

Adam awoke to find himself sprawled upon his scrubby greenish couch. His stomach growled. He was hungry. Adam braced out his right arm against the rim of the couch in preparation to hoist his bulk into a sitting position, but something held him back from the final push. A wave of annoyance briefly pushed through Adam's consciousness: he was hungry, why hadn't he gotten up so he could get some food? Yet on the couch he remained. What was he going to eat anyways? His abysmal fridge was running on empty and he never stocked it with anything fresh or organic. Doritos maybe? Adam glanced by his feet at which five packs of Doritos lay empty. He never bought more than five packs of Doritos at any one time. This meant that he had none left in his apartment. Perhaps Adam still had some pork rinds in his rotisserie cabinet? Perhaps. But what was it that had caused him to hold back from his almost automatronic search for food and instead to sit back and think in the first place? Was it that he knew deep down that he had no food left? Or maybe it was some remnant of a health consciousness within Adam, urging him not to consume the junk food that he so regularly frequented. Perhaps though, Adam's discomfort stemmed from something more pressing, an almost subconscious existentialist realization of the futility of a life spent laying on one's couch all day eating Doritos. But then again that wasn't all that Adam spent his time doing, was it? ENOUGH! Adam's nutrient deprived brain could no longer handle such rigorous thought and, as unhappy as it made him, he aborted his brief thought train, choosing instead to finally stand up and meander about his apartment in the search for sustenance.

Adam's cat, Tito, was suddenly around Adam's feet, and a deafening torrent of mewing accosted Adam's ears. It occurred to him that he was no longer alone, for Tito was hungry too. He was no longer alone. In a twist of fate that seemed almost ironic to Adam, despite the lack of human food in his household, his cabinets were still stocked with cat food. He poured a bowl of dry cat food for Tito. As he watched Tito devour the dry processed pellets of cat food, Adam became almost jealous. He began to salivate, imagining the salty taste of the pellets in his mouth. Would the pellets retain any semblance to meat? He didn't know. He briefly considered trying one, just to see, but then decided that to do

such a thing would be sinking too low, even for a lowlife like himself. Having had enough, Adam resolved to go get himself some food and, in a rapid, almost fluid motion, he slipped his arms into his camouflage overcoat, grabbed his key (he only had one) and vacated his apartment.

The rain was pouring outside, Adam hadn't counted on that. He had always loved the rain. When he was a little boy, someone had told him that the rain washed away one's sin, and since then Adam had found the rain to be soothing. Such sentiments, however, couldn't protect him from the frigid temperatures or cascading water, and within seconds he was drenched and cold. A soon miserable Adam sloshed through the watery streets, drudging his way towards a seemingly distant grocery store which, for him, became as a beacon of light in the darkness that was his reality. But as he came within five blocks of his destination, he was drawn off course by a truly grotesque sight: a rat, a massive slimy rat, sprinted towards him. Unleashing a high pitched shriek, Adam leapt aside, sprinting through an alley to escape his rodent antagonist and emerging on a street that was unfamiliar to him. With a deep breath, Adam collected his bearings and was about to continue on his path towards salvation when he noticed an old homeless looking man staring at him from across the street. Adam shouted a nervous greeting to the old man. Upon closer inspection, Adam noticed that the man was dressed in a tattered military fatigue and held clutched in his hand a cardboard sign reading, "veteran, need money for food." Adam felt a pang of sadness; this old man had been across the world, done battle for his country, and had probably done things that most people could only dream of, and yet now this old man's life was ending in complete poverty and obscurity, utterly meaningless with nothing to show for his life's work. Adam gave the old man eight dollars.

