

HEY

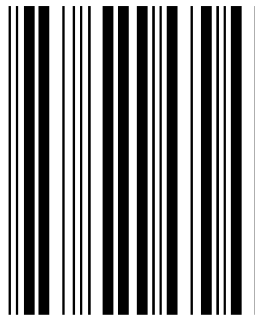
JIM!

You know, you talk to people, and you ask them, "Hey, did you know you're all covered in huge **SPIDER** webs? Christ, these things must be a quarter inch thick! I can cut you out of them but you're going to have to help me." And they just turn for a moment to look at you, but they don't really have real faces, do they? No, they just have eyes and this little tube where there mouth would be, where you and I would have a real mouth that we could talk and sing with, and that little tiny tube is somehow big enough to suck up a Big Mac while they slowly shake their heads and look back at the glowing box.

And while you're doing this, the spider comes. Man, that's one bigass **SPIDER** . It's as big as Madison Avenue, no scratch that, it's as big as the world, it's as big as everything...And it opens its fangs and drools a bit and says "There's nothing physiologically wrong with you. Your problems seem to be entirely stress related." and then it gives you a bottle of pills and you know that all you have to do is take the pills and you can be happy like everyone else and you can finally relax a little and learn about all the fun things that glowing box will show you and you didn't really NEED a mouth anyway, right?

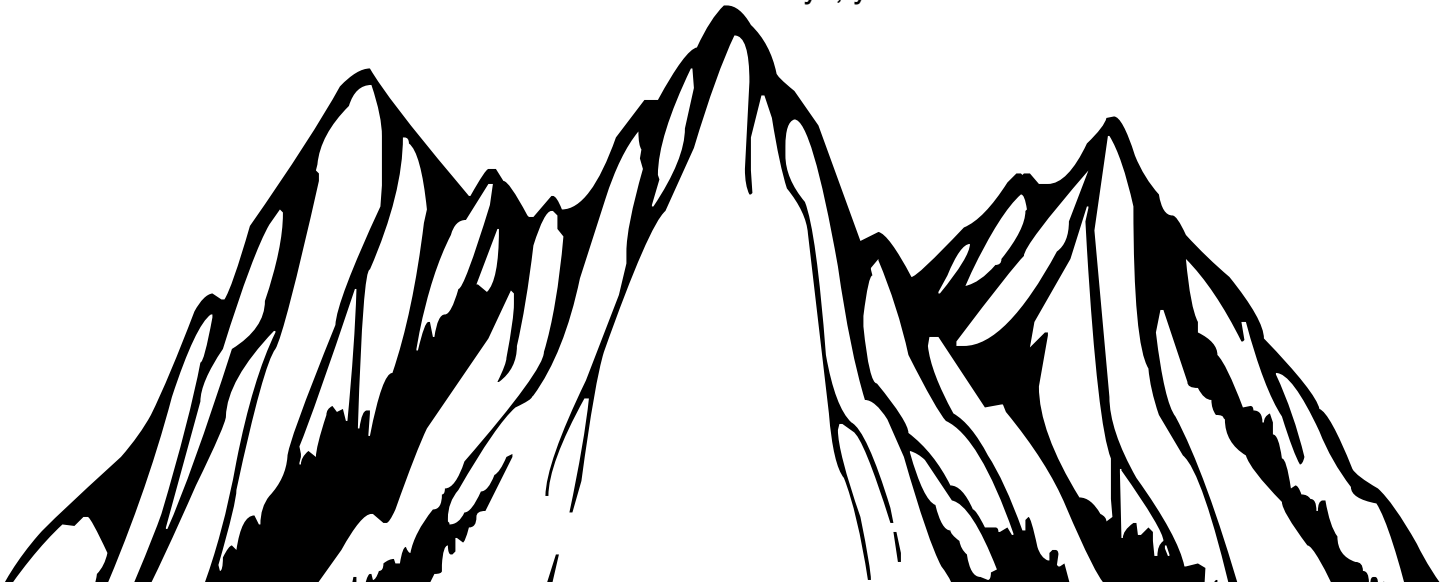
That's a powerful big **SPIDER**, Jim. And it loves us all. It wants you to be happy. Happy like me. So happy you can't stop crying.

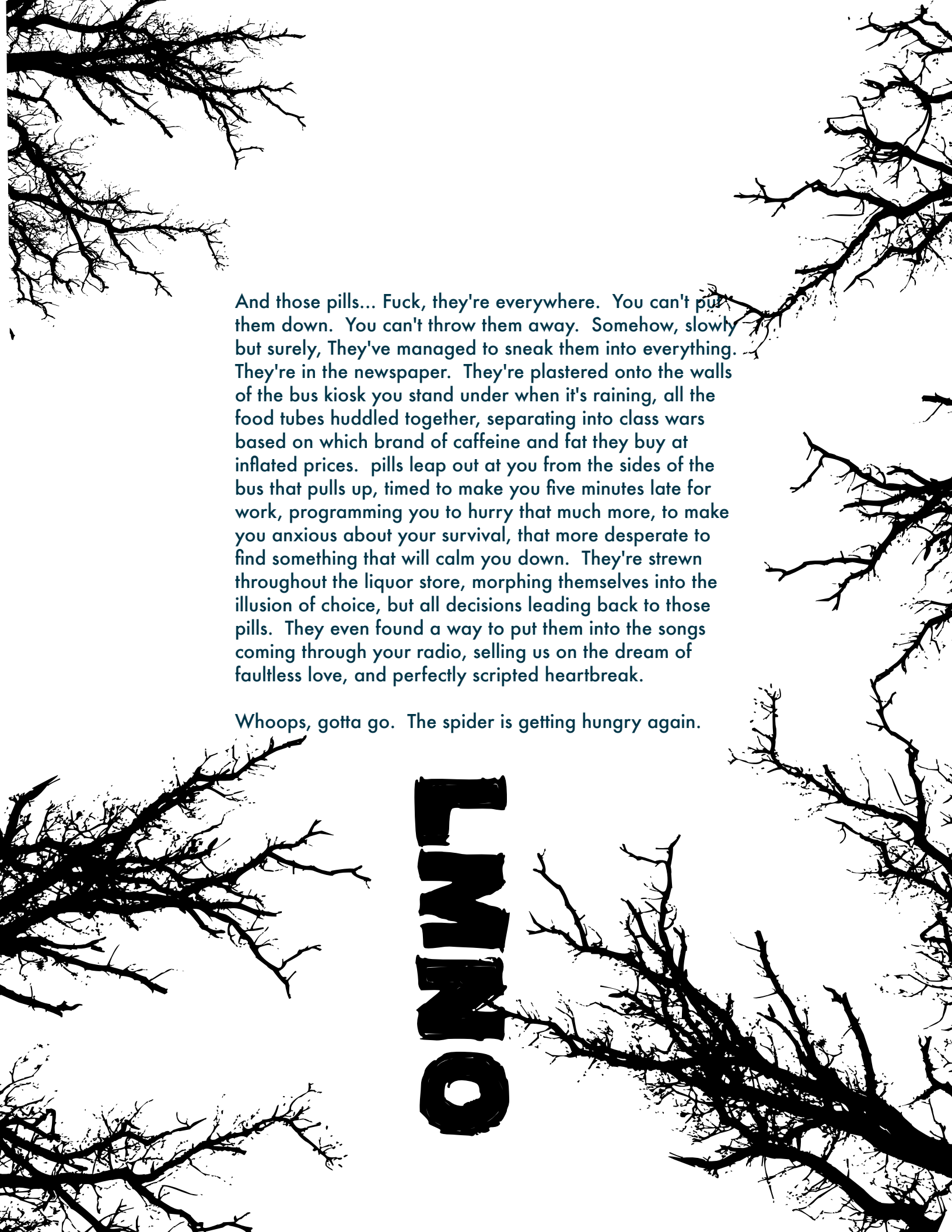
Or kill me.



T G R R

Has had better days, yeah.

