



The Weekly Man

A Room Without a View

For the third time today, Jasper wanted to kill his computer. He wanted to punch it hard in the monitor, kick the shit out of its CPU, spin the mouse by its tail and smash it onto the surface of his desk, pull the letters out of his keyboard and set them on fire.

But he didn't.

He sat at his desk staring at a screen where everything was suddenly dormant, his cursor frozen over a Word document, his web browser refusing to surf, his keyboard disabled, not even Ctl Alt Delete working so that he could close all the programs and start over again. And it was against company policy to do a hard shutdown by pressing the On/Off button. He'd done that shortly after he'd started working for xTLan Tech and he'd found himself surrounded by two inquisitive geeks from Tech Services and an annoying manager asking him if he'd read the policy manual, quoting from it, offering to send him printouts of the relevant passage. He'd felt like he was auditioning for a sequel to *Office Space*.

In a situation like this, according to the policy manual, he was supposed to send an email to Tech Services. It had to be an email so that an automated Job Number could be assigned to the request for services. It couldn't be a phone call. It couldn't be a face-to-face request. It had to be an email. There had to be an automated Job Number.

Which was impossible.

His computer was frozen. Useless. A piece of junk. A high tech paper weight. There was no way out...he had no choice but to accept the inevitability of his situation. He stared at the monitor and, dead pixel by dead pixel, the solution presented itself in all its wonderful and inescapable glory.

He punched his computer monitor so hard he broke his hand in four places.

Unemployment really sucked, just like everything else in Jasper Proud's life. He was forty-two years old, single, and hadn't had sex in three years. He wasn't bad looking but he was no whatisname...that guy in the movies. Jasper was the *other* guy...the one nobody remembered. He lived by himself in a flat with windows facing the concrete block wall of a four story furniture outlet. His flat was on the second floor and he had to turn his lights on in the daytime and he had to keep the window open to let out the killing

heat and the stench of rotting things in the walls. He had no savings. His credit cards were maxed out and to top it all off, he hadn't shit in three days.

Stress had that effect on him.

"Fuck the world," he said. The bitterness bleeding out of his voice soured the air around him and made the gray concrete buildingscape on the other side of his windows all the more depressing. He craned his head upwards and told God to fuck off. He guzzled another mouthful of beer. His chair could have been salvaged from the bottom of a landfill but it matched his mood and his life.

He used his left hand to guzzle beer because his right hand was wrapped in a cast and it hurt like hell. He stared at his reflection in the forty inch flat screen television that he'd accidentally poured water on while he was watering his dying corn plant because he wasn't used to watering it with his left hand. Maybe he shouldn't have watered his corn plant when he was drunk. Maybe he should have just stayed in bed. Maybe he should never have been born.

No TV tonight.

His alarm clock went off late, but that was OK...he didn't have to get up for anything. He was unemployed and incapacitated. The alarm could go off anytime it wanted. But he was pissed anyway. "Fucking clock." For just an instant, the thought crossed his mind that maybe he should slap the clock off the bedside table, but it was the kind of thing he would do with his right hand and he'd already done that kind of thing and now he was unemployed and had a broken right hand. He reached out and pressed his index finger on the button to turn the alarm off.

"Fucking stupid clock." He rolled over and faced away from his stupid clock. He stared at the concrete blocks of the furniture outlet and it occurred to him that he was the only person in the world who could see that portion of the outlet's wall unless he had friends over, but he had no friends. Not even his landlord, who never visited the flats he rented for fear of contamination, would see it. The view was Jasper's and his only. All that dark grey concrete. The parallel lines where concrete cemented on concrete. All his to enjoy.

"Fucking wall."

Or not enjoy.

He stared at the wall and the longer he stared, the angrier he grew. He wasn't sure exactly what he was angry about. He was unemployed, broke, maxed out on his credit cards, his television was broken, his hand was broken, he was in pain, his clock was stupid, he was out of beer and he still had to shit. That was a lot to be angry about, but it wasn't really what he was angry about. There was more. So much more. There was his whole life and what he was going through now was no more than a replay of his life for as long as he could remember...like a bad song stuck in a loop.

