

YLB

"If things get to be too much and you feel like the whole world is against you, go stand on your head. If you can think of anything crazier to do, do it."

—Harpo Marx

## the insanity virus

Want to know the real reason the polar ice caps are melting? It's not what you think.

It's not carbon emissions, deforestation, solar activity, or any of the other reasons They want you to believe. The real reason the polar ice caps are melting is because they are currently the staging areas for a microbial invasion force from outer space.

That's right. Alien pathogens from the planet *Germanicus* are right now massing at the North and South Poles and the combined heat from more than a googolplex of the little buggers is what's causing the ice there to melt at an accelerated rate.

In short, little green men. Subatomic, little green men. At least that's what my good friend, Professor James Aloysius McCarthy, tells me. The Professor lives just down the hall, in Apartment 9L.

Do I believe it? I believe the Professor believes it, and that's good enough for me. Despite his mad-scientist facade, he's still by far the most cognizant person I know. The Professor is also, unfortunately, a stage-4 germaphobe, which means, just like with cancer, there's little to no chance for recovery.

The last time I saw the Professor he was ranting and raving all up and down Santa Monica Boulevard, warning everyone about the microbial alien invasion force soon to take over the world. Either he was having a complete meltdown right there in the middle of Santa Monica Boulevard, or just taking a long overdue day off from work.

Even crazier, the professor was wearing a ten-gallon hat. You know, like the one Hoss Cartwright wore on Bonanza? What a sight.

He was really letting 'em have it, but when I tried calming him down he accused me of being in conspiracy with Madison Ave. and the whole medical profession on behalf of alien invaders from outer space. The really sad part was, he looked me right in the eye and still didn't have any idea who I was. I left him to it.

Anyway, that was about a month ago, and I hadn't seen him since. I was, at the very least, concerned.

So I decided to go and see if he was okay.

I must have rung the bell twenty times before he eventually came to the door, and even then he only cracked it open just enough to pass me a bottle of hand sanitizer.

He insisted I wash thoroughly before letting me in. Still, as soon as I walked inside, he ran back into his bedroom where apparently he was holed up.

It took some doing to get into the bedroom, but when I finally did I found him standing there, stripped naked. He was rubbing hand sanitizer all over his body, literally dripping with the stuff. It was a disturbing sight to say the least.

When he finished, he threw the bottle to me. "They're coming after us," he said. "If you don't suit up, they're going to get you too."

I tried moving closer to him, but when I did he jumped into bed, pulling the covers up over his head. Personal bubble.

Hiding in bed and pulling the covers up over your head is a big thing with germaphobes. I think it goes back to childhood,

when pulling the covers up over your head helped keep the boogeyman away. I guess the logic is: if it's good enough for the boogeyman, it's good enough for germs.

I asked him: Who are They, and why are They coming?

"We got it all wrong," he said from beneath the covers. "All these years, we've been playing right into their hands."

I asked him again: What in the world was he talking about?

That's when he told me about the army of highly trained bacteria from the planet *Germanicus*. It was only a matter of time until they began their all-out offensive against the human race. The Professor is the kind of person who is always onto something big.

"They've been softening us up for over a century now," he said, sticking his head out just above the covers. "Appertization, pasteurization, antibiotics; it was all *Their* idea. Now, the final stage of their insidious plot: hand sanitizer. Once the human race has put enough distance between itself and the germs of this world, once the human body is no longer capable of producing antibodies on its own, that's when the main assault begins. Before mankind even knows what hit it, the conquest of alien pathogens from planet *Germanicus* will be complete."

I asked him: If hand sanitizer is the problem, then why was he soaking himself in it?

"It's too late to be philosophical now," said the Professor. "The damage is done. As long as I keep myself wet with the stuff, I'll survive. I suggest you do likewise."

I looked in the corner of the room and there were boxes upon boxes of hand sanitizer.

"They're going to start pulling it from the shelves." he said. "You'll see. Any day now, the government—infiltrated by infectious agents from Germanicus itself—is going to initiate a total recall and pull all hand sanitizer off the shelves, the walls, the tables, everywhere. That's how you'll know the invasion has begun in earnest."

I asked him: Why attack at all? What are they after?

"Why gold, of course," he said. "Don't you know that? The whole galaxy is addicted to gold, and we've got oodles of it."

