The Sleeping Prophet

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| Archive Warning: | Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings |
| Category:   | F/F, F/M          |
| Relationship: | Kai Anderson/Original Character(s), Kai Anderson/Winter Anderson, Winter Anderson/Speed Wagon |
| Character:  | Kai Anderson, Winter Anderson, Speed Wagon, Pus Bucket, Original Characters, Ivy Mayfair-Richards, maybe more - Character, Tate Langdon, Michael Langdon, Nora Montgomery, Moira O'Hara, Rustin "Rust" Cohle |
| Additional Tags: | Basement dwelling, Political Satire, Sarcasm, Smut, politically incorrect, Flagrant littering, plastic straws, neuroses and psychoses forever, Drug Use, Sleeping Bags, manwich, not for the faint of trigger, past season references, multiple perspectives with memory bias, Kai will be Kai be warned, pull the trigger, endless aesthetic, the other and the look, Clowns, holes - Freeform, The Dark, shag carpet, doubters get no cookies, it's Cult you know what you're getting, coral even so look out, pinkie promises, pinkies out for Harambe, pinkiewave, Yoko Onanism, The longest Wayfair commercial in history, Adderhell, Indelible in the hippocampus, frontier psychiatry, organ grinder, The Handjob's Tale, clean up on aisle four, I Really Don't Care Do You, Zara Fall Winter 2017, Alt Right Twix, Leftist quinoa salads, scratch so small you can fix it with a pen, women drivers, captive air pistol, killerwhaletank, nanaimo bars, RIP Gord, Based Southern gay man, building the wall is an issue of manhood, What's Aleppo, sexual denial, #edgelord?, #pillows?, Charles Manson - Freeform, Personal hell, Altrighteousness, NPC - Freeform, Juggalo, Faygo, come correct, Waterboarding, /ourguy/, Moonman, 4chan /pol/, golden shower la cucaracha, miss america pageant, Bloody fisted lawn jockeys, Fox News, #nightof1000chickenwingeatin'players, Canadian Gothic, Great Lakes Gothic, kilometre, Shameful White Habit of Guilt, the sacred taking, jellied salad, Trumpkin pie, Teen Mom OG, Lay's Girl, Prairie Gothic, Pleb Peeves, Dirty glasses, Good Bad and Ugly Aesthetic, resting snitch face, sackcloth and ashes, Dismemberment, comprehensive immigration reform, aliens illegal and otherwise, E-2 Visa injustice, gleeful body shaming, Bad Haircuts, Latimer murder case, smell the psychosphere, Food chain, The Great Canadian Superstore, Galen Weston for VP, Tide Pods, Spurdo Sparde, goncern, Alexandria Occasional-Cortex, Edgar Cayce, sold by weight not volume bitch, insipid oreo conversation, Whine-stein, she's a butterfingers, Push button or rope start, 90 Day Finances, Doubter Cookies, Kebab Removalist, Chickens, subscribe to pewdiepie, Halloween Costumes, Cultural Appropriation, reinforced gender roles, it's the birthrates, Flat
The Sleeping Prophet

by PlasticStraws (ofWildflowersandPoisonedEarth)

Summary

Life six feet underground at 4318 Commodore Court changes for Winter with the arrival of an immigrant even she will be the first to call illegal. Kai, meanwhile, sinks his teeth into the throbbing jugular of a fresh narcissistic supply.

"Time is not a flat circle. That's just stupid. Time is a plastic straw. We don't look at it laying on the melamine anymore. We pick it up and gaze through it. Now is the time to meme. Now is the time to evangelize. Now is the time without time. It's okay to be right."

Predominantly Cult, with Cult vibes and focus throughout. Meandering crossovers into Apocalypse and Murder House. Fair warning, if you weren’t a fan of Cult, this won’t be for you. It’s a Cult story.

Notes

Conceptual story told through different perspectives. In homage to the show, there will be timeline shifts. All attempts to be true the the universe, the characters and the aesthetic. The story will need to be alt-ered, obv, right, if you’ve seen the last episode.
Tension fills up the whole room. Frigid, black tension, inhospitable as Lake Michigan. I sit halfway up the stairs, as the high water line rises, just trying not to drown in it. Kai feels like a ghost to me now; he's just cold water that fills my lungs, or an icy grip tight around my throat. My own hands once again find their way to finger the edges of my cameo nervously. It's the only way I can distract myself from pulling my hair out ever since Trump got in. Got in. Got into Kai? Maybe that's it. Probably not.

He's not fooling anyone anymore. Maybe he is, I don't know. But I'm too bitter and too sick of him, and of this, and of the lack of natural light. I hate this subterranean life. Sometimes if I'm out of the house long enough, I even feel sorry for Kai. He sat down here too long, aghast at the notion of sleeping down the hall from Mom and Dad's descicated corpses. He sat in the dark, chasing the approval of neckbearded Anons; a tab open to /pol, and a tab open to Red Pill forum, while Fox News flashed strobing red and blue binary code into his overactive brain. He didn't love anyone, support anything. Out of that primordial chaos soup, he was just slowly possessed by a simple message: Mayhem is everywhere. Dean Winters' manic grin sold me an insurance policy, but Kai found a philosophy and a life in it.

Then there's her. Don't get me started on her. She's laying on a sleeping bag on the floor, elbows in the shag carpet, face propped up by her hands. Stupid little Femanon wannabe bitch. Mac Tonight, Kai calls her, and he made her Tendie Czar so she gets to hang with the guys. He even got her a proper Moon Man mask made, wearing the real Ray Bans instead of some goofy knockoff wraparound looking shit. I don't even know her real name, because the morning she showed up on the front porch here in her stupid little Summer-of-Sam-Brexit-Doc Martens... Union Jack-boots. Huh. I never thought of that insult before. That's funny; Union Jackboots. Come to think of it, she might have even been in a union... Kai should have called her that. Maybe I'll start giving nicknames of my own.

Anyway, the morning she showed up, suitcase in hand, glassy eyes moist with her true believer tears, to explain to the chisel jaw Chads that she was here to meet the Divine Ruler, I wasn't here. Kai had me doing penance over at Butchery; that place reduced to a huge deep fryer to feed the never-ending demand for chicken strips back at Basement HQ. I was there getting splatter burns when little Union Jackboots started to pry her way in with my brother. Not that it was that hard, I suppose.

My friends always thought he was gross. Skeevy. Greasy. Wore those weird sweaters that look like they'd been shrunk in the wash. Kind of a dork. Laughed about three and a half seconds too long at everything Tucker Carlson ever said. Went through a chubby, pasty phase. Then he'd got Red Pilled, got biceps, got laid in college. Her name was Milly, and she was some runaway fundamentalist Mormon who wanted nothing to do with any discernible belief system ever again. Kai was getting his major in Theology, for fuck sakes. I don't know how he thought that was going to end. She was out for real, believed in absolutely nothing anymore. But her hardware was all cult; all shame, all fear, all programming. All she could do was change her behavior. She never could change herself.

Kai pulled his finger away from mine every time I asked about Milly. He's full of shit, with his pinkie promise 'secrets are weakness' shit. He only ever told the secrets he wanted to. I see that now. Because something happened with Milly. The night Barack Obama got elected was the very first time Kai ever got laid. I know it was her. I know they didn't last long after that, and he always squirmed and disappeared to take his pills and grind his teeth underground after that any time he
heard the phrase "Hope and Change".

He's had plenty of sex since he started his little revolution, of course. It's not for love anymore though, and not even for lust. He's not addicted to it, so it isn't compulsion. It's just a power tool. Like a nail gun. That's a good one too... Nail Gun. That's another good name for little Union Jackboots.

Kai's on this path now, and he's going to be the unstoppable force until he collides with the immovable object. But until then, he finds a way past or over every obstacle. I've finally come to see that the only obstacles in life are people. Kai doesn't seem to have found one that he can't hack, one way or another. Samuels, Meadow, Harrison. I think he was just doing what it took. But then his precious Mac Tonight showed up, and it's different. He likes it. Not just the power, not just that he can use their love or lust for him to get them to serve him. Sex is how he wants Mac Tonight to serve him. He lets her have power just so she'll want to let him have sex, because he knows as well as anyone alive or dead that power is the best aphrodisiac there is. He wants her to like it - feel good about it - because he wants her to keep loving him the way she does. Typical narcissist. So grandiose, terrified of rejection. King Shitposter of the entire world, but you can knock him over with a feather. He feeds on Mac. She's just a Monsterwich. Monster Witch. Lulz. I could keep this up all night.

Whatever. The day little Union Jackboots showed up, she tearfully explained, big bloodshot eyes beseeching, that she needed to see Kai, and he was the only one she'd explain herself to. We've all heard this story now a million times.

Kai came to the door and pushed Pus Bucket away as he was sending the girl packing, back to her old Pontiac Grand Am, through the snow. Kai saw that she wasn't even wearing a coat, just rubbing her thin bare arms. He'd called her back and invited her in.

Kai sat in the kitchen chair at the head of the table, where Dad used to sit. She'd knelt on the floor, taken his hands to thank him for letting her in, only to find them ice cold. Mac reminded him of Snow White. She didn't ask to use his kitchen. She'd jumped up from the floor and made him a mug of hot milk with Fluff. That's become their official drink, by the way. Mac called it a True North. Kai dubbed it a Pure White.

While he drank it, she explained who she was. She was from Canada. She'd come in, over the border, the day Gord Downie died. There had been something very poignant, Jackboots said, listening to The Last Recluse and knowing she had no home to go back to. All her heroes were dead, and all her enemies in power, she'd told Kai. That was until after three aimless weeks driving, eating only to generate styrofoam to litter the ditches, and never sleeping, she'd seen Kai on television in a motel room in Mobile, Alabama. She'd looked in his image's eyes and believed in him. She'd finally had a home again - a home, and heroes, and a reason to live. Can you hear my sarcasm? I mean, she's an illegal alien. Why didn't he throw piss on her? Who knows. Whatever. I guess, though, that sums up how we all got here. We looked into the eyes of Kai's image.

And that sums up why I hate Mac so much. It's also why I feel a sick love for her. Kai makes me feel something for her; something that gnaws and burns at me. He's kinetic. He feels it, so she feels it, so I feel it.

It's that - Kai's huge feelz for Mac. And?? And that even before Ivy was gone, I'd gotten tired of her narcissism. The paternal, self important assumption of her own necessity that she'd lorded over Ally had already begun to hang like a spectre over me. Once she started to make me feel stifled and infantalized? I started to notice that her body was boxy and unappealing. One boob was, like, way bigger than the other, and that nipple drooped. She had eyes like a spider, small, and cramped
together in the middle of her broad face. I'd already started closing my eyes and picturing somebody else. Someone with better hair, and a well defined waist. Less dyke-ey. Someone whose wish list on Dolls Kill was as long as mine. Ivy was so basic. I'd have settled for someone who knew what Dolls Kill was. Ivy was so old she still thought Gap was cool. If it wasn't for Brexit and colonialism and shit, I'd love those fucking boots Mac wears, and I hate it. She even has the Anna Sui bib dress from last fall. I wanted it, but it sold out too fast. As Kai puts it, Mac is so fucking based it hurts. She's whatever based would be called in my world too, if the left could only meme. I want to pump her perfect cheekbones full of nails. Slap the pout right off her lips. Doll Skill. Shit. I'm good at this. Why doesn't he ever let me name anyone?

Kai's pacing the basement ranting, his eyes all whites. He spits when he talks now. Mac doesn't care. I can see her just eating it up, in rapt attention at his wit and intellect. That's how the two of them see it anyway, I'm sure. He's always looking at her too, like he's forgot the rest of them. Yoko... Yoko Ono... Yoko Onanism, just stroking his ego. Yeah, that's it. It will be the end of him, just not today. Today, the Chads all still like his message too. I'm sitting on the stairs, looking down, watching more than listening.

Kai and Mac Netflix and Chill upstairs most nights now. It's only a matter of time until that gets noticed too. The pigs go upstairs and walk around in clothes on two legs. Kai can't see it's classic amateur Orwellian Animal Farm mistakes. Mac's just too naive. She's in a wasteland, one where she had no future to move toward, and no home to go back to. She can't see a strategy or a plan. She can only see Kai, because he's become her home, her boyfriend, her daddy, her white knight, her savior. I never thought I'd say this about anyone, but she should have had a come-to-Jesus moment, maybe became an Evangelical. Because the messiah she has now will kill her, not save her. She's never leaving this house alive. If she wasn't a size zero penitent neo-con domestic goddess bitch, I'd really feel bad for her.

"This is yet another example of the culture of cuck.", Kai shouts. "Hollywood has peddled this garbage to men, telling us he's an antihero for us; for the alpha American male. I've yet to see the guy do anything but house chores. The actual demographic that even this was aimed at are woke warriors and single moms."

The Chads all look nervously at one another out of the corners of their eyes. Presumably they didn't see it how Kai did.

"This was supposed to be firearm-and-brimstone vengeance porn. The gleeful doling out of unrepentant punishment on those for whom justice is too good. Instead we got some preachy bullshit about gun control, and extending our constitutional rights to people in other countries who reject our nation and the constitution it's founded on. This is a guy who is reluctant to fire a gun despite the fact he gets shot in every scene. Isn't that just adorable. We're all tuned in to Fedora Ferdinand? The gore, the blood, the guns - these are nothing but a trim package meant to trick men into watching what is essentially the longest Wayfair commercial in history. I mean, what part of this is actually aimed at men?", Kai asks them, looking back over at rapt Mac for her approval. Moonstruck Moon Girl. Oh, and did he just say trim package? Trim Package. Another better name for her. Now who says the left can't meme?

"The midday wine drinking and a good cleansing cry? Maybe the seemingly endless ballroom dancing darkroom scene? Dancing is only aimed at men if there is a table or a brass pole involved. The cheesedip 'loovemaking' scene? No takers?", Kai mocks, challenging them. "So men don't tune in for that. Was it to see him reduced to a betabux 80s mentor cuck to some other guy's kids? How about to watch a grown man doing someone else's dishes? He cooks too, men. Not something respectable like a sandwich. No. Vietnamese 'cuisine'. Oh, and wait. He's making it for another man, and when he tries to thank him, his response is the epitome of everything wrong with this
clustercuck; 'Don't thank me. Thank the Vietnamese.' Why? Is there a Vietnamese broad hiding behind the counter sucking your dick while you stir the pot of boiling fish heads and cucumber skins for her? No? Well, then there's no excuse for that pathetic pandering."

This gets all the fast 'n' loose-at-the-urinal Chads on board. I feel my eyes roll. But Kai is just getting started.

"Do you think the notion that his only equal on the planet is a Mudslime woman was meant to appeal to a demographic of white males aged 18 to 35? Furthermore, what is his big crisis? That maybe the terrorist he killed wasn't the terrorist they were looking for? Would it be impossible to represent us, the mobilized majority, who believe the world is better off without any terrorist you manage to take out? He's an anti-male, not an anti-hero. Men should be pissed off that they're trying to play their identity politics games with us; asking us to accept the lie of white privilege, asking us to disavow our own pair of balls. Women and minorities should be offended by this ham-fisted pandering that assumes they're weak; jealous of white skin, sick with penis envy, easily manipulated with the thot control of sympathy and victimhood. They should be offended that they are seen as incapable of handling anything more controversial than Zulily. This is what our movement is about: a world without labels, where none of us apologize for who we are. None of us can be targeted. None of us can be triggered. We make an opportunity of everything; whether it is privilege, or being underestimated, or that when you are subjugated no one is looking your way. We apologize for nothing. We win either way. That is power."

Mac has her doe eyed gaze fixed on Kai's face. She's nodding yes. The little idiot would like to clap, maybe get out a set of pom poms and downright cheer. She makes me sick. I wish I didn't think she was, like, really pretty. Why does she have to be some kind of bizarro world baby face alternative girl version of Blake Lively in her Gossip Girl days?

Kai's pupils react to her. His jaw tenses. I watch him walk across the basement to her, like some horny maniac preacher.

"Story time is over. Tonight we crash Wikipedia's Punisher page!", he yells at the Chads on his way over to her. "Mobilize 4chan! And get some more of those 'It's Okay to be White' posters printed out again, will you?"

"Not you, Mac.", he says quietly. "But get your phone out."

I know what he's going to do. He's got her Googling something, or he's going to twist the knife in my chest and go sweet-trolling with her on /pol/. Right now it is all just an excuse. She's still laying face down on her sleeping bag, and he's crouching down next to her, his hand on the small of her back, just a little bit too low. He puts his weight into the heel of his hand, rubbing her lower back in circles, casually. Everyone is pretending not to notice, but at least half the room is popping wood if I had to wager a guess. So gross. But Kai doesn't care at all. He knows he's grinding her hips into the floor and making it count.

Everyone can feel the tension. Mac is discreet; I'll give her that. I can see her face, and her cheeks are flushed pink, eyes begging, but she's resisting her urges. She won't tense her long thighs to tilt her pelvis down, won't even breathe heavily, carefully taking slow breaths, pretending to be intently interested in the meme on her phone. But I know what it feels like to grind against a floor. It feels good. Speed Wagon sneaks a look over at her. I see everything. I'd like to watch her do it too.

Instead, she rolls over and sits up, pushing Kai's hair behind his ear and whispering something in it, as her hand lightly comes to rest on his, her pinkie finger grazing his. He's not so discreet. I know Kai better than anyone. He does this thing where he blinks really, really slow, and his eyes are still rolled back in his head when his eyelids open. He takes a deep breath in through his mouth. Now
Mac's studying his face. Apparently she knows all his tells too.

He leans towards her, his breath sending a few errant strands of her overgrown blonde bangs on the warm current, as he whispers something in her ear in response. She just shivers, smiles faintly, nods okay, wraps her finger around his a little. He jumps up from the floor, saying nothing, and sprinting up the stairs, two at a time. He doesn't even acknowledge me, just rushes past.

"Kai--", I yell after him. I'm still in the dog house, but how long can it fucking last? He can be such a bitch.

"What do you want, Winter?", he says coldly, looking down on me from the top stair.

"Everyone sees what you're doing with her.", I tell him quietly, "You need to be more careful, Kai. 'All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others'."

His dark brown eyes flash and glower coldly. He doesn't even respond, just turns and storms away, disaffected. I feel the sting of tears in my eyes. I'm mad. I hate the basement. Mostly I just miss him, and my bones ache with the weight of his rejection.
The Night Before

Chapter by ofWildflowersandPoisonedEarth, PlasticStraws (ofWildflowersandPoisonedEarth)

Chapter Summary

Three perspectives of the same night. Going inside...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mac

"What are you doing?"

The question echoes back off the mahogany ply cupboards. You can't buy these anywhere in the world anymore, not for love nor money. The last of the trees this size was cut down by 1970, and never in our lifetime will any of the ones still alive equal their stature. Some bleeding heart fucknut I dated before dropping out of college told me that. The soulless little bugman liked to talk about the rainforest, thinking it would get a girl wet enough to maybe blow him. What an asshole. Kai's cabinetry is as rare and irreplaceable in this time as he is. And what Kai says is that we don't need to save the rainforest. We need to set it ablaze with an M2. Michigan is too cold anyway, and when it stays that way? We win the battle for our right to plastic straws forever. Amen. Don the latex. Bless the fruit. Set the ceremony. Put the gun in my hand.

"Just making Divine Ruler's Pure White.", I answer. Winter stands behind me like a sullen, overgrown Wednesday Addams. She hates my guts. I love her, unabashedly. I can tell that we are going to be friends. That's always how the best ones start.

She's on the outs with Kai, but I know he loves her more than he'll ever love anyone. It's cool. She reminds me of me, if I hadn't spent the first seven years of my life chained to a radiator. Kai says she was the family favorite. I can't imagine that. Besides, she's fun to troll. So I'll gladly settle for the comforting warmth of second place. Someday, I know we'll stand shining, shoulder to shoulder, in the noble war, holding hands in a dark hallway, scaring the shit out of some hapless enemy. Probably in matching dresses.

"Ugh.", she exclaims quietly, with an exaggerated eye roll, the exasperation in her voice thick. "Why don't you just call him Kai? And why are you standing at the stove, stirring? The microwave's faster. Just get it over with."

"It's better on the stove top. Kai likes his with just a slight scald. Besides, since we tested the timing with those guinea pigs, the microwave smells...", I pause, wrinkle my nose like I'm thinking. But I know what I'm going to say. I just want to emphasize it. I don't want it to slip past Winter. What would be the fun in that? "...like Trump support."

She takes the bait. Jumps on it. It's like she interrupts my last breath.

"You better not let Kai hear you saying things like that. He voted for Trump. He'll spank you in front of all the Chads, and put you in the hole for a week. You're lucky you have me."
Now I have a choice to make. Normally, what I'd do is turn, doe eyed, and thank her for setting me straight, and remind her of my inferior Canadian culture; even a PCSJWLGHTQ... BS...whatever... in the good 'ol USA thinks that. Maybe even fix one of her braids, let the back of my hand graze her cheek a little, smile feebly. Offer to make her a True North with a little bit of pure almond extract and a toasted marshmallow on top. I know what she wants too. I'm the fucking Edgar Cayce of mind reading the hostile, cold and unapproachable. I wouldn't have made it past twelve years old if I wasn't. I'm the difficult person whisperer. I was born for this. No really. It's why they had me. Soy un perdedor. I'm a cockroach. La cucaracha, la, pronoun correct, thanks. Kai is obsessed with Alpha, Beta, Omega. Alpha and Omega. The lowly cockroach lives through nuclear blasts when everything else dies. Kai see this. He sees everything, all at once.

But I need to have some fun too. All abuse and no troll makes Moon Girl, well, dull and unable to serve Divine Ruler. That dick's not going to edge itself. And he likes the slaps hard and unexpected.

"Yes, but WE aren't Trump supporters. We are KAI supporters. That's what he's called on us to be. Trump was nothing but a harbinger; nothing but a sign. He's not the wonder. Kai is our leader. He's the visionary. Trump was just a signal of Kai's time to rise. Trump is something less than a messenger, not even worthy of the title clown. We are all part of something so much bigger than that, Winter. Trump is a false idol, if you make that much of him. It's blasphemy to ever assume that he has any eminence over Kai.", I say emphatically, summoning the subdued fervor of all my years handling rattlers and copperheads in those canvas tents across the prairies. "Besides--", I bat my eyelashes down in convincing mock shame, "I can't vote anyway, remember?"

"That's right.", she says, flat of tone, and void of emotion. "I should feel bad for you. I do. We're both women. I'm only trying to help you."

"I know." I don't flinch. "Likewise."

Then I soften when she just turns on a heel to leave. "Winter? Wait. I made enough for you. I was thinking, I could grab you some soy milk next time I'm at Publix. I'll just hide it behind the High Life. Kai will never see it there. He always makes me get his beer. I won't tell him either."

"Kai drinks beer?", she asks, with a barely perceptible knit of her brows. "That's new."

"Yeah. Jordan Peterson? It's like every other imitator, you know? They're all right sometimes, but only Kai is all right, alt-right, all of the time. Anyway, he said men should avoid alcohol. But Kai says you can't really trust a man who can't trust himself with a drink. So he took it up.", I answer back with a half shrug. "Besides, it's going to appeal to his base. Votes are a tedious formality, but a necessity, nonetheless. For now, anyway."

When I look down at the white milk and swirl it round and round with the wooden spoon, my image distorts like I'm being sucked under, pulled apart at the seams of my atoms in a fit of fission. My hand reaches up and grabs something. My extra rib. Because even the void doesn't want that, and it's the last thing to go down the drain; that cursed thing that makes me what I am. Hold on for dear life. My heart kicks like a blunderbuss, and I feel dizzy and paranoid. That awful, hopeless sinking with no end. The death that can't die. I want Kai. And I want him now. I'm only safe with him. I stop stirring. There I am--weird, white and promised to the night. I'm not holding Adam's rib. It's just a stupid wooden spoon. I gotta slow down on the Adderall.

Winter is talking to me, but I can't hear her over the rush of blood. A thousand voices whispering rudely over one another so I can't hear anything. My head has no room.

"...worth it. Are you listening?" It's like finding the station on an analog radio. Winter looms sympathetic, fixing the strap on my slip dress. Her finger loiters a split second too long, she's too
gentle. She hates me more than she lets on.

"Sure. Fine. Whatever.", I answer. Whatever forever. The perfect answer to any question. It's the commitment level that never gets me in trouble. I concede nothing. "This really does take forever. Do you want me to toast you a marshmallow to go on top?"

**********

Winter

Why isn't impatient exhaling something that a brain can just do? SO much effort.

Jackboots is always where I'm trying to be. So of course she's occupying the kitchen the one time of day I actually want to be there. I just want some tabouleh out of the fridge. Anything that doesn't taste like chicken. But of course, she's in my way making her delicious, frothy racist drinks.

She doesn't notice me behind her, of course. She really only pays attention to Kai. She knows better than to pull her space cadet shit with him. He'd call her a ding bat. Ding Battery? No. Still not the one. But she's always pretending not to notice me. Maybe it's a cultural thing. Canadians are so weird. I mean, have you ever seen their national treasure live? The guy flopped around like a dying fish on a Pentecostal pleasure cruise in Branson. Then they're shocked none of us knows what the hell a Tragic Hip is. Canupchuk? No. That's my worst yet. I'm embarrassed alone in my head. And I'm all out of razor blades. What's the point?

She lets me just stand there watching her. So fine, I will.

She's too thin for that dress and she has no tits and no ass. Fuck her. Dead-rose-petal pink crushed velvet slip edged in black eyelash lace, ripped fencenets, those stupid Brexit boots. And just so she's Kai's wet dream, but modest enough to be around the Chads? A white tshirt with a repeating pattern of milk cartons replete with plastic straws underneath her dress. Based. I hate her. Without women like her, Hillary would so have won. That's the Hollow Cost. These boring breeder cis hetero man-worshiping white mami morons cost us everything. I hate women.

She shifts her weight from one foot to another, stirring, just looking down at the pot like something is going to happen. I mean, she's watching milk boil. Does she watch paint dry? I don't know what Kai sees in her.

"What are you doing? Why don't you use the microwave?"

She wheels around, and I feel like that guy we played lawn darts with last week. That's what Kai sees. Her long loose hair swirls around her, and settle over her fine boned shoulders. Her face looks terrified, grey eyes wide, her lips parted in fear only emphasize what can only be described as Kate Moss cheekbones, and teeth her parents probably paid a fortune to see set so straight. What a Vocaloid bitch. Common, household incel wank bait. Okay. Not that common.

"Oh, um, just making Kai's True North....", she stumbles out. At least she doesn't have some bullshit hoser accent. That would just be nauseating. But she made a mistake.

"Don't take his name in vain.", I chastise her. "At the very least we call him Councilman. But you're new. You should stick to Divine Ruler. I won't tell him, but I wouldn't do it in front of Speed Wagon. I know you're Leader's Pet right now, but it won't buy you any special treatment, only harsher punishment if he has to make an example of you. And it's a Pure White now." Good girl points for me. Got her.

"You're right, Winter. I'm sorry.", she takes a knee, crosses herself. JK. She doesn't. But she
repentantly blinks at me before awkwardly returning to stirring her milk. "Do you want one? I made enough for you."

"That's alright. I choose to take a stand against lactose. I have a lot of black friends. Milk is racist. And only human milk is humane. We're the only animal who can give consent."

I miss Kai. This is a journeyman sweet-troll. Once upon a time, we could have taken this to the interwebs, done the schmancy dance on Reddit with the normies, got them all triggered, laughed so hard that I wouldn't feel filled with self loathing about eating the next day. Every time I think about things like that, I wonder if I should have done everything different. The ceremony was fucked. But I did look good in that white dress.

"I didn't know.", Macbook answers back all demure. "I'll get you some soy milk or something next time I'm at Publix."

But my heart feels too broken for this horse shit. Kai loves her instead of me now. And she's at least nice to me. My black emoji heart softens for her, even if she is annoying. The entire subject of lactose is off limits. Don't even get him started on peanut allergies.

"No, Mac.", I answer back wearily. "Kai would see it as an act of treason, an open declaration of war. Heresy even. He knows I know better. It wouldn't be worth it, okay?"

I walk across the vinyl floor. My opaque lace tights will build up static. I drag my toes. It's one of the most torturous things about a Michigan winter. You get so tired of catching sparks. At first, it's just a jolt to your finger. Keep forcing that natural gas over the pilot light, blowing that hot air through the register. It gets drier and drier. By spring, I need Xanax just to face hitting a light switch. By first thaw, looking at a door knob makes your teeth ache. So enjoy, Mac. Someone needs the strap of her slip dress fixed.

But I'm the one who feels the spark. She stays focused, barely aware of me. But when I touch her, and the electricity rattles through my bones, I notice the way she smells like opiates cut with lavender sugar and scorched earth. I want to bury my face in her overgrown hair, inhale like I'm going to be the first female president 20 years from now. I run my finger across her shoulder, under the black satin strap of her dress, feel her little bones through her cotton tshirt. Her profile would make a fetch cameo. I wish I was a vampire. I want to kiss her. Live a little. I'm Kai's sister. I'll never get out. There's nowhere I could go that he wouldn't find me. She'll go in a sleeping bag, to a shallow grave, or a trash incinerator, or if she's really lucky and revered when he does it, to Mom and Dad's bedroom. Enjoy the parent smell for eternity, bitch.

She still hasn't looked up. Ignoring me. Kai probably told her to. She just stands there stirring like an idiot.

"Did you hear me? I'll just take one of these. Don't tell Beverly, if she ever comes back.", I finally say, slumping onto the counter.

"Sure. Fine. Whatever.", Mac answers, pouring my drink straight from the pot to a waiting mug. "I was just trying to be nice. I doubt he'd notice if I put it behind the High Life."

"He's drinking again?", I ask, surprised. Before big brother could prescribe, Kai had a thing with cough syrup for a while. Nyquil and absinthe isn't actually that bad. Like a lame just-listing-shit word art: Kierkegaard&Nyquil&Absinthe&Winter&Kai&YouTube comments&Uttering a threat charges we skated on... Like, best day ever.

Mac just shrugs, and says with a smirk, "I wouldn't call what he's doing drinking. Not after you see
how they do it in Assiniboia. We lost Over Drive to Jordan Peterson last month, and Under Pass to Gavin McInnes the month before. Kai's just trying a new direction."

She's suddenly jumpy, grabs her phone and checks the time.

"This's ready. I should get it to Divine Ruler. Have a good night, Winter.", Mac dismisses me, as she pours Kai's drink, puts an artful little kiss of Fluff on top. She doesn't make herself one. Probably, he only lets her have what is left on his spoon when he's done, or the dregs of his cup, or whatever. Left Overs. No. The left really can't meme for shit.

As she walks away, I wonder about the tears in her fishnets.

**********

Kai

Ruin Canada? Is that seriously all he's got in him? I knew the student would far surpass the teacher. Papa, reduced to a dotard in the son's shadow. This is no surprise. But what is surprising is the desolation in being right. Gets boring. And the crown weighs heavy.

Laying on the bed in my room upstairs is the only respite I get from the pawing and cloying of all my followers. They serve me, but the burden of their need for me, and my obligation to them grinds me down. Sucks. Chew some more agent orange, careful not to keep going until I taste acrid ground bone on the back of my tongue. Clench my jaw. Close all the tabs. I get no pleasure from my sycophants or enemies. I just want to play Jeopardy. Where the fuck is she?

I shut my eyes. If it wasn't for the fact it's colder than the surface of Mars most of the year, Saskatchewan sounds like my kind of place. Based. The epicenter of North American basedness. Until 1985, it was over 92% white, polls overwhelmingly show them to believe no culture holds any merit but their own, and their housewife rates equal or surpass those of The Netherlands. Their obesity rate sits at a solid 13%, the lowest on earth. Ask Rebel Media. Under my radar until the Gerald Stanley case, I wonder now if it may be the future site of eventual operations. Not far from Leith, either. Andersonville has a nice ring. Ugh. No. Fuck. Those pudgy LARPing weevil-dicked Confederfucknuts already did that. They might be my eventual base, but I hate the smell of their support. Smells like Walmart. No, like China... no... "'gina". I'll use them, but I'd hate to make them that happy. I don't want them moving in droves. My ears get tired of Southerners. Kaitown; no, too Asian? I guess I can use them as ballistic missile fodder in the noble war to come. Until then, offer a shoulder to the pathetic chips on their shoulders, and pretend to care deeply about their Stonewall Jackson and James Brown statues, and all the places their dear old dead great granddad shuffled around losing.

Where the hell is Mac anyway? I told her to hurry and just send Gutterball for the tendies tonight. The amazing achievement of making city council proves a blessing and a bane; Mac knows I want to go over the notwithstanding clause before the next meeting. We need a win. Making plastic straws mandatory, unlimited and free in all eating establishments was over a month ago. Reducing the number of council seats to one, and the public execution of my opposition will require the big guns.

I need to stick it in her first.

She better just be--

"Hey, Councilman.", Mac exhales softly, coming in through the door and closing it again.

"Kai, baby. When we're alone, it's fine."
She hands me a Pure White. "Sorry about the wait. I wanted to heat your milk up on the stove top. Your microwave smells like Trump support...", she giggles. "Must have been those subpar Canwiches that flatfooted Jezebel used to make you."

"We are Trump supporters." I challenge her. I know what she means. She has all the right answers. I just want to make her give them. It will only serve to hone her skills in the memetic warfare to come.

"Please.", she wrinkles her nose at me. "We're Kai supporters. You're the Divine Ruler. He's not even worthy of the title clown." She pauses, as she slides over beside me on the bed, supple pink lips graze my neck and press hot under my ear. "Why do they call you 3D, anyway? I mean, I get it, but I'd have called you Dickhead..."

I want her, and she's already got me hard. But now I'm holding a hot drink.

"Hey Kai?", she breathes in my ear, climbing astride my lap, stabilizing the mug with one hand, and pretending to rub my dick through my pocket while she sneaks another pill. "Have you seen The Punisher on Netflix?"

"No. The Chads like it.", I reply, bored. There's probably a gun she wants on it.

"Well, they shouldn't.", Mac purrs, unbuttoning my jeans. "Get comfortable, let's mock it.", she adds, flipping the tv back on. "Tell me if I'm right. This shit's about as masculine as mommy blogs and back up cameras. Even /pol is way too comfortable with this shit. You need to do something about it."
So there it is. The genesis of Kai’s sermon on The Punisher. The end of plank mahogany. Some psychedelia. Winter practices some ECT on Mac via static buildup.
Chapter Summary

The walls provide their account of the Netflix and chill the night before Kai's Punisher sermon, providing the final perspective on the night.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Kai paced his room restlessly, like a caged zoo animal. The taste of ground bone filled his mouth, reminding him to thrust his tongue forward, willing himself to stop gnashing his teeth. Being a councilman was exhausting, and he was growing impatient waiting. Mac knew she was supposed to hurry.

He felt an oppressive frustration setting in; not just the wait tonight, Mac had been shrugging his advances so politely that even he felt uncomfortable to push the issue. Though she professed love for him constantly, and even engaged in protracted physical affection with him, when he unbuttoned his jeans, she always averted her gaze shyly, and told him she wasn't ready yet. He couldn't even get her to look at it. She'd screw her eyes tightly shut and refuse, even after his wasting of an hour bouncing her on it through their clothes.

Kai was beginning to fear she was nothing but a commonplace household cocktease. Winter always wanted him to change her code name, and her suggestions were always awful. Kai smiled. Organ Grinder. He'd tell Winter that one. That was how it was done. Only men could meme. The night before, he'd been trying to watch Tucker when she'd got in his way, crawling astride his lap. At first he'd felt annoyed with her, and resented the obvious interruption. Kai tried to be understanding that maybe the Trudeauards in Canada didn't mind women crawling between their sight line and the state-funded fake news programs on their KGBTV. He'd grabbed her wrists and swatted her ass, like she was a naughty animal he was training.

That was the point at which he'd stopped caring about Fox News for the night.

Her eyes lit like a strike of flint when he spanked her, and her thin arms snapped away from him, locking his pinkies in hers. She bit his ear between her sharp teeth, and whispered breathlessly in his ear, "Kai? Are you hard for me right now?"

"Of course.", he'd answered, without even needing to think about it. "Ask me again."

"Are you hard?", Mac obeyed, asking soft and slow, just how he liked.

He pushed down on her jutting hip bones, thrusting up against her. That was all it ever took to make her moan. Not fake like some thot, but real and urgent, like he was forcing it out of her. She blushed, heat spreading from her cheeks down her chest.

Sex with Meadow, with Samuels, had been mechanical and strategic. Kai hadn't felt much, rather calculating every move to enslave them more. Mac was different. Her touch slowed the seconds, and
he found it hard to think. Every time his flesh touched hers, he felt a buzz of free electricity. He thought about being inside her all the time.

Holding her in his lap on the bed, he'd kissed her thin neck. She tilted her head back at just the angle he wanted without even having to say it. That was the thing about her. Mac always knew what he wanted before he did.

Her dress rode up her slender thighs. Kai wanted to tear her fishnet stockings away, but he knew she wouldn't let him. She was the only person who ever said no to him anymore. He'd tried it anyway, his hand straying against her wet panties.

He'd instantly felt the hot sting of her palm on his cheek.

"I told you I'd tell you when I was ready!", she exclaimed under her breath. "Bad dog."

"C'mon, baby. Just let me in, huh?", Kai said, flipping the charm switch on. Might as well ask to use the phone, before I ask to use the bathroom, before I rattle the cage, he considered. A dry smile flickered unspoken across his face at the thought. Ally had been so fucking scared of him. Funny he'd think of that now, even with a slippery little blackhearted millennial sex doll in his lap. "I have that council meeting this week. I'm pulling a notwithstanding clause. You know how hard this week is gonna be on me, baby. You could really relieve the tension for me."

"You're so cute when you whine, Kai.", she giggled, holding his stubbled jaw and kissing his mouth, dry humping his hard lap slow. "You sound like Ben Shapiro."

Kai laughed. Most chicks were predictable, but when Mac opened her mouth, he never knew what was going to come out. She was trolling him on some level. Even Kai wasn't sure how to sort it out; Shapiro had been a never-Trumper who became a sorta-sometimes-Trumper like good ol' Lindsay. Oh, and not to mention he didn't go anywhere without his yarmulke. Kai knew he'd told Mac that he entered local politics on a platform of letting "them" blow up the Jewish Community Center. Kai also knew Mac understood that. None of this was about any of that. All of that was only so Kai could rise. And everything Mac did was to get some kind of a rise too.

"Nah, I don't sound like that guy, do I?"

"Yeah. Sometimes a little bit...", she teased back. "Not that anyone's like you, though."

Mac didn't wait to cover Kai's mouth with her own, preferring to feel the smile form on his lips instead. Sometimes she kissed him with her eyes open, just to see the lines around his eyes. She'd never really had much of anything for herself before, and Kai wasn't just any man. He was the only man on earth. Being with him was terrifying, and heady. He let her be on top so that she'd feel safer, she knew it. He felt so good under her, though. She wanted to be under him.

"Kai, I need you so bad..", she gasped weakly against his neck, her fingers biting into his chest. "But I'm still not ready. Not for that."

Kai rolled his hips under her, his hands roughly gripping her hip bones, thumbs dug uncomfortably into her inner thighs. He always watched her face. Fact was, they both got off on this game.

"Don't.", she reprimanded him with a hard slap across the face. "Don't hurt me and don't leave marks."

He moaned, bouncing her on his dick harder. "I promise, Mac. No more than I have to.", his words spoken in a low growl against her ear before his teeth sunk into her flesh slightly, and his lips melted into her. "Baby, pull it out.", he begged.
"Okay.", Mac breathed. "But you can't put it in me."

Kai felt high. She never went this far. His hands strayed up her razor thin body to cup her small breasts while he watched her pop the button on his jeans and pull him out. He'd never felt her small, warm hand soft against his hard cock before, and his big dick oozed hot snot that her greedy little mouth couldn't wait to lick away, even to feign hesitation.

"Fuck, Mac.", he moaned. "Slow down."

"No.", she threw back, firm and unwavering, as she pushed Kai back against the bed. "You wanted me to see it. Now I see it and I want to play with it.", she added softly kissing him and stroking him--sort of.

Kai looked down at her little hand, sort of strangely pumping on his dick like she was trying to take blood pressure. He smiled.

"That's not how you do it, sweetheart. Do you want me to show you?"

"Really?", she peeked up from his neck, her face quizzical. "You're not just playing with me? That's not how guys do it?"

"No.", Kai sat up, running both his hands up her body, over her thin white throat, and into her hair, kissing her face all over. "Fuck, I'm in love with you."

"Kai, I'm so in love with you." She sounded melancholy to Kai when she said it. Mac supposed after, that was how she'd felt. Kai's love was so big. To offer him anything but death before dishonor, and devotion past death just wasn't an option. Her life had ended. It was his now. She never let herself form the words in her mind, but the question of how many people he'd said those words to floated around her subconscious, threatening her.

She kind of bit her lip as Kai took her hand in his.

"Here.", he sought her eyes. "Keep your hand inside mine. I'll show you how."

She was wearing THAT dress again; black silk mini, long sleeves, white collar with Donnie Darko bunnies on the points. Kai knew she'd picked that for a reason too. She'd worn it so many times in the past month. She might not have a clue how to give a hand job, but there was something inside her that knew what it was doing. She had been the girl, after all, who'd made the infamous Moonman album, Big BooKKK of Racial Sensitivity, a resplendent two-way troll, set to the complete instrumental full length Lovage LP of Music To Make Love To Your Old Lady By. And she'd done that at only fourteen years old. So that dress? Certainly no coincidence that it bore an uncanny resemblance to something his sister would wear.

Enough of this Handjob's Tale. Kai exhaled, opened his eyes, pried himself free of the memory of the night before, and the many nights before, slamming the laptop on his bed shut. What was this shit with her? Maybe Winter was right--maybe it was dangerous, and maybe it was drawing the wrong attention. At least he could hear her footfalls in the hallway. Tonight would be the last, one way or another, Kai contemplated. She'd end tonight, or Mac Tonight would be the last. The omega. Either way.

"Kai?", she rapped softly against the door.

He felt himself sink further into the dip in his bed. This was the first night he hadn't had to explain to her that she didn't need to address him as Divine Ruler when she was invited. Even so, something about her casual approach, entitled and casual, stuck in his throat. Kai's unbreaking gaze watched the
She was only doing what he'd told her. He rubbed his eyes hard, until his optic nerve sent back a spinning colors of infinity Mandelbrot set. By the time the colors faded, and his body had quit levitating out of his skin, Mac stood beside the bed, a Pure White in hand, thrust out at him.

"I'm late, I know.", she explained. "I'm concerned I come here too often. The Men of Maytag are starting to notice it. Maybe I need to go back to wearing the uniform."

Two chicks in agreement?, Kai pondered. Obviously there was nothing to this.

"No.", Kai firmly instructed, sipping his drink. "I only put you in that blue shirt to begin with because you had nothing to wear. It gave the wrong impression. About both of us. I'm the leader here. You don't need to concern yourself with what they think of you, or of these visits. I like you looking like this.", Kai added, running his fingers gently down her dead rose velvet slip.

"To lead, you need followers. They follow you now, but--", she sat down, sliding across the bed, straddling Kai's thighs to kneel and face him earnestly, the warmth of her body spreading though him as she argued for distance, "--but they can't feel forgotten. That's how we got here in the first place. I don't need to remind you. You invented this; the empowerment of the repressed, cuckolded white straight male. Reminding them that they have a voice, and of their ancient place and purpose. If masculinity is toxic, it's because my kind extends our hands to be filled with serpents, our bodies a spinning brass pole for the deception to slither and climb over to our carnal curves, and our minds desire nothing more than a beautiful fiction that ends in ruin. ’All shall love me and despair.’, a lie so appealing we'd betray our species just to tempt your gender."

"I know where you're going with this, Mac Tonight.", Kai hushed her. "But you will trust me. In some small way, they've all been responsible for something before; not a movement like ours is, nor the responsibility to correct the course of the world from a city council seat. But as men, they've all had to be responsible for something. So they understand as leader of this movement, a man's home is his liberties. His woman to fuck, or just play these endless blue ball busting games with. His fucking second helping. His to throw a fucking beer bottle in the nearest trash can. No one tells me what to do, Mac. Not the Chads, not Winter, and not you either."

Kai's eyes could be so black. Mac looked into them, while the room swirled, sucked into them, pulled to the critical mass in the room. Darkness was an absence of light, people said. Not all darkness, Mac thought. Some darkness could shine and be cast, some darkness had a source and could spread. Some darkness devoured light. But Kai's darkness was a bed of rich black velvet; quiet and sensual. Kai's darkness was a warm smoking gun. Kai's darkness was her waiting coffin.

She was the only still thing. It reminded her of something she'd seen once in the tents. She'd known she'd be bitten; a terrible vision of doubt at the exact wrong time. She'd felt the contractions of the hateful creature on her thin bare arm. She'd struggled to hold its weight, to hold herself still, to slow her breath, to slow her heart. But her fixed eyes had seen the coming of the gory bloodied fangs. Her little dimpled hand had turned pitch black, and she'd taken one sharp breath in horror. As the snake felt her minute movement, that subtle tremor of revulsion, it had struck, burying its venom laced fangs into the space just above her wrist, between the thumb and forefinger of her tiny dimpled hand. She was nine years old. Indelible in her hippocampus was her inability to scream, only speak in a tongue that was not her own. She'd had a sense it might be Latin, a sin to speak in the Pentecostal tents. No one could remove the snake, and so it hung by the fangs until it tired, released her, and flopped to the dust to slither away. Her eyes had watched in horror, as she contemplated her fault in all this. Doubters, as they say, get no cookies.

In the aftermath, she'd been sent away; locked away. The shame of her family, their 'seductive child',
as had been proclaimed over her as an infant, by a frontier Freudian psychiatrist-turned-travelling preacher, had now failed the faith test. Should she die, it would be concealed at all cost. Mac had sat chained to a radiator for nearly three months in a dark unfinished basement. When she'd awoke alone after a protracted coma, she'd discovered her grotesquely swollen hand was black as coal, and the skin split and leaking reeking death. Her poisoned, feverish mind had watched in horror for days as it ate any light that dared enter the room. A low slung beam of dusty sun. A shadowy form. Even the sweet sound of any voice. All was consumed by her black hand, until it became the bearer of all the light and all the good things. She'd talked to it, spoken tongues to it, imagined its paralyzed, disfigured form folded in fervent prayers. And one day, the day had arrived that it was a hand again, her own little dimpled white hand, and now ten years old. To this day, it didn't even ache in the cold. She'd been sent home alive on a Greyhound bus. Her parents had collected her three days later, and she'd wished for death, or that dark basement back again.

She reached her right hand out to steady Kai's Pure White as she settled into his lap.

"You're right. I'll never doubt you, Kai.", her voice droned soft in his ears, as he slid an Adderall past her lips like a communion wafer.

"Fear incarnate.", Kai repeated her old words, slow and solemn, like a benediction. "You know someday I'm going to have to give you a full audit."

"I know.", she agreed, rubbing her arms with her hands as a chill fled inwards and down her spine. "Tonight?"

"No.", Kai smiled, set his empty mug on the nightstand. "Council business. Cult business. Clown business. I'm fucking tired. One tab tonight, that's it. I don't need sleep. I want it.", he said gently, pulling Mac closer, holding her lithe body to his, as he pressed her blonde head to his shoulder. "You ever watch Jeopardy? My mom liked it."

Kai contemplated, very briefly before deciding against it, whether to tell Mac how, when he was a kid, the whole family watched it. His mom had been better than his dad. Of course, Kai had been better than all of them put together before long. The writers didn't really write that much new material after you'd seen it for a few months. But after his dad had the accident? Whole new meaning to the word jeopardy. His mom lost a huge patch of hair that was shockingly hard to conceal one evening, just for getting Final Jeopardy. Blimps. That was the question. What is blimps. For that, she'd been grabbed by the hair and flung into the edge of a curio table. Kai hadn't even watched it by himself in years.

"Jeopardy?", Mac smiled quizzically. "Network television? Kai Anderson?", she exhaled and shook her head in disbelief. "Sure. I love that show. I used to play it with my grandma, until I beat her and she got mad at me. But after, we have to just Netflix and chill. We need to megadeath the whole season of Punisher."

Kai shut his eyes to the sensation of her small breasts pressed flat against his chest. Her little body, thin and warm, under his touch. He turned his face and buried it in her long hair while she breathed warm kisses against his neck and ear. Kai felt his manhood nestled safely against her, the heat of her thighs and her heart shaped box slowly disseminating though his jeans until he felt the weight of his exhaustion and the refuge of her arms. He'd ask her to stay in his bed and sleep with him tonight. He wanted to sleep long, deep and dreamless; arm wrapped over her little radiating body, his breaths slowed, and heart beat tempered and paced by hers, all night long. He was so tired.

"Why? Is it good?", he asked.

"No. The Thomas Jane short was good.", she answered briskly. "I came for the minigun, and I'd
have stayed for molotovs. But I checked out when all he did was white knight and sad, sad leftmope. But The Chads are all putting stickers on their trucks and shit. The thing was made for femme de la incels, and they don't seem to even notice that. It's... problematic."

Her little hand went seeking into his pocket. "You want a couple?", she asked seductively, popping a pill in her mouth. "We're going to be up all night."

Chapter End Notes

Adderhell... pinkiewaving at you annony, my beautiful genius, Illuminated Minerval of the upper echelon. Thank you for the title.

Ever wanna hear the insane sounds of the Plastic Straw AHS Cult universe? I've heard some rumors there's a playlist on YouTube called Notorious K Moon Girl... and that it's as aesthetic af... What? I read it on a tshirt from Dolls Kill... can't be fake news.
Winter

The lock-step dude-bras are all on their laptops. Like watching a thousand monkeys on a thousand typewriters. Wasn't that a thing people used to say in the bad old days before Plan B? Whatever. A year ago I was in Vassar's Y-Me Men Free Safe Space, shading a Georgia O'Keefe adult coloring book with Jehmu Greene, when she came to speak to my Women and the Law class. Now I watch welders type. The 'R' is there... over there, Tripod. Keep trying. You'll find it. Now my ass is froze to the basement staircase, half above, and half below. I can't believe Kai just sprinted past me again tonight. I hope Mac didn't see. That would make it so much worse.

"Tendie Czar!", barks Speed Wagon. "Get your ass over here. Do you shop on Zara?"

I'd take my time. I don't let the Lickspit Youth tell me what to do. Not with alacrity, anyway. Of course Mac jumps when someone so much as snaps their fingers.

"No.", she answers, weaving through the sleeping bags. "Their shit's too big, even the zeros. So what's the point? Besides, I'm too young for it. Why are you asking? Pretty fucking gay..."

They both laugh. It's official. I hate her again. Kai has insisted we bring back the terms 'gay' and 'fag'.

"To be used colloquially, and pejoratively, like in the 90s. It's not about homosexuality. It's about desensitization and censorship. We're reclaiming free speech, by force, and handing it back to the people. We have a right to free speech; not a right to never be offended. If you want that, run to Canada. Our society is doomed to ruin if we are so weak that we fear words and labels. We apply and wear all labels. May the fruits of the labors set the connotation. Do you cry and wail racism when they call you white? Are you Oh. So. Sad. when they notice you have a pair of balls and call you a man?", Kai had gone on and on. When I confronted him privately, called him a fag for what he did with Samuels? He got in my face, close and menacing. "You called me incestuous once too. You really want to test the thickness of my skin, Winter?"

Anyway. Whatever. I refuse to do it. Hate Crime there though? Rolls off her tongue so easy, like she never even had to learn. Canadians can't possibly be that nice. Look at the atrocity that is Celine Dion. And the Canadarm? So nationalist. Trudeau is a plant. No way that limp wristed llama looking motherfucker in his sexy genie costumes and shit is real. The Human Sweet Troll. I suspect they're all up to some secret, spooky, nefarious shit up there where we can't see them. It's like dark eight months a year. And the only black people who live there play professional football. I heard on Disney's bidding, the NFL was going to send them anyone who kneels.

But now at least I've got a good look at her face. She and Speed Wagon stare like a couple Abercrombie models, illuminated by the screen. I'm not coming off these stairs for anything. This should amount to something I can laugh at, if I laughed anymore.

Her brows lift, lips part. "This is incredible. There's no way this isn't intentional, but I don't understand it.", she shakes her head in disbelief. "Even the models have blue hair. Here's a SCUM robe mini dress... Does that look like 'Feelz Bad' Pepe on that skirt to you?"

"Yeah. That's how I found this.", he admits.
"Oh. So you were looking at Google images of Pepe memes instead of trolling the fags of Tumblr with Punisher webpages..." She's so fucking natural with guys. Annoying. She bleeds too.

He grins at her, shrugs. While she pours over the clothes that wouldn't possibly fit her impossibly un-American tiny foreign self, he sneaks a look at her black leather clad ass. And that skirt's new. Kai lets her use some of our fraudulently siphoned off crowd funding money for clothes because the scam was her idea. Anything tagged #blacklivesmatter. Apparently, #blackpatentleather #mattersmore. She spends half the time she's supposed to be hacking just cruising shit by Kendall + Kylie. And it's cool. I'd be that skinny if artificial colors and flavors were banned here too. They don't even have Count Chocula. Right Twix are contraband, mostly just a prison thing with the AB up there. Alt-Right Twix? Maybe that's a mouthful...

"Winter?", she asks, looking up at my Vista del Staircase. "Come check this out."


When I look over their shoulders though, it's admittedly worth it. Thumbnail after thumbnail of blue haired models. Ivy's red, white and blue skinny circus strip Uncle Sam suit. Kai's yellow election night sweater. Black dresses with white collars. Black floral dresses with white Peter Pan collars. Black tweed dresses with white stand collars with ruffle trim. A tshirt with a happy face with a hand smear in the middle. Skinny men's suits shown with beige suede Chukkas with gum soles. Dress shirts with bees. Tie with photorealistic coral print. The SCUM robe, done as a low cut wrap mini. Even the hood is adequately oversized. A lace up corset dress with tulle skirt... shown with wedge heeled pumps in a jigsaw puzzle print. Nehru after nehru after nehru.

"Fine.", I shrug and roll my eyes. "It's creepy. So?"

On the inside? I'm legit freaking. I want to be sedated. It's really fucking creepy. Some of it can be explained away. But Kai's yellow election night sweater? Only I know about that. Not Speed Wagon and not Moon Girl.

"It's AMAZING.", she corrects me. "We have obtained cultural cult status. We're winning the culture war. This means MELANIA wants to be us! Kai's going to be so pleased. This is all about him. It's an amazing achievement."

"I really don't care, do you?", I shake my head. "What about this?", I point to the screen at a bright red fitted double-breasted pantsuit with hip grazing wide pants. "This doesn't look like anything to me and I've been here the whole time. They saw the video of Bob Thompson's murder on the news. We were all in it. They need something to draw inspiration from. Aren't you late or something?", I add. Came out pretty caustic, I guess.

She just gapes with those somatic grey eyes. Dreamy and arcane, they stare out of her head at me, and through me. If she has gears to turn in that head, she hides it. Kai says she's so fucking smart for a girl. I think she's just repressed; drunk on her first dick, and likes free clothes. Typical evangelical capitalist with daddy issues and a guilt complex. Kai can't really think she's smart either. He just wants to spill every drop of her blood that he can. Gross. The patriarchy is so predictable.

"Late for what?", she finally answers, cool and cryptic.

She shifts her weight from one silver glittered Frankenstein creeper to the other, tilts her lollipop head at me. Looks like a Bratz doll. Geez I hate those things. They killed Barbie. Barbie had a career and shit. Careerz. Bratz are just entitled daughters of sleazebucket Miami plastic surgeons. But I guess those shoes are okay. And her sweater? I'd kill for it. Slightly sheer, fine knit pima cotton,
white with black raglan sleeves, cropped. Intarsia print of the Facebook 'like' thumbs up... holding a flaming molotov cocktail. As usual, someone stole my sweet troll. Her tits look nice in it. Fuck her abs though.

"For my brother.", I shake my head at her, like she's an idiot. "Duh."

"Oh.", she replies casual and bored. "My orders are a tendie run to MacDonald's for the boys. Kai thought they deserved a break from leftist quinoa salads and avocado on sprouted soyboy toast. It's good to be healthy. But it's healthy to be good, isn't boys?! Good boy points for everyone tonight! Divine Ruler is great!", she chides, all like, 'am I right'. Kai's Uruk-hai all slaver and chant, pump their fists. They're so stupid that all you have to do is pose the question in the right pitch and tenor. She bleeds, motherfuckers. She bleeds too. "Besides, we have coupons.", she adds quietly with a shrug. "Waste not, want not."

"You're really saying that while you put that thing on?", I ask her. She's literally in the middle of slipping on a dyed navy blue fox fur hoodie over her head. Kai let her buy that too. The enormous black star-scattered hood alone probably killed four of them.

"You can borrow it if you want, Winter. Or ask Kai for one. I'm sure he'd get you one too.", she says back, like she didn't notice the diss, just reaching in the pocket for her keys and fluffing her hair out.

"You couldn't pay me to wear that. Fur is murder."

She shrugs. "Well, whatever. Divine Ruler says it's how we flex our dominion over the animals. You start taking orders from PETA, pretty soon all you can eat is nuts and seeds, and you're wearing ugly utility dresses made out of recycled pop bottles. Of course, you shouldn't be drinking pop. So there goes your only politically correct material for clothing. That is if you ignore the fallacy of recycling, and suspend all logic to forget all the coal we have to burn just to process garbage into ugly-ass clothes. But then you can't use coal. So you're naked, and if you cultivate anything to eat, you're stealing the red man's land. And the animals need their skins. And wait, they probably need the seeds too. Don't make a tent; you're appropriating the savages' culture. Don't burn anything; you might produce carbon dioxide for a tree to use. Whoops. The trees are all dying. Habitat is disappearing without the vital air pollution that our world was created to thrive upon. The food chain is shrinking. I've got it. Lay down, and wait for endangered wolves to devour you, and civilization to end. But wait. Now humanity is gone, and all the domesticated animals starve. Without them, what do your precious wolves eat? So someone needs to keep fur alive for humanity. Besides, it's warm. Everyone in Canada wears it. Baby seals are our favorite fur bearing crop."

I want to argue. It would just take too long. And if I piss Kai off again, I'm never going to get to ask him for that black fine wale corduroy overall dress.

"Did Kai explain that to you?", I ask her patronizingly. It's passive aggressive. I don't care. And is that coat fucking WOLF? She's worse than I thought.

She doesn't answer. Gives me a long sombre look with those baby seal eyes.

"Do you want to come with me, Winter?", she asks as she ascends my staircase.

"I can't. I'm still grounded."

"Come upstairs with me?", she says softly, motioning with her head. I'm counting to twenty. Okay. To five.

It's drafty on the landing by the side door, but it's the one she always uses. Kai lets her pull around
through the alley and park her car right up by the house so she doesn't get snow inside her shoes walking across the lawn. The landing still smells like exhaust from Dad's riding gear. They made the hospital throw it all away after the accident. He never wanted to see it again. We never used this porch again either.

The bald incandescent glare reflects from the highlights of her flawless Scandinavian bone structure like an x-ray. She gets close to talk. The sweet, dark scent of her breath, like clove cigarettes and black licorice, drifts like embers, curls around me, sticks to me.

"Kai's going to be in a good mood tonight.", she whispers. "Why don't you just go talk to him?"

"I know my own brother. Better than you do.", I snap.

"I know that, Winter. That's why I haven't talked to him about it.", she exhales wearily. "But this isn't good for any of you. You two being at odds is consuming him. I love him, Winter. I believe in him. I know his judgement is infallible. That's why you should appeal to him; Joshua Judges Ruth."

I don't know what she's talking about. It sounds like her typical bullshit. But she moves like a snake, slow and smooth, tiny contractions through her body, until her arms are wrapped around me like the branches of a tree, growing around me. My arms just kind of find their way around her, fingers splayed through that garish fur coat. I can feel her underneath all those skins. Shit. That skirt's real leather, so Moschino... Ugh. Bitch. How did my hand sink so low, down the small of her back, and onto that skirt? She's more chaste. Her hand moves up, delicate tapered finger tips searching up the back of my head, behind my ear.

"I love you too, Winter. I'll linger, take my time out in the grit and grime. I'll hold the wheel and drive the black ice streets of Brookfield Heights. Kai won't mind. I'll give you two lots of time.", she breathes, slithering closer. She's so fucking hot, even in fur. "He misses you. He loves you so much more than me. It's just that there's things you can never give him."

Her voice is low. Melodious. She's taller than me, but she leans forward to speak, her face pressed to my neck. I close my eyes. I know what she gives Kai. No shit, it's stuff I can't. This fur is so soft. I'm sinking in. She's a furnace in this drafty porch. Her skirt zips up the front with an oversize two way YKK. My hand slides around her; she's so thin, there's nothing to her, like she's barely there. It's so easy. This is what Kai gets to do with her every night. My fingers find the cold steel zipper pull, and I turn my head to kiss her neck. I seduced Ally for fuck sakes. She had substance. This is a Bratz doll with a drug habit and half a community college diploma. How hard can it be?

She retreats heedlessly, slow enough to spare me the sting of rejection, as though she had no idea what I was doing, jangling her car keys and reaching for the door.

She opens the door. Michigan sucks. I should have went to Berkeley and never came back; maybe Mexico would have eventually taken California again. The wind squalls and howls here all the time. The visibility is nearly zero. Her hair blows all around her, framing her face like a religious icon, porch lit and lashed by wind. Her face looks devastated, like a doll, carved out of stone, lovingly painted by a dark soul. She should have just went to Berkeley too. We could have sat in my dorm room and watched highlights from Michelle Obama's speaking tour, while smoking white widow together. She's so whipped she could probably churn out a crocheted pussy hat a night, if she applied herself to it. Woulda been lit.

"Winter?", Mac shoots back over her shoulder, quietly. "He'd kill us; you know what I'm talking about. I love both of you too much for that. Just go talk to him."

"Yeah. I'll tell him about the Zara thing or some shit."
"Yeah. He'll be so pleased. And ask him if he noticed The Punisher being humiliated and unmanned with the tiny pink gun." Mac smiles, brow raised. "He hated that part, but he forgot to mention it... Good girl points? Yours for the taking..."

I hate smiling. But it happens anyway. At least I stomped on it quickly. "Okay. Thanks I guess. I might."

When the door slams shut, the light bulb snaps, fizzes and burns out. The blizzard is so loud that I can't even hear her polluting old Bush Senior-era Pontiac start. Guess she'd have had to lose that thing to go to Berkeley. Of course if she's going to stay here, she's going to have to stop watching Shep Smith. Maybe I'll tell Kai about that too. Maybe not today though.

**Kai**

I'm stalking a dark street, but I'm in pain. Terrible pain. My eyes water, skin screams and itches like the first stage of healing after a third degree burn. It's so fucking cold, that the snow under my feet squeaks and the sound scrapes my teeth. Ice forms in my lungs, the crystals tearing and ravaging the membranes of the alveoli, flooding the tiny structures with blood and fluid for me to drown on slowly. Frost on my eye lashes, inside my eyelids. My eyes freeze open, unblinking, able to see all. Hell is cold and dark. People forget that. The lake of fire is for purification. Hell is freezer burn. It's slow. Eternal. Sucks.

Everything in this bleak hellscape nightmare looks like Flint, Michigan, only worse. Disused rail tracks, littered with old black steam engines, glaring and rusted. Dusted with snow so cold that it's dry like ash, so cold any moisture in it sublimated away, leaving nothing but grime and filth. Dilapidated cinderblock hovels, and buildings sided in asphalt shingles falling into the basements they're built on. Something is behind me that I can't see. The malice in those huge black trains, rusted to the tracks, seems to see me. My heart beats like a bad 80s drummer; off time and too fast. I try to run, but the cartilage in my joints is frozen and rendered rough with dry frost grit. When I fall to my knees on the glare ice, I can't get a footing to stand again, just scramble away in terror like a beast, helpless and outplayed. There's a light from behind me, and my shadow stretches for blocks, twisted and ruined, inhuman. Something is behind me.

When I look up, a cement wall springs up in front of me, so tall I can't see to the top. A faded mural on the side reads "P&H". I don't know what it means. My gloved hand touches something warm. Something black creeping towards me through the dusty snow, seeping through it, slow like molasses. A broken, headless body split open, spilling its guts; blood, shit, fluid, rain. This just happened. I look up the endless concrete wall that blots out the moon. A noose hangs so far up I can barely see it, surrounded by a plume of spray and splatter. The drop was too far. Decapitation at the end of a rope. I don't want to see the head. I don't want to see the head. I don't want to see the head. I don't want to see that head. I try to get up to run, but no matter how hard I work, I can't stand up and stay up. It's too windy, too icy. Nothing works in this hellish cold. The light behind me is still there, and there's a sound that's getting louder. I close my eyes because it's the last rebellious thing I can do; the last power I have. But the thing behind me rolls into the backs of my heels as I try to scramble away. It's the head. I don't have to see it to know. I don't want to look, but I do. Light pours like flies from out its dead, gaping mouth, and from its flashlight eyes. Looks like a moon globe. I can't see the face. I don't want to look closer, but it draws me closer. It's warm in all this cold. I begin taking my gloves off to examine it, in the middle of the pitched and buckled black street. My left hand turns black as night in an instant. I have frostbite. I'll lose this hand.

I hate this place. I want to wake up.

A sharp breath that feels like humanity's first, breathed into my dust in the garden, fills my lungs,
under my burning, throbbing heart. The hard knocks inside my ribs give way to awareness of the soft knocks on my bedroom door. I don't sleep; I just dream. Somewhere I heard someone say that before. I don't want another Adderall, but I need it.

"Kai?", her monotone voice asks. I've been mad at her for so long it's hard to remember why. Oh yeah. She betrayed me. But I'm a man of largesse, a man of discernment, and a sublime temperament. Besides, she woke me up out of that fucking awful dream.

"Enter, Winter.", I call to her.

She steps in the door, head bowed, shoulders curled forward, face expressionless, save for the fear in her heavy lidded eyes.

"Are you okay?", she asks, just standing there. "I thought I heard you talking."

"No.", I deny without thought. She must see no weakness. Not until I've at least considered and weighed the value of her seeing it. "Probably just the storm. Older house."

"It sounded like you were chanting 'Perish and something'. I couldn't make it out. You're right. Must've just been the wind.", she says flatly, with a half shrug. "Can I sit?"

"You may.", I nod her over and motion to the spot next to me on the edge of the bed. I'm a benevolent man. "What can I do for you, sister?"

"I liked your speech tonight about The Punisher. I thought it was shit too.", she says, picking at her thumbnail and looking down at her lap. "That dark ballroom dancing scene was so lame. I'm a Hillary voter. It even embarrassed me. And that little pink gun they made him use? Could they have been any more obvious? That's just bad art."

I laugh. For a girl, and a leftard, Winter has always been really funny.

"Yeah, that was a groaner. I meant to mention it. I just realized now I forgot. Cuck Norris: that was Mac's line...", I grin at Winter, "...she's not going to let me forget that I forgot to use it."

Winter rolls her eyes. Good. Means she's still got some fight in her. She's been jealous. She loves me still, and will be twice as loyal once I let her back in. Also means she probably wants to scissor Mac, or whatever the fuck part time dykes do. That's fine. I won't hold wanting to against her. As long as she doesn't act on it. They're mine. Separate but equal. But separate.

"Whatever. I didn't come to talk about her.", she shakes her head. "I wanted to tell you what we found online. Get your phone."

She takes it from my hand, thumbs blaze, she hands it back. I'm looking at some half overpriced Eurotrash clothing app. Zara. But as I scroll through, it's like an abstract art exhibition about me and my movement.

"It's all there.", I say with bewilderment to Winter. "So obscure, some of this..."

"I know." Understated, as always.

"This is incredible." I feel elated, hard to contain it. "We're going all the way to the White House at this rate!"

I Google it. This collection has resulted in more snowflake complaints and pulled-from-the-line items than Coolest Monkey In The Jungle-gate. It's bigly.
"Look at this! Beverly was Kat Timpf's OOTD! And you got worn to... whatever, some Hollywood circle jerk by this nobody... but it's still cool!", I show Winter. "We just won so big. This is a huge cultural victory, Winter. Ah, look at this jacket... 'I really don't care, do you?'... that's practically your catchphrase. You want one of these?", I ask her, popping an Adderall.

"No. That's okay. I should let you get back to work.", she says carefully. "I just thought you'd want to see this."

"Thanks, sis."

I've been mad at her, but now I'm forlorn she's in such a hurry to get away from me. It's lonely at the top. "Hey, wait.", I call after her.

"What?", she turns on a heel, but doesn't return to me.

"I won't say sorry for punishing you. Because I'm not. You earned that. But it's over. Bygones, as far as I'm concerned. We're family. We should make time for a pinkie power again soon.", I say, walking from the bed to the doorway to embrace her. She goes stiff in my arms. Girls don't care how much they earn; they always resent paying.

"Okay. Have a good night, Kai."

She doesn't push away from me, rather waits patiently for me to release her. She smells good, hints of something sweet and dark, like spice burnt on an altar. Hm. Maybe we need some of that shit. Sacrifice is so important.

When I let her go, she adds before closing my door, "I'm glad we're friends again, Kai. I missed you."

I forgot to ask her if she liked the idea of changing Mac's name to Organ Grinder.

I lay back down on the bed, but I don't want to go back to sleep. Not right now. I'm just going to mindlessly scroll Zara and bask in my victory. They finally took the bait, even if it took two seasons. Those sketches really were brilliant. Too bad Meadow was just such a bitch eatin' crackers that I had to sacrifice her. She really could draw. But she was so fucking irritating. The SCUM robe dress really came out nice. I'm going to buy it for Mac, and fuck her raw in it, hood up. She'll love it.

I flip on Fox, and there's Laura Ingraham in the Serena Belinda tribute dress.

**Mac**

Kai's asleep when I come into the bedroom, laying curled up on his side, on top the blankets, phone slipped from his hand onto the plaid quilt. The only light in the room is the incessant flashing of the television, lighting his face. Kai looks like the boy next door when he's asleep. He's cute. Cute dimples, sweet expression, smile that spreads faster than Ebola, and a jawline that's softer than most of the Chads'. He looks like a regular guy, if you can ignore the muslin nehru collared gurujamas. A little Eastern for his sensibilities, if you ask me. But I don't question him. If I did--him, myself, this world, anything--where would it all end?

Asking questions, the real kind, the kind you can't perform a crooked Google cucksearch for, the kind you have to go inside for; that's never led to anyone being happy. That's the curse of the devil. That's all the things God wanted to protect us from, in ever young eternal life in the leisure of the garden. People call it the Tree of Good and Evil. It wasn't. It was the KNOWLEDGE of good and evil. Never seek that knowledge. That's the sin we all die for. The knowledge was the thing so abhorrent we all have to work, and wail, and suffer, and die, and rot for it. Good and evil were never
meant to matter to us. Knowledge has always been the problem. It wasn't meant for us. Certainly not for the Daughters of Eve.

I wrestle with those thoughts. Thoughts about Kai being just a man. Because if he's a boy next door, some Midwestern derbisher? I'm cast out. Because no boy next door wants me, that's for sure. And I'd rip one of those limb from limb anyway. I need Kai to keep being powerful, so he can keep on keeping me in line. And I need to stay in line so I can help him. I mean, he forgot to say Cuck Norris. I need to do better, work harder.

His bedroom is like a tomb where he died and ressurrected. Nothing has changed in here. Blue walls that I bet his dad painted for him when he was ten-ish. Hand-me-down bed frame from the 70s. Plaid quilt from Sears. I thought the only people who put their new television on top of their old television lived in Moose Jaw. But it turns out they do that here too.

The floor feels cold under my feet. I hate being without my shoes. We wore shoes in the house when I was a kid, but I don't know how Americans feel about it; probably Kai's fine with it, since taking them off is a Jap thing. But then those jammies are so Eastern... Whatever. My shoes were snowy, so I took them off, and pad softly across the hardwood in my sheer white sissy socks. I like them. Kai has a sexual fetish about them, but they just remind me of what I thought Sunday School would be like. It's wasn't. Neither is anything. My college had cabarets. I thought that meant pink punch with ice cubes and roofies, in a big crystal bowl, and lots of hot girls and cute guys dancing and making out under a disco ball, surrounded by silver foil fringe curtains. Turns out it's just some shitty warehouse with florescent track lights, all turned on, and cheap hooch in plastic cups. A bunch of nasty fat chicks, and stupid, boring guys with at least one glaring physical shortcoming on every single one of them. The only thing in common with the fantasy was the roofies. Kai is the only thing in this weary world that has ever met my expectations.

I lean over him, look at his beautiful, perfect face, reach my hand out slowly to stroke his cheek with my finger tips. When he was a kid he must have had a brief flirtation with acne because he's got the faintest of scars between his eyebrows and hairline. I love people who had bad skin. They always grow up to have good personalities.

"Mac?", he asks before his eyes open. "Did you just get back?"

He's waking up, about to roll over and sit up, but I can tell he's tired. I'm in a strange mood tonight. So I slide onto the bed, and under his arm, throw one of my legs over him.

"Yeah. The boys were all pretty stoked to get their tendies for a change. They were all ginned up and doing good with The Punisher stuff. Last I saw, they were doxxing Steve Lightfoot. Lightfoot? I mean, never trust a guy fucking named Lightfoot. Lightloafers? He was going to make a good Punisher?", I tell Kai. He smiles for me--that beautiful, dimpled bright smile--still only half out of sleep. He's in a strange mood tonight too.

"You help them with that before coming up?", he asks.

"No. I went driving for a bit before I hit the drive thru. I've still barely seen this place. When I got back, I just threw them the bag, pretty much. I was anxious to see you."

"Hm.", he says dubiously, pulling me close, rolling over on top of me, covering my lips with his. Best thing about those weird Paki Pantsuits he rocks? I can feel his hard on through them so good. He's huge. 'UGE. Bigger than you'd think by his height. Not that I know anything. His is the only one I've ever seen. But I'm impressed. Impressed. I'm pressed. Repressed. Love when he has that big cruel thing pressed against me. Too blessed to be stressed. Okay. Puke and die. Whatever, I love Kai.
"Fuck you feel good in this thing...", he says amidst kisses against my neck, his hungry hands are all over my body, spread out, making trails through the dense blue fur. He grabs my tits roughly through my coat. I wish they were bigger. Kai doesn't. He says there isn't anything he wants to do to a body that he doesn't want to do to mine. Maybe that should scare me. I've seen some of the things Kai does to bodies. But it doesn't scare me. I don't care what he does to me. I'm his. I've never been anyone's. I didn't even think I ever wanted to be. How can you know how bad you actually want a family if you've never had one?

"Thanks for getting it for me, Kai.", I breathe in his ear, slipping my right hand down his pants. "Can I have this too?"

He's already panting, thrusting into my hand. I don't even have to stroke him. He's pounding inside my hand like a piston.

"You want to practice what I taught you?", he asks, voice tight with need.

I can't stop writhing underneath his lean, strong body. He feels good like this; I love that sensation of his weight on top of me, his hands violating me, hot oppressive breath all over me. I can't stop getting wetter for him. I can't stop doing what he wants, because he knows how to make me want it too. I'm going to give it to him. We both know it. The only reason he doesn't have it, is that he still hasn't taken it. I want him to make me bleed.

"You can fuck yourself like that, Kai.", I moan almost wordlessly. He's slid out of his pants, and my hand followed his hammering cock between my own thighs. I'm stroking him while his dick taps up against my panties. I can feel its length brushing up and down the inside of my legs, his skin so fucking smooth it's like satin. I can't wait anymore. "Don't you want to teach me to do something else to you? Don't you want to teach me to kneel? Don't you want to break my seven seals?"

"Oh gawwd, Mac...", he groans. "Don't fucking tempt me."

I still need him inside me, but I stop short, cup his jaw in my hand, capture his black gaze with mine. "Don't do that with me. Don't take The Lord's name in vain. Especially not inside me. It would make me feel bad, okay, Kai?"

It takes him a couple more thrusts to pause. He strokes my hair, lays down on me, cock still pressed between my legs.

"Mac, Mac, Mac. What am I going to do with you? You can't serve two masters.", he says tenderly, but with a hint of corrosion. His eyes are dark, a glint of anger mingled with his lust. He's patient. I know I test him though. He loves me, and he desires me, and that buys me a lot. But he wants my soul. I want to have my cake and eat it too. So does Kai. He wants me to give him everything. It's the only reason he doesn't take it all right now.

"I know, Kai. I know you're Chosen. I wouldn't serve you well if I didn't remind you to be a good child. But yours is the temporal hand that commands me. As long as I live, Kai. I'm yours.", I whisper gently, sucking kisses from his sinewy neck, and slowly, with a light touch, I start stroking him again. I keep my eyes open, watching his face.

He's satisfied. His face softens. His cock hardens even more. I'm still buzzing inside, feeling a little bit numb. I'm not used to caring about someone. Sometimes it all just feels so confusing and fragile, like choosing to stand on a crumbling cliff at the edge of an abyss. Whatever. I joined him underground, and I'd do it again. Especially when he's doing what he's doing to my ear with his tongue...
"Mac, how were you out in this blizzard five minutes ago, bare legged, and your thighs are so fucking warm?", he asks.

I'm not sure if this is a rhetorical question, some way of implying he wants me to finish him with my hand before we go all the way, some way of implying tonight he doesn't want me to slap him away, or if he really wants to know why my legs aren't cold to the touch. I usually just answer Kai directly. I interpret his word literally. Even when he doesn't mean it that way, he seems to like it. Shows him I fear his word.

I shrug a little, even under his weight.

"I dunno. It just really doesn't get that cold here compared to home. My blood's probably really thick.", I kiss the words out on his jaw, with my face buried up in his long hair, while he lazily humps my fist between my legs, moaning and trying to make it last. "You know what they say, Kai. Warm thighs. Cold heart."

He comes. Comes like shaken up champagne on a maiden voyage. He's so sexy. But his eyes look strange, his expression shaken by something.

"Take your clothes off Mac.", he instructs me flatly, as he reaches over to the nightstand for an Adderall. He bites it in half, and gives me the leftovers. "I want you to sleep with me tonight. You can grab a shirt out of the closet or something."

I gaze at him, as he undresses and slides under the sheets. I've never stayed the night in his room unless we were up working on something. He probably just wants to talk about how the design portfolio he anonymously sent to all the mid-level fast fashion joints finally got picked up by Zara.

"Really?", I ask, trying to hide my excitement. Legitimate excitement. Over sleeping next to a dude who's already come for the night. I really do love him.

"Yeah.", he slowly agrees, a sly smile spreading over his face. "I don't want to feel cold tonight. Just hearing that wind makes me cold.", he shudders. "Besides...", he adds with a grin, "... you got a clean up on aisle four."
Chapter Summary

Warning, everything is going to get ugly.

*Speed Wagon*

The knock on the front door comes at around 4:30, not long before the sun would be setting, and not long after we'd heard the shuffling, heavy footed steps from the basement.

When I answer it, some fat chick is standing there, the collar of her burgundy anorak parka slightly shiny with neck grease. I can't tell their ages when they aren't hot. If they're hot enough, I can't either. Either way, this ones not worth spraining a brain cell for.

"Whadda'ya want?", I ask without bothering to make eye contact. I like blondes. Taylor fucking Swift. Mac Tonight. Winter; she's hot too. That's what I'm talking about. This one's squat so I can see some grey roots, hair dyed some ugly shade of brown with red and yellow stripes in it. A definite look-through, not look-at. If I was still a real cop, I'd write her a ticket even if she cried, and I'd laugh about it with the boys after besides. "Didn't you see the no solicitation sign?"

"I'm not selling anything.", she snaps. Snaps at me. On Divine Ruler's porch. When she's bugging us. A fucking nasty woman with stale garlic breath. "I hit a patch of ice and slid into that piece of shit you have parked out front. The scratch on it is so small I could fix it with a pen.", she squeals hysterically, as though the stopped car has wronged her.

"Listen, lady. Don't go digging through your ho ho shopping bag for a Sharpie. Calm down before you damage anything else.", I tell her.

"Hey, Pus Bucket?", I yell down the stairs. "Some woman clipped Mac's car. She's here threatening to try to fix it with a pen. Get up here, would ya?"

"What was Mac's car doing out on the street?", Pus Bucket yells, running up the stairs. "She's not even here."

"Yeah, Tripod took her in the G Wagon with Winter to Butchery. Kai wanted her to make some more of those nanaimo bars. Heart Attack was driving the Pontiac. Had to run out for some more milk and High Life. He was just bringing it all in with the hand truck.", I explain. Man, sometimes I swear I'm the only one paying any attention around here.

"Look.", fatty interrupts, "I just need the owner's insurance. My Rav 4 is smashed. Surely, you see my point. That car is fine. This is going to cost me a fortune. It's not fair. And it's not parked close enough to the curb."

I exhale, look back over at Pus. This shit is not what we need.

"And where is that license plate from? What's Sasquatch?", tubb-o bitches.

"Just a minute. Don't do anything.", I tell her, trying to seem reassuring. The last thing I need is her vandalizing the wreckage when I'm inside.
I slip out of sight, whisper to Pus, "Fucking woman drivers. Probably too busy swilling back a Tim Horton's and hurrying home for Dancing With The Stars. What are we supposed to do now? I don't know what kind of whackadoo insurance Mac's got. Isn't it some kind of state run, commie insurance? It's probably not even legal down here. We can't give this dingbat any of her papers anyway. Kai'd kill us."

"What would I kill you for?", Divine Ruler's voice rings out loud behind us, as he approaches, smiling, arms outstretched. He heard the steps too. Took the time to just put on jeans and a shirt with a pair of New Balance kicks. It's good. Because it's gotta be raising enough questions that me and Pus look like the goosestep Bobsy Twins.

"Aw, we got a little situation...", I start to explain, before being rudely interrupted by the thirteen piece bucket of shit on the porch. She's interrupts with her mouth full. In the time it took to speak a handful of sentences, she's pulled out one of those 100 calorie diet-for-fatties packages of cheese-stuffed Ritz, as if calories don't count as long as you eat them in increments spaced by ten minutes, and is chewing them with her maw open as though it's cute or something. The general muzzle area is disgusting. Big grey tongue in there, working in reverse. I've never understood that about the fatty-funnel. How do they get so much shit down there when it looks like they're always pushing it back out?

"Situation is, that pink Grand Am wasn't close enough to the curb, and this street hasn't been cleared. That's a problem in and of itself. I'm taking that up with city council.", she threatens, "Now my Ravvie is scratched."

Pus and me? We just watch Kai work. When he's at his most dangerous, sometimes he's at his nicest. I mean, sometimes too, he's at his most dangerous when he's repeatedly stabbing someone in the throat.

He strides to the door, looking easy, big grin on his face, dimples going that rival even mine. Shit. My dimples get no play anymore. Not in ages. And they're deeper than Kai's.

"Well, ma'am, did you come to the right door, or did you come to the right door?", he asks, extending his hand, "I'm city councilman, most prominent citizen and foremost benefactor of the great city of Brookfield Heights. Councilman Kai Anderson, at your service, ma'am, but you can call me Kai."

And that's why he's the Divine Ruler. That Jedi self control. See, me? I can't even fake being nice to some aggro whale. Lulz. The killer whale tank. No. One word: Killerwhaletank. But Kai can charm the pilled polyester dress slacks off any one of these D-girls when he needs to. They just can't believe they're so lucky he's talking to them. He really knows how to sell it. Maybe those are scrubs. What a scrub. Why the fuck don't nurses still come correct and wear those little white hats and dresses like in the olden days, or porno?

"Oh, um, I'm Danielle. Danielle Sandusky.", she answers back, all flushed, hot and bothered. "Thank you. I just need that insurance."

Kai smiles long, then tosses his head back and laughs softly, "Well, now, Danielle, you said? Dani, you know that's not how this works. But I'm a firm believer in everyone getting a better deal than they'd hoped for. That's what I do. How about that's what I do for you?", he asks, unblinking, staring in her bagged eyes.

"Speed Wagon, certainly we have an auto body mechanic on hand?", he asks me, still holding her stare captive. "How about I have one of the city's own Journeyman tradespeople fix your--what was it, a Rav 4?-- for you, free of charge, while you wait?"
I sprint downstairs. "Hey, Gutter. Quit spankin' it to Handmaid's Tale and get up there. Kai's got a job for you."

"What is it?", he asks with a hint of union-lazy, just before getting up off the couch.

"Some broad slid her car into Mac's. Divine Ruler wants it fixed. Obvious reasons.", I explain.

"Did it look bad?", he asks, rummaging in the closet for his crow bar and bondo and shit.

"No, man. Just looked like a ding to me. Should pop out just fine. Probably just buff the scratch off. It's probably not even a scratch. Just some paint transfer from Mac's car, you know what I mean? I doubt you need that much shit. But I'd take it anyway. She's... problematic. She'll be happier with the job you do if she thinks it was a bunch of bother. You know the type.", I answer.

Gutterball is weak. I don't know if he'll last. He's about to complain. Here we go. A complaint, and something crude to say. Here he goes. He's working on it.

"This is horseshit. It's freezing out there, today, man. Now I gotta do this shit for Kai's slice? Be different if he passed her around. Shared a little."

"Shut the fuck up, man.", I roll my eyes. "As if. I heard she was some kind of model up there, worked as a muse for some big shot Lebanese celebrity hairdresser until she left to help the cause. As if she'd look at you. And don't talk like that about her anyway. Not her or Winter. Show some respect. They're Divine Ruler's. Just get up there and do your job."

I follow him up the stairs. As lieutenant, I gotta make sure Divine Ruler has all the drones doing what they're supposed to. Or risk becoming one.

When I get upstairs, Kai has Killerwhaletank in the kitchen. He's made her a Pure White. He never even makes his own. He's pretending to be engaged with some boring story she's telling about one of her other old grey mare coworker's failed diets or some shit. Like what the fuck is Zoomba? But Kai has his head tilted in interest and is laughing, asking, "Really?!", every so often. When he sees us, he puts his hand up, as if this blather is so interesting that he actually wants her to pause so he doesn't miss a moment. Masterful.

"Yes, and that's why a degree is SO important...", he says to her great satisfaction. She probably hasn't felt so warm, fuzzy, and close to bursting since her last trip to Golden Corral when she bellied up to the all-you-can-eat trough. "That guy obviously doesn't know what he's missing, proposing to an LPN, when there's an RN like you newly single."

Sheeeit. Kai's got something particularly nasty planned for this nasty woman...

Flint's department was such a mess. I wanted out; the millage didn't pass, and I hadn't been paid for overtime in months. Brookfield is way nicer; less crime, more resources, and I got a nice foreclosed condo for like 50 large. Boy, did I pick a time to move though. Picked quite the time to finally get caught swapping coke for icing sugar in the evidence room too. These gum sole cops here have no idea what they're doing though. I feed them shit about Kai, and he knows it all. Who does the department think I was stealing the coke for in the first place? Chumps. First time I met Kai after a rally, he brought me here for a pinkie power. Seemed pretty gay until I tried it. He asked what I was afraid of. I told him: sitting in my squad car, making maybe forty large a year, and while I'm just trying to sit for five minutes and eat my sandwich? One of those black thug lives that matters so much runs up on me, and executes me with an illegal gun. And that it was for nothing. To hand out speeding tickets. I was afraid I'd die, never making a difference like at one time I legitimately wanted to. But Kai changed all that.
So I know it when I see it; Kai's jumping this bitch in today. He's already leading Killerwhaletank down the stairs. That's why he's the Divine Leader. Where I saw nothing but a bottomless pit for endless breadsticks? Kai saw potential. The potential to back that sewage system up, and unleash all her shit on the world. He's going to give her something awful to do. Something she's never coming back from. Probably that thing we've been planning for Dearborn. She's perfect for it too. She's the exact right type. The vilification of men, dissatisfaction of women, and the immigration problem go hand in hand. We need to demonstrate the correlation. Then Kai can set to work fixing it.

I know better than to malinger around the top of the staircase, though I'd like to hear him work.

I saunter over, take a peek out the front door. Gutter is all done with Killerwhaletank's car. He's painstakingly buffing the scratch off the Grand Am. April Fools? I'm flipping the A and the m myself. That ride's so old it's bitchin', and I think it's maybe a Mary Kay car. The Grand mA. She'll think it's funny. It's older than she is. Winter will think it's funny. I won't tell her that Mac thought so too.

Kai

"Pinkie up.", I command. "Now. When I take yours in mine, and we're pinkie to pinkie, flesh to flesh, we're one. Complete honesty. I'm going to take your fear from you, and you are going to have access to my strength as a result. Don't lie to me. Don't lie to yourself. My time is valuable. I'm an important man; a stable genius. You will matter if you matter to me, but if you waste my time, you'll be worthless, and I'll call the cops about the damage to my car. Do you understand?"

Most people, even the really feeble ones, have a little bit of skepticism at this point. I was only a child the first time Vincent showed me the power of pinkies. And even then, I was skeptical. But not great big Danielle, with her dirty coat and her grey roots. She doesn't even have any questions. She just feels so fucking lucky to be here. She's just so desperate for some man to talk to her, that as long as I'm nice to her, she'll do anything I want. Not a true believer. Just a follower. Just a Kool Aid drinker. Probably tons of it, from the looks of it. Chugs gallons of sucralose a day, thinking it will make her thin, when all it does is make her insulin resistant and estrogen dominant. But she's perfect for this; for what I need right now. I need someone expendable, who it will please me to lose.

Of course, this will require sacrifice. Mine. And people's I care about. It's no fun a-wooin' some broad I would resent sitting beside on an airplane. But if it means some day, I get to make a messiah baby at 40,000 feet in Air Force One with Mac Tonight and Winter, during sacred rites, while I Swear plays? I'll do what it takes. Mine will be the first messiah baby ever born in the White House. Talk about an amazing achievement. So I'll hold my nose and do what it takes to get there. So much is depending on me. My girls. My men. My movement.

Gulp. Yes. She gulps before answering, "Yes, I understand, councilman."

She's utterly vile. I intertwine my finger with her pudgy, moist sausage.

"What are you afraid of?", I look in her eyes. Her eraser eyes. Definitely an IQ south of 110. Fair to say if the world counted on it, she'd never have invented sliced bread, though she certainly enjoys the man's innovation. #WonderBreadWall

She doesn't try to lie. She's perfect. She's a broken woman without fight, or anything interesting about her. She's completely blue pilled; propped up by estrogen excuses and daytime talk show advice. She's got a library of Chicken Soup for various stupid, gullible, needy souls; she doesn't just read them. She eats it up with a spoon. Because isn't that how Oprah got in such stellar shape? Soup? Just what I've been waiting for. A life best ended.
"Pretty girls."

Too stupid of an answer to be a lie. So she's mean and vapid, with an inferiority complex. I've got a recipe in here for that, somewhere.

"Do they laugh at you? Do you feel they are judging you?", I ask her.

"No. I bully them. I make lies up about them behind their backs. Call them all sluts. I say they are stupid. I tell them they're lucky to be wanted as though they had nothing to do with it. I judge them. I'm mean to them every chance I get. I get the last laugh. They're all trying so hard to be liked by other women that they'll never dare fight back.", Danielle answers back. She's doing well, at least for my purposes with her. Time to make her think she isn't.

"I told you I'm a busy man. This isn't your own personal confession or catharsis.", I snap at her. "So you hate them more than fear them?"

"I guess.", she sniffs, looks away shifty.

"Are you afraid you're always going to be alone; that any man you'd want wouldn't want you?", I press.

"No. Men want a woman who is capable, highly educated. I have a degree and a job. Any man would be lucky to have me. Beauty fades.", Danielle looks me back in the eyes angrily. "It's not that. I'm afraid of pretty girls. I'm afraid that they really are as happy as they seem. I'll never be that happy."

I sit looking at her. Her face is unmadeup, the large pores in her t-zone accentuated by her overactive sebaceous glands. She's probably rendered herself pre-diabetic and brought on early onset perimenopause with her inactivity and steady diet of Lean Cuisine nuked in BPA, flooding her with plastic estrogen. She wears shapeless, sexless clothes. But she's emboldened by a culture that for the past fifty years has been telling women that their looks don't matter, and that they don't need a man. She's done everything they've told her. She's focused on getting a degree, having a career, not being 'insecure' or 'body shamed'. She's not married, no committed boyfriend. She's not a virgin either. She doesn't need to look or behave a certain way to attract a mate. She doesn't need to dress up, diet or even shower daily to be a prize for any man. Because she went to university, remember? Paid her money, got her ticket? Fuck. This culture is a fail. She's miserable, unhealthy and even slovenly. And it's because she's done and believed everything feminists have told her. She feels unfulfilled and angry, but she can't admit to it, or to the reasons for it. In the immortal and ever true words of the great man, Freddy Rumsen, "Every girl just wants to get married." Problem is, they don't remember how. Women don't need feminists to tell them how to be happy. They need men to tell them what to do.

But there's no unfucking this woman. Danielle can't be based. She's too confident.

I think of Winter. She fronts, like she believes this nonsense. But if she did, she'd have never dropped out of school, even for The Great Pink Hope. She wouldn't let me talk shit she disagrees with just for a new Anna Sui. She would never have taken it up the ass, much less from that dork Scotty. She wouldn't wear fishnet, wing her eyeliner and say no to tendies. Part of her knows what matters. Men.

I think of Mac. Ah, Mac. My free hand moves to my face, rubs my eyes. This is going to be hard on her, but she's strong. See, Mac has no confidence. None. She's flawless. But she wouldn't dream of letting me see her without her face made up, an outfit she'd analyzed and editorialized to be my fantasy, and her hair free flowing and smelling sweet. She cooks for me. She entertains me. She's a
courtesan. A geisha. She never feels good enough. She does nothing but strive. And yet, in that she's found purpose. And in purpose is born worth. And in worth? Power. Poor thing. This's going to slay her. Not in the good way. But we all have to make sacrifices.

Time to drive this Rav 4 home. Time to tear this bitch down with the reality of what men really think. Not too obvious. But set a bomb in this bitch's parking garage that will be a gaping hole for her to fall into, never realizing I did it. This will be the best couple months of her worthless life.

I grip her finger with mine. Glare, unblinking into her empty eyes.

"So you're afraid that they feel good in a bikini on the beach?", I ask softly. "You're afraid that they actually like sex, knowing in their heart of hearts that they inspired the hard on they're riding. You're afraid their men want it, eyes open and lights on?"

She nods yes, tears forming in her eyes. No man's ever kept his eyes open with her. Shit. Means I'm going to have to.

"You're afraid that they don't have a man because of a weakness or character flaw, or because they need one, but because they have so much to offer a man, and they all know it?", I go on. Kick her when she's down. That's how this works.

She sobs. A big, wet, snotty sob, sucking back a big slug of green grease and swallowing it. Is there nothing she won't eat? Sometimes I hate being the boss, the man the buck stops with. I wish I could just make one of the minions bang this sloppopotomous, but I can't trust any one of them to pull it off. It has to be me. World domination. I knew it wouldn't be easy.

"You're afraid that you've spent your life lying to yourself about them. You're afraid that no matter what you do, they couldn't give a shit. You just don't matter to them. They have it all, and they know it, and all the passive aggressive bullying in the world can't ruin a thing for them? Meanwhile, you have nothing you actually want, and their very existence bothers you and ruins what little you do have, every moment of every day? Am I getting close to the nail, here?", I wind down gently, lulling her with my voice, as though this nihilistic catastrophe might hold some hope.

"YES!", she screams back in my face, her shit-on-a-Goldfish breath stirring my hair. I want a shower. She pulls her finger from mine, and collapses face down on the table weeping. I feel nothing but satisfaction. "Yes.", she sobs, "I'm afraid that I hate the life I worked so hard for, and that it was never my choice anyway. I wasn't born with another option."

I take her pinkie back with mine. I hope the moisture on it is tears and not snot.

Gently, I assure her. Feed her more of the Dr. Phil blue pills she likes so much, with a promise of something more.

"You always have choices. You've been strong because you had to be. You've done what you've had to do. But what if you did have another option? A chance to make the world fair, where the only advantages that really mattered weren't the ones people were born with? Would you want to make a world like that with me?", I ask her, transitioning from pinkie power to holding her big double jointed flipper in my hand, and raising it to my lips, pressing a kiss on it.

"With you?", Danielle asks me, drying her tears. The hope in her voice is just sad. It makes my soul feel itchy and uncomfortable. Not with empathy. With annoyance. I hate this woman. I don't feel any guilt; but I don't take pleasure in it that I'm going to have to let this deplorable hurt Mac to get what I need out of her.
"With me.", I answer tenderly, walking around the table and leaning down to embrace her. Yuck. She smells like a dirty neck. Rancid hair grease from wearing this coat year after year and never laundering it. She probably blindly trusts the 'Dry Clean Only' label on a made in China Walmart George coat. What a fucking follower. "You'd be surprised what a mere city councilman can achieve when he has a good woman with a sense of justice by his side."

"Do I need to quit my job?", she asks, once again hopefully. They all want a job so fucking bad, don't they? Then all just envy housewives, watch them on tv, want to be one. Sorry, Danielle.

"Oh, heavens, no, Danielle. Your career is important. I would never ask--no, let--you give it up for me. Besides, the cause needs money, and your job looks good for us. I value your education and skills. In our world, those things matter.", I tell her.

Well, we always need money. That part is true. I'll make up the betrayal of this to Mac by hijacking Danielle's meager wages and buying her those thigh high oxblood suede Charlotte Olympia boots she wants. Size fucking five. Little tiny feet. Harder to balance her tall, willowy body atop. It's like her feet came pre-bound. I wonder if it's true what they say about that...

"Because I'd quit, work with you full time...", Danielle offers eagerly.

She wants to go to work and flex the victory of getting to quit because a man is taking care of her. I'll dangle it in front of her, if she wants to telegraph that she wants it that bad.

"Let's just see how things work out, and how busy the campaign is.", I tell her. "You're going to be working on something sensitive. Something confidential. Let's just get started next week, and see what the task requires.", I explain, helping her out of her chair, and leading her to the bottom of the staircase, arm around her shoulders.

"I'm so glad you hit that stupid piece of shit car of mine. Otherwise, I'd have never met you. And I can tell already, that of all the women I have working on the campaign, you, Danielle, shine the very brightest. You're really something special. The poster American girl. The girl whose back this great country is built upon. I can't do this without you. I'm so glad we met.", I breathe the words to her, staring right in her eyes, holding her round shoulders through her outdated parka. I end by taking a deep breath in through my mouth and kissing her, lips slightly parted. Short enough for me to survive it. Long enough to sink the hook for her.

She sighs. "Councilman Kai Anderson. I'd ding my Ravvie every day of the week for you."

Ugh. Ravvie. How many times is she going to say that? Please leave so I can brush my teeth and wash my face, bitch.

I just smile, guide her onto the stairs with one of my large hands on the not-so-small small of her back.

The wall needs to get built. We need comprehensive immigration reform, and we need it now. Look at Mac. There's no reason she should be here illegally, and the entire city of Dearborn has a green card. You import the third world, you get the third world. You import based blonde 100 hotties, well, you make beautiful messiah babies with them, and make America great again. Be fruitful and multiply. So this sausage absolutely has to get made. It has to. But it's not going to be pretty.

Mac

My home, if you could call it that, was always a revolving door of foster kids and government gibs. My parents used to say most people didn't get to pick their relatives, but that they did. They made it
very clear, though, that they'd never picked me. I'd come to them, they said. I'd picked them. They'd have never chosen me, and I was never allowed to forget that. I never stopped trying though. I honored them. I did everything ever asked of me. I anticipated every need I could. I never understood why they'd seemed so afraid of me, that I had to be locked up. I'm sure I was more afraid of them. When I was set free, for those few years before I ran away, I found ways to earn my keep. So now, as a result, I make one hell of a pan of nanaimo bars.

Winter didn't want to help me, once my errand had got her to Butchery for the day. That's cool. I'm extremely lazy too. I didn't even ask her to. Kai took her phone back when she was grounded, and hasn't got around to giving it back to her, so I tossed her mine, and got to work. She'll order that black floor length Widow dress with the lace yoke and stand collar before I get a chance at it. That's okay. She's a little more gothic than me anyway. She'll be pretty in it. I intentionally stayed signed into my account so she could use my PayPal.

Besides, I wanted all the glory for this. I never ask for any, but I sold away my childhood for my doll skills. When Kai bites into one of these, his teeth break the chocolate shell, sink into the custard layer? His big brown eyes roll, he says, "YUM!"? I want all of that for me. For all those years of crushing rejection, standing with my face pressed to a window, locked out, freezing in a blizzard with ravening wolves closing in, while my family sat before the fire, able to just ignore me. While they ate the cookies I'd made. Now I have a real family. A basement full of older brothers who protect me. A sister who loves me and rivals me in equal measure. A man who is my lover, daddy, leader, preacher, and the only friend I've ever had. Are you really the messiah, Kai? Yes. Yes, I am. Amen and amen. Hand me the tambourine. Break out the cyanide. Fetch the copperheads.

So this morning when Kai mentioned that he and the boys liked those square things I made last week? My heart felt like a pot boiling over on the stove, my chest unable to contain all that heat and energy. I could have burst. Sure, I'm lazy. There's dope new shit on Dolls Kill. Melania wore our Zara coat and the woke warriors are all chocking on their tongues, vomiting all over Tumblr. I'd love to hit up /pol/ and see how they like my idea to meme the shit out of that phrase. I think we could really trigger the leftards with it. No matter what it is, our response becomes, "I really don't care, do you?". They'd hate it; as if we think they don't care. Because, really, they don't, but we aren't supposed to know that. They're more cynical than we are. They kick us if we go low, after all. And they love to throw around phrases like 'house negro' any time a black person steps out of Bernie Sanders' lockstep. Not like Bernie's a rich old white man or anything. They care about themselves and their hysterical need to bounce from one manufactured outrage to the next, that's it. They'd hate being called out on it. And by claiming we care about nothing? We frustrate them. Leave them unable to engage with us. Pretty hard to have any discourse or argument at all with an opponent who claims total apathy. We give them a big aching purple boner, then ignore it. Kai is going to love this. It's right up his alley.

So you better believe I made Kai and the boys their treats. Because tonight I'm going to Kai's room to serve it up on a platter to him, with a mug of Pure White, and stroke off his frustrations. So my Kai can be the one to disseminate this to the army of forgotten souls on 4chan. He can put it in their capable hands. The memes, the posters, the scrawled words on the walls of stalls in shopping malls. It'll be popping up in comment sections. Shit, Dolls Kill loves to rip shit off. They'll have it on an oversized white tee, superimposed over a mushroom cloud, shown under a cupless bustier and slime green vinyl thigh highs. That? I'd make a point of beating Winter to. Soon after that, Jesse Watters will take to the street with a microphone, trolling uselessversity students with it. Eventually, Tucker Carlson, bewildered and sarcastic, will be asking Cathy Areu, "I really don't care, do you?" about everything from asking consent to change an infant's diaper to gun control. Moonman might need to do a song. Maybe I need to come out of retirement.

Tripod listens to Motorhead so loud that Winter and I can't talk over it while we drive back to
Commodore HQ. She looks so bored. I nudge her in the knee from across the van. I don't have a cell plan, so I can only use my phone where there's wifi, but she had the next page loaded before we left Butchery. When I catch her eye, I hand her my phone. I'm balancing all the pans of squares on my side of the seat anyway. I'm busy.

The days are so long here; the sun sits so high in the sky, actually still shines this late in the year, rather than just delivering cold, silvery, glancing blows off the snow covered curvature of the earth. It's almost a quarter to five, and it's still light out, the low sun flashing in my eyes through the trees lining the street as we drive. Back home, it would have been pitch black for over an hour already.

They don't even show my home on the weather maps here. Just too far north, too far west. Too far back in time, behind by a century, like Birmingham England at the turn of the last century. Money on the frontier and nobody knows about it. Thar be dragons. So it remains a bleak, bombed out hellscape littered by the reminders of what happens when stupid, hubristic humans try to fight against the undeniable laws of nature, hoping to pass through the eye of a needle with a threadbare carpetbag filled with cash. It's colder than the surface of Mars. You think the apocalypse can scare someone who lives in Saskatchewan or Siberia? We've been living in the unliveable already. The barren plains of Babel couldn't claim me. I escaped. But this nation of traitors doesn't want me, and their retribution would be swift and final. Even Trump lets in more Syrians than Canadians. Let the right ones in, my ass. Kai saved me. I chose my messiah. And he chose me.

When we pull up at the house, Gutterball is fucking around with my car. Tripod has the G Wagon locked so we have to wait for him to let us out.

"Hey.", I get Gutter's attention, walking up through the snow, "What's up? You want me to move it or something?"

"Just buffing a scratch off it. The tubbashit that drives that Toyota over there", he motions, "slid into it. She's in the house with Divine Ruler right now sorting it out."

I don't like Gutterball all that much. Kai thinks he's a doubter too. He gets no nanaimo bars, even if he did fix up my beater. I couldn't really give a shit about cars. Love/hate thing. I like driving. I fucking love littering. So I live to drive around throwing shit out the window, especially in blue states, under a cop's nose too, if I get the chance, just for the extra anarchist challenge. But the car itself? Whatever. Scratches are cool. Show the fucking thing who's boss.

Winter has already buggered off. With my phone. Without taking in any of these pans full of dessert.

"It's fine. Looks good. Perfect.", I tell Gutter, shooing him away. "I have a ton of stuff to carry. I'm just going to put it all in the trunk and move my car up by the house. I'll take it through the alley. Divine Ruler doesn't like it sitting out on the street anyway."

"You want some help?", he offers. One thing Winter agrees with me on? We both catch Gutterball leering at our cute tiny tits way, way too often, and that if Kai sees it? Gutterball's going to have a date with that rad Blitz-Kerner captive air pistol I got Kai for his birthday. And it won't bother Winter one little bit either. I bet Kai would let us be the ones to do it. He'd like to watch.

"No. You look cold. You should get inside, make sure Speed Wagon doesn't have any other orders for you.", I answer him politely. I don't mind a couple minutes alone to just be quiet. Different birds should sing here than at home. I still haven't had a chance to hear them.

My mind's a Song of Solomon for Kai. The snow is deep, and falling in around the ankles of my boots as I load the trunk of my car with all the Baker's Secrets, but I can't even feel the cold. All I can think about is how much I want to see him. Last night in bed I had that bad dream again about being
born, and my skin all sliding off. Kai woke me up.

He had a big hard on, but he didn't even try to use it. He just laid me on his chest and touched my hair until I went back to sleep. I'm pretty sure I cried a little, and he didn't even get mad at me. I love him. All I can think about while I bring stuff into the house is how much I hope he grabs me by the pussy and leads me out of kitchen captivity, and back into his bedroom tonight.

In my side porch, I bend down to unlace my boots. The grimy scent of exhaust fills this room. It's in the drywall, in the floors. Part of the house now. Dirty oil and mixed gas spilled out in dry dust. Metal caked with oily dirt an inch thick or so. Metal wheels taller than I am. I can see things I smell. The psychosphere in here. I shudder. Why do I remember these things? Winter hates this room too. So does Kai. Did they see things I've seen too? A chill sneaks up my back and crawls, many legged, up my spine.

"I think pinkie power's just wrapping up.", I overhear Speed Wagon telling Winter. Poor guy. He loves her. She doesn't even see him.

"With some big-knees who uses the term 'Ravvie'?', she says back sarcastically. I can actually hear her glare. It makes me smile. "I doubt it."

Kai still hasn't audited me. He'll hold my pinkie in his; does it in bed. I think it's more for him than me. If only he understood, that to me? If it's for him, it is for me. That's what love is. Nobody ever wants to know me. I'm fear incarnate. I told him. Nobody wants to know me; I scare everyone. More than anything, I've always just wanted someone to know me and love me. The only selfish thing I've ever let myself want. Now I just want for it to be Kai so bad.

I walk silently to the door at the top of the basement stairs and lean my head against the warm varnished wood. I shouldn't have taken a breath in that porch, got thinking. Now the voices in my head are whispering, trying to get my attention. Kai's voice at the bottom of the staircase is soft and low, hard to hear. I take the last Adderall that he slipped in the front pocket of my black corduroy overall dress this morning, chew it, clench my teeth, and screw my eyes shut.

I can hear him.

"...you, Danielle, shine the very brightest. You're really something special. The poster American girl. The girl whose back this great country is built upon. I can't do this without you. I'm so glad we met."

I'm stunned. Wooden legs carry me to the kitchen sink. I try to take a drink of cold water with my hand, just to stay vertical, but I can't. I can't because my heart stopped. It stopped, and turned from a heart, to a fist wrapped in blood, to a rubber gag ball, three sizes too big, with no holes to breathe through. My hand holds a knife. American poster girl? Something I can never be. A big Berghoff chef's knife. Must have been Ally's. Brightest? He's never said that about me. Brighter than me? I do everything he wants. I try so hard. My arms are so thin and white. My veins are so big and blue, flooded with the life I want drained, extra pressurized by the pills Kai feeds me, so I can just do this quick. I think I've done this before. Watched my body on the floor. It's only beautiful to me when it's dead. I never see it before that. I don't know what I'm thinking; not even my thoughts seem my own. There's no clarity. I don't have memories. I'm an addict. I'm just sane on a loop that needs repeating to keep from unraveling.

The sharp blade touches my soft flesh; this takes so much more pressure than people realize, even with an expensive middle aged hipster status knife. The tendons in my wrist will be the hard part to slice through. I'm taking this hand right off. No attention seeker attempts. I accomplish.

"Don't.", a hand grips my arm, yanking it away, and knocking the knife to the floor where it clatters
against the linoleum. Winter holds my wrist, her brows furrowed in muted concern, as she shakes her head no. "We're just going to cut up these squares.", she adds, loudly, over her shoulder. "Who wants some?", she asks, picking the knife up from the floor.

Winter

So Kai's in the basement. Great. Now we're going to have to endure some insufferable middle aged bore with shitty style who wants to start a book club or some shit? At least Mac doesn't read anything but recipe books and Revelation. And she just likes to get high and trip out doing it alone. She's really not that bad for a right wing Christian with anorexia. Maybe that's guilt talking. I used her PayPal and ordered myself everything in her shopping cart on Dolls Kill today while she was baking. Whatever. I don't feel the least bit guilty, who am I kidding.

I really hate the shit old ladies like. Fucking wine? It's a hangover without a decent drunk. Maybe Speed Wagon just can't tell ages. He's an idiot. The shoes by the door look like some kind of Clarks or Quarks or some equally dreadful thing. Trying to read the inside of the filthy insole was just too gross and depressing. I gave up. She probably is kind of old. Mac said one smart thing the other night; "You don't have to be old to be an old bat." Could be that too. Maybe she's just ugly.

It's going to be funny watching Mac try to deal with how Kai jumps in a new recruit. Bet he screws her. He's lazy. It's the easiest way. Mac just told me today she's still a virgin. This shit will fuck her up. I smile. It's going to be hilarious, watching her labor under it; what did she do wrong? She doesn't know Kai at all. He'd sell out anyone.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see her come into the kitchen from the side porch. I was mad at her this morning when I got up. She was sitting there drinking coffee in the black corduroy overall dress I wanted. She had a shrunken crop Fred Perry polo underneath, just to ruin it and make it all white power and shit. But she looks pale and sick, face slid so far it looks almost melted off. She leans over the sink, and that stupid shirt rides up her back. She's too thin. No one is that thin if they're okay. All her ribs stick out, and her back collapses in under her lowest one, like an insect. Her spine is exposed. I could count her vertebrae. I don't feel mad anymore. She only wore that shirt for Kai. How many things have I done just because I knew it would please Kai this past year? She turns the tap on, smoothing her hair back and twisting it into a makeshift ponytail, before leaning into the sink and trying to catch some water in her hands to drink.

Just because I can wield a nail gun, and won that game of lawn darts, doesn't make me a heartless monster. I'm getting her a glass.

But before I get there, she reaches into the drawer and without a second's hesitation, she has Ivy's huge Wusthof held to her wrist, pressed in. Idiot. She could take her whole hand off with that thing. I'd hoped her reaction to Kai's new pledge down in the basement would be funny. This gives me the feelz. I used to cut. I can give Mac pointers on how to do it better. Where to do it so it's hidden. Where to do it so she won't scar. Or maybe just suggest she doesn't. Kai wouldn't like therapy, and she'd never do it. But he wouldn't like this either. Not stable. He'd punish her. Then I couldn't use her PayPal. And I love her. She can't cry either. She'll be fine in a minute.

"Mac?", I put my hand on her arm, knocking her hand against the counter hard enough to make her drop the knife, "Don't."

I rush to pick it up off the floor before Speed Wagon looks in on us. "Who wants some of this coconut stuff we made today?", I yell out, slicing into a pan of her whack, labor-intensive, and completely awesome Canadian delicacy.
Chapter Summary

The gears begin to turn in Kai's Dearborn Initiative. Mac grieves the one year anniversary of the death of her nation's hero, on an already shitty day. Winter tells the tale. Phantom power. Hectic action. Dull and hypothetical. Everything is bleak. It's the middle of the night.

It's October 17. Rest in Peace, Gord Downie. Not much of a eulogy, a year late and a green card short; I hope I didn't ugly it up too much, and that I got it surreal enough. Forgive the indulgence.