Despite having deviated from his original route, Adam did eventually make the final push to the store, entering only twelve minutes after his departure time. He bought five packs of Doritos, as he had done so many times before. As he waited in the checkout line, he regretted not getting a different brand of chips, simply so that he could have some variety. And yet, he had to admit to himself that he didn't really want to try something new. As much as it pained him, he found himself clinging vehemently to his old habits, completely

unwilling to deviate from the simplest of traditions. This realization made him feel powerless. He finally reached the end of the line and found his cashier to be a pale young woman with a faint accent. He couldn't decide if he found her attractive or if she was simply too bland and unmemorable looking for him to find her so. As she ran his Dorito packs through the automated scanner, Adam noticed that her nametag read "Eve." He spoke out loud for the first time in several days, remarking to his cashier what a coincidence it was that her name was Eve and his was Adam. She smiled and said that the two of them were like the biblical Adam and Eve. He chuckled and an awkward silence ensued for roughly five seconds, during which time both Adam and Eve wished to speak, but were at a loss as to what to say. The silence was finally broken when Adam told Eve that he had noticed her slight accent and wanted to know where she came from. As it turned out, though she had been living in America for most of her life, Eve originally came from Croatia. The duo experienced another painful lapse of conversation. Adam gathered up his Doritos and was about to leave when he impulsively resolved to ask Eve out to dinner. She stared at him with a look of surprise and confusion, eventually agreeing only to consider his proposal. As he left the store, he decided that he didn't really want to take Eve to dinner anyways, even if she did consent to it.

He walked home in the thundering rain, and his mood turned deeply bitter. Right then, to Adam, his life seemed utterly pointless; he sat in his dark apartment all day, eating Doritos and lounging on his couch, perhaps occasionally providing some meager foodstuffs for his cat, Tito. True, Adam could get a job, or make more friends, or follow up with Eve, but what would be the point of doing those things? Even if he were to improve his quality of life, what would be the point, he wondered, when in all probability he would just end up with nothing anyway? As Adam's unhappy thoughts persisted, he began to fall into somewhat of a stupor and he unconsciously began to retrace his steps to where he'd seen the old homeless war veteran. When Adam eventually realized where he had gone and lifted himself from his thoughts, he was surprised to find that the old homeless man was gone, but even more surprisingly, that he had left his jacket behind. Adam was about to continue on his way back to his apartment when he noticed something extremely

disturbing: the homeless man's jacket was splattered with blood. Adam was quite alarmed by this. Perhaps the old man simply cut himself, and then just happened to leave and forget his jacket, Adam reasoned, but he knew that this was naïve and improbable. A soft squeaking sound made Adam jump. When he looked up, he came face to face with a gigantic rat that bore an uncanny resemblance to the one that had so startled him on his way to the store. He screamed, much like he had done on his first encounter with the rat. Adam prepared to run again, but this time the rat did not bolt after him, rather it simply sat, maybe ten feet away from him, and stared.

It is said that when one stares into the abyss, the abyss also stares into one's self, however the rat received no such reciprocation from Adam. In Adam's eyes there was a vacancy of sorts, a hopelessness, a lack of respectable response to the creature who was now standing in Adam's path challenging him. So Adam looked at the rat, but did not truly understand. Then, the rat did something that, to Adam, was completely unexpected: the rat stood on its two hind feet, much like Adam was standing, walked towards Adam, opened its mouth, and it spoke.

The rat's voice cut through Adam's soul, separating him from all that he ever was and all that he would ever become. It was not that Adam did not believe that what he had seen with his own eyes, that the rat could speak, was true. It was not even that the rat terrified Adam, but rather that Adam could not comprehend that the rat could do such a thing and that he could not reconcile that the world would make this so. If Adam had been in the mental state to process thoughts and emotions, he might have found his reaction ironic; he had wished for something more to life, for a reason to be intrigued in the world, but now that one presented itself, he was shocked out of the very reality with which he had surrounded himself. Adam had always assumed that the world in which he lived was governed by certain rules, and now that one of his perceived rules had been broken, he lost his grip on reality, and through connection, on his place in the shape of the universe as a whole. With no reality to continue to bind them, the molecules that made up Adam's body began to loose their tethers. Adam screamed again, this time not so much in response to the

rat, but in response to what the rat signified. The universe had shown its true face to Adam, and this was his reply. Adam toppled backwards, and fell off the edge of the world.