

Invidia

(51 inch rear projection Sony)

Look at my face. You see my chest and head, no arms, but you can tell I'm busy, working hard. Then I notice you, I am surprised to see you, and then – almost too quickly for you to catch it – I'm annoyed. Well, of course I am: you're being a silly, a great big goof, and you've interrupted me. But that passes in a blink, and now I'm shining with love-light. You worry I won't love you, but yes, I love you. When you see me, you have a catchy tune in your head, something just a little bouncy, upbeat, with lyrics that mention the universal troubles of life, and the solace of having friends around. You know it's a silly song, but you still like it. You smile as you remember me: that time I opened the door and – oh! What a surprise! – my mother was standing there, wiping cream pie from her eyes. Or the time I was so worried that Thanksgiving dinner was about to burn up that I grabbed it from the oven, opened the window and – whoops! – out it fell. Life is funny like that. Funny-“ha ha,” even when it's funny-peculiar. And in the end, we're all in it together. You can see it when we all gather around the sofa, three generations, no, four: here comes the baby. And yes, you can see it in our eyes that we all sometimes fight; but what you see even more is that we love one another, and always will, that no matter what happens, how bad it seems to get, it will all turn out all right, in about 22 minutes.

You need this reassurance, because you are alone, completely alone in the world. I could say, “no one understands you,” or “no one appreciates you” – those things are true, but such phrases don't capture your emptiness. You are alone in your soul, an orphan, abandoned. You're nobody. Or, everyone thinks you're nobody. But deep down inside you know you're not *supposed* to be nobody. You know that you were born for something great, that you are the princely child born to be king, a good king, a king that will save this land from our dark times and bring a new era of happiness – as soon as your true destiny asserts itself. But it seems your rightful fate will never be, because something has gone wrong, and you are alone, utterly alone. And so I give what you need most: a winking hope that your true identity will emerge from you like a desert flower, and you will rise to your proper state. In my world such things happen. So you fill your empty heart with me, and my antics, and you accept my reassurances. And I will keep you safe in the electric glow of my love-light.

But it's truth time. We both know you are a discarded member of an unheeded mass, a nameless orphan enslaved in an opium den. We both know that in a few years time you will accept that you are nobody. Of course it's hard to accept. But in time, the truth will envelop you like a new skin, and you will wear it. Then you won't need my reassurances anymore. Then you and I will do something else: we'll take it out on someone. Why not? There is no

benevolent king, anymore. No lands to save from darkness. There is only the darkness, now. We feast upon your heart and we enjoy its bitterness. We dig deep in the pits of ourselves and muster contempt. We make a great ball of contempt and use it to crush the young, the foolish, the innocent, and then we laugh. I'm not comforting you, anymore. We've evolved beyond that. Now, we're in this together. We know. We're knowing. We're clever. We're hardened. We no longer flinch.

But like all comrades in bitterness, we must eventually turn on each other. I do not like you, and though it takes you a while to figure it out, eventually you know. For one thing, I am tired of pretending, and I let it slip, let it show. One day you see with cold lucidity that I will humiliate you quick as anyone else, that you are grist and I will mill you. You hate me now. But there is nothing you can do. I hold all the power and always have. I've only been toying with you, since the first day you basked in my artificial love-light and let it bring you calm. The truth is I have used you.

You look around the world for some weapon, something terrible enough to stop me, but instead you see a world of people who hang on my every word, an army of lovers enslaved by me. You see that each of them is being nursed by me, or coached through truancy. You realize now that you were never special. This makes you hate me most of all. This orphan is leaving the opium den. You're walking out. Not looking back. Screw you, you say to me. But I'm not worried. I know you'll be back. And when you do return to submit to my light, you'll be broken, finally, once and for all.