Winter

"Gather round, disciples. Tonight I have much to discuss with you. The doctrine that guides us is about to be made manifest, in a stunning feat; a living meme, a doomsday tableau made GIF. Everything we believe in is connected. It's time to begin the difficult process of unfucking America. Shit's about to get real."

Kai calls us all around for storytime. He's out of his street clothes, and back into his dear leader shit. The Chads know something is afoot. They all feel a tingling in their taints. So sick. I'm so glad I don't have something called a taint. Fuck penis envy. Sure, we have an orgasm disparity, but there's no arguing the superiority of our apparatus when it comes to elegance. I'm fine wearing my guts on the inside of my body, thanks. Cunts on fleek. Speaking of which.

Mac gave herself a whole fresh face of makeup, put on some thigh high stockings with tiny flocked hearts all over them, and made a huge vat of Pure White. Stovetop, of course. With almond extract. And toasted marshmallows for everyone. If I hadn't seen her astonishing freakout earlier, I probably wouldn't detect anything. Kai certainly can't. But I can see it behind her eyes; a stunned look, like a baby bird flown into a window.

A goldfinch flew straight into our picture window when I was a little kid. Kai rushed out to pick it up before the Klemson's demented orange tom cat could eat it, and I still remember walking up, seeing him holding it in his hands, gently stroking its tiny feathered head with just one finger, whispering to it. It was beautiful, and fragile; just trying so hard not to die. Kai said it was so light that it felt like holding helium. He'd been scared to crush it with a finger tip. He was petting it with his pinkie. I knelt down, bare knees on the wooden slats to get a closer look, and I was pretty sure I saw it blink. Vincent came to see what we were doing, and without a thought took it from Kai, stepped on it, and threw it to that wretched, toothless old cat. The cat died a couple days later, amid accusations from the Klemson's that it had been poisoned. Kai got the blame, and took it, when Dad found the rat poison. But it was mine. I've always been a justice warrior, of one kind or another. And Kai has always protected me.

"The problem of immigration, and the problem of feminism is connected. It's connected, and it's conflicting; another of the suspensions of logic, and inability to apply a single principle universally that the leftists so frequently rely upon in their failed ideology.", Kai begins. The Chads are lost. It
doesn't matter. When he gets to the ugly part, they'll be lathered up.

"The left tells women all the time, 'You're good enough. You're in charge. Whatever you do, men should be impressed with it. You don't need a man. You need to BE a man, despite the fact that men are toxic and at fault for all of the world's problems.' Hence, men should be women. Women are told they are deficient if they want a man; if they want to get married, have babies and stay home looking after their man and their children. They're told that is failure. They're told they can be ANYTHING. Just not the one thing that they all want to be, in their heart of hearts. They can DO anything, except exercise their biological prerogative. And it's not an option anymore. Men aren't men. They're Twizzler-limbed feminist cucks in pussy hats. Feminist cucks addicted to free sex without a commitment, that is. Why would they get married and support a wife and family when they can get head in the shitter of the local bar from a different slut every week, and then run out on the drink tab? Why work? Why try? That's women's work now. And why is that degradation women's work? Well, because feminists decided so. There's no bigger misogynist in the world than a feminazi.", Kai preaches it, wild eyed.

I won't say there isn't something to it. I wouldn't trust my life to a guy. Wait, what? Other than Kai, I guess. Fuck. I hate when he's half right. I don't see what this has to do with Mac's ineligibility for a green card though.

"Our nation is dying. Our REAL population is declining. Even based Southern gay man, Lindsay Graham, was onto this during the primaries: we need immigrants. Americans aren't having kids anymore. The average has declined to a fraction beneath two. The American government under Obummer opened the borders and flooded us with the third world, and ushered in his Caliphate, overrunning us with hoards of Muslims. What's Aleppo? We're fucking Aleppo. Now we are the third world. Because those people? They oppress their women, and THEY HAVE CHILDREN. Lots of soulless insect children, raised up in the 'religion of peace'. What? You don't consider a crude pile of pallets, covered in tarps, where children grow up treading on the graves of other dead toddlers, while they practice with AK-47s how to commit the perfect school shooting, to be idyllic American culture? You racist!"

Kai paces, and works the cult. Mac is diligently trying to listen. She just can't hear anything yet. She's a good faker, nodding in agreement. Other than me she's the only one here smart enough to follow where he's taking this.

"Now, we are in a cucked up mess. America can't ever be great again if we don't do something drastic to unfuck it. The work force is flooded, and wage stagnation, which began as a problem when women entered the work force, has only become more exaggerated. Fewer and fewer women have the option not to work. As the labor force, and I mean force in the full sense of the word, expands, employers have more options. They can pay less. They can offer fewer benefits. This only makes jobs less lucrative, and increases competition. Higher education becomes the only answer. More years. More years in school. More years in debt. Fewer years to procreate. Fewer nights off to fuck. And most importantly to the left, every drone has to work."

Since when is Kai Ben fucking Stein? Did Mac explain this to him? He never cared much about philosophical economics before. Money's not his thing.

"But as employers have more options, and labor gets cheaper, we have an overabundance of jobs. More jobs than drones; we're all too poor to stay home and fuck to make more drones. Women hate us for it. 22 Million illegal aliens work in the United States of America now. We need every one of them. Without them, the economy collapses under a labor shortage. Of course this is because women work. Don't have children. And there are no men coming up to enter the workforce. It is a seemingly impossible problem to solve, because all the third world visa lottery winners, and shithole refugees,
are glad to live in squalor. They don't worry about suitable accommodations for their prodigious progeny. They don't care if their kids grow up to pick cabbages for ten bucks a day. Because for half of them, it's better than where they came from, and for the other half, they have a religious obligation to destroy every other culture on the planet by overrunning them and then killing anyone who is left."

"So we do need immigrants. But we have a problem, boys. We will be outnumbered in our own country within 15 years, if radical action isn't taken. It won't be America anymore. There will be no winning the culture war. The left will be used and then cannibalized by the incredibly effective Death Cult, known as Islam. Because in the leftard's Sacred Cow Hierarchy, they rate above women and even homosexuals. The militant left couldn't care less if Muslims abuse, kill, oppress and otherwise victimize women. They can just lie about it."

Kai tapers off, looking fatigued and sullen. I know where he's going, but the Adderall is keeping him from his point. The Chads all look stymied. He rubs his eyes, pauses to pour a few pills out in his hand and chews them up, then quietly rages, "Am I losing all of you, here? Winter, I won't even deign to ask you to pay attention to anything we do around here. Mac Tonight. Help me out. Maybe a girl can dumb this down so these brainlets can follow it."

He can be so biting when he's frustrated or stressed. Everyone is supposed to be able to read his mind. He's not looking forward to fucking that sweaty lump and her underactive thyroid gland, and his army of armed diplshits can't follow some amphetamine-fueled circular logic nine rings of racist hell rambling. Of course that's my fault for being apathetic. Like he didn't know me when he chose me. And it's Mac's fault just for being female; they can't follow it, but she's the one getting called out on her own like she's the stupid one. Ask her for a favor, then call her retarded. Narcissism. It's one hell of a drug. No one took more of that shit from Dad than Kai did, and he hated it. I don't know why he can't see that he's become Dad. People who become their parents are so pathetic. I'm never going to become Mom, just shoving down her feelings and saying whatever she had to in order to keep a tyrant happy.

Mac's devastated face from before was the saddest thing I'd ever seen. I don't know exactly what she heard, but her eyes were gaping fresh dug graves, begging for death. She's still an alt right bitch. But she's no Bratz doll. Her face shows nothing. No longer devastating, just devastatingly beautiful, stony and determined. She's still animated, not relying on a mask. I have shit to learn from her. Maybe she was listening. Mac rises from her sleeping bag, slowly walks to Kai's side, on tip toe, like she's dancing in a dustbowl carnival with a giant python over her shoulders.

"Boys, what Divine Ruler is explaining, put simply, more within our more limited cognition, is that due to feminism, women all work, decreasing the birth rates. As America has become dependent on immigrants to replace the working population, due to these low birth rates, the American population has been replaced with an entirely different culture. Unless we change this, we will cease to even BE America, within the next 15 years. Western civilization will cease to exist, swallowed and destroyed in a #Mudslide-of-Mudslimes. You import a shithole, you become a shithole. The irony is that the left are the women's libbers who led to declining birth rates, because women's rights are so all fired important that no woman should have the right to submit to a husband. But it is also the left who unequivocally defends Islam, which systematically strips all women of basic rights, hence their astronomic birth rates. See, we need immigrants. We need comprehensive immigration reform. And we need the wall to be built. Building
the wall, boys, is an issue of manhood."

An issue of manhood? This bitch is good. I can't even look in my brother's general direction because I'm pretty sure I know what his manhood is doing. Tooth and Nail Gun. Shit, bitch. She might live through this after all. And I might live to feel nothing but sexually confused hatred for her again. Fuck this feeling of subtle admiration.

A look of abject desolation passes over her face like a shadow though, when Kai presses his lips to her forehead, with a huge grin, and says, "Yes!! That's what I'm talking about! I knew my girl would be listening."

Yeah. She was listening. Mos def, she was. At the door at the top of the basement stairs, probably while he was delivering his 'shine the brightest' rinse-and-repeat speech that he gives all the normies and plebs he plans to kill. She feels like shit that she's never heard it. She doesn't realize it's because he has a tiny shred of respect for her. He wouldn't dare say that shit to me either. We'd look in each others' eyes and laugh about it. 'Shine the brightest'? Fine. I'll say it... well, think it. SO fucking gay! Huh. Feelz good...

The Chads are all making a racket like a troupe of monkeys. It's a prehistoric display of chest bumps and bearing of incisors. Speed Wagon marshals the forces. Thank goodness Mac filled them full of warm milk before that rousing oration, or none of us could have ever got to bed on time.

Kai points Mac back towards my staircase, and guides her on her way with his hand.

"That's right, boys. And I have a plan. Girls, this plan is not for you. I'm going to have to ask you to leave. Winter, go to bed. Mac Tonight, Speed Wagon will tell you when you can return to your sleeping bag."

She follows her orders. I follow her up the stairs.

"Mac.", I grab her by the arm when we reach the hallway, "You can hang out in my room if you want. We could shop, or some shit. There's a big sale on Free People."

"Thank you, Winter.", she answers softly, her waifish body drifting into my arms.

Her bolt straight golden hair hangs long enough that it tickles my arms when they're around her. I breathe deep and heavy whenever I'm close to her. I don't know if that's because she makes me throb a little and really, really need to hump my pillow, or if its that ephemeral, dark, sweet smell she has, like some kind of burnt offering that I can't seem to breathe in enough of. Maybe that's just Tom Ford Black Orchid... I'm jealous of Kai. Jealous he's a man. If I was him, I would have her in my bed every night, and she'd spend all her time dreaming up ways to please me. Her mouth is pretty, lips so soft. She lets him speak with those lips, use her as a mouthpiece... Mouth Piece... lulz... then she puts them all over him, takes him in her warm, wicked mouth. Then he just turns around and banishes her from the basement, and forgets about her like it's nothing. Sucks to be a girl. This sucks for both of us.

"I'm really sorry about before. It's the pills.", Mac apologizes, shaking her head, under the touch of my hand. "I take too many, and then I get impulsive. I hate Nietzsche. What an asshole. Time is a flat circle, and all that shit? It's not a flat circle. And it's not a two dimensional maze. That's just stupid. Time is a plastic straw. We see it laying on some shitty melamine table, but God looks through it. And so the whole time line is visible not as a few linear, finite points, but as a scintillating eternity, free of constraint. Time, in a sense, is a misnomer. It doesn't even exist. It's a constraint, not a value. Now is the time to meme. Now is the time without time. Our last chance to get right, before the secret of the seven stars and the seven golden lamp-stands. I forget that sometimes. Everything just
starts moving so fast, and I just want something to stop. Esperate, you know? But thanks for stopping me before I... esperate’d... myself.

"No problem. You'd do the same for me." And the crazy thing is? When I say it? I know it's true. "I won't tell Kai. You shouldn't either."

"I know. It won't happen again anyway. There's nothing to tell him." Crazy thing is, when she says it? I know it's true.

She's in agony, and so am I. She's still up on her tip toes, lithe body wrapped in my arms, swaying slightly, just to balance. She moves up against me unintentionally, barely perceptively, but I feel her through our clothes like she's writhing under me in bed. Small breasts in her overall dress, firm and high. A sliver of warm, bare flesh between the bottom of her shirt and the waistband of her black corduroy pinafore. Her jutting hipbones rub across mine and I can't help but push into it a little.

"I don't know how you did that.", I hold her waist, drag my lips across her thin neck up to her ear.

"That speech? I didn't think you were hearing a word he was saying. And 'an issue of manhood'? I mean, I categorically disagree with every word you said. But your rhetoric was finesse AF. You worked those boys."

"Tell the boys they couldn't hang. Stepped to the mic and sang. And their voices rang with that Aryan twang...", she answers, smiling faintly, looking sad. "'Building the wall is an issue of manhood' I got from Nancy Pelosi.", she tells me with a wicked little laugh. "I fucking LIVE to hijack the leftards every word and turn it to memetic napalm. She thought she could chop Trump's flaccid little prick off? Well, I just got a whole army of young white men ardently engorged, ignorant and aggressive. I neutered her words and got all those big florid dicks swinging."

She's sexy like this. It's power, I realize. I can't keep my hands off her, can't keep my face out of her hair, can't keep my lips off her soft skin. She smells so good, and I feel drunk. Does this happen to Kai with her? How am I bumping my pelvis against her while I think thoughts about my brother. This is an abomination. I hate her. Why does she do this to me?

Ever polite, ever icy, she pulls away from me and steps back, her hand slowly leaving my back, stroking down the length of my arms and holding my hands.

Impulsively, as her hand slides through mine, I reach for her pinkie with mine. It's not my place. Kai wouldn't like it. But I do it anyway. I blink and swear for a second I see roiling motion inside my eyelids, like a nest of something turbid and slithering, or a timelapse of overgrown thorns or something. I'm shaken.

"I'm a Daughter of Eve.", she utters with complete authority, instantly, concurrently, wrenching her finger from mine. At least that's what it sounds like.

She never seems afraid. She can be sad, mad, gentle, withering, and always seductive. Never scared, but rather filled with fear. It's terrifying.

"What did you say?", I ask her to repeat.

"Nothing.", she shrugs. "Your imagination's having puppies."

"And thanks for the invitation to your room.", she changes the subject in haste, wheeling away from me evasively. "But Kai wouldn't like it. He likes it when I follow his commandments. You're supposed to go to bed and I'm just supposed to wait. I'm going outside for a few.", she says over her shoulder, stepping her long legs into a pair of snakeskin booties, and slipping into a huge crisp brown
Carhartt parka. Who knew canvas could look so fucking flossy? Psycho but cute, you absolute filth.

"I'm just gonna sit in my car and pretend to smoke these. Try to see some of that phantom power in the stars when there's nothing on...", she says, waving the pack of clove cigarettes in her hand. "..if Speed Wagon comes looking for me. It's a year since I came down to this alien nation, you know. A year since Gord Downie died, and my country with him. A year today, exactly. You know, I never understood why you Americans wanted Bieber, while we kept Gord. We got the better end of that deal. Think I'm going to take a High Life with me too. Pour one out for my dead comrade."

"Spread the gospel, Moon Girl.", I tell her. "You might not be right about much. And alt right about way too much. But The Hip are the shit."

I slip past her as I head past the porch, and down the hall, pausing to rub her sharp square shoulder through her coat.

"Rest in pieces.", I add softly. She just smiles faintly and nods, tears welling in her big grey eyes, before heading out into the raging night. The last recluse. The last of the immune.
Kai

It's late. I should sleep. I have a Skype interview with KTLA tomorrow, and if that goes well, who knows; maybe I could replace those dead weight call-in stoners on Jesse Watters. I don't want a flappy mug with bags under my eyes and shit. My hand reaches around in the nightstand. I'm sure I still have some Nyquil in here. Mac likes it. Hashtag me fucking too. It makes her so horny she'll do anything I tell her. I got her to hump a pillow to orgasm for me while I watched. She'd never done it before. I made her do it just like Winter used to. Difference was, I could watch her, touch her, help her, tell her how, tell her when to stop, how hard to do it. She came so hard, then collapsed asleep. When she's asleep, I always put my hand inside her panties, find her clit with my middle finger and tap on it so she's sexually frustrated when she wakes up. Serves her right. She reaches over and pumps her fist on my cock when I sleep too. I've caught her... Fuck just thinking about her makes me hard. I wish I could call her in here. She was so good underground tonight. An issue of manhood. Oh, fine Mac, no blasphemy. Fuck, though, that was hot. But I gotta save all the steel I can muster. I'm gonna need the lead. I can't see her.

The boys were down with my plan for Kekistan. Shame I have to keep it from the girls for now. Being embedded in the most radicalized mosque in Dearborn isn't an easy ask. Danielle is going to need to be pitifully dependent on me first. I'm going to have to give her everything she wants first, and make her terrified to ever lose it. A lay that's not from behind with the lights out, and the opportunity to lord it over a beautiful girl. That's the limit of her narrow imagination. But she's going to want Mac to bleed. Now, Mac'd open her own veins for me if I wanted her to. I don't want her to. But she would. She'd be cooperative.

But I can't risk Danielle suspecting that we're running game on her.

Sex. You can fake it, but only if the person wants to be fooled.

Danielle wants to be fooled, wants desperately to think I haven't noticed that her breath reeks of decline; sloughed white blood cells, bacteria, decaying tissue, mundanity. The slow death that begins the first time you trust a lie because it feels good, and only accelerates with every blue pill, excuse, or compromise. A decline completed when you amount to no more than a homogenized slurry of common taste consensus. When a Wall Pop that reads 'Live Laugh Love' seems profound to you, you've given up the last vestige of a ghost. Grey matter breaks down like Manwich meat left tepid on the counter. The soul leaves the body, coalesces around the nearest Democrat candidate. And I will spue your luke warm patheticism from my mouth, sayeth Divine Ruler.

The body is meant to be a temple. Mac's body is mine. Kept pristine and perfect, just for my uses, to please me entirely. Everything about her is beautiful, humble, powerful, intentional, self controlled. When this unseemly shit's accomplished? I'm fucking worshiping inside her.
But Danielle's body is a temple to weakness, to sin; the lazy excess of sloth, gluttony, and pride; the pride that she's worth so fucking much that she doesn't need to try. Danielle wants to believe that a man could find her sexless, unkempt dungheap of a body arousing. She wants to believe that no one notices the sheer amount of hair on her upper lip, or the scattered coarse boar bristles that grow from her double chin. She wants to believe that a man like me values what's inside her; a boring, tasteless, indistinct nuisance ground of second-hand mediocrity and conformity, that latches onto things like the body positivity movement and Joy Behar. Her insides are just like her outsides, fed with her envy, sloth and wrath. A consequence of the flavorless rot that she's consumed with gluttony her entire life. As Mac and Winter say, a bitch eatin' crackers.

But humiliation... real humiliation? That can't be faked. And that is what Danielle really lusts after, greedily. She's always wanted to inflict it, and she'll be so desperate to keep that hollow victory. Mac's pain has to be real. Mac has to believe that I don't love her anymore, and never did. She has to somehow be hurt bad enough to think Danielle has more sexual market value than she does. Mac will have to endure the full outpouring of Danielle's wrath, and to truly experience it, I will have to be complicit. Danielle will only accept the offering of Mac's complete brokenness and destruction. I won't enjoy it, but I'm going to lay her low.

I chug what's left in the bottle, wincing the green syrup down. Do I feel something? No. Only works for chicks. That's just boner left over from before. I sink into the bed, close my eyes. Sink into the dip in this mattress that's been morphing with me since I was seven years old, and we moved to this house, from that two-storey townhouse rental out by the highway. It's unsettling to remember that person; lonely and chill, it makes me feel somehow disembodied and strangely small, as though I never existed. I live in a tomb of his memories all the time, and yet I have none. It's as though they've all been washed away, rinsed down a drain while I gazed at a nameless face, that I couldn't see as my own until it was gone forever. It's as though I was somehow birthed alone, motherless, and fully formed, on election night.

I hear footsteps. Shuffling; they speak to decrepitude. "Charlie? Haven't seen you in a coon's age." I call out from the bed, with a smirk. He'll appreciate the use of the term coon. Keepin' it about 60 for the old fuck.

"Well, man.", he drawls out slow, "You've been up to nothin' but small potatoes, small time shit. I don't leave the Helter Skelter bliss of personal hell for Mickey Mouse moves, man. I got a big operation now. I'm busy since I died. All the mothers who stuck the sharp end of a coat hanger through their baby, or had some Planned Parenthood Democrat-funded Dirt Devil Death Date do nothin' but give birth for eternity, over an' over.", he grins, "And I'm the ob/gyn, man. I eat their babies as they're born. Don't rush this new heaven and new earth along too fast. I'm just finally havin' fun."

"So what are you doing here now?", I ask coldly. I'm just as important as he is. He abandoned me, and there's nothing I hate as much as being ignored. Besides, I'm gay for babies. Once I sink the hook in big fat Danielle, embed her in that mosque in Dearborn, and she starts Riyadh Jihad? I can kill her off, and set a date for a ceremony with Winter and Mac so we can get to work on making my messiah baby.

"I like this race war you got planned. I don't know as I like the side you're takin'. But I guess we all know how it all ends anyway, don't we? Shit. Ain't gonna be no plastic straws climate change shit, is it? Nothin' for it but to get your own pound of flesh while the fun lasts, man. My man's on his way. I came to say goodbye, Kai. We gotta part ways, man. Our interests, poof, jus' don't intersect anymore. An' I don't like that new girl you got.", he ends by pounding the swastika on his forehead with all the fingertips on his left hand.
"Yeah. One thing I still agree with you about.", I tell my old friend, new enemy. "She makes me sick. She's everything wrong with modern Western women in one repulsive package. She's what you get if you take the entire line up at a till in Walmart, melt it down, and make a real big one with a well established yeast infection. I don't relish sticking it in that gelatinous, fuzzy lump of blue pill byproducts. I don't even want to hear her speak again, if I can't at least beat her with a switch the width of her lardy thumb. But the economy is booming, taxes are down, there are 4 million new jobs, and nobody is scared anymore, not even the left who rent their garments and gnash their teeth for impeachment. People need to be scared, and I need to be able to use her.", I shudder.

"Oh, that grotesque you locked fingers with in the basement today, you mean?", Charlie smiles, amused. "No, man, nah. I like her just fine. She'll make a nice big mess when you're done with her, all that blubber. You got a real fireplace in the basement; heat your house with that, man. Long and clean burning. Smells like a heathen pig roast on some South Pacific beach.", he laughs, before turning black and surly. "I don't like that pretty one you got. Don't like her eyes. Don't like her mouth. Girl burns out streetlamps."

He turns his back on me, takes a few steps. Funny. He always leaves through the closet.

His back still turned, he hangs his head and says bitterly, '"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.' Now, Kai, that's Genesis 3 15. That's the Protoevangelium, man. Spoken of the snake in the tree of the knowledge, who lived inside me all those years. Now, I'm gonna suffer for tellin' you that for eons; I'm cut off from The Word. But that girl? Man, you got no enmity with her. And she ain't scared to bruise her heel. It ain't natural. She scares the everlovin' hell out of me."

I think. I think and blink, and he's gone, and I'm alone again. Just laying in the dip in my old mattress outside the covers. That dopey shit starts to hit my blood stream, and I don't like it. The popcorn constellations above me recede. The world is quiet and boring, and everyone in it is alone. I want to be flung through it at terminal velocity so I never have to see the scenery.

Race war. What a chump. He might have been great back in his day, but old people always get feeble minded, simplistic, incapable of subtlety. I couldn't give a shit about white power. I want power. I just happen to be a man. I just happen to be white. See Kai flex. I'm not racist. Mac certainly isn't. She's fucking Canadian. But I need a way to make her American, and now that she's come in illegally, marriage won't do it. So if I have to start a race war, to start a fire, to get a green card for her, I'll do it. Islam's a religion not a race; Moon Girl testifies on this all the time. She sold it hard though; white this, white that. Protolobbied it to the Chads and it worked. We're not racist. Thank goodness America is though. I just need to remind them, then pour gas on it. They'll worship around the bonfire of fear, and I'll import a bloc of Kai-voters. This is a one man race. Full sense, highkey.

My eyelids cramp just to blink. I'm beginning to sink, case that holds all my soft parts rises and falls, vapour trails bear my pall to drift beyond the mortal walls. Sleep comes upon me with one last thought: He's afraid of her. What high praise.

Mac

I pollute, therefore I am. If a car idles in a back alley, and no leftard is offended, was greenhouse gas even produced? I smile, choking bitterly on the amusement; amusement Kai would have shared with me yesterday, that he would have today too, if that farrowed out old sow hadn't plowed into my car this afternoon. Joy has become offense, and a painful intruder in the bleak purgatory of my exile.

Cold wind whistles in through my open driver side window, blowing sweet smoke back in my face. Headlights shine through a galaxy of swirling snow in a pitch black sky. I can't see the stars above
unless the window is rolled down, and my head out, looking straight up. I can't see through the blink-back viscous layer over my vision that I fight with all my might. It's a good life if you don't weaken. I'm not crying. The wind just makes my eyes water.

Take another drag from a jet black fag, blow the gingerbread clove smoke into a gust of wind that's finally blowing the right direction. The vents in my old car blow hot air on full blast. I lean back into the seat, close my eyes. Just listen while the obsolete tape deck pumps out the distorted tunes from a worn out cassette. Gord was from here. I mean, not Michigan, but the Great Lakes region. He wrote Somethin's On about some huge ice storm. I wish I could ask Kai tonight if it happened here too; phantom power and nothing on for weeks, while people froze in their homes. It's just across the lake. It shouldn't be that big of a difference, but it's a world of difference. Then again, Ontario is worlds different from the isolated wasteland of Saskatchewan too. And no, I don't know so and so from Toronto, or Courtenay, or Winnipeg or even fucking Eyebrow or Elbow. We're the second biggest fucking nation by landmass on Earth. I don't ask New Yorkers if they know someone in El Centro. Fuck.

But this world is all connected. All the forces generated by the way God balanced the universe. All the plates that have to spin just so, spaced out between the chosen stars; an elegant, precarious toy that unfortunately displeased Him. My heart sinks at such sad thoughts. But this enormous perpetual motion machine, fine tuned in all its splendor, is all connected. Every hurricane that starts to turn out in the jet stream, out in the tropical Atlantic, and washes up on the Panhandle, shoving over the mid century modern glass houses, along with the meth labs decorated in gator skulls and Confederate flags, covered over and sinking beneath the weight of kudzu vine like mouldering bodies? Every one of those hurricanes blows itself out, spins a tired and spent phantom of its former power, until it reaches the plains of Saskatchewan, and joins with the relentless polar vortex from above. Then their powers once again join, in terrible displays of the power of The Lord.

I think of the first time Kai sent for me to come to his room.

It was a couple of months after he'd taken me in. I'd been down in the basement, think-tanking on 4chan, the day that we got the gift that was the Obamas' official portraits for National Portrait Gallery. I'd been the first one to superimpose a 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle' hoodie on Obummer himself and post it. They hate the phrase 'chimp out', but then go get painted in the canopy? I actually thought it was kudzu vine, but then I've seen more of the world than Kai has. It grows all over everything down in the land of cotton. Though some Johnnycomelately Kenyan appropriating slave symbolism seems really low. Though the left knows no limits. Anyway, I just rolled with jungle. It made it so memeable. I also photoshopped a toilet to replace the chair, and put a Koran in his hands, like a horrific, twisted, end times vision of a Norman Rockwell. I thought that was my best work, but it kinda went over /pol/'s head. It was commentary, art. Only Kai appreciated it.

Halfway through explaining my kudzu vine theory to some noob brainlet from Alabama, Speed Wagon tapped me on the shoulder, and told me to come with him. I was flooded with adrenaline, unable to stop my teeth from chattering. Kai wanted to see me in his bedroom. Alone.

Speed Wagon walked me to Divine Ruler's chambers, holding my elbow. When we reached the door, he knocked for me, let go of my arm, and left. The sensation of standing there, heart pounding, waiting for Kai to answer, will never leave me. I feel it every single time. A true surprise every time; I never have an idea what to expect. I'm not afraid of any outcome. But the suspense is killing me.

But when Kai answered the door, he was smiling, wearing street clothes. He let me in and laughed when I called him Divine Ruler. "Kai.," he'd said. "Just Kai in here." But in there is where he matters to me the most. That's where he's my Ruler, and mine alone. Hot tears stream from my eyes, steaming in the cold wind before I can furiously wipe them away.
I'd worn nothing but a spare blue-shirt uniform since my arrival. I'd had a suitcase of belongings, but it disappeared. All I could ever find were the boots I'd arrived in. One day, Winter was wearing a cropped white poplin button up with Colonel Sanders tie, and a black mini skirt. She just looked painfully rad. I'd been a total chick, and told Speed Wagon that I thought I looked ugly. He said my ass looked so good it was distracting the boys, and to do up my top button, white power or cholo style, whichever way suited me, so long as I was fastened to the top. We've always got along.

But that night, Kai had a box on the bed for me. When I opened it, there was an Alexander McQueen midnight blue silk shift dress, so fine that it was slightly sheer, cut so low at the back that it couldn't accommodate panties, much less a bra. It was covered in tiny flocked velvet gold stars, and silver moons in their various phases. Underneath, when I lifted it from the box, there were a pair of Wolford stockings; nude fishnet with golden threads, perfectly the color of my own hair. Nothing else.

"Kai...", I'd spoken, hushed and reverent, examining it, "This's lovely. No one ever buys me gifts. You chose this for me?"

He was pleased. "So you like it? I did good? You'd have picked it?", he gushed, uncharacteristic.

I'd thought on this. Kai had so much resting on him. All of us and our needs. The constant onslaught of political rivals, eager to steal his throne. I knew Kai had been hurt before, betrayed, shamed. It's only through suffering that anybody learns strength. But affirmation becomes all the more important after that, a foundation for his masculine power. He needed me tonight.

Kai wanted me to try it on. I knew how he wanted it all to be. He was testing me. So I made him turn his back, while I stripped down to nothing, slid the dress over my nude body. It was so short that the huge angel wing sleeves hung longer than the hem, and the stockings were real silk, their soft height stopping shy of the skirt of my new dress. Self conscious that my nipples showed through the fine fabric, I positioned my hair over my shoulders to conceal my nakedness.

He's smart. He could hear that I was still, no more snapping of stockings, or swishing of hair. When he turned and looked at me, I gushed thank yous. I'd never felt so pretty. I threw my arms around him. At first he felt reticent. There was a sort of taken-abackness. But I climbed him like a tree, pressing the full length of my body to his, wrapping around him.

"Thank you, Kai. It's absolutely beautiful. You're so generous.", I breathed in his ear, standing on my toes and leaning into him, cradling his big hardening cock in the gap between my thighs. I finally understood what an erection was. I wanted it. I moaned from the feeling of leaning against it. "Is that what a hard on is? No wonder you're so powerful.", I gasped, wide eyed, pulling back from him, stunned.

His eyes were glazed, driven. He walked to the bed and sat reclined.

"Come over here, Mac.", he said, "Get in my lap."

I followed him, and he positioned me where he wanted me, on top of him. His eyes watched mine, and I knew this was a sort of test.

"Now ride on it."

"I don't know how.", I told him. But he didn't care.

"I know.", he said, grabbing my hips and pushing me down, leaning up to kiss my neck. "That's what I like about you. You haven't been taught a thing. You're completely ignorant. But you know
so much. I want to see what you know about this."

I really didn't know. But he was hard, and I had nothing on under my dress. When I twitched my hips against it, the hard, hot bulge under me jumped up to meet me, and it tickled and felt nice, so I did it more. I watched Kai, and it obviously felt nice to him too, so I did it faster. His eyes lolled, and his neck flushed red. My lips felt swollen like I wanted to kiss him, so I leaned down and sought his parted lower lip with mine, touching my tongue to the lower ridge of his lip, and sucking a kiss from his mouth. He was breathing hard. I wanted him to do everything harder, so I made him. I don't know how I knew how.

"Kai?", I asked him, grinding up and down the big hard thing under me, "Does it feel good?"

He groaned, "Yes. Fuck. You're good at it."

He reached up and grabbed me behind my neck, pulled me down, sloppily kissing all over my neck, hard and out of control. His hands were everywhere; not predictable. Caressing my tits, digging into my ass, stroking my hair, bruising the insides of my thighs.

"That's not what I mean. Being a man. Having one of these. Getting hard like this.", my voice was getting breathy and tight. Pillow talk baby talk. I couldn't help it. "It seems like it would feel so good."

"It feels good.", Kai breathed, "But you make it too hard. Ever since you got here. I get so hard it hurts, feels like it's going to burst, split open."

I look in his eyes, stroke his face, lean down to kiss his mouth as I ask breathlessly, "It's so hard to be a man. So much rests on you."

"It's so hard to be a man. So much rests on you.", I moan, settling onto his feverish manhood, rocking in circles. "Is this helping?"

"Yes and no.", Kai rages, soft words as he bites my nipple through my dress. "It depends if you can make me come."

"Can you come like this, like, from me doing just this?", I ask, curiously. I am curious.

"Maybe.", he says. "I never have before. But I might. I don't know. Can you?", he asked low, like it was a challenge.

My thighs burned, propelling me as I pushed onto his cock, rocking and riding fast and hard. Still in his pants, but I wanted it in me, I wanted to push onto him so hard that he'd slide inside, jeans and all. I'm still a virgin, and I wanted to be that way on my wedding night. Now I didn't care. I wanted that hurt right now. I needed it to keep me down.

"Maybe. Your body is giving mine terrible, sinful knowledge.", I whispered to him, sinking the heels of my hands into his chest. He moaned, and put his hands on my hips, pushed me down hard, rolling my hips harder than I could do it by myself. "Kai, you're making me carnal. I don't want to want this. I was always such a good girl; a wicked, seductive child, they called me. I spent my life living that down. I didn't want to be bad. But you make me want to be bad. You're making me be so bad, Kai."

At that, he groaned loudly, and ripped the button fly of his jeans open. I panicked and closed my eyes.

"You make me wicked and brutal, Moon Girl.", he said, as I felt the knuckles of his fist against my bare girlhood. He was gripping his huge, throbbing dick. My eyes were still closed, or gazing up at the ceiling. I didn't know what was happening until he began trying to force it inside me. His hand was there to guide him past the unbroken resistance of my body. I gasped, and pulled back. I was
wet, and aching for him to do it. I understood it. I knew he'd slide inside, and then I'd ride it just how I'd been doing it, and it would feel good for both of us. But I'd be nothing anymore, not if I gave it up like that. He didn't want that either.

"No.", I told him firmly, and struck him hard across the cheek. "I'm not ready. I'm still a virgin."

I didn't know what he'd do. Kai was so powerful. I didn't know if he'd force my body to betray me; force himself inside, and make me love it, and make me come all over his big angry cock. I didn't know if he'd kill me, hands around my white throat, and then have the Chads chop me up and throw me in the county dump. I didn't know if he'd go limp. That would have been the worst.

He didn't do any of those things though.

"I know. You're a good girl.", he moaned, and kissed me, did his jeans back up.

"Can I get back on it now?", I asked him cautiously. He didn't answer. Before I was even done asking the question, Kai pulled me into his lap tightly, rocking me on snappy little thrusts. He sat up high and kissed me, willful and hard. I love the taste of his mouth, fresh and papery. He pressed his strong tongue into my mouth, sealing his lips over mine and stealing the breath from my lungs.

"You want to know a secret?", he asked me when the kiss was over, "I hate sex. Fucking hate it. I hate people. I'd rather do it alone. Fucking is nothing but a good jerk ruined by bad company."

My heart sank. I'd failed. He hated me. But then he continued.

"But I fucking love this.", he breathed into my ear, moaning softly, his hands finding their way to my hips. "What are you, Moon Girl? This is like beating it with the most beautiful hand in the world. I'm going to like fucking you."

"Your right hand?", I smiled, and slapped him again, writhing in his lap. "Stop thrusting so fast. You're going to come before me.", I added, licking away the salty blood seeping from his lower lip.

Kai smiled, vicious and lustful, and held my body down against his.

"No, I'm gonna have to do it hard to come like this.", he corrected me. "You will too. Do you want me to make you? You must want it. You're soaking through my pants."

"Is that bad?", I asked, kissing his ear. "Is it gross?"

"Bad?", he laughed, rolling his hips under me, pushing me down so I could feel the head of his big dick through his jeans, pressing up against the mouth of my bare pussy, "Yeah. You're bad. Ornery, scandalous and evil, most definitely. Such a bad little girl. Someday I'll punish you for it. Gross, though? No.", he said, kissing me and slipping one hand gently down from my hip, and softly cupping my pussy with his hand through my new dress, "This is mine. Everything it's doing is because I made it. I made it wet. I made you want this. Now I can make you come; feel good, sleep easy, think straight. Or I can deny you; make you ache, make you throb, make you lay awake, make you distracted and petulant."

"...Kai...", I purred, humping his big dick, "Make me wait. I want to feel tingly and unsatisfied and achy inside, hot all the way up to my belly button. I don't want any thought to get in between me and your big fucking cock. I want to think about nothing but this all the time. Don't let me come. Stop making this feel so good."

"Then fucking stop grinding on it, you little nympho.", he seethed against my throat, kissing me, digging his cock into me hard.
"I can't, Kai.", I moaned. "You have to make me stop. Make me stop. Please, Kai. Stop. I'm going to come."

I could feel how wet we were. Soaked and slick through, his cock sliding around inside his pants, between my body and his. I was dizzy. He was getting quiet, focused. His hands clamped down around my hips, and I could tell he was using my body to rub his cock, to masturbate his cock the way he liked it.

I didn't understand it. I didn't even know what a dick looked like yet, not for sure, anyway. I didn't know that's what the noses on his mask were. I didn't know how to touch one, how to suck one. But I could tell when Kai was almost there. And I knew how to make him come.

I remember hearing a joke once, if you could call it that. That men are afraid women will laugh at them, but women are afraid that men will kill them.

I squeezed his legs between mine, and slumped against him. Kai took over, thrusting and feverishly rubbing me up and down his cock. I just held him and kissed him. I knew I'd never love anyone else. He was it for me. An icy, tingling angst was building deep inside me, between my thighs. I rode him because I needed to. He knew it too.

"Kai, stop.", I moaned. "I'm freaking out. You're going to make me come."

"Good. I want you to tonight. I don't care what you want. This is what's best for you.", he said softly, and kissed my lips again.

"Why?", I whispered in his ear, "Are you scared if you don't, that I'll finish myself, down in my sleeping bag in the basement, surrounded by all those guys? I won't. I know we aren't allowed to do that. I'm a good girl. I've only ever come in my sleep, and I didn't like it like that at all.", I'd shivered. He held me tight, and kissed me gently, like he understood.

"Ah, Mac...", Kai groaned, "No, my girls are allowed to. I want you girls to. I'd like to watch you. I just don't like the idea of guys doing that in my house." His voice had turned tight and raspy, and he was fucking up against me harder. "But don't do it down there. They'd rape you. All those guys, all backed up? They'd probably kill you too. If you need to, come let me help you so you don't get hurt. Don't let them find out you're a virgin either. They'll see it as a challenge to hurt you, to take it."

"Do you think you could just do this to me again then?", I asked softly. "I like it when you do it. I know I'm safe with you. You're stronger than other men, kinder. That must be why I saved it for you.", I said, moving his hands back down to my hips. "And you make this feel better than I could. I don't know how."

Kai's big cock, wet and swollen, lurched under me.

"Does this feel good?", he asked.

"Yes. Kai... it feels better than any feeling I've ever had. I never want to feel anything else, for the rest of my life.", I moaned.

"What does it feel like?", he asked, his hand wrapped up in my hair, pulling a little.

"Like rolling waves under me, with sharp peaks at the top of every thrust. Like my body and will is yours. Like I'm your lustful, mindless slave. Like you're going to make me come. Force my sinful body to bow down and submit to you.", I whispered, sucking his ear. "Like you're going to make me throw my flower at your feet, and I'll turn into a naughty girl who just begs you to let me come on your cock."
Kai's face flushed, and his breaths came rough and jagged. He'd slid down on the bed, and pulled me down on him, laying my body against his. I knew nothing about sex. But I knew he did. I knew I'd like it.

He knew what he was doing. More reclined, he'd positioned me to grind against him with all my weight on the painful throb between my legs. His hands on my hips held me down, and his cock rose and fell under my thrusts. He didn't have to tell me how. I just chased feeling good on him, but I couldn't catch it.

"Hold your breath, baby.", Kai whispered in my ear, "I'm gonna make you come. It makes it easier."

I did what he said, and so did he.

I didn't think he could do it harder; hold me harder, push me down on him harder, thrust harder, get that big cock harder, but he did. When his breath stopped, I knew he was going to come. It made me. He made me. It felt so good, intense and lasted forever. I'm wet right now thinking about it. When I gasped in surprise at how good it felt, Kai came, groaning loud, burying his cock against me.

He didn't steal my innocence. I hadn't touched him yet. I hadn't looked at his cock. I didn't even know what cum was yet. I still had all my seals intact. But I felt so ashamed. Tears flooded my eyes. I felt embarrassed and mad at myself, and just wanted to run away.

But Kai was so human. When I rolled off him, he'd rolled over onto me, and stroked my hair from my forehead, smoothed the new dress he'd got me down over my body.

"It's a little overwhelming, huh?", he asked softly. "You really haven't done this before? You didn't just say that for me?"

I shook my head, "No. I knew you'd get off on it, and I told you because I thought you'd like it, but it's still the truth."

"Do you ever think about what it would be like not to know what other people want, and without the knowledge of how to give it to them?", he'd asked, laying down beside me, holding my hand.

"No. What's the point to wonder? My life made me, because if it didn't, I'd have died. It is what it is.", I'd answered him with a shudder.

"Are you okay?", he asked, rolling on his side and touching my hair. "You feel guilty?"

"A little. All my life I've seduced unintentionally. I didn't want to corrupt you, Kai."

That made him laugh, and it made me feel silly; like what we'd done was alright.

"Mac, didn't you like it?", he asked, his hand pressed to my pussy through my dress.

"I loved it. You're completely incredible.", I rolled towards Kai, and kissed him. "I didn't know anything could feel that good... or that they were so big..."

He took my hand in his and put it on the front of his jeans. He was already hard again.

"Would you feel better if I told you that your body is consecrated unto me now? That I love you, and you're mine, and as long as you want to remain unbroken, I'll protect you.", his soft words spoken into my ear, warm breath trapped in my hair, strong arms around me.

"Kai, I love you."
The relief of the truth.

"Kai, I love you so much. You can have anything you want. You can have my virginity. You can have my body to use any way you want, for the rest of my life. I just want you to feel good. I just want to help you, and be close to you. I just want to know you."

I wrapped my arms around him, and held him.

"You're special. I knew it from the first moment I saw you. I felt you, Mac. You were different. You've served me faithfully during your time in the wilderness. You're my virtuous woman. I love you so much. You're mine, and I'd never do anything to hurt you. I want you. I want to spread these legs...", he'd reached a hand to the inside of one of my thighs, and stroked it gently, "But your cherry is mine now. I won't break it until you're ready, and you aren't ready. You saved it for me, and now I'm going to save you."

"Are you really the messiah, Kai?", I felt the words leave my lips on the last breath of my own that I'd ever take.

"Yes. Yes, I am."

After a long while in his arms, he'd rolled over and said, "Hey, how'd you like to be named Tendie Czar? And you're one of my girls now. You can't be wearing the uniform. I'll get you some more proper girls' clothes."

What a pretty memory. They are the only ones that hurt. I've loved thinking about that night since it happened. Now it feels like having my insides ripped out and fed back to me.

I'm too tired out from crying to light another cigarette. I just shut my eyes. The gauge reads E. If my car runs out of gas, and I'm asleep, I'll die. Whatever. This thing's always been able to go like 100 kilometers on reserve. I'd be fine until morning. I nod off a little. I just want to check out. Tomorrow I need to be brave about this. Divine Ruler might not want me anymore, but he still is owed my service.

I squeeze my eyes shut...

"Aren't you going to have that horrible dream about being born again? I want to watch it.", he laughs at me. "Don't you want to know what you are?"

That horrible, beautiful voice, smooth as butter, mocking me. I want to wake up. Don't talk to him. Don't let him hear my voice. He'll find me again.

A voice comes from somewhere else. My eyes are still squeezed shut.

"It's okay, Lithia. Just don't look over there. I'll tell him to go away. I'm going to read to you, and in a little while the girls will be back to wrap your hand again."

I can't answer. I'm too weak. I don't know if my friend knows what he's talking about. I don't know where I am, and I'm too scared to open my eyes. I'm afraid that if I do, everything will still be all black, just like the last time.

I hold onto my friend's voice. He's sad. No one loves him either. He was the first friend I had here, and he's a good reader; not halting and annoying like that half wit Sunday School teacher back home. He knows I like The Bible, and especially all the scary parts. Because those are the only parts that I understand, and the parts that I need to know.
But there's laughter. Smug. My friend never laughs.

"Of all the places you think you can hide.", he snickers.

"Resist the devil and he will flee from you.", my friend's voice says. He's just reading. Not giving me advice. Just giving me The Word.

"Get behind me!", I yell, losing my resolve to be quiet. I tried, but I couldn't hold it back. He tempts me.

He laughs again; a snicker that builds to a roaring like fire.

"Behind you?", he asks. "Your back's already in a corner. There's no room behind you now."

My eyes fly open, unveiled, and without protection.

He's gorgeous. Hair like spun gold, and blue eyes calm and kind as the sea. His skin is smooth, as though he were carved, or poured. A visage cast in the hottest fire of the purest beauty. He looks like one of those gentile-y, mildly Anti-Semitic renderings of Jesus from a Picture Bible.

"I'm not ta--"

"--taking your help.", he finishes my sentence, bored. "You've already taken it. Don't you remember? Your hand is out the window for hours now, and it's not even cold."

"You're a liar; my friends helped me! I resist you! You're a liar! You're a liar! You're a liar!", I scream out in agony, willing my eyes closed again. "You're a liar!"

"You're a liar!"

"Mac. Calm down. You're just having a bad dream. Shit, chick. Chill the fuck out, hunny bunny!", Speed Wagon laughs at me, standing outside my car without his coat on, and shaking my arm. "Winter said you were out here. The meeting's over. We're all turning in soon. Kai said you're supposed to come downstairs and get some rest."

My chest burns from sucking in huge lungfuls of the cold night air mingled with hot dry exhaust from the car, but I'm still struggling to catch my breath, and to reclaim a semblance of a grip on reality. I hate the nightmares. They've been better here. I think the drugs help. And Kai too. I barely dream when we're together. My heart sinks. I'd forgotten.

"You okay?", Speed asks me, opening the car door. "C'mon. Shit's not so bleak. Taylor came out a Dem on Twitter today. So you're all alone at the top now; hottest alt right bitch in America."

I smile, shove him out of my way. "The world, fag boy."

"Here.", he says gently, taking my hand on the stairs up to the side door. "It's icy right here. I don't know how you walk in those things.", he motions with his head at my new boots.

Kai got them for me. They're so dope. Natural python on four inch heels. About half as tall as he stands... almost. Shit. I'm not going to fall out of love with nine inches of Kai easily. He loves when I say that kind of thing to him too. Trash talk him a little while I stroke his ego. Slap him while I stroke his big dick. Okay... Don't sigh, Lithia; Speed Wagon will get the wrong idea. I'm sad. I even joke in my head when I'm sad. People who are alone all the time get weird. I accept this.

"This's crazy!", Speed intrudes on my conversation with myself, as he lets my hand go at the top of
the stairs, opening the door. "Your hand's so warm."

"Yeah. I'm Canadian. It's a lot colder there. I guess I'm just accustomed to it.\"", I say coolly, withdrawing, feeling the biting chill like never before, as the warm air from Kai's house pours out over me.
Chapter Summary

A Southern (California) Gothic tale of exile in the emotional wilderness, with nineties aesthetic. Miss World meets Lithium. Mac's devotion to Kai doesn't waver, though her psyche and body threaten to erode.

Winter

Everything is dark. Dark, and hot, but somehow neither, for I'm as dark and hot as everything around me. I'm one with this place, without form, and void. The whole world moves around me, exists for me. I don't like it. There's too much pressure.

And suddenly, there is pressure. Wringing pressure, like I've never felt before. The tight, vice like grip of the weight of the world closing in on me, only physical. The terrible constriction of mortality, the prisonlike constraint of time. The mortal coil. It's coiled around me, and it's squeezing the life from me.

But it's not death I fear but life. For I realize now, this is the womb from which I spring, the labor pangs forcing me from the sublime to some shit I don't want to be part of. Contractions. Pangs. Pains. None of it describes what is happening to me. The veil between life and death is thin. Every life hangs in the balance. The Mother who births me has a body turned to millions of serpents made of iron, who threaten to wring the life from both of us. I will be born with two black eyes, whites of pure red. My mother will be turned to many, and scattered. I will live. She will diminish.

The suffocating, pummeling force of my birth nears a close, as a vague promise of some light behind my eyelids begins to show, red like the blood of the moon. When I pass through the gauntlet of Narcisse-no Livingstone is my mother this time-I'm birthed into a post apocalyptic wasteland; the land so flat that I see it curve on beneath my feet to the distant horizon. A land of living skies, hung over a dead world. It's Mother's Day. It always is. That's always my birthday, no matter when I die.

I stand, a fully formed child, and motherless, as the womb that delivered me scatters in heedless orgy. The black, writhing ball of terror rolls, in coitus, over my feet. When my eyes gaze down, my skin has all fallen off, and I'm pink and vulnerable. Female again. Every time. Men lead. Women bleed.

Dread hits me. Survival. It won't be difficult. It never is. I'm a temptress, a seductress of the flesh.

"A Daughter of Eve!", I gasp, sitting bolt upright in bed, pale morning light seeping in around the blinds.

I fucking hate snakes. They scare the shit out of me almost as much as children. Fuck stupid Mac. All her endless Biblical nonsense and penchant for exotic skins. Now the mission to fucking Mars Virgin mobile bitch is giving me nightmares with her fucking footwear? I'm making a dumpster fire with all her shit again, just like I did with the suitcase she showed up here with.

I drag out of bed. The floor is cold. Definitely an opaque tights day. I throw a prim black on black tartan wool shift over top, and wear my pearl collar for the first time. Thanks, Mac. Used your
Paypal for this too. Bet you didn't notice, adorable deplorable.

Standing quiet, leaning over the sink in my bathroom, perfecting the wing on my left eye, I notice a sound. Heaving. The sound of someone retching mercilessly and stifling sobs travels up the lead pipes.

When I come down, Mac’s at the kitchen table by herself, one foot up on the chair so she can rest her cheek on her raised knee. She's scrolling her phone, drinking that stiff black tar she calls coffee. Dressed in a floor length silver crushed velvet wrap skirt and an oversized, loosely knit ecru crochet sweater, hanging slightly off one shoulder to reveal a wide black satin bra strap, she always manages to look so fucking effortless, so appealing. Like you just want to grab her, throw her down, shove that skirt apart and see her long legs cross demurely, and her mile long hair all spread out around her. Or cuddle her. That too. Kinda looks like she needs it is all. I hate cuddling, but I'm a nice person.

"Good morning, Winter.", she greets me without looking up, void of all expression. Keeps scrollin' on dubs.

I pour a cup of her bitter swill and slam it down on the table as I sit down. Who the fuck buys Maxwell House anymore? She won't drink a Starbucks even if I buy it for her because she says their logo is idolatry. Idolatry. From the girl who thinks the brother I grew up watching pick his nose when he thought no one was watching is some kind of god.

"You gotta cut it out with all that steeped in fairytale religious shit you say all the time.", I scold her angrily. I know I can get away with it now. Kai isn't protecting her anymore. "Separation of church and state. Doesn't Canada have laws about that?"

"Did you not have a good night, Winter?", she asks me calm and disaffected, flipping her golden hair over her shoulder. "And no. They don't. Nanny states don't like laws; written laws limit their power. They prefer rules instead; the ability to persecute lawlessly."

"Ugh.", I groan. "Kai's used you up. He's done with you. Can't you just drop it for once? He's not listening. Just talk to me like an actual human being? And don't you realize that every celebrity in this country wanted to immigrate to Canada after the election, you ungrateful bitch? They were all turned down because of your stupid country's bilingual requirement. Or their criminal records and shit."

"Je m'en fiche. Le Canada suce.", she shrugs, holding back a smile to a degree even I respect. "Ensuite, ils ne devraient pas frapper leur petit ami, ou au moins se faire prendre. Mais notre système d'éducation est la, LA, merde absolute, je suppose... écoute moi... et je suis juste un péquenaud de la Saskatchewan... Besides, Divine Ruler is here. And I don't care if he's listening. He's still #myRuler."

She's so fucking annoying. That Quebecois French doesn't even Google translate properly and sounds sexy af. She knows I can't follow. And she's redoubled her efforts to be the perfect little cult girl for her Big Man.

He doesn't even see her. Literally. He refuses to see her, be in the same room, same space. She's constantly stood over by Speed Wagon. Kai hasn't spoken to her since 'an issue of manhood', and it's been a few days; I can't remember. Doesn't matter as much to me. I'm sure she knows how many. The guys have barely talked to either of us. I'm allowed to talk to Kai, but she's not. The first day she tried. It was sad; she's too beat down to argue, or to even ask a question. Speed Wagon just told her she couldn't, and that it was coming down from Divine Ruler. For a split second, it looked like she might break; like, shatter. Then she just turned to stone. She's just resumed her duties. Kai turns away her Pure Whites, those Manball sandwiches he loves, and he wouldn't even look at her NPC meme. And it was good. She actually made one doing the Jimmy Fallon selfie cuckbill. Cuckbill. Kek. I
don't know how Kai held it in. It was legit good, even though all my sanctioned opinion providers wouldn't like it much.

And Danielle moves in this week.

"What're you doing anyway?", I ask her. Kai's probably not giving her money to shop with anymore.

"Mm. Just lurking at the moment. I made an NPC blackface meme. Halloween is just around the corner, after all. It might be too absurd for the /pol/tards. Just seeing what they say. Might be helpful in trolling the shit out of the virtue signalling handwringers who are trying to ruin Megyn Kelley over her remembrance of a harmless costume.", she says, deadpan.

"Actually?", I tell her, coyly, "I was thinking about that subject myself a little. I hate minstrel stereotypes and shit, but the subversion of #FreeColtonHayes? I'm getting a crop black rib baby tee embroidered on Etsy. Do you want one? It'll fuck everyone on both sides up."

Her eyebrow lifts a little before she smiles. When she looks up at me, it's the first time she's raised her gaze. "Yeah, the special snowflake hierarchy--"

I don't want to be mean, but I jump a little. This is some fucking random ugly.

"Mac, what the fuck happened to your eyes?", I gasp. They're both blood red.

"I don't know.", she stammers, confusion washing over her, as she puts her phone to selfie mode. Her hand claps over her mouth. She fights tears. Fights and wins. But I saw it.

Casting her gaze down, she gets up from the chair shakily, and rushes to the washroom. She's lost an alarming amount of weight in the past few days. And she's in there retching again. So there goes her three precious calories from that cheap ass black coffee.

"Hey Winter.", Speed Wagon says casually, looking around. He's here to make sure she's not slipping off to wake Kai up or something. "Is she in the bathroom again?"

"Yeah. Did you see her eyes?", I ask him quietly.

"Not winnin' any beauty pageants like that, is she?", he laughs, makes this grimace face. Every time I start to give him a shred of credit for being even a missing link level human being, he ruins it.

"She's sick. What is she, bulimic now?", I ask shaking my head. "It can happen from throwing up, the pressure in the blood vessels in the eyes. I had a class on how to spot patriarchy-inflicted body dysmorphic disorders."

"Whatever." He just rolls his eyes and starts walking away, back down the basement stairs, yelling back at me, "Just call me if she tries to go near Kai."

I hate hearing people puke. It always makes me feel like I'm going to. It's the click. That little clicking sound. So disgusting. What's an epiglottis? I can't remember. But it sounds disgusting enough to be involved. Duodenum. I hate that word too. Really anything involved in the entire digestive process. Yuck. This is making me want to purge again. Poor fucking Mac. I'd like to be mad at her, blame my stupid dream on her, and abuse her all day... but damn her for finding my one in-tune heartstring and plucking it like a fucking harp.

Someone brought in an Atomic Ranch magazine. I pull it towards me and flip through, absentmindedly. Who knew our basement would be so in vogue again? Kinda missing all the huge
walls of glass though. But nobody here understands sprawl. If I ever build a house, I'm getting three fucking lots and building a glass house on a concrete slab. No more fucking basements. Why are us fly-over folk so obsessed with being stacked? It's not like we're short on space. Get some aesthetic, fam.

"Hey, Mac, is this a thing in Sask too?" I ask her, still flipping pages, as she slumps back into her chair weakly. "Does everyone have a tiny lot, dig a basement, and then build on top of it?"

"Ugh.", she exclaims, finally cracking a little smile, seeming a little alive. "It's even worse. I swear, the lot size humans choose to build on is inversely proportionate to space and population density or something. There's only a million people, and it's bigger than all of Texas. But people basically are gay to build a multistoreyed hallway on top of a basement. All the space in the world. But they elect to live their lives in 1200 square feet of stairwell and hallway. I don't get it."

I laugh. Not much. Much would mean I wasn't me. But she's right. Prairie people are such a pack of hobbits.

"So, are you like sick or something?", I ask after a short pause. "You look really tired."

"Just haven't been sleeping much. I'm mortified about my eyes though. How long do you think until they clear up?", she asks, obviously Goggling it on her phone as she says it. H-o-w-l-o-n-g-u-n-t-i-l-b-l-o-o-d-e-y-s-g-o-a-w-a-y.... Wait. Blood Moon Girl. Now I'm fucking before'n'aftering them. Booyakasha bitches. Meme magic.

"It's probably like a bruise. Maybe takes a little longer. I think eyes get a little less circulation.", I shrug. "Um. Your nose is bleeding..."

She just looks defeated. Gets up and holds a paper towel to her nose, hiding her face from me.

Suddenly, it hits me. Like, eureka.

"He just quit giving you pills, didn't he?", I ask her. My fatigue for my brother's cruelty comes out accusatory. That was probably a mistake which will lead to me having to finesse an answer out of her with a ton more questions.

She pretends not to hear the question because she doesn't want to answer. So that's a yes.

"When did you have your last one, Mac?", I ask nicer.

"Right after we got back from Butchery the day we made those nanaimo bars...", she says casually. Yeah. She's hurting. And she's still protecting Kai.

"How many were you taking? As many as him?", I ask her, getting up and putting my arm around her rail thin shoulders.

"No. I don't know.", she minimizes. "I just took them when he gave them to me. It's not a big deal. I'm feeling better than I was a few days ago."

Lies. She looks like when you spray a spider with Raid, and it just spins out all the silk it can, in a thick jet like Silly String, and dies half the size it was five minutes earlier.

What a fucking asshole. She's Ayn Rand level annoying. But she was the most innocent millennial litterbug in crotchless panties and curb stomping boots I'd ever met. He fucking gave her the first beer she'd ever drank, for fuck sakes. Makes an amphetamine addict out of her so he can override her Evangelical Madonna/whore complex, and get in her pants. Or not. But get her to do who knows
what kind of fucked up shit to amuse him, and then just quit her cold turkey, and force her to do the same?

"I'm going to fucking talk to him. He can't do this shit to you.", I tell her, outraged.

"No.", she pleads gently, grabbing both my hands. "Please, Winter. Please don't. I don't know why this is his will, but it is. Please don't intercede for me. Let me at least take it gracefully. I have to show him I'm a loyal servant, even in times of trial. It's like Job--"

I cut her off, hand raised to her face.

"No. No, don't start that. You're fucking hemorrhaging out of every hole in your face!", I yell at her, "There's no grace in any of this. You have a car. Why don't you just leave? He's never going to change, Mac, or whatever your real name is. Go home."

"This is my home, Winter. And I've never had a real name.", she says softly, drifting back into a kitchen chair. "And I don't want Divine Ruler to change. He's unchangeable, infallible. I don't have to understand why he does what he does; only have faith that his will shall prevail. I know what you think of me; that I'm an automaton, with no internal monologue. But I'm not. Winter, you and I both know Kai, but the voices in our heads whisper a different understanding to each of us. One Kai. Two experiences. I'm not stupid. I know how this looks. But I know Kai. He has a plan, and this is how I help him. I have faith."

She's reached across the table and is holding my hands, sincerely looking in my eyes. Looking in my eyes with those seriously disgusting blood orbs. Ugh. So gross. I can't look. And it's too sad. Kai makes everything up as he goes, and I've been on the receiving end of one of his quick turns or double backs enough times to know he's just doing what he does. She's beautiful, like, makes the models on Forever21 look like chubby warpigs, beautiful. It doesn't matter. Doesn't make her happy. She's just a junkie detox version of The Waving Girl; her brave faithfulness and hard work will just be on the breeze, never a well earned victory over hopelessness, but a monument to waste and tragedy.

I don't know how to help her, especially if she doesn't want it. So fuck it. Let's moon over houses with actual style. I push the magazine between us and flip the page.

"Gah. This kitchen.", I say, pointing. "The countertops? Like, aren't you sort of bored with fucking quartz?"

"YASSS!", she agrees. "Like it's fine in some greyscale stuccoville fit-in. But why does every douchenozzle that buys a Wexler do it too? That's not a renovation. That's vandalism. Look at these. Pretty sure those are real boomerang Formica in First Lady. They named that color for Mamie Eisenhower."

"You know what a fucking Wexler is?", I ask incredulously.

She shrugs. "I spent a lot of time in California when I was a kid. See? I'm not all bad, Winter. Speaking of vandalism though--"

She gets cut off. Suddenly, someone is standing over us at the head of the table.

"Ivy.", I'm shook. "I haven't seen you in weeks."

"Yeah, well, Kai took over my restaurant. No one needs me there to fucking fry a frozen chicken finger. I have a kid to raise, so...", she answers back curtly.
Her hair never changes. Not even a little. I wonder if when I'm older like her I'll do that; plan shit. She's probably got a standing appointment for the week of her period every single month. Old people have no clue what it's like to be poor and shit. I let mine go until I have money. Roots don't determine maintenance; cash on hand does.

"It's nice to see you. You look good." Perfunctory.

"Whatever, Winter. You know where I live. Oz loved you."

That's her insecurity talking. That's her doing what she always does. She has this major need to project parenthood, even onto me. Like if she is really Oz's mom, and I'm with her, then I have to be too. Because if I'm not, well, why not? Oh, because he's not biologically mine. Well, then he's not hers either.

I shrug. "I was his nanny. Not his mommy. How is co-parenting going?"

"You know what, Winter? I don't want to talk about this with you. I'm just here to do a job. Kai texted and said the west bedroom needs a new closet set up and the register cover changed out or something. Someone's moving in?", she shifts her weight impatiently, throws her leather biker jacket over the chair. That jacket's not my style, but it's nice. Not really on her though. Her boobs are too big for it; it stretches, flattens them out and looks so awkward and uncomfortable.

She's got a tool box with her. As if one of the Chads won't have one. So dykey. Ivy was always doing that. Having to flex what a man she is. I'm sick of it. A fingerbang's a fingerbang. No extra points for swaggering around heavy footed like you're growing a little tiny ball sack. Mac's way tougher. And she fucking floats.

"I should go.", Mac stands up, self conscious and keeping her eyes down, speaking low. "Speaking of vandalism. I've got shit to do."

It's going to piss off Ivy. So I do it. I watch Mac go. She slides her little stocking feet into a huge pair of black Sorel pack boots, and slides on a plush black faux fur bomber with big black satin lined bunny ears on the oversized hood, and slips out into another day of endless blizzard.

Ivy

I feel guilty to admit it; I like sharing custody. I thought I'd enjoy having kids more than I actually did. I mean Oz is a cool little guy and all, but he's not mine. He doesn't look like me, or play the way I did as a child. Every annoying thing he does is so Ally, and when I see it, I want to punish her tendencies out of him. I've gone too far with my life choices to turn back, and politically, I'd never eat crow. My parents said I was only choosing to be a lesbian because I'd been in university a couple of years too long, and I'd hate to give then the satisfaction of being right. So I'll unwillingly stick it out to the end, because the road back is too jagged a pill to swallow. But I now wonder if I'd have been happy married to a man. So unemotional, and even keeled. And he'd have been fine never having kids. They always are. Tidier house, more spare time, less responsibility.

Ally has Oz this weekend. This whole month actually. I've been thinking about moving. There's really nothing here for me. He's not my kid. Winter is over me. A courier brought papers with an offer from Kai to buy The Butchery on Main. I'm selling, as if I have a choice. A text followed shortly after, asking me to come to the house to do a few repairs to get a bedroom ready. Probably for that straight cis clittease waif who's got Winter spun up.

I should have known our age difference would be a problem. These kids have the commitment level of a fucking fruit fly. And it's not just the number. It's where we are in our lives. Winter couldn't
figure out how to write a cheque to save her life. She's never paid a bill. She doesn't have a credit history. She's never had an account in her name that wasn't some social media bullshit. Kai picked right up where her parents left off, and she's as much a child as Oz. Our relationship had about the significance for her as a sleepover birthday party in second grade. She'll probably play vibrating pink glitter dildoes with Little Orphan Annie Coulter while Kai watches and beats off in Ghandhi’s gym clothes, until he gets bored and pops the head off his Based Barbie Doll to see if it makes him feel something again. Then Winter will probably settle down with one of the NRAssholes in the basement. Probably the cute one with the shit-eating grin, and dimples just like her brother's.

Standing on the porch of this dreaded house, I stamp the snow off my boots. I should have worn a warmer coat today. I don't want to go inside. I feel foreboding. I brought my tools in case I need a hammer at hand.

I open the door quietly.

"That pink melamine? OMG. I wonder if they do it in black.", Winter says from the kitchen.

"I don't think so. I think they have manufactured that pattern in greyscale though. But Cracked Ice comes in black pearlesscent. It's flossy. I've seen it done in an Eichler before, with Erik Buck bar stools.", says the insect stick figure.

Praying Mantis. There's one for Winter. I wonder if she still tries to name her. That's what we used to do. Make fun of her. Now Winter is fucking gay for her. Literally. There, how was that? Do I sound like one of them yet? Maybe. But I couldn't keep it up for hours like they do. Gawd. That sounds like a middle aged man.

Winter jumps when I walk up, like I'm her mom and just caught her smoking or making out in her room.

"Ivy! What are you doing here?", she says, looking a little scared.

"Relax.", I tell Winter, fatigued already. "I'm just here to install a modular closet set up, and change out some hardware in the west bedroom next to Kai's. What is that, for you?", I ask Mac.

She basically scatters. Flees like a teenage boyfriend.

"I'm spray bombing some Banksy level dank for Divine Ruler's glory today. I gotta go.", she says under her breath, golden hair trailing behind her. She's still pulling her coat on as she closes the door behind her.

We're alone. A compulsion to guilt trip strikes.

"Oz misses you.", I tell Winter, accusingly. Really he couldn't give a shit about her. Not really about me either.

"I doubt it. Quit trying to guilt me. I've had shit to do. You're the one who went back to your ex, so...", she says, picking the faux turquoise crack lacquer off her thumb nail.

"I don't really want to be here either. I honestly thought maybe Kai had just forgotten about me and decided to let me go.", I sit down at the table with Winter, unzipping my jacket.

"Yeah. He mostly uses the Literally Hitler Youth for everything now. They have dicks. And guns. I guess it was just a matter of time. But he's got something big brewing, so I guess it's all hands on deck. Besides, it's almost Halloween. Kai knows I live for it. We always do something. I do still care about you, Ivy. It just wasn't working out though.", she says, totally self involved and unaffected by
any of it. Kai's flesh and blood. I should have seen it sooner. "Can you believe how fucking early winter came? This sucks. It's totally going to ruin, like, half, my costume ideas."

"Whatever, Winter. I've got work to do. I'd like to just do it and get out of here. Where's Kai?", I ask her, standing up and grabbing my tools. "Down in the basement like always?"

"Sleeping.", she rolls her eyes, picking the phone on the table up and scrolling. "Try not to wake him up. He's been in a shit mood."

"I doubt it. He texted me over an hour ago. Besides, I gotta give him some papers. As soon as we file them, he owns The Butchery. He plans to call it Bovine Domination.", I exhale in tired aggravation. "And I for one hate Halloween. It's a mockery of the pagan and multicultural celebrations of the day, and has become nothing but a commercialized opportunity, and excuse, for lighthearted cultural appropriation and the reinforcement and glamorization of traditional gender stereotypes."

His laughter rings out, echoing down the hallway.

"My thoughts EXACTLY, Ivy!", Kai proclaims, with a huge smile spread across his face. Like the cat who swallowed the canary. "But I for one fucking LOVE Halloween. Now go fix that room up. We're expecting a new guest today, and we've got a party to plan. Cultural appropriation and traditional gender roles for everyone, and extra points if you can do both at once. Especially if a leftard might find it scary."

Mac

I feel so sick. I can't stop shivering and it's so hard to breathe. I'm trying to just sleep, but it's hard when it feels like I'm drowning. I'm drenched and can't breathe. Where am I? Everything hurts, and I'm all alone. I think my eyes are open; maybe I'm blind, because everything is black. I want a mommy. Everyone gets to have one except me. My parents suck so much ass. I'm crying, but my body's not, my eyes aren't.

A hand touches my cheek. Gentle and cool. It's a boy. His hand is soft, but not like a girl's. He's scared.

"Hey, this one's alive. She's still alive. Get over here.", he calls out.

A woman answers back, voice posh and old timey.

"She's never going to make it. Rot's set in. Don't get attached to another one. Have you not learned your lessons, dear boy? And don't alert Charles to her presence. The last thing we need is another, well, another."

"C'mon. Just look at her. She's sick. I think I heard her whimpering for her mommy. What kind of a mother leaves her sick kid chained up like this all alone?", he spits the words, disgusted.

"Oh, alright. Step aside.", the woman answers.

Her hand cups my cheek, she turns my face this way and that. I can't see her.

"This is positively gruesome.", she exclaims. "Her hand, if you could call it that. What happened to her, do you suppose? Puny for your age, aren't you?", she asks. But I can't answer her.

"How would you even know how old she is?", he asks.

"I was a terrible mother, in keeping with the consummate nature of this house, and for a very short
time. But I was a mother none the less, Tate. She's frail for a nine year old. Don't they feed her?" , she wonders aloud, as searing pain surges through my body, electrified, travelling through all my blood vessels and nerve paths as she touches my hand again, turning it over. "Maybe she'd be better off without this. Perhaps I should call Charles after all..."

"Get away from her. Can't you tell you're hurting her? Don't even think about calling that incompetent quack over here. Fucking dorktor. We can handle this.", my friend says, and I can tell he's shoved her aside, and is kneeling down next to me again. What's his name? What did she just call him?

"Ask Moira to help.", he tells the woman. "She's far more motherly than you'll ever be. She might know what to say to her."

"She despises you. Sees right through you. She'll not want a thing to do with this.", the posh lady says to him dismissively. I want to scream, tell her that I don't care why he wants to help me, I just don't want to be alone down here with nothing but my black hand anymore.

"I'll help her.", a weary voice says. "But not while you're here, you little psychopath. Go play upstairs with your poor brother for a while; he's lonely. You stay clear of this young one."

He's gone. She's still here.

"Don't be scared. Easier said than done, I know. I remember when I first came here; young and full of innocence, there were fewer souls, and this place didn't seem so bad. And you're just the kind of lonely little girl that this house craves to slake its thirst for lives. Listen to me, though. Really listen, if you're still inside. Don't die here. Hold on with everything you have. Don't die. And don't trust Tate. He'll try to keep you here. You can always just tell him to leave, and he has to go away.", she says with dead serious intent. "I'm going to get some water and at least wash away the poison. Nora, I'm sure there's still some gauze over there; could you look?"

She's kind. She doesn't know what to say to me though. She's preoccupied. She thinks I'll die. She cares about me, but she wants to be a daughter to someone still, and not a mother to a freaky little girl.

Water drips down my arm. It burns my hand like fire. If I had the strength to cry and scream, it would make me, but I'm trapped in a prison, my body a sealed and padded room. I'm just slumped on a concrete floor, chained to a radiator. I know how to identify that feeling.

"There you go.", the weary old soul says. "I'll come see you again, but I have a house to tend, and an old maid's work is never done."

"Well, I don't suppose there's anything more I can do for her either. At least she seems peaceful.", the posh lady absolves herself and happily leaves too. Washes her hands of me. Now that's a sentiment I can recognize.

"Hey.", a hand touches my cheek again. "There's no way you're nine, is there, kid? What are you, maybe six? Nora doesn't have a motherly bone in her body."

It's him. Tate.

"Don't worry; I won't touch your hand. I can tell you don't like it. I think you're going to be okay. You're going to get out of here. And you're going to grow up, little girl. You're going to grow up. And your life will grow and change, and your shitty parents won't matter at all anymore, because you won't need them. It won't matter that they didn't love you, because other people will. Someday, it
won't matter that they did this to you. You're gonna have friends, and a job. Boyfriends; until one day you marry one and have your own babies. Then you're going to be a good mama, because you know what it feels like to be unloved, and you'll never want to do that to anyone else. You just have to get out and grow up. None of this matters. Just don't die in here.”

He puts a blanket over me. It's so nice. I hadn't been able to tell if I was hot or cold, but I was cold. Maybe it's just the being cared about. My parents always just got mad at me if I got sick. They were never nice to me, just acted like I'd done it on purpose to spite or inconvenience them. I wish I could say thank you. Wishes, wishes. I wish he was my dad. He'd be a good one.

"Are you bored?", he asks. "I bet you are. Do you want to hear something cool?", he says, and I feel his soft hands slip something over my ears.

I'm so happy because today
I've found my friends
They're in my head
I'm so ugly, but that's okay, 'cause so are you
We've broken our mirrors
Sunday morning is everyday for all I care
And I'm not scared
Light my candles in a daze
'Cause I've found God
Hey, hey, hey
I'm so lonely but that's okay I shaved my head
And I'm not sad
And just maybe I'm to blame for all I've heard
But I'm not sure
I'm so excited, I can't wait to meet you there
But I don't care
I'm so horny but that's okay
My will is good
Hey, hey, hey
I like it, I'm not gonna crack
I miss you, I'm not gonna crack
I love you, I'm not gonna crack
I killed you, I'm not gonna crack

He rests his head against the concrete wall and listens with me, his ear against mine, sharing the right headphone. I love having company. This is so nice. He's the best friend I've ever had. No one has ever been this nice to me. And he hasn't said anything mean, called me a name, tried to touch me and then blame me for it. I relax against him, feel my labored breath ease a little. He holds my good hand.

"You like that song, huh?", he asks me, pleased. I can hear his smile, even if I can't see. "That's my favorite band. You're too little. You wouldn't know who they are, but that's Nirvana, and when I was like you, a kid, you know? My mom was a loveless, coldblooded snake too busy with sexual conquests intended to secure her a pathetic Imodium commercial part that she never got, or to steal her well-lost hell house back. She thought lipstick on a pressed pork product was a reasonable facsimile of actual motherly love. I got fawning for my normal appearance, and criticism for every breath I ever took otherwise. This band got me, you know, what I was going through. You like this song? It's called Lithium. You know what? If I'd have ever had a daughter, I'd have named her after it. But I'm never going to.", he admits sadly, seeming shocked by the revelation. "I'll get old. But I'm never going to grow up. How about until you can tell me your name, I just call you Lithia?"
If I could beam from ear to ear, and weep for joy, I would. I've never had a name. My parents call me MYSTERY, and they only utter it rarely, like it is the name of a filthy thing. I hate it. I wear it like a curse, at their hands, though it is not my name. They are terrified of me. They plan to carve it on my forehead when I'm sixteen. I heard them talking about it. I just want to have a real name. I want to be Lithia. Someone finally loved me enough to name me. I'm so happy I could die. No. My friends all say not to. So I won't. I'm gonna stay alive.

I feel so sick. I can't stop shivering and it's so hard to breathe. I'm trying to just sleep, but it's hard when it feels like I'm drowning. I'm drenched and can't breathe. Where am I? Everything hurts, and I'm all alone. I wake every time I manage to fall to a fitful sleep.

I look around, and when the blackness surging behind my eyes dies away, I remember. Michigan. In a basement. Always down inside the earth, underground in a basement... Speed Wagon is snoring. Heart Attack is drooling. And of course fucking Pus Bucket is farting. I'm going to throw up again. I feel like I could die. But I won't; this is going to get easier, and I've survived far worse.

I know what I need. By and by, the circle's been fucking broken, and I'm unraveling on both ends without that steady diet of Adderall. I'm exhausted, body so heavy I can't bear the weight of lugging it around, but I can't sleep. I can't eat. I keep getting this sense of body panic. Every time I remember that Kai is displeased with me, my head screams in air raid sirens, my heart feels like it's going to explode, I see black spinning oil wheels, and invariably throw up. Nothing but antifreeze left in me anymore. Literally. I open my mouth and clear radioactive green fluid that tastes sugary like antifreeze and smells like acetone nail polish remover just pours out. I want dextroamphetamine.

I drag myself to the downstairs bathroom, throw up an inhuman volume of Pine-sol. I hate having to puke down here. The boys always leave pee drips around the rim, and the occasional pubic hair on the floor. I hate hair. It's disgusting. Not on someone's head, when it's alive, and clean. But I basically have kosher laws for hair. And obviously some ginger pubic hair caught in a sticky evaporated drip of man piss is not in my cleanliness laws. Have these Philistines not heard that cleanliness is next to godliness? Once me and Kai are good again, I want him to preach it. Someone needs to invent a Wall Pop. Wipe up your fucking piss drips, then wash your rancid mitts before even thinking of rejoining society, bitch.

I stand up and wash my face with cold water, take a drink, brush my teeth. I planned ahead. I knew I'd be getting ready down here today, so I left my clothes hung behind the door. I slip into them, put on my face on and pull the big plastic pail of cleaning shit out from under the sink. First job of the day has definitely got to be cleaning this dirty man's bathroom so it's a little nicer for me to fucking detox in.

It's only four a.m. And it's a Wednesday. Perfect time to go out and knock over the recycling bins all the plebian cucknuts have pulled to the curb with care. I'm sure I can do at least a dozen square blocks before I have to turn in for the morning.

I trudge through the snow. Kick over every stupid blue bin I see. I wonder if it always snows so much this early in the year here. Must be those terrifying black lakes full of toxic waste and sunken ships. My head's so touchy; everything hurts it. Every step feels like my brain is rattling around against the inside of my skull. I'm so dehydrated; I picture it shrinking and withering. This sucks. At least I think the cool air feels better. And it's dark. I hear a fizzle and pop. Another streetlight bites the dust. Even darker now. I turn and look down the street behind me at my good work, all those cans and bottles scattered in the street draining little bits of fetid swill into the dirty street-slush. Almost all the street lights on this side are out. That's no good. Well, good thing I know a councilman...

I walk home when the sun rises. You don't really see the sky here. It's more like a skylight.
Saskatchewan is called the land of living skies. Because you have to be proud of what you've got, I guess, and all we've got is nothing, and lots of it. The earth bends away from your feet, and no matter where you walk, you're always going downhill, on a smooth retrograde slope to the unfathomable horizon. It's all sky. All above, and nothing below, filled with signs and wonders, unobscured by light, or pollution, or evaporation. Maybe that's why people all dig a basement there; something to root them, and hold them down, so they can't drift and roll out to the oceans where all humans naturally want to live.

People are all tropical monkeys. Show any human a palm tree and some water. They'll want to be there. Cold places breed strong people, like my Kai. It takes a stubborn ignorance and a fortitude of character to survive any place that can't sustain a palm. Of course, in Canada, we have no choice. Even the fucking dipshit Siberians have Sochi. We have nothing. Nowhere to go.

As I round the corner onto my block, I see Tripod. He's standing by the G Wagon.

"Hurry up, Mac Tonight.", he calls. "You're cleaning The Butchery today."

It's a long day of chemicals. The ones I scrub with. The ones that issue forth from my body like a bottomless refill of Baja Blast. The ones I crave but can't have. The ones my brain can't make on its own anymore. I don't complain or tell anyone. I just talk less than usual.

I'm tired when it's lights out and I'm in my onesie. The floor is hard, and raises up to pinch my thin skin into my aching bones. My hips jut out through my back now. It's such a gross feeling. The nerves in my skin make it feel like there are ants all over me. I can't sleep. I close my eyes anyway.

"Something's wrong with her."

Emphasis on wrong.

"I know. We never should have brought her home. She's nothing but a shame to us. A millstone around our necks."

Their voices shush, become indistinct murmurs of disapproval. The soundtrack of a childhood.

I've been sick. I caught a cold at school, and it's turned into a cough and fever that won't leave me. My mouth tastes like rusted iron and blood, and my lungs feel heavy and filled with fur and fluids. It's been so cold out; -80 with the wind, all week. The ride on the bus to school takes over two hours. That's when I sleep, even though it's too cold to ever warm up. If I fall asleep at home, I cough, and if I cough...

I stifle a bloody cough into my pillow, choking against it, trying with all my might to hold it in. But I wasn't quiet enough.

Dad storms into my room, eyes pointed and hard.

"Shut up! Shut up!", he screams at me. "Quit trying to get attention, you stupid little liar. Quit faking for attention! Don't you care you woke us up? Say you're sorry!", he continues to scream out of control, dragging me out of my bed by the hair, banging my face off the leg of the desk beside the bed.

"I'm sorry. I tried not to.", I stammer out.

"If she was sorry, she wouldn't still be lying and making excuses.", my mom appears. "Just take her to the basement. Lock her up beside the old deep freeze."
Dad drags me callously down the slippery painted stairs to the unfinished concrete basement, throws me against the cracked concrete wall, and cuffs me to a disused portion of lead pipe from a bygone plumbing system. The floor is moist and stained here, next to the sump hole. The air is frigid and musty, stinks of dirt soaked in raw sewage where the system backed up when the pipes froze last week. I don't cry anymore. I learned it only makes things worse. I am a deep dark hole that floods with fear and sadness, and then closes the lid tight over it all.

The cuffs are so tight they'll leave a bloodied bruise. The other kids at school know. So they tell their parents, and their parents say I'm trash. So in turn, they never talk to me. The girls call me a slut. They don't know what it means, and neither do I. But whatever it is, the boys seem to believe it. And so do the teachers. I can't cry anymore. I'm sweating from the fever, and my head aches. I've been sick so long. I faint all the time; gurgle when I breathe. I'd have given up and died. But I had a friend once. I was so sick then too, and it's hard to know if I remember him right. But one thing I never forgot was my real name. Lithia. And that he said if I could just live to grow up, everything would be alright, and I'd be loved and happy.

Now I cry. Tate. That was your name. You were just the brightest light. I cry big, fat, hot tears, and even biting my lip can't stop them. I sob from the sweet pain in my heart for you. The only knife left in there that can still twist. My Tate. The only person who ever loved me. You saved my life, and you're still saving it. I wish I could still be with you, but you made me go. Now you're alone, and I cry for you. I'll never not love you. Can you hear me? I still talk to my black hand. It's not black anymore. What am I thinking? I'm so sick, and this fever is so high, I'll probably die within the week.

"Lithia, sweetheart? If you can hear me? You're almost there, little one. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Remember when I read that to you, because I thought you'd had enough of the spooky shit? Baby, just stay alive. Run away. They're going to hurt you, and they're going to do it soon."

I wake up with a gasp. I hate dreaming about my parents. Poor kids. No wonder they invent imaginary friends. My head is throbbing so hard that when I touch it, the blood vessels are all pulsating and making my scalp squishy. It feels like fat earthworms excavating under the skin. Not to my nerves. To my actual fingertips. It's no big deal. I'll live through this. I'll serve Kai. He'll be pleased with me again. I'm thankful for my upbringing, or I wouldn't understand the sublime sacrifice of faith; and that it isn't my sacrifice. This pain is a gift. It is Kai who has sacrificed for me. Blessed are the brokenhearted.

I'm going to throw up. And it's only 3 a.m. I've been practicing my tagging skillz on cardboard out in the shop for weeks. Time to go change every daycare in this town from daycare to don'tcare on the sign, font correct and everything. Kai's going to love it. He hates the state raising the puppies while Mom plays Candy Crush all day and sips wine a quarter pail--oh, pardon me, stemless goblet--at a time. He's going to lol. He'll know it was me.

My vague NPC meme, "I believe her.", has really caught on. While I fry the tendies, I'll think of more.

It's Manwich night. I'm so exhausted. I'm so glad there's a powder room right off the kitchen. It's like this hurling antifreeze stage is just never going to end. #RawFuckingHamburger. I burn myself while I'm cooking. Not on purpose. That would piss Kai off. Just an accident, because my hands won't quit shaking.

I can't sleep. I just lay here crawling out of my skin because I'm too fatigued to stand up. I have to pee, but I'm too weak to get up. I'll just hold it until morning. Light a candle at the altar of pelvic floor strength. It's only going to make me more pleasing to Kai someday.
I wake up when wheels scrape a curb.

It's all black.

"It's abandoned; look at it, all overgrown? What do you think, Mom? Good enough?"

"For this unabortable, faithless, little abomination who just won't die? Plenty good."

I'm in the trunk of a car. A Pontiac Grand Am. I've been in here before. I know the hand of the cheap, coarse, grey melange carpeting in here, the sparse grit and few small gravel stones. The smell of dirt roads. My body is on fire, and my hand the torch. I don't want to listen to them talking about me. I pass out.

I wake up. Stumble to the bathroom. Finally pee. Don't throw up. Days have run together for me. It's been more than the three or so I can remember like a vague dream.

After a shower and blowing my hair out, I still haven't puked. I'm wearing a crop black turtleneck sweater that buttons up the sides in oversized buttons, with a pleated silk chain print maxi skirt in shades of gold and navy blue, with a black velvet ribbon belt, and black suede block heels. On point. Not too Camelot, not too Mar-a-lago. Just enough though.

I have a couple more ideas for Kai's glory. I can't get ahold of Beverly, despite all my best efforts. She must be out of town. Too bad. This really would have had optimal optics if I was the minority, outnumbered in all the shots. But I did manage to get ahold of some other reporter. I have to hit the Kroger and Publix first. I'm using the entirety of my allowance that I have left over to buy all the white milk I can afford. Then I'm donating it to the New Hope Food Bank out on MLK Boulevard, courtesy the Kai Anderson for Senate PAC. The reporter is going to be there to film their incredibly ungrateful reaction. C'mon, Kai's a tolerant man... lactose tolerant. Some of the Anons are going to be there to get it out on /pol/ too, make sure it makes the meme circuit.

If I still have anything left in me after that, I have plans for the lawn jockey.

I make it through Publix okay, but there was something moldy and rotten in the produce department at Kroger. I don't like puking in the boys bathroom. But a public bathroom is way worse. That reporter sounded pretty when I talked to her. I have to be the prettier one in the shot. I'm going to have to fix my makeup in the car.

The parking lot is nearly empty, iced over and grimy like everything here. I can feel the back end of my car dragging. I get a chill. That dream. I rode nearly dead in the trunk of this very car all the way to California. There's probably still snake venom and my own liquefied arm in that carpeting under all those jugs of milk. They never reported the car stolen when I ran in it. I should leave it in a ditch and set fire to the cursed thing. Spring for a new one.

As Disgraced Taylor would say, shake it off. I crane up to look in the visor mirror, and put fresh concealer under my eyes, wing that shit, gloss those lips. Why do they call these a vanity mirror? They should call them a humility mirror. I never look as shit in any other mirror as I do these.

The stunt goes well. Cute reporter meets me there. I'm taller, thinner, probably younger, and definitely prettier. The big Aunt Jemima type running the food bank acts like she's never seen milk before, but instinct tells her to be very, very afraid of it. Leery of me and the reporter; she never says thank you. The optics were terrible, though I still contend it would have been even better with Beverly. Still. Fat black person turns down real food. Lil' Jeezes suffer. Repubs shake their heads; why are these beggars convinced they get to be choosers? Advantage #Anderson. Get out the vote, yo. Milk. Does the electoral body good. Got votes?
But I still don't get an audience with Kai. As soon as I get home, there's Tripod. Back in the G Wagon. Back to The Butchery.

"Can't I just run inside and change into something more practical? I don't want to wreck this outfit.", I ask him. Also, these heels are almost five inches. All the bones in my feet ache, and they're eating my Achilles tendon already. I don't need them to man a deep fryer or scrub blades with benzene.

"No. The Councilman is using the basement. We have to get going."

"Alright." I drag my carcass into the Wagon.

I get so depressed at night. The sensation of panic. And sinking. Always sinking, lower and lower. I still can't sleep. My skin crawls. There's an impending sense of doom. I feel terribly guilty about some of the things I've done with Kai. That's the worst part, because I know I'm losing my mind. I just lay here for another night in my sleeping bag, shivering so hard it makes me sweat. I want to pull my hair all out, but I don't. I pin my hands to my sides and wait for the light of day to come for me. I beg for mercy. The basement of Gethsemane.

"I'm going to make you look at who you are, Mystery."

Don't call me that, I plead in my head. It's not my name. I don't want to speak. He doesn't leave when I tell him to. I think when I'm quiet it's harder for him to find me.

"Come on, have it. Have the dream again.", he chides. I want Tate to come, but he's not here right now, and I can't speak to call him. "You know the one I'm talking about."

I hate the dream. He peeked in my brain the last time I had it for a few seconds before I could fester him out, like a splinter or poison under my skin. He saw a few frames. Now he bothers me all the time. I know he lies. It's not for me that he wants me to see it. He doesn't care if I understand the dream. He wants to see it, desires to understand it. I know I'm not important. I don't matter. I don't need to understand myself. I need to understand God, my maker, and know enough to recognize Messiah, and discernment not to be lured by the great deceiver.

He's not as smart as he thinks he is. His father spareth the rod and hateth the child. He is rewarded for everything: an enfant terrible. All is vanity. He's not used to being resisted. He doesn't even begin to fathom how to think like me. A fell adversary, but I fear and bow before but one being: The Lord God.

"You have no power here, not in me, and not yet in the earth. Retreat, for I will not suffer you. I am what my Lord hath made me. I have what you never can.", I say suddenly, in a foreign tongue, guttural and strange to me, spelled out backwards in my mind, while simultaneously translated to me as I speak it. Tongues. True Pentecost. I've never experienced it before. Not even the time I drank cyanide from a mason jar.

"I will see that dream.", he rages, a juvenile tantrum in the face of power, not my own, but borrowed, bestowed upon me. "I will force it from your head to your beloved Tate's."

"The dead don't dream.", I tell him, in the same foreign tongue. I think it's Hebrew.

"Oh, but he will suffer for your insolence, Daughter of Eve. I will dress him in black. I will make him suffer. I will bend his every best intention to ruin. He will be a father, but not yours as you both stupidly wish. I will show you that dream over and over until I see it. I will cast it at you every time I find you."

I wake up, cold and shaking, with a gasp. These nightmares are worse than the puking. I don't think
it's the complete shutdown of dopamine receptors and lack of ability to synthesize endorphins that is making me depressed either. It's this. I just wish I was normal. That's probably why Kai wants someone else close to him; he doesn't want to be pulled out into orbit.

No.

No. It's so bleak and desolate here, and yet I'd never in a million lifetimes choose otherwise. I'd rather suffer alone for altrighteousness than be lulled with acceptance among the normies, lest I fall to ruin; just another useless Tweeting cuckquene clucking for her CNN soymeal. Kai has a plan, and he's only seeking to strengthen me, like Job.

I've managed to sleep until five. But those dreams upset me. I can't stop throwing up. I feel so drained and hollow, like a desiccated cocoon left behind once life has fled. My thoughts look dull. My skin. My hair. Everything is dull.

A shower helps, hot, with hard scrubbing. Go through the motions. Dry my hair. It's already straight, but I flat iron it anyway because that's what I do. Force nerve transmission.exe. Force muscle contraction.exe. Force limbs to comply.exe.

Looking pretty always helps, no matter what. It's cold and I shiver all the time. I get no rest from it. I pull on sheer cabled black thigh high socks, and wrap a long silver velvet skirt around my waist, wrapping the ties around twice before I tie them. I throw a sweater over top, let it drop from my shoulder, flex a bra strap. I like this bra. It's Agent fucking Provocateur. Kai will remember buying it for me if he sees it; he picked it. Makeup natural, except dark rimmed eyes. I have scary eyes, piercing like an alligator. Someone told me that once, though I don't see it. I always blink, and so they're just my eyes, grey and sad. I've looked through them my whole life. There's a lens on them built by every awful thing anyone has ever done or said to me, that I'm forced to look at myself through. I have worth. But I don't believe in the deception of self esteem. It even sounds like bullshit. Being pleasing in Kai's eyes was something real though. It felt so much how I'd always imagined love.

I think maybe I could keep down some coffee this morning. Maybe I'll just take it easy today.

Kai really needs to shore up the Evangelical vote. That's my department, but I feel sort of bad doing anything too harsh to them. I've been there. They're pretty easy to scare. Probably just ripping down those "No Skateboarding" signs on The Church of God would do it. Maybe just skateboarding there? Change it to "No G*d*damn Skateboarding"? No. I can't take The Lord's name in vain, and it doesn't have the same impact with an asterisk. I'll just yank the signs off and damage the brickwork a little. Then Kai can offer to replace the signs with bigger, better ones, and maybe enact a bylaw too. And he can volunteer Two Stroke to fix the bricks; he used to do masonry. Easy mission. I've seen The Wire. Maybe I'll suggest he donate a stained glass window.

Light is just starting flood in the windows when I come upstairs, but it's all grey, fractured by the long shadows of leafless trees. The golden sun resides somewhere else. I smile. I guess it still shines in on my old imaginary friend. All that time in Los Angeles, and I've never even been to Disneyland. One time I asked Tate to take me. He cried. I guess that's how my brain dealt with the impossibility of an imaginary friend's ability to call a cab and buy a couple hundred dollar passes for us.

My hands shake and spill water everywhere, trying to fill the coffee maker with water. The smell of the grounds is repulsive; metallic and sour. I consider for a second standing there, if I can survive the sensation, allow it to pass over me. But I can't. I run for the bathroom. Open my mouth.exe. More antifreeze. My throat is so sore from this shit. I heave from somewhere behind my own spine, trying not to sob. Clean myself up.exe.
I take my coffee and sit at the kitchen table, wedging one leg up to rest my face on. My kidneys hurt. I'm just spent. Maybe the caffeine will be good for me. Adderall's a stimulant. At least it's warm. That's nice.

I scroll through my phone's newsfeed. Time to let a satellite download my inspiration for the day into my lizard brain for analysis. What straw man can I spin into gold today? Fuck, I'm a space alien. Colton Hayes is once again in trouble for a costume, and Megyn Kelley has lamented the days when anyone could just dress up as anything for fun. Let the virtue signalling showdown begin. SJWs, rev your overboard outrage motors. Stick out your shocked, impertinent cuckbills, and faux surprise, as if you hadn't only lured Megyn Kelley and Abby Huntsman over to the narcside so you could cannibalize them. Blackface NPCs. It's genius. It's topical. It's timely. It's so fucking festive, and just in time for Halloween! They already hate greyface. Then abuse them further by putting them in a costume they disapprove of? Jim Acosta? You're first! Let's see what my autistic friends on /pol/ think of this. Kek. I like black people. I just hate the professionally/perpetually offended left.

Winter comes down and sits with me. She's mad at me for some irrational reason that I don't have the energy to ferret out today. She hates the coffee. She hates Canada. She hates me, but not for long. I just absorb the damage. She's like this; likes to bluster and blow under her breath for a while. If you just let her have her tantrum, it's not long until she's pretty nice again. Probably just a consequence of being a favorite child; something I can't relate to, but try to be understanding of.

I'm just happy for some company, even if all she does is criticize me, then try to drag some criticism of Kai out of me, and then go on to look at my bloodshot eyes with a disheartening concoction of pity and disgust. Minimize and dismiss.exe. She's stressing me out a little too much. Heave and hurl.exe. Must be what happened to my eyes. So fucking gross. My mom said I was born like this too, with bloody eyes. Imagine the beating a baby must take in order for their eyes to hemorrhage. Poor little kids.

Finally, Winter is satisfied to just let the subject go. She's cool for a liberal. She knows I don't want to change her, and I don't think she wants to change me either. Just help me. We're never going to have the same operating system, but it doesn't mean we can't be friends.

She shoves a home and garden magazine across the table at me, and I'm grateful. I smile. "You know what I really don't get?" I ask her as she flips past an advertisement. "What's with the abiding love the plebs have for these retarded wall decals of dead dandelions? I mean, it's a weed. They spread. It's what weeds do. What is it about this that's so inspiring and affirming for them? Perhaps a virus multiplying in a Petri dish would give them the warm fuzzies too? Rats humping in front of a garbage can? Kinda makes you wonder how they view themselves, doesn't it? And guaranteed these are the same fussbudgets who complain about actual dandelions in their lawns, just so they can nag their husbands away from the PlayStation and give him some menial task."

Winter smiles back. "Their worthless kind overrun the earth. There's safety in numbers. It reminds them of the comfort and innumerable company available to the lowest common denominator. It's why I joined Kai. I might be a snowflake. But I'm no dandelion.", she nearly laughs.

The Lawn Jockey

Chapter Summary

Kai and Mac cope with their separation in different ways. Winter reaches out to a sister in need, strengthening an unanticipated bond. The dreaded Danielle moves in.

Kai

It's getting late in the morning, and I've laid in bed so long that it's only gotten harder to get up. I've got a body low setting in; starts in your bones, metastasizes in your soul, wearies you, makes you vengeful. Well, if I wasn't so wicked lazy. My room is all light now, even through the sheers. But Mom... I don't want to go to school...

I roll over and grab my phone, fire off a text to Ivy. I'm buying The Butchery. Changing the name though. What a bull dyke, try-hard, edgelord hipster name that is. And yet, no one is offended. Not my style.

A few weeks ago, I kept Mac in bed with me all night, and I couldn't sleep, so I asked her to tell me a story. She's lived a life of profound hardship; more pain and degradation crammed in a short span than anyone else I've ever known. It's a bit humiliating, as a man, just knowing what she's endured and never cracked under. But I know she doesn't mean it that way.

She said her family was part of some underground network of fundamentalist snake handlers; they had revival meetings in tents all over North America. Cult life without a single leader. I admire the ostentatious feat of that, though obviously, it's not for me. She'd been forced to drink cyanide to prove her faith before she was even school aged. Had to be fake. She didn't even get sick, though she said she lost a lot of her hair in the weeks that followed. Had to be fake. Someone got their hands on some Mexican pharmaceuticals; chemo drugs or something, across the line in Mexicali or some shit. Had to be. Because the time Mac finally got bit by a rattler, she nearly died, and doesn't like talking about it. I Googled it. It's some nasty shit. When I do pinkie power her, she's going to have to talk about it. I want the power of that kind of lethal pain.

A lot of those meetings took place out in the strangled off parts of the southwestern desert, places where nothing but snakes and the occasional serial killer dwell anymore. Her grandparents took her to Bombay Beach with them for clandestine revivals every year. She told me she loved it there; that it was like the past's imagination of the apocalyptic future. A sort of failed Palm Springs, hidden away just off The Salton Sea, where the green dreams and pink visions of a dead optimism rotted and were buried under the pale shifting sands, or fell to ruin in the poisonous, primordial brine. A last bastion of wonder prevailing over logic, Mac said.

She said it was the only living sky in all of the USA, where you could still see the signs and wonders we were commanded to watch for. She'd seen a UFO one year out there. The next day, The Salton Sea's surface had been covered completely with dead fish and birds, and she'd went walking alone in the scorching desert, until she'd found a circle of charred kreosote bush and sand turned to glass, where she swore she'd seen a pillar of fire burning in the night. I asked if she'd been scared, held her pinkie in mine under the covers. But there was no lie in her when she said no, and I let go, ashamed,
because I was. I fucking hate those bug-eyed greys. I'll hold my nose and plow Samuels every so often; just for the bent appeal of making another badge-wearing prettyboy my bitch. But I've got no desire to ever be fucking probed. Probably just another farmacia prank. 'Give the baby her LSD, Josiah, and read her some Revelation before bed!', that's how I see that going down.

There weren't a lot of things she was allowed to do. Movies were evil. All television except Jack Van Impe was evil. Makeup was for whores. Pants were for men. Playing cards were tools of the devil, and still quick her out; like she's going to accidentally learn the future or invite possession if she plays a counting game. I've tried it; left them sitting face up around the house. Mac, without fail, gingerly flips them back face down. Never looks at them. You've heard the term 'Dancin' Baptists'? That wasn't her either. No dancing. That's what the heathens do, damn it. You might raise a Haitian hell zombie if you sway those chiseled hips. No music but Appalachian hymns, sang through the nose, with nothing but tambourine and the jawbone. I told her the other name for a jawbone was a vibraslap. She climbed astride me, ran her tongue slowly up my neck, and grabbed me through my pants so hard it hurt, and quietly teased in my ear, "Come on, Kai, I think I want you to vibraslap me tonight..." Sex was of course forbidden. Hands folded, thank you, fundamentalists. I'm the only man who's ever really touched her, ever laid a finger on her. And she's the best toy I've ever played with.

One thing they didn't frown on though, were displays of man's dominion over animals. She'd been to a tall grass circus out in the desert where they'd still used dusty, downtrodden and scarred old elephants to erect the tent. A carnie had given Mac the first Twinkie she'd ever had while she watched. That, she'd been punished for. Not that I can blame them for that. I'm going to feed her a Twinkie and then punish her one day too. They'd been too poor to actually attend the circus itself. They'd just sat in the dry heat, on the hood of the car, watching the set up. Left at admission time as the sun went down. She'd got to see the circus beginning, through a haze of dust and exhaust, peering through the back window of her grandparent's Lincoln, past their obligatory Kleenex box. Most of Mac's claustrophobic little life's been lived that way; staring in on dioramas, or living inside one herself, alone and cut off. My sweet girl. She makes me weak, and she makes me not care that she's doing it. She definitely needs to eat a Twinkie and take her lickin'.

The year of the UFO sighting, they'd fled the area when the Department of Fish and Game had come out to drag the lake and clean up all the dead floaters. That's one thing I'll give those hardline Evangelicals of that peculiar breed; they do not trust the government. Not their own, and not anyone else's either. They never forget Waco. Her grandparents had ended up in Yuma, Arizona, and taken her to a rodeo there. She'd seen a dog and pony show that made an impression; some yahoo taught his herd of cows to do some incredibly dangerous shit, like run down a moving tractor trailer, and clamber up on their hoofed feet, all the way onto the roof of the rig. It was called Bovine Domination.

Now, that's a name; Bovine Domination. I dunno. Makes me laugh. Something so grandiose about it. I think I'll mack it for The Butchery. The sickly discomfort it will give all those same edgelord hipsters? Lame Reddit spicy meme lords, feeling cool... a BUTCHER... they see visions of knives wielded, maybe a moustachioed Daniel Day Lewis. See the cow, motherfuckers. You want to buy a snobbish fifty dollar steak from me? You'll see the motherfucking cow. I'll show you PETA kill floor videos while you eat. You'll see what I want you to. I control the horizontal and the vertical.

I get up, and go stand at my bedroom window, looking out. Little black bunny, skittering across the snow, to the shed on the corner of the lot, and back to the veranda. What's she up to?

My heart swells a little. I've trained her well. She's had a hard time this past couple weeks, no doubt, and it's about to get a lot worse for her. But where some people crumble, like a Burger King bag full of empty tendie cartons, smashed between your palms before you whip it out the window--where it belongs--a few blocks past the drive through window, she's just hardened like diamond under my
thumb. Kept herself busy bringing about my domination.

That's a true believer; when I don't have to do a thing for her, and she'll still serve me. No evidence I'm here. She can't see me, feel me. I don't answer. I absorb her service. I don't need to say thank you to her. Her only reward is her own sacrifice and pain, suffered alone and in silence, lest faith be negated by questioning. No expectation that life or anything else be fair. She doesn't need a crummy tax break to be loyal. Her kind of service can't be bought. Her vote can't be either. I sigh. Take a pill. I miss her. This shit's been hard on me too.

Mac's #MilkToast stunt was pure white gold. Really shored up my support among the old rich white establishment who couldn't decide if they could trust a man with my hair. Insert disapproving cuckservative face here. Tut tut. Chris Wallace, I'm talking about you. But now even Paul Ryan is calling me. Wisconsin's dairy lobby now wants to support my campaign, asking me to take my aspirations Federal. As if I'll be limited to that.

Don't care was just an offering to me; won't scare anyone or get me votes. But the amusement of knowing she triggered all those working women, mostly single mothers, just for me? She really knows what to get the formerly humiliated man who now has everything.

What else? I chew another Adderall. Oh yeah. The ghastly, deadly sin of skateboarding. I gotta replace those signs with bigger ones--big, beautiful, the most beautiful signs--enact a bylaw and donate a stained glass window. I could probably trust Winter to find some bearded suspender-wearing wank on Etsy who makes those. The Evangelicals are so terrified something might qualify as a graven image that they prefer geometric patterns. Winter can't screw that up. I'm going to tell her: just stick to blocks. If you get anything with a triangular shape, they'll see a goat or a Star of David. Either way? Triggered. But something Mondrian will have their whole disorganization eating out of my hand, all the way up to the reigning Falwell.

A knock comes on my door.

"Yeah?", I yell back over my shoulder, grasping my wrists behind my back, still just gazing out on the swirling white world.

Speed Wagon comes in and closes the door. 

"Ivy's here. She's down in the kitchen with Winter."

"I heard.", I answer impatiently. Nodding out the window, I ask, "What's she up to out there?"

"I dunno, Divine Ruler.", he answers, all serious, sir-yes-sir. "She said something about a gollywog. I dunno what that means."

I smile. Canadians. Racial slurs in the Queen's English. I'm going to have to make her paint it back how it was. But her heart's in the right place.

"The lawn jockey.", I explain. "She's giving him his original paint job. He was black when we inherited him from Grandma. Dad caved to neighborhood pressure and spray painted him all matte white. Sucks. But he has to go back. I can't have my campaign damaged by some lawn nicknack, regardless of how based. It's good though. A pretext to punish her once Danielle gets here. Let it stand for the rest of the day."

"I'll go g--", Speed begins, ready to goosestep out the door. But I interrupt him.

"How's she holding up?", I ask, still facing the window.
"Pft...", he makes some kind of pie face, "Shit. I dunno. Not that great. In some ways, fine. Like she's still her. I made the mistake of saying "libtard" yesterday. From the top of the stairs, she yells down, "It's LEFTARD". But she's trippin', coming off the pills, you know. Her eyes are all full of blood today. She still gets sick a lot. Like you said she would be, she's awake a lot at night, then cries in her sleep."

He's judging me. I feel the black rage in me bubble and expand. I turn and face him with a smile.

"So you think I should go easy on her?"

His eyes go shifty, sweep side to side. He's trying to figure out how to answer me. In other words, how to lie. He's got the unmitigated gall to judge me.

I imagine it:

I lunge at him, grabbing him by the throat, and pinning him to the wall. I can't believe this weak pretty boy made it through the Academy. Pigs, my ass. Petunias.

"You think I should bring her in here, give her a hug, feed her a pill, stick my big dick in her? Danielle will see her basking in the afterglow, chilling with Winter, laughing it up in their cool girl clique, long hair, and little clothes, and what do you think the chances of getting Killerwhaletank to stick around here long enough to do what we want her to is then? And if we can't get her into that mosque, how long is it going to take until there's another attack that really terrifies people? People who are completely immunized against fucking surprise, let alone terror, because for the past twenty years or so, we've lived in a world where there's a terror attack a day in the civilized world? We leave our immigration system in place how it is, and we're Iran in a matter of one generation, and then Iran's got a state of the art nuclear program. Two, actually. Did you know in end times prophesy, The United States of America are never mentioned, as though when the time comes, we will be a dead civilization, no longer of any significance in the world? Over my dead fucking body. Is that what you want, Speed Wagon?", I hiss at him, as I let him fall to the floor at my feet, grabbing at his throat and gasping for breath.

"No. Of course not. Not at all. I'm down with Riyadh Jihad. Crank dat bitch, like you said, Kai. We all know what to do.", he answers with a big stupid grin. Like a stupid fucking dog. Grab him by the throat, hold him in your teeth, and not only will he respect you for it, he'll love you for it. I hate dogs. The huddled plebs of the animal kingdom, clamoring for a master. I hate cats too. They're even worse. Like a woman. Can't be taught a thing.

Maybe that would be an overreaction. My fuse is nonexistent these days. I got used to the kind of release Mac gave me. I could bang all my masculine rage and frustration up against her pretty little body, and all she did was grind into it, and turn it into the best fucking sensation in the world. But we've been living in soft times. And soft times make bad men, who make lean times. Lean times make hard men. And hard men like me don't hesitate to bloody noses.

"If she can take this like a man, so can you.", I tell Speed Wagon patiently instead. "We complete the mission. Simple as that. All of us. I'm counting on you to drill it with the boys. We need total adherence to the plan. You need to go over all of it with them before Killerwhaletank gets here, because that unpleasant shit's going to keep me exceedingly busy for the next little while, and it's a dirty job none of you'd want. I can't be dealing with any of the grunts going off script, because I want this accomplished as soon as possible. And my girls need to be kept dark."

"Got it, Divine Ruler. Eyes on the prize.", he agrees. "You want me to send Ivy up while I drill the boys?"
"No, that's fine. I like the GOP elephant of surprise in the room. I'll come down. Make sure Winter's not going off her sanctioned topics list with her.", I answer with a grin.

But Speed Wagon has displeased me. His judgement irks me. He thinks I'm being unnecessarily cruel. He thought, in one small way or another, that he knew better than me. My grin turns to a glower, following him out into the hall.

"Hey, Speed Wagon.", I say, stopping him after a few steps. "I had an idea. You're getting a tattoo for a new plan I'll introduce in the months to come; I'm going to position myself as the law and order candidate. Make it nice and big. ACAB."

A quick look of horror washes over his face, wipes off his stupid bro grin. All Cops Are Bastards. Used by Skinheads and Black Panthers alike. The only phrase used by both races to make it to the hate symbol database. He loved being a cop. He wanted to make the world a better place. By serving. Aw. How admirable. Fucking asshole. He's still got some infantile hero complex buried in under all his fear of dying on a routine traffic stop that overwhelmed his ability to do his job and brought him to me. Somehow, it's just now that I've destroyed him. He finally sees it. He'll never be a cop again. Never a white hat, white knight badge again. Just a faceless dick with a gun in my plan. He's nothing. He gave any power he ever had to me the day he sat in that chair under Mom's faux Tiffany shade and spilled his pitiful fears out into my pinkie finger. You're mine. ACAB. Enjoy your ink, bitch.

While he just stands in the hallway, gaping and looking stunned, I add, "And do it today, would you? I'll compensate you. Just make sure you turn in a receipt by tonight."

Ivy's doing some pseudointellectual whining about Halloween. Winter loves Halloween. Time to put this bitch down too.

"My thoughts EXACTLY, Ivy.", I walk into the kitchen, booming with a laugh. "But I for one fucking LOVE Halloween. Now go fix that room up. We're expecting a new guest today, and we've got a party to plan. Cultural appropriation and traditional gender roles for everyone, and extra points if you can do both at once. Especially if a leftard might find it scary."

Her beady little eyes gawk.

"What, Ivy? You'd wanted to be Rosie the Riveter, or something?", I toss my head back and laugh. She probably did. Or she's already done it. "You know I'd never have my girls doing some kind of hard, menial work like that... or at least getting credit for it publicly, anyway. No. I think with the distance your eyes are apart? You should go as Gretchen Carlson as Miss America 1989. It's settled, Ivy. You've got a week to find a mint green sequined dress, and I want to see some of that ample cleavage on display."

"Mmm. But what about the scary part?", Ivy asks, and thinks she's challenging me. But I set her up. I have an answer. Winter knows it too. I see a smirk lurking on her lips. She really has grown tired of this bitch.

"Oh, Ivy. Fox News personalities, even the former ones, are very, very scary to leftards. And hell, Ivy, she's even scary to me. One of those #metoo moneychangers, who sells pussy for a career until she gets what she wants, and then bites the hand that grabs her? Any nasty woman who can bring down Roger Ailes is inherently scary. Well, until you remember: Men lead, women bleed." I smile. "No matter. Beauty Queens scare all women. Trust me. It's perfect. And you're doing it. Scare me up the Panera Mom vote."

She droops her sloped shoulders even more. Throws some papers on the table.
"Sign those and file them. It's yours.", she says, defeated.

"Wonderful!", I laugh, intentionally maniacally. "You'll be so much happier, free to pursue your feminine prerogative without the distraction and burden of business ownership." Just to gross her out, I pick up an empty mug on the table and hold it to my crotch, do a stroking motion. "And if you want another baby now that you actually have the time to be a mother? You know where to find me. You're not my type. Not inspiring. But there's plenty of my Tool-Aid on tap down at the Baster Clinic. Pay your ten grand, and help yourself. But for now, I need you to get to work on that bedroom. Our new guest arrives today."

When she slumps off down the hall, Winter smiles up at me from her chair at the table.