"FUCK OFF WORLD!"

He suddenly went quiet. He raised his eyebrows. He lay motionless, thinking: *Did I just scream?* He thought about this for a moment. It sure did sound like he'd screamed. His voice had been loud like a scream. It had been full of anger and remorse and pain and pissed-off-edness like a scream. His throat was sore, as though he'd just finished screaming. He was frozen motionless, except for his eyes, which darted around the room at the walls, the window, ceiling, the door. No complaints from the neighbors. No pissed off bangs against the floor, ceiling or walls. Maybe he didn't scream. Or maybe no one gave a shit. Maybe everybody was at work or sleeping off hangovers or too high to notice anything but dust motes floating just beyond their noses.

"FUCK OFF WORLD!"

He held his breath, listening for a response, an echo, a complaint, a confirmation, but a dead silence clipped his words the instant he finished mouthing them as though he hadn't said a thing. As though his anger at everything didn't exist. As though it had been taken away from him by the silence like everything in his life had always been taken away from him and making him almost afraid to own

anything including his own life...and that just pissed him off more. He wasn't going to let the silence silence him. He would have his words. His words would resound. His words would crush the silence.

“FUCK OFF WORLD!”

What the fuck...not even an echo? Where's the echo? He looked around as though maybe the echo was hiding somewhere in his bedroom. Where could it be? Behind the cheap faded imitations of famous pictures with their cracked frames and broken glass? Was it under the bedside table? Maybe it was hiding behind the dresser with the drawers that didn't close all the way because the plywood was so warped.

There should at least be something for a second or two. It doesn't have to be an echo...just something...for a second or two.

But there wasn't. There was nothing to confirm that Jasper Proud had just screamed.

“FUCK OFF WORLD!”

“FUCK OFF WORLD!”

“FUCK OFF WORLD!”

Nothing. Not even a scared roach scurrying away from the crazy man's screams. And still no complaints from the neighbors. He jumped out of bed and ran, naked, to the livingroom. He screamed at this water-logged TV.

“FUCK OFF TV!”

He stood in the middle of the room, back bent forward, arms dangling, staring into silence. He screamed at this mismatched couch and arm chair.

“FUCK OFF COUCH!”

“FUCK OFF CHAIR!”

He screamed at the beer-stained coffee table.

“FUCK OFF TABLE!”

He screamed at the yellowing ceiling.

“FUCK OFF CEILING!”

He screamed at time-flattened carpet.

“FUCK OFF CARPET!”

He screamed at the open window with its magnificent view of concrete blocks and parallel lines.

“FUCK OFF WINDOW!”

He stopped short. He stared at the wall. He held his breath. *What was that?* He cocked his head to the side. *Was that an echo?* He listened.

Nothing.

He listened again, this time a little more intently.

Still nothing.

“FUCK OFF WORLD!”

And there it was again, somewhere in the distance of the concrete and the parallel lines:

fuck off world

It wasn't much, but it was there. It was an echo, an anemic feeble half-hearted echo (sort of like his life) but it was an echo.

It would do.

He stood in the middle of his living room, bent forward, arms hanging. He'd just accomplished something. He wasn't sure what but he knew that something had just happened and it was a positive thing that just maybe didn't suck. Maybe. He walked to the window and stopped directly in front of it. Another foot and he would be outside falling into the void between buildings. He braced himself, took a deep breath and...

“FUCK OFF WORLD!”

fuck off world fuck off world fuck off world

An echo.

A wave of exaltation rampaged through the very cellular structure of Jasper's body. Every molecule in his biological composition vibrated with exoneration. Jasper DeLong was a man. He was a man with an echo.

