

### *The Fat Man Reads*

The fat man sat slouched between two cushions on his couch, cemented in front of the television as the microwave hummed its dull tune. One couldn't be faulted if they thought him a permanent installation inside his own home. He embodied a certain statuesqueness that the modern art world would find delectable. He resisted the urge to pick at his newest tattoo — Calvin & Hobbes embracing in front of a blood red brick wall. Littered across his arm, hidden between the cracks of the brick wall were symbols of anarchy, a message against the oppressive state, and a signal to the trustworthy that he could be trusted. A hammer & sickle, the black-eyed cardinal, and the pitch-forked tail of a devil.

He downed the remaining scotch in the glass before him. Two cubes that'd long since melted. He'd re-up when the timer beeped. Words sought to form from his mouth but he worried at who might be listening. Why would they be listening? He hadn't spoken a word for nearly two days, there wasn't cause to, but he considered that this behavior might be odd — that saying nothing might be just as bad as saying the wrong thing. Shifting his weight, he lurched forward and picked up the book from his coffee table.

*A Biography of Cesar Chavez* by The Cardinal Collective. Going to the library at all was a risky move, but not near as dangerous as borrowing a book about one of the world's most efficient organizers. Still, the fat man believed, that a world without books is a world without meaning. So it was that, two days prior, he traipsed down to the local library and decidedly put his life on the line.

He'd waited and read. At any moment he might hear the stampeding of footsteps outside his apartment, the furious knocking on the door before the inevitable kick-in. Or worse, he thought. A lone ring of the doorbell, echoing through his apartment and reverberating in his skull. As it happened, no such cavalcade of noise came about. Only the three beeps from the microwave indicating dinner was ready.

The fat man sat up from the couch. He grabbed his glass and wandered into the kitchen.

The microwave door swung open and inside the boiling tarpit that was a four cheese lasagna caused his stomach to rumble with desire. He reached for it and pulled it out. He cupped in his large, brown hands the thin cardboard case before the heat from its radiation overwhelmed him. He dropped the lasagna to the floor with a holler.

It landed neatly on the floor, spraying a small portion of mariner on the surrounding white cupboards, but otherwise unspoiled. He ran his hands under cold water. *Fuck*, he thought.

*Fuck*. Now that's a word. Nobody used fuck anymore. The world was too good, too pure for a word so unendingly linked to exasperation and despair. He felt weird just thinking it. He was despairing, though, so it only made sense to think it. So he thought it some more. *Fuck*. *Fuck*. *Fuck fuck fuck*. It sounded as though a song as he bounced his back and forth across his mind.

Then, the doorbell rang.

His fear seized him as the echo played across his 905 square foot apartment. He grabbed at the bottle of Glenlivet only to discover he had long ago drained it of its contents. How was that possible. He'd purchased it on his way home from the library two days ago. That's when he considered how foolish he had been.

How like a scholar he must've looked. A book in one hand, a bottle of scotch in the other. Scholars were dangerous, allowed only to remain because of their ability to transform the minds of the radical into machines for the state.

Then the knocking began. The fat man began to shake. His fear was overwhelming. He'd begun to pray, silently. *Please. All I want is to finish this book. Please. Just let me finish this book*. Life couldn't end if something was left incomplete, surely. Then he was reminded that that's the only way life ends — incomplete.

He meandered to the door.