time surveillance. The ability for analysis by AI and virtually instant identification of 'persons of interest'. The State has absolute power. My brother coined the phrase The Prison State. Yeah that one, and he said we're not too far off it. And," Niall laughs caustically, "He should fecking know, heh? He doesn't see anyone preventing it. Especially not those fecking useless Privacy Advocacy NGOs. Supposed to be getting in the way of the neoliberal governments, but more like are doing their mouthpiece. I mean, you can't find a better example than facial recognition. They parrot the argument that we shouldn't have it when it's inaccurate. But it's OK once it is! For feck's sake. I mean, we're talking once it's built into CCTV – like already in China – you've got Prison State. That's how close we are to it."

Tina smiles, "So, we're talking about your brother who's inside for drug dealing again, are we? No, no, I didn't mean that. I just wasn't sure which one – it sometimes seems like there's two football teams of them! I remember you saying he was some kind of genius as a kid – got scholarships to the best schools – but fell in with the wrong crowd and dropped out." Niall shakes his head angrily, "That sounds like he was a victim. No, Seamus was - is - arrogant and thought he knew better than he did. And he was always in a hurry for everything. No patience that fella, my mum would tell me whenever he got into trouble. I was the youngest and she confided in me. She used to worry about Seamus, blaming herself for letting him slip through the gap. And of course, once he got a taste for the money.... You know, he never really wanted it for spending, it was just a measure of how much smarter he was than everyone else. Well, that was it – he wanted to make it the fastest way possible and there's only one way to do that."

"But what did he say about The Prison State? He would know that side."

"Yeah, he's in prison in England. Again. A high security one because a bent Pig pushed him and pushed him. He could only resist the temptation for so long - even though he had his poor, beautiful little boy by then – until he took the bait and set up a big cocaine deal. They're the fecking worst – Bangkok Hilton got nothing on them." Niall shakes his head in real wonder, "How is it that no more than two hundred kilometres across the water you've got prisons in Norway and Denmark where they're really committed – seeing their behavior as a disease to be treated, with.... Ah, feck it, but that's another story. Seamus, now, what did he tell us when I visited him in prison?" Tina interrupts, "Hold on, tell me something about his background: you never told us much about him."

At first Niall's reluctant, but then shrugs and says, "Ay, The Black Sheep. So, yeah, like you said, he was a bright kid, you could say, a fecking genius – always top of the class, 100% in exams most the time. So he gets a scholarship to one of those posh private schools. He was well up for it, the uniform and all that shit, but he left after only two terms. He told me he missed his mates, but I figure – he's about the most conceited prick you'll ever meet – I think it was that he didn't like being only a little smarter than the rest of the class. He likes to stand out, and there he was just one of..."

"Anyway, later, with the chasing after money he got into dealing when he was still only in Year 11. He still passed with flying colors but by the time he finished school he was on the hard stuff himself. Gets one of his customers pregnant – heroin, a prostitute, mentally unstable with four kids from three different dads. Emotionally abused her kids – I saw the court documents – withhold love from them, and abandon them for months at a time. They were all

in therapy. Lucky little Flynn gets taken off them after he's six months old – yeah my mam has him. I dunno, something happened. Dunno the details, but bad enough Seamus got a beating from two of my brothers. He spiralled after that. Good timing for the bent cop. So now he's down for a five year stretch for the cocaine bust." Niall then recalls to Tina the first time he saw Seamus after he was put away again.

Seamus told Niall, "I swear when I came out I wanted to clean up. Went to live with mum, because little Flynn was in her custody. Yeah, they call it kinship carer and she's his legal mother now. No, I don't mind that, but it was a bad idea. I try to stay out of trouble and bond with Flynn but there's something missing you know. And with mum, love her but she's a fecking tyrant! Alright, she had to be - seven of us, six boys and the old man kicked out. But, feck, she treated me like I was still a teenager. I bottled it up, maybe if I'd laid into her.... But she'd have none of that, I'd be out on my ear. Anyway, it came to a head – nah, it doesn't matter what – and I left. Alright, I was fecking bored out of my tiny fecking mind. I'm no good as a dad, I know that now. She can have him the little bastard."

"You only get a fecking heart beat when you're up to your ears in it." Seamus shrugged, "What the fuck else is there? Anyway, things are going just as planned."

"Ah, come off it Seamus, you fucked up and you're paying the price." Seamus' eyes bulged and Niall sits back warily in his seat, for once glad the prison guard was only a few metres from them. He was expecting a tirade but it doesn't come. Instead it's the ego comes out, "You think I didn't mean to get caught? Little brother there's more money to be made inside than out. A shitload more. You know how much you can get for a phone – anything up to \$4000. I bring in a shipment of ten every week. And weed – I don't deal in Class A - \$100 goes for \$2000 inside. The smart ones are on the inside fella. And free fucking board thrown in."

Niall shakes his head at a question from Tina, "I didn't believe the story of planning to get put away, but if he's involved in smuggling, and it's the kind of shit he'd be into – doing it under their noses, taking the piss out of Authority – he'd get a buzz out of that."

"No one in their right mind would want to be inside though, would they?" asks Tina incredulously, "He could be killed any time – you said he was at Wandsworth. Isn't that one of the worst?" Niall shakes his head, "Seamus doesn't need to worry; he's got his head on, knows how to work the system. And he's a big man, a professional fighter - he's not afraid. Yeah, he spent a year in North East Thailand at a gym, learning Muay Thai and then took up fighting for prize money.

Yeah of course it started out all good, him winning - but like everything with him things went to shit.”

At first it was easy. Seamus had trained for six months, no distractions: being the only *falang* in the whole district there was only training to occupy him. Body hard as rock, he’s a machine. He won the first few fights with ease, and the crowds give him a grudging respect, and more important he starts getting the kickbacks from gamblers that are making money off him winning. But as always, the money on its own is never enough. His ego - always so quick to thrust itself forward and now even more so since his self confidence was wrung out of him in prison - he starts thinking he’s something. Begins playing to the crowd. Whereas for the local fighters they’re there for only one reason – to win. The money is everything to them. It starts with a little known fighter, when it should have been an easy win. The Thai fighter starts taunting Seamus, calling him a big buffalo. Seamus could speak the language pretty well by then, and he knows there’s no worse insult. At every taunt he gets madder, and with that his technique gets sloppy. This time he’s lucky. A few heavy blows to the head land and the Thai fighter slows up: Seamus beats him to a pulp. But the other fighters have seen it, there on the night or on video later.

The next night it’s a bigger, better fighter, and he does the same – taking the piss out of Seamus - and again he bites. Starts showing off to the crowd, a few flashy round houses and flying kicks. None of them quite connect but it looks good and the crowd love it. Playing to them, and still distracted by the taunts of the other fighter, his mind is only half on the fight when a couple of good straight kicks - one to the face really connects - he’s seeing double. Then the punches come. A straight left and right to open him up, and then a hook: he goes down like a sack. The last thing he hears is the jeers of the crowd, telling him, *Falang*, to go back to the gym and learn how to fight. After that it suddenly becomes much harder - win some, lose more - and he gets a well justified reputation for being erratic. Which means few punters will back him, and when that happens you might as well give up and go home. Because the kickbacks is where the real money is.

Seeing the writing on the wall Seamus had already made plans to leave when he hears of a big competition in Bangkok – real prize money, enough to pay for the whole time he’s been in Thailand. Still smarting from the boos of the crowds, it’s also a chance to make a name for himself in the big time. He convinces himself he’s learned his lesson. No more reacting to the taunts. No playing to the crowds. Just head down and fight to win. He almost meant it.

At the start of the competition it's like the early days. *Falang*, locals, they throw everything at him and he beats them all – smashes a few so bad they'll never fight again. He's starting to get his reputation back, and the gamblers putting money on him again. Before he knows it he's in the finals. He calls Niall to come over and watch the fight but neither Niall nor any of the other brothers can be bothered. Seamus has a lot to make up before anyone would be interested in what he's doing.

In the final he's up against a little Thai fighter: Udon. Mean and very fast. And hard as nails, with a face made ugly by the batterings he's had since he started fighting professionally at six years of age. He has a strong record; a pugnacious, reliable fighter that won't give up – the only way to end it is to knock him out. And no one had done that in a long time. Still, with Seamus' record, and his size and prodigious power, the big money starts coming onto him. But not only can he fight, the Thai is ring smart. In the first clinch he doesn't waste any time getting under Seamus' skin. At first he takes no notice, but as the first round runs down Udon keeps it so tight that Seamus starts to feel slow and like he's playing catch up. On top of that Udon gives him no room to take advantage of his size and reach. The momentum starts to go the other fighter's way. Seamus gets frustrated and starts making flashy, reckless shots. Like the elbow to the head: towering over Udon it emphasises their height difference. A few in the audience laugh - but it doesn't hurt him. And then in the last minute of the round Udon turns the tables. Springs high in the air and with all his weight behind it returns the shot, catching Seamus on the soft spot on the crown of the head. He goes down, blacks out for a bit. Back on his feet, Seamus barely knows where he is. Lucky there's only a few seconds on the clock, but it's brutal to watch. Kicks, punches, Udon throws everything at him and the crowd is screaming. To see the small, slight Thai dwarfed by the hulking *Falang* buffalo, but beating him with skill and lightning speed. The crowd love it.

Seamus recovers some in the next round, but the smaller man is too quick for everything he tries, and Udon's shots all connect, sapping his energy. Udon gets in close at every opportunity, and keeps up the taunts, "*Falang*, you're all shit. Buffalo. All this.... No skill, no brains...." Variations on the same theme, like a broken record. And from the audience too. It really gets to Seamus when Udon throws in some fancy kicks - kicks he should have been making - that have solid connects. The audience applaud, laughing as Seamus struggles to fend off the relentless flurry of blows. It's all one sided now and the crowd are screaming for Udon to finish Seamus off. Still only the third round, pinned down and hustled, he's unable to find the space and time to shine. Into the fourth round, slowed up

some but the years of training show. His head is clear and he's still strong; he still has a chance to take the fight. But by now he's seeing red and leaves himself open and Udon takes him apart. No rush, he gets in solid, penetrating kicks that continue to wear Seamus down.

Even after the break he feels tired – moving slow; thinking slow – but it's the last round and Seamus figures he's got to take some chances. Early on he manages to get under Udon's guard and lands a few solid blows that earn him some muted applause. Another elbow to Udon's head and this time it sends him reeling back to his corner. With the height advantage the Thai doesn't seem to have answers and Seamus gets a few more of the same in. A section of the audience starts to get behind him. And finally Udon seems to be slowing up. Seamus sees an opening. He feints with a couple of punches and then fakes a round house before catching him sweet on the head with an Axe kick. Udon goes down hard – poled, and looks almost out of it. The fickle crowd are all behind Seamus now and he's loving it. He stands no more than an arm's length away from his still sprawled opponent, ready to finish him off as soon as he's on his feet. The referee admonishes Seamus and pushes me away.

He's already decided what he's going to do – how he's going to finish Udon off: a crowd pleaser kick that he won't get up from. As soon as Seamus sees the Thai get up he lines up a spinning hook kick. It always looks good and to be fair it isn't that risky a kick if the other fighter had been as out of it as Udon appears. Seamus doesn't know what hits him. One second he's half way round on the spin, and has just turned to line up with his opponent's head when Udon is airborne, feet first, coming at him with all his body weight behind it. The last thing Seamus remembers is two feet connecting with his head, his own arms going haywire and his head hitting the canvas. He comes to in the changing rooms and though the next day he wants to see Udon, to congratulate him, the gym owner says Seamus has to leave the country fast. "Big money after you after lose them packet on last round. Take next plane out. The next one! And never come back of you want to see the next day."

The Wandsworth Hilton

Wake up to the familiar sound of the general alarm. Like I never fucking left. First day of another five years at this prehistoric fucking hell hole: HMP Wandsworth. Another classic of the Victorian era, that should have been knocked down half a century ago. But instead they just keep cramming more of us into it. Maybe one day the whole of fucking London will be just one big prison. The way the government is hell bent on custodial for even the smallest crimes, it might fuck happen. Ah, what the feck was I thinking allowing the cunt to get one over on me? I must have had my eye off the ball, because sure as fuck he wouldn't have caught me on a good day. I can run rings around those bastards with one hand behind the back. But I should have realised I was on their radar and that meant they'd line me up for one of their bollox schemes. Bend the rules any which way to get me netted. Ah, you can't beat The State – that's the thing. Aren't I the living proof of that. The judge just as bad - wouldn't believe the lawyer it was a pure set up for revenge because I'd fucked the cops missus. And that only for revenge on him.... How the feck dumb is that? No way to spend your best years. Feck, five years. In this shibboleth. But don't worry, Seamus will come out on top. He always comes out top dog.

