

## Bitch's Brew

"You ever feel like you're being watched?"

"Yeah, kinda got that feel- you hear that, Rick?"

"Hear what?"

"Over out yunder" The two men on the TV screen get up and stare out from their box towards the living room. All still, all silent except for Jerry who's rummaging in the kitchen and chortling his high head off.

"I don't hear nuthin'," TV Rick scowls before returning to his campfire. The doorbell rings and Jerry abandons his hunt for, for whatever he was looking for in the first place. On the television, a large creature resembling the afterbirth of a box of Trojans shambles out of the forest while the two men scream.

"Adan, you made it," Jerry's smile splits his face as he opens the door.

"You ass, you already started without me?"

"Nah man," but Jerry lets out a snigger that gets the both of them laughing. "Maybe a little bit."

They both walk into the house, Adan flops onto the broken living room sofa and flips the channel off of the wet latex monster as it slurps down a grumbling Rick. "The fuck you doing, man? I was watching that." Jerry says from the kitchen.

"You've seen it before, monster takes dynamite up the ass from the park ranger and gets blown up."

"Yeah, but I hadn't seen his wife's fine ass yet." Jerry smiles and brings out a small box. Both their eyes light up. A few joints are in there already rolled, Jerry lights one up for himself.

Adan reaches and then stops. "You didn't get these from the guy behind 7-11, did you?"

"Nah, Smooch left them here last time. Finders keepers."

Adan grabs one and lights it up. "You still getting shit from him?"

Jerry releases a cloud of blue smoke, and his shoulders relax. "7-11 or Smooch?" Adan winces. "Don't have to worry about that weird ass stealin' my shit like Smooch does." Jerry started giggling, "you ever talk to 7-11? Weird-ass man, talking 'bout aliens or some shit. At least he's cheap."

Adan says nothing, he's flipping through channels then finally stops on a televangelist in a shiny blue suit. An announcer with a distinguished, elderly voice announces the Good News Network's fifteenth annual Shareathon. Adan lights up, and inhales, the joint's thin paper crackles, the televangelist's microphone sounds vaguely like a fart. A gray-blue cloud erupts from Adan's mouth in a fit of laughter. His pupils dilate and his muscles relax. "How much more," the preacher says "will He feed you?" God, will they be hungry soon. Jerry has already polished off several bags of chips and a box of cereal before Adan even arrived.

Adan laughs alongside Jerry, whose stomach bulges and ripples underneath the skin. There's something spasmodic about Jerry's movements that Adan finds particularly amusing and he drowns himself in belly laughs. The preacher on screen laughs with them. Adan's muscles start to go limp as clouds of blue, acrid smoke fill the apartment. Let me tell you, that boy felt real fine. So fine, in fact, that even the thoughts of the dealer behind 7-11, who said he had been reformed and raped by the master race melted away. He's drifting now, deeper, deeper into that soft couch. He may even find himself a might bit sleepy. Oh yes, with a little herbal hypnotism, he felt fine indeed.

"And I tell you, folks," the preacher said "he wants you. That's all he's asking for. God is asking for you."

"Hear that," Adan snickered "he's asking for yooooouu."

Jerry smiled a little, perhaps his mood was beginning to drop just a bit. His mouth hung like a crooked painting. Adan laughs at himself while Jerry rolls around in his seat before rocketing himself from it. He scratches at his neck and arms which vibrate ever so slightly. Adan thinks of Jerry as a clockwork man, little gears and pistons whirring underneath his skin. Pale brown skin, with belly and man-tits that hung like depleting sandbags. Was that thin last week?

It doesn't matter though, the couch swaddles Adan in its meaty flesh. Soon the bellowing preacher on the television becomes muffled and only the highest major notes of the organ are heard. He blinks for too long and his head floats along in a river of sound and vision. Perhaps his mind is right when some obscure corner of thought says *this ain't no normal joint*. He'd have to remember to hook up with Smooch sometime in the future, *Smooch the mooch*, he giggles again. Adan's eyes swim in blackness, shaded with color as the eyeballs swirl against the lids. When he finally manages to pull one lid open, his first image is Jerry breathing inches away from his face. His face is loose and mask-like but put it pulls together all right. "The fuck you doin'?" Adan jumps and the room jumps with him.

"Wakey wakey," Jerry's laugh grates on the ears. "Got somethin' special. Good shit, man."

Adan doesn't like Jerry's color, it ain't right. The way the preacher moves on TV ain't right either. "I gotta take a piss," Adan tries to get up, his legs feel like they're crawling out from under him, like centipedes. He has to use the furniture to get to the bathroom. He nearly falls into the door because the walls tricked him and pulled the door away at the last minute.

When Adan gets in he shuts the door. The dolphins on the shower curtain laugh, but not at him. They're cool enough. He knows better than to look into the mirror though. Light spurts from the faucet, and he lets it pool into a rainbow before he splashes it onto his face, it burns like a motherfucker. The dolphins laugh at him now. He looks into the mirror. His face peels off from the heat and a million hungry flowers grow wild over him. Adan throws the door open, but his legs crawl out from under him and he falls, face-first into Jerry's arms.

Where their skin touches feel like trillions of baby spiders crawling underneath the surface. Adan starts panicking, only to be put into the couch's warm embrace. *Smooch the Mooch, I'm gonna kill the fucker.* He's not sure if he thought this or shouted it, either way, the televangelist farts in disapproval. This earns a laugh from both Adan and Jerry, who is pouring white granules onto the coffee table.

