

Processed

By Supernova

A commissioned work

Dim morning light covered the grey, rectangular kitchen table in thin strips. Fiddling with the adjustment string, Mikkel sighed as he heard a soft snap, accidentally opening the blinds to their fullest brightness.

“Too much!” Exclaimed his wife Cecile, lifting her pale hand up from her bulging, pregnant belly to cover her eyes. Looking back at her, his hands still on the little rope, he couldn’t help but smile slightly as he saw the beautiful sheen of his wife’s long, bright blonde hair.

“Sorry, sorry. It looks like it got jammed or something.” Standing on his toes, Mikkel attempted to re-align the small strings that composed the over-engineered closing mechanism. “Ugh. Fuckin’ thing,” he muttered under his breath as the blinds quickly opened and closed, creating a strobe-like effect that blinked over the whole kitchen.

“Would you just stop? It’s fine! It’s fine!” Cecile almost shouted, her eye twitching; her stomach growling.

Using his fingernails as a tweezer, he managed to slip one of the strings back on its track, enabling the blinds to open and close as they should. Enjoying his handiwork, he pulled the thin rope slightly, watching the dark grey horizontal strips of plastic open and close, again making the kitchen blink from dark to light.

“Mikkel! Enough!” Cecile pounded her fist against the table, causing her small cup of water to shake.

Upon closing them so the entire room was almost draped in shadow, Mikkel slumped his shoulders. “I’m sorry, babe, I just-”

“Annoyed me on purpose? After I told you to stop doing that shit! Ugh! What gets a hold of you sometimes, Mikkel? Seriously!” Sipping her water loudly, Cecile let out a “hmpf!” as she rubbed the black maternity dress that cloaked her belly.

Now hanging his head low, he just turned towards the coffee maker, not saying a word. He knew that Cecile was under a lot of stress, both due to the coming of their first child and the secretive nature of her work, so he always chose not to engage in conflict. Anxiety brewing in his chest, much as the coffee was brewing in the pot, he instead chose to let a long, drawn-out breath to let out some of the pressure.

“And now you’re sighing at me?” She drank the rest of the water as if it’s a shot. “I can’t have any breakfast, I can’t drink coffee like you’re rubbing in my face, and now you’re acting like I’m the annoying one? After that light show you just performed? I’m gonna get a fucking migraine!” Cecile’s tone of voice was beginning to rise, as if she were legitimately annoyed.

“What can I do to help you, babe?” Mikkel tried raising his eyebrows in a “puppy-dog” sort of way, trying to defuse the situation.

“You can shut the fuck up. Babe.” With an obviously sarcastic sting on the word “Babe,” Cecile rolled her eyes and turned her chunky, grey chair away from Mikkel. Placing her elbow on the table and her chin on her palm, she furrowed her brows and stared at the monochrome wall-mounted television in the other room.

Mikkel couldn’t help but feel a pang of annoyance. She was truly acting unfair, but he knew that she must be acting this way for a good reason. Upon marrying her two years earlier, after obtaining The State’s approval, Mikkel had the happiest, most fulfilling few months of his entire life. Even going on The State-sponsored honeymoon all couples were mandated to attend, he found the team-building exercises and family planning orientations both educational and fun.

Having both been born under The State approximately 25 years ago, both Mikkel and Cecile were organized into the same “Age Cohort,” and, given that they were born in the same district, the Ministry of Culture demanded they engage in the same educational and entertainment programs starting from birth. A social bond such as theirs was extremely common, some would say inevitable.

Mikkel pursed his lips as he saw Cecile’s eyes glued to the television as The State’s propaganda blinked by. Incessant messages beamed via satellite chattering about how “Outsiders thrived on inappropriate behavior,” whatever that meant, but Mikkel knew better than to question any vagueness by the state. In spite of this internal confusion, he somewhat enjoyed how enthralled it made Cecile, both because it gave her something that made her happy and because it took her attention off of him.

The television, a 15-inch black-and-white screen embedded into the grey, almost monolithic wall, did not have an off-switch. It blasted messages, simply called “Talk,” without end. The Ministry of Culture was so prolific that it was somewhat uncommon to see the same program twice. There were both fictional programs, depicting happy couples having large families under the guidance of The State, non-fictional programs, telling the populace the “History” of The State, and of course standard informational broadcasting such as commercials.

“Reminder! The price of disorganization is death! Procrastination is a disease! The State can and will purge all kinks within the system! Our efficiency is second-to-none! The forecast for today is partly cloudy with a high of 78 degrees Fahrenheit!” The voice was a masculine, deep,

almost robotic emanation. In spite of the messages often changing, the voice remained the same. It came from tablets, vehicles, and State androids. The voice of authority.

Mikkel sighed softly, making sure that Cecile wasn't able to hear it. Moving slowly and somewhat gracefully, he stood across from her, leaning his back against the sink and clinking his coffee cup on the countertop lightly. The awful, cheap scent filled the room. He wondered if there were any better quality coffee out there, but quickly quashed the useless thought from his mind.

Speaking softly, Mikkel remembered the training protocols for relationship maintenance. He remembered the script. "I am sorry for my wrongdoings, Cecile."

"Oh, you're going to give me Talk, now? When I can get it right here out of the wall? Don't be pathetic, Mikkel. You can say what you really mean. I outrank you."

She was correct. As an A-7 citizen, she was deemed important enough to handle a job labeled "Confidential." Mikkel knew better than to question her mood or push her too hard. He pursed his lips as he thought about his own rank. B-5. He couldn't help but wonder if she looked down upon him as an individual given the literal power imbalance. After all, she knew that he was a mere "Paper-pusher" at the large factory in the district and her job was completely classified.

Having very little interaction with those outside of his letter-rank, and interaction between domiciles being heavily looked-down upon to be practically illegal, his relationship with Cecile was nearly all the human interaction he had outside of work. Gatherings of four or more people were seen as automatically suspicious, as the cameras everyone had installed in their homes would algorithmically calculate everyone's behavior and deem whether or not their behavior was "appropriate." After all, "Inappropriate behavior" was seen as something that only "Outsiders" engaged in. Outsiders were purged.

"Look, Cecile." As Mikkel went off-script despite every word being analyzed both by the all-watching computers and his angry wife, his heart began to beat faster. Eyes were everywhere. "I love you, deeply."

"Oh, please, Mikkel." Cecile rolled her eyes. "We're having a fucking child together." She rubbed her pregnant stomach, almost as if on reflex. "Is this just your long-winded way of calling me a bitch?"

His chest was now pounding, annoyance grew in his chest. He almost wanted to raise his voice. Almost. "I'd never call you that. You know this. But why are you acting like one?"

Cecile shivered, her head slowly turning from the television to Mikkel's face. Their blue eyes met. It was no coincidence that they both shared the same hair and skin color, as well.

A slowness came over the room, as if neither of them even dared breathe. The “Talk” continued to blather from the television in the background.

A long gust of air emanated from Cecile’s lips. “Thanks for being real with me for once, Mikkel. I was wondering what it’d take for you to stick up for yourself. Again, for once.” She grunted as she stood up, her dress drooping well below her legs, looking conservative, almost completely hiding her black flats as she waddled over to the sink. Upon re-filling her cup with tap water, she looked into Mikkel’s eyes again, but with a softer expression. “I can’t say shit about what my actual job may be, but it’s very physically demanding. Being pregnant as I am it’s just hard.” She took another sip of water. “But it’s my duty. It is appropriate behavior. There is no option.”

Mikkel leered at his pregnant wife. “I understa-”

“No you don’t. This is not only well beyond your purview, but you’ve never been pregnant before. And never will. You don’t understand.” Cecile slurped her water. “But that’s fine. Someone of your station isn’t meant to. Though, you may find yourself raised to an A-level one day if you ever embrace that bravery you found when you called me a bitch.”

Mikkel was beginning to grow angry, in earnest. “I never called you that, Cecile! What’s wrong with you? I’m sorry you have to go through this stuff at work, but we all do.”

Cecile turned to him and placed her pale hand on his shoulder. Their faces nearly touching, the intimacy was more intimidating to Mikkel than romantic.

“Consider yourself blessed by The State that you don’t know what I do. It knows what is best for you to know.” The eye contact was extremely severe. There was a sick layer of love in Cecile’s expression, as though she honestly felt that she was keeping a knowledge away from Mikkel for his own good. “What I do would destroy you.” She closed her eyes and lightly kissed Mikkel on his unmoving lips before turning around and walking towards the living room.

“I have to go to work now.” She stated, blankly. “The auto-ride will be here in thirty seconds. I will see you when I see you.”

Mikkel stood there motionless, watching his wife shuffle out the automatic front door. It closed with a soft, hissing vacuum sound.

Now alone with his thoughts, Mikkel almost wanted to burst into tears. His wife wasn’t the woman he grew up with. She had changed, either through her job, her pregnancy, her marriage. Something. Even in the relative privacy of his own home he felt the crushing presence of Cecile, as if she and The State had become one. Her rapid rise in rank was surprising and disconcerting to him. The very fact that she was so superior to him now meant that she could literally order him as if they were in the military. She was, by all rights, a superior citizen to him.

Darting his eyes around the room, he tried not to keep his eyes stuck to any of the black half-spheres, one of each were plastered into his house's walls. The very cameras that analyzed behavior.

He stared out his window as he looked over his sink, sipping on his coffee. Its hairline fractures always bugged him, but he knew that complaining about minor cosmetic issues to the authorities was "inappropriate behavior," so he kept his mouth shut about it. He couldn't see anything over the flat-grey landscape of the city, anyway.

Mikkel continued sipping his coffee and sat down in the chair that Cecile was just sitting in. He rubbed his hands along its edges, feeling what was left of her warmth. Mikkel hung his head low. In spite of being with people nearly every minute of every day, it was only when he was truly alone that the sensation of true loss set in.

He was truly by himself.

Spinning his coffee cup, he looked at his reflection in the brown liquid. His eyes looked sunken, as if he were exhausted, in spite of getting plenty of sleep every night. He was already growing wrinkles next to his eyes, his sideburns showed flecks of grey. He was twenty-five years old.

His vision began to blur as he felt hot fluid between his eyelids. It wasn't until his reflection rippled that he realized he was crying. With no friends, a distant wife, and an extraordinarily clinical job, he felt as though he were floating away on an ice floe in the middle of an ocean. No one to hold him in the cold. No one to help him back. Not even Cecile.

As his tears continued to fall down his cheeks, the black cameras that lined the walls of his residency blinked red for a split second. A new sound came out of the television. Something like microphone feedback shook Mikkel to his core. The alarm. The robotic "Talk" voice, sounding much louder and angrier than it usually did, almost screamed at him throughout the house.

"INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR DETECTED. YOU HAVE USED ONE OF TWO DAILY ALLOTTED STRIKES."

The high-pitched screeching vibrated the very air within the house. It was an alarm more piercing than any he had ever heard, it was even more distinct than the one The State used for emergencies and fire. It had the same psychological effect on him as a baby's wailing.

His anxiety exploded within his chest. Right. He wasn't even allowed to cry. Wiping his tears from his face, he tried breathing deeply. Being only a B-level citizen, he only had two strikes per day. In spite of this, even using one strike was still incorporated into The State's behavior analysis algorithm. Knowing this, he began inhaling through his nose and out his mouth, he stood up and practically marched to the television.

The warning remained there for at least ten more seconds before it softly faded away with the sound. Now trying to clear his mind, he watched the Talk return to the screen like normal, continuing to talk about the seven great naval victories The State had succeeded in just as many days.

He knew better than to even think “Against whom?” or “Why?” but at least his internal questioning wasn’t nearly as emotional as ruminating upon his near-loveless marriage.

The next program aired. A commercial for a new brand of house scrub. Though it was the only brand of scrub, Mikkel knew that these were more to impress upon the populace how important it was to clean one’s house. The before-and-after images the commercial aired about how clean this scrub could make one’s residence was clearly an exaggeration, but what wasn’t?

