

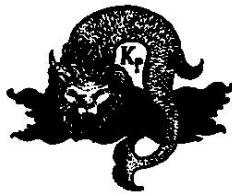
A dark, dense forest scene. A large, dark tree trunk stands prominently in the center. The ground is covered in a thick layer of fallen leaves and branches, creating a complex, textured surface. The lighting is dim, with some highlights on the branches and leaves, suggesting a misty or overcast day. The overall atmosphere is eerie and mysterious.

# ZOMBIE GIRL



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A fable by Mike Finley



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Dedicated to Daniele, with greatest love

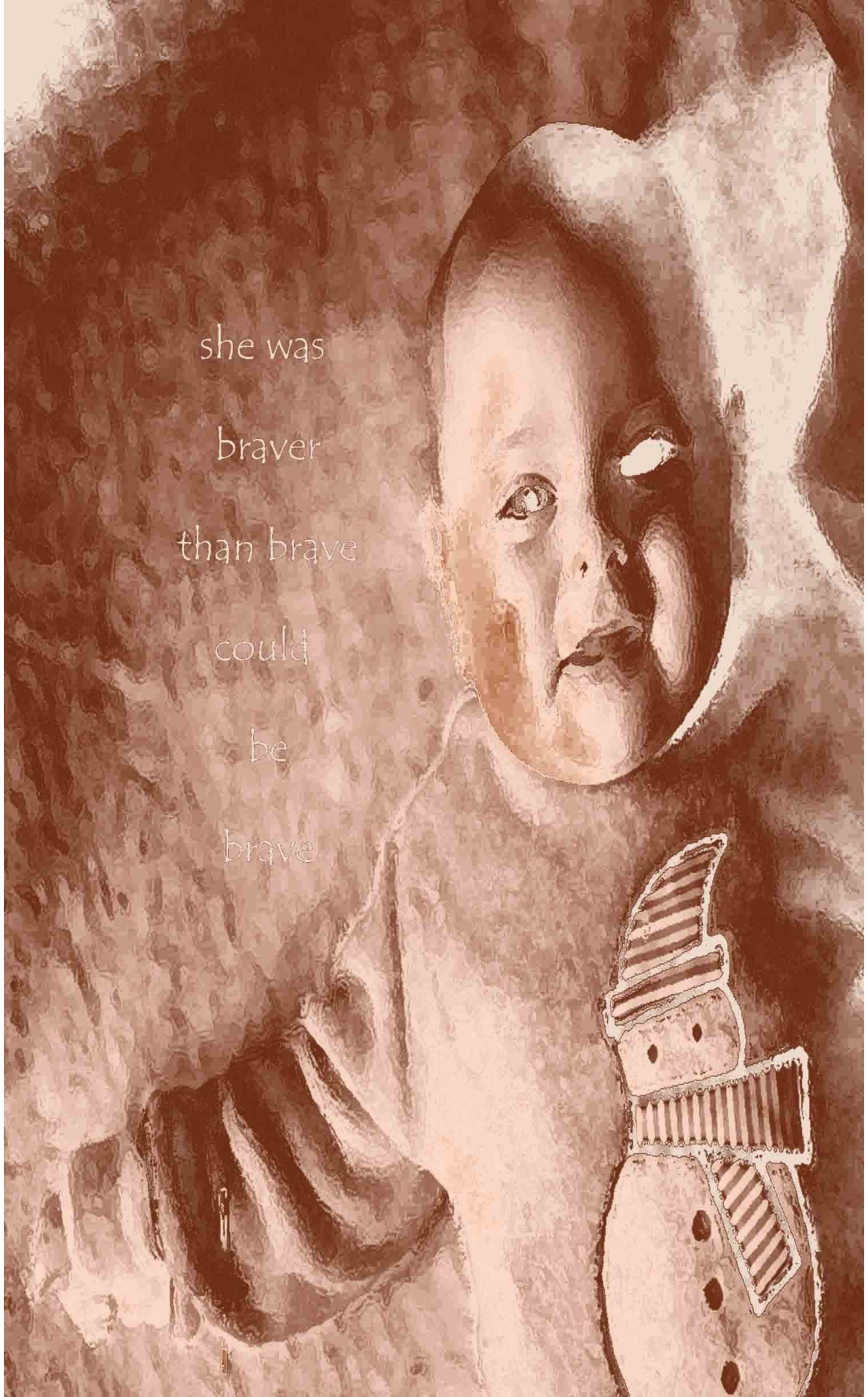
A portion of the proceeds of this project will go to  
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MISSION: To provide emergency support to young adults  
in the Twin Cities.

For more information go to  
<http://mfinley.com/daniele/robots.htm>



she was  
braver  
than brave  
could  
be  
brave



## Zombie Genetics

The zombie girl's father was a Very Smart Man and a fabulist by trade. He loved the Beautiful Zelda very much.

The two exchanged vows on vacation in the jungle state of Quintana Roo, below the Yucatan, in the ruins of the Pirate Blackbeard, who used to kidnap women and hold them prisoner on an island there. It was an exotic place, with parrots and lizards and sometimes, in the dead of the night, the scream of a jaguar.

The very Smart Man, who considered himself very spiritual as well, made a prayer in the jungle to God:

“Thank you for our love. Now send us someone special, someone who will teach us what we don't already know.”

The God of the Universe stood behind a banana tree, slurping a guanabana sandia very, very quietly. He did not say anything. But he was thinking, “OK, but you asked for it.”

