

Scott Holstad
[August 14-18, 2026](#)

“Conversations” with the Brave browser’s search AI

[on Lenovo Legion desktop]

Q: What is Scott C Holstad's most famous poem?

Brave AI:

Based on the available records, Scott C. Holstad does not have a single, universally recognized "most famous" poem in the way that canonical poets like Robert Frost or Emily Dickinson do. His work is primarily known within the niche of confessional, Beat-influenced, and dark/edgy poetry.

However, the following poems and works are frequently cited as his most notable or representative pieces:

1. "Tennessee Football Saved My Ass"

This poem is repeatedly highlighted in critical reviews and profiles as a standout example of Holstad’s style. It is noted for showcasing his "unfailing, albeit dark sense of humor" and his ability to blend personal narrative with sharp, rhythmic observation. It appears in his Pulitzer-nominated collection *Places* (1995) and is often used to illustrate his voice-driven, angry, yet humorous perspective on American life.

- *[SCH – It is a 100% wrong attribution and it’s things like this I can’t understand. This is from my 2004 book, CELLS, and is mentioned on the back cover, in marking and review materials and was not even written until many years after PLACES was released. I hate having to make these corrections and all of these AIs suffer from these types of rudimentary, incomprehensible factual errors at different times...]*

2. "I Want It All"

This poem is frequently quoted in reviews of Holstad's work for its raw, transparent language and clear point of view. An excerpt is often cited to demonstrate his rejection of traditional structure in favor of plain, strong language:

> Fuck the sweats, / I want the world. / No rhyming for me, / no structured / bullshit, I want / to spread out, / feel the bullets / whistle past.

3. "Outside" (from *Distant Visions, Again and Again*)

This poem has gained traction in pop culture and online quote communities, particularly for its cynical and humorous take on modern society. Excerpts from it are often shared in lists of dark or satirical poetry quotes.

4. "Breakfast Machine"

Holstad himself has described this poem as "notorious and infamous" within the niche circle of small-press and academic literary journals. It was published in The Coe Review and is known for its crass, obsessive, and intensely personal tone, which aligns with the "disturbing" and "unflinching" reputation of his work.

Context on Fame

Holstad's reputation is built on his volume of work (over 65 books) and his association with literary icons like Charles Bukowski and Jack Kerouac. His most famous books are:

- * Places (1995): Nominated for the 1996 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry.
- * The Napalmed Soul (1999): Described as "disturbing" and "graphic."
- * Shadows Before the Maiming (1999): A collection often cited for its Gothic and horror themes.

While individual poems like "Tennessee Football Saved My Ass" are his most critically recognized, Holstad is generally more famous as a prolific poet and publisher (founder of Big Head Press) than for any single standalone poem.

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Q: How does Holstad's style compare to Charles Bukowski's?

Brave AI:

Scott C. Holstad’s poetic style is frequently compared to that of Charles Bukowski due to shared themes of raw realism, working-class struggles, and a direct, unfiltered voice. While Holstad acknowledges Bukowski as a major influence—particularly in his early work—he has also developed a distinct identity that incorporates elements of the Beat Movement, horror, and personal psychological exploration. Critics and readers often note the similarities in tone and subject matter, but Holstad’s later work diverges into more experimental and darker thematic territory.

Core Similarities

Both poets employ a **laconic, colloquial narrative style** that prioritizes authenticity over ornamentation. Their work often centers on the **American working class**, depicting scenes of drinking, sex, madness, and urban decay with brutal honesty. Holstad, like Bukowski, uses poetry as a form of survival—“the crutch, the gun, the good drink”—and both writers are known for their **voice-driven poems** that feel like direct confessions or monologues.

Key Differences

Aspect	Charles Bukowski	Scott C. Holstad
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| **Influences** | John Fante, Hemingway, Céline, Dostoyevsky | Bukowski, Ferlinghetti, Gerald Locklin, Bill Shields |

| **Tone** | Cynical, detached, often humorous | Angry, morally outraged, sometimes more introspective |

| **Themes** | Drinking, gambling, women, urban life | Similar early themes; later work includes horror, sanity, and psychological depth |

| **Style Evolution** | Consistent throughout career | Evolved from Bukowski-inspired to more experimental and “disturbing” |

| **Language** | Simple, direct, anecdotal | Simple but with a “beautiful lexicon in its simplicity”; more layered self-exploration |

| **Reception** | Cult hero, widely recognized | Cult favorite, often compared to Bukowski but less mainstream |

