

# Bad Attitude

by Leopold McGinnis

## Chapter 9

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**dOUGlas Coupland, Save us aLL!**

Today is the last day of my cash suspension. It has been like a summer vacation. I've been able to laugh off all the cash bullshit, because I knew I'd just be gone after four days. But now I am dreading going back to the floor. Cash hasn't been all shits and giggles, though. During the first few days I was periodically seized by a terrible panic that the next cart would roll up and inside, glistening, golden, hideous would be the Golden Calf, sold by somebody else! But it never happened, thank the gods. And, as the cash days wore on, I worried less and less. The only unfortunate thing was that Lisa wasn't on cash most of the days that I was, so I didn't get to talk to her much. Our shifts overlapped for two hours last night, but it was busy so we barely got to speak. Today, however, we are sharing six hours and the place is dead.

The store usually alternates between rushed and hushed on Sundays. As usual I am slacking off on my cashiering duties and, instead of tending my own till, helping wonderful, double-stuffed Lisa bag for the rare customer. Of course, there are no customers at this moment so we are just talking.

"So, if you have your degree, why are you working at Electronics Pit?" she asks, her faced scrunched up in a combination of honest curiosity and pained amusement. For the way she looks she might as well have asked, "Why are you so *weird*?" or "What is *wrong* with you?" Her face reflects the fact that she is unable to fit the existence of anomalous me into her world-view, though it's nice that she tries.

I've been waiting for this question. Everyone who knows me inevitably asks it...unless, like me, they are graduate meat for the machine...or members of some other similar unwanted sub-universe. I can never answer this question. Anyone who

has to ask this will not understand my answer, no matter how I put it. It's like sex. You read about it and ask questions about it and watch hundreds of porno movies but you'll never really understand it until you've done it. But I'll try for Lisa. After all, she's double-stuffed and will possibly know herself one day, dining with me at the nuclear oasis.

"Front row seats," I explain.

"Front row seats?" she asks. Her face is even more pained now.

"Yeah. Tickets to the big one."

"The big one?"

"Yeah. The big one. It's coming soon. I know it. It's going to be great."

There is a pause as she expects me to say more. "The big *what*?" she asks.

"You know," I say. "The end of the world."

". . ." Lisa looks at me curiously.

". . ." I respond to her.

"Huh?"

A customer comes and our conversation is put on hold for a moment as we usher them, like robots, through the yuppie assembly line.

I set up another bag in the bag holder and reply to her. "A Douglas Coupland-esque end of the world is coming. And we will all be fried like little ants in the petty superstores and widget huts."

She listens carefully as if, at least, amused by what I am saying. I appreciate her desire to understand, and want to explain it to her.

"UV one-millioned to a crisp. Carbon statues, like shadows of our former selves, will be delicately frozen where our bodies once were: vaporized at the till accepting a credit card, in the aisles while explaining the latest feature on a media player and how you can't live without it, in the office sweating away for Canadian Tire money already pre-spent on crap. Out in the concrete landscape featherweight, charred human-crisps will be

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# Family Blog



CLARY ANTOME

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frozen in time, driving gas-guzzling luxury vehicles, listening to easy-listening channels. Underneath, the ground will tremble, rippling forward in waves, preceding a giant, yellow-orange half-bubble of nuclear vengeance. And Douglas Coupland will be riding on top, drinking from a stubbie beer bottle, waving his hat and laughing, frying. ‘*Come to me Douglas Coupland*,’ I’ll say. ‘*Make me Generation X-tinct!*’ Meanwhile, out of phantom stereos, will come the apocalyptic soundtrack, Tariq singing *Not Just a Waiter...ohhhh...*” I try to sing the tune, but am not a very good singer, nor am I sure that Lisa is familiar with the song.

Lisa looks like she wants to say something but doesn’t know where to start. I watch those luminous deep brown eyes searching me, quivering as if trying to absorb the impossible. I want her to understand, so I continue.

“And even if all the nihilists, who realize what’s going on in this great big ball of crap, survive to rebuild...” I continue, “Well...why would they? The human race is a joke on itself. No, the survivors would convert to hedonism...but with birth control pills...enjoying, to their last breath, the beautiful power of squandering away the chance for mankind’s resuscitation. Just bloody, stupid squandering – sun-tanning in cancerous rays on the nuclear beaches, sucking on Daiquiris, playing post-apocalyptic volleyball until they are all gone: nuclear lizards who’ve fried-out their last skin, empty shells lying on a hot, spent world. Now *that’s* life. I look forward to it.”

She doesn’t say anything for a few moments while she thinks about this.

“You like Douglas Coupland, eh?”

“Yeah. He’s alright.”

“I don’t understand. You work here because you think the end of the world is coming?”

“The end of the world *has* come. It just takes a while to complete. Remember that instructional video in Junior High where they have that room full of ping-pong balls on top of mice traps. Well, the first ball has already been dropped and the chain reaction has started, but like the video, it takes a few moments

to reach total meltdown.”

