

INDIFFERENT





Part I: Prescription

This is the story of John Laberton. Like every morning, today, John was working his shift at the Abquinne Corporation. For as long as he could remember, he was the only employee with the designation 11863, and more importantly, the 169th journalist. As a journalist, his job was to write unbiased work about the news of the day. It was a simple job, and that's all he had to do. That was until today, for today, he had forgotten something very important. "Wait," he said to himself, "did I take my neutralizer?" He, in fact, did not, and promptly realized that. Hoping not to get attention drawn towards him, he whispered near-inaudibly to himself, "What do I do?" He dropped his pen in disquietude. In his confusion, many questions flooded his worrisome mind, but one thought stood out from the rest; "Do I really need it?" It had never occurred to him that his neutralizer wasn't mandatory.

He decided to alert his co-worker, Ross.

"Hey, Ross!" John exclaimed, through a wall.

"Yes?" replied Ross, seemingly completely monotonously.

"Are you still taking your neutralizer?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Have you considered, y'know, not?"

Ross responded instantaneously, "No."

"Really?" John asked, "Not even a little bit?"

John thought he saw a glimmer of hope in his co-worker's eye, but it was immediately extinguished.

"John," said Ross, in a very stern tone, "for countless years, I have put up with you and your constant rambling."

"Okay, but—"

"I am not finished. If you want to convince anyone to stop taking these pills," he showed a pill container, "then by all means, you do you. But just not with me."

This made John feel something that he had never felt before. Although he couldn't find the words to describe it, what he was feeling was annoyance. He didn't want to pressure Ross into doing something he clearly didn't want to do, so John reluctantly went home.

When John arrived at his apartment, there was a surprising emptiness to it. He cried out for his roommate, "Sarah? You here?" Then he realized. He left his shift early, thus Sarah wouldn't be here. "Right," he thought to himself, "this is going to be a long night." Instead of leaving and finding something to do, John decided to just stay at home. There wasn't really anywhere for him to go, anyway. He decided to finally read a book that he's been leaving in the backlog for who knows how long; *The History of the Abquinne Corporation*.

Back in 1996, David Whitman and Paul Abquinne started to experiment with medicine to help people with emotion-based disorders. They called it, 'The Whitman-Abquinne Project: The Depression / Bi-Polar Research Centre'. Eventually, by 2011, the project had a prototype drug. Unfortunately, the same year, Whitman died of pneumonia. That left Abquinne to take over the project and subsequently, continue developing the prototype. By 2017, Abquinne had successfully created the neutralization pill. According to him, this was the first step towards a grand utopia, free of depression and sadness.

Upon reading this, John started to wonder, "What are the side effects to this?" Before he could really delve into this question, he heard the door click. Sarah was home.

"Hey, have you got a minute?" he asked.

