

Anxiety in Wonderland

Down Rabbit Hole

Adam knew His parents had tried to give Him the best life they could manage. But no parent could protect a child from civilization itself and its elegant decay, its invisible humiliations, its endless appetite for the human nervous system's stability. Their generation had inherited steadier economies, simpler ambitions, quieter minds. Innovation had not yet evolved into a machine that rewarded the extraordinary and quietly suffocated everyone else.

They never noticed the anxiety Adam carried inside Him. Some days, He doubted they even believed depression existed outside Plath poetry and people on screen.

"Adam, just shake it off. It's a phase. Everything passes."

"Okay, Mum. Sure."

He entered His bedroom after that. Small. White. Minimalist in an emotionally evacuated way. The setting sun leaked through the blinds in long golden bars next to stretched black shadows across the floor like prison shadows.

Adam unscrewed a bottle.

He swallowed two Xanax pills He had stolen from His mother's medicine cookie box, washing them down with gin that burned less than consciousness did.

For a while, He simply stood there, outlined against the dying light like a figure waiting to be erased.

Then He dropped down the rabbit hole.

He collapsed onto the mattress, pupils widening, jaw loose, body sinking slowly beneath the heavy steel curtain of sedation.

*

He was standing in a city that looked emotionally exhausted.

The world existed in ombré tones: burnt orange dissolving into abyssal black. Granite skyscrapers rose into the sky like unfinished tombs. Public parks overflowed with exotic animals tearing one another apart with an oppressed human resentment. Crooked streets twisted around broken sidewalks littered with shattered signage, collapsed billboards and dead streetlights.

One billboard, miraculously still standing, read:

*SPEAK ROUGHLY TO YOUR LITTLE BOY
AND BEAT HIM WHEN HE SNEEZES.*

Adam stared at it longer than necessary.

Then He kept walking.

Cars burned soundlessly along both sides of the road. Laundry lines burned. Storefronts burned. Dustbins burned. Yet nothing produced smoke. The fires consumed everything with eerie restraint, as though destruction itself had grown too tired to announce its presence.

Still, Adam felt Himself suffocating.

His chest tightened with every step.

And somewhere inside that tightening came the terrible realization that this was exactly what depression felt like: burning internally while producing no visible evidence of damage.

Ahead of Him stood a massive steel roundabout raised like a ceremonial dais. Rusted signs and dead vegetation circled its perimeter. At its center towered an enormous clock, its face made entirely of reflective glass.

Adam climbed onto the structure and the city burned elegantly around Him, like civilization had rehearsed this collapse for centuries.

He stared into the mirroring clock face and the minute hand swept across His reflection and the reflection began to speak in a melancholy sing-song voice.

“Adam, your misery wastes time. Unlike me, time is not in your hands.”

The giant hand dragged itself slowly across the clock-mirror.

“Long nights where breathing feels like manual labour. Guilt whenever happiness catches you off guard. Escaping rooms full of people because existing among them exhausts you. Digging your nails into your palms to outrun your own thoughts. Regretting every attempt at becoming more than the frightened thing you already are.”

Adam said nothing.

“Time has seen millions of people like you,” the reflection continued. “You are not uniquely broken. Merely modern.”

The words landed harder than Flight 2216.

“This,” the reflection said, “is the civilization your mind built from everything it consumed. Look at it properly. Look how exhausted it is. Look how badly it wants to disappear.”

The minute hand swept across His face again.

“Did this world ever truly leave you with a choice besides surrender?”

The voice softened into something almost compassionate.

“And tell me honestly, Adam, do you really believe time alone can save you from becoming this?”

Silence.

Adam looked down and realized He was wearing a jumpsuit made entirely of ash. Every movement caused fragments of it to drift from His body like the remains of burned paper. He looked as though He had already survived His own cremation.

Then He heard screaming and turned.

Four crowds were charging toward the roundabout from every surrounding street. Men. Women. Children. They wore neon furs, plastic bags, dresses stitched from human hair, impossible fabrics and grotesque imitations of fashion that looked less like clothing and more like psychological breakdowns with sleeves.

Adam should have run. Instead, He watched.

As the groups neared one another, people began clawing at their own flesh. Some laughed while doing it. Others screamed. Toddlers shrieked beside their mothers with the same primal terror. The sound burned Adam’s chest at 451°F.

And the crowds collided. Bodies crashed together in violent intimacy. They clawed, embraced, struck, kissed, tore. Adam could not distinguish affection from brutality anymore. Maybe civilization couldn’t either.

