

White Lie

The school bus made a right on Black Street, and all the kids scrambled as if playing a game of musical chairs in their seats. They didn't like how N. Word looked and smelt, but N. couldn't help it. He was poor, as were all the Words in the town of Shithole. He was almost completely covered in black from working in the tar pits. N. smelled grease and grime, matting into his hair and making it look oily. All the kids avoided having to sit with N. on the bus. All except Status Quo. He did not so much avoid sitting with N. Word as much as he was shy and did not talk to anyone on the bus. While in the few minutes before reaching Black Street each morning on the way to school, as the other kids gossiped among themselves, Status Quo remained silent. Then, the bus would arrive at N. Word's house, and silence was spread throughout the bus. All the noisy chattering of the children ceased the moment N. Word stepped onto the bus. And even having to sit beside N. Word wasn't so bad, thanks to the silence N. created. But if one listened intently, most often, one could hear whispers here or there saying: "...little grease monkey."

"Never be ashamed of gettin' dirty." N.'s Gramma' would tell him. "There is nothing wrong with it." She insisted.

N. Word would arrive at school, and he always seemed to get in trouble for this or that, but primarily for nothing at all. The teachers were cranky in the morning, and the smell and looks of N. seemed to get mixed up with the teachers' coffee. When they drank it, the temperature of the hot coffee heated them all up inside, getting them riled up and angry at N. And it was always the same from an English teacher called Mr. Yes, Sir.

"Break your jaw t' say yes, sir?" He would babble out in fragmented sentences.

And N. Word would remain silent, as he was taught not to talk back to his elders.

"Break your jaw t' say yes, sir?" He would babble out a second time.

And N. Word would remain silent, still.

"Break your jaw t' say yes, sir?" He would babble out the third and final time of his sadistic abuse in a genuinely evil authoritative ritual.

Then came the other part of what the students knew was sure to come.

"Out in the hall N." Mr. Yes, Sir would remove a paddle from his desk drawer, which he took pride in.

"I'll teach you a lesson you won't forget." And N. hadn't forgotten; his palms began to sweat if anything ever reminded him of those days.

But that was years ago. N. Word's Gramma' had since "passed away." And the town of Shithole hadn't changed much. N. was 23 now and still working in the tar pits. And that was because the town of Shithole didn't allow...

N. Word was a "word," but he and his kin were not just any words... they have not considered Men like others were, as an unwritten rule. The Good Gentiles of Shithole saw to it that this was justified with their friend and sheriff of Shithole, a man named Old Law, and his faithful deputy named Pig. And he was to be a just and fair man. The Good Gentiles would attest to this, but Old Law was hard to interpret, to see this justice as a necessary evil.

N. Word was happy, though. He had finally met someone, a girl whom he had fallen in love with. And though Windy was not a Word like N... he and she would not have stirred things up in the town of Shithole except that Windy's Father was Bible, an authoritative figure in Shithole, the pastor at the Holy Gentiles Church. Bible was the type of man who demanded respect from everyone, as was afforded to him from his position in the inner workings of the community.

But N. had long since outgrown his days of biting his tongue. He considered himself a Man now and on equal terms with any of the other Men.

But he still worked the tar pits and was snickered behind his back, called little grease monkey.

Gossip of N. Word was rabid. And N., in his mediocre existence, could do little but defy the mob. Yet Windy insisted that they conceal their relationship. And even though N. thought that by doing so, he thought Windy was somehow ashamed of him- he, in a way, saw the problems it would cause for her. But not only for her, it would also cause problems for them both. This N. Word was naïve about.

Though none of this mattered now, Vermin, Windy's ex-boyfriend, had caught wind of their relationship through an intermediary in the whole affair, Status Quo.

"That Word-loving little bitch!" Vermin ejaculated.

"Well, I don't know if that is who she is seeing now." Status Quo realized he had given away too much information. "You know how rumors are in this small town."

"Who gives a fuck!?" Said Spit, Vermin's confidant. "Just give me a reason to kick the shit out of that fucking N.!"

"Fucking grease monkeys..." Vermin loathed.

Vermin and Spit left the house, and Status Quo waited for Captain to return. Captain's house was a haven for the young nouns. He let them drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes but was against any illicit drugs. Old Law didn't much care for the young Nouns hanging out at Captain's house, but now that they were not teenagers, he ceased sending his deputy Pig up to the house on the weekends to investigate and ensure things were orderly. By request of Captain's neighbor Bible, nonetheless. And by a neighbor, it was more like 40 acres and a mule apart from each other in the town of Shithole.

"Hey, S.Q., how's it going," Captain said as he walked up the driveway after parking his truck.

"Oh, all right, I suppose?" Status Quo's mind was still dwelling on the question of N. Word. "I saw Vermin and Spit fly past me on the road." Captain was a decent Man. "Those boys need to buckle up and slow down. Little bastards threw rocks all over my truck!" Captain exclaimed in his usual pacifist way.

"Yeah, they're a little pissed off." Status Quo brought up the subject. "I accidentally told Vermin that Windy is seeing N. Word."