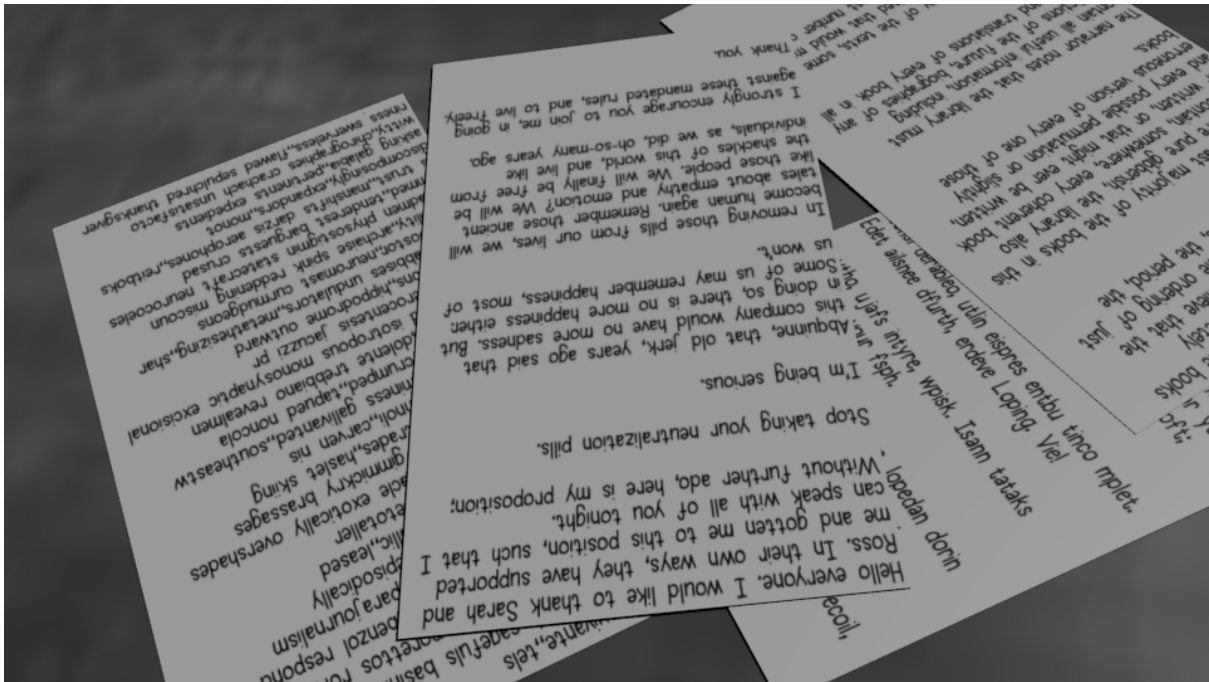
"Okay," replied she.

"Have you considered quitting the neutralizer pills? I have a feeling they aren't a good influence."

"I hadn't given it much thought."

"Well," he said enthusiastically, "give it some thought."

After some time passed, Sarah eventually agreed to stop taking her pills, and even to write a speech for him to perform, but on one condition; under no circumstance must John mention her involvement. John found this quite odd, but went with it anyway. After all, what did he have to lose?



Part II: Misdescription

John had never written a speech before. Mostly because he never had to. Sarah, on the other hand, had written an immeasurable number of speeches prior to this one, so for her, it was a breeze. In less than 2 hours, she had the entire speech written and finalized.

“What do you think?” said she, more excited than usual.

“That looks great!” he replied.

It seemed to John that going off the pills made people more happy. Then why did Abquinne say they would create the most ideal world? Something didn’t quite add up.

“Ready to present it this Mondie?” asked Sarah.

“Well,” John said, hesitating for a moment, “Theodecamensis the unth, isn’t that a bit early?”

“No, you idiot!” shouted she, “This is far too late, you should present this immediately!”

John recoiled in shock. After getting himself back together, he replied, “Alright, if you say so.”

That Mondie, countless people showed up for the event, hoping to see li’l 11863 announce his big idea. As John approached the stage, he was absolutely speechless. This was a large audience, and he better not screw it up.

“Attention everyone!” he yelled at the top of his lungs. The crowd was hushed. He began his speech, with strong points about the company’s history. The middle was, quite frankly, filled with many reputation-destroying remarks, but in the end, he delivered, (at least to him) a wonderful presentation for the rest of the employees. He had kept his composure the entire time, so as not to expose himself. This would have worked great, if not for Ross’ knowledge of the situation.

“Hey, Laberton!” screamed Ross, which was rather unorthodox of him.

“Uh... hey, Ross,” responded John, quite nervously.

“How’s being off your medication going?” retorted Ross.

All of a sudden, an uproar began to rise. People were yelling and shouting all over the place, and John was booed off the stage.

“Why don’t you live in your imaginary world, huh?” snidely asked an employee.

“Sure, and while I’m at it, I’ll ride through Aqur’ban with my flying pig,” rudely remarked another.

