

Something Ugly

Alan W. Mills

You are sitting outside a coffee house, at a small plastic table, on the patio, on the street corner, near a place people call Vaseline Alley. Your name is Justin and you're drinking Nutty Doodle coffee (it's one of the specialties around here). You're wearing clothes that you've just washed, but they could still be called grungy only because your oversized jeans are completely shredded and your green shirt has faded into a color that might be jade.

Despite how specific all the details are, you're still only words. You're a collection of words, but you must understand, people are watching you. You're Justin now, and even though no one at the coffee house is paying attention to you, everyone is watching. They're not watching you, they're watching the words you have become. If you do not like this, if this bothers you, you should stop simply being words.

You're Justin and you're sitting outside a coffee house and, in case it hasn't already been mentioned, you're completely fucked up. You've been drinking. You've been smoking pot. You've been doing crystal. Of course, you've been doing crystal. You always do crystal, if you have a choice.

You're the reader now, and you're completely fucked up because you don't know how to be fucked up but you are because the words are telling you that you are. You're on crystal, so try reading faster. Pace a little. Grind your teeth. Open your eyes, nice and wide and try not seeing anything. Don't stop looking so that you won't have enough time to focus your vision on any single object. Think of your perception as being Cubist. See everything from every angle until what you were attempting to perceive has become distorted and abstract, until what you are looking at becomes a masterpiece of art. This is the crystal and this is the vodka and beer, not to mention the pot. A lot of this is the pot.

You sit in the coffee house with a sense of pride. You've washed all your clothes, not all your clothes, but all the clothes you have with you. You've washed all your clothes and you've folded all your clothes because you were fucked up and had to do something. You folded your clothes and inserted them neatly into your backpack. The backpack's in your car, your Toyota MR2. You still have a car because you don't feel like wandering the streets today. Today, you want to be normal. You want to be recognized and acknowledged. You want to be real. However, no one is paying attention to you, but you like that; you like it when no pays attention to you. But, remember, you're words, and you're always being watched.

You're the writer now and you're thinking that everything seems too linear right now. You've extended a single moment for as long as you can, and despite the fact that

nothing has even occurred yet, you're feeling like a linear progression is taking over. You're trying to avoid that because a linear progression implies a quality of time. You're resisting time because the next moment is an ugly moment and you're trying to fight it. You want to disrupt the temporality in order to avoid the next moment. You're going to disrupt the temporality in order to avoid the next moment. You're going to keep repeating yourself in order to avoid the next moment.

You've decided to wander the streets today. You're going to become homeless again. You fill your little gray/matter backpack. You close the door reverently. You walk away from your mother's life and you board a bus to L.A..

(Ellipse)

You step off the bus and you're a street person now. You're impoverished and you're a hustler and you're loaded on Crystal or coke or special K. You enjoy the moment you step out onto the street. All of this is an ocean to you and when you walk out into it, you are a small thing. You are a thing without an identity, without value, without importance. No one knows you. No one wants to know you. You can drift now. You can float through the moments now and enjoy the excitement when a mugger jostles you and takes the few hundred you sold your ass for last night. Understand though, you don't mind. You don't need the money. You only sold your ass last night to see what it was like.

Imagine you are the street. You are the people and the violence. You are the sounds and vapors rising off the asphalt. You are the pungent smell of this alley's gutter and the awareness that the citizens don't look at your people because they see your people as they walk past. You are this sea of experience and horror. You are intoxicating. Lost children are addicted to you and you love it.

You're sitting at the coffee house and when the two cops on bicycles stop in front of you, you look up lackadaisically because you know better and because you really don't care.

You are words, you are sounds. You are a series of sounds. The moment has broken down and you are of flood of different sounds. "Faggot Why are your Faggot Go fuck yourselves Eyes so glazed Faggot Is this your Faggot Pigs Faggot Blow me Faggot Open the Faggot Car Faggot Eat Shit Faggot Where do you Faggot Trunk Faggot Live Faggot Suck my cock you fucking pigs Faggot Is this your Faggot Bag Pig Can I look Faggot Inside Faggot You already did Pig No I didn't Faggot Yes you did Pig Inside Faggot Inside Faggot Inside Faggot Faggot Can I look inside Faggot Yes but Pig you already did Pig Faggot Fucking pig Faggot Is this yours Faggot Yes Pig Is this yours Faggot Yes Pig Is this yours Faggot Yes Pig Is this yours Faggot No Pig I've never seen that before Pig Yeah right Faggot Yeah right Faggot You have the right Faggot What rights Faggot Faggot Faggot To Faggot Remain silent Faggot Remain silent."

