Flavor:

*You mustn’t be seen. You mustn’t be heard. You mustn’t be caught.* The mantra rang clear enough. Easy to know, yet hard to follow in the filthy, collapsed alleyways. It was just shadow down here. His pace quickened—anyone could be waiting for him. He ran and jumped and swung and climbed and didn’t stop moving until he reached the door. Quickly, the boy wrenched it open and crammed inside, away from whatever was chasing him.

The crystal doors beckoned the gentleman into the community of pinstriped suits and platters of fraise de bois. A genial, composed crowd beckoned him in. A ruffle of his cufflinks, a shift of his watch, a correction of his tie and he made his way past the innumerable amount of appetizers and into the chair at the head of the table. This wasn’t going to be easy. The people around him seemed friendly enough but he easily saw past their expressions and into the malice behind.

“I understand your weariness gentlemen, but I can assure you everything is being done to resolve the situation. Trust me, my team and I are taking the necessary steps to ensure the safety of our company and your portfolios.” He calmly looked around the table trying to reassure the gentlemen that were there. But despite his cautious approach, they eyed him with unfavorable and piercing stares.

Suddenly, a grumpy voice from the back spoke, “I know a lost cause when I see one. I’ll have every one of you know that I’ll be withdrawing my investment—whatever’s left of it—and I suggest that you all will do the same.” With that, he popped up and scurried towards the crystal doors. He was a fat man with an admirably well tailored suit and long thick facial hair that wrapped its way around his mouth and up the sides of his head. He seemed to sway ever so slightly to the sides when he walked but managed to remain in a comparatively straight forward motion.

That man had been extremely influential in the success of the company and with such a large investment gone, the gentleman was finding his next steps to be much more difficult. “It’s…it’s a shame to see such a gentleman go.” He paused. “I’m counting on every one of you to keep this company alive. But not just me. The world is counting on you to keep this company alive—because what else do they have? We provide flavor to a bland world. We provide hope to a desolate world. Don’t you understand? There are no more farms or oceans or ranches or anything that can give our people a taste of what there once was. If you pull out, you’ll be damning humanity to multiple lifetimes of madness.

“You’ve got enough money to last you the rest of your lives. To keep you safe while the madness rages on. But nobody else does. You can escape your debt. You have people. You have places. But nobody else does. I don’t run this company for myself, I run it for the people. If you choose to defund me, you’ll be defunding the people and you’ll be defunding humanity.”

The collection of gentlemen glanced around the room at each other. Their suits were amazingly well kept but their eyes were shivering and their noses twitched when they thought too hard. All together now, in a silent and nervous way, they began to hobble up from their chairs and collect their belongings. The man exasperatedly rushed to each one, desperately trying to explain and convince them to stay, but none of them seemed to listen. Rather, they mumbled something about this or that and flocked away from the table together and out the crystal doors.

The bankruptcy of Flavor was only three months ago and already the people were riled up far beyond any prediction. “These…caloric cubes just won’t do anymore. The people are tired of eating the same bland thing day after day. They want something *new.* They want something *fresh*.”

“Sir, there is nothing else. Everywhere is a city nowadays and there just isn’t any space to farm or produce anything.”

“You’re not understanding, are you?” He smirked and sat a little straighter in his chair. “There actually *is* room for farming and we *have* produced some very promising samples so far. I’d like for you to try one.”

He waved his hand and an assistant brought over a sample. He gestured for him to eat. “Hmm, this actually is pretty good.”

“It is, isn’t it? I’d like for you to organize a vendor where we can solicit our food. Make sure to keep it on the ground level sort of tucked away…we don’t want anyone trying to copy our product.”

“Sure, sure, I can do that. I trust that you’ll supply me when I need it. May I just ask, what is it?”

Rotten life. Rotten world. Rotten everything. The young man eyed the filthy room around him. Only about 100 square feet of dirty walls and dirty floor. Grease and grayness lined the walls and shadowed him from the world beyond, not that there was much of a world beyond, only other filthy greasy rooms. Only up about three stories, the world had effectively cast him away from all decent forms of life. Left to rot at the bottom of the urban cesspit his soul had departed from him long ago, leaving behind a corporal weapon of any necessary destruction—and the necessary destruction had come.

The opening of the new shop four stories below him promised an opportunity he could not pass up. Finally he would have a purpose. Finally he would have success.

The boy sat huddled in his shelter. He didn’t dare move. Not with what was happening outside. Peering through the bars he could vaguely make out the scene above him.

