

Weary

by Tobias Carroll

At this time of night, the fluorescence makes his eyes bleed. The muscles in his legs are tight; walking's more of a necessity than anything else. Alexander pushes the shopping cart down the endless gray tile floors of the Grand Union on 35. It's two thirty-five in the morning, and he's been awake for over twenty hours. Trudging along, all he wants to do is sleep. Endlessly. Lock himself inside his bedroom and sleep; pull down the shades and turn the phone off and paint some medieval sign of plague on the door to keep visitors away; sleep until he feels full again.

Angel hair pasta appears suddenly on his left. He reaches for it, and stops. Pasta needs sauce. That's two things to cook, two different pots to clean. No time for that. He steps back five feet, sees the macaroni, and takes that instead. Drops it in his cart and resumes his walk.

Four, five years now, he's been doing the same job. It pays well - that's how he's come to live in a nice, well-kept, mostly hollow house - and he's managed to move from one shoot to the next smoothly, with almost no downtime. Do I need milk? he wonders. Do you need milk for macaroni? He thinks he's got some back at the house, and he's almost certain that it's still good.

The hum of the florescent lighting is hardly present, but it is there; Alexander can hear it. He knows silence well; he's stood there as they've called for quiet on the set to record room tone dozens of times, and has learned to hear background noise. This buzzing...this low, humming buzzing...there are days that he wishes that they'd just turn the lights off; line the aisles with candles and lend the place an almost dignified air.

He keeps walking, turning right when the aisle ends. He's now

moving perpendicular to the aisles, gazing up at each sign. He reads them but they hardly register in his mind. Even when they do he's no longer sure if they denote something that he wants. He can begin to smell himself; his sweat-caked shirt and pants have begun to reek, and his eleven days of stubble don't help. He worked with a guy once who managed to meet women somewhere off the set, and found the time to start a relationship with one of them in his off hours. Amazing.

Alexander works as a location manager, mostly on low-budget movies shot near the town where he grew up. He owns his own house; he drives his own car. He lives from shoot to shoot; they're each about five weeks long, and he's begun to forget what a month is. It's approaching three in the morning, and a string of yawns contort his face. It's him and a cashier in the store; them and the hum and the muzak. And this routine? It's something he takes comfort in, in a way. The faces and names change from shoot to shoot. The walk, the lights, the fatigue, the aches, the stubble, the smell...they're the constants.

Alexander turns down the frozen foods aisle, and makes his way to the ice cream section. He takes a two-gallon carton and puts it in his cart and continues on his way. They decapitated someone today. Alexander didn't bother to catch the actor's name. He covered the room with plastic bags and hoped that they wouldn't use too much fake blood. At a family gathering the previous summer, his younger cousin told him that his job sounded cool; Alexander didn't know what to say. After the first few months, the initial enthusiasm had nearly vanished. It was a job with latex masks and red and knives and dirt and irate motel managers and zoning restrictions and squibs and paint and permits that had to be dealt with. Above all else, it was a job; no more or less than what his friends from college who wore suits to work every day had.

Two turns later and he's in the beverages aisle. Alexander drearily

reaches out and takes a container of OJ, some milk (to be on the safe side), and sweetener for his coffee. He remembers a night a few months ago when he'd had some time off and some old friends of his were in town. They'd gone out for dinner and one of them had asked him, Are you happy with your job? Alexander had looked over and said that he was. It never gets boring? You never want to do something else? Nope, he said, and dug into his meal.

The cart's starting to rattle now, and he's glad that he's done shopping for the night; he can get back to his house. Sleep will be welcome. He pushes, the hum fades away, the cart goes still. Peace. One moment of peace...and he jolts back awake. He'd slept for a moment. Ah well, he thinks as he walks towards the checkout. Better here than on the road.

