

the
SUSHI
PROPHECIES



AUGUST HILL

The Sushi Prophecies

August Hill



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*“Expose yourself to your deepest fear;
after that, fear has no
power, and the fear of freedom shrinks
and vanishes. You are free.”*

— Jim Morrison

**Part I: Six Days Prior to
Swallowing a Fairly Important
Molar**



The Record Man



He was sitting cross-legged on the counter when I came in, his hands in a flurry of explanation. Three hipster chicks stood in awe, all wearing colored leggings and what can only be described as wrestling shoes from the meeker years of the eighties.

“...And so, when Belushi died, Billy Idol just lost it,” Burton stopped to gulp from a clay mug before continuing. “Idol fell into the tequila all night and that’s when he got the ink done...seventy-five bucks in a west LA parlor. What people don’t know is that it was that *same* night that Idol wrote *Cyberpunk*...he wrote it in his head before puking it all out in streams of golden tequila all over his hotel room carpet. Then he carved ‘William Alucard’ into the side of a TV. That’s what he used to check into hotels under...’Dracula’ backwards, you know?”

“*Cyberpunk* came out over a decade later,” sneered the hipster chick in green leggings, using her deepest reach of *Rolling Stone* blog knowledge.

“What the fuck does that have to do with anything, retard?” Burton said quickly, tapping

his head, "Music's a state of mind, it's in there for years before it comes out."

"John Belushi *is* Cyberpunk!" said the hipster chick in orange leggings, she was the one hugging three different copies of the same Billy Idol record, clearly the center of conflict.

"That's like saying Chris Farley *is* New Order..." Burton wagged a finger, "it's only partly true." I was already lost in this mush-theorem but tried to catch up as best I could. "It's more like Belushi, a liter of tequila, and cheap, questionable tattoo needles wrote Cyberpunk. You know...it didn't even come out in the States?"

"I know!" she squeezed the vinyl like her parents never did for her.

"Now be gone, strange little circus animals, I have business to attend to with my horticulturist friend here."

I was just watching from the door as the girls all turned to me with hopeful eyes.

"I'm not that kind of horticulturalist," I said, waving off any kind of thoughts they may be having of following me back to my cool, dangerous lair and shimmying out of their respective leggings for free drugs and a new story.

"*Shoo*," Burton said again to the girls and they scurried off.

"Gimme that tea," I pointed at Burton.

"Now, Seb, let's not get drastic, this is a caffeine-free tea if you know what I mean."

“I have no idea what that means, but I have the feeling you’ll be calling me off the hook later today to help you grapple the space orangutans.”

“No man, there’s barely anything in this tea, like a stem and two caps...just enough to open the ear canals a tiny bit more, you know?”

I shook my head with a smile. “Where do you even get this stuff?”

“Well, turns out that place I happened upon up on the North Shore last month was somebody’s pet project, and not a fortunate accident of nature as I had previously assumed. I took the bus up to Seymour Mountain and hiked to the coordinates again but there were dozens of little white gangster midgets harvesting the magical spore stuffs like a proper operation. One of them suggested I find my way back to the road and disappear lest I earn his fancy knife in my soft places.”

“He pulled a knife on you?”

“It was one of those ones that appear out of nowhere, with a flip of the wrist. Thus ended my exploration in local mountains for that same mystical crop of freedom fungi.”

“So, where did you get these little guys,” I asked, peering over the rim of his mug at the expanded bits floating about.

“Oh, well, I just went down to Wreck Beach for a quick swim with my free brothers and sisters, and it just so happens that Cousin Porpoise had a little bag of harvest glory earlier than expected. I get the feeling he purchased it

from the very same midget gangster villains that I happened upon...the taste-difference is negligible.”

“What...they both taste like shit?”

“Indeed, but this particular brand emanates turtle feces, a potent varietal to be sure.”

“Turtle shit? That makes for a premium mushroom experience?”

“Well, my friend, though I am unusually cool and maintained to the layperson’s eye, inside of my head I am currently the savage king of a rainforest...and I can see your energy expulsing at an alarming rate. You have had magnificently disturbing sex in the past twelve hours, haven’t you?”

