

'Something is Watching Us!' Cried Denise Stingley to her Special Boy.

December 19th

“I fell asleep,” Tim called out as he tried to raise himself from his bed.

He was quite comfortable, having cocooned himself within the bottom bunk by stapling old comforters and blankets to the bed frame, and this made him even more annoyed by the fact that someone had just loudly knocked upon his door; a fact that he couldn't really ignore after having announced his presence so thoughtlessly.

He looked around, a bit confused, until he was able to read the blurry digits of his alarm clock. He let his head sink back down into the pillow and tried to calm his racing heart. He looked up at the ballpoint pen that hung from a beaded chain from the upper bunk, the pen that Julie had stolen from a bank for him a few months ago, and felt bad that he couldn't remember what it was that he had been dreaming about. When he couldn't record a dream immediately after he had it, he tended to feel as though he had wasted all of his time on just plain sleep.

The floor was cold and he had to tiptoe to the light switch in order to locate his slippers. He slid them on as he tried vainly to rub the sleep from his eyes. He headed for the door, and hoped that it wasn't Drew knocking. Yet Drew was the only one who hadn't planned on returning home for the holidays, and so the odds were very small that the culprit would be anyone else. He cracked the door a tad and saw that his fears had been correct.

“Your father just called on the house phone,” Drew said as he barged his way into the room, “I told him that I didn't think anyone was still here but that I'd check, and here you are.”

“Yeah,” Tim said, “here I am.”

“You're lucky that I was in the lounge near the phone room,” Drew said.

“I was supposed to be home by now,” Tim said.

“That's what you're dad said,” Drew said as he snooped through the film collection sitting on the shelf above Tim's desk.

“But it's only a two hour drive,” Tim said.

“It'll be longer tonight,” Drew said, “the weatherman said to expect another two to three inches by morning.”

“Really?”

“Yeah,” Drew continued, “and your dad said that if I found you asleep that you should give him a call and postpone your drive home until morning.”

Tim looked at Drew, pictured spending the night listening to one of the rosy-cheeked boy’s monologues and decided to take his chances with the drive.

“If I leave now,” Tim said as he knelt down to put on his boots, “I should be home by two in the A.M.”

“You’re crazy,” Drew said, “I don’t know why any of you guys go home anyway. This is where it’s at. Do you know how much liquor I have in my room?”

“I just hope we don’t come back in three weeks to find your bloated corpse surrounded by empty Canadian whiskey bottles,” Tim said.

“You don’t have to worry about me,” Drew said.

Tim put on his coat and rifled through his backpack to make sure that he had everything that he needed. It was all there, except something to write with, so he grabbed a handful of black ballpoint pens out of the T-vending mug on his desk that Chad had given him for his birthday last summer.

He hefted his large black laundry bag over his shoulder and headed for the door. He stepped into the hallway and dug in his pocket for his keys.

“Can I borrow one of these?” Drew called from inside the room as he pulled a couple of films off of Tim’s shelf. Tim had almost forgotten that Drew was still in there and wouldn’t have been surprised if he had accidentally locked him in.

“Sure,” Tim said, hoping that he would just grab one and leave.

“Which ones do you recommend?”

“Obviously I like them all,” Tim said, trying not to sound too annoyed as he walked back into the room, “otherwise I wouldn’t have them in my collection.”

“What’s this one?” Drew asked as he pointed to the Japanese characters that Tim had meticulously copied onto the white cardboard box.

“It’s a good one,” Tim said.

“Hmm,” Drew said and put it back. He absently grabbed another Japanese labeled box from the shelf.

“It’s got nudity in it,” Tim said.

“Really?” Drew looked back at the first film he had grabbed.

“Grab them both,” Tim said, “they both have nudity.”

Drew snatched up both of them and stepped out into the hall with Tim. Tim locked up his room and they headed down the worn burgundy carpeted hall together.

“Aren’t you going to call your father?” Drew asked when they passed by the telephone room.

“No,” Tim said, “he’ll just try to talk me out of the drive. If he calls again, just tell him that you saw me driving off or something; that way, neither you nor I am accountable for anything.”

