

**Korrupt Yr Self**

**Issue #4**

**fuck You Cancer**

*A Mole, A Fucking Rat Among Us*

7:50 AM, I am staring at the computer screen that sits on my desk at work. An ugly cubicle surrounds two sides of me. Behind me a dreary fall day presses its foot against my neck. I think nothing of it; it just hangs around like a wet sweatshirt from my shoulders. It is damp and depressing. The phone rings. It's not a number I recognized. Not one that I have stored in this idiot device. But it's a local number. I pick it up.

"Erik, this is Dr. Murrow."

"Good morning,"

"I wanted to call you about that mole I biopsied last month," he starts.

"Okay," I interrupt. The nerves hit immediately. Last go around I got a call from the desk clerk.

"The mole was pre-cancerous. I'd like you to see..." he continues, but it all trails off in my head. Somehow I successfully write down the name of the doctor he wants me to see for a follow up. I call that office and make an appointment.

None of this would have happened if it weren't for, well for a lot of things. I had the mole on my left leg for my entire life. As a child I looked at the odd, brown colored anomaly with curiosity. A certain amount of vain animosity existed in regards to the blemish that broke up the otherwise perfect skin. I never thought much of it at all in my life. Ever. Then Clark Sabine died.

At his memorial service, I was in tears. I hadn't cried with this amount of grief in my life. Even my own Grandfather's funeral didn't affect me like this. Through a stream of tears I spoke with Clark's sister about him, and how he touched me. In our awkward, unfortunate conversation she requested, that in Clark's memory I go see a dermatologist for a routine check up. Clark had died of skin cancer. It's not a very sexy cancer. It doesn't have a PR campaign or a ribbon or a walkathon. No one on TV dies of skin cancer. You just don't think about that shit.

Had it not been for that conversation, through wine and tears, had it not been from the urging from my friend to make sure the doctor looked at the mole on my leg, had it not been for seeing Bald Rapunzel in a garage,

where I met Bonnie, who later played in Motorcycle Wars with Clark, who I had a few great conversations with over beers here and there, would I have even thought about that mole or the possibility of skin cancer.

I got lucky. Very very very lucky. I am not the most observant person. I don't know at what point, if any I would have even recognized that the mole I've had my whole life was getting bigger. Chances are it would have been too late. This scares me more than anything. It's not a cancerous mole yet and my leg will be cut up a little bit and I will go from there, most likely with nothing more than a scar and an annual check up. I'm not worried about what will happen. I'm just really frightened about what could have happened. It's not the normal kind of anxiety I am used to. Dodging the bullet can be just as intense as getting hit by it.

Since Clark passed in June, it's been a different kind of life for me. It doesn't quite seem that way on the surface sometimes, but I assure you that it is. I made more than one promise that day in the ballroom, where his closest friends, his dearest family and a whole lot of people who he knew and touched gathered in memory. I made a promise to do something as mundane and ordinary as go to a Doctor. But I also made a promise to really love the shit out of this life, to do the things I wanted to do, to always plant the seed, tend to the garden, pull out the weeds as they expose themselves and if the crop doesn't yield anything, plow that land and plant the seed again.

I'm not normally the sentimental type. I don't really believe in fate. I feel, in the face of all this realization, that this is all just coincidence. I am by no means trying to belittle Clark's existence on this planet by any means in saying that. It obviously had a bigger impact on me than I would have ever expected. But these are just the kind of things that happen to people all the time. I'm not special, just completely fucking lucky. We are in the midst of a crucial time in American history in terms of health and health care. I am so skeptical of so much of modern medicine, modern diet, modern health care, but please do what you can to take care of yourselves. Listen to your loved ones. Go to the doctor, get the diagnosis at least. There are many ways things can be treated and your body can be healed, but if you don't know what you're dealing with, you can't begin to fight it.

