

Character II

Having lived on his own since leaving the home of his parents as a teenager he had become somewhat fastidious in his habits, a tendency only exacerbated over the past few years as the orbit encompassing his daily environment had been intentionally reduced, flat by flat, job by job, supermarket by supermarket, until the range of all potentially unexpected inconveniences was contained within a comfortably restricted radius of ten walking minutes from his place. He had trimmed the frayed edges of his activities in a similar manner, controlling their number by excluding those whose content involved a high proportion of unpredictability; whether that be the innumerable and often unavoidable encounters that occur in nightclubs, or the too often inadequate, and quite randomly bestowed attentions paid to hygiene in the hotels and bed and breakfasts of this world; it was these moments which saw the volatility of chance scratch violent marks on the pristine surface of a life he had been busily polishing, perfecting and preening down to its smallest details, down to the meticulous pairing of complementary shades of gray and their fabric's subtly contrasting weaves, down to the diaphanous aroma of Polianthes Tuberosa scent and Bergamotte oil that filled the space immediately around him, down even to the pruning of his friends and colleagues into a small but vigorous collection, which neither cared too much to be any imposition on his privacy, nor were entrepreneurial enough to seek out and search for more interesting and rewarding relationships.

This scrupulous and highly developed aesthetic sensibility with which he diligently governed his life had also taken the form of a system of ethics based on the precedents of his own experience, a moral code of unquestioned value against which he would mercilessly judge his own every action and decision; he never spared himself the harshest of self-imposed verdicts and their punishments of ever increasing habitual and aesthetic sedulousness, punishments which sunk him further and further into the tyranny of a regimen so uniquely structured that he soon reached a point where everybody else, every other person he came across -no matter how clean or polite or well turned-out- was nothing but a seething hoard of flagrantly ill-considered mistakes, a living manufacturer of repulsive flaws.

His entire method of judgment meant that when spending time in the theatre, the cinema, a lecture, or any other intimate environment with other people, the upturning of a collar, the odour of cheap fabric softener, the uncontrolled wispiness of a haircut, the unwieldy handling of a gaudy shade of mascara, the continuous twitching of an errant lip, the maker's label flipping out the neckline at the back of a t-shirt, the red and dripping nose of someone with a cold, all shocked him as fully as would someone masturbating in the auditorium for anyone else: he rarely managed to pay

attention to what was happening on screen or on stage as his agitated gaze was inevitably pulled through the crowd's flagrant rudeness, its total lack of decorum, and while he would have instantaneously purged himself of any such deviant ugliness as that which surrounded him, deep inside, under a sharp line of righteous indignation, lay the fascination of a voyeur, the unthought envy of the man who sees that other person masturbating in the aisles, and although full of horror, nonetheless wishes at his very core to be able to cast aside his values and be in that person's place. Without his realizing it, in the flawless excellence of his routine, it was the appended and entirely un-excellent anomalies of the stuffy and jumbled atmospheres of West-End theatres and the closeness of underground Odeons that maintained a tether attaching him unconsciously, vicariously, voyeuristically, but surely, to the rest of humanity.