

Short Stories of the Twenty-first Century.

Prescott Fry



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of
the
Twenty-first Century*

by: Prescott Fry

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June 11, 2015

To the reader,

Life is hard...
It always gets harder...
But when you spot the light of Truth,
it ALL becomes clear!

This is the first time I have published any of my stories under the official pseudonym,
Prescott Fry.

You may wonder why I am writing under a pseudonym.

You may think it is because I want to hide behind a penname.

But verily, it is because I choose to express my beliefs and speculations freely, liberal-mindedly, and I do not want my societal ego to over-run my creative mind....

And most importantly,

Money kills everything.
Even Good storytelling.

Therefore, from this publication onward, I will be sure to remind my readers of a message I constantly repeat to myself before sitting down at my computer and going to work:

“All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental...”

I remind myself that message daily so that I stay humble and remember the Good...

Writing... throughout my journey in a homeless shelter in Maryland... gathering all sorts of fascinating, strange characters through the people I had encountered... to writing on the beaches of Southern California... the beautiful houses... cars... and Women--in all--has been a fun, sometimes taxing experience.

Down to the fundamental nits and grits of survival as a twenty-first century male in a westernized country... I am very, very thankful to everybody who has seen me to the point of finally publishing.

Most of All..

Thankful to God, Krishna, Allah, Yahweh, Buddha, Christ, or whomever you choose to call the name for the Ultimate Realization.

Hopefully, these stories reflect those deeper truths.

Enjoy.

To the Disenfranchised ...

When a Cloud Dies:

I am supine, legs extended, the creaky rub of hammock fibers squeezing against the bark of two trees.

My mind is relaxed but I feel a smidge guilty about all the wings I ate. Carol is going to kill me for today's historic breaking of my cholesterol numbers.

erhhhh—

The dome of sky angles westward, clear and beautiful, the sun dipping away.

urhhh...

Then the eastern sky would show, but really just a sideways view of the back portico, my wife, the girls, and grandbabies gabbing animatedly, eating their last plates of the remnants to the birthday BBQ.

erhhh—

It had been a good birthday, probably no different than all my others.

urhhh...

What had it been? How many years, days, week, hours, seconds, from long ago starting off as a Minnesota boy from the rough streets of an industrial town called Togen?

The hammock dips back toward the house, a perfect angle to his wife's sun wrinkled face, ebullient and graceful as she had been since the afternoon he had met her some fifty years ago.

errhhh

The dog, Rookie, chews passionately into a toy in the part of the lawn farthest from the house.

"Good boy,"

And the dog gives a smile, the tongue drooling in slimy drops all over the toy.

And the hammock swings the other way.

urhh

The whistle of the truck.

Duoh- doooo

A frenetic image of all the neighborhoods children chasing the truck.

erhhhh—

Oh, and the unbelievable delicious sight of the crème filled pastries.

Boy, were those pastries, good.

urh...

And there she stood like an angel from above, Carol, a green-yellow sundress, giddily staring amongst some friends.

"What are you lookin' at?" I had said, rather defiantly, but of course, out of flirtation play.

erhhhh...

Oh, and what she said still gives me the laughs...

"I'm trying to figure out if you're supposed to be eating a Boston crème pie."

My face had blanched red, my throat pasty and lost for words. My gang of friends looked at me like I was a Big Whimp for being talked like that by a girl.

My future wife was a real scrapper. She dug the knife deeper, "My mother says oinkers like you shouldn't eat off the Helms truck. She says it only makes you fatter.

erhh..

And she had probably been right about that. My belly always stayed like the white Michelin guy... I sometimes still get nervous when I'm at the beach, or around any of her friends.

But after a certain point, surviving two major heart attacks... a triple bypass... I learned to embrace my body's resilience to consume and still survive.

urhh.

Most of my suits I grew out of and had to give away to Goodwill. Over the years, my waist got bigger, and bigger, my confidence less and less...

