

RE: Work  
By  
Tyler Morency  
A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts (English) at  
Concordia University Montreal, Quebec, Canada  
April 2015

© Tyler Morency 2015

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY  
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Tyler Morency

Entitled: RE: Work

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (English)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Chair

Nicola Nixon Examiner

Josip Novakovich Examiner

Mary di Michele Supervisor

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of Faculty

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Abstract**

RE: Work Tyler Morency

RE: Work is a collection of stories that revolve around the workplace—an environment where we spend a large part of our waking life. Within the stories, characters contend with themselves, their circumstances, their co-workers—work itself even—in workplaces across a fictionalized Alberta. The stories explore themes of tedium, indignity, malaise, and dread. For the protagonists, work is linked with constructions of purpose, safety, and identity. Set in office spaces, bottle depots, cleaning closets, and sound studios, the stories vary wildly in tone, perspective, and form. “Trail Bottle Exchange” draws heavily on elements of social realism. Meanwhile, “Facilitation” and “NOTICE TO TENANT” are grimly absurd. As a collection of short fiction, RE: Work accounts for the wide variety of paid and unpaid employment that people find themselves in.

## **Dedication**

To Casey Burkholder, for reasons I hope are obvious to her

*I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.*

—Proverbs 24:30-34

## Contents

My Writing Process is Important.....	7
Facilitation .....	9
ACTAR.....	15
Jedit and Klamp .....	20
Turnbuckle .....	27
May Esmeraldas .....	32
NOTICE TO TENANT.....	40
Who am I?: A Personal Response Essay for English Composition 201.....	59
Excerpts from <i>Hostility Complex</i> .....	63
Trail Bottle Exchange .....	82

## My Writing Process is Important

My writing process begins completely nude at 5:30 in the morning when I wake up and reach for my breakfast cocaine, which I prepare the night before on my bedside table. I drink as much Wild Turkey from the bottle as I can for exactly nine seconds. Then I immediately begin dictation of my dream journal to my interns who I'll henceforth refer to as my "Creation Team."

After performing a therapeutic colonic, the Creation Team massages a liberal portion of oil to every inch of my body. I visualize the first sentence I will write as team members kneed my flesh with studious and adorable fists. I concentrate on creating a sadness that I draw on for the rest of the day. I consider the nature of human failure and the mountain of adversity that I had to personally overcome to find myself in such a privileged position as an artist. These musings usually coalesce into the memory of my mother forgetting a cup of orange soda on the roof of the family car as she strapped me into my car seat. The image of the drink falling over as the car rolls in motion continues to inform my work. I wanted that drink so bad. For the next three minutes, I cry the tears of an artistic mega-genius.

After a bowl of quinoa and shredded coconut, along with a selection of seasonal fruits, I dress myself in a cassock of Egyptian linen and a mask carved of Narwhal bone. The creation team assists me into my writing orb, which was custom built by the late Buckminster Fuller for Don DeLillo (who happens to be a terrible poker player). I sharpen two pencils that will sustain and comprise my day of writing. The pencils are extremely rare deadstock that were manufactured until the OPEC Crisis created an oil shortage that prevented availability of the particular lubricant that greased the machine that made the

pencil's distinctive eraser. I don't know how I'll manage to write when I've depleted my supply. Perhaps I'll die before then, but for now, there seems to be an ample amount.

The paper I use has been milled and pulped from trees in the Amazonian basin. No stationary teems with such rich creative potential as that made from the wood of an endangered biome. Your work has to come first—I suppose that's the advice I'd give to any starting writer.

On good days, I can complete several short stories, a book of conceptual poetry, and revise whatever novel that's getting ready for publication that month. When I become fatigued, I ring for one of the creation team to rub peppermint oil on my eyelids and spritz liquid dexedrine under my tongue. I always save 15 minutes at the end of the work day to work on my Magnum Opus, which I'll burn on my death bed. The ashes will be mixed with my own before the Creation Team tearfully scatters them at the National Library. When both pencils are worn to a stub, my day's work is over.

Then I pass my notes and drafts to be typed by my most cherished member of the creation team—the eunuch scrivener given to me by *The New Yorker*, in lieu of payment for the first short story I published in their magazine, which is common practice for *The New Yorker*, but a bit of an industry secret.

I hope the insight into my process aids you in your future creative development. A final note: In case my advice proves to be a little too helpful to you, please keep in mind Creation Team assassins are enrolled in writing workshops across the continent and are extremely astute readers.

## Facilitation

Dear Mrs. Wanlim,

I am facilitating. It's what I do for a living right now. Just like how you are the controller for that company you work for. I am a facilitator.

Currently, my facilitation looks like this: I am sitting in an office chair across a grey table from the person I am expected by my superiors to support with my facilitation. The chair has the kind of polyester upholstery that keeps dust on it forever. On the table in front of her is a stack of papers—150 copies of a four page, double-sided document. Beside it are 150 copies of the cover letter. She takes a cover letter then counts out the correct number of pages to make sure she doesn't miss a single one or grab one extra. She taps them on the grey table, staples them and puts the stapled documents in a pile. The two stacks shrink while the third one grows. One hundred and fifty in. One hundred and fifty out.

“I like hot chocolate that tastes sweet. I don't like Timmy's hot chocolate,” she tells me.

“It tastes funny.”

She makes grumbling sounds, the tedious nature of the task obvious even to her. When the stapler binds she fixes it with a bent paperclip. She does not specify what hot chocolate she prefers.

The other day I was shopping, Mrs. Wanlim. While I was waiting in line, the person

ahead of me had this strange looking melon. The clerk at the till asked him what kind of melon it was. He wasn't sure. The guy buying it had no clue what kind of melon it was. The clerk had to ask the clerk at the next till over.

"It looks like some sort of squash to me," the other clerk said.

Then the first clerk had to get a customer service manager to take the melon back to the produce section to match it up with the other melons of its kind. Then the guy revealed that he didn't even want that melon in the first place. He wanted a cantaloupe, but the cantaloupes weren't ripe enough, so he thought he'd try this mystery melon. He apologized to everybody for the trouble.

I was silent in all of this because I'd never seen a melon like it in my life. I've been in the produce section of supermarkets thousands of times. How could I have overlooked this fruit? Was this melon always there? Honestly, it might as well have come from another planet. I like to think that I'm urbane. When I go to dinner parties with friends we talk about fine wine, cheese and scotch. Or contemporary art and design. Culture. The pressing issues of the day. That kind of thing. I keep up. But I didn't know what sort of melon it could be. I thought it was a squash. This haunts me.

The manager came back and said that it was a casaba melon. Everybody involved had a collective "oh" moment. Then the clerk couldn't find the number for it in the system. She spent ages going through the entries on the little price computer attached to the till.

Casaba Melons weren't there. It was like there were some extra casaba melons left over on the truck that the crew didn't want to throw out so they just snuck the box onto the floor.

You know that joke that people make with clerks that are having trouble with things like that? It goes, "Well, I guess it's free then?" This guy doesn't make the joke even though it's an appropriate time to make it. The best part is the clerk ended up giving him the former mystery melon for free.

Why do you think that nobody knew what a casaba melon looks like? Do you know what a casaba melon looks like, Mrs Wanlim? I trust that you do. I trust that you are more knowledgeable and worldly than I am. I believe that you know.

The room where the grey table sits, where I am facilitating and she is working, is small. There is a cheap bookshelf in one corner filled with empty file folders. Blue, yellow, purple, green, and red. On the top are a few reams of coloured paper. Golden rod, buff and orange. The room itself is inside a building that is made of orange-coloured bricks. There seem to be few windows. The windows that are there are placed high upon upper floors. It acts as a shelter for the homeless or those in transition, as they say in the literature here.

Besides the papers there is a box of Kleenex, a desk lamp, a vase filled with plastic flowers and a sewing machine pushed to one side of the grey table. I try to imagine the

last time it was used. In what context would a sewing machine ever be used here? It's insane.

On the door, marking the entrance to the room is a metal plaque with the word "OFFICE" in a san-serif font, as if anybody would be under the impression that the room was functioning as anything but. Under the plaque is a scotch-taped sign made with a sheet of computer paper that says, "M3."

Can you guess what kind of lighting is used here Mrs. Wanlim? Think about it for a moment. You would be correct if you guessed "Harsh, unflattering fluorescent light that flickers intermittently."

"The other day a pile of box springs fell on me in the warehouse," she says. I tell her she should be more careful. There is no point getting hurt at your job. Now that she has fixed the stapler, she continues to grab papers and staple them together under this kind of light that you've no doubt guessed correctly.

I am imagining you in your office reading this I wish that you could see this place and that you could exist here for a moment, this moment. Remember when you gave me your business card in that very office? I'm sure you do. I'm extremely sorry it has taken so long to follow up with you.

Now she is finished. It has her taken hours. She rolls her eyes and sticks her tongue

into her bottom lip so that it looks like she's got a wad of tobacco or seeds for the winter in there. The document outlines the shelter's new Respect in the Workplace Policy. In the full title it mentions Bermuda as one of the territories that falls under the document's jurisdiction. Here and Bermuda. As in the Bermuda Triangle. We are not in Bermuda, are we Mrs. Wanlim? I remember the Bermuda Triangle was a big thing when I grew up. I'd read about planes and ships vanishing without a trace there. Military aircraft, small schooners captained by ex-navy men, all vanished. They passed through the void, into another place. Now entire cruise ships filled with the elderly line up for all-you-can-eat buffets while college-trained jazz musicians play the standards, pass through the Triangle safely. What happened to the Bermuda Triangle?

What could be there waiting for them, Mrs. Wanlim? Will she be there, bruised from warehouse box-springs? Will people recognize the casaba melon there? What about 150 copies of a document that outlines respect in the workplace stapled by somebody that I've facilitated? Will the homeless, those "in transition" be there? Will this room, this terrifying room filled with unused objects and shrinking and growing stacks be there? Or will they pass through, safe and comfortable like a giant cruise ship?

I am going to take her to meet you one of these days. Some day soon?

Mrs. Wanlim, will I always be guessing that it is some kind of squash? I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Joseph Doyle Facilitator

## ACTAR

Debbie got the part-time job washing and sterilizing the ACTAR dummies used in first-aid classes just before she missed her period. She got the job during the flu scare and then got pregnant. She never reads the news, but if she did, she'd understand that flu wasn't a big deal anymore. She is now eight weeks pregnant and has had the job for the last three months.

The wash bay is just a room with two doors, two sinks and black-and-white tile flooring. The plastic heads arrive overnight in separate Tupperware boxes brought in by a number of classroom instructors. The white heads represent adults. The grey heads represent infants.

Debbie dumps the baby heads in the sink. She squeezes green soap on their non-faces and runs hot water over them. Every fist-sized head needs to be washed, scrubbed, rinsed, and sterilized. The chewing gum that rattles in the hollow heads needs to be shaken out. The lipstick smears on the faces need to be removed with a brush or, for the stubborn stains, her thumb. The infant heads fit on grey life-size bodies that have little silvery toes and fingers.

In the room next to the wash bay, the classroom instructor shows his students a video illustrating the important elements of first aid. Debbie can always hear it as it plays. "Help! Help! Help me!" says an injured man in the video. "Somebody! Help me!"

Debbie rinses the faces and puts the heads to dry on the shelving racks. The racks fit nine heads a shelf. Mostly Debbie treats the heads with little attention, but today she faces all the heads in the same direction though it takes longer. Dozens of baby heads point out to the small room and look at her with blank non-eyes and silent open mouths.

She's heard the man screaming every day since she started. The video plays on the hour for every class rotation. She's never seen the video herself. She's never taken a single first-aid class but she imagines the man clearly. He is middle-aged. He has curly hair. He is holding his right leg while sitting in the grass, the shinbone pointing out. She imagines a tree in the background, implying the man has fallen out of it. She never considers what a middle-aged man with curly hair would be doing climbing a tree. Debbie hears the man calling to nobody. The video goes quiet before rescue comes for him and an inaudible voiceover interrupts. The instructor is supposed to fill in the blanks, to instruct. Debbie can't hear the instructor unless he or she moves closer to the door. She sometimes hears small parts of sentences: "Safety first," or "Remember the ABCs. Airways, breathing, circulation."

But if the person is calling out for help, breathing isn't a problem. The person would need something else, a stretcher, or a doctor.

She thinks, what you do after the ABCs? Debbie would try to hold him and wait for help if she was walking in that meadow, she decides. What else can you do with a broken leg?

\*\*\*

The last person Debbie held was Tom. Debbie remembers meeting Tom at a party, the summer after high school. She remembers meeting him in the backyard, his face lit by an empty 15 pack of Lucky Lager burning in the fire pit.

Tom and Debbie were standing close to the couch and the stack of old broken televisions that wait near a fence, neglected by the city garbage workers. A group of people nearby played a full-contact drinking game called Beer Ball. Debbie didn't watch

long enough to understand all the subtleties of the game, but it involved bouncing a Ping-Pong ball off the opposing team's cans, then drinking and tackling simultaneously.

"If booze is a crutch, then both my legs are broken!" somebody with a beard said.  
"Toss me another one!"

