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THE GOAT IN THE ZOO

I write this with the knowledge that I may be dead before it is read. The entire effort may be futile, yet I write in hope that the individual who reads it is frustrated with his present life. Yes. I'm hoping that this will act as a catalyst for you, as I was in need of one some months ago.

To identify myself would be pointless; the Lake City military accountants have presumably debited me to "marginal battle losses" while crediting "operational infantry." If they knew the ironic accuracy of that, I would've been neutralized by now. Their omnipotence, you see, only permeates into the lives of the cringing fools who place their lives in the hands of the government. Kept in line by the tokens and petty gifts they hold as ideals, my former comrades rarely sense the pathetic comedy that they motor through.

"Ah," you are musing," another one of these radical students. The rhetoric has an interchangeable flair about it. The dissident usually is just another off-brand sheep following a messiah in the guise of a herder."

Perhaps I am a dissident: a creature who slinks through the abandoned suburbs; a man living on borrowed time and whose very existence is a threat to the structure of Lake City. That might be more accurate. Yea, I shall even flatter your medicated mind in that you are embarrassingly accurate in your evaluation. You've learned your lessons well so I'll compliment you on your absorption and... ah... command, if you will, of modern criticism. Though I think you'll have to relearn your studies the way the Europeans had to learn that they lived upon a sphere and not a plain. It's painful when you thought that it had some corporeal shape to it, isn't it? The first rape is the most traumatic.

Now I'm a twisted old lecher, who, in a spasm of perverse energy, scribbles out his twisted legacy for the world. He vainly hopes some wandering fool will find his
manuscript and .... I've deceived you long enough!
It is time that I render for you a thumbnail sketch of
the author so you'll have a frame of reference to work
from. I think you'd appreciate that immensely.

In the beginning I was the son of typical midapt
parents. Life was uneventful until I started my primary
education. It was in school that I was earmarked as
potentially dangerous because of my mannerisms and
speech idiosyncrasies. Corrections had to be made
quickly to avoid a future problem. I was made to
understand that my growth was not different, nor my
skills retarded: it was my antisocial attitude that had
branded me with a stigma. Thus a long process of special
conditioning became part of my daily life.

What have I done to merit such treatment? Were my
stutter and hesitancy to follow orders responsible for
the culturing of the suspicious school authorities against
me? Once their curiosity had become terminal I was
removed from my family's midapt (Oh, to remember that
last portrait of helplessness upon the faces of my
parents only reminds me of a Harp Seal mama watching her
virgin pup skinned alive,) and placed in a special
school designed to nullify harmful traits. It was there
so many sightless years ago, that I learned of my fault;
of how I had to be exorcised of my impurities or I would
be unable to add to the glory of the Lake City. Slowly,
grimly they suppressed the germ of my difference. I was
forced to realize my genetic evil and to believe that
it was in my own best interest if the foulness was
exorcised. I soon possessed a hatred for my former
self and then developed an unnatural need for acceptance
by my peers. All they did was to merely banish my demons
to the back of my mind where they grew more powerful.

When I graduated (released) from the school I was
eligible to enroll on any of the secondary schools.
I had realized where the loyalty of an individual belonged
so I naturally headed towards the CivPro Tower. I was
accepted and eagerly donned the uniform of the cadet.

What a brainwashed nothing I'd become! Before I
could decide my future the Gov't was kindly training me
for a wondrous position. They taught me to be a loather of the unique and surreal, while forcefeeding me their universal virtues of organics and pragmatism. Again I can hear you babling like a dial-a-critic: "He is just substituting the philosophy of the marginals for that of the Lake State. From his arguments--he is as consistent as the wind".

You are so wrong. So terribly ignorant are you of life in the Margin that you'll believe any nonsense that the NuSheet (I read it today so it has to be fact), feeds you. The truth is, Oh singular newt of a man, that after the marginals accepted me I was only required to stay with my nomadic tribe. Any change in personal philosophy was by my choice and not by indoctrination.

We have been sidetracked, so back to the happy, happy life of a cadet. What a truly wonderful life it had been: no worries, no thoughts; just embrace the doctrines of the state and I'd get my soft, pink reward at the end of the month. Why concern myself with metaphysics when the state offers all that a man could desire? Such a significant advancement made from a problem child capable of revolt to a trained cadet, who craved to be a dog-wise administrator of Lake City love. Is that not how an individual should live in a state? Like a moth to the flame? I beseech you to search your own history and locate any segment in which the state treated you as an individual and not as an expendable unit. You, pitiful man, were always asked what you could do for your state. Yet you never, not once, asked what can the state do for me?

"Hypocrite, hypocrite," you rave sickly, "what about your years as a public servant? Let us hear you discount your training and void the pleasures you enjoyed."

Your words are like those of a bothersome child to a judge, simpleminded. It was the state-provided pleasures that proved to be the positive enforcer. Those succulent young women were trained to be our mistresses and to dispense pleasure whenever their 'mate of fate' proved himself. Those poor ambulatory corpses! Not only did they agree to their whoredom but they pursued it with open arms. All that a woman would receive from life is
the hollow, confident feeling of being a faithful servant and a necessary part of her mate's career. As I progressed in rank my own bedmates became more and more desirable, yet, these all were soulless trinkets used to add a petty substance to the dream.

"Now he'll expound the virtues of being a celibate hermit."

Not quite. Your comments are completely missing the target. The more sharp and adolescent your mockery, the more I know that my story is bringing up some questions about the values and goals that you hold so dear. You're getting closer, oh foolish Oedipus, to the naked lunch and there is no Jocasta to stop you from realizing the truth at the end of your fork.

