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World's pearl

Stephanie Van Berkel

It's vacuum-packed memories and fit bodies gone soft from working corporate jobs and wearing cashmere sweaters. It's piecing together a life, stitching it up with the shoestrings of old budgets and trying to prop it on a foundation of all the brand-name crap that money can buy. It's wanting and trying and fucking and buying, building and breaking and bringing home the bacon – the breathless crawl up the slope of success.

You hang on the precipice with one hand, taking business calls with the other. Life is a mountain and you are nearly at the peak – reach the summit, claim your prize and bask in the brief victorious glow before the light fades and everything starts the southward slide to middle age and mediocrity.

In the back of your mind you carry a dark room, black as pitch and full of nothing. In the room digital red numbers are ticking down down down and an infinite siren sounds, winding up up up without ever reaching the crescendo.

Time ticking down, siren winding up, anxiety stretched in both directions and you are waiting for the world, your oyster, to open up and show you its pearl.

It haunts you, the echo of the siren and the memory of the numbers on the timer, tattooed red across your eyelids so that you can't escape them even as you sleep, counting slowly down to something, but you don't know what. Trawl through endless days of wake up, coffee, work, eat out, go home, performing each task with desperation disguised as aspiration,

driven by the terror of what will happen when your time runs out.

You want success but you don't even know what it is. Get a job, get a man, get a nice car and a big house and spend whatever's left on things to make you happy: shoes and surround sound systems and a new phone every six months and brand-name everything. Things, things, things, all these things, but the dark room in the back of your mind never fills up, and you wonder if maybe the price of success is trading in proper happiness for store-bought happiness.

But you keep buying anyway — gadgets, knick-knacks, 'investment pieces', instant coffee and instant gratification, one click and you're two grand poorer but three pairs of shoes richer — filling your life with things to fill the void in the dark room and scale the summit before the timer reaches 00:00:00 and whatever is going to happen, happens.

Shun your lover for the warm embrace of your new leather couch. Turn your eyes from the stars and wonder instead at ears and fingers dripping with diamonds. Choke down your fear of the dark room and the timer ticking down and the endpoint looming over you and go and buy the recliner to match your couch, because the soothing embrace of softened leather is enough to ease the troubles in your world.

Forget loving and living and giving and receiving and all that shit: you are what you possess. Time to start buying.