\* \* \*

So when the man and the woman came together in love – not at that exact time, but a little while later – there was a hasty and fateful arrangement of chromosomes.

You know, genetics is a lot like Powerball. The balls spin round and round, and you never know what you're going to get. Sometimes a monster, sometimes a clone.

Usually you get a lot of chromosomes labeled X, and a bunch more labeled Y. But this time, improbability took over. The jumble reached way back into the family, and picked up:

- a gene from Grandma Mildred, who liked to rock and rock on the front porch of the sanitarium in Grand Junction
- another from Uncle Jerry, the bachelor taxidermist in upstate New York who never talked much
- a big juicy one from the Very Smart Man's Great Grandpa Herman, who served for 44 years as the groundskeeper at St. Margaret's Church and Cemetery, in Allamakee County, Iowa
- and the almost forgotten genes of Great-Great-Great Aunt Hermione, on Zelda's side, who lived in the Amish Country and who had thirty cats and a waving field of catnip

All these people had the Z gene in spades, and they all lined up perfectly to form the most beautiful child ever. Z, Z, Z, Z, Z.

\* \* \*

You may be asking, What exactly is a zombie? It probably is not what you think it is, although it is that, under certain circumstances. A zombie is someone who is different, and cannot be like other people. It is an attraction to death, a tug in that direction that they feel, at times very strongly.

Many people have a touch of zombie in them. At a certain moment, under the right circumstances, they will break out for a moment, and do something crazy, something antisocial, something violent. And it will feel good at the moment. But then they will change back. These people are only occasional zombies.

But this little girl forming in her mother's womb was 67 percent zombie – a very high score even by zombie standards. She was still quite human, but a zombie through

and through. For her, there was no chance of going back.

She was a sure thing from the get-go.

\* \* \*

And so the zombie girl grew inside Zelda, who ate only the healthiest greens and grains, and sang Schubert and union songs from the 1930s to the zombie baby ripening inside her.

And when the zombie girl emerged, like a prickly pear in bloom, the parents, and the doctor in green plaid pants who attended the birth, saw something they later forced themselves to forget – that the zombie girl floated in the air for just a moment, its umbilical cord coiling in space.

And the zombie girl opened her eyes and beheld her mother and father, and said *Ahhh*.

She was the most beautiful baby anyone had ever seen. When she blinked in the August air, a single tear rolled down her already moist face.

\* \* \*

People were astonished at the new baby's countenance, which was impossibly confident.

“She is so beautiful, I would trade all three of my own children for her,” said Mrs. Woodruff, whose children were not chopped liver.

“How can someone so young be so poised?” asked Clara the occasional babysitter. “It's not natural!”

There were some who denied the obvious. “Oh certainly, she's pleasant enough,” said Marian Kitchener, the

busybody in Apartment 6. “But it's not as if the sun and moon hung still in the sky for her!” She said this, but that night she bit her knuckles in her antique feather-bed and wept.

One woman was so envious she placed an unintentional curse on the baby. “She's very well behaved now,” said Maddie Green. “But those are the ones to watch out for later.”

Maddie Green turned out to be right, but few feel she deserves credit for this.

\* \* \*

Zelda knew in her heart that her baby was special. But nobody could see that she was a zombie baby. Indeed, the designation would have had no meaning to anyone.

Instead the baby drank deep of its mother's milk – long, soulful sessions on the nipple, and the baby would roll its eyes from the sweetness. This was a baby who drew deep of life, who took her fill, and sometimes – made you wait.

The Very Smart Man enjoyed playing with the zombie girl. Her first word was the word “guh!” – which meant duck, a stuffed animal with a jingle bell inside, and a furry yellow beak. The baby was quick to learn about animals. Their first outing was at the zoo, in January, where he carried her in a backpack from building to building, unsure whether the baby behind him was upright and enjoying the animals – she was – or had fallen backwards and was dangling by her feet – she wasn't.

One day the Very Smart Man wadded an athletic sock into a ball and pitched it, Rollie Fingers-style, at the tiny sitting girl. The sock bounced off her little tee-shirted chest, and the zombie baby burst into laughter, like a flock of birds

flying out of a hollow tree. It was far and away the dearest sound the Very Smart Man would ever hear, and he knew in an instant he would spend the rest of his life trying to hear it again.

the jacobsen's organ

tells you what's going on  
around you

## Zombie Wildlife

It is just a fact that all zombies love animals. Perhaps it is because they identify with the simplicity of animals, relative to the competitive environment of The Factory.

The zombie girl was no exception. From her earliest days, when her father took her to see the animals in the zoo, she was wild about animals.

They would ride together in the car and talk even before she could talk. The Very Smart Man would call out an animal. Horse! Dog! Cow! And the zombie girl, snug in her car seat in the back, would make the correct sound in response. Whinny! Bark! Moo!

The game could get creative. The answer to Snake was Hiss! The answer to Snake, Laughing was Hiss! Hiss! Hiss!

At age two she pointed at two elephants at the zoo. The male was really giving it to the female. "Daddy, look!" the zombie girl pointed at the unbelievable sight.

At three the Very Smart Man bought her a little tetra fish and named it Icky. They would poke their fingers in the bowl, and Icky would come up and nibble.

One day the Very Smart Man changed the water in the bowl, and the next day found Icky floating sideways in the water. He flushed the fish away, and prepared to explain it to the zombie girl.

"You know, sweetheart, we love our pets, but we don't always get to keep them forever. Sometimes they have to leave us, and it makes us sad, but we know that they have gone to a happy place, where they get to swim or crawl or bark forever."

