

Antimatter Animal
by Eric Cecil

It's the year after next, and they call me the Antimatter Animal. They say it's because I can't be seen. Or maybe it's because when I'm done with a job, there's no telling where one man ends and another begins. It's all the same to me. And if it's all the same, then all is nothing, and nothing seems to matter anymore.

They don't know what to do with someone like me, so I lay low every few days, then set out again when I'm sure it's clear. I walk until I find a job worth doing. This time it's a grocer's. The first few faces I see inside are blank, and everything feels dull or unnecessary, so I just pace the aisles: first becoming the pale lights overhead, then assuming the skin of an apple, making a speck of myself in the cashier's eye. As she rubs me away, I return to the lights and inhabit them fully. They don't stand a chance. They can't handle me for more than a few seconds, and when they go, so do I.

The whole place goes with them. There's a bang and a kind of bottoming, and then it's over. Flames leap between broken and blackened shelves, lick collapsed beams, glitter broken glass like diamonds. The mess left behind is all of one piece: no difference between bodies and building, and no matter, or all matter, everything smoldering at my back.

Through the back of an abandoned bank, past a school closed long before summer, I stop beneath the shadow of an overpass. There I find a smaller fire. This one's confined to a pile of discarded tires. A man warms his hands there, listens as I tell him what I've done. And what I'll keep doing, I add, until they catch me. He glowers. Maybe they never will, he says. Probably, I remark. But before the man can respond, I become him, walk him to the nearest wall, nod his head into its bricks until he and they are one in the same. It's a trick that works every time. And every time feels like the first or last.

I quit the underpass and run the city ragged. First I'm a delivery van, ribboning its side around a utility pole. Then I expand myself in the front wheel of a passing scooter, upending its rider into the fray. I'm a train derailed, a sinkhole cratering, a transformer showering sparks on a blasting hydrant. Just shy of downtown, I assume the shape of a bridge, writhing its lengths into knots, retreating as cars and pedestrians slide into the water: metal or man, it makes no difference. The water will rust or rot them all, and all is nothing anyway.

I don't know how it happens, but somehow they find me. They follow me to a parking garage somewhere just south of downtown, where I drag my feet through skeins of torn plastic, the gravel of broken bottles. When they finally corner me, I try to become them, then the walls, the surrounding cars. Nothing seems to work anymore. Not your day, is it? one of them says. Don't

think this is over, I tell him. Don't think it matters, he returns. He takes his time approaching me, first walking toward me headlong, then getting at me from the side. I try to dodge, but he's already me before I'm him. And as fast as it's always been, there's no telling where one of us ends and the other begins: which one of us matters, and which one doesn't. And all of us are animals anyway.