The world annihilated itself around Him and He felt almost nothing. That frightened Him more than the violence.

Because suddenly He understood He had been watching Himself self-destruct in exactly the same way: silently, passively, almost politely.

Drawn toward the clock again, Adam stepped closer to the swinging arms.

Too close.

The minute hand struck Him violently across the chest and the world vanished beneath His feet.

*

He stood at the end of a narrow, dusty lane, in an area that resembled the 2026 Gaza Strip after its neighbour's gentle defences.

At the far end rose a five-storey building shaped like Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Beside Adam stood Orson Welles, as though He had always existed there, waiting patiently inside the architecture of Adam's breakdown.

Adam barely reacted anymore.

Together, they stared at the building.

"It creeps up on you quietly," Orson said in His deep theatrical voice. "That's the clever part. Real suffering rarely announces itself dramatically."

Hairline fractures spread slowly across the structure.

"You deny it first. Everyone does."

The cracks deepened like veins beneath skin.

"Then it spreads into your mind. Your heart. Your habits. Your sense of tomorrow."

One of the building's central pillars burst apart in slow motion.

"It suffocates you at your very core."

The middle floors began folding inward unnaturally, collapsing into themselves like dying lungs.

"You try to exhale," Orson continued, "but despair is greedy. It wants all the space inside you."

The windows exploded outward.

"You begin bursting at the seams."

The building tilted violently toward them.

“And eventually,” Orson said softly, almost tenderly, “you collapse down to your foundations.”

The structure gave way.

Concrete thundered downward. Dust consumed the entire street.

“When you fall,” Orson’s voice echoed somewhere inside the collapse, “you rarely fall alone.”

Adam could no longer see Him.

Dust flooded His lungs. Concrete scraped against His skin. He could barely breathe, yet still He felt no instinct to run. Only exhaustion. A colossal exhaustion. The exhaustion of someone who had spent years surviving Himself.

Then Orson’s voice emerged one final time through the debris-clouded air.

“Let’s dig deeper into the why.”

And the world disappeared again.

Explore Rabbit Hole

Adam no longer attempted to make sense of where the rabbit hole took Him.

Control itself had begun to feel theatrical, a lie.

He now found Himself standing inside a circular room.

Naturally, Orson Welles stood beside Him.

The room was enamel white, polished to the point of sterility. The walls curved endlessly around them and were lined with identical doors made of something resembling ivory or polished tusk. Under the pale light, the surfaces gleamed with surgical coldness.

Orson looked amused.

“Adam,” He said gently, “choose a door.”

“Why am I here?”

“Because,” Orson replied, “it is time to rock the boat instead of fantasizing about jumping off it.”

Adam swallowed.

“Orson, I don’t feel good.”

“Why, pray tell?”

“This room is spinning.”

Orson smiled faintly.

“It probably is. Circular things enjoy pretending they are infinite.” He stepped forward slowly. “See, Adam, this room offers you the illusion of endless possibilities. Endless doors. Endless selves. Endless outcomes. But life is not an infinite spiral. It is painfully linear. There is only the choice you make and the consequences that crawl out of those choices.”

Adam stared at the doors.

“They’re making me anxious.”

“Everything meaningful usually does.”

“I don’t want to choose.”

“That,” Orson said softly, “has been your problem for quite some time, young man.”

A silence settled between them.

In Adam’s chest, anxiety began its familiar ritual. Tightening bronchioles. Restless pulse. The sensation that His ribs were slowly shrinking inward. Somewhere in the distance, a string quartet began repeating two sharp notes that sounded eerily similar to a ticking clock.

His vision blurred slightly.

He walked toward the door directly facing Him and pressed His palm against its smooth surface.

The floor disappeared instantly.

For a while, He could see nothing: stubbornly keeping his eyes shut.

But He could hear music.

It sounded ancient. Sacred. The sort of music that belonged inside seventeenth-century cathedrals where God impregnated peoples' nervous systems with yearning fear.

Adam felt wetness rising slowly from His feet to His knees and then, opened His eyes.

He was standing inside a vast luminous puddle.

The water glowed softly beneath Him, imperfectly circular, like a child's failed attempt at drawing eternity. Strange fluorescent organisms floated across its surface in electric colours. They resembled microscopic lifeforms enlarged beyond reason.

Then He felt it again.

The insects.