The zombie girl looked up at her father. "Did Icky die?"

The Very Smart Man sighed sadly. "Yes, my darling., he did."

The zombie girl frowned sympathetically and said, “You know, Daddy, he was only a fish.”

As a young girl she got a job at Como Zoo, holding a blue-nosed skink to visitors passing the reptile bay. You could tell from the excitement in her eyes how she enjoyed telling people about the Jacobson's organ located in the roof of the creature's mouth, that helped it identify things by their smell.

At the zoo she had time to study every creature, from aardvark to zebu. She loved them all. Her favorite, however, was a black jaguar, who managed to look cool and in charge even though it was confined to a tiled cage in the cat house.

“She's just so beautiful,” she told the Very Smart Man. “So intelligent and alive. Sometimes I think she is talking to me. She is telling me that she is just biding her time here, that she will be free some day, and nothing will ever contain her again.”

The zombie girl was an equestrienne, and rode horses at a ranch in Wisconsin for five years. It was one of the great triumphs of her life when she was able to overcome her fears and jump with her steed across the gate. She was so proud.

She had a guinea pig named Bumba, that taught her humility and affection. When she and the Very Smart man were out, their eyes were always cruising for a leaf of the right plant, a dandelion or chamomile, that Bumba liked to nosh. And when she lifted Bumba to her face, the little creature would lick the zombie girl on the nose with its lettuce-buttery breath, and make her giggle.

The zombie girl used her animals as tests for her friends. If a friend did not respond to the dopey sweetness of the creature, there was something missing or inaccessible in that person, and the zombie girl steered clear.

The ultimate test was her boa constrictor Crimson, whom she obtained from a friend who could no longer care for her.

Seven feet long, the snake liked to curl around the zombie girl's neck and shoulders and squeeze. Once a month she fed it a large, live rat.

Once, when her parents the Very Smart Man and Beautiful Dr. Zelda were interviewing a visitor, the zombie girl appeared in their midst, Crimson wrapped around her, flicking her tongue – her Jacobson's organ. The zombie girl was announcing. “You need to know who we are – we are not normal humans!”



halloween  
was the  
best night  
of the year

## Zombie Education

The first day of kindergarten provided a sign that school would not be easy. The Beautiful Dr. Zelda put the little girl on the school bus, and the zombie girl, only five years old, looked back one last time, as if she would never see her happy life again.

Sure enough, when she arrived at school, no one led her from the bus. She stood there, weeping, not seeking solace, until finally a teacher saw her and took her to the classroom.

The zombie girl began showing signs that she was not like other kids. Where other children would line up to cooperate, and seemed to enjoy the factory games, the zombie girl was ashamed to be doing all that they asked. She wanted to do something else, she was not sure what.

In dance she collapsed on the stage, and hid her face from the other children's parents. She saw that some of the girls were doing better than she was, and she felt the disgrace of being bettered. She longed to be accepted by the other children, but she couldn't bring herself to act the right way.

The teachers at the factory school meant well, and wanted to help. But the system was set up to process children through, to make them fit to live in the world. The zombie girl looked at the world they were fitting her for, and wished for another one.

“When I asked what her favorite color was, she said 'black,’” said her second grade teacher.

“When I look at your daughter I see storm clouds gathering,” said her third grade teacher.

“Your daughter is working through some difficult problems,” her fourth grade teacher said.

“I urge you to intervene now to help this girl,” said her fifth grade teacher. “She is so desperately unhappy.”

A young girl with blonde hair, wearing a white dress with a ruffled collar and a patterned skirt, is being held up by an adult whose hands are visible. The adult is wearing a dark-colored shirt. They are outdoors, surrounded by dense green foliage and trees. The scene is captured in a warm, golden-brown color palette.

giving  
her back  
to  
God

here  
you  
take  
her

## Zombie Psychoanalysis

The Very Smart Man's daughter was afraid of everything, and it mystified him. She needed tricks, he thought, tricks he could teach her about how to succeed in life.

- “Always, if you mess up, tell people you are sorry,” he suggested. “People have no choice except to forgive you.”
- “Always think ahead. If you are going to be with people you are unsure of, have a bag of jellybeans to share with them. Get the kind that are many flavors, so you have something to talk about. When you give people things, it predisposes them to you.”
- “If you are unhappy being the person you are, use your imagination, and be someone else. Just pretend you are happy. Put your hands on your hips and you feel different in a second. Then use that power to be stronger.”

And the zombie girl was attentive, and she sometimes took the Very Smart Man's advice. She got to be a world-class apologizer. But this was only because she really was sorry. She was being honest. She was sorry she was a mess. It wasn't fair to other people that she should always be in a storm.

So when she was in great pain, she would go to people and tell them she was sorry.

But other advice she rejected. “Daddy, I can't be someone I'm not. I love you for having these wonderful ideas. And they probably work for lots of people. But they don't work for me.”

And the Very Smart Man hugged his daughter and kissed

away her tears.

\* \* \*

The zombie girl saw almost a dozen counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists in her lifetime. Her parents kept hoping there were something minor that could happen that would cause her to be happy again.

An insight, a regimen, a pill.

“Your daughter is depressed,” one counselor said. “But we have medicines to help her come through it.”

“She suffers from anxiety,” said another, “but we have a wonderful medicine for this called Klonopin.”

“She is what we call socially phobic,” said yet another. “She needs to be made to feel more comfortable with other people.”