But I'd always find time for my family—and my food.

erhh

I'm a pizza, potato chips, and beer kind of guy.

I like to keep it simple...

But Steak—

mhhhm..

A fresh simmered sirloin, a little onion and lemon juice on top.

urhhhh.

Talk about heaven.

erhh.

But no matter what, my real joy is my wife and children. I gave them everything. All my daughters had graduated college, found respectable husbands, and were prepared to raise their wonderful babies in the cruel twenty-first century world.

erhh..

My family.

erhh.

And the hammock arches, showing the western sky; the sun sits so low, red and purple, dropping, dipping until gone from sight.

urhhh.

And between half eyelids, Carol connects with his eyes resting back in the pouch of the hammock.

The dark barked silently.

ehrr,

And the sky looks like a portrait, painted of his life, an enormous cloud--fat like him—swelled into the maroon sky.

erhhh—

“CAROL.” He whispers.

Erhh—

The cloud moved with the last strengths of his eyes.

urhhh,

And his hand slumped over the hammock, Rookie peddling beside him and licking stiff fingers.

“Roo-f”

The dog licked away, the family guffawing, undertones of happiness and joy.

The cloud's hues morphed maroon, to purple, to indigo, to finally pitch black.

....

The Good Salesman:

“It’s time for ANOTHER sale...”Milton Frock thought with pride.

His spotless leather shoes stepped from the work van onto the asphalt, the leaves rustling in the breeze of the languid Sunday morning. Posted conspicuously across the side of van were the likes of Mr. Frock, a long grin stretching up a strikingly pasty face, a miniature globe in the man’s wiry fingers, the quote in bubbles above a bald pate:

“Frock gets the Sale, rain or hail!”

As Mr. Frock strode up the cobblestone pathway toward the suburban home with maroon sidings, the man’s knobby knees thudding slightly as he limped, he glanced over the name of the occupant, Mr. Sean Blane, a tiny 2’x4” picture posted crookedly on the clipboard. Blane smiled cheekily. Cheeks swollen fat like a plump turkey.

Mr. Frock cajoled because he always loved the heavy ones who always were slow-witted and out of breath, as if they were nine hops away from an inevitable stroke.

Halfway up the path, a beat black cat frolicked in the garden by the house. The cat froze when Frock neared. Even as he stepped a long leg onto the porch, the cat eyeballed him without remorse.

“GET !!!YOU LITTLE FUCKER!!!”

The cat scurried away, meowing mirthlessly...

“Jesus would be proud.”

A Christmas tree, red and green sprites, stood in the living room windowpane. An angel, glistening splendidly, peaked from atop.

“A good, sacrilegious Customer...”

Frock pressed the pants of his pinstripe suit before swallowing an anxious breath.

“ANOTHER SALE” He said, rapping three times, loudly.

He heard scuttling behind the door, followed by shouts, then there was a click and the door opened to a corpulent, unshaven man who raised a suspicious eyebrow. He barked: “Can I help you?”

Mr. Frock opened both hands jovially, as he always did. Something changed in the voice, more amiable, but surely feigning enthusiasm from how Frock sounded before.

“HELLO! How are you doing?!”

The man looked a little disarmed, heeded the padlock expression. “I’m fine.”

“Superb! It’s a wonderful Sabbath morning!”Mr. Frock looked over a shoulder and appraised the man’s neatly cut lawn, the gray, rather gloomy sky above... “A great, wonderful time to enjoy the weather!”

The man bobbed a flabby buccula. “uh-huh...” The man’s face looked about as interested as an egg.

“Christmas is right around the corner!” Mr. Frock trailed off... “Sir, you may be interested in some of the products that I have to offer at low prices.”

The man stared unassumingly as Mr. Frock fumbled the briefcase between the knees and unlatched the pins. He grabbed out a pamphlet... “Hidden treasures!” as he passed it to the man’s chubby fingers... “In there we have ALL SORTS of holiday jems!”