“You’re strange. I don’t understand your explanation at all.”

“No. I didn’t expect you would. Maybe in a few years, when you’ve finished your degree, you will,” I say hopefully, looking forward to the moment when we can meet – really meet – again.

But she continues. “How will Electronics Pit be the front row seat to all this?”

“Because it all culminates here.”

She scrunches her face up at me and laughs, desperately trying to understand what I’m saying. I love her to death for trying, for actually caring to know, to listen.

“Look,” I sweep my arm out across the floor where the salesmen perch like lethargic, drugged hawks and customers aimlessly roam the isles browsing, snooping, pricing. My sweep continues past the check-out counters with the electronic money sending and receiving devices, past the data-tracking computers and scanners, past the cashiers, past the till posts with the big red number light-bulbs up top. My arm sweeps past the theft detectors and out the door into the grey concrete parking lot lined with mini-vans and SUVs delineated into rows and columns along the strip mall. My sweep fades away into the swathes of people loading their purchases and products into the back of their mobiles before heading off to the gas station. Above them the sky, tinted with greyish white clouds, hovers. “This is where it all happens.”

“Where what happens?”

“Ping-Pong balls.”

She pauses to think about this for a moment. Somewhere there is a ticker tape counting down – tick tick tick – discounting the world. \$100 off! 50% off! Sale! Sale! Sale! Until it hits zero and, bang, it’s all gone. As Lisa ponders this, three ticks go by.

“I think you’re just disgruntled because you couldn’t find a real job,” she continues. “You were too lazy...or pessimistic to try or something.”

“You mean this isn’t a real job?”

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ENCOUNTERED AN  
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She laughs. “No. Not really.”

“What are the alternatives?”

“I don’t know. Something other than selling consumer goods?”

“There is nothing else. What do you think all these customers do for a living?”

She shakes her head, disappointed.

I don’t want her to be disappointed, so I continue. “For the record, I did find a ‘real’ job. I had one for a year and a half. I spent eleven months rolling in the pit of post-graduate unworthiness: begging, pleading, fretting and conniving to get a ‘real’ job. And I *did* get one. Marketing Assistant. 40 grand a year.”

“So why are you here, then?”

“Because the front row seats aren’t up there,” I point off way into the distance through the front doors to the downtown skyrises. “The longer and harder I looked for a job and couldn’t get one, and the longer and harder I worked at my job when I did get it, the more I could feel the end. In the staplers. In the computer screens. I could hear the incessant chant of electromagnetic devices and concrete girders shouting, louder and louder in unison: the end! the end! the end! If I have to be part of some universal joke, I’d rather be near the punchline,” I say. “And, for the record, all jobs are ‘real’ jobs. It’s all just a matter of how much you want to commit.”

“I don’t understand how you can have that attitude,” she complains. “If the world is going to end and you can’t do anything to make it better, wouldn’t you at least like to have a higher paying, easier job? Even if just to have money to do whatever you want? Just to relax? Or, if you think the world’s going to end, then why do you bother even getting up in the morning?”

“To sell widgets. Front row seats, baby. Remember? If you’re lucky, you’ll get to see it too.”

“I think you’ve got a bad attitude,” she says laughing, half serious. I laugh at this too.

“I do, don’t I?”

She smiles.

“And you’re naïve,” I say to her. Her smile fades. She doesn’t like this comment, taking it, perhaps, as condescension, but I don’t care. I meant it as a compliment, though I never expected her to understand that. And though it makes me look like a jerk, I wanted to compliment her anyway. Her outlook is naïvely solid, unshakeable and optimistic for her own limited experience with the world. Whether she is right or wrong, she’s maybe 19 and still hasn’t shed her youthful optimism. And I like her all the more for it. Though I can never be like her again, and wouldn’t choose to be, I enjoy sunning myself in her positive outlook.

We don’t talk for a while, just filling up empty space and time. I am relaxed and pleased just to be near her, one of the few pleasures uncorrupted. We help a customer through the till and a few moments later, I speak to her again.

“When the world ends I would like to sit on the nuclear beach and drink daiquiris with you,” I say. “We could talk about the end of the world. It would be interesting.”

Her lovely, energetic smile returns and I stare deep into those exhilarating eyes. They are the pool at our oasis. But with that last comment, I have to leave. The floor is suddenly busy, so my ‘punishment’ is temporarily relieved. I have to sell widgets now. And I have great motivation, because the more widgets I sell, the sooner the end of the world will come, the sooner I’ll get to lounge in the radioactive sand with Lisa.

## QUITTER'S epiphany

Now that the place is dead and we're alone again, I think I should tell you...

I felt the familiar chill creep through my bones today. Secretions of Quitamine are in full effect. It always surprises me

when this feeling comes on. You always figure you'll quit in a rage, finally, over shit at work piling up and up until you throw down your badge and storm out in hot-blood. But it never really does. Instead, it creeps up on you like cold, fat fingers playing a haunting piano tune on your spine.

**To be continued...**



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