Trickles of light and color pour from Adan's forehead. He watches the granules that Jerry is spilling on the table. They move and squirm about. He can hear their cries as they writhe about. George Washington bellows, he loses his dentures as Jerry rolls up a dollar bill. Adan watches the granules crawl up the rolled bill as Jerry pretends to snort. The remainder still writhe about, crying.

Adan's arms and legs feel numb as he grasps at the couch to try to escape. Jerry head tilts his loose, rubbery face towards him. Adan props himself up, his hand sinking between the couch's arm and cushion when he feels something like ice, he grips it. Jerry opens the dollar and lets the white granules squirm onto it. He's smiling as he turns toward Adan, who's certain that he sees the little white things crawl out of the loose flesh around Jerry's eyes. George Washington has a mouthful and attempts a muffled scream.

Jerry's body shivers as the things move under his skin. His loose maw widens, and he grips the arm of the couch for balance as he leans forward, bringing the infested dollar toward Adan's nose.

It takes all of Adan's strength to lift his hand from the folds of the couch. The gun that he pulls out is so heavy. "Glo-reh, glo-reh," someone shouts on the TV, tears in their eyes "praise God, give yourself to Him" Adan thumbs the hammer and points it at the thing pretending to be Jerry. He can see the waves of sound reverberating through the air when he fires once. Jerry stumbles backward, but doesn't fall. His face drops down, showing his lower teeth and gums. He sways, his eyes are dead. White things crawl, from the gunshot wound.

He steps toward Adan, grabbing a handful of the squirming white creatures. The sound waves ripple through the air, crossing themselves again and again. The things pour from Jerry's new orifices. He staggers, and they spill onto Adan's clothes. He tries to brush them off, but they latch onto his skin. Jerry writhes about in the floor. The congregation on TV screams with George Washington. Adan's screams join the chorus. He feels one of the things bite down on the inside of his ear. He claws at his crotch as he feels them begin to burrow down that way. "You at home, let the Lord work through you to be a blessing," says the televangelist as the choir cries.

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The Hood County Sheriff's Department had been there at least a good thirty minutes. Lancett is chewing on chips he found scattered in the kitchen. A woman with pink hair and huge eyelashes is crying into a microphone while soft music plays. No one listens to her. The medical examiner has yet to arrive. Deputies Holcomb and Lancett arrived around ten minutes ago. "Looks like they got into some bad shit," is all Holcomb says as he lights up a cigarette.

"The fuck's he doing?" Deputy Lancett has his hand on his gun, free hand protecting the chips. Jerry's body is blindly groping at the carpet.

"That ain't nothing," Holcomb says "it's like when you blow a snake's brains out- the nerves still work." With the toe of his boot, he strokes dead Jerry's side. Lancett cringes as the bloodless body twists. "If it bothers you that much," he laughed, "go get some air." Lancett turns pink, but says nothing. The sound of his chewing resumes, and Holcomb hears the fridge open.

Deputy Holcomb takes out a little baggie and pockets several of the white granules spilled out on the table. He'll be sure to fetch good money from them, and he can always fetch a few more baggies worth from the evidence locker when he runs out. He doesn't even notice the slight squirm as he puts the baggie in his pocket. Deputy Holcomb knows a few guys that might like this. He steps outside and sees the weird fuck who hangs outside the 7-11. "Get the hell out of here," he says. Holcomb doesn't like the way that man moved like something else was controlling the man's nerves.

The man starts to shuffle away, his greasy coat twitching in the lamplight. "Wait a minute," Holcomb says as he pulls the little baggie out of his pocket. "You interested in some of this?"

The man eyes the baggie, his eyes take on a shine. "How do I know you ain't trying to poison me?" His voice is hollow. Holcomb rolls his eyes before opening the baggie and dipping in his pinkie finger. The greasy vagrant smiles as the sheriff's deputy put a few granules on his tongue. "See," he says "you want it or not?" The shit is strong- when the man pulls a fifty-dollar bill out of his coat, Holcomb swears something is moving under the skin. "You son of a bitch. Give me half of what you make off it, or I'm hauling you in for bribery."

The man's loose, gray face attempts to pull itself into a smile. His eyes shimmer as he nods. Holcomb tosses the baggie at the man. He doesn't want any closer to him, especially when he sees what looks like lice dripping from the man's mouth and crawling into the man's beard. The deal done, he waves the vagrant off.

God, how his tongue itches, like a hundred little mites scratching at it. The deputy eyes the table where the piles of the dope lie, he scratches his tongue against his teeth, then licks his lips. He takes a handful of chips from the other deputy, but they taste ashen. "Taste and see that the Lord is good!" The televangelist smiles with his pink-haired wife.

Deputy Holcomb's tongue involuntary writhes and licks at his lips. He glances outside and sees that the greasy lunatic is still shuffling away, twitching like he were a living marionette. Lancett

heads to the john. When he is sure no one is watching, Holcomb takes up a handful of the dope on the table. Right before his eyes, the white granules crawl about in slow, jittery movements. His upper lip curls in disgust. His tongue, on its own accord, reaches out. He feels them crawling down his throat and up the nasal passage. They burrow into the throat.

"Well done, faithful servant" the voice is that of the televangelist, but soon it gives way to a horrid buzzing. Holcomb's last conscious act is clawing at his ears. Then all is lost in the cacophony. His hand grabs a tissue and dabs away the blood running down his nose.

The new host turns and looks out. Outside, they recognize the other hive, consumed by their brethren. He stands in his greasy coat and smiles. The hive that was once Holcomb pulls its dead face into a smile and waves back.