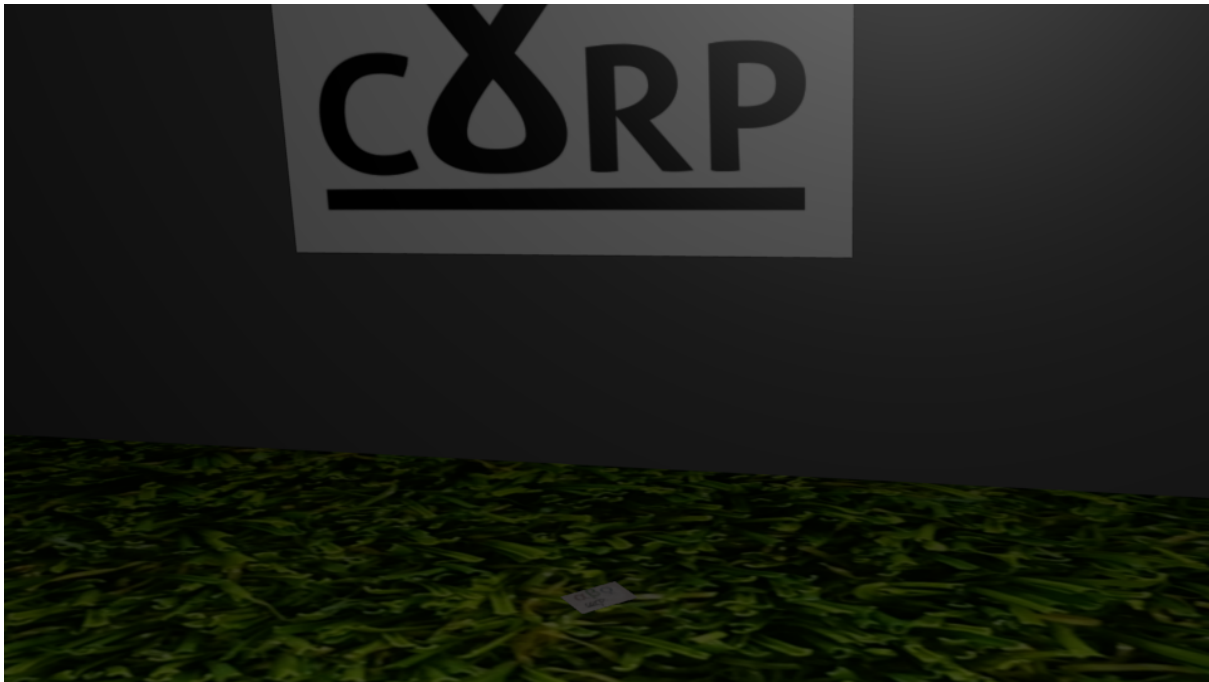
John had no time to reply to his audience, for he was being escorted out of the building. Once outside, he saw a familiar face.

“Heya, John,” said she.

“Damn it, Sarah,” he grumbled, “did you tell Ross?”

“Didn’t have to. He already knew. All I did was call security.”

John looked at Sarah in utter disbelief. He was just a regular guy a week ago, and now everything is being taken away from him. Now, he had no choice.



Part III: Proscription

Without saying a word, John ran. He ran as fast as the wind, for now, he was on the lam. For what felt like half an hour, he just kept running, trying to escape the corporation once and for all. But running can only get a person so far. Eventually, he got caught.

“Please state your name and designation number,” read the paper form.

“John Laberton, 11863,” he wrote.

“What did you do?”

“I tried to expose the corporation.”

Coming to terms with what he did, he signed the form and was promptly taken away. Away from the corporation, away from the city, away from Aqur’ban. John was taken far away, never to be seen again. After that point, to everyone else, there was no employee 11863. In fact, to them, John never existed.

No one knows where John is now. He could be anywhere. Maybe he’s moved to a new planet. Maybe, he has discovered the cure for cancer.

Or maybe, just maybe, he has written a cautionary tale.