

It had been a long, tragic day. Seventeen more children had come in sick, and seventeen of them had died before he'd even had a chance to begin tending to their illness. There was nothing to do. This new virus, whatever it was, was simply astonishing in its power and ferocity. He wasn't particularly upset by this; he didn't enjoy the company of children, and only they seemed susceptible. But still, he felt an obligation to the parents, who day after day, came in, weepy eyed, begging for his help. He wished he could turn them away, disgusted by their antics; their sniveling, their pathetic imploring. He was their God, he could do as he pleased. After their desperate energy had been depleted and they could cry no longer, they wiped their nose on their sleeves and left.

He got off the gondola at the bus shelter. He tried to pull it onto land, but it sailed off out of his reach before he was able. It didn't matter, so long as nobody saw him. He was hoping to meet the atheist with the huge uncut penis with which he had been having the affair. The boy was handsome, playful, delightful to have around. He reveled in the feeling of the body next to his during the days as he napped, spent, basking in the afterglow and semen of their encounters.

Instead, he turned and ran into an old acquaintance that he hadn't seen in years. She greeted him. He couldn't remember her name, but was excited to see a familiar face amongst the sea of strangers. They talked, of old times, of high school memories. She was on her way to a David Bowie concert. He told her that he would be going to see a concert next week – a *fabulous* electronic show down in Toronto – and she was genuinely interested. He found it touching to meet someone who wasn't completely absorbed in blind self-indulgence, like most of the people he knew. They weren't looking for companionship; they were love sucking leeches, subconsciously only seeking to drain emotional energy from the people they met, and flit away when there was nothing left to parasitically devour.

He hopped on the next bus, only because he was too lazy to cross the bridge and walk the five minutes closer to home that the bus would take him. They bid each other farewell as he was whisked out of her life again. There was no offer to exchange phone numbers because secretly, they both knew they would never end up calling each other. He admired her genuineness, her common-sense, and almost wished that he *could* call her, but this was not the way that the world worked.

Although it was only a one-minute ride, he helped himself to a seat, squeezing himself between two obese women. They both snorted as he had glanced over at the seat, a prisoner swimming between two seas of lard. As if somehow they had more claim to this real estate than he did. He took it just to spite them more than anything, secretly delighting that he had the ability to frustrate these two unhealthy, unpleasant, and downright disgusting creatures. He shuddered at the feeling of their soft, jiggly flesh against his body, but it was worth it. They seemed even more annoyed, even more invaded as he debarked at the first stop, mere seconds later.

He jumped on his bicycle, pedaling home. He knew that he was a morally reprehensible person, but his one concern remained the environment. He didn't care

about the children (“Oh my God! Won’t somebody please think of the children?” the right-wing advocates had screamed from his television). Children could be damned, along with the rest of the human race. He did care about the plants and the animals; innocent beings that lay in the path of the bulldozer destruction of mankind.

He wondered what life would be like when the atmosphere became too polluted to allow all but the strongest to breathe. He wondered how the mass capitalists, the industrialists, would feel as they laid out on the street, their skin stained yellow from the thick sea of pollution that swam overhead, their lungs just begging for oxygen but unable to adequately deliver. As life slipped away from them, would they, even in the throes of death, realize their folly? Or would they sit there, their precious dollars clenched tightly in their hands, ready to buy their way into heaven?

He got home. His girlfriend was there, surprising him. The girlfriend tried to kiss him; he pulled away. There was no love between them. Their relationship was long dead, just a shell of what had once been, but they both clung to the familiarity. The girlfriend tried again. He let her, feeling defeated, no longer having the strength to fight against her advances. She looked at him, suggesting that maybe they could go upstairs. She wanted sex. He desperately wanted escape. He told her they could try. “Go upstairs and wait for me,” he told her. As soon as she disappeared around the bend in the arched staircase, he quietly slipped out the door and headed down the street, wanting to be alone yet wishing to escape his thoughts.

As he passed by his brother’s house, he saw that his brother was mowing the lawn. The brother walked about shirtless. He was once a stunning specimen of masculinity. Slender, smooth, tanned, gorgeous. But too many years and too much beer had ruined his figure, leaving him a middle-aged man with a disgusting pot-belly. Still, he walked around shirtless, trying to recapture the glory-days of his youth. He stopped in to say hi, going into the kitchen to see his sister-in-law, who was squeezing lemonade for a group of strangers. “Hi,” they welcomed him as he entered, scanning the crowd for a familiar face.

One person in the corner caught his eye; his childhood lover, a man named Justin. He remembered how, before he had become disillusioned with the world, him and Justin had spent long hours in the forest near his house. The two of them smoked joint after joint, looking up at the crystal blue sky and enjoying each other’s company. He laid his head back on Justin’s stomach. Justin reached down his hands to cup his chin. They kissed, sadly at first, because they knew that this expression of passion was wrong. He had loved Justin hungrily, never having quite enough of him to feel satisfied. Justin’s smell, a sweet scent of cologne intermingled with boyish sweat, made him ravenous with desire. But upon turning 18, one day in the forest, as he swallowed Justin’s ejaculate and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, Justin told him that he thought they should never do this again. Justin had met a girl, a flighty young creature called Rita. She was pregnant, and the two of them were to be married. He was hurt. He slinked away, waiting until Justin was gone to cry his soul out to the world under the boughs of a fallen tree.

He did not want to talk to Justin, but a mutual childhood friend, remembering their special bond, pointed out how isomorphic the two of them were, much to the titillating pleasure of the crowd. As he took his lemonade off the serving tray, he felt burning annoyance build up in his ears.

Justin, even more handsome than he had been in his youth, looked at him and came over. He whispered a timid hello. He ignored the man, who was as much a stranger to him now as anyone else in the room, and excused himself to the backyard.

They had a dog; it was the oddest animal that he had ever seen. Elongated neck, gangly legs. It almost had the semblance of a giraffe. "It's a rare Asian breed," his sister-in-law had told him proudly, trying to find a collar that would fit it. It reminded him of an insect, a hideous bug he had seen one time on the Discovery channel, and he loathed it. It felt his hateful stares and it despised him in return. He entered into the backyard, having forgotten about it. As he closed the door behind him, it accosted him, running towards him. He tried to reopen the door, but his hands slipped on the latch. He reached down to grab a stick, a chew toy for the vicious animal, and took a swing at the beast's head as it barreled down on him. The dog-giraffe-insect avoided the blow, moving its elongated neck out of harm's way at the last second. It catapulted itself on top of him.

He screamed, crying out for help, but no one could hear him over the sound of the lawnmower. The luncheon party continued inside, no one noticing him, as the dog-giraffe-insect reached down its maw to tear bits of flesh from his arms, his legs, his abdomen. He started to laugh, feeling pleasantly detached. Man against nature, and while man had thought himself victorious, often, man had lost. The dog-giraffe-insect's teeth tore into his neck. He could feel darkness setting in. He embraced it, slipping from the insanity of this life. As he died, his only regret was that he had not seen his mother in sixteen years.