Tom wore a New York Yankees baseball cap and a sleeveless T-shirt that said "The Doobie Brothers" on it. He was skinny.

"Hey."

"Hey."

"I like your shirt. Smooth music."

"Thanks. Yeah, I got it for five bucks, second-hand in Nanton." Tom sipped his beer.

"Sweet. Looks old." Debbie sipped her beer. "Yeah."

Later, he shared a joint with her and they stared at the fire. He didn't want to make out after, like some of the other guys that got her high tried to in the last few months at Crescent Heights. So she wanted to make out with him.

They left the party later that night and it happened. She got pregnant quietly in the basement of Tom's mother's duplex.

\*\*\*

"Okay, performing mouth-to-mouth—if the person is not breathing normally, make sure the person is lying flat on their back on a firm surface and..." The instructor walks away before Debbie can hear the rest.

Once the heads are dry, Debbie sprays them with medical disinfectant, then again waits for them to dry. A knock at the wash-bay door as her boss enters.

“Hello, Debbie. How are you?”

“Hello, Phyllis. I’m okay.”

“You have a minute?”

Debbie puts the head she was rinsing onto the rack.

“You know, we haven’t had a good year.” Phyllis puts her hand on the table beside her and leans on it. “This is hard. I know how much this job means to you and how well you’ve been doing it, which makes this difficult for me, but we have to let you go at the end of this pay period. It’s not you. Your work is fantastic, but we have to make some accounting adjustments for head office. I hope you understand. I’ll be happy to give a great reference for where ever you end up.”

Debbie pauses and she thinks of the party, its consequences and her future employment.

“Who is going to clean the heads?”

“The instructors will need to do their own. They will need to come in a bit early and leave a little later, but the heads will get done.”

“What does ACTAR stand for?”

“I don’t know. I think it’s just the name of the manufacturer. Don’t worry. I had plenty of different jobs when I was your age. You’re young and you’ve got your whole life ahead of you.”

“I guess I have some decisions to make.” Debbie nods.

Phyllis leaves and the grey faces look at Debbie from their places in the drying racks.

“Who would save these things? These things are not worth saving.” Debbie puts the heads into bags that have the acronym ACTAR written on them to go back into the classroom for the infant cardiopulmonary resuscitation demonstration. If one of these grey, alien faces without eyes and ears stopped breathing, then that was for the best. Let them suffocate. Let them suffocate on their high chairs with their static, unmoving arms at their sides. Let them suffocate in their cribs with their rigid bodies. Let them suffocate at the edges of backyard sandboxes and plastic swimming pools.

“Help! Help me!” Debbie again hears the man calling to nobody. “Somebody! Please!”

## Jedit and Klamp

My job right now is to make the children dance for the cameras. They will never be this young again and neither will I. I will not appear on camera. I will stand offstage, facing a number of children who appear either happy to be out of the house or curiously expectant of some surprise or maybe a treat afterward. Once they get started, I will have to keep their energy up for a good 10 minutes while Tanis captures their little shimmies and shakes for perpetuity.

Jedit and Klamp are the titular stars of the show. They are a pair of these aliens (illustrated on computers by some guys in LA and New Delhi) that are visiting Earth. The show has not gone to air as we are currently producing the first round of episodes. Which means, I need to make the kids pretend to care about characters they've never heard of. Never mind that Jedit and Klamp are computer-generated. So there isn't a person in a purple dinosaur suit for the kids to look at. If we had a bigger production budget, I'd probably spring for a costume of some kind—a friendly looking tiger or a zebra. A gorilla would probably scare the kids.

From the storyboards the studio sent, it looks like Jedit is a chubby John Goodman type-alien and Klamp is this yellow blob thing that changes shape so kids can learn the names of different kinds of objects. Jedit wears a flannel shirt even though he's from another planet because flannel is definitely the universal way to fit in when you are in the city, any city. The pair go around and encounter everyday situations like going to school, shopping for groceries and speaking to neighbours. Jedit and Klamp communicate with each other through an alien language that will be made of weird bloopy sound effects. Apparently, a voice-of-God narrator explains to Jedit and Klamp

(in what I imagine will be a calm, vaguely pedantic voice) what is going on, which in turn, teaches the kids watching the show. Because so much of the show is made elsewhere, the only stuff we are going to shoot is the dance breaks that kids do back in J and K's ship at the end of the episode. It's an audience participation segment to get kids' blood moving. They hope it's going to be a popular show.

Bim, Tanis and I operate on our own. Our studio is located in a quasi-industrial area so we save on rent. Inside, the soundstage is painted an almost neon green so digital effects and scenery can be added in during post-production. We usually make commercials and visual web content for business to business marketing, but this contract for J and K (our uninspired shorthand for Jedit and Klamp) came in and we get paid handsomely enough so we don't need to shoot anything else for the rest of the week. We are thankful this week isn't like some weeks when we juggle several low-paying projects at once, sometimes having to work 14-hour production days.

The casting call is for children aged 3-7 with an aim for even gender distribution. When I step into the little waiting room we've got set-up, I count just one kid wearing the forbidden colour. We shoot against a green screen, so kids can't wear any green or they will look like a disembodied head along with a pair of floating arms bobbing around the cartoon interior of a space ship. So now comes the worst part of my job, which is telling a kid that they can't come in to shoot Jedit and Klamp because their parent or guardian didn't read the production notes I write out (designed to conform to the daily master production notes we receive from Burbank), which clearly state that green is strictly verboten.

This mom, a kind-looking woman probably in her 30s asks: “Don’t you have an extra pair?” referring to an extra pair of pants, the green item in question. We don’t. I have to explain that we don’t have access to a wardrobe and that we’ve got to start rolling. The kid doesn’t know what’s going on at this point. I shuffle the rest of the non-green wearing kids into the studio, while the moms wait near the walls, off to one-side.

The kid wearing green realizes what is going on. It’s the worst. Both the parent and I have to console the little guy, but I’m real busy, so I can’t do a good enough job. I try to explain that they can come to another shoot some other time. I think he starts to cry as his mom leads him toward the door and hopefully a good lunch with chicken fingers and orange soda. I feel terrible.

Tanis has a head set on. I have a head set on too. So does Bim even though he’s usually just listening to how the sound is mixed. Even though the room isn’t big, it’s important to be able to whisper into the microphone and have Tanis hear. I met her in technical college probably seven years ago. I haven’t counted.

Tanis, I can feel her behind the camera, sneaking glances at me. Just waiting.

“I can run the cameras today if you want,” I headset whisper to Tanis.

“Nope. I’m good here. This is all yours.”

“Please.”

She puts her eye into the viewfinder. The discussion is over. She wants to watch this, the jerk. For the first time I’m worried the children will laugh at me. Despite the absence of any material reason for their ridicule, the threat that they could laugh made the idea that they didn’t need any reason to laugh that much more real.

“We don’t have all day,” Tanis says.

I push play on an old mp3 player that I bought way back when I used to run. It is the only thing I own that still uses AA batteries. The playlist, specifically constructed for this shoot, has “Tequila”, “The Bird Dance”, and some random house music I downloaded from a blog that promised the “hottest house music ever.” Music that should move bodies. Do you think DJs ever refer to themselves as body movers?

“Tequila” starts playing. I’m mortified at how corny it is. I should have actually listened to the music before I put it on here. They’ll put in whatever music they want in post-production, so it doesn’t matter what is actually playing.

“Okay guys! Let’s start dancing!” I clap my hands.

Dancing: The only time in your life when you can really go for it. Not a single care for the future. No matter how it turns out. No worrying about how you are going to feed yourself or what sort of work you are going to do.

“How?” asks a girl who has terrible intensity in her face. A mix of impatience and curiousness about the actual intended specifics.

“You know...” I start to do a lot of what I call “chicken wing” stuff. You point the elbows up parallel with the shoulders and rotate the upper torso a bunch. I get the 1000-yard stare from the girl.

“That’s not dancing,” the little girl says. “There’s supposed to be moves.”

“This is a move. The chicken wing.”

“It’s a bad move,” the girl says. This is not cruelty on her part but honest critical feedback. I will no longer be able to use the chicken wing in any public setting because of the association with this situation, it had been my dance move bread and butter at the bar.

“Esmé! Be polite,” her mom shouts from the wall of the studio.

I look over to where the voice came from—Esmé’s mom—and try to deflect any need on my part for her involvement.

The rest of the kids start to horse around. Esmé is disappointed. “How do you dance then?” The girl looks up and then starts to twirl around. The kids nearby (some of them) follow suit. The girl shows the kids how to dance the way she wants. She is decisive. She starts raising her hands in the air, then out to her sides in an obviously choreographed sequence. There are little leg slides and turns. The kids are looking at her, grateful to have something to look at.

“How do the kids know how to remember a dance that complicated?” I ask Tanis.

“This swirling is good for about three seconds of footage. There’s no swirling on a space ship. We need more boogie shots, not music video shots,” Tanis radios back. “We can’t have one kid doing something while the rest of them are just standing there looking bored. See that kid picking his nose? That’s what I mean.”

I think about “The Worm.” I cannot pop the worm to get their attention, even though this is as appropriate time as any to perform the dance-party maneuver that is sure to please the people drunk as the person doing it. I’m too old to do the worm and haven’t done a push-up in probably two years.

“What about this?” Instead of the worm, I do a vague running man and kind of swing my shoulders then do that Andre 3000 thing with my fingers. The kids are pretty into it and finally start moving around. “Make up your own moves that are better than mine.”

The shoot is finally over. We’ve got the 30 minutes or so of footage of these little kids that will be cut and spliced into every episode of Jedit and Klamp that will be

produced this year. I imagine they will need to shoot more eventually. The kids scuttle to their moms by the wall. The intense girl gets a big hug full of love and congratulation. I give everybody's moms cheques for \$25 out of an envelope. Tanis takes the video off the cameras and uploads the footage to a server so Bim can start on the effects stuff before he sends it to the computer animators in LA and New Delhi. I think that by the time these kids have kids of their own, this afternoon won't even register in their memories.

We have beers to celebrate.

Tanis asks me if I want to have kids, "Do you see yourself as a father ever?"

"I'd have to adopt because I'm infertile I think," I say.

She laughs at first but realizes I'm serious about this.

"I climbed over a chainlink fence when I was 15. It was the first time I drank alcohol. I lost my footing when I was climbing over and got caught," I say. "I fell right onto the sharp wire."

"You could lose your balls that way," Bim scrunches his face up and puts his hands between his legs.

"Well, I've got a torn sperm duct. That's what the doctors said. The kids in high school called me No Balls Charles for a while, then NBC. I might be able to have kids but I won't know until that situation presents itself. I mean until I'm trying to have kids and not being able to. I'm not doing that right now."

"There was some weird dancing today," Bim says. "Kids are so funny sometimes."

The show comes out a few months later. The studio gives it a big push all things considered. Lots of ads on the Treefort Network. They even designed an iPad game app

for it because that's the sort of gadgetry pre-teens in the age six-to-10 demographic have these days. But no McDonald's Happy Meal tie-ins or anything. Jedit and Klamp is no superhero summer blockbuster. Jedit turned out to be more scatological than I expected. He makes these not-quite but basically fart sounds when he gets confused.

They are going to make another run of episodes but have a bigger budget so they plan to produce in house. They might do away with the real-life kids all together. I'm not sure. The important thing is that we made something that we can be happy with. If I had a kid, I'd let them watch it.

## Turnbuckle

In the wrestling business there are only two kinds of people—the good guys and the villains. There’s the baby faces and the heels. The crowds cheer the baby faces and they boo the heels. When Samuel Barham finally turned heel his professional wrestling career improved and he had to give up pizza for good. Sam knew diet was an essential component in his conditioning. Exercise was the other important element. During wrestling school as a reward for training hard, Sam ate single slices of Hawaiian from the Canadian Pizza Unlimited down the street, but now that he was poised for main match-ups on the top card, guilty pizza wouldn’t do. Cheese and carbs get in the way of real conditioning and real conditioning was that important to a real professional. He changed a lot during those two years.

“Everybody gets hurt when the conditioning isn’t there and somebody doesn’t have the gas to do the work,” Resident trainer, promoter and CEO of NWC Wrestling (Calgary’s leading independent pro-wrestling promotion), Philliam Pondo said all the time. “Unprofessionals start to huff five minutes into the match and you won’t have the pop to get you over with the crowd. That’s how you end up at a garbage promotion doing garbage wrestling for garbage idiots. You owe it to your self, the other guy in the ring and the fans to be in shape. Most importantly, you owe it to me.”

“I think I’ll always miss pizza,” Sam would say sometimes, usually while he was eating tuna straight from the can after he’d just finished doing hundreds of practice bumps in the ring.

“Treat yourself a couple of times a year or something,” I said to him one time. “You’ll go crazy obsessing over stuff you can’t have. I remember working with a guy

whose wife had real bad peanut allergies. If she even smelled peanuts she'd have a reaction. So he couldn't have anything with peanuts in it when he was at work because the smell would get on his clothes. When we'd go to conferences, the first thing he'd do was buy a bunch of Snickers and eat them all at once."