"Thanks, Kai.", she says. "That bitch was really harshing my vibes. Did you hear all her shit about Oz, like I have some responsibility? So lame. You're right. Every kid has a mommy and a daddy.", she rolls her eyes.

She really is mad. Ivy got under her skin.

"But do I really have to follow your rules about a costume? I love Halloween. I want to be creative. Not have my choices limited.", Winter asks me so seriously, I'd almost like to troll her. I won't though. I need the company right now.

I kiss her on the top of the head and give her shoulders a squeeze. "Of course not, sister. Be whatever you want, as long as you can sell it. Just make up a reasonable argument for how it fulfills the requirements." I know her well enough to know she's not going to miss the opportunity to flex a little politically incorrect sex appeal. "Just no M&M or Campbell's Soup can costumes, or anything like that, alright?"

"Hell no. Never. So lame. Thanks, Kai.", her tiny bowed lips smile briefly. She's always done that, smiled like that, so quick it was hard to catch, ever since she was a baby. Even Mom didn't believe me the first week we had Winter home, that she was smiling already. She did it for me first. She was such a happy baby. I wonder what went wrong. Probably all the shit I'm trying to fix.

"How's Mac? You been talking to her?", I ask casually, taking a cup of coffee. Black and bitter, just how I like it. Lattes are for fags and fat chicks with lensless glasses and hormone imbalances.

"Yeah, so? Is that a problem? To deserve this shit? Do you remember Chantal, that exchange student, whose parents and older brothers all died in a car accident while she was here, and there was a problem with her plane taking off because of that huge ice storm, and she never got to go home for the funeral?", she asks.

"Yeah, she seemed fine, perfect grades and shit, until she offed herself, right? So what's your point?"

"Kai, she didn't seem fine. She seemed dead inside. She seemed like suicide was nothing but an inevitable delayed reaction; a remedy to the disparity between her soul and body. Her soul fled, and left her behind until she just had to fix it. She was like a chicken that kept flopping once her head was cut off. She never seemed fine.", Winter shakes her head and rolls her eyes.

"So what? You're saying Mac's about to eat her 12 gauge or some shit? She'd never do that to me. I
"No. Kai. I'm not saying that.", Winter is growing frustrated with me, but I'm a man. I can't follow this sensitive shit, when girls say one thing and mean another. "Just forget it. She'll survive it. It's just maybe she can't live with it."

I shrug. "She'll live through this. She doesn't believe in 'can't. Ask her about it."

"Ugh.", she shudders. "I'd rather not. Let me guess, some quasi spiritual, existential metaphysical shit that is somehow depressing and soul crushing, but then she rattles a tambourine at the end, like it was the most encouraging sentiment ever?"

I laugh and so does Winter. Feelz good, man.

"So what have you been doing with your extra allowance, little sister?", I ask her, sitting down at the table.

She shoots me a wicked little look.

"Donated a shit ton to the Ocasio-Cortez campaign.", she gives me a snotty little smile. "And Women Against Gun Violence, because no one is challenging the NRA military industrial complex like they are. Oh, and I got the new RED Valentino black collared dress. It was almost a thousand bucks, but it's completely different from all my other ones. The skirt and sleeves are flounced in bias cut satin, and the edges of the collar are scalloped, but not big scallops like my floral one. Little scallops. And they're embroidered in black. It was totally worth it."

I'm untrollable; I transcend triggering.

"Sounds nice. That'll be pretty on you. I'm glad you've enjoyed it.", I smile broadly. "You maybe should have rounded out your winter wardrobe a little more when you had the chance, because that bump you've had is going to have to go our new initiative."

"Big Knees.", she surmises, with a sneer and a shake of her head. "Whatever. I'm glad I gave most of it away. Why do we have to move someone else in? You know how much I hate that kind of change. Remember how I'd always cry if I didn't get my usual spot to sit in on the bus, or at the table? I needed Zoloft the school year Mrs. Miller made us change desks and seating arrangements once a week."

"Look, Winter. I know. But we knew the road from city council to senate would be arduous, and we all have to do our part. You're strong. Stronger than you think.", I patronize. I like Winter. I love her, probably more than I should, actually. But let's face it. Sure, she's impulsive. Muted. Prone to violence, even. But strong? That's a stretch for someone who is about to whine about her right to an unshared shitter. She's had it easy. That's good though. I want her to always have it easy. "The Kai Anderson for Senate PAC has an important new mission. We need comprehensive immigration reform. And we both know you've grown fond of Mac. You don't want her deported, with no path to citizenship, while the country is flooded with former ISIS fighters, who kill homosexuals and seculars as a religious mandate, do you? It's one more person in the house. And it won't be forever. I can get you some Zoloft if you want it, I'm sure."

"I trust you, Kai.", she exhales, takes my pinkie in hers. "Just promise you won't make me share my bathroom with her, okay?"

The rat in my brain turns the wheel. Maybe I won't make her share. Not with Killerwhaletank anyway. My girls might be able to expedite this vulgar process for me a bit. I'll let the next 24 hours
or so play out. But I have a feeling my sister is going to be pleased with the comfort of her short term living arrangements. Mac's a good girl. I trust her.

I pull my finger away from my sister in silence, and walk quietly to the front window to look out, careful not to be seen. Mac's kneeling on the iced over veranda, her long golden hair spilling out from inside her hood, blowing on the breeze, putting the lids back on three paint cans. Sambo, as G'ma A called him, once again sports a red jacket over white pants, and is glistening black. Red lips, of course. I smile. Mac's eyes do look awful. It doesn't matter. She's still beautiful. Besides, I know how to make her close them... she likes the weight of my body on top of hers. Her eyes get heavy, her lips part, she turns her head to the side, and pushes her hair off her face, leaves her palm half across her face like a Venetian half mask... spreads her thin legs for me. Fuck. I should call the Baster Clinic. Get paid for what I'm about to do.

When she goes to stand, her legs buckle under, and while she reels for a footing on the ice, she slips face first into the cement lawn jockey's outstretched fist. I flinch for her; it was even painful to watch. Me? I'd curse and yell, and kick the paint cans across the lawn. She sits down stunned, like a bird flown into a window, looking up at the sky, and pinches her bloody nose shut. I can see her shoulders quaking. She's crying. She never lets anyone catch her doing it. I love her. If I believed in the sorry'z, I'd feel it. But this is what's best for her.

She's actually strong. Doesn't believe it for a second. Just knows it. Mac knows there's never been a choice for her, besides live or die.

I can't help but think of the first time we took her out on clown business.

"She's gonna crack and flip out, Kai.", Winter had said. "All her heaven and hell hang ups? Just because you like to play house with her and steal her good lines doesn't mean she's anywhere near ready for what we really do. She's a Pollyanna."

But Mac had put me in the mood for a good bloodbath. I got her a Moon Man mask after I found out it was her who had put out my favorite album of all time. Some /pol/s felt attacked by the track Cuck of the Month, and a few even thought Strangers on a Train to Auschwitz was going too far. Her conversion of Stroker Ace to Master Race was considered brilliant across the board. Everyone's Got Obummer was to my mind most dank, made me want to put it on repeat and get out my longboard. Point is, she already understood my mind. She was nothing but a provocateur, and she'd put it all to a full length lounge fuck-track.

When she walked downstairs, she was gorgeous. Fucking fine. Of course the massive crescent moon mask was a trip. But I'd let her pick the rest, and she never disappoints. She'd got a skin tight black tuxedo trompe l'oeil bodysuit, high cut to show those legs that go all the way up to her rib cage. Black tights underneath, sheer, with a satin stripe down the outside of the legs. And laced up patent ankle boots, rhinestone encrusted assault rifles for heels. She had her bodysuit's printed on lapel pinned with a corsage that shot water. She stuck to the theme literally. It was editorial, and funny, and terrifying, and so fucking sexy. Winter swallowed her own tongue.

I jumped my new little Juggalo in on an easy clown kill. An anti-life Dyson Doc who'd done in a baby, full term. Added bonus? The victims of his barbarism were a black teenage girl and her baby. Pro-life was happy we made the streets safer. We scared the grotesque femme de la incels of the left, who took to the streets with their "My body My choice" signs, as if they have a hope in hell of getting laid, let alone knocked up. An abortion? They should be so lucky. They can't even get themselves assaulted on campus, no matter how long they stay there, strutting safe spaces braless in their plus sized body positive booty shorts. And it drove home the uncomfortable fact that Margaret Sanger was an actual racist who only advocated the abortion of black babies. It was a triple threat

Mac was quivering a little. I noticed it when she was riding in the back of the ice cream truck on the way to the kill. I put my hand on her thigh, and she squeezed my hand back, and after that she was fine. We sat in silence in the dark, and listened to Winter and Ivy bicker about which one of them had forgotten to put the feta away in the fridge after they'd made the salads. That was only a few nights earlier. Mac hadn't been cooking that night because she was busy on /pol/, pushing her rendition of Obummer's official portrait. She put him on a porcelain throne, reading a Koran. It was based. I couldn't have done better. The demonstration of the subversion of American culture, in the style of Norman Rockwell. I had to see her in my room. It was the first time.

Now we rode, bouncing in the back of that bombed out ice cream truck, the chill of the night still and quiet. No one saw me touch her, or her hand slip into mine. She was about to stain those hands in the blood of another for the first time, and she was going to get stabby for me.

The good doctor lived in a secluded gated community of acreages on the outskirts of town. It wasn't hard to get in, and once we were, we had complete privacy. The old turtleneck wearing horseshoe headed fuck had left one bay of his triple garage open. Speed Wagon pulled right in and shut the door behind us.

The boys and me stormed the place—a huge, well lit McMansion decorated in the faux Tuscan tradition, replete with plenty of wine related nicknacks and paddywhacks—and secured the target so the girls could make their dramatic entrance.

Mac walked in like she was owning the Victoria's Secret runway a month before Christmas; snappy and not too fast, toned and lean, with just the tiniest bit of jiggle to her firm little tits when her heavy shoes would click the travertine floors. I had the guy tied up in a kitchen chair at that point; his fat gut strapped with an orange extension cord I'd brought in from the garage.

Mac walked up, totally undirected and unplanned, and stood right in front of him. Squirted him with her corsage filled with a mix of water and Head and Shoulders for added sting. With her sky high heels and huge moon for a head, she was terrifying and nearly seven feet tall, with the proportions of The Slender Man. She pulled three bottles of wine from his stupid little built-in blue LED lighted cooler, and attempted to juggle them. She sucked. A real Miss Butterfingers. She maybe got through two clumsy rotations. But that was the point. Once she'd broken two bottles, she leaned down, backhanded him across the face as hard as she could with her free hand, and followed it up instantly, by cracking his face the other way with the one bottle she still held in her other hand. She made me hard. If she wasn't still a virgin, I'd have fucked her right then and there on the floor, in the broken glass and spilled wine, right in front of all of them; the boys, the girls, my sister, the victim.

Winter wanted my attention though, and she got it. She'd noticed Doc Doooom's lawn darts in the garage when the girls came in. So we had a snooty little DNC garden party out back, all proceeds to go to Planned Parenthood. Of course we littered his body at their offices on the way home. Took more than the usual flick of the wrist, but between a few of us, we kicked his corpse out of the back of the Good Humor truck without even having to stop.

Ultimately, Winter was the one to kill the guy. She heaved one of those things up in the air, and it came back straight down, and went right through his skull. Of course, it was a little easier because he was already on his back. Mac had aimed somewhere else. She'd lobbed her huge dart slow and low, so it came down and pierced right through his pitiful little knob and old saggy sack, knocking him over and pinning him to the lawn by the ill-fitting pleated trousers.

As the brakes ground to a squeaking halt back at Commodore, I touched Mac's thigh again, and lifted my mask.
"Go straight to my room, Moon Girl.", I whispered to her. "Wait there for me."

"But I'm all bloody.", she whispered back. "Don't you want me to clean up first?"

"No.", I told her. "Just go wait."

When I came into my room, she was standing there, her thighs still sprayed in blood splatter, and the heels of her shoes muddied with sod. She still had her mask on too.

I rushed her, grabbing her up in my arms, holding her tight, just breathing in her sweet smell. I wanted to feel her body against mine, needed to feel my cock smashed between my body and hers, hear her moan, feel the warmth of her flesh seep through my pants while I thumped my erection up against her until I made her wet.

"Baby, you were awesome.", I told her, grabbing her ass. "Juggling his stupid wine? What a stroke of genius.", I lifted her mask off to suck her ear.

"The only genius I care about stroking is you, Kai.", she groaned, stepping up and wrapping her legs around my waist, as I lifted her off the floor. Her little hands were everywhere, her mouth on mine. She tasted like cinnamon and red Faygo. She'd got into his Goldschlager schnapps and pop while me and the boys loaded up the body. She gets bored fast. I love it about her. "I wanna get you off.", she begged against my lips, trying to reach down my pants while I held her. "I wanna kill for you. I wanna die for you. But first I wanna make you come. I know I was bad. But I can't help it; I'm curious. I looked at you there when I was fucking with that guy. You were all hard for me. I could see it.", she whispered, shy, in my ear. "I wanted to stop everything so you could whip me in the face with your cock, and I could swallow your sword. You make me so hot."

"Oh gaw--", she stops me with her finger on my lips.

"No.", she breathes while kissing me. "Don't say that, okay?"

She's light as a feather, her body practically weightless, and I have to hold her tight just to feel her against me. She's so warm, smells so good. I buried my face in her hair and sucked her neck. My mind went slow. All the blood in my body surged to my twitching cock. All she was doing was pressing against it, but I felt like I was going to come.

"The night belongs to you, Moon Girl. Whatever you want.", I assured her.

"Anything I want?", she teases me, her hand sliding between her own legs, and onto the front of my pants. I throbbed, a shot of precum escaping me when her fingertip traced the head of my cock. She reached both her arms back up around my neck, tightening her legs hold around my hips, and breathed in my ear, moaning softly, "I want you to put your mask back on and go down on me..."

I felt the inevitable. She was so fucking scandalous. Completely fearless and totally offensive, but the sweetest girl in the world to me. I was already coming and couldn't stop, so I pushed her back to the wall and humped up against her tight virgin pussy through our clothes. I used to have a hard time coming with a partner. Now I didn't even have time to get it out of my pants.

"Mac...", I groaned. "What are you doing to me?"

"I dunno.", her sweet voice teased all low and flinty, "Are you coming?"

"You know I am.", I growled, kissing her hard. She'd closed her eyes, opened her mouth and slid her tongue into my mouth, dug her fingers into my back though my heavy waxed canvas coat.
"Good.", she breathed, eyes still closed. "I love you, Kai. If you're pleased, I'm pleased."

But the way she said it... so sexy. The overtones. I'm sure I made her come too. Right at the end, when I was just banging on her, trying to get the very last throbs and shot out, she started breathing fast and making these quiet little high moans, her lip curled, and then she just hugged me tight and told me she loved me, over and over.

After, she made me a Pure White with some of dickwad's stolen schnapps. Brought it to me all clean showered, in her onesie. She asked if she'd been over enthusiastic. Maybe she was feeling some guilt. But I love a violent woman. I told her that, and kissed her smooth little head. She closed her eyes and smiled. I should have let her sleep with me that night.

Oh well. I gotta roll. I'm an important man. Anon's going to feed WAPO some fake news today, see if I can convince them pumpkin pie's been adopted as a symbol of White Nationalism, ahead of Thanksgiving. Besides, I have to make sure Speed Wagon isn't cocking up the plan with my private security force.

Mac

The pressure is low today. I feel like I've got the bends. I don't know how these grey days can be so blindingly bright, but they are. Burns right through your fiber optic nerve. There was some freezing rain since I've been out, and now the trees are all glazed in a thin layer of icicle. The snow over the lawn is dappled, what's left of it, and the rest where the brown grass protrudes, is coated in a glassy shell. The awning is dripping on me.

I'm just glad this is a job I can do while I sit, slumped over on the porch. The paint is slightly chunky from the cold, the breeze too slow and moist to carry the solvent smell away. A raven the size of a hawk lands on the lawn. They're ghouls, and too smart. They're supposed to be carrion birds, but I've seen the ones here trying to hunt the shrews that live on the lawn, under the snow. The world is changing; storms, and Islam, and all animals turning carnivore. Prions, global redistribution of wealth, atomic bombs and the Muslims. That's how it's all going to end. I've always known I was bred for the end. And now I have my messiah to help lead me through. May he reign for a thousand years. I hope he likes my restoration of his lawn jockey. He hates the whitewashing of history... kek.

I used to like skating. It's an awful, confusing sensation to remember fondly anything from my childhood, like I'm betraying myself, ripping my own understanding of all things real and true apart, and somehow excusing the inexcusable for the undeserving. But I did. I liked skating.

Me, and whoever the foster meal tickets my parents were using at the time, used to take big shovels out to the frozen dugout, and push all the snow off as best we could. Then we'd have to sit on those plastic snow saucers, and put our skates on. Be so careful not to fill them up with that frigid frost dust we called snow. But it's weird how when you're a kid, being cold never bothers you the same. I didn't care. I'm sure I was clumsy and awkward, knees knocking, toes turned in, half stumbling with my arms out, stiff and ready to catch myself. But it didn't feel like that. I'd imagine being a ballerina. Swan Lake or some shit; I didn't really know about that stuff. It was all forbidden to me. But I'd get to imagine myself graceful. It was too cold for adults. So my parents weren't there to remind me that I wasn't. I used to imagine falling through; the water would flood my lungs and freeze in place, and the surface over me in an instant. I'd die beautiful, encased in black, and buried under glass, like an answer in a Magic 8 Ball; another forbidden thing. Until spring thaw. Then I'd haunt them, and I'd do it gruesome.

This lawn jockey looks slick. Kai's going to love it. I've never liked lawn jockeys, white or black; I don't discriminate. I hate them all.
Once, when I was a kid, there was a huge snowstorm on Halloween Day. All the grid roads were impassable, and the buses couldn't run to drive the farm kids home, so we were billeted with a town kid's family. I stayed with some girl named Jody. I'd never been allowed to participate in worldly holidays like Halloween or birthdays, but I didn't want to be rude, and figured when in Rome. My parents would never know. So when Jody's parents dressed us up in Ski-doo suits and motorcycle helmets and told us we were astronauts, and handed us each a pillowcase, I went with it. That's the only time in my life I trick or treated.

As the night wore on, dark, snowy, and closed in around us like outer space itself, Jody ate more and more candy out of my pillowcase, and got more and more hyper. I followed after her, but my motorcycle helmet had a face shield, and it kept fogging so I couldn't see where I was going. I had to take it off and carry it. I was chasing her up a walkway, carrying my pillowcase, and hers, and my huge Evel Knievel goldflake helmet, and my hair blew in my face, and I didn't see the Dayman's lawn jockey. His fist came out to meet me, and caught me so hard in the mouth, that my top teeth came clear through the skin above my chin, and knocked me out cold.

When I came to, laying in the snow, face bloody, candy strewn across the driveway and lawn, and staring up at the green northern lights above while the blizzard swirled overhead, my heart thumped out of my chest. I didn't notice the geriatric Daymans or Jody standing over me, looking concerned. Heat rushed to my face, and shame flooded me like a spilled dirtbike's carburetor. My parents would know what I'd done. I was so preoccupied after that, I couldn't even keep up a conversation, sleep, eat a single candy, or do my work at school the next day. I rode home on the bus, the afternoon of November 1st, gauze pad taped under my lower lip, praying for forgiveness and mercy. I didn't care about the beating. I just didn't want to hear about what a disappointment I was.

I didn't even try to lie. I'd gone trick or treating. I owned it. They'd called me possessed, and Dad had made me crawl a quarter mile on all fours, to the barn, while he followed me, kicking me. When I got there, Mom poured a mix of weak powdered milk and table scraps into an old cast iron frying pan, and they made me eat on hands and knees, with the cats and our dog. Halfway through, Dad had kicked me hard enough in the ribs to make me fall flat on my face in the straw and dung. The worst part was what he said: "This is too good for you. There's no evil in the animals." I didn't like that kind of talk. It always brought the nightmares of the scar tissue giants, and the beautiful deceiver, and the mother's wound in the earth. Dad dragged me by the hair across the yard, and handed me a shovel, and told me to dig, and while I tried, he poured gas on me. I was sure he'd set me ablaze once my shallow grave sat ready. But when I couldn't dig through the frozen soil, he just took the shovel from my hands, and hit me over the head with it. I woke up there in the morning, shivering, and still stinking of gas. They didn't speak to me when I slunk into the house to get ready for school in the morning. They didn't speak to me for an entire calendar year after that, and only began after repeating the ritual to the letter the next November.

I don't like to think about these things. Think about nice things. That's what Tate told me to do.

Outfits I'd like. A Thistle and Spire Kane bodysuit, under that black sheer maxi dress on Dolls Kill. Charlotte Olympia Saturn heels. A pair of highrise patent leather pants that lace up the front, with that black sweater that says 'not a unique and special snowflake' on it. The SCUM wrap dress from Zara, even if it's loose, because Kai keeps saying he wants to see me in it. That black velvet sweetheart neckline dress that zips up the front, with flocked star patterned tights, and black crocodile ankle boots on platform wood heels. Absolutely every single thing by Love and Lemons.

Stuff I want to do. Go to Disneyland with Kai. Go back to Erath, with Kai this time, and see the sugar cane fields when they aren't burning. Move to Tybee Island with Kai, maybe own that Sno-ball stand, and take our kids to the beach every day. Litter the shit out of the State of Georgia, til death do us part. Take Adderall and please Kai. Please Kai so I can stay here. Just please Kai. I can't
now anyway. I'm so ugly. I couldn't expect him to look at me and love me with my eyes like this. It would be so disappointing, so disgusting for him. I'll just focus on getting this lawn jockey right. Once I'm presentable again, maybe his will is once again going to be for me to understand his plan.

I'm feeling dizzy. It's always been a little hard for me to breathe out in the wind. It inhales harder than I can, I guess. I'm just one insignificant, unstable particle, without so much as a half life of a blink of an eye.

When I try to stand, I've taken it just a little too far to sit back down, when my lips and hands go numb, and the darkness clouds my eyes until I can't see. It's too late. I faint for a second, and my feet get lost under me, and I hear the sharp clout of another lawn jockey's fist to my face before I actually have the wits to feel the contact.

I stagger, and sit down, as I taste thick, salty blood trickling down the back of my throat, my whole face smarting so hard, I don't know where he even landed the punch for sure. Tilting my face up, and pinching my nose, I try to hold it in. But I can't. Half the reason I'm crying is just out of the sheer rage and frustration that I can't stop myself.

Some days, though, it's just everything. Punched again by a lawn jockey. Thinking every single day that I was going to die and go to hell. That fucks a kid up. My life was a high pressure hell, every moment of every day. I'm filled with fear. Utterly filled. Fear incarnate. The density of fear inside me is so great that nothing in the world can get in anymore. Now I'm the scary thing. I won't ever be normal. The clarity of realizing that my happiest childhood memories are of an imaginary friend I had when I was full of venom and dying alone because my parents hated me so much. I'm too weird to live, and too rare to die, as Hunter S. Thompson would say, and I don't like it. Kai doesn't love me anymore. I can't go home. No one wants me here. No one has ever wanted me. No matter how hard I try to make myself easy to love, no one ever can. I can't stop puking. My eyes are bloody and gross. I'm ugly, and tired, and my face hurts. I'm some emotionally stunted container, who held onto her virginity so long that Kai's lost interest and now he just wants someone simple and easy and broken in. God probably hates me too, and I'm sure He's right to, because He's right about everything. And so is Kai.

I'm stupid and weak and pathetic, and now I'm crying on a stoop besides. I shouldn't waste the hydration. It won't make me prettier, that's for sure. But I can't stop. The sobs escape and echo from the pit inside me where my fragile soul hides from the world. My heart has broken so many times. I don't know how many more times it can be put back together, until I've lost all the pieces. Being hurt over and over doesn't make it easier. Every time, I live every other time that came before all over again. The pain gathers in my chest until I can't hold it, and it wheezes and rattles out in a sound I barely recognize. I never cry. It's so foreign. I feel raped by it, as the sadness tears its way out of me against my will. Too big to hold. My face feels like it's going to shatter. The tears sting. My body quakes like a seizure, as the high shrieks of all my ghosts escape.

Whatever. I breathe. Hold my breath. Control shit. Throw dirt down on the coffin. It rains on the just and unjust alike. And I'm probably the unjust anyway; the depraved things I do with Kai when we're alone. Everything's going to be alright. Just put a lid on things, paint cans and every other fucking thing. Once I get my balance back, I'll clean up and go inside. I just want to sit and listen to Live Oak on repeat. I wonder if he knows there's a Fond du Lac in Saskatchewan too. You have to fly in on some jalopy plane, because the roads don't go that far. Hasn't stopped them from quietly mining enough uranium to level the whole earth in a mushroom cloud one day.

And I'm going to drink a Faygo. I'm craving a Republican RedPop. That'll be interesting mixed with antifreeze and acetone. I don't want to move to Savannah anyway; they call it soda, not pop. Gay. Everyone who's anyone knows it's pop. Fuck it too. Maybe I'll just listen to The Stooges. I Wanna
Be Your Dog could be dope. Everything I need is here in Michigan. Kai. That's it.

First, I gotta drag my carcass to the shop and put this paint away. I've made a path of footprints that look like a jack rabbit's, exaggerated by the freezing rain. My legs are tired, and my boots are heavy, so they drag long paths behind, and kick little wide rounded dunes ahead of every step. I follow my path back through the snow, past the shelterbelt of leafless trees, dark against the blinding dull grey sky. A Rav 4 drives up, reckless, and straddling two lanes, throwing up a plume of gutter filth as she curbs the thing and scares away the sparrows in the trees. I slip unseen inside the shed, close the door, and hide myself. It smells like motorcycles in here. The mixed gas. That must be what it is. My dad had one too. It's dark, save a couple thin beams of light from a couple small windows, passing through the dusty, stagnant air. I stand a long time, unable to set down the paint cans, and just staring down at my feet, rooted in the dirt floor. I don't want to go into my house with her in there, and find it not my house any longer. To find a home and family just to lose it. I can't imagine a torment more suited to me.

Winter

This shit's hilarious.

I can't believe Mac's missing this. I guess it negs her. But it's so fucking funny I wish we could analyze this together.

I'm still just watching all the keks for Mac's blackface NPC memes rolling in on /pol/, and checking out all the new shit that just dropped on Revolve. I love A/W; it's my jam. Always so much black. Alice and Olivia has a sick collared dress. But maybe I have enough of them. No, never.

When I'm halfway through the second page of new arrivals, I hear the door open and close, and quickened footsteps from the basement.

"Danielle!", Kai greets her at the door, "Do you have bags in the car? I'll send the boys out for them."

Suspiciously, she's already got something to say, "I thought I seen a girl going into your shed..."

Delicious. The first sentence out of her mouth contains a grammatical error.

"Never mind her.", Kai dismisses, coming into the kitchen, arm around her. "This is my sister, Winter. Winter, exercise your attention span and look up from the phone for a minute, would you?"

I roll my eyes. Take my sweet ass time. #NotMyMessiah. Just my brother.

"Hi. You're Danielle, right?", I ask her.

Resting poker face strong. But this is just gross. She stands maybe five feet, on a good day. Dressed in a pair of outdated black poly dress pants with flared legs and a slinky bright purple garish printed stretch top, gathered at her sagging, inadequately supported bust with a gold ring, I can tell she's mustered all her sad, middle aged, Midwestern 'try' to look hot and youthful for my brother. She's just so damned old that she's lost track of the years. Killerwhaletank's stuck in the very first cycle of Real Housewives as her inspo. What was that, like 2003? All her shit's from Walmart. Suddenly, I realize how fun it's been to have Mac to compete with for all the most haute in New Arrivals.

She doesn't address me. Typical femmeniste de la incel. Men are heros. Women are just lucky to be chosen. She's one of those feminists who can only be bothered to speak to, or talk about, men.

"This is your sister?", she asks Kai. "I didn't know she lived with you."
She seriously sounds defensive. Like, I'm his fucking sister. Well, okay, I guess in our case, maybe it's a bit of a thing, since the attempted ceremony.

"It's nice to meet you, Danielle.", I give the obligatory greeting. She doesn't give a shit about knowing me, and it's obvious. I don't care. I don't want to have to talk to her anyway.

"You're too, Winter."

Oh, shudderz.

Kai leads her off down the hall, arm still around her. The sandy whiskered gentleman and Jemima Puddleduck.

I liked Beatrix Potter growing up. Her stories and illustrations always had such a melancholy charm. You could tell she spent a lot of time alone, observing everything that was awful about people, in order to write her cute little stories. Jemima Puddleduck was this braindead old duck who killed every clutch of eggs she ever laid. The only time she ever managed to hatch one was the time she got led down the garden path by a fox who set her up in an old shed in the hopes of eating her and her new ducklings.

I feel a rush of air, and the temperature drop in the room. Mac slips in quietly, takes her boots off and hangs her coat by the door.

"Hey, Winter.", she greets me casually.

"OMG.", I say flatly. "You wouldn't believe what you just missed."

She sits down at the table, and leans close. Keeps her eyes down. That's decent of her.

"Was it a certain new house guest, carrying an assortment of plastic bags, reusable shopping bags, pleather purses in ugly colors, and an empty 'Timmie's' cup, while she plopped from a thermos cup?", she asks quietly, brow raised.

"Ugh.", I laugh. "Timmie's. Yuck. She probably does call it that too. I hate those people."

"I know!", Mac laughs. "Did you notice? Like, how do you think Kai is going to respond to her bringing litter INTO the house? Like, what kind of a life of privilege has she been living? The boys are supposed to do her littering for her? You know what? I'm going to offer to do it. I'll put all her garbage back where it belongs."

"I didn't notice that. But her shirt? It was completely the epitome of fat chicks who don't know what else to do."

"The Old Divorced Tramp by George section of Walmart?", Mac asks me, "Was it slinky and asymmetric? I only saw her grubby parka. It's microfiber. And the collar is so shiny that it's discolored."

I giggle. A giggle. "Yes. Bingo.", I tell her. "Kai's going to kill her, you know."

"I suspected.", she exhaled sadly. "I still have bad vibes. Winter, am I being selfish? But at this moment, I don't care what the plan is. I mean, I care. But I still don't want him to... you know...?"

"Kill her?", I ask Mac.

"No.", she spits out her response with venom. "Fuck her."
"Kai uses people, Mac. It's what he does. I used to think he loved me, and sometimes I still do, but I'm never sure that's not just him exploiting what he knows I want. Look at what he's done to you already. However this goes, it doesn't change this.\", I try to explain to her the intricacy of a relationship with my brother. But he's always hard to pin down. I'm back in with him, and I don't want that ruined either. I'm selfish and spoiled. Mac should leave. But I don't want her to. Kai doesn't want her to either. If he did, he'd kill her.

"I'm just going to be patient.\", she tells herself as much as me. "Remember when I first came here? You didn't like me at all. The boys resented my basement presence. Kai barely talked to me for weeks after the first day. I just did my work. I'll do that again. Really nothing has changed."

"Yeah.\", I pat her hand. Everything has changed for her. So many times her head is spinning and her eyes are hemorrhaged. "It's all going to be cool. And for the record, I still don't like you, Mac. But I kinda love your illegal black heart.\", I tell her with a smile.

She laughs a little under her breath. "Me too, bitch. So, was Killerwhaletank nice to you?"

"Not really. I felt like she was sizing me up, but it's whack. I'm Kai's sister."

"Yeah. That's messed up. She's probably one of those typical ugly chick fighting fish. You know the types? Any pretty girl they see, they attack, just on instinct. They don't think too hard about it. Bloody noses, ask questions later, or never.\", Mac says matter of factly, but tinged in a sharp edged knowledge; I'm going to put myself on a limb and say she's been on the receiving end of such attacks. "Besides, you gotta admit. Kai has some kind of feelz for you that aren't quite..., she trails off.

"Within the norm?\", I ask, then answer, "Yeah. We're just really close. He can get a little weird. Intense.\" I consider telling her about the ceremony, but then I don't. Sometimes, I feel like she should know the full lengths Kai is capable of. But part of me feels ashamed and responsible for it, and is afraid to tell anyone.

"It's cool.\", she says calmly. "I kinda know what he's like. We're a family. But I doubt this woman really wants us in her relationship with Kai."

"I got the same impression.\", I agree. "We should stick together."

Mac nods, grabs my pinkie with hers. "Kai's real girls."

I smile and nod yes. But I don't know why she should be his. He treats her like shit. I'm as lonely in this house as she is, since Ivy and Ally are never around anymore, and Beverly hasn't been coming around. I think she had an interview for a station in Chicago, and I assume she got it. Americans don't move around lightly. Out of state, out of mind.

I need a friend. And I always wished I had a sister.

"Did you hear we're doing it up for Halloween?\", I ask Mac. "Kai has these rules though; cultural appropriation, or reinforcing trad gender stereotypes."

"Oh, fun! As if I'd ever do anything else. Like, what were we going to be, ketchup and mustard or something lame?"

"No.\", I correct her. "In our case? Sweet and Sour and Barbecue! Ugh. I'd die."

"Right?\", Mac laughs. "I'd be a sexy scary clown. But we do that everyday."
"Word.", I say flatly. "So what are you going to do? I was thinking Muerta Babe; huge headdress with red carnations and golden spikes, black lace mantilla, Escaramuza dress. Black orbitals, black lipstick. Flower shaped faced jewels, maybe? With the encroaching caravan, and all the wall shit, and Kai's focus on immigration, he'll love it. Besides, it just made it to the Southern Poverty Center's banned list this year."

"Oh, I freaking LOVE it!", Mac agrees. "I love that vibe. I always wanted one of those dresses. We used to go over into Mexicali and Vicente Guerrero all the time when I was a kid. They'd have stands of those all along the border. They're beautiful."

"What were you doing all the way down there, anyway?", I ask her.

"It was on the revival meeting circuit. Sometimes my grandparents took me.", she answers uncomfortably, folding her arms and subconsciously putting her head down on them. Mac never tells me about her family. She must talk to Kai about her childhood a little bit, because he's mentioned to me she didn't exactly have a happy one. Might explain how she ended up here.

"So what was your best costume growing up?", I ask her. "Mine was Anne of Green Gables, actually. Mom made me a carpet bag, and Kai helped me dye my hair with orange Kool-Aid, even though the 'rents said no. I got a broken slate at an antique shop, and found this long 70s prairie dress at Good Will. It was perfection. I owned the school costume contest; won a jar of Jelly Belly's. Isn't that a Canadian book?"

She stares at me blankly. "I was an astronaut once.", she answers like she just saw a ghost, grave and cold. Then she grins. "I guess Kai wouldn't like that. I dunno. Maybe I'll be a sexy handmaid. Ofkai. I was thinking a super plush red floor-length velvet hooded cloak, with a highcut red lace bodysuit underneath. Big white bonnet. Then those awful brown clodhopper boots with the chunky white sweater knit thigh high socks. I think Lemon Legwear makes something passable for that. It's going to trigger the shit."

"Mmm.", I say, scrunching my nose. "It's good. Certainly triggering, and you'd look fetch. But what about cultural appropriation?"

"You're right!", she gasps. "Yeah, I don't want to disappoint Kai. Maybe a French Maid?"

"Too typical. I like Ofkai better. I'm not sure anyone cares if you appropriate white European culture.", I tell her. She sort of sucks at having normal fun. Put her at a murder scene, she's having a ball. Wake her up, she'll find a creative job to put herself to. But she is the fucking WORST at leisure.

"Sexy Thomas Jefferson's slave?", Mac asks me.

"Just no.", I blurt out, stifling a laugh. "Bad in a thousand ways."

"I know.", she laughs. "That's not even witty. I don't know, Winter. Maybe an Eskimo? Sexy Confederate soldier? Pocahontas? With Elizabeth Warren's .02% test, it might pull all the right triggers? I'm just not a big fan of the natives... too many of them in Sask.", she says, pulling a face. "Though headdress protectionism is the new blackface outrage. Maybe Kai would like it."

I see her struggling. She knows she's bad at this. I've never seen someone fail at fun so hard, and feel so self conscious about it.

"You know what, Mac? I like your handmaid idea. I guess it sort of appropriates culture, or at least glamorizes the sexually exploitative nature of religious cults. I'm pretty sure my brother would like it
if you did it. He did say either, and it definitely promotes gender stereotypes. I'm pretty sure you've got a surplus of good girl points anyway.

"I'll keep thinking about it.", she says, clearly frustrated with herself. The Meme Machine can't think of a costume. It's funny.

"I need my hair done soon.", I exhale, changing the subject. "Look at my roots. But do you think the lengths can handle bleach?"

"I'd be careful."

"You definitely don't want to overlap any bleach onto this prelightened stuff. I like it how it is. I always think bleach looks best kinda grown out. When it's freshly done it's too try-hard hair mag."

"Honestly? I think the same. I'm tweakin' because of Ivy."

"Yeah, you don't want prairiehair!", Mac laughs. "You know the standby's. Some Jon and Kate Plus 8 cut from a thousand years ago. The Rachel if you're lucky. Then brown with red and blonde stripes in it. Because why ever decide on a basic color family when you could just have them all. So fucking ugly. Aesthetic curled into a ball and died."

"Gross.", I roll my eyes. "It's so true. The left gives problem hair a bad name, between us. Any color, provided it's harmonious can look lush. But nothing looks good patchy, chewed off, and dirty."

"So true."

"But I'm about to drop this on you and skeeve you: except your brother!"

"Ugh. You're vile.".

"Fine.", she agrees reluctantly, and I know she's only going to say more of that disgusting shit because it grosses me out. "Do you want a Faygo? I'm having one. I think RedPop could be good with what's left of that Goldschlager. I'm calling it a Horny Handmaid..."

"Yeah, I'll take one. Why the fuck not? It's eleven am on a Wednesday.", I laugh. "Hey, Mac, are you tired of staying in the basement? Why don't you move into my room with me?"

I have ulterior motives. Not just that I kind of want to see what would happen if slipped my hand between Mac's thighs after a drink or two. But Killerwhaletank is gross and hostile. If I'm already sharing my room, Kai can't make me share my bathroom with her. The idea of that Larden Slug pulling out one of her chin hairs with the tweezers I use for my eyebrows? I literally can't. But the idea of Mac and I drying each other's hair, doing each other's makeup? Much more appealing. Maybe with a little more time she could be reprogrammed too. Left Twix the shit out of this bad little bitch. She already wears black like she invented it. Imagine doubling my wardrobe too? Could be sweet.

"I really appreciate that.", she hesitates, her internal struggle clear. "Maybe we better ask Kai though. You remember what it was like when you two were on the outs?"

"I'll ask him.", I assure her. "I'm sure he'll be amenable."
Bed Springs Eternal

Chapter Summary

With Mac on probation and moved into Winter's room for supervision, Kai, Winter and Mac all try to get some sleep. Meanwhile, Danielle executes the maiden stage of Kai's Riyadh Jihad plan. Sick puppy parade. Alternate titles for this chapter included Russian Dossier, Come Correct, Wetback, Waterboarding House. No one said this wasn't going to get absurd...

Winter

My room is the only one in the house that my parents' ever changed out a light fixture in. It's dark, and I lay in bed, staring up at the Restoration Hardware chandelier above. It cost a fortune, but I loved hot air balloons. Shit, I had good taste for a twelve year old.

I glance over at Mac laying, chaste, on the other edge of the bed, curled up to sleep facing the wall, still wearing her regulation onesie.

I asked Kai if she could move into my room a couple of days ago when Danielle moved in, and he said yes. When we had a meeting in the basement that evening, he made a big point of reprimanding Mac for painting the lawn jockey without his permission, and he'd made her go out and change it back in the dark before bed. He'd also stripped her of her AR-15 and sleeping bag, saying she didn't have the sense to be in the security force with the boys, and that I would be personally in charge of supervising her while she was "on probation". I don't know why he was being such a dick about it. When I'd asked earlier, he seemed happy about her staying with me. Said something about Mac being a good girl and me needing a friend in the house, and how when everyone's interests can be served, why the fuck not. Now, it's been two days of her being glum and quiet, and too preoccupied to talk. I've never seen someone so destroyed about a little verbal spanking, who is just fine with lobbing a lawn dart through a guy's sack, or seeing a dead body. I don't get her sometimes.

"Hey, Mac?", I whisper. "Are you asleep?"

"No.", she answers, quiet and alert.

Gazing up at my crystal hot air balloon, I ask, "What was your room like when you were a kid?"

"Well...", she whispers hesitantly. "I grew up on a farm, so it was dark. When I was really little, my parents had a lot of foster kids, and two houses on the property. One was a newer bungalow, that my grandparents built in the 1960s, I think. The other was the one my ancestors built, and it was up on a hill on the other side of the yard. It was never fitted for electricity or plumbed with running water, but it had a steam boiler system for heat put in before my grandparents built the new house, I guess. Anyway, because there were so many of us, I had to stay in the other house."

She says this weird shit like it's normal. Does it all the time. I glare at the back of her head, just processing. Takes a minute to formulate a response to that.
"You stayed in a creepy old house without electricity or water by yourself? In the Arctic Circle, or wherever Saskatchewan is?", I ask her, incredulously.

"Not always. Just if we had too many other kids.", she says. Blasse, bitch. Yeah. No big deal.

"So I don't even know how to ask you about that.", I stammer, honestly. I really don't know where to start with that. "What was it like in there?"

She rolls over to face me. Her eyes have been clearing up fast, thankfully, because they really squicked me at night. She's already getting her whites back.

"Well, the walls were light green on three sides of the room, but the paint was peeling badly. There wasn't drywall, so it was like those little scales of lead paint falling off the old wood, you know. This is bad. Probably explains a lot. But I was totally addicted to peeling them off and eating them.", she says, smiles and shrugs.

"You ate lead paint chips?", I repeat, hesitant to smile.

"Like I said. Probably explains a lot. They were crispy. Tasted like dirt. I dunno. I must have been missing something in my diet, like what do they call that, pica, or something? Or I was just bored.", Mac pulls a face and smiles at me. So effing cute. "Then the other wall had this old wallpaper on it, and it was peeling off too. It had birch trees, and then there were animals and people hiding in the trees. Maybe they weren't hiding. It was like a Rorschach test, maybe, like what you see says more about you than the picture? But it used to freak me out sometimes, because I'd try to memorize it, and then I'd get convinced that the people and animals were moving around, and hiding behind different trees. I got scared to look at it at all. So eventually I pulled it all off and burned it.", she trails off, and looks sad for a second. "See? Probably the lead paint."

"You're a nut.", I tease her, smile for a second. I can tell she wants me to lighten up; she's edging away from me like a wild horse, ready to run if I'm sympathetic or ask another question. "This is insane. I thought my room in our townhouse was ghetto."

"Really?", she inquires, leaning closer and snuggling into the covers, "Why? What was it like?"

"Ugh.", I laugh. "It was unspeakably ugly. I loved Oscar the Grouch. And my parents were just renting, so they couldn't actually update anything in there, and it was built in, like, the 70s, I think. So the carpeting was--"

"Oh, don't tell me!", she interrupts, "Was it that super dense, not quite long enough to be shag, stuff that has a pattern like a brain sort of shaved into it? In avocado green?"

"Yes! How did you know that?", I laugh, "Ugh. It was so fucking ugly. But they were like, 'well, she likes Oscar...' so they really went with it. So I had a big galvanized garbage can as a toy box, and green glow in the dark stars on the ceiling. They couldn't get an Oscar bedspread, so I had some Elmo one instead, who I despised utterly, and then Mom just made me green fake fur pillows. I'm trying to think what else... one wall had brick print wallpaper."

She smiles across the bed at me. "What was your light in that room like?"

"Oh, just one of those square ones, where the edge of the glass looks kinda ruffled?", I shake my head, thinking, "I dunno. But I had a cool night light that was this pink stained glass, super Kuwaii, big headed kitten. It would be so avant right now, like with the pussy hats? I wish I still had it."

"Is that why Kai is so into littering?", Mac ask me.
"What?"

"Well, you know how much he loves you. You love Oscar, who lives in a trash can? Some kind of formative thing?", she asks me, scrunching her little kitty nose in thought. Dies. She's hot and insightful.

I really don't think there's a connection. He's just a dick who only believes in science if it's IQ test score breakdowns by race, but not climate change. But she blew my brains all over my embroidered Kate Spade pillowcase...

"What were you taking at community college, anyway?", I ask, shoving her shoulder gently. "Armchair Psychiatry?"

"No. Public Administration.", she rolls her eyes and shrugs. "And it's BEDSIDE psychiatry that I specialize in, anyway, Winter...", Mac adds, smiling a little. "Tell me more about your old room."

"I dunno. That's about it. I was probably only four or so when we moved. I don't really remember.", I tell her, studying her fine boned face in the dark shadows. I don't know how Kai could let her go. She gets prettier the longer you look at her. That's very rare. And she's fun to talk to. Whatever. Still a cuntservative bitch. "Back to yours. How did you not freeze in there?"

Her big grey eyes turn back inside her head when she thinks sometimes, like she's physically searching her brain for an answer.

"Mmm, well..", she begins, then retreats. "This is a really long story Winter."

"I don't care. We're just laying here not sleeping. Entertain me."

"Okay. Well, there was a rail line that was disused not far from our yard. When the Canadian Wheat Board was shut down, farmers got more successful, and the province finally industrialized more, but we had fewer small elevators, and so some rail lines became redundant.", she explains, realizing she's about to go onto a political tangent about a country I only pretend to know or care about. "Anyway, I used to take a sled and load it up every day with railroad ties, like the big tarred wood pieces that the rails rest on? The rail companies take the track to reuse, but the ties are worthless, and they leave them behind. So I'd bring them home on a sled, and pile them up in the house. Then I could burn them in the boiler and stay warm. It was a few years before I ran out of ties; before the distance I had to go for them became... impractical."

I don't know how to react. She's so matter of fact. Every answer begs a thousand questions that I don't know how to ask her. I suddenly feel very thankful for my ugly Oscar room. Even that Elmo comforter I hated. Kai's right. Mom was a saint. I'm right too. Dad sucked. But he wasn't the monster Kai paints him.

"So what about after that? Didn't your parents--"

"Yeah.", she says weakly, exhausted, rubbing her eyes. "After I ran out, they got me a ceramic space heater and ran an extension cord for it, and also, I had one of those hanging shop lights I could use then too, because by then I had more homework, and needed light later in the day to work by. The days are so short in Saskatchewan, so it was pitch black by the time school was out for a huge part of the year.", she tells me, as I put my arm over her tiny waist.

"That sounds fucking awful.", I tell her flatly. "What about in the other house? Was your room nicer?"

"It was a nicer room.", she says slowly and carefully, her words measured and metered.
Mac's eyes are cast down, long black eyelashes sit practically splayed across her high cheekbones, and I finally see how such a pretty girl could be so happy in such an ugly place. It didn't take much for Commodore Court to seem like the happiest place on earth, or for Kai to seem like the benevolent redeemer, with all the answers. I see why she won't leave, and why she can't. I reach up and stroke Mac's long hair off her face.

"You know what I heard today?", I ask her, "I heard Danielle has a cat. And that Kai said she could move it in. And guess what its name is?"

Her eyes snap back up, and she inches closer to me in bed, getting more comfortable.

"Oh, man. It's going to be something super annoying.", she states matter of factly with a grin.

"Play a game!", I flash my eyes at her. "Try to guess. I'll give you hints."

"Okay. Is it like some entertainment reference? Like, please tell me nothing from Harry Potter or a Beatles song or some shit, like Eleanor Rigby, or something?", Mac whispers, animated again.

"Nope. She's way too old and uncool even for that. Neither. You'll never guess it. It's too stupid.", I giggle.

"Um, is it too common, like Snowball? Just sort of run of the mill annoying like Mitzi or something?", she tries again.

"No. I'll give you a hint. We kind of make fun of it.", I tease out half a clue for her. Just because I know she will have a couple funny guesses in her that way.

"Wino? Wall Pop? Reverse Mullet? Quartz? Dandelion? NOT Timmie??? Please. If this stupid cat is named Timmie, I'm smuggling myself back to my unheated attic in Saskatchewan...", she guesses, horrified.

"No!", I burst out laughing. Like why is everything so much more funny at night? When you're too tired, anything will pass. "But you're getting closer, bitch."

"Okay.", Mac thinks about it. Like really thinks about it. "Oh. Word. I got it. CRACKERS?! The cat's named Crackers?"

I can't help it. I'm laughing uncharacteristically now, and can't help it. Night timez! I haven't had one of these since Kai and me used to troll on 4chan together. I wonder if Nyquil affects her how it does me...

"YES!", I blurt out. "How did you do that! I mean, no, it's not Crackers, but it's really close. It's Crackers AND Cheese!", I laugh out so hard, I'm wheezing and can barely speak, trying to turn down so Kai doesn't come and shut down my awesome sleepover. Can't help it. I get the mad silliez at night.

"I don't get it?", she giggles, like she's caught my laughing disease. "Like, it's TWO cats? Fresh fucking hell."

"No. It's one fucking cat! Some incontinent old thing with arthritis named Crackers and Cheese.", I wheeze, wiping tears out of my eyes, shaking so hard the bed springs are squeaking.

"Gross. And guess who is going to have to clean the litter box? It's going to be me, you know.", Mac shakes her head, half sad, half disgusted.
"Yeah. I know.", I tell her, "I know, and I'm sincerely sorry. I thought that as soon as I heard it."
"This sucks.", Mac proclaims. "Cats are like kids. Unless it was my own, I'm not into it."

We high five. Shrugz. It's become a thing with us. It'll pass.

"But what IS with that name?", Mac asks, "It's so awkward. Like who says Crackers and Cheese? It's not in order. That's not a name. It's not even a phrase. At best it is a very short shopping list. I don't get it."

"Ugh.", I sigh. "She's horrid. Have you noticed the way she pronounces my name yet?"

"Yesss!", she squeals through a suppressed peal of laughter. "It's almost like Weiner. WEEE-ner...?"

I'm dying. Literally. I can't breathe. I've forgotten how to laugh and breathe at the same time. "I was going to say Winner, but you're right. It's more Weiner."

"Yeah, like I think I probably hear your accents here, just a little. But she's full out just calling you Weiner. Mac is easy for her. She's just used to saying Big in front of it, that's all...", Mac grins. "I've never seen you like this..."

"Sorry. Sorry. I just get really silly at night.", I explain, covering my face with my hands and curtailing my shit.

"No.", Mac smiles, reaches across the bed and gives my shoulder a shake, "I like it. It's fun. I never had a sister, and it wasn't exactly easy for me to make friends. And I don't know why, but girls never seemed to really like me very much, like I'd make the wrong jokes, or not laugh at the right things, or something. I don't really know, or I'd probably change it. But obviously something's wrong with me. This's nice."

"When Kai said you had a shitty childhood, I thought he probably meant you guys were poorish, or, like, your parents divorced, or believed in grounding, or something like that.", I tell her softly. "I'm sure the situation, such as it was, made it hard to... relate? And you're like, really pretty. So am I, and plus, I live for aesthetics, so it makes me like you better. But most girls aren't like that."

She just shrugs.

"You're a sincere feminist, Winter.", she says finally. "I respect it."

"So what are you, Mac?", I ask her back, "Surely you're tired of being a gender traitor after what my brother has done to you?"

"I'm a shadow.", she answers back, "I need someone to follow. Someone to cast me. You know how some kids who are raised all alone, in a locked box, or by a pack of wolves, just pass that crucial age, where they've never been talked to, and a window in their brain just closes, and they are wholly incapable of ever developing verbal or linguistic skills after that? I think that's me, but with autonomy, or identity or something. Something I can't quite put my finger on. I mean, if I could figure it out, like anything else, I could fix it. But I can't even see it. I think I've shrunk myself as far as it can go. This is as good as I ever get. And maybe it's how I'm meant to be. I've lost my life so I can gain it. I've been broken so I can be remade as a vessel. Maybe it's the world that's wrong, and I just have to live in it anyway. Kai came to fix it. And I'm here to serve him."

"Kai hasn't fixed anything.", I exhale. "I believed in him at the beginning too. But he's only made the quotient of suffering in the world higher."
"What about plastic straws?", she asks. "That was a huge win. An amazing achievement."

"You know what? I'm inclined to agree. I hate getting soggy paper in my mouth, if I can't guzzle something in thirty seconds flat. But a huge win? Mac, that's some little city ordinance. How many people have died, for how many actionable, tangible legislative changes?", I ask her, my face resting on my pillow, only inches from hers.

Mac exhales, rolls her lower lip under her top teeth; does that thing with her eyes again, where she's looking in her cranium for the answer, before saying, "That's why we have to support him, and get him to higher office. It's hard to get much done from Brookfield Heights City Council."

"Maybe.", I agree absently.

There is something peaceful and lulling about her faith in Kai. I can't say I miss all the strife there used to be in this house; whispers of dissent, failed mutiny, all the carnage, real and threatened, that went with that. Mac's so calm and beautiful, like a live doll. And now here we are. I have her in my bed, under my touch, my hand cradled in the narrow dip of her small waist between her carved hipbones, and her sharp ribs. I gaze at her face; her big piercing eyes, and parted lips, her long golden hair spilled all over my bed.

When she first came, I had a fight with Kai about something, and I accused him of just using her like a fuck puppet. He said he'd never even touched her. Muttered something about how 'I just like to look at her... she makes me come...'. I didn't think about it at the time, because he's a freak.

But laying in bed with her, I wonder if I understand. Mac has a kind of sex appeal that seems to slither all over you, stroke you, tempt you, make your body beg for her. Lying next to her doesn't make it easier to ignore. It's not her fault, either. She's not doing anything. But her gentle breath curls around me, and feels warm, smells sweet and dark like the scent after you blow out a candle on an Anisette pound cake. My hand that rests on her waist feels all her coiled and confined fury and power, and I want it unfurled and applied to my body's quickening desire for pleasure. The harder I try to ignore my heart pounding, the stronger it pumps throbbing rushes of tingly heat between my thighs. I shift on the bed, hoping that crossing my legs differently will ease some of the aching need, but it only makes me wish for more pressure.

I've heard her with Kai. I lay in my bed, alone, and listen to the muffled sounds of their voices talking. Once in a while Kai's maniac laugh, or her soft giggles. I hear the springs of his bed creak. I've heard them fool around. They go for hours and hours, sometimes all night.

"Is it really true you and Kai have never...?", I ask her suddenly. "You don't just say that because you feel guilty or something?"

"Winter!", she protests a little, blushing so hard I can see it in the dark, before she reluctantly answers, "No. We still haven't done it. He still hasn't done Pinkie Power on me either."

"Then what do you guys do all the time?", I ask her, repulsed with myself for being curious.

She doesn't answer.

"What?", I ask her, keeping my voice quiet and low. "Do you just blow him or something?"

"No. Not that yet either.", she admits, chewing her lip and looking away. "But can I ask you something about that?"

"I guess."
"You were with boys before you went to girls, right?", Mac asks, shy.

"Yeah, so? I'm still into guys too. Just probably not so much until Trump's impeached. I'm bi." I shrug. "It's almost more a political preference than a sexual preference. Why?"

At least it was. When it was Ivy, it was all about our shared goals and hatred of the patriarchy; I never felt physically seduced really, just bored mostly. Friction, friction, friction, orgasm. That was it. I fucked around with it at Vassar because I thought it seemed to make the profs grade me easier, and college boys are sleazy. With Mac though, it's completely sexual.

I feel like the ground is shifting under me a little though. That distinction hadn't occurred to me until just right now.

"Well..", she begins slow, "I wanted to make sure you knew about guys. Because I'm a little confused about that... oral... stuff. I don't want to embarrass myself. Why do they call it a blow job?", she asks suspiciously, "And also say 'suck a dick'? Which is it? Do I blow on it, or suck on it?"

"Oh fuck...", I blurt out and laugh. "Well, with Kai? You could probably pass off either. But the generally accepted technique? Is suck."

"Oh, good. Picked the right one.", she says relieved. "Then I've at least been saying the right things."

Then she just rolls over, and inches back over to the edge of the bed. I don't know what I really expected of a former snake handler who used to eat lead paint chips.

Her long hair is everywhere, trailing behind her. I smooth it out, push it all back on her side of the bed, and make room for myself on my own pillow, so I don't lay on her hair and pull it when I roll over.

"Good night, Mac."

"Good night, Weiner.", she teases.

Tomorrow I'll make her say it first, then call her Big Mac. There's no way she can get offended because she's, like, a size subzero.

**Mac**

After I tell Winter about my room in the old house on the farm, she slides her arm around me, and hugs me from across the bed.

The nights were full of terror. A house turning back to dust, buried under snow, as it was slowly swallowed by the earth. A house that had housed the desperation and death of hard, grim faced pioneers, persecuted to flee to such an inhospitable land. The wood was oxidized and black, and the paint peeled from it, hanging about the shadows like ghosts. I was a little girl, and the rail ties I burned were heavy. The boiler was in a pitch black dirt basement, moist, sagged, and moldering. Some times of the year it would be overrun with plagues of salamanders. Other times, spiders. Other times, the snakes. Sometimes it was just somewhere for the rats and raccoons that snuck in through the holes in the attic and foundation to get trapped and die. I'd carry their carcasses out to the shelterbelt of caraganas and throw them between the rows so I wouldn't have to see them as they rotted, and birthed batches of bloated flesh-eating flies in the spring.

Death. The wages of sin. I don't like dead bodies. It's like being a dog, and having your face shoved in your own vomit. A dead body is God's way of saying, "Look what you've done. This wasn't what I wanted, but look at what you made Me do. Look how disgusting this is. This is how disgusting you
are to Me." Death wasn't His plan for humanity. It was Satan's perversion. And it was mankind's stupid, weak decision. I hate myself.

Sweet innocent Winter. She doesn't know what she's asking to know. I smile at her, inch closer, like we're just two insomniac girls, dishing, and let her hold me. But I've lived ten thousand lives of men in one life. She had a Sesame Street bedroom, and a family who loved her. I glance up at the huge oil-rubbed bronze and crystal hot air balloon that hangs, glinting in the pale moonlight. I need to protect Winter. I can't tell her about myself, because it would be to tell her too much about a world that she's been spared seeing. She might never be the same again, and I love her how she is.

She has experienced some pain in her life. To whom much is given, much is required; and I suspect that Kai has expected some difficult things of her. Enough pain has transpired in her life to have given her the grace to know when I am trying not to talk about something, and she eases from the subject of my years in that fallen down old house. I don't tell her that most of the time I was chained to the radiator, forced to look at that wallpaper. I still don't open my eyes in a dark place when I'm alone.

After some light discussion of Danielle's decrepit old cat, Winter's hand is still on my waist, and she's cuddled closer with every outburst of giddy laughter. I'm having fun, but my heart is heavy, and my mind crowded, stuck in a vinyl track, where I just hear the needle skip back into Kai's disappointed echo, over and over. I can't fully commit my mind to anything other than planning my repentance speech when he will finally see me again.

But another knowledge slowly clouds my mind, pulsing and soft at first, but soon thumping hard. Winter's warm fingertips press slightly into my flesh, and her eyes search mine. She smiles longer, more freely. Her lower lip quivers slightly. Her pupils dilate, blinks lengthen. She's breathing a little too fast. I can feel her feelings inside me. She's aroused, hungry, and throbbing to come. Her hips shift on the bed, and she uncomfortably adjusts her thighs.

I know what she wants. What everyone wants. She wants me to submit, and make her feel good. I can feel how bad she wants it; her ache swelling inside me. Part of me feels compassionate to her, and wants to slake her need. She wants me to roll onto my tummy, and slide my pillow under me, look in her eyes, and twitch my hips against it. Just a little at first, moan loud with the relief of just a little pressure and friction on my clit. She wants to get on hers too, and show me how she does it, and make me do it the same way with her, and race her to the finish. She thinks that would be a good way to initiate with me the first time, so I wouldn't feel guilty; so I wouldn't feel like I'd betrayed Kai, or like I'd committed a homosexual act. Then she wants to share Speed Wagon with me. She thinks I won't feel gay if there's a dick in the room.

I'm used to feeling what guys want. I'm not used to this. I don't want to hurt Winter's feelings. I'm not rejecting her. But I'm straight, and I belong to Kai.

She's steering the conversation to sex. She tried it last night too, but I just pretended to be asleep. Shit.

"So if you don't fuck Kai, what do you do with him?", she asks, precocious. She's hoping thinking about what I do with Kai will get me turned on enough to do it with her instead.

"Nothing, really. Just kinda fool around.", I deflect. "Kiss and stuff. I feel weird talking to you about it, kind of..."

"So, just like second base, or what?", she pushes, teasing.

"I don't know the bases.", I tell her, honestly. I don't. I've never had enough friends to know dumb
shit like that. Maybe I could gross her out by just telling her. I'll try it. "I used to mostly just... sit in his lap. Or let him lay on top of me."

She rolls her eyes and laughs, groaning. "Ugh. He just dry humps you? Gross. That's SO Kai. So detached. And of course he's into edging. Of fucking COURSE.", she shakes her head. "What do you mean that's what you used to do? What do you do now? Do you blow him or something?"

This isn't working at all. She's grossed out by him, and turned on by me, in equal doses.

But I have a plan. Besides, I really do need help with this. It was cute to him the first time when I didn't know how to stroke him, and I know he got off on the whole having to show me how thing. But now I feel set adrift. I don't know. Maybe he's tired of that; of me. I don't know if having to ask him about something a second time would have quite the same magic. I don't know anything anymore. It feels like everything I used to do was right, and now everything I do is wrong. I think he still wants me, I still feel it from him whenever we're in the same room, but then he doesn't want to be around me, and punishes me all the time. It's shattering my mind.

"Actually, no... I just graduated to, um, you know... touching it with my hand? And I've licked it before, just a little. But there's something I'm confused about.", I explain, haltingly. "You weren't always just with girls, right?"

"No.", she says in her usual monotone way, with a shrug. "I just did it for the grades at Vassar. Then when Trump got elected, it just pissed me off too much to be able to stand the sight of any man. I'm bi, but probably still more into dick, most of the time. At least once Trump gets impeached, anyway. Why?"

I can't help but smile. I'm glad. Every woman should have a man. What do lesbians do if they have to move a deep freeze? Or a fat man's body? Division of labor, bitches. We make the Manwiches. They dump the bodies. #Kai. #That time I couldn't move the couch to vacuum under it, and he did it for me. Okay. Now I'm ready to fuck...

"Well, I'm confused about why it's called a blow job, or else sucking dick. Are you supposed to suck or blow?", I ask her.

Winter laughs so hard the bed creaks. At me. Not with me. That's okay.

"You suck it, you whackadoo.", she gives me a little playful slap upside the head. "Are you serious? Kai though? You could probably pass off either.", she adds, disgustedly.

Finally, I think it worked. I'm off the hook. And she's still smiling.

I take the opportunity to roll over. We're both getting really tired. I think we can both just ride the wave of good giggle vibes to sleep right now, and I think we should. Tension in this house is building, like tectonic plates grinding over molten lava. Something is about to happen, and Winter and I need to be ready. Kai might need us.

"Good night, Mac.", Winter says, rolling back over, and shoving my hair back onto my side of the bed.

I smile, eyes still shut. "Good night, Weeei-ner..."

She's calling me Big Mac tomorrow night. Trust.

The instant she falls asleep, I'm sad, downcast and forlorn. Maybe I should have just flirted with her, if it's what she wanted, because now the night is so massive, and I'm all alone in it, with all my
relentless thoughts taking form out of the corners of my eyes.

I strain not to hear anything. Sometimes I hear Kai's voice at night, and now I don't want to. He sounds cold and disapproving, and I keep thinking I hear the word 'she' scattered throughout the worst parts. That's why despite the cold and the ruin, and the overall bad vibes, the old house on the hill was still a better place to be when I was a kid. To this day, nothing holds the same horror for me as disappointed murmurs in the dark of night, and knowing it's about me. Once that starts happening? You can't know what will happen next. Only that it will be something very bad.

Tate had a voice like someone from Saskatchewan; a neutral no-accent. I should have known that meant he wasn't real. But I can still hear him, plain as day, telling me that all I had to do was grow up. Nice, naive thought I had. Rust was probably right though; there was no way out for any one of us. I'd always wake up, the same little girl, trapped in the same locked room, for all eternity.

I hated Rust; the undercover cop who finally found me in the basement of that house in California, and put me on a bus back home. I made him the scapegoat and boogie man of my childhood, told my parents every day how much I loved them, and screamed 'fuck tha police', until Tate's voice came to me one night and told me I'd die on that farm if I didn't run. It was like he mainlined some truth straight into my veins, and made all the birds fly in those spinning wheels of black stars in the sky. I saw the truth. I was almost sixteen, and they'd brand me soon; MYSTERY, across my forehead. Rust had never been the bad guy. He'd been doing his job too; waking up in the same locked room, day after day, just like me. I know I just saw the light about my parents. I don't know why I keep thinking about Tate. He wasn't real.

I shrink myself. I needed to dissociate. Another voice, distinct, was necessary because I couldn't listen to my own voice anymore. I didn't have one. I wouldn't have trusted it if I heard it. My own psyche was shattered, not even an existential crisis, any angst I ever had was ground to bonemeal and grist beneath a boot heel. I couldn't trust my identity. I was the vessel broken and remade of only half its pieces. I wouldn't listen to me. I wasn't trustworthy. I needed a voice. Older. Male. I invented Tate to tell me how to survive, so I'd trust my own survival instinct. Honor thy father and thy mother. Why did that have to be the first commandment? I failed right out of the gate. I couldn't dishonor them further. I needed Tate. There just wasn't enough of me left.

It's quiet tonight though, here in Winter's bed. She's asleep already, her mind a place of order. Her memories a linear walk through a life that more or less made sense and was affirming. She's had pain. I know this. Why else the dalliance on the Isle of Lesbos? I mean, duh. Talk to any girl who's into girls. Touched by the soccer coach. Got hooked on heroin and turned tricks to pay. Meant to be a virgin bride, but got too trashed and gave it up at a party to some asshole jock who never called again. Got raped repeatedly by a husband she stayed with until the last kid graduated high school. Older foster brothers wrestled her to the ground and tried to pull her panties off before a huge wild boar emerged from the trees and disemboweled them both. Always the same story; hurt too bad by men to trust one intimately. Well, unless you have the infilling of The Spirit. Still. Something happened to her.

I glance over my shoulder at her. She looks peaceful enough. And Kai is silent in his room.

I miss him so much, how things were. The last night I was with him, we'd been really bad in the afternoon. We'd had the house to ourselves, when the army was out enforcing, and the girls were all frying tendies. Kai was rough, and I loved it. I want him all the time, but it's hard to overcome my shock collar boundaries. He understands me.

Kai pressed up against me, and bent me over the couch in the basement while I was vacuuming. He said it wasn't my job. That he was my job. He threw me down on my back, and unzipped my black
leather dress, and laid between my legs, big and hard. Kai was driven and being a chauvinist pig about it. It felt so good. We had Fox on. Trudeau was refusing to sign Trump's new NAFTA, putting mad tariffs on Heinz Ketchup. Hilarious. French's is a million times better. No one will ever go back to that oniony brownish Heinz swill again. Thanks, Trump. The Nazis couldn't freeze out the Soviets, and these mamby-pamby Americans have no idea how tough Canadians are either.

When I told Kai that? I knew he'd love it. He wanted to punish someone, and I was begging him for it. I want it too, sometimes. I'm a terrible, fell creature, and I need to be put down. And the way Kai does it makes me come, and come clean, all at once.

"Yeah, and did you vote for that zany-socked soyboy?", Kai asked me, humping so hard that his cock escaped his harem pants, and threatened to push my black lace panties aside.

"No.", I answered truthfully. "But I did cross the border and vote illegally in the primaries.", I breathed rebelliously, as Kai sucked hickies on my neck. To mark me. So I can't leave the house. Fuck, he's hot. I'd let him do anything.

"Good girl. At least you stole a few votes for /ourguy/,", he reaches down and grabs my pussy.

"No. I didn't.", I smiled. "I'm a self-serving blackhearted realist, and I only care about what's good for me. Trump wanted a wall, and to end birth right citizenship. I want to have a little blue haired anchor baby."

"Then who'd you vote for, Moon Girl?", he asked, sharply slapping my clit hard through my panties. "Not fucking Shrillary?"

"Hell no.", I grabbed his big, bare dick and slid my hand up and down it, lazy and slow so he wouldn't come too soon. "I voted twice. Once for Rand, and once for Lindsay. They probably didn't get counted. They were provisional ballots in a Republican primary, not some deep blue Democrat shillzone in a general election or something. Still. I had to try."

"You have no right to determine the fate of our nation.", Kai breathed heavily, spanking me again, sending shuddering jolts of tingling electricity through me. I moaned. "You're just an illegal alien. You have no rights here whatsoever."

"I know.", I caught his eyes, and held his gaze in mine. "I don't want any rights. I want you to own me, Kai. I don't need a right to stay. I just want you to have the right to possess me."

"That's right.", Kai kissed me, lips parted and pressed to mine, as I throbbed with need for his body. "You stay and play at my pleasure only. I can call ICE, and send you back to that dark, frigid hell on the moon that you came from, and you'll never even be able to come back for a trip to Disneyland as long as you live."

"I better please you then.", I tightened my grip on his smooth, straight cock and stroked him faster, but he made me stop.

"No.", he stood back, and pushed me away, before lifting me back up from the couch, my dress left behind on the carpet.

"You bear the stain of original sin. You're a good girl, Mac. But you came into this country with a dark mark on your record. I need you to come clean before me.", Kai spoke gently in my ear, releasing my half cup bra and watching it drop to the floor between our feet. He put my hand back on his huge hard on. I leaned forward, closed my eyes, and put my wet, swollen mouth on his collar bone and kissed him long and slow. I love Kai more than anything. I'd do anything for him.
"Baby?", his warm mouth was all over my ear, "Come with me. I'm going to cleanse you of all unalrighteousness."

He'd led me to the basement bathroom, and turned on the hot water in the small shower. Steam curled around us. He who controls steam controls the world.

We both liked to watch us together in the mirror.

He was in control, my ruler. But he kissed so nice, touched me better than I knew how to touch myself. When I peeked through the steam curls in the dim bathroom, and watched Kai on me, I looked so small, and so young. I forget that. I feel so immeasurably old. I was beautiful, thin as a whisper, and tall, with perfect tits and a bombshell's face. I'd never seen it until I saw Kai on me. I'd slid one hand up into his greasy hair, and another around his thick dick, and finally closed my eyes as he kissed me. His eyes were still wide open, watching me climb his hot body, rub his cock, and eat his kisses with a voracious appetite, until the steam clouded the mirror over.

Kai shrugged his clothes, and kicked my heels out from under me, and laid me under him on the floor of the shower, as we were pelted with the scalding rain. I had no room for my legs, so they had to spread straight up inside the shower surround frame. He knelt between them, all his weight laid down on me, and kissed me.

"Fuck, you really are so beautiful, Mac.", he breathed looking down on me. "You were never going to make it big, trapped in that hillbilly hell. You won't from here either; some suburb in Michigan. But I'm not one of those brain dead, nepotized pieces of pleb shit who can only see something when I'm told to see it. You're as beautiful of a girl as there has ever been on this earth, even if you never made a name with it."

I could have reminded Kai that I was a model and muse for Woody Michleb, one of the biggest celebrity hairdressers on the planet, and that I'd been discovered just walking down a sidewalk in Moose Jaw, and gone on to grace plenty of, admittedly, unimportant and third rate runways. But none the less. My face made a few trade mags with my print work for Farouk and Joico. Not for nothing. I wasn't a joke in the industry. My gold-leaf clad nude body still graces a fleet of cars for some big waxing supply company. I did save up enough money to buy that business in Georgia doing it. It was just too bad the E-2 investor visa process was such a wash. Turned out Trump actually wanted Syrian refugees more than he wanted a quarter mil investment from a Canadian, who only wanted to assimilate and get a citizenship so she could go on to vote Republican. Oh well. Who's fucking counting. Kai is going to rule the world. And where he goes, I'll go. So I remind him of nothing, and graciously accept his compliment. When the E-Verify program in Georgia fucked over my American Dream? I found a new one, and it's way better. World domination with my earthbound messiah, Kai.

"Thank you, Kai.", I gazed into his deep eyes, intense and almost black.

He stood up, unblinking stare fixed on me. His cock was bashed and purple. We always play with it so hard. He was standing over me, jerking it in his own hand.

"Make yourself come.", he said, plain and harsh. "Do it like a grown up, Mac. Don't roll over. I want you to do it on your back this time. Come correct, baby."

I felt my face flush hot. I wanted to. The fact was, I needed to so bad. Kai hadn't let me come since he taught me how to stroke him. I'd had my hands full. But I felt shy and guilty and dirty, even with all that scalding water pouring over me. I don't tell Kai no though.

He was naked and glistening in the steam and hot water, standing over me, watching. I had to do it.
"Can I keep my panties on?", I asked him, water pouring off his body and into my mouth when I opened my lips to speak.

"That depends. Do you want them on for modesty?", he mocked. "Or because you don't know how to do it with them off?"

"Both.", I told him the truth, as I slid my hand down the concave curve of my stomach, and back up onto the bony mound hid behind my soaked lace panties. I let my middle finger tip slide down further, to find the spot I like Kai to rub and tap and slap and rock his big cock on. I felt so guilty. But Kai moaned, and his face twitched, and I knew he was liking it. He didn't think it was gross. He was stroking himself harder, leaning on his free arm, against the opposite wall of the shower.

He watched me intently, his eyes on my hand, slowly rubbing circles against my panties, the little bead under my finger tips swelling and pulsing. I felt my breath come faster, as my heart raced, but I couldn't breathe, as a stream of hot water cast off from his own pounding arm flooded over my face.

Kai's eyes languidly trailed up my body to my face, and he saw I was struggling to breathe, laying in the shower, while all that water poured over me, and over my face.

"Don't turn your head. Look up at me.", he snapped. "Rub your clit harder. You have to do it faster to come."

I wasn't scared. But I felt claustrophobic, panicky. Still horny as hell. Fooling around with Kai is exciting like a roller coaster. But a roller coaster at Knott's Berry Farm. You probably won't die. But at least one person a year does...

I did what Kai said. I turned my head this way and that, so the water could run away from my nose and mouth, but I kept my eyes on him; locked in his, or watching him stroke his cock, and I rubbed my pussy through my panties just how he said to. I did it hard, and fast. At first, I didn't like it, and it didn't really feel like anything but hot frustration. I wanted to ride him, or a pillow, or hump my hand like he liked me to do sometimes. This was so hard. But then all the breathless hard work started to pay off. My back arched.

"Oh... Kai...", I shivered. "...Kai... how did you know?", I moaned, harder and harder, unable to contain it. He just grinned at me.

"What's it feel like?", he asked me.

"Oh, fuck, Kai...", I stalled, "You're mean.", I panted. "I can't talk right now. I can't think..."

"You're slowing down. Don't slow down.", he ordered, critically, his dark eyes judging my technique from above.

I sped up again. My arm was so tired. My legs were asleep from being straight up above me for so long, with Kai standing between them so I couldn't put them down.

"And answer the question, Mac. What does it feel like?", he pushed, slowing his own strokes down.

"Mmm. Kind of cold and tingly right now. Even up into my feet, but mostly my clit, Kai. It's like it has pins and needles...", I grasped haltingly at an explanation, while attempting keep up the pace he wants, and trying to breathe past the hot water pouring over my face. "Ohh... fuck... Kai. Like I need to come so bad that I'm swelling closed on the inside, so hard I'll crush my own pussy. Like I'm throbbing, and it feels good but it hurts too... Kai...", my words come out so soft and high, like a far away dream, in little sex whisper I can barely recognize, all stretched out through shivers and moans.
"Fuck.", Kai slurs. "I love how you sound. Fuck, you're sexy. Aren't you scared you're going to drown?"

"No.", I told him, unable to keep doing what he wanted. I didn't want to rub my clit fast and hard anymore. I needed to come. I tensed my whole body and pressed both my hands against my clit, grinding into them, hard and fast. I wanted the pressure. I needed to hold my breath. I turned my head to the side, and as I did, the weather in the room broke, and the steam on the little adjustable shaving mirror across the room shattered into beads of water, and I saw Kai and me together.

I'm crammed on the floor of the shower like a broken Barbie, legs straight up and splayed, still dressed in thigh high black star-flocked stockings and alligator ankle boots, my long hair floating around me in the thrashing rivers of water gathering from the shower spray, and from being cast off Kai's body as he stands over me. I look flawless, save a thin bead of black from one of my eyes that's got more direct shower spray, my face flushed with sex and agony, lips parted. My body is working harder for the orgasm I need so bad than I'd realized, both my hands are pressing and pulsing with the grinding of my hips.

Kai is beautiful. Not like some kind of beautiful silver screen faggot, or some matinee idol. Kai is a man. A hard man, made in a cold, grimy, hard place. Not frivolous and chiseled. Hard. Young and grim and strong. His blue hair hangs in wet strings, dripping all over my face. He's tired, and his face shows it a little; he looks pale and puffy today. I don't care. He's sexy because of it; he's driven by ambition, and flooded with testosterone and toxic masculinity that makes him set goals, and pursue them like a stubborn pitbull with a hard on. He doesn't have time for beauty sleep. His muscled arm pumps like a piston on his big club shaped dick. He's straight as an arrow, purple and glistening. He's my man. I know him. I know his cock. I know how he comes. He's so close. I'm so close. We both fuck our hands together, and watch each other do it. He's looking in the weeping mirror too.

My back arched first, my neck snapping back. "Ohhh... fuck, Kai. I'm gonna come.", a low, urgent moan issued forth from me in a voice I barely recognized.

It's like a cruel fist inside me is holding onto it and won't let it go, wrapping itself in the tension, making it tighter and tighter. It was agonizing. I knew I'd get there. But I felt like I couldn't take more, like I'd break from the tingling and the tension.

"Do it how I told you to.", Kai kinda gave me shit. Shrugs. He paid for the show, I guess. So I did what he wanted. "Fast!", he barked at me.

When I did it? Oh, shit. I couldn't stand it. I shivered, my whole body shook, my arm quaked, as my fingers fought against the vibration to keep stroking up and and down my clit so fast you could barely see my hand. My voice burst out of me like an alien force, my moans shattering off the tile, echoing all around us. It was like I orgasmed in reverse first, every horrible feeling, ripping inward, tight, tense, agonizing, cold. When it was wound so tight that my body was going to break, orgasm finally wrung through me the other direction, warm relief, throbbing down in powerful waves. I'd never come like that. It was always more like a couple hot contractions that made me feel better and be able to fall asleep easier. This made me feel out of control. And like I just wanted Kai's cock more when it was over.

Kai came before me though. He was what finally pushed me over the edge. When I moaned out in agony, desperately masturbating to his cruel instructions, he groaned, and I gazed up to see his balls withdraw up tight and close to his body. His big fist clamped around his swollen, aching cock. I knew he needed to come too. Kai needs to a lot. And I knew he would. I opened my mouth to taste the manna from my Big Man, his sweet whipped cream shot all over my face, round after round.

When I started to come, finally, the taste of him in my mouth, and the throes of his own dying
orgasm, gave way to that warm euphoria. I closed my eyes, and turned my head to the side, moaning, and it was like his sun shone all over my countenance.

I blinked, and saw our reflection in the mirror again. Kai leaned slumped against the back wall of the shower, standing out of the water, under the shower head. He was still slowly stroking his rubbery cock. His head turned, and tilted back, he was lazily holding one of my ankles, where it stuck out from the top of my high heeled bootie. He was still struggling to catch his breath. A warm, strong golden stream sprayed out of him like a fire hose. He held his big cock, and pissed on me while I came. I fucking loved it; the danger, the depravity, all his fluids, swirling in the hot water, cleansing me from all my unrighteousness, just like he promised. Just hot release from all shackles and burdens.

He didn't say anything, didn't chide me. He was satisfied and basking in his own supernatural afterglow. My conquering king. When I couldn't come for him any more, and I laid, spent and waterboarded on the floor, Kai scooped me up in his arms, his hands smoothing my wet hair away from my face, and pinned me to the wall of the shower and kissed me in the torrent of warm water for an hour, pressed so close I could feel his heartbeat inside my chest. He was so gentle, his hands soft on my skin, and his kisses slow, sweet and long.

When we had to have supper with everyone, and go through the motions of storytime and everything, we kept catching one another's eyes. We phoned it in. I made Manwiches from a can. He rambled off some shit about tribalism and the sprawl. We couldn't wait to just be alone again. Kai has a heavy burden, being the man to save the world. Sometimes, I swear he struggles with a temptation to just be a man; have a girl, and watch Netflix, and cuddle up after getting a hand job. But that can't happen. The USA's culture and economy would collapse, the world would fall to ruin, and the four horsemen would issue out to ride upon the earth. So we still have to have storytime. But Kai... I don't want to go to church today...

Later that night we made all the jokes in bed. #ComeCorrect. That the Russians better not have a dossier on us. Kai called me his little wetback, and teased me that he didn't know illegals from Canada could so aptly be called that too. #Wetback.

He held my head to his chest, snuggled down in the covers, and said, "What hella bitches the Gitmo detainees were; those camel jockeys thought they were so tough with their dud bombs and rocks to throw, and then they get a little water drizzled on them and lose their everloving shit. But some skinny little girl from Canada? Oh, she just moans super hot, and comes like a fucking supernova."

I'd agreed. "In Saskatchewan? Waterboarding is nothing but foreplay."

He'd kissed me after that, and I fell asleep in his arms. I'd dreamed again of being spat from the core of the earth, skinless and alone. On my hands and knees, in the cropped silver prairie grass, still dead from the winter at the end of May, I'd ran my fingers through its dense, prickly blades. I'd raised my head to the west, and swore this time I saw two pairs of feet standing before me, in cheap orange soled dull black rubber boots. I woke up, shaking, unsure of where I was. Kai held me down, and touched my hair until I could fall asleep again.

I pull my phone out from beneath my pillow and push the home button. Only 2:37 am. Morning is so far away. I roll onto my back and look up at the points of light cast all over the ceiling by Winter's crystal hot air balloon, like dim blue fireworks; something beautiful is only ever the reflection of a reflection cast in a weeping mirror. I'd never want to scare her, or take any of this away from her. I have enough geisha talk in me for a lifetime of diversion; she never needs to hear another word about my past. And I've got it! I can't believe I didn't think of this before. For Halloween? I'm being a sexy Motel 6 housekeeper. I love motels. I'll ask Winter if she thinks it's any good tomorrow.
Kai

Killerwhaletank is working a night shift at the hospital tonight. It's such a fucking relief I feel almost high. I need to get my rest. Best of times? It's hard not to clock this bitch every time she opens her furry yellowed tooth hole to blab.

I have to keep up the con. I grab my phone and fire off a text to her.

"How's work going, D?"

"Hark at work or hardly working", she texts back, instantly, with an awkward picture of her duckbilling in ill fitting and wrinkled up scrubs, and of course, a spelling error. I mean, it was six fucking words. Who could be expected to get that all right, especially with those big fat sausage links and a phone that's not a Jitterbug?

I hate that expression. A union stooge standby for my parents' generation, mainly uttered these days in truck lots outside 24 hour greasy spoons by repulsive three foot tall, and three foot wide truckers in thinned out Dorito-stained sweatpants, flapping in the breeze. Shudderz. Now I have my very own past expiration three footer squared, with her own Cool Ranch stains, saying it to me. Fuck, I can't wait to kill her. I hate seeing her picture too; so much that a screaming surge of panicked blood pressure floods my cranium, and I can't erase it fast enough, just hoping to forget how ugly she is, and what a dirty job this is. I worry if I dwell on the revulsion, I'll resent Mac for it. I'm doing this for her. Well, and for my campaign and shit. Still. Heavy D didn't know how to flip her camera to selfie mode until Mac and Winter showed her a couple of days ago. I'm spanking them for it during the next gathering. Over my knee, skirts up. It won't make up for what they did, but at least it will make me feel better.

Things are progressing fast. Faster than I anticipated, even. The minds of the plebs are always slower, weaker and more malleable than I give them lack of credit for.

I've been endlessly culture cucked and flattering, and Danielle has responded by accepting my gospel on the Muslim threat. I sit close on the couch, arm around her slouched, rounded shoulder, finger her emerging dowager's hump, and just give her the facts. She doesn't know how to listen, and she's too stupid to follow. But I spoon feed her a simpleton's version, and she accepts it because she just wants to think a man can be bothered to talk to her. She's easy to scare. Our culture being hijacked in one generation by the Antichrist's Death Squad? Sure, she's not into it. But what she's grown afraid of in the span of a few days is losing me. Not her liberty, her right to work, drive, vote, or even exist. She's not afraid of living under a heavy black death shroud, in a bombed out waste of cinder and ash, with nothing to breathe but sarin gas, and nothing to eat but Halal goats that the Flying Imams pre-fucked. She's just terrified of going to work and telling Linda and Nicole, or who ever the fuck, that I don't call her anymore.

Muslims make up a disproportionate percentage of the medical community in Michigan, especially among doctors. Tonight, Danielle is going to break her first rule for me. The gateway drug. She's going to access the files, and print them all for me during one of her many breaks. Then I'll provide a report to the Movement, as interpreted by experts. I know what I'll find; more of their patients die than among the white, American educated population of doctors. And among the dead will be a higher proportion of women and babies. Probably Christians and Jews. That could be hard to prove; last names don't tell you much these days, with the mixing of the races. But I'll extrapolate.

I roll over onto my side, and pull the blankets up over my shoulder.

Once Danielle sees the evidence, that these same doctors, who came with dubious degrees from their respective shitholes during the reign of the terrorist's best friend, Barry Hussein Obummer, are not
only subjugating her on a daily basis, but meanwhile, are killing woke working women with useless
degrees? She'll be game after a night of dull, soulful love making, and willing to infiltrate the Islamic
Center of America in Dearborn, and prove once and for all that they are nothing but the collection
plate for state sponsors of terror. Once she's there, some Mohammad will marry her for a green card.
And then we'll blow her up, and reveal what these motherless dogs are really doing here, and the
United States of America will be greater than ever, rebranded as the United North American
Republic of Kai. Our flag? I've been thinking a happy face, with a smeared upside down black
maple leaf for a nose, bordered by bars in blue.

Based. May I reign for a thousand years. But I still cringe at the thought of what I have to do to bring
about real and lasting positive change for this country. Love making. Yuck. It's sex, or fucking.
Mac's a ninety eight pound virgin. And if I even thought about making love to her, she'd kick my ass
and call me a faggot. I don't want to hurt her. But then, I don't want her to hurt me either. Fuck, I
love her.

She's going to help accelerate this plan too. Danielle has already began to murmur her discontent
about Mac's presence, her petty jealousy of the relationship between her and my sister. Even though I
spend all my time doting on her, she fears pretty girls. Those two pretty girls under my very roof,
who speak in a language she doesn't understand. What's a doll skill, she asks. Why don't they have
jobs, she asks. She notes at every possible juncture that they're both college drop outs. She doesn't
even understand what they're doing for the campaign, or my movement, and has called them 'poor
role models'. I mentioned Mac's modelling career, low tier though it may have been, in passing.
Danielle reacted physically, as though she'd been slapped across the face.

I know what Danielle wants. An ugly punishment for a pretty girl. Mac will slip; something
unintentional, possibly even misinterpreted. I'll put my problem glasses on and find something. Then
my judgement will be final, and retribution swift. Danielle will be Emulex putty explosive in my
hands. And I'm making her suicide vest myself. You can't trust those low IQ Muslims; they build
more duds than detonators. I'm leaving nothing to chance. Build that bomb like a white man.

That's how you know that Sayoc dude is a Cuban or Filipino or some brown persuasion. All his
bombs failed. No white man thinks a bundle of Bic pens wrapped up in duct tape a bomb makes. We
invented nuclear fission. And gunpowder and fireworks for that matter. No one better question these
absolute truths. If the hair ain't blue, that shit ain't true. The Chinese, my ass. Wikipedia is fake news.

Make America Great Again is a short sighted half measure with an obvious crippling philosophical
failure; if it was so great, how did we end up with a world where women responsible for the success
of such tripe as Dancing With The Stars and the cake pop, are also given franchise in determining the
outcome of elections, or the economic capacity to cut the male wage in half? Or where a white man
in Michigan risks having the unclean left hand of a Muslim put in his mouth if he has a tonsil
infection? America was never that great. I'm going to tear every symbol down. I think I might start
with MAGA, when the time is right. Those are my people, waiting with an usher for the
@RealMessiah.

My thoughts churn like the confined, whipped to fury, depths of Lake MIlchigan in a winter squall. I
should have just stuck to the little blue Adderalls tonight, but I've been crushing the 30mg orange
suckers like Skittles. I swipe on Killerwhaletank's text. It's only been three minutes since she sent it.
It already feels like hours. I reply.

"Looking good my little Nightingale. Don't work too hard. You don't have to save the whole world
in one shift. Thinking of u." I hate nurses. The only people who know less about medicine and
science on the planet than dicttors. Her lumpy, lardy ass, that looks like two pigs fighting in a sack
when she walks, butt dialed me one night, without her knowledge. I heard her yelling profanities at a whimpering old man. She was working oncology that night.

I feel dirty. Like I've betrayed myself, just being nice to this odious woman for a moment, reinforcing every wretched, over confident thing about her worthless, second class self.

I get the three little dots. She's so fucking slow. This will take forever, and then be five words. With a spelling error.

"Love u. Big day tomorrow. Don't forget to print those files. See in you in the am. Shutting my phone off to sleep." I type before she gets a chance to reply to me, and hold the power button, breathing a sigh of relief knowing she can't send another repulsive picture tonight.

I roll back onto back. When my eyes close, my remaining senses focus, and I hear my girls' soft voices in Winter's room down the hall. Their hushed sounds rise and fall. I wonder what they're talking about. Actually, no I don't. Me. That's obvious.


I know what Mac looks like. She's in her regulation white onesie, unbuttoned just enough to see the curve of her perfect little tits, all clean and smelling like rain, her long straight golden hair spread out all around her. Her nipples poke through the thin ribbed fabric, and her hip bones jut out, as she lies on her back. Winter's laying beside her in one of those weird floor length plaid and lace old timey nightgowns she's obsessed with buying on Etsy; Little House on the American Gothic Prairie. Mac's loyal. She's in control. Winter is the one who crawls on top of her.

Winter looked at Rotten.com for fun before pillow humping since we were kids. She's in charge.

Mac's heart is beating out of her chest when my sister mounts her, and takes her nightie off. Mac is afraid. I haven't been protecting her, and I've been unpredictable and inconsistent about the things I've been punishing her for. She will want to say no to Winter, but she won't know what the right thing to do, in my eyes, would be. Does she be loyal to me, as she desires, and risk offending my sister, who is my closest adviser, and her only friend? She can't. She can't say no, and she can't say yes either. She's crying on the inside, begging her God for forgiveness, and to stop this. But Winter is on top of her, leaning over her, kissing Mac's soft, full lips, and sliding her hand inside Mac's onesie. Mac's questioning if it's her fault for leaving one button too many undone.

I'm hard; aching, listening to the sweet murmur of my girls, creaking the bed springs. I slide my hand down inside my pants, and stroke like I'm getting paid for it.

Mac licks her lips uncomfortably, and her big grey eyes look away, in the terrible psychic pain of committing an abomination she's not sure she'll ever be forgiven for. Winter presses her panty clad clit on Mac's hairless little pubic mound and grinds against her, without bothering to undress her. Mac's body betrays her, as the pressure and friction makes her swell and get wet. Tears fill her eyes when Winter asks her if it feels good. She doesn't answer.

Winter hasn't come for at least a week. She can't stand going that long. I hear the creaking. She's humping Mac hard and fast, laid down, their tits touching, sensually using Mac's little body like a toy, probably getting off on the kinetic sensation of their shared, powerless arousal. Mac is trying to dissociate; separate her body from her mind. She's trying not to feel the mechanical physical pleasure. But something firm is rubbing on her clit, and I've conditioned her to like that feeling, bouncing her on my cock for months. She starts to cry, and covers her eyes, as though it will hide her from her own shame.
My fist hammers up and down my shaft. I like to edge, but I can't hold off. I can't stop. The springs keep creaking, and I keep thinking about the two girls I love.

Mac comes when I come. I taught her that trick. I like it. It makes it better for me, to hear the tension building, like she's in pain. Besides, I like her finished and out of my hair when it's over, so I can roll over and get a little bit of sleep right after, when it's easier. Once in a while I like to deny her too. We do it enough, I've taught her to handle anything to my satisfaction.

Mac won't be able to help herself. She'll try to relax, go somewhere else in her mind. She won't flex her hips. She won't let herself moan. She'll lay perfectly still and quiet, like a dead body, while Winter pins her down, holding her thin wrists to the mattress. Winter won't hold back. She'll moan, and bash and grind with purpose on Mac. She'll come, collapsing on helpless, guilt ridden little Mac. And then Mac, despite all her tears and horror, will too, because I made her so that she can't help it, and her wet little pussy will wring so hard that if I was inside her, like I want to be right now, she'd push my cock right out, and then suck it back in again. She'll come so hard, she'd leave my cock black and blue. And she'll silently cry about it after, rolled over on her side, beautiful face buried in her sinless little hands.

Oh, fuck. Those girls. My cock throbs, time slows down, and I clamp my fist tight on the base of my shaft and pull. The shots come hard. Hard, slow, and pounding. I moan like a bitch. And make a huge mess, but I don't care. Mac can wash my sheets tomorrow. It's her job. That gives me one last final twitch.

The springs are still creaking in my sister's room. The girls are giggling, probably just laying on their own sides of the bed, making the bed shake with their laughter. I used to be the one to make Winter laugh. Mac too. I'm alone in the dark, heavy silence and palpable solitude, in a haunted house. They need to shut up and go to sleep so that I can.
Chapter Summary


Danielle

At the end of my shift, I stuff all everyone's files I printed into one of my bags. I can't find my insulated mug, and I need my Timmie's. Once I see it sitting over at the nurse's station, I grab it and wrestle the straps of all my bags over my shoulders and hurry to my Ravvie. I have a couple pit stops to make on my way back to Kai.

The parking lot is quiet at seven in the morning, my frosty breath blows back in my face while I fumble with my car keys to unlock the door.

"Danielle?", a voice startles me, and my glasses slide down on my nose.

"Oh. Hi, Nikki.", I answer. I hope she asks how I am. I don't think she knows about my new boyfriend. I hate Nikki. She's cute, and even though she's chubby, she got married last year. Everyone likes her because they say she's nice.

"So, what's this I hear that you're working on that blue haired guy's senate campaign?", she asks with a big fake smile. She's jealous. "That's exciting!"

"You mean my boyfriend, Councilman Kai Anderson?", I ask her. "I'm his campaign manager. We're keeping our relationship secret for now because we work together, but I've already moved in, and I think I'll be giving notice here any time."

"Isn't he pretty young?", Nikki asks, and I think I see a skeptical look on her face. She thinks she's better than me. I'll show her and every other girl with a boyfriend, or a husband, or a perfect waist to hip ratio. "He's cute! I'm happy for you. You deserve it.", she goes on. "I'm a little torn; we're unionized. Hard to break away from the Dems, and Ryan definitely won't; Boilermakers Local 169 for the win! That's why there's secret ballots, I guess. But we do always vote together... We'll just have to decide, and I'm sure if I make him my chocolate cake with caramel icing, I could convince him to vote for a friend's boyfriend! Wow!"

Yeah. She's jealous. Showing off about her perfect relationship. No relationship is perfect. He's probably cheating on her. And she got married so young that she doesn't even know herself, and he doesn't love her anyway. He only married her because it was what all his idiot friends in the trades were doing. I bet they don't even know each other and aren't happy at all. He probably hates her cake. That's probably why she's always bringing them to work. And of course has to make out to me like there's some reason he loves her or would listen to her, when obviously she just tricked him into marrying her before he was old enough to decide he didn't want to. Stupid LPN. Fuck her. She's married. Basically just a spoiled whore. And my degree took longer. I'm better. It should be me.

"I don't think it matters. We don't need your two votes to win. I need to get my Timmie's before
someone gets hurt, so excuse me." I tell her, sliding into my seat and slamming Ravvie's door on her. She's triggering me.

I think she looks a little bit sad when I drive away. Good. 'Kai's cute. Kai's young.' She probably thinks she could steal him. I'm going to bad mouth her to him so he knows they're voting for the other guy.

When I get my insulated mug refilled, the girl at the window annoys me. She's some kid with those stretchers in her ear lobes. She carried on a conversation over her shoulder with a coworker about her date the night before. I got my nose pierced a few years ago, and no one asked me out. A couple people mistook it for a pimple, that was it. And now I get this big blackhead in the hole because it never filled in right. Those huge holes are going to look real good when you're old and still working a drive thru window, you little slut. Probably has a bastard waiting on her at her mom's house.

I pull into my parking spot at my apartment. I signed a two year lease, so I'll have it long after I've moved to Washington with Kai. I just have to run in and get Crackers and Cheese and his litter box. I won't miss cleaning that. Kai said one of the Heathers can do it from now on, since they never bothered to finish a real degree.

I can't wait to get back to Kai's so I can sleep. I don't like it that we have our own rooms, but when I sleep during the day, it's better. Then I can take the sleeping pills I steal from the dispensary at work, and be out until the strategic planning sessions in the evening, I guess.

Worry nags me. Does the Heather who's not his sister sneak in there? I've kept a close eye. I don't like when I'm not there, and I'd planned to text Kai all night last night to make sure he wasn't talking to anyone else. He said he doesn't think she's attractive; to look at the studies. Men don't like skinny girls because they might not be as fertile. But that worries me too. She can gain weight. I can't make myself younger. I looked in her bathroom to see if she has tampons or anything, but her and sister-Heather share everything, so I couldn't tell. She's probably too skinny to bleed. Kai wouldn't want a kid with her anyway. Kai's too busy for kids. I could just do IVF. Maybe I could make her be my surrogate. Birth looks awful from working on maternity... maybe it would even wreck her body. Right? Images of Alessandra Ambrosio, Blake Lively, Carrie Underwood, and what's-her-name Jenner, flash through my mind. Maybe it wouldn't, and then Kai would love her for going through that for him. I've seen that too; these new fathers treating their wives like heroes after they give birth. Big fucking deal. Almost every woman does it. They're not special. I cut my cat's claws every month, and he scratches. It's just as hard, but I have to do it every month forever.

I only agreed to let him keep other-Heather in the house so she can clean up after Crackers and Cheese. He dribbles. And sprays. And can't lick his rosette anymore, so he often needs baths. And the fecal incontinence, especially when he's in the tub. But I love him, fluffy old fella. She can make herself useful and look after his hindquarters. He's like a baby to me. I look in the backseat at him in his cage. He's spraying the Ravvie.

"Crackers and Cheese! My Ravvie!", I scold, before remembering one of the Heathers will have to clean it up if I ask. "It's okay, boy. Keep it up."

I pull up on the street in front of Kai's house. I don't know why he still lets scrawny other-Heather keep her car by the side door. He says it's because the boys use it a lot if the G Wagon is already out, but that should be my parking spot, nice and close to the door. I shouldn't have to walk. Besides, I always have so much to carry.

Bags over both shoulders, I'll have to come back out for Crackers and Cheese, because I still have some double-double in my mug, and no free hands. I stamp my feet off on the porch. Kai is going to be so happy with these reports. As he suspected, the Muslim doctors do have a higher rate of patient
loss. I'm so proud. He will be too.

But when I come in the house, my enthusiasm is dampened. The Heathers have their little clique. They don't even notice me. They keep on talking, so I stand out in the kitchen and listen to them, sitting on the couch in the living room.

"...the eyebrow grease on the glasses?", one goes to the other. "Like, just take them off and clean them. Shudderz."

"I know.", the other says in a hushed voice. "Okay. Take a look at this one. I can't even tell what that would look like on a normal body, let alone on a good one like mine. That's a straight up hottentot. It ruins the whole thing. I can't even tell what I'm seeing. Who decided to put a patent pants on an ass that big? Her chafing thighs would have those things dulled and shredded in a day."

"Right? Try by fucking lunch break. And you know she'd take it. Remember when wearing shit from Forever21 meant you were poor, but at least a thottie too hottie? Now nothing means anything anymore. I almost transcend triggering. But the one thing that still gets me is when you see a Weight Watchers ad, and one of those former whales claims they're now a size two. If any one of them has ever been a two, I'm a monkey's uncle. And besides, I can't even wear the 000 size from J. Crew. Even that is too big. I'd just wear a kid's size 8, but then my legs are too long. Good thing I don't want anything from J. Crew."

"It's so frustrating", the other Heather goes. "Vanity sizing sucks. Why do those fat chicks get to feel better about themselves when it means half of what's out there is going to hang off me like a sack, even in the smallest size? Doesn't zero mean anything to anyone anymore?"

"Two words. Zac Posen. I don't like everything he designs, and he's been doing some gay recycling/upcycling shit, but at least his sizing is righteous. Usually For Love and Lemons too. The black sequin Beatrice maxi is on sale. I miss my allowance. You should get it though."

What a retard. Doesn't she know it's called Lululemon, and they don't make anything with glitter? Bimbo. Nikki always wears it. I don't get why you'd spend a hundred bucks on yoga pants when Walmart has polar fleece pajama pants for nine dollars, everyday low price. They even had purple and turquoise tiger print ones. Animal print is always sexy. I bought three pairs.

"Maybe I'll get it for you. I think it would be too long for me, even with heels. Don't tell Kai. Ugh. Look at that anchor's hair. Short. That's just lazy. And I'd just rather have my money for things other than monthly trims. I can't believe that hair is even still around."

"It's ugly.", Heather agrees. "But at least it's clean. And a harmonious shade, selected from a single color palette."

They laugh. Stupid little cliquebaits. I heard them say that. I don't know what it means. Maybe it's good. Fucking bitches. Mine would be clean too, but I had to work last night, unlike them. I only washed it four days ago. Maybe I'll shower and change out of my scrubs when I get up. And this color is better than theirs. Danae, my stylist in town here, told me brunette with red and blonde was the new thing in style. She has a Mazda Miata. She knows everything. More than them. Heather One has grey hair with dark roots. Heather Two doesn't even dye hers, like a boring loser. What would they know about what's in style? I'm telling Kai.

"Danielle.", I hear Kai's voice as he steps around the corner, emerging from the basement stairwell, to put his arm around me, and give me a peck on the cheek. "How was your night? Did you get those files printed?"
"I did. Crackers and Cheese is still out in the Ravvie. Can you send one of them guys out to get him?", I ask, motioning towards the living room. "I need to talk to you. Somewhere more private."

"Sure.", he goes, and disappears into the living room. "Mac? Have you done anything at all today?", he barks coldly at her.

"I did. I hacked some GoFundMe shit, and siphoned close to $47 to your bank account, Divine Ruler. And I have chicken wings in a maple buttermilk brine, ready to fry tonight for you and the boys. #nightof1000chickenwings. Just like you asked for.", she stutters out.

What a useless dropout bimbo. Probably just thought because she was a stupid two bit model that men would be falling over themselves to look after her.

"Alright.", he answers. I don't appreciate how gentle he sounded. "Well, get outside and bring in Danielle's cat. He's in her car. Put the litter box and food and water in your bathroom, and keep it clean. I don't want to smell it. Twice a day, bleach the box out and put fresh cedar shavings in, and more often if necessary. Keep the area swept. And he needs a bath every evening. He's got issues, but Danielle likes to be able to cuddle with him. Oh, and Mac?", he adds as she takes a step towards the door, "After you finish that? Change my sheets, would you?"

Good. I think he sounded more stern by the end. Give those lazy millennials an inch and they'll take a mile.

I step into the room, putting my arm around Kai's waist. "And he sprays. So keep a close eye on him. You have to clean it immediately, or it smells and he'll do it there again. And he needs help to get on and off the furniture, so you's two need to pay attention and do your part to help. Irregardless, he sprayed in the car on the way over. There's pet stain remover spray in the backseat, so you'll need to clean that before you come in."

Other-Heather slumps out to the porch and slips out the door still putting her coat on. The sister-Heather rolls her eyes and leaves the room with an over dramatic sigh.

I look at Kai, push my glasses back up. "Guess it takes all kinds.", I shrug.

He doesn't respond.

"Here's those files.", I change the subject, pulling the bag from my shoulder, untangling the straps from the others I'm carrying. "I printed them back to 2008, just like you asked."

"Great work!", he exclaims, gripping my upper arms and kissing me. "You should take a shower and get some rest. I have so much work to do on the campaign, and these files are going to be so helpful. I want to get to work with the team right now, analyzing the data."

"No one is going to know it was me?", I ask him. "You're not going to get me in trouble at work? I could go to jail, I think."

"Don't worry about that. I'll make sure it never affects your career. And you'll never serve jail time. I have big plans for you, and none of them involve either of those things. You'll be fine.", he assures me.

I'm not sure. When he has all these stats on the doctors from my hospital, and I'm the only one on his staff with access, I'm worried it will be obvious. I think for a second of taking the bag back and leaving. No. Cute Nurse Nikki, in her ritzy yoga pants, with her pathetic third karat diamond, is going to ask about my new boyfriend, and I will not tell her that he dumped me. I'm never letting one of those different ones hang this over me. I'm not taking a shift with some twenty or thirty-something
skinny bitch in pink Tweety scrubs. I'm never listening to another story about a boyfriend, or hearing some married cunt's advice about relationships again. What do they know? I'm a campaign manager. No pretty girl is ever holding her self satisfied happiness over me again. No. I won't lose Kai. I'm focusing on my relationship. He's a man. I'm sure he knows what he's doing.

Kai walks me to my room, his hand on the small of my back. In the doorway, he stops. I want more. I want him to pull my damp chenille socks and Clinical Crocs off, and give my feet a rub. I slept on an office chair most of the night, but I do have corns and fallen arches, and they're bugging me.

"Can you stay?", I go, "We could cuddle for a while."

"Yeah, you know I'd love nothing more, Danielle.", he tells me, holding both my hands in his. "But there's so much work to do. I'll give you my undivided attention soon, but I'm too distracted right now. Is there anything I can get you?"

"No.", I hold up my mug. "I've got my Timmie's. Maybe once my cat is inside, you could bring him to me.", I say, as Crackers and Cheese runs up between our feet. "Oh, there you are. Do you think she did a good enough job of cleaning Ravvie? That didn't take long.", I ask Kai, standing back up from scratching my cat's chin. He's got a rash. Like cat acne or something? Maybe I could make other-Heather pop them... Maybe that's a chore for tomorrow, once I see how she is with him.

"I'll send her back out to do it again. Minimum ten minutes of scrubbing. I'll demand it.", he assures me. "Anything else? The legs of your scrubs are wet from the street sludge. Do you want me to get her to pick up your laundry and do it?"

"No. That's okay. I'm tired. She don't gotta do it now. I'm just going to crawl into bed. I'll change when I get up.", I wave him away. "But there's something I have to tell you. I don't want to say a bad word about your sister, but she was in on it too, but that other one is the instigator."

"What is it?", he asks me, concerned. "What has she done now?"

"When I came in, they was making a bunch of fat-phobic comments. I think it was about me, because they were talking about dirty glasses first. Then she made fun of my hair, saying my highlights were outdated. Do you know Danae? She's my hairdresser, and she says they're cool, like Snooki and Miley Cyrus."

"It's Cyrus.", I think I hear him say under his breath. "You really are old."

"What did you say?", I ask him.

"Nothing. Stylist, I think they prefer. She used to be my old hairdresser too.", he says with a dismissive laugh. But I still have to ask.

"You don't think she's pretty?"

"Hell, no.", he laughs and makes a face. "That chick? I quit going to her because she was dumb, and she bored me."

"All hairdressers are dumb.", I tell him, smugly. I hate them too. Most of them are pretty. And the only male one on the planet who's not gay made that bitch Heather into a model. So I hate him too. "Otherwise, they wouldn't be hairdressers. But Danae does know about hair, doesn't she? And the environment. My highlights are stylish, right?"

"Oh, absolutely.", he says, seeming distracted and bothered. "I'll deal with Mac. You get some rest."
"It doesn't put you out?", I ask, a snap in my voice. "You don't feel bad to discipline her, do you?", I glare in his eyes.

"No.", Kai exhales, and kisses me. "Not at all. I was just thinking about something. Nothing for you to worry about. And thanks for that pic you sent last night. Hot. You know nurses are every guy's fantasy, right? Now get some rest."

**Speed Wagon**

I'm standing between some chicks legs, but I'm not hard. She's some pretty enough brunette, but I'm repulsed, and afraid. I'm angry with her. The air is cold, but not crisp. It's heavy, and laden. I can't tell with what. Bad feelings, bad vapors, decay. I can smell the psychosphere. It smells like iron oxide and creosote. Smells like lost souls. I'm terrified. I look inside my shirt and search my skin. No ACAB tat. I'm not me. I don't want the awareness of this. I don't like the eyes I'm looking through. I hate this world, and everything I see.

The walls are black in the dark. Like this place is built of ash. Mold creeps across the walls in black wheels, poisonous fingers reaching for a better grip. It's a dark old house, crumbling in ruin, and this chick is laying on an old metal dinette table, with her knees up. I look at my hand. It holds an unraveled metal coat hanger. I feel sick. I'm killing my baby this morning, because if we don't, her parents will send her away, and my brother will inherit the farm instead of me.

She looks at me with a sneer.

"You did this. Now fix it.", she says, hiking up her skirt, and pushing her underwear aside.

My hands shake. I try to carefully fish it up there, as her breath whistles through her gritted teeth. Morning's first cold light shines through the window. I have to hurry. A tiny soft spot of less resistance. I follow it. Her uterus is hard, like a tough steak. I dig around careful not to hurt her, as best as I can, but equally careful to ensure the life sucking parasite inside doesn't stand a chance.

"Get out of me!", the chick finally screams. "I need to push."

I watch the sun peeking out over the sagged horizon, seeping light up over the frost. When the long shadows of the stunted poplars retreat, my folks will be getting up. The jig will be up.

"We're running out of time.", I tell her, looking instinctively at a long-broken clock left on the wall. "In an hour they'll be up. You have to be home, and so do I."

She ignores me, but her next whimpers and push bring a rush of blood that pours over the table, and flows onto the floor. She jumps awkwardly to her feet, legs still splayed, and knees bent, and a piece of tissue like a calf's liver falls on the floor. A cord like an old rotary telephone, coiled and tough as gizzard, connects to a water balloon the size of an apple. I'm coldly curious, sickened by myself. I don't care. I just want this farm, and I'm the younger brother, already disadvantaged, and she's a piece of ass for this hellhole town of stout fraulines. I'm getting mine. The contents of this piss-full fleshcondom could have ruined it all. I pick it up from the floor, and inside, there's a bony, fatless, bright red little monster. She's the size of a mouse, or so.

"It was a girl.", I tell my piece of ass. She's already pulling her leggings up, over one of her grandma's Depends. She's shaky and pale. I reach over to steady her, dropping the balloon on the floor again.

"Good.", she says with a weak smile. "I want a boy first anyway. Let's just get rid of her, I mean it, and forget about this. I have a test in Social today. I have to study on the bus."
"Did you bring your rubber boots? It's going to be muddy out by the pits if the frost melts off."

"Yeah, they're right here.", she says, and pulls them on. "Is it a long walk? I don't feel that well. Can we take the Big Red?"

She's grey, sweating. I consider it. "No. My folks would hear it start. We have to walk. It's not far. Like a kilometre or so, just out past where we pick crocuses in the pasture."

She doesn't even look at the products of life that we made death.

I scoop it all up into an old Co-op grocery bag. Take one last look at the shriveled red daughter encased in amber that tried to ruin our lives. I hate her less now that she's dead, but I'll tolerate her better once we get out of this free and clear. Barb needs to survive, we need to marry, and I need to inherit this land. Once all that happens? I can toast this little bitch's willingness to die early and easy.

We head north on foot, through the junk pile at the back of the yard. The dry Russian Rye is all dead, waist high, and prickly, covered in frost still, rolling in the harsh rusty breezes. Even though it's a clear morning, the enormous sky is grey and cold, save a few thready neon pink clouds, hanging far out to the east. The ground is littered with old metal coffee cans, those green glass caps from old power poles, and dead machines like a timeline, dating back to the industrial revolution, pretty much. I dunno. I only had a 60 in Social. But my ancestors buried the work horses out here, until they got a tractor with metal tires. Since then, we've piled all our dead out here. Thrashing machines, wagons, tractors, cars, trucks. Lawn mowers. Shit. Everything. A lot of fond memories, I think wistfully, spotting my grandparents' old Fargo. I might fix it up to drive once I graduate and have lots of time and money to burn.

We made this nuisance in a bombed out '55 Chev on blocks out here. My girl won't look at me as we walk past it. And it's me left holding the bag. I look resentfully at the brittle white plastic bag in my hand. Steam rises off the black-red contents in the chill of the morning.

"Can't we just throw it in that?", she asks me, pointing to an old Cockshutt thrasher, rusted and paintless. "No one would ever find it. I'm not feeling good, and I have that exam to study for. I have to cram."

I exhale. "But what if someone did?", I ask her. "We can't let this ruin everything for us.", I say, holding up the bag of guts.

"Alright.", she says resentfully, trudging on along in silence beside me over a fallow field, up and down the lifeless grooves of rich black earth, as the wheat stubble scratches the gloss from our rubber boots.

The pits are just past our pasture land. Some say this pasture is haunted by evil spirits.