A familiar “hum” began ringing between his ears as the zombifying hypnosis of the “Talk” took hold. Far from being upset over his isolation, he was now subsumed with the comforting sounds of the robotic, masculine voice lecturing about The State’s military superiority, the prosperous economy, and unprecedented freedom that every citizen enjoyed.

He pursed his lips as he watched the next program: An educational video on the honor and responsibility in being an A-level citizen. Like Cecile. He grit his teeth as he watched all the attractive blondes march across the screen in different work attire. Some looked like scientists, others were engineers, it looked like one may have been a doctor. Mikkel couldn’t help but wonder what Cecile’s job was. Being a good citizen, she had never even given him a hint in all their time together. Even when she was a C and B-level, she still kept her cards rather close to her chest.

Shaking his head, he knew he couldn’t think about her. There was too much risk in getting emotional again and, because he had already used one strike, he understood the algorithm was placing him under extra scrutiny. Looking at the clock in the corner of the television, he knew that work was in ninety minutes. Almost too long to stew like this, he found himself fortunate in the fact that he could zone out in front of the television. Each program was just five to ten minutes long apiece, each equally engaging. He knew he would just have to wait watching television for the auto-ride to stop in front of his residency. Knowing he was on thin ice, he didn’t want to waste his last strike on the most common error: watching television to the point where you ignore your duties.

As the minutes passed, he found his way on the immense, grey couch in the middle of the main living space in the residency. The most comfortable spot in the entire living space, the couch itself was mandated by The State to be placed approximately six feet from the television both for optimal eye health and viewing. He went from being incredibly sad, to simply numb, now he was back to being on the happier side of neutral. Cecile was just doing her duty! As would he, once the auto-ride came and took him to work!

Mikkel smiled. Everything that was happening was perfectly natural and, after five or so more program viewings, he found it quite obvious that crying was inappropriate behavior. Only babies cried, not adult citizens. After all, citizens had no true reason to cry given the fact that they all lived in such a prosperous, free society where the ills of outsiders were both taken care of and separated from public life. He did not want to be an outsider. As a matter of fact, he didn't want to be anything like an outsider! He wanted to be free! Free from the nasty influence that made him weep earlier. It wasn't The State. It wasn't Cecile. It was these disgusting outsiders whose very existence corrupted all!

The longer he stared at this screen, the more disgusted he had felt about himself for daring to even get one strike! Didn't he realize how hard The State was fighting for him in order to prevent that kind of corruption? He should know better than to leave his heart too far open, for it would both bleed and be open to infiltration. His heart itself then began beating faster. Who was the outsider that had influenced him? Perhaps it was someone at work?

Looking at the clock, he realized the auto-ride should be there in just a few moments. Standing up, he stood up and stretched in his dark grey jumpsuit. Feeling refreshed, he decided to simply march outside and breathe in the fresh, city air. As the door opened before him, he saw it was still quite a nice day out. The skies were a gorgeous light yellow with only a few black clouds scattered about. Inhaling deeply, he could only smell a moderate amount of smoke. The State's air filters must have been upgraded, of course!

Standing on the side of the road, he pondered how lucky he was to have a wife as loving as Cecile. Someone who would sacrifice her own mood for The State, who always behaved appropriately, who was even an honorable A-level, was absolutely suitable wife material.

Staring down the street, Mikkel felt a pang of confusion as to where the auto-ride was. Always taking the form of an electric, bubble-like car, the auto-ride was incorporated with the algorithm as part of an integrated transportation matrix. The State assigns you a job and the auto-ride is automatically sent to your position to bring you to your workplace at the same time every day. Seven days per week. Even uttering the word "Weekend" was considered inappropriate behavior.

Pursing his lips, he continued waiting as his anxiety grew. The auto-ride allowed for uniformity of architecture, as well. Line after line of dark grey buildings with no addresses or other identifying markers. The auto-ride enabled you to merely travel to your workplace and back, there was no need to memorize any pesky numbers, for the auto-ride knew where you needed to go and when. It discouraged gathering, which was inappropriate behavior, as there could only be one person in an auto-ride at any one time. Too many people in a space by themselves could end up discussing something inappropriate.

Mikkel felt the tension melt from his body as he saw the grey bubble of the auto-ride crest the horizon. He grinned, knowing that his time at work would be made somewhat more interesting, given the fact that he knew there may be a corrupting influence about. The one that

made him cry. Outsiders know how to affect your behavior without you even knowing, or so the Talk said rather constantly.

As the auto-ride stopped before him, Mikkel couldn't help but smell the interior as the door popped open with a hiss. Somehow, they always managed to capture a smell of being new; the insides were always immaculate. Sitting in the single grey seat, he felt a sense of security as the door lowered on its own and locked itself.

Now within a protective bubble, Mikkel knew that the next time he'd see sunlight, it'd be right outside his workplace. He knew he was fortunate to have a B-level job, as the C-levels truly had to labor in more dangerous positions at the factory, working with the furnaces and such. His plan was to sign the paperwork, enter some data into some spreadsheets, and observe who may be acting suspiciously. As a rule, no one knew the names of their co-workers. That would encourage fraternization and therefore inappropriate behavior.

In spite of there being no windows, nor windshield on the auto-ride, Mikkel knew he was in motion due to the sound of the electric motors whirring to life. Wow! He couldn't imagine how honorable the A-levels were that created such a miracle of technology. Leaning back in the seat, he pressed one of the buttons on the armrests that turned the television back on. Still black-and-white, it displayed in place of a windshield. He felt truly safe and secure in the knowledge that he just needed to wait twenty minutes or so before he was dropped by the factory.

He felt every muscle in his body loosen up as a sense of relaxation took hold. The television was truly a bastion of comfort. The algorithm understanding where he was going, it intentionally beamed relevant programming into his auto-ride, assuring him of the importance of his job. Signing purchase orders, organizing paperwork, forming spreadsheets, and conjuring up detailed reports were all solemn duties of a B-level clerk. A large graphic depicting sheets of paper forming the blood-stream portion of an anatomical diagram followed the phrase "CLERKS: THE LIFEBLOOD OF THE STATE!" It filled Mikkel with a sense of pride.

He wondered what Cecile saw on her way to work. Perhaps something about how doctors are the brains of the operation? Engineers are the skeleton and we cannot stand without them? Something similar, for sure!

As the minutes passed, he saw two videos about clerks and one about the auto-ride system in general. In spite of the programming being black-and-white, a blinking red dot abruptly appeared in the center of the screen. Mikkel raised an eyebrow, having no experience with this. He didn't even know it was possible.

Without any warning, a joystick burst out of the dashboard before him, exploding shards of broken plastic over his grey jumpsuit. The television cleared way for a transparent piece of glass. He was travelling down what looked like a long road at full speed, careening towards the guard-rails.

The robotic "Talk" voice stated, in a louder tone than even in his warning message:

"DANGER: ERROR IN AUTOMATIC DRIVING SYSTEM. USE JOYSTICK FOR MANUAL OVERRIDE."

Mikkel dove forward, his heart now exploding out of his chest in panic as a red glow illuminated the inside of the auto-ride. As he grabbed the joystick itself, he could feel the electric motors whirring in response to his input. In spite of this, he had only a few sessions' training in the operation of this when he was a teenager. He had forgotten what all the buttons did and how sensitive the controls were. He shivered, his quivering hand literally causing the entire auto-ride to shake with him.

Pushing the joystick forced the auto-ride faster, pulling it back slowed it down. The buttons on the side were mysterious to him, as was the little miniature joystick up top. In spite of him pulling back the stick as much as possible, he could not slow down the auto-ride to any speed at which stopping was a possibility. One of the buttons served as the brakes, but he could not venture to guess which one. For all he knew, there was an eject button somewhere on there!

The buildings whirred fast, far too fast for him to gain his bearings. Given the fact that he had never ridden in an auto-ride with the windows open, he could not even gauge his own speed. Perhaps one hundred miles per hour? More? Time almost slowed down as he weaved around the other, slower auto-rides, their passengers likely having no idea that he almost just collided with them.

The "Talk" voice boomed through the chamber yet again.

"DANGER: ERROR IN AUTOMATIC DRIVING SYSTEM. USE THE JOYSTICK TO SLOW THE AUTO-RIDE TO SAFE SPEEDS IMMEDIATELY."

He could feel the entire vehicle begin drifting to the side. He bit his lower lip as he watched it, inch by inch, drift closer to the side of the road. In spite of his use of the joystick in the opposite direction, he found that it simply wasn't reading his input. Mikkel grit his teeth in terror. This couldn't be happening! Wincing, he felt a bead of sweat drip down the side of his face as the guard-rail slowly approached.

A loud screeching pierced through his eardrums as metal scraped against metal. Even through the windshield he could see orange sparks fly off the side of the auto-ride. Now pulling and pushing the joystick in random directions, he screamed as he became weightless: the vehicle was now in the air.

Falling back down to the road on its side with a crash, the bean-shape of the auto-ride slid down the road before crashing into the front of a grey building, looking exactly like his place

of residence. Forced forward, he slammed right into the glass before him, smacking his torso on the joystick hard enough to leave a scrape. Squinting through the shattered windshield, he felt himself become dizzy with the sudden stop. Shaking his head, he felt a sharp pain thump through it, but he knew his body was still intact given the fact that he could still crawl almost painlessly through the tipped-over auto-ride.

Trying to kick open the door, he quickly fell tired. Slumping in the near-crumpled mess of the auto-ride, he felt his jaw begin to quiver. No. He needed to breathe. In through the nose and out through the mouth. What would Cecile think? He was completely trained for such a contingency, they covered it in his education program! Feeling like a complete failure, he covered his face with his palms. Without any clue on how to continue, he decided he'd just wait.

Still quivering, he sniffed hard. Fuck. No. A single tear ran down the side of his face as he thought of Cecile yet again.

A warped beep, sounding like the one he heard from inside his residency screeched through the mangled wreckage of the auto-ride.

“INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR DETECTED. USE OF FINAL STRIKE DETECTED.
WAIT FOR PROCESSING.”

“Well what the fuck else can I do?” Mikkel screamed at the unthinking machine, almost resigned to his fate. Curling up in a ball, he found a new meaning of isolation, just allowing the tears to drip from his eyes. He didn't have to hold it back anymore. Living this life sucked. Cecile treated him terribly. The television wasn't truly entertaining. He didn't feel like he had any real freedom.

A crunch emanated from before him as a pale, womanly hand punched through the windshield, spraying him with broken glass. Seconds after the hand threw away the protective layer, it angrily dove for Mikkel, grabbing him by his collar.

In a split-second, a seven-foot-tall robot, looking like a beautiful woman with delicate features and sky blue hair held him up above her. Almost choking, he knew that her grip alone was many times more powerful than what his entire body could muster. Staring down, he saw that she bore the uniform of the State Android Corps, complete with black military-style hat, complete with a golden skull-like emblem.

As she spoke, it was as if the “Talk” voice from the television had been feminized. “You have been found in violation of The State's laws through the use of your two daily allotted strikes. You have been sentenced to processing. Any further violations will expedite this procedure.”

Mikkel felt a veil pierced within him. His face was beet red, he couldn't stop weeping, he held the android's strong wrist with both of his hands as she held him over her almost-seven foot-tall body effortlessly. "Fuck you!" He shouted, kicking her in the torso, to no reaction.

"Expedited procedure engaged."

A bright pink flash of light blasted from the android's eyes and Mikkel felt his consciousness slip from him.

He woke up in the presence of an uncanny, buzzing sensation, as if many people were all talking around him. Still feeling battered, he touched the pure white, cold floor with a sense of unease. Lifting his head up, he noticed what looked like a forest of legs. Most with the mandated civilian uniform; some without. As he got up to his feet with a grunt, he gasped as he began to understand the magnitude of his situation. Scanning the environment, he couldn't believe what it was that he was seeing: just a sea of heads that stretched nearly endlessly.