You're sitting on the curb next to your MR2. A cop is talking to you while the other scavenges through your trunk. You can't see him, but you can hear him going through your neatly packed bag. When he comes around the car with your backpack in hand, you're not surprised to see all your newly washed clothes chaotic hanging out of it. You know what's going on but it's not like you called them pigs or anything. You didn't call them pigs and didn't tell them to go fuck themselves. They called you faggot, you didn't call them pigs.

You're a single word. You are the word faggot. You are a death threat. You refer to the act of burning medieval homosexuals alive. You signify that homosexuals should be burned to death as if they were kindling. That's what faggots are, kindling. When you are used, you are used to threaten. When you are used, you should be retaliated against. When a homosexual is threatened, he should defend himself.

Justin, You know what's going on but there's nothing you can do but play along and make silence into your uneasy friend.

(Pause, edit, insert sound).

When you were a little boy, you used to ride in the rodeo. It was a children's rodeo and you'd ride ponies and rope sheep, you'd wear your tiny straw hat and laugh when it hit the dirt as some small calf knocked you off its back. You still have pictures. Your mom still has pictures.

(Fade sound out, quick cut to scene outside coffee-house.)

He pulls your clothes out a piece at a time and drops them to the ground. He asks you if each piece belongs to you. You say yes every time. He pulls out your make-up bag and asks what it's for. You don't feel like saying that you're a performer. You don't feel like telling the pig that your first single is doing well in Europe. You tell him it's your make-up bag and that you like wearing make-up. He asks you why and you tell him that you're completely made up right now. Neither of them believe you. You say that you're real good and could make yourself look better than their wives if you wanted to.

You are the law, and according to you, it is illegal to threaten the life of a police officer. According to the law, a threatened police officer may do whatever is necessary to protect his own life as well as the lives of innocent citizens.

He knocks you down on to the street and twists your arm behind your back. The asphalt scratches your cheek as some part of him presses down against your back. It doesn't stop you. You still say that if either of them needs tips, you be glad to help. You don't get an answer. The cop with your bag pulls out a shirt and asks if it is yours.

You are the person this story is about. You're telling me this story and you stop the tale to say, "I'm not crying victim or anything, because I knew that I deserved it. I was

fucked up and there've been so many times I've gotten away with shit when I shouldn't have. This was totally my karma. I think I needed it."

He pulls out a gray/matter case for glasses. He asks if it is yours. You say no. You say you've never seen it before. You say the truth. You say you don't even wear glasses, forgetting about the sunglasses that were sitting on your head.

You're the reader now and there's no surprise about what's coming next. You wish the writer would just get to the point, but this isn't about the point. This is about the writer not wanting to get to the point. This is about the writer being afraid of the climax, but this isn't the climax. The climax comes later. This isn't the inciting incident. The inciting incident occurred before this story was even written.

He opens up the case and reveals a rather large bag of coke or crystal. It really isn't a big bag at all, it's just that even though it's a small bag, there's a lot of coke or whatever inside it. There's not a lot of powder in it, but it's full and worth about eighty bucks, if it's crystal. It's probably crystal.

(Curtain closes. Curtain opens. Scene II)

You're asleep now. Maybe a month has passed. You're on parole now and you have an "intervention" meeting tomorrow morning. That's why you're sleeping here at David's house. David's a dealer, but he's also your only friend. Besides, he lives two blocks from where you need to go and that's important considering you no longer have your MR2.

You're in the living room right now, but you're not Justin. Justin is asleep in the bedroom. You're in the living room but you're not really anybody. You're the third person and you're in the living room watching addict after addict walking in through David's front door. There's fourteen of them and they're having a party which Justin thinks is just a dream. There having a party and doing drugs and you're the third person who's always invited but you never get to do anything because people are watching. You can see the living room and you can see outside the living room. The people having the party don't know what you know. They don't know about the cops waiting outside the door.

There's a loud thud on the bed and you wake up to a room full of cops. You know what's going on but you can't let the opportunity go by. You ask if everybody's having a neighborhood watch meeting. You think it's funny. They don't, and they drag you out of bed.

(Time passes like gray/matter through an hour/glass.)

