

Retirement



by

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1. Modern Romance

"What kinda work ya do man ... ?" - that's what my hooker asked me.

She was young, about 25 or 26, at least 20 years younger than me ... I dunno ... that's my guess.

She, Misty, had brown hair - not too long, but not short either.

She was clean - but I still insisted she take a bath before we had sex and I would do the inspections (and the washing).

I was tyrannical about keeping things clean ...

Yeah - this "washing thing" was partly for the kink (it turned me on) and partly because I have some issues concerning women's bodies. To this day I've never "gone down" on a girl - not once. I got close a few years ago, while I was trying to save my marriage, but close doesn't count - close, in this case, is just pathetic. I remember the conversation - like yesterday ... so humiliating.

"Honey ... you need to lick it ... tongue it ... like a snake ... you know ... little flairs of tongue ... not slosh-y like a dog drinking water", my ex-wife was always so nice while being a condescending bitch.

"I know ..."

"Do you even know where it is?"

"What?"

"My clitoris ..."

"Yes ... fuck ..."

"Don't fucking stop ... try honey ... come on ..."

And that's how "that" went, clearly portending the break-up to come.

But this young woman, Misty (as if anyone would believe that were her name) ... well ... she seemed nice enough ... really nice ... kind. But that place between the legs? - hooker or not ... that place was a grotto of disease and crabs. I know I shouldn't feel this way, but there is something kind of gross about a woman's vagina. It's not some "golden valley of lustful desire" - it is a hole from

which emanates urine and little beasts.

Misty didn't have any needle-marks (at least none I could find). Her skin was unmarked and unblemished by tattoos. I wasn't specifically filtering for "women without tattoos", but I was pleasantly surprised. She was soft, and firm, nubile – another good find, someone to add to my "fuck list". She reminded me of those young women, in college many years ago, who ignored me – I was scum to them, I was nothing (fair enough, I can't blame them). Misty, not having a lot of choices, was not much of a proxy for those other bitches ... fuck it. Misty was hot, and our transactions were fair.

And, DUH! - "Misty" was not her name.

I doubt Misty would tell me her real name if I had asked, and I really didn't want to know – I had already made the mistake ONCE in my life of letting some tramp "inside". Ok, I know "tramp" and "bitch" and "whore" are all misogynistic terms – I know this, and I don't fucking care. It's not my intent to tell you about how "I grew" after my divorce – I didn't grow, except maybe around the mid-section.

Misty was pretty. She had nice sized breasts. Her body was proportioned as a woman's body should be – not skinny, not fat, simply beautiful. "She's better looking than my ex-wife ... and younger", that was my opinion. And, best of all, after an hour she would leave and we both could go on with our lives without the "sturm und drang" of marital crapola.

I've been divorced for more than a year now and I have spent many nights calculating, in my head, the relative merits of prostitution versus marriage – usually doing this accounting just after coitus with a call-girl. I gave special attention to the "sex cost", because I felt, after the divorce, like I had been cheated – swindled, bamboozled. I don't know if I still "loved" her, my ex-wife, but I did feel like I had made an investment – and that investment failed miserably.

My guess, ceteris paribus, is I had sex with my ex-

wife (Amanda) 5 times a year (on average) over the the entire 8 year marriage. This comes out to about 40 allowed "sex transactions". But I'm going to romanticize the past (a tad) and say "shit, maybe we had sex 50 times while we were married". And, FYI, I really can't blame her. I look at myself in the mirror ... the rolls of fat ... the sallow complexion ... the morbid and crestfallen expression that clung to my face like a Halloween mask almost every day that last year ... the stroke or heart attack or other fatal disease or syndrome waiting for me. And then there's my attitude – and it does suck. No – I don't hold this against her. (I suck in bed – I know this) She, my ex, is likely having much better sex ... even as I think about it right now.

I've been a software engineer for 20 years ...

When I first began to program computers professionally I would say "it was different" - and it was. It was different because it was the 1990's, everything seemed, felt, and was believed to be "great, awesome, spectacular, prosperous" and everyone was undeniably full of shit ...

Back in the 1990's my work was new – I wasn't hired to "on-shore off-shored work", I wasn't hired back then to "fix a broken application, that has just a 'few' bugs". Back then, during those days, those halcyon days of yore ... well ... I built new systems from the ground up. I was a wunderkind, a prodigy, and I made LOTS of money – and I spent, wasted, a lot of money - buying lots of stupid shit.

My first job was as a JAVA developer for a start-up called "Galaxy Search".

You see: back then there were many companies, start-ups, competing to be "number one in the search space". It wasn't just GOOGLE back then ... there was Lycos, Alta-Vista, Ask Jeeves, Lighthouse ... crap ... there were a lot of "search space" start-ups back then ... Of course, only GOOGLE had secret under-the-table funding and support from the NSA, CIA, DARPA, but back then we didn't have a clue about this, we believed "free enterprise" was at work. We actually believed that the winner would be chosen based

upon the results of the search, the merits of the solution, and not based upon some fucked-up global scheme to control the minds of men.

We ... heck ... I was a chump – back then. I was not “special” ... I was one of a millions of “wunderkind” believing they were part of creating some new “cyber epoch”, but we were all high on our own shit back then. We smoked our own shit – we didn't know any better.

Now, in my forties ... no longer thin, no longer that healthy ... I seen nothing but the desolation – the massive waste of time. I'm not saying the 90's weren't great, they were, but they were also a decade of delusions. And here I am, divorced for a year, and paying for sex – and that's my reality, probably until I die or can't get an erection.

Oh, yeah ... fuck ... let's do some maths:

1. Assume 50 acts of sex over an 8 year marriage, each act of sex lasting about 1 hour (the actual “sex” lasting more like 20 minutes).
2. Assume that the cost of “non-exploitive” sex (or “clean sex”) with a hooker is 200-300 dollars an hour. I will use \$250.00/hour as the baseline.
3. $50 \times 250 = 12,500$ (would have been the total cost if I had used hookers instead of my wife)
4. I will adjust the number UP by 0.5, based upon an assumed implicit cost of “criminal risk, STDs, birth-control, etc.”. So let's just make the real “substitute” cost of “paid for sex” approximately 7K – and I'm gonna fucking round up EVEN MORE and make the whole “cost” of “HOOKER VS WIFE” for this 8 year period \$25,000.00 (total).
5. What was the cost of my marriage? – well, shit, I didn't think of it that way, back then ... I guess I would include the 20K I spent on my wedding (that's a good start). I will include the years in grad school, her grad school, when I paid for everything and she lived quite well ... unlike most of her peers ... because she had a “sugar daddy”. Whatever – fuck it.

Rough itemization -

- a) \$20K, wedding
 - b) \$15K, per year, "supportive costs"
 - c) Total: 120K + 20K → 140K ... fuck it ... let's call it \$150,000.00 ... the "cost" of my "marriage sex".
6. So, for each act of "marriage sex", I was paying \$3,000.00 (roughly ... plus or minus ... fuck it).
7. Have you ever had sex with a 3,000 hooker? - me neither. But I've decided I might do that every 5 years ... till I die.

So you can see where this is headed ...

This kind of cursory analysis can only lead to one conclusion: on average, marriage sex is the most expensive kind ... well ... maybe not the MOST expensive kind ... but crap - it pretty much scales up too. If I had been rich, well-to-do, then the numbers skew even HIGHER ... so YEAH ... marriage sex is a fucking financial burden.

And ... YES - sex is for having kids ...

I wanted kids ... I think. She denied me this - end of story.

My ex-wife wanted everything to be perfect, paid for, safe, before we had kids ...

Problem is this: I met her, fell in love, married her, only a few years before everything started falling apart for everyone - we met in 2004, married in 2005. By the 3rd year of our marriage my job disappeared and I had to do what my dear old dad said a man should be willing to do - "take any job you need to in order to survive" ... and I did that, tried that, and it sort of worked (sort of).

After a few years of "contracts, engagements, short-term gigs" and one or two full-time jobs that were too ridiculous for me to stomach for 40 hours a week ... well ... needless to say I had passed the zenith of my career - I was now what I dreaded, a software burnout. She was very disappointed in the fact that our combined incomes only amounted to \$145,234.88 (our last joint tax return amount). I wanted kids, sure, but she wanted a perfect world and an

obedient, compliant, husband. We were both disappointed.

"What do you do?", the Misty asks while we lie in bed ...

She was persistent ...

Of course - this kind of thing isn't like it used to be.

There is no more of the trolling for tail in the low-income neighborhoods to find a pro. These days all you need to do is find a copy of the local "youth weekly" - you know, the trendy newspapers you find in bars and bathrooms and at University Kiosks ... the ones with hipster authors who "write out of their cars because they ain't got no cash for rent and are so 'counter' and 'anti' any ways man".