"FUCK OFF WORLD!"

fuck off world fuck off world fuck off world

He forgot about his broken hand. He forgot about his broken TV and his broken life. A wave of beatific relief spread through his body and tears saturated his lashes with hope. A wonderful thought raced through his mind.

I think I can shit.

He spent about an hour in the washroom, shitting gleefully. He became acutely aware of the human body's profound ability to hold vast quantities of excrement. Without exploding.

He also thought about the echo. It wasn't all that big a deal. It was just an echo, his own voice bouncing off the walls in the narrow space between the two buildings. He wondered why such a small thing made him feel so good. He wondered how it could possibly have made him shit.

He stayed on the toilet long beyond the time he'd emptied every ounce of shit from his body. His hand didn't feel as painful and his bowels felt like they could float away. He hadn't felt this good in years. He hadn't felt this good in his entire life. For the first time in ages, he smiled. It was a crooked, uncomfortable smile, something lacking experience and practice. But it was wide and scary.

He wiped his ass and flushed, pulled up his skivvies and pants and left the washroom without washing his hands. His place, his germs, fuck off world.

For the first time in his life, he felt like he was on to something. For the first time ever, he felt like he had control over something. He wasn't sure what it was yet, but he could feel it, feel the sense of empowerment. After all, he'd just had the most intense shit of this life. Now that was control.

He walked to the window and kneeled down. He stuck his head out and looked up. A slit of blue sky hinted that maybe there was more to life than his tiny apartment and the furniture store's wall. He looked down. Despite the sunny day, the ground between the two buildings was dark and overgrown with shade-loving weeds. He screamed.

FUCK OFF WORLD!

fuck off world fuck off world fuck off world

He smiled. Sort of. He would need ample practice on that front. But the overall sense of wellbeing felt good. He pulled his head back in and stood up. He wondered how he could apply his newfound sense of elation to something more productive than shitting. There had to be something else he could do with it. He sat down in his ragged chair and pondered. He made faces as he pondered, faces that reflected thoughtfulness, inquisitiveness, puzzlement, excitement, calculation, disappointment, criticism, lightheadedness...but not a glimmer of conclusiveness or decision.

FUCK OFF WORLD!

fuck off world fuck off world fuck off world
No decision, but he did have to shit again.

Three days after Jasper started shitting again, he passed out on the livingroom floor. He'd eaten everything edible in his refrigerator and cupboards, mostly condiments like catsup and relish, a couple of withered apples, freezer-burned veggies and a piece of chicken. He found a couple of bags of crackers that may or may not have had traces of mold but he covered the suspect spots with scrapings from the bottom of a peanut butter jar and a raspberry jam jar.

He had no money and he hadn't been outside his apartment in a week or so. He couldn't leave. He had to stay inside until he reached some sort of decision. What could he do with his new sense of self? How could he apply his new found positivity in a positive way? What was his next step?

That's it, he thought as he stared at the cracks in his ceiling and a metal fan that had likely stopped fanning before he was born, I need to decide on a next step. What to do after I get up off the floor.

He sat up and put his head between his legs. He was dizzy as hell but he finally had one clear thought: What do I do next?

Sitting up was a good start. He waited until some of the dizziness passed and stood up. He walked to his chair and sat down. *What's my next step?*

He'd never thought like this before: thinking in terms of 'do this' and then 'this' and then 'this'. He'd never had any kind of chronological order in his life, a checklist for living. He'd always simply jumped into the day and let it take him wherever. When he was working, he did whatever came at him, finished it, and went on to the next thing. He couldn't remember ever having written a list. When he went shopping, he bought what he came across. He paid his bills as they came in. He did laundry sometime after he couldn't stand the smell of things he donned. There was no order in his life, no progression from here to there. He was always just here. And right now, here wasn't a good place to be. He could starve to death hanging around here too long. He needed food and there was no food here. He needed to just get out and about, do the social thing. Go out and shop or something, with emphasis on the "or something" given that he had no money, no credit and no job.

Where would he go? What would he do?

