

NFL CONCUSSION PROTOCOL: THE TRAGEDY

A fucking novel by Kim Cancer



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A FUCKING NOVEL BY KIM CANCER
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PRESS

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DISCLAIMER:

This book delves into graphic subjects and mindsets. The subject matter concerns various mental and physical issues, mass media, professional sports, and contemporary society.

This book is an exploration of psychology and a work of fiction. It is a study of cause and effect, effect and cause.

It is a study of ghosts, both living and dead.

The Funeral Home:

“It used to be a funeral home...”

“Whoa, it is... gothic... and that burgundy color... looks a bit like an old church. It’s definitely big enough for all three of the kids,” says Susan, who’s stirring nervously in her seat and repeatedly sweeping back a wayward strand of wavy golden hair behind her right ear.

Jim, her husband, seemingly pays little attention, and mumbles “kids” sarcastically. Sitting behind the wheel of his black Porsche SUV, his eyes are empty as open graves. He snarls and turns the steering wheel, nosing the vehicle smoothly into the property’s long, straight, almost endless driveway that reminds Susan of a tarmac.

“How long will the project last?” she inquires. Her voice slightly raises. Anger and annoyance are coursing through her.

Jim relapses into silence, then shrugs his shoulders, parks the car. Susan sighs and shakes her head.

“Typical Jim,” she thinks, “malignant in his reserve and stoic in his void.”

The two exit the vehicle. Susan’s high heels clicking rhythmically on the black pavement of the driveway as they walk towards the verandah, step up the curiously steep stairs and approach the high, pitched, thick black metal gothic double doors. The entranceway is cut from granite stone and has ornate carvings of Biblical themes and 3-foot statues of Peter, Paul, Jesus and Mary built into the lower left and right sides of the archway.

The door opens inwardly, as if by itself. The pair are met by a real estate agent, a frumpy woman who materializes, like an apparition. The schmoozy woman smiles with her whole face and ushers the couple inside.

Susan thinks the agent just looks like an agent, just looks like someone from a real estate sign. Like she's more of a photograph than a person.

The agent moves fast for a woman of her size, and makes cloying conversation, attempting to ingratiate herself, and as she speaks, she laughs mechanically in a way that reminds Susan of the sounds of sitcoms she'd watched as a kid, like *Married With Children* and *Friends*. Those 90s sitcoms with laugh tracks that'd go off in bursts at snappy one-liners.

Susan wonders if the real estate agent is a human at all, or if she's a bot, a cyborg, or AI hologram.

Then Susan starts to notice the agent's perfume, how musky it is, how it lingers in the air as the agent whisks them through the furnished house. No robot would be programmed to smell like that, Susan thinks.

They move fast through the first floor, their heads on a swivel. The agent's hands glide, gracefully, as if in tai chi movements, and she speaks of amenities, distances, and dimensions.

Inspecting the antique furniture, the drapes of crushed velvet, the house strikes Susan as a time warp. Or perhaps a bizarre, grotesque museum. Everything seems dusty, like a museum, and although every room has large windows, little light enters the house. There's such a grimness to the place. A stuffy feeling. An ugliness to everything.

Even the hardwood floors. They look freshly polished; however, their shine is almost unnaturally sparkly, Susan posits. She scratches her nose and notices a strong antiseptic smell wafting in the air.

When they step onto the wide staircase, they find themselves instantly on the second floor, unnervingly so, as if they didn't climb the stairs at all, or as if Susan experienced a splice in time, or a spell of amnesia.

Then they are checking each bedroom. They move with precision, at an almost military speed. The hallways slant and bend curiously, disturbing Susan's equilibrium.

The bedrooms are horrendous, each room painted a different unsightly color- lime green, 70s neon orange, banana yellow. Yikes. Whoever designed the place must have been color blind. Or insane. Susan ponders redecoration schemes...

Susan is suddenly spooked by the rooms' dim, unnatural light that repeats in various wall mirrors and gilded picture-frames. It's a sepia tone that's harsh, hideous.

Gazing at one of the picture-frames, she's creeped out to notice that all the picture-frames hanging about the house are empty. Every single one of them. They are devoid of photos, paintings, anything, and Susan feels it renders the house indescribably creepy and bleak...

Besides barren, the house just seems... chaotic, uneven and off-balance. It's as if the house was an experiment, a strange arrangement of angles, geometric spaces and patterns only a mathematician could understand. Every room seems like a wrong turn, a dead end in a maze. Every room she sees is confusing and ultimately unsettling.

In addition to her aesthetic repulsion and discombobulation, viewing the house just feels joyless. It's a mechanical, cold task. It's automatic. It's forced. There's no happiness here. The place feels suffocating. Susan loses her breath and wheezes once or twice, like she's at a high altitude.

After inspecting the fully furnished bedrooms, which, to Susan, are all morbid, they're at once in the basement; and again, Susan only recalls beginning down the stairs from the second floor, right as she was thinking of how the stairs remind her of an Escher print...