He was, along with thousands of others, trapped in this strange, sterile-seeming chamber under what looked like a dome of hazy glass with a hole in the middle of it.

"Wh-what the fuck?" Mikkel asked.

A younger woman turned to him, looking extremely worried. Grabbing him by his shoulders, she stared into his eyes deeply. "Is this processing? Is this what processing is? Do you know? You look like you know!" Her voice was deep and desperate, she spoke in deep, gasping breaths. "I don't know how I got here! I just used up my strike and... and now I'm here."

Peeling her hands away from him, he was surprised at how strong her grip was. "... I don't know. I'm in the same boat. I just used up my strikes and one of the Corps just..."

"Zapped you here! I know! What the fuck? What the fuck's going on?"

The woman embraced Mikkel, who couldn't help but embrace her in return. It was the closest he'd ever truly felt to someone else, even in spite of meeting her just seconds earlier.

"I can't say I know, I'm sorry." His voice was soft; reassuring.

Taken aback by the sudden display of affection by this stranger, Mikkel continued to dart his eyes around the strange environment. Most buildings and rooms were mandated to be a shade of dark grey, this was a strange, sterile white. Feeling the warmth from the woman who embraced him, he rubbed her back slightly, feeling her heartbeat against his. Did he ever have a moment like this with Cecile? Ever?

Stepping back after several seconds of embrace, the woman's jaw continued to quiver.

With her shoulder-length brown hair, she stared up into Mikkels eyes. Tears flowing, but no screeching warnings. No robotic voice giving strikes. It was far too late for that.

In spite of the strange situation, the entire crowd seemed rather calm. How could this be possible with none of the Corps keeping order? No screen reminders and Talk of how to behave? Everyone just seemed to be having conversations, rather tense conversations, but conversations nonetheless.

Clinking his shoe on the har floor, he noticed it was made of some kind of ceramic, as the inside of a bowl. Looking left and right, he certainly saw no entrances, no exits, nor any bathrooms, as if the floor arched up into the wall itself.

Between the two figures and the wall were hundreds of human beings composing all shapes, sizes, races, and ages. Having lived in a mostly homogenous community, the diversity was rather new to Mikkel. Some were even speaking in tongues he had never heard before, oddly disconcerting given the only language he knew to exist was the one of The State.

Outsiders. He was here with true outsiders.

A conflict brewed in his head, both experiencing a definite fear of the outsiders, who were seemingly minding their own business, and the fact that they didn't appear to pose the biggest threat right now. That appeared to be the hole at the top of the dome.

The roof was clearly made from a thick, warped glass. Light emanated from far above, the sources far too hazy to make out. They almost looked fluorescent, but that didn't make any sense given the sheer scale. Squinting, he tried making out some shapes above. Were those ceiling tiles? How large was this building he was now trapped in? The very "bowl" that encased him was large enough, but the size of the environment that enveloped the dome itself could only be described as astronomical.

He felt the woman beside him embrace him yet again, this time so hard that the air was nearly forced from his lungs. A grip of sheer terror. Gritting his teeth, he darted his head as he saw an immense figure begin to cast a shadow over the transparent dome. Obviously human, but far, far too large to be possible.

"Oh my... Fuck..." The woman's voice whimpered as the immense, pale head loomed over, the glass blurring their face.

Mikkel embraced her in return, feeling a sense of dread and confusion as to what "Processing" entailed. Was this some kind of tremendous android? A machine of some kind?

Assorted screaming and grunts of horror echoed through the white container as an extraordinarily immense hand seemed to grip an almost equally large pipe and insert it snugly into the hole in the top of the dome itself.

The crowd of thousands all seemed to move in unison away from the tip of the pipe as it continued its slide down into the bowl itself. Like a school of fish evading a predator.

As the pipe itself hovered above the crowd, who formed an empty space in the center of the bowl, an eerie silence overtook the crowd of thousands, though a handful of people were still in a screaming panic. Scanning the length of the pipe, he saw it went right towards the blurry figure's face. It almost looked like a woman, though Mikkel couldn't be sure.

The pipe, upon being adjusted a few times by the mysterious figure, a strange clicking sound echoing throughout. In spite of the strange silence, the main tone of the chamber was confusion. What would this tremendous pipe eject? Some kind of poison gas? Fire? Something worse?

As it lowered closer to the first row of people, they all appeared to back into each other, forming a near-uniform mass of widened eyes and sweat. Mikkel was now shaking as the crowd itself condensed, though he found a strange level of comfort in this stranger's embrace. He didn't know her name, but he felt an intensely close intimacy as her nails buried their way into his back and she dug her face into his torso, soaking tears into his jumpsuit.

Piercing terror forced every human body within the bowl to jump at once, as if a shocking pulse coursed through everyone in an instance. At that moment, thousands of people were acting as one.

Mikkel winced as he noticed the pipe leading to the figure's face. It wasn't a pipe, it was a fucking straw! He breathed heavily as he watched a number of people literally leave the ground; swept right into the hole of the straw itself. Long and transparent, he could see them sucked right up the thin tube at blinding speed right into the mouth of the immense woman who held the tube of plastic.

The tension of the crowd ripped open into outright panic as everyone fled from the direction of the gusts that were vacuuming up people by the dozen. Mikkel, holding the woman he was trapped with by the hand, ran as well, only to be pressed up against hundreds of bodies. The crushing force was almost overpowering as the crowd both in front and behind him vied for position in spite of there not being any space.

A harsh sound emitted from the straw itself. Each time someone was sucked up, a loud "fTP!" combined with a quickly muffled scream sent a shiver down Mikkel's spine.

“fTP fTP fTP fTP” With each suction, Mikkel knew that a human life was extinguished. Someone who had their own inner world, who once likely provided The State with prosperity, now completely gone.

The straw dipped lower as the head lifted away from the other end. A soul-shattering gulping noise forced the crowd into a new form of mortal panic as the lips, again, wrapped themselves around the plastic. People were practically climbing on top of each other as the round end of the straw began sweeping along the outer layer of the crowd, sucking them up ruthlessly into the mouth of the woman above.

Experiencing an electric terror, Mikkel felt a sense of entrapment. Not only within the bowl, but in his own body as well. He grit his teeth and tried to move forward, but the rushing current of human bodies was much too pressed together for him to move. The only constant was with the shorter, brown-haired woman who would not let him go. An odd comfort. He gulped as he thought that he wouldn't be dying alone.

As the crowd began to noticeably thin, he understood the sick pattern that was unfolding. The immense, mysterious woman would suck up a number of people, roll them around in her mouth, then swallow. A vile sense of disgust overcame him as he understood that this was his fate unless some miracle occurred.

Gritting his teeth, Mikkel knew he couldn't fully escape from this rather cruel form of execution, but he may be able to buy a few more seconds. Seeing a gap in the crowd, he wondered if he could pass through the empty center and get under the “back” side of the straw so that he could flee under the far end. Grasping the woman's wrist, he bolted at the opposite direction of the fleeing group. His flat-bottom shoes coil hardly grip on the flat, ceramic flooring, but he still made good pace as he looked back at the frightened woman he was dragging.

Slamming into the back end of the bowl, he couldn't help but let another tear fall from his face, watching layer after layer of screaming people sucked up into the straw above. As the suction stopped once every few seconds, he could see a few unfortunate bodies slide within the tube itself, leaving them in a situation where falling meant death but climbing upwards meant having to face their fate all that much sooner.

As the gusts continued, he watched the stragglers sucked upwards with near-blinding speed. Alone on their side of the bowl, Mikkel and the woman hugged each other, both now so sweaty through their jumpsuits that visible stains grew through the fabric.

The embrace grew so tight as to pass the point of pain as the straw itself stopped, breaking the pattern. Strange.

Mikkel couldn't help but grunt in terror, hearing only the woman's shouts, as the straw began turning towards them, hissing with consistently gusting air. Time almost slowed down as

the round hole began inching its way towards them. Mikkel felt as though he were back in the auto-ride as it lost all function.

Gritting his teeth in his lonely corner of the bowl, he reflected upon the fact that this entire day had been a disaster from the start. He thought that The State was supposed to maintain order and give some kind of control. What he had seen now, with an immense straw heading straight forward, was just pure chaos.

Which is exactly what he felt when he sensed the air itself begin to flow towards the entrance of the straw. His blood turned to ice. The sweat now covering him felt as though it were freezing cold. His blonde hair gusted as he felt lifted straight off of his feet, as though gravity didn't exist anymore. Embracing the woman he had just met, they both screamed in a terrified chord. The speed at which he was jet upwards was beyond that which he could comprehend. Air forced its way into his mouth, up his nose, and up his eyelids. Pounding against the side of the straw itself, he could sense the bruises he gained from the auto-ride accident swell up in pain.

In spite of the trip through the immense straw lasting only a split-second, to Mikkel it felt like a full minute. Saliva was forced from his mouth. Tears were split from his eyes. The hissing sound of a tempest of wind buffeted his ears before everything was quickly muffled with an abrupt hot, wet warmth.

Splattered on the woman's tongue, Mikkel's first sensory experience was that of the chorus of panicked wailing as he saw his fellow victims scattered around the mouth itself. With light still shining from the hole from which the straw protruded, Mikkel could see saliva-covered human beings, with their spit-stained clothes crawl on the massive, soft tongue. Some were stuck to the wrinkly roof of this woman's putrid mouth.

Inhaling the heavy air, he couldn't help but cough, as the scent wasn't what he had expected. It smelled rank, but salty. Almost like ham. Coughing out the globs of saliva, the idea that it may be an android passed his mind, but scrubbing his palms over the soft tongue, the pattern of the taste buds were far too natural and "random." This was an actual human woman's mouth he was in. Whose, he had no clue.

As the hissing continued, several new screams filled the chamber as they were ejected into the humid, shadowy mouth that surrounded them. As he tried to move, he noticed that the woman's hand was still wrapped around his wrist. Looking down at her, he saw her hair looked darker from being soaked with the saliva that was now raining upon them in thick cords.

He had no idea what to feel. He knew what he *should* feel, but any true sense of loss must have been washed from him long ago. He mostly felt confused. *This* is processing? *This* is what happens when you use up your strikes? The woman next to him grunted and wept as several more people were thrown towards the back of the tongue with screaming plops.

A loud “K’thun” sound clipped through his bones as Mikkel was wrapped in darkness. The straw slipped from the immense mouth as the floor began to shift. Still on all fours, Mikkel landed on his chest and felt his neck smear directly against the wet flesh below him. In a blink, he couldn’t maintain grip on the woman next to him, the slime lubricating away any friction he felt with her.

In the bubbly torrent filled with perhaps a dozen other screaming souls, he was now alone.

Being rolled and positioned in a “ball” of gooey, squirming human beings, Mikkel felt his chest jump in panic. Saliva bubbles fluttered all around him as a thrashing glob of arms and legs kicked at him, forcing sharp pangs of agony to spread from his already sore bruises. As the ball was rolled from cheek to cheek, he winced and pursed his lips, trying in vain to keep the stranger’s fluids from spilling into his face. In spite of the thrashing he faced, he did the same, feeling all of his limbs slide over the bodies of other terrified strangers.

Slamming into the molars of the woman that he was trapped within, he felt himself ooze away from the main ball of squirming victims. Slipping over the other side of this woman’s teeth, he could hear the distinct scream of the woman he once embraced slip away into the darkness above as he sank downwards, now lodged between her cheek and gums.

A loud “gluck” sound sent a gushing of horrified panic through him as he realized that all of those other people, who he had just writhed with, were now traveling down this woman’s massive throat to who-knows-where. Her stomach?

Wiggling, trying to get a grip on the shelf of flesh that lined this woman’s back teeth, Mikkel couldn’t find a grip. The lubing was far too effective as bubbly mucus continued to course over his body. Gritting his teeth, he could hear the slashing, slick motions of the woman’s tongue begin to slide over her teeth. The tongue probed next to him like a snake searching in a burrow.