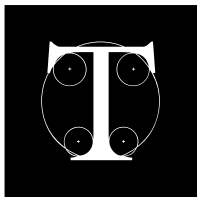




And those pills... Fuck, they're everywhere. You can't put them down. You can't throw them away. Somehow, slowly but surely, They've managed to sneak them into everything. They're in the newspaper. They're plastered onto the walls of the bus kiosk you stand under when it's raining, all the food tubes huddled together, separating into class wars based on which brand of caffeine and fat they buy at inflated prices. pills leap out at you from the sides of the bus that pulls up, timed to make you five minutes late for work, programming you to hurry that much more, to make you anxious about your survival, that more desperate to find something that will calm you down. They're strewn throughout the liquor store, morphing themselves into the illusion of choice, but all decisions leading back to those pills. They even found a way to put them into the songs coming through your radio, selling us on the dream of faultless love, and perfectly scripted heartbreak.

Whoops, gotta go. The spider is getting hungry again.

LMNO



he **PILLS** give you a pouch like **KANGAROOS** have, and you keep your screams in it. The screams are uncomfortable, because they move around and remind you that something just isn't right and you worry a little that one day your health insurance will run out and the pouch will open and you'll deafen everyone when the screams keep coming and coming, you'll scream, until your throat bleeds and you'll never, ever stop. And some days you worry that your boss or your spouse might see that **POUCH**, just like you've started to notice their pouches, and sometimes you maybe even wonder why everyone has these pouches I mean where did all the normal people go, where did June Cleaver and Mister Rogers and Captain Kangaroo go, they didn't have pouches, right? They were always happy and everything was nice and all the problems got solved in a half hour, minus these words from our sponsors.

And you want a world like that, the glowing box tells you there's a world like that, if you do what it tells you, so you do, but maybe you got something wrong because everything is still a river of shit full of copies of the Three Stooges, and Moe keeps poking Curly in the eye over and over again, but unlike the Stooges on the glowing box, Curly goes blind and eventually drowns, still screaming and holding his bloody eye sockets, I guess his pouch ripped under the strain.

And that's too bad because Curly had a real face, not just eyes and a tube, and he always seemed so happy anyway. And the Spider tells you that Curly was unpatriotic so you don't have to care about what happened to him, that sort of thing happens all the time to people who don't have the right values.

But I miss Curly, and I kind of wish I could fish his body out of that river of filth and at least, you know, give him a decent burial. But there's no time, really, and I have to keep working to afford those pills that keep me so very, very happy.



So I buzz by, and I see the web. It's just fucking hanging there in space, strung between skyscrapers and apartments, churches, satellite TV dishes and cellphone towers. I see almost everyone, friends, family, love interests, enemies, and irrelevant fucks tangled in it some way or another. Twisting a struggling (about what they web says they should twist or struggle for), they just cocoon themselves deeper.

"This is nice, this is what I care about." They say, but they're just wrapping themselves deeper into it. Some days it's not even worth trying to tell them there's more out there. They don't believe you because all they know is the web. And it's SO soft, they must be comfortable there. Some days I wonder why the hell I'm not in there too. It'd be easy, just plow in, wrap around into those strands. They'd be so warm, and comforting. Like being hugged.

They'd be sticky too, I'd never get out. Then again, once I've met the spider once or twice, would I WANT out again? I'd just be another thing on the web. I'd be happy. I'd be able to relax.

So I buzz by, and I notice the web has started to wrap a few strands around my leg. (They ARE warm.) I think about panicking, flailing, and ripping them off, but then I wouldn't have them.

So I buzz on by. Some part of me won't LET me fly into the web, even though being outside means misery, cold, struggle and strife. I'd rather have that than sitting happy, waiting for the spider. Some part of me hasn't gotten the balls to throw off the strands either.





TGRR

And the strands are all colorful, too. They're red, white, and blue in some places and in other places they are the colors of your favorite sports team or the colors that make up the logo of your favorite products. And inside that web, everything is warm and bright and happy, and everyone smiles. Sure, sometimes the smile is actually a rictus or even the cheerful grin of a skull, but nothing's all the way perfect, right?

And as long as you look at things the right way, and don't ask annoying questions, the web will keep you safe forever, or at least until you die. Sure, if you look at things the wrong way, the happy fat people around you are actually emaciated skeletons, like some horrible golem made from Dachau inmates...but who wants to look at things that way, when the life they pump into your head is so much happier? You can even be an American Idol, if only in your dreams. Yes,



that could be you up there, and maybe someday it will be, but it's been a bitch of a day at work and you just want to relax with a bucket of chicken and the glowing box...the glowing box that tells you to be proud to be an American or a British subject, or whatever, you're proud because you should be proud, because you're part of all this, right?

I'm happy in my web, and I know I have the Spider to thank for it.

But sometimes I still miss Curly.

All you need.

It smells like the boiled bleach cleaner and grade B lunch room food at a public elementary school.

It looks like smiling social workers and DSS Christmas parties.

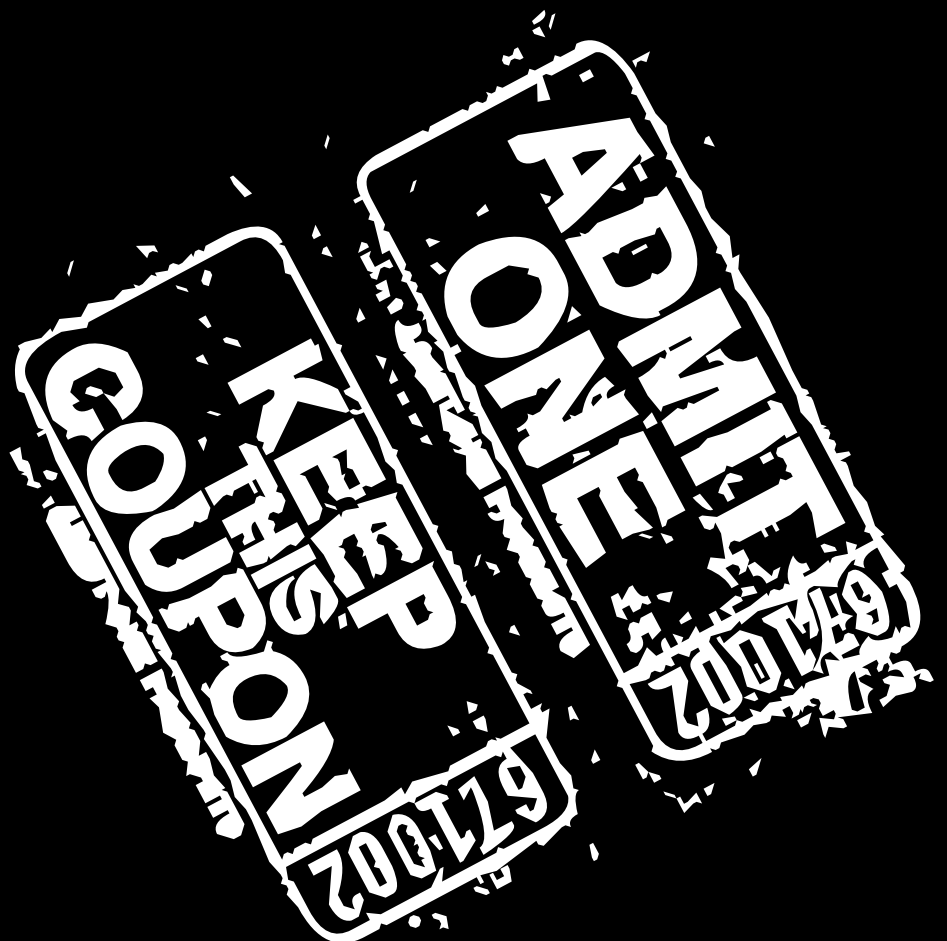
It's handed out happily by people who honestly expect it to make you happy. After all it's "proven" to satisfy 99.9% of the wants that the average kid will have.

It's the average number of beers, and bong hits rationed to mining town workers on Friday nights at the bar. It's tabulated and calculated to be what will make the majority of them happy enough to keep moving smooth and intervention free, made JUST difficult enough to get to keep them thinking they're getting away with something good.