“Hey young fella, stop sucking on my cock and turn over, you're gonna feel a hot poker up your arse. Ha, ha, I see you like it. Well now, we could be friends and cell mates after all. Afterwards, alright, this'll only takes a few minutes,” he says to the teenager, who's in for petty fraud. Later, on their separate bunks, leans over the side and says, “Alright young Rory, you're my boy now. I don't fucking care who's been pumping your hole, send them to me if they've got a problem with that.” The new cellmate is a pretty looking boy; an innocent face that shows none of the scars. Up against walls, in the back of cars, anywhere they could get him alone for five minutes. Began for the kid when he was still in primary school. A rough neighborhood to be sure. The kind of place that supplies a good percentage of the prison population.

Casually, trying not to laugh, I tell him, “Oh, and another thing fella, go and tell Jakey that I want to have a meeting with him in an hour.” Rory looks terrified and his lips start to quiver. And with some justification: Jakey is the undisputed boss of the most powerful gang in the prison. Vicious bastards even by the standards in here. He doesn't know it – but that's all about to change. The kid whines, “But I'll get a beating if I go in there – they won't even listen to what I

have to say before I'll have my balls kicked in." Rory starts to cry. Jumping down from the bunk I pull him to me. The boy snivels a bit, buries his face in my chest. Sugar Daddy I might be but he needs to learn the most important lesson. Give him one, a nice hook to the side of his head, and the stomach for good measure. All soft, like a kid's toy he is. Still gagging for air I pull his face close to mine, "You know how it is young fella – if you're due a beating your only choice is who's going to give it you. Now I'm sure you've heard the stories, and they're all true. So who's it going to be – Jakey or me?"

You had to laugh at the look at the pretty boy's face when he comes back – still surprised as fuck he didn't get a hammering. One of Jakey's minders in tow: we agree the meet. With him gone I call the kid over, "Listen up kid, I had this place worked out long before I even got here. Don't you worry how I knew: stick with me and you'll be safe as houses and have more money than you ever seen before." But I have to remind him: he looks a fickle little fucker. Like he'd shaft you without blinking for a better deal. Give his balls a nice squeeze, "But young fella, you cross me and you won't last the day out. Your only consolation will be your ma will get a bunch of flowers at the funeral. You get me?" He starts asking questions – not as dumb as he looks, but now's not the time. "Look fella, you gotta head on you, I can see that - so fecking use it. It's like this. Every system has it's weaknesses because screws and their like aren't professional criminals. We'll always be a step ahead, work something up they never thought of. How? Didn't I just fecking tell you - because we're smarter than them. Right, kid?" Cunt gets a smug face on, "Yeah fella, if you wanna beating keep doing that. It's lucky for you I AM smarter than everyone else in here. But don't take my word for it; stay when Jakey gets here. Listen. And learn. I might have some use for you. We'll find out, won't we kid?"

"Nice to meet you Jakey, I've heard a lot about you – surprised we never met before. Look, I'll get to the point – I'm not planning on joining up with any gang." I'm expecting the reaction; of course he's got the radar up, looking for an excuse to get heavy. "Ah now, keep your hat on fella..."

"Fuck off, you don't get a different set of rules to everyone else. It's simple, you join a gang or you're dead, or you wind up in hospital wishing you were. That's the rules."

"Ah well, there's rules and there's rules, don't you know Jakey? I never felt tied up that way, you know?" I can't help laughing, the look on his face, and his goons just waiting for the signal. His back to the wall, he shifts a little – I heard he's good with a knife. But I'm not worried, I've got the pace on him. One of his eyes would be gouged out before he got near me. But I'm not here for a fecking

bloodbath, “Hold your horses Jakey, I asked you here for a very good reason. A business proposition. Good money; easy; safe.” He relaxes at that – I’ve got a reputation and he knows my word is good. And the goons follow like trained fecking monkeys. “You know, the amount of contraband coming into this prison is chickenfeed. Pathetic I’d call it. Oh, don’t take it out on the messenger boy – I’m only repeating what Her Majesty’s Inspector’s reported – that Wandsworth has by far the lowest level of phones and drugs compared to the all the other prisons I could have been sent to. That’s why I sorted it that I would be sent here.” Feck, that’s bullshit, but I want him to think I’m all over this place, fingers in the whole fecking shebang. “Because it’s got the best scope for growth. Because up til now this place has been running like a fecking kindergarten.” I’m expecting it, feck I want it, and I’m ready. It’s not Jakey but his #1 minder. Comes at me with his knife out. Before he knows it he’s bleeding from one eye and the knife is sticking in his leg. Jakey comes at me next, but I don’t want anything with him so just fend him off.

I can already hear the Screws running. Ah, here the feckers are, “You’d better see to that one,” I point to the minder, his hand over his face, blood pouring out between his fingers. Let’s hope he doesn’t lose it, but it can’t be helped. Of course when the Screw asks what happened, it’s just an accident. Lead guard says, “Alright you, make sure you get over to the clinic. Now! We don’t want the paperwork for you fucking dying cunt.” Minder gets to his feet, gives me a look and then shuffles out. “And the rest of you, break it up.”

Never let them have it easy, that’s my rule. I like fucking with their heads; sure of a reaction every time. “Fuck it brother, what are you doing, a Screw in a shibboleth. like Wandsworth when you could be a prison OFFICER in Norway. Oh, but of course, they wouldn’t have you. They have to go to fecking University for three years before they step in a prison. And you, what is it? Three weeks? Oh, three MONTHS is it now – you must be up for a pah. fecking D or something. But think of the money you’d make there, and the facilities. It’s like a fecking hotel you’d be working at. Not this fecking cess pit you gotta keep coming to, until one day you drop fecking dead with your dick up some poor fecking Rory here....” Yeah, that gets him, but Jakey steps in on cue so there’s feck all he can do about it. Course, he’ll be after me later. Two or three of them likely. We’ll see who comes out on top. I’m putting my money on Seamus.

After they’re gone I tell Jakey, “Hey, you know what I just decided? When I get out I’m going to deal in Norway. The money’s swamping the place and if it doesn’t work out it’s an easy life. I’m not bullshitting you. Makes a lot of sense if you think about it. You’ve got nothing to pay for and all the time in the world – I

always wanted to study to become a lawyer.” Ah, I can see him losing interest. “Alright, just a bit of small talk to get to know each other. Look, do you want to increase trade by a factor of ten?” Eyes pop out of his head; then the flare: “No, I’m not shitting you fella. You know my reputation – I don’t feck around when it’s business. You’ll be able to bring in anything you want – I mean anything – well, short of Cunt. But who needs that anyway? Fucking girls is for pooftas, ain’t it Jakey?” Feck the cogs are slow. He knows it’s been under performing but he didn’t know what to do. I know, I’ve had the feelers in here since I’d got it down to the likely three. “Look, I checked out every prison I could be sent to and I worked out a foolproof scheme to increase smuggling with minimal risk at seven of them. Given more time I’d have done the same for the other two. Trust me, there’s always a way. And,” I can’t help smiling at the thought, “This is the sweetest, fecking simplest of the lot. Why I pushed to come here, you know.” I’m starting to like the look on his face, like I’ve caught him. I don’t need to say much more and I’ll have him hooked - so let’s get the feck on with it,” “We got a deal then Jakey? Alright, yeah, shake on it brother. Now we can talk about the How. Who does the shit detail?” Of course he’s taken aback by that but answers, “Anyone needs punishing. No one wants to go down and clean out the sewers – three inmates died last year from toxic fumes.”

“That’s good. Couldn’t be better: we’re going to keep it that way. Put it round there’s been more cases of lads being overcome. Get the Screws to supply you with masks and make sure the detail wears them so everyone can see. No, they don’t need to work, just for show to keep prying eyes off.”

You can see he’s desperate to know, but he still can’t see it. And I’m in no hurry: “So what are we talking – in the food? Visitors? Drones? Lags back in off a break? We’ve got all that covered. What’s the fucking sewers got to do with it? There’s no way in there.”

“You think so? I understand it’s like this: the Screws don’t worry about the sewer because they know it’s got metal grills with bars an inch thick this side of the nearest manhole to the outside. Alright, so this is it: we might not be able to get a hooker in, but anything else you want, just float it down and we catch everything at a grill we set up just downstream on the manhole in the kitchen. Collect the stuff when we do the regular cleaning inspections we’re going to start up. Distribution from the kitchen with meals, all color coded so no one gets a package they haven’t paid for.” Gradually you see the light bulb getting brighter. It takes a fecking minute though - I’m not fecking kidding. Feck, this is gonna be easier than I thought. “Of course we keep everything else going just the same. In fact more with the drones – they’re all the fecking rage – makes them think

they're all up with the times. Yeah, we don't put the good stuff with them - cheap junk. Get them looking up in the sky while we're down in the shit where no one's looking. Basic, not sexy: most of the time in business that's what works the best."

"Bent Screws? Yeah, we need to cut down the risk. We'll have a fecking flood of contraband coming in and at the moment detection rates are too high – we'd be losing a fortune.... Like this, alright. You've got a few already. We add to that with a little underage sex blackmail. I've got the social media for every Screw in the place. Some of your smarter lads sending out sexy photos and inviting messages – girls and boys, whatever their preference: I got that as well. Once they've committed themselves we get daddy on the line threatening to go to the cops: they might suspect but they'd still lose their jobs and after that we've got them on a leash. Get some of them like that, and with a few other schemes I've got up my sleeve the rest will follow. We want half of them on the payroll. Fuck yeah, at least half! We're talking millions Jakey, we don't wanna let that fuck up for a few quid in bribes. Yeah, everything sewn up inside and out: chances of getting caught minimal and we max the profits. Any questions?" Dead silence. Yeah, this is going to be easy – just how I planned it. Why would I ever want to be on the outside?

A few months after the meeting between Seamus and Jakey, Niall comes to visit his brother. He has two black eyes but he's smiling like a Cheshire Cat and still teasing the prison guards about how they'd be better off in Norway. He doesn't explain his injuries to Niall, "Sure I was pissed off at first with the stretch being so long but now I'm glad." Niall gives him a look Seamus has seen on the faces of all his brothers: disbelief and since Flynn was taken off him, little disguised contempt. It riles him but what can he do? And if he's honest with himself, which he finds he can be more as he's got older, he knows he deserves it. But with his siblings he can't help it, ego always gets the better of him: "It's true little brother. I'm making more money inside than I ever did on the Out. We're talking ten, fifteen times more. I'll be the richest of the lot of us, just like I always said.... Aw, Niall, come on I was on only joking. But it is true, believe me or not."

"I don't know what you're on about, but be careful will you? You might be smarter than them but sometimes it's not enough. You saw that with the set up – all the way down the line, it didn't matter what you said, they were determined to put you away, and they had the judge on side. Won't you get caught? It's always just a matter of time isn't it? Another two years on top of the original sentence, you'll be a fecking old man, a granddad before you get out."

Seamus smiles at his younger brother – the only one that will still see him after what happened with little Flynn, “I won’t get caught, I’ve got it all worked out. No, I’ve got more chance of getting caught if I was on the outside – more variables, yeh know? Anyway, what’s the rush, I can set myself up for life in the time I’m here. Retire to Spain. Or maybe head to Australia. Meet a nice Sheila. Isn’t that what half our fecking stock did?” The prison guard indicates they’ve got another five minutes. “You know what little brother, I don’t know how I got to thinking of it but there’s not much difference any more between *Out* and *In*.”

“What the feck are you talking about?”

“Ah, what would I be doing different to what I’m doing now for a start. But that’s not it. But that’s what got me thinking. Looking around me. It starts with the cameras and surveillance of the internet. All our communication. All our actions. And it reminded me, especially the CCTV, of *The Outside*. They’re fecking everywhere there too. Ah, I know what you’re thinking, but *Prison State* - it’s closer than you think. What you should be asking yourself is why they want it so.” Niall looks skeptical, “A few CCTV and surveillance of phones and internet doesn’t make *The Outside* a *Prison State*. It’s nowhere near the same as in here.”

“Well little brother, with those in place it’s not hard to make it so. Read up on Tibet. The Uyghurs. You’ll get the picture quick then kid.” Seamus smiles sadly at Niall for a moment, “You’re the smartest of us all kid. I always told ma that.” Silent for a moment, somewhere else, and then he comes back. Smiles, “And you know what - it’s human psychology - you treat someone like a crook, giving them the feeling everything they do and say is being watched and recorded, they’re going to become one. *The State* is turning people into villains.” He prods Niall in the chest. “You want to rebel and fight back don’t you?”

Niall glances evasively at his brother, “I don’t know. I know I said something like that. And I get what you’re saying, but I never thought about it that way. I don’t know....”

“Anyway, what was that: oh, yeah.... and your life. Your free time. In fact all your time. Through *State* systems, and financial inequality – you have no say worth counting. No meaningful choices. These systems indirectly, but very fecking forcefully, regulate your whole life. Recognise it little brother? Yeah? The only difference is that here they can be open about it because it’s OK to treat convicts as sub human.”