Sam just looked at me with those weird blue eyes of his, he was a smart guy so he said: "A man does what he must—in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures—and that is the basis of all human morality."

Sam loved quoting Churchill whenever he could.

Sam eventually decided that he'd go the Adonis route. That's not a widely used industry term. I made that up. Some guys can work a bit flabby but only if they are tall enough and though Sam was plenty tall, Sam wanted to have the most perfect body possible. And he did. He sculpted his abs, pecs, delts, you name it. He built real gravedigger shoulders. He was a real athlete in every sense of the word. His face though. Well, when Sam finally turned heel and his pro wrestling career improved and he had to give up pizza for good, he also started wearing a mask.

Sam developed this character—a really cocky, ostentatious character who would wear a gold lamé cape and be followed by women that we'd get off Craigslist looking for promotional work. Sam wore a Mexican luchador mask we ordered off the internet. The mask accentuated Sam's athletic gifts—that body—by mitigating his face. It's hard to describe precisely why his face wasn't fit for the ring, especially when ugly guys wrestle all the time. But there can only be two hillbilly characters working at a promotion at any given time, usually as a tag team. Go over that threshold and you risk saturating the roster. That generally counts for most specialty characters like hobos, zombies vampires,

voodoo practitioners and other demonic types. You can get too much of a good thing.

Sam pitched me his character like this: “The best revenge is living well. The gimmick hooks the fans because fear of the other is a deeply-rooted element in our unconscious. That fear manifests itself in all sorts of places, especially in the idea of ‘the other.’ You see it in the closed-minded attitudes toward immigration. People fear for their livelihoods being robbed this imagined group. I embody all the things that people fear and misunderstand like a good villain should.”

A typical heel would shout at fans and give everything back the fans gave them. Sam would just ignore them, chin up and looking entitled and not talking too much. He’d throw paper money out to the crowd as he walked to the ring. I made the money by photoshopping a picture of Sam as “La privilegiado” on to a picture of Donald Trump and then photoshopping that picture onto a picture of the American dollar bill. I took the red colour scheme from the Mackenzie King \$50 though, so it looked real enough from where the audience was sitting. The people at print shops got uncomfortable printing these. But the fans loved to hate Sam swaggering toward the ring with these women while tossing the bills all over the place. They made great souvenirs.

Philliam Pondo had to work hard to get people to remember “La Privilegiado.” When Sam was still getting used to the character, he had George Tombs (while George had a serious real-life lower body injury that kept him out of serious in-ring competition) as a manager who would do all the spots with him. We had Tombs say “La Privilegiado” really slowly at the end of the shoots (another industry term for the bits where the wrestlers call each other out).

“Pree-vee-lah-hay-dio,” he’d say, stretching out the ‘hay’ for ages. The fans love

to hate it but everybody in the back would break up. George could cut a promo that got everybody in the place involved. Best mouth in the business. He could talk up and down anybody for ages. He didn't really need to develop a character outside his natural, charismatic personality. A living legend in the business. George cut his teeth at NCW first, worked the circuits in Mexico and then Japan and even made it to the big promotion for nearly a decade. But he got tired of the stage and he wanted to be back home to take care of his mom.

Eventually, when Phillip Pondo got sick of the mispronunciation and gave up, Sam got shortened to "The Priv" pronounced just like "shiv" as in "prison shiv" and Sam started his own shoots and eventually won the NCW title. Buy-ins for our online streams were way up and we were all happy. He had a feud with George that we milked for weeks.

Those two had so much compete during that time. Compete is the fire—the drive to destroy internal limitations—that all real athletes have inside them. Sure, "compete" might be a difficult concept to understand when the winners are predetermined by the creative development writing staff, comprised of myself and Phillip Pondo. Unlike other sports, the competition here isn't to see who wins but who gives the most of their bodies to entertain the fans. That's what separates the wannabes from those meant for the big promotion in the states.

"We work real hard to look like we are hurting the other guy. Learning to not hurt people was the thing that hurt you as a wrestler the most," George said to me when he pulled his back trying to cushion the fall for a kid that sandbagged a fist dive from the top rope.

The build-up was pretty standard soap opera stuff. Every alliance breakdown storyline starts with a wedge that causes tension between the primaries. The wedge tends to be arbitrary. If I remember correctly, I think we had Sam start blaming George for a disqualification loss in a match-up. Sam slid a steel chair into the ring to use against the opponent's skull. George failed to distract the referee at just the right moment. Things would build from there until we had a big pay-per-view come up, which in the case of Sam and George was the "Remembrance Day Massacre." The tagline on the poster read "A Moment of Violence." The gimmick for the match was a good old-fashioned ladder match for the NCW championship.

People in the back still talk about that match. True athletes through and through. Sam lost that last one. After nearly an hour of back and forth, the crowd completely mesmerized, George knocked him off the top and Sam just lay there on the canvas. George climbed that ladder the rest the way and grabbed the belt.

Sam moved on to the big promotion down south after the match. He got a great offer. Everybody wants a chance to wrestle for the big audience and the money that goes with it. Sam was ready for it. For me, it was like how I imagine parents feel when their kids grow up and move away—happy to have built something but sad to see it go. The other day he sent me a text without a message. It was just a picture of him biting into a slice of pepperoni with a big smile on his face.

May Esmeraldas

The soon-to-be Green Giant sipped warm ginger ale from a plastic solo cup. The drink made the front of his teeth feel furry. Chef Boyardee and Wendy were close by chatting with Captain Morgan while a man in his late 30s talked to everybody and no one at once whenever a thought occurred to him. He was the only person in the room whose dress would not cause a scene in public. He wore a sensible Navy sport coat and slacks ensemble. Chef Boyardee looked normal enough if he were in a kitchen. Wendy's gingham dress would be perfect for a colonial history museum. Instead, the group was tucked away in a side corridor of the Jacob Javits Convention Centre, at the North Shore Food and Beverage Expo, in preparation for a mid-afternoon panel discussion titled, "Embodying the Brand: Leveraging the Power of Narrative."

"... You'll need to explain to the attendees what the average working day is like for promotional mascots, pardon the phrase, like yourselves," said Nathan, a slim, thin-necked, panel moderator. "People love stories. Narrative is how consumers' brains are hardwired. Advertisers need to add their chunks of story the same way a movie writer does. Have you seen *Casino*? Scorsese is a genius."

Nathan was not a professional panel moderator by trade. He was a self-professed "experiential marketing specialist." He came up with the idea of this "panel discussion" as a way to get some extra self-marketing to the attendees of the Food and Beverage Expo by talking about his brand of marketing. He was marketing his marketing. Nathan was a real go-getter. He'd booked the room from the expo organizers two months prior.

"We need to make the audience feel like they've experience something worthwhile and take that experience with them so when they see you in the grocery store

they can reflect fondly on today and maybe put your product in the shopping cart. And the other retailers might just want to get themselves a great big piece of Nathan,” he chewed some gum. “You’ll have some time to practice out in the exhibition hall by the booths set-up. Hand out those stickers and coupons. Talk to the attendees. Talk to the exhibitors. Make them root for you by giving them something to root for.”

Nathan hired Wendy, Chef Boyardee, and Captain Morgan from a talent agency. The guy playing Captain Morgan already had that French musketeer-style moustache. Nathan had hired Scott as the Green Giant as a favour to his wife because Scott was her younger sister’s roommate and was looking for a bit of extra cash. Scott made the perfect Green Giant because the professional actors had other work to do that week and couldn’t be made green without costing Nathan a fortune.

Scott had to be at the conference centre at 8:30 in the morning to dye his hair green and get make-up put all over his body.

“This colour is going to take a long time to wash off when you get home. I had to use the good stuff so you don’t sweat it off during the day,” said Abby, a make-up artist that Nathan hired off Craigslist—pointed to the lights on the ceiling. “You’ll need to take a long shower when you get home and you’ll be green for two days after.”

Scott stood shirtless. Abby dragged a pad over his exposed chest and stomach. The pad left long patches of green over his nipples and gut. She padded green on his shoulders. His face took much longer than his body to cover. She carefully applied green into the lobes of his ears, painting the cartilage, tracing the ridges. She painted his ears, down his neck. She covered his eyebrows and made him close his eyes when she gently

coloured the lids. It felt intimate because of, or perhaps in spite of, how uncommon the experience was compared to the rest of Scott's life.

"I'd try to keep your mouth shut as much as possible because the contrast between your new skin colour and your teeth might be weird to other people."

"Nathan told me to smile a lot," Scott said. "I'm not sure who to believe."

"Believe the boss when he's looking, I guess," she said. "Do you feel green?"

"I am green."

He left his clothes in a shopping bag under a chair after he got changed in a bathroom nearby. Scott put on the dark green toga and slightly less green matching tights she gave him out of a fresh package and he became the North Shore Food and Beverage Expo's Green Giant.

\*\*\*

"Jolly Green Giant, are you listening? There is going to be a Q & A portion at the end of the discussion and I can't control what people are going to ask," Nathan said. "I need you to be jolly. You can't be giant. I understand that. It's a physical limitation you can't help. Right now you have the opportunity to be a big giant in your energy. Just stay in character, Scott. Remember I'm doing you a favour here. You come from a valley where everything is delicious and you are the king of that valley."

"King of the valley? Sorry. I'm waiting for something important." The greened Scott had been refreshing his phone's email. Scott had managed to persuade a publisher to read a poetry manuscript he'd be working on in various forms for two years called May Esmeraldas. He expected to hear back sometime later today. Nathan pushed the

importance of sticking to their stories: You do this all the time. You love doing this. You embody the brand. You are the avatar for the product.

“I just need your head in the game is all. Here’s a stack of Green Giant two-for-ones to hand out.” Nathan handed him a small stack of coupons that said “Just for One” on them, which was the name of this frozen broccoli product designed for single servings. “I want you to say ‘Here’s a two-for-one for Just for One.’ You got that? Leverage the narrative.”

“I got that.”

“Short. Friendly. To the point. I would have made a script but there was no guarantee that you’d remember it, so I thought, ‘Why bother?’”

\*\*\*

Later, after Scott had wandered around passing out coupons and Nathan’s business cards, a few attendees wandered into the panel discussion. Nathan talked for a long time before the other promotional actors talked about their work. Nathan proselytized. The Jacob Javits Convention Centre was his church. This group of eager food and beverage sellers and distributors were his congregation.

“How is this going to help my business? The answer depends on your business.

The Q & A portion was short and mostly was about the brands rather than the actors. Chef Boyardee talked about how ravioli is how childhood tastes for some people. Wendy talked about how quality is freshness squared in clear reference to the fast food chain’s square burgers. One attendee asked Scott if the make-up process was difficult.

“This is how I always look,” Scott answered. The comment was met with silence, which disappointed Scott, who had hoped the audience would find humour in his remark.

“In all seriousness, being the face of the product is an important part of what I do as the Green Giant brand’s ... um... Green Giant. Make-up is just part of that, part of becoming the brand and embodying it.”

Afterwards, Nathan gave Scott \$180 from his wallet. “You really pulled it out. Not bad at all. There’s a bit of a bonus there because of the colour. Remember to give the toga back to Abby. She needs to return it to her university theatre department.”

Scott changed back into the clothes he brought with him to the convention centre.

“Here’s the toga. Do you need the tights too? I think I ruined them when I took them off.”

“No. Those are yours forever,” Abby said.

“Good. Though I don’t think I’ll need them again.”

“Do you do this work often?”

“No. I do contract copywriting for a couple of websites. It’s not the best. Ever heard of SEO? This was fine for a day though. It was weird. Maybe I’ll write about it.”

\*\*\*

Scott let himself into his shared apartment where his roommate was watching TV.

“Whoa.”

“I know. I’m headed to the shower right away.”

“Nathan really made you work for it, eh? Was Kermit right about being green?”

“Kind of. The actual stuff I had to do was pretty easy. I walked around with these coupons and handed them out.”

In the shower, Scott shampooed twice. He scrubbed hard. His skin on his upper torso was noticeably lighter than before but still green. Scott looked down and saw the

clear line of demarcation between his emerald abdomen and his fleshy, regular pubis. He watched the green soapy water swirl down the drain.

\*\*\*

Scott saw himself reflected in the freezer's glass door. His face, coloured a dark green, disappeared when he pulled on the door's plastic handle. He had waited until a half hour before the supermarket closed so he would see as few people as possible. He reached for a box of Just For One: Broccoli and Cheese Sauce—a frozen vegetable product manufactured by the General Mills company and marketed under the Green Giant brand. Scott was looking at himself—the Green Giant on the box—through himself. The towering illustration—a green-skinned, wide-shouldered, muscular giant—wore a leafy toga. His smile beamed over a valley teeming with vegetables overripe for the harvest which would bring them one step closer to their frozen cheese sauce destiny. The box continued to read: “Portable, single-serve vegetables are ready in minutes in the microwave. Great for lunch on the go, a quick afternoon snack, or individual tastes and needs.” That last part resonated with him. The rest of the phrase didn't make syntactical sense but Scott understood the importance people placed on individual tastes and needs.

