

Chagrin

(c) 2005

almost a novel, but fate had different ideas

written as Gaud Rockefeller
by Eddie Corona

part of the Brick Jayne universe

CHAGRIN, P 6... REAPER, P 7

12/19/2025

Note: All Gaud Rockefeller novels have been uploaded to the internet:

— ZoToN	(c) 2003
— Title	(c) 2004
— Anguish	(c) 2006
— Trampled	(c) 2007
— Exacerbation	(c) 2008
— Annihilation	(c) 2009

I made them available at Scribd and I physically printed them at Lulu. I wrote a book a year from 2003 until 2009, but you'll notice a gap at 2005. I was taking a business law class in the autumn of that year when Katrina was ravaging Louisiana. My hard drive crashed. Whatever progress I was making on Chagrin was gone. *But not all of it!* I still had some stuff saved, but it was very little.

Chagrin still lives with me. I wonder what would've become of it if it had been finished. When I changed my pseudonym from Gaud Rockefeller to Brick Jayne in 2013, I had the idea to finish Chagrin. I wrote an introduction to it. The whole project makes me cringe, now, in a lot of ways. It was the most frustrating project I've ever been involved in. Nonetheless, it is Disclosure Day. Yes, the Epstein Files were supposed to be released in their entirety today, but the DOJ seems to be covering up for the White House. Also today? Fringe scientists claimed 3I/ATLAS was supposed to crash into Earth. If you are reading this, it didn't happen! Finally today? Avatar: Fire and Ash hit the theatres! It truly is a special day today!

In the spirit of Disclosure, though, I give you what I have of Chagrin...

— *Eddie Corona*

Introduction for Chagrin

Rain pounds outside my window. I sit here in *Phantom Studios*. I'm not much of a writer. That's okay. I'm a story-teller. Is there a difference?! I'm not sure. I tell my stories in bars and grilles. I *speak*. I get drunk. I talk for hours... and most the time, I'm not finished with my tale.

I understand there's a difference between talking crap. "Libel" is when it's in print, and "slander" is when it's spoken. What's the difference?! There was a car made by *Chevy* years ago. Make?! *Corsica/ Beretta!!* That's right!! *Motor Trend*, the magazine, went ahead and coupled the thing together when tallying sales for the year!! Why?! Basically, they're the same car except that the *Corsica* has four doors, and the *Beretta* was made with two!! Libel and slander?! Same shit!! It's ruining someone's reputation with language!!

Gaud Rockefeller, I understand, is slippin' into dementia!! I don't believe it to be true! I met the tike a couple of nights ago at a *Barnes & Noble* in Cucamonga next to a *Starbucks!!* Book-signing?! Nah! Somethin' like it, though!! He called a group of people together!! Eddie Corona, Dax Robinson, and about five others!! "Loyalists"!! His very description!! "I'm going to put *Annihilation* straight online!!" he told us. "Here's a copy!!" He handed out some three and a half floppies. I understand they're not goin' to make those anymore. "The ebook's yours!!" He coughed, and I nearly thought he was faking sickness. "I don't *want* it no more!!" he said. The guy's great. I mean, I read five of

the books straight from scribd.com. Proper English. I know the guy knows proper English, but he spoke like a character from his novels. "Party 'til the cows come home, *Eddie*," he told one of the guys. "Dax... You're a whore, but the best whore I've ever been around!!" He coughed a little more, then I realized there was something real to it. "The government won," he uttered. He sat on one of those wire chairs. "I beat 'em... *in my mind*, and in my books!!" He shook his head. "I look up at night an' I see the coptors!!" A tear fell down his left cheek. "Back in the day, I knew when they were screwin' with me!!" He looked up. In the distance, a helicopter flew near the southern horizon. "I curse the fuckers!! Is there a criminal in my neighborhood?! Are they screwin' with my head 'cause the stuff I write?!"