Amazingly, there was more blood than flesh; it was in the air, on the floor, on the bodies, and other peculiar places he didn’t know it was able to travel to. About a dozen bodies were fighting with he didn’t even know what. As to which were dead and which were alive he couldn’t tell, though some were remarkably more mobile than the others. Rationality and reason lay victim to savage barbarism in the unholy gladiatorial indulgence.

The boy could taste the flow of blood seeping into his shelter and it was all he could do not to swallow. He couldn’t become one of them; except he had to. There was no other way. So when the fighting eventually wound down, he carefully pried open the bars and crawled outside to forage. What was left was certainly not the healthiest option, but it was all there was. He ate what he could and carried back what he could, not daring to stay out there for more than five minutes. He retreated past the iron bars and back into the shelter, continuing to watch the bloody stream seep into his abode.

The young man hopped down the small steps into the ground level store. Only the worst of the worst lived down here, and right now they were exactly who he needed. Did he feel guilt? Only subliminally. Not enough to terminate the operation. He walked around the room, adjusting packages for the hell of it and dragging his foot along the dusty floorboards. Five minutes later, he hoisted his gun, swung open the thick metal doors, and retreated behind the counter. Each time a customer would walk in the young man would aim and fire at whatever ethical heathen entered. Too risky even to look. Just hop up, shoot, hop down. *Easy money. Let ‘em come. Just a few more and I’ll be open for business.*

The gentleman’s Luciferian tumble found him wiping his recently bloodied suit and pumping himself up to enter the building. He eyed the sign. Not promising. Not promising at all. However, what was he to do? In the face of destruction primality takes over, and this city’s primality was a force so obtusely grotesque that it consumed all other fascinations of the mind.

He opened the door. A young man behind the counter stared back at him. He eyed the selection of foods. Very odd. He continued to stare, standing dead still with his back against the door. “I’ll take that one.” He pointed to one of the offerings at the far left of the display. He took off his suit coat and handed it to the young man. He received his food, backed out to the alley and began to eat. Three months ago he had been consuming a wealthy platter of fraise de bois in a penthouse board meeting; now he stood hunched over in a back alley chowing down on overpriced human remains.

The boy peered into the large metal warehouse crammed full of caloric cubes. Ever since the cannibalism ramped up, the distribution of the world’s food source had waned, and he couldn’t help but wonder if a certain malign coup from the people had done the job. In any case, the boy had to creep down here once a week and bring sustenance back to his shelter.

Although most of the boxes were sealed off, some of them had broken patches that allowed him to take food from the inside. He quietly made his way to one of these broken boxes. Opening his pouch, he began to shovel cubes in. There. That’s enough. He turned to run back the way he had come, but saw that the door was closed. Eerie shadows began to stretch around the perimeters of the room. Slowly, the elongations shrank as they came nearer to the boy. He was just able to make out the crude human forms when they pounced on him.

“This one? Not very much, but a little.” The young man handed over a few eclectic items to the supplier.

“Good. Here it is.” The supplier handed over the boy. “I know he don’t look it, but he’s alive.”

“Good. I like to give my customers the freshest produce I can.” He took out a knife. The supplier took a step back.

“Don’t try anything funny or my guys will blow you up.” He gestured to two of his goons on either side. The young man stared at him for a moment, then began to crouch.

“Oh, I understand. Now, if you don't want to see how the sausage gets made, I advise you to leave very quickly.” Immediately, he started carving out the most recent produce. The suppliers squirmed out quickly. The young man watched them run down and out the back of the alley. He shifted his focus back and began to carve once more.

Across the alley the gentleman looked on at the horrid scene. His expression hadn’t changed in the last hour. He looked on at the murder with the same indifferent face that he had eaten the body with. Was the world this way because of him?

He turned around and faced the rest of the building. Empty. Just black walls and dirty floors. It would never change. The world would never get better. He took a few steps and tugged on the rope. His expression didn’t change as he got set up. And his expression didn’t change as he depleted what little life he had left in him.

“You’ve set up the store very nicely.” The young man wheeled around from his post at the counter. It was the same man that had presented him with the opportunity. “I hope that you’re now in great trust with me and my associates?”

He lowered the shotgun. “Oh, yes, sir. Very much. This position has…saved me from the fate of all the others.”

“I’m sure it has.” He stared at him. “You’ve done so well, I’d like to offer you a promotion.”

They stared. The young man wondered.

“I’d like to offer you the opportunity to get out of this hell hole and live with the higher-ups. This opportunity, I’m sure, you cannot pass up.”

“Oh, no, sir. Thank you so much, sir.”

“Good. I’ll see to it that it happens.” The man turned around and nodded to one of his associates. The associate raised his gun and fired five rounds into the young man who subsequently dropped dead on the ground. “Good. Onto the next one, then, shall we?”