Upon coming into contact with its relatively rough surface (in comparison to the smooth cheek), he screeched as the tongue itself deftly scooped him up. Now truly alone in the center crevice of the stranger’s tongue, he was smeared along the hard palate in the middle of a thick wad of bubbly spit.

Scraping his fingernails against the hard surface, he wailed, but could only emit a bubbly froth through the fluid. The strong muscle below him undulated, forcing him back towards her waiting throat. Gliding along the back surface of the tongue, he could sense that the scum buildup was quite deep, as it easily squished through his fingers. Wrapping both his hands over the plate-like taste bud, he could sense the edge of it digging into his fingers as the soft palate splattered on to him, blanketing him in a layer of slick mucus.

As his fingernails continued to dig into the flesh below, he attempted to climb, but only succeeded in gathering a buildup of soft, wet tongue scum, the leftover residue of which she forgot to brush away. The odor now supremely heavy and rank, Mikkel felt his eyes water not just out of emotion, but out of disgust in how harsh the scent was. His nostrils almost felt as though they were burning as he was forced to experience an extremely pure form of halitosis assault him directly in his face.

Attempting to hoist his leg up to the tongue, he could sense himself slipping closer to the edge of this stranger's throat. In spite of a more advanced part of his brain beginning to despair, a more primal part began to take hold, coursing adrenaline through his brain.

"No! Don't eat me! No! Please!" Knowing his bargaining was useless, he continued to attempt to hoist himself into the soft surface of the back of this person's tongue. Vile squishing sounds echoed in his head, in his delirium, he couldn't tell what was real and what was just a panicked form of his imagination.

Watching light fill the cavern yet again, he almost saw two openings part before him. He was clearly seeing double. This realization let him to experience a sense of supreme dizziness that made him limp, slipping over the edge and landing near the woman's closed throat.

As the straw entered yet again, Mikkel was small enough to cling to the side of the tube as the rush of air coursed by him, cooling him slightly. He hadn't realized how used to the wet body heat he had gotten as the chorus of screams began to assault his eardrums yet again. Gritting his teeth as the darkness took hold again, he could sense the tongue's movement behind him, forming the group of panicked human beings into a bolus of squirming food.

The chorus itself was formed in equal measure by a third screaming, a third crying, and a third bubbling through the thick slime. It was hauntingly familiar, including the odd, slick wet slapping of the immense mouth movements. He grit his teeth as he heard a unique sound: a low groaning from below. His first sign of a mysterious, painful fate.

As he sensed the bolus of human bodies growing closer, he had regretted not paying more attention in whatever cursory biology courses he had received in his Age Cohort. All he knew was that food went down the throat and it kept you from being hungry, he didn't know what organs there were or what they did or how they worked. He just knew it would be impossible to survive.

Shivering, he screeched in terror as the writhing sphere of adhered victims slathered over him, peeling him away from the back of the woman's throat and forcing him to slide downwards. Now on the outside of the glob of saliva-human mixture, Mikkel understood that he was truly doomed as he passed through the arch of the woman's throat.

A booming "Gluck" sound" almost shattered his sanity. Slipping downwards at full force, squeezed with at least a dozen other people, he screeched at the same time everyone else did.

Squirming in united panic, the entire ball, with Mikkel pressed on the outside, began its descent down the woman's esophagus.

The change in texture was immediately revolting to Mikkel. Over the side of his face, he could feel the slick epiglottis, turn to the smooth, pulsing esophagus. He knew he was truly fucked in spite of not knowing what these body parts were called.

As the tight, constricting tube pressed him downwards into the body that trapped him, a cacophony of sounds assaulted him from every direction. Wet squelching, screaming, moaning, blood coursing before him, and an immense, calm heartbeat. He grit his teeth, still dizzy with panic, not having any idea what awaited him at the bottom of this tight tube.

Having never experienced anything like this before, the consistent rippling of the esophagus reminded him of the motion of a slug. Slow, wet, and disgusting. Not a single inch of his body was free from the hot slime of this woman's body. Still tasting her rank saliva, it was as if her bad breath was now his. As if her tight throat was Mikkel's entire world.

Attempting to dig his nails into the surface before him, he could feel that they were already fully stuffed with the scum he scraped on her tongue. With no ability to slow his own descent, the fiery sensation of being trapped took hold.

"Hrrrp! Pllllrs! Hlllp!" A voice shouted behind him, sounding bubbly as her entire body was flooded with a stranger's saliva. He felt isolated within his own mind, though he couldn't help but experience a pang of annoyance. Who could possibly help at this point? Why would you shout that, even in desperation?

The slow descent was agonizing. He could sense the flesh before him relax before tightening above, pushing him lower and lower as if he were inside a roll of toothpaste. In complete, pitch darkness, he had no idea how far it was that he'd descend. With no knowledge of how the body worked, he didn't know if he'd be in this tunnel for ten minutes or ten seconds.

As the bolus of "food" slowed to a halt, he couldn't help but scream. An acrid sourness began to envelop him as another loud rumbling echoed from below. Spitting out the newly harsh slime, the flavor of this stranger's bodily fluid was much different. As if his sinuses were being aerated with vomit. Was this it? Was this her stomach? Feeling a light stinging in his eyes, he thought himself to be in the process of digestion. The panic within him increased dramatically as he thought himself to be in the chamber where he'd truly be dissolved alive. What would happen next as he was trapped within this "craw"? Would he be crushed? Spitting out another mouthful of sourness, he couldn't help but let out some vomit of his own, mixing with the fluids around him.

Inhaling, he couldn't tell if the acrid scent around his body was his own puke or the woman's. Though he didn't truly know how, he tried to swim upwards, thinking there may be

enough fluid to push against, but only succeeded in worsening his bruises and chafing his skin against the clothing of the other people trapped in this section of tubing.

A chunky sputtering emanated from below, the vibrations shaking him, as if his own body were warning him of something ominous. The screaming was, again, muffled as what felt like a ring of flesh was grasping at and dripping his fellow victims into a large chamber below.

His desire to claw his way upward went into overdrive. Thrashing as hard as he could, he could sense the ball of saliva-covered people become smaller and smaller and they were deposited into the mysterious new area. “No! No! No! Fuck! No!” He shouted, the woman’s saliva rushing into his mouth whenever he opened it.

Mikkel’s panic had now almost completely overwhelmed him. He was experiencing his identity slip away, especially as he felt grasping hands at his legs easily slip away into the mysterious hole below. “Guh! No!”

Yet again, he was the last one to slip through one of this woman’s orifices. Suspended in a wad of goo, he spread his arms and legs out as widely as he could in a vain attempt to slow his descent.

It failed.

A new vibration began spluttering, this time from above. He knew that sound by now, the sound of peristalsis over the calm, consistent heartbeat. He put his hands up before him in a vain attempt to keep the inevitable from him, but he couldn’t resist the force. He was pushed downwards as the wrinkly, fleshy stomach entrance glided over him.

The plop down into the sea was quick, too instantaneous for Mikkel to even process. A shocking sensation of horror blipped through him, as he couldn’t comprehend what was happening. His brain refused to parse his situation. He could breathe, he could feel, he could smell, he could taste, but he could not see. The sensation of being within a bolus of human bodies was nothing compared to this. In his mind, the descent through the woman’s throat was as bad as it could get. The very fact that he was now living through a situation that was infinitely worse caused a sensation of confusion within Mikkel’s mind that forced him to mix reality with imagination.

As he remained still, floating in an ocean of writhing, mucus-covered limbs, Mikkel’s face was expressionless. “Is this... real? Is this really happening?” A low buzz began overtook his hearing. In spite of not moving and laying down flat, the “material” below him was thick enough that he could just float. It was almost as though it was bubbling, and it was, but Mikkel inherently knew that wasn’t what was causing most of the motion below him. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of bodies were composing a veritable sea of suffering stretching infinitely below him. Lifting his arm up, he could feel the “roof” of this woman’s stomach. It was oddly low and strangely wrinkly as cords of slime slowly dripped from above.

Mikkel's panic was flooded away by numbness. Even as his eyes stung in the hot fog that surrounded him, he didn't move them. In spite of a deep sense of dread that flooded through his veins, he couldn't truly resist. It was as though his very mind were suppressing everything he felt, as opposed to just the mere urge to cry.

As the mucus from above drizzled on his body, the fingers, hands, wrists, and faces of all of those below and around him slathered him in the woman's hot slime. Still laying down and floating, the constant motion of the bubbling ocean led him in arbitrary directions, sometimes causing his clothed body to skim against a low-hanging stomach wrinkle. He didn't know how to care anymore.

The whooshing sound that overtook his ears temporarily subsided as another loud "gluck" sound preceded another racket of panicked screams. It was as if the effect were staggered: First the stomach's entrance would widen, exposing new screams, and then an echo of lower, more gravelly screams would shoot through the darkness as the bolus landed on top. The oceanic slime was alive, truly, and experienced one uniform emotion: horror.

As the mucus continued to soak its way into his clothes, Mikkel could feel an itching begin to burn away at his soft bruises. Wiping his eyelid, another sting came across it before the numbness abruptly faded, giving way for a growing, ominous agony.

Though he was partly protected by his shoes and jumpsuit, he knew that he would find a new meaning of pain very soon. He wasn't in any position to reduce any suffering, not even his own. Whatever he felt at that moment he knew would be getting so much worse.

The aroma of the chamber itself was so much worse than either the mouth or esophagus. It was as if every time he inhaled, he was breathing in the essence of toxic fire. The haze clung to every single one of his internal surfaces. Not only were his nostrils beginning to burn, but so were his sinuses, his trachea, and his lungs. Coughing out a few hacks, he could distinctly taste blood on top of the strong sourness of the slime that he floated upon.

Though the wailing was mostly pure screaming, Mikkel could hear distinct cries in the choking sea. As he continued to drift, he passed a woman, whose head was just above the surface shouting "It burns! It burns! Please! Make it stop! Make it stop, please!" His empathy struck him, but he knew that his situation was just as dire as hers.

His system couldn't comprehend the sheer ocean of suffering he was literally floating through. Another bolus of human bodies landed on top of them, causing a veritable wave to jump up and down. He had no idea that a mixture of bodies like this would act as any other fluid.

As the minutes passed, the screaming became more gravelly and low-pitched. The surface that was in constant contact with the writhing mucus was now itching as though it were covered in a thousand mosquito bites. Mikkel knew the best move wasn't to resist. He'd just

quickly sink in the pond of limbs. In all of his years on Earth, he had never conceptualized anything as horrifying as this. He had felt scared and disgusted before, but those emotions paled in comparison to the transcendent doom he was now feeling.

Now feeling his limbs begin to sink further into the soupy mixture, the acrid scent began to change. With hardly any room between his face and the ceiling of the stomach, the aroma started to take on an uncanny odor of "death." He couldn't quite articulate it in his mind, but he knew deep down that a large part of the humidity that covered him was composed of dissolved flesh.

As the final bolus of food splashed into the stomach, he could sense his body raise upwards, now forced between two mucus-covered wrinkles that lined the top of the stomach. Fortunately lodging himself by an air bubble, he found himself able to cling to life for a few more moments. Not even needed to move in order to stay afloat, the thrashing limbs below him provided a pushing effect. He had never seen, nor witnessed it, but it was as if he were crowd surfing over a scum-covered audience.

The slick sound of bubbles bursting coincided with screams from below. As he remained still, he could feel a hand grip his jumpsuit from below and shake it violently. He almost felt himself tugged below the surface before the hand's grip loosened slowly before sinking. The aura of death surrounded his body as countless sparks went out.

Much less active than before, the ocean began to churn, sliding him against the mucus-covered stomach lining and causing some hellish moans to echo through the various air pockets. He remained silent as he sensed the burning begin to take hold between his fingers, on his ears, over his genitals, and between his toes. Mikkel felt as though he were actually one of the more fortunate victims, being able to float near the top for the majority of the time, whereas the ones who had sank to the bottom had surely drowned by now.