And in the back of these papers?

These weeklies?

CLASSIFIEDS ...

And the best part of the classifieds is the "ESCORTS SECTION" BITCH! And, so you know, I'm talking about the website - because nobody grabs that paper unless they must, or they are homeless and need insulation or some way of wiping shit off their ass.

I could see Misty was really interested in knowing my occupation ...

"I don't know ...", I muttered.

Misty looked at me coyly.

We'd just finished having sex, the entire enterprise lasted about 20 minutes (I am nothing if not consistent). I was hoping I would get another erection soon and then I could "go for round 2" in under an hour - that would be pushing it, I was an old man now. But, crap, it's nice to maximize return on investment. I feel less guilty when I get can "two" taken care of.

"You know what you do man ... you know you do and you can tell Misty ... you have a good job?"

"I work, when I can ... and as long as I am able."

"What do you do?"

"Why the fuck do you care?"

"I'm just asking man ... fuck it ...", laying there,

next to each other, barely knowing one another and yet quite clearly aware of how fucked we both were. She wanted me to tell her some nice story about some nice world – a world she was exiled from. She probably came from a fucked up home or a series of crappy events had befallen her, who knows ... she wanted me to comfort her ... she wanted to know that somewhere, somehow, there were normal people in the world living normal lives. She wanted me to lie to her, and I was the one paying for the sex. This wasn't my first time with a hooker and I could tell she was put-off by my taciturn responses.

Hookers – like bar tenders, hair dressers, and other sundry types – believe they serve some dual social purpose ... at least some of them believe this shit, or want to believe this. They are “confidants” – counselors – in between the pounding. I guess I get it. I, too, seek dignity in my daily life, a rationalization – though, these days, “Dignity” is predominantly a stripper name and not a state of human nature. I have no dignity in my job, and I don't consider the pay-check a surrogate for this.

Misty thought she was the “exile” from normality, if only I could explain to her, tell her – I was an exile also.

She wanted to talk.

“Crap ... this isn't that much different from marriage” is all I could think.

“I program computers ...” – that did it.

Misty's eyes grew wide ...

She began to smile ...

I think programmers, technicians, geeks, are the safest and most lucrative sect for hookers. I'm guessing, I don't really know.

The stereotype of “programmers, developers, software engineers” is not false – in fact the reality is more exaggerated than the “exaggeration”. Most of the programmers I've met over the years (and this is triply so for the talented ones) were not manly types ... mostly. They were not Karate men or muscle men or men of adventure ...

The greatest danger these "skinnies and fats" posed were to themselves because of the truly fucked of life-style this work enabled - the lack of sun, the poor eating habits, and a fair amount of drug use for many.

For a hooker ... a steady diet of "software engineer" is preferred. Misty probably hoped I would become a repeat customer - and how can I blame her. I wanted to be a repeat client as well.

"That's cool ... I always wanted to learn to do that shit." Oh, if she only knew.

"Yeah, it's not that great ..."

"You make good money?"

"I get paid."

"They pay you well ... right ... I mean ... you have to go to college and shit?"

"They pay me."

"... But it's cool work ... I mean ... I know I sound stupid but ... man ... you work with interesting people and you get to be involved in such amazing shit ... like ... you know ... my phone, fuck ... my phone has this application that will keep track of all my finances man ... and there's this game I LOVE ... some kind of 'farm game' where I'm a farmer and stuff, it's a really fun game."

I didn't want to be rude, so I deleted from my response stream what I wanted to say and instead said: "I'd like to become a farmer."

This was true, I would really like to become a farmer.

"Well, Mr., it just seems nice to me ..."

Her smile went a bit crooked, and she gave me a snuggle-hug - one of those nice naked hugs that causes your whole body to tingle a bit, reminding your reptilian brain of what it was like back in your mother's womb and crap.

I think I enjoyed the hugs from my hookers as much as the sex. Each time some strange woman hugged me ... naked ... I felt safe, connected, alive. I was worried I was becoming addicted to that, and then I realized in my head - "fuck Steve, you were married". Then I stop worrying about being addicted to hugs.

The hour was almost up and Misty had to leave ...

I tried to avoid seeing the same hooker too many times in a row. I had about 6 or 7 I rotated through. These were the "clean ones", the ones I felt safe with. Misty was in fine running to become number 8.

But Misty had to leave ... my time was up.

I lived in a studio apartment – the bathroom door, the main door, the kitchen, the TV (living room), were all in sight of my bed. She began to dress, but she didn't seem rushed – and that gave this whole shady affair the veneer of normalcy, almost like we were "boyfriend and girlfriend". She opened the door, paused for a moment, and turned around and looked at me – with a nice smile.

"This was nice Steve ... I hope you call me again some time."

We had taken care of the money earlier, after she arrived – so we didn't have to muddy the waters with that cold exercise.

She gently closed the door behind her ...

I drifted, not so gently, to sleep ...

And I thought:

"I am connected to nothing ..."

"Nothing is connected to me ..."

"There is no Buddhist epoch of oneness and shit ..."

"I am alone ..."

"You are alone ..."

"We are alone, and getting lonelier, at an ever increasing rate."

"Drifting apart faster, like stars, blue-shifting to the horizon ..."

And then I fall asleep.

2. Exile

I usually get to work by about 8:45 AM.

I attempt to stomach 6 or 7 (and sometimes 8) hours of the soul sucking stupidity of my job. What is my job? - yeah, software engineer ...

Really, what is my job? - my job is fixing broken shit OR bringing back "home" shit that was outsourced to India, or China, or some other fucking place where human misery is the chief domestically produced item. I don't want to get into "outsourcing" and crap like that - mainly because that's "yesterday" and the paradigm no longer applies ...

Today, in the world of IT (Information Technology), it's all about "down-shifting" - which is another term for depressing/limiting domestic worker's salaries by importing cheap labor from India, China, or some other fucking place where people think "\$40k/year and beer" is paradise.

My current project involves "bringing back under control" code that was written by some barely literate moron, from somewhere in Bangalore (India), who claims to have "known JAVA".

So many JAVA mills in India these days, China too ...

So many places in India where moderately intelligent people are shuffled in, and 3 weeks later they "know Java" and will only charge \$15/hour for development work ... and that's a guarantee.

Mind you: there are no sour grapes ...

I think we are all fucked ...

No matter where you live, no matter who you are - you are fucked.

So let the slave laborers in India make \$15/hour writing really fragile code - that's fine with me. There will always be work (make-work) in fixing that broke-ass shit when it is "in-sourced" ... eventually. (well, there will be work until there isn't)

Our break-room at work had one of those new portion-based, quasi-optimized, coffee machines. You would push a button on the top of the fucker, a drawer would slide out, and then you would place some plastic cube (presumably with coffee inside, laced with rat semen) into the contraption ... and then ... a few seconds later ... COFFEE. This morning, I needed it. I had stayed up most of the night after seeing Misty (my "girl friend"), and I was not quite rested.

What was my goal for today? - fuck it, to see how much

non-work I could squeeze out of the day without being recognized for the slacker I was ...

Of course, I hated this, it drained my soul – but I knew, deep inside, 7/10 white-collar employees these days did the same shit ...

We were all the last guard, the final barrier against the coming collapse of all the rancid shit that surrounded us. We were the “stalwart class” – the one's expected to stay “at our posts” while the entire society burned. Fuck it – this was no life for a human being, it was simply a more comfortable death-row.

I had barely 5 minutes of peace, at my desk, watching videos of elephants attacking people on YOUTUBE when John stopped by my cube ...

“Hey ... Steve ... What the fuck is up with the c-sharp port of Digi-Health?”

John was one of those bro-grammer types.

John wasn't a bad guy, just not a very serious person when it came to engineering applications. He was either in his late 20's or early 30's – I really didn't know. I had been at my current job for about 3 months and I'd adopted a policy (previous to this) of non-involvement ... mainly because of the knowledge that I would not be making friends at work, because I wouldn't be there long enough ...

John might have been the kind of guy I could have had drinks with or gone to clubs with ... who knows. Sure, I wasn't dead yet, I could party ... sort of – but I still wanted to keep my work life as clinical as my sex life (no complex entanglements). Getting to “know John” meant investing emotional energy in him – just one more person I would disappoint when I moved on in a few months.

What you need to understand about me is that I've become a serial job-hopper ...

It's not that I don't want to work, it's not that I am incapable – it just isn't that simple. I am simply disillusioned and I know longer have the care or concern I once did ... you know ... concerning my work.