The basement is a tall, windowless space. It is bright white. White everything. Shiny white linoleum floor, white paneling, white walls with Grecian cornices, but in the background, the basement's space is vast and dark, and Susan sees stars, moons, and planets, cosmic debris and what looks to be an asteroid, the space rock barreling forth, in their direction, like a wrecking ball.

Susan presses her eyes shut, grinds her teeth, braces herself for impact, feeling as if she's aboard a passenger plane, about to crash.

But she opens her eyes to find herself in a forward motion, from the living room toward the kitchen, and Susan has a sensation that their feet aren't moving, that the floor is moving, instead of them, like the floor is an electronic machine, a people mover, like in the airport. She feels a hard stop and gets slightly dizzy crossing into the kitchen.

She shudders, gulps instinctively, then pans her gaze around the spacious, fully equipped kitchen, with its silver refrigerator, and modern appliances. It's a stark contrast to the rest of the house. It's so... modern... It's light and there's not a single antique... It could be in one of those "Modern Homes" magazines she sees at the supermarket.

Surprised by the commodious kitchen's immense size, she also thinks the house appears far larger, almost infinite inside; the house far bigger than it seemed from the outside.

Jim, as usual, doesn't speak much to the agent or Susan, just grunts and snorts, here and there, but he stops to take a business call, rages at his phone, drowning out the tinny voice in his headset. Hoarsely, he bellows out something unpleasant regarding a projected target date.

Susan does most of the talking with the agent, asking the usual, perfunctory house-related questions, inquiring about the neighborhood too.

However, in truth, she's confused and scared. She already hates the house, its design. Its effect on her. The psychic visions and unnatural movements. How she's losing her grip. It's as if the place was meant to be intimidating, disorienting, and ugly.

It could have been nice, warm, a real home, perhaps, Susan thinks to herself, pensively. It has huge panoramic windows in the living room, a wide staircase in the anteroom, and its chestnut brown hardwood flooring is an inviting color. There's plush antique furniture everywhere, 19th century moldings, and recently added marble flooring and brass fixtures in the bathrooms.

And the kitchen, even by Susan's standards, is immaculate. It's sparkling, and state of the art, having just been remodeled, and has a fancy, see-through fridge, and smart controls for the appliances.

It could have been a nice home, Susan thinks. It really could have, if not for...

Behind the house sits a sizable spit of land, a behemoth of a backyard. Tragically, though, it is an eyesore. The square patch of land is filled with only shabby wildflowers and bushes and is bisected by a small unkempt lawn.

The backyard is curiously empty, giving it a strange, eerily vacant and lonely feeling. She'd never seen a backyard that big be so empty. Not a patio set or a wooden table or grill or playground or pebble path or bird bath or anything. Susan thinks it probably should have a pool, given its tremendous size, but considering the house's history, she understands why no pool was installed.

The house's history, yes, it flits through her mind, once again. The history is probably what makes it appear uglier than it is.

Almost telepathically, the agent's smug robotic face shifts, darkens, and becomes downcast, as she lowers her double chin toward the floor, the basement.

"So, you know, this property was a business, providing services for those who'd passed on," the agent's cheery voice deadens and sounds apologetic.

"Services for those who'd passed?" scoffs Jim. The sarcastic tone of his voice clearly mocks the agent's euphemism, and he cocks his big head to the side, his hazel eyes narrowing. He stares dead on at the agent and sneers at her, menacingly, his pearly white teeth peeking out from underneath his curled, thin upper lip, his bleached choppers gleaming in the bright sunlight slanting in from the kitchen's floor to ceiling windows.

"It was a funeral home, yes. But this was disclosed in the literature. And it's why the place is renting for a fraction of the price of the others in this neighborhood," the agent goes on, matter-of-factly. Her tone returning to saccharine, her eyes brightening, she continues, "This place is a steal. A property this size..."

"The price is hardly a steal if it's really haunted! Your literature didn't mention anything about that," Susan shoots back, her venomous candor taking the agent off guard.

"There was... was an unfortunate..." the agent bumbles, turning her cheek to avert the couple's scrutinizing gaze.

Susan's sigh interrupts the agent's feeble attempt at an explanation. "Unfortunate?" Susan blurts out, her face twisting into a harsh scowl.

Susan sniggers, clucks at the agent's callousness, and goes on, "The kid killed his siblings, his parents, then went to his school and shot 25 people. He claimed he'd been possessed by demonic spirits and had a paranormal expert testify on his behalf in court. Please, we heard about it on the news, and we read about the case online just this morning," Susan's arms are akimbo as she speaks; her eyes are bulging, electric in anger.

The agent rolls her eyes, flutters her long fake lashes and draws in a deep breath. She shakes her head and brushes back the curly black bangs hanging astray from her chignon.

