

## Everybody Tunnel-ling

by Leon Ward 2016

Sam P Jacobson is this guy who comes early to meetings and sits along the wall. Not in the corner exactly because that might draw attention to what he's going through, but kind of midway between the middle of said wall and the corner where he pretends to work on this or that whatever resting on his knees, keeping his head down like he's a really hard working guy interested in what he's doing and timing little feigns of hmms at something he's not really reading presenting little problems interesting in themselves in his interesting work and not real problems that might bring someone to their knees, tears flowing and wishing they were dead. The management in dire tones and thinly veiled warnings tightening the screws and lipsticking the crippled pig, which somehow they don't seem to realise is what management who've brought a potentially successful and enjoyable workplace to crippled pig status are wont to do, they don't seem to notice Sammy's face going satin with sweat contradicting the airconditioning as his interesting work starts to lose its ability to distract him but I do. I notice, for instance, that his ears in the first stages of flushing red and his breathing bottoming out and speeding up despite his trying to count it out four and back is he's dying another little outstretched death inside that never actually kills you but drags you nauseous and desperate deep inside down the long tunnel of the transition to death to the point you'd do pretty much anything, the worse the better to get your mind off this particular kind of dying than suddenly be seen by management direly lipsticking and gossiping peers confirming their suspicions you're not one of them but the root of problems, that you've got something to hide other than you're dying from the fear of being seen. As Sam furiously writes irrelevancies to try and not hear direness lipsticking the crippled pig that might finally push him over the edge into full blown panic attack, I can tell that feeling is the dread of a rebel sympathiser in the ranks of Assad's torturers. It's a sick animal's trying to look healthy as the farmer pans inbred eyes over the inmates. Furious looping thoughts looking for a way out of themselves even though there by definition is none is a religious pogrom out of control. You don't want to find yourself in the tunnel with a crippling mortgage and newborn child. In the tunnel that's the opposite of what most people think of as dying because in here the light's behind you, fading, with only the worst kind of darkness up ahead, facing facts takes on a whole new meaning. With unemployment pushing twenty year highs and the dynamics of stigma, you need to shut it down but that's just feeding the elephant in the room. I can tell, Sam in his neutral colours and conservative haircut and wishing he had glasses to hide behind even it wouldn't help caught in the self-reinforcing hell of the looping tunnel of dying that has no way out and only

needs to spin a fraction faster in your churning stomach for a full blown panic attack to draw all eyes in the room, he's the kind of guy who sits numb on his couch in his negative equity house falling to pieces on Saturday nights when his distant wife and crying baby have gone to bed and watches music videos on Rage like a starving person food ads. Like an alien on his planet of one picking up transmissions from the distant world of real people who aren't being dragged on the verge of nausea through the tunnel of dying, he imagines being beautiful, wanted, being part of something that isn't killing you. Cool, youthful, interesting and interested with open horizons and blissful ignorance of how terrible waking up each day can be breaks his heart but he can't look away. Even the vast majority around the world who can only dream of Sammy's outwardly appearing comfy middle-class existence seem better off in those ads between clips asking for money to save them since at least they have each other and know what it feels like and aren't alone and becoming more so by the minute. Pills, clubs, therapy, booze, drugs, sport, art, TV, the outskirts of infidelity, humour, horror movies, getting punched and piercing the flesh of his leg with a tack in his pocket to get his mind off the certainty that he's only moments from the crushing weight of all eyes in yet another meeting turning on him like the church scene in 28 Days Later but instead of eating his flesh they see with revulsion and judgement the sweat pouring down his beetroot face, nothing distracts from the tunnel of dying. Sure seeing all this like at every meeting without fail I could go over there and put my hand on his shoulder and tell him, Sammy bro, it's OK man, because no matter what you think they think of you, even the fat controller pacing back and forth looking for other's fat to trim and warning that if the pig they're in the process of lipsticking like all over its face doesn't start walking right even though they in their ivory tower don't seem to notice it's only got three legs by now and two are looking shaky, it's actually what you think of you that's the problem here. But I don't. I could say, Samsta, dude, you're not even the only one because if you read the Pale King by David F.W that he killed himself before he finished, specifically that part where it's probably like a self-portrait which everything is anyway but this part even more so where this character he's backgrounding had this sweating problem in his highschool days that was essentially an anxiety feedback loop from hell that made his life unbearable, well, you'd see there are others just like you, but I don't do that either. Maybe it would make him even more desperate and depressed because if a guy as part of something and beloved as David couldn't hack the tunnel either, what hope is there for a nobody in a shitty, three-legged lipsticked pig of a job who goes home every evening and tries laugh with his baby doing raspberries but ends up crying instead? Which only upsets his wife who doesn't realise how lucky she is she doesn't understand or she'd be in the tunnel too. Even celebrities and government gravy-slurpers

are falling over themselves to pay lip-service to tunnelers, even the management direly reading from the code that bullying has no place right before tightening the screws more with thinly veiled threats and not so subtle innuendo, even Radiohead who had that French guy from Lovers of the Ninth Bridge getting hit by cars in an actual tunnel, which you'd think might represent the dying Sam's enduring but doesn't really since it's more like getting eaten alive bit by bit than sudden impact, even there's that other music video that might or might not also be Radiohead featuring a guy lying on the street who won't tell anyone what's the prob even though everyone wants to help because he knows that when he tells them they too will be suddenly powerless and on their backs dying in the endless tunnel from which there's no escape like they are at the end, even there's all that which makes it almost look like people might understand, I know that he knows they won't. No, the fact is that Sam who by the way has a better desk than mine, like one at the windows looking out at the park and not near the men's toilets, he knows as much as me that he's alone in the tunnel and there's only one way out. I mean, we're all going to die anyway, right? So what's the difference at the end of the day when you get down to facts? Because when you think about it outside the tunnel, who is anyone to get in the way of natural processes running their course?