"Windy... seeing a Word?" Captain was dumbfounded. "I feel sorry for N., but he should know better than to mess with Bible's daughter. Not that I care too much for him anyway. But you know as well as I do by now... How old are you now? What 27?"

"28." Status Quo said. "I'll be 29 this year."

"Still young, though... Anyways, you know how things are here in Shithole." Captain pondered.

"But... It won't surprise me one bit, typical preacher's daughter."

"But Windy's 18 now and old enough to think for herself." Status Quo elaborated. "Even though I remember being a little naïve at that age, I think she's, or I guess I should say, that a Woman matures faster than a Man. They have to, in a way."

"Well, you may be right there, S.Q., but either way, you have Words, and you have words. I used to have a word that worked for me in the tar pits. And then there was this other Word, totally ignorant and lazy. Wouldn't do a damn thing and blamed everything on him being a Word." Captain philosophized. "But you know what the first Word said about the second Word?" Captain paused and let his cliché and rhetorical question impregnate a little. "He said, 'Typical Word for you, just another grease monkey.' You see, even Words know the difference between one Word and another like N. Word."

Status Quo sat listening, smiling as if he agreed with what was being said. Vermin and Spit drove back up the driveway, and Riddle walked up behind them. Riddle was about the same age as Status Quo. They were in the same grade growing up, but Status Quo was still wiser than Riddle. Status Quo had been attending college and was home for summer break. Status Quo had gone to college and to the University because he had been told by his Dad: "If you can't be a part of the conversation, Status Quo, you are not a member of the club." Status Quo still doubted he could get in the "club." But his Dad told him that he was as "sharp as a tack," and that was all the encouragement he needed. But S.Q. was in the dark as to how to grasp an inkling of understanding of his roots in Shithole.

"You know what that N. is, don't cha? He comes from a fucking sorry ass Semitic noun." Said Vermin. "Bible told me so."

"You know what that N. is, don't cha? He is from a fucking Semiotic descent." Said Vermin. "Bible told me so."

"No shit?" Spit thought. "Well, that makes sense. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's a nonGentile."

"Yeah, that N.'s a dumb fucker ain't he?" Vermin added.

"It's in their blood..." Riddle joined in. "But those Words, they sure stick together, don't they?"

"Amen." Vermin and Spit said simultaneously.

"But they're all part of Mankind, just like us." Status Quo had heard enough. "Besides, Word means Logos if you want to know the real 'semiotics' of it, dumbass!"

“Just like a college boy.” Riddle challenged Status Quo. “I suppose they taught you that at the University, huh? You’re not one of those educated idiots, are you S.Q.?” And Riddle grinned. Status Quo sat silently. He knew that he was right. Not only did he not have any evidence in his mind to support his interruption in the flow of the conversation, but he also saw the uselessness of his effort. “Time makes more change than reason.” Status Quo would constantly have to remind himself. But it wasn’t “reason” that Riddle and the others operated. “Words aren’t one of us...” was the phrase he always heard. And when he was younger, he believed this.

“Why you and I used to fight those fucking grease monkeys all the time,” Riddle argued. “S.Q.’s done gone and ‘come to a Monk.” Riddle sarcastically laughed.

“A grease monk-key.” Vermin and Spit said simultaneously.

“Yeah, well... I’m not like that anymore.” Status Quo said.

“Nobody changes,” Riddle spoke with poison. “They just think they do.” “Fuck off.” Status Quo said to defend himself from criticism.

“Whatcha gonna do, S.Q.” Riddle may have been a little younger and dumber than Status Quo, but his menacing physical prowess began invading Status Quo’s space. So, he got up and went outside on the porch to sit and talk with Captain.

“Well, goddamn it, there’s got to be something you can do?” Bible was furious as he talked on the phone.

“She’s of age, and I can’t do a damn thing about it in those regards, Bible.” Said the voice on the other end of the line. “But I’ll have Pig keep an eye on that damn N. If I can’t arrest him for being a Word, I can sure make his life hell here in Shithole.”

Windy walked in the door just in time to hear the last thing her Dad had said before hanging up the phone. She tried to sneak into her room down the long, silent hall.

“Where have you been!?” Bible demanded.

“Out,” Windy said, startled. She knew the information he sought and was not willing to release it. “I talked to Vermin today.” Bible rapped his fingers on his desk in a tattooing sound. “He tells me that you have been seeing somebody new. I didn’t know you and him had broken up?” Bible lied. “We’re just seeing other people for a while, that’s all.” Windy went through the basic rites orally.

“So, who ya seein’ now?” Bible persisted.

“No one, Daddy.” Windy played like a child.

“Don’t lie to me.” Bible went on. “S.Q.’s the one who told Vermin and Spit, and I have never known him to lie. Says you been seeing that N. Word.” And now the truth was out in the open as Bible cursed his fingers over the black leather belt that held up his cheap trousers.

“You know how people talk in this small town, Daddy.” Windy eluded the question. “Why would I see a stupid grease monkey like N. anyway?”

