

Sanctuary of the Mind

by

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This is a completely original work by Michael Southard and has never been previously published.

SANCTUARY OF THE MIND

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AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Please allow me to apologize for the formatting of this book. The first problem is that no matter how many times I tried, Microsoft Word simply refused to number and head the pages the way I wanted them. The second is that Lulu suggests 1½ spacing, which is irregular. When I tried to format it single-spaced, the Lulu software could not convert it, so I'm stuck with it as is. This is one reason—besides pricing—that I am not publishing this book in paperback form at this time.

For Will, who said, "Do it yourself."

1

Out of the Blue

In times past I have sought freedom from the surreal delirium that imprisons the intellectual passages of my mind and soul. I have dreamed of reaching out to the starry darkness of night and grasping my destiny with a firm grip—believing in the strong, spiritual drive of my humanity. Nevertheless, there are barriers to hinder my progress—perhaps even annihilate every goal before they can be achieved—that arise from within my character. Often I have betrayed myself as I strive to succeed, imagining me as the king of the world, only to be locked away in a dungeon as a treasonous pauper.

What thoughts are these that now pass through my head? They are reflections of my experiences and where they have led me in life—which is to hell. It is becoming a question of maintaining control over my actions, my words, and even these very thoughts. There have been times when I wondered if my thoughts were my own, and more recently this feeling has grown stronger.

Also, the question of faith arises, my faith—in God and life and everything else that matters. It diminishes with each new day that I am forced to agonize through. My prayers seem to have become worthless—without meaning and without hope. "There is therefore now no condemnation" for those who sin and commit atrocities without knowledge of their transgression!

I'm beginning to lose coherence...

Am I not a man? Or am I truly a coward, disguised in the role of a lion that pretends to be a fearless hunter?

Once I sought honor, love, and happiness with the fervor of a mythological hero, only now I hide away in fear of life itself. There is no honor—never has been—in the behavior that has come to embody my daily existence. No honor in theft, substance abuse, or the lie we continually refer to as "love"—the lies we share in relationships, the secrets that destroy us. Nor is love real at all; never has such a farce existed! No one has ever been in love, and when they believed so they did not receive it in return. Happiness also is only a cruel façade, a mask of joy to cover the face of despair.

Sanctuary of the Mind

Why should I allow such prevarication to rule my life? It is true that I want love—or did once! I want happiness! I assume that this is what brought me to this end, my insatiable privation for love that refuses to be fulfilled. By continuing to accept these falsehoods I fool myself. I want to let go ...all of it ...I can feel myself slipping...

Honor, love, and happiness are the bane of my loathsome reality.

Noooooo!

I no longer accept reality! That which is real is a curse on my soul. It is pain: injury to the mind, body, and heart. It is failure: I now know—for I've tried so hard—that success shall always elude me, for my own hands build the walls that block the path, and they will not cease their labor. It is hatred: the fire burns within us all, in some simply because they thrive on the sensation of power it gives them. And it is fear: everything and everyone are unknown—suspicious—including me, and therefore a threat.

I'm losing my grasp, my hold ... losing control ...going to fall...

...down into the well...

...the interminable blackness of the bottomless pit.

My God, I'm so scared! I have become a slave to fear. The chains that bind me are of my own avarice and lust, my own horror. Finally, I'm letting go ...breaking down...

...out of the blue...

...breaking down...

2

Honor

This was the content of Leslie Perk's brooding. Leslie was an intelligent young man, in the literary sense, being mostly self-taught by a plethora of intense reading during his preadolescence—and a few years beyond. The problem was that just being smart was not enough to make it.

He had smoked his first joint when he was nine years old, and before he knew it he was a semi-violent, self-centered, drug-addict asshole. From there his life degenerated; he lost his motivation in middle school, and even his zest for reading tapered before he was nineteen.

Small wonder he felt so depressed.

It wasn't too bad, at least not in the drug addict sense—which, of course, was almost nothing as far as Perk was concerned. He lived in a low-rent apartment just outside the Baltimore City line and—miracle that it was—he always had his rent paid on time. Only that was because he would lie, cheat, steal, and whatever else he had to do to finance his lifestyle. Sure ... the pad was cheap, with a little paint flaking on the walls and a few bugs—okay, maybe an easy thousand, which was nothing a morning roach bomb wouldn't handle—but it was furnished nicely. An expensive emerald green carpet stretched from wall to wall, and he had a recliner that was covered in fur—dyed the same color as the carpet and sofa. In front of the sofa sat a polished oak coffee table and his entertainment center faced it from the far wall. This included a thirty inch high definition TV connected to all-around-sound, a stereo with a ten disc CD changer, two large speakers that stood as high as Leslie's shoulders and two smaller ones that hung from the wall behind the sofa.

Below the television was his pride and joy, however outdated they might be in the next few years—a collection of compact discs. He owned a copy of every Black Sabbath and Pink Floyd CD in circulation, not to mention countless other hard rock works from Jimmy Hendrix to Iron Maiden—all of which he'd brag about at every opportunity.

He had a cat somewhere too, although he hadn't been able to find it for a few days. It must have slipped out for some nooky and decided it had too much fun to come home. Of course, under Leslie's normal states of either euphoria or withdrawal, he had forgotten its name.

His car, a red '95 Corvette, was what kept *him* getting laid on occasion. Usually it wasn't necessary to look for prospects, because he had a girlfriend, but it was the car that had initially attracted her to him. Jackie adored it—and lately Perk began to think more so than him.

Money, food, and luxuries did not concern him much, since he believed he had them covered. There were *other* things that tended to depress him.

Social stresses like Jackie—once too often she had proven to be an unadulterated shrew—and his work were the worst, under normal circumstances. Buying and possessing drugs didn't help, but the activity that he called his "job" was much riskier. Leslie often stole appliances and other products from department stores and passed them off to a "fence"—a person who buys stolen goods to resell them.

Lately, however, he had experienced anomalies complicating things further. Something seemed wrong in his *head*, and it wasn't just when he used drugs. It occurred more when he was sober and intoxicants helped him to ignore it better.

A few weeks ago, Leslie had recognized a sort of "buzz" in the back of his mind, which then gradually moved from the back to the front. Soon it had become *audible*, a clear sound that emanated just outside of his ears, resembling low, unreadable voices of people—like a "buzz" of conversation. No more intense than that so far, but it persisted all the time now when he wasn't high.