Momentarily Niall looks shocked. Eyes wide in surprise, “Allright. You could be onto something. I’ve been thinking about them on *Welfare*. THEY”RE treated as Subs. Anyone on it they don’t have the same rights as the rest of us. Like you lose those rights just because you don’t have a job. When *AI* kicks off and there’s

more unemployed than employed – I call them Consumers - it'll be the same for them. They'll be the new Welfare. But the difference is that it'll be the majority of us. I heard a historian give a name for them – The Useless Class.” Niall shakes his head, “Fek, classic Divide and Rule, hey?”

“Yeah, you're getting it. But there's something else. Another piece of the jigsaw. Not so obvious yet. Like in prison, as much as possible they want us isolated. Alone or in small family groups. Get us away from the idea of having power in numbers. They make it so it's *The State V You*. Same as in prison – you step out of line and you're isolated. Completely powerless against the prison system. Anyway, think about it.” Seamus looks grimly at Niall. Sadness and despair flicker in his eyes for a moment before shutting them out. “Then this one. Maybe easier to see: order in prison is enforced, right. No consensus. No negotiation. Of course not! Though you could argue, why the feck not? And it's the same Outside now. Any difference of opinion. Any alternative. Any resistance. It starts with the media shouting it down. And if that doesn't work State steps it up. State violence. The threat of the law. The fear factor's the losing your job. Because with that it's a fast spiral down with no fecking bottom to it.”

Niall stares back blankly, for the first time really connecting with what Seamus is saying, “Yeah, I agree with your there. I go away to Asia and places like that and I feel more free straight away. Like a weight I didn't know I was carrying is lifted off me.”

“And remember, you little brother are one of the fortunate ones who work in IT. But most people – and it's getting so everyone except IT and the Elite will be in this boat – most people will be only be able to work in jobs so menial it would be a joke to think in terms of it giving you self worth.” Niall looks suddenly frightened, “Modern Life.... deliberately rubbed out the opportunity for purpose and self expression.... They're some of the basic human needs.”

“Well now they're a luxury.” Seamus stares at Niall, watching what he's been saying sinking in. “There's still countries where they expect it, but in any of the neoliberals anyone would laugh at the idea of The State caring about us. And from the bosses, from the Elite, there's no compassion. Yeah, we know they fecking care more about their animals than fecking Welfare. And you can see it will be no different when it comes to when people on welfare are the majority – your Consumers.” Seamus sits back and folds his arms across his broad chest. “So that's it. The Set Up. The First Class. The Second Class. Welfare for now, but soon the majority - Consumers, The Useless Class, whatever you wanna call us. We're a different species to them. You know, in the same way we differentiate ourselves from animals, the Elite differentiate themselves from us. And to enforce that they

need Prison State. Total surveillance. Total control. So that's the How and Why. What are you gonna do about it little brother?"

Niall turns to Tina with an uncertain expression, "Like he says, some of it's hard to take but you can see the way things are trending – The Divide between what he calls The First and Second Classes getting wider and wider and no one doing anything to stop it. Money everything. The First Class exerting increasingly ruthless control over us." Tina nods, eyes widening, "I'm shocked. I've never seen it laid out like that but yes, you'd have to say that democracy is there only in name."

Just then there's a series of loud crashes and a screeching of metal on metal. Moments before a bright orange Ferrari had shot past the two friends but now, no more than thirty metres away, it's come to a stop after ploughing into a group of motorbikes. Sent cartwheeling through the air, bodies land awkwardly, strewn about the car: an unnatural, macabre Still Life. As it had sped down the narrow street the car had been weaving erratically, as if the driver was drunk. Immediately it came to a halt a loudly vocal group of locals had formed up around the badly damaged sports car, banging on its sides. Fists were waved and angry threats made. But as soon as the driver side door opens and the man steps out there's instant silence and everyone steps back, smiling ingratiatingly.

Niall and Tina, keep to the back of the crowd: "No one seems to be taking any notice of the victims," Tina whispers, "Oh god, look!" Beneath the rear wheel are the blood drenched, mangled bodies of two young schoolgirls and an older woman. Eyes staring, all three are obviously dead. On the long bonnet of the Ferrari, sprawled across it, a guitar still strapped to his back, is a young man. It's only by his clothes one has any indication of his age because he's been decapitated and his head is nowhere in sight. There is one survivor – a studious looking uni undergrad. Engineering text books are spread around and over the car like confetti. Screaming in agony, pleading for help, at first people had gone to his aid. But as soon as they'd seen the driver of the car – a caricature of extreme wealth, wearing the most expensive designer clothes and weighed down in bling – everyone backs away from the him.

A wide circle forms around the car. Niall suddenly notices that, with the traffic backed up as far as you can see and the crowd wary and diffident, for the very first time since their arrival in the country there's almost complete silence. In the centre of this tableau is the driver – obviously very drunk. He looks around wildly, and his manner is jittery, like he's also on coke. When two police arrive, they're excessively deferential towards the man. The friends can only pick up the

odd word, but it's obvious what's happening: the man's wallet is out and he's flashing large wads of money. Almost unconsciously, to Niall it seems, the police and several hopefuls in the crowd stretch their hands out. Agreement appears to have already been reached when the driver suddenly spins around and starts screaming at the injured student. The police join in, and one of them kicks him. No one makes the slightest movement to stop them.

Tina drags at Niall's arm, at the same time trying to push through the crowd, but he pulls her back roughly. When she shrugs him off he grabs her and drags her from the accident scene back to the bar. Out of earshot, his voice shaking, he yells at her, "Are you fucking insane? You want us both locked up? Or worse. You know they still have capital punishment here, don't you?" Tina doesn't react as Niall had expected. Eyes blazing, she screams back, "I know that bastard. Don't you recognise him? Ferrari he calls himself – the oldest son of one of the richest men in the country. Calls himself *The King of Industry*." Niall turns and stares. Just then the driver starts to get back into his car but then changes his mind and turns and throws the remainder of the money in his hand into the crowd. This immediately starts a ferocious fight. Some of it lands within reach of the student and he dies smiling, clutching handfuls of notes which others in the crowd snatch from him once they see he's dead.

The Festival

Brothers and Sisters, you have entered Total Freedom. Fly outside yourself: release into the air everything that constrains you. Reflect on the Impermanence of Life: nothing matters. Shed you fears and find The High Ground: your domain.

These words are punched into the temporary archway that signals the entrance to *The Festival*. Surely it has to win the prize, the gold fucking medal, for being the most concentrated bullshit ever scribed. “Ferari baby. Yeah, don’t these words make you feel deep? Like this place is something metaphysical?” My new friend looks blankly back at me, but I notice his Boy’s eyes starting to spark with jealousy. This is gonna be fun. On first glance they’re an incongruous pair. As far as looks go, compared to most Asians Ferari would be slightly above average height, and is of a stocky build. Presently he sports a scruffy patch of a beard: disappointed with it, he’s told me he’s investigating hair growth surgery. And apparently it’s not the first cosmetic enhancement he’s applied to himself. On this though, he doesn’t elaborate. Which gives me a few moment’s mild amusement to judge what’s real, and not. A small, cruel mouth: he rarely smiles. He has the look of Absolute Privilege. But despite the designer clothes, the expensive haircut, permanently glued on sun glasses, and all the rest of the de rigueur paraphernalia he is, and will always remain, an unimpressive, thoroughly unappealing caricature. He just doesn’t have that indefinable IT. And I think he knows. He receives attention with awkward self consciousness and the thin shell of bravura fails to conceal a Try Hard social ineptitude.

The Boy, his lover Zafar, on the other hand, as one might expect, brims over with conceit. From some Middle Eastern heartland, he stands a foot taller than Ferari and has an imposing personality when he chooses to employ it. And an arrestingly chiseled physique which draws attention to him even among this crowd. He appears preoccupied by only two things. The first, his personal appearance – long dark hair held in a ponytail; a close cropped beard that frames a square, jutting jaw; the blackest eyes set so deep it’s often hard to read his mood; a light, honey colored skin; flawless, like a woman’s to touch. This contrasts with the whitest teeth – revealed when he flashes a wide, charismatic smile, which he uses like a weapon. The second is entertainment; his amusement. He views life, like so many of the Born Rich and their hangers on, as one continuous party out of which they are entitled to derive all and whatever pleasure they can.

The main connection between them, apart from the physical attraction, which is strong, appears to be a shared addiction to cocaine and other Class A's. Zafar is of course a complete fucking parasite. But then again, aren't we all?

For my sins I'm in the company of THE richest crowd at the festival. Where I belong! I am on a mission to Mars – to be more exact, I'm putting up with this schlep of the Undeservedly Rich to get seed capital for the greatest application ever invented: the year's *Must Have* app. And I should know just how good it is, because I've slaved over it for at least three weekends to put enough code down to have something to convince potential suckers to spread their ass cheeks. What does it do? What do you take me for – a country hick just stepped off the bus? Let's just say, it's for well being. Mine! I've worked out I need, presently at least, \$15 million to lead the lifestyle I want to become accustomed to. This lifestyle for instance: in the company of tech entrepreneurs, fund managers, Old Money and, like Ferrari here, the sons of disgustingly rich International Oligarchs. You see, I intend to be remembered as someone that mattered. And since I've no interest in being A Saint, Infamous Sinner it will have to be.

"We are the inheritors of the world with the right – nay the obligation – to foreshadow the future world model in our vision. We are The Dreamers. The Leaders of Innovation. But also The Doers and The Winners. Let this be a shared quest to venture forth – Discerning Voyagers - and close on the possibilities our talents create. Remember, there's no ticket to this club – having billions IS the ticket." I'm about to respond to this pseudo philosophical poison with a suitably ass licking encouragement.... Why? Because Dumbfuck, these boys who's pockets I plan to turn out lap this bullshit up. Because it justifies – on the rare occasions they feel the need for vindication - the glaring inequality they expect as their right. But I'm distracted: just then a red Ferrari comes flying over the brow of the hill, almost hits the archway signage, snakes down the dirt road before expertly slide turning into the last remaining parking bay at *The Fort*. At the same time helicopters skim over the smoothly undulating terrain and bear down on us. It's as if we've suddenly been shipped onto one of those twist of reality (ie. when The US of A wins) Vietnam war movies. Greeters scuttle like beetles across the roads, the fake smiles already three dried coats thick.

Out of the car - almost exactly as I'd pictured - steps a chick so hot anywhere else every guy would be falling at her feet. Here she barely gets a look: get in the queue, baby, and maybe at the back third. Shedding the civilian clothes she wears in the default world, for a moment she stands naked as a plucked chicken before donning a Festival uniform. Bending over to give us a view of everything, she laces up thigh high suede boots after having slipped into a yellow Bruce Lee body

suit. Dazzled by the sequins and rhinestones, which reflects the light like a fucking Disco Ball, it's not immediately obvious that the body suit is sheer. Yaaaawn! Who the fuck cares! She saunters over. "Hey babe, you look the hottest chick on the block - I hope you've brought your chastity belt. Oh yeah, and loving the Bruce Lee look." Blank look – like, what is a chastity belt, who is Bruce Lee (actually I said Bruce Ree, but that's a private joke). As I thought, one brain cell, and that only functioning intermittently. Babe has left Money Beau to extract his lard carcass from the bucket seat. It provides momentary amusement for the riched guests, and gives me an opportunity to check out the opposition: none of us flex a face muscle.

"The modern world doesn't need to be fast paced: let's slow things down. It's not just a word, we need to live by Mindfulness." I nearly commit the faux pas of agreeing with the sentiment, "Yeah bro, the Hippies were right on," is on the tip of my tongue when everyone, including the speaker, burst out into well heeled laughter. Fuck, this place could be a fucking minefield. Actually, I blame the drugs for my slow wittedness; instinctively my eyes start wandering, seeking out the source of The White God. It shouldn't take long: among this crowd at any time you can stretch out an arm and there'll be some Blow to hand.

"Hey Texas, none of that Socialist Devil's Advocate bullshit here. Fuck slow! Get some coke in you Tiny." Which alleviates the need for further discreet survey, as speaker waves over at a black Chinese lacquer box. Holy fuck if that baby's full! "Coke up and get with the programme bro. Gentlemen," (of course there's no women here – the Braincell Babes don't count) "Gentlemen, we have to transform it every day so that the world wakes up new and shiny, in our image. Mindfulness isn't about living slow – it's clarity of the mind: working out what you want and how you're gonna get it." He waves his hand again, taking in the excess of luxury of our camp, and guffaws, "Right now this is what we want!"

The Fort consists of a laager made up of top of the range RVs parked in a circle close enough to the next to prevent human passage. A securely guarded wall constructed for one purpose only - to keep out THEM from US. Prepaid, everything is laid on for a flat fee though by the end of the week most of the guests will have doubled it with their (and my) tab. A mobile kitchen provides a *Michelin* dining experience. As the Greeters had ushered us in we were told by The Chief Concierge (a complete wanker): "You will be treated like Kings and Queens for a week with a Coolie personally assigned to you. They are paid to provide you with whatever you want. Which might be: holding a parasol over your head the moment you step outside; making your favorite macrobiotic drink EXACTLY to your liking; supplying, and injecting if desired, your chemical needs.