*Last Regrets*

You curl up next to me, my back towards you. We always slept like this when we slept together. Without fail. No matter how close I wanted to be to you, it was our own unexplainable needs to be comfortable that somehow prevented us from sleeping face to face. No matter the room, or the situation, I don't ever remember a night I faded out into sleep looking at you.

I had teased you about the music I put on your iPod. A little gift. I want so badly for you to find these secrets I hid there for you, but my excitement and anticipation get the better of me. I have no way of keeping them from you. I can't be withholding. On some things anyway. Sometimes I hold mountains from you. It's not fair, but I realize sometimes to make you happy I have to hurt myself and self preservation is just instinct. It's just what we do as animals. Whether it is right or wrong, we will slice those we love cold, before we turn the knife on our selves and make the incisions.

We listen to Paul Baribeau in the dark. The words from his songs, so personal, so self referencing and yet somewhere we relate to them. Even after all has been said and done, and apologies made, that sadness he cries out still makes sense. The room is cold. The fall has quickly turned into crushing grey. It's going to be hard to keep things in perspective. Nine months is a long time. And I feel like this is my own pregnancy, and that the diagnosis I received, minor though it is, is a complication an expectant mother would fret over. *Pre-cancerous* I whisper to myself, your arms around me, the guitar noodling in my head.

I know it's hard for you, sometimes, to believe that I don't give you credit. And I can certainly see how you feel that way, excluded so often from the context of narrative. But you should understand that you are more engrained in my life than anecdotes. The story, it's just a story. Even if it's true, it still carries embellishments, and the parts emitted leave glaring holes. I've always felt that was obvious to see. Even in the greatest writing, even from the greatest story teller, the audience will still have questions. *"Yes, but what about this?"*

You probably will find this hard to believe, but I still love you deeply. The biggest question for both of us is to see how we really are going to live without each other. But this is the time to do this. Walking to work this morning I thought, I am doing what you wanted to do, and you have done what I wish I could do. I think the overlapping irony in all of this is actually quite sad. But it couldn't be any other way. There is no doubt in my mind that we will love each other forever. But this is just the way it is.

We will find out new things. And for some of them I hope we are there together still, some way, some how. I would not have taken these steps without you, though I know sometimes you think they are in spite of you. You thing I take you for granted sometimes, and on the surface it seems that way. But you are always the one planting those seeds. Everything else afterwards is just the fertilizer, nurturing what you have already laid in the soil. You get all the credit. Even when I can't admit it to myself or you.

Three

## *Anxiety Takes A Shit*

I decided last night, while perched on my throne to read the packet of information sent to me by my dermatology surgeon. Along with the requisite directions to the office and patient rights information was a glossy book about skin cancer. Since all the other papers were standard Doctor's Office Stuff I decided to read the booklet included. This was no pamphlet mind you. It had a table of contents and lots of pictures. Scary fucking pictures of people with large chunks of their face removed. What the fuck?

This diatribe of mine would probably hit home a lot more if I remembered some of the facts and figures I learned about skin cancer. I can tell you there are three types of skin cancer; I can tell you that you need to keep an eye on any spots or abnormalities on your body, that according to the statistics, one person dies every hour from skin cancer. I can also tell you that most cases of skin cancer are treatable if detected early and that the best way to avoid skin cancer is to cover up and use some SPF 30 at all times.

While the diagnosis I received was pre-cancerous, it still has that dreaded word, cancer, lodged between some otherwise meaningless letters. So a part of me thinks I am being a melodramatic little shit, worrying my self into a frenzy. It's not even cancer yet. Not definitively. But not matter how I look at the scabby skin on my leg, where that life long mole once resided, I can't stop thinking about abnormal cell division. I can't really help feel betrayed by this body I am in. It's not doing what nature and I intended for it, which is to encase this conscious mind for as long as fucking possible. These cells running rampant, or at least in my case, scheming to enact the chaos theory pisses me off.