And there were still more disturbing events. He had at times formed bizarre thoughts that were either nonsensical or just plain impossible, and he occasionally gave them serious consideration! Leslie had difficulty with every attempt to suppress them.

Then there was the "blank out" incident—as he called it—last Friday, when he felt he had retreated deep within his mind. His body had continued to function while he watched, only he did not feel he was initiating or controlling his actions in any way.

This was what bothered Leslie most of all.

Hey, he thought, *that's okay*. He had exactly what he needed to make everything as smooth as ever. Such rigmarole could not occupy his attention for long because he numbed his emotions and brain on a daily basis. He mainly did this with LSD, although he would sometimes administer heroine or cocaine intravenously, maybe smoke reefer—but acid was his thing.

He planned to do some right now, in fact.

Perky—the name he preferred—took acid in liquid form. The paper stuff, also known as "blotter," did not contain enough juice to satisfy him; besides, it was cut with too many other chemicals to increase quantities. Pills didn't have a strong enough effect for him either, since he'd been using it for eight years and took it at least once a week. Perk usually made plenty of money boosting to maintain his supply of liquid LSD, which was hard to find if you weren't ready to pay.

This past week he'd binged, hoping to suppress the weird voices in his head. Nothing else seemed to work. His normal dose lasted about one day—maybe one and a half days—but as soon as he came down the voices ambushed him. When that happened, he immediately began to set up another, which he did by drinking plenty of orange juice, taking vitamins, and eating until he felt good enough to take more. This often took an entire day to accomplish, unfortunately.

Timing is of the essence, he thought then, for no apparent reason, *and time is in the hands of space, the space of my bedroom ... alive and kickin' the ass of grandfather white bear!*

"What the hell?" he shouted and shook his head to clear it. *This again?* If it wasn't voices, it was a random inability to have coherent thoughts. *My God, what's happening to me?*

Rather than accept that something might be very wrong, he quickly reached into the coffee table compartment and retrieved a large metal lock box. He placed it on the table, on a dark, square cloth that he'd bought for this purpose—to prevent scratching the wood. Perky opened the box with a key he fished from his pants pocket. Inside were several eyedroppers, some needles, a tourniquet, a dime-sized baggie of white powder, and a jar of murky liquid.

He removed the jar and an eyedropper, then sat them on the table. After opening the container, Perky discarded the lid to one side and siphoned some of its contents into the eyedropper. Then he leaned his

head back and squeezed about half into his right eye. Afterward, he did the same for the left.

The phone rang.

Perky jumped so high off the couch that he nearly lost the eyedropper. On the second ring, he tossed the dispenser into the box and picked up the receiver.

"Perky?"

It was Jackie.

Perky began to sweat as he answered, "Yeah, I'm here."

He thought something was awry. He wasn't sure what it might be, but he felt like Jackie wanted to betray him somehow.

She hates me—I can feel it. Maybe she's going to have someone kill me and grab my money and drugs and stolen merchandise. Or maybe she called to make sure I'm home so she can have the cops bust me with my stash.

Although he knew this did not make sense, perspiration sizzled on his face. Perky was suddenly afraid—paranoid.

(Out of the blue...)

But Jackie?

"You gonna bring some stuff over like you promised?" Her voice was soft but demanding at once.

(Breaking down...)

That was the second thing that had turned him on to Jackie. Perk recalled the day they met nine months ago at the bar where she worked, and his first impression was that she was sweet—because of that voice. In reality, she could nag a man until he contemplated suicide, or scream like a harpy whenever she was so inclined.

The first thing he'd noticed was her tits.

(Breaking down...)

"Well?" Jackie blurted into his ear.

He cleared his throat. The acid was starting to work, which was a good thing. "Uh, yeah. Yeah, I'll bring it over in a little while."

"In a little while? Come on, Perk. I need some *now*. I haven't had any in almost a week, you know."

The drug had at least settled the chaos that tore at his mind, which it replaced with another form of befuddlement. A few minutes ago Jackie's response would have made him nervous. Now it only aggravated him.

"Will you give me a break, woman?" he said. "If you don't mind, I'm just going to stop at the liquor store on the way to get something to drink. And cigarettes. I know you want Schnapps to go along with it, don't you?"

She sighed with what sounded like resignation to Perky. "Yes, you're right. I know I need the cigarettes too."

"Okay. I'll see you then. You keep that bed warm for me, you hear?" It wasn't just his head that felt better.

"Okay, baby. I love you."

He wanted to laugh. Jackie loved his drugs, his car, and maybe the sex, but she didn't care for him much at all.

"Right. Good-bye," he said, and hung up.

Perky had forgotten all about the promise he'd made. The truth was that he didn't have enough coke to get her high and he was out of smack. It was a wonder he hadn't already taken care of that. Not much could be done about it now, except to see the man before he closes shop for the night.

He had started to pack his works and the jar of acid into the box when he somehow pricked his finger and a drop of blood appeared. One of the hypos was uncapped, he noticed after glancing down to see how it could have happened. That was careless, which he seemed to be a lot lately.

Damn, he thought as blood trickled down his finger and dripped onto the coffee table. *I hate that.*

He found the cap, covered the naked needle with it, and put the whole thing away, then closed the lid on the box without locking it. Afterward, he walked into the bathroom, holding up his hand so the blood ran down his arm, and turned on the cold water to rinse. Then he found some gauze pads in the medicine cabinet and pressed one to his finger to stop the bleeding, finally adding peroxide to clean it. He decided to ignore the dirty needle for now.

When he was about to apply a medicated adhesive strip, he stopped and stared at his hand. It throbbed like a malignant tumor as it slowly

turned black and grew purple lumps all over it. He knew it wasn't real, but he could not orient his vision to stick on the bandage. Soon he gave up and let the dressing fall into the wastebasket.

How long had he stared at his hand? Perky wasn't sure. The acid distorted one's perception of time as well as images. This might be a problem, since Jackie waited for him and tended to mutate into the vile witch of Eastern Avenue when he was late. He checked the kitchen clock, which indicated it was five PM, although he had no idea what time he'd gone into the bathroom.

No help there...

Jackie was a fine looking woman and good to him when she wanted to be. It's just that their relationship had strained since that day about two months ago, when Perky had found her in bed with some jerk she'd picked up at the bar. She had brought the guy home because he had drugs. He had given her plenty, so she repaid him in a way they both enjoyed—as Perky saw it.