The Professor had really gone off the deep end this time. He wasn't just completely off his rocker, now, he was paranoid too.

"You know what they say?" said the Professor.

No. What do they say?

"You're not paranoid, if you're right."

No, he was paranoid all right. Downright schizophrenic.

Before I left, he asked me to toss him another bottle of Purell, the bacteria-fighting, germ-annihilating, alien-pathogen-repelling, refreshing gel. According to the Professor, the "bacteria-fighting, germ-annihilating, alien-pathogen-repelling, refreshing gel" was the original catchphrase the mad men on Madison Ave. came up with that, needless to say, agents from Germanicus did not cozy up to. They did, however, keep the last part of the slogan. Nevertheless, the Professor did in fact have a point about the whole hand sanitizer thing. Antibiotics, too. Unfortunately, he was completely off his rocker.

They carted the Professor off to the loony bin soon after. His neighbor told me he was shouting the whole time how he's

a Cleithrophobe. Cleithrophobia is the fear of being locked up. Who isn't afraid of being locked up? Like they need a clinical term for that.

While it looked like things had surely gone from bad to worse for the Professor, maybe the booby hatch really was the best place for him. There's a new theory in medical circles right now that's gaining real traction. It's called the Insanity Virus, and it could explain a lot about the Professor and germaphobes just like him.

For a long time, the cause of schizophrenia is believed to have been genetic, even environmental; but this new theory puts forth the proposition that the disease may be in fact brought on by a virus. Germs.

A leading researcher found that schizophrenics show signs of inflammation in their white blood cells, the ones that are supposed to fight off infection. One woman who thought she was going mad actually discovered she had developed a rare autoimmune disease that is known to attack the brain: Anti-NMDA Receptor Encephalitis.

One geneticist even places the source of the virus with a lemur-like creature from over sixty million years ago. Once the virus got into the monkey's testes, it was just a matter of evolution running its course.

So maybe the Professor really was onto something. I mean, there actually is a planet called *Germanicus* right here in our very own solar system. *Germanicus* is a minor planet, located in the asteroid belt between Jupiter and Mars. It's classified as main-belt, minor planet No. 10208 and is named after the ancient Roman general, and father of Caligula. The same Caligula, by the way, who is believed to have suffered from

encephalitis, and meningitis, both inflammations of the brain, and was by most accounts completely mad.

Of course, there is also the *Gamma Germanicus* star system, but that's located in the Star Trek Universe. Given the Professor's state of mind, and the fact that he's been hit in the head at least half a dozen times while playing in traffic out on Santa Monica Boulevard, I just naturally assumed he was referring to the latter.

Perhaps the Professor spent too much time in the lab, or maybe he just read one too many Michael Crichton novels. You know what I think? I think he was just lonely, that's all.





You  
Lucky  
Bastard

a thing by Philip Loyd

For everyone who ever suffered brain damage  
and was better off for it

This shit is copyrighted

first part  
it's not easy being me

## how this whole thing started

I'll never forget the day She moved in.

Remember the toy, "Mr. Potato Head?" Did you know that the original design was actually a potato? Why do I bring it up? Because that's who I feel like sometimes, Mr. Potato Head.

Why not? My whole life's been nothing but one big spud-dud, anyway. It's been thirty years now since college and I'm still a virgin. How pathetic is that?

Hi. My name is Arlen Schmeck, and I'm a perfectly normal human being. At least, that's how I look on the outside. If there is anything wrong with me, I guess you could say it's that I know too much.

For instance, I wish I didn't know so much about germs. Mysophobia, or *Germaphobia*, as it is more commonly known, is no laughing matter. Even though some people often confuse a germaphobe's constantly washing his hands with OCD, I know in my case it's simply a matter of having too much information in my big fat brain. Like the fact that a toilet seat has over seventy thousand germs, a kitchen cutting board twice that many. The average kitchen sink has half a million germs per square inch in the drain alone.

I wish I knew what it feels like to be close to somebody, but to do that first I might have to touch someone, and the human epidermis is literally crawling with trillions of bacteria, like *Erythrasma*, *Carbuncle*, and *Cellulitis*, which imbeds itself deep in the skin.