“I’m not accountable for anything anyway,” Drew said defensively.

“That’s true.”

“You’re a brave one though,” Drew said as he headed towards the student lounge, “good luck with the drive, I’ll see you when you get back.”

“I hope you enjoy the movies,” Tim said, curious as to how Drew was going to appreciate the fact that the movies were in their native Japanese with no subtitles.

Drew made a beeline for the television lounge, so Tim decided that he better vacate the premises before Drew found out that he had four hours of difficult viewing ahead of him. On the way out, however, something compelled him to take a detour passed Julie’s old room. She had left a couple of days earlier and was probably hanging out at home with her old high school friends. Tim looked at the study room next to her room sadly; they had spent so much time in there together that her suite mates used to jokingly refer to it as “Chez Tim and Julie” in bad French accents.

He turned on the light and stepped into the room, letting his laundry bag fall to the floor. One night he and Julie had spent a good half hour appraising each piece of furniture. They then had a phenomenal make out session in which they would take turns chasing each other around the furniture, trying to pin the other down to their favorite piece. He looked at the burnt orange recliner and felt his heart sink as he remembered pinning Julie’s small body to the stained upholstery.

He could still see her face in his mind, as if she had just kissed him goodbye this morning, but they had been broken up now for almost three and a half weeks. She had tried to wish him a Merry Christmas just before she left for home, but when she knocked on his door he had remained very still and waited for her to go away, even though it was obvious that she knew he was in there; He just couldn’t deal with having to look into her eyes again without the freedom of touching her without permission.

She had the most amazing green eyes, and he wondered if he would ever be able to forget about how they looked when they were aimed intently into his own. He felt himself getting depressed by the thought; this was a shame, because since she had left his days had improved markedly. He dreaded returning to the same dormitory when Christmas break was over and

seeing Julie. He sighed at the thought, shouldered his laundry bag once more and headed out the door, turning off the light as he left.

As he stepped out into the cold air, he tried to tell himself that there was no place to go but forward; but that was little consolation when he had so enjoyed what was behind him. He gazed up at the small flurries that floated gently in front of the tall parking lot light. He crossed the parking lot to his ice-encrusted car. Luckily, his lock wasn't frozen, but he still had to struggle to pry the door open.

He threw his bags into the back seat and started the car. He turned the heater to high and waited for the windows to clear themselves of ice. Huddling behind the steering wheel and wishing for something hot to drink, he imagined how nice the steam from a cup of coffee would feel on his palms and wished that he had had the foresight to brew some up before he had left.

It was hard to figure out his mood, making it especially difficult to find a tape to listen to. He and Julie had made some mix tapes together earlier in the semester. They thought that it would be a good idea if they made one for each of their different emotions. They had alternated putting songs on the tape, that way they would be able to expose each other to their favorite music without having to listen to a whole tape made by the other person.

The one that was in the deck now, "Melancholy", was doing nothing to help him out of his Julie-induced funk, especially since there was a fifty percent chance that whatever song would be the first to cue up would be one of hers.

He threw the tapes that they had made together into the backseat of the car and pulled the ones he had made that afternoon from the side pocket of his backpack. Looking forward to the night drive home, he had put together a tape of moody songs to listen to, not especially sad, just moody. Slow songs, songs that he knew would make him feel good to be on his own. He put the tape into the deck halfway, feeling that it would be more appropriate to make his way through the winding streets of the campus in silence.

He pulled out of the parking lot and pumped his brakes down the steep road that ended at a ninety-degree turn at the large frozen duck pond. It had snowed quite a bit, removing all traces of the ice skaters that had been out that morning, but the roads had been plowed, the blacktop dusted to a light gray by the fresh snow that had fallen since. It was a good omen, if the campus roads were clear than the freeway must be even more so.

He stopped for gas, knowing that he would never make it back on a quarter tank of gas and bought a cup of coffee to extinguish the last remnants of sleep from his mind. As he stood outside of his car, waiting for his tank to

fill, he cupped his hands over his coffee and was glad that he was able to fulfill at least one thing this cold and lonely winter night.