He placed the box in his wire shopping basket along with the produce, a box of wine, granola, yogurt, and a frozen pizza. He didn't want to leave the house again for at least two more days. He wanted to drink wine, listen to Angelo Badalamenti and write poetry. When he got hungry he wanted to microwave some portable, single-serve vegetables covered in cheese sauce—Just for One.

Scott walked to a till and put his groceries on the rubber conveyer belt. The box of wine had an illustration of a silhouetted person riding a horse with a yellow sun above in

the background. A clerk he'd never seen before rang through each item, paused at the package of frozen broccoli, then looked at Scott as if this was part of an elaborate prank set-up by that show where they trick the public. The clerk looked around, decided there were no cameras and quickly placed it into the plastic bag as if Scott's colour would transfer over, infecting him.

"Ho, ho, ho," Scott said as he took the receipt.

When he got home Scott poured himself a jar of wine and sat down in front of his computer. The background was a picture of an urban street scene—artfully overexposed, making the lights and objects blurred and simplified to long swathes of colour. He started to drink. He checked his email:

*Scott,*

*Good news. I'm excited to tell you that Goose Bay is picking up the manuscript for the Spring season. I know it is a long time to wait but it's better than having the book gather dust in a drawer. We are unable to offer you an advance. This is poetry remember. I mailed the contract to you this afternoon. Celebrate. First books only happen once.*

*Yours,*

*Mats Nielsen*

*Goose Bay Publishing*

Scott exhaled and looked at the file icon titled May Esmeralda. He dragged the icon into another folder called "Archive." He opened a brand new file in Microsoft Word. Scott tried to write but he couldn't concentrate. The cursor blinked in and out on the blank page. For the past two years, everything had fed into the file that now was finished.

He keyed back to his email. He typed: "Hello Nathan, Thanks for today. If you ever need anything else, please keep me in mind." Then he stared at the screen for so long his computer's display went to sleep. Scott saw his face reflected in the darkness. Still green, even in the reflection. He smiled.

He woke the computer up, opened the system settings and changed the desktop background to a picture of the giant Moai statues on Easter Island that he found on Wikipedia. The description of the photo read: "The Ahu Tongariki on Easter Island. The average height of the Moai is about 4 m (13.3 feet) high, with the average width at the base around 1.6 m (5.25 feet) across. These Moai were restored in the 1990's by a Japanese research team after a cyclone knocked them over in the 1960s."

Scott put the single serving of frozen vegetable products into the microwave and set the timer for a minute and 30 seconds as the package instructed, careful to poke a hole in the plastic film over the icy broccoli florets and solid cheese sauce. He flattened the now empty box, looked at the Green Giant one more time. He pressed start.

## NOTICE TO TENANT

On behalf of everyone at Evenbright Management, we'd like to welcome you, the tenant, to Shawville Manor. We hope your living experience here will be pleasant and comfortable. We are here to serve your needs.

### **Rent:**

Rent is due on the 1st of every month. Non-paying tenants will be evicted without notice.

### **Pets & Smoking & Parties:**

Just a reminder, the lease agreement prohibits pets (cats, dogs, ferrets, fish, lizards, pot-bellied pigs, and all other mammals). Note that smoking, underage drinking, and parties larger than eight persons are prohibited.

### **Garbage & Recycling:**

Garbage is collected from the black bins in the parkade every Friday morning. Recycling is collected from the green bins every Tuesday.

### **Maintenance:**

If problems in your suite should arise, you should email me with a description of the issue. I check my email several times a day. Include a detailed description of the problem along with your name, rental address/unit and phone number. If you do not hear back within 12 hours or if it is very urgent emergency such as no heat, too much heat, malfunctioning taps, vermin, insect infestation, ferrets, persistent noise from beyond the walls, etc. please give me a call.

### **The Courtyard:**

Shawville Manor is a modern and beautiful condominium complex, home to over 100 residents. Built in a square-shape, featuring a large courtyard that offers a relaxing green space, Shawville Manor is your sanctuary hidden from the outside world. There is a paved area for visiting with other tenants to drink alcoholic beverages while the clouds pass in the sky. There is space for lawn bowling. There is a space for water sports, if filling a small plastic pool with water and then putting your feet in the pool is a sport. There is ample room for dances and balloons and drinks in red solo cups.

**The Gazebo:**

Ask any of the residents of Shawville Manor and they will say the large gazebo in the centre of the courtyard is the biggest factor in deciding to live here. We believe strongly in the gazebo's reason for existence. Great things are done in gazebos. There is shade when it is hot out because there is a gazebo. The gazebo is important for public functions. Everybody looks at the gazebo because the gazebo is a focal point. We are sure that numerous scientific studies have shown that gazebos are essential elements in community-building. These studies are authoritative as far as we are concerned. Naturally, the gazebo must be booked in advance.

Evenbright Management hopes for only the best Living Experience for all tenants of Shawville Manor. We are here to serve your needs.

Sincerely,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

Extensive renovations to the main foyer will be taking place this weekend. Management appreciates the inconvenience is grave, however the renovations will be well worth it. The renovations are a direct result from numerous and lengthily discussions we had with leading security experts. Your safety is of the utmost concern to us.

The new attitude towards security reflects our changing environment. No offence to the residents outside, but this neighbourhood used to be better. I don't mean "better" in a broad sense, but specifically. There was less crime. There were fewer instances of vandalism. Fewer hooligans roaming around causing damage to vehicles. Nevertheless, the times change and we must change with them. Shawville Manor can stand as a shining example for what community can be. The disturbance now will be but a distant memory after the year ahead.

Sincerely,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

Expectations. Everybody has them. The best way to satisfy expectations is to know them. How can a person satisfy expectations without knowing what they are? That's why I formed a brief statement on our four core values. I use the word "we" because I speak for all of us in the Evenbright management team. Hope it doesn't get too confusing.

### **Evenbright Management's Core Values Statement:**

**Expertise**—We are proven experts and leaders in property management. Our goal is to continue to deliver the best living experience possible. Example: We are currently engaging with leaders in the field of high-density, high-occupancy accommodation to maximize what we deliver to our tenants. We feel that reaching out and seeking new insights from organizations outside of the traditional property management brain-trust is going to keep us ahead of the competition. All competition.

**Integrity**—Staying true to ourselves and others is what we're all about. That's how we deliver an outstanding living experience to our tenants. Example: When we said we would get rid of the brown on the rear-facing window frames because the shade of brown was hated by all and called even "poop-like" by one tenant, we stuck to our word and had all the frames re-painted at great expense. Keep in mind, we didn't think the particular shade of brown was "poop-like" at all.

**Service**—We challenge ourselves to execute flawlessly. That means identifying our tenants' needs and delivering. We take the time to know our tenants intimately. Example: You may not know that your taps are dripping, but we do and we'll come and fix them for you.

Commitment—We are passionate about what we do. No excuses on the road to excellence. Example: We could choose not to run this company. We could do something else. We could have purchased a number of fast-food franchises instead. But years ago we made we a commitment to make this building work.

Remember Evenbright Management is dedicated to providing attention, loyalty and partnership to our tenants, no matter what the cost.

Sincerely,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

The Evenbright Management Living Experience that is created here at Shawville Manor is all about what tenants bring to it. Everything that Shawville Manor stands for is dependent on co-operation. Last weekend, I sent out a statement regarding our core values. I felt a beautiful sense of accomplishment for a moment. I thought about the lease agreement that everybody in this building has signed. It struck me: The lease agreement is a kind of set of core values for our tenants. Values set expectations. Here's what we expect from our tenants:

Commitment—Making a pledge to work hard to make sure the living experience at Shawville Manor continues. Fulfilling that promise is important. No matter what.

The Desire to Improve—Wanting to get better. We need tenants that want to get better all the time.

Pliability—Have you ever noticed how a tree moves during a strong wind? That is the model good tenants must adopt. Bend without breaking.

Attached is an entirely optional amendment to the lease agreement that demonstrates the enthusiasm for the Evenbright Management Living Experience here at Shawville Manor. Please sign as soon as possible to avoid eviction.

Sincerely,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

Exciting news! Sign up and register for floor food distribution plans today! Registration is now open. Food will arrive to your door every Tuesday and Thursday morning. Please find the meal plan attached. There are many healthy and nutritious options to choose from. Evenbright Management is committed to providing the most convenient living experience possible. Food selections will be totalled and added to the amount due for every month's rent. A friendly reminder that sign up is necessary for all tenants.

Sincerely,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

You will notice the renovations have continued. We apologize. While the intention was not to take this long, the saying goes the path to H-E-Double Hockey Sticks was paved with good intentions. Similarly, if you want something done right you must take the time to do it right. I'm not sure if there is a saying specific to that effect but you get the idea, right? Measure twice, cut once? Is that it? Personally, I just want to remind everyone that the delay of short-term gratification for long-term gain is one of the most satisfying things a person can accomplish. There was a time when I wanted a new bicycle. I could have begged my parents for it. Instead, I started a small business protecting the neighbourhood kids from bullies. I made sure I earned enough from them every week that I had enough to buy a bicycle in no time. Dream it and you can achieve it.

Remember we get to take this journey together.

Sincerely,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

We are proud to announce the renovations to the front foyer have finally been completed. Hooray! There have been a number of changes that will be of interest to residents of Shawville Manor. These changes reflect the demand for increased security in the building.

Previously, residents required a key for the deadbolt lock on the front foyer door. Visitors, meanwhile, needed to be buzzed through by intercom. Good news: keys are no longer necessary to enter Shawville Manor. Rather, residents will now gain entry by passing through a new state of the art security system staffed around the clock by the Evenbright Management Living Experience Lease Agreement Team (EMLELAT). Dynamic new screening measures include (but are not limited too): fingerprinting, retinal scans, blood testing, pat downs, saliva swabs and x-ray digital imaging. The permanent security staffer tasked with verifying identities will then allow admittance to residents, assuming they pass the verification measures mentioned above and haven't attempted to bring any prohibited materials into the building

Here's a helpful primer about the new entrance procedure:

1. Proceed to the vestibule checkpoint and press the button to speak with the helpful member of staff. Tenants will be identified by cross-referencing the Shawville Manor Biometric Database.
2. Answer their questions honestly and truthfully.
3. Pass through the metal detector.
4. Head to the elevator, then on to the suite allocated to you in the revised lease agreement.

Members of the Evenbright Management Living Experience Lease-Agreement Team will inform tenants of the prohibited materials on a case-by-case basis. In other news, other, more significant renovations to suites will begin this week, specifically to the doors. On a further note, tenants will remain inside Shawville Manor until all renovations are complete (not to mention the Shawville Manor Biometric Database). Unfortunately, given the new features and the importance of maintaining a consistently high standard of security, visitors to Shawville Manor are no longer permitted. We apologize for the inconvenience, but we believe that providing a high standard of security is of the utmost importance.

Sincerely,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

In light of recent telephone calls to city officials, Evenbright Management has reviewed the Shawville Manor communications policy outlined in the revised lease agreement. We've set-up a productivity station adjacent to my office in the first floor lobby where I'll be working nearby.

I understand that this is going to be an uncomfortable arrangement initially. Trust me, nobody understands as much as me. Managing a successful property with over 100 suites isn't a cushy job. I've got to address the concerns of everybody involved in making this building successful. I invite you to look on the bright side. We are going to get to know each other a lot more intimately. This is an opportunity that we cannot afford to throw away.

Members of the Evenbright Management Living Experience Lease-Agreement Team have likely collected all telephones, computers, and cellular telephones already.

Best,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

I'm happy to announce a new feature to the beloved court yard—stocks! No, not investment opportunities, but the device for public display. Stocks have been used for centuries, starting way back in medieval Europe. By honouring these powerful cultural traditions, Shawville Manor builds our own community's own values and traditions.

The stocks that have been placed in the courtyard will be used when Evenbright Management has determined a violation of the lease agreement has occurred. Residents of Shawville Manor are invited to view tenants placed in the stocks during the hours of 7-9 pm every Sunday. Bring what ever is left over from your food bin to hurl. Food fight!

Please keep in mind, Evenbright Management regards tampering with the stocks a serious offense. Any tenants found attempting to sabotage the stocks with small hatchets, paring knives or corn cob holders will certainly be placed in the stocks. The stocks are under 24-hour surveillance with a closed-circuit camera. Fair warning.

Now for some more good news! Rent is no longer a requirement to stay at Shawville Manor. However, there will be some exciting new tenants arriving in the coming week that you should be aware of. Please give them a friendly welcome. Don't get too close because some of them have been convicted of violent crimes.

Sincerely,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

Living in a multi-use residential building has its inherent challenges. Residents live in very close proximity, with neighbours beside, above and below. The lifestyles and behaviours of one resident can easily and negatively impact several others. The following tenants have been found in violation of the lease agreement and will appear in the stocks.

The tenant residing in Room 409: Careful water usage is important both the environment and the sustainable financial viability of the building. The tenant was found wasting water by keeping houseplants. Houseplants are hereby prohibited.

The tenants residing in Room 137: These tenants did what tenants are not supposed to do. Members of the Evenbright Management Living Experience Lease-Agreement Team could hear what sort of foul activities they got up to. Fornication is not permitted. Especially that kind of fornication.