Not forgetting, to fulfill any desires our Masters and Mistresses of Pleasure have failed to quite fully satisfy. We assure you: we guarantee to cater to the most eccentric requests with absolute confidentiality.” Fuck it, I’m sold on the first line, but it just gets better. And to be fair, so far *Concierge Services* have delivered on every one of their extravagant promises.

And this while the peasants, the Great Unwashed, will rough it in tents for a week living off only what they were able to bring with them. Or scrounge from us – for a barter defined by the extent of our desire to exploit; to humiliate; to stone cast our superiority. Already though - have we only been here a binary of hours? - they have become no more than landscape. Driving in, when we first passed their oily slum village, I was conscious of the wide disparity: this mirror on the Social Divide. A volume of humanity in contrast to our exclusive enclave. It reminded me immediately of the ghetto refugee camps I once passed en route to a Big Game hunting safari. The ragged line of torn and much repaired tents. Bodies hunched over meagre repasts scooped out of tins which are then thrown onto a communal pile where rats scuttle unseen but can be heard rustling, and screeching as they jostle for the rotting leftovers. Swarming and gaining ground, until they outnumber this detritus of human kind.

The eye was then led along the snaking queues to the Blue Glare toilets: the only color in this wilderness of grey. The stink was a physical apparition, a cloud that hung over the encampment. Occasionally wisps broke off and drifted over the flat salt plain. That evening we stray too close and I have to forgive myself for instantly regurgitating our eloquent morning victual on being overpowered by the foul mixture of stinking, unwashed body and pungent burn from the toilet chemicals. The smell of Weed and Crack only added a heavy flavor to the fetid slime odor. If only opium: at that moment I craved the sweet smoke haze, which would have masked the worst of their olfactory excrement.

I want nothing more than to dash back as fast as I can to the refuge – the cleanliness and purity - of *The Fort* and submerge myself in spring water and have my Coolie rub perfumed oils into me. Then have him drape blemishless white silks over me. And never, **never** again have to be exposed to The Abhorrence. It is indeed as The Life Guru said, when observing a tribe of them passing him by, ‘*How hard it is to imagine them derived from the same species. Clearly we’ve diverged significantly through evolution’s passage.*’ Yes, this gathering illuminates with glaring clarity both the extent of our infinite superiority, and the chasm that separates us so wide it would be unhumanly possible to span it. Light footed, breaking into flight at will, we rush towards a bright and better future, while they prefer to wallow in a chemical green sludge. What IS there to connect us?

Back at *The Fort*. Phew! Within the coral of RVs there's state of the art luxury; my first impression immediately reminded of a bordello in Paris that has a well justified reputation for catering to the most extreme of outre tastes. The accommodation area consists of a choice of futuristic looking cube shaped tents, the more traditional Bedouin, and for the less adventurous, a share of one of the RVs. All paths lead to the entertainment area. Apparently conceived on a Post Apocalyptical Industrial theme, I couldn't help thinking when we first arrived that someone had embraced the flavor a little too literally. This, when I see a band performing on a stage with cranes swinging dangerously overhead and butt crack wielding construction workers intermittently wandering on and off it. It transpired that their work was as at that point unfinished. The core of Party Central consists of a dozen well used shipping containers making up a quadrangle open at the front. The Space, over the course of the day, transforms through several distinctly different guises: into down to the detail Chic Café, IT Bar, fine dining restaurant, A List Night Club. And, yeah, in the hours around dawn into a brothel with enough girls and guys to provide for even the most sex starved pervert. Which most of these nerd Tech Billionaires and Bankers appear - and prove by their subsequent behavior - in fact to be. The place reminded me (admittedly it was after my second, or was it third? Pipe) of a schitzo Rich Bitch I used to know (or should that just be - used?) that over the course of a day, every time you saw him/her had immersed themselves into a different Shakespearean character. Across the front of the open square is the bar. Signs welcome the peasants and suggest that free drinks are available. These are deliberately misleading and by the time they realise, it's too late. I confess when I first read the sign it threw me, until I came to appreciate that in our biosphere their purpose is singular: to entertain us. Either sexually, or as the butt of amusement or exploitation.

Like the others before them, the guy and his girlfriend are funneled around the bar and, by the lure of free cocktails, through to the back of the lounge which is so lit to conceal a closed off, and sound proofed, area beyond it. Within the softest calf leather sofas and armchairs are arranged around its walls. The timber deck is covered in rawhide rugs and cushions. The atmosphere is deliberately masculine - that limp dick masculinity you get at Cigar Clubs - with the heads of reindeer and snarling wildcats looming off the walls at you.

On pushing open the heavy door Boy realises straight away something's amiss and grabs Girl's arm and tries to back out. Burly security guards, well rehearsed by now, throw him onto one of the armchairs and stand over him threateningly while Gurl is manhandled onto the rug strewn floor. Immediately a

professional grade video camera is triggered, in order that she may contribute to the substantial library of debauchery already recorded. Threats made against Boy's life quieten into submission the pretty blonde haired, blue eyed Cheerleader Girl who deeply loves her Football Captain Boy. They're like an open book – the pair of them from some hick town, Big Fish in small pond, never had a care in the world. Their first time into the big ocean on - they naively anticipate, with the cold innocence of their type - the first of their many Big Adventures. After which they'll come home and brag to everyone about. Though, just a guess, maybe this one doesn't have the happy ending they assume to be forever theirs.

Three of my compadres have on only the shirts and jackets of dinner suits a hobo would think twice about stealing. The stink of something indefinable but familiar is vomit revolting, and there isn't an inch of cloth on the once pristine white shirts that isn't stained with something out of the same cesspit. As the girl squirms on the cowhide rugs, on an agreed signal – I saw them a few minutes earlier Rock / Paper / Scissors – one of them drops to his knees and grabs a leg; Two follows suit. The last, Three, his face a mask of hate filled lust, throws himself on top of her, knocking any remaining spark of resistance out of her. Of course Boy, held down by two Burlies, is screaming for them to let her go, which enervates the girl, who'd looked about ready to give in, to lash out. She manages to catch Three with her nails, leaving two long lines down one side of his face. Not wishing to have my entertainment curtailed I grab onto her arms. In fact, and far more importantly, the rapist happens to be my Big Hope for funding, so what else was I supposed to do? Blood drips into girlie's eyes, blinding her, as My Future Business Partner thumps into her.

He has an incredibly small penis – a surprising number of them here do. Which is why my interest first drifted onto Ferari, almost as a last resort, but quickly settled when the size of his appendage was inadvertently revealed. He has in anyone's estimation a stupendous cock, which I discovered later he takes enjoyment in casually displaying. On him, an Asian, it looks like he's had an elephant's dick transplanted onto him; he seems to stoop at the weight of it, or is that just my imagination? I look forward, once I've driven wider (yes, it was easily formed) the wedge between him and his blood sucking parasite of a boyfriend. An early lesson in my fascinating life has yet to be disproved: there's rarely room for more than one parasite on a body and anyway, who wants to share?

I digress. Despite the girl's obvious attractions Tech Nerd is struggling to shower her with his gratitude. I encourage him: "Rolly, you're the man bro – look at her, she wanted it all along. The fight was just a show for the boyfriend." Rolly, another from Pork Club mainstay, is still struggling to recover his breath (don't

you dare have a fucking heart attack on me you bastard!). Suddenly he looks up and gives me a penetrating stare. But it takes more than that to unnerve this boy. I can do Innocent, even with a gun in my face. How else could I have got away with all the things I've done. And am planning to do. Saved my ass a bunch of times, starting all that long way back when I got the other scholarship kid expelled for robbing the school's candy shop.

That said, how long can you keep up the bullshido? Boredom is hard to conceal and this display of Emasculated Man is another depressing reminder (as if I needed one) of the undeserved power of disproportionate wealth. How fucking uninspired, and uninspiring, they are. Aren't I doing a Public Service by relieving them of it? I make eyes at Ferrari to leave, but he seems in no hurry. Boy Zafar is of course as Camp as a Tree Top Fairy. But he too is quite effeminate, so am surprised to find that he also swings cuntward. It requires some force to lever him out of The Cave. Shadow of course following close behind, I suggest "Let's go and sample some of the rest of the entertainment." By now the night sky is lit up with imaginative LED light shows, fire breathing dragons and creatures so weird it would take too long to describe them. In the middle distance DJ's are working the bobbing crowds formed around the stages. However the dominant sound, blasting out from speakers inside one of those metal monstrosities Sheep People think is art, is the voice of a woman - almost drowned out by the repetitive roar of a Harley - screaming for help.

Taking it all in, my Dynamic Duo give a prolonged hesitate, teetering on the edge of the melee. Caught one foot in the air, the other still planted on the top step leading down from the bar: a comedy act, but I keep the straightest face when Zafar swivels round and stares at me. Grinning then, I give him a shove that sends them both stumbling down onto the desert sand. "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, right? Let's make that our motto for the weekend?" Before Zafar can give me the stinging put down he's been itching to throw several Coolies run forward proffering bicycles festooned with gaily colored lighting and intricate flower themed decorations. They've been slaving all afternoon to paint and decorate these bicycles and some of them do look like works of art. But what a fucking waste of time - these spoiled children are going to appreciate neither the art nor the effort. For them it's just another shiny new toy for them to show off. With them it's ALL about insecurity. Egos requiring massage. But isn't it? Not having the actuality, so substitute by swing sicking around the place with their very own giant metal unicorn or full sized fucking pirate galleon. Who can build the most elaborate; the most expensive. Who can ship in the coolest DJ line up. It sure as fuck isn't about the best music. The best art. Slave asks me which one I

want. Who fucking cares? “Yeah, darling, I’ll have that one. Isn’t it a frigging masterpiece? You did it? Hey, you should be in design baby. Let me put you in touch with someone.” At first I think she’s just another hick but then, as she turns away, I see the ingratiating look slide off her face and something like derision replace it.

A light breeze ignites, with the likelihood of it blowing up into a storm. And over what? A fucking bicycle they both want. For fuck’s sake, there’s at least twenty of the fucking things, all of them as fantastic as the last. Start riding around them and shout, “Hey, remember, first stop is the Orgy Dome – you both told me you wanted to check it out.” Immediately diverted – fuck it’s like dealing with children – they start practicing riding their bikes. Comical though it is – and there’s always the prospect of Zafar doing himself injury – I’m sidetracked by a conversation taking place at the front of the open air bar. Two middle aged men are holding out large glasses of electric colored cocktails to a simple looking guy and his attractive girlfriend. Is it me or do all these peasants look like they just rolled out of a fucking barn with straw still stuck in their hair?

We foster the notion that We will remake the world without interference from any quarter to dull its perfection. It may be The Dark Heart to some, but Inequality is the natural order.

Simultaneously the men laugh and say, “Entertain us.” At first The Hicksvilles think they’re joking and join in the laughter, “Come on man, we’re dying out here. Someone stole our backpack with all the drink in it.” The men shake their heads and one says stubbornly, malice coming into his expression, “Nothing’s for free in this world buddy. You know that. Dance for your supper....” The boy looks at Lard Face, his expression a mixture of disgust and serious hatred. But the girl seems more in tune and puts a hand on her boyfriend’s arm and whispers something. He shakes and says vehemently, “No!” Her independence surprises me: she dismisses his reluctance with a broad smile, directed first at Boy, then the two Lards. Now the centre of attention - you get the feeling she’s familiar with this situation. Immediately there’s a sense of separation between them: when before they were a pair, now it’s two, and it wouldn’t take much to split them. I guess it’s this that first attracted, and still holds, my attention.

It comes as no surprise to me when the girl, still smiling broadly, lifts up her bikini top, walks confidently up to the two Lards, gives a shimmy that sets her breasts wobbling and their eyes bugging out and, taking the glasses from them, says, “That’s what you were after wasn’t it, gentlemen?” I see the anger flare in

the boy's eyes for a second but then you see him pick up the vibe: there's something impersonally professional, completely unsexual in her demeanor. That what she's doing has no emotion, no connection, attached to it. Tables turned: suddenly it's the Lards at the bar that look foolish – the desperate social dwarfs they are. They swing round and laugh sheepishly at each other, and then try to bolster their wafer thin confidence by shouting unimaginative misogynistic abuse after the girl as the pair walk away, cocktails in hand. The kind of childish language you'd hear every day in the playground. It makes them look even more pathetic – which the moment before I'd have thought impossible. And even smaller still when, just silhouettes now, laughing the lovers clink the cocktail glasses, give their asses a few twerks, down the drinks, throw the glasses over their shoulders and saunter off. But then I wondered. How do the Lards see themselves? After all, nothing is so infinite as our capacity for self delusion.