“That was the same thing that I was wondering myself.” Bible was somewhat fooled by Windy’s betraying rhetoric.

And who did Windy betray more? N.? Her Father? Or herself? She did not know. But the confusion had settled in and would begin to run its course. It was an innocent lie. The truth in Shithole didn't get one very far in life. Concealment of your beliefs was something Status Quo was learning more and more every day. He remembered some of his conversations with his friend Discord at the University. “I despise Men who consider themselves Good Gentiles,” Discord said quietly.

“Well...” Status Quo thought. “I wouldn’t say that I despise them. I believe I would be acting just like what you despise about them.”

“But they’re such fucking hypocrites.” Discord went on.

“Yeah, well, maybe?” Status Quo continued. “But who am I to judge?” “Them! ‘Lest you be judged’ S.Q.!” Discord laughed. “Well, who’s going to judge me? God!?” They both laughed in disbelief.

“Means ‘fish.’” Vermin said as they walked out onto the porch where Status Quo and Captain were sitting silently, watching a black dog sniff around the back of the property.

“But that was an early Gentile symbol.” Status Quo interrupted.

“We’re gonna have to start calling him I.Q. instead of S.Q.” Riddle laughed with the others. “Well, for fuck’s sake, it was.” Status Quo persisted. “It was an acronym in...” “Shut the fuck up, I.Q.” Vermin made the mistake of saying.

Status Quo was not a big Man, but he could be every bit as hostile as one as he grabbed Vermin by the throat and pinned him against a post on the porch.

“Let ‘em loose, Quo.” Captain got between the two, and Status Quo let Vermin go. “Now you fellas gotta get along.”

“Yeah,” Riddle interjected. “Those Words want us to fight amongst ourselves. That’s how they are, you know?”

“Oh, just shut the fuck up yourself, Riddle!” Status Quo retaliated.

“Watch it there, S.Q.” Riddle went on. “It’s not like anyone called you a grease monkey, right?”

Riddle chuckled and slapped Status Quo on the back. “We’re all friends here, brother.”

Status Quo tried to smile as he did earlier, but everyone could sense a change in him. Especially Captain, who tried to give Status Quo some peace, as the other three lit out to hit the town, probably to get “geetered up” and try to hunt down N. Word.

"Don't let Vermin get to ya, S.Q," Captain said. "He's just young and stupid like you used to be." But Status Quo wasn't young and stupid anymore. Not stupid, anyhow. He had learned a lot at the University. "And not just book smarts," he said. He could see things now that he used to be blind to, like Men and how they functioned. And the Good Book and how it was misinterpreted. But he did not understand why he felt so uncomfortable when he had to talk about Words or the Book. Status Quo lit a cigarette and thought about it, too. Everything was seen, as he saw through this haze of smoke in the mirror, as he saw Vermin in himself, in the past. And he thought of how he and Riddle had drifted apart since he had gone to the University. He thought about the town of Shithole and all the Shithole inhabitants and how ignorant he thought they were. Status Quo wished at times he would have never attended the University and how much easier his life would be if he were more like Riddle. "Did you hear?" Spit said excitedly. "Bible killed that fucking N."

"Are you serious?" Vermin's eyes lit up with sadistic pleasure. "What happened?" He asked as Status Quo, Captain, and even Riddle were slightly surprised.

"Well, Bible got a call from Pig... Pig's been watching Windy for Bible, so I heard. But, anyway, you got to hear this. So, Bible gets his shotgun..." "The double barrel?" Vermin exclaimed.

"Yeah, yeah! And so, Bible supposedly goes over there to Black Street where that N. lives, just to scare the hell out of that little grease monkey, I hear tell. But when he gets there, he sneaks up and looks through the window. And guess what ol' Bible sees?" Spit paused. It made him feel important to have what he thought was important information. "Just guess what he sees?"

"Just fucking tell us, Spit!" Status Quo was already feeling sick to his stomach and expected the worst. "Bible, that fat ol' bastard, peeks in the window, and that N. is mounted on top a' Windy." "Caught that fucking N. with his pants down, did he?" Riddle added.

"Yep." Spit paused again. "So, after catching that N. and Windy fuckin', Bible went nuts. He kicked open the door, and that fuckin' N. tried to run, but he did have his pants down!" Spit laughed excitedly, almost giggling. "And N., dumb fucker he is, tripped and fell as he tried to skedaddle the hell out a' there. Then, Bible walked right up to that Word and said: 'You fucked with the wrong bull N.' and then took that shotgun and gave 'em both barrels right to the fuckin' head. I heard Old Law and Pig talking on the scanner on the way here. Said it took N.'s whole head off, and his fucking brain got blown all the way over the other side of the living room. Windy said she had chunks of that N all over her. Little Word-loving preacher's daughter just covered in that N.'s blood." "Whew, doggies!" Vermin said. "Only thing that pisses me off is that I didn't get to kick the shit out of that little grease monkey 'for he 'got greased.'" Vermin giggled as he made a pun, though he had no idea what a pun was.