Many diagnoses got batted around. Obsessive compulsive disorder. Narcissistic personality. Social phobia. Bipolar syndrome. Borderline affect.

Only one psychologist seemed to see the girl that her parents knew. “She is very gifted, very imaginative, with a vaulting intelligence,” she said. “I know she seems troubled now. But she is so creative, and so strong inside. I think she will create a life for herself that allows her to be strong. And I would like to help her do that.”

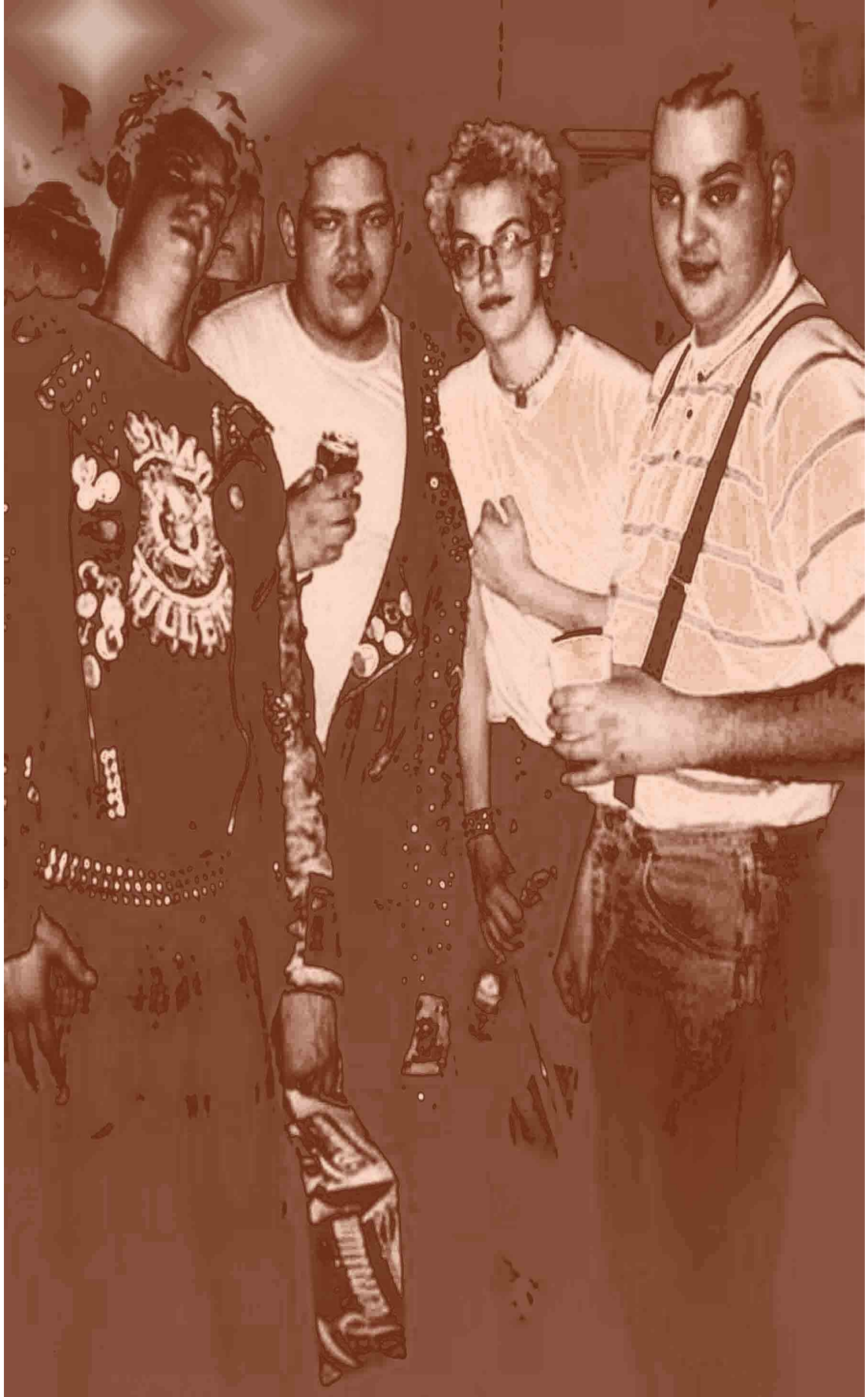
But then that psychologist got a job offer in California, and moved away.

The Beautiful Dr. Zelda confronted an expert at a conference. The expert shook her head sadly. “A borderline

personality with a high IQ is a prescription for great unhappiness,” she said. “I wish I had better news to tell you.”

The psychologists were not acting in bad faith. They meant well, and they sincerely wanted to help. But it must be remembered that they all, in one way or another, worked for The Factory. They defined successful treatment in terms of suitability for The Factory. Their job was helping the patient adapt to that reality, to the needs of the marketplace, which could not be called into question.

The doctors made no mention of the fact that the girl was a zombie girl. “Zombie girl” was not even a diagnosis. So nobody thought to consider how very wild, deep in her nature, she was.



## The Zombie People

And the zombie girl slid deeper into unhappiness, until the very Smart man and the Beautiful Zelda had an idea – take her out of the Factory School and put her into the Other School.

At the Other School, there were other zombie children.