The tenant residing in Room 231: Ferrets are not an appropriate animal to keep in the building. Ferrets are not appropriate animals full stop. Long and slinky and disgusting little creatures that are detrimental to the living experience here. Calling your ferret a child and dressing it up in clothing and letting it sleep in a child-sized bed will not fool members of the EMLELA.

These tenants will be publicly stocked and displayed in the courtyard this coming Sunday. Feel free to bring unwanted fruit and vegetables.

Sincerely,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

The Shawville Manor talent show will be taking place this weekend. Performances will include tap-dancing, stand-up comedy and magic. Both attendance and participation is mandatory. A myriad of refreshments will be available to tenants, while some kind of macaroni dish will be provided by Evenbright Management group. Refreshments must be provided by tenants and added to the cost of the monthly meal plan.

Sincerely,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

This is a personal note. I try to keep memoranda as professional as possible but I think things are reaching a bit of a critical mass. The events that occurred yesterday after the Shawville Manor talent show in the courtyard are exactly the kind of thing that we are working to avoid. Physical and verbal abuse of members of Evenbright Management Living Experience Lease-Agreement Team is prohibited under the terms of the revised lease agreement. Subsequently, it should not be a surprise to anyone the team members reacted the way they did. The talent show was supposed to be a fun and exciting way to spend the afternoon. Instead, our medical experts are currently assisting tenants with injuries incurred during the incident. Tenants are prohibited from entering all common areas at this time.

As a way to formally address the concerns voiced by many of the tenants in attendance, let me explain the concept of deterrence. The threat of being placed in the stocks is supposed to deter tenants from violating the clear terms of the lease. We don't actually want to use the stocks. At this rate, we are going to need to have extra days to accommodate all the lease violations. I want to say one more thing on the topic. It is a bit of advice. There isn't anything worse than being a whiner. That's what my grandpa always said. You might feel that life is unfair but it's up to you how you respond. If you find yourself in the stocks, accept it. Don't involve others. Don't shift blame. Now I'll finish with something that my grandma (they were quite the pair) always said about pouting: "Suck in your bottom lip or a bird with poop on it." See the wisdom in that?

Yours,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

Efforts to carve a path through the dry wall and into the suite adjacent is strictly prohibited under the terms stated in the updated lease agreement. Several tenants have been found doing this and they will be placed in the stocks. Further, tenants searching for other ways to escape the building are jeopardizing the security for all of us. Security! It should be a very simple concept to understand. Attempts to break windows or remove the hinges on the fire-escape doors for the purpose of breaking the deadbolt locks are ruining it for the other residents that are committed to a top-notch Shawville Manor Living Experience.

Firstly, the noise of these attempts has been prompting complaints from other tenants. Secondly, the firewall that separates the suites in Shawville Manor is extremely thick and cannot be penetrated with dining cutlery, no matter how determined the tenant is to get through. While Evenbright Management believes in the life-affirming power of community, tenants are prohibited to fraternize with other tenants in Shawville Manor.

These are all extremely stockable violations of the lease agreement.

Sincerely,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

Aldo, here. It has come to my attention that certain tenants having been taking the easy way out and breaking the lease agreement. Some might call it suicide, while I refer to it as self-eviction. Self-eviction is prohibited in the newly revised lease agreement. Commitment to the Living Experience of the building is of the utmost importance. Retrieving former tenants from newly available suites is an excellent way to assist management.

The future of our building is at stake.

Yours,

Aldo Spietato,

President and CEO of Evenbright Management

## NOTICE TO TENANT

Hello new tenant!

On behalf of everyone at Evenbright Management, we'd like to welcome you, the tenant, to Shawville Manor. We hope your living experience here will be pleasant and comfortable. We are here to serve your needs...

## Who am I?: A Personal Response Essay for English Composition 201

Who am I? I'm Bruce Willis sometimes. This is a compelling thesis, right? Sure, my name is and always has been and always will be, Matt Taylor Greene. Maybe, it's better to say, I've got a serious Bruce Willis-feeling sometimes.

I need to develop this, so let me explain: This Bruce Willis feeling is not for long, usually only for a few moments at a time. And not physically, obviously. I'm not a Bruce Willis lookalike or stunt double. I couldn't go to a fancy restaurant and get a table without a reservation by using the power of my Willis face alone. I have light brown hair and blue eyes and a weak chin not at all like a movie star. I wouldn't go to a fancy restaurant anyway. My job at T-shirt Shack doesn't leave a lot after I pay rent and bills. Sometimes for a treat, I'll grab a couple lemongrass chicken Bahn Mi sandwiches from this place down the street. About the T-Shirt Shack: If you need a shirt with an iron-on that says something like "Urban Gardeners do it in the Ass" or "Vote Pedro" then T-Shirt Shack has got you covered. The joke about the Urban Gardeners shirt is that there is a picture of a cartoony backyard garden with a shovel on it, so it makes you think about dirt, which is a joke from another shirt about farmers.

Once, my dream was to open up a record store called Sounds Good. The bank manager said it was the best business plan he'd ever seen but they still wouldn't give me the money. He said it would have been a bad investment because people had already gotten used to stealing music off of the internet. People will come around, I said. He wasn't having any of it. No big deal because now I'm back in college, writing this paper, still working at the T-Shirt Shack part-time.

Back to the Bruce Willis-feeling thing: When I'm in the shower, for a brief moment, with my head under the stream and I can see water emptying into the drain, going wherever it goes, in that instant, my inner identity, my inner thoughts, my deepest hopes and my greatest fears, are exactly the same as Bruce Willis—a Willis moment. When I'm out shopping for groceries and I'm choosing a single sparkling box of toothpaste from dozens of possible options, it'll happen. Looking at each box promising teeth whitening, or cavity protection, or tartar control, or enamel strengthening but never in the same tube, it'll happen. Of course, the dental industry can't get all those things in a single tube. Magic bullet toothpaste is impossible. A person has got to decide what is the priority for the lifetime of that tube. So, it'll happen when Bruce and I, in an instance of cosmic oneness, choose not only the very same brand, but also the very same variant within that brand. If someone were to ask, "Hey, how's it going?" Bruce and I would offer the same response, "Fine." Then we would both think quietly to ourselves, "I've made cleaning my sensitive teeth with a suitably sensitive toothpaste a priority." When I've burned my arm on the edge of the ultra-hot machine that fuses the iron-on pictures of The Dude from *The Big Lebowski* onto a baseball crew neck at the T-Shirt Shack, I know we'd make the same sound of surprised pain—not loud but intense.

I don't know much about Bruce. I know he was married to Demi Moore and they had some kids and got divorced. I know he's been in some movies. I have the average amount of Bruce Willis knowledge as anybody with a typical exposure to modern popular culture. I haven't researched him, if that's what you're thinking. I don't somehow extrapolate information from that research. I don't have a creepy shrine in my room made out of tabloid magazines and toe-nail clippings.

I watched part of *Die Hard* on cable once. But my friend Thirsty (nickname shortened from Thiessen) dropped by. He was selling truckloads of hash at the time, so we just ended up playing Golden Eye on this old N64 he brought over and laughing about the time he made out with his cousin by accident when he was 15. So the only part of *Die Hard* I remember really clearly is when Bruce Willis has to walk on broken glass in bare feet to get out of some room. That's the part that most people remember, I guess. Why didn't he have his shoes?

"So you met her at your grandma's 68th birthday party?"

"Yeah, but I made out with her like two months before at this kid's place when his parents were away," he said. "Before I knew her."

"Did she remember you?" "For sure." He said meeting her was gross and weird. "I mean, our grandma was there. Our grandma. And the worst part about it was that for the 15-year-old me, it was the hottest thing I'd done with a girl. It was the go to in the shower for like a month after."

"Did you know about her?"

"Not really. I knew I had a cousin somewhere. But Mom wasn't close with her family though. You know how many girls are called Katie? Basically all of them. Turns out she moved back to the city with her dad that summer."

"Have you seen her since?"

"No. I think she decided to go back living with her mom in B.C., which I'm glad about, I guess."

"It's like trying to meet somebody is the worst bumper cars," I said.

“Now when I meet a girl, there’s this light that goes off saying, ‘She could be your cousin!’ I have to shut it down. It’s no big deal but that feeling is always there.”

A person could say: “This Matt Green guy is crazy. He’s not Bruce Willis. Nobody is him but him.”

Everybody is someone. And these people are trying to meet somebody else. The CIA Factbook (a great website for research if you haven’t heard about it) estimates the total global population at nearly seven billion people. But with that many people, there is bound to be some overlap somewhere. At least I’ve never made out with my cousin. I can say that for sure. But that Bruce Willis-feeling is always there. That’s who I am.

Excerpts from *Hostility Complex*

**Simon Burns Has an Unusual Job Interview**

Everything about Bernard Ferrante also seemed out of place, not just in this pub, but also in a more general, larger sense. Simon wore a sport jacket over the best sweater he owned. He used the four-in-hand knot for his knitted tie. He had spent two hours in front of the mirror the night before, carefully cutting his hair until his hand cramped and he gave up. He tried not to sweat. I got this, Simon thought. Sure it is weird that the interview is in a bar. Roll with it. Adaptability in every situation is the key to success.

There were hardly any people enjoying their afternoon at FARMLAND but the restaurant seemed very loud all the same.

“My name is Bernard Ferrante,” he offered his hand. “Call me Bernie. Nice to meet you Simon. Let’s take a seat. This place is great.”

Simon shook his hand. It was clammy and limp. Bernie selected a table near the window. The downtown foot traffic passed by. The afternoon was grey.

“I’ve never been in but I’ve walked by it before,” Simon said.

He resisted the urge to look down at Ferrante’s hideous nipples, which made the urge all the more irresistible.

“I’d like to order two beers,” Ferrante said to the server. “The IPA for both.”

Satisfied, the server left the two alone before Simon could respond. Simon was surprised at the order. Drinking during an interview seemed at best, old-fashioned and at worse, unprofessional. Put on the spot with this new prospect of alcohol during a job interview got Simon flustered. Should he follow Ferrante’s suit and drink the beer? A

student of history, Simon knew that John A. Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister and legendary binge alcoholic said that he did not trust a man that doesn't drink. Or was this a moral and ethical test of Simon's character? A "do as I say and not as I do" sort of thing.

"What do you know about the HAWS company brand?" Ferrante said immediately. "I use HAWS for my internet," Simon said. "It's the biggest telecommunication company in the city, probably in the province, if I had to guess." Ferrante nodded.

"It's true. HAWS is the largest telecommunications company in western Canada. Telecommunications is the most public face of the company," Ferrante said. "However, there are many other businesses that HAWS is involved in. Think oil and gas, of course. And security. That kind of thing. The details are not important at the moment. Hell, it's probably just as well that you don't know."

Simon nodded, although the last sentence confused him. He expected that most successful corporations had similar arrangements. He imagined that if somebody was given a diagram with all the subsidiary corporations and shell companies operating throughout the world, it would look like a spider's web. That person would see that corporate ownership sprawls out with no beginning or end. This person would understand the actual interconnectedness of the economy.

"Tell me about yourself," Ferrante said.

Simon considered the question even though he had anticipated it well before it was asked.

“Well, I finished university at the U of C a few years ago with a BA in Communications and Culture. I have been doing a bit of freelance writing in the non-profit sector, along with some service industry stuff.” Simon looked directly into Ferrante’s too-big for his glasses eyes. Ferrante nodded. Simon detailed a few of his previous jobs, which included: Fund development assistant for a youth literacy organization; content producer for an adult film company during university, which meant he wrote “Babe Profiles” of various adult performers; bus boy during high school at the Carriage House Inn.

“This position is for a social media manager. Strictly speaking, you don’t have managerial experience reflected in your resume,” Ferrante replied.

Simon felt a pang of dread. Shot in the foot for lack of experience.

He imagined himself hearing the words: “You’ve got the job! It’s yours. It’s perfect for you. You are the perfect candidate. You two were made for each other. The position has been waiting just for you.”

Those were the words Simon Burns wanted to hear at the end of this job interview. Simon wanted to visualize success because he’d read that visualization is an important part of being successful. Simon read that successful people—the people that are in the position to survive—imagine themselves succeeding at what ever task they put their minds to doing. To triumph over life’s obstacles and potential enemies must start with the thought of their debasement and ruin. So Simon pictured that he’d shake hands with the interviewer and then he’d start work at his perfect job the following Monday—a cubicle workstation, free breakfast every morning, coffee all the time, paid vacations, a monthly fitness allowance so he could take Krav Maga classes.

The perfect job to Simon would provide opportunities to appear busy while having little in terms of actual responsibility. Also, there would be many meetings. So many meetings. Days upon days of meetings where people would just talk, ask dull questions to each other while he drank coffee in the dark/bright light of a digital projector, shifting soundlessly through the second PowerPoint presentation of the morning. Simon wanted to have a stylish condo downtown perfectly suited to bachelordom. He wanted to live by himself, without a roommate or a family member. He wanted to be able to buy new clothes whenever he wanted. He wanted to casually date a specific breed of woman that valued material objects (modestly-priced gifts) rather than long-term emotional connections.

