Cap drives his big, black Durango down 8 Mile with Kid Rock blasting out of the speakers. He fiddles with the bass, trying to find the right balance. It still feels weird to see so little traffic on this road. The old tract housing seems to be collapsing right into the road. Before The Crash, 8 Mile was crowded day and night. If the traffic didn’t catch you, then the ill-timed stop lights would snare you in traffic hell. Now there are almost no other drivers and rarely any electricity to power the lights. Not that the police would bother stopping anyone for something so minor as a traffic violation.

In fact, there goes a cop now. Actually, the official title is Personal Property Protection Officer. “Yeah,” Cap says to himself as he pulls over to let the P3 pass, “you get those Crashers before they loot some poor sap.”

As he drives to the Asylum or “The Mall” as some of his darker colleagues call it, Cap thinks about what he’ll get Cassie for their second anniversary. He starts the interval timer on his watch; he only allows himself two minutes to think about acquiring a gift for Cassie. Even though the doctors claim Crashing isn’t contagious and getting a gift for your girl is only a borderline symptom, Cap is cautious. He doesn’t want to resemble the Crashers in any way, shape, or form.

Just as the timer beeps, Cap hits the gates for the Steve Jobs Recovery Asylum. Cap punches in his code and then begins driving through the grounds to get to the main lodge. He drives up a ramp to a mechanical elevator that lifts his truck up to the top of a ravine. Next, he drives down a huge, artificial hill to a drawbridge that lowers him down to the other side of the moat. After that, he turns left, then right, then left, and finally another right. He takes an entrance ramp to Parking Lot B and enters through the “A” door. This labyrinth based on the Konami Code always makes Cap laugh. The Crashers are only interested in the newest video games, and even then, they only want to possess the games – they’re not interested in cheat codes for playing the games.

The designers of the prison (asylum implies there’s a chance for recovery) knew how to contain the Crashers, though. Throughout the maze of the grounds, bright, shiny objects are embedded into the walls, trees, and even the earth. Any Crasher trying to escape is drawn to his unattainable bling. Cap has personally had to sedate the sick to pull them off the shiny objects bolted to the walls.

Cap clocks into work and heads out on the grounds to patrol. He starts by walking around the wall surrounding the main building. He inspects the base for loose blocks and watches for gaps that would make climbing over the wall easier. After fulfilling this duty, he climbs the towers to do a visual scan of the estate.

From the Northwest Tower, Cap can see an illegal billboard advertising the Somerset Mall. “Man,” Cap thought, “that’s in poor taste. The Somerset Mall was destroyed by the first wave of Crashers almost two years ago.

Cap finishes his shift by touring the cages of inmates. He starts in the basement. This area is for the most advanced of the diseased. The cells are lit by candles to reduce the sparkle caused by excessive light. Bright light seems to exacerbate the Crashers’ desire for new things. It emphasizes the remaining glitter of the few items they are allowed to retain and fuels their desire for more. Cap hears them mumbling about the updates they desire.

“Hey, man, when does the iPhone 7j drop?” whispers one man.

“Do you have a wi-fi stick?” a sweet little girl asks. She flies into the bars when Cap shakes his head.

They used to allow the “guests” to receive gifts from relatives outside the gates, but recently outlawed this activity. It only agitated the sick. Besides, their relatives were either uninfected and therefore clueless about what to send or infected and busy hoarding all the newest toys for themselves.

Cap slowly made his way to the upper floors. In these folks, the disease was less evident inside the protected walls of the hospital. Most of them could even carry on conversations about real topics. Even these conversations were littered with references and allusions to material goods that would “make life so much more complete” according to the sick.

Cap finished his rounds and dialed Cassie on his new cell phone, a gift Cassie had lovingly given him on their 23-month anniversary. “Hey babe,” Cap says. “How’s your day been?”

“It’s okay,” she replies. “Just doing some secret stuff for our anniversary. Are you coming home soon?”

“Yeah, I’m just getting ready to clock out. Do you need me to pick anything up on my way home?” Cap asks.

“No, I ran out to the store today. In fact, I’m on my home right now,” Cassie says. “I wish we didn’t have to live so far from Target. I’ll see you soon.”

Cap says, “Okay. Love ya. Bye.” Cap punches out and thinks, “We don’t live that far from Target. It’s only six miles. We’d probably be safer from the infection if we were farther away.” He climbs into his truck and drives carefully away from the Asylum, always looking out for Crashers trying to escape.

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“Hey babe, I’m home,” Cap yells as he walks into the house. He sees a pile of brown shopping bags stacked in front of the door. “Didn’t you get groceries, like, two days ago?”

“Yeah, but I needed a few things for dinner tonight,” Cassie answers. “I thought we could have fish with fried rice tonight.”

“That sounds good,” Cap says.

“Yeah! Doesn’t it?” Cassie said excitedly. “So I had to get this new stainless steel rice cooker. And they had a sale on these cool fish-shaped frying pans. I thought it would be fun to eat it Japanese style, too. You know, sitting on the floor around one of those short tables. So I got some chop sticks and this cool little rug. I even found this little paper boxes like those restaurants use for take-out or for left overs,” Cassie rambled enthusiastically.