The man shoved the pamphlet back and it fell to the ground. “Well I don’t need any jewelry. I bought enough jewelry while raising my two girls.”

“Oh that’s MOST wonderful ...” Mr. Frock’s eyes flashed red for a second as he bent double for the unraveled pamphlet... “I’m sure your daughters LOVED them!”

“Yeah-they did.” The man began closing the door... “Now, you have a good one.”

Frock flustered.

The man had almost gotten the door shut in Frock’s face, which would’ve probably been the best thing that had ever happened to that man’s life, but when the door was two inches from closing, Frock jammed a heel between the frame and mouthed two words:

“Sean Blane...”

The man whipped the door ajar and stood, wide-chested. “HOW do you know my name?”

Frock tucked the briefcase inside an arm and unassumingly said: “I see that you have a REAL Christmas tree.”

Frock opened eyes wide, pointing to the tree.

Blane looked at the tree, perplexity in his fat expression. “Yeah, soooo, What’s that have to do with YOU knowing MY name?”

Frock wagged a finger peremptorily.

“Because I KNOW... I was told by someone at the office that this Blane fellow owned a REAL tree and MIGHT be interested in buying an artificial. You know—”

Frock leaned forward, his eyes peering seriously at Blane...

“In light of what happened to that family up on the north side, who had a REAL tree and it caught fire, setting the complex ablaze and consuming over twenty poor, poor lives.”

“Are you SHITTING me?!” Blane looked like a lame person who had just managed to understand his first joke. “I didn’t know THAT MANY people DIED. That’s insane...” Blane’s face wrinkled in real concern... “But WHO from your office sent you over here in the first place?”

Frock’s eyes shifted as he remembered the name... “BIG man, delivery driver, says he knows you from the old days.” He spread both arms...

“Was it Charlie?” Blane touched the chin, “Orange beard?”

“That was HIM!!!” Frock’s eyes lit up marvelously... “He said you MIGHT be interested, for SAFETY reasons...”

“Man, I haven’t seen that sonafabitch since I worked at the steel mill...’ Blane expression was a teaspoon surprised but resoundingly euthanized by the conversation and the mention of an old work associate named Charlie, who according to Frock’s records really went by Charles Dove, a *customer* Frock had once long ago visited on a old country road selling a catalogue of hunting supplies...

“Yeah, I have two daughters who visit sometimes....” Blane opened the door the rest of the way and waved Frock in... “And they both have babies, so I might check out what you have.”

Frock entered and Blane directed them into the parlor with the gigantic cone-shaped tree. Blane closed the door... “I can’t believe TWENTY people from the town died!”

“Oh yes, SO tragic,” said Frock, curling a lip.

“Sit down over here...” Blane cleared a giant stack of newspapers and junk from the couch and walked to the edge of the hall...

“Would you like anything to drink?”

“Just water. Thank you.”

As Blane got drinks, Frock gazed around the cluttered parlor, untidy, just as the apparel of his customer. He sneered: "What a SLOB..."

He wondered whether Blane had always lived so odiferously.

On the adjoining walls were two deer mounts, beady black eyes staring blankly. One was a ten point, the other, a twelve...

Blane had probably hunted along with Charles Dove back when they were acquainted...

The deer mounts only added to Frock's notion of Blane's simplistic life. Blane hunted simple minded animals because that's all he could comprehend killing... Yet he was no different than the thousands before that Frock had sat down with and sold to...

He straightened both shoulders as he heard clamorous footfalls.

"Thank you "accepting the water, swigging half the glass.

Blane chugged lemonade. He rested back into a lazy boy...

"So what do you have for me, Mr..?"

"Frock" He placed the water on the side table and recovered the pamphlet, placing it into Blane's hands...

"The trees are toward the back page."

"Here we go..."Blane set the pamphlet on a knee and looked over the shimmering artificial Christmas tree and frowned, squirrel cheeks sagging dopily."No, I don't want gold...or silver ...tree."