They crawled calmly across His skin in organized patterns, as though His body were territory already mapped long ago.

"In your genetic pool," Orson's voice echoed somewhere above Him, "you may find answers to your anxiety, Adam. Have you considered that possibility?"

"Orson," Adam whispered, trying not to panic, "there's something crawling on me."

"Adam," Orson replied patiently, "there is nothing crawling on you."

Adam kept walking.

Numbness had not disappeared. It had merely evolved into fatigue.

The puddle eventually curved downward at its edges and Adam stepped beyond it onto darkness.

Ahead of Him rose a steel dais.

A swarm of bodies gathered beneath it on the opposite side.

People clawed desperately at its edges trying to climb upward. Beside Adam stood a tall chrome ladder and, at its base, a transparent jug shaped like a rabbit's head. The vessel glowed softly in the dark and was filled with water.

The moment Adam touched it, the crowd below began screaming.

“WATER!”

Their voices sounded dehydrated.

Animal.

Adam hurried toward the edge of the dais and poured water downward into their open mouths.

The reaction was immediate.

They recoiled violently.

“YOU INCOMPETENT FUCK!”

“IT’S DRYING US!”

“YOU EVEN RUIN WATER!”

Adam stumbled backward.

Something inside His chest folded inward.

Panic arrived all at once.

He rushed toward the chrome ladder and climbed the first step.

The ladder lowered automatically.

He tried again.

One step upward.

One step downward.

Again. Again. Again.

An endless mechanical humiliation.

Orson’s voice drifted calmly through the darkness like a university lecturer discussing climate change.

“You fear disappointing others because you already feel inadequate long before they confirm it. You are thirsty for proof of your own worth, Adam. That thirst becomes suffocation.”

“Orson,” Adam snapped, voice cracking, “I don’t like this.”

The insects erupted across His skin violently now.

“ORSON.”

“There is nothing eating at you, Adam.”

But Adam no longer believed Him.

He walked toward the opposite side of the dais and stepped off into darkness again.

★

This time He landed hard against grass.

The insects surged into chaos across His skin.

Then He felt plastic tightening around His wrists.

Cables.

Bright pink electrical cables slithered around His limbs and torso before lifting Him violently upward.

Light exploded across the darkness.

Adam found Himself seated at the head of a long dinner table set for twelve. The tabletop itself was an enormous television screen broadcasting endless footage of terrorist attacks, ecological collapse, police brutality and screaming news anchors speaking with polished detachment.

The cutlery gleamed beneath artificial light.

Holograms flickered in the surrounding chairs, people Adam recognized from His own life appearing and disappearing like corrupted data.

The cables tightened around His chest.

His throat.

His mouth.

He couldn’t breathe.

Panic fully consumed Him now.

Orson remained silent for a while before finally speaking.

“You are over-informed. Over-connected. Over-exposed.” His voice echoed softly around the digital glow.

The cables constricted tighter.

“You do not rest, Adam. Your generation confuses constant stimulation with aliveness.”

Adam’s eyes filled with tears.

The suffocation felt familiar.

Too familiar.

Suddenly the lights vanished.

The table disappeared.

The holograms dissolved.

Adam floated alone inside a black vacuum with nothing beneath His feet.

The insects continued their endless marathon across His skin.

“Orson,” He whispered shakily, “please make them stop.”

“I still do not know what insects you’re talking about.”

Then the vacuum began changing shape.

*

Adam found Himself standing inside a narrow neon doorway.

Two faceless figures stood on either side of it, leaving almost no room for passage. To move forward, He had to squeeze between them, pressing His body against theirs.

The space was suffocating.

Every breath felt borrowed.

He missed the emptiness of the vacuum instantly.

The figures pressed harder against Him as He tried to move.

“ORSON!”

“Oh,” Orson replied conversationally, “I believe this is peer pressure.”

The music around them grew louder.

More distorted.

“Funny little thing. Human beings would rather destroy themselves collectively than encourage individual difference.”

The faceless figures continued crushing Him between them.

“Orson, please.”

“There are still no insects, Adam.”

Then everything vanished again.

Adam stumbled forward into another space, crying now from exhaustion more than fear.

*

He was standing inside a courtroom.

Every surface was made entirely of mirrors.

The judge’s bench. The jury box. The witness stand. The walls. The floors. The ceiling.

Everywhere He looked, He saw Himself reflected back infinitely from impossible angles.

Too many versions.

Too many faces.