You've made it to the jail. You've finally made it to the county jail. Your information is taken. They ask if you've ever had psychiatric therapy. You say no, but you think that

you'll be needing therapy real bad as soon as all this is done. Nobody laughs. Nobody laughs in jail.

(etc. etc. dot dot dot)

You've admitted to being a faggot, so you get put in isolation. Everything is taken from you so that you won't kill yourself. That's what faggots do. Faggots kill themselves. When they bring you the phone, you try to hang yourself with the cord. It seems like the right thing to do. You fail, and when a guard comes for the phone, he looks at you funny.

You're the reader again and there's something you need to know about how to read the next few sections, the next few isolation sections.

Justin is in isolation for four days. To get the full effect, take four days to read the isolation sections. This should be difficult because you're not fucked up any more. You're not on coke or speed or pot. You haven't even had a beer. Take four days to read this and don't do anything else, just read one word at a time, real, real slow.

You're in a small gray/matter cell. Everything is gray/matter and there is no one to talk to. Your clothes are gray/matter because they're getting soiled. You're wearing Calvins and a T-shirt. It's what you were arrested in. They were white, but now they're gray/matter and the walls are gray/matter and the floor is gray/matter and the stainless steel toilet bowl is gray/matter and the world outside a tiny slit is gray/matter. All you have is gray/matter. For four days, all you have is gray/matter.

(Everything's a nursery rhyme.)

You are God and you're in a cement cell with Justin. Everything around you is gray/matter. Just gray/matter, grey, grey, grey/matter, matter, matter, gray/matter. You are God surrounded by gray/matter. You are God and you don't like being in jail. You are God and you leave Justin in jail. You leave the Jail and you leave Justin alone in the jail. Everything is gray matter.

After four days, you beg the guards to let you out. You say that you lied about being gay, forgetting about the pink triangle tattooed to your shoulder. They let you out. They put you in general population. They make you shower and they give you clothes and you're grateful until you step into your crowded cell.

You are second person, present tense, and you are interactive. You are like virtual reality. You are not reality, but you are virtually like it. You are the device that permits the reader to take on the role of someone else. You're the device that is being used right now. You are interactive because you can only function to the level that the reader will permit you to function. The reader can choose to believe you and step into the offered role or the reader can choose to read the words as if they are only symbols or signifiers.

If this is the case, it doesn't matter what the signifiers state. As long as there are random symbols, this reader will be happy. As long as there is the possibility of interaction, the other reader will be happy.

You scan the room for an empty bunk that has a mattress on it. Almost all the bunks are taken. A few top bunks are empty, but their corresponding mattresses are being used on the bunks beneath them. You wander around aimlessly until a deep voice addresses you. "Here use my mattress." You turn around to see a huge black man throw a mattress pad on to the bunk springs above his own bed. You smile and walk towards him. You hear another voice. "No, take mine." You freeze. You take no more steps. A third voice says, "No! Blondy's mine." You look around at the three huge black men that surround you. You can't pick one. You know you can't pick one. You don't care who fucks you, but if you pick one, the other two will kill you.

You are a prayer. You are a prayer that, if it were spoken, would sound like, "Dear God, please let these guys decide among themselves who's bitch I am." You are a prayer coming from a person who's run out of options. You are prayer from a person who doesn't want to die like this. You are a prayer that is praying for itself, hoping that God has come back, hoping that God has come back.

After just a few minutes of subdued argument, the three black men reach a solution. One of them smiles at you as the others walk away. He's the first one who called to you and he pats the mattress above his bed. You smile and jump into it. This could get interesting, you think. This could be fun.

You are a moment in a person's life when things have to change. You are transition. You are inevitable. You occur because you must occur. You occur because God has come back to a place that He cannot stand. You are a moment that has been forged according to the will of a higher power than yourself. You are a moment that changes everything. You are a moment that brings hope and possibility and courage and strength.

(Test the sound system.)

You lay down and only five minutes pass. A guard calls your name. It's the fifth day and you've been bailed out. You say goodbye, amused by your master's disappointment. You step out of the cell with a nagging fascination. You wonder what the black guy would have felt like. You carry curiosity with you out the door, but you make one prayer again.

You pray that they don't send you to jail. You pray they give you something like rehab instead. You know you never should have entered here and you pray that you can change your life. You pray for some new chance and you pray that some higher power hears your words. You pray, you really pray that God is here, and you pray that He is listening.

(You are listening.)