Perky could not trust her anymore after that, although until then he had thought he loved her. Okay ... so he was first attracted to her breasts, which were sized thirty-eight, and then it was her voice. He thought that listening to her soft tones was divine. After that it was her wild blue eyes, which had sparkled in the dim light of the bar. The next thing he knew his hands had stroked the long, soft strands of her fiery red hair, and they had smooched heavily right there on the stools. The barmaid had to tell them to stop because it distracted the patrons.

From there they had experienced a weekend of inebriating chemicals, sex, more sex, and ... more sex. It ended only when he ran out of money and figured he needed some work. She had been so damn insatiable that she refused to let him dress, let alone leave—although he suspected her appetite had increased with the cocaine. They started to go out to places after that, like some nightclubs downtown, big parties and such, even dinner at a nice restaurant once—before they had engaged in a night of serious, drug-induced lovemaking.

The whole relationship was a huge riot.

And a farce. He had fooled himself about his love for Jackie and soon realized that there was no way a coke whore like her could ever love him...

Indeed.

His faith in her was irreclaimable, just as his faith in a Creator had faded over the years until it disappeared for good. At least the copulation they shared was worth continuing. If love wasn't true then there was only one reason to have a relationship.

Perky sat in the recliner and picked up the phone to dial Rick Hammond's number. Rick was his dealer and a strict businessman. He smoked pot but never messed with anything else—not even alcohol.

This was not the case with Perky, who indulged in just about anything given the chance. Coke and heroin he usually did with Jackie because that was her thing, but he declined if he was dosed at the time.

Rick answered after two rings. "Hello?" His voice had a powerful bass quality. He looked as powerful physically as he sounded. Besides being a drug dealer, he'd been a body builder for six years.

"Rick, it's Perky. See you in half an hour?"

"Sure, man. I'll be here until eight."

"Thanks, Rick. See ya."

He replaced the receiver in the cradle and relaxed for a second, thinking about how much cash he had. Before he went anywhere else, he'd have to stop for gas.

He turned his attention to the television then and began to stare at the screen, and fell prey to perceptual distortion. It was on, which was strange because he did not recall watching it earlier, but he did not see what was actually there. Instead he saw a road in the desert, where *he* traveled alone. Understanding that this was just one in a string of hallucinations he would have throughout the night, Perky decided to look away and call for his cat.

Do I really have a cat? Why can't I remember its name?

Then something new on the screen caught his notice. His eyes shot back to the TV in a paranoid frenzy and he was shocked to see them gawking back at him. Perky looked closer to be sure...

Yes! They *were* his eyes, surrounded by his forehead, cheeks, and the bridge of his nose.

His anxiety rose with a painful thrust, sweat beaded on his face, and his hands shook. For a minute he thought he might cry, or regurgitate, but before he could do either a mysterious psychic ball invaded the sanctuary of his mind and exploded into words.

-LOOK AT YOURSELF.-

The "thought bomb" left Perky disoriented. The words were in his head, however, and not audible like the others that had plagued him without self-medication.

When Perky did not respond, another bomb struck.

-LOOK AT YOURSELF.-

What?

-LOOK AT YOURSELF.-

I don't understand.

-LOOK AT YOURSELF, DAMMIT!-

Oh.

When he complied, his trepidation magnified a thousand times. The screen now showed his body splattered across the highway in a mass of blood, flesh, and bone, with a tractor-trailer roaring away toward the horizon.

"MOTHAFUCKERRRRRR!"

Perky vaulted out of his seat, knocked down the lamp beside it, and kicked over his precious coffee table. Then he charged for the offending television, stumbling over the table in the process. He grabbed the set with both arms, lifted and tossed it across the room. As he watched, the projectile seemed to slow its motion and magically floated from his arms toward the wall beyond, leaving a radiant trail of rainbow colors in its wake. After what felt like hours, it crashed into the wall over the couch and erupted into a brilliant array of sparks. Shards of glass and plastic splintered out in all directions.

He felt much better then.

~*~

Quite some time must have passed. There was no way to ascertain how much, but Perky guessed about two hours—which meant he was in trouble. He had no inkling what he could have done in all that time. Whatever it was, he could not have sat still with all that acid in his veins. He sensed the cool, wind-like "rush" that flowed from his head to his feet and back, and it was more intense now than earlier. How he had ended up in his recliner, he would never know.

Perky just noticed a half-empty beer can on the floor before he could knock it over. That led him to think that it would be a welcome relief right about now, so he picked it up and consumed it in one massive swig. It was still cold—refreshing.

Maybe it hasn't been such a long time after all, he thought.

When he finished, he remembered that he didn't have any beer before fading out. He must have gone out then.

It had been a while, and Jackie still waited for him.

("There is therefore now no condemnation" for those who sin and commit atrocities without knowledge of their transgression!)

Man, I hope I got everything else, too, he groaned. If he had Jackie's stuff, she could wait a while longer. She won't die right away without it. He knew she had exaggerated about how long it had been since her last fix.

He noticed that he had picked up the coffee table and removed the television from the sofa. There were still fragments of it everywhere but he had otherwise straightened the place. His box sat on the table as well, and it was locked. Its contents must have been strewn across the floor during his tirade, so he hoped that nothing was broken—especially his jar.

Perky unlocked the box and checked inside to be sure. All was intact, and everything he'd promised Jackie was there too. He locked it again, crushed the empty beer can, and decided to get another drink.

About halfway to the kitchen, something thick and wet splashed on his forehead. The substance felt sticky on his fingers when he wiped it away.

Suddenly, the voices burst through the wall of self-medication that normally subdued them. This time they were clear, horrifying, degrading, and full of accusations.

-You animal! It's bers ...and it's on your hands forever!-

-He doesn't care. He craves it. You want it, don't you, Perky?-

Perky knew better than to inspect his hand now, with his vision distorted from LSD, so he stepped back and looked up instead—and tried to ignore the voices at the same time. A dark red blotch had formed on the ceiling and began to spread away from its origin as tiny droplets escaped it.

-You want it! Admit it, you pedophile!-

Drip ... drip ... drip...

It was blood; he *knew* it was.

Drip ... drip ... drip...

-Your mother's a pedophile, your father's a pedophile, and so the hell are you!-

The dribble persisted for close to half an hour. Perky did not move at all during that time. He stood as rigid as a department store mannequin as he studied the oddity. When it stopped, the bubbling stain appeared frozen in limbo for a moment. Then it shimmered like a reflection in a pool of water and started to peel away from the ceiling. It formed a huge glob that hung by a strand, like a spherical light, and then pulled away from the drywall with an eerie popping sound.

