

The People Who Ate The Earth

by Chris Okum



From *The Junkyard of Dreams: Portraits of Lonely Los Angeles*, by Wesley Meadow, Barbara Hexum, and Benjamin Strick, Black Sparrow Press, 1966: “Judith came to Los Angeles to escape her ex-husband. Her only company was the voice in her head, a poet’s voice, asking her questions for which there were no replies. She moved into an apartment complex for other desperate divorcées. She got her hair done and went shopping. She spent the rest of her

time in the City of Angels travelling around the perimeter, where the lonely and abject keep their homes. Rummies, victims of car accidents, strippers, born-again, the mugged, and those who came to be seen by others and who stayed knowing they would never be seen, permanently demoted to a place in the audience. West of La Brea the only obscenity is death itself. Stay long enough and the voice directing you towards Bethlehem will vanish. Even Judith lost the voice, eventually. And she had no idea where it went, or that it was even gone. One day the questions just stopped. Everyone in Los Angeles is always not looking for things they never knew they had. But at least there's music. Not that you can hear it. Judith couldn't hear it, the symphony, the non-stop whooshing through the purple sage, the bigberry manzanita, the sagebrush, and milkweed, but that's because there's only ever one instrument playing at a time, and it's the kazoo. What goes for every other major metropolitan area on planet Earth goes double for L.A.: no one here gets away without being burned alive. The world is melting. You are the bride, and the stranger who marries her. Amen."

From *Make War, Not Love: Fragile Masculinity in the Wake of First Wave Feminism*, by Dr. Sheila Herk, Bloomsbury Press, 1995: "The paradox of the Sexual Revolution was that it forced the Baby Boomers into the institution of marriage faster than if they had honored the previous tenets of courtship, which were slow and deliberate and time consuming. This is what happens when you abandon tradition and replace it with untested rituals. Meeting someone on a Saturday night and then moving in with them on Monday isn't rebellious; it's irrational, and the exact type of counterintuitive move that leads to the very thing you think you are running from, i.e., domestication and monogamy. The Baby Boomers, through their forced casualness, created the conditions of their own imprisonment, leading them to escape from one situation into a replication of the same. Instead of being miserable once, like their parents, they were miserable multiple times. That they construed

this misery as freedom is further evidence of the unique pathology affecting the children who grew up in the shadow of the Bomb."

From *We Must Go On: Interviews with the Parents of Mass Murderers*, by Michele Blackwood, Unicorn Press, 2019: "Roger Frogelle's son, Dennis, is the worst serial killer in American history, having killed 298 people while working as a nurse at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis, Minnesota. 'He had a normal childhood,' says Roger. 'We never abused him physically, emotionally, or mentally. As far as I know, no one did. He was a good student. He played sports and did fairly well. He graduated from high school with honors and went to the University of Minnesota, where he graduated in 4 years with honors. He never had any problems with girls. He always had girlfriends. He was never sick and never had to go to therapy. He never hurt animals or started fires. He was never in trouble with the law, ever. He got a good job at the hospital and then he started killing people.' Roger still has a large group of friends that he plays golf with every weekend and has been married to the same woman for almost fifty years, Amanda, who refuses to talk about her son or discuss his crimes. 'I think she feels,' says Roger, 'that he did what he did a long time ago. Yes, he killed almost 300 people, but he never did anything like that before he started working at the hospital, and since his arrest and sentencing he's been a good boy.' Roger says he understands that the general public wants a reason as to why Dennis decided to kill so many people, but he says he also understands that maybe the answer doesn't lie with him. 'Look,' says Roger, 'these deaths? They have nothing to do with me. Or my wife. Maybe it has something to do with society, though. Maybe it's society's fault. Dennis got these ideas from somewhere, right? He didn't get them from his parents. Why do we have to take responsibility for something our son did as an adult? You raise your child as best you can and then you send them out into the world and you have no control over what the world does to your child. These ideas he had, ideas about killing people, maybe they were just floating in the air and he picked up on them.