I also start thinking about Helen Marie. She's in my age group, a college alumni, she works at the zoo, playing with monkeys. She was diagnosed with breast cancer. That's some full fledged, really fucking up your body kind of shit. I read about her journey through this fight daily now since I found out (you can to by going here <http://fucancer.blogspot.com/>). Comparatively speaking she wins on the Fuck You Cancer scale that I am currently now standing on. She's jumping up and down on that

mother fucker, pounding feet and taking no shit. How our bodies can betray us is fucking cold. I feel even more pathetic when I think about Helen Marie and what she has to go through. My ordeal is after all probably going to be very mundane.

But I can't stop thinking about that fuck all word, cancer.

*Friend of a Friend In The End Time*

I had dinner at a friend's house tonight. There was nothing out of the ordinary that occurred. It was dinner and wine and conversation. And I really did not want it to come to an end.

I've felt this overbearing need to talk about my pre-cancerous bullshit crap skin anomaly. Despite my otherwise general disposition to run my mouth or express whatever ungodly emotion that I happen to be feeling at any moment., this seems a lot harder. I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to contemplate about what it is or might be. Frankly after just a few weeks I am pretty fucking exhausted. Most of the time I don't ponder upon the itchy scab on my leg. I've done my best to ignore it.

And so when my friend asked about it, curious and concerned like a good friend should be, I went through the motions talking about it. It's actually harder to talk about it more and more because I do know so little about it. And I feel the less I know about my own body the worse off I am. I keep putting off the phone call to the doctor to get more information. Because though I know that I don't know much about what is wrong, I am not really sure I want to be an expert on this.

Talking and writing, it's supposed to be therapy. Somehow maybe it's going to extract these cantankerous cells if I can just ramble on and on about it. Bludgeon them into non-existence with verbosity. Wear them down with jaw gymnastics. It's easy to talk about the words, some how thinking about the word cancer and talking shit on it is a lot easier then actually talking about the emotions that run through my mind. For example, I think of match books and gasoline and burning down all the bullshit in my life, because I am afraid I will never get another chance. At the same time I am afraid to move, scared that should preserve each second with stillness, as if clutching onto it will suspend it from moving.



*Statehood and Steak Knives*

I ducked out from the rain and into the old familiar confines of the Galaxy Hut. The day was long and stressful, the weather enough to make you truly understand Elliot Smith or Ian Curtis. Grey fucking October bleeding it's way slowly, solemnly into what is expected to be a terribly wet and cold November. I hate what they call fall in Virginia. It's not fall by any stretch. There is no crisp air, just a water logged atmosphere filled with wet mold spores, sinus infections, soggy shoes.

Rebecca is already at the bar, talking to the trusty bar tender, Bill. I can't hear them, but he makes a gesture in my direction. Despite this I still approach with reservation. This evening is like a blind date in its own way. I am meeting someone for the first time, connected by friends and acquaintances under unusual circumstances. I am excited, nervous, and under the circumstances of our connection, anxious. With tempered steps I approach Rebecca, she turns and says hello and offers me a big hug. Hugs are good, the best way to meet someone, and I instantly feel at ease. The feeling of a friendly body in your arms and your body in the arms of someone else is comforting. It's a level of intimacy that is so overlooked in this world; a social grace seemingly given up sometime when the teen years turn into the reckless twenties. In spite of the weather, in spite of the stress, in spite of the long and trying working day, I know things are going to be better. My racing heart beat settles, my breathing resets to normal. We order beer and sit down.

Rebecca met Clark Sabine five months before he was diagnosed with skin cancer and given fourteen months to live. From her story I calculate that with the sixteen months he hung on, she was with him for twenty-one months, less than two years. There is not a person in my life that I have known less than two years, let alone five months. And yet Rebecca stayed with Clark until the day that he died, as his lover and caretaker. It's a type of devotion that sadly people rarely get to see in each other unless they are faced with the circumstances that these two people found themselves. At such a young age I can't help but be humbled by this woman. Her courage and dedication to one person is indicative of the compassion that does exist in this world, the type of calm, kind care that I am desperately trying to understand and exude.