It wasn't until he hit the main highway that he put the tape in. The song started up in a slow way, just a few chords strummed on a guitar that was so heavily filtered that it was hard to identify which instrument it actually was. It was a perfect way to start his isolated night drive. Tim smiled to himself, if he was going to feel alienated, at least he'd have a soundtrack to match.

There weren't many cars on the road this evening. It was a Thursday night so he wasn't too surprised, and since most of the kids from University had already gone home on Tuesday and Wednesday night the roads were pretty much clear. This town was nothing more than a farming community that happened to have a large university in its center; the university was the only thing that kept it alive at all. When the students were gone it was as if the blood had been drawn from it, leaving behind an empty husk.

As Tim passed the propane distributor, the half way mark home, he grew more and more apprehensive of actually going back. He wished that the ride were about two hours longer. All he really wanted to do was drive around all night. He wished that the family lived in Canada or something, so he could fight the treacherous icy roads for another five or six hours. Something about the highway at night calmed him. It made everything okay; it was as if the road offered solace. The way everything just kept passing him by reminded him of a bad metaphor.

He almost regretted that he had vowed to give up poetry when Julie dumped him. This might be some good stuff, the way the road was like time, and you were always running in the same spot, always watching everything go by from behind the windshield with the future just on the horizon and the past in your rear view mirror. On second thought, however, he could tell it was cliché without even having to see it written down. If he could tell that his poetry was that bad before he even wrote it, he supposed that something deep inside him had forced him to make that anti-poetry vow, and he thanked it.

He hit an icy patch and felt the disconcerting half-second of lost control. This jarred him out of his daydreaming and he crouched forward over the steering wheel with a newfound sense of either safety or guilt. He would hate to end up in a ditch like the abandoned truck he had seen a few miles back.

As Tim pulled into the outskirts of town he decided to stop at the donut shop. There was a girl there that flirted with him once. Maybe she would be

there, and he could reverse the direction which, judging from this first night, his vacation was heading.

When he pulled up he peered into the shop. Of course the cute girl wasn't there, there were two middle-aged ladies behind the counter instead. He hadn't yet turned off the car and was debating whether or not to go in when something told him to just go in with his notebook, anti-poetry vow or not.

The lady behind the counter said she didn't mind if Tim used his gas station coffee cup as long as he paid the refill price, so he did, and found a table near the window. He opened up his notebook and stared into it, waiting for some words to pour forth from his mind onto the page. But nothing came, so then, following some strange idea that crept into his mind, he stared down at his chocolate donut and wondered what the guy who had made it looked like.

He was hoping that he could somehow psychically divine an image of the pastry's creator simply by looking at his handiwork. Again nothing came, so he left shortly after finishing his donut with nothing more than a bad sketch of it labeled 'Failed Psychic Pastry Divination Attempt Number 001' in his dream journal. It was hard to tell the importance of something at first and it was good to be thorough.

He kicked the ice and salt deposits from underneath the bottom of his car and got back into it. He decided to drive by Nick's house, on the off chance that his bedroom light might be on. He had a strange feeling that it would be and that it would somehow salvage the evening.

The light wasn't, but Tim could make out the outline of what must be Nick sitting in front of his garage with the glowing red point of cigarette hovering in front of him. He turned out his headlights and coasted to a stop a few car lengths down the street. He wasn't sure if Nick had seen him because the garage was behind the house.

He made his way up the frozen driveway careful not to slip; it was odd that Nick hadn't cleared the snow and ice off of it yet.

"Who is it?" Nick called out suddenly. His voice made him sound as though he were barely awake, much the same way that Tim must have sounded to Drew after he had awakened him.

"You really ought to clear this driveway," Tim said as if he had a vested interest in its state, "you know your dad's gonna make you do it anyway."

"That's true," Nick said, "however, whether or not you realize it, it is three in the A.M., what am I supposed to do, start scraping ice in the middle of the night?" He looked at the long driveway and frowned.

"That's going to take you all day," Tim said with a laugh, "I'm glad I'm not staying the night or your father would make me work on it too."