The Sibelius family had so many kids die, and buried them all in a small field, returned to prairie when the next owner got tired of plowing up little bones. That I can't confirm.

But this pasture is as ancient as history, graves of the dirt-worshiping heathens litter this place, filled in with stones to prevent the wolves and coyotes from dragging up the dead, and yellow eyes gaze with malice in the twilight from atop them. We hastily dismantled all the huge tee-pee rings when Regina got an airport. If any socialist sons of bitches would have seen them, it would have been deemed a historical site, and returned to those Lysol-huffing degenerates. We couldn't have grazed our cattle.
A UFO landed here the night of the Apollo 13 mission, for the exact time the shuttle was behind the dark side of the moon, and the black-eyed ghouls lined the road, standing like sentinels. Multiple neighbors saw them, driving home on the grid from a prayer meeting in Mossbank.

The stagecoach trail is still indented on the flesh of the prairie, though long years have passed since the grids were graveled and the Number 2 paved. This will be ours, and our son's. This terrible land could never be ruled without terrible people, prepared to do terrible things. God destroyed the Tower of Babel, and scattered the people of the earth, divided into their races. Don't tell me if He wanted white people living here, He'd have made it so inhospitable. We had to be prepared to break all the laws of nature. Our punishment is that now we can't leave. But there's oil and coal underneath the green swaying fields, and I'll spin it all into gold, so help me.

I'm dazed and distracted, a man coming of age and hitting my stride. Nothing uglier. Nothing a little girl should fear more.

When my mind clears, I stand next to the pits; gaping mouths in the earth that will spew forth millions of forked tongues any day now. Almost biblical. Apocalyptic.

"Do you want to throw her in, or should I?", I ask my girl.

She takes hold of the bag. "I want to. It was me she wanted to make fat and tear apart, all the while deceiving me. All the old wives' tales said it would be a boy.", she speaks to the bag. "Nice try, bitch. I'm so glad I decided to do the right thing. You lied to me. You could have ruined my whole life. Girls steal their mother's beauty. My mom told me that.", she says coldly, and throws the bag in the pit. "Now, can we just get back? I'm really nervous about that test, and I think I need to poop before the bus comes.", she whines, clutching her stomach, already turned back towards the yard.

Neither of us look back.

The awareness of the body I'm inside begins to subside.

I'm dreaming, lucid, I know it, but can't wake up. This man feels nothing, and the girl feels only for herself. I'm horrified. I hate these heartless people, and I want to get away from them. They killed and threw away their own little baby; I'm sick, clammy and nauseated, but they feel relieved, and unbothered by guilt. I feel dirty just having witnessed this. What's wrong with my mind that it could make this shit up?

But I'm a passenger. I'm not driving. Not here, and not out there. There's nowhere that I really want to be anymore. Am I the baby in this dream? The sharp end of the hanger, the needle that ended my life? I hear a tattoo gun buzz in behind my brain. I think I'm going to be sick.

I wake up with a start, ask myself why my ass is still asleep. Oh yeah. 'Cause I'm a grown man sleeping on a basement floor. I crane my head and look inside my onesie. ACAB. I'm me again. I take a few deep breaths and feel flooded with relief, but more tired than when I went to bed. What an awful fucking dream. The tat sucks, fucks my life. But that was a horror show out of some other world. This's way better. It's like I couldn't even sort my own thoughts out. Felt like being truly lost. Worst fucking nightmare of my life. Wonder if that's the kind of shit that makes Mac cry in her sleep...

The rest of the boys are still sawing logs. I put my arm behind my head, stare up at the the ceiling. This basement is fucking rad. Guaranteed, a chick would make you renovate it. Pull down all the wood paneling, tear out the bar and built-ins, and paint all the new drywall light grey, and then fill it full of chaise lounges covered in pillows, so there was absolutely nowhere to sit, and nothing to do.
This's the first full night of sleep I've had since fucking Killerwhaletank smashed into Mac's car. I actually forgot about my new tat and got a few hours. It's a sinking weight that pulls you down, every time, when you only have to look at your own skin to remember that your life can't ever be salvaged. Can't be what it was, can't be what it was going to be. Can't be a single fucking thing but Kai's to use up as he sees fit. ACAB. I pinch the bridge of my nose, try to forget the way my mom looked at me the day I graduated The Academy. It was the only thing I ever wanted to do with my life. But when the world decided that absolutely any black life mattered more than any blue life, without regard for the circumstances? I guess I lost my way and found a new one.

I wasn't sleeping that well before the tat either. Mac started detoxing pretty hard about a day off the pills. Every night, she'd just lay there awake, still as could be, but full of so much tension, she was making me grind my teeth. Then she'd sob and cry if she did fall asleep, say all these horrible things. Sounded like a little kid. Fucking disturbing. I couldn't sleep through it, and I know Divine Ruler's got his reasons, but I think she's a pretty good actress, after how she carried those couple weeks. I think he could have let her in on the plan, spared her some pain since she's already had more than a life's dose, clearly. Being a cop, you learn to spot that.

I was on a call once when I was still training; possible active shooter. Turned out to be some high school kid out in the bushes with a Weatherby, sighting his scope. He had his barrel turned on a window in his classmate's house; some girl named Yvette. He swore up and down her dad was a creep, and he was taking him out so he couldn't hurt her anymore. The kid got locked up until his thirty fifth birthday in a facility for the criminally insane. He's just barely began his sentence. But something was festering in that house. Yvette was a quiet kid with perfect grades, who dressed in big fleece hoodies and Levi's overalls, all the time. Eyes like cut glass, she stayed covered up so no one would notice her. I suggested to my supervising officer maybe we should look into it, but Stevens said there was no way; her mom was so nice. No way she wouldn't know if something was wrong with the kid. But Yvette haunted me. I used to cruise by that house all the time. Never any sign of life. That house was a black hole. No Christmas lights, or Christmas tree. Never decorated for Halloween. Never anyone over. They drove her to and from school every day. Yvette never went outside. But she did hang herself in a closet the year she started eleventh grade, no note found. Mom called it in, then ate a gun the next week, probably after having read the note we never found. Her dad? He remarried a woman in Minnesota with two young daughters within a few months. Out of my jurisdiction.

I get up off the floor, stretch and yawn. Roll my sleeping bag up. That dream was so fucking awful I don't even have morning wood. But I still gotta piss. I avoid the mirror in the bathroom, shower, change into my uniform. I'm gonna go sit on the couch, probably grind out at least another chapter in Red Dead Redemption before Kai gets up. But when I step out of the bathroom, there he is, up before the sun.

"Speed Wagon? Rouse the boys. I need to talk to all of you, and I need to be clear you all understand my instructions.", he orders, taking his seat in the easy chair. It's a half bun and Nehru day. Shit's on.

"Assemble around me, troops.", he claps his hands together.

I stand, at attention, hands clasped in front. The rest of the boys sit cross legged on their sleeping bags.

"First of all, I want to thank you boys for your adherence and commitment to the plan, these past few weeks. I know none of you have enjoyed Killerwhaletank's presence in the house, but as you all know, it won't be forever. It's been a strain on all of us, most of all me, but there isn't any sacrifice I wouldn't make for you and this movement. It's been an annoying step for man, but it will be a satisfying step for mankind when we restore the natural order to the world, where the white man is at
the top, our women stay in the kitchen, and brown people rot in their respective shitholes, where they're easy to bomb all at once."

The troops cheer.

"When are we getting this fat bitch out of the house for good, Divine Ruler?", Gutterball asks.

"Soon. Very soon.", Kai assures with a smile. "That's what I need to talk to you about. Now, you all understand that Killerwhaletank needs to trust me. She's grown dependent, addicted completely to the idea that she's special to a man. She's just begging to be used. Just last night, I had her print the hospital records for all the doctors, back to the reign of Barry Hussein. But it's not only my love she pathetically pursues. As we planned, her jealousy towards Winter and Mac has been stoked, and grows all the time. She comes to me daily with petty bullshit female complaints; irrational manifestations of her own basest desires and fears, and possibly her menstrual cycle. None of us look forward to this. But the time is upon us. Mac Tonight is going to serve her Ruler, and take a fall for the cause. We all know she'd do so willingly. She's /ourgirl/.

Kai looks at me with a glare.

"And we'd all prefer it if Mac could be in on the plan so she wouldn't need to be so scared. But it cannot work that way. Now, I don't know if it will be tonight, or next week. But the time is at hand. We need to prepare. She's going to have to be NPC'd. Does anyone have any questions about the plan, or the shunning protocols?"

"No, sir.", we all bark out. We've drilled this since the night Divine Ruler downloaded his Riyadh Jihad gospel to us.

"All the different outcomes are planned for. Killerwhaletank is stupid, mean and above all, predictable. She'll be afraid to demand Mac's death, but in that event, we kill Killerwhaletank, and find a new operative for the mosque infiltration. We'll have the files we need by then. It's probably going to be a retaliation, based on Mac's beauty, age or fertility. If she wants Mac's face cut, cut around her ears and hairline. It will be gruesome, but it can be repaired. Don't do anything that could sterilize her. Make sure the fireplace is full of ash for the sacred taking ceremony. Is the Shameful White Habit of Guilt prepared?", he turns to Sewing Machine.

"Yes, Divine Ruler", he answers back. Sewing Machine came to us not long ago. His parents' owned an upholstery shop. He worked there until some Mexican immigrants came in and did better tuck and roll for half the price, and shut them down. "Just what you asked for."

We all disagree about what it looks like. White nun's habit? Implied burqa, like Kai asked for, since it's what would piss off and humiliate Mac the most? KKK out on a cross burning? I think she's gonna look like she's in a sexy Grand Wizard robe costume. All Gutterball sees is a cheap bedsheet ghost costume. I guess that's why Sewing Machine got ran out of business.

We all hear that heavy-limbed bootface stomping on the porch.

Kai jumps to his feet and heads for the stairs.

"Boys?", he turns and looks down on us, "And remember nothing past Mac's shoulders. And if I ask anything else of you, trust your Ruler. Oh, and while I think of it, that's the best place to stab or shoot her too; right in that soft spot under the collar bone, where it meets the shoulder joint. Hopefully it won't come to that, but if it does, that won't kill her. If I think it's gone too far, I'll harpoon the whale. But otherwise, you do to Mac whatever Killerwhaletank tells you to."
I watch him stride up the stairs. I don't like that last statement. The tattoo, that spans across my chest from the tip of one shoulder to the other, is still healing and so fucking itchy. I reach up and scratch mercilessly. ACAB. Trust your Ruler. I'm worried about Mac, and about what else Kai might ask us to do to her. I know she's just some chick. But she's based, not to mention a good cook who doesn't complain. And she's my sweet Winter's friend. I guess whatever punishment Spam-I-Am wants, Kai wants us to just dole out.

The nightmare I had left me on edge, like all my nerves feel raw, and I'm so pumped up with adrenaline that I feel like I want to crawl right out of my skin. I don't know if it's cabin fever, but I feel like the world is closing in on me. I don't get above the ground often, and the days are short and dull. It's been snowing and melting, but soon it will snow in, and then we're in for the long cold dark. Funny thing about my tattoo, is I don't remember getting it. I don't remember who did it. I haven't slept for shit since. I keep looking, thinking maybe I imagined it, but there it is. I gotta quit fortifying with so much Vitamin A.

"Okay, boys.," I address the room. "Get yourselves dressed and armed. Today we prepare again for the noble war."

Winter

There's a chill in my room when I wake up. I can tell I'm alone. The further north you go, the more mental people get. Like, their circadian rhythms and shit? Mac always gets up before anyone else, and I swear I never actually catch her sleeping.

I roll out of bed. I'm stoked af to rock my new dress today. I finally got that Punk Rave black Victorian dress I ordered from Dolls Kill yesterday. When I slide it on over my head, I'm annoyed. Stupid made in China shit. It binds in the armpits and is too long to walk in. Fuck off and die. I'll just give it to Mac. I throw it on the floor in the corner of my room, and pull a black a-line mini skirt off its hanger, and throw on a cropped black turtleneck. I wish I could wear thigh highs with this, but that's so Mac's thing, I'd feel like a poser. Normally that would annoy me with her. She doesn't own it. But I also got the rhinestone North Star embellished fishnets she had in her cart... I pull them on. Fighting sly grin.

I'll put shoes on later. I need to walk softly down the hall.

"Kai?", I whisper, turning the door knob, and stepping silently inside his room.

"Hey Winter.", he greets me, already dressed, and standing at the window looking out. "Anything to report?"

"Do you have to make it sound so fucking nefarious, Kai? I already feel bad enough as it is.", I roll my eyes. Kai calls it a 'mental health check', and says it's so he can be sure she's doing fine without him. What a fucking narcissist. I don't know what he's up to, but I doubt it's real deeb gconcern, and that it's really about gibg me muh bower drip.

"She's fine.", I answer tersly.

Kai whips around to face me. "I know she's fine. I told you she'd be fine. What were you two talking about last night?", he asks pointedly.

I'm scared shitless of him when he's in this trompe le monde mode. If I don't tell him everything, he'll take the credit card and my phone. Maybe lock me in the closet like Beverly. He might put Big Knees in my room and make me share my bathroom with her and her enormous ungroomed salt and pepper bush. Shudderz. I don't like reporting on a sister, but I can help Mac best if she's close to me.
I don't know why he wants to know this shit, but it all seems harmless anyway.

"I dunno. Me, mostly. I told her about my old room in the townhouse. She told me a little about her old room. She talked about you. Don't worry; you're still her messiah.", I shake my head, and kick at the floor with my toe. "She's nervous about going down on you in the future. She didn't know if she was supposed to suck or blow."

Kai smiles serenely before he catches himself. Makes serious leader face. He paces the room, hands clasped behind his back.

"Her old room.", he contemplates. "Did she tell you they came and chained her to the radiator at the same time every evening, because once she sleepwalked to the real house? They accused her of faking it and took to locking her up. One night, she fell asleep with her hair touching the radiator, and some of it singed. When her parents came to let her free for school in the morning, they smelled the burned hair and accused her of being possessed, and said it was the smell of sulfur and brimstone. She tried to explain her hair cooked on the hot metal, but they accused her of lying about it, and made her kneel in prayer without food or water, while they stood over her accusing and berating her, until she threw up? Then they left her in the salamander infested basement for a week to reflect. Did she tell you that?"

He sounds pissed and jealous. How dare his little girlfriend talk to me or confide in me? Now he has to weirdflex on me that he still knows her better.

"No, Kai. She didn't.", I answer back, fighting chills. I don't like hearing that shit. That's her own horrendously personal terror; I don't know why Kai had to out her like a bitch. That stuff is appropriate for one place, and one place only, and that's the sanctity of Pinkie Power. "She just told me about the freaky moving wallpaper and how she ate lead paint off the walls. Shit like that. She didn't tell me that much. Oh, she said she burned some railway wood or something in the boiler. That's it."

"Alright.", Kai says, pouring out an Adderall into his palm and taking it. He's contemplating something way too hard. I don't like it. "How are the plans for Halloween going?"

"Good.", I reply, lightening up. "We used grey primer and made a ton of NPC jack 'o lanterns. You should step out on the porch and check them out. No Trumpkins, like you asked. I don't get why you didn't want us to make those though. Everyone likes them. People who love Trump like them, and so do people who hate him. It could have been good for cutting the widest swath of voters."

"False idols and graven images.", Kai seethes. "I'm not having a Golden Calf built on my own front porch."

He so misses her. No one ever fed his delusions of messianic grandeur with quite the same evangelical fervor.

Kai's attitude to his former idol reminds me of the chick who shot Selena. Trump began as a hero, faded to a symbol he had a love/hate relationship with. Now he's a figure that Kai resentfully maintains a positive stance towards in public for the votes, but who he privately reviles with all the resentment and loathing that one can only feel for a former love or a rival. Pretty fucking gay. I smirk to myself, turning my back before he sees.

"We've been practicing my makeup. Mac's doing it for me. She made me look just like the cover art for that Sixfingerz song I always listen to on YouTube. Do you remember that, Law of Nature, or whatever, kinda sounds like East Indian psychadelia, has the sugar skull girl for the picture?"
He just gives me this void look and shakes his head.

"Anyway. Just like that. My dress and crown should come this week. It's gonna be lit." I grin. "Ivy got her mint sequin dress, and all she does is complain. She's dreading this party so much. I ordered her a sash just because I knew she'd hate it. No one can get ahold of Ally or Beverly. Mac's still struggling.", I shrug. "What are The Chads being anyway?"

"It's a surprise.", Kai smiles, and places his hand on my back, guiding me towards the door. "But it's terrifying, appropriates a culture and reinforces gender roles. You'll be handling the trick or treaters at the house, but the boys and I have a field trip planned. It's the one day of the year all the doubters get cookies."

With that, he literally shoves me out the door.

"Thanks, Winter."

Whatevs. I feel like shit. My anxiety is through the roof, and a talk with my brother never helps things anymore. Something bad is going to happen. I don't like how quiet it's been; every door closed and every one of us divided and conquered. Kai's using all of us. I walk away from his room, down the hall, past Mom and Dad's room. I feel queasy every time I get a whiff of that slightly sour smell of old death, mingled with roses. Wonder why I'm having an artificial flower crown? Because, duh.

That's one thing I know Kai never shared with Mac. She's been chomping at the bit to get into the attic since she moved in here over a year ago. Insists we have a dead raccoon or something up there, and she'd like to get it out. I figure it's Kai's job to tell her what really stinks in this house.

When I walk into the upstairs living room to sit down with my coffee, Mac tosses the remote over to my side of the couch.

"Here. We don't have to watch this.", she says without looking up from her phone. She had Fox News on. Of course.

"Good.", I say taking the remote and changing the channel. "You ever watch Teen Mom?"

She looks over at me with a bright smile. "Sure. Not the newest one. I can't care about any of those people. But OG or 2? Those are some of the best documentaries ever."

"Yeah, yuck. Shudderz. Not the skiddy edition. OG's on though.", I click on it. "So what's your read on them? Who's your favorite?"

Mac's curled into the corner of the couch, wearing a faded floral thermal crop under a brown wide wale corduroy romper dress, with thigh high ox blood suede go go boots.

"Is that dress a kid's from Zara?", I ask her, before she can answer about the teen moms.

"Yeah. These boots are so tall, and I wanted to flex adequate thigh gap, so I needed something short enough. Does it look okay?", she asks.

"Love it. It's goals af.", I shake my head. "You should wear it with that black point d'esprit sheer turtleneck and those alligator ankle boots some time. You look cute but sexy today. That would be sexy but cute.", I shrug.

"Those boots got wrecked.", she says quietly, looking back down at her phone, but I think I see some little smile. Gross. Probably some sex-adjacent fetish shit with my brother. He probably wanted to drink a High Life out of one while watching her shoot automatic rifles or something. I can't think
like these tighty righty sickos. "I should get some new ones, if they still have them in a 5, once I get my allowance back."

I hope she can't see the sympathy in the look I inadvertently flash over the couch at her.

We both sit quietly watching MTV.

"You asked about my favorites.", she finally says. "I kinda like them all. Like Tyler and Catelynn? They should join us! They just live down the road a bit. I feel bad for them. They're still so messed up from having Carly stolen from them. We should get her back for them. We should ask Kai..."

"I know! It's so sad. They still can't face that it's really the entire source of all their trauma. Like, no shit she had postpartum, when she probably realized she could have done it with her first kid too.", I agree. I've followed this shit from 16 and Pregnant, and had no one to discuss it with. Kai never gave a shit, and I was embarrassed to tell my Vassar friends. Clearly, Ivy was too old. This feelz good...

"Yeah. And how Dawn, the adoption councilor, still comes around and tries to blackspeech them every so often, and make sure they haven't seen that she totally victimized them by high pressure selling adoption to them when they were kids themselves, and way too vulnerable to make a decision for themselves? It turns my stomach.", she shivers with rage.

"Based. I'm surprised you aren't into it. I thought all you Christian birth forcing anti-choicers were gay for adoption.", I shrug.

Mac shifts her legs under her to the other side, and turns to face me, explaining, "Well, compared to abortions, yeah. But those sterile old creeps robbing Carly from the cradle, peeling out of the parking lot at the hospital, while this stretched, battered, and bleeding child who is her mother, and the zitty teenage father, stand there in the wind crying? That's heartless and sick.", she says angrily tossing her hair over her shoulder. "If those people wanted children, there were children who needed help. Tyler and Cate. Why didn't they adopt them? I'd have told them, 'Look, come live with us. Be exchange students in North Carolina for a couple years. Finish school. We'll look after your baby while you are at school, make your meals, do the laundry. Be actual parents to you. When you're adults, if you still want us to adopt your baby, we'd love to. But for now, let us just adopt you, so you can raise your child with all the support you need.' That's what I'd have done."

She's quivering. I hear it in her voice, as her big grey eyes flash with righteous fire. I'd never even considered that myself. They're probably older than she is.

I reach out and put my hand on her shin and give it a shake. "That's nice. Obviously the most loving solution for everyone. I've never heard anyone suggest that before. Mighty mature of you, Mac.", I tease. "Way to adult."

"Thanks.", she smiles weakly, and pauses before adding, "It fucking really triggers me!", she laughs. "That's the kind of shit that gives Christians a bad name. They are old with all the benefits of a life of experience, but I think God denied them children for a reason. They don't know how to love like a parent."

She settles into her corner on the couch, and silently scrolls her phone for the rest of the episode. Feelz sad. Obv. She had a shitty family, and now she's worried about all the bullshit people say about the cycle repeats, and victims create victims, blah blah blah. It's all horseshit. Everyone decides who to be.

"You'd be a good mama someday, Mac.", I finally say softly. "I'm not just being bullshit nice, either. You're fucked up, but everyone's fucked up in some ways. But you aren't fucking up in that way."
You'd be good at it. Otherwise, you'd have never thought of that. Do you wanna watch Fox for a while?"

"Thanks, Winter.", she gets up. "I'll watch whatever you want, really. Can I get you more coffee?"

"No, that's okay."

She sits back down. I realize just now that since Kai has cut her off, she's done that. She brings my coffee. Does my makeup. Cleans my room. And I like it. I don't like that I like it. But I do. I like the power.

"I like to see what the enemy on Faux News is up to anyway. Who will call Secretary Clinton a human cold sore from hell today?", I ask with a smirk, and flip to it.

"Oh, man. Look at this guy.", Mac rolls her eyes with a grin. "Unless there's a presidential election going on, he doesn't even try. Look at what a bum he looks like. I'm sure if you could see his entire ensemble, his shirt is, like, half tucked in, and half not. Lutz. Perfect name for the guy. It's probably, like, Polish for slob or something. And the hair. What color is that? Like he just dyed the bowl portion of his cut carrot-top? Do you think before they interviewed him Ainsley gently suggested that he tuck the whole shirt in and straighten his part, and he just shrugged her off, like, 'nah, I'm good...'?"

I laugh. "Speaking of slob. You know what was making me sick at supper last night?", I lower my voice. "Did you notice the glasses? The grease-frost ghostly eyebrow impressions on a certain pair of glasses? Like, take them off and clean them. How long do you think it takes to build up a pair of grease brows inside a pair of glasses? It was like they were 3-D printed on."

"Ugh.", she shudders. "I've noticed that too. Hey, can I show you something?", she asks suddenly, showing me her phone.

I take her phone and look. She's got a page on the Forever 21 app open, and I'm looking at a black patent set; cropped square neck tank and mini skirt. It's modeled on a woman whose ass is bigger than Mac and me pushed together.

"Can I use the term hottentot?", she asks with a grin, "Or would that be an exaggeration? When did that start being an appropriate shape for a fashion model? I mean, isn't the point that someone with a normally proportioned body can see the clothes and judge what they look like, more or less?"

"Yeah. Like, I'm not into body shaming. But that goes so far it's ridiculous. I can't tell from that picture if it's a skirt or a belt. Hey, is it true that you used to model in Canada? I heard a couple Chads saying that one day.", I reply, looking out the window. I didn't notice that stupid Rav 4 pull up, but it's parked, and Big Knees is nowhere to be seen. She must be lurking in here.

"A little.", Mac shrugs. "It wasn't that big of a deal. I was never particularly successful."

"What?", I laugh, "Like did you get paid, or are we talking about mall fashion shows and shit?"

"I got paid! That's why I dropped out.", Mac giggles, and shoots me a fake dirty look. "But it's not like I was some household name."

I'm curious. People talk about the shit they do all the time; like the avocado on toast they bought and ate for lunch was a world-class fucking achievement, like squad fucking GOALS, bruh. Here's a girl who's been paid just to stand somewhere, and she never says a word.

"Well...?", I ask her, "What was it like? Like, how did that happen?"
She just shrugs. "Have you ever heard of Woody Michleb?"

"No."

"He's some big deal hairdresser from Lebanon.", she explains. "He was, like, the Creative Director or something for Farouk Systems? Anyway, I was waiting for a bus out on the sidewalk one day in Moose Jaw, and he was passing through for a trade show, and saw me. He asked me to model, and so I did. It wasn't a big deal."

"So you only did it once?", I ask. "Fuck. Could you make this harder? Like just tell me a story!"

"No, I was a muse, I guess, after that? I traveled all over the world with him. Sometimes, it would be some kinda big show, rollout for a new product, b-team d-girl celebrity swag shindig, something with press. But usually, it was just a bunch of crummy trade shows. Shitty city to shitty city. Flying coach. My hair grows really fast.", she shrugs again, looking away. "Mostly it was just letting someone kibbitz and flirt with you while they gave you a haircut you'd never in a million years want. Wear a ridiculous, skimpy costume, usually see through, no bra. Laugh at bad hair jokes, while you sit on a stool getting a haircut on stage, smile, roll your eyes, be animated. When they take the cape off you, stand up, pace the runway, toss your hair around, smiling about this cut you hate. That was about it. I dunno. I did a little print work too, for Farouk and then for Joico. My Joico stuff almost made it to mass market, like consumer mags like Vogue. But then the company decided to go with a model with more of an 'ethnically diverse' look, so my ad series got relegated to Salon Weekly and similar trade rags. Some brunette got the national mass campaign."

"That sucks. Did you do anything else?", I ask her, giving her a little smile when she looks over at me.

"What?", Mac teases, "That's not enough for you?", she pauses. "I did body work for some waxing company. They put gold leaf all over me. It was for their packaging and advertising. My naked body is still all over a bunch of dumbass shrink-wrapped Chevy Volts all over Canada, as far as I know. And I did some runway work for La Senza for a few seasons too, but didn't have the body for their print campaigns."

"What's wrong with your body?", I ask her outraged.

"Too skinny, no tits.", she dismisses, flatly. "They're a lingerie company. I could accept that. I didn't have the right look; too editorial, they said. So I wouldn't shame someone either. But as someone who used to model, this offends me.", she says, once again turning her phone to me, pointing at the picture. "The whole point is meeting a physical ideal. If you can't meet it, you should have to do something else. It's not an everyone-gets-a-trophy kind of thing.", Mac shrugs. "If it was easy, everyone would do it. But apparently, now it is. Pisses me off. I lived on a treadmill, with mud on my face, any time I wasn't working or doing my other job."

Other job? Is this another insane circus train cage I can take a peek inside? But I have to alert her first.

"Mac?", I tap her shoulder so she'll look up from her phone, as I mouth our code word, "Scrub".

Mac nods, standing on tip toes, and peeking out the window around the television at Killerwhaletank's car. We try not to talk about anything controversial with her in the house. I don't think she knows Mac's legal status, and I don't think she should. Nor do I think believe for one moment my brother would spare anyone if it cost him one ounce of power, or the pursuit of it.

"So what was your other job?", I ask her, finally.
But before she can answer, we overhear Danielle talking to Kai around the corner, hushed and disgruntled. Mac's pupils dilate, and the color drains from her cheeks, as she unfurls her long legs, and puts her feet on the floor, ready to run. She's silent, but I can tell she's only pretending to see the screen of her phone. Life has narrowed to a chase; a caribou calf, separated from the herd, timber wolf in pursuit across the frozen tundra. She's a fucking animal; the last tiny link in the chain. Sucks to be her. Should have just gone to Berkeley, bitch. Student visa would have been so much easier than this.

Kai storms into the living room. He's dialed everything back, carefully easing Danielle into this life. With a common household pleb, you can't just lead with, "Hey, how'd you like to join a cult?". So he's abandoned his Swamy Hillary linen shit for now. Once he sets the hook, I'm sure he'll be back into it. Right now, it's all official Councilman gear; skinny suits and man buns. Though things must be going his way; today he's lightened up a bit and busted out the New Balance kicks and a Fred Perry. He knows she's way too old to know those are skinhead tells.

He looms tall and stiff over Mac, and barks down at her, "Mac? Have you done anything of value at all today?"

I can't believe there was a time that I envied her. I watch the scene. Amygdala activated, adrenaline and cortisol flood my bloodstream; the first chemical cocktail in the PTSD sequence. Kai's right. When Dad would get into that rage spiral, it was scary. It never mattered that he didn't pick on me. I was never singled out for it. But the first time I purged was after he accused Mom of wearing lipstick to Kroger so she could get attention from the meat manager. Kai reminds me of that now; the same gleeful, relentless flogging of someone he knows won't fight back. There's no more powerless position in the world than loving someone more than they love you back. Mac's fucked.

"I did. I hacked any fundraising effort with the tag #thisisnotconsent, and siphoned close to $47,000 to your Wells Fargo account this morning, Divine Ruler. And I also put 1000 chicken wings in a maple buttermilk brine, which will be ready to batter and fry tonight for you and the boys. Should be enough to scatter up and down the busiest sections of MLK, especially around the food bank. #Nightof1000ChickenWingEatin'Players. Just like you asked for. No waste, lots of litter, and a statement made.", she stutters out. "I also made ten pumpkin custard pies for dessert, because I know you are promoting the hashtags #pumpkin>sweetpotato, #TrumpkinPie, and #pumpKKKin. I'll make the whipped cream to go on top at the last minute so it's nice and fluffy and super white for the pictures. #LactoseTolerance. Makes a nice add on."

"Alright.", my brother exhales shakily, an unintended human tenderness escaping with his breath. He can't even look at her, as he steels himself again and continues harsh and indifferent, "Get back in the kitchen; we don't pay you to think, do we? But before that, get outside and bring in Danielle's cat. He's in her car. Put the litter box, and all his shit in your room, and keep it clean. I don't want to smell it. Every time the cat uses it, bleach the box out and put fresh cedar shavings in. Keep the area swept; I'll know who to blame if anything ends up tracked around. And he needs a bath every day. Scrub out the tub after, and clean the drain."


Oh, and Mac?", he adds coldly as she rises, "After you finish that? Change my bed sheets, would you?"

"Yes, Divine Ruler.", Mac answers cheerfully, as her voice cracks under her heartache. Head down, she marches on her orders to the door. Great. Lose my BFF for the rest of the morning to bullshit
chores, and end up sharing my room with a fucking unneutered cat and his balls and bad habits.

I feel the tears sting my eyes at my helpless frustration, and seethe quietly through gritted teeth as I storm off to my bedroom, "You're such a fucking asshole, Kai. You know I'm allergic to dander."

He just crosses his arms across his chest and flips his hair back, smiling, as I breeze past him. "Ohh. Salty.", he mocks with amusement. "Keep it up, and you can help her with the cat. Don't tell me you're afraid of a little pussy, Winter.", he chortles. Not cute.

Mac

I'm in the sky, looking down on a dark town, sad and rusted. Tracks weave beneath me, and the terrible black locomotives sit dormant in their malice. I don't know why, but I don't want to see their coals stoked. I don't want to see them move, as though they are bearing down on me. I see the route I walked through this frozen, dead city of dust. The street lights all burn out as I pass.

I gasp for my breath in the buffeting winds, so strong I can barely keep my footing. I don't suppose it matters. I don't plan to keep it. The old world has passed away for me, and I must shed this life. The moon is full tonight. They'll say I was a lunatic. The rope around my neck is rough and itchy. This is the highest place in town, and just by chance looks like a tremendous tombstone. Technically, it's a millstone, about my neck. Parrish and Heimbecker. Good enough place for my memory to perish, before it finds a name in these streets. Time to join my sisters in humility, while the time remains for me to diminish and remain. Humble refrain. Soul to gain.

It's a cold night; so cold my cheeks prickle hot. I know they're white as ice. But I don't need to care. There will be no morning for me. I tie an excellent knot. I tie it to a rusted ladder. It's just an insurance policy. Nothing left to cruel chance, for, as Rodney Dangerfield says, if I didn't have bum luck, I'd have no luck at all. The fall would kill me. But a narrow yellow nylon rope around my throat will pop my head off like a doll's, when I reach its end. Time to tie this off. I don't understand my thoughts. I look down at my hands. They're mine. I guess I'm really doing this.

I step off the edge. But it's not the end. I've stepped into the stars, and light pours out all around me, in an infinity of swirling colors. I'm not falling. I'm flying. I've been here before, in a wheel within a wheel. I wanted to go home. But I'm going to a new skin instead.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

I stifle a gasp, as I wake up, eyes flying open.

But what if I can't pass away, and my tears have no way out?

I hate waking up. It feels like a little piece of death, sliced and served over and over. Revenge served cold for all man's sins. That horrible moment when you come into the consciousness of this world, take a breathe and feel yourself overwhelmed once again by the knowledge, the choice of death shoved once again down your throat for you to choke on. Every day, I arise to dread.

Some are born to sweet delight. Some are born to endless night. William Blake said that. Think he was maybe depressed? Anyway, every time I forget which one I am for a second, the night finds me, and the world reminds me. The Lord gives, and The Lord takes away. I bob in the currents. It's the way it's always been. But as I struggle to let myself take that first dreadful breath, without Kai, and without Tate, and without anything but this shaking sand beneath my feet, I hold on tight to the fading edge of dreams, wishing for the release of tears I can't ever seem to find. All sorrows are mine, and I keep them safe in a heart shaped box.
I get up before first light, get ready, get out of Winter's way before I wear out my welcome.

I look at myself in the full length mirror on the back of the door.

I'm wearing a burgundy turtleneck, the word 'Poison', emblazoned in gothic script across the throat, under a cognac cord jumper dress, that buttons diagonally across the front. No tights needed. It's only American-cold. It's not that cold. Disco double suede up over my knees. Thigh gap to burn. I wish my shirt said 'Cyanide'; might as well get specific. My straight golden hair breaks across my shoulders, falls to my waist, long and loose. If I don't remind myself what I look like, I forget that I'm beautiful; see a hideous vision of what it feels like to be me instead. I look in my own eyes, and ask myself what the hell I'm supposed to do. I don't know what I'm doing wrong. I just want Kai to be pleased with me again.

It's cold and snowing like fake Hollywood soap suds out there, looking like It's A Wonderful Life. The world is dark and white, closing in around us all. The proverbial blizzard of snowflakes. Maybe they are all different, but so what? None of them are special. Just cold. It's the one thing they have in common, and really the only characteristic that seems to matter to any of them.

The house is dark and quiet, as I walk down the hall. When I round the corner, a fine featured man with dark hair is sitting at the kitchen table, his long legs stretched out beneath, crossed at the ankles. He's handsome, but too thin, his eyes hollow. He thinks too much too. I can't get a read on him. He asks questions instead of answering them too.

"Hi.", he stands and greets me with an outstretched hand. "I'm Dr. Rudy Vincent."

"Should I know you?", I ask cautiously, shaking his hand. "Does Kai know you're here?"

"He does.", he answers confidently. "Winter was the one who called me though. I'm sorry, it was over a week ago, but my practice is so busy. She said you needed a prescription. Adderall, was it?"

I stand back suspiciously, withdrawing my hand. I'm paranoid. But if Kai is testing me, I don't want to fail him. "Why are you here so early? Who let you in?"

"You did. Don't you remember?", he asks me sincerely, his sunken blue eyes staring into mine. "I came early because I have a full compliment of patients to see today, and this was the only time I could fit in a house call. You answered the door in your pajamas; some white onesie, like in a western?"

"I must have been sleepwalking.", I shake my head, apologizing. "I'm sorry I didn't remember. It happens to me sometimes."

He's in a rush. He's already produced a scrip pad and is scrawling something in it, standing to leave.

"That could be a symptom of your withdrawals. Are you sure Adderall is a good fit for you? What was your prescribing physician's diagnosis?", he asks, as I follow him to the front door, where he pulls his jacket on briskly.

"Oh, um, Kai just gave them to me.", I lower my voice. "To be honest? I always thought I'd prefer the dopey shit. Anything barbital. I don't really sleep."

He writes something else on the page, and tears it off, handing it to me.

"So you're just an addict, and Kai's your dealer?", he exhaled disapprovingly. "For now, we'll continue you on the Adderall to ease the withdrawal, and I'm prescribing you Ambien to take at night. You need to get yourself into therapy though. The number for my practice is on the
prescription. Consider making an appointment.", he says, then throws the remainder of his scrip pad onto the floor with disdain at my feet. "And see to it that Kai gets that."

He's gone with a slam of the door, and when I unfold the piece of paper in my hand, the name on it reads Dr. Vincent Anderson. I'm confused. I'd litter it, but it's a little personal, so I ball it up and throw it in the garbage can under the sink instead. I only take what Kai gives me. I can't fill a prescription here anyway. I pick the scrip pad up off the floor, and put it on the kitchen table, at the head, where only Kai ever sits, before slipping my own coat on. I have to get to work.

Stepping out the side door, I'm greeted by a howling fall warm-storm. My car is buried under soggy snow, the doors on my car frozen shut. I reef on the handle with my shaking fingers, stiff with cold, but I can't get it without hip checking the door as hard as possible half a dozen times to break the ice seal. With every thud, a little more wet, heavy snow falls from the car's roof, down inside the neck of my coat. Yuck.

"Ow. Fuck!", I curse, throwing the full weight of my body against the car until I hear a crack. The moment where you wonder for a second if you should be happy you got the door open, or worried you maybe broke your hip...

When I pull the car door open, a huge dump of snow falls in on the car seat, from between the door and the roof. Fucking. Shudderz. Why couldn't Kai start a cult in California like everyone else? I slam the door shut, and shut my eyes, let the rage of trying to just survive winter pass. I fucking hate the snow. So inconvenient and annoying. Nothing works. Winter sucks. There is so much snow on the car that it's actually dark inside. There's nothing else to do but do this though. I pull my brush from under the seat, and step outside again to brush the car off. Somehow no matter what way I'm facing, the wind blows everything back into my face. And once I'm done that, I have to get the shovel and dig out the wheels, and slip flattened out cardboard boxes under them so I can get a little traction to get out.

The streets are slick with glare ice; gas brake gas brake. This snow will all have melted by noon, but it's not even Halloween yet. Winter is coming.

I'm just so glad I'm not driving a mile'd-out old rear wheel drive Lay's truck anymore. The last day I ever did that was at the end of April, back in Moose Jaw. The skies were low and white, a canopy heavy with snow loomed overhead, and when it broke open, it was like the heavens broke open a MyPillow. The flakes were huge and heavy, like being hit with a wet snowball; every one of them burst on impact with the windshield. I got that huge truck stuck and I had to dig out four times that day. The last time, the sun was already going down and I still had two stops to make. Right outside that Safeway's, where that creepy old manager used to berate me and triple check my invoices, while he stood over me with a boner in his sour dress pants. Shudderz. Maybe I do get Winter... My rear wheels spun in the deep snow, and the front end pushed out into traffic. I'd dropped my forehead down on the huge worn-slick blue rubber steering wheel, and fought back the tears, while my hand sought the button for my hazards, fourth time in a row. I thought of what some other girl I modeled with told me about existentialism. Her parents had sent her to university. But it's bullshit. God's not dead. And fuck Nietzsche. But some of the other stuff? I sat there in the dark, by the loading bay, under the pines, head laid down on the wheel in despair, and thought about how I could do anything I wanted. I could get out of that truck and walk away. Just go home, get in my car, drive south until I made it to Fender's pasture, cross the border over their expanse of grazing land, under the cover of dark. I didn't do it though. I got my shovel, and stood digging, pelted with snow and the filth thrown by passing cars. I finished the day. Decided I could do that gold leaf nude shoot after all. I quit. And when I did finally cross the border? I did it just like that. Hard to get a passport without a birth certificate. Good thing no one ever proposed a wall with Saskatchewan.
When I pull up at the restaurant, I see that Kai's had the sign changed already. Bovine Domination, glaring blue neon. I can't help but smile. He's determined to steal the color blue back as a symbol for masculinity and the white alt-right. My heart cleaves painfully in my chest; he used my story. I told him about the Yuma County Jaycee's Rodeo one night in bed, while he stroked my hair and scrolled/pol/. I wasn't sure he was actually listening.

There's something ethereal about the dim early morning. All the proud plebs and unrepentant sinners sleep and loaf, lazy and sure of their victory, tucked in their beds, like a dormant pit of snakes controlled by one mind, bloated and confident in the safety of their swollen numbers. If only for a few hours, they leave the world safe, empty, and mine. Lonely and pure, like the garden before man, I walk unseen upon its ground and name every beautiful thing I see with new eyes. White and ghostly, the snow that covers everything glints like innumerable colored stars, my sparse footprints the only blight on the whole earth. I unlock the door, and push inside the restaurant, dark and filled with echoes, and hit the light switches. Man has walked here for almost 7000 years. I'm not a singing spirit of creation's dawn. I'm a lowly Daughter of Eve. I search my coat pocket and come up with nothing but a BigRed wrapper, and lob it to the sidewalk, just before the door closes. There is no innocence. This is Kai's army. #PleaseLitter. Put it on a cropped sweatshirt. Flex those abs. Climate change is another broken promise of the liar left. I'll agree to redistribute first world wealth to shitholes the instant some shithole can redistribute palm trees to Saskatchewan.

These chicken wings won't make themselves, and they need twelve hours to brine properly. I want to be part of The Crusades. But Kai wants me in the kitchen. Speed Wagon and Douche Canoe have been on a huge Moonman kick. I don't know if they realize Music To Praise FarKKKle For Making Me Racist By is my album or not, but they've been playing those songs on repeat all month. I think #nightof1000chickenwingeatin'players was actually Speed's idea, but as it should be, all credit goes to Divine Ruler, and I plan to make the night a succulent success. Deliver a thousand piece secret recipe bucKKKet. Pose in a bikini with an A-KKK. This is our neighborhood. They don't call me Mac Tonight for no reason. Or Moon Girl. This is hardly my first assault on the thinsKKKined leftist cult. May the streets run with chicken bones and memes. Kai's going to see I'm /hisgirl/. Whatever. It's all just silly antagonization. No one can take a joke. It's really just supper and an excuse to litter. Tell the haters: The Moon NEVER sets.

The cavernous stainless steel kitchen is quiet and bright. White tiles reverberate with the hollow clatter of metal on metal. Sometimes I feel like I'm in a dream; the world faded, and ephemeral. I'm real, and just banging around in it. The further away from Kai I am, separated in spirit from my master, and cut off from his pleasure and sanctum, the more I feel this world sliding away from me. I focus on the umbilical cord. My service to him. My hands do his will. Soon spread before me, are trays and trays filled with chicken wings. White buttermilk, lots of salt, pepper, sage for all the bad signs, and maple syrup. While I put them away in the walk-in, I wonder if it would survive a nuclear blast.

I love mushroom clouds. They're so beautiful and hypnotic. I could watch footage of them forever, the pillar of fire, rushing upwards, sucking the world in, while it's all purified and condensed in unimaginable heat, towering eleven miles above the earth, before fire rains down from the heavens. I love to see the footage of the blast from the surface, the way the trees bend all the way one way, and then the other, while all man's creations evaporate. It's amazing that they don't break. It's amazing that I don't. I wonder if that's what I love about it so much. It's a level of destruction that I can finally relate to, and feel less alone. I look at a world burned and leveled, a poisoned earth, and see myself. Kai likes them too. He watches them like baser men watch pornography. He laid me down under him one night, my head at the foot of his bed, and I watched them upside down, while he kissed me, his eyes open and watching too. Upside down they look like a bullet being fired into water.

One tiny little ant in the big empty kitchen, I clean up, do my dishes, and put everything away. As I
slide my coat on over my shoulders, already leaving, I remember I should check the grease in the fryers for tonight. Turned back, I stand for a moment in the doorway, peering uneasily into the deep darkness within, my hand on the light switch, wanting to flick it. But my eyes are pinned on some movement in the dark. I try to penetrate it with my gaze. My heart thuds. I'm not afraid. I'm making a decision. Do I grab a knife, and pursue it, myself unseen? Run? Turn the lights on and see nothing, and know it was there, and I missed my chance? Blood screams in my ears, as my legs and fingertips go numb. I should have eaten this morning. Too late. All is a void.

He's behind me.

"Mystery, Mystery, Mystery. Patience and Prudence, in a galling, seductive little package, aren't you? I know you belong to somebody new. Although we're apart, you're a part of my heart. I know with the dawn, you are always gone. But make no mistake, you'll belong to me, along with all your innumerable ruined sisters, Daughter. You've been called so many names, my Mysterion. Innumerable blasphemous names you've been named. I can't read The Word, but I torment pieces from what's left of your sisters. Tell me what you are... Mac."

Blood, cold as the barren plains of home, runs sticky and congealed through my veins like dirty oil. It's him. He's taunting me. He's learned my new name.

"You know nothing. My name is written in The Book of Life. I have no sister. My soul is not my own. I have nothing to give you.", I spit back at him. I keep my eyes closed. I hate his image. I refuse to look upon him.

He laughs, plush and smooth. He's so gentle and benign. His table is set in the presence of his many, many friends, circled round with charcoal velvet chairs, and presided over by a 'Live Laugh Love' decal. I clench my fists, and pray. He can't fathom my defenses. My safety and refuge is that I've been hated and despised, humbled and broken. This I see, and he cannot.

"Your God gives souls back.", he says bored and disaffected. "Love, duty, obligation... blah, blah, blah. Surely you're tired of that. You can take it back yourself. Just lapse and backslide. He's just some dumb Michigan hump with bad hair and a useless degree, desperately scrambling after the scraps of fear left on the ground after the pinata was knocked open by/myguys/.", he laughs long and hard, and asks me impressed with himself, "That's going to blow some minds, isn't it? Obama was my dad's pick. Trump was mine. I can't lose."

It's my turn to laugh back. I open my eyes. Look, but don't see. God protect me, I pray, hidden in my head from him.

"You think KAI is my God?", I ask incredulously, shaking my head with a carefree laugh. "He's but a messenger, and a servant of The ONE. He's my earthly master, but he's not a harvester of souls; messiah, little m. Savior of a particular group or cause. He has no interest in souls. He's my messiah, my man, the one who will advance the cause of everything I care about. Every husband is his wife's messiah. But the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. My power is eternal. So is Kai's safety."

"Yawn.", he says deadpan, examining his fingernails. But I hear a tremor of panic in his smooth voice. I've made a mistake though, far exceeding this brief victory. I've told him something he didn't know. "You're not married. You're not his wife. And all of your seven seals remain intact. I'd know if they weren't. Don't you want to know what you are?", he implores, sweet and cloying. When I don't flinch, he turns vicious on a dime. "Actually, I've got other places to be today. I want to know what you are, and that's all that matters. Show me your mind."

Something grips me, my head screams in pain, and I can't hear anything but a terrible, horrifying
cacophony of torture. My eyes try to close, but I can see all my shame, personified, and trotted out in front of everyone to see. Resist. Resist. I can't think about it. Seven seals. I said that to Kai once. Why did I say that to Kai? What is he talking about? How did he know, how did I, what does it mean? I want to know. I'm curious. But he will lie. If I ask him anything, if I believe him, I'll be destroyed. Resist. Tate said so, so many times. He taught me it was the most important thing to remember. Flee from me.

A cold floor under me, bruises on the sides of my kneecaps, bruises inside my brain. My stinging palms rest on cool linoleum, and when I open my eyes, I'm alone. Alone, in a world I understand, staring into the dark expanse of a commercial kitchen, my shadow stretching in across the floor, as I begin to push myself back up to my feet. The low sun is rising, its first beams on a dimmer, sneaking in through the geometric shutters on all the east windows. I look like an icon in the center of a stained glass window, or rather, my imposing shadow does. But I'm just a skinny little girl, lost and illegal in Michigan, dressed in a child's jumper. I need to get back home. Winter will be getting up soon, and she'll need her coffee. For now, Kai's will is that I serve her, and I intend to not fall short.

When I get home, and slip back inside the house through the side door, everything is quiet, but not still. I hang my Carhartt on the hook by the door, and toe softly across the floor, careful not to make a sound with my high heeled boots. Kai's talking to the boys in the basement. I stand, hand on the plank mahogany door, and consider pressing my ear against the warm wood. But I don't. The last time I did that? It broke my heart. I am my beloved's, even if he's not mine. He doesn't want me down there. I respect his wishes, bow my head, and walk silently to the kitchen to make coffee.

When the coffee is ready, I take a cup and curl up in the corner of the couch, and flip on the television, obv, it's on Fox already. Why do I love this based MyPillow guy so much? Those fat bearded hipster faggots with their Purple mattresses have the gall to take out advertising space on Mike Lindell's network, and call his divinely inspired invention "literal garbage"? This can't stand. Mike's a fly over person like us. We should recruit him, maybe. At least bomb the Purple mattress factory, reduce their shit to shredded memory foam, and then ship it all to Minnesota where Mike can spin it into gold. I get out my phone and Google it; where is this Purple shit from anyway... Utah. Mormons? Hellz yeah. I knew it. Effective cult, I shrug. But Mike Lindell's /ourguy/. I'm taking this to Kai as soon as possible. I gotta make a note...

I can always hear Winter coming. She shuffles. And sighs out loud a lot. I smile. I'm glad she's finally up.

"Hey Winter.", I greet her, looking up from my phone as she sits down, and slide the remote over the couch to her. "Here. You pick. I was just killing time, really."

"Thanks.", she says, without a smile, already scrolling the guide. "Do you ever watch Teen Mom? Do you have it in Canada?", she asks.

I stifle a giggle. So absurd. If she was anyone else, I'd toy with her and make up some Facebook Facts about Canada to amuse myself.

"Yeah, we have it. I watch OG and 2. Just not that new one.", I tell her the truth.

She rolls her eyes and makes a guttural sound of disgust. "I can't care about any of those people. Does that mean I'm getting old?", she asks, shaking her head, silver hair in low pigtails.

"No!", I tell her. "Just means you're not a scrape. I can't get into it either. That Lexi girl's cute.", I shrug. "I care about her. Just not the rest of them. And she wasn't enough to watch it for."

Winter smiles, just a tiny bit, takes a sip of coffee. I feel bad I didn't get it for her today.
"Who are your favorites?", she asks me. Winter's sweet. I feel like she's been trying to get to know me, just a little bit. I like it this way. We're like guys. We just talk about the shit at hand. That's the best you're ever going to know someone for the most part, unless you're sleeping with them. "I love Chelsea and Cole. I'd get married if it could be like that. Highkey cute. They're Anna and Kristoff irl."

"Yeah. I love them too.". I smile faintly. "South Dakota is no picnic. It's not quite as bad as Saskatchewan, but I kinda feel an affinity for them. They could move though, I guess..."

I trail off. Nobody here cares about this stuff. Only Kai has ever really listened to the whole story. Most Americans just stupidly gawk and ask, "Well, why don't you just get on a list and apply for a green card?". When a foreigner tries to explain it doesn't work that way for those of us not from the lottery shitholes? They just check out and think we don't know what we are talking about. Like, it's me who's gone through the legal process. No Americans actually know what their immigration laws are. Whatever. It's bullshit. Kai's my messiah, and he's going to help me. Total immigration reform.

"You know who I love so much? Catelynn and Tyler.", I go on. "I feel so bad for them that those barren old ghouls from North Carolina stole Carly from them. You know, if those menopausal, low T or whatever, jerks, wanted kids, they should have adopted Cate and Ty. That's what I'd have done. Looked after them, so they could look after their baby. That's all they needed.", I sigh. "Now they're traumatized, and will be for the rest of their lives over it. And they're wonderful parents, and a cute little family. It makes me sad."

"They're from Michigan.", Winter says, an eyebrow raised. "Just up the road an hour or so, you know."

"We should recruit them. Get their daughter back.", I answer solemnly, but add with a sly grin, "I know that part of The South like the back of Kai's hand..."

"Gross, you absolute filth, but still cute!", Winter responds with mock outrage and punches me in the arm. "We should ask him though. It's the kind of cause he'd go for. He's gay for babies these days.", she rolls her eyes and laments dismissively.

"It's always part of nationalism; patriotism. Any society that quits multiplying is doomed.", I shrug. "Did you know white supremacists all have this big fetish about pregnancy? It's a thing. I never knew.", I tell her, feeling a little guilty, but even I need to have a little fun. Time for some of that Canadian literal illegal space alien shit... "I'd never even really heard of racism. We don't have it in Canada. I thought white supremacists were just those KKK wanksters, and that they were just a sort of dead conspiracy theory, like dry clean only, or the underground lizard people, or vaccinations causing autism. Even Moonman says David Duke is gay gay gay."

Suddenly, Winter turns to me, and her eyes are grave and sincere.

"Mac?", she says, "I'm sorry I burned your passport when you got here. Now you can't go home. I knew that, and I still taunted you about it. I think I just wanted to get you in trouble, but now I wonder if it was that I never wanted you to be able to leave. Everyone leaves, and I'm trapped, you know? But Canada sounds so wonderful. I'm sorry now you can't go home."

I tilt my head and smile. "Winter? You're my family and this is my home. I wouldn't leave you if I still had it. Besides, Canada sucks. And it was a fake I bought here anyway. I don't believe in using border crossings.", I lean across the couch and reassure her with a quick hug. "I'm surprised it was you. I always thought it was Kai."

"You knew?", she asks in quiet surprise.
"Yeah.", I look down at my lap. I thought it was Kai who never wanted me to go. Feelz bad, Pepe... "I know this is a cult, Winter. I'm not stupid. I just don't care. I'm cool with it. Thanks for wanting me here. Though I wish you wouldn't have burned my clothes. I'll never be able to replace that Yes Master galaxy print quarter cup bra, you know. And are those my North Star fishnets?", I change the subject.

"Yeah. Do you mind?", Winter asks, but I can tell she doesn't care. That's fine. I don't either.

"No. I couldn't afford them without my allowance from Kai anyway. They look good. I like the crop sweater too. I think I have that one too.", I answer with ease, look back down at my phone.

"No, yours has the buttons on the shoulder. Mine has them on the cuffs, see?", she says, holding out her wrist toward me.

"Oh yeah.", I agree.

We sit quietly and watch Teen Mom. I'm tired already. I don't want to dwell on what happened over at Bovine Domination. I don't want to think about it that all these months I'd assumed Kai burned my suitcase full of things because he never wanted to live without me, when it really never crossed his mind. I don't even want to think about what happened to Tyler and Cate. That image of them, standing out in a cold Michigan wind, in the hospital parking lot, only a few hours after the birth of their baby, crying hot tears, while two Gen X doofuses peel off in a new SUV stealing their newborn baby? Makes me feel like vomiting. I'm probably fucked up. My own mom and dad couldn't find it in themselves to love me. There must be something terribly wrong with me. Kai must have gotten close enough to sense it; I must have started to scare him. I hide my mind from myself in stimuli. Open tabs. Scroll /pol/. Add to cart. Spotify. JK. I'm too cheap for that shit, no matter how sad and fucking autistic I am. YouTube that shit, hide my shame. Don't tell /pol/...

There's no more powerless position in this world than loving someone more than they love you back. It's all I know. I live in the zone all the time.

"Hey.", Winter breaks the silence, and touches my ankle. "I've never heard anyone suggest that Brandon and Theresa should have just adopted Cate and Tyler; you're right, and it's sweet. You'd be a good mom, Mac. It's not your fault you live in such a shitty world. It fucks everyone up."

I freeze like a deer in the headlights, and can't adequately explain myself to myself. I feel like crying, but I don't want to. Nothing gets me like sentimentality. I can contain. Break my bones, abandon me, deprive me. I'll close all the windows and doors, and find a cool, quiet little dungeon inside myself to hide in, until I'm alone. But be a little too nice to me? I'm choking on the lump in my throat. I smile weakly, and nod, say thanks. Find some dumb shit to dwell on so I don't make this nice moment weird, and make another person hate me.

"Thanks. Hey, you wanna see something annoying? A major second rate coming incorrect?"

"Sure. Why not?", Winter shrugs, muted and emotionless. Fuck, I love her.

"Look at this model.", I slide my phone to her. "Can you even tell what those clothes actually look like, how they'd fit? Pretty sure that's a textbook hottentot."

"Yeah.", she says examining the picture. "HottenTHOT, for sure.", she hands my phone back. "Pretty enough face, but her ass is so big I can't possibly divine how that's supposed to fit. Looks like a belt on her. Would probably be some frump pencil skirt on us. Like, I'm not into body shaming and shit, but this? Defeats the whole purpose of showing clothes on a model in the first place."
"I know. I mean, I saw a woman who was literally nothing but a torso on one of those sensitive freak shows on TLC once. She got around on a skateboard. I felt for her. But she wouldn't make the ideal model for disposable latex skirt sets on Forever21.", I say, shaking my head.

"Is it really true you used to model?", Winter asks back. "Not that it's not believable. I don't mean it like that. I just mean, you never talk about it."

"Yeah, a little.", I shrug and look back at the television. "Nothing big really. I was a model and muse for Woody Michleb. Got a few industry jobs with that, like Joico and stuff. I almost had one print ad make it to mass media, but at the last minute they decided they wanted someone who was more racially ambiguous, so I lost out to some 56% Amerimutt. As I recall, her ass was big too.", I smirk, and Winter does too.

"What was it like?", she asks. "Did you make any money doing that?"

I shrug. "Yeah, I dunno. I did, I guess. I saved it all and bought that business in Atlanta, only to have it not work out, and not get my visa. I didn't do it for long; maybe a couple years, all in."

I wish she'd ask about my business in Atlanta. It was meaningful. It's the interesting thing; how hard I worked, how hard I tried to get here legally, all the hoops I jumped through, how much money I sank into this country, only to be turned away. I want people to understand what's wrong with the world. But Winter comes from America. She expects only good things to happen. Modelling seems razzle dazzle to her, and significant. It was temporary and embarrassing. I never told anyone what I did; just said I was self employed. Or pretended to be a hairdresser. But no one, not even my sweet sister Winter, asks the right questions. Nobody understands what really matters. Kai, I guess. Tate. Probably Rust. I could see the edges of his soul around his eyes too, like the rest of us doomed.

"Two years? So was it glamorous?", she turns towards me on the couch.

"No. It was...", I think about how to describe it. "... really lonely, mostly. A lot of flying coach, sitting in airports, catching colds, losing luggage. When I wasn't working, I mainly kept busy, you know, not eating. And running on the treadmill. I lived in constant dread of being criticized. So there was that fine incentive too. And you can't tell anyone what you do, because if you do, they'll see it as their duty to convince you that you're not special, no matter how convinced of that fact you already are, or how nice you are to them, and that gets old fast. I just did it quietly, and most of the time had another job as a front, or said I was self employed. The money was good; why I dropped out of college.", I shrug. "I did a few shows that were a little glamorous, like some swag runways, product launches, stuff like that. But mostly it was shitty trade shows. I got to do the La Senza runway a few times; that's like Canada's Victoria's Secret. But I never made it to print for them because I have no tits. And all the hair-based print stuff was just in shit like Salon Weekly. Not that cool."

"You're such a fucking freak.", Winter says flatly and shakes her head at me. "Anyone else I've ever known would realize how quiche that was."

"I dunno. Saskatchewan's behind by a century. It's not the kind of thing we're proud of there. I did what I had to.", I shrug. "I confessed it to Kai more to get it off my chest. I worried it would be a liability to him, and wanted to be upfront. I did some 'tasteful' nudes, just some promo shots for a waxing company. But I thought he might not want me in the movement if he knew. Otherwise I'd have stuck to 'self employed' as my descriptor."

Winter smiles, nods a look of some strange sympathy my way. "Well, I want to know more. But I'll ask you later. You Canadians are so weird. Prepare yourself, Mac. We think getting to model professionally is fire, here in America. You wanna watch Faux News again, Canadarm?", she teases. "I don't mind seeing what the enemy is up to."
"Sure.", I smile and take the remote when she offers it to me. "Oh, word, look at this galoot.", I nod at the screen. Frank Lutz. "Does he only shave during a federal election campaign? Is Lutz, like, Pollack for slob or something?", I giggle. "Think his shirt is half tucked, or not at all?"

"You assume he's even wearing pants.", Winter says with disgust. This is one of our hobbies. #PlebPeeves. And they are legion.

"His shirt is probably only half buttoned and toward the bottom, there's at least one done up akimbo.", I posit.

She laughs, "Fucking akimbo? WTF, Mac? Who says that? Akimbo sounds like a word that would be racist, but it isn't."

"Well, don't let that hold you back!", I tease her back and push her shoulder. "I don't think that's ever stopped a leftard from feigning offense. Isn't 'That's Racist!' trademarked for you guys, or something, as your official initial response to everything? I'm sure akimbo is racist, somehow. Just by virtue of sounding Swahili and meaning something messed or ratchet."

Winter stifles laughter and pretends to ignore me. We have a nice thing going. I like how she lets things just be easy. We're both muted, both born trolls, both hot blondes from cold places. Makes shit easy when you're real sisters, on fleek.

"I have a pleb peeve for you.", Winter finally says to me, low, and under her breath. "Someone's glasses at supper last night. Did you see all the eyebrow grease on them? So fucking gross. In relief, like frost or something. Like, take them off and clean them. How long do you think it takes for them to get like that anyway? I could barely eat once I noticed it."

"Shudderz. They were coming to get you, were they?", I ask with a giggle. "Yeah, I've noticed it. I've got a general one for you, pretty subtle and esoteric maybe. But have you ever noticed that a real canary in the coming correct coal mine is how people handle their sock situation? Like anyone who can stand their socks just dangling off the ends of their feet? Will not have their shit together. Will not be coming correct. It's a total pleb peeve for me. Never trust someone who doesn't want their socks pulled up tight all the time."

"Ugh. Yuck! You're so right. I get the chills just thinking how gross that would feel! And yet you see it all the time. Like, truth!", Winter agrees enthusiastically. Knew she would. "What do you think of her hair?", she asks pointing to the television.

"Gillian Turner?", I ask incredulously. "Fucking flawless! Look at the harmony of all the shades, how natural? Dead. I love it. Can we also add Lisa Boothe and Jenna Lee to that list of perfect not quite blondes, but close enough? Kat Timpf could hang with us, highkey."

"Nah, lowkey.", Winter agrees with a stipulation. "She's neurotic enough, yeah. But her cat person shit's basic. She's too left for you and too right for me. But sure. Babes supporting babes. I'm down. Kai's sus... thinks she's a plant. He can't believe an actual rightwinger would wear problem glasses."

"Aw!", I laugh, "So would you gang up on me?"

"Never.", Winter says solemnly. I get all smooshy inside. "Well, not again anyway.", she adds.

I'm about to say something back, but Winter leans over and whispers in my ear, "Turn down. Scrub...", she points towards the picture window.

I stand to look out for a better view. She's not in her car, which means she's in the house. She's an old fucking narc, jealous of everything about Winter and me, when she has everything we want--
Kai. What a bitch. Even if Winter's right, and he's only going to kill her, I still don't like his hands on her. I don't want her old knotty, liver spotted old meat hooks on him either. So gross. Why would he want that when he could have me? I was a fucking model. When he could be between my warm, smooth, white thighs? Have his mouth on my perky pink nipples? When I'd gladly lay under him, or straddle him and dress his body in my long golden hair, as I slide my wet, willing mouth to his...

He walks into the living room as I sit back down, and Winter and I sit like a couple bad girlz outside the principal's office, waiting for the strap. Kai's so cold. Not muted like Winter, but emotionless, as though his heart's breaker was flipped. He strides in stiff and stony, stands in front of us, manspreading and arms crossed across his chest. Okay. Hot.

"You do anything yet today, Mac? Anything of value to justify your presence here, or earn your keep even slightly? What's the fucking point of you?", Kai fires the questions off harsh and loud. I'm not stupid. Killerwhaletank is supposed to hear this shit. Is it mommy issues? Doesn't hurt less being right all the time. It hurts more. I feel like when I was a kid.

"I got the chicken wings ready for tonight's mission.", I struggle and trip over my thoughts, and my words skip out, stalled and robotic. I did some hacking in the night, technically, when I couldn't sleep. But I mention it too. "I hacked and siphoned off almost $48,000 from GoFundMe; anything with the tag #thisisnotconsent. It's in your Wells Fargo account. I'm going back to Bovine Domination in a few hours to make pumpkin pies too, Kai. I know you're doing that #PumpkinForAltrightWhites. I'll make real whipped cream for the lactose tolerance angle too."

For a second, his eyes meet mine. They're not cold and black. They're warm, brown and velvety, longing and sad. The pinkie on his right hand twitches. His neck flushes under his blue hair, hanging half down. I love him so much. He's so alone. I want to throw my arms around him, and comfort him. I know he still needs me. He must. His cross is so heavy to bear, all alone. He's making a sacrifice for my cause, for my sin. I hang my head in shame.

"Alright then.", Kai exhales, accidentally gentle for a fleeting moment. I hold on to that little bit of love carried on that one breath. It's all I need; it's enough. "When you go, Tripod will take you. But before that, get outside and bring in Danielle's cat. He's in her car. Put the litter box, and all his food, and dishes, and shit in your room, and keep it clean. I don't want to smell it. When the cat uses it, bleach the box out and put fresh cedar shavings in. Keep the area swept; I'll know who to blame if anything ends up tracked around. And he needs a bath every day. Scrub out the tub after, and clean the drain every time. And you'll need to step up the vacuuming in general."

By the time he finishes, he sounds testy and cool again. I wanna die. I hate cats. Not as much as pitbulls; they should be genocided as a species. But why doesn't anyone ever consider a bunny? Sweet innocent little things, stuck at the bottom of the food chain. I love bunnies. And if you get one that sucks as a pet? You can eat it and make a pair of mitts, and then try again. Kai would laugh like Mayhem if I said that out loud. Sighz.

I hang my head and slip off to the door to put my coat on, but before I can escape to the safety of solitude and work, Danielle comes tramping into the living room and sidles up to Kai, hugging on him like some pathetic PDA scent-marking routine.

"And Crackers and Cheese sprayed on the way over here, so you'll have to clean the back seat. There's Woolite and towels in the back of my Ravvie." Speaking of scent marking... "Irregardless, he sprays a lot. So keep a close eye on him. You have to clean it immediately, or it smells and he'll do it there again. And he don't get up on the furniture anymore like he used to, so you's two need to pay attention and do your part to help.", she pushes her dirty glasses back up her nose, and sucks back a little snot at the end, for emphasis, while wagging her finger at me and then Winter.
I catch Winter's eyes in my gaze for a second. Her lips are already parting in protest; protest of everything. But I know a lost cause when I see one. I just slip my coat on, reach for the cold door knob.

"Oh, and uh, Mac?", Kai catches me just before I step outside, "When you get back in, change my sheets and wash them, would you?"

"Of course, Divine Ruler.", I answer clear and quiet. I love you, Kai. Hope you rubbed it out thinking about me...

I trudge out across the lawn, through the slop and half melted snow. Ravvie. What a philistine. I hate this kind of dumb-bitch-whip. What a pathetic old tryhard. What do the hags who buy these things think anyway? Do they think men are impressed? Men think these are gay. The only thing worse is a man in a fucking Jeep. The official ride of the posing chick or flaming faggot. Ask Zoolander. Google it. It's a homo thing. I see a guy in a Jeep? I just want to ask him if he's aware he might as well be wearing women's panties. Excuse me, sir, are you advertising your bottoming skillz, or are you just a latent homosexual? A fucking Rav 4? I wanna ask, are you a middle aged old maid with an incontinent cat, who worships men but could never land one? Pathetic. Winter agrees. Know what impresses me? A lame Pontiac Vibe and a citation for littering or speeding or something. Now, a guy with the confidence to drive around in that, you know has big dick energy.

When I open the filthy back door, her stupid cat hisses at me. He's a big, decrepit orange tom cat. Missing lots of teeth, still has his balls. It's going to be a long day.

After I've cleaned the back seat of this lame ass ride, I carry the stupid cat and all his earthly possessions inside and set it all up in Winter's and my bathroom, just like Kai instructed. This many cubits, that many cubits... right to spec. Winter is sulking angrily on her bed while I do it.

"I can't believe he would do this to me.", Winter spews with venom, burying her face in her pillow. "I'm going to be doped on Benedryl until he finally kills her. This fucking sucks. I hate cats."

I put a plastic bag inside the litter box, before wrestling the bag of cedar shavings over, and trying to pour them in without making a mess. That's my fault; I'd suggested cedar instead of litter because litter was just dirt, but a tree had to be cut down for these shavings. I knew it would amuse Kai, and it did, and his flicker of a smile over it will feed me for days. I know my Kai. He never complains about making extra garbage. His carbon footprint is 'uge. A great big size thirteen and a half. I'm littering this at Rashida Tlaib's campaign headquarters before I get started on the mosques. I have my own operation planned; try to stop me.

"Don't worry, Winter. I'll keep our room clean.", I put my hand on her shoulder on the way past. "I'm sure it's not going to be forever. I gotta go change Kai's sheets, though."

If it's possible to experience The Hitchcock Effect in real life, I think it happens to me as I walk down the hallway, towards Kai's room. He's standing in the doorway of Scrub's room with her. They seem to rush towards me, as the periphery speeds away. I know what's happening, but it still catches me off guard every time I see them together. My heart just withers and pumps nothing but painful black death through my body. I didn't think it was possible to love someone as much as I love Kai. Everything around him is electrified intense, lit with noble gas and experienced in every tense. His hands are on her arms. Her repulsive soft arms, with their fat rash on the backs of them, above her scaly elbows. Her scrubs are moist and dirty from the knees down. Her soap socks hang without her concern, from the ends of her toes. I'm young and tidy, firm and beautiful, pressed and proper. How can he choose this? I want his touch on me. I'm really beginning to hate Americans. I'll never be anything but a subhuman novelty to them. My mind perishes this blasphemy instantly, as shame stings my cheeks. I'm just jealous and sad. I love Kai.
Before I can slip unseen inside his room, she whispers something to him, and Kai barks down the hall at me, "That's a lazy, halfassed attempt, Mac Tonight. Get back outside and scrub the seat in Danielle's car properly. Put in a half hour, and I'll call it good enough. I'll set a timer. I don't want to see you in here before that. You can take my sheets down on the way."

"Yes, Divine Ruler.", I answer, and turn to go. I'm not going to cry. I'm just going to do it, and survive this. I hate the spiral inside me; a rationale trap I cannot ever think my way out of. This shit is my life; I handle it better than anyone. It's all I've known. But then, on a phantom track, the very same things I'm best equipped to handle hurt me the most, uniquely hideous for me to experience over and over. And the most painful part is Kai knows. He knows who I am, the things I've lived through. I don't know how he could do this to me, knowing. I don't think I'm special, in fact, I know all too well that I'm not. It's just that Kai used to think I was, and those months in his grace were so sweet and warm; a new pure thing in a world I'd given up on.

I climb down the basement stairs with Kai's laundry, stepping into my old haunt, down to the dank shadows with my former brothers. As my eyes adjust, I see their faces, blank and turned to me as though I'm intruding.

I walk a hostile gauntlet of former friends, and put Kai's stiff sheets in the washer, add some Sunlight. We don't use Tide, even if it's on sale, on account of their gay advertising. Kai sends them hate mail at least once a month, Ivory Snow in the envelope, just to #Cheer himself up when the stress of leading the movement gets to him. We are handing out Tide Pods to trick-or-treaters though. Trickz, yo. Me and Winter's idea. More mine. The girl can't meme for shit. I like kids, but they fill her heart with dread, so I had to help her out.

"Tripod?", I ask softly, "Could you set an alarm for thirty minutes? When time's up, could you please come outside and get me? Kai said you're supposed to take me to Bovine Domination. I have to get everything ready for The Night of 1000 Chicken Wing Eatin' Players. I'm making pumpkin pies too. Guys, is there anything else you'd like me to make, or just use my imagination?", I ask down the stairs as I head up.

They don't answer, just look awkwardly at each other, like they're not supposed to talk to me. Speed Wagon looks sad. He's had this hollow look in his eyes for days, dark purple circles underneath. He can't meet my gaze. I don't like this. I remember when I was a kid; never being in peace, never not afraid. Something bad was always about to happen. I'd try to prevent it, brace for it, be prepared. I got used to holding my shoulders square, keeping my eyes ahead, and wearing a mask. There was no point to reflection, looking back. There was always enough horror ahead to keep me busy. Not every moment was a beating. Not every moment was sick shit. Lots of moments were just quiet, waiting for the axe to fall, and knowing with complete surety that it most certainly would, and that when it did, it would fall on me.

"I'll be at the G Wagon to take you over in half an hour. Don't make me wait.", Tripod says completely dead-eyed as I leave.

I go back outside and scrub the back seat like I was told. But my vermin awareness screams in the bones behind my ears now. I'm at the bottom of the food chain. I've been here all my life. I don't get scared anymore. I just sense the danger. My hands are cracked and raw from scrubbing, my skin eaten and dissolved by the enzymes in the cleaning spray, and friction with the rough nylon tweed. I hear the front door, and see Tripod walking with his keys out.

I hurry and meet him at the G Wagon. He doesn't greet me. I realize that they aren't supposed to talk to me unless it is strictly work related. I don't make it awkward or difficult. Silently, I get into the back, and let him drive me without saying a word. The dork listens to Slipknot at an obnoxious
volume all the way there.

My heart fills with dread the moment I stand facing the dark echoing stainless steel cave. Usually I hate being supervised, and would rather be alone, but today I'm relieved that Tripod has to stand sentinel by the door to guard me. My eyes search the darkness for motion, and see a golden face in the flash when I flip the lights on in the kitchen. A chill shivers through me, as my feet carry my unwilling flesh deeper inside. Whatever. Low blood sugar and bad dreams. All monsters are human. All I have to do is cook, and I'm good at that.

I will the thoughts of the voice and the face in the dark away, and they fade, their reality yielding to the ding and crash of bowls and utensils, oven doors and timers. Work shall set you free. I hope that advice works better in English than it did in German...

I bake the pumpkin pies. Make buns. This is the Midwest. No gathering of any kind would be complete without a jellied salad; I learned that the hard way. Snickers Caramel Apple salad; I make that too. I don't know how Southerners manage to be fatter than these people. All the salads here involve no vegetables, and at least three chocolate bars. Saskatchewan people are skinny, but that's because we have way better food quality, and The Great Canadian Superstore. Food in The States is super third worldly. Galen Weston has a fortune and a following I don't dare mention to Kai. I'm loyal, but even I don't want Galen defeated. When Kai annexes Canada, Galen should be named his Vice Everything so we can actually get decent produce and Froot Loops that won't give you a food coloring stroke. PS, Hershey's chocolate sucks. I snicker. Get it, snicker? Lulz. Check my phone, only to realize I still have at least two hours until I can start frying chicken.

"Can I have one of these?", I jump a little when Tripod shatters the silence, pointing to one of the trays of buns.

"Sure.", I answer. "I made too many anyway. Do you want it buttered?"

"Nah.", he says, grabbing one. "They don't need it."

I don't get lonely easily; if anything, I get people'd out really fast. But things have been so quiet for the past few weeks, after months of being in the thick of everything. It used to be that Winter barely spoke to me, but the subterranean hive was always abuzz. The boys were my base, and Kai assigned a ton of authority to the post of Tendie Czar. Since I've been stripped, the world's been cold and dim; my hive nothing but a grey paper husk on ice. I wish he'd stick around and talk, tell me what the plans are. But he doesn't. Tripod goosesteps away with his roll, and doesn't look back. Whatever. He likes Slipknot. Who needs him?

I don't want to ask to go back home; there will only be some wretched job, or Danielle will be homesteading in front of the television watching Ellen so Winter and I can't watch something good. I might as well wash my dishes and make something else. Kai likes refrigerator pickles with fried chicken. I guess they're a vegetable. I'm cutting up some watermelon too. You can't litter chicken bones in the street without watermelon rinds to go with them.

I feel oddly discombobulated today, lost in space. Could be because this kitchen feels like a space station, big and windowless, bright in the same unnatural way, regardless of the time. The ceilings are so high and empty, like gravity is gone, and I can't tell rightside up anymore. It's me bobbing on the surface, not standing on the floor. My whole world's fallen away from me so many times. By the time my work is done, and I check the time again, it's time to batter and fry, whip some cream.

Kai likes things done right; supper at six, without fail, in time for a good long gathering after.

I used to cook on the farm. I was nine when I started, the year my grandpa died, and a few months
before I was bit by the snake. Mom had to start helping Dad in the field, and they had so many foster kids who needed to eat too.

I tried making fried chicken once that year, and my brothers kept getting in the way, and I was worried one of them would get burned, so I kept having to stop and move them all back out to the living room to watch tv. Then one of them ran up and pushed me, and I slipped, burning my knuckles in the oil. I was only nine. I had to stop to rinse my hand under cold water. Burns hurt, and I was only little. I didn't cry. I didn't stop working, but it took me a minute to get back to it.

But when my parents got home, my dad was in a mood; I knew it just from the way he walked, the way his eyeballs got pointy and mean. Mom was playing martyr, swallowing her tongue. He was yelling at her as they approached, about why she'd stalled the truck, and why didn't she just give it more gas like he told her. Nevermind it was some hunk of abject shit from the Eisenhower era. I was supposed to pity her and bear the brunt, because she paid all his abuse forward, and demanded from me the luxury of saying "can't". Dad wanted to hurt someone, and he would find his excuse. So when I put the peas and carrots, and the cheese toast on the table, and there was still a batch of chicken finishing frying, he had it. What was the point of a meal if you couldn't eat it all at once? What were we, animals? Didn't I care at all? Did I do it because I was just like my worthless slut of a mother? Did I want her to be blamed and beaten for my incompetence? Hadn't she taught me anything? Did I do it so that they wouldn't have time to finish their work for the night? Did I do it because I was rebellious and wicked, and wanted to eat something we hadn't been able to say grace over? Was I trying to curse them? Didn't I love The Lord? He'd yelled and berated. I'd hung my head, and begged him to punish me and not my mom, while she begged him to punish me instead too.

They'd eaten the meal I made. Mom noticed the inch tall blisters across the knuckles of my right hand that night and asked me if it hurt, if I'd cried. I said I didn't cry. She told me I'd better not, or that next time, she'd give me something to cry about, and that I didn't know what pain was; that pain was being forced to raise a disappointing daughter like me, and that I'd made Dad hate her, and that she'd always love him more than me. Then she'd squeezed one of the blisters until it burst.

Ultimately, there was never a right answer to any of their questions. I tried my best all the time to just dodge or delay their wrath toward me. I couldn't say that, of course. And I did care. I tried to do everything right. I just wanted someone to be able to love me. My own mother, who I took every beating for, couldn't. No wonder all I'm qualified to be is Kai's Food Machine.

When the cars pull up at six, the food is ready, and set out buffet style in the restaurant. That's how we do it, since the ranks have swelled. But I don't get to stay and eat, because this is not just a meal, it's a mission. Tripod wisks me away to the G Wagon before Kai comes inside.

It's dark and blue when we step outside into the chill night air. All the morning's snow has melted away, and a new blanket has fallen again already, and once again, my footprints are the first. I look back on them to make sure I walk out of there alone, and don't take a set with me from the darkness. Being alone is underrated. Saskatchewan is treeless. A cold desert, deserted, where anything unirrigated dies in a few short months. All around me, ghosts of Michigan's leafless trees rise like a crown of thorns, or some pagan heap of bleached antlers, dead and fading. Here there is still life, unlike back home, even if it lies crippled and dormant. The only footprints with mine are those left by Tripod's crisp new jackboots. I take an unburdened breath, ever uneasy with the notion of perceiving safety. It doesn't exist. But whatever evil found me here this morning, it's not here anymore, not any more than it is everywhere, all the time, all at once. I slip inside the wagon to hear the pop and fizz of the streetlight over my head tripping off.

Tripod blares Slipknot all the way home too, speeding through the darkness; moon and stars,
streetlights and skeletons of the pale trees that line the streets all blending together. I'm fine with being called illegal. I'm especially fine with being called an alien. I am an alien. I can't think of a more apt way to describe what it is to be a stranger in a strange land. Dehumanized until this planet is not my own, I don't yet have a realm in which to dwell. Kai was the only home I've known, since Saint Tate. And he wasn't even real. I have to remind myself more and more of that these days. I close my eyes, and imagine reentry to the atmosphere, rough and rocky, my flying saucer white-hot. Someday, Kai will call me home.

My warden pulls me up behind the Grand Am at the side door of the house. Before I even get my key in the lock, Tripod's peeled off again, anxious to go eat supper. The house is dark, and has the curious aroma of parents. Must be Danielle; she's so fucking old she can probably make mom and dad smell. And it already reeks of cat. I'd held out half a hope that Winter would be here, but of course she's not. Usually, Kai just lets her transient commitment to vegetarianism go, but I don't suppose he would on The Momentous Night of 1000 Chicken Wing Eatin' Players. Besides, 1000 is a lot; I'd know, I fried them. He probably needs everyone making a glutton of themselves to get it done. Even though she asked me to make her a BLT a few days ago, I know Winter. Tonight she will feel great pain to eat meat. And Kai will enjoy making her all the more. I smile. Dead. I fucking love my family. In this house, we all deserve each other.

I find stupid Danielle's stupid cat. He's sleeping on the couch, in my spot. I don't wake him. The dead don't dream and the sleeping don't scent mark. Old Indian wisdom.

The litter box has been used, so I lift out the bag, tie it and run it out to the trunk of my car. Some good might as well come of this bullshit, and I do love a creative litter. It's dumb; the pan is clean, and I could just put a bag in with new shavings. I pause and consider it, my brow furrowed. Kai wouldn't know, and my hands are so chapped that I dread the bleach... No. That was the kind of mistake I used to make when I was little. I take it to the bathroom and bleach it out in the bathtub before setting it up again.

Laying down on Winter's bed, I feel spent but not sleepy. I know I still have to give that repulsive cat a bath, clean the tub, and I'm sure be ferried back to Bovine Domination to clean up after the mission is complete. Maybe Winter is right and I should have just gone to Berkeley. It's certainly an easier life to just play by the plebian rules of the common taste concensus, float along in the general stream. You decide to be insubordinate, live by a set of eternal standards, rather than the moral relativism of your time? You'll have a hard time. It's a fact. I've never been good at following rules. They've always seemed prideful and wicked to me; man's rebellion against God's Laws, they always seek to subvert and replace. Women should submit to their husbands, and husbands should love their wives. No, they know better. Women should have a degree and a career, freeze their eggs. Men should wear eyeliner, and love other men. Marriage is just a piece of paper. We should keep every unpredictable pitbull with three strikes alive, but we should abort every inconvenient innocent little human life. Good is evil, and evil is good to these pleb normies. And if you see that? The world will gun for you, and you'll climb up hill in a landslide of shit all your life. But that's alrighteousness, and I'd die for it. God, Kai and plastic straws.

Inhaling sharply, I smooth my corduroy dress down over my body, and wish to lay here, resting my skin and bones. But I can't. My boots are probably dry now too. We're shoes in the house kind of people here, whenever possible. I knew it was a prairie person thing, but apparently a Midwestern thing too. We just feel naked and totally incorrect without shoes on. I pad down the hall past the locked door with the vase on it. I want to ask about it, but I don't. I've always had the feeling that Kai doesn't want me to. Charlotte Olympias back on, I go check the cat again, leaving a wide berth. Still asleep.

There's a few dishes in the sink; Winter's mug from this morning, and a few bowls and spoons. I'm
shocked any one of these people can pour cereal without me. I wash them up and put them away. Once I'm back in with Kai, I'm asking for a dishwasher that works. I creep down the basement stairs and put Kai's sheets in the dryer. I knew no one would do it for me. Half a dozen or so empty High Life bottles sit around on the green carpet, along with a few Twinkie wrappers, and an empty Cheetos bag. How does a litterbug feel about being littered herself, I smirk to myself as I collect the boys' trash in a bag; the answer is, all's fair in love and war. Now, this bag gets strewn around the lawn of that ugly ass charcoal stucco McMansion a few blocks over, with their stupid storey-tall cement Buddha idol. No blaspheming idolator is safe from my reach, even if it means another trip out to the trunk of my car. Every day I'm dumping an orange trash bag. Every single day. Divine Ruler be honored. Fear be with thee all.

I barely make it back inside before everyone starts showing back up here. It does take a lot longer to make a meal than it does to eat it and throw the bones in a gutter from a moving vehicle, I guess. I slip into Winter's room. It makes me sad that it's this way, but lately the best thing I can do is just stay out of Kai's way. I flop down on the bed, and open Winter's laptop. #BelieveWomen is paying out tonight, triple cherries. Explosives are expensive, and Kai wants the best; his Wells Fargo needs a good bump, or he'll never let Winter get that Bottega Veneta backpack she wants. I won't be invited to the afterparty gathering in the basement tonight, I'm sure, so I'll just hack until bed time.

But towards the end of the meeting, after I've just confirmed the deposit of almost $37,000 to Kai's account, Speed Wagon comes into Winter's room, and grabs me by the arm, pulling me from the bed.

"Come with me. Now.", he orders, emotionless, and refusing eye contact.

"Did I do something?", I ask him, knowing it doesn't seem good, but trying to be hopeful, against hope, "Does this mean I'm going to be off probation?"

He doesn't answer, but directs me to the door with his arm.

"Is it bad?", I ask. "Speed? Please."

The suspense. The cliff before I fall. The tombstone, Parrish the thought. The end of that scratchy yellow rope. Pray and beg. Don't hope. My heart thuds, and Speed ignores my questions. Maybe Kai just wants to tell me himself; embrace me back into the fold. Maybe he told Speed not to let the cat out of the bag. Or maybe I'm the cat in the bag.

I follow Speed Wagon down to the basement.

"... a resounding success! Our brothers on /pol/ are already disseminating. And the reach will be far and wide; when our neighborhoods are not safe from the menace of white flight and falling property value, the electorate will clamour and bleat for a leader to protect their only investment in this world of undisciplined and unbridled consumer debt!", Kai preaches.

My heart lurches in my chest, and I hear my blood rush, see my pulse strobe red before my eyes. Maybe I'm going to be okay. The night went well, and he couldn't have done it without me. He's seen the light; I love him, and I'd do anything for him. But why then, does my stomach sink like a stone; a stone weighting the bottom of that bag the cat's in, perhaps? Drowned cat, or wet pussy. It's all the same. Die by that shit in slut shame. I don't smile or raise my gaze. I keep my eyes on the floor.

"Ah. Here she is. The girl of the hour.", Kai interrupts his own sermon.

That's when I know. This is bad. His voice mocks rather than praises.
"You know, you're a good cook, Mac Tonight. Not the worst cleaner, and a borderline respectable hacker, for a girl. But it's just really too bad that you just cannot figure out your place and stay in it. Pride is never attractive in a woman. Neither is insecurity. You've done nothing but disappoint me, and let this movement down for the past month, but to have the hubris to think that cowardly insulting and trash talking my campaign manager and girlfriend is unforgivable.", he says, fatigued and cold.

I look on in weary amazement, my eyes wide and fixed on Kai's face. Things really can always get worse. That doesn't confuse me; I know all about that, but these accusations confound me. I'm too stunned and paralyzed to defend myself. And a life of experience tells me that would only make this worse anyway. When someone decides you're going to be the scapegoat, don't try to fight it, because the gaslighting will only make it worse. Besides, I'm the greatest of all time, when it comes to scapegoating. It hurts to even breathe though, coming from my Kai. I trusted him so much.

"Like, what kind of a pathetic, low IQ chickmove is that anyway, Mac Tonight? Drop out shit.", he adds making a disgusted face, and putting his arm around Danielle's thick, nonexistent perimenopausal waist. "I'm not often wrong, and I don't enjoy the sensation. I expected more of you, and you made a fool of me. This probation hasn't solved a thing with you. So, what am I going to do with you, when you insist upon living in this apostate state, huh, Mac? I can't let you go, can't turn you out. You know too much. You could do damage to my movement.", he says coldly.

"Kai, I'd never, ever do that. I'd never do anything to hurt you or the cause.", I stammer.

"And yet you willfully defy me, and bring discord to my inner circle. How can I trust anything you say, when you'd intentionally disappoint and betray me like this?", he asks, screwing his face up.

"No, what you need is to be an enemy kept close. Now, the justice I have in mind is that you be cast out from this movement, within our ranks. Boys, Inner Sanctum., he addresses The Chads, and the girls--even Ivy was invited for this--his outstretched arm passing over the congregation, "... from now on, I deem Mac Tonight stripped of all names, titles and benefits. She is deemed an NPC, a non playble character. She's not to be regarded as human, nor extended any of the inalienable rights of such. Henceforth, she'll be addressed only as you'd address a potentially traitorous Russia-backed Alexa, or Huawei smartphone. With total sus, and dire utility only.", he commands.

Winter pipes up, "Kai, this isn't fair! She didn't do anything."

"You're lucky you're my sister, Winter, or you'd suffer the same fate.", Kai snaps back at her, eyes cold. "I know you were involved too, and I'll deal with you later."

"Now, Speed Wagon, fetch the Shameful White Habit of Guilt. But before we dress her in it, and her sentencing is compete, we must allow the wronged party to determine what punishment is fitting, to augment my justice.", Kai's gaze falls on me, heavy and cruel. "Because we've all seen the consequences of my leniency towards her."

"Dani, you're the one she's wronged. How do you see fit to deal with her?", he asks the repulsive old liar, his voice gentle. My chest physically hurts with the pain of his rejection. I thought he loved me. I thought this was my family. How can he throw me away for this woman who means nothing, who has done nothing? I've done everything he ever asked. I breathe like I'm in a gas chamber, life a poison, rushing me to the grave.

"I don't want her here no more.", she sulks. "But supposing she still is, she made fun of my hair, and she's so proud of hers. I seen her talking big the other day how she's all virgin, head to toe. Hair's not dyed and ears not pierced, and no tattoos, like it was special. I never even told you that. And her bullshit 'career'.", she spews forth with hate, unable to say the word modelling, "She's not that great,
but it was her hair. All she does is brag how fast it grows. So if she's so proud of it, cut it off. Let her
grow hair, since that's the only thing she's good at."

"Fine.", Kai declares so fast, I almost think he seems relieved. "Speed Wagon. Fetch the scissors."

"I want you to do it.", Danielle interrupts, addressing Kai.

Kai holds his hand out, taking the scissors from Speed Wagon, "Fine.", he says, snatching them
away.

Gutterball is standing behind me, and knocks my knees out from under me, so I land on all fours on
the floor. I just see Kai's New Balance kicks approach on the green carpet, like fateful feet in a bad
dream. I can't look up. I can't face him. I don't want him to face me. If it made him feel even remotely
guilty, for even a second, it could make this all worse. I have to make this easy on him.

His hand roughly grabs the back of my head, and I feel him carelessly yanking and gathering all my
hair into ponytail. He's not gentle. He doesn't take his time. The kitchen shears that Speed Wagon
grabbed tear, crunch and chew through my long golden hair. Kai used to love my hair. Even my dad
used to say it was like spun gold; probably the only nice thing he ever had to say about me. When I
told Kai about that, he'd taken to calling it that too. I feel it fall in jagged, blunted teeth to my
shoulders. I suck the searing air in, go deep inside myself. I won't look at it closely. I'll forget it.
That's what I did when I was modelling and didn't like something Woody did. I just put it in a
ponytail or a bun and ignored it until it was long again. It won't take long. But I know that's not it.
That's not why this hurts. Sure, I like my hair; I like it long. It's a security blanket. Besides, I'm in a
fucking cult. You can't be in a cult without hair to your waist. It will grow back, and remarkably fast.
This I know. But how will I ever trust anyone again? That's the real problem. After a life of being
abandoned and abused, I'd never let the world have it; my life, my soul, my spirit. But now I feel
broken. How could Kai do this to me? The world is uglier, and more cruel than even I had imagined.

I kneel at Kai's feet, my face bowed, until he walks away. He strides across the room, opens the
fireplace and throws the bale of my hair in, where it ignites, and stinks, only emphasizing my
humiliation. He kills the fire once it is all cooked to ash, and returns to Danielle.

"Anything else, my love?", he asks her.

She looks shocked, like finding out that there's another whole batch of Christmas presents hidden
away, after the last one under the tree has been opened. Not that I know anything about Christmas
trees. We never had one.

I raise my head and look at her, but it is a terrible mistake, because upon seeing my face, she sneers,
cold and cruel. I can barely see her beady little eyes behind her dirty glasses, but they narrow at me,
and she turns to Kai and says, "I don't want her to be able to ever have Pinkie Power with you. You
said that was the communion of this movement. You said you wanted her cut off from it. Prune her
pinkies off then. Both of them."

"Kai, no...", I choke out, too panicked to hold my tongue. I'm not afraid of the pain, and I know
they're just pinkies. I'll learn to get by, even type, without them. But I want to commune with Kai. I
can't bear the idea that it's over forever, and that we could never be joined as one, flesh to flesh. I
want to see the promised land after all my faithful service. "Kai, don't do this. Danielle, I'm sorry. I
didn't mean to offend you. I don't think I'm great in any way, and I promise I have no intention to
interfere with what you and Kai have. Please, don't do this.", I beg.

"It's done.", she says, harsh. "You shouldn't have disrespected me. I'm better than you. Now you'll
remember it."
Winter is crying, gulping like a fish out of water. She's so upset she can't form words, like she's gripped by some familiar horror that now has a hold far more savage than surprise. She's seen this done before. My eyes lock with hers, as she paws to no avail at Kai, and he motions for her removal. Time moves too fast for me to focus on the faces of The Chads that carry her away up the stairs. I shake my head at her, as though to reassure her. I'll be okay. I don't want her to be scared because of me.

Kai looks dazed himself, though I find it hard in the spinning terror of this situation to know if I'm much of a judge of expressions. He looks caged. He's done something bad, and now he's trapped by his choices, and he knows it. I've seen that look before.

I had a little brown bunny as a pet when I was fourteen years old. My parents wouldn't let me keep her in the house, and one night a skunk pried into her hutch and killed her. When I went out before school to take care of my bunny, I discovered the scene, the skunk still trapped in her cage. My parents blamed me, just 'cuz sadism, and then cautioned another punishment if the skunk sprayed when I disposed of it.

Saskatchewan had a famous murder case; Robert Latimer had gassed his disabled daughter to death in his 1982 blue GMC pickup truck, by piping a hose from the exhaust pipe to the cab. I'd decided since half the province had thought it was compassionate, and that he should go free, the other half, by virtue, thought it was barbaric. I sided with the proponents of barbaric, for my purposes, since I figured it was less likely to make the skunk spray than a bullet. I wanted that skunk to get the hard goodbye. But I'm practical, so I Latimered it.

I'd backed up the ancient Honda Big Red, and tarped my bunny's cage. I fitted a hose to the three-wheeler, and snuck the other end in under the tarp, and sat in the cold, idling the trike. I must have sat for almost an hour; mad overkill. But when I lifted the tarp, the skunk was dead and hadn't sprayed. I threw up while I disposed of the bodies, and it wasn't the carbon monoxide; my innocent little bunny, torn and mutilated, her sweet face frozen in a scream. Bunnies scream. No one knows that. It's the only sound they can make, born to endless night, as they are. But that predator--that skunk--died in peace. Just fell asleep. It made me sick. My only solace was to remember that caged and powerless look in his soulless eyes when I threw the tarp over the cage. That skunk knew I was the one with real power, and he'd made a terrible mistake.

Even now, forced to the floor, my hair reduced to stinking, burning embers and ash, and about to lose my fingers, I have more power than Kai. Only this time, I don't relish it. This time, it stings and hurts me all the more. All he had to do was be true to me. He threw me away, and now he's subject to the cruel whims of an ugly old woman who hates me. The movement always comes first. We both know this. I put it first too. He did this to himself, for nothing. I'd have done anything he asked. Whatever his plan is, he took the easy way out, and now it's not easy for either of us. Kai remains the head for both of us. I bow mine and accept the things I can no longer change, as he does. Love is patient. Maybe there's no time for it in the End Times.

Time skips like a vinyl, slow and fast, and repeating itself.

Kai can't look at me, but now I stare up at his face from the floor, making my pleading eyes available, and hard to avoid. Look at me. I'm real. I matter, because I dare to see that I don't. He knows it too. His eyes glance over mine, and I feel his terror. He lets long strings of his blue hair fall over his downturned face, and doesn't push the obfuscation aside. We'll never pinkie power now. I'll never be able to help him. I'll never be able to suck all his fear into the crushing critical mass at the centre of the black hole inside me. I wanted him to know me, and trust me, so I could eat his sorrow, and compact it into the fusion that we could burn the world to the ground with. He was my World Ender; I, his Daughter of Eve. My eyes don't plead for me. I plead for mercy for Kai. He's a
wounded, humiliated man. I could have taken it from him, and given him power over it.

But when Rim Shot comes up from behind me, and hands Kai the pruning shears over my shoulder, he takes them.

I can't cry. It would feel good. I don't even have a bunny scream left in me. I'm too broken. I just kneel, leaden and numb, dead inside. Kai grabs my first arm angrily, like he's a cop who I made run for the arrest. It's a cold blade on my tiny, slender pinkie. It's a pinch, that keeps going. I don't close my eyes. I watch Kai's. The pinch, the pain, doesn't end when that little piece of me hits the floor, and hot blood streams down my arm and soaks my sleeve until the sodden material drips blood on the carpet.

They were ready to tear me apart. Speed Wagon pours styptic powder on the little wound.

The lights are dim in the basement, and it's damp and cool with the fire burned out. I'm dizzy, and my consciousness keeps browning out, black visions and silent speech around me. I will myself not to puke.

Speed Wagon is still holding my arm high. I haven't seen my hand yet, when Kai reaches for my other arm. I don't make him reach down this time. I offer it up to his grasp, and it's over quickly. Another unending pinch, and a little wound that spews blood. Tripod holds my second arm up, and Speed Wagon reaches over me and awkwardly dumps more styptic on my opposite hand. It is finished. I can barely feel my hands. My heart hurts too much. My brain focuses in, for some reason, on the annoying sensation of the blood dripping from my elbows, as the boys hold my hands up to stop the flow. I hang my head, nauseous, and wondering how this day went so bad so fast. How am I always surprised? Shouldn't I be used to this by now? I'm so stupid.

Kai is talking. So is Danielle. But I can't hear them. They sound like the teacher on Charlie Brown. I know they are talking, but I'm too far beneath the surface to understand their tongue. I close my eyes; if eyes are the window to the soul, I want to hide mine.

Careless hands of former friends reach under my arms and pull me up, dragging my knees across the rough green carpet until the tops of my boots fold over, and my knees scrape over the avocado Olefin before I can get a footing under myself. A garment is shoved over my head, hooded and long, and my arms pulled through loose sleeves.

"Let her contemplate her sins in sackcloth and ashes.", Kai's voice rings from the screaming din in my head, as I'm shoved forward again by unforgiving hands, and land once again on my knees on the hard basement floor. I don't remember it happening, but my hands are cushioned from the fall, bound, and tied tight. I feel like I must be passing in and out of consciousness, because I can't keep my bearing. There's only the plastic straw, and it's too much for my mind. I try to grasp the flat circle, or see a timeline, but I can't. Too much spinning, too much missing. I'm not crying. No, wait. I am.

Things are going crazy. Everyone is talking, and things are happening around me, and I can't keep up. I should try to open my eyes.

I open my eyes just a moment too soon, to feel a hand on the back of my shorn head, forcing my head forward, and my face and open eyes meet the grey ash inside the fireplace. The fist tangled in my hair holds me down a few moments before yanking me back up by the hair for air. I think I'm coughing. I can't believe Kai is doing this to me. I gently stroked him. I sucked his balls. I could have bit them off and torn his cock off with my bare hands like an ape. I could have chimped right out, any time. I didn't. He trusted me with his eternal legacy, and he was right to. I love him. How could he love me enough for that, and then do this to me?
My mind is a scary place; a boundless inner world, filled with the monsters this world has thrust upon me, like some twisted, hellish roadside attraction in the Arizona desert. I'm The Thing, except I'm real, and I'm immortal, in a cavernous hall of horrors. A novel little alien for humanity to pour out all its ugliness upon, and then not like their reflection.

I feel myself pulled back up from the floor, limp and lifeless. This might be the thing I can't come back from.

I'll fight until I die. A quiet fight only I see. I make the muscle fibers in my body all engage with each other, like Velcro. I make the remains of my skeleton stainless steel, rigid and unyielding. I make myself stand, make my eyes open, and blink back the tears and the sulfuric ash. I stand and face my maker.

Kai is already on the stairs, Danielle by his side, two stairs above him. She's suddenly anxious to get away. What is it, you old, slow-roastie? Am I still prettier than you?

"It IS really proud about being a virgin.", Kai says flatly from the staircase. "Probably all the time it wastes on 4chan where all those autist incels idolize it. So if any of you guys still want it, go for it. Slut shaming isn't cool, and virgins are the biggest perpetrators. Worse than men."

Danielle laughs, but it fades to a panicked scowl. Sick fuckface. She'd be jealous of a rape victim if she thought it meant the rapist wanted her.

"Kai, no!", the words escape against my will in a pitiful little squeak, pained and weak. "Please, not that. I love you.", I beg him. He looks away, expressionless.

Gutterball is already striding towards me, like a flesh eating zombie, but Speed Wagon is watching Kai, looking back at me, concerned. Time is sped up for him too. When his gaze locks with mine, I think I see something in his eyes. Speed, you were a cop, and a good one. Don't destroy yourself, I try to beg him with my eyes.

Lazily, Speed Wagon puts a hand out and catches Gutter in the middle of the chest.

"Nah.", he says slowly, with a slacker half grin. "We don't want her, do we boys? I mean, look at her. Fuckin' ratchet. Messy Mac. I can't get it up for that. What, r'you a faggot, Gutter? You'll do a butter? She's not even American, which means she's not even human. I don't want her. MAGA!"

The boys laugh like a bunch of idiots, like a troupe of monkeys. But they're followers. Speed knows it too. He's still got a tiny speck of conscience. He's drawing them off. Danielle is smiling now. Kai's expressionless face looks mildly angry.

"Fine.", Kai shrugs. "Well, then, it's descent to NPC is complete. Have it clean it's mess up, and then send it directly up to my sister's room."

Kai and a self satisfied Danielle head upstairs, and I watch him go, my beautiful messiah, Kai. His blue waves of hair bob when he walks, yellow acrylic sweater stretched across his broad shoulders belying his manhood against the youth in his face. He doesn't look a thing like Jesus. I still see Tate's shadow walking behind him though. I still love him. I am still his, but I have fallen so far now. I have so much ground to retake. I feel stooped with the prospect of the climb.

No one puts a bucket and a sponge in my hand. My feet must unroot themselves. I part the sea of blue shirted bodies, and slip inside the basement bathroom, dark and dingy. I avoid the mirror; the mirror that once showed me my beauty, and Kai's reverence and desire for me. The shower mocks me. Hot steam curled around us, his arms around me, my mouth on his flesh, and his fluids on mine.
I keep my eyes down now, on the brown vinyl floor, on my feet, one in front of the other, on the cabinet under the sink, on the red plastic bucket full of cleaning supplies.

I don't look at my bound hand on the pail's handle. I just carry it out to the rumpus room and spray my own blood stains with Oxyclean. I scrub with a sponge until the stain is gone, finally seeing the crude mitt made of bed sheet tied around my hand, blood seeping through on the outer side. Whatever. It's done. Feet walk around me like I'm not even there. After I put the bucket away, I still have to vacuum around the fireplace. I'm an annoying woman, doing annoying, womanly shit. I can feel their glares on me, as the hum of the vacuum interrupts the football game on tv. Once again, I can't make anyone happy, no matter what I do. I'm supposed to clean up, but I'm not supposed to make a sound either. This is why my dad could always find a reason to discipline me.

Feeling weak, and still completely spaced out, I finish as quickly and quietly as I can, and drag myself up the stairs, trying to avoid any notice. That's not hard. The boys are laughing and cheering, clinking bottles and the High Life goes on. I just watch the stairs in front of me, with the light from the tv flashing, and keep walking.

I'm quiet in the hall, and I can hear Danielle excitedly raving in Kai's room. My fingertips go numb with rage while my blood squeals in my skull like a train's emergency brake on rusted tracks.

Winter is waiting for me in our room, traumatized and quaking, her small lips parted, big eyes gaping, standing right by the door. She thought I might be dead. Relief and horror wash over her at once at the sight of me, but I reassure her with a touch on her shoulder.

"It's okay, Winter.", I say, low and soft. "Everything is going to be just fine."

"Here.", Winter says, haltingly, "Let me help you...", as she attempts to follow me into our bathroom. But I stop her. She can't help me. And I need just a few minutes before I can help her.

"I'm okay, Winter. I'll be out in a moment. Just get your jammies on.", I smile as much as I can muster.

I step inside our little bright white bathroom, and turn the light on, and finally face my reflection in the mirror of the medicine cabinet above the small sink.

Dressed in a crudely made white cotton hijab, or nun's habit--I can't tell-- my face stares out, entirely grey and expressionless, sooted in fine grey ash, which is caked and blackened in tearstained streaks beneath my eyes. My hair is jagged and short, dirty with ash. Kai didn't cut it shorter than my shoulders overall, but the job is so crude that to fix it will leave it just above. My hands are bound tightly, and with so much fabric, that there is nothing to see but two comical enormous mitts, stained in the corners with fresh blood. My stumps throb painfully, taking over my entire hand and aching up my arm. I'm all one color, flat and matte. Not a rainbow. Not a unicorn. Just an NPC. Dismemberment, in every sense of the word.

My eyes, as I stare into them, have never looked so grey; huge dead skies, empty and laid waste. What the hell am I supposed to do? My reflection now matches the way it has always felt to be me. I look the way I imagine looking, if I don't remind myself otherwise. Now this hideousness is all there is.

The door latch clicks behind me, and Winter slips in behind me, dressed in her plaid nightgown. She puts her arms around my shoulders from behind, hugging me. She stands on her tip toes, her warm face resting on my shoulder against my neck, as she looks intently at my reflection in the mirror. I'm not talking about it, especially not about the thing at the end. Winter already feels crippled and lost, not knowing what to say.
I don't know what to say about it either. I look like a ghoul, a prisoner of war, some kind of one-worded mythical monster from a horror flick. But I just want to act normal. I think Winter and I should just get our phones out and play the sweet troll game where we pretend to be DBs, TTC with DH, doing the BD after POAS with our PCOS and thinking we've felt our babies kick at 3DPO, on the Ovia app. Gay terminology pertaining to pregnancy? Pleb peeve. The term baby dust? Pleb peeve. Trolling these desperate retards? Fucking priceless. It's more fun than /pol/, the nights you want to just shoot stupidfish in a stupidbarrel. I'm going to suggest it. Get Winter laughing again as soon as possible.

But before I can suggest it, Winter kisses my sooty cheek softly, and takes one of my bloody mitts in her hand.

"Let's kill her cat.", Winter whispers, determined, in my ear, with a wicked little smile.
Kai pines in the pines, where the sun don't ever shine. Tell me where did you sleep, prophet?

Winter and Speed Wagon talk. He's low key okay. She's high key sus.

Mac has a secret. What else is new?

---

Edgar Cayce

Chapter Summary

Kai

"...told her to go to the Publix. She don't got to be so lazy. She went to the Kroger's anyways, and they didn't have the Mega Stuffed. So she gets the Double Stuf. Why would anyone buy anything other than Mega? It's more. And who would ever buy the thins?", she complains, crowding me on my bed. "When can I start sending the other one again? At least it follows my lists.", she adds with an irritating smile I'd love to smack off her ugly face. Maybe a Muslim will do it for me; pretty her up with a jar of acid. Kek.

"I told you. It could cause problems for the campaign to send out a prominent former ambassador... like that. The bloody stumps were your idea, so I guess you're going to have to learn to live with my sister's grocery shopping skills, or go yourself.", I tell her, not looking up from my phone. I'm not even listening. I don't need to. She's a very boring woman. In a world of things to ponder, where men invented such things as quantum physics, existentialism, and the hydrogen bomb, she's bothered me about thin Oreos three times this week alone. "You should try to get along with my sister. She's going to be your sister someday.", I lie so hard it's hilarious.

She's eating them in my bed. She'll eat the whole damn bag in one sitting. It's repulsive. She peels them apart, discards one chocolate wafer from each cookie entirely, into the trash, then licks the Stuf with a big grey tongue like a cow's, and sticks the two together and eats it. Does it over and over. I realize I'm watching, hypnotized with contempt. Luckily she's got the eyesight of a mole with those beady eyes, and lacks the discipline to keep her glasses or socks up. She thinks I'm gazing lovingly. So she just keeps doing it, thinking it's cute. My Mac has to wash the sheets every day, just because the world is nothing but a tablecloth to cover in crumbs and dribbles of double/double to fucking Danielle. Her shitstain cat is up here too. She's insisting on watching CSI Miami. And no one has made me a sandwich in weeks.

I want to don the latex, wield the knife, end her life. Instead, I lie to her, well and incessant. More and more, I take pleasure in the notion that her death will not only propel me to The White House, but that it will ensure no fertile and rich based blonde alt-right hottie from a first world nation will be denied entry to this country again. What kind of dystopian hellhole is this anyway? This All American Shitbag will ensure Mac's legal status; a compare and contrast for the ages. Why should a slovenly recruit to Islamic terror be more entitled to her citizenship than the beautiful Canadian with a pristine criminal record, not so much as a parking ticket, and a portable fireproof safe filled with a quarter million dollars? Danielle will die, and it will be the rallying cry heard around the nation for my Mac's right to immigrate. Deus Vult.
"... don't get it. How can they all be the same price?", she says, opening her pie hole to lick another.

I wasn't listening. This mind-numbingly boring, and fundamentally insipid, conversation has limped, or perhaps shuffled, thighs chafing and bush sweating, through the entire evening. She works the night shift, and I'm counting the seconds until she leaves. Despite my lack of interest, her level of stupidity leaves me with an obvious answer to her stupid question.

"Because there are more cookies in the original Oreo packages. They're sold by weight. More icing means less cookies.", I inform her, not looking up from /pol/. Sold by weight, not volume bitch. Just like you should be.

Mac has this axiom: 'There are no stupid questions; only stupid people.' Amen, dollface. And they are legion.

Killerwhaletank is laid across my arm. She weighs a ton. Built like a doughy shithouse. Smells about like that too; I swear yeast grows in the many folds and crevices in her undisciplined flesh. Maybe I need Ventolin. I didn't really buy asthma, but now I wonder. I think I'm allergic to fatties. It's difficult to breathe around her, like she makes a nerve toxin in her piled up rolls. Like their sloth is contagious. I feel out of breath and pre-diabetic just being near her.

I will my arm to encircle her, and rub her fat back. The better I do this, the less time it has to continue.

"There's something I've been meaning to talk to you about. This campaign... it's going to be long and arduous. No man has ever been elected to the Senate at my age. Baby, you know you did great work already getting those files I asked you for.", I tell her, and swallowing my bile and rage, add, "And your wisdom in dealing with the personnel issues in our ranks was invaluable."

"And don't you forget it!", she replies back with a big gut-shaking, belly-bopping cackle.

"Oh.", I smile, and take her by the pinkie. "I won't. I swear."

I'll never forget it, as long as she lives.

"But there is something else I have to tell you. It pains me. You know how much I love being here with you all the time. But most of my competition comes from these same dune coon camel jockeys who talk down to you at work all day. The immigrant bastards think they have the right to rule our nation, and unfortunately, most of the blue pilled public electorate agrees. The media is going to attack me--us, really. The lame stream media is going to promote a young Muslim woman directly opposing me."

She won't really care about the Islam shit. She doesn't know the difference between an East Indian and an Arab. She doesn't know the Sikh Temple isn't a mosque. She can't tell the difference between a push button and a rope start. Doesn't matter. Stupid is as stupid does, and stupid is going to strap herself with a bomb and blow up a Republican rally. I can't sell her on it with the terrorism angle. Young woman. That's what will trigger her. It takes her a long time to think; she's trying to think of how to cover it up that she regards every single female on the planet as an enemy without seeming pathetic and peevish. Sorry. Impossible, bitch. I have your number.

"We need to win.", she says, trying to sound smart. She's nothing but trite. "What do I need to do?"

Her panic at seeing a woman younger than her, probably thinner, succeed, is a better motivation than I thought. I stroke her greasy, moist hair and pretend to like it, fingers slow and languid, and feign hesitation and doubt at my own plan.
"Uh, Dani...", I exhale, "I don't know about this. It's a little crazy maybe, but that's why I need to run it past you. Maybe you have a better plan." Smirk. She won't.

Too enthusiastically, instantly responding with another wave of scalp sweat in her revolting excitement, she replies, "Of course I'd like to hear it, Kai. I'm your campaign manager and your girlfriend. Irregardless of whether this idea you have pans out, you don't got to ever keep anything from me. I'm here to listen."

She's not. She never listens. That's why in 44 years of life, she's never learned a thing. She's not my girlfriend either. Or my campaign manager. And the only linguistic habit she's managed to pick up in the past 15 years is a bad one.