The night went on and I think the guy needed to vent more than anything else. The *Patriot Act* really mashed his thinkin', and waterboardin' scared him a bit. I thought he was paranoid, yes... *but the era we're coming from...*

I'm going to edit. I finished that night knowing that *Ellis DeAngelo* doesn't have what it takes. She didn't show. She was the only one the *Gaud* truly missed not being there. A couple of other "fans" said they'd show... but I didn't see 'em. Maybe there were afraid to approach. The guy can be intimidating when he's on a role. Maybe they showed to the coffee house and watched us from a distance. These're the "internet people" whom depict themselves through cartoon avatars. I volunteered, though.

I rebuilt an engine, years ago. Did I know I could do it?! Yes!! No different than you know you can bake a cake or make cookies... if ya' really tried and followed instructions. I can edit *Chagrin*. I'll do *Annihilation* as well!! Then I'm going to write some books of my own!!

Bold statement from a guy that's never done such thing!?

I was born in Tuscon, Arizona--just *outside* of Tuscon, actually--at the tail end of the sixties. I rode dirt bikes, hiked high hills, and walked countless miles in arid heat. I can do what I want to do. When I set my mind to it?! Nah. *More*. Any time.

This book, *Chagrin*... I've been told a few things about it. It was written in 2005. Gaud printed two copies, but I heard another story that there are three. Logistics aside, the only copies in circulation are not edited a bit... and Eddie Corona had a copy... *or two*. His buddy "Flipshaw" was dyin' on a hospital bed not far from where I'm at in Southern California. Liver. *Pancreas*. That sorta thing. Eddie edited as much of *Chagrin* as he could by hand.

There were a lot of people comin' and goin' around us at *Starbucks*. "Flipshaw" I know is not the guy's real name... but I didn't take notes by paper and pen, and only a fool would've filmed Gaud with a camera phone. My memory? This is as good as I can to. I'll continue...

Eddie made notes, but *Ellis DeAngelo* had been Gaud's unofficial editor!! She didn't show the other night, or else she might've been given duties to get *Chagrin* done. If I recall correctly, she SAID she was going to do it but blew Gaud off. So Eddie's makin' these mental notes of where the story ought to go, but the stage was so raw that he couldn't make out the story line. As a matter of fact, I want to believe it was incomplete in sections. Gaud said the story was supposed to be about a carnie whom aspired to be an entertainer. Then he wrote a back story to the guy, put it at the front, and the guy was goin' to be a writer. Then Gaud figures, *I'll interject some incomplete fiction I've written for effect...* THEN...

...the hard drive crashes...

That much I know. That much is concrete in my head. Before insertions could be made between chapters, the frickin' drive screeches to a halt and there were no backups made on disk of any kind.

Okay. I have the fucker. I have both, as a matter of fact. The drive has been taken to a couple of local computer fix-its, but it's gone to the point of... *Only an expert can repair it.* Two such outfits exist in Souther Cal, to the best of my knowledge, and one's in Irvine. Why Gaud didn't take it there off the bat is beyond me. These guys are like surgeons, I'm told. They fix the drive in a dust-free room with masks and gloves. If any spec falls on the unit, it's no longer of any use and all data's gone forever. Maybe Gaud was afraid of heinous failure.

The "in between" story was told to Eddie. Notes're still in the book. I'm scrappin' the shit. I'll take as much as I know from what they told. I'll be true to the spirit of the fiction as it was explained to me. *But?* If I get anything wrong? I'm sorry!! It's worth it, though!! There's a story there.

I look forward to engaging you as a crowd. Gaud wrote his own introduction... and he usually writes one before each book. The introduction I've been given is incomplete. Talks about Disneyland and some nutty dude... but... a promise has been made!! Gaud, for whatever reason, has decided to step aside for a while. There is a void. There is a collective mental void!! I read a few Gaud Rockefeller books, I waited for *Chagrin* to be released to the public, and now I realize it won't happen without my work. "*Annihilation* is already online," I remember telling Gaud the other night.