"Yeah, go ahead and rub it in you bastard," Nick said and lifted the bottle that he had been sipping from to his lips. He took a big swallow and offered it to Tim.

"What is that you're drinking?" Tim asked him.

"Just take a sip," Nick commanded and shook the bottle in front of his face. In the darkness Tim couldn't make out the label and so he just took it out of Nick's hand and took a small swig of it. The strength of it caught him off guard and he coughed embarrassedly.

"It'll keep you warm on a cold winter's night," Nick said and took the bottle from him. He shook his head, "look at all of this ice."

Tim stared down the long driveway and looked back at his friend, something actually made him feel sorry for Nick when he thought about him spending the whole day tomorrow clearing the driveway.

"So what are you going to do tomorrow?" Nick asked him as if he had already resigned himself to his daylong task.

"I'm going to my Grandma's to take care of some things in her attic," Tim said, "I have this weird feeling that I am going to find something of extreme worth in it."

This was an understatement, ever since a few months ago he had been looking forward to a chance to go back to his grandmother's house. He had dreamt that his mother had pointed out a trunk in the attic, telling Tim that he should be careful with it because one might never know what a trunk of that magnitude may provide for the family.

He thought it strange because he only had a few vague memories of his mother, her having passed while he was still quite young. Yet, in the dream, she appeared to be the middle age woman she would have been now, had she survived, and not the young thirty-five year old that had died so long ago. The dream had gotten Tim writing again, something that he should have been doing all along but had neglected since starting at the university.

"Oh boy, Grandma Kaedich huh?" Nick said with an exaggerated shake of his head, it seemed as though Nick didn't hear what Tim had said, but on second thought Tim was a bit relieved, he didn't really feel like elaborating anyway. Nick sighed, "you know, now I don't feel half as bad about having to clear this driveway."

Tim looked down the driveway and then back at Nick, "you know, I just had a brainstorm, but I don't know if I should share it with you."

"What are you talking about?" Nick asked him, "do you have a heat beam or something in your car?"

"No," Tim tugged at Nick's coat and headed down the driveway, "come on, we have to go to Martin's and pick him up. Do you have money?"

"Wait a minute," Nick said, narrowing his eyes at him, "how much is this going to cost me?"

"Enough to get us some tacos," Tim said as he climbed into the car, "or if you'd rather not..."

"Just open the door."

"It's nice and toasty warm in here," Nick said as he rubbed his hands together, "what have you been listening to?" He gestured towards the tape deck.

"Just a tape that I made this afternoon," Tim gave Nick a melancholy look, "I was hoping that it would help get my mind off of Julie."

"You always let chicks get to you," Nick said as Tim put the car in gear and headed slowly down the street.

"How long have you known me and you just now figure that out?" Tim asked, "there's not been a lot of development for me in that area, you know?"

"You can say that again," Nick said. They pulled out onto Burton Street.

Tim loved the way Nick's side of town looked late at night. The area had remained unchanged since before Tim was born. The buildings were all very low and unassuming. Most of them were supply stores and garages owned by men who saw no reason to remodel them, and so neon signs that would have been replaced years ago on the other side of town remained here, giving Tim the feeling that he was still just a very small boy. It always surprised him when he'd drive down this street late at night and find himself behind the wheel instead of in the back seat while his father drove.

The Wood Creek apartment complex was diametrically opposed to these surroundings. It had been built up about two decades after everything else and looked as though the architect had envisioned some sort of world of tomorrow that was going to spring up right in the middle of all of this industrial gloom. The architect was, of course, wrong; but the apartment complex had decent management and was well kept, giving it the same kind of strange museum quality that the rest of the neighborhood had. Tim enjoyed driving through the winding roads of the complex about as much as he did the other area, because even though the scenery was completely different, the feeling was somehow the same. It had always reminded him of a ski lodge the way that the tall trees surrounded each small building.

"Is Martin even going to be up this late?" Nick asked Tim as he pulled the car to a stop in front of Martin's building.

"Yeah, he'll be up, he's been working swing shifts as of late."

"I hope you're right," Nick said, "or Nicole will have your head."