Rebecca and I are connected through something very terrible and in a very bizarre way. I knew Clark only through being a fan of music in a community that we were both involved. But as I spoke with Rebecca that night, I learned just how similar our lives were. We grew up in the suburbs of Washington D.C., separated by miles of town houses and winding Virginia roads. Both Clark and I, from the shadow cast over the city by punk rock legends, yearned for a piece of that experience, that world. We loved this city so much, religiously devoted to its music, our own self expression bursting out without containment, and in our own ways looking for that acceptance. As Rebecca talked about this Clark, a man I only knew as an enigmatic front man and complex musician, I realize how much alike we were. My sadness at his loss grows a little bit deeper.

Not all of our talk is about the ghost of Clark Sabine though. Most of it is casual and fun. We learn about each other a little bit as people. This in the midst of that word “cancer” makes me feel a whole lot better. Rebecca does her part to be comforting and compassionate as well as supportive to me, still mostly a stranger. I do my part in being vulnerable and brave, something I am not really able to do in full my closest family and friends. For reasons not yet clear to me I feel I owe this much to Rebecca. I feel an intense responsibility to this woman, someone I hardly know myself.

The most revealing moment comes towards the end of the night. It’s poignant to me for everything in my life revolves around music. It’s all personal; clearly my reflections lack the type of academic sterility that allows people to write for shitty periodicals and callous websites. No, tonight I find in Rebecca a companion of infinite proportions. She shows me her tattoo, a simple XO on her back. The font so familiar to me, it graced the cover of an Elliot Smith album. And so in this moment Rebecca tells me one final Clark story, one that I find so much comfort in, despite its overlaying sadness. Clark used to tease her, probably with a bit of anger in his tone about the tattoo. How could she mark her self with the tattoo in honor of a man who gave it all up? To Clark, and to me, Elliot Smith had everything both of us started searching for in Fairfax County suburbs from as early as we could. Elliot Smith put a steak knife in his heart. A poet of immense talent, his small suicide note barely anything, Smith wiped himself from this earth. Clark’s small feeling of betrayal makes perfect sense. And I can’t help but agree.

I walk with Rebecca to the metro station, opposite of the direction of my car. Rain water weighs in on my shoes. The air is cold. I make more promises that I fully intend to keep. We say good-bye. A hug exchanged to comfort me on my journey back into the cold and dark and rain. I watch Rebecca descend down the escalator to the trains.

I feel drowned as I walk back to the car. I want nothing more than to be healthy, to come out of this odd, unknown scare relatively unscathed. I've never felt more sadness and more afraid. If I could have cried, I would have, but what good would more water falling on Arlington pavement really accomplish? Nothing. But the reason I am not moved to some awkward and embarrassing emotional outburst is because even in all the sad stories and all the memories I heard on this night I couldn't help but feel a little hopeful. Clark truly was sent an angel, in the way that human beings are the only possible angels we can have. And in that Clark sent me an angel, in the odd and strange way the strings of our life weave and interconnect through the most unlikely places.

The morning after, I am exhausted, but I feel better than I have in a week. I feel more strength, more resolve, more confidence. That six letter word "cancer" stuck in between "pre" and "ous" can go fuck it self. My resolve to live a fuller life is strengthened even more after meeting Rebecca, after watching her go down those wet, moving, metal stairs last night. Cancer can go fuck it self.

*I Don't Know the Difference*

When I got the actual diagnosis, I didn't honestly think to ask to get a report from the doctor. I didn't make a follow up appointment, and as willing as my Doctor is to answer my questions, like most other doctors, he isn't phased by giving out a diagnosis that is inevitably going to throw one of his patients into an anxiety attack.