Simon got a phone call requesting an interview two days prior to when the interview was to take place. Now the day had come. Simon thought the idea for the interview was off on an unusual foot right away. He discovered the interview was not to take place within the HAWS building where the position would be. Instead, the meeting was to take place in an upscale resto-bar gastro pub on Stephen Avenue. The kind of place with tables made of reclaimed wood from telephone poles and railroad tracks. The kind of place with the menu written in chalk on the walls. The kind of place that makes french fries in duck fat. The kind of place that puts blue cheese on top of burgers made with organic, locally sourced Alberta beef chuck. The kind of place that has local micro-brewed beers with in-joke names like “Lanny’s Moustache,” or vaguely evocative but not actually evocative names like “Gold Spur” and “Velvet Fog.” Every previous interview for every job he’d ever worked had taken place in offices. The place where the job was.

Simon had been looking for a job after returning home to Calgary after a year working under the table at a Wetherspoons pub in Reading, England called “The Hope Tap.” He’d been taking austerity measures during the three weeks since he arrived back in Calgary. Since returning, Simon had lived in an illegal suite in an old two storey place a block from the Beltline region off 17th Avenue. Well, old for Calgary, which means the building was built in the mid 1970s. His separate entrance was located along the side of the house behind a rotting wood fence that was painted green and had started to flake off. The place was shaped like a rectangle. On the far side closest to the tiny backyard was the kitchenette that had a fridge and a small sink. There wasn’t enough room for a stove. Simon cooked with a microwave and toaster oven tandem. On the opposite side, his bed on the floor was half-underneath the stairs that led up from the house’s proper entrance. Between the kitchen and Simon’s bed was an old couch that came with the place and a small desk that Simon bought off craigslist. The floor sloped toward the centre of the house so that if a person placed a marble on the ground, it would slowly roll underneath the fridge. His landlord charged \$750 a month.

In his mind, Simon labeled the austerity regimen with the phrase, “Tough titty.” The phrase came from his past. Once when Simon was a child, he wanted to have a Batman action figure that he saw in the aisle of a Woodward’s department store. Although he remembered spending a lot of time with his grandpa, it was probably the only time he ever shopped with him, the only time Simon remembered any way. Simon’s grandpa died the year before Simon started junior high.

His grandpa handed him a cheaper alternative—a bearded thug that was still a Batman toy but didn’t do anything. It was just a henchman on sale. When Simon began to

voice his displeasure the way that children do, his grandfather said “Tough titty. This is what you get. Be happy you got something.” He proceeded to ignore the now silent Simon completely, which hurt him. The sound of it. The alliteration of it. The feeling of it. It sounded dirty. Just hearing the phrase made Simon feel as if he was guilty of being complicit with a serious crime, and that his complicity meant he would be punished for the rest of his life. He held the henchman and walked with his grandpa towards the checkout.

The words stuck with Simon. He wanted to avoid the indignity of Tough Titty rather than the cruel routine of spending as little money as possible. A regular job, meant that he could avoid Tough Titty, he could avoid having to be happy with “something” rather than what he actually wanted. He was using his credit card to cover his daily expenses, a terrible situation that would shortly lead to worse trouble in the future: An austerity regiment consisting of a rice and lentil diet, the stealing of salt and sugar from 7-11, the stealing of toilet paper from public bathrooms, the stealing of Wifi internet from the nearest Starbucks or Tim Hortons.

Initially, Simon found an ad for Social Media Managers on a forum for Calgarian sports. it was one of Simon’s daily visits on the web—his other lived-in life—the digital one. Some others included: *The Calgary Herald*, *the Calgary Sun*, *Metro*, gawker, buzz feed, Facebook, Twitter, tumblr, reddit, etc. Simon thought of these as the core. Lots of the content he found on there would just be repeated elsewhere on the internet. As long as he read those, he felt prepared. Tucked away on one of the “Looking for” sub-forums, was an post that read: “Wanted: Social Media Manager for a busy company. Competitive salary. High intensity workplace. Apply with this link: <http://tinyurl.com/55bszu>

At first, the words “high intensity workplace” stood out to Simon as a red flag. But Simon decided that jobs that promise high intensity must be trying to sound more intense than they really were. He clicked the link to read more.

The URL linked to a page with a number of mutated Likert scale questions. The phrasing of the questions presented a situation and an unresolvable problem, which frequently appeared in the form of a non-sequitur. Simon expected the only possible explanation for the questions was to generate a psychological profile of the person answering them:

*QUESTION: There is a car flipped over on the shoulder of a highway. There is a single woman and a child trapped inside. The smell is of burning rubber and gasoline. You have time to save one of them. Do you attempt to save one or the other or choose to phone for help? (Answer 1 to 5. Yes or no?)*

*QUESTION: It is your birthday and a grand cake has been made for you. During the party, you find that the cake has been cut and distributed without your consent. How likely are you to be patient during the occasion if you know with certainty that expensive and thoughtful gifts are forthcoming? (Answer 1 to 5. Yes or no?)*

*QUESTION: What is more important to raise an infant: breast milk or gasoline? (Answer 1 to 5. Yes or no?)*

*QUESTION: You are stranded on an island with another person. For a number of valid reasons, you are not sexually attracted to them. How likely are they going to cry from the absence of their left-at-home pet? (Answer 1 to 5. Yes or no?)*

Simon read the questionnaire as thoughtfully as possible, not as quickly as possible. Any hidden meaning in the questions must be teased out through concentration,

he thought. He tried to imagine the kinds of answers they wanted to receive rather than what he would actually answer 100 per cent truthfully. The questions continued on and on. He tried to imagine what a successful cut-throat business person would do. Rather than waste time answering the questions, he simply attached his resume to the bottom of the form on the website. Within an hour, he was on the phone with a woman who said she worked in the Human Resources department for HAWS. She wanted to arrange an interview.

“Look for a short man with glasses and short dark hair. He’ll be wearing a neck chain. His name is Bernard Ferrante,” she told him. “We will provide the address in an email shortly.”

On the day of the interview, Simon met a man dressed in a lime-green polo shirt and a pair of tan khaki slacks that needed at least an inch more of cuff. He wore thin metal glasses that got lost on his spongy face. The prescription made his eyes appear larger than they were. Simon could see the man’s nipples perfectly through his shirt. It was distracting. During visualization, Simon had pictured someone in an undeniably bespoke on-trend fitted suit. Somebody that had real power. But this was different. The polo shirt seemed out of place in the context of the upscale resto-pub. The man indeed wore a gold chain, machine flattened so the links were smooth, which was somehow more disgusting than an unflattened gold chain. On the whole, Simon thought the appearance of this person was vaguely reptilian.

“I’m going to tell you about the position. Then, if we have time, you could ask a few questions. The position does not entail overt managerial responsibilities necessarily,” Ferrante said. “The management you are expected perform is of the public perception

variety. You'll be working for us. Where ever we need you. There are a lot of voices out there."

"Out where?"

"The internet, Simon. But not just there. These voices pretend to have the answers," Bernie said. "They don't. We have the answers. You are going to share our answers. Every where you can."

"That's good," Simon said, unsure whether or not he should relax.

"Tell me about the next big thing. What's getting people thrilled or excited?" Ferrante asked.

Simon began: "There's more pictures of skulls now. Skulls are everywhere. Fashion cover shoots use skulls now. Fast food advertisements use skulls. The skulls are coming out of nowhere. Lots of skulls in overseas conflicts. Thousands of pictures from thousands of retweets from non-known users in the feed. Skulls are big right now."

"I don't want to mince words here, you have the position. It's yours," Ferrante said.

Simon felt a sublime moment of elation when he heard the words. He felt like he could finally relax. Victory had been guaranteed as far as he was concerned. The time for tough titty was over.

The server returned with two pint glasses filled with hazy amber liquid. Ferrante took the beer and consumed the entire pint in a single drink before Simon had a chance to reach for the beer he thought was his. Bernie grabbed the second glass before Simon realized what had happened and started to drink more slowly, but still in gulps. Soft rain began to pelt the window outside.

“Mind the weather,” Ferrante said. “It might be raining now but just wait 10 minutes.”

Simon failed to notice that three men had entered the restaurant and took the table nearest Simon and Bernie despite there being ample room to sit elsewhere. The trio wore Eddie Bauer short-sleeve checked shirts and khaki pants with cellular phone holders that clipped onto their belts. One was a pear-shaped, short, portly man with thick wrists and a poor heart who looked like he ate steak every meal. Not healthy, but strong nonetheless. The other two were bald with wiry beards.

“I want to talk about choices. Everybody has them to make,” Ferrante said. “Do you ever find yourself making the wrong choice? Say for example, whether or not you take a job. What if the pressure of making the correct decision was taken off your hands. HAWS can do that. HAWS does that. It’s a hard labour market, you know? Not enough qualified applicants to fill positions.”

“Don’t worry. I’m very interested in the position but I had some other questions about the job,” Simon said. “Will there be meetings?”

“I think we are just about ready to go,” Ferrante spoke to the three rather than to Simon.

“But I still have a few questions.”

“Tough titty,” Ferrante said. “There’s no time. We need to get started.”

Ferrante took out a large roll of \$50s and paid the tab with a generous tip. Then the four led Simon out towards the street.

### **Scene from Simon’s Childhood**

Simon holds hands with a small boy in a striped shirt that was purchased from Woolco on Macleod Trail. He is also a small boy. They are in the courtyard of a condo complex where the exteriors share a stained brown cedar exterior. Everybody calls them the “cedars.” They walk to a raised planter that contains a tree and some smaller plants. The two boys have cups that hold apple juice from concentrate. The plastic cups are soon empty. The two stir up a number of ants. They dig at the ground with a twig. They find a caterpillar on a leaf. Adding the ants to the cup requires careful attention not to crush the little legs or bodies or to not get too much dirt in. Caught in a plastic arena with no escape, the ants and the caterpillar crawl around each other. The action is too small for voyeuristic enjoyment. Perhaps the two imagined the caterpillar would use its body to violently bash and crush its opponents. Instead, the ants crawl over the green and yellow thing dispassionately. The reality is not dramatic or even interesting to either boy, really. Disappointed by the lack of spectacle, Simon’s accomplice dumps the cup and uses his shoe to flatten both the ants and caterpillar into the concrete.

### **On the Way to Work**

After leaving FARMLAND, the group led Simon from the front door down Stephen Avenue into the back of an aged Ford Aerostar parked down the street. Simon sat between the two bald men in the back. The pear-shaped man drove. Ferrante sat on the passenger side. Simon had been inside an Aerostar van before. The interior grey and off-grey upholstery guaranteed an unclean appearance. Simon noticed a crumpled bag of Old Dutch ketchup chips on the floor.

“Everybody’s in?” One of the twins asked as he got behind the wheel.

“These two gentlemen are not in fact twins, but rather two individuals that happen to share very similar appearances,” Ferrante said. “That’s Tim and Evan, two that merely happen to look very similar to one another. I think Evan looks like a white supremacist.”

“I’m not a white supremacist though,” Evan said. “I’m Bahai.”

“I’m not,” Tim said.

Simon nodded as he searched his memory for any information on the tenets of the Bahai faith, found none and went on trying to look as acquiescent as possible.

“Is it normal for this many people to be involved with hiring?” Simon asked.

“Not typically,” Ferrante said. “You are a special hire. Your application profile demanded an expedited process. The profile was off the charts. We have specialized human resource departments for ferreting out people like you.”

Tim and Evan smiled. Bernie looked out the window for a moment as the vehicle started to move.

“Can you grow a beard?”

“No,” Simon said. “Should I?”

“Beards are not required for your position, facial hair of any kind in fact. For Tim and Evan on the other hand, a beard is an informal part of the uniform. You’d never be able to work in HR acquisitions without one. Which isn’t to say it isn’t possible, but that to this point not a single person without a beard has ever been successful in the position. Here put this on. It’s for your head.”

Ferrante handed Simon a black bag. Simon raised an eyebrow.

“It’s like a mask but with no eyes,” Ferrante said.

“This is like that part of the first *Mission Impossible*. Tom Cruise has to put on this bag thing to make sure he can’t follow the people he’s in the car with. But if this is for security or something, I know where the HAWS building is. Everyone in the city does,” Simon said. “It’s on maps. There’s a big sign out front.”

Tim and Evan laughed.

“And a fancy fountain designed by a famous artist. This is not a security measure. It’s a trust thing. This is the last part of the recruitment process,” Ferrante said.

Simon placed the bag over his face with the man with hideous nipples’ help.

“Please don’t joke to make the bag less than it is. This isn’t a movie. These reassurances won’t help you appreciate your situation any better but I’ll make them to you all the same. The bag is the symbolic indication that you are ready to be part of the HAWS team. Whatever happened to you before the bag doesn’t matter. What is going to happen is different. You are a HAWS man now. Prove it by wearing the face-bag. A HAWS employee is not like those unemployed bums on the street. You’re not even like those bums that have jobs at other companies.”

“Will I need to wear the face-bag often? Or is this the leap of faith I need to make just the one time to prove I’ve got this?”

“No, this is it.”

“Great. Pop it on.”

