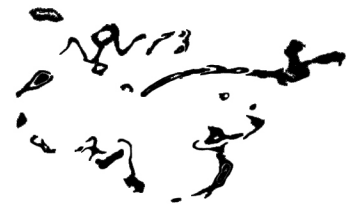


Chapter 1



"You should always check with local authorities to ensure that any DIY project abides by local codes and regulations." reads the "DIY Industrial Lamp: Cool Desk Lamp Made From Pipe" article on the home depot blog, posted by an anonymous staff member.

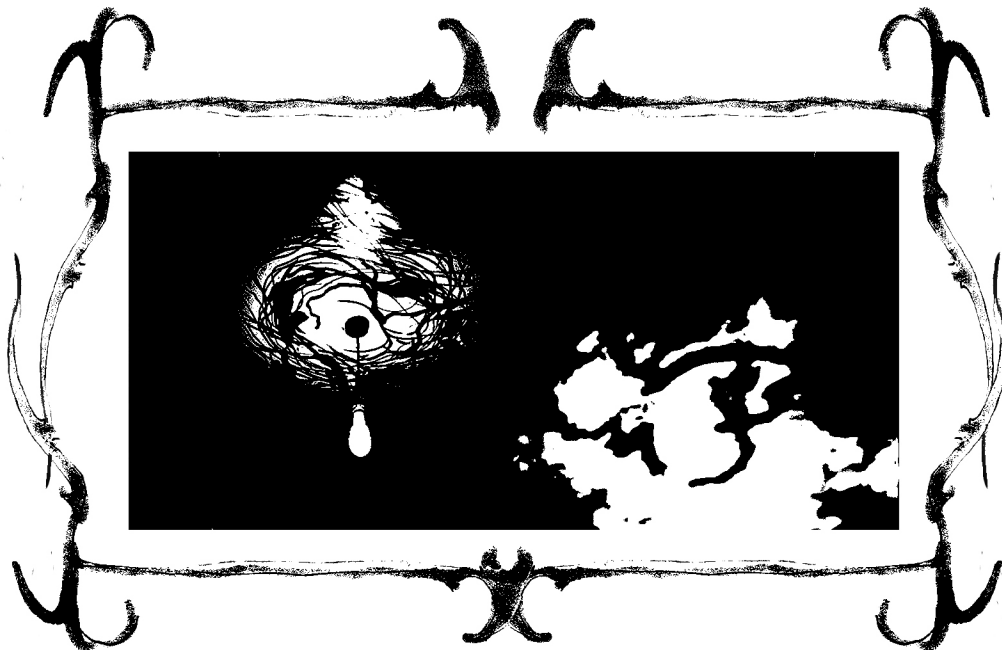
I'm pretty certain that the local authorities wouldn't care about a lamp made out of store-bought steel pipes, or I mean, they shouldn't care about low-wattage lighting devices in general. There are usually more important things to worry about, like actual human crime.

I didn't think I would need to contact the authorities, but I did.

'Building the Lamp Base,' easy enough.

With the blog's instructions open on my phone for reference at my studio desk, I read on. 'Building the Lamp Body and Wiring It,' I knew I had to process this part a few times. I'm afraid of getting electrocuted and get really OCD about turning switches on and off. It's a wonder I've gotten into home projects. I followed each step meticulously and found that the lamp was easier to make than I thought. I switched it on and off a few times. It worked, but it looked plain.