"That's because you were too big a pussy to go over there to Black Street, Vermin." Riddle poked fun at Vermin's cowardice.

"Like I said, boys," Captain said solemnly. "N. Word should've known better. Not that I think it was the right thing for ol' Bible to do. But everyone knows you don't mess with someone like Windy if you're a Word."

"So, what did they do with the Bible?" Status Quo asked.

"Don't know?" Spit spat out. "Probably nothing."

"Oh, they'll have to do something with him. Don't matter who you are or who you kill 'round here. Ol' Judge Justice will do something to 'em." Captain shook his head in disbelief. "Didn't think Bible had it in him, though, tell the truth. He always seemed hot-headed but always thought he was a coward, myself."

"He is a coward." Status Quo said nervously. "Shoot an unarmed Man like that."

"Unarmed Man!" Riddle laughed. "You mean an unarmed Word, don't cha I.Q.?"

Status Quo smiled that smile of dissonance, and a butterfly fluttered all over his stomach; his palms were sweaty. He got up, went to the fridge for a beer, and grabbed three.

"Let me get one of those," Riddle said. Status Quo was unwilling to relinquish one, knowing plenty were in the fridge. But it took a lot of energy now to get there and back. His legs felt weak as the bloody scene played itself out over and over in his mind; he could almost picture himself being in N.'s situation. He lit a cigarette and thought about those days N. Word used to sit beside him on the school bus. And how he had never really said anything to N. but maybe mumbling out, "Hey."

"Bible kills Word," read the front page of The Daily Shithole the next day, the town's only newspaper. Gossip spread throughout the town. Accusations of how N. Word had threatened Bible. Mankind's finest from every corner of Shithole came to the local jail in support of the Reverend Bible. "He is a moral and Gentile Man,' says the defense in a statement issued this morning. "He just lost control; anybody would do the same." Said Bible's defense and one of Shithole's most prominent citizens. "That young Word got what he deserved." Says a master at one of the town's tar pits. And so went the various lines from the paper as Status Quo noticed all the cliché phrases the reporters of The Daily Shithole used in what was supposed to be objective information. But all of Shithole's inhabitants attended the Holy Gentile Church. Judge Justice and the prosecutor refused to recuse himself from the case by saying, "I will treat this as if it were my own Son."

"What bullshit!" Status Quo was frustrated. "Treat who like he was his own Son? More like he'll treat Bible as his own Son since Bible is practically his Father. That's even what the son-of-a-bitch calls Bible at Church! Father... huh!"

"Now, S.Q.," Captain tried to comfort him. "You know how Shithole works. No one gives a damn about a Word."

"Yeah, that's for fucking certain." Status Quo went on. "And how the hell is there going to be an impartial jury here in Shithole?"

"What's wrong, S.Q.? It ain't like you knew him personally. That's what happens when a Word like N. messes around with a preacher's daughter. I told you he should have known better. Hard way to learn."

"Learn what, Captain, how to die?" Status Quo asked.

"Well, maybe the rest of them will learn something. But it ain't like this is the first time something like this has happened to a Word in Shithole. Just seems odd for a preacher to do what he did. Had to be out of his mind. Bible's conscience wouldn't let him do something like that." Captain tried to reason with the events.

"Well, I've been to his holy-rolling fucking Church and even heard him give whole sermons about Words, saying they are not to be even considered Men according to the Book." Status Quo remembered.

"So, what happened to Windy?" Captain tried to sound concerned.

"Bitch done got herself locked up in the nuthouse." Riddle came walking up the driveway behind them.

"Hey, Riddle, have a seat. We're just going over the daily gossip of the town." Captain welcomed him.

"So, where's shit-head one and shit-head two?" Riddle mocked Vermin and Spit.

"Swinging from a tree, I wish." Status Quo slipped out.

"Well now, aren't we cranky this afternoon, S.Q.? I suppose those two are a couple of dumb fuckers. Ain't worth a damn. But they are my cousins." Riddle tried to stick Status Quo's foot in his mouth.

"Everybody's everyone's cousin here in Shithole, Riddle. Tell me something I don't know." Status Quo fought back.

"Yeah, I guess we're just a bunch of inbred hicks from the sticks, not college material like you."

"At least I've been out of Shithole and seen the world a little."

"Now fellas, just cause the University is for one of yuns don't make it... Well, it just ain't for everyone." Captain philosophized. "But everyone should get out of this town once in their life. I agree with that."

"Not me," Riddle concluded. "I was born here and plan to die here. Plan on gettin' my own tar pit one of these days. A Man has to have Mammon to stay on top of things. Else he ain't no better than that damn N. Word. But we don't have to worry about that little grease monkey anymore, huh S.Q.? Just one less Word in the world, far as I am concerned."

"Maybe so. But I'm not for killing anything or anyone." Status Quo stated.

"You don't even hunt anymore, S.Q., done gone and lost your blood lust?" Riddle laughed his sarcastic laugh. "College life done took all the spunk out of ya!"

