

how to act like a normal human being- mordi silver 2010

...from the guy who wrote such crap as AGOODMANINPIKESVILLE ("the raw pathos was breathtaking") comes a book about just trying to make sense of life.

HOW TO ACT LIKE A NORMAL HUMAN BEING



BY: MORDI SILVER 2010

*"Dear Sir or Madam, will you read my book?
It took me years to write, will you take a look?
It's based on a novel by a man named Lear
And I need a job, so I want to be a paperback writer,
Paperback writer.*

*It's the dirty story of a dirty man
And his clinging wife doesn't understand.
His son is working for the Daily Mail,
It's a steady job but he wants to be a paperback writer,
Paperback writer.*

Paperback writer (paperback writer)

*It's a thousand pages, give or take a few,
I'll be writing more in a week or two.
I can make it longer if you like the style,
I can change it round and I want to be a paperback writer,
Paperback writer.*

*If you really like it you can have the rights,
It could make a million for you overnight.
If you must return it, you can send it here
But I need a break and I want to be a paperback writer"*

(Lennon/McCartney)

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This is dedicated to like minded people. And I want to thank everyone who inspired me and helped me throughout my life. There are too many people to thank, and you probably know who you are.

Copywrite Jonathan Frager 2010

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Seasons in the Valley.

don't put on any airs when you're down on Rue Morgue Avenue...

-wise old folk proverb

Lloyd Metchnikoff never had his day in the sun, but he looks like he would have had quite a few already. This is the guy who looks so shiny; the guy who has “rise and fall” dramas daily; the guy who some overbearing mothers mistakenly wish their boys were like; the guy who really has no concept of reality; what more? It seems to me that, he doesn't ever care to register consequences at all because he lives his life like it's always at its climax... but even for all the pity in the world, he still looks surprisingly real.

Lloyd is just the archetypal fool and you got to cut him some slack or just ignore him. Because every normal person has been a fool at one point or another- and anyways, a classical saving grace of the fool is that he relies on his intuition more than his analytical abilities and for Lloyd that meant that he could just flow naturally anywhere which is kind of nice to be around...

Lloyd's just always the fool. And though he enjoyed the sort of attention that commands in the past, when he got out of a long break at his grandmother's last year, he felt very humbled and he wanted to find himself so he decided that California was the place he would start a life fresh and new.

Once the decision was made, it wasn't a matter of planning as much as it was of just watching the minutes go by as his departure time approached and his only responsibility was to make sure he got on the plane that flies from JFK to Burbank. To Lloyd, his whole life was full of loose ends, so he felt no need to start tying them up then.

So now he rents an apartment with some cash that he saved during last year from a clever but ultimately self defeating regimen of embezzlement of college scholarship money at the expense of student loans. He did that till he failed out of scholarship and loan money; at least he seems to actually find jobs fairly quick because he looks good in a suit and tie and that always gets the job if you know how to wear it and if the interviewer likes that kind of attitude; and if you talk politely and nicely— well there are a slew of things that contributed to Lloyd's hire-ability.

Now Lloyd is cool aside from the fact that he is retarded at random moments. He recently took up smoking again after not having one for eight years because he was wandering one evening in Venice and he saw a street musician playing some song he liked and he wanted to hang out and talk to the guy. So he bummed a cigarette to open a conversation and for some reason this now means he smokes a pack a day like it was 2002, when he had 25 year old lungs.

But that's just how he rolls. Cigarette to cigarette and job to job, collecting small severance pays from various places till this one day like all others.

He was standing and thinking on the corner of Kester and Clarks when he decided to smoke a cigarette. He found himself stumbling for some matches in his pocket when his elbow knocked a pole with a sign on it soliciting the loan officers to come out of the gutter for 75% commissions and that grabbed his attention and then he read “EXPERIENCE NOT NEEDED; IN FACT, NONE IS A PLUS.”

Well, Lloyd happened to have just got fired at Macy’s because he was stealing shoes for Amanda, the girl he loves back in New York and he got in a fight with someone who told on him. This was just an example of his attitude for work once he gets comfortable somewhere. So, you could figure loans to be perfect for him.

Lloyd was listening to Tupac’s “God Bless the Dead” as he tied his tie and he smoked a joint and waited for the clocks to strike 11:45. Then he rode a bus to some hole in the wall office building on Ventura Boulevard, the street where people who live at their parents lease Mercedes and super-cars.

The nineteen year old interviewer was impressed with our guy’s submissive respect so he hired him on the spot. He even took him for a ride in his new Tahoe for drinks when the clocks struck 1pm and they discussed the Tao of being a good Loan Officer.

The boy, Ron was imagining what it would be like to command such an individual who seemed to have so much potential emitting from his pores and Ron saw money signs and boy did he intend to fully take whatever he could.

And Lloyd was ready to be exploited because he understood that in this world, you either exploit or are exploited, and if you just play the bitch role patiently, you could at least hope to rise through the ranks by learning the tricks of the trade.

Lloyd was spacing out and he wondered how the baby-faced Ron was able to order drinks, and Ron responded, “If you dress sophisticated and order drinks in the afternoon, make a habit of tipping well, then no one cards you.” Lloyd asked him if most bartenders in L.A. “consider the skull painted on your corduroy jacket the mark of a cosmopolitan yuppie;” Ron didn’t get it, and Lloyd forget why he said that and he blamed the Patron.

So lesson number one was that Loan Officers drink Patron; they only smoke the finest weed; anything in a pill must be good for you except for ecstasy; and on Fridays for lunch, it may be appropriate to go to Chili’s to celebrate work that you’ve done.

Also, it seemed important to note that they dress in style because they are hustlers and gangster who try to be unique and because many of them think that they are artists and Machiavelli’s.

Ron was astute and he noticed that Lloyd’s style was only passable if he worked in the escrow department but he was just not a believable loan officer— Lloyd wore nice enough clothing that he got with his grandmother at Target before he left New York. But come on now! That Merona blue, pinstriped, oxford shirt looked 3 sizes too big and that

tie clashed with just about everything else he had on. So Lloyd was forced to acknowledge that he is not really a hustler even if he wanted a cut of a hustle.

The next Monday, Lloyd showed up at the office at 10 a.m. but only the receptionist was there. So Lana drank some coffee and smoked some cigarettes with Lloyd as she explained that this era was the worst times to make money since loan officering became an occupation in 2000, and no one has job security in these parts because of the market's unpredictability. But she predicted a total collapse of the whole mortgage system by 2008 because of all the disarray caused by their profession. Lloyd laughed and called her paranoid but he was crushing on her.

She was trying to tell him that this job wasn't for nice guys as much as it was for players. But although Lloyd was almost provocatively keeping his eyes on her's, he still didn't seem to heed her warning; but he never heeded any warnings about what he was doing because he was a space cadet with his mind usually obsessing on some distant memory; and he likes to just go with the flow till the flow won't have him anymore... and forces him to leave.

So the first thing Lloyd discovered at his new job was that this office looked like it would be a surprisingly nice social network. At 11, Vlad met Lloyd and Carlton, a preppy looking black dude who wore a Farakanian bowtie and Vlad gave them both the grand tour by introducing the staff at their firm as almost family because they all spend so much time together. On that particular day the office sounded much like a classical boiler room that Lloyd thought sounded like a heated moment at the United Nations.

From the start, the staff favored Lloyd over Carlton because Lloyd would laugh at jokes and Carlton kept a very straight face. Nobody came to show Carlton around except for an outcasted loan officer named Lionel who sympathized with Carlton's disadvantage by identifying through his own issue of dyslexia.

Lionel (a proud L.A. Cripp, who started off his professional career at a liquor store working for an abusive, blind, grandfatherly alcoholic from when he was twelve till five month ago when someone had his baby) gave Carlton beautiful encouragement and strategies to overcome disabilities. Carlton was polite for a few minutes but when he told Lionel that he was not dyslexic, Lionel became enraged thinking that he was being disrespected.

Lloyd was at the bottom of the company but everyone had to notice his great attitude towards the work. He was eager to please everyone and he was game to take everyone's abuse as ritualistic hazing. Some hustlers like working with those kinds of individuals. According to Vlad (and he knows because he grew up watching prohibition era gangster movies in Moscow and Cleveland,) "in the gangster mentality, it's always cool to get a classically Irish, Mike Sullivan working for you."

The guy who sat next to Lloyd for his first month would be Otis, and Otis never used his real name but he said he was from Chicago. He likes coming off looking like a 60-some

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year old, black musician; Vietnam Vet; two years sober; Christian; Morgan Freeman in Shawshank Redemption type of man.

As Lloyd and Otis dialed cold calls for hours they bonded in an eerie way. By the end of the first day, Lloyd even confessed to Otis that his biggest fear is that he may not only be insane, but deceptively incompetent.

Otis decided to take the young man under his wing. It was almost like Otis was projecting his fatherly nature onto Lloyd and Lloyd loved it so Lloyd drew funny pictures for Otis to hang up in his cube. Lloyd really wanted to impress Otis with how good he was at working. But at lunch, Otis urged Lloyd to take a break from the phones and gave him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and then they went their separate ways for the break.

Lloyd surpassed all expectations on his first day.

His instructions were to call up who ever he was told to and fill out applications for loans without having the party on the other end of line realize what he was doing. This meant he needed to get a social security number of the phone answerer and as many other's he could happen upon.

It's actually much easier than you'd think to get a social. First if you are working for a good broker, the company buys financial profiles with half socials and with that all you got to be is a drop creative. Lloyd got lucky by calling someone senile and he had a whole application for a mortgage filled out in no time so his confidence soared.

Carlton didn't fare as well. He made a few calls but apparently the guy gets frustrated very easily. The bosses were listening to him talking to lead:

Old Man: (Calmly) now I all I'm saying is that I told you guys to take me off your list.

Carlton: (drawing pictures of pigs shooting guns at naked women on the list of leads and real agitated) and I told you sir there isn't any list, listen motherfucker, I'm calling from your current lender's wholesale department!

So he was fired.

All the loan officers reintroduced themselves at the end of the day. They were anticipating that Lloyd would be able to provide them with healthy and viable applicants for loans in exchange for experience and education on how to one day become a loan officer like they were.

Lloyd knew nothing about the job so he accepted all the big talk as gospel and went home with a very fulfilled feeling that made him feel as if he was in love. He called his old friend George W. Tinsley from Baltimore to convince him to leave the lucrative career of

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the dental hygienist, to become a loan officer. George only laughed when he heard the voicemail.

That night, Lloyd went to sleep thinking about the three sharks who liked his potential. Otis thoughtfully told Lloyd about each: Deema, Darin, and Ely. Deema is a skinny 20 year old dude who though he wears red and blue power striped ties in the office, likes to consider himself as the Russian-American Eminem and he even records raps with his homey's after work. Darin is an eighties metal head who decided to resurrect his life after Metallica's St. Anger came out. And Ely was a clean cut but dishonorably discharged Israeli soldier who though he was very clever, could only write but he never learnt how to read.

Otis wisely advised Lloyd to choose Deema because that kid really had spunk. Lloyd said that at first he was intimidated by the serious looking kid but Deema always tells him "good job" and that really means a lot.

They all approached Lloyd on his second day giving grandiose praise, each in their own way. All of them wanted to hang out after work to go over things— Deema wanted to smoke pot; Darin wanted to drink beer; and Ely wanted to go work out.

Lloyd ended up with Deema who wowed Lloyd with his down to earth approach on loan telemarketing. Deema compared it to drug dealing and how word of mouth gets more clientele and interested customers are very motivated to do business because they are usually in a bind and that the key to being a great loan officer is having your consumer swear by you after you make a ton off him or her— and if you really make a lot of money, you send out flowers, whisky, or if you can, send them whatever they confessed to you to be their guilty pleasure.

From that bowl on, Lloyd was in a trance which he later recounted to George W.T., "it was like I was seven years old and the lights were blaring, and the mobs were screaming, and I was even cheering, all because Hitler just came to Nuremberg with some cool new laws!"

So lesson number two in loan officering: It's all about opening and closing. Both are equally important and there's something in the middle, too. There are a total of fourteen arbitrarily marked spots in the process that I'll call "Steps to Making Money Off of Other People Taking Loans."

It all starts with a phone call. The primary objective is to get the stranger you just called to be totally excited about you; like you are Jesus and you just came to town from Nazareth and you got some cool new laws to show off (don't juxtapose with my shit it's just a joke.)

In order to start off on the best foot, a good loan officer picks his best persona and a name that fits appropriately that he will stick to forever; and if at all possible he picks a short Anglo-Saxon persona so he could get a short name because those are easier to pronounce.

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During first contact, the loan officer is called an “apper” (named that because the goal is taking an application.) The apper is no better than the telemarketer, but in this industry, to be a good apper you got to be a wolf dressed like a financial advisor.

Follow up calls each function to systematically have the client become more submissive and gracious of your monumental financial genius as you con him/her to send you all their paper work so you could figure out how to make money off them by giving them a new mortgage or line of credit.

Some thrifty loan officers even like to use their “don’t calls” to call back from cell phones another time, as another person and offer great deals for Direct TV installation by calling 800-DIRECTTV and entering an access code.

Loan officers are multi-ethnic salesmen. To them, the Shylockian Usury of European Imperialism cannot survive in the US, because there is too much customer service places like the Better Business Bureau. Instead, they had to turn to outright scheming on random individual’s financial portfolios in order to make money from nowhere. They call unexpectant home owning consumers (America’s fill with them) and force a discussion on the properties of equity.

The trick is to talk quickly and repeat the common rebuttals as often as possible to make them sound more real.

Lloyd always wanted to be the best at whatever he did, but as people get to know him they usually notice something off. No one could explain it but though he always smiled appropriately, after a day or two, anyone could see the tremendous conflict in his soul.

In the mornings he would smoke cigarettes with whoever came in on time and when ever he got the chance, he would to flirt with Lana about how they could overdose on heroin one day and leave a note for her boyfriend explaining that they were Romeo and Juliet; and if they were coming off lonely nights, they liked to show each other the drawings that they colored on themselves.

After a week or so, he started to fit in more and that intangible out-of-placeness seem to be forgotten. Lloyd felt good at the office because he worked hard and he had coworkers to befriend. In fact, this little community really helped keep his life feeling balanced, at least for the first month of employment.

On the first day after Otis seemed to have vanished, Lloyd was very hungry in the afternoon and he had difficulties paying attention during his meeting with Ron. It was about a month in and Ron had come to realize that Lloyd’s realized potential for loan officering was not really quite like the hype.

The sharks wept when they realized that Lloyd was a dud. Ron spoke to Lloyd as if he wasn’t there,

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“He sounds good, but he doesn’t respond quick enough to folks on the phone. He makes good earnest arguments but then he pushes himself into corners by trying to explain too much and he’s too honest and all that is scaring costumers.”

Once Lloyd even told some lead that he had no faith in American Banks because the mortgage process had spun out of control. It was Lana’s fault for explaining that to him and some well dressed stranger had to take him out for an afternoon of brainwashing and weed smoking to teach him otherwise.

The stranger explained that money is not based on gold anymore but a complex calculation a country’s credit score. As Lloyd explained it to his neighbor one afternoon, the US has such good credit that it could co-sign mortgages for it’s citizens. All a person really needs is property for the government to back up a loan.

Even with that, Lloyd was having a hard time. Well, maybe when loans were easier he could have made it; but where he was—well nothing really lost... Lloyd decided that he was gonna continue trying to make a sale until he figured out how to get another job.

It got to the point where the bosses were prepared to offer Lloyd a position as a telemarketer before Lloyd volunteered to work for commissions only. They were just shocked; and Lloyd was just happy that he got to stay... it was so much better than New York anyways when he wanted to die... well it wasn’t even a memory anymore.

So good old Lloyd continued to show up on time. He would drink a lot of coffee, but he always made more than he took. He smiled and made people feel good and he never disrupted others during work time. Sometimes he’d doodle as he developed his and he seemed to be working hard.

Lloyd understood the consumer in a subconscious way that he very much identified with- he just knew how to spot the cowboys and cowgirls who wanted to stumble upon some easy money. He saw himself progressing but whenever he went for the close, everything seemed to slip away.

Once in a while one of the senior loan officers would secretly close his accounts but Lloyd didn’t care because he knew he couldn’t close anything, anyways. Lloyd always knew that something happened with his accounts when someone mysteriously took him to Chili’s—

Once even, when he made someone \$56,213 the top guys at that hole in the wall mortgage company were waiting for Lloyd after work in a black, stretched Hummer and they introduced themselves as the Israelis who started the company and also as people who started off exactly like Lloyd and they got him drunk and fucked up on ecstasy enough for him to confide that he secretly moved to L.A. to become an actor and he was beginning to get disappointed.

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Lloyd acted out a passionate but very confusing monologue from Henry V and the Israelis were really amused so they took him to a Beverly Hills Strip Club and they gave him 5 hundreds, 10 twenties, and 100 singles.

They got a VIP room and then Lloyd got a phone call from Amanda from Spain because she was able to call for free while she was shacking up with some dude she found on Couchsurfer.com who had a great big mansion with horses. Lloyd went outside to talk to her because he only actually gets to speak to Amanda a few times a year at random moments.

Since he is very much in love with her, he receives her words as if she's an oracle,

"So you're living in Los Angeles, huh, so when you become a famous actor you better not become a pill popping, weed smoking, L.A. alcoholic, and I hope you don't end up going to strip clubs and getting hookers, too! I tell you this because you, my friend are a naive and crazy one and I want you to succeed."

Lloyd wanted to tell Amanda about making someone \$56k, but he always ends up asking her if she loves him before he gets to say anything to her and he speculates that must be why she talks to him so seldom. Amanda still wasn't in love with him and she was a bit annoyed that her rare phone call had to be interrupted but she wished him a pleasant night.

Lloyd went back upstairs heartbroken like a pro and he sat shell-shocked all night rolling on that ecstasy. The Israelis sent over strippers to dance for Lloyd till he ran out of money. He looked really weird as he sat limp repeating "no love for good old Lloyd, nosiree" and he would have come off as creepy but he told the strippers that he was rolling.

Brea sat down next to Lloyd after she saw that he had no more cash. She told him that Rio De Janeiro was very lovely and the people have an amazing attitude and she said that she still loves her job after four years because it's not really work and Lloyd told her that he was watching a History Channel thing and he saw that in places of poverty everybody sleeps with everyone because a big part of the marriage/ownership situation is some sort of financial support, and when that's out of the question, sex has a whole different attitude.

She was speechless then but at 4 a.m., Brea gave Lloyd a phone number but he was confused about whether calling her would cost him money and the Israelites took him home before he could ask.

The next day, Lloyd was very different. He looked at ease as he ran back and forth to the fax machine, calling appraisers, and talking to everyone who answered the phone. It was a shame that overall his performance was more incompetent than ever.

At lunch Lloyd spoke with his father who was a military man so Lloyd thought that was why he never told him that he loved him. Lloyd has a chip on his shoulder whenever he talks to his dad because to him his son was always a nut-job from the start and he hates talking to his mother because she thinks he could do anything and she doesn't understand why he drifts around.

After work, Lloyd emailed Amanda a letter describing how he felt when he met her five years ago at his friend, George's dental assistant job from his NY days and how that encounter personifies Lloyd's whole existence in New York—just so many missed opportunities.

Amanda was 17, but she looked like she was 15 and she was pretending to be 18; wearing a short skirt working as a receptionist, Lloyd thought she was 18 and admitted that he was 26.

Now what was so appealing about Amanda was she had a tattoo of sheet music with green stars on her calf and Lloyd likes to think in symbols and he knew those symbols represent serenity to him on a very subconscious level, and though he would never get one himself Lloyd was always fascinated by tattoos.

So there was Amanda chatting with Lloyd at her desk when she admitted that she was attracted to him. Lloyd only heard that seldom despite his fairly attractive looks so he felt that there was something special about her and decided to fall in love and erect a pedestal for her in his head as the prettiest woman in New York. Lloyd recapped his experience in the email by starting off with the fact that though he never actually met up with Amanda again, they did exchange phone numbers and they were sort of each other's telephone sponsors through the crazy parts of life for about a year.

She's the person who had been able to explain to Lloyd the nature of his narcissistic depression. Usually Lloyd would laugh when therapists would point out that he was a narcissist, but Amanda was able to explain to him that the world does not revolve around him even in negative ways and that he had to learn how to be independent and less reliant on his family's support.

Their contact faded because Lloyd became pretty possessive of the regularity of the phone calls, and he even tried to strike up a phone sex conversation without any warning once; and those are just examples of Lloyd's attitude towards the phone conversation once he gets comfortable.

So calls became infrequent but still consistent enough to remain a fixture in Lloyd's fantasies but they continued to email each other. Amanda sometimes sends Lloyd music or links to funny things and Lloyd sends her pretty love letters, but she never really responds more than "ha ha" and that's after a while, especially when she reads them late.

Occasionally Lloyd sends her gifts; and even he can't explain why he does that, but he feels that his relationship with Amanda is his most complete relationship with any individual. Sure, he sent random gifts to random women all the time but Amanda really was special. He always seemed to lose touch with the other women for one reason or another. And along with that, he felt that even without his borderline personality disorder he would want to send her gifts.

Lloyd ended his letter by inviting Amanda to the Valley to live with him. He tried to be poetically realistic by stating, "life will be tough, but together we'd overcome everything." He had no expectation of her actually coming but he decided that it was worth the shot.

After a week more of lonely nights of Jack and Tylenol Pm, Lloyd was bummed out that he still didn't get a response to his latest correspondence, though that was pretty predictable. He arbitrarily decided that this meant that Amanda wouldn't play the correspondence game anymore and he must get over her no matter how hard it would be to manipulate his thoughts.

This time when he got drunk he didn't take any sedatives. Instead he mixed half a cup of coffee with half a cup of Jack and he walked two blocks from his apartment with \$60 to a strip-club that he always passed on his way to the supermarket.

He was there for twenty minutes, but that was enough time for a lap and he only really needed it for one song. So the second song Lloyd spent explaining to Allison, the stripper that coming to a place like the one they were at made him understand addiction in a new light; Allison smiled and acted charmed over Lloyd's eagerness for a dance and his nervously talkative nature afterwards and said that dancing is not really a job for her, it's more like fun.

And Lloyd agreed that it was fun for him too, but it's kind of strange that all the strippers he met in L.A. told him that stripping was not a job to them; he wondered if that statement was helping him not feel bad for her having to dance on him for money and then he remembered that he has judgmental tendencies and maybe that was why he assumed that most strippers wouldn't like the job— but don't worry about any of that if you happen to have a stripper on your lap now, because Lloyd just thinks too much.

After he spent his money, he went back home and he found himself drinking out of the bottle like a pirate and thinking that he was pill popping like Marilyn Monroe. He was fantasizing about dying and he faded to sleep thinking how his Amanda obsession had really damaged his work to the degree that he wasn't even making any phone calls and how earlier that day he even snapped at one of Deema's clients when he was suppose to be building Deema up as God's gift to the consumer. He decided that night that he was in the wrong business.

So it was the next day, Raffo, Paul, John Stanley and I all started working as telemarketers at the loan place. It was \$9/hour with chances for \$200 bonuses if loan

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officers made any sales from our leads, but the job was easy to get. Raffo was Armenian, but he spoke English like any other foreigner and Paul looked like he may really just be a Utah Mormon on Mission who got swept under California's capitalic tsunami and he had aspirations of making a career of this. John Stanley was 21 and he looked like a paler Jimi Hendrix with corn rows. We all were good buddies for the two month when we worked there before the company totally folded because we all liked to smoke weed and cigarettes throughout the day.

The first day, me, Paul, John Stanly and Raffo were sharing a blunt during our 10 o'clock smoke break in Raffo's Chrysler 300 and we were talking about Deema offering us extra money on the side to hand him the really good files and Raffo looked at me and said he saw me checking out Lana, and all I could be was bashful and Paul said that he also took a liking to her and the truth is I was just checking her out and if Paul was taking a liking then I guess he should take that liking. But Raffo said that one of his friends who works there said that Lana has a Russian fiancé who sells used cars and I don't know if Paul ever even approached her.

Then Lloyd knocks on the window. Lloyd looked familiar because he introduced himself to us when we got the tour of the place and we knew he worked with us. Paul got freaked out about being fired, but when he saw that we weren't really worried because it was just a telemarketing job, he calmed down.

Raffo rolled down the window and Lloyd asked if he could smoke with us. Raffo said he could but that we were listening to music and not talking. Lloyd was quiet but gracious.

After the blunt he went off to the end of the parking lot and he was writing something and then he went upstairs. Five minutes later, he came down with his knapsack and he just walked off into the smoggy horizon of Balboa and Ventura, and no one has seen him since.

We all went up stairs and Ron asked us if we noticed Lloyd leaving and we told him that we did. So he dramatically told us the Lloyd saga and that Lloyd was let go because he actually ruined a big loan because he had a nervous breakdown. As every employer in the past had it, it was hard to fire Lloyd because he always acted helpless and gracious when he was being fired, but the trick is to stand firm and wait a second for him to snap into the moving on mode.

A few days later, Deema found a note that Lloyd left in a file that looked like it could be worth \$20, 000. Deema read the neatly handwritten farewell to the office:

1/12/08

To My Wonderful Coworkers,

It's kind of shocking, but realizing that tomorrow I will not have a place to work has brought me to a maturity in my understanding of the world. I left New York at the

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expense of everything I had (which obviously wasn't too much) and I've been living at a near poverty level on and off for my past year in North Hollywood and it was worth it because this has brought me to a point of totally humility.

I only lament this town because I don't think I really took advantage of the commercial aspects of living in L.A. but it's really nice that it stays warm for most of the year. I guess my best option is to look for another place to work. I harbor no resentment to this wonderful company because I fully understand that I am an incompetent worker and that is why I'm sinking but I believe that it is symptomatic of my emotional turmoil.

I hope you all lead wonderful and fulfilling lives,

-Lloyd Metchnikoff

No one knew what to make of the letter; most people had no complaints about Lloyd at all, so there was a very intense feeling in the air. Deema quickly dialed Lloyd's phone number and he discovered that it was temporarily out of service.

I turned to Raffo and I remarked about one time seeing a car accident as I waited for a bus. Raffo said it sounds like Lloyd's gonna kill himself. And then we all were quiet and we all knew that we should go to Chili's to toast poor Lloyd.

Then the silence was broken by Lana saying that she moved from Toronto to Los Angeles because she wants to be a fashion designer. She was walking back to the call center with a very satisfied smile on her face as she led Amanda to meet the loan officers.

Everyone was shocked that such a pretty girl would be looking for Lloyd. Ely thinks he's a player so he took off a drop early for lunch and he drove Amanda to P.F. Chang's to explain that the consensus in the office is that Lloyd had killed himself and even if he didn't, they had no address for him because he never really got paid to be there.

that's the end of that... and now for;

A Post-Apocalyptic Amerikan Tale

if you live in a wasteland, you'll probably end up wasting away

Gus and Paul

Gus doesn't look like a Gus. He'd probably pass well as a Bob; but isn't Gus just a generic form of Bob in Hillbilly country. He likes Gus better than Gustav because he doesn't like being looked at like he's Russian just because his mother likes the name, and he says that he doesn't feel stupid in his name, but who could really imagine anyone really feeling stupid in their given name and it's not like the guy at the donut place has a

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better name and he couldn't say that he's ever encountered someone making fun of his name since kindergarten, when Paul said that Gus was a silly sounding name.

Gus is going to be totally dead in two months on his birthday. He's been planning the day like he was getting a tattoo. Every morning he woke up for the past year, he knew that he would be going out on his birthday. Gus wasn't really concerned about what others thought about him, especially after he was dead, so he wasn't considering Paul's suggestion to make the suicide look like it was an accident.

Gus was really set on dying in his sleep, so he decided that he should swallow a bottle of sleeping pills at a secret hotel. He told Paul that he would write a note for the maid expressing his sympathy to her for finding his dead body.

He couldn't die at Paul's place for three reasons:

The first reason was because he knew that although Paul accepted the fact that Gus was intent on this more than anything he ever was intent on before, he didn't trust that Paul wouldn't have a change of heart on the day, Paul was like that anyways, very fickle.

The second reason was because dying at someone's place is an imposition that Gus would never ask for, or even accept as an offer- hence even his note to the maid.

The last reason was that he really did want to die where he was born, and that wasn't California.

Gus and Paul were original friends. They met each other in kindergarten and happened to be beside each other till they graduated high school. In some ways the strong friendship impeded normal development that is expected to occur in the lives of people who are socially well adjusted.

Whenever either one would experience bone crushing defeat from the world, the other was there to listen to the entire meltdown and the comfort of sharing grief would put the issue to rest to be forgotten about or chronicled. Because of this, Paul and Gus neglected to learn ways to put out the fire of their failures; both of them feel that if they had any choices other than accepting the shit that happens in their lives they would love to adapt, but they can't really be objective when shit starts to hit a fan, even for the other.

Along with that, Paul and Gus were the only people who could tolerate each other. Most people who got to know Gus felt that he was too depressed for real life, and Paul talked so much that it was hard to find people who would continue to listen to his constant barrage of philosophical opinions especially considering that he was pretty callous and contradictory, saying anything even without always doing the proper research first; along with that Paul felt very insecure with just about anyone.

However, Paul is quick to recall that naive adolescent drug dealers always liked them; those kids seemed to always enjoy the cynical aura that surrounded Gus and Paul.

At the end of high school, Paul began experiencing a few joys in life, nothing excessive, but he would share it with Gus who at first didn't understand the concept of joy even though he remembered reading about it in English class. But after a while, Paul described enough of those types of instances for him to see that joy has something to do with fun, but that was all he could see.

Gus knew that different things make different people happy from TV; he just didn't know what could make him happy. He constantly told Paul that he felt like he just wanted pass time doing nothing because time never passes easily for him and he didn't want to exert any extra energy if time doesn't pass at least a little quicker during the exertion-

And who told him about time "going quicker?"

Paul was the one who demanded Gus to say if he had ever experienced an adrenalin rush, and Gus bashfully said he didn't know. Paul said that it wasn't an orgasm he was talking about, but a rush you felt when the stakes get raised. Gus then knew for sure that he'd never had experienced an adrenalin rush either and he even went skydiving once.

Paul once said to Gus outside a gas station where they were hanging out in 2001, "I don't know what makes me happy, either!"

Gus doesn't say much but Paul likes to exercise his vocal chords just in case, "Life's just a bitch, and you got to fuck it while you can... at least you could play guitar and do creative shit, I can't even write a fucking story and you sit down for a second and there it is, but you can't even find joy in that?"

Gus was very pleased to hear that Paul regarded his writing with respect. But Gus would have been very upset with Paul had he said that he even handed Gus's "Avalon" story in for a writing assignment and that his class and teacher really enjoyed it. That's because Gus felt that his art was really a therapy even if he is incapable of healing and that it should never be shown to the people.

So Paul is getting his life together slowly and almost passively and nowadays with some grace. Life definitely had its ups and downs; it had only been 2002 when Paul moved to Northridge solo to go to school at CSUN. But Paul had always made fairly wise decisions. CSUN wasn't the opportunity of a lifetime, but it was livable and he found loans and even some scholarships for his out of state tuition. He just realized it a few years after high school but he knew he should probably move away from his hometown in Virginia just because.

In preparation, he took a semester of community college so he could transfer to a University because otherwise he really couldn't figure out how to justify his wanderlust and up and move. Paul thought that the college experience would shape him into a well rounded individual immune to the pains cause by the fluidity of the world. And by going to classes and hooking up with as many sexual partners as possible he was learning how to be happy.

Gus didn't come along and instead tried to become a Buddhist for a few weeks and he just stayed in Virginia because the thought of leaving his town never even occurred to him as an option.

Gus fantasized for a minute about going and tagging along with Paul, but he knew that he couldn't live on a floor in a dormitory and he did not have enough will to get his own place; in fact until just last week he was living with his mom. Now he's sleeping on Paul's living room floor.

and Gloria

Paul and Gloria are on a purple air mattress with green sheets in Paul's pretty much empty room. And Gloria is about to turn into a pumpkin as soon as the clock strikes twelve.

Paul looks like John Cusack ten years ago but he's 25 years old. Gloria, also 25 looks like Catherine Zeta Jones, just with a bigger ass, in fact this couple looks a lot like that High Fidelity couple.

So they are on the bed and it's kind of late. Gloria is laying down smoking a cigarette and Paul is sitting up biting his nails because he finished his cigarette already and Gloria wants to get going after hers. Gloria's kind of a bitch, but Paul will never know that because he is totally in love with her.

Anyone who eavesdrops on them would know her secret immediately, and no matter how emotionally stunted and inexperienced Gus ever was, even he was able to notice that Gloria is bad news.

Gloria says to Paul that when he bites his nails he is revealing a sign of weakness in his personality. Although usually Paul finds observations like that from others to be quite invasive, when Gloria makes that statement it becomes almost endearing to the point that if a total stranger would now come up to him and tell him to stop biting his nails, he would probably thank him or her. So Paul quickly stops biting his nails and tells Gloria that he had a friend who told him that before, but he guessed that he just forgot.

Gloria asks Paul about his essay that he wants to send into the Valley Beat and if he's done it yet and Paul states that he is still thinking about the topic. Gloria seems to be perplexed because he has been discussing whether or not art should exist to educate or to entertain since they first met each other. Gloria is not bashful when she says that art's

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primary function is for entertainment, but Paul doesn't blame her because they were both raised on MTV and she's used to fucking cops.

Gloria tells Paul about a weekend work conference that she has in San Diego that she's taking her sister to, and she reminds him to catch up on his Marijuana Anonymous meetings. Paul deflates and counters by saying that he actually was offered some extra shifts at Macy's this weekend and Gloria reminds him about his rent coming up. Then she asks why he doesn't work more than he does.

They had a conversation but it got boring once you know the beginning— she says she wants him to take her out to dinner and he jokes something and she says that he's able-bodied and capable and he says that he I hates the economic system in the U.S. and then tries to get her to sleep over, and she tells him that she knows he's just gonna wake her up with his penis at 2am and she invites him to her parents for dinner and then gets going.

The morning comes. Paul wakes up by himself. Before he opens his eyes, he pretends Gloria is still in his bed and he turns his head and smiled at the imaginary woman. A small thought creeps into his head that Gloria should really have to stay overnight when she comes to visit him at night, but then he feels almost guilty for thinking that possessive thought and he opens his eyes with a look of pain on his face and he sneaks out of bed like a four year old trying to catch Santa eating the cookies, to check if Gus was still there. He sees Gus sleeping on the couch. And another day of clean living.....

...but what was so dirty about his other living? Paul smiles for a second and lights a cigarette and walks to the bathroom. He looks in the mirror and states his affirmations to life, he's happy, and he won't smoke pot. Paul answers his ringing phone and he tells his sister that he's still clean. Two month ago was a rock bottom when he was a hundred short on rent and sisters likes to check in to show their support.

So the day happened and the night is here...

and Emily

I want to write Emily looking like a 19 year old Courtney Love, with that grungy sex appeal, but Emily looks more like a shorter, blond Claire Danes, or maybe not shorter, but that's not the most important thing. Emily is onstage playing melancholy songs about breaking up with her boyfriend as Paul and Gloria walk into the lounge. Paul hands his guitar to Gloria and he heads to the bartender to get two Budweisers. He hands one to Gloria and they sit smiling at one another for a second or two.

Paul still doesn't know exactly why Gloria smiles so much at him when they go out, but long ago he decided to take it in stride and enjoy it. But she just likes to smile in public and this time she also had a new idea.

Her idea was random for the moment but she wanted to save up enough money to go to the Burning Man Festival that year. Paul seemed excited about the idea, too. But then she noticed Gus.

Ideas always excite Gloria. It's not that her intelligence is any greater than an average person, but she gets eureka moments that are really life-affirming... but she wasn't enjoy the grungy chick on the stage and when she saw Gus walking over she resisted changing her expression. Paul interpreted that to mean that Gloria was in such a good mood that she didn't even have to scowl at Gus like usual.

Gus to Paul, "I told you I would come. I had to see you play LA before I left." And to Gloria, "hey, how are you doing?" Gloria is still smiling daggers, "Well, I'm good, Gus, I'm shocked to see you outside, did you ever find a dealer who take food stamps yet?"

Paul looks a little confused, "Come on guys."

Gus, "It's fine, I'm gonna get a beer and enjoy the show." Gus walks away and watches Emily on stage.

Paul forgot about being annoyed when Gloria starts to smile her tongue at him and show him her boobs. Gloria is acting drunker than a Budweiser because of her antidepressants and her cocktail of mood stabilizers. When she gets into this mood she likes to commute back and forth from her body to see herself as some actress, like Gina Gershon or something; the sultry vixen bitch and she appreciates herself from a distance more that way. So Gloria has another Budweiser and tells her man that he was much better than that chick on stage.

Gloria says to Paul, "we got to get out of here after you play, I got work in the morning." Then she moves her chairs very close to Paul and sucks his ear; she does this for a while and it didn't really bother Paul till Emily tapped him on the shoulder and said that the MC announced his name.

Paul walks up to the stage with his finger in his ear. He plays a song that sounds like "Rape Me" and he quickly bored watching Gloria rubbing herself and he finishes up quickly.

Paul and Gloria run out of the club as fast as they can and they get into Gloria's car. Emily walks by them by herself, holding her guitar. Emily looks at Paul and Gloria. Paul doesn't notice her, but Gloria gives her a nasty look trying to be the best bitch she could be, and she asks Paul if he thinks she looks sexy when she's not smiling and Paul is in love with her so he sympathizes with her need to be a diva.

Emily walks to a bus stop and when she finally gets home, she walks into her empty apartment. She goes to the freezer and takes out two alcohols and mixes them. She turns on 90's grunge music and turns the lights off and sits down on her couch and lights a cigarette.

And that's the night. In the morning...

Gloria is putting on lipstick in Paul's grimy looking but clean enough bathroom. Both of them are yapping away at each other because neither one knew who interrupted who. Paul talks too much because he's neurotic and Gloria talks too much because she is always in the cycle of understanding life as she encounters—usually they get along well because they try not to listen to the content of what the other is saying, but they always pause at appropriate moments.

Gloria is annoyed because Paul gave her some hickies last night and she was trying not to make a big deal of it. But when Gloria refers to his writing as a hobby, Paul and Gloria were forced to realize the tension between the two of them and to discuss exactly what a hobby is; and what does it mean to be self righteous; and what is encouragement; and are all writers crazy, and who'd of guess that Stephen King is an alcoholic, or is he; and can people ever expect anything from anyone else?

Usually Gloria is an overpowering debater and she doesn't mind helping Paul understand the things that she says because Paul is her latest project, but she had to be running so she began writing while Paul was still talking and she taped the note on the fridge:

Tonight with my folks, I need you to be nice and social. This is not like being with my friends, and I need my parents to at least like you. My dad plays guitar, too, so at least you'll have something in common. Don't worry about how you look, my parents dig the Mormon boy thing. You think you could handle it?

Gloria makes a point to peck Paul on the cheek before she exits the apartment. After the door slams, Paul lies on his couch and closes his eyes for a second and stares at all of Gus's neatly packed possessions, including a black guitar case. He gets up and walks to the bathroom and puts on cleaning gloves.

Throughout the day, many people work at jobs, Emily is one of them and she is standing at the cash register at Starbucks. Her recently ex-boyfriend, Ely and his co-worker, Raffo are wearing Nordstrom suits and Armani sunglasses and they are in their bubble conversing about the Lakers standing in line while Emily is noticing them while she's taking an order.

These guys are loan officers (wikipedia the easiest stereotype,) and they think they are hustlers so they also make sure to talk about money in line and how smooth they are.

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Then Raffo and Ely are at the head of the line.

Emily: (smiling) Hey Ely, hey Raffo. How are the loans treating you today?

Ely: Hey Em, I'll have-

Emily: Two Venti Café Americana coming up.

Raffo and Ely: Thanks (pulling out their wallets)

Emily: (looking around) Put those back in your pockets.

Raffo: Thanks Blondey (and he walks away).

Ely: I got your messages...

Emily: (Looking down) Yeah, uh, I thought you may have wanted to come see me play last night.

Ely: You play every Wednesday... I got the messages before that, too.

Emily: Oh... I was very upset.

Ely: Actually, Lana got them.

Then Ely apologetically notices people in the line are getting impatient. So Emily serves and smiles at them and they walk out of the Starbucks and get into Raffo's Chrysler 300 and Ely makes his same joke about the car being the poor man's Bentley and Raffo socks him in the arm.

Emily couldn't see if Ely had the balls to punch his better built co-worker because her view was blocked by an SUV.

And the Chrysler 300 zooms past Gus who is walking home with a brown grocery bag. Gus notices Ely with his finger up his nose and a cigarette hanging out of his mouth and he thinks to himself what kind of buffoon that guy must be.

When he arrives, Paul opens the door with a cigarette hanging from his mouth and his finger up his nose. Gus walks inside Paul's apartment and he sees a proud collection of industrial strength cleansers lined up in three perfect rows on the counter. Paul had 2 coffees at Starbucks and he just came home to bask in his cleanliness and watch Californication on the internet.

Gus says something that Paul doesn't really hear and the episode ends. And then Paul turns to Gus and says that every now and then he needs a reality check- so he appreciates criticism. Gus never knows what to say when Paul opens a conversation talking weird

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like that. Paul states almost poetically, “you come to certain age where nothing really matters anymore and you just accept life for what it is!”

Gus stands up in a drunken stupor, not to be mistaken with excitement and says that he was writing about that in his short story, “A Birdcage in Avalon.”

Paul pulls out Gus’s dirty little pipe and smokes some of Gus’s weed and Gus almost jumps up in joy. Paul asks Gus if it would be conceivable to him to think that someone may actually be jealous of his abilities and then he totally digressed into saying lyrics of random songs in a rant-like fashion and Gus smoked a bowl.

Gus was excited because he was just at a doctor’s office and he got a prescription for marijuana. He actually stumbled on the opportunity after he decided to get a California I.D. just because he wanted to know what his would look like and he doesn’t have much to occupy his day so he usually followed through on his opportunities. When he mentioned his California ID to Paul’s neighbor, he was real jealous but he told him to get a pot card and then he could get much better deals and shop at a store.

Gus was originally reluctant to go for it, but then he decided that because the prescription would at least make it legal (as far as the state law goes) for him to buy and smoke weed, it was a worthwhile pursuit.

So he was real animated because he had a variety of fancy weed to smoke and also because he saw a chick that he liked. Gus never likes anyone so it really was a big deal for him. It wasn’t big enough for him to change his mind about dying, or even enough for him to actually try to ask her for coffee or something, but it was enough to make his day good.

This receptionist had a tattoo on her calf of a music staff with green stars instead of notes. Gus likes that sort of thing. And the cherry on top was now he even got to be stoned with his friend. And you better believe that Gus had recently saved up topics to discuss with Paul just for this occasion:

First, Gus opened by explaining that he never means to take credit for ideas that they spring boarded together, but to Paul it was a non-issue; second, why is credit for one’s own work so important even if you’re not trying to show it off; thirdly, what’s doubt- if you see the path- then you should just go on it, and if you’re not sure, then you should just feel around and get more information and just wait till you know what to do because life could only change slowly.

Paul was too stoned to tell the difference between each of Gus’s words so Gus pulls out a few bottles of alcohol, and some soda. Paul’s phone rings. He looks at the caller ID but doesn’t answer. Paul notices that it’s after 2 and he grabs two wine glasses and they drink a half bottle of Jack Daniels. He discovers that it’s been a shitty week for Gus; they revoked his medical assistance, he had to pay \$135 at the weed doctor, and he’s been having the nightmares again.

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Gus: ... about the dreams.

Gus's phone rings. He looks at it but doesn't answer.

Gus: Bill collectors.

Paul: Is suicide the answer?

Gus: (Southern accent) You of all people should understand

Paul: (Getting silly) Where'd you get that accent?

Gus: (Pause) Hey, I was thinking that people sure seem to be more self conscience if they think you think about them too much.

A few hours later, Gus and Paul are still both sitting on the couch drinking final drops from their own bottles of soda. Paul's phone rings and he breathes on his hand and smells it. Before the ringing stops, Gus comments how this era in his life feel very post-apocalyptic. Paul comments that this era in humanity feels the same way, but he may just be projecting his depression onto the world. He makes a face and composes himself. Gus says, "George Bush is a pretty post-apocalyptic type of leader and Paul puts his finger on his mouth for Gus to be quiet so he could answer the phone.

Paul: Gloria!

Gloria is at her office and she stands near a stairwell huddled on her cell phone.

Gloria: Hey baby, you sound real happy to hear from me... (smiling) yeah, yeah I had a good day... well I'll be there in forty-five minutes. Dress sharp, put on a nice tie, please... yeah, see you... (whispering) did you just say you love me?... you hug me? What does that mean... (sigh) oh, damn, well lay off the weed till after supper, would you?

And there was Paul, drunk in his apartment waiting to go to a big show, and it's a shame because he was really hyped up for this so...

Paul: Gussy Boy, I need you to leave... and take these bottles with you. I got to clean up quick now.

Gus: Paul, you don't love her, don't start with that bullshit.

Paul: Come on man, not now. Do I look drunk?

Gus: Look me in the eyes Pauly, (Paul looks him in the eyes) Sober as a clown, and you don't love her. She's not even going to stick around.

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Paul: I'm going to her parents tonight.

Gus: That means nothing, her parents just want to meet the fucker who fucks their daughter and she's tired of pushing it off.

Paul: Come on now, get out of here.

And then Paul was waiting for his ride...

Paul is waiting outside of his apartment dressed in a white shirt and a black tie. He is holding a bottle of wine and smoking a cigarette. Gloria pulls up. Paul gets in the car.

He notices that Gloria's dressed nicely in a short black skirt and she didn't say "hello" before she drives away quickly.

Gloria: My dad could be kind of scary, but you can't show any fear.

Paul: (Covering his mouth, he burps) come on, we aren't 16.

Gloria: Are you all alright? You smell... sick.

Paul: Just ate something bad.

Gloria: Oh shit, you're drunk, are you gonna be able to eat?

Paul: I'm gonna try.

Gloria: (Urgently) you have to eat or they'll think you're a junkie, my mom's a nurse.

Paul: I'll eat, I'll eat... why would they think I'm a junkie?

At Gloria's parent's house, Paul quickly noticed that Gloria's mom, Liz loves to talk to anyone about anything. Paul's first impression of Liz was that she likes to be flighty and change subjects randomly and he suddenly understood Gloria in a brand new light. Liz proudly told the tales of Gloria being a black belt in Karate and All Honor's in high school, and how she tailed off in college.

Paul enjoys talking to Liz and he lets her believe that she's a drink ahead of him. Liz told Paul that Gloria first described him as a country boy, and they shared a moment of pure laughter.

Al (Gloria's father), Gloria's sister, Beth, and Beth's friend Jill are sitting at a nice table staring at Paul and Gloria who are still standing at the doorway talking with Liz.

Finally, they sit down to a Thanksgiving banquet served by Liz and a Mexican girl that no one noticed was there till the salad that Gloria dropped disappeared. Beth drinks some

wine and laughs that Gloria is really the craziest girl in the world. She told a story about one of her boyfriends in high school playing football and being popular and going off to college and becoming a doctor on a TV show and Paul listened to the stories and then he noticed a high school photo on the wall of a very anorexic and gothic-looking Gloria.

And then a soufflé of an orange, squash-like vegetable is placed in front of him. Paul stomach suddenly becomes overwhelmed with everything he went through that day and he starts to regurgitate his Jack Daniels and he runs to the bathroom and relieves his esophagus.

Liz really wants to cover for this poor boy so she tries to get the table laughing about Gloria's past boyfriends and Jill calls Gloria a slut and Gloria yelled at her and then there was some awkward and quiet tension, but that broke quick to the awkward noises of Paul puking his brains out in the guest bathroom.

Then Liz starts to recall when Gloria was ten and she drew up a book about a ten year old princess cutting through culturally chauvinistic obstacles to save her small African village from the plague on all firstborn domesticated dogs and cats (reptiles and rodents were spared)- Paul giggled by the toilet when he heard that.

Al even tried yelling to Paul while he was in there, that he heard he plays a mean guitar, but Paul could'nt hear him because he was out for the night from the exhaustion.

an MA meeting

The next day Paul is tired but he made it a point to try to get back on the wagon so he's sitting at his Marijuana Anonymous meeting till it's his turn to talk and then he stands.

Paul: I'm Paul and I'm a pothead.

The group: Hi, Paul.

Paul's phone rings but he never answers it at his meeting. He's been relatively clean for a few months now and he found himself feeling very alienated from everything. He finds himself sitting at home and wasting more time than when he was smoking pot full time. And insult to injury, he feels that his girlfriend is becoming more distant than she used to be with him.

He doesn't think that he's as much fun as he used to be. "She went to San Diego with her sister and her sister's friend, Jill this weekend... I feel like I'm much more needy than I used to be also... My best friend from Virginia moved in with me last month. T still need Gloria but I really enjoy him around. Gloria thinks he is just a freeloader. But I've been begging him to move here so he can escape his stagnate life forever, but since he's got here, I always feel like I have to choose between him and my girlfriend... and I blame her for this because she's the one who stands in the way because she just doesn't like his sad vibes... I love her, but I guess I'm saying that I feel trapped into being different for

her... This is really an inarticulate way to put it, but that's the best I have. I don't think she loves me... and I'm not willing to ask her... I'm always fearful that she is leaving me... I know deep down that even when I don't smoke weed, I have the thought process of an addict, but that is all I know and that is the only process that feels healthy to me... Thank you... and everything I said about Gloria isn't true."

the Breakup

Outside of the building, right after the meeting, Paul is standing away from the group waiting for Gloria to pick him up after the meeting but he was surprised when she pulled up because for some reason he thought that her car was a police car. After Paul buckled his seatbelt, Gloria suddenly states that she has tried to save Paul because she saw something amazing in him- and she bows her head instantly and she calls him her failed bipolar project. Paul had no response.

Paul: Did you have good vacation in San Diego?

Gloria: It was a lot of work.

Paul: Sorry to hear that.

Gloria: Don't worry; my friends are taking me down to Rosarita this weekend... I haven't partied for quite a while.

Paul: Well, you'd invite me if you want me to come, right?

Gloria: You don't have money for the trip, we are going to be staying in a nice hotel, because we are finally at the stage of life where we could afford it... anyways you have work... don't feel bad...

Gloria drops Paul off a little way from his place so he could walk and smoke, but before she drove away she spoke to him by her window and reconfirmed that they were not together anymore and they should not see each other for a while.

Paul is taken aback by her final statement and is walking home with his head down smoking a cigarette. Foreshadowing enough, Emily is walking across the street outside her apartment doing the same. Emily looks up and waves at Paul, and Paul waives back.

Paul gets to think that at least he still got "it" whenever he sees Emily, but "it" wasn't good enough tonight. Emily walks up her stair way, goes into her house, pours from two bottles of alcohol and turns on Bush's second album, lights a cigarette, and turns off the light- well that's what Paul was imagining she was doing because,

the breakdown

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Paul is sitting in his room in a white, wooden rocking chair, listening to grunge, smoking cigarettes. Gus walks in the room. Paul lights a bowl and passes it. Gus says that Emily is not listening to Bush's second album; she's probably hanging out with a neighbor or something, because she has a pretty smile and she looks like she could make friends easily.

Paul: So I don't even know why we do it?

Gus: What?

Paul: Why are we here in California?

Gus: Because you think that it's all worth a shot.

Paul: (Sadly) Yeah...

Gus: (Sadly) yeah, today was bad, too. I'm running out of money so I booked my flight back... but it doesn't hurt as bad anymore and I just got to do what I got to do. You know, all morning, I've been using my memory of that receptionist's tattoo as a happy thought and it's been very helpful in making me feel better.

Paul: Shit, man... you do what you got to do... I'm glad you're here though.

Gus: (Taking a hit) Well, I kinda owed you this try before I kill myself.

Paul: Man, you don't owe me shit... how long do you got here?

Gus: 3 days...I got some oxycontin .

Paul: Well, I'm gonna stick with this, now that I have a tolerance again... (takes a hit)
Man, I wish you were just a repressed gay, then at least we would know what the answer is.

Gus: (Stoically) Me, too... I'm sorry I pawned your guitar. I don't know what I was thinking, but I guess I thought I would never see you again, and I know that's ridiculous, but I really wanted that cash so I could- I'm sorry I know it was selfish.

Paul: (Reassuringly) It's cool.

Emily and Paul

It's been two days since Paul has seen Gus and Paul is beginning to assume that Gus is in Virginia so he found himself lonely enough to hang out at that place where he gets to be on stage. Emily is on the stage playing a song and she messes up. She actually looks like she's gonna start crying mid set, and Paul's heart is really sympathizing with her. Paul is spacing out thinking about Gloria when he suddenly hears her say on the mic that, "life

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sucks! I'm just another fucking cliché, my boyfriend dumps me and I can't even deal with it."

Emily walks off the stage and the place seems to be clapping unenthusiastically. Paul is sitting alone at the bar looking sad, nursing a Budweiser. Emily composes herself and walks up to the bar and orders a cup of vodka and sits next to Paul. Paul tells Emily that in 1996 he discovered that life's a bitch.

Emily doesn't know if she should laugh yet. And Paul asks for a toast and Emily toasts very intensely, "we are always prostituting our shitty feelings into the perfect four chords! Not this time, I'm gonna say what I want to say!" (She sighs and continues) "Ely is a loan officer, you know what that means? He fucks people over for a living. He's the motherfucker who calls your grandmother during dinner and convinces them to sign over their home's equity to his company; promising intangible dreams that can- fuck it! I moved from Florida two years ago to be this...I didn't actually think that I would be a star here, but I thought life would be better at least... I said goodbye to my shitty community college, to my shitty friends to come here and be totally isolated... I said goodbye to my deadbeat family, who were better than this at least... Fuck LA! Fuck Hollywood! This is worst than any other fucking town because it cons us desperate artists here so we could pay a thousand dollars a month for a shithole to live in and watch our dreams never go anywhere!"

Paul didn't know if it was only appropriate to save his laughter for after they drink so he sort of cut her off there, toasted to being "rootless" and drank the rest of his beer. Their conversation is quick like a film noir movie without the cigarettes because you can't smoke inside anywhere in California.

Emily: So where's your doll tonight?

Paul: I don't know she's not my doll anymore.

Emily: Are you bummed about it?

Paul: Yeah, she's was everything I ever wanted and more.

Emily: She's pretty... and she hung off you like a nice trophy... I miss being a trophy.

Paul: (Looking down) She was only like that here, when she was being supportive... It was nice to have someone supportive of my shit, you know?

Emily: Well, I like to think that this place is pretty supportive; we all clap for each other.

Paul: Yeah, but we all clap because we have to.

Emily: So you clap because you have to?

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Paul: (Pause) Honesty's a virtue, right?

Emily: The virtue of the Jackass... you think we are all a bunch of losers?

Paul: Well, aren't we, sitting here showcasing our unappreciated talents...

Emily: My boyfriend left me because I'm a depressive. And I'm not pretty enough float him with my personality. And I don't like to rave.

Paul: Ain't life the bitch? All we wanted was someone to make us feel our lives are worthwhile, is that such a crime? I bet that role could be filled by anyone who likes to sit around listening to grunge, and likes to fuck to pass the time.

Emily: Why did Gloria leave you?

Paul: Well, I guess for the same reasons... I think I was too uneasy for her.

Emily: You always look pretty easy going.

Paul: Well not around her... I always thought she was going to leave me because she could do better than me... my heart always races too fast around her.

Emily: I sort of understand that. It confuses you into thinking you're in love... Why do they pick us to begin with?

Paul: We're novelties, artists, they need to see what it's like to puke up your insides and wear it on your sleeves... I should have just told her that it's just a dark and lonely place, where you do things to past the time.

Emily: You're cynical, I could really see you as someone's bipolar project... (touching her face) We got a lot in common; we both feel like losers and we both get dumped.

Paul: (Looking up and distancing himself inadvertently) yeah, now we are both lonely like we were before. But that's our eternal condition, right?! We know how to deal with it. We lived through it before, and we do it again. We are too old to kill ourselves with dignity.

Emily: (Touching his leg) we could keep each other company, you know? We won't have to live up to any expectations; we already know who we are.

Paul: That's comforting...

Emily downs her glass of vodka as if she expected Paul to be really excited.

Emily: there sure is comfort in having someone to sleep with! But I guess we are pretty easy.

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Paul: That sounds cool, and when I fuck you I could think about Gloria and you could think about-

Emily: (laugh) Ely. You don't got to say shit like that, you know? (Pause) Let's catch the bus before it's too late.

Paul finishes his beer quickly. Emily says goodbye to John Stanly who compliments her on her set.

It's now 5 in the morning and Emily and Paul have been sitting on Emily's couch for a while and they look like they are just dozing for a second before they start their drinking games another round. Emily suddenly jumps and nudges Paul.

Emily: Hey.

Paul: (smiling) Hey.

Emily: Was this just for last night?

Paul: (groggily) does it have to be?

Emily: (Kisses Paul's forehead) cool, you could get some sleep, I just got to get to work. I'll leave my phone number on the fridge. Lock up when you leave. Emily walks into the bathroom and closes the door and Paul falls back asleep.

a catalyst for change

Paul walks into his empty apartment. He imagines that Gus is packing his bag and unpacking them. He's been imagining Gus since a few days after he left so he was getting used to it. They walk into the bedroom and Gus sits on a beach chair and Paul sits in his rocking chair by the window. Gus asks Paul if he ever thinks about Virginia Beach anymore, Paul says that he always hates talking or thinking about that place but he always adds, "for now" when he's stoned.

Gus tells Paul how ironic life is that when Paul used to be getting stoned and drunk, Gus would not partake, and now that Paul's living clean, Gus is the one getting drunk and stoned. Paul smiles bashfully at the bag in Gus's hand and says, "well, man you're dead, right? What kind of weed did you bring over there?" Gus's face lights up and he says that he doesn't want Paul to feel like he's relapsing. Paul said that he "really hates talking or thinking about that for now."

Gus gets stoned and Paul closes his eyes. He tries to shed at least a tear, but he can't. He reaches in his pocket and pulls out Gus's pipe and smokes a bowl... and Paul tells Gus all about the wonderful aspects of new love and Gus listens but he can't exactly comprehend everything but it's more interesting than TV, unless it's American Idol, Journey Man, or Smallville and then they discuss the value of art and:

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Gus: (Sadly) Hey.

Paul: Hey, how's your day going so far?

Gus: It sucks.

Paul: Sorry man... you know what I find?

Gus: What?

Paul: Sometimes when my day sucks, I pretend that it doesn't.

Gus: Does that work?

Paul: Not really... but last night I went home with that chick from the open mic.

Gus: I thought you were working the stockroom for the sale?

Paul: I called in sick, I never do that stockroom shit so there was no problem, and I needed to just do something or I would've went insane.

Gus: Well I'm glad to see you forgetting Gloria.

Paul: Well, she's not forgotten... I still love her; it's just gonna be at least a week before I start trying to get back in touch with her.

Gus: Are you talking about Emily?

Paul: (smiling) Yeah.

Gus: She's more like you than Gloria, why don't you make that work?

Paul: You don't know Emily!

Gus: You sent me her CD a few months ago.

Paul: Well... as long as Gloria's not in the picture.

Gus: Man, you got an opportunity here, forget Gloria... I know how you are. You're already figuring out how to sabotage this thing.

Paul: Come on dude. Hit a bowl with me, it's been a long night.

Gus: (making a shocked face and smiling) this how you said you'd become a pothead again.

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Paul: Fuck it man, just till you leave... I want to enjoy my time with you; otherwise shit will feel too heavy.

Gus says to Paul that he looks so crazy whenever he's in love. Gus also says that he read that the brain uses the same neurons are for love and addiction, and isn't that kind of funny? Gus declares that he is not addicted to anything and he's sure of that because he has never loved anything or anybody; he can never get addicted because he's just passing time on death-row.

Paul was preparing for bed and he was about to turn on an episode of Rescue Me when his phone rings. He answers it.

Paul: Hi Ma... I just got back from work and I'm going to sleep... no, I'm still clean.

A year ago, Paul hit a sort of rock bottom when he didn't answer his mother's phone calls for a period of two months and his mom likes to check up on him periodically. His mom almost booked a flight to bring her son back from California but her ex-husband maxxed out their credit cards.

at Starbucks

Paul and Emily are sitting at a table outside drinking coffee and chain smoking. They have just decided that despite each other's flaws they would probably benefit very much from a sort of committed and romantic relationship.

They both decided to focus on self development. For example they mustn't indulge their neediness every single day because then their fire may burn too fast. And Paul wanted to figure out what he wanted his life to mean and how to pay off his student loans, and Emily wanted to get a steady gig on a new internet sitcom.

and the Martin guitar

One day during the following week, Emily and Paul got to Paul's place and saw Gus's guitar case melodramatically mailed to symbolize his death. Paul felt very grateful. He prepared to cry a tear and then nothing happened but he did feel sad. Paul tells Emily that he will forever hate Gloria for making Gus feel bad at his home...

so, just like the Martin will continue to be strummed, life continued and Emily and Paul drew tremendous strength from each other and they loved their moments together, but none would testify that they actually were in love because these folk don't believe in love anymore they were indulging in quiet commitment.

So Paul became an assistant manager at Macy's by a series of lucky breaks and Emily got a monumental phone call that she was in the Writer's Guild and it's getting her parts on many sitcoms this upcoming season.

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but guess whose back from... Burning Man!

Gloria's never done mushrooms before because she was used to fucking cops who told her horror stories about mushrooms and other drugs. In fact, one cop-fuck-boy told her an Eminem song about mushrooms as his personal story. Well, she also never knew that the world was ending in four years till she met that nice guy who said that the Incan spirit lived in him... and wanted to get into her. So Gloria ended up missing her ride to LA because this guy was guiding her through some monumental personal moments when Jill's neighbor's friend was looking for her to bring her home.

Now Gloria's guide had to get back to his job as a barista in Seattle, but he found her a ride to L.A. and by the end of the ride, these friendly folk offered Gloria mushrooms as they were just coming down and they were swearing by that batch so Gloria ended up tripping out in a Tarzana motel room solo where she discovered herself and she discovered that the only man she has ever loved was Paul; he didn't guide or molest and he was nice and polite and she calls him and he answers and she's coming over and Paul's just cancelled plans with Emily to be with Gloria who's bringing a Wes Anderson movie.

But Paul is his own man today. Paul has been improving and now he's even got a spine. Paul is fiercely loving his moments with Emily and Gloria just might be bi-polar and he wants nothing to do with her... aside from resolving this business of her calling him and trying to get back into his life.

But when she arrives, Gloria is down and out and she amuses Paul by telling him that she just was on mushrooms. Her thoughts sound burnt out and tired but she appears serene and happy. When she comes inside and notices Gus is gone and his Martin is there and she realizes that Gus is dead, she even feels a little guilty for being mean to him. She claims that she honestly thought that being mean was the best way to teach Gus that his desires for suicide were inappropriate; but now she was mature enough to offer her respects.

And then she breaks down crying over her life and Gus's (she reveals that she has had similar trauma in high school when all her friends were killing themselves.) This emotional display lures Paul back to thinking about being in love with her. And then Gloria pulls out a bottle of Jack from her purse and they drank like American poets. And that idea really gets them off.

So it really was quite inevitable. Gloria told Paul to dial Emily's number and he did. He told Emily that Gloria was back in town and that they got to end their thing and Emily was shocked but she decided to get over Paul as quick as possible because just moments before that she found out that she's got a part on an HBO show for a year, but before she could tell him that, Gloria hung up the phone.

That was the night. Now this is the morning...

Gloria wakes up at 6 a.m. and showers. She told Paul to continue sleeping and then she vanishes from his life forever. When he desperately called Beth, she just told him that Gloria moved to New York and that Paul should have known that she's "good-bye-polar."

Paul didn't laugh even though he knew that was what Beth was soliciting. Beth tries to make Paul feel better by telling him that the mania runs deep in their family and that she even calls her dad a bi-polar bear and then she said more of Gloria's wacky adventures with guys and the climax was a story of how she once brought home a sixty year old southern congress man home for dinner and he argued with the Bear about the Rowe v. Wade and they both really didn't have much content in their arguments though it got real heated.

So life melted back to that repetitive blur and one day, Paul found himself walking to the bus stop and that's when he realized that he just had to get over the two women that he loved. He met a fifty-some year old El Salvadorian lady who was waiting for the bus, too. Paul asked how long she thought it would take for the 164 to come. The lady guessed twenty more minutes. Paul made a joke and she laughed and they both sat down on the bench. She sighed and Paul gave her a cigarette, "life's a bitch," the lady started laughing really hard, "you are such a young boy, what happen, did some lady leave you?"

Paul was embarrassed but he wasn't a liar so he didn't answer. The lady sighed, "my husband has cancer, and he's driving me crazy... it's so hard when someone you loved once is dying, and he is never comfortable..."

Paul told the lady that her husband should get some medicinal marijuana. The lady laughed, "he would never smoke that stuff and his liver can't handle pills or alcohol... he's such a pain in the ass and I'll tell you stranger to stranger, I wish he'd die already."

That was when the bus came and they threw their cigarettes out and boarded.

epilogue

Paul didn't feel better for two weeks and then he walked over to Emily's place but he found out that she may have moved to the Hills.

The Reclamation of Amanda

Sitting on a blanket under a tree in Madrid with a Spanish gentleman smiling at her, Amanda puts it this way, "the abyss is so enticing; it feels like total comfort and introverted euphoria in a little cocoon, it was originally invented by lovers- but it's the junkies who gave it a bad rap... (turning to the adorable man)

"these past few weeks have been so good, and I feel like if I ever come back to this place, I'll really be looking forward to knowing you again... I know, I know, if it

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feels so good how could it be bad for me, but I'm not meant to live here, I was only meant to travel here even if it's so lovely, this is just becoming an... abyss."

The Spanish gentleman is still charmed, but he only talks when he feels it to be completely necessary. Though they have been together most of the time for the last two weeks, the last thing he said to Amanda was the day before, "I am a offspring of conquistador like you."

The gentleman won't talk Spanish to Amanda because he doesn't like her accent, but he refills her wine glass and her water glass in a fatherly way and Amanda sips the water and kisses her friend on the cheek.

Amanda is in Spain now and I would describe Spain more but she didn't take pictures and I have never been there. But she's there planning what to do with her life now that she has graduated college, moved out of her parent's home completely, and has traveled her fill. This past year was kind of rough, but very necessary for her.

She made some very major decisions during that period. She flirted with the idea of marrying her boyfriend who oddly enough wouldn't stop asking her, but then she decided to break up with him a few weeks before graduation because there really wasn't anything that held them through that school year aside from the fact that they were next door neighbors for years and they liked to smoke weed. And as they got closer and closer to graduating they felt less like neighbors and more like... the past.

Amanda smokes American Spirits and is listening to a RiotFolk mix cd that this dude she used to know randomly mailed her and she's also wearing the Oxford Riding Boots that he sent with it. Throughout the years, Lloyd Braun must have sent thousands of dollars of gifts to Amanda, so she always updates him with her address and he's just the dude who sends her things.

Amanda always sings along to cd's when she's by herself and she is drinking wine, "I never wanted to give you rock star babies and I never want to be your cheerleader."

She gave up listening to the lyrics in mixes because she never liked to find hidden meanings so she didn't know what she was singing and the truth was, she felt that this mix was really sub par and the only reason it was on was because she needed the noise because she was missing her father who had died seven years before.

She and her father used to listen to Van Halen and compare it to Led Zeppelin together and listen to Stevie Ray Vaughn and compare that to Clapton; but there was none of that in Spain, but that was no big deal. She was remembering when she was 13, and he took her to see Van Halen on a reunion tour with David Lee Roth and Sammy Hagar.

Jeff used to try to teach Amanda whatever he could. He would talk to her in corny riddles which made him look like a crazy character but Amanda loved the nuances of his persona. Amanda's mom used to blame him for making her into a weirdo because

Amanda used to copy Jeff's behavior. But boy did he enjoy fucking with Amanda's momma, way too much to stop teaching her weird ways. Jeff used to say, "sometimes people neurotically think about themselves and sometimes about others, but we pay no mind."

Jeff was also into getting tattoos. In 1999, it seemed that every Saturday morning with his coffee in one hand and his cigarette in the other he would proudly show the art that he put on his body. He mostly did little things on his back and his arms and he used to tell Amanda how bad it hurt to get them on his ribs and neck, close to his armpit, and on his chest. But as a little girl, she just looked in awe at the quasi-stranger who would visit so quickly, and act so flashy.

She always called her father Jeff, because her mom's new husband was Dad. Jeff wasn't there till she was seven and he was Italian and no matter how close they ever were, he wasn't Dad.

Amanda was even reluctant to get in his car when he kidnapped her when she was 15 and took her cross country to bars with live bands and different national parks. Her most cherished memory of Jeff came on the last night of the trip, when they shared a 40 of malt liquor, and a pack of cigarettes, but Jeff smoked most of them.

Jeff also explained to Amanda what love is, and though she never repeated it to anyone, that was the definition she kept forever. The following day, the police arrested Jeff and sent Amanda back home with her mom and step dad. Her step dad reassured her that Jeff would make bail quite quickly and he did.

When Jeff killed himself, it had nothing to do with her. Instead he wrote that it was because he had a brain tumor and that he decided to leave the world with the most dignity he could grab. He pawned his classic Gibson so someone else could have it and went to Wal-Mart and bought a hunting rifle.

There was a bloody picture of Amanda and Jeff that Amanda pocketed when she discovered her father dead a week after the trigger was pulled, just a mess on the couch.

On the back of the picture Jeff wrote, *"it's not you, it's me- that's a joke- I got a tumor in my head- have a good life my lovely little girl."*

At the funeral were three of Jeff's fishing buddies and Amanda for an audience and services were presided over by a Vietnam Vet in a wheelchair. He spoke about Vietnam as Amanda got drunk with her biological father's friends. She had nothing to say at the pulpit, but she knew him better than anyone else in the world. And she was shocked that no one even mentioned the dishonorable discharge her mom told her about.

So recently Amanda decided that she had three priorities in life. First, her mind- it always was her deepest fear that she was going crazy. She decided that the trauma was rooted in some incident where this neighbor of her's just about raped her in her home

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when they were thirteen and he denied it and although it had been seven years, she wasn't sure if she ever got over it.

She decided to forget the negative feelings she had about the incident because it was only a destructive obsession, and even to repress the positive feelings of the empowerment of this molding her into the stronger and less naive person she was— and now the idea was neutral and neutral ideas are forgotten quickly in her head.

Second, her body was going to be a priority. She would do push ups and sit ups daily and instead of smoking as many cigarettes that she could roll, she would limit herself to two a day; but if need be, she'd allow herself to bum an unlimited number. Also, she decided to look for a yoga class when she finds her city to settle.

Third, finances! She never wanted to be tied to anyone. She once saw a History Channel show about people in poverty being less chauvinistic and less patriarchal about everything, including sex because money was virtually non-existent. So she decided the best way to make money a non-issue would be to have her own money.

With that settled, Amanda dug inside her bag and pulled out an astrology booklet that Lloyd sent her. It didn't have the cover because she used it for filters for cigarette and joints. She opened it and read the words with her lips but she consciously did not pay attention to the words. And then she wandered around the villa.

Sergio Velente was sleeping so well that Amanda went to check her email. She had a lot of mail because she gave out her email often but never actually checked it. She had many emails from the dude who sends her things. As she was reading some of the letters that Lloyd had sent her in chronological order, she was astonished to see that Lloyd seemed to be intensely in love with her. She kind of suspected that because every time he spoke to her he said that, but seeing it in writing turned out to be so much more overwhelming for her.

She thought about him and she thought about how he made her feel about herself and how she could make him feel about himself and she decided that it may be worthwhile to visit Los Angeles and to hang out with good old Lloyd. Though she had been shooing him away for years, Lloyd didn't come off too creepy for too much of an extended period of time and for the most part he didn't seem to have many self defeating behaviors. So it was decided, she would book her flight back to America to end up in Los Angeles where she would gather information about Lloyd and plot a plan.

She felt very satisfied on that. Now she had to decide what career she would pursue.

When Amanda was a little girl she wanted to be a teacher and a mommy. When she was ten, she wanted to be a nurse, and when she was fifteen she wanted to be a bartender and when she was eighteen she was bartender and a receptionist and then she wanted to be a therapist. She had a degree in Psychology. She didn't want to be in school for more than four more years so she decided that she would look for places to apply to school in the

city she chooses to settle. She had very good grades and she knew how to present herself, so she was satisfied with that. But she needed to know about Lloyd before she got too far along so she could plan him into her life.

She was satisfied with her plan. She knew that she didn't have much planning experience aside from making flights to random cities every once in a while, but she had faith in her abilities to take life however it may come. So without having as much as his address or even a working cell phone number, just a name of a company that Lloyd worked for and the work number he left her— Amanda packed up her bag and she left Sergio sleeping with a nice note and hitch-hiked in hopes of reaching Barcelona before her time in Spain was up.

When she got to JFK, Amanda bought Victor Frankl's book, and when she read him quoting Doshevsky "yes, a man could get used to anything, but don't ask us how," she laughed and remembered reading Camus' *The Stranger* with some emo-bum with grungy long blond hair and Cobain blue eyes in her sophomore year of high school so she explained it to the guy who was sitting next to her on her flight to Los Angeles.

It turned out that she was sitting next to a very nice, and seemingly educated young man who said he was a writer. She noticed his wedding ring and she felt very much at ease in talking to the man for their five hour flight. They didn't exchange names but they both shared their current dramas with each other and entertained each other's suggestions.

Before the flight was over, the man pulls out a classical looking deck of tarot cards. He exclaimed, I really dig identifying with the collective consciousness and I love seeing things as archetypal. Pick two cards, any two cards."

Amanda pulls two cards from the deck. Her power cards are Strength and the Fool. The man says, "You have a lot of power but be sure not to take advantage of it too much and you are starting fresh and new and you can make your life however you want it."

Amanda eats this shit up and pulls two more cards, the Hermit and the High Priestess. She is delighted.

The guy, "This tells me about your desires. Sometimes you don't have the energy to be social and you feel like you need distance from the drama in your life, but you always choose to overcome it because you know that you have infinite potential."

Two more pulled, and it's the Fool and the Strength card again, "And you will be very lucky in your mission.

Two more pulled, the Wheel of Fortune and the Magus, "Stay on your mission, but you'll have some detours, just go with them."

Amanda told the guy about the abyss and he said to enjoy those moments when they come. Then she said, "It so much easier to talk with a stranger about these things."

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The guy, “the best conversations are usually with strangers.”

Amanda looking at his ring, “You got any kids?”

The guy, “No, a cat.”

Amanda, “I’m just coming back from Spain.”

The guy, “Why were you there?”

Amanda, “I just graduated and I quit my job as an assistant for some sleazy social worker who does some community programs, and I broke up with my boyfriend and one of the quiet nights after everything died down, I thought about dying and I didn’t like it. So I needed to make a plan, but I couldn’t think straight where I was, so I went to Spain and I got this tattoo!” She points to her calf and shows a tattoo of a three music staves in the shape of an “A” and it had green stars instead of music notes, “I got this star last week.”