“That I have; unfortunately, despite how high you appear to be, you cannot see through my pants to bear witness to the gargantuan ball sack that I am carrying around with me.”

Burton winced, “Trouble unloading the by-product?”

“The dump site shut down early for the night.”

“Sorry, man.” Burton sipped from his cup and stared at my crotch as he did so. “Listen, there’s nobody in the bathroom in the back...that I know about. Feel free to lighten your load.”

“Ah, I think I’m good, you know, thanks though.”

“No really, there’s a copy of Guitar magazine back there from ‘ninety-two. Great photo interview with the bassist from Smashing

Pumpkins. She's lent an unknowing hand more than a few times to my own pleasant toil."

"Really, Burton, I'm good."

"You know the very first time I was gifted a woman's anal-pride was to the soothing sounds of their debut album, titled *Gish*. The bass work on that one is simple and profound."

I stared at him as he sipped again. This is what the city needs more of, truth - straightforward tactlessness.

"So, every time I saw my mistress anew, I would ask where she desired it that night, in the fish, or in the *Gish*."

I tried not to laugh but failed, and just put my head down.

"Here comes my guy back to me! Lighten up, you stiff," Burton smiled and showed off several chunks of mushroom that were stuck between those surprisingly straight and white teeth. "Oh, hey, I've got something for you that you're not going to believe. Hang tight."

I looked around behind the counter and noticed a shiny box, long and thin like it held a new-age harmonica for sad people from the future.

"Check this out," Burton came from behind and thrust a record into my face.

"*Engelbert Humperdinck: Live from Alaska?*" I read out. "Where did you get this?"

"I don't know, some kid came in with it, so I traded him for an extended Nirvana unplugged

DVD...one of the best acoustic shows to date, sad to see it go.”

“Seems like a fair trade to me, you have a whole crate of those Nirvana discs in the back, don’t you?”

“Yeah, fucking flooded, man. Courtney Love didn’t have the cash to settle our bet back then. But isn’t this great?”

I looked at the back of the cover, there sat Ingleburt on a dog sled smiling like the official pervert of winter. The dogs looked frightened, but unable to escape the soothing drip of his lounge voice, lulled into a paralyzed state. “This is amazing,” I said.

“Take it, and play it while you close up shop, you’ll find that your plants will sleep much happier, like they too had just enjoyed some bassy sodomy.”

“Some *Gish*, you mean?”

“Yeah, man! Now you’re talking. You should trademark that shit for me...do some logos, let’s go global with this thing.”

I nodded, wondering how many Smashing Pumpkins lawyers it takes to dismantle a nursery and a record shop in one fell swoop.

“Perfection. Say, Burton, what’s that shiny box back there?” I pointed to the case.

“Oh, yeah, that’s what I wanted to talk to you about. Sanford’s place is being re-taken by some wiry Oriental guy.”

“Japanese?”

“Right,” he nodded. “So, this guy comes in this morning and introduces himself and he gives me this. Check it out.”

Burton handed me the futuristic harmonica case and I turned it all around before figuring out how to slide it open. Burton *ahhhhed*, confirming that he had yet to figure the contraption out himself and wanted me to open it for him.

It glided as if in parts but appeared to be all one piece. Inside, tucked in a bed of blue velvet was a set of ivory chopsticks, laced with gold leaf and sparkling blue jewel. A fantastic explosion of elephant bits and some pirate’s treasure.

“Wow, man, what are those things?”

“Chopsticks. Really, really nice chopsticks.”

“Wow...why’d he give me those things?”

“I don’t know, but these are really, really nice,” I said, mesmerized.

“What should I do? Should I give him a gold record or something?”

“You have a gold record?” I said looking around to the packed walls of the place.

“Yeah, I’ve got a couple dozen, I produced some Duran Duran tracks, and a few of the Stones’ later singles...there was that Janet Jackson run too, but I keep those in my private collection”

I watched Burton as he sipped his tea again and picked at his teeth with a puffy tongue.