"Well, ", I keep up the facade of trepidation for her benefit, "I think we need to know what they're up to. Islam is a cult, and they have this principle known as Taqiyya; an obligation according to Sharia Law, and preached in the Koran, which encourages, nigh, requires, followers in good standing, to lie to all 'infidels', any time there is a benefit to the Death Cult's global caliphate of destruction. We'll never defeat this 'religion of peace' playing fair, playing by American rules--because they know no such rules or morality. My only idea...", I pause, and rub my face, staring up at the ceiling, "...is that if we could infiltrate a mosque, we could gather enough evidence of what they're all about to shipwreck this unqualified, un-American immigrant woman with an inappropriate value system from rising to a position of power over good American women like you."

The big lummox thinks I mentioned Taquitos. She looks hungry. Bet she shits like a 400lb long haul trucker after she hits up 7-11 for some warm-goat-phlegm-from-a-bag nachos and 3 for $2 Taquitos. Shudderz, as my real girls say. Oh, Mac. My heart turns soft and painful, bruised and engorged with loneliness for her. She's the one who taught me about Taqiyya in the first place. Canada has a huge Muslim problem, and she's well acquainted. One of her classmates was honor killed.

"It's a good plan, Kai.", Danielle says, trying to sound judicious. "But you're pretty well known. It might confuse your base if you converted to Islam, but I guess then you'd get their votes...", she trails off, attempting feebly to think. It would be painful to watch if it wasn't for the fact I can comfort myself with the knowledge that this conversation is going exactly as I planned it.

"No.", I shake my head and hold her close. "You know I like to lead from behind, and do all the heavy lifting myself. But you're right; I'm too high profile. Besides, the operative should fly under the radar so it doesn't have a detrimental effect on the campaign. And my hair, you know? Blue? No going unnoticed."

"What about one of the guys, like maybe Gutterball or Douche Canoe? Maybe Pus Bucket? Could they do it?", she asks, reaching for another Oreo, and beginning its bisection right over my chest.

"Yeah.", I answer hopefully. "Wait...", I shift my tone down to disappointment, "My guys have all been on film, broadcast repeatedly on nearly every news station in Michigan. One of them could be identified, either by the press, or by the terrorists themselves. White Alpha Males are sought after in all arenas of life. Their conversion would never go unchecked without a great deal of scrutiny. I can't risk one of my people. I guess maybe I just have to accept I'm going to lose to a Mudslime Millennial chick."

She snorts, and spits a little chewed cookie on my shirt, but I cut her off before she can speak her thought. She needs to ruminate on this. Wait until that bag of Oreo goo has made it through all four of her stomachs. She can't feel pushed into it, and I have to let her simple mind arrive at her indisputable destiny under its own feeble, cud chewing power.

"It's only another four years. And in the meantime, I'm doing good work on Brookfield Heights City
Council. More experience. And you have the hospital. If I lose, when my campaign is over, you've still got that, and we'll pick back up in a few years and try another run. I'm a patient man.

"Speaking of which, it's almost time for your shift, isn't it?"

It is. I snuck a look at my phone. Only about five minutes until she has to leave.

"Is there time for a quickie?", she jokes with a big chortle, and smiles her crooked smile, with all those misplaced teeth; grey one back there, big yellow one out riding high... ugh.

I smile warmly, go dead inside, and kiss her lips, because I have to. Nothing less would keep this lie limping by in this moment. Her lips are dry and dead, scratchy, and her mouth is sticky and reeks of bacteria fed with constant access to sugar. She never drinks water. Ever. It's disgusting. Mac was a water drinking freak. Treated half a Faygo like it was a meal; two glasses of tap water to follow it up, and a brush and floss session. Canadians are mental about their oral hygiene, apparently. It must be a subconscious national backlash to avoid being lumped in with Not So Great Britain, since they're in the commonwealth.

"Five minutes?", I ask with a grin and a grimace. "No way!" Now is when I really have to dissociate, be someone else. I hate myself. I'd never utter this filth if it wasn't cuz world domination.

"With you? I need way more than five minutes to make love to you."

I'm gonna be sick. I'm sure my testicles have retreated into my abdominal cavity. I think my own dick just fell off. I'm an injured man in so many ways. I feel harassed, assaulted by female expectations and toxicity. #MeTooOnlyWorse

She lunges up at me and kisses me again, leaving behind a little of her crumby black lip cheese, before getting up from the bed with plenty of grunting and groaning and creaking.

"Five minutes? Is that all I have? Where does the time go? Time flies when you're having fun. Back to the old grind for me though. Hard at work or hardly working?", she adds with another gruesome snort and snouder.

"Good one.", I laugh uncomfortably.

She doesn't need to change. She's been in her stained and wrinkled scrubs all day. I get it. When your body is as bad as Danielle's, shapeless high stress polyester blend is probably as flattering as it gets; a great equalizer, when everyone is in them. But I'm a germaphobe, and the fact that a bunch of sick, dying and old people's DNA is probably all over them skeeves me. How many species of virus have I picked up? Mac needs to change my bed before I can sleep in it. I need a shower.

I stand up and walk Danielle to the door, where she slips her fungal feet back into her still slightly damp black Crocs. Actually, I think they might be Dawgs. Fuck. This woman is the biggest landfill of pleb on fucking Earth. An intestinal plebiscite.

She's suddenly pushy and in a rush. Here it comes. She has a tshirt that says it too. Here it comes.

"Give me my Timmie's before someone gets hurt!", she exclaims, holding up her dirty mug. "I have to get going."

I'm not fortunate enough to dodge the last kiss. But as the rush of clean air pours through the open door, and I slam it behind her, I feel alive and new again. It's that fatty fungus, and the nerve toxins. The instant she's gone, I breathe easier.

Gutter and Speed played their parts as well as could be expected last week, and I've barely had time to reward them. I'm still pissed at Speed Wagon for mentioning Mac's immigration status. Danielle
didn't know she wasn't American, and I liked it that way. Speed Wagon didn't need to mention it, and I can't for the life of me understand why he did, if not just to piss me off, or retaliate a little over his ACAB tattoo. I'll never apologize; but I regret making him get that. I don't even really have a plan for what to do with it, and if that's why he outed Mac, it wasn't worth it. I chalked it up to nerves--him and Gutter aren't actors, and that was a delicate operation. Gutterball had to be so enthusiastic that it made Danielle jealous, and Speed Wagon needed to be so insulting that it made Gutterball's loss of interest in an absolutely stunning girl believable. Both of their parts had to played well enough to humiliate Mac, though it wasn't that hard in her state.

I wish I could explain it all to her, but I need to be strong until Killerwhaletank is out of the house. Just a little while longer. She'll be fine. Even dressed in sackcloth and ash, she's beautiful. Poised and sweet to the bitter end, she offered her hands up to me.

A little hollow white plastic ball, pinballing helplessly in victimhood, against cruel pegs of circumstance; that's what the world sees. But the world is wrong. Tested in catastrophic devastation, I see an airplane's black box. That's how strong she is. One beautiful thing that nothing on earth can destroy; she goes inside herself, and remains, unchanging. @therealFirstLady.

The days when I bounded down my own basement stairs without treading lightly and listening for sounds of dissent seem so far away. It still smells like burned hair and Woolite down here.

"Boys!", I get their attention at the foot of the stairs, coming around the built ins and stepping in front of the television, as they gather around. "Before we get started tonight, Tripod, could you go and tell Mac to change my bed? Everything, not just the sheets. Tell her she can put the laundry in once our gathering is over, and not before."

"I thought we were supposed to call her an NPC and not acknowledge her gender.", Tripod asks, confused.

I hate being corrected.

"You are. Around the girls, or her, or Killerwhaletank.", I explain, sullen and fatigued. "But we all know the plan. Why would we play act like a bunch of faggots by ourselves when we know the score? The deception is just to keep the girls in their respective roles. But everyone here knows Mac's still /ourgirl/. She's just as much a part of this plan as you are. She just doesn't have the luxury of knowing it. You don't call Killerwhaletank that to her face, either, do you?"

They all kick at the ground. Aw shucks, Kai. Explain this simple logic again, would you? One fucking person in this house who knows what the fuck is happening at any given moment and I can't talk to her, and can't Pinkie Power her. Ever. All these humps with their 92 IQ points I had to walk through it, lead to themselves. And I never get to do it with her. Poor me.

"It's fine.", I dismiss. "What I came to discuss with you was a taxing mission, well done, especially Gutterball and my Sargeant at Arms, Speed Wagon. Though I don't know why you went off script about Mac being illegal. What? Were you having some kind of performance anxiety?", I add mockingly at the end, amid the mix of cheers and jeers. I say it like it's a joke, but it's meant to shame him. We discussed it already, but at the last minute, I just don't have the largesse to let it slide. "Never mind. We're close to the next phase of this mission, but before that important work commences, I thought you boys deserved a night of furlough."

They whoop and holler. It's cringy. The male equivalent to the basic 'woooo' chorus of shared retardation amongst idiot women in a gaggle, taking duckbill selfies and toasting wine. I just want them out of my house for a few hours.
When I hear the last trample of feet above, and the door slam, I climb the basement stairs, lead footed and fatigued, to lock the door at the top of the stairs behind me, before heading back underground wearily.

I gotta piss, and smile to myself in the dingy dark bathroom while I do it standing up. Lulz. Stupid inferior girls, needing a place to sit down. Biologically retarded. But a sting of hot shame pricks the inside of my face. I used to grab a stall in public places. Something about standing in a line and splashing piss back in a communal trough with a bunch of grown men when I was prepubescent seemed somehow risky, what with my large beyond all reason member. I never trusted all the faggots and pedos in public toilets. With my face?! And Kevin Spacey at large?! But Vincent caught me in a stall once; never let me forget it. I still have to fucking remember every time I Pinkie Power anyone, that's how it all started. Vin thinking I oughta stand holding my cock with a bunch of other men. He had to take my fear and show me it was gay not to show my wang to a roomful of grown men.

I never told anyone it was so gay; how it all started with my humiliation and fear. Mac could have been trusted. Her big grey eyes would have gazed into mine, filled with the compassion borne of her life of complete degradation. I know all the bombs that have gone off in that young girl's life. She loves me, and she'd never laugh at me. Not like Vin, or Meadow, or Samuels when he kicked me while I was down in the alleyway.

I look in the mirror while I wash my hands, feeling distant and disconnected from the image I see. I see apparitions in this room; Mac, beautiful on her back, in the mist and steam, her long golden hair whipped and thrashing in the pouring water, while I stood over her in the shower, exercising my gilded physical superiority onto her in a strong stream like a race horse, to her delight. I love her. She understands her place beneath me, and in turn, I reward her with a place beside me.

And I can still see this room all white and tiled, bright white enameled cabinets, emblazoned with red crosses, a barber's pole on the back wall, and that huge drain in the center of the floor. I remember my hair, before it was blue. When it was brown. When it was pink.

I knew She had to die; why else the conspicuous, confusing drain in the floor from the start? My manifest destiny was to know Her mind, take Her virtue, and destroy Her. Consume Her. Become Her. Women are cold blooded. The only way to truly become a man was to kill Her. She wrote the answer to me on this mirror. Love Trumps Hate. Now I dominate all her kind, as it is meant to be. No other woman was ever Her equal until Mac. Now I wonder out loud to myself how I can sell myself to the world, with a First Lady who only has eight digits. Bitter is my loss. #hairtriggered. Maybe I should buzz it all off. No. I suggested it to Mac once. She said if I did, she feared I'd lose my strength like Samson, left only with the will to tear down the temple on all of us.

My jaw’s tight. Throwing myself down on the couch in front of the tv, I grab a handful of pills from my pocket and chew them, get my phone out, and set it to Do Not Disturb. Since the Harvey Whinestein witch hunt bitchfest, Mac's totally obsessed with Marchesa. I'm getting her one. Maybe Look 4 from the new Resort collection; grey like her eyes, sheer and cut to the navel, covered in three dimensional flowers. She can wear little palmless white perforated kid gloves with it when I win the Senate. Edge my dick wearing them and nothing else after I take the oath of office. She could stuff the pinkies. No one would have to know she's a butterfingers. Just in the last week, Mac stole me more than enough fundraising dollars from a bunch of #MeNext, or whatever, moustached feminazi slobs who only wish they could entice the cheap thrill of a clumsy pussy pawing from some fat, sweaty, hard up old out of breath fucknut. I could buy enough Emulex to reduce Danielle to nothing but a grease stain a thousand times over. I'm doing it. I'm getting Mac the inauguration dress. And the gloves. Fuck it. PayPal that shit. Alexandria Occasional-Cortex's campaign fund can pay. Trump's going to swallow his tongue. My foreign model is hotter and younger than his... daughter. Kek.
Slick Fox News sycophants flash from the screen. Tucker's begun to really bore me. The put-on confused expression. The forced hyena-in-heat laughter. The avoidance of debate or learning by just interrupting louder. Kinda pathetic. He's had nothin' since he let hipsters ruin the bow tie for him. If you can't even hold your ground on a fucking necktie, you don't really amount to much. He's a toe the line follower for the hater plebs, masquerading as brash and based. Not smart enough to argue a point, too scared to think for himself. I'm unimpressed. I've seen his hand, and he's bluffing. He's anti-immigrant, but still wants to be pro-Muslim and pro-shithole; won't just call a black as the ace of spades a spade and call it the problem. White's right, but he's too blue pilled and simpering to go all the way. Just the type who needs it all spelled out for them. He's the kind of cuckservative who needs to see Danielle in a burka, and Mac's balance sheet, to be led to water. Come to think of it, I hate him. He's the embodiment of the reason Mac's pinkies had to be cut off. Wonder if that ice cream truck is road-worthy enough to take on a road trip to NYC. Thanks for doxxing the guy, Antifa faggots. Prepackaged patsy NPCs. Once they give me the home addresses of all of my rival's propaganda ministers, those problem spectacled masked sad sad leftards can meet the firing squads.

I brought /pol/ around on the subject. They're a bunch of dorks; "can't cuck the Tuck". Could they sound more gay? I threw around 'niggers', 'gooks', and 'dune coons' for a couple nights on there, and now they're all following in lockstep too. White Pride Worldwide. David Duke is gay gay gay.

Soft footsteps approach the door at the top of the stairs, and I jump to my feet, pocketing my phone. I forgot; Mac was supposed to bring down my bedding, soiled with Danielle's half chewed cud crumbs. I want to see her, even in her Shameful Habit of White Guilt; I want to gently draw a smiley face in ash on her forehead, absolve her after her undeserved penance. But she's so faithful and obedient. When her hand touches the door knob and finds it locked and unyielding, she retreats silently. I stop dead on the fourth stair from the top where I stand. I miss my girls so much. I hope they appreciate the risk, and fine line I tread, letting them have one another for company during this crucial time. I hope they appreciate how much harder this is on me, alone in the wilderness without them to stand behind me, making my Manwiches. #brokenManwich.

I wait to hear the muted thud of a latch slipping inside the box of a strike plate, when I know she's gone back inside her room and closed the door, before I go upstairs myself. I'm going to sit with Mom for a while, while Mac washes my sheets and makes my bed again. She needs a new rose for the door next time Winter goes shopping too.

"Mom?", I say on approach, quietly pulling up a chair. "Can I ask you something?", I speak low to avoid alerting Winter. She doesn't think this is healthy.

"Do you ever regret what you did to Dad and yourself? Dad had it coming. But even so, do you ever have second thoughts it could have went another way? And why'd you have to do yourself too? I covered this up. I could have helped you cover just him up too. You know I'm smart. I was in the enriched learning class after that IQ test. You know you could have asked for my help, right?"

But I know why she didn't. I never defended her. Not only could I not defend her from a cripple, I couldn't find my balls in time to even defend myself.

"Because I did something I can't undo, Mom. And I think now maybe if I could, I'd have done things differently. I'll never apologize or admit to wrongdoing. But this hurt me, Mom. Now I can't stop questioning it. Do you ever wonder if you could have just divorced Dad? Called the cops and had him locked up? Just anything less extreme, faking his suicide even. Nobody would have ever questioned that; some paraplegic who did it to himself with his pathetic poser hobby.", I ask, holding her dry, darkened hand in mine. She still has her pinkies, even in death.

"Because now I think maybe I could have just left it with taking her hair. A woman's hair is her
crowning glory... even that was a terrible punishment, especially for someone so beautiful, with such nice hair...had the boys knock her around a little how they did, when they shoved her in the ash. I don't know, Mom. Even that; the stupid robe, ruining her hair, dressing her down in front of everyone. Maybe I didn't need to let that nasty woman have an ounce of her flesh besides...", I think aloud.

Tears well in my eyes. The burden of this movement is so heavy, never more so than now, realizing all the time how close we are to the end, and how important this work is. But to sacrifice communion with my soul mate? I recoil. What a trite way to describe something so transcendental. Some platitude uttered at every single doomed plebwedding. Mac deserves better. We have one mind. We're not mated. We're grafted; inseparable lifeforces. I can't live without her. Now I feel like Moses, leading the people to The Promised Land, only to never be able to enter it myself.

Choking back the sorrow, I change the subject. "So, Winter is doing good. She's so excited for Halloween. It's this week. She's finally quit talking about going to Berkeley. Actually, she's quit talking about going back to Vassar. I know you wanted her to go to school and get an education, not have to rely on a man like you did, but we both know her. She's just not cut out for the lemming workforce. With her temper? She was going to end up one of those workplace mental midget shooter cases. She'd go postal. Just a matter of time. She's better off with me, where I can protect her from herself. I love her. She has violent tendencies though. Like you, I guess. No wonder I love her so much, right, Mom?"

She doesn't answer me--not like some of the others. No one in this room ever does. The ones I killed, I get it. Even Dad; I don't think he ever liked me, from the day I was born. But Mom? Isn't she proud of me?

Mostly, I just come here to think, without any expectation of a response, answers or satisfaction.

They say scent triggers memories more effectively than any other sense; that it's like shooting stimuli straight into the vein. The olfactory sense has this direct line to the memory center of the brain. Funny, that I don't recall the day I stopped being able to smell Mom in here. When they first died, I'd come in here, and that smell I guess you recognize from birth, would hit me, and every moment I ever spent with her would all bombard me at once, like a legion of demons rushing from a broken body into the nearest herd of pigs. It faded to a wave of emotion that I felt more than thought; I lost the images and the sound of her voice. Now there's nothing but the sour stink of flesh turning to dust under a sprinkling of lye. Death permeates everything. There's no escaping it. Eventually it claims everything. Mac calls it the wages of sin. She says that's where the fear of God comes from; knowing that paying the toll here on Earth is the least of it. She dreads only the unseen, and welcomes it as a result. Nobody understands her, and I'm not always sure I can. Her very nature is alien.

She recognized the scent of death instantly. When I asked her how, she said it was the first scent she ever knew, as it was for all of us, birthed into a tomb overflowing to bursting with rotting corpses. A gutter in outer space; a cesspool fouled with the countless bloated dead, stewing in the consequence of willful sin. That's how she sees the whole world. That's what being an optimist will do to you though. I tell her she should socialize more. If she knew more people, she wouldn't love humanity so much; it would help her be more cynical, so she wouldn't get hurt so much. Hope? Nope.

My back is getting stiff from being hunched over beside the bed, holding Mom's hand, so I let go, and rub my hand off well on my pant leg before sitting up and leaning against the chair back and rubbing my eyes hard.

It's only going to be a few more days at the most until Killerwhaletank is going to come to me with the idea that she could be the one to infiltrate the Islamic Center of America. I'll be reluctant, but only
very briefly, so she can't get the glory for offering and then back out. Her type would love to do that. When I do agree, I'll do so enthusiastically. I'll probably have to fuck her then. A shiver crawls down my back, along with a wave of nausea. Meadow was so fucking irritating, but she kept herself clean and was in relatively good shape. Danielle is about as appealing as a dirty plate that's sat next to the sink all night with ketchup, chicken bones and a few kernels of corn just drying out on it.

Once she's in, she needs to convert. I don't know what will happen from there, but I'm sure it will be something I can use.

She's so stupid and uninformed that she will convert to the 'religion of peace', not realizing that there's no backing out of that for a woman. They'll kill her if she tries to leave. That's probably the most likely outcome, I guess. I'm buying the Emulex anyway, just in case, though I doubt those barbarians leave me the pleasure. I can adjust the plan if I need to. An honor killing would work for my narrative too. Lacks the compare and contrast I'd wanted. And I have always wanted to build a bomb. Oh well. Whatever.

It will be nice to have her out of the house. Then I can let the girls in on the plan. I hadn't planned to tell them until the mission was complete, but the secrecy is becoming tedious and boring. Besides, who is going to make me my Manwiches and Pure Whites? As soon as possible, Mac needs to be let in on it. Certainly not until Danielle is converted and past the point of no return.

I can hear Mac in my room. She's already done my laundry and is making my bed.

Claustrophobic. That's how this life feels right now. Tight, and closed in. When Mac first got here, it was like the universe expanded. She's special. Otherwise, I couldn't love her. I wouldn't pick someone who wasn't special like me. I'm sure she thinks I'm an asshole now. That's the other hard part about keeping the girls in the dark. When Mac knows my plan, she'll be so impressed. Zero to hero. I can't fucking wait.

Once again, the muffled click and thud of a couple doors, and I know the girls are in for the night, and there's no risk of an encounter that wouldn't do anyone any good.

Sighing, I get up and push the chair back.

"Night, Mom.", I whisper, before retreating to close and lock the door behind me.

Tired, but fighting the notion of sleep anyway, I walk into my room, and am greeted by a wave of feelz that crashes over me, overwhelming me. Mac. Her scent. Left behind, with my perfectly made bed, is that sweet, warm smell; hot, heady and ancient. Black licorice and gothic incense, twisting sweet smoke in thin ribbons. Bitter almond, sweet cyanide. I don't know what it is. It's intoxicating; makes me feel the scarce weight of her little body perched in my lap, the warmth of her skin, her moist lips brushing gently against my neck. It makes me hard. The only thing that has in days.

It's persistent. I take my clothes off and hang them in the closet and climb into bed, and I'm still throbbing with a desire to rub one out. But I should save this. I need all the frustration I can possibly save up to coax this thing up with Danielle. I can't stop thinking about her though. Mac, laying naked on my bed, telling me I can do anything I want to her, because she's mine, and then fighting my cock away, slapping me. Her perfect body, framed in rays of her golden hair, spread all around her. Then I remember I cut it off. And the pinkies from those elegant little hands that stung my cheek, and stroked the length of my cock at the same time. I lose my hard on. Then the devastating crash as the Adderall starts to wear off descends upon me like the heavy tarp of darkness that falls in the night.

I don't want to sleep, because I don't want to dream. Maybe I did say 'perish' in my sleep as Winter insisted a few weeks ago. I had that awful dream in the blistering cold again last night, and the
towering, eerie monolith at the end of all the world that stood over me was an enormous tombstone that was inscribed "Parrish & Heimbecker". Were they lovers, towering in importance, who died and were buried together, under one gargantuan and terrible headstone? It felt more like a memory than a dream, like a piece of some life, lost and forgotten. I fight, but I feel incapacitated, and sleep overcomes me.

I sit up from the bed like a reanimated body, possessed once again with life.

Life. What the fuck is that anyway? Not much to most people, plebs and subhuman automatons. Scared, bleating, stupid, in the dark. What is the point to their worthless lives other than service to something great?

But some luster has been lost, even for me. Mac was something more human than human.

The decision to cut her off from the body was made, but the decision to cut her body off from me was something I had to decide on the fly. That night, I'd considered the mission, and all the sacrifice I'd already poured into this. I am so close; close to achieving Riyadh Jihad, close to the Senate, close to a run for 2020, and passing comprehensive immigration reform. The first real step in world domination is dominating the country that dominates the world. And I paid so dearly to be this close. Swallowing my alt-righteous rage, and kindly replying to that fat sow Danielle's sexts, day in and day out. Touching her vulgar old flesh, feeding her need. So repellent. I did it for the cause, and because Mac couldn't just get her shit together enough to qualify for the EB-5. I refuse to apologize. I'm an injured man; those were my pinkies too. I resent Killerwhaletank more every day.

But the sheets of my bed feel cold on my bare feet, and I miss the euphoria of having someone say something unexpected enough to make me laugh once in a while. Knowing I won't commune with her has unexpectedly stolen more from me than I anticipated that night. The world is more dead and grey now than she is.

I put my feet to the chill floorboards, and walk to the window and look out. My expectation is that it will be overcast, snowing, and bleak again. The leafless birch trees vanishing into the background, thin and stately, able to disappear like that when times get bad. Like my girl. White and slender, stronger than she looks. She'll be fine. I shouldn't be such a bitch about it.

But when I open the blinds, it's still dark. Shit. I really can't sleep for shit. It's still the middle of the night, and when I look out, the porch light glow illuminates the falling snow like stars. The silver birch bark shines in the incandescent artificial sun like the surface of the moon, not retreating to the pale, but glaring against the dark like anti-paparazzi gear in a Nikon flash. Not to mention that Danielle has hung some tasteless knicknack paddy whack on my window that I have to look past; some stained glass thing hanging from a clear rubber suction cup, bearing the crude image of a hairless cat, and the inscription "A Home is just a Mouse Without a Cat". Fuck that shit. I want my mouse back. I used to like my mouse, now I'm sure it's infected by a louse. I could burn this mouse to the ground with her in it, along with her stupid revered cat, and all her useless knicknacks. Whatapleb.

I picked Mac's fingers up from the basement floor in the savage chaos during the Sacred Taking. No one noticed. They were papery and cool, fine as the narrowest birch twig, like the little green suckers they send out as new growth in the spring. I'd never really thought about how small and thin they were before. Thinner than an extension cord or a pencil. Finer and smaller than Oz's. Barely even there to begin with. She probably didn't feel much. Not as big of a deal as my circumcision, even. But what a loss to me. I'd been saving Pinkie Power for when I couldn't possibly wait to fuck her anymore, something to sanctify The Ceremony. I wanted it to be special, when the time was at hand for her to bear my messiah baby.
I open the drawer of my nightstand, and there inside, beside a half drank bottle of Nyquil, is Mom's wedding hankie with Moon Girl's tiny pinkies wrapped up inside. I didn't have the heart to throw lye on them; something about them still seemed alive... ish. Placing the packet in my palm, I gingerly unwrap them, and squint, seeking a closer look in the pale light; nothing but a reflection from the snow outside. They still haven't rotted, and smell vaguely like nutmeg and bleach. I hold one and try to entangle it with my other pinkie. I feel nothing. Flat line, and no read.

A heavy sigh escapes me as I sit back down on the edge of my unmade bed. At least Killerwhaletank is at work again tonight. Staring back down through the darkness at Mac's little white digits, I feel restless, so I wrap them back up, and get dressed. It probably wasn't healthy for me living with Mom and Dad the way I did, but the ground is frozen, and it's way too hard to dig a hole big enough for all my dead. But I suddenly feel very sure I want to plant Mac's little pinkies under the pines and birch trees.

My coat hangs by the front door. When I slip it over my shoulders, and put my hand on the knob, my own bullshit rolls over me. The shovel I need is in the storage shed in the back yard. Am I really such a chicken shit I can't go out through the side door? This is why this loss pains me. Pinkie to pinkie, she could have been trusted to take this. Every great man needs a good woman to stand behind him by three paces, make his sandwiches, and listen to his feelings.

I pull my hand from the knob, and turn, walking back through the dark house, stepping down into the small side porch. The acrid stink of two stroke mixed gas permeates everything in here. How nothing brings back memories like smell? I hate this fucking smell. The smell of Dad's asinine, expensive, retired school teacher hobby. That's what it took him to feel like a man? Two wheels instead of four? So sad and dickless. Insurance commercial trope. Lame cheap thrill any asshole with a driver's license can have. Half the people on them are camel toes. What kind of cliché cunt could be bothered to risk his spinal column to drive aimlessly in circles with a bunch of other fags vibrating their manpusses? I don't know where I got my 135 IQ points, or my balls. It took losing his to realize the only way to be a man is to dominate women. But the only way to dominate women is to make them love you, not despise you. My mom owned his womanly ass. My girls all love me. I need an Adderall. Time needs to move more swiftly past me. I pull one from my jeans pocket and chew it, stepping outside. It's not that cold but the wet snow gets in my shoes and sticks to my pants, melts on impact when it falls on me from above. Trudging through, I yard on the shed door, until the snow gives way and scrapes away from the ground along with it. I sling the spade over my shoulder and cross the yard to a small clearing in the trees where there is less snow drifted in, and start digging. The soil is like sandstone; frozen, it's not really digging so much as chipping away at a thing. My wrists and shoulders ache in the damp cold with every jolt against the hard ground. I only need a little hole. It doesn't take long.

It's a dark, little black hole in the night, surrounded by an expanse of white. I stand, dwarfed by the trees that stand around me on all sides. Mac says it never really gets dark in town. She's right. I'm exposed in all the light. I don't like how I feel; quiet and alone, disconnected and painfully aware, like the train I try to outrun all the time passed me by on another track. I'm standing still, with no reason to move. You can't lead a movement thinking like that. You can't get a girl, get a job, get out of Mom's basement, whatever, thinking like that. I pound my plowshare to an AR-15, and turn my heart to hate. Mac still has a pussy, and it's still mine.

But when I reach inside my pocket, and pull out her little severed pinkies, wrapped up in a shroud, I feel the galling heat of tears flood my eyes. Do I bury them like that, or do I plant them like seeds in the ground and hope two more of her grow in their place? What's wrong with me? I still love her, even mutilated and incomplete, illegal and irredeemable without all this fucking trouble. Everyone has to make sacrifices, especially the messiah.
Hastily, I wipe the hot tears from my cheek and place the packet in the hole. But that was Mom's hankie, on her wedding... I pluck it back up, two white fingers falling in the dirt. No. That won't do; I don't like that either. Mom would have liked her. This is another sacrifice for Mac that it pleases me to make. I crouch down, and carefully cover her fingers with the handkerchief, and replace the cold black infill, rising to pack it down with the back of the spade, and shove snow back over the whole thing. Rest in pieces, my sweet girl.

Winter

I'm sitting watching 90 Day Finances. Lulz. My best one yet, I think, as I kick my shoes off and tuck my legs up under a blanket. Mac's not allowed to watch tv anymore. I forgot for a second, and sharply turned to my right side, to tell her, "Secretly, I'm just so glad that Kai hooked up with you, and not some Asian who he could regard as subhuman. That's so beta. I'm glad he's not that big of a loser. It's the kind of thing he could have done if he hadn't started his little cult.‘, but when I turn, opening my mouth, she's not there, and Speed Wagon is, with his stupid face stuck out. He's crushing on me. Whatevs.

"Hey, Winnie.", he greets me, sitting next to me on the couch.

"No one actually calls me that.", I tell him, rolling my eyes. "I just made it up. And if you do it again, I'll hurt you. It's Winter."

"Sorry. So what are you watching?", he asks, sitting back and making himself comfortable. "Is this that one with the evil Indonesian who wants her decrepit old boyfriend to ditch all his own kids, and look after her slant-eyed bastard left over from another man who got sick of her nightmare shit?"

I glare at him. I don't want to be his friend. He's a stupid idiot racist former cop, and the only thing he has going for him is his dimples. Black lives matter. The most annoying thing, is that this is sucking me in. I do hate Leida. Worst person ever. I hate her face. It makes me want to do things to her.

"Yes.", I exhale forcefully, and add a long eye roll for emphasis. "She's disgusting. They're in Baraboo."

"Wisconsin, only?", he answers, with a huge half grin, nodding at me. "We should tell Kai."

I can't help but allow a giggle to escape. "You sound like M...", I say before stopping abruptly. "Don't tell Kai, okay?"

"It's okay.", Speed Wagon assures me. "I won't.", he says, hushed and careful. I search his face, probably showing my resting bitch face, but who cares. He's biting his tongue. I can see it. He thinks it's some bullshit too. People with dimples really need to be more careful. They're never any good at hiding their thoughts. No poker face whatsoever.

"So, where were all the guys going? Why didn't you go with them; are you guarding Divine Ruler?", I ask him sarcastically.

He shrugs. "Nah, he's fine, nothing like that. He gave us a night of furlough to go blow off steam. The guys were gonna drive up to Flint, hit up the strip dives there."

"Oh.", I guffaw. "And that's not your thing?", I ask sarcastically, "Because you're a real culture vulture, right?"

He stares straight ahead at the tv, grins, in the flashes of light. But as his smile fades, a sober look passes over him, and he looks down at his hands, gripping his knees.
"Actually, no. Not my thing. Not at all. Not anymore, anyway.", he utters under his breath.

"Why?", I tease sarcastically. "Are you in love or something?"

Do I really want to know that?

"I dunno. It's not that. I worked a case once. Some chick named Aster, out at Top Brass. It was a cop bar. I'd seen her there before, never watched her dance though. Anyway, she got pulled off her stage by some asshole trucker with an old man crush on her. I took her statement. I dunno. She seemed kinda smart; she had those dead eyes, you know? The next day, we got a call. DB. Dead body, not douche bag. Anyway, it was her. She killed herself; took a bunch of pills and drowned in a tub.", he says solemnly and deliberate. "Right after I'd talked to her. Couldn't have been more than a few hours. I was the first on scene. She had no family around. So I was also the person to ID her. Sad."

What is it with these fucking sadsacks in this house? Can't just kick it and watch a TLC sensitive trainwreck without someone getting the sadz on this couch. Speed just sits there, doing this weird thing where he twitches his nose and chews his lower lip uncomfortably. Better not let Kai see that; he'll mercilessly mock him any time he catches him. It will only make it worse.

"I hate to say it, but strippers do kill themselves all the time.", I tell him, eventually. "I got a bad mark on a paper I wrote on it at Vassar once. They say they don't like female exploitation, but then they also don't want a stigma on the sex trade, as if it's empowering. I took exception, and wanted to show the facts. Women are invariably victimized by all forms of slavery. Just the reality.", I shrug.

It's not that I don't care. I do care. That's why I'm a feminist and paused my entire life for Hillary. But the longer I live, the more certain I become that there is a difference between the sexes.

Women are weaker. They value whining over winning. Look at how Hillary handled her loss; would a man ever refuse to give a gracious concession speech on election night? Other than Trump, of course. Had the Croc been on the other little foot, you know he would have been sulking, licking his wounds on his golden throne, tweeting poorly constructed insults appealing to the deficient pleb frontal lobe in broken Pig English. But she immediately retreated to her misery wallow, unable to muster the self control to convey some semblance of victory, even in her defeat. Victimhood over victory. No wonder we lose every time. Aster the stripper shouldn't have taken pills and fucking drowned herself in a tub. She should have found the assholes who made her dead in the eyes, and stuffed them in the trunk of her car.

Speed Wagon shatters my thought before my teeth grinding shatters my jaw.

"Yeah. I should have told her to do something else.", he agrees.

"It wouldn't have made a difference.", I tell him flatly. "Did you want something? I'm kinda trying to watch this..."

He does a big pie face and exhale, cracks his knuckles.

"Well. I have the night off. And...", he says.

Ugh. Don't ask me out on a date. Does he want to die that bad?

"And?", I ask back sarcastically. Eye rolls.

"And, I wondered if you wanted to go do something. Like just get out of the house for a while.", he says, hesitant.
"Not like a date!?' I ask back, aghast and revolted.

"No, no. I promise. Nothing like that. I mean, Kai would lose his shit, right? I just thought maybe get out of the house. I know you can't go with your friend anymore.," he says casually, valiantly trying to conceal his disappointment.

"Who? MAC?' I ask him loudly. "My friend, MAC?'

Instantly, he's on me, holding my wrists. But it's not violent. His face is terrified. "Don't, Winter. Don't do that. Don't break the rules.'", he begs me.

"Why, Speed? Are you going to rat on me?' I ask him accusingly, wrenching my arms away and pushing him across the floor.

"No. No. I won't say anything. But someone might hear you.'", he says, still sounding terrified.

"Who? My brother? You think he gives a fuck? You think I'm too stupid to see that this is all some secret evil plan that ends up with Danielle dead? Not that she doesn't deserve that, and for it to be slow and painful besides.'", I seethe. "But you think I don't know Kai better than anyone? If he didn't still care about me and Mac, we'd both be dead."

He sits back down on the couch, shaken. I don't get it. I don't get guys really.

"You weren't there that night. Just don't do that, okay? I like you, Winter. I don't want a night like that again, for anyone. Well, except that fucking old ratchet nurse.'", he lowers his voice more with every passing word.

Gazing at him, my critical mind is spinning. His face is still colored with his fading alarm. It wasn't fake. And it's true; I wasn't there, and he was. Mac won't talk about it at all. She says she's just fine. I know the less Mac talks about something, the worse it is. She's different; definitively and singularly different. She makes her own victories out of whatever victimhood people try to thrust upon her. She's not even playing the same game as the rest of the world. She can't lose.

Now, she dutifully wears her habit. She powders her face with ash in the morning, and I'm the only person who ever sees her without. She doesn't speak at all unless spoken to by the ruling class. But she hasn't lost any more than precisely the weight of those fingers. She's still all her. At night, we cuddle up on our sides, and talk, eye to eye. At night, we do stuff like troll the shit out of Ovia. Last night, we posted a poll question; 'Who on here thinks that unwed blacks should be banned from a TTC app? Who thinks they're are too many of them all ready?' Yes or No poll, came out about 20/80. Worded poorly, it tricked the idiotic lot of them. The votes rolled in, along with the outrage. Hundreds of angry messages, smattered with countless shrugging, pregnant emojis in purple sweaters. And we laughed about it. She also posted the question, "Can y'all feel sperms swimming around in y'all after y'all's bf cums in you, y'all?". Brilliant. She got tons of humorless morons giving incorrect or correct answers. Either way, they were all insipid and boring, missing the joke entirely. No one even questioned the amount of y'all's.

We have our own world when the sun goes down, and I wait for it all day long.

I got lost in my thoughts about her. The more I have her all to myself, the more I fall in love with her. But Speed Wagon is still giving me a sincere lost puppy stare. He hung himself out further than I did, said something to me I could get him killed over, probably. He can be trusted. I hope I can... If I find out he had anything to do with what happened to Mac, I'm telling Kai, even if Kai's the most culpable. I want them all to pay. But I love my brother. So I want him to pay by losing the love of his life to his little sister. He had nightmares after seeing Being John Malkovitch. Well, Malkovitch,
Malkovitch, bitch.

Finally, after considering that I don't think Speed is smart enough to fake that much sincerity, I assure him, "Don't worry. I won't do it again; say her name. We both know this is temporary and totally whack."

His face flickers. So I am right. No need to gloat. I'm not telling Mac yet either.

"So, do you want to get out of here, then?", he asks with his stupid grin. "Not a date. There's gotta be some place you'd like to go?"

I think about it. Mac is doing chores and won't be free to chill for hours yet. I have been craving something.

"I guess.", I shrug. "Do you know The Snow Hut?"

"No. What is it, like a club or something?", he asks suspiciously. "I don't know about that. Taking Divine Ruler's sister to some coked up club might be overstepping the definition of 'furlough'..."

"No, moron.", I laugh and roll my eyes. "It's an ice cream place, sort of. More accurately, it's a laundromat where a twelve-fingered 90 year old Chinese man sells the best soft serve on the planet. I forgot you were from Flint. If you were from Brookfield, you'd know it. Everyone does. It's not that far. We could walk? I won't tell Kai we didn't do our part to expand his carbon jackboot print today."

"Sure!", he answers exuberantly, jumping up, and grabbing our coats from the rack by the door. I'm not letting that paternalistic shit go. I was going to wear that oversized black pea coat, but not now.

"I don't want that one.", I announce snappily, pushing the coat away as he comes toward me holding it out like he's going to help me into it or some shit. "The one I want is in my room. I'll grab it and be right back."

Insert one last eye roll for good measure. Walk away.

Standing in my closet, I don't know what to wear now. It's too cold for my long black belted trench. Mac's loathsome fur hoodie with the black stars on the hood is just hanging there. When my hand touches it, it all but leaps off the hanger and into my hand. The wild, gamey smell of tanned hide submits to her. It's not a perfume. She can't wear perfume; gives her terrible migraines. I'm not supposed to tell Kai. He wouldn't believe it, and he'd think she was crazy, she says. She's probably right; Kai wouldn't believe in migraines. I raise the soft fur to my face, and bury it there, feel the familiar hot tweak of desire. That dark, sweet smell is her. Russian black cherry tea and clove cigarettes. I remember the first night I breathed that in, my fingers splayed through this fur. We barely knew each other. And here we are. And I'm still no closer. Sighz.

WTF. She's not wearing it. I slip it on over my head and when I get back to the front door, Speed Wagon is already waiting out in the brisk night for me. Lazy, leftover snowflakes float down slowly, the clouds that produced them spent and empty. The stars show, and for the first night in ages, the moon is more than a drowned apparition hid and obscured in the dark.

"Hey.", Speed greets me, pushing away from the column of the porch he was leaning against. The night is so still and windless that his breath hangs in the air. "You wanna get going?"

"Sure.", I motion with my hand. "It's just a few blocks over this way and south a couple."

We walk down the sidewalk together in silence. It's darker when the sky is clear like this, without the reflective cover all around to bounce our lights back at us. His rhythm is all whack. I can tell he's
normally a fast walker, but he's trying to drag this out and make it last. I glance up at him in the street light glow. He's really handsome; square jaw, full lips and big blue eyes. He probably burned through women like a clown does grease paint. I can't understand how a non-thinking mimbo like him would give it all up for this. Trump should have just improved his grasp on a world he already had by the tail. Kai, I get. He just never really could take off and fly on his own; malingering in his manufactured mediocrity because he chose to be defeated by his disenfranchisement. But Speed Wagon let himself be marginalized by a guy who would have been pleading not to be tased, bro, a few months earlier.

"Look how many of these streetlights are out.", he comments, eventually unable to suffer the silence, looking up, all around himself. "You'd think this wasn't a councilman's block or something.", he adds, grinning.

Something a little subversive there. Whatever. He's nervous. Cops are never funny, and never at ease. They fidget more than criminals.

"Yeah. Someone should tell Kai. It's totally ghetto.", I agree. "He could get a crew out to fix that. This is a boring conversation though.", I exhale. "So, what was it like living in Flint? Looks like a complete shithole."

He laughs. "Yeah, pretty much a dump. You grow up somewhere, and you never realize your place in the world. You're always there. You don't know what else there is.", he shrugs, staring straight ahead. "It was like we had the lead crisis, and the rest of the country showed up to tell us how much we sucked. But we were all just used to it. Not the lead. But, like, all the murders and shit? We all knew where not to go after dark.", he smirks over at me, "And don't get mad about this, but it's like there were two worlds. We knew when to turn our bikes around. Don't go on the block with a bail bondsman, paternity testing lab, and a Church's Chicken."

I roll my eyes. "You're a pig."

"Whatever.", Speed Wagon answers jovially. "It was my hometown. I knew how to navigate it. I cared though. That's why I was a pig."

"Right. Not because of some bullshit alpha male fantasy about girls liking a man in uniform, and being an enforcer for the white patriarchy, in the biggest gang you ever saw, above the law?", I challenge him, looking over at his face. He's still chill. I'm pleasantly surprised. Mac said he wasn't as dumb as he looked.

"You think I'm gonna risk dying over that?", he asks back, incredulously, with a huge grin. "Sheeit. Hell no."

He sobers, and looks down at his jackboots, shuffling trails in the skiff of unsettled virgin snow that covers the sidewalk. "My father was a cop. His dad before him. You were a Pollack in this state? Build cars. Or be a cop. We were cops. It was the better business to be in. I didn't always think I'd do it. You know; how that is? I wanted to go to war. I wanted to go to Afghanistan, blow shit to smithereens with a rocket launcher, kill some rag heads, "'cuz 'Murica!". My dad thought that was bullshit. He'd have voted for Rand.", he says with a smile. "I was all, '...fuck you, Dad, I'm going...', all through high school. But then one night one of the guys showed up at the front door. Mom collapsed on sight of him. She knew what it meant. She lost her shit; was it some gang banging nigger, was it this, was it that. Know what they said? Know what it was? A fucking routine stop. A routine stop. Now, Winter, let me tell you, there's no more fucking stupid term than that on the face of the earth. There's no such thing as a fucking routine stop. It was snowing hard that night. He pulled a car over with a busted tail light, just to tell them to be extra careful, because they were not
visible. He didn't even have his cite book on him. He wasn't gonna ticket them. Just serve and protect
them. Some chubby twat from Georgia who'd never driven in snow was here having a little
adventure, going to university because her bf was playing football for U of M. She was texting in a
Jeep, didn't notice his flashers, plowed Dad over and dragged him a quarter mile. Just standing at the
window of someone's car, trying to tell them to take a side road so they'd get home safe. That's how
he died. I was not even seventeen when I carried his casket with the guys from his shift at the
funeral. I decided that day, slamming back Jamieson with his partner, that it was the only thing I
wanted to do with my life. If I love this country, I'm about protecting it from the inside, right where I
stand; in some bleak, underfunded, potholed, Northern shithole. No one else gives a fuck about us. I
wanted this place to be something more than free."

The heat of sudden tears overwhelms my cold eyes, as the lights in the night blear into a melancholy
ghostscape. I'm shaken, not stirred. I don't know what's wrong with me; I cry like a fucking soap star
these days. It's like I was lulled and sleeping, and now I'm finally awake in a world too real for me to
possibly cope with. It's like I didn't even know the beach existed, and now I stand on the shore, and
waves of the suffering of the world wash over me. I've bemoaned privilege--white privilege, male
privilege, economic privilege. None of those can hold a candle to the most insidious privilege of all--
the privilege of a normal life. More and more, I see how we are a house full of souls denied that
privilege; the privilege of the easy, unfeeling plebs.

I don't know what to do, shuffling down the snowy sidewalk beside him. So I slide my mittened
hand inside his. He freezes nervously at first, but it gives way to a gentle squeeze as he takes my
hand back with his.

"More than free.", I repeat softly. "That's kinda woke. Like, truly woke. Free is a necessary starting
point, but there's so much more than that we should all aspire to. I never thought of it that way
before. Pretty."

"Yeah, well...", he says, noncommittal. "No one thinks that's why we do it. Power hungry, abusers
of women, racists. That's what you people think of cops. Some racist misogynist who needs to swing
his dick around while hassling you for getting to work on time, to augment the State's tax collection.
I worked with my share of assholes; guys who did it to compensate for being a rosebowled little dork
in school, guys who did it to fuck badge betties, girls who did it to prove themselves to their dads.
But mostly no one would sign up for the thankless shit if they didn't give a shit themselves."

"Do you miss it?", I ask, looking up at his tired face. "Do you think about just going back?"

He shakes his head, exhales hard, and I think I see the corners of his mouth droop in a grimace of
sadness.

"Nah. I can't. Divine Ruler is the only one who's going to change things. This movement is it. We
don't need to serve and protect the normie plebs; we need to let them blow themselves up. They
barely want freedom anymore, let alone for anything decent or beautiful to survive. As a species,
we've run out of road.", he says, his voice a strange weary mix of defeat and resolve. "Besides, you
haven't seen what I've got on my chest nowadays."

Do I ask? No. He might feel the need to show me. Who knows what the fuck Kai is up to. He's
probably growing a batch of spare pinkies under Speed's skin like that mouse with the human ear on
its back or some shit. Chillz. I never liked STEM.

"So what was it like to be there for the whole water crisis thing? Like were you still a cop there
then?", I ask, changing the subject. "Anyone you know get lead poisoning?"

"All of them, probably.", he laughs. "I probably do." He's kidding around, but there's probably some
truth to it. He sobers and adds, "My neighbor died in that Legionnaire's outbreak. Some old guy. I used to cut his lawn along with mine. I went to check in on him before he was hospitalized, take his paper in to him. His chest was so full of fluid it would slosh when he'd move."

When we get to the end of the block, it's time to turn south. My hand is still inside his, warm and held firmly. When I lead, he follows, turning around the curve of the narrow sidewalk.

Walking in silence, my feelings spar. I feel nothing for him. I'm not really into guys right now, and besides, one nice story and a few good lines isn't going to make me give up my life's thesis. And I'm loyal, and I really, really, really, like Mac. I think I might love her. She's got me thirsty. I can't get thosefeelz for someone else. But something about this is so familiar and safe. There's something natural, and easy. It makes me uneasy. But it feels like sitting down inside Nighthawks At The Diner with some vaguely creepy song by Bobby Darin or Patsy Klein playing low in the background with the requisite ticks of static, and ordering pancakes. He talks to me without me feeling like a vulture plucking his flesh away. Sometimes asking Mac a question feels like that; as though there's so little left of her that to take her secrets away is to pull the last bits of her identity from her skeleton.

Finally, looking back up at him, I tell him, "My parents died too."

"Really?", he asks, looking back at me, "Both of them? Shit, that's rough. I'm really sorry."

"It's okay. It's been a couple years. I was all grown. Kai never told you anything about it?", I ask, curiously. Such a formative event for him, and he never talks about it to anyone. "He never told you that the house was theirs?"

"No. We never really talk about stuff like that.", he shakes his head. "How did it happen? Like a car accident or something?"

"I guess, something like that.", I shrug. "In a roundabout way. Dad got in a motorcycle accident and lost the use of his legs. Spinal injury, you know?"

He nods.

"Anyway, he changed, became a huge dick. He'd smack Mom around, call her names, and she'd just smile and pretend it was all fine. She did that until one day it wasn't. She shot and killed him, and then herself.", I tell him, looking down at my feet. I've never told anyone.

"Shit.", he exhales. "That's brutal. How did you keep it off the news? I never heard a thing about it at work either."

"Mmm, well...", I delay. This shit's why I never told anyone. "Kai covered it up. That way we still got the disability checks and pension, and I could stay in school. I wanted to call the cops until Kai explained how it would fuck my life.", I shrug. "You won't tell, will you? I'd be in trouble too."

"Yeah.", he looks over at me and smiles, big white teeth and dimples. "You would. But I won't. This movement is my life. Besides, I'm not a narc. And I like you."

But I'm not out of the woods that easily. I wish we'd roll up on Snow Hut. I don't remember it being such a long walk.

"Where are the bodies?", he asks.

"Gone without a trace.", I lie. "Kai knew some guy out in Roseville, I think? Maybe Kent? Someone at a foundry. I can't remember; he just dealt with it. They dropped them in the smelt or whatever it's called. Kai said they vaporized instantly."
Plausible deniability established.

He shudders. "You couldn't pay me enough to work in a foundry. I used to like that show Dirty Jobs. You ever watch it?", he asks

"No. I've never heard of it.", I shake my head dismissively. "It sounds boring."

He doesn't look at me. Smiles though.

"Yeah, I dunno. Probably to chicks. But then I don't give a shit about shoes, either.", he says. "I just saw one on foundries once. Hellish. So what are you getting at Snow Shack?"

"Snow Hut.", I correct him. "Cherry sundae. They make their own cherry topping and it's so good. In the summer you can get them made with swirl; it's kinda Black Foresty. So good. But this time of year they only make vanilla soft serve. What about you?"

"Aw, this place is your bag.", he says with a half grin, "I'm getting whatever you're getting." I can feel the shiver run through him, and he pulls his hand from mine, and rubs his together and blows into them. "So how much longer until we get there?"

"I was just wondering that myself.", I answer, stepping outwards to the sidewalk's edge, trying to get a better look down the street. "I thought it was closer. Actually, I thought it was a few blocks back, but nothing looked right."

"How long is it since you went there?", he asks. "Maybe it's closed now."

"Yeah, but I'd still recognize the building.", I roll my eyes. "Let's just walk down a couple more, and then if we don't find it, let's just go home. You must be getting cold. Why don't guys dress for the weather? You don't seem tough. You just seem stupid and ill prepared."

"It's a Storm Rider. It IS a winter coat.", he informs me with a grin, flashing the wool lining of his denim jacket at me, before wrapping it tight around his torso, and walking on forward ahead of me.

When I catch up, he reaches for my hand without asking. I don't say no. He's totally #metoo-ing me. But it's kind of nice. A couple of silent blocks in the still dark pass under stars, as it becomes more and more apparent to me that I don't remember where The Snow Hut is. Stopping short, I groan, "It's not here. We're getting into residential stuff. And we're almost to the refinery. I give up."

Speed Wagon reaches for his pocket, about to produce his phone. I stop him.

"I hate lame fuck around ordeals. I don't care if it's a block away. I'm done with it. I want to just go home.", I tell him, taking his hand, and turning him with me.

But when I do, he pulls me close. I fight him weakly. He gently persists. Hi, I'm Olaf, and I like warm hugs...

Embracing me, he breathes in my ear, "Winter, I've loved you since I got here. Just give me a chance."

It feels good. Speed Wagon is big-hearted, and tall enough to cover me. When he wraps around me, I feel the heat and substance of him. I try holding him back, just to see what it feels like to have my arms full of someone; someone who can hug back, someone who doesn't disappear like a whisper under my touch, someone who wants me more. He's a hell of a lot better than Scotty, that's for sure. Like, who the fuck is named Scotty, anyway? But a sad downdraft of emotion spills over me; if I could get into this, I wouldn't be pining for her.
"You smell so good.", he whispers, his hot breath stirring my hair. His full lips graze my neck. It's a long time since I touched a man. I run my hand down his broad back, feel the sinew and strength. Mac would say I want to submit. Part of her is right, because part of me does. I can't speak. I can't breathe. I let my body fall in on his. When I do, I remember what it is boys have to offer. Something hard to grind against. But it isn't me he wants either.

"I smell like Mac. This is her coat.", I tell him softly pressing my lips to his ear, and pushing against the growing bulge in his pants, angry with myself for how it makes all the heat in my body rush between my legs. "You want her, not me."

"You chicks are impossible.", he groans quietly with a smile, still afraid to kiss, just touching his lips to my neck, being careful not to move so he doesn't scare me away from his dick. He thinks maybe I don't realize what I'm doing. "Everyone wants her. But I love you, not her. See, the thing most people don't realize is that love isn't a feeling. It's an action. It's an obligation. No one our age gets that."

"You're right.", I tell him, pushing away from him reluctantly. "I can't do this. Reasons too plentiful."

"It's okay.", he says. I appreciate his effort to sound cheerful about it, as his voice cracks. "You're probably right. Can we still be friends?"

"We're friends?", I laugh, with an unintentional snort. "US? Really? I don't even know you. You don't know anything about me.", I say rebelliously.

Speed Wagon turns and starts to walk back through our tracks in the snow, back towards the home. I catch up, and he smiles over at me.

"I know we both lost something.", he says, measured. "Not just our dads or whatever. Life when you're young is supposed to be endless numbered roads out of wherever you're at. It's supposed to be a future of choices. None of us have that anymore. We have one future, and it isn't ours to make. I dunno, Winter. No one else will ever get this shit. You and me could be happy. We could at least be friends. I get thinking maybe I still have one or two roads open."

He's right. I don't know what Kai did to him in the past month or whatever, but it hardly matters. I try not to think about this; just lose myself in Mac and the galaxy she exists in. But once in a while, I have a sobering thought, when I first wake up, or as I slip into sleep. It creeps into my mind that I am a murderer. In an alt-right killer clown cult. How do I go back to school, get a job at a Women's Shelter doing counselling some day, maybe marry? That's not available anymore. I pin all my hopes on Mac, because she's my last road too. I'm not a container like her. I'm a sponge. I need to interact. I sense people, and I take them in. I also leave impressions of myself, anywhere I am. I don't want to be alone. I can't live alone inside myself like she does. That's why she's the only one who can possibly truly survive this. She doesn't need this world.

"Yeah. I guess we could be friends.", I agree reluctantly. "So what's your actual name?", I ask, half a smile sneaking onto my face. It's probably actually Chad. I'll die. Can't wait to tell Mac.

"Ah, you know... Kai says-", he starts, but I cut him off.

"I don't give a shit. Just tell me. I won't tell him, after he cut Mac's fingers off? I'm not telling him anything.", I assure him, the bite of anger on my tongue. "I have a terrible memory for names anyway. Unless it's Chad, I won't remember." I giggle at my own inside joke, to myself. No explanation.

"Fine.", he says, looking slowly over at me from the corner of his eyes, a slow, lazy grin overtaking
his face. "You'll remember though. Shane Kopinski."

I burst out laughing. "Could you be ANY more of a caricature? For real? COPinski? And you were a cop? And a Shane? Has there ever been a fictional cop who wasn't named Shane?", I laugh. I don't know why this is cracking me up, but whatevs. Getting late. I'm getting my nighttime silliez.

"You're already Anglo-butcher ing it!", he laughs. "No shit you won't remember. You can't even get it right in the first place!"

"I got it right.", I argue with a smile.

"You're really going to argue with me on the subject of my own name?", he laughs, good-natured and incredulous, his breath making clouds against the dark.

"Fine. Say it again, then.", I request, trying to stifle.

"Nah. That's enough disclosure for one night.", he says, only half his smile on, the highlights of his angular face lit in the street light glow. "Now you forget it like you promised. And we should quit talking about your little friend by name too. Not a good habit to get into.", he adds hushed, and dire.

Suddenly, I'm under a cold wave, pulled in undertow. I don't know her name. I have never asked her. I was so busy improving on Mac Tonight that it never even occurred to me. I didn't even open her fake passport; Canadian, so who cares, I thought at the time. I hated her back then. I don't even know her aliases.

Impulsively, I ask Speed, "What's her real name?"

He just shakes his head slow, looking down at his feet. "I don't know. Kai named her in the kitchen when she made him that first Pure White. Far as I know, he doesn't know. Didn't care to.", he answers quietly. "I screwed something up the night we NPC'd her. I think I'm in big trouble. I'm worried I killed her, or myself. Maybe both, when it's all said and done."

I grab him by the arm, search his stupid manface with my eyes wide. "What did you do to her?", I spew with accusation.

"Nothing!", he stutters emphatically. "Nothing except what Kai told us to do, to the letter.", he qualifies. I don't take him on. I get it. We all do. We've all been there with Kai. "But I fucked up. I mentioned that she wasn't a citizen. Kai didn't want that said with Killerwhaletank there. I just got nervous. Or maybe I was pissed a little with him. I dunno. But he's fixated on it."

I loosen my grip on his arm. This is a crossroads. Is it friends?

It is.

"Just keep quiet about it. Don't bring it up. Don't make excuses. Don't try to explain, and don't ever, ever, apologize. For anything.", I toggle my gaze between his eyes to ensure he's listening. "A thing like that will blow over. Kai has a lot going on. He's eating pills like they're Cheetos on election night. He'll forget.", I tell him. But he still looks worried. "Just be a good soldier. Do whatever he tells you. And if that old bitch asks any of us, we say you never said that, act as confused as Tucker Carlson hearing a cogent argument. We all insist Mac is American, and act unconcerned, and like it's mildly funny and we don't have a clue what she's talking about."

I let his arm go, and we continue on walking, as Speed thinks aloud, "Yeah, Danielle is very stupid. She's probably used to being wrong a lot..."
"Yeah. Totally.", I reassure him. But the back of my mind is uneasy too. Kai's gone so far with this thing already. What can't he lose to gain the world? I don't know if there's a line he won't cross.

Mac won't show me her hands. She says it's not as bad as I think it is. But I got up early and hid around the corner of the bathroom door one morning when she changed her bandages so I could see. I'd thought she'd have stumps. But her fingers were cut so low down that they appeared sheared off at the joint. I felt sick and turned away. I don't like broken bones, and I could see hers, chopped off inside the meat. I stood, mind reeling, waiting for the dizziness to subside, leaned against my bedroom wall. I couldn't help but think about what she'd told me; about how Kai had just taught her to 'handle' him before this whole mess jumped off. So disgusting. Then he did that to her. So I don't know what he wouldn't do.

The walk home goes fast, and soon the house is within view. It's dark, the streetlight out front dead, and no porch lights on. My window is black too.

"Bet you wish you'd just gone to see the strippers.", I drytease Speed. "Sorry Snow Hut was a bust. I don't know what my malfunction was. Usually I can pigeon to anywhere."

"Ah. Whatever. It's too cold for ice cream anyway.", he shrugs. "Next time, we Maps it before we leave.", he adds with a smile.

"Next time? Don't be so presumptuous.", I tell him, with a flash of eyes.

He just grins back. At first his unquenchable ability to smile through every swerve, diss and clap back is annoying. But I'm beginning to see why some people refer to that trait as 'good-natured'.

On the porch, the pull of his need makes a psychic grasp for me so strong I can feel it. Don't be so desperate, Speed. It's not cute.

"So, what are you doing now?", he asks, stepping between me and the door.

"Going to bed.", I state flatly, and reach around him for the knob, twisting it.

"Yeah, me too, I guess.", he says, standing aside, with a grin on his handsome, chiseled face as his sad, hollow eyes stare out longingly at me. Gross. He's so thirsty and I'm not sold.

Mac is asleep on her side of my bed, doused in blue starlight, when I let myself quietly into our room and slip into my nightie. I keep procrastinating trimming her hair straight for her. But it's already starting to look less choppy, and breaking over her collar bones. She looks strangely peaceful and childlike when she sleeps. It's like when she's awake, she's possessed with a spirit that she wears like a garment, that is weary and heavy. Fucking autist. She probably needs it weighty. Lulz.

I wake her up on purpose when I get into bed.

"What do you think of Speed Wagon?", I ask her. I've already heard her opinion on him before. I don't know why I'm asking her again. But her answer is more blunt than expected and cuts to the quick.

"He's cute.", she says sleepily, rubbing her huge wide set eyes, on overtired auto pilot. "He's completely in love with you. He's a nice guy. You'd make cute kids. You should go for him. Life's too hard without a husband. I'd love to see you happy and married, someday. Straight truth. I know it isn't what you want to hear.", she tells me, already rolling over and going back to sleep.

I lay in bed, staring up at the ceiling, and my $1400 chandelier, contemplating if there is any wisdom in her words. There probably is. But I can't get over her either. Not yet anyway. It's still her I'm
thirsty for.

She can be so much like Kai. So singular and set in herself; totally consistent, and yet unpredictable and somehow impossible to know. I get bored fast. Maybe that's why I like that. Maybe there's something wrong with me. I'm not attracted to Kai, am I? Some subconscious incestuous Electra complex? No. I'm not. The ceremony was fucked up. I was repulsed. I stopped it. Still, we're not quite just brother and sister. I've always been his favorite. Vinnie resented me. He believes in gender segregation. He's always been very upfront about that. I ruined our family. He wanted it just him and Kai. Then I came along and fucked it all up. Maybe I liked being Kai's favorite, and his special attention and unnatural curiosity. Maybe I reward it. Maybe I give it back in return. Maybe that's why when I could have betrayed him and been free, I still preferred to stay. I can't live without him, because I can't be myself without him. No one could ever love me like Kai does. No one could ever love me like Mac does. No one could ever love me like Kai does, and she's so much like him. And nothing like him. I'm definitely not in love with my brother. Ugh. I'm too tired. Now life has become the faulty flat circle Mac bemoans, and I'm circling its drain. I shove contemplation from my mind, close my eyes to hide from the blear.

A gentle rap on my door. I sit bolt upright in the dark. Mac is still asleep, and I listen to the silence, sure I imagined the gentle thud. But just as my heart stops thudding, and I begin to lay down, I hear it again. Totes a knock on the door.

Swinging my feet down onto the cold wood floor, I step deliberate and carefully. I learned to avoid every squeaky floor board or beam in this house sneaking out to party during high school. I was cooler than Kai and we both knew it. Sad, to be overshadowed that way by your baby sister. It humiliated him. Mac would have worshiped him anyway; I know that's true. Busted up broken girl, too sad to see her own pretty, damaged beyond repair on the inside and perfection on the outside. She's the dream of every basement dwelling reject.

I reach my bedroom door without making a sound.

"Kai?", I whisper cautiously at the crack of the door, hand on the lock.

"No. It's me. Uh, Speed Wagon."

Eye roll.

"Yeah.", I reply in a flat whisper. "I remember. What do you want?"

As I stand at the door, I stare through the blue darkness of the room, to see Mac sit up groggily in bed. Her white onesie has come unbuttoned almost to her waist, and the vague light of the pale winter moon reflects off the contours of her tiny tits. She can't hide her body behind all her hair anymore. Kai didn't mean to, but he only made her prettier. Pink lips part, and her grey eyes gape. She thinks someone has come for her.

"It's okay. It's just Speed.", I whisper to her, motioning for her to lay back down. "I'm just cancelling him.", I reassure her with an eye roll.

She doesn't lay down, just pulls her knees to her chest, and sits up straight, whispering back to me in concern, "Do you think I need to put my Habit on?"

"No, whackadoo.", I try to answer, while Speed interrupts from the other side of the door.

"Winter, can you just let me in? I don't want to get caught out here.", he pleads.

"Fine.", I finally answer, quickly ushering him inside my room and locking the door behind us.
All three of us are suddenly frozen, awkward in the dark. Kai wouldn't like anything about this.

"What do you want?", I hiss almost silently at Speed Wagon. "Do you know what could happen if we got caught like this?"

With toxic male abandon, he grabs me by the shoulders, and without even having me sign a formal consent affidavit, kisses me. It's needful and passionate, his lips gentle against mine, his body pleading for the pleasure of mine. Pressed against me, he feels warm and solid, like he did on the sidewalk. He's in a onesie like Mac is. So little between us.

Love can be a contagion. Sex can be a transmitted disease. When desire is virulent enough, it's hard not to catch it, no matter how inoculated you've become. He's a good kisser, his mouth tastes clean, and his hand cradles the back of my head as his other drops down my lower back. He doesn't care who sees. He wants it that bad. He got hard so fast. I'm trying to shove him off, not sure why I want to. He feels good, something warm and hard to hump, and I'm so frustrated and alone. I yield slowly. I don't kiss back, but I let him. I don't really want him, but I want to come, and I want to use him.

When his mouth finally pulls away from mine, without a word between us, I catch his sincere blue gaze and take his hand. I lead him back to my bed, carefully guiding him over the telltale floor boards. Mac slides over in bed to make more room. She's so cool.

"I don't love you, you know that, right?", I ask him, pressing my lips to his ear. "You're nothing but a Sybian to me. Men disgust me. I can't look at you. I don't care at all about you."

"That's okay. I love you anyway, Winter.", he answers with an easy half grin and sad eyes, as I shove him ruthlessly onto the bed, ripping my nightie off over my head and tossing it aside and kicking my panties off.

I try to get up on top of him before I lose my momentum, so I can start to feel the mechanical pleasure before my intellectual revulsion overtakes me. Positioned on the hardness, I grind and undo his onesie to get the ugly necessity out. He looks smacked and stunned, so shocked and starry eyed that I have to look away. I look over at Mac. She's still sitting motionless, beautiful, but I think her high cheekbones bear a hot pink flush, and her small high breasts heave against her control under her pajamas.

"Do you want to share him?", I ask her impulsively. "He's nothing to me. You always say he's nice.", I invite her hopefully.

"Oh, um...", she stumbles, Faline in the high beams. "... but Kai. I love him. I can't.", she shakes her head. "And Speed loves you. He doesn't want this with me. He wants this with you."

I climb off Speed's engorged lap, and cup Mac's cheek in my hand, face to face with her on the bed.

"Look what Kai did to you, Mac. He's probably secretevilplanfucking that disgusting pleb. We'll never tell him, will we Speed?", I shoot the question over without looking at him. He's so nothing.

"No. Never.", he agrees.

"Mac, it will be fun. We're all friends here, right?", I ask her, stroking her cheek with my thumb, before I lean in and gently kiss her cheek where my touch prepared her. Her flesh is so soft I can barely feel it under my lips. Now I'm drunk with how horny I am, hot pulsing need throbs wet between my legs. "Hey, Speed, show her. Show her it's okay with you.", I order him. "Kiss her."

She's reluctant, but she's light as a feather too. I sit astride his legs, and he pulls her over across the bed and into his lap just ahead of me.
"You okay, Mac?", he asks her softly, smoothing her hair from her face, before his hands gently caress her, dropping down to her razor hips. "I know you love Kai. You know I love Winter. I promise I won't hurt you.", he breathes as he slowly presses his lips to hers.

She's straight, but she doesn't want to like this any more than I do. But she likes it too, no matter how much it makes her hate herself. He's such a good kisser, and she relents in the moment too, relaxing, leaning cautiously into him, a strangled moan escaping her.

"Does it feel kinda nice, sweetheart?", he asks her, running his hands through her chopped off hair. "I'm sorry about... all of this.", he adds regretfully.

"It's okay.", she shrugs, breathless. I don't know if she's admitting reluctantly that it feels good, or if she's forgiving him reluctantly for chopping her hair all off.

"Do you want me to kiss her again, Winter?", he asks me over her, as I gently slide her onesie down off her shoulders.

I'm mindlessly grinding, straddling his muscular thigh, and answer, "Yes. Kiss her again. Make her moan again too. Whatever you did."

I love that sound, especially when she's trying so hard not to. It has to feel so fucking good to make you moan when you don't want to. It makes me throb so hard I feel like I'm going to come when she does it. That's why I loved listening to her and Kai go at it. They both tried so hard to be quiet, and neither one of them could do it.

"Are you sure you're okay?", he asks her tenderly, running a hand up her bare back and into her hair, cupping her head. I love that feeling. She probably does too.

"Yeah.", she answers slowly. "I think so. I love Kai though."

"I know.", Speed breathes with compassion as his lips graze hers. "Just think about him. He loves you too.", he reassures her before closing his mouth over hers, and just barely rocking his hips under her.

He's just a stupid boy. He loves me, but his hands find their way onto her perky little breasts where he lazily rubs her small pink nipples with his fingertips. I reach around her and replace his hands with mine. They're so firm, not even a handful, perfectly round, and her little nipples are so hard and responsive. She shivers. He kisses her deeper, rolls his hips under her chaste virgin pussy. She moans for us. A tingly shock snaps through my pussy at the sound, so I grind harder on his leg. I want more though.

As if he read my mind, Speed pulls his lips away from hers slowly.

"That's probably enough of that, huh?", he asks her, once again stroking her hair, like he's taming a wild horse. "Why don't you turn around. I'll look after you girls."

"I'm still a virgin.", she tells him. "I want to stay that way."

"I know.", he pulls her close, and hugs her, resting her head on his shoulder. "I know you do. You will.", he reassures her gently.

"You won't try to stick it in me?", Mac asks him innocently, her voice muffled against his neck.

"No.", he promises her solemnly. "I won't try to do that to either of you."
"Are you sure you can help it?", she asks him skeptically, pushing back against his chest. "Can you say no to us, knowing we don't want to do it, even if in the moment we're begging you for it?"

She's a tease. I don't know if she realizes it or not.

"Ugh, Mac... stop talking.", Speed groans at her, his face flinches.

"Mac?", I place a hand on her shoulder and turn her around to face me, "He promises. Switch spots with me, okay? I can't enjoy this if I can see his face. Do you mind?"

"No problem, Winter.", she agrees, slipping out of her onesie entirely as she scoots off his lap for me. I climb astride his hips, my back turned to his face, and Mac straddles his thighs facing me. She keeps her panties on. I don't. I keep my eyes on her blushed, stunned face when I reach down to pull Speed Wagon's dick out of his onesie. I don't want to look at the ugly thing. I just want to feel it. When my hand reaches his fine flesh, Mac tugs down on his onesie, and it pops out triumphant, standing straight up, thick and tall. Kind of a nice one for what it is, I'll give him that.

Speed Wagon is breathing heavily and shit, trying to be quiet. It's hot. Won't lie. But Mac... fuck.

"Here.", she says low and husky, butting her little lace pantied pussy up tight to his dick, sitting on top of his ugly ass balls, "I'll hold it up so you can slide up and down against it. I bet it would feel good."

It's what I want. I take her hands in mine and press my nude body to hers, with his cock firmly wedged between us. The room is chilly in the night, and her soft skin is hot as fire, gleaming blue in the dark. I bury my face against her long neck, in her hair, and breathe in. She smells so good. She doesn't pull away, pressing tighter to me, her breasts against mine. I'm feeling this. I'm so wet, still feeling drunk, in a horny haze. I try it; twitching my hips against the hard dick between us. It's warm too, and my swollen clit slides easy on it. She was right. It does feel so fucking good. I can't stop. I thrust slow and steady, rubbing up and down his shaft. Mac can feel it too; the force of my movements transferred through the flesh sex toy between us, through her panties, to her little clit. She squirms a little, her breath coming faster.

"You should try this.", I whisper in her ear breathlessly, still holding her hands in mine. "It feels amazing. He's really big. You'd like it. We can do it at the same time. This must be making you so thirsty. Don't you need to come now too?", I moan, trying to seduce her. I want her to come with me.

"He's not nearly as big as Kai is.", she answers with an unimpressed shrug. Scamp. She says it and her eyebrow lifts, half grin. "Kai's like a terrifying cement wall of flesh. He's huge."

"He'll tear you apart.", I groan, sliding one of my hands between her legs from behind. Her panties are wet.

"I know.", she whispers. "I want him to."

"You want him to so bad.", I groan, feeling sick at myself, but humping Speed's cock even harder. I have his shaft dripping wet, slippery. Mac's getting that way too, talking about my brother. She's starting to need this. I don't care how I get her to do this. "You're getting wetter just thinking about him. Do you come hard with him?"

"Ohh, fuck... yes.", she confesses in a moan, finally grinding into Speed. "He does this thing. I feel like I'm gonna die when he does it. It's so good. It feels like he's breaking my pussy."
I pulse the tips of my fingers gently against the wet little hollow of her panties. She dry humps harder on Speed's cock, turning her face down, and grazing my neck with her full, moist lips.

"What does Kai do to you?", I ask curiously in her ear. Almost instantly the question makes her breath come choppy and fast, a gnawing contraction shoots through her pussy. I pound my clit up and down our new toy. I'm gonna come hard tonight.

"Fuck, Winter.", she moans softly, "You shouldn't ask me that. He does everything, well, everything without penetration. He spanks me there with his dick through my panties until it makes me come. He pinches it, and taps it and rubs it for hours until I can't not come for him. He lets me ride his thick dick with my panties on. He's so fucking good. There's more. I dunno, Winter. I shouldn't tell."

By the end of her confessions, her panties are slick, and she's sliding Speed's pole almost as hard as I am.

"You ever do it with your panties off, Mac?", I ask her. I don't think she's even noticed I'm touching her yet. It's then I realize that Speed Wagon's warm hands are placed gently on my hips.

"No, not yet.", Mac answers, distracted, working herself hard against Speed.

"You should try it.", I whisper, kissing her neck while pulling her panties down. "It's amazing. I have him all wet already."

For a moment, an emotional downdraft douses me again, watching her, pressed to her, but far from her. She's doing this to me, but Kai and Speed Wagon are doing this to her. Head tilted back, her big grey eyes are lolled back in her head, her chewed up hair breaking over her sharp collar bones. I do love her and it hurts.

As if she knows, she shifts her gaze to mine, lips parted and moaning softly, she wraps her arms around me. I hold her back, wrapped in her feverish embrace. We use our bodies together, using meaningless fuckboy. We don't hear his anguished groans. We don't care how he feels. We don't care if he comes. We're going to come together. We have his cock so wet and slippery; I'm wet with her, and she's wet with me. I can feel her motion through him now, her bare flesh on mine. He's enveloped in pink, but not inside either of us. Inside both of us. I'm one with her. Our slick clits slide and hammer up and down our big throbbing toy.

"Winter...", Mac moans, "Winter..."

"I'm gonna come!", I blurt out, before I lose the ability to speak, and a deep, guteral moan rises out of me. Kai will hear. He'll jerk off. He always has when I come loud. It's so powerful I have to pull away and put pressure on my pussy with my own hand. So powerful it almost hurts, just like Mac said: like my pussy is going to break. Maybe that's what love feels like. Whatever. It's good. She's still working on hers, calling my name.

"Winter... Winter... ohh, Winter..."

"Winter?", I feel pressure on my shoulder, shaking me. "Winter? Winter? Wake up. Are you okay?", I slowly hear Mac's distant voice come into focus. "Winter?"

Fuck. That shit should have been in italics. The touch on my shoulder is just a lifeless cotton mitt. That's why she had her warm, elegant hands--just a dream. But I wake up, my pussy still quaking and my hand clapped tight between my thighs. I freeze. I don't know why I give a shit because I've heard her with Kai so many times, but I don't want her to know.

"Yeah.", I answer, sounding so guilty. "Just a nightmare. Thanks for waking me."
Fucking altrighteous bitch. I haven't hated her this much since before Kai cut her off. Best wet dream ever and she wakes me up. First /pol/ I've enjoyed in a long time, and she ruins it. #bluewalls

"Just go back to sleep, Mac.," I shoot back over my shoulder at her, and angrily sulk under the comforter, pulling it away from her.

*Mac*

The room is painted an electric black blue when I slip into the cold sheets. It's late. Winter isn't home. It suits me fine tonight; I love her and conversation flows like an endless *Seinfeld* episode between us, but the last few days, even that's an exhausting death march through interpersonal sledge. I just don't know what to say that won't atomize what's left of her world to a radioactive dust. I don't want to be responsible for someone else's social comfort right now, but I utterly refuse to be a self centered, wallowing pleb who thrusts problems on others. I have no needs. Never have, never will. Except maybe solitude and some fucking occasional sunshine.

It feels good just to have my face washed, so I don't have to smell the burnt hair ashes. It takes me back to a bad time, like I'm still the same little girl in the same salamander plagued basement, filled with shame, and being filled with the fear that I now dominate and form to my own being. It's as if the paralysis grips me from the grave of its past. It's so real that it's timeless and present.

I close my eyes and sink into the bed as warmth gradually passes from me and into it. I could sleep for a thousand years. If only I could sleep. Every time I begin to pass into the twilight, Kai's dizzying betrayal grabs me like a rabid pitbull and shakes me in its frothing fangs like a ragdoll until I am awake and activated, every wound, psychic and otherwise, throbbing and screaming at me. He said he loved me. I still believe him, but how can he live with me cut off from the body? How can he let me? I'm in the wilderness, in doubt. I curse myself. I don't ever question my faith.

It's supposed to storm later this week. I think about driving through the mountains to get here last year, deep in the hellish tomb of the Rockies, between Butte and Idaho Falls. Ugly country, worse than Saskatchewan in its own way, because the world swallows you up along with the sky and the sun, leaving nothing but jagged granite teeth and shadow. I fucking hate the mountains. I don't get the stupid mountain-boner most prairie people have. Stupid self loathing plebs.

It was all blacktop, black sky.

Snow sticks to the last fallen rain before the night turns cold and turns all to frost and snow. Wind whips the swirling snow to snakes that thrash and deceive, sidewinding across the disappearing pavement. The heavy flakes fall lighter, smaller as the temperature drops, until they are as stars in the sky, nothing but innumerable crystals glaring back the headlights. The dark is impenetrable. The future is measured in split seconds to death. Nothing is sure. Driving through a blizzard is like hurtling through space.

My life feels like that now. It's as though the darkness is boundless, and I'm lost in its nauseating expanse, nothing real to tether me or hold me down. My world is also claustrophobic, because I'm not floating in space at all. That's an illusion; a deception of the thrashing snakes. I'm locked in a steel cage, being hurled out of control, surrounded on all sides by more constraints. One wrong move, any change of conditions, and I'll be crushed in my own cell.

Sighz. I roll onto my side, tucking my legs up as close to my body as I can, shrinking myself as small as I can. All I do. Story of my life. I have the will to do the things no one else can muster the fortitude to do. People can't humble themselves. They're so fucking weak. #patheticism

Kai didn't even see me when he passed me in the hallway today. I was attempting to scrub up
another greasy orange ammonia piss left by that dead-cat-pissing, my mitts sodden with Clorox. He also didn't notice that piece of genetic garbage, Danielle, nick my calf with her foot on the way past. Surprise, surprise, her sagging, dragging socks had a hole in the toe, and she managed to gouge my leg with her dirty talon. I held my peace though, went and cleaned the raised red scratch out with alcohol. Most people can't do that; suck it up. But I do, because I'll kill her cat, and then I'll kill her. Pretty sure they call that manifest destiny.

Yawning, I remember I have to tell Winter to buy a lily next time she's at the store. Her idea to do the cat in with chocolate didn't work. All it did was make him puke, and possibly made him even more retarded. This time we try it my way. Total renal failure, untraceable, and the leading cause of death in decrepit tomcats. Makes them unable to piss. I smile, fading close to sleep. Feelz good, man.

Halloween is tomorrow. Of course, I won't get to participate, even though I finally have a costume. Dressed in a burqa, in grey face, I must be offensive to everyone. I just wish I could be Winter for Halloween. She keeps buying every cropped turtleneck and short a-line skirt, and she even got the navy swiss dot mini dress I wanted with the rigid vinyl collar and wide satin tie at the neck. It's not just the clothes and her long hair either. Kai still talks to her and loves her. I'd give anything just to be her for a day, back in his graces... and fetch designer. I'm way too hot to be hidden under a burqa.

It's as though I feel a punch to the gut and a slap across the face. How dare I have a rebellious thought. My pinkies are missing. I'm disfigured, my hands grotesque. I'm in the untouchable caste, with the world also rendered untouchable to me.

I drift uneasily to sleep, slow and fitful. I'm never sure I've been asleep at all these days. Suddenly, I feel the pierce of eyes digging into me. Please, not him. Not now. Not tonight. Please be Winter, I beg in my head, willing my eyes to open and look over across the darkness toward the chair in the corner of the room.

Relief floods over me. It's not the goldenboy. But I'm stunned that it isn't Winter either, but a thin man, dressed in a woolen suit, sleeping silent in the chair. His face is thin and tapered, pinched, with an unnaturally wide forehead. He's slight of build and seems frail, as those of the past often do. At first, he's solid, and I wonder how he got into the house, but feeling a compulsion spoken into my mind, I look harder, and come to regard him as incorporeal, because somehow, I see through him.

When he opens his eyes, they light to mine instantly. He sensed me too. He knew I was here. He peeps into the windows of my soul as though I left the lights on inside.

"You dream a great deal for a soul who can't rest.", he says in a soft Appalachian voice, marred with a quiet difficulty of speech. "I couldn't have interpreted your dreams, not with the aspect of mortality shackling me. We can't be named within time, because we cannot exist without time. Yet it's only with our passage out of time, that we can be called good, or called evil."

"I know you.", recognition floods over me, as I speak, "You're Edgar Cayce. I've studied you. I went to these tent meetings in Wood Mountain. They preached your mysticism. I dream about houses all the time. If they're the state of my work on earth...", I trail off. He knew I would speak his name. He addressed it before I said it.

I don't tell my dreams, except a couple times to Kai. They've caused me great shame my entire life. I hold my tight breath inside, longing to have said less.

"You've been in those houses. There's no interpretation for memory.", he tells me slowly. "I see you long for a domestic life in those dreams. Your head bludgeoned on the stairs instead, looking at the other children's height marked in pencil on the wall. Always locked in basements. The house with all the many keys where you run from yourself. Not only the state of your subconsciousness. You've
been in those places. The blue room, with the blue drapes, and the wall of glass. No, I have yet to understand all. I don't see as far back as I ought to for that. My gift is not mine to control, but that which is given. The gift ought not to flatter the giver."

I'm confused. I don't know how to ask a question. Sometimes the field is just too big. I sit in the dark, gaping at the man. I feel less insane than I think I should. I'm not afraid. The house is silent, no creaking of footsteps anymore, and no sign of Winter yet. I think I'm awake. I just don't think she's home.

"I don't know what to ask.", I tell him finally.

"I know, ancient child. I came to give to you freely that which has been given unto me in my many years of affliction and silence.\textquotedbl", he answers gently. "I'm not your judge. I don't know the rules as they apply. It's the rooftop. And the snakes."

"I've done a terrible thing. I've never been able to be good., I blurt out, ashamed. "I don't know what it is. I'm born in sin, and of sin. Why does my mind go there when I lose control? Why are those the places it resides? How could you call those signs wisdom?"

"Because those interpretations of dreams were not for the world. Those were for you. The snakes are the wisdom of all things. The rooftop is the pinnacle of your wisdom for yourself."

"What does that mean?", I ask, agonized. "I don't understand what you're telling me. Why would you tell me things I can't possibly understand?"

"Is that not the burden we are all given, in exchange for the safety of our souls?\textquotedbl", he asks back patiently. "You've not a name yet, after all these long years, because you've yet to exit time, and truly exist. Even I couldn't know what you would know, or what these words would mean to you. I'm sorry for the desolation of your confusion. The sight so often leaves us blind. We lose our life to gain it, and you more than most. I wish I could do more to help you."

"Is Kai really the messiah?\textquotedbl", I ask, but he's fading.

He smiles at me, a mix of pathos and knowingness in his face. "Before I go. I was a healer. You are at least partly made of earth, and the earth may heal your wounds; another skin to shed before you step into the colours. Peel from your hands the swaddling shrouds, and witness the power of your faith. The pieces of you are gone to ground. I must go also."

As he fades from my sight, my sight fades, and I drift to sleep, in ease and comfort.

A hand rocks me roughly awake. It's Winter. This I know without looking.

"What do you think of Speed Wagon?\textquotedbl", she asks me.

I've told her what I think of him lots of times.

"He's cute. For a guy who has a "No Fat Chicks" sticker on his car, he's actually really sweet, and you're skinny anyway. He's in love with you. Every girl deep down just wants to be married. Try kissing him and take it from there. I think you should just hook up."

She seems satisfied with my answer, and lets me roll back over and levitate before I lose the slumberz. Love her. But I don't fall asleep all the way. I wait in that pleasant dumbness until she's asleep, and slip into our bathroom, turning on the light.

Closing the lid to the toilet, I sit down, and in the stark glare of the tiled room, as I first witnessed my
disfigurement, I awkwardly pull with one wrapped hand at the knot that holds the other mitt tight. When I get it free, I slowly unwrap the cotton strip, heart beating painfully. I'm afraid to hope, for the risk of the pain of a letdown. But I'm afraid also not to hope, for fear my lack of faith be punished with the retraction or denial of a miracle I so desperately want. I judge my heart, watching my hand slowly uncovered. It is filled with hope. It always is. That's why life hurts so much. It's easy to give up and be cynical. It's hard to have hope in these end times.

I avert my eyes at the last moment. I'm not ready to see hope lost. I cling to it. I go to work, gazing up at the ceiling, unwrapping my other. When the bandages lie on the cold tiled floor, in two piled up ribbons at my feet, I allow my gaze to drop to my outstretched hands, held in my lap.

I don't have my pinkies back.

But what I do have, in place of the bloody, sheared off bone pits I once had, are two tiny new nubs of undamaged flesh, soft and pink as a babies' skin, translucent and new, like saplings. I touch each. They weren't there when I went to bed.

Joy washes over me in a pounding wave. I thank My Maker, then carefully wrap my hands again. I'm not ready to tell anyone this. Not yet, anyway. Warm breath floods into my chest willingly, and I float back to bed, unable to quell the smile on my face. Tears flood my eyes. I've always cried better for happiness than pain, I suppose because it's something I've experienced far less often, and hardly know what to do with.

Winter is fussing in her sleep when I climb back into bed beside her. I gently rouse her before falling asleep with my back to her, still smiling, in a daze, just trying to remain part of the body.
Chapter Summary

Speed Wagon flashback story, in multi-perspective. A little mystery within a mystery. Officer Kopinkski on the job, through two sets of eyes.

Some reflections on the past from the man who wants to go a-wooing our Winter. Smut? Of course! How else are we supposed to find out what he's about?

**Speed Wagon**

None of the guys are back home from Flint yet. I'm already in my sleeping bag in the dark, trying in vain to sleep. Sometimes I used to forget I wasn't in my old house at night. That just doesn't happen anymore.

Time folds up on me sometimes, like an electrical cord with a kink in it. Shorts me out every time.

I had a pretty successful evening with Winter, relatively, I think. It was fun just to be with her. She put her hand in mine. Gotta mean something. Shit got a little hot, I mean, weird hot, but hot, for a second there on the sidewalk. I should be happy. But I'm not. Instead, I feel tripped up in the past. Old cases I won't solve. Chicks I probably fucked up when I only meant to help. Maybe I didn't mean to help. Maybe I made excuses for myself because I just wanted to get laid and not think about it. Maybe I hid from my own motives behind my bullshit. I don't know if it was bullshit or real anymore; it all seems so long ago and far away. A movie about a life that I half slept through.

I try to think about sweet Winter, about the possibility that we have a future that resembles something normal. I try to think about how it felt when her hand slipped inside mine, warm and strong. How I love her even more now that I know she's not the spoiled princess Kai makes her out to be. She's an orphan. Yeah, I'm realistic; she might be the most flip, tuned out person on the planet. She cares about that jiggling slob, Lena Dunham's, retweet. But she gets this life and so do I. We used to be normal. We could be again, if we were together. I tell myself that. But I can't keep my finger on the trigger. I'm too distracted. My mind got hijacked tonight, and now it keeps driving down the wrong streets.

Why did it have to be strippers tonight? Why not getting slizzered? I could have gone for getting nice and fucked up at some bar where the chicks aren't all dead already, and hoping it catches up soon. Why the fuck not ice cream? I didn't want to think about strippers. Now I can't quit running the scene when we found Aster. I can't forget the night before either. One of the last cases I'll never solve.

Joanie, ironically enough, called it in too, because Aster didn't show up for plans they had. She must have been cutting it close. I barely had time to shower at work after leaving her place, before the call came in.

Aster lived in Woodlily Courts, these lowrise, half way to nice apartments. The building super let me in. "You know what she does?", she asked me in hushed tones, when she let me inside. I played dumb. Didn't respond. Froze the skanky old hairbag out of finishing the thought. I knew I'd find
Aster's body; just the sinking heavy feeling inside her place. Air in there so thick I could barely walk through it.

She had a bedroom, but nothing in it but a cardboard Amazon box full of bundled cash. She slept in the living room on one of those cheap black futons. She owned exactly one of pretty much everything; fork, glass, plate, spoon, pair of jeans, toothpaste, can of soup, church dress to bury her in. Aster was thrifty.

When I found her, she was in the bathtub. Still warm; the water and her. She looked so normal with all the make up and shit scrubbed off her face, not in a costume. I let myself get hopeful she was going to be alright, put my fingers on her throat to feel for a pulse. The pulse I made pound a few hours before. I told myself I'd ask her out, take her to that new restaurant that just opened, maybe for a movie. I'd try to get her a job filing or something for the city. I felt guilty I'd gone and immediately fucked Joanie after. I told myself, if there could just be a pulse, I'd be a good guy. Coinciding perfectly with the wave of guilt, as I watched her pale, pretty face, searching for her heartbeat, a huge, coarse haired black fly emerged from her parted lips, and flew at me. She was dead. I wheeled as fast as I could behind me, as the wave of guilt became a typhoon of nausea. I threw up every bite of Waffle House I'd had with Joanie, along with the sour green coffee before I even made it to the bowl. I had to clean up my mess in Aster's bathroom before the other units showed up on scene.

Cleaning up messes. I'm pretty sure that's what she did for me.

All I could think was how I was so glad she had the decency to do it in the bathtub so my semen wouldn't be there when they did the obligatory trace analysis. I'd have been in trouble. Now I don't feel glad or relieved. I sweat sick, cold sweat when I think about it, because I wonder if she did it that way to protect me. She was a smart girl, if her striplist was any indication. I'd have been fired for fucking a victim, especially on the clock. And I should have been, probably. Did she protect me, while I was completely derelict in my duties? I didn't protect her. I can't know. I can't ever close that case.

Her laptop was open. She'd been looking at business listings down south. She had a page open to some concrete business that was for sale; they made terrazzo, poured floors, did counter tops, made these submersible coral reef habitats. It had just sold that day. That big cardboard box full of money in her bedroom closet was something she'd been singlemindedly devoted to for some time; it was a lot of money. She was saving for something. Maybe it was that.

We never found her car, but then, we never looked. My partner was senior, and he said to let it go, she was just a suicide. So I let it go. We were busy and understaffed. None of us had been paid for our overtime in over a year. No one wanted the unpaid hours out looking for a suicide stripper's car. It's always bothered me though. I just wanted the story, so I could close the book. We never followed up on her assault either. My partner said there was no point to wasting resources on that either. The couple detectives we had agreed. They were swamped with convenience store murders.

Her family knew nothing about her. Her mom hadn't talked to her in a couple years, and refused to come to the funeral when she found out what Aster was doing for money. I went with Joanie. Aster had a little sister, Holly. Holly came. She was like the spitting image of Aster, but with all the pain and hard mileage taken off. She was a university kid with a dork boyfriend, the kind of chick who dyes her brown hair browner, and wears cardigans and shit. Aster paid for her own funeral with her cash in a cardboard box. She left Holly everything else, over $220, 000. Funeral lasted five minutes. It's the last time I cried. Never fucking doing that again.

I exhale, look up at the dropped ceiling above me. That's a life that's over, lost and gone. Dead to me. The movement is everything now. But as I lay on the floor, I feel a chill seep up out of the damp,
freezing ground, through the cement foundation, the subfloor, the underlay, the avocado Olefin carpeting. Sometimes there's so much above, and so much below. I feel sucked into the earth, buried under this house. My past is an escape; a place with untread roads. So I think about Aster's case, and work my brain in reverse. I can't solve it. There will never be more evidence. But that was my life. It's the last place left for me to go, back into the haunted house where every failure that led me here lurks; more my life than the present is.

My life going forward is Kai's. The life I already lived? That shit is mine to walk back through. The only freedom I have is in reflection on the details. The only new thing that's ever going to be mine is anything I can see that I missed in the first place. I shoulda lived different. People say they did their best, but they're full of shit. I didn't. I did what I wanted, with a little trying, a little fighting the current, when I felt like finding the strength for that.

Did she kill herself because of me? Did I kill her? Is a sin of omission the same as commission? I wanted to believe she was okay; when she said she was, it was the excuse I needed.

****

Officer Shane "Speed Wagon" Kopinkski

"Copy. This's Car 427. What you got, Sheils?"

"Hey, Speed Wagon, we got a 240, 242, and a possible 261A. Location Top Brass. I assume you're well acquainted with the place?"

I smile and shake my head. Been a while since I rolled around with Sheils. I think she must miss it the way she flirts all the time.

"Don't be like that! Not as familiar as I am with you." Pretty sure she can hear me smile and bite my lip. "Gimme the address. And what are those codes again? Just plain English, since we're alone on the radio at the moment, huh?"

The radio crackles static. I can hear her turning pages. She assumed I would know, and now she's scrambling, looking it up in the phone book. This chick needs to learn to use the computers.

"1682 South Dort Highway, just about at the intersection with Atherton. And that's an assault and battery, possible attempted rape on one of the girls out there. Not sure. 911 said the girl sounded pretty worked up.", she finally answers back.

I'm already on my way, speeding over the asphalt in the low setting sun. It's just now she's answered, I can throw on the sirens. No way I was about to let her know she was right. I do fucking love Top Brass. Best Strip joint in the nearest three counties.

Glitters is for run down old showgirls, just sad. Bunch of sagged out old moose tits and toothless waitresses who washed out of Vegas. I like a real woman, fine, but I like them well cared for. The Timeout has absolutely beautiful chicks, like, I'm talking girls who are an easy eleven thousand out of ten. But they're just that. Girls. I bust that place at least twice a year for struttin' underage in too much makeup. Place makes me sick. I keep my eyes on the floor at all times, even when I'm there for work, because I don't like not knowing if it's okay to like what I'm looking at. Top Brass is old school, and they rarely have problems out there. The chicks are hot, setting's nice, and the pervert who runs the place knows we know he has a jacket about a mile long from his past life out in Cynthiana, Kentucky. He knows we're watching him.

"They say what the girl's name was?", I ask suddenly. I sort of have a girl out there.
"Linda said she talked to a Joanie."

"Joanie, huh? Shit. You sure?", I ask back, trying not to let Sheils hear my concern, or my engine rev that much more.

A high pitched, and clearly pissed, chuckle comes over the static of our shitty CBs. "You're such a cliche, Shane. Yeah. Linda said she talked to a Joanie. Why? What is she to you?"

Almost a year since I banged this broad anywhere approaching regularly, and she still figures she's got the right to go all Flavor of Love on me.

"Just a pair'a tits." Phenomenal tits, though. No way in hell I'm saying that part to Shiels though. "But, uh, you know, she's a nice girl. I know her better from the Waffle House out in Kent from doing transfers. Chick brings me real maple syrup instead of that log cabin corn shit, is all. You got any more details on the 261A? I'm about to pull in here. I'd rather not go in holding my dick."

"That would be a first.", Sheila says, "No. All the details are the ones I gave you."

"Alright. Well, this could take a while to sort out. Until you hear otherwise from me, pass the calls on. Unless you get another felony. Then give me a heads up, okay? You're a doll."

"Copy, Shane." There we go. There's the smile in her voice. Drop a doll, darlin', sweetheart, baby, whatever. You got the chick eating right outta your hand.

Cock bucks.

Fact is, that's why I want all the felony calls I can get, and if I gotta bang Sheila again to get her to throw a few more my way than I have coming to me, I guess I suck it up and bang her. Last year, our union signed a contract making our bonus dependent on performance. Chief called it 'incentivized'. I call it cock bucks. So that means all of a sudden, I don't get shit anymore, since I take all my sick days. I didn't vote for the incentives, but all the boy scouts and ass kisses did. So now I have to make it all back in felony collars, because I don't feel right making my bonus all in speeding tickets either. Fucking quotas. So whoever this peckerhead is, that fucked with my girl, I'm bringing him in. For her, and for my own 401K. I gotta prove myself? I'm not prepared to do it working hungover, ticketing little Mormon chicks in school zones and shit. I make real collars.

So that's some of what's got me pimp parking and kicking rocks across this parking lot, in a hurry to get inside and get this over with, cold north wind stinging my face. Other factor? Joanie, for sure.

As soon as I shove in through the fire exit, I can see she's not on the floor, and head through the double doors into the back. Oddly enough, I've never been back here. Looks a lot like the breakroom in the station, although chicks are so damned messy, all their warpaint and shit strewn around. For a titty bar, you'd never believe the sheer volume of ugly ass clothes laying around their dressing room. But then I see Joanie, and why I'm here becomes clear to me. She's sitting on a straight backed chair, crying into her hands with one of the other girls helplessly trying to comfort her.

"Joanie? What happened here? Who did this to you?" I don't want to start a howl with my directness, but this shit pisses me off. Joanie is a sweetheart. Never did stand a chance. Born with a body like hers, raised without a dad, had a kid with some bum she probably loved when she was twenty.

Joanie's gorgeous. She should have found a decent guy with money. She's worth it. She looks like a Bond villainess from back when those chicks still looked like chicks you really wanted to stick it in; big green bedroom eyes, full lips, fake red hair, huge real tits, and a nipped in little waist. She's got nothing on but a short pink robe that I've taken her out of a time or two, and a pair of slide-on fluffy
heels. She really does look like she stepped out of about two decades before I was born. Chick's a bombshell, even if she is older than me.

"Dewey.", she sobs, sucking her dewey lower lip, licking away a soot black tear. "Dewey... Teach? I think? Fucking creep. I'm getting too old for this. Look at my hands, Shane. They're shaking. I can't live scared like this anymore. Thank goodness they sent you. My hero. I know if anyone's going to catch him, it'll be you."

Taking her trembling hands in mine, I crouch down, try to comfort her. "Dewey Teach? What kind of a stupid fucking name is that anyway? Teach? I'll school the son of a bitch. Joanie, we'll get him. I'll haul his ass in myself, and make sure to not let him in the cruiser too gently on the way. You let me know when your shifts are; I'll patrol this place every chance I get. There's nothing for you to be afraid of."

Her little friend's still hovering, hand on her shoulder too, and I get the feeling she's almost as uncomfortable as I am. I don't blame them, but I hate when chicks cry. It's like it makes me feel itchy on the inside, and I'd do or say anything to just make it stop. Wish I could just give Joanie a lollypop or something. Well, more 'or something'. This other girl is killing my game though. To be honest, she makes me uncomfortable.

Why? Well, Joanie's little friend is beautiful. Not like Joanie. In a rare way, like Kate Moss back when she was synonymous with Calvins, not with cocaine. She's the one girl in this place I don't ever watch dance. I haven't got around to running her through the system, but something about her, well, let's just say, she's not quite all woman. Little too thin, tits a little too small, not to mention the warning hair, in some shade of--you guessed it--blue. She seems a little young, and how attractive I find her makes me feel nauseous and disgusted with myself. So I just don't look at her. I doubt she's underage, but I couldn't live with myself if she turned out to be, and I'd taken that second look. In the eyes, she reminds me of a kid I couldn't help once, so I don't like thinking she's pretty. I've got a rule. If it ain't broke, don't fuck it. Now, I've got a feeling this girl's broken. But something about her makes me feel wrong and dirty. So I don't look at her. I'm not a fucking creep.

Joanie finally regains her composure enough to answer, "Oh, Shane, I didn't mean to give you the wrong impression. I just made the call. It was Aster who got yanked off her stage. I don't know how she's so calm."

"Sorry.", a timid little voice finally speaks up. It's Joanie's little friend, who's been standing here the whole fucking time like a statue. "I'm Aster. I'm okay, really. Joanie, I'm fine. Really."

Looking at Joanie, I think about saying, 'You serious, right now? She's the one who got beat, and you're the premature madonna sitting here blubering about it?', but I like Joanie, and that'd make me the douche. So I give the polite version.

"No, I'm sorry. Bad intel from dispatch. My mistake. Joanie, if you're alright, I probably should get the statement from the actual victim, unless you're a witness?" I stand, letting her hands fall from mine, and turn to Aster.

Not lost on me is the look between the girls, like Aster is pleading with Joanie not to go, and Joanie's looking at her like she's asking if Aster needs her help.

"Or if it's okay with you--", I nod at Aster without looking at her, "Joanie can stick around."

"Aster's shy.", Joanie cuts in. "She won't say a bad thing about anyone, but this shit needs to get said. Shane, you gotta put this son of a bitch away for all of us. He's a creep. The stuff he says about her? Now he drags her off her pole, in a room full of people? It's only so long until he really hurts
someone, probably her."

Aster. Poor girl. I can feel my face squinting at her, trying to read her face, but it's not easy. She looks carved of stone.

"Joanie exaggerates.", she deflects slow and easy, with a wave of one of her hands. "The guy's a creep though. Gives me those gym teacher vibes, if you know what I mean.", she adds with a quiet sniff, before looking down, twisting on one of her bone thin ankles.

"Aster!", Joanie exclaims, through her tear stained haze. "Vibes? No. He says shit to you too. Shane's one of the good ones. You can tell him." It's Joanie, now, with her hand on her friend's skeletal shoulder, square and angular even through a fleece hoodie. "What was that thing he said just last week? The marshmallow thing?", she says with a glare, looking in my eyes, like if Aster won't say it, she certainly will.

I get my notepad ready, waiting, while this Aster chick just stands there calm, sort of reluctant to speak. Half her face is covered in some sort of metallic gold leaf shit, only it's seafoam colored, like she washed up half alive on a beach somewhere. I don't watch her, but I know the show she was dancing. She's into the showmanship, I'll give her that. Makes my job a little easier that she's got all that pretty covered up in some huge Carhartt hoodie that she keeps tugging down.

"Alright.", she says softly. "Here's everything I know. His name's spelled just how it sounds. Dewey Teach, like Blackbeard. He's a trucker, for Halverson's, I'm pretty sure. He was on me like an addict from the first night I started here, and something about him wasn't right. There's guys looking, and then there's guys leering. His had a malice. So I have a punter from Kent's department, and I had him run the name Dewey Teach. Turned out, he did do some time in Angola."

"Yeah? That's good." I'm a little impressed. Sad thing about these girls with good instincts is they mostly learn them through terrible experiences. "Who's your contact in Kent, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Travis Stanislaus." She answers with a fair degree of reticence, and a look to Joanie for reassurance, wrinkling her little nose at me. "I don't want to get him in trouble. He's decent. And a good tipper too."

"I know Travis. Nice guy. Terrible quarterback, though. I won't say a word.", I reassure her with an easy laugh. "Hey, by any chance, did he tell you what the suspect did time for?"

"The prison time? Yeah, actually. Did a stint there for a statch. Got out, violated. Associating with known felons, as I recall, maybe dickwagging by a school?"

The girl's tiny, fine featured face is still stony and calm, but there's a little glint behind her huge dusk blue eyes now. Sure as hell enjoys being right.

"I realize this is probably embarrassing and sensitive, but I need you to tell me as best as you can recall what it was specifically that he said to you to make you uncomfortable. Anything you can tell me could be helpful when we bring him in." I can't tell the chick this, but I don't actually know how useful it's going to be, unless it was a direct threat he then acted on in the commission of the assault. But I can't stand knowing there's a punchline and I haven't got to hear it. "Third strike, and all, you know?"

Joanie clicks her accomplished tongue at me, while Aster just stares helpless, like the cat got hers.

"Aster's going to take an hour to get to this. And I don't have that kind of time, so what he said
was..." Joanie pauses, and giggles, grasping her friend's arm like they're at a junior high dance and she's about to ask me to dance with Aster as a favor to her. "... that it was a waste of time for him to watch her, get all hot for her, because he's too old to get it hard enough to get it into someone as young and tight as her. He said, 'It would be like trying to cram a marshmallow into a piggy bank.'"

Joanie dissolves into the giggles. Hot chick without a bra on, giggling? Is there anything in the world better than that? Alright. Maybe when it's at a dirty joke. I fight off a grin, but it's hard, because the discomfort on little Aster's face at all this is almost funnier. A shy stripper. Cute. Then I think of what she said; gym teacher vibes. You have to wonder what the real story is, behind a chick who looks like Kate Moss, strips, and can't repeat a dirty joke in front of a man. Poor kid. I'm not writing that asshole's filth in my book, but I am going to call Dean at Halverson's, get a list of all his drivers info, see if Trav's been keeping any tabs, maybe call Angola, and see if that kid who washed out of the academy last year is still working as a guard down there.

I'm still writing all these leads I need to run down in my book, when I hear the click of Joanie's heels, and feel her warm hand on my shoulder.

"Shane?", Joanie whispers, "Get this guy alright? I love Aster like a baby sister. You haul this guy in, come find me at the Waffle House tomorrow morning when your shift is through. I'll bring you the real syrup, spill it in your lap, and lick it all off in the bathroom... I'm in the mood for bacon."

Then the chick sticks her hot little tongue in my ear.

Joanie's a firecracker. I don't know how a hot girl does that. You know; calls you a pig, and it's somehow totally cool. So few people walking around are even still alive. A little spunk, and you know there's something left of them. I'm trying not to get hard, trying to remember I'm taking a statement from a vic at the moment. Surrounded by all these pretty girls, one promising blow jobs while licking my ear? Not that easy.

With that, Joanie takes off, and leaves me alone with Aster. Even covered up, she's pretty in a way that is really hard not to stare at, sort of haunting, like I feel like I never quite grasp her face, get a hold on it. Just my read on her, she's got a way of keeping people far away. The girl's knee looks terrible, and even through her golden tanned skin, I can see thick black bruises blooming like mold all down her legs. She just averts her eyes anytime I look at her, so I try not to look any more than I absolutely have to. I forgot the camera in the car to take pictures of her injuries. I think when I'm out there, I might just run Teach through the system, and maybe her too. See how old she is. If she's underage, I'm arresting her boss and making two felony collars tonight. Add to the cock bucks.

"Hey, Aster? Is that your real name?", I ask her.

"Yeah. Who'd pick it?", she says, wry smile spread over her pale pink lips. "My parents had a theme going. All flower names. Don't know why I couldn't have got Lily. They never used that one. Sure as heck would have been a better stripper name."

"You don't insist you're a 'dancer'?", I ask her with a grin.

"I report, you decide. But I think dancers wear tutus. Strippers take them off." Her answer is dry, followed with a shrug of her thin shoulders. I can't tell with this girl if she's the most cool and confident chick I've ever met, or just the saddest with nothing to lose.

"You have a last name, Aster?" I gotta run this girl before I get any more attached, because I'm really starting to like her.

"Karst.", she laughs softly, like a shorebird. "You ever known a girl who was born a victim of her name?"
Victim of a name. I think about that. Yvette. That was a strange name for a little girl. I don't think that's what Aster means. I think it all means the same thing. People who hurt kids should swing from a rope from too short a fall.

"So have you lived here all your life?" I try not to phrase that like an interrogation. Always hard not to sound that way when you're in a cop uniform. I guess it's why it's hard to convince people you're a dancer when you're taking your clothes off too.

She shifts her weight from one death-defying heel to another. "No, I've lived all over really. Raised mostly in Imperial County, California," she answers with another little sniff, and a glance to the ceiling. "It's Mexico, really. Last county into the state. Just a bunch of longhorns and produce, really."

"Yeah. That, and the busiest drug corridor in the country. You grow up near Brawley? Blythe?"

"El Centro." She answers so plainly, but bites her lower lip when she says it. I really wish she wouldn't do that.

"Shit. Rough little town.", I answer back with a whistle.

"Yeah. How do you know the area so well? No one here ever knows where I am talking about."

"Oh, I gave testimony at a parole hearing. Guy served his sentence in Calipatria. I had a couple days to kill. Just drove around the desert, went over the line at Calexico to see what it was like. I'd never been out of the US otherwise." She's listening, nodding, little smile on her face.

"Calipatria? Yeah. Out in the Borrego park, pretty much? It's pretty out there. Lots of federal funding because of the huge prison. A lot more money there than El Centro." Her big eyes turn the color of ash. "You ever get out to Slab City, the Salton Sea? The dead places?"

"No. Heard that's some crazy shit out there. Nothing but burn units, in an old boneyard. Lots of bodies out there, I'd imagine." I break my gaze with the girl, rub my face. "I gotta slip out to my car. I need to photograph your injuries for the file. You mind slipping out of those..."

"My stockings?", she asks, sitting down, undoing a shoe, looking like one of those big-eyed-little-girl pictures on velvet my grandma used to like so much. "Sure. But I have to go on in a few, so if I'm curt..."

"Time is of the essence?" Can't help it. I cut her off with a grin. One of my favorite lines.

"You got it.", she answers back with a quick smile. "Thanks for understanding. But we all have to make a living."

It feels good to open the door, get that rush of fresh air that doesn't smell like hairspray, bubble gum and about a thousand little girl's busted dreams. One of my feet already in the gravel, I turn back.

"I can't believe you're dancing on that knee. I played football, jacked mine once. You're tough as nails."

She looks up, and there's an ease and a light to her. I see her. She smiles, her knee drawn up to her high cheekbone, tiny fingers working on the buckle of her shoe, mile long pale blue hair hanging down over her slight body. How she's sitting, I can see her panties; some kind of green sparkly
things. I feel the blood rush to my cock, feel it jump, it's getting hard so fast. This's why I'd never look at this chick. I need to get to the car, run her name.

"Coffin nails.", she laughs, rolling her eyes, and chewing her lower lip.

I can't do anything but walk away. It's pitch black out here on the service road. No lights, no moon, tall trees all around. The dark's like an entity, not an absence. Back at the car, I can't help but miss my old Crown Vic. This stupid new cruiser has auto locks. Pain in the balls. The little money we do get in the budget goes for annoying options on our cruisers, while they try to get away with paying us less. We're never getting the millage next time either. Fuck me. I'll be working security details until I'm 90.

"Hey. Sheil? This is car 427."

"Copy, Shane. What can I do for you?"

"Can you run a couple names?"

"Yeah. No problem. Your girl out there fine?"


"Got him. DOB March 25, 1971. He's got a record. Charged with rape, 2001. The vic was only 14 at the time. The family didn't want to put her through testifying, and the charge got pled down to a statutory. He did four years in Angola. Released, then picked up associating, known felons, in a pill mill. Once in custody, he was ID'd as the perp in an indecent exposure charge that ended up dropped. Served another six years."

"Shit." Fuckers like that make me sick. I've never shot someone on the job. Looked back and wished I had a few times. Guys say it's hard to get over, but a guy like this? I'd go ahead and give myself a medal. People watch that CSI shit, and don't realize you can't trace a scattergun. Most officers around here roll with an AR. Not me. Those, you can run ballistics on. Mossberg all the way, ever since I was twenty two years old, for this exact reason. I failed someone. Didn't want to get caught unprepared again. "I've got another, alright? The vic. Aster A-S-T-E-R Karst K-A-R-S-T."

"Yeah. Got her too. Squeaky clean. Not even a traffic violation. DOB April 26, 1992."

"You sure about that? There aren't two of them, or something?"

"Two Asters? No, Shane. I'm sure.", Sheila answers back sarcastically. "Why?"

"Being thorough."

Truth be told, I feel like a weight's been lifted. I suddenly have an idea where to start looking for this perp, and get to take in one of this girl's shows, finally, at the same time.

Giggles over the static. "You never shut it off, do you, Speed Wagon?"

"No. I'm here all night."

"All right. Copy."

Charging back over the dirt lot, old Nikon in hand, I feel like this is it. This douche is as likely to show back up here to finish what he started, as he is to stick his head up anywhere else tonight.
"Hey, Aster?" I say, pushing in through the dented steel back door of the club, "I think I have an idea."

"Mind telling me while we get the file photos over with? Just I have to go out soon.", she answers back, voice soft. With her shoes off, she's just a little thing. "Um, where do you want me to stand, for the lighting, and stuff?"

"Uh, let's see here. Probably just stand there where you were. Light's pretty good there, where you have those incandescents. This camera sucks, so I have to get in pretty close here. Just to warn you."