Then the agent stiffens up. Perhaps expecting another fusillade of questions or complaints to spring from the couple's lips, the agent decides to play hardball, and her tone suddenly shifts to one of robotic rage and forced politeness.

"Okay, okay, you folks know the history of the place. It was all over the news. But remember, the kid eventually pled guilty, and no such evidence of 'paranormal' anything was found." The agent flicks her fingers in air quotes around the word "paranormal," and continues, "The show on TLC came up with only white noise. Because, frankly, that sort of ghost stuff doesn't exist."

The agent pauses and her cyborg smile shifts back on, as if her software has set her veneer back to sugary.

Her voice sweetens too, but she speaks, condescendingly, like a mother who just lashed out at a petulant child, "You see, this is what we refer to as a 'distressed property,' yes, but this is the only property for rent in this neighborhood. You said you wanted a house here for 6 months. You said you wanted to be near downtown. Well, this is it. If you aren't interested, I understand, and I can show you a similar property. Buuuuut," Susan winces at how the agent draws out that syllable, "it's an hour farther from the city and twice as expensive. And I already have three other clients interested in this property, soooo, please, take a few minutes, talk amongst yourselves, look around a bit more if you'd like. I'll be waiting outside."

The agent's smile grows so big and forced Susan worries it might explode the lady's cheekbones. The agent turns and clicks off, her heels talking to the floor at an incongruous clip as she plucks out her phone from her black Fendi handbag and saunters away staring and swiping at the device.

Susan believes the device might be controlling the agent somehow, a digital overlord...

Jim nods his head, "Susan," he says, speaking her name for the first time in what seems like years, not just calling her "you..."

"Susan, I can't live in an apartment again. Even a big condo. I hate having people living on the other side of the wall. I hate smelling people's food in the hallway. I can't do it again. I can't."

Jim pans his gaze, toward the spacious dining room, the place still furnished with the previous owner's belongings. The couple's relative who'd inherited the property, while attempting, unsuccessfully to sell it, had decided to rent it, and had kept it furnished with the belongings of the slain family.

"But, Jim, it is... so... so... creepy. I mean, what happened here. It was a funeral home, and then... Ick, it's... I mean, what if it really is haunted?"

Goosebumps run up Susan's arms and she feels a chill splash over her, like she's had a glass of ice water thrown at her.

"Do you believe in that crap? I don't. I want a house. I want my space. I don't want to drive four hours every day. It's only 20 minutes from here to the office. We're renting the place and moving in."

And with that, the matter is settled. Jim's big round eyes remind her of portholes on a sailing ship as he lumbers his massive frame out of the kitchen, through the house, to the verandah, on his way to speak with the agent and sign the lease.

Susan, her arms crossed over her chest, taps her foot impatiently, shakes her head and grimaces. She thinks back to when she was younger, working part-time as a cheerleader. That was when she met Jim, when he was a rookie in the NFL.

Like she often does, she thinks back to those days, but not nostalgically. Because sometimes, just sometimes, though increasingly often these days, she wishes she didn't get pregnant then...

She wishes she'd stayed in college. She liked reading and studying, campus life... And she wishes she had started the clothing business she'd dreamed about. She'd had an idea for something like Lululemon, athleisure wear. But she'd never pursued it. And that haunts her... The missed window of opportunity. It hurts her, watching the Lululemon company raking in billions. Seeing every housewife, every lady in her neighborhood in yoga pants. And now, here she is, having lost all her money. Money she didn't even earn. Money she'd married... Pathetic...

Worse yet, though it makes her ashamed, her mind sinks further into regret, and sometimes... sometimes she wishes she'd not gotten pregnant. At all.

She hates thinking she shouldn't have had that kid, that first one. But she can't help it. And there are times she regrets the others, too. She really can't help thinking about what she could have been. Her son, her daughter, even her youngest son, just their faces, remind her of that missed time, missed opportunities, her unrealized dreams. Just their faces can be such cruel, cruel reminders.

She loves her children and hates thinking like this. It makes her ugly, a hideous, terrible person, she knows, but the thoughts remain, appear in transit, like awful graffiti scrawled on a highway overpass...

All these thoughts flit through her mind as she stands there, defeated. Her youth gone. And now their fortune was nearly gone too. They had debts piling up after Jim's business ventures went sour. They had to sell their mansion, most of their possessions, most of their cars, their cute speedboat. Like so many other NFL players, Jim had found his earnings squandered and vanished.

She should have stepped in. She should have done more. But she was busy, with the kids, with the charities.

She was just as guilty, too, she figures, having taken those retail therapy shopping trips, those European vacations, booking those first-class plane tickets, even for short flights, and those ridiculously fancy lunches and dinners, those afternoons of facials, Dead Sea mud wraps, manicures and pedicures, foot massages at the spa.

She knows her harsh reality. That this is what it is. That Jim must take on this project. She knows they could, theoretically, get by without it, get by on his healthy NFL pension, but if this project takes off, if it is a hit, they'll be rich again. Really rich again, Jim says.

