

This piece details the mental breakdown, and the events leading up to the aforementioned, of a 46 year old clerk working in Parliament. The character is based on a line from James K Baxter's 'The Maori Jesus'. It details the need for excitement, progression, and change in our lives, illustrating the grave possible consequences of a lack thereof.

Clerical error.

I'm 46 years old and have nothing to show for it. No family, no wife, and barely any money. Last year I was 45 and had nothing to show for it. Next year I'll be 47 and have nothing to show for it. When I die I'll have accomplished nothing but marking the passage of 60, 70, 80 years.

I wince slightly as I lift my slender frame out of my bed; my Sciatica is still giving me trouble. After a shower and toast, the same toast with marmite that has been breakfast 5 days out of 7 for 24 years out of 46, I slip into the grey trousers and austere white shirt that are my habitual uniform, and drive the same white Pulsar, the white Pulsar that's never seen Lake Taupo or carried a Lady friend. It seems I'm drowning in a sea of normality and can't do anything to save myself. I think about how I could make a change, I could quit my job and live a fast life, become famous, have fun... But I can never bring myself to do it. Something deep inside me is forcing me to continue the endless cycle, as if my consciousness is trapped behind my eyes and spectating someone else's life.

I snap out of this daze as I pull into my parking space - not mine *per se*, God forbid the *Powers That Be* should consider me so important - but space 367 in lot A, the same as every other day of my career. Once again - the same bland routine. It must have always been there in the back of my mind, but today I cannot stop thinking about this awful day-to-day repetition. I step into the great recesses of New Zealand's House of Parliament, swathed in green carpet and rimu panelling. There is a heightened sense of activity in the halls as there always is on the first day of the parliamentary year. This means that more people than usual brush past me, all far too busy to pay any courtesy to a mere clerk. I catch fragments of conversations passing over my bowed head; trade embargoes, economic reforms, and... "the stupid entitled bastards who want to take our damn land. Daylight robbery and we can't do shit because it isn't politically..." I recognise the corpulent, foul back bencher as the 'honourable' - the honorific pains me to hear - Richard Dickens, and grimace. At last, I break through the crowd and reach my office.

Already awaiting me at my desk are a calendar and a day's schedule. I glance at the old wall clock, confirming that I am as punctual as ever. It being the start of the year, I have a mound of administrative paperwork to complete; at a glance I'd say a good 3 hours' worth.

The morning slips away like treacle through a sieve. For the next 3 joyous hours I'm rostered onto recording parliamentary debate. As I skim through the agenda I notice, with an inward groan, that there are 2 questions from the Hon. R. Dickens. Question time is always a nightmare, an awful mix of greasy list MPs currying favour and opposition backbenchers doing their best to complicate, irritate, and generally prevent anything of worth from being accomplished. A tap on the shoulder from another clerk - one of the faceless many, the apostles of bullshit - lets me know my 10 minute shift is about to begin. Notepad and pen ready, I take my seat at the edge of the gallery and begin the arduous process of recording every interaction, interjection, and altercation that occurs. Unsurprisingly, the question posed by Dickens causes extensive dissent. How could he possibly imagine that sort of thing would go over well? Complaining about Maori in open parliament! The nerve! This is not to say that everyone disagreed with him; over the chaos I heard support for both sides of the argument.

How these bigoted, selfish, arrogant oafs ever got their seats remains a mystery to me. Racism is horrifically alive and well in this country. Blood boiling, I try to make myself heard over the angry shouting and speaker's calls for order: "Your turn. 10 minutes then find Lachlan." As the fresh faced young clerk stares at me in horror, I realise he must be new to this. I add "Over there by the door. Make note of who speaks, when and to whom, and who interjects. The transcriptionist will deal with the actual words." He stutters a brief thanks and I snatch my papers and return to the office.

To pass the remaining time in the working day, I'm required to edit the earlier session of house. Wonderful. The dull words of petty politicians to be immortalized, in print, by me. That phrase 'apostles of bullshit' stirs in my mind. Clever, witty almost; something very unusual for me. My government issue calendar taunts me from its perch on the wall. 250 more days of this, and then a short break. What then? Another 250 days? 2500 days? I see my life looming ahead of me, stretching out into the depths of infinity with no hint of variety, and quietly, almost imperceptibly, I begin to sob.

As I start my car, the disappointment and sadness begins to condense into anger. This life is all I get and what am I doing with it? Nothing. Almost in a trance, I pull into a grubby BP station and purchase a 10 litre drum of petrol, and on second thoughts, a box of matches. I don't smoke, so I don't have any on me. Typically, I can't even have an interesting vice. I pull out of the station but instead of my usual route home I do a 180, straight back the way I just came. 7:20 pm, so I shouldn't have too much trouble making my way in - even with a drum of petrol. To be safe, I slip it into my leather hold-all, and creep down into parliament's basement. Having worked there for such a huge portion of my life, I know the place inside and out, and waste no time in locating the office of the 'honourable' R Dickens. The thick Kauri door is unlocked - the callous fool couldn't give less of a damn about security or privacy. I dump the bag on the ground and wince as my back complains about the movement. Unscrewing the bulky cap I think about all the time I've wasted in here, all the late nights and weekends. All the times I was passed over for promotions and all the times I've snubbed, shunned, abused and ignored. Ignored. No one cares about a worthless clerk. I think about the future ahead of me. No more of this. Ever. I'm free; it's the first day of the rest of my life. I begin to giggle - and suddenly freeze at the sound of approaching footsteps. My skin crawls as bright light floods the room, silhouetting Dickens against the dark hallway. "Security! SECURITY!" He yells, and I am dragged away before completing my vendetta.

White walls. Stained blue carpet. Not pompous green braided with gold. Not rich, dark, Kauri panelling. "Smith, David. Step this way please."

I smile. This is change.

"You have been charged with conspiracy to commit arson. You will be remanded in custody until a court date can be arranged for you."

This, I smile, is life.