I wish I could fall in love, but falling in love would require a

first kiss, and human saliva contains more than thirty-five million individual germs, the human body in all more than one-hundred trillion total bacteria. I wish I could do all the things most people do, but because I know too much, I cannot.

Besides knowing too much, thinking too much, there's really nothing so out of the ordinary about me. I'm forty-nine years old, single, and I live in Santa Monica, California. More precisely, the Hacienda Palms Apartments, just across Palisades Park from the Pacific Coast Highway and Santa Monica Beach.

The Hacienda Palms is one of the oldest buildings in Santa Monica. Perhaps you've seen it. It's that big turquoise monstrosity over on Ocean Avenue. Built originally as a luxury hotel back in the 1920s, it was in its heyday an oasis for movie stars like Clark Gable and Carol Lombard. Now, it's a rent-control unit. Nothing fancy anymore, just a decaying old high-rise with a slight hitch in the foundation that one day will be its ruin. Until then, I live on the ninth floor there.

Besides going to work and the occasional errand, I pretty much spend all my time at home. That does not mean I'm agoraphobic. I'm not some sideshow freak who goes into a panic every time he walks out the front door, like Keith Brunsmann in *Blue Skies Are a Lie*.

It's not that I can't leave my apartment, I just choose not to. Why would I? I have everything I need right here. If it's a view I seek, the Santa Monica Pier is just outside my window. Venice Beach, Route 66, the Pacific Ocean too. If it's the rest of the world I'm missing, I have TV. Other than that, I have my peephole. That's how I keep up with all of my neighbors.

Through my peephole. That's how I came to know Professor

James Aloysius McCarthy in 9L. The Professor was always talking to himself, carrying way too much in his arms, and fumbling for his keys. After watching him for about a year, I finally decided to knock on his door one day. He'd dropped something important-looking and left it out in the hall.

Through my peephole. That's how I know Timofej and Tatiana, the couple in 9F. The Professor calls them TNT because they're always fighting. ALWAYS fighting. They're Russian or something, and when I say always fighting I don't mean just yelling and screaming; I mean flying dishes, pots and pans, everything but the kitchen sink. Timofej has always got some kind of red mark on his face, or a black eye. Last week he came home with his arm in a sling.

Through my peephole. That's how I know Old Lady Nuttermeyer in 9H. Old Lady Nuttermeyer is so old, legend has it they built the Hacienda Palms around her. My only fear is that one day when she dies, they're going to demolish the building around her too.

Through my peephole. That's how I know Madam Maui in 9J. Madam Maui thinks she's Norma Desmond. She's one of those people who came to Hollywood when she was young and from the very beginning began making up stories of how she used to be in pictures. Her face is all wrinkly from too much sun and she claims to have once entertained Joseph P. Kennedy himself. Madam Maui is skinny from cigarettes and has white streaks in her hair that make it look like she's got a skunk living on top of her head.

In something right out of *101 Dalmatians*, Madam Maui has this odd fur coat she claims is a one-off from the 1960s. It's a hodgepodge of different colored furs that this couple from downstairs swears used to be their cat. One section of it, at

least. Their cat, Gary, went missing about a month ago and they've accused Madam Maui of kidnapping him, skinning him alive, then adding him to her fur-coat ensemble. I'm not sure what actual proof they have, but who the fuck names their cat Gary?

Then, of course, there's the young couple next door in 9A. Those two have a lot of energy and they're always fucking. ALWAYS fucking. Maybe they're newlyweds. Maybe they're cousins. Whatever it is, they fuck so hard they're constantly knocking my pictures off the wall. Since they live next door, there's no peephole involved. Too bad.

I'd complain, but who would listen? Anyway, I kind of like it. It's better than TV, and always has a happy ending. Truth is, I'm jealous as hell. Besides, it always reminds me to go and look out for my neighbor across the hall.

Through my peephole. That's how I know my neighbor across the hall.

My neighbor across the hall is new to the building; she moved in just thirty-six days ago. I remember exactly when that was, to the day. I remember because it was the last time I ever saw anyone else, besides her, going in or out of her apartment. Not to say she doesn't have friends, but like me, she enjoys her quiet time, without all the chaos and craziness.

While I've seen my neighbor across the hall ninety-two times in all, the truth is we've never actually met. I don't even know her name. Seriously. Like me, she rarely leaves her apartment. In the morning, I watch her when she goes to work; in the evening, I see her when she's coming home.

