



The man nervously watched the lighted red button on his wall. It had just begun blinking on and off and it captured the man's attention. He watched it with nervous pleasure. And then, after a few minutes, the light went out. The man walked away from the giant wall in his mansion. He sat down and stared at the wall with a mix of awe and pleasure. In front of him was a massive wall filled with an innumerable number of red lights. The man had tried once to count them all but to no avail, there were too many. It had taken the man 10 years and over one billion dollars to construct, and yet, he was still unable or unwilling to use it. Day after day, week after week, the man would stare fastidiously at the wall and watch. It was the blinking lights that got his attention. Sometimes they would blink on and off for weeks at a time, sometimes only for a short order and sometimes they would blink off suddenly without warning. They would almost always light back up though; they would never be out for more than a minute at most.

The man rarely left his house. He was not what one would call a "sociable" person. It wasn't that he loathed other people; he just didn't care to know anything about them. And since he was a billionaire he could remain reclusive for as long as he wished.

One day the man sat there staring at a blinking light on the massive wall. He decided it was time for him to press a button and use this machine, if only to at least make himself feel as though it were money well spent. He would wait of course, for the light to turn off before he would press the button, allowing himself the opportunity of feeling as though he were doing something worthwhile. He waited, staring at the red blinking light. How long would it continue blinking until it turned itself off? The man found that he could not take his eyes off the blinking

light. He just stood and stared. He couldn't leave; because once the light finally extinguished itself it would light itself back up in a little more than a minute so he had to be prepared. He would not push the button once it was lit again. He waited, patiently. Hour after hour, day after day he stayed there staring at the blinking red light. Would it ever turn off? How long could he wait? And then finally, it blinked itself off. Ahh, the feeling that came over the man was one of relief and anticipation. Anticipation of finally being able to push a button. He leaned in to get a good look. A slight tremor was felt in his finger as he placed his finger on the button. And just as he was about to press the button, the light came back on. The man froze. He did not want to press a lit button. He wanted to press an unlit button. But he found that he could not stop his finger from performing the final act of pressing the lit button. He had waited weeks to do this and although his mind said no, his body said yes. He pressed the button. The light turned off. He felt a combination of joy and horror. He had turned a light off. Somewhere in the world a parent's worst nightmare came true.

The man knew not to press a lit button. That was rule number one. But yet, he had. And he found that the exhilaration it provided him was something that was beyond his control. He had to leave the room. He could not look at the lights anymore. The man retired to another room in his compound.

He vowed never to return to room with the red lights. But like an addict, he felt the pull of the room on his psyche. Just one more "drink" was the famous cliché of an alcoholic. He would maybe just peer inside the room with the lights, just have a quick look. He wouldn't walk in the room. He knew he couldn't do that, he wouldn't want to do that. He walked towards the room. He carefully opened the massive doors. A low humming sound came from the room. It was a comforting

sound. The man, now satisfied with peering inside the room, decided to close the door and leave. He ever so carefully closed the door. The humming sound was still there. He turned around and to his horror he was in the room with the lights. The lights, splayed out in neat rows, thousands upon thousands, if not millions stared back at him. What was he to do? He closed his eyes and slumped to the floor. He fell asleep.

The man woke up to the low hum of the machine. The glowing red lights comfortably surrounded him. He did not know how long he had been asleep. He didn't care. The man tried looking away from the lights. He tried to ignore them. He even tried to leave the room once-and-for-all, but he knew he would not. He walked away from the door and towards the lights. He stared blankly at the wall. The red lights stared back at him. Were they mocking him? Another red light started blinking. The man's pulse rose slightly. What harm, he thought, could he do by turning off a blinking red light. What harm indeed! He would be committing an act of mercy! The blinking light clearly stated that the person associated with the light would be dying soon. And maybe the person was in pain. Would the man not be doing a service to another human being by shortening the suffering they felt? The man should be considered a saint for what he was about to do! He pressed the red blinking button and somewhere in the world a dying person's wish was granted. The man felt an overpowering sense of importance come over him. Oh, and the feeling that washed over him, how could one explain it? It was wonderful. Another blinking light caught his attention out of the corner of his right eye. He lunged towards it and pushed it off. He saw another blinking light; he rushed towards it and pushed it off. He walked away from the wall to get a better look. There were so many blinking lights! He noticed them before but now he was obsessed. He started to furiously find and push all the blinking lights he

could find. What an overpowering sense of joy he felt! He could do this all day. And he did.