"No it's *not*, smarty!!" He huffed. "That piece of shit that you read is a raw shell of what's supposed to be!!" He reached into leather bag which resembled a seventies larger purse. I chuckled. "*THIS!!*" he yelled. Unbound. No paper clip. Some pages facin' opposite direction of others. Some pages were orange, some powder blue, others white, and some canary yellow. "Fuckin' GET THIS DONE, ass wipe!!!" he yelled at me. I felt warm inside... *and proud.* It was like gettin' chewed

out by Bill Parcels. "YOU KNOW SOOO MUCH!!!" He plopped the pile in front of me. "*It Ain't Like That Anymore* is supposed to be the Alice In Chains song!!" He sniffed, not because of holding back tears. That's what I would've thought. Clear snot started running toward his lip. "*Love, Hate, Love... bitch!!*" He sniffled again, then Eddie handed him a napkin. "Changes the whole dynamic of the novel!! Do ya' know what a bass line is, *FUCKER!?*" He cried. "Olivia Newton- John's song sounds like *It Ain't Like That Any More.*" He wiped his snot and tear. "Changes the whole fuckin' thing... and I have typos, of course!!"

"Yes sir!!" I felt proud, and I dared not ask him why he didn't do it himself.

"You'll hear from me again!!" Gaud waited until I tucked the writing into my backpack. He began to speak about the forties and fifties. He talked about how big band music made way to rock 'n' roll. He spoke, and I wanted him to write.

I'll finish the story. There were a couple of other things in the *Annihilation* book that didn't compute in his head. I'll do my best to take that 'un from "raw" to "finished"... and I won't mind being called to the production of "Anguish" as it eventually becomes a full-length movie.

"*Back burner,*" Gaud said. As he wrapped up the discussion at the Cucamonga plaza he said, "Now *I'm* getting burned!! Time is consuming me!!!" We looked around at one another, wanting to know if this was all. At last, Gaud got up and walked to his car midway through the parking lot. I waited for him to turn around to say "good-bye" or "thanks" but he slinked farther and farther away. Eddie said, "He'll die if you don't finish that story!!"

"Have a good one, *Gaud!!*" I called to him when I realized he had nothin' more to add. I felt corny. I ran twenty feet toward his car. He raised his left hand to us but did not turn around. He got in his car, an eighties *Buick* from the looks of it, and sped away.

Chagrin is before you. I write this before the true editing has begun. A fire in the pit of my gut. *Annihilation* will advance beyond its raw stage. *Gaud Rockefeller's* given work that I'll remember. He was no Stephen Coontz, but he was a decent guy.

-- *Brick Jayne*

Chagrin

- this was a work in progress in 2005
when my hard drive crashed
- it was started as a Gaud Rockefeller novel,
and it's been largely cited in the years following 2005
- perhaps fate will have it completed,
though much of the content has been forever lost

“Winter is here again, oh Lord!” Ambrose shouted into the cool, breezy air.

“I know what you’re talking about,” Hilda responded. “I can’t *stand* this shit,” she muttered. She cried into thin frost, “I was your *lover!*”

“Huh? Are you even talking to me?” Ambrose mused. He gazed into the sky and could faintly see the Southern Cross through chops of distant ice as they whizzed across the underbelly of the sky.

Hilda broke down into tears. “I don’t know what to do.”

“I think you’ve been cheating on me!” Ambrose said. He wasn’t serious. “Do you know the Antarctic has ghosts?”

Hilda returned into the isolated quarters to get away from the cold, both from Ambrose and the chilly outside. She headed toward their computers, shook her head in a form of disbelief, then muttered some more things that Ambrose could not hear. “I’m going crazy, you know?” she asked Ambrose when he finally joined her a few seconds later. She wasn’t sincere. Ambrose didn’t mind. He headed toward their kitchen. “*Coffee?*” she wondered. “I’ll take some too.”

Ambrose headed toward the kitchen. Hilda didn’t know if she was heard. A minute later, Ambrose returned with a cracked pot. “Did you forget to put water in it or turn it off?”