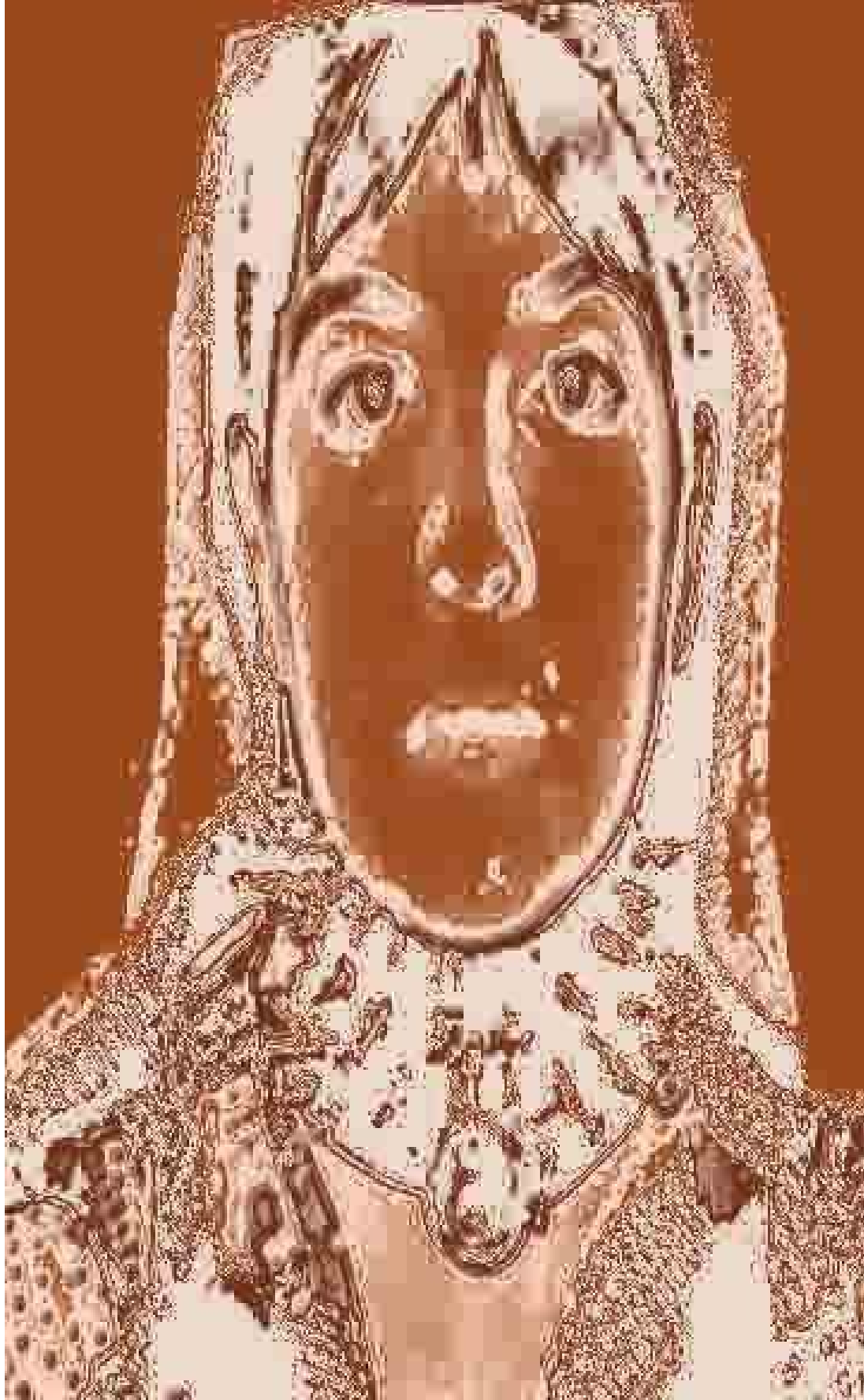
Almost immediately the zombie girl perked up. These other kids were like her. They didn't fit in, and they were glad they didn't. They fit in with each other instead. They hugged. They laughed. They swapped cigarettes. They kissed. They wore death's heads and tattoos. They stayed up late and drank black coffee and cursed.

The zombie girl had found her people.

The Very Smart man and the Beautiful Zelda were uncertain about the decision they had made. Life seemed scarier and less certain. The new kids did not appear to be headed for great careers. But it was too late to stop the zombie girl. Years later they found this in her diary.

“I am at a crossroads. I can be the good girl my parents wants me to be, and please them, and try to be a normal girl. Or I can break free from them and go my own way. I love them so much – but I have to be free.”

With a tearful goodbye she parted from her parents. They still saw her. Often she slept under the same roof. But from age 13 on – the halfway mark of her life – she lived a separate life. This rupture occurred without an argument or raised voices or slammed doors. It just happened.



## The Man Who Had No Brain to Begin With

The zombie girl was standing at Randolph and West Seventh, lacing her fourteen-eyelet boot on the bus bench. It was 1:12 in the morning on a Wednesday, in the spring of 2002. She was wearing net stockings and black mascara. Her hair was a fiery flower of dayglo fuchsia. A car pulled up beside her.

“Need a lift?” asked a man.

“No, I'm fine,” said the girl.

“I can get you wherever you're going,” said the Man.

“I'm waiting for a friend,” the girl replied.

“There might be fifty bucks in it for you,” said the man.

The girl looked at the man, and contemplated the insult. She was a senior honors student. The man wore a ring. She felt a chill run through her, as if she were about to do something she had wondered about, but never done. She felt it in her maxillary gland, the way she used to feel before having to throw up.

“OK,” she said, and slid into the front seat, straightening her plaid skirt over her thighs.