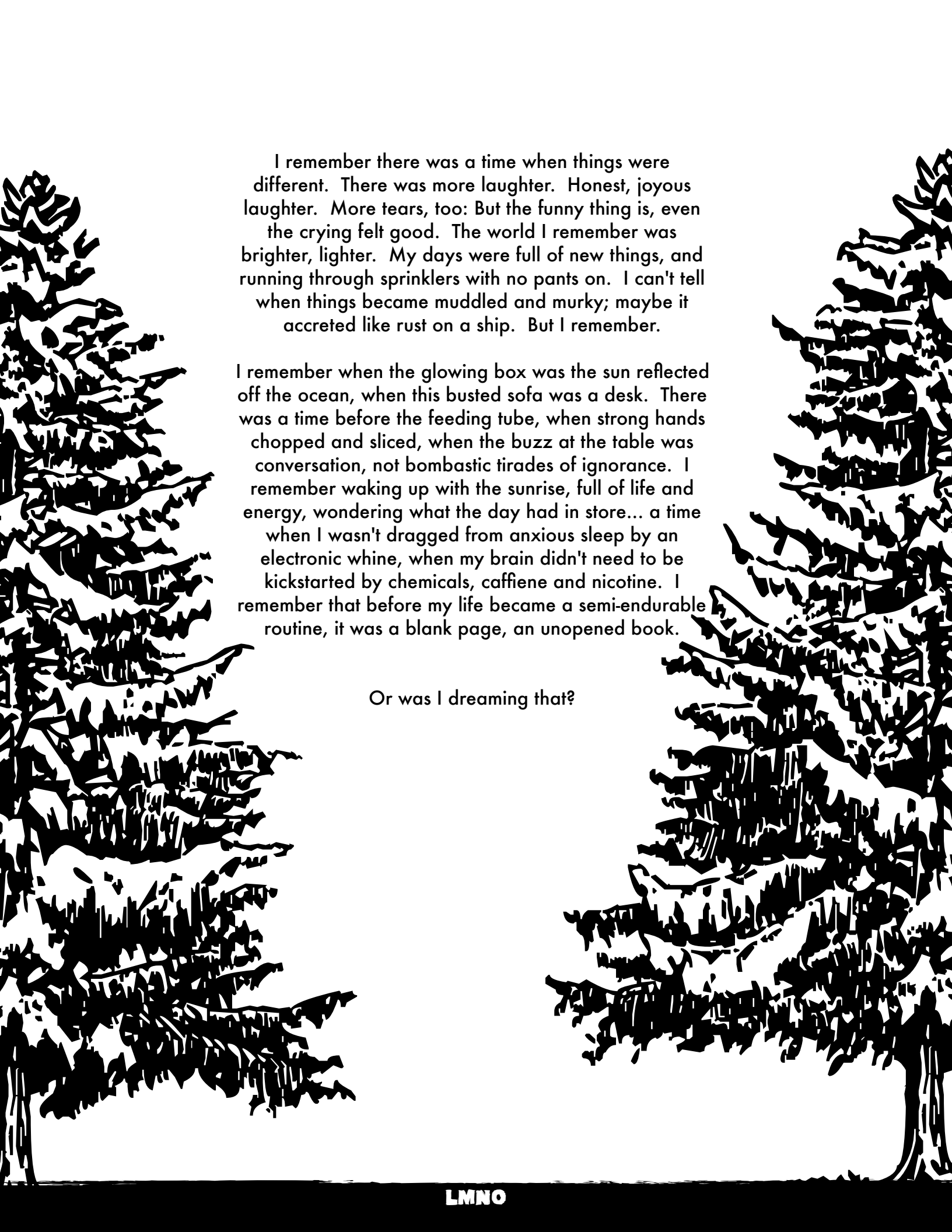
It's parceled experience, tourism in places you can only ever be a tourist. Meaningful sites, friendly locals, respect and tea with the monks, shamans, and Bedouins, all paid to give it to you.

It's having your fun and your comfort and not acknowledging the nagging that there might be something WRONG, insincere, and overly, tastelessly prosaic about it all.

You should enjoy it. It's All you need.



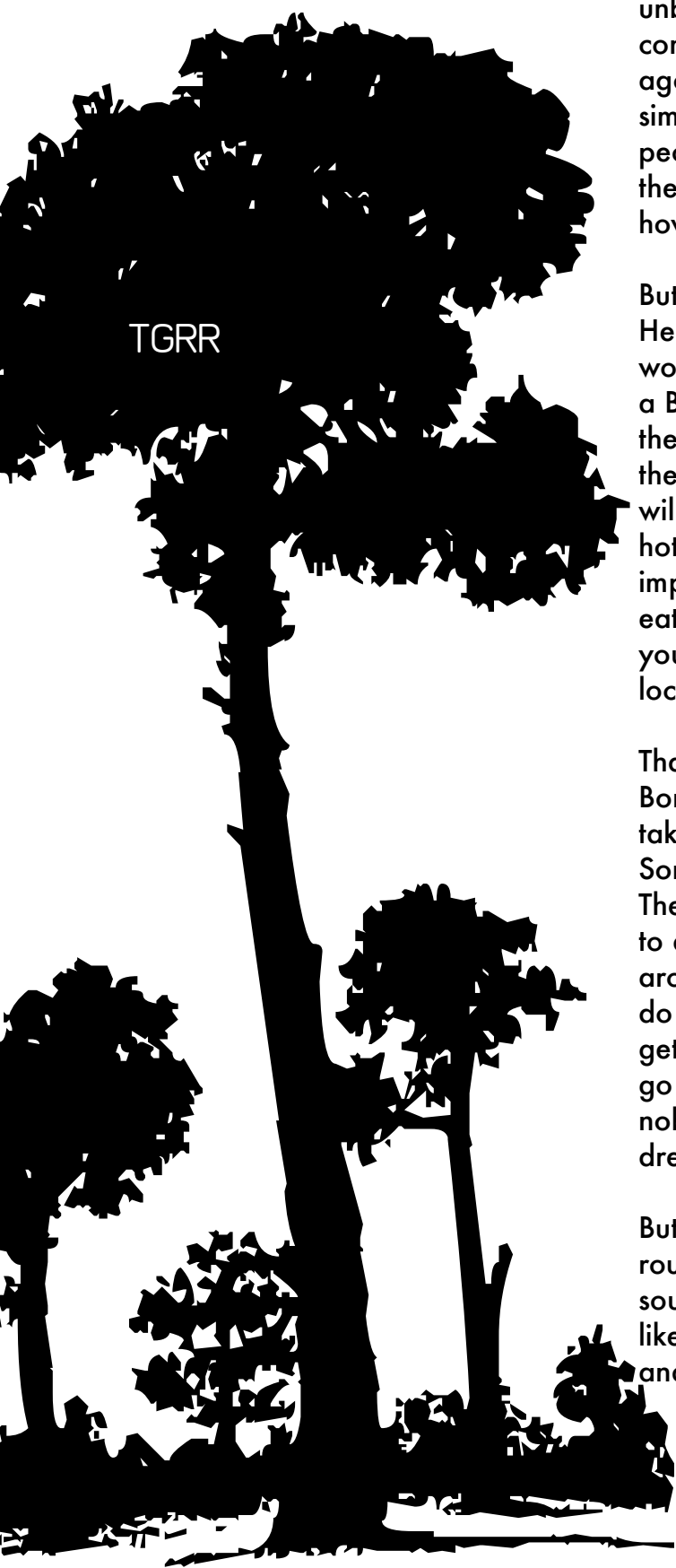
Richter



I remember there was a time when things were different. There was more laughter. Honest, joyous laughter. More tears, too: But the funny thing is, even the crying felt good. The world I remember was brighter, lighter. My days were full of new things, and running through sprinklers with no pants on. I can't tell when things became muddled and murky; maybe it accreted like rust on a ship. But I remember.

I remember when the glowing box was the sun reflected off the ocean, when this busted sofa was a desk. There was a time before the feeding tube, when strong hands chopped and sliced, when the buzz at the table was conversation, not bombastic tirades of ignorance. I remember waking up with the sunrise, full of life and energy, wondering what the day had in store... a time when I wasn't dragged from anxious sleep by an electronic whine, when my brain didn't need to be kickstarted by chemicals, caffeine and nicotine. I remember that before my life became a semi-endurable routine, it was a blank page, an unopened book.