“Please *stop*,” she said to him after getting off of her office chair.

“I appreciate that you care for me. I’d appreciate it even more if you wouldn’t *mock* me by saying that I was your *lover!*”

“You don’t *know*. You really don’t *know!*”

Ambrose and Hilda had been sent on a six-month expedition to the South Pole, as many people would call it. “I don’t know what?” Hilda left him. “I ate you *out* one night! Does that count as being my *lover!?*”

* * *

“I remember thinkin’ that I love you!?” Ambrose’s face was blue. White powder on his brown jacket.
“Close that fuckin’ door!?”

Hilda pulled at Ambrose’s legs. “*Stupid!*?” She dusted off frost from his legs. “*Whiskey!*?” She pulled at his ankles knowing she didn’t have the strength to move him. “Fucker!! Get up, Ambrose!!!” She pinched his jaw like a loving aunt. “Get *UUUP!*?”

“Penguins treat me much better than YOU!?” Ambrose rolled toward Hilda. She let him roll a few times like a child. She yanked at the door which had a few inches of snow at its base.

“Isn’t my name somethin’ else?!” Ambrose asked. “Like, ya’ know the song where George Thorogood’s drinking with Jack and his buddy, *Wiser!*?”

“You sound like a *dick!*?” She brushed off more frost from his pants and jacket. “I have rations for you!?”

“We’re going to get left behind!?” Ambrose said. “*The storm is just the beginning of it!*! They don’t like us, Hilda!?” She smiled at him. Whiskey was on his breath. “Or is your name... *TIFFANY!??*?”

“Bitch, I’ve gone through this too many times with you!?” Hilda stroked at penis over his pants a few times as she dusted away the whiteness brought from outside. “If ya’ ask too many questions, we’re going to role-play, then your going to be mad when I tell you I have another lover!?”

“*Another LOVER!*?” Ambrose demanded. But he’d been through it before. “Another LOOOOVER!!!” He looked around at electronic equipment. Temperature gauges. Barometers. Communications microphones. “Yeah!?” And Hilda brushed the snow off his shoes. “My shoes, Hilda, I can do myself!?”

Ambrose ran to the restroom. She got him erect. Ambrose liked to yell at her and blame her for crap that his mother had done. He hated women. He felt powerless. Hilda learned the trick the last time he had gotten drunk. Help him clean up, and accidentally turn the valve. There’s a pressure relief inside men. She knew where it was. Ya’ stroke the outside of the zipper a few times when there’s snow there. If ya’ go straight to it, it sets off alarms. But whiskey, plus diversion of speech, plus subtlety led to the same thing: Ambrose ran for a shower. His libido gone.

* * *

(from Reaper)

“The girl is special!?” John said Walt. “She won this contest, right?!”

“*The TV Show!*?” Walt bellowed. “‘Majority Rules’ the name of it!?”

“Hundred thousand bucks, she won!?” John said. He looked down at muddy carpet and thought

one of them should be vacuuming. “She’s really good in bed, you know?!” He looked at Walt. “I mean... that’s why I got together with her was ‘cause I was tired of fuckin’ my hand!?” He wanted to laugh but continued with the game show story instead. “The program is set up so that ya’ have to think like everyone else!! It’s like ‘Weakest Link’ in a lot of ways but it rewards dumb people too much!?”

“‘Jaywalk Allstars’!! You said they reminded ya’ of the ‘Jaywalk Allstars’!?”

“These questions aren’t easy, though!! I mean, my girlfriend’s nineteen!! Why is she supposed to know who Manute Bol is!? They asked, ‘Who is taller? Shaquille O’ Neal or Manute Bol!?’ You know the rules!! If you’re in the majority, you gain the number of points of the people that agreed with you!! If you’re in the minority, you as many points of how many people buzzed in as minority!! Game starts with eleven, then nine, then seven, then two!! Second round, points are doubled... Third round, they’re tripled!! Final round is ten questions judged against a national survey!?”