Too much visibility.

The insects danced violently beneath His skin.

Adam screamed and began striking the mirrors.

Nothing cracked.

Nothing moved.

Orson's voice filled the courtroom.

"You were taught visibility before identity, Adam."

Adam kept hitting the glass.

"I'M GOING TO FUCKING KILL YOU!" He screamed at His own reflections. "I'M GOING TO KILL ALL OF YOU!"

"There is nothing there to kill."

The music became unbearable.

Then suddenly Adam started falling.

*

When He landed, He was tiny.

Miniaturized.

He stood atop a mountain composed entirely of dark soil. Towering above Him were enormous chiffon lilac curtains fluttering casually against invisible wind.

The sight terrified Him immediately.

Not because it was violent.

But because it felt ancient.

Primal.

The insects slowed injected with fear.

Fear. The kind that existed before language.

Adam's lungs constricted painfully.

He could barely move.

Orson's voice emerged softly between the fluttering curtains.

“You were always frightened, Adam. Some people inherit fear more deeply than others. Fear was the architect that sketched the blueprint of these nerves of yours.”

Adam tried to speak. Nothing emerged.

“You confuse fear with prophecy,” Orson continued. “You always have.”

The curtains continued their impossible movement.

“There are still no insects, for the record.”

Adam forced His foot forward at last.

The world shifted instantly beneath Him.

*

He stood before a white cot, placed in the center of another stone dais, illuminated by pale light.

Ahead of it was a white bedroom door.

It looked exactly like His childhood bedroom door.

Adam understood immediately that He was supposed to climb into the cot.

And despite everything, some exhausted part of Him wanted to.

He climbed over the wooden bars and lay inside.

The music softened.

The light dimmed gently.

Then the door began opening and closing.

Slowly.

Repeatedly.

Open.

Close.

Open.

Close.

The sound hollowed Him out instantly.

Fear flooded His body so violently that He nearly stopped breathing altogether.

Memories rushed toward Him faster than thought itself.

“Adam,” Orson said, in his quietest tone so far, “I am sorry for the abuse you’ve had to witness so young.”

The door continued opening and closing.

The insects returned all at once.

Adam snapped.

He climbed out of the cot and stumbled blindly away from the dais, no longer caring where the rabbit hole took Him next.

“No complaints about insects?” Orson asked softly.

Adam fell through darkness again.

*

When He landed, He had returned to His normal size.

He found Himself at the bottom of a massive hollow cylinder. Its walls glowed orange beneath pale white light. Enormous pills littered the ground around Him like ancient ruins.

Adam sat among them trembling.

Empty. Enraged. Exhausted beyond language.

Orson spoke one final time.

“And eventually, you medicated yourself. But highs always negotiate with lows, Adam. Magic tricks come with instructions written in very small print.”

Adam’s voice cracked.

“Orson...”

The music around them faded into its final aching notes.

“I’m drowning in these insects.”

Then He broke down completely.

Violent sobs tore through Him without restraint, the kind that leave the body heaving and fluttering like a white flag in a battlefield.

For a long while, Orson said nothing.

Then, almost sadly:

“I still cannot see any insects.”

Become Rabbit Hole (Chapters 9, 10, 11, 12)

“I believe things should be clearer now that they’ve played themselves out inside your mind.”

Orson’s voice sounded gentler now.

Adam sat beneath a massive rose tree, breathing slowly, still shaken from everything He had seen.

“How did we even get here?” He asked eventually.

Orson chuckled softly.

“Adam, Adam, Adam.” He leaned back against the tree. “Do you really think we went anywhere?”

For the first time since entering the rabbit hole, silence did not feel threatening.

The tree above them was enormous with hanging grey leaves, and around it moved a group of men dressed in identical uniforms. They climbed tiny ladders quietly, attaching small red batteries to the roses growing from its branches. Each battery pulsed faintly once connected, feeding the flowers an artificial glow.

The scene felt strangely familiar to Adam, like a corrupted memory from a childhood television favorite.

No music played anymore.

No insects crawled across His skin.

Stillness.

A clean sort of clarity moved slowly through Him, though it did not arrive triumphantly. It felt less like healing and more like finally locating the wound. The batteries weighed the roses downward, their branches sagging under this new artificial weight.

The world modernized everything eventually. Even beauty.

Orson watched the workers quietly before speaking again.

“Did the experience give you any clarity?”

Adam laughed weakly.