Or was I dreaming that?



It's hard to say what things used to be like, before the Spiders came and made everything real. I, too, have memories of a time when summer was warm and not unbearably hot, when people had big smiles that contained some form of warmth. But that was long ago, and is probably an idealized memory of a time similar to this one, when people are things as proper people should be. Newfoundland probably was never the way I remember it, and I half suspect that...well, how DO I get to Shell Beach?

But that's not what's important. What's important is Here, Now, Bigger, Faster, Sexier. Implants to make women look like Barbie, because what little girl wants a Barbie that looks like a woman? Viagra for men, so they can remember that they're still 22 years old, and their current body is just a phantasm, a bad dream that will end any time now, and they can go back to getting hot chicks with bodies like rubber bands. That's what's important. That's what's good. Buying your love, eating your love, because love you can eat won't hurt you, and besides, it's easier to get...right down at your local supermarket.

That fat person on the couch isn't you. You're Bourne, Bond, the Desperate Housewives, Simon Cowell. All it takes is time, and you'll be rich and beautiful, too. Somehow...and the how doesn't really matter, does it? The brass ring is there to be grabbed, and all you have to do is wait for the merry go round to bring you around to it. It's only a matter of time. All you have to do is sit on that couch and wait. For God's sake, don't get up, don't touch that dial...because the ring might go by while you aren't looking, and then you'll have nobody but yourself to blame for your unfulfilled dreams.

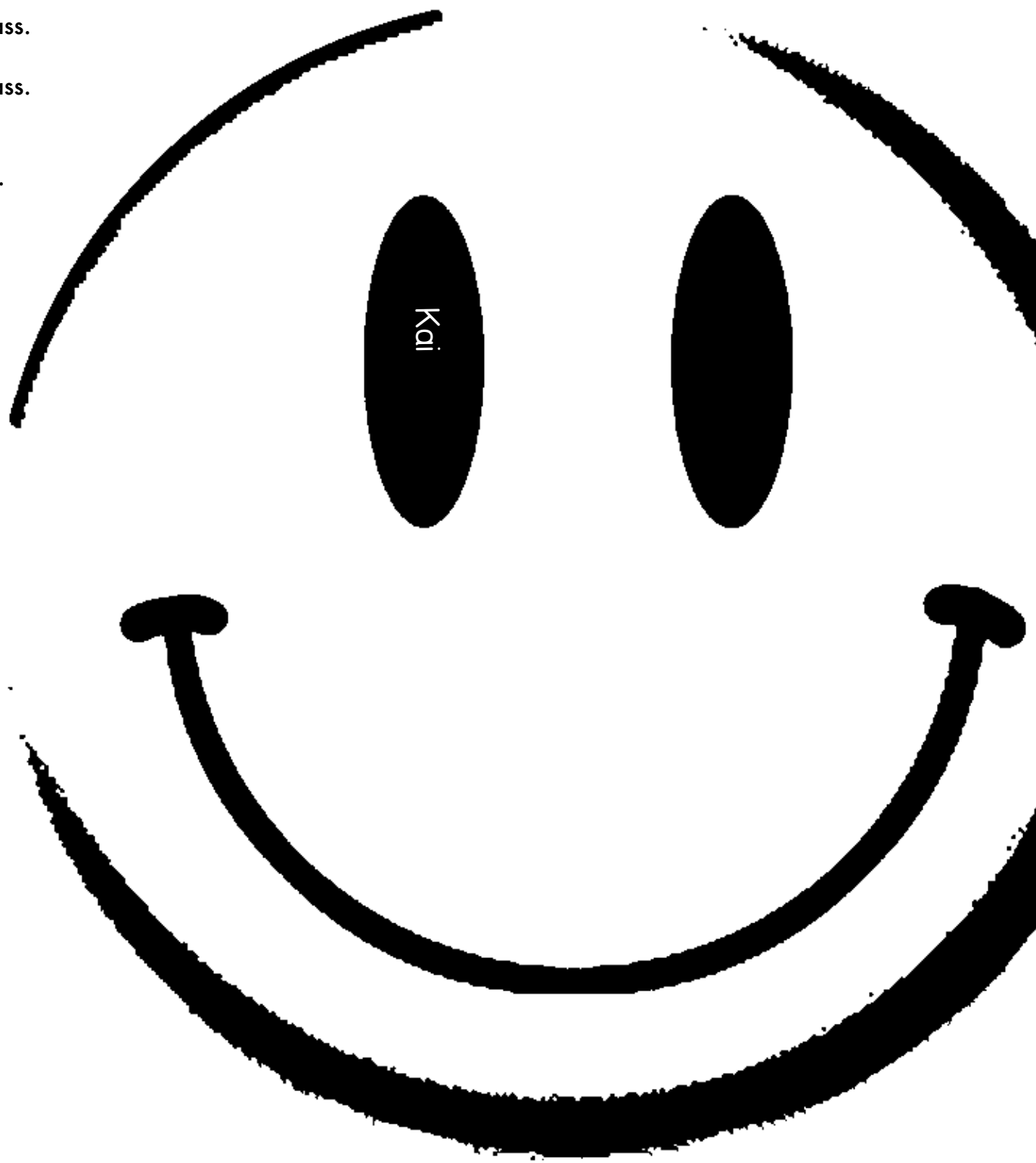
But it sure does take a long time for the merry go round to go all the way around, and the calliope music sounds like a dirge and the other riders look almost like they're screaming in horror instead of excitement and I still can't see the brass ring yet.

I used to be happy a long time ago, you know, the sort of happy that comes on its own, that just sinks in slowly from being alive. These days, I'm Happy™. Happy™ comes from the glowing box, and the pills, and the bright shining faces and bodies of the Beautiful People. Happy™ is delivered right to my door in a wrapped box with a pink ribbon, and an offer inside ACT NOW, YOU TOO COULD BE THAT MUCH MORE HAPPY™ IF YOU JUST TAKE THIS OFFER, and days pass as I sit in Happy™ land.

And days pass.

And days pass.

And days.....





The smell of grass and dandelions perfumed and punctuated every evening. The roars of laughter echoed throughout the neighborhood in an epic game of hide-and-seek. Even as the daylight faded, the games went on. Only after several beckonings from our Mothers did we retire to our homes. There was no schedule to keep. There was no pull from the purveyor of artificial imagination. We frolicked in the oceans of our own visions. Played in our own possibilities. We were the guides and the guided. Now, far too many surrender and far too much is surrendered. How was that allowed to happen?

I don't know, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe the spiders are trying to help me. I mean, they know things. They know what will make me attractive, they know what will make me popular. They know what I should be listening to. And for a small fee, they can all be mine. They have ideas, too; so all I have to do is repeat their ideas, and then I'll have ideas. And they're always right – the proof is right there on TV. See? All the pundits are saying the same thing. Just like the spiders whispered into my ear.

The spiders say that it's a good thing to spend 60 hours a week grinding your soul to a nub just so you can almost afford a mortgage – because then you're safe. Plus, the pills they give you fill up that hollow emptiness in your gut - and if that doesn't do the job, by God a glass of whiskey and some out-of-focus internet pronography will do the trick! Thanks to the spiders, I don't have to do anything when I get home from work. I can just sit here, and watch other people pretending to do the things I don't have the time or the motivation to do. It's right there, on the screen. Now hush: The new Melrose Place is about to come on, and my Megan Fox downloads are almost complete.





They said there was a time when we were all young and beautiful naturally, but now we have to work for it, and we have to pay for it. The glowing box made us understand that we were losing our youth, and perhaps never had any real beauty to begin with, but then it told us that we could go to the Doctors and have it restored. One of us started first, of course; one of us noticed her youth slipping away and went and had just a little age cut out, just a little, to begin. And we all agreed that she looked so much better.

So one by one we all followed suit because it was the right thing to do; snicker-snack like hair at a barber shop bits of age were snipped off and cast into the biohazard bins; goodbye crow's feet and eyebags and wattle. And we all agree that we look so much better. The spiders agree, too, and the glowing box tells us so all the time. Every once in a while I have a nightmare where I look at us and realize that we've made ourselves into scarred, ludicrous monsters, mockeries of youth, but then the spiders tell me that it's only a dream and that I just need to look at the glowing box and go back to sleep, back to sleep, back to sleep.

