

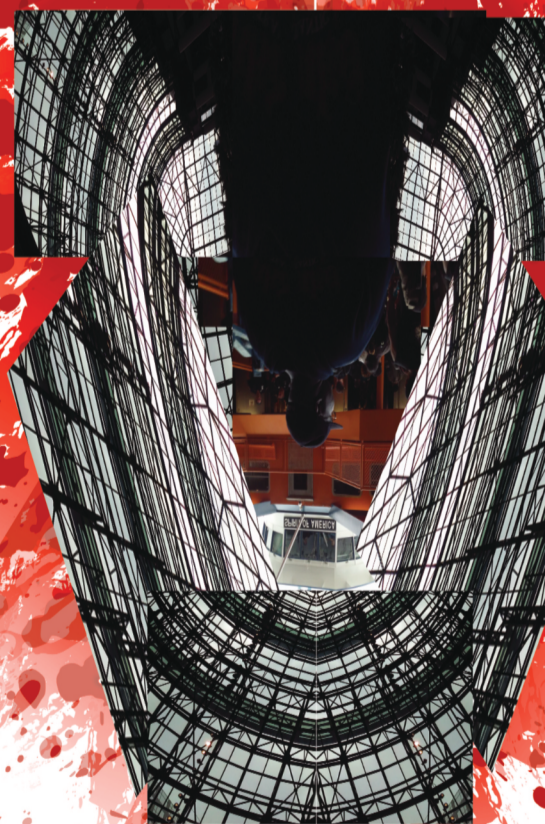
chapter two


Mr. Wall Street was headed back home to pick up something necessary for him to start his day. He ran down the stairs to wait in the throng that appeared out of nowhere and let him know a train was approaching. He began to sense something feeding off the fear he was trying to hide, feeling death's perversely feminine breath softly on his neck. Blindly, he pushed thru the turnstile. Artyo slid her hips snugly against his and sauntered into the subway car behind him.

The bad day he'd been having snapped into perspective as the doors closed and he spun around to face the personification of what had been riding him during the early overtime at his desk at work. He found himself almost eye to eye with her and felt his chest heave as he took in how impossible this innocent-eyed woman looked, openly staring back at him with a soft smirk playing across her face. He felt naked as her eyes took in the lines of his gray wool bespoke suit as if she had made it and he was wearing it wrong. He believed himself belittled as she whispered "nice tie" more to herself than to start up a conversation with him, her eyes playing across the unintelligible glyphs that covered the silk as if she could translate what it said about him: that he put more time into his edgy unaffected look than anything else. In that moment, a voice inside of him pointed out that he had in effect paid for this little trip of hers, and the browbeaten expression coating his J Crew catalogue face bloomed into full-blown scorn.

She smiled in recognition of his latent realization and made her way into the next car, her nose passing within a centimeter of his, smelling him as if he were her last meal, daring him to say a word, like she knew there was no power behind that sneer that he hadn't already sold. The door jammed open as she made her way to the next train car. His eyes followed her as she got comfortable in the low seats before the casings readjusted themselves and slid shut, cutting her off from view.

Full-color ads hung from the ceiling of the train, selling ESL courses and beer, with Right-to-Life banners imploring MEN to stand up for their rights to take away their wife's right to not bring more kids into the world. Hostility hung in pockets of recycled air. Everyone on the train had a different paper pandering takes on the story in Cleveland to their respective portion of the masses.






Every time Artyo closed her eyes on the ride uptown, she was a child watching an adult Thyaz on a tiny TV, in a white room with no windows or doors. Thyaz was bingeing, club after club, bloodstained from the fights he kept picking. The only sound was an erratic heartbeat.

A homeless man came into the train car from the other end. His feet were covered with sores. Even in the stuffy heat he was swaddled in three layers of filthy winter coats with his pants tied around his head in order to beat the heat. He smelled like dirt, which was better than stale urine in molding wool any day. Everyone ignored him. He was so far gone that he even forgot to rattle his cup in anyone's face. He trudged past Artyo belligerently arguing under his breath with the guardian that was trudging beside him as invisible to everyone else as the homeless man was.

"I've told you for 55 years-" the old man groaned softly to the glowing being beside him who pleaded for him to put his pants back on. "I am not going to hell for not putting my pants back on-I isn't hurting nobody no more- Hell is you being on my back all these years- about keeping my pants on -I don't trust you- you ain't from no kind of heaven I'm going to," the homeless old man sputtered softly. "I'm going to Hell? Hell is you on my ass-"



Over in the corner, a tiny Peruvian man turned up his battery-operated radio tuned to 1010-ten ten wins, NYC's premiere talk radio station. A shrill voice broke in over the civilized din of the Community forum being broadcast in regards to the whereabouts of Artyo Jaymes.