After stressing out on a friend of mine for the umpteenth time, she told me blankly "just call the doctor and ask for the biopsy". So I did just that. I called his office, spoke to one of the office team and had a copy of it faxed over to me. The thing is It still didn't make sense. Medical science is not written in English. I equate doctors to auto mechanics. They have a specialized skill that I don't and there for when they talk in their language of coded nonsense I just get blank eyed. I punched a bunch of words into the internet until I got something that made sense. I won't bore you with the actual language, but I allowed this random opinion by this random doctor found in some random meeting minutes convince me that this was not a death sentence. And this is what we want at all times.

Skin cancer doesn't feel like it should be that big of a deal, despite it's obvious, visible nature taking over our bodies. And I did watch the doctor pull out a scalpel and slice this chunk of brown skin off my leg. Your disease is available to you. There is no out of sight, out of mind. Every time I get into bed, I look down at the spot on my leg, this little spot I ignored for so long in my life. And that sense of betrayal, my body turning against me, it taunts me. The evidence so daunting.

So I look for comfort in words I don't understand. At the very least I know I am not going to die tomorrow or get very sick. That should be worth something. Should I trust it? No, not really. Especially since with in these notes, from some random meeting taking place at some random time, there are dissenting opinions on the severity of the diagnosis. But I am too calm now to do any more research, to convinced to actually call my doctor and make that appointment, the one he probably should have insisted on to make sure that his patient was well educated and knew what to expect. It's hard to learn that your health care is in your hands and you have the right to ask questions until you understand. And it

would have saved me a lot of trouble if I actually understood what the fuck it was that was going on. For two weeks I probably would have slept more, got more done. Felt productive. Instead I just wondered how fucked I was.

VII.

## *Knives Out*

I wake up early on the morning of November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009. My appointment with the surgical dermatologist is at some ungodly hour, like 7 A.M. or some terribly cruel hour. Far too early to get stuck in the leg with needles, cut open and left to bleed for enough seconds that you can watch the blood run down your leg before the medical assistant can put a bandage on it.

I got lost on my way there. Well, lost is a bad word. There was construction on I-495 and what used to be a lane that went all the way around suddenly merged into an off ramp for I-66. I had to turn around at the exit for Route 29 and then back track a bit. I decided to stay off of the beltway. Better to go down Chain Bridge Road. The left was off that road anyway. I didn't want to be late. I was too nervous, anxious to get this fucking shit out of my leg once and for all. It had been a month since the original biopsy, since that odd and fucked up phone call. It's time for the removal.

The first thing I notice, pulling up to the non-descript office building is that it shares the last name of my doctor. I can't help but think that despite it's relative underground status as a cancer, skin cancer is fucking lucrative. Not every schmuck smart enough to go to med school, graduate, practice under some idiot and then start their own practice gets to name their own building. You have to be pretty special to pull that shit off.

This comforts me, the brand like quality of the name in steel letters on a slab of granite, rain falling upon it as winter starts to sneak in. I feel like I'm in the hands of an efficient corporation. And though usually I like a little personal attention when getting medical treatment, this time I want precision, sterility, efficiency. Like so many unseen workers, busting away at keys, keeping the machine going.

Of course there is nothing unfriendly about the whole thing. Every one is very nice. Almost too nice. The young woman behind the counter looks more like an executive assistant than any doctors office associate I have ever seen. She is dressed with a cold preparedness that screams

Capitol Hill professional. But she greets me with warmth, hands me the paper work I am to fill out and goes about her day.

It is not long after that I am called back. It is just after seven and the medical assistant seems wired. She has had her coffee for sure. I have not, and am overwhelmed by her enthusiasm. She leads me into the operating room, takes my jacket and book and lays them out of sight. I sit in the chair, lifted by hydraulics higher off the ground than I care to be at this hour as she begins to talk to me. I work my pant leg up to reveal the offending skin. The medical assistant comments on my tattoos, the round mole lightly kissing the edge of one of them. She warms me they may have to cut into it. I tell her I don't care. Whatever gets this shit out of me.