There was a day when they taught me to look for the sun, and instead I found a moon and turned all inward and shit. Something jim-jammered me in my ear and hey! presto! I was no longer the little girl with a smile. I thought it was time, that kept on slippin, slippin...slippin-into the future! But no. It was instead the whir-whir of something I'd forgotten and then remembered painfully. Like a splinter you don't remember getting but know you gotta get out. And your teeth don't work, but you cringe at using that damned needle your mom stuck in the pin cushion after sewing a button.

The pitiful thing is that the songs have no meaning except what you remember about them, and the food only tastes like a sliver of what you think it should. Smells are no longer sharp, and words are so bloated they're exploding into the sky, inking out the stars with their blackness, so very dark, forgetting you're so small and here and just waiting for something significant.

I don't remember anymore what I did that was so special, but I know I did it. Somehow I've forgotten but I have the feeling left, and that feeling makes me touch myself where they say it's not best but THE best, and I still don't remember anyway. I like to run, but I don't know where I am going most of the time, though I can give you directions to anywhere you want.

Sometimes, I forget what my name really is, and I forget how long I've been married, and what year it is. No one knows where I came from, what I look like or what color of eyes are in my face. But they know what my breath smells like, and they know the colors of the ribbons in my hair. I'm done with wishing for tomorrow, because when it comes, it never delivers like the newspaper-on the lawn, in the dark, in the wet, and crinkly as fuck when you finally get it out of the damned grass.

I saw Roger's spider once, in fact, and he offered me a cup of joe. Turned out it had fleas, but they smiled kindly as I sipped, and I was forgiven for being alive. For that forgiveness, I have paid dearly, and something within says I will pay for the rest of my living days.



It festers like a sebaceous cyst. Deep under the skin, your anger rots and creates a stinking ooze. It seems sometimes that this boiling thick jelly will come pouring out of your mouth, eyes and nose holes like a soapy discharge at the next person who looks at you and says "At least you have a job".

At least.

At least you have.

It's the scalpel that pierces the flesh and allows this fountain of hate and filth to come erupting from the hole it tore in your existence.

As this volcano of scum and blood pours from your gut your hands instinctively yet unconsciously reach out for the neck of the person who auditorilly assaulted you with their speech bubbles of inanity...

Then come the lights. The screams of children. The sirens.

The impending doom that you now have to face.

You've done it this time, son.

This is the one.

You'd better run till your lungs explode like an overinflated tire. Run till your feet turn to pâté and legs are just imaginary items you used to have.

Run.

Till it all goes Shhhhhhhhhhhhh.



I finally crawled my way out of the hive, that awful place full of the tube-mouths. I spit out the pills because they were making me feel all funny on the inside, and not the ha-ha funny. The spiders took them back, of course, and apologized for what was clearly a mistake. I must have been taking the wrong kind of pills; see, everyone is different and a unique snowflake and in our modern world there's a formula to make everyone Happy™.

But I don't want any pills, I said. They're so considerate, the spiders are. Even though I'm not Happy™ and clearly broken in some subtle way, they let me into college where I learn how to find my way into the softer, cushier webs. It's okay if I don't indulge in the joys of the glowing box now, they say. Study hard and soon I'll be in a web so warm and cushy that I won't even notice when those kindly spiders put a high-definition glowing box in front of me with surround sound. They're so nice, the spiders are, giving me all these wonderful options to make my way into the softer webs and providing idle amusements for me on the way. The pills are just a doctor visit away if I ever want them, and I probably will. What's the point of the web if you haven't got the means to be Happy™ and comfortable while you're in them?

Even if I don't really want Happy™, the spiders have something else that's sure to satisfy my wants (they think of everything, the spiders do). They don't sell it in pills, but I can have Bitter™, Misanthropic™, and Angry™ for cheaper than dirt if I really want to try it. It's distilled from the screams of cranky old farts (though how exactly it's gotten out of them they won't tell me) and it's for youngsters who want to feel more mature and fit in with people who've been in the web for a while.

But I have a question for you, my wise elders. What's it like in the web, and how high should I try to climb before giving up and falling into a coarser grade of web than the spiders told me I should strive for? And between you and me... what pills do I take to deal with the fact that I hate spiders?

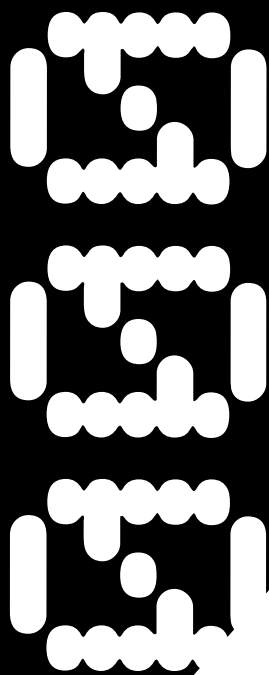


Cainaa

...and when I entered the ninety-five on-ramp, I once again re-entered the world of nine to five. Another weekend behind and another week ahead. As I merge into the stream of traffic I bear witness to others making the same routine journey. All wearing the mundane mask of Monday. Mouths, slightly agape in a wandering stupor. Heading to jobs that perhaps were not bred from youthful wonder. But they put the wonderbread on the table. And at this time this is what we all must live with. We are where we are and The Machine and The System have seemingly trapped us here. Mobility is limited thanks to the bankers and the mortgage brokers. We are boxed into our lanes. All of them slow. All of them leading to

... where?





STUCK IN STICKY STRANDS OF STATIC HIGH-PITCHED BLEEPS
UNFEELING OF FORGOTTEN FREEZING THOUGHTS IM WATCHING THE TEEVEE
WHERE I AM BACK ALONG THE WEB THE SPIDER WAITS WHILE WATCHING ME
KEPT CAUGHT CURLED-UP AGAINST THE COLD AND :FAP:FAP:FAPPING ME TO SLEEP.

I lament for the tricksters
who have lost their spider god

I lament for the spider god
who has lost the tricksters

the spider is the original trickster, the guardian and guide, the kinky
storyteller who spins the world to-be

the web is everywhere, it's everything, it connects you and I and the
you-to-be.

You cannot be, you can only become
and we became poison
and the spider spun us up and drank our vitality
(as she is wont to do)