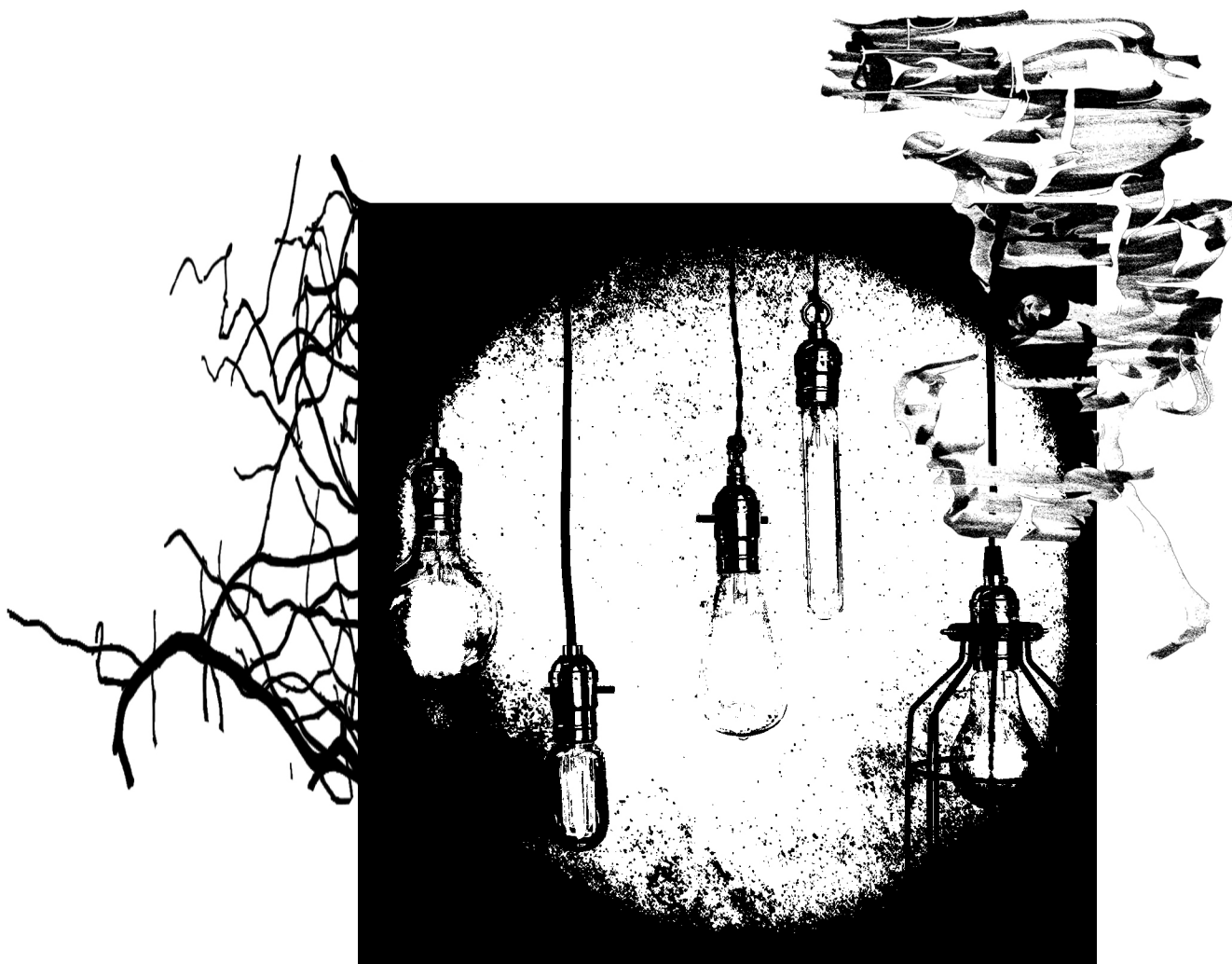
Over a few months I assembled dozens of lamps. Sometimes I'd work only by the light of the last lamp I built, but despite leaving the bulbs exposed, it always seemed to get darker in my studio. Sometimes I went out for more materials from the hardware store, other times I would just use things from around the house.



I thought about how darkness masks the dangerous figures in horror movies. I would worry about what they really were or how they actually moved. But you can't hold up a lamp in a horror movie, you just wait. I guess I was obscuring my own fears by building these lamps.

Midnight, one-fifty, three-thirty, six-o-six. I'd stay up fitting sockets and burning imprints into my retinas of luminous filaments, ensuring that they'd hum actively when I pressed on one side and dead silent for the other.

Eventually, I wasn't sure if I was dreaming in the studio, seeing the just-dimmed glass of a bulb or the face of a cesspool-born monster. I'd miss work sitting watch over the lamps, daylight thinning and counting down until the first light switch would be pressed in.





Chapter 2

My house lies last on the block heading west. Other apartments and corner stores down the street are overshadowed by two big brick warehouses and the piles of litter you might imagine around such relics. It doesn't matter what used to be produced or packaged here, there's not much of it happening anymore. It's a great place to live if you're flexible about amenities.

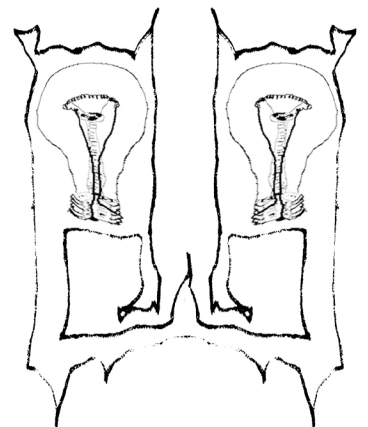
Occasionally I head down to the bar a block down to kill an hour or so and gulp down a cheap pitcher of beer. It's easy to pick up a conversation with another laborer, or just as effortlessly slide into a seat alone. I'm not saying I'm antisocial or even that I'm broke, I just prefer this lifestyle to a drag and drop suburban home.