“Maybe we’ll go in there when he’s open in a few weeks and just spend some money, you

know, welcome him to the neighborhood. He seems like a nice guy.”

“Look at those sticks Seb, they’re so shiny,” answered Burton slowly.

I eventually left Burton with the promise that he would not have any more magic tea until after lunch, to which he laughed and thanked me kindly for teaching him about the oysters of Jupiter. Then he started yelling obscenities at a poster of Jack White.

I have to admit I was somewhat jealous of the chopsticks, Burton must’ve been more welcoming than I had. I felt kind of bad about the way I had sidled up on Aira, like he was trespassing or something. He appeared to be a pretty sweet guy, giving Sanford a break, not too many shopkeepers in the city would do that.

There we go again. Despite my bitterness, I still cared so damn much about what people thought of me...as if it’s so important that I be liked when *I’m* the one who is first to judge and dismiss the majority of this town. It’s all very confusing, like trading jeans with a stranger.

I recall when I was nine years old, I accepted a rare invite to a birthday party at Chuck E. Cheese. I had just barely made that particular invitation list, barely edging out Booger Steve, the kid who ate boogers...other people’s boogers.

There I was at this kid’s birthday, just barely hanging on by a string after a slew of failed knock-knock jokes and a disastrous orange soda chugging contest. I took a breather alone in the

plastic ball room, when I found the guest of honor hiding under an unusually large pile of balls in the corner.

“Hey Chris,” I approached, “great birthday thanks for inviting me. Wanna hear a knock-knock joke?”

“Get out of here Sebastian, beat it!” He threw a green ball at me, I recall ducking with lightening quickness.

“What’s the deal, you’ve been mean to me all night. I’m outta here.”

“That’s right beat it! You stink like poo!”

As I waded off, I suddenly get a whiff of just that. Ripe poop.

“Jeez...” I turned around and looked at Birthday Chris who had sunk a tad lower and was starting to tear up. “Oh no,” I said.

I came out of that ball room with his pants on, full of his fresh poop. He came out of that ballroom with my pants on, they were fresh as a daisy, save some minor orange crush evidence.

Seemed like a good idea at the time. Turns out Chris didn’t hold true to his promise of telling the other kids we had wrestled down a viciously rabid, and simultaneously pooping, wolf-dog that had attacked a group of terrified cheerleaders. Instead, Birthday Chris turned on me, pointing and laughing as soon as we got back to the other kids at the pizza table. He got off Scott-free, and I ended up with an unfortunate nickname and a severe rash, go figure. My mother scolded me as my dad scrubbed me in the tub. She repeated the

perils of trusting others, of not being independent,
not being proud.

Truth is bullshit.

Bent and Broken Pins



The front doors of Verdigris rushed open just as I leaned in to pull at the wrought-iron handle and a frantic Elle scooped me up.

“I need you upstairs *asap*.”

“Elle, we simply must stop beating around the bush like this.” I said, reaching out for her face with both hands. She slapped them and pulled on my shirt.

“There’s some fucking plant up there that looks like a crayfish humping a flamingo...with an afro...and it reeks like rotten macaroni and cheese,” she grabbed my hands back out of the air and pulled me behind her through the store like I was a child who had licked too many toys.

The loft had a particularly stringent type of odor, much like Cheez Whiz on rye bread lying on a sidewalk in San Diego.

“What is *that*?” she asked.

“Oh, don’t worry about that, it’s a new type I’m trying out.”

“What do you mean ‘trying out’? I’m pretty sure they have over-the-counter stuff for Adina’s Chlamydia nowadays.”

She was good that Elle, she was damned good at striking hard and fast.

“Alright bitches,” I pointed to both Elle and Cam, the latter of which looked up as if he had

caught a bullet in the crossfire for no apparent reason. He had been just sitting there alone, innocently playing on the music production software he'd illegally downloaded and installed on my desktop. His face twisted as if it was just a grazing wound to the butt cheek. More annoying than anything, but painful enough.

