

From **“MESSAGES FROM THE ASYLUM”**

By Winston Weathers

Welcome to the Madhouse. Your room is number
Three billion, seven hundred twenty-four million,
Four hundred seventeen thousand, one hundred nine.
That's on the second floor. You'll have to walk.
The elevator's broke. (And the Feeding Trough
Is closed – in case you're hungry – until next week.)
But the Maternity Ward is open. That's our club.
Very swank and popular, just off the lobby.
Or perhaps the Mortuary? That's our rooftop
Bar. You can see the entire world from there.

Get a good night's rest. Keep down the noise.
And tomorrow there'll be entertainment: We're going to run
The Madhouse Handicap. You can place your bets.
It's a notorious race. You've heard of it? The Human?

Will the widows of the firemen get in line?
I want to get your picture while the light
Is right. Will widows of the firemen burned
To death in last night's holocaust please stand
Along the smoldering wall? I need a shot
For human interest. Will widows of
The firemen numbered in the city morgue
Pose in a row for Sunday's supplement?

Mrs. Bartram on the left: Stare
At the burning wood. And Mrs. Brown: Lift up
Your eyes to God. And Mrs. West: You clutch
That helmet to your heart. Come, be quick!
Now – everybody grieve! With tears! Steady. Click..

Dear God. I thank Thee for Thy holy gifts.
First, for gravity. We pushed old Thompkins
Off the roof. He was about to squeal.
Thanks to Thy immutable laws, he took
A fatal spill. Second, for the germs
That carried Mrs. Finklestein away
And left us with no social worker for
One glorious summer. Third, for deep and dark
Instincts in the human blood that made
Patrick O'Hara's game of murder, rape,
And torture come off so well – with natural grace.
And fourth, for all our clever minds: we build
Guillotines in basement rooms and slice
Off chicken heads, for fun, on rainy afternoons.

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To celebrate the end of the world we shall have
A parade. Please line up. Two by two.
Yes. Just like the other time. We'll need

Two men. Two women. Two dogs. Two cats. Two birds.
Two Australians. Two hippopotami.
Two musicians. Two eschatologists.
Two hemophiliacs. Two Republicans.
Two aardvarks. Two college sophomores. Two coquettes.
Two chiropractors. Two banana trees.
Two air conditioners. Two nudists. And two
High school principals. Now we shall march,
Singing, into the waiting structure. Nope!
It's not an ark! (Would you believe a slaughter house?)

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Will you rub my brain? It aches today.
Thank you. Not too hard, of course. My brain's
A human one: on the brittle side.
A little on the left – yes – that's right!
Softly scratch. That's where I keep desires.

(If you scratch too deep they may begin
To undulate.) Wonderful! And now
Massage a little on my memories:
That yellow spot on top. (Sour old things;
They won't heal up.) Yes, yes, it feels so good!
Now I'd like --- but, ouch! – you're getting rough!
That's not a rub, it's a punch! And something ripped!
Let go my intellect! You're bruising it!
Ach! You always trick me! God of ambiguous hands!

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I am dying. Thank you for dying, too.
Mortality is bearable if it's shared.
We'll drag away from here on motorbikes,
Wearing jump suits white as a bleached bone,
Flashing our chrome and leather in a rage
Of obscene departing! Then we'll transfer
Onto an electric sled sliding upon
An arid snow. And at last we shall ascend in a wild
Victorian balloon, swollen with the world's despair.

O Mortal Friend! Once through the gates of death,
We shall park in paradise and walk
The last dimension. And we shall come to a house
Called heaven: Colored movies on TV
Cold pop. And golden cuspidors.