Rubbing his fingers lightly over the pulsing stomach lining, he wondered who it had been who consumed him. Who would take such a job as this, even without having a choice? Would Mikkel rather experience this than force it upon others? He honestly didn't know.

What he did know was that he'd never see Cecile again. He'd never see her bring her pregnancy to term. He'd never truly become a father. The rest of his life was stolen from him, replaced by sinking into a writhing mass of wailing limbs.

As his head remained positioned above the surface of the wriggling slime, the rest of his body felt heavy. Buffeted by the bony limbs of the people who surrounded him, he could now truly feel how broken down their bodies were. Over his hands, neck, and socks, he felt bare bone scraping against him as often as an entire hand or face.

In spite of the degradation of those around him, Mikkel himself still felt very much intact. Though there was some definite stinging growing around his toes, eyes, and crotch, he had

largely avoided the incessant acid exposure by remaining on his back. Now in a vertical position, he wiped the back of his head down to his neck and winced as he felt the back of his scalp peel back like a banana. His only source of air being a bubble lodged within a ridge of stomach wrinkle, he waded forward through the sea of bodies, literally stepping on them and pushing off to move.

As he moved his legs to continue his slow “march” forward, he noticed his shoes had washed away in the current of mucus-covered bodies, his wet socks now squishing in the darkness. The agony increased at the same rate his numbness subsided, made worse knowing that each time one of his feet pressed down on something solid, he knew it was a human body.

Stumbling, he kicked his leg in the thick, bubbly slime until he found something stable. Upon his wet sock gaining traction on the round surface, he sensed the flesh under him rippling and bubbling. He cringed as he realized he was stepping on a living person’s face a split-second before he felt their jaw open and close, snipping a chunk of flesh right off of his sole, through the sock. In reflex, he kicked away, feeling the face below him pare from the skull it was attached to. Bending his knee to retract the rest of his leg, he found his sock still clamped between that person’s teeth as the inside surface of it flayed the skin off of his foot as it was ripped away.

“Augh! Guh! G’k!” It was as if lightning bolts of pure agony lit their way up his leg, ending at the middle of his torso. Reaching down to his foot, Mikkel leaned on the back of a floating corpse as he ran his bare, wrinkled fingers over the exposed tendons and musculature over the top of his right foot. The sensation was intensely unnatural, jettisoning him back in shock and forcing him to splash down in the surface of the slime before him. The surface now beginning to foam, Mikkel instinctively beat back the fine film of bubbles, trying not to breathe in the sour froth.

The entire chamber he was trapped in shifted slowly from left to right. Now sensing as though he was on a boat, he found himself experiencing a form of motion sickness on top of the intense nausea that was gripping his chest. Dry heaving, he found that he had no true stomach contents to eject, but he found the actual act somewhat cathartic. For the split second he heaved, it was as if the pain around him went away. Kicking again, he sensed his pinky toe, as well as the several bones attached to it, tear away under his own weight. Now sensing it attached only by a ribbon of flesh, Mikkel shook his ankle in an attempt to be free from it. He didn’t know why.

Still shifting from left to right in a rhythmic pattern, Mikkel began to understand that the woman who had consumed him was now walking. He lifted his hands and grabbed on a wrinkle for balance. The rumbling around him continued, though the wailing of the bodies around him grew lower and raspier. It was haunting to him hearing the familiar sounds of the human body that surrounded him in comparison to the increasingly inhuman sounds of the victims swimming within her. As though she would continue to live as a person and he would be forced to die as puke. Even the fact that she was walking and he was swimming gave him pause, she’d continue to live life as normal while he wasn’t even given the “luxury” of solid ground.

Still kicking his legs, he now felt the skin peeling up to his left shin as his fingernails detached one by one. A strange, thumping sensation thundered through him as he felt his pinky toe finally detach from the rest of his body. He was truly disintegrating now. To become one with the woman who consumed him. He didn't know how to cry at this point. What once was taken from him by force of The State was now removed by the pure physicality of what was happening to him.

Using one hand to grip the ceiling and one hand to cover his face, an alien sensation came over him. His own hand didn't even feel his anymore. What was, just hours ago, a normal, smooth palm now felt more like a raisin-covered bag of bones. As he wiped his face, he knew he wouldn't even be able to recognize himself in a mirror. Though staying too long in a shower was considered "Inappropriate behavior," the few times he managed to sneak an indulgence, he felt his fingertips wrinkle. This felt the same way, but to a terrifying extreme. As if the wrinkling itself split his skin wide open.

Gasping for breath, Mikkell thought of Cecile. As an A-level citizen, she should have access to certain records that he would not, including the names of those who had been "Processed." In the beginning stages of true despair, Mikkell wondered what she would think when he didn't come home, even far after his latest hours. Would she look him up immediately? Would she even care? She had been acting somewhat strangely recently, especially after being promoted to an apparently stressful position. He hyper-focused on her mental state and what she would be feeling after having the news broken to her. Would she cry? Would she be cited for "Inappropriate behavior" as he had been? A flood of questions flooded Mikkell's mind, enhancing his despair as he knew that none of them would be truly answered.

The very idea of spending the rest of his life in this pit was growing to be more revolting to him the more inevitable it became. He couldn't help but experience pangs of rage mixed with the disgust, sensing how calmly this woman was walking with a soup of pure death stewing within her. He hadn't heard her say a single word since he was consumed. Not a single hint of who she might be. And yet, he'd be becoming one with this person. A life-bond that he did not choose.

"G'k'k'k'k!" He tried to scream, but could only emit a gruff, creaking noise as two hands attempted to climb his leg like a rope. The fingers dug straight into his soft flesh, easily pressing through the fabric covering his legs. Relentless wetness forced his skin to be softer, more sensitive, and as pliable as clay. Each puncture of his skin exploded with a sensation that was beyond agony, as if the mental and physical anguish combined. As the figure continued climbing his torn skin, he could feel their head approach, pushing it back with his bare hand. Now knowing better than to touch anyone near their mouth, Mikkell pressed downward with an open palm. Shivering in horror, he felt the open nose-holes and eye sockets of a skull still covered in mostly living flesh. Using as much strength as he could muster, he attempted to push away this figure, but only succeeded in slipping his hand off of their forehead, scraping away skin and hair. In an act of desperation, Mikkell stuck his thumb through their eye socket and

grabbed the skull almost as if it was a bowling ball. Pinching the stomach wrinkle above, he tried to pry away this person from his body, but the more strength he put in, the further their fingers dug into his skin. He tried to shout "Get off of me!" but only made a series of guttural noises, his throat feeling sore, as if he were breathing for hours.

The hand crept up his torso, one of the fingers finding its way to his belly button. Now switching from the head area to the grasping claw at his front, Mikkel cracked back several of the fingers, forcing the body below him to squirm in renewed activity. The fingers themselves peeled back deep scratches down his skin, of which he could feel flutter in the mucus like torn flags. Cracking away the entire wrist with a horrifying vibration, he lifted his leg and kneed the person in the chest, forcing out a fat bubble of air that popped a blast of foam right next to his face. The body itself went limp, but the other hand still clawed on the other side. Plucking the hand from his own flesh, he pushed it away into the twisting ocean of hot mucus. For the first time since he had sat on the couch that morning, Mikkel had breathed a sigh of relief.

He pursed his ripped lips, feeling the flesh fit together like a jagged puzzle piece. Now feeling the puncture marks begin to expand from the exposure to what he long-ago realized was some kind of acid, he sensed the gentle rhythm of the walking stop, causing an odd stillness in the churning slop. A loud thud overcame him, the shaking being quick and severe. He grit his teeth as he heard another low, bubbly rumbling from below. The sounds continued to be very strange and alien to him, what he could only describe as some kind of "alien twisting" - like the sound of someone vomiting a thick gel. To his horror, the level of the sea lowered quickly and substantially. Now unable to maintain grip on the wrinkle above, he slipped off of it and found himself completely submerged. Grabbing two dead bodies, he hoisted himself upwards, spitting out the warm mucus, tasting mostly blood.

The quaking continued as Mikkel pushed aside bodies both living and dead. As he came into contact with one of the stomach's walls, he felt his palms slide downward, signifying that some of the digested slurry was being squirted into the lower, deeper part of this woman's guts. With more room to swim, he could hear the other people who found small pockets of air. Largely quiet, he could still listen to the wet slapping of their thrashing, as well as a few wailing cries that barely sounded human. Perhaps eighty to ninety percent of all the people this woman had consumed were now dead, composing the very mass that was now being ejected through her stomach's exit for further digestion. Mikkel wondered how long it was until he was forced to join them.

Intense, deep "glorping" sounds continued to permeate the stomach as the wet bubbling pulsed from below. Feeling the skin on his palms pare away from his palms as the glop level continued decreasing. He had wondered if anyone was still alive as they were pressed through the sphincter below. In his blindness, he found a new depth to his hearing, as if he could form the shape of the chamber in his mind through the echoes of the groaning against the walls.

Without warning, those very flesh began to press inwards, smearing against his body. A loud, roaring explosion burst through the cavern as the two walls came into contact with each

other. The mucus dripped down from the soft surfaces, covering Mikkel's face, forcing him to blow bubbles through the snot itself. Another explosion of sound almost deafened him as the walls, still pressing against each other, slid in opposite directions. He could recognize that sound: a stomach's growl, amplified one million-fold. Even in spite of the stomach being full of thousands of human lives, it still wasn't enough for this ravenous woman. Her body was demanding even more.

Each time the wrinkled walls passed over, Mikkel found himself rolling between them as if he were in a pair of twisting hands. In the complete control over the fleshy ripples, the stomach continued churning, both in an effort to digest the melted corpses and to press them into her bowels.

The very thought of this woman's "bowels" sent another wave of disgust through him. Was that truly going to be his final resting place? As some stranger's bowel movement? Now so numbed-out from panic and despair, he couldn't help but perseverate upon the way his body would be disposed of in the coming hours. At one point in his life he thought he'd be cremated in the Great Hall with the honored dead, possibly as an A-level citizen. Now he was going to be some random woman's shit. Even the way this person was involuntarily handling his body seemed disrespectful. He and thousands of others would either burn or choke to death, the last moments being both disgusting and horrific, only to be turned into something that was flushed away in the toilet. How many people had she pushed out her asshole? Hundreds of thousands?

As the churning continued, he felt something leak from his eyes. Upon feeling the hot fluid pass his nostrils and approach his lips, he realized the normal saltiness had a metallic tinge to it. It was blood. Mikkel, still barely accepting his situation, could barely comprehend the concept of literally crying blood. Gripped by the pressed-together stomach walls, he lifted his arms, dripping cords of stomach slime, and touched his face again. His eyelids were completely torn and where there should be eyes, there were misshapen orbs that felt like rotten grapes. He wanted to scream, but nothing came out, only what was like a reverse-gasp with a tinge of bubbling. The stomach reversed direction and slid along yet again, pressing his jumpsuit into his skin.

Large gashes now replaced where his bruises once were, though he knew he couldn't do anything about it. His very skin felt inundated with the sour fluid that surrounded him. As the rugged walls continued to slide, he found himself briefly pressed into other bodies and corpses. The general fluid now composed of many broken-off limbs, flaps of skin, and bits of cartilage, the consistency turned from a soft, smooth mucus to a chunky, bone-laden soup. As he lifted his arms yet again, what came up in the cords were ears, human hair, and a patch of face that contained an eyebrow. Mikkel felt as though he was becoming one with it. As though he were already mostly there in the stew of death.

As the acid continued to burn through his skin, the agony was now reaching its peak. Mikkel, now completely blinded, could strangely "see" where his body was. Because of the severe pain, it almost "looked" as though his limbs were composed of pure light. The sensation

was bright and relentless, the nerve endings all giving the same effect as wide-open eyes staring at the sun. He grit his teeth, feeling his torn cheeks squish between his teeth. He couldn't even feel it. Where he did retain tactile sensation, he only suffered, able only to tell what position his body was in because of where he felt the pain the most. Any place where skin rubbed against skin was now a fiery, grinding chafe, as if he were aiding in his own digestion.