"There have been sightings in London, Cincinnati, Tokyo, Barcelona, and Brazil-ALL within the past 24 hours -This is not a joke, people! There NEEDS to be Justice! This is Vigilantism, and it is not the answer!!" the man leading the forum sung out.

"Violence is not a game!" a woman yelled, like she had heavy hands that had beat down so many kids for no reason that they had been unable to stop shaking since the story broke. "These adults are dead-DEAD!! Swarmed on by their now mostly grown children like locusts from the Bible! It's DEMONIC-demonic!! How dare they? Are we going to continue to allow our deranged children to openly applaud such hostility against -against the very fabric of our society? Cheer for the murders of the very ones who created them in the first place?"

“Does anyone care what happened to make these kids resort to this?” a staccato-voiced man snapped, fed up by the bogarting by Mother Bible Belt.

“Who cares?! They're kids out of time- Bad Things Happen! Even happened to me- you get over it- it's part of life- they need to grow up!!”

“They need to grow up? They're Dead- they killed the ones who'd eaten them alive, then themselves!” Staccato interjected.

"I have a question- what did you do as soon as you got some authority over anyone else? After you escaped the things you went through growing up-did you know How to do better or-" another female member of the panel asked as politely as possible.

"Who cares what horrendous things those people enacted against those kids in the past? The past is over! You gotta treat it like it's over!" Mother Bible Belt whipped around towards Politely. “And what are you trying to accuse me of?!” she screamed.

"No one's accused you of anything- but you sound like you're scared you may end up marked too-" a panelist snorted.

"Now wait a minute- that's enough!" The moderator tried to regain control of the table.

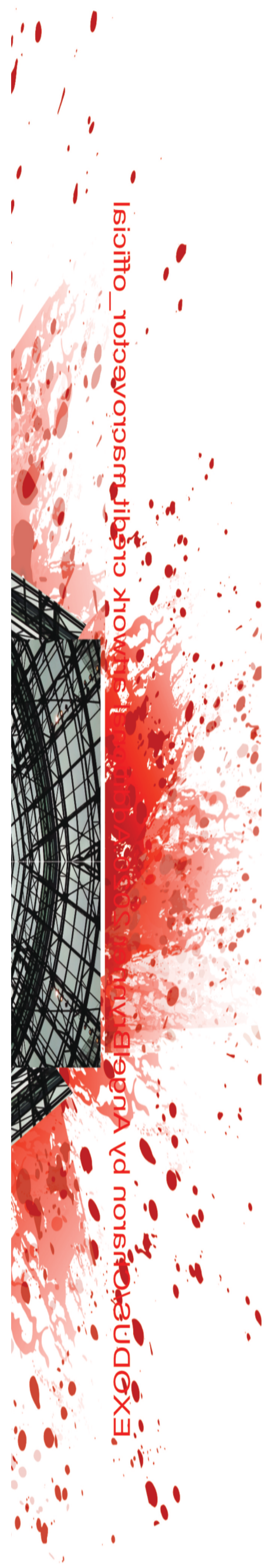
"Look! Kids can't be socially educated to resort to violence against their own parents- we can't let this happen!!”

“We've taught them to resort to violence with everything else- we've let what moved them to it happen all the time. We've turned our eyes away from kids being attacked forever. This was bound to-”

“She's the oldest- she's the ringleader! If she isn't brought to JUSTICE -”

“She may already be dead somewhere- look how the cousins ended their lives-” Politely whispered.

“Oh, She's alive! And she must pay for these heinous crimes or it'll be the end of the World as we know it!" Mother Bible Belt hissed.



“Maybe it is time for just that to happen. For this messed up world to just...end.”
Staccato sighed.

“The Bible says whoever curses his mother or father must be put to death! Honor thy mother and father! Do NOT murder!” Mother Bible Belt barked at Staccato.

"I-I understand you're upset m-Madam, but-" stuttered a charming old man who had been silent for most of the Forum, "In Mark 9:42, The God in that b-Bible you quote also says- '*But whoever causes the downfall ...of one of these little ones....*' and these were kids when this began- little kids, that is what everyone is tiptoeing around in this- '*little ones who **believe** in m-Me- it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the s-sea.*'"
“Also says it in M-Matthew 18:6.” Old man Mo continued calmly.

Stunned, the entire forum went silent as the microphones picked up the rustling of pages being flipped.

“Is- a life addicted to drugs to cope- is that d-downfall? Hhow about no self-respect? S-seeking out a-abuse cause it’s all-all you know- does THAT sound like it’d be a Down-ffall from what – a loving God would h-have on tap for a – world full of kids that h-he loved?”

No one on the panel had an answer for him.

“So m-maybe, just maybe these barely grown-up, broken, now dead kids had been down-falling for so long that they-”

The owner of the radio got bored and flip

Excerpt from chapter two of
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