The plane lands and Amanda leaves off with the wisest things that she has ever heard, “life is the same joke over and over transposed into different events- I made that one up but also... if you are prone to depression you should know that it is something that needs to pass but you can make the wallowing time shorter each opportunity and the periods of happiness longer... and if anyone ever tells you that ‘life’s a bitch and you got to fuck it while you can’ you should say, ‘fuck bitching and live life’... and that’s it... oh wait, one more thing- validation is an internal thing, so don’t look for it anywhere else- I made that one up, too”.

Amanda arrives in Burbank and she spent her first night on someone’s couch and the next day she went to Ventura Boulevard to the place where Lloyd last said he worked. When she got there, she found out that Lloyd was gone. She also discovered that his phone number didn’t work anymore and his email account was closed. She went to Roman because one of Lloyd’s old coworkers, Ely said that Lloyd buys weed from Roman. But Roman hadn’t seen Lloyd either since he left the job.

Amanda ended up walking down the stairs of the almost rundown two story dirty white building by herself. She found herself in the parking lot smoking a cigarette when a white Hummer pulled up.

A Sephardi guy got out of the driver’s seat wearing Gucci sunglasses. His skinny Sephardi fiancé got out of the passenger’s side and she put on a pair of Gucci sunglasses, too. They both looked as if they were walking out of a magazine and up to Amanda but they narrowly passed her. The guy kissed the girl quickly and he went inside and the woman stood next to Amanda and texted something on her phone.

They stood quietly for a few minutes and Yossi came down the stairs. He also looks like a Sephardi or an Israeli and he walked up to his sister, “Michal! You waste so much of my time!”

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“Oh, Yossi, I just remembered that I have to get something from Leor, upstairs.” And she threw her cigarette down and went into the building. Yossi looked annoyed and then he acknowledged Amanda with a head nod, “you work in this building?”

Amanda, “No, I was looking for my friend who worked here last month, Lloyd Braun?”

Yossi looks credible, “It’s none of my business but he was a real moron. When we hired him, it was like he was this jolly, fat, man. Except he wasn’t fat, he just acted that way, you know how people act that way? Because he wanted to be treated that way. He was always letting us know that he knew he was a nothing and he didn’t want us to hold it against him... I think he really misplaced his efforts... I used to drive him somewhere every day after work, but he never told me where he lived.”

Amanda walked away after Michal and Yossi left. She didn’t know what to make of the report, aside from maybe thinking Lloyd was an insecure person. Eventually, she found a one bedroom apartment to share with her cousin’s friend and she signed a year’s lease.

She decided that she would spend up to one year looking for Lloyd. She took out her notebook and wrote January 8, 2008 on the top of the paper and titled the page: Places to Look for Lloyd. She smoked a bowl and then she opened a Yellow Pages and started calling doctor’s offices to see if she could get a job as a receptionist because she had some good references for that.

SEASONS IN THE VALLEY. II

DISCLAIMER FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY: THE FOLLOWING PIECE CONTAINS MUCH VULGARITY AND EVEN SOME HERESY. IF YOU ARE EASILY OFFENDED BY REFERENCES TO Sacrilegious notions, SATIRE OF DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED FOLK, PORNOGRAPHY, COCK-SUCKING, ANARCHISM, LESBIANS, STEALING FROM RETARDED PEOPLE, OR EVEN JUST FREE/PSYCHOTIC THOUGHT THEN I SUGGEST RATHER THAN THINKING MORE POORLY OF MY STORIES THIS IS THE END FOR YOU... I TOTALLY UNDERSTAND BECAUSE I FEEL THE SAME WAY ABOUT W. WHITMAN... AND THIS IS JUST A SENSATIONALISTIC STORY OF A DRUG BINGE ANYWAY.

THERE’S A FUNNY STORY ABOUT CAL RIPKEN FANS AFTER THIS, BUT NOTHING REALLY BIG HAPPENS ANYWAYS ...bye

IF YOU ARE LIKE ME, HOWEVER AND THIS DISCLAIMER LOOKS LIKE A JOKE AND IT JUST MAKES YOU WONDER WHY I’M SO SELF-CONSCIENCE ABOUT SOME STUPID STORY, THEN PLEASE READ. ... a tip I have found helpful for reading this, is to move your lips as you read and if something is funny or something outrageous or interesting happens you should read it out loud, even if no one is around and laugh with your stomach. NO RESPONSIBILITY WILL BE TAKEN IF YOU ARE TO BE OFFENDED OR IF YOU BECOME INSPIRED, IN FACT, I MAY DENY THAT I EVEN WROTE THIS. SO THIS IS WHERE IT GETS GOOD.

I was sitting on a bench outside of my friend’s place in Oakland smoking a cigarette. Upstairs in the apartment we were drinking some California Cabernet with the Seven Eleven silver medal award for 2006 and taking digital photographs of ourselves very quickly so we could watch ourselves like a movie because we still had a TV hooked up to the laptop. Someone remarked that California is better than Italy and I just finished

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saying that maybe I should paint a pinup calendar for 2009 when my phone rang. It was my boss and he wanted me to work the weekend shift at the group home in the Valley. So I went down stairs to ponder my decision.

I sat on a bench and blankly stared at the orange of the streetlights as I sipped my chamomile tea and popped some Excedrin, "I've found the place that I want to be right now, but alas, responsibility calls, and money's needed in order to survive, and fuck; I'll smoke these cigarettes and I'll walk to the bus", I thought when all of the sudden a car pulled up right in front of me.

And I wished she was an omen, because she would be a real pretty one, with her rosy nose and cherry lips. She smiled so brightly when I asked her how her night was going. She said, "better than yesterday". Her friend's mother or father just died in a car accident and she was going to be running to the airport in a minute to pick her up her friend's sister and her boyfriend from Florida. She asked me what I was up to and I told her that I was getting ready to go back to L.A. to go to work at this group home, so she kissed my cheek good luck and I started to walk to the station.

So now I was on a Greyhound for the next eight hours and I looked around, I was scanning for chicks, though I know it's kind of a creepy habit for red eye bus rides but if you hit the jackpot then who knows and anyways, one time when I was riding to Oakland, I saw a British chick with neon anarchist tattoos and she was pretty cool till she told me her only opinion was that the Velvet Underground is not really punk rock and I said, "see you just don't know everything" in a calm southern sounding slur.

and she said, "Fuck your opinion, Los Angeles has no culture"

and I said, "you clearly don't know what you're talking about, every American artist stops off there, and it beats the fuck out of Paris".

and she asked me if I had ever been to Paris and I ignored her.

So, I decided to listen to music when I discovered no one but the raggedly tired boarded my bus. I ate a half a brownie that my friend gave me but I didn't seriously expect to get higher than I perpetually am so I savored the chocolate and I swallowed some sedatives so I could sleep and enjoy my skipping cd more.

I started dreaming about numerology, and in my dream I couldn't comprehend how people could passionately attach symbolism to numbers, and I wondered if these folk felt certain ways about the decimal point. I drifted through numbers imagining them colorful and painted like on Sesame Street, and the Count was singing the numbers, "Ah von! Ah Two! Ah number three!" When we got to 27, the Count's wife snuck up from behind the Count and took him home like he was an Alzheimer's patient scheduled for his afternoon applesauce.

Recently, I had been thinking about turning twenty-seven and the magnitude of a new developmental stage that I'm highly anticipating. My friend, Georgie W. T. is turning twenty seven, too and he's finally being proactive about treating a bad bout of Post Traumatic he got from his older brother raping him since he was five and until he turned 15. I support him in that attitude noting that he'd been born under Kurt Cobain's sign and his time just may be approaching if we don't plot an intervention.

I also rededicated my next five years to pursue my professional, social, and carnal life more seriously. My professional career was pretty easy to commit to because I don't really have one; I also decided that I want to see my friends and family more because they help anchor my mind to the practical and their love makes me feel Country-Time-Lemonade-content; and I feel excited to think that I'm finally out of the marrying/monogamous mindset of my youth, shed like baby fat leaving my head quite liberated to casually sleep around.

Usually, my five year plans don't last more than a week but I was optimistic this time because I deduced my values from the sum of my action thus far.

I awoke when we entered Los Angeles. Off the bus, I wanted to test my luck with a chick at a bus stop because I felt I was coming from a lucky streak. I realized that women in LA don't like being hit on before 7 a.m. regardless of the pitch, and I don't think it'd be any different if I was driving a Mercedes so I walked home pissed at myself for breaking my charming streak.

On the way I called my dealer and left him an absurdly long message that I was back in town and when he wakes up he should bring me over something for the weekend. I stopped at Seven Eleven and I bought a cup of coffee and went to my apartment. I smoked some resin pieces that I found in a shot glass, listened to some music that I downloaded, smoked some cigarettes, and surfed some porn. Then I passed out for precisely thirty minutes just to be woken by a ringing phone and the upper that I swallowed right before I passed out.

I recognized Sally Mae's number and I took it as my morning cue to shower and shave. After that, I strolled out of the house and down to the Seven Eleven to pick up a coffee and a pack Gold Coast. I pulled a dirty coffee cup out of my bag and got my 99 cent refill and the Indian guy at the register hands me a photo of himself proudly standing post in front of his mighty collection of buy one get one free cigarettes he sells, "I'll give you a six pack of small Corona light bottles if you paint this for my fiancé back home in India."

I take the photo, and I take off my sunglasses, "two cartons of Gold Coast, man;"

he takes back his photo, "oh;"

sipping my coffee, "one carton, because the cost of the material;"

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he takes my quarters and puts them in the register.

“see you later”. So back on the road.

I like to walk to work in a half wander so I could make phone calls and space out. I called my dealer again and texted him a million more times telling him that I don't want to wake him, but he should call me when he gets up. When I passed a house that someone told me was Pete Rose's and I looked at the white Mercedes SUV in the driveway, I de'ja-vu-ed my old loan officer supervisor, Deema telling me that Pete Rose's son sold weed to pay for his major league dreams which were rudely actualized as minor league baseball reality as late as two years ago.

When I saw the 183 bus, I decided not to knock on the Rose's door and I rerouted to the fourteen-five block of Ventura to go to some Cannabis Club that I knew would sell to me even without papers. I pondered that, “every time I spend a few days smoking weed, I automatically start this zombie like feening as a junkie, and it usually occurs very subconsciously”.

So I got off on the 14500 block of Ventura. I walked up to the storefront and I saw a guy who looks like Iggy Pop standing next to his bike. I asked him if he was waiting for the man, and he said he was. Then I straight up asked him if he was Iggy Pop. He told me he wasn't. I popped some Excedrin and offered Iggy some, but he didn't want any. Then I asked him if he was from Detroit, he told me to, “cool it, I'm not Iggy Pop.” So I asked him if he knew why no one was at the store. He said that he doesn't know and maybe I should call them. I said I did already and ran to work.

On the bus, I felt bad for wasting so much time looking for weed and I vowed to never let substances control me like that again. I popped a Xanax and swigged some coffee and all the sudden I was a new person. I was focused.

So I arrived at work when I told them I would. The group home that I entered is an immaculately kept brand new tacky-tacky house. There is always a stocked refrigerator and there is cable on a big screen. Some LA Jewish philanthropist constantly donated old computers, toys, and money for trips (among many other random things) to this home like it was on a list or something and now it looks so brochure-like. Housed in this house are six developmentally disabled Orthodoxly Jewish males, ages 20-35. No one was there at the time and I just had a little work. My task was to prepare two Shabos meals for three group homes serving six apiece.

Velvel appeared from his office to smoke a cigarette with me and we spoke about the prospect of Soundgarden getting back together for a tour because he heard some DJ joking about that and then I told him about the wonderful women who live in Oakland. Then he told me that he has to do some errands and that I would be relieved from my post when the Shabos guys for that home come in and that we should play music sometime because he found an old bass for me to use.

I got the cooking directions out of a binder and I figured it down to a conveyor belt like efficiency. I made salmon, chicken, schnitzel, and loaf gefilte fish. I chopped up potatoes and onions and washed the gout of handfuls of random cow meat and made three bags filled with assorted beans labeled “chulent ingredients”- chulent is basically a traditional stew cooked in a crock-pot that many Orthodox Jews feast on during the lunch of Shabos, and I guess I’ll explain Shabos as the weekly Jewish day of rest, as in “and on the seventh day GOD didn’t watch TV”.

The whole time I was cooking I was wondering to myself why I would never cook at home, By the time everything was in the oven or bagged and put in the fridge, I concluded that I just may be content with Cliff bars and fast food unless I’m otherwise directed.

I was reading the paper when the door swung open and Andrew arrived off his yellow school bus. Andrew is thirty-two, or twenty-four, or seventy-one depending what he says that minute (I’m not even sure if most of the residents know how old they are) He is an attention seeker (like most people) who repeats random things he heard and mimics behavior soliciting some sort of approval. The sweet looking man/boy dresses like a little Ken doll with his yuppie looking sweater tied around his shoulders and he likes to pick trouble more than others because he can’t tell the difference between positive and negative attention. As he enters the home, he remarks in his calm Children of the Corn creepy (kid’s) voice, “I like the Celtics”.

I always ignore Andrew when he sounds like that because I’m deathly afraid that if I tried to follow him in a conversation, blood would start dripping out of my ears.

“Celtics are my favorite”... “Chicago Celtics are my favorite”... “Shaquile O’neil is my favorite”... “Celtics are my favorite”... “Shaquile O’neil is now on the Celtics and they are my favorite team and Shaquile O’neil is my favorite”...

“Here, take this”, I handed him some medication almost feeling guilty that I was just shutting him up, but after a half hour when our Xanaxes kicked in, it wasn’t so bad. Ari-ay came just about that time. I packed up my stuff and started heading to the other group home. It’s only a fifteen minute walk. On the way, I stopped by a Seven Eleven and got a refill and I realized that I just spent my last dollar for four days, and I called my dealer obsessively in between clicks from my family wishing me a good Shabos.

So I arrived at the group home I was to be stationed at for the next day. This house is probably ten years old and it’s in ok shape, but every time I enter this one I feel like it resembles a prison. It’s really a Club Med for these guys though, because they were always taught low expectations, they just don’t have water sports. This place is also for the Orthodoxly Jewish, developmentally disabled male, but the age range is 30-50. I guess when these guys age out of here, they’ll just go to a nursing home where they will finally be able to totally integrate with society like JFK once envisioned.

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Anthony was standing outside the house reading Michael Crichton. He's a tall, pale 40-some year old tall man from Israel with white hair and a big stomach. He left Israel ten years ago disgusted by the socio-economic corruption of the Israeli capitalistic perspective that spread during his lifetime, and also from a messy divorce that left him without visitation rights (I don't know what happened because I didn't get to the point in our relationship to ask terribly invasive and personal questions.)

When he got to America he was quite disappointed to learn that Israel was just modeling itself after the United States. He's currently working on a manifesto that illustrates exactly how the United States and Israel are exploiting the world while I simultaneously work on this manifesto mourning that there is nothing more for us to exploit.

So he's devoting five years of his life to research and to write this and if it doesn't sell he's going into business (but I never know what people mean when they say that; for example in this case, he's gonna being trying to sell this work for five years, and that's being in business, even if he fails.)

His voice will be the shiny finger pointing accusations written from the perspective of a Clancy-esque hero- he didn't decide who yet, but the guy will be staunchly anti-capitalism but certainly not anti-Semitic; he'll just dislike religious Jews and secular Israeli Jews and also all other secular Jews (but that's because he believes they are running the world.)

Anthony likes me because I professed my sympathies to the anarchist, and because I clean up at the end of my shift. He told me that there were only three guys home till tomorrow night and bid me a good weekend and he drove away in his white '92 Sentra.

When I opened the door, I saw David walk up to me. David is my favorite resident to work with because he has Adderal and I don't have health insurance. He's a Persian man in his 40's and he is mentally retarded with Attention Deficit Disorder and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. He loves to be doing an activity, and the most accepted activity he wants to do is clean things. His only issue is that due to his limited intelligence, he doesn't understand the correct hygiene for house cleaning. He doesn't wear gloves for anything and he touches everything he sees and he washes dishes and puts them away dirty.

So David walks outside onto the lawn and back up to me with his hands midchest, his head looking down and his eyes pointed at me, greeting me with an almost cautious posture, ready to run away at a moments notice, "Are we going to election day today?" and then there he was dusting the table before I got to smile that this was the first time in the year that I've known him that he actually asked that question at an appropriate moment in time and in fact, we should stroll to the local firehouse to vote in the primaries when they come to.

I'll get them to vote for some propositions for community colleges to stay \$15 a credit forever and I think we might as well make more Indian-land casinos if the cash that the

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state gets is substantial enough but I think that we, the public really can't be informed correctly on these issues due to propaganda at every juncture that taints the information we telephone to one another, plus those TV commercials are crazy... then there was David walking to the couch and dusting the couch, and then walking to the kitchen and dusting the refrigerator.

Then I heard the bathroom door slam and I realized that Mark was out of the shower and then he came outside and I noticed fresh drool running down his chin. Mark is 30ish and he thinks that he is in charge of the group home because his family knows the psychiatrist for everyone in the home.

Then David appeared again for a second and disappeared when Mark noticed him. Mark and David are roommates and they resemble Ernie and Bert in everything from the way their beds are set up to the way Mark snaps at David for leaving cookie crumbs in his bed. But outside of the bedroom they seemed to ignore each other.

Hilky was just standing by the window waiting for me to come inside. Hilky is thirty-two and some say he looks like an albino Yoda, and I agree. Hilky is a copier with Down's Syndrome, but luckily he talks so unclearly that he always sounds like he's grunting so the only thing we need to work on is his volume control sometimes when he feels ignored. He's really my favorite.

Mark walked by him holding an upside down empty bottle of shampoo for some reason that I don't know and Hilky grunted something at him. Mark changed from goofily smiley to preposterously furious, "I'm not gay, stop saying I'm gay!"

Hilky giggles and grunts.

Mark, "That's it! I'm calling Dr. Sherman!"

I came inside and sent Mark to put on clothing so he could talk to me man to man and when he came back I asked him what his problem was. He told me that Hilky is always pushing him around "and he doesn't listen!"

We stepped outside so I could smoke a cigarette and I lied to him softly, "you know I always give you special treatment, right?"

"Yeah," he shamefully said.

"Well I expect you to be able to act with a certain dignity for your post as leader of the group home. There are times when a leader must ignore his subjects or else he won't be able to do what we have to... like George Bush, for example, right now most of the country thinks he's a shmuck, but if he thought about that all day, how do you think his horseshoe throws would look? You think he wants his drinking buddies to see old Georgie Porgy preoccupied with what the country thinks about him? No! They don't want him depressed, they want him to tell jokes and do his impersonations like when

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Collin Powel was around, and George needs to crack that joke about Colin asking Condoleezza if she wants help ordering at KFC!"

Mark asked, "because they are black?"

"Yep, you think he'd be able to show his face at the oval office if he was always bitching- Mark, do you see why it's important to be able to ignore things? "

He smiles as he puts his fist together, "They just make me so mad!"

"Enough said! Go watch TV!"

Mark went to the TV room and I went to Mark's empty room and lifted up his heavy piggy bank. I shook out enough quarters for a coffee and a pack of cigarettes and put it back. Mark starts yelling from the other room, "Is someone touching my money?"

I walked up to Mark and asked him what the matter was and he said he heard his money move and I casually said I was making his bed and it fell, but I put it all back together again. He calmed down immediately and told me that he really wants Barak Obama to win the election. I put my hand on his shoulder and sympathetically said that I knew.

David, "I'm voting for Obomer"

Burt snaps, "Obama" and he stares a signature out of context wife-beater stare at Ernie.

David, "I'm for Bomer Obomer".

Mark throws his arms up at me, "What do you want me to do?!"

I walked up to the TV and turned it off because Shabos was starting and they were prohibited from doing pretty much anything except for eating on Shabos. David was upset, but Mark reminded them through grinded teeth that they all have to "keep Shabos." I told them that I would serve supper soon and David stopped saying "Obomer." I made up three plates for the guys and served them their meal and their meds. Afterwards they all retired to their rooms.

So everyone's passed out and I found myself restlessly pacing around the house walking into every room and focusing blankly on blank subjects and dropping down to do push ups till my arm cramped and then I stretched and I began to pace, "I'm gonna be here for two more fucking days" was not as much of a sigh as it was an apathetic calculation.

I was thinking about using the inevitable passing of time to meditate and grow as a person but I just ended up wandering into the office to the filing cabinet and took out the bin with all meds. "It's 8:00 o'clock and I have to take them to a synagogue at 10 tomorrow morning".

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Mark and some other dudes here take Geodone nightly and they pass out as soon as it kicks in. I think it's a replacement for Thorazene because this doesn't have the side affect of people stuck rubbing their finger together forever after (a tic that many who were administered Thorazene reported- I believe it's called tartive diskensia or something that rhymes with that). So I took the biggest dose available and went for a cigarette.

After a bit, I started thinking about the Dylan music video for "Subterranean Homesick Blues" and thinking that if I wasn't always stoned then I would have got my friend, Mark G. to recreate that gay old Ginsberg/Dylan thing with me and then I started feeling the rhythm of the song and then I was thinking about Seoul, the chick with the rosy nose and cherry lips (if I heard her name right, she was a pretty, little, white girl, with beautiful dark locks of hair framing her face and she wore a knitted hat and a puffy black coat and she wanted to be an actress), "Oh fairest Seoul, if that's really your name, my soul yearns for you and you don't look Korean and our conversation was so brief that I'll never know if you are Korean and you couldn't smoke a cigarette because of your bronchitis... Oh, how I wish to hold you at least for a week... I could hop around the town while you substitute teach for unfortunate urban youth, and you really do look like a pretty teacher I would have a crush on in any grade..."

And then I thought about calling Layla to tell her about Oakland but I only had one phone call a month to her and I'd rather spend it on a random confession of ultimate love and then I thought about Ezra's email of job listings all over LA related to my degree and interests...

And then like lightning my mood turned morose. I tried to decipher whether I was tired or hungry, but alas I just saw a dark and hideous purple and maroon cloud and then the worst wind just blew into the room and knocked down the lamp and broke the 5 year life light bulb and it released mercury in the air and my heart filled with sorrow and shame and guilt. My skull felt like it was imploding upon a realization that my soul disappeared and that I have no idea when it did but it must've been for a while because we always remember it this way.

And then I thought maybe it's like God disappeared and no one knows when, because it's always been this way and then I mocked myself for thinking about god-like he was real because I already *-well I go to pet your monkey and I get a face full of claws, I asked you who's that in the fireplace and you tell me Santa Claus, even the milkman comes in wearing a W. hat, and you ask why I don't live here, why do you have to ask me that?(*a* Bob Dylan song) knew that if a God of the Judeo-Christian persuasion ever existed, it could never- Ah fuck! I do not enjoy thinking about the technicalities of some fantasy based-Ah FUCK I ALREADY THOUGHT ABOUT THIS FOREVER AND I NEVER WANT TO THINK ABOUT THE PROSPECT OF A JUDEO CH*****

*****AND I
DON'T GIVE A FUCK*****.

Like protocol, I tried to think about Albert Camus to rid my mind of these thoughts by trying to set up some nihilistic self-comforting explanation for my mood swing but this strange compulsion overpowered my will to open my eyes so wide to see if they were going to fall out and they didn't and then I remember an interview with George W. where he said he enjoyed Albert Camus and he pronounced Camus' name wrong and I realized that Camus books are pretty short and written very simply.

Then I thought of an answer about religion I used to seek out- like an epiphany I understood how people could be intellectually satisfied with any religion (but even a Judeo-Christian one!) but out of my contempt to the yoke of the religious lifestyles I have seen, I tried my best to forget it and I'll swear I did. I went to the couch not trusting my irrational side not to do something stupid and I held my hands tightly together as I did some breathing patterns I learnt from watching my sister practice for giving birth.

Then I thought that I must be drugged or poisoned into this morbid state of being. Irrationally, negative emotions were just flooding my perception. I was just about resolved to accept this reality when like falling down a stairwell, I got tireder and tireder till I fell into to a dreamless dreamland on the front steps of the house.

Bzzzzzzzzzzzzzz (just like a dryer). Like clock work I wake up at six every morning and today was no different. Bzzzzzzzzzzzzzz, I knew there was no alarm clock. I stood up from the couch. My head felt like a puzzle freshly thrown from the box onto a table. I knew where I was and what I had to do for the day but that's just because I saw the picture on the box. Bzzzzzzzzzzzzzz, "is this gonna be happening all day?" I drank some water and Excedrin and made some moldy Jew brand instant coffee (I scooped out the mold.) I thought to myself that I didn't drink much alcohol in a little while and a little Bacardi and Smirnoff wouldn't be too bad in this coffee. So I thought about making a small party at my house so maybe I could start a new booze collection.

I went outside and watched the sun peak out from the moon and I smoked a few cigarettes pacing and recalling the horror of the night before. I was perfectly calm and cool now, I was just a little foggy but I wondered what could have possibly brought on such a drastic mood change. I retraced the steps of the following month. I recently got another job doing telemarketing; could that have messed up my equilibrium, but then I realized that I never actually went to the job; oh, the Geodone!

"Damn, what the fuck are they putting into these guys?"

And I remembered the time I found little Hilky strung out from his Geodone sitting on the floor of the hallway outside his room. He looked catatonic and he didn't respond to me as he always eagerly did. I brought him a cookie and opened his fingers so he could hold it and it just tumbled down his white buttoned down shirt, past his tzitzis strings (you'll have to look that one up yourself) and rolled off his dark slacks. After I smoked another cigarette, I was able to get him to standup by tugging on his arm till he had to choose to lose it or stand. Eventually the shrink took him off of the medication because they suspected it may cause him seizures.

I put out my cigarette and walked inside and that was when my feet went out from under me and my coffee spilled all over the carpet. I was able to stand back up but I don't believe I was aware of the coffee all over me till I happened by the empty cup on the floor a bit later.

When I came to, I drank some water and I took some Adderal and a caffeine pill. Then I got all the morning meds together and took one of David's Centrums Silvers (for after 40 but they feel fine to me- it's just silver shoe polish as opposed to orange,) cleaned the kitchen and the bathroom, did all my paperwork for that day and the next, and I crunched a whole bunch of sit ups.

After that, I went to Ernie and Burt's room and gave them their meds and told them to go back to sleep. When I exited, I saw Hilky walking to the kitchen in a daze (still fucked up from his new meds) to the refrigerator where he took out the peanut butter and a piece of bread, made a sandwich, and ate it in front of the cool breeze of the open freezer. I said good morning, and he awoke. I asked him what he had planned for the day and he grunted some grunts, I smiled and nodded my approval for his schedule, "After that sandwich, you may want to take a nap".

I heard him grunt, "K"!

At 10:30, I gathered the guys and we walked a few blocks to the synagogue. It is a great, big tan square building with a gate around it. We entered past a little security hut with no questions asked because we put Yarmulkes on our heads before we passed, so we cautiously looked over our shoulders to make sure that no Muslim fundamentalist followed us. We walked through the museum-like hallway passing silver goblets, old photographs of people at banquets, gold torah crowns, and big paintings of cantors and rabbis. We entered the sanctuary and sat in the back. My guys know that they are to be totally quiet during the service or we leave.

As the congregation began to sing, I heard Hilky's very un-melodic grunts and moans over everyone. I wanted the little to fellow sing because he was getting a real kick out of it. Then we all sat down and listened to the rabbi talk, I don't know what about because I wasn't listening, but it seemed like a classic Young Israel so I don't know how off I'd be by guessing that it comes down to how Israel needs us more than ever and how we all have to work on ourselves to attain the spiritual nirvana in order to fully appreciate some upcoming holiday, I think he was talking about Festivus but how could I be sure, there are so many Jewish holidays.

A fat guy with a beard sitting in front of David mischievously turned around and said hello. He whispered a few times that he knew David till David agreed. Then he playfully asked David if he had ever been to a Turkish prison. David said, "no, would you please?" very loudly.

I looked at David sternly and he shamefully looked at the speaker. Then the guy asked him if the food was good in a Turkish prison. David said, “would you please?” just as loud as before, but more annoyed.

I looked at the guy sternly and he shamefully looked up at the speaker.

After the service, Hilky proceeded to shake all the men’s hand in the building; Mark chatted with his father, the group home pediatrician/gynecologist, a bald man who looks like his son and wore a similar expression, and I think I saw him drooling, too; and I don’t know what the others were doing. I stuck around for five minutes and then got the guys together and we went to the Kiddush which is refreshments over a blessing after the services conclude.

It’s an all-you-can-eat buffet of cake, soda, and chulent. Hilky ran away from me so he could get lost in the crowd to fill his plate as many times as possible before I threw his plate out. Mark walked up to me with his plate stuck to his shirt glued on by a piece of cake. I took the plate off his chest and he grabbed it from me and told me it belonged to him. And David was cornered by the fat, bearded man now armed with a few shots of Chivas,

“All I want to know is how they treated you in the Turkish prison!”

David deferred to his catch phrase of disappointment, “would you please?” a few times before I rescued him and I asked the fat guy if he was lonely.

Then another fat guy started waddling over. I was thinking of something quick witted to get us out of there when he introduced himself as Hershel Weinstein. He said we were supposed to eat lunch at his house. So we followed him home ten minutes away from the synagogue. He didn’t talk much to me, but he seemed to get along with the guys and he listened to Mark speak about Dr. Sherman’s daughter’s wedding and how he was the only one in the group home invited including staff.

We approached Hershel’s massive abode and passed three Jaguars and a late model Mercedes before we got to the door. Hershel knocked on the door and a lovely looking brunet opened the door. So we all filed in like ducks in step wiping off our shoes on the mat and I observed Hershel’s seven beautiful, all brunet daughters fall into their chores as they harmoniously and chaotically reminded me of Charlie’s first chocolate factory. We sat around a beautifully set table and feasted on bread, fish, chicken, many different types of cold cuts, and of course more chulent. And they served strawberries and cake for desert.

At one point, Hershel was looking at me almost as if he was pretending that I wasn’t eating his food. I think he was noticing my “yehova” tat. He even asked Mark to pass him a chicken platter that was in front of me and he didn’t apologize when Mark spilled it on my lap.

When Hershel saw one of his daughters looking at me, he sent her to prepare some tea for him and he told me to take off my sunglasses and asked me if I was Jewish. I told him that my parents served bagels when I got the old snip-snip, but he didn't get any friendlier.

So after the meal, we left and Hilky walked out with a stack of Jane magazines. Hershel's pretty brunets were too polite to take them back and I was too uninterested to give a damn plus we needed more magazines back home. We passed the three Jaguars and the late model Mercedes and started to head back to the home. I was trying to figure out how to get back to the group home when Mark said he did this walk many times and he knows how to get us back. So Mark slowly led us down Burbank, past Laurel Canyon for thirty minutes insisting that he knew where he was going till we ended up at the North Hollywood Metro Station. I knew how to get back from there; it was only an hour walk.

We got back to the home around five and one of my coworkers, Stephan stopped by to pick up a bag he left at the home and he brought me a cup of coffee because this really was his shift and I was covering for him. Mark and David ran up to him and told him that he was scheduled to work. David repeated that forty times before I told him to go relax. So Ernie and Burt went to their room.

Hilky stood next to me as I chatted with Stephan, and every now and then Hilky grunted his two cents and we nodded our head affirmatively at him. Stephan is native to the Valley and he has the very experiences that make the Valley the cliché it's labeled. He is a 23 year old, tall, white guy who is very open and friendly and almost wise experience and he could engage in conversation on some things very well. He had a brown jacket with red, yellow, and orange stripes that I liked very much, but I decided not to steal it (don'tcha worry Ma, it was before I knew him and befriended him) because I would probably just look ridiculous wearing the coat since he is way bigger than me.

I was remarking to Stephan that I never really took the time to examine this place because it was just another gig for me. However, after a while, it has a way of starting to expect things from a worker. It started to expect me to work with allegiance to the spirit of the management's agenda; it started to expect me to have a certain honor and respect for my tasks at the group home.

But I'm not salaried, and they don't give me health insurance and I practically have to suck everyone's privates to get the amount of shifts that I want. Stephan looked at me confused. So I asked him where he was from and he said, "this area";

I said, "I guess that you must like this place".

"yeah, it's home. I went to Grant High School where they filmed that teenage dirt bag song."

I said, "Oh yeah? That Weezer- I mean Weatus song?"

He said, “yeah”.

After I told him what had happened that day thus far, Stephan pulled out his bowl and packed it deep with OG Kush TM (what he claimed to be the best pot ever grown). Stephan told Hilky that he should do something else and I didn’t get involved and when Hilky refused, Stephan led him to his room and turned on the TV. Like he just said “open sesame,” Hilky sat mesmerized by some cooking show and Stephan sidled out of the room and we went to the backyard. We smoked a bowl and he told me tales of growing up in LA, gambling in Vegas, and playing basketball at the same school as Gilbert Arinas from the Wizards.

After smoking three cigarettes, I stood up and stretched as Stephan packed another bowl. I was pretty stoned already but despite fully understanding that I didn’t need anymore to get high and knowing how the feen in me gets loose every time I smoke a little excessively, I decided not to feel disappointed at myself that I was too very much excited to smoke yet another bowl.

I decided to perceive the experience of the moment through the eyes of my 2 year old niece, who when I would approach her with five pacifiers one at a time she’d cry out in joy, “more! more! more!”

I comforted myself by thinking that Piaget probably felt the same way when he was smoking weed.

Then we spoke about the Laker girls; the most exciting celebrity sightings in the valley you’d ever hope for; what it’s like to be in a frat; how cool it would be to be an extra on commercials making \$300 for the day; driving to Colorado to drop of \$90,000 worth of marijuana to pay off \$3,000 out of \$30k+ because when you’re a drug dealer who is always being fronted product and you get robbed with a new shipment for everything you have, you still have to pay the guy back, even if your creditor was sitting there with you when it all went down, even if you’ve seen the guy gamble away tens of thousands in Vegas, you still have to pay him back; even if you got to become indentured.

That’s when I would think about Mexico; but he was thinking honorably like a Samari soldier who’s got to kill himself and that’s the difference between us: he has honor and I don’t think anything is worth dying for;

[we spoke about cont.] Vegas and it’s beauty, with it’s big flashy lights, it’s anything-goes attitude, it’s magnificent buildings and casinos and hotels and women and shows-his uncle is the president of AVN, the porn makers, and he gets to go to their Emmy’s and all the stars thought he and his entourage were big time producers! and casinos and casinos! and women and alcohol, too and you could walk outside with open alcohol and have as many cigarettes in your mouth that you may possibly want, in fact the guy at the door pours your beer out of your bottle and into a plastic cup when you leave any building, even at supermarkets and courthouses (but Stephon told me you can’t smoke cigarettes in the courtrooms unless court is in session because the room gets too

smokey). For some reason I don't foresee myself going to Vegas unless I happen to be getting married or something.

We entered the living room to find Hilky fucking the couch. He looked at us knowing that we had to disapprove but I think he reached the point in his lovemaking session that he could not stop even if he chose to. He just looked at us just slightly embarrassed like we were his wife and we just walked in on him fucking his secretary. So he continued to fuck the couch despite our cries of disgust.

Stephan went to check on Mark and David and he burst out laughing (I think "burst" maybe a Baltimore made-up word like "warsh") when he saw Mark turn off the TV and David leap from Mark's bed onto his bed because they didn't want the staff to know that they were breaking Shabos and Mark pleaded, "Please don't tell".

Well, this week, staff didn't really care about much of the job, and enforcing metaphysical superstitions based on a religion was not a high priority of mine either.

Stephan left and the guys warshed up and I served chicken and chulent to the guys and gave them their meds. I took out my computer to check my email after dinner and after everyone went to sleep. I didn't have any email so I went for a cigarette.

I had an outdated letter that Layla wrote me last year in my pocket and I read it again:

I can tell that you are in a better place right now. Dealing with major psychological issues such as addiction is never easy, but the struggle does get easier. I'm somewhat disappointed by each binge I see you on, but not too much. People fail, so then they just have to try again. Plus those things aren't about me.

I'll be your friend like you want me, but I'm not your "chick." I do read your emails which do get overwhelming at times but I only call you if I can and I think you need it. SO: give me the space I desire and then I'll be more inclined to want to hear from you.

PS. I swear you have a fetish for unavailable women. I watch you enough to know that."

I called Georgie W. T. and we spoke for a bit about a shrink who was gonna guide him from being totally stagnate and stuck in the same moment in his life as he always was to place a peace and functionality. We discussed personal milestones in such conflicts as basic trust versus the human instinct of shame and self doubt; peaceful self reliance versus the conditioned guilt of our youth; our competence versus our inferiority complexes; our battle against unnecessary conformity; whether or not life is worthwhile if we isolate ourselves; whether or not generating shit is better than staying comfortably stagnate; and whether or not we envision ourselves to become old and satisfied, or old and decrepit.

He told me about his new shrink a bit more and it sounded like the guy charges \$125 a pop to hypnotize patients to see life better by looking at life through the lenses of Erik

Eriksson's Developmental Psychology Theories. So skeptical about my friend's new shrink, I called Cloe to see if her dad knew about the guy and if he was worth the cash and she emailed her dad and handed the phone to Andy and he asked me, "How was your trip to Oakland?"

I responded with my trademark metronome cough from the bowl that Stephen left for me to smoke.

Andy laughs, "so you emailed me that you didn't let yourself feel guilty about smoking another bowl when you are already high despite knowing how you get to be a feen who's always seeking out more and more and how it doesn't make you higher".

Then I coughed again and ever so cleverly said, "You know why I was coughing?"

Andy smiled, "Yes".

With a long swishing noise, "I mean sometimes you just got to face it, all I want to do when I'm not stoned is jerk off and lay around the house doing nothing... or wait, is that I when I'm stoned or not stoned?"

Andy said, "dude, I really love you... but if your always doing the same thing and you're expecting different results then that's what we agreed means you're acting crazy... why don't you try something new like dating someone, you are totally capable and maybe you'll create a structure to sustain responsibilities like... who knows? driving a car, paying bills on time and mortgaging a house, and starting a family, I'm not upset and I don't want you to feel bad, but I do see you deteriorating at times and it's my duty to do something".

I was really stoned, "You're correct about your duties, but I always deteriorate and then regenerate it's just a matter endurance to how low it goes, every time the cycle runs I get better even if I don't try and I finally love life and I love the seconds and I understand much more about time and how life is long so sometimes you could get by better by keeping your mouth shut and then I say anything to anyone and how bad could that really be? I kind of want to not be neurotic anymore, but I've finally found a way to harness my neurosis like never before, but then again what's neurosis..."

Andy asked me why I choose to always live with a "fuck it all" attitude like I'm sinking and he told me that it makes me come off as a victim.

"do you know any words that rhyme with vagina or ecstasy?"

"no, we had this convo last week."

For a second I was thinking about the next time I would get depressed and how I could use it as an opportunity to figure out how to retain my dignity in trying times but I really should have listened to Andy's question, because it was good and I can't afford a shrink

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to tell me things like that, but I just answered that I'm fed up with wanting to have a long term relationship with just one lover (Andy reminded me that one's closer to two than none) and I also really believe it really doesn't matter if I ever make copious amounts of money because then I'd just buy copious amounts of shit and I don't really care for shit, anyways, "what are you up to?"

Andy said, "You know what, maybe you and Mark really are on to something about this living modestly thing and using just what you need rather than consuming".

I suddenly sincerely stated, "I don't live modestly, I just pay my bills late... Fuck modesty! I like things, I like nice things, I want a Mercedes, I really want to sell my writing, I'm totally into the material shit in this world and if I ever could to afford to party in Vegas I'm totally down for it and I would pawn my soul to the devil if I could only meet him".

Andy, "sounds like you're a maniac at a news conference."

I said, "That's another casualty in conversation."

Andy, who was almost confused said, "what does that mean?"

I said, "I just smoked a bowl and you know how I like to let my thoughts just wander the yard."

Andy sounding clever, "If they are in your head, do you have to clean up the shit they leave on the yard?"

I said, "true sometime I do that, but this time I really can't even remember what I said to try to make the words make sense, and yes I have to clean up their droppings and aliens are watching me like god recording my actions and my masturbations but they like me because I turned them onto opiates and Radiohead... so what are you up to? Yes, I got to clean the shit it litters in my life, and epiphany! If you don't scratch the itch it might go away!"

Andy told me that he was helping Cloe look for a job when he stumbled back onto the Craigslist Classifieds! (for sexual companionship!) He reported that our friend Odiela has seemed to've upped and left Baltimore and that the classifieds in other cities were much more graphic (and even offensive) than in LA. That made my mind wonder to a place where maybe there was a chance that this Babylon of a city has some sort of grace and that this city even courteously allows creeps to just roam with a graceful demeanor, and I began to feel so relieved to be in such a great town.

I went to sleep shortly after that thought and at two in the morning I woke to Tamir and his father, a tall, lanky, bald fellow with eye glasses and a white trim beard and a ponytail entering the home. His father came in and said he's dropping Tamir off, but he walked up to my laptop to see what was on the screen and I said "it's the Office, you could watch

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it on nbc.com and it plays Target's cover of hello/goodbye every four and a half minutes" and he said, "good night".

Hilky appeared from nowhere and sleepwalked Tamir's dad to the car.

Tamir is 33 and he is a moron and I'm operationally defining that to mean that he looks as if he were totally normal but he's really retarded even if he's smarter than he acts and he eavesdrops whenever he wants and the only way to deal with him is to openly tell him when you are pissed at him or when he says something stupid or when he's doing something annoying...

It sounds more abusive than it really is, but I explained to him that part of my job was to help the residents act normal so they don't ruin the really normal people's in their lives' realities, "you guys got to find normal things to do.

For example, Tamir, your father told you to watch sports because that's what normal men do, so you obsessively sit in front of the TV at every free moment leaning back in that chair by your bed, eating a sandwich that you commanded Hilky to make, watching ESPN like a good old boy,"

Tamir cheerily bursts out, "Heck yeah!"

And Hilky harmonized with a compound grunt.

I continued unphased, "and it sure is a fucking shame that you have the memory for details of a turtle or your dad could walk you around like you're a scorebook at least... and man, your vocabulary is straight out of the ninja turtles".

Tamir cheerily chimes up, "I don't watch that anymore because I'm too old... So cowabunga, dude! I'm gonna watch the game this week when I go back to my father's house, oh yeah! (he starts moving like he's dancing at a Snoopy Christmas party now) And then I'm gonna work in a Chinese sweat-"

I always try to walk away before I remember any of Tamir's words, so this time I just fell back asleep.

Hilky started to repeat, "too old."

I saw Mayra's car pull into the driveway at 8 on the dot when I was sitting on the front stoop and I stood up. Mayra's a sharply good looking, 21 year old Latino chick with a hooded sweatshirt that says, "rock me" on it, black spandex, and sneakers. She walked up the grass slowly and took off her Raybans when she got up to me. I took off my sunglasses for a few drags of my cigarette. And I noticed the bags under her eyes brought out many colors in her face lit by the L.A. morning sun, "I saw I Am Legend on the Imax!"

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I said, "You should have called me, I wanted to see it".

Mayra replies in her totally sexy accent, "I'll keep them in mind next time."

She entered the house first so I could check out her butt because she knows I like to do that whenever I could. I grabbed my bag and I started recapping the drama of the residents for the weekend and Mayra said, "see you later, man."

She was right, I had to be back at 4pm and she didn't have much sympathy for the previous shifts as she was starting her post-workout-supposed-to-be-at-church shift.

I arrived at my apartment at 8:30ish, Seven Eleven coffee in hand poised to be productive during my eight hour shift of off-time. Thinking about the power of positive thinking and Adderal, I made a point to notice that my building has many endearing qualities, for instance it's one of two consecutive pink buildings with pink flamingos hung up in their fronts.

It's a classic specimen of California architecture- a two-story square with an outdoor pool in the middle that's cleaned once a month in the spring and summer- it's a perfect Hotel California in my opinion and these are gonna be the places writers and artist are going to romanticize in twenty years, like Rancid sang about Oakland or even like Dylan sang about Oxford Town.

When I got home, I was dead set on posting a Craigslist personal ad. While I was walking, I totally envisioned it. I would write that "I'm a young 26 year old, good looking, stoned but brilliant artist starving in NoHo and I'm looking for someone with many attractive qualities to show me places in LA before I leave this neck of the woods and I always get along with a chick with cash who doesn't mind flipping the bill. I like all types of people with very attractive qualities and as long as you're over 23, I would probably at least sleep with you if we could do that safely".

As soon as my laptop booted up and I closed all the viral pop-ups on my screen, Leslie knocked on the door with her laptop in her arm. Leslie is my neighbor; she has a tall fit and tone body and short 90's peroxide blond hair as if she was totally imagined. I always see her in plain Hanes undershirts, hot second-hand jeans and flip flops, She has my sign on July 7 and she's a year older than me, she's got a Queen of Hearts on her shoulder and she told me everyone who comes to LA gets tattoos.

She has this sexy walk and you see her exotically Russian features whenever she laughs or drinks; she's a model and she doesn't laugh when I refer to her as a card carrying lesbian and her lovers are usually just like her (most of them even have "L" names) and I love seeing them and getting stoned with them and they prove to me when I'm looking down on myself that I don't just like pretty women because I only want to sleep with them.

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Leslie comes inside and she puts her laptop on this wooden chair I found three blocks away a few weeks before. She hooks a cord up to the big screen TV my brother is storing here and sits down next to me. Leslie coolly, “wanna smoke a bowl?!”

I totally just smiled pleased with the suggestion, “you got some herb?”

Leslie pulls out her bowl and packs it deep with some cronic- that’s the regular shit but for we transplants, it’s just good ol’ California buds, “How was your visit to your friends?”

I say, “I gave Benny and Rebecca the painting and they told me they think I could sell these in San Francisco at a gallery for \$400 a piece and this is just for the 16x20’s and they gave me a haircut!”

Leslie puts her hand in my hair and says, “I noticed, you were starting to look homeless” and then Leslie playfully accuses me, “look at you all clean and shiny now marketing yourself like a suave pro, so I take it that you didn’t find any cool new porn this week?”

I put my arm around Leslie and kissed her cheek, “Don’t worry, I’m still game to look at what you got.”

This week Leslie had been interested in two brunets and a blonde, all in their early twenties with very natural looking philosophies but she still ran the gamut and kept a very open mind as she surfed for new and exciting vaginas. She scrolled past some Latino-looking chicks, two black girls’ asses, and even a few of this pale looking pregnant teen.

For all it’s diversity, I couldn’t believe how Leslie’s picks were so tailored to a certain kind of beauty that I’m totally sympathetic to, a sensibility that doesn’t have a brand; but Leslie said I thought that because I was stoned and they were naked pictures of hot girls, and I said, “so what if that’s true?”

We discussed whether most people enjoy pornography, or if we are gluttons; we pondered, that if we like to get stoned, then mustn’t everyone like to get stoned; we spoke on the topic of being self-centered and whether we should feel shame for that trait or not; we debated whether most healthy individuals are really addicted to sex or were we just horny degenerates exploiting the relaxed and apath-

then Leslie asked me if I “wanna fuck?” and I should’ve seen it coming a mile away but it didn’t really matter and I was more than eager to take her up on that. I laughed so deeply when she said she hadn’t sucked cock since sixth grade, and I asked if she was being serious, and she said “I don’t know” very credibly.

After we fucked on the couch to our heart’s content Leslie made coffee just how I like it with my homemade coffee filter, my old Seven Eleven cups, water from the stove, and a shot of Bacardi, and a shot of Smirnoff, and she even put in a half of shot of Nightquil!

We sat there on the couch in love for those few hours, which really was nice. We were feeling really romantic just sitting and smoking our Gold Coasts consecutively, sipping our favorite coffee drink, listening to Blonde on Blonde on my computer and occasionally groping each other, but mostly we were listening to the stories of the song, “everybody knows that baby’s got new clothes,” Leslie hummed with Bobby D. and asked me why I would want to try it as a writer, especially given that even good writers are sort of creepy.

I laughed and took another hit and I said, “the guy who shot John Lennon had Salinger in his pocket. Now I love John Lennon’s persona and I would never want someone to kill anybody with my book, but I guess I’m looking for something like that.”

Leslie looked almost amazed and then she coyly asked, “are you seeking validity of your ideas through publication?”

I kept quiet to hear what she’d say next.

“Oh shit, I give you more credit than that, don’t you know personal validity will always elude your type of personality and if you ever get some of it, it will only be man-made, so you might as well make it yourself!”

I was insulted.

But she said, “Don’t worry, we still love you”.

“Whose we?”

“Me and you... I hope you do get published.”

At that point, I got uncomfortable and decided to change the topic. I said to Leslie almost giddily, “you’re not going after dick now, are you?”

Leslie stretched to show me her body and said, “It’s a pleasant novelty to have around.”

I stood up and emptied the ashtray, “well it’s pretty pleasant for me to be involved, I could probably do this once a week.”

Leslie gets up and says, “well, we’ll just have to see, won’t we, and next week I want to see some progress on our project.”

“I’ll find you a brunet that will make you slip on that puddle you’ll be standing in.”

Leslie smirked a trademark and grabbed her laptop and walked to open the door and turned around and smiled, “you totally have my confidence.”

As Leslie left, Judy the landlady peeked her head inside and I invited her in and asked if she minded if I smoked a cigarette and she didn't. She was telling me that the lean on the apartment will be lifted soon and court proceedings were coming to an end and she is in escrow but the judge wants the court appointed surrogate to evict anyone late on rent and I told her very friendly that the lawyer told me not to talk to her but I would anyway and I thanked her for the tip and promised to always pay my late fees.

As I was talking to her, I walked to the bathroom and started to shave and brush my teeth. She kept on talking about the drama with her ex-co-owner and the trouble she's had with him because he's a mood-swinging-cocaine-addicted psychopath. I really did want to hear the tale but I was to be getting dressed for work and my mood was beginning to swing so I excused Judy to go take a shower and wondered why she's not at the beach or doing something relaxing this Sunday.

After I cleaned up, I smoked a bowl and decided to wander a bit before work started, so I moseyed down Whitsett to Magnolia and then to Coldwater, and I saw a Ralph's supermarket. I don't go food shopping often so being there was sort of a novelty to me so I went inside to get a Cliff bar for 99 cents (Seven Eleven sells them for two bucks).

One time in this particular store my brother and I saw Stanley from the Office buying mustard and we asked him if he thought the Writer's Strike would disrupt the show's schedule and he said that he didn't know.

When I exited Ralph's, I got a text message from Roman that he was in Palms Springs with Ilana at some casino and you can't do phone calls when you're playing so he left his phone in his room and then he was hung-over when he got back home and then he had to take care of a family obligation and he went to work, but he's off now.

Roman used to be my supervisor at a radio-add sales job for three weeks and now he sells me weed at very affordable rates. I texted him to pick me up at the corner of Magnolia and Coldwater. When he got there, I finished my Cliff bar and got into his '96 Explorer and we drove to a parking lot.

I smoked a bowl that he keeps in the car and he smoked out of a liter soda bottle bong and he would mix it with tobacco and take "Seh-Seh hits." A few Israelis I know also smoke their weed that way, but I can't even finish a hit because I don't have a 22-year-old's lung capacity.

I apologized about calling so many times and he showed me his missed calls and how there were some people who call him non-stop and he told me some people always come by an hour after they say they would and some inconsiderately stop by without calling. He advised me that if I need a steady supply of weed, I should get a card and that I shouldn't be worried that I would smoke too much because with an unlimited supply, a healthy equilibrium automatically is constructed, but he's always happy to serve me some cronic that I like and he said that he still has seventy bucks of mine.

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He got a phone call and didn't answer it. I told him he should really be careful as I thought of Stephon's tale of how he was robbed of so much money and how he's still paying it off and Roman said, "You know Stephan K.?!"

I was so taken aback that Roman knew Stephan and I immediately thought of my first impression of Roman as the ultimate salesman and that this moment he was just so clairvoyant I thought he was gonna rob me, "how do you know him?!"

Roman said, "he played basketball for Grant, I known the fool for fifteen years" and he laughed at how stunned I was, "he was a fool, he got robbed three times, did he tell you that?"

Still shaken, "Yeah, I just thought you were Russian?"

"I am Russian, I came in 1991 and I buy weed with a card."

"Oh, I don't know why it didn't make sense... you know I really dig Russian girls from Toronto".

Smiling in agreement, "Lana?!"

"See, I think Toronto makes very cool Russians, and Russian chicks already have a unique beauty."

"I don't agree with you."

"What!? You like blonds? Like the Swiss. They are just Ikea's knockoff Barbie dolls; you see them when they all come here to visit the shopping malls and Venice beach."

"Those are just stereotypes... in 1991, let's say there was a one in a million chance to get a visa to the U.S., but only a one in fifty thousand chance to Canada, and everyone wanted to be in New York or L.A. I got some family up there, but they want to move here one day".

"You're Jewish?"

"Yeah"

"You could've went to Israel."

"Who the fuck wants to be in Israel, you have to join the army, here's it's optional. Here you could have four cars, in Russia my family didn't have a car, America is the best land that ever existed, Canada seems cool, but nothing's really going on there." Then his phone rang.

He didn't answer it; instead he told me some common problems that fools get into trying to deal for quick, big money and that Armenians are little punks and they are a foot shorter than everyone and they try to act tough and if you kick their ass they bring their brothers and sisters after you and they'll be on you like flies. And they always try to act so cool.

I was so disappointed to hear all those nasty things about Armenians; in my experience I found Armenians to be pretty nice. The guys do try to look hard all the time but the chips on their shoulders balance out and I already learnt a few Armenian words, "Bo-rev" means hello and "Ushpeset" means how are you; goddammit!

Roman explained to me that I should wait and see when I get to know these guys better and I told him that there is a lovely teller with long, thick black hair at the Bank of America on Laurel Canyon and Magnolia who I like to go to when I get paid, and she's Armenian and Roman said that Armenians stick together and the chick would never think of even going to get coffee with me but he said I shouldn't feel insulted about it.

But I was, I said to Roman that, "I had this really funny English teacher about how weird the Russians were when they came to Pikesville and swam in their underwear at public pools, and they nickled and dimed everyone, and they brought gang-violence."

Roman blushed, and for the moment I actually thought I beat the racist out of him. So I said, "don't feel bad, if I didn't have a bathing suit and I wanted to go swimming I would go swimming in my underwear, too."

But Roman wasn't worried and he just disagreed with me. So he dropped me off a few blocks away from the group home like I requested so I could walk a bit before work with an eighth in my pocket.

I got to work about a half hour before I was supposed to and I suppose that's remnants of an OCD issue I had when I was a baby, as my mom likes to fancifully remind me, I always like to be on time. I entered the prison in its Sunday dress and heard five TV's blaring softly. I teasingly greeted David in Persian, "Saba-khey" and he responded with his exacerbated, "oh boy, would you please?'s" and he scuttled into his room.

Mayra was sitting on the couch and I sat down next to her. She smiles at me like she doesn't ever smile at anyone else that way, and that's where it is. In a calm and sweet Latin accent, "David asked me out on a date today, right after he grabbed my ass" and she handed me the incident report, a two pager and she laughed like a devil and said, "Did you walk here?"

I said, "yeah,"

she said, "you poor boy" as she put her hand on my face to feel if it was cold.

I replied proudly, "I walk around by choice because I don't care for driving... I drove for more than seven years!"

I always dug people who change the subject when they are disinterested rather than struggling to understand shit that most likely doesn't make much sense; out of the blue she confided some frustrations, "I'm an alcoholic and I haven't sipped alcohol since Halloween, because I needed it for everything before that, especially for sex and church. But it's not too bad, my boyfriend hasn't smoked pot since then either."

When I thought about it, I came to believe that I also hadn't drank alcohol or smoked weed since Halloween at a murder-mystery party. I admired her wooden cross that lay so nicely on her neck and she let me hold it up to look at it closer. She put my hand right above her ass and asked me if it would look weird to get the Serenity Prayer tattooed on her back, and I laughed and said, "the one with the footprints?! Seriously though, symbols are so much easier to decide on, but if you must belong to words than you should think about it for a year at least because you don't know how long those words will apply to you... life is long."

She turns to me like an angel radiating a new perception, "I been with my boyfriend since last February and I love him and I haven't cheated on him yet, but I've had boyfriends since I was fifteen and I cheated on all of them and I'm going to community college now and I think I want to be single for five years and my brother thinks that's a good idea, too and he went to college and plus I'm getting into really good shape."

"I don't know what to say aside from that sounds... tough".

Earnestly she said, "Yeah... you know what? I like to moan really loudly during sex..."

Though I wanted this so bad, my blood was rushing to my head, "y-y-y-you didn't cheat your commitment yet?"

"No--"

"And this guy and you are doing a sobriety/church experiment together?"

She replied somberly, "yeah."

Like a big man, I smiled reassuringly and changed the subject before we got into any trouble, "did Romeo also specially request that you to come to the group home party?"

"That's my last shift, tomorrow during the New Year's party."

I took a camera out of my bag and I said, "Then you got to pose a few photos for me so I know what you look like when I get around to painting you."

Mayra did a few poses till the clock struck four and I checked out her ass again as she left for the day and she turned around and smiled, "Saw 12 is coming out and I hear it's gonna be up on the Imax."

I laughed thinking about David pinching her ass, “I always thought that he had a heart just for black girls because Vilma said so, but in fact he’s just a horny, old motherfucker just like the rest of us.”

David was heard from behind the curtain, “would you please?” and Mayra said “bye.”

That shift was relatively quiet. I slept on the carpet all afternoon while the guys ate peanut butter and occupied themselves. Norm woke me up at 11pm to relieve me and send me to the other group home. I stumbled up to Emilita Street dreaming about what it would be like to try the muscle-relaxors I spotted in Seth’s bottomless bag of meds.

When I approached the group home, I saw LAPD officers standing in front of the group home with a short, bald, and stocky white guy who looked like George Costanza in more than an everyone-angry-short-bald-and-stocky-looks-the-same sort of way. G.C. was shouting at Max about a boom box he got from his late mother in 1986 while Stephan was explaining to the officers that this man points his boom box at Max’s window until 10 p.m. every night, and that night, when Stephan saw it up and blaring, he took it. When I walked in, I commented to the cop that he should rev his taser at the man.

G.C. was classic, “if you pull something, you better use it, ooh boy, I told them not to put a half-way-house of retards here!”

I brought out the boom box to taunt the angry lunatic and I said to Stephan, “look what I found, you think someone donated this for a Hanukah gift for the staff.”

The shocked cop quickly identified it to me as the boom box in question. The cop said, “give me that” and I did and the cop chastised the now awkwardly quiet, grown man who seconds ago was parading like a buffoon outside of a home for retarded individuals, I didn’t really see what happened in the end before I passed out on the couch.

Max was standing in front of me when I suddenly awoke from sleeping and I felt totally dehydrated. Max is an interesting cat, his parents are from Mexico and he acts with a strong dignity that comes from being raised by dignified folks. Mayra told me that he had even tried to pick her up in fluent Spanish before she knew he was a resident and she owes him a homed cooked meal.

Max was standing in front of me at 3 a.m. because he couldn’t fall a sleep because he was still afraid of the neighbor’s yelling and he wanted to make sure that I didn’t leave the couch, just in case that guy came back. I assured him that I would be there all night and I promised him that the cops tasered the guy in sensitive areas in the back of their squad car so well that this guy wouldn’t be starting up anytime soon.

Max went back to his room feeling reassured and then I couldn’t sleep, so I took some of those muscle-relaxors and I drank a gallon of water. I plopped back down but I was not able to fall back asleep though my limbs grew heavy because my stomach was growling

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I laid awake and started thinking about all the things I put in my body and the unlimited amounts of tobacco I inhale and caffeine that I ingest and I was scared that the pills would start leaving gunk in my kidneys if I didn't drink enough water to constantly to flush them out, and even then- some credible but spooky dude once told me that the disease that will break my back will start around my urinary tract but he also said I would get a motorcycle and I'm soon approaching the age where buying a bike just seems like a goofy idea, though I kind of want one so I could learn how to do some tricks on it and Jay-Z said thirty's the new twenty- but not when your urinary tract is fucked up!

I thought about when Georgie W. T. thought he had stomach cancer and how lame it is to worry about unconfirmed medical ailments. But my dad got a kidney stone before and it's very plausible that if I don't watch out I might be abusing my organs.

I wondered what they do with the dirty or broken organs they take out and replace; do they send them to be sold in third world countries like junkyard parts or do they end up at universities or are there already an over abundance of cadavers to go around for research and retail replacement purposes in the world?

The other day, I was talking to Cloe about a Facebook group she started for healthy aging inspired by playing around with Photoshop and seeing what she looked like being old; I thought about what I would look like as an old man and decided if I ever needed a cane I would buy a nice one with the same consideration I would buy a pair of glasses and then I remembered this chick who told me she was able to see exactly what people will look like when they are old and after she saw my father's dad, she said that's what I'm gonna look like when I get old but I said that she could only say that because there's no way to find that out even though I remembered my grandmother showing me photos of my grandfather as a kid and comparing those with my photos...

I was going to the medicine cabinet to get some Xanax to help me come to terms with my dying body because at that moment I don't think I was willing to proactively change any of my unhealthy behaviors. When I entered the dark office I saw Michael's illuminated face fixed on the computer giggling whispers looking at we all know what.

In the morning, John turned on Sesame Street and we were educated about eating healthy foods as I got the meds together. Andrew was eating a bag of potato chips and I didn't even say anything this time because it never helps. John walked over to me and pointed to my sunglasses and smiles, "movie star, you movie star" and I smiled, "thanks, that's what I'm going for" and he picks up my cigarettes from the table, "cigarettes bad for you, maybe you quit on birthday?"

I was gonna smile at his concern when like hell hath no fury, Andrew was sounding off his morning loud and extreme, random noises. "No Xanax for Andrew in the morning for any reason!" states a sign on the refrigerator and on the bulletin board, and on the door to his room, and on the door of the bathroom, and I think Anthony has a tattoo of it

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on his forearm, too. So I gave Andrew his tiny paper cup of meds and I instructed the other residents that Andrew is just a force of nature we have to endure and it's best to just ignore him.

John walked to the rocking chair where Andrew now sat like Dennis the Menace making his noises as if he was threatening me, "what are you gonna do if I shit my pants right before Velvel comes to free you from me, are you gonna clean me up or pretend like nothing happened and leave... I know I'll tell him before you walk away and then you'll have an awkward decision to make, won't you?! P.S. I love the Chicago O'Neil Celtics."

John is a smiley looking zombie who is most of the time very agreeable and good hearted so venturing to defuse the situation he spread newspaper over Andrew's head and Andrew actually shut up.

Then Seth entered the kitchen half in a daze still in his Starfleet issued pajamas and I handed him his 47 pills in a 16 oz. plastic cup. He stood at attention when he told me that his acting class had been cancelled this week because of New Year's. Seth is a big fan of Star Trek and Star Wars and takes those stories very seriously as if each movie was actually a Fox news report. He has been an extra in a few movies with the help of his parents and like most actors, he takes his acting career very seriously, even considering his work-training program to be his second means of employment.

Avrumel walks in the kitchen smiling like the jolly man he is. He walks by Andrew and sadly looks at him and he peaks under the newspaper and Andrew goes off again. John jumps from the couch at the sound of Andrew pathetically shameless voice and he runs up and carefully replaces the newspaper over Andrew and looks around as if to ask, "how did he escape his newspaper cell?"

Avrumel is a twenty-three year old heavy set man with Downs Syndrome and a scruffy, religious-zealot, freedom-fighting beard, "My wife will be giving me a ride home today so you don't need to pick me up today."

I was kind of confused because I don't ever pick him up from anywhere, "tell your wife thanks a million."

So Avrumel likes to be referred to as a rabbi and he feels like he's the chaplain of the home, but since he's just a copier he just likes to say he's the staff rabbi, but he doesn't take his duties seriously. He comes up behind me and says his wife likes Jewish Orthodox pop music.

My moods were messed up because of the random drug cocktails I was playing with that week and I suddenly saw myself in all my shame in the soul of Avrumel with all my weaknesses expressed in his ludicrous statements.

And then Michael, the 35 five year old autistic, little boy I caught downloading porn last night onto Velvel's computer giggled at me as he enters the kitchen. I laugh at him and then I see from the corner of my eye some paperwork about Seth and I quickly notice a sentence about one of his meds, Buspar, describing it to work wonderfully as a mood stabilizer. I jump up, "who needs mood stabilization more than me?!"

So I took a double dose remembering that many times the first few doses of shit like this doesn't do much. Sure enough in a half hour, I felt chemically stoned and it was good because it only lasted for a half hour and I was totally straight when Velvel relieved me at eight.

Velvel told me that he's not sure how long he was going to be work the manager because the new director, Richard wanted to hire his managerial staff from scratch and he just hired a funny looking, old black lady to take over his job.

He remarked that Richard never returns phone calls and if you are not in front of him he really doesn't give a fuck about you and I said it's kind of funny because he reminds me Barak Obama in more than an every-black-guy-in-a-tie-looks-the-same sort of way and he surprises me every time he shows his inner fascist. Then Velvel told me that this is just part time work for Richard and he was really in law school.

That was the end of the shift and I went home to shower and shave and smoke some weed before I had to go to the New Year's party to pick up my paycheck.

There were streamers inside and outside of the group home and the smell of barbequed kosher beef blew all around Ethel Avenue. When I entered the home, I joined the line of my co-worker waiting for Norm by the door to get our checks.

Romeo approached us all holding a microphone and disappointed us by reporting that Norm would be an hour longer than originally planned but at least we were all settled down here to party because it was going to be 2008! And though it was quite early for a party before lunchtime, Romeo looked like he really wanted this to work out.

Velvel and Mayra were flipping burgers in the back and we were officially requested to have a good time; I don't know if it was for the sake of the residents, or for him, or for us staff but he even brought in a karaoke machine and told us that karaoke is a sacred and old Philipino tradition and that's why he knows where to get the best karaoke mix cd's.

I eyed a bag in the corner of the room with the gifts that David's mom bought for staff before she received the memo from Cheryl (the Queen Bitch of the Corporation of Bnie Yisroel Group Homes: "We House the Jewish Retarded Demographic") that no gifts were to be distributed to staff for the holidays anymore.

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Romeo saw Mayra coming out of the bathroom and he told her to sing a song to get the party started. She found a Spice Girls' song and read it off the screen, attempting to sing at random parts she remembered. Then a Hilky sang "Hava Negilah," and I sang "Take It Easy" by the Eagles, and Stephan sang "The Eye of the Tiger," and Mark sang "Hava Negilah," and a guest representing the corporate office came by and he sang "Hava Negilah," too not realizing that Mark just finish that song.

That's when Yitzchak called me and I stepped outside, though Yitzchak was still able to hear Hilky's un-melodic howl. Yitzchak recognized the song because he used to work here till he saved up cash and went to live in Israel for a little bit and now he was back and sometimes we chill when we pass each other's neck of the woods, and he was in the Valley now and wanted to hang out and when I told him about our party he was thrilled to stop by and say hello to the guys.

I walked back in on Mayra belting out the "Sign" by Ace of Base and she laughed at herself when I smiled at her, and Stephan sang "It Must Have Been Love But It's Over Now," and then Tamir sang "Hava Negilah."

Corporate's representative interrupted Tamir and proudly handed out gifts to the staff on behalf of Richard, the Supreme Commander of the Managers who doesn't even have time to answer to the Board of Parents let alone attend functions like this one (and if he happened to have been able to attend and he took a nap while corporate's representative was making a speech, then fuck you.)

I got a picture frame and David's mom left the Nordstrom tag on it so I could return it and get \$15. My phone rang and I walked outside as I hear the rep say, "Richard regretfully can't be here because he is negotiating for more group homes on Indian land in exchange for casino revenue sharing or something like that..."

I told Yitzchak to come on in when he gets here and I saw Norm pull up. He came up to me and handed me my check. I opened it immediately and it seemed to be significantly less than I expected. Norm entered the home and was swarmed by the staff. I went inside to the office to call that bitch Cheryl so she wouldn't recognize me on her caller ID and I could straighten up this check thing quickly.

Cheryl told me to hold on for five minutes and as I listened to the noise her receiver made as it was inserted in and out of her vagina to the rhythm of one and a half corny country songs I began to frustrate. Then she was back and in her condescendingly informative tone, "Oh I see what happened, apparently we have been overpaying you a dollar an hour for the past one thousand hours, don't worry, you don't owe it back anymore because I took it from this check and started to pay you normally." And then she hung up on me.

Yitzchak walks back into the office to see my face stunned. We walk out of the group home while Seth was on the mic solemnly explaining the power of the Force to a audience being held captive.

I asked Yitzchak if he wanted to get stoned and he said that he's trying to stay away from weed and that now he is focusing his restless energies on experiencing spirituality. I respected that even though spirituality's a dead issue to me because he's a good man; when I met him we were working suicide weekends at the group home and the first night we hung out he took me to a party where we got wasted and I tried to sleep with his sister not knowing she was his sister, but he took that in stride.

So, Yitzchak took me to his friend's apartment. He met this guy working as an electrician for a few weeks. His name was Ko-khev if I heard correctly, but his friends called him Star. He's an Israeli with a big five point star tattooed on his forearm in red and black. He answered the door in his boxers holding a bottle of Jack Daniels, "Oh, I wasn't expecting you yet."

A lovely looking black chick who looked like she may or may not be a prostitute stepped out of the bedroom in a tee-shirt and introduced herself as his Star's wife. She went back to the room to get dressed and Star told us that this was the two-year anniversary of their Vegas wedding and we drank some Jack to that.

Then we drank some for the new year and then we drank some to get drunk. We took a little break to go to some Kosher Israeli restaurant so Yitzchak would be able to order something, too. Then we came back to Star's apartment and got stoned and another Israeli stopped by.

We were all having life-confirming conversations with each other; Yitzchak was explaining to Star's wife about the beauties of Chabad Judaism while I was discussing with the other Israeli whether or not Quentin Terontino's Jackie Brown was a good movie. Star was observing the conversations and making sure we all got as shitfaced as possible.

Star's wife asked me my opinions on God and I said that I have no new ideas on the topic and Yitzchak, already knowing my opinions stated that I may not be all that comfortable endorsing any God. Star's wife examined my position with questions like, "so if there is no God, how was there a big bang?" and "don't you believe in an ultimate justice?"

These questions were very hard to respond to without a book of operational definitions and schizophrenic impulses so my responses sounded rude because I was pretty drunk and stoned and quite impatient to talk to the other guy about Terontino's "True Romance."

Star's wife proudly proclaimed that she likes to adhere to the seven Noahide Laws which seemed to delight Yitzchak and Yitzchak explained theories of random kindness and the greatness of the late Rebbe of Lubavitch. Star's wife ran to her room to grab her photo of the rabbi and Yitzchak told Star to "watch out for this one."

Star smiled bashfully and drank some more. Then she asked me some other things to test my intelligence and she periodically repeated that she's just about finished her Master's in Metaphysical Psychology whenever my responses got too condescending.

At five, I had to go back to the group home for my final shift that week. I relieved Mayra and she said, "peace out" to me for the last time. I called Romeo to see if the office would be open tomorrow so I could resolve my paycheck issues and he assured me that we don't break for any holidays.

I was still quite drunk and that's my favorite time to talk to my friends, so I called up Andy and I asked him to do some voices for me. He did his famous "Goldberg the Bagelman" bit for me and also an old British rabbi who met the Beatles before they were big, "so Paul McCartney said, 'we already turn on the lights for you on Shabbos, you might as well let us play a song for your Bar Mitzvah, too,' and I told the Beatles, 'that's a splendid idea and they played Johnny B. Goode but when George went for the solo he saw that his hand was literally fading into oblivion so I went outside and I dragged Biff out of the car and I punch him and I said, 'hey man, you got to treat her like a lady!'"

I asked Andy to imagine the rabbi as a Yorkie because I'm so amused by talking dogs with British accents and we bounced around ideas for a screenplay he was writing in film school. We discussed "The Dream Team" as the perfect model for an ensemble cast and then Andy got inspired and he had to write so I spoke to Cloe.

I told her about the payroll error and she asked me if I was relying on that \$1000. I said that I was but I still had money coming in so it didn't shake me that much, it just meant that for the next two weeks I'd be late on rent and have to steal food from the group homes, I reassured her, "this isn't the first time I took a loss like this before, in fact, when I moved away from Baltimore, I abandoned much more property than that, even my car."

My lack of regard for money seemed to disturb Cloe, and my explanations of "that's just how I am" and "I don't care if I get evicted" didn't really relax her worry too much. She wished me luck in my responsibilities and I went to sleep.

When Romeo relieved me in the morning, I walked to the corporate office a mile away. I entered as if I owned the place and I saw Leor, Cheryl's assistant. I told him my problem and he told me that I had to speak with Cheryl. So I walked in on a perspiring Cheryl playing computer solitaire and she told me that I didn't have an appointment so I must go down stairs and schedule something with the receptionist. I went back down the stairs and asked the receptionist if Cheryl was free to see me and she looked on the computer for the schedule and called up to her.

I waited a half an hour reading an old Jewish Weekly News and I was summoned before Cheryl. As I went back up the stairs I tried to figure out how to keep my cool. When Cheryl let me in her office, she looked at me cold as she leaned back on her chair. I told

her that it's not fair for her to just take money out of my check how she did and I said that she shouldn't get paid till she pays her employees correctly.

She restated that I was living it up in luxury for quite a while and she's not ashamed about what she did. I said to her, "and along with that, I work 60+ hours a week here on average and you're the one who keeps blocking me from benefits by saying I'm not a salaried worker, I've been here for a year and I can't even see a doctor, but you sit here for 38 hours a week and you get all the abortions you want!"

She was quiet and I was fuming so I continued, "Goddamn you, you always fuck with me, I would punch you if I had a bigger dick!"

She tried to dismiss me but I told her that my lawyer would have been here today but she was hung over and she wanted to come in tomorrow and she's even a bigger bitch than Cheryl is and I stormed out. As I was walking down the stairs, Leor chased me, "hey, they are giving you another check now!"

So I walked back up there and Cheryl said she never wanted to hear from me again. I asked her if she was giving me another check and Leor told me that I shouldn't talk to her because she was very offended that I called her a bitch.

I said that I was very offended that she took a thousand dollars from my check without asking and Leor said that he'd rather stay out of it. I waited at Leor's desk for Dr. Sherman to come in so he could sign my check and Cheryl walked past me a few times, staring at me all wounded as she tried to get on with the day.

Leor told me that Cheryl wanted to have me fired, and I said "fuck her" and when she walked back in her I said, "fuck her" again but it may have sounded more like "fucker" but I think I conveyed my point.

After an hour of silence, I asked Leor when Dr. Sherman would be in and he said that he may already be there and he went to check his office. He came back shortly and said that the doctor was on the phone. I asked Leor if Dr. Sherman was the psychiatrist for the homes and he said that he had no idea.

Twenty minutes later, I left with a check for a thousand dollars. I called Roman as soon as I got outside and I planned to spend the rest of the week looking for pictures of a new brunet for Leslie to drool over.

The Oakland Plan

When I was seventeen, I didn't know it. In my free time I sat in my backyard chain smoking and sitting still. My 12th grade rabbi, Rabbi B. said to me that it's a shame that I have so much potential because I'm just gonna end up feeling like I was missing out on life.