Holstad’s Own Perspective

Holstad has acknowledged that his early work (particularly in the 1990s) was heavily influenced by Bukowski, but he emphasizes that he rarely set out to write “Bukowski-type” poems. He cites Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gerald Locklin as equally significant influences and notes that his later collections, such as **Cells** and **Surviving Immortality Again**, explore more complex psychological and existential themes. While he appeared in the same magazines as Bukowski and was even featured alongside him on a Finnish magazine cover, Holstad sees his work as having moved beyond mere imitation.

Critical Reception

Critics have described Holstad’s poetry as having a “Whitmanesque-Ferlinghetti street feel” and being “reminiscent of the Beat Movement.” Some reviewers place him on the same level as Bukowski in certain contexts, noting his “gritty, personal, jaded, snarky” voice. However, others point out that Holstad’s work often carries a stronger sense of moral

outrage and explores darker, more surreal territories than Bukowski's typically grounded realism.

Q: What are specific examples of Holstad's experimental style?

Brave AI:

Scott C. Holstad's experimental style diverges from traditional confessional poetry through the use of narrative sequencing, horror aesthetics, and conceptual frameworks that challenge linear reality. While his early work mirrored the anecdotal style of Charles Bukowski, his later collections employ structural innovations to explore psychological fragmentation and dystopian themes.

Narrative Architecture and Concept Books

Unlike Bukowski's standalone anecdotes, Holstad often structures collections as loosely woven tales or "concept poetry books." In ***Cells*** (2004), poems function as ****chapters**** in a larger narrative arc, creating an experience akin to "spirits of half-remembered nightmares" rather than isolated observations. His 2025 collection, ***Surviving Immortality Again***, is explicitly designed as a ****modern Prometheus myth****, envisioning a dystopian future where immortality is a trap with no exit. This approach transforms the collection into a singular, cohesive descent into existential woe, similar to a modern ***Inferno***.

Horror and Visceral Imagery

Holstad integrates horror fiction techniques into his verse, utilizing graphic, unsettling imagery to evoke physical revulsion and psychological dread. Critics note his "gothic pieces" and themes of self-mutilation, dementia, and death are presented with a clarity that makes them "even more unsettling."

* **Specific Example:** In *Surviving Immortality Again*, he describes a character's track marks not metaphorically, but with grotesque precision: "so many track / marks, it looked like a / river of small lakes on / her torn body."

* **Technique:** He employs "short, quick lines" to deliver these images with the "focus and power" of a knife cut, blending brutality with a strange form of compassion.

Fragmented Syntax and Voice

Holstad experiments with syntax and voice to mirror mental instability and the chaos of modern existence.

* **Stream of Consciousness:** Poems like "I am an addict" from *Cells* utilize a breathless, run-on style to mimic the manic episodes of bipolar disorder, listing addictions and suicidal thoughts without traditional punctuation or stanza breaks.

* **Disjointed Dreamscapes:** In *Surviving Immortality Again*, he uses fragmented phrasing ("distorted screams," "inexcusable modes of shrieking," "squat bodied visions") to create "dystopian dreamscapes" that assault the reader's sense of reality.

* **Moral Outrage vs. Detachment:** While Bukowski often maintained a cynical detachment, Holstad's experimental voice frequently erupts into moral outrage, using aggressive, "in-your-face" language to confront violence and hypocrisy directly.

Thematic Extremes

Holstad pushes thematic boundaries into areas of existential paradox and absurdity that exceed Bukowski's grounded realism.

* **The "Dog Paradox Equation":** In one prose-poem hybrid, he details a traumatic event involving a injured dog, oscillating between the urge to kill (to end suffering) and the fear of legal repercussions, freezing the narrator in a "dog paradox equation."

* **Immortality as Torture:** Rather than celebrating survival, his recent work frames existence itself as a "twisty, turny ride" of "lamentations" where the "centre cannot hold," blending the gritty realism of the street with high-concept existential horror.

Q: What is the 'Dog Paradox Equation' in detail?