Frock nodded, already well aware of the tree Bain *would*, in fact want. He was a plain man, so he'd want a tree that looked like a real one...

It was just like matching up Mr. Dove with the Titanum Cross bow in the hunting catalogue...

Blane shook his head disapprovingly. Frock gazed around the living room, family portraits suspended over the decommissioned fireplace; his two daughters...grandbabies... family friends... Frock would one day visit them all, eventually, a knock at the door... He was the best damned salesman in this godforsaken World. One thing Frock had learned was the truth that people want new, unnecessary things they would probably be better off not having in the first place...

"I'm not sure if I want a tree that looks like a pickle." Blane flipped to the back page."Don't you have anything that looks plain, like a normal Christmas tree?"

"Oh, Mr. Blane you may be IN LUCK!" He took the pamphlet from Blane's fingers."It's NOT advertised in here... But I have a VERY special one in the back of my truck..."

"For all you could tell, it looks exactly like the big tree you have, except this one won't shed or run the risk of burning your house to the floor!"

"No kidding."

"Mr.Blane, I'm not the type of man to kid a customer."

"How much does this "special" tree cost?"

"For you, Mr Blane, there is NO CHARGE!!!"

"Are you kidding me? What's the catch?"

"NO catch, I could go and grab it right now..."

Mr Blane stared at him awkwardly. He was not the sort to ask or care for free handouts, and now it all seemed a bit coincidental that this complete stranger now stood in his house, wanting to give him something completely FREE...

"There's NO catch..?"

"NO catch. Matter of fact, I'll be right back!"

Before Blane could mouth another word, the screen door thudded shut as Frock zipped out the door to the van... Blane sat in the silent parlor, wondering about the strange, lanky man he had just met... He couldn't quite figure it, but something seemed "off" about what was happening...

In a way, he wanted to protest but Frock had mentioned Charles, and Frock seemed altogether good-hearted... So when he reemerged through the door with a long, rectangular box, Blane silenced the wanton suspicion and helped Frock lug the package in.

"WOW, this is heavy..."

"Although very easy to set up!"

When they got it into the living room, Frock leered and shoved the clipboard into Blane's belly. "All you have to do is... Sign."

Blane's thoughts about rebellion returned... He stared back at the box, then the tree with the angel. He didn't really like 'fake' trees since his wife Mary, now long passed away from a twelve year battle with Leukemia, loved the piney smell of real trees, and because of her, he to-this-date had upheld that tradition...

"I was thinking about this tree being the last one I put up anyway... Maybe you can give that to someone who needs it..."

"Mr. Blane." His voice sounded hypnotic, distant, "you NEED my tree..."

"But Mr Frock, I don't even know WHO you are; does it make sense for you to give me this?"

Mr. Frock dropped his chin.. He shot back a lofty look at the family portrait with the two grandbabies, the two daughters...

Mr. Blane's deceased wife...

Suddenly, Blane's forehead creased in sharp pain.

He dug a finger into an ear as he heard a screeching static.

Frock's voice, "You need the tree for your family..."

All of the sudden, Blane's pallor changed and he signed the paper without question. His eyes looked like they had seen the twilight zone as he moved, dazed, as Frock exited the front door and Blane mechanically waved a goodbye.

Frock leered curtly. "I give Her greetings..."

"Bye now, good sir..."

Frock's comment about Mr. Blane's dead wife never registered the conscious mind as he shut the door to absent-mindedly unpack the *new* tree.

Mr. Frock's van vanished before the front door had closed entirely.

He cackled to himself. "ANOTHER good sale!"

And the *good salesman*, Mr. Frock's pupils narrowed into pinpoints, pearly black.

Mr. Blane ripped open the cardboard to find some stuffing... a three foot tall Christmas tree... a business card.

Frock stood with a thumb up, smiling widely.

Blane tossed the card aside and returned unpacking the tree.

