

The Inkblot Test

by Roz Warren

“Regard this inkblot,” the Psych says to Worker 168. “What do you see?”

Worker 168, a thin young woman wearing overalls, peers at the inkblot. “I see a beautiful summer day,” she says. “A young woman, wearing a flowing dress, sits beside a stream. She is writing a poem. This vision gives me pleasure.”

A murmur sweeps through the audience. The correct answer has appeared on the Monitor over their heads. They know the young worker is dead wrong.

The correct answer reads: IT'S A PRODUCTIVE DAY IN THE MISSILE FACTORY. A YOUNG WORKER, WEARING OVERALLS, IS WORKING ON THE DELICATE MECHANISM THAT WILL GUIDE THE MISSILES TO THEIR TARGETS, SMASHING THE ENEMY! THIS VISION GIVES HER PLEASURE.

Worker 168 can tell by the audience response that she is off. She knows that members of society who are incapable of formulating reasonable career goals are considered useless and are quickly disposed of. She puts on her most serious face.

“Wait a minute!” she says. “It appears to be changing. Now...it looks like...”

“Factory!” hisses an audience member. She is promptly smacked on the head by one of her neighbors. The Psych stifles a yawn.

“It looks like a factory!” says Worker 168. “A clean, loyal, well-run factory,” she elaborates. She looks at the Psych. “A poetry factory?”

Muffled snorts and giggles from the audience.

"Guess not," says Worker 168. "But there is a young woman."

"Just like you," the Psych prompts. .

"A worker!" says Worker 168. "Just like me. Wearing comfy overalls. At her post. Working diligently. Happy. Satisfied. Thrilled."

"Don't overdo it," says the Psych. "You're almost there. A factory and a worker. Now, why does this vision give you pleasure?"

"It doesn't," says Worker 168. "It makes me want to puke. I don't want to be a worker. I hate being a worker. I want to be a poet."

The audience stirs.

"Why can't I be a poet?" asks Worker 168.

The audience leans forward to hear the Psych's response.

"We don't need more poets," says the Psych. "We've got at least five poets already. That's plenty of poets."

"More poets!" screams the audience. "Poets! We want poets!"

SHUT UP, reads the monitor. IF YOU DON'T SHUT UP, YOU WILL BE DEMOTED FROM YOUR POSITIONS AS AUDIENCE MEMBERS AND MADE INTO PLUMBERS.

The audience is suddenly silent

"Let's be reasonable," says the Psych to Worker 168. "Let's not goof around here. This is a very important moment in your life. Your personal response to this Inkblot will determine your entire future!"

It should be obvious that you can't be a poet. We don't need poets. We need workers."

Worker 168 nods. This is true.

"And you know what kind of workers we need, right? You watch the news. You know about the war. You're patriotic. What kind of a factory would a patriotic worker like yourself want to work in?"

"Missiles," says Worker 168. "But..."

The audience is cheering wildly. There is pandemonium. Worker 168 has psychologically determined her own future!

MAKE LOTS OF NOISE, instructs the Monitor. JUMP UP AND DOWN. HUG EACH OTHER.

Under cover of the noise, Worker 168 leans over and speaks quietly to the Psych. "This game is rigged," she says.

"Of course," says the Psych. "I rigged it myself. But I'm doing you a favor. You have the potential to be a great poet. We don't need great poetry. We need mediocre rhyming bullshit designed to acquaint the masses with Society's goals. You'd have hated that job. You might have even tried to rebel. Then, we would have killed you. This way you can make the missiles Society so urgently needs, and still write poetry on the side."

"Thanks a lot," says Worker 168. "This planet sucks. I want to go to the moon."

"You mean you want to be a space explorer, despite the awesome risks?" asks the Psych. "Why didn't you say so?"

"I always wondered how they found the poor suckers dumb enough to take that job," says Worker 168.

"Now you know," says the Psych. He motions to a technician.

SHUT UP, says the Monitor to the cheering audience. BE QUIET. PIPE DOWN.

The audience readdresses its attention to Worker 168.

"Wait a minute..." Worker 168 is saying. "The inkblot is changing again... I see the surface of a planet. There's a young woman wearing a space suit..."

IN THE BACKGROUND HANGS THE PLANET EARTH agrees the Monitor.