The doctor bounds into the room, that same sense of a full stomach of coffee carrying him. He greets me, quickly, precisely. He reads out loud the biopsy and then examines my leg. I ask him exactly what the biopsy means. And he tells me that there are three stages of precancerous growth, mild, moderate and severe. He tells me that mine is moderate, that it looks like I caught this early enough that this procedure should get all of the offending cells and I should be on my way. I ask if this means I am more at risk for developing this type of anomaly in the future elsewhere on my body. He assures me that yes, I am more at risk, but mostly to just be aware of any moles I have and wear sunscreen. Even in winter.

I take a shot of something to the leg to numb the area. The doctor waits a few moments and then asks me if I feel numbed up. I tell him I can't feel anything below the knee and he seems pleased. He puts on his surgical mask, sits down and grabs a scalpel off the metal tray next to my chair. I feel nothing. He tells me he is done and shows me the offending chunk of my leg. This is his way of confirming for me that he actually did something I guess.

The doctor informs the nurse that the skin around my shin is too taught for stitches and instructs her to get the staple gun. The gun is similar to a staple gun you might find in a hardware store and the staples they shoot into my leg are no different than those you will find in the spine of this publication. I have never had anything stapled and while they are wiping away yet more drops of blood I sneak a peak. I don't like the

looks of this. Eight staples in all. I think the medical assistant was a little over excited to suture me up with these pieces of metal.

The doctor leaves the room for a moment and I stand up. I walk over to the counter where the specimen from my leg sits. I want to get a better look at it, to see if it shows any obvious signs of illness. It just looks like a bunch of flesh. I can tell by it's girth that this is a deep cut. I also notice that the tip holds a slight slit of pigment from my tattoo. I can see where the layers of skin desecrated by the ink end. It is actually much less than I thought it would be. Not even tattoos are for ever, I think. After all this hole, while deep, will eventually heal.

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Two weeks later I make an impromptu appointment. The wound has gotten angry and sore and I want to make sure that it is not infected. I leave work early. Way too early actually, but traffic sucks ass and I get there a few minutes late. Fucking Virginia. You can count on the Virginia Department of Transportation to interfere with the actual art of transportation on any given day. Idiots.

I walk in and the nurse grabs me almost immediately. A rare occasion, but I sense that this doctor employs an army of people in this medical compound of his. I realize too, that he shares the complex with his wife, also a dermatologist. I sit down in the chair and the nurse leaves almost immediately. On the wall I am captivated by a photograph of a lounging polar bear. Somehow this silly photography of this great animal calms and soothes me.

The nurse returns to the room a few minutes later. I can see lab results paper clipped to my file. I am anxious to hear what is on them, but I assume the doctor is going to give them to me. The nurse first looks at the wound and says it looks okay, nothing to be concerned about. I am relieved by this. The pain however does not subside at the news. But I can live with this. She then grabs the chart and looks it over, asking if anyone called me on Friday. I tell her no, not a soul.

"Well, the biopsy shows no further traces of cancer. I looks like we got it all."



The news eases me into a sense of comfort and calm I have not felt in a long time. The world almost seems to disappear around me. I feel at once a sense of relief and silly, like I blew it all out of proportion. But the doctor seems relatively pleased with himself as he dabs some Neosporin on my wound and slaps a band-aid on top of it.

So there I am, cancer fucking free. It's actually hard to wrap my head around that. This whole experience has shaped my future. There is a need to not take shit for granted. And while I spend too much money on CD's and records, I work to prepare for some grand new adventure. Life gets shorter with every movement we make and we don't know what odd ball, stupid ass bullshit is going to take us out. We make our days so fucking predictable, until the unpredictable happens. And once that happens, you realize very quickly you have absolutely no fucking control what so ever.

*Five Months Later*

I go to a birthday party at Rebecca's house. This is one of those moments in life where I have to step outside of my comfort zone. It will be a house full of people I don't know. Normally, I won't force myself into these awkward situations. Rooms full of people I do know make me unbearably uncomfortable. I am just one of those people who prefers small, intimate groups. I am, and have always been a wallflower. But this is a different situation.

