

THE END IS NIGHT

"I got whiplash from waking too suddenly from a dream."



One scene for every year of the last decade in America.

By Fiona Alison Duncan

2019. A young service worker at "LAX-it," Uber and Lyft's attempt to synchronise pickups at the Los Angeles airport, is getting spit on. She has been guiding hundreds of folks through a labyrinth of letter-number combinations – 1A, 1B, 6D, 5E, 2C – since 6am. It is now 1pm, and the sun is rebounding off the concrete lot, echoing on green umbrellas and flags. There's not a water fountain or vending machine in sight. A petite Canadian professor and an overweight Culver City hippie have been waiting for an Uber Pool for 65 minutes, watching on their phones as the cars promised them to loop around their pickup spot only to get stuck in traffic, take two wrong turns, and cancel. A young American male stomps onto the scene. Wearing cap-to-toe streetwear, he – six feet tall, husky build – lingers in an empty traffic lane. The service worker whose shift is two hours from over calls out to him, "Sir! Get

out of the street. Sir! You cannot be there." He turns around and spits on the ground, "What do you know? No one here knows what the fuck is going on." "Sir," she replies. "You'll get run over. I am just doing my job, sir." "Fuck you, bitch." "Nah nah. You can't speak to me like that." "You fucking cunt, I can do whatever I want, keep doing your \$12/hour 'job.' I'll see you here in ten years." The hypebeast unzips his Supreme backpack and waves bricks of hundred dollar bills in the service worker's face. "This is 20K, money like you'll never see again in your life." Then he spits on her outstretched hands, which have been held like two STOP signs in front of her chest. Security guards orbit the scene. A manager walks up. "What's going on?" "Get this dumb bitch fired!" For a few minutes, the manager and security at least feign to take the hostile young man's complaints seriously. The LAX-it employee is asked to

clock out. “But he started it —” the Canadian professor steps into the cluster of men in relative-power. “He’s the asshole!”

2018. On the otherwise vacant roof of the Standard hotel in Downtown Los Angeles, Anna lies on a poolside recliner shaped like an elongated wave. Beside her is *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Revised Critical Edition*, which she has yet to crack open. Anna pulls her borrowed bathing suit bottoms to one side, revealing her labia. She worries aloud that they are “too orange” before trying again to suck change out of an empty roach.

2017. The restaurant is crowded with conversation. Rose goes into one of her bits — Honor’s heard it before — about how her high-school psychics teacher taught her how you can choose what to tune into in a loud room. “The ear can focus just like the eye.” Rose instructs Honor and their date to try and listen in on the table to her left. Indeed, with but a slight shift of their eyes, they start to parse full sentences. “I got whiplash,” someone complains, “from waking too suddenly from a dream.” Next, Rose asks them to focus on the table behind Mack’s back. Again, with intention, it’s as if the volume on this conversation has been turned up, as their previous eavesdropping blends back into the ambient noise of the restaurant. They listen as a nervous voice describes a meme they saw, that “perfectly describes a real trend in the art world. It’s an image of a band-aid being laid over a wound. The wound is labelled *white guilt* and the band-aid is *queerness*.” Mack laughs. A friend sent them that meme this morning.

2016. “I’ve eaten more pussy than any living man on Earth,” Eric John asserts as he humps Maya, who is 20 to his 45. They are on a makeshift stage in Inglewood, California, performing on a weekly livestream sex show. There are four others on stage: Dr. Susan Block, the show host; Jay Toriko, who just sucked their own cock; Shannon Coronado, who in an hour will rant about how “unwomanly” and so “untrustworthy” Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton is; and finally, Ikkor the Wolf, who is rapping to the rhythm of Eric and Maya’s fucking. An old man in the front row yells, “What about Ron Jeremy?” Eric’s eyes roll back into his brain socket as he calculates aloud: “If I’ve eaten two to twelve pussies a day since 1985 ...” Like a boy in a schoolyard debate, Eric starts repeating his self-belief louder and faster, as if this will convince his ignorant audience.

2015. “It’s not even that I want kids,” Rosie says. “I know it’s bad for the environment, and I can’t afford it. I just wanna be pregnant. I wish I could give birth to a dog.”

2014. Fan is gift-wrapping books for a customer when Arielle walks up to the cash register. Fan’s friend looks dejected. She confesses, “I just had coffee with X.” This splinters Fan’s spirit. X is an author Fan admires who writes profiles of artists and other real life characters based solely on time spent with his subjects. This author takes minimal notes and never uses a tape recorder, claiming, “My memory is the most

truthful device for capturing reality.” This author is a Pulitzer Prize winner. He was on the masthead of the American weekly that used to publish the best nonfiction writing when it did. Fan had introduced herself to this author “as a fan” in this very bookstore months ago. Too shy to go alone to the events he started inviting her to, Fan had asked her only friend in the new city she was living in, Arielle, to join. Instead of giving Fan what she wanted but dared not ask for — attention for her writing — X became smitten with Arielle, who’s a successful catalogue model, Jewish like him, with blonde hair, blue eyes, an elfin nose, and docile manners. Because Arielle wants to be taken seriously intellectually, it had taken six “meetings” like the one she just had for her to acknowledge that X might be ulteriorly motivated. Veiled in mentorship, her one-on-one meetings with X were opportunities for him to emotionally unload and touch her hands, shoulders, sacrum. Today, he was bemoaning a culture shift wherein editors were suddenly suspicious of his subjective research methods.

2013. At dinner in SoHo, brand strategist Steven Mark Klein boasts that he knew *weeks ago* that Jared Kushner would buy seventeen walk-up apartments in the East Village. “\$130 million!” the man spits. “Last year he bought a \$58 million portfolio in the same zone. You know what else he owns? 6-6-6 Fifth Avenue. Ha! You know who his wife is?”

2012. He bounces on the bed of a post-Occuppy kid. Three walls of built-in bookshelves surround it. He thinks, *I’ll never sleep over because I’d be too afraid of the books falling on us*. Marx, Jameson, Graeber, Žižek, ... A lipstick Marxist films the bouncing boy on her iPhone. She’s an *influencer* (that term doesn’t exist yet). Unlike *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, where the actors step out of the screen into real life, we’ve been invited *in*. Though not into cinema. We’re living out advertisements: everything in short segments.

2011. Judith and Natasha are making grain bowls in their Portland kitchen. “They say next year is supposed to bring about major shifts in consciousness,” Judith relays the title of an article she read online. “I always liked the sound of 2020,” Natasha replies, trimming okra to steam. “I feel like 2020 will bring clarity. *Perfect vision*.” “Toe-tally,” Judith nods, thinking her new roommate is a genius, before asking: “Do you have perfect vision?” “No,” Natasha counters. “I’m like 20/80. I can’t see in the distance, and it keeps getting worse.”

2010. Back home in Virginia, I’m looking through our family photo albums. They end in 1999. I ask my father why. “That’s when we got a digital camera,” he replies.

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