“I didn’t ask for clarity. That whole thing was fucking horrifying.”

“Yes,” Orson replied calmly. “Meaningful self-knowledge typically is.”

The workers moved away from the tree now and approached a towering obelisk wrapped in old electrical wires. They began fastening glowing bulbs around its ancient surface with near-religious concentration.

Adam found Himself watching them carefully.

There was something peaceful about the order of their labour.

Something human.

“Knowledge,” Orson continued, “has always been treated like a sacred thing. Some people believe we inherit it. Others believe we discover it. Others still think suffering earns it.” He glanced toward Adam. “But self-knowledge is different. Self-knowledge arrives violently. It forces you to sit in rooms you spent your entire life trying to escape.”

Adam stared at the obelisk.

“And what exactly did I learn?” He asked bitterly.

Orson smiled faintly.

“That you are not crazy.”

The answer unsettled Him more than He expected.

“You are overstimulated. Frightened. Emotionally exhausted. Traumatized. Lonely in the way modern people often are, constantly exposed yet rarely seen, understood.”

The bulbs flickered softly across the obelisk.

“The world you inherited,” Orson continued, “is psychologically loud. Your nervous system was never designed for this much noise.”

Adam looked down at His hands.

A long silence passed between them.

Finally, He spoke again.

“You failed us.”

Orson nodded without argument.

“I know.”

“You all failed us.”

“I know.”

Adam’s voice sharpened now, bitterness returning to it like heat returning to metal.

“You built a world so disconnected. We are not loved anymore.”

The words hung in the air.

The workers continued attaching lights to the obelisk silently behind them.

Orson looked tired suddenly. Not defensive. Just ancient.

“We tried to build progress,” he said quietly.

“And instead, you built this.”

Adam gestured toward the glowing batteries, the electric roses, the wired monument, the strange mechanical garden surrounding them.

“A civilization where people sedate themselves just to survive their own minds.”

Orson lowered His eyes.

“I suppose every generation accidentally passes on that which wounds the next one.”

The honesty of the answer disarmed Adam.

Wind moved through the tree above them.

The battery-powered roses trembled softly.

After a while, Adam stood up.

“I’m ready to leave.”

Before Orson could answer, the obelisk suddenly flashed bright pink and yellow.

An enormous advertisement illuminated its surface:

*THEY NEVER, NEVER WAKE AGAIN
WHO SLEEP UPON YOUR BED.*

The words glowed beautifully against the dark.

Orson looked toward the sign.

“Before you go,” he said softly, “I want you to think about the daises.”

Adam exhaled sharply.

“What about them?”

“The moments that elevated you physically also offered you escape psychologically.”

Adam said nothing.

‘Maybe your experiences on each dais had ideas in common. Did you not recognize the healing power of being conscious of time, understand the therapeutic act of connecting with others and witness the impact of having enough courage to walk away from your inbred fear? All of those potential solutions lifted you up on a dais, quite literally.’

Adam shook his head bitterly. Adamant.

The wind strengthened around them.

“Every dais, made you, for want of better word, rise above it?”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No,” Adam repeated more firmly. “You’re trying to make this sound hopeful.”

“Perhaps because it is.”

Adam laughed bitterly.

“That’s easy for dead old people to say.”

Orson smiled at that.

Then slowly, almost tenderly, He asked:

“Do you finally understand the kind of knowledge one finds inside a rabbit hole?”

The wind sharpened suddenly.

Orson’s body began dissolving into it, not dramatically, but naturally, like smoke losing interest in remaining visible.

And despite Himself, Adam understood.

He understood the architecture of His anxiety now. The inherited fear. The overstimulation. The numbness. The exhaustion. The self-medication. The loneliness of existing inside a civilization moving faster than the human spirit could ever evolve today.

He understood all of it. That was the tragedy. Because understanding something did not automatically save you from it.

The obelisk pulsed brighter. The roses began dropping onto the ground.

And Adam realized, with terrible clarity, that He no longer wanted salvation nearly as much as He wanted silence. Oblivion suddenly felt softer than healing. More attainable.

He thought of the nights He had erased from memory. The chemical comfort of numb mornings. The relief of not having to feel every sharp little thing so intensely all the time.

The rabbit hole had not cured Him. It had merely shown Him what He had become.

Adam stared at the dying electric roses as the last traces of Orson disappeared into the wind.

Then, quietly, almost peacefully, He accepted that somewhere along the way, He Himself had become the rabbit hole.