The landscape of American business is so polluted and

disgusting today ... and to participate "whole-heartedly", and to be "fully-committed", is to be a fucking schmuck, a chump, a total rube. I can't pinpoint the exact date when this happened, this replacement of a real economy with a farce, but it was not because of the "Republicans" or "Democrats" or some stupid fucking shit like that - I simply see through the lie now, completely through it. No amount of weed, or whiskey, or anything, can obscure the truth or enhance the lie for me any longer. It's over ... my romance with being a software engineer is done and all of corporate America is shit.

John is just some piece of movable office equipment to me - and not a very useful piece. He is funny sometimes, but his jokes are superficial homage to the deceivers. John wants to talk about football or some band or some movie or video game he "stayed up all night playing" - it really didn't matter, his topics were silly to me.

John is a good guy ... in fact, I felt sorry for him. He is part of one of the last generations before the world starts taking some serious steps backwards ... reversing the fortunes of mankind.

John still believes in the "American Dream" - whatever the fuck that is. The last few weeks? - John has been talking about "house hunting".

"Dude ... I was on the East Side this weekend ... looking at places near Marshall Ford Reservoir ... I found this amazing little place ... 1,500 square feet ... lake access ... good schools."

"What the fuck do you care about schools, you're single?"

"Dude ... I want to get married."

"How much was it ... this nirvana with great schools?"

"Oh, fuck ... I think about \$350K or something ... but I can get a 30 or even one of those new 40 year mortgages ... shit ... I think I might do it Dude."

Recently, by act of congress, the government had approved the funded support (via HUD) for 40 year mortgages at a supported interest rate of 2.5%. This was considered

radical by some, not radical enough by others. Senator Weinstein of California, upset by the timid action, suggested a "health-screened genomic-based risk-analyzed" loan structure that could support home loans with periods between 20 and 60 years, at fixed rates varying between a high of 5.6% and a low (for those with great credit) of 0.89% ... really ... less than 1% for up to 60 years ... to pay for a fucking house ...

I knew the neighborhood John was talking about ...

It was an interstitial realm sandwiched between one of the richest and poorest neighborhoods in our city. To the North of this home, the one John wanted to buy, was "Geist" - a very affluent, very conformist and very white section of the city. To the South was "Riverton" - one of the poorest places in America (according to the New York Times).

Riverton had more than 20 homicides last year - officially. It is well understood that "uniform crime reporting" is bullshit now, probably has been forever. No politician, no council member, no mayor wants to admit that their community is falling apart - bad for real estate prices, bad for property taxes. So, they lie, they confuse - they classify as many deaths as they can as "accidental" or "suicide". Riverton wasn't really that special, it was just another puss filled sore - one of thousands covering the face of America today.

"John, why do you need this? You're fucking single ... what the fuck."

"Shut up! I know! You said this! But I dream of having a girl friend and even a dog or a cat."

"You can barely take care of yourself."

"Fuck you!"

"Hey, just saying."

"Shut up ..."

And John walks away, a little pissed, probably to go pester Valerie (the office lesbian-programmer) regarding his new found futuristic homestead - I knew I had made him angry, this would buy me a few days, maybe a week, without

his morning bullshit.

This is how most of my mornings went ... for several years now ... no matter where I was working. Most of these people are trapped in a make-believe reality of sports and video games and clothes-shopping and wine and beer and clubs and other distractions. "They are all walking, talking, hand-grenades", is what I believed – sooner or later they will wake up and start pulling their own pins. Sooner or later the killing starts, and once it starts only the expulsion of eons of pent-up frustration will end it. Streets covered in sticky red blood ... viscera covering the sidewalks ... headless bodies tossed in the river ... this was the reality, below the surface, that no one could see ... well ... except for me.

But this was work, and I had to at least pretend to work ...

Every hour or so, like desperate voices whispering from the dark nothing of this world, I would get a call or an email from some fucker who says he is calling from "Veergineya" (Virginia), but I know he is calling from Mumbai or Bangalore or Madras, asking me whether I was looking for a job. I had a job – but I was always "looking" ... so I played along on so-so days ... and sometimes I fucked with 'em.

"Helloo, Misteer Broo-store ... My name is Rupagaprah and I call on behalf of Genta-Probic-Solutions ... How are you about feelin too-day?"

My last name is Brewster ...

These days, when I get calls like this, I have a special kind of harassment technique ...

I just ask him where he's calling from and then hang up. I would love it if just one of these SOB's would be honest and say "Mumbai" – instead they always pick some fucking banal place like "Too-li-do, Ohy-yoh" (how it sounds).

When they call, these "viral recruiters", and they tell me the name of the American city they are living in, well ... then I ask them what time it is. They never know.

They are never smart enough to open a browser and AT LEAST figure out what time it is ... More often than not they give me the time in India, and that's when I hang up. Sometimes they will tell me the correct time, after fumbling for about 45 seconds, but that's almost as bad, perhaps worse. I don't know, I think there is a trend of using these "large net" phone based recruiters for contacting candidates – and then the info is passed off to some American douche, perhaps in the city where I live, and they take it from there – but the cold calling is done by some jerk in Mumbai.

In the last few months, maybe the last year, a thought has occurred to me ... and it is a very paranoid thought ...

Basically, I've done everything in my power to sabotage my career. I have a blog, where I publish real stories, of real shit, companies are doing – companies I've worked for. I have a linked-in profile where I publish make believe articles and anti-pieces ... just to fuck with people. I spend most of my work day tweeting or on Facebook. I've told at least 3 of my previous bosses to "fuck-off" in front of other team members – bottom line, given the sorry state of the economy, I should be homeless ... but I'm not.

I know this is crazy, but I've been thinking that maybe I'm not allowed to become "homeless" or "destitute" or to simply opt out of this giant, toxic, Monsanto, cancer-butt-hole thrill-ride to the end. The last great road trip of "Thelma and Louise" before we all drift off to forever-ever-nowhere-land. I must be made to work, no matter what.

In the last 5 years, I've averaged 2 or 3 jobs a year – and most of these were permanent hire roles (not contracts). What's the difference? – shit. With a contract, you have a beginning and an end – so working many contracts is not that strange, in fact it's the kind of work I would enjoy IF that kind of work existed any longer. Oh – there are still contracts, it's just that the rates are so high that many employers simply opt for full-time as a cost

savings ... shit ... I really don't know about this either.

So, yes – I wonder, sometimes, late at night, if no amount of quitting, poor work, crappy attitude, fucked up resume, will allow me to simply be left alone, to die in poverty ...

When I was still married, I made the effort – no matter how Pyrrhic that effort might be ...

Sure, I stopped believing in this crooked game – the American economy – a number of years ago, but I suppose I still loved my ex-wife and there was a part of me that still wanted to believe despite the fact that there was nothing to believe in. All that was left of American enterprise was a hollowed out receptacle for the broken dreams of failed entrepreneurs and the crony games of sociopaths.

But single? – what the fuck do I care?

I'm an only child, my parents and grand-parents are dead. I have a cousin, in Florida, who is in prison for 20 years on charges of drug-dealing and rape. There is very little in my life worth living for. I'm not suicidal, practically the opposite of this. I don't want to die, I want to live – I want to be happy, and joyful and content AND MARRIED. I would like ALL these things ...

I would love to have a home, with a 2 car garage, a dog named Cliff, a cat named Ada, a big-screen TV, a wife and 1.5 children or whatever the average is for my demographic – my guess, 0.78 children. I want a normal “middle class” life as defined by Norman Rockwell and “Leave it to Beaver”. But here's the thing – that life was bought using the currency of a very big lie ...

The truth is, this whole fucking nightmare of toxic-human relationships is about to implode ... badly.

Western civilization, or whatever the fuck you want to call it, has been living a cocaine driven, speech slurred, heroin to the rescue, fossil-fuel fantasy land for so long that no one alive today actually really understands what it was like before before the magic of coal, petroleum, natural gas, etc.. I would love to have that lie they

promised our grand parents – heck, I would settle for the “baby-boomer lie”. But this is not reality. We are stuck in a rather crazy paradigm, and it is unlikely, given the constraints of the natural world (as understood by science), that we will get out of this alive ...

So NO MOTHER FUCKER ... I don't have some bullshit pipe dream scheme of thinking I can change ANYTHING about the hell we're all heading towards – I simply don't want to participate any longer ...

That's it – I just want to jump off the crazy train ... I know the crazy train is a nuclear crazy train ... I know there is NO SAFE HAVEN from which a good life will be found EVEN IF I JUMP OFF this crazy train ... I just want off the crazy train from now until it hits the train labelled “reality” – which it is currently on a 300 MPH collision course with.

YES – I expect to be destroyed!

NO – I don't want to be one of the assholes shoveling coal into the boilers!

