

# William Michaelian

## *Today the World*

Today the world spit me out and I landed on the sidewalk on my head. An old whore coughed and asked, “You wouldn’t have a cigarette?” I answered, “Baby, I don’t even know what day it is.” I clawed my shirt pocket and held up a mangled generic.

“Gotta match?”

I tried to shake my head but groaned instead.

The whore laughed. She slid the cigarette between her bright red lips and knelt beside me. She massaged my pockets and everything else, while her sunburnt vinyl tubes dangled in my face like a pair of gassed bananas. She found a plastic lighter with two drops in it and my expired driver’s license. She lit up and read my name. “Hiya, James,” she said.

“Hi,” I said. “How’s business?”

“Oh, so-so.” The whore’s nostrils flared and smoke came out. She stared down the street. It was hot. My back was burning through my shirt. There was a broken beer bottle by my head smelling sour like spit and lies and broken promises.

I tried to think, but it hurt. The whore whispered obscenities to my cigarette. “How long you going to lay there,” she said finally. I told her I didn’t know. I told her I couldn’t make up my mind to go or stay, one way or the other. “I guess it doesn’t matter,” I said.

“I guess not,” the whore said.

“What about *you*?” I said.

“What about me.”

“What’re *you* going to do?”

“Well, James — I thought I’d make sure you’re all right, then go home



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and make a nice spaghetti dinner for my good-looking husband the stock broker and our three happy, well adjusted, clean young children with bright futures. I cut them out of a magazine this morning. They're still fresh.”