-We know you want it, Perky. Why don't you go get it?-

-He will, just wait and see. Perverts can't help themselves. It turns 'em on!-

Perky was ready to scream at the voices, wishing above all that they would stop and leave him alone, but the vision captured eighty-five percent of his attention. First the sensation of stickiness from the blood—a tactile hallucination, which he'd read about in a psychopharmacology book—and now an actual *vision*. He wasn't sure it was possible.

It was true that people could have "hallucinations" when tripping; however, they were normally visual distortions of objects that were real, such as the perception of a wall breathing—or maybe eyes staring at you from the television. He had read that these distortions were in fact classified as "illusions." Hallucinations appeared out of nowhere and had no relation to their surroundings.

This experience could not be an effect of the drug ... could it?

Maybe...

The crimson globe floated to the floor in slow motion, and as it settled it formed into a recognizable shape. First the legs, then the hips and waist, followed by the rest of a human body—one part after another, ending with the head. When the metamorphosis was complete, Perky found himself face to face with a man who could be his twin.

This can't be happening!

-It is happening, jerk! And it's all real.-

The voices laughed at him now and injected more contemptuous allegations about Perky and his closest relatives—and about Jackie, whom they called a whore.

He continued to stare at the improbable sight with his mouth open, as if in a hypnotic trance.

Then it spoke.

"Don't just stand there looking like a fool," said the mirror image. "Why don't you offer me a beer?"

"A ... beer," Perky replied. He not only saw it; he *heard* it! So many hallucinations—tactile, visual, and auditory—were becoming difficult to follow—let alone handle.

This ... is not ... happening. It can't be!

That book he'd read—he could not recall the title or the author's name—had explained that these experiences were symptoms of psychosis, commonly associated with *schizophrenia*.

Perky stopped gawking then and demanded, "Who are you?"

"Aw, come on," said the apparition as it patted the man's shoulder, "don't you recognize me, Leslie?"

Perky growled. "Don't call me that. Who are you?"

The "man" shook his head, as if amazed by the ignorance displayed by his twin. "I'm *you*, dumbass. Call me whatever you want. Now where's that beer?"

"I might be talking to you, but you're not real. How can you hold a beer if you don't exist?"

"Good question. Bring me the beer and I'll tell you."

This wasn't going very well, Perky decided. He crossed his arms in front of his chest and said, "You're nuts."

"No, *you're* nuts. You gonna get me a beer or not?"

Although he was just as alarmed as he was irritated, Perky growled again and went into the kitchen. He returned a moment later with two beers and set one on the coffee table before settling into the recliner; he did not dare hand it to his guest, who now sat on the couch in a spot that was clear of debris.

The man grabbed the can, popped the lid, and raised it to his mouth.

"I'm hallucinating all of this," said Perky.

"Whatever you say, hotshot. What if I spilled this on your lap?"

"Nothing you do can make me believe in you."

The man shrugged, splattered malted liquor on Perky's pants, and laughed.

Perky bounced out of his seat and cursed. "What the hell, man! You didn't have to actually *do* it!"

The dampness in his lap seemed real enough as he investigated it. It still wasn't enough to convince him, but for some reason he began to reevaluate the situation anyway.

"I'll be right back," he told his twin, and then retreated to his bedroom for a change of clothes. By the time he finished, his mind was too clouded to know what was real and what wasn't.

The man remained seated on the couch, grinning like an insane clown.

Perky noticed a small wet spot on the fur that covered his chair and suppressed an urge to cry. He wasn't sure if the feeling arose because of the ruination of the fur or the living nightmare before him. Since he'd trashed half his stuff earlier, he suspected the latter assumption was closer to the truth.

The possibility that all of this was real was more terrifying than being crazy.

-Damn pedophile. You know I let my dog screw your mother after my friends and I sodomized her.-

"SHUT THE HELL UP, DAMN YOU!"

"It's no use, Perky," said the man. "They won't stop. They're always going to be with you now, as will I. You see, they're my friends—and yours, whether you know it or not. In fact, they're your *only* friends."

"Some friends. The way they talk, you'd think they hated me. Where are they?"

"Not here. You're hearing them from a long distance. Accept it and get on with your life."

"If you're real then tell me who you are, where you came from, and why you're here."

Perky thought he saw a malevolent gleam in his twin's eye.

The man said, "Okay. You know I can't be you, right? Or you'd be split. I *am* your doppelganger—your evil twin. Or maybe I'm the good one, since you've been pretty rotten on more than one occasion, haven't you?"

Both angry and afraid, Perky blurted, "My ... doppelganger? It was you, wasn't it? All those times I wondered if someone else had planted thoughts in my head—that was you. And the 'blank out' thing was also you, wasn't it? You're stealing my thoughts and replacing them with yours ... or just operating my body outright. You—you're *controlling* me!"

The man laughed. "Perky, I'm your friend. Anything I do is to help you. I'm really not trying to hurt you—"

At that moment the phone rang.

"Wait a sec," said Perk, then he answered the phone.

It was Jackie, of course.

"*Perky!* What the hell have you been doing? It's almost nine o'clock. I need my fix! Are you deliberately leaving me hanging?"

I'm gonna deliberately hang you by a rope, he thought. Perky was not at all prepared to deal with Jackie's tantrums right now.

The doppelganger whispered in his ear, "That's it, Perk. That's the way to be."

"Uh, sorry, babe," said Perky. "I got it. I'll be right over."

Jackie said, "Yeah, well ... good. I'm waiting. But don't you expect us to do anything now. You wasted too much time and I'm not in the mood anymore."

Perky imagined that he tightened the noose around Jackie's throat.

"Yes, that's right," whispered the twin, "that's exactly what she needs, whorin' around on you like she does—plus yanking your chain. She's the one who wants to control you, Perk. She's manipulating you to get what she wants."

"To hell with that!" Perky said to Jackie. "Who cares? I just want to party tonight anyway."

-Go ahead, Perk. Hang her!-

"Why?" Jackie sounded suspicious then. "You been doin' someone else? 'Cause if you have—"

"You got some nerve pullin' this crap, woman. I *planned* on having a good time tonight—with *you*. I ain't messin' around with nobody else!"

There was a moment of silence on the other end after that, and the doppelganger took advantage of it.