It's not like we live in peaceful, empathetic world, you know. My son's not the only person to murder other people, you know. It seems like a pretty normal thing to do nowadays. What's that got to do with me or my wife? We never killed anyone. And we never told Dennis to kill anyone.' After Dennis was sentenced, Roger lost over 60 pounds and is now no longer on the cusp of acquiring diabetes. He has taken up photography and accrued a significant number of pictures of the Minnesota landscape, so many that he's considering putting together a portfolio for a potential exhibition at a local gallery. 'I'm not going to stop living my life,' says Roger. 'I didn't do anything. I'm not guilty of anything. I don't feel the need to punish myself. I am alive and I will continue to go on living. People die every day. My son is responsible for some of those deaths. But not all of them, you know. Things happen.' At many points during the interview, Roger says he doesn't know how much longer he can talk about his son's crimes. He says that talking about Dennis and what Dennis did is starting to bore him. When asked what he would rather talk about, Roger says that he would prefer to talk about his successful marriage, about his love for his wife. 'I met Amanda at a Minnesota North Stars hockey game in 1977,' says Roger. 'I was sitting in the same section as her and we were both wearing Tim Young jerseys.' After an unsuccessful attempt to steer Roger back towards the topic at hand, i.e., the mass murder perpetrated by his son, Roger continues to talk about the first time he met his wife, and then, as if in a state of blissful reveries, relays the details of their first date. 'I took her to see *Day of the Animals*. I had a patch of Clearasil covering a pimple on the bridge of my nose,' says Roger. 'Amanda leaned over and started picking at the Clearasil She asked if what she was doing was irritating. When I said it kind of was, she said, Good, I'm going to be your wife one day, I'm supposed to be irritating.'"

From *Knots 2*, by Ronald David Laing, Vintage Books, 1977: "Hilla and Bernd say it's not nice to not be nice to people who are not nice to them. They say it makes them look like not nice people too. When

they tell their father that they're only trying to get the people who are not being nice to them to stop not being nice to them their father says if they keep being not nice to the people who are not nice to them that he is going to not be nice to them too. When they say that's not nice their father says they're not nice. Hilla and Bernd say their father says they should be nice to the people who are not nice to them. When they tell their father that they don't understand why they have to be nice to the people who are not nice to them their father says if they're nice they wouldn't be not nice to the people who are not nice to them. Their father says they're no different than the people who are not nice to them. Their father says they deserve to be treated not nice for not being nice. Their father says they have to be nice to the people who are not nice to them. When they tell their father that if they're not nice to the people who are not nice to them then maybe they'll stop being not nice to them. Their father says he doesn't care if the people who are not nice to them are not nice to them. Their father says the only thing that matters is that they don't act not nice. Their father says the people who are not nice to them are going to be not nice to them whether or not they're nice or not nice, so they might as well be nice."

From *Rabbit in your Headlights: A Compendium of British Fairytales for a Post-Brexit Society*, edited by Wynce Barker and Lawrence Landis, Gallatrix Press, 2021: "Once upon a time, there was a man who thought himself the unhappiest person in the world, so God sent to him the happiest person in the world. "No thank you," said Mr. Unhappy. "I don't want you to introduce me to the woman who you think could be the love of my life. I don't want this woman to bear me children who will grow up to be human beings of impeccable character and incredible success. And no, I don't want the job you are offering me, even if it is my dream job, even if I've been waiting my entire life to do something that I'm proud of and which fulfills my need to be a productive citizen along with using my creative skills in such a way as to render the work nothing of the sort. I don't want these things. Please, stop asking me if I want them. I don't." Mr.

Happy said, "Say yes. Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes. Say it. Say yes to happiness." Mr. Unhappy tucked his chin into his chest and looked down at the floor. "I don't want to be happy," said Mr. Unhappy. "Because If I'm happy I know what will happen. Something bad. The moment I find happiness something horrible will happen to me, or happen to these people I don't know yet, these people I assume I will wind up loving. I don't want something bad to happen." Mr. Happy put his hand on Mr. Unhappy's shoulder, took a knee, and tried to look Mr. Unhappy in the eye, to no avail. "But something bad has already happened to you," said Mr. Happy. "You're already unhappy." Mr. Unhappy looked up at Mr. Happy and said, "I know. Something bad has happened to me. But I'm used to it. So if I can, I'd like to try and avoid something bad happening to me again. I don't think I can be this unhappy twice in my life. Once is enough."