He was real conflicted about what to say to me because he didn't start off as an orthodox rabbi so he knew how to recognize things that other rabbis couldn't. But he could never tell his class about some of the realities of life for a handful of reasons. First, because he represented a Yeshiva who paid his salary and second, he may have forgot that stuff already.

When I was eighteen, I told Rabbi S. that my goals were simple enough and that my ambition didn't reached farther than wanting to grow up to work at Wal-Mart and always having enough Budweiser in the fridge. I don't know why I said that, but I'm glad I did.

Rabbi S. told the younger Rabbi T. to tell me to take a Jewish philosophy class, but I'm not interested in philosophy because even if you set words up to sound mathematically articulate, it's an illusion to logically conclude as anything more than a possibility.

Once I was sitting around on acid listening to Johnny Cash's "Boy Named Sue" and I got all riled up identifying with that song. Then I realized that we all live the way that we feel is correct and we must have confidence in our methods. My parents chose to teach me to be religious because they believe that is right, so I can't really blame them.

So, now ten years later, I declare that I'm through with all my quests, especially the one for enlightenment, because it's a trick and if you are on that quest you'll never get home. I'm so exhausted, in fact that I can't ever imagine a time where I will let wonder take me over and drive me to the depths of sanity again.

Most people who meet me only a few times think I look like Toby Macguire from Spiderman so it always comes as a shock to them about how I frequent the ends of sanity to the point that many times I don't recognize the extras that I formed strong connections too; and I think that I've formed strong relationships with extras who I don't really know.

So I guess I'm saying that for me, enlightenment and insanity usually occur in that pair and I'm totally sick of it— oh and I'm also saying to take lots of drugs on your journey because if you are anything like me, you are going to need them. And that I take it as a compliment when people tell me I look like a movie star.

There's an old Talmudic tale which tells a story about four rabbis who got to a level of enlightenment where they were able to stand in the presence of God in a place called the Pardais. So one guy died on the spot, another lost his mind, one became a heretic, and the last became a highly quoted and well respected rabbi. I always wanted to be the heretic and one day I got my wish.

I identify with this story because from the minute I was born, I was taught to be a fervently religious fellow; my parents prayed three times a day, they blessed every action they did throughout the day, and so much more and I was expected to see life the same way. I don't feel like a prick because I totally respect and love my parents and their goals in life and I don't think my parents are stupid or even ignorant...

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I just had to come to terms with the fact that I believe that their core beliefs are just fairy tales and I don't want to waste meaning injecting it into someone else's fairy tale, but the reason why I almost feel guilty about this is because I could totally understand life in a way that I would share their values, I just think it's silly to expend that effort on that particular life style, but I definitely respect them for being so stubborn about it because that could actually float them in life.

Their lifestyle has been set long ago and has been running this whole time. I'd be highly traumatized if I woke up one day to my sister calling me to tell me that my parents were breaking Shabbos. I'd probably tell them to "stop that childish behavior this moment and go inside!"

So now that my quests are totally satisfied, why the fuck am I still in LA?

Roman calls me and says that he will be out of town for a drop and I should really get a prescription for marijuana and stop calling him every morning. So I walked home. Well at least I knew.

Time for a new plan. So Oakland is the city I want to live in for now. When I get there I want to live nicely or at least at the standard I was used to growing up. I counted my cash that I set aside for rent. I was twenty short and I guess I was feeling fight or flight and that finalized my decision to move.

I was gonna drop my lease on grounds of no money and just leave this place. I originally came here on the banner that I wanted to make movies. And yeah, movies are cool but in reality, it takes far too much work for me to want to pursue it. I decided that I wasn't a screenplay writer with wanna-be aspirations anymore, now I'm just a writer with wanna-be aspirations. So fuck LA...

I took \$150 from my rent money and I went to a doctor who advertised in the Valley CityBeat to get a prescription for marijuana. Amanda was the receptionist and I noticed her tattoo. She dressed like she was a sixteen year old punk with cut off skater jean, a grey tee-shirt, and no makeup.

She looked like she never had a boyfriend before. She made eye contact with me for an incredibly long second and then took me back to a Jamaican doctor who gave me a prescription and then Amanda sent me across the street to get a deal on some weed by dropping her name, but that's pretty standard and she gets a kickback for referrals. Before I walked out, I commented to her that I wished I wasn't leaving for Oakland yet, because I just met her and she smiled.

I came by the next day before the office opened and we smoked a bowl in the checkup room. I repeated that I was leaving for good in two days but we had a good time anyways, and she drew me some stars on a prescription pad and we both enjoyed the irony of what we were doing.

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The next day, I went to the library because I was thinking about writing a play adaptation of an Albert Camus book, and I needed to choose which one. He has such great and different dialogue in each book, I wanted to choose wisely. Either way I decided to incorporate the confessing character from “the Fall” into the plot of whatever one I chose and then I picked up “A Happy Death” and I fell in love with it.

Anyways, I ended up waiting outside of the library because every other day it opens at ten- but today was not the other day and they opened at twelve. So I sat on a bench smoking and reading hanging out with the homeless guys waiting to use the computers.

A lady approached the door and saw that it was locked and I told her that it doesn’t open for an hour, and we made a few jokes. Then this other lady came by and she looked like a regular person but when we heard what she was yelling at a Jewish Weekly News we all realized that she was crazy, “kill all the Jews, because they are disgusting, but you’re all still drinking Manashevitz.”

So the nice lady decided to come back another time and leave me on my own to avoid eye contact with the psycho.

I texted Amanda the next day that I wanted to see her but she didn’t reply. I didn’t actually end up moving. Reality struck me down when I realized that breaking a lease is really stupid. So I texted Amanda two weeks later telling her that my subletter pulled out and that I was here till July. So Amanda texted me that she would call me and after a few days; I texted her back that she could call me or I could write her a lovely fanciful email.

So she gave me her email address and for a week I wrote her letters instead of writing Layla emails. So one Sunday weeks later, she calls me and says that she got her roommate’s car and she’s stopping by my place. She comes up stairs and looked at my empty apartment and she told me that we can’t hang out there yet, so we took a drive.

We went to Griffith Park which is right outside of Studio City and took a long hike into a garden on a cliff with picnic tables and we both took out our weed. She told me to try hers first and I did.

Amanda, “you don’t think that the world is ending in 2012, do you?”

Me, “no, why would you think that?”

Amanda, “I don’t know, there is so much shit out on the History Channel and you strike me as someone who likes to believe things.”

I laughed, “I like you.”

Amanda, “you must make a fool of yourself pretty often.”

Me, “you don’t even have an accent when you speak English.”

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Amanda, “when I’m with my family I do, you want me to talk with it?”

Me, “very much so, hey first say it in Spanish and then in English like you’re translating for yourself.”

Amanda says something quick in Spanish and she resumes talking with her Latina accent and I was thoroughly enjoying myself, “Mardoqueo, you got to believe me about some things, I know a lot and I see you exactly like you are, you have to figure out what dignity means to you... you are a real sweetheart, but what if I didn’t like you, then all those messages you left me would really be considered invasive.”

Me, “but I thought you liked that.”

Amanda, “no, I didn’t... Today I just wanted an adventure, so I came to see you, maybe do a good thing by setting you straight. I felt that you were very invasive, showing up to my office, and all. I didn’t even like you till we got to this part of the park.”

Me, “hey, I thought you had fun when I came by.”

Amanda, “I did, but your actions show a carelessness towards reality. You were a sideshow that I got to tell stories about. I’m not pissed, but you are definitely capable of understanding this so I’ll tell you, but you’re letters were really sweet and I was flattered, but how could you possibly know what you’re getting into with me, what if I was crazy and I’m sure you know that my roommates make fun of your email, I have all your information at the office, what if I wanted to kill you when you were sleeping... obviously that’s not my plan-”

Me, “thank you” and I lit a cigarette.

Amanda, “why do you smoke cigarettes?”

Me, “because...”

Amanda, “if I still know you like you want me to know you in six months, you’re gonna have to hide every time you have a cigarette, what do you think about that?”

“I think tough Latino chicks are sexy.”

“I know... ok, so our most common denominator is that we smoke pot?”

“I guess you could say that... uh, you got a degree in psychology.”

Amanda, “you just want free therapy.”

Me, “no I also like your tattoo, you know about classical conditioning?”

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Amanda, “yep, Pavlov and the dog.”

Me, “ok, your harsh appraisal of my... circumstances—”

Amanda, “I thought you like people who call it as they see it?”

Me, “oh, I sincerely do, but over the years the shit you’re saying always ended up being considered foreplay for me and I really want to kiss you now, though I’m highly interested in what you’re saying... do you mind talking during sex?”

Amanda smiles, but she straight up ignores what I just said, “Ok... what are the consequences of our actions? You could be critical of me, I know that you’re perceptive and have an anti-poetic way... so we smoke weed and then? ...and then we experience more brain dead moments, is it all worth it?”

Me, “sometimes.”

Amanda, “Yay! You’re getting the hang of it... you should know I’m having the time of my life now... this weed is great isn’t it?”

But then she kisses me on the cheek and smiles, “if you want to know me at all, you have to take care of yourself. You look like someone who lets himself go when ever you want and I think that it’s not only unhealthy for you, but also for anyone around you- I will not stand around and watch you deteriorate ever. Not because I’m a bitch, but because you said that you want to fall in love with me and I would like to fall in love with you and I don’t want to have to deal with stupid shit... I’ll kiss you now but you can’t make anything of it...”

Me, “fine!”

Amanda got solemn before the smooch, “there is one thing, six months ago, I moved here on a mission and nothing could stop it if it comes to fruition, and I’m gonna give up totally in six months but-“

Me, “are you an actress?”

Amanda, “yeah, but that’s not my mission... there’s a boy I have to try to love because he’s been loving me for so long and I like him and I wasn’t able to love him like I wanted to, but like I said, I had no luck finding him yet, but if I do- you really must forgive me.”

Me, “six months?”

Amanda, “I promise.”

I felt real sincere, “well, then I could help you if you think of a way.”

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She thanked me and kissed me. As the sun began to set, we made our way down to her roommate's car. Amanda said for the next six months, I could smoke cigarettes inside of her vehicle and home because her roommate smokes, but Amanda reserved the right to request me not to smoke for limited periods of time and I could never litter the butts again, even if I was by myself.

So we were sitting in the car outside of my apartment and we were fanaticizing about life in Oakland come July. I was a little sad or tired at the end of the night and I said to Amanda, "this past year has been rough and I have felt very isolated for extended periods of time, but I learnt how to cope reasonably fine... for a while I used to talk to myself when I was at home for more than a few days at a time... it's kind of eerie but the voice I spoke to, sounded a lot like yours."

Amanda kissed my cheek goodnight and told me not to make anything of it. And then she dropped me off at home and I went to sleep.

In the morning at seven, Amanda was at my door. I opened it and she jumped on me and we drank coffee and she gave me a Spanish lesson and we fanaticized about moving to Mexico and at ten she caught a bus to work.

She came back at 4:45 with a college ruled notebook filled with my emails and her ideas about how our relationship should function. She was really excited to explain her rules to me and they really did make a lot of sense and after our third joint, Amanda lovingly looks into my eyes, "what are the side effects of long term pot smoking and cigarette smoking- I heard that men get impotent from that."

Me, "well by that time I'll have health insurance and I'll get Viagra."

Amanda, "well, let's not be so uptight about this now, you got six month... and we'll deal with Viagra when we get to it... I really don't want not smoking to feel like a prison sentence."

So I lit another cigarette. We were listening to NPR because it's pretty pleasant to leave on. Amanda's face lit up and she turned to the middle of her notebook with a list of her ideas, "yesterday when I was driving home, I wanted to tell you that it would be fun to write a book about growing up into adult, like a comedy, like you write."

She looked at me ridiculously when I asked about trying to publish it if it's good. She said we could give it out, but it's absurd to talk about real publishing. And I liked that she said that because that's a perspective that has a real nice ring to it. "We are just part of the proletariat."

Then we heard a radio add offering a free three day trip to Vegas if we could answer, "what color was the lone ranger's hat: white; pink; or purple! If you know or think you know call 800-MY VEGAS in the next half hour and we will throw in a pair of tickets for

something.” We both called- it was completely out of our natures, but when we were sitting together that’s what happened.

We were both disappointed to find out the number was really a link to a 900 number, and it would have been totally antithetical to our core beliefs to call that one. She made a note of the incident in her notebook and then she excited, “I have a plan for moving to Oakland in July!” She explained a very thorough plan and I was really impressed. So I asked her what she thought about internet chatting and friendships, already predicting the frown on her face, “aside from being totally exhibitionistic, they are sleazy, and that’s the bottom line, you could do the math yourself. Oh, and I found you on Myspace hiding in Spanish.”

I’m in awe and I only wished that she said more curse words, “but when we move in July how are you going to say in touch with your friends?”

“I don’t have friends... only phone calls, no emails, no text messages- just phone calls.”

Well, I had a good question for her, “what do you got to say about reputations that you acquire in communities that you live in?”

“They are a good gauge for what you really are, especially by your age... we aren’t going anywhere where our reputations bother us unless it’s family or something we got to deal with... what you’re favorite record?”

I said that I ask that question often enough that I should know the answer but I guessed any answer was as good as any, and I said, “one that me and my friend Georgie liked in 1998 was “So Much For the Afterglow” by Everclear and I turned it on and gave commentary at dulls parts of the album. Amanda took notes in her notebook as I dictated my commentary.

So Much For the Afterglow- “This is a song about Susan” has a surprisingly potent harmony of “ooh’s” and “ahh’s” in the beginning, but the crunch of a blunt Boss distorted Gibson Studio or something comes and knocks my socks off and in some regards, this whole album’s even reminiscent of Nirvana, if they ever collaborate with Phil Spector and a Colt 45.

The palm-muted, punk bass is the foundation of the smooth pop mix, and it fades off with “so much for the afterglow, oh well, oh well” just like reality. But it is the perfect song for my memories.

Everything to Everyone- Those rhythmically melodic noises, hypnotic drumming in the beginning and a most prominent bassline hold it all together. It’s a song about being a martyr and it begs to question or whether it’s ever really worth it to subjugate yourself to anyone for any idea or reason.

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“You say they taught you to read and write, I say they taught you how to buy and sell your body by the pound.” And Art (the singer) is such a joke (though I love the music), “come on do that stupid dance for me.” I totally identify with him.

Normal like you- *the only thing unnerving about this guy is that he’s 40 year old redneck singing about Prozac, and other parts of life we hope to mature away from. But it’s an awesome song anyway; beautifully mixed, melodic power riffs—all a major theme of the album.*

I will buy you a new life- *it’s like the twin song to “everything to everyone,” Redneck pop-grunge consists of simple chord progression, and very rhythmically metronomical beats and tones and he’s saying I will buy you anything to be with me. I feel like I have felt that way many times but I was thinking of buying her a cup of coffee and maybe a muffin. And Art is a man of repetitive fatalistic financial cycles- which I could totally identify with too— so as I listen to this, I think that I need to find stability in my own life.*

Father of mine- *I always skip that track because I don’t identify with it, because I feel like my dad was always around and I love him.*

One hit wonder- *“No fear, no shame, won’t rest till everyone knows his name” It’s about that feeling of a need to make it. Because folks back home are looking at you like you are ridiculous for chasing undefined goals and dreams, “they can’t hurt you unless you let them” It comes from total isolation. In this song I hear the joke about the headstrong boy who is pulling all his efforts on long shots and trying to sell his soul but having a hard time finding a buyer... and it makes me think about what I would sell my soul for.*

Distortion- *gives it the garage band feel for credibility, it’s cool, but straight filler, but it serves to cut the album in half. The second half of the album is even better, so during this track I listen in anticipation for the next act. It sounds like they are changing costumes and we are to quietly smoke our cigarettes-*

and then...

Amphetamine- *“She came out west to find the sun, she lost her name but found a new one... now they call her Amphetamine” and “she’s perfect in a fucked up way”- that line was something real profound to me in high school when I was looking for the girls my age that were as fucked up as me— “she looks like she’d be happy in a better life” and “all she wants to do is sit by my window and listen to the sirens—” and power chords-driving “the doctors say everything will be fine just take your pill.” They really should have recorded a symphony version like Metallica would have.*

White men in black coats- *always my favorite, “I’m just a boy working at a record store, she’s a girl doing what she can,” “all I want to do is loose myself in your room; all I want is a slow fuck in the afternoon... the white men in the black suits are diminishing.” This song makes me sad because it almost reminds me of the set for “Requiem of a*

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Dream,” it sounds like he’s singing about his paranoia, “I could still hear those people say,” but I think he may have been singing about his reality.

Sunflowers- *this is why I like Van Gough, this is a creepy song about being a passive stalker as you growing up next to someone. “I know where you go; I know how you feel, you get crazy inside, they say it runs in the family, your mom says your just like me,” and “I see you when I see myself when I was a younger man” the lyrics are so full of obsessive realities and but at the same time it has such a universal feeling- he was 33 when I started high school, I could only imagine him now pushing the crap he’s pushing (which isn’t as bad as you’d think.) Art must feel like such an old man singing these songs, and because he writes in an almost self-conscience way, he is not self-conscience when he performs it.*

Why I don’t believe in God- *since I grew up in a religious home it took me a very long time to really give this song a chance. When I was living in Israel though, right after high school, it really hit the spot— “I heard the truth about you and it doesn’t really read along like the whipping stick you whipped me with; scared kid in an electric hell... Momma they woke me up, I was in a sleep and eight years old, I heard big words that I don’t know what they mean, one day, why’d they called my school and say my mom had a nervous breakdown” and “I heard those voices you hear sometimes” and “ran away looking for you back in Culver City and the old neighbor.” I took a train through Culver City once on my to San Francisco. Over the years, I developed philosophies about life being such a bitch, and when it’s horrible you just got to plow through anyways... “I know the truth about you.”*

California king- *It’s about carpet baggers heading to California to become famous or rich quickly and this song delineates between old wealth and new wealth which is a funny concept to think about. “I’ve been told you found yourself a brand new time” and “there is nothing new about you, just another self made man, what makes you think you are so special, what makes you feel so unique” that line actually was very traumatic when the first girl I was ever in love with when I was 21, not so randomly called me up drunk a week after our week long fling and asked me what makes me feel so special that I think we should be together that was an intense time of nicotine patches and just post-teenage heartbreak.*

The hidden track- *I’ll be hating you for Christmas- that track is the last punch, “thanks for the Christmas card, I don’t want to hear about your new job now, or your new boyfriend and apartment, I just want to sit here and hate you” and “there’s got to be a better way to deal with this, I wish I could have a drink and make you go away.”*

After we finished the album, I checked my email for no reason and I read a short note from Layla telling me that life’s going well for her and she wishes me well and that I would stop asking her to elope with me.

Then Amanda’s text message goes off and she says, “Well I love you, but I have to hang out with my roommate tonight so me and you don’t become too clingy of one another.”

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I thought that was incredibly mature.

Amanda, "I'll see you in the morning, my ride's here... do you have heat in your apartment?"

"I never play with the heater."

She walks over to the heater and opens the vent door, turns on the gas and take a match and lights the pilot. "Now you won't freeze to death." And she left me with a smile.

And then Roman called me up and said that he was having a kickback at his house with some old guy's from my loan company and I should come over. So I walked two blocks to Roman and chilled there for a while.

We were watching a Tivoed Laker's games and we were having a pretty good time. And then I saw Lloyd come out of the bathroom and it hit me like a ton of bricks. Everything became illuminated! I jumped up in horror when Lloyd went to shake my hand and recall a blunt that he thought I shared with him, this is the dude Amanda's looking for.

"I sell cars now and I'm living like a mile down the—" this is the dude that I promised Amanda I'd help her find.

It's horrible to be at such a moment of truth. There is nothing in the world to do except for live with your decision. On one hand, this dude has always been a flake and maybe he'll be gone before Amanda could find him and on the other hand, part of the beauty of our relationship was that we molded it on foundations of rules and it was a structure we could love and trust- this was specifically #12: *"Don't ever withhold information that may be pertinent to decision making."*

I left the party without saying bye to anyone and I walked down to Velvel's apartment. I enjoy his company when my mind feels cacophonous. I told Velvel that I totally feel like I could try heroin and run away and he told me that his divorce was just finalized and now he feels free for the first time in three years. So I went home and went to sleep.

Amanda arrives just before seven o'clock in the morning and she's smiling and she declares a new rule for me that I am to keep my behavior from being erratic at all costs, because I can't be honorable if my actions are erratic.

You know, there was a time when my inner cynic would tell me to face it and admit that I've been writing checks that I can't cash- but I looked at Amanda, and the front of her hair is blond and back is brown and sometimes she looks like a bald old man in the morning sunlight and I've been waiting for her to come into my life since I was 15.

So Amanda pulls out her notebook and looks through the list, "I want to make a deal with you- this is something you didn't promise me." She was suddenly seductive like I've never seen before, "I hear you saying the word, 'fuck' on the phone to your friends—"

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Of course I was laughing.

“And in your writing—too much, there are way too many “fuck you’s” and “Fuck yeah’s” and I’m trying to get through it all to find the good shit and it turns my stomach—so, if you do this, on our tenth anniversary from when we met- and that’s the thirty-first, you could sleep with anyone you want.”

Me, “you got that from Curb Your Enthusiasm?”

“Yeah, you like it?” She loosened up and then she just kisses me intensely. And that’s totally fair because I wrote to her that if she ever wanted something from me, she could always get it if she’s using sex.

I looked deep in her eyes, “I’m gonna tell you something tomorrow, and I should tell you now, but I’m afraid you will leave me forever, and I don’t want you to leave... if there is anything you want to do or say with me before this happens, I’m totally game- I mean like something fun you wanted to do with me.”

She looks at me and thinks, “Let’s not talk about it till lunch time tomorrow and I’ll give you a phone call.”

That made it worst, getting permission to withhold such news like I found her long lost soul mate. But I forgot about that till lunch the next day.

So that night, I was telling Georgie W. T. all about Amanda, “This is love my friend, and when I think about all the efforts I’ve wasted in the past, I really only have regret for how my erratic behavior had been hurtful to others in the past... Was our traumas really anything peculiar?”

George stopped me there, “I’m really sick of you acting like someone raped you as a child, you had a fine childhood and you’re not the victim you act like... Uh, I hope that doesn’t offend you, you know how you like honesty and all...”

I said, “thanks” because I appreciated it, but it made me want some alone time. I hung up and I smoked a bowl and I thought about how shitty I have always acted and I felt really bad. I fell asleep by myself with Tylenol Pm and blues on the radio, but it was cool, Amanda laid in bed with me all day and I was tired.

So, seven in the morning, Amanda knocks on the door and she’s smiling with a surprise. She brought her boom box and an Eminem cd to review for me. She packed a bowl for me and turned on a burnt copy of 2002’s Eminem Show.

She wrote notes for me in the notebook:

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White America- *It's about so many people identifying with him, "I could be one of your kids- Erik looks like this; even Erika likes my shit" and "when I was underground, no one cared I was white," but now that he and Dr. Dre swapped fans, people don't think he should be acting that way because he is a white role model.*

"Am I the first to slap a bitch or say faggot? But since I'm white it's an issue when I pissed on the White House lawn- well fuck you Cheney and Tipper Gore and your parental advisory just makes more kids want it." And at the end he says "just kidding" like he could take it all back once it was on the radio.

Cleaning out closet- *"Ever been hated, picket signs for my rhymes... aren't you sick of me now... I'm sorry momma, I never meant to hurt you, but tonight I'm cleaning out my closet" and he is singing about his trauma with no dad, (so he could never leave Halley because he knows what it's like and he would have wanted to work things out with Kim but now he "wants to shoot her." So he's sorry for telling their secrets.*

And he's not just dissing to sell cd's, but what if your mom was a pill popping abusive bitch and it's horrible because she's just a manipulative lady trying to take his money after she wished that he was dead when Ronny died. It's kind of eerie but a heartfelt song of why he has his apathetic attitude to people he writes about and it's interesting to note how Freudian his issues seem.

Soldier- *Gangster/Dance track, "never was gangster till he earned it and people doubt you when they see you, sometimes you can't be reasonable when someone challenges you," some dude raps from D-12, and it's a song about how far you got to go if you are a gangster- and it got the sirens playing as part of the music.*

Say Goodbye to Hollywood- *it's about the end of him and Kim and he should have known when she had him arrested, and then he catches her cheating on him and he wants to shoot both of them-*

Q: Why would he care if she cheats if he's a cheater?

A: He has different cultural and social standards than you have, and it's all because he doesn't want to leave like his dad left him. And half of the offense is letting yourself get caught.

Superman- *This song is like Amanda's Achilles heal. She loves it, but she thinks it has the sleaziest lyrics she has ever heard but she sings the chorus and raps along, "they call me superman, single now, never let bitches bring me down, ever since I broke up with what's her face, if you don't put out, I put you out, what are you trying to be my wife; maybe I love you one day but till then sit your ass on the runway..."*

Marshal really can't trust women because they really do just take him for the ride. "Bitches come and go" and they lie, "I think I love you."

It's strangely poetic and the second part is the best "first thing you say I'm not phased I hang around big stars all day, I don't see what the big deal is anyway, you're just plain old Marshal to me, oh yeah run that game, Halley Jade, I love that name, love that tattoo what's it say, rot in peaces, well that's great" and he rhymes "anthrax" with "Tampax!"

When the music stops- *More Gangster shit-talk Em is facing mortality if he gets shot, and he sings "what the fuck you take me for?" This songs deals with confusing Hiphop with real life and how that is a mistake.*

Then the D-12 gang kicks in- some rapper sings about how crazy he is; and another about pursuing money and what it's like when you find your friends dead; and then another, the point of view going after revenge and getting to sit in jail and he said some disturbing shit, "fuck a whore with a knife;" another is a wolf, and he says you have to drop when the Uzies come and music stops; then another sings that music influenced his life since 5th grade, from LL Cool J to NWA. "fuck the police, now I'm in jail, Mike Madison and Manson blue hair and titties, Ludicris, broken nose, fractured elbow, reach for Glock but the music stops."

My Dad's gone crazy- *This is the best track, "I'm going to hell who's coming with me" and Halley sings, "Oh please, someone go with him; I think my dad's gone crazy." He says that he's so crazy that he's even gay and he fucks Dr. Dre, and he's "gonna blow everything but Afghanistan on the map off" but the funniest string in the song is the verse he begins with, "Like my mom always told me Rinny rinny rinny, goddammit mother fucker if you ain't got nothing nice to say don't say nothing."*

Amanda started getting ready for work after the album finished, "what are heroes? Who are our role models? That's what I want you to think about and tell me about when I come to see you tonight."

I laughed in my head knowing that she wasn't coming to see me tonight— or at least we probably aren't going to be talking about heroes and role models.

Amanda walked through the door to catch her bus, "Don't wait for the bus with me today, I want you to shower and take a walk to a park or something and listen to some music... oh and I'll call you at 1pm to discuss what we spoke about yesterday." She blows a kiss at me.

I took a shower and walked to a public golf course a mile away from my place and I listened to "Ziggy Stardust" because David Bowie is great for when I just want to think or sulk. I thought about honorability versus the happiness I could have with Amanda.

So, I finished my joint at 12:59 and at 1pm Amanda calls me. I didn't try to prolong the situation and I told her that I know that Lloyd is the dude that she's looking for and I know where he is. Amanda was quiet for a minute and told me that she would meet me at the golf course in an hour.

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At 1:59, I finished my joint and at 2 o'clock, Amanda strolls up a path and walks up to me sitting under a tree. I wrote down the address where Lloyd was working at the present moment and handed it to Amanda. I almost expected her to turn and walk away and then she said, "Please come with me, I need you there just in case something happens."

We walked to the bus stop and sat there in silence for forty-five minutes before the bus came. Amanda took one of my cigarettes and smoked it like a cigar because she said she didn't want to get addicted again and just commented, "these things taste like shit, why do you like them?"

She was trying the best she could, so I laughed for her.

We got on the 224 and headed down to Ventura and Van Nuys to Lloyd's Used Car Lot. We both saw him talking to a customer when we passed the place on the bus. And then we got off and quietly approached Lloyd who had just finished with his customer.

When Lloyd saw Amanda he was smiling so widely and I waved and started walking home. I was a block away when Amanda came running up to me. She kissed me on the cheek, "I loved your intensity... good luck."

I said, "me, too." And she walked back to Lloyd. I walked home and thought about all the pretty women in Oakland and I saw Amanda's notebook and I thought about all the rules that Amanda wanted me to follow and I decided that since she's gone and it didn't look like she was coming back to claim them, I was gonna take her rules and call them my own.

That night I had a random memory of a conversation with my buddy Will back in Baltimore. Some friend of his offered to fly him out to Israel and back if he would just speak to a certain rabbi. So I asked, "why rabbi's?"

Will said, "he's studying for his smicha and it's a mitzvah to get me to talk to people about Torah, and he was cool."

So I said, "well some rabbis are cool and some are real wise and they know it, and we do look up to them because it's engrained in us. It's our first respects, like first love."

Will, "when I was a kid, I was all into it and I guess that's why mitzvah's don't count when you're a kid— because the things you do when you're a kid is a reflection of the limits of what you know."

The Ripken Way

"Calvin Edwin Ripken, Jr. was born on August 24, 1960, in the small Maryland town of Havre de Grace to Calvin, Sr. and [Viola](#) Ripken. His father had been with the Baltimore Orioles as a minor-league catcher since 1957, and after a shoulder injury dashed his hopes of a major-league career, the elder Ripken stayed on with the club

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as a coach and manager at both the minor and major-league level. While the family made their home in Aberdeen, Maryland, Ripken's father traveled around from Wisconsin to South Dakota before finally managing the Orioles minor-league team in North Carolina. Cal Ripken, Jr. (born 1960) holds many records in professional baseball, but it is his breaking of Lou Gehrig's record of 2,131 consecutive games played that especially endears him to his admirers, who call him the "Iron Man" of baseball. The perseverance, endurance and everyday work ethic that Ripken has exhibited throughout his 17 seasons with the [Baltimore Orioles](#) has made him one of the most popular professional athletes in all of sports."

-the internet

"His brother Billy was also playing second for the Orioles when Cal was at short and Cal Sr. was bench coaching for something. This sort of made the Ripken family the model mediocre sports family for Baltimore and they have always portrayed a fan-friendly attitude leaving some youth to fanaticize about having the Ripken family as their own."

-Lord Louis Fontain, the third of Baltimore, PHD in Blues Guitar/Crack Smoking
Smoking

In Los Angeles, everybody knows that Jonny S. was instrumental in the formation of the underhand softball league in 1996 and that their first season was the best one. That was the season that Little Joe Fielder tossed two no-hitters and four shutouts for the Angels (not the Major League team), but he failed to go two innings for the playoff game. That was the season that Jonny S. hit 21 home runs and a third of the players got tattoos of their team logo, sponsor, number, or actually anything.

CHAPTER UNO

In 1995, Jonny S. moved to Sherman Oaks to become a movie producer. He had dreamt of movies since he was a little boy and he was determined to be successful. When he realized that it was a lofty goal to chase, he decided that he would have to anchor himself to the city if he would ever be able to pursue his dreams.

In order for him to live somewhere, the place would have to be hospitable to baseball, his other passion in life. Jonny S. is first and foremost an Iron Bird and he regards his childhood as hard. He says that without baseball he probably would have ended up being a juvenile delinquent who obsessively listened to rap music which leads him to attributes all his success to living life in the Ripken way.

Both me and my brother Johnny were Ironbirds, but I stopped with all that when I was 12 and I got off Ritalin. But he never got off it and he kept going and I think he really believes that he's an outfielder just living his life under the guidance of the greatest ball player who ever lived.

The Ripokanic Oath is a sacred oath that Ripken Juniors all over Maryland vowed every morning when they woke up after the pledge of allegiance during the mid to late 80's. It

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was a very long and verbose and quite the manic manifesto that Billy Ripken crafted over an intense winter month of oriental calf stretching.

It was originally written as an inspirational speech to goad the Orioles back to the World Series, but it had too many tangents to be real effective and it never really took off in the clubhouse. It loosely outlines what it takes to be a team player on the field and in real life, too. There are also verbose rants preaching the ills of Red Gatorade addiction dispersed at random instances which left us all so intrigued to eventually hear it as the topic of a series of motivational cassette tapes.

So, Ripken Junior must always keep his nose clean. That means it was fundamental that they vowed total abstinence from steroids and amphetamines unless they were doctor prescribed so cautious were they that they ended up distancing themselves from non-Ironbird teammates because they wouldn't even share the same water. In some regards, these boys [and girl] developed a sort of xenophobia towards other children their age. Though part of the oath acknowledged racial equality, there are many reports of Junior members hiding from black kids who lived on their streets because they had a reputation of jumping white kids. After all, Baltimore was known to be pretty violent and the violent folk didn't want anyone thinking otherwise.

Once in a while Iron Birds make barbeques with people who encouraged cross cultured dialogue with gangs such as the Baltimore Cripps. The attitudes projected gangs not to be as big of a problem as they were made out to be. We were taught that 9 out of 10 kids, who said they were in a gang were really lying.

So Cal would visit us every now and then and give us advice and direction. I remember random pep talks about sportsmanship. He promoted giving water to tall people playing sports as being good exercise too. He warned us about being fat and acting awkward and stalking athletes; everyone has self control and we can all choose to stalk or to be fat. The messages were only of empowerment.

So of course my brother Jonny and I love the man. We needed a hero in our youth who could survive to our adult years. Why, we lived in the Reagan years, where it felt that life is just so much work. Cal was the spokesman for our home team who never won but always finished each game.

Before Jonny S. left Baltimore to pursue his dreams, he actually had an audience with Cal at the Maryland Public Television Studio in Owings Mills and Jonny S. heard of his idol's whereabouts when he was already at BWI, all ready to head to Burbank. He had to make a quick decision, but he decided that he really would appreciate Cal Ripken's attention so he caught a cab and pushed off his flight.

Jonny S. cleverly disguised himself with a tie and a fake mustache and he sneaked in the studio holding a jug of water. When he found Cal just walking in the hallway, Jonny S. dropped the water and it spilled a little onto Ripken's shoes. Cal is a giant person in

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person, and he was stunned but he saw how Jonny S. was so very apologetic and he forgave him on the spot and went on his way.

Then he took off his fake mustache and grabbed a clipboard from a desk and started down the hall. Cal was sipping vitamin D milk in a conference room by himself trying out different facial expressions and voices when Jonny S. smoothly walks in and sits down and reads some notes on his clipboard to himself.

Jonny S.: (Flashing a loose Iron Bird merit button from his pocket): Hello Mr. Ripken this is an honor.

Ripken: (Smiling, stands up and closes the door and sits back down) Hello my son, how did you find me?

Jonny S.: Someone posted it quite late on the member's site and my friend called me at the airport and I came to see you before I leave the land of Baltimore.

Ripken: (long sigh) well, I'm glad you are here. Do you have any questions for my wisdom?

Jonny S.: I thought you'd never ask.

Ripken: "And for when wisdom flows like the fountain, one should always offer his two cents;" Billy, 3/17/86.

Jonny S.: "And any type of opportunity could only approach once" Senior, 10/2/83.

Ripken: Impressive, what's your quest?

Jonny S.: I want to be a movie star in Hollywood!

Ripken: (pensively thinking) Ok, that's not too bad of an idea, may you always have baseball in your life... "and softball counts as baseball."

Jonny S.: Kelly, 6/7/91

Someone is coming.

Ripken: Farewell my young Iron Bird.

Cal handed Jonny S. a coupon for a month free of Comcast Cable to give to his mom. And Jonny S. walked backwards out of the room and Cal called him back and quickly scribbled something on a Post-it and folded it. He directed Jonny S. to read it on the plane and if it was found to be enjoyable it should be shared with the world and the message should travel as far as Seattle to be told to a boy named Alex Rodriguez at a fanfest or at a batting practice.

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Jonny S. caught a cab and Cal filmed some promos for his next philanthropy action.

He was on the plane, drinking a Heineken in a plastic cup. Listening to the snores of the passenger passed out next to him, he opened the note,

“If you build it, they will come” – Costner, Field of Dreams... “even in evil, wisdom may hide” Calvin Edwin Ripken Jr. 7/7/95.

It was a real short note and moments after he had nothing else to think about he had a vision of Ozzie Smith and Tony Gwynn sitting a few aisles up. Jonny S. ordered two Heinekens for them and when they turned to look at him, he flashed the Ripken hand signal and they smiled and drank their beers. And then the plane started to shake a little violently and Jonny S. stepped out of the trance. Otherwise the flight was pretty smooth.

So Jonny S.’s first course of action after he got settled down in L.A. with a steady job working at a mortuary five nights a week was to find a baseball league to play in. Whenever he scouted, he made sure to keep in mind an important axiom— one must understand his abilities: for example if someone was meant for professional baseball he would know by his environment but if someone is only meant for softball he can still attain nirvana.

So Jonny S. went from league to league but he only found the extremes. There were some really nice semi-pro leagues, and recreational leagues, but no place was comfortable enough to be his home field.

Walking outside a park up on Saticoy one Sunday almost disheartened Jonny S. was deep in a monologue, “sure those guys playing on the field are 20-40 years old, and sure they have pizza, and beer, but they don’t have buttons on their cotton uniforms and the players look like goofs, all drunk and laughing. And so many people were making fun of each other that little kids are riling up in the stands, but wait till one little dimwit starts to spray soda on some outfielders... then it won’t be so funny!”

Suddenly, Jonny S. began a flashback from when he was 7 and there were 25 crazy hyper kids in a closed classroom and everyone was throwing Shasta and Wise Potato Chips and Dipsy Doodles and salt but he was trying to be a good sport till someone took out a small container of blueberries, dumped it all on the floor and he rolled in it! Jonny S. couldn’t handle the memories anymore and he ran around the parking lot twice yelling, “Ahhhhhhhhhhh!”

That was when he spotted Shabsi sitting on a curb with his head was down. He was holding his glove and his bat and he wanted to play but he didn’t feel invited because one of them made fun of his Tzitzit and he thought L.A. was more evolved than that. Even though Shabsi takes things in stride, he didn’t want to play with anti-Semites.

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He was smoking a cigarette and even offered Jonny S. one, but Jonny S. would never smoke so he just drank his blue drink. They sat side by side on the curb in the parking lot quietly staring off straight ahead till Shabsi pulled out his red drink.

Shabsi: My wife's gonna come in two hours.

Jonny S.: Well, I wish there was a place for baseball players like us, who are serious about the game.

Shabsi: I know! It sounds funny but when I was a kid I was part of the Jackie Robinson fan club, We had the right idea about baseball, it was for everyone.

Jonny S.: I totally understand what you're saying! Every at bat should be serious, every base runner should be chased! Teams! Jerseys! Training! Drama! Pride! With a coach who cares!

Shabsi: Yeah!

Jonny S.: (Meekly) You ever heard of Cal Ripken?

Shabsi: (Jumping up) Oh no! Are you a Ripkenite?!

Jonny S.: (Ready to explode into a rage filled UFC fighter) No! We are Iron Birds! You got a problem with that?!

Jonny S. stands up and starts to walk away. Shabsi called back, "Please dude, I'm sorry that I was insensitive, I was raised in a sheltered environment." Jonny S. comes back, "If you ever talk shit about my beliefs, I'll kick your ass." Shabsi apologizes profusely and,

Shabsi: (Still shocked a bit) No... I... I... just never met one of you guys before?

Jonny S.: (Taking off his Oriole cap) See, I don't got any horns.

Shabsi: Wow, I actually thought that one was true... so you guys are like dungeons and dragon for baseball or something?

Jonny S.: Why do you have to understand my beliefs if you aren't interested in the way?

Shabsi: You're right, I should mind my own business.

Jonny S.: That's right, (angry) but I forgive you!

Shabsi: Thank you... I actually understand the baseball as a fantasy existance... I was an only child in a family of eight kids. No one in my family was interested in baseball at all, and I always wanted to go to Little League but the best I got to play was in Yiddle

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League - (sigh) hashem yerachaim... five strikes, sure we got to run around in the field but there were also five outfielders...

Jonny S.: Ok, ok, I get it, life is hard, I also had to sacrifice to play little league... I got to get going.

Suddenly, Shabsi proceeds to beg Jonny S. to start a league with him. Jonny S. was reluctant because he needed clearance from Iron Birds National and his would-be partner is a baseball agnostic; and he could only sanctify a team in Baltimore though he wasn't scheduled to fly back till one of his friend's funeral.

Shabsi pleaded with Jonny S. to do what ever he needed to make baseball a reality for them by next season.

Jonny S. flew back to Baltimore a week later and got together three knowledgeable and wise elder Iron Birds and they gathered in back of Brooks Robinson's gas station on Reisterstown at the border of Pikesville and Owings Mills.

The case was presented and the panel notarized an official letter on Ripken Way stationary introducing Jonny S. as an authorize merchandiser of Iron Bird paraphernalia and he also received a framed Cal's Official Blessing certificate.

So Jonny S. flew back to LA and he and Shabsi devised their league. Shabsi wanted to draft a charter but Jonny S. vetoed him with an Iron Birds Constitution. Shabsi was frustrated and almost told Jonny S. that "the Ripken Way is little more than a cult," but he knew that Jonny S. doesn't sign away every other paycheck to hear that he belongs to a cult.

The next task was to recruit players who share the same philosophies on baseball as they did. Shabsi made a website for the Ripken Iron Bird League of the San Fernando Valley and opened a chat room for serious minded people who wanted to play ball. At first it was slow, but every recruit was worth while.

They even recruited a very talented and athletic white guy who was only at this chatroom accidentally. But Jonny S. told him that he could search for underage sexual prey anytime but this league will be once in a while opportunity! Shabsi told Jonny S. to never joke about sexual prey because that's not classy and the advice was even received without conflict.

As it got closer to the season, it seemed that there was only enough players for two and half teams. Shabsi feared a lopsided schedule and he was so nervous one night that he couldn't sleep. His wife kicked him out of his bedroom because he was pacing and it was getting creepy and his kids hate when he wakes them up. So he went to his study and called Jonny S.

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Jonny S. was scared because why would Shabsi ring him at 1:43 a.m. but he was up because he was working at the mortuary and he liked being on the phone and his wife went to sleep at 10 every night. Shabsi was apologetic for waking Jonny S. but he was really worried about not having enough players.

Jonny S. understood and said he would do something about it in the morning. So at 9, Jonny S. called our old friend to do a favor for him. George W. T. of the Baltimore Ironbirds and he knew someone who held a lot of clout with the San Diego Ironbirds which were really just an underground sandlot, but you got to go with connections.

The next day, two quarter-semi-pro softball teams, the Glendale Armenians and the Chatsworth Mexicans suddenly lost their spots in their league. Shabsi and Jonny S. quickly went to meet Roy Wise and Bobby Wilson, the coaches and they persuaded the teams to join the Ironbird League with 15 pies of pizza, 5 cases of orange Shasta, and 10 cases of Budweiser. Wise and Wilson, however refused to wear the Ripken logo because they said that they were too old for that shit (and Cal would have respected that.)

Jonny S. and Shabsi spent the next month's Sundays listening to "Eye of the Tiger" and training for five hours a day in the gym and five hours on the ball field and when the season started they were ready.

Jonny S. was the commissioner of the league and Shabsi was the treasurer. Jonny S. appointed himself a manager for the North Hollywood Dell Orioles, and Shabsi got to lead the Sherman Oaks Hallmark Angels, and Roy brought a friend, Sam Perlozo, to coach a third team but the uniforms and hats were blank.

Now no one ever saw a league blossom so well. There were 16 games for each team a season, 2 playoff games, and one World Series game. The success was due to the general attitude towards the game and the players seemed real passionate. They practiced and they played well. The pitchers generally kept the score low, and the fielders pounced on everything.

And Jonny S. was the star of it all- he was an outfielder, but he once pitched six scoreless frames when his pitcher was too hung over to play. He hit the league record that stood for more than a decade of 21 homeruns and he batted a neat .645 for fourth place in the league. Pitchers were really afraid to pitch to him but not Joe Fielder who faced Jonny S. during the first round of the playoffs. Showing no fear, he threw as hard as he could at Jonny S. as hard as he could and knocked him real bad in his right knee- his bad one.

Jonny S. fell to the ground crying out in agony about how he was gonna kill Joe and his girlfriend and cut off Joe's penis and put parts of it in both of the corpses mouths and the Orioles ended up losing the high-scored game even though Joe was ejected immediately. The Angels just had the best defense in the league.

In November, Jonny S. took great delight in suspending Joe Fielder from the league for 50 games but Joe said he was moving back to Chicago and he didn't care. This enraged

Jonny S. so he blew up Fielder's car but he didn't run far enough in time for a piece of shrapnel flew into his bad knee and Jonny S. was to be sidelined from actually playing ball again until 2008. He valiantly stayed with the Orioles in various capacities over the years.

Well those were a hard stretch of years for Jonny S., and though his league grew in size and popularity he always felt very lacking in the baseball world that he loved so deeply. He kept his job at the mortuary and he slowly worked his way up to the master undertaker position over the years and he even got to work on a variety of movie projects over the years as an important extra. His wife had some kids and life progressed in many wonderful ways.

But if anyone even spoke about baseball, Jonny S. would talk very offensively and get real defensive. He eventually even had a falling out with George W. T. who flew in for the 2001 World Series Ceremony in Memory of the Towers to represent New York because his uncle and grandmother live there.

The rift began during the visit, George became worried about Jonny S.'s excessive Red Gatorade drinking. Billy Ripken specifically warns in his audio tape, "I'm a Winner and a Recovering Loser!" (tape 7, week 15) that drinking too much Red Gatorade increases the red electrolyte blood count to extreme measures which causes Red-Rade-Rage and it is a dark path from there back to reality.

Billy was a great orator because he never bored his audiences even if he was repeating himself. He was also a master birthday party magician so he was always doing some sort of trick while he was talking. This worked well for my generation because ADD seemed to be as rampant back then as polio was.

Along with that, Billy sometimes used puppets to show his students how to role play out different scenarios so they won't ever get caught by surprise. And once he personally showed Johnny S. how to make puppets out of old socks if he couldn't afford to buy new socks to make puppets.

And Billy never bored us with the science of things, because we knew we could trust him. His mom always said that he was the brainy Ripken. He even won the first place in a second grade science fair.

Of course Jonny S. was thinking about all the things we learnt from Billy when he was throwing a bat at George and kicking him out of his dugout, but he had so much pent up Gatorade that he couldn't control himself. The community papers were outraged. The headline read, "When did you ever make a whole baseball league by yourself you stupid dental hygienist!"

Even Shabsi, who weathered all of Jonny S. control issues from the start was totally fed up after that season and he resigned as manager of the Angels, and vice commissioner. Out of professional courtesy for his friend, he officially said that he wanted to spend

more time with his family. But Jonny S. was once quoted saying, “Shabsi and I share different visions of the future of softball in this town. He is a dear friend and we will always have our memories... I think my best time with Shabsi was in the office, because we all knew he couldn’t play for shit, he tried to be a catcher but he always got injured in the face because he has a freakishly fat face that can’t be protected by standard equipment, so that’s the only reason I said that he could coach in the first place.”

As Shabsi packed up his desk at the guesthouse that the headquarters were stationed out of, he could only remember Jonny S. as the once shining example about how to be a good ball player, good teammate, and a good person, but now he’s just a lush drinking his Red Gatorade all day long.

CHAPTER DOS

Red Gatorade abuse always starts innocently enough. With Jonny S., he was signing baseballs at the end of a ’99 game and a little boy, no older than eight handed Jonny S. a 20 once bottle of the stuff. Fearing that the papers would label him as a Ripken fanatic again, he drank the stuff and posed for pictures doing it, too.

’99 was a hard season for Jonny S and Ironbirds across the country. Cal Ripken was retiring and really treating his followers like he was on vacation. Many wondered if their leader was leaving them forever. Billy Ripken had been out of sight for quite a while, too.

There were rumors floating around that Cal was assassinated in France while on an outreach mission to angry Muslims who were rioting against something stupid. As rumor goes, everyone needed to see Cal retire because he was a demagogue in life. So Billy had to take one for the team and do the “face-off” thing and retire as his brother Cal’s memory like a mench. So, that was ’99 and it was so intense and bitter for everyone that anyone who thought he would return as their leader, prophet, or savior, was seen as a total disassocio-path.

Friendships and marriages were dissolving all around the membership. Suddenly, it wasn’t cool to be an Ironbird anymore. Some people admitted that they were going through a phase and some said that they really felt abandoned.

After the streak broke and Cal’s eventual retirement, Jonny S. didn’t mention him for quite a few years. Sometimes people asked him questions but he would slickly distract them by telling the stories of Ripken’s timing and the way he always came through for the team. But Jonny was drinking the red stuff.

One night, Jonny S. realized three things: that he deprived himself of the “red stuff” for so long that he probably never wanted to quit it; that his career was over; and that he was real depressed. It would be a very slippery slope, but it was not like he was still playing

so he decided to be reckless. By the end of the '01 season, Jonny S. was drinking that stuff nonstop and worst of all, he was yelling at everyone. His weight also went totally out of control. He tried to take the rumors about himself in stride but he felt betrayed by journalists and fans alike.

He retained enough charisma to float as he still carried a certain amount of respect, especially considering that he had the best all around record that the league had ever seen, with a gold glove in center field and two MVP plaques— the one for the World Series he gave to himself because the valuable rule that came from the shattering of his knee that prohibits hitting batters on purpose and calls for a riot and/or suspension as punishment.

So we are now up to 2008 where Jonny S. has been totally sidelined from any actual work in the league due to his Gatorade abuse for the last three seasons and all his hopes to play again still seemed like a fantasy— but he got clean and he just got knee surgery.

Johnny S. was born again when he visited Ripken Stadium in Maryland. He didn't see Cal but he saw a statue of him and a whole new generation of Iron Birds.

Jonny S.'s knee surgery was long overdue but never the less a complete success. Dr. Andrew Johnson in Anaheim performed and named the brand new surgery Jonny S. Surgery. It has .098% more of a chance to repair past botched arthroscopic surgery by putting a band on a patient's stomach with a tiny camera in it to broadcast live clips of what's going on in the patients stomach on a public website. This camera/band on the stomach actually causes a patient to be more self conscience which naturally diminishes one's appetite which causes them to lose a lot of weight, which thereby reduces the pressure on the knees and allows them to heal stronger than it would have otherwise. It's all about using surgical interventions to treat psychosomatic injuries.

The surgeon made a documentary of the surgery. There was so much publicity that the New York Yankees from Major League Baseball tried to persuade Sidney Ponson to get the same procedure. Sidney said he would think about it when he's finished his current binge but he found an extra million dollars in an old pair of jeans and bought some coke instead.

Well, Jonny S. recovered and was doing better than ever. He got a new personal trainer who had experience working with pros. Greg Anderson was also was an ex-phlebotomist and he prepared Jonny for surgery by teaching him about newer, and more alternative lifestyles so he would recover .010-.015% faster.

The surgery was quite an intense ordeal and though Jonny S.'s friends tried to be there for him as much as possible, he always felt neglected. He understood that his past issues didn't make having friends easier, but he was through with those evil ways and he was reinvigorated in the ethics of his baseball tradition and there really was nothing else to do about it. But without Gregg Anderson helping him by conversing with him; giving him his medications in a small paper cup; and injecting those shots in him he wouldn't know how he would have survived.

Gregg was such a nice guy. When Jonny S. woke up from surgery the first thing he saw was his Bobble Head Ripken Family that Gregg brought over. They actually bobbed the ceramic heads for quite a while together, entering some sort of trance. Gregg used to joke that Kelly Ripken had a nice body for a white girl and it was usually a nurse or Jonny S.'s wife who kicked Gregg out of the hospital when they laugh too loud.

[It may seem strange to mention Jonny S.'s wife because she's a secret character, but that's because she tries to keep herself totally separate from Jonny S.'s baseball life/fantasy. I seen her once or twice, she looks real nice and put together and she seemed to be real supportive of his choices and interests in a noninvasive way and she takes care of their children so well that I don't even know their names and she's a nice sister-in-law.]

This big experience provided him a rock-bottom and a framework in which he could try to get his life together. Jonny S. felt like the last few years had slipped away from him, but he wasn't going to remain down; he was a fighter and Gregg knew that.

Gregg spoke to Jonny S. about everything; counseling him on matters that ranged from responsible child rearing to making stews from left over chicken bones— the Carl Weather's method. He helped him rehabilitate very quickly and Gregg was first to suggest that maybe Jonny S. could even play again.

On the first day of spring training, Jonny S. announced to the team that he was taking out the awkward Wizokowsky boy out from in center and putting him at batboy, and the bat boy could be the water boy and the water boy would be fired because he never was really good at bringing water.

Jonny S. would be starting in center field and as coach, because he never really even vacated the spot. Jonny S. seemed like the Godfather he always was when he took his charge back. He always told everyone that he was the Jimmy Hoffa of softball and that when he commands respect, he takes it.

At first the team seemed uneasy, and the Wizokowsky boy didn't like the move at all but then Jonny S. started clapping behind his back and the team joined in. Paul stepped up and shook Jonny S.'s hand, "anything you say coach."

Jonny S. stood in awe for a moment and then asked the boy to smile. Jonny S. beamed, "Ah-hah, you do look like that actor who plays Roger Maris in that movie 61!"

Paul Oppenhiemer had always tried to look like Roger Maris and that's why he always wore pin stripes, so he was flattered. He was in his sophomore year at right field for the Orioles. He was brought to Saticoy Park in a trade along side with the Wizokowsky boy at the end of last year for Pedro the Outfielder because the Orioles weren't contending.

But Paul had been training all winter for this. He had been swinging the bat in his apartment and doing push ups obsessively all year. He also trained a little leaguer to

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throw a bucket of grounders all over the infield for him to field at least three times a week.

At first, he started training so if he saw either one of his ex-girlfriends they could notice how strong he got, but then he would fantasize about big games and that was exhilarating. And in the Ripken League every game really felt like it was a big game.

They played in community college stadiums and fans purchased tickets for very nominal fees which went to the maintenance of the facility. It was billed as “Average Men Playing the Super Human Game.” Paul knew that he was average but he always wanted to play a super-human game, so he went to the website and that was two years ago.

You had to hand it to Jonny S. Over the last ten years, he built a strong league and fan base and all as a volunteer, as a manager and commissioner. And as an Oriole, he even traded for Paul Oppenhiemer who already was building a name for himself at batting practice.

Jonny S. greeted Paul after the cage, “I’m so impressed with your progress.”

Paul, “Well, I’m just happy to be playing ball for a team with such history. And you are the best coach and your instruction has made me better than I could ever imagine!”

But Jonny S. didn’t realize how good Paul was till their first game. Jonny S. was the leadoff hitter in his first game back and he had the announcer put a boombox up to the mic so he could listen to “Eye of the Tiger.” He sent the first pitch over the right field fence.

Paul batted number nine and he also requested the announcer to play “Eye of the Tiger” and he sent his first pitch over the right field bleacher. Then Jonny S. came back to the plate and he seemed to be stalling but he was just trying to get the announcer’s attention to play his song, but the guy was just talking about Paul.

“And Jonny S. also takes the ball deep and it looked like there was gonna be a homerun race this season... on the warning track, oh, no, some guy on the Angels, Jeff Mayer caught the ball.”

At the end of the game Paul was only up three times, but he had three homeruns and Jonny S. only had one.

Jonny S. took Paul out for ice creams and drinks after the game. Paul was so excited about hitting so well, Jonny S. asked him why he never hit homeruns before this season. Paul joked that he was on steroids but Jonny S. didn’t understand he was joking. Eventually, Jonny S. confided to Paul how violated he felt when he heard “Eye of the Tiger” playing and how he went to the plate early thinking that he was up. Paul apologized because he didn’t know that the song meant so much because it was either that or “Can I Get Witcha” by Biggie.

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Before the next game, Jonny S. officially announced random steroid testing for every player and the games were all postponed till Tuesday night when the results would be in. Jonny S. paid for the testing out of his pocket with the help of a secret sponsor from Baltimore.

On Tuesday night before the game, donuts and ice cream were served to all the players and a local LA band Baby Angelo played for an hour. Jonny S. also gave out spirit award trophies to everyone. He also announced a positive reinforcement program for coming on time for 90% of the games and practices which culminated with a group paintballing trip the week after the World Series.

At the closing of the festivities, Jonny S. picks up a manila envelope with the names of the steroid users.

When he got to the pitcher's mound to announce the results the crowd was silent. Jonny S. grew to love when the crowd is silent and he launched into a speech about how steroids could ruin the great game that they play and he opened the envelope. He read the first paper to himself and he said that he is thrilled that there is no rampant steroid issue and there are only two people who have tested positive. He turned to the second page and he saw his name and Pedro the Outfielder.

His face turned white, "Oh no... oh no, I'm so sorry to have to say this, but Pedro the Outfielder you are hereby suspended till further notice... I'm so glad I traded you when I did! Give me back my spirit award and you can't come on the end of the season paintballing trip, either!"

Pedro was crushed because all he did was work out so he could be a good player and be appreciated. He could only be described as a nice guy who brought good cheer wherever he went and he lived with his disabled mother and his younger sister and he supported his family. So his team tried to cause a fuss.

Someone yelled that the charter was as useless as the queen of England. Then Jonny S. still at the mic, walkie-talkied the maintenance crew of their facility to bring tear gas and suddenly people seemed to relax but within five minutes, everyone was gassed and the games were postponed for a makeup night.

The next game, Jonny S. was distant. He had two more homeruns and Paul only had one, but he really thought he'd get Paul on the steroid thing but instead he found out that he has steroids. He wondered if steroids were a made up phenomenon and then he wondered if AIDS was even real. Well either way, Jonny S. thought it was ridiculous; maybe b-12 or maybe Gregg mixed some creatine in his shake, but no steroids.

Jonny S. decided to go visit Gregg in jail where he was serving because of some perjury thing. When Jonny S. actually got to sit with Gregg, he told him, "This is the best season I'm gonna ever have, I could feel it, I may break my homerun record!"

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Gregg, "I'm so happy to hear that."

Jonny S., "there is one thing, though... this other guy on my team might be better than me."

Gregg, "that's ridiculous, no one is better than you, I read that you got 3 homeruns already, two games in."

Jonny S., "yeah, but Paul has four and he's up less than I am, I even tried to get him busted on steroid-."

Gregg, "don't say that word-come on man, don't you know that steroids are a made up phenomenon that haters made up to blacklist talented individuals, kind of like herpes. That guy is getting lucky, you could do anything... remember, whose my hero?!"

Jonny S. blushes and looks down, "Me... I am... just I wish I was better."

Gregg, "ok, I knew this day would come- just double everything I taught you and you'll be fine."

Jonny S. gets happy, "gee, thanks, I would send you money for the session, but I think your bank account is still frozen."

Gregg, "well it's the thought that counts... hey, you know what you could do for me?"

Jonny S., "anything!"

Gregg, "well I just realized how profound my advice was and I thought of another friend of mine who is going through something similar while he's resurrecting his old dreams and all, and he doesn't even know if he will play ball next season, could you get in touch with my buddy Barry and tell him to double his doses, too?"

Jonny S., "sure thing!" And Jonny S. left the prison happy as can be just thinking, "I sure hope Gregg doesn't have a big cellmate who rapes him."

So the season went on. By the last game of the season Jonny S. and Paul were neck to neck in the homerun race. Jonny S. had 26, and Paul had 27. Jonny S. felt like he really was an underdog who would succeed and he would do anything aside from out-right sabotage (he won't use sabotage anymore) to achieve his goal.

The night before the game, Jonny S. sat at a bar till 2 a.m. He was mostly talking to himself, but there were people around him and the loud music made him feel normal as he ranted, "I once had to bury an acquaintance... it wasn't as hard as you'd think... I went to school with the guy and he lay in critical condition for a month after a car accident and I flew back home and stayed by his bed till he died... he died satisfied with me... no one paid attention to the guy before he died... sure everyone always shook

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hands, but my devotion to this dying man gained me a great reputation and popularity that was totally to my contentment...*”

*this paragraph may have been plagiarized directly from Camus’ “the Fall.”

At 2 a.m. he walked home by himself. He found a metal bar on the ground and he started swinging it as he stumbled. When the metal bar hit metal signs it made an excruciatingly inappropriate noise which woke people sleeping and scared the hell out of little kids with insomnia. He began to shuffle and make-up raps, “gangster, gangster where you go with that gun in your hand?”

Someone yelled out their window and Jonny S. yelled back, “I’m Jonny S. and tomorrow I’m gonna defend my title as the real homerun king!”

CHAPTER TRES

Everyone came to the game. I came with Lana because she wanted to see Paul and in the distance I saw Amanda and Lloyd. I saw Ron, Roman, Stephan; even Otis; Deema; Ely and Emily were together; Andy and Cloe; Gloria came with Beth because she had to see Paul go for the record; Al and Liz came because they had nothing better to do; Raffo and his Armenian posse was there smoking cigarettes and throwing the butts all around the stadium till an usher tried to make them clean it up and then Raffo’s sister and his girlfriend jumped the usher and cops escorted all the Armenians out of the park (even the old people who were obviously not in Raffo’s posse);

John Stanley’s band was performing; he was doing jimi-shit on a strat; blues based bass and drums. Paul’s MA meeting buddies were there— Marvin, Martin, Sara, Sheena, Judy;

Mayra came with her boyfriend and they parked the motorcycle illegally but it wasn’t towed; the group home guys all came with Romeo because they got free tickets, and Richard even came; Dr. Sherman was there with his daughter and new son-in-law to see a friend of their family play; Leslie was there and she brought Lisa and Laura and Linzy-Sue and Leticia and Lucrecia; Velvel and his baby girl, Olivia was there; G.C. was there with his grandson; even Hershel and his seven daughters were there; and there were so many others, too. We all came to see who was gonna be the new homerun king.

The announcer laughed, “the funniest thing about the situation is that the Orioles are a last place team because they’ve had the worst pitching in the league for seven straight years. Even with more than 50 homeruns between just two players their record was 6-9.

So Jonny S. was the leadoff hitter and he was standing in the batter’s box before the game started, drinking his red Gatorade (it was a relapse but no one really cared about it

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anymore and his Ripken dreams of his past were so distant) but he launched that first pitch into the bleachers.

During the second inning, Paul was up and he did the same and Jonny S. struck out. In the fourth inning Paul hit another homerun and Jonny S. struck out. And in the seventh inning, Paul hit another home run but he broke his right arm unnecessarily sliding into home plate.

And though he was in pain and he really couldn't imagine playing another game, he broke Jonny S.'s homerun record and he felt better than he ever did before.

That was Paul's moment in the sun and he said that his painful and rocky journey was worth it. He thanked his family—but he knew that his whole journey, Gus, Gloria, and Emily all led him to that point. As he laid in the stretcher with the mic in his hand, he was satisfied.

That pretty much was the game and Andy and Cloe decided to leave. They came up to Lana and I and told us that they will see me tomorrow at Micha and Erika's Shabos table. Cloe took me to the side and told me that she likes Lana because she is just friendly and perky with no strings attached.

I told her that when I go to Oakland, I'll give her Lana's number and they could meet up sometime for drinks and discuss fashion design whenever they want. Andy came over and told me that he's happy to see me outside of my bedroom and off my rocking chair and feeling less misogynistic.

And as we were making our way out, I noticed my brother, Jonny S. ended the game striking out. Most of the crowd had left and really no one was watching. He threw his bat in the outfield and he walked off the field. Georgie W. T. accepted Paul's homerun king plaque and the crowd disbursed. As Lana and I headed away from the ball field, Amanda and Lloyd spotted us.

Amanda and Lloyd approaches Lana and I. Amanda looks really happy and satisfied.

Lana, "Amanda! You found Lloyd!"

Lloyd's beaming, "Lana!"

I just waive and smile at the couple. Amanda punches my arm, "Hey, hey, hey?"

Me, "Shit girl, you look like you got it all figured out."

Lloyd preemptively, "It's great to see you guys, and we should go to the beach sometime but we are running a drop late."

Lana, "Why are you being awkward? Didn't you see Paul's last homerun?"

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Lloyd, "It was great to finally see him have his day in the sun."

Amanda, "Are you guys going to Oakland together?"

Lana laughs, and I say, "I'm moving at the end of the week."

Amanda sincerely, "Well it's good seeing you guys." And they walked away.

Lana and I sat down for a moment before we started strolling back from Valley College to her apartment. Lana asked me if I knew Lloyd and Amanda's story and I said I heard it before.

Lana, "Is Amanda good at it?"

Me, "Yep."

Lana, "What happened there?"

So I told Lana all about Amanda and how from the moment I saw her I knew that I could be in love with her forever. I told her about my text messages and emails till one day she arrived at my place and we had the best relationship for four days, and then I found Lloyd for her.

Lana, "was it hard?"

I said, "of course it was hard, she is the woman of my dreams and in fact I knew I could've got away with not telling her, too."

Lana, "So why'd you do it? Did you think if you play a martyr she'd choose you?"

I said, "at the end of the day, he was her mission and you can't get in the way of someone's mission like that. And I wouldn't be too proud to play martyr."

Lana, "why not?"

So I replied with my story of this girl that I fell in love with years back and how I believe deep in my stomach that she is mine. I said that I still feel this way often enough that I send her no less than twelve emails a year begging her to dump her boyfriend and come live with me. And she never does or she doesn't have a boyfriend but I really don't know.

But I still do it and it's self defeating because this cycle could only cause problems. And no matter how I try and try, I can not stop wanting to be with her more than anyone else!

And I feel horrible that I feel these possessive and chauvinistic ways at my friend. Sometimes I get over her for three-week-periods, but then I just think about how people

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like to fuck in the morning and at night and the craziness starts all over again... but she's my mission, I guess, and if there is anything that I could do, I'll do it and I can't give up even though there are so many days that I try to..."

Lana, "Well... until then you're just gonna love the one your with?"

Me, "Yeah, that's what I wrote you, didn't I... let's go back and roll, John left us eight pills."

Lana, "Ok, but we're chewing them this time."

Me, "Yeah... you know, I can't wait to meet another good looking Russian chick from Toronto in California."

Lana, "You're a moron" but it must not have bothered her too much because she pecked my cheek right after she said that.

EPILOUGE

I was still in Los Angeles when Layla emailed me two months later. I had just walked in the door with my neighbor and his crew. They are 15-18 year old El Salvadorians. They speak to me in Spanish and I explain to them the importance of an education by asking them questions like "how many eighths are there in one once?" I also tell them about pizza and how that is the best way to learn fractions.

That particular day, my neighbor's sister gave birth to a baby girl. She used to come up to me when I was standing at the top of the stairs, smoking and looking at the pool and she would talk in Spanish, and way too quickly for me to understand, but she always seemed to enjoy my company. So I was in a great mood when I sat down to read this letter.

I am sorry that I have not responded sooner, I have been very busy recently, and most likely have been avoiding having to send this. But, I feel that this cannot be ignored anymore, and that I have to say my piece.

At the end of January, you had sent me an email where you had expressed your feelings for me. I wrote a response, but never sent it; I saved it and since have not responded.

I am not sure exactly what to say here, what I have the right to say, what is correct to say, or should say. So, perhaps, I will just say it all, without stops, and complete honesty. I think that that is what you would want and understand since that is always how you have shared with me.

I also feel that I have to be completely honest with you because I care about you and I have had some concerns about you for quite some time, but have never come out and said anything bluntly. I have always sugarcoated things, or stepped delicately around the

issue. However, in my mind, and I may be totally off, what is going on now, i.e., your recent emails to me are not disconnected at all from my concerns for you in your life as well. I may be off, but I want to share my perspective with you, and understand that it is still my individual perspective.

I could go back now and respond to each email individually, but I think that it is best to address the bottom line.

You have expressed and shared feelings for me, again. . . I have not taken them lightly now or in the past, and I do not know how to express that more profoundly. But, in the past I have made myself clear. I have told you many times that I do not share your love now and I WILL NOT in the future. That is the bottom line.

Maybe, my mistake in the past was saying my piece but leaving open the door for a future possibility of friendship, which may have muddled the message or may have unwittingly undermined my message and then never let you have the break that you needed. I always left the door open for friendship because I care about you and appreciate your unique perspective on life.

But, right now, I have to say that I am pretty upset with you. It is one thing for you to have your continued or recurring/rekindled feelings. However, you have now overstepped and completely ignored my personal boundaries. This has happened before, but I have always respected your feelings and taken the situation as it was, but this is just too much. You have not truly listened to me. Whatever I say, you do not want to hear it. I know this because I have told you so many times in so many ways that I am not interested in a romantic relationship of any kind between us now, or in the future.

By you going at this again and again, tells me that you do not respect my personal intuition or really understand that I do have a sense of self and can perceive what are and are not the right or appropriate possibilities in my life. If we had not given this a shot or if I hardly knew you, then you would have a case to argue. But, I do know you and have enough of a sense of you to know that I do not want a future together.

I feel that whatever I say may be heard at the time, but ultimately your wants and desires overshadow the picture and then it becomes what you make it, your creation and your illusion.

This really scares me, and I find it so disturbing. Largely, because I think that I am not a unique situation, completely out of the norm in your life or way of thinking. I do not feel that I am the esteemed object of obsession here, but what is happening highly resembles it, more to the point I am one of many obsessions. If you continue to have this tunnel vision where you see and feel only what you want, and refuse to move on, you will miss out on some of the best things in life and hurt people in profound ways. You will close some great doors for self-growth and opportunities, although those openings may not always seem wonderful and sometimes even painful. You will continue to create greater opportunities for seeing people, hearing them, and then recreating, overriding them, and

then completely obliterating any true listening and understanding that you may have had of and with that person. And that is the most hurtful thing you can possibly do to anyone. To not be heard by someone you care about, and do not confuse this with agreeing, but the few times in my life that I wanted someone in particular to 'hear' me and they did not was perhaps one of the more painful experiences in my life. While on the other hand, when I was heard, but not agreed with, was a healing and moving experience.

I have seen this, not only in these continuing experiences with us, but in our past relationship as well. There were times when I stated boundaries or wanted you to listen to me, and that did not happen. There were times when I felt that you were more interested in going your personal tangent than really staying on task and discussing the matter at hand, whether it was something important or trivial, it did not matter. But, for clarity's sake, I know that this did not happen all the time. There were many exceptions. But it did happen, and apparently in many ways it still does.

Sometimes I feel as though you see the world through this wonderful and crazy Technicolor movie. You see it and analyze it but never really become a character in that film. Although you may hear and respect other perspectives, if that movie is really forcing you to see a world or perspective that you do not want see, then you just look at it in a different way, get a different take or perspective on the unfolding events.

I do not know what pushes you to do this. I do not know why you refuse to let go of me. But it has gotten to a point where it has become clear that it is not about what I have said or not said, but what you want to believe or need to believe, and that is what truly concerns me the most. That there are things in life too painful for you or too scary and then you fall back on illusions and a tunnel-vision bordering on obsession. I cannot begin to understand or claim what the source of this pattern is, but for a long time now, I have truly hoped that you would figure that out. I feel that I am one instance in your life but the bigger picture is the pattern. For all I know you may truly love me, or you may also be falling back to a place or memory that is comfortable, a vision full of promise. You have to figure this out. It seems that there is so much in your life that has happened and that you have just picked up and moved on from without ever really working out. In many ways, it has also given you a great skill; the ability to take life in stride with a kick of humor to add to it. This is something that many, many people cannot do. But it is also something that has to be taken in balance.

You speak of this grand adventure we can have together almost as if we can help each other actualize our dreams. But that is only possible with someone if you begin that yourself. If you believe that you can, will, and are doing that yourself. Nor can I be your dream or part of your dream. and with me the possibilities of life. Because it is again, a dream, a fantasy which is what makes it so appealing. I feel as though you want this great, awesome, creative life to materialize and that somehow through your associations I have become part of that fantasy. It is not that you do not deserve or will not have a successful creative career and life, but the fantasy is that it will just happen....somehow. For instance, you cannot just be proactive about writing you have to be proactive about how to get there, which may not always be a fun ride.

Going out to California, was a big step. It was a move in a direction. But, after talking to you while you are there it seems as though you are all over the place. In another one of your Technicolor film scripts. Writing, writing, writing, which is great, but not seeing or refusing to see all the pieces of life that that are out there. Moving to Oakland may be a good step for you but that in itself won't solve your future, and I may be wrong about this. Who knows, wonderful opportunities may open up there and I hope they do, whether you are in Oakland or L.A. But something I may not have said bluntly enough in the past, because I care about you, and am saying now, because I care about you, is that your writing needs serious work, and you need connections. If writing is your dream then you have to pursue this end relentlessly and realistically. You may not end up where you want or expect, but at least you will have no regrets, did all that you could have done, and got a hell of a lot out of it in the process.

Your writing has a lot of potential, some of it is great and some of it is brilliant. But it needs a lot of serious work. That does not make you a bad writer; it just makes you a writer. You have gone a long way on your own, but you need a mentor now. Someone who is objective that can take you to the next level, and/or someone who can steer you in the right direction and help you develop relationships and connections in the industry that are not bogus. I am not only referring to grammar and for willing here, but that is part of it. You need someone or people, that are not your friends looking over or perusing your work for you.

Maybe going to school like Andy's would be a good option, and screw the fucking loans, or maybe there is an alternative. Maybe get a job, any job or internship in the industry. Whatever it is, you have to do something that is clear, directed, and challenging.

Anyhoo, I am sorry if my writing has been rambling and jumping from thought to thought. However, there is really no good place to end things in a letter or in life. So, I just want to say goodbye. I realize now that it is not feasible for us to be friends now or in the future. I will not be contacting you again, and I ask that you not contact me either. If you feel that you need to respond to this and would like a response from me that is okay, and if you do not want or need to respond that is okay too. But beyond a response to this letter, our friendship has to end, since it seems that our friendship reinforces a recurring, unhealthy cycle.

-Layla

Well, at least in L.A. Tupac keeps it all in perspective:

"Keep ya head up, oooo child things are gonna get easier
ooooo child things are
get brighter [2x]

Aiyyo, I remember Marvin Gaye, used to sing ta me
He had me feelin like black was tha thing to be
And suddenly tha ghetto didn't seem so tough
And though we had it rough, we always had enough
I huffed and puffed about my curfew and broke the rules

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Ran with the local crew, and had a smoke or two
And I realize momma really paid the price
She nearly gave her life, to raise me right
And all I had ta give her was my pipe dream
Of how I'd rock the mic, and make it to tha bright screen
I'm tryin to make a dollar out of fifteen cents
It's hard to be legit and still pay tha rent
And in the end it seems I'm headin for tha pen
I try and find my friends, but they're blowin in the wind
Last night my buddy lost his whole family
It's gonna take the man in me to conquer this insanity
It seems tha rain'll never let up
I try to keep my head up, and still keep from gettin wet up
You know it's funny when it rains it pours
They got money for wars, but can't feed the poor
Say there ain't no hope for the youth and the truth is
it ain't no hope for tha future
And then they wonder why we crazy
I blame my mother, for turning my brother into a crack baby
We ain't meant to survive, cause it's a setup
And even though you're fed up
Huh, ya got to keep your head up

THE RANDOM BONUS TRACK—this story is not directly connected to any other story in this book
The Day Bandy Got Lost.

