

You are asleep . . .

Well then, here you are now so you might want to wake up. You shouldn't worry about how you got here or why you slept for so many years, but you should know you're in a bed in a cramped little room. With one shuttered window, it doesn't look like much. Maybe go downstairs and see what's there. The place is a mess and clutter of junk: a series of Xboxes, Playstations, and Nintendos along with stacks of games and various accessories to go with them, piles of DVD and Blu-ray disks ranging from box-office hits to convenience-cooking shows, and a refrigerator box filled to the flaps with smart phones and scrawled on with the declaration, "Dozen for \$5." There are some books—mostly paperbacks—in every genre from romance and thriller to self-help and weight-loss, all stacked on a hodge-podge assortment of particle-board bookshelves. There might even be this book sitting there. Apparently all this is for sale. But nevermind that. You might want to see where you live now. Outside, the lawn is dead—you should have watered it—and the house needs a paint job and new roof—the moss and weather have ruined them. In the lawn, there is a sign crookedly pounded perpendicular to the street. It reads:

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| Remnants of the Ancients antiques and rare books buy and sell <i>go through the back door</i> |
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The street is deserted of people and cars but is lined in seemingly abandoned houses with the seamless-steel siding stripped off and sold for scrap at \$3000/ton. Why did you choice to live way out here? Perhaps see what's in the shed.

How this decrepit building is still standing, you could never guess. The ribbons of sunlight seeping in through the gaps in the roof are all the light there is. Think about pulling that sphere-linked chain tickling your cheek there. The pendulum bulb makes it a little better but it's only that hideous portrait you can see with it. It's of a crooked-looking fellow sporting a thin mustache, safari hat and leopard-print thong. You have strange taste in art, but it could be your roommate's. This may even be his house.

It should be about time for you to sit and wait for customers. Remember, that's how you pay rent; it's your job. The chair is hard having been stripped of its cushion and you really don't have a cash-box or anything. It's a long day when you only have two customers. Don't worry, it's not your store. All you have to do is sit in the chair and you're fine. Your roommate doesn't come home which is typical. You hardly ever see him.

You could eat now if you'd like. The milk is bad at only three-days old. The refrigerator barely manages a temperature less than the sticky atmosphere of the house. The six-pack is okay, even if warm. Graham crackers and beer seem fine for you. The beer is a bit skunky but it gets you buzzed all the same.

Since you have nothing better to do, you ought to dust the merchandise. You don't have a duster or anything, but the rack of women's clothes is lined with coats lined with fake fur that will work just fine. Flat-screen TVs don't seem to collect as much dust but the self-assembly furniture hosts a layer deep enough to generate a dust cloud in your face. When you've finished, it is late enough in the day to assume no customers will come in so you might as well just go to bed. But don't

forget to put on your jammies. And just as you are about to do so, you hear a knock on the front door. It could be a customer. It's not, though, but just some snoopy cop with a big flashlight he likes flashing around the living room and in your eyes.

“‘Scuse me, sir. I want to search the premises, sir.”

It would be better to just say no. He accepts and walks away. Good thing since your roommate (landlord?) might not like some copper looking around. That is why you should lock up the place, but there are no locks anyways. It really is an odd thing, that copper, but you shouldn't have to worry about it. You 're okay to go to bed.

There's a twin-size upstairs in sunken fashion and no sheets. Sure, the springs poke your ribs and lying on it cranes your neck because you don't have a pillow, but you must have slept on it before. It is really stuffy in here. Opening a window might help. And what do you know, there's a beam of light hovering around the yard. That damned cop is trespassing now and you should be furious. It's your job to watch the place when your roommate is away on business. You better go see what he's up to down there.

You find him with his girth caught hanging on the seemingly new chain-link fence circumscribing the shed. “Sir, I need to search the premises,” is all he has to say in his defense. What he lacks in athleticism he makes up in persistence which gets him over the fence in spite of you being there. Though fat, he is fast, so you'd better hurry to unlock the gate. It seems he knows right where to go: through the shed door, past the old ten-speeds and plastic kayaks and up the pleather sectional to the portrait. His round form makes it hard for him to get it—like a fat kid reaching for the cookie jar—but at last,

he gets it down. You should be really mad now.

The back of the canvas is blinking. Green bulbs and red strobes, what do you know, it's like a computer or something. The fat cop looks at the screen and grows a face of terror at the stream of words flashing there. He drops the painting/computer and runs outside in a momentum throw of a door barely able to stay on its hinges. Well, you could follow him.

Outside is turning morning much, much too soon. Poor you, not getting hardly a wink. Try the front yard and see if he's out there. He's not, but you're standing there in the crispy grass, sunlight gold and nothing but your jammies. You must feel ridiculous, especially when the train of cars comes flying down the abandoned road and screams to a halt at your crooked sign.

"Where is he?" the growing mob asks you.

Don't worry, you don't have to answer since it is obvious he is just over there. It's awfully difficult to hide in trees that have no leaves. They want him down right now. Why don't you go help him out? He's heavy so be careful. His shirt rips getting down but he manages to safely plant his feet before the mob approaches.

"What do you want, pig?"

"Sirs and ma'ams, this is an illegal trafficking hub for the illicit *Substance P*."

"So? We need it, you government lapdog!" a skinny girl screams out.

"Ma'am, no you don't, ma'am."

"You government people, you think you know what we need. We don't need your self-righteous morality tracking chips, sustenance vitamin supplements and your cyberized brains. Technology is a sick perversion on humanity. Well, take our bodies, but we'll never give up our *artificial* genetic intelligence!"

If this confuses you, you might want to ask them what *artificial* means.

“What an idiot. *Artificial* means human. That’s what Oprah says.”

Look at this crowd, pitched and ready to fight because an outdated talk-show host’s cognitive remnants said so from a Mason jar.

You know, Oprah’s not always right.

*R*emnants of the *A*ncients
A Collection of Stuff and No-Stuff

Albert T. Schmitz