A half mile later she stepped out of the car, wiped a smear of brains from her cheek with a moist towelette, and deposited it in a barrel marked Keep St. Paul Clean.

Only this didn't happen. Not for a long, long time.

she was saying don't expect



because you're not going to get it

## Zombie Economics

Capitalism is not a bad economic system. It encourages initiative, it enables the spread of wealth, it creates a middle class, and it motivates able people to be the best they can be. It is by far the best system ever devised by humans.

But it is very hard on zombies. Some zombies – those with Z scores even higher than 67 – do terrible, disfiguring things to themselves. Carl wore his hair in four foot long extensions, hanging in pigtails to his boots. Felicia had a pig's nose-ring, and an ear-tag. Fritz, whose father had sexually abused him for more than six years, had a blue butterfly tattooed across his entire face.

It was as if they wanted to save the world the trouble of discriminating against them. “Here,” they seemed to be saying, “let me help you hurt me.”

Zombies can be a bit twisted.

For instance, they really don't want to keep up with the Joneses. They are not out to out-compete the people next door. They have no great appetite for the new car, the well-coiffed lawn, the framed degree on the office wall. They generally do poorly in school.

They just want to roam with their fellows, pat their dogs, find nourishment where they can, and get by – that's all, just get by.

But the world is not organized with these simple needs in mind. Zombies must deal with all the contrivances ordinary people put up with – parking tickets, taxes, getting movie rentals back in time,

The zombie girl was better than most. She had a fair head for math and she liked to work. When she needed work, she went out and got it. Not everyone would take her in, because she was a zombie. She had the look, and she had the smell. Unless you lived next to an insane asylum, she would never be the girl next door.

She worked for Target for a while – bad idea. Zombies do not do well with large corporations. They do not even do well with name tags.

She worked as a hostess at the science museum, holding down kids' birthday parties. Zombies are not good with kids. The noise, the cake, the crying, the clowns. Soon the maxillary glands start pumping and it's not a party any more.

Finally she found a job as office helper in a small bakery, and the people there were very kind. She called customers, took orders for bread and rolls, filed things away, took checks to the bank. It was the best job she ever had, and she loved Ernie the baker and George the boss very much.

But the bakery was in St. Paul, and the zombie girl felt called to be where the other zombies were, across the river.

There she enjoyed roaming with her pack very much, and drinking Pabst Blue Ribbon beer. It is said that the zombies' byword is “PBR me ASAP!” When they say that, you know you are safe from pretenders.

Zombies must create their own servile economy as waitresses, parking lot attendants, vending machine installers, and night depository staff.

It is possible to have dreams. The zombie girl dreamed of being the hostess in a wild club. She would create the perfect ambiance, and a menu to die for. The club would be

like the jungles she had seen in the Yucatan, with the ceiling a leafy canopy, and the blinking eyes of animals in the lower branches.

She knew all the guests by name, and what they liked, and what they drank. And she always knew just what to say and what not to say. It was a point of pride for her, knowing just how much to intrude on people's evening, and not a micron more. A club was not a factory or a cage. It was a place of refuge and restoration. Their souls had been placed in her hands. The vendors adored her, and the wait staff showed her every respect.

Of course, none of this ever happened. Because she was a zombie and they say you can never put a zombie in charge of anything. No one knew she was the most beautiful girl who ever lived. They looked, and they judged, but they did not see.

So the zombie girl worked below radar, in places that were official parts of the factory. A tea joint. A coffee shop. A building manager's office. A pizza shop. A saloon.

She worked for tips, and kept the change in a box beneath her broken bed.

Her most distressing experience was when she was lured into applying for a job at a restaurant opening up in St. Paul. It was a fancy place, with a great menu and a solid gimmick. It was called the Chatterbox Pub. She trained for almost a month before it opened, and she was very excited. She imagined herself doing very well, and perhaps getting benefits, and health insurance.

But two days before the grand opening, she and a half dozen other trainees were dropped from the program. "Fire that girl when the shift is over, after I have left," said the Evil Restaurateur. And it was done according to his will.

And the zombie girl went into a deep funk, knowing she could never have a nice job.

The zombie girl believed it was her jet-black hair that tripped her up. She had dyed it black in order to fit in. And while her hair looked black, people would look at the zombie girl and somehow they knew it wanted to be fuchsia, and that her eyes glittered like spinning roulette wheels.

She was a zombie, and there is a tradition that zombies are not allowed to live.



## Living in Minneapolis

The zombie girl grew older, and as she did her parents were emboldened to think that if she could just hang in there, she would be OK.

She was such a funny person. She could be in deepest grief, insulted and depressed – and then stun people by getting herself together. When she got into trouble, and stumbled, she would get up and start moving forward again.

In a sense she lacked resilience – “always drowning” was how she described her condition. And yet she kept going. She knew the odds were against her, but she soldiered on. She was braver than brave could be brave.

And she did not let her problems get in the way of her friends. Her friends knew her as the hugger, as the smiler, as the joker, as the encourager. Life is rough in the zombie community. People lose jobs, lose love, lose hope – and there is a tendency to get bitter and wash it all down with despair. The zombie girl knew a bit about despair, but she counseled against it as counterproductive.

“I always felt she was on my side,” said one friend.

“She would spend time with me, like I was somebody important,” said another. “She saved me so many times.”

“When I would be blue she would invite me over, make popcorn, and we would watch some stupid horror movie.”

“She was naturally clever, always had something cool to say. But she wasn't an asshole, you know, showing off all the time. I always felt, when I spoke to her, that she really saw me, really heard what I was saying. I will miss her so

much.”