Lard #1, petulant, jeers to the other, "Look at how those fucking peasants live compared to us. Why would you want to rough it when you can lap in this?" He waves a hand behind him, "Fucking cunts are only jealous." The other, for whom the effect of the hydroponic weed has kicked in, responds with a pained, philosophical air, "Who ever said you need to rough it to be inspired. They look so uncoolly arduous! There's already enough Tough in life: don't sweat it, yeah? Mindfulness; the intimacy of the shared space; vulnerability. That's what brings you to The Place." He raises a glass: "Epiphany, man."

Lard 1 is unmollified, "Yeah, but why do they allow the peasants? They always fuck it up for you, man."

Lard 2: "Well, if you want your Radical Self Reliance to be immediate, you need them as a resource. I mean – you can't do it on your own, right?" They both laugh at the absurdity of the suggestion. "They say we should rough it otherwise it's not real. But what is REAL man? The lifestyle we're used to, it would be hypocritical of us to stoop to living like those.... Those Ants."

Behind the pair of weed soaked philosophers, The Fort is coming to life. The cubic tents are formed from carbon fibre skeletons covered with silken sails of every color. With the breeze picking up they look like sailing ships in a storm. In fact Party Central, draped in the same material, is a motorized sailing ship installation capable of being driven around. Surveying it for a steady minute The Philosopher concludes his theory: "Well look on the bright side compadre, we won't need them any more once one of us comes up with robots that can do the job as well. I heard Rolly was pushing for his latest design to be trialled here but The Concierge didn't think they were up to it yet." Later I heard these particular Excrements managed to persuade one of the Peasants to be humiliated in return

for an unlimited supply of cocktails. It started tamely enough with verbal abuse and some light whipping and everything seemed to be going to plan. But things went off the rails when they started using electrical cable on him, and then pissed on the open wounds. The boys were feeling a whole lot better about themselves – sometimes hurting someone else is the best catharsis – until the ‘Victim’ ripped his pants off and started furiously wanking himself. And then pleaded for more. The Lards were last seen running into their RV screaming for Security. You sure get all sorts at *The Festival*.

By now Zafar and Ferari have sorted out who’s riding what and we set off in the direction of a large, luridly lit pink tent. Which to Straights might look like cunt lips, but to anyone else – didn’t you see the brown flashing lights? – it’s a winking asshole. Don’t you just fucking love it! Anyway, take your pick. If you feel the need. After only riding for a few minutes – and our goal still some way off – Zafar is panting and complaining in a high pitched whine: a pure caricature of the kind of Queen that Hollywood used to portray. But only until they realised there was more money in Queer audiences than Straight. His voice is starting to give me a headache and it’s on the tip of my tongue to say something. Of course I don’t, though repeatedly tempted. I can see he’s also getting on Ferari’s nerves. But yeah, I only made that mistake once. Even when it looks a cert they’re gonna split – if not one kill the other - don’t side with either of them until it’s irrevocably over. And even then wait some: make up sex has a nasty habit of turning round and biting you. Ouch!

An obviously old argument erupts between the Dynamic Duo, “Oh, stop complaining! It’s all you ever do these days. You think you’ve got something that gets you whatever you want. Think again sister – there’s plenty of cute ass begging for it.” Zafar only tosses his hair (a thick, lustrous black mane he’ll throw around at every opportunity) in response: “You’re only with me for my money,” Ferari screams at him. How many fucking times have I heard that fucking line. Actually it seems to placate Zafar and he tones the Queen act by about 30%: I guess he was feeling on thin ice with me around and Ferari’s insecurity has reassured him. I’m tempted to stir things up and see where it leads, but decide there’ll be plenty of opportunities – better ones – where we’re headed for. And we’ve still a way to go to get there.

Just then I see up ahead a little glow of light in the vast desert blackness, and decide to pull up there for a pit stop / drug refuel. Someone has built a wooden counter with a flimsy frame over it. It advertises itself simply and boldly: **Ask for Advice**. But it’s written on both sides, which begs the question: who’s giving who? Yeah, don’t you see that all the time? Is anyone actually LISTENING to what

anyone else is saying? If they are giving half an ear, isn't it only so they can pull more ammunition for the Killer Put Down, or Come Back that sets up another Brag stage? Already a small crowd has formed around the booth when we arrive. Zafar, the prick, throws himself down on the ground dramatically but then jumps up with a shriek when he remembers he's not at some cossetted bar but rolling around in the desert dust. We take no notice of him when he insists on going back to The Fort to change. Everyone's attention is on two men, one either side of the booth, engrossed in conversation. At a glance they look as different as two people could be. The first is dressed in the traditional white thobe – typical Arab, down to the long beard and fierce looking eyes. On the other side of the counter is a small man wearing a white cowboy suit, with fluffy white chaps and clinking gold spurs. The rhinestones on his shirt front throw sparkles of colorful light out over the audience.

Dumping the bikes, we're hovered at the back of the crowd when a girl joins us. I can't hear what they're saying but for a moment the conversation becomes very heated. But suddenly everyone's laughing. The girl, another naïve Hick, had pushed through the crowd and gushed at them, "Wow, what were you talking about? It looked like you two were solving the problems of the world. You know, peace between America and The Muslims. An end to terrorism...." but then looks bemused, because it's only when you get up close you see that the cowboy is actually an Asian guy. The Arab looks up and with a strong Texas accent drawls: "No, darling! Much more important – we were discussing what nail polish we should wear with our outfits." The girl gives a disconsolate, "Oh!" and covers her mouth with a pretty little hand, but shows no sign of embarrassment, even when a few people titter. Familiar territory seems to be reached on both sides when the Arab pulls up his thobe to reveal an already throbbing purple headed cock. Mechanically she drops to her knees. She smiles deprecatingly when, only a minute later, he shoots a considerable load over her face. The crowd – audience? – clap appreciatively as if – who knows in this place, perhaps it is – they, all three of them, are an art installation. My interest is more caught by the parthenogenesis of the Hooker Red nails curled into a soft fist around his manhood.

In fact I see the cowboy a couple more times around the place over the week. He's always in the full gear but the color's each time different, and his bicycle is matched to it. It started with the white we saw at the booth, next he's in badass black, and then passes through the more lurid colors of the rainbow as he gets into the swing of things. On the last day his outfit's all gold – Icarus The Sun God. Over this he has a coil of multi colored LED lighting wrapped round him. The lights go off in random patterns that at night make him look like he's covered in

fireflies. At his groin he has a blinding white strobe light. Unlike with most of the attention seekers - which is near all of the Richers, and how FUCKING hard they try! - I did wonder about him, what he did in default life. There were interesting contradictions about him.

We're still some way off *Orgy Dome*, which takes pride of place is in the centre of *Exclusive Fun Arena* – I overhear the Coolies calling it *Exclusion Zone*. On our way we pass more Host Bodies, dressed in a typical festival uniform. Here dressing straight would be truly fucking radical, but they'd never get that. Pink tutu and nylon furs. The crocodile outfit. Which is only funny because the head keeps slipping to reveal a bespectacled guy with a heavy comb over. He has the unfortunate look of someone that would get locked in irons the second he went within molesting distance of a kid. In fact there's a zoo of animal outfits here. And of course along with everything else the gold lame gets a work out – though the cowboy, despite the stiff competition, still won it for me.

Women wear the de rigeur uniforms of strategically wrent bra and pants. Shedding the rigid constraints of the default world they have entered into a common sisterhood, their mission to transform the blank desert canvas into a place of beauty and terrible longing....

I thought we would have no further distractions – by now I've an itch on to see how they'll handle the *Orgy Dome*. But unavoidably straight ahead of us – it looms out of the darkness before I can swing a detour – is an old school phone booth. All on it's own, with vague shadows around it, it's only dimly lit by the glow from the light shows at *The Exclusion*. The incongruity of it has already intrigued me and when I see the sign over it – *Phone God* – wild horses couldn't have dragged me away. Inside there's a man - again the incongruity, he's wearing only a baby nappy - in earnest conversation. I overhear him exclaiming, repeating himself several times, each time louder than the last - as if God is some jiggery old deaf grandpa. Then, after frantically sucking his thumb for a few seconds, very slowly this time, he repeats: "I want to know how to be happy.... You know.... Happy!"

The ***Phone God*** phone booth is connected by satellite to *The Red Fox*, a Weed Only bar on the far side of the festival site. When the man in the booth picked up the receiver, at *The Red Fox* a phone on the counter rings. Anyone can take the call. But for that they need to be able to see it - through the smoke haze or the denser fog of their weed soaked brain. The phone resembles one of those old style gramophone players, and you converse by speaking into the megaphone. At the other end their voice echoes and sounds very far away - the listener

receiving the dazed out wisdom of any one of a dozen coneheads. On this occasion a weary looking old man, eyes glazed, a permanent smile on his face, takes the call: "You want to know how to be happy? First of all, forget about being happy. Everyone talks about being happy when what they really mean...." The line suddenly goes dead and when Happy Hunter rings back someone else answers: "Brother, not so fast, slow down." The voice is so slow there's a measurable gap between each word, "Now, what was that you wanted to know...? Being happy.... Now let me think a bit on that.... Well for a start you could head down to The Red Fox; everybody's happy here.... What's that, you want to speak to the old guy you were talking to before...? That sounded like God? Don't I sound like Him.... Oh well, they do call him *The Sage*, and yeah.... I guess.... the closest thing to God I ever heard OK brother, no problem but he's just gone for a leak....I'll tell him just as soon as he gets out...." After five minutes of waiting The Happy Hunter starts drumming his fingers on the handset and then the line goes dead again. Staring into the phone for a second he smashes it against the wall, breaking it in half.

The phone rings. Happy Hunter, lonely, lost of understanding of other people and of his own place and purpose, can't believe it: God is calling him! Awkwardly he holds the phone together and presses the Receive button. Immediately he hears The Sage's voice again. He lets out a deep sigh; it feels like a weight off his shoulders to hear it. "Sorry, a brother asked for my help; he seemed in greater need.... Where did we get to.... Oh yes, looking for contentment. No, friend, I know it may not sound so cool. But there's a cosmic difference. Contentment is a permanent state of being, whereas happiness is a yoyo with sadness. You want content right? When we're OK with both. Sadness will pass, but don't rush it man. Sad is good. When we're sad we empathise. We understand other people's pain, especially if we're experiencing the same kinda pain ourselves. We think about other people, which is the first stage of contentment: thinking about other people instead of just yourself brother. When you're sad you know it's going to change, so it's not so heavy. Whereas the other way round you know sadness is coming. So what's so great about being happy? And you're more selfish, enjoying only your own happiness, forgetting about other people"

"We are a prisoner of our Present and our Past. Release yourself to the future of your wildest imagination!"

As if aiming to compete with Him, as we're leaving God's Phone Booth out of the gloom emerges a troupe of gaily decorated tandem bicycles being ridden

along in a circular formation, with one tandem at its centre. On the back is a man renowned the party circuit over as *The Life Guru*. To me he's always just looked a weaselly little cunt with a nasty, calculated glint in his eye. If that wasn't enough warning that he's only waiting for the opportunity to screw you – and for all his clown devotees it obviously isn't – what passes for his 'Divine Wisdom' is like a Verbal Chameleon, saying the exact opposite of what he said only a few minutes earlier. Listen to the Anus for five minutes and he'll have contradicted himself a dozen fucking times. He also likes to spruik himself as a Style Guru. In this circumstance – when it's de rigeur for the social rules to be broken, twisted and burned in a cryptic effigy – he's elected to wear a knee length fur coat, Hawaiian tank top, Gucci's with three lenses ('to protect the third eye'). And if I'm not mistaken, the claw from a fucking excavator bucket dipped in fucking gold around his neck. He tries to tell me later (yeah, we get briefly intimate at The Orgy Dome) he only ever wears latex underwear. Fortunately he was sucking cock at the time. So it only required me to ram it further down his throat to curtail that turd stream.

While on the bikes I hear one of his acolytes ask earnestly, "I sometimes feel guilty about my privilege. Some people say it's OK if I use it to do good and help other people. Is that enough? I mean, we get to travel to all these amazing spiritual places and learn everything there is about the world, but most people spend most of their lives just working." The Life Guru gives a horrified screech. It's not immediately obvious whether this is triggered by The Bleeding Heart's question or that another of them at that moment loses control of their bike and knocks Life Guru off the tandem. It IS obvious that none of them have been near a fucking bike before. Then again, by the look of them, I'm guessing life for them doesn't get much wilder than posing for more photos in places on some Influencer's Bucket List. Life Guru, bike untangled, struts around within the bike circle: "It's NOT your job to help!" Gestures like the worst fucking Ham: picks up a handful of sand and throws it at the ground. Points dramatically into the sky: "They are Earth: You are Air. You float over the planet bringing beauty and life to it. Your purpose is to travel the world and experience all of it. Not everyone can be doing that – imagine the imbalance!" It's perfect: at that moment three of the tandems run into each other and fall in a wailing heap. Of course bare milliseconds later they're screeching at Coolies for rescue. Fucking Air! But yeah, fucking appropriate – no fucking substance.