The bag felt warm. The inside smelled like the breath of other people. Even robbed of sight, one of his favourite senses, Simon was not afraid. Although a very different experience, he was reminded of the pleasant sensation of having his head covered with a fresh-from-the-dryer duvet. In his mind, he could almost smell the Downy

Mountain Spring fabric softener. He remembered the simple comfort of having nothing in particular to do on a Sunday in late March. Simon couldn't place exactly when that time was or how long that feeling passed by. More voices: heard from inside the face-bag then road silence. The stop and start of traffic in the city. The quality of being inside of a car in Calgary. Simon was a passenger for a good part of his life. Riding in cars exactly like this. On the way to the shopping mall, to the soccer dome, to visit the family. All the memory that seemed so far in the past as to no longer exist. The face-bag on the other hand was very real. The face-bag was the period to the sentence that was his life up to this point. Now the new would start. Probably with a capital. Simon felt the odd weight of an object with soft edges in his lap. No shape to indicate what it was.

“Having the proper equipment is extremely important for success as a HAWS employee. You may now remove the bag.”

“It's a gun,” Simon had never seen a handgun in real life before, but recognized it immediately from thousands of movies, video games, and the evening news. He thought there could be nothing so obvious as a gun.

“It's loaded,” Bernie said. “So don't mess around with it. I'm assuming you've never used a firearm before, so you'll need to clock some time at the firing range at HQ.”

The gun had an expensive black leather and moulded-plastic holster. Simon left it on his lap.

“Why do I need this?” Simon said. “I don't think I want to shoot anybody. I mean I'd prefer not to.”

“Preferences aside, you probably won’t have to. I’m not saying you won’t have to for certain because I’m not the kind of person that speaks in absolute certainties, if you know what I mean. You know who spoke in certainties?”

Simon didn’t want to guess, so he shook his head.

“Hitler. I can’t predict the future. I’m not going to just discount the possibility of it simply because prior experience suggests that the prospect of you having to use a gun is extremely unlikely. You are here now, however. So anything can happen. More importantly, having the predatory mindset is key to success in business. Grab profit out of the hands of the competition. Bash their brains in if you have to. We murder the weak ones,” Ferrante smiled. “Not literally of course.”

“The gun and what you just said would suggest otherwise.” Simon picked up the weapon carefully. It was slightly heavier than he expected.

“Do all employees have guns?”

“The ones that need them do.”

### **Simon’s Desk, His New Pod-mates, the Red-Circle**

Bernie led Simon towards his desk. The floor was massive. Simon thought it was at least two hundred feet wide. The ceiling was at least 15 feet tall. The expanse was as impressive as it was cavernous. The visual theme was plastic grey. So many shades of plastic grey.

“Welcome to your pod,” Bernie said. “These are your pod-mates. Simon Burns, everybody.”

The cubicle pods were surprisingly large. Two people sat at opposite sides of the pod. One was a woman in her mid-thirties or late thirties. Simon couldn't tell. Maybe she was in her fifties. She held a water bottle that had slices of cucumber and strawberries floating in it. The other person was a man was in his 50s with gently sloping eyes with greying brown hair that receded. His head was a round Charlie Brown-like shape. He had a robust nose and slightly weathered cheeks. He was extremely sweaty.

"This is Gary. This is Emily," Ferrante said. "I'll let you get to it."

"Hey new guy," Emily said. Everybody shook hands. Simon took his seat.

"Do you like sleeping?" Gary asked Simon.

Simon nodded in the affirmative. He intended his nod to show that he thought the question was extremely obvious. Who didn't enjoy sleeping? Often times, Simon had trouble sleeping but he'd never claim to not enjoy it when he could.

"Me too," Gary said. "I mean, I used to. I can't sleep anymore. The dreams. The nightmares. They do not stop."

Gary stared at Simon as if his eyes could communicate what he meant. Something in Simon's face made Gary continue.

"The red circle. It's there. It's there when you close your eyes. Not at first. But after you've been trying to get asleep for a while," Gary said.

"Gary hates the red circle. You just get used to it," Emily interjected.

"The red circle?" Simon asked.

"No, Gary talking about it," Emily replied. "Red circle! The red circle turns and turns. We wait and wait for it and it always comes!"

A terrifyingly loud metallic wind that sounded like static punctuated by intermittent clicking preceded a voice over the intercom: *“Outside, the rain continues. It is expected to continue through the rest of the day and tomorrow. A special hot lunch will be served after this message in the recreation area of your floor.”*

Then all the computer screens turned black. A red line appeared. It started to create a circle like a snake eating its tail. The red line trailed off and disappeared. The fast rotation was hypnotic. The regular din of the floor hushed. A group of nearby employees in the pod adjacent stared at the circle unwavering in their attention in the red circle. Emily and Gary’s eyes were fixed on the screens as well. The red circle seemed to reassure Simon’s pod-mates, settling Emily. Simon tried to look away, think of anything else and found that he could not. Gary continued to sweat and stare.

“I can’t stop watching it. I try to look away but my eyes drift back. It’s like a magnet,” Simon said.

Emily shushed Simon with a finger to her pursed lips, getting little orbs of spit on her keyboard, her eyes fixed on the rotating line as if every sound and sight had been locked into a single anchor of focus. Employees swayed in their chairs like discarded breakfast sandwich wrappers caught in the wind.

The employees, under the sway of concentration borne out of a sense of anxiety rather than peace or pleasure, began to work on bizarre personal projects. Maps made from thinly shaved aluminum from soda cans. The shards woven into a kind of semi-stiff textile. Hardly any chit-chat during the craft time. The only observable similarity between the work seemed to be that the projects occupied only the surface area of the desk adjacent to the computer screen.

Simon considered the prospect of the promised hot lunch but found himself overcome by the urge to begin chewing paper rather than leave the area. He began to tear up scrap letterhead. He placed a strip in his mouth. As Simon chewed, the paper formed into a flat wad. He added another strip. When his mouth was full, he spit the entire thing on to the space beside his desk. He tried to form the chewed paper into a ball.

### **Moments from Five in the Evening**

Simon's pod-mates and the adjacent pod-mates rose to their feet in near unison and proceeded to mill about with their coats and cellphones and bags and backpacks. Emily held a set of keys askew in her left hand for no immediate reason obvious to Simon. The keys formed a silhouette in the strong top-down light, the colours and distance beyond obscured the shadow of four jutting angles from a paw.

"Simon Says! You look like you've lost the plot a bit. You'll need to come with me. Grab your shit. Where is your dongle?" Gary said.

"Is it in the employment package?"

Gary nodded and Simon began to dig around the folders Ferrante had left with him. He found the dongle.

"Right, the dongle," Simon looked at the small black plastic keychain.

"Put it on your keychain," Gary said. "You should have already. You'll need it for the gates."

All employees were issued these dongles. They opened doors, provided the person had sufficient security access for the given area. These RFID-equipped dongles allowed the HAWS management team to easily track movement and time at work. It

made it impossible to lie about punctuality when the arrival time is logged in a hard drive as the employee passes through the door.

The machine beeped.

“Step out of the line, sir,” the security attendant said.

Simon stepped towards the attendant, still holding the dongle. The attendant held a black device to Simon’s dongle.

“Yep. There is a slight problem. Just head back to your pod and sit tight. We’ll sort something out for you shortly,” the attendant said.

“I want to go home. I’m hungry. I would like to have a beer to celebrate my first day at work,” Simon said.

“Don’t make me repeat myself. I’ve got kids at home. They’re stupid. Dumb as shit. I have to repeat myself constantly. ‘Pick up your toys. Stop hitting your sister. Grandma’s not dead, just sleeping.’ Repeating myself drives me crazy. Don’t drive me crazy. Move on.”

“Tough break Simon. See you tomorrow.” Gary waved then turned towards the elevator.

Simon headed back to his pod, walking past the long line of HAWS employees in single file moving towards the central bank of elevators. Direct light from the roof formed cones of illumination over each desk. Grey skies continued to pour rain against the office windows. The cubicles gave the impression of foreboding the way that most, if not all, public spaces do if they are without the usual hive of human activity to keep them bound to normalcy. Simon placed his jacket on the back of his chair and sat down at the computer. He waited for his work day to be over.

## Trail Bottle Exchange

The smell of the bottle depot was bad at first but Aaron got used to the stink usually within the first five minutes of his shift. He'd get reminded of how bad the smell was when kids came in with their shirts pulled up over their noses. Some adults probably would have liked to do the same but they were polite enough not to.

On the first day at Trail Bottle Exchange, a short guy handed Aaron a filthy green apron and a pair of neon-orange gloves that might have been for gardening but weren't made of canvas. He removed his own glove to shake Aaron's hand, "Hey, my name's Wyatt. Welcome to the depot," Wyatt gestured around to some cardboard boxes placed on racks that were filled with juice boxes, plastic soda bottles and glass bottles. "I'm going to show you how to count bottles."

Aaron had trouble hearing Wyatt over the sound of the bottles clinking and breaking. Wyatt explained to Aaron how the bottles were separated, and the amount of deposit paid for each category of size and material. There were big Rubbermaid garbage bins that held aluminum cans. The coloured glasses were separated from the clear ones. Two long conveyers took the filled boxes on rollers to the back. The roof of the building was high.

"Here's your stall," Wyatt said, pointing to the one empty stall. "You know how to count in fours? It goes four, eight, 12, 16, 20. Then the pattern starts over again all the way to 100. That's how you count pop and beer cans. When you get to 100 you mark it on your sheet. Tally 'em up."

Wyatt had asked the question as if counting in groups of four up to 100 was a normal part of every day life.

“I think I’ll get the hang of it,” Aaron said.

“When you’re done, just bring the sheet up to the register in the middle to cash the customers out,” Wyatt added.

“It’s loud in here,” Aaron said.

Wyatt said the two guys who worked at Trail for the longest time had lost the mid-range in their hearing. Joe and Dwayne. The frequencies had been burned out by the sound of hundreds of thousands of glass and aluminum bottles clinking together. Both smoked constantly and seemed to be missing teeth.

\*\*\*

Aaron worked at Trail Bottle Exchange weekday evenings from one in the afternoon to nine at night on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Then he worked 9-to-5 on Saturdays and Sundays, because that was the busiest time for the depot.

During breaks, he drank cokes and ate gas station egg sandwiches from just down the road. After work, he’d walk home to shower all the slime and stink from the bottle depot. He tossed his t-shirt and jeans into a stiff heap beside the bedroom door. His mother wouldn’t get home until some time in the middle of the night because she waitressed at a neighbourhood pub. He’d microwave frozen pasta or pizza for dinner. In his room, Aaron listened to his only Bone Thugs-N-Harmony CD on the Discman he got for Christmas to replace his old one that wouldn’t spin discs. Next up, Led Zeppelin’s Houses of the Holy. He doodled in a spiral-bound notebook.

\*\*\*

Aaron wasn’t sure if Wyatt had finished high school. He was a little older than most of the other workers, probably in his mid-20s, maybe in his 30s. With Wyatt, it was

hard to tell. Aaron thought Wyatt looked a little like Wolverine. The others seemed to be high school kids. Aaron was just a few months out of high school himself. Aaron didn't see the owner that'd hired him. He rightly assumed she didn't spend much time outside of the office.

\*\*\*

In Biology 30, not long before graduation, the teacher gave a lesson about sea sponges.

“Sea sponges are unique creatures because they are hardly alive. They don't seem to meet the requirements of ‘living’ that we discussed last class. Sponges don't have a skeletal system and like plants, they don't move. Sponges can't move. What do sponges do then? They are filters. Filters for the ocean. While the other features in the sea get to procreate and move around, sponges sit and wait.”

Aaron wrote the only note he made that period: “Sponges are the lazy zombies of the sea.” He drew a chubby circle and drew a line pointing to it that said sponge. Beside it, he drew a similar circle, added some fish fins to it and wrote sea sponge.

During group work, a girl named Alison Bickell pointed her finger at Aaron as she leaned to her friend and whispered something into her ear. The other girl giggled. Alison was in three of Aaron's classes during the last year of high school. She had straight brown hair. She wore flannel shirts a lot of the time. She stooped a bit when she stood.

“Aaron what are you going to do after graduation?” Alison asked.

By now, everybody's friends had sorted out who was going where, who was going to university, who was going to backpack through Vietnam and Thailand for the year, who was going to work full-time for the family company.

"I'm going to find a job, I think. My mom said she is going to charge me rent unless I'm going to school, like college or university or something. I'm not going to go this year because I think I missed the application deadline. I don't even know what I want to do."

"I'm going to keep my job at Co-op while I go to SAIT. Where are you going to work?"

Aaron tried to make something up.

"Bus boy. Or something. I don't know. I've got to look for something. I want to get a car, finally."

Alison nodded.

"We should get out sometime," Alison said.

Aaron nodded. He drew a nautical hat for the sea sponge that had an anchor in the middle of it.

\*\*\*

People's recycling was as different as the people themselves. One couple came in with pre-sorted bottles. Their cart two cases of wine in perfect shape, one box of red placed on top of a box of white.

People with orange and green garbage bags had something to hide. Inside the bags kids in their 20s brought in were pieces of half-eaten pizza slices mixed into hundreds of beer cans. Guilty but happy for the money.