Breathing in the toxic fog, he didn't know whether he was damned or if it was a miracle that he had lived so long within this stomach. As the walls glided back again, he felt the air knocked out of him as he crashed into another living victim. Through her high-pitched gurgling, he could tell it was a woman. He grunted as he felt "interlinked" with her somehow. As though, when the walls rubbed back into place, he was stuck to her, chest-to-chest. In a vain attempt to push away, he had come to a horrific realization that both of them were so shredded that they were pressing nearly bare rib cages together and they had become locked together. The bones between them crunched and slid, making it hard to breathe.

As they both slashed at each other's softened skin, they both slunk down into the main slurry. The woman he was connected to actually let out what sounded like a short vocalization, an ability that he now lacked. He instantly recognized it as the woman he was embracing in the bowl earlier. He wished he could say he was sorry for not helping her. Sorry for sticking to her like this. Sorry for shredding what was left of her tissue with his bony hands.

Churning muscles abruptly relaxed and they both dropped into the mixture below. The last two of the thousands digested in her stomach left alive. Still attempting to push her away, he placed his hands on her shoulders and sensed his bones literally scraping away the flesh under her skin. Their ribs cracked, but still were locked together. Breathing was done only through short, gravelly gasps. They both knew it was the end. Mikkel's agony was not letting up, as the breaking ribs provided new bursts of pain that jolted his consciousness to full-force. Unconsciousness would not grip him so easily, as being linked with this woman provided an extra level of buoyancy that forced both of their upper bodies into the thing, poisonous air.

Mikkel's emotional state was as sludge-like as the soup he was floating in. He had felt as though he were undergoing a supreme violation, feeling humid body heat from every direction. The mucus still rained down upon them as the shifting returned.

With a rhythmic "Glorp. Glorp. Glorp." the stomach shook with each step the woman took. As they floated together, they found themselves splattered against one of the walls, adhered there by a wad of mucus. As the woman continued walking, the movement of her legs vibrated the very walls, from which Mikkel could hear the goings-on of the rest of her body. Her heartbeat was still calm, the rumbles were still low, and the blood was still coursing, just as he had heard within her throat. Her victims were nothing to her. They didn't provide even a hint of indigestion.

The walking stopped, as did the rhythmic shaking before another abrupt slam. Having grown used to the patterns of the body that consumed him, Mikkel knew that she had just taken

a seat. Engaged in such a visceral intimacy with her, it was the only thing he could focus on besides his own pain and the suffering of the choking woman he was stuck to.

His own heart pounding painfully in his chest, each time it pulsed, he could feel his ribs cracking just a little more. He tried to close his eyes in the darkness, but he had no eyelids. In a vain attempt to escape his own reality, he tried to vicariously live through the woman that surrounded him. A booming came from above, sounding almost like an incredible, gooey crushing followed by a low grumble. He was used to low grumbling by this point, but this had a slight, high-pitched squelching to go along with it. As if something were being squeezed through a tube.

His heart sank, though he was happy he could still focus on something other than the agony of his burning body, as he realized that the woman was eating again. Were more victims being thrown into this hot, sticky furnace?

The stomach entrance above glorped open, letting out almost a flatulent sound, as it widened and splattered out a hot, saliva-ridden bolus of chewed food. Somewhat relieved that it wasn't another wad of human bodies, Mikkel inhaled and could only smell blood and vomit. The food plopping before him was a mystery to him, even as the walls themselves began to eject new fluids.

"U'rg'g'k'k!" The woman he was bound to sputtered as the stomach walls let out an ominous ripple. Unable to do anything but gasp, Mikkel could sense cords of slime, yet again, dripping down upon him and the other woman. The woman beside him whimpering, the stomach wall itself bent outwards, pressing both of them into the sloppy mass of what Mikkel quickly understood to be scrambled eggs.

Both of them knowing that trying to pry away from each other was a hopeless endeavor, they both embraced. Mikkel, as he flowed into the saliva-inundated mass of eggs, wondered if she recognized him from before somehow. As they continued to embrace, their ribs interlocked more, and the more painful it was to breathe. Mikkel experienced pneumonia as a child, his lungs filling up with fluid, causing a painful stabbing-sensation in his lower chest. This was far, far worse. As if the stabbing was less a mere knife and more of a hot poker.

The mash they were blended into was of a nearly uniform consistency, though with the churning it appeared to contain bits of bone and cartilage. As another chewed wad plopped from overhead, he couldn't help but cough. The slurry was warmer than the mass they were once floating in, which added to their torment given that the heat was already Hellish. They had no idea they could be cooked as thoroughly as they were. Mikkel knew that both of them were experiencing a unity of emotion. A sick thought quickly blipped through his mind: "I never really experienced that with Cecile."

Guilt flooded through him. How could he think of such a thing at a time like this? These were his last moments and he still felt mad at his wife for treating him awfully that very morning. When everything was okay. When he didn't have any reason to cry.

Blood still gushing from his tear ducts, the stomach walls expanded and contracted yet again, forcing chewed eggs and human flesh down their mouths, into their nostrils, and into their eye sockets. Inundated with what would have been seen as yellow fluff if the darkness weren't present, they couldn't help but continue to hold each other tight. In a way, it was almost as though they were trying to expedite their own deaths, given that the cracking was more apparent the harder they hugged.

"I just need one of these ribs to pierce my lungs." Thought Mikkel as he was flushed up into an air pocket, instinctively inhaling another hot bubble of fumes. Using as much of his strength as he could, he could hear the creaking between them increase at a rapid rate. She did the same, as if she had the same plan.

Placing their heads next to each other, a light squish sounded between them as what remained of their ears slid into place. With yet another tug, they had both experienced a harsh snap at the exact same moment. Her ribs cracked. His ribs cracked. Both of their lungs filled with the fluid of hot, digesting eggs as they went limp and they sank into the churning mixture.

Though death didn't take them immediately, the finality of it was both reassuring and merciful. Mikkel, feeling the warm fluid rush into him, experienced a sense of finality to his suffering. He wouldn't have to live forever like this, only a few more seconds embracing someone who seemed to genuinely care about him.

His back landed against the floor of the stomach with the woman on top of him. Bubbles ejected from his lungs at the same time as hers, combining on their way up the thick sludge. He wanted to say "I love you," but he settled on that phrase being his very last thought.

Their corpses literally hooked into each other, Mikkel's body now flowed freely in the churning slop. No resistance, no breathing, no splashing, no hanging on to any stomach folds. The last two lights in the stomach going out, the burning ocean found some form of peace as the suffering within it truly ended. The stomach now churning loudly, they were only pressed further into each other. Their limbs intertwined and their jaws unhinged, the back ends locking with each other as well. They were now both tied together in death as they were in life.

The digesting eggs continued to ooze over them, softening almost as much as their skin. Their clothes remained frayed, but largely undisturbed by the digestive process, though the fabric still adhered extremely harshly. Both wearing the mandated grey jumpsuits of The State, their skin bonded together where any flesh was exposed, specifically their feet.

As the woman finished eating her rather plain meal, she drank a small cup of water, splattering the corpses with extra liquid to loosen them up. Their hair now both scraped free from their scalps, they looked as though they were those people permanently preserved after the Pompeii eruption.

Thunderous squelching filled the chamber as the stomach warped yet again, forcing the two bodies into the stomach's "pyloric antrum," the lowest portion. Along with all the scattered indigestible bones and articles of clothing from earlier today, they sank to the bottom before the flesh around them warped again and forced them into the narrow opening of the pyloric canal. The thickened muscle of this valve crushed what was left of them, shattering their bones, mashing both skulls into each other until they cracked. Their brains now spilling out, they intermingled lightly before being washed away in the mass of the digesting chyme.

The canal continued to ooze them forward, treating them as another chunk for the lower intestines to deal with. In an odd turn of events, the duodenum itself, the next chamber in which food is digested, is extremely thin and compact compared to a standard, round tube. Slathered with bile to counteract the effects of the stomach acid, the two forms almost became one mass as they were jammed in the extremely tight tunnel of flesh.

In the shape of a crushed straw, the duodenum, if they could taste, would have the flavor of almost pure lemon juice without the hint of sweetness that citrus fruits provide. Even the duodenal bulb was much more compressed than would otherwise be normal. Rushing over the first curve, their jumpsuits slithered along the soft edges of the precursor to the small intestine. An essence of sour inundated their bodies as the peristaltic motion crushed them into the remains of their fellow victims, as well as the digesting eggs. A slow, muscular press oozed them slightly upwards before they were pressed down a C-shaped curve with a wet squelch. The further they went through the duodenum, the more sour they became. Their skin now dyed a light green color from the flood of bile, the chemical composition of their bodies began to fundamentally change. Instead of being composed to live as human beings, they were being composed to digest in one.

The sloshing fluid they were pressed within was watery, like diarrhea, with the only hard portions being the bones and scattered bits of clothing. Rushing down the tubing as though they were in a river, their bodies bashed the sides, the woman's forearm going loose before detaching within the sleeve of her jumpsuit. Sinking to the bottom of the bend of the duodenum, it continued to eject more chemicals to aid in their digestion and absorption. Still extremely hot, at almost 100 degrees Fahrenheit, the fluid did not provide any relief from the relentless heat in spite of having a water-like consistency. It was the same temperature as the woman's blood.

Too watery to be sludge-like, this mixture stalled within this juncture, as most of the body's protein absorption occurred here. Without much more than animal tissue, the mucus lining continued to ripple and groan as the mucus lining almost sucked in the protein-heavy mixture. Through Mikkel's wounds especially, his gushing innards provided nutritional fortitude

to the woman who had consumed him, the molecules that were earlier composing his body were now rushing through his murderer's blood stream.

The protein that once composed his eyes were completely jellied, dissolved into the mixture, being voraciously sucked through the duodenum's lining along with the eye matter of the thousands others the woman's stomach had recently killed. In this mass-protein absorption, the woman's body didn't discern between whose matter was whose, the involuntary motions only noted that they were nutrients for both energy and cell growth. The complete domination of all of their bodies was now nearly complete, as this was where her own body would gain most use out of the digested forms.

Mangled corpses continued to intertwine within this compressed curve of a tube, reduced to nothing but a hot slurry. As the bodies landed near the bottom of the crevice, they stuck and clung together in clumps, their clothes only partly frayed, unable to be digested or absorbed. The chunks themselves were clinging together in a mucus-protein mixture, especially the indigestible bits such as fabric and hair. Looking like an exhumed clog from a backed-up bathroom drain, the main "clump" of indigestibles was large enough to be passed through the main tube and splattered over the edge without much effort on the part of the tunnel itself. The lubricated mass was intentionally clustered into a round form that bent over the edge and squirted into the winding path below.

Mikkel's skull scraped along the circular folds along the horizontal region of the duodenum as they bent around the lower curve. A bright white patch of bone was quickly stained green as the peristaltic motion continued to press both of them forward. As their movement slowed, they stalled for several minutes, sinking at the bottom of the ascending region preceding the duodenal-jejunal flexure, the final bend before the "proper" portion of the small intestine. At an incline, the both of them would have felt ripples of musculature slither below them if they were still alive, but their corpses merely bent as the whim of the woman's gut. It took three peristaltic thrusts for them to finally arch over the final curve and begin their descent into the jejunum, the first portion of the small intestine.

Though it was a near vertical pipe, they still adhered to the side as though they were a slug descending a tree. Their flesh was melted and the protein that composed them liquefied through their cotton garments, forming making their corpses sticky.

As the watery fluid continued to rush downward, they still slid slowly down at a slower rate than the rest of the digesting slurry. The bones, shirts, shoes, and skulls of the others they were consumed with battered and slid along them, some even clinging to them as they formed a small clump of protein-based mostly-indigestible material.