On a night such as this, I looked in on the lamps before heading out. I couldn't tell if one of the light bulbs was on. There was just a slight warm glimmer coming from it, but I couldn't be sure from the doorway. It definitely shouldn't be on. I always check that things are turned off when I leave the house.

I pushed the door open further. The shadows from the lamps slid sideways a bit. Now I really couldn't tell. I leaned in and stepped into the room. The armatures of the lamps seemed to reach into space, toward me or at one another. I moved through them toward the tallest. Squatting under that one's height, an assemblage of PVC and metal still seemed to emanate yellow.

Like a low-exposure photograph, details seemed to emerge from the objects I crouched beside like grains. The grains seemed to swim on the surface of my eyes. Did a power cord just slither?

The grainy effect took over and real shapes evaporated.



Chapter 3

I woke up on the floor outside of the studio with a pounding headache. It consumed the space behind my brow and eyes and seemed to pierce all the way to the stem of my spine. I clutched my forehead and clamped my eyelids down for a while. Finally looking further into the studio I saw the lamps all blazing bright.

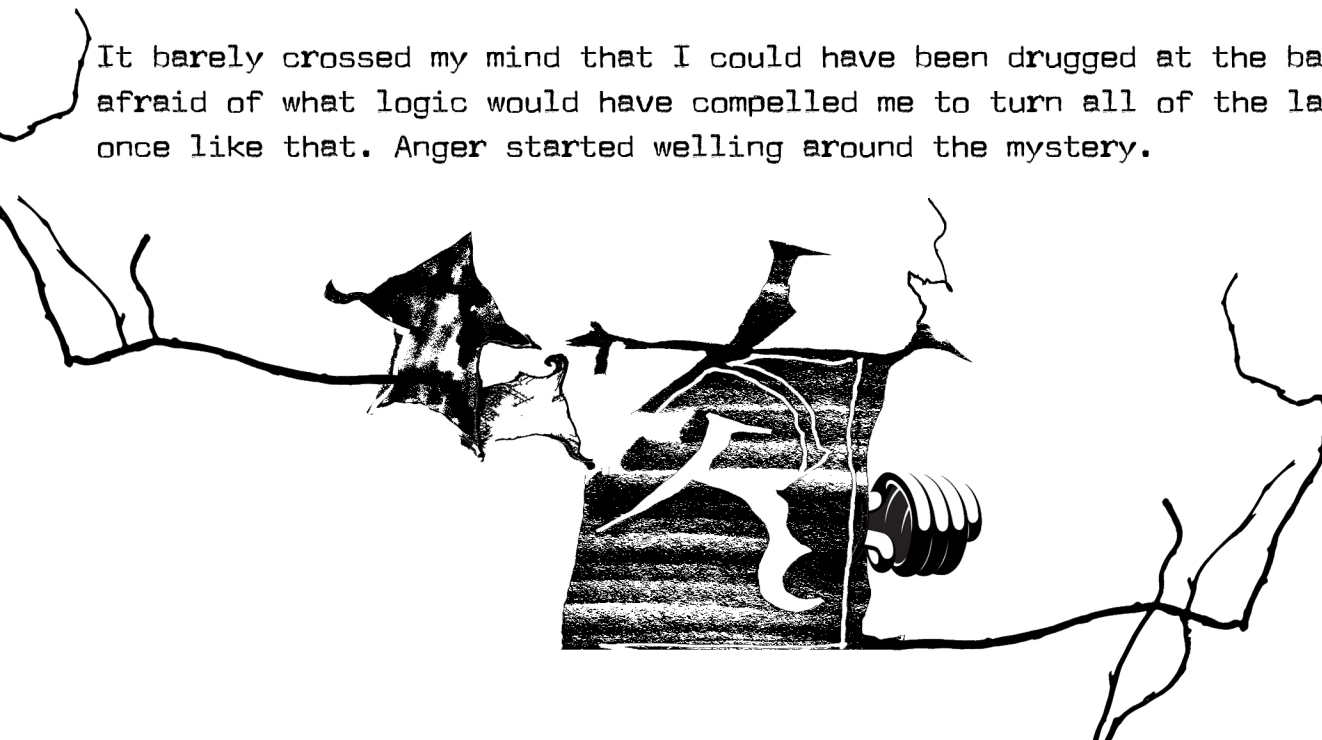
Nauseous with anxiety, I turned and got up to begin flicking the switches off.

What happened? Was I still dreaming? My headache was making me feel slightly out of body but my brain felt heavier than the whole earth.

I thought about my trip to the bar. I'd talked to the bartender for a bit, a great no bullshitter. We took a shot together after she poured my pitcher. Chilled mug in hand, I sat at the long bar and talked to Jerome, another regular. He has his own moving company with five employees. They seem like a wild lot in general. He told me once that the first time he tried crack was on a job. And then he moved someone's whole apartment right after that. I shared almost half of my pitcher with him. No way I'd had enough to B.O.