I know she always gets home late on Fridays; I know she always goes somewhere in the middle of the day on Saturdays;



and because she's always leaving early in the morning on Sundays and returning around noon, I figure she must be going to church. I also know that Wednesday is supermarket day because she's always coming home with grocery bags in her arms.

So why don't I just go across the hall, knock on her door and introduce myself? I'm not an Anthropophobe. I'm just shy, that's all. Especially around women.

I've been watching my neighbor across the hall ever since that first day, but don't get the wrong idea: that doesn't mean I'm some kind of stalker. I can hear when the elevator doors open and I know approximately what time she gets home from work every day. I know it's her because her shoes squeak. I wait by the door around the same time every day, but I am not a stalker

Of course, I've tried everything to get over my shyness. Shyness is more than just a curse, you know. It's an illness. I've tried every self-help method there is to get past it: yoga, meditation, the art of visualization; but when I see me introducing myself to her, all I visualize is a bumbling fool who can't even remember his own name. Nothing seems to work. Every time I think I might muster up the courage to go and talk to her, my heart starts beating fast and I break out in a cold sweat. So I stay right here behind the safety of my door, in my own little personal bubble.

My neighbor across the hall is a nurse. At least, I think she's a nurse. She's always wearing scrubs. I assume she's a nurse of some kind, or a dental assistant perhaps. I don't think she works at the blood bank.

Does my supposing that she's someone's assistant, just

because she's a woman, automatically make me some kind of male chauvinist? Why couldn't she be a doctor? The truth is, it's not because she's a woman. It's just that I can't imagine a doctor living in a hundred-year-old, rent-controlled building in Santa Monica.

My neighbor is petite. She's blond, she's beautiful, and I'm not just saying that because I have a crush on her. She drives a baby-blue, 1995 Volkswagen Rabbit Cabriolet (the ultimate girly-girl car), and by the sound it makes, it's badly in need of a brake job.

I've had a crush on her ever since the day she moved in. If you think having a crush on someone through a peephole is strange, welcome to my life.

## **i'm not crazy, just lonely**

Whenever I feel like there's just too much information in my brain, I go and stand on my head. Not only does it empty it out, it puts life in a whole new perspective. Still, it does nothing to change the fact that I'm all alone in this world.

Isolophobia is the fear of being alone. But I'm not an Isolophobe. I might be alone, but I'm not afraid. I'm not an Autophobe or a Monophobe, either.

All I ever wanted was to be happy. But how can someone like me, with thoughts coming in and out of my mind like so many bugs crawling on my skin, ever really expect to be happy?

Although I do not like leaving home, I'm certainly no shut-in. I go out sometimes. I have a job. I have to. How else would I survive?

It's just that I prefer staying home when I can. With everything going on in the world today, can you blame me? And besides, why would I need to leave home when I have a perfectly fine peephole to see what's going on around me? No, I am not a Peeping Tom. I just have a peephole. What's wrong with that?

I didn't always like staying home. I used to go out quite a bit. I went to UCLA, majored in microbiology, but while most of my friends went on to high-paying careers, I chose a different path. For some reason—I still don't know exactly why—I came to the conclusion that there was more to life than just getting a good job. I didn't know it at the time, but it was the first indication that my brain was turning on me.

I dropped out after only a few semesters. After that, I was just one of those losers hanging around pretending to still

be going to school. Not even my friends knew.

No one cared. Not even my parents. As long as I didn't hassle them, they just kept sending the checks.

Nowadays, whenever anyone asks me where I went to college, I tell them UCLA. If they ask what I graduated in, I tell them I majored in molecular biology. They just assume I graduated. It's not a lie. It may not be the whole truth, but then again, who tells the whole truth?

Whenever someone asks me where I work, I tell them at the UCLA Medical Center. They just assume I'm a doctor. I guess I could have been a doctor. I look like I could have been a doctor.

The truth is, I'm a bagman at the Infectious Disease Center over at UCLA. Before you go getting too impressed, however, you should know that "bagman" is just a fancy word for janitor. Actually, the Professor came up with it. The Professor is clever like that. He's always coming up with one smart-ass handle or another.

I'm a janitor, okay! But hey, the good people over at the IDC know practically everything there is to know about germs. I should know; I clean up their mess every day.