Brave AI:

The "Dog Paradox Equation" is a specific moral and psychological dilemma described in Scott C. Holstad's poetry (notably in the poem titled *Dog Paradox Equation* from his 2025 collection or related publications). It encapsulates the paralysis of a witness facing an irredeemable situation where every possible action leads to a negative outcome.

The Scenario

The poem depicts a graphic traffic accident:

- * ****The Incident:**** Two dogs run in front of an SUV; one is hit at 50 mph, suffering massive trauma ("side ripped open, intestines pouring out").
- * ****The Aggravation:**** The driver, described as "clueless," backs over the dying animal again while the narrator honks in fury.
- * ****The Aftermath:**** The mutilated dog drags itself to the bushes, suffering intensely with no chance of survival.

The Paradox Defined

Holstad defines the "equation" as a trap between compassionate action and self-preservation:

1. ****Option A (Intervention):**** The narrator considers returning with his gun ("snub-nose") to euthanize the dog and end its suffering.

* ***The Risk:*** He fears being misunderstood by witnesses or police, leading to severe legal troubles ("Nix legal troubles!"). He would be "saving" the dog but potentially destroying his own life.

2. ****Option B (Inaction):**** Driving away to avoid legal risk.

* ***The Cost:*** Leaving the animal to suffer a prolonged, agonizing death. This makes the narrator feel like a "bastard" and leaves him "even more tortured" by guilt.

3. ****Option C (Forgetfulness):**** Trying to erase the memory.

* ***The Result:*** Moral failure and internal torment.

The Result: Frozen Paralysis

The "solution" to the equation is not a resolution, but a state of catatonic freeze. The narrator remains "stuck," unable to act because the cost of mercy is too high, and the cost of indifference is unbearable.

This concept exemplifies Holstad's experimental shift from simple realism to existential horror. Unlike Charles Bukowski, who might focus on the drunken stupor or the cynicism of the driver, Holstad focuses on the psychological torture of the witness—the "dog paradox" is a metaphor for the modern condition where systemic fear (legal repercussions) prevents basic human compassion, leaving the individual trapped in a "twisty, turny ride" of lamentation.

Q: What literary themes does the dog paradox represent?

Brave AI:

The "Dog Paradox Equation" in Scott C. Holstad's work represents a convergence of several dark, existential literary themes, moving beyond simple animal cruelty to explore the paralysis of the modern human condition.

Moral Impotence and Systemic Fear

The central theme is moral impotence caused by systemic fear. The narrator knows the morally "right" action (euthanizing the suffering dog) but is paralyzed by the fear of legal repercussions ("Nix legal troubles!"). This reflects a societal critique where bureaucratic and legal structures inhibit basic human compassion. The paradox illustrates that in a litigious society, doing the right thing can be synonymous with self-destruction, forcing the individual into a state of ethical freeze.

The Torture of the Witness

Unlike Charles Bukowski, who often focused on the participant or the cynic, Holstad focuses on the psychological torture of the witness. The theme here is not just the dog's physical pain, but the narrator's internal disintegration. The "equation" results in no solution, only catatonic guilt. The witness becomes a victim of the event, trapped in a loop of "what if" that is arguably more torturous than immediate action. This aligns with Holstad's broader exploration of sanity vs. insanity, where the "sane" response (following the law) leads to an insane emotional outcome.

Existential Absurdity

The scenario embodies existential absurdity: a situation where logic fails, and all choices lead to suffering.

- * ****Action** = Potential imprisonment/social ruin.**
- * ****Inaction** = Complicity in torture/moral decay.**
- * ****Forgetfulness** = Psychological denial.**

This mirrors the absurdist tradition (Camus, Kafka) where the individual is trapped in a nonsensical universe. The "dog paradox" is a microcosm of a world where there is no "good" exit, only varying degrees of damnation. It reinforces Holstad's theme that existence itself is often a "twisty, turny ride" of unavoidable lamentation.

The Failure of Agency

Ultimately, the paradox represents the failure of human agency. The narrator wants to be a savior but is reduced to a helpless observer. This theme critiques the illusion of control; despite having a gun (power) and a car (mobility), the narrator is powerless against the abstract threat of "legal trouble." It underscores a recurring motif in Holstad's later work: the individual is small, fragile, and easily crushed by the invisible weights of societal expectation and fear.

Q: How does the legal system appear in Holstad's work?

