

## OBSSESSION

They stood there. Huddled like a herd of cattle, by the wind's whips. Makeshift cardboard signs were scribbled on with semi-intelligible prose. Most of the signs were in ink; others were clearly carved by drought-ridden markers or etched by nine-millimeter pencil.

It was easy to distinguish the vagrants from the lazys. Those truly in need had a tinge of grit behind their ears and wore shoes revealing the hole-ridden socks within. The lazys had stoic eyes that took in their periphery and slightly upturned mouth-corners shielding clinched jaws.

It always interested him to drive by this corner—especially at this time of the year. The holidays had reached full bloom while the night's reaped death in their chill. He'd always made a game of it: counting out the lazys amid the homeless. The lazys' signs were always on too-square cardboard pieces—clearly not affected by the slush of the prior night's wet snowstorm.

The game of the lazys normally kept his mind preoccupied—diverting its eye from memory of the past to the yearning of the moment, but it had become difficult to sate his craving. He'd been playing a game for almost seventeen years, but occasionally his mind would wander back to that moment—the instant that ignited the thirst that he would forever need to feed. The desire that—in that instant was growing more and more and that made him hate *them* all the more. He smiled and remembered . . .

*A rain droplet caught the sunlight. Within it, a kaleidoscope rainbow refracted and shone across the woman's brow to reveal deep creases adorned with age's ornaments. Grit was indistinguishable from the sunset shades that caressed her face. His gaze found hers as he marveled in the vision.*

*He noticed that her irises had no vitality—probably having forgone any sense of lightness due to all she'd been subject to—she was homeless, after all. He could sense her sorrows weighing down on her like a heavy droplet curling a leaf on a branch in the trees—the chill in the air cradling its descent.*

*Her sign was misshapen and peeling in one corner. There were sketches of some sort fading on the backside. He read the scribbles on the front: "Anything Helps" was written in a dilapidated hand—she was surely not the creative sort, and her location was ideal. "I can help," he had said. She was frightened by his voice—a sort of molasses-tinged throaty noise with a deep rough crackling not unlike an elder man's cries as he lay resting on his deathbed. There was something in it that made a fresh cold course up her spine. There was no one around, the sun had only just started to send its rays across the horizon and something compelled him forward. He burst forth at the same instant he became disembodied—an omniscient looking down at the scene—bird's-eye watching his body charge forth fists raised.*

*She could hear a crack like fire, the crunch of snow underfoot, the snapping of branches along the path as she ran. It all gave way to the eruption of fractured bone. Laughter overtook it all, that of children playing on black asphalt fields, of families rumbling in unison. Memories streamed forth from the geyser, faster than the crimson stream and far too dense for the inconstant light to reveal. Thoughts became a stream of pictographs requiring deciphering, faces holding a semblance of importance quickly dissolved into a pool of unrecognizability.*

*The tides had forever turned and the inundation that followed was equally interminable as it was instantaneous. Blood continued to drip as if juice from a ripe fruit.*

*In that never-ending instant the vitality that once resided in the woman's eyes re-surfaced, and for a moment that which was regained purpose and filled her throbbing heart.*

*She collapsed to her knees and witnessed the rippling of her tears in the pooling blood. He stood above and around her, his laughs dominating the soundscape—the final blow giving way to a smile.*

The smile from his recollection spilled across years onto his face. Perhaps today he could take another in need and end their misery—after all, things couldn't be much worse for them dead than alive. Any lazys

would get only what was due to them—their parasitic nature put a bitter taste in his mouth that could only be sated in blood.

He scrutinized each face and each motion in the group at the corner, seeking the suitable sacrifice for his grand scheme to rid the world of the lazys. In his mind, it was a disservice not to remove such unproductive and ignorant individuals as the lazys from society. Over the years this game had become such a joy that he'd started counting. After today, he would be at seventy-one, but his goal was to reach one hundred before he died.

He saw her—the ideal candidate for extraction. He always preferred the women—they were even worse than the men. At the very least they could find a man and marry him and live off his wages. Baring a child is their only purpose in life . . .

Hours passed; he had parked the car in the strip-mall parking lot so that he could see the corner and his victim. His binoculars were dangling from his neck as he listened to NPR and smoked a cigarette with the windows rolled up. The sun was teetering at the edge of sunset. He knew that she wouldn't be there much longer so he started the car up and drove to the corner light. The people and potential witnesses were sparse and he'd honed his technique to the point that it was so easy to carry out the task at hand that he could do it daily if her really wanted to. The gloves he wore served a dual purpose—protection from the cold and from the various poisons he had stored in a plastic container. Today he opted for Dimethylmercury—one of his favorites. The death that would ensue was always so delayed that it was impossible to track back to him. The poison would build over several months and eventually she would die. He took out the syringe and a fifty-dollar bill. The guise of extreme generosity always drew the lazys that much closer and made it that much easier to stick them.

He beckoned to the lazy women who wobbled over. As her face came into view something turned inside of him. The women's was that of his sister—Margaret. Their eyes met and he dropped the syringe she sort of chuckled and he snarled as he reached down for the syringe and leaned out the window . . .