This isn't some ridiculous homage to “John Galt” and Ayn Rand – as brilliant as Rand might have been, she was infused with some rather fantastical thinking herself. In fact, I would contend she wrote “Anthem” as a response generated by her own internal conflict over the “optimistic” or “pessimistic” vision of the future ... you know ... whether a life of “free human dignity” and shit could be victorious? Well – I think she wrote that short story deliberately as a refutation of Dagny drawing the sign of a dollar bill in the horizon ... as if she knew that she lived in the other universe, the one where the Wesley Mouch's of the world win and achieve their goal of turning the world into a medieval, open-air, prison.

Whatever ... John is not so bad. I do like John, well, I think I like John ... he's tolerable.

This morning is going fine at work so far ...

I'm currently doing the “move the scrollbar” thingy, where it looks like I am scanning c# code and “looking for shit” in the IDE (Integrated Development Environment) – but

no ...

I am really watching, on my other monitor (because I have 2 or 3 or more of them), a video showing an angry elephant rampaging through some small village ... somewhere ... some place ... where a programmer can be hired for \$15/hr. This is fun (well ... this allows me to endure).

And then I get an email ... (asshole) ... and I must actually do some work.

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Steve,  
  
I'm really sorry, but the deployment of  
Digi-Health console to the Frontier  
Healthcare System is being moved up a bit.  
I'm really going to need you to help out on  
this, and show us what you got!  
  
This is why I hired you, Steve!  
  
We can do this man!  
  
Peace,  
  
Paul Craigmore  
Information Architect for Digi-Health  
Proxy Wellness Incorporated  
  
Affiliated with:  
Dental Clearing House  
Pharmaconsumology Inc.  
Foxmore Partners, LLC.  
Fornower Funeral Homes  
Surgical Splendor of Utah  
  
"We make healthcare the priority!"
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"We make healthcare the priority!" ... they do not lie, I will give them that.

My current project is an "integration" project ...

I am currently integrating code for our premier revenue cycle management system.

What's revenue cycle management? - well here's one description:

Basically, imagine if you will a healthcare system where the patient isn't the customer (I know, hard to imagine, right - sarcasm off), in fact you could make a reasonable argument that in the aforesaid system there is NO CUSTOMER - just broken relationships ...

Patients don't trust doctors ...

Doctors don't trust patients ...

Insurance companies (and other payors) don't trust providers (Hospitals, doctors, nurses, etc.).

Hospitals and other medical care professionals don't trust the payors - Medicare, Medicaid, Private Insurance, Workers Compensation Insurance, Department of Labor, and so on, and fuck this ...

Bottom line - this is a system built on a dozen people, all standing in a circle, pointing a gun at each other's heads ... and they are all trigger happy - and they all want "pay back".

With respect to Digi-Health - we only really care about "Payors" (those persons or entities that pay for a medical bill, drugs) and "Providers" (those organizations that provide medical care, services, supplies, drugs). Digi-Health has a built in algorithm optimized to "re-price" medical bills to determine whether one of the following applied:

1. CREDIT BALANCE: Where the provider, like an MRI/Radiology center, charges too much. Like, let's say a insurance company has a secret agreement (and these rates ARE secret) with some provider to pay \$500 per MRI, if the Radiology Center then comes back and

charges more than this, like say \$2,000, our system can determine this difference and construct an appeal letter explaining why.

2. UNDER-PAYMENT: This is where the provider is not paid enough for the services/supplies/drugs/etc provided. This happens a lot with complicated procedures, and there are rules, defined by CMMS (Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services), that tell you whether or not any 2 or more procedures/charges can be billed. These are really boring rules, with really esoteric names like "bi-lateral rules", "multiple-procedure rules", "mutual exclusion codes".
3. DENIALS: Cases when a payor decides they were billed in an inappropriate or inaccurate way and the entire charge is rejected. For example - there is something called a "bi-lateral rule", scenarios where a surgery is performed on 2 of the same thing (like double carpal tunnel surgery). You can get paid for certain things once, even if you are having both of your wrists "worked on" - and if you attempt to get paid twice? - denial. Some denials are not correct, which means the payor is in the wrong ... and this is where re-pricing engines come into play. Well, here and will the other 2 cases (under-payment, credit balance).

Then there is the "contract engine" - the part of Digi-Health which contains the knowledge of "special rates/carve-outs/fixed prices" that are negotiated between an insurance company and a hospital (for example). This is where the rubber meets the road ... this is where a lot of the bullshit resides ... this is why a fucking "explanation of benefits" is NOT a fucking medical bill ... and ONE MORE FUCKING THING, the relationship between payors and providers is the CLASSIC "prisoner's dilemma". Ok ... fuck ... now we're talking formal Game Theory (sorry).

Here is the quickie summary:

Imagine you and a friend rob a bank and you both get caught by the police (sorry). You are both separated from

each other, different interrogation rooms, and the only source of information you have about your friend comes from the cop. If you keep your mouth shut, and your friend talks – you go to jail for 10 years and he goes to jail for 5 years (your friend is an untrustworthy dick). If you talk, and your friend is tight-lipped, you get the “nickel” and he gets, you know, the “dime”. Obviously, if you both talk, you both get 5 years (assuming you were smart enough to have a lawyer help you negotiate and verify the plea agreement beforehand). But here's the thing – if you both keep your mouths shut, and act like Sergeant Schultz from “Hogan's Heroes”, you will get ZERO time (they let you go – those fucking cops ...)

Of course, when I say “friend” I don't really mean friend. I mean “person you are robbing a bank with”. You really don't trust each other like brothers or friends or shit like that. Also, you need to know that the cops are going into each room and telling the other guy, “hey man, your friend seems close to talking ...”. This makes it hard to know, right? What would you do?

For the above scenario, because of the inherent lack of trust, the most likely behavior or “Nash Equilibrium Point” is to talk ... to spill the beans.

The “don't snitch” urban legend is less powerful than the human psychology at play – and the biological imperatives or survival instinct.

Payors and Providers are like the 2 bank robbers: a) payors assume, almost as policy, that providers over-bill [and Payors probably try to take advantage on under-paying where they can] b) providers assume payors will always under-pay (and they, the providers, also try to find a way to inflate the bill as some kind of financial balancing act). This is a very toxic situation, and NOWHERE in this equation is there this fucking thing called a “patient”.

So when they say “we make healthcare a priority”, they are inadvertently being honest ...

Their priority is in maintaining the “healthcare system”, they couldn't give a fuck about patients and what

happens to them AS LONG AS they get their money. You can pretend "oh, Steve, it's the insurance companies", but believe me – it's both fucking sides ... it's all one big shit storm.

Whatever – our Digi-Health product is marketed mainly to hospitals, large physician practices, clinical services organizations, outpatient surgical centers, ambulatory care facilities, and other kinds of healthcare schemes that provide some kind of toxic, cancer-ass, shit to patients ... and continue to do so until the patient is dead. My point is: they must get paid, no matter what happens to the patient – "you", the patient, are just a widget in the process.

Paul needed me to "step up" and really "buckle-down" and "saddle-up" and "get motivated" and other kinds of granola-kayak-owner-dog-park-stalker-agile-nazi bullshit. He needed me to get the code converted from JAVA, to c-sharp, and he needed all the tiers, all the services, all the web-page code, the whole fucking 1,000,000 line boon-dongle completed in the next 3 weeks ... this was bullshit ... "this is a really good reason to quit", is all I could think.

You must understand – I care about the quality of my work, I just don't care about helping this crony-economic system in its functioning. Digi-Health exists BECAUSE the system is broke. Digi-Health is like a salvage yard for busted healthcare financial transactions. Digi-Health is a scrap heap. Fuck it – cue "Sanford and Sons" theme.

No – I don't care.

I once proposed to one of these guys the following:

"Hey, why don't the insurers and Medicare and hospitals and everyone get together and re-mediate all of the questionable transactions? You know – a cooperative, optimal solution?" Everyone laughed at me ...

"What, how would we stay in business?" – that was the response.

So no, I don't care if Proxy Wellness Inc., the revenue-cycle "experts", succeed. Rather – I wish they

would fail ... miserably ... painfully. I dream of showing up at work and seeing all my coworkers balling, sobbing, pleading, "what happened? Why did I lose my job?". Well, you lost your job because you're a Nazi "go along, get along" fuck.

Nope - I don't care about Proxy Wellness Inc..

I didn't know how to respond to Paul's request, however. I wasn't really sure I wanted to be "back on the job market" so soon.