He slowly unraveled the chord. In a hand, he held the plug and reached for an outlet on the wall. His fingers brushed against the metric surface. "Dammitttt !" He recoiled as electricity shocked the fingertips...

The tree flickered for a moment, and then lit up red and green... It was a funny sight, seeing the artificial next to the full sized tree. It was like a little miniature of Christmas...

Blane stuffed the box into a trash bag. He set Mr. Frock's card on the side table, by the new tree, making a mental note to take down the old tree before he tossed the bag out with the rest of the garbage... Mr. Blane went upstairs and fell asleep...

He snored far away in deep, heavy slumber as the new tree flickered on and off...

Then the parlor's lights followed...

And finally the whole house--

POPPPP

A spark landed from the outlet onto the carpet and a small flame started in the living room... The room blazed into wild flames until the real and the fake tree ignited into a raging glow...

The plastic of the fake tree dripped onto Mr. Frock's business card.

First, his bald plate melted away, then his lanky body, then finally, the entirety of the quote from his van:

"Frock gets the sale, rain or hail..."

Believe me, I'm the One who struck the Nail!

....

The Mark of the Beast:

While the students worked on their written assignment, Mr. Headly skimmed over a news magazine that his wife had bought for him the day before. On the cover page there were people standing in a lineup, all smiling, forearms extended for a picture. They all had recently received the newest implant, the “TH-41,” a small bead that syncs up with various technologies... For parents, it was a tracking device that monitored their children’s heart rate and resulting behavior. For children, it was a cell-phone that never gets lost. The article explained how the node worked alongside the nervous system, firing and in-taking electrical surges...

Mr. Headly felt his head throb as he read the article... The same thought kept smacking his conscious like a brick wall: this isn’t right, this is playing God. When he reached the end of the article, there was a doctor wearing a white smock with the company logo: a small bird spreading its wings to take flight flanked behind a rising sun. In the photo, the doctor was smiling cheekily and the caption read, “Dr. Whitehouse, Harvard graduate in neurology, recommends the TH-41 as the leading device in Somatechology... “It’s a must-have for assimilation into this modern society.”

Shaking the head, Headly set the magazine down and let out a deep, anxious breath. He shut his eyes, ever so slowly regaining a walk around heart rate. He looked at the class. “You can stop now.”

All the students stopped typing on the flat-screen impressed into the desks... Headly tapped a control button under his desk and all the screens went blank...

“How many here has had a node implanted?”

Faces around the room looked puzzled...

“Raise your hands, I’m just curious.”

About two-thirds the class lifted hands... Mr. Headly nodded and glanced back to the magazine. His eyes fixated on the birdie spreading its wings. “Okay, I’m going to ask you a question. This is random, but because we have a few minutes left, I think it will be an interesting discussion. Especially considering the events in the last two years... Here it goes: What, if anything, is *all* the motion in the universe heading toward?”

Headly watched the class from behind the desk... His eyes were deep and hallow, the hair resembled a bowl cut, the bangs parted into a v-shape across the forehead. He wore the standardized clothing for staff, black and blue slacks, a school mascot above the pocket. A patterned tie hung from his neck like a long, red snake, which was the only dress variation allowed under regulation by the school-board for male faculty members... There was a prolonged silence while the question sunk in. The only sounds were a clock ticking away and an occasional ruffle as students shifted uncomfortably when Mr. Headly’s gaze transfixed upon them...

“Come, on. Somebody please answer me; what is all the motion heading towards?”

It looked as if nobody would answer and the echoing silence would persist, but then from a far corner of the room, a shaggy haired boy with rounded spectacles spoke up. “God. It’s all heading toward God, in some manifestation or another.”

Heads whipped around like wild swivels. Every eye in the room stared at the boy as if he had committed nasty blasphemy. Then, in order to catch the reaction, they all looked back to Mr. Headly... To their profound surprise, he was nodding and smiling... “Mr. O’Connor, could you elaborate?”