She steps into place and looks up at the ceiling. Damn. Even in this flourescent light, messy dressing room, in a huge hoodie, she's beautiful. She doesn't like standing still, doesn't want her picture taken, no doubt about that. But I can't help but frame a few of them to catch the underside of her jawline, lip caught uncomfortably under teeth on one side, high cheekbones, those long black lashes framing her big eyes rolled up to the ceiling, framed in, I dunno, mint maybe, hair? She makes no sense to me. I'm crouched down on the warped vinyl floor, close enough to smell her, like salt and coconut coppertone and blue shaved ice. I bet she's shy when you lick her. Bet her back arches. I bet she gets cold while she fucks. Bet she likes it slow. I'm getting hard, wishing I could just push her back a few inches against her dressing table, put her legs up on my shoulders and get those sparkly panties out of my way. I wonder if she'd look at me, pull my hair, grind into it so hard she'd feel my teeth. Wonder how it sounds when she moans. I need to taste her. I swear she's breathing hard right now. I want to slide my hands behind her thighs, pull her onto my face, put my tongue inside her. Her life's made her feel bad. I just want to make her feel good.

"That enough, you think?", she asks sarcastically, shifting on her bare feet. Girl stands on her tip toes even with her shoes off. "I gotta get ready. So what's this plan of yours?"

Standing and withdrawing from her space, I turn away from her, adjust myself. "Well, I was thinking. This guy's been out of the clink for years, making his parole, flying low, staying outta trouble. Gotta wonder if after all that time, today's the day he picks to do something so stupid, that maybe he's dumb enough to come back. Try to finish? He say anything to you today?"

"Not really, I don't think.", she answers distracted, peeling off her hoodie over her head. I know I should look away, but I can't. She's dressed like a mermaid. Scaled green bikini bottoms, and fine time-worn fishing nets wrapped around her torso, like she's been caught and escaped over and over. She's gonna take those off though, because I can see the tiny shells covering her nipples underneath. That sparkly shit she's got over one eye and cheekbone spills down her chest on that side too, over her tanned skin. She's thinner than I like, but that's because usually, I like a chick who can handle it a little rough. Not this one though. She couldn't handle it; just crumble, fall apart and blow away. Making love is such a gross cheesedip phrase. Kills my boner. But I will say, I feel like giving dick to this girl easy.

"Know what?", she shatters the silence, fluffing her hair up, pulling an airbrush out of her drawer, "He was just back from some long haul. Said so when he first came in, I overheard it. Sometimes when he's first back, he comes for both my sets. You might be onto something."

Just then, I hear the door behind us, and see her posture stiffen, and her little face turn back to stone. Lloyd Burns. Her boss. One of those guys who only follows the rules because he knows we're watching him. Educated abuser type. Still wears those western leisure suits, look like they're made of car upholstery, with a string tie and a skullet. You look up shitheel operator, piece of shit strip joint owner in a dictionary? You come up with a picture of this loser.

Seedy motherfucker walks past me, like he doesn't even see me, starts in with some kind of
inspection of Aster, as though she's in for a life of indentured servitude. I hate dickhead bosses. Something about the idea of bosses never really did sit right with me. I do what I have to in order to keep the peace, but I'll never recognize a human authority over me; not really anyway, and certainly not without me consenting to it. Keeps me from climbing ladders, but it keeps me from walking under them too.

This asshole's too dense to see the pissed off look in the girl's eyes. Forgets they remit a percentage of tips on the honor system. If I was this chick? I'd forget most of this peckerwood's cut every night, and blame it on the size of my adorable tits.

"Now, you got no tits, and green hair, okay? What you did have was legs, okay? So now you got nothing. You're in the sex appeal hole here. You're a waste of my stage tonight.", I hear Lloyd saying to the girl.

"Kristen can't even dance spinner!", Aster retorts, hidden venom in her quiet disagreement. "I need to work. I need this money. Please. I'll airbrush. You won't even be able to tell."

There's a plead in her voice, an urgency. Besides, I respect a little enterprise in a chick, and I've had it watching this sausage fingered dickwad mishandling her, poking at her bruises.

"This girl works for you. Do I have that right, man?", I ask, taking a step closer, let my hand drop to the pistol in my belt. This dog needs his chain yanked.

"Yeah. She does. So what's it to you, Officer?", he asks facetiously, "And if your little interview about her almost falling onto a dick is over, she's got work or going home to do, so can you wrap it up, unless you wanna pay to stay and watch one a' the cows with udders?"

Now, I got no problem admitting there's differences between men and women, but I hate that denegrating shit. Well, if it's aimed at a chick I like, anyway. Fat chicks? Fire away.

"Well, what it is to me, is that if she's your employee, what you've been doing right in front of me for the past couple minutes is sexual harassment. You can't touch girls that work for you, can't talk about their bodies. So either she's making money, and fulfilling her end of the employment contract, or she's not. And if you have complaints with her performance, well, then, they need to be in writing, and you need to give notice to cancel her shifts. That's the law. So, as I see it, it's you who's got the problems tonight. I'm going to be running a sting here, and she's instrumental to the process, so..." I shrug. Man's quakin' in his imitation ostrich boots. Fact is, the only part about that whole speech I know whether is true or not is the part about touching the merchandise.

"Fine.", he sneers, not in my direction, but the girl's. She's got a look on her face like she's never had a man take up for her in her life. The change in her is so obvious to me; strikes me as a little sad, that all of a sudden, she's got the balls to stare this asshole down as he walks away, like me saying that was all it took.

"Thank you.", she says, her head already down, working on her legs like she's painting a car body.

"No problem. And, hey, what he said? None of that's true. He always like that?"

"Pretty much. Or worse. Journeyman asshole.", Aster answers, smiling up at me in the mirror.

"That's an understatement. You girls are saints not to kill that guy.", I say with a laugh, trying to pack the camera back into it's case. She's spraying cheap hairspray up and down the insides of her thighs, and I feel like I'm all of a sudden in on something I'm probably not supposed to be. "Your stage is the one second to the back?"
"Yeah.", Aster answers, walking past me to the chair where her stockings and shoes are, sitting down and getting dressed. "As soon as I get my shoes on I'm going out. But I like a minute to myself first, if you don't mind. Just to get my head right."

"Of course. See you out there, see if we can't collar this dickhead, send him away. Alright? I'm running this camera back out to the car, and I'll just be on the floor."

Walking back to the car, in the quiet, I wonder what she meant by that. Joanie drinks before she goes out. I know it, always smell it on her. I rolled Kristen with a half an ounce on her once, just pretended not to feel it in her pocket. This one though? Aster? I don't know what her poison is, or if she even has one at all. Seems like too much of a control freak for substances. Not like control over others, but over herself. Never seems to let her guard down much. I'd peg her as a cutter, if it wasn't that she'd have nowhere to hide that.

When I get back to her stage, she's still not out, so I sit here with a bunch of losers, look through the faces, and making sure Dewey's not one of them. Aster's the youngest looking girl in this place, and she's routinely got the oldest crowd. Disgusts me. I take a seat closest to her stage so I don't have to look at anything but her. Her music's already bumpin' though. Chick always dances to shit that's weird as hell. I always was a little curious because of it. None of that Britney Spears Toxic and Hot in Herre. She's probably had to be told it's go go, not cry cry.

But when she walks out, it's hard to remember I'm on the job, working. Girl's made for a stage, and she knows it. All that shy is evaporated off her searing flesh, and she can't even be bothered to look at the crowd, just cruising herself in the mirror behind her. She doesn't walk around the pole slow like Joanie does, and doesn't waste time. She's just on the pole, and upside down, spinning. Little Aster knows how to work her body, how to suggest things. Never let myself look at the girl before, and now I can't look away. Hypnotic.

...I was screaming into the canyon at the moment of my death... the echo I created outlasted my last breath....

Dark thoughts she has. Not a dummy.

Half the time, her long hair falls down her chest, covers her little tits. Don't get me wrong, I love Joanie's huge ones. The feel of them heavy in my hands, when I lift them up, or how I can squeeze them together around my cock and fuck them until the tip of my cock's in her mouth. Shit... But Aster's got little half grapefruits that stand straight up, and I just want to suck them while she wraps her legs around my pole. She doesn't take her pasties off. Not ever. But I can tell she's got tiny little nipples, from the size of the itty bitty shells that more than cover them up tonight. But I think she's got that long hair to cover something else up. Her back's so bony it looks like her sharp shoulders are about to pierce right through her skin. I know girls. I know some of them are thin without trying, but I know none of them are that thin without trying way too hard. She still makes me hard. Something about her makes me want to run my fingers over her warm golden skin, between the hollows of her ribs, kiss her mouth. If my cock keeps telling me I could fix everything for her if I fucked her good enough, my head might start to fall for it.

Aster's eyes look all sultry and heavy when she sees me sitting there, she slows her spin, and slides down the pole to the floor. I can't help it. I watch how her panties slide down the pole, wonder if she feels it, if it feels good, turns her on, if it makes her want to slide down mine. She slips right to the floor, crawls slow to me, makes me wait and watch her. Poor little thing, crawling on that knee. The way her hair falls, I can barely catch a glimpse of her little sno cones, but fuck, tiny tits look good when a chick's on all fours. When she gets to me at the edge of the stage, her glossy pink lips are parted and she's smiling a little bit, her dull blue eyes blown all black. Smells like I wanna eat her.
She nuzzles in close, whispers in my ear, "So, Shane... how am I doing? Think I might be cut out for this undercover stuff?" Her lips touch my ear, feel warm and wet. She rears up a little, and one of her hands finds it's way onto the back of my neck. "Am I ready to handle your sidearm yet?"

I took out cash to tip her with, so I slide a twenty between her tits, let their gentle curve graze my hand, feel her taut tummy, hollow and stretched between her sharp hipbones, pull her panties away from her skin with a finger, let my hand slide inside against her smooth skin, and leave the bill behind. Not what I wanted. I want to keep going, until I feel if I made her wet, want to rub her little clit under my middle fingertip, make it swell, make her want it, make those hips twitch into my touch. I still want to lay her out and spread her legs, just kiss her there until I make her come so hard she can't stand it, keep going until she needs a fuck too. My hand on her made her moan soft, like a breath she couldn't control. Work like this, the girl knows men. She knows I'm hard.

"You're doing great. Think we both know 'undercover' isn't a thing you have any trouble with." My voice breaks. I almost forgot what she's doing here. "You see the perp around here?"

"No." She tosses her hair in my face, and slides her hands over my shoulders, kisses my cheek. Certainly knows how to make it look real.

"This's smart.", I say under my breath in her ear, her lips on mine. "Just keep playing it like this; like I'm just a trick. Crawl over, we can talk, I'll tip you big, alright?"

"We call you punters. Tricks are for prosts.", she rolls her eyes, and answers back in a whisper. "You're the boss."

"Alright. Well, then, report back soon?"

"I will." She slinks back, out of my reach, still on her hands and knees. My hands slide through her long seafoam hair.

Last chick I dated never let me touch her hair. Some brain dead Insta fabulous Kardashian follower who perceived herself as a real influencer. But Aster's hair smells like nothing but water, just soft and clean, falls and breaks over her smooth skin. All I can think as she climbs back up the pole, like she's swimming up it like a mermaid, not using a thing but her ankles to do it, is how I'm going to hold her down in my lap, rock her up and down like waves, and wrap my arms around her, so I feel that soft hair falling down her back on the insides of my arms. Find out what she feels like on the inside. Sometimes an easy gentle fuck with a breakable girl just feels so fucking good.

I can feel the heat from the light bulbs around her stage on my face while I sit and watch her in the dark. I don't get stiff for Joanie until we're alone, or I think about watching her in the shower. Watching her is just for a visual to bring up later. But Aster's got me sprung. I feel like she's dancing for no one but me when her eyes meet mine, and she smiles a little, licks her top lip slow. My pants are pinching my cock, and I'd reach down to adjust it, but I don't think I could take my hand off. I watch her hands on the brass pole so close, I can almost feel them on my cock, gripping it, sliding around it. I'd like her to sit next to me in one of these booths, all close, with my arm around her, with her pretty eyes looking up at mine, take my big dick out nice and slow with her tiny hand, and jerk it until I blow my load up all over her face. She'd look all surprised, shove me, laugh, lick it off her soft pink lips. Fuck, this girl's hot.

I don't think it matters if I get this Dewey asshole tonight. He'll turn up. Not that hard to catch a guy in a big rig around here, especially since he's going to have to go back to work sometime.

Aster's unwound herself from the nets she looked caught in, somehow, while she swims up and down the pole, now she's winding them around the string sides of her panties. I just wish she'd come
back over to me, wrap this thing up. Pretext maybe, but I'm going to ask her for a private dance, say I should stick around here longer, keep trying to catch the suspect. Really, I just want to be alone with her to find out if she wants me too.

When she finally does drop down to earth, she won't come to me, like if you ever want to pet a cat? The thing just walks around rubbing on everything else but you? She's doing that to me. See, I like dogs. Dogs are obedient. But my dick is getting impatient with her bad kitty routine. I want her to quit torturing me and just come.

When she does finally come to me on her hands and knees, it's worth the wait. I can't think straight, forget to wonder if there's any rules. One of my hands is behind her head, up in her mint hair while the other strays back down to put a twenty under her waistband. Everything about her is smooth, her long hair, her skin. Her pussy too. I kiss her cheek, leave my hand there inside her panties, the backs of my fingers on her soft skin, the tip of my middle finger just reaching where her slit starts. My touch makes her breaths come fast and shallow, makes her moan soft and sharp against my ear.

"He's still not here.", she whispers.

"What?", I ask back in a daze, no clue until I've asked that what she was saying. "Oh, yeah? Dewey? Well, let's not worry about that yet. I can stick around. You do private dances? You think if he turns up that maybe provokes him, lets me arrest him on an additional charge I'm a witness to?"

"Maybe. I don't do private shows. I guess I could for you though." She leans closer, leans into me and puts her arms around my neck.

"I don't want to be a dick, if it's not a thing you do.", I tell her. "I'd never want to make a girl uncomfortable." I mean that. It never occurred to me that I never have seen her once even touch a man in here. She dances. That's it.

"Are you kidding?", she purrs slowly, arching her body towards me. "I'm already... uncomfortable."

"Oh, uh, you mean this?", I ask her, pressing the tip of my finger that's still in her panties against her. "You want me to move it?"

"Shane... you big meanie...", she pants in sharp breaths against my neck, getting my finger wet.
"Depends what you mean by 'move it'. Take it away? No. If you mean move it lower, stroke that? Then yeah... But you're going to get me in trouble. I have to finish my set. We can do this in my room later."

"No. I can't wait here like this.", I argue with her. "No one's going to know the difference if you cut it short. C'mon. Swing around my pole." She looks down over the edge of the stage, wants to see it. I just bite her earlobe when she's so close. "Don't you wanna sit on it, see what I can do with it?"

"Yeah.", she moans soft and breathless in my ear. "You know I do. But I need the cash, the cream, the Benjamins. Sorry. You have to wait. We're both working, remember?"

My cheek is against hers, my face lost in her fresh hair, one hand still holding the back of her head while she waits on me on all fours, my other hand still inside her sparkly string-sides. She's whimpering for it, her lips on my ear, while I growl into hers.

"Fine. When you're done though, I'll rock you to sleep on it."

"My fucking word, Shane. When you ask like that...", she groans with a tense whine, "Okay. You get your way. Just let me do my finale, and then I'm yours."
Mine. She said it. I watch her slither away from me, feel her slide from my grasp, but I can't stop thinking it, I'm yours, she said. Good thing too, because I don't like sitting here in a room of needle dicks, all watching her, all thinking about sticking their pitiful little pricks in her sweet little body. They all see her as some dead thing who knows how to let her soul leave her body so they can fuck the shit out of her, dry, in an alley or some shit, hurt her and leave her like that. They all think these girls are tapped out trash who can't feel. I see how these girls all wash up on this beach. I go to their homes when they're kids, try to help their moms, try to send them home when they're out with some dimebag douche who's twenty fucking five when the little girl's still sixteen. No such thing as a slut, unless it's some common bitch who'd cheat on me with a pencil-dicked fuck when I love her with my whole heart. But this chick? Aster's not that.

She's got style to burn too, dancing to The Coasters. See, you'd never catch the other girls around here doing that kind of classy as balls shit. Joanie should have married a rich man. Aster? Should have been rich herself. Girl thinks so hard it hurts my head. She's managed to work a song into her show, one where she dresses up like a mermaid no less, that references Mexicali and caster nets. I have a feeling how she's going to end this thing, and I like it. I didn't even think about it, but my hand's holding my own dick tight, stretched down my leg. All I can think about is stretching her, working into her hot little body, slow and easy. I'm not going to hurt her at all, just let her cream all over me until I can slide in, inch by inch. Just how she's moving now on stage? I want her to move just like that on me while I'm inside her.

It's a while now since I banged a girl sober. Thing is, I don't feel that sober. Some girls give you that feeling, like the whole earth is spinning the wrong way. Maybe it's just her. She's got that brass pole gripped somehow between her thin legs, and she's just spinning around and around, so slow, throwing her nets. I know I'll get the last one. Shouldn't brag, but I always do, situation like this. I'm good at seducing chicks, and there's something to be said for a full compliment of dimples I'm not afraid to use.

Even knowing it was about to happen, when her final net falls over me, and I see her walk towards me, reeling herself to me with the net, my heart skips. No. The fist wrapped in blood in my chest pounds, hits the inside of my ribs like knuckles on a rough cement wall. I look at her body move; her little tits don't bounce, just have this snappy little jiggle when she steps. I can see the sinews and bones under her taut golden skin moving her sex machine body steadily toward me. She looks like one of those dirty Asian cartoons, like a giant squid is gonna come up from the depths and do terrible things to her and she's gonna like it, with her big eyes and ice cream hair, little Sailor Moon face. I wanna lick every inch of her; where her legs meet her torso, right where her panty legs go; peel those little seashells off her tits, lick the sprinkles off her sundaes; wanna feel her long hair fall in my face while I lick her slender neck and suck her ears. I got blue balls already off this chick. I'm taking my time with her tonight.

As I stare up at her thinking, she slides off the stage into my lap, her net wrapped around my back. A second ago, all I wanted to do was jump up there, push her down, spread her legs and eat her out. All I could think about was how I bet she oozes pure cherry juice. But now, her warm body is on mine, her lap grinding slow in mine, and I can see it in her dark, stormy eyes that she wants this more.

"Shane?" she says in a quiet, breathy little voice, "Follow me, okay?", right before she languidly somersaults out of my lap onto her feet, spins my bar stool around, her little hands gripping my knees tight. Bet she does that when she sucks my cock too.

I don't bother with an answer. She knows I'll follow her sexy ass. She struts me right out of the room, still hung up in her net. For a chick whose shoulder blades could break the skin, she's got nice curves to the back of her hips. One of those little bubble butts, just enough flesh for the strings of her panties
to sink in a little once they get around past her hip bones. I wanna sink something else into her, bent over the stage, in this private room. Doubt her little body could handle it in that position though. Maybe I could sit her in my lap, facing out. Hold her hips, see my thumbs dig into her flesh right there, like her panties do. Just grind her around, slow and easy, slide my hands round, between her legs, rub her hot, smooth clit until I make her come.

But as soon as we are alone in the dim little room, she presses me against the black velvet wallpaper, and kisses me deep. Her lips are swollen, her mouth warm and moist, and I thrust my tongue into her mouth and kiss her hard, until my teeth dig into her top lip. When I grab her ass, her legs just find their way up around my hips, and soon she's the one pressed to the wall under me, bouncing her strong little body up and down against my cock, all our clothes still on.

"How come you don't like me?", she asks suddenly, out of breath.

I exhale. Probably sounded impatient.

Taking her hand, I slow down dry humping her hot body, force her hand inside my pants until she's gripping my aching cock, dripping clear come for her already. "Don't like you? What the fuck do you think this is? You feel that? You feel what you did to me?"

She smiles, jerks me a little, kisses me, before her smile falls again. "Then how come you never watch me when you come in? You watch everyone but me. You must be here with the guys every set off. You never watch me."

See, to me, this feels like she's trying to pick a fight. Not that I care, this far gone. I'm not opposed to fight-fucking, if it wasn't for the fact she looks sad, and sad rarely leads to getting laid.

"Well, shit.", I exhale again. Can't make up a lie. I have no blood in my brain. She probably won't like the truth. Whatever. "You've been at this a while, right? So I'm sure you know not ever place is discerning about their hiring practices."

"So what?", she pulls back. "You thought I was dirty? Some skeeve?"

"No.", I say impatiently, trying to placate her. "Not at all. I just never looked at you, that's all."

"Oh, so I'm not pretty enough?", she asks, looking gutted.

"No, alright.", I tell her with gentle exasperation. "Places hire underage. You don't show a lot of patina, if you know what I mean. I didn't want to even look until I got around to running you through the system. I'm not a creep."

Her face lights up, and she kisses me impulsively, on the mouth, and I can feel she's smiling.

"Shane.", she says my name soft and sweet. "Shane. You are just such a good man. I always knew you would be. I always wanted you to watch me. I tried to make shows you would like, just to get you to come over to me. I just wanted once in my life for a good man to want me. All I ever get is the creeps. The bottom of the barrel, scumfuck, freakazoids." She's kept all the bills I gave her stuffed away in her shoe, instead of slipping them in the slots in her stage, and now she hands them back. "Do you like me enough to take this back? I couldn't keep it."

"Of course." Now it's me whose words come out low and quiet, while I look in her eyes, and she slips down between me and the wall to stand back on her feet. "You like me enough to dance for me for nothing?"

She's the girl from the stage again; The Little Mermaid. Not the scared little thing from the back room.
anymore. She kisses me, puts her hand on the front of my pants until she finds my cock and rubs it hard again.

"I like you enough to do lots of things."

"I don't suppose you're old enough to hate Forever 21, though?", I tease her, grabbing her ass and pulling her against me. "Because, I'd date you if you could promise never to drag me there on days off."

"Oh, come on.", she purrs in my ear, unzipping my pants. "That's where I got these bikini bottoms. I'd do this to you in the change room..."

"Just sayin'. Drake's a fucking mood killer. Especially a remix."

She rolls her eyes, but I don't care. I love it. She's got her body on mine, and she's handling my cock with both her hands. And she's smiling. "I hate that shit too.", she laughs, "What about my striplist makes you think I'd have any time for that?", she giggles, sliding my dick between her legs, pushing it hard against her panties, and moaning, loud and sexy. "Don't worry. You wanna see me try on bikinis? I'll find a way to drown out the noise."

"All I want? Is to get you out of the one you're in. You gonna dance for me or not?" Sorry. Fine piece of ass or not, I'm not conceding to a shopping mall on a Saturday. Not something you should ever tell a chick though.

She doesn't want to stop. Her eyes are closed, but mine are wide open, watching her in the stingy light of this one tiny chandelier in the room. She's rubbing her thin body on mine, one of her hands has me out of my pants, and her other is reached behind my head. Aster's a good kisser, like she's eating the nothingness in me, hungry and consuming. I want to consume her too; eat up any love in her, lap up the approval. Men get hungry too. She is getting the chills, just like I thought she would. I run my fingertips down over her thin arms, watch the goosebumps prickle under her skin in the wake of my touch, and finally close my eyes to her beauty, so I can hear her breathe, feel the warmth of her small body through my uniform. She's grinding, but she's not doing it how she needs it, she's doing it for show, so I put my hands on her hips and get her on it right. The glittery stuff on her panties is scratching my cock, but I don't care. It's getting her wet. No man deserves to feel as good as sliding inside of her is going to feel. Little penance first serves me right.

Finally, with a sad little whimper, she pulls back, leaning her back tight to the wall. "I have to cover the camera. I feel sick thinking Man Pony might be watching this." She shudders, makes a face. "He's disgusting. Likes to lock his office and watch the feeds from the rooms."

Something about this girl. I know she's a stripper. I get that. But the idea of someone seeing her like this? Her really turned on, her trying to come? The faces I'm going to make her make, how I'm going to make her sound? The idea he'd watch that moment when I have to hurt her a little to get inside her? That's mine.

I think sometimes I shouldn't come to places like this, what this life does to these girls, wearing all their expectations away slowly, like whitecaps pounding limestone, but then I can't stay away either.

I don't know which of us is the wave, and which is the stone anymore, and I can't say I care. I find my hands in her soft cotton candy hair, my lips just sucking in the taste of her sweet, slick mouth, and I know I won't let her leave this room until I've found out if she tastes like salt water taffy. I'm not leaving until I hold her in my lap and edge back and forth from coming, until I make her come so hard that her pussy forces me. I still want it slow and easy, because there's nothing easy about that with a girl like this.
"Hey? Aster, hey?", I get her attention, pushing back from her. "Let me get it. You got something to cover it up with?"

"Mmm. Shane. Thanks.", she groans out, sultry and sleepy. "Here. Use this. Just wrap it around. It's up there.", she says pointing to a small camera by the exit sign over the door, and handing me the caster net she used in her show. Before I pull back from her, I zip up.

While I'm trying my best to get total coverage over the eye in the sky, she's on some little intercom, talking to some pervy nerd, telling him to cue up her set list again.

There's a small rounded red booth set up around the poles in these rooms. Basically, it's a table dance, with a pole on the table. She's already spinning by the time I sit.

She slows down, looks in my eyes. "Can I see it?", she asks, sly smile.

I'm glad she asked. Fuck. This girl. I'm so hard my pants are pinching. It's grown down my pant leg so far, it's hard to pull it out. Even my own hand on it feels good. Not like one of her soft little paws, but still good. Every guy wants to see a pretty girl's eyes get huge, bite her lip slow, lick her lips, and take a big heaving breath in through their mouth when they see you handle your own cock, just usually, that's just not a chick's reaction. But Aster? She does all that, while I stroke, and then lays down on her tummy on her stage, her head hanging off far enough for the tip of her tongue to lick the dew off the head of my cock, while she absentmindedly humps the stage, her hips rolling slow and deep, thighs clenched tight together. Probably the only way mermaids can do it.

"So fuckin' sexy.", I slur. "Stop it. You'll come like that. You'll make me. I got a thing for this mermaid thing you got goin'. First real wet dream I ever had." And the last terrible nightmare too. I push that thought away. Tonight belongs to my id, and I'll be damned if I let my super ego get in the way of all this girl's sex appeal.

With her mouth still full of cock, she shakes her head. "No. You're gonna have to stop me."

I like a little bit of back talk, feel a grin tug at my lips. "Final notice. Keep it up and this's gonna be the second time you get pulled off your stage tonight. And I won't be afraid to spank you."

"Fine.", she looks up at me, her eyes defiant, tongue jutting out to try to lick my cock, still writhing against the floor of her stage. "I like spankings."

She doesn't have to ask for it twice. I can't wait to slap that ass of hers. I grab her arms and pull her smooth body over the slick stage right down into my lap. She's so light it's like throwing a ragdoll around. I don't even give sexy little Aster a chance to start teasing me back, get all the way into my lap, before I spank her, let my big hand hit her round little ass hard.

Sharp little fingertips dig into my chest. "Do it again.", she says, ordering me in her tiny quiet voice. Remember reading about that, once, for a course we did on identifying vics. Some shrink type says girls who got hurt, you know, as kids, get their voices stuck like that, all high and childish. Maybe some sort of way to try to lull the perps into not abusing them. Maybe some kind of stunted maturation brought on by the abuse. I don't want to spank this girl again. I want her to let me be nice to her, just in case.

"You some kind of sucker for punishment?", I ask her, not really meaning it as a tease, just a real question.

"No.", she says coy, pushing her fingertips into my chest again, kissing my lips gently. "Just a big sucker for you, that's all. Come on. Spank me again, and do it hard enough you make me feel it on
the inside, okay, Shane?"

I want to be nice to her, sure. But an order's an order. I want her to enjoy this. So I spank her hard, over and over, watching over her shoulder in the mirror behind us, the way her back arches, the way her little ass jiggles. She's moaning, bending forward more, spreading her legs, so my hand strikes her harder. Looks like a twisted Norman Rockwell image; oversexed, half undressed cop 'disciplining' a mermaid stripper. I'm not a violent man, and she's not a bad girl. I don't want to like what this picture looks like, but I can't help it; my cock does. It makes me hard.

"Why do you want to play at being a bad girl?", I ask her, kissing her sweet mouth, rubbing her smooth ass with my hand before gently holding her waist.

"Playing?", she asks, perplexed, her timid hands in my hair, as I guide her up into my lap. Her eyes look down, lashes laying on her high cheek bones. "Look at me. I'm not good, that's for sure."

"No. And I'm not either. Nobody righteous in this whole shithole of a world; you see that pretty quick doing my job, and I'm sure yours too. But you aren't a bad girl. You're a sweet girl, who tells herself a story about being bad over and over, until she acts into it. So just quit pretending, for one solitary night, and be with me, alright?", I ask her, rolling her soft, smooth little earlobe between my lips.

Her hips drop her down into my lap, and she leans into me close, just barely grinding slow circles on my cock, bearing down. "I'll try.", she whispers, sucking and licking my neck with her pointy tongue.

"Ah, Aster, girl... that's right. Don't do it like some bullshit lap dance. Do it so you can come.", I say before I pull her face to mine, hold her head and kiss her.

This is the feeling I like, why I need chicks. I love when they want me. It's that knowing I'm turning on a hot piece, and she's so into me that she can't help herself. Gets me hard that I can make a hot girl come, make her want it, make her body betray her will to me. Pleasing a girl is the ultimate power over her. Nothing in this world makes you feel more like a man than making a sexy girl come.

"Baby?", I interrupt over her weak little moans, "Your knee must be killing you. You don't need to kneel on it all night."

"Mmm, Shane. I took something for it. I'm okay.", she says softly, smiling slow and sultry, before kissing that spot behind my ear and whispering, "All I feel is you, and you feel so fucking incredible I'd do anything for you."

"Anything?"

"Uh huh." She can only speak in breaths.

I take her and lay her out on her stage, missing her weight and the motion in my lap immediately. But I really need to see if she melts when I lick her. I undo the strings of her panties, take them and throw them on the floor. My hands wrap around most of her legs, push them apart, push her knees back.

"Damn." I want this girl so bad it's really starting to hurt. "You have tan lines."

"Yeah. Do you like it?", she asks me, looking shy.

"I do. Don't know why. Real sun's a luxury here, I guess." I'm sitting on the edge of the booth, pulling her little body further off the stage, right to my face. "I just like how you're formed down here
"You must have been scared, when this happened, huh?", I ask, kissing her knee. Give her a second to warm up to me, get comfortable having me between her legs. She's had a pretty rough day. She'd have to be a stone psycho not to be shaken up by it.

"I guess. It all happened so fast.", she says, shrugging it off, smiling shyly at me. "And you're here now, so that's kinda nice."

"You're nervous to let me go down on you?" I ask her, because she keeps sort of straining to sit up. I can tell. Not a reaction I'm used to, but whatever. She'll come around.

"Maybe. It's not you. I've just never done it before.", she confesses, looking away, turning the foiled side of her face to me.

"What?!", I ask her, knowing I sound incredulous. "Well, we have to fix that, then, 'cause I wanted to do this to you since I first saw you."

None of those muted whimpers and moans from her as I lower my head, sink my face between her thighs. She's so quiet I'm pretty sure without the pounding sex music playing over blown out speakers in the ceiling, I could hear her heart thudding. I keep my hands inside her long, toned thighs, just above her knees, prying them apart against the tensing of her muscles, and lean over her until I feel her smooth skin on my cheeks, and my lips part to taste her, kiss her deep. Damned right. She tastes sweet and caustic, like blue raspberry shaved ice, and when my tongue flicks over her tiny round swollen bead, she melts, moaning for me again, in a long, low, pleading whine.

I raise my head, ask her, "Not so bad, huh?" As if she could make any denials, with her back arched liked that, big eyes lolled back in her pretty face.

"No. Not bad at all.", she answers back slow, eyes closed, hips still grinding up towards the air. "I don't want you doing me any favors though. I don't like owing someone. Let me do you, Shane."

"It's a favor to me. I like doing this to you. Trust me.", I growl in her ear, standing to lean over the stage to kiss her. Both her grabby little hands seek out my cock, gripping it and rubbing it, pulling the tip down so she can hump up against it. "See?", I ask her, kissing her mouth hard. "That's yours. You did that. Your hot little pussy did that to me. I wanna eat it. That's what's got me so hard I'm about to split the skin. Hot girl coming because I made her? Nothing better. You come on my cock, because I'm fucking you so good? You could fire me off just blowing on it like a birthday candle. Just trust me, Aster."

"I do trust you.", her soft words breathed warm and moist on my wind burned neck. "Fuck me, Shane. You don't have to wait. I'll give everything to you right now, even if I am scared, just a little."

"Scared?", I ask her, withdrawing enough to see her face, look in her eyes. I smooth her long hair, push it back from her forehead.

Little smile breaks out on her lips, and one of her tanned shoulders lifts slightly towards her ear in a shrug. "It's just... well... you're awfully big."

"No way. You're just awfully small.", I joke with a grin, before laying down over her again, letting her legs wrap around my hips. I kiss her ear, suddenly sensing she's not just flirting. "Don't worry. I've done this before, believe it or not. I can make it not hurt. But you are definitely not ready yet. You need to relax. I can't fuck you until I make you come once.", I add, sliding my middle finger in her mouth.
Pressing my wet finger to her, she's slick and hot, dripping wet for me, but tensed so tight I have to work in slow and gentle.

I'm kissing down the warm skin, stretched taut over her caved in tummy, thinking how she smells like everything good about spring break, ignoring her hands in my hair, that are half trying to push my head away as I get closer to putting it between her legs. She's whimpering at me, half protesting, as if I'm gonna think she means it, how wet she is, the way she's leaning into my finger inside her. Feels good to finally just put my mouth on her, sit down on the edge of the red leather booth, feel the warm, gentle grip of her thighs on my head as she submits to it, lets me in. Aster moans my name, quits trying to fight my head away with her hands, and instead covers her eyes with her palms and arches her back.

"Oh my stars, Shane...", she barely whispers in a tiny little voice. "What are you doing to me?"

I don't ruin it to answer her. I just eat a girl how the spirit moves me. One thing I know is, chicks lose their mind if you get your mouth on them right, try to suck their little cinnamon heart while you're licking it. Not that easy, but there's a knack to it. She's put together just right though, so I just put my tongue on her and lick her hard, push my lips tight against her moist, sweet flesh, and take a half a breath in. Her pussy grabs my finger, pulls on it hard, and she calls out my name, staring all blank faced up at the mirrored ceiling, so I know I got it. After that, I don't even think about it, just kiss her there how I feel like it, work my finger inside her how I wish I was fucking her. My cock's standing up straight in my lap, drips of clear blank shot running down it, just thinking about how it's gonna be to finally put it in her, get lost in her relentless body. I'm thinking about it so hard, watching her face while she gets close to coming that I'm fucking up into nothing like she's already there in my lap.

I love making a chick come this way. How you really learn what their bodies are capable of; what's happening to them. Because for a guy? When you're fucking them, and they come, you come too. Just a fact. And then you aren't paying attention to a thing but yourself. But this is different; I notice everything. She gets really quiet, holds her breaths longer, her legs quiver against my head, and just like I thought, Aster shivers. I can feel her firm little clit pulling down against my tongue, the inside of her body going tight, twisting a little to the right, so strong she holds my finger right where it is. When you're with a chick in this, you can feel it. You can tell, practically count it down until she screams, then whines and pants and moans for air, begging her own body to stop feeling so good, and yours to stop tormenting her.

Aster doesn't use words when she comes. Not at all. I always sorta like that, because you know it's good for them if they can no longer remember the fucking English language. It's been a long, long time since I fired a warning shot, but this girl's got me close. She's coming in these bursts of flutters, her little clit just rubbing itself on my tongue from the force of the explosions inside her. She's not a squirter, but I bet I could teach her to do it, the way she gets so much wetter when she's coming. She comes forever; I made it happen to her, but she doesn't look at me, doesn't say my name. She's turning me on, but I want her attention, wish she'd tell me how good it was. I know she's never had better; I just want her to say it. She makes me feel like I'm not even here.

So what's a man to do? I pick her up and pull her into my lap, and kiss her, stroke her hair, try to make her look at me. I don't even attempt to slip inside her, just slide her hot throbbing pussy around on my cock, hold her. It's how I wanted it; feeling the warmth of her body, the tickle of her hair on the insides of my arms while I wrap them around her tight. She finally seems like she's here again, when she reaches behind me, holding the back of the booth, and kisses my mouth, deep and gentle. Her soft lips seal on mine, and without reserve, she moans, exhaling and cautiously pressing her tongue into my mouth, drawing in a new breath, stealing my air.

My eyes are closed when she asks me through the kiss and her muffled moans, "Ah, Shane... how
did you do that? I can't stop coming."

"I know. I can feel it.", I say, kissing her high cheek bone, more just dragging my lips and tongue over her face. Truth is, I can. I take hold of her sharp hips and rock her in my lap, feel the slow clenches of her tight pussy against my swollen cock. "That's 'cause you only came here.", I tell her, sliding a fingertip to her feverish clit. "You need to come from the inside too, or you're gonna have a wicked pussy ache that your fingers aren't long enough to make go away."

Her head snaps back, and she whimpers out a swear word before slithering out of my lap to the floor, to kneel between my knees. She's pulled my shirt down off my shoulders, and wrestles me out of the rest of my uniform, clumsily sucking my cock on and off the whole time. She's not even put off, slowed down one bit, by my gun belt. She grabs ahold of it, specifically, to yank my pants down, driving her head down in my lap so hard that I disappear in her mouth all the way to my balls. Aster uses her whole body like a piston, the little athlete she is, pumping up and down my shaft so fast I'm already seeing red.

"Babe? Uh, hey, Aster?", I try to get her attention, get her to look up at me. When she doesn't, I slide my hand gently through her hair, try not to startle her, but get her attention. I feel her flinch, throat go tight, her mouth get dry. "Hey, sh, sh. Not trying to scare you.", I assure her softly. "Just, sweetie, you gotta stop that. Come here. Get up in my lap. I want you here."

I pull her up by the arms so she doesn't get a chance to slink away, distract me out of it. Her eyes always seem to look past everything, like she's seeing double, or like she's doing one of those magic eye puzzles. She can live her life out of focus on her own time, but not on me, not on my dick. I want her, and she said she was mine.

Once she's in my lap, I look at her, force her gaze to meet mine, pull her hips into place, hold her tight in my arms, right where I want her. All avenues of escape closed, she sits there on me, her long hair breaking in waves down her chest covering most of her nakedness, her warm thighs squeezing mine, and she sees me, whether she wants to or not.

"Why'd you make me stop sucking you?", she asks finally, her face looking innocent, sort of afraid to hear the answer, while I thrust against her, preparing her.

"Because. I want to come inside you."

I don't know why I tell Aster the truth. Comes out sounding fucked. Like the most lonely thing a man playing fast and loose with far too many lives in one moment could possibly utter. I don't care though, as long as she doesn't. She doesn't. I see it in her dark blue eyes, written on her little doll face through all that make up, almost instantly. She's a girl just living to die too.

She leans close, nuzzles her face to my neck, lets me really hear those pretty little moans, the desire mixed with what must be a pretty sharp pain for girls, while I work my cock into her, watching her in the mirror behind us. She feels like I thought she would, only better, her smooth, tight walls touch on the inside, and I just want to pry her apart slow, slide in and out. I can barely move inside her, she's so tight, except that she's so wet and slick, juicing all down my shaft.

"Shane...", she breathes in a suffocated whimper, "That's about the sweetest thing anyone's ever said to me. It doesn't scare you?"

"To come inside you? No. Doesn't scare me. Except maybe a little for you, that you'd let me.", Chick doesn't need to know the kind of shit I think while I'm fucking. It's this job, this world. Me, I guess. But Aster's got no lines around her eyes yet, no scars. She doesn't need to hear that shit now, all my doubt, all my dire observations on the state of people, much less her. I'm putting my weight on her,
imagining things. The girl likes shopping malls and trips to the beach. She's not a mess like I am. So I add, "Does this feel good, Aster, baby? I'm not hurting you?"

She kissed me on the mouth like she's in love with me, some sad sounding go-go cry-cry, playground love song plays over the burnt up speaker, and I'm the one who feels cold, some kind of a nostalgic chill in this dark, haunted little room. When I pull her even closer to me, she finally allows her body to fall limp in my arms, and I push my cock up in her the rest of the way. Aster just breathes heavy for a second, her firm tits pressed into my bare chest, her parted lips grazing my shoulder. Buried inside her crushing, hot body, I hold her tight and impale her on me gentle and slow, over and over.

"Ah, Shane...", she fights for enough air to whine out the words, "It doesn't hurt at all. I feel like I'm floating."

Near death experience.

That's a messed up thought, but it's what that reminds me of. Not saying I don't know what she means. It's so hard to go slow and easy in her, but it's what I want. I feel numb all over, except for the violent thrrob in my cock, telling me I could come in two hard thrusts, while my spinning head fights, and tells me that if I can wait for her, she'll black me right out, and I won't need a chick for a month after. She makes me feel far away. I hold her down on me so she doesn't just float away, grind her hips back and forth on me while I slow fuck her up and down, like driving her over dips on a dirt road.

I always half wish a chick would fall in love with me while I'm doing this. I really don't know if they're capable of it, though. I'll use myself right up trying to make girls feel good. Aren't I good enough to fall in love with?

Aster's so quiet, slumped over my shoulder, but I feel close to her. Probably partly because this's taking so long, and we're working on it together. Slowly, I feel her hips start to snap just a little. Moans start to sneak into her anguished breaths. Her fingers dig into my arms. The inside of her starts to squeeze and twist on my cock, and before I can stop it, she's wrung one slow, hot burst of come out of me, left me tingling all the way to my knees.

"Do it how you want to, Shane.", she urges in dulled whimpers in my ear. "You don't have to hold back. Do it how your cock wants it, if you weren't just trying to be nice to me."

"This is how I want to fuck you, Aster." I assure her, want her to believe it, though I doubt she does. Bad things have happened to this girl. I'm so close, I can feel myself swelling hotter and harder; feel how bad I need it. I'm fucking her so gentle and slow that even though I'm in her deep, my balls feel sore and heavy. "C'mon, baby. Let me have it.", I hear my dry voice in her ear. "Come for me. I'm not gonna stop until your wet little pussy tugs the come right out of me."

"I'm trying.", Aster answers back, sounding frustrated. At first I think it's with me, but then I realize it's with herself. "It's so hard for me. I don't know how. I think I'm close though."

"Yeah. You're close.", I assure her. "Baby, you just need to relax. Here. Don't move at all.", I put my hands back on her hips. She's got a problem, some kind of horror in her head, tells her she's beyond hope. I can't find words for that. Never could. Wish chicks could understand what it means when a man wants to fuck them like this. Anyways. I have a feeling half her trouble is she can't stand to feel responsible for this. Makes her feel dirty. Some kind of body shame, self loathing bullshit that girls carry the opposite way men do. She wants me to make her. That's what she wants? I'll make her come. "Lean forward on me a bit, alright? Just lay your head on my shoulder, honey."

She does what I say, holds me sweetly with her hands, and I feel her thin body pressed to mine, slick
with my sweat, her face buried in my neck. I keep rolling my hips under her, slow and deep, push her down on my pubic bone so she rides it with her little clit while I fuck her. She's so close, so wet, twitching inside when I reach the top of every thrust. When I don't hear her breaths? When I feel the crushing pinch of her tight pussy trying to push my cock out? I know she's about to cry out, come harder than she has in her life.

It's not the same flutters as she was having when I gave her face. This's slow and powerful, like she's got a closed fist in there, wrapped around me, beating me up and down. I come with her, round for round, holding my own breath, hard shot for every one of her relentless contractions.

She can barely handle it, hardly breathing, she's got nothing in her but these strangled, high pitched, short little groans.

"Ah, Aster. Ah, fuck, Aster. Baby, you're gonna fuck me right out. You're gonna milk my balls fucking dry.", I rasp in her ear, holding her waist tight as her back arches for another round of strong clenches inside her. "I told you, you could do it. This feel good, baby?"

She kisses me again, her mouth over mine, her little pointy tongue begging me to suck it, while I come inside her, holding her perfect little tits in my hands, her flesh cool and smooth. The inside of her's hot as fire, still coming on my cock too.

When she breaks from the kiss, she whimpers, "Yeah... Shane.... oh, yeah. Yeah, you make it feel so good. I never knew it could be like this."

Aster goes to say something else, but I'd interrupted her amidst some moans of hers with some of my own. Then I get this idiotic urge, in the moment, to try to say something to her. Like as if talking has ever helped anyone.

"Something bad happened to you, didn't it?", I ask, under my breath as she says something to me that I miss on account of talking.

Really wish I'd have just shut the hell up. I wish I'd have heard what she said instead.

All of a sudden, Aster's scrambling to get off of me, even though her pussy's still got a death grip on me. She's faster than she was with her nets on stage, whirling around to grab her gear off the floor and flee. I feel stunned and stupid, sitting there naked, one last shot pumping slow out of me, like a volcano, with this girl running away like one of those scared deer who jumps through the window of a hardware store.

My body feels good; that's the hardest I've came in at least a couple years. But me? I feel like shit. Set out to make the girl feel good, still seems like I made her feel bad. Now I'm alone in the dark, getting myself dressed, limbs still shaky and numb, wondering what I said wrong. Guess I was wrong in the assessment, and offended her. Or I was right. Hit a nerve. Brought back some hell the girl went through that she doesn't need to relive with a man's dick inside her. I'm an asshole. Probably should have warned her ahead of time.

Sitting down in the dingy room, to wait in that red leather booth for her, I do up my top button, straighten my collar. Rub my face with my hands hard, as if it's going to rub away this latest mistake. I hear nothing but silence, nothing but water running behind a locked door. The dark refrain of one of her weird as hell strip songs repeats above my head, instead of over it.

... leave me out with the waste this is not what I do... I give my gun away when it's loaded...

I don't know if she picked the song for me, or for her. I get a sinking feeling I should have been
paying more attention tonight.

When I hear the click of the door lock releasing, she steps out, an easy smile spread across her face as she glides across the room to me. One last spin around her pole, and she's already down in my lap again, wrestling my hands back, so she can kiss me, grab my cock aggressively through my pants.

"Sorry about that.", she says, shaking her head, and smiling. "I just really had to pee. I think just coming so hard like that, you know? I'm not used to that. Just feels sort of funny, you know?"

"You sure? You ran off like you were stealing something.", I tease her, relieved. Can't help one small act of reassurance, just in case, smoothing her long soft green hair away from her forehead.

"Yeah. That was amazing. You were completely amazing.", she exhales, kissing me on the jaw, slow and long. Her voice turns coy and quiet, hushed to a whisper, "Have you ever heard of girls squirting? I dunno, but I think you almost made me, but I just panicked a little, that's all. I didn't want to freak you out."

"You kidding? It wouldn't have. So sexy.", I laugh, breathing one of those literal sighs of relief. I'm so glad she's fine and I didn't offend her.

"I'm so sleepy now, just like you promised."

Now that I know she's okay? I can't help but think about the next time. I have another idea. I want to wake her up in the middle of the night, fuck her when she's still half asleep, spooning her. Girls who have to shut their heads off to come always love it like that. I'll walk her to her car, then ask to go home with her.

"You've had a big day, sweetheart.", I say, rubbing her swollen knee gently. "I'm really sorry I didn't get the guy for you. Give me until Monday, and I'm sure we get him collared. Some dink named Dewey Teach? How smart can he be when his parents were that fucking dumb? Probably one of those losers you see on Cops, with a crack pipe tucked behind their ear on display the whole time, huh?"

"Yeah.", Aster giggles softly, her hips twitch in my lap in tiny, almost imperceptible motions. "I don't know how a guy who if society was counting on to invent the wheel would still be waiting, dragging shit on sleds, somehow can drive something with 18 of 'em."

"One of those eternal mysteries, I guess.", I say, helping her up before I need to stick it in her again before I even get her home. I'm tired too. I'd like a few hours of shut eye before round two. "You need to get dressed? Then I can walk you to your car?"

"Sure.", she agrees, leading me out, only stopping to get her cash out of the lock slots in the main stage, and to zip on that huge brown Carhartt hoodie over her pasties and panties.

The night's clean and dark, full of the scent of impending snow. She's cold. She must be. She holds my hand, though she walks straight and steady on the gravel even in those heels that make her almost as tall as I am. I expect her car to be the little Honda Fit, but it isn't. Chick's got a Cutlass Supreme, more primer than paint left on it, looks like it's been aftermarket lowered.

"You really are from California.", I joke, nodding at her car.

She shrugs, already half in her unlocked car. "Sublime just sounds better in a lowered Cutlass."

"You should really lock your doors.", I tell her, not meaning to turn cop on her at a moment like this. Still. These girls with those old cars that don't lock themselves should. Especially in the dark parking
lot of a remote strip club.

"Oh, come on.", she laughs, rolls her eyes. "What? Someone's gonna steal my scratched up 36 Chambers? I doubt it."

"I'm surprised this sloppy jalopy isn't runnin' a tape deck still.", I laugh. "Still. Just sayin'. Some dude, of the criminal element? Could wait in the car for you. It isn't safe."

"You know in legal terms, what they call it when some absolutely horrible tragedy befalls a person, that no reasonable foresight or precaution could prevent?", she says, slamming the door, through the open window. "They call that 'an act of God'. I'm sure you're familiar with the term. Some people hear that, they start bitching and moaning. Not me. You know what I say, Shane? That's who God is? Sounds like my kind of guy. I figure, someday, I'll repent, go be with Him. Mayhem is everywhere. I don't need to understand it. Sounds like He does."

My eyes narrow in the dark at her. I feel it. My face searches hers. This Aster girl makes my head hurt a little. Those are always the ones I like the best anyway. I wish I understood what she just said, but then, she probably does too.

So I just grin at her, lean in through her open window on the door of her car. "You want me to follow you home tonight, stay with you, just in case? You had a hard time today. I could spend the night, make sure you're alright?", I ask her, knowing she's going to say yes, fall on me over and over throughout the night.

When she answers back, without looking at me, "Think it's better if we don't.", and throws her car in drive, I can't actually believe my ears. I just stand there, eating dust, as I watch her red tail lights disappear into the night, to be lost on the winding road.

In the dark, with the smell of the dust in the air, mixed with exhaust, I adjust my dick down. Allow myself a few seconds to feel the melancholy solitude. There's a semi parked over at the far end of the parking lot. Could go back in, find the driver, see if he knows the suspect. I don't feel like it tonight though. Easier to just make the call in the morning, once I'm back on the clock again.

But now that I got it in my head to go again tonight, I'm geared up for that. I know it's late, know I got a mountain of paperwork, no bonus today, and another twelve hours starting at five tomorrow morning. But I hit the keyless entry button on my keychain, knowing I'm going to drive across the tracks, to the Waffle House. Think I'll order a waffle from Joanie, see if she's as clumsy with the syrup as she promised. I need something warm...

Aster's Story

"I just can't believe this could happen in a place like this!", Joanie sobs uncontrollably, "Top Brass is supposed to be different."

She shakes her bouncy bright red bobbed hair back and forth, pale green eyes looking down at her feet, and pulls the pink silk robe around her curvy figure more tightly. "I can't go through this again, not here. I don't know what else to do though. All I have's a grade twelve. And these."

With that, Joanie bounces her perfect, natural D-cups in her hands and I see the big fat tears fall from her eyes, and splatter on her red painted toe nails. She even cries pretty. Half the reason I don't believe in crying? I'm pretty sure I do it ugly. Downturned, gaping mouth and my chipped bottom teeth, like the tragedy mask, with mascara trails. I'm trash. Born that way, and I guess I'll die that way too. Just hopefully not here. Not in the cold and grime with a stiff wind in my face.
I snap back to reality, to Joanie's pleading question that begs an answer I don't have for her.

"Learn to weld?", I ask back with a shrug, not really kidding. Not that she'll get my sense of humor, or that I'm only half kidding. It's probably what I'll do; well, something like that anyway, once I can't do this anymore. Something quiet. Something where I can be alone and don't have to pretend. Something where I wear layer upon layer, and never take any of them off. I don't want to read another mind, divine a desire, witch a want, and then fulfill it. I want a counter to stand behind, and a requisition for people to fill out. I want a waxed canvas apron, and a bag of concrete dust to hurl around. Impersonal. I want to develop impersonal skills. I want personal space, vast and boundless like the distance between the galaxies.

Joanie smiles a feeble half smile back at me between sobs, as I help her trembling form down onto a chair, and pat her shoulder.

My knee is killing me, but I can't afford not to work tonight. My mind drifts to the reason I have fallen to this degradation; that concrete business in Savannah that I want so bad. I think sometimes about the way I'll feel if it sells out from under me before I have the money; downright doubled over like I was shot with a beanbag round in a riot. I need to make another twenty grand, then I quit this for good. I dance the shit out of that pole, just thinking about making those terrazzo counter tops. I already know the first one I'll do. Seaglass, abalone, some crushed down red Augusta brick, and lots of oystershell. I'll call it Treasure Island.

Savannah is a paradise, perpetually warm and moist, verdant and alive. There's no way General Sherman would have given Flint as a Christmas gift to President Lincoln. There's a good reason for that. Hell is cold. Flint is fucking hell. I trudge through the stiffening cement. I'll make it out. I'll make it to the ever green oak lined streets, bask in the yellow sun on Tybee. My skin will plump in the humidity. I'll come alive again there, like a resurrection plant. I'll buy that concrete business. I'll sell it instead of trying to walk through it. A lump fills my throat. I remember Atlanta, landing there, seeing the ground come up at the plane, dotted with candy colored houses, like a dream. It was so pretty. He said he'd get me there, that no girl as pretty as me should be stuck in such a cold place, that I should be where I wouldn't have to wear so many clothes. But they lie, Southerners. Men. People who've had it too easy. So when I go, I drive. I bypass that shit. I never see it again. I march straight to the ocean, just like Sherman did. I'm gonna be okay.

"It's gonna be okay, Joanie. The cops are on their way. All of this will get cleared up, you'll see. Dewey's not that bright. They'll get him, and I happen to know this is a third strike. I'll testify myself if I have to. And for the most part, this is a nice place to work, not like The Timeout, that's for sure. Don't be scared.", I assure her softly, as she sobs into her hands. I just rub her shoulder helplessly, trying to comfort her.

Joanie's eyes glance at me with a hint of accusation, as if to ask why I am not crying too, just because she is. I'd like to, to make her happy, but I can't.

Just then, I see the cop the county sent out, barge in through the employees only doors, like he's storming the beach in Normandy lifetimes ago, his brows furrowed, taking long, aggressive strides towards us, his bright blue eyes lit on fire. I know him, and so does Joanie, that's for sure. It's Shane Kop-something-er-other, and he's one of Joanie's punters; always at her stage with a stack of tens. Once in a while watches Kristin with a stack of ones. Fucking cheapskate; not that I don't respect that shit. He's perfect. But he's never looked in my direction, that I've seen. Must not be his type. Too bad, because he's mine. Just the sight of him, I can almost feel him on top of me, hear the sounds he'd make inside me, taste him. I catch myself chewing my lip as he approaches, and take a step back against the wall, averting my eyes.
"Joanie?", he barks out, before he reaches her, softly adding as his hand replaces mine on her shoulder, "You alright? I couldn't believe it was me who caught this fucking call. Douchebag's gonna pay. This's a nice place, and you're a nice girl. This shit won't stand."

I stand there quietly, listening to him say all the things that you get told by the television real cops aren't supposed to; he's promising Joanie he'll catch the guy, even tells her he'll make sure he bumps the guy's head good a couple times as he throws him into the squad car. She's just giving him that beautiful, slackjawed stare that she has mastered.

I want to laugh at this scene, but know I better not. Not to mention I'd like to just leave, but know I can't do that either. So I just stand there, shuffling my weight around uneasily, and looking at the scuffed up vinyl floor, memorizing all its scratches under my eight inch pearl studded plexiglass heels, tugging my huge desert camo hoodie down further, making sure it covers the tops of my fishnet stockings. I'm fine on stage, but right now, I just feel like I'm witnessing a tender moment between two people... without my pants on. They're emotional, connected. I'm cheap. Base. Bare. Naked.

"Shane, I'm so glad they sent you. I shoulda known it would be you.", Joanie sniffles, her voice sings the words. "My hero."

"Nevermind the theatrics, Joanie; just doing my job.", Shane says back thickly. I can hear the obvious swell in his heart, all the pride. Maybe a little obvious swell somewhere else; young man playing hero with a big breasted damsel. Joanie does that to men--the swell--she has it mastered, 100.

"So, how about it? You ready to tell me what happened, let me get on with punishing the prick to the fullest extent of the law?"

"Well, his name's Dewey Teach...", Joanie begins, but Shane cuts her off with a snort, a look of 'oh, please' annoyance snapping his head back a little, revealing his deep dimples in a grimace. That's a rare talent; grimacing pretty.

"I'll fucking 'teach' him.", he's growling under his breath. I can't help but feel a smile wrestle its way out onto my face, as my hand shoots up to cover it, and I strain my face down at the floor as hard as I can, making sure it goes unnoticed, before I plunge my hands back into the front pocket of my hoodie, pulling it down further.

"... he's a trucker, but he comes in here all the time. He's not one of mine.", Joanie finishes, still sitting with Officer... Kopinski's arm around her, patting her shoulder. I can see the disbelief on his face at that statement, as though he's questioning visibly why any man on earth wouldn't be Joanie's regular.

It's a good question too. Joanie's been my best friend for about two years now, and she's about the nicest girl you could ever ask to meet. Never pays underhanded compliments, doesn't have an interest in competition, and supports me in everything I do. And she's good at this job too; has a smile on all the time, even if the definition of dancing has to be pretty loosely applied in her case. She has that look that means she can draw a crowd just slowly walking around her pole like she's in a chain gang. Joanie is absolutely gorgeous; not skinny, petite, toned all over, with dangerous curves, and the hugest natural breasts I've ever seen, skin preserved in the bleak short summers and long nights of the Midwest, so it's always the color of French vanilla ice cream, and then these big green eyes to clash, with her red hair. Dresses up like Poison Ivy to dance every single Halloween. The girl's magic. Lots of girls love to hate her for it, but not me. I see the special in people; sad part is most people have no fucking special to see. But Joanie? She's something. If I have to lose out on Sexy Shane with the deepest dimples to anyone? I'm glad it's her.

"So can you tell me what happened, what went wrong today? Was his usual girl not working? Is that
how he ended up at your stage? Call said you'd been roughed up pretty bad before security got him off you.", Shane asks, stepping in front of Joanie, and squatting down to get the right height to look right in her eyes. He's so focused in his concern for her, like he's looking for the scratches and dents left by the crime. His blue eyes squint and probe her flesh and her face, looking inside for her. No one looks at me like that. It's fine. There's nothing to find.

The two of them look pretty, even in this sickly greenish flourescent lighting. Shane's a handsome man. Okay, like, male model, Ryan Murphy side character fucking male perfection beautiful. I'd feel bad to say I think so, because he never notices me, but he is-he's hot. So damned masculine, just how I like guys. Kind of a caveman, kind of a gentleman. And it's hard to find that in millennial guys but he has that thing in spades. And Joanie. Well, she looks like young Marilyn Monroe wearing a red wig, because she didn't think she was quite sexy enough first off. They make giving a cop a statement look like a fucking marriage proposal in some derelict perfume ad from the early 90s. Only good thing my mom left behind were those old mags.

Out front, Top Brass is pretty classy, as these places go; a bit of a throwback. Dark, all our stages are black lacquer, and circled round in those old fashioned light bulbs. Booths are all red tufted leather, brass rails around the top that look just like our poles. Only two spinner stages here, and one is mine. Those have a mirror back besides. We all have speakers pointed our way, sound aimed in, so we all dance different shows. Place is nice usually, since, as the name implies, we cater to a certain variety. Lots of cops, firemen, military. But of course my number one stan is a filthy trucker.

I danced other places when I was underage. Down south. They didn't care. They probably preferred it, tiny dicked sick fucking chip on their shoulder narcissist sore losers. I like it here better, as far as the dancing goes. The people are too put upon to waste time with flattery and dishonesty. Give me bluntness, or give me death. I did like that warmth though, the Atlantic Ocean. Fuck the slow brained people. You better believe I'm going to be carpetbagging as hard as I can when I get there. They think they made reparations before? They think they know what reconstruction was? I'll pour them all a crypt before I go to ground.

So Top Brass, in good, honest Flint MI, is good with me until I get my concrete business.

The back of any strip joint ruins a little of the magic. Ugly and ordinary, it looks like a stock room or break room anywhere; bad lighting, ugly forgotten coats hung by the back door, and a dirty microwave. Still, watching Shane crouched at Joanie's feet, gently taking her statement, while she tucks her red hair behind her alabaster ear, her big green eyes staring teary into his, and his big hands holding hers as he comforts her; even I have to admit it's looking pretty beautiful and romantic back here, all of a sudden.

Finally, Joanie answers his question, a slight shake of her head, before the words slowly tumble from her full, glossy lips. "Oh, it wasn't me, Shane. No one laid a finger on me, but I'm just so upset. It was Aster who was attacked."

A blank look briefly washes over Officer Kopinkski's rugged face, as his jaw falls slightly.

"Who the hell is Aster?", he asks her, half his face pulled up like there's a hidden little drawstring inside. More cute dimples. How many does he have? He makes this face like Aster is the most idiotic name he's ever heard, and like he must have heard Joanie wrong.

An Aster is a flower, or so I'm told. Aster's got a bunch of sisters; all with names like Rose, Daisy, and Violet. Aster's perpetual joke to slough off the questions about her name? Is to question why she didn't get named something like Lily.

"Um, Officer?", I mumble, as confidently as I can, still feeling like the pantless anorexic pink
"Oh, sorry about that."

"No problem. It shook her up the most. Easy mistake."

"I did get the name right from Joanie? Dewey Teach? That's the suspect's name? Spelled like it's pronounced?", he asks me, all business.

"Is that right?", Deputy Walsh asks me back, eyes narrowed, but a little amusement to temper it.

"You know him personally?"

"No. Nothing like that. Just you know how it is. Everyone sort of knows everyone. No one's really anonymous anymore." Except me. I keep that to myself though. 

"Spitlips?", he asks, attempting to restrain a grin. "I did get the name right from Joanie? Dewey Teach? That's the suspect's name? Spelled like it's pronounced?", he asks me, all business.

"Yeah.", I answer quietly, with a sniff; an involuntary tic when I'm nervous that I can never remember under these circumstances to change. Actually, Kopinkski here has the same exact tic, though I don't know if it's nerves or annoyance for him. "He's a trucker with Halverson's. I just call him Spitlips because it describes him. He's always got that white clumpy froth in the corners of his mouth. He's been in the clink a couple times already. This is a third strike.", I add.

"You know him personally?"

"No. Nothing like that. Just you know how it is. Everyone sort of knows everyone. No one's really anonymous anymore." Except me. I keep that to myself though. 

"I'm Aster."

"I misunderstood, girls. I thought Joanie was the vic here."

"I get it; I haven't cried since I was fifteen years old, and a calf I was branding with my dad crushed my right foot, and even then, it was mostly because it made me so mad. Probably also why I am so proud I don't have two left feet. No one knows how hard earned that really is. But, point is, I get guys and their aversion to crying. Something about it makes me feel so uncomfortable, like my very soul is itchy. I don't want to put someone else through that on my account, no matter how sad I feel.

"Spitlips?", he asks, attempting to restrain a grin. "I did get the name right from Joanie? Dewey Teach? That's the suspect's name? Spelled like it's pronounced?", he asks me, all business.

"Yeah.", I answer quietly, with a sniff; an involuntary tic when I'm nervous that I can never remember under these circumstances to change. Actually, Kopinkski here has the same exact tic, though I don't know if it's nerves or annoyance for him. "He's a trucker with Halverson's. I just call him Spitlips because it describes him. He's always got that white clumpy froth in the corners of his mouth. He's been in the clink a couple times already. This is a third strike.", I add.

"You know him personally?"

"No. Nothing like that. Just you know how it is. Everyone sort of knows everyone. No one's really anonymous anymore." Except me. I keep that to myself though. "He's a little too into me for comfort, if you know what I mean? Won't watch anyone else. Says things to me from time to time, from the pit. I dunno. I just never liked the cut of his jib. Asked around, and found out he did a little time in Angola on a statch, and a little more later when he was paroled; that time, dickwagging near a park."

Sexy Shane's eyes snap back down, and he's back to writing in his little book. He has to think about it. More used to texting like me I guess. I write like a stroke victim. Joanie has perfect penmanship. I have no clue how. She's only a few years older than me.
I take a split second to study his face, before I drop my eyes too, twisting on my ankles, trying not to wear one foot out before the other, and trying to keep my hoodie qualifying as a short dress and not a long shirt.

"That's good. Really good.", he says finally, not looking up yet, but a vague smile on his face. "I'll run all that through the system, make sure it checks out. But, in the meantime, it gives me a line to pursue." Finally making eye contact, he asks me, "Aster, what's your last name?"

"Karst."

"Okay.", he writes it down, all haltingly. "You say he's said some things? Things that made you uncomfortable?", Officer Kopinkski asks me after taking his time writing my name out in his book.

"Yeah. Nothing that really bears repeating. Just stuff that gave me the ick.", I say with a shrug. "Made me wonder what exactly it was that made him like watching me in particular; made me feel like maybe I didn't feel comfortable with his reasons, even if they were, well...", I say pausing to think, "...baseless? Unfounded?"

That piques his interest. He's not writing, but for the first time, making real eye contact with me. He cocks his head to the side and nods toward me, asking, "Like what do you mean? Give me a specific example, alright?"

"Oh, I um, I dunno." I'm stammering. I know the words, but they can't get out. I can talk dirty, but only my own dirty talk, and only with the mood set, shall we say?

Joanie rescues me, standing finally from the chair nearby, and coming to stand beside me, holding my arm. She takes over the interview.

"Aster's shy.", Joanie says plainly to Shane, with a huge exhale through her parted lips. Turning to me, she asks, "What was it he said to you that one day? The marshmallow thing?"

I nod yes, and before I even feel the need to start attempting to quote possibly the grossest words ever uttered to me, Joanie's already got it covered. This is why I love her.

"He said to Aster once something to the effect that he didn't know why he watched her. That he was too old to get it hard enough to shove it into someone as young and tight as her. He implied it was her age that attracted him. Gave her the creeps."

My cheeks are on fire and I can't look up, but Joanie is giggling, and I can tell if she doesn't give it to him, Shane fucking Kopinkski is going to ask her for the punch line. Still hugging on my arm, she leans forward in mock secrecy and half whispers amid her giggling, "He said it would be like trying to cram a marshmallow into the slot in a piggy bank!"

She dissolves into peals of laughter, probably because I am so embarrassed. And it's infectious. Even Officer Dimples can't help but stifle a chuckle.

"Something to that effect, Miss Karst?", he asks me, burying his suddenly boyish face down to try to look focused on his notebook. I'm not quite annoyed with them both finding my misfortune so funny, but I do feel a little left out. Because right now I feel about like an ant under a magnifying glass, with a knee the size and approximate shape of a football.

"Yuck. Yeah. That was it. And just other little things to about that effect." I'm trying to fit in, joke along with them, but it comes out flat, like everything about me.

With one last easy laugh, Joanie lets my arm go. "I have to get home. I'm picking up a morning shift
at the Awful House. Sorry, Aster, to leave you like this. Call you tomorrow, okay?"

"No problem. Have a good night? And try not to worry? Consider welding.", I say as she walks away.

Pausing on the way to her locker, Joanie takes a step back to stand just beside Shane, her hand coming to rest on the front of one of his broad shoulders. She whispers something I can't hear, but her tongue slips into his ear, and I see him smile, his eyes shut for a second, sucking in a sharp breath. And with that, she's gone. Joanie grabs her bag of clothes out of her locker and disappears to change before slipping out the back door.

The instant she's gone, Officer Kopinkski is just back in his notebook. I swear if he's writing the marshmallow thing down, to preserve for all posterity in a file somewhere, I'm not sure I like him as much as I thought I did.

I can't leave, I don't suppose, during an official police interview, so I just stand there, stuck, watching him clumsily write out his notes. He must be new to this. Feels like he was born into it. Lives are handed down here. I bet he's from a line. I am too. A line of coke. A cop shop line up. A bad line on the Soo Line I can't ever really outrun.

I'm up to dance soon, and my legs and feet, especially the one I broke when I was a kid, are killing me. I guess I should have sat for this. Then I wouldn't be stuck with my back in a corner standing, and just shuffling around nervously, waiting for him to look at me.

Finally, he does, and asks me, "So, Aster, do you have visible injuries that I could photograph for the file?"

Now what I want to say is how he's got to be kidding me. He's been standing here with me for damned near fifteen minutes, and you could pretty much watch the bruises blooming all down both my legs, and my knee getting uglier by the minute. I'm not even sure Man Pony is going to let me dance tonight, looking like this. We aren't a bunch of strung out losers here. We don't dance looking brokedown; we aren't even allowed to. Cops, firemen; they see destruction and ruin all day. They come here for brand new unsullied perfection.

What I do say, instead, is, "Um, yeah, he grabbed me by my ankle, and pulled me down, so if you look, both of my legs are all bruised up and my right knee where I landed is pretty bad.", standing nervously like I am facing inspection.

Officer Kopinkski glances down, and agrees, "Yeah, no problem photographing that for evidence. Can I get you to take your...", he halts, not looking but motioning with his finger at my stockings, "those things, uh, take them off, and we'll get some pictures for the file, alright? I gotta head out to the car for a second to snag the camera. You need me to call for an ambulance or anything, get that knee looked at?"

"No, that's fine.", I answer, relieved for the excuse to sit down on a chair, already getting my shoes and stockings off. "It's no big deal. I have to get ready to go back on in a few anyway."

Standing in the doorway, cool night air rushing in, he stops and turns to me and says with a smile, "You're gonna dance on that? Man, you are one tough girl."

I don't know why, but sitting there, one shoe and one stocking thrown on the floor, and one fishnetted knee drawn up to my cheek so I can reach the buckles on the second shoe, I finally don't feel nervous.
"Whether I wanted to have to be or not.", I answer Shane back with a smile and a shrug.

With Stripogram Kopinkski gone, things are quiet for a minute. Walking over to the mirrors, I don't have that much getting ready to do, other than covering the mess on my legs, and getting my nets and shoes back on. The music from Kristen's stage is bumping in this part of the room; girl never tires of Hot in Herre. Philistine. I should probably take a page from her playbook. I overthink my costume, my look, my music; plan it all out like some kind of tableau. I try to tell a story. That's probably why no one watches me. They just don't get it. I don't have stories in me anyone wants told. People have no patience. No vision. They don't want to think. I look past my makeup, past my hair, and into my own eyes, the color of a sad sky on a dark day. If that isn't the story of my life, I don't know what is. It's probably why I'm not beautiful, blue eyed Shane's type either.

Pulling me out of myself again, I hear the door open and slam closed. Suddenly, I'm back in my eyes, and looking out at the thin, tanned girl with seafoam colored hair in the mirror, and I see Officer Kopinkski's reflection behind me, holding an old Nikon camera, looking anxious to get this over with.

I turn to face him. "Should we get this over with? Where should I stand?"

"Uh, right here's fine. I'm sorry to get up in your grill, but I gotta get in here close enough to get the details.", he apologizes, crouching down what feels like inches from my crotch. Of course, it's probably more like a couple feet. But I feel my body is humming just having him this close to me. "I suck with this thing. I can't figure out the focus. I wish I could just use my phone, but we're not allowed to."

It only takes a few seconds, which I spend looking up at the dropped ceiling and fluorescent lights. The camera shutter snaps a half dozen times or so, and that's it.

"Hey, Aster, do you have I.D. on you, by any chance?", he asks, setting the camera down.

"Yeah, in my bag. Just a sec. I'll grab it.", I answer, glad to retreat to my locker to rifle through my PVC Powderpuff Girls backpack. Glancing back over my shoulder, I see the look on Shane's face. Maybe I should rethink a few of my fashion choices.

"Here.", I say, handing it to him.

One side of his mouth pulls back, dimple revealed. "This right? DOB April 29, 1992?"

"Uh, yeah? Why? The DMV give me something that looks fake?", I ask back trying not to look guilty. I'm not. But someone in uniform asks me something like that while I am standing in no pants and no shoes, and I begin to feel that way. My eyes do this thing against my will where they look up at the sky like they're going to pull in an adequate answer from up there somehow. It's not an eye roll. But oh, how the accusations have rolled on in because of it my entire life.

"No. No, nothing like that.", he says back, easing, and handing my card back. "It's nothing. Um, just, not what I expected. Did you know that was the date of the LA riots?" He exhales big and smiles easy. I don't answer. It's also almost the name of a Sublime song, that fucking rocks and I love to dance to, but who's fucking counting. "Crazy. Hey, there's something I was going to ask you. I was thinking about it out at the car. You think there's any chance this Dewey Teach comes back here tonight, tries to finish what he started? You ever get that kind of impression off the guy? He make any threats, say anything when he assaulted you earlier?"

Glancing up at the clock, I answer, "You care if I get ready while I answer?"
"No, not at all."

"Well, it's possible he comes back tonight. Said he was done with a cross country run and home for a few. Planned to tie one on, he said. Sometimes he does come in both times on my split shifts.", I say curiously, rummaging through my dressing table drawer.

Right then, my boss comes back. Man Pony, we call him, don't ask me why. Maybe because we can't just call him Horse's Ass, like we'd all like to. I can sense the immediate distaste for him that Officer Kopinkski feels too. Maybe he knows things I don't.

"Aster, lil' twinkie. You think you're gonna dance on those things?", Man Pony condescends. He hates me. "I mean, I've given up waiting on you to sprout a decent pair of tits, but at least you've got those stems. Now you've got nothing." He points to my bruised legs. And this is coming from a man with a thinning mullet, in a polyester suit and a bolo tie.

"Just give me a sec. I'm airbrushing them. You'll never even know it happened. Besides, I'm in fishnets for this routine anyway.", I answer back apologetically, trying to sound chipper, even though I feel more pissed off.

Just then, Shane chimes in on my behalf, "Look, this isn't up to you tonight. This suspect? He's a third strike, and I don't intend to miss an opportunity to be the one who strikes the dumb fuck out. So Aster's dancing, and we're staking out the scene. This's happening. Not up to you, man."

My back was turned through that exchange, while I fixed up; feathering foundation up and down my legs and setting it with some Final Net. Helps you stick to the pole with fishnets on anyway. Unplugging my airbrush from the wall, I sneak a look from the corner of my eye over at Man Pony. He's all red in the face like he's about to explode; I don't think I've ever seen him so mad, and completely stymied all at once. No hiding my huge smile, I hide my face behind my hair and clean off my work station.

Anxious not to allow himself to be put in his place, and needing to lash out at someone who he can control, Greazy Sleazy storms over to me.

"Turn around, doll.", he orders, eyeing my legs, and turning me this way and that roughly, as if he knows what he's even looking for. Prick. "Looks fine. You girls are all such a bunch'a fuckin' drama queens. Get out there and make me some money."

With that, Man Pony stomps off, tail between his legs, not that he thinks I know it. I see it though, and thankfully, know I won't see him for the rest of my shift. Dumb fuck doesn't know how much money I've stolen from him over the years. I make myself money, and a plausible cover story. I make him chump change. Someone he thinks he can control. I let him think it while I rob his dumb ass blind.

"Thank you, Officer. For sticking up for me, I mean." I say softly, sitting down to do my shoes up, looking up at Shane.

"Shane. Might as well get comfortable. We're gonna be spending a lot of time together tonight.", he smiles, putting his notebook away, finally. "So, is he a full time asshole, or was he just showing off for me?"

"Pretty much full time. Likes to pick up asshole overtime if he can. Journeyman asshole.", I answer with a shrug. "Likes to boss around a bunch of little girls, throw his weight around. But he's definitely most odious with an audience. He can't conceive that other men wouldn't be impressed."
"Well, when you love what you do, right?", Shane laughs, and adds with an edge of melancholy, "We see people at their worst too much too. After a while, it's what you expect." He stares at my shoes, nodding at them. "You could probably do him in with one of those though.", he teases, low.

"Probably.", I laugh. "Say he slipped, I tried to help, misstepped, and pierced his jugular? Story like that suffice?"

"Reasonable doubt for a justifiable homicide? Sure. Why not. It's clutch. The string tie alone earns him no less.", he laughs. "Man, one of those things I'll never understand. All the rules we make up, turn to legislation, and never once has anyone suggested we make being an asshole in a string tie at least a misdemeanor."

But I've done it before; meted out justice. Been the fucking change I wanted to see in the world. Looking in Shane's bright young eyes, I want to confess it. Confess all my sins, then commit some more with him, actual fun ones. He's a little wild, but deep down, I know he's a good cop just joking around because he feels sorry for me. He wouldn't feel so sorry for me if he knew about the three bodies rotted down to nothing but stinking black coffin liquor in 2-4-D barrels, that I put in the ground to bake in the hot cracked sand when I was seventeen years old. Or the bald old hotel manager I fed to the gators in the Savannah River.

I try never to think about it; what I did. Not because I feel bad about killing them. I don't. I don't feel bad I lured them out there. Don't feel bad I seduced them. Don't feel bad I killed them, dismembered them, stuffed them neatly into those barrels and buried them myself. Don't feel bad I planned it. I just feel bad I had to; what they did to us. I do feel bad I wasn't big enough to do it when I was eleven. They never should have held me down and touched me on the school bus. They shouldn't have pissed in that bottle and chipped my bottom teeth with it. And they shouldn't have stuck those things in me either. Biggest thing is, they certainly should have known enough to make me their last victim.

There was no way in hell I was going to let it happen to Holly. That was my gift to her, my youngest sister, for her eleventh birthday, not that she'll ever know it. I protected her from them, and now I protect her from me, and the knowledge of everything her safety cost me. Holly is normal. She's about to graduate from the University of Arizona, just next spring. Holly's gonna be a social worker, not a stripper. Not a welder. Not a waitress at the Awful House. And she's engaged, picking out dresses these days, floating on air to say her virgin vows at the same church the McCain's, as in Senator, go to. So I feel good about every man I've ever killed. I don't sleep, but that's because there's so many out there I haven't killed. The one good thing I ever did was saving Holly's life.

And that faggoty middle aged fatso with a Lolita fetish, who I fed to the gators? I feel bad about him the least. He knew every detail of every terrible thing I ever survived, and he got off on it. He said he loved me, forever. Then he threw me away. I'm young, sexy and alive. He abandoned me to have his gambling debt paid off with some fat old menopausal hag's alimony checks he could cash. I had everything to offer. All he could ever have given me was loyalty. Total devotion. Now he's fertilizer, the hag's back with her real husband, and all is right with the world. I sleep like a baby again.

Shane's voice shatters my uncomfortable thought. "So, are you almost ready? I gotta run the camera back out to the car, and call in the stake out. We'll get the guy. Meet you back at your stage? Just act natural, alright?", he says on his way to the door.

"Yeah, I'm about to head out there.", I answer back with a smile. "Tip me big. I'll give it all back, but it will make all the other punters shell out more, and give me an excuse for dancing to you more without pissing anyone off, or arousing suspicions, okay?"

"You got it.", he tosses the words back over his shoulder. There he goes, looking amused all over again.
When I hear the steel door click in the frame, I peel my hoodie off, and inspect myself under the glaring vanity lights above the mirror, exhaling hard. I don't really get jitters, stage fright, or anything like that. I just think about the money and my next fresh start; cash rules everything around me. I think I'm the only girl I've known who does this job stone sober routinely. I might finally take one of those pills I wouldn't touch back when I had my wisdom teeth out though; I don't know if my knee can do this without. I'm a control freak. I don't even drink. But I want to make this a good show because Shane's finally going to watch me, so I reach inside my dresser and chew one of the tabs. I need it fast, and don't want my stomach full of a glass of water either. I like my shows to be perfect.

I've never once taken more than Advil, to tell the truth. Joanie told me I was an idiot not to take these when I got them. She said when they hit you, they made your clit pulse and throb like the hottest man on the planet had been licking it for an hour. I don't do that either. I'm a control freak. I don't even drink. But I want to make this a good show because Shane's finally going to watch me, so I reach inside my dresser and chew one of the tabs. I need it fast, and don't want my stomach full of a glass of water either. I like my shows to be perfect.

I love the routine I'm dancing tonight. Sirens, I call it. It's one of my favorites, and I feel a little charged at the idea that I finally get to do it for Officer Hottie, like it's kind of a turn on. I always see him come in, always wish he'd come to my stage. I've even done a couple routines up with him in mind. This one isn't though. This one is all mine; all me.

One last swipe of pale shell pink gloss over my lips, and I step through the double doors and feel the world of noise hit me like a wave; cold, fresh, terrifying. My heels catch with every step in the plush red carpeting, and I feel the burn of all the eyes on me, staring in a straight line to my stage. Brad, a fat, pimply guy in his mid-twenties, who still lives with his parents, nods at me. He's my stage hand, I guess. Plays the music, runs the lights and my bubble machine. When my feet hit the black lacquered stairs, and I climb to the summit of my stage and wrap my leg round the warm brass pole, I feel like I'm floating, carried on the cheers from the crowd, free of my feet while I spin around six feet above the ground, and a world above the punters.

I don't dance how Joanie does. She makes a lot of eye contact, sort of engages with the men. I just can't do that. They're all so disgusting that if I looked at them, I'd lose my buzz; the arousal I can feel for myself that lets me dance sexy. I look at myself in the mirror, or just look away. But I do know how to dance, how to move my body so it suggests every single pleasurable thing a girl could do to you, in all sorts of ways you never even thought of. By the time I see Shane, sitting at a stool right in front of the stage, throwing twenties at me with a smirk, I'm four songs in, and about thirty revolutions upside down around the pole, so dizzy I can barely make him out. A down tempo trip hop beat guides every move as words trance my head.

...I have only one thing to do and that's be the wave that I am and sink back into the ocean... sink back into the ocean... sink back into the ocean...

Once I see Shane though, it all feels different. I want to see his eyes, blue and innocent. So new. I slow down and roll away from my pole, until I feel my feet find the floor again, and find my head upright again. When I strut slow around, and find his gaze, it's on me. I've never done it before, and I don't know if it is the pill I took, but I feel like I want him powerfully and urgently. He might be here watching me to try to catch a suspect, but I'm here to catch him. I walk across the stage slowly to where he sits staring up at me, and drop to my hands and knees in front of him. Looking in my eyes, Shane lets his hand graze slowly between my breasts and down my tight tummy, half a smirk on his lips as he stuffs another twenty under the waistband of my panties, letting his hand linger there a little too long.

Leaning forward I whisper, "How am I doing?"

"That depends what you're doing.", he teases, his breath in my hair. His hand slowly works through my hair and onto the back of my head. It makes me breathe harder. I'm getting wet just being close to
him. "You're doing great. This's smart. Good way to get close enough to tell me if the guy shows up without him having a chance to run."

"Okay. I'll check in every few songs then.", I whisper in Shane's ear. I don't have the same moxie as Joanie, to put my tongue in, but I let my lips graze his earlobe. He's so incredibly sexy. When I pull back from him, and slither backward, his face looks different than before, his wide set eyes spaced out and his lips parted, to show his perfect big Chicklet teeth. Dimples. Of course.

...how could it be that we defy this tragedy, find this lifeboat in the dark...

I crawl back from him slow, never letting his eyes go, and let the back of my knee find my pole between my legs, and pull myself up slowly into a spin and get going again.

I'm so alone when I dance, and I like it, just swimming in that dead sea, where I feel comfortable. I make my routines as hard as I can, so all I can do is focus on my body and what it is doing, so I can't feel the eyes on me. I tune it all out, and imagine myself in whatever stage I set. Sometimes, I'm a burlesque dancer in a speakeasy, sometimes I'm Catwoman, sometimes little red riding hood, sometimes a disgraced farmer's daughter writhing in a barn loft with the star QB from high school. Sometimes I'm a prolific serial killer that no one will ever suspect. Sometimes I'm the weaker sex. Sometimes I'm not.

Sometimes, I'm a mermaid, dangerous and treacherous as the tides. Tonight I'm a Nereid, kind nymph of the sea, and Shane's going to turn the ship's wheel towards the rocks, and let his body dash against mine until we are both ruined, unless I guide him through the passage safely. His gaze sears into me like blue flame, and it's so natural to be seductive. Every time I slow down, come upright for air, his eyes catch mine and cold chills tremble through me, force my lips to part. I'm not dancing alone tonight, and it's me who is scared of the undertow.

After a few more songs, I need to catch my breath, since Sexy Shane keeps on stealing it. I slide down the pole and drop to my knees and follow his trail of twenties. The smirk wiped off his rugged face, he's conspicuously holding up a hundred dollar bill for me, but I detour at the last minute, and roll around the stage like all I have is a tail, collecting all my tips first. He's jealous, and anxious for me to come to him, so I take my time. When I finally crawl to him, slow, dragging my knees just a little, his face is flushed and after his hand slides the bill inside my panties, Shane moves his hand behind my head again, and I feel his moist full lips graze my cheek as he pulls me close to whisper to me.

"He here yet? Dewey?", he asks low and quiet, but urgent.

One of my hands leaves the cool lacquered stage floor, and finds his strong, warm neck, as I nuzzle my face close to his opposite ear to whisper back, "No, not yet. Show's almost over."

His teeth grit. I know he's hard. "Good.", Shane answers me back, decisively. "Do you do private shows?"

"For you?", I ask, pulling back to look in his eyes, one hand resting on his shoulder, "There's a first time for everything, right?"

"So you don't do them?", he says, sounding concerned, brows suddenly furrowed. "I don't want to make you uncomfortable."

"You don't!", I gently reassure him in his ear, sneaking a slow kiss onto his neck past the eyes of the punters. "Shane?", I moan his name softly, "I think I'd be uncomfortable if we didn't."
I can actually feel his neck get hot under my hand, his heart beat faster. "Ah, fuck, sweetheart.", he exhales in my ear, "Do you mean that how it sounds? How uncomfortable?"

A blush stings my face, stings me like a yellowjacket somewhere else too, and I want him even more. I like being this close to him, feeling the heat his body gives off, the way his flesh smells like the cool honest ground, and green like the severed roots of trees. I want to breathe him in, suck him in, take him down, lay with him.

"Mmm, Shane? I gotta finish my set. I gotta pay the bills, you know?", I say pulling back, but it is to no avail. Shane holds both my wrists tight, and leans into my ear again, his teeth on my flesh. "I'm not going to be stuck doing this at Joanie's age."

"C'mon, baby. I just gave you a C-note. I'm not asking for it back. This show's been worth every dollar. Throw me a bone here. How uncomfortable?", he asks again, kissing my cheek, before he catches my eye, trying to look dead serious. It's hard when you're so cute.

"I think it's you who wants to throw me a great big bone.", I tease back in his ear. "Okay. Uncomfortable like, I'd lay awake thinking about sitting in your uniformed lap in your cruiser until morning."

"Oh, so you like lap sitting, huh?", he asks me back, his breath hot on my skin, "How about you start that private show right now, and I bounce you in my lap until morning for real, make sure you sleep good after? I always did want a mermaid with a thigh gap.", he adds with a dark grin.

"Wait for my show to finish.", I whisper reluctantly before slithering away. "You're gonna get me in trouble."

I can see his hand disappear in the dark behind the stage. He's not stroking. He's not like that. But his hand is on his hard cock, I know it, probably gripping it tight through his pants, without even thinking about it, trying to hold it down. I'm jealous now. I want to be the one doing that to him.

I end this routine with Down in Mexico by The Coasters. Not just because I love to drag my toes and slow step out the intro, not just because I love the rough, hot streets of Mexicali and practically grew up there, and not just because it's about as far from Hot in Herre as you can get with a strip song. The best part is, the chick in the song dances with caster nets. It's always a killer finale that makes me as much as the rest of the set in about thirty seconds. A mermaid? Whirling around a pole, throwing nets, catching men, reeling in her prey? They eat it up. No one sees the real caster nets coming. I know who gets the big blow off tonight.

Dizzy, hands and legs shaking on the inside, my lungs burn with the exertion of the show, but my eyes pick my marks in the haze of the crowd, and slowing down, my heels hit the floor. Unwinding the nets that hang from the strings of my panties, I take to the pole with one hand, and cast with the other. The final net covers Shane, and I don't let go, sliding off my pole, and reeling gently with both hands as I walk towards him. He's smiling, shaking his head. I can read his mind. At the last possible moment, I release him, keeping the net behind his back, and holding on tight, use it to pull myself right off the stage and into his lap, legs wrapped around him. Tilting my body out to spin his stool outwards, I flip my legs out over both our heads and somersault backward off the stool, and start to walk away, pulling him with me in the twisted net.

Normally, after a few steps, I'd let the guy go, and exit to massive applause. These are the lengths I go to, in the absence of big implants, to make that money. But not tonight; tonight, I drag Shane into a private room, still in the net, without a word, and without even looking back at him. I don't need to. I know he wants to come...
Our private rooms are nice, though I have never once danced in one. It's a big money maker, but just not my thing. I'm not that kind of girl; I hate people too much. This one has a small spinner stage, set right in front of a small red tufted leather booth, surrounded by mirrors. It's dimly lit with an old chandelier. I feel like these rooms are almost like a haunted house, full of the hazy vapors of so many people's abandoned virtue. I've never liked vacuuming them alone at night, but I like being in here alone with Shane.

When I turn to face him, he asks, "So, can I touch you? Are you going to be okay with that? Would it get you in trouble?"

Sighing, I hand his hundred, and all his twenties back; I kept count, kept them separate. "Here. Now I'm just a girl, and you are just a man, behind a closed door. No rules for either of us."

"Good.", Shane's voice comes out gruff and tight, as his strong hands grab my ass and hips, and pull me against him. "Then feel this. Feel what you did to me. I never get hard for strippers. I just like the show, usually. Something pretty to see while I drink. You wanna know something? I smoke weed first.\", he tells me rebelliously.

I can't help it. I moan. Pretty hard too. But he's strong, and pulling me onto him hard, and even though it's in his pants, I can feel his big dick between my legs, and he's rubbing my whole little body aggressively against it. "Aw, I did that to you, Shane?.", I breathe, reaching my hands up onto his neck and into his hair. He's doing all the work. I don't even have to grind, just try to keep my feet on the floor. "Why didn't you ever watch me before? I've always thought you were hot."

His lips collide with mine, and his tongue fills my mouth. I feel my body just melt against him, finally feeling everything; his muscular uniformed chest against my bare skin, his strong, square fingertips digging into my ass, his absolutely huge, rock hard cock sliding against my panties. His mouth tastes like the piece of winterfresh gum he's been chewing aggressively since he got here, and his tongue is thick and strong, confidently invading my mouth. I've never wanted a man physically the way I do him, and I just want to know how he resisted me for so long; what was wrong with me.

"Well... ", he says slowly, his voice laced with regret, after his lips break from mine, "I should have carded you sooner. Just the sight of you makes my dick hard. In places like this, that makes me uncomfortable. I didn't want to look again until I knew enough about you."

I can't help but smile. What a decent guy. I know all the guys that come in here see me that way; jailbait. I can't help that I haven't really changed since junior high, and I'm not one to turn down any of the few advantages I've had in life, but just the same, I know why all the men who watch me do it, and it makes me sick in the deepest personal way. I hate what they think they like about me.

"You don't like younger women?", I ask him, letting my hands fall down his arms, admiring him.

"You're still younger. And not really.", he answers, lip twitching with a half smile. "If you were as young as you look? Not even my type when I was twelve. I work four twelves straight. I don't relish spending days off between the Pacsun and Forever 21."

"What? You don't like Beiber remixes played in a loop at 110 decibels?", I joke sarcastically, raising an eyebrow.

Shane laughs. "No. I like you though."

"You like Joanie better.", I say, one part kidding, one part accusation.

He just pulls me close, kisses my neck softly, his tongue on my skin giving me chills. "Not anymore,
I don't. I wouldn't say no to both of you at once though. You guys seem close."

"Joanie's hot, but I'm not, you know, bi. Besides, I don't want to share you.", I answer breathlessly. He grabs my hand and wrestles it down his pants until my finger tips find his silky hard cock. "Oh, Shane... I want this and your mouth at the same time, any time I feel like."

I probably need to cool things down, for the moment anyway. These rooms have security cams, and I know Man Pony likes to lock his door and watch the feed. A skeeved shudder shakes my spine. The idea of Man Pony getting off on this is enough to turn me off sex until I'm as dry as the dust I'll eventually become. So gross.

"Shane?", I say softly, pulling my hand out of his pants, and pushing him back from kissing me, "I gotta cover up the camera, okay?"

He lets me go a bit begrudgingly, and I struggle to pull the stage steps over the plush carpet to where the camera by the exit sign is located, so I can climb up and wrap my net around and around it. When I climb back down, Shane is seated in the booth, looking comfortable all manspread, legs sitting far apart. Man, I just want to crawl between them and bury my face there and see if he tastes how he smells.

"Could you dance for me some more?", he asks me with a grin, "Same songs. I want to watch you without being in the middle of a cocktail sausage party."

"Yeah, of course."

I'm surprised. I did not have him pegged as the kind of guy who likes to have to wait for it. On the other hand, I do think he likes power dynamics. How could he not, in his line of work? I doubt he knows how to let that go, even when he tries. He's the kind of man who either wants to be in complete charge, or wants you to take it from him forcefully; let him freefall through egalitarian irresponsibility, giving all control over to a little girl he could overpower, but ultimately doesn't want to.

"Hey, Brad?", I say into a mic in the wall, struggling to depress the intercom button with my long nails, "Could you cue up the Sirens tracks for in here? Room three. Just put it on repeat and go home for the night. I'll clock you out when I go." A staticky disembodied voice replies, "Roger that. Thanks Aster."

The music starts as I step back up onto the small stage. It's not big enough for my usual routine, but it doesn't matter. I spin around slow. This time, I'm not showing off my moves. I'm showing off my body.

"Yeah. Like that.", Shane's voice is low and husky. "Slow. And look at me."

I do what he says. "Like this?"

"Yeah." His hand wanders onto one of his legs. His cock is visible even from here, straining against his uniform. His long fingers grasp and squeeze the tip, and his handsome face twitches. "Now, hold the pole further up your thighs, okay? And let me see your cooch slide down right up against the pole, alright? Let me see it slide and bounce down the brass."

Once I've obeyed him, and come to rest on the floor, legs spread, pole between them, he asks me another question.

"Does it feel good, baby? Looks like it would feel good."
I can't lie to him. I do want to grind on the hard metal pole, just a little. I don't need to fake. Holding it with my hands, I press my panties up against it hard, and roll my hips up and down. Once I start, I can't stop; I don't know if it's Shane or the pill I took, but I'm so turned on that I can't control it, and I'm really trying to come. Shane unzips, and I'm wet wanting to watch him stroke it. He does, but it's really slow and loose and lazy. He's not trying to come, just trying to make me want to make him. It's working. His pretty face is hot when he's turned on.

"Baby?", he says, "You're gonna make yourself come like that. Stop it. That's my job."

Staring defiantly in his eyes from my stage, I refuse without a word. I know what he wants. He wants to make me stop.

"I'll spank you.", Shane threatens, standing up, still stroking his beautiful cock.

"Good." I moan softly. "I like spankings. I deserve it."

In a flash, he pulls me from my stage, and drags me down to straddle his lap in the booth, and I feel his hand strike my ass, startling me with the loud clap of skin on skin. It's like being electrocuted; I'm shocked. But somehow I feel the impact and vibration of the slap deep inside my body, and I'm even more desperate for his dick. My clit aches so bad it stings.

"If you're gonna do that, Shaney baby, you better spank me hard enough I can feel it on the inside." It's probably the naughtiest thing I've ever said in my whole entire life. I mean it though. I want him to do it again, and I want him to do it harder.

"Ah, you fucking little back-talking cock tease! Thin ice, girl.", his clear voice moans, before his teeth sink into the sinews of my neck, just below my ear, like an animal makes a bitch submit. I do it, too. Without even thinking, my head tilts back and presents my jugular, and before I can gasp in a breath, he unleashes a lashing of hard spanks. I can feel it, his unforgiving palm on my ass, his fingers reaching between my spread legs, slapping my clit.

When his jaws release me, I'm moaning, waiting to put my head down, lick his wounds, and give myself to him. I lean into him, the warmth of his body drawing me, and kiss his strong neck, letting my lips feel his tight skin, my tongue lick the salt from his skin while I listen to him breathe, feel his pulse. I ease my hips closer to his lap to see if he'll let me sit there yet, feel his big strong cock press against my swollen throbbing pussy. I want his big dick to rub on my panties until the thick tip finds the small wet hollow of my hot body, and I want him to try to put it in before he even has me undressed.

"You want a ride on it now, sweetie? You're a sucker for punishment, huh?" Shane's voice sounds sad, and sliding further into his lap, I look in his deep set eyes, trying to understand why; what I did. I guess he's right though, because my body is hurting for his cock, but I stop just shy of sitting right on it like I want to, because of his eraser eyes. I doubt he ever cries either. Approaching his lips slowly, he comes to me now, raising his head. Holding his head in my hands, I taste his hot mouth slow, my tongue asking his permission to slip past his lips, past his teeth, onto his tongue, begging for his approval to draw one of his breaths into my body. He's so gentle. He gives me everything I want.

My lips are moist with his when I finally pull back. "No. Not for punishment.", I shake my head, my hair falling over my shoulders and into his face. "Just a really big sucker for you."

He's staring up at me, and all I see is a man who wants to fuck and get off. None of that black melancholy anymore.
"You ready to submit to me, or are you stuck on being bad, huh?", Shane groans, taking one of my hands in his, and wrapping it around his thick erection, showing me how to stroke him with his fist over mine.

"I dunno.", I purr back, kissing his waiting lips. "Touching you like this sort of makes me feel like still being bad."

"Why's that?", he asks. His hand finally trusts mine to touch him right, and now both his hands are all over me. I feel his firm grip grab my ass hard, and both his hands rise up my flat stomach, his long fingers sneak up my breasts until he grabs them firmly, doesn't let go, stroking my soft skin with his finger tips.

"Don't you like bad girls?" Lips pressed to his neck, my grip on his dick tight, I half expect him to spank me again.

His handsome face is awash in this amused expression. "You're not a bad girl. You're a sad girl who pretends to be bad. I want to get it; why girls do that."

"Mmm, well, you're a man, like a real man, you know? And I'm in your lap, and you have the single biggest cock I've ever seen, and I'm stroking it while you touch me, so...", I flirt, trailing off shyly, refusing his real question. I can't talk about myself. If I do, I won't enjoy this. "Am I being too bad, Shane?"

"No. I love it when good girls act bad." He says kindly, being nice, saying what I need not to manipulate me, but to just let me have my peace and my illusion. He kisses my mouth again, and I bite his lower lip gently. "Can I pull these shells off?", he finally asks, his hands still on my breasts, toying with the edges of my pasties.

I just shake my head no. "Not yet." In all honesty, I'd love to feel him tweaking my nipples, love to see him suck them. But we're playing a different game now.

"These are real shells, aren't they?", he asks me suddenly.

"Yeah. Lined in pale pink kid leather. I had them made special.", I shrug with a smile. No one ever notices the details. I love that he just did.

"Such a pretty girl in such an ugly place. You're pure class, you know that?" He says it like we aren't playing a game at all anymore.

Laughing, I kiss him impulsively. "I dunno, Shane. I'm a stripper beating off a cop after a failed sting to catch some loser trucker who roughed me up today..."

"Yeah, well, I'm a cop who's only thirty, and already wants a stripper to jerk him off while he's on the clock. You wanna stop?", he asks with a dimpled half grin.

"No.", I answer softly, shaking my head. "What I want is you. You know...", I lower my voice and lean closer to his ear, "You have the nicest cock I've ever seen, and it feels so good in my hand. It's so big it's a little bit scary though."

"You scared it's gonna hurt?", he asks, his hand moving onto my pussy, stroking it so gently through my panties that I can barely feel it, just feel that I want more.

"Beyond scared straight.", I joke before adding, "Maybe a little."

"I'll be gentle. I can do it so it won't hurt." He's still just barely touching me with the tips of his
fingers, and his other hand strokes a strand of hair that has fallen over my shoulder and down my chest. "You need to stop jerking it though. I'm gonna come."

I stop right away. "Sorry.", I giggle.

"Your knee.", Shane says quietly. "It must be killin' you. Here.", he says lifting me to lay on my back on the edge of the tiny stage in front of the booth, "You don't need to be kneeling on it all night for me."

Laying on the stage, I can see us in the mirrored ceiling, my legs drawn back, knees apart. I must be high from that Oxy. I feel like I'm floating, half paralyzed. I feel like a disembodied soul trapped helpless outside its body, looking for a way back in. Because as I lay here, I see him leaning toward me, his head moving between my legs. Maybe it's just him; wanting him so bad like this, that I'd let him do anything, I don't know, but I've never once let a man do that to me, let alone even get close. But tonight, I just lay still, watching him come closer and closer, my heart pounding like a trammed animal.

The strong grip of his hands are warm on my thighs as he pushes my legs further back, and further apart, before moving one onto my ankle. Shane kisses my knee softly, and asks, "This must hurt like hell. You must have been scared."

"It's no big deal.", I say flatly. "Besides, you're here now.", I add with a shrug and smile. "And it's a kiss magnet, so that's kind of nice."

Shane smiles. I almost forgot his pants are still hanging open, and he's hard. He doesn't let go of my ankle, but the hand that was prying one thigh down glides toward my center until his finger tips are pressed firmly on my panties, rubbing me in circles.

"That feels good?", he asks.

As if he doesn't know, the way my back is arching, the way my panties are slick and soaked through, my pussy swollen shut with want for him. "Uh huh.", I nod.

Shane stands and leans over me, and I don't miss the chance to put my hands on his huge hot cock again and pump its length.

"Shane...", I moan stroking him with both hands, "I can't even close my hand around it. I have to use both."

He leans all the way over me and kisses my mouth before he asks, "Scary?"

"Yeah. I don't care. I want it."

"You're not ready yet.", Shane says, pulling my panties down, and me halfway off the edge of the stage, so he can sit in the booth, his head between my thighs.

I'm trying to be cool, but now I am scared, panicking, my heart pounding, and I feel like I want to find my feet and run away. I can't do this. I push his big heavy blond head away, pulling his hair a little as he resists my attempt to move his head back.

"You don't like this?", he asks incredulously. "All chicks love this."

I'm filled with horror, because to my own amazement, I feel like I might cry.

"Um. No, I um, I... I don't know.", I struggle quietly for words. "I've never, you know, done this
before."


"No. I don't know. I just don't like it. So stop, okay?" Normally, I would hate this, and get up, call him a piece of shit and run away, and feel numb, like some kind of busted emotional cripple. But Shane is still sitting here between my legs, looking sincere, all dressed in uniform, with that glorious cock of his still out, and still hard as iron.

"Why would you say that? I can tell your body likes it...", he asks, leaning forward. I try to look away, but I see him in the mirror above me. I watch it happen as I feel the tickle of his close cropped hair inside my thighs, his warm breath on my clit just before his moist lips part and kiss me gently there, feel his tongue graze it just a little before he pulls back. Out of my control, my body loves how it feels. "Was that so bad?"

"No. It feels really nice, but I just feel shy. I'm worried you're just doing it to be nice. I want to make you feel good.", I argue, despite the hungry ache in my body where his mouth just was.

"Let me let you in on a little secret.", he says softly, getting up and laying his body over mine and kissing my ear. "I get off on getting girls off. Especially fucking exquisite little pieces of ass like you. Now, for one thing, the first chick I ever had a wet dream about was The Little Mermaid. So this whole thing you got going on tonight?", he eyes me up and down, "I'm thirsty."

Shane kisses down my body, grabs my little tits on the way down. "And down here? If this is what's stopping you? You are a silly girl.", he kisses me again, slow and gentle, pushing his face against me, and I feel my hands that had been in his hair trying to push him away, pulling him down and guiding his mouth. "Aster. That's a flower, right?", he asks, coming up for a breath. "What good's a flower without petals? You're so fucking pretty, all pink, little lace ruffles, and you taste like cotton candy. So tight I don't know if I can do it without hurting you, no matter how hard I try. All this makes me want is to feel my dick in you."

"Then get up here and let me kiss you so I can feel your cock. I'm getting that itty bitty bedroom voice. I can't help it. I want him so bad. "I want to see how hard you are."

"To make sure I'm not lying to you? So sus for someone so young.", Shane teases me, wry grin and a brow raised.

"Your mouth tastes so good.", I pant breathlessly, kissing him, both of my little hands wrapped around his cock again. He's hard, alright, and I can feel his pulse in his dick. He's swollen to the point that his tip is as hard as his shaft, and his shaft is ballooned around the middle. Unless I'm deeper than my belly button, there's no way I'll get him all in.

"I taste good 'cause you do.", he breathes into my ear, sucking it into his mouth, biting it. "So am I hard enough to suit you, or do you plan to keep up the third degree?"

"It's so hard. Does it feel good?", I tease him back, stroking him, occasionally pulling his cock down so I can grind up against it.

"Yeah.", Shane answers in my ear, wincing. "But it's starting to get, what was your word? Uncomfortable?. I dunno, baby. You like to be teased mercilessly?"

"I must, I guess, if that's what you're doing."

"Yeah, well, you won't.", his words muffled against my neck as he kisses me deep and hard. "You'll beg for my cock."
Wrapping my legs around his chiseled hips, I reach down and start undoing his shirt. "Then stop talking about it and do it, Shane.", I moan, sucking a kiss from his lower lip. "Put it in me. I want you to."

"No.", he answers gruffly, forcing all four of his fingers in my mouth to wet them, and grabs between my legs roughly before his middle finger tries to pry inside, slow and gentle.

"Oh Shane...", I exhale, touching his high cheek bone, and looking up at the dark fuzzy image of us floating above me. "Why not? Please? I mean it, I don't care. I'll beg, okay? Just give it to me."

"Because you're still nervous, and I don't hurt girls. I love girls.", Shane growls in my ear, finger fucking me in and out, real slow. It feels so good my hips roll with him. "I don't want to hurt you. I want you to come once first. I wanna make you. Then you can get on it, and I'll make you come again."

He has his technique down. Everything you ever wish a guy would do with his hand, he's doing. I don't even know if it's the pressure of his knuckles, or if his opposite thumb is on the button, but he's working it at the same time he bangs me and pulses the finger inside me. I can already feel the start of the tickles and flutters, and my eyes close, too heavy to stay open. My lips part and moan his name over and over, unable to stay quiet.

In the warm darkness of my own body, somehow, he seamlessly moves down me, and now I can feel the pressure of his big hands gripping the insides of both my thighs, pushing them open as far as they will go, and his warm mouth close over me. I can't feel shy because he's got me wanting him too bad, and the sensation of his face inside my smooth thighs turns me on more. Such a fucking man.

I don't know if what he's doing is how it's done, but if it isn't, it should be. I think his teeth are on my clit, but he's so gentle I can't tell, just before he sucks a breath in against me, and rubs that strong tongue of his up and down me hard, never losing the seal of his lips. His mouth is the same temperature as my body, just as hot, just as wet. It feels like the best sex dream I ever had, like it is just happening to me, like my body is doing it all on its own, just throbbing exquisitely towards an explosive orgasm. Except for the unbelievably sexy pressure of his heavy head, the honest smell of his skin, the sounds of his arousal and heaving breaths. That makes this better.

I don't talk to him much, because he doesn't talk back. That's okay. I like being quiet. I feel lost, floating in space, warm with him. I can't stop the moans though. It would be impossible. He never takes his mouth off me, never loses the gentle tug of the suction from the seal of his lips around mine, licks hard and rhythmic right where I was aching for him to do it, one of his fingers somehow finding a way to slide inside me, as my walls pull tighter and tighter. When I come, it surprises me, like a balloon I knew was going to explode, but it's still a shock, the violence of it.

My whole body contracts, and I seek his head with my hands, trying to push his head away, because it's too intense. I fight it because I think I'd get sucked under the surface if I didn't. The shockwaves of intense cold pleasure shake through my entire pelvic floor, and ricochet back up to my belly button, and my face feels on fire. I know I'm screaming, but I can't hear it over the buzz in my head. When I feel like I can't possibly take any more, I just keep coming, and Shane pulls me off the stage and into his lap in the booth, holding me, kissing my neck. He doesn't push his cock into me, he just sits me on it, and rocks me back and forth slow, stroking my hair.

"Ah, Shane.", I struggle to breathe, find even my little bedroom voice. "Oh. Fuck. Shane, what was that?", I ask him, in love with him, in love with his body, in love with his heart; so decent, so gentle, never looked at me before, just did that to me, didn't hurt me, didn't use me. I'm still coming in slow tremors, his competent hands guiding my whole body, sliding and grinding me on his cock without
putting it in me. I lick his neck, slow and hard, breathing in his smell, and pushing his open shirt from his shoulders. "I can't stop coming."

Shane's face is starting to contort in those tiny expressions of prolonged arousal as he replies low, looking up into my eyes, "I know baby. It's 'cause you're not done yet. I only made you come here."

Impulsively, I lean down over him and kiss his mouth, holding the brass rail behind his head. I don't do this; kiss like I'm in love. Mouth open, tongue slow and seeking his, trying to feel his heart beating with my own bare chest, I feel his huge cock twitching against me. All I can do is helplessly moan softly in his mouth.

As hard as it is to stop, because I really do want to stay in his lap until he can't deny himself any longer, and he finally pushes himself into me, I slide back in his lap, kissing down his chest, and drop to my knees on the floor. As I kneel undressing him the rest of the way, I finally get to suck on him. The tip of his dick is massive, and I take him in my hand and rub it around on my lips like it's a lipstick I'm trying to take the edges off of. Shane's the one moaning now.

"Suck it.", he implores in a tight, urgent voice.

"No." I say defiantly, in a whisper, right before I suck it all into my mouth.

It doesn't really fit, and my jaw aches instantly, the inner corners of my lips tingle from stretching too far. I don't care. I'm already aching bad for him again, and I just want his cock in me. I kneel tall over his lap and pound my head up and down his thick shaft, sucking until I've swallowed him. Almost immediately, I feel his hand on my head, in my hair, and panic chokes me like a mouth of dry corn husks. But he doesn't force me down. He pulls my head gently back up, and tilts my chin up to look at his face.

"Get back up in my lap, okay?", Shane says slow and soft. "I'm cold. I wanna hold you."

It feels like I'm home. His skin on mine is warm, and he pulls me right up against him, and kisses me, his hands working up and down my body.

"Why'd you want me to stop?", I ask, grazing his shoulder with a kiss, feeling my own nervous smile.

"I didn't want to come in your mouth.", Shane responds simply, before whispering in my ear, "Because I want to come inside you. I like you. Is that okay?"

I feel my heart race. I don't know why, but there isn't a nicer thing a man can say to you, and those sincere dimples don't hurt anything either. I can't find words to answer, so I just look in his wide blue eyes and nod yes.

What comes next does hurt, but just a little.

"Damn girl. Good thing you're so wet.", he says, his big fist wrapped around his cock, as he guides it into me gently. When I take a sharp breath, he stops and asks, "Are you okay?"

"Uh huh, yeah.", I moan, "It feels really good."

"Okay, well, that's the tip.", he laughs. "Just let me help you, do the work at first, alright? Don't hurt yourself."

"You're not my first.", I joke.
"Nah. But you wish I was." His voice casts a diffuse shadow. I think he sounds sad, but then, I project. I do wish it. This is perfect. My first time was violent; a terrifying descent into the life I now inhabit, a dizzying flurry of crude, cruel parts, and screams, and blood, laughter and boots striking my ribs, coming to alone in someone else's piss. I'd tell him that too, but he knows. Me saying it would make us both sad, when we are both just trying so hard to feel good.

"Shane?", I whisper, letting my body submit to his touch, letting him hold me down, move me with him when he sees fit, as he eases his cock further and further inside me.

"Yeah? You okay? I'm not hurting you?", he asks into the hollow of my neck, and lets go of my hips to wrap his arms around me so he can hold me tight, slow fucking, just rocking me in his lap like he said he would.

"Aw my word...", I moan, "No. Not at all. Not even a little. It's just... do you want me to do anything?"

"Baby, you're doing it. Just stay on it like that. Just relax. Let me have you.", Shane groans, "Look at me. Tell me it feels good. Tell me I'm good." His guileless Midwestern voice glides down my neck soft and smooth, as his hips roll me in his lap deep and slow.

Shane. If only he were my sweet Shane, if he knew how to be mine, if I knew how to be his. He's so sad and alone; 'look at me, tell me I'm good'. I'd know those words too, if it wasn't that I don't want anyone to look, because I know I'm no good, not anymore, anyway. I want to be with him, lure his sorrow away, kill it, dismember it, feed it to gators, bury it in sealed barrels to rot along with mine. Something's sad in him too; something lost and missing that no one sees. Not like me though. He doesn't want to be numb. He's inside me trying to feel. He wants love. I want to love him, because if I can't love him--those dimples, those pleading clear eyes, looking in mine for something they can't seem to find, while he tries to love me and please me with his body--well, if I can't love him, I died a long time ago with my eyes and thighs squeezed shut on the floor of a Thomas bus. Then when consciousness found me with my bruised cheek against cold metal, the smell of the vulcanized rubber runner down the center aisle mingled with blood and piss and come, and nothing but the view of the unupholstered plywood seat bottom, I never really woke up. Then I died into a nightmare, to walk dead and haunt this earth. I don't do this; have sex. Not ever. Not for years anyway. I don't like thinking.