We continue toward our destination. Which is taking a fucking age because we have to stop every few minutes when Zafar falls off his bike, and then have to listen to the parasite moaning how unfair life is. When he sees the tandems of course he wants one and demands Ferrari ride for him. And then pout sulks the

rest of the way when Ferari tells him he's lucky he's not a Coolie, riding him around. We make a worthwhile detour to The Snow Tent. This is actually something – a desert where the temperature doesn't drop below forty until the early hours and they're pumping out fucking snow flakes. Zafar squeals like a kid, drops his bike and runs through the tent windmill arms and screaming over his shoulder, "I've never seen snow! I want to build a snowman. Come on, let's throw snowballs." Thank fuck Ferari just rolls his eyes and, the bikes now dumped, keeps walking. A minute later Zafar sulkily rejoins us. In a voice full of spite, he whines, "You're getting like an old man – you never wanna do anything!" I get the feeling from the look that passes between them that this is an old but still raw taunt, and see another cat fight looming.

Fortunately the diversion tactic works again: "Come on, the Playapede tents are just up there." He'd actually been whingeing for some time that we shouldn't miss it but still manages to get another dig in, "Yeah, alongside the Bicurious Den: they offer Queer Upgrades there. Someone here certainly needs one." Fortunately Ferari doesn't take the bait. Again, *The Life Guru's* voice drifts over, "This is one of the lessons I wanted you to experience for yourself. This is life transforming..." What, touching fucking snow! "In the future your first experience of EVERYTHING will be through VR. In fact, for your children their only experiences will be through it. Imagine the possibilities – of all the things they will get to see, to touch, to live..." I'm just about to shout over, "What the fuck happened to 'You are the Air: travel and experience the world'" when a guy minces past in stockings and black sheer lace underwear with '*Permission to come on board*' emblazoned in gold lettering across his ass. Zafar pretends to chase after him and the tease waves his ass invitingly. This lifts attitudes and so we enter *Playapede* in better than expected spirits.

There's three entrances to the pink tent, each with equally attractive invitations. 'Take your pick: Ass to Mouth / Ass to Cock / Cock to Mouth.' Of course Zafar wants all three. He rejoins us half an hour later, eyes glazed and unable to stop laughing. He stinks of semen - it's in his hair and is encrusted all over his naked torso. I'm surprised when Ferari just laughs and shakes his head. Then again while he was sat in a long recliner picking out new outfits for his Queer Makeover a boy of barely legal age was down on his knees giving him a drawn out blow job while he stuffed his face with Lobster Mornay. So what could he say? It was the first time I got a good look at his cock and after that I'm in a hurry to get to The Orgy Dome. There are in fact two reasons I want to go to The Orgy Dome. The one just alluded to. But the main reason is to allow me the opportunity to so fuck with their heads that Ferari and Zafar will want to kill each other.

Head fuck starts at entrance to *OrgyDome* in another Bicurious Tent. I guide them to a man / woman couple where Zafar immediately goes down on the Alpha male. He looks like poster boy for The Marines – tall, blonde, buzz haircut. All muscle. And gets all gooey when you come on his face. His wife straps on and fucks Ferari while I get in a sandwich between Soldier Boy and Zafar. It takes some persuasion but after that I manage to convince Zafar to swap the couple, so he's going down on her while the guy fucks a delirious looking Ferari. The chick is hot and I was tempted myself but there's a lot at stake. Indulgence for once has to take second place. I manage to keep Zafar's head buried in the bitch's thick bush long enough for Marine to fill Ferari's ass with another prodigious load of cum. After that Zafar's whingeing that he's the only one getting no action. Which he comes to regret after I give him so much shit he reluctantly agrees to fuck the wife – still very easy going and taking the whole thing with good humor. I'm expecting a No Show from Zafar's dick but I'm surprised – and I notice Ferari is too – to see that he gets a solid Wood. It gives me some angles to work with I hadn't expected, and my strategy only solidifies further when he comes quickly and gives Ferari a guilty look. Things get better still when The Marine won't take no for an answer and Zafar ends up in a sandwich between Mum and Dad and gets so horned up he's staring at her tits like he wants to eat her. And he's still got his tongue down her throat when Daddy comes over their faces.

I'm about to stir things up but Zafar gets in first. But he only manages to dig a deeper hole for himself with Ferari by trying to make out he was just fooling. But you can still see the glazed look in his eye, and when he tries the mincing act it suddenly looks just that: an act. Ferari throws off his hand and storms off in the direction of The Orgy Dome, Zafar trailing behind him, still trying to make up. I follow at a more leisurely pace, enjoying the TV. Eventually, giving up on trying to placate Ferari he drops back and joins me. Of course I slow down to take the opportunity to drag out the awkward silence. I try a few teasers to get him talking but he doesn't bite. And then he surprises me when we get inside – as yet I haven't taken in the hundreds of bodies engaging in every sexual act known to man (oh, and beast) – and he immediately disappears into the dark tangle of bodies. But then I see the look on Ferari's face. For the first time I see the mask off. I hadn't realised (how fucking stupid could I be?) what he was hiding. Sure he's mad, but in that anger there's something unrestrained. Maybe, uncontrollable. I only get a glimpse of it for a couple of seconds. But I'm so glad I did. The plan has become almost childishly easy, and I'm thinking that in here I will have ample opportunity to conclude it.

On entering The Orgy Dome it's required to strip - full nakedness de rigeur. And I'm pleased to see that Ferari checks me out: natural selection, plus several operations have ensured my penis attracts comment. In fact you could say the Orgy Dome is wasted on us because we don't see anyone else. Just make a beeline for a dark corner with a just vacated mattress. We're straight on to each other - this is pent up lust and there's no preamble - and we're still at it like dogs when Zafar turns up. I make a play of pushing Ferari and I think he's spotted Zafar too because he latches onto my face with a sudden increase in ardor. I don't know how long we keep him waiting - standing there while I fuck his lover and he claws the flesh off my back - but it's long enough: "Stop it! Stop it!" he screeches, "Stop it now!" Everyone around us starts laughing, but worse still Ferari pays the least attention to his pleas for us to decouple.

We're almost back to the RV camp before we catch up with Zafar. At the entrance, right under the spotlights, Ferari and Zafar start the mother of all cat fights. Lots of slapping; face scratching. Pathetic to watch. Accompanied by screaming insults which sounds deafening in the dark silence of the night. The music from the Exclusion Zone is a muffled backing track to their caterwauling. A crowd is soon drawn from inside The Fort. Soon physically worn out, they're reduced to verbally whipping each other. Age old grievances - betrayals, lies, misdemeanors - so trivial to be comic. Ferari, who I know to be a very private person, must have been very angry because it's only when the sniggering turns to all out laughing that he becomes aware of them. Immediately he stops and tries to drag Zafar in the direction of their tent but Zafar pulls away and, Queen of the Desert act in full bloom, screams the grievance that's been the main thrust of his attack: "You don't fucking love me! How long have I had to live in secret, hiding from your family like you're ashamed of me. Yes, don't lie - you're ashamed of me! Your father's just an excuse. Look at you tonight," he spits out the words, "With him!" He glares round the faces in the crowd until he spots me and points an accusing finger: "You'd rather be with him! Well, take him fucking home to daddy then. He can have you!" Ferari pleads with him to stop. But he's only just started, and I don't help by playing Straight Face to the crowd. Deep bow of recognition to Zafar. A few choice words and somehow they get the impression he's small AND limp dick. The mock sympathy has the crowd pissing themselves. Zafar struggles to go on: "Are you ashamed of me now then? Why are you with me even?" His voice has risen to a plaintive wail, but there's something still fake in his manner when he comes up close to Ferari and screams in his face, "I'm going. Now! Now!"

If you want me you'll have to marry me and tell your father about us." And with that he storms off.

Ferari tries to follow but for some reason one of the Coolies intervenes and tries to calm him down. There's a loud gasp of surprise through the crowd when Ferrari lashes out with a backhanded fist. When the girl goes down on her knees clutching her face and crying he starts kicking and punching her. Just before he hits her I'd seen the same deranged look I'd got a glimpse of in OrgyDome, so for me none of this is a surprise to me. He only stops when he runs out of energy. At no point does anyone try to intervene. By the end of it she's covered in blood. When she looks up into the bright glare of the spotlight her face is puffed and distorted, and her eyes have disappeared into purple folds of swollen flesh. Along with the punches Ferrari clawed her. And at one point he even grabs her hair, pulls her head back and starts biting her neck. The transformation is electrifying: he IS a vampire.

At the sight of this a visible tremor passes through the crowd. But the shock is not just the viciousness of the attack - I mean, this hasn't been the first Coolie to receive a brutal beating - rather that up until then Ferrari had been almost deferential towards them. A few of The Boys had even teased him about it. From this frenzied, unrestrained attack I can see his servants must live in terror of him, and the Coolies have only been spared until now because, I'm guessing, they're Whites and he's off home territory. It was amusing to observe that in none of them did an instinct arise to help the girl. The women in the crowd, if anything, appeared aroused by the violence. There's a few Bros in the crowd of onlookers, and this time there's an edge of respect when one of them says, "Hey dude. We always knew you had it in you; why you hold back, man?" Another of them claps him on the back and laughs, "Great show bro." By now we've hit the anticlimax point - when everyone's standing around, coming down off the adrenaline rush of the fight and wondering what to do next. You can see it in Ferrari too: he stares at the Bro for a few seconds unseeing.

Eyes gradually coming into focus he asks, "Uhuh? What was that you said? Well, it's all different here. In our house the servants aren't allowed to live in the house. They have kennels." His manner is deferential again. Everyone laughs at this and he smiles, at first uncertainly, glancing quickly over the crowd. Reassured, he goes on, "Yeah, Father always says the peasants don't have the same rights as humans." A few people blink at the bald directness - the naive innocence really - of the statement. But then the laughter again - cruel, entitled, more assured this time - ripples through them. I hear a few Bros talking; one says, "Hey, I like this guy. Yeah, he seemed a nerd but we better get to know him. Got some cool ideas - left field, you know." Drunk still, from the booze, the adrenaline, Ferrari is suddenly

more confident around them. Turning to Bro, he says, “But that’s how it is, isn’t it? Even with you guys, right?” With that he pulls out a wad of greenbacks, peels several hundred dollar bills off the stack and throws them at the injured girl. With an ingratiating expression she looks up and gives a broken toothed smile.

People have started to drift off and it’s with ease that I persuade Ferari to come with me. In my tent, sailing across the night, we quickly resume where we’d left off in the Orgy Dome. The attack on the girl seems to have energized him, and I find him more dominant. I enjoy the variety, and am relieved: I’ve never trusted anyone that claims to be The Man or The Woman. In all of us, is all of us.

The next day it’s as if we’ve just arrived at the festival. Never once is the previous day mentioned. Nor is Zafar. Great! But what’s this? What the FUCK is this? *Wellbeing Day*? Well, fuck! Does every sky have to have fucking rain clouds in it? “We’re going to indulge ourselves.” Ferari is in unfamiliar guise – all Decision. Assertion. The Man. Reads the brochure: “Rejuvenate. Replenish. You know.... I want a complete wellness makeover. I think I’ve earned one. Being rich can be a fucking chore.” At that he winces because the choice of words mimics one of the things Zafar had thrown at him during the fight. It happens several times through the day. I guess it takes a while to extract a parasitic tick from the body, yeah? All said though, things are going well. From one of the Coolies I’d heard that Zafar had followed up on his threat: called in Ferari’s private jet and flew out at dawn. Everything going to plan, hehe. The only downside is that I have to bear the brunt of these fucking hours of extremely healthy living. It starts while still in bed with a green shit drink and then a yellow IV’d into us. Apparently.... Oh, what the fuck, I’ve forgotten. But who the fuck cares? Actually, I know that one of these days I’m going to have to pull the plug on the drugs. I have a strong motivation – to be the proud parent of an excess of wealth. But it will be, by most recent calculation, eighteen months before things peak. When it will get complicated enough that I have to give life my full attention with a mind free of fuel. But until then.... Roll me up another bill and let’s party like we’re dead tomorrow!

The Life Guru is surrounded by Tech Bro’s. Feather bedecked; glitter faces. I shit you not. Their unhealthy, milky pallor contrasts with the svelte bodies of the shipped in babes they drag around like Comfort Bears. He tells them, “We don’t abuse the fierce festival spirit – this self reliant temporary community of adventurers are boldly exploring this lethal, wild environment.” To breathless oohs and ahs – while I’m still looking round for the wolves and grizzly bears - he goes on, “We take all of that and channel it into creativity. Some of the best

applications and business concepts have been born right here. And more will be germinated by you. The creative yeast is *The Festival* – that amorphous space where creativity and capitalism converge seamlessly and harmoniously. Cojoined they will spawn our bright future.” I thought the bullshitometer couldn’t go any higher, but there’s more: “This is a gathering of The World Builders, with the common goal of celebrating the infinite possibilities of the future. We have a perfect grasp of the aesthetic – weird, deep, dark, but ultimately an exploding Light Star. The effortless vibe that transcends the Sunrise: we are The New Born Day.”