Al woke up very confused which made him very disconcerted. The birds he heard chirping outside the window threw him into a dejavu moment of horror. There was this one time when he was seventeen and he got involved with an older married woman and he really shouldn't have and he really felt ill about himself afterwards and her husband happened into the home in a very unexpected way like it was pulp fiction.

So like a story, he climb out the window and heard these same birds chirping and he fell off the roof and limped away before the good doctor could discover anything and he got out of that. And he learnt so many things that day... but this day, the birds chirping were out of place.

Al knew he woke up in a rocking chair, a creeky old thing with heavy enough wood to feel respectable. He knew that he dressed in button down shirts and dark slacks because the closet door was open. He knew that the room he was in felt like an ancient New England style guest room, so he knew he wasn't in Korea.

He stood up carefully and when he got his balance he did some long stretches and then he checked himself in the mirror and again, he knew he wasn't in Korea. So Al, you're old! At least late-fifties, and you look kind of handsome and at least you're pretty fit. You know he kind of looked like a poster for Cool Hand Luke... just old, how did that happen?

Do I have a family? I'm in a guest room; Is this my daughter's home? Do I have a daughter, I have an image of a little girl with her back against me as she sat on one knee on this wooden chair staring out the window... in Atlantic City... Is she my daughter?

Al slowly opened the door and peeked out at a dark wooden hallway and he saw a stairwell that must lead to an attic and a bathroom and closed doors. So Al ran down the hall to use the bathroom past the stairwell because he just woke up. He locked the door and put a stool by the door and he opened the window but closed it immediately when the birds started chirping again.

Al slowly exited the bathroom after doing what he needed to and combing his hair and looking at his teeth. Ah fuck! He found a fake tooth and it's not glued in forever, and maybe he had to be soaking it and he didn't. Alright the first thing on the to-do list is to find out about his tooth.

So Al's in the empty hallway and he sees the stairwell and he goes downstairs. The down stairs was immaculately kept but it had a real dead feel to it. It was dimly lit but Al didn't want to turn on any lights till he assessed the situation totally. So he walked into the dimly lit white tiled and totally white kitchen. It was immaculately clean and it reminded Al of 2001: Space Odyssey. But it was dark so maybe it was an off white, but with the fluorescents it may look very bright.

So he walked into a dining room and he saw an extremely long glass table with old and ragged books piled high out on one end. Papers were everywhere. It looked like a different language. And then there was a typewriter set up with paper overflowing but it looked neat because there seemed to be a clear border between the work space and the rest of the palace like dining room.

The living room had more light. A big mirror lined one wall and a pale velvet couch sat like it was never touched. There was a bowl of chocolate candies on the coffee table and Al decided to help himself and he discover a possible cause for his fake tooth when he realized that he was biting into a marble.

It hurt a lot... so he went up stairs and rummaged through his drawers and he found a Virginia driver's license and his name was Alvin Levine and he used to be younger but he was born in '33 and goddammit, he's a Cancer. He got dressed and put his license in his pocket.

He had nice enough clothing; he thought he looked like he may have once worked for the government and he was pretty sure that he was in the Air Force at the end of the Korean War. And he did look like he always kept in shape so he went to the bathroom and drank a few cups of water and he started alternating sets of push ups and sit-ups for an hour till he was fatigued, but he felt real healthy.

So he sat in his rocking chair for a few minutes and then he looked under the mattress. He found a pack of Marlboro 100's and two matches in the book.

So I'm a secret smoker; he opened the pack and smelled the cigarettes trying to see if it reminded him of anything, it didn't cue anything up aside from a smirk at himself. He ran to the bathroom and grabbed air freshener and he came back to his room. He rolled

his blanket long and placed it by the door and opened the window and stared outside. He lit a cigarette like a pro, but he coughed a storm.

He was staring out at a foresty suburban street with Victorian homes. It seemed quiet, like the spring or the fall on the East Coast. And then the minivans arrived, and a pickup truck, and a lot of cars. Bandy put his cigarette out quickly and pulled the blinds down and peeked out the window like he was in a gangster in a shootout.

Families dressed in formal wear. They look like Orthodox Jews because of their black yamakas, and some of them are smoking cigarettes so he's not gonna be caught. Now, what's Bandy?

"Bandy" was what he just referred to himself as, he had that name in his head with a little negatively contexted, "who the fuck do you think you are... oh I'm Bandy, who do you think you are?" but he didn't even have a voice for the thought and he decided not to dwell on a random self-depreciating thought, but Bandy is scared, because people he doesn't recognize are invading his home- unless he rents the room and then it all makes sense. Then those are the people who lived in the other room. It is a big house.

Bandy calmed down and he sat in his rocking chair and thought about what to do and then he dozed off for some time to be awoken by a light knock on the door. Bandy meekly opened the door and an old rabbi was holding a tray of 2 bagels and 2 scoops of cream cheese and a bowl of fruit and some assorted cakes. The rabbi was clearly sad but he asked Al how he was feeling and Al said that he was coming along and the rabbi left quickly.

Now that was crazy. The rabbi must have been Al's age- you think he's my friend and I should see what's the matter? No, no, I still hear a lot of noise and I smell tobacco smoke so he put the blanket back down by the door and smoked another cigarette out the window.

Bandy was getting to feel pretty serene. But then he saw a cigarette butt fly from above him and land in a weed infested old garden. He heard girlish giggling and then another butt flew from overhead. Bandy felt so uneasy about those people above him because they must be drastically different than what he knew of the place.

And then suddenly some boy in white shirt and black slacks comes running in the house yelling, "Ida's down, I was picking her up at her house and she fell, and she wants everyone to come to her!"

Everyone files out the door in a mechanical somber daze. They all fill up their mini vans, sedans, trucks, and motorcycles and they all drive away. Bandy thinks about time and it must have been 11 in the morning and then he asked himself what month it was, but he knew that he didn't know the difference between fall or spring because some folks leave their leaves on the yard and leaves growing always looks the same to him as dead ones.

And he was colorblind. He smiled that he forgot that. Then he looked at his white socks and said he must have learnt to adapt.

He turned on the radio and he listened for a few minutes. It was Beatles Time! And that was recognizable to him, he knew the Beatles and he just bought Abbey Road and felt so satisfied with it, and he thought that maybe the Beatles were getting back together because they were talking about the fight in India, so it was probably 1968. He listened to "I'm So Tired" and then he stretched. He went to the bathroom and drank a cup of water and then he smelled tobacco and burning plastic coming from the attic.

Bandy is an inquisitive and nosey sort because "what if they are blowing up the building?" So he crept up the stairways and heard rap music and girlish giggling. And then a youthfully rugged voice declares, "remember that gold ball with all those jewels she wore around her neck... that's Jew gold so if they ever get caught by European Jew choppers they could trade it for their lives... and she's dead so she's gonna be buried with it because that's what they do... such a shame, 50 grand... fuck we could at least get 10 grand for it and she's dead... look Jack is looting the store... her family and her church is looting the store, but we... my momma told me about her (HACKING COUGH for a minute and the giggling girl screeches) Sorry, sorry, sorry" And he starts for the door.

Bandy runs back downstairs and goes to the bathroom and locks the door. He goes to the sink and he washes his face. I got to get out of here, this is just ridiculous! Anywhere but here, with thugs upstairs, plotting to steal some old lady's gold- but wait, she's dead and a pawnshop will give 10 grand and he could start over anywhere with 10 grand. He wanted the Jew gold.

He composed himself and he left the bathroom. He was feeling strong and almost adventurous and he decided to see what was in the other rooms on his floor. He slowly turned the doorknob for the room right next to the bathroom and he slowly opens the door just to jump back in horror as he looked at Rosy sitting in her Lazy Boy just being catatonic.

Bandy had no idea that she was catatonic but that may have been an even worse introduction for them. He slams the door quickly because he saw a witch in a chair with crazy eyes sitting around in a library of so many books in foreign languages like she was making spells.

After his heart stopped beating he realized that she wasn't chasing him. He went to the next door and opened it to see an empty bedroom set, and a vacuumed carpet. He liked the room because it was white and empty. He checked the bedside drawer for a Gideon's Bible, because then things would start making more sense. But no bibles. So he went to the next room.

It was the same room, but twice the size and the carpet was unvacuumed. There was a typewriter and stacks of papers and clothing on one bed and on another just a blanket.

There were boxes filled with old Hebrew books covering every space near the closet. He walks into a master bathroom. He grabbed some Listerine and dental floss and puts it under his shirt and runs back to his room.

Jew Gold! Where is it?! He quickly snuck back to the messy bedroom, because if it's a necklace and it's not around the lady's neck then it's likely that it would be in the bedroom. So he goes through the drawers just to find old men's and women's clothing. Also office supplies! So he grabbed a few pens and a small notepad. And then the front door swings open and he quickly ran back to his room.

"Ida needs Aleve, I need whisky, but who comes running to bring me that... you know the shvartzas stole my tie... what Tizpora isn't here... the African-Americans... now if they live in England are they African-British because that just doesn't sound right to me... alright! I just need for cigarettes and I'll pick up some extra packs." And then the footsteps running out the door.

If they wear gold around their neck then they may have buried treasure, too! So he runs down stairs and opens the door near the bathroom across from the kitchen and he walked down a stairwell. It looked like this was a storage den because the stairwell was plain concrete. He turned on the lights in the basement and he saw the concrete floor. The room was filled with unused furniture, unopened children's toys, and it looked like a warehouse for a store with only random things.

Then he saw a hallway. He turned on the lights and he saw a magnificent living room set complete with a packed china cabinet. Then he walked to another room and he saw a complete and luxurious kitchen complete with everything a gourmet, state of the art kitchen would have.

Bandy understood it all. He was in a bomb shelter. He opened the cupboards and saw it was jammed packed with Matzo-meal and cranberry sauce. He looked through every cabinet and no gold. He ran back up to his room. And he heard scuttling down the stairs from the attic a gruff youthful voice and the stupid girlish giggling, "Ms. Ester is dead and they are gonna throw us out anyway... if I was Sol Levinson I would be robbing these motherfuckers blind... I bet they do..." Footsteps run out the door.

Al took a nap. He woke to my mom laughing through her story about her mom's magnificent gold necklace with a big and gaudy gold ball at the end of it that was packed with jewels and how some worker who her mom took into the house stole it and skipped town years ago.

Al was filled with disappointment. Then the place filled with people. Well he was leaving, that was it, he had to go outside and see what he could figure out, maybe he'll get food stamps or something but it was just too overwhelming to be there.

He straightened his clothing and put on an overcoat. He saw a black old-time-gangster-style hat and he put that on too. He grabbed his cigarettes, felt for his license and grabbed some sunglasses and put them on.

He walked down the stairs trying to be invisible and the only ones who saw him were the kids and he walked out the front door. He walked by a few guys in black and white smoking cigarettes by the door and then he saw more people smoking cigarettes and two empty baby carriages on the lawn and he walked by everyone and walked up the street. He got a block up to Park Heights and he made a right.

He pulled out a cigarette for his victory and kept walking till Clarks and an old blue pickup pulls up to him. A guy in black and white tells him to get in the car. Bandy says, "I'm smoking a cigarette." The kid says, "So am I, I'm listening to the Beatles."

Al got into the pickup and they drove back to the house in silence smoking their cigarettes, "Do you know where I could get a beer?" The kid burst out laughing. When they got back, the kid ran inside and grabbed a Budwiser but his mom took it away from him when he handed it to Al, and Al realized that he wasn't getting a beer and he went back to his room.

I drove over around five o'clock to help clean up a drop or at least give my sister and my cousins some company while they clean up. Al is sitting outside on the front porch in the wicker chair getting some air. He's staring at Rosy who looks like a vegetable.

It looks like Al is trying to stay distant from Rosy so she doesn't think that they are friends. So, I lit a cigarette and sat on the steps and finished my coffee. And then I jumped up and said, "Hey Al, guess what I brought you?" Al was startled, "Who are you, boy?"

I laughed at him and said, "I'm Jesus' son and my dad sent me on an errand for you, he told me you like to smoke Dutch Masters."

I pulled out two Duchies and I handed them to him. He lit up and then I said to him, "and you know what else? I have caffeine for you, too!"

I handed him a mocha frapachino in a bottle, "Drink it out of the bottle, buddy, your kids are coming to get you soon, I got to go, you want a light?"

I lit his cigar and he asked me quickly and in a muffled voice, "What's Jew-gold?" and I laughed and I looked at Rosy and smiled at her but she didn't know that and I went inside. I walked in laughing saying that Bandy asked me what Jew-Gold is, but my mom looked at me like I was acting inappropriately; but everyone else seemed to get a kick out of it.

Al comes inside five minutes later with his cigar in his mouth. My aunt takes it out of his mouth and he walks up to his room.

Fifteen minutes later an old green Mercedes convertible pulls up to the home. And then a late model Camry. Two yuppie couples walk up the path and comment about the leaves in the walkway and the bushes looking too shaggy. They enter the house and five little children start yelling, "Al!" and "Bandy!" and "You're ride's here."

The rabbi walks up the stairs and apathetically knocks and he says, "You're good for nothings are here." And then the rabbi laughs like it was his first time in a year and it was hearty and ironic. "Good luck" and then two cleanly shaven middle aged guys walk in Al's room.

Paul is sitting on the bed and Adrian is standing by the door. The two wives were standing in the hall. Paul takes his sunglasses off and looks almost empathetic, but Adrian is a stone.

Paul jokes, "you always said SSI checks are for chumps..." and they all got going.

A few months later Bandy is sitting up in a hospital watching Days of Our Lives. He looks over and he sees another guy in a hospital bed who looks like he is about to die.

Ok, he knew what to do. He was gonna get up and go to the bathroom and look in the mirror. So he went to move his left leg, it didn't move. And he tried his right side and nothing and he tried moving his arms and they moved but he tore a piece of tape on his arm off and he saw an IV.

The rabbi knocked with quick motorized enthusiasm and he comes in and he peeks at the almost dead guy next to Al, and sees that he doesn't want company. He goes to Al and he's a bit shocked, "Al! You look like a million bucks!."

A few nurses are laughing at the interaction as they look through the door.

Al says, "Who are you?"

The rabbi says, "Ester's husband."

Al, "I hate Ester, she was never there for me!"

The rabbi smiled at Al.

Al, "Who named me Bandy?"

The rabbi laughed, "No one, that's an old boyfriend Ida had."

Al, "So you're a holy man?"

The rabbi, "I'm a rabbi."

Al, "So why does so much shit happen in my life? Why does it feel like everyone is stealing from me and holding me prisoner?"

The rabbi pauses and calmly explains, "It's because you're mean and you always act like a shmuk... Even before you got dementia, you weren't a nice person at all to know or to be around... no one liked you because you're abusive and cutthroat... and you're a fly by night who stole from every passer-by... once you came to us and stole Ester's necklace... after that day she never felt safe anymore."

Al's face looks disgusted and he says to the rabbi, "How could God punish me and not let me remember my crimes?"

And the rabbi looked at his watch, "You punished yourself." And then the nurse came in and laughed like she had been witness to so much more and she escorted the rabbi out of the room like she, and the staff nurses had done for him at that hospital so many different times before.

how to act like a normal human being- mordi silver 2010

“Seasons in the Valley” tell stories about a random sample of people who moved to Los Angeles to pursue their dreams of breaking into Hollywood. It’s written in five or six chapters and from different perspectives.



***Look out for
“HOW TO BE A NORMAL HUMAN
BEING IN TEXAS”
coming out at the end of 2008*
M. SILVER*L.A.*2008**

HOW TO BE A NORMAL HUMAN BEING IN TEXAS.

*Though this is based on very real people, please only regard what I write as fiction
because I pathologically make so many things up that you should assume that I don't*

know what I'm talking about if what I say bothers you; and I don't want anyone claiming that I wrote about them unfaithfully because I'm not writing about anyone in particular except for Sarah; a.k.a. Ashley/Taylor/Jordan because she's my biggest fan even if she never read a word I ever wrote because she doesn't care how I write her as long as it's exactly what I see...

Vicodene is a bad one to be on. It's 4-6 dollars a pills and if you take as many as Sarah- and then it's three pills every few hours- it costs more than 40 dollars a day and if you don't spend that much your body really starts throwing fits and you lose all capacity to deal with life as you'd like.

"Who fucks with the ostrich anyways?!" I thought about it a second before I spoke because I wasn't interested in having to explain it again. I told Sarah Cash, "if instinct is rooted in wisdom of experience, then the ostrich must be the most philosophically evolved creature- when danger presents it with insurmountable odds, it covers it's eyes and leaves his fate up to that sudden surprise, and if he dies then he feels no pain and if he happens to have survived there is no scare to leave him any trauma."

Sarah ignored me and continued telling me how she started using vicodone for fun when she was 17, but after a few weeks she realized that she had severe back pains that actually necessitated a prescription to the drug. Her doctor acknowledged that she had extensive nerve damage to her spine from a fall down a stairs and he now prescribes her an almost unlimited supply. She doesn't even need to take as many as she is entitled to, so she sells her leftovers to others in need.

Now a vicodene user will appear to be just as stable as everyone else when the drug is in supply, but they get their bad rap for their times in "rare form," when they don't have their pills. Most vicodene users that I've encountered, have always secretly held OCD compulsions, so they make for the most functional of addicts because they make sure to care for their own needs.

For the past year, Olivia has been calling Sarah a junkie because she had a bone to pick with Sarah. Sarah really hates when her friends fight with her because she really cares deeply about her family and friends and she swears that she would sacrifice anything for her relationships.

But many people take the people around them for granted and she happens to be a Pisces so she always reserves the right to change any plans on the fly- but when push comes to shove, she sometimes tries to be there for her commitments.

Sarah was extra mad, though because she knew how to read extra into Olivia's openly aggressive voicemails because she is psychic, too. She likes to remark on occasion, "If I could totally let go, I'm sure I could rely on my intuition!"

William casually warned Sarah over a phone call that she may be facing a law suit and her intuition was ringing about that, too- but Sarah mistook that for paranoid anxiety from her drugs interacting with her turkey sandwich. Sarah is always stubborn and always wound tight and she will never give up without her best shots thrown; and that's why she's lays on the side of the road as often as she does— so to speak.

Sarah was especially frustrated with Olivia because she felt that the little black haired coward (as she occasionally referred to Olivia) was harassing her about a lease she signed

on an apartment in Maryland after there was no good to possibly come of it. Sarah's mother just had a stroke and she straight out asked Sarah to stay in San Antonio and help for her care.

Sarah's step dad, Darrin worked hard to care for Sarah's mom, but he was a closet alcoholic. He wasn't mean or anything and he always kept his word and never had a problem driving, but it was a bit trying for him at times when he had to juggle everything.

And the alcohol mixed strongly with his own \$40 a day vicodone fix which would make him pass out unexpectedly. Sarah's mom was realistically forgiving and to some degree oblivious but she knew that she needed more attention than her husband could ever offer. He did his job well though; he made the cash and put most of it in her bank account.

They love each other and know each other and one day after Sarah freaked out and ratted poor Darrin's alcoholism out to the sick old lady, Darrin decided to change his ways. So now the only chemicals that he depends on are the nicotine from his cigarettes and his vicodone from Sarah.

Sarah has seen prettier and healthier days. She's emaciated now but her curly blond hair still reaches her shoulders. She's is a jack of many trades, but the bulk of her money comes from her pickups and deliveries for Rhett.

He travels to California every few weeks to pick up pounds of marijuana from his growers. He drives the cargo back in his custom designed, black, late model F-150. He's a great employer because he loves her deeply and even wants to marry her, but she can't marry him because he is too controlling. So he shows his love to her by giving her good weed and employing her even though she is a huge pain in the ass at most times.

Sarah also is a model. Her most permanent gig is as a Miller Light girl at different conventions. She's been in calendars and can always be counted on for working an honest day. She likes the security of working with a company that she claims runs Texas. Because of the position, it is her responsibility that all 5 feet of her look in tip top shape and she'll never leave her home without makeup applied.

Sarah demands that her friends also keep their appearances up. She believes that it is the first aspect of a person that is seen and therefore the most important. In fact, she believes that she should ditch anyone who is not presentable and it would be their own fault. And she tries to reward her friends who look pleasant by taking them with her to trendy parties and offering her own highly maintained looks to open doors.

Last year, Lauren was Sarah's friend and she worked for Sarah's mother for three months as a caregiver. Sarah got her the job because she had known Lauren all her life and Lauren just lost her job and needed some source of income.

At the time of her hiring, Lauren and Sarah were still fighting, but that was the most normal thing about their friendship. They were so similar that the state of fighting was something that they knew, accepted, and occasionally looked forward to. The last fight was over Sarah's lawsuit against Lauren for damages for a black eye administered on the day of a real important photo shoot which directly caused Sarah to loose the contract.

Lauren started up because she was resentful towards Sarah though she didn't want her to know because she was hooked on vicodone. Sarah nevertheless put in a good word for her but after Lauren felt like she saved enough money to enjoy herself for a few weeks,

she stopped showing up for work as often as she began, and Sarah's family had to make other plans to care for the sickly, aging woman.

Whenever Lauren comes over, Sarah first gives her a vicodone, because that's the reason Lauren sucks up her pride and comes over. Lauren has been pretty much an addict since she found her mother overdosed on darviset in her college apartment living room, on the couch in Denton.

Her mother was supposed to be helping with the interior decoration, but instead she died in her sleep. Lauren's half Filipino boyfriend, Peanut ("a 22 year old ex-con; kind of badass-looking in a Backstreet Boy sort of way; but really he's just a homo because he prefers to promote clubs over mindless ecstasy charged fucking," according to Ms. Cash) saw the grey lady first, but he just thought she was sick.

It was Lauren who checked for signs of life and she was sorely disappointed. She called the cops for someone to pick up her mother, but dead folk are deprioritized around Dallas and she waited around for eight hours; enough time to discover that hugging a corpse may not be all that hygienic.

Sarah understands that Lauren may have some legitimate reason for being fucked up, but she wishes that Lauren would just deal with it already. But what can Sarah judge; she still didn't grieve her father's death from years ago- which manifests itself through strange but predictable ways in relationships with everyone.

So, Lauren's family knows what to do with drugs. Her dad is a pharmacist and he makes a healthy living. He even gets to shoot demerol and morphine in the privacy of a Walgreen's handicap restroom whenever he has a second. Their family doesn't believe in going to a doctor unless it's for stitches or to amputate a tumor. With pride, her dad's grandfather once demonstrated to him how to pull his own tooth, and said that their family was known in Odessa for being able to do that the quickest. Then the elder passed him the secret family heirloom- an almost puzzling small leather bag of gold teeth that no one knew where might they have come from.

Lauren's family also knows how to con. She has a notorious and free uncle who conned millions of dollars from so many in his career. The family's standard of living is more than extravagant. Lauren knows that in the wastefulness lays their pride and she also knows that anyone could get anything if they just know what they want.

Six months ago was the last time Sarah heard from Lauren until this knock was heard at Sarah's front door. Through the peephole, she saw the sisters, Becca and Lauren both standing with their hands in their jeans like they were pathetically cold. Sarah poured four Vicodone from her bottle onto her hand and opened the door. She swallowed three pills dry without saying a word, and gives a pill to Lauren, waits for her to swallow it, and hugs her.

Becca was 20 years old but she was unrecognizable to Sarah who had watched her from the time she was born to just about a few years ago when she ran away to Florida. Becca sadly asked for some vicodene too and Sarah graciously hands her two pills from an orange bottle.

Once upon a time, Becca had long, thick, dark, brown hair that made her the envy of the nappy haired skanks of her town and now all she had to show for it was a short blond

bob. Her face was painted thickly and eerily with makeup. And now was the first time Sarah saw Rebecca in such a gritty place. So of course she stared in blank astonishment at the young girl who really let herself go.

Even Lauren, a veteran of many impulsive choices with long-term consequences looked tired and beaten down from her journey, too and from Florida and the stories of it all.

She apathetically reported to Sarah that she doesn't care about anything anymore and if anyone wanted to shoot her for their actions in the past, she was at peace with that prospect. Sarah was compassionate to the girls and they felt real comfortable.

Then Sarah thought she heard Lauren whisper to Becca, "well, back to the lion's den" but Sarah actually let it go.

Becca stands tall and quiet and glares intently a stare that acknowledged nothing. Sarah remarked, "I'm not gonna shoot you baby, come in and take a load off. Becca, come in."

Becca took her first free opportunity to speak to Sarah alone to inform her how fucked up Lauren was. Allegedly, Lauren now was addicted to heroin and even vicodone couldn't help that. Lauren appeared suddenly after Becca sold her story to Sarah and Becca slipped out of the living room and Lauren then reported to Sarah how fucked up Becca was and cites a story about Becca dating a man who was addicted to heroin. Sarah later told me that she felt good as she offered her empathy to the sisters indivisually. Then everyone passed out.

Becca slept in a guest room and Lauren shared Sarah's bed. In the morning, Sarah woke up agitated like she wakes up every morning. She popped her vicodones and smoked some bowls and snapped the sleeping Lauren awake with a righteously viscous voice, "When is my 25 year old friend gonna grow the fuck up?!"

Sarah passed Lauren a nug of weed. Lauren smoked a bowl and exited the bedroom quietly. Ten minutes later the front door slammed and Becca came running into Sarah's bedroom in tears. "Did we overstay our welcome?"

Sarah was befuddled, "I didn't say that."

Becca, "I can't go back on the streets with Lauren, I just can't. She wants us to sell ourselves instead of just finding jobs and an apartment. For drugs! And I told her, we could budget our money for it but she won't listen."

Sarah knew that Becca was a liar so she would have said the same thing she told her even if Becca didn't to end off with, "I'm so scared I'll be dead like my mom real soon; I even look like her; and also, I can't go back to my dad! Ever since I was a little girl he makes me sit on his lap while he has a boner."

Sarah saw through the lies and beneath all the bullshit were pure motivations and intentions which Sarah always judges sympathetically. For four months, Sarah paid for every pack of cigarettes that Becca would smoke, for all the pot she hit, and for every morsel of food, till one day Becca got access to a U-Haul truck.

Sarah rented it because the two were moving into a bigger house because the lease on Sarah's expired and Sarah was sure that she couldn't move to Maryland like she planned with Olivia, especially when she had to care for Becca also, now. So, it all went down when Sarah and Becca were on mushrooms.

It was a pleasant enough trip and Sarah invited her childhood swimming buddy, Josh over to party with them because he was to help with the move. Sarah had known Josh their whole entire life, and he even shared 3/12/84 as a birthday with her. Eventually through the course of the night, Sarah ended up going to bed earlier than expected because Josh and Becca decided to fuck on the only remaining furniture in the living room, the couch.

When Sarah woke up, she had the flu. She didn't leave her bed till the evening. When she went downstairs she was pleased to see the house emptied and that everything had been packed away and put into the truck. She peeked out the window, but to her surprise the truck was gone.

So she called Becca but there was no answer. And through the course of the night the voicemails she sent gradually turned frantic. She tried Josh's phone throughout the night too. Josh finally answered the next day at a quarter to twelve in the afternoon.

He had never got to fuck someone as hot as Becca before so he ignored his ringing phone. Sarah realized that and she didn't really hold it against him because she knew he worked way too hard and that he always chose to smoke a joint after work rather than do something so he really never gets to meet new pretty girls.

"Becca robbed you because you are the most abusive person she has ever met. She took your furniture, wardrobe, jewelry, makeup, and computer." Josh said that and then he hung up the phone.

Josh was robbed a month later when Becca got a hold of another U-Haul. He got to keep his clothing, but not much else. Becca even took his guns and a shoebox with over twenty thousand dollars in it from the closet.

So now Sarah lives in a big empty house in San Antonio with her two dogs, a bedroom set, two mangy cats, and a fish tank with a dozen exotic fish that Rhett gave her. She spends her free time clipping her two black Danes' nails. She's still shell shocked from her life's perpetual drama but she feels close to finding an equilibrium that she suspects exists.

She smokes Parliament 100's and watches the E channel. She sometimes eats gourmet chocolate ice cream and Funyuns and she usually goes to a Pinero's and buys a turkey sandwich for lunch. Up until this week she drove a '99 Mercedes SUV that was gorgeous but she got into a car accident and totaled the vehicle. She hates driving a Toyota Camry but that's what her insurance rented her for three days. Now it's a stolen car because they took such a long time to send her ten grand for a new car.

But it's also May and Sarah is looking forward to Kerrville's annual folk festival that begins at the end of the month. The festival has always served her as a place to get her thoughts together and to gather the strength for another year. Sometimes, the only thing that gets her through her day, is dreaming about the folk festival that she had been attending her whole life.

Sarah walked onto her back porch and watched her dogs run around the yard. She was holding a letter that she just received from her mom's house from Travis L. who writes her monthly from a prison in Florida. He's the guy who messed up her back and she hates him for it, but she always appreciates letters, even if she doesn't read them.

Sarah lit a Parliament and looked off into the sky. She saw a vulture in the sky and it's symbolism struck a chord deep inside of her and she began to cry.

Sarah let herself cry for a bit until she got a headache and then she looked at the envelope that she wasn't planning on opening and she dramatically exclaims to the sky, "I don't want him to hang himself, he's already in his cage and he already wants to do it- but he doesn't even know the extent of the damage he did to my spine!"

Sarah thinks about Travis often. She thinks of the love she had for him and the love he has for her and the bullshit of it all. According to her, the bullshit of love is that if such an intangible bond forms, it circumnavigates itself around all logic and good choice.

She knew her heart originally chose Travis despite her gut screaming that he would only lead to trouble. It was because she had a void in herself that needed to be filled with anything and she wasn't finding any quality filler. She used to think any dick who dressed sharply could fill that role.

But when she met Travis she saw that he walked around with a void, too and he had a dangerously attractive quality to him also. Travis declared that he would always stick around, even if he was just a prisoner of his love for her- so she decided to let him in her life.

The only force strong enough to help Sarah to leave him came from the ghost of Shanel Jones, Travis's first love, who he happened to have killed accidentally when he fell asleep at the wheel of his car. Shanel came to Sarah and introduced herself as a guardian angel.

As Sarah lay at the bottom of the stairs, just a few years ago, Shanel extended her hand for Sarah to grab onto. Sarah stood up, exited the house and never turned back. She never called Travis to tell him where she was, and she never answered his phone calls.

She thought about him daily for a while, but in a few months time, after she heard that Travis became a heroin user, and after that had been arrested in Florida for killing more people while drunk driving, she understood that for the first time in her life that she made the right choice.

Now all she had were letters and memories and ghosts- well just Shanel's ghost, but sometimes she got to meet other ones, too, but they never said much to her. The memories that haunted her least were from the folk fest. Sarah always had a place at the festival with her Kerrville friends.

Three years ago at the eighteen day retreat, she met William, Olivia, and Gregory and they accepted her from the second they met her. She knew that she had to repair her relationship with Olivia if she were ever to want to revisit the connection she had with the three siblings and she was ready to suck it up and apologize.

Last year, Olivia shared her shoulder with Sarah because another boyfriend just had hit Sarah. It wasn't a Travis beating but it made her think of him and it got her thinking about bettering her life and finding an expert to fix her back with an innovative surgery.

Sarah told Olivia and Shanel's ghost before her that she stayed around Travis because maybe one day she thought, Travis would change.

She defended her naive decision, "anyways, till you're 19 you can't even know how to

make decisions because your decision making processes have not graduated to a level of functionality... so I wanted to believe him when he said that he was sorry, and I wanted to help him get help because he had serious trauma... but he would give me fucking beatings... he would just snap; he was just so bipolar; but when he was nice, like all the time except for two periods a year he was great."

It took Travis two years to get comfortable enough to hit Sarah. "He hit me like I was a man... one time after sex, I made a joke and he snapped and bickered with me and then he picked me up naked and put me outside in the cold... He locked me out and I was screaming to be let back in. For forty-five minutes, he left me there and the hole he punched in the wall was all he had to show for it."

Sarah met Travis when her dad was in hospice and her dad never loved her so she found what she needed in Travis and to this day he's still the love of her life because "when you walk away from him you can't help but thinking that you're walking away from the coolest person in world, even despite his inevitable path of destruction."

He used to be only a sweetheart, even deferring his college baseball scholarship to wait for Shanel to graduate high school. "Now," Sarah still speaks about him, even if it's just to herself, "he's in jail... but that abusive man will always love me."

So it was Erik S. who hit Sarah last year. She never thought he would because since they had met he has not even let her light her own cigarette in his company. So it took him three years to do it, but he finally whacked her loud and bluntly right on her self-centered mouth with an open hand as Sarah was waiting for her ride to the festival.

When William arrived to pick them up to go to the festival, Erik slickly followed like nothing with Sarah's camping gear. Right before he turned around to go back inside the house, Sarah suddenly decked him right beneath his left eye. William calmly gets out of the car, walks to the passenger's side to lean and lights a cigarette. Sarah yells at Erik, "I hate you, you son of a bitch!"

Erik composes himself, straightens his shirt and takes a step back. Sarah picks up a few rocks and pelts the fuck out of Erik the best she can; but only one caught him on his right thigh. Erik picked up the rock that got him and like he was a caricature he began to wind up like pitcher and Sarah charged him and punched him in the ribs. So Erik put his arm out and put his hand on Sarah's head till she backed off silently.

Erik sat down on the curb and was looking at a hawk flying high in the sky and Sarah was leaning against William's Eclipse smoking a Parliament. Then police sirens began approaching the three. Suddenly Sarah hugs Williams, "let's get the fuck out of here."

Erik looked up, "fine! I'll see you when you get back!"

Sarah fucked William and cried to Olivia all weekend. The story she told Olivia was one of miscommunication and regret and Sarah plotted her reconciliation with Erik. That Sunday morning, to William she described Erik as, "the most intelligent man ever and he is also the biggest bullshit artist ever."

William asked, "What's his job?"

"He sells timeshares, sales." Sarah's phone rang after she said that and Erik told her that his dad had to bail him out of jail and that the police tried to contact her to see if she was

pressing charges on him. Sarah was furious that a neighbor called the cops and she vowed that she would never call the cops on him and she would testify in his defense if she decided to indeed press charges on him.

Erik was so pleased to hear a friendly tone in Sarah's voice that he decided to drive down to Kerrville with his friend and finally meet William, Olivia, and Gregory formally. It was to take him a few hours to pack up his truck but he arrived at the campsite by the afternoon. He brought tons of beer.

He acted wonderfully to everyone as he personally polished off a case of Shiner Bock in the first ten minutes and his buddy, Brennan got to sell all his coke and ecstasy. Then Erik suddenly pulled a propane grill out of his trunk and cooked twenty steaks for everyone at the camp. He even had a few bottles of soda for people to drink and he handed out five packs of cigarettes.

However, by nightfall, Erik was feeling sad. Sarah brought up the domestic abuse he committed a few days before and he became seductively introverted.

William and Olivia watched in amazement as Erik and Sarah's one of a kind dynamic revealed itself in true comedy and tragedy as they remained locked into each other for the next few hours. By eleven, Sarah had to abandon the camp to drive the then too-drunk-Erik home, because Erik never intended to sleep in a tent.

That was last year's fest- it was Sarah's best one. Afterwards, she brought William and Olivia to San Antonio to meet the new guy, Rhett and everyone had somewhat of a good time. However, Olivia felt that Rhett was kind of an ass because he refused to pay her back a few hundred dollars he borrowed, rationalizing that he gave her at least that much in hospitality.

That contributed to the hard feelings that festered over the year between Sarah, William and Olivia which soured even more due to unrealistic expectations and failed commitments between the summertime buddies. For Sarah, this year's fest was for peace and reconciliation with the friends she loved best.

Part 2:

Kat Y. believes that it's usually not a coincidence when like minded people happen to cross paths with each other because they are both probably looking for each other. Other than that, she's a 19 year old mystery. She lives nowhere but recently she's been in Texas around San Antonio. In the fall she's planning to move to Atlanta to pursue cosmetology. She told me anything I asked about because I was a stranger who she didn't intend to get to know.

Our first discussion was on the topic of how financial independence provides people the luxury of not having to rely on anyone else. It eventually evolved to be about how emotional independence provides the luxury of not relying on other's interactions as a source of fulfillment.

When we got stoned, I explained to her that when I'm stoned and speedy I like to go on tangents in conversation so I told her that the other day, I recalled my friend once witnessing me drop something and just losing my temper and yelling "fuck" at the floor.

He told me that he was real concerned because he never saw me like that before. So, I guess I was getting at an observation that controlling our outward affect is also important when trying not to impede on others.

Kat Y.'s hobby is writing a diary of her adventures and collecting articles about Warren Jeff and his church. These past few years she followed stories about a Texas ranch that makes even a Libertarian wary.

She followed the ranch via news stories on the internet and she spent a chunk of 2007-8 at the ranch but she won't be ready to write about it for a while because she left all her notes and articles at my campsite and there was no identifying information for her.

This is a journal entry on this topic that I found in the papers Kat Y. left at Kerrville:

"5/13/08

I don't think I could write about these people because they have a privacy that they cherish and they didn't invade my privacy in any way. The ranch is a very nice place to live. Though they are very secretive, they took me in and gave me their trust and I will never betray them.

But I saw a hawk in the sky today and that means I have to go. The bird is my phoenix. From the ashes, I rise. I will always remember my family and I miss them. And again, I accepted that they are all dead to me.

Last I caught myself speaking about them, I was saying to no one, "I was reluctant at first, but that was because I have an uncle who's a teacher in Utah who molested my cousins by threatening to kill their younger brother if they told anyone... he ended up in jail for a drop and when he came out, his wife took him back." So I decided never to mention them because I can't explain them and now I'm an orphan.

I met another orphan. Caroline seems like a nice person down on her luck. I think she's 26 but she insists that's she's 24. She asked me to play along if she tells anyone that she's 17. She is with me because she doesn't know where to go and she saw me on the ranch. She said that she's from New Orleans. And she goes by the name, "Pumpkin." We are going to Rob in Austin and then we'll moved to San Antonio. Business as usual."

Part 3:

Olivia states as a Kent that, "if you ask any one of us what the confederate flag means we'll tell you that it stands to support strong state and individual rights by driving to limit governmental jurisdiction; as well as southern pride." Once at a late night barbeque in Baltimore, someone said to Olivia that that flag represented racism and we all got offended (but I only did because I was bored.)

William heard the conversation and remarked that slavery happened to be just one of the issues that the south felt should be dealt with by individual states because it's essentially an issue of economics; in the north they didn't need slaves to prosper."

William continued, "The Confederate States were not inherently racist and the propaganda that we learn about the Civil War is misleading because the war was not about slavery. Slavery as an issue was just a flashpoint in history that Lincoln twisted for

his Union purposes when he instituted the Emancipation Proclamation... he did that because he ran out of white soldiers and he was trying to recruit black slaves from the south. In fact, the proclamation did not even effect any slaves in union, like the ones in Maryland. And the confederate army also gave blacks free papers if they served for their army.”

Some dude at the barbeque seemed baffled. He was telling us all moments before how good “black booty” is compared to white girls. He naively acted like he was holding a provocative position, silently accusing us of being racist with his assumption that most of us white Jews usually kept their eyes open for other pretty white Jews.

Olivia told him that she also has an Israeli flag hanging up in her home and she asked the guy if he felt that the flag was racist, too. The dude really didn’t know what she was getting at because he was raised with so much pride about Jewish survival that he couldn’t entertain a possibility that the symbol could be thought of as racist.

William jumped back into the conversation, “the ugly racism came from the north- you ever heard the old black saying that ‘in the south you could get as close as you want to white folks, but you better not get big; in the north you could get as big as you want but you better not get close.’

The majority of decent Southern folks felt that black people weren’t subhuman and they respected the fact that money subjugates property. Human property was only a naturally occurring phenomenon that is a by product of the world, with as many societies instituting it. Many white Southerners had close relationships with blacks but they felt that they shouldn’t be able to threaten them, especially if they could maintain control... Wars, including the Civil War are fought over economics and dressed up with morals to placate the constituency.”

A day after the barbeque, Olivia flew to San Antonio and a few days later she met her brothers. She was going to go to Dallas first, but the last time she stayed in Dallas it was not as pleasant as she would have liked. She stayed at a house which her friend and his brother shared.

She grew up in Dallas with a boy named Austin and always enjoyed spending time with him. Austin’s older brother is Nate, and Nate controls the house because his brother is off at Harvard for most of the year. Anyways, Austin wasn’t around and she would have to catch Austin in Boston at the end of the summer.

She was only staying with Nate because hotels are expensive. And because Nate ended up making amends for rummaging through Olivia’s bag in the spring by taking her to rocking parties for three nights in a row.

William and Gregory drove down to the festival like they have been doing for the past four years. Olivia didn’t drive with them because William’s car didn’t fit her this time around. That was fine with her because she was scarred from the ride two years ago, when they were driving down an old Subaru and it broke in Tennessee. They ended up having to take a Greyhound down to Texas and abandoning the car. At the fest, they needed to rely on their Kerrville friends to lend them tents and other basics.

Week One:

It was a Saturday afternoon, Olivia was waiting by the campsite with Mikey and Eli.

They had just put up the big social tent for the camp and they were sitting around smoking weed when the boys arrived at Quiet Valley Ranch during the pre-Kerrville Folk Festival preparations. Everyone was greeting William and Gregory with “welcome home’s” and so did Olivia, Mikey, and Eli.

This was the Kent’s fourth year coming to the fest; Mikey’s second; and Eli’s first. The air of excitement and anticipation was a contagious feeling that would have invaded the camp had they not brought it with them. The five sat around at the camp and inaugurated it with beer and smoke and they discussed the philosophy on which the camp was to be run.

Rob and Kat Y. were attracted to the tent when they whiffed the marijuana. They sat on a cooler and introduced themselves. They were coming from San Antonio but they were in Austin for the past few months. Rob was a skinny blond haired dude dressed as a hippie but wearing Oakley sunglasses. Kat was a skinny redhead dressed in a colorful bikini and jean shorts. She had a tattoo outlining angel’s wings on her back. They were both nineteen years old and seemed to have known each other for quite a while. After their introductions they got quieter and everyone enjoyed each other’s company.

In Kerrville, the key to happiness is doing whatever you want without impeding on others, and if someone invades your space, you are to tolerate it and it give it a chance. If someone is coming on too strong and invasive, you are to be as polite as possible before walking away. However it is the individual who should remember not to be invasive and to teach the lesson by example if he or she knows it.

Another central tenet of the place is sharing. Whenever the opportunity arises, you are to share whatever you can. This means that if you smoke cigarettes, you should bring three times the amount that you need and if you buy a case of beer, you’re probably going to be able to drink about a third of it; if you buy weed or cooking supplies you must budget similarly.

This is a spot for people who are givers and receivers to safely live by those ideals, and rely on the fact that others around came on similar pretenses. The Kerr-virgin is the most comfortable role. People recognize first-timers and treat them even better than plain old tolerance would dictate.

The first-timer is totally accepted and veterans try to train these people to show others around as they are being shown around. A first-timer is also cut slack when it comes to being awkward or even inappropriate. In worst case scenario, a first-timer who is too disruptive will be conditioned in the most comfortable and appropriate way on how to act.

When the bowl came to Gregory the second time, he was already remarking about a ranch in El Dorado that he heard about on the news the year before when he and William were driving down to Kerrville, “I was shocked that the place didn’t turn into a Waco showdown yet, with all those rumors going around for last year and the year before and the year before that.”

Olivia, "Well, I’m glad no one went in there again. They had no right to go in there in the first place and take the children. The state wasted a lot of money on it and all the children were returned. All from a bogus phone call! Some psycho lady pretending to be 14 years old."

Gregory, "well you have to understand that there is a shit-load of circumstantial evidence, even though there is no reason for a warrant; we still are all just watching. And what did we actually see?"

Kat shocked everyone, "The FLDS? I lived there for a few months, and they're not that bad."

Olivia opened her eyes wide in shock, but Kat responded, "They are good people and no one should be able to go into someone's home and tell them how to live. When I was there, I saw nothing but love and hospitality, and we should respect their privacy like they respect others." No one had anything to say to that, but the quiet only lasted a second before Rob asked if anyone wanted to go to the river.

That Sunday morning, my dad drove me to BWI at 6 a.m. He didn't know when he would see me again because this how many of my long journeys begin. I had a one way ticket that I bought for \$100 and two bags. My dad bought me a Dunkin Dounut's coffee and he let me drive his new Charger at 100 mph on 695. He hugged me, handed me \$60, and asked me to keep in touch when he dropped me off.

As I sat in the airport with time to spare, I couldn't help but feel that airport nostalgia I always feel. I always think about my parents and my family at BWI, but I was also thinking about other friends of mine who I wasn't leaving in Baltimore because they already left.

Then I thought about Andy and Cloe. I left them in North Hollywood four months ago. They are enjoying California and I don't feel like I ditched them in a strange town, because they made themselves quite a nice home and have a steady flow of visitors. And then I thought about some women that I have fell hopelessly in love with. I thought about how it hurt me to realize that I pushed every last love away from me because I realized that they couldn't satisfy my fundamental deity complex rather than accepting reality and enjoying what ever I have.

I can't say that I regretted anything, but I did feel real sad about things and how they seem to go down. But I wrote all that off once the plane got in the air, because half of those heavy feelings come from a conditioning I found in that airport. I tried to telepathically thank the friends who stood by me and weathered my moods and my obsessions and I smiled knowing that I would be in Texas soon.

In conversation, I have found that many people feel comfortable in anonymity with strangers because there is no expectation on their behavior. With no expectation, people could be free to be whoever they please and act however they would like. Personally, I feel the opposite. In my home city, I feel much more leeway to act how I need to, and in strange places, I have to act with more honor. I don't exactly know why.

Then we landed. I sat outside of the airport lazily waiting for my ride like I do in every city but Los Angeles (my brother there is the only one who makes sure to picks me up punctually) reading the "Yiddish Police Officer's Union" because my buddy Mark G. told me to.

And as if she was an omen, she dressed conservatively, in blue jeans and a tee-shirt and an Orioles hat. In fact she looked a lot like Cloe, but her name was Tiffany. She was in

San Antonio for a conference but I don't exchange numbers anymore because I don't like paying my phone bill, and I don't want anyone to get their hopes up and then become disappointed on account of me.

So Tiffany, who doesn't look exactly like Cloe, and who went to Goucher [and enjoys speaking Spanish] lives in Howard County and has heard of the land of Pikesville was really cute and meeting her put me in a really good mood. So, I sat and read and sipped a coke. Eventually, an extra serene looking William picked me up in his convertible, green Eclipse. We sped for a half hour and picked up a few cases of beer.

William is a tall, skinny white dude, who I consider to be well read, well thought out, and thoughtfully mannered. He also holds attitudes and philosophies that are at least consistent if not the same as my own. He was my roommate for six months, four years ago. We used to read and discuss shit over marijuana in our backyard. He sold weed at the time and therefore always kept me well stocked when I was a painter on Aderral back in those days.

He is still my friend because he believes that one should mind their own business as long as no one knows anyone who is being harmed. And that is why we should vote for Ron Paul- he'll at least try as pragmatically as possible to end the war. And don't worry about his side in the Roe v. Wade thing because he's just for state rights and even 8 years of George W. and two supreme court justices couldn't really change that ruling. Now I think Mr. Obama would be a swell president but when has he ever mentioned legalizing weed?

I met William K. five years ago in Baltimore on a February evening, when I was in an elated mood. Lisa S. had just dropped me off over a bagel, cream cheese, and lox sandwich because I twisted my ankle earlier in the day on the ice on the sidewalk. She also made corrections on my stat homework and completed the last five problems. When she left, William entered my room with Gershon and he gave me some vicodone for my pain. Gershon said that William was a medic in Israel till last month, but I realized that it was a joke a few weeks later.

William was looking for a room and we had an extra one that we were trying to rent. So we smoked some weed and discussed what he could bring to the table at our house. He told us that he could pay rent on time, and that was cool.

That month, I met Olivia and Gregory. I met Olivia when we were tripping on mushrooms— which is why she knows me as “the purple caterpillar.”

When she saw me, Olivia hugged me, “last time I saw you, you were so incoherent, saying so much but I couldn't understand a word.” The last time I saw her was during the springtime. I had just returned from California and I was still smoking joints I rolled over there. I was walking to a gas station to get a pack of cigarettes and Olivia and William drove by me. They pulled their car in reverse and then we went back to William's apartment to catch up.

I was babbling something about not making movies and California weed and Olivia had nothing to respond aside from insisting that I should come to Kerrville. So now, I was finally there after four years of their annual solicitations.

“Well, I'm ecstatic to be here... such a beautiful place, with pretty people in summer

cloths.”

Olivia, “Well, wait till you see all the boobies.”

Olivia walked me outside the tent and began to introduce me to some people who for the life of me I will never be able to remember, but she introduced me as the purple caterpillar from Alice in Wonderland. It seemed like there were thousands of people walking around and I didn’t know the lay of the land to have a context to remember anyone. William came up from behind and we left Olivia with some of her friends and began to walk around.

William was showing me where the toilets were and Niquai ran up and kissed William’s mouth like she just slept with him last night. She greeted me with a hug and said that she knew I was coming and she was so excited to meet me. When she saw my puzzled face, she said, “he told me he was bringing a Kerr-virgin and we take care of our first timers here.”

Niquai has pretty features. She has dark hair and very deeply tanned skin. She wore a feather in her hair and looked like an Indian princess in an old western. To me she looked like she was 20 but something teenage was radiating from deep inside of her. Her sex appeal reminded me of someone I know and that freaked me out a little.

Niquai lives in Kerrville all year. The town is basically a retirement community with a pretty strict sheriff’s department; but they never invade people’s property, they just do their job and that consists of keeping the peace and keeping drunk drivers off the road.

Clementine A., who also lives in Kerrville, walked by us and handed William a hamburger. Then she saw Gregory and ran up to him and showered him with affection. They worked together at the Grill at the Kerr-tree Store. Then she came up to me and introduced herself and I said she reminds me of a cowgirl, and not totally in the classy stripper sort of way; she said she just a Texan.

Clementine is 18 and she is the archetypal Texas blond bombshell- that is her look, that is her code, and we all love her dearly for it. She is the niece of the owner of the grill and she started to work there last summer where she got to know Gregory. Gregory is William's brother. He is a handsome dark featured 19 years old who played lacrosse. They flinged all last festival and they seemed to really love each other.

So now I was totally broke. I'm not gonna pretend that I ever really had any savings but William brought me there as his guest knowing my money situation. William took on paying for anything I needed which ranged from food and cigarettes to daytrips and other things. I was planning to work for the ranch so I could get more food, but William told me to take my time and I did. I spent the first few days partying and thinking.

I had realized a few things about friends. A good friend is such a good thing to have. For many, it’s a constant decision to continue being in someone's company. And after years of confusion, I have finally become able to identify who my friends are. A friendship need not be complimented with daily contact or even much more than sporadic correspondence. A friendship weathers bullshit that people make and eventually the bullshit evaporates in its own uselessness.

However, one tip about friendship, I find that if someone is ignoring your phone calls or emails, they probably aren't the friend you think they are and you should probably stop

trying after a year. When I thought of that, I also realize that I only trust people on varying degrees. Along with that, when I'm distrustful I like to act like a clown because that seems to keep folks at arm's length.

I arrived at the festival in the capacity of a butler. This was the only way I could accept this vacation from my friend because I hadn't seen him in years when he called me up to offer this. To me, the butler is a very nominal position in life. A butler is not a slave, a butler is a friend who is also a personal assistant. A butler permits his friend to do the grandiose and the position allows me to neglect the tolls of room and board while I travel. I like being a butler because if being told, "I can only handle you in small doses" is the ultimate insult, then having my needs cared for in exchange for my company and assistance is the ultimate compliment.

My first task was to assist William in bringing down ice for the cooler. As we walked up the dirt road to the Kerr-tree Store, we saw a diverse sample of white people all around us. First off, the women walking around were plentiful. And everyone was smiling like they never smiled before. And there were guitar players littering the road as if they manned checkpoints.

It was at least 100 degrees because it was the beginning of June in Texas. A crowd of people were gathered and waiting for the truck that pulled behind the store, and some pretty woman in a baby blue Polo shirt announced that "we" need to form an ice line to carry the bag to the store. William and I looked at each other like we were going to be camping here for the next 18 days so we might as well help out.

We walked to the back of the store and met up with about a dozen other volunteers. We got into two columns of six people each and someone opened the back of the truck and began throwing a bag at a time out to us. Our job was to catch the bags and pass them quickly. It seemed like we were all having fun.

The announcer woman came to my side. We were to eventually meet but at the moment she was nothing for me to remember. I only recalled that when Kara H. later told me that she laughed at my baseball jokes, I didn't remember.

But I think I remember that she smiled when I almost jokingly told a little boy who was poking holes in the ice bags that he was passing, to "stop being an ass."

Apparently, the boy thought he was being real funny, so I had a limited sympathy for him. He didn't know why it should be funny, but I guess he's seen other kids make mischief and he just copies it as best as he can, but as I told him, he was fucking with the bags of ice that we all need.

After quite a few bags, someone who already felt comfortable at the ranch decided to traumatize the boy and scolded him till he had to hold back his tears and just behave himself.

So since we were working the ice line for a little bit, I eventually turned to Kara H. and told her about the baseball team called the Baltimore Orioles. She was perplexed enough to mention that I may need to retool my pickup lines and I was insulted for a second till I turned my head away from her.

She must have realized that I was only trying to make small talk with her as any volunteer would, and she mentioned the Miguel Tejada trade. I always am thrilled when

I find another baseball fan so I was laughing when I was talking to her. So that at least made me feel comfortable enough to forget her and after the line William and I bought three bags of ice and headed back to our camp to fill up the coolers.

After the beer was put out, I went to fill the two giant bags of water and then William set a chair up for me and handed me a big, purple, plastic Kerrville cup filled with cold beer. He instructed me to keep my cup with me at all times so I could drink water all day and buy beer refills throughout the festival for a dollar.

Everyone in our camp had either a green one or a purple one. Gregory walked in and informed me that everyone loses their cups, but we have to hold onto them as long as possible because in a week, we won't even be able to buy those again and we'll only be able to get small plastic cups.

I met Mikey for five minutes in Baltimore when we were discussing this trip, but we didn't really know each other. He was sitting at the front of the tent next to an empty chair and he pulled out a glass piece and packed it from a jar he had filled throughout the year with the best weed he could find throughout the year. It was quite lovely. Eli came to the tent after, and I met her a few more times than Mikey so we knew each other enough to say to each other, "I'm glad you made it."

In Texas, we prefer to drink Shiner Bock. The cheaper beer at Kerrville is LoneStar. The core of our camp had all arrived and the group sat for our first time to relax together and William told me that we are going to go on a tour of the various camps that he has found so I could get an idea of the place.

Mikey could only report that the people here are amazing. He's another skinny white boy with black hair and a beard and I'm used to seeing his charmingly goofy smile. He stands at 5'10 and smokes Marlboro Lights. He came with his girlfriend Eli who is a bit shorter than him and has blond hair and glasses and she smokes Camels and she buys the Number Nines when they are on sale.

Mikey declared that everyone that he met, even last year were awesome. Olivia confirmed his observation by saying that the only person she ever met at Kerrville that she never wants to see again is Sarah Cash.

So we got good and wasted and I set up my tent and then turned on my phone to check my voicemails and Andy called me. I told him where I was and it sounded like he was amazed. He was calling because he and my brother, Jonny were playing through a weird drama and Andy and Cloe were invited to a Sheva Bracha party (a Jewish seven day traveling party that follows a wedding) and he needed to know if my brother was to be attending.

So I called my brother and asked him who won the Oriole game and asked him what his plans were for the evening. I relayed to Andy that I didn't think my brother would be showing up that night and I told him that I'm turning off my phone for three weeks and I bid him and Cloe a great month.

The first person whose face became familiar to me was Hope's. She has a smile almost as good as my own. I saw her when I exited my tent and looked out across the Meadow at hundreds of tents. She must have noticed me looking at her because we walked up to each other and introduced ourselves. I said to her that we should be friends

because it feels very natural to walk up to her.

Hope is a brunet farm girl. She wore a blue and white checkered bandana and sunglasses that she took off to show me her eyes. She agreed with me and we decided that we should continue approaching each other after we check the place out individually. Hope walked up to the store and I walked over to an old, stripped down looking upright piano that was set up on pallets.

I played a chord and a skinny, white blond dude came out of a tent. I asked him if he brought the piano and he told me I could use it whenever I want. William walked over and he beamed with amazement, "there's a piano here! I told you this place is great. You're gonna see so many instruments and so many talented people."

We walked off a few minutes later and filled our cups with water. I was noticing so many different types of people, "hey dude, there are no black people or Asians here."

William told me that there were Asians, but we probably aren't used to seeing them so much so they don't really stick out and there are a few black people, too but he didn't think that many black people like to camp. That validated a survey I once took in East Baltimore in my acid days.

I said that I liked meeting all different types of people but I was pretty drunk already so I added, "I still have a prejudice to Germans because my family's consciousness, but I have never met one who I didn't get along with."

We walked back to Kamp Ker-rUnk and William told me that he is known as King Ker-rUnk there, because many people use camp names. I thought about it for a second but I couldn't come up with any name that I wanted to call myself and I decided to keep my name.

My name was always something that I never thought to identify with and I might as well just had been a number. Anyways, I don't like hiding who I am because I don't know who I will bump into, and if I am just myself, I could remeet people I meet in the future and feel comfortable with them like I was when I originally met them.

The reason why Kerrville was a great opportunity for me was because I wanted to meet, get to know, and hang out with many new people in those 18 days. I wanted to see and hear as many different personalities and attitudes as I could. After checking out the place and realizing that it's also great for meeting many women and having much casual sex, I had to decide that I would rather be prudent these first few weeks.

There was a time not too long ago when I was so sex deprived that I could not make that decision, but then unexpectantly one day, I realized that I was satisfied and anyways, satisfaction seems to attract whatever I need. And anyways at a campsite it is hard to be private because everyone can hear through each tent and you see everyone daily.

We were looking out the door at some dude chasing some chick, and we were watching her body language as she sent the dude to get her another beer. William said that people get real interesting there. Some people have done extraordinary things and some people use the opportunity of meeting strangers to make up extraordinary stories. I replied that I get along with everybody and I don't mind if people are big talkers because it usually means they have to live up to more and that's always entertaining.

Kat Y. and Rob were making their rounds and they stopped by our tent to see if they could buy and sell some weed. We ended up hanging out a drop and getting to know each other. Kat thinks she's the Angel of Death.

She has angel wings tattooed on her back and she is being prudent on how she will get them filled in. When she left she told us that "the wings are for my six dead and there will probably be more so I want to be careful with my space."

The sun began to set a little while later. That was the best time to sleep because it wasn't too hot, and parties usually began after midnight. Since it was my first day there, I wasn't able to sleep then and I hung out with Gregory while Kerrville quieted. We wanted our camp to have the reputation as a party camp so we were having a big party at our camp that night and there were people stopping by to drop off cases of beer every now and then. Eventually, I took a nap.

I guess I woke up past midnight. I went to the showers and used some of the many shampoo bottles and body soaps that folks had left there. I brushed my teeth and went along with my business. On my way back to the camps I decided to get over a few hygienic insecurities and to use the Porto-potties so I could be a real camper already. At night they smelled much less toxic than during the day. That worked for me because the dehydration seemed to constipate me during the day anyways.

The wooden porto-potties were setup in a line or in a circle. By the upper meadow which was closest to my camp there were two rows of men's bathroom divided by a room of plastic urinals. There were many writings on the wall, but nothing derogatory. "Welcome Home;" "The earth is but a tiny speck in the universe;" and many "vote for so-and-so's."

I noticed a certain John Hogan's name on the wall every time I went to use those facilities. He was campaigning to play at the staff concert because there was limited time and therefore people voted for acts that they wanted to hear.

When I came back to our camp a party was raging and random people were yelling, "KerrUnk" all along the streets to our tent. There must have been thirty people in the tent and another thirty just outside smoking cigarettes and drinking beers. I saw William was now totally introducing himself as "King KerrUnk" and he was having a blast.

He was giving out sharpies to various people to draw on the white walls of the tent and giving out beers to musicians who came by to play for the party. No stereos or electric music is ever allowed on the ranch during the festival, so live acoustic music was in demand .

There were too many people to meet at the party so I just sat at my chair and hung out with people who I already met. A girl with a black eye introduced herself as Pumpkin and sat down next to me. We shared a cigarette and smiled at each other a lot. Her boyfriend came by and introduced himself as Saliman. He also had cuts and bruises on his face and he seemed to be the jealous type and at one point he put his nose up to mine.

I exited the claustrophobic tent and Pumpkin followed me out. I asked her where she got the bruises on face from and she said that she was drunk the night before and she hit Saliman with a hiking stick so he punched her by reflex. She added that she started up.

I asked her about the arrangement she had with this guy. My intentions were altruistic

and I wasn't really worried that Saliman would try to beat me up for being nosey because this was my camp and people get protective of me fairly quickly. Pumpkin said that the two had been traveling on her dime for quite a while and he sometimes would get antsy and try to run away. I didn't quite understand her and then she drew a heart on my arm with a sharpie. I said to her that "I was missing this benign, unadulterated free love all my life... this place feels like ecstasy to me!"

After my cigarette, I hung out with Kat Y. and Rob. Rob asked me if I liked the ecstasy he gave me two hours before and I smiled at him and Kat Y. sat down with them. They had a lot of different drugs that they were wheeling and dealing and they were showing me their wares. There were eight balls, molly, e, acid, and of course weed, too. Then someone brought over a bottle of Jack Daniel's which seemed very out of place at this party but he also was carrying a bottle of coke. I took half a cup of Jack and walked over to William who was drinking a Shiner.

William was in his head and he declared, "this is my home, and I love that I could throw a party for my neighbors."

A group of guys walked over to us and they asked for beer. William told them like he told everyone, "if you're a musician you have to play for us sometime, and if not, you have to yell 'KerrUnk' at the top of your lungs, and then you could feel free to drink as much as you can."

Then Woody Guthrie and Kat II entered the tent. Woody looks like a twenty-something skinny redneck and he walked around with the guitar he played and sang some shamelessly versed Texas folk music with an innocently sincere dustbowl voice.

Kat II's one of those little girls that you just got to love and she opens with, "A guy walks into a doctor's office and his doctor says to him, 'hey putz, you got to stop masturbating.' The putz asks the doctor, oh but why and the doctor says, 'cause you're standing right in front of me.'"

I immediately identified with Woody; imagining him to be straight out of the Cliffs Notes' "Of Mice and Men" and we totally hit it off. We drank and played together and told each other more dirty jokes.

Kat II had met him a month ago and brought him to the festival. Woody seemed smitten with the dirty blond with the cute smile. After a bit he played a few country-folksy songs about getting laid that Kat II sang harmonies to with much gusto. And after the set she drank a beer in a gulp and crushed the can on her head for our applause.

I woke up at the crack of dawn the next day. Mikey, Eli, and Gregory were sitting in the beer can-littered tent smoking a bowl. I swallowed a caffeine pill, drank a few cups of water and joined them. And we discussed getting jobs on the ranch.

Mikey was working for the trash crew, and he only had to work two hours a day. Eli was to be working at the daycare, which was a four hour shift. Gregory worked at the grill and was the only one who would be walking away with cash in his hand at the end.

I had a wristband that permitted me to stay on the ranch without working. William gave me one when I came to Texas. The wristband meant that every employee had to treat me nicely and it gave me the ability to mingle with everyone.

I still wanted a job so I would have a schedule; and so I could get to know how the ranch was run; and because staff is served breakfast and supper in the dining hall. However, Gregory told me to take my time before volunteering.

For Gregory's first year, he worked as a roving security guy for the six hour shift at 3 a.m. He remembered it to be brutal but very worthwhile because he got to see all the parties and he got to meet everyone he wanted. The security people are well respected because their job was considered the hardest.

They were not there to get anyone in trouble, but to help people with even the most minute of inquiries; people who were lost or just looking for a good party. Also, with walkie-talkies, they could answer questions for people and get first aid if necessary.

There were more frills to working. First, a musician who worked was eligible to be voted to play at the staff concert on the ranch which was being advertised for three weeks. This concert is considered great exposure for an artist and many people who played the show received some sort of record deal as a result. Second, staff were allowed to receive free acupuncture and massages from the Health Station. Third, it was considered a way of paying your dues for accepting the festival's hospitality.

I went off wandering, looking for musicians or somewhere to sign up for a job. I ended up outside the Kerr-tree Store drinking coffee and playing chess with Joel, who I didn't know at the time and had a hard time remembering because he looked like every other black haired hippie dude with a beard at the festival. It was a good game though we never finished it because we decided that we should get stoned by his camp.

Eventually, I wandered back to my camp and then up to the Kerr-tree Store again and then back down. I sat down in our empty camp tent and took a nap till around midday and then I walked back up to the Kerr-tree Store.

There is a stage at one side of a picnic table setup, and at the other side is the store that only sold drinks and next to that, a grill. There is just a hundred feet of space between the store and the stage. There were a few different groups of people sitting all over the place and there were a few people jamming on the stage very informally.

I sat down on the front of the stage as Raina R. and a guy who introduced himself as a guitar builder played music. Raina played a country-looking acoustic guitar and the guy played a mandolin. I was really enjoying what I was hearing but after a few songs, they both look at me skeptically.

I looked back at them skeptically and walked away. I could understand how and why they would act that way to me because guys sometimes try to hang out with pretty girls, but I was offended anyway and when I periodically encountered them two in other instances, I found them to be snobby though they played real nice (but who doesn't.)

I wandered on down the street enjoying my coffee trying to get my bearings. When I looked up at the sky, it was clear blue and there were a couple of big birds flying around and I watched them for a few minutes. I smoked a Camel and found a bench to sit on and then I meditated on nothingness for a bit. Then I walked off to a more secluded area and did some stretching and meditated on more nothing.

On my way back down, I bumped into Kara H., who I still didn't know. She smiled at me though and I asked her what she was up to. She said that she was just walking around

and enjoying the day and I left her to that and went down to my camp again. Clementine brought down some sandwiches and we all ate and chilled for a bit.

We were smoking when Frankie entered our camp with an old looking guitar with nylon strings. He's a deeply tanned redneck 12 year old boy who is really twenty-something with an accent that was a mix of farm boy and Ebonics. He came to our party the night before and he played for us. The selection was a dark tune with gangster-rap lyrics. At first it was very off-putting to some of our other guests, but we would never be rude to people who came to perform for us. After a while, he packed some weed in the communal bowl and he eventually joined our camp as an honorary member.

I became bored after a drop and William and I went roaming. We acknowledged that the place has the feel an artist's colony vacation. It's a place where everyone could feel comfortable to present their shit and to see other's. There seemed to be no critics, and if there were, it seemed that etiquette dictated that they should keep their opinions to themselves.

Even we walked down the road singing in slow, bellowing, deep voices, "oh, I ain't gwanna stay no longer, gonna pack my bundle and go, cause way over yonder is my little lady in a guinea blue gown that I used to know, oh get you ready in the morning, I'm going away to that lady in the guinea blue gown."

We passed a big, bearded, drunk man and a little redhead girl. That was Pirate James and the Little Redhead. William knew the pirate for years. He assisted the Kent siblings when they lost all their camping gear a few years ago. William and James exchanged hearty "arr's" and then we saw Jimbo.

Jimbo is a skinny white dude with a crew cut and a short mustache. Looks are very deceiving when it comes to this dude. He looks like a soldier in his button down short sleeve pastel colored shirt but he is an anarchist who plays well-written protest songs and who has safety pins in both of his nipples.

Jimbo has known William for quite a while and he was excited to meet me, too. We played a little guitar together for a few minutes and we decided that we liked each other's chops and we would play again in the future and possibly write a set to perform at who knows... the staff concert.

William and I then went to Camp Mixed Nuts. These guys looked like classical Grateful Dead Hippies. They were welcoming and had guitars all around the tent and a loose-leaf binder full of music for people to play. They had a giant bucket of mixed nuts in the center of the open tent for which they named themselves, of which I was enjoying.

Most of the people at this camp were over 50, and they are a real cool bunch. There was one teenage girl who sat next to her grandpa the whole time. I sat there for a while and eventually I played "Don't Think Twice" with their trio of guitarists, ate some more nuts, and smoked and shared some cigarettes.

On our way out, we passed Camp Minion which is a camp specifically set up for people who maintain a few of the big camps in that area. The camps they cooked, cleaned, and entertained for provided their housing and the people seemed to have a real gracious spirit to them. They also entertained guests during the day, but they joined other camps to make parties at night.

On our way back to our camp, we bumped into William's father who was camped in the quiet area. He came back to hang out with William for a bit and to drink a few beers.

William was thrilled to have his father visit his camp so he could show him hospitality. Mr. Kent told us about the acts at the main stage that we should check out. There were some premier folk acts, some promising new acts, and some acts that just looked interesting.

After a bit I decided that I should probably find some work. I walked up past the Kerr-tree Store, and passed the main entrance, and down into an area that I had never been to before.

As I got closer to the staff center, I saw many people wearing different color staff tee-shirts. These people also had on paper wristbands that they changed daily. On each wrist band there could be up to four stars, which would mean that the person wearing it has already received four free beers. Also a "D" is written when someone receives dinner. (There is no mark for breakfast.)

I found a spot to sit in the shade for a drop and drank some water and smoked some cigarettes. I bummed out a few to some passer-byers and spoke to a few people casually. Then a tall, blond in a real skimpy bikini for her build came over to me and put out my cigarette. She told me that smoking was going to kill me, but it won't kill her.

She put her hand on my chest and told me that she is the head of security and she was recruiting. I took her hand and noticed "it could always be this way" tattooed on her wrist and asked her how hard it was to recruit workers.

Foxtrot ignored my question and asked me if it was my first year there and when I told her it was, she looked at my wristband and asked me what I expected. I said "nothing" but I wanted a job so I could eat with the staff.

She told me to wait a half hour and she'll get me all signed up and she'll give me a red shirt. I told her that I may be a Kerr-virgin, but "no charming Jedi mind tricks could make a worker out of me." She was amused and asked me if I read sci-fi; I didn't know how to respond.

So I got to eat supper with staff right away. It was really good, too, though I don't know what exactly it was- it could have been burgers, little mini quails, stir-fry, or something just as good for the main. We were usually served bottles of different ice teas and cookies or cakes for desert. For most of the meals, I sat down next to some low key looking people and quizzed them on who they were and then I would bring back some food for my camp.

When I was walking back to my camp, I happened by Woody who was walking around with his guitar. He played me "Folsom Prison" and I gave him some food and a cigarette and told him to check out our camp that night.

When I got back to camp I got stoned and tired. I asked Gregory to wake me up at 1 a.m. so I could party a bit and I went to my tent. The heat has a way of draining a person in one way and energizing in another, simultaneously. It felt impossible to fall asleep during the day because the sun keeps you active or at least sweating, but as soon as the sun goes down the toll of the day would come crashing down on me.

I must have slept through such noise because by the time I was woken up, the main tent was filled with empty beer cans and bottles. I found that there were roving bands of people coming in and out of our tent all night, but no one was there when Gregory and I were chilling. Gregory was laughing that I was to be working the graveyard shift, but he told me that the camps still up would treat me very nicely.

My first roving security shift began at 3a.m. and it lasted till 9a.m. When I put on the red tee-shirt, Wild Bill was the shift lead and he told me that we were on a relaxed shift and he sent me to walk around RV road.

Most of the shift, I spent wandering around on the roads that I was assigned and smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee. I was having a good time and I was meeting random people who were having trouble sleeping and I was getting to listen to musicians playing all throughout the night. The time went by real quick.

When I got sent to the meadow I was totally in the deep part of my sleep and my legs felt like feathers. I was perky but calm from the coffee and cigarettes and marijuana that every one shared. Kara H. happened my way in a red shirt, too.

Kara H. has medium/longish, curly, red hair worn in a pony. She has softly raised Prussian cheekbones which made her look like a Ralph Lauren model at camp. I saw Wild Bill and his eyes locked into mine as if to ask who I thought was sleeping with this woman in the immediate future.

My eyes answered, "you are." And I swear I heard him say, "yeah, that's right." But that was way fine with me. He told Kara H. to come with him and then he brought her back to me in an hour and I don't really know why.

So I write about sex quite often now a days and most of the time I feel I must bashfully justify myself because it feels quite narcissistic. However, I'm gonna either stop justifying or eventually I will stop writing sex as a focus; but for now I have found sex to be a major part of the experience of "man in his environment;" to be the root of personality; and a fundamental variable for consideration when decision making.

In fact, personally, I probably prioritize it in my third tier for responsibilities (i.e life, money, sex) everything despite fleeting properties. And for Kerrville, sex in terms of the way it influences relationships between men and women is real important to write about when examining the festival's unwritten and unspoken social contracts and norms.

So, Kara H. and I walked in silence and I answered some introductory queries from her for a bit and she giggled to me, "I'm impressed by you. It's like you don't feel any need to say anything to me. But you're smooth too."

I was so tired that my responses were set on a 24-hour delay. That seemed to make her more touchy than I had been expecting. I replied, "I've been trying to speak as little as possible for the past few years."

I may have imagined Kara H. telling me, "some people are wary of taking around new people here because what occasionally happens when someone guides another in a new place is that the guide becomes a beacon for that person. With attachments come responsibilities that hold the person in the role of the guide down."

I answered, "well, I guess that the first person to make an impression on someone in a

new environment really resonates in a memory.”

And Kara H. giggled.

At 9, I ate breakfast. I bumped into Kara H. on my way back and I sent her to breakfast.

After that I got my daily wristband and I bumped into her again and I sent her to get a new wristband.

Then I went to the men’s shower and bumped into her when I was coming out, and I sent her to the women’s shower and I went to my tent to sleep.

Somehow, during some part of the day, Kara H. and I found ourselves sitting by the street together and I said to her, “I’m so fucking tired you have no idea.”

Suddenly some girl storms by us. A dude was following her and she turned around for a second but then continued walking.

The girl told the boy, “I had a good time with you really and maybe if this was real life but you really got to stop following me around here. I’ve been coming to this festival for twelve years and I want to see some people without you!”

Kara H. and I smirked at each other and I said, “Yeah, the first second you get to catch your breathe you feel it... I like to stretch before I go to sleep.”

“I like to stretch, too.”

“How do you stretch?”

“Well, I teach yoga.”

“Right, that’s why I’m asking.”

“I’ll show you sometime.”

“Well, I’m so fucking tired you got no idea.”

“So why don’t you go to sleep yet?”

“Well sleep deprivation is a trip in itself, and I’ll pass out soon.”

Kara H. giggles, “you know where you are going?”

“With you, right?”

“I’m going to meet up with people and mingle.”

“Well, I could try that.”

“Ok.”

“Let’s sit down.”

“So?”

“ So?”

“I don’t get it.”

“Neither do I... I don’t know, I don’t have to work tonight... I really am going to sleep soon, does it sound like I’m coming onto you? I’m not, I’m just so tired like a skipping cd.”

“...so you like this place?”

“Yeah, it’s like we have a social contract that you got to act like everyone’s family or something... I don’t know, what do you do?”

“I teach Spanish.”

“You’re gonna think I’m full of shit when I say that’s my dream job.”

“Ha, Ha.”

“I swear I draw comics in Spanish, but I only have a small vocabulary... soy un enscribar en espaniol.”