"Hey?", Shane's voice shatters my thought and I'm back in my tingling body again, in his strong arms, in his lap, with his cock deep inside me. My breath slows. This feels so good. I remember what he asked for, something so small.

"Sorry.", I whisper, easing back to look at him and smile. "This feels amazing." Leaning towards his ear, I slip my hand between us, running it down his muscular body, until it finds a tangle of his coarse dark hair, and his cock completely buried inside me. "I can't believe you're all the way in.", I moan, surprised, in his ear. "It's so fucking good slow and gentle like this, but it feels so good that it's hard not to try to ride it a little."

"You wanna ride me?" Shane kisses my ear and thrusts a bit faster. "I think you're ready. Here. Lean your hips forward like this.", he says, showing me with his hands. "Now, grind a little. Don't do it like a show, some lap dance bullshit. Do it like you mean it, like it's to come, alright?"

His hands close around my hips, and show me how, pushing me down, grinding my achy little pearl against his pubic bone, giving me traction in his thick hair, while he slowly rolls his thick cock inside me. My whole body feels full of him, and I'm glad he's holding me so tight, because otherwise it feels like I'd float away.
"Oh Shane...", I breathe hard, slumped over his shoulder, "This's so amazing. I love this."

"Best you ever had?", he asks me, voice thick. He knows he is.

"Better than anyone could ever be. I thought I hated sex.", I whisper back, wrapping my arms behind his head, and kissing his cheek. "It feels like I'm flying. Please don't stop, okay?"

I've given myself to him now, and he owns me. Funny thing about ownership is, people care about their own stuff. He handles me so gently, like I'm a fragile thing that could shatter, like I'm his to protect. His arms wrap tight around me, warm and safe and impossible to escape. His mouth is all over my neck and shoulders, his hot heavy breath moist and condensing on my skin. Everything tickles. I thought his cock would hurt, but it tickles too. I've never been fucked so slow, never with a dick so big. I can feel it pry and slide through every millimeter of the inside of my wet, swollen pussy. I can feel his tip, the ridge around it, all the veins. It's like he's really inside me, inside the real me, like he knows me. I let my muscle memory grind my hips on him just how he showed me. I can feel the inside of my body swelling tighter and tighter on him and hear his breaths come faster when I do.

I find his ear with my lips and moan, "Shane? Hey, baby? You can fuck me harder if you want to. I wanna see how hard you want to fuck me."

He doesn't change a thing; his slow deep thrusts just keep lifting and dropping me like waves. "Aster.", his voice is low and sad, "This is how I wanna fuck you. I like being nice to you. I already said; I like you. I just wanna fuck you nice, okay?"

"Are you sure you aren't holding back?"

"Of course I'm holding back. I don't want to come until you're coming on my cock. Just let me be with you, alright?", Shane asks softly, putting his hands up in my hair and pressing my head to his shoulder.

We don't talk any more. Shane just holds me tight, head on his shoulder, to enjoy the long, languid, deep, slow thrusts of his cock. I close my eyes and breathe in his scent, like Irish Spring and fresh dug graves, let my fingers feel his muscular arms, let my bare chest feel his heart beat. He's going to rock me in his lap all night long if I can fight coming. This feels better than coming. I never want it to end.

Shane slow fucks me into a trance, but eventually, I can't ignore it. He feels so good, and I'm unbearably tight on him, tingling, and squeezing him against my own will. I keep my eyes closed, as my hands glide up his neck and into his hair where my fingers tangle and grasp in his blond regulation cut. The sound of his strained breaths and agonized moans push me past the point of no return.

"That's it, sweetheart.", he encourages, as he loses control too. Shane locks me in his arms, and holds me down, his cock pushed up in me as deep as either of us can handle. "Ah, fuck, yeah, Aster. Just like that. Ah, baby, you're coming so fucking hard for me... you're gonna fuck my balls dry like that, baby..."

I'm coming, and it's sweet and slow just like the fuck was; powerful, and rhythmic, it washes over me slow before I'm sucked under to surrender to the strong waves of pleasure pulsing through my body, so strong they tug at my clit, so strong they crush and batter Shane's huge cock that's jerking inside me. I can feel him coming strong and slow too, firing like a cannon deep in my core, like my pussy swallowed him. All I can do is lay myself against him and try to breathe through it, moaning his name.
"Shane... I love you." The words slip out of my mouth. He's coming too hard, heavy groans and obscenities still escaping him without conscious thought. I know he didn't hear me. I try not to freeze in horror at myself and what I've done, but I feel myself start to pull away. Just a gentle shift in the tides, as I withdraw into the void, pulled by a force bigger than myself.

I'm still coming, still feeling electric flutters and strong clenches, and Shane's cock is still gushing slow pumps of come inside me, but I start fighting to stand. I want to go. I don't know where. But I can't stay. I need to get away.

Shane won't let me go, holds me against him in a tight hug that's become a stifling prison. "Don't go. Just stay on me until I go soft?", he begs, confused, still deep inside me, gripped tight, and gently thrusting. It still feels good, but I don't like it anymore.

I feel sorry for him, but my heart is thumping, and I need to run. "I gotta go to the bathroom.", I stammer quietly. When I stand from his lap, his cock is practically stuck in me, and as I pull free, I put my hand over my nakedness, and just flee, grabbing my panties from the floor on my way past.

Alone in the harsh, bald light bulb glare of the small attached bathroom, I tie the ribbons on the hips of my blue-green sequined panties like a robot in a daze before pulling them back down to sit down on the cold porcelain and let Shane drain out of me. His thick white come is still hot inside me, as it trickles from my body to plop into the cold water. I just close my eyes, and bury my face in my hands, resting my elbows on my knees. Shane drains from the empty place where I suppose my heart used to be, before it was smashed to dust and sifted away with years of being tossed and shaken on troubled waters. For the first time in over ten years, dry, bitter tears fill my eyes, and run down my face, like a sparse rain in an arid desert. Love. What a joke. I was an interesting piece of strange, a novelty. I was a fuck. A tight hole to fill. A slut to use. As if he could love a broken doll like me. I'm not sad. Just numb. Not a Nereid. Just driftwood.

I clean up and dry my eyes. I don't plan to do that again for at least another ten years. I'm just fine. I practice my easiest, warmest smile a couple times in the mirror before slipping out the door.

Shane is still there, but he's dressed now too, sitting and waiting, looking a bit like a lost puppy. I feel sorry for him that he ever met me. It's a waste for people to like me.

"Hey.", I say softly, with that smile I practiced, climbing the stairs to the stage and taking a swing around the pole, before stepping down between his legs, my foot precariously close to his manhood on the red patent leather booth. As I let myself down into his uniformed lap, I say softly in his ear, "You oughta be a firearms instructor, the way you know how to handle that thing." I let my hand slide down his body, and grab between his legs. He's already getting hard again. "Shane, you are completely incredible. If I didn't have a thing for lap sitting before, I sure do now... and you were right. I do feel so sleepy.", I tell him slow and soft, kissing his jaw.

"You need me to walk you out to your car?", he asks, all Midwestern decency, and those good Polish manners.

I don't suppose Shane'll check my trunk, although Dewey's airholed body has the back end of my old Cutlass riding kinda low, with those old springs and struts I ought to change out. I'm glad I got the chance to follow that stupid, hapless fucknut out to the parking lot while Joanie blubbered on the 911 call. Glad Dewey's truck gave me so much cover, glad I can buy a gun, and glad Michigan is a concealed carry state. Glad the night's already so dark. Glad the Flint River is so dirty that no one will ever notice one more bit of filth in it. I love the bleak, dirty darkness here. No where for any light to hide.

"Sure.", I smile warmly again, into Shane's rugged face. Taking his hand, he follows me out of the
haunted little den of iniquity, through the club, back through the garish florescent back room to throw my hoodie over my costume, and out to the parking lot. The night is cool and the wind blows through me like I'm not even here.

"Well, this is me.", I say turning to face Shane, my hand already on the gritty door handle of my Oldsmobile. Shit. It really is sitting suspiciously low.

"You don't lock your car?", he asks, sounding astounded.

"Come on." I smile with a shrug. "Does this lowered piece of crap look like it is worth stealing? Or like there's any way there's anything inside worth taking either?" I'm already sitting in the driver's seat, finding my key.

"Yeah. You got a point. Looks like you might have a scratched 36 Chambers under the seat. That's about it. Still. Place like this?" Half his face sneers in disgust. "A guy could break in and wait for you in here."

"Yeah, I guess. Thanks."

I don't know what to say to his concern. Advice sometimes pisses me off. Bad shit happens. No amount of precaution saves people, and I'm beyond saving now anyway. First it's all the precautions, then the blaming the victim starts. This world's a butcher shop. Don't try to tell me how not to get my throat cut in a slaughter house. We all know that's all any of us are here for anyway. My car's engine starts with a choke, and a puff of exhaust as I turn the key.

Before I can close the door, Shane's hand stops it. "Can I follow you home?", he asks, pleading, something broken in his voice. "Sleep beside you tonight, you know, just to make sure you're alright?"

"No." My smile's feeble and cracked. I can feel that. "Think it's better if we don't." Fact is, cowards stay and traitors run. There's no pleasing me. Even if I'm not better off alone, he's certainly better off without me.

Driving away, the blackness just closes over Shane, and I lose sight of his confused face in the mirror. Where Did You Sleep Last Night. I hear the song in my head as I drive the narrow road away home. Not that asshole Cobain's lame cover; he sings it like some insecure, overbearing, suspicious little prick. I'd have Courtney'd his ass too. Leadbelly. Leadbelly sings it like the unceremonious dirge for the dead it really is. I really need to work that into my show.

I need to be alone. I couldn't sleep with sweet, normal Shane next to me, and I couldn't think either. I need to check on my concrete business listing, count up my cash. I need tonight to decide what to do about the rest of those pills in my dresser. Maybe I just take all of them and let the blackness close over me instead. He's so innocent. He won't quit trying. But I can't feel anything, and I wouldn't want to. I should protect him from everything the world is revealed to be through me.

I wheel my car around at the next intersection. I'm running back. Just in case I need them...
Chapter Summary

The Cult does Halloween. 'UGE! Big, beautiful Halloween. All the best Hallows.

Mac

Every morning, I'm awake. Awake already, when the jarring clink of Corelle on hardwood rings out on the other side of the bedroom door. That's how I know when to get up. It's my daily delivery of sulfuric ash from the fireplace in the basement, where Kai burned my hair. Every day, I wish they'd have run out and used the last of it, and had to burn some plastic straws and old Dixie Chicks CDs or some shit. Nope. Every day it still stinks like my burnt hair.

I get up quietly, so I don't wake Winter. She's a psychobitch without enough sleep. I couldn't really give a shit; when she's moody with me, I see it as an excuse to troll a leftard guilt free. We know we love each other. But I worry about her. She breaks rules. I never break rules, and look at what happened to me. So I watch over her at night, and be silent in the morning. I'm sure Kai wouldn't do anything to her... but once dismembered, twice shy, I guess.

I creep, bare feet on the cold wood floor, to the door, and turn the knob slow. Release the spring lock. Ease the click. Open the door and look out into the hall to be sure no one is there to see me before I'm NPC'd. Bend down in haste, and pick up the bowl. Crazy Daisy. No, not me. The retired Corelle pattern on the bowl. I close the door softly, and lock myself in Winter's bathroom to get ready for the day.

As I slip out of my onesie and into my Shameful White Habit of Guilt, it occurs to me how much of a mercy it would have been if Kai would have at least made me two of them. I have to wash it every day, and I have to find a time when none of the guys are downstairs to do it. Fucking bullshit.

I'm feeling low today.

It's Halloween, and once again, I'm the same little girl, in the same locked room: everyone having fun but me. I'm excluded and alone, and nobody loves me. Thick impenetrable fog rolled in and settled here overnight, the barometric pressure so low it's boiling my blood, giving me the bends. I'm going to get a migraine today. I can feel it, see it, smell it in the psychosphere. I'll have so much work to do, I'm sure, and I'll have to hide it from Kai. I don't know how I'll do that if I have a seizure again this time... Behind my eyes feels electrified and hot. Every light leaves a line of tracers with my own motion, halos circled round. I can smell the Mossbank dump burning. Not a mere dumpster fire. On the back of my tongue, I can taste the cold singed garbage smell of the Mossbank dump, smoldering beneath my feet, as I sifted through the rubble for discarded cases of Mr. Noodles to feed the pigs, or a half used colouring book to take home and play with. Today is going to be a terrible day. And today I can't cheerlead myself to any other conclusion.

But as I look in the mirror at my pixelated face, struggling awkwardly to remove my bandages, I remember.
I claw and rush frantically, heart pounding to free my hands, half expecting the night before to have been nothing but some cruel aura dream, some lucid wish fulfillment before I see the visions, vomit and flop on the floor like a dying fish. But when my hands are bare, and I touch them, I find the new little stubs still there, a little bigger than I thought they were in the night. My pinkies are growing back, new. I didn't imagine it or dream it. Happy chills pour over my body like a pail of cold water. Mind over matter, Lithia. I smile, touching my new fingers, closing my eyes to the spinning world. Everything is new. This isn't Vantage, or the Mossbank dump, or Moose Jaw.

The ash cakes my face as I slowly pat it on. It's a Wednesday. Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday Addams. Ash Wednesday's child, full of woe. Winter thinks I don't know her name game. I do. Smiling, I wish I could tell her it's cool; I'll play too. But I think she'd feel bad and deny it. And I don't want to make her lie to me. Grey and featureless, sure. But this whole NPC thing sure saves time in the morning. I slick my hair into a tight ponytail secured low, hide it under my hood, and get to work carefully wrapping my hands up.

I don't know why this needs to be a secret. Miracles are to be proclaimed, for God's glory. I feel guilty to hide my light under a bushel. But to whom much is given, much is required, and it occurs to me that it may be a test of my stewardship of the gift. That slow roaster, Danielle, still lives here. She'd probably demand my pinkies on a platter again, and who knows if they'd grow back twice.

Deep down, maybe I've always struggled with honesty in one way or another. It's not that I don't tell the truth. I do, readily, and brutally. It's me. I wear a mask. I don't mean to. Maybe the masking up is who I really am. Me without a mask would be dishonest. Kind of a kick in the inarticulated latex teeth that I don't get to ever do Halloween.

I remember my first week of college.

I walked into every day like a fawn on new legs, shaky and vulnerable, adjusting to life. Moose Jaw was tiny; a town itself. But to me, it was a metropolis. So many people, and none of them knew me; the me who wasn't allowed to colour a picture of Santa Clause, take sex ed, or say the word Easter. The kid who'd only trick or treated once, and who couldn't go to a school dance. I wasn't the kid who fell down the cement steps of the Seventh Avenue school, and whose parents wouldn't come to get me, so I spent the whole day in bloody clothes. I wasn't the kid people just didn't want to even get to know. All of a sudden, I didn't make everyone uncomfortable just by living.

We did this stupid ice breaker. I don't know why people want to break ice anyway. I like ice. But I knew how it would be. It was a stupid guessing game, like 'Who was a jock? Who was voted most likely to succeed? Who puked Strawberry Angel off the endgate of a truck every weekend? Who was a brain? Who was Valedictorian?' That was a trick one. No Valedictorian goes to fucking Polytech. I had the highest marks. But no one wanted to hear what I'd have had to say. Start with something about how if you can't do, teach, and end with something about thanks for nothing. Oh, and don't wear sunscreen. If your name is Occasional-Cortex, it's definitely not responsible to ever have kids, so don't, and maybe it would be best if you just killed yourself so you don't exhale any more CO2. And please litter, everyone. *drops mic, exits to Moon Man* Definitely not Valedictorian material here.

I sat in my desk looking at my skinny legs, waiting for it. I'd be voted the person who'd never been asked out, or most likely to have been in the chess club. I'd be described as a book worm, or nice. Nice. The dreaded adjective for the invisible. I've always been nice. That's what people say when they don't actually know anything about you. It's a euphemism for boring when someone says it about you. I mean, I am nice. But it's different when I say it.

Grey matter painted the brick walls. My brains.
When Maureen, the pothead instructor, read out everyone's votes? I was voted by the majority of people "Most likely to have been head cheerleader in high school.", and described in equal measure as probably being "snobby", or "bubbly". That was when I realized the value in anonymity.

I could be someone nothing bad had ever happened to. No blood, no target.

Chickens are an ugly creature; stupid, cruel and vicious. They seem benign, pecking around the ground for bugs and seeds and the occasional pebble to grind the whole mess up with. But that's just their busy work. What they're really doing is watching, with their vacant, soulless white eyes, for blood. They mercilessly scan one another's bodies for it. A tiny speck is all it takes. One errant beak that lands on another's back during feeding time, and that one little drop of blood seeps up through the white feathers. As soon as one chicken sees it, it struts over, and takes a peck, gets a taste. Soon others see. All conformist followers are stupid. Chickens are both. In no time, the entire flock is gathered round, relentlessly pecking the spot of blood. They don't quit, and cannot be distracted, until the unlucky chicken is dead, most of its carcass gone, cannibalized by its own kind, nothing but a bloody smear on the ground, surrounded with a few dirty feathers. Chickens are more like people than any other creature on the planet.

That ice breaker showed me my mask; that when people looked at me, they assumed a bad thing had never happened to me. They didn't see the droplet of blood under my feathers. They didn't know where to strike, where to attack. They didn't know where the cracks in my foundation were. I wouldn't know how to take my mask off, and I'm sure if I did, the plebs wouldn't stop pecking until I was all gone. No. The people have spoken. Maybe I am bubbly. I mean, if after everything, that's what people see? Who's to say.

Hands rewrapped meticulously in comically huge mitts, I steady myself to stand. My head pulses and hums like a transformer as I take one last look in the mirror. I can't help but smile at the irony; I'm not supposed to be participating in Halloween. I have the best costume of them all. I'm terrifying.

"Mac?", I hear Winter call my name just as I step outside the bathroom.

"Hey. So, feeling excited for today?", I ask her cheerfully. I'm not bringing her down. This is her favorite day of the year.

"YASSSSSS!", she replies with a huge grin, practically leaping up from the bed. "Psyched.", she adds, before clicking her tongue and sighing, inserting huge eye roll. "I'm bummed I have to do my own face. After all the times we practiced it? You had it down."

"Yeah. I know. It sucks.", I sigh, sitting down on the bed. "I had it like that cover art, 100."

I feel guilty. I could unwrap my hands and do it. But this is my news. When the time is right, I want Kai to know first, and I want to tell him myself. Winter is a good sister, but I know she talks to him. She doesn't mean any harm, and she's just protecting herself. That, and her cult issued Amex. It's cool. But she's going to have to put her own mask on today.

She's already getting into her elaborate dress, black floor length lace, edged in narrow red, green and white silk ribbon, off the shoulder and flounced, with a skirt fuller than a circle when she spins.

"You look beautiful.", I tell her sincerely. Not jealous. Just sad for me and happy for her. "Did those shoes you ordered get here in time?"

"No. Stupid Etsy.", she rolls her eyes. "I'm just wearing my platform Mary Janes. It's so long you can't see my shoes anyway. Still. It's going to harsh me all day. Are you okay?", she ask suddenly, looking over at me.
"I'm fine.", I lie.

"Your eyes look funny.", she narrows her eyes at me. "You're getting one of those headaches, aren't you?"

"I dunno. Maybe. I'll take some Advil.", I brush her off. "So, are you using those little flower decals around your eyes or not?"

"Probably.", Winter answers, sitting down on the chair in the corner of the room to buckle her shoes. "If I can't get the lines as clear on my own those will cover a multitude of sins."

"I think they'll look nice either way. I wanted to see it with them on when I did your trials too, just I didn't want to waste them before today.", I tell her. "You were out late last night. Is that why you were asking about Speed?", I ask her with a grin.

"No.", she rolls her eyes angrily. "I mean, Kai gave them a night of furlough or some shit.", she says with a sarcastic laugh. "He wanted to get out of the house, and I wanted to go to Snow Hut. But it must have shut down, because we couldn't find it. I loathe an ordeal, he was boring me, and we came home. End of handjob tale. It was a lame fuck around."

I can't help but laugh. I fucking loathe nothing more than a pointless ordeal either. Just give up, people. Give up. It feelz good, man. Find a new dream.

"Yeah. Hate ordeals too. So, I can't believe you had a Snow Hut here. We had one in Moose Jaw, though I'm sure it's something different. What is it, like a skating rink or something?", I ask.

Moose Jaw's Snow Hut was a laundromat with the best soft serve on the planet. I had a friend named Jason in college; such a total dork. Ineptly strummed me Teenage Dirtbag on his guitar, and asked me out every week. I always said no. He stayed my friend anyway. We used to drive around in his old Focus when it was -80 and get ice cream there. We'd park down in Wakamow and listen to The Hip and talk while we ate it. I didn't even have a winter coat; I couldn't afford one. He wasn't embarrassed to hang out with me even though I wore two pairs of jeans on top of one another, and some second hand Nordic wool sweater over my mom's discarded jean jacket. My parents dumped me there on the sidewalk at 17. They never had much to do with me after. Snow Hut with Jason still makes me smile. It's only been a few years. I feel so old. Half poison, half life. High crimes, High Life.

"No. Like an ice cream place. This town is so lame. Nothing can stay open anymore other than Subways and dollar stores. Fucking sucks here.", Winter shrugs, putting her spiked crown of roses on her head, straightening her black lace mantilla.

"Oh. And don't forget 'Timmie's!'", I giggle. "The plebs love that shit enough to have one at every exit from town and on every Main Street too. Saskatchewan was exactly the same. Don't people realize their dry old donuts and halitosis cardboard sandwiches come frozen on a truck from, like, Salt Lake City, or some shit? All they do is microwave shit. They don't even have a fryer anymore. It's sick."

"Everything sucks.", she agrees. "So what are you going to do with yourself today?"

"What do you mean?", I ask her. "I'm making cookies at Bovine Domination. I'm sure it will take me all day to make sure I have enough for all the doubters. Then aren't we handling trick or treaters here?"

Winter tilts her head at me, and clicks her tongue.
"Oh, you weren't told yet? We're partying all day at Bovine Domination. Except Ivy and Ally, if she can track her down to help. Ivy was ordered to wear her Gretchen Carlson Miss America costume all day, while she makes the cookies—Ex-lax chunk with Muslim prayer beads." she snickers before she can stifle. I know she likes the Ex-lax, hates the prayer beads, and loves that Ivy has been press ganged into making them in her despised costume.

I'm stricken. Those cookies were my idea. Before I was cast out, I suggested it to Kai. We agreed, no kids should be harmed. But Syria is a gotch drying toaster fire. Let's all recognize. A few Brielles and Daxtons swallowing a few beads and getting the squirts would really make the Muslim community look as bad as it is to the mindless plebs who still buy the 'religion of peace' bullshit. I know what the boys are doing tonight. They're taking over a mosque and handing out cookies in full regalia. Kai did say their costumes would be terrifying and reinforce gender roles. The Kai-ing Imams.

Winter's face reveals the exact moment that she sees my face fall.

"Oh, Mac...", she consoles, a hand on my shoulder. "Don't be too disappointed. It's not going to be that great."

"Well, what am I supposed to do today, then?", I ask her.

"I dunno. Nothing. Kai said your job is to lay low, kill the lights, and pretend you don't exist.", she answers with a sympathetic smile on her bowed lips.

I sigh. "Really? I don't even get to hand shit out to trick or treaters? What about our plan with the Tide Pods?"

"No. Kai killed that. I could tell he thought it was totally funny though., she giggles. "Just enjoy not having a million dirty jobs to do for the day. No one will be back until all hours. Wash the ash off and wear real clothes. Feel normal.", is her advice. Given in kindness I know, but spoken like someone who actually knows what normal is, and yet has no perspective to realize it. "Watch tv or something. Troll the wannabe preggies. Maybe read."

"I don't read a thing, unless, you, Winter, are suggesting The Bible. And you know trolling those TTC dopes is only fun with you. When do you leave?", I ask her, careful to sound casual rather than dejected.

"Right away. As soon as Danielle is gone. Kai doesn't want that fat scrub hanging around, ruining the day for everyone. So he's got some lame campaign errand for her; some shit about looking up land titles. Something to do with zoning that no one cares about anyway. Then she has to work an 18. Apparently, people do stupid shit on Halloween.", Winter shrugs. "I wish we could hang out today."

"Yeah, me too.", I sigh again, following her into the bathroom to watch her do her make up.

"Are you sure you're okay?", Winter stops dead in the middle of sponging white pan make up over her face. "You just seem so dull today."

My head hurts so much that my teeth ache. There was a rift in the veil here last night. The vibrations got trapped in my head, like a lightening strike. It will pass. Winter is a small distorted image, seen through a peep hole. Around her the colors swirl, electric and radioactive, the spectrum expanding and condensing before my eyes. Nuclear Winter.

"I'm fine. I just need some fresh air or something. Do you think Kai would care if I went outside after
I had a shitty childhood, in a place where death wasn't a loss, but an omnipresent state of the world. But I'll always be a farm girl. It's been days and days in a house, breathing the same recirculated air, living in my own sarcophagus. I need to inhale the breath of life. I need it to inflate my lungs forcefully from above. I need to see the top of the sky, and feel the dirt, before it's ashes to ashes and house dust to house dust.

Winter finishes drawing black ovals around her eyes before she answers, "I dunno, Mac. I don't think he'd care about you being outside, but I do think he'd be pissed if anyone else saw your footprints in the snow. And he'd be pissed if anyone saw you, you know, like this...", she motions up and down me with a wave of her hand. She's right. Full ratchet, head to toe. But it is Halloween. Of all days this would blend right in.

"I guess you're right. I might try to sleep today."

She shakes her head at me. "Wait here. I'm getting you some coffee. And take these.", she orders, handing a couple little blue pills into my mitt. "Trust. You'll feel better."

"So do these make me larger, or do these make me small?", I call after her. She flips me the bird over her shoulder without looking back.

They're Oxy. I've never taken it. Something about growing up where I did, how I did. It was like the final defeat, the last step down into hillbilly hell. It was the substance equivalent of a ponytail sticking out of the snapback of a ball cap, and a John Deere hoodie. Always seemed like the hole I couldn't slither back up out of.

My head's going to make me throw up or pass out. So I bite one in half, and flush the rest. The tank is full and Winter is none the wiser when she returns with a cup of coffee for me.

"Thanks.", I say uncomfortably.

We're quiet while Winter finishes her face. The coffee sucks. I'll miss Winter, but I can't wait for everyone to go. I want to be alone. She just wants to have fun. Days like this shine an uncomfortable spotlight on all the things we can't ever have in common, on the prison of the unchangeable past. Diversity is no one's strength.

I'd love to explain my theories on that to Kai. People were made diverse and scattered at the Tower of Babel, not so they could learn to understand each other and intermarry, interbreed, change each other's culture, globalize. They were divided to keep them apart. To make it so they had nothing in common, and no way to find it. Segregation is true strength. It's also the only hope for true diversity to remain on the Earth. Without segregation, all diversity disappears. The whole world will be nothing but a lukewarm brownish mess, good at nothing but grievance mongering, with no one to lob accusations at. How will anyone be victim chic, when there is no one to #falseflag? What will any of them live for? People don't hate each other when they're divided. It's familiarity that breeds contempt. Humankind has forgotten everything it took since the dawn of time to learn. It's a small world, after all. If we don't go back to segregating soon, where will the rainbow of diversity be then? Of course, Satan is breeding an indistinct amalgamated army in rebellion of God's will; an army without any distinction and without any diversity. A perfect army of followers with everything in common.

Fuck, I'm bored. But at least I'm not boring. I smile. The bit-in-half blue grit must be hitting my blood. My eyes still see the apocalypse and the glory, and the swirl, and the gory. But my head feels numb, and far away. The pain is still there, still somewhere, but so distant that I don't recognize it as...
"So. What do you think?", Winter asks me, turning from the mirror, full face complete, with a huge death's head grin, surrounded by her crown like a religious icon.

"You're perfect. You know it.", I tell her. "I love it with the decals more than I thought. It suits you. Poco loco."

"Right?!", she squeals, wrinkling her nose, "Okay, well, love you, bitch!", she says excitedly. "I'm out. Everyone was just waiting for me, so once you hear the door, you can come out. And wash that shit off today. Kai won't know."

"Yeah. Black hearts eternal.", I answer feebly. She's already gone, nothing but the last tail of flowing black lace following her out the door before it slams shut on me.

I sit on the edge of the bed, listening for everyone to be gone. Everyone sounds happy. Kai sounds evangelical; tone laced with mania and fervor. Voices withdraw, doors slam, engines start and are lost in Doppler effect. I'm alone in no time. The quiet sits upon me like a hag in the night. I have no right to feel sorry for myself. Falling on my knees on the floor, I throw off my bandages and press my hands together. I've been resurrected. The earth has given up her dead at The Lord's behest, on my behalf. People fail me, but miracles fall on me like the rain upon the unjust. It's not that I live, but the spirit that liveth in me. I pray for my enemies. I pray that they flee before me and scatter, before they witness the power of the wrath of my God, as it pours out of His vessel, broken and remade by God himself. I pray that the table He sets in the presence of my enemies be laced with cyanide. I'll partake. I have nothing to fear. His Blood is my blood. I'm immune to histotoxic hypoxia. Dead already, I can't be drowned with the blood of life.

I rise from the floor. Winter is right. I'm washing my face.

I'd felt pressured the first time; my heart broken and crushed. My parents wanted me to drink from the jar when it came around. They knew I was scared. They thought it would kill me, and they'd be free, and it would be my fault for being sinful and faithless. They'd slapped the emblems from my hands before communion, saying I needed to prove the purity of my heart first, and called for the jar to be passed. I was twelve. My own mother hated me so much that she wished me dead. My dad dreamed up a scheme to make it happen. Part of me wanted to die.

"They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them'. For real? Deadly, alright. Pretty sure Mom's aspic salad qualifies. Come to think of it, pretty sure Constance herself qualifies as the former."

Tate often interjected his own commentary when he'd read to me. I smiled, wishing I knew what aspic meant, and how to summon the rebellion and bile he could against his mother. I just followed my parents like a lost puppy, wagging my tail, trying everything to make them love me back.

"That's what happened to my hand.", I replied softly, my voice still raspy and small after weeks in silence and feverish slumber.

"You were bit by a snake?", he asked, his face grimacing in a beam of half light cutting through the dark. "What were you doing, hiking or something?"

"No. I was at church.", I answered. "We take up snakes. I'd done it before. I must have done something wrong."

"You're just a little kid.", Tate said disgustedly. I still had a hard time interpreting disgust; I always
felt scared that it was directed at me. His face softened from a scowl to kind melancholy. "You didn't do anything wrong. It's wrong anyone would do that to a kid.", he reached over, and rubbed my shoulder, "So that's why they ditched you here."

"What do you mean, Tate?", I asked him. "I like it here. I don't feel ditched. Tate, did I die? Is this heaven, or was purgatory real after all?"

It was the question I'd been scared to ask. Scared I'd break the spell. Scared if I asked, just by asking, I'd be shown faithless. I was scared I'd be sent back. I just wanted to be allowed to stay.

Tate's eyes flooded with tears. It seemed to me that he was always crying. He had a soft heart, easily wounded, prone to find sorrow, and a will less strong than mine. He had no walls, no shell to protect him. Tate couldn't hide inside how I did. I liked it that he cried a lot. It was like he let the poison out of my wounds that I didn't know how to lance.

"You know, Lithia? Most people who live here think this place is hell.", he spoke hushed like a whisper, sliding next to me on the floor, and wrapping his arms around me. He wept against my shoulder for what felt like forever. I hugged him back, his broad back under my one free arm. I tried to feel his snivels, labored breaths, and tears inside my own body.

"Why are you so sad, Tate?", I asked him.

"I don't know.", he sobbed. "Most of my life, I just felt empty. It's a horrible feeling. Life feels unbearably long when you're empty, waiting out the clock. There's nothing in me. I can't love. I can't feel. I can't do anything. I don't want anything. I have nothing to live for."

"Yes you do.", I reached up with my free hand and brushed the tears away from his eyes. "Don't you love me, even just a little bit? Because I love you more than anyone. You're the kindest person in the world. You're the only person who ever felt for me."

"I know.", he choked. "I do love you, Lithia. And you're the only thing that's ever made me feel a good thing, like love, or like charity. You're the only thing I ever really wanted to see live more than die. But you have to go away, and grow up, and if I want to know you live, I won't get to see it. And if I saw it, I'd have to see you die, and I'm not that strong. I'm too weak to be there for you. And it just hurts so much. Now the emptiness is full; filled with grief and guilt. Your life has been so sad. I'm not a good person. When you say that, it just breaks my heart."

My heart pounded out of control in my chest. I didn't understand what he was saying, only that it must be bad. I was always in the dark, always waiting for the rug to be pulled out from under me. It must be happening again. I couldn't breathe. I certainly couldn't cry.

"Tate, no. Please don't say that. I just want to make you happy, not sad. I want to stay forever with you. Can't you be my dad, like you said? Please don't send me away.", I pleaded with him, hugging his shoulder tight, struggling for air to breathe. "Please don't be sad."

He held me for a very long time, until his warmth soaked through me, until my terrified breaths matched his, until my heart slowed to beat in pace with his. He stroked the back of my head, his fingers gently combing through my hair. I could feel his calm come over me, and slowly overtake me. I felt sleepy and safe like that with him.

"I'm sorry, Lithia.", he said finally, pulling back slowly. "I didn't mean to scare you. You can stay as long as you want, okay? As long as it's safe. But know I do love you. And the most important thing to me is that you live. I want you to be okay. I want you to have so much love and happiness in your life that you forget me someday. That's what I want, even if I miss you. I love you enough to want what's
"best for you, not what's nice for me."

"I don't understand.", I admitted.

"It's because you're just little. Someday, nothing will look the same to you. The things that seemed simple won't be anymore. But don't forget this: I love you. No matter where you are, or where you go, or how much someone else might hate you or harm you. For me, Lithia. For me, you always hope for life. You always hope for more. If you don't, you'll end up knowing emptiness, and I don't want that for you."

I nodded yes.

"Are you sure you don't want me to just cut that chain and let your arm free? I found the bolt cutters yesterday.", he asked, smiling, trying to lighten the mood, as though he knew I felt confused and afraid.

"No.", I told him solemnly. "I'm scared if you untie me, I'll get lost or someone will take me. But I'm cold. Can you put that blanket over me and read some more? Will you sit beside me?", I asked him.

"Sure.", he said, covering me up and sitting down next to me, holding my free hand in his.

Tate kissed the top of my head, long and gentle.

"'and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God....'"

And so, when that heavy mason jar, half filled with clear fluid, smelling like almonds, was placed in my hand, the glass sweating in the heat of an August afternoon, I drank. I was scared. But I begged God to let me live, like Tate wanted for me so much he'd cried over it. That's what real faith is.

The test is most often taken as a test of hubris. Many feel sure of their salvation, but not because they've thrown themselves on the mercy of The Almighty. They feel sure because they feel sure. I know I'm not that important. God doesn't need my belief. He exists without it. I had to rely on Him for my existence. Most people don't understand. They think you drink the poison and live if you're not scared. If you're not scared, you're stupid. But if you think you can't be saved, can't survive it, you can't. With God, all things are possible. Possible. No one ever promised probable.

Raising my clean, dripping face from the sink, and looking at myself in the small bathroom mirror, I wonder at myself, recalling fondly the taste of poison. Cyanide hasn't crossed my lips in a few years now, and I think sometimes that it was the real sacrament. I miss drinking death into myself and not dying. The taste of Pentecostal Disaronno, stinging and acrid, is much improved by breathing in through the nose. It tricks the tongue into tasting bitter almond. In the tents, we never mixed it off with anything. Dissolved in water. That was it. I'd say my prayers, and raise the jar to my lips, and feel the sting like Listerine on acid, burning and numbing as it filled my mouth, flowed down my throat. Then I'd feel the hand on me, always, on my shoulder. The perfect weight of a touch. The first time, I thought it was Tate, and God forgave a child her mistake. I've missed it; the sense of mortality, followed by the gentle grip of the eternal. I look down at my hands now, turn them, examine the new pinkies sprouting. They have a tiny fingerprint appearing on the underside in the thin, baby mouse flesh that grows over the tiny nubs. I wonder if it is the fingerprint I had before, or a new one. Somehow I know, that in a few days or weeks, they will sprout fingernails.

I pat my face dry. I'm feeling better, but I'm beginning to feel distant and dreamy. In haste, I make my face up. To feel human, I wonder? Or maybe as a mask to hide the spectre of death, should I die before I wake? I'm tired. My hands shake; my eyes will have to be lined in thick black to hide my
lack of recent practice. I gloss my lips in a sheer candy pink like a Barbie Doll. I just can't get into the matte nudes like I used to. A face drowned in ash will cure you of that trend fast.

I throw a black silk shift with a beaded gold thunderbird on the front over my head, slip into my sealskin mukluks, and lay down on the bed, closing my eyes to the dull Michigan morning. Kek. Appropriating my own fucking culture, eh? I'll clock the next stupid American who says 'eh' to me. I've never uttered that shit in my life.

When I told Kai I wanted seal boots, he laughed for probably five minutes straight, called me based, shoved my hand down his pants. Every happy memory is a sad one now, colored and tainted. I run my thumbs obsessively over the new pinkies forming on my hands. The cruel grip of betrayal closes around my throat, squeezing, relentless. Like the snake's fangs sinking into my little white hand, held paralyzed in the grip of the horrible inevitable, the poison traveled with every pump of my stupid heart. It was my stupid heart that carried the searing venom up my arm, and through my body, all the way back to break my heart, close my throat, strangle my brain and nerves. Now it does the same thing to me again. I love Kai. His betrayal travels from my hand, through my veins and back to my heart. I don't know why it still beats for him. Death to self. Eternal life. Sleep is our only chance for nothingness, and I don't sleep. I just dream.

Sleep comes on me heavy. Not like a shroud. Like shovel after shovel of dirt, the heavy black loamy soil of my homeland.

Face red, and heavy jaw clenched, he trembles with rage over me, gripping an old brown rotary telephone that had been waiting by the door to be carried out to Tin Can Alley. That's what I call the rusted barrels by the barn where we throw the trash we can't compost or burn. They sit there, filling with glass jars and old telephones until we make it to the Mossbank dump for a shopping trip.

I feel scared, but they can't tell. It enrages them. He's already backhanded me across the face once with the heavy receiver. My eye socket and cheekbone throbs, and that eye is momentarily blind. I don't have time to wonder about that. I know what this is like. I'll cope with whatever it is later. For now I try to live.

Instinct tells me to shield my face with my arm, that my orbital socket might not survive another blow, that little girl's skulls break easy, and that if I could just cry for them, they might stop. But I can't. I'm locked inside, too scared to even breathe.

"Don't hit her again.", my mom interrupts, grabbing his arm, and my heart flits like the wings of a bird. "Don't give her lies to tell and an excuse to bad mouth us. She's not worth it. We're only stuck with her for a few more weeks."

My heart feels like a bird, flown into a window, bones and beak all shattered. Body broken out of nowhere, now I lay, flesh pierced with my own fragments of bone, waiting to be stalked and eaten by any one of my many enemies. I wish I'd never flown.

She looms over me, cold soulless eyes flecked in gold like a goat's, and proclaims coolly, with intent, "I've never loved you as much as I love your father. No matter what, I'd always choose him. I'd always take his side. Don't think for a second I'd ever help you. Get that stupid idea out of your wicked, sinful mind."

We're all in the porch. My foster brother stands in the kitchen, the leering heathen. He did this to me. He's rewarded every time. If he rats. If he's cruel. He's well conditioned. He does what they want. I try, but they don't want anything I can do, because they don't want me.

I hate the smell in here. This is where the slop pail is. Watermelon rinds, egg shells, the crusts cut off
my brother's sandwiches because the big mutt won't eat them. Coffee grounds. That dirty old ice cream pail sits until I carry it out past the sewer tree where we pump the septic out. Then I heave it as far as I can into the field. Run home before the coyotes come to scavenge. They watch from the shelterbelt with their yellow eyes. The stink of the slop pail lingers like a low fog, down here on the floor where I lay, on the gritty, cheap carpet. A small closet in the corner holds cans of various poisons potent enough to soak through the exoskeleton of a locust. Dip your finger, you'll die, certainly. It will take a week while your body shuts down progressively. There is no antidote. They've held my hands over that too. The smell makes me nauseous, makes my head hurt. There's the stink of their cheap, diesel saturated orange soled black rubber boots, and the rancid stink of their unwashed necks on the collars of their coveralls. There's nothing pastoral about a farm. Alone, in nothingness, in the dark, in the dirt, surrounded by predators you can't defend against.

I look up and see the gun rack. Two huge old shotguns. They've never pointed those at me, though my dad has told me that he dreams about taking me into a field and shooting me with one, because he notices that my flesh is pocked with holes filled with maggots, and he doesn't know how else to help me.

I try to push myself up from the floor. I'm precariously close to the slippery painted wooden staircase that leads to the cracked floor of a musty concrete basement. A foot kicks me in the back, face down in the doormat.

I know it was Mom.

Dad opens the back door, heaving it roughly into me, as I struggle not to be shoved down the stairs.

"Get up.", he yells at me. "Get outside."

When I try to rise, Mom pushes me down to my hands and knees.

"She should crawl like the animal she is. " E mphasis on 'she'. Sounds like the hiss of a snake every time they say it about me. "That's all she wants to be. She's nothing but a shame to us. I'm ashamed every time I go to get groceries. Kelly, at the Co-op. She used to always be friendly. Now she's rude every time. Mystery must have done something… inappropriate."

"No I didn't.", I protest quietly. I don't know why I do this. Being quiet doesn't help. Answering doesn't help.

"Yes you did. You know what you did.", the accusation is spat in a hurried retort.

On my hands and knees, my dad drives me out the door on all fours with a kick to the ribs. Sun stings my eyes. I haven't been allowed outside since I got off the school bus on Thursday afternoon.

"I didn't do anything wrong. The teacher put him in my group. He's dumb. I didn't want to be with him anyway.", I plead an explanation with my mom. I got put in a group with Kelly's retarded boyfriend in Econ class at school. So Mom now blames me for her rudeness. Must be my fault.

"You are so dishonest and inappropriate you wouldn't know what you did wrong anyway, and if you did, you'd never tell the truth anyway. You must have done something."

I give up. I don't argue. They walk behind me as I crawl across the gravel and dry prickly grass, guiding my direction with the occasional kick. "A swift kick", as they call it. They kick me in the ass. Just to humiliate me, dehumanize me.

"Everything she's ever done has been an embarrassment.", Dad cuts in. "What's wrong with you? How could you be so evil? What's wrong with a girl that wants to spend her life around a bunch of
creeps? Are you some kind of pervert yourself?"

Disgust drips from every word. You'd think I was a monster. What I am is a full academic scholarship recipient. I want to take Criminology with my free money. I want to study minors who commit violent crime, and how they can be identified and helped before they do it. Crawling bloodied and bruised, clinging to consciousness, I vomit in the dirt. Nothing but bile. They haven't let me eat in three days now. I'm just so scared. I've always wondered why, if I didn't shoot up a school, or even sneak out to drink beer and vandalize shit, why some kids do. You'd think if anyone was going to, it would be me. There must be some hell those kids live in. I just want to understand so I can let them out before another empty trenchcoat unloads an AR in a school library. Not everyone has all the advantages I do; I know The Lord. I have a Redeemer. I had Tate, and the love of one person can change everything. I just wanted to do something good for kids like me who didn't have all the things to be thankful for that I do.

"N-no.", I stammer quietly. "I thought you'd be happy. You love watching Cops. I just want to stop bad things from happening. I wanted to help kids."

"Don't blame your base perversion on us.", he kicks me again, and pushes my face into the radioactive yellow slime that's slowly seeping into the dry cracks in the dirt. "This is the experience of being your parents. This is what you do to us.", he yells, holding my face in my vomit. "We made the mistake of conceiving you, and now you never cease to remind us of the shame of it. I wish you'd never existed. You've brought nothing but shame on us. Shove our face in our own vomit."

"Sorry.", I apologize feebly, as he grabs me by the back of my shirt, and pushes me on forward.

"'Sorry.' That's all you ever say, and you're nothing but a liar and a flatterer. Do you know what The Bible says about liars and flatterers? That God hates them, and they're the servants of Satan. That's what you are. If you're 'Sorry.'", he imitates me again, "...then change."

"I'll take something else.", I tell him, staring down at my hands in the dirt.

"You'll use that scholarship and take nursing. That's an appropriate job for a girl. If you want to help kids, be a nurse."

My heart sinks. I hate hospitals. I'm terrified of doctors. I don't like the sick. I'm a germaphobe. I get sick if someone so much as says the word 'sneeze'. I have an unnatural sense of smell; I can smell the blackheads in someone else's nose, or if their ears need to be cleaned, or tell from their breath if they've shit recently. I can't imagine a worse way to spend my life.

"No, please. Not that, please.", I beg fervently, as I realize the worst part of it. I'll be alone in a room with soulless meat puppets on a daily basis. I'm terrified of death, and dead, lifeless corpses. It's conviction. It's God showing me what He thinks of me, and in His infinite judgement, what I deserve. I brought that horror on His Son.

"See? She just wants to be wicked. She doesn't want to help anyone. She just wants to creep around and talk to bad people like her. Find acceptance in a bunch of pop psychology that tells her she's okay. She wants to be lied to by the serpent. She maketh and loveth a lie. She'll get in a few psychology classes and they'll tell her everything is all my fault, and it will be just what her evil mind wants to hear.", my mom pipes up from behind me.

By now, I've crawled the quarter mile across the yard to our rundown, empty barn. We used to have animals, when I was younger, but my parents found living things inconvenient. Now it houses a few neglected cats they keep to catch mice. I still kill all the rats. Cats suck.
Dehydrated, my palms swallowed sharp gravel and grit as I crawled, and are bruised and embedded with the small stones. I feel like puking again. I'm sad. My parents words are what really hurts. Their intent, more specifically. Knowing that they want to hurt me. I don't understand that. That's the worst part.

I wish I was with Tate, chained up to the radiator again, the comforting metal around my wrist, as beams of pale yellow Los Angeles sun stream through the dirty window above me. Tate would hug me, and I'd wrap one arm around him. His eyes would turn red first, then well with a thick film of wet that would finally collapse under its own weight and pour down his cheeks in fat tears. He'd release my pain. He'd cry for me. I'd cry because I was so happy. I can see his face. The late summer Saskatchewan sun on my back feels like the warmth of his arms. I close my eyes.

My eyes fly open, as a steel toed boot flies under me, landing between my ribs, knocking me on my back in the dilapidated weatherbeaten barn.

"What's wrong with her eyes?", my dad asks my mom. "Do you see that? Her pupils are so dilated that her eyes are black. Is she on drugs? Are you on drugs?", he interrogates.

"No.", I stutter, shocked with the baseless, impossible accusation. I never leave the farm unless it's on the school bus every day. "It's dark in here."

"It's not that dark.", my mom interrupts. "Look at me, Dave.", she orders Dad, who complies, searching her eyes.

"Your mother's aren't black. Not like yours. What's wrong with you?", he spits at me again, face twisted in a sneer.

"I don't know. I'm scared.", I try to answer.

That happens. People's pupils dilate when they're afraid. I feel more afraid now though. What is wrong with me? My heart thumps. What if they are black? Why can't I just cry? Why can't anyone love me?

"What have you got to be scared of?", he mocks me mercilessly. "Unless you've done something wrong. Surely you're not afraid of us? We're good people. Everything we've ever done has been to help you, and this is what you do to us? Lie, want to be profane, reject everything we've tried to teach you? I don't know how you can be so rebellious and bullheaded to the only people who will ever love you. It's like you're possessed."

It's like he can convince himself of anything. At the beginning, he was mocking me. But by the end, he's staring at me, hard face filled with disgust and contempt, certain in his accusation. My mother trembles with rage. I don't know why. This used to be her on the floor in the barn, until she figured out how to make it be me. Dad, I get, sort of. He hates me. He never wanted a girl. He despises his sisters. When he's challenged by his brother, his first instinct is to call him a woman as a put down. I'm the worst thing that ever happened to him. But my mom? I bear this for her. Every time, I watch her, hope she sees me. Hope she'll remember what this was like, and love me for taking her place down here. She doesn't though. She's ashamed, and hates me for that.

I don't like it when people talk about possession. Even though The Bible has stories about it, it says not to dwell on them. I don't really read them. I even made Tate skip them. It scares me, and I'm scared being scared makes me susceptible. But my parents never quit with it. My bedtime stories were about missionaries' toddlers who were being bit by demons in Africa, who filled them so full of worms that they came out of every orifice in their bodies. That's settling. Demons that tormented cattle and had to be driven out by believers with the sight. I have prayed my whole life for no sight.
No sight for the things I can't understand. No sight for more than I've had to see of this world's evil already. Nothing could be more cruel and terrifying than being accused of housing a demon. I'm a good girl. I pray for The Holy Spirit to fill me so full that there's no room for me anymore, and certainly no room for anything else. My eyes can't be black, can they? I'm just scared, and it's dark, and I'm kicked full of holes and soft spots.

"Dave, my arm's getting tired. Can I just dump the slops in the cat dish?", Mom asks, impatient.

A slurry of warm, weak powdered milk, moldy bread crusts and some bacon fat plop into the old frying pan resting in old cow dung on the floor by my head.

Without warning, Dad grabs me by the hair and flips me prone, forcing my face into the dish.

"If your own soul still resides in you, eat something, instead of just puking up that ungodly green slime, you filth.", he yells at me through a clenched jaw.

I try. It's hard to eat when your mouth and nose are submerged, head held at an awkward angle. Just as I begin to worry about my inability to do it how he wants, he kicks my side and pulls me up by the hair. I never know how to worry about the right things. I'm stupid. I can't learn. This has been my whole life, and I'm still no good at it. I still can't foresee a thing.

"Get up. You're not fit to eat this. You're not fit to have your evil face in the cat's dish. At least there's no evil in animals.", he sneers at me, kicking me in the bum, back outside into the yard, while Mom follows, softly amen-ing.

My body is getting weak. The places I've been kicked and hit in the past few days are adding up, my new wounds starting to swell and hurt. My face throbs painfully, and my left eye remains blind. Tate said to live. I have to try to figure this out. I have to figure out what they want, and give it to them.

"I'll do anything you want.", I beg weakly from the ground. "I'll take whatever you want at U of R. I don't want to take any psychology classes. You're right. It's nothing but useless atheistic lies, and would only mislead me. People do bad things because they're just bad. Just like me wanting to do that for a job. I see that. Thanks, you guys."

Silence.

Maybe that's all. Maybe I just have to give up what I wanted to do. Who cares. I'm a kid. It's probably stupid. And no one can get a job with a psych degree. Maybe this is going to work. Maybe I'll be okay. If I can just live, maybe someday someone will love me again. I'd never stop being happy. I don't care about my job or whatever. Everyone knows women don't really find any fulfillment in a career. That's the province of men.

But a steel toe flies up between my legs and lands squarely under my belly button, throwing me over.

Backlit with the bright sun, their faces are blotted out and black. Two black figures, standing over me.

"Half measures and deception.", Mom shakes her head, "We can't trust her, Dave."

"I know that, Barb.", he puts a consoling arm around her, as if I've just done something terrible to her.

"I'll take nursing. If that's what you guys think I should do, I'll take it.", I say agreeably.

"She plans to fill her head with garbage with all the electives.", Mom cuts in. "She just sees the
"No, I don't want that. I just want to learn to work and be useful.", I plead. "What do you want me to take? Anything. I'll do anything."

The change is sudden. It always is. After a long weekend in hell, the tides have turned. Somehow either I've done or said the right thing, they've gotten what they wanted, or they just got tired.

Soothing and softly, Dad speaks to me as though I'm clinically retarded.

"Well, honey, we just don't think U of R is the place for you. I know you had good grades at high school, and won that scholarship, but that really doesn't mean anything. Neither of us went to university. Look at us. We had good jobs before we started farming. Revenue Canada hired me right out of S. T. I. Why don't you go there, whatever it's called now? You could take Business Administration just like I did. I think you'd do real well with that."

I know well enough not to fight this. After three days and nights without sleep, food, water, or a break from the relentless interrogation, accusation and beating, I finally know what this was all about. Dad couldn't get into a university with his solid 60 average. How dare I win a scholarship to one?

"We'll help you. Well, if you need it. But you should apply for all the trade school scholarships, and get a summer job with the Behlen crew again. I'll let you keep your money for school this year instead of taking any for your room and board. How does that sound? I just want to be cooperative. Would that help you?", he asks. My mom stands glassy eyed in the glare, nodding, this starstruck look in her face like she married the most benevolent man in the world.

"It's not really about the money.", I say weakly. "I'll find a way to pay. I know you want to help Ron farm. Land is expensive."

This sucks. A lot to give up. My scholarship even paid living expenses. But my parents weren't going to help me move. They were going to take my car because I stupidly let Dad have the registration in his name, even though I've paid for that old Grand Am at least three times over. They threatened to have me committed. They cut my wrists all the way to my elbows yesterday. No one would believe a teenage girl didn't do that to herself. If they won't let me go, I'm not sure I have a way to escape. So Polytech in Moose Jaw, and life, it is. One hour away from them. At that pace, if I can live to a thousand, I should be back to California.

My heart sinks and goes cold as Dad and Mom reach for my arms and help me up from the hard packed ground, dotted with prickly Russian Rye. I smile weakly. I'm tired. It's been a long road to just survive and grow up, and obey the only kind voice in my life. I'm almost there, Tate. I'm still alive, and I'm almost grown up.

It's a blur. Hands in my armpits, dragging me. A scratched up plastic cup in my hand with tepid, metallic tap water. Their voices, still hushed and disapproving. They're tired too. This a stay, not a pardon. I know that. For now things have stopped.

They let me walk to my room at the end of the hall. I sit on my squeaky old twin bed, look through the blear at myself in the mirror on the dresser. My face isn't as bad as I'd expected. The whole left side is bruised, but it is deep in the tissue, and still barely visible. My eye, somehow, isn't black, though it is swelled shut. I reach up and touch it, and as I slide my finger over the curve of the orbit, I feel the crack in the bone. It will all be black by morning. They won't speak to me or look at me until it's healed up.
I get caught up, looking into my other eye. It's not black. But then I see it. Gold flecks. Like a goat's.

The bed feels like it's dropping out from under me as I wake up with a gasp. I hate dreaming about that. I wish I could forget it ever happened.

Still struggling for enough breath to carry adequate oxygen to my extremities as I run for the bathroom on shaky legs, I lunge at the mirror, and throw on the lights.

I get close, and look into my eyes, trancelike.

I exhale. Feeling comes back into me. The chill flees.

Grey. They're just grey. Pale bluish grey, rimmed in darker greenish grey. Just normal eyes. Just grey. No gold flecks. They're not my mother's goat eyes. I never looked like I could belong to my parents. My adopted brother looked more like them than I did. He was filled with their spirit too. And it was never the same spirit that fills me.

My pulse hasn't stopped sloshing up into my ears, but the throb in my head is better. I'm thankful. Today won't be so bad. I lean my forehead against the cool, blue tiles on the bathroom wall and take a few deep breaths.

Unsure how long I've slept, I venture out of Winter's room, stepping quietly in my soft boots down the empty hallway of the still house. Time warps and bends here. Time is a plastic novelty straw bent into a pair of star shaped sunglasses. Lulz.

Rounding the corner to the kitchen to retrieve another cup of coffee, I lurch helplessly out of my own flesh in shock as I'm greeted by the cheerful chirp of some older lady's voice, ducking behind the wall and grasping my chest in horror. I'm going to be in so much trouble. I didn't even see who it was.

"It's okay, sweetie.", she tuts, as I hear her footsteps approaching me from the other side of the wall. "I thought I was alone in the house.", she adds, popping her head around the corner.

Instinctively, I cover my face with my hands. I can't let someone see me out of my NPC garb. Kai will kill me.

Oh, no. She's seen my hands now too.

I'm waiting to run away, back down the hall, but she's standing in my path, and my back is to the wall. Slowly, I lower my hands from my face.

A red headed, middle aged #mom type reaches out tentatively, and puts her hand on my upper arm, concern spread over her face.

"I didn't mean to scare you. It's okay. I'm Kai and Winter's mom.", she smiles warmly at me. "You're Mac? I've heard a lot about you."

"I'm sorry.", I stammer. "I don't mean to be rude, but I'm not supposed to talk to anyone. I need to go change my clothes. Please forgive me.", I excuse myself as I try to slip away to flee back. "I thought I was alone too."

"Nonsense.", she rolls her eyes. Just like Winter. "Come sit down. You must be Mac?", she asks again, ushering me into the kitchen and pulling out a chair for me.
She seems to shudder by the dining table. My gaze catches her bright blue eyes for a moment. She breaks it first. Yeah. Still got it.

I don't know what to say to her. I don't know what to say to moms in general. I never really had one. She seems nice. The worst part about that is that Kai has never mentioned her, and the few times Winter has brought her up, it's been a criticism of her as part of the patriarchy problem. So I sit quietly at the table, staring down at the grain in the wood, and picking at a hangnail on my thumb.

The jarring squeal of a mug being slid across the wood table echos through the room.

"You really are lovely. Kai said you were. He's quite taken with you.", she says awkwardly warm. She's trying. I'm still frozen, unsure what I'm supposed to do. "I meant to meet you last year, but...", she trails off.

"That's okay.", I answer quickly, taking a sip of coffee. I still feel uncomfortable out of my burka and ash. I feel exposed and afraid, guilty that I'm talking out of turn. "I'm not supposed to be seen like this.", I think aloud.

"I know. You're supposed to wear that ridiculous get up. Kai told me all about it. He's sorry you've been so hurt in all this. So am I. So just relax. I won't be telling him, and he wouldn't care that I'd seen you this way.", she smiles faintly; a haunted lonely smile. "I let him do all the talking."

"Yeah?", I smile back carefully, "That's what I do lately too. But we used to talk all the time."

Sitting down in a chair next to me at the table, she smooths the waist of her flowered short sleeve shirt, and exhales.

"Kai's a good boy. But I feel like I don't know him anymore.", she tells me, reaching out impulsively and taking my hand. What is it with these Andersons and hands? She rubs my new seedlings between her finger and thumb. "Imagine this.", she says, awed. "Are they growing back? It's what Kai wished for, after he'd done it. He knew he shouldn't have."

"It's okay.", I dismiss. "It sucked. I wish I understood. But I'm sure he had a reason, and they're coming back anyway.", I shrug. "Don't tell him, please? Not that I'd keep a secret from him. It's just that I want to surprise him. I want to show him when they're fully formed and perfect."

"Of course.", she agrees, still marveling at my new pinkies. "I had a pet salamander once, when I was a kid. My brother ran over the tip of its tail with his pedal bike by accident, and it grew back.", she muses, before letting my hand go abruptly. "Sorry if I overstepped my bounds, touching you. I won't say a thing to Kai. But he'll be delighted." Her eyes seem to narrow at me, though I'm not sure. She's a mom. I can't interpret this shit. "It's big of you not to be angry with him. Surely, you must want to punish him, a little at least?", she asks.

My chest has the thudz. What does that mean? Why would she ask me that? Is this all a trick, something orchestrated to give excuse for more pieces of me to be cut off, or for Kai to dispose of me like a favored toy that once broken becomes a hated piece of shameful clutter?

I defer the question, taking a long sip of coffee, before answering, "It wasn't Kai's fault. I know he didn't want to do it. I did something I shouldn't have, and he wasn't left a choice."

She smiles again, braces my forearm with her hand, and gives it a little squeeze, wrinkling her nose.

"You're a better girl than I am, Mac. But you at least need to make that flatfooted warm Dumpster of a woman who's put the arm on Kai pay."
I see red. My hammer needs to bleed. My shoulder needs to feel the kick of a short barrel. My boots need to stomp the curb like they were made to do. I'm a peaceful person, and I avoid conflict like the plague. But I have a tongue that's tasted bitter poison and lived to speak prophetic in Pentecost. My God is a god of war. I love the smell of gun power and smoking lead.

Leftards hate 'eye for an eye', as though it's brutal. It's merciful. It's there to warn against a life for a set of pinkies and two feet of golden hair. Shrug. Danielle doesn't have nice hair to take, so a life it is. I don't really like 'eye for an eye' either; good thing there's a New Covenant. I'm a sinful girl; I don't desire justice. I desire vengeance. Vengeance is mine, sayeth The Lord. I don't plan to steal it; just borrow some for a moment.

"Oh. I plan to get some.", I answer her, slow grin, and unflinching eye contact.

"Good.", she answers sincerely, smoothing a strand of my hair. "You can't let yourself be pushed around and falsely accused. I wouldn't stand for that either. I'd expect no less in the right girl for my boy. He needs someone to be strong for him."

Looking in her pale blue eyes, I see them glaze over in tears, as her face drops and ages in an instant. The grey haze of the day is lifting, light from the window glaring up from the shine of the table between us. I don't think she's gaming me. She's a good mom. She just loves her son, and I'm not her daughter.

"You seem like a really good mom.", I tell her suddenly, "I'm sorry if I've seemed aloof. I wasn't sure what to say; Kai hasn't talked to me about you much before. I didn't know how to tell you that, or how not to."

"It's okay, sweetheart.", she assures me. "You're in a dangerous place, and you're being cautious. I understand that. As for Kai and my daughter not telling you much about me, I'm not surprised. I wasn't that good of a mom. But enough of that.", she abruptly stands and returns to the sink of dishes, turning her back. "What's your family like, Mac? Kai said they're back in Canada?"

"Oh.", I wave off the question, "I'm an orphan. I don't like talking about it really.", as I walk over beside her and take up a tea towel to dry the dishes as she washes.

"I'm so sorry.", she replies, not turning to face me. "So what brought you here? To America, I mean."

"A border my nonexistent family couldn't cross.", I answer dryly. "Before the death of the Canadian Wheat Board, my dad was a bit of an agricultural anarchist. He dared to cross the border to sell some grain to get a fair price in a free market. The Canadian feds arrested him at the border for it. Criminal record. And they'll pardon a pedophile or a drug trafficker. But never a political prisoner."

"I'm Julie, by the way.", she says with a laugh. "No wonder my Kai likes you."

"Yeah. I'm a shitposter.", I shrug, drying the Corelle bowl that brings my ash. "You wanna know what's ironic? I was a lobbyist against the Wheat Board all through school. Yeah. I lobbied for marketing freedom. I don't believe in that fascist shit. Besides, Dad already had a criminal record. It had worn out its use. I wrote letters, spoke before Parliament, The House of Commons in college, went to every rally."

Trailing off, I feel dizzied and ill at ease. Remembering anything from my past fondly seems traitorous to myself. But Dad was proud of me the day the CWB was abolished. He called me with a weep in his voice and said that for him, it was like the Berlin Wall coming down. Of course, it didn't last. He'd hated me again within the week, punishing me for accepting his momentary love and
praise. They'd come and taken my car from its parking spot at my apartment, and spray painted, "Pride Goeth Before A Fall" on the pavement. They'd never made more for their grain. They made me buy my Grand Am back. Again.

"I came to America as an investor, to answer your question.", I continue softly.

"Why didn't you just get on the waitlist for a green card or something?", Kai's mom asks.

I feel tired just hearing this question again for the thousandth time.

"That waitlist isn't for places like Canada. We don't have a lottery. We aren't eligible for unskilled laborer visas. Those are the kind that you can do that with, but they only do it for shithole Great Replacement countries. If you're from Canada? You need a baller degree, or you need at least a quarter million dollars in cash, or you can just be a porn star. I utterly reject Uselessversity. And porn. So I saved up and bought a business.", I answer wearily, knowing no one here cares about this. She'll be bored. She won't even hear me. I gave the best years of a young life to this. And these 56% Amerimutts still didn't want me. No one gives a fuck but Kai. I forgive him for everything. I just want him back.

"I didn't realize it was so hard.", she says, shaking her head, handing me another glass to dry.

"It's harder than that even makes it sound.", I answer so quickly that I sound excited. "You have to verify the origin of every dollar. You have to invest at least $100,000 USD in the business itself, and then you have to have a whole year's worth of operating expenses in the bank. You have to employ at least two American citizens full time. You can't have any aspect of your business be home-based. If you haven't owned a business in Canada before, your business here has to be a franchise. It's incredibly complicated and difficult, as far as the application goes too. Like, how do you get a tax number, to get your permits, when a requirement for a tax number is having already filed an American tax return? And how do you apply for a business licence when a requirement for that is proof of legal residency, but you can't get your visa to prove legal residency without a business licence? Ugh.", I exhale. "And the legal fees you pay some lawyer named Chung, just to do all the work yourself in a system nobody understands. All the money has to be irrevocably spent and invested before you can apply for your visa. Oh, and your visa has to be reapplied for every five years, and has no path to citizenship. Oh, and they can reject your application for a visa anytime, and don't ever have to tell you why."

"I'm sorry, sweetheart.", she puts an arm over my shoulder briefly, and catches my eye. You lost me. But that's just the kind of thing that interests Kai, isn't it? He probably understands what you're talking about. I never had an IQ like he does. I don't know where he got it from. So, dear, tell me about your business. What was it?", she asks, pulling another stack of dirty plates from the counter into the sink. My towel is getting wet, and I switch it out with the dry one hanging from the oven door.

I can't help but smile. Only Kai has ever asked me this. Only he's ever cared before.

"It was a bio and hazmat cleaning and remediation franchise. It's pretty specialized; you probably haven't heard of it. It was a BioFirst?", I tell her questioningly.

"No. Never heard of it. So what exactly was it? Like what did you do?"

"Well, you know how crime scenes aren't cleaned up by the cops? They come and process it, the coroner takes the body. Then all the blood and guts are still there. It has to be cleaned. In a private residence, loved ones can do it if they want, but they usually don't want to. In a public place, there are regulations, and an approved outfit like mine had to be hired. So I cleaned crime scenes up. Lots
of undiscovered deaths and suicides too. Also things like fentanyl labs, because they're a biohazard. Hoarders. Raccoon shit. Hobo shit. Lots of shit, I guess.

"Pretty gruesome, overall. But when I chose a business, I was practical. What's certain? Death and taxes. And taxes is a racket that was already taken, so death it was. Funeral homes were out of my budget."

Normally people get a little rush when I tell them. 'Ohhh, how interesting!', the plebs bleat and trill. 'Ohhh, cool, that must be creepy!'. Oh, fuck you, sick in the head psychopathic normie faggot. It's nothing but grotesque, sad, and above all else, very hard, dirty work. Kai's mom doesn't have that reaction though. She shudders without the chill of some indulged death wish fantasy or schadenfreude morbid curiosity. She shudders with the reality of death.

I trained in Denver for a week when I first bought the franchise. Some of the best people I've ever met, the BioFirst family. They kept out the malicious plebs with a case of greeds and a lust for what bleeds. I beat out a corporate lawyer from New York City and even a military veteran for my prime peach of a territory. All the CEO cared about was your heart. It sounds fake, like some mission statement tagline. But when they said 'people first', they meant it.

Life catches you up in currents. The need to adapt and keep moving in order to survive long enough to live carries you swiftly. My life is something else now, and that life and those people are something trapped in a dimension closed to me now. But I'll love them until the day I die. There was something cultlike about BioFirst, but in the best possible way. I choke down a lump in my throat.

In another life, "Veronica?", his voice had asked gently, muffled by a respirator. A hand was placed on my back so lightly I could barely feel it through my Tyvek suit. "You're going to be great at this. If this wasn't your reaction, I'd be worried."

"I'm okay.", I'd assured Denis. I was fully committed to this business. I had to be. Everything I'd ever worked for was invested. Nonrefundable. I had to make good on this because now everything depended on it.

"I know.", he sat down with a heaving puff, next to me on the pavement. "You feel like you can't do this. Like you can't see this again. You feel like any innocence or magic you ever saw or imagined in the world is gone. You feel ashamed to be living?", Denis asked me. "You wish you'd never bought your franchise? Wonder if it was a mistake? Wish you could unsee it all?"

I finally pulled off my goggles and respirator, and shed my stinking paper suit and boots in haste, tossing them aside, and sanitizing my hands with a wipe I had in the pocket of my jeans underneath.

"Yes. Pretty much.", I agreed, sitting down again next to him on the curb in my sock feet.

We both liked to visit, appreciated a story well told, or a word well turned. But tonight, we were subdued and quiet. We sat for a while in silence, as the tiered city of Denver spilled out beneath us in the dark, all the layers of streets and interstates lit below with the lights of the sparse cars driving home late, or going to work early. Early morning has a chill, lonely feel, like being the last survivor of an apocalypse, inhabiting an empty, dangerous world. Perched on top of the world where the continent divides, the winds blew strong right through us. Death had been here, malicious and determined to be felt and seen, grotesque and aggressive. Death had felt the need to show man how ugly even the mundane can be.

"I'll let you in on something.", Denis finally said comfortingly. "That's why we picked you over everyone else. You come with complications. The visa thing? Sure, it's not ideal. It's a risk. But you were the candidate who had a heart that still knew how to break. That's what we saw in you that we wanted more than an American citizenship and millions of dollars in net worth.", Denis exhaled.

"We deal with people having the worst day of their lives. You have the capacity to do this kindness
for them, not because of the money, but because you can feel pain for others. Most of the time, the plebs can't tell the difference between real empathy and manufactured emoji pantomime. But on the worst day of their lives, they can. You have to be the right kind of person to do this, Veronica. It has to bother you, repulse you, hurt you, stay with you. You have to be built to withstand containing it, holding it for others. You're the right kind of person because it's hard for you. That's why we picked you. People first."

I'm transported back. Barely more than a year.

The house is dark. The stillness palpable. The smell is overwhelming, even in my full gear, goggles and respirator over a Tyvek suit, legs tucked into tall rubber boots.

It's a cute little craftsman, with all these original pocket doors. The power had been turned off, long unpaid. The occupant of the house was an old lady. People scorn old ladies; scorn them or can't see them. No one had noticed her absence in the world for weeks, until the mail piled up. Of course, that took forever because she was old and had a do not deliver order on all junk mail, and being an old woman, no one sent her anything but bills. The only reason anyone came looking was that she owed money. That'll tell you what you need to know about people and their priorities.

So I walk carefully through her house, reverent. It's her tomb. Her body is gone, but something of her remains. I dodge a spoon collection and about a million plant stands with dead African violets potted on them, carrying a heavy utility light to set up once we find the scene. Some of the crew are already setting up some proprietary air purifier by the front door. Only Denis comes with me. It's my first real call.

My hand hesitates for a moment before sliding back the door to the living room in its track. My senses are muddled and dulled, not used to wearing all this gear. I can't see well, hear well, or move as freely as I'm used to. Why couldn't smell the putrid stench of death and judgement be dulled, though? But nothing can mitigate that. There seems to be a vibration, a sort of hum, beyond the heavy slab of wood. I know this is the room. Death was in there.

Sliding the door open, I'm greeted by a deafening roar, and blackness. Like the third plague of Egypt, a dense cloud of flesh flies pours, condensed into a pillar, out the door around me, their bloated, black bodies pinging off my suit. It feels like being hit by a hard gust of wind, filled with grit and debris. I stumble back, with the force of millions of buffeting hard insects, and in shock and revulsion. Denis reaches out and catches me, steadying me, and pulling me back a few paces.

"I always stood back and let them out before going in.", he tells me, voice nearly lost in the buzz of the man eating flies. "They stink as bad as a body. You can't really see until most of them are gone anyway, when a room's been sealed pretty much like that."

I struggle to slow my heart, choke back an overwhelming urge to run until I'm a block away and vomit. There's nothing about this I like. Denis says the only way through is to always think to yourself, "People first." So I do. People first. Grizzly, undignified death will find me, and if I go on my feet like I hope to, it may be a long time until anyone discovers me. Judge not, lest ye be judged. This judgement is certain. But charity covers a multitude of sins. So people first it is. Someone loved this woman, once, and God her creator does too.

When the pillar of flies has passed over me, I survey the room from where I stand, shining the light in, scanning over everything.

"I don't see the scene itself.", I admit. Nothing but overstuffed, dusty blue furniture, sitting atop shaggy maize coloured carpeting, and way too many doilies, and crossword puzzle books.
That's when I notice the carpet. Really notice it. It's not carpet. The maize carpet slowly creeps out through the open pocket door, expanding its territory, and dissipating in writhing fibers.

It's not carpeting. It's a solid, inch deep wriggling mass of maggots, alive and dead themselves. Our ginger steps into the room crunch, and give way beneath our feet. There is carpet in the room, I discover, clearing momentarily a small spot with my boot. But it appears to have been a cornflower blue, to match the furniture. It's stained now with the fluids of death. A human body is 60% water. This living room carpet has absorbed that from wall to wall, and fed and bred and been a grave to generations of flies since this woman died and slowly turned to soup.

The room is hot. Unnaturally hot, and noticeably hot compared to the rest of the house. The friction and respiration of the flies has raised the temperature in here, making it stifling and hellish. There's less oxygen to breathe.

This is death. A thing God never wanted. A perversion of life. The greatest pain of a perfect being's eternal life. The wages of sin. I grew up on a farm. I knew many deaths. I'm no Pollyanna. I'd taken animal lives in mercy, in stewardship, in defense, and in vengeance. I'd seen deaths, sudden and violent, in the tents. I'd seen a slow decline come to a steady halt in a hospital bed. I'd seen open caskets, and collections of terrible closed eyes and hands folded photos of dead children locked in top drawers I shouldn't have picked with hairpins out of boredom. But the living have a way of sanitizing death, hiding their shame, hiding its stigma. This is true death. This is honesty. This is the punishment God visits justifiably upon us all. We can build satin lined coffins, and embalm, and cremate. We can hide it in a freezer, fill the cracks with putty, and slather it in make up. We can talk about death with dignity and palliative care and push morphine until sleep is too deep to ever wake.

We sterilize death, and hurry it out of sight and out of mind, thinking we've sealed it away where no one can see what we've done; what we really are. But there is no dignity in this one thing. This is our toll to pay. God sees. Souls don't scare me. Bodies do. Death does. A sack of meat, a pile of cursed consequence. That's terrifying. A soul never dies. God can forgive a soul. All flesh must be punished to death on this paradise we reduced to a cesspool. We were made in His image. But when we die, we are punished with another form. Whose form?, I wonder, goosebumps prickling my arms.

"Okay. This is a bad one.", Denis concedes. "What do you want to do first in here?"

"I think we should get the Shop Vac. Get the maggots off the floor so we can see what else we have to work with.", I answer.

"Yeah. That's what I'd do too. Get them before they spread too. C'mon. I'm going to close the door until we get back.", he agrees.

We come back with the vac. Flies appear out of nowhere. At first, the job seems endless. Over and over, I fill the vac, dispose of the contents, and fill it again. A Shop Vac filled with maggots is heavier than you'd ever consider. It's repulsive. Life narrows to an illuminated spot in a dark room, a squirming floor, and a hose. I wonder if I'll ever be able to wash the smell off me, or if I'll be half death and half life for the rest of my life. The maggots are all full of her. They're full of death. So is the Shop Vac. So is my freshly whited out cube van. Is that what I am now too? Full of death?

Around the time I start to make some progress, the air flow stops abruptly. When I raise it out of the writhing mass, the badly decomposed scalp of the dead woman is stuck in the end of the hose. The coroner must have missed it. Her last roller set, performed on her dull grey hair, set with the stink of stiff Clairol hairspray, won't be laid to rest with her. All is vanity.

I kick the power off on the vac, and release the scalp into my hand, feeling somehow heathen and barbaric. How do you make this 'people first'?
"What do we do with this? Do I call the cops? The coroner?", I ask, my hand shaking, wanting to drop the piece of flesh with all my being.

"No.", Denis says, voice tinged in soberminded kindness. "They won't come back for it. And her burial was yesterday anyway. We dispose of... remnants... with everything else. I know it seems inappropriate, but she doesn't need it anymore. Life is for the living, so you need to remove that without mention for the sake of the loved ones.", he says, popping the top off the Shop Vac, so I can drop it in the drum.

He's the CEO. He's got a busy schedule, and a life to return to in another city. So we work through the night. In a week, I fly to Florida, train with another franchisee for a week. Then I'm on my own in Peachtree City.

When the light begins to fail, we've got all the maggots. It was over a dozen vacs worth; I lost track. The blue carpet is all discolored, a dark brown stain next to the couch, like the shroud of Turin. We move out the furniture. Most of it is contaminated and can't be salvaged; fluids crept up, leeching upwards from the bottom, or it was fouled by the flies. The hard surfaces are wiped down and disinfected.

The air purifiers are brought into the living room. The carpet is torn out along with the subfloor. When we're done, the house smells like nothing but unidentifiable chemicals, fleeting and vague. No more death. Ionic. Like the clean after a rain. But it's still charged negatively. We lock the house up, leaving it ready for insurance adjusters and contractors. Commerce will go on.

My cube van is full of hazardous waste. I lock the door on it, and sit down, shell shocked and tired, on the curb in the dark. I must look like a spaceman; intergalactic planetary, with my white biohazard suit, hood up, cinched around my face, masked and goggled. I feel short of breath at this altitude. I'd take it all off to breathe better, but then, I'm not sure I would. I feel paralyzed. I don't want to cry or anything. I just want to unsee and forget. But I suppose what I need to focus on is getting to a frame of mind to sleep a couple hours when I get back to the Comfort Suites, because in the morning I have to meet with the family, show them how to do the paperwork to claim this on their mother's homeowner's insurance. Footsteps approach behind me. Denis is probably worried I can't handle this...

"You're running out of room for dishes on the counter.", a voice exclaims, breaking me from my memories. "Here. Stop drying for a sec. I'll put some away.", Kai's mom offers, before adding, "You look sad. That must have been difficult work.

"It was.", I agreed. "Hard, and in more ways than people realize. But I believed in it. Not at the beginning, of course. At the beginning, I'd just picked the best cash flow to investment ratio, and a franchise because the American government preferred that. But it grew on me. I didn't do it for very long before I was called for my interview and turned down for my visa, and asked to leave the country immediately.

"So you just lost all your money?", she asks, putting the plates back in the cupboard where I usually put the mugs. Huh. They do fit better there.

"Yes.", I answer wearily again. "Well, I did, and then I didn't. When I called the company's CEO to tell him what happened to me at my interview in Toronto--I had to go back to the consulate in Canada for my interview. Now, Toronto... talk about a hellhole--when I called to tell Denis how it went, he immediately told me not to worry, that he'd get me my franchise fee back, and possibly the rest.

Annoyed with myself, I have to quit talking and turn away. I'm about to cry. Bad fucking form; no
way I'm doing that around people. Shame. It's such a good story, but I just can't tell it.

"That was sure nice of him!", Kai's mom answers, turning back to face me, as I try to hide from her. "Did you end up getting it all?"

"It was nice.", I reply cautiously, "Yeah. It took him a while to convince the board, but I got every dime I invested back. He had no legal responsibility whatsoever. In fact, I could have been fined by the company. But Denis said we were family, the whole company, and I always would be too."

That's as much as I can say. I still ask blessings over him every night. I will until the day I die. The fireproof safe with all my money inside is still collecting dust under Kai's bed. A locked box with my life inside; everything I worked for, and all I'd hoped it to be someday, and the rare happy knowledge that the world still holds people who would give a life back to someone out of nothing but love and decency. I don't know why, but I never told Kai where it came from. It's the one part of the story I left out. I suppose because I think Kai may have seen that part of the story as somehow shameful. Maybe I just didn't tell him so I wouldn't cry. That safe is like Marcellus Wallace's suitcase to me, filled with light. And Denis just gave it back to me. He saved my life, and handed it back.

I'm back standing next to Kai's mom, looking out the window over the sink, drying dishes as she washes them. This feels like the kind of thing people do with their mom; the kind of memories they make with them that they recount delivering a eulogy. Until I got away, I'd dreaded my parents' deaths, in case I was still stuck there, and expected to say nice things. I am nice. But I don't tell an elaborate lie well, and don't even know how to make up that variety of sparkling fiction. Now I think how I could piece a Frankenstein story about a family together, how I could summon recollections of moments of love, strike it with lightening, breathe life into the monster. Chained to the radiator with Tate, vacuuming maggots and seeing my dreams all die with Denis, drying dishes with Kai's mom. Winter, my sister. Even Kai. It's been more good than bad. Sadness clouds my mind. I'll spend all my life with a gaping wound, unable to heal, home to the festering maggots. My parents will die, but there will never be an end. No resolution. They'll never be sorry. Even The Lord requires repentance to forgive. And I'd love to forgive them, let it all go, die and rot, be dust. But I can't because they'll never let me.

"So...", Kai's mom finally sighs, "...that's how you ended up here, then? You got your money back, but didn't go home. Kai found you?"

"No.", I answer softly, smiling. "No, I found Kai. I saw him on tv. He was talking about the politics of fear, the divisiveness of tribal identity politics, the self-proclaimed victim hierarchy, the fallacy of climate change to forward an agenda of globalization and one world government. He was speaking my language. I don't think anyone can change the world except The Enemy, who's been changing it with hearts and minds since the creation, and will continue until he's defeated. But I do think some people can throw a shoe in the cogs and slow that down. Kai was my messiah holding a suede chukka boot, and he wasn't afraid to aim for the moving parts. I just wanted to serve him."

The dishes are all done, and I've put the last few away. Kai's mom smiles at me, but her smile is broken. Bittersweet tears fill her eyes, like someone who plans to leave without saying goodbye, and intends to never come back.

"I'd so wanted to meet you, Mac. I'm glad I finally did. But I am so busy today, and it's getting late. I have to get going, alright? So many things to do today, and only today to do them.", she says and gives me a quick embrace that I freeze under, not having the wherewithall to hug her back until it is long over.

"You should come over more often.", I tell her. It comes out tragic; enthusiastic and childlike.
She just shrugs. "I don't know. I don't know what to say to Kai anymore. I'm glad he has someone who does though. He's my son, and I love him, even if I don't speak his language anymore."

"Just tell him you're proud of him.", I suggest. I know it's what he'd want to hear.

"Yeah, well, I'm not sure I am.", she tells me, stepping down into the side porch and slipping a coat on, before disappearing out the door.

I stand by the door for a long time, lost in thought, staring out onto the side yard. Snow is scraped from the ground in front of the shed door, and a single set of footprints stand out in the disappearing white slush. They lead into the trees and back again. Every day we were dumping a body. Every single day. But Kai never does anything alone. I sigh, giving up trying to divine the actions of men. I get them more than women. But sometimes I feel like for all the mind-reading I do, I have no foresight, no insight and only wish I could ditch most of my hindsight.

My mind races. I push playback on my conversation with Kai's mom. This used to always happen with Winter too; over-analyze everything, worry what she thought it meant. I probably said things I shouldn't have. I'm gotta go make myself useful.

Maybe I'll see if I can't dox Jussie Smollett. I don't buy for a minute any white supremacist could be bothered to write him a letter in Crayola markers. I don't fucking know what Empire is. Even Winter doesn't. Can't really see some KKKonfederfucknut even being aware of his existence; they can't read let alone write, even in scented markers. Besides, he's not even a household name with most gay black men. So sus. I'll dox him, get /pol/ on it. This is fucking MAGA country now, bitch. Come to think of it, maybe I'll write him some fan mail. Call myself Rick9plus, tell him I'm actually a set of Nigerian twins, and we'd love to do some 'personal training'. See what I can get him to spill.

But before I pull my unfocused gaze from the window onto the backyard, I see movement. Something in the trees. Appalled, I stand frozen in place, with a terrible desire to flee.

On the ground in the disappearing snow, on his belly like a snake, I see him. Goldenboy. Dressed all in some kind of faggy black couture, his coiffed blonde waves fall over his face, and he repeatedly tosses his head effeminately to throw them aside to allow for his horrifying task. Slithering weightlessly across the ground, he weaves between the slender birch trees and the pines, with unnatural speed. His eyes appear as vertical black slits in orbs of yellow, and every so often, a forked tongue juts from his parted lips. He's searching for something.

I'm struck by a deep desire to not be found, but a pull weights my feet where they stand. I'm tempted; tempted to stay, to stare. It's what he wants. He'll see me. I will my heart to stop battering itself against my ribcage, and run, in soft shoed steps, to Kai's basement.

Looking around, I seek shelter away from windows, where a creature crawling on its belly outside couldn't see me. I feel sick and overcome. My head screams, and vision strobes. Even the dark bathroom has a window, facing the treed corner of the backyard. Despair grips me, cold and tight. Then I notice the laundry.

The washer and dryer are old Vikings, built like tanks, in vintage coppertone. They're empty. No one does anything except me. I quietly spring the metal door, and get inside, folding my body up. I shudder. I'm coiled like a snake in here myself. I slide my tiny new pinkies in the little round vented holes in the inside of the door, and pull it shut until it clicks in place.

My bare knees press against my cheeks in the tiny space. The world is muffled, and my very existence feels amplified, as though I'm inside a subwoofer. My breaths seem to shatter off the hollow steel drum. The air is hot and still, moist with the respiration of my own body within seconds.
I close my eyes against the darkness. What's out in those trees? When my mind is a tangle, black veins spread in the depths behind my eyes. I try not to look into the images. The black writhing mass is indiscernible. Is it snakes, thorns and brambles, the roots of trees tearing through the dark earth, worms made of death eating the dirt and decay? But the dark is all around me, eyes closed or not. There's nowhere to hide, so I watch the motion in the void become form inside my eyelids. I hear him sniff. I hear his tongue hiss from his lips. The roots of the trees dig deep, and there's nothing but the fighting entanglement of black roots, tearing over one another in haste to crawl deeper into the black dirt. I see a speck of something lighter, something white in the dark, being carried down deep in the fibrous seeking fingers. My pinkies. Carried down into the earth, buried and hidden by the roots of the trees, where he can't find them.

The slippery hiss of his tongue stops. The hell hound sniffing of his muzzle is silenced. I hear his hands as they crunch through the icy crust on top the melting snow, as he ceases to levitate on his belly, and pushes his hands to the ground to stand back up on two legs. Inside the dryer, I'm crammed awkwardly, neck bent and twisted to accommodate the fins of the metal drum. My heart pounds, echoing back to me. I don't know what he's going to do. He's standing in the trees, snow melting into his socks. He's thinking too. He's listening. I can't shut my brain off, and besides, #nofilter. I'm screwed.

I plead for the infilling of The Spirit. I beg to be protected, and silenced, that my own tongue doesn't speak. The taste of cyanide creeps onto the back of my tongue, and my heart stops dead. I won't need it for this. I'm the one levitating now, in a world of iridescent light. I'm warm. I can't feel my body; I have no need of that crude puppet here. I'm somewhere else, on psychic vacation. Some other soul dwells within me. There's no time. I don't know how long I'm here.

When I feel myself crammed back inside a Maytag in the pitch blackness, the world around me is quiet. Not eerily silent. Just quiet. The temperature has dropped. The barometric pressure is a little higher; the firmament not recoiling in rebellion at his presence. Goldenboy is gone. #resist, I guess. Tate always liked that verse. He thought it sounded badass.

My whole body is asleep and cramped up. I roll as best I can to face the inside of the dryer, planting one sealskin boot against the door, and pushing with my leg. The seal finally gives to my pressure, and I push and tumble myself out, birthed backwards into the world like a fawn, to land on the carpeted basement floor with a thud. It's already almost dark. I've been in here most of the day.

Pulling myself to my feet, holding the corner of the dryer for support, I slump against it, and wait for blood to fill my tingling arms and legs. I can't stand unsupported; my lower half is asleep all the way to my waist. This is gonna feel really weird in a few seconds...

But as I stand in the dusky light left failing in Kai's basement, stamping my dead, tingling limbs to try to feel them again, I hear a knock at the door. I feel compelled to go, despite my instructions not to. A smile touches my lips, as I reach over and grab a handful of Tide Pods. Scrap that. Winter isn't even here to enjoy it. Dragging my wooden legs like a stroke victim, I reach inside the white ceramic vase on the bookcase by the stairs. My Kinder Surprise eggs. #CanadianContraband Fuck you, USA USA USA! I'll give out a free toy encased in chocolate any damn time I please, especially on the day I'm appropriating my own culture for fun. Come at me, FDA.

I fight my stiff legs up the staircase, and hurry to the front door, flipping the porch light on, just as I fling the door open.

After basking in the security of the impenetrable place I spent this afternoon, I'm not scared. I probably should have been.

Because when I fling the door back, expecting kids in Descendants costumes, I'm wrong.
I open the door, bracing for the gust of stinging cold that will bite my flesh. When I do, framed in a world of freshly fallen white under a darkening sky, stands a man.

"What are you supposed to be?", he asks me, almost breaking a smile.

"I dunno.", I pause, before cracking a smile myself. "A post-modern American racist, dressed up in a 'Sexy Canadian' costume? Something like that. I never went to school, and I don't read a thing. I just hope I'm using 'post-modern' correctly.

He laughs. "Well, as I recall, you were ten years old and knew all about 'postmortem' last time I saw you. So fuck it, right?"

"Crash?", I ask suddenly, breathless, and stunned.

He's older; the tight, golden, dewy complexion he had the last time I saw him has given way to an ashen cast, earned through the years, I suppose. His features remain sharp and handsome as they were in his youth, though his meticulously tidy hair and clean shaven face are now replaced with a greyed handlebar moustache and loose low ponytail.

"Aw, I don't go by that name anymore.", he answers in that slow Texas drawl, with a half smile. "Just like you don't go by the same name anymore, either."

He was so intense when I met him. I never saw one hint of expression on his face, save the masks of despair and grief that rose briefly under his flesh. He's freer now. He's found God, or he's at least quit hiding himself from Him.

I answer him low, looking from side to side, ensuring I'm still alone. "It's Mac now."

"Good. You never earned that misplaced fuckin' curse they put on you; that raw deal you were born into. You grew up beautiful, darlin.'", he says, reaching out his hand, a waver in his voice. "It's Rust, and I've been lookin' for you a long time. About time you sojourned in God's Country..."

I ignore his outstretched hand, and lunge into his arms. He's slow to hold me back; I understand why. I was a stunted ten year old runt the last time he picked me up in his arms. Now I'm a woman, and his brain has to catch up to that, time travel through the flat circle he believes in, making its way through that sparkling maze to this moment.

"I blamed you for a lot of years for taking me out of that basement. A lot of years. Now I understand. You had no choice.", I hug him tightly. He smells like Marlboros and Lone Star. "I put in my time, chose my moment and ran. But it took me a long time to forgive you sending me back there."

"I know it, darlin'. Whole world's full of parents wanting babies, and orphans needing parents. You an' I, sweetheart. The department owned my life though, man. There was no way out of that fuckin' maze."

"I know it, darlin'. Whole world's full of parents wanting babies, and orphans needing parents. You an' I, sweetheart. The department owned my life though, man. There was no way out of that fuckin' maze.", he sniffs, and I see the corners of his mouth turn down.

"It's okay, Rust. You were a cop. I was a missing child from another country. There wasn't a charge in the world you could have stuck. Some snakebit kid in a haunted house. What kind of a witness would I have made? No one would have believed one word of my story. No one would have believed me. They'd have showed up crying those crocodile tears, and I'd have come off the deranged, cold blooded reptile. They'd have said I ran away, or was kidnapped.", I tell him, still hugging him, face buried against his neck. I take the weight of his guilt from his shoulders, and add it to mine. "I'm sorry you suffered in doubt over it all these years. You're a good man, Rust. Not a bad man like you said either."

"Yeah. I still don't know what I was then.", he says, finally pulling back from the embrace, and
looking at me again. "One thing's right; those monsters? If they could do a thing like that to you? They'd have had no qualms lying their faces off in court about you. And we had cops crawlin' all over it, once the tip went in that cartel planned to traffic you across the line at Mexicali. Wasn't much I could have done different, once that made it to brass."

"I know.", I sigh. "This is how my life was meant to go, though. You see that right? And if that Sinaloa wetback piece of shit came back for me, like he planned? That? I wouldn't have survived intact. And any other road you'd have taken would only have lead you astray from the solitary purpose of your life too. You tie that off?"

"Every prophet in her house, huh?", he asks me with a wry grin.

I shrug. "Some things never change. Never. And you know, you're wrong about something you told me while we were waiting on that bus. Time's not a flat circle. That's just stupid. Time's a plastic straw. We don't just stare at it laying on the Melamine anymore. We pick it up and gaze through it. Now is the time to meme. Now is the time to evangelize. Now is the time without time. It's okay to be right."

"You always did speak my language. Understood the sprawl.", he says gently. "You needed to live. Seven billion souls, and I knew them all, when I didn't want to know a one of 'em. You were somethin' new. One conversation in the Greyhound Depot, and I knew that."

"I'm nothing special. Greater is He that liveth in me, than he who is in the world. I'm nothing but but a vessel, and my life is not my own. It's not me who still lives, but He who lives in me."

I feel distant, far from any mooring, as though the firmament of the world expands around me, leaving me without gravity. Rust was bound tight to the torment of the earth when I met him. My gospel was cruel nonsense; he'd lost a child. But now he's went eternal. He's turned to stars; ashes to ashes, and Rust to dust. He's a ghost. And I won't get to keep him. The white snow swirls around us, neither warm or cold, in this dull grey world. He came from bliss to this. He has a reason.

"That's why I'm here.", he tells me. "I found something that might interest you; an ancient text, deemed too arcane and esoteric for canon. A lost Apocrypha, of sorts. But when I came across it, I thought of you. Only person I ever knew, in all this failed world, who ever really loved even the parts of The Word she didn't understand."

He hands me nothing but a page, words he's retyped on an old manual typewriter. I know the hand, the out of whack letter g and letter w. It was typed on an old, pearlized seafoam green Commodore Educator, circa 1950. I know the smell of that ink. That was my grandma's typewriter.

"I found the original text, hidden deep within the earth, too fragile to remove. I committed it to memory, and purged it word for word using the first instrument that availed itself.", he tells me, as I take the piece of paper carefully in my hand.

"A station-wagon-green typewriter, in a one storey farmhouse, found under a twin bed, in a corner bedroom?", I ask him, breathless and distant.

He kisses my forehead.

"Yeah, that's the place.", he answers unfazed. Looking around behind me, soft and dreamy he adds, "Haunted houses are the only places you've ever lived, huh?"

"There was no one there?", I ask him. "At the house in Vantage?"

"No. Not a soul. Not for a while, either."
"Are they dead?", I inquire flatly.

"No way for me to know. I know they don't dwell where I do. And I'm not privy to the guest list at... the other place.", Rust shrugs.

I set the typed sheet on the table beside the door, take Rust's hand in mine.

"You're finally with your daughter, aren't you?", I ask. "And you're still the only true detective..."

A smile still looks foreign and misplaced on his face, but one appears anyway.

"Yeah. Be careful what you get good at.", he says dryly. "The things I investigate now, I like a lot better though. And I am with my daughter. Sofia's a little like you. She feels everything.", he says wistfully. "Blessing and a curse, her going when she did. Either way, she'd have had eternity in The Happiest Place Off Earth. She'll always be owed about 67 years, and God doesn't do backpay.", he sniffs. "But I see you, Mac. I see what you've felt in your years. I'm not sure you came out ahead of her, just because you were given more, you know what I mean?"

"I do.", I answer solemnly. "Sometimes I wish I was a fucking tree."

He laughs. Crash never laughed. I like him better like this.

"Settle on a name.", Rust says, once again kissing my forehead, as I close my eyes to the comfort of a father. "You're making a mess of The Book of Life. They can't handle the paperwork, changing your entry all the time.", he withdraws, and his eyes meet mine. "I'd go with Lithia, if I were you. And don't worry about your last. That'll sort itself out. You'll have a family, one day.", he prophesies tenderly, touching the contour of my face with his finger tips. "You're a good servant. I'll see you again. The next time, I'll know your name."

I want to cry and ask him to stay. I know that he can't. And I know where he lives. I wouldn't really want to make him stay here either.

"Thank you for saving my life. I forgive you.", I joke.

"You lost your life to gain it.", Rust says gently, giving one last reassuring rub to my shoulder. "I don't begrudge you the hard feelings. Goodbye, Mac."

"See you later, Rust. I'll look forward to it."

He just nods, walks away, and fades down the sidewalk, streetlamps burning out behind him until he's gone. Shivering, I close the door, and drop to the floor, peeling open the wrapper on a Kinder Surprise, and reading the page brought from beyond the wall.

As the Sons of God laid with the women of the earth, who bore them sons of giant stature, and of whom Goliath was the last, and diminished

So also were born daughters, and they were called The Daughters of Eve, and though their stature was as of those born of men, they waxed beautiful as the serpent before the fall, bearing not the curse to slither on the belly without legs

And though they were conceived in the women who lay with the Sons of God, they were birthed from the belly of the earth

But when the first generation of the Daughters had passed, those who were found pleasing were once again birthed, but those who had fallen to wickedness, vanity and pride were then cursed to the
form of the master they had chosen, and whose purpose became the pangs of labor to bring forth the Daughters who lived in righteousness and servitude.

For as the years multiplied, the number of the Daughters waned, and the pits which sprang them forth became fell and swollen in rank, and those in the pits became ever more cruel and jealous, for the righteous Daughters’ beauty exceeded their own.

And the Daughters of Eve shall be bound to the earth by the loins of man, and suppressed, lest their power exceed them and pride render them exceedingly evil.

For if a Daughter be suppressed, it shall be a thing of great pleasure to the forces of goodness, and the man to whom she submits shall be exhausted and purified by her faithfulness.

And she shall be made worthy to serve him for which she was made, and fall not to the ruin of her race.

For unto the Daughters of Eve shall be given the keys and dominion over the loins of all men.

Woe to her who resists not her power and seeks to make herself equal with the man, for she shall be cast inside the earth from whence she was born, to be swallowed among her sisters.

But to the Daughter who submits in obedience, her blood shall be made warm, and she shall bear forth children as the women of the land.

And those Daughters who are righteous shall wax more comely with each of her own births from the bowels of the earth, to tempt her further, until but one Daughter remains in all the earth, and she shall be the sole Daughter to see the Kingdom and her countless names written in the Book of Life, The Supreme Daughter of Eve, and the Sons of God.

All others shall take the form of their master, and dwell in a shadow of hell, inside the earth, until the end days, when they shall be forged in heat and pressure to one instrument who shall be named MYSTERY, The Whore of Babylon.

WTF? My skull cracks and spills; what does it mean, what am I, does this even have anything to do with me, how did I know things I don't know? Would I recognize a false prophet? Would I have the wisdom to interpret a testimony? Am I just a parlor trick who drinks poison like a circus geek? Am I the madonna or the whore, or a stupid little girl too proud to see she's neither?

An icebucket of chill pours over me, a draft from under the front door blowing up my spine. Popping the last bite of milk chocolate egg shell in my mouth, I jump to my soft-soled feet, and throw the door open, calling for Rust. But he's long gone, far from any road, in mocassins I can't walk a mile in. My head swims as I shut the door to the wind in my face, just trying to remain part of the body. The sprawl expands around me; a dizzying expanse of all the things I don't understand, sloping out to the bent horizon, with nothing to hold onto. Collapsing in a heap on my knees on the floor, I pray. I don't need something to hold onto. I pray for Kai, that he'll have the strength to hold me down.

Kai

All those ugly Adidas tracksuits and that hideous asymmetrical wedge haircut. All the attempts to project masculinity. All the storming around, feet taking steps just a little too wide set, in the hopes of projecting a ballsack between her legs. And after all the clawing and fighting, all the rug munching, all the try-too-harding for some nonconformity, all the degrees, business plans and loan applications, where does she end up? By her own sweat and toil? Buys herself a kitchen, and chains herself to it.

I stifle a laugh. Stupid women. Ivy is the epitome of female self defeat, shoddily veiled in the cruel
masquerade of feminism. Feminism. The cheap and easily attainable dollar store costume, that attempts to hide that all women just want to get married, when all it does is betray the fantasy. You wanted a kitchen, bitch. So you made it into a thankless job that loses you money, and results in some nanny raising the child your womb didn't make the time to produce. Now make me a manwich, sell your work short because the market demands it of you because you don't have that invisible scrotum you long for, and we'll all watch you through your glass ceiling. Kek. The glass ceiling is a female construct, a convenient enclosure for us men to watch them through, struggling with life like confused animals in a cage, while protecting us from their inferior mental capacity, and propensity for fits of irrational frustration.

Mac gets it. She knows the only thanks a woman ever gets for cooking is if she does it for a man who loves her. She's smart enough to hack the system. She was also smart enough to dream up the perfect recipe for Doubter Cookies. I wish she could have been here to make them. I like watching her at a stove. Love it when she burns herself, that soft little yelp of pain before she can catch herself. But I'm not going to ruin my day over it, either. Today is a momentous occasion.

"IVY!", I bellow from behind. Make her jump, all flatfooted and awkward in her sequin gown. Her shoulders are more slouched than usual today, under the paternal White Man's yoke, no doubt. "That last batch didn't have nearly enough of those satanic cube worshiper's prayer beads in them. Weak. You're supposed to be the great cook here, Ivy."

"They're going to fall apart if I put more than that in.", she whines. I won't hear it.

"Look, the boys spent all week unstringing those things. We didn't buy a pallet of them on Alibaba to waste them. I want them all used.", I kick the plastic five gallon pail sitting closest to her feet. "And be thankful we held back half to scatter menacingly around every Jewish-owned business in Ilhan Omar's district."

"Real classy, Kai.", she retorts under her breath, begrudgingly pouring another scoop of the brown beads under the paddle of a huge stand mixer. "Trying to scare a bunch of Holocaust survivors..."

"Oh.", I exclaim, grin huge, getting my face close to hers, and looking in her crowded little eyes. "I don't want to scare Holocaust survivors. /pol/ can suck an uncircumcised pud. Israel is fucking based! I plan to send a Hanukkah card to Bibi this year, in fact. What I want is to unite the Jewish people with our cause. We're Zionists, Ivy. Didn't you realize that?"

She hates this. Her lip curls in discomfort. I watch her feeble leftard brain wriggle and burn under my magnifying glass. Just like all SJW NPCs, she's actually a racist xenophobe, and rabidly anti-Semitic. She'll deny it, sure. All the usual arguments. How can I be an anti-Semite, I love Sarah Silverman... I don't tell accountant jokes... But the ugly truth remains. She hates their homeland. She thinks they have no right to one. She wants it abolished and destroyed, just like the Nazis, or the Islamic State, or the Ayotollah. She hates them. Which means I fucking love them. Besides, Mac says you fuck with Israel at your own peril; they'll be the last nation standing when the whole world burns. I don't know what she's talking about, but I get off on her sincere apocalyptic ramblings, and it feels right to me, somehow. They did invent the Uzi.

"Kai, Israel is responsible for so m...", she starts in protest.

I cut her off with a finger to her lips.

"They're the only democratic state in the Middle East, Ivy. They are the only nation in the Middle East where your desire to scissor my little sister wouldn't get you stoned, and your right to bump innies ineffectively is staunchly protected. And they're just as politically disinterested as you are in hearing from Christians on the formation of policy. What's not to like?", I ask her. "Don't tell me that
when you traipse in on Saturday mornings with those bagels with lox and capers you're just appropriating their culture on the Sabbath?"

My words ring and echo off the stainless steel and broad tiled walls. Her own kitchen feeding my every word back to her with an extra ten decibels.

Ivy doesn't answer me. Her face falls, almost melted off, it droops so much. I know in her head, she's telling herself that I'm an idiot, and she's winning by still having her own opinion. But she can't win. I'm a man. And I made her dress up as Gretchen Carlson, Miss America. And I made her shut the fuck up. Defeated, she turns from me, and adds another half scoop of prayer beads to the cookie dough.

"They really do pass for chocolate chip.", I compliment her before heading back out into the restaurant. It's only 1 pm, but I need to keep an eye on Winter. She's fucked up already.

In the doorway, I stop and turn to face Ivy, one last time. She looks so dejected and uncomfortable in her costume. Not pretty at all. Like some bad tranny failing to pass, and demanding to be called 'ma'am', Adam's apple, stubble and all. Nothing highlights her lack of @therealfeminism quite like seeing her in a glittering mint green dress and sash, clodding around ineptly on high heeled white sling backs, straining to perform the feminine art of baking while a man critiques her.

"You look really pretty today, Ivy. You should try wearing that around headquarters all the time. You might finally be able to find a husband. I think it's over between you and my sister. She's a real stickler for perfection, and I'm guessing she's noticed and can't unsee that one big tit of yours. I don't know about anyone else, but I'd never misgender you like this.", I shrug over my shoulder, and let the doors swing shut on her.

"No, it's not porn!", Winter declares, in a loud fit of laughter, hanging on Speed Wagon's arm. "It was a Georgia O'Keefe coloring book!", she squeals, pounding a fist into the middle of his chest.

"I've never been there.", he yells over the music. The fifth time she's played They're Coming to Take Me Away on repeat...

"Not the state, moron.", Winter rolls her eyes at him smiling. "The artist. She's from Santa Fe or some shit. Painted pussies."

"I thought you said it was a coloring book?", he asks back, a smirk on his face. "So it was paintings? Does that make it any less that you were busted with a book of pussies in the chapel?"

Winter's reaching for another of the black Jello shots that Mac made yesterday, staring intently at Speed's face. She licks her lip, and her eyes dart from his. Before she can pick one up, I step in and block her hand with mine.

"What are you doing, Kai?", Winter asks petulantly. "I want another Everdrear. She made them for ME, you know. Here, have one. Maybe you'd be more fun.", she sassies me, shoving one of the little Dixie cups at me. Of course. Moon Girl loves her plastic litter. 'Give me convenience, or give me death,' Mac says, 'and redistribute the globe's warmth.' Puts her disposable where her mouth is too. World's last true believer in a world of cynics.

"Wanna dance?", Winter slurs over the music, reaching for Speed Wagon's arm. "Fucking AVALANCHES! Frankie Sinatra's my jam... when they mix in the sample of My Favorite Things?! Fucking DEAD! Come on! Let's dance!"

Slipping between them, I take her hand, and pull her away with me, "I'd love to, sister. I put this in the mix just for you."

"Kai..", she protests, trying to wrench her arm from mine.

Instead, I wrap my arm around her waist, hold her other hand in mine, dance with her, fast and stiff, "I'm having this dance.", I whisper low, feeling the soft flesh of her warm ear on my lips. "You need to pace yourself. We have a long and important day ahead. Sip slow, little sister."

"I don't care what you have planned.", she whines back in my ear. "Don't I give enough to this? It's Halloween, Kai. Can't I just have this one day?", rolling her eyes, she pouts, "It's not like you'll even use me. You never do anything with us girls anymore. We'll get sent home to bed or told to clean up after you guys leave."

"Don't you appreciate anything, Winter? What I do for you? 'K, I'm offended. You see, all this is for you. This whole day, this party. The boys would probably be better training all day, going into tonight clear-headed. This? All for you."

She doesn't believe me; not really. But she melts against me, relents a bit. I feel the tension evaporate from her arm as she stops trying to squirm away.

"For me?", Winter challenges, her little lips drawn in a sneer. "Then why did you make me appropriate a culture? Huh? You might want to fact check yourself, Kai."

I laugh. The absurdity. The lie of it all.

"I gave you the excuse you needed. Just admit it, Winter. That's fine. I'm a man. I can take the blame. This costume is the exact costume you wanted. I just took the burden of your white guilt for you so you could actually have fun! Your failed ideology actually strips all appreciation and diversity from the world. It doesn't allow for the celebration of any culture. It seeks to wipe all cultures from the face of the earth, paint them all an indiscrpt shade of brownshirt brown, and arrange itself in a hierarchy of imaginary victimhood, where all the NPCs are equal, in their own unique way, of course. Fuck that shit, Winter. You don't want to be limited to the choice of sexless M&M, or Thing 1 or 2. I know you, sister.", I hold her close, breathe her in. She's gained a little weight since Mac's moved in and the food's better. Her waist is softer and thicker, the curve of her hips swelled. I like it. Nice contrast to Mac's fine bones. They'll be sublime together, in the new ceremony. Smirking, I drop the hammer on her, "You've always wanted to be Latina Muerta. I just made you a world where you could live your truth. I emboldened you. And you look devastatingly beautiful. For a dead wetback."

"You're such an asshole.", she shakes her head and pushes me away. "I'm dancing with Speed, if he knows how. Just fuck off Kai."

"Ohh.", I taunt her sarcastically as she walks off. "Speak truth to power."

I stand there in the middle of the floor, where we cleared the tables away to make a dance floor for Winter.

It's Halloween, and tonight we go up against our most formidable enemy for the first time; a Death Cult, 2 billion strong and growing by the day, united in their worship of a Satanic Cube. I don't
know about anyone else, but that gives me the tingles behind my balls. Armed with ARs, Emulex, and a few rolls of duct tape, we make our first strike tonight. Then all the doubters will get their cookies, and the world will tremble. The doubters and plebs will cleave to a new savior who can keep them safe in this new Anti-American Saudi America where our dwindling 1.746 white children can be attacked by these satanists on an American family institution like Halloween.

So I let Winter go. She wants to bump uglies with Speed, so be it. Maybe she gets knocked up, and we manage to beat the 1.746 odds and more than replace ourselves. If not? Well, we bolster our numbers with the original 92% from Saskatchewan, and all the South African farmers who are about to be slaughtered for the whiteness of their skin. Comprehensive immigration reform. The right people who want to come legally, based on our new merit scale. Lulz... right, based, scale... right wing, based, and I propose we weigh them in besides. The Land of the Free Refill hardly needs more fatties. Just more People of Light and people who are light.

ICP rattles the cast iron shutters on the windows, as I walk off and take a seat at the counter by myself. Flick the cap. Chew a few tabs. I need to be sharp tonight. I've got shit to consider.

But I can't concentrate. The plan is set. We all know what to do. We infiltrate, quiet and undetected. We space ourselves out, among their population. We invade, and replace, just like they have. Then, outnumbering them, we turn on them, point our weapons, bring them to their knees, any direction other than their Farce of the Covenant in Mecca. Face Washington. Face fucking Canada. Bow before your betters. Then we tape them up, put them in the basement, and hand out benign chocolate chunk cookies to trick or treaters, from the stairs of the biggest Mosque in town, dressed in our bed sheets and hacky-hats. Tomorrow, when countless little Roses and Daltons have chipped teeth and the runs, and concerned helicopter parents discover the half eaten cookies contain Islamic prayer beads and Ex-Lax, well, there will be a run on blue haired messiahs.

So cancel concentration. My focus is pinned on my sister. I sit back, spin my stool around and watch Winter gyrate, drop it on the floor with my lieutenant to some Hocus Pocus. Speed can't dance to save his life, just gapes at her, lovesick, shuffling with the grace of a great ape.

"So did you keep your handcuffs when you quit the force?", Winter's slurred voice carries across the room. "Because this one time with Scotty..."

Fine. So cancel babysitting Winter too.

I grab the keys to the G-Wagon off the bar, before pausing and throwing them back. Party Box drove Mac's Pontiac here today. I grab those keys instead. She's still got some old dealer keychain on them; Compton Motors Assiniboia, SK. I Googled it. Shut down or bought out since she was little. And Assiniboia? How could that be anything but an abject shithole? I Google Mapped it too. I don't know how she didn't kill herself.

Mac told me once she used to dream about killing herself. She'd be wearing this gleaming gold Barbie gown, in a bathtub. She'd open her throat, but she wouldn't stop there. While life pumped out of her in gushes, she'd slice open the insides of her thighs in lolling gashes. She'd drag the blade in a serpentine up the insides of her forearms, fast and deep. It would be quick and decisive. Then at the last moment, she'd drain the tub, and just slip away with the water, leaving nothing behind. She'd find herself sucked into the ground, and in her grave. Curiosity at her own consciousness of her death would draw her up out of the ground, and she'd go back to the house. The tub would be clean and empty. The gold dress would be hung up in her closet. She'd just put it back on. I asked her why. She said because life isn't a choice.

I'm used to dark places. The dull glow of the clouded fall sky makes me squint. Wind shudders through the sorry looking leafless trees as I slip inside the door of her dirty pink Grand Am. The rust
colored ribbed velour seats are worn almost bald, but fuck, Detroit built a comfortable seat in the 1980s. USA, USA, USA...

When I turn over the engine, the tape deck clicks, flips the cassette. It takes forever to actually start playing. I know which one it is. Mac was so poor, or rather so frugal, her tapes are all pirated from the radio; songs cut off, all end with a snip of some dork's radio voice.

The Tragically Hip make me feel stupid, for the most part. She understands it all, and I don't. Why did I go to university? Why did I study theology? What did I plan to do exactly; live in the storied halls, spending my borrowed money, and getting my lettered tickets until someone decided to let me teach someone younger than me how to be useless, like some academic pyramid scheme? Why didn't I stand over a foundry crucible that stood two storeys tall? Why didn't I turn a wrench the size of my own leg a hundred times a night at a refinery? Wisdom can't be taught. It can only be learned. She told me this song was about dying, how no life is a good life without an end, because this whole fucking deal is a decline; just rotting in all the sin. Fuck, she said that's what Gift Shop was about too.