We’ve only penetrated the outer perimeter of The Wellness Zone, and already The Life Guru has overstayed my welcome. I guess I’m not in the best mood having wasted the first half of the day dragging Ferari’s pouting, sorry for himself ass out of *The Fort*. Am certainly leaning towards a preference for Yesterday Man. There’s a peculiar intensity about him. Early on, while the pee yellow is still IVing into us, he stares unblinking at me and in an anxious voice says out of nowhere, “I need to cleanse and put the world in order.” Thinking, whoa tall order bro, and you ain’t the one to do it. Unsure of the ground, I respond cautiously, “Yeah, in our position we have a responsibility.” The blank look of incomprehension is all the clarification I need. I should have realised, he meant HIS world: “Starting with my body”, confirms it. Though I doubt he would recognise the distinction. They don’t.

After priming and finally making a choice of outfit from yesterday’s Queer Upgrade Collection we poke our noses out of the tent dome. “Where next Boss?” I ask a little too facetiously. He gives me a hard stare and I’m reminded of the previous evening’s finale. “Eat: we dine Omakase,” he tells me very seriously. Yeah, yeah, I’ve read the spruik outside Party Central – *‘For the brave and adventurous, this will be an experience unique to you: a treasure to remember and include in your Festival Album. Let your chef flex their creative muscles to the fullest extent of your personal delight.’* Yeah, all well and good, but since we’re using Ferari’s personal Omakase chef that travels wherever he goes – who has a strictly limited menu from which to ‘be creative’ - don’t it kind of defeat the object? “Yeah can’t wait bro. Seize the day. What doesn’t...” From the increased intensity in his stare I realise I’ve incautiously picked up the same bullshido shovel Zafar had got himself into trouble with. Throwing it away with an ingratiating smirk I ask, “Sooo, what are we doing after?” trying desperately to look super, SUPER interested.

As we’re winding up breakfast Ferari muses, pulling at a few strings of hair he calls a beard. Suddenly, in a voice I only later realise he’s plagiarized from The Life

Guru, he tells me “I feel my auras need cleansing.” I don’t bat an eye – actually, not listening too closely (fuck, you’d lose your mind listening full shelf to the prick), I’d misheard and thought he’d said ‘arse needs cleansing,’ which was the first thing he’d said so far that made a microbe of sense. Fortunately, as you would expect, the festival has an abundance of the weird, wonderful and complete charlatan bullshit. “I know just the place!” injecting as much enthusiasm as I can into my response. And so, at last having managed to prise Ferari from the security blanket of The Fort, we get tandemed over to the aforementioned *Wellbeing Zone*, starting at a tent I’d seen the day before which proclaims in gary LED: ‘Our mission is to accelerate your moods and emotions so you can gain the Radical Evolution you’ve been searching your life for.’ And then more prosaically, ‘Tools and Technology for the Busy World Leader.’

The too innocent looking dude in Hippie Persona – anyone that works at these festivals has had all trace of purity sucked out of them – promises “a Radical Aura Cleansing.” Why does everything have to be fucking Radical? A radical ass cleansing – now that would be something babe. But no, it’s the usual intensely serious staring, waving of arms.... I won’t go on - if you haven’t already seen it go watch the Vimeo clip. After that, with The Life Guru’s words wafting on the breeze, Hippie funnels us into the next tent for ‘A Radical Friendship Ceremony.’ By this point I’ve decided I just have to go with it or I’ll go fucking insane. Don’t ask me how it relates but this comprises an arrangement resembling the gym circuit I assiduously avoided at school. Instinct propels me to the next tent but one look at Ferari tells me that if I want to mine gold out of his ass – and I SO do – I’m gonna need to do some serious cock sucking. Figuratively - and literally - if that wasn’t clear to you. The Friendship Ceremony finishes with a face painting of The Beast Within. Somehow everyone sees themselves as an Eagle, a Horse, A Wildcat, or a Radical fucking Dolphin. To me they all look like overfed and under exercised hamsters and would do well spending more time on the treadmill. Oops, isn’t their whole life a fucking treadmill? Actually a few of the worst cases resemble more a South Atlantic Elephant Seal.

The next tent proffers *Radical Detox*. I manage to persuade Ferari to skip that one and we move onto the next, whose sign at first perplexes me: *Ritual Sunrise Party*. I actually fucking checked my watch (how fucking out of it am I?) but, yeah, it’s fucking midday, what gives? And then I read underneath and The Life Guru’s words come back to me: ‘Experience sunrise without the sweat of having to get up at dawn. The cutting edge in VR bodysuits provided.’ I don’t know how good the actual VR was because before leaving The Fort I’d given in to the urge to drop a tab of LSD. I have a brightly vivid recollection of seeing the sunrise. But it was

every color of the rainbow, I could mold it with my hand, and a dolphin was doing loops over it, so I'm guessing it was one of my better trips.

Now, it's getting a hot day, and there's a short walk to the next tent, but not to worry, we've each got a Coolie – mine is a pansy boy who, with only the faintest encouragement, will drop to his knees or offer his ass - carrying a giant parasol. To my relief – at moments it felt like we wouldn't emerge from this Health Hell until some time the other side of next fucking month - I find that we've almost reached the end of the production line. The 'Radical Baths.' With water in short supply a conventional one is the most expensive. I was more than content to limit myself to this. Honestly, I'd have settled for a five second fucking shower. But Ferari is insistent: "We need to cleanse ourselves, inside and out." I don't push it: at the 'Friendship Ceremony' he'd broken down and started verbally whipping himself for what he'd said to Zafar. The boy has serious self loathing issues, and from what he's told me of his life it developed before Lover Boy.

I can bide my time. The field is now clear and the boy has a cookie jar of neuroses to exploit. So it's with only a show of reluctance that I bypass the pleasantly cooling Spring Bath - picture a rock formation with pool and ice cold waterfall. That image carries me through the first of the 'Baths'. Gong bath. Sound bath. Which Ferari raves about but all I can picture is my vital organs being vibrated into soup. But then we get to the Top End and there's two choices. The first is Asses Milk Extravaganza. But for me in fact there is no choice. Set on a pedestal is a black enamel bath with gold lion's feet, the inside of which is half filled with a thick glutinous white liquid. The smell hits you the same moment you read the sign: 'Lavish yourself in Chilled Prime Bull's semen.' On seeing it Coolie and I turn and stare at each other, before burst out laugh. But almost immediately Gloom Cloud appears and a look of longing spasms across his face. I know I shouldn't have but I can't resist. Grabbing the naked Coolie I throw him, screaming, into the bath and slide in after him. It doesn't take long. I mean, the image of pints of bull's semen spurting out of their massive schlongs is about as novel a turn on as it gets. Before I pump my meagre contribution up Coolie's ass I spit his few drops into the bath. He looks visibly pleased when I tell him, "Boy, I saw the semen level rise visibly. Your cum is gonna be over half the guys at The Festival."

There's Energy all around us. This is Spring Rebirth and we are the Sexual Energy that kindles a feeling of Oneness and Community. No one should ever feel alone. Without Hearth.

I'll tell you what happened with Ferari in a minute – I knew I'd have to pay a price for my indulgence in the Semen Bath, and in fact it wasn't an unreasonable one – but I want to say something about the people in the queues. All Super Rich, they do their best to appear like they're not in a queue at all. Because they wouldn't normally be seen dead in one, right? I guess when your whole life it's been reinforced that the world will fawn at your feet, you are whatever you imagine yourself to be. Reality will mould itself to your satisfaction. Fuck, am I starting to sound like the fucking Life Guru? Yes, I think I fucking am. Get me the fuck out of here!

Anyway, on exiting the Semen Bath and after a rub down - in the heat the cum is already forming a thin crust over me - look around but Ferari is nowhere in sight. When we finally catch up with him, outside the next but last tent 'Radical Mindfulness' he screams at me, "How could you abandon me!" Wails, "I felt so alone; you know I'm missing Zafar." Tosses his head: "I'm leaving this evening – the plane is already on its way." Fuuckk! You can imagine, it takes a deal of grovelling - something I consider myself particularly adept at - but in the end he agrees to stay the night. Of course he only wants fawning attention. My Coolie has a natural flair in this regard. I have yet to discover the limits to which he will debase himself. Add to that, I've seen Ferari eyeing him. It seems only sound business sense, given the downward trajectory of my star, to insist that we swap slaves. I will still hold the reins: given time and opportunity I'm convinced he could replace Zafar. In fact before it's finished Coolie and I conclude an interesting business arrangement which proves the most lucrative of all my trades initiated at *The Festival*.

Anyway, back to The Mindfulness Tent. At its entrance is a tall man in an undertaker's black suit. His already impressive height is enhanced by an elongated top hat, and his coat has shards of mirrors attached to it, in which you can't help being distracted by multiple truncated and distorted reflections of yourself. It's only when he speaks that I realise it's a robot: "Look into the mirrors and you will comprehend the fragility of Life. You are on a countdown to Death – every second counts. Don't waste it.... Don't waste it...." I keep hearing these words, in his dull droid voice. Seemingly out loud, though we're quickly so far enough away from him it would be impossible to hear. Very weird. Through the tent one finds the usual corny's. Stacking the rocks in an artificial river. Slow eating. You know, I'm sure the next day I meet a guy still eating the same fucking raisin he was chewing in the tent. Prick! But it's the group at the far end that captures everyone's attention. A seated circle of naked men and women are plucking out each other's pubic hair – which reminds me instantaneously of a time at the zoo, watching

monkeys catching lice off their partner's fur. How little have we advanced. On approaching I see that they're actually building small effigies of Buddha out of each others pubic hair, and then reverentially set fire to it. Thereafter its creator sits staring at the pile of ashes, long after the brief spurt of flames has extinguished. Yeah, long held suspicion confirmed: we're regressing, a species in decline. Yeeha! What is there to do then but party!

At fucking last we reach the final tent - Radical Massage. And I'm definitely both in need of one, and have earned it. There are of course a wide variety of extras on offer. Feeling the Coolie has exhausted my lust to penetrate – and wanting to reingratiate myself with Ferari, I suggest a dual massage which he somewhat reluctantly agrees to. Lying close together the masseurs use our limbs to knead each other's bodies. Falling quickly bored by this innovation, the Cavalry comes in the form of an overweight transsexual in a sagging bikini out of which folds of flesh are trying to escape. Styling herself as Radical Cleopatra she gives us an invigorating spanking before converging on less amusing exploits. On my instruction Coolie Boy - who has taken to going naked except for pink cowboy boots and a white fur handcuff dangling from one skinny arm - inserts his ass into proceedings.

About half way through the spanking I become aware that Life Guru has set up camp within range: the mind numbing content of his pulpit sermons has me almost immediately falling sleep. But then he starts talking about – of all fucking things – Climate Change. I mean, it's got to be the most irrelevant topic in existence isn't it? So fucking responsible! So fucking intense; arduous. But then he says - of course, what was I thinking! - "It is not your responsibility to address it. It's only the peasants, who consume the vast majority of our fragile, finite resources, that can really effect change. Our responsibility is to train them to curb their profligate consumption." He laughs and everyone joins in when he says, "Aren't they always the cause of the problem? And us the ones that have to fix it. Our duty is to persuade them to stop travelling. Stop eating. Do less. WANT less. It's not for us to change anything we do. After all it would be asking too much for us to give up our essential luxuries."

Once the Life Guru finishes a couple of his sheep start a loud conversation piss taking the latest exploits of Extinction Rebellion. With sleep now impossible I'm in the process of deciding which put down will draw most blood, when to my surprise I find their conversation not devoid of insight. "I mean, fuck it man, these guys talk about having planned their campaign of civil disobedience with military precision. And when you think about it, they are conducting a military campaign. Only trouble is, their *carefully crafted and thought out strategy* seems to consist of

pulling straws out of a fucking hat when it comes to deciding what they're going to do next. I mean – where's the fucking logic, the connection between one action to the next?"

His friend, let's call him Bee, responds, "Yeah, we're all for them bro: keep it up. They're diverting all the attention and resources away from the organisations that do have an effective strategy, and represent a real threat to the Status Quo we love. I mean, anyone would think they were working for us." The two give each other meaningful looks and then burst out laughing. Aye recalls, "Yeah, overheard Father mention someone high up in there has a direct control through The Feds. I guess that's why they get all the Bleeding Hearts airtime. What's their latest?"

Bee shakes his head and grimaces, "Why would I give a fuck. My point is, there's no connection. These XR are playing at Activism. I mean, using the military analogy, you'd conclude XR tactics ineffective and weapons unsuited. Tanks in a fucking swamp scenario. Battles that win useless territory which are immediately abandoned because there's no advantage to holding it."

