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*Epiphany (1989)*

The Canyon Center is (or was — I won't go back to look) a large office complex at the corner of Ninth Street (N/S) and Canyon Boulevard (E/W) on the west end of downtown Boulder. It faced Ninth, and behind it lay a plaza, a parking lot, and a rabbit warren of townhouses and condominiums that disappeared from sight into the west. The Center proper consisted of three pieces: a smaller chunk which held a few small shops but mainly comprised a large open office space filled with cubicles inhabited, in the days when I knew the place, by a vipers' nest of penny stockbrokers; a larger chunk in which a variety of businesses hung their assorted shingles; and a detached low building in the plaza, which at the time was occupied by a restaurant.

I worked here for a season in the evenings, from six until nine or ten. I generally cleaned the first building by myself. There was another guy who worked with me, but he had a much more relaxed attitude toward the job, and tended to get there later than I did. As always when I worked as a janitor I arrived on time or if possible early, started immediately, and moved as fast as lightning until I was done, because I hated the work and wanted it to be over with as quickly as possible. — The devolution of tolerance for cigarettes had progressed far enough that I could no longer smoke while working, however, a serious drawback, and so I usually paused for a few minutes on the pedestrian bridge while crossing from one building to the other on the second story to get a quick fix before continuing. Sometimes I took a moment to read the *Wall Street Journal*, which I fished out of the trash in one office and perused rapidly before handing it over to a lawyer who worked late on the other side and was too cheap to buy it for himself. — These were still the

Eighties, after all; I felt I should participate, if only vicariously, in the Decade of Greed.

The *Journal* was a curious mixture of useful information and unbalanced opinion. Thus I learned on one page that in a competitive experiment comparing the advice of an assortment of professional stock-pickers the control, darts thrown at a board, had won, and on another that Michael Milken deserved to make half a billion dollars a year because he got up to work at four every morning. Since I slept three hours between jobs, went to work at two, and made six hundred a month, I felt there must be some flaw in this argument, but was too tired to discover it.

One evening as I stood smoking in an exhausted stupor on the bridge a young couple came in off the street and walked beneath me toward the restaurant, holding hands, animated, laughing gaily as they crossed the plaza toward their dinner date.

And here was the epiphany.

I didn't think quite so cinematically in those days, but nonetheless I could *feel* the crane shot that would reveal this tableaux, the camera rising up behind me to frame me in the foreground leaning on my broom, burnt out and desperate with a cigarette in my hand, gazing down — O bitter irony — on this happy couple below as they danced without a care into a dinner at this restaurant I could never afford. — Here suddenly I understood what I had always repressed before, that the life of the city went on without the slightest concern for me and the social class to which I now belonged. That there were two kinds of people, the people who went to the party and the people who cleaned up afterwards, the Eloi and the Morlocks, and that I had now become one of the lesser of the latter, the merest Wog. That it would never get better for me, that it would only get worse. That the bright lights, the parties, the drugs, the drink, the

laughter, the romantic entanglements, were all for others, not for me. That the society into which I has been thrown would never rest until it had clubbed me to death, because I was a cull, a reject, one who had been cast aside, and they wanted to see me die in the gutter.

And I shrugged, because who could give a shit what those morons wanted. — I finished the cigarette, littered the pavement beneath me with the smoldering butt, and moved on to the next building. — *Was mich nicht umbringt, macht mich starker.* — I felt now I could crush rocks with my bare hands.