"Well, look what the cat dragged in." Captain joked as Vermin and Spit pulled up in his driveway. Status Quo sat listening and downing beers and smoking cigarette after cigarette, drowning away the conversation as Vermin and Spit went over the grotesque and irrational details of the murder of N. Word. And in the laughter was all the fear they felt toward a Word.

They did not understand the most dangerous narcotic of them all, the narcotic that was injected into their minds since they were infants, the narcotic of the masses: hate. Dusk fell, and Status Quo stumbled into bed and dreamed the bloody scene of N. Word's death over and over, and as the night progressed, it was he who was to face the gun. Bible was after him as his guilt and anxiety haunted him in his dreams.

"Judge Justice Accepts Plea from Bible," read the headlines of *The Daily Shithole* a month after the slaying of N. Word. Status Quo read the article in his usual apathetic mood. He knew that Bible would get a light sentence, but five years. "Jurors say Bible didn't know right from wrong when he shot Word." Status Quo let out a sigh of indifference.

"Out of all the people who should know right from wrong, Bible doesn't strike me as the type that would temporarily forget about the two." Status Quo pleaded with Captain as he sipped on his coffee. "Well, you're not a Father, S.Q.?" Captain argued. "Bible was just doing what any dad would do in that situation."

"But it wasn't like he came home to his own house and caught the two of them fucking in his bed, now, was it?" Status Quo set about his premises. "He thought enough about it to bring along a shotgun, didn't he?"

"Yeah, but as Spit said, he only meant to give that N. a scare."

"I don't buy it. Spit also said that they said Pig had been watching Windy for Bible. I'm guessing Pig told Bible they were over there fucking, and he thought that story up afterward, with the help of Old Law, no doubt." Status Quo continued. "Everyone knows Law and Bible are fishing buddies. And everyone on the jury was a devoted member of the Church, thanks to the prosecutor. He supposedly argued that their Faith would let them be the best to judge one of their own because they would not want to tarnish the image of the Church because of one bad seed."

"Well, that last part makes a lot of sense to me, S.Q." Captain added.

"More like they were protecting their kind if you ask me." Status Quo concluded.

"Nobody asked you." Riddle walked out onto the porch. His eyes were dilated and had that void look meth gave a Man. "Ah, I'm just fuckin' with you, S.Q. I didn't even hear what you were rambling on about. Probably that fuckin' N. Word again." "No, not really." Status Quo said. "It's Bible I'm talking about."

"Well, that ol' son-of-a-bitch got off with 5 years in the loony bin, huh," Riddle said as he glanced over the paper's front page and put it back down. "Guess you'd been happier if they'd fried his fat ass, huh S.Q.? Or are you 'gainst the death penalty, too?"

"I am, in a way. But it wouldn't bother me to see the Bible go to the chair, even though it's not the electric chair here anymore. They put them to sleep like dogs." Status Quo continued as Vermin and Spit, so wired up they could hardly sit still, came outside onto the porch. "But if you were to ask me, I'd say any Man who kills another has to be temporarily insane."

"Now, what the hell does that mean? I hear it all the time: 'insanity plea this or that, blah, blah, blah...'" Vermin interjected.

"It has to do with whether or not you have a conscience, whether you know right from wrong when you dust somebody," Riddle told Vermin.

"Hell, everybody knows right from wrong." Spit spat out.

"Obviously, the Good Reverend Bible didn't." Status Quo added.

I have said Status Quo was a kind of intermediary in this whole affair. And one may think that Vermin was not the type of boy that a girl like Windy would take to in the first place. This was the work of her Dad, Bible. He had seen to it that Wind, as was her given name, was that Vermin would meet Windy as it was arranged through Bible. Bible knew that Vermin was a bad seed, but he chose the lesser of two evils. Bible knew that Wind was fond of stirring things up with Words at school. She occasionally sat in the balconies with them at sporting events and was particularly fond of N. Word. And she also knew Status Quo through his work at the Shithole Library. Status Quo had tutored her the summer before. These books revealed new things to her, and Status Quo was assigned to her for her reading lessons. Books by a Man who talked about Words in ways even Wind was guilty of thinking. And this guilt grew in her, leading to her infatuation with N. Word. The books were opening up Windy's eyes. The books opened doors to other perspectives: the darkness of Man and the light of Man. And it was there that Windy read what she had always felt was true, that all Men are created equal, but that Mammon saw to it that some Men possessed more power than others with the division of the Rich and the Poor. And she learned about the history of the tar pits and the history of a Word.

Windy had taken to N. Word. She found his kind to be attractive in a dangerous sense. She was like a child who got away with the things she knew she was not supposed to do. Windy had only maintained her relationship with Vermin for outer appearances to be kept up. And how Windy's relationship with N. Word had escaped the gossip and rumors of the town of Shithole was a mystery. Vermin only kept up his part in the relationship for sensual purposes. Windy was a possession for Vermin. But she had even transformed him in a way he had not recognized. He read some of the books that Windy read. Still, his interpretation of them rested solely on the manipulation of Bible's influence, as Vermin sought Bible's interpretation of the entire world as did most of the Men of Shithole.