She wants to believe it. She wants more than anything to be rich again. To not have to worry about money. To not have to deal with jerks like that leasing agent, the patronizing robotic bitch. That's the

best part of having fuck you money, she remembers, being able to say “fuck you.” Not having to take shit from anyone.

“Dammit, ugh, I guess we’ve got no choice,” she mutters to herself. She hangs her head low, draws in a deep breath. Then she exhales, suddenly finding herself sitting in the passenger seat of their car, the Porsche inching in reverse, rolling out of their new home’s tarmac-like driveway.

New Money:

Susan slumps in the passenger seat, her face glued to her phone. But she can’t focus on her Facebook feed. Instead, her mind drifts and shifts, like a remote control clicking through television channels. Then she fixates, ruminating on the couple’s recent life, their dire change in circumstances...

They’d been rich. They’d been “new money.”

They’d bought an ostentatious, 10,000 square-foot mansion. The sprawling property had previously belonged to a movie star and had vaulted ceilings, teak double doors, bulbous white fixtures, crystal chandeliers, bay windows, multiple fireplaces, and infinite rows of rooms, rooms fitted in oak paneling, oak bookshelves, and an arcade with pool tables and video games, and a luxurious fitness center with a jacuzzi, sauna, free weights, fitness machines, spin bikes, treadmills, plus an indoor pool and an outdoor pool- both of which Susan had decorated with exotic plants and Hawaiian, tropical décor...

Of course, they’d bought the place back when Jim was playing football, when those 6, 7, 8 figure NFL checks were rolling in and their bank balance was constantly elongating... Now, though, that the NFL cash had dried up, everything was different...

Susan’s mind is racing; she is outwardly detached and taciturn. But inside, she is burning. She’s spinning, psychically, riddled in time scabs. She’s writing lists of lamentations.

She’s considering the anomaly, the career of a pro athlete... The gift and the tragedy... How in most professions, one’s 40s, 50s are prime-earning years. But for pro athletes, very few continue to even play, let alone enjoy big paydays, far into their 30s... For most athletes, their late teens, 20s to early 30s are the windows of opportunity, their chance to amass a fortune, possibly accumulate generational wealth...

For professional athletes, there’s only now or never, a window in time that opens ever so briefly... And Jim had seized upon it. Everything had come together, for a time, everything was ideal.

Jim and Susan’s situation, initially, was perfect. He was an all-pro and collected hefty checks. But, because of the anonymity of his position, because he wore a helmet, because he wasn’t the one scoring touchdowns, hardly anyone in the general public knew him. and the couple could go wherever they pleased... Unlike the team’s star quarterback, or even their coach, who weren’t able to appear in public without causing a mob scene or being hounded by journalists.

Every so often Jim would be recognized due to the handful of print ads, endorsements he'd done for a local "Big and Tall" clothing chain. Sometimes a person in a car next to him in traffic might gape and point, perhaps yell, "Hey, you're that guy!"

And there'd been a handful of times when he'd be stopped, asked for autographs or photo ops, often by young, aspiring offensive lineman from high school or college. But that wasn't too often. Generally, there weren't many folks among the public who could even pick his face out of a police lineup.

And that suited Jim and Susan just fine.

Jim had told her, that as an offensive lineman, people usually only talked about him if he'd let up a sack or blew a coverage. The best offensive linemen are anonymous, they're those you don't hear of, he'd said... And given his outstanding performances, his prowess on the field, how he'd batter away defensive lineman and linebackers, very few outside the game's analysts, coaches and players, die-hard fans, knew his name.

Jim and Susan could go most anywhere, in anonymity, and only receive occasional stares that were more due to Susan's fetching, cheerleader looks or the sheer immensity of Jim's hulking, monstrous physique, the eyes of passersby shifting upwards as he'd tower imposingly over crowds, almost like Godzilla...

Jim really is an enormous creature, a giant of a man, standing at 6'7. And he was nearly 330 pounds of muscle and fat, back in his playing days. Post-retirement, though, he's slimmed down to a leaner 270, comprised largely of muscle and thick heavy bones...

Following retirement, he stopped eating like a machine, cut back heavily from the 8,000 calories per day he'd consumed while playing.

Back when he was playing, Susan jokingly called him a "human garbage disposal," due to his proclivity to consume, pretty much eviscerate food. The man was practically always eating. Though it wasn't due to gluttony. To be an NFL offensive lineman means one has to maintain, and at times even increase his weight.

Jim's usual daily diet would include: a breakfast of six scrambled eggs, 6 strips of bacon, 8 ounces of red meat, a bowl of chopped apples, a bowl of oatmeal, and three waffles, pancakes or bagels slathered in butter; lunches were 8-10 ounces of meat, two or three servings of rice or slices of toasted bread, and some fruits and vegetables; dinners were 16-20 ounces of meat, two more servings of rice or maybe pasta and two servings of vegetables.