“She gained eight points for the final question of the first round!! And the girl to the left of her... *who answered the question correctly*, I might add... lost three points and missed the cut!! So ignorance is rewarded!?” Walt shook his head. He took a wiff of the room. *Rotten beer*, he thought. “Hundred thousand ya’ said?!”

“You’re missing the point!! She’s not *stupid*!! There’s too much to know out there!! And there is strategy, believe it or not!?” John stood up and flicked a beige wall switch upward. No light. “You knew to come here how?! You knew it was safe!! No homeless vagrants!! In your bones!!” There was still daylight outside. John’s mind had a lot of doubts. He thought, by magic or chance, the light would turn on after the tenth time trying it. “*People have instincts*, Walt!?” He looked to the kitchen. “I knew there’d be beer cans in there!! Why?! I could just imagine it!?”

“You said she knew when people were going to lie on purpose!?” Walt wanted a beer. The place reeked of it, and John was right: There were *a lot* of cans when they came in.

“Round two, Joyce knew what to do!! Lincoln was president before Jefferson!! She knew the answer!! I know she knew the answer!?” He looked at Walt and knew he was losing interest in the discussion. “Six points gained instead of three points lost!! Head bobs!! Fidgety smiles!! Gleams in the eye!! She could tell people were goin’ to tank the answer and ‘play dim’!?”

“*Four points*!! She would’ve lost four points because she would’ve contributed to an additional minority buzz in!?”

“*Smart guy*!! I’m saying that I have a rich girlfriend, now, ‘cause she has some mean ass instincts!?” John looked around. He wanted a beer just as much as Bob. He would have to wait. “And in the third round half the questions are *opinion-based*!! ‘Is George Clooney hotter than Taylor Lautner’?! What kind of crap is that?! Ya’ just have to know what most people are going to say!?”

“It’s not fair!?” Walt said. “*That’s our world now*!! ‘Is nuclear energy better than solar energy’?! One leaves a mess for years on end and the other... Ah!! It’s no time to get political, but...”

“I know!?” John said. “No one cares about science or facts any more!?” He walked to Walt.

“Let’s get some beer!!”

Walt smiled. “Today’s our last day of being homeless!!”

“A box!!” John said. “She shaved it like a box!!” He became nervous. “I think she might leave me!! I would!! She’s rich... and she has no obligation to me!!”

“You’re her first love!!” Walt said. “You fought her enemies before she was on that game show!!” He peered through a boarded up window. “It’s gettin’ darker by the minute!!”

“Do you think the strangler is out there?!” John sat down on a creaky wooden floor with his back to the wall. “The *news*!! I never pay attention to the NEWS!! But I felt that danger!! Have you ever felt that *danger* in your bones?!”

“We’re about to get to paradise!! Well, it’s not paradise, but an apartment is a lot better than finding sheltering bridges and vacant warehouses!!” Walt reached his hand toward John. He pulled him up. “*Beer*!! Not FEAR!!”

“I’ll miss it!! I had adventure these last six months!! The futile job-hunting!! The arguments with friends and family!! The corny tales from nuts we’ve come across!!” John opened the door for Walt and let him out first. “I have a buck thirty left!! With your two dollars, we can split a forty of *fine* malt liquor!!”

“Keep your bat close to your chest!! We’re going to practice ball if any looney tune cop decides to ask!!” Walt laughed. “On second though, just drop the thing and *run*!!”

“Our last day of *TRUE* freedom and I’m afraid of some purported murderer that’s roaming our neighborhood!!”

“*Toss the bat*!!” Walt punched John in the shoulder after John whizzed a twenty-nine-inch Louisville Slugger toward deep shrubs. “We’ll have to get by on luck or cunning today!!”

* * *

John and Walt woke up at ten in the morning to the sound of loud thuds on the front door. “*Joyce*?” John asked Walt. “Do ya’ think it’s her?! She’s not supposed to be here ‘til noon!!”