"She hates you. You know that, don't you? I happen to know she paid someone to break into your apartment sometime this week—maybe tonight. She wants everything. She agreed to get you over her place but told the guy to kill you if you happen to be here."

At last, Jackie said, "Okay. We'll talk about it when you get here. But please get here soon. I just smoked my last cigarette an hour ago. Please?"

-She's lying. She doesn't want to talk. She wants to take your drugs, drink your booze, and kick you out. Then she'll have someone else come over to satisfy those other needs.-

Perky began to believe what his twin and the voices said—and more. While he listened to everything, a thought formed in his mind that Jackie was not human. She was something else altogether, a demonic creature—a succubus—sent to extract his soul through sex. He believed that *she* would kill him after she drained his essence, that she would all at once reveal her monstrous claws and rows of razor sharp, knife length teeth to rip out his throat. In fact, this seemed more plausible than the doppelganger's accusation.

"All right," he said, "see you soon, Jackie." Then he hung up the phone.

He was convinced that it was true. He started to understand that the entities that spoke to him had created the doppelganger, to be his only friend in a hostile world. The voices were telepathic aliens, agents of some deity provided to protect the men of Earth from this invasion of female demons.

All women had chosen of their own wills to become succubae so they could dominate the world and make eternal slaves of men.

The doppelganger smiled. "You have a knack for discovering the truth, Perky. That is exactly what's happening."

Perky nodded to signal his understanding, and then addressed the twin in a positive manner for first time. "Yeah," he said, trembling. "I thought so. Are you going to protect me?"

"We'll give you the courage and the means to protect yourself, but we'll be with you in case you need us. The demon bitches will not harm you—especially Jackie."

Perky sighed, closed his eyes, and tried to compose himself. Soon the tremors subsided, although he still felt a bit edgy.

He opened his eyes and looked at the doppelganger. "By the way, since you said to call you anything I want, I think I'll call you John. I always liked that name. Do you have any idea what it's like to go through life with a name like *Leslie*?"

John sipped his beer and said, "You tell me."

"Forget it. Let's just say that my mother didn't think I needed a middle name—which is so like her. So how did you get here anyway?"

"You saw. I came through the ceiling. You don't have anything besides beer, do you?"

Perky nodded, reached into his pocket for the key, and then unlocked the box on the table. He set up an eyedropper with a dose of LSD and placed it on the table in front of his twin—still wary about handing him something. Afterward, he tried to relax and hoped the chair would help to soothe his nerves.

John picked up the dropper and applied half its contents to each eye. "Ah, that's better. So what do you do for a living?"

Perky raised an eyebrow at this question. "Why do you ask? You can read my mind, remember?"

"Humor me."

"All right. By the way, the voices have let up a bit. Are they still around?"

"Yes, they're here. They'll never leave you; they're just leaving all the talk to me right now."

"Oh ... okay. Anyway, I boost. You know, steal stuff from department stores and such and sell it to a fence."

John looked amused. "Why do you do that?"

"Well, there's good money in it, but I can't get a real job if I wanted. No skills, no college—you know how it is."

"Sure, I know. No experience, either."

"Huh?"

"Come on, Perk. Don't play dumb. You've ruined your life and you know it—"

"Hey, what is this crap? I don't need you to lecture me about my life. I know it's my own fault. It tears me up knowing I had the brains to make it but never used them."

"Oh, you've got the brains all right, but you lack motivation. And you *know* why. Past history, bud: You started using drugs when you were nine and by the time you were fourteen you were mainlining coke. I'll never understand how you broke that habit. Or did you? That's right, you still do it sometimes, with Jackie. You broke into people's houses at eleven, stole cars at twelve, and sold dope to second graders before you were old enough to drive—whew, you were bad! You even shot a classmate in ninth grade for burnin' you, before you quit school. Does that tell you why you can't get a job? You don't know any other way."

Perky could no longer contain his hostility. "Shut the fuck up! I don't want to talk about my pissy life anymore. I'm gonna drop some more acid, head over to Jackie's, and forget all about it. Got it?"

All at once, evil laughter assailed him and the voices of superior beings—which claimed to be his protectors—screamed deprecation into his ears.

"Suit yourself," said John the doppelganger. "You're just trying to avoid a nervous breakdown that's been building up over the past few weeks—or at least be sky high when you do have it. Want to know who I really am, Perk? The truth?"

Perky looked at the figure on the couch. A cloud of paranoid confusion swam through his head and added spice to these newly formed and very bizarre delusions.

John stood and approached his flesh-and-blood twin. He bent down so that he was eye level with Perky and said, "I'm your nervous breakdown. I've been waiting for you, and you're going to have me ... *whether you like it or not!*"

Then he melted into a dripping, oozing ball of blood that swelled and contracted as if it breathed. Leslie Perk trembled as he watched the horrifying vision manifest before him. For a moment, it hung suspended in air, each second amplifying his dread, then it shot straight into Perky's mind like a blazing, crimson bullet.

(BOOM!)

3

Happiness

Perky fell from the chair to his knees and emitted a terrifying scream that seemed to burst his lungs. He touched his head to the floor as tears swelled in his eyes. He pounded his fists on the carpet. Anger, fear, and pain undulated throughout his psyche. Although paranoid, he began to feel powerful—indestructible.

Yet, he was also alone.

Was there a chance to salvage the love he craved, to build something good on what he had with Jackie? Without a doubt, he wanted to, but he no longer believed it was possible. He could not believe in *love* anymore.

But there had to be a way; he wanted so much to give it another opportunity to work.

(Am I not a man?)

The thought that Jackie and *all* women were succubae had not gone away and he could not fathom how to sort out everything that had happened tonight.

Okay, what are the main problems in my screwed up life? One: my name. Why the hell did my mother have to name me Leslie? Two: my stupidity. I've messed up so much I oughta kill myself. Three: my love life. Let's face it; my

relationship with Jackie is a total cesspool. She uses me for my money, and when I don't have any she fucks around. With ducks. Ducks that eat each other after playing basketball with their neighboring squirrels. I ride the squirrels to get to the top of the rocks scattered around the mountain range, and watch the bears as they spread their beautiful wings to fly. And now aliens talk to me, saying they're here to protect all men from the succubae—whoa! Stop for a sec!

-What's the matter, Perk? Can't think straight?-

Ducks, squirrels, and flying bears? Obviously he could not think straight. The tears came faster and harder now and his sanity had slipped away for good.