Then there'd be snacks throughout the day, like granola bars, and a protein shake that Jim would combine with another shake of chopped bananas and ice cream.

Once accustomed to such dietary regimens, it shouldn't be a surprise that retired offensive linemen often experience weight issues. But Jim had gladly cut back on his caloric intake, saying he'd considered it a chore to eat so prolifically.

He'd also happily stopped lifting weights, saying he hated the smell of the gym and the sound of the clanking iron bars and dumbbells.

Just as well, perhaps. His light exercise, swimming in the pool, was probably better, since Jim had been plagued by injuries, physical ailments, three knee surgeries, chronic back problems, and perpetually sore joints that had only gotten worse following his retirement, at age 38.

Mornings were the worst, physically, for Jim. He'd limp and groan, struggle to unroot himself from bed. There'd been a time when he'd wake up and vivaciously swing his legs off the bed, but nowadays he slowly maneuvers his limbs like heavy objects elevated by a forklift.

Some days were worse than others. But, every day, getting out of bed was a definite challenge. Every morning. Every morning, he'd wake up with a look of exasperation, a pained gaze, his humungous full-moon face looking like sleep had been punching at his unconscious rather than rejuvenating him.

He'd let out low grunts, hot sighs, and fight his way to his feet, then walk, hunched over, like an old man, to the bathroom to gather himself.

Then, throughout the day, Jim would be afflicted by throbbing headaches, when even the slightest sound appeared to be blaring into his ear with the volume of an air horn. He'd clench his teeth, press his eyes shut and stroke his head in an attempt to soothe the tenderness in his scalp, the tightening sensation in his skull.

Sometimes he'd wear bulky, softball-sized noise-cancelling headphones, and listen to meditation music or white noise. He'd sit in his recliner, trembling, with his feet kicked up, those big earphones clamped on. He'd grimace as he'd hang his head low, close his eyes, purse his lips, and wait for the pain to pass, like he was on a turbulent plane, flying through a violent thunderstorm.

The headaches gave him photophobia, too, and Susan often saw him draw the curtains closed in daytime, dim lights at night.

He'd take various pills, pills he'd begun, been prescribed during his playing days. Pain pills, mostly Oxycodone. Susan never asked about it, like how many he was taking, partially because, at least to her, it seemed like he had it under control- but also because she didn't know how to broach the subject.

However, neither the injuries, the headaches, nor the pills were his biggest issue following retirement. His biggest issue was the deep-rooted depression fogging in, gripping him, post-retirement... His overwhelming loss of identity. He missed his teammates, the camaraderie, the banter in the locker room. For the first time since he was 6 years old, he was without a football team. He was without his second family. He was without his regimen, routines, game tapes and game prep, and his calendar was blank, with no dates circled...

It was obvious to her that he felt listless and empty and was experiencing a profound lack of purpose.

Susan's mind clicks, recalls years ago, as he lay in a hospital bed, stitched up, following a knee surgery. She'd gently floated the idea of retirement, and he'd responded to her by glaring, his eyes dripping with venom. Then he'd proclaimed emphatically that he never wanted to quit, that he'd play forever if he could.

She'd never forgotten that, seeing this colossus of a man in insufferable pain, a man who'd already earned millions, yet he wanted to keep bashing away, buffeting his body. And for what? The adrenaline? The adulation of the crowds? His teammates? She couldn't understand it. She knew he'd only retire, quit

playing when he was ready. She didn't feel like there was anything she could say to convince him otherwise...

Finally, of course, Jim succumbed to time's teeth and his accumulated injuries. He was aware that Father Time is undefeated and after deciding to hang up his cleats, he was initially content. But when he really did walk away from the game, it hit him hard as a ton of bricks. Susan had never seen him so blue. She did her best to be the good wife, the soothing sounding board. She encouraged him to do like others in his situation, guys who'd wanted to stay around the game, and go into coaching, or do broadcasting.

But neither was for him. And he knew it. He didn't have the patience to coach. He didn't have the eloquence to be a broadcaster.

So, for a few dark months, he wasn't sure what to do. He was catatonic much of the time, perched in his recliner, watching ESPN, guzzling beers.

That's part of why he ultimately decided to go into business, she figured. To be part of something. To feel the rush. The adrenaline. To join the chase, the hunt. To get the juices flowing.

Sadly, though, his entrepreneurial ambitions didn't pan out. His company, which was started to consult, guide aspiring athletes, failed, and a few real estate, land development deals tanked. His investments in high-growth stocks and corporate bonds flopped too...

There was still a barely seven figure bank account and a couple six figure checks owed to him by his last team. There was the NFL pension, too. But none of this would be enough to finance the lavish lifestyle they'd grown accustomed to. So he went all in on an incipient project, though he wouldn't elaborate on its details...

Susan watches herself, at the kitchen table, the trophy wife, in the trophy house. But her shine, her sparkle is darkening. Her head hung low, her gaze is glued to the purplish-red cabernet in her wine glass and she's nervously rocking the glass back and forth in choked mini-movements.