A week had passed. The man was exhausted. There was no way to keep up with turning off ALL of the blinking lights. He must think of a better way. And while he thought and stared he noticed more and more blinking lights come into his field of view. He couldn't STAND the blinking lights. But curiously, he also found himself annoyed of all the lights.

The man finally decided to leave the room. There was no way he could solve the issue with the lights by simply pressing one at a time. He had a mission. He would find a way to press as many buttons at one time as he could. This way he could keep up with, or at least slow down the re-lighting of the lights that occurred as he shut each one off. He would show the lights who was their master. He would not be satisfied until all the lights were off.

The man spent a week designing his contraption. Using some particle board attached to the end of a plunger he figured he could turn off over a thousand lights at a time. Yes, the man thought to himself, this will work.

He approached the room with the red lights. He opened the door. Ahh, the low hum was music to his ears, but the lights! They were no longer comforting. They stared at the man, mocking him. The man's pulse rose. He thought to himself "How dare they!" and he lunged at the lights with the fury of a man on the ultimate mission. Boom, over a thousand lights were turned off simultaneously. Boom! Another thousand, boom, another thousand. Over and over and over and over again the man turned out the lights. The man spent the next 12 hours

turning off whole sections of the wall. Finally he stopped. He was exhausted. He took a moment, stepped back and admired his work. It was beautiful! Although the wall was still lit up with red glowing lights, whole sections were now dark - and it looked like they were permanently dark as well. They were not turning back on. The man fell asleep with a smile.

The man awoke with one hand on the wooden contraption. Blurry eyed he looked up at the wall. No! In the previously beautiful void areas where he had managed to turn off the lights a few were coming back on. **No no no no no!** He wouldn't let this happen, his masterpiece was being ruined. And so he lunged at the newly lit lights and turned them off. He then proceeded with great zeal and determination to finish the job he laid out for himself. He would make sure all of the lights would be permanently turned off. Over and over and over again he pressed thousands of buttons at a time. He felt himself tiring, but no, he would not give in. He would turn them all off and he would not stop until he was done.

He didn't know how much time had passed. It felt as though he had been turning off the mocking red lights for an eternity. But he was doing a good job. He then realized that he was near the end of the wall. Had he really come this far? He was amazed. He decided it wouldn't do too much harm to quickly run back from the wall and gaze, if only for a moment, at his accomplishment. He ran back and stared at the wall. All but a small section of lights were turned off. He couldn't believe it. Just a few lights left to go. He immediately got back to work. He raced back to the wall to finish up. He didn't want any of the lights that were off to turn back on. He needn't have worried though, there were only twelve lights left. He decided to turn each off at a time. He would savor each moment.

Maybe he had been too brash in turning off so many at a time, he hadn't spent a moment enjoying his work. Well, he would now. "Ennie meenie minnie moe..." he quietly sang to himself as he extinguished each light. 5 left, 4 left, 3 left.... And then he was struck by horror. What had he done?! These were not just lights. They were lives! Each, an individual as his own. Had he gone mad? There was only one light left on the wall. Just one. His. The guilt was overpowering. How does one live with oneself after extinguishing mankind. The answer is; you don't. He pushed the last red button and died.

Out on a Caribbean island sat John Matisse, drinking, quite comfortably, an exotic drink while finishing up the day's paper. The headline read "**Billionaire Dies Alone in Home**". John smiled. He had spent less than a million dollars on a secret project for this billionaire, yet charged him over a billion. John would never have to work another day in his life. He left the bar and headed towards the white sands and warm water.

The End