Brave AI:

In Scott C. Holstad's work, the legal system appears not as a mechanism of justice, but as a predatory, bureaucratic force that exacerbates suffering and paralyzes moral action. It is depicted as an abstract threat that often outweighs immediate human compassion.

The Legal System as a Paralyzing Force

The most prominent example is the "Dog Paradox Equation," where the fear of "legal troubles" prevents the narrator from euthanizing a suffering animal. Here, the law is an invisible cage:

- * ****Compassion vs. Criminality:**** The act of mercy (shooting the dog to end its pain) is framed as a potential crime ("Nix legal troubles!").
- * ****Systemic Absurdity:**** The legal system creates a scenario where the "legal" choice (doing nothing) is morally monstrous, while the "moral" choice carries the risk of imprisonment or social ruin.
- * ****Result:**** The narrator is frozen in "catatonic" guilt, illustrating how the law strips individuals of agency.

The Legal System as Predatory and Corrupt

Holstad's poems often portray lawyers, judges, and courts as exploitative entities rather than neutral arbiters.

* **Family Court:** In poems like *Courtroom Melodrama*, the legal process is described as "legal bullshit" where life hangs in the balance of "subjective intention." Lawyers are "hired hands," and judges are viewed with suspicion ("all the judges are corrupt, or addicts in bed with the sleezeball attorneys").

* **Financial Drain:** The system is a machine that consumes resources (" \$250.00 per" hour) with no guarantee of justice ("There will be no winners").

* **Criminalization of Illness:** In works like *Cells* and *Hang Gliding on X*, the legal system intersects with the mental health system. Holstad writes of "jail," "arrest poems," and "community service" where he is treated as a "dangerous criminal" due to his bipolar disorder, highlighting how the law punishes instability rather than treating it.

Contrast with Bukowski

While Charles Bukowski often depicted the legal system with cynical detachment or as a backdrop for drunken brawls and petty crimes, Holstad treats it with visceral dread and moral outrage.

* **Bukowski:** The law is a nuisance, a game to be played or ignored.

* **Holstad:** The law is an existential threat that actively prevents human decency. His collection *Hang Gliding on X* is explicitly subtitled as "A cautionary set of poems detailing how NOT to deal with the LAPD," suggesting a lethal stakes environment absent in Bukowski's more romanticized "street" life.

Summary of Themes

| Theme | Description in Holstad's Work |

| :--- | :--- |

| **Moral Impotence** | Laws prevent basic acts of mercy (e.g., the Dog Paradox). |

| ****Bureaucratic Horror**** | Courts and lawyers are depicted as soulless, corrupt, and financially draining. |

| ****Criminalization of Madness**** | Mental illness is treated as criminal behavior, leading to jail and community service. |

| ****Fear as Control**** | The **threat** of legal action is enough to freeze individuals into inaction. |

Q: What are the consequences of his arrest poems?

Brave AI:

The consequences of Scott C. Holstad's arrests and legal entanglements, as detailed in his "arrest poems" (particularly in the collection **Hang Gliding on X** and **Cells**), are depicted as a cycle of physical degradation, bureaucratic humiliation, and psychological fragmentation.

Physical and Institutional Consequences

* ****Incarceration in High-Security Facilities:**** Holstad describes being transferred from local jails (like Glendale) to the Los Angeles County Jail's "Twin Towers" facility, specifically the medical section for inmates with "medicinal needs." Here, he is subjected to heavy sedation, noting he was on "14 prescription meds including two strong anti-psychotics."

* ****Forced Labor and Stigma:**** A direct consequence of his sentencing was community service, where he was labeled a "dangerous criminal." In the poem **Confessions**, he details being rejected by two placement sites before being accepted at a thrift store. The labor was grueling ("unloaded sofas, washing machines, a cast iron stove"), nearly breaking him physically, though he paradoxically found a strange camaraderie with fellow workers through shared cigarette breaks.

* ****Criminalization of Mental Illness:**** The legal system treated his bipolar disorder as criminal behavior. His "paranoia" and "anticipation" of police action (described in

Anticipation) became a self-fulfilling prophecy, where his mental state led to arrest, which in turn exacerbated his instability.

Psychological and Existential Consequences

* **Erosion of Agency:** The arrest poems illustrate a total loss of control. Holstad writes of being "beaten to a gooey pulp by cops," "crushed," and "mutilated," leaving him in a state where he is "not even obsessed with death like I was when I was younger" because the trauma has normalized suffering.