But Vermin, being the scoundrel he was, let Bible believe that he had chosen these books himself. And as for Status Quo, he did not seek any romantic affection from Windy, though, as did other Men in the town. His interest was a friendship, with tragic results he could not foresee, as the tragedy began with a conversation one summer evening. Status Quo had seen Windy and N. Word together at the Shithole Library. He had waited for his opportunity to speak with Windy in the absence of N., and he whispered into her ear: "What happened to you and Vermin?" He uttered the abominable question. And she replied with the utmost confidence that Status Quo had mistaken what she had said. She replied: "I told Vermin about N." she giggled.

But she merely wanted to see Status Quo's reaction. Startled, Status Quo stood there as Windy said goodbye and rushed over to N. Word, still giggling. The next day, Status Quo asked Vermin what he thought of Windy seeing N. Word. But it was too late. And soon, Status Quo realized that Windy was just being her usual self, telling a little innocent lie to see his reaction first before she broke any taboo in the town of Shithole.

Two years have passed now in the town of Shithole. Bible had just recently gotten out of a minimum-security prison that was more of a mental institution than anything. Bible was let out on good behavior and the persistent "good word" that was given to the prison parole board on behalf of the residents of the town of Shithole. Status Quo worked at the Library for the summer and prepared for graduate school in Library Science. And Bible fits right in at the prison. He was reformed. He had rededicated his Faith and had become a born-again Gentile. For in prison, his antics were not recognized as they were, in truth, as delusions. And Status Quo had transformed, as he was now 30. He was torn between his intellectualism and fear of the Good Book. He had tried to read it and believe it several times, but his atheism got in the way of his Faith. And his Faith was torn from being a Good Gentile by the rabid hypocrisy that was in the hearts of the citizens of Shithole. But the path of the two would cross, and Windy would lead them to the crossroads. She had been living secretly with Status Quo for the summer in Shithole after a holiday in the State mental hospital.

"Bible says he has paid his debt to society." Read a line in *The Daily Shithole*. Status Quo sat quietly, reading and sipping his coffee, as Windy got out of bed and entered the living room. "Whatcha readin'?" She yawned, and her petite figure caught Status Quo's eye as it did every morning.

"Put some clothes on. You can't go 'round here half-naked like that." Status Quo verbally chastised the now 20-year-old Wind.

"What? Don't cha want to fuck me, S.Q.?" She laughed sarcastically as she stuck a wet finger in his ear.

"Quit it, Windy." Status Quo was already irritated by the article he was reading, and feeling cruel, he added, "I see your crazy father Bible got let loose from prison."

"I told you not to say his name." She yawned again and seemed unmoved by Status Quo's attitude.

"And he's not my Father, Daddy." She mocked Status Quo.

"And I'm not your Daddy." Status Quo added.

"Well, anyway, that fucker can rot in hell for all I care." Windy drank the milk from the carton. "I suppose he thinks he's just as high and mighty as ever."

"Well, what the hell are you supposed to be? If you'd get off "the shit" for a while..." Status Quo mumbled the rest to himself as he continued reading.

"What? Like you haven't ever done it. I bet you used to even fire it up, you know, slam that shit, being that you were running with Riddle and all." She assumed.

“I never used a needle. But whether I like to inject meth isn’t the point.” Status Quo went on. “That shit will rot your mind and your gut. Just look at your arms and feet. You get all strung out on meth, and you’re gonna fuck up and end up back in the hospital or, even worse, in prison.”

“Riddle told me he fixed you up a few units once. Well, huh, huh? The ‘dirty-thirty’.” “Well, I told you, that was just one time. And Riddle didn’t tell you, I did.” “What a wicked web you weave, Quo,” Windy said.

She went to the phone and called up a Half-Man, Priest. Windy bartered her body for a taste of the euphoria. But Status Quo was aware of her debauchery and the stimulant that plagued the town of Shithole. And it was only a matter of time before Bible found out about Windy’s whereabouts, but he heard immediately of her dealings with Priest. Bible considered Priest to be as low as a Word, and rumor told of his being a “half-breed,” according to the town of Shithole.

One drop of blood. That was the rule. Priest had avoided a life of working at the tar pits by being a scarab, a mediator, a meth dealer, rolling up and slinging “the shit” to any takers... or as in the case with a Lady like Windy.

Now, as to what actual circumstances occurred, there was little doubt in the mind of Status Quo. For the character of a Man does not change quickly: Bible was as shady as a two-thousand-year-old oak. Bible was not allowed to return to the Holy Gentile Church as a matter of politics. And his loathing had grown into drunken violence. On several occasions, Old Law had to “arrest” his friend at his house. And at times, Windy was her old self that Status Quo remembered tutoring at the Shithole Library. And at other times, she was just another “meth head.” But the truth lies in the consequences of events during that morning’s blood-red dawn.

“Well, look who it is?” Captain said with a warm smile.

“Hey.” Status Quo said with half a smile and a half-hidden frown, but Captain was too pleased to see Status Quo, as it had been a whole summer past since his last visit to detect the dark cloud that hung over his head. They shook hands, and Captain offered Status Quo a beer.

