

Alison Jupiter

By Nora Wendl

Alison Jupiter wakes too early, and with a sense of the wrong skin. She feels her mind steeped like tea leaves in the wrong body before she realizes that she is lying in bed upside-down. She rights herself and waits. She waits and waits, not moving from her bed. She waits the sky from sunrise to high-noon, well past the time that she should be at Mega-Mattress, which is three hours earlier than usual, to open the store for the Sleep-a-thon. Instead, she's holding her own version of it right here in bed, watching for the shadow that should cross her lawn any minute now, any minute. At half past twelve, she realizes she's been waiting for six hours. The Sleep-a-thon should be in full effect by now, and she's certainly displaced from her position as Mega-Manager, a promotion she's had to stick around for three weeks to obtain. Yet she waits for it to appear. Alison Jupiter has total faith in this vision.

She breaks at a quarter after twelve to take care of her body's nagging insistence on eating. She dashes to the kitchen for provisions, and is absent as the two figures descend unfocused on her driveway. What she does not see happens in the empty pavement between her beater and the city's broken sidewalk. A bulldog squats over a steaming pile, salivating and licking his pleated jowls. He looks to his companion, a-grin and a-squint in sunlight. The sun's rays catch at the razor edge of the smoking man's night-shift stubble. This man spends his nights working in a gas station Alison has never seen.

Though she sits squarely behind a window that frames the two, Alison Jupiter doesn't see them right away. She eats her cereal in bed with one fist supporting the bowl, one strangling the spoon, engrossed in breakfasting. Her vision is eclipsed as she drains the bowl, and it is only in the act of peeling it from her face, mustachioed with milk, that the two figures appear to her on the lawn.

That's him, her stomach says, turning over. That stubble, it defines him, exactly as she imagined him to be. That's him, he's the one whose dog leaves steaming piles of shit in her driveway, as he has every workday for the past seven or eight weeks. The dog froths with the labor of his deposit, and Alison can appreciate the effort that Nightshift puts into leaving these specifically in her yard. He must feed the dog a very special diet to do this, plan the route and time it carefully, dropping the little bombs when she is out of the house. Of all the cement pastures that the morning people zombie-march their dogs into, he has chosen the center of

her driveway. She doesn't know whether to be honored, impressed, or disgusted. Either way, she can't take her eyes off of him.

From the driveway, Nightshift smiles at her, shrugs his shoulders as if to say, 'It's nothing.' For a homosapien, his arms hang low in his denim jacket, to the pavement it seems. The sweating dog walks away from the pile, satisfied. Nightshift extracts the cigarette from his unlippped mouth and nods, slowly grinding his teeth. He remains pseudo-anonymous as a blinding light reflects off of his horn-rimmed glasses, frames so thick that they seem to wear his face, rather than the other way around. He drops his marker, his spent cigarette, into the fresh mound. The two turn slowly and set off together down the street, not a leash between them, man and man's best friend.