Gone. Sianora.

Hell, I don't care. It's easier just to let myself go crazy...

(Am I not a man?)

Ducks, squirrels, and flying bears. Perky was sure that he was dumber than the animals.

Speaking of animals ... where'd that damn cat go? I know it's around here somewhere.

He suddenly wanted revenge on animals just because he had irrational thoughts about them. Perky shot off the floor like a pouncing spider and began a ruthless search of his apartment. Fire burned his soul and made him seethe in undiluted malice.

"Here, pussy pussy. Come to Papa. I think I'll have you over for breakfast this—"

A disturbing thought occurred to Perky then. What cat? When had he ever had one? If he had, why wasn't there a litter box in the apartment?

It must have been one of his delusions that had crept into his mind and took root. That would explain why he hadn't seen it for a while, and why he could not remember its name.

But if so, then wasn't everything else a delusion too?

Perky was confused, and had no idea what to believe, and he really felt like killing something—anything at all.

The telephone started to blare then, and snapped Perky from his reverie. He knew who it was, so he retrieved the drugs and cigarettes he'd bought for her, as well as the beer from the fridge, and left.

~*~

(AM I NOT A MAN?)

As he drove, Perky's deliberation became more unmanageable and often less coherent. He saw a police car in an otherwise empty shopping center parking lot and he could not help thinking it was there to watch him.

They know I've got drugs, Perky thought. They know I'm on drugs. Jackie must have told them.

The car's lights came on then, its engine revved, and he was sure it would follow him. He barely resisted the urge to run.

-You're a pedophile and they want you off the streets to protect the neighborhood children!-

Even after he drove more than six blocks he still imagined that the patrol car followed him. Once he came close to ramming a telephone pole because he looked over his shoulder countless times.

There was a young couple at a bus stop and the man pointed at Perky's car. Regardless of their true intentions, whatever they might be, in Perky's mind they had singled him out as a bad person. He also saw a murderous red gleam in the woman's eyes.

She knows. She can tell that I know what she is.

-Yes, Perky. She's a succubus, and must die along with all the rest. Even now she plans to suck her boyfriend's soul through his nose when they get it on tonight.-

-Yeah, after doing something else!-

-Speaking of that, Perk, your mother's really good at it. You're father wasn't too bad, either.-

"SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP!"

(AM I NOT A MAN?)

On a different corner he noticed a small group of denim-clad men engaged in conversation. Perky knew one of them was the man Jackie had hired to rob him; in fact, he was positive that they all planned to do the job together, then beat the crap out of him when he came home.

(Am I not a man...? Or am I really ...a god?)

It was about ten o'clock when at last he arrived at Jackie's house. No one noticed him, or else they didn't care, because he was there most days out of the week.

As he approached the side door he stopped in front of the steps, afraid and not sure if he should go in or not. If the premonitions were true, then he should run as far as his aerodynamic car and a tank of gas would take him. True or not, it might not be wise to enter her home while so many uncontrollable emotions that ranged from depression to fear to rage seized his heart and mind.

This choice he could not make for himself.

It turned out that he didn't have to, because as he stood there—half in a trance—Jackie opened the door and glowered at him.

She said, "It's about time."

He looked at her without answering, the bottle of Schnapps slipping from his hand—which he caught before it hit the pavement.

(I am no man ... I am a god.)

The voices screamed at him—challenged him. Adrenaline rushed through his spine, pounded his ears and made him shake again. The challenge ignited every cell in his body.

(I am a god.)

Screaming at him ... daring him...

She was beautiful, red hair ragged and unkempt from lack of care, and blue eyes like ice that glittered in starlight. In Perky's eyes, this woman shined.

(Not a man...)

He wanted to remember her the way she was before she had cheated on him. He wanted to recall the sweetness of her voice before it had turned nasty, and the shape of her body before the cocaine had taken it. And, since he felt a swelling sensation in his pants then, he just *wanted* her.

-She'll kill you.-

-She'll suck your soul through your nose.-

-She'll squeeze your neck until blood squirts from your ears!-

Jackie asked, "Perk, are you all right?"

Perky shook his head and took a deep breath. "Yeah, I'm okay."

Jackie studied him for a moment before she replied, "Well, come on! I'm dying for a cigarette. A cigarette I've waited hours for, as if you didn't know."

Without speaking, Perky passed into the single story house and placed the Schnapps on the kitchen table. Then he pulled a beer from the six pack tucked under his right arm and put the rest in the refrigerator. He sat down across from Jackie and reached into his coat pocket for a pack of smokes, which he tossed on the table.

(No, not a man...)

-Sicko, pervert. You know you want it, so take it.-

Perky thought, *These guys are my friends?*

Jackie snatched the cigarettes, packed and opened them. With a long, deep sigh, she lit one. Her eyes closed as she inhaled the first drag.

"You brought the stuff, didn't you?" she said after taking a few puffs.

At first Perky ignored her while he guzzled his beer.

"Did you hear me, Perk?"

"It's in my pocket."

He fished out two twenty-five dollar bags and gave them to her, hoping they would keep her quiet for a while.

When Jackie left the room in search of a clean hypodermic, Perky looked up from his beer. He was disgusted by the state of the kitchen but not surprised. As usual, dirty pots and pans—some still with uneaten food—littered the stove. There was grease and spaghetti sauce smeared over and dripping from the smooth, white surface, and a mass of scavengers gathered provender from the mess. Dishes also filled the sink—caked with decayed but revitalized corpses of forgotten meals—and a faint but nauseating stench emanated from there. He noticed too that the trash overflowed and thought Jackie must not have taken it out in more than a week.

The more that woman banged the dope, the more she deteriorated.

Jackie returned then with her works and started to set up everything. She looked at him and smiled as she prepped her first dose.

What he saw in that instant terrified him. It was not his girlfriend who leered at him with menace in her eyes but the monster he had envisioned earlier when he talked to the doppelganger. Her head was

massive, sleek, and gray, with bulging red eyes that dripped a luminous fluid. Long, razor-sharp teeth extruded like scimitars from her blood dribbling mouth.

That was not a smile on her face. It was an evil grin that grew wider as she thanked him for the drugs and told him that she loved him.

Demoness. *Succubus*. Perky trembled with fear again.

"Perky, are you all right?" said Jackie. "What's wrong with you tonight? Did you drop too much acid or something?"

"No, no . . ." he said, half in a trance, and he still shivered like a naked man lost in the Himalayas. "No, no . . ."