“Rachel!!” Walt said. “I slipped out last night after you went to sleep!! Spent our last thirty-five cents to call ‘er!!” Walt opened the front door. They had both slept on the living room floor. The place still smelled of foul stench. “It’s a pleasure to see you!!”

“Here’s the sixty you asked for!!” Rachel Levy hugged Walt Sawyer. “Joyce won’t be able to make it at all, today!!” she said. “Apartment hunting!!”

John Rust rubbed his eyes. “We found out some more about that killer last night!!”

“Yeah?!” Rachel was interested. She kissed Walt then turned her attention to John. “Speak on!!”

“*Reaper*!!” John said. He looked down at the forty of Mickey’s he had shared with Walt. A half inch of flat backwash was all that was left. “On the streets, they say he’s a mercenary!!”

“*She!*” Rachel contested. “I heard it’s a six-foot tall woman!! Thirty-ish!! Husky!!”

“Okay!” John swatted a few house flies scurrying near his face. “Doesn’t matter!! The people on the streets near *Pete’s Liquor* say it’s the way it used to be!! Pacoima, California is no Athens, Greece but ‘back in the day’ people used to be banished instead of jailed. *Reapers* weren’t ghosts as we have ‘em in our myths. They were actual people!! The would wander outside of the city to find people barely hanging on to life!! Sometimes, they would show mercy and let a strong person live. The tale of a list on a scroll is real enough. If ya’ were weak or had done something horrendous, ya’ got the sickle!! Black hood!! Real!!”

“So this strangler?! Ya’ think he’s a copycat of an anciet-yet-forgotten part of our *world*?” Rachel asked.

“*Copycat*?! That’s interesting that you asked that!! We had that conversation while we drank up last night!! Not a copycat!! Psyched out!! Living the part!!” John wanted to ask Walt for a twenty so he could run to the store for a twelve pack.

“*Yeah*!! But it goes both ways!!” Walt said. “Superman had already been out as a comic book hero for a full generation when Immortal started to walk the streets in this town!!”

“Same people told ya’ this as *Reaper*?!” Rachel asked.

“*Yeah*!” Walt smiled. “They were drunk and we wanted to *be* drunk!!”

John continued for Walt, “Some kid grows up—*black kid*—reads Superman his whole life... and believes he needs to be a hero!! Immortal!! That’s the guy’s name!! Six-four by the time he’s an adult and locals say he stopped about five or six crimes during the course of his life!!”

Walt laughed. “The guy figured he’d be like Jason Voohees but as a good guy!! He figured that when he actually died, someone’d remember him!!”

“*Immortal*, ya’ see?!” John told Rachel. “In the seventies, a five-nine guy comes and catches a few burglars and maims a bank robber!! Fucked up his shin with a crowbar!!”

“And now he’s back?! Is that your point?!” Rachel asked. “Sounds silly... but it makes for chitchat!!”

“*Yeah*!” John smirked. “*One* sighting is what they said!! He’s going to catch *Reaper*!!” John became embarrassed that Rachel hid her face in her hands. “Okay!! The first Immortal, though... *knew Ritchie Valens*!!”

“I’ll give ya’ another twenty,” Rachel said. “Get drunk!! Stay here!! Keep your stories up!! Anything to get by ‘til tomorrow!! Joyce is gonna have an apartment for the four of us!!”

Walt blushed. “You think we’re stupid for believing it might be true!!” His cheeks were bright pink. “Why do I have to believe rumors from *THE NEWS* that a strangler is out and about... but I can’t entertain that protector is on the people’s side?! *Besides the police, I mean*!!”

“You’ll get on internet when we’re living together,” Rachel told Walt. “You’re sounding like you’ve been on a deserted island for a few years!! You’ll get rooted in *reality* when ya’ have a TV and

computer!!”