"You're being a fuck-o right about now," I shoved a finger into Elle's face and circled it around in case it was too close to focus on.

"Simmer down," she retreated, "I'm just messing with you, what's your problem?"

"My problem is that I can't eat goddamned soggy Eggo's and nail polish coffee. My problem is that I hate otters, with their cocky floating and middle fingers. My problem is that I don't want a glow-in-the-dark dick!" I backed away, circle-pointing at the two of them as they stared back at me. Moving like a hold up man forced into a corner, I reached down to pick up the potted marine-circus orgy plant but must have pinched a stem as an entire piece of it snapped off under my arm.

"Shit, now look what you made me do," I put the pot down again, still holding the broken appendage under my arm so as to not let it fall to the ground. As the two pieces separated from each other and the thick, stringing juices within oxidized, the horrific cheese odor intensified and misted up to the ceiling. Both Cam and Elle made unnatural heaving noises before bumping into each other in a dash for the spiral staircase.

“Oh my god, my asshole just went up inside my stomach,” Cam yelled, flying down and around at top speed, missing steps often, possibly drooling.

“The fans! Get the fans!” Elle followed screaming.

I looked down at the thing with its fresh fracture oozing pale green gel to the ground, the first contact of which was made with my bare toes. I watched it crawl into the space between my big toe and the next one, leaking into the thong of the sandal. As soon as the cool goo reached that sacred separation of toes I was forced into the defensive arms-out, bum-out position like a stretched feline, or a pirate avoiding a slashing sword in a rapier tussle. It was too late; I could sense the stuff making its way under my foot, warming instantly with the touch of my skin. I kicked off the sandal immediately and it flew over the railing and down into a bush below on the main floor.

“Fucking siiiiiiick!” I notified the entire store.

And then I felt that warming sensation, like joint-and-muscle-pain gel, or personal lubricant, whichever feels more percolating. It was as if my pores were just soaking the stuff up and dancing with satisfaction, Ecstasy at a cellular level. My toes went fuzzy for a moment and then spasmed back to life. I lifted my leg for some reason and sort of danced around the room like you might after stepping on a push pin, only

to discover that it's your favorite color on the end of the thing sticking out of you.

Bittersweet stabbed-foot dance.

With my foot up in the air, breathing in deeply, I immediately noticed that the loft no longer smelled of rotting processed cheese. I looked around at the fans across the ceiling that were still taking their sweet time to complete a full rotation. The piece of the plant in my grips looked back at me, and I shuddered as I spun it around, slowly inspecting it, careful not to drip any more of the smelly ooze onto myself. But the wound had completely dried up and sealed itself off. It was as if somebody had burned the nub and closed it up for good.

"What—"

I looked to the rest of the strange plant at my feet. It was shaking slightly of its own accord. The piece that had been ripped off not a minute ago had regenerated itself. It looked fresher, thinner, in a newer, lighter shade of green.

I shook my head and placed my foot back to the floor. Stepping down, there was no terrible juicy feeling between my toes, and lifting to investigate, I could see no trace of moisture from the stream of innards.

"...the fuck?"

Collecting myself, I stuffed the broken piece of mutation into my pocket and carefully nudged the pot behind the couch to where somebody would have to really stretch to see it. This was my secret, my discovery. I could hardly contain

the thought of researching the shit out this thing to understand what I had just seen. What was it...and how could we capitalize? My mind was all spun up.

Okay, I had to tell somebody, immediately, I couldn't help it.

Leaping down the stairs to explain to Elle, I nearly knocked over an older woman holding two tiny irises.

"Dear," she said in that wavering *help me* way.

"Yes, what?" I said abruptly, looking past her, scanning the floor.

"Which of these do you recommend?"

I looked into her eyes, "You need to stop relying on people for the right decision. The answer depends on you, so don't depend on others."

She stared at me with her jowls quivering, I twitched in waiting for the next question.

"You know, you're right. Very honest, thank you."

What am I a rogue asshole poet now?

I blinked hard and turned on my heels quickly.

Elle was going in circles behind the juice bar trying to find the master control for the fans.