(*No, I am not a man...*)

Although she seemed far away and dream-like, Jackie sounded scared as well when she spoke again.

"Perky, what the hell is wrong with you?" She stood like a flash of lightning and planted her hands on the table. "You son of a bitch, don't be freakin' out on me!"

Then it felt like his eyes rolled into the back of his head.

(... *I AM A GOD!*)

~*~

I am no longer a man—if I ever was. I am now a wild beast that has emerged from the jungle to roam the city as I stalk feminine prey. A living tower of corruption and desire is what I am, an awesome tool of destruction. To satisfy my thirst I will do anything...

(Love is a lie...)

I plot a rendezvous that few others even dream possible in their mindless goals. It will be a confrontation with the succubus who would kill or enslave me, yet she knows not the true identity of her victim.

(Reality is pain...)

In these hands, with this magic, I can do anything I wish and no one can prevent it. No one can alter my destiny. The voices that are my master's disciples have told me so. I am in command of all things in my environment, because my master Jupiter—the ruler of the universe—has ordained me as a minor deity . . .

(... pain, failure, hatred...)

... a god of malevolent force, a god of destruction...

(... pain, failure, hatred, and FEAR!)

...and a god of MURDER!

(The Reality of Love is the Pain of Lies...)

~*~

Hallucination became Leslie Perk's world. At first he was frightened, until the voices exerted their psychopathic squeeze on his brain. His initial reaction was to jump from his seat and toss it between him and the drooling, bloodthirsty monster. Then he reached for a dirty kitchen knife that lay unattended on the kitchen counter.

-Kill her! Kill the demoness before she kills you!-

"Stay away from me," Perky warned Jackie with a pathetic whine. "Please, stay away from me!"

He did not expect her to back away toward the refrigerator and knock the wall phone off the hook, which gave him pause but only for a second.

"Oh, God, Perky," she whispered, "what's happening to you?"

Perky would not, *could* not, answer her. He did not even hear her. He heard only the disciples of Jupiter as they screamed obscenities and saw only the terrifying monster with murderous eyes that loomed before him.

All at once the confusion, pain, and psychosis seized him. Confidence to overcome the beast inflamed his soul. He was a god, after all, the god of Murder, and the beast was his to command.

Perky straightened to his full height and cried, "I'm not afraid of you anymore, demoness!"

The succubus cowered. She was scared! Now encouraged, he moved forward. He watched as the monster transformed again and her beastly countenance melted away to reveal a small, drug-beaten woman whose blue eyes flooded with tears.

-She wants you to feel sorry for her, let down your guard, and then she'll pounce.-

I know, he thought. *I know.*

-Don't let her fool you, Perky!-

-Come on, Perk! You're a god. Don't let this bitch get over on you. Kill her!-

Agitated beyond his ability to cope, Perky roared so loud that people across the street probably heard it.

"ALL RIGHT, YOU SONS O' BITCHES! *Damn* you. Can't you shut up for a lousy minute?"

Jackie whimpered, "Wh-who are you t-talking to, Perk? P-please stop this ... p-please."

Adrenaline empowered him at the sound of her fear. He would not stop with her pleas ... not at all. The hell would endure forever. It was his hell, his prison of fire, and he would bring her down with him to torture her for eternity.

He raised the knife high over his head and lunged. She was faster than he expected, because she darted away before he could catch her. This resulted in him slamming face first into the refrigerator and the door handle pounding into his ribs. He also stabbed himself in the thigh after the knife glanced off the door.

Perky screamed like a baby.

~*~

When Jackie dove through the passageway into the living room, she tripped over the phone, which buzzed insistently for someone to hang it up. She hit the floor hard and several bones snapped in her left wrist. The injury seemed to swell right away. Now she was positive she would die.

Jackie tried to crawl away before her deranged boyfriend came after her again.

She risked a glance over her shoulder to see how he fared. It seemed that his injury wasn't serious, although it bled a lot. Not only that, he was so zapped out on LSD that he probably did not feel the pain at all.

Perky looked up then.

"Where ya goin', baby?" he said with a grin that reflected the rage in his eyes.

Sobbing, Jackie continued to squirm in a desperate effort to escape, and in the process acquired rug burns on her arms. It was too bad that she never got that shot of coke. That might have given her the boost she needed to stand and run—broken wrist or not. If she could just get to the bedroom, to the gun in her nightstand, then she might stop him.

Of course, that wasn't to be, at least not before Perky had a chance to make her bleed a little. He stopped fussing over his wound, shook blood off his hand, and returned all of his attention to Jackie. From his position against the fridge, he dove into the living room and landed on top of her.

Jackie saw all of this from the corner of her eye. She moaned when his hand latched onto her shoulder. Then the blade slashed into the tender meat of her right triceps and she let loose a deafening howl laced with the agony of her soul.

Oh, God, why? she thought. *Why is this happening?* She could not believe that her boyfriend had flipped and now wanted to kill her. *How the hell could this be happening?*

Her blood stained the carpet. Hot and sticky on her skin, it reminded her of her mortality. She was not indestructible after all. She would not live forever. In fact, she would die any minute now, when Mister Psyched Out on LSD finished with her.

Then something unexpected occurred.

~*~

Darla, Jackie's next door neighbor, knocked on the door.

Unlike Jackie, Darla did not live alone. She was married but her husband worked the night shift as a security guard for a local mall. Darla could not sleep on those nights without her husband. Often she tossed about in bed, as restless as a wild horse in heat. It was the same tonight, and all the noise that came from Jackie's house annoyed her.

She knew something was wrong, but she could not be sure how wrong. Jackie's junkie boyfriend might have beaten her and Darla would not stand for that. The idea would have made sense if it weren't for the intuition that tickled her nerves. After she called the police—she was at least smart enough to do *that*—she headed over Jackie's to see if she could do anything to help, like talking the macho man into putting down his fists.

Fat chance.

Darla noticed that the door was open so she rapped on the screen. The kitchen light was on and all the other lights were out—except the bedroom, which she had seen from her window. There was movement in the living room but she could not get a clear picture. It looked like Perky might have Jackie pinned to the floor, which could mean anything.

"Then she heard the pig shout from the darkness, "What the hell do you want?"

"Is everything all right?" she called through the screen. "I thought I heard noise."

"Ain't you ever heard a little noise before?"

Darla stood her ground, refusing to let him intimidate her. "But I heard a scream. It sounded like Jackie."