and thus the spider was poisoned

we poisoned her,
you and I

& now the web is twisted

the spider needs that poison, she's hooked on it,

on the worst parts of us

we have to keep making the poison for her, she needs it now

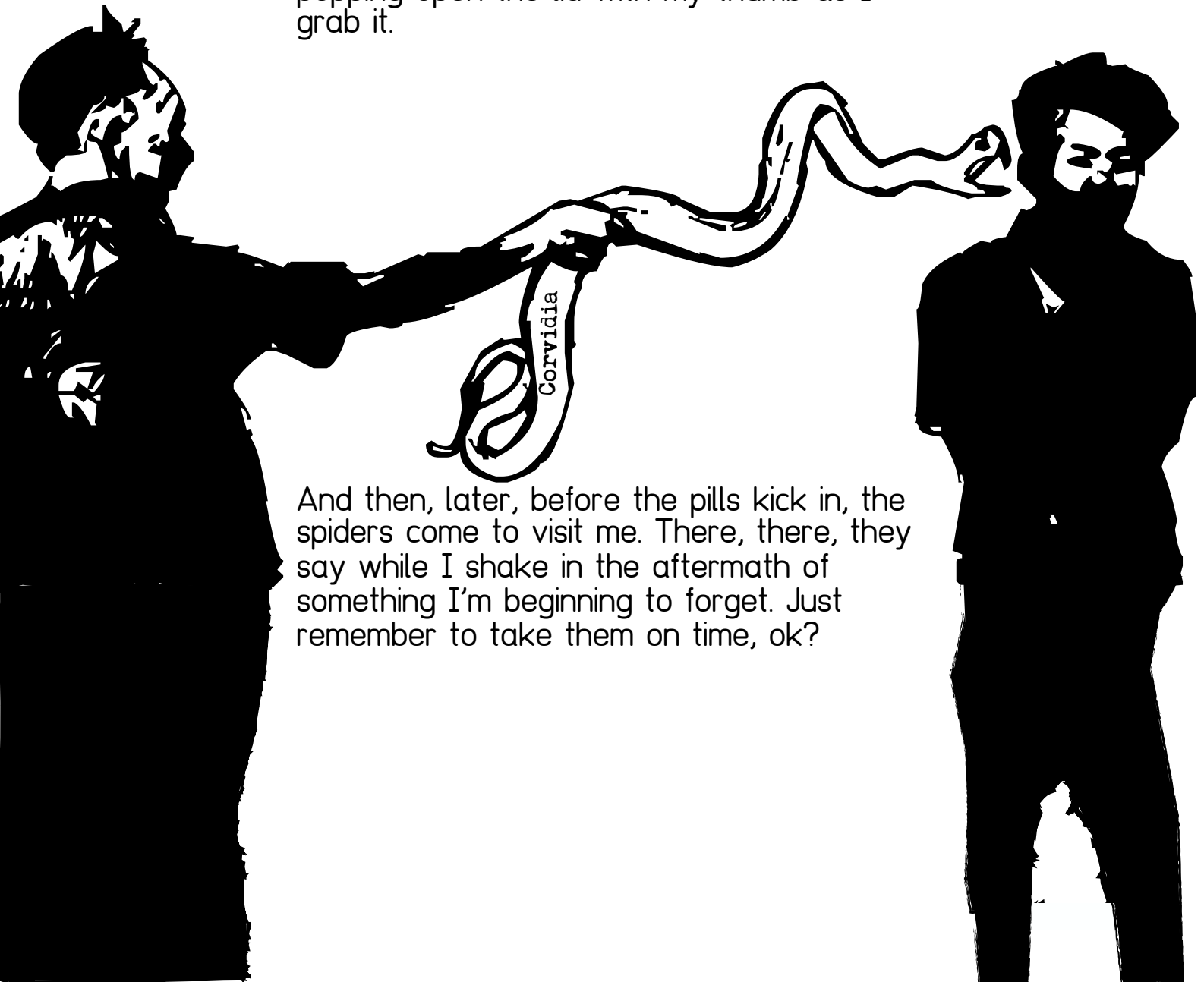
we're brewing it in our guts,
in our gas tanks
drip by drop
in every road rage
every 401K
each cup of black coffee to get throughout the day

the spider-to-be is becoming for us



My memory is kind of fuzzy. What did I do yesterday? Or last week? I can't really remember. I think it's the pills the spider gives me, but I'm not sure. I don't really want to stop taking them, so does it matter anyway? I suppose I can live with a bad memory if it means I can be happy and warm for the moment.

But sometimes, sometimes when I miss a dose, the world snaps into sharp focus and I know what I've been doing with my life and I see all time I've wasted in front of glowing screens. I hear the cold wind that blows through the web and the glowing box snows. I can't bear the chill and I can't bear the now loud, harsh hissing of the glowing box. I scramble for my pills, frantically popping open the lid with my thumb as I grab it.



And then, later, before the pills kick in, the spiders come to visit me. There, there, they say while I shake in the aftermath of something I'm beginning to forget. Just remember to take them on time, ok?

A ring at the door. I taped a bicycle bell to my dorm door, so I get an actual ringing sound.

I answer it.

Hello, says the man at the door. He has a simple green tee, khaki pants, and two pairs of goggles over two pairs of eyes. Eight altogether.

Hi, I'm David, I say. I have to say it. If I say anything different the conversation goes all wrong and I'm back to no friends again.

Hello David, the man in the green shirt says.

Shit. Back at the beginning of conversation. Try a different tactic.

You've reached dorm 1C, how may I help you?, I say. I worked at a call center a summer ago, so I switch to that web, hoping it will keep me stuck to the right path.

Aah, I thought we might encounter that, says the man in the green shirt. He smiles. His incisors are jointed, little grasping things.

Is there anything I can do for you?, I say. Last shot on the customer service web, then I stop talking until I know what the fuck is going on.

No, no, he says. Rather, there's something I can do for you, he says.

I stand and listen.

I had heard that your wrappings might be getting out of date, he says. I can help you, he says.

I stand and listen and look at his eyes. You can't have friends if you don't look at people's eyes while they talk.

A very advanced case. Oh dear oh my, he says. Didn't you feel them getting old and thin? Patchy, almost no adhesive left, hardly enough to keep you from falling over?, he says.

I stand and listen and look at his eyes and balance the safety of closing the door against the likelihood that this is an important person.

Ehem, he says. He doesn't clear his throat, just says the sound. Possibly he doesn't have a throat? Curious.

Are your cognitive and sociocultural heuristics sufficiently well-formed to dictate your behaviors, enabling you to free neural resources from decision making tasks and reallocate them to processes of high utilities, such as participating in normative cultural events?, he says.

Why don't people say what the mean at the beginning?. Would have saved a lot of panicking.

Yes, I say.

Aha!, he says. I can help you with that, that's what I'm here for. Tell me, have you heard of new Silk®?, he says.

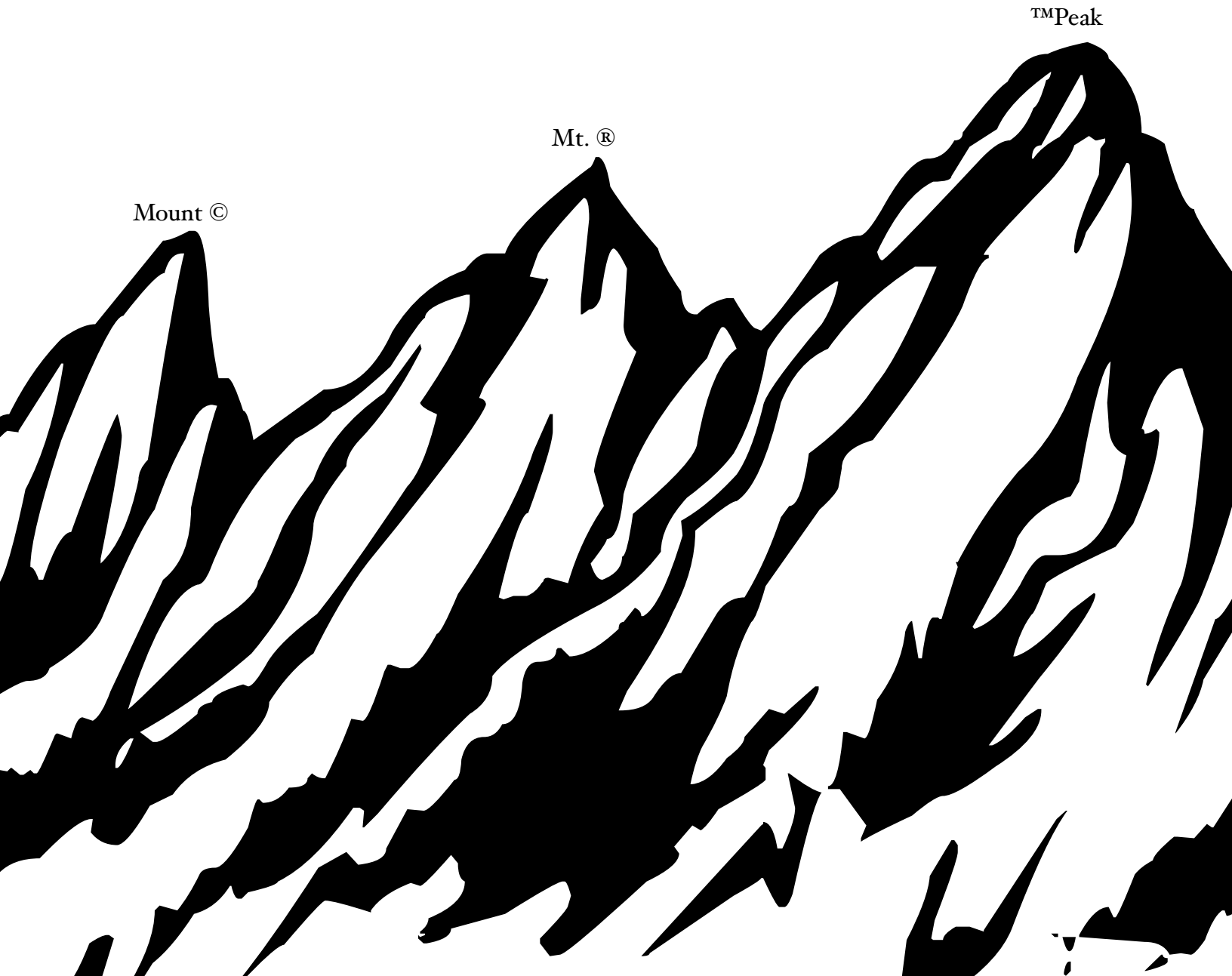
Let me tell you all about it! Silk® is a service superficially similar to the standard culture-web everyone uses. However, Silk® has several advantages. A full suit weighs only a fraction of an equivalent coverage of standard web. All the same benefits, but without the hassle and inconvenience.