"Elle," I said calmly.

"Fucking vomit...smells like vomit coming out of a bum-hole..."

"Elle, the smell is gone."

“No, you’ve got to be...oh,” she said breathing in suspiciously. “Well that’s not bad at all. What happened up there, did you break out the Mr. Clean, or what?”

“Did you ever wonder about Mr. Clean?” I answered all racy, “I mean the guy looks like a proper *Cleaner*, you know, like from the mob or something.” Elle twitched her nose back and forth, half-listening to me and half-smelling. “He’s got like a closet full of sailor slacks with bleached-out blood stains from the time he used electric hedge clippers to break down the carcass of that boxer who wouldn’t take a dive, or from when he was on his hands and knees trying to find all of that snitch’s teeth amongst a recently-exploded Cadillac. I mean, the guy’s built like a cage wrestler and he’s got that massive earring...probably made from Nazi gold.”

Elle stared at me.

“Well,” she said, “I guess he shaves his head bald for a reason, hey?”

“Nobody’s DNA getting in there.”

“Nice one.” She smiled like she used to.

“So, you’ve been kind of fucked up towards me, hey?” I said out of nowhere, having decided that I didn’t need to tell her about the whole plant regeneration thing. I didn’t want to look like a crazy guy, again.

Elle gave me that look, like she had just gotten hit in the face with a frying pan.

“Ya, I mean...Adina? What the hell is that all about?”

Elle rolled her eyes and picked at her nails the way you might if you had nothing to say. But she did.

“You know...fuck you, you know?” is what she settled on.

“True,” I answered, “by the same token, fuck *you*. All you do is attack, I defend, you attack my defense, and so forth. It gets to a point where I really question my place in this friendship as anything other than a pincushion that you push full of all of your bent and broken pins.”

“What does *that* mean?”

Too far? I thought, as she stepped back. But I kept at it.

“You get dumped, or you gain three pounds, or your mother pays for another semester of your brother’s sports medicine degree...all bent and broken pins that you turn around and jab right into me.”

Silence, but the rustling of leaves beneath the fans and trickling of water through elaborate ponds.

“I...” she stammered before I pounced again.

“*You* see pain in yourself and you’ve found an easier way to get it out. Take on Sebastian as a project and turn him around to be the way that people are supposed to be...how you think *you’re* supposed to be but don’t have the guts to face.”

Silence but the beating of my heart, quicker than usual or so it felt. I looked to the bottom right corner of my skull’s view like my words had just caught up with me, and they had.

With nothing left to say as her eyes started to glisten, and feeling repercussions around the way, I floated off.

My mind may have been floating, but my feet were on fire. I ran the other direction, away from Elle, Verdigris, away from the sea. I heard the voices behind me, but I carried on. Deeper and deeper into the city I ran, past hot dog stands and tourists, weaving in and out of idling traffic and bicycle delivery boys with their thin bikes and little hats. I touched shoulders with an old Chinese man who turned on his heels with inertia and cursed me in the many ways of the Mandarin tongue. I threw an arm up in apology and accidentally tapped the hindquarters of a window washer jittering on a ladder. He wobbled before throwing a wet rag at me, it thwapped my bare calf but I carried on. On and on through the crowds of suits and cell phones, through and through the masses of shopping bags and oversized sunglasses.

It may have been ten minutes later that I reached the bottom of Davie Street where the intersections all intersect, and an unnerved patch of triangular grass is orphaned as an island oasis amongst cement waters. I crossed through the nexus to the sounds of several tiny hybrid honks, and with the jewel in my eye I triple jumped onto the sidewalk separating English Bay's beached logs and Denman Street's donair stench.

My heart let me know when I saw it. It was empty and luxurious. It had a better view than my

apartment and may even have been a little bit bigger. This phone booth was amazing.

I snuck inside and slid the doors closed behind me gently. A heaving sigh left my body and with both hands to the glass as if to brace myself after long shower sex, I caught my breath.