It was then that Cap realized he had been living in denial. Cassie was infected. She was a Crasher. He gently took her in his arms and held her, gently caressing her hair.

Cap can’t stand the idea of caging Cassie up at “The Mall,” but he knows she will only get worse if left alone. He starts by taking her car keys from the new key rack and disconnecting the newest high-speed internet connection. He then guides her into their basement and starts talking to her about how they could use all their new shelving units and Rubbermaid Crates to organize the finished basement piled with boxes.

Cassie seems less than thrilled, but Cap exudes such enthusiasm and love that she half-heartedly joins him. They futz with the shelving units for a while. Each time they get frustrated with inserting Tab A into Slot B, Cassie suggests a Menards-run for some new tools, but Cap perseveres and gets the shelves assembled. Unfortunately, it only gets worse from there. Each item they try to organize and pu on the shelf spurs a new shopping fantasy for Cassie. When she sees the Roomba Robot Vacuum, she says, “I saw the cutest new shag carpet at the store today.”

Cap responds, “Remember when we first got married and we had no furniture? We had to eat all our dinners on the floor out of take-out containers. We always said that was the most romantic time of our lives.” Cap keeps re-directing her, reminding her of their love and the awesome times they’ve enjoyed throughout their lives together.

After three hours, Cassie says, “I don’t think we’re gonna have enough Rubbermaids. I’ll run out to Menards for a few more. Give me your truck keys.”

“OH, let’s just fill the ones we have first,” Cap says. “Remember that time we tried to bring the lattice home in the old Grand Prix? We had to hold it on the roof with our hands as we drove so slowly. That was hilari…” Cassie’s not laughing with Cap. Her eyes have gone steely.

“I don’t care about those old times. I only care about getting the new Rubbermaid tubs we need,” she hissed. “And maybe some rugs so we don’t have to stand on these stupid, cold concrete floors.”

“Uh, babe, let’s eat a little dinner first. Why don’t I go get that rice started.” As Cap backs toward the stairs, Cassie bares her teeth and lunges for him.

“I NEED TO GET SOME NEW STUFF!” she screeches.

Cap races up the stairs and barely slams the door before Cassie takes a bite out of him. He throws the deadbolt just as Cassie crashes into the door. “Babe,” he says, “you’re sick. I love you. You can get better if…”

“LET ME OUT! I’LL GO TO THE PHARMACY FOR MEDICINE! LET ME OUT!” The whole time, she’s screaming and crashing into the door. Cap knows if he lets her out, she’ll kill him to get the truck keys and go shopping. He’s glad these old Detroit doors have solid core.

Two hours later, Cassie is still screaming her need to go to Menards and crashing into the door. Cap continues saying, “We don’t need more stuff. I love you. We can get through this.” It doesn’t seem to be helping. He reverts back to his previous plan. “Remember after we got married? We returned so many of those wedding presents that we didn’t need. Remember that stupid crystal dog your Aunt Rose gave us? We must have tried to return that thing to every store in Detroit.

She laughs, and Cap’s hopes soar, but then she resumes crashing into the door. The hinges shudder in their joints, but they are holding so far. With each crash, Cassie screams another item she “needs” from Menards. “RUBBERMAIDS!”

“RUGS!”

“SCREW DRIVERS!”

“HAMMERS!”

“WRENCHES!”

“ALLEN WRENCHES!”

“TENT!”

“SLEEPING BAGS!”

Cap sees an opportunity. “Remember that hiking trip in the U.P.? When I talked you into that 10 mile hike in Pictured Rocks and didn’t tell you it was 10 miles each way? How great did that stew taste that night?”

The crashing stops. Cassie says, “Yeah. I knew we could do anything if we could make that 20 mile hike without fighting.”

Cap feels great. That’s the real Cassie talking. Could they have broken the fever that fast? “Yeah, and it rained so hard and our tent leaked so much that night.”

Cassie says, “We had mud EVERYWHERE!”

Cap is so excited; he just has to see if that look is gone from her eyes. He cracks the door open slowly, and Cassie comes flying through the door, blasting it straight off its hinges. She’s on top of Cap instantly screaming, “YOU SHOULD HAVE GIVEN ME THE KEYS!” Spittle is flying from her lips as she bangs Cap’s head into the floor. “WHERE ARE THE TRUCK KEYS? I’M GOING TO MENARDS NOW!” she growls.

Cap tries one more time to use their love to snap her out of her sickness. “Baby, tell me you remember. Tell me about a time in our lives when you knew we were in love. I knew on our first date when we were sharing that ice cream cone and feeding the ducks in the park.”

Cassie pauses for a moment, and then she says, “Remember when we registered for wedding presents? That was so much fun. We got to go all over Target, scanning anything we wanted. And people bought us so much of it, too!”

Cap sees it is too late. He gently kisses Cassie’s face and hands the keys to the truck to her. “Let me grab my coat.” As he reaches into the closet, he hears the truck slam through the still-closed garage door and sees Cassie dragging bits of the garage behind the truck as she drives toward the store. Cap sits down and waits for her return. “Maybe I’ll get sick, too. Then we could at least share the disease.