

David Dennen, 2008

## **Babu**

“Babu.”

Someone, I forget who, once said that said that a person’s ideology—broadly, one’s view of the world—is like a wire framework. No one person’s ideology is ever capable of perfectly meeting the demands of all reality. Occasionally something—an experience, say—will come along that cannot be accommodated by one’s existing framework. And so the wires will have to stretch a bit in accommodation. But if too many of these odd-shaped occurrences impinge upon one’s consciousness, the framework can get quite bent out of shape indeed, even to the point of snapping.

“Babu babu babu!”

There are, perhaps, three ways out of this predicament. One can overhaul, radically alter, one’s worldview to take account of the ill-fitting phenomena; one can become parochial and deny the existence of said phenomena; or one can simply let the wires snap, slipping into madness.

“Babu! Aah!”

So you see I am sick and haven’t eaten for two or three days. I am walking down a dusty street, intense sun, and ahead of me a stunningly beautiful woman is crossing the road. Her feet are bare, red and gold sari covering her head, carrying a metal pitcher of water on one shoulder as she walks toward a row of huts off to the left. The giant, discolored concrete mushroom looms on the right. I know she is aware of me but doesn’t look out of propriety.

“BABUUU!”

Somehow (contemplating this lady), in a fit of white man’s burden, I am reminded of a beautiful wastepicker girl I had seen sorting through garbage at the side of the road with her mother. She said “hello” to me, horribly...beauty plays the clown...

“BABUUU!! AAAH!”

no savior, I am dizzy but keep walking, sweating. Eventually realize I am crying, tears are rolling down my face...

“BABUUUU! BABUUUUUU!!!”

my eyes are burning because of the dust and I wipe my eyes with a tissue and it comes away dirty brown (I am brown too) ha ha (but can wash it off)...beggar girl is walking towards me, a little platter held out in front with a few coins on it...she looks at me, I jerk my head slightly, but severely, to the side, she walks by...mother is a few paces behind her, as she passes me her own

platter gets caught on my bag, coins and the little framed picture of her gods spill into the sand at our feet...daughter and mother bend to the ground gathering up the coins, I awkwardly grab one and place it back on the plate, walk away, it is too bright I need darkness...when judgment day comes we will be found wanting

“BAA—!”

SHUT THE FUCK UP some kind of nightmare, we are all trapped in some sort of hell bloody-eyed offended I can feel a wire straining...there are mendicants outside my window, you see, they are calling to me, you hear? why won't they leave me alone I don't know their religion language I can't

“BAABUUUUU! BABUU—!”

WILL YOU STOP FUCKING SCREAMING AT ME I CAN'T THINK WITH YOU FUCKING SCREAMING disfigured hands reaching out, grabbing at me won't let go...calm shade, boy little boy, of five or six years, shaved head, dirty little shirt, has come into the front of the hotel as I stand talking to the manager, little little boy is holding out a little tin bowl...hotel workers gently tease him as he looks at us placidly, silently...why does little boy not talk?...Kuna says I should take him back to America with me, he would fit in my luggage, I smile uncomfortably...presently little boy, no wealthier than before, wanders off, I go to my room to be where I cannot see the world

...still I hear it

“Babu! Aah!”

The Bohemian said, “You must change your life.” The Welshman said, “If you tolerate this, your children will be next.” The Indian said, “In my next life I'd hate to be born again as a human being” (? cause really, who needs this shit).

Maybe in the end life, the whole mess of it, has too many contradictions. Maybe in order to survive we all—those of us to be considered sane—must, from time to time, slake our humanity with a stiff shot of denial.

“Babu!”

Then again, maybe we are all just a little bit mad...

Wild dogs, like the vengeful undead, now howl outside my window.