He is smiling now, meaning that he is happy to be talking about Silk®. I am smiling too, because I want to let him know that I am happy that I know what to say.

People have tried to get me in webs before. I have developed a technique to keep me safe from the webs. I can use my system and I can finish the conversation without having to close the door on him, which might make him angry. You can't have friends if you make people angry.

I don't like wearing a web, I tell him.

Webs are too heavy, I say. I have trouble breathing while I'm wearing a web, I say. It gets in through my ears and sticks up my brain, I say.



But Silk® is light!, he says. You won't have any of those problems with Silk®. Silk® is 275% stronger than a black iron bar but has only one thousandth the weight. Silk® won't get in your way at all!, he says.

I don't like having to use the television to keep the web strong, I say. All the programming is the same and none of it is ever any good, I say.

Again, not a problem!, he says. Silk® can be maintained through any telecommunications portal at all! Why, with a complementary internet connection, you can access the collective works of nearly six billion other customers. With so much more to choose from, there's no way you'll be unsatisfied. If the group norms don't satisfy you 100%, you can simply find a subgroup with norms more to your liking!, he says.

Webs make it hard to think, I say. I have trouble thinking anything that's not already in the web, and I do a lot of writing and programming and science and engineering so I need to be able to think of new things, I say.

Completely manageable!, he says. Silk® automatically connects you to every other customer! You won't need to think of anything new; with almost six billion customers, someone will already have thought of it. No more wasted hours trying to figure out the best algorithm or the best way to phrase a sentence - someone else has already had that problem and solved it for you!

No more wasted hours developing a properly controlled experiment or a failsafe device - our Silk® network already knows which assumptions are safe, and nearly six billion customers can't all be wrong, can they!, he says. He laughs because it is silly to think of nearly six billion customers all being wrong about something.

Okay, I say. **THIS WEB DOESN'T SOUND VERY BAD AT ALL.**



Hush, my darlings. We can see you are upset, and that's ok. But you know too much stress is bad for you. Our doctors said so, just the other day.

So sit down, and try to calm down. It won't help matters any if you get yourself all riled up, will it? Shhh. Relax. We'll take care of everything. Just sit right there, close your eyes, and breathe deeply. That's right. Let us help you. We know how upsetting life can be, and we're here to help. We can get you through your day with a minimum of fuss. Just leave it to us.

Can we get you a drink? Sure, you just stay there, and we'll be right back. Feel free to watch the TV if you'd like. We always keep it on, for background ambience if you will. Yes, that's one of our favorites, too. Here we are. No, don't get up. Just sit there, take your shoes off, and forget about the troubles of your day.

We know, life can be so unfair. Let us help you forget all that. We can show you fabulous things, right in your own home; brightly colored, flashy things, you take your mind off of your difficult and painful day. We don't want you to hurt anymore. Not now. Now is your time, time to loosen that tie, maybe even unbutton your pants, perhaps even-- well, we promise to look away if *The Girls Next Door* becomes too exciting.

See, don't you feel better already? It's as if the day never happened at all. And with our help, you can experience the best, most glamorous parts of life without ever leaving your comfortable, soft couch. Shhh. Relax, my darlings. Let the empty glass slip from your fingers. Let us tuck you in...



WAKE UP.

LMNO BACK TO

WORK.

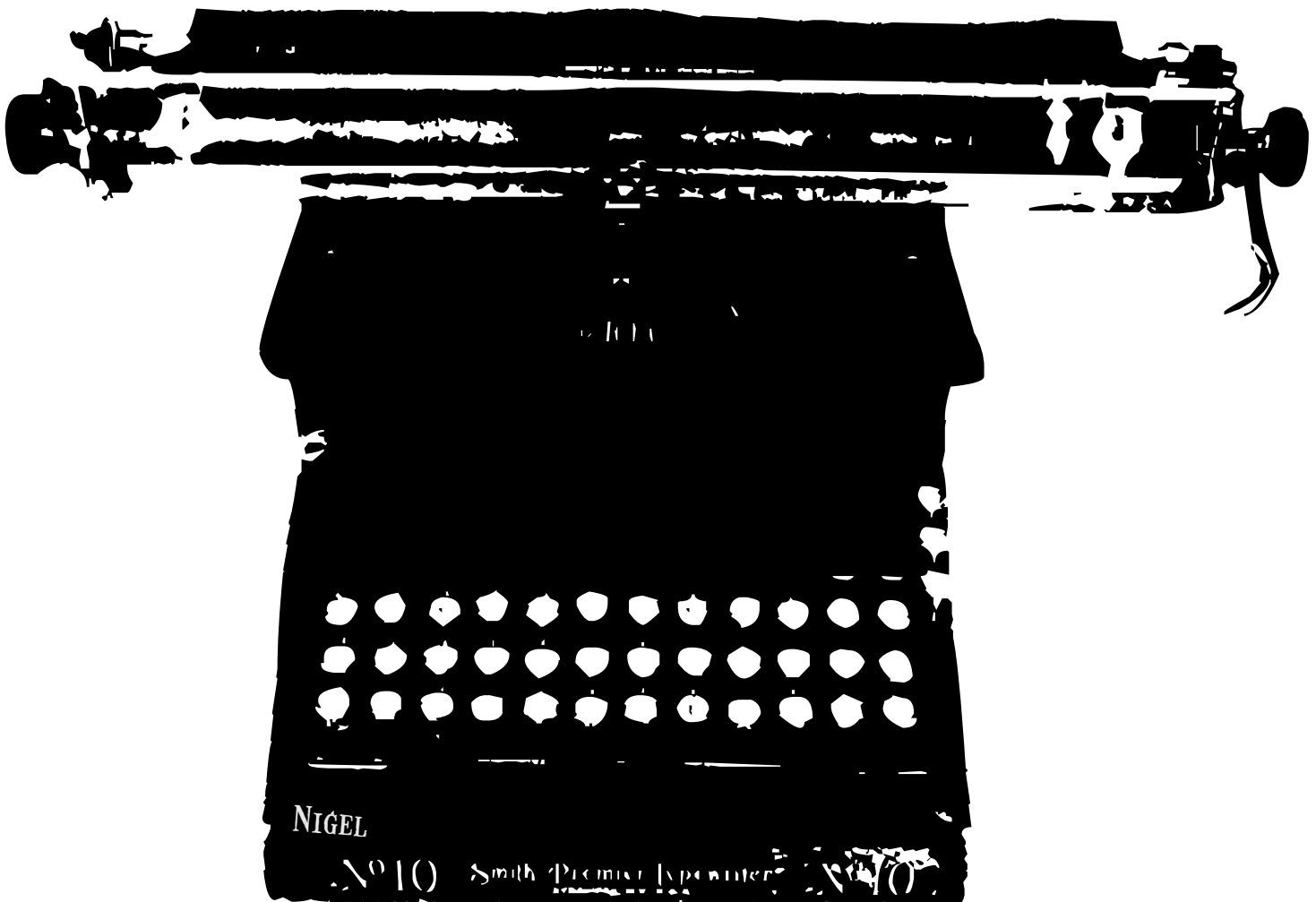
YOU WILL

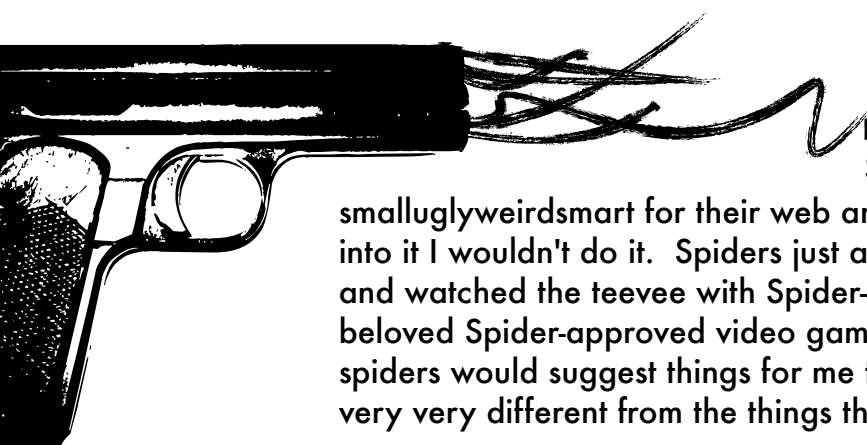
BE LATE.

