

Of the side of the canal running through my neighborhood, a couple of the feral cats are hunting rats. Sometimes the rodents dive into the waterway, knowing the feline on their tail will never follow into the thick water, reeking off rot. The cats refuse to go anywhere down near it's edges. It is not out of fear of water, but fear of it's toxicity. Even the strays know its dangers. It is a filthy canal, tinted a dark shade of eggplum, with dross coating the surface. The channel used to be our waste disposal. We only stopped using it for that purpose in the last five years. Anything you needed to get rid of, like a can of racoon repellent, a couch, or a deceased family member, was tossed into the water and flushed out a sea to which it leads. No one goes to the shore line anymore, for it is littered in styrofoam and broken glass not yet weathered down by the licking waves. Only the homeless ever walk along the beach. When it was fresh, they would pick out garbage from the tidal pools to see if it is of use. Only they can't do that anymore, of course. There is nothing there that hasn't been decaying for years. Most of us steer clear of it because water like that can get you horribly sick. The world is infected with sicknesses, and viruses and infections. We try to avoid the less slightly parts of our cities, like the parts where the lower class can't afford any type of clothing, or the areas where every square inch of brick is coated in fungus.

The brick is the best thing we've come up with for building in this century. I'm well aware that bricks have been used for centuries, and they're nothing new. However, our use of them benefits our society in every way. We were having a problem with carcasses about fifty years ago. There was no room for graveyards anymore. The cremation fad had passed, and no one wanted their relatives in urns. So what do we supposed do with the freshly dead? At first, they were dumped into the sea- out with the trash. Citizens complained of the rotting flesh on the shorelines. The tide dragging in demolished and unidentifiable carcasses caused a stench, which began to creep inland. Simultaneously, the lack of building material was becoming a serious problem. Some person reached a revelation- brick is formed of ash. Why not make use of our resources? And so, beginning with his conurbation, every region began to build with cremated bodies. Upon death, they are shipped in boxes to the incinerator, and mixed with other burnt rubbish to form bricks. Buildings are formed through this. They only recently began using the body brick in my region. My cubicle, being a new one, is constructed from the innovative

recycling. Sometimes I lay awake at night, staring at the ceiling and contemplating of whom lies buried in it, submerged with their peers of death.

I particularly like where my cubicle is located, for it has a nice neighborhood. We all pay taxes and pull the trash bins away from the curb after services comes collecting. We do a respectable job of keeping our trash, like our business, to ourselves. I have only once been spoken to by someone living near me, and they were simply reminding me of the protection offered by personal police. The cubicles surrounding mine turn off their lights at night and don't bother each other. My neighbors, like I, are fans of the health system. We have pills and shots for prevention of disease; pills being preferred by many. The government decided, in the past, that it would be cheaper to make medications than to actually clean. In result, our lands are as filthy as our conscience, and we pick our way through streets of muck. Everything lies under layers of filth. No one is supposed to become sick. Equality reigns in our care, with everyone receiving the same medications. If you cannot afford them, there are programs. Many, such as the unsightly vagrant men, or 'urban campers' cannot pay for the pills they leach from the government. They receive them in free bottles, like goodie bags. However, some people, a very small handful of the general public, never buys them, whether they have the money or not. The "organic oats and grain" sort of people, who don't touch anything stamped with a company's logo or treated with chemicals. They call anything unnatural evil and tell us that, as a people, we are doomed to death from the drugs. I think it's one of the stupidest things anyone can do.

I'm sitting in my small kitchen, watching the canal through the window. The one downside of my area is that the channel runs straight through it, and I have a view. Its odor is intolerable, and I wear plugs in my nose the majority of the time. As I look out upon the purple water, I see a stray cat catching something hairy. I do not assume it to be a rat, for it could be a rotten anything, simply covered with fur-like mold. I do not even attempt distinguish what's what anymore, seeing as when you examine things closer, the whole lot of things were the same. The view is sordid. I don't want to observe these vermin being devoured by wild tomcats, while I try to consume my excuse for a breakfast. I always have the option to look away, but the bland interior of my home does not do much better. The walls are unadorned, layers of gray brick sitting upon each other. They are made of a special sort of remembrance. They struck no one else in such an emotional way. It seems that I am the only one affected by bereavement of strangers.

I toss away the leftovers of my stale buttered bread, down the coffee, and take my regular pharmaceuticals. The side effects of my medications make it difficult for me to stomach any amount of food, so my meals are usually a chunk of toast with something spread on it and some sort of sugared drink. Sometimes I spike what I am drinking to give me more vigor, but today is not that sort of a day. A screech is heard from the street, and I know my Hilde has just arrived to pick me up. We are going to the club, seeing as neither of us work at the factory today and there is nothing else to spend my free time doing. The morning is the best time to go to the club- it's when all the high class citizens go. If you set out later in the day, the only other humans you'll find will be the wrong sort entirely, people who use the easily available drugs for the wrong purpose, bliss or gratification. Some folks who end up smuggling to other countries and being eradicated by the government. I pay my taxes, the income taxes, the foodstuff taxes, the taxes on my weapons. And so it is my money, and the society's money, which goes to their many programs, like providing the pills we rely on, or "cleaning up" the general public.

She walks in, without needing to announce her presence, and sits across from me at my table. Hilde has a devilish smile, and the way her lip curls upwards sends chills down my spine every time.