"She'll be just fine," Tim said as he got out of the car, hoping that he was right. They started up the steps, leaving their footprints in the powdery snow.

Tim pushed the button of Martin's intercom. No one responded so he pushed it again.

"You'd better ease up on that button pushing," Nick said, "you know how Nicole gets when a man shows impatience."

"No need to worry," Tim said, "she loves me."

"Hold your horses," Nicole's voice screeched out over the tinny intercom speaker. She took a long pause, as if she had just come up to the intercom to yell at them and then went back to bed. Tim looked at Nick and wondered if he should say something when she finally spoke again.

"Who is it?" She asked.

"Tim and Nick," Tim said into the intercom, he looked over his shoulder to see Nick shaking his head.

"She hates me with a passion," Nick whispered, "you really opened up a can of worms with this one."

"You got money to buy her a taco?" Tim asked as the loud buzzer went off, unlocking the door. They stepped into the hallway and headed down the stairs to Martin's apartment.

"Now I have to buy her a taco too? I pray to God that Martin doesn't have some out of town guests over too, or I'll have to buy them all tacos," Nick said, "you know she hates me, and no gift taco is going to change that fact."

"She does not," Tim said, "she just has a weird way of showing affection," he softly nudged Nick in the ribs, "just try not to say anything offensive."

"My very existence offends her," Nick said.

They got to the door just as it opened. Martin stood there in his pajamas, his hair messed up as if he had been asleep. He looked at Tim and Nick and smiled absently, as if he didn't quite comprehend what was going on, "what are you two doing?"

"Do you want to join us for tacos?" Tim asked him.

Martin's face brightened. He turned around and yelled into the apartment, "Nicole, do you want to go out for tacos?"

The three of them stood there a moment, waiting for her to reply.

"I don't think she heard me," Martin said, that weird smile still on his face. He stared uncomfortably long at Tim, then at Nick and then vanished into the apartment. Tim and Nick stood in the doorway, straining to hear what was being said inside. It was hard to make out so they gave up trying.

Nick rolled his eyes.

Tim gave him a preemptive look, "remember, we're doing this for you."

"You're going to have to explain what me buying broke dick a taco has to do with anything," Nick said, "I should have known this would end up in disaster, it always does with you."

"Just trust me," Tim said, "all will be revealed in due time."

A moment later Martin came back.

"Nicole doesn't want to go, but she said that I could," he said, "this is exciting, being roused in the middle of the night for tacos. Give me a second and I'll put on some winter apparel." He went back into the apartment.

"Man is that boy whipped," Nick said, "what's this 'Nicole says I can go' stuff all about?"

"You know how it is," Tim said.

"No, I don't," Nick said. He pushed the door open a crack and poked his head through the opening.

"Hey Nicole, how goes it?" He called into the room, a second later he too had vanished, leaving Tim all alone in the hallway. Tim decided to go in and stop Nick from making any potential problems for Martin.

Nick was standing silently in front of the television, peering expectantly into the bedroom while Nicole was sitting on the couch in a long black T-shirt and thermal underwear doing her best to ignore his presence. Her hair was jet black and trimmed into an impeccable bob, it was hard to believe that moments ago she had been asleep.

Tim tried not to stare at her legs, but found it quite difficult to with the way that the tight material accented every curve. The answer to Nick's question now seemed quite obvious, he only wished that he could be whipped by a girl as attractive as Nicole.

"Oh, Hi Timmy," Nicole said, her face brightened considerably when she saw him. She stood up and headed towards him. Tim loved the way she moved, the way her body looked so malleable within her sleep attire. She gave him a long hug and this made him think of Julie and he felt himself get sad yet again. He wondered what other lost persons being in this apartment was going to remind him of and hoped that they would be leaving soon.

"I didn't know it was you, over the intercom it is hard to make out voices," she said, "I thought that it was Ethan or something."

"Ethan moved out of state last year," Tim said, "after that long hospital stay."

"Oh," Nicole said, "I had no idea."

Martin came out of the bedroom with his winter grounds crew outfit on. He looked quite official except for the pair of cheap looking boots that he wore.

"Martin, you didn't tell me that Ethan moved away," she said.