Aaron wore clothes that could get stained: t-shirts his grandmother would bring back from vacation for him that had illustrations of lizards, or tequila bottles with cartoon eyes and guns on them. Jeans that he got on sale from Bluenotes at Chinook mall. He didn't feel clean, let alone stylish.

Working in the stall beside Aaron, Wyatt poured the last bit of rosy Crush cream soda left in the bottom of a two litre bottle into the bucket on the floor by his section of counter.

"I'm going to bottle and sell this shit," Wyatt tipped the edge of the bucket to show Aaron the mix of liquid collected from all the bottles of liquor, beer, and juice left in people's empties. "Just give it a European sounding name and people will buy it.

*Dougsebeer*. Charge a lot for it. Let them know this is premium shit."

*Dougesebeer*—it sounded like Doug-zee-Beer when he said it. Aaron thought Wyatt was all right. Nobody else spoke to Aaron, except for Joe when he wanted Aaron to "pick up the pace, already." Joe shouted because that was the only way he could hear himself on account of his shit bottle depot ears.

\*\*\*

Wyatt and Aaron sat on a concrete ledge and smoked cigarettes in the back behind the warehouse. Nearby were the big trucks that took the bottles from Trail Bottle to the head bottle depot that processed all the bottles and cans into carpets or fleece sweatshirts. The two rested their feet on plastic milk crates.

"Found three boxes of KFC in one of the bags today. One of the boxes had some gravy left in it, so everything was covered," Aaron said. "I tried to get as much of it into the *Dougesebeer* as possible."

Wyatt laughed a long time, “I’ve seen some gross shit working here. One time a guy brought in a Pepsi bottle that had a mouse and a half in it.”

“A mouse and a half?”

“Yeah. The theory is that the two mice fell in and when they couldn’t get out, the stronger one ate the other one but couldn’t finish it. They looked like little hollowed- out, mummified turds.”

“Ugh.”

“Another time, a person brought in a bottle that was filled with needles. Medical needles. I don’t know if the guy was diabetic or a druggie or what? But do you have the deposit back on that one bottle? Your needle bottle? I seriously wish that they’d make a movie about this place one day,” Wyatt said.

Aaron thought a movie about any bottle depot wouldn’t make for a very interesting movie, aside from the gross parts.

“Why did you decide to work here?” Wyatt asked.

“I needed the experience. I get the hours I want. Some places I looked at could only do part-time or constant overtime. I need to pay down a loan for my car. But it’s not easy work.”

Wyatt nodded.

“Why do you stay at the bottle depot? You seem like you could find another job pretty quick,” Aaron asked.

“I’m saving up for a condo. Dude, lots of guys are going to tell you that chicks dig guys with cars and that’s kind of true. You need to have a car here. But chicks also

really dig houses. That's where you are able to make out. Chicks don't want to make out in cars when you get to be my age."

"Why?" Aaron asked. To Aaron, owning a house seemed impossible, even renting an apartment seemed like it'd require money and time and responsibility that was impossible.

Aaron had never made out in his car. His car—a rust-grey '92 Chevrolet Beretta—had a tape deck instead of a CD player because the car was old. The tape deck was broken. When he got bored of the radio Aaron listened to his Discman with earphones when he drove.

"I'm saving up for a down payment on a place in Ramsey—like a fuckin' duplex. Shit's cheap there, man. Then I'm going to fix it up a bit with my cousin and his buddy while I live there and eventually try to sell it. Make a bit of money on it. That's how I'm going to get out of here. I don't want to end up like Joe or Dwayne."

"I get that."

"Those guys are like the ghosts of people."

"Won't saving up like that take forever?"

"I make more than you because I can drive the forklift," Wyatt said.

All the aluminum cans went into big canvas bags that were put on trucks. Aaron never saw anybody drive those trucks away.

\*\*\*

Near the end of the summer, Alison came in to Trail Bottle Exchange. She pushed an orange cart that had in it two green garbage bags of bottles. Alison saw Aaron noticed her. At first she pretended to not see him by looking away but she had to stand for so long

near the door that mutual recognition was impossible to avoid. Customers entered the bottle depot through a set of doors and formed a line. One by one, customers would be waved over to the next free counter. Alison approached Aaron's counter pushing a shopping cart filled with empties.

Alison started moving other bags to the edge of the counter. When she dumped out the first garbage bag, a wave of fermented orange juice rushed out, which dripped on to the floor, covering his shoes in a syrupy goo. She pinched a corner of the bag with two fingers, careful not to get anything on herself. Her eyes weren't looking at Aaron.

"I'm so sorry about this," Alison said. "Oh god, I'm so sorry."

Aaron felt his socks moisten. The gunk changed the green suede and tan canvas on his shoes a darker shade. Aaron felt that Alison was avoiding looking at him, as if acknowledging his existence as a human being would get the permanent filth that lined every nook and cranny in the depot onto her own body.

The garbage bag was filled with Tropicana containers with the lids off. He didn't think that much liquid could be transported in a car without it getting all over. It was a miracle that none of it had leaked out of the bag. Previous spills during that shift were localized to the counter—small left overs from bottles and cans. He had a little shower squeegee and a bucket for those minor occurrences. Aaron paused, not sure how to handle anything.

He didn't want to confirm Alison's assumption that he was as slimy and foul as the bottles that he handled. He tried to avoid looking at the mixture of beer, cola, liquor in the plastic pail. The smell was sourly sweet, powerful in his nostrils. He set it down at his feet.

Aaron began to count in fours as he reached in to the bag for the Tropicana containers. He put twelve into a cardboard box and sent it to the back of the depot on the roller-conveyor. He did this over and over. He counted her other things. Aaron marked the number down with a ballpoint and tore the sheet off the scratch pad. He took off his gloves. His fingers were like he'd been in a warm bath.

"I thought you were going to try for a job as a bus boy?" Alison said.

"This was closer and it pays more," Aaron smiled as much as possible under the circumstances.

"You haven't called."

"I've been meaning to. Really."

"I want to hang out before September."

Aaron had her number and her email. Aaron had never contacted her because the perfect time never presented itself. He worked nights and weekends. Times when dates are supposed to happen.

"They will help you at cash," Aaron said as he handed the sheet to her. "Thanks for coming to Trail. Have a good day."

"You have a good rest of your day. Call me sometime, Aaron," Alison said. "I'm fucking serious."

"I promise."

Soon another customer wheeled their cart up to Aaron's counter. The line stretched past the doors. Aaron's eyeballs felt as if they were drawing back inside his skull. He watched Alison exit to the parking lot. She didn't look back.

“No way I can last another four hours of this,” he thought to himself. He wiggled his toes in his shoes coated in coagulated Tropicana orange juice. They felt cold. His cheeks felt hot.

Aaron remembered a holocaust survivor at a school talk about his experience. The diminutive man answered questions from this audience of high schoolers. He gave the kind of answers that made you forget all about the questions. He was polite. One of his answers was that he felt safest when he was at work. He said the Nazis were extremely enthusiastic about employment. They put up a sign at the entrance that said: “Work makes you free.” The most famous one is at Auschwitz or maybe Dachau. Aaron couldn’t remember. When the man wasn’t working he felt like he could be killed at any moment but when he was working he knew that he would be alive until his shift finished at least. Work was safe. After that, all bets were off. The shower could be water or gas. The idea haunted Aaron—one’s life could end with one or continue another day with the other.

Saturday’s shift dragged on. After it was over, Wyatt and Aaron smoked a joint in the back parking lot near Aaron’s car because it was warm out. Across the street from Trail Bottle Depot’s parking lot was an old water park and mini-golf course. They looked at it while they smoked. A long fence ran along the perimeter of the property. The park was built on a natural slope that provided a steep angle for propelling the human body through wide plastic tubes. The slides were still there. Grimy lines of dirt lined the segments like tendrils. Some of the white plastic had yellowed in the time since the park closed. Stairs made of thick 4 x 4 pieces of wood riveted into long angled pieces of steel ran along the slides from the pool to little platforms where the kids would wait in lines

for their turn. Near the empty pool was a rectangular building that housed a mini-golf course.

“Did you ever go there?” Aaron asked.

“I had a couple birthdays there. Bonzai!”

Aaron had forgotten that’s what the park was called. Bonzai.

“My dad took me here on a Saturday morning once before he moved away. The only time I remember ever getting up early on a weekend. We spent all morning and afternoon there,” Aaron said.

“I played Mortal Kombat at the arcade. A big kid taught me how to do the fatality. Forward, forward, down, forward, high punch. You had to stand a little ways away. That’s how you grabbed the guy’s head and tore it off and the spinal cord hung out and the blood dripped everywhere,” Wyatt mimicked the head rip and made a screaming sound at his fist which held an imaginary head.

“I remember that too,” Aaron laughed. “I played the Rampage game more. With the wolf and the lizard and the King Kong guy that smashed up the buildings. I remember getting hot dogs and fries from the stand around the back. The ketchup came from a pump thing. People were never careful and got ketchup on the ground. It’d mix with the water from the pool.”

“That smelled so fucking gross,” Wyatt said.

When the weather got hot, the ketchup would stew and cook with the water. The smell of vinegar was terrible. Aaron’s dad left later that summer because he started going to AA meetings. He wanted Aaron’s mom to go with him. She didn’t want to go so he

said he wouldn't see Aaron's mom or live with her anymore. That was a couple years ago.

"Let's see what it's like now," Wyatt said.

Aaron agreed. He didn't want to go home this early in the evening on a Saturday. The two walked across Horton Road. As they got closer, they saw the door had been jimmied open before and was just resting closed. They left the door open for light after they went in.

Inside, the mini-golf course was multi-levelled. A path beside the holes started near the door, went up some stairs, turned a corner behind a big wall that had the big letters that spelled out "Mini-golf" and then finished down another set of stairs. The shape made a weird square. There was a greasy sleeping bag and a few empty plastic bottles of vodka in the place where the arcade used to be.

"You know why they make those bottles of plastic?" Wyatt asked.

"Because it's cheaper than glass?" Aaron answered. He kicked a bit of brick on the side of the course over the edge.

"It's because the dirty people that need to drink this shitty vodka would always be falling on the bottles, losing their teeth and eyes and cutting up their faces," Wyatt said.

Aaron imagined falling on to the tip of a bottle of Smirnoff and it driving up into his right eye. He wasn't sure how somebody could manage to be so unlucky to fall like that.

"Plus, when they are finished drinking with this bottle they can use it as a pillow," Wyatt continued. "Shit. We've probably counted the bottles of the person that stayed here."

“Did you like the water slide when you were a kid?” Aaron asked.

“What kind of question is that?” Wyatt furrowed his eyebrows together. “I mean, what’s not to like? Water slides are supposed to be fun. You slide and it’s fun.”

“I heard a story from my uncle and it kind of put me off the water slide,” Aaron said.

“What do you mean?”

“He said that he knew a guy who had a mole on his back torn off when he went over one of the seams that connects the sections together. Then the guy got cancer and died.”

“What? What does that have to do with the mole?” Wyatt kicked at some garbage.

“Like, the mole released the cancer when it got torn off or something,” Aaron replied.

Wyatt’s eyes squinted as though he were trying to see something far away.

“That doesn’t make any sense to me,” Wyatt said. “I don’t think that’s how cancer works. I’m pretty sure that’s not how you get cancer.”

“That’s what my uncle thought anyway. And I have a mole on my back, so I stopped going on the slides. Once when my junior high class had a field trip to the Southland Leisure Centre, I just stayed in the wave pool and floated around.”

“I heard someone died here and that’s why it closed down,” Wyatt said.

“I think I’m going to try to get an apartment soon,” Aaron said. “And then I’m going to quit the bottle depot.”

Wyatt nodded: “You got something else lined up?”

“Nope,” Aaron replied. “I could work at the depot and nothing would change. Until maybe I end up here, sleeping on a bottle I just drank.”

“You probably won’t end up here.” “Nobody knows how you end up here until it happens.” Wyatt kicked at a piece of mini-golf turf that had come up from the edge where it was once tacked down. “Think of it. One day you are making mini-golf money hand over fist, then people stop coming. Then you take to drinking then sleeping here after you’ve lost everything.”

“The person that owned this probably sold it and made a ton on the property alone,” Wyatt said. “I get that you don’t want to get caught in a rut.”

“How do you know when you are in a rut?”

“When you can sleepwalk through everything. Shit. Maybe I’m in a rut. I don’t know.”

\*\*\*

Across the street from Trail Bottle Exchange, off Horton Road, two big machines coloured pale yellow, made greyer from the overcast sky, levelled the building and the old waterpark. The machines had tank-like treads and huge claws that punched through the roof and grabbed the mess of construction materials that looked like concrete and tar paper and metal and placed it in the back of a parked dump truck. The dump truck had a logo that said “Movex Demolition Solutions” on the side of it.

In two days, the machines were done and the lot was empty. No slides, no stairs, and no building with a dirty sleeping bag in it. Just a few trees left over at the lot’s perimeter and one or two large chunks of concrete by some strips of aluminum sheeting. A real-estate developer put up a picture for the condos that would be built there.