When your relationship with someone begins with bad news, when it is surrounded by the absence of someone, and yet somehow your own life makes a difference, it's odd. It's not really describable. So when people ask you "How do you know Rebecca?" it's not a question that you can answer with a simple anecdote.

"Well, I knew Clark and then I went to the doctor and then I found out I had cancer and then..."

This is what a lot of my day is like. Meeting new people, many of them drunk, high and pleasant. Surprisingly I have a good time. Everyone I am around is genuine and nice. Not everyone, that's a lie, but the people I manage to talk to are. I spend a lot of time in Rebecca's wake, partly because it's my nature to cling to the familiar. I feel awkward about this, but she is the only thing I really know. Some people are smoking pot, and had I not driven, I would have indulged myself. The only tension breakers I find in the several bottles of champagne brought by the guests that have long since come and gone.

I go home. A home that is being torn up and rebuilt. I am moving on. I had resolved when Clark died that I would do something else with my life. It's been a long time coming, a prisoner of my own undoing. The reality of the housing market boom, acting as my own jail cell. I learned a lot. You can make big mistakes that aren't so catastrophic sometimes.

The weeks crawl by. The anxiety, the anger, the anticipation of escape all weigh down on a daily basis. You feel like you could burst at the unseen seams that hold everything together. I am lying in bed, my ex

girlfriend at my side. I ask her to scratch my back and remove my shirt. Then she stops and stares.

“C’mon, scratch my back,” I whine.

“You should have this mole looked at,” she says.

“Fine,” I say “now scratch my back”.

I go to the doctor a week later. The familiar walls, clinical, but not cold. They have since repainted everything a piss/daisy yellow. It’s a bright, April day now. I am off of work for the rest of the day. The doctor’s hands are old and worn, despite being a dermatologist, his own skin is heavy with the weight of constant gravity. Pulling, endlessly, causing canyons and valleys in his hands. They are neither cold, nor warm to the touch as he pierces my back with a small needle. Suddenly I feel nothing. I can only just make out the motions of his hands. It feels like he takes forever to cut this new lump out. I don’t remember it taking so long. I put my shirt back on and leave his office. I don’t even think about it again.

The doctor calls me on a Saturday while I am eating lunch by myself. I am covered in dirt and grime from removing doors from their archways. The dust I can actually smell as it settles into my hair and clothes. He gives me the same news as last time. My reaction is much more swift and calm. I still don’t understand half of what he says. Something about being benign now, but to be sure he wants to get a bigger chunk cut out and biopsied further. It’s not a problem.

It’s only later that the sense of betrayal becomes evident. This mole is like finding out your best friend secretly hates you. The betrayal of your own skin, turning against you, it’s not even upsetting anymore, it just pisses me off. At night I wonder if I will ever beat this. Since the last time, I watch every spot I can find so closely for any change. I don’t understand how a spot on my back, so rarely exposed to light could be growing uncontrollably.

I’ve never been comfortable in my own skin and now it turns out my skin has never been that comfortable covering me, protecting me. This excess growing it’s doing, it’s over compensating. I wonder if I tattoo all the skin on my body if that will some how block out the radiation that

seems to make all the cells hyperactive, oversensitive. The organic nature, the biology of self becomes evident when some part of you is growing in a way that is literally detrimental. This isn't just regular rejuvenation, this psychotic expansion, akin to the ever expanding suburbs that seem to be choking every city.

Nine

*Typed on a fucking cell phone to Rebecca.*

I am listening to Statehood this morning and it made me remember this time, I was at my friend Kadd's house. His new band was playing a show. It was a really exciting night. A lot of people were there including Clark and Shelby. Clark and Shelby were really excited about some new music Clark was working on, and he played me some demos. His pride in his work really struck me at that moment. He really loved doing it and lived to share it with people.

