

GROUP INTERVIEW

It was 2008, at the height of the recession. I had dropped out of college after consuming a crop of magic mushrooms and was now foraging for work to fix my being broke, a fact exacerbated by a nasty addiction to coke. The problem was there were too many people to compete with. Desperate Joes and Janes who'd been let go from shops and chains that had considered their positions disposable income. Surplus. A plus side to the unemployed mass of applicants was that the few places that *could* recruit the occasional dupe or two often did so through group interviews, where all were equal until proven unequal and nearly anyone who wanted could go, from former CEOs to hobos. They were like AA meetings but with less chance of recovery. Speaking of drinking, Starbucks was hiring. Which was ironic since I'd been cutting my blow with instant coffee to conserve it. Side effects included buckshot energy stalked by suicidal

thoughts and anxiety attacks
but I kept on using because
it wasn't an option to not
when like a pre-dawn train
the day of the interview came
and I showed up looking like
a spokesman for the living dead.
I was high. Ionosphere high.
Had my eyeballs fallen out
they would have shot into orbit
around my Ferris wheel head.
Instead my nose started to bleed
and the questions veered toward
me. I blamed the dry weather
even though it had poured
the week prior, a portentous
bank of sky having blown
in from above the rough ocean.
It was as if a supersonic jet
or giant Greek trident had ripped
a hole in the stretch denim
of the space-time continuum
that sucked all the moisture
from the unripe fruit of the future
then spit out rain like buckets of
coins from a slot machine, only
no one got rich. Just wet.
But soon the heat returned with
the sun like an NBA trophy
and increased the temperature
like the volume on a speaker

blaring the rock 'n' roll music
of light: dynamite bright, and hot.
So there I was, sitting in a cell
of a room like a sauna, dripping
drugged blood like sangria.
I excused the zombie that was
my jacked body to the john
where I wiped the warm
gore like a puréed rose
from my nose then sniffed
a venti-sized line of smack
with a buck. When I got back
the interview was almost over.
I sat. Everyone was going
around in a rectangular circle
stating where they would travel
if they could travel for free.
Three people said Hawaii, one
Russia in a Russian accent,
some dude in a suit the moon.
Shit, I thought. How's anybody
supposed to top that? I could
hear the anxiety arriving.
Yet I had to wonder whether
he actually meant it or just
said it to strut a rehearsed
outside-the-box wit because
to make like an astronaut
and leave this oxygenated planet
in a shut shuttle you cannot leave
because if you did you'd become

a snowflake drifting across
the perennial winter of space
would induce in my cerebrum
a hemorrhage of panic I'd pop
open the exit like a sealed
bag of chips to stop, to feel
for a suspended moment a sense
of expansion and of my place
in the cosmic entropic order before
drowning in a sea of stars
which reminds me of the time
I went on Supreme Scream
at Knott's Berry Farm at night
except I didn't go on if "went on"
means *rode* because I jumped
off before the metal leviathan
began levitating, stricken
by a rush of irrational adrenaline,
a feeling I'd get stuck
up there forever like that poor
fucker who got stuck in an elevator
for two days or maybe three
or four or eleven or a billion
if no one had ever pressed
the up/down button again.
Cover a rat with Tupperware
and it'll start thrashing against
the dome, suddenly aware
that it's *in* something—caught,
trapped. Unable to evacuate.
And I suppose a rocket ship

is one way of escaping
this warm terrarium of a world
just as suicide and psilocybin are
though it's possible you may
find yourself more cornered
than before, sent to some warped
black hole of a dimension
in which there is no door
you can punch in a code and push
open, parachute back down
into the downy safety of sanity
from the kaleidoscopic carnival
of your skull. But I wasn't about
to tell the interviewer that.
The interviewer with her green
apron and caffeinated grin
and pen poised above a clipboard
who was waiting like a customer
for my percolating answer.