"Yeah, about seven months ago," he frowned, "I guess I never did tell you. I don't know, you weren't incredibly fond of him or anything, plus, I think you were away on vacation or something when it happened."

"Oh," she said, "that could have been when I was in Taiwan."

Nick rolled his eyes. Tim looked over at him apologetically; Nicole seemed to segue into a monologue about her trip to Taiwan as often as possible, having an uncanny ability of using any subject of discussion as a jump off point.

"Anyways, I'm sorry Tim, I thought you were Ethan on the intercom and Ethan always kind of gave me the creeps," she said matter-of-factly.

"It's okay," Tim said, "he seemed to have that effect on people," he looked over at Nick, who was trying to look busy staring at a poster up on the wall, "especially girls."

She sighed, "Well, I can't say that I really miss him, he seemed to have a strange effect on you boys too, I'd have to spend hours with Martin just getting him back to normal every time that he came back from hanging around him."

She sat back down on the couch.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," Martin said, trying not to interrupt the subject of discussion, "do you want anything?"

She shook her head and added, "I'll probably be asleep when you get back, so make sure you brush your teeth before you come to bed."

Martin closed the door and stared icily at Tim, "Are you trying to get me killed or something?" He asked.

Tim was amazed by the sudden change in his demeanor, and felt worried that he had somehow screwed everything up between him and Nicole.

Martin looked over at Nick and then back at Tim and shook his head, "this is the first time in weeks that Nicole and I have been able to spend any time together at all."

"Well then I'm glad we came by," Nick said rather harshly, "she always does this exact same thing to you, it's good that you give her a taste of her own medicine once in a while."

"Yeah, you always have to deal with her friends coming around, you were complaining about that the last time I saw you," Tim said, and then added, "anyway Nick here is gonna buy you some tacos, that should more than make up for it."

"He's right," Nick said, "you relationship people always get so inbred that it's good for us to come out of the blue once in a while and split you up."

"Well I thank you for the thoughtful intervention," Martin said, "but this doesn't smell completely altruistic on your part, what's this all about?"

Tim and Nick looked at each other and said nothing. Martin shrugged and followed them up the stairs to the car.

"That isn't a parking space," Martin said when he saw where Tim had parked.

"Who cares? It's the middle of the night," Tim said as he opened the door and let Martin crawl into the back seat.

"You guys have absolutely no respect for Wood Creek policy," he said.

"I think a day later and we would have lost him," Nick said.

"You might be right," Tim said.

"Don't be so concrete," Martin said, "I was kidding."

"I don't think you were," Nick said.

"I was."

"I don't think Tim thinks you were kidding either," Nick said, "do you Tim?"

"Not really," Tim said.

"Well I was."

Tim put the car in drive and took a right hand turn out of Martin's parking lot.

"This isn't the right way," Martin said.

"We have to make a quick stop," Tim said and headed along the winding roads deeper into the apartment complex. Tim liked the way the apartments looked at night. Almost all of them were completely dark, except for the few that were bathed in the blue dye of late night television.

"Does the garage still have an ample supply of salt?" Tim asked as he pulled into the grounds department parking lot. He backed his car up to the large garage door and popped open the trunk.

"I have to hand it to you," Nick said as they all got out of the car, "you have this way of always making the ends justify the means."

Martin went into the side door of the garage and a second later came out with a bag of salt hefted over his shoulder.

"I know you don't plan on having me load all of this," he said as he dropped it into the trunk of Tim's car, "you want any more, you know where

it is. I'll be waiting in the car. Make sure that you lock the door when you're done."

"Have you ever noticed," Martin said, "that compared to Burton street, the buildings on 58th street look like they've been created by plastic injection molding machines in some innocuous factory, completely stocked and air lifted into place above the city, and then dropped and allowed to land anywhere the wind blows them onto the vacant spots along the road?"

"I don't think I would have ever thought of it quite like that," Nick said, "but I kind of see what you mean."

"Yeah," Tim said, "now that you mention it."

"Maybe I should write that down or something," Martin said, "maybe I can use it for something later."