Another zombie friend said this. “I loved that girl. But she was stubborn, stubborn, stubborn! Once she got an idea into her head, you could never talk her out of it.”

\* \* \*

A friend told this story:

“We sitting outside the Triple Rock, and we were sipping on pina coladas. It was about eleven at night. A woman from Somalia was walking by the place, just a few feet from us. Suddenly this guy was in her face, ordering her around and calling her names. He was a big, scary, violent-looking guy.

“The zombie girl stood up, pushed back her chair and got into this guy's face!”

“Hey, mister, you leave that woman alone.”

The mean man snarled at her. “Mind your own fucking business, bitch!”

But the zombie girl pushed right back. “No, you mind your fucking business. I will get the cops down here on your ass for harassing this woman, and you will spend the night in fucking jail!”

The Insulting Man from the Triple Rock Sidewalk strode away, shaking his fist and calling the zombie girl a whore. But the zombie girl stood in front of the bar like a pillar of fire, and watched the bad man dwindle in the distance.



## A Kiss Goodbye

The zombie girl spent the afternoon with her mother, discussing the future. She fretted about her health, about her jobs, about her bills. Zelda always counseled her optimistically, thinking she was one good idea away from happiness. But the zombie girl looked at her like happiness was on the moon.

Later she made a call to the Very Smart Man, and they had a good conversation. They told each other they loved her, and they would see each other real soon. His last words to her were, “I love you.”

Then she went for a walk in the neighborhood, and passed friends she had not seen in a while. They joked, and hugged, and said goodbye.

Then she ran into her friend Antoine, who always had a thing for the zombie girl, something between love and sisterhood. He always felt she understood his heart. He always felt her love for him.

“Wait,” she told Antoine, “I have something for you.”

She stepped up to Antoine, she stood on her tiptoes, took his head in her hands and she kissed him. And as she kissed him, she bared her teeth and bit deeply into his bottom lip, until her teeth touched.

“What are you doing?” Antoine cried, breaking free from her and spitting blood through his wound.

“I’m telling you goodbye,” the zombie girl said, a single tear running down her cheek, as she turned and walked away.

She returned to her apartment and put on a DVD she had

rented, the second disc of the third season of Dexter. She poured herself a glass of vodka and washed down eight Klonopin, and dialed her cell phone.

“Poison Control,” the voice said.

“Yes, I have a question,” the girl said. “I have a friend who just took eight Klonopins, and thinks he should get himself to the emergency room. Is that right?”

“Absolutely,” the voice said. “Eight Klonopins is a lethal dose.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Yes, you better get your friend down here immediately.”

“Right away,” said the zombie girl.

And she pushed the off button on her phone and sat down to watch, rapidly stroking Zeppo in her lap, tears streaming down her face.

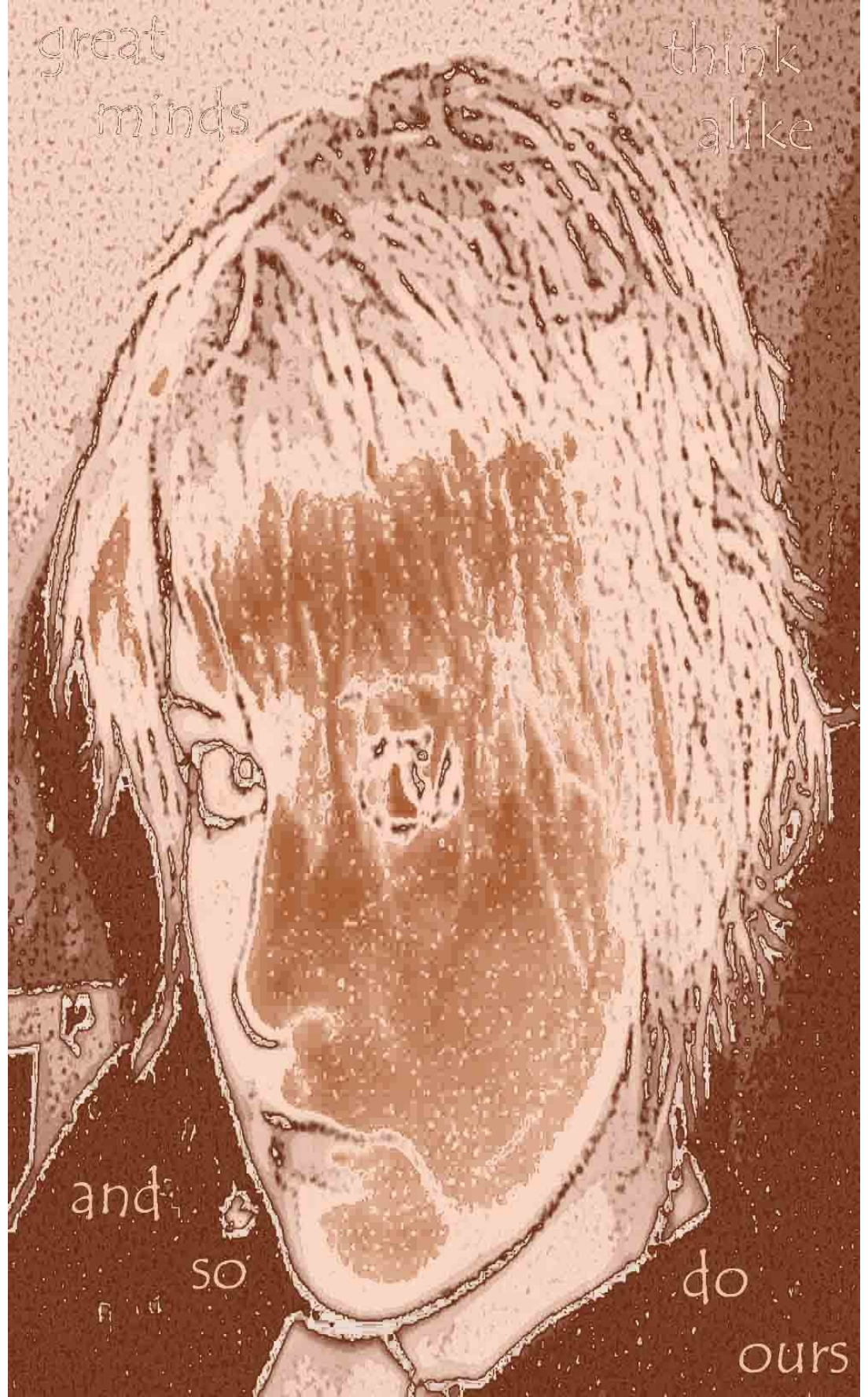
And this really did happen. On the eighteenth of August, 2009.