“...I never see you trying to have a good time.”

“I came here to sort out my head on some things.”

“You could have more fun with all the wonderful people here, I suppose.”

“Like what? Like sex? I don’t want to meet people and only know them from sex. I’m sorting that out now too and I’ll be in a state of inactivity for a few weeks.”

“Ok.”

“It’s not you guys fault, it just is... because like I love... so much that I have no respect for women, this so gay, ok, whenever I fuck ...with ...some chick, like not with her, but-shit, your getting a lot of credit to hear this one... after I have sex that’s all I want out of someone, at least till I’m satisfied which does take quite a bit of time, and it always seems like I’m deprived because the more I get the more I want and I attribute not getting over this already to the fact that I grew up in a household which restricted my... getting sexual desires filled... ah shit, you got to love that shit...”

“You are hysterical.”

“Yeah, but I only say true- seriously...” and then like a speed freak at a Dunkin Donuts around midnight I rattled, “if I said to you that my only pursuits in life, in order of priority was first, to find a scientific connection between my moods being controlled by astrological movements- like the moon causing waves in the oceans; second, basic life necessities; and then sex and other luxuries, would you think that I’m totally crazy, would you ask ‘what could be so important about moods and celestial bodies and gravity, especially if the calculations are so complex and practical application seems to be magical as bullshit...”

She giggled like she was saying, “you’re just uniquely balanced, like the rest of us. But you speak funny.”

So I said, “That must be my game!”

“So then we could have sex?” She said this so overhand that I had no idea if she was making fun of me or coming on to me.

“Of course we have sex, except, I can’t for two weeks because that’s what everyone at home thinks I’m doing here, even if I don’t say shit... and getting stoned, but I decided that I’m always stoned and I don’t need this place to get stoned... ironically, I think it’s ironic for compound reasons... it’s more true to say that this place could offer me more sex than where I’d be otherwise... I’m sorry if I’m being insulting I think I have OCD.”

Kara H.’s “H” stands for Houston where she’s from and it so happened that she was

camped right beside my tent this whole time and I really didn't know and she suddenly stopped walking and said to me, "you're acting to me like you're a puppy dog and you are definitely the too much information guy, don't you know that women like good listeners, but you constantly talk and share information that's boring and irrelevant to our conversation. Why don't you let there be some mystery to you? Do I really care about your ponderings questioning imagined morality of sexual expression and when you are attractive and you want it, sex comes fluidly not like a reward for a good show..." She giggles, "but nice conversation, we'll always both like Jeff Tweedy... and go read your "Yiddish Policeman's Union" to sleep and that little star of David tattoo is so condescending..."

"...or something! Shit, you're so right, I'm going to sleep."

"...and I'm German."

"Well then... Gut a Nach, mien frau-n-shmow... or something, right?"

When I got back, William was explaining that it's not wrong to have hate for people who happen to fit the exact criteria of derogatory stereotypes. He says that it's wrong to assume that some people with certain qualities are exactly like a stereotype. He says that he hates thugs who try to be niggers and Jews who act like kykes.

Then I woke up in the morning and I heard people saying that there were many manmade lakes in Texas. I stood up from a bench and walked back to camp and Frankie dosed me with acid. Frankie is a musician and his music was good enough for me to enjoy for a drop and then we went our separate ways.

On LSD, I handed out all of my paintings that were supposed to pay for weed while I was traveling. So, I went to the Rebel's Camp and I met Johnny Red, a skinny dude in swim trunks by his kiddie pool who looked like me but was fifty so I gave him a painting of this chick; Mayra wearing a crucifix (from "Season in the Valley! if you like this read that) and we smoked some weed, drank whisky, played some chess and shot the shit.

His older brother, Stonewall, a bald man with a mustache sat by a bar on a barstool at the entrance of the camp. He smoked from his own pipe the whole time and mostly minded his own business. I sat down next to the guy and smoked a cigarette.

I asked him if he wanted to smoke a bowl and he said his immune system is too weak to share a pipe with me because he is positive that he has HIV. I looked at him and I noticed he was bald and he smiled.

I was so impressed with the way that this man held himself that I couldn't refrain from saying it, "Forgive me, but I must say, and not just because I'm tripping on acid- I admire you, if I knew I was dying quicker than I anticipated I don't know what my dignity would look like." I think he appreciated what I said.

Then John H. came over to us when we were laughing too hard and he played us a song. His guitar literally had a banjo in it. He played a song about his Cheyenne woman. I told him I would vote for him for the staff show but I had no intention of voting for anyone.

Then Johnny Red's daughter, Pixie entered her camp with a limp after the song and sat down at a chess board. She's a petite 23 year old with short blond hair and a nice smile. She yelled to John H., "we wrote a list of reasons why you can't get laid on the table, you

should have read them before you washed them out.”

I smiled at Pixie and sat down at her chess board and another chick pushed me away from the board.

“You could play winners.”

“If I’m here...”

Pixie turned to me and coyly smiled, “I dreamt about you last night- that you were dying and you were just sitting quietly like you were trying to retain your dignity by keeping quiet, almost as if you were trying to make amends for the past because that’s what someone told you to do.”

I got a chill for a second and I remembered another friend of mine having a similar dream about me, “baby, it’s cause I got this black heart, like coal.” And I wandered out of the camp.

Johnny Red walked me past the kiddy-pool and we sang, “I got me some Seagram’s gin, everybody’s got their cup but they ain’t chipped in. This type of shit happens all the time, you got to get yours before I get mine.”

Mississippi Brandy looks like she’s a hot Hell’s Angel. She wore gold-rimmed, cut-off Aviators, a black sleeveless tee-shirt, and black cut off jeans for the whole festival. But it’s her tough-girl-punk-rocking haircut that makes me want to fuck her for a while. During the year, she lives in the Redwoods of some North California forest with her dog, which if I recall is a grey Shepard with a girl’s name.

So Mississippi was a Peacekeeper stationed on the way to the dining area. When I saw her, her Confederate crossbones belt buckle was a magnet pulling me up to her waist. I looked at my hearty supply of paintings and I was confident that she would find one that was pleasing. She chose a painting of the Seinfeld crew standing in a dressing room from a scene in the puffy shirt episode. She said she loved Larry David. And then I spun off.

And in front of me stood a fifty-raggedy-years-old redneck couple who seemed to be totally in love with each other. I offered them a painting and Jim said he wanted me to paint his wife for him. I said I would draw her and I declared that I would capture ultraviolet beauty and he gave me a pipe that he whittled from limestone.

We marched along the road for a while laughing and talking about how he was disappointed with George W. Bush. Somehow we ended up at the KerrTree Store where Frankie and some hippies were sitting. Frankie saw us all having a ball, and he ran over to us and looked at the couple protectively, “you know these are my parents...”

I turned to the couple and said, “now for sure I will draw you!” and I turned to the lady, “Won’t you find me a paper and a pen, and I swear I’ll do the best I can and make you look realer than you’d think you would with minimum pen strokes!”

Then Frankie and his dad walked me down to their camp and we smoked some weed but I was really on acid so I didn’t need any weed, but I smoke a lot of cigarettes. Then after a while, the lady found us by the tent and I sketched a profile with a smile and eyes and then I couldn’t concentrate anymore. She loved it and we all smoked some more weed.

...Now as I write this, it occurs to me that in every instance weed was smoked, and I don’t even write when we drink a Dr. Pepper which is what I was drinking pretty often

and the reason why is because:

A. We were smoking a lot of weed at every opportunity because that was part of why we came there.

B. Smoking weed is a communal activity that helps some people get to know new people.

C. This is not a reason but I read that in the Beatle's heyday they referred to the activity as "going for a laugh."

I must have handed out forty paintings from the leftovers that I had collected over the years. People seemed very gracious and some people gave me cigarettes, weed, cd's, art, pipes, and even a little money for my paintings. I felt really good about myself when they were all gone and then I bumped into Eli and she gave me half a pack of Parliament she had found and then she had to go back to work at the daycare so I began to walk down to the camp.

I bumped into Kara H. and we walked together. She asked me if I was still tripping on sleep deprivation and I smiled, "no."

Clementine and Gregory came up to us and told us that they were driving us to a river. Kara H. was really excited to do that so I went with them to Clementine's Malibu. William joined us by the car and we all got in. We drove down a bunch of winding roads and listened to MIA's, "Paper Planes" on repeat for a few times.

We got to a part of the river with a concrete bank by a quiet crossroad. William swam down the river and Clementine and Gregory were standing in front of us. Kara H. was stripped down to her underwear. I thought of being flirty but I decided against it because I was weird at the time.

Kara H. looked at our crew playing around in the water and remarked to me, "you need to loosen up! Time away from home is the best time to leave the old anxiety-ridden version of yourself behind. If an attractive woman comes on to you while your on a trip, allow it in and of itself to calm your nerves... all work and no play can make Jack a very lonely boy."

I was totally at a lost.

I went to grab my bag to smoke a cigarette and my bag slipped into the river so I went after it. I slipped into the water because the wet concrete was on such a steep slope, "Kara, I'm way too possessive to meet you here you'll get annoyed when every time you see me and I want only sex and I'm intent on specifically not making friends or any deeper relationship from the sample that I meet during plain old hedonistic sex and drug using anymore."

And then she went swimming. I was really flattered and I was confident that Kara H. understood me because we hung out enough to read between the lines and it wasn't like I was rejecting her in the least, I just wasn't comfortable. After a little swimming we all dried off and smoked a bowl and went back to the ranch.

Gregory seemed upset when we came back to the ranch but he wasn't vocal about what bothered him. Then it seemed like Gregory disappeared for a week and we didn't see him unless he was doing chores or retrieving something from his tent. It seemed very weird

to me because Clementine stuck around the camp.

I fell asleep as soon as the sun went down and I missed my 3 a.m. shift. I ended up waking up to light rains at 5a.m. and then I ran down to Staff Central to work. When I finished working I was so tired. Nothing happened on my shift and I spent most of it guarding the empty main stage because people kept merchandise in tents around the outdoor theater.

I divided my time with naps and the activity of collecting rocks and throwing them as hard as I could at the empty field in front of me. I pretended to be different major league pitchers from all over time. And I used both arms because it tires me out better. Then I was relieved of work and I went back to my tent and gave out some breakfast and got smoked out.

Afterwards, I was real spun but too sweaty to sleep so I went around intent on meeting people. That was when I met Painter. She has a key on her arm and she inspired me to be proud of Kerrville and the work that we, volunteers do for the camp.

Painter is a real dyke. I don't mean that in an offensive way, I love a handful of dykes. (I once sacrificed a couch to a Lesbian Goddess in Los Angeles- straight the fuck up. And she even came to the festival in a few pages, I think- that's Wendy!)

Painter and I hit it off from the start when I asked how old she was. She was 28 and I was almost 27 and she told me that she did indeed have a special party for surviving that long. We spoke about Kurt Cobain, and Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin. She drew a huge key on my forearm and we hugged and then we parted for our own adventures.

That's when I bumped into Jill. She is a very big lady. She sits around rolling cigarettes and I wanted one but had none so I approached her and she gladly gave me one. So I sat down to schmooze with her. She had been coming to Kerrville for ten years and she told me that she is like a fixture there and she loves the place.

She sits around talking to everyone and she works two shifts for peacekeeping a night and she was on a break. I told her that her job sounded cooler than mine, I was a rover. She told me to read the back of my red shirt and I'd realized that I was also a peacekeeper.

Frankie's parents happened my way and they asked me to come with them, so I did. I was actually feeling the opposite I was feeling the day I met them, but after a moment there presence felt seamless. They wanted to drink beer at their camp but I said we were closer to my camp and we have beer there, too.

When I brought them back, Frankie happened to be playing music at our camp. Frankie had been coming to Kerrville for four years, and this couple had adopted him when he first came.

The lady, "Frankie has gotten so good on the guitar."

The guy, "When we first met him we didn't let his crazy tattoos give us prejudice and we never regretted it."

Wendy who I originally knew in L.A. entered our tent randomly when she heard music and smelled weed. She walked up to me and made out with me for a minute which was quite the treat considering that she's really gay (that's what she says, even if I got lucky a

few times.) So, I gave her a beer and we all listened to Frankie play morose music and sing horribly violent lyrics and we all clapped after each song.

Wendy introduced herself as a Mexican-Californian who wandered to Texas and she eventually told us that her mom named her after the fast food place because that was the first meal she had after she got to Los Angeles, and her water broke right after she finished eating.

Wendy is a true shorty with her petite body and pale complexion for a Hispanic. She was wearing skater shorts, a tee-shirt designed by Travis from Blink 182, old looking sneakers, and a short light brown pony. She has brown eyes and slightly yellowed teeth. She happened upon the festival with her girlfriend Christina G. because they wanted to vacation and lay low and I told Wendy to come here before I left the face of the earth.

Christina G. abandoned Wendy after only one night of camping because her sister was having a baby back in Cali. She should've known that was coming because just the other night, Christina G.'s estranged parents reconciled with her and made a deal with her that they would set up housing, transportation, and money for her if she would stop being gay. The offer was too good for her to refuse.

Wendy was now thinking about getting a job in Alaska at a fish processing plant. She almost sold the idea to me (especially considering that my old friend James Johnson actually worked in Ketchikan before; the book I was reading was set in Sitka; and I used to dream that I was hibernating up in Alaska for a drop when I was a little boy.)

We ended up walking to dinner together and somehow I ended up telling her that if there were previous lives to be had, I must have had one as a lesbian. She laughed like I was telling a joke and told me seriously, that I was never a lesbian but I am an incarnation of her best friend from when she was thirteen who killed himself.

We sat down and ate our food and this pretty girl with long pink and black hair sat down next to us and Wendy and I couldn't take our eyes off her. She looked like she had her own little bubble where she lived.

She offered to smoke us out later, but Wendy said that she was tired and I was too. So I told the pink haired girl that she should wake me up at my tent at 12 o'clock and to bring me some coffee, too. She said she would and when I told her where I was camped she said she knew because she was setup right across the street from our camp.

But it was the Hawaiian Johnny Cash woke me at 12 and with his guitar playing "Folsom Prison" and he switched "I shot a man in Reno" to "I shot a man in Denton just to see him die." I was laughing and he told me he was to smoke me out and his "little pink haired darling" was coming over with some coffee for a late night party.

H.J.C. and the pink haired girl met each other last year and had a Kerr-wedding and though they hadn't seen each other in a year due to living thousands of miles away from each other, but they came back this time and renewed their vows.

We played music for a bit together and then H.J.C. received some requests from me but he didn't know most of the songs I asked for so he played some songs like the request that I didn't know.

The time flew to 3 a.m. and I was off to work and I bid the lovebirds a goodnight and

they said they had a great time trying to help my perspective evolve. I didn't know what they were talking about but a fun time was had by all.

William happened upon me during my shift and we chilled for a bit. William and I were discussing the American dream and what that may be. William's dream was of a house on a hill, in a ranch in Medina between Kerrville and San Antonio or Austin. He wants a wife and kids, and fast cars and luxurious items with plenty of money from independent wealth to entertain brilliant philosophers, artist, and his friends. These are his visions of success because he fancies himself after Ben Franklin. But now he looks more like a young, hippie Mark Twain than anyone else.

Every now and then, he searches the internet for blogs on different topics, but primarily theological topics and he watches arguments play out and gathers information till the opportune moment to send pages of critiques on both arguers. This is a game for lonely nights but it's better than drinking alone. And he always likes to fit in somewhere his favorite line and his potential trademark, "theological opinions are telling comments on a person's psyche."

He admits it's a guilty pleasure that's only meant to invigorate himself as he always closes out of the blogpage after his piece is sent. He will accomplish his dream eventually or he will adapt it to reality; but for now his ambitions are grandiose. But he has a plan. He will quietly and methodically work his ways through the ranks of marijuana market until he could retire and distill a Texas Single Malt Whisky that he could be in love with. There is a lot of school in between.

We both agreed that even if we find ourselves submitting to an employer, 9-5 jobs are really for chumps who have their back against the wall to pay for their lives and the lives of their families without really getting the time to appreciate the greens of their labor in first person. If that is what is, then we both would have to accept that, and with a little luck we would find a good retirement program and maybe we would get to retire at 65. But if not, it our responsibility to find a better way.

So the dream of William's Single Malt came as he laid awake in bed after studying for a chemistry final in B-more. He was looking at his fine collection of empty bottles in a china breakfront in his room and he was pondering a realization he had earlier that month; he didn't want to be doing what he was doing. He wanted to be a renaissance man; he wanted to be Thomas Jefferson and the only way to do that is by being independently wealthy.

We passed by the sink outside a porto-potty and William began talking about anti-bacterial soap in a derogatory way. He claims it paves the way for mutated bacteria and makes us and our children not immune to strains with which we were originally raised. And along with that, these strains that our body learnt to deal with may even provide us with some sort of utility as nature seems to pair things like that together.

I told him "we are not hippos, so we don't need birds living on us" and then we retired to our separate ways.

When the sun rose, I started my day like the ones before and it felt like a blur of protocol already. I went for breakfast and mingled with the early risers and went back to my camp to get high and clean up the mess from last night and then around 11, I went to get one of my staff beers.

When I came back to the tent, Olivia was there. She seemed real relaxed and we were talking about something but I couldn't really figure out what the conversation was about. She was asking me a question and my attention span was just not working so she gave up, "well at least you're the boy I know and have grown to love." And I smiled bashfully as she left the tent. Then I must have passed out till the night time.

Well at least I got up in time for work. Jason was the shift lead that night and he likes to play a game he calls "Chase the Rabbit." He runs around and hides and we try to find him. Along the way if there is any work to do, then we take care of it. He does this to teach the staff the lay of the land and to keep us awake.

He likes to hide right behind the people looking for him and throw pebbles at them to show them he's there. I think he was cheating though because he was using the radio that night and he taunted me by radioing that he recognized my smoker's cough when I passed him taking a leak behind some tree.

I ended up finding him by accident because I wasn't really looking for him; I was just wandering. Then I was assigned the Pavilion shift at the main stage again where I got to throw rocks for a couple of hours. And then to the meadow.

Since I was more familiar with the meadow, more details stuck out to me. It was basically quiet and I happened upon some people I knew and some folks were at my camp. When I passed Kara H's tent, I couldn't help but notice two pairs of shoes right outside. Rather than be irrationally resentful (of which nothing good could happen) I decided to borrow one of her lawn chairs and I brought it to my main tent to hang out with the crowd there.

William and Clementine were hosting something. I don't remember who exactly was there but I saw Joel and a few others that I recognized. The crowd was staying awake to watch the sun rise that morning on Chapel Hill and hear the musicians take turns serenading the hippies and lovers. There were a few people that I gave paintings to before and they were really nice but I didn't really remember them. And William and I took a walk after we got stoned.

William told me that he had forced himself to stay awake all night to hang on Clementine because she was flirting with him and was so hot. However, he was pretty baffled that all his advances seemed to be shot down. I said that maybe she's being sensitive to Gregory's feelings and in that case, he'll have to wait at least a week or till she fucks around with some others.

But William wasn't phased and he said that he decided to always be respectful of her and he would take out his frustrations by yelling, "KerrUnk" with his guests. So we chugged a beer each and yelled "KerrUnk" at the top of our lungs. Then I tried to smash a beer can on my head but I had little success. And then we walked back to the camp and Clementine and William went to his tent.

Dawn came like it did every night on the night shift. I went to the closed Kerrtree store to drink coffee and smoke some Tops. An older woman approached a bench within earshot and she begins to strum a song as magnificent as Joni Mitchell's "Clouds." She looked pretty bashful but after I assured her that I was really enjoying the music she played me some more songs.

Little Shakespeare, as he introduced himself standing 6'2 with a short, trimmed, red beard. He sat down next to me and we smoked cigarettes and drank coffee listening to this lady play. After a while she got bored and Little Shakespeare and I played chess and I bummed some Camels from him. He won, but it was a close game.

When the store opened, William came up the hill. He was looking to get something to eat and I told him to walk me down to the staff breakfast and I could get him banana pancakes. As we were walking he asked me if I remembered a summer four years ago when I told him, "you are a rock star if you act like a rock star."

Of course I remembered, but I was almost embarrassed of saying that. William however, loved the saying and he told me that we are rock stars now. So I said, "yep, yep, yep... so you got laid."

"You know why I save all year for this; because being King KerrUnk is the way I want to be all year long, but I can't afford it- but it's worth it to be this way for a month out of the year at least. Since this is my vacation, I could spend it how I please and here I could do everything I want to on vacation. There is no time here and what ever I do, I do, and what ever I don't, I don't."

"You really remind me of Texas up in Baltimore... like you got the same philosophies as King of the Hill."

"Yeah, I guess."

William then told me that Pod the Pirate had arrived. He was very excited when we happened upon him. William yelled across the street, "Arghh!"

And Pod, without looking yelled, "Arghh!" back and William ran up to him and said, "What up fool!?"

And then Frankie seemed to appear from nowhere. He grabbed Pod from behind and lifted him off the ground. Frankie asked Pod if he knew when Shaggy would arrive but he didn't. Then Frankie turned to me and told me that without Shaggy there probably wouldn't be a Kamp KerrUnk. William playfully remarked, "what, I can't do it on my own?"

Frankie told me a few stories of Shaggy getting parties together. The common thread of the story was that where ever he hung out during the day, was where he would make his cook outs, bring his beer, and bring his party.

...And time seemed to bend a lot on the ranch.

Olivia likes when people read out loud to one another. Her family always had bedtime stories read to them and she feels it brings an air of aristocracy to our camp. I always like being read to, even if the reader reads without expression and even if I can't follow because the sounds themselves are enough for me to focus on and I had to learn to be polite when a reader is reading something even if I am not following because sometimes the reader needs to read more than the audience needs to hear. So Olivia got really excited when Mikey, Eli, Frankie, and I were willing to let her read Kipling to us.

William, Olivia, and Gregory all love Kipling. So even though I didn't follow her talking in that British accent, I took her enthusiastic endorsement of the book seriously enough to have Gregory explain the story to me.

So, "Puk of Pooh's Hill:"

Puk is a fairy that's always lived in England and writers and poets always wrote about him. So two kids come to Puk's forest and made a parameter of stones and put on the play, "A Midsummer's Night Dream" where Puk is a character. Puk reveals himself to the kids, and says that there would be more fairy people around but technology drove everyone out. But he wanted to show his magnificence by telling the kids all about England and how he was there before and he will be there after.

One story tells of Wayland the Norse conquering the land and being successful for a brief moment before the natives lost faith in the religion he brought and the Christians drove him out. Gregory loves this story because he grew up observing religious people in his environment and this story illustrates the control that faith can subjugate over a whole society.

Week Two:

I had a dream for the first night in years. It was the night Lesli flew in from LA because I asked her to come. She surprised me. We had a real pleasant reunion and I showed her around the parts of the ranch I knew and I told her that she would probably want to camp by herself and meet new people. In my dream though, she was much more intimidating.

"You want closure?"

"no! that time was closure... from what, we had drama?"

"oh come on!"

"well, we are meeting as old friends."

"Do you want to discuss anything?"

"Nope."

Well in real life, she hooked up with William ten minutes after she said hello to me because she knew he was my friend but she wanted to confront me with that. Right away, she said, "Life's so vivid now. The pleasure intoxicates me and the pain decimates me... so I have compassion for your plight... I need you to understand that I have love in my heart for you but,"

I politely walked away and cried for a few minutes because Lesli was the one for me... or the one of five, or ten, but she was my secret and she actually came here, so this hurt on a private level. The only real friend of mine she met, she fucked. But I know Lesli, and all obvious things aside, I think she fucked William because she wanted me to understand something about life.

Lesli became frustrated and explained that and she said that she is moving to Oakland and wanted to tell me, but it's so sad to tell me anything because it seems that the concept of her had become so distorted in my head that when I hear good things about her, all I could think about is that she is having a good time without me. But I told her that I'm in a different place now.

In the morning, Wendy appears and speaks to me like a therapist. I always try to get her to make out with me and she always seems to take that in stride even when she's not

interested. And she interpreted my reality that Lesli obviously represents my discarded goals and dreams and then I told her that I was really just sad over Layla because both of them have July birthdays, but I was not gonna let it get to me and Lesli just being who she is, just brought me some healing somewhere else and I guess I really didn't care about her.

Wendy spoke about Alaska and then about Ms. Layla, who she never met. She said, "I understand, you want to show her you're new perspective and you feel she didn't believe you, which just proves that you're no different in that regard to start. It's fucked up, I guess you got to keep searching for what you need. Let's distract ourselves... you know I'm also sad... about Christine. Let's be hyper!"

Wendy and I skipped around for a drop singing old Metallica songs because we both remembered the lyrics enough to follow each other.

We totally decided, "when in Rome, etc." I had been observing the conveniences of the Kerrville social contract. There had been minimal drama here thus far. When I returned to the tent I told this to Hannah the Beer Angel (that's what we called the bartenders because they only served beer) who visited our camp one day with a nice looking guitar that had an oval sound hole, gilded with pearl.

She said that she observes minimal drama here, too. I told Hannah that I thought it was funny how there were so many "Raina's" that it seems like people just randomly pick out names as if to tell others that they only offer a guest pass for their company. But Hannah just thinks that there are more babies than good names.

Then this guy bursts into our tent drinking a beer. He said his name was the Saint and that people think he's sleazy but he's not. I asked him why he is so concerned that he introduces himself to us that way and he left our tent and he said it's because he needs to get some.

Hannah told me that there is a very fat lady that this guy had slept with and she never lets him forget it. That's how he got the name he had. Hannah also said that he was probably tripping on something. Then Hannah started describing the drugs that she had in her body at the moment and how it was so cool to be at a place where everybody had drugs flowing through their bodies. And Kat Y. the writer entered our tent.

I was really fascinated by Kat Y. and I didn't know why, so I told her that she reminded me of Holly Golightly from "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and then Rob entered the tent.

Kat Y. decided to blow my mind by telling me stories of being beaten and dragged from at car one night and put in a trunk to be eventually saved. Now she's moving to Atlanta where she will go to school, work, write, and eventually finish her tattoos.

Then William walks in with a middle-aged guy named Bob. Many people acted wary towards him because word that he was a narc followed him. William felt as if he had nothing to hide and he brought him inside our tent and explained to him that being a pirate meant "that though life gets dirty, you can't just lay down and die and sometimes you need to be grass rooted and homemade and you always got to fight for what you want and need." Then William turned to me and asked for my shirt and traded it to Bob for his shirt and we all drank beers at daybreak.

Kara H. was playing guitar in the morning sun and I walked over and listened. I

said to her that we should play some music together and she told me that playing music with someone is real a private thing. I was baffled and she asked me if I was good.

I reluctantly said that I was really good and the people who play with me usually enjoy it and then she said, "well aren't you the guy who puts "cock" in cocky?"

"Well, I practice a lot and read a lot of music books."

She looked at me like she was trying her best to be condescending, "you're serious?"

So I began walking away from Ms. Kara and I bumped into Mississippi Brandy. She was smiling so nice to me so I went up to her and smiled. She took off my sunglasses and I took her pair and looked at her green eyes. She said to me in a low voice, "We could melt right now, but we would miss out on too much fun... a few years ago, I made the mistake to fall in love here and now I could never do that again."

"You used up you're try?"

"No, I learnt from mistakes. You're the cheese!" Mississippi handed me a pack of American Spirits and walked away.

I ended up walking by myself in my head. I was thinking about modeling and reflecting behavior and about walking up and dancing with someone and how I would have to lead if I approach someone to dance because if I'm expecting her to mirror what I'm doing, I have to do something to be emulated. I would have come in with some sort of dance but my partner following me would have to provoke more innovation or whatever.

Then a hippie got me out of my daydream and told me that we are doing the Staff Concert voting. He told me that I should vote because this could be a big opportunity for these guys to be heard by people who have access to contracts and it's the road to main stage if you have no reputation.

I replied in a daze, "just be happy and enjoy and be creative and it doesn't matter who is best... it's your own fault if you have a bad time." Then it seemed that the hippie was gone.

And then I noticed an older woman looking at me skeptically. So I walked down to my camp.

There were swarms of people blocking the intersection right before our camp. I went to see what was going on and I saw that the crowd was focused on two guys who were passing a joint. William came walking through the circle and he told me that Shaggy had arrived.

Shaggy was a hero in the meadow. He always brought two big, octagon shaped tents which were being constructed by a dozen or so people across the street. Both held three hammocks and two kiddie pool. They also had big fans to keep the inhabitants cool. Shaggy seemed to be a very nice person.

There were even older folks from the Rebel's camp who came down to greet Shaggy. Shaggy was a skinny white dude with a goatee, a mullet, a short sleeved buttoned down shirt, an old fashion looking dark baseball cap, and aviator sunglass. Even Johnny Red and [Big] Shakespeare smoked cigarettes with the dude.

There were too many people so I wandered to get a cup of coffee across the camp. There

were clear skies and the heat made everything look fuzzy. I walked by the empty Kerrtree store and wondered if everyone who hangs out there were greeting Shaggy. I passed by a checkpoint and I bummed a cigarette from Jill and then the Saint came from nowhere and kissed Jill on the cheek and walked away.

Then Woody and Kat II came wandering around. So I asked him to play me some Dylan songs. Woody didn't really have such a good memory for lyrics so he made up dirty words for "Memphis Blues" and it was wonderful.

Kara H. seemed very frustrated with me one of the next few days. I know why; but first I say that time melts into blurs on the ranch. She bumped into me when my shift was over and she didn't bring up how I ditched her the last morning to sleep when she went out of her way to find me a shooting range and an impressive gun collection to shoot.

She walked with me and brought me to the picnic table in front of the staff stage at Kerrtree. She introduced me to Jessica and I smiled charmingly. Then Kara H. began talking me up to a frightfully offensive level and even asked Jessica to "fuck" me so I turned and walked away.

Later around sun down, Jessica came to me by my tent and I was raggedly tired. We smoked some weed, spoke, and if I had any serotonin, I would have seen a delicate window to create a bond that for an introduction that would seem quite comfortable. But I didn't have any serotonin left and I was spacey so I asked her if she sees parallels between physical laws and psychological laws.

"Either, infinite space on a whole seems to be a liquid spilled from a cup that's evaporating and thinning out or is logic an illusion when it comes to philosophy or I was thinking that all celestial bodies orbit something, and that's because of gravity, so if there were no gravity, then no orbits, and nothing spins and no energy is produced as a by product and everything would just explode because everything would just be still? The truth is I'm not sure that my string of logic makes sense at all, I'm pretty sure what I said was actually wrong...but what about this one? In order to create order you got to displace an equal or greater amount of order- which creates total disorder somewhere else- when energy is expended it burns to nothing."

We smoked another bowl and I excused myself to my tent.

I woke up at 1 a.m. William was drinking and carrying on with his hiking stick. He had been practicing fire-spinning and staff work all winter long. He had just spent the night walking around spinning his stick for people because someone stole his kerosene but he was taking it in stride.

He broadly smiled because he was thrilled to be entertaining when we entered into the tent. The regulars were there.

Will took the stage, "absolute zero, is when there is no movement or energy... Ok, so follow me now, there isn't enough energy to extract anything from a black hole; so right before the big bang happened, everything was just a mathematical point with no mass floating in nothingness because there was no dimensions yet in existence, there was no space; so God must have died when he opened this black hole containing the universe that we live in!"

Wendy approached me and told me that William was giving a physics class and it got

over her head. She led me out to somewhere dark and totally seduced me. She told me she couldn't have children because of something that was very private; then she said when she was 12, her brother was raping her alot; and that her prom picture is the only one with her in a dress because her friends made her wear it.

Wendy said to me as she put her jeans back on, "if you're really a traveler, we should be traveling together."

That sounded nice and then I never saw her again.

At work, I stopped by one of Shakespeare's late night parties going on at Rebel's.

He's an older hippie version of his relatively clean cut son, Little S. There must have been over seventy people in that area. Many people were watching a chess game.

Pixie walked by me and I went up to her and asked her how she got her limp and she told me she was in a motorcycle accident and then she hopped on an a small ATV. Her tone was as if she was gonna drive off at any second when she asked me if I knew Piam and I told her that I heard legends of some 30 year old Casanova drug dealer walking around with an entourage of acid tripping teenaged girlies.

Pixie said, "an attractive woman entourage attracts more attractive women to you, so veterans of Kerrville realize..." Then she really drove away.

I was meeting some pirates when Missy Brandy said hello. She stumbled up to me outside of the party and we smoked cigarettes. It was just a magical scene, and then Niquai came dancing by us. And Pixie zoomed up and Brandy jumped on behind her and told her to drive fast. So Pixie drove around in a dizzying circle and when Brandy wanted more, Pixie just let her take the thing for a ride by herself. Me and Pixie smoked some cigarettes and we were quiet. When I left, she told me to come by for a haircut in the morning.

I was moseying till I would remember where I was going when Janis Joplin walked up to me and grabbed my ass and said, "I need to get laid, too." I smiled hiding my crepped out feeling and sped up away from her.

I woke up around 9a.m. at the Rebel's. I drank coffee with the matriarchy and some how I began telling them about Canada, actually Hamilton, Ontario where I spent 11 days with my friend at his mom's just chilling in the mild sun with a dog named, Hershel who was dying of age related complications. I told them about the reservation cigarettes that are cheap and about a school called McMaster where they have a nuclear reactor.

When I wandered down to KerrUnk, I saw Olivia and she said she wanted to trip with me and I said sure and then Cowboy Rob appeared before us. He was shirtless but he wore a cowboy hat, "I was saying that West Texas is a different world baby, we have meth labs and boar hunting." There was something off about Rob that made me feel anxious.

So I left Olivia on her own to get out of that and then I saw Hope. She was working on the recycling crew and they drove around in an old white F-150 to each crossroad to sort through different colored beer bottles and retrieved bags of cans just hollering up a storm. As always, she was a pleasure to see. She approached me while she was taking a break and asked me how things were going and I told her that they were fine and then it was back to work.

A drop later, I bumped into Hope again and she said she and her crew were going down to the river and she invited me to come. She and I drove down in her old fire engine red Civic hatchback, and Kelly, Terry, Jim, and Dave met us at a river crossing twenty minutes off the ranch.

So Kelly is the oldest of the three girls. She's Hope's sister and she looks like she is 26. She's a skinny girl who wore a black and white thick striped bikini. She was married to Dave, who she met a few years back in Yellowstone National Park when she and her friend lost their supplies. Dave seemed to be 5'10 and in good shape. He had a trim beard and a real calm demeanor.

Kelly even told me that though she was always attracted to Dave, when he was helping them at Yellowstone she wasn't sure if she should come on to him because he seemed to be helping her and her friend for altruistic purposes and she didn't want to make the situation uncomfortable. Dave smiled like a saint and shared his cup of whisky with me. And Jim passed me a can of Coke.

Jim is Hope's and Kelly's younger brother. He seems to be in his early twenties and he worked on a farm all year. He's a white boy built like a football player who also carried a bottle of Jack Daniels and he has blond hair. He and Terry were showing each other rocks from the water.

Terry is their adopted sister. She was twenty-two and recently divorced. She had a baby back in San Antonio with their mom and she said she only came camping on the weekends for this festival because she had never missed a year since she was born. I remembered Terry from some sleep deprived stroll I took where I met her originally and we ended up smoking cigarettes for a little bit.

Hope told me a little about her life. She was also twenty-two and recently divorced. She still loved her husband but he was a crazy man. He was in the Army and he currently was in San Antonio and she still handled all his bills. She told me that I should never hand over my finances to anyone that I was in a relationship with because then I would be at their mercy when it's over. She said that her husband is real lucky that she still loves him.

We sat at the river smoking, drinking Jack, chasing it with Coke, collecting interesting stones, and throwing rocks in the river all afternoon. These guys have been examining rocks like this all their lives looking for different and unique stones to project their fortunes. It was very peaceful in the shade of the river and we all came back to the ranch refreshed.

As I was walking back to my camp, I passed a woman singing old country songs and her voice reminded me of Jewel. I sat down by an empty chair near her and listened for a while. Shannon is from Arkansas and she came here with her band to play main stage.

She's a brunet with an olive complexion and she wore a knee length denim skirt, cowboy boots, a yellow tee-shirt, and a cowboy hat and she liked my tee shirt made by the drummer from Blink 182. She is 5'4 and doesn't smoke cigarettes, but she loves performing and she sang me a really old Dolly Parton song.

We sat for a while and I told her that I would definitely stop by more often and she seemed very flattered. Then we walked to dinner and went our separate ways when we

got to the line and people we had met before grabbed our attention.

I ended up not working that night and I was hanging out with some people I didn't know at our tent. We were sitting around playing music for a bit when the tattoo artists came into our tent. They wanted to draw some designed on our walls and I was more than happy to let them.

Caution and Dildo are a part of a traveling collective of tattoo artists. They told me that if I paid 10 bucks a color and 20 an hour they would do work for me. So I started sketching a design floating around my head. It was a classically conquistador-looking death on a horse being attacked by a phoenix. I got real excited and began searching for William so I could get money for that.

I bumped into Mississippi B. who was apparently drunk and horny and I told her I was on a mission. So she followed me for five minutes and asked me what I was doing. I told her that I was looking for William because I needed money and I pulled up my shirt and showed her Caution's sketch of my idea on my back. She told me that it was big. I said, "yeah."

"That's really intense, you're getting this now?"

"Yeah, you want to watch?"

"Oh no, I can't be part of that."

Then I pulled up the sleeve of her shirt and gazed at a colorful tattoo of a tree on her shoulder and she asked me if I was willing to ditch the tattoo party and drink some whisky but I was already stubborn with my idea.

I spun away from Miss Brandy and I bumped into Kat Y. Kat Y. hugged me and told me that she was heading out. She had gotten much to write about and she had a great time. She told me that she really couldn't afford to come to fest this year but her friend paid for her to come. Her only obligation that week was to help him sell some drugs and she had a great time.

I told her that William paid for me to come to Kerrville and I'm kind of like his butler. Kat Y. told me that she once "butlered" for her older brother for a few months and it wasn't so bad.

I told her that I wasn't complaining and she responded, "I've noticed that people occupy roles in other people's lives. For the most part it seems like we solicited these folks subconsciously, to the point where we seldom need the very person who occupies the role as much as we need the role just to keep occupied."

William seemed to suddenly approach us and he stated, "Perception! Time is dependant on speed and density. So if there is an object traveling at .5 of the speed of light- we'll call it a planet- and let's keep in mind that light speed is the fastest that something can travel, and we shoot an object off of it at .4- we'll call that a spaceship- and then we shoot a bullet from the spaceship at .2, then the bullet is traveling at 1.1 times the speed of light- which is faster than the fastest speed. However, that bullet is not really going 1.1 relative to the center of the universe!"

Kat Y. had to run but William and I took a hike and laughed at the fact that light is the fastest speed that something could travel knowing that we would never even be able to

travel that fast.

Travis L. arrived to Kerrville looking for Sarah, but she was now Ashley and she happened to have been in San Antonio. Like a Stephen King story, Travis had been released from a Florida prison the week before and his only goal was to find Sarah. He searched the ranch for a whole day and ended up meeting Kat Y. when she was looking for a ride into San Antonio.

Travis and Elliot were driving a black '98 Mercedes C class that they got from their father. They lived in San Antonio for most of their lives and Kat Y. thought she actually may have known Elliot in his previous life. However, Elliot definitely didn't know her. Travis had another accident before the Florida one where he was driving his brother, Elliot in Texas and he fell asleep at the wheel and Elliot wasn't wearing a seatbelt and now he's totally brain damaged and he has none of his old friends anymore because he drools and says horrible things sometimes.

Elliot was always quiet in front of his older brother, Travis and Kat Y. couldn't feel threatened or offended by him. Kat Y. and Travis hit it off and had intimate conversations about the reality of their lives and they identified themselves in each other.

Travis quoted a poem that his "dead" lover, Sarah had written when she was 15 after he impulsively told Kat Y. that he accidentally killed Sarah in a car accident. "It excites you, but the fat of fear becomes you; God would help if he cared, but we are the wounded children."

Travis explained that he had been off of heroin for 2 years in jail, and he is not the "Chosen One" anymore. Kat Y. told him that she wants his story. And Travis is a lover so he was flattered to have Kat Y. hanging off his every word. So, Travis, Elliot, and Kat Y. drove one of his father's old cars down to Miami together. They were to go through Atlanta before Miami so Kat Y. could get the feel of the city but Travis had business in Florida afterwards.

Kat Y. was intrigued to make some cash so they eventually rendezvoused with one of Travis's high school baseball buddies in Miami and he had a big transporting job for the couple and Elliot which included an all expenses paid trip to California.

This was a gig that Travis and his brother were very lucky to fall into. There was great opportunity for steady income so that the brothers could finally start their lives over. And none of it could have happened without the high school baseball buddy, Rhett.

Rhett is Sarah/Ashley's strongest admirer. He employs her and is protective of her. When he found out that Travis was coming back to San Antonio from his ears near the grapevine and he knew that Travis would be looking for Sarah. He was always informed on matters that he cared about and Sarah cooperated by even giving him Travis's jail letters whenever they arrived because she had no intention of actually reading them.

Travis had really tried to reform himself in jail and he seemed to always excel at anything he wanted to do. He got an associates degree to be an X-ray technician; he became a yogi; and he was the star of the prison softball team. He really did love Sarah, but Rhett knew that Travis wasn't a threat, just an annoyance.

Rhett didn't want Sarah to have to revisit this pain especially when her back never fully healed and her mother seemed to be dying. So he did everything in his power to return

Travis to Florida and he knew that with Elliot's needs, Travis would need a lot of cash. Of course Rhett didn't want Ms. Sarah to find out about this plan because she would definitely be defiant to him on this and it would just make a mess. He knew that eventually Sarah would request that Travis be sent back to Florida anyway because Travis could only be destructive to Sarah/Ashley's daily, new lease on life.

BACK TO THE KERRVILLE FESTIVAL:

So William and I walked down the road and he dropped some acid. We noticed Kat Y. kissing Rob goodbye and saw her leave with Travis. And Rob walked up to us and we all smoked cigarettes. Rob was cool, and though he missed her, he was excited for her opportunities and he looked at William straight faced, "Life is full of disillusionment."

I woke up in the day and saw our camp trashed. We realized that all the responsible folk left the camp to various roaming bands of pirates. Pirates usually act cool if there is a host around, but when you leave them alone, they sure know how to trash a place. Our RV neighbors were piddling to our camp complaining about the noise and an indignant William stumbled from his tent to hear what the complaints were all about. William told the neighbors to politely go fuck off because this was a party area and they could come and join the party sometime or go to sleep at the quiet areas, or RV camps.

When that died down, I smoked a bowl with Gregory and explained to him how simple it could be for him to understand the guitar:

Simplistically speaking, we will say there are five ways to make a chord:

- A. The open formations
- B. The E bar chord
- C. The A bar chord
- D. The D bar chord
- E. The C bar chord

Chords are the foundation to song playing on a guitar. I drew up the chords and explained how they could slide up the fret board making each chord in the book. After a few months practicing chord playing and recognition I told him that he should go on the internet and print up chords to songs he likes and do that for the rest of the year and then he should come back to me.

I drew Gregory a chart and walked off to the Kerrtree Store to get some Dr. Pepper. It had occurred to me that I had been drinking a lot of Dr. Pepper at the time when I bumped into Kat III.

Kat III is about 5'3 and she has shoulder length dark hair. She is a skinny little white teenage girl who walks with a lot of confidence with her bikini striped white, orange, and blue and her tummy real tight and defined. She approached me at a table and chatted me up wanting me to hang out with her that afternoon.

I wasn't opposed to anything so when she walked away and I waited for her like I said I would. Then she came back to the table with another dude, Erik the Norse, who had blond hair and a long beard and sporty, fiery-red framed, dark-lensed-reflective

sunglasses.

She told us to wait a drop longer and she got another dude, Nathan, a tall, brown haired dude who I recognized as a dude who hangs off Hope whenever I saw her. We all headed back to Kat III's RV to meet her family, smoke a joint and listen to her dad play James Taylor covers. I met him before at Mixed Nuts and we played Dylan's greatest hit volume 1, so when it was my turn for Kat III to flirt with me, I felt a little uncomfortable. Eventually she left us all with her family to do something else.

When I left that camp, I happened upon Clementine who was giddy on acid. She told me that this chick she played around with the night before is following her and we had to duck out. We went to the side of the road and smoked cigarettes and she said that there were so many people to play with on the ranch and she loved it so much.

Ducking out, we saw Jen running down the street asking people if they saw Clementine. Jen looked so hot but Clementine said that she's really too crazy. After she passed we noticed William walking so we flagged him down.

He walked up to us and Clementine took him on a walk. And then I saw Wendy again and she was barefoot playing with a soccer ball. She called me over and showed me some tricks she did well with the ball and then she did a backwards flip. I was impressed and so were other people. So much so, that a circle formed around her and people began clapping.

I got a little thirsty and I got away from the crowd and went down to the camp. William came back a little bit later and said that Clementine was still flirting with him constantly but won't let him have much sex with her anymore. I said, "don't you know how the story goes?"

And then Mississippi came up to us and she asked me if I got my tattoo. I told to her that I most certainly did and she said I was crazy and I said, "but you live in a tree" and she does—I think it's a form of protest. She lifted up my shirt and there was no tattoo, just the faded sketch so she punched me in my arm.

Eventually I found myself sitting at some camp listening to a sexy, dust-bowly Oklahoma chick who lives in New Mexico playing banjo for her parents. We were all quiet while we ate and afterwards we had a sing-a-long and the whole family sang along, "I've got five pounds of possum in my headlights tonight, and everything will be all right."

Her parents looked like the farm couple in that painting of the farm couple with the guy holding a pitch-fork. But the dad had a long and pointy white beard and he reminded me of a Hell's Angel. They were real hospitable, sharing their meat and moonshine with me and eventually I fell asleep at their table only to wake up to a dark and empty tent.

The night got still and I wandered in another trip of the sleepless working the real-late-night shift. I walked and stood and at times sat on the quiet road. And then an old lady dressed too formally and crisply for the atmosphere appeared from out the blue horizon.

She looked like she was heading out for a night on the town dressed in a real cosmopolitan looking dark blue woolen overcoat and pearls. Her response felt very eerie as she approached me in a posture of a flirty teenager. Her face looked innocent, clear,

and aristocratically daring as she told me told me that she wanted to know where she could sleep tonight.

I looked at the old lady who was acting as if she thought she was sixty years younger and asked her where she was supposed to be sleeping and she smiled charmingly. She spoke a slow English with an accent that sounded Hungarian and she seemed totally out of place, but that's what should be expected here.

I asked her where her family was and she just said that she was coming in too late and she made a motion with her finger to her neck that they were going to kill her. She was so real, but I'd be really shocked if her parents were alive and then I realized that she must be senile.

I was still stunned that I was talking to an old lady who actually believed she was sixteen and I realized I was on duty and I was wearing a red shirt so I offered to walkie talkie for assistance but she looked at my eyes and pleaded not to. She said that we should go somewhere and I said that I had to work, but then I told her that she could follow me.

This was definitely a new situation to me; in the past when old ladies who are senile and happen to be out and about are trying to follow me I try to lose them, but I felt a responsibility to give this guest the best trip she could have. Eventually we passed Ms. Jill and we all smoked her cigarettes for a drop drinking coffee from the station's coffee maker. Eventually I wandered off and left the lady with Jill.

Week Three:

The Nigerian dude in golden aviators and a red shirt elbowed me when I was staring at the clear morning sky. He told me to turn around and look up. He was pointing to what looked like a pigeon diving like a kamikaze into a hawk and then they both flew away showing no evidence of the conflict in their retreats and a minute later they did it again.

That's when I met Jared. He was a skinny redneck with cut arms marked in every inch by blue and black tattoos. He was wearing a sleeveless, black tee shirt and he came up to me and told me to drink from his beer.

Niquai came from behind and hugged me. It was real nice to be greeted like that. She looked so tired, but she's a real pretty one regardless. I have no words to really speak with her but that's real fine with me. She was sad about her pet rat she brought to the festival that seemed to be dying.

She introduced Jared as her older brother. He was drunk as fuck and he was carrying around a half empty six pack of Shiner. He was real nice and Niquai promised him a real good time. She wanted to pair him with me if I was going to the river or something. But he was still amazed by the ranch so we all walked back to KerrUnk.

Joel, the guy who handed out the cigarettes was following behind us and he was aiding the distraught Niquai because he seemed like the closest thing to a medic. He came from Humboldt County in Northern California. He's a 26 year old hippie who was just delightful to have around, with nothing better to do because he was really just released from jail a few days ago after being there for almost a year for growing mushrooms.

Joel looked real tired and he excused himself and handed me the rat in it's carrying case.

Then he walked off pretty quickly. So Jared, Niquai, and I entered the tent and Clementine kissed me on the cheek and her friend did the same. It was Jen the Rainbow Something girl with the tattoos of shamrocks on her arms and she was cookoo for Clementine. Clementine was playing a game with her and they headed somewhere. Jared followed them out of the tent.

So Niquai and I sat quietly and she told me that she tried to revive Jared the Rat with water and other things but the poor white thing looked eternally famished. I sat with Niquai in the tent as the sun began to set waiting for the little guy to wake up again. But eventually I fell asleep and I don't remember what ever happened.

The night I met Sarah, I was meeting many "Sarah's" to the point that I briefly saw red flags when I was meeting "Sarah's." I would say, "my sister's name is Sora, and it's not pronounced with an 'or', it's pronounced with an 'uh'- 'Suh-ruh' and it's pronounced quick in one breath."

When she had arrived fresh from civilization, Sarah was feeling generous so she decided that she was going to distribute the drugs that Rhett gave her to sell for free because she wanted to be the Drug Ferry of Kamp KerrUnk. The Drug Ferry is the most individually treasured part of a camp and therefore they solidify themselves in the group. Olivia tried to veto this but everyone really wanted the free drugs.

Sarah likes to talk more than me, and more than most people. She told us her tales of being a female hustler who is big in the San Antonio game; stories of animals that she had personally saved; and stories about her ex-boyfriends, namely Erik who happened to also be a klepto.

Sarah responded like all the other "Sarah's" I've met in Kerrville, "yeah, but I have an "h" at the end of my name, but my name now is really Ashley." I felt reassured that she told me that she changed her name. (FROM NOW ON SARAH is ASHLEY)

So, Ashley told William and I, that she was real depressed that Olivia is upset with her. She mentioned that every time that I had known her when any reminiscence was cued in her head that was vaguely about Olivia. Since William is Olivia's brother, Ashley felt that she was constantly having Olivia's anger brought up in her presence. Over the fall, winter, and spring she had developed an obsession based on Olivia's hatred.

Sarah pleads to Olivia on voicemails habitually, "just be my friend enough to see, I've changed, and I know I screwed you out of thousands of dollars because I backed out on a lease and now you had to get a job and now you want to sue me when I gave you so much hospitality, you stupid bitch hoe, you should at least have the decency to fucking call me back, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you; I'm sorry, no, I love you, just call me before you leave Texas."

She always thought that there was a chance that Olivia really lived in Texas. In this delusion, Olivia was stalking her waiting to bump into her at an inopportune time to say "fuck you."

And then Olivia appeared at our camp wearing a cool yellow sundress, and a cowboy hat and Ashley ran up to her and hugged her. Olivia is petite, so people my height have to point their head down to see her strong brown eyes. You could tell she's a Jew from how

she acts, but if you just see her you'd think she's just another California flower child-California because of her complexion (I'd say Miami if her skin was sun-torn.)

Olivia was a stone because she has some convictions that she values. Ashley didn't even get to tell Olivia that she was now Ashley when Olivia turned away. Ashley called out, "It looks like you're getting laid!"

And Ashley held out a bag of weed and declared that she is the Drug Ferry of our camp and Olivia took some weed, left, and reported to her friends that Ashley at Kamp KerrUnk gives out free kind weed.

So Olivia is a sweet heart, I know her. She's got a dark complexion, a nice smile, dark hair and an athletic build. In relation to Olivia, Ashley is a very unstable person. Olivia knew that Ashley couldn't even possibly know her as the person she had become because she had not spoken to her for a year. Although it's not imperative for her to talk to her friends who are long distances away, she was insulted that Sarah assumed that she still was friends with her. Olivia respects her friendships, though she had to rationalize the shame it was in the guise of, "oh well, she was a loopy one from Kerrville."

So Olivia walked away and there was a silence. So I broke it and rapped, "Can I get a fuck you to all these bitches from all of my niggers who don't love hoes, could I get a woo-woo to these niggers to all these bitches who don't love."

Ashley ignored me because she was highly insulted by Olivia and she claimed that it had something to do with one summer when Olivia got into love with some douche from the festival. So something happened that made her feel the need to share some painful emotion that she was going through at the time.

Usually, Ashley doesn't tolerate her friends bitching and moaning about boys but she made an exception for Olivia that time because Olivia was from then on her protégé. Ashley spent many hours in bed pondering to totally make-over her and turn Olivia into a blacked haired version of herself.

Suddenly, Frankie came by and rapped Dre, "Sippin 151 that gave me too much pride to back down, cuties peep my style, if I don't get some ackrite, I'ma have to ack-wild." Then he walked away.

So, Olivia was always polite and whenever she heard the artist formally known as Sarah C. allude to making her over; she took it as just a way people in Texas talk and think. Ashley felt her two cents to be solicited because of her mild success and the fact the Olivia didn't say anything to the contrary. Ashley also used to try to get Olivia to listen to the same music as she but Olivia's musical taste were too broad for Ashley's grasp.

So Ashley made sure to rant the contents of Olivia's breakdown over and over. She justified it by saying that now that Olivia had ditched her it's like she's a hypocrite because once a boy ditched her and she felt bad. What about hoes before bro's? Ashley is way more blunt telling Olivia's shit, "he basically told her that fest was over when she came to visit him in Denton."

And then Frankie appeared from nowhere and he was rapping, "can I get a fuck yeah, yeah?"

She sure spoke a lot of shit about my friend but she was perfectly charming to me and she

kept on getting William and I stoned, along with all our friends. Also, William was trying to fuck her again. You can't blame him. He was camping and she came by and she appeared in a very similar manner as she did when she was fucking him before. Then I noticed that Clementine had disappeared.

This weekend brought many fresh faces in clean clothing to the meadow. The new crowd was refreshing to everyone and then someone started saying, "what up, in the butt?" and people started repeating that.

And then Ms. Ashley kept on giving us drugs. She brought so much mushrooms, acid, and 2 ounces of really good weed for our camp. Also, Olivia wanted us to take Ashley's gifts so we could have a good time. She knew that I was poor and therefore appreciated free drugs and she knew that William would enjoy fucking her because that's why he always stuck around her loud mouth.

Ashley decided that she was just gonna sue Olivia for all the stress she put her through when she got settled down in the fall.

However, Olivia did ask us, "if she can't afford to pay me, then how could she afford to bring drugs for everyone?"

Off beyond some hill, Olivia and I smoked some of Ashley's weed and I had a eureka moment that summed up something I once thought about into a compact verse of, "acceptance brings peace" and I bet someone came up with that before me, too and I just pulled it from the collective consciousnesses that I have encountered.

Olivia approved of my sentiment and she ran off somewhere and I bumped into Joel who rolled me a cigarette and when I finished he rolled me another one and then another, and he kept on doing this gleefully for quite sometime and then the sun was starting to show a drop.

Joel was the Nik at Night for the meadow. This is a post that I heard originated at Rainbow Gatherings where some hippie runs around giving out nicotine all the time. Joel had been the Nik at Night guy here for quite a bit and he loved it, but at that particular moment he was feeling as though he had wasted all his time just giving out cigarettes instead of enjoying the party.

The poor dude felt very bored in his current post and he felt that he didn't make any new friends the whole festival. So I said that he did, too. I, in fact recognized him and always appreciated him at Kamp KerrUnk and that even King KerrUnk who doesn't smoke anymore spoke highly of him.

I told him that it sounded like he needed to get laid, especially if he's feeling jealous of the party and that he also was probably tired. Something I said seemed to trigger a smile and he told me that I made him feel great.

At 11p.m. I woke up, stepped out of my tent and went to the Porto potties to pee. I washed my hand and walked on the road and I met Lillian. She was staring at me like she was in heat so I walked up to her and introduced myself, "Hey, did you get laid here yet?"

She hugged me and I must have made some sort of suggestion because we walked back to my tent. On the way there, we bumped into William who gave me a few tabs of acid

and offered Lillian some, but she declined and we went on our merry way. At 1, I realized that I couldn't work my 3a.m. shift, so I found a supervisor and reported that someone dosed me and I would have to work in the morning.

So Lillian looks like Elizabeth Shue with a button at the end of her nose, dimples, and short wavy blond hair. She wore a plaid short one piece and she played her southern accent up when randomly I replied to some question, "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn to her."

Around 2ish, we were both satisfied and we realized that we were total strangers so we decided to get some rest. I shut my eyes but I was tripping so I wasn't falling asleep. Lillian also kept peeking up to see if I was sleeping. I eventually told her that she should get some rest because though I was spent, I couldn't sleep. I offered to wake her up when I got another wind so she felt comfortable enough to pass out.

There was a raging party at my campsite and I had to see who was there. I put on some sweatpants and a buttoned-down and I peeked my head into the tent. There must have been forty people yelling, laughing, drinking LoneStar and Shiner, and drawing on the walls. William passed me a pipe and I smiled for a few minutes and went outside to smoke a cigarette.

William followed me outside and we decided to walk around and see what was going on. I got a cup of coffee and smoked five cigarettes. After a drop, I returned to Lillian and woke her up.

She was such a good sport so I promised her that I would be the best lover she ever knew. We rolled around for a drop again, but then we suddenly noticed scattered people who were overflowing from the party in our main tent. We also noticed that the windows in my tent were totally down and we decided to find a more private place.

We ended up walking down a dark street that had many quiet tents. We laid out a blanket between a few tents and resumed what we were doing. Eventually, my rover colleagues on a golf cart happened upon us with their brights on us. It was Jason and FoxTrot and they were trying to get us to move into our tents without having to tell us. But we were naked and we weren't trying to go anywhere so we pretended to be sleeping till the golf cart drove away.

When we exhausted ourselves again, we walked back to my tent. The party at the camp was just about dead and Lillian passed right out. After a few minutes with my eyes closed, I decided to tidy up my tent with my red little flashlight around this girl while I searched for my cigarettes. After the tent was clean, I realized that I must have dropped my pack somewhere.

I stepped out of my tent and ran into Caution and Dildo the tattoo artists. Caution gave me a Marlboro Light and Dildo gave me a light. Caution put his arm around me and leaned in as we walked. He told me that they spoke to William and that he agreed to pay for the tattoo that I was to get.

I said that I was tripping on acid so I couldn't get one now. But they said that being on acid is really good for getting tattoos and Dildo started saying, "yeah dude, the conquistador death riding on the fucking horse just minding his own business, just raping and pillaging. And then out of nowhere the bird comes and bites his neck!"

Luckily, Lillian peeked her head out of my tent and asked me not to go get a tattoo that moment. So I told her that I was just taking a walk.

Around 4 a.m. I bummed some cigarettes from Mississippi B. and we chatted a bit. She was drunk as hell but holding it well. I played with her silver jolly roger belt buckle for a bit and then she had to return to a party. I turned to go and she grabbed me in a hug and I totally grabbed her ass. After a second she looked at me and said, "you're crazy."

All I could say was, "sorry, it's my conditioning."

She smiled and walked away.

I stumbled back to my camp just in time to greet William and Ashley smoking a bowl. We sat around laughing till 5 a.m. till Lillian woke up and came to hang with us. I was real excited to see her.

Lilly introduced herself and sat next to me. Ashley introduced herself as Queen KrunK because she hands out drugs and alcohol and she says that she cleans, too.

Then Ashley told us all a captivating story about her friend Aaron. She met him when she was sixteen while she was having a brief bout of alcoholism. They lived together for a month until some black guys who were trying to rob a coke dealer who lived above Aaron, mistakenly stalked the wrong guy all night till the lights went out in the apartment. They kicked down the door around 2 a.m.

Ashley was passed out on the couch totally covered with a blanket but Aaron came out of the bathroom when he heard the door come down and the black guys shot him many times. They only grabbed a bong when they realized that they were at the wrong apartment. Then they shot Aaron's dog and the dog ran out of the building.

Ashley's sleep was stirred by the dog's wail, but luckily the guys ran out as if they were following the dog. Ashley saw Aaron bloody body on the floor and she yelled to him, "Is it as bad as it looks or is it worse?"

Aaron was unconscious and Ashley had to call the cops. Suddenly the cops came and they dragged her outside to a curb and she sat for seven hours till she snapped back into it. She began yelling at random detectives and she ended up leaving the scene to find the dog.

Ashley says, "it's not like I don't value life, but I'm like a cat and I keep getting these new leases on life, and I probably always will."

Everyone thought that Aaron T. had a cool apartment when Sarah was sixteen.

People would come over and chill, watch "Supertroopers," and smoke bongs. Aaron was a friendly boy and he allowed many people into his home.

Sarah's quick reflexes and steady head through the crisis saved Aaron's life and now he is attached to her forever.

Ashley's story was the most intense story you could hear at that particular Kerrville night's end. We all were staring off into the distance thinking about what she just told us. Ashley then looked at Lillian and I.

Lillian was holding my hand and she was wearing one of my plaid shirts that was similar to the one that I was wearing. Ashley snapped at Lillian, "who are you, you guys look

like a plaid block; woman, if you ever get lost we'll know where to return you."

That was real insulting to both of us, but Ashley was getting me real stoned and getting along with William who told her to shut up anyways. But I kissed Lillian on her cheek and whispered that the "attitude around Kerrville seems to promote individuality," but I should have told Ashley to shut up because it was early in the morning and no one needs her bullshit but I was stupidly timid because I didn't know Ashley all that well. Lillian got stoned and went back to my tent to pass out.

So then it was William, Ashley, and I. Ashley told us, "that girl is not part of our camp and she should be gracious that she got to smoke our weed." I gave Ashley a funny look but she didn't get it so I left Will and Ashley to each other and I took a nap beside Lillian. I laid next to her till sunrise and silently rose to get breakfast and I brought back food for Lillian and some extra for my camp. But then I had to go work a shift because I got caught by FoxTrot.

So, at 9 a.m. I had to follow around an Indian guy who actually lives on the ranch, but only because he got into a fight last night when he saw someone he knew sitting on his missing trunk in the wrong camp. I had to walk him to the porto-potties and then to the showers and wait outside.

That was when they found a dead guy in the toilet. A fire engine came with an ambulance twenty minutes later. And I saw the guy's face and I imagined he knew he was dying and I think he probably wanted to die here. That was heavy.

That night with Lillian, I made sure to speak as clearly as possible. And though I said that I wasn't trying to be condescending, she asked me, "Why don't you think I'm cool enough to understand that after, I have to be cool?"

Then the morning. I looked at her tired face and I reached the juncture that usually happens this way and I asked myself if I could really love this chick tomorrow and I thought, "hell no, I'm on vacation."

So I told her, "I need to be solo when I'm walking around and people here seem to reinforce the notion that being solo is the way to be."

She looked so sad so I gave her a pair of Raybans I found in my tent, and we walked along the side of the road for a few minutes but it was really hot outside so we looked for a tree to sit under.

So Lillian whispers, "let's do what we did yesterday."

I'm honor-bound to at least an encore and I was flattered too so I said "sure." We walked to a shady empty parking lot and laid a blanket near a old truck. And wouldn't you know, twenty minutes later, two guys came to the truck and just sat there watching us. I noticed after ten more minutes and I stood up and said, "why do you sit here watching us?"

I don't remember what they said but we resumed whatever we were doing till we got bored and we went our separate ways.

Later, William brought me to his old friend the Question-Girl, Kara Q. She asked me, "What is your biggest regret?"

I responded after smoking a bowl, "Well, that's hard, I probably forgot my biggest

regret... but I got something for you... I think I'm real selfish, but selfish doesn't mean looking out for my best interest- it means that I have been a total slave to my id... all my life and it bleeds over into my most important endeavors... like when I think about friendships... I had- and I value my friendships very much. I was totally infatuated with this girl friend for everyday of the three years since I met her, and I would do small feats of generosity for her, but it was all because I wanted to possess her. She gave me so many chances to forget those selfish motives and I always chose to go after what I wanted instead... but I could never be satisfied with anything and no matter how much she tried to satisfy me, I wanted more and more and even if I didn't end up really hurting her, I hurt myself through my selfishness... one day after many warnings she couldn't just sit by and listen to my bullshit. I think about her because this is the flaw of my life, I realize it with her. And I want to be different now and I want to construct my life in a way that at least I will never do that with anything or anyone again. And one day, when I do altruistic actions, I don't want to have ulterior motives."

Kara Q. told me I was a heavy-thinker. I walked away with my head down and I heard Kara Q. yell out, "you're a pussy... but everyone here seems to like that." And I turned, smiled, and kept walking.

I came back to the camp and Frankie told me that he had a problem with Cowboy Rob. I said, "who the fuck is Cowboy Rob, not skinny Rob from Kat and Rob?"

"No, the dude who was selling drugs at our camp last night." I told him that in that case he should go speak directly to King KerrUnk.

For the past two weeks, Frankie and I have grown very close. He played me his horrifically gangster songs on this guitar he restored to look like an old time country gitbox and somehow he silently sealed my allegiance.

And Cowboy Rob is a dick. He was making fun of the hippie women who visited our tent and then he would also try to seduce any chick with blond hair in our tent (which is every white girl in Texas) to go to his car, smoke weed, and sit in the air conditioner.

So I told Frankie something that may or may not be true, but sure felt cool to say, "I only talk about people when I'm gonna fuck them over." Frankie liked that and he replied, "this guy needs to be fucked up."

Then Liane from Miami/Austin interrupted our conversation and she wanted to play some music with me and Frankie had to find William so he left. Liane was holding a guitar and she was wearing this long wrap-around skirt and a white tee-shirt. She smiled at me as she strummed her guitar and approached me.

This time she led me to a group of trees and we sat in the shade. She played me some morose songs with slow raspy singing and I played simple repetitive guitar that sounded nice behind her song and then she sang in her Radiohead moan.

She told me that she had to leave but to give her a call if I come to Austin and then Frankie and William came into the tent. Frankie turned and left and William grabbed two hiking sticks and we went for a stroll across the ranch and through different camp.

William and I were walking up Chapel Hill when William said that he realized that "you can't try to force one trip to take the form of the last one because it ruins this one and tarnishes the memory of the last one."

Then we came upon a random milk crate and William got up and projected his booming voice with complimentary gestures with his walking staff. "Holy is something worthy of being worshipped, Greek philosophers eternally argued whether gods are good, and this definition sanctifies their attributes as good; or are their attributes what makes them gods? There are certain ultimate goods and certain universal morals. In my Judeo-William belief system, I must act with honor, meaning I must always be able to look someone in the eyes and not feel guilty. My word is my bond. Honesty in dealing with honest people. Don't betray. However, during times when no expectation of honesty is held you can't be bound by that. But if you want to really know what holy is, you'll have to define it for yourself."

That was when Olivia walked by me and then doubled back. She was drinking a giant glass of red wine and smiling. She led me under a tree and shared her wine and we smoked a cigarette and she asked me what I liked best about the place. I told her that I enjoy the music and all the different faces. She told me that she always enjoyed coming to fest because no matter what life is like on the outside and who's dating who, at fest everyone is friends and you get to pick your lovers daily.

Then Kara H. walked by us all packed up. She pulled me aside and she said that she that it was nice meeting me and she gave me her email address. Then she said that she wished that I had sang her a song so I sang her some radio R&B that was in my head,

"One of them brand new big boy toys, I do big boy things, I make big boy noise cuz...I know what girls want...I know what they like, they wanna stay up , and party all night, so bring a friend... I got friends, and you got friends... They hop out, and you hop in...I look fly, and they jocking. The way you drop, drop makes me wanna pop..."

She said that she loved Chris Brown and then Lillian appeared before us. She waited for Kara H. to walk away and followed me down to the meadow. I told her that I was gearing up for my noon session of sitting in a chair and looking at the wall in the tent and she was welcomed to drink water with me.

But Lillian really wanted to fuck because she was leaving at 4 p.m. It was so hot outside that I really had to reserve my energy for drinking water and I told her that and she didn't like it.

So I said, "This is why I'm really not meant for relationships, I just drive you up the wall with my sexiness but I'd impose on you and you'd think I was gross when I scrape resin and selfish when I disregard your boundaries."

Lillian tried to manipulate the situation, "I'm just not used to just sleeping with just anyone I meet and then just walking away from it."

"Oh come on, you can't want me for the rest of the summer. I'm really too moody even when I try not to be. And, as much as I'd loved to pop a caffeine pill and chug some water—"

"Yeah! Pop a caffeine pill!"

"I'm soooooooooooooo tired. I know I must be coming off as a real shmuk, I really wish Layla could see this because this is just soooooo funny, no offense. And that just illustrates how disassociated I really am and Patty would be laughing on the floor if she saw me now. Those two are loves of my life, yeah..."

"I never even implied—"

"Sorry, I was projecting, I'm really neurotic sometimes." And then we yada, yada, yada on the side of the highway, because I always wanted to try that, if I was to be expending all that effort.

As she followed me back to the camp after, I got bitter for no reason, "Let me share something with you. I once said to some chick 'I wish my dick was bigger so I could punch you in the mouth.' Am I really the type of guy you want sucking all your resources till it gets vindictive- well hon, you didn't think I had psycho in me?"

She didn't believe me and laughed. So, I laughed back in her face because I knew I was telling the truth. She said, "At least make out with me again!"

...but we just had sex under the beating sun.

I looked at her face and I remembered not too long ago pleading myself to Ms. Layla to make out with me one more time before she walked out of my life and she did. I thought about how funny that my claim of love came out that way but I didn't let it get to me and I kissed the girl standing in front of me.

We made out for a second till I saw Mississippi through the tent's doorway walking up to my camp. I pinched Lillian's butt and smiled at her because she really had to leave now, so I told her that I had a trick to show her; I turned her back to me and she really thought I was lifting up her skirt. I put her open hand above her head and folded her fingers to a peace sign and then I pinched her ass again because I wanted to and slapped it to signal her to get moving.

Mississippi walks in the tent as Lillian walked out and she hugged me and like a Pavlovian-mechanical-error, I grabbed her ass again for a second before she realized, "You just grabbed my ass again!"

She pulled my hands off her butt and laughed and said that she wanted to drop by before work and pose for some photos for me, but not the naked ones she wanted a few days ago. I told her to pose with my guitar and I snapped a handful of photos and she laughed at me when she walked out.

I noticed two hawks or eagles flying in the sky after she walked away. And Clementine came over to me. It's real exciting when Clementine comes around because she always brings me gifts and is smiling at me. She brought me a hamburger and asked me to accompany her to get some cigarettes.

We listened to the MIA song on repeat while we drove and she told me it was the last day of the festival and added that on the 19th day there is always drama, "ever heard the old parable of a frog that jumps into boiling water and he knows to jump out, but if he starts off on the stovetop in cool water and the water slowly boils, he gets comfortable and dies... This is the day that everyone officially overstayed their welcome."

She told me about Jen's camp fracturing last year. She said that no one ever expected punches to be thrown at Krustation Nation.

When we got back to the ranch, I decided to go to sleep so I could be awake for the staff party but I woke up late the next morning. All the tents were coming down. Mississippi came by to give me cigarettes and told me that she'll see me next year. I told her I'd be

here.

Part 4:

William and I arrived in San Antonio in an hour and we went to Toby's place to make a plan. We had about a week and a half at the max to spend in Texas because we had to drive back to Maryland in time for William's summer classes and before that began he needed at least three days in New York to arrange some business matters. Aside from that, we really had no parameters of how we had to spend our time.

William had \$500 cash left over, which was \$500 less than he had three hours before. Olivia needed some cash for her and Gregory's travels because they were not planning to join us in San Antonio due to the drama with Ashley. Anyway, Olivia and Gregory planned to travel with Clementine because she had her own new white Malibu and she wanted to make her way up to Baltimore.

Jen and Trace share a three bedroom apartment with Toby and it seems to be a great fit for everyone. They are all 20 years old and independent, all just working their different jobs. It seems that they look out for one another and there is a certain harmony that they found.

Toby led William and I into the kitchen where all the weed and paraphernalia are kept. Toby's a professional weed salesman so he has a least five different strands at any given time.

William perused Toby's setup and purchased some of the Super Silver that was the premium grade floating around Kerrville and Toby packed another kind of something that was quite remarkable called "Secret Island."

The kitchen is decorated with light colored wood cabinets; a small table; clean counter tops; 2 framed Bob Marley posters; 2 unframed Marley posters; and one puzzle of him. The living room has many posters of sexy women; a Dazed and Confused one; one with Pink Floyd albums painted on the backs of women; and a giant Jolly Roger informing you that the apartment had pirates living there.

Trace entered when we lit the bong. I met Trace a few times at fest, but I never remembered who he was. I introduced myself to him again and asked where the bathroom was.

After I came out, I discovered that Trace is an unpublished novelist and when I asked him what voice he writes with, his only comment was, "mentally, I feel alone in this world; it's from my hero's complex from hundreds of hours playing Final Fantasy 7."

I asked Trace if there was a library in walking distance and he told me to hop a fence on the side of their apartment complex, walk to my left till the light, and then make another left and I'll see it on my right in five minutes. I went to send some emails to my parents and a friend to tell them that I was alive and I responded to few other letters and walked back to the fence, jumped it, wander back into the apartment complex lost.

When I walking, I was daydreaming about making quick money by transporting a large

quantity of marijuana to the east coast. In my dream, I could pack the vacuum sealed quantities in a suitcase and take a train and read a book. I'd probably get a for-dummies book on cars but I would want someone trailing me, in case I have any sort of trouble on my journey to help me protect the cash that I would owe back.

I thought of Trace because he probably had well thought out stories to share if we had to share a hotel room and he seemed to be competent and trustworthy as William, Toby, and Jen knew him well.

Then I recognized Toby's car and luckily saw Toby on his porch smoking a cigarette. He's a skinny, white boy with a salt and pepper curly afro wearing an oversized silver Spurs jersey.

I was sipping my coffee when I was walking through the doorway, but I recognized Ashley's voice immediately. She carries around an intense vibe whenever she enters anywhere but she seemed very relaxed on this particular moment. When she saw me, she smiled, led me for a cigarette on the porch and asked me if I was willing to make a lot of money transporting marijuana to the east coast.

I said that I was actually just thinking about that and if we could secure a worthwhile quantity from California or even Austin/San Antonio, then I would be very willing to work out a nice deal because my current lifestyle was hospitable to those opportunities.

Ashley called me naive but became excited and asked me how I would do it. I said that I would take trains and probably ask Trace to trail me.

Ashley froze up to tell me that Trace couldn't be trusted on such a mission because he's a goober, she cautiously looked inside the apartment and said "no, Toby will be your trailing guy because he already works for my guy."

When we walked inside the apartment, Toby was doing his regular business with a loyal costumer. Ashley walked up to Toby like she owned his weed and picked up a jar and said to Toby to push that one. The customer swept her auburn bangs out of her eyes, looked at Ashley like she must understand that she is ostracized from everyone and totally ignored her suggestion to buy something else and packed a bong with that pick. Toby and his costumer smoked and then went to the back rooms.