"It'll be a big thing," he assures her, as he confesses to selling the house, in part to raise capital for the venture. Seeing her face crinkled in sadness and angst, the giant rises to his battle-worn legs, lumbers over to her and kisses her forehead, attempting to assuage her worries, before he limps off to bed...

Susan knows the score. She knows he is pushing all his chips to the table. All THEIR chips to the table. He is investing the last of his football earnings as well as their equity in the house.

She hates it. In her opinion, it is a reckless move. He is basically ripping out the kitchen sink and throwing it wildly. But as she gulps down a sharp swig of red wine, she quiets those horrible voices, those demons of doubt. She hopes her hunch is wrong. She can only have faith. Hope. At this point, all she can do is hope and wish for the best.

Susan feels like a voyeur. She can only watch her ghost of recency, watch the hot tears streaming down her flushed cheeks, as she is sitting alone, at the kitchen table. Staring at herself staring at the white marble floor, the gravity of her situation once again sinks in, the weight of it like an anchor dropping in the sea...

Then she is back in her body. She is fused. She is one. She is blinking away the tears, wiping her face with her forearm. She is distraught. But she again realizes there is nothing she can do, aside from just hope

for the best. For him, her, but most of all, for their kids. She worries, for the first time, ever, about the kids' futures. For years, she had been able to give her kids anything they wanted. Her credit cards were her favorite parenting tool. Money, she felt, could solve any problem. Satisfy any need.

She'd always felt like a genie in a bottle, able to grant any wish, able to provide whatever the kids needed or wanted. The money made her feel like she was a superhero...

But now, for the first time in years, she feels... human. Pathetically so. For the first time in years, she is actually concerned about money. And it is such a horrible feeling. Such a punch in the gut...

Snapping back to the present, Susan pans her gaze toward Jim, who is shaking his head, leaning to the left side of the driver's seat, mumbling curse words at traffic. Susan then thinks of other athletes, famous people who'd blown multi-million-dollar fortunes: MC Hammer, Vin Baker, Antoine Walker, Vince Young.

Jim clicks the stereo to near full blast, pumping up the DMX jam, "Ruff Ryders' Anthem," bopping his head to the beat, copying DMX's dog growls...

Susan tilts her head, scoffs, purses her lips. Then she swings her gaze, watches herself in the rearview mirror. Morose, her spirits sink, and she wonders... How could anyone ever respect a person who lost THAT much money? Why should their kids ever listen to them again? Why wouldn't their children hate them? God knows how much she was starting to hate herself...

Euphemia, "Mia"- Jim and Susan's daughter:

Growing up, I idolized my dad. He was a giant, like, really, a giant, like the Incredible Hulk, but with a beiger skin tone.

That's always who he reminded me of. The Incredible Hulk.

But unlike the Hulk, he'd never shrink to a normal human. He was big and bulky all the time. And angry. I'd see him rage, his face full of damnation, and he'd yell and throw things and break stuff around the house after he lost a big game.

My little brother likened him to Frankenstein. And yeah, he'd kinda remind me of Frankenstein, those times he was so mad. He was so big and tall and angry and limping and there's tons of scars on his body from football and surgeries. He could be pretty scary. I loved him and admired him, but, truth is, I've always sorta been afraid of him. I remember running, my heart thumping, and diving into bed, hiding under my blankets, those times he was mad. He really was like a monster from a horror movie or something.

I think he was shooting steroids or HGH, or whatever those football guys use. Once I walked by his parents' room, at age 10 or so, and saw him bending over, in front of a full-length mirror, injecting something into his, uh, rear end...

That was when my idea, concept of him changed. That muggy late summer afternoon, with the cicadas roaring in a collective buzz, and the sun spilling in, its yellowish glow illuminating my parents' room like a

box of jewels. Walking by, seeing my Hulk dad bending over like that, sticking a syringe in his... After that, like, I knew, he was just a guy. He was a human. He wasn't invincible. He wasn't Frankenstein and wasn't really as scary after that either.

Not that I saw a lot of him, though, growing up. He'd mostly be gone, at practice, traveling for games, doing press, doing whatever he was doing. Sure, I'd have liked it if he were around more, but I can't complain too much. I grew up in a house that was almost as big as my school. We had a moat in the front yard. A moat with fish!

I'd read children's stories, thinking, how the princess in the story, living in her castle, was just like me. I'm a princess, yeah, I know. I won the genetic lottery, being born into a rich family. People hate trust fund kids, rich kids, but most people would do the same thing for their kids, and my dad gave his blood, sweat, and tears for every red cent he provided our family. Every Christmas present, every bite of food came from his hard work. I don't know why anyone has a problem with it. It's not like it's their business anyway.

Why do people like to count other's money? Like, I once saw a website devoted to celebrities' net worth. I've seen people in heated arguments online about who earns more money, Beyonce or Jay Z... Why would anyone care? I don't understand it.