From *A Black Couch in a Suburban Living Room: Notes on Todd Haynes' Safe*, by Tracy David, Harper & Row: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999: "*Safe* is not an allegory about AIDS. It can be if you want it to be, if you need it to be, but that's only because there is always a need for movies to be about something, anything, because that's what movies are for, or at least that's what we've been told. But what if *Safe* is not a movie about AIDS, or the environment, or New Age beliefs, or female hysteria? What if it's a movie about nothing? Because there is no explanation for why what is happening to Carol White is happening. Reasons are given, of course, explicitly, and then other reasons will be hinted at, and finally, reasons will be lightly insinuated, but nothing explains anything in this movie, which means that *Safe*, for all intents and purposes, could be a movie about nothing. Or maybe it's about everything. Or maybe *Safe* is about ambiguity itself, about the introduction of ambiguity into a formerly transparent life. Or maybe *Safe* is about the sign of ambiguity and how it reads to those who don't accept ambiguity, who find ambiguity to be an evil presence, a stain, a smear of the wrong color on a carefully composed canvas. Carol White needs a

story to explain to herself what is happening to her, but none of the stories that are presented to her explain anything. Carol learns nothing about herself through the myriad narratives that are constructed around her illness. But what if some stories don't have any intrinsic meaning? This is the question Todd Haynes seems to be asking. *Safe* is one of those stories. *Safe* is a movie about how stories don't work, how at the center of each story is some wobbly, hidden anomaly that makes no sense, a figure which cannot be accounted for, a remainder that cannot be excised. *Safe* is not the first movie to tell this story — about how at a fundamental level stories don't work — but what's different about *Safe* is that it does not provide another story explaining why stories like this don't work, which other stories do, which can be cold comfort, which is better than no comfort at all. *Safe* provides you with nowhere to sit, no place where you can rest and relax in the knowledge that even if this is a story about how stories don't work, at the very least it's a story about why stories don't work, the implication in those stories being that there are stories that will provide you with the meaning you seek. *Safe* is not that kind of movie. *Safe* is the kind of movie that leaves you with nothing. Nothing has been said and yet, at the same time, everything has been said. At the end of *Safe* there is only Carol White, alone, floating in space, paralyzed in a web of language she doesn't understand. Carol ends her story neither here nor there, and that, in the end, is what *Safe* is about: nothing, or everything, and how she will continue to live inside these two states, or, maybe, how she doesn't.

From *Oh Happy Day!: Gamer Culture, Accelerationism, and Innovations in the Elaboration of Mass Suicide*, by Isobel Cunningham, AK Press, 2025: “The ultimate irony of the black-pilled subculture of young male accelerationists, most of whom reside in America and who follow the tenets of groups as disparate as the Groyperers and Atomwaffen, is that the very societal structures they want to erode and collapse are also the societal structures that keep them safe and snug in the echo chambers which allow them to

continue their project of bringing about the end of the day-to-day operations of the United States. If they accomplish their goal of watching it all burn down that would seem to create a whole new set of problems, though, as they would be exposed to the elements and the diaphanous scrim of protection that covers them like a risqué prom dress will have dissolved. These are not young men with the skills to survive in what will amount to a dystopian landscape, and no one knows this better than these young men, who seem to be good only at kvetching like yentas and screaming finely polished edgelord material at each other. So, what could possibly be accomplished by accelerating the collapse of society (other than the giggles that would attend watching it all burn)? Wouldn't it lead to death for not only everyone they hate (which is...everyone) but themselves as well? Yes, it would. And this is what it means to be black-pilled, it means to crave your own extinction, to end a world you find infinitely complicated, a world that presents you with a multitude of rules which need to be followed in order to achieve even a baseline of moderate success, a world which you simply cannot not parse or find purchase for the seeds of genius you've been convinced you have store, a world that refuses to maximally reward you for your minimal effort on all fronts. When life is reduced to a cycle of masturbating to ISIS beheadings and getting frustrated because the instructions on how to prepare a hot pocket are just too damn complicated, then it makes sense that life should end. But committing suicide isn't really the answer, at least not for much of this crowd, because that would be seen as surrender, as an excuse, as admitting to weakness and terminal vulnerability, which are attributes these young men abhor. Better to dismantle - one atrocious and terrorizing move at a time - the entire frame of existence, that way they can claim they never had a chance. If there's no world not to succeed in, then it's not your fault, right? If it's not you that ended yourself, but the world itself, then every single petty gripe you've ever had can be justified. When the rules of the game don't work in your favor, then it's not the rules you get rid of, but the game. Suicide via omnicide might seem like the ultimate

in selfishness, but from another angle, and maybe the right one, it looks like nothing so much as a deadly Rube Goldberg machine invented by a high-functioning autistic who feels murderous because his mother gave him red grapes instead of green.”