What had I been thinking? My mouth moving about however it damn-well pleased...I could've killed somebody with the words that were coming out so haphazardly. To filter one's thoughts, to engage in just a touch of emotional intelligence and practice the art of tact is even the simplest man's born instinct for Christ's sake. Had I completely lost all sense of self-preservation?

Things were bleak, things were bleak indeed.

Before I could lift the receiver to my ear and heed the words of that sweet operator scolding the lack of payment, there was a brushing on the glass doors behind me. I turned to see Sanford's broom sliding up and down on the glass, sweeping like a cat at an inattentive leg.

"Sanford?" I said, still standing in my place like a moron.

He continued to brush on the door with no semblance of emotion, the closed glass obviously a hindrance to any successful exchange.

"What's up buddy?" I asked, climbing out of the booth like a vampire with cataracts. When I saw him in full, I felt the need to acknowledge that Sanford was wearing a Japanese kimono, flowing blue silk tied up around his waist just so. I must say he wore it well. He also had on

wooden clogs that showed off a set of very well-spoken for ankles.

“See Aira wants...to you,” he spoke slowly, clearly, and the words sort of dripped out of his mouth, albeit mixed up.

Sanford has some sort of spoken dyslexia that threw me off when I first met him years ago. The conversation was like an Abbot and Costello routine; I offered him a couple of bucks to sweep Verdigris’ back patio, he kept asking ‘I’m pay you when sweeping can finish me’. After some negotiating, we straightened things out and have been nodding at each other ever since. They say the human brain processes at thirty-two frames per second and your mouth can only move to the equivalent of about two frames per second, so it’s easy to imagine at full speed excitement, one might trip over their own thoughts and sound like Dennis Rodman on speed.

Now, here was Sanford at the front door of my sanctuary – one of them – trying to sweep me back to the old house and my new Japanese neighbor. This Aira guy must really be something. Or maybe he’s got some chopsticks for me.

“Is everything okay?” I asked.

“Talk, he you needing to with fast.

Thanks...fine.”

“Good enough for me,” I said, thinking it was probably a little more normal to walk away with a homeless guy in a Kimono, carrying a giant broom, than to submit to my breakdown and

kneel to the telephone booth gods in broad
daylight. So, I bought Sanford a hotdog and we
strolled back to our small street by the harbor.

The Sushi Temple



I couldn't believe my eyes when we walked through the front doors of the old abandoned house. The place that was just days ago completely gutted and cobwebbed had transformed to some lush and fruitful oasis, much like I imagined Skinny's bedroom to be. Inside was some sort of Zen escape, a mix between Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory and the Secret of Nimh...but with beautiful fish tanks and a fresh ocean breeze.

A gentle waterfall came from the ceiling somehow, rushing down a rock wall and flowing through narrow stone creeks all around. White koi nibbled at the surface, showing their fat faces as they kissed at the air. Fish twice as big as any I had in the back of the nursery, and somehow less severe looking. A man doesn't like it when his fish is inferior to another man's.

The floor was finished with some sort of large, dark bamboo-hardwood surface, rolling slightly like wide and low speed bumps over and over again. Not like those yellow speed bumps in the inner city that bust your car up, more like the gradual, oversized, smooth type that gated communities are privy to.

There were alcoves and grottos where decadent seating arrangements flowed naturally,

no two situations alike. Soft lighting ebbed and flowed with no real source to be seen. The ceiling appeared alive in itself, ethereal shapes shifting but stable. It appeared the space was some sort of mandala with opposing forces in each quadrant. The seasons, perhaps. It was very jarring and settling in the same breath.

“My new friend, I have a favor to ask of you,” Aira came out from behind a white silk panel leading to somewhere a wall may have once been. I no longer understood this house as I thought I did, so it’s possible I was just staring with my mouth open.

“It’s coming along sure enough.” Aira answered my gaping expression.

“Sure enough? This place is...unreal. How is this possible?”

“Things are possible as you deem fit, young master. You just need a little *truth*.”

My mouth snapped shut.

“Truth. For instance...you have plants and I need plants. This is a truth, correct?”