“Sure, I’ll take a six-pack.” Status Quo tried to produce some humor in his voice, but there was gloom instead, and he wondered how long it would be before Captain noticed it.

“How’s Windy doin’,” Captain said he knew about the arrangement.

“How did you know?” Status Quo asked.

“Vermin and Spit,” Captain said.

“Crank-whore, what else can I say.” Status Quo replied in stereotypes he didn’t usually use.

“I heard.” Captain shook his head. “And with another one of those Words.”

“They call him Priest.”

“Priest. Huh!” Captain didn’t understand the position Priest held in the subversive world of Shithole.

“Now, why’s that?”

“Never mind.” Status Quo prescribed. “You don’t want to know.” “Probably not.” Captain agreed.

"Listen..." Status Quo tried to break the ice on the subject, but there was no easy way to go about it.

"...Whew! Man o' Man." He downed his beer and asked for another. He took a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket, took one out, and lit it.

"What's up, S.Q.?" Captain said as he returned with a beer for them both.

"I think N. Word is back from the dead." Status Quo said to a startled Captain.

"What in the hell are you talking about, S.Q.?" Captain pried. "Are you alright?" "Far from it, Captain. Far from it. The Devil's come for me; come for us all." "What's on your mind, S.Q.?" Captain asked quietly, reassuringly.

"I just came from the house..." Status Quo swallowed a lump in his throat so big he had to wash it down with beer, and then he took a drag off his cigarette and began to speak, feeling out-of-body as he started his confession.

"Windy showed up covered in blood, crying, wired out of her mind. That was early this morning." Captain still didn't seem alarmed, so Status Quo delved deeper. "Priest is dead. And so is Bible." "What are you talking about, S.Q.?" Captain was less in shock and more in disbelief.

"Bible followed Windy from my house. It must have been those two heathens, Vermin and Spit, who told him she was staying with me. She had been up for at least three days, and I heard her talking on the phone about getting an eight-ball of the shit. And then she left. About an hour later, she came in, like I said, and told me that Bible kicked in the door at Priest's house. He walked up to him just like he did N. Word and said the exact same thing: 'You fucked with the wrong bull, Priest,' and then he shot him. And I can only guess where he got another shotgun. That fucking Pig... all he had to do was let him in the confiscation room and take one that would be traced as stolen." "But you said the Bible was dead, too." Captain was uneasy.

"Yeah. I guess I did." Status Quo downed another drink of half a beer. Captain did the same, left, and returned with two more beers as Status Quo used one cigarette to light another.

"Just relax, S.Q., I could care less for that so-called Priest and Bible, too, for that matter." Captain tried to ease himself as well as Status Quo.

"So Windy comes in all covered in blood and bawling and laughing... just totally fucking hysterical and wired out of her mind. I don't think she... anyway. Windy said that she ran into the bedroom. I'm guessing she was fucking Priest just like she was N. when he got shot. Now, if that wasn't enough killing for one day, she gets Priest's .45 from under his pillow. Bible was at the door, she told me, and it was open about halfway when she just unloads the .45 into the door, through it, and knocks Bible down. But he wasn't dead yet. So, instead of just leaving or calling Old Law, she reloaded the .45. Then she said she kind of blacked out. Whether she was afraid or just out of her mind on meth, I don't know, but she said she sat down and talked to him!" Status Quo took a breath, a drink or two off his beer, and a couple of long drags off his cigarette.

“She says that she asked him if he loved her. And he says back to her that he does. And then she said that he was begging her not to kill him and all this sort of shit. But then she said that she shot him twice in the head. Like a fucking execution. Now I didn’t know what to do...” Status Quo went on as Captain sat stunned. “So, I called Old Law. And when he and Pig asked me what happened, I said Bible killed Priest and then tried to kill her, so she shot him. ‘Two times in the head?’ That condescending fuck says to me. ‘That doesn’t sound like self-defense to me.’ And I said...” Status Quo paused again and downed his beer. Captain got him another and sat back down.

“I don’t know what to tell you, S.Q.” Captain tried to comfort him.

“That’s not all.” Status Quo continued. “It gets worse. So Windy lit out of there when I called Old Law, even though I told her everything would be all right...”

Riddle walked up the driveway about that time, and Status Quo paused the conversation.

“Well, what’s with the gloomy faces? I guess it has to do with all the killing that’s been going on.”

Riddle had a smirk on his face as he and Status Quo glared at each other. “Heard all about it and figured I’d find you over her S.Q.”

Status Quo stared at the ground and felt that sickening feeling a Man feels when something like this happens to him. Silence hovered in the air for a minute, but it seemed like an hour.

“Just a shame, a damn shame. Lady Windy, her age and all. Her life was bad enough as it was, what with all that happened with her and N. Word. And now this.” Captain sounded his usual empathetic self. But it was more pity than empathy.