After they left, Trace, William, Ashley, and I were watching TV. Eventually, Toby came out and told us that he needed the space for some people who were coming over to buy some weed. William stood up like he understood exactly what Toby meant and I followed. William hollered to Ashley that we should go to get some food and figure out our plans.

When we exited the apartment we got into Ashley's stolen Camery. She was still vocally embarrassed about the car but she quickly informed us that she owns Toby because Toby "gets his product from Rhett because Rhett trusts Toby's brother." She was also conjuring up some madness over Toby having such traffic in his place of illicit business because he could get robbed easily and the quantity is always on credit.

William began to tell her that Toby does a good, cautious, and honest job but Ashley would have none of that and she began yelling at the red light we happened upon. We went to some sandwich shop and Ashley bought us our meal then I had to get a pack of cigarettes.

Ashley, knowing my tight budget gave me a ten and told me to also pick her up a pack of Parliament 100's at the Walgreen's. I ended up having to get Ashley to come in with me to buy the cigarettes because they didn't accept any out of state ID's because in Texas there are so many fake ones.

We arrived at Ashley's house in the evening. It was a big, new, empty house in a gated community. Ashley stated that her friend owns the two story, tall, pinkish bricked house and rents it to her for \$800 a month, instead of what it's worth- \$2500 a month. The house is carpeted in crème, with ceramic tiles in the kitchen and bathrooms. Ashley exited onto a back porch to retrieve her 2 five foot great Danes and she gave them some attention.

Then her two cats wandered up to her. She has a grey and white, timid one and an orange and brown dominant one that sounds like it's haunted by some soul trying to tell us to help him/her because she's fallen and can't get up. Ashley fed the cats a can of something and then noticed cat poop in the empty living room. Apparently, that really overwhelmed her and she asked William to clean up the mess while she swallows some vicodene.

Ashley is a self-proclaimed rescuer of all living creatures. She rescues people as well as animals if she ever crosses either in distress. She brings in each being and treats it as best as she could afford till it's totally nursed back to health. But Ashley believes that cats are the most ungrateful creatures especially the two nameless things that she got.

An ex-fiancé happened upon them in a coked up-drunken stupor in the middle of a street during a pouring rain and used it as an excuse to call her after six months of restraining himself at the behest of his parents and the courts. After she got out of bed at 3:30 a.m., snapped into it, and saved the poor, starving kittens she hit Erik up for some cash that he owed her.

She noticed that he looked real Ethiopian for a white boy, and he was so drunk that the only way he was walking was on coke. After that, Erik probably crashed another one of his dad's sport's cars.

"San Antonio is the best city and I grew up here," Ashley told us after William retrieved her when the poop was off the carpet. "Ok, so you guys should make yourselves at home and take whatever you want... the only thing is that you have to keep the upstairs bathroom door closed because I have a scorpion in the bathroom that I'm trying to put into a painting I'm doing. Also, I have every Saw movie if you guys want to watch them."

I slept on an air mattress in an empty bedroom. Ashley said I could move in there for \$300 a month, but I wasn't ready to plan another move for a drop. William and she went to her room.

I always wake up earlier than everyone else wherever I stay. I walked out to the porch and looked over the railing and down the stairs and off into the distance. I looked at the brittle, hill country trees and brown grass that were dried by the summer Texan sun. It was a clear but slightly cloudy sky. Ashley came down like a zombie when I was on my second cup of coffee, and she let the two dogs out and I watched them run down those stairs and Ashley returned back upstairs.

A few minutes later I noticed that Ashley left us a note on the refrigerator instructing us to find a '99 Mercedes SUV on Craigslist with the \$9,000 of insurance money she got from her accident. Also *"the rental Camry has been reported stolen already and maybe you guys could weed the yard because you're eating my food."*

I ate a box of cheese crackers that were in the pantry and then I had this flashback of this box of Cheese-it's that I had on the ranch that were infested with ants. I was so tired the day I stuck my hand in that box and scarfed down a battalion of those SOB's. It felt so uncomfortable.

After I finished that memory, I made a list of everything in the moonlit fish tank:

a puffer with blue eyes and an almost snake-like pattern on his skin;

a damsel;

a brown one with black stripes;

a red and white one;

a Dr. Sues blue, luminescent, long, fish;

a big brown one with black poka-dots

...and they were all swimming back and forth and I thought of Sisyphus and what purgatory must be like.

Then I stuck my finger in to the tank and when I saw how fast the fish went for it, I pulled my hand away suddenly. So, I stuck a plastic Reese's wrapper in it and the blue fish really made a decent go at it but he only held on for a millisecond. All these fish have strong beaks and bad attitudes but they live in harmony because they all are equally aggressive.

And Ashley's also a painter. She's a pretty good one, but she only does one painting a year. I told her that I liked her painting and trying to identify with her I then said, "when I paint, I feel like I'm pregnant and I just need it out of me. So I isolate myself with a goal and pop addies till my project's complete."

Then I happened upon the note on the fridge again. Whatever, I thought. I popped an adderall and went to the garage to look for a lawn mower or anything to use to landscape the yard but I found nothing aside from two pairs of scissors and garbage bags. And with those meager tools I did the whole yard in 2 ½ hours. It wasn't too bad. It was interesting to me because I was speeding and I haven't ever encounter desert growth that intimately.

I spent the rest of the day reading "the Yiddish Policeman's Union" till William woke up and we took a stroll through the gated community through three circular neighborhoods. We passed a bench and we smoked a bowl in the dead of the night. Suddenly two cars pulled up side by side and when they saw us, they both drove away. I said to William, "So Ashley's batshit crazy, we know that right?"

William, "Yeah."

"Does she have the connections she speaks of?"

"Apparently... but nothing less than five pounds is worth the risk."

The next day, I awoke earlier than everyone and I tidied up the basically empty house of the trash littered from the day before and I noticed the oven clock read 1 p.m. which shocked me quite much because I don't sleep in late usually. Then I saw the microwave clock read 9 a.m and another clock read 7 a.m. I went up the stairs and another clock read 2 p.m.

I was feeling disoriented and I decided to smoke some of the weed left on the table. I felt less anxious and more self indulgent and I pondered about "time" for a while. Nothing real crazy, just how it's a perception that people feel and that it is not necessarily as important as I thought it was. I learnt that in L.A.

And in a daze, I thought about William saying "lips move and talk and it seems like it's the same time, but light is faster than sound- do you want to have a talk about quantum physics?"

And I remember Stephanie Tanner was on the cover of People, because she has a baby now and she's not on meth anymore.

And then I always heard Ashley on the phone saying, "the boys are here from Maryland and you could show them your guns and we could do that on Father's day" and she put her face in my face and said, "he has a gun club membership."

And then I remembered Joel. And I wished I was in Humbolt County instead of being in San Antonio.

Then it was Ashley always with something nasty to say about everyone, "I think Joel may be a cop."

William declared, "In terms of Kerrville friends, I've known him four year, I've known him as long as I know you."

Ashley, "But you know I'm not a cop... A narc is a pimple you just got to pop because no one likes a pimple."

And then I was saying, "Ashley doesn't care what you say about her if it's true. She's a magnificent painter, glass smoking piece aficionado, she's got an aggressive fish tank and she likes to say that she's fervently anti-abortion, even for rape' and I told her that not all sex is rape but she never even looked at me funny because she never heard what I said. And her stepdad's Darrin and he collects Boar Heads!"

Darrin is from Chicago and he's in the Mafia. Once, he got so fucked up that he spent a morning chain-smoking with Ashley telling her stories that he really shouldn't have told. Later he told Ashley that they weren't true, but Ashley knows how many people this man has killed.

After she spoke about Darrin, Ashley says to me, "What would you be if you were reincarnated? You can't be the same thing twice, I'd be an elephant or a whale."

I replied, "if there is reincarnation, I have no reason to believe you can't be something twice."

Then Ashley turns to theology, "I have a higher power and god isn't male or female; I pray through Jesus; I surrender when I pray; I'm a better person when I pray and the 10 commandments are rules basically to be a good person so they never go out of style; oh, you know, time when you're on your knees and you can only look up, that's God you're

looking at; I know there are reasons I don't see for why certain things happen; and the bible is a book that I haven't read much of, oh, my mom is a bible beater especially after she got sick, but don't get me wrong, I would so kill for the bible but I take what I want from it but yes, he certainly has a son, a son named Jesus."

"So, God may be sexless and so I guess the same goes for the Holy Spirit, but would you agree that if we knew the sex of either God or the Holy Spirit, then we would be able to deduce the sex of God?"

Ashley told me to shut up because I was obviously being a smart ass and she added, "god, the holy spirit are probably male and Mary is female."

William, "So god created us or are we creating god... we only have perception... I think that people psych themselves into belief."

Ashley knows that William's mom got cancer and she found god more and more and after that her cancer went into recession. So Ashley smugly thinks William's a dumbass for not believing in god.

And then we arrived at Natasha and Chris's in the Mercedes SUV that I found on Craigslist for Ashley, and Ashley kept talking, "Chris does stupid pyramid schemes and they don't want partners; only people under them and she knocks off copies of paintings from the 60's and I don't make up fake issues and yell to get my way and that Mercedes was Chinese and they know that they are bad drivers and the fucker was an ethic professor who didn't want to rip us off, stupid bitch, William go call her with exaggerated issues with the new car and demand some money back. Oh no, I'm William, and I'm a pussy and I can't do it because it's a hustle to a person who has only played us straight; Rah, rah, rah, bla, bla, and I'm loud about it, oh Will tell me about working at Price Busters in Baltimore selling cheap furniture."

She was mocking him in reference to a story William said about when he was a warehouse manager till a local economic recession forced management to promote William to Warehouse Manager/Floor Salesman. They insulted William by not offering commissions or even a pay raise and William was not predisposed to do the face to face hustle like he was suited for manual labor. William would stand on the floor not selling anything everyday for a week till his last day came suddenly.

And then Ashley came home one day ranting angrily about more incoherent things to me while William was sleeping, "I have a California scheme and I have a boyfriend with a fish store and did you see that puffer bite off that kid's finger tip and I have a Mercedes ML430 and why does Olivia demand I pay her money, she's partying with Clementine; we need money as a unit..."

And Rhett's a pill stacker and his black truck is made to transport 100 pounds and I'm like his ex-girlfriend/girlfriend in his head to him and he doesn't care about up to \$30k if I steal it and sometimes I mail vicodine, if you make my myspace page to Lil' Wayne "I Feel Like Dying" then I'll suck your dick and pay you 50\$, I'm serious and he loves weed, too and why the fuck can't you just go on Craigslist- oh you already bought the fucking car then let's go fucking get it, why didn't you fucking tell me..."

To think that Ashley only started vicodene for fun. Her friend Chauncey would sell them to her step-dad and Darrin would send her over with thousands of dollars and there used

to be extras so the kids both tried it. Now Ashley swears by vicodene, "it made me understand that there is real pain in my in my back that I've been living with, and now my doctor gives me a prescription... I wake up to pain and go to sleep with pain and I know it will never end."

One morning, I woke up in a great fucking mood and Ashley and I smoked some weed and chilled for five hours. She was so charming and elegant. I left her so she could take a shower and take us out partying with all her slutty friends.

When I walked down the stairs to William and I told him that we are going partying and then I spoke to William about the prospect of trading me to Ashley for a \$20k run. I said that she's great to work for because she buys whatever I need for the mission and she seems to be hospitable even when business isn't booming. I added that I also understand her and we get along smoothly.

Ashley never came downstairs that day and William and I sat around playing chess till we realized that she had totally passed out. It wasn't till the morning that Ashley came down the stairs. She smiled at me and then she looked at her barking dogs and told them, "I wouldn't listen to him either."

And then Ashley turned to me and began, "Olivia is with Gregory and they aren't answering phone. Olivia really flaked out on us during the festival and all I want is to clear my name."

I say, "Olivia has become an obsession for you."

Ashley, "I just happen to be thinking about her because I actually care and it is not causing me extra pain, I would feel this betrayal either way."

I said to her, "fuck Olivia, this is your best time slot of the year!"

"You're not considering that she's only in town for a week!"

"But you got to face it, she doesn't care like you do."

"She sure wants that money."

"But she doesn't think your giving it to her."

"I would if she came to visit and didn't act like a bitch."

"Well she can't take money that you don't have so she's not trying to get anything from you. She just wants to party with Clementine."

Ashley yells, "Toren's the fucking boy! She loves him and chases him everywhere and he's 24 and not nice and he thinks he's real cool, but he's just a dirty hippie who happens to be semi-cute, but the cutest on the ranch and he didn't even talk to Olivia when she went up to Denton which is right outside of Dallas! Olivia said that she is fucking with him now but Toren avoided her on Myspace even though they were "first special friends."

I stated, "you totally are obsessed with friends who are pissed at you and you're saying really nasty things."

Ashley, "Clementine's just another trust fund kid who thinks it's cool to be a slut; Lake Travis is so dangerous, don't they know that people are handing out jello-shots with roofies in them. And Olivia always says, 'I don't get drugged; you think that I would just drink anything without knowing what I was getting into?' but nooooo, all she said to me

was 'could I have weed,' and then she bitched me out and tried to act too cool for me and I told her last year if she cries to me about him, she could never say his name again and I know she says his name and she talks shit about me to everyone, because when Miles was fighting with me, he said that no one wants me here, even Olivia knows that Miles is a real shit; he's 21 and he wanted his girlfriend and I to fight for him but I already told him that he is too young and he walks around like he owns the place. So, Will, what could you say in defense of your sister?"

William, "It's probably my fault for the years I treated her poorly and it stunted her development. I can't answer for my sister. But personally I am a new and better man and if I caused any of this fight I apologize and I take full responsibility."

That seemed to go right over Ashley's head, "she could be here now with my hospitality rather than with some bitch. I would pay for everything here and I would stick around and Gregory could come, too."

William suddenly realized that this was not a joke but we were a cog in some crazy scheme aimed at his sister. He decided that Ashley was using the prospect of sex and business to keep us at her home for as long as she could in hopes to bring Olivia down to her.

So, William already decided to stop trying to fuck Ashley when he realized that it wasn't gonna happen again during this stay with her, and now he knew that it was about time to get moving and that's when we decided to get moving, but we were pretty broke and we had a broken Eclipse, and we both kind of wanted to get laid again before we left Texas. We both slipped away from Ashley and met each other at the door. As William was opening the door Ashley went off again, "Where are you going? You guys are my guests and I don't walk out on you unless I'm visiting my mother during the day because ever since Darrin has become Mr. Responsible, he always cockblocks me from her and Darrin has boar heads; deer heads; rams heads; a Billy the Kid rifle; confederate revolvers; old maps; ceramic turtle/lizard thing; small paintings of houses; a collection of crosses and my parents have so many cats and one is fat and shaved and they are refilling the prescriptions now and they are so strict and they should be because people like me do meetings at Walgreen's and Darrin gives me Ambian..."

Despite what she said, we ducked out the back and went to Toby's to fix the car.

Trace was there and he told me about an El Dorado Cult with old men raising girls for wives and having children with them. He said that four hundred kids were once rescued and brought to San Antonio. After a bunch of people got their kids back they were publicly asked what was going on there and they said, "they didn't come to talk about that" but some slipped in, "our children are enlightened early."

William said that some kids are enlightened early and on kibutz'es in Israel kids are sent away at 14 to live with others their age and they live out all their craziness and they get it out of their system as soon as possible or whatever so they could be enlightened as soon as possible.

Toby continued, "A lot of kids were taken from the ranch and the parents came down to court in San Antonio. The newscasters interviewed the parents. There was even a Mexican couple with two kids and they said they were Mormon."

William quipped cleverly, "Mormons are the Scientologist of the 18th century."

We all were laughing and in good spirits hanging out at Toby's for the day. It was nice. We ate Doritos and cold chicken and we drank gingerale and beer.

And then Ashley came out of nowhere with ice cream for us all and declared, "one thing you should know about me is that it's always your fault!"

Ashley was back! And she's happy and charming again?

But then, "Toby charged me \$50 when he should charge \$45, even though we all get it from the same place. And she led me outside and continued, "Natasha made me antsy and Natasha is just a copier and she copies paintings and doesn't care about the copywrites and she is conniving and ever since last festival when I called Natasha to tell her that I'm insulted that both of our paintings are hung in the same bar, Natasha always made sure to display her work when ever I come to visit. But I already told her that they are disgusting!"

William came out to check on me, "but there is nothing new under the sun?"

Somehow we were back at Ashley's house when she said, "there are these railroad tracks that you could have your car in neutral, and be pushed by the ghosts of a school bus full of children, and if you put baby powder on the back of your car, you could see the handprints."

I said, "Is it on a hill?"

"No! And I said there are handprints, too. I only saw partial handprints because the only time I put the powder on the back of the car, I ran out of it, because it spilled, so I saw footprints; we also have a haunted mansion from plantation days and the ghosts of slaves try to kill you or at least show that they are there.... Oh Natasha, I love her, but those chopstick paintings that she sells for \$400 are from a cover of a takeout box and the colors are from her apartment, this is not art, and she keeps making more of those... I told her that she has skill but I can not enjoy her work knowing that she is not using her potential... now she wants me to be her bridesmaid, and I know that I'm only a backup to Melony, but now I have to come through... she's always competing with me and you know that's a sin, envy and also another one that starts with a "g"... tell this kid (in reference to the car next to us) to move his ass, you guys are not familiar with living next to a high school sometimes you got to run these kids off the road.

When we got back to Ashley's I heard William mutter, "we are so fucked, we weren't fucked, but I fucked us."

But thank Jesus for Ambian and Ashley passed out...

Me and William walked around North San Antonio but everything was so spread out that we didn't go anywhere. But we were having good conversation. We were discussing William's statement of, "holy is that which is life; beauty," trying to figure out if that statement was accurate. I replied randomly to something that Ashley only complains about things that she really is. So we called Toby but we knew he wouldn't answer because Olivia was there and then we went back to the house.

And then a few hours later, Christi the coke girl suddenly came to visit. Ashley came downstairs dressed like she was going out clubbing and she winked at me and said, "I

brought someone to you so you could get laid.”

Christi was real nice but she was worried that she didn't have enough coke for me even though I told her that I don't really care for it all that much. So I ran upstairs to William who gave me an Adderall but when I came back down stairs, Christi had been kicked out of the house and was speeding away in some Mexican dude's Mustang. Ashley just said, “William's an asshole and that's why you can't have sex.”

William heard that and he came down the stairs, “fuck you, you happen to know we are only stranded here because you keep promising to do business!”

Ashley, “And we'll fucking do business, fucker!”

Ashley went upstairs and William took a nap on the couch. And thank Jesus for Ambian because Ashley passed out a few minutes later.

So I walked all over North San Antonio, but probably not so much of it and I didn't see much of anything. And then when I came back she and William was reading the Yiddish Police Man's Union and at some point of night we are found serenity.

At 5 a.m., Ashley came out of the bedroom and she walked in and out of every room singing some R&B song. “William made up Krunk and it's his, he thought of it when he was tripping and he constructed the camp from the concept and the name and that's where he feels at home and I once auditioned for the Queen slot but I never made it and William gave the slot to Olivia to keep it in the blood.”

Then Ashley found William and she brought him to me and told us how we Yankees got to learn better manners and that was when Erik called Ashley from Pestal Airpark and said that he just got out of his dad's Cessna and he wanted to see Ashley and he would be flying back to the Dallas late night if he wasn't too drunk to get the plane some fuel. Both Erik's and Ashley's parents are opposed to having them see each other even though they used to be engaged. He calls every six months or so and Ashley always picks him up and takes him through her daily errands before dropping him off a block away from his mommy and daddy's airplane hanger.

William was directed to answer Ashley's phone because Erik was calling from a strange number. After Erik and William refamiliarized themselves with "what's ups" William began to feel that maybe seeing Erik wasn't the best idea. He knew Erik's the most charming person and he knew that Erik currently doesn't know where Ashley lives, but if the day goes nice and Erik comes over, next time he gets drunk enough, he'll fly over here again he'll come and bang down the door and grab the girl who was supposed to be his wife.

But Ashley took the phone and she told us that Erik gives off crazy vibes when he is crazy and that day Erik gave off only a distantly tired vibe. Ashley informed us that she wanted to see Erik because she heard he was gonna be having a baby boy in Dallas from some crack-whore soon.

When Erik brought the pregnancy up, Ashley pretended like she didn't know and she begged him to say that the baby's only been around for ten days but Erik always wanted a baby boy so he waited to tell Ashley till after it was too late to abort. Ashley's experience assured her that he was not up to anything today and she was confident that she knew how to predict Erik's action because they usually were on the same wavelength.

Erik is the black sheep of his family. His sister is a vet; dad is a big attorney; he has a great family who raised him well and he almost married Ashley and he thinks that since they were engaged at one point, they could elope at any minute so he's always prepared.

Erik is a man who knows who he is. He's a nice guy, but a smooth, mean, or manipulative drunk; he is the smoothest dude, but the cops have a rap sheet on him for twenty plus instances where they found him to be not smooth enough; he's \$30 million dollar trust fund baby who's 26 years old and anyone who sits for more than four drinks with him knows all that.

"He only wants to hang out with us while we are at the river," Ashley said as Erik walked to the back door of the car. It was 2pm and Erik was waiting for us for over an hour but he was in good spirits carrying a six pack of Coors. After he sat down, he leaned forward for Ashley to kiss him and before she did, she looked at William and said, "well we won't fall for any manipulative begging this time."

William and Erik polished off the six pack while we were driving on the highway. And by the time we got to the river, the both raced to the porto-potties that were set up behind the parking lot.

There were at least a hundred people at the watering hole on this fine summer's day. White people and Mexicans were drinking beer on the beach and in the water watching their kids running and playing with beach balls. High school students and young adults were making out with each other and the music alternated between Spanish techno/dance to Lil Wayne.

William asked some of the Mexicans for a beer and they gave me one, too. Then we bumped into Rob from the fest there and he was with a girl named Brea who knew Ashley from the North San Antonio party scene and we smoked some weed in the Mercedes but Rob didn't fit in the SUV.

Ashley was in her networking mode where she acts charming and she and Brea were like old sorority sisters. Erik was getting along with Ashley well, too. At one point, he lit Ashley's cigarette. So William scoffed at him, "who are you, Humphrey Bogart?"

Erik ignored William and continued his story about just last Friday, and totaling his dad's new Camero. Ashley interrupted Erik to tell him that "relationships are a nation of two who work together for each other. Love is not earned, it just is; trust is earned."

Erik had no response so he paused and made a facial expression that showed he was digesting what she was saying and after the pause he told Ashley, "Shelby almost got a job with us"

Ashley knows everything and she said, "he can't hold a job more than eight month!"

"But he would be perfect for us."

Then Erik and Sarah suddenly declared in unison that they made up the camp name "krunk." William playfully argued and then he pulled out his wallet and he saw that he was missing \$100. William was drinking so he yelled, "sometimes you just got to brawl" and Erik didn't even look up and then Will found the hundred in his other pocket and it was soaked from the river.

Erik seemed to become more familiar as the afternoon proceeded. He was indeed a

charming man. To him, my compadre and I were traveling gypsies with nothing who were being rescued by his kind-hearted woman. We were cute to him, like we were kittens. He bought the beer and sodas and food and he acted as if we were co-hosting him.

Then Erik told us a story of getting a truck he used to drive out of mud with his high school girlfriend. They were helped by a guy who lived in his van down by the river where they liked to hang. After the truck was free, Kelly, who was still at the wheel sped into the man's van accidentally. Erik couldn't hit and run the guy who rescued them so nicely so he gave the guy fake insurance information but Erik was still pissed at Kelly for destroying the man's home after he helped them.

Now what I liked about Erik was that his stories were sometimes racy but they always seemed to be innocent misadventures. He told his stories like a gentleman never mentioning the things he's not supposed to and all.

Ashley loved to bring up Erik's crazy stories and defend his shortcomings in front of him. She told us all that Erik only steals if he needs something like coke, alcohol, or gas. But even though it's hard to hear that about himself, he took the stories to mean that Ashley thinks about him often.

She also said to him that, "he's a great liar, but today, you're tired and scared and you don't want to fuck up anymore and this child may be straightening you up— either it will change you for the good or for the worst; it's worse if you stay the same with these added responsibilities; your parent are like, 'we aren't surprised, you never come to us with good news!'"

Well, Erik still acted cool and periodically he would remark, "no te preoccupyis"

"Nothing is a big deal because he never gets in trouble because his father always bails him out, and he and his dad flew over the Bermuda Triangle because you really can, there is just a higher incidence of getting lost because of the magnetic charges and shit down there."

We were passing around a bowl and it seemed like William got the cashed bowl too many times and he complained about how Erik packs a bowl and Erik said that bitching about that is "such a negro thing." William laughed while he tried to come up with something dapper to say but we were interrupted by Rob knocking on the window asking to hit the pipe we were passing around. I said, "that's Rob, from the fest, let's smoke him out!" But Ashley made a face and Erik rolled down his window and told the skinny, sun-burnt hippie that it was cashed and Rob turned away dejected. And Ashley repeated a few times that she didn't know that boy.

Then we all got out of the SUV and walked towards the beach. Ashley, Brea, and Erik walked past Rob just ignoring him. So Will and I walked towards him but he was insulted and he turned his head and said, "yeah, yeah" and he walked away.

Toby and his crew were swimming and we were just standing watching the swimmers and William told me that he felt outplayed by Erik because the guy doesn't even play. The only thing to do was beat the fuck out of him and then Toby came up to us and told us his sixth grade fight story where "basically, I got the crap kicked out of me and I yelled stop, your obviously beating me more than I'm beating you. The bully stopped

because he realized that only a coward beats on someone smaller than him."

And then Ashley came over and pulled Toby aside and Trace walked up to William and me and said he saw a "Youtube of Tom Cruise a year before he became a scientologist and he said that you could make up any religion and the world is too dumb not to get you followers."

I asked if he was insinuating that Scientology is a cult that has shareholders or even that the average worshipper could hope to one day attain dividends? William laughed and Trace didn't respond to that but I enjoyed his commentary because he always liked to remember fun things.

Trace declared that he can't get behind mythologies anymore because he was raised Catholic till he was 12 and then he started questioning and now his mom is even an agnostic with him. He seemed real proud of that and he asked us if we were close to our mothers and Will and I both looked at each other funny and I said, "I'm not close enough to her that I could get her to be agnostic with me." And we all laughed another riot, each with our own reason.

Noticing William playing with his phone, Trace said that he once had the same one and once he threw it against the wall in anger with the world and it continued working and was renamed the Jedi phone, because even without a screen it made calls just fine and he used it like that for four months.

So, he types his novel on a TI-83 calculator and he said when they were 14-16, Trace and his friend Mary-Ann "were very angry kids and we would drink whatever we could and vandalize shit." Mary-Ann once told Trace that everyone in their peer group was going to hell except for her boyfriend because he had qualities that insured his saving. Trace was so early inundated with religion that he didn't have a sense of self till later in life.

Then Ashley came over again with Erik following close behind ranting about Erik so much that he appeared to be basking in the sound of his name. It may have been because she wanted us to meet him the whole time or maybe it was because she just needed to vent her feelings about Erik. But the dude was standing right there.

So she summed it up by saying that, "Erik is Jekyll and Hyde. He is the most loving man you will ever meet and I hate him. Last seen before this, he was an alcoholic and a cokehead. He stood 6'3 and was the archetypal youth de'elite with his trust fund, Jeep, and all. And now he's gonna be a daddy soon to a genius crack baby; the mom literally smokes crack while she is pregnant." And then she turned to Erik and said, "so, I'm your best and worst fan."

After that day, I thought about Layla again. I had been resisting emailing her for three weeks in Texas but for some reason I just needed to email her then. I wasn't real sure what to write because I had recently came to the conclusion that email bombarding is kind of violating to someone even if you think that they should care about you. And along with that, I had recently figured out that just because someone doesn't stop you from doing something ridiculously wrong to them, that doesn't make it right to do it.

But I still was in the grey area and I wrote something and just the action made me feel stoned... or was it that vicodene I found. I don't even remember what I said because I try not to think about it.

And in the morning, William happened upon a sword somewhere in the house and he'd been twirling it for quite sometime when he approached me and said,

"I saw that guy make Sarah cry. He came to fest, and he fucked it all up for everyone. Last year, Sarah was finally my woman at Kerrville and it took a long time. Erik comes for one day, the Kerr-Valentines day and he got real fucked up. At one point, Sarah threw a small boulder at him. Then Erik, who brought a cokehead buddy wandered off and Sarah felt responsible for them and goes off with them and returns crying and she said she had to take them home because they were both too drunk.

Now he comes back and she's not my woman and he's gonna cockblock me all the way from Dallas because he is just so smooth that he doesn't even have to play a game. I could take it like I was totally outplayed or just play it like any other game that fails, I'll change focus and take what I could get. And we have some business we could tend to," William states that as he grabs one of Sarah's Great Danes by the scuff and he demonstrated how to dominate them by eying them into submission.

William is a thinker and he remembers his psyche fracturing when he was a kid. He blames a therapist who methodically conditioned him to always leave an objective eye as he acts through life to make sure his behavior is normal enough for his environment.

The reason it was so important for William to keep a lookout on his behavior was because as a boy he was constantly getting beatings from his classmates in elementary school. The therapist postulated by observing the lanky awkward boy's mannerisms that he brought the beatings to himself because he was a dork. Understanding all that and coming to terms with himself from an early age made him a hardened fighter and a secret gangster. It defined him and drew out his compatible talents.

Ashley comes down stairs with her sketches of mushrooms from when she was 16 and she said that you could see the moods of fish when their skin changes color, and then she goes back up stairs and then she came back down.

And then Ashley had a eureka moment!

Ashley was gonna fuck Toby over because she was feeling malicious. She would get Rhett to tell Toby a safer way other than having so much drug traffic in his house. Rhett gets scared easy because if Toby's fucked than he's fucked. And San Antonio is a dangerous place, especially in those parts.

And then if she didn't already, Ashley had a complete psychotic break. Afterwards, I told her that I get neurotic sometimes so I kind of understand her need to manifest such behaviors but it was real unbecoming of her.

She responded, "If you're so concerned about morals and family shit, she ditched me! She's being cowardly, talking the talk but not walking the walk, I could see her suing me when she gets back home to Maryland, so William what's your position in this fight?"

"Will, you are such a pussy, your sister totally controls you!" Ashley was so loud. I think Will was daydreaming about Clementine and he walked out.

I looked at Ashley and said, "don't call him a pussy, don't you know he once had a crush on you?"

And she stormed off and out the door. She went to Rhett's and she came back 45

minutes later, "I told him I was going to stay the night and he gave me attitude when I changed my mind and I left everything there all 5 pounds, so we'll make up tomorrow and you guys have to meet Rhett now and distance yourselves from Olivia. He'll sell you them for a little more than 4k apiece and the first run is buying trust, Rhett is temperamental."

Then we all went to Toby's and Trace and I were discussing Springsteen's "Radio Nowhere" and Paul McCartney recording everything himself nowadays. Also, Trace is a Modest Mouse fan but "All Night Diner" brings him down because he remembers an old lover who left him when he hears that song.

Trace's dad is a guitar virtuoso and he plays in a band called James McMercury and the Heartless Bastards. Trace is currently working on a fictional account of the creation of the world and it sounds intriguing. Trace says, "people who do coke always talk business all the and it's always out of their ass."

And Ashley walked by and she happened to be coked out of her head, "I want to show that I could be flexible. 4k for a pound, I bet I could get Rhett to be fine with that. You know we could sell it for \$1500 more, really. Well, really \$2000 more."

And then Ashley walked away as if we were at a party. And someone called Ashley a "cunt" and Toby told us a story of some girl bitching at him never to use the word "cunt."

Then Ashley wandered back to tell us about her first Bar Mitzva freaking her out and she told me about it with such a smile of superiority. She was drinking little bottles of vodka outside the synagogue after a cigarette and she moseyed into the hall and witnessed the boy being paraded around on a chair.

She winked at me when she said she just couldn't take it anymore and she had her mom come and pick her up, "did they carry you around on a chair when you turned thirteen?"

I said, "no, but they would have if I asked them too. And you're a bitch," and I smiled and winked her face back at her.

The errand of the day was to fix the both malfunctioning vehicles. Ashley had no power locks but she knew some Mercedes' mechanic who finally called her back early that morning. So by one that afternoon we piled into Ashley's new SUV and headed to Toby's to jump William's car and we met at a Nakoma Avenue garage. Greg had Ashley park in the center of his shop.

Greg glanced with the corner of his eye at William's dusty Eclipse and confidently told us to get a new battery and William got one at an auto parts store across the street and Greg installed it, and low and behold that was the issue.

Greg fixed the locks in Ashley's SUV and we were all on our way back to the house to shower and go out in celebration. As we were leaving the garage, I asked Greg how he knew it wasn't the alternator, and he ignored me. He stayed at the shop.

So we got back and headed up to Ashley's bedroom to get stoned. We were at the point where the vibe would just get so tense at random points that getting stoned was all anyone could think to do. So William asked Ashley if we were going out partying and she didn't answer.

A few minutes later she said that we should go to her friend who is a glass blower and he

could blow us pipes. William seemed pleased with the prospect of doing anything so he said that we should go and then Ashley seemed to have forgotten those plans and she said that she wanted to be alone and go somewhere by herself.

Before she left the house she asked me if I freak out because I'm getting older every day. I had no response for her query aside from, "sometimes." She told me that she worries about me because I seem very quiet and like I don't let people piss me off. She wanted to know if I was prone to bottling shit up and then just blowing like Rhett does. Then Ashley disappeared and was nowhere to be found in the morning. I had a spare key she gave me the first day I was there so William and I decided to do something.

"Sarah's psychotic! Let's get the fuck out of this city; let's go to that lady your dad told us to visit and come back to get the weed later."

William had a family friend who lived in Johnson City who he thought would impress me. With a newly fixed car, William decided that we should drive out there and meet her for a late lunch. William played Pod's music while we drove and he told me that he's been wanting to hear it since he got it, but Ashley insists on listening to the same Lil' Wayne song over and over and over. As we drove and listened, I saw how Frankie must have been influenced by Pod as they encountered each other annually.

So on acid, Pod reminds me of a crab drawn in a Disney movie and his wonderful music sounds like reggae mixed with acid. But it was good. And his voice is gruff like a pirate.

Eventually, William and I began discussing politics for fun and William who has no love for the Clintons told me that "the shit that went down [in the past eight years with Bush and the economy] was building under the Clinton administration. By the end of his last term, the second Intafada began, the stock market crashed, but there is only so much you [a president] could actually do about the manifestation of the consequences of close to three hundred years of America. Bush II originally campaigned on the platform that we are not the world's police, no more nation building... but he recognized the Kosovo rebellion!" So Will was irritated.

William tells me that he voted Independent many times. After a drop of silence I asked William what he thought Ashley thought of George W. and we laughed thinking about her discussing politics. Then I thought to mention to William, "remember, if she talks shit about her friends to us, she is probably talking shit about us to her friends."

Will says, "for sure, we can't actually believe that we are special."

The road from San Antonio to Austin is mostly hill country and it was a serene drive. We passed so many ranches: Faith Christian Cowboy Ranch (with a US, Texas, and Israeli flag); Rocking J's Ranch; Blanco Cowboy Church and Arena; Natural Bridge Wild Life Ranch (with a huge sign with a picture of a giraffe); and those are just a few.

It was 106 F of dry heat that day but I felt comfortable because we were used to it already. We passed a billboard of Nolan Ryan selling beef and a string of firework stands that were closed because of the burn ban. I recalled that there were fewer bon fires at the camps back at KerrUnk than I expected.

I was spacing out thinking about paying \$3.95 a gallon for gas when I noticed a bumper

sticker of some car ahead of us supporting Ron Paul for president, he was running on the republican ticket because he promised his supporters that this time he wasn't gonna run independently.

William told me, "he's not a neo-con guy. He was part of the Reagan revolution; he wants to kill inflation because it's a tax on the poor; wants to get out of foreign entanglements; and wants to limit government taxing. He's personally anti-abortion but he calls on states to make the laws because it's a matter of healthcare which is a state's agenda.

We arrived in the afternoon in Johnson City: birthplace of LBJ. We followed a few dirt roads with small houses sporadically laid out along the way till we got to one driveway and we parked outside of Norma's house. And William said, "she grows mangoes, pairs, and persimmons. And she takes in any wild cat."

Norma

Outside:

benches, clutter, azielas, wind chimes (many, wood, metal), stars, high grass, daisy the deer running in the field and eating all the cat food, ticks

Inside:

Dragon statues, paintings by children and grandchildren, paintings and photos of children, crosses, Frieda magnets, an iron cast oven, Japanese art, masks, African stuff, more photos, a needle-point sunrise pillow, a painting of Quanyen on a dragon; she an Oriental archetype for strong women and she rides the waves of chaos patrolling with compassion.

Then we got in the car again and drove pass the LBJ Park and LBJ school and football field, "the home of LBJ" banner and past the old lumber yard to the Silver K Café. As we waited for our beef, Norma said,

"it took me seven years to quit smoking when I was 70. "

William,

"it's a self image thing, I saw myself as a guy who smokes Reds and drinks whisky."

Norma says,

"I went to the San Juan Islands, yep, a ferry from Seattle and then ferry to Vancouver. And you guys should check out 'Sheltering Sky' by Bowles"

Norma had a family once. Three of her daughters died of cystic fibrosis in a span of eight years in the 60's. She ended up dropping her husband off at his mother's because of his organic brain disorder from mixing thorizene and other psychotropic meds with alcohol.

She's a Virgo,

"I love nature and it keeps me grounded and real, loving my body and I adore it even as it ages because it's the vessel of my soul."

In '95, Jim P. was her friend and he was dying of cancer and Norma was recovering from a car accident and they took care of each other. Jim used to collect Japanese prints

whenever he could and he left them all to Norma, who sells them when she needs to, but she still has an almost endless supply of these valuable pieces of art. He also left his walking sticks, too which William remembered them from his youth.

Urtha the cat was walking around but she stayed away from people because she scratches them and she learnt that no one likes her aside her Norma, and that only when she's alone. She was found in the garden as a kitten being attacked by fire ants— now she's 18 and she forgot how to even retrack her claws.

Norma gave me advice for the artist:

“You need to learn how to discriminate or you get sucked into things you don't want; don't be too self indulgent or you will get to be dying and wonder where your life has gone.” Then she turned to Will and said that “scientist are also a type of artist, they just have more rules.”

Norma,

“I missed Olivia this year but she called me, what's she doing now a days?”

William,

"Olivia is trying to learn how to bend people to her will."

Norma remembered that Olivia likes sea shells— big colorful ones, green, purple, black, brown, or white ones and she said,

“well you should experiment when you are younger. The middle class bourgeois over protect their daughters and only teach them to marry well.”

William had an Indian girlfriend who told him once,

“Indians want to be rebellious but their families wouldn't approve because parents are way too domineering. As soon as Indian kids buy a house, it means that it's time for the parents to sell theirs.”

Norma continued,

“internet helps kids understand alternative lives. And if they look out for predators they should be fine” and then she said that “if you haven't faced death, you still live with rose colored glasses.

Crosby, my first husband had no skills for calamity...The Wallace clan made you take care of yourself. We are part Indian—Native American). We didn't learn how to live in cities because that was where the devil lives. We were all artist.

My dad had a primitive technique of painting and he basically stuck to painting pictures of deer like the ones hanging up that you thought my grandson did... But my dad was also a Shamon and he could read plants and animals...

Dissociation is a great tool but it leads to craziness and you can't feel grief or what you have to feel.”

Then William declared,

"half my psyche is watching the other half perform."

Norma answered,

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"old shamans would call that your raven/death looking at you."

William,

"I cried when I realized that I was bereft of emotion."

Norma said,

"the cost of intellectual maturity is understanding which is always an obstacle to staying intact through the experience. It's a shame when we lose the childlike sense of the moment. The new information's got to leave room for that child to remain present."

When she lost her husband of 18 years and her three children, she had to disassociate to raise the rest of her kids. She befriended an older widow with cancer to get by during that time. The lady would come by with whisky and they would make éclairs. The lady left Norma her collection of Norwegian mosaic tiles when she died.

At 28 years old, during all the hardships, she was on the way to work when she was knocked down by a light. She felt fulfilled but she couldn't breathe. She thought she would die but she understood that she was an important cell in the universe and especially in her family, and that was a fact even if she died at that moment.

She bowed her head to this majestic mystery and when it was finished she went back to tell her father what had happened. He thought she was anointed by the Holy Spirit but she had a hard time buying that. She leaned to the more plausible explanation that her friends were suggesting, that she had just experienced her first nervous breakdown.

For the next nine years she explored. In the process, she attained a degree in comparative religions, became a priestess in a church that practiced using peyote and eventually she became a shaman and then a yogi; it all came down to knowing that we don't have enough information to hold a candle to science. But science also has its limits. She cited Newtonian science as totally human because it doesn't transcend to even today.

She says that shamanistic ideas bring her to the center of the earth and the sun and the mystery of why is so baffling that she is able to let go and live and know that it will work.

William,

"I discovered the cosmic joke and that is that everything is inconsequential, so whatever you choose to focus on is what is meaningful."

Norma laughed and looked at the boy she had seen annually for as long as he could remember and he was just like his father when you put a few beers in him,

"if you despair you'll be blind, and if you're happy you are able to see... People have not evolved enough yet for widespread clairvoyance and telepathy."

And then she started talking about some things that were way over my head but I still took notes:

"quantum soup:

*9 dimensions of reality, people channeling, Ken Wilber "Integral Consciousness";
"Alchemy of nine dimensions" Barbara Crow.*

1. center of earth (nucleus)

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2. *elemental- atoms and nature*

3. *our reality- up, down, limits*

4. *archetypal*

can't measure:

5. *light?*

6. *geometric*

7.

8. *creation through sound*

9. *unity of it all*

Nowadays, overwhelming frequency changes, we are due for a shift in magnetic poles (every 20,000yrs)"

I don't know what to make of that.

Norma continued,

"I'm in a lower class but I have more freedom than 95% of the world. Because all I need is love and light to have my life aligned. So, 2012 increases the frequency for action- we are coming up to many things. You can definitely survive with quantum skills. But you need all of your psyche.

And we don't know when it really is coming because the Gregorian calendar is messed up. But Christians look at Israel's reestablishment as a sign of the end times.

Now let me tell you that medical intuitives have a freaky power. Some can read from your psyche, what emotional trauma is blocking your spine and just knowing helps you accept it and helps you govern your behavior rather than an ailment, which I find much more productive."

We both were soaking her up.

"You both have the hero archetype. You are more of a Loki-type, a trickster and a Pooar with eternal youth. Free and spontaneous, with no responsibility and you're looking for new things.

We all see your dark and light side... and you probably will hate aging, and definitely troubles in committed relationships, because you always are seeking brand new information. Avant garde, and it could lead to chasing glamour. But you're like the great teacher Parcifal.

William, you are a Patron, the benevolent dictator type who likes to take care of, encourage, and attract others. And you're like Apollo, of the lovers who wants to know the inner workings of others.

So guys, we only have 50,000 years of consciousness before we spoke to God directly. And 50% of the world can read and write and there is a clear evolution of truth—"

William,

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"there are more people living now then ever died."

Norma,

"One Hundred Monkey Syndrome; a Japanese explorer went to an Island of monkeys where the monkeys used to prepare their food in a certain way. When a sweet potato was introduced, one started washing it, and soon everyone followed so when people invent things, others also simultaneously invent that thing, the idea was ripe for the world."

William,

"people confuse gods with desire and they say god wants it when they really want it."

I said,

"you think Trickle Up Economics would work better than down?"

William,

"our forefathers wanted education and equality for all and in order for it to work, everyone needs education."

It got pretty late for Norma and we left so she could get ready for bed.

On the road back to San Antonio, William told me that Norma used to harvest honey from bees behind the house as we drove on those country/farm roads passing various types of ranches, cows, horses, longhorns, and Dairy Queens.

We got back to Sarah's in good spirits and we stayed that way because she wasn't home and I went to bed early. She woke us up the next day and told us that she changed her name from "Ashley" to "Taylor" but I don't know who kept track of her aliases aside from me. Anyways, she was real calm and talkative.

Taylor says, "I use my benevolence as a tool as opposed to as an end... I've got Rhett focused on me and not the weed and that's right where I want him. He's doing a favor for Shelby as we speak. Giving him five pounds and a steady job."

Taylor now told us about random member of her history. It seemed that the plot of her story was largely based in the memories she made with Travis, so Shanel's brother Shelby had an interesting relationship with her. He lives with his older brother, Wade who has been landscaping forever.

She and Shelby dated because Taylor felt a connection to him because she knew the details of his sister's horrific death from Travis's court processions. They dated for eleven months. He's a goober because he has lame jokes, he goofs off when he has to do something, and he's always smiling, causing people to make fun of him.

When they were together, Taylor witnessed Shanel's ghostly presence in her two older brothers' home namely when all the photos of Shanel would rattle. Taylor even tried to make the photos Shanel-proof by securing the frames with more screws, but later that day, when she and Shelby were having sex, Shanel seemed to try extra hard to rattle the photos and she proved herself strong. Shanel also used to visit whenever the couple would fight.

Eventually, Sarah decided that Shelby was crazy. He had good reason to be after

witnessing his sister's faceless body die. Taylor almost got over her sympathies to confront the ghost and request that she leave everyone alone, but then she realized that Shanel is probably only around because Shelby and Wade need her.

Taylor really understands ghostly presences; when she cries at the beach where she and her dad went fishing, she actually feels her dad spirit.” William told her that memories could feel like ghosts, but he by no means meant that the memories were of metaphysical origin. Taylor agreed but it was only a miscommunication.

Taylor’s story abruptly ended when Aaron came to the door. He handed her a zip lock bag of money and she handed him a shopping bag and he left. He had no scars on his face, but Taylor assured me that his body was quite disfigured.

Aaron is a business hookup and in relation to Taylor, he is like a brother who is obsessed with his sister. Aaron always keeps up with her name changes, "He was a three-night-one-nighter that lasted a little longer;

“he will tell you that he is marrying me and people really warn me to stay away from him because he seems like he loves me so much that he would kill me; but he's just a monkey that hangs on your back; his parents and shrink think it's because I saved his life, but he was like this before; he's aware but doesn't care; he's so obsessed that he climbed up my mom's two story house because I didn't answer the phone;

I briefly lived with Aaron when I was an alcoholic for a couple of weeks; we dated but I didn't like dating him and he didn't like that, but I'm just not attracted to him after he got shot, now he still dates chicks and hides them from me because he wants me to think that he's in love with me; Aaron has an auction license but whenever I ask him for something he wants to do everything with me and if not he gets so insulted that he doesn't want to help me because he's such a little shit;

but his body is like a monster's, under his cloths, his chest and leg are so disfigured, he has graphs all over the place; his scars look like chicken fat. And he calls from strange numbers, one time he was even pleading for sex and I almost felt bad enough for him but then I had to tell him that it's his own fault that I can't let him stick his penis in me because I'm afraid he's gonna try to capture me by making me pregnant;

I would never take money from a man like that, my mother raised me to never be dependant; Rhett was the first one to pay for things, I spent \$50k on Travis, \$20k on Erik and Aaron shows off his leg to let everyone really understand how dealing with the wrong people at an early age could have lifelong ramifications like this lady who was on Oprah who had many reconstructive surgeries.”

Then Taylor looked like she was coming on to William so I went down stairs and smoked some weed and when I heard Will and Taylor fucking loudly I went on a final walk around the community. I came back 45 minutes later and Taylor read a poem from when she was 16, "What I do know scares me, what I don't know scares me more, I want my sword by my side."

“Travis was 19 and I met him when I was 16 years old and it was love at first sight. The relationship lasted four years and I still love him!”

This relationship ended four years ago when Travis L.'s semi-annual bipolar production cost Sarah much flexibility in her back. Travis threw her down four flights of stairs.

This was just the most physically destructive thing he did to her, but it was by no means the only.

Travis L. is, by all accounts by his peers "the Chosen One." He isn't a Messiah; he's an angel of death. He onetime even shoved a shotgun into Sarah's mouth. And he didn't speak much when he was dealing out beatings. This is Sarah's "love of her life."

Taylor wanted to treat us to lunch before we hit the road and we were totally up to it. She tied up the Travis story for us as we ate our ten dollar sandwiches. Sarah met Travis when she was 16 years old. The day she met him, her biological father came to visit her home.

The man was dying of cancer and the time was really approaching. Dad came by Sarah's house and waived to Sarah like he was going to talk to her and then he went to her 10 year old sister, Carly and they left together. Sarah saw her mom crying but she didn't know why till her mom said that Sarah might as well know, her dad wasn't coming back to be with her before he died because Sarah "bitches at him way too much and it was too annoying to be around right before he dies."

Dad left the picture too early to really be described. Sarah was 11 when her mom asked her how she felt about the upcoming divorce and she replied, "what's new, he's never around anyway."

He died without saying goodbye to her because, "since I was 14, I always stood up for myself and for others. I used to demand he tell me why he'd cheat on my mother and Carly never gave him shit... dad was a coward and he never understood me or my mother, we are bulls, we're always in the shit shooting our way out. My dad was selfish, but was he a good architect? Yes! Was he a good fishing buddy? Hell yeah! He never beat me and always provided... So Travis arrived in my life. Travis is tall, dark and handsome, and just a blue eyed, good old boy with a baseball scholarship to UT."

A few weeks after they started seeing each other, Travis requested Sarah's support through a heavy time filled with court appearances he had to make for the involuntary manslaughter charge in the matter of the death of Shanel Jones of San Antonio of Macarthur High.

Travis fell asleep driving and he crashed his '95 Nissan 300 zx into an 18 wheeler and Shanel flew halfway through the windshield as Travis remained buckled safely in his seat for the car's eventual six complete rolling cycles.

This is the details: "Shanel Jones was popular. She was 17 and she smoked weed and she had the face of an angel. She had a naturally blond bob and a pretty smile. And Travis and she were caravanning with a bunch of friends to the border to drink. Shanel's brother and a group of a few more friends were in a Suburban behind the two.

They were in Katula, about halfway to the destination when the accident occurred.

When the car stopped rolling, the unscratched Travis quickly snapped into it and he unbuckled his seatbelt and he tried to save Shanel's life. He got her out of the windshield and into the middle of the street and Shelby picked up Shanel and dropped her when he realized that she was dead.

Shelby charged at Travis swinging his arms wildly and Travis had to restrain him until

the cops came. And they watched their friends prepare Shanel for the paramedics by gathering an arm, a jaw, a finger- I won't continue describing all that. When the cops came, they arrested Travis.

But it was Shelby who came to the station to bail Travis out of jail.

As we were leaving she told us that if only we could stay a few more days she could make our business proposition happen. However, it had been over a week and she never actually brought us the five pounds of amazing, cheap premium grade pot for us to buy.

I wasn't too resentful though because I was recuperating from the festival but that whole time we were living with Ashley was just nuts. And no business went down with her.

We were so grateful to get on the road again. Now we were heading to Dallas. William was feeling a little down as we sped away from that crazy bitch, Sarah's house. So, I pulled out two little bottles of energy drink and I lied to him and said that I stole a ten from Sarah- she really gave it to me but I didn't think Will wanted to hear that.

At the redlight we put the top down on the car and then he drank the drink.

I decided to try to cheer him up so I started thinking about random funny topics to riff on. I thought I had pretty good bits on phone sex chat lines so I gathered my thoughts.

I said that I originally began thinking about phone chat lines in the Valley when my 20 year old, El Salvadorian neighbor from Whittset told me about the free chat lines. I used to hang out with him when I would buy or sell him gram bags and he told me that was where he met his baby's momma.

So last month in B-more, I was watching TV late night for a few minutes and this ad came on for a free thirty minutes for meeting singles on a phone chat thing. So I jotted down the number and I just left it alone for a while.

The Free Chat Line Stories:

I said to William,

“So, this one afternoon six or so months ago, I was sitting at home bored as shit and I decided maybe I should call a suicide hotline and tell them that I want to kill myself so badly but I don't have the guts, so I'm joining the navy instead. But then I saw this chat line phone number, so I said, ‘what the fuck, let's see what happens.

So I called in and you get a free thirty minutes to check it out. I said my name was Joe, and that I was going to the navy. So, I listened to a few people's messages and I spoke to a few people. The greetings ranged from very serious people looking for love and friendship with uptight voices, ‘Hi, I'm Vicki 47, professional African American, big married woman not looking to bring complications into my life but looking for friendship that could lead to something more if you know what I mean.’ All the way to very horny women looking for “some cocks to suck.”

So I spoke to the horny people. Most of them that I chose hung up on me.

There were a few people who chose me. A couple of women, both from New York said that they really wanted to fuck me. I was feeling adventurous so I

decided to continue looking for someone closer. I rationalized that if women were desperate enough to be on this line than they probably weren't getting enough sex to be all that dirty, and I wanted to see what would happen.

I was being mindful of the time because 30 free minutes goes quick when strange women are telling you how they like to be fucked.

So this girl, Megan/Mickey chose me and started talking to me about love. I told her that though I fall in love about every two years, and I am just about due for another run, I didn't think it to be so likely that I was going to be falling in love now. I told her that I was very interested in sex and I asked her to describe herself.

She said she was Asian, 5'1, 150 pounds. I asked her what she does and she said that she is a singer. She said her favorite song was a Pink song. So, we chatted and because I was afraid we would be disconnected I told her to call me at my home number.

At this point it was only because she was entertaining, and I swear I had no intention of meeting her. It was a leap of faith in humanity because I didn't want her calling me after this, but I rationalized that we get a million telemarketers everyday, so my grandfather and I only answer the phone if we know the number on the caller ID anyway.

So she calls me and tells me, I'm gonna fall in love with her and I say, 'probably not.' But we talked for a drop.

She reads Harry Potter and is a writer too, but she uses Harry Potter characters. I told her that the only thing I was interested was in sex but since she is cool enough to tell me that than I could talk to her a drop longer.

And it turns out that she was pretty horny herself. I asked her if she worked and she said she was disabled. She can't really walk all that well because she has the lowest level of Cerebral Palsy. So I said, "for a cripple you sure have a dirty mouth"- no I didn't.

I just kept talking like she didn't say anything about it. So she wanted to meet me. I was intrigue and I'm not afraid of someone a step away from a wheelchair and I don't know anything about CP, but if she happened to be attractive enough then I could have struck a jackpot and I did tell her I was shipping off to navy shortly.

So, I asked where she was from. She said Fairfax. So I said I didn't have enough gas to get there and I told her that I don't have much money and she said she doesn't either.

She asked me how much cash I had, and I told her seven dollars and I thought I had a quarter on the floor of my car. So she begged me to see if I could find more money. So I called you but you were in Annapolis fucking that girl without CP, Rachel. So I went to the gas station and put in a buck and a quarter and decided to watch the Oriole's game at Mt. Washington Tavern for a beer.

So I called her back and said that I couldn't make it that night. She was disappointed but still wanted to talk. By then I was bored and on a pre-paid

phone and I said I had to help my friend do something.

So I went to Mount Washington and I watched Chris Waters pitching like Jeremy Guthrie and it seemed like the 6th or seventh inning. And some chick from that house you used to live happened to be there incidentally. I remember on my 21st birthday she flashed me and I said thank you, so when I saw her I did a double take, and she saw me but I was finished my beer and she looked exactly the same so I left without saying something and I asked myself if I really wanted to fuck this girl, who is 5'1 and 150 pounds with Cerebral Palsy when I received a text message, "call me when you get home, i'll be up all night <Mickey>."

So when I got home I was tired from the beer I had and I decided that this poor girl shouldn't be waiting up for me because she'll probably call at a bad time. So I called her to tell her that but instead I said that some of my friends came over to drink.

I stammered something and she accused me of calling the chat line looking for a Baltimore girl. So I swore, 'no I only did it because it was free and I was fucking around and why would I call for someone new?'

She said, 'you're gonna find someone who walks, I know you!' - no she didn't say that exactly, but it felt like that was what she was saying so I said I'd call her tomorrow.

Now can't you imagine George Costanza doing something like this and getting caught by his mom?

So, Mickey texted me in the morning and called me in the afternoon. I didn't know how to respond totally but I decided to wing it and answer. So, she wanted me to come down today. I said to her I could because I was feeling horny and I knew you would lend me some gas money and it was raining.

So I started heading to your house and got some cash and drove to the gas station and she called me back. She said she didn't want me to come because she's not that type of girl and then she hung up.

I wasn't incredibly pissed off because after all I never even seen her and then I wondered if she was in a wheel chair. So I took the gas money and I bought cigarettes. When I got home she called again and I told her to call me on the house phone. She did. I asked her if she's really in a wheelchair and she said that she didn't bring it with her and she doesn't really need it.

Then she said to me that I shouldn't come because I would be disappointed with her because all she wanted to do was make out. I said to that I wasn't the pushy sort and before I could think about it she said that that since I was leaving for the navy in a week she was worried that she would fall for me.

So I told her that she has a good point but she should look forward to meeting more people like me in the future.

Then she said that it sounded like I was falling for her. I assured her that I wasn't. I told her that I speak softly to everyone by virtue of their humanity. She said she didn't believe me and anyways today was not a good day for her because due to

her CP she's been falling a lot and she scraped her knee and she's got blood on her dress and she doesn't look presentable.

She added that she couldn't change her cloths because she was currently living in the garage of a library because her parents left town and she didn't have a key.

I realized that she must be a junkie, because I couldn't imagine Asian parents of a 21 year old girl with CP abandoning her like that. So I bid her a sweet life and she said that it proved that I was falling for her.

I decided that since I got hopped up on caffeine for this, I might as well sing this song I was writing about the joys of antidepressants. It sounds like a jingle so far:

Wake up, feeling fresh

Everybody's jumping out of bed

Gonna start the day off right, with my [name of the drug] and my orange juice

Get dressed and off to work

The zombies all out in full force

But I started my day off right, with my medicine and my orange juice

Dream a little dream for me

I could tell you all how to be free

You got to start your day off right, with your [name of the drug] and orange juice

Part 5:

Then Will and I got to Dallas and we saw the gaudy green neon strip on the skyline.

Will thinks the architecture and highways are magnificently beautiful. I think that though it's all technologically space-age and all it looks way too busy. But at least we were at the next destination and I had talked the whole way and I was feeling at peace and Will was in a great mood. Will called his friend Nate to tell him that we just got into town. Nate was to take us to some wild party so we could unwind and get drunk after being caught in San Antonio with Crazy Sarah.

Will seemed much more traumatized than I, but Sarah just treated me like I was Will's friend who she was indulging so I didn't have much of an opinion on her. But then I realized just how long we were held up there without alcohol.

So Nate is paranoid that the world is using him for money, parties, drugs, car rides, food, and many more things that he thinks about constantly in a neurotic cycle of imagined offenses and totally thought out and justified punishments. He has good reason to believe that some folks would really not want to be around him. I think it's because he likes to act like he's sadistic and ruthless.

Nate responds to inquiry that revenge's his family's prerogative. He told me a story about his grandfather who was a tiny man. He was rich and someone tried to sue him frivolously.

The old man, who only spoke Polish, won the case but he was still very upset that some shmuck would be wasting his time like that and he showed it when both him and the plaintiff exited the building with the attorneys.

The plaintiff's attorney got too close to the Jew-Pollock and he got his foot stomped once by a bone crushing blow. The old man walked away like nothing, and upon inquiry remarked in confused Polish something about just being an innocently senile old man.

Nate also passionately remarks often, "mentally ill people should be euthanized" and, "I would divorce my wife if she wouldn't give a retard away" but he would give a learning disability a few years before he would give up on it because he would probably would only realize the child's limitations after a few years and he would already be attached.

I asked him why he thinks of marriage at all with an attitude like that and whether he has someone in mind and he ignored me.

To sum him up, Nate believes that might makes right. He once rummaged through Olivia's purse while she was his guest and told her that if he really wanted to, he would steal her last few muscle relaxors.

So you'd think that someone would put him in his place, especially in a town like Dallas. However, over the years Nate had learnt to defend himself. William even used to wrestle/kick box with Nate on a daily basis from a very young age and they both developed into quite the street fighters. Nate gets his pride from people thinking that he's good in a fight, so he'll never back down if you suggest one.

Now, Nate is a giant person who functions on 120 milligrams of Adderall daily. But even medicated he could be pretty trying company and I guess that's why he's always thinking people don't really like him and only put up with him because he has cash and a house.

His parents gave him his house and cash because they love him and could afford it. Allen is an amateur writer who wrote such short stories as "the Downing of Flight 837" and "The JDL's Big Night" and Nate's mom is a tall lady who watches Oprah and laughs at people's jokes.

As Nate paints it, his lineage totally illustrates the dog eat dog world we all live in. They were first and foremost survivors ever since the Cossacks made them white. This line would refuse to be trampled on again; but if you must trample on them they will at least barter and force their way through.

To survive they have been Judenrot officials and cops and gangsters and lawyers and salesmen. They always had their weapon by their side and Nate told me that they are known to be giants; both ruthless and fearless. He carefully took a bullet out of his pocket and put it into an empty magazine and clicked it into the barebones AK47 he was cleaning all day long as he told me about his family. Then he walked to a locked closet to put his gun away.

Nate knows that I don't think so highly of him. I met him in Baltimore a few years

back when I was tripping on mushrooms and he was wearing a Nintendo sweatshirt. He was talking so much that even a nice guy like John R., who was tripping next to me tried the TV remote in efforts to mute the nervously weird fellow.

I know that whole night replayed in his head when he saw me with William at his door because you can tell when someone has a photographic memory by looking in their eyes when they are thinking about something just like in a movie.

So Nate is a see-er who tries to forget how to see and he said to me, "you see things with a cynical perspective and you write about things you believe skeptically and contradictory.

I don't know what I responded but Nate started watching TV because he saw that I was still judging him and he said, "you're a good schmoozer but I don't like to talk during TV. No offense."

A little while later, Nate wanted to demonstrate his physical strength over me by grabbing my neck and squeezing. He knew that I had claimed to be fearless of death because he asked me and he gave me a knife to position by his stomach if I wanted to tap out. So I pinched William right before I cut the guy's stomach open and he popped him in the back of his head.

He looked stunned, but professional like a seasoned Kapo, straight out of Auschwitz; he looked in my eyes and told me that if he needed to kill me, he wouldn't hesitate.

Then Will walked into the house and again, Nate grabbed my trachea in a way that convinced me I could have passed out in a matter of seconds. I was tapping the arms of my chair wildly wishing him off but he was in a zone and he didn't even listen to Will yelling at him from inside that he's gonna break a bottle on his head if he didn't stop.

When I grabbed the knife from the table, he let go of my throat and he declared, "I could kill you and you know it so you're scared."

I guess I had to defy him, "I'm most certainly not scared of you killing me, because I'm not afraid to die."

"Yes you are... how about we do it again and I'll give you a knife to stab in my stomach when you want me to stop and I'll stop before you plunge to deep."

"No, we've been doing this all night."

"See, you're afraid of death."

"No, I don't like gore and if you give me a knife and touch my throat again, I won't be able to control my reflexes and I'll stab you right away, and I really don't like gore."

He stopped but he still thought that I was afraid of death, "You're no fighter."

"No, but I'm quick and I could dodge things and I'll come back with someone bigger than you and I'll spit on you after you're bleeding already and I know that there are a few people out there who would try to avenge my death."

And then Nate got friendlier towards me.

He lives with two small very well behaved dogs, Shiner and Ashley and he handed me Shiner and told me to be nice to her. And then Nate told me, "I would only share my writing if it's published."

I asked him if he thinks that I'm naïve and he replied, "honestly, yes. Asking questions is a sign of not knowing too much and you can't dispute that."

"Well, I never claimed to know much of anything, but naive doesn't mean stupid, it means inexperienced. Oh wait, you don't believe my character?"

"I don't believe anyone's character."

That evening he took us to a freshman college house party at a Dallas mansion. Will and I drove separately from him because Nate is a free spirit who was always drunk and recklessly driving and we were driving down those windy roads with manmade lakes and ponds all around the place and we just felt safer going in separate cars.

Once we got to the house, I got comfortable. I sat by a table by the pool and paid \$5 for beer. I was chilling and just staring at the pristine pool reflecting the party when this moron named David who was gonna be a Golani in the Israeli military. He was playing Beer Pong till a few minutes ago and he was in a bad mood because he was too drunk to make his shots.

I was really too tired to engage in conversation but I was in a really good mood. I was wide awake though because I gulped down a five hour power. SO after David finished telling me how tough and bad-ass Jews could be, I wandered into the house to use the bathroom.

There was a gorgeous Jesus shrine in the bathroom. When I got out, I saw Will and some dude talking, so I asked the dude if the Jesus shrine in the can was a joke. He didn't understand what I was getting at and I didn't want to risk being inappropriate by explaining myself. Then I introduced myself and the dude said his name was Homeboy. So Homeboy showed me and Will around and introduced us to random people. Homeboy is a skinny blond dude with a red baseball cap and a white tee-shirt and jeans. After a bit, he sent us to mingle by ourselves.

Then I met DJ who seemed pretty cool and he looked a bit like a bigger version of me. He told me about the Jew Crew from Dallas who introduced me to Sara the Israelite who she said, "we all know Kimbo Slice."

Then there's Chelsea who says she 18 years old and she is even prettier naked than with clothing on. Her necklace reads "Shira" in Hebrew letters and she introduced herself by asking me if I have ever heard of a book called "The Game" by a dude named Mystery. She found out about this book on VH1 and she pitied me for not having read it.

She told me that if I would follow the exercises in the book, I would never have another lonely night again. This book was written to teach anyone how to get laid. Chelsea swears that the techniques are shockingly flawless when approaching a woman who is secure with herself, "which limits the pool to good looking women."

I told Chelsea that she had to tell me what kind of tricks were in this book. So she told me that "negs" are so important. "Put a woman down when you first meet her. You should be good at this because you seem to be naturally condescending."

Along with that, being unavailable helps alot too, "so you may even want to pretend that you're gay. You could accomplish that by showing her that you understand where she is coming from by saying, 'gee, those heals look like hell, I wore something like that one

night."

And peacocking is very important. That means you should bring something flashy and ridiculous around with you and that way you will be remembered when a girl is ready to make her plans for an after party.

Chelsea asks me in the most baffled tone, "Why don't you try to get laid here?"

"Well I know that many kids here are like 16 and the truth is that I'm not trying to get into trouble but I'm having a good time nonetheless, I like just sitting at tables, with chairs, smoking cigarettes and drinking Dr. Pepper and noshing on Fritos and chilling."

Chelsea walked away, "well, you should at least hit on some women so we don't all think you're gay."

Then DJ approached the table. He stood at 5'11 and he had dark hair and blue eyes. He introduced himself to me again with a handshake and he was really nice. He gave me a beer and told me that he was a musician. I told him that I like to play guitar and I asked what he played and he said that he scratches records in a band.

I told him that I worked in foster care and he asked me if all my children were niggers. I told him that they were indeed, but I call them black kids and he asked me if they think I look like Peter Parker. I told him that as a matter of fact, they all do and he said that little black kids think he looks like Peter Parker, too and then he walked away.

And that moron David came back around. He has thick, black, hair and small, black, rectangle glasses. He stands at 5'9 and he's a bit overweight. David sat next to me and told me that Chelsea was his girlfriend and he asked me not to take her up on her advances, even though they were on their Dallas set of rules.

Then Chelsea walked over to the pool and disrobed. She called out, "who's gonna join me and jump in?" No one responded and she called us all pussies and then a naked blond girl came out of the bathroom and they both jump in the pool at the same time.

But then people came flooding out of the house yelling that DJ punched Christina in front of Homeboy and his girlfriend because Christina was making out with Homeboy's girlfriend. So Homeboy tried to beat the fuck out of DJ, but when he turned around DJ hit him with a folding chair and then Christina began to cry that she just wanted everyone to leave her house so Nate started ushering people out.

These types of house parties always seem to end with these types of drama, especially when volatile people are all in the same room after a little time apart. So everyone was kicked out of the house...even Nate, who like a total drunken buffoon sped out of the driveway going 50 mph. He drove an "S" around a black Acura and onto a lawn.

On the lawn, Nate spun his tires wildly trying to figure out how to get back on the street. His issue was a broken axle which kept the right front passenger's side tire immobile. A Chinese dude in his underwear and his mechanic came running from the back of the house and he pushed past Will and I and ran to Nate's car.

Will and I ran down the street to the Eclipse and we sat in there because Nate is way too crazy to be around when he thinks he's at war. And Nate admits that he always lived in what he knows as a Hobbsian state and that's why he hit the Acura—the Chinese guy tried to show him up at the party.

That Eclipse was a great car for the situation because it's dark green and low and we got to observe the situation in the rear view. William instructed, "we tell the cops that we didn't see anything, it's better not to get involved, better that we didn't see it."

Then we saw Nate run past us with a limp and a ridiculously childish look of stunned guilt on his face; he looked at us in the car, pause for a second and then he just ran like a little boy.

That Sunday morning, we had breakfast with Nate's parents. It was great; all we can eat at a nice place and then we stopped by a Denny's and saw a car show with corvettes and other sports and novelty cars.

Nate's mom told me about an article about how to say "no" that she read that week and Nate's dad, Allen gave me a copy of his short stories. He asked me, "what do you do?"

I said, "whatever I see."

Allen laughed politely and I didn't say anymore on the topic.

Back at the house, Nate mixed some Asti and Absolute and seemed to calm down. He stared me in the eyes and again he declared that he can't have a retarded child and if he ever got one, he would give it away or divorce the lady who gave it to him without paying child support... "A retard only fucks up everyone's life and he could never even be productive."

And then it was time to leave and we drove back to Baltimore in 21 hours. The ride was to be pretty boring and William told a story about when he was in Israel hiking a wadi by the Dead Sea and he and his buddy were competing for the attention of this blond they both knew. And she brought along some chick with asthma to make herself look more attractive. That was fine, but the two women brought along so much shit that it was inappropriate for a week of tiyul, let alone a day trip.

It ended up raining and since they were in a canyon, it got real crazy and slippery. So, like men, they sent the girls up solo and carried the bags through the treacherous terrain. Will sighed and said that he thinks about that sometimes. He added that all-in-all, he had good time in Texas.

Then he asked me if I had another story so I responded with this one,

"Chatline Hookups, part duex:

Well as we know, many times, sequels are lame, but this one happens to be a better story than the first one. Before I start the story, I must say a few things.

I have already firmly decided that I will not be calling any of these lines again. The reason why I need a firm decision is because I have discovered that my personality gets addicted to many unhealthy things even when they don't serve benefit.

In the case of these phone calls, I have never been satisfied; seldom even gotten off; and definitely never gotten laid. So if you didn't know, you'd probably ask how would I get addicted to that?

Well I'll tell you even if you know enough.

It's like chasing an illusive high that you know is out there but you haven't

uncovered yet. This high is based off the assumption that if this intrigues me, than it must intrigue others who look as good as me and are likeminded. That is the prospect of the magic voice! And I only wanted to see what happens on these lines in the first place.

I already saw it happening, therefore, my brief tenure of searching free phone chat lines for sex is totally over, never to be revisited.

Also, I'm afraid that I'm being recorded by the Patriot Actors and I really don't want to hear a tape of me talking about how I want to lick someone's clit in court if I ever get accidentally accused of treason.

So, I came home one Friday afternoon from doing a shitload of errands with a recently filled gas tank, four packs of Camels, and forty bucks in my pocket- which all together made me feel unstoppable. My Canadian buddy, James was to visit for the weekend but he didn't make it, so I came home to an empty apartment. I studied reading music for a while and then got bored.

And then I thought of Mickey- the sweet 21 year old, almost immobile girl, who lives in the garage of a library and I thought of how easy it was to get her to invite me down to visit her in Virginia.

So, I decided to search the internet for more free chatlines. At first I excused myself on grounds that as a writer, it's my professional responsibility to listen to and document the various greetings that women leave but I'm full of shit and I just wanted to get lucky.

Eventually, I began leaning towards moaning women because they seemed the most interesting. So I attempted to have phone sex with people but it wasn't going as smoothly as I hoped.

It occurred to me that there are only a limited amount of dirty things I could say, so my phone sex basically was impatient propositions for casually sexual encounters.

Eventually, one woman stated she wanted me to come to her. She said that she was 24 years old and in pretty good shape. I believed her because I get gullible when I'm wishful. After our dirty talk began to get repetitive she asked me again to come to her.

So I asked where she was from and she said Philadelphia. I decided that since it was Shabos I may as well do something. So I was going.

I told myself that the further I drive, the more anticipation I'll have, and that will almost surely make the time much more passionate. And there I was in my car driving down to Philadelphia just thinking how cool I was that I had no fear and that I was willing to follow through on this experiment.

Two hours later, I was lost in Philadelphia. I stopped by a gas station to ask an attendant where I would find Marshall Street. The boy was a white dude in a Phillies hat And I congratulated him on the Phillies having such a good team and I told him about the Orioles. He was real nice and he told me that he likes Cal Ripken.

He also told me that he didn't really like Marshall Street and he was even from there, but he pointed me to the township over.

I got to Marshall Street and then I called "Sweetie" back because she was gonna give me directions to her house. She told me that she lives with family but not her parents.

I interpreted that to mean that she lived with her sisters or something because she said no one would care if we were fucking in her house. So she answered and told me her address and that she thought I was a block away but she couldn't tell me how to get there because she is stupid. Instead she said to ask people on the street.

Marshall Street is in Upper Darby, and it is almost synonymous with West Phillie. The buildings looked like they were redone in the classical architecture of 1980's ghetto/projects without the high rise apartments. There were enough liquor stores for each resident to have his own and there were many people hanging outside on the street which lent to my misled notion that this must be a real safe and friendly place.

I happened into a parking lot and I noticed three good-looking, young black women walking by a boarded up pastry shop and I asked them how I could get to Spruce Street. They were real friendly but they weren't all that good with directions either.

So, one of the girls wearing a hoodie offered to speak to my friend on the phone and figure out how I could get there. She looked very trustworthy because she was pretty and wearing Abercrombie on her chest. So I called Sweetie and the girls chatted and laugh a bit and then they told me how to go and even how to avoid a one way street.

So back on the road. It took two minutes to find the street and the correct house. It was a small brick house on a street overcrowded with them. There was a white picket fence that seemed crowded by the neighboring house and the house it protected.

I walked up a path lined with flowers and rang the doorbell hoping to find an attractive, 24 year old, African American standing naked at the door. Instead, a large woman dressed in tight white shorts and heels welcomed me in to her home.

I entered the home without disappointment realizing that I should have expected this. So I sat down on her couch and I noticed that "Sweetie" looked a lot like the hooker that Larry David picked up when he wanted to drive in a carpool lane to a Dodgers' game in an episode of Curb Your Enthusiasm.

Her living room looked like the ones in the homes that I used to visit for foster parents in Baltimore. Crowded, with flashy looking things and a big TV.

This reinforced my notion that African American females from the ghetto all buy the same type of furniture and they all go to the same store owned by the same shiesty Jew and spend way too much when they should do what normal people do and go through Salvation Army stores and buy quality furniture.

And then she asked me what I wanted to do. I told her that I wanted to have sex, like we discussed earlier in the evening. I was prepared for any response and I was ready to fuck a fugly.

She asked me when I had sex last and I told her three months ago. She asked me how I could go that long and I said that three months is nothing.

She told me that she wanted to sit and chat a little first and she was relieved to find out that I was a smoker too. We went outside and she told me about the hard work she put into her yard.

And then she told me that she was currently upset because her daughter's cousin, who she practically raised was on the news for killing two cops. The first one was by accident. But then he was pulled over for a broken taillight and he ran and hid in the woods and then threw a shopping cart at the cop who chased him and he shot the guy 14 times.

I told her that it sounded like a classic story and I asked if he was ever in jail before because I thought that maybe the guards traumatized him and as a matter-of-fact Sweetie said that her cousin served ten years before this incident. Then I told her about the navy and how I wanted to be a nuclear tech and get a nursing degree and become a car mechanic too.

She was real impressed with me and she imagined that I was very rich. So I told her that I was poor and she told me she was poorer.

I also told her about working at Baltimore City DSS and she told me she runs a daycare during the day and then her 20 year old daughter came up the walkway. She smiled at me and went inside. She was smaller than her mother but quite heavysset, too, wearing the referee shirt that they wear at Footlocker.

So we went inside again and sat down to watch TV. She watches TLC- a channel that shows doctors doing weird surgeries like making midgets into dwarves, or which ever one into the bigger kind. I told her that in real life those things don't disgust me as much as when the are on TV, so she took me to her bedroom.

Another tiny room with a giant bed. She said it cost 2300\$ and I told her that she was crazy for paying so much and then she asked me if I liked it and I told her that I have a mahogany bedroom set that I found for free that I liked more and she smiled and I looked at her with those giant white wooden bed-posts behind her.

On the TV a doctor was trying to fix a boy who was literally born as half- tree-half-human. I told her that it disturbed me, too so she turned to CNN and turned off the lights. Then I asked her if she was gonna vote for Obama because I was going to the navy and I didn't want to die and she said that she was planning on it.

Then she began to complain that the heel of her shoe broke and I told her she should go to a cobbler who could probably fix it and I explained that a cobbler has nothing to do with professionally eating corn on the cob— her cousin who used to be employed doing that would probably be called a corner.

Then I took off my shoes and she told me which side of the bed to go to. I went there and she asked me for money.

I was taken aback and I said to her that I was too pretty to pay for sex and I already spent a tank of gas and tolls. She looked real disappointed and I said, "look at me, you don't want to fuck this for free. I'm so young and skinny, I should be charging you."

Then she asked if I could give her cash and I tell her that she should have looked at my shoes to know that I probably didn't have any. I hold them up and they have paint spots on them and they look pretty worn out. She said that she told me that I had to pay on the phone and I told her she didn't. So we didn't have sex.

A little disappointed, I asked if I could use the bathroom before my long drive home. She sent me to one without a light bulb so I left the door cracked so I wouldn't piss on her floor and a little black girl started playing with the knob.

So I finished up quick, walked down to my car and I was laughing so much as I sped away that I got lost. I had a cop tell me how to go and eventually I made my way home.

That was when I vowed not to do that anymore. No more phone sex, no more blind sex dates, no more fuglies. I was a little disappointed that I never even got to do a fugly, but I guess my life is richer because of that.

I also decided that this is what I do when I don't smoke weed and I decided to deal with this differently in the future. I ended up drinking a beer at Mount Washington and I bumped into Mendy and Jeremy who were watching the Orioles.

So there it is. Unguided sexual curiosity took me far. On my way back I did consider looking for a university and going to a tavern, but I decided that I had enough adventure for one night and I had no regrets so I wanted to leave it that way.

From now on, I'll stick to picking up women at Kerrville or the MVA or doctor's offices, and high schools. I seem to do better in those places anyway. Well, not in the high schools but I like teachers.

And the moral of the story is sometimes getting stoned and thinking about doing things till you forget is better than actually doing them."

Right before we got back, William and I composed a list of things to bring on an acid trip which included musical instruments; video camera; Power-aid, the blue flavor; a big red ball

Back in Baltimore, we noticed that things changed a drop. There was gas station that stopped selling gas and turned into a cigarette store. I still had nothing to do so I told William that I would do his laundry because his machine was broken and I was feeling thankful. I washed two of his duffle bags and I found three vacuum packed bags with a pound of weed in each.

I called Will when I finished the job and I told him what I had found in his bag. I told him that it looked like at least a quick 12-20 grand. When I called him, William seemed to have totally forgotten that he took Ashley's three pounds right before we went for

lunch. But he was real happy that he had. Will told me, “in this business, you shouldn’t fuck people over unless they fuck you over first or you think that’s their plan.”

Eventually, Taylor, who switched her name from Ashley, which was switched from Sarah, decided to call herself Jordan. I don’t know why she changes her name before she gives up her baggage, but she was fuming over Will ignoring her phone calls for the past week when she arrived in Dallas at a small airstrip.

Erik flew her in because he always drops everything to give her attention and she asked to be transported to Dallas as quick as possible. She knew William had Rhett’s weed and she was trying to track him down and make him pay for stealing from her.

She once had his sister’s address but she threw away all the paperwork for the apartment she and Olivia were going to get. But she had Nate’s address because Will wrote it down on a paper that he left in her house.

Jordan wanted to try to fuck us up in Dallas. She probably also wanted to kill Olivia and Clementine.

So, Jordan knocked on Nate's door.

When there was no answer, she yelled that she was going to murder William. That got Nate to open the door and he palmed Jordan's skull and hid one hand behind his back. Nate, "pull out your gun."

Jordan, "I don't have a gun you dumbfuck!"

Nate quickly opens the door and shoves his AK in Jordon's stomach and pulls the lever that puts the bullets in the chamber.

Jordon yells, "What the fuck, are you a lunatic?!"

Nate asks her what her beef with Will was and she told them that we stole three pounds of weed from her. Nate laughed real hard and Jordan slapped him. So he slapped her.

And then she punched him and he knocked her out with one blow to the face and then he saw Erik in the car and he went out to him and said to Erik to get his bitch out of his house. But Erik noticed the automatic weapon when he got out of the car and suddenly he wasn’t as brave as he thought he would be and he didn’t want to carry her. So Nate picked Jordan up and carried her to the side of the road.

I want to say that Erik and Jordan lived happily ever after and that they are raising a genius crack baby who’s mom lives at one of Erik’s father’s extra houses with a lifetime’s supply of cigarette, meth, and paint supplies— but that’s just a possibility and I didn’t follow up on them.

Part 6:

Baltimore

8/1/08

Dear Layla,

The new plan:

So, I was talking to Andy yesterday, and we were reviewing alternative options to the navy. At first I was just indulging in the conversation for conversation's sake; then I was indulging because it afforded me the opportunity of pushing off my decision and thereby affording me stalling time to smoke more weed and worry about passing the drug test another month; and then I was indulging in it because I wanted to make the logically best decision.

Over the course of our conversation, a few things were brought up that needed my consideration.

Because I scored very well on my entrance exam (don't ask me how, I thought it was the hardest test I ever took; it felt like it took me as long as the LSAT) I am in the position to take my pick from a multitude of lucrative careers with the navy before I sign any papers- but I really need to discuss that with their career counselors before I know exactly what I will do. I do know however, that the program that I like most so far doesn't require me to sign up until late October (and to ship out to Illinois by November) so that gives me some breathing room.

So, I plan to use this next month to critically dissect my plans and weigh the pros and cons rather than just sign up for a romantic fantasy that is really a harsh reality.

Andy was objectively pointing out various exciting opportunities that are approaching these coming years that would be impeded by enlisting. Many of which sound great, however they also seem very distant, temporary, and almost vicarious. But this is due to my current mindset.

I am thinking about finding a Life Coach to discuss all my information and goals with, but I still feel drawn to the navy. Since I was fortunate enough to be forced (by my parents) to construct a viable plan that I liked that had nothing to do with the military, I do have some options.

I told you about a teaching residency that would begin employing me in January. With this, I would be a guaranteed 41K a year, health insurance, and an advance degree. Along with that, I would have the opportunity in time to have my federal loans forgiven. It sounds like a good deal to me and there is opportunity for advancement.

To bridge the gap between now and January, I do have options too. I have an offer to work for Kaplan doing something for 15\$ an hour and I have some social work temp jobs also in cue. The only thing preventing me from gaining employment today is myself, so if I got my head together, I'm sure things would work themselves out.

I don't like these options because there is so much personal maintenance that is required to actually be successful in my personally constructed plans and though I have many pieces of a great support network, it may not be enough- but that's just fear and I know it's limits.

The navy is appealing to me because I get to consolidate all my anxieties and just do the program. This sounds like a weakness on my part, but when I look at my history and how I usually attain success, I feel like I could be weak this time in exchange for success.

I feel like I have run out of time to fuck around and waste time on stupid romantic manias

anymore. I also know that I feel quite uncomfortable relying on friends and family to provide for my gaps. I sort of feel like when I was in high school and I would call my cousin up to buy me packs of cigarettes because I had no money. And now adays, I just can't live off my friends smoking me out anymore (even if they say they don't mind).

My friend George asked me what the advantage was of being locked in to the navy bring if I am getting to a point of taking life seriously anyways. He says that I could achieve success without the fail-safe of a contract. I don't know about that.

Already with the teaching plan, I feel like it would take an uncomfortable period for me to get back on my feet. I feel like I have to get on top of my bills, and incur more bills to make my life as comfortable as I'd like (like a car, car insurance, phone service, internet, and luxuries). It's do-able, but it's much more daunting to me than just signing up.

James (whose advice has the highest appropriateness average) has told me that in his opinion this is probably my best idea.

Will also reminded me that the 6 years I'm looking at with the navy seems quite appropriate for me considering that the first month I came back from California I told him that I was taking the next six month to figure out a 6 year plan in which I will accomplish self sustainability for the long term. He also reminded me that I was quite insistent that I never gave up my dreams of being a successful writer and one of my primary goals was to continue coming back to my creative endeavors.

Well that's pretty much it, and if you read up to here, I really appreciate it. I don't really know what kind of response you could have for this because like you said to me before, "you just got to choose one and go with it."

I'll leave you off by paraphrasing what this guy who just got out of jail after five years told Will and I in Texas:

"I make decisions with two methods; (1) either I flip a coin and if I don't like what it says I go the other way; (2) but sometimes I imagine what the better story would be when I'm 80 years old."

So here's to true agency.

A week later, when I realized that Layla doesn't talk to me anymore, I was sitting in the back of a U-haul smoking a joint with William. Clementine was walking outside with a pitcher of lemonade and she was telling me about some boy in Pikeville who is trying to marry her because she sucked him off two weeks ago.

Clementine looked at me for a second as if she was gonna ask something, when approaches this grungy looking girl with ugly thick, black tattoos; big, black circles weighing her ears down; thick black plastic framed glasses; and black skater clothing. I never met Emily B. before but I heard all about her. She and her boyfriend Sloop John B. worked for William selling weed by the eighth.

They had been real good money makers all year so when William left to Texas he deposited a pound and a half with them trusting that the couple would come back to some profit so he could start the school year with less stress.

So Emily B. pulls out a handful of twenties and called it a thousand dollars. Then she sparked a joint and called her day rough. William was a little disturbed because he was

expecting at least seven times what she handed him. Emily B. noticed William's discomfort and she stood up.

"John has been so fucked up on coke that he's been stealing cash from my wallet. And he stole a bottle of 80\$ rum from me and I told him that I was on my way home and I would drink with him!"

William asked her if she was short on the moneys he owed him. She said she was and she ended up leaving quite quickly to figure out how to pay William. Clementine remarked that the girl was real sketchy and William replied that he owed some Jew from New York 7 grand and he was gonna pay him from that cash.

Clementine changed the subject back to what she was saying before to cheer William up. She said that she mentioned that she likes fashion and she likes to sew and the Pikesville jewboy replied by pulling out a few pairs of pants and asking her to hem them. She walked away from us when William started talking to me about what needs to be done.

William was sure that he was being cheated and he was sure that in order to keep his status and respect he needed to address the issue. William's natural inclination was to beat the couple to a bloody pulp immediately. His reluctance centered around his relatively new found respect for peace.

He had a crew that would love the opportunity to beat on this tomboy and her coked-up emo-fuck-head but he didn't want to go back down the road of violence. The practical concern that he owed the Jew in New York was what we discussed next.

Recently this guy had been less accommodating than he should be. Along with that, he had been secretly flooding William's prime market with the same product that he was selling William. The straw that broke the camel's back though was he ripped off William's old buddy and silent partner, Shuli last month.

The Jew claimed it was an accident but Shuli always holds grudges and he had been working on William to run off on the dude without paying. Shuli has a clear business sense for how to be successful and William loves their different approaches and how it all comes together for profit.

So, William made up his mind to avoid the Jew from New York and ditch the bill. Now he needed to go to New York to find his other Jew there so he could get some inventory. Along with that, William decided not to tell Shuli about Emily B. until tomorrow because he knew Shuli would be likely to shoot her because he used to be friends and he vouched for her.

So, I went home to look for a job and William and Clementine went up to New York to reestablish some old connections. Clementine came along because at that moment they were each other's good luck charms. Clementine was great at mingling and gaining trust in this business. And the Jews they were working with seemed to always love the blond, 18 year old, shiksa.

When he came back a couple of days later, Will and Shuli tried to collect the cash from Emily B. and John B. But upon an exhaustive search they found that Emily checked herself into some rehab and John quit his job at the McCormick spice factory and seemed to have vanished from Baltimore. Eventually they found John sleeping at his apartment and he was already beaten up pretty badly and his father's Audi was destroyed by a

baseball bat.

When William was telling me the story, my phone rang out of the blue. It was Layla calling. She found out I was back because my mom called her to tell her that I was safe because a few weeks earlier my dad called every one he thought may have been able to get me to call home. And Layla was cool.

She asked me if my head is in one place. That's code for, am I in a sane mind or am I in a state of obsession over her. That's perfectly valid concern because I seemed to be obsessed like that for much of my life as she knows it.

But nevertheless Layla invited me to come to her parent's house to drink coffee with her. I arrived fifteen minutes later and parked my beat up Sentra a little further from her house because I was embarrassed that I was driving my dad's old car. I walked up the steps and she greeted me with a smile and she hugged me.

We sat on the porch swing and silently watched cars zip by on the relatively busy Baltimore street. Suddenly, Layla just starts laughing at me, "remember when you parked your car right here and came over to give me flowers and we saw that white van smash up your side mirror and speed away."

I remembered and I gave the thought a moment of silence before I said my piece. I explained that I'm not obsessed with her any more and that I'm totally a different man and like she had done dozens of times in the past, she smiled and seemed to believe me.

I smoked a joint and went into a monologue and I tripped out over the faces she was making in response to what I was saying, "These past few days, I've been having this insomnia that I just don't fight anymore. It's probably chemically induced from not smoking enough weed. So then let me tell you about weed. In terms of pleasurable things to do, smoking weed for me is ranked between 2-4 at all times."

She looked gorgeous as she listened to me talk expressively, "from the second of inhalation my mood automatically gets better, no matter how good it was already. Because this has been such a mainstay in my life for the past 9-10 years I have a hard time honestly conceiving of myself apart from it. It's almost like cigarettes. I have known for quite awhile of my needs for dependence, and at times I've wanted to do something about it, but I've never really been able to cross the thresholds of success in this endeavor. It ties into many things in my life. As of late, I plan to be dealing with addiction while I'm in the navy. Boot camp provides me an opportunity to detox my body and change my self image. I don't think that I'll change in terms of whether or not I'd be recognizable, but inside myself there will be many changes. I happen to think that I'm just as insane with or without my substance abuse issues in fact, I do credit my addictions for keeping me out of some sorts of trouble."

Layla smiled at me, "you are so narcissistic and please don't join the Navy!"

I calmly continued and she sat quietly, "Addiction is so funny to me. I think in my life, every pleasurable thing I could do over and over, I try to do. It passes time well, but at the end the only thing I could hope for is more. I've been struggling with that for a while because it's in direct conflict with another drive I have that pushes me to do things that I don't have to repeat. I believe that my addictions root from obsessive compulsions. I find it very hard to sit and not to be doing anything and therefore I always try to find

something to do, and addiction occupies the time.”

Then I asked her about her life and she declined to comment. But she did say that she had to drive to New York later that day that I shouldn't contact her anymore. She said she didn't want me to have hard feelings and I decided to accept that, so I left.

I walked the other way and left my car parked there and I thought: now adays, I find myself looking forward to the next part of my life, too much. This has also been an issue for me in the past. I thought maybe I do that because my present is not satisfactory and I'm too stoned to figure it all out.

What I should have been doing in the past (which I almost never think about unless it gets related to something instantly gratifying) was setting myself up for the present but I don't seem to plan much when I'm daydreaming about the future.

My "daydreams of the future" are way too vague to actually deduce plans from them. They consist of feelings that I imagine I will have in the future. Those daydreams do keep me where I am (for better or for worst) and working towards my goals, but it's hard to be a self starter when you're lazy.

Then I thought of my tattoo on my arm that says "Layla" and I couldn't believe that I forgot to show it to her. But I guess it's just as well and I let it go.

Then I thought that the questions about life that we all have plague me too much. I know they bother others as well as Andy points out all the time but that does not make me feel better.

Andy also points out to me that most people in America live with college debt, and even in the community where we are from, most people have to deal with it. I still look at my parents and many of my friend's parents as extraordinary for raising their families, but when I think about debt it bothers me so much because I got under before I could even understand the system. But it helps that the money I owe is invisible.

Years ago, when I decided to go to school, I remember talking to my sister. We were discussing student loans and whether they were worthwhile. I was real exhausted from coming back from living in Israel, but I'm always exhausted.

I said I just want to pick something and do it. So basically student loans were the answer and I decided not to think about them till I could deal with them. So I'm looking at the Navy like it's more college. I intend to get an online masters and I'll figure out many things in life. Afterwards, I will be more marketable for work that makes much more money than I make now. I should come out when I am 33 with a clean slate and so much resources.

I most probably will move back to Baltimore when I'm done because I have no better place to live and I think I would enjoy this place after I make myself into what I want.

I don't think I could end up being a career military officer unless I fall in love with my job there or the lifestyle or the huge bonuses for re-signing.

So all this is so I won't have the opportunity to live with regret of wasting my time in life and then I realized that I was real depressed.

Then Patty called me up. She told me that it's very hard to respond to my emails and since they are so long and they twist so much it's hard to even see the point in reading

them, but she does anyways. She said that she'd prefer to see me in person. So I went over to Patty's parent's house right away.

Patty is gorgeous. She's 25 and she's a Taurus. She looks like a 1920's movie star and she speaks with amazing insight. We hung out for six hours and I avoided talking about Layla.

At one point, I asked Patty why we weren't a couple and she said it's because we are incompatible and because I once was with her friend, Layla. As a consolation prize she offered me a date to a Love Addiction meeting and I accepted the offer.

So, the following Sunday, Patty picked me up and we went to some church off of Roland Avenue. It was lame and I recognized some woman who went to school with me but I pretended that I didn't know her and I left when she shared her tales of needing to masturbate at all the wrong times.

I was waiting outside for Patty when she came out of the building talking excitedly with some lascivious old man from her group. He escorted us to Patty's car and bid her a good night and then we went back to her house to drink wine, and I said,

"I'm not going back to those meetings but I want to tell you about this book I got in the bathroom. I don't know the title but it's Peter Browns' take on the Beatles. I know I mentioned this book to you already. Ever since the Beatle's anthology came out in the 90's, this history spanning about ten years in the 1960's has been like the soap opera that I follow. And it still moves in stores! It's incredible. I read these personalities over and over from all these points of view and I even learn new lessons.

John Lennon was an abusive asshole to everyone. He once told his manager Brian Epstein to title his autobiography, "Queer Jew." And Epstein had a crazy psyche himself."

Patty was fine with my decision and she pointed out that she only offered those meetings to me because she thought it would help me with my Layla obsession but she noticed that I was gracious enough about it.

So we sat quietly for a while and enjoyed each other's company in front of the cold and quiet wood stove in her living room. Eventually I got good and drunk and took off my shirt to be more comfortable. So I was wearing a short sleeve tee shirt and Patty noticed that I had Layla's name tattooed on my arm. I totally forget about it and I really assumed that it was covered by my shirt, but I was wearing Fruit of the Loom that day and I had less arm coverage than my Hanes.

So, Patty was shocked and a bit mad because she periodically speaks to me about not using other people's names for my art. I told her that I don't showcase this tattoo and she said that it was still creepy.

So, I said to her that she spends too much time with me to get freaked out by my behavior and she agreed. I said that I got the tattoo because I was so obsessed with her and it totally brought me peace and I added Layla and I don't even know each other anymore and I don't care anymore.

Then Patty asked me if I even remember my relationship with Layla and though I tried, I really didn't. She told me that she remembers it as a peaceful one that deserves no villainy because it was not even contentious.

I told Patty that I knew it was certainly not a loving action to get the tattoo, and that it was actually real selfish and that I would get something over it in a few years but while I have it, I'm gonna enjoy the peace it gives me, because I already did it.

Somewhere that night, I found a jail letter that Ashley gave me that I was carrying around because I wanted to read it later. It was from Travis in Florida. I told Patty about Travis and Ashley that afternoon and she said, "wow."

In 2006, while employed doing construction with his 19 year old brother Elliot, Travis had fell asleep at the wheel and killed another bystander driving in an opposing lane. According to the letter, these are the details:

After he broke up with Sarah, Travis began to develop his heroin addiction. He still liked to do everything he used to do and one night he was driving around drinking with his brother E, Mike the roofer, and Gin the fun girl in his car and he hit something when he fell asleep, and he killed someone else outside of the car.

Because no one wears seatbelts in Florida, all the passengers were thrown clear except for Gin. She only tumbled up a scare. Elliot was in a coma for three month and now he's brain damage and now he embarrasses his friends.

Travis always walks away without a scratch, but this time Shanel's mom made sure that he sat in jail for what he did.

Patty was entertained by the story and then Will called. I went to him because I could really waste all of Patty's time if she'd just let me.

Now William is not a Jewish name but that's his name. He went to Jewish day school, and he knows Hebrew so every Jew could recognize that he's a Jew even if he looks like a hippie so all of his really good business contacts are Jewish. But he's pretty small time if your comparing it to operations outside of the Jewish ghetto-like sphere of business.

The Jew he owed money to was Richman. William met him in Dallas. He was at one of Nate's party's a few years back and William feels safer working with Jews because they seemed to be reluctant to shoot another Jew. But Richman ended up screwing William when a necessity surfaced and alls fair in love and business.

He started saturating Will's market with competition. But worse yet, he made another small time Baltimore Jew boy look like the weed god while we were in Texas. "Then he tried to cut me out with some boy that was working under me. He gave my order to him and handed me a crappy product so that's what I used for myself and if he comes around I have what to say to him."

I asked William if he could still conduct business at a level of prosperity if this guy thinks he owes him 7 grand and I asked him what his credit could be like with other dealers, but he had no concerns. William said that he didn't want to talk to him or else he's gonna have to set up a meeting and just stick Shuli on the guy if he became aggressive at all.

We walked outside and Clementine was washing William's dad's car outside. Will was on his way out so I hung with the girls. Olivia, Clementine and I smoked a bowl. Olivia was talking about reading "Hell's Angels" and I was telling Olivia that my favorite line that Hunter S. ever wrote was about the only thing Nixon ever had a sense of humor about was paraplegics not being able to reach the lever in a voting booth and Clementine told me about her father's letters from jail.

She keeps them in her glove box so she was able to show them to me. He wrote that "I've done pretty well for myself" but cocaine was the end of him and he wanted Clementine to stop messing with it. He also wrote that he had invented a treadmill to charge up batteries and he wants to sell them and make a business with his daughter in Oregon one day. If that was not profitable he was thinking about trying to manufacture floating massage beds for the pool.

He also explained his deal with his mom before he went to prison was to help care for her and she would pay his legal fees and helps him stay clean. She ended up killing herself in Oregon because her health was failing and life was too painful. That didn't cause him to loose structure in his life because all his success was really just a facade.

Now, Clementine has an oil rigging, horse raising step dad who has private jets and tickets to A&M games. After the chat I walked away and down the block by myself.

I looked around the streets and saw everything I always known. "Well, here I am, holed up in Baltimore. When I left this place, I slandered it so much to myself, but this is the place where I'm from. This is the place where I have an apartment that I enjoy. This is where my family lives."

A few hours later, Clementine and I were watching TV when William walked into the Kent's living room with none other than Ms. Kat Y. I was so excited to see her and she totally remembered me. She was in town with her friend Travis who was taking a nap in the car at the moment.

So, we all drank beers and listened to the Allman Brothers on the outdoor speakers. We were all having a great time till we started talking about San Antonio and Kat Y. accidentally mentioned her boyfriend Rhett's name. That was about the same time that Kat Y. and Clementine started making out with each other. It was definitely Clementine's idea to get naked in the summer evening.

All of us were having a blast and then something struck me. I was taking notes at Sarah's and paying attention to her stories and everyone's big talk, and for some reason I knew that there was a good chance that Rhett was on his way to William's home that moment. I didn't know what to make of it so I texted Shuli to come over.

When Shuli came over, I was feeling real paranoid. I told him that I had to check something out but he should hide and wait for a guy in black F-150 to come out of the car. Since Rhett was definitely out for blood, I instructed Shuli to just kill him quickly. And then I went back to see Will, Clementine, and Kat Y. doing some real rap video shit.

And I turned back and walked through the house back to Shuli.

When I came out, Shuli was robbing the dead man outside of his F-150. And then I told him to hold on and I ran back through the house to get William and I brought him out to meet Rhett and the two naked girls followed.

When we got out to the truck, Shuli was playing with the man's customized black Desert Eagles. William broke out into hysterical laughing and Kat ran to Travis who was sleeping at the wheel. Travis woke up to the loud cackling to see Kat Y. running carefree and naked and he thought that she was taunting him because she stopped hooking up with him.

So in a fit of rage he tried to run Kat Y. over with his car. When he saw that she escaped to the house, he rolled down the window and yelled, "fuck you, bitch!" and he sped away.

So we all looked at each other like we had no idea what to do.

We carried the corpse to the back seat of an old car on Will's property, and we saw that the trunk was filled with used oil bottles.

Then Kat Y. declared, "I don't work for dead guys and I kind of like you guys..."

Shuli grabbed her throat and said, "I could kill you right now, are you afraid to die?"

Kat Y. stood still, accepting death as she looked at Clementine's eyes. Clementine looked back horrified but she understood that Kat Y. just tried to kill Will and probably me, too.

Shuli dropped his hand and asked her where she wanted to go.

Kat Y. wanted to go to Atlanta and Shuli gave her Rhett's keys and then Will took one of the Desert Eagles and offered it to her but luckily for me, she declined. I ended up walking home just trying to forget what had occurred with that heavy souvenir in the back of my jeans.

I saw George that morning and he was telling me about "the Secret" and how that movie had changed his life. I told him that it was very popular in California. When I saw Patty, I asked her if she saw that movie and she said no.

So I like to tell Patty my secrets and distant memories because she is so nice to me. So I said that my mom likes to tell stories about me from when I was six and she tells me that I don't remember them because they were too traumatic and I blocked them out. I like to respond that maybe that's so, or maybe I was too young to remember everything she found amusing when I was a kid.

Patty asked me if I purposely block out memories. And I said "hell, yeah! And I live in denile too. Like when Layla went traveling in South America and I didn't want to believe her when she said that she was really sleeping with some other guy while I was waiting for her to come back."

Patty just blushed and agreed that some things shouldn't be remembered. And I asked Patty to tell me what she has been up to. She told me about different things but she seemed to enjoy her privacy more than she would have enjoyed talking. So she acted more and more entertained when I told her stories. It was so cathartic that I told her that I was using her as my shrink and she asked me not to refer to therapists as "shrinks."

So Patty says to me, “sometimes I try to block out memories, too. Do you think it’s a good thing for you?”

I said, “I don’t know how clear cut an answer to that could be. Some things need to be blocked out because... I do know that being in this town, I recognize fifty percent of the faces. I try my utmost not to show that I see the people. Such habit, kind of like once a teenager starts rebelling that’s just what he does or like me never wanting to hug my parents.”

Patty is adorable as she says, “well we feel connected to these people or at least like we came from these people.”

Then like she just noticed, Patty told me that she is much younger than I am. I responded that I’m only 2 years older than her. She said that she was still figuring out things that sometimes she has really hard days where she just sits at her computer all day wasting time. She recently came up with a fitness goal to get herself out of the slump. Now she’s sleeping much better than she was a couple of months ago.

So then I walked Patty down the hallway of my grandpa’s apartment, down the steps, down to her car. Patty had recently cut her hair much shorter than I had ever seen it in the past. But she always looks good, and we said good night and I went back upstairs in such a good mood and lit a cigarette and turned on Pandora and a Biggie song came up and I sang along to sleep,

...Can I get witcha, can I get witcha
Why you wanna get with me?
Cause you got a big b-u-t, t, see
Can I get witcha, can I get witcha
Can I get witcha, can I get witcha
Why you wanna get with me?
She said if I get witchu
I gotta get witcha whole hood rat crew
Whatcha I think I do? sling skins for a livin
My name aint november, this aint thanksgivin
You aint michael bivins
Mack it up flip it, rub it down
Do me baby, I aint down
My name aint tupac I dont get around
You hittin this nigga, how that sound?
Huh, first of all you got me mixed up with

Somebody ya done slept with, hold up
Thats my neneh cherry shit, I got somethin slicker
Let me just sip up on this liquor
All I wanna do is smoke a little chronic
Slam ya like onyx, and get ya hooked on
This biggie smalls phonics, 102
How to squeeze 22s in them reeboks shoes, huh?
I said walk me upstairs, cause I forgot my phillies
She said I dont care, just dont be actin silly
I knew I had her trapped with my hardcore rap
And it wouldnt take a second fore I had her on her back
Foolin with the bra strap, threw on my silk cd
Cause, I wanna get freaky witchou
Lose control on the skins is all I can picture
Now Im about to hitcha

The End of Texas and the summer.

“How To Be a Normal Human Being in Texas” is the story of random people meeting at an annual folk festival in Texas for no reason. It’s written in four chapters, I think. Enjoy.



***Look out for
“HOW TO MURDER A MAN LIKE A NORMAL
HUMAN BEING”
coming out in the beginning of 2009*
M. SILVER*SAN ANTONIO*2008**

How to Murder a Man like a Normal Human Being.

“Only a narcissist could seek revenge.”
-me, I made that up!

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oh, I got a job. I'm a social worker in Maryland and I work as a foster care case manager. I love my kids. This was actually the first caseload that I ever loved.

These are their names:

Rasheed and Wayne,
Rachel and Rebecca,
Javon,
Makaya, Oniaya, Jeremiah
Brandon, Talaya, Makayla, and one who I always forget, but he's a baby.
Keyante and Josef,
...and the McCauley boys!

Then there was narcissistic depression. I wasn't really sad, but when I was sitting still I would remember many strings of incidents where I felt sad. But I was definitely too stoned to be sad, but I was heady and sulky and in solitude.

I'm self centered like that.

So what snapped me out of my personal misery?

My oldest friend killed himself and wrote me a letter telling me why. It was on Election Day; the day Barak Obama got elected. George was 27 years old and he said that he did it because his older brother tormented him from such an early age that he never got over it.

This is definitely sobering enough for my focus to shift to my friend's sadness. I only vaguely know what the torture was, but I do know who the older brother is. I don't think it's anyone's business to find out the inner mysteries of their dead friend's past but simply put, I wanted to have my revenge, if only because rising to this occasion is a once in a lifetime experience because I'm mostly agnostic.

My rationale is simple. The dead guy was my oldest friend and he had been there with me through everything. I came to him in frustration and I took his advice which was tainted by his experiences. These experiences gave him the wisdom to let go, and that was what he had been projecting on to me all his life.

And I kind of had a feeling that this was going to happen and I promised George that I would avenge his death. I knew that in order to accomplish this, I couldn't tell anyone anything at all.

the Crime

"I just shot someone."

I'm talking to myself,

“I’m a narcissist. I’m not bragging. In fact, I have hurt people because I couldn’t even see their point of view when they explained it to me... but what the fuck, I feel good now because today, just about an hour ago, I murdered Joe W. T.

Joe was executed for his crimes against his baby brother George...

I didn’t particularly care for the hunting part of the job much more than any other activity and I spent my whole car savings executing this plan. It was pretty hard but I only had to use one bullet and it was nothing unnecessarily elaborate. I did it and now everything about this whole nasty affair is totally over.

I know I will never be caught because I’m too clever for that. I didn’t do anything that anyone will find.

Right now, I’m practically giddy though because this is a brand new experience for me, but look, I’m keeping it to myself.

I would be the best criminal ever, I should have been living in the 1930’s and 40’s.”

I thought about something James once told me,

“Sure, I’d do a Murder Inc. thing. Jewish hit men. Like Bugsy Siegel. Like Once Upon a Time in America. Murder Inc. once dressed up like cops and did a major hit on a whole gang. It was so brilliantly executed that it was the original ‘syndicate.

But I was born a gangster. When I was in high school, someone from another school beat up my friend and we came with six people and destroyed his dorm room and he couldn’t do anything about it, because there is power in numbers.”

I called William to rant to while I smoked another joint,

“I feel self righteous and almost as if I’m being possessed by an archetypal spirit that transcends through the ages. Now I know why I was obsessed with true crime stories and Helter Skelter shit when I was growing up... yeah...

Man, I felt like Bruce Willis throwing a Zippo on a stream of gasoline pouring from a hole on an airplane. Now I’m gonna mosey aimlessly in a foreign city for five more hours till I go to the airport.”

William said,

“cool.”

I was walking along a long stretch of road that seemed to be an industrial area. I came to an empty gas station that I stopped by and walked up to the attendant. She was a cute white girl leaning on the counter and I picked up some gum and asked for some Camel 99's.

Suddenly I thought, I had a few joints in my pocket and she looked so bored. I asked her if she could stand by the door and smoke and we could keep a look out for costumers. She said no and then I walked to the door, opened it, and lit one. She walked around the counter and pushed me outside and took my joint.

I was overwhelmed and I had a hard time containing my excitement over my day but the number one rule about killing someone is not to let a single person know. So I just laughed and appeared charming.

Passion and adrenalin and fearlessness. And I was thinking how the papers in the morning will scream about a new serial sniper loose in St. Louis and I will for sure hear about it at work tomorrow back in Baltimore. And then I told Julia, the gas station attendant that I decided that if this gas station got too busy I would go to a Starbucks I saw around the corner to drink a cup of decaf coffee, smoke and bask in the glory of a job well done.

This is what life is about. It's about having meaning that you live for and that makes you receptive to all the fruits of your labor. Life is a garden and we pick fruit straight off the tree and we shouldn't even smile bashfully when someone sees.

Eventually I said that I had a flight to catch. But I told her that she was the cherry on top this successful business trip. So I made out with her and I think that's where I got the flu.

Last night, I saw Erika W; she's living in St. Louis and working at a bar down there now. I got in touch to have a shot with her because George Bush wasn't the president anymore and we discussed that prospect a few years ago.

Now a days, I kind of don't like her because of something really stupid. But she looks like my friend Patty and that goes a real long way with me, except she has black hair.

When Erika and I were visiting however, we were getting along real well. She asked me about my life and even asked me about Layla. I met Erika when she was a bartender in Palo Alto and I was a waiter across the street on California Avenue.

Eventually, I entertained her with the Layla saga that I wrote in my head as she did a Sudoku puzzle one afternoon. Erika always was pessimistic, so she told me horrific things that she imagined that the girl in my stories must think of me.

Erika has even gone as far as saying that it was wrong for me to propose marriage to someone when I don't have financial resources to back the offer. She says it's like I went to a fancy restaurant and ordered the best dish and only brought a five.

Whenever Erika and I are smoking weed and talking about Layla, I describe this fantasy woman. Layla is Persian and she is not stick thin all the time. She's like 5'8 or 9, perfectly attractively proportioned and she has a honey brown complexion with coffee bean eyes. "Her smile is infectious. Tina Fay glasses. Chain-smokes, intense gazes when no one is looking.

"She looks good in black, orange, blue, brown, red, or any color. She's great in skirts, jeans, Converse or cowboy boots, anything or nothing. She is the most beautiful woman I know but I once told her that on a scale of 1-10 she was a 7. But that was because I'm a jackass."

Erika told me that I should have gotten Layla pregnant when I had the chance. And I said that I knew that...

yeah, so, Erika's mom is doing well and still fighting fires outside of Sacramento. Erika remembers my bunk bed in my uncle's house. I told her that I had a friend living with me now in Baltimore and it's real fun.

...you know what, fuck Erika W.

James came to live with me a few days after George died. This had been the plan for the past month. He had just finished becoming an Orthodox rabbi last year, but he lost his passion in the Lord as soon as he got the smicha in the mail.

He all but abandoned the Jewish God when he realized that adhering to the Torah lifestyle was taking a heavy toll on his life. I think the straw that broke the camel's back was when his rabbi told him that he couldn't attend his sister's wedding because she was marrying a gentile.

With that said, James who claims that he could save any marriage but his own because he can't imagine being married for more than 20 years. He quotes his aunt's words about me, I currently go for one-nighters because I'm too much of an observer and a commentator to enjoy people.

He also tells me that I shouldn't let myself be enamored by someone unless I'm willing to nurse her. For himself, he knows that he likes to exploit the women in his relationships so he prefers just to find someone else like that and go for however long it goes.

I said that the reason I spend my time on one-nighters is because I'm still waiting for Layla to come back. James would have walked away at that moment if he realized how obsessed I was with that ex-girlfriend, but he didn't know yet and right after I said it, William came by with Rachel and a bottle of Mac10 to greet James.

Rachel is a nursing student from Annapolis but she loves to come down to Baltimore every weekend to fuck William and to smoke weed with us.

She was in a good mood because she and William were hitting on a waitress and they actually got her number. She's also a Jew, but she's from Miami. She drives a white Escalade and she's fun. So we all got hammered and I went to sleep early.

Well, James came to town because he needed to decompress, I guess. He spent most of his time studying for the MCAT's in my apartment because he was gonna take it again. It's really my grandpa's place, but he only comes around there for an hour in the mornings because he lives at my aunt's house.

James and I get along well because we are both respectful of each other's boundaries. Along with that, I sort of look up to him enough that it changes my behavior. I become a more polite person and I act with patience. It's funny, but that's why I like him around.

So, the first thing we did was take a drive to New Jersey so James could get his tattoos. He wanted them for quite a while and I had a car so we took care of that. We spent a real long time there because James likes to savor his moments and the tattoo shop was very amusing to him.

I took a few photos for his sister while they carved a compass and a scale onto him. And I walked in and out and made the place my home because we were there for a while.

I was hanging with two of the apprentices for a bit. One guy, dressed unseasonably in shorts loved talking about zombies and how getting images of them on his body lets him manifest his natural call to evil and as an added bonus, those tattoos serve to keep evil away from other people by attracting it for himself.

That was too esoteric for me so I asked him if he likes to smoke weed, which he did and he totally chilled out and I tried not to look at the pained and demented faces on his arms and legs.

We walked to his house a block away and drank some soda together. Then he showed me his chin up bar that he bought at Wal-Mart that removably hooks on top of his bedroom door frame. So we started playing with it and doing pull ups and the bar fell on me and I landed on my ass and I injured my right hand. I felt real dizzy and then I figured out to splint my hand with a magazine and a garbage bag and the dude drove me to an emergency room.

When we got inside I asked the guy at the desk how much it would cost to be seen. He said that it's covered with health insurance. I told him that though I look like I had insurance, I was working for a temporary agency and I didn't really have any.

He told me that I would get billed and I found a little perspective and realized that my hand injury wasn't all that serious. So, we left dishearten by American health care again and we got stoned outside the tattoo shop. Then someone gave me a handful of

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painkillers, and the apprentice tried to cheer me up by tattooing a “no-smoking” sign on my hand for free but it was the painkillers that made me forget that I even had a hand.

As the day went on, I met another artist who showed me around his office and a video of him doing different types of piercings. I also watched him nose-pierce a mother and her three high school aged daughters. We were talking about manic depression when a drunk, overweight, and disheveled, middle-aged man entered the shop and asked how much it would cost to put a shamrock stud in his junk. That’s when I left for a cigarette.

The artist followed me outside and left the guy in a room and told him that he’d be back in an hour and we smoked cigarettes till the guy left the parlor. The artist said that he’s from DC and he used to want to be a social worker. He never ended up going to college but he was part of a punk collective that fixed up long abandoned houses for homeless families to live in till some one kicked them out for squatting.

Willing families who supported the cause would live out of the homes until too many people found out about it. Then his buddy would call news crews to broadcast the ordeal to receive public acknowledgement and sympathy for the absurdity of the situation.

As he finished his sentence a young woman with piercings all over her face walked over and took a drag from his cigarette and then stood there.

So I asked him if he gives money to homeless people and he said “if they don’t act entitled to it.”

The girl looked and said, “I like when they have signs saying that they are saving up for booze or something. And where do they get those boxes and permanent markers to draw their sign?” And then she walked inside,

The artist looked at me and asked me what I did. I told him that I’m a foster care worker and he said that he’d probably like my job a lot. He told me, “but I’m an alcoholic.”

“So?” I said, “I’m a stoner. And you may be shocked to learn, but I think there are quite a few social workers who are alcoholics.”

“And I’m a stoner, too, and I have ADD so the only thing I could pay attention to is tattooing. And my dad is republican who has no sympathy for the weak in this country but he would buy a disabled vet a sandwich even if he was a junkie. Oh, and as for my ADD, I started taking Stratera last month; it’s expensive without health insurance, but maybe you should try it, too.”

I said, “maybe I will, when I get health insurance.” And I painfully raised my homemade splint.

Then James called me in to snap some more photos of him receiving his tatoo. He was talking to the artist about weight training and fitness and the artist told us that he’s been

getting into great shape after a DUI that had already cost him more than 10k. Then the room quieted aside from the buzz of the machine in the artist's hand and I left for a cigarette.

After a bit, James came out of the shop beaming proudly. These were his first tattoos and they made him feel invincible. James stands over 6 feet. He dresses in a very GQ looking style and I guess he looks like a hipster straight from Williamsburg in Brooklyn, but he wasn't always from New York. He was born and raised an hour away from Toronto.

So James had to drive us home because I was still fucked up on those painkillers that I never tried before and it made me too sleepy to drive. But I took some caffeine pills by the end of the trip and I got a second wind.

When we got back to Baltimore, we drank two bottles of red wine. James drank most of it, but I drank enough to wake up with a hang over. We spent the night listening to music and telling jokes. Before I went to sleep and James stayed up as long as he did.

So, a week before I killed that man, I was sitting at my Zaide's (grandfather's) apartment in Baltimore with James. I had known him for close to a decade and we've been friends even though for the most part we lived in different countries. I met him in Israel when we were 18. We attended a yeshiva for a year together, spending our days sitting in my room playing guitar, going to classes on select tractates of the Talmud and various theological topics, and walking through the militarize country as tourists.

Some days we tried to join the Israeli army and other days we tried to meet skanky Israeli women dressed as Eurotrash or Chayals. And at least weekly, we went on some sort of adventure, be it riding the bus or going to a movie theater to watch the Coen brother's "Achi, Aifo Atta?" again and hanging out with Israeli strangers who I never tried to understand.

At the time, I had a religious conscience but I always felt stuck at a crossroad of sorts. Since everything was always good versus bad, I felt like I had to choose sides so I decided to pride myself with choosing to be good as frequently as I could.

Eventually I got tired of always needing to make choices. It was during my stay in Jerusalem, I decided that the parameters of the orthodox world of Judaism did not suit my needs for instant gratification but I was still too insecure to recommend to anyone that maybe this lifestyle wasn't for sane people. So when I left, I wished James the very best luck in pursuing his spiritual pursuits.

He ended up staying the course for three more years till he ended up in New York and one day he found himself as a rabbi giving classes for guys who were just like us. The day he realized the magnificence of his journey, was on the first day of podiatry school

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and after ten minutes of an introductory class, he decided that he needed to take a break from everything.

So when we are together, we drink kosher wine. One night an \$11 Carmel Cabernet from maybe the Judean Hills and it made us reminisce about when we went to a wine factory in those Hills. It was part of a yeshiva tiyul. We were meant to gain a respect for the spirituality that could be attained by alcohol and some of us probably did.

I just remember that they gave us each a bottle of wine and it was good. And also we drank with a settler who tagged along on our trip because he had an M-16 and we all know how guns make people feel safe. He told us of the tranquility of his home and life on a farm and how his settlement doesn't need a fence because they all enjoy target practice.

He was real proud to be adopted by his community and a major staple in his diet happened to be beans.

So that's what I remembered and also that James always prefers to drink wine. I was drinking Johnny Walker, black label when we didn't have too much wine because a guest brought the bottle to my parent's shabos table and my parents don't drink. They were gonna save it to put it in their annual shaloch manos (Purim gift basket) for the only person they knew who drank; my parents do not encourage the drinking of alcohol but this rabbi was Hasidic and he knows what he's doing.

Even I think the Hassid's a good man. I would drink with him if we happened to be drinking next to each other but I really wanted that bottle all for myself and anyways, the last time I saw this guy, I was waiting tables and he smacked me on the back of the head when he asked me if I was happier not being Orthodox and I told him "not by much."

So, my Zaide's apartment is a condo in a ten story light-pink-bricked building. It looks quite nice from the outside but it's really a place for older people to live. We got a door man who opens the door and makes all guests sign in. We got two big bedrooms, and a dining room, a living room, a kitchen, two bathrooms (only one is in service,) and the place's so cluttered.

In the dining room, there are thousands of Jewish books all over in stacks on the floor and all over a long glass dining room table. They are all written in Hebrew but some are in English and other languages. There are books from all over pre-World War Two Europe. There are books from Cracow during 1862; a torah in an ark; philosophy and Mussar books, among other miscellaneous religious books.

My Zaide was born in Baltimore in the 20's. He is a rabbi from a long line of rabbis and shoetim and there is a family legend that his favorite sister growing up died in a car accident on a Friday night. He married my grandmother when he was 30 and she 24. She was born in the ghettos of Baltimore but found God when she was 23. She made

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the cash and he observed and followed the laws of the Torah for the both of them and they had three children.

The living room has a huge photo of my Zaide's rabbi hanging over the couch. Rabbi R. is an intense looking man who was as sharp as a knife and I heard he had a nasty little temper. Zaide and Bubby moved a three story house's worth of stuff into a two bedroom condo right before she died.

I moved in because I keep the place somewhat clean and he's an easy landlord. I guess in between my travels, I've live here for 3 out of 5 years. When I'm working, I even try to pay some rent. It's nice and it's home to me. Over the years, I have installed internet and cable and I even use the kitchen now, too.

Zaide comes to the apartment every weekday morning at 11 and he stays till 3. He reads the mail and drinks tea. Sometimes he would read the Yiddish newspaper to James, but I didn't see him much because I was usually at work.

So one day, James and I were in the kitchen cooking grilled cheese sandwiches when I turned to him and remarked,

“ Hamas sanctions missile attacks against Israel and even provides their civilians with missiles.”

James had nothing to remark.

I told James that my grandfather agrees with me that Israel needs to defend themselves and since we are not in the parliament we really don't know what's going on. James doesn't talk about politics or sex, but if you want to talk religion or philosophy he'll give you a run for your money.

So then James and I were chilling and I was real stoned and tired when he told me what a soul is. James was wide awake because he was trying caffeine pills that week, so he calmly turned to me,

“why, it's the spiritual consciousness of absolute truth.”

I said,

“I once knew an educated pretty blond who believed that there was an absolute truth in this deceptively chaotic universe, and I think she held that against me for some reason, but I was really in love with her vagina so I tried not too talk too much when I was down there. What do you call absolute truth?”

Like a rabbi he spoke humbly but clearly,

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“I can only tell you what I’ve been told, read, and seen- I hate saying ‘told’ because saying ‘told’ makes me sound like a sheep, but on a concrete level an example of an absolute would be, many people don’t like gravity, especially when they are falling out of buildings, but it’s there...”

James also uses gravity in other examples so I replied,

“Ok... so our soul knows the truth?”

And then I said something to the effect of,

“our consciousness deceives us... if you see Jiminy Cricket you’re probably going crazy... this girl, Caroline likes to say to me that the human eye sees things so quickly that our brain need to fill the picture in from what it already knows and it does this instantaneously and I told her that the same thing goes for quick thinking and perceiving and this quickness helps us believe in absolutes then we spoke of priori concepts that 5000 years of civilization has formatted our brains with, oh Caroline is so lovely and she’s only 19 and she had a crew cut that sometimes seems to grow into a Mohawk!”

James commented,

“she’s totally jailbait!”

I quickly said,

“No dude, she doesn’t even live with her parents and she has a job.”

So James believes that one should always keep his nose clean and also one should always be completely presentable. He states that a shirt should cover the whole torso and arms but nothing more. In fact, if you are able to raise your hand in class and your cuff covers your hand then your shirt is too big,

“the soul always knows the truth. But revelation is hindered by existence within this physical world and placement in the body.”

It was around the time that Texeria signed with the Yankees for \$180 million when James and I went to a Shabos dinner at my parents house with 2 bottles of wine. My brother Yanki was in from yeshiva and he was excited to meet James because he remembers me telling legends about James; a rabbi who does things his own way... brave enough to go fishing in Alaska by himself and live off sardines and books on the topic of Yaro Dayah.

James told my mom that her dad was real funny and he was always in a good mood and he was always making jokes for people.

“He tells the story like you know what he’s talking about which gets you more involved and makes the process of listening also a fun spectacle. He came in the apartment the other day and he continued a conversation that we started last week, “eh, eh, eh... James, Rabbi R. said of the guy, ‘if you spit on him he thought it was raining.’ It could be compliment saying that nothing could phase him. And then he laughed till I laughed.”

Yanki told us all that one of our cousins said that at Lander’s Rabbinical college, James is sort of a hero. He is what orthodox Jews call a Ba’al Teshuva. Those “who repented” or “returned” are sought out by officers of Kiruv because Ba’al Teshuva’s are noble-minded people who were born without the Torah spoon fed to them. And they could accomplish Mitzvos that some scholarly and righteous could only learn about.

Officers of Kiruv bring people “closer” to their destiny so they could play an important role in Am Yisroel or for that particular community, at least. I don’t have much bad to say about these professionals. But they loved James and they always hoped to recruit him to be an officer himself.

It’s a valid paycheck and it serves a function for the community by instituting a way for people who want to join the community to join. It also is a very important gate for aspiring members to cross. Some people already in the religious lifestyle may find these folks as preachy, but I don’t think there is anything wrong with it because you don’t have to pay attention to what people say.

James likes to say,

“acceptance of the religion provides access into a very special community.”

I like to say,

“what we refer to as ideological exclusiveness could be seen as racism when you’re not included; even if we don’t discriminate in the workplace.”

James thinks that people who mislabel things as racist may be responding to feeling patronized, but they are too emotional to sort out their feelings to properly analyze the situation. I don’t really care what people think is racist and I haven’t been keeping track either, so it’s hard for me to argue against his point.

James is a proud member of a family of intellectuals. In fact, he is very skeptical of anybody who would even decide to be an orthodox Jew. Seven years ago, he decided that he was intellectually convinced that his path to spirituality lay in adherence to the lifestyle of Orthodox Judaism. This decision conflicted with his availability to his family more than he anticipated and he tries to be available much more now that he’s completed that level of his spiritual education.

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So, James was very apparently deconstructing his former life and trying to strategize the next step in his life. I had done this a few times in my life and I really respect the process so I sent him to my friend Patty. At first we would arrive at her parent's house with two bottles of wine on weeknights.

James and I prefer red wine, but I always brought Patty a bottle of white because she is always so nice to me and my friends.

Pretty quickly, James got comfortable and would go on his own. I think they spoke a lot of philosophy but I don't know and I really don't care. I knew time with Patty would be good for James.

On weeks where James was staying with Patty, I tried to drop in daily. Then one day, I tried to kiss Patty and she told me not to stop by for a month. I thought that was a good idea. And then after a bit, she started inviting me again to drink wine with her and James once in a while and that was nice.

Then she left town for a bit and James and I went back to our apartment.

So James got back into the deconstructing thing again. He is a very passionate man who hides that with jokes and his ability to keep a straight face,

"I must begin to understand the concept of suppression of the soul. As a first step I have defined it as merely an opposite. It is the opposite of enlightenment of the body.

My first question is, must I understand the concept of the soul in itself or do I accept it as an absolute?

I will acquiesce that in discussing the suppression of the soul, I am entering a realm of axiomatic thought in regards to the soul and thus it adheres to certain absolutes. Similarly, it would be pointless to discuss the color red in a world of black and white."

I told James that he should start a southern Baptist ministry and I'd play church music for his congregation, and he said,

"'Religious' is a man made word that, more often than not places us into social categories rather spiritual ones, like a membership."

It was then that Mark G. arrived at my apartment. He's a soft speaking, but articulate punk-anarchist who I've known for years. We are pretty tight and whenever we pass through each other's town we like to meet up and smoke some joints and play some music. So James, Mark, and I listened to some music and shot the shit for a drop.

He was in a real good mood and he said that he just came from New York and he saw Patty and she made-out with him. James was amused if only because he had a good

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picture of Patty in his head. I don't know why exactly, but Mark seemed to be looking at me apologetically and I didn't want to acknowledge that so I said, "that's real cool shit, she's a pretty good therapist."

So he took me downtown to around the 800 block of St. Paul's and James stayed back home to study for the MCAT's.

Mark and I met up with a lot of familiar faces Red Emma's to listen to some new music for a bit. All the regulars were there, they just looked a little older and more mature since the last time I saw them, but they were still the same as I remembered they always were. After a little time we walked to an Irish pub with a group of people who Mark was trying to introduce to me.

I couldn't really keep up with all the names but I remembered this good looking girl who seemed to be right up my alley. She was telling me that she records and produces albums for her friends and I told her about the album I was working with songs loosely structured after Beatle songs and I said that I needed a singer. She seemed a little bored by my idea and I regretted telling her, and I should have just tried to fuck her.

So on the way back to the car, Mark was telling me some frustrations he was having with his collective of musicians. For the most part, the members of this ten year old team were pretty cool and very interesting. However there was one guy who has always seemed to be a thorn in everyone's side.

The guy's a pretty boy pop singer song writer who preaches violence as a way to prove how passionate he is for his causes. And to be trendy, he cross-dresses so people will think that he's queer but anyone who really follows him, knows that he only hits on teenage girls after his stupid shows.

For the most part the collective just dealt with this guy's poser tendencies, but as of late he seemed to be getting into more trouble and to be sticking his foot in his mouth much more often than before. The bottom line is that he's giving his collective a bad name. Not only is his violent attitude totally fabricated, but the ideals that these musicians work for are becoming more articulate which are beginning to exclude this fake-fag (he takes off his skirt and turns straight when he's chased down the street with other more permanent queers and he has been quoted saying things like "of course black people can't understand queers.")

So Mark explained that in order to get his messages out, they need to be more diplomatic and less accusatory. For example, rather than passionately saying that the Israeli apartheid in Palestine is comparable to Nazi discrimination, he would focus on positively increasing human rights and bringing up the standard of living for Palestinians.

Now Mark and I are fundamentally on opposite sides of the issue. We are both Jews. But I think Mark identifies with much more groups than just being Jew, because he's poly-amorous and he doesn't define himself by just one relationship. But I really do feel

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like the basis of my identity is that I'm a Jew. I would call myself a Zionist because I like that I could go to Israel and feel at home being openly Jewish.

I like that Zionism came about because the historically, the whole western world (excluding the United States and modern England) has persecuted Jews worse than any other group of people. Up until even the early 1900's (even post World War I,) most European and Russian governments were instituting laws that were aimed at destroying Jews even going as far as prohibiting most occupations for Jews, basically limiting them to peddling used shit and money lending (because Christians were not supposed to be usurers unless they really wanted to be that.) In the name of nationalism, Jews were not allowed to make their share of a living because they were outsiders even though they lived in these lands for at least a thousand and sometimes more than two thousand years.

So Jews dreamt of Israel. They bought as much of the desolate desert land that they could throughout the 1800's. And they only had minimal issues with their Palestinian neighbors aside from some isolated religiously charged pogroms against them until the '30's and '40's when Nazi propaganda was used to create support from Arab citizens with the aid of the very influential Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. It's a small wonder that the largest individual SS company was comprised of Muslim non-Europeans.

Well, this Nazi influence lasts for quite a while. Even in the '60's when Egypt was warring with Israel, they had a handful of Nazi survivors as their advisors and powerful government officials.

So Mark and I debated our same old debate. He focuses on the current situation of disgruntled people living in refugee camps and in Gaza's super-ghetto and their angst. I don't discount any of that, but I really believe that there are two sides to this story. Israel has legitimate concerns about this population because they are always attacked even if they concede major concessions.

I guess we agree that the only way that this situation could get better is if both sides suck it up and make their enemies their friends, like Nelson Mandela had to do in South Africa. But talk is cheap...

James was still awake one day after I got home real late. And we began talking theology. We are both very proud of our talmudically analytical abilities,

"It's rewarding in that it provides structure, purpose, and stability to one's life. As such a person who abandons religion can often seem unstable to everyone who knows about the abandonment, because he has abandoned a provisional form of stability.

To maintain the impression of stability some things must come [into focus] from other areas in one's life. People always migrate towards emotionally rewarding situations. To migrate towards one that is not, implies that there is greater motive

than just the emotion; for perhaps in doing so may leave a person emotionally conflicted.

To make such a decision requires solid conviction and perhaps even emotional attachment.”

I said that

“all I need for stability is a steady income and good people around me.”

He said,

“In religions, emotion and thought work in tandem not independently. Emotion has the ability to shape one’s thoughts allowing him to be available to certain conclusions.

If he is not emotionally available, there will be difficulties in making him intellectually available. In the world of absolutes, emotion and thought function independently. And in fact, thought shapes one’s emotions.

The Rambam refers to it as Simchas Hameedee, meaning our emotions [emotional states] are defined by our thoughts rather than being shaped by our emotions. For conclusions are not found within emotion but rather emotions are found [or placed] within our conclusions.”

And then Patty came over! She didn’t know what we were talking about so she changed the subject and said that there are

“three things a relationship needs to run: passion, intimacy, commitment. Most relationships have a combination of the two.”

Then James says,

“I could save any marriage but my own. And I can’t imagine any marriage lasting more than twenty years.”

So I asked,

“then what’s dogmatic love? Does it exist? Is it like heroin?”

And then “Jane Says” came on Pandora and after that I went to bed.

In the morning I went to work. I like my job because it pays the bills and it’s been awhile since I’ve been in the middle class and nowadays I was even able to have guests over.

One night, Clementine and Olivia came over and told stories from their lives. Clementine was in a near fatal car accident once because of a drunk ex-boyfriend. She

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also once had a best friend named Emily T. who stole all her cool clothing when she was recovering in the hospital.

Olivia told us that she went to Emily T's house to get back the clothing but it was all gone and she ended up smoking a blunt with Emily's step-dad:

Emily T's Step-Dad said,

“no I really shouldn't, I'll just get tired and lazy.”

But Olivia flirted with him until he submitted.

They both agreed that Emily T. is a bitch and he even went with Olivia to look through Emily's empty room. Emily T. stole \$2000 worth of clothing and shoes from Clementine and she bounced one day from her mom's house and she stole all of her step-dad's weed and a pipe... at least Olivia found a cute pair of Locoste shoes in the otherwise empty closet.

Now, Clementine was in Baltimore and she really enjoyed her summer and fall on the east coast as she spread her “love-elution” to the Jews of Pikesville and throughout College Park and through selected boroughs in New York and Boston and North Carolina and Virginia.

She was so successful in fact, that she really wouldn't trade the experience for anything and now she understood the value of sex in many situations. She learnt how to be a player and how to make the best of situations. And now she acts like a feminist and calls herself a lesbian even though she has a boyfriend.

So Clementine and I were smoking cigarettes on my balcony and she said she liked the place and she thought my grandpa was an interesting old man who carried a lot of heritage.

I told her that my grandfather's family moved to Baltimore in the second decade of the twentieth century. His family came from a Lubavitch town but they were undercover in a Misnagdig world. My Zaide's father was a shochet or a ritual slaughterer of ba'haimos dah-kos, which meant that he was the guy in the village who killed the chickens.

The next morning, I overslept and I woke up around 11 to sit by the window and watch the rain. Then my grandfather and he entered the apartment in a grey London Fog raincoat and a black Homberg hat. He wears a tie under his dirty sweater vest and he looks like an old school Yeshivish rabbi. He stands at 5'9 at least and has a grayish yellow beard that falsely portrays him as a smoker.

His voice is real gruff and deep but he always talks in a playfully hushed voice like he's telling a dirty joke but I never heard him tell a dirty joke. He likes to tell me about his old rabbi friends and that day he told me about one rabbi friend of his living in Wickliffe, Ohio. The guy wants to move to Lakewood, New Jersey but he can't abandon his house which is located near Telz Yeshiva to be sold to a gentile.

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Zaide always says,

“a man’s got to do what a man’s got to do, you know what I mean?”
and,

“are you a man or a mouse?”

and,

“...we’re moving slower than molasses.”

He once got a haircut from Perry Como and he also once was a bartender in Atlantic City, but he told my mother that he never served alcohol, only tomato juice and all the costumers loved it.

He had just read an article in the Jewish Times about a colleague of his who was long dead. It wasn’t flattering and it was actually accusing the man of being a pedophile. My grandfather had no comment but he said that when he knew the guy, the guy was principal at the day school he worked at and the guy always kept his door closed. Then he reported that the talk in the old man rabbi world, was that this was slander against a good man and it had to be stopped.

For weeks, select rabbis got on their pulpits and accused the Jewish Times of spreading an anti-orthodox agenda. My grandfather had no comment because when you get old enough, people can’t tell when you are telling a joke or the truth because sometimes you use the same tone of voice for everything and it get real tiring trying to convince people something that they are ignoring.

So that was that.

the Preparation

Will made up the murder plan for me. I paid him one hundred dollars to type the plan as realistic fiction. I gave him all the variables and he researched and wrote a great little for dummy’s paper with step by step directions. So I followed it to the letter and that’s how the mission got done.

Honestly, I don’t even remember what I did because I was smoking joints the whole way through and Will is such a good sociopath that he just wrote the plan that well. I threw away the manuscript as I planned all along because I was afraid it could link me to the crime and then I even forget the whole thing.

So, James picked me up from the airport and didn’t even think to ask about my trip. That’s a good thing because I was feeling pretty sick with a cold or a flu and I just wanted to go to sleep.

We have no secrets, but we don't pry. This however was a secret but I know James would have understood why it was a secret. I pick James up from the bus station weekly and I don't think that I have ever asked what he was doing in the town he was coming from.

At first when I was picking him up, I always tried to be early but after a while I started coming on time or late. But one time, I came so early that I got to watch the whole World Series from start to finish in some hotel lobby. The Devil Rays and the Phillies were playing and it was magnificent and through the first few games, I had no idea who would win.

There was an old, bald man sitting at a chair rooting for Phillies ahead of me on most nights and we would chat from time to time. However, our true colors were revealed when we got into an argument because I like the Devil Rays' young pitchers and he hated them and I blew up his car and then I lied about it to his face because that was when James arrived on the China Town bus from New York.

Sometimes, I used to get Patty to pick James up. She and I came once after we saw a movie that Cloe told us to see together. So I dropped James off at Patty's and I went home and emailed Cloe,

"Hey!

It's was a real good movie. Something to watch a few times, I remember you showing me a part of Euphoria on the computer, but on a big screen it really looked good. The metaphors are so you. I didn't catch them all because I was tired but visually it was pleasant and it also made me laugh. Life is going smoothly for me. I like my job and I finally got it about this profession in Baltimore.

I get paid to be on call for these kids between reasonable hours and to visit them weekly but it's not a 40 hour week. It trips me out to think how the profession evolved here to be suited mostly for the schedules of mothers, and incidentally enough that provides enough flexibility for an artist and even a junkie.

Sometimes, it could be a real long week, but most of the time you show up and do your work. This was how the navy folk told me the work days at navy would be as an enlisted when not deployed and I couldn't believe that there were jobs like that.

Now, I like my kids. I got some normal little boys which is a trip for me. At DSS they only gave me cationic little boys.

So this applies to the point of the film: The more things we find meaningful the smoother shit goes. My job gives me money which is meaningful and my kids entertain me. It's only been a month, but till I'm rich, I'm probably gonna do this or something like it. When I become rich, I'll hopefully be in the middle of schooling for something.

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Either automotive stuff or nursing. I'm laxsidayical about becoming rich because I want a respectable name too.

Well Cloe, Andy sometimes says you guys may be moving back to Baltimore. That would be amazing if that was best for you guys. I will at least be here for a year or two. My plan is to figure out where I should be. I like moving around and I like doing things.

Well, I really miss you. I'm probably gonna speak with Andy sometime but I don't get to talk to you as much because my head hasn't been in one space for quite the little while.

But like I said, shit is good.

Oh and I described you to James by saying, "I said to her 'life's a bitch so you should fuck it while you can' and she told me, 'Fuck bitching and live life'"

Good shabos. And may the gods allow Obama to bring us all affordable health insurance!

When James came back from Patty's, we drank some wine and I smoked some weed. James declared,

“to define one's self, one must become isolated, as one, must first exist independent of any other being. Through this process man defines his circle, and he invites others into it.

In doing so, their meaning to him is found within his circle, though the existence of this circle is independent of them. This process begins when one is most himself; when he is alone with his thoughts.

For this is the only time that it is truly evident that his character is not one of circumstance like a mask that one wears over his true self. These who are truly in with in his circle will not challenge this feeling of self.

For they are with in his circle and help to strengthen it and compliment it. In doing so he could remove himself from isolation and still exist as a whole.”

I admitted to James that I didn't follow that one because I was spacing out but it could very well make sense and he didn't mind and he just went on,

“do I speak words that have been spoken already; am I just saying things that haven't been heard?”

I popped a bubble with my gum.

James had enough,

“you shouldn’t be blowing bubbles in front of people... just spit out your gum.”

I did just that because he found it more annoying than I found it pleasurable.

Then we were listening to Pandora, and the Kings of Leon were on. James walked into the kitchen to cook something and I turned on Jenny Lewis’ “Acid Tongue” and got more stoned and more stupid. When he returned to the living room I was huddled by the heater coughing my brains out. He always feels weird seeing me this way because he says that I look schizophrenic like that.

He once asked me not to look so pathetic in front of him and I said that one day I’ll grant that request but for now he should please ignore me when I’m like that.

I was still a little insulted, but really I was too stoned to care. So I lit a cigarette and he informed me that my chain smoking makes everything he owns smell bad and he thought he even developed the black lung already. I said that I would feel bad about it, but not too bad and I asked him to cut me some more slack and he did.

James said,

“Four factors that may influence a person to break with character: intoxication by substance; a situation; an epiphany; or reevaluation.

The first two are temporary and second two could be permanent. Often epiphany is followed by reevaluation before character is broken.”

And then we texted Patty. Last time she was in town I went to her parent’s house where she was staying and I brought her a bag of apples and she laughed for me and called James to come over.

When James came by, Patty started talking about Layla, saying things like Layla smokes like a chimney. So James asked me why I would want to date a smoker. I said, “not date, marry!” He responded by glancing Patty a look of “I’m not with him.” And Patty said,

“because he also smokes like a chimney!”

This time, when she entered the apartment, she was on the phone talking very a-matter-of-factly,

“no, while Sartre and de Beauvoir propose a need for greater equality to men through modifications in education, laws and culture, they maintain that the most essential transformation within relationships must take place in the consciousness of self and other.

Through the fundamental existential belief that each individual, regardless of sex, should be encouraged to define him or herself and to take on the individual responsibility that comes with freedom, each partner is able to identify with self as subject and the desire toward othering is sublimated by mutual acknowledgement.

In this way, a mutually empowering relationship can be actualized. Moreover, authentic love between a man and woman may be possible after all... I just got to XXXXX's, I'll speak to you later"

I was imagining that she was talking to Layla, but I would never ask if she really was. And then she hung up her phone and said hi.

Patty grew up, up the street from me but I didn't know her till I was 25 because I was a little nutcase growing up, and even some after. She's a pale white girl with a scar from an eye brow ring or something but her green eyes could make anyone melt. She likes psychology and I think she thinks about others and collective consciousness.

I say,

"all my friends are elitist; it's criteria to know me."

After Patty left, I was going through Craigslist personals with James and sent this email to a Red Sox fan:

"Hi,

I turned 27 this past July. I have brown hair, green eyes, glasses and a friendly demeanor. I am 5'11 and I weigh between 155 and 160. I was looking through the Craigslists classifieds this Sunday hoping to meet a like minded woman and if that's you then I guess I'm pretty lucky.

When I think of a BoSox fan, I think of someone who likes to wear green and drink beers while watching the games with their friends. I like green and I kind of like beer and the Red Sox- especially Jocoby Elsberry, Dustin Pedroria, and Diasuke Matzu-- dice-k. I really like Manny Ramirez as a Red Sox (but I also like him as a Dodger.)

My brother likes to joke that just like Manny, I like to excuse myself by saying, "I'm XXXXX, being XXXXX." But I have a tattoo of an Oriole bird on my shoulder.

Six months ago, I moved back from California after two years chasing my Hollywood writing dreams with some friends of mine and my brother. That book isn't finished (we didn't sell anything yet), but I'm finished with that lifestyle. I just decided to just live in Baltimore and be closer to my family. I work as a social worker and I plan to go back to school probably for nursing.

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Naturally, I am the happy-go-lucky type of guy, but recently I just got over the hump of deciding where I should live and who I should be (again.) I was a pothead for a longtime and I still am.

Well good luck fishing.”

Then James did some voices in Russian, Mexican, and Beatles. And then Will and Shuli came over. Shuli walked in loudly,

“It blew my mind to watch that fat guy sit with loads of confidence thinking that I don’t know he’s a fat ass!”

Then James saw the .22 in Shuli’s pants and he asked if he could play with it. Shuli first started saying that it’s only a .22 but Will asked for it, unloaded it, and handed it to James.

Then James spun the empty revolver and started pretending that he was in a cowboy movie. Then I got my Desert Eagle to show off but I never had bullets for it and I played along with him.

When he saw the Desert Eagle he took that and he was fascinated. And then Will pulled out his Desert Eagle that was simpler than mine but bigger. James went for that one, but Will laughed and pulled it out of reach.

So after a second, I turn to Shuli and said,

“many times, obesity starts when kids are too young to understand it and it rolls out of control.”

William,

“I had a big nose growing up but I still had to run around.”

Shuli was just ranting. He was on mushrooms waiting for them to hit and then he challenged me to a game of chess. I said sure I’ll play you and he beat me and I told him that I felt like a sore loser and that I kind of wanted him to leave.

Then Shuli raved about homeless people who hold signs asking for money or food:

“you can’t even find any job!”

James,

“no, it is a job!”

Will and I went in another room to discuss something and then Shuli called up some bitches from Catonsville. James wasn't sure if I wanted him inviting people over. But Shuli reassured him that of course I want him to invite these people over because one of them wants to sleep with me.

James was a little overwhelmed by all the smoke in the apartment so he wandered off to Patty's house while I was smoking a joint with William in the living room.

I had asked William to tell James and I the story about a guy who made up his mind to assassinate someone living in a different city. I looked for James but he was gone and Will smiled as he said the plan as simply as he could. It was so funny that I was laughing for a few minutes. And we drank some scotch and we played some more chess.

The girls came over and we got stoned and the girls tripped on mushrooms and I told everyone a story,

"My father were getting coffee at the Starbucks at the Safeway one Sunday morning. Well, I was interning at the social services in the county and my dad was so proud of that.

We were walking up and down the aisles of the store looking for something to do when we bumped into some lady my parents once met ten years ago. She immediately recognized my father and told her all about her life and my father told her how I was a social worker and I made a stupid joke and I had to add that I was a mandated reporter. My father loves everything I say so he starts asking me what that means. So I said that if I see child abuse occurring then I have to do something.

I get a little antsy around my dad sometimes and that's when I focus on my nicotine dependence and I excused myself for a cigarette. But before I could escape, this lady tells me that she knows someone who was molested and I said then call DSS.

So my dad and the lady eventually met me in the parking lot wearing stern faces. My father told me that the lady had to tell me something. "Blah, blah, blah, responsibility." She looked me in the eye and said that we had to wait in the parking lot for a minute while she brings something to me.

My dad was in good spirits as we waited for the lady to return. He bought me a few packs of cigarettes and another coffee but I told him that I refused to take off my sunglasses because it was Sunday and it was sunny and I liked the tint. I also said that I didn't want to be apart of this waiting for that nutcase lady to return and he told me that I should have spoken up earlier and I didn't.

This lady returned with a 22 year old quasi retarded Lubavitch male. He was about 5'6 and heavysset, dressed in a white buttoned down shirt and dark slacks.

The lady looked at him and said, "tell him." And the boy smiled as he told me how his dad molested him when he was fifteen and the lady was intent that he press charges. Then my mom called my dad and he had to go and he left me there.

The lady ended up calling the cops and she instructed me to meet them around the Clarks Lane apartments and to take the boy with me. I said that the boy had to go with her. But she said "no."

So I told her, "you got to be crazy to think that I'm cool with this."
She continued to insist and argue with me and all the while this bearded Lubavitch boy is grinning like whatever.

She ended up agreeing to meet me with the boy at the address of the molester. I waited for her to leave first so I could smoke a joint. Then my mom called me up to tell me how proud she was that I was saving a retarded boy from his abusive father. So we get there and we stand outside for a drop and I don't say a word.

Eventually we see the man, a big fat man who molested the boy, get in to a car and drive away. Both the lady and the boy felt real disappointed like they were imaging a scene from Cops with them all busting down the door. Their disappointed faces appeared horrifically comedic.

Then the cops arrived and the lady told them the man's license plates and pleaded for an ATB. Luckily the cops decided to hear what was going on first and do their own questioning. It turned out this boy calls the cops every few years and tells them the same story.

Each time he brings in other people to meet the cops. So I just went home and I painted."

The next few days, James was gone. Then one day he came back to the apartment with many bags of clothing that he said they were for me and I gave 500\$ and I got real excited to showoff my new threads and I wrote a letter to my grandmother,

"Hi Savta!

So, I share an office with Amber (27 white, blond, LGSW), Reggie (25ish black dude LSWA- what I got), and Kim (27 LGSW). I worked with Kim when I interned in the county, and it's funny because she knew me with a kippa- but she didn't mention it. My boss is Bunmi, and she seems like a real fun person. She's like 30, black, real professional and funny and genuine. I was real impressed every time I met her- she hired me and the interview was like five minutes. She brought 20 binders to my desk in the morning (my caseload is 12) and said when the workers go to see the kids I'll come and introduce myself.

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Monday was Potluck day. We sat around for three hours (Monday is the mandated "stay in the office day" because we have two meetings.)

So work is great. I know I sound bi-polar but it doesn't matter if I am. I'm really loving life. I can envision working here for awhile. Mostly because it's the most pay I ever got for a day of work. I still have to adjust my grandiose budget for reality, but I could definitely afford the normal stuff and the necessary stuff. It surprises me because even though I knew that it worked theoretically, I was too stressed on the mental block against being confined to a job to see why it was worth it. After I accepted it, I realized how good the situation was.

I'll tell you about my job. It case management like I did before. I wasn't mature enough to appreciate the work like I do now adays. I liked it, but I was always distracted. One of my old supervisors once told me that.

Whatever the case is my job now is to see the kids once a week and work on some agenda usually pertaining to the child's goals or something. This is a great job for me because I'm learning alot about developmental shit. All my kids are in therapeutic or medical placements. Our company is a subcontractor for department of social services. It's great because I'm seeing the whole professional in a better way.

Even though I saw my kids at DSS twice a month or once a month I had this distance between us because to DSS, the kid obviously doesn't want to be there and is not cooperating or making real goals (especially because we are not supposed to be their clinicians, that for their therapist.)

So this job is more hands on (though not like a taxi service and more like an uninvolved referee but less like a judge.) I have mostly little 6 year old boys with ADHD and PTSD. It's such a trip. They aren't retarded but some are nutcases set on random timers.

I like them and they are totally new to me.

This is also perfect for my eventual goal of teaching in ten years because I'll have good insight. And I want to teach in public schools too. Also, I go to five elementary schools and they are staff mostly by women. I think I work best in a female office because I always find something to do. I shared that because it's a funny observation. Well, have a good shabos"

And then... I sat on my living room floor obsessed over Layla trying to telepathically plead to her to come visit me. Everyone told me that I was crazy. Recently James had even said to never say her name again but after a week I said to him that I'll take his opinion for anything else but not on my obsession with Layla.

I told him that I know I'm crazy and that's why he shouldn't tell anyone about this. I dug deep in my storage bins and pulled out photos of Layla and James left because he couldn't see me acting crazy like that because it makes him nervous about my stability.

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I understand him because he says he has much respect for most of my behavior. He doesn't judge me more than he has to and I can't blame him for when he has to.

I wrote a letter to Patty about Layla telling her that I needed to heal and therefore she should tell Layla to see me. Patty responded that she was uncomfortable doing that. So I bought her a pair of Raybans and asked her again.

I thought maybe it would work because she took them to show her family, but she gave them back to me the next day. She told me not to contact her for a week and I felt that was appropriate.

I kind of am in love with Patty also and I learnt many lessons from email stalking and harassing Layla, so I decided that for the most part, I really should try to respect Patty's boundaries. And I probably looked like I learnt my lesson the next time I saw her.

James tried to lighten up my mood once by saying,

“for every child my grandmother birthed, my grandfather bought her a mink coat.”

I ignored his quip and continued pining till he eventually couldn't take it.

James,

“shut up man.”

I say,

“fuck you, you should ignore me.”

Then he decided to defuse the situation by doing a funny, upbeat, Russian accent that I love,

“Ma'am, here's your car, I found it in a tree.”

I replied robustly like a big, curly mustached, Pakistani gas station attendant,

“In the tree! It's your car! And we found it!”

James,

“we were taking a walk.”

I reply,

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“we mind our own business! On a walk! Just like 2 Eastern European bachelor gentleman would!”

James tells me that I fill a unique place in his life and that’s real nice to hear. But we differ in our opinions on such topics as what we think is the point of meditation. He’s a Kabbalist, like fucking rose meditation! And I’m a nothing meditator. And Patty is the woman that we looked up to and she’s the master of all this stuff because she goes to Yoga class, so we brought it to her attention and she came over and gave us a lesson and told us to vote for Obama because we think she’s pretty.

Well, James couldn’t vote because he was Canadian. But I once sold my vote for a joint to Mark G. So I told Ms. Patty that I would indeed make it my business to be there even though Maryland would go to him either way.

Patty then tells James,

“you need to be more in your body,” referring to the way he never dances with her when she wants to dance with him.

Well for now. He was deconstructing and I think he knows that dancing is a good way to be. But he says that not showing your emotions gives off an impression of control.

So we were both transforming. I was trying to stop latching on at Layla’s memory or lean on Patty too much both of which became a sort of life style for me and he was going from Orthodox Jew rabbi to civilian. We both needed quiet reflection time. We both had to come to terms with foundational delusions and we both vowed not tell anyone about the pain or discomfort of it all.

So let’s talk about LA instead because I mentioned it to my cousins when I brought James to meet them. They are a family of old school rabbis and they are actually my favorite people. 10 kids! But now the youngest is 15.

So, there’s one cousin who is 21 year old and almost a rabbi who just got married and was living in a slum in Jerusalem. Growing up together, we always got along. At one point in our lives, I taught him Mishna so he could finish it by the age of 13; I also gave him his first cigarette because his brother gave me mine. My cousins love James because he had a story for everyone.

So I told my cousins that whenever I think about LA, I remember it as being awesome but so expensive. I had to work every opportunity and I lived in a slum,

“Life was so expensive there that all my money went straight to drugs.”

After my cousin’s, I was at a birthday party for Will with his crew at some farm off of Security Blvd, by an area not yet developed into suburban neighborhoods. We were tripping on mushroom to mark the occasion.

There was enough land to go hunting and wandering but it was cold outside. I had a good time. But I threw up a few hours into the trip and I don't think I'll ever be eating mushrooms again.

Sometime in the night, Shuli and his boss, Pinny discussed construction stories of rehabbing homes in the ghetto. Shuli once kicked over a brick and found 25 pills of crack, and Pinny grabbed it and yells,

“we're rich. I've been waiting for a slowpoke nigger to leave this shit behind!”

That was so funny because I would never say that joke or ever experience that feeling and I was still laughing when Mendy dropped me off at home and even when I got to Patty's to meet James and her for wine I was laughing- Pinny, jumping up and yelling like that! I would have paid a dollar to see that.

The Motive

During the last conversation I had with George, I told him that I tattooed Layla's name on my arm. He responded by telling me that he was feeling suicidal again. I told him that if he gets to kill himself then I get to kill his brother. He replied to me that his brother would beat me up because he is built like an ox. I told him that I'm content with walking up to him and shooting him in the head without saying a word.

So George made me promise not to stick around to pee on the corpse after I do what I do but other than that he had no objections to the plan. He was only worried that his brother would get me, too.

After a bit of silence, George asked me not to sacrifice my life for revenge. I said to him that if I thought that I would get in trouble, I would fly to Israel and let them arrest me there and they can't give me up because I'm a Jew, so I'd just sit in jail in Israel and make friends with radical Jews by telling them stories of my heroics and I'd make friends with terrorist Palestinians and I negotiated middle east peace by charming everyone with my irreverence for everything.

When I live in Baltimore, I would see George twice a month. We drove on country roads and called it a burnout drive. He was a hermit and I have nothing to say about him, aside from his memory is worth killing for.

Last spring, I went to Canada for eleven days and I stayed at James's house for Passover. When we were walking to shul one day I told him that George had been sexually abused as a child and he finally just told me, but I didn't want to know the details and he didn't tell me. James said that I'm very loyal but I should never look for trouble.

Canada was where I met James' mom's friend, Claire. She's a nice 35 year old lady (“who said I'm not charming?”) who James said was kosher caterer even though she's

Catholic. She said she got the gig originally because she was born Jewish during the Holocaust at a monastery and that sticks out in the memory of her clientele. She overheard our conversation one day and also agreed that there was nothing to do for George but sit and be there for him.

So, James always looked up to her so he told me some of her stories. One night in Baltimore he said one where Claire got a hechsher (kosher certification) for her restaurant. The place became real successful and she began to run a catering company under the name of her restaurant. So, she agreed to only cater kosher events, none-the-less her first gig was a retirement party and on the menu was lobster. So she had to give the gig away to another caterer.

The other one happened to be a kosher caterer, too, but he didn't mind bending the rules. So he organized a team of waiters and waitresses comprised of gentiles who were entirely unaffiliated with the Jewish community. But being Jewish, the other caterer didn't know how to cook lobster and over a hundred people got food poisoning. The papers reported it and he ended up losing his kosher certification because of this non-kosher event.

I was listening to the story, but I was smoking a blunt and I started hacking for five minutes. James was worried that I was having an epileptic attack but I was able to write on a piece of paper, "don't worry."

Then James couldn't take it anymore,

"stop coughing like a baby!"

So, I stopped coughing,

"that's how you know you're high, you know?"

James,

"No man..."

Me,

"It's ironic that these coughing convulsions feel so... heavenly."

So James got so frustrated that he changed the subject,

"what is marriage for?"

I said,

"what do you want, for children or a green card? But tell me why is marrying someone from a different faith bad?"

James,

“I don’t really have a good reason for that but maybe down the line when someone has a spiritual awakening it could really impede on life. For a couple must at least share the same ‘god’ even if it’s not a religious one... I have a friend who was dating an Italian and whenever that punk got mad at her he would call her a stupid Jew. But that just means that Jews and Italians don’t mix... I don’t know if there really is a logically good argument on one way or another.”

William walked in the door and I said,

“I’m gonna marry a shiksa if I ever get married!”

Then I noticed that William was looking more like a hippie than ever, with his scruffy beard and his hair growing long and totally out of control. Funny enough, he was coming from a date with an Indian chick who won’t bring him home to her parents. He wasn’t really too upset but she told him that her mom would say he looked like a vagabond and he replied that his mom would think she’s an idolater.

To that, I declared that religion is a hereditary disease. And Shuli came into the apartment with a joint and we talked about the movie “Religulous.”

Then Shuli started talking. He’s amusing to hear because he says real violent but thought out things.

“I hate Judaism because it stunted me in relationships with women because I was segregated from women from when I was a little kid and I even grew up in a family of all girls. And that’s hard sometimes; like they used to beat the shit out of me, but yet (in a sing-song tone) when it comes to the upside of having a lot of sisters (ominous sing-song tone) I had none of it.”

James also came from a family of woman and he had to sympathize with the possibility of alienation in that context. He knew that if he was born Orthodox that his relationship with his sisters would have turned out differently.

Then Andy called to tell me that something I wrote him was real disturbing. I didn’t tell him about George, because that email he was referring to was only sent to see if he cares to hear about about revenge shit it and I found out that it freaked him out. So much so that his tone scared me, so I told him that I had guests over and I wrote back to him later:

“I appreciate it.

Zack Grenke is good or at least definitely better than our little guy (Brian "I have a stomachache" Burres, AKA Mr. 5[.30 era] and steady). So Grenke knew that we are better than him because he knows what it means to be rebuilding (and the value of trading Bedard and Tejada). And I guess he likes Kansas.

I must say on a different note, I really don't want to concern or worry you (for some reason that term freaks me out immensely when you tell me that- probably similar to how you feel when you read my shit. I write to vent shit the I can't vent otherwise. I'm confident in my abilities to get over this shit, but I felt like I had to write it and have someone else understand, maybe I shouldn't be writing to you if I'm getting this response (because that is very far from my goal, in fact there are probably other people who I shouldn't write to because I know this shit freaks people out).

Please don't be worried, because I will get through it and writing it helps me do just that. I want to reiterate that this shit is my reality. Though at times I do feel like I need some help or a doctor, I am not really sick or anything and therefore don't like to be thought of that way- I just have a hard time figuring out how to deal with certain shit sometimes and you are my friend.

Ok, with that said. I love Trembley! And Manny Atca wishes he knew what this dude knows, or at least that he had Adam Jones and Nick Markakis. His strategy of not focusing on batting average and only focusing on RBI's has made 2008 our most exciting season since Jeffery Mayer. That is how you win. And our bullpen!

Now don't get on Sherrill's case because though he blows two saves in a row every now and then- I saw him on quite a few occasions. He was amazing accept once this pinch hitter hit a homerun off of him because he was probably watching tapes of Sherrill all day. But it was a good shot and a good pitch and one run-leads are hard to keep and we all know that. Getting on Sherill's case would be like blaming Guthrie for never winning.

I hate that everyone is watching tapes of each other and learning the mechanical weaknesses of each other. To me it's the same as stealing a pitcher's signs; like that story in the World Series during the fifties.

Now what are we gonna do with Huff? We should trade him. It would be so cool if we could give him back to Tampa and borrow some other guys like David Price. And I think even Shields would love Kranitz and we could give him back in two seasons if we can't figure out how to fill that lack of a shortstop. Cintron at least hits over .190 and if you hit a ball straight to him he could throw to first but where have all the Brooks Robinsons gone? It was worth it to get rid of Migi because he was from a different era, and our media can't focus on him now anyway... oh and I think Rafeal Palmerio should go to the Hall of Fame.

So, Chad Bradford. A least we still got one submariner... by the by, ever heard of Chad Billingsly on the Dodgers?"

Adios

Ps. Adam Lowen has talent and the Orioles invested a lot into him. Therefore the Orioles own him and may do what ever they'd like aside from selling him to a Japanese hydroponics plantation as slave labor for to assemble high end sex toys in an old

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greenhouse. So, I think they should make him a permanent two innings middle relief guy. It's not worth it to hope that one day maybe he will be better and we don't want to waste such a draft pick.

But alas, he's wasted, no one could make him into a starter, we gave him three plus years and he has always disappointed us. Therefore, in sound mind I declare Adam Lowen's maximum potential to reach it's ceiling in middle relief and nothing more- let's hope we could give him to the Blue Jays for a shortstop or a catcher."

George W. T. had just killed himself that Saturday morning because he wanted a cigarette just that badly. He kept Shabos till the bloody fucking end. But seriously, who the fuck cares? Because this type of story could happen to anyone, even if they are not Jewish.

There is always someone getting destroyed because some people just happen to be destroyers but we who live in the Orthodox Jewish community like to feel secure and think we have less casualties because we have over protective parents who sometimes can't even comprehend their children enough to understand what the fuck they mean when they are saying that some creepy dude dressed like a homeless rabbi wants to play with their peckle or when someone says, "my older, sexually repressed, eluy of a brother is fucking my sister"... but does this really happen?

I calmed down a second thinking that at least this didn't happen to me, but it could have if things were just a tad different. What if my family was poorer or what if my momma liked drinking?

So what have we learnt? This is fucking life. Life is life. Life is a bitch. Even when things come around, there is so much chaos for anyone to really get it. Full of options and responsibility and pain.

I was bitching to my Zaide about the handful of child molesters from Pikesville who people have told me about over the years for no reason. And he told me that those are bad situations that no one wants to mess with because it would take too long. So James told my grandfather that we can't be cynical when it's time to be zealous and he agreed that a younger man needed to do something about it.

After my Zaide left for the day, James said to me,

"people who don't believe in God are condescending towards people who believe in God because they are closed-minded."

I felt that to mean that I got to be careful not to project my assumption of, "why of course, everyone knows god is dead."

And he continued that,

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“a lot of people look at believers as cavemen. It’s like people who believe in UFO’s and those who don’t; the one’s who don’t have a rational view of the world without it, and say it’s up to the ones who believe to prove it. But the world sure seems like it needs some sort of creator to understand how it came into existence.”

Then I snuck out to Patty’s house. And Patty asked me, “Well, what have we learned today?”

I sang to her that “we still got to change!”

She pecked me on the cheek and I hugged her. At that moment in time she was my best friend and forever when I see her I’ll shall at least treat her that way.

Her green eyes caught me,

“Layla’s totally my best friend,” she said thinking that I was gonna make a move on her.

I wasn’t fazed by that because that’s what happens. I didn’t know why though. Somewhere along the way I totally forgot what Layla looked like.

But then I remembered that Layla told me that she didn’t love me everyday because that’s how often I asked her. She told me that if I could not act differently towards her I would have to go away. And I dramatized it in my head till not even a memory of her smile exists in me. But I never did act differently and I was thinking about Layla; I just happened upon Patty on cue.

Patty smiled at me because she knew at least one way to change my mood,

“do you think about Layla often?”

I said,

“every rainy day because I like rainy days.”

Patty reminded me,

“why do you waste your rainy days on that?”

I thought about that for a second and responded,

“very much indeed...”

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and I kissed her because I had no more sense to make and I happened to have turned off all inhibitions but she pushed me away before I got too far. Patty laughs because she knew that at least I'd enjoy that response.

And then she declared that she knew James was my fashion designer but at least I'm dressing nicely and she added,

“you're there emotionally there but not intellectually... You know, sometimes I get depressed for days, too. I just don't let it make me feel desperate.”

Patty told me that I always have a choice. She told me that Layla's only issue with me is that I violate her by trying over and over to contact her when she told me that I shouldn't.

I said that if Layla sees me again, I'd bet \$300 that she comes round my way. Patty didn't respond and then I said that when I know her again, I'll be on my best behavior. Patty became almost frustrated and she told me to stop living in the past.

And she even tried to distract me by turning on Beyonce' new song and giving me a dance lesson.

Eventually I left and as I walked down the stairs, I said “fuck her” but not to anyone and I did some breath work that Patty taught me when I got home.

James,

“would you cut off your hand if it shot your friend?”

James seemed distraught and then he told me about using intellectual control to the point of devaluing his life by prioritizing orthodox Jewish values over basic needs.

I said,

“that's parallel to me having no value for life because of my “mission” and now I'm sorting it out all the fucking time. But the mission is only there to keep me floating; I'm so afraid to give it up because it's the only thing I haven't let go of yet.”

And I was getting real fucking stoned,

“It's my personal belief that everyone mature or even immature has their own psychosis. My psychosis was Layla. I'm supposed to keep it private because it's a psychosis but then how would my friends and family be as entertained as they can be...

You'd probably think I'd let some of them watch me fuck her if it'd get them off, but that's a false expectation. But hear now, I opened my bin and I took out my

Layla notebook. I remember this one containing the letters that I deemed too crazy to actually send to Layla. Oddly enough the notebook was originally started at the end of another obsession named Lisa. So fuck memories and fuck women, but don't talk too much unless you really mean goodbye."

Then I told James that I thought I was going to be a new person and then I said that George passed away a couple of months ago and he told me,

"come to think of it, my dog, Hershey also died about the same time... you want to sit in silence for them tonight?"

I met Hershey twice and he was a lovely dog and I think that he was once James' best friend.

And then I lived happily ever after.

Epilogue:

First, my dear reader, this was all fiction. For example, if this were non-fiction in this time span, I'd be twice as crazy and probably have half as much sex. The reason being is that writers and artists have to hole themselves up in their rooms in order to create the things they are trying to create. This could make for some real awkward people doing real awkward behaviors.

So, I say all this as a note of caution. All the crazy behavior written about in this book comes with it's own consequence. So if you happen to think that acting crazy will bring you more money or more sex, you may be making a false correlation. If you want to make money you need a job, and maybe a college degree, but most of all when you are at work, you can't complain or do whatever you want. You have to do the tasks that you are supposed to do and be gracious about it.

And if you're a guy who wants more sex, what you got to do is stop looking for sex; save your money; start working out; learn new hobbies; and meet people for altruistic reasons. Most of all, you got to be receptive to it.

Like the sex-addicted main character in "Choke" (written by the guy who wrote "Fight Club") realized. The last scene in the movie shows this girl using a bathroom on an airplane without locking the door. When the guy walked in she told him, "don't lock the door and that's what it's all about. If you want it, just show your wares."

And from my childhood, I remember this giant, fat, Hispanic girl named Maria. When I first noticed her, my mother said that this girl has schizophrenia. Well, I heard her talking to some big, black dude who was buying her ice cream at a 7-11. She was telling him that she already had two boyfriends and who buy her things and fuck her good.

That's my two cents, for whatever it's worth.

So now, Layla:

12/31/08

Dear Princess Layla,

It's been such a long time since I spoke to you- 11 months. Well, I'm not mailing this to you because it's not psycho enough anymore, but I'm gonna try to publish it instead so if you come across this at a library, you should take this book out. I don't care if you read it, but you should hold it, because this book is about you.

Well, I declare my obsession over you to be over. I am a new person now. I don't know how to explain it. I always knew the day would come but I was never able to rush it because I had to play out all that energy and chaos and bullshit of my previous perspective.

So we all know that life is so long and we all just want to get through it and survive and be affluent enough to be relaxed during each day. Well, I never want to remember the pains of yesterday because if I learnt anything in the past, it is that even if you forget the pain you could retain the lesson... but you got to be receptive.

Life is humbling. I'm still naively cocky and narcissistic but that's who I am. I decided that I need a code to live my life by. This code will make sure that I never fall too far off the path. Some of the rules I've never transgressed and some probably only apply to me, but when I'm depleted of energy at the end of the day and I feel good, it seems that these things were addressed.

Now these rules are always subject to rationality, but I think they are good enough to say that they have deeper meanings and logically transcendental practical applications.

Also, it is important to note that this is a life style code not a ritualistic practice so I don't go to hell if I don't follow my code, I'd just be missing out on something that is so intangible that it has no relevance. Also, the goal is to have so many overlapping vague rules that it covers everything in life.

I hope you enjoy this.

613

Ok, Prncss. Layla, I never finished the list because I never come through when I say things to you, but here's my shot.

THE ALWAYS DO's:

The income requirement:

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1. Due to the human condition of compulsive consuming, I must have as much income as I am able to have while balancing the ideals of my life.

The health code:

Push ups and sit up should be done daily and eat healthy food.

The hygiene code:

- 2.
3. Work
4. Responsibility.
5. family
6. friends.-Only treat people like royalty in private.

The code for showing affection:

6. Hug friends who arrive in town and hug them when they leave.
7. Smile at will but remember to check the scene first.
8. Only kiss females at appropriate moments.
9. Only show sexual affection to available friends.
10. Always use the best judgment when with strangers.

THE NEVER's:

1. Never kill a person unless said person is set on unjustly killing and can not be stopped otherwise.
2. Never destroy other people's property.
3. Never steal from people.

The cigarette laws:

5. Don't smoke cigarettes in front of more than one person at a time.
6. No cigarettes after I turn 30.
7. No smoking cigarettes between the hours of 9-5 on a week day.
8. No chewing gum in front of other people.*tacked on in 'cigarettes' because chewing gum makes me smoke less cigarettes.

The art of the conversation:

9. Never speak about regrets.
10. Never talk personal things with people who are not directly subject to the personal thing; unless speaking to someone in the capacity of an advisor or therapist.
11. Never bring up embarrassing things up to a person; unless in private and necessary.
12. Don't insult anything or anyone casually.
13. No talking or writing about sex.
14. No casual phone talking.
15. No personal emails.
16. No profanity.
17. Never chat online.
18. Never show excitement when knowing the answer.
19. Never wine like a baby to anyone.

The relationship:

- 20. No disrespecting.
- 21. No fighting.
- 22. No marks.
- 23. No abandoning a person to be helpless.
- 24. Never cheat on someone first. And never flaunt it or even admit it unless caught.
- 25. Don't be in a situation or mental state that cheating sounds appealing.
- 26. Never get sexually involved with someone who wouldn't have the courtesy of hiding her other lovers in a respectful and responsible way.
- 27. Never receive STD's, but if you do, never purposefully give someone an STD. And if you did, only tell them if they ask or you know them well enough to deal with their reaction.

The etiquette for a break up with someone you will never see again:

- 28. No crying, no matter what.
- 29. No begging.
- 30. No prolonging the conversation.

The etiquette for a sexual break up with a friend: If you have found yourself in this situation, you or your partner probably does something obsessive or abusive. Having this discussion may be symptomatic of deeper issues.

When living with someone else:

- 31. Never finish off your housemate's food, and if you share food, don't finish a food specially selected for your housemate.
- 31. Be excited when coming home.

Well, that's that.

Now for a bonus, a play adaptation for your delight:

Camus' A Happy Death. 2008. Mordi Frager



Act I: A Happy Death.

Scene 1:

The set is elevated and divided in half. For ACT 1, half of the set will be a bedroom setup as various bedrooms and the other half is a café. The front of the stage is a rounded strip of stage that will serve a street for characters to walk on and there are rounded stairs leading to the main set. Creative lighting will control focus.

ZAGURUS's BEDROOM always contains a chair, a bed, books, a Luger (Nazi handgun), a suicide note, binoculars, something that is apparently but subtly Nazi memorabilia, pens, and a clothing rack with pants hanging up neatly.

The COVER BAND plays a cover song offstage (the director should choose what song.)

ZAGURUS looks like an older professor; he wears a beard and the same type of clothing Sigmund Freud would wear if he were confined to a wheelchair because his legs are amputated. And he always sits by the window all day. NARRATOR is a young French woman dressed in black who walks on and off the stage throughout the play at a casual pace.

The NARRATOR displays a sign on poster board, "The Algiers, circe the 40's."

NARRATOR: Sometimes, narrators are lame and get in the way of the story, but I plan to be as un-invasive as possible and Camus needs a narrator if it's to be done as a play and I will try to look as pretty as possible... *(Picking up the Luger and pointing it at the sleeping man)*

[cont.] So, this is Zagurus. He's taking a nap right now because he has been tired in the mornings lately. Right now, it's 10 in the A.M. and Patrice Mersault is walking very briskly to this apartment.

(Pointing at the sleeping man's head and says softly)

[cont.] POW!

(Picking up a note and reads it with mock sympathy to the audience)

[cont.] "I am doing away with only half a man. It need cause no problem- there is more than enough here to pay off those who have taken care of me till now. Please use what is left over to improve conditions for men on death row. But I know it's asking a lot. {Signed} Roland Zagurus."

PATRICE MERSAULT is walking up the street and into the bedroom. He is coughing violently and then he composes himself. The NARRATOR puts the gun and the note down and walks off stage.

PATRICE enters the room and he picks up the Luger and points it at the man's head as the curtain goes down on the sets. A gunshot is heard.

COVER BAND begins playing the Proclaimer's "It's Over and Done With" at the side of the street.

As the song plays, the cast introduce themselves by wearing signs with their names and characters. Every character has an instrument voice and riff for themselves. They enter in a creative, but low key choreographed entrance.

The NARRATOR appears first. She tap dances for twenty seconds.

Then PATRICE MERSAULT enters shyly, as if he doesn't want to be there.

Then MARTHE (a very attractive teenage looking girl) enters pushing ROLAND ZAGURUS in a wheelchair.

EMMANUEL (a rugged, sincere, soldier-type- maybe 20 years old), CELESTE (a fifty year old French cafe owner, who likes to talk a lot), and RENE' (a waiter who has Tuberculosis and who works really hard) enter at the same time.

THE MAN IN THE SUIT (middle aged, posh looking dude) walks in and gives RENE a cigarette and they smoke.

PATRICE's MOTHER (the ghost) enters quietly.

ROSE (attractive, tall, darkish skinned, long black hair), CLAIRE (teenage looking), CATHERIENE (tall, with short hair) gracefully walk in together.

ROSE and CLAIRE mosey to RENE and CATHERIENE walks up to PATRICE.

PATRICE gives her a cigarette and they both smoke.

ELAINE (just like Elaine in Seinfeld) enters doing an horrific dance and NOEL (middle aged balding sculptor) enter in a very reserved way.

At the same time, CARDONA (30 year old, almost handsome deaf mute) runs in and he is being chased by his SISTER (30 year old attractive looking lady chasing him with a broom).

CARDONA hides behind PATRICE and bums a cigarette from him. CARDONA's SISTER moseys to the MAN IN THE SUIT and he hands her an orange. The the MAN IN THE SUIT walks to the side, puts his cigarette at the side of his mouth, and he proceeds bend down a bit and to clap with the rhythm of the song.

LUCIENNE (30 year old attractive brunet, always in white gowns) enters and ZAGURUS gets out of his chair, takes off his beard, puts on glasses, and switches his sign to DR. BERNARD (the same actor should play ZAGURUS and DR. BERNARD and they should play the characters as Peter Sellers would.)

When the music stops the COVER BAND introduces themselves as the GUITAR PLAYER, KEYBOARD PLAYER, MALE-SINGER, FEMALE-SINGER, and the rest of the band.

Everyone who doesn't have a cigarette either bums one or takes one from their pocket and then the two cats come onto the stage. GULA the cat and CALI the cat.

Then everyone moseys offstage as the curtain goes down.

Scene 2:

The café side of the set is lit. PATRICE and EMMANUEL are walking on the street.

EMMANUEL is singing the end of a song.

The NARRATOR follows them on the street. A sign is displayed, "before Patrice shot Zagurus."

EMMANUEL: It comes up in your chest. It comes when you feel good. When you're in the water.

NARRATOR: It's true, Emmanuel sings whenever he swims.

PATRICE and EMMANUEL sit at one of two tables at Celeste's Café. The NARRATOR sits down at the other table.

CELESTE walks up to PATRICE and EMMANUEL.

CELESTE: Welcome.

EMMUANUEL: Hi.

CELESTE: *(as if he was answering a question)* Well, pretty good for an old man... but you know that old men are all the same, Shitheads. They tell you a real man's got to be fifty. But that's because they are fifty. I knew this one guy who could just have his good times with his son; they used to go out together. On the town. They'd go to the casinos, and this guy would say why should I hang out with a lot of old men! Every day they tell me they've taken some medicine and there is always something wrong with their liver. I have a better time with my son, some times he picks up a whore and I look the other way. I take a streetcar, so long, thanks, fine with me.

EMMANUEL laughs.

CELESTE: Of course the man was no authority, but I liked him alright. Anyways, it was better than this other guy I knew. When he made his money he would talk with his head way up making gestures all the time. Now that he lost it all, he isn't that proud of himself!

PATRICE: Serves him right. If you're a bastard all your life-

CELESTE: What, the guy took it while he had it, and he was right... almost a million francs he had... now if it'd be me!

EMMANUEL: What would you do?

CELESTE: *(quickly)* I'd buy myself a cabin on the beach and I'd put some glue in my navel and stick a flag in there and wait to see which way the wind blows.

RENE', a skinny, sickly looking waiter places food in front of PATRICE and EMMANUEL. PATRICE begins eating his food.

EMMANUEL: Hey, Celeste, do you know that I was a soldier?

PATRICE: *(takes a bite and with his mouth full)* Cut the bullshit.

CELESTE is captivated by what EMMANUEL is saying.

EMMANUEL: *(animated)* The major said, "Charge!" and we ran down into this gully except with trees in it. He told us to charge but there was no one there so we kept on marching, just kept on walking. And then all a sudden the machine guns are firing onto us and we all fall onto each other. There was so much dead and wounded that you could row a boat across the blood in that gully. Some of them were screaming *(intensely)* "Mama!" Christ, it was awful.

RENE' wipes his hands with a small towel, places the towel in his back pocket, takes two hard boiled eggs out of his pocket and he sits down in front of the NARRATOR and he quietly and slowly eats his eggs.

PATRICE stands up to stretch and he is looking at RENE' as if he were freakishly deformed.

NARRATOR begins looking at RENE' to see why PATRICE is staring at him and CELESTE walks away.

PATRICE: *(still staring at RENE')* Poor kid's really had it.

NARRATOR: Rene was usually quiet and serious, and though he was not peculiarly thin, his eyes glittered. (Looking sympathetically at RENE') Why just now, another customer came to you explaining that with time and patience, TB could be cured, and you just sit here, nodding, eating your egg.

RENE' almost grunts an affirmative.

NARRATOR: Did you ever hear of Jean Perez? When he knew it, he worked for the gas company. Now he's dead, but when that one lung went bad he left the hospital and went home. Oh, poor wife, she was his horse. You know his sickness made him like that; he was always on top of her—

RENE': *(With his mouth full)* how so?

NARRATOR: You know how so- *(smirking pause)* she didn't want it, but he had to. So two, three times a day, it ends up killing a man.

RENE': Yes, the thing comes on fast but it takes a long time to get rid of it.

The band plays a short song.

NARRATOR, RENE', EMMANUEL, and PATRICE look off in different directions and they all pull out cigarettes.

CELESTE comes back on stage and pulls out a cigarette and they all smoke quietly as the curtain goes down.

Scene 3:

The lights are on the bedroom side of the set. The bedroom is changed to PATRICE's bedroom/kitchen at his apartment. PATRICE is sleeping in his bed. There is a table with two chairs beside the bed.

NARRATOR: This used to be Patrice's mother's room. They had this little three bedroom apartment for a long time. Now that he's alone he rents two rooms to a man he knows, a barrel maker and his sister, but he kept the best room for himself.

PATRICE's MOTHER (a ghost) is sitting at the table. PATRICE wakes up, lights a cigarette, gets out of bed, and prepares a plate of food.

NARRATOR: (*looking at PATRICE's MOTHER who doesn't notice her*) she was 56 when she died. At 40, she was stricken by the terrible disease and she had to give up her clothing and cosmetics, and she was reduced to hospital gowns. Her face deformed by the terrible swellings and her swollen legs and her weakness kept her just about immobilized. She would grope frantically around the colorless apartment, which she couldn't care for anymore because she went half blind. The diabetes she neglected had been further aggravated by her careless lifestyle. So, Patrice had to abandon his studies and take a job. For ten years that woman endured that life and the suffering had lasted so long that the people around her grew accustomed to it to the point that everyone forgot that she was deathly ill and that she was going to die-

PATRICE stops eating.

MOTHER: What? You're not hungry anymore?

PATRICE: (*opening a book*) no.

MOTHER: Sit closer to the lamp or you'll ruin your eyes.

PATRICE: (*looking at the lamp and slowly*) this poverty that we share...

MOTHER: Yes?

PATRICE: There is certain sweetness to it. I have a secret joy in this silence we share and the simplicity of it all.

NARRATOR: Patrice was her only companion for her last ten years, but when she died their whole neighbor mourned her as if they cared about her.

PATRICE: Yep, it was almost offensive.

Lights in the bedroom go down and the focus is shifted to the café.

Scene 4:

PATRICE and MARTHE are walking. They are followed quietly by the NARRATOR.

As the NARRATOR describes PATRICE's thoughts, PATRICE mimes something low key, and vaguely appropriate.

NARRATOR: Patrice is walking proudly and he pauses to look at the lights and the shadows flickering across Marthe's face because everything is wonderfully simple- he is always grateful to Marthe for displaying in public, the beauty she offered him day after day like some delicate intoxication.

A MAN IN A SUIT walks by MARTHE and nods to her like he knows her. He enters the café and PATRICE and MARTHE follow.

PATRICE: Who's that?

MARTHE: Who?

PATRICE: You know, that man!

The MAN sits at one table and PATRICE and MARTHE at another.

MARTHE: Oh.

PATRICE: Well?

MARTHE: Do you have to know?

The NARRATOR walks over to the MAN. PATRICE turns to look at him.

NARRATOR: *(to the MAN)* Patrice is thinking that you are thinking, "Sure, show off all you want."

MAN: Now why would I be thinking that?

NARRATOR: Because you can, he's thinking that you are imagining Marthe's every gesture, even the way she puts her arm over her eyes—

MAN: *(small smile)* Well, yeah, I am thinking that.

PATRICE kisses MARTHE quickly.

NARRATOR: *(looking At PATRICE)* He just fell in love.

The lights go down.

Scene 5:

Lights focus on the bedroom. PATRICE is sleeping in his bed.

The NARRATOR walks in and she sits at the end of PATRICE's bed.

MARTHE is walking on the street and she looks annoyed.

NARRATOR: Marthe's walking over to Patrice's now. She left work early. She's a secretary. She doesn't love Mersault, but she was attached to him in so far that he intrigued her and he flattered her. Since the day Emmanuel, whom Mersault had introduced her to, told her that "Patrice is a good guy, you know, he has guts. But he doesn't talk so people don't realize what he wants" she regarded him with curiosity and since his lovemaking satisfied her, she asked nothing more, adapting herself as best as she could to the silent lover who made no demands and took her when she wanted to come. She was only a little uneasy about him because he was someone whose weak points were not discovered- but last night, as they entered the cafe, she realized that she could hurt Mersault. She didn't say anything about it all evening and she slept in his bed, too. But he didn't even touch her. So from now on, she would use it to her advantage. She already told him that she had other lovers, but now she seemed to have found the necessary proof.

*MARTHE enters and the NARRATOR sits quietly at the table.
MARTHE sits at the end of PATRICE's bed and looks at him.
PATRICE suddenly wakes up.*

PATRICE: I don't like being watched when I sleep.

MARTHE: Oh darling, another one of your moods.

PATRICE: Don't call me darling, please. I've already asked you not to.

MARTHE: You remind me of someone that way, I wonder who he is... you're mad at me, aren't you? It started yesterday, that's why I came. Aren't you gonna talk to me? You know that man yesterday? Well, I was just kidding. He was never my lover.

PATRICE: *(almost totally reassured)* No?

MARTHE: Well... not really.

PATRICE: How many lovers have you had?

MARTHE: *(shyly)* don't be like that... maybe ten.

PATRICE: Do I know them?

MARTHE: Some of them are around here.

PATRICE: Now listen to me, (*lighting a cigarette*) try to understand what I'm saying. Promise to tell me their names. And I want you to point out the others, the one's I don't know, if we pass them in the street.

MARTHE: Oh, no.

PATRICE: I'm asking you to tell me because I know myself. If I don't find out exactly who they are, each man I meet will make the same thing happen and I'll wonder- I'll imagine. That's what it is, I imagine too much. I don't know if you understand.

NARRATOR: (*standing up*) She understands and she's gonna tell him. And he's even gonna make a joke next time they fool around regarding Rene the waiter's lovemaking skills.

PATRICE and MARTHE look at each other calmly.

NARRATOR: Marthe will say, "don't get any ideas, we only did it once and besides she didn't even take off her shoes."

PATRICE: (*at the NARRATOR*) shut up!

MARTHE: (*to PATRICE*) oh darling!

PATRICE: (*calmly to MARTHE*) who's Zagurus? He's the only one I don't know.

MARTHE: Oh, him! Ok him (*laughs*) I still see him. He was the first one, you have to understand that. I was just a kid. He was older. Now he has both legs amputated and he lives alone, so I still go to visit him sometimes. He still reads all the time- in those days he was a student... and he's always making jokes. Besides, he says the same things you do, he says to me, "Come here image".

She kisses PATRICE. MALE-SINGER and GUITAR PLAYER walk on stage and play a song.

Scene 6:

PATRICE and MARTHE are walking. The NARRATOR follows behind.

MARTHE: I've told him all about you. I told him that my darling is very handsome and very strong. He wants to meet you. This is what he said, "the sight of a good body helps me breathe."

PATRICE: He sounds crazy.

MARTHE: Oh, not as crazy as some of your friends.

PATRICE: What friends?

MARTHE: Those little grinds.

PATRICE makes an almost disgusted face.

NARRATOR: The little grinds were Rose and Claire, students in Tunis whom Mersault used to know and with whom he maintained the only correspondence in his life.

MARTHE: Listen darling, you don't happen to be in love with those little grinds by any chance, do you?

PATRICE: No.

MARTHE: Do you love me?

PATRICE: *(laughs)* now that's a serious question.

MARTHE: Answer me.

PATRICE: People don't love each other at our age, Marthe- they please each other- that's all. Later on, when you're old and impotent, you could love somebody. But at your age you just think of love.

MARTHE looks sad and PATRICE kisses her and they enter ZAGURUS's apartment.

After they enter, the NARRATOR takes PATRICE's hand and walks him over to ZAGURUS. PATRICE and ZAGURUS play out the narration.

NARRATOR: Now Roland Zagurus, this is Patrice Mersault... Patrice, you look annoyed, and you're staring at the man's amputated legs. You have to relax. Zagurus is going to avoid anything that might be embarrassing about two lovers of the same woman, meeting in her presence. He's gonna make you something of an accomplice by calling Marthe a "good girl" and laughing afterwards. And Patrice, I know you don't care to be around half

portions, but why don't you listen to his boyish laugh? And how could you be jealous of a man who has no legs? When you think about them two, what? Is it a big worm on top of your Marthe? (*To Zagurus*) No offense. (*To PATRICE*) also, Zagurus thinks before he talks!

MARTHE lights a cigarette and exits the apartment. The NARRATOR and PATRICE sit down.

ZAGURUS: You look tired.

PATRICE: Yes, I don't know what to do. (*Walks to the window heavily.*) I feel like getting married, or committing suicide, or subscribing to L'Illustration... something desperate, you know.

ZAGURUS: You're a poor man, Mersault. That explains half your disgust the other half is from your submission to poverty... you know a man always judges himself by the balance of the needs of his body and the needs of his mind. You're judging yourself now and you don't like the sentence. You live badly, like a barbarian. You like driving a car, don't you?

PATRICE: Yes.

ZAGURUS: Women?

PATRICE: When they are beautiful.

ZAGURUS: That's what I meant, all those things... I don't like talking seriously because then there is only one thing to talk about, the justification you can give for your life. And I don't see how I could justify the amputation of my legs.

PATRICE: Neither do I.

ZAGURUS: (*laughs*) Thanks. You don't leave me any illusions. But you're right to be hard; still there is something that I would like to say to you. I have someone to help me, set me on the toilet and afterwards to wash and dry me. Worse, I pay someone to do it. But still, I will never cut short this life that I believe in so much... I accept even worse, blind, dumb, anything, as long as I feel in my belly that dark fire burning in me that tells me I'm alive. The only thing that occurs to me is to thank life for letting me burn on... and you Mersault, a body like yours, your only duty is to live and be happy.

PATRICE: Don't make me laugh. With eight hours a day at the office. Oh, it would be different if I was free... a few years ago I had everything before me- people talked to me about my life. Yes, I even did all the things you have to do to have such things. But even back then it was alien to me. To devote myself to impersonality- that's what concerns me. Not to be happy, not to be against! I can't explain it but you know what I mean.

ZAGURUS: Yes.

PATRICE: Even now, if I had the time... I would only have to let myself go. Everything else that would happen to me would be just like rain on a stone. The stones cool off and that's fine. Another day the sun bakes it. I've always thought that's exactly what happiness would be.

ZAGURUS: (*intensely*) a body always has the ideal it deserves. That idea of a stone, if I may say so, you'd have to have the body of a demi-god to sustain it.

PATRICE: Right, but don't exaggerate. I've done a lot of sports, that's all. And I'm capable of going quite far in pleasure.

ZAGURUS: Yes, so much better for you. To know your body's limits, that's true psychology. But it doesn't matter anyway; we don't have to be ourselves. We only have time to be happy... You can't just save a little here and a little there. It's a record like anything else.

PATRICE: I'm sorry Zagurus, but it's been a long time since I've talked about certain things. I don't know anymore- or I'm not sure. When I look at my life and it's secret colors, I feel like bursting into tears. Like the sky, is rain and sun and both and noon and midnight. You know, I think of the lips I kissed, the wretched child I was, the madness of life and the ambition that sometimes carries me away. I'm all those things at once. I'm sure there are times when you wouldn't recognize me. Extreme in misery, excessive in happiness. I can't say it.

ZAGURUS: You're playing several games at the same time?

PATRICE: Yes, but not as an amateur. Each time I think of that flood of pain and joy in myself, I know, I can't tell you how deeply I know that the games I'm playing are the most serious and exciting ones to play.

ZAGURUS: Then you have something to do?

PATRICE: I have my living to earn. My work, those eight hours a day. Other people can stand, my work keeps me from doing it... and yet, if I was strong enough and patient enough... I know what kind of life I'd have. I wouldn't make an experiment out of my life. Yes, I know what passion would fill me with all of it's power. Before, I was too young, I got in the way. Now I know that acting and loving and suffering is living, of course, but it's living only as long as you can accept your fate, like the unique reflection of a rainbow of joys and passions which is the same for everyone.

ZAGURUS: Yes, but you can't live that way and work...

PATRICE: No, because I'm constantly in revolt. That's what's wrong.

ZAGURUS: (*pauses*) anyone who loves you is in for a lot of pain.

PATRICE stood up.

PATRICE: Other people's feelings have no hold over me.

ZAGURUS: True. I was just remarking on the fact. You'll be alone someday, that's all. Now sit down and listen to me. What you said was interesting. One thing especially, because it confirms everything my own experience as a human being has taught me. I like you very much. Because you have a body, more ever. Because of your body, I feel like I could talk to you frankly.

PATRICE sits back down. The NARRATOR looks at ZAGURUS as if she is interested what he will say.

ZAGURUS: What I'm sure of is that you can't be happy without money. That's all. I don't like superficiality and I don't like romanticism. I like to be conscience. And what I noticed is that there is a kind of spiritual snobbism in certain superior beings who think that money isn't necessary for happiness. Which is stupid, which is false, and to a certain degree, it is cowardly.

You see, Mersault, for a man who is well born, being happy is never complicated. It's enough to take up the general fate, only not with the will for reunification like many fake great men, but for the will of happiness. Only it takes time to be happy. A lot of time. Happiness too, is a long practice. And in almost every case, we use up our lives making money, when we should be using money to gain time. That's the only problem that ever concerned me, very specific, very clear...

Oh, I know perfectly well that most rich men don't have a sense of happiness. But that's not the question. To have money is only to have time. That's my point, time could be bought. Everything could be bought. To be or to become rich is to have time to be happy if you deserve it...

At 25, I already realized that any man with the sense, the will, and the craving for happiness was entitled to be rich. The craving for happiness seems to me the noblest thing in a man's heart. In my eyes, it justifies everything, because a pure heart is good enough... that was when I started making my fortune. I didn't let the law get in my way. I wouldn't have let anything get in my way and in a few years, I had done it, you know what I mean, two million. The world was all before me. And with the world, the life I dreamed in solitude and anticipation... the life I would have had, without the accident that took my legs, almost immediately afterwards. I haven't been able to stop living. And now here I am. You have to understand that I didn't want to lead a lesser life. For twenty years, my money has been here beside me. I live modestly and scarcely touch the capital. Life should never be tainted with a cripple's kisses.

ZAGURUS picks up his unloaded Luger and puts it to his head and clicks the trigger.

ZAGURUS: Of course my life is ruined. But I was right in those days: everything for happiness, against the world that surrounds us with its violence and stupidity. You see, all the misery and cruelty of our civilizations could be measure with this stupid axiom: happy nations have no history.

ZAGURUS loads his Luger and looks at it pensively and places it on the table. PATRICE stands up to leave.

PATRICE: I think I understand.

ZAGURUS: I'd like to be sure. Don't think I'm saying that money makes happiness. I only mean that for certain classes of beings, happiness is possible, provided that they have time, and that having money is a way of being free from money.

The NARRATOR looks at PATRICE like she's bored and she stands, too.

ZAGURUS: It's a beautiful risk to take. And it's better to bet on this life than the next. For me of course, it's another matter.

NARRATOR: (*laughs to PATRICE*) a wreck. A zero in this world.

ZAGURUS: For twenty years I've been unable to have the experience of a certain type of happiness. This life which devours me, I won't have known it to the full, and what frightens me about death is the certainty it will bring me that my life has been consummated without me. I will have lived... marginally, do you understand? Which means Mersault, that underneath, in my condition, I still have hope... think about it.

PATRICE: Could I turn off the lights?

ZAGURUS: Please.

PATRICE and the NARRATOR walk outside.

ZAGURUS: (*heard through the door*) don't take me too seriously. It always annoys me, the tragic look that comes into people's faces when they see my stumps.

PATRICE: (*to the NARRATOR*) He's playing games with me.

PATRICE and the NARRATOR walk on the street and the BAND plays a short song.

NARRATOR: (*mocking*) "Don't take anything seriously but happiness. Think about it, Mersault. You have a pure heart and you have legs, which can't do you harm. Clear out now, it's time for a peepee."

Scene 7:

PATRICE passes the bedroom of the barrel maker and he hears sobs. He enters the room and sees the Barrel Maker, CARDONA sitting on his bed holding an old photograph of his own mother. The NARRATOR enters and sits on a chair.

CARDONA: She's dead.

NARRATOR: (*apathetically to CARDONA*) that's true, but it happen a long time ago! (*As an apathetic narrator*) Cardona's deaf, half-dumb, and a mean and violent man. Until recently he had lived with his sister, but his tyranny had at last exhausted the woman, and she had taken refuge with her children. So he now remains alone, as helpless as a man can be who must cook and clean for himself for the first time in his life. His sister had described their quarrels to Mersault one day when she had met him in the street.

PATRICE: *(as a more sympathetic narrator)* Cardona's thirty, short, rather handsome. Since childhood he had lived with his mother, the only human being ever to inspire him with fear, superstitious rather than justified, more ever. He had loved her with all his uncouth heart, which is to say both harshly and eagerly, and the best proof of his affection was his way of teasing the old woman by mouthing, with difficulty, the worst abuse of priest and church. If he had lived so long with his mother, it was also because he had never indulged any other woman to care for him. Infrequent pick ups in a brothel authorized him, however, to call himself a man.

CARDONA lays on his bed on his stomach crying into his pillow.

PATRICE: [cont.] His mother died. From then on he lived with his sister. I rent them the rooms that they occupy. They each had their solitary lives that they struggled through. Long, dark, and dirty. They found it hard to speak to one another, days without a word. But she's gone now.

The band plays an instrumental to the tune that the NARRATOR sings.

NARRATOR: *(in a playful sing-song tone)* He's too proud to complain, to ask her to come back. So he washes his cloths but the place is a mess and he eats at a restaurant and sits in cafes looking at people. *(to PATRICE)* you know when he's putting things in order, he's just hiding the disorder, pushing dirty clothes behind cushions or arranging the most disparate objects on the sideboard. He doesn't make his bed and he sleeps with his dog in his blanket.

PATRICE: *(almost sighing and at CARDONA who is still with his face in the pillow but responding in song)* I met your sister in the street and she said you're carrying on in cafés, but her friend at the laundry said she saw you crying when you were washing your own sheets.

NARRATOR: *(singing and dancing with a broom wearing a dress that symbolizes CARDONA's SISTER.)* Your sister lived with you in pity and you kept her from seeing the man she loved. *(Holding up a framed picture of the MAN IN A SUIT holding two handfuls of oranges and smiling.)* It's not your place to judge the guy, even if he is a married man, you never were married, what do you know?

CARDONA doesn't move. The song is over.

PATRICE: Well she wanted me to give you a guilt trip-

The café side of the set lights up and CARDONA's sister is sitting sadly by herself smoking a cigarette.

NARRATOR: (*vindictively*) that guy used to bring her flowers, oranges, and tiny little bottles of liquor. So what if he's not that handsome, you're a deaf-mute, and you can't eat good looks, he was decent.

The BAND plays light dancing music.

The MAN IN THE SUIT walks up to CARDONA's sister and hands her oranges. The couple slow dance and the lighting focuses on them.

CARDONA jumps out of bed and socks the man in the face and he falls to the ground. Music follows appropriately.

CARDONA's SISTER swings at CARDONA and he knocks her out and runs back to his bed and wails for a second.

CARDONA holds out the photograph of his mother. Light, building, dramatic music begins.

CARDONA: (*singing like an opera singer*) Poor Mama.

NARRATOR: Stop pitying yourself!

PATRICE: (*to the NARRATOR*) Get out of here!

NARRATOR: What about you?

PATRICE: I don't want to be here! Give me a second!

The NARRATOR exits. CARDONA stands.

CARDONA: (*still in opera singing*) No more work... I loved her, I loved her, she loved me, she's dead, I'm alone. In the mantelpiece is a little barrel with brass hoops and a shiny spigot, I made that for her last birthday.

PATRICE lights a cigarette and CARDONA falls asleep.

CURTAIN DOWN

Act II: Scene 1: A Conscience Death.

The set is half a train seat and half a motel room (a room with a desk). There is a small sign that says "Prague."

The NARRATOR picks up another poster board sign,

"Audience is to assume that Patrice just shot Zagurus and he's running away with the cash now."

PATRICE enters a dark motel room. He lights a cigarette and examines the room. The NARRATOR walks in after him. PATRICE sits on his bed as if he is exhausted.

NARRATOR: Well this is some peace we found here... (*lighting a cigarette and then sitting down on a chair.*) Well, nice city... and I liked the gothic steeples and all...

A BELLBOY (an old man) knocks on the door and he is carrying the NARRATOR's heavy suitcases. He looks enraged.

NARRATOR: Sorry about the broken handle.

NARRATOR stands like she is going to shut the door. PATRICE hands the man money.

BELLBOY: Fourteen crowns?

PATRICE: For one day's storage?

NARRATOR: Now stop being so cheap, we got the cheapest room and enough money.

The BELLBOY storms out. PATRICE puts out his cigarette and he turns to the NARRATOR.

PATRICE: I'm going to town to find a woman.

NARRATOR: Yeah, you look so sick now. Remember the train, each woman to pass you; you sat there waiting for the glance—

PATRICE: Well how else are you permitted to play this delicately tender game of life?

NARRATOR: Healthy people have a natural skill of avoiding feverish eyes. Unshaven, rumpled hair, you look like a restless animal, wrinkled shirt and trousers—

PATRICE: So we'll get a suit and a car and I'll get my respect back when I find a place to live.

NARRATOR: Well at least we have peace.

PATRICE: (*nervously*) you saw that guy on the train last week?

NARRATOR: You're paranoid.

PATRICE: All right, I'm gonna shave and see what I could do.

NARRATOR: Hey, why doesn't it bother you when you overpay a hooker, but to a poor bell boy you can't give a decent tip?

The lights in the hotel go down.

Scene 2:

The train car is the focus. PATRICE is sleeping in his seat and he is holding a letter in his hand. The NARRATOR comes back to the seat like she just went to use the restrooms. She sees the letter and picks it up and reads it aloud.

NARRATOR: "Dear Children, I'm writing from Vienna. I don't know what you're doing but speaking for myself I'm traveling for a living. I've seen a lot of beautiful things with a heavy heart. Here in Vienna beauty has been replaced by civilization. It's a relief. I'm not looking at churches or ruins; I take walks in the Ring. And in the evening, over the theaters and sumptuous palaces, the blind steeplechase of stone horses in the sunset fills me with a strange mixture of bitterness and delight. Mornings I eat soft-boiled eggs and thick cream. I get up late, the hotel people shower attention on me. I'm very impressed with the style of the maitres d'hotel and stuffed with good food (oh, the cream here.) There are lots of shows and the women here are good-looking. The only thing missing is the sun. What are you up to? Tell me about yourselves and describe the sun to a miserable wretch who has no roots anywhere and remains your faithful, Patrice Mersault".

PATRICE stirs.

NARRATOR: Hey, how are you feeling?

PATRICE: Sick, so sick.

NARRATOR: Is your mind at peace at least?

PATRICE: Well money, but...

The other side of the set- the room with a desk. ROSE is sitting looking at a letter.

ROSE: "Dear Patrice, We're in Algiers. Your children would be very glad to see you again. If you have nothing to do in the world, why don't you come to Algiers-we have room for you in the House. We're all happy here. We're ashamed of it, of course, but only for appearance's sake. And because of popular prejudice. If happiness appeals to you, come and try it here. It's better than re-enlisting. We bend our brows to your paternal kisses, Rose, Claire, Catherine. P.S. Catherine protests against the word paternal. Catherine is living with us. If you approve, she can be your third daughter."

Focus on the other side of the set- the train. PATRICE is sitting next to the NARRATOR.

PATRICE: I have no question about sleeping anymore.

The NARRATOR checks to see if PATRICE still has fever.

PATRICE: I'm gonna stay awake. I must remain conscious despite friends, despite the comfort of body and soul. I have to create my happiness and my justifications. And doubtless the task will be easier for me now... but I crave a woman's love! But I'm not made for love... never till I met Marthe did I think I was made for love.

NARRATOR: Oh... we mailed her a letter when we left-

PATRICE: Well, she's not necessary... I was just born around her, but it was my suffering that made me.

NARRATOR: Well it often happens that what's best in life crystallizes around what's worst.

PATRICE: Well, most men can't prove they are not mediocre, but I will, just by loving life.

NARRATOR: And the little grinds are gonna bring you happiness.

PATRICE: Where else should I go?

NARRATOR: Well enjoy your friendships.

The COVER BAND plays a short song as the curtains go down.

Scene 3:

The set is changed. Half of the set is a kitchen and the other is a terrace. There is a sign stating that they are in the Algiers at the House Above the World.

PATRICE and CATHERIENE are sitting on the terrace in their bathing suits. They are eating breakfast. Two cats enter and mosey around (GULA and CALI). PATRICE stretches. [The NARRATOR is never around when ROSE, CLAIRE, or CATHERINE are around.]

PATRICE: Taste the sun.

PATRICE puts out his arm. CATHERINE licks his arm. CATHERIENE puts out her arm.

CATHERIENE: Yes, now you.

PATRICE licks her arm. CATHERIENE reclines in her beach chair and lays on her stomach.

CATHERIENE: I'm not indecent, am I?

PATRICE: The world and I, disapprove of you.

CATHERIENE: You should know that before you came, we were totally free of inhibitions. For me, that meant I could walk around naked. I was naked in front of the world.

PATRICE: Yes, well women naturally prefer their ideas to their sensations.

CATHERIENE: Are you calling me an intellectual wanker?

From the kitchen, ROSE and CLAIRE sing, "Shut up Catherine, your wrong!"

CATHERINE: So it's well understood here, that I am wrong.

ROSE and CLAIRE walk out to the terrace.

ROSE: Well no one could decipher the secret language of the trees, of the sea, of the wind like you.

CLAIRE: (to CATHERINE) Oh child, you're a real force of nature.

GULA, the cat jumps into ROSE's lap.

ROSE: Cat's are my escape.

PATRICE looks at CLAIRE.

PATRICE: When did you start gaining weight? A lovely creature such as yourself is not entitled to grow ugly.

ROSE: Oh please, stop tormenting the child... and I have good news for you.

PATRICE: My dear Rose, I'm all ears.

ROSE: Today is your turn in the kitchen.

PATRICE: Splendid.

CLAIRE: And remember fresh cream.

PATRICE: I'm sure that's important to you.

Scene 4:

PATRICE is standing holding a book (preferably this book, "A Happy Death") upside down.

ROSE opens the door for ELAINE.

ROSE: This is the boy. He was almost late because he gets held up looking at the pretty girls in the street. (*Putting her arm around PATRICE.*) And we welcome you to our house above the world. We have pines all around here.

CATHERINE enters.

CATHERINE: And cypresses, dusty olive trees, and eucalyptuses.

ELAINE: Well...

ROSE: Mina's father died again for the third time this month and I had to clean all day.

PATRICE: The Arabs here think that they have lives, too.

ELAINE: Well...

PATRICE: So you're the Idealist?

ELAINE: Why?

PATRICE: Because when you hear something that upsets you, you can't help but say that it's true, but it's not a good thing.

ELAINE looks amazed.

ROSE: She used to be so enchanted by our "leave your inhibitions at the door" policy. Till we told her that her stories were boring.

ELAINE: And that I'm an idiot.

PATRICE: No, just an idealist.

NOEL enters.

ROSE: This is Noel, he's a sculptor. And he has such good manners that he is kind of a push over-

CLAIRE enters.

CLAIRE: Noel is not a push over. (*To PATRICE*) Rose once tried to get Noel to buy our house things, because he used to come over with pies when we moved here and he always gave us cigarettes and he used to give Rose full packs of cigarettes-

NOEL: Do you want cigarettes? I brought an extra carton in the car.

CLAIRE: At least you didn't buy that list of things for Rose.

NOEL: Well you guys haven't been praying for me to win the lottery.

ROSE: Because then, we might as well be praying for ourselves... dumbo.

They all pick up a cup of coffee and light cigarettes.

ELAINE: As the Idealist, I ask you people, what do you all think of love?

PATRICE is spacing out during the discussion.

ELAINE: [cont] well if I were in love I would get married.

CATHERINE: Why would I waste being in love on figuring out how to get married?

ELAINE: Well that disgustingly materialistic.

ROSE: Elaine, I'm so glad to hear you talk back. And I agree with you—

CATHERINE: Otherwise, she would have said, "don't talk back."

ROSE: (*in poetic wonderment*) But the only thing is that I found that marriages totally dissolves love.

NOEL: (*standing up*) I believe in women and children, and in a patriarchal truth of a concrete and sensuous life.

ROSE: And I believe you're a fag, so it's not all that applicable to you... (*Long stare*) unless your always coming here because your inviting me to your patriarchal fantasy.

NOEL looks really embarrassed.

ROSE: (*putting her arm around NOEL*) I know. I understand without your having to speak a word: you're the kind of man who can hold his tongue and let other people guess what he's thinking. But I'm glad you've declared yourself at last, for the persistence of your attentions was beginning to sully the purity of my reputation.

PATRICE: Not to mention, that you'd have to act real fast because Rose's condition obliges you to take certain steps quickly.

NOEL: (*veiled optimism*) What?

CLAIRE: (*Walking over to NOEL*) Oh heavens, it's only her second month.

ROSE: (*almost sweetly*) Besides, you've reached an age when you'd enjoy finding another man's face on your child.

NOEL seems as if he's gonna burst out in tears.

CATHERINE: It's a joke, only a joke, just play along with it.

PATRICE: (*gestures to NOEL*) it wasn't a joke.

ELAINE: (*sadly to ROSE*) then you are just like me.

ROSE: (*extravagant gestures*) No. I'm merely trying to be happy-as happy as possible.

PATRICE: (*folded arms*) and love isn't the only way?

ELAINE: (*index finger to her chin, she sighs*) A mediocre ideal.

PATRICE: (*he smokes his cigarette in his mouth and puts his hands in his pockets*) I don't know about a mediocre one, but it's a healthy one. And that...

GULA jumps into ROSE's lap. ROSE is petting GULA. ROSE closes her eyes.

ROSE: Yes to be as happy as possible.

PATRICE walks onto the terrace and he sees LUCIENE standing with her back facing him. PATRICE is in a trance.

The lights go down in the kitchen as PATRICE walks up to LUCIENE and he puts his hands on her waist.

PATRICE: When I was saying that the women in the street were beautiful I was talking about you.

LUCIENE: We walk well together.

PATRICE: Let's go swimming.

ELAINE comes onto the balcony and LUCIENE slips away unnoticed.

ELAINE: I'm going.

PATRICE is visually annoyed by Elaine's presence. They awkwardly hug each other. ELAINE exits and LUCIENE returns, her back is still facing PATRICE.

PATRICE: We should marry each other.

LUCIENE: Do you love me?

PATRICE: Do you really think that's important.

LUCIENE: (*sarcastically*) This sure is romantic.

CLAIRE, ROSE, and CATHERINE come onto the terrace and LUCIENE slips away unnoticed.

PATRICE: I'm buying a cabin on the beach in Chenoa. I have to leave tomorrow.

Everyone was sadly silent. CATHERINE choked up.

PATRICE: *(to CATHERINE)* Are you cold?

ROSE: No! Besides, it's so beautiful.

CLAIRE walks over to PATRICE.

CLAIRE: On good days, if you trust life, life has to answer you.

PATRICE: *(looking away from her)* yes.

CATHERINE: If you're happy here, why are you leaving?

PATRICE: There's a risk of being loved little Catherine and that would keep me from being happy.

CATHERINE turns her back to PATRICE.

PATRICE: *(continues more passionately and poetically)* A lot of men complicate their lives and invent problems for themselves. In my case, it's really quite simple. Look...

CATHERINE: What I meant...

PATRICE: *(putting his hands on her shoulders in a paternal way)* Never give up, Catherine you have so much inside of you, and the noblest sense of happiness of all. Don't wait for a man to come along. That's the mistake so many women make. Find your happiness inside of you.

CATHERINE: I'm not complaining Mersault. *(She turns around and straightens PATRICE's shirt.)* The only thing that matters now is that you take good care of yourself.

PATRICE: *(sadly)* You shouldn't have said that right now.

Curtains down.

Act III: Chenoa:

Scene 1:

The set is half a bedroom and half a terrace. There is a sign stating that they are in Chenoa.

PATRICE enters in a bathing suit and a towel and he sits on his bed smoking a cigarette and he stares at the wall for a second.

PATRICE: (moaning) Chenoa!

The NARRATOR walks out of the bathroom with a towel on her head.

NARRATOR: What?! We got a house and a life. We have beaches and trees and nature and cafes.

PATRICE walks out of the room and the NARRATOR takes the towel off of her head.

NARRATOR: I was just trying it out because it was new and soft. He has what he wants... he's in solitude and he's totally conscious and he has friends here and abroad... he has a wife who visits him... so he's sick and coughing up blood every morning...

PATRICE enters the room.

PATRICE: Shut up, don't talk about my disease!

NARRATOR: Ok then, let's talk about Lucienne, a lovely lady if I must say so myself. And as a matter-of-fact, she's she's walking over now.

The NARRATOR is facing to the audience.

NARRATOR: Mersault had seeped himself in the humiliating, yet priceless truth: the condition for singular happiness he sought was getting up early in the morning, taking regular swim, a conscience hygiene. So he has now established a routine that would henceforth require no further effort to harmonize his own breathing with the deepest rhythm of time, of life itself. Every morning now, he came downstairs before sunrise and this first action controlled the day. Moreover, these swims exhausted him, but at the same time, because the fatigue and the energy afforded, gave his entire day a flavor of abandonment and joyful lassitude.

LUCIENE is walking on the street. The NARRATOR takes a chair over to a corner in the room and sits down.

LUCIENE enters. PATRICE stands up and goes to hug LUCIENE but he acts as if his cigarette is in the way and doesn't hug her.

LUCIENE: I missed taking my walks with you.

PATRICE: I am so happy to see you!

LUCIENE: How about we talk about me moving in with you?

The NARRATOR enters and waives at LUCIENE and she waives back. PATRICE looks at the NARRATOR to mind her own business. The NARRATOR quiets. PATRICE looks at LUCIENE straight-faced.

LUCIENE: You don't love me.

PATRICE: But I never said I did, my child.

LUCIENE: I know, and that's how I know.

PATRICE: You're a lovely girl Lucienne. I can't see any past that. It's all I ask of you and it has to be good enough for the two of us.

LUCIENE: I know.

The band plays music that goes along with PATRICE singing the following:

PATRICE: *(as if he was singing in an opera)* Believe me, there is no such thing as great suffering, great regret, great memory... everything is forgotten, even a great love. That's what's sad about life, and also what's wonderful about it. There is only a way of looking at things, a way that comes to you every once in a while. That's why it's good to have had love in your life after all, to have had an unhappy passion, it gives you an alibi for the vague despairs we all suffer from... I don't know if you understand what I mean.

The music ceases.

LUCIENE: I think I do understand. You're not happy.

PATRICE: I will be! I have to be. With this night, this sea, and this flesh under my fingers.

LUCIENE: At least you feel friendly to me, don't you?

PATRICE: Friendly, yes, the way I feel friendly toward the night. You are the pleasure of my eyes, and you don't know what a place such joy can have in my heart.

LUCIENE looks disappointed and she exits the stage. The NARRATOR returns.

PATRICE: I miss Marthe.

MARTHE casually enters the room.

MARTHE: *(in a mocking tone)* Oh, Patrice, I'm so glad to see you, what has become of you?

PATRICE: Nothing, as you can see, I'm living by the sea.

MARTHE: Wonderful. I've always dreamed of living by the sea. You know I'm not angry at you or anything.

PATRICE: Yes, you've managed to console yourself.

MARTHE: Don't be nasty, Patrice I knew it would end like this some day. You were a funny guy. And I was nothing but a little girl. That's always what you used to say... of course when it happened I was furious. But finally I told myself, 'he's unhappy.' And you know it's kind of funny but that was the first time that I felt happy and sad about it at the same time.

PATRICE: You know Marthe; I'm very fond of you. Even now, if there's anything I could do-

MARTHE: No, I'm young still, and I don't do without. I hope we see each other again.

PATRICE: Oh yes, that's your little girl's face, till next time, image.

MARTHE casually exits the stage and the NARRATOR stands up and checks out MARTHE as she exits.

NARRATOR: She was very decent to you. She accepted you as you were and spared you a great deal of loneliness. You were unfair: while your imagination and vanity gave her too much importance, your pride had given too little. So this is the cruel paradox by which we always deceive ourselves twice about the people we love, first to their advantage, then to their disadvantage...

DR. BERNARD knocks on the door. The NARRATOR opens the door.

DR. BERNARD: Well?

PATRICE: Well, here I am.

DR. BERNARD enters the room and sits down and they both smoke cigarettes.

NARRATOR: Bernard is a silent man, but he had kind of a bitter wit that casts a gleam in his horn-rimmed glasses. He had practiced medicine a long time in Indochina and at 40 he had retired to this corner of Algiers and for several years, he had led a tranquil life with his wife, an almost mute Indochinese who wore Western style clothing and arranged her hair in a bun. Bernard's appetite for indulgence enabled him to adapt to any milieu. He liked the whole village and he was liked in return.

DR. BERNARD: So the mayor here has presided over our destiny for the last decade, and this semi-permanent position makes him think that he's Napoleon Bonaparte.

PATRICE: He's a wealthy grape grower and he lives in a Greek style house. He showed me.

DR. BERNARD: Well he doesn't run everything... there is a rivalry between the two richest Spanish landowners here. Morales and Bingues. They both got rich off a series of speculations... but when one buys a car, *(taking a matchbox car out of his pocket)* he chooses the most expensive make, but the other, who would buy the same make, would add silver handles. *(Taking a nicer matchbox car out of his pockets and then he drops both on the floor.)* Morales is a genius at such tactics. He's known here as the King of Spain, for on each occasion he triumphs over Bingues, who lacks imagination... During the war, Bingues pledged several hundred thousand francs, *(throwing dollar bills around)* Morales declare, "I'll do better than that, take my son!" In 1925, Bingues had driven a magnificent racing Bugatti, 2 weeks later Morales had built himself a hanger and bought a plane... how are you feeling today?

PATRICE: Not great.

DR. BERNARD presses his stethoscope against PATRICE's chest.

BERNARD: *(solemnly)* Yep, it's there. I can't imagine you having much longer to live.

PATRICE lights his cigarette and DR. BERNARD lights his and they sit quietly. The COVER BAND plays a song.

The curtains go down.

Scene 2:

CATHERINE and PATRICE are standing on the terrace in Chenoa.

CATHERINE: We are alone now, Mersault, tell me something, are you happy?

PATRICE: *(smiling)* Look!

CATHERINE: Yes, but... well, I wanted to ask you, of course you don't have to answer if you don't want to, do you love your wife?

PATRICE: That's not essential. You make a mistake of thinking that you have to choose, that you have to do what you want, that there are conditions for happiness. A kind of enormous ever present consciousness. The rest, women, art, success, is nothing but excess. A canvas waiting for one's embroideries.

CHATERINE: Yes?

PATRICE: What matters to me is a certain quality of happiness. I can only find it in a certain struggle with it's opposite. A stubborn and violent struggle. Am I happy? Catherine! You know the famous formula, "if I had my life to live over again just the way it has been... but of course you can't know what that means.

CATHERINE: No, of course I don't know what you mean.

PATRICE: And I don't know how to tell you... If I am happy, it's because of my bad conscience. I had to get away and reach this solitude where I could face it in myself. I mean, what had to be faced, what was sun and what was tears... yes, I'm happy in human terms.

CLAIRE enters the terrace.

CLAIRE: Oh Mersault, you look so tired.

PATRICE: I am not surprise, are you?

CLAIRE: It's none of my business.

CATHERINE exits. ROSE enters the terrace.

CLAIRE: But I don't think this place is good for you. It's too near the sea, too damp. Why don't you go live in France, in the mountains?

PATRICE: This place isn't good for me Claire, but I'm happy here. I feel in harmony with it.

CLAIRE: Well you could feel in harmony longer.

PATRICE: No one could be happy relatively- for a longer or a shorter time. You're happy or you're not. That's all and death is an accident of happiness, in that case.

ROSE: I am not convinced.

CATHERINE escorts DR. BERNARD to the terrace and ROSE, CLAIRE, and CATHERINE exit.

PATRICE: Oh it was really bad in the morning.

DR. BERNARD: I don't like getting sick much myself.

PATRICE: Can I ask you a question?

DR. BERNARD: Of course.

PATRICE: You never swim; you're never on the beach, why did you pick this place to live?

DR. BERNARD: I don't know exactly. It was a long time ago... besides, I've always acted out of rancor. It's better now. Before, I wanted to be happy, to do what had to be done, to settle down somewhere I really wanted to be, for instance. But sentimental anticipation is always wrong. We have to live the way it's easiest for us to live, not forcing ourselves. I suppose it sounds a little cynical, but it's the point of view you have to take to survive.

PATRICE: Yes, but I'm not sure that all sentimental anticipation is wrong. Only unreasonable at sometimes. In any case, the only experiences I'm interested in are precisely the ones where everything turns out the way you'd hoped it would.

DR. BERNARD: Yes, a ready made destiny.

PATRICE: A man's destiny is always passionately interesting if he achieves it passionately. And for some men, the passionate destiny is the ready made destiny.

DR. BERNARD: Yes. You're the only man besides myself who lives here alone. I'm not talking about your wife, and your friends downstairs, they are just episodes. Still even so, you seem to love life more than I do. Because for me, loving life is not going for a swim. It's living in intoxicating intensity. Adventures, other countries... it's action, making something happen. A burning marvelous life. What I mean is, I want you to understand me, I love life too much to be satisfied with nature.

PATRICE: Actually, you're an idealist.

DR. BENARD: That's because you see, the opposite is too often a man without love.

PATRICE: I don't believe it.

DR. BERNARD: To think the way you do, you have to be a man who lives on either a tremendous despair or a tremendous hope.

PATRICE: On both, perhaps.

DR. BERNARD: Oh, I wasn't asking you!

PATRICE: I know... are you capable of feeling contempt for a man?

The NARRATOR enters. DR. BERNARD waives and she waives back.

DR. BERNARD: I think so.

PATRICE: On what conditions?

DR. BENARD: It's quite simple, I think. In cases when he was motivated by expediency or a desire for money.

PATRICE: That's simple enough. Well good night.

LUCIENNE is walking up the street. DR. BERNARD exits. ROSE, CATHERINE, and CALIRE enter the terrace. The NARRATOR sees them and she exits quickly.

ROSE: We are leaving you to your paradise but it was wonderful to see you.

LUCIENNE enters and ROSE, CLAIRE, and CATHERINE exit. LUCIENNE goes unnoticed. The NARRATOR enters. PATRICE walks into his room. He is followed by LUCIENNE and the NARRATOR. PATRICE lays on his bed and looks sick. LUCIENNE pulls a chair up to his bed. The NARRATOR stands on the side.

NARRATOR: Another man's contempt leaves you indifferent... It seems intolerable that a part of yourself should condemn the rest. Did you act out of expediency? You do know that money is the quickest way to acquire your own dignity... the poor end in poverty the life they had begun in poverty. You have rejected that curse by using money as a weapon opposing hatred with hatred. And out of the beast to beast combat, the angel sometimes emerges, intact, wings and halo and all, in the warm breath of the sun.

LUCIENNE: *(sympathetically)* So, you're dying now?

PATRICE: Yes.

LUCIENNE: I'm so sorry.

PATRICE: *(weakly, in between dying coughs)* don't be. I knew this would happen and I'm taking this as an opportunity to face this head on.

PATRICE closes his eyes and he looks as if he's concentrating.

LUCIENNE: I see why you didn't want me here, and though I'm still insulted, I thank you because I don't like seeing you like this, because now I can't leave you till you die.

PATRICE closes his eyes like he is falling asleep. The NARRATOR approaches LUCIENNE.

NARRATOR: He's so handsome when he sleeps.

PATRICE coughs while he remains asleep.

NARRATOR: When he dies you're gonna be rich, you know?

LUCIENNE: *(sadly)* I know.

NARRATOR: Well you got to at least buy me drink then.

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LUCIENNE: Ok.

PATRICE coughs wildly in his sleep.

Curtain goes down.

THE END

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