And no, I don't feel bad or guilty about how I grew up. I offer no apologies. I am proud of what my dad accomplished.

But, I guess the haters will be happier now, right? Now that we're not so rich anymore. Misery loves company. Poverty too perhaps?

It was when I started college, that's when the money problems started. It didn't immediately affect me, financially, that much, because I'm on an academic scholarship and work part-time at the campus bookstore.

As I said, I don't feel guilty about my upbringing, but I do want to make my own way, so I've always had part-time jobs and stuff... I've never wanted to be the stereotypical trust fund kid mooching off my parents, like some of my friends.

Some of the kids in my high school, too. They were so... apathetic, so passive, and would do mountains of drugs, drink like fish, probably just to feel something, I guess. They always seemed sort of dead to me. Like lacking a soul. Some of those kids, it was like they were empty, basically just waiting to die.

I don't know. It's hard to explain, but you know it if you see it, where I grew up...

I never wanted to be like that. I think part of that stems from seeing how hard my dad worked to earn his money. It motivated me. I was always driven to succeed, always got straight A's, always worked odd jobs, usually at bookstores and libraries, so I could read, study on the job. I've always had goals. I want to start a company someday. In what, I don't know. I want to be like Elizabeth Holmes, but, like, not corrupt. An Elizabeth Holmes but with an honest company and product.

(I would wear a turtleneck sweater like her though. She looked ON FLEEK in that black turtleneck...)

Back to my parents, the money problems they're having, like I said, the whole thing didn't immediately affect me, financially, too much, but I've noticed how terrible it's been for them, especially my mom. God, I really feel bad for her...

Okay, I will be honest and admit that it was a nightmare to see my childhood home sold off to a punk YouTube star. A kid who's a couple years younger than me.

To think of the sweat my dad shed on the football field, and that YouTube jerk, Jack Thee Jackass, this guy who judges fart competitions and makes prank videos with his bros, those morons, those guys who are far too much like the annoying backwards baseball hat frat packs who try to fuck me and my friends... Just to think THAT GUY... Those guys... are in my parents' bedroom, my bedroom, doing, ick, whatever sickening... debauchery... Oh, I can't even think about it...

It makes me want to puke. Seriously.

I wish my older brother would have played football, or something, like my dad, so he could have bought the house.

My older brother, the wannabe international playboy.

I heard he's working as a DJ at a strip club. Ack! Disgusting! The pig...

Why couldn't he have at least been a millionaire YouTube jerk? I could imagine him producing those fart compilation videos, or videos of shooting things from his butt, like those jackal idiots. I remember he tried doing videos like that, before...

Mia's Brother, Colt:

Dude! I love that our house was bought by Jack Thee Jackal! I sent him a DM, congratulating him on buying the house, offering to show him around, party with him, but he didn't reply. No probs! He either didn't read it or didn't believe it. He gets thousands of DMs, I'm sure.

I tried making a YouTube channel like Jack's. I'd grab my bros and we'd go out, do stupid shit, copycat Jackass stuff. We did one where we dressed up in girls' lingerie and played golf in a graveyard.

And we made another series, where we preyed on victims at school, or around the mall, or the neighborhood. Our goal: to find them, and fart on them. We'd stalk, hunt, hide, and then jump out of bushes, burst out from behind closed doors, or jump up from the backseat of a car or leap down from a tree or fire escape, either naked, wearing only a pair of assless chaps, or in just a pair of briefs, and then we'd unleash ass, point and fire unfiltered farts at friends and classmates.

Sometimes a classmate might open a door to a classroom and find one of us, pants pooled around our ankles, bent over in their direction, ready to launch a stinky ass attack.

Possibly the worst of the videos was the "Fart Alarm Clock," where a buddhi bandit would patrol the library, sneak up on a sleeping classmate, drop trou, bend over, lean his ass in, and just let out a booming burrito fart, ass mere inches from the sleeper's face...

“Bare booty fart ATTACKS! The most vicious, NO FILTRATION!” was the title and theme. But no one watched. Except a couple people, who told us that we suck. That we “suck RAW!” I think those were the exact words.

Then I tried making music, rapping. I wasn't good at that either. I got even worse feedback on that when I uploaded my tunes to the interwebs. In my mind, though, I sounded dope. I sounded like Eminem. I was going to BE the next Eminem. But then I saw the comments I was getting. In fact, one song went sort of viral- but for the wrong reasons. Thousands of people watched my video, cracked jokes about it, called me all sorts of shit, a “wigger,” mostly, “wack AF” and I even received death threats and a couple guys challenging me to fistfights.

All over a free video, a basement rap I slapped together on my computer. A song about smoking weed in my school's handicapped bathroom!

(Handicapped people were the most pissed about it. One even asked, “Dude, where am I supposed to smoke weed?” Looking back on it, he had a point. It was pretty fucking wack...)