“Well, she ain’t feeling nothin’ now.” Riddle almost laughed but didn’t out of respect for Captain. But he wanted to laugh: to laugh at Windy, to laugh at N. Word, and especially at to laugh at Priest since Priest was taking business from him. Riddle’s dream of owning a tar pit included raising the money from “slinging shit” from dealing meth.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Status Quo was about half intoxicated and feeling rather hostile about the whole affair.

“She has done herself in. Didn’t you know?” Riddle asked rhetorically. “She slammed 50 units, ate a whole gram, and then ate a bullet.”

“Are you serious?” Captain said miserably. “That’s just a shame, a damn shame. I tell you what...” He muttered.

“I suppose you’re all torn up about it, aren’t you, Riddle?” Status Quo was staring him right in the eye. And Riddle remained silent.

“Fuck it.” Status Quo blurted out just to appease the crowd.

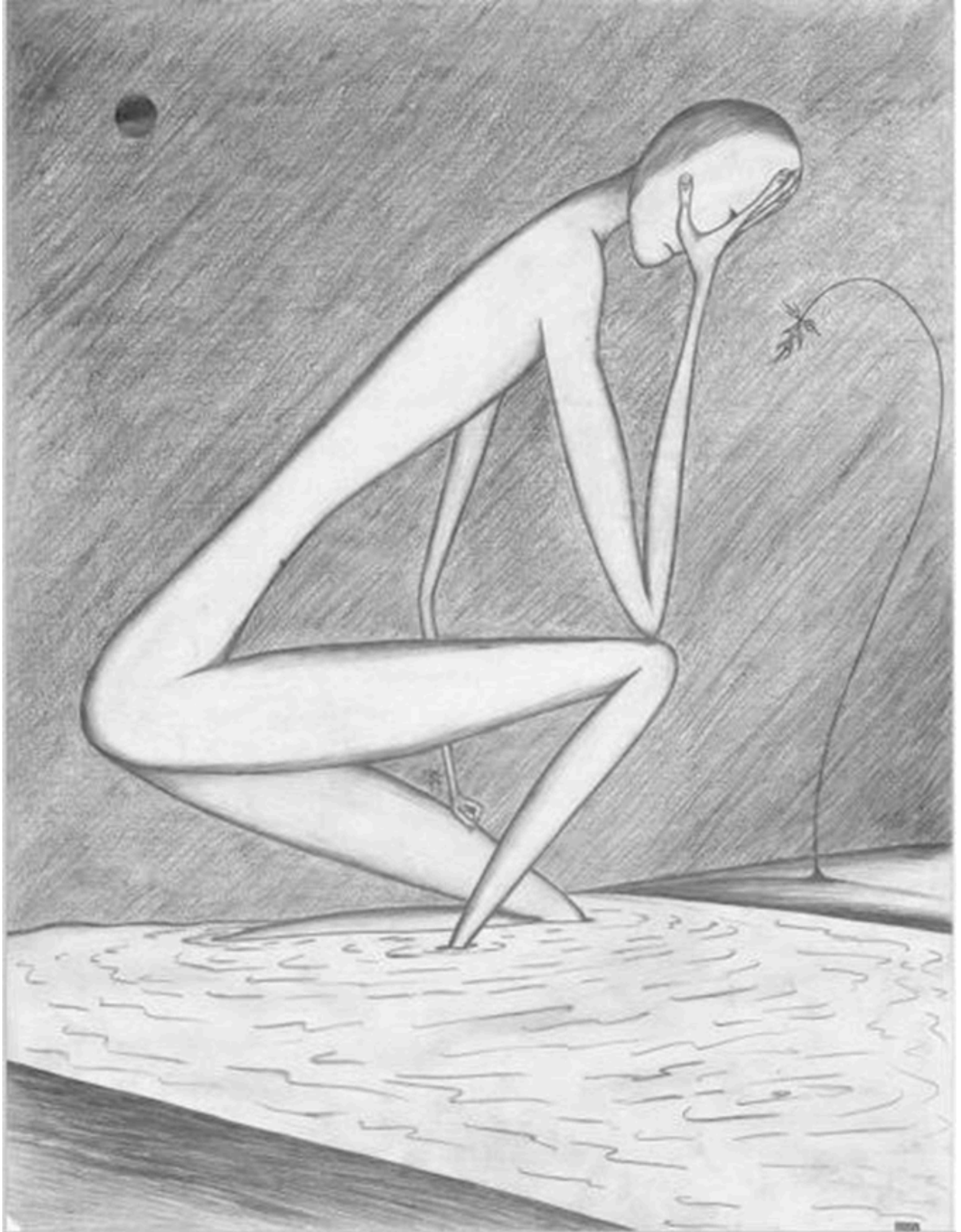
Vermin and Spit pulled up in the driveway. Status Quo retreated to his silent self again. He went and got himself another beer and lit another cigarette. He thought about how glad he would be to get out of Shithole and move to the City, where he would do his graduate studies. And he felt about Windy.

Poor Windy.

“Fuckin’ a!” Vermin exclaimed.

“What are you two worthless pieces of shit doing?” Riddle broke the silence and spoke as if it were just another day.

But it was just another day in the old Shithole.



Despair