Aye nods in agreement then laughs. "Yeah, what's the point of what they've done so far? Glueing yourself to a fucking train so the whole fucking New York network was grinded. Don't they fucking know it's the most environmentally responsible form of transport there is? You wanna send a message, right? What the fuck does that send? Park a pink fucking boat - named after a fucking South American environmental activist no one's fucking heard of – outside the Stock Exchange. What's the smoke signal there? Throw buckets of fake blood over the road. What the fuck?" His friend is rolling about with tears in his eyes. "I mean, how fucking cryptic can you get bro?" Bee throws in, "Or maybe the message is in a code only they know." They start joking about what you'd need to decode it. First of all, predictably enough, it's Sun Tse's Art of War. The Marquis de Sade. They hit on the text off a soap box – "Yeah, that's about how much their grand fucking message is worth." They're quite funny about it in a schoolboy kind of way, but I start to lose interest as they continue in this vein and fall asleep.

Dunno how long I'm under but Cleopatra wakes me with an entertaining spanking. Tech Bros have gone, along with The Life Guru. For fuck's sake, all this wellness is making me exhausted and I feel like shit! Noticing that Ferari is still asleep, and he'd talked about packing afterwards, I make for The Zone and get seriously pissed and feel a world better for it. Somewhere along the way I think I kill someone.

Daedalus hunts down the Coolie for the purpose of transporting him to The Exclusive Zone on his back, as by now most of the expensively decorated tandem

bicycles have been stolen. Having snorted two lines of Coke and lost count of the number of rocket powered concoctions – which had attracted him by the vibrance of their colors and the height of the flame they were able to fuel – he finds himself surprisingly low in spirit. After some debate with himself he discards the possibility that a gross consumption might transport him to Happy La La Land – principally because the normally resuscitating war cry of ‘what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger’ on this occasion veers to probability of the former. Finding the Coolie indulging in the iniquity of sleep affords Daedalus the opportunity to give him a few half hearted kicks before ordering him to “wake the fuck up, and make like a fucking donkey.” Having overcome the confusion - it was after all a reasonable assumption on Coolie’s part that by this Daedalus wanted to fuck him - the added humor of finding that Coolie’s name is actually *James* sustains him for the entire journey homeward. But on reaching his shiny steel fort he finds it does not, as it had done when distant from it, propel the hoped for resurgence of spirit. This time Coolie James is nimble enough to avoid his tepid attempts at chastisement.

Daedalus can next be seen wandering aimlessly towards one of the art cars – this one seemingly modeled on a Little Red Riding Hood cottage. Grabbing the rickety looking timber railing, he drags himself up the steep flight of steps, only to miss the very last one and tumble to the bottom. Floppy drunk he avoids serious injury. Now cursing loudly and occasionally kicking at the banister, which he holds responsible for his fall, on his second attempt he manages to reach the summit of Mount Everest (it’s how it feels to him). The view strewn before him more than justifies the effort, but it fails to provide the hoped for catharsis. Leaning over more structurally unsound railing, before him the flat grey salt plain stretches emptily to the horizon in every direction. The only sign of humanity’s existence on the planet are the two encampments, placed well apart, and the two Entertainment Zones. One is for both Squire and Peasant; the other is so exclusive at most times it appears abandoned.

The DJ demonstrates his artistic fervor by sustaining a maxed intensity of stage presence despite the almost uninhabited private booths and oft deserted themed dance floor. He arrests the discerning audience’s attention by sheer Cult of Personality. Those that dare to grace the tiles are rewarded by a wall of cryptic, metaphysical aural stimulation. And as the Sun greases down the sky they become infused with the effortless vibe: this is the kind of party our crowd was made for.

This observation, of the deserted Zone, occupies Daedalus' mind for some time. In fact is only arrested by noise within the cottage. At the same moment a figure appears that to Daedalus' disjointed mind immediately connects with Red Riding Hood. The hooded cape was all it took. Thereafter whenever he recalls her, which is almost every day, he would be most aware of her blonde hair fringed in an electric blue which matched the color of her enormous eyes. And her face framed by the hood of the bright crimson poncho. "Hello" she says with disarming friendliness. Daedalus immediately bursts into tears, recognising that this is the first word of genuine warmth he's heard in the last decade. And while that may be an exaggeration, it's certainly the first since he stepped out of the Porsche that had consumed the last of his savings for the privilege of its rental for Festival Week.

Perhaps it's his disconsolate mood. Unusually he allows the conversation to drift over the vicissitudes of employment for the laboring classes. And more specifically how Red is being royally screwed by Cool Pete – the Head Chef and Supremo of *Concierge Inc.* He who on introduction had made an almost touchingly pathetic claim of his importance by eschewing the conventional garb of the Michelin Chef. "Why shouldn't I? I'm as much a mother fucking rock star as them: the badass of badasses, carving mandala emblems out of watermelon, radishes and rainbow carrots. Yeah!" He used to like cooking in a pink tutu and fluffy bomber jacket, until one of the sleeves caught fire. And will only respond to his guests by singing verses from his favorite Judy Garland musicals. They adore him.

Red tells a mildly interested Daedalus how appallingly the staff at his camp are treated. "I mean, people are paying up to \$100 000 for the weekend and we put the whole thing together, slave for them, and what do we make? \$240 a day! And I literally mean per day: Pete warned us that we're expected to do whatever it takes, and if that means working a twenty hour shift, so be it. '*Let me remind you,*' he snarled at us when a couple of us plucked up the courage to tell him we needed some sleep. Pulled us all together and, waving a contract in the air, yelled at us: '*Let me remind you that you agreed that normal hours don't apply. Time off is NOT guaranteed.*' I think I spoke for everyone when I told him we hadn't realised that meant no break between days!" She laughs ruefully, "Pete finished up his lecture with a warning. It was scary, a couple of the girls started crying: '*Anyone that refuses to honor their contract will have all their wages withheld, to cover the cost of finding a replacement, and all food and drink supplies will be confiscated.*' In other words we'd be kicked out into the desert – I mean, it's a lethal friggig environment – and left without any means of getting out."

Daedalus is starting to get bored and goes back to horizon scanning at the balcony while Red continues with her horror stories. A few minutes later, Red joins him and points at the exclusive camp he's staying at. "Don't you think it's hideous? Walled in by those huge metal containers and the RVs. Everything so ordered. Even the bikes in perfect rows." She sniggers, "They're supposed to be decorated into something creative and original, but look at the new ones they've just done up. It's a production line. All exactly the same decoration; we were told to do it like that. They don't want real creativity, just the appearance of it. Like everything here. And apart from them - no color. And no people. This is supposed to be a festival - it's all about the people! But you're all the way out here, everything deadened by the grey dust. Yeah, exactly: so exclusive you never see anyone. It's the same at all the executive places I've worked at.

You know, I've spent an entire week of my life putting this up. Helping people that want to build walls to keep out people like me that they look down on because we don't have as much money as them. To separate people, when the whole point of The Festival is to put everything aside and bring people together. It's so ironic the elite choose this festival of all places - that stands for everything they, Invading Vikings, with their weapons of Power and Wealth, want to destroy." Red glances at Daedalus earnestly and is about to take his hand when she sees something in his expression and recoils. She stares at him, "You're one of them aren't you? The way you smile. Another Rulers of the World. Why didn't I see it before? Hey! Hey? What are you doing?"

"I've listened to as much of this whining fucking monologue as I can fucking handle, Miss Riding Hood. Hehe, Your Wolf, you recognise him now?" Grabs her round the throat and pulls her face close to his, "I mean, how do you expect to be treated? Way of the world, baby. The only thing you got right was The Vikings - yeah we pillage and, oh, what have we here.... Rape?" The girl wrestles herself free and backs away, but Daedalus has already cut off the only escape. Short of jumping off the balcony there's no way out. She contemplates it, but she'd only be even more helpless with a couple of broken legs. Too late she thinks of barricading herself inside the hut and calling for help on the old style phone. Daedalus grabs her by the hair and - she screaming to be let go - drags her into the quaint little wooden cottage, where he throws her on the floor. With only shorts on, and a kind of cardigan that just covers his chest, Daedalus is quickly naked. With one hand pressing down on her face, with the other he rips her clothes off. Still resisting, it takes an effort to prise open her legs. Once on her he thrusts violently into her: her back arches in pain and she gives a silent, wide mouthed scream.

Up to this point, though ineffective, she'd been struggling against him but the young girl suddenly goes limp. To Daedalus it's like fucking a rag doll. Infuriated, he screams into her face but in her eyes he sees nothing, except the reflection of his own rage. Desperate for a reaction – love or hate it's all the same to him – his mind starts to twist on itself. He feels frantically alone in this desert expanse. Like he's the only living human on the planet: a sudden apocalyptic vision of him wandering a desolate landscape, everything destroyed. He screams into Red's face, "I'm going to strangle you! You're gonna die, and the last thing you're gonna see is my face, and me fucking you." The girl stares up at him, wide eyed and unblinking. His intention had never been to hurt her – if anything he'd expected things to end with the usual denials of guilt and a little hush money, but her lack of response rouses The Animal and he's lost all control. His fingers are like steel ropes round her throat. She starts to gasp for breath; he looks into her eyes, praying to see something, but there's nothing. Like looking into the eyes of a corpse – an absence of emotion; looking through him as if he weren't there. Still she doesn't resist or cry out.

As his fingers interlock at the back of her neck, and his thumbs press down harder and harder on her windpipe she starts to blink rapidly and mouth words, but no sound comes. To Daedalus it seems like a silent prayer and – why is it so? – it's as if she's pleading for his redemption. The girl's face goes through shades of red and then a darkening blue. Suddenly her eyes snap wide open and she stares sightlessly up at Daedalus. At the same time her body goes heavy. After staring down at her for several minutes Daedalus suddenly snaps out of his daze – a long dark tunnel with a pinpoint of light in the distance rushes towards him and the pinpoint bursts in a bright flash of light that momentarily blinds him. He sees what he's done and in horror he jumps to his feet. For a few moments he looks wildly around – a terror of discovery his only thought. Pulling frantically at his hair, doubling up, he gasps for breath. Touches her and recoils, crying out. Outside the only movement, the only presence, is the Coolies at his camp and they all appear busy and preoccupied with the endless task of keeping the guests catered to. The normality and familiarity of the scene reassures him and gradually his movements, jerky and awkward at first, return to normal. Daedalus walks away from the scene of the innocent girl's murder with a sauntering, nonchalant step, as if without a care.

Over the course of the *Day of Wellbeing* Ferari has become increasingly distraught, missing Zafar as one would a favorite toy or pet. The mood in fact is not an unfamiliar one. Their relationship consists of a roller coaster of passionate

lust and arguments which, though meaningless, are heated and extremely violent. However, Ferari's thirtieth birthday is only just around the corner and, exacerbated by Zafar's constant taunts, this time the psychological impact of their fight is more significant. He is very conscious of time passing and feels unusually vulnerable. Coming down off a Coke binge doesn't help matters. On waking Ferari had found himself alone in The Massage Tent – Daedalus' absence is not unexpected. On returning to the camp, where he fails to find Daedalus, and the solace he'd anticipated from him, Ferari decides to give Zafar a call. Expecting at least contrition for his behavior and sudden departure (still picturing him Loyal Pet) Ferari is rudely surprised to find Zafar in combative mood. In fact the conversation is short and one sided. After a brief harangue at Ferari's infidelity with Daedalus he concludes with a repetition of his last ultimatum (which Ferari had hoped would be forgotten) before slamming the phone down: "Tell your father about us and announce our marriage or I'm leaving you."

From his arrogant, unusually calm and assertive manner, Ferari rightly concludes that seeds sown among the plethora of potential benefactors met at *The Festival* are already showing signs of germination. Disconcerted into nervous confusion by the prospect of the sun setting on his relationship, after Zafar hangs up Ferari stares at his phone for several minutes while jerkily pacing around his tent. Eventually coming to a resolution, he orders his plane to make preparations to fly him home. In fact Ferari's customize Lear is doing a low fly past over the expanse of grey desert at the very moment Daedalus is throttling the life out of Red. As his plane jets towards the horizon, trailing a billowing cloud of dust that obliterates the blood red setting sun, The Life Guru weeps a lament: "This is a gathering of the greatest minds celebrating the infinite possibilities of the future, unshackled by the past and radiating positive energy as it flies above and beyond the daily cycle. Why is he abandoning us...?" Given Ferari's innocuous contribution to any society, and that Confucian trait of blank disinterest in the welfare of anyone but immediate family, The Life Guru's reaction to his departure appears overheated. In fact he's mistaken Ferari's Lear (they all look the same, don't they?) for that of a potential investor in a planned Regeneration Center. Of which the design and purpose leans heavily towards ensuring him a luxurious retirement rather than to garner benefit and well being for its guests.