great  
minds

think  
alike

and  
so

do  
ours



## **“Me – A Zombie?”**

The final chapter is still a few pages away, and it is a hum-dinger. In the meantime, we offer this brief self-assessment tool.

- If you had trouble competing in school, and turned against the whole status quo ...
- If you prefer the simplicity of animals to the complexity of human beings ...
- If you are prone to addiction ...
- If you hate your body ...
- If you have more than three tattoos, or more than one in plain sight ...
- If you cannot get through a metal detector without some disassembly ...
- If you are unable to shut your emotions on and off at will ...
- If you reacted as a child to school uniforms as if they burned ...
- If your sympathies go automatically to the downtrodden and the underdog ...
- If a customary response is “What's the use?” ...

If you answered yes to more than four of these questions, there's a very good chance you have more of the the Z gene than you know what to do with.



## What would Zombie Girl say?

- If you feel low down, go for a walk. The body can show leadership when the brain is out of gas.
- Every night, before you go to sleep, think of three things you liked that day. Be glad that they happened. Call this your prayer.
- Beware of certainty – it isn't your friend.
- Your thoughts are within your control, and also your moods. But it takes practice.
- If you think this is your last day, get a second opinion.
- Don't hate yourself – there are people who love you who know you better than you do.
- Watch the alcohol, and the smokes. Not all spirits are divine. Some are arrows pointed at your heart.
- Keep going. Something may be gaining on you.
- Consider happiness but don't jump right into it. You want it to respect you afterward.
- Always tell people you are sorry. They will forgive you in a heartbeat.
- Remember that everyone you meet is fighting a terrible battle.
- Be kind – rewind.



## Zombie Heaven

The Very Smart Man awoke one night beside the Beautiful Dr. Zelda, who had taken Lorazepam and was snoring softly. He had a fearful feeling that they were not alone in the room. He imagined that an invisible cat were walking across the blankets, placing one soft paw after another. His hair stood on end.

“Excuse me,” said a voice across the room. The Very Smart Man turned to see God step from behind the drapes. His beard was decked out in rasta locks. He wore a Hawaiian blue shirt with swordfish on it, baggy chinos and sandals.

God put his finger to his lips. “Gotta show you something,” he whispered. The Very Smart Man noted that God had blotches of calamine lotion all over his forearms and face.

God reached for the pole holding the draperies in place and pulled down, revealing a tropical jungle where his yard used to be. Toucans leaped from branch to branch, and the screech of a howler monkey in the upper canopy split the air.

“Over this way,” God said, tiptoeing through the tall grass.

In a copse under a giant baobab tree the Very Smart Man saw a remarkable sight – a female jaguar, all in black, crouching over the corpses of several persons, licking from the emptied brain pan of one, a man in a patrolman's uniform. It was the the Policeman Who Needed to Make His Quota, a vacant look in his eyes, and a ticket book clasped in his fist.

The jaguar knelt over him like a kitten over a saucer of milk, separating the gray goo from his skull. She purred, with all the power of a mighty tractor idling its motor. Where the sun found her satiny coat, the Very Smart Man could make out

the faint embedded spots – black on black.

Strewn alongside the policeman, in no particular order, was the Insulting Man from the Triple Rock Sidewalk, the Evil Restauranteur, the Sunday School Teacher Who Knew God on a First-Name Basis (“Not true, actually,” noted God with a shrug), and the Man Who Loved His Country Beyond All Reason.

The jaguar noticed the newcomers in her midst and bared her fangs, as if to say, “You are in my house now, so stand back.” Then resumed scraping clean the skull with her raspy tongue.

It was the monstrosity of monstrosities, the Very Smart Man concluded. His beloved daughter, a wild animal scouring the skeletons of the unkind in some Meso-American fantasy land.

The Very Smart Man turned sharply at God. “I don't understand,” he said, tears bubbling from his eyes. “I asked you years ago for a great gift, and instead you gave me a child who suffered all her life and died by herself. And now this cruel absurdity. What kind of loving god are you?”

God squinted, and looked at the zombie girl, who had turned her back on the two and was slinking into the shadows of the inner forest.

“But look at her,” he said, pointing his aerosol can of Off! in the panther's direction.

“Isn't she something!” God said.









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