He was asking for a lot, and I'd only known him a few months (cuz I'd only been working there a few months). "Fuck it!", I thought, "and fuck this place".

```
Paul,  
  
Digi-Health "code conversion project"  
cannot be completed in 3 weeks. I doubt  
this work could be completed in 3 months.  
  
I'm really glad you have so much faith in  
me, but I'm not Merlin YOU FUCK!  
  
I resign,  
  
Steve
```

Paul did not respond too well to this ... or very quickly. Even with his long sandy hair ... his "Jesus sandals" (birkenstocks) ... his "Value Village uniform of faux non-conformist douche-baggery because he's pouring his cash into his home" ... he was just another stooge, sent from somewhere, to harass me - to suck the life out of my life (what little life I had). He was pissed, of that I was sure.

"Hey, Steve, can you and I go find an empty conference room?" Paul asked me this, as if he was actually wondering if it were feasible, like "hey buddy, could we land a man on the moon?".

"Sure ..."

We were able to find a room fast enough, and the general sense of dread that was emanating from Paul's unkempt arm-pits acted like a panic pheromone in the office ... all eyes were glued on us ... everyone knew something was up ... the herd was restless. They knew, because this kind of thing triggered chemical reactions in the ancient brain, that part of the mind that lurks below our consciousness.

"Steve, I'm just disappointed that you didn't come to me earlier."

"I did, last week, I told you there was 3 to 6 months of work ahead."

"Yes, but I know I told you we needed it done in 1 or 2 months."

"Yes, you did ... and that's STILL MORE THAN 3 FUCKING WEEKS!"

Paul was scared.

Paul knew I had lost it.

Actually – I hadn't really lost it, but I liked to play my part in this charade. I was just enjoying the theater of it all and I really enjoyed seeing Paul so confused and distraught. From his perspective I was that "crazy man", that "demon-person", of which all the latest HR literature was a-buzz. I was the crony-capitalist version of a Soviet era alcohol infused absentee dissenter, the only option left was to slack, to skip work, to tell our bosses to suck our cocks – we were the unstoppable rebellion of "no".

Paul looked at me, and then down at the table, shaking his head. I knew what came next ...

"Steve, I'm really sorry, but I think we will have to let you go."

"I already resigned ... are you stupid?"

"Yes, we'll have to let you go ..."

And Paul got up, walked out of the conference room, and I left the building. There was no box – I didn't need one. I hadn't "nested" in an office cubicle in YEARS. All I could think was "cool, more retirement".

I don't bring in to work plants or knick-knacks or

coffee-cups with pictures of my kids – I don't have kids, and I wouldn't have a cup like that besides. I don't bring in anything extra, that will slow me down during the exit – because the exit is inevitable. On the off chance I did find some horrible shit-hole palace I “wanted” spend a decade or so at (because I could stomach it without getting nauseous), I would still keep my cubicle sparse – almost empty of any evidence that a human had worked there. Why leave any evidence of humanity where none exists? I would only leave some yellow sticky note saying, “A Slave Sat Here” ... and get drunk ... and leave (sometimes in precisely that order).

I had my back-pack, and all my shit, and there was nothing left behind for the rats to scavenge through, and so I left ...

“FUCK PROXY WELLNESS INC.!”

Those were the last words that left my mouth before I left the office.

3. *The Quest*

I can't work with the same recruiter more than once or twice ...

Sure – I would LOVE to have a conspirator as a recruiter, but they are part of it, part of the fucking scheme ... the scheme by which Steve “must be made to work”, irrespective of Steve's disdain for the wretched monstrosity of it all. I am a whore – and they are pimps.

So now I'm looking for work again ...

After telling Paul to fuck himself, and sending him a link from Porn-Hub showing him how this could be accomplished, I decided to update my resume. I decided that I had just finished another “contract job” – which is bullshit, but I really don't fucking care. I called everything on my resume, since 2008, a “contract job”.

Listen – they are ALL contracts now when you break it down. If someone asks me if I were a “permanent” employee, well, I would say “no, I was contracting” – what the hell

does "permanent" mean these days?. I always ended up with one or more co-conspirators at each place I worked. They, my "buddies", were always willing to play the part of "supervisor" or "manager" or "co-worker" for the purpose of references - this is something you must do if you want to walk my path. I would always promise to be a reference for them - mutual help and support. But "permanent" - what a fucking joke.

The job I had before this, RONDO Aerospace - there I was working on a business rules engine for their strategic "supply chain initiative". Basically, they wanted a configurable system that could search the U.S. Department of Defense database for RFPs (Requests for Proposal: basically how the government throws chum into the water to attract corporate-crony sharks and other scum). These RFPs describe the requirements of the "item" or "service" and then one or more companies provide a proposed solution, with budget/cost estimate, and hope they win the contract. Usually, this is all "fixed" from the beginning - some senator or congressman had already chosen which company would get what contract. The "competition" is for show - for the freaks who think we all have a chance.

But, this also means that the project they hired me for was pointless, a sham, a make-work job ...

While at RONDO they told me "we have no turnover" - no one ever quits, no one ever gets fired. This was a nice fantasy for the twenty somethings who've been tossed about on the seas of recent economic history, but I knew it was a lie. I made this buddy there, at Rondo, called Nick - Nick knew when they drug-tested at RONDO so Nick was able to carry on his other life as a Rastafarian.

Nick had great weed.

Nick, who basically showed up to work later than me and left earlier, was laid off just 5 months after I started there - at RONDO. Our director told us "Nick had an illness in the family and had to take some time off to take care of a loved one", but I knew what was going on.

Nick was canned, fired, laid-off.

Nick deserved this, of course he did, he refused to contribute the requisite amount of work to RONDO — a company that built missiles which carried cluster bombs ... bombs which were a mix of fragmentation and white-phosphorous ... the kind of shit that tore a child's body to shreds while super heating what was left ... leaving only crispy strips of bacon. Drones carried these missiles — drones used for the strafing of weddings, to torch schools, and attack other kinds of terrorist initiatives.

Nick's job was actually to develop/engineer the software for these bombs and I think Nick was deliberately sabotaging his work — but I can't prove this. He was an expert in laser calibration and targeting, and his algorithms (programs) allowed these bombs to accurately hit their targets. Buried, somewhere deep, in thousands of lines of real-time C-code ("C" is a computer language), was the truth. The truth is Nick was a kind of moral-hero type. He disdained the bullshit, as much or more than I did, but he still cared enough to try to throw his "wooden shoe" into the machine — I knew, all too well, that the machine was a giant, mutable, morass of quickly adapting satanic goo ... and nothing stopped it on its way.

Nick and I were similar, and different — and it was where we were different that most irritated me.

But Nick had some "family emergency" to attend to and I never saw Nick again.

I never had the chance to steal away to the parking garage again, to smoke a bowl with Nick, and make fun of the bullshit.

I can't say Nick was a friend, I barely knew him, but I would say he was an ally — and a committed one at that. After I found out Nick was gone, because I knew what he was doing, I suspected that maybe he wasn't around any longer in a more "permanent" sense ... any ways ... that maybe Nick was dead.

So many people die these days - "mysteriously".

I read about this vice president, this "important man", at Goldman-Sachs, who killed himself (suicide) with a

nail-gun – he shot himself 12 times in the skull.

I don't know how someone shoots themselves 12 times in the head with a nail gun. I can see shooting yourself in the head once, perhaps the second shot happens as an involuntary reflex – but 12 times? Lots of bankers, financial geeks, and other folks “important to our continued economic progress” were dying off these days, and very few people questioned this. Just a bunch of accidents involving nail guns.

So, no – I don't believe the bullshit about some happy work environment where no one is fired and no one quits. In fact – I WOULD NEVER WANT TO WORK IN THAT FUCKED UP WORLD!

What? – you think you are owed a job? Because you showed up? Because your mother's egg was fertilized by your father's greasy spunk and that somehow this entitles you to a job? Fuck that ... no one owes you shit. But here's the thing: we live in a world now where failure is rewarded for the powerful and punished in the weak and in that world EVERYONE will be made to work ... everyone will be made to burn out their souls in pursuit of some nonsensical goal of keeping this ugly thing alive. This Monster (what I call the amorphous mass of evil grinding the human race into the ground) that probably killed Nick ... this Monster that will devour me one day ... probably ... or it will ignore me ... as a benign parasite – there's no reasoning with it, and very little leeway allowed.

I want to be ignored as a benign parasite ... I am no threat ... not like the “Nicks” of the world ... this time I have between jobs is the only retirement I have left. To put in as little effort as possible until the Monster dies – and hopefully, maybe, some new world replaces it (without another fucking Monster taking its place). Who the fuck knows when this might happen, if ever.

I had enough money saved up to cover my expenses, rent, food, for about 4 months ... maybe 5 if I stretched it. It did mean I was on hiatus from hookers – but maybe I could set aside money for one or two “visits”. This is the “retirement” of which I speak.