The slow rate of their descent softened their skin even more. Both of their faces were mostly melted off, but still somewhat recognizable. Still having their eyebrows and most of their lips, their mangled faces strangely had an expression of peace. They didn't seem horrified or despairing, they almost seemed as they were just sleeping, despite Mikkel lacking eyelids. Their

embrace continued to hold strong as the bile started to wash away, making their skin less green and more grey.

As a large clump of bodies came crashing down, they were quickly peeled away from the side and fell with them, landing right at the bottom of the first curve of the woman's jejunum. Now fully softened and somewhat "disinfected" by the immense stomach, the small intestine was fully prepared to complete the digestion and absorb as much as it could.

Still in a completely liquid form, the soup that the two bodies were flowing in was being washed through a tight, triangular tunnel. Some spots too thin for the bodies to swim through, the heat continued to pulse around them while the peristaltic motions forced the current forward. Still softened by the mush that surrounded them, the half-dissolve protein, especially that which was leaking from under their broken skin, was being washed through the intestine itself without being absorbed at all.

In spite of their bodies being mostly waste at this point, the consistency of the stew they were being washed in was still watery. The compacted, dense, squeezed-in nature of this particular jejunum meant that the trip through was agonizingly slow. The constant stalling meant that the bodies and other undigested bits of protein would sink to the bottom and cling together, forming long strings of mucus-laden protein. These strings would become somewhat homogenized, though the bones protruding out would continue lightly scraping the mucosa of the small intestines, harmlessly gathering up more of the woman's internal snot.

As this process continued, the corpses themselves would begin to bubble. Formed by the woman's gut flora, these gas pockets would often form within the skulls or chests of the victims, forcing the bodies to pop from the pressure. Many of them, their skin undigested, looked almost ballooned with bloat, their softened skin easily bursting. In spite of the violent look of this occurrence, the sound produced by it was little more than a soft "glorp."

Bubbles rising upwards through the digested liquid, they were all forming into larger bubbles near the top of the triangular passageways. As the intestine rippled forward, so did these bubbles, vibrating the dark caverns with the sounds of fluttering gas. The flatulent spray would occur whenever it passed over a larger clump of indigestible material, but were for the most part silent.

Mikkel and the woman he was bound to were each bloated in their own way, though their gas was escaping more through the punctures they had made in their bodies as they tried to pry themselves away from each other. Over Mikkel's leg, the puncture wounds that some grasping fingers dug into him were spluttering air as a flat tire would underwater. A consistent stream of hot carbon dioxide and bacterial by-product. The punctures themselves growing more frayed as the gas sprayed out faster, eventually a large liquid membrane formed under his thigh. The surface tension of this bubble too strong for it to burst immediately caused his thigh to inflate between his knee and hip. In a sudden burst, the flesh of his leg splashed out, spluttering

the greenish musculature of his quadriceps into the slowly-flowing river of muck and slipping his kneecap under the skin of his calf.

As the bubbled area over the corpses continued to grow, a loud, thunderous groan quaked the entire tunnel, washing the dead crowd over another bend. The intestines now nearly closed, the body squirted the bubbly muck through a descending bend as the lining absorbed amino acids and glucose. Having died last, Mikkel and the woman he was interlocked with were likely the most “human-looking” bodies, the rest now having a similar consistency to that of mud with bits of skin attached.

Being such a small size, traveling through the nearly eight feet of this woman’s jejunum was the equivalent of being washed away through a river that was several miles long. An endless expanse of blazing sludge whose coasts stole your very essence.

As the two interlinked corpses continued to be battered against the walls, or “coasts” of this river, the woman’s jumpsuit inflated, looking almost comical in any other situation. Her forearm having detached earlier in the digestive process, the tissue had clogged up the front of the sleeve, leaving room for the digestive material to eject gas in the enclosed space. In the hot, digesting tube, the two bodies continued to slither along, the bottom before the closed arm of the woman’s jumpsuit provided an element of flotation. Now rising up through the mixture like a zeppelin, Mikkel’s body hung low, his last remaining fingernail detaching and sinking into the darkness. As the inflated sleeve pierced the surface of the bubble above, the two bodies remained afloat as the spheres of air continued to float above and, in some cases, through them.

Their skulls also bubbled where they were crushed together. Mikkel had now looked completely unrecognizable, identifiable only by the undigested number on the chest of his jumpsuit, though even that white rectangle was now stained dark brown. Another two thin streams of bubbles were emitting from his eye sockets as his brain was being fully broken down. The bones, softened from the incessant exposure to the warm liquid, began to crack as two large emissions jet from his face, cracking the sockets themselves and splitting his skull at the three seams at the top. The digested mash now flooding into his brain case, the double-corpse flotation sank slightly, losing some of its buoyancy.

The river of brown slime continued its way through the twisted, compressed maze of this woman. Mikkel’s skull was now cracked in half, his chest cavity filling with the fluid, forcing the two to sink even further. Now, on average, having the same density as the mixture, they were now suspended almost perfectly in the middle of the river.

The soft fleshy halls shook abruptly as the familiar rhythmic pattern of immense legs began, yet again. Mikkel, if he were still breathing, would immediately recognize this as the walking of his own predator. Where they were walking was completely irrelevant to them, as the human being that encapsulated them had such a level of power over them that their fate would not change no matter what she planned to do.

Another quick quake blasted a few more bubbles out of Mikkell's body, lowering them in the suspension of digesting solution. The guts twisted slightly as the suspensory muscle attached to the intestines expanded and contracted as the woman sat.

A muffled "Kshhh" sound permeated her intestines as the thousands within her guts continued to process. Excreting the excess water from her bladder into what, from the scale of the tiny corpses, was an immense toilet, the woman's guts grumbled. As the hot piss came into contact with the toilet water, the woman's ass shifted slightly, again rocking her guts back and forth.

"F'RRT!" Another, sharper blast vibrated through the tunnels as air was ejected far further down the tubing path. Several more flatulent bursts echoed in the tunnels, coaxing air pockets to rise to the top of the woman's intestines, though she had no need to defecate at that very moment, though she flexed her rectal muscles and tried anyway. A low, vocal grunt reached the corpses as the woman puckered her anus and pushed, to no avail. She would have to wait until later to find any sort of relief. Rumbling emitted from the lower, deeper parts of the intestines, the shaking reaching the mass of victims as the end of their road yearned for their arrival.

In spite of this, the air bubbles within the jejunum continued to gurgle down the brown river, now bending around the corner, in which the double-corpse sank below another bend. Still bubbling through the mashed liquid, the stringy fragments of Mikkell's foot remnants became entangled in a clump of hair. Formed of the clustered scalps of hundreds, it acted almost like a mucus-laden tumbleweed as it looped over the remnants of their lower limbs, whittling away at what was left of their flesh. Their feet were easily torn away from their shins as if their joints were made of soft butter. Veins, arteries, and tendons now spilled below their legs like tentacles, some breaking away in the hot fluid. All four feet were then carried away to another portion of the river, never to be connected to their original bodies ever again.

As they continued to float through the slow-moving river, the point where Mikkell bruised himself had now been completely exposed. His jumpsuit frayed above his belly button, the damaged flesh was now replaced with an exposed gash, which now had a flood of his own intestines, spluttering out bubbles of their own. Each end being frayed as much as his skin, the soft flesh of his own innards was now intertwined with two different rib cages. The more they flowed down the dark tunnel, the more their organs wrapped together. The woman, all of her skin nearly disappeared, was leaking flesh from the underside of the jumpsuit's legs. With her feet completely gone, the exposed tibia and fibula of her left leg detached with the flesh it was bound to and washed away. Sinking to the bottom almost immediately, it found its way into another clump of limbs that had formed a bonded, mucus-covered sphere of adhered bones.

It was almost as if "like attracts like" within this woman's intestines. The material was nearly self-sorting through the digesting mess, even as they bent through the corners. By the time the fluid had reached the ileum, there were clumps of hair, bones, tendons, shoes,

scattered clothes, and nearly-complete bodies. The shapes of each seemed to naturally bind against one another, the clothing aided by the scraps of tissue that had peeled away and provided extra stickiness. In spite of this, Mikkel managed to stay above these gatherings, for the most part, because of the flotation the woman's sleeve provided. Still increasing in size because of the gas ejections, the inundation of their bodies with liquid provided a balance, maintaining their suspension away from any of the intestinal walls.

As the ballooned sleeve was pressed into the ileum, the next portion of the intestines, the bonded flesh clogging the tip twisted slightly. The woman's humerus detaching at the elbow, it splashed down slightly in the inflated fabric. With a sudden splutter, the clod of tissue burst from the sleeve itself, ejecting all of the air out of the woman's jumpsuit like a jet, forcing both bodies forward a few inches in a cluster of foul bubbles.

Immediately falling to the bottom of the clustered intestinal contents after the blast, the tiny woman's arm was now composed of just one bone attached to the shoulder by a stringy joint. Upon hitting the intestinal floor, it cracked in half, spilling marrow out and shredding more of her soft flesh with bone fragments. As they spilled from the holes in the frayed clothing, they lined the intestinal floor. As the duo rolled around, the peristaltic motion of the tight ileum dragged Mikkel's back along these razors, now completely detaching his jumpsuit from his skin.

It peeling away, the frayed tissue exposed his spine and coccyx, the nerve endings spilling away and slipping into nothingness almost immediately. The smooth muscle of the giant woman's intestines continuing to ripple with Mikkel's exposed bones in direct contact with her flesh, his body twisted in new and unnatural ways. The peristaltic motion now creaking his spinal cord as he was being pressed into the floor, the two had finally smashed into the other main cluster of corpses.

Though they were still linked at the ribs, Mikkel's crushed skull pressed into the skull of another and pasted with it almost immediately. As they oozed forth, more bodies flowed over him and layered on top of both of them. Their immediate link still present, but now largely irrelevant, they found themselves just one piece of a near-homogenous clump of twisted human bodies. Their clothes, shoes, bones, skin, and hair clusters now all being pressed together as they slid over a "cliff" within the immense intestines, the compression of the unusually tight intestines made this experience much more intimate. With some portions being as thin as a drumstick, the relentless compression and slow flow caused more of their bones to crunch together.

Mikkel and the woman's rib cages were now so pulverized that telling the difference between them was now impossible. They were just two masses of shattered bone mixed together. Though some pieces still remained intact, like the roof of Mikkel's mouth and the woman's hips, the sheer pressure of the tight walls made sure that even these recognizable body parts were short lived. They were but dust in the intense tempest of the woman's body. As they slid further, the color of their flesh became more of the same, having them being completely bonded to each other.

Their bones, having been stained a sickly green, began to spread along widely as the mush entered the terminal part of the ileum. Lacking the circular folds of the previous areas, there was far less mechanical destruction of their bodies in comparison to earlier organs. Slithering along the smooth bottom, their bodies continued to mash together, forming a consistent ooze with bits of bone fragments scattered with clothes. In spite of this, the clothes mainly existed as torn fragments thanks to the sharp splintered bones. Out of everything this woman had swallowed earlier in the day, the shoes were the most recognizable, though some had clear evidence of damage, like peeled-off soles and unwound laces.

The river of death continued to flow, the smoothie of human bodies all rolling against each other. Though the consistency was all the same, there were two distinct colors, representing different densities within this woman's gut. There was the yellowish liquid above, composed mostly of water as well as the flowing brown gunk on the bottom, looking almost like dust blowing in the wind. The brown dust dropped whenever the woman sat down, settling into its own pattern as the dead bodies clustered within it. As the lower surface was covered with this brown haze, one could easily tell that it was composed of bodies due to the floating bone fragments, including entire skulls, being dragged through the tubing.