The neighborhood might appear shady to some folks but we take care of each other. Migrants, mostly families, good people. Women around here feel safer here than they do in more populated and grossly commodified areas where they're more likely to get mugged by someone who's just stopping through to dip their hand in the excess and take some with them.

It barely crossed my mind that I could have been drugged at the bar, but I'm afraid of what logic would have compelled me to turn all of the lamps on at once like that. Anger started welling around the mystery.



Chapter 4



At the open fridge door, I gazed at a near-empty carton of eggs.

The lamps, now all off, still felt animated, as if I was reliving a vivid dream just thinking about them. I wondered if I had gotten too obsessed with them, but a person obsessed probably wouldn't have such a thought. It seemed important to focus on relieving my headache before going back to the lamp studio.

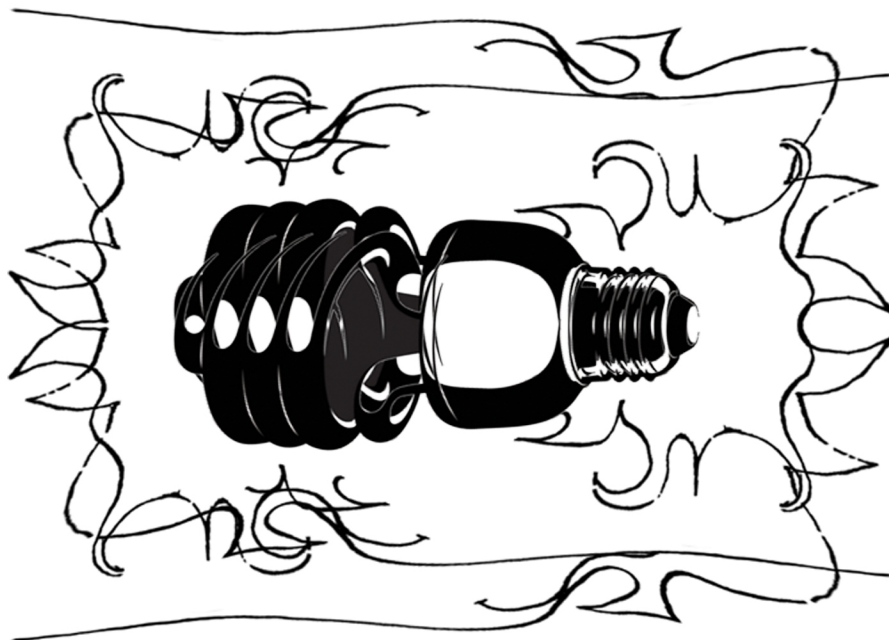
A cup of coffee and two eggs and toast later, I turned my head toward the doorway.

The tension caused by the walls in between me and the light bulbs, the lamp bodies, their circuits, and the wall sockets they were connected to was intensifying again. I wondered if my own awareness of each lamp system was remotely routing some of the electricity to my own nervous system.

In another attempt to stop worrying, I went out onto my stoop. Each item or web of detritus within my view seemed to buzz. Like roadkill, snack wrappers, rope, and nylon packaging bits littered the scene with once-relevant leftovers. Is there hope for a future that doesn't produce so much waste?

Somehow, even in the fresh air, it seemed I was plugged into a socket.

I picked up the littered objects at the bottom of my stoop and brought them into the studio.





Chapter 5

Production assumed residence in my arms. Assigning the new objects from outside as body parts, I already began to grow affectionate for my next lamp. This one would have legs, maybe take itself on a walk to its former bed outside.

This intimacy that had developed compared to friendship. I wanted to include the lamps in my daily rituals, share my world with them. At times it felt familial, like I could remain unconditionally close even if I was concerned or disappointed. The thinking about them, well, I suppose that could even be romantic.

Light streaked across my field of vision from a vague source. Already evening, I realized the new lamp had taken all day to build. My eyes burned with the sense I'd barely blinked. Past the inverted streak blinding part of my vision, I thought I could make out stripes on my skin.

Were these relationships healthy? Could they be negotiated by both sides? My paranoia returned, easily at home within me.

Coiled wires held my arms out like splints. The wires stretched across the floor, a root system combining the power for all the lamps.

Still realizing the scene, I tried to shake the feeling of paralysis. A muscle spasm in my arm helped me to flinch. My thumb came down on a smooth plastic morsel smaller than the digit's pad: a switch. I jerked and held my eyes wide open to take in the room's sudden glow.

-Brook Sinkinson Withrow