Posting stuff online, I guess it's pretty easy to discover your limitations when you get that amount of instant feedback. Man, reading hundreds of people telling me that I sucked, I can't say it was good for my psyche.

Oh... Well.. Fuck them! I was still living in a house big enough to have its own zip code. I was always aware of that. Particularly since my earliest memories, from when I was a tiny kid, were of being in a cramped apartment, with my parents, back when my dad had first started playing pro football. But once he signed that big contract, ah man, life was pretty easy.

My life has always been easy. Maybe too easy... I've spent countless hours just watching and rewatching gangsta rap videos, smoking weed... I've never been too motivated... My sister, a few years younger than me, was always a nerd. She was always hitting the books...

Not me, though. I've never found a calling. I never took to football, like my old man. I got more of my mom's DNA. I'm not that tall, only 5'11, and am thin, like her. I'm not super coordinated, either. I'm just not great at sports, which kinda always made me feel like I was a disappointment to my father.

Not that I didn't try. When I was little, I joined Pop Warner. Dad didn't force me into it or anything. But I thought he'd want me to be a jock like him. When I sucked at football and quit, however, he never mentioned anything about it. I didn't know quite what to make of that then. I still don't.

He was always a bit distant, my Pops, off in his football world. But I respected him, I must say. I looked up to him. He was big and powerful. He gave us a great life. He was gone most of the time, and was aloof, but that's just his temperament. He's a quiet man. He lets his deeds do the talking. And I respect that. My dad is cool. He was good to us. I mean, like sure, he'd spaz out, break stuff around the house and scream after games. It'd scare the shit out of me and my sis, but it was never directed at us and he never got violent. He was never abusive.

Him, nor my mom, never really disciplined us, ever, that I can recall. There were a few babysitters and maids who'd get in our faces, from time to time. Usually they'd be on my case for my shitty grades and a couple Jackass stunts the school got upset about.

But other than that, I never got in too much trouble. As a kid, I was pretty mellow. I still am. I think I've been in one or two fistfights in my entire life. I'm just laidback. So much so that people might think I'm on Xanax or something. But nah, I don't take drugs too often these days, aside from an occasional bump or two of the nose candy and, of course, smoking weed, but that's a plant, not a drug, in my opinion...

Nah, man, my biggest problem has been, and continues to be, my lack of direction.

I mean, like, at first I'd wanted to be on Jackass. Then I'd wanted to be Eminem. But since none of that transpired, I don't know what to do. I didn't have a Plan B or C.

Lately I've been working odd jobs. My degree sucks. Like, I went to a party college, got drunk, and copied all my papers from the internet, paid nerds to do homework for me. Even with cheating, though, I still barely graduated college. I failed English. WTF? I speak English! How the hell did I fail English? Damn...

I guess part of the problem was that I was never interested in learning the stuff they taught in school. In math class, I'd be thinking about learning to fix my engine, buying parts for my car. In English classes, I hated Shakespeare, but I liked reading other stuff, like Tucker Max, and thrillers. I love thrillers! My friend in high school got me into Bukowski. His poetry kicks ass. Reading it, I couldn't believe anyone would actually write shit like that. It's the only poetry I could ever enjoy.

But the stuff they assigned me to read in class was terrible. It was always so fucking boring. The only assigned reading I ever liked from English class was Mark Twain. That dude was fucking cool. Emily Dickinson? Beowulf? Nah, not for me. Jane Austin? Yuck. Fuck off!

To me, that's the problem with school. You're forced to learn this or that. It's something about being forced into it that turns me off. If I'm into something, if I want to learn it, I can't pry myself away from it. I'll spend hours on Wikipedia sometimes. I'll dive down intellectual rabbit holes, reading all sorts of shit. I fuck with knowledge; it's not that I don't enjoy learning.

I could just never find that spark in school. Maybe I just wasn't lucky enough to have a Dead Poets Society jump up on the desk "OH CAPTAIN, MY CAPTAIN" type of teacher. You know, a teacher from one of those 1980s movies...

My degree was in Business Administration. But I had no idea what business I wanted to do. I still have no idea what business I want to do. In fact, I don't even like business. I don't like the corporate world.

What do I like, aside from pranks and jokes? Women. Oh, man, I LOVE women. They love me back too. I'm not that tall or muscled-up, but I'm sinewy, and have been told I resemble the actor Robert Pattinson... I've never had a problem meeting chicks...

Women, yeah, dude, I'm really a fan of their organization... Every time I hook up with a new girl, take off her clothes, I feel like a little kid opening a Christmas present... I love their soft skin, their hair, their scents, their makeup, stockings, high heels; the way they walk, talk, the way they dress, their shapes, curves. Seriously, if there were a job where I could just stare at women all day, that's what I'd do.

My dream job would be that, or maybe a photographer, snapping photos of models all day. Nude models. Or a pornographer. But I'm not too into the hardcore stuff. I prefer the more tasteful, Playboy

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