“Plants I have, but it looks like you have miracles.”

“Miracles are a waste of time my friend, they take too long.”

The place smelled of sweet lilac and lavender, like spring water and thick air warmed by a setting sun. If I had closed my eyes, which I could not, I would have kept them shut and disappeared into some cherry-blossomed summer land hugged by fragrance and birdsong.

There were sounds that came about in their own time as well. The kinds you notice when you're ready, but not until then. A wavering comb of some salted breeze through feathers of a flock, or perhaps a tall field of seaside grass swaying against itself. The stream tickled and licked at smooth stones of course, and from somewhere less obvious I couldn't have been crazy to have heard long lean muscles pushing hooves across some sort of red-earthen plateau. Just sounds, of course. Just strange noises playing inside of my head, driven by some strange atmosphere I didn't understand.

"Where'd you get this playlist? Did Burton sell you one of those mall samplers on CD?"

Aira thought for a moment as I pointed to the rafters like a tourist. "Yes, surrounding your being are the sounds of your North American shopping complexes. If it makes you comfortable, then I am happy."

"I think I sense some sarcasm, Aira, my new friend, good for you." I walked in further, "Well, I don't know what to say, this place is incredible. I guess I just need to know what you would like to add in here in terms of greenery. Though it looks like you're covered."

I tried pricing out the inventory in my head but got caught on some species I couldn't name in that moment and quickly realized these were not all mine. "Where did you get this stuff anyway? Is that golden angel's trumpet beside all that aloe? Is that even legal?"

The tall wiry Japanese man started to pace around the bamboo floor, his bare feet sliding without sound. With his arms behind his back, he wandered off, and just as he started to speak, I felt it again.

Electric pain from my tail bone, up around and around my spine to the back curvature of my skull. Hundreds of miniature Christmas lights heating up and exploding, unraveling the endings of the nerves in their spinal cord as they sizzled to an end. My eyes squeezed tight and I bit my lip hard enough to feel its blood creeping out. The next thing I felt was my kneecaps crunching against the tough bamboo floor. And then all else was quiet.

“That would be great if you could. Be sure to rinse them well, very potent, it is.”

A voice somewhere.

When the blood, light and oxygen rushed in seconds later, I could feel it moving through the lids of my eyes, warming my sight and flooding my mind like millions of floating rose petals.

The ceiling glistened down at me, and when I did realize I was sprawled out on the floor I instantly thought it appropriate to spring to my feet. I suppose to avoid the usual embarrassment of passing out midday in a stranger’s abode, but I also felt a strange shot of adrenaline as if I had just won the big game...whatever that means.

“Be easy with it, Sebastian, this is likely a new feeling for you.”

I shook my head around like a boxer and gave a twist left and right, because that's what they do on TV when they get back up from being knocked the fuck down.

"Not really sure what's going on, but I think my spine just exploded," I said, looking around at my surroundings again because I forgot where I was again while I was talking.

Sushi temple-slash-Victorian manor. Got it.

"Yes, what did it feel like?" asked Aira.

"What do you mean...what was *it*?" I asked, apparently kind of pissed off.

The bare-footed Japanese man hesitated, "Well, you just fell over. How did the floor feel, is it too hard?"

"Well if you mean does it hurt like a son of bitch...yes it does. That's the nature of ground I suppose."

I was beginning to think Adina's entire body was toxic with some sort of super drug that had transmitted sexually and lay dormant all morning until suddenly attacking my nervous system. Maybe equal parts cocaine, ecstasy, tequila and pudenda.

"Do you want some tea, it might help," said Aira.

"It's okay, I'm just sort of confused. But yes, I would love some tea."

Sanford had appeared from behind the wall of white silkiness with a pot and three modest clay cups before I had actually answered...I think.

“Am I okay, I mean, did I hit my head or something?”

“Not that I know of. I mean, not in this place, so don’t sue. You people like to sue one another. If there was an *Art of War* for the modern man, it would describe two groups of individuals training to sue one another. This I know.”

Sanford poured three short cups of foggy brown tea and pushed one towards me.