Tim could vaguely remember what the street used to look like before this unfortunate turn of events had befallen it, back then it was some sort of automobile row, with lots of garish signs and warring salesman on either side of the street trying to create the illusion of a better deal.

Texas Juan's was one of the few establishments on this street that had been there before the huge build up had begun, and by looking at the swarm of neon signs on the roof, the owners hadn't seen any need to change their marketing strategy.

"It looks closed," Tim said. It was strange because the hand painted sign on the main window said 'open 24 hours'.

"That's strange," Martin said, "this place never closes."

Tim pulled up to the entrance and stopped the car.

"Someone needs to see if they're open," he said.

"Well hop to it," Nick said.

"I'm the wheel man," Tim said, "I have to stay here, behind the wheel."

"And I'm in the backseat," Martin said.

"Fine," Nick said. He got out of the car and walked up to the glass door. The foggy windows made it difficult to make out what was going on, but when he pulled on the door it opened and he disappeared inside.

Tim pulled the car into the parking lot of a large furniture distributor a few blocks away from Taco Juan's and turned off his headlights but let the motor run. Nick distributed the tacos and drinks from the cardboard drink carrier he held on his lap.

"Thanks," Martin said as Nick handed him his large drink and a couple of tacos.

“Isn’t that going to keep you up?” Tim asked as Nick handed him his smaller drink.

“Not as much as driving around in the middle of the night is,” Martin said, “anyways, I’m sick of sleeping and the winter season is usually pretty laidback at work. We clear the parking lots and sidewalks by eleven and usually sit around the rest of the day unless it’s really bad.”

“That makes me feel a tad less guilty,” Tim said. He opened up his taco and bit into it ravenously. The late night seemed to do something to Tim’s appetite, and the taco he held in its greasy yellow wax paper was the perfect thing for it.

“Hey Tim,” Martin called from the backseat as he crumpled up the paper from his first taco and produced his second from the bag on the floor, “how are you doing on your thesis?”

“Oh God,” Tim said, “you just had to remind me didn’t you?”

“Sounds like it,” Martin said.

“I have some vague ideas and loose ends but nothing that is going to really meet the criteria in a spectacular manner like ‘Coin Mannerly’ did,” Tim said.

“God,” Martin said, “you’re really aiming high aren’t you?”

“Well, I suppose,” Tim said, “but I’ve always dreamed of doing something like ‘Coin Mannerly’, that thing was out of control.”

“Are you guys talking about your little social club again?” Nick asked as he threw the wax paper of his final taco into the backseat.

“You’re not still jealous are you?” Martin asked.

“Why would I be jealous?” Nick asked, “I quit. Remember?”

“I never understood why,” Martin said.

“It was fine except for the people,” Nick said, “they never really got my sense of humor.”

“I wonder why?” Martin asked sarcastically, “is it because it’s misanthropic, misogynistic, sophomoric or just plain stupid?”

“It’s neither stupid nor sophomoric,” Nick said, “and its’ redundant for you to say misogynistic when you already said misanthropic.”

“Touché.”

“I should be more like you,” Tim said to Martin, “you had no problem with your thesis.”

“That’s right,” Nick said over his shoulder to Martin, “I never did see yours.”

“It was a collection of 367 index cards documenting different office environments around town,” Martin said, “but like Tim said, it really was no problem for me, it was a hobby I had started at a young age.”

“I think Tim told me a little bit about it,” Nick said.

“I did,” Tim said, “but I was waiting to show it to you when I got my own copy so I didn’t go into great detail about it.”

“It was nice to get it over with though,” Martin said, “and now that I am on the alumni board I don’t have to worry over those sorts of things anymore.”

“That’ll be nice,” Tim said, “I just hope that I don’t blow it.”

“When is your abstract due?” Nick asked.

“Soon,” Tim said, “too soon, like the eighth or something.”

“Of next month?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh God,” Nick said, “do I pity you.”

“Make sure you submit it to Jeff and not Bill,” Martin said.

“Why’s that?” Tim asked.

“Just trust me,” Martin said, “I don’t really have the time to go into it, but you will be a lot more happy if you submit your abstract to Jeff.”

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