And if you're wondering how a guy like me with such an extensive knowledge of germs can work in a place like that, it's easy. What better place to know exactly what's going down, and how to best prepare for it? Just like being in the eye of a hurricane, the IDC is the safest place there is when it comes to avoiding the coming storm of bugs, viruses, and pathogens.

It's not a bad job. For someone who didn't even graduate college, I make really good money. Or maybe it's just that when it comes to handling hazardous substances, a good man is

hard to find.

On top of that, I have job security like nobody's business. Want to know how to get bulletproof job security? It's not taking a job no one else wants to do, it's taking a job no one else *will* do.

So what if I dropped out of UCLA? So did James Dean. Ben Stiller and James Franco, too. Jim Morrison only stayed in school to avoid the draft. Even saying you've been to UCLA looks good on your resume, whether it's true or not. Just ask David Geffen, who got his start with a fake diploma from UCLA. Today, the UCLA school of medicine is even named after him.

Does it matter to you that someone like me with such a big fat brain is just a janitor? Quite frankly, I don't care if it does. My job doesn't define who I am. It's just a fucking job, after all. Anyway, Matt Damon got his start as a janitor. William Hurt, too. Don't believe me? Just check out *Good Will Hunting* and *Eyewitness*. Janitors, both.

If you're all that caught up in what it is you do for a living, however, it doesn't surprise me. Whether you know it or not, it's an American thing, all dreamed up by big corporations to keep you in chains. If you thought slavery ended with the Emancipation Proclamation, think again. Slavery is alive and well and working at America's largest corporations every day; they just traded in the plantation homes for tall buildings.

Fact is, you've been brainwashed into thinking that who you are is limited to what you do for a living. Ridiculing the French, Italians, and others for their three-day workweeks and summers off is all just part of the brainwashing. Truth is, those countries already had their turn at obsessing over

money and ruling the world. They found out it wasn't all it was cracked up to be, something I hope we here in America will discover as well—if we're lucky. Me, I've always considered myself lucky.

But my job, as exciting as it sounds, is actually quite dull. There is no real human interaction. The only people I ever see are either hermetically sealed or all bound up in bubble wrap. So in reality, my life isn't just boring, it's lonely. So very lonely.

Did you know you can actually die from loneliness? It's true. You can die from loneliness just like you can die from a broken heart. But a broken heart is a whole different thing, altogether. Dying from a broken heart means at least you had someone, at some time. What I wouldn't give to die from a broken heart.

According to the latest research, loneliness is a serious health risk, right up there with smoking. No joke. Studies even show that loneliness is twice as dangerous as obesity.

But even if loneliness doesn't kill you—which it will in the end—it can make you chronically ill. In fact, according to psychotherapist Dr. Nicky Forsythe, loneliness is the new germ. No joke. Just listen to what the good doctor has to say.

“Just as we once knew that infectious diseases killed, but didn't know that germs spread them, we've known intuitively that loneliness hastens death, but haven't been able to explain how. Psycho-biologists can now show that loneliness sends misleading hormonal signals, rejiggers the molecules on

genes that govern behavior, and wrenches a slew of other systems out of whack. They have proved that long-lasting loneliness not only makes you sick; it can kill you.”

And she's not the only one. According to UCLA's very own Steve Cole, professor of biobehavioral sciences, the immune system in lonely people breaks down over time and even affects their genes. That's right. Nowadays, even people's genes get lonely. Key gene sets, especially those involved with antiviral responses and antibody production, they get lonely too.

Wow! I mean, sure, I thought being lonely was a real drag, but I had no idea it was clinical. I wonder what John Steinbeck knew when he said, “A sad soul can kill you quicker than a germ.” I think the only thing Steinbeck knew was that finishing one bottle of booze didn't necessarily make you an alcoholic, opening the next one did. Wait. That was Hemingway. Same difference.



All this talk of loneliness was getting me depressed, and the last thing a lonely person living on the ninth floor needs to be is depressed. The last thing a lonely person living on the ninth floor needs to be doing is thinking of Ernest Hemingway, either.





Take a tour of Los Angeles, YLB style. Come see LA through the eyes of Southern California's resident outcast, Arlen Schmeck. <http://philiployd.com/ylb-tour>