And don't get me started on COBRA – fuck COBRA ... fuck the “hey fuck, why don't you hand over \$1,400/month to some ass-hat insurance company so we can all pretend that life is worth living ERGO you MUST have health insurance ...”. Fuck that – COBRA is bullshit (not part of my retirement plans).

I know there are people with 401K plans and IRAs and pensions who believe they will retire one day.

I know there are still old people alive today who serve as “cargo prophets” foretelling a retirement world for all.

Those “prophets” tell you “just wait till you're 68 or 70 years old ... and then you get to rest, to sleep, to enjoy yourself, to tune-out, to surf” and other happy tales of bullshit.

I also stop by the stores, once in a while, to buy some kind of shit – and I am greeted by someone, in their 70's, working at WALMART or TARGET or wherever ... and the lie of retirement, even now, reveals itself – it is laid bare.

There is no retirement for people like us, the slaves – maybe there never was, but certainly there isn't now.

I will not retire, you will not retire – accept this.

My “retirement” is the sum of those brief windows of time between jobs – the amount of time I am “allowed” to disconnect.

I know, crazy ... what do I mean by “allowed”?

I mean I don't think that I will be allowed to stay inactive, out of work, for long ...

You see, I AM NOT FUCKING NICK! I have no intention of fighting “the man” – if the man knew this, then I think he would just give me \$3K a month and an ounce of weed ... each month ... and just leave me alone until all the shit fell apart.

I threaten no one but myself, but the Monster doesn't know this.

The Monster probably knows I know “it” exists, but the Monster doesn't know if I am a threat.

And besides ... what if one or two of us were allowed some relative peace, some respite, from this shit? - that would be chaos for the Monster, the system. Then everybody would want out. But when I think of it this way, and I think of all the folks on disability now? - well, I guess I have too much pride to lie my way onto disability, but perhaps I get why so many are on disability.

So no peace for me, or you - no retirement.

All of us - those of us who see the world for what it is - must be made to waste our time IF we have the potential of being a threat. This is the important part - are we a threat if we are not working?

Many of us are no threat at all, in my opinion - and the Monster will allow those to simply lose their jobs, collapse from despair, commit suicide, or just disappear into the streets as homeless people. This dark entity doesn't care about most people, most people are nothing to it. It does, however, keep track of some people - mostly those few of us left (about 40 million out of a nation of 300 million) who are necessary to "keep the lights on" and shit. Those few of us that are beyond "functional literacy" and understand the Monster's weaknesses.

So maybe it's more than just about "keeping the lights on", maybe it is also about "keeping us occupied" ... occupied ... occupation. Think of it as an occupation of your soul.

We must be "made to work" - we cannot be allowed the idle time to ask questions, to ponder, to wonder about our situation or to even smoke weed.

We will work, and buy iCrap, and consume our Monsanto food-nuggets, and defecate that slimy black shit into the cesspool of nothing and then we will fall asleep and dream of "retirement".

The slave says: "Well ... at least I have my retirement investments", and he/she cracks open a beer and turns on their Xbox to go kill something ... virtually.

And at that moment, thinking about my current "retirement", my burner-phone rings ...

"Hey, Steve, it's Scott from Acu-Realm ... do you have a second to speak with me about an opportunity that I really, really, think is a great match for your skill-set?"

"What? - I'm eating lunch, can you call back in 2 or 3 hours?"

"It's 4 pm?"

"It's not 4 pm where I am ...", it was 4 pm where I lived, but I enjoyed this, messing with these recruiter assholes.

"Ha ... ok ... well it's a great role ... they need someone with .NET API experience ... they need someone who understands n-tier development and database operations ... Have you worked with J-NGA?"

J-NGA was a "no-sql" database developed by KOROLLIAN PARTNERS ...

J-NGA was/is one of the worst designed systems ever developed. Every primary key in J-NGA was a random string — this caused a lot of shredding/fragmentation on the mechanical hard-drives (and didn't work so hot with solid-state drives either). J-NGA's indexing scheme GUARANTEED a polynomial time search cost for every filter, every "join" (join: the method by which 2 or more tables are linked via a key-2-key relationship), every fucking query (miserably slow).

In the scenario we were using it, a multi-terabyte clinical-health data store, very simple queries took hours (even days) to finish ... this was really stupid.

That job, that "Jenga Job" as I called it, was for a major hospital system — and what you should know is about 100K people die, each year, for simply making the choice of going to a hospital ... and a large fraction of these die from hospital acquired infections (flesh eating bacteria, MRSA, and crap). Well, our J-NGA install was used for reporting on infectious disease, in the hospital, to identify (for nurses) which rooms had been exposed — so that post-op, weak immune system, patients won't be placed in these rooms ... you know ... so they don't fucking die. Well, our reports took 48 hours to run — and this was bad.

This meant that if a room were unoccupied for 2 days (unlikely in this current scenario) then MAYBE J-NGA could help ... but no room stayed unoccupied for more than a few hours. When it was finally discovered that 5 people had died, in our hospital system, as a result ... well ... J-NGA was never blamed. It was some IT spazz who got canned, and then J-NGA was replaced, under the radar, while no one was looking. Fucking J-NGA.

I had emailed KOROLLIAN about these problems, these defects, and their response always was, "Steve, we don't think you really understand how J-NGA works ..." - and then nothing, they simply blocked my email address.

I despised this system, J-NGA, but I really didn't care too much, either way, at this point in my life. "J-NGA" wasn't about "systems theory", or patient care - it was a jobs program to keep a bunch of middle class assholes employed, until everything, the whole fucking world, just disintegrated.

Scott was very excited about my J-NGA experience.

"It's on my resume ..."

"I don't see any recent work with J-NGA?"

"I don't have any."

"Well ... it would really help if you had recent work."

"How much does it pay? This fucking job? Hourly or contract?" - I was hoping it would be a contract job.

"They are looking for someone senior to bring on-board permanent ... does this interest you?"

And with the least amount of commitment I could muster, I murmured the words "yeah, sure".

"Great ... this is really great ... can we meet at Kenny's tomorrow ... at the Mall ... to review your background in person? Lunch is on me." Free lunch - so more money left for weed and hookers, why not.

"Yeah ... uh ... when?"

"When can you meet?"

"I dunno ... noon?"

"I would love to meet earlier ... could we meet at 9 for breakfast?"

"Uh ... no."

"Then I will see you at noon, tomorrow."

At this point I figured there was a 1/5 chance I would show up.

The job was neither good nor bad from the description, from my perspective – all of this was pointless.

I didn't need more cash just yet, and I had just barely begun enjoying my "retirement" ... so the odds were not good I would show up. Really not good odds at all.

I sat there ... after the phone call ... connected to my vaporizer.

I wondered, "what the fuck am I doing? Why don't I have any goals?", then I smiled, laughed, and continued playing "Terror Strike 12: Mission Mexico" - a first person shooter game set in Juarez. And as I sat there, killing Mexicans, listening to their realistic screams as I stabbed and shot and burned them to death ... well ... I wondered ... "are my parents proud of me?".

Ha ... no.

4. The Lunch Meeting

Waking the next morning, I went immediately to my coin jar.

I kept this jar of coins, on my dresser ...

This jar of coins contained all the pennies and nickels and dimes and quarters that the U.S. mint didn't even make any longer ... because everybody used plastic or their phones now to pay for shit. Some people still had cash, and used cash – but not many.

But this jar did serve a purpose for me, especially for me ...

Whenever I needed to make an "important" decision, I would do the following:

1. Assign an option to each kind of coin in the jar – an "option" being a choice or a decision.
2. Shake the jar thoroughly.

3. Grab a hand-full of coins.
4. Toss the coins on the carpet ... in front of me.
5. Then, I would turn-around 5 times ... close my eyes ... and jump onto the "splattering" of coins.
6. Whichever coin was the closest to my left foot's big toe – that coin won.
7. In case of a tie, or a perceived tie – because I was too drunk or high or both to disambiguate the answer? Well ... the tie-breaking rule was: ignore the coins that tie, and then find the next closest coin.

I had chosen the "nickel" to signify going to the meeting with Scott.

I shook the jar, grabbed some coins, and tossed them in front of me – gently.

I spun around 5 times ... it might have been 6 ... I had gotten up that morning, turned on the vape immediately and already I was lit-up.

And there it was – as if providence or God or some other universal force had deemed it!

A nickel – just in front of my left foot's big toe!

And ... even further out ... there were more nickels!

THIS HAD TO MEAN SOMETHING!

It appeared as if I had accidentally grabbed a whole bunch of nickels ... and now this was looking spooky and weird ... so I needed to vape a bit more ... I needed more weed ... to chill me out. So I took an hour or so to ponder this, while surfing YOUTUBE.