I could go on and on about my life before I defected. I feel your concentration is slipping so I'll skip my last fun-filled years of military service. We'll go back to the day, the last day with the human batrachians, of awakening. I'll chronicle for you all of the events and symbols so you'll think my Rousseaulian Renaissance was preordained. You'd love to believe that.

It was a cold day in March with a breathless, vacant sky save for the ancient sun which hung motionless. As I looked out my window and into the north, I saw the white icebergs of winter slowly disappear over the horizon of the Lake. Never to return, they would slowly melt back into the water that had spawned them. The surrounding towers about my conapt were so arranged that only my section of the building was illuminated by the sun. The streets and the towers outside my window were grey and haunted by the shadows of the night.

I went about my breakfast and reworked my schedule for the day. It was my first day as commander of a defensive attack force. Our primary concern was to neutralize radical marginal groups and inter-city subversives. I donned my chromium plated jumpsuit and headed toward the sidewalks. The trip was a daily routine which took me across the breadth of the Loop. I noticed how the shadows were so clear, so precise in their delineation, almost like a razor bisecting an apple or a
laser separating a boulder.

At H.Q. I immediately went to orient my company. The mission was basically a milkrun that involved riding a section of the suburbs of a group of marginal radicals. The marginals would usually be tolerated as long as they remained harmless and unseen. Some of the more 'art-minded elites of Lake State had promised to feed and shelter a group of marginal musicians if they (the musicians) would perform in a tour of the major city-states. They eagerly agreed and it was only natural that after a few gigs the optimistic musicians all perished in a building fire. So much for culture enlightenment.

The group of radicals I was to neutralize, (cute official phraseology for slaughter,) had been stealing food from a rootfield across the barrier. It had been a rigorous winter and they had been unable to sustain themselves, so they made pigeon stew with the carrots and turnips that had been left as perennials in the field.

All five of us were armed with the AEtrex-4L laser device. The wicked weapon could burn a penhole through the Grand Teton Mountain or adjust to a concave ray that could devastate a forest in an instant. The poor marginals had only metallic projectiles. Speaking of marginals: What have they done to deserve to be eradicated like roaches? Why was there such an awesome prejudice against a group trying to survive? Does the mere thought of our existence threaten your well-ordered way of life? Or are we the source of too many unanswerable questions that must be erased from the Archives if the state is to survive indefinitely? HOW can you deny us? We are conceived and we grow the same as you, our presence is a fact in all of the cities and in all the great wilderness. It is like Alpha condemning Omega for existing. This all makes me think about the extinct whales that I've learned about since I became a marginal. That ancient genera of waterbound leviathans had been wiped out by science and technology over a century ago. Only through the
books and photographs that have survived in private hands is there any positive record of their existence. You see once the whales had been neutralized the state reedited all of the books and magazines that might have had reference to whales: whales had never existed. What is a crime without a victim? Such would be the fate of the marginals.

We drove to the rebel territory in silence. I remember the change from city to suburbs, from grotesque cliffs of stone to softly decaying structures. All of the houses in the suburbs had immense trees in their yards, planted decades ago for satirical effect by designers craving a comic relief. The suburbs, I am told, had once been the heart of the American dream. The dream fell apart like a balloon pecked by a crow. When the oil disappeared the rich left the suburbs for the reconstructed cities and the poor were economically forced into the 'ghettos of the nineties'. Here they patiently lived until proper accommodations were built. Eventually the suburbs were abandoned to the thieves, harlots, and thinkers.

Walking down those deserted cities of the mist, where all anguish had dissipated, had an uplifting effect. The cracked roadbed and cyclopean trees gave the homes the appearance of corroded platinum skulls while I acquired the attributes of a solitary rodent. Strangely at ease, I visualized the bony canopy with the fattness of summer growth upon it. Such a contrast to the palisade of stone I'd lived in all of my life. The men in my command seemed nervous, hesitant; I attributed this to inexperience and culture shock. Our objective was in the clearing ahead. The marginals were cooking their meal on hearths of stone and drying clothes on rigged lines. The pace was slow and melted harmoniously with the environment. The men broke dried wood for the fire while all the women came and went, barefoot children too. Under a patriarch of a conifer men and women were instructing a class of children. I was enraptured by the pleasant scene that unfolded before me: how could I decimate such a sanctuary of bliss?
I ordered the men to fan out and to commence firing at my command. They walked upon the plain like shadows of clouds on a desert. I looked at them, blinking at the thoughts and emotions that struggled within me. I spat out the bile that was a side-effect from my first anti-social behavior in twenty years. I laughed. Not the superficial laugh that is evidence of a tortured soul, but like the laugh I once heard from an ancient black in a bar or as I've heard issue from the marginal men when they have a new baby.

Four shadows I slew. Four greying, oxidizing souls that had been interred nearly the whole of this life. I spat out the vinegar-cheese taste in my mouth and walked passed the corpses with gaping holes leaking an oily smoke. I strode towards the clearing, slowly at first, but quickly once I had been seen. I threw away my equipment when one of the men raised a pistol. The marginals said nothing to me while they led me to an abandoned house.

So there you have it! I don't know what is going through your head, but as long as the cognitive pattern differs from when you picked up this paper I'll be happy. You see the purpose of this little essay was not autobiographical or historical but catalystic. Perhaps even now you may feel some empathy towards me, or... loathing. Someday in another time you and I may sit down in an open field with the sun on our heads as we sip wine. Until then, I'll be a shadow screaming at you in the void.

/Dan Sutherland/