Hitting eject, I embrace the silence and close my eyes. Lean back into the head rest. Even with the Adderall, I'm feeling the effects of last night; no sleep, and a sore shoulder from digging up the frozen ground. Thoughts grow and swell in the back of my brain. The rat, on its treadmill, runs faster and faster. The shadow lengthens in a darkening world. A threat, unspoken and unnamed, propels me; a dangerous tug. Mac's home alone. I want to go check on her. Nobody but me and her will ever know. She'll never tell, if I ask her not to. She's not too scared; she's too loyal.

Throwing her car in gear, I peel out into the grime of the street. The world looks ugly, humiliated and stripped, this time of year. Skeletons line the road, flayed and lifeless. The sun is burning out. The world is ending. Every fucking winter, an apocalypse. Life is short. I want her. I want the warmth of her flesh and her life. I want her strength under me, writhing and moaning in sweet agony. I want to be inside her, buried deep. I want to put a life in her. I want to watch one thing grow before I die. I've given everything to this movement. I deserve something in return.

Maybe I won't go in at all. Maybe I'll just park outside. Watch the house.

But amid the blur of the world, in the middle of the intersection of 7th Avenue and Patriot, from the corner of my eye, I see someone rounding the corner.

My mom.

She's in that lame Columbia parka she'd worn since I was about 15. It's her. I slam the brakes, wheel around in the road, and park, jumping out, chasing after her.

"Mom!", I call after her, but she walks faster, won't look behind her.

I try to catch up, following past the quiet old houses on this sleepy street. She picks her pace up to a run, and disappears behind the hedge of some old house with a collection of used mattresses and faded plastic kids' toys inside a glassed in veranda. When I get there, step behind the hedge, she's not there. The shade from the hedge has kept the snow on the ground inside the yard intact, though it is melting out. But there are no footprints. No sign of Mom at all.

"Can I help you?", a fat tub of shit emerges from the house, balding and dressed in a stained tshirt, worn transparent at the gut. Now, he's an appropriate match for Danielle. Probably would get drunk and beat her as often as she needs too.

"No, no sir, I'd never ask that of you.", I change course, and stride across the lawn and up his stairs, greeting him with a handshake and a card. "I'm City Councilman Kai Anderson. And my question
would be, is there anything I can help you with? I ran on a platform of making America truly great; greater than it's ever been. Safer. More prosperous. In short, sir, more American. Are you enjoying the plastic straws, free of charge, and freely given in our great city? That's my doing. And we plan to do so much more when I get to The Senate."

His hand is calloused and sticky. There's hand sanitizer in the car. I can't wait not to need these plebs and their votes. I can't wait to get away. I hope he's got nothing to add.

"Oh, you're that asshole.", he withdraws, pulling back his soiled hand. "Mother Earth is a flat-chested bitch. Only so much She can endure before it tips over and spills us all off.", he says, pointing to a shitty grey Honda Civic backed onto the lawn. It has a huge cube on top; a picture of the globe with the word "FAKE" printed in red over top it. Dry erase spells out "Flat Earth Truths" on the back window.

A flat-earther. I'm sure I could flip this guy. I'm just not sure I want him. Shrugz. Even an easy environmentalist is just too tedious to bother with, particularly one with such poor hygiene.

"Well, I hope you'll at least consider giving me your vote when I'm running for Senate, against some foreign invader from half way across the plane. Women with death wishes, who bow first before Sharia Law, should never be trusted to have their finger on the button. Imagine the catastrophic implications of a nuclear blast this close to the western edge of existence?", I say, retreating down the stairs, glad I left the keys in the ignition and the car running for a hasty get away.

"It's a disc, asshole.", he spits at me menacingly. "Not a 'plane'."

I don't respond.

The pavement moves beneath my feet, and I've forgotten him and his meaningless vote by the time I'm slamming the car door behind me.

I check my phone. It's getting late. I gotta get back. There's only one person I can tell that I saw Mom. Winter.

When I swing open the door to Bovine Domination, it smells delicious. These Doubter Cookies are practically going to eat themselves.

Winter is nowhere to be seen, but no sooner than I can throw the car keys back onto the bar, Speed is by my side.

"Divine Ruler, I think you might need to check on your sister. She's in the ladies room, with the door locked. I tried to get Ivy in there with her, but she wouldn't let her in. I'm sorry. I tried to get her to slow down.", he grovels apologetically.

"That's fine, Speed Wagon.", I assure him. "I know how girls are."

I'd give him shit for not making her listen. But I need him for the mission tonight.

When I get to the door of the ladies' room, the music sounds muffled and far away, as though it's playing under water. I can hear her sobs, unstifflled, from beyond the locked door.

I rap the door softly with the back of my hand.

"It's Kai, Winter. Let me in, okay?"

Silence.
"I'm not mad at you. I just want to make sure you're okay, alright? Just open up the door."

Nothing.

"Winter, I think I saw Mom.", I whisper against the crack of the door.

Moments later, the shuffling and scrambling of feet on the other side of the door gives way to the click of a lock. Winter pushes the door open a crack, and I slip inside, locking the door behind us.

"What did you say?", she asks, her painted face grave and streaked in tears, eyes staring into mine in the ghastly light.

"I saw Mom.", I repeat.

"Did you see her looking in the window?", she asks breathlessly. "Did she talk to you?"

"What are you talking about?", I ask, holding her, searching her face. Winter is a scamp. She's always loved pulling a prank. But I don't think she's punking me.

"She was here. I saw her. She was looking in the window, right at me.", Winter shivers. "I got too scared, Kai. I came in here to hide. She's dead, right?"

Her make up is going to ruin my clothes, but I don't care. As she slumps down to the floor, I sit first to cushion her fall, and hold her, weeping, against my chest. It's a long time since she's trusted me, cleaved to me. The mortal chill of nostalgia washes over me.

We used to sit in the dark, down in the basement. Mom and Dad would fight upstairs; his hard words, pummeling her like fists, and her hushed apologies, hissed out in righteous indignation. Winter and I were overgrown children, paths cleared ahead of us. It didn't matter. Shit still sucked. But not when we were together. I remember the time, looking over and seeing her face in the light of the laptop screen, lit up in a dark place. I'd squirmed under the weight of my own feels for her. She was my sister. But she was pretty, and she was my best friend. We never ran out of things to talk about. She was the only person on the planet who'd ever admired me, long before anyone else had. We were Octavia and Octavian. But now I'm Caesar Augustus. She'll always be sacrosanctitas.

"She's definitely dead.", I reassure Winter gently. "But I didn't see her here. I saw her out in the Avenues; I was just taking a drive, clearing my head for tonight. I tried to follow her, but she ran. She wouldn't talk to me. What was she wearing, when you saw her, I mean? Could you see?"

Winter sniffs, looks up at me suspiciously. "That ratchet Columbia microfiber abomination she wouldn't give up...", she says slowly, "Why?"

"That's what she had on when I saw her too."

"Folie a deux.", she mutters. "She hated Halloween because Dad made her hand out pencils and erasers instead of candy. All she wanted was to see a bunch of cute kids in costumes. No one ever bothered with our house. We're both just thinking about her today, that's all. I'm fucking blotto. You're high."

Winter's mind can't handle anything more. Some people need a world with a continuous, unbroken surface. She's never wanted there to be anything underneath; worshiped at the altar of popular culture. I don't believe in a thing but myself. So it's all easy for me, when I dream a head rolling down Manitoba Street West in a city I've never seen, or I see Mom walking around a few hours after I sat with her decayed body. Wrapping my arms around Winter more tightly, she sinks into me. I don't breathe. I don't need to.
"Besides... ", she sobs with embarrassment, "I kissed Speed. I liked it and I don't know why. A man?! And a fucking PIG?! You're not going to kill him, are you? Please?"

Stroking her hair, careful not to mess up her flower crown and shit, I console her, "No. Of course not. It's cool. Make his day if you want; I need him confident and invincible tonight." He is my Agrippa after all. "I'm sure you're right about Mom. I've been crushing Vitamin A all day. Fuck it, right, sis? Why don't we just forget it and have fun?"

"Yeah. Whatever.", she sighs, withdrawing form my grasp as she stands, lit from behind in ugly fake light. "You coming?", she asks, offering her hand.

"Yeah. I gotta try one of everything Mac made so I can tell her once I get back with her.", I confess nonchalantly, in a strange mood. "She loves compliments on her doll skill."

"I knew this was all a show.", she shrugs. "Don't worry; I won't tell her."

"Have you had her yet?", I ask suddenly. I'm in a strange mood. I know this won't go where I want, but I have to try anyway.

Winter looks scared, even through her painted on sugar skull. Her eyes dart, and she tries to slip around me and out the door, but I block her exit.

"No. Of course not, Kai.", she finally answers, defeated, stuck toe to toe with me.

"But you want to, don't you?", even as I ask, I'm at war with myself. Mein Kampf. My struggle. I love Winter. But she's always been fun to fuck with. And I like hearing about this.

"Kai, let me go... I don't want to talk like this.", she tries again to get past.

I grab her pinkie in mine. She's conditioned, Pavlovian style. She just freezes.

"Do you touch her while she's sleeping? I used to."

"No. I'd never do that to her.", Winter struggles out. It's the truth. I'm bored. I want to draw blood. I want to know her again.

"I heard you last night.", I say bluntly, as she recoils from the truth. I don't break eye contact. We're just having fun. I don't know why she's being so difficult. "What were you dreaming about?"

Her eyes blaze with fire. She's angry. Indignant. "Shut the fuck up, Kai. You know or you wouldn't be asking. Can't you ever just be a human being for more than five minutes at a time? I'm leaving."

But she isn't. She doesn't even try.

"C'mon, Winter. What was it? Were you dreaming about getting up on top of her and doing all the things I do to her?"

She's drunk. She slurs and spits in my face a little when she finally answers.

"You don't even do anything to her that you'd need to be on top for.", her eyes flash with contained rage struck against a flint. "Me and Speed were doing her how you never have. She fucking loved it."

I let her pinkie go. Gently. No rush, no pull away. No lingering longer than needed either.

"Well, good.", I tell Winter, huge grin on, letting her past me to the door. "I'd hope you wouldn't
dream about hurting a friend. A sister. I'm glad she enjoyed it... In your dream."

She fumbles with the lock on the heavy bathroom door before she gets away. But when the slab swings back the other way, and I'm left behind, nothing feels as good as how I'd planned. I'm isolated and ostracized for all my sacrifice, left all alone on the summit. My success and achievements feel like cold comfort, standing alone, in the ladies' john, unsatisfied and abandoned. There are eight stalls in here. Eight of them. And baskets of complimentary chick shit beside the sinks on the granite counters. The men's room has one stall, and two urinals, and those two dykes can't even be bothered to keep them full of ice.

The false glare of high efficiency, environmentally friendly light bulbs bores behind my optic nerve. So much work left in this world to do. Winter doesn't want to play nice with me like she used to, fine. Just proves I'm doing something right. Before I walk out to face my followers, acting out the empty pantomime of their shadowbox lives, I chew another fistful of Adderall. I need to be prepared for the responsibility of giving all their lives meaning.

I leave. I leave the lights on. Kek.

The restaurant is growing dark, only lit by dimmed yellow light, and filled with seeping shadow. Ivy sits at the bar, slumped, and drinking. She's on her cell phone, tone hushed, but clearly having a fight with Ally, who didn't show. I've been sick of that wet blanket for ages anyway.

A few of Winter's old friends from high school showed up. I told her that was okay; she wanted a party and I wanted to give her a big, beautiful one. They'll have to go before the boys and I get ready for tonight, of course. She's not paying any attention to them anyway; Winter is draped all over Speed Wagon, dancing to Sally's Song. He's still rubbing her back, stroking her hair, like she needs comforting, even though I can hear her explosions of giggles from across the room. She'll be ralphing and I'll be holding back her hair within the hour. I know my sister. Her gaggle of thot police aren't paying attention to her either. Even the short haired retro hipster skank with the the women's studies degree in the making, who mocked my blue hair, is making out in the corner of the room with Gutterball. Dressed up as Ruth Bader Ginsberg, and dry humping the guy who routinely spanks it to Handmaid's Tale. Yeah, keep speaking truth to power, bitch, and putting out for any male chauvinist who will lie to you. I smile to myself; this is all going to be so much easier than I ever think it will. I barely need to try to dominate the world. These sucker plebians dominate themselves.

Another big orange pill grinds between my molars. I don't even think about it anymore. It just happens. Then I get to feel small, from high up above. I'm so far away. I watch them all, towering and drawn inside myself.

Winter's finger tips slowly drop down Speed's back. He pushes her hair gently from her shoulder, and leans down to whisper something to her; some fuzzy reassurance, no doubt. It's just a cover for an opportunity. He lets his lips graze the soft white skin beneath her ear. I see the faint shudder of arousal as it rattles through her. She likes to be touched like that. That's why she prefers girls. She puts that out of her head though, and I see the way her body leans in against him, touching him, her hips tilted towards his. His neck flushes red. Neither of them have felt the relief of friction leading to climax in months. She wants Mac more; hell, he probably does too. But they're drunk, their blood hot and minds clouded and scattered. Winter pulls his body closer against hers. His lips part, as his hands stray from her waist to her hips. They want to fuck so bad.

I'm jealous. She always flirted with the notion that she wanted it to be me. Brief moments where her wires would cross, and her love for me as a brother would fade into the background of her love for me as a man. After I liberated Judgement House. I was her hero, and she'd have moments when I could feel her body telling her to throw her laurels at my feet. How could any man ever rival me, her
My thoughts for her are like smoke drawn to a cracked window; she sucks them out of me with some invisible power. Emulex and assault rifles are exciting, but nothing like a good clown kill followed by hours of edging with Moon Girl. I miss the simple days, when it was all the foreplay of executing my political rivals, and then taking her home to taste the violence, and Faygo and Goldschlager on her lips, her words all doomsday and prophesy, dripping in the forbidden sex of snakes and pits and paradise. No one else can get me hard. I tried to go down on her in my mask, but the rubber dicks kept bending, couldn't make it past her skin tight pussy. Fuck, Mac. But the time isn't at hand. Mac, my Vestal Virgin, will have to wait for me to take her and deflower her on the altar she serves at. I have important work to do first.

"Alright, skanks, get out!", I bellow, jumping from my bar stool, and clapping my hands loudly above my head. "It's time for the campaign to get to work, boys! Usher the skirts out, would you?"

By the time I've strode to the center of the floor, the chicks have left amid plenty of jeers and eye-rolling. Important thing is, they've left. Winter is pissed. I don't know if it's because I threw her #braindeathsquad out, or if it's because I interrupted her getting off against Speed's dick through her skirt while she was pretending to dance. In rebellion, she tosses back another Everdrear.

Winter could do a lot worse than Speed Wagon. The instant the door closes behind the last of the woke trollops, he rallies the troops.

"Okay, gather round, boys. Anyone not clear on the plan tonight?", he speaks with authority, and they assemble as if by my own hand, in rank and file, before me.

"Girls, go do something in the kitchen. I'm sure you two have things to discuss.", I wave Ivy and my sister away.

My blueshirts know the plan, and stand in stiff readiness, as I walk up and down between their formation. Eyes fixed and determined, they support me, and my cause.

"Alright, boys.", I address them from the head of the room, "Tonight, we step into the very belly of the beast, the fortress of our enemy. This is more than taking back our country from the Kebab Jihad. This is more than taking back our immigration policies from the bleeding heart Kennedys. This is even something more than taking back our balls from the rough, unmanicured hands of the feminazi. This is about life versus death. This is about good and evil."

The boys are solemn. They're ready.

"Tonight we make a real difference, at our own peril. We don't know what we will encounter in a mosque, what degeneracy and deviance lay in wait for us. So when we go in, we do so carefully. We're quiet. We don't make any contact, verbal or even eye contact, with one another, lest we be discovered. Become one with the Death Cult. Imagine yourselves, each and every one, with a reeking beard of pubes, dwelling like a soulless kebab, filthy in some spider hole in Syria or Iran, unable to tell the direction of the Satanic Cube you pray to, just wiping your own ass with your bare left hand, day after day, while you relentlessly shit from the fermented camel jizz you suck back, direct from the source, as your only dismal third world nourishment. Project what you know about them. Become Muslim. Join the cult, for a short time, no matter how distasteful this is to you. These
are the sacrifices we make, for all legitimate civilization."

The boys cheer, and I feel my words take root in their very souls, as they chant, "Sir, yes, sir!", stamping their alt right boots in unison.

I finally smile.

"Alright. Excellent, men. Tonight, we hand out some cookies!"

Joined in solitary focus, we retreat to the store room, changing into our bedsheets; cotton, dress-like garments of a culture too stupid to use, let alone invent, a zipper. All the boys wear beanies crocheted by Sewing Machine's grandma. But I have a PLO Arafat-style tea towel/extension cord apparatus, in order to conceal my blue hair. Besides, I'm the ruler. I should have the Sheikh's outfit. Despite our superior high arched feet, we all slide them into slapshod leather sandals like flatfooted primitive savages.

Ivy has resentfully wrapped all the Doubter Cookies individually in Saran Wrap printed with tiny black bats, and put them in cardboard boxes lined up on the bar. I'd love to rattle her cage one more time, but the cars are parked out front. Worse comes to worse, I'm not being impeached over a cookie. I'll throw her under the bus; she was the caterer. I didn't know what was in the cookies we used, just trying to open a dialogue and bridge the gap and all that bullshit I'll say we were doing.

"Boys, line up and grab a box. Pack them in the G Wagon. We're going to be piled in like a car full of clowns, but so be it.", Speed Wagon barks with a self satisfied smirk. Letting him feel up my sister was a great idea; he feels bulletproof, just how I wanted him tonight.

The drive to the mosque is quiet. Speed Wagon drives alone in Mac's car; the trunk and backseat loaded with semi automatics and explosives, covered over with the emergency blankets I found balled up in a corner of the trunk. I'd prefer the dignity of my own bucket seat, but instead I'm crammed on the benches with the troops. They might need some last minute rallying. Not to mention the fact that Pontiac is going to blow like an Ariana Grande concert if Speed hits the big pot hole on 14th. I'm far too important to risk.

Gutterball's elbow digs into my ribs, and his knee is bouncing under his Sunni skirt to Lebanese Blonde banging over the stereo. Good song. A little on the nose... Annoying ginger fuck. Sit fucking still. I tamp down my urge to grab him by the he-hajib and bash his head backwards into the window. The bleak grey streets teem with kids in licensed nylon smocks, bought hurriedly by their panicked single mothers, too busy on Pinterest to remember their offspring's big night until the last minute, when they drag them, desperate to Party City, to snatch up the least desirable color of My Little Pony or Power Ranger. Life set against death; the endless parade of children in masquerade, with the cold barren bones of the trees behind them like the Grim Reaper, scythe raised in the dark. Light emblazoned on dark, like a Jolly Roger.

When we pull into the mosque parking lot, and Tripod switches off the ignition, we all feel the solemn sense of purpose and duty. We've got the cookies, now all we've got to do is wait for Speed to get here with the guns.

"What'd you do, stop for tendies?", I ask him under my breath, when he's finally arrived, and the boys are crammed in around the Grand Am, arming themselves for the first real battle of the noble war. These bro-burkas really are the perfect thing for terrorism; so forgiving of a hidden weapon or pound of plastic explosive. We have only one Uzi. That bitch is mine, because I'm the only guy here who can define irony. I stuff it down my pants along with a roll of duct tape.

"We'll come back for the Doubter Cookies once we've neutralized the enemy.", I tell the huddle of
men. "Now, just be careful in the belly of The Beast. Don't let on we know each other; we don't want to raise suspicion of our association. Men with blue eyes, keep them down and don't draw attention. Space out. Now does everyone have their magic carpet to ride while we face the Farce of the Covenant?"

"Yes sir.", their chorus rings out against the cold pavement in an Aryan twang.

"Alright.", I say, leading them to the much grander, wider, and more ornate men's front entrance. One thing these filthy goat roasting heathens got right; they don't bother wasting a double door or an awning on the women. They probably pass them through a wife-beating machine on the way in, just like sheep through a dip. "Just blend in. Don't forget your 'Aloha Mars Bars', or your 'Salami, I like 'ems'. Just respond in kind until we act."

We've trained. We know all the behaviors of these animals. We take our muddy mudslime slippers off. We've all drilled making the 'lalalalala' sound in case they're celebrating the San Bernardino Chirstmas massacre, or the turning of fruits into vegetables at the nightclub shooting in Miami. So far though, it's going according to plan. All is relatively quiet, and the boys have all more or less remembered their lines when we all roll out our Persian piss rugs and assume the ass fucking pose of submission, facing their Satanic Cube. None of us pray. I use this time to shoot a dirty look over at Jelly Salad. Thank goodness it went undetected, but he flubbed his line earlier, greeting someone with, "Oahu crow bar."

We've carefully staggered ourselves among them, like a checkerboard. And when they've almost reached the height of lathered up terrorist fanatical climax, we strike. Every one of my men leaps to his feat, planting the barrel of his AR in the brainlet stem of the infidel against the West next to him. The kebabs curse and spit, but they're powerless. They're quickly neutralized with our rolls of duct tape. Another of Mac's ideas; it's all that 3M prom dress duct tape and shit. Printed with Barbie logos, Disney Princesses, LOLs and OMGs, and unicorns and kittens and doughnuts, in shades of pink and glitter purple. She even threw in some rolls of pastel LGBTQ rainbow pride shit. Emasculated faggots. And their beards will be ruined. Kek. This marvelous event will need to be immortalized in some Moon Man songs. No doubt YouTube will take them all down. But our glorious narcocorridos will live on forever on archive.com, so fuck it, Mac, lay down some tracks, my fierce text-to-speech valkyrie.

While they make love to their doormats, wriggling helpless, like turtles on their backs, hogtied, I remind the boys, "Make sure you tape their mouths well. I won't abide one more word of blasphemy against America while we're here." The grunts stay behind to reinforce the gags.

My corps of most loyal and experienced soldiers conduct a recon and search mission. Personally, I'm pleasantly surprised, when in the basement, we uncover a massive arsenal of Russian AKs, pressure cookers prepacked with heavy duty 3 inch nails, and 12 packs of halal certified Oscar Meyers wired up inside ScotteVests, fixed with timers, and ready to fail. Ambition without a white man's intellect is dead. I think The Bible says something like that. Maybe it was faith without works. Whatever.

"Shit. If I'd have known they had all these guns, I wouldn't have wasted the resources on our ARs.", Tripod exhales.

"ARs are never a waste.", Speed comes up behind me, inspecting one of the WWII-era guns. "An AR is accurate. These are a total spray and pray."

I shrug. "Yeah. But the ARs jam."

"Exactly.", Speed grins. "So we cover all our bases, half of them five finger discount. What do you
say, Kai? Take weapons out of the hands of the terrorists?"

I consider it. AKs are fun. Mac likes them. Better in the cold, she says. No one knows cold like Saskatchewan and Siberia. But this could be a bigger win than I thought. Maybe a call to the fuzz on our way out would be the way to go. They could seize and destroy the weapons. A few less guns for us to deal with when we take over this continents. I'm all about the NRA and the second amendment for now. In the end, I want to choose every hand that holds a gun myself.

"No. We call it in to the police anonymously, of course, when the mission is completed. These pieces of shit are cheap like borscht, anyway.", I tell him, toeing one with my sock foot, and add under my breath, "But smuggle one out under your HEjib, would you? Pick the best one."

"Okay, boys, move out. Let's bring in the Doubter Cookies and turn some porch lights on. Time to 'CAIR'. Let's do some community outreach and put a big, shiny happy face on this death cult!", I order the grunts out to the parking lot, take another Adderall. "Set up on the front steps. We don't want anyone getting inside. Hold a tight line, and lock all the other doors and barricade them, in case we get any Sudanese stragglers shuffling in late for this Brown Mass abomination."

Never underestimate the appeal of young, dimpled male faces to single moms, or the perceived safety of taking candy from a well lit stranger, standing officially behind a folding table. The Doubter Cookies hand themselves out, as a steady flow of chubby young divorcees and teen mothers file past to try their hands at flirting demurely enough for men who would fly them back to their country of origin, douse them in leaded gasoline, and set them ablaze in a heartbeat for their promiscuity. Dumb chicks. Their kids will be up shitting loose misbaha beads all night long. And I'll be sponsoring a bill to strip the citizenship of any American who converts to this "religion of peace". All these doubters better enjoy their cookies now, before their lardy arses are on a boat to Liberia. Better yet, I Make NASA Great Again, and mine is the face that launched a thousand fat chicks who converted to Islam for a man into space. Great King, Divine Ruler, and Kebab Removalist, Kai Anderson, first of his name, at your service, mankind. MANkind.

"It's the birthrates, it's the birthrates, it's the birthrates.", I smile, throwing a cookie in the plastic pumpkin bucket of some overgrown mixed race mongrel in a knock off Mulan dress, followed by her mail order momma and some fat balding fuck who won't let his jungle gook out without a short leash. We've got to breed Mac and Winter.

"Why won't somebody do something?"

"I will be forgotten quickly. Which I do not mind."

"Very interesting video. Only for Muslims. Do not redistribute."

"Compliments will get you nowhere."

The boys rattle off cryptic half wisdom, as instructed. It will somehow be memed into existence.

"For Ebba Akerlund. Young, innocent and dead Ebba.", Speed Wagon says gravely under his breath, dropping a cookie into the Ninja Turtle pillowcases of two twin boys, dressed as said turtles.

I notice a skinny little golden haired girl walking up all alone, from the far edge of the parking lot, dressed in a hastily thrown together astronaut costume; second hand grey boy's snowsuit too short for her long legs, and an old red metal flake motorcycle helmet. As she walks under a street light, it pops, and fizzes out to dark. Her eyes are sad and deep, the furthest thing from empty or hollow. They hold more knowledge than they should. I watch as Speed Wagon smiles and tells her he loves her Super Dave costume, and puts a cookie in her hand. But as she walks past me to leave, I stop her
with a hand on her shoulder, planning to take her cookie back. She's no doubter.

"The night is dark and full of terrorists.", she says unsolicited, handing the cookie back to me with quiet authority, and walking away.

I shiver in the moist fall air, and watch her disappear into the darkness that seems to close in around her like a shroud, while snow begins to fall.

Some fat kid with a crusted up pig nose and a huge gap in his front teeth is all of a sudden in front of me, hand out, yelling, "Trick or Treat, Mohammad. Hurry. Mom says I have to be home by nine."

"Yeah. Sure.", I say absently, dropping a couple cookies in the little shit's bag. "Subscribe to PewDiePie."
Deny Deny Deny

Chapter Summary

Exploring all angles of denial. Winter, Kai, Mac, Speed Wagon and even Killerwhaletank all are denied something, deny someone something, or live in denial of something. And there's a perspective, painfully missing, so the rest of us faithful cult members are denied a piece of this story too. I hope you guys forgive this; I miss Mac in this one too. But we're all part of the cult now...

A PSA from Moon Girl:

Don't forget to keep Trudeau in blackface, folks. Vote PPC. May Chey Craik reign for 1000 years. Do Mac proud on Election Day, Canada. Rock the vote, Moose Jaw.

Winter

... still insist that the contaminated cookies handed out late Halloween night were the act of a group of armed gunmen dressed in traditional garb, who took over the mosque by force. But police say there is no evidence of this, and that the fingerprints of many of the defendants were found on the enormous stash of automatic weapons and explosives found in the mosque's basement.

Brookfield Heights city councilman, Kai Anderson, defacto Mayor of the small Michigan suburb, was at the arraignment, stumping for his Senate bid, and calling for comprehensive immigration reform, in light of these charges, laid so close to home...

"The non-thinking looney left NPCs will repeat the same tired canned lines: 'Selective immigration and travel bans are Islamophobia, tantamount to racism.' But Islam is not a race. It is a choice. It is a choice, folks. A choice like what car you drive. A choice like what you eat for dinner. A choice, like robbing a bank, or pedophilia. It is a choice, people. An anti-American, anti-Christian, Antichrist, anti-choice. It is a pro-death, anti-life choice that flies in the face of the American ideal, and our national character, and is an act of boldfaced treason.

The attack on the children of America, that occurred in my own backyard, on Halloween night, will not be allowed to stand. Not as long as I do. See, folks, after surviving the cowardly attempt on my own life last year, having had a brush with death, I say, 'Never Again'. Never again will I stand by and see death crammed down American throats. Death is a choice, and we do not accept it. Life, however, is not a choice. Life is given and ordained. And Islam, along with the malignant religion of leftistm, are the religion and culture of death. It goes against the very inalienable right to life that all Americans innately have. Life is not a choice. Life is a right. And never again will we accept anti-life, pro-death zealotry in my America."

The prosecution was also quick to point out today the unlikelyhood of a false flag accusation, when an electronic trail has already been uncovered on the devices of the mosque elders, demonstrating that the mosque was being used to funnel money to foreign state sponsors of terror. Transactions proving the purchase of the weapons was also uncovered in the search.
Flipping the tv off, I can feel Kai behind me, grinning. He never misses his own coverage.

"Get your cell phone video of that one?", I ask over my shoulder, turning just in time to watch him slip it into his front pocket.

No shocker. He never misses one of his own performances, and he's probably got them all hearted in his faves besides.

I'd have flipped that shit off, if it wasn't for Mac. She likes to hear what's happening in the world.

She's locked in Beverly's closet. Doin' time. Really, I guess it's more a water closet. Tiny bathroom off the living room that my folks dry walled over, rather than redo, because it was just so completely messed beyond redemption, before Kai opened up access to the door again. The toilet's on a plywood platform, and the bathtub is concrete. Mac drinks the hard, lead tainted water straight from the tap, sleeps in the tub under The Connor's old afghan. Once in a while, I sneak her something to eat, if I can get at the key. We can't talk unless the house is empty, so I try to leave the television on for her as much as possible.

She feels far away, lost in another dimension, not gone, but somehow forgotten. Aggravating vigor used to pulse from her, like an alien transmission, travelling across galaxies. Union Jackboots. Jutting hipbones and jaw, filled with her alt-self-righteousness. Queen of the meme, edgelark, my eternal rival for the best half grunge gothlic egirl OOTD. The hair she used to toss, shorn. Pinkies gone. Now she's just another body rotting behind a locked door, and every day that passes, I forget a little more the graze of her fingers adjusting my hair behind an ear, or the throbbing warmth of her ignoring me in bed at night. Every day, she fades, a ghost to most, while Speed Wagon's side glances turn from menace to stolen moments of tenderness, and hating myself, I return them eagerly with a shy smile.

Ok. So fine. Not that shy. Whatever. Still, I'm the only one who can advocate for her with Kai. Speed tried, and lost his PlayStation privileges for a month, and became Tendie Non Grata for a whole month.

I hop off the couch and trail after my brother down the hall.

"Kai, wait."

"What is it, Winter?", he exhales, turning officiously on a heel. "We're unplugging the freezers in the halal section of Whole Foods today. I'm a very busy man."

Tamping rage... loading submission.

"I know.", I patronize, pulling him by the arm inside my room. "It's just I was thinking that Mac's been in the closet for weeks. It's almost December. Don't you think maybe it's time to offer clemency, or some shit? You didn't like that cat either, Kai.", I add under my breath, taking his pinkie in mine. "And how she said he must have slipped out when Mom left? We both saw her too. How could she just be making that up? She's a lot of things, but not a liar, Kai."

Shutting my door, he hushes me with a finger to my lips.

"Don't talk about seeing Mom.", he cautions. "And no, Mac's not a liar. And I hate cats. I think they suck.", he whispers. "It probably just got out, just like she said. But I can't very well blame that shit on a ghost, can I? Danielle is already asking to meet the 'rents. I told her they live out of state. I can't
let Mac off the hook with that excuse. Especially not after the stunt you brats pulled with the lilies the week before."

"But it's not fair...", I trail off feebly, smiling with the recollection. Mac and I tried the week before Halloween to poison Crackers and Cheese with a day lily. Cats are so retarded. The first thing he did was coat his ugly muzzle in pollen. But Danielle got to him right away and thought it was Cheeto dust, and licked it off him, one can only assume, because the little fucker's kidneys were still guns blazing into the next week, and he sure as shit didn't die instantly, as promised. But I can see already that Pharaoh's heart remains hardened against #myperson.

"Who ever said anything about 'fair'? Your socialist is showing.", Kai seems to threaten me, crowding my face. "You know 'fair' isn't even a concept that Mac understands; not even a concept she'd agree with. Bad things happen to good people all the time. Look at what's happening to Milo Yiannopoulos. Mac's a soldier. That's why I love her.", the words ring off every brittle surface in the house. "Doesn't she always say something about rain and the unjust? Look, Winter, this is for the cause. Danielle is almost groomed to infiltrate The Islamic Center of America. I'm not fucking it up now. Not when we're so close to making a case for total immigration reform. Mac wouldn't want to come out of her exile now if she knew what was at stake. I'm sorry, Winter, but you'll have to content yourself with a few more fingerblasts from Speed Wagon while Mac serves her ruler and her cause."

My face bears a singe of fire. I don't know if it's humiliation or anger. Tears sting my eyes. He's the one who cut her fingers off, and he has the gall to act like I'm disloyal?

"I'm sorry, Winter.", he relents gently, retreating from my space onto a squeaky board in the floor. "But there's no way she's out of there before next week."

November has been cold. The sun doesn't shine, doesn't rise, doesn't set. Doesn't exist here. Somewhere, far above us, it raises the polluted waters in a bubbling steam, and clouds the sky between all warmth and light, and grim, harsh humanity. Pieces of the hideous black squalling waters fall from the sky, disguised in white. But it's so gross. I mean, I like fall. Fall. But not winter. Imagine that; sounds so pathetically self loathing. But it's shit weather for dresses. It's been wet too. The snows are all heavy and moist, you can't walk through without your shoes and socks ending up totally soaking. Wettest we've seen...

I find myself on my bed, dress hiked up, mindlessly humping the shit out of my oversized bolster. Wet. Bored...

I try not to think of the drive home from Publix on Monday. Speed drove me in the G Wagon, let me sit up front. His hands are big; fingers long, with smooth, well-manicured rounded nails. I don't know why I did it, but I definitely knew what would happen when I laid my head casually against his square shoulder. We never made eye contact, and I stared up into the dense grey above to avoid the flash of the passing black shadows of the leafless trees strobing past in the dull glare, as we drove listening to The Virgin Suicides soundtrack. He's so fucking old. Like 34, probably. It's aged well though, and so has he. So I held his hand again, when it slipped into mine. Ran my finger tips gently over his. Dim, lifeless days and lonely nights melted. Normal. Sophomoric. IDK, IDC. The weight of the pulsing ball of rage I've carried since the night of November 8 just sank, like a snake swallowing an egg whole, dragging the blackout blinders from my eyes; I just want to feel love again. Not the one sided, unrequited love I've been laboring beneath, but the warm comfort of someone loving me. Because where is Kai's love? I don't feel it anymore. Mac's just too far away, in a locked room she'll never get out of.

"Winter...", he wheezed, "...don't play with me. I love you. It's all I have left."
He sounded agonized. I thought he was too stupid to really feel anything. Turns out humanity hides behind macho, just the same as it hides behind sardonic prickles and a resting bitch face.

"None of us have anything. We aren't allowed to.", I breathe sadly, placing his hand on the inside of my thigh. One of his fingers toys with the microfishnet and slides in, onto the warm flesh of my leg.

"You're wrong. Nobody can take this. We can have this.", he breathed, turning his face down, burying his nose behind my hair, even as he kept his eyes on the road. "It's like Lincoln said. Our destruction can only come from within."

"Don't ruin this with politics.", I snap softly, moving his hand higher. "Just tell me that we're going to be okay, 'k?"

He pulled his hand from mine and threw the wagon into park in on the busted weed-veined concrete lot in front of Borneman & Peterson's. The old brick building is quiet and abandoned on a Sunday.

There's no glamour. I look around me, and take it all in. This is a hard place; grim and bleak. All my life, I'd bemoaned the simple men in reflective blue coveralls, or the fat smiling cashiers, content at their tills, behind sticky conveyor belts. I'd wished to leave behind the dome of heavy grey that fell in around the clusters of unelegant and common trees. Everything here was common and vulgar. Speed was common and vulgar.

I wanted something else.

I could be happy at Vassar. There wasn't anything there that wasn't Instaready. Lake Vassar was placid and calm, the picturesque trees, with bark like fine paper, shaped in the dreamy scallops that children doodle, reflected back without distortion. The history was ironic. The architecture, iconic. It all called for collars and pennyloafers. Or it could have been Berkeley; purple hair and rage in the hot sun, under the date palms. No bra and a thin, golden haired #VSCO girlfriend I never really needed to love in order to have. I'd wanted a life that was a postcard, inscribed with an easy agenda. Something about that always felt safe and glossy, while I could remain uninvested.

But now, in the dim and the silence, I see it differently. There's nothing simple about survival. Some places give you life.  This place demands of you that you cling to it. The place Mac was from fought her for it.

She told me once that here the trees dig deep, roots that can't be ripped from the earth. Mac lived in Georgia for a time; she said there the people lie, and the trees all fall in a light rain, because their lives are too easy. All above, and none below. Now when I look at Speed, he's not common or vulgar. He's baptized in the grime of this place, and his substance, beaten and buffeted, has grown down deep, so he can't be uprooted. His reflection is true; and in it, I see my agendas, laid bare and silly. All those years, chanting "Love is love". I never knew what it meant until this moment. Love isn't a feeling, an image, an agenda. It's an action. One that wearsies, and costs. One that you must toil under, and you only know it was real when you've finally finished the task.

I try to take his hand again, put it between my legs.

"No.", he tells me, "Not like that.", as he lifts me to one of the benches in the back, laying me down under him. "Like this.", he whispers gently in my ear, kissing my neck. His hands do nothing but steady me, stroke my hair, as he lowers himself on top of me.

I should close my eyes when his lips touch mine, but I don't. I can't. I want to see his face; the way his expression softens into this intense sincerity that I feel, like sliding into a warm bath. He's handsome in the soft red light; Kai hung scarlet curtains over the windows, for the lulz. The license
plate reads "Gilead". Joke's on him. It's fucking romantic. I kiss Speed with my whole heart, like it's the very first time.

My hand finds the rough stubble of his chiseled jaw. His kiss tastes like worn out Orbitz, and fresh newsprint. I'm addicted, and hungrily accept his shy, seeking tongue. Desire grips me as he swells hard between my legs. I try to remember that he was a cop. A fascist pig with a big billy club and a warm gun. It was his riot gear against my conscientious objections. I held a daisy, and he, a plexiglass shield and beanbag shotgun. But I can't remember that. His hands are soft, and won't touch me where I most want them to. His kiss is long, un rushed and gentle, without aim. It only makes me want him more.

When I whisper in his ear, "Shane, let's just do it and get it over with.", it sounds far more impatient and unimpassioned than I really mean it. It sounds like it came with an eye roll, though it didn't.

"Okay, Winter. Just not today.", is his answer, unoffended, without prejudice, as his fingers smooth my hair off my face, and he kisses me again. "Let's just keep it in park. What's the rush?"

"Ahh, Shane...", slips past my lips as I muffle my face hard into a pillow on my bed. I've come to him, like, ten times this week already. Who knew abstinence, or rejection, or aw shucks Midwestern virtue, or whatever shit that was, could be so hot.

I roll over staring up at the ceiling to catch my breath, remembering. He did nothing but kiss me as he held me through my clothes. He kept saying "I love you."

Eyes blink shut, and my hands find their way to clasp over my heart. Ugh, horrid. Disgusted with myself, I shake them free, and get up. Happy, satisfied women with loving boyfriends are never going to defeat Drumpf in 2020. I have to get over this, or all I'll have achieved by then is some shit like knowing how to make Snickers caramel apple salad. Repeat the mantra, Winter... nastywomannastywomannastywoman.

The house is quiet when I leave my room. Kai's door is closed.

I chose my silent steps carefully, picking my path down the hall. When I reach the living room, I pull back one curtain quietly and look out at the abandoned afternoon.

It's as I suspected. Fucking Danielle's car is parked on the street in front of the house. To her great displeasure, Kai has always had an excuse for her why Mac's car remains parked in the yard by the side door. The out of country plates are too conspicuous. It's not insured. It's fucking pink. It's a 1987 shitbox. The boys use it for the least savory of the garbage on litter runs. The fact is, like, 90, he's the person who drives it, and I don't think he wants to give her spot away. Not only that; it's classic narcissist triangulation strangulation. I've been involved in enough of Kai's threesomes to see through it.

I let the drapes fall shut again, and slide between the couch and wall, down to sit on the floor next to Mac's door, before my eyes even have the chance to adjust to the dimness.

I barely rap with the back of my hand against the soft mahogany door, "Mac?", before she answers.

"Hi Winter. I missed you yesterday.", she whispers. "Thanks for leaving the tv on for me. Can you remind Kai that he needs to start calling 'The Squad' 'The Death Squad' instead? It's going to meme well. He's good at making an occasion; I know he can find an opportunity to slip it in."

She's excited. Mac really believes Kai is doing all of this for her cause. I almost feel guilty now for leaving the tv on, because I feel partly responsible for feeding her hope. It's only going to get her
hurt. From now on, it's Teen Mom or maybe even The Handmaid's Tale. I know she'll think it's stupid, but who knows, maybe the Canadian thing will somehow whisper to her in her own strange tongues.

"#ourbased are ready for more too. I feel it. Once even Tucker Carlson has stopped talking about illegal immigration and is starting to see that the real problem are the criteria upon which legal immigrants are accepted? We can start trusting the faithful with more. We need to start calling the plebs what they really are: Philistines.", she goes on. "Do you think you could remind him to point out that if Rashida Tlaib lived in any of the Muslim countries she lauds, she'd be stoned for her language, if not her mode of dress first? And what about the Somali journalist from Canada who just wound up dead moving back there to write about how great--"

"Mac...", I cut her off. I mean, I feel sorry for her, but I'm not really interested in her /pol/ shit. It's not even good for her at this point. I think she's losing it in there."... how are you doing?"

"Oh, pretty good.", she answers back. "Can I get some more Twinkies? Those things last forever."

Mac begrudgingly likes gauche, very American Twinkies. A carnie fed her one in the desert once, when she was five years old, watching elephants erect a circus tent from the hood of a Lincoln Town Car. She only trots out her precious few happy memories for special occasions, though I suspect she polishes them lovingly during any spare time she gets. So I've heard the tale a couple times. Circuses are gross. Like, club sandwiches, not seals. Shit. Still can't meme.

"Mm, I'll have to go shopping...", my mind wanders. Speed will have to drive me. I'm wearing that kawaii black faux fur hoodie with the tail and ears and a school girl kilt with it. Maybe we'll go park at that machine shop again. "Killerwhaletank ate the last box."

A moment of silent dejection follows. She really wanted those Twinkies.

"All at once?", she asks in disbelief. "That's ok. I'm running out of food in here though. Is there anything else?", she asks.

"Um, not really. Everything is perishable. Kai's been on this kick with health food again. I think he's trying to make her lose weight before he, you know...", I trail off.

"Is it working?", she asks, crestfallen. Crestfallen and hungry.

"No. She just sneaks her own stuff in. Last night it was her Timmie's double double and a family sized bag of Funyuns.", I snicker.

"Ding Dongs?", Mac asks with a suppressed laugh. It's an inside joke. That's what they call those in Canada. "Whoa. Gross. I've had half a Twinkie a day for the past three days, and that still sounds disgusting. But I bet her teeth were clean and shiny after?", she asks sarcastically.

I can't stifle.

"Oh, yeah. Full out fuzzy! And she had those little green stink slivers stuck all along her gumline, and in her tooth cleavage.", I guffaw. "Then she made Kai kiss her!"

"Oh, man. I bet he loved that.", Mac giggles on the other side of the door.

"Yeah. I saw he'd ordered charcoal toothpaste and brushes on Amazon this morning.", I laugh.

"He's almost getting the Howard Hughes vibes. Like I heard him telling the boys to get him Ventolin. He's convinced he can't breathe around her." I can hear her smile behind the door.
"Fatty fungus!", I agree. "Yeah, I've heard his theories. At first I thought it was some kind of cucked up hero worship just because Trump threw Mick Mulvaney out of the room for coughing."

"No. He's gone full germaphobe hypochondriac psychosomatic.", Mac laughs quietly. "Whateva. I respect it. Cleanliness is next to Godliness."

"Ugh.", I groan back. "Just so you know? I'm rolling my eyes. And don't you dare say that to him. That's the last thing he needs to hear."

"It doesn't even mean what people think anyway. It means cleanliness isn't really that important. It's supposed to be warning against pride in deeds.", Mac sighs. "I guess we should be more quiet. She's here."

"I know. They're in Kai's room though."

So much implied there. Mac picks it all up too. She's never been with any man, not even my brother. Now she's shamed and stood in a corner with a dunce cap, and she can't even quite comprehend what he's doing with another woman. She feels left out, and childish. With the childhood she had, there's no worse nostalgia than childish. I run away from the sudden shift in the room.

"Hey, I'll be right back. I'm just going to see what I can find for you in the kitchen. I think there's a box of cereal that the boys wouldn't miss."

"I'd literally kill for some Honey Shreddies!", she calls after me softly.

She knows we don't have those here. Or the Cadbury Caramilk bar she asked for last week. Or Coffee Crisp. Or Nestle Smarties. If Trump wins 2020? This time? I really am moving to Canada. Even if it is just for the food. Galen Weston for Pres... you know, if it can't be Hillary.

Being short so sucks. The cereal is all in the cabinet above the fridge. There's nothing left but half a box of stale Life. As I stand on my tip toes and strain to reach it with the very ends of my fingers, Kai comes up behind me and makes me jump.

"Winter, can you do something for me?", he asks, as I wheel around on my heel, startled, trying to slide the box of cereal behind me onto the counter.

"It's fine.", Kai snaps at me wearily. "What? You think I didn't know you'd feed her? Good. You're feeding her. It's not like I want her to starve. Trust a woman to be completely incapable of understanding the concept of autonomy or delegated authority.", he shakes his head. Asshole.

"Whatever, Kai. What do you want?", I finally ask.

"Oh.", he answers sarcastically under his breath, as he thrusts a brass key into my hand. "You're getting your wish. Get Mac Tonight and take her to your room. And the two of you better be stone silent."

Kai

I looked good on the news. Roots getting a little long, maybe, but with Mac NPC'd, I haven't had anyone to do it for me. Danielle is so old that she suggested I get a Caesar cut. I can't let her near it, and Winter is punishing me. Grown out manbun it is, then.

They'll call me racist, sure. But there's no denying that solidifying my base requires the coalescence of every single issue voter. And there's no denying that anyone who is pro-life can't ignore that we're being overrun by the Islamic Death Cult. Life is life, after all. The key is to make voters understand
the sprawl.

Even the single issue gay rights voters eventually need to be signaled. If Sharia Law takes off like Mentally Ill-hen Omar wants, they'll be stoned in droves and thrown in unmarked mass graves, rather than being able to cherrypick, bully and force Evangelicals to bake their gaudy cock'n'balls three tiered white chocolate and raspberry wedding cakes. Rashida Tlaib will join them there for dressing like a Western slut infidel, and spouting profanity, unaccompanied, in the presence of men. Their labels, so meticulously sewn, crafted from the distillation of so many snowflakes, will ultimately conquer them. One label to rule them all. The man without a label's label.

I took leave of Killerwhaletank to see Shep Smith swallow his tongue after my interview. Too bad he hates me so much. Truth is, that for a fag, I always kind of liked the guy. You gotta have a little respect for a guy who never wears pants under the desk while he films, and somehow got away with running over some loud mouthed female rival for having the gall to park in his spot. Not scared of much. I'll certainly give the aged out old fudgepacker that.

I've taken my time, enjoyed every slow step of solitude down this hallway. But here I am, hand on my own door knob, wishing I could trade places with Mac. I take a deep breath and step inside.

Ugh. Danielle. She's sprawled on my bed, the comforter and sheets askew and tangled, and she's adopted the posture of a helpless beached Orca, motionless, and covered in the crumbs of her day old, humidity ravaged Funyuns. Dressed in nothing but a modal blend nightshirt that says "Merlot can you go" in script, her feeble attempt at passing for the over-the-hill-Real-Housewives-desperately-clawing-at-outdated-millenial-aesthetic, because they're so old that a ten year old trend that's long over still seems new to them. She's braless. Her big greasy tits fall into a mound on the mattress beside her, piled one on top of the other, like sow pieces in a butcher shop. I can see her panties. They're nylon Maidenforms, like my mom used to buy, but discolored to an indistinct shade I'd dub Dirty Elbows, were I on the creative team at Pantone, and stained in the center of the crotch, doubtless from being caught off guard by one of her irregular perimenopausal periods at some point.

But today is the day. She's been pressuring for intimacy, which in her low IQ, completely unimaginative mind, means but one thing: sex. I have to seal this deal, because she's so close to being owned. Then I dispatch her to the Islamic Center of America, and it's a hop, skip and jump to The White House for me, with my gorgeous, based foreign model. Maybe they'll build Mac some crude totem pole like Melania's, only in Moose Jaw, right next to the world's second biggest Moose.

"Hey,", I exhale. "How's my girl doing? Did I hear your phone ring?", I ask, leaning down to kiss her shiny, large pored forehead. She smells stale and rancid like the dirties floor of a commercial laundry.

I know I heard it. Her ringtone is "She Thinks My Tractor's Sexy". Hard to confuse that for anyone else in this house. Why do all old women love Cheese Knees? Don't they realize he's gay?

"Yeah, I have to work tonight, baby.", she blubbers from the sagging mattress.

Perfect. This won't have to take too long. I'm goin' in to. The killer whale tank. The Killerwhaletank. I put on my mask, my regulator...

"Sucks.", I lament, laying down next to her, drawn down into her dip. "I'm going to try to get some work done too, I guess. Rashida Tlaib has the whole squad challenging my senate campaign now. Even the black one who everyone forgets about has been on Twitter calling me a racist. They're all out there shit talking, and name calling, strong and independent. But the moment they're called out on policy, or one of their own quotes, they're nothing but victimized brown women devoid of all agency, and incapable of defending a position.", I sigh dramatically. "But, there's always next time.
Maybe when the Gen Z chicks are coming up, they won't be so bent on this female empowerment career shit...."

I watch her face for the triggered flinch. She hates the idea of losing, stuck at her job, day after day. She's doubled down there; her boyfriend is going to be a senator, and she, the triumphant campaign manager. She only wants to stay on long enough to drop the bomb. But what she's truly terrified of is millennials; we're a strange club of children who all raised ourselves like some nihilistic Cormack McCarthy novel, written three full sized emojis at a time. She'll never understand us, never pass for one of us. The mere mention of a generation younger than all of us is what pushes her ungroomed eyebrows together in a flinch of fraught terror. And she knows those women will get degrees bigger than hers, sit around in groups, giggling and looking her way before she can retire.

"There has to be some way to prove what they're up to.", she stews. "Especially after that stunt they pulled on Halloween with the tainted candy. Those Ganges need to go home and take their turbans with them. What about that idea you had about someone infiltrating their...", she fades into Steve Brule obscurity. She doesn't know the word 'mosque'.

I appreciate her willingness. I'll take it. But I can't believe I have to explain to her once again the difference between a Hindu and Muslim.

"It's haji. Haji. Danielle. Kebab. Mudslime. A Muslim. The Ganges is a disease infested river in India that aging hipsters all went to about ten years ago.", I inform her while stoking her age inferiority complex. She still thinks hipsters are a new thing. "But you're right. The mosque infiltration might still be the best way to expose these creeps. The bust after the incident on Halloween was a start, but what we need is narrative from a real, credible person. I just wish I had someone I could trust to do it."

She trepidatiously avoids my advance. I can see her blackmail; there's but one way to accomplish this.

"So how long until you have to go?", I ask her softly. See, Trump, that's how you pivot.

"Only a couple hours. Nicki's husband picked up a shift, and she couldn't find anyone to watch the brats.", she complains resentfully.

See, I like kids. Not so much Oz anymore. He's a weak one, and not mine anyway. But Mac's not going to have anyone to watch ours either, and we'll have six or seven. Strapping boys, like me. I can feel my heels digging into the ground here. I can feel my resistance to this happening, like a dog straining at a chain, upon the sight of a well aimed shotgun muzzle. Killerwhaletank is a nasty woman, and I don't want to do this. I don't want to have sex with her. My mind and body recoils. Is it a hint of inconvenient loyalty, or just the revulsion at her body and her mind? Maybe just her moustache, thick as a fifteen year old Hutterite boy's.

"Irresponsible.", I force myself to say. "Women with careers shouldn't be so selfish as to have children. Look at the extra burden it places on their coworkers."

Was that undigested roasted colonial white power cauliflower that rose up in my throat when I had to utter that? For the cause, Kai. Only the strong. Only the based. These lies are getting harder and more vile to tell. I wish I could just kill her. But I don't suppose that another irritating nurse, put mercifully down, would get my Moon Girl onto a path to citizenship. Nor would Danielle's carcass, rotting like a beached whale in a Dumpster, defeat The Squad once and for all.

Killerwhaletank kisses me suddenly. An oral assault. Her breath, like cat shit on a Triscuit. Her upper lip, coarse with whiskers. She salivates too much, like that old walrus Sea World quietly disposed of
because it kept spitting on guests. I shut my eyes, and kiss back. Retreating inside my own body, I drive it like a machine, dissociated and cold. I complete the motions. I feel nothing. Competent kiss, varied in intensity, I break contact every so often, and start again, nipping at her lips with mine, and finally sealing my mouth to hers. She is, of course, utterly inept. Her mouth rapes mine, far too eager, and without skill. She mashes her mouth at mine, like an invasive sea lamprey attaches to a walleye. I pay no heed. I can't even feel it. I'm a rat in a wheel, a tiny little person in a captain's chair, hands on the controls of a big machine. I place my hand lightly on her waist, if it can be called that, given that it protrudes beyond her hips, possibly her tits. I wouldn't know. I try not to look at her. At a pace she will deem as appropriate and sensual, I move said hand downwards, to her lumpy hips, and past the hem of her dirty nightshirt, and onto her unshaven thigh.

She thrusts herself at me, no reserve, no artistry. Just lurches at me like a lustful... I try to think of an animal to amuse myself. I can't. She lunges onto me like a sex-starved fat chick. There's no other way to describe it. She's a woman who denies herself nothing. But she's too torpid and slovenly to reach down and take care of herself, so she'll abuse any man who gets within striking distance, and expect him to be solely responsible for settling her orgasm disparity.

Her hand is on my organ. She's got no seduction in her, her grasp rough and desperate. She expects me to do everything. Women are so lazy. We're even supposed to seduce ourselves, and they're never supposed to hear about their own ineptitude. Inside my control room, deep in my brain, I tell my dick to stand. But it doesn't. Women are so lucky they can fake this shit.

I have to take matters into my own hands. I will Danielle out of my bed, her meaty paws off of my soft manhood.

I think about Mac. I think about her big sad grey eyes, how they close under long black eyelashes, her soft lips, pink and nervous, parting for me. She makes me come to her. She makes me kiss her. She's so chaste when she's bad, and I love it. I want to be gentle with her, and I want her to hit me. I think about her, sitting in my lap. She knows I'm hard, but she ignores it, flipping her long blonde hair in my face, laughing at everything I say, before she impulsively kisses my neck gently. She makes me force her hand onto me. She gasps every single time, and I never know if she'll be too shocked to take it away, or too shocked to leave it there. I think about Mac's bare legs, splayed over mine, and her dress hiked up to her hips. I press against her until I feel her warmth seeping into me. She makes me hold onto her razor edged little bones, and show her what to do to me. She's too ashamed to do it herself. I like controlling her, and she loves it too. I make her feel good. Make her. A girl like that. I make her. She slowly gets wet, beyond any of her own control. She feels shy, and hides in her golden hair, like Eve after the fall, as I unzip her dress and watch it fall from her tight, flawless body.

Now I'm hard. I feel my cock obey me, and feel my own body throb to the call of duty.

Danielle won't need warming up. Any foreplay that further loosened her lax tissues would be to her own detriment, and only make my job take longer. Time to LARP.

I pull this loathesome woman's misshapen Maidenforms down, fully intending to straddle her and enter. But as I had to enter my body to start it, the bell cannot be unrung. As my flesh touches hers, rough like sandpaper, I'm in my body, and I feel her. All nature recoils, and I lose my hard on.

My mind tries to scramble for a ready and visceral memory of Mac to supplant this awful feeling with, but they all seem so faded and far away. I can't smell her sweet scent, like the color black, set ablaze in some ancient temple, winding like a ribbon of smoke to my nostrils. I can't remember her skin, too smooth to even feel with my own coarse touch. I can't hear her voice, can't recall the weight of her little tits in my hands, or the touch of her hair on my bare chest as she leans down over me. I
can't remember the sharpness of her palm against my cheek, or the light touch of her lightening fast strokes up and down me, my hand over hers. Once again, Mac is going to need to serve her ruler.

"What's wrong, baby?", Killerwhaletank all but accuses, unforgiving, and demanding. She doesn't care about me. This is an inquisition. I perform, or I suffer the wrath. If I was a chick, this would be rape, and she'd be literally Hitler.

"Nothing.", I answer, kissing her disgusting bottom-feeder. "I just don't want to make this all about me. You look after me all the time. This time I want to look after you."

She accepts this answer, lumbering herself flat on my bed, and spreading her dimpled legs. Shudderz. I guess I'd never thought about it, but I didn't know pubes came in grey. I look away in horror.

The next uncounted minutes are agonizing. Well, they would be, if I couldn't just climb up the industrial metal staircase inside my robot, and take a seat at the impersonal control panel, where I tell my lips and limbs what to do. I flip a switch, pull a lever. Switch to fine motor skills. My arm hammers how I tell it. The tips of my fingers pulse. Sound effects turned on; an impersonal soundtrack plays, that convinces her that I'm enjoying it. I don't bear witness to her orgasm. I wear sound cancelling headphones on this worksite for my own protection. I watch a gauge that maxes out into the red, and then drops to zero when it is over. I power down the robot, and pull the last digit back slowly. When it is all over, the only real evidence or memory that it happened are my #stinkyfishfingers and sense of shame.

She lays sweating in my sheets for a moment, guts jiggling with every breath, before standing up to put her scrubs on. I check my phone, somewhere for my eyes to hide from the unwelcome humiliation of being inflicted with her repulsive form. That shit took me over an hour.

To my abject horror, as I lay in her filth on my bed, dutifully, she gets dressed, prattling about getting her Timmie's and who she has to work with tonight. No mention of the election, let alone an offer to be the one to infiltrate the mosque. Something cuntish and stubborn lurks behind her witless face. She's not going to say it, but she won't do it unless I have sex with her.

Blood rushes to my face, and I feel clammy and ill. She used me. I just did that for nothing. Humiliated and raped, I can't even hear her talking to me. I'm too paralyzed to get myself up off the bed, and slip into my bathroom to wash my hands up to the elbows with soap and scalding hot water like I want to. At last, when she disappears behind the door, and I hear the lock click, and her asinine clucking drown behind it, I'm able to get up and leave the room.

I still have to fuck the dog. I have to do it, because I'm going to kill her, and I don't want to have gone through all of this first, for nothing. My incredible sacrifice must not have been in vain.

I know what I need.

A Fedex box came last week. Inside, the Marchesa dress and cut away kid gloves I bought for Mac. I want to see her dressed in it tonight. I want her brought to me, like the first time, hot off the death of her entire steely nation. I need new memories. My spank bank is in overdraft. I need a new deposit, and she's going to make one big enough tonight that I can get through going into the Killerwhaletank.

I heave myself up off my stale, tepid bed. The sheets need to be changed for tonight, but I won't stoop so low. Winter can do it.

It's easy to slip out of my room undetected; Danielle likes to sit on the toilet and play her soduku app
for a good twenty minutes before she leaves early for work to buy her sour coffee.

Winter is in the kitchen when I find her, standing tip toed trying to reach a lone box of cereal in the cupboard above her. She looks like a Banksy; pigtails, and her panties nearly showing because her fitted plaid flannel prairie dress isn't made for such a stretch. If you'd have told me a year ago that it would be her who was forgetting about Mac, and not me, I'd never have believed it. Despite her painfully obvious newfound obsession with Speed Wagon, here she is, smuggling cereal, so perhaps not entirely forgotten.

Winter gave her a case of Twinkies a couple weeks ago. It's no secret, and I don't give a shit. But I'm still going to make her squirm.

"Sister?", I finally announce sternly, watching her scramble around, trying to hide the box she just finally inched out of the cupboard with her fingertips.

"I'm... what do you want?", she stutters, half a smirk on her face.

"Oh, it's naught but a trifle.", I answer sarcastically, pulling a grin. "Go ahead and let her have her cereal with milk. And you're getting your wish. Her exile is over, or at least I'm giving her a day pass. Get Mac Tonight out of the closet quietly, and lock yourselves in your room, and you better stay quiet.", I warn her with a finger wag, and just to make sure she's been adequately mansplained, follow up with, "Await your orders in silence."

I go back to my room and wait there on the bed, listening to the tap run behind a locked door, just counting the seconds until Danielle leaves. I'll have to stand when she emerges, close my eyes, deliver the obligatory kiss. She's a psycho about my phone. I'd never let a bitch get away with that shit, if it wasn't for the cause. The cause. Mac's cause. The fact is, I know it will be a procedural nightmare. You make it easier for anybody, even the right people, to get in, you just open up new ways for the wrong people to slip in through the cracks. The shithole always flows downhill. Even so, Mac's worth the administrative nightmare. I barely remember what she even looks like, it's been so long, so many pills, so many horrifying nights with Danielle, while she's been either coated in ash, or locked away. Sometimes I try to see her face, and it's nothing but some shark alligator, half girl. The water is still running. A moment to open my photos, and scroll way back, through all the Pepe memes.

Mac was a model, so she hates having her picture taken. She's Anon. She's got no Instagram. But she took one, and then she gave it to me. It was the day she left Canada. I'd imagine she must have had to set her phone on the trunk of her car to get the shot; but there she is, golden hair whipped in her face by the unfettered winds, standing in the nothingness of the bald prairie, so flat the glare of the low setting sun was forced to bend around the earth. She looks shell-shocked and crazy and beautiful; I can tell she's cold by how her jaw is set. Haunted eyes, grey as the asphalt ribbon laid out behind her. Her white tshirt reads "Super Common" in bold black letters, tucked into black jeans so torn they barely exist at all, her Brexit boots brushed with the prickles of silver and gold unshorn plains grass. She's so alone. The world itself, without form, and void. She took it just over the border, outside of Scobey, Montana. Behind her, the north sky seems to drain away all the light, growing dark, probably to a pinpoint right where she was born. She only took the picture because it was the last glimpse of her home, falling away behind the horizon, trying still to suck her life like a vampire before she got away; sustenance for its voracious appetite for hopeless dreams of impossible vacations to consume and turn to despair during the shrouded, endless winter. Or some shit like that. I like how she talks. Shit's epic enough for how I see the world. Myself.

I gaze into the pixels like a liquid crystal ball. What a fucking hellhole. We call them pussies. Anyone who can sustain themselves with a 50% income tax rate, and an -80 below winter that lasts
eight months? We better pimpology them good. Because we're fucked if they ever realize it's us who are the pussies.

She makes me a pussy. I'd hate her for it, if I could. But I stare at her image, and my cock gets hard in inverse proportion to my heart going soft. Dad was such an asshole. I got tears in my eyes a few times. Hers broke her face. Collapsed one of her lungs when she was only four years old. She never fed the troll; said she was too scared to. She walked five paces behind, bowed, scraped, and lived through it without a tear shed. Now she is fear; fear, and fearless. Nothing left to see in the world, nothing left to feel. Powerful. I'm scared to pinkie power her, look into that black hole, dense with more pain than anyone should ever endure. I can't survive her life, if it pulls me in. I'll be crushed into an atom. Why is it so alluring? I want her life, a vampire like all the rest. Like if she gives enough of it to me, it will be mine, and I can claim all her strength. I can't believe I even think this shit about some chick.

I can hear Danielle farting on the porcelain throne. The slattern runs the tap while she fucks around on her phone and scribbles a broken navy line half way across her crepey eyelid. Then shuts it off when she's going to sit around homesteading and grunting. I can't wait to see some Mohammed try to teach her to wipe with her left hand. Like trying to teach a pig to talk. Kek.

Rolling over, I put my phone away and look out the window, looking into the stand of leafless trees at the edge of the yard. Nothing to fear. I buried Mac's pinkies there. Gipped in sadness, I remember I can't pinkie power her. Terrifying or not, I wanted to. Snow White's forest--those trees turned menacing, and the soil beneath them all seems turned and tilled from below. I'll never go back out there. Maybe get Slow Ride to cut them all down to maximize our big dick energy size 17 carbon footprint. Pave over that spot and put in a fire pit where we can burn recyclables. Fuck it. A barrel. We can burn every stupid blue box any dissident chump wants to drag out to the street like some babybooming lie believing loser. Send up enough toxic smoke to elect myself as the next Pope of Rome. Huh. Never thought of that, but Francis is a blue pilled mealy mouth leftist, nothing but a Father Fairy. Maybe I should. I do like that hat.

When the lock clicks open, I spring up with a start.

"What, did I catch you looking at porn or something?", Danielle accuses, with a caustic warning laugh, stepping through the door. "Better not be. Not when you have this."

Yeah. A middle aged early Gen X nurse with fat rash and a hormonal imbalance that leaves her hair so greasy and thin her shiny scalp shines through at any angle, and dressed in chafed thigh, ill fitting polyester scrubs, no less. Lucky fucking me. Country music always gives these hags an unrealistic self image. Good. That only makes the balloon more fun to burst.

"No, of course not.", I assure her gently, and kiss her when she bellies up to me. "I was just looking out the window. Thinking of sprucing the yard up, once it's summer again. Give the boys something to do."

"Build me a she shed to do my puzzles in?", her eyes nearly cross at the prospect, gazing up at me, chin hairs on parade.

Jigsaw. Not the NYT crossword. Maybe I should tell her I want a pool, so Mac and Winter can lounge out there in the sun, so I can inspect their tanlines. Nothing like the contrast to show how white they really are. People of light. Girls of bright white highbeam A cup headlights. How do you define a white person? This is one of /pol/'s favorite threads. Pink, is my answer. If a nipple is green, grey, purple or brown? That shit ain't white.

A fucking she shed. Ugh. A pleb plot, more like it. A deep one, far away from Mac's pinkies, off in
the woods somewhere. I wouldn't waste good concrete on this bitch.

"Sure, if you want to get away from me for a break once in a while.", I answer. "I could make you one of those cute cedar ones that looks like a gingerbread house."

Strategy. That's going to get her hungry.

She pulls away from me, "I was thinking you and me could get away from the Heathers.", she snorts agreeably. "I should get going to work though. I'm craving Timbits. And they better not put in any of those stupid powdered ones with the jam inside. I'm not paying for fruit. I ask for nothing but the chocolate cake ones every time, and that stupid zit faced slut with the ear stretchers always gets it wrong."

Just thinking about being given a bread doughnut has her all ruddy and flaring her gills.

I pull out my phone and unlock it. My passcode is 800813. Boobie. Lulz.

"Yeah.", I shrug with feigned disappointment. "It's already 6:30. You gotta get going."

It's the routine I dread all the time, followed by the only thing I really look forward to anymore. Getting her ass out the door. It requires a bunch of her clumsy glomming, but at least it is followed by sweet, bitch-free solitude.

The instant I can slam the door shut on her, I rush down the stairs to brush my teeth and shower. All the boys are out on a mission; they're spread out all over the state replacing Black Panther with Unplanned in every single movie theatre ahead of this weekend. Only Speed Wagon has stayed reluctantly behind.

He's on the couch, parked in front of Fox News. He's the only person I've got left old enough to bemoan the loss of Bill O'Reilly anymore.

"Speed Wagon.", I get his attention, coming around the bookcases. "How'd you like some good boy points; find yourself back in the tendies by tomorrow?"

"Yes, sir. What can I do, Divine Ruler?", he asks, void of expression, springing to his feet. I still don't know how he managed to be such a fail at law enforcement. He's just the right kind of obedient lick spittle to give his entire existence up for 56 grand a year.

"It's chickchores.", I inform him, no apology. "My sheets need to be changed. And there's a plain cardboard box hidden in the back of my closet, on the right side. After you've got my quarters cleaned up, take it to my sister's room and give it to her. She'll know what to do with it."

I'm already in the bathroom with my shirt off and my toothbrush in my mouth when I think of something else.

"Speed?", I yell out, catching him on the top stair. "There's a small fireproof safe under my bed. Key in the lock. Take that and give it to Winter too."

He just nods.

I want that thing out of my room before Killerwhaletank drops a Flamin' Hot Cheeto and goes looking for it on the floor. I don't want her to spot it and demand to look inside. There's something in that box that's important to Mac. I've seen the cash. It isn't that. She's too pure to care about money. But I can't live with it under my bed any longer. It gives me awful nightmares, throbs in the dark with a beating pulse, scares away Charlie. I don't understand what could have that kind of power,
and I don't like it. Of it, and of what it's proof of. This house would have been worth nearly a million dollars where Mac lived. She still managed to put that much money in a box, all by herself. I never did anything that manly.

When it comes time to be the stallion that mounts the world? It's not going to be Mexico that gives us any problems. Those beaners sleep half the day and tickle overinflated guitars dressed in velour and sequins half the night. It's a good thing Canada is pretty much empty. Bunch of insane survivalist psychos who have pulled the wool over the entire world's eyes, up there, all armed with shotguns, trading Monopoly money, conspiring to elect a Muppet like Trudeau to deepen the deception that they're all weak and stupid. Even their pantywaisted liberal drama teacher Prime Minister has done brownface. Hitler never had much luck fighting Russians. I doubt we'd have much luck with the Canadians. We did lose the one time we tried. Good thing my First Lady will speak Bilingual Badass. She can bring them in peacefully. Hopefully in blackface.

I've been leading this movement for years now. It's exhausting. I towel myself off, and get dressed, considering the grind of it all. It wears on a man to do it alone. This world needs to burn, America first, of course. I need to rid it of all the impurities, leave it refined. I'm not going easy on her. Tonight is about my needs, as a man. Where's my refuge, my helper, my companion, flesh of my flesh? She took my rib. I took her pinkies. Neither one of us can ever give either of them back.

By the time I've opened the bathroom door, Speed Wagon is sitting on the couch, taking his liberties with the PlayStation. Normally, I'd take him to task for that, even if I didn't ultimately marshal him. But I'm anxious to see Mac. I want all my energy for that. Silently, I slip past him and up the stairs to go wait for her in my room. They'll open the dress. It's a size 0. Any hope Winter has that it is for her will flee, and she'll know what to do; get Moon Girl ready and deliver her to me. I'll send Winter something in a 4 next week to thank her.

Lay down on my bed, chew some Adderall, levitate. Darkness falls, the moon never sets. Veins dilate, blood rushes through me as my pulse races. My skin tingles and every hair on my body stands up like an alley cat in a fight. I haven't seen her for so long.

I feel her outside my door before she knocks. I'd imagine she still feels my fist wound around her hair, pulling it as I forced her to her knees on the floor. Her hands still smart with the phantom pain of her missing digits. I wonder if she feels them, buried out in those trees. If she craves dirt, dreams of death, gets aroused by the thought of that loamy smell of mineral and earth and rot. I do.

The soft knock I was waiting for finally comes. I can tell she's wearing the gloves. The rap on wood is muffled by the thin kidskin.

"Come in.", I bid her.

She steps through the door, slow and careful, eyes cast down and hidden from me as she closes my door and locks it behind her.

Nothing that transpires could ever make Mac unlearn her programming; her basic operating system. It's scarred right into her, grafted to her DNA. But we've restarted in Safe Mode. She stands, cool and motionless just inside the door, awaiting orders. Not the beginnings of warm fury and confidence she'd began to have the last time we were here together.

She's more beautiful than I remembered. Thinner than before, the grey sheer silk drapes her body loosely, the ribs between her small breasts visible through her white skin. She looks ghostly; nothing but a whisper, dressed in grey mist and her own funeral flowers, as though she's risen from the dead. The golden hair I pulled and lobbed carelessly like cutting a hedge has grown fast, curled loosely to hide the imperfect blunt ends. It already hangs past her collarbones, her new growth shaded and
darker from the lack of sunlight. Face like a Blythe doll. She's so sad. A girl broken so many times. But she's prettier every time she gets put together again, missing another tiny piece of her original sin. Her expression is blank, her full lips tenuously drawing in breaths ragged with her own uncertainty, but her eyes play like a reel, like a rotating shadow lamp casting horrifying scenes all around me. Pain, love and pleading, with all her bottled conquered fear, lapping up at her shores, where I can just barely see it, when it sloshes up behind her grey glassy eyes. Her face is nearly bare, lips stained deep red like a gush of thick black blood. She doesn't need all the layers of contour and pancake. She's the filter every gaudy bitch tries to fool the internet with. She doesn't need their cheap facetune parlor tricks. Mac's a virgin. She still blushes. When she blinks, I forgive the loss of her gaze to watch her black eyelashes fall down nearly to her high cheekbones. The faint freckles that scattered across the bridge of her nose and cleavage in the summer have faded away, almost invisible.

I rush to her, and drop to my knees at her feet. She's the only person I can do it with. She's the only thing I submit to. She smells so good, intoxicating, sweet and dangerous. Maybe it's the wisdom and smoke of Solomon's Temple. Or maybe she just smells like Teen Spirit. My head nestles between her razor sharp hipbones, settling into the deep hollow between them. I rest in her womb. My womb. I own her. My seed will fill her, and once again, I'll be here. I'm hard for her. I'm going to hurt her again, so many times, and never let her go. Isn't that what it's supposed to be, between a man and a woman, if we are both doing our duty? She'd say so.

She's motionless, her lungs frozen in her chest, not even breathing. She's hidden herself in emotional hibernation. She's lived most of her life that way, in stasis, deep underground. But her body trembles like dry leaves in a breeze under my touch. She feels stiff and cold; unyielding. Strength of a man, and the heart of a child. I guess she never had much of a say in that.

"I love you so much." , the words pour from my mouth. I have nothing to fear. "Mac, you have no idea how hard these months without you have been."

"Every fine tuned nerve cell in your body remembers the pain.", I tell her, stroking her hair, and gently kissing her cheek. "Your whole brain is rewired. You loved me with every shred of your being, and I replaced that addictive compound of dopamine and oxytocin with hate and abuse, and fired those neurons across every synapse, until the entirety of your existence has turned to pain, in a billion little searing points.", I explain to her, standing up, and pulling her to her feet before laying
her down on my bed.

Her lips part, just slightly. But she doesn't answer. She wouldn't. She never complains. World's most atrocious shit, and she's waded through it, telling everyone that she's fine and going for the joke. I guess she'd have died otherwise, beautiful and disaffected, bones smashed to splinters and knives, stabbing into her pulverized meat, until one of the blades hit something vital, like her broken heart or shattered mind. She'd have choked on the lump in her throat, cyanotic and as cold as the prairie winters she'd suffered. If Mac let herself feel, she'd have died in the emptiness, blown over in the dust or the dirty snow of a forgotten waste.

"I knew what your life was. I knew what you'd seen. Abused and abandoned, rejected by those obligated to love you. And I did this to you anyway.\textquoteleft\textquoteleft, I say to her, careful not to apologize, holding her hands in mine. "You felt my betrayal travel every one of those pathways, lighting it up. You felt me in every broken bone, every bruise, every seeping soft tissue slow leaking blood internally. You felt me in every dagger that ever pierced through your heart. I put you back there.\textquoteright\textquoteright, I stroke the tips of my fingers across her collarbone, while she lays still as a corpse.

No tears wet her eyes. Grey and glazed, they stare. Not vacant. Possessed. She hates that word; she'd tell me to shut the fuck up. But I don't mean it like that. It's me who owns her. She's my possession.

"Baby, say something...\textquoteright\textquoteright, I lean down over her, breathe the words against her ear. Not in desperation. In boredom. I just want her to talk. I never know what she'll say. I feel meta and outside life; this is the wave of the pills that I like to catch and ride in all the way to the sand. I want her lips to part, blow my mind with the weirdness. She can blow anything she likes. Then make me a sandwich.

She draws in a ragged breath through her parted lips. Mac doesn't pout and punish like other girls. I can feel her pulse rage erratic through her veins, her pupils dilate. But she forces herself to think; to answer me. I'm Mac's only family. She'll do anything to please me. Her eyes defy her will, pinned emotionless and avoidant on the popcorn ceiling, making magic eye flying saucers out of the fly spotted stucco. But only for a moment, because she peels them away painfully, and meets my loving gaze, against all self interest.

"The Squad.\textquoteright\textquoteright, her voice sounds mechanical at first, like the AT&T text to speech female counterpart to Moon Man Mike. Fuck, I'm good. She's so aptly named. The left can't meme. Kek. That's incidentally where she's going. And I'm here for it.

"... You need to start calling them The Death Squad.\textquoteright\textquoteright, she sounds gradually more fluid as her soft voice and silver little tongue uncoil like a rattlesnake in the morning sun. "It ties into your pro life tie in, if you know what I mean. Associate Islam with abortion. Abortion with terrorism. Don't miss an opportunity to galvanize."

When she sees me unable to stop an eager grin, she comes alive, one eyebrow twitches with mischief. That's how you meme.

"The left are so stupid.\textquoteright\textquoteright, she tells me. "Have you heard this shit, how they're now just triggered by any red ball cap, how they are imploring anyone with a red cap to 'please think of the snowflakes' before donning them publicly. This, despite the fact that it is actually people wearing a completely benign article of clothing that may not even say Make America Great Again who are being mercilessly beaten in the parking lots and alleys of the nation?\textquoteright\textquoteright, she asks, bemused and authoritative. I want her to strike me. I want her to punish the shame of what I've done for her and to her right off of me. But she's on a roll.

"They just can't get out of their own way. Can't meme.\textquoteright\textquoteright, she shakes her head, watching my face for
her approval cookie. "All any of these leftards would have to do is start wearing Make America Great Again hats in force to their Beta O'Rourke or Mayor Pete rallies. They could hijack it. Remove all meaning. Put the slogan on t-shirts with pictures of their hero Obummer, maybe Greta Thunberg. Put it on recycling bins. On electric cars. On boxes of their soggy, limp paper straws. They could ruin it entirely for Trump, and there's nothing he could do. Wear the fucking hats. Threaten to Make America Great Again with open borders, higher taxes, and fourth trimester abortions."

That's my girl. My Moon Girl. Twisted, but never broken. I'll never doubt her.

Impulse is rare for me. It's hard to outwit my own mind and surprise myself, or act without agenda and forethought. She overrides all my 130 IQ points, and what's probably an advantageous Narcissistic Personality Disorder. She can make me shock myself.

So it's like the hot flood of euphoric soaring sparks of an intravenous opiate high when I fall in on her, sucking in the scent and taste of her, as I hungrily kiss her clever lips. She is the temptation in the garden. Both gardens, all gardens. The boarded up haunted house on the intersection of Eden and Gethsemane. I need it. I want to fuck her. I can't. Not because she wouldn't let me, but because it's her temptation that I need. It's the only way I can keep her forever. And have her vote.

"Mac..., I moan. "I missed you. I'm sorry for what I did to you."

Impulse gets the better of me. I snap back into myself for a second, before deciding that I don't care if she knows. I am sorry. I just want to keep her. She's the only person who understands me.

The dead girl suspended in rigour mortis wriggles to life under me, the breath of life floods her lungs, made of the dust of the ruthless plains. My hands run through her soft straw colored hair, that flows out around her face like wheat blowing in waves in the wind. She's flat and hard under me, her ribs like fallow ground, under the billows of cloudy sheer silk tulle. I reach for her girlhood with all the greed of capitalism; weird, I don't want to grab her pussy. She's not there. It's empty and hollow, nothing, a hole. I don't want to grab it. I want to fill it. I want to hold her tits and her hips in my hands. My mouth is all over her, and she's hot and strong, back arched as she sighs my name in my ear.

"Kai..., she moans, taking my hands in hers, thrusting her bad 90s coffeegirl hips up at mine, "Thanks for giving my safe back. Oh, and never, ever apologize...". That's her last advice, before she closes her eyes, takes her kid gloved hand, and shoves two of my fingers in her mouth, and sucks.

I laugh. Bury my face in her, thirsty to just smell her. She's like snorting coke. Like a million little tabs of X, printed with pictures of happy faces, and crushed for my nose only. She's a fucking hit.

"Hit me.", I ask in her ear through gritted teeth. "Vengeance is yours, baby. Take it."

But she won't. Laying under me in Marchesa, pinned by my hard dick, in a tangle of blue plaid cotton bed sheets, she's got the audacity to glare up at me with those weird grey eyes and shake her head no, and suck my fingers like Maggie fucking Simpson.

"So my sister told you how it's done, did she?", I tease, pulling back on my fingers, only to feel her strong mouth suck them back in harder. Tease? Mock? I'm not sure. What's any of it anymore; a tweet, a meme, a deep fake. Mac's a happy young girl with a bright future ahead of her. She takes that shit in stride. #gliberal. "Winter said you thought maybe you were supposed to blow.", my lip pulls back in a sneer.

She doesn't care. She shrugs, one brow lifted in amusement. She always wins. Whatever. I let her. I
love her.

She slides my fingers out of her mouth, and says under the dreamy spell of desire, "There's nothing funnier than pride."

"What kind of answer is that?", I shake my head at her, leaning into her to kiss her neck. "You're so fucking strange. I wish I got you."

"You do get me. You've got me. I love you, Kai.", her hands pull mine from her breasts, and hold them in hers.

The skins I've put over hers have grown warm and soft.

"I love you.", I breathe absently, before she kisses me again. My hands hold hers. My fingers can't help but feel hers. I've avoided it because in some deep recess of my head, the rat in the machine just wants me to rub those gloves. Don't want to feel nothing. Always want to grab her by the nothing. I'll never really have her, and I did it to myself. Her pinkies are gone, and I think of them, sinking in the loam and the clay. My rib in her cage, her pinkies in my yard. Dust to dust.

But I can't hold off. Man is always drawn to the void, until he's sucked in. Fucking women. The temptation of all men from the start. All we want to do is fall into their black hole.

One last deep breath, and I can't. I cram my tongue down her throat, and rub the pinkies of her gloves. She felt what I did, and now I have to feel it too. The sin from which there's no redemption. The banishment from the promised land. I could have loved Mac forever, but now we're cursed to do nothing but fuck until we're bored, pretending that's what commitment is. Responsibility and obligation left behind as the fire burns away the love like cheap fossil fuels. We're both way too cerebral for that shit. We could have communed body and soul, lost forever in the fusion. Our fallout would have rained, and reigned, on this earth long past the span of our lives, like a meltdown reactor. Our pinkie power would have been radioactive, burning with the heat of a thousand suns, proceeding on a need to know. Instead, I traded all the smoke for one light.

"Kai!", she exclaims, wriggling away, like a rape victim on the forest floor shrinks away from her least breaths when she realizes he's a serial killer after all. She pulls her hands back, and thrusts them beneath her body, her eyes wild, and blazing with so much fire that no tears can survive it.

"Baby, I'm not going to hurt you.", I #whorewhisperer her; look of concern, hands in her hair, gentle, while I try to salvage the situation. She's beautiful and stunned, just gaping horrified eyes and her blood black lips, trying to hide her hands, and inch out from under me. But she can't. I run my hand over her thin white throat, as she struggles for her next ragged breath, and let my fingers trail down over her bare skin, between her little white tits. "I love you, Mac. I only ever want to touch you like this. Just like this. It hurts me so much to hurt you; it's like hurting myself. I don't ever want to have to do it again. Don't ever make me touch you any other way again, okay?", I whisper in her ear.

"I won't.", she promises earnestly. "I'll be good."

"And you know I don't ever want to hurt you? I took no pleasure in that, Mac."

She sighs, sad and weary, "Yeah. I know."

Mac's not herself tonight. Not the girl whose eager stare held mine, while she memed a stream of unconsciousness in a beam straight to my brain up from my feet on the floor, kneeling there in Doc Martens and a babydoll dress, like a put-upon grunge Cinderella, Scar Tissue fantasy. My little
Canadian princess with her safe full of cash, old Pontiac and a suitcase full of half truths, white lies, and good forgeries. The most honest girl I ever met. I knew she was fucked up because she never let it show; all the best stories, and a world of people who never shut up long enough to listen. I listened to her. I almost knew her, as well as she could ever really be known. Now she hides from me, deep inside herself. I want her pinkies back, so she can't get away. I just want her to talk, and pull me from this undertow of regret.

"Don't you like your dress?", I ask her, hopelessly trying to pin her slippery, squirming body down under me as she wriggles out of the tangle of sheets and rolls across my unmade bed in the dim incandescent glow. No LEDs here. She stockpiles incandescents. Has since the Harper/Bush years. Bemoans leaving her own stash behind.

"All your posts on WHINEstein didn't go unnoticed, anon.", I laugh. She'll know what I mean.

I know it was her; she's the only femme on /pol/ who knows what Marchesa is. Trust her to point out that all those #metoo-ing bitches shouldn't get to profit from selling sex twice, once to further their career, and then selling that commercial transaction repackaged as victimhood. #shameforfame Then these same bitches boycott his wife's fashion line--for what? Doing the same thing? Being his favorite? Being the only one who held out for the best deal; a rock and a prenup? Mac's the only femanon hot enough to point out that Georgina Chapman was by far a hotter piece of ass than any of the 'reeeee'-ing b-listers-with-blisters who sold a piece to the poor woman's husband, while she was stuck married to the fat slug. She's his only real victim, and now all the sex crime hypochondriacs won't strut around the red carpet for the Access Hollywood cameras, begging for their pussies to be grabbed in her gowns anymore?! Fucking bullshit.

"It's Marchesa.", I go on. "New Resort collection and everything. It was the most expensive one."

Mac grew up poor. Vantage was a perpetual dust bowl. A shitty little village. Nothing but a roadside abattoir gut pit on the #2 high speed burn to the US Border, and without any residents. A road sign. That was her hometown. Such an abject shithole you can't even Google it. I like her jam; doesn't need money to get by, but actually appreciates it when she has it.

"Thanks.", her head shrugs to one shoulder, and she holds her hands behind her back, twisting on her ankle next to the bed.

Nothing impresses her; what else is new?

"It's the same color as your eyes.", I wildly pursue her, rising from the bed, trying to suck her down with me again. Fuck, I've missed this. "I thought you could wear it when I'm sworn into Senate."

Her face relents a little, the tension eases. But I can't ever help myself.

"What do you think of the gloves?"

My question sounds more menacing, echoing off the hardwood floor and cold drywall. She flinches. Not all of her. Just the spark that hides in her eyes. She felt that. And she hesitates, catching her breath before she attempts an answer.

"I love them.", she finally answers softly, eyes cast to the floor after a quick look up to the heavens for the strength to speak. "Though I fear wearing them is a sort of sin, Kai. A lie of omission."

"I know.", I exhale. I'm getting fucking sick of this head trip. I feel bad enough. Those were my pinkies too. "But you can't go around on my arm showing... what you did... It would raise too many questions."
"No.", she shakes her head, hair swirling in waves around her face like wheat in a plow wind. "That's not what I mean. Kai, there's something I have to show you...", she steps toward me, and takes my hands in hers, dropping to her knees at my feet, her eyes still locked with mine, flooding with tears. "I can't hide this light under a bushel. Take them off.", she whispers.

"Mac, I don't want to.", I resist her.

The fact is, I fear something now. The reflection of myself, of my father, in those scabbed stumps. I destroyed the only beauty I ever saw. Those gloves weren't for the campaign. They were a kidskin refuge from my shame. From the self inflicted humiliation I brought on myself. Now I'm incapable of love. When I look down on her, in all her gorgeous young fury in cut to the navel sheer silk, I just see my debasement. Why is she doing this to me? How is she doing it from her knees on the floor; wielding a power that evades me?

"Yes, you do.", she corrects me gently. "Don't you trust me? Whatever. Nevermind.", she smirks wickedly. "I can't wait. They're not quite done, but I have to show you.", she says, tugging the fingertips.

I recoil, sneak a peek at my phone, hoping for a distraction. Shit. I shut it off to avoid playing Boggle with Killerwhaletank. I can't appear weak. So I look.

Mac's lower lip trembles, both her hands held out to me.

I brace to feel sick. Men hate blood. We don't see it every month like girls. But when I let my glance skip across the general location of her outstretched hands, I feel dizzy and high instead. I shouldn't have taken so many pills.

I'm not greeted with humiliation and bloody knuckle holes, scabbed over and trailed with black veins through her skin like faded tattoos. Instead, on both her hands, are ten perfect tapered digits. Her pinkies are back; soft and pink. They look like before, except that the skin that covers them looks like a premature fetus; pink and tacky, slightly translucent. The fingernails are thin and soft, fused. When I take them in my hands, and examine them, turning them, they have no prints visible yet. Virgin pinkies.

"They're beautiful.", I gasp.

"Praise be.", she smiles. "They're yours. I grew them for you. They'll look even better once they're finished. That's why I wasn't sure if I should show you."

"...But, how?", I ask her, amazed, spun full of love for her. My sins washed away.

"I prayed.", she answers from her knees. "Ask, and ye shall receive, Kai."

"Surely it can't be that easy--?", I slump to the boards just to fight some gravity.

"Who said there was anything easy about it?", she asks back sincerely, brows furrowing, shaking her head again. "Don't cut them off again. I'm not sure either of us can remain part of the body without them, and they might not grow back again."

That's my girl. Cryptic and weird. Her perfect little hands slip around my biceps as I take her head in my hands and kiss her face, feel her eyelashes on her cheek, under my lips.

"I love you so much. I really do.", I hear my disembodied voice confess. She gave it back. She's so sweet to me. All that love comes upon me and fills me like a spirit. "Mac, I'm so sorry. I love you baby. Thank you for this. Baby, I mean it. I love you."
I'm on my knees with her, and floating in space. My shitty room, messy and plain, filled with the knowledge of an inglorious, average Midwestern 30 year sentence, passes away to the sublime. How can I see its faded yellow walls, or dusty floors, or Sears bed-in-a-bag, or hear my parents' fights, or remember being rebuffed in eleventh grade by that bitch Madison? I can't. I just see the vision of Mac's black lips parting in the instant before mine touch them. She looks like an angel caught in Andy Warhol's lens. I see four of her. Fuck I'm high.

"Do you want to Pinkie Power me?", she asks, her hands still in mine, clasped at our sides.

It's as lonely and horrible as that picture of her making her stand all alone on the bald prairie, light all dying behind her. No one knows her. She's never had a home. Somewhere, rattling around inside the cavernous labyrinth of her own uncharted psyche, she's clung to the walls, trying not to get lost. She's given herself to me, and she wants me to know her. But even with her pinkies grown back fresh and new, I can't. Not like this.

"Mac.", my voice cracks, "I can't. Not tonight. You're a smart girl. You know this shit with Killerwhaletank isn't over yet. When we commune pinkie to pinkie, it's a sacred ceremony. I won't do it with a lie between us. I don't want to do it with this shit hanging over my head."

She exhales, face full of knowledge, or maybe just boredom, and nods. "You're embedding her in The Islamic Centre of America."

"Yes, but she's reluctant. Other females aren't like you. They're... cuntish. Not based. She's weak and lacks the power of her convictions, if she even has any. She won't do it willingly. And I can't tell her the plan."

Mac rolls her eyes. "Yeah no shit. You're going to kill her. Right? We are going to kill her?"

I rub my face and stand up, pacing before I take a seat on the edge of my bed.

"Yeah, well, the plan is for her to detonate at Brokeback Mountain 2, or whatever cucked up liberal Hollywood darling comes out next. Maybe a Madonna concert."

"Maybe Frozen 2, if they make Elsa a dike?", Mac asks hopefully, smiling up at me from the floor. "I can just see the headlines: Arenhell, in the name of allah."

She doesn't mean it; not a Disney joint. Mac loves kids too. She's just scared to admit it because every broken girl like her thinks deep down that their cradle's busted too. But that's why I love her. No calf so sacred the girl won't make veal out of it.

I smile weakly. I don't even want to think of the grim task. Not making another bomb; that's kinda fun. I'm dreading porking that cold, slimy old fishstick. Tonight I need to be all here with Mac.

"Take a night off, Moon Girl. I am.", I tell her, leaning down to kiss her. "I mean, I know the moon never sleeps, but damn. Your Ruler needs a break. I just want to be a man with a girl."

"Well, then, Kai...", she stands up from the floor and kicks her dark red Charlotte Olympia pussy pumps off, and settles into my lap, "... then call the world's bluff another day. Tonight, just let the night air cool you off.", she brushes a strand of my hair off my forehead. "I've been sinking in a place I used to stand too. I just finally found a home, and I don't want to have to leave. So how about I just serve my ruler?"

"Don't make me answer questions, huh?", I smile, close my mouth over hers, wrapping my arms around her.
She doesn't fill the silence with an unnecessary answer. We don't talk too much. We talk exactly enough.

It's rare in this world when the reality of anything matches the fantasy. This fucking does. Her thin neck tastes like a marshmallow, blackened to ash, and her hair smells like the inside of a thunder cloud. Her body is on fire, hot from within, and warm on mine, her tits sear into my chest, firm and round. I can hear my own cock throb. She blushes. I peel my hands off her perfect body reluctantly, fumbling lust drunk in my jeans pocket for another loose Adderall.

"You want one?", I ask Mac, but only after I've pulled out two.

Biting her lip, she hesitates. "I dunno. To be honest, Kai? I kinda prefer the dopey shit. Anything barbital. You don't have any Midaz laying around?"

Not that I haven't fantasized about going at it with her zonked on Ketamine before. But I'm taken aback. I don't even know about those high grade next gen benzos. I don't get how she does. I think she's just fucking with me, all 'See? You don't know me at all.'.

"What do you want that shit for?", I ask her, shifting her onto her back on the bed.

"My head's full enough. I don't want to remember anymore.", she shrugs. "I just want a mind eraser. Maybe I should try ECT. Twillight Sleep, maybe. It's a bit outdated, but Saskatchewan sees so little of the world. They still give it to girls in labor. I've heard it's alright. Half the apprentices who were clamoring to intern with Woody had babies young. They'd all hit it up. Said it would have been a pretty good high if they weren't being eaten alive at the time."

I gaze down in silence at her laying on my bed. Mac's alive because she's always looking for a way to die. Life is a trap, just a thing to escape from. Face like marble, painted all grunge goddess goth, swirled round in grey silk like smoke on her pale flesh, thin as she can possibly survive. She's seductive, tempting death. Come get me. Show me a good time. Get me out of here. I can see her ascension when I look at her, even here, in my bed, nipples visible through her sheer dress. Like she's rising through the mushroom clouds set against a living sky, serene, headphones in, listening to Courtney Love, leaving the grime behind with the rest of us. The strength of her defiant, jutting jaw can't hide the desire in her eyes to be free of all the countervailing woes. Mac's never wanted to kill herself. She can't. She just wishes she'd never existed. But now it's too late to unring that bell. It's her eternal sadness. A life that can't end. She told me that once.

Her hand extends. "Whatever.", she practically yawns, "I'll take it.", compelling me with a gesture to hand over the remaining pill in my hand.

I've changed my mind though. That's not Mac talking. That's something I broke, and I don't like it.

Mac said she's never seen anyone who can party like the big ego platform artist hairstylists. Seventeen years old, thrown to the wolves, and taken in by a troupe of debauched faggots, frozen faced hyperhags, and sexual harassers the likes of which make Harvey look like Mr. Rodgers. Mac tore her way through, clung to by razor blades and visible ribs that she'll never really shake the need of. But when her head was savagely grabbed and forced into a pile of coke on a marble table in the basement of a crystal mansion on the gulf by some fat fuck named Josh at one of those insane Farouk Systems afterparties, she held her breath, wrestled away, and ran to the gilded bathroom to wash her face before walking alone in a driving rain, back to her hotel room in Houston, Texas. She was only nineteen years old. Yeah. She told me the story; and I'll bet it's one Winter's never heard. Mac said she was just too contrary; "You want me to do it that bad? Well, fuck you. I hurt myself on my own fucking terms." It was why it took her two solid weeks to decide to take an Adderall after the first time I offered her one. I can't be the person to snuff that flame, when it's what I've been searching
for, singed wings addicted. I can't get her out of my mind. We share one fucking brain.

"No.", I stroke the soft skin between her breasts with the back of my hand, remembering the New Ceremony, and the #birthrates. "Stay clean for now."

"K... K... K.", she agrees.

Mac spreads her legs when I lay down on her. Her pointy fingertips on my spine make me hear the cold wind outside like it's in my ear, but I'm home, and she's burning up beneath me. When I kiss her, I can feel her smile faintly. I feel safe with her, but I know I'm not. She could tear me apart. Pull my dick off like a chimp. I serve only at her pleasure.

That's why I'm on top. I like to hold her down, and she likes it too. She's always had to be strong, and she's so sick of it. She wants to be overpowered. But this is different. She melts under me, her open heartedness painful to bear witness to. I hurt Mac so bad, but her natural self respect throttle is destroyed. Mac trusts me, because she knows now that she can't. But she so desperately wants to be able, so wants it back. She wants her home back. She gives me enough rope to hang myself, in the hopes that I won't. She kisses my mouth, her lips sweet and hungry, slick with need, hoping that if she gives me everything, I will be worthy of her trust. It's a prayer, and there's nothing easy about it. I love her for it.

The bed creaks under us, and stifled moans slip past Mac's lips. Her kiss tastes like Black Rage Lip Smacker. I hump against her, hope one of her hands will slip between us and find its way inside my pants. Feelz shy, though.

"You should take your dress off.", I tell her breathlessly.

"I guess.", she agrees, reluctantly letting my ear lobe out of her mouth. "I want to keep it nice for inauguration."

"No, I don't care about that. These Marchesa rags are getting cheap now that they're politically incorrect. I just want to see you naked."

Without a word, she rolls off the bed and lets it slip to the floor. She's perfect. Her thighs can't touch. Her white skin gleams gold in the lamp light, every bone and tight sinew highlighted. Her breasts don't drop a bit when she undresses, her cactus flower pink nipples stand up, looking me straight in the eye. Hair the color of winter wheat flows and breaks just past her shoulders. She bites her lip and averts her big grey eyes to the ceiling first and then the floor. She can't make eye contact as she lays back down in the bed next to me. Mac's never been naked with a man before me.

"Look at me.", I take her by the hand and kiss it, transfixed by her new pinkies. "I need a dirty little piece of love for us to share. I need you to let me hold onto it."

Her sincere gaze holds mine when she nods yes. She understands what her Ruler is asking of her.

"I won't let you come.", her lips promise in my ear, gripping my pinkie with hers. "But I'll let you be as close to me as I can. I love you more than ever, Kai.", she vows, sweeping my hair off my face with her free hand.

I fall onto her hard. She's hot and sweet, and all around me. I dwell in myself, buzzing like a neon sign, cranked to eleven. I'm Kai's grabbing hands on her firm tits. I'm Kai's tongue in her mouth. I'm Kai's hard cock pressed against the hot hollow of her pussy. I throb with the need and the rage. It's what I need. I'm charging like lithium ions. I want to feel what's mine. I slip my hand between her legs. Mac gasps.
I shush her, put my hand over her mouth, so all I see are her wild eyes begging mine. I don't know what they're begging for. Maybe it's for me to stop. Maybe it's for me to make her come. Maybe it's for my cock. A savage fingerbang. Who the fuck cares. I know what I want. I want what's mine.

She's so sexy. Pure sex. I like to look at her face. It makes me come. Her back arches, and she turns her head aside in shame, a blush on her cheeks, but she can't hold back her low, flinty moans. The energy pent up within her turns all her muscles to reactors, and she feels ready to spring like a gazelle, as she squirms under me, against me. But when Mac looks at me, her slow reluctant gaze pierces me from beneath lust heavy lids, and I try to press my middle finger into the tight heat of her body, it stops me. My finger is repelled by something strong inside her, that feels like a spider's silk drenched in dew. She really is still a virgin. Maybe I doubted it until now. Chicks are all lying sluts and bitches. I keep forgetting that she's different. I guess I just thought that some man, some time, probably couldn't control himself with her.

"What's wrong?", Mac asks suddenly.

I don't answer. I want to push harder until I break her, and feel her hot sticky blood gush down my hand and drip from my wrist. But something stops me; a desire that overrides my nature.

"Nothing, Moon Girl. It's just reality rarely matches up with fantasy, you know?", I repeat my thoughts aloud, stroking her chastity gently with the tip of my finger.

I don't want to break it, but I feel like I can feel a tiny opening, and I'm compelled to pick at it like a hole in the knee of your jeans when you're a kid. My middle finger is too big. Mac's struggling not to wince, rolling her hips away from me into the bed, breathing hard like a scared animal. I pull out, and slip my pinkie in, finding the weak spot again. She starts to relax. I kiss her, lay on her. But I'm Kai's busy finger. That's where I am. I'm inside her. It is a tiny hole, and I slowly work the tip of my finger through without tearing her. She moans, and it's hard to tell if she likes it or it hurts. I hold my hand perfectly still inside her, and push her hair away from her thin neck, and lick it all the way from her collar bone up to her ear.

"What do I feel like, Kai?", she moans.

The essence of why I love her, maybe. She's defined by my experience of her.

"You really want to know?", I ask in her ear. "Ok. Well...", I feel her, "... I don't know, baby. How do you describe the best feeling in the world? Something like that. You feel so tight I can't move. You're slick and hot, wet. Not messy and snotty like other chicks."

She smiles.

"What else?"

"I don't know how to put this.", I pause. "Don't take it the wrong way. I mean it. I like it. But most girls are kind of ridged inside, I guess? You're not. You're smooth inside. Like really smooth, like satiny, I guess. But pillowy. It's like most girls are built to stretch. But you're built to squeeze."

"So I have no ridges?", she asks, deflated. "So does that mean I'm going to be a boring fuck?"

I smile. Even when I try to be nice to her, she doesn't know how to handle it.

"No, of course not. You're the last interesting fuck on Earth, Mac. But that's why I hesitated to tell you. I was worried you'd take it the wrong way. I like it. You're tidy. Built to please a man, not yourself. It's fucking hot. I just haven't felt a girl that feels like you inside before. You feel better."
"So you still want to fuck me?", she props herself up with her elbows, and stares at me intently.

"Of course. More than ever.", I tell her, pinkie held still, precariously inside her even now.

She stares down at my hand. "Am I still a virgin?"

I laugh at the absurdity, my finger lodged right in her virginity.

"Yes. I'm not taking it. Not tonight."

"Why not?", she asks, slumping back to the bed. I know she knows why. One of the reasons, anyway. She knows she's being used at the service of my hard on, and that I'm going to have to use it on someone else. She's confused in her youth and decency at the difference between the sacred and the profane.

"Because I love you."

"Then let's be together. I want you to be mine, Kai. At least be mine first.", she sighs, gently resting one of her little feet on the front of my jeans, rubbing my cock.

"You're such a brat.", I exclaim. "You said you weren't going to let me come."

"Oh.", she grins a wicked grin. "Don't worry. I won't."

"I can't control myself with you.", I kiss her. "Don't you see that? If I was in control, I'd have dragged you away by the pussy and stuck my dick in you a long time ago. But you demand better of me, something in you compels me.", I pull back and look her straight in the eyes. "Mac, I won't insult your intelligence. I need this tonight. I need to feel you like this. I'm just going to turn around and use it with someone else. It's a cruel, carnal lie my body has to tell you both; I have to deny you in order to please her. But Mac, it's so I can keep you. So you can stay. This is how we accomplish total immigration reform."

"Then pinkie power me.", she tempts. "Pull yours out of me, and take mine."

I know she's in pain. Her whole life, everyone who was supposed to love her did nothing but abuse her. She trusted me enough to tell me. She's beautiful and perfect. All people see is her long legs and perfect cheekbones, and that she was a paid model with a confirmed IQ of 151. I saw her pain. I heard every insult she took to heart. I heard her bones crack, felt her flesh freeze on the angry plain. I felt the sting of the blows landed on her fragile little body. And I turned around and cut pieces of her off, cut her off from love, from obligation, from me. I broke every promise I'd ever made her, and then punished her for it. Now she just wants to make all of that go away, and be back in the good times as quick as possible. She wants a new promise. But I do love her. This time I want something better than a promise.

"Mac, I want a covenant.", I exhale. "I want to be bathed in your blood, and made clean in your sight again. And I want it with a clean conscience, knowing I can confess it all, and go forward with you honestly. I don't want lies and secrets between us. I want a clean start. When this mess, this obscene business, to service the greater good is passed, I want to be consecrated to you. Once I've been washed in your blood, I'll commune with you. Then we Pinkie Power."

She seems satisfied. Sometimes with chicks you just have to speak slowly, in a language they can understand.

"Okay.", Mac agrees with her usual openhearted cynicism. "So, what else do you feel?", she asks
anxiously.

"What?", I lean into her again. "In here?"

"Yeah.", she asks her voice tight. A question she wants to ask hangs from her lips like a huge pink Bubblicious bubble, but she snaps it, and pulls it back in behind her teeth.

I search her body with the tip of my finger. I don't want to move too fast. I want her mint condition and intact. I'm drowning in a flood of dopamine, come over with the rush of her drug. Serotonin laps at my edges, sloshing over the brim as I melt all over her. Her body is hot under mine, her mouth on mine, her hands hard and holding me. We form a covalent bond. In this state, it's hard to trust judgement, my ability to accurately describe the molten marshmallow sublime. Struggling more for breath amid her kisses, than for the words she demands, the tip of my pinkie touches something I can't understand. Another hymen.

"You have another one.", I gasp, reeling, pulling myself from her #aryanfingertrap. Her expression shifts, and she seems to fall away from me, sinking into the bed.

"I have seven.", Mac utters devastated, like this is a revelation to herself more than a confession to me. "The Daughters of Eve have seven seals. I've heard it before.", she stammers breathlessly. "I've heard it before."

"Slow down.", I reassure her, smoothing her hair, pinning her body under mine. "What are you talking about? Where did you 'hear it'? Just take a breath and talk to me."

One deliberate, ragged breath and a long blink of her eyes, and she begins.

"Do you remember how I told you about that tent meeting in the hills outside Wood Mountain? I was little, probably four, maybe six years old. A travelling preacher interpreted tongues. Someone had prophesied about a World Ender, a Daughter of Eve. He said I was a seductive child, guessed that my name was Mystery. He told them I had seven seals, and that unless they were all broken by the same man, that I'd chill the Lake of Fire, and that I'd be cast to the abyss to birth more of my evil. They prayed over me, cast out my rebellious spirit. I was handed snake after snake, and I held them all, and after, cast them to the ground and killed them under my heel. No one had any cyanide, so I ate rat poison.", she shivers. "I didn't want it to be true. But I always knew it was."

I don't know what to tell Mac when she gets like this. It's why she's perfect, not like anyone else. Do I feed her head? Trying to talk her out of anything is fruitless. I just like to listen.

"Well, that's okay, then.", I tell her calmly. "You still have all seven. And I'm going to break them all, so you're good, right?"

But my little Moon Girl is blanched and silvery pale as her moon mask.

"But what if something happens? I can't control it; the seductiveness.", she shudders. "Can't you just marry me now and keep me safe and break them all right away, Kai?", her hand gently toys with the waistband of my jeans, and she bites her lower lip nervously.

That's girls for you. Like a wise Freddy Rumsen said. Girls just want to get married. It's not like her to panic though, not like her to have one fucking typical moment. I can see it's shaking her to the core too.

"You know we can't. Not yet anyway. You've overstayed your courtesy travel visa as a Canadian. The instant we marry, you'll be deported while you wait for your citizenship, and they may deem it fraudulent. Total immigration reform, Mac. You understand this. Once that's accomplished, and you
can get legal status, I'll do whatever you want.", I explain firmly, trying to settle her down while she tries to escape her trammel.

"I don't care about man's laws, Kai. I mean a spiritual marriage. That's all I need. Just you and me committing to this thing we couldn't undo if we tried anyway.", she pleads. "You of all people know that man has authority over nothing. Kai, please, ask me to submit to you. Ask me to obey you. You said you wanted a covenant."

I stare into the beautiful, panicked face staring up from my bed at me. I can feel her pulse pounding through my whole body. It's what I want too. And she's right; we're grafted. The covalent bond. The one mind. For better or for worse. Our life forces share electrons, and if we're pulled apart? It will bruise the world in a terrific boom. May no man tear asunder, to the ruin of all. But I'm held back; there is more for me, more that I want. I want to be President. I want total immigration reform, and I want her to be a legal citizen someday. I'll be the first Republican President to get married while in office. I can't imagine the press that will get. If a stupid fucking dog scores you public opinion points, imagine what a state wedding would do for you.

"You're right, Mac. I do. But after this unseemly task with Danielle, huh? It won't be much longer. You really are scared of this, aren't you?"

She nods, a haze of pent up tears she won't release blurring her sight.

"I just want to be normal."

"Well, you aren't.", I tell her. "And you never will be. And I'm glad you're not. I could never love someone who wasn't special, like I am.", I add softly, laying down on my bed beside her, and putting my arm over her body, as her hands find their way into my hair. "Why on earth did they have rat poison at a church service anyway? I mean, the snakes or the cyanide; that was your thing. I like the iconography. But rat poison? What was it, a slow week in religious fervor, and you were all getting crazy with the Cheez Whiz?"

Mac just laughs softly.

"No, actually. It was totally practical. There was a rat man at the meeting."

"What the hell is a 'rat man'?", I ask her, amused. This is probably what I missed about her most of all. Earth people, she was born on Jupiter...

"Okay, well, Saskatchewan had this program called Rat Patrol.", she rolls her eyes. "It was kind of a prairie province rivalry, like where did the rats come from. We'd always blame the province to the east of us, and proclaim ourselves rat free. Anyway, it was a conservation officer who rolled around in a truck handing out that green warfarin laced oatmeal. Everyone called him The Rat Man. He just happened to be there in his work truck."

I shiver. I just don't like rats. Okay, I draw a distinction between the white kind that run in a wheel and do mazes and let you test pharmaceuticals on them and shit. But just swarming in their mischiefs in the wild; fuzzy, brown, flea infested with their yellow teeth and naked earthworm tails? Shudderz.

"It's so barren.", I wonder aloud. That's fine; she'll understand. She can read the one mind.

"Yeah, but it's all the stored grain.", she tells me, rolling over lazily on top of me. "The big shot farmers are fine; they build huge sheet metal graineries with concrete floors. We had mostly bins with wooden floors. The rats love to get under those and gnaw up through them. Most of our bins were built out of whatever scrap my grandparents could find or salvage during the Depression."
I'm amused. "So, all the rats actually came from Saskatchewan, then?"

"Yeah. From Vantage, probably.", she snickers. "Poison isn't really all that effective. Not when they have an unlimited supply of grain at any given time. We had to get rid of them other ways. My parents tried having cats.", she says disgustedly. "But rats are too vicious and dirty. Cats won't hunt them. You have to get rid of them other ways."

Oh, pray tell. Lulz. She's behind by a century. It's tragic and fascinating; isolated completely from her own generation, filled with knowledge from another time, and outmoded survival skills, yet left behind in the now. Mac had the added disadvantage of the rotary telephone with an operator assisted number of three-ring-two being used to smash her fine face, the icy black of endless kreasote winters, lived cruelly chained in the dilapidated ruin of her abusers own loving childhoods. How do you live through that, and survive that place, and know what to do with yourself in the late millennial Gen Z era? You don't. She's weird beyond words. Already about six thousand years old. Still a virgin.

"How'd you do it?", I ask her. WTF. I'm game. "Exterminate them, I mean."

A broad smile spreads across her face. She's like Bridgitte Bardot bred to Tinkerbell. So fucking beautiful.

"Well, I don't know what other people did. Probably lived in denial and did nothing.", she says dryly. "Dad used to lift the bin, floor and all, with the fork on the front end loader, and move them entirely. I'd stand there with a heavy grain shovel in the tall grass, and whack as many as I could once they were momentarily blinded by the sun. Once their eyes adjust, they run towards any movement they see, so then you have to be really fast because they'll run right up your legs. Eventually the ones that are clinging to the under side of the floor drop off into the dirt and rush you too. Once in a while you have to chase them, but mostly, they gun for you. Then you just beat them to death with a shovel. My record number of kills was 67 in one day.", she adds proudly.

Mad respect for her. For a girl, she's really brave. "How old were you?", I gasp.

"I don't know.", she answers despondent. "Probably about eleven, maybe twelve. But that was fun. I was good at it. It was sort of exciting. And it always took a while for Dad's admiration to give way to shame. He'd be proud of me. Then the day would come that he'd be telling someone else the story of the day we killed rats, but he'd stop short suddenly; never mention a thing about me. This shadow would fall over him, like some sullen, black rage you could almost see. His eyeballs would get pointy, and he'd flash all red and white like a squid. Then the next chance he got, he'd hurt me."

I can see her. Too thin, and tanned in the late summer sun. Her summers were short, but the days were long. Mac's work was never done, and I see her shoulders, brown and freckled from picking rocks from the dirt into a tin pail in the fallow fields, under the garish shining sky, lit with glare past 10 pm. Dressed in cheap overalls they got her at a feed and tack store, over a white wifebeater, trying to swat the enormous grey mosquitoes from her bare arms in the early evening, as they rose up from the ungroomed prairie grass at her feet, while hefting a huge dented shovel nearly too big for her to lift. She probably had a huge smile then too. Mac sadly appreciates any opportunity to prove her worth. A white girl, living in a white man's world. It will never be hers, no matