In that first decade of the twenty-first century, the decade commonly known as The Noughties, (alluding not to being notoriously naughty, but rather to being notoriously an era of naught), a counterculture of anti-reading youth emerged. Dubbing their movement: Ill-lIT, the four founders began by renaming themselves names that could be spelled without knowing how: CJ, TJ, PJ AND DJ. If someone asked them what those letters stood for, they’d answer, defiantly:

“Nothing.”

Ill-lIT amused themselves for not only having
three consecutive L’s in their movement’s name (an impossibility in any language), but also for confusing the archaic reader with the L-like capital I’s, making the name seem more like a Roman numeral than a pronounceable word. (For an anti-reading group, they were quite adept at manipulating the common reader).

Reading, Ill-IIT decided, was an outdated skill: computers could recognize your voice and correct your spelling, and any book or article could be summarized by a sound-bite online. Reading had become even less necessary to learn than multiplication tables.

When adults asked the four rebels how they thought they’d survive without reading, the four laughed and said:

“What do you think is gonna happen? You think we’re gonna die from not reading?”

So they continued their struggle battling the literarchy by spray-painting graffiti of daggers rather than words, disseminating books on tape and wearing pins that bore blank surfaces, demonstrating the power of the wordless, unread message.

The four sat under the bridge one night, celebrating their excitement over their counter-literacy activities. TJ brought candy and soda from the store. PJ brought cookies and milk from home. CJ supplied the boom-box. DJ just stood around, still holding his can of green
spray-paint, which may or may not have been the source of his hair-color (it also could’ve been the extensive amount of time he spent in the chlorinated pool at the local YMCA—another favorite hangout for the members of Ill-lIT as, again, it spelled itself.)

The next morning, a police officer was completing his local patrol of the neighborhood and his routine stroll brought him under the bridge. There, amid puddles of stagnant rainwater mixed with under-bridge-type fluids, lay the four bodies of the counter-literates.

DJ, with his fluorescent hair, lay nose to spray can, his tongue sprawled out as green as his hair (he had not been able to read the large, bold, DO NOT INGEST warning on the bottle). CJ was still blotchy and swollen from a fatal allergic reaction to the almond extract in the chocolate bar he’d eaten, evidence of which could be observed at the corners of his mouth (he had not been able to read the MAY CONTAIN TRACES OF NUTS written in small letters underneath the ingredient listing on the wrapper). PJ’s hair stood on end and his eyes bulged exaggeratedly, having been electrocuted when he had tried to unplug the boom-box as he stood knee-deep in a puddle (fully unaware of the BEWARE ELECTRIC SHOCKS MAY OCCUR WITH LIQUID CONTACT label taped to the electric cord).
And finally, sweet TJ, the only one of the four who, classically, loved cookies dunked in milk; TJ, for whom PJ specifically dug out a milk carton and cookies from the recesses of his refrigerator and pantry, respectively; TJ, still milk-moustached and crumb-lipped though his body lay motionless, had expired four months after his milk had (its shelf-life was clearly marked, but TJ could not read GOOD UNTIL FEB 6 09).

The policeman, whose name was Levaquantario, a name that one most certainly had to know how to spell, shook his head in dismay at the evidence:

“If only they had known how to read!”