“I’m not stupid!!” Walt said. He changed his tone. He did not want to offend Rachel at this point and blow chances at better things. “The news wouldn’t touch these stories... *and that’s okay...* but ya’ve gotta believe there’s more to it than what they report nightly in a fifteen-second piece!!”

“Okay!!” Rachel said. She squeezed Walt. “Fair enough!! That sounds like a smart way of lookin’ at things!!”

“When we get to an apartment, I *swear* I’ll work hard enough to get us in a house within a year’s time!! I can’t stand living this way for much longer!!”

“It’s funny... ‘cause he was telling me that he’ll miss this way of life... *just last night!*!” John said.

Rachel and Walt laughed. They walked to *Pete’s Liquor* together and bought an eighteen pack of the cheapest beer available. Rachel took off on her own after that and Walt returned to the abandoned home with John. They drank their beer in a matter of a couple of hours and talked into the night. Joyce came the next morning with some more cash and updated the apartment situation.

* * *

“The apartment situation is that there *is* no situation!!” Joyce Mills was energetic. “A couple of blocks from here, there’s a home for sale...”

“*You said no homes,*” John cut in.

“*Rented!*!” Joyce said. Walt was finally picking himself up from the ground. “I’m renting... but I talked to the landlord and he’s *selling!*!”

“Fifty thousand dollars!!” John said. “After taxes and paying a money company a service fee, ya’ have fifty thousand!! And paying off two credit cards!!”

“Bean stalk, kid!!” Joyce said. “You know better than to let me buy *anything* by myself!! I had to have it!!”

“Is it that *haunted* house that we passed by last week?!” John asked. “You had a look in your eye when we saw it!!”

“Haunted?!” Joyce looked to the cobwebs above them. “Old house!! It has a cellar!! For your *Reaper* character!! Rachel told me that you’re going to revive the Immortal character and *catch* the son-of-a-bitch!! You’ll have a dungeon to put ‘im in!!”

“*The place looked spooky,*” John said. He looked up at the cobwebs that Joyce was still scanning. “Yeah, I guess this shit hole isn’t much to look at!! Maybe I don’t know what I’m talking about!!”

“I signed a three-month lease!!” Joyce said. “We’ll have to wait for things to go through escrow... and that kind of stuff!!”

“I think we’ll be more comfortable in a *home,*” Walt said. “We were talking about catching the *Reaper* last night—*yeah*—but that was after we became convinced he doesn’t exist!!”

“Speaking of *capturing* people...” John swiped at the webs above his head. “Did ya’ know that they did it all the time in the nineteenth century?! Asylum, I mean!! Innocent people locked up for years without having done anything wrong!! They say sanitariums are jails for the rich... but the jist I got was that somewhere between the wild west and the Atlantic coast, a struggle for civility existed!! Some wanted to roam around like hippies of their time!! Others tried for an immaculate world and wanted to sweep oddballs out of the public eye!!”

“Your point?!” Joyce asked.

“They’re still doin’ it... *is all!*!” John took a wiff of the place. “I’ve been down-and-out!! I’ve been poor for the past few months!! I could feel it when I want to stores!! That they wanted to grab me and throw me in a padded room or a jail!!”

“And ya’ did nothin’ wrong?!” Joyce coaxed. She giggled.

“*Nothin’!*!” He rubbed his forehead with his wrist and left behind a thick dusty trail above his brow. “I drink beer and keep to myself!! What makes me different than a doctor drinkin’ wine?!”

“And ya’ thought it could happen!! On your last day where ya’ have to live like a bottom dweller, ya’ thought ya’ could get picked up!!” Joyce laughed some more.

“I’ll be grateful when I’m in a room of my own!!” He wanted to hold Joyce... but he had a stronger urge to get out of the dingy place he and Walt had made their own. “*Let’s go!*!”

By six thirty in the evening that day, Joyce Mills, Rachel Levy, John Rust and Walt Sawyer were settled in to their new home. Temporarily, they used green and black fold up lawn chairs for furniture. Each of the two bedrooms had a mattress but no bed frame. They ate Chinese take out.

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