Maybe he could apply for a new job, pass out resumes, look for Help Wanted signs in store windows, check the Want Ads or go to the library and use one of their computers to find a job. He wasn't sure what he wanted to do...anything but what he did at the last job...data entry. He didn't like computers and they didn't like him. They spewed strange messages about esoteric errors and pages not found and they broke down when you needed them most.

He looked across the room at a metal telephone stand with a phone on it that hadn't been used in ages because the bill hadn't been paid in ages. But it wasn't the phone that caught his attention...it was a large book with a yellow cover: The phone book on which the phone rested. He grabbed it desperately, almost knocking the phone onto the floor, and curled up in his chair with it. The yellow pages were bursting with possibilities. He turned the pages and scanned. The book was heavy and his broken hand hurt like hell but he ignored the pain as he scanned each page for an escape from his life.

There were restaurants and plumbers and auto sales and signs for your truck and stuff for your pets that he would never be able to afford for himself.

His mind spun with the possibilities. With all this, there had to be somewhere where he fit in, somewhere without idiotic error messages from computers, somewhere he could just work and be happy. Could he sell flowers to love struck young men and be happy for them? Could he flip a burger and take pride in grilling it to perfection?

A notice slashing downwards on one of the ads caught his attention:

LOOKING FOR A NEW START?

It went on to say that they were always on the lookout for new talent. No experience was necessary. No startup expenses.

No experience. He was qualified. This job was cut out just for him. A thought blazed across his mind: *What is this job that I'm qualified for?*

It was difficult to tell. The ad was written in a confusing way. He thought it might be some kind of delivery service. He could deliver things. Maybe they would give him a car. Or maybe it was some kind of referral service. He could refer. And he didn't have any experience in that. They would train him, teach him to refer like an expert, make him a referral wiz. And they would pay him. He could buy a new TV. Beer. He could buy a case of beer to drink while he watched sit coms on his new TV. All he had to do was refer.

Or deliver. He didn't care much either way. Deliver...refer...it was all the same. He would have a new TV and a case of beer. And maybe even a car. He would like that. He smiled. He scratched his groin. He eased back in his chair. He'd never felt so exuberant before. He almost couldn't breathe.

The following day, he woke with a new sense of purpose. Today would be the starting point in a life bursting with meaning and satisfaction. He snatched the phone book up quickly and turned to the page

with his NEW START. Still naked from bed, he walked into the kitchenette and copied the phone number. There was a pay phone in a drug store just down the street. He would go there and make the call that would change his life.

Jasper sat on a park bench staring into the street. He wore a blue plaid full-sleeve shirt, navy blue slacks and black leather shoes with newly fortified soles, fresh with glue from that morning. His face was blank, his eyes unfocussed. His lips trembled. His new sense of purpose had been thoroughly doused with a single phone call.

The woman on the other end had asked, "What do you want to do with your life?"

Without thinking, he'd replied, "I want to refer. It's always been my dream." To cover his bases, he'd added, "And deliver. I've always wanted to deliver."

A silence had followed. He'd waited seemingly forever with his new sense of purpose gasping for air in the silence until he'd begun to lose patience. "Why did you ask that?"

"I beg your pardon?"

That did it. He'd heard that line before...too many times before. "Why did you ask me that stupid fucking question?"

At the exact instant that he'd realized that was the wrong answer, there was a click at the other end. The call was over. His new sense of purpose fizzled. He'd hung up the phone and stared at it for several minutes before trudging down the street to the park bench.

It was a bright sunny day and passersby were animated in the brisk sidewalk traffic. He wanted to kill them all but his hand was still recovering from killing the computer monitor. He wanted to tell them to shut the hell up...there was nothing to be so happy about. He wanted to stick his foot out and trip them. He wanted to sink into the bench and disappear from the face of the planet. Or maybe he could just stand up and walk into the street as a bus passed. But he wasn't ready to die.

And he wasn't ready to live.