I sat back down to watch a YOUTUBE video about street vendors in China. They spoke of dredging sewers for fat deposits ... fat and oil ... all of which was the lingering left-overs of human feces. The Chinese, well, they would use this "poo oil" to cook food in – not cool. They talked about "sewer shrimp" – which was a fancy name for Asian cockroaches. It was really gross, but still less spooky than grabbing that hand-full of nickels. But cooking oil from human shit? – this seemed like a "yep, there's really no point" moment. "The whole world will be eating their own

shit soon ... then dying ...", and my mind drifted back to my meeting with that douche Scott ... the "nickels" demanded it.

I didn't know Scott – he might be nice ... but he was just another phantom.

I've met a few recruiters I could stomach, but they're mostly like used car salesman or real estate agents or pimps ... yeah pimps, without the beatings (well, hold that thought) And, they're so needy ... fuck ... it sucks the life out of a person, they're neediness.

I know they need jobs, as I do, to pay for rent or food or whatever the hell they use what's left over to buy. I don't know.

I think these recruiters are people – but I don't know.

I can't go anywhere, do anything, without a call from them – and in that sense they feel like agents of the Monster, that force keeping me from my sliver of humanity ... my own personal retirement.

I change my mobile phones out, every 6 months now, and only give the number to my friends – all zero of them. How the hell do they get my number? These fucking recruiters? How do they get my email address? How do they always know when I'm between "contracts" (jobs) or as I put it – in "retirement"?

"Shit ..."

It was almost noon ...

The good news was that the mall was only a few miles away.

These days, almost no one was at the mall – even the "fashion malls" (whatever the fuck a "fashion mall" is).

This mall was a "fashion mall" – a designer boutique, designed and constructed in the late 1990's to cater to those affluent X-GEN types who were prancing about, with their golden labs, all willy-nilly, pretending to be more than what they are/were. Sure, that's my generation ... but I don't cop to it. I see myself as a rogue, variable, unpredictable wanderer, programmer-drifter – after the divorce, the crap, the waste, I just wanted to be left

unmolested. But the recruiters always, somehow, know ...

"NO MOLESTAR" - that's my motto ... just leave me the fuck alone ... better for me, safer for you.

I'd taken an hour brake from the vape, so I felt I should be ok to drive.

I jumped into the shower, quickly washed and rinsed my blubber rolls and other fat cleavages that surrounded my now shrinking skeleton. With my hair still wet, I made my way to the mall.

Whether I smoked a little weed before (or not), I always wondered - "is today the day?".

Is today the day some coked-up (probably crystal-meth), rhoid-raged, fascist piece-of-shit cop pulls me over. I imagined these scenarios, these incidents, and considered the possibilities ...

What would I do if some cop pulled me over and started harassing me? I mean, they're mostly military rejects now, completely devoid of any professionalism or intelligence or moral compass.

It is well known, now, that if you test "too smart" on police entrance exams, then you have no chance of getting hired as a cop - they don't want smart cops. They want the "cop" to simply be an extension of whatever mad agenda some douche politician wants to instigate - usually against pot smokers, because truly they are so very dangerous ... the Rastafarians.

The scenario I was pondering in the car went something like this:

The cop pulls me over ...

"Sir, do you know why I pulled you over?"

"No fucking clue."

"Sir, please don't take that tone with me ... put your hands on the steering wheel."

"Fuck it - ok."

"Sir, please ... if you continue with your profanity I will consider you aggressive and I will need to take action."

"What action?"

"Well ... I'll tase you ... with my fucking taser."

"Listen, I have a camera on all the time when I drive. This camera is linked to my YOUTUBE channel and is broadcasting all the fucking time. You should know I'm not a young man, and I have a heart condition, so 'tasing' me would be about as risky as shooting me."

"You mean you're recording me right now?"

"Yes"

"Why would you do that?"

"Because I don't want to be murdered by a cop ... it's the cheapest insurance I can think of for this sort of thing."

"Well ... maybe I'll jam your signal or some shit ... you don't know that I can't do that now do you?"

"I dunno ... you might be able to do that."

"Do you have any cash on you?"

"How is that your fucking business?"

"Do you know why I pulled you over?"

"I fucking don't care."

"Sir, you were driving 30 MPH in a 25 MPH zone."

"Fuck ..."

"I'll let you off with a warning, this time. Please drive safely Sir and have a nice day."

"Fuck ..."

That's how it goes ... in my head.

I know what you are thinking, "but Steve, aren't there some decent cops still out there?". Well, there might be. There might be one or two or three decent cops for every 100 cops. This still means my odds are quite good that what I get is the raging, pot-bellied, muscled, bridge-troll who just really wants to kill somebody before he retires. And, no – I don't really have a camera set up in my car ... I would just like to see the expression on that pig's face if he thought I did ... maybe he would kill me any ways. Maybe he would just want to get famous.

I think even the "good cops" get converted to bad – by drugs, by environment. They have an open wound where their soul used to be and they are, in many ways, the avant-garde

of the fucked-up world to come. They see themselves as "soldiers", but they were supposed to be guardians – folks who would step in and stop a crime or investigate actual crimes. Remember: a crime needs a victim, otherwise it's not a crime, it is just fascist bullshit.

I didn't get pulled over on my way to the mall ... maybe next time ...

Kenny's was pretty much empty when I got there.

It was a "work day" – which means those who had jobs were either working, or shuttling between job 1, 2 (or in some cases), job number 3. You could see it in the eyes of those down-trodden, sleep-deprived, over-stimulated youth. They were the zombies, in protean form. They were the sweltering, growing, toiling mass of pent-up anger not yet ready to explode ... but getting close.

I could hear the damn cracking, creaking ... that barrier holding up the pent up frustration of tens of millions of Americans who had bought into the "one house, 2 cars, a cat, a dog, a wife, 2.5 kids, AND you get to retire one day ...".

I knew this was all bullshit ... the "American Dream" ... the big lie ... but I still felt sad for those young people who believed, the same sadness I feel when I spy a gazelle, on some nature show, being stalked by a pride of lions. "The dam is breaking ..."

Kenny's was one of those "theme restaurants" where the food is more "fun looking" than tasty. Everyone knows that the food we eat, at these restaurants, is manufactured some place else – could be Mexico, could be China, could be anywhere. They get this food, in some kind of freeze-dried form, and then place it in large stainless steel re-heating ovens. It all says "fresh" – but when you ask a waiter or waitress what "fresh" means, well, they usually roll their eyes and frown. And you don't want to piss them off, not unless you want something "extra" in your soup – something that is actually fresh.

As I walked in, I could see only a few people seated – and logic deemed that Scott was sitting alone to the front

of me, but he immediately jumped up to greet me to remove all doubt.

"Yo .. STEVE ... HOW ARE YOU!"

Scott was very clean cut, well dressed, and apparently between the age of 25 and 32 (my guess). Scott had blond hair, blue eyes, and a short haircut that would have been vogue in Germany during the late 1930's. His handshake was firm, but greasy – probably because of some hand-cream he used. He wore a light yellow pastel polo shirt, tan slacks, and birkenstocks – I hated those fucking birkenstocks. Like most douches these days, he had whatever iThis or iThat had been released recently from the bowels of Apple – like so many white rectangular nuggets of digital feces ... that shit disturbed me.

"How ya doing? Ya doing good?"

I usually responded "yeah".

"Yeah ..."

The waitress came by with our menus, we ordered drinks.

Scott ordered water, I had a coke. We both ordered our food and once it arrived I ate, as Scott talked and talked and talked some more ... this was good, he enjoyed hearing himself talk, which gave me time to eat.

"... so I know that you have a lot of experience, but I'm wondering if you are ready to step up to some real challenges ... to grow ... I have a client and they are doing some really exciting work with IoT ... you know IoT ... right? Right Steve?"

"Internet of Things ... yeah ... that's essentially the networking of ordinary items, via embedded client-server architectures, all of which support what's sometimes described as 'ubiquitous computing' ..."

"YES! Right ... Right-on Steve ... I'm really glad I got your name from Phil ..."

"Phil who?"

"Phil Kemper ... you know Phil ... from Toxi-Swap?"

Toxi-Swap was a "contract" I had worked on for 6 months 2 years ago.

Tox-Swap was right before my divorce, a really crappy place to work and actually a really crappy company. Basically, they designed high-frequency trading algorithms that were designed for "dark pool" markets – derivatives markets, shit like that. Toxi-Swap's real claim to fame was in cornering the Portuguese bond market in 2011 or 2012 and earning over 100% for their clients in just one year. They weren't a hedge fund, they just designed software for hedge-funds. Toxi-Swap was also being investigated – and several of their founders had recently committed suicide with nail guns.