"Someone is feeling good today," I tell her.

She laughs as she responds, "Hardly. My head is throbbing and my hands are shaking. I haven't felt so unstable in weeks."

"So why are you so exultant?"

"I godamn love it!" She almost yells. I laugh as I stand up and walk through the front door which she had left un-open. My comrade and I are dressed quite nicely, for our medium wage salaries. I am sporting a relatively loose romper, with a cropped khaki jacket and thigh high boots, while Hilde wears a legless body suit with long tight arms, laced tights and dust gray desert boots. Hilde is my favorite acquaintance, for her unexplainable energy and high spirits. She possesses lovely hazel eyes, but always has large plum circles under them, from her racking insomnia. She has a certain physical weakness that makes her more susceptible to the potential

side effects of the medicine. Somehow, though, she powers through it every day and is constantly a source of delight.

Once we are out, and driving off towards our destination, she swerves around a corner, dangerously, heading at 50 miles per hour to the club.

“Hilde,” I ask her, once we are later waiting in line to get in, “Are you positive you’re alright? You’re beginning to seem a bit, distant.”

“I’m perfectly fine Claire, I mean; I took all my pills this morning.”

I nod. I am not usually one for many words.

At the door, the two of us have our identification authenticated and our wrists embossed with their logo. The second we walked through the metallic arch, we were absorbed into a sort of almost gelatinous atmosphere. Breathing is difficult, though forgotten and not troubled over. We cannot speak, as the atmosphere allows no sound to travel other than the repetitive, electronic synth. The humans around us are dancing intensely to the throb of the atmosphere. Hilde and I move slightly in the minute space between us and the men near us, while the sounds kept throbbing, pulsing, like a slow heartbeat. Hilde is already sunk into the beat, and her face shows it, eyes closed, torso moving, in, and out. I am not yet conformed, but with ease pushing myself gently back, and forth, waiting for the room to take over. But I am pulled out of the start of a trance when Hilde begins to fade out of the regularity of everyone’s movement. I watch in alarm as her eyes open in fear. She claws at her chest, pulling breath through a gaping mouth, and collapses.

Around us, no one notices, other than me. They are moving, thoughtlessly, like jellyfish. I pull her up by her thick wrists, and drag her to the seats against the wall. We sit there for several minutes, unable to exchange words over the sound, over the beat. Not only is the music too loud, but it is so difficult to force yourself out of the conforming rhythm. I don’t understand how her heart isn’t beating along, how her breaths aren’t coming in, flowing out, like so. As I look at her, I notice she had passed out. I grab her wrist, and her individual pulse is not only oddly not melting to the echo, but not existent at all. I lift her up, pushing my way through the swayers. The door man notifies government services, seeing her obvious unconsciousness once I haul her

out the door. She's a dead weight, like her bones are filled with cement rather than marrow. I lay her down on the pavement outside, while the citizens awaiting their entrance, in line, look on in confusion, but not worry. An ambulance arrives in a minute or so, and one white coated medic lifts her into the van to take her not to a hospital, but the incinerator.

“They sent me with an ambulance, because they didn't know what it was from his description. But if I had known her health state, I wouldn't have bothered, see. There wasn't a chance in heaven or hell that she'd make it through it. She's too thin and sick. How long has she looked so frail?”

I think about it. Hilde had never looked any other way to me.

“It was probably caused by a side effect of her medication. It was a heart attack. It was all very sudden. She'll be burned to dust within the hour. Her ash will probably be used in the bricks building the new research facility, seeing as the city isn't building any homes right now. The rapid decline in population isn't requiring it, see.”

And the medic continued speaking bluntly like this to me so, until I, marginally disturbed and troubled, walked away to go home.

When she died, Hilde was the only distinct heartbeat in the club; the only pulse that was not moving in sameness. Her death was not through a plague caused by the rats, or the disease swirling in air particles. It was found through the prevention. Her body was thoroughly drugged and weak, likely not having slept in days. The strain today's experience put on her heart was not tolerable, and it failed her. Hilde was a slight reassurance to me, constantly pushing through the mental fog drugs put you under. Unlike others, she was a survivor, until the day she wasn't. And that then, is one of the sad possible side effects of the many drugs we take, that while we might not be laden with any diseases, we still put ourselves at risks, perhaps higher than without them.

The waste was suffocating the country, literally overflowing from junk yards. As our concern for the environment decayed, we began flushing it out through cannels, sending our garbage to the ocean. Litter is not the proper word for a surging tide of trash. With the rise of rubbish, filth began to overtake urban communities. Simultaneously, we dealt with over population. Sprouting from all of this, plague racked the people. Few actually died, but everyone

lived in crowded, grimy gloom. When the Government began to take action, we were all heavily medicated. Since I was born, I've been shot full of vaccines, taking drugs daily to kill what kills me. I wake up in the morning, and take half a dozen pills. More follow in the evening. I eat little to nothing, and flip between sleeping for days, or hardly getting any rest for weeks. Like Hilde, many bodies cannot handle it. They fail under the strain. People began dying epidemically about ten years ago, since I was twelve. The country has half the people it did a decade ago.

Sometimes, when I think about the people making up my wall, I also think about how they passed on. Was it a hippie who refused to take anything, and was exterminated by plague? I wonder if they perished from a heart attack, the way Hilde did today. The world is assembled on our demise.