Every time the woman moved, the yellow and brown portions of the intestinal mixture combined, forming only a diarrhea-esque coloration. That's how this mixture would be ejected as well, if not for the important work of the next phase of the digestive process. By now, the predatory woman's body had done all it could with the food it was given, being unable to absorb any more of their little mangled forms. Though most of their bodies were completely mashed into brown goo, a few still retained somewhat of an original form. The bottom of Mikkel's skull was still attached to the top half of his spine, for example, though the rest of him and the woman he was stuck to were just liquid dust floating near the end of the giant woman's small intestine. Having nowhere else to go, the chyme was forced towards the woman's ileocecal valve, smushed together in the last stop before the large intestine.

The valve itself absorbed various bile and vitamins as it opened to let the watery cadavers slide into the cecum, a small, fleshy pouch and the first area of the woman's colon. Fleshy spluttering spilled the loose chyme, lightly expanding the very contracted sack as it emitted a bubbling, flatulent sound. Yet again, the solid chunks sank to the bottom, including the scattered remains of Mikkel. The cecum rippled and pulsed, churning the mixture of digested food and human beings. A small, round dip below the first column of the woman's colon, it served as a gathering place for all of the people at once, just as they had gathered in the bowl before they were sucked up an immense straw. Now barely recognizable even as human remains, only scattered eye sockets and vertebrae were signifiers that this mush was mostly composed of people. "G'wruuurp!" The lower intestine grumbled as the tight plug continued to eject digested human beings into the cave that would officially turn them into a bowel movement.

The valve itself had then shut tightly, one of its main functions being to prevent spill-back from the colon into the small intestine. This one ring of muscle contained more power than nearly every one of the swallowed human beings combined. As it squished together, every person consumed in the previous day were now stuck in this woman's large intestine to be turned into feces.

Peristaltic pressure went into overdrive as the dead bodies were forced up the ascending colon, through the cecocolic junction. What should be triangular arches looked more square as the brown mush slowly pressed its way upwards through use of the smooth muscle beyond the tunnel's pink walls. The crowd of people, other than the bubbling, were completely silent. Waste had nothing to say.

The woman, busy with her day's other activities, paid no mind to the goings-on of her large intestine. Her careful waddling throughout the day translated into the waste within the vertical tube of the first section of her colon to quiver with each step. Because they were much closer to the ground and there was less flesh between them and the floor, the sound waves emitted by her footsteps could be easily heard within this area of her body, that is if those inhabiting this cave weren't all long dead.

A large plop shook the liquid waste yet again as the woman sat down on a large couch. The heart beat that pulsed all over their bodies began to slow, and the robotic voice of a television began to pierce her flesh, forming a soundscape of bubbling and "Talk." The constant glorp of the ascending colon coincided with the slight absorption of water, lightly thickening the mixture in the compressed area. As opposed to being triangular, the cross-section of this tube was almost more rectangular, like a pipe being squeezed by a wrench. There was no more yellow-brown separation of fluids by density, the mixture was now a constant, relentless, pure brown color with flecks of green bone fragments.

What remained of Mikkel, his lower skull connected to a few vertebrae, was now lodged in the thickening mixture. Even as the soft, mushy warmth continued to slither along the tunnel, his spinal cord still twisted as it slid next to the wall. The ribbed surfaces provided a crunching factor to the constricting walls. With each peristaltic thrust forward, the vertebrae fractured a little bit more, the extreme ends turning to dust. The cord itself slithered out long ago, the discs that were between them had mostly melted away.

Wet squelching echoed from every direction as the mush continued its trek upward. It was almost as if the wet shit were being sucked through a tight straw. It could hardly be called a "log" of feces at this point, for the constriction was much too great that it elongated like a spaghetti string. The slow movement of the shit itself forced Mikkel's bones to soften at a greater rate, especially now that, since she was asleep, the digestive process slowed even further. The longer the waste continued its way upwards, the darker it became.

At this point, the solid portions of the shit were being solidified into place. No longer being washed around, the clothes, bones, and shoes of the victims were now hanging

completely in the middle of the clumpy, sticky string of brown feces. Every single particle of consumed matter stained, Mikkel's spine and lower skull rolled as it was positioned horizontally. Now spinning as a pencil would on a desk, the hardening shit lodged its way between each of his vertebrae and gently squeezed out as it bent. The foramen magnum, the large hole at the bottom of the skull, was still intact in a large O-shape, as it bent through the first flexure of the woman's colon, soft feces oozed through it like Play-Doh pressed in a die.

The pulsing runnel of her transverse colon was where most of the water was absorbed. With another quick thrust forward, the squeezing surfaces sucked water out of the shit almost like a sponge. The absorption was quick and noticeable, forcing the shit's composition to noticeably harden. In spite of the fact that all of the people were consumed at once, the woman's intestine split the meal into two distinct groups, somewhat arbitrarily. The two nuggets of feces continued along the track, separated by a few inches. Mikkel was split between these two clusters, his spine in one section and his clothes in another. Each one becoming drier and stickier at roughly the same rate, they were both somewhat misshapen, not having the normal circular cross-section as a normal piece of waste.

The gas bubbles present in the small intestine were still not ejected from this mixture. Still rippling and fluttering over the clustered logs, they mainly stayed between the two large clumps, forming a gaseous barrier. As the peristalsis forced its progression forward, the guts themselves made flatulent resonances as the wet surfaces plopped against the now-compacted pieces of feces.

The woman who Mikkel was pressed against was now nothing but bone fragments. Almost scattered uniformly between the two distinct logs, she had completely lost her form and her corpse had taken on the pure essence of this woman's feces.

Because there wasn't that much fiber in the immense woman's diet, the feces itself became extremely hard, slowing the flow to a crawl. The protein-rich composition of the feces caused a near-constipation-level of viscosity within the compacted intestine. As the progression continued, Mikkel's spine could no longer roll, now fully embedded within the log of shit.

A calm, sleeping heartbeat continued to thump over the round cave. The blood coursing through her veins was now rich with the water and nutrients which once belonged to the people she had consumed. Even at that very moment, she was stealing and absorbing the water of those human beings. Their tears, their blood, their saliva, all now being used by this woman, some of which was now even being deposited in her warped bladder.

Loud groaning continued as the two distinct logs were led through the rippling tunnel by the peristaltic force of the smooth muscle. Now oozing over the final flexure of the colon, the first log bent slightly before being thrust down the descending colon with a spluttering "gulch" sound. The thin, flattened tube proved difficult for the log of shit to press through, but with another splattering sound, it managed to eke out a few more inches before the second log squirted over the curve.

Deep sputtering noises emanated from the thin tunnel as the muscles desperately pressed the waste downward. The final bits of water were absorbed and what remained were lumpy, knotty clods of human feces. Embedded along the edges were torn jumpsuits, bones, bits of skull, undigested cartilage, and Mikkel's spine. Wet squelching continued to emanate as a result of the slow motion of the descending colon's undulations. Now taking on an almost wrinkled texture, the first clump of brown mud stopped moving.

The second log, composed of both undigested protein matter and clothing, continued its path through the humid cave. Growing closer to the first log, the air pocket between the two chunks of feces squelch forward, bubbling past the first clump and forming a new bubble on the other side. Now crashing into each other, the newly united log of feces pressed ahead with a renewed fervor. Spilling into the sigmoid colon below, it formed a U-shape as it ceased movement shortly before the rectum.

Now with two distinctly colored halves, the log of shit emitted a few final gas bubbles in this hot, tight, wet constriction. Sticky on all ends, this bowel movement had spent hours desperately sliding through the blazing tunnel, ending up with a hard, misshapen piece of feces. As the gas bubbles before it spluttered into the rectum, the log of shit couldn't help but follow suit.

Pressed into the shit that the woman tried to defecate hours earlier, the feces was now composed of three distinct parts, all of different texture and color. The soft front end, which was light brown and more fibrous, and the two back ends, which were composed mostly of protein, being two shades of darker brown. As the two logs pressed downward, the softer end flowed up and filled in some of the cracks made by the meeting of the harder, protein-based nuggets.

Now wrapped in the hot, pulsing sack of the woman's anal canal, Mikkel was truly processed. In less than twenty four hours he had gone from loving husband to literal piece of human feces. The woman's heart continued to beat against him, his spine still embedded on one of the edges, directly in contact with the hot, fleshy sack. As the person who consumed him slept soundly, the rectum gained a new level of foulness, having more gas bubbles allowing for a more humid environment for her gut flora.

Sitting soundly in the rectum, the smooth sack began to undulate as the bubbles flowed downwards, towards the end of the round log. The anus itself slapped violently against the soft front-end of the log as the woman let out a long, wet fart. Clearly waking her up from her rest, the heart pitter-pattered more rapidly as she realized that she desperately needed to use the bathroom.

Within her ass, the rectum smeared slightly as the quick footsteps brought her to the toilet. With a familiar plop, the sac began to ripple before relaxing. Mikkel's spine slid against the soft, warm flesh as her anus widened. The shit now crowning, gravity now mostly took over. The

heavy, distorted log glided through the widened hole as Mikkel was being defecated. The wrinkly anus continued to widen, smearing some shit over the spread asshole.

Now hanging directly over the toilet water, Mikkel's spine remained clinging to the anus, touching one of her coily blonde hairs, remaining as residue as the rest of the shit landed in the cold water with a plop. The woman grunted as she leaned forward, unfurling a wad of toilet paper, as she ejected a stream of steaming urine on the log of shit she had just set free from herself. The hot gushing tore through some clothes, crushed some soft bones, and un-embedded some shoes from the brown mush. She didn't even look down between her legs, not that she even could because of her fat, pregnant belly, as she reached down and swept any excess feces from her asshole and dropped the wad into the toilet before flushing.

Cecile sighed. She knew it wasn't like Mikkel's superiors to force him to work all night. Upon getting up from the toilet, she washed her hands, and shuffled into the empty kitchen still wearing her nightgown. The "Talk" emanated from the television as the thin strips of light covered the grey table.

Pursing her lips, she looked down. Though she was somewhat concerned about her husband, she knew that he was prone to inappropriate behavior. He seemed especially annoying yesterday, and if she found him annoying, then the algorithm must have taken notice as well. Being dressed-down by an A-level was sure to raise some red flags.

Clearing her throat, she filled up a cup of water before sipping it lightly. Having no idea when her due date was, she hoped it wouldn't be at an inopportune time, especially due to the fact that it was her responsibility to find a substitute if labor struck her. Annoyingly hungry again, she knew it best to keep an empty stomach, for the processing system was never really easy on her stomach, especially now given how heavily pregnant she was.

She couldn't wait for Mikkel even if she wanted to. Upon entering the auto-ride, she turned on the internal television to see some video titled "EXECUTRICES: THE LIFE BLOOD OF THE STATE!" with a diagram of a human body with little straws filling their veins. Funny. Another video showing the necessity of their execution style, saying that those who engage in law-breaking and inappropriate behavior aren't "One" with The State, and therefore the best way to ensure unity is to literally make them "One" with an A-level citizen. And it had to be a woman, but that reason wasn't specified. "Oh well, I guess the reasoning isn't important for me to know!" she thought.

As she found her way to her work-desk, she quickly opened the log-computer to find if her suspicions were true. There was always some waiting time before she was served, as it always took a few hours for enough people to use their strikes to compose one of her "Meals."

Clicking through yesterday's archive on the black-and-white touchscreen, she typed in Mikkel's name. Yup, just as she thought. Two strikes for inappropriate behavior. Of course. She couldn't help but feel a pang of loss, especially because their child would grow up without a father. Scanning through the processing details, she gasped as she covered her stomach. Cecile's jaw started quivering as she read who the executrix was in his case. What a perversion! Staring down at her stomach, she looked down at her body and up at Mikkel's picture several times. Wha... could the system truly be so cruel as to force her to eat someone she knew so well? Did he know? Was that him leaving her body when she went to the bathroom that morning.

Covering her mouth in shock, she felt a strange blip of coldness at the corner of her eye as that chill dripped down her cheek.

The machine went black and screeched as the familiar robotic voice barked.

“INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR DETECTED. YOU HAVE USED ONE OF THREE DAILY ALLOTTED STRIKES.”