"I don't really know Phil."

"But you have him as a reference, and you've recommended him on Linked-In?"

"Yeah, but that's not reality."

Scott's apparently endless store of bubbling smiley optimism was impacted by that statement ... as if I had insulted him by demeaning some religious figure or some kind of crap like that ... some taboo protestation against the gods ...

"Steve ... you shouldn't treat Linked-In like that."

"Why?"

"Because people use it for their careers."

"What careers?"

"To find jobs."

"What jobs?"

"Come on ... Steve ... get serious with me for a minute."

And then Scott just kept on talking about the "role". I was happy to be eating my re-hydrated/re-heated cheese burger – and it was "fresh" enough. I chomped down my fries, my lunch salad, and tossed back one or two refills of coke ... and Scott kept talking.

"Steve, I need to go to the bathroom, please don't leave ... I'm coming back to pay the check."

Scott stepped away, and after I could see he was in the men's room, well – I took off too.

I didn't usually go to the mall, but I did enjoy seeing the strange sights of it all, so I walked around a

bit ... kind of like visiting my dying mom in the hospital, but without the emotional attachment.

All of the shops and stores and kiosks and other crap designed to soak up what little wealth people derived from working 50 or 60 or 70 hours a week ... all of them seemed sickly.

The Lego Store was especially fun, because they apparently had a "Lego kit" for just about every TV show or movie you could imagine – and I could see only 3 people in the store, and 2 of them were employees.

I walked through the food court and marveled at the glistening, putrefying, noodles and brownish/greenish chicken at Tso-Long's Chinese Take-Out ... and fucking Sabarros ... that place could NEVER be shut down!

I went past Forever 21 and Fossil and wondered, "shit, are we in a permanent loop of the old trying to stay young and the young never being allowed to grow up?" ... and I kept walking.

I figured I would make one or two laps of the fucking place, visit all the floors (there were like 8 or 10 fucking floors to this mall), and then go home and play video games till I passed out from beer and weed ... ah, retirement.

And then ... fuck ... Scott was there, right in front of me.

"Steve ... hey ... you're messing with me, right?"

I wasn't messing with him. I was trying to ditch him, as I had ditched so many other recruiters in recent years – avoiding the uncomfortable post-lunch discussion about "next steps".

"Scott, I got a call from my mom ... I can't talk right now ... problem in the family."

My mom had been dead for 15 years.

"Crap ... well, maybe we can spend a little more time talking about your resume and ... well ... how we can clean it up a bit."

"Nah ... I've got to go."

And I kept walking ... and Scott might have been

following, I wasn't sure.

I made a few more laps, visited the RadioShack which was having an authentically, existentially, REAL "going out of business sale". After looking at some electronic shit, all of which was manufactured in Thailand, I made my way to the Mall's exit – and Scott was nowhere to be seen.

As I neared the exit, however, I could see Scott sitting there ... on one of those fucked up metal benches ... the ones that look like they could double as torture racks once the revolution arrives.

Scott was waiting for me.

We made eye contact ... and he got up and began to follow me ... so I went to fucking Sears (and I hate fucking Sears).

"I'll use Sears to lose that fucker" is what I was thinking.

Scott might follow me in, but I would wind my way through the "Men's Fashion" and then to the "Tools and Stuff" and finally pass the gauntlet of "Women's Undergarments" knowing that Sears had an exit as well – one not too far from my car parked outside, just beyond women's underwear.

I knew I had lost him, I was sure of it ... and then ... fuck ... he was there, standing, talking ... to one of the pretty (but ditzy) check-out girls, flirting.

I immediately turned around, 100 feet away from him, and I heard ...

"Hey STEVE, come meet Carmen ... she's GREAT!"

Fuck ... fuck you Scott – leave me alone.

I made my way back ... back into the the massive orifice that was the Mall. That bloody colon of consumerism.

I moved slowly, from store to store, not caring what kind of crazy-ass shop I was in ... I even stopped at the fucking "Knife and Sword" place ... who stops at that fucking place but shut-in serial killers?

I tried to be stealthy ... turning back to look every once in a while ... to see if "He" was following me. I must have looked like Peter Lorre in some old-time film noir

paranoia classic.

I didn't know what I was doing.

I'm not fucking James Bond! (and I'm not fucking him either - FYI) Sure, the Mall wasn't empty, but I stood out clear as day - and it was simply impossible for me to hide from that spry fuck Scott.

I meandered through the group of octogenarians getting their daily exercise, their "walk-er-cise", in. I would see one of these old codgers stop, every once in a while, to engage in a "nice conversation" with some 25 year old college graduate selling mobile phones or DIY T-SHIRTS at a kiosk. When I see things like that ... when I think about the kids who are prostitutes instead of factory workers or scientists ... shit ... I don't know ... in that moment I realize how truly fucked up this whole mess is and how one day, not too far into the future, one of these "mobile phone sales-person twenty-somethings" is going to pull a knife out of their pocket and slit the throat of one of these elderly citizens. Don't bite the hand that feeds you? - fuck that, don't taunt the dog that you are slowly, painfully, inextricably, draining of its blood ...

And then there was Scott, again, in front of me ... fuck.

"Steve, you can't get away from this - this is a big opportunity for you ..."

That savage bitch ...

Scott was waiting there ... standing there ... as if transported by some futuristic technology... with his tight young body ... his chiseled good looks ... his sparkly, shiny, Pollyanna fucked up smile and pasty white-man face. I hated looking at him ... his good health mocked me.

"Steve, I'm serious - this could be a big role for you!"

We were on the 8th floor of the Fall Center Mall. The drop would be significant if someone were pushed off or something ... and I thought about it ... and it is worth mentioning ...

I didn't want to take the leap myself, I enjoyed my

life – as farcical as it is. But I didn't like Scott – he seemed like a demon and demons must be destroyed.

“Man, what are you doing? Come on man?”

I stepped back, about 10 feet from Scott ... maybe 20 feet ... enough space to build up speed, momentum – he was completely oblivious to what I was about to do ...

“Steve, buddy, let's go grab a coffee at Starbucks ...”

That was it!

FUCK STARBUCKS!

FUCK SCOTT!

FUCK SCOTT'S HARD BODY AND GOOD LOOKS!

FUCK HIS OBLIVIOUS HIPSTER EXISTENCE!

I ran as fast as I could, building up velocity over that short distance. Scott was in better shape than me, but I was simply a 270 pound man, traveling at 12-15 MPH (maybe faster, maybe slower, who knows) and Scott really didn't get it ... Scott was the gazelle and I was the lion.

He was leaning against the railing – his back facing the long drop below.

When I struck Scott, I placed my hands on his shoulders and pushed him off – and the force of that collision had him topple end-over-end all the way down, “Shit man, Fuck!” is all Scott had time to say on his way down ... I was astonished at how well it all worked out.

“Spin, and spin, and spin through the air ...”, my internal voice chanted.

His body, tumbling through space ... was magical.

I was like the inverse of that fucking thigh bone from “2001: A Space Odyssey” – except I wasn't tossing a bone into the air to celebrate some magical moment of consciousness leading eventually to space travel ... nope. I was tossing a douche into the pit in memoriam of how pointless a journey it has all been, and how near the day was when we would all be beating each other over the head with thigh bones.

The last rotation of Scott's body ... just before he struck the tiles ... well ... the force of his spin and the

vector of force from the fall all contributed to the impact on the mall's first floor. And it had quite an impact ...

His head cracked open, like a rotten egg, with bloody red-and-white bits of brain scattered in a circle about his torso ... well ... and also around the spot where Scott's head used to be.

It was a slippery, nasty, mess ... in fact, I think two old people slipped and fell because of that mess.

The gawkers, the walkers, the old people looking all befuddled and twitchy – it made me smile.

I could see the security guards rushing up the stairs ... elevators ... escalators ... to corner me until the cops arrived ...

I could see frantic mooks and fools and bitches and other bystanders ... rushing out from FOSSIL or Abercrombie or the Container Store ... to take their videos and post them to YOUTUBE ...

I was hoping, really expecting, that some fuck caught Scott's fall – and that would get posted too. That might have been too much good luck.

I had only seconds before this dreamy moment would end.

And then, as if the Devil were taunting me, my cell phone rang ...

"Misteer Boosters ... I am Jabla-va-tooh-rum ... I'm calling you on behalf of Compu-ticks Consulting ... how are you about doing so well this day?"

"I'm great Jaba ... really great ... how are you Jaba?"

"I'm great Misteer Steevs ... are you currently looking for work?"

"I am Jaba ... I'm looking for work ..."

No retirement for me.

THE END