“It was like my spine exploded,” I repeated, “all the way up my backbone, one piece at a time.”

Aira stared at me, sipping his tea quickly. “What else?” he asked like he was scribing a medical paper in his mind.

“Well, I’m not really sure, except that this floor is sturdy, but kind of bouncy also.”

“Yes, it’s from within the bamboo where we hold much of our bounciness.”

“The Japanese?” I asked, testing the tea with my tongue, which was fuzzy and numb at the moment.

“Mmmmh,” he sipped again.

“Was I out for a while?”

“No, you echoed quickly.”

The tea was hot on the back of my throat but stung with a sweetness on the very root of my tongue. Then I realized I was tasting blood.

“Ouch, shit, did I bite my tongue?” I felt around at a giant gouge where the bitter taste buds might have once been. I watched Sanford who was looking at me sideways, concerned.

“That’ll clear right up, just relax.”

So, relax I did, and I sipped on the hot tea like a little boy. Plumes of warmth erupted like an underwater volcano deep within my chest. I found myself wondering about Skinny in that moment, and so she appeared in front of me with her flip flops on, smiling out of one side of her mouth. Her damned hair blowing in some kind of wind. White haze floated around with no particular bearing as her dark skin absorbed the endless ethereal enveloping us.

What a sight.

“*Are you alright?*” She asked, reaching out her arm like a swan’s neck.

“*No,*” I said inside of my head, “*I bit my tongue off, I think.*”

“*Why don’t you pay more attention?*” she asked sweetly.

“*To what?*” I said.

She smiled in sympathy, “*Sebastian, you should open your eyes now.*”

“*I don’t want to.*”

“*Open your eyes and pay attention.*”

“*I am paying attention. I’m paying attention to you.*” I reached towards her.

“*Open your eyes.*” She smiled.

Volcanic plumes folded back on themselves like some kind of a sped-up reverse montage in a trendy British action film, and the strange world of Aira’s sushi temple returned all around.

Aira stared at me.

“What was it?” he said.

I blinked at him. Then down to the uneven cup in my grips. “What?” I asked.

“What were you thinking about? You paused like a monkey defecating from a tree.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” I reacted, feeling oddly like I might resemble a monkey pooping from a tree in that exact moment.

Aira took my cup - I must have been finished – and peering down into it he looked disappointed on his way back through the silk sheets. Maybe I drank his tea the wrong way; maybe I was rude in my sipping maneuvers or something. I was definitely confused, and that was the only thing that was clear.

Sanford came sweeping by, whistling some sort of Dizzy Gillespian riff that didn’t quite make sense the first time, but when he repeated it a few bars later it did, and I felt more aware like I had just solved a two-minute mystery.

Should I be worried? I said to myself. To which I answered, *worried or perhaps intrigued*, and smiled to a third and fourth me who were milling about.

“Anyways,” I said loud enough to be audible from the back room, wherever the back room may be, “just let me know what type of plants you want, and we’ll set you up.”

I took a shiver to clear the particulate.

“The things I need are not of ordinary repute, Sebastian.”

“Ya, I figured you might say that, not to worry, my friends in Abbotsford have all sorts of

oddities just sitting around. You name it and they've either grown it themselves in a tropical lab or can have it to you in no more than a week."

"At a steep cost to many, I imagine," he snickered to himself.

"Well, quite possibly, but that's not my game. I don't see a lot of legwork in getting plants from my loading area over to your restaurant here, so I'm not the guy to turn a profit on you. Besides, we're neighbors now. And you have good tea." I felt vaguely aware that I may have been trying to weasel him out of a set of those chopsticks. Jealous of the chopsticks, clearly jealous.

"Fundamentals of business, unheeded?" he raised an eyebrow.

"Well, I just am not that guy. Profit comes from people who deserve to part with their money. It's the natural order of business."

"I see. Well, we shall be in touch then." By which of course he meant he would have Sanford hunt me at a later time.

I bid Sanford adieu and bowed slightly to Aira who looked at me strangely in return before lowering his own head.