Mr O’Connor used a finger to push the glasses up the bridge of the nose... After a pensive moment, he finally said, “God is perfection. Therefore, all the motion of the universe is moving towards perfection.”

“Ahh, Perfection... Now that is something to move toward. Wouldn’t you agree?”

The students nodded in unison.

Headly looked displeased. “Why are you all nodding? Only two people in this room—Mr. O’Connor and myself—have any clue what they’re talking about...” Headly rolled the eyes, waved a hand peremptorily, and continued... “As for the rest of you, you’ve lived eighteen or so years, and none of you have the slightest idea about your existence. Pathetic, if you ask me...”

Another student, a boy with droopy eyes and baggy clothing, leaned back into a chair and truculently said, “Why does God have to be brought into this? Isn’t the fanciful notion of God the polar opposite of Philosophy?”

Whack— Headly hopped from a chair, sending it reeling backward into the wall. Palms down, he set both hands on the desk and leaned over. “Mr. Smith, WHAT is the meaning of the word Philosophy?”

Mr Smith’s jaw went slack like raw bacon and he stumbled for words...

“You have five seconds, Mr. Smith. Five..Four..Three..”

Smith’s face went scarlet... He finally admitted, “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” Headly rolled the eyes even more drastically, and spun around to the board. He touched a finger against the glassy surface and scribbled the word “philosophy” onto it. From the word, he extended a line and wrote something else which looked like a foreign language... “Philosophos, a Greek word which means lover of wisdom.” He turned back to Mr. Smith. “Now Mr. Smith, I’ll ask you one more time. Is God, what Mr. O’Connor referred to as Perfection, relevant to Philosophy, the Love of Wisdom, TRUTH?”

“If you say so...”

“If I say so? When does it matter what I say? It’s what you believe!”

The class was once again silent... Mr. Headly pulled his chair beneath and plopped down... “Okay, now I have another question for you—Are Computers perfect, flawless beings? They can calculate without error, observe without the blindness of subjectivity... Are computers meant—”

RINGGG—at that moment, the bell pierced over the intercom and students started packing up their things.

“On that note, have a good day...”

A girl asked what the reading assignment was for tomorrow and Mr. Headly told her that they didn’t have one, that they were free to go... After the exodus of students, one remained... It was O’Connor, his square spectacles glaring from the bright fluorescents above... He walked up to Mr. Headly’s desk and asked, “Mr. Headly, I’m afraid of what’s happening...” He flipped over his forearm. Halfway up, there was a red circle the size of a coin and in the center of it was what looked like a titanium bead stuck just beneath the skin...

“So am I.”

“Since I’ve gotten it installed, I feel like everything is a little off..”

“What do you mean?”

"I'm not sure, I can't really put my finger on it. At times, I feel like my thoughts are all jumbled up and disordered. I'm not sure... Anyhow, what got an ol' geezer like you thinking about the nodes?"

Mr. Headly lifted the corner of the magazine... "My wife bought this for me and I gave it a read while the class was testing."

"Is your wife afraid of them, too?"

"More so than me... She wants to move from the country if the congressional mandate goes through and all citizens are required to install the node."

"Hopefully, they vote it down... One more thing—that stuff you said about all the motion in the universe is really starting to make sense..."

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, it's human nature to be impulsive... Yes, we humans have rationality, which in its purest sense is perfection, but I'm afraid this is going too far..."

"Good," said Headly. "Means I'm actually teaching you neanderthals something... But why did you get that node put in if you believed they were intrusive?"

"My entire family choose to have it installed, and at the time, I really didn't have a choice in the matter..."

"Well Mr. O'Connor, I think your fears are justified. Who's to say some guy isn't sitting behind a desk controlling your emotions and actions... It may be the first step toward a monster which will get out of hand..."

Mr O'Connor nodded and stared at the metallic bead. Then he abruptly said, "Thanks Mr. Headly. That's all I was wondering. Have a good day."

"You too, son..."