See you when you get back home darling!

Face down in the street. Wet pavement against my cheek. Something pressing me down, something heavy and cold keeping me off my feet. Where's the web? Why isn't it keeping me warm and safe? I struggle to turn my head and see nothing but gray, pinning me, slick, cold and impenetrable. The web that was supposed to hold me up is pinning me to the ground like a smothering blanket, but cold, so cold. I did what the spiders wanted, I did everything I was supposed to do, bought everything I was supposed to buy, went to work every day and never questioned what I wasn't supposed to question. I voted dutifully, I used my credit cards, I watched the glowing box after work and on weekends like a good citizen, but somehow even doing everything right was not good enough and I lost my job and I lost my house my car my wife my comfortable position on the sofa the suburbs

I try to push it off me but the web is implacable. I notice that my limbs have turned to claws, pointy crablegs digging my position into the asphalt, and I scuttle off in search of scraps.





I can remember a time when the Spiders didn't want me. I was too smalluglyweirdsmart for their web and, after all, even if they did ask me to fly into it I wouldn't do it. Spiders just aren't my thing, said I, as I sat on the sofa and watched the teevee with Spider-approved shows on it or containing my beloved Spider-approved video games. Smaller and seductively different spiders would suggest things for me to listen to and watch that were obviously very very different from the things the other Spiders suggested.

Even that fell through after a while. I saw Spiders everywhere, always coming for me, always making an offer that sounded so sweet. I only ate what I knew the Spiders hadn't touched and I only supported what I knew was certainly not Spider affiliated. And no, no thank you, no pills for me. I went to college and I studied psychology so I'm way too smartadjustedtalentedhaughty for that. Seeing them everywhere got to me and some days the sun was bright and glinted so perfectly on fall leaves or spring blossoms or that snow that clings to dead trees like crystals and it was still all pointless and awful and low. But at least I wasn't in that web.

Then one day I stepped out my door.

And I fell off the world.

Up doesn't become down and the ground doesn't become smaller just somehow it all goes away and you're tumbling directionless, terrified, flailing for something to hold on to, screaming for anything to stop you. And it did.

Tricky Spiders, I thought, silly big devious lovable things. I was never too smalluglyweirdsmart and they never didn't want me. They knew, tricky Spiders tricky old Spiders silly big devious lovable things, they knew. I'll take the things they give me like I said I never would. Because here it's blessedly sticky and I know I won't fall off again.

These webs are so cozy, so warm, they keep me asleep most of the time. I dream then. I dream of a world that is imperfect, but full of Happy™. I dream of an easy way to live, full of nice things, and other people who also have nice things, and some other people that we never talk about because that is Not Done. And the others do, too, of similar things. But in dreaming, a person can change nothing, only watch, and go along with things sometimes. That's what the spiders say, anyway.

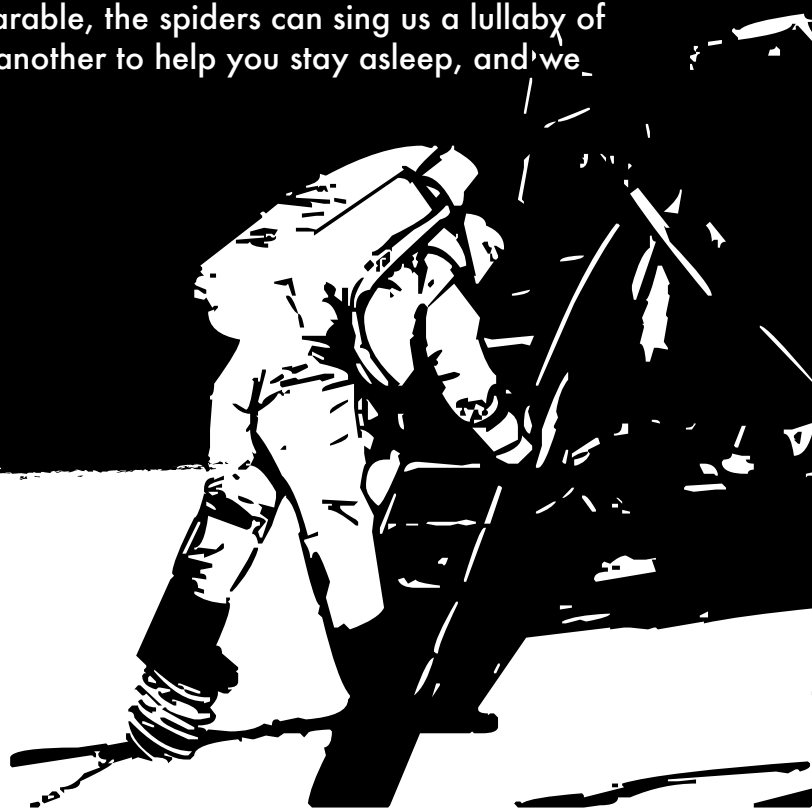
And when I get tired of dreaming, I groggily open my clouded eyes. I remember that it's gray and gloomy here, and these webs that span the spaces between glistening and shiny towers, they reach as high as the clouds. The space at the top, the spiders tell us, is for the special people, the people they tell us to love as much as they love us. These webs also reach all the way to the ground, and it is crowded down here. I see everyone around me, so long entangled that they no longer see the strands, and they cast aspersions on people who think "badwrong" thoughts, or them that refuse the pills, and the weirdos who don't like the glowing box. They even gnash their teeth at those on the Hamster Wheel, accomplishing everything in a short space of time what we in the web always wanted to do but never got around to in the whole of our lives.

The streets are strewn with trash and filth, while way up at the top (the spiders say) it is clean and bright and there are fewer strands of web, not that the web is a bad thing, oh no, it is nice and snug and is very comforting, and the spiders made it specially for us. But sometimes the web down here at the bottom is coarse, and heavy, and blinding, and suffocating.

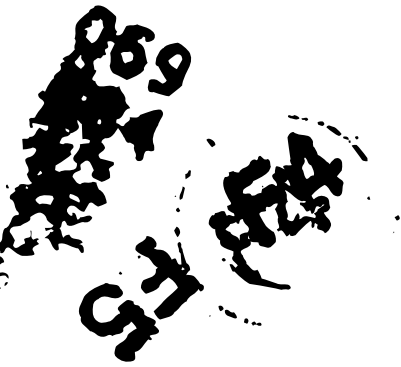
Someday, say the spiders who love us, if you work hard enough, we might just let you climb to the top and see for yourself how nice it is. Won't that be nice? But you have to work harder. You're not working hard enough yet.

Until someday comes, me and everyone else down here will have to settle for the almost-kind-of-bright light (though most days it just seems gray and overcast, and dark and gloomy, even when I look up to the top of the web, between the very tops of those shining, glassy skyscrapers. And if being awake becomes too unbearable, the spiders can sing us a lullaby of two layers, one that helps you get to sleep fast and another to help you stay asleep, and we can dream and dream and dream.

MISTRESS FREEKY



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