The shadows shuffled a bit and she heard whispers. A moment later Perky said, "Everything's okay here, Darla. Don't worry about us."

"I want to hear that from Jackie. Jackie, are you all right?"

No more than a whimper arose from Jackie's throat. Darla wasn't sure if she had heard it or not.

"Jackie?"

There were more whispers, then Jackie yelled.

"NO! HELP ME, DARLA! HE'S—"

Darla saw a shadowy arm pull back and swing forward then, cutting off whatever Jackie had tried to say. Now she *knew* something was wrong. She opened the screen door and ventured inside. As she drew closer the details of the event became clear. Perky sat on Jackie's back and, down by his knee, was a knife with a dark wet stain.

Is that blood? Darla wondered.

"Oh my God," she said when she realized that it was. "*Oh my God!*"

Perky said, "Shit."

He jumped to his feet and whirled to face Darla, the knife held high over his head.

She turned and stumbled over the phone into the screen door. For a moment it seemed she might get away, but she ended up fumbling with the handle. It was jammed and in her fear she tried to bust through.

Just as the door burst open into the night air, Perky grabbed her collar and yanked her back. Then Darla heard the knife hiss above her ear as it came crashing down...

... and she felt the sting of cold steel tear into her back, felt the blood ooze out of her body and stick to her shirt. Her scream was loud enough to wake everyone on the street, she was sure.

The police, she thought. I called them ... I called the police.

Sadly, when the police came it would be too late for young Darla. Perky wrenched the knife free of her flesh and brought it down again. And again. And again.

~*~

Tears welled in Jackie's eyes as she watched Perky attack her best friend. She saw the knife rise and fall at least ten times before Darla went limp.

Jackie was not one to wait around to be murdered by her boyfriend. She quickly raised herself to her knees and sprung jackrabbit style into the bedroom, groaning from the pain in her wrist. Then she climbed onto her bed and reached into the nightstand drawer, where she found the nine-millimeter Perky had given her for protection. Who knew that she'd need to use it on him?

It was not loaded but the clip lay beside it in the drawer.

She couldn't get the magazine in the gun. Her wrist was in too much pain. After setting the gun down, she balanced the clip on the nightstand with her right hand, then retrieved the weapon and slid it down over the clip.

Just in time too, since Perky was at the door when she finished.

The sight of the gun did not appear to frighten him.

Sirens blared somewhere in the distance.

The police are coming, she thought. Please let them get here on time. Please.

But they would not, and she knew it.

~*~

Perky saw the gun in Jackie's hand as he leaned against the doorframe. This didn't bother him at all, since he could see her swollen wrist, which was likely broken, and he knew that she needed both hands to fire it. He knew this because he had taught her how to use it.

He took a step closer toward the bed.

And, of course, she shot him, as much as it surprised him.

The bullet ripped through the flesh of Perky's unwounded thigh and lodged in the doorframe behind him.

The pain was more than he could bear under normal circumstances, but his drug-induced state was not normal. Now it merely served to spur him on. He dropped the knife on the floor and laughed at her and the gun. Perky found the whole business amusing and the voices chided him for it.

Two more steps and he grabbed the weapon from her hand, then slapped her hard. She fell back into the lamp on the nightstand and screamed. Then he snatched her by the hair and dragged her into the bathroom on the left, limping all the way.

Perky forced Jackie to her knees in front of the toilet and knelt down beside her. He made her look at him as he said with all the malice and rage that possessed him, "No more. I'm not afraid anymore ... *I'm not afraid.*"

"What ... what are—"

He laughed. "What do most people do with shit?"

Her eyes were as wide as an owl's now.

Perky slammed her face into the commode and broke her nose from the impact. He heard it crack as water splattered over him and the bowl turned red. He held her there, just wishing her to die.

"You're shit!" he informed her as he applied more pressure. "Shit ... nothin' but *shit!*"

In his mind he saw the succubus beg him and his master for mercy as it died ... and just before he blacked out.

(The chains that bind me are of my own avarice and lust, my own horror. I'm letting go ... breaking down...

...out of the blue...

...breaking down...)

4

Happiness

Within the sanctuary of his twisted mind, Perky saw only himself as he stood before his master Jupiter, glorifying him and reveling in his own splendor for murdering the succubae. He did not remember the end of his cold-blooded act but he felt sure that Jackie was dead. He had drowned her in the toilet bowl, man! Oh, that was *nasty*.

All that existed for him now was his master, his mind, and his desire. Perky delighted in this world that he had created.

Actual events outside were much different from his grandiose delusions, although he was aware of them at a subconscious level. He sat cross-legged on Jackie's front lawn, quivering like a timid little boy while he laughed and cried at once. His vision was crossed, which blurred and distorted the police cars parked on the road.

One police officer stood beside him as several held the line to prevent contamination of the crime scene and more inspected the house. Most were uniformed, except for the two in plain clothes that interrogated the nosy neighbors.

A forensics unit arrived then, just in front of an ambulance that sat behind the patrol cars.

The ambulance attendants went into the house as another emergency vehicle stopped behind the first. The road was so congested now that nothing else could possibly get through.

Perky was vaguely aware of the paramedics that lifted him up to strap onto a stretcher.

Jackie suddenly appeared in the doorway, her crooked nose bleeding, and she thrust her uninjured arm upward in defiance. She screeched and cursed him like an old hag, her anger plain for all to see. Two police officers tried to restrain her in vain. She charged outside and kicked Perky when she reached him.

The attendants dropped Leslie Perk's defenseless form and one of them hissed under his breath.

Jackie continued to kick her "boyfriend" in the head with her bare foot and screamed at him until several cops arrived to pull her away.

"YOU SON OF A BITCH! I HOPE YOU ROT, YOU HEAR ME? YOU BASTARD!"

As the officers held her back, the paramedics returned Perky to the litter. Then, just as they began to raise him into the vehicle, Jackie spat in his face.

~*~

Time has conquered my mind and brought me to exist on a dimensional plane where I have always belonged. I made a discovery after venturing far from home, over seas that swarmed with sharks, to mountain summits infested with wolves, and through deserts that crawled with snakes. I have spiraled headfirst through the cosmos and emerged into the heavens to discover that...

...that I am not a man, or a savage creature of the earth; I am higher than these, higher than everything. I am nothing.

Happiness is...

...a cell with padded walls, where I really can be a god if I want.

THE END