Headly frowned as the boy closed the door on his way out... He stayed around for a while, grading papers and organizing the room... The hallways were empty and ghostly while he locked the classroom as he left... With a briefcase tucked beneath an arm, Headly strolled the brief walk to his car, thinking of little along the way. He recovered the keys and fumbled with the lock. He let the car idle for a second before pulling out of the school parking lot.

He drove twenty-five miles an hour through Main Street on the way to his suburban home... He came to a stop at a red light and looked over to notice a large throng of sign wielding protesters chanting, "Nodes are bad, they make you go MAD!"

They were referring to an incident in Florida where a faulty node failed to sync up with a teenage boy's nervous system and the boy went crack-pot, walking into his school and shooting at the entire class. Mr. Headly starred transfixed on the protesters until a car behind him honked and he realized the red light had changed to green...

On the highway, he passed several billboards advertising the newest node, the same titanium piece O'Connor had recently had installed. The billboard showed the same company logo: a birdie taking flight over a setting sun...

Mr. Headly wouldn't have been so concerned about the nodes if the government, accompanied by high-end capitalistic investors such as the company manufacturing and selling the nodes, hadn't attempted a unequivocal effort over the last two years to force ALL citizens to acquire such a node under the skin... Next month, Congress was voting on the proposition..and then..if they choose to mandate all citizens to have the implant..then Headly wouldn't have a choice in the matter... He voted *ab imo pectore* they'd vote it down.

The past year had been a scary dream to him.

In the last book of the bible, the book of John, also known as the book of rapture, the one predicting the end times, there was an explicit reference to “**the Mark of the Beast...**” It was probably the only thing that Headly had remembered besides the Ten Commandments from those Sunday school lessons when his mother compelled him, sometimes even using threats of whipping, to force him to read the Bible scrupulously...

As he remembers, the book prophesies that the Mark of the Beast is the telltale sign of the coming Apocalypse... Everybody would be forced to carry the sign—*and if they choose otherwise*—buying food and acquiring the means to survive will be nearly impossible...

Headly saw the node and the government’s attempts to force citizens to acquire it as ‘the Beast... He hoped with all the heart that Congress would vote it down or else he would have to find another country to live in...

But the problem was that most of the westernized countries had also adopted the node...
He thought it was all insane.

On the other side of the argument, the proponents of the node envision a day when crime would be virtually eliminated since the nodes can monitor all the sensory input of the persons wearing it...

Perfection, they argue...

With the node, they can create the perfect state.

But Mr. Headly didn’t see it that way at all... He saw the damned thing as the elimination of free will, the very thing that makes us human...

What was the world coming to?

He tried to forget about the billboards and the morality of the nodes as he drove into the driveway... He shifted the car into park, leaned back and shut his eyes... He swallowed deep breaths while he cleared the mind...

Stacy would be inside, moving about the kitchen, preparing dinner... He didn’t want to bother her with more of his unnecessary fears. They were bad enough on their own. He didn’t need them infesting her already troublesome conscious... He opened his eyes and commanded, “Glove box, open.”

It popped ajar and he recovered an orange pill bottle. He unscrewed the lid and shook out two tic-tac sized pills. The label on the bottle recommends one daily, but with the stress from these last few weeks, Headly swallowed two anyways...

When he stepped into the night, the sky had morphed an amber hue and crickets were already singing their sporadic tune... The soles of his shoes crunched the pebble surface of the walkway leading to the front door.

He stood before the door and took more of those deep breaths... As he slid the key into the door, he heard a rustle from somewhere behind.

He whipped around suddenly and nervously squinted over the shadowy lawn... There was no noise except the whistling wind and crickets, and absolutely no signs of anybody around.

“Come on, Bill.” he told himself aloud... He shook his head and, ever so lightly, pushed in the front door...

It swung open in a slow arc...

To his surprise, the hallway light was off and the house was dark except for a light pouring from the kitchen down the hall...

“Stacy, baby, I’m Home.”

No response...

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