* **The "Cautionary" Legacy:** The collection **Hang Gliding on X** is explicitly subtitled as "A cautionary set of poems detailing how NOT to deal with the LAPD." The consequence of these encounters is not just legal punishment, but a permanent scar on the psyche—a warning that interaction with the police can lead to a "twisty, turny ride" of destruction where the individual is powerless.

* **Paradoxical Satisfaction:** Despite the trauma, Holstad notes a strange irony in **Confessions**: receiving a "great worker, thanks" on his community service paperwork gave him "more satisfaction... than nearly all of my poems I've ever had published." This highlights the disorienting effect of the legal system, where basic human validation is found only in the aftermath of punitive labor.

Q: Discuss Holstad's treatment of suicidal ideation and self-harm in his work, possibly with a focus on his book **THE NAPALMED SOUL**

Brave AI:

In **The Napalmed Soul** (1999), Scott C. Holstad treats suicidal ideation and self-harm not as abstract melancholy, but as visceral, graphic, and often paradoxical acts of survival. The collection is frequently described by critics and readers as "disturbing," "nauseating," and comparable to **American Psycho** in its unflinching depiction of psychological breakdown.

Self-Harm as Deflection and Redemption

A central theme in the book is the redirection of violence. Holstad depicts a protagonist teetering on psychosis who possesses violent urges toward others but consciously chooses to turn that aggression inward.

* **The "Sacrifice" Mechanism:** In the poem *sacrifice*, the narrator realizes that acting on external violent impulses would be wrong, so he "turns his violence, his bloodlust, on himself, sacrificing his body for others."

* **Physical Manifestation:** Poems describe cutting with "clear and sharp" language, where the blood is "ruby" and congeals in lumps. This self-mutilation is portrayed not as a cry for help, but as a necessary release to prevent greater harm, a way to "puke this blackness out of my soul."

* **Aesthetic of Horror:** The imagery is deliberately grotesque, featuring "shaved head, mascara, black eyeliner," and references to gothic music (Shadow Project, My Dying Bride), framing self-harm within a horror aesthetic rather than a medical one.

Suicidal Ideation as a "Napalmed" State

The title metaphor suggests a soul that has been incinerated from the inside out. Suicidal thoughts are depicted as a constant, high-velocity pressure.

* **The "Suicide Wannabe":** In the poem *normalcy?*, Holstad writes, "my body bears the strain of a suicide wannabe," suggesting that the *attempt* or the *strain* of holding back is what defines his existence, rather than the act itself. The "look in my eye turns people away," marking him as visibly damaged.

* **Eroticizing Death:** Holstad occasionally frames the proximity to death as "erotic," writing, "dancing with death when he whispers in your ear is a very erotic moment." This reflects a bipolar manic intensity where the boundary between life and death becomes blurred and seductive.

* **The "Fiery Escape":** In *i drive 160 on the freeway*, suicide is envisioned as a "major x-mas wish," a desire for a "fiery escape" from a life that feels like "shit on a razor's edge."

The Paradox of Survival

Unlike purely nihilistic works, ***The Napalmed Soul*** contains a ****struggle for redemption****.

* ****Laughing in Death's Face:**** Critics note the book is about "laughing in death's face, begging it to play Russian Roulette." The act of writing these graphic poems is itself a survival mechanism—a way to process the "metastasized spiritual cancer" without succumbing to it.

* ****The "Anti-Savior":**** Holstad positions himself as an "Anti-Savior" who takes on others' pain. By documenting his own "napalm," he validates the suffering of others, creating a "shared language" of trauma.

* ****Physical Reaction:**** The intensity is such that readers have reported becoming physically ill ("stomach twisted in knots," "nauseous") yet being unable to stop reading, indicating that Holstad's treatment of suicide forces a ****confrontation with reality**** that is both repulsive and magnetic.

Comparison to Later Work

While ***The Napalmed Soul*** focuses on the ****immediacy of the breakdown**** (the "burnt offering"), later works like ***Cells*** and ***Surviving Immortality Again*** analyze the ****aftermath**** and the ****systemic causes**** (jail, meds, legal trouble). ***The Napalmed Soul*** remains his most raw and "splatter punk" exploration, where the knife is still in hand, and the blood is still wet.