The drive this morning was a bit sad and lonely. But remembering that night with such vivid recall mad me remember how amazing people can be. I didn't really know Clark and now I feel I didn't know him as well as I wish I had. But that connection between people is so strong and important. I'm sitting on the side of the road, typing this on a fucking phone and crying. But I'm really happy about what he contributed to my life. And I'm really glad you are a part of that, even under the worst of these circumstances. It's just such a reminder of how precious this life is.

Anyway, this is feeling ridiculous and all now. I hope you are well. I am sorry if this is a bit of an emotional dagger, and it's kind of unfair to lay it out all unexpected like this. I just felt compelled.

XO

*One Year Later*

The other day, on the internet I wrote this “memorial” to Clark. He’s been dead for a year. I’ve essentially been working on this zine for a year as well. My whole life has been turned upside down in that time. I’ve played human pin cushion for my dermatologist three times, the most recent exam just a week ago. The back of my leg hurts like hell, one of the moles was in my knee cap. Even though it nags at my best intentions incessantly, it’s nothing. Not compared to what some people go through. I try not to bitch about it too much or let the burn effect me. I put my Neosporin and Band-Aids over the little holes, cauterized to seal the skin and try to go about my day. They serve as small reminders, it could always be worse.

I relive moments of this year over and over in my head on a daily basis. Some of them are so mundane and stupid, some of them just cut like a knife. Most of them end with me, exhausted in my bed, sleeping amongst drywall dust and cat hair. Some of them end with me, exhausted in my bed, thrashing against stress, anxiety and depression. Some of them end with me click clacking at a keyboard, either at home or at work. Sometimes our possessions are not even tangible items. As we are all owned by the things we own, sometimes we are owned by the work that we do. Sometimes you have to give that shit up.

It’s been a year since I decided to leave all this shit. It’s anxiety inducing to actually think about that. Most nights these days I sit in a mostly empty house, can-kicked that nobody stopped by to look at it. If that buyer would just walk through the door, I’d be free from this hell. Waiting to start your life over, especially once you’ve decided that’s what you want to do, since you worked your fingers raw and your nerves to shreds, since you’ve cashed in every favor, and even overdrawn on your friends and family’s good graces, it’s fucking hell. Sometimes I just want to light a match and drop it on the empty floor and walk away. I wish I could delete myself from the paper trail. I don’t even care that much about money, the promises, the debt, the possessions, they all just hold me down. Even the letters I clutch in my hands, loving the delicate penmanship, the deepness within, they are possessions that own me, that connect to my oscillating lines, plucking

at them like guitar strings and resonating out into the world. I don't want this violence to be my soul song. But for now it is.

This skin cancer episode, this overview of my mortality, this slightly deeper understanding of how this world works, it's not over for me. But for the purposes of this exercise, this document, a few thousand words on paper, I have reached an ending. My next diagnosis won't be documented. Future diagnosis and growths and worries of this matter will be left off the written page. At least in the context of *Korrupt Yr Self*. This has all become self referential and for the author, even unreadable. It's because I live this, every day of my life. There is so much I am figuring out, even right now as I slap these icons against a non-responsive plastic keyboard, even as the slinky sounds of Shellac hum from the burnt out speakers of my computer monitor. I've realized, forgotten and expunged so many things in the year since Clark has passed from this earth.

I am not half the man he was. That isn't a slight against myself, but a toast to Clark. He lived, as so many before me have said, more than one life time in his short years on earth. He experienced each moment to the fullest, while most of us have a tendency to drag them on, the good and the bad, through our entire time here on this forsaken rock. A day is coming when I hit the reset button, cast caution, common sense and financial soundness to the wind and just say "fuck it". Where there is no place to call home, and no phone number where I can be reached. Where I am not exhausted by my environment, my job, or the ghosts I resurrect from my past. It sounds a lot like running away when I think about it too critically. And maybe it is. But if your not busy running in life, life runs right by you.

# **Korrupt Yr Self**

## **Issue #4**

At press time, no fixed or return address to speak of, sorry mail carrier person

**TO:**

**Korrupt Yr Self**

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