



[REDACTED]

“You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you. You have the right to an attorney...”

Right. My rights. Never mind that I’ve already been questioned for three hours; they say that part was “voluntary”, but I’m nineteen, and it doesn’t *feel* voluntary. If I had rights, they sure didn’t want me to know about them, not before we left the cop shop anyway.

I hadn’t said much, but it must’ve been all they needed because suddenly I’m being handcuffed and marched out to a police car. I’ve never been restrained, *contained*, like this; so humiliatingly powerless and vulnerable. They drive me across town to the jail and we pass right through my own neighborhood. I see our house, our neighbors’ houses; I even see my cat sitting in the front yard, but somehow none of it quite looks like home from this perspective. We pass my high school, and I feel like a sideshow circus freak, chained up and on display for the mocking amusement of everyone who sees me. *Does anyone see me?*

After my rights are read, everything changes: the cops’ attitudes, the physical space, my status as a human being. For nineteen years my world was a stable place that I understood like my own skin, but now everything is turning, churning, making me nauseous. I know they’re taking me to jail, but I don’t know where I’m *going*, not really. All I know for sure is that everything is moving too fast; sickening, jerky, heaving motions, unfamiliar seasick movement through an alien world that’s apparently always existed, unknown and invisible but right



alongside my own. Images swirl like I'm being flushed through some cosmic toilet vortex into a parallel universe...and I am terrified.

The jail itself is a brutal, slit-windowed monolith that I used to pass on my way to school, just months ago, when I was still a "Good Kid" hurtling toward a future full of brilliant tomorrows. Many mornings I'd stood along the bike path and stared, conjuring childish phantasms of what must lie behind that ominously tranquil façade, the exterior projection of a human kennel. Ultimately I walked away each morning, relieved and reassured that such a place could play no role in my world or the path I travelled. Now, so improbably inside of it myself, the exterior illusion of quiet dissolves and I find myself drowning in noise—hysterical shrieking; lunatic laughter; incomprehensible, duelling shouts of orders and defiance; the thunderous crashing of inhumanly heavy doors. And the smells. The *smells!* Jail has its own air: a sealed-in mixture of urine, feet, flatulence, and sweaty desperation, a stink that does no favors for the already queasy.

No one knows I'm here. No humans, anyway. Only pigs. Pigs and robots, which is to say, cops and jail bureaucrats, all the creatures native to this foreign place, along with my fellow captives. I wonder idly: where do they all come from? After all, I've roamed the streets of my small town for a lifetime, yet somehow I never noticed any of these people before.

I don't know how to contact my family, and I realize I don't want to. The shame is soul-crushing, not for anything I've done, but for what's being done to me. No one can ever see me like this. I'd rather die...or disappear, and it occurs to me—maybe I *have* disappeared, finally, forever.

After uncounted hours a mangled plastic tray slides under the door: they call it “chow”. I wonder if it’s daylight still; maybe daylight again? Time is purely an abstraction so deep down the rabbit hole. The “food” looks disgusting and smells worse, so I eat all that’s edible: a thin, stale piece of cake. I fleetingly wonder when more food will come, but quickly realize how little it matters—my appetite isn’t much, and I doubt it ever will be again.

At some point during what I think is the night, I am forced to strip and display my asshole for inspection—another new experience—then told to shower. I don’t want to, but it turns out to not be my choice. An incongruously joyful old prisoner, wrinkled, naked and wet, smiles at me in passing. “Hey kid, welcome to the Happiest Place on Earth,” he chuckles. “But it ain’t no Disneyland!” His comment unnerves me as I feebly cover myself, mentally superimposing this horrorshow over memories of the real Disneyland, the joyous laughter and my parents’ loving faces; the fantastically costumed characters of the magical Main Street Parade...all now juxtaposed against such dehumanization, this grotesque parading of my own naked terror among angry and insane men, driven inexorably toward Golgotha. I begin to understand how cattle must feel when they are forced through the death chute, impotently resisting a fate they cannot comprehend but which the crush of bodies and stench of blood, shit, and fear assures them won’t be good.

More hours pass. I’m led to a quieter, darker place, where commands from behind mirrored walls direct me into an open cell. One disembodied voice says “close the door,” and I’m struck dumb. I think to myself, “You want *me* to lock *myself* into *your* cage? Seriously? *FUCK. YOU.*” A moment later another unseen voice, this one from a fellow hostage, warns me



that I'd better shut it or they will come, in force, to slam it for me, but not before first slamming me a few times, too. I decide to comply.

I'm locked in now. Locked up. I'm not claustrophobic, but in this tiny, closet-sized cell, a single thought consumes me: *I cannot continue in a space this small and empty*. I just can't. This isn't a matter of hours, which already stretch unbearably ahead of me, but about *days*, months, maybe even years. I cannot survive it. I panic—but my anxiety amounts to nothing. Nothing changes, and soon I realize, not without horror, that I *will* survive. Laying my head on a roll of toilet paper and staring at a featureless ceiling, I think how even in the midst of such monstrous incomprehensibility, my body *will* continue—eating, breathing, defecating; ceaselessly creeping forward through a bleakness no less desolate than this cage in which I am now trapped, crawling along a path that leads to nothing but oblivion, and eventually, somehow, I fall asleep.