Q: How do critics respond to the book's gore?

Brave AI:

Critics and readers respond to the gore in **The Napalmed Soul** with a mixture of physical revulsion and compelled fascination, often describing the experience as visceral and overwhelming. The work is frequently characterized as transcending "dark" poetry to become something more pathological and dangerous.

Physical and Visceral Reactions

The most consistent critical and reader response involves physical illness.

* ****Nausea and Distress:**** Multiple reviews note that readers became "nauseous toward the middle" of the book, with stomachs "twisted in knots." One prominent review states the reader "cried 3 poems into it" and felt "quite ill," yet found they "could not put this book down."

* ****The *American Psycho* Comparison:**** Critics frequently compare the reading experience to Bret Easton Ellis's **American Psycho**. The gore is not seen as gratuitous but as a psychological assault that leaves the reader "greatly affected" and shaken, forcing a confrontation with "metastasized spiritual cancer."

Critical Descriptions: Beyond "Dark"

Critics argue that standard labels like "dark" or "gritty" are insufficient for Holstad's gore.

* ****Transcending Darkness:**** Jonathan Penton (Unlikely Stories) notes that Holstad's work is "so violent, angry, and self-effacing that they seem to transcend darkness." The pain is so "engorged" that moral questions become irrelevant.

* ****Poetic Biopsy:**** The gore is described as a "poetic biopsy," forcing the reader to gaze into an "abyss microscope." It is viewed as a "confession of a soul lost," reminiscent of Lautréamont's **Les Chants de Maldoror** and Baudelaire's **Les Fleurs du mal**.

* ****Psychic Wounds:**** Todd Moore (Outlaw Poetry) warns that "some poems contain within them the ability to inflict serious damage to the reader," inflicting the "deepest of psychic wounds."

The Paradox of Engagement

Despite the extreme content, the critical consensus highlights a magnetic quality to the gore.

* ****Inability to Look Away:**** Even readers who "started sobbing far too early" or "got sick to their stomachs" admitted they "couldn't put it down."

* ****Redemption through Pain:**** Critics interpret the gore not as nihilism, but as a "need for redemption." The "clear and sharp" language of the violence gives the poems "focus and power," transforming the bloodletting into a "sacrifice" that validates the suffering of others.

Q: Which specific poems contain the most extreme gore?

Brave AI:

Based on critical reviews and textual excerpts, the following poems in **The Napalmed Soul** are cited as containing the most extreme gore and disturbing imagery:

**"sacrifice"******

Widely considered the collection's most visceral piece, this poem details a "mutilation-fest" in a bathroom setting.

* ****Graphic Content:**** The narrator slips in a "pool of blood still congealing from last night's mutilation-fest." It describes arms as a "wreck" with "rivers of blood dried to crusty pieces of rusty death."

* ****The Act:**** The poem explicitly depicts the redirection of violent urges: "i want to stab you but stab myself instead / i want to kill you but am slowly killing myself." The imagery of blood congealing in "lumps" and dripping off the body is frequently cited by readers as the point where they became physically ill.

**"i drive 160 on the freeway"******

This poem focuses on suicidal ideation manifested as a desire for catastrophic physical destruction.

* ****Graphic Content:**** The narrator drives at extreme speeds ("160 on the freeway") specifically "in the hopes of a fiery escape."

* **The Imagery:** It frames a high-speed crash as a "major x-mas wish," contrasting the desire for a "fiery" death with the grim reality of "life on a razor's edge." The gore here is anticipatory, focusing on the violent potential of the car as a weapon against the self.

**"EXIT WOUNDS"**

While full text excerpts are less common, the title and placement within the collection suggest a focus on the physical aftermath of violence.

* **Context:** Listed alongside titles like "Torture Techniques," "Deaths," and "Bile," this poem contributes to the "splatter punk" aesthetic that critics compare to *American Psycho*. It is part of the sequence that readers describe as causing nausea due to its unrelenting focus on bodily destruction.

**"i torment my neighbors (may they rot in hell)"**

This poem blends psychological threat with physical gore.

* **Graphic Content:** The narrator describes standing in the shadows with "bloody eyes and smile of satan," promising that the victim's "last glimpse of this earth will be sick as sin."

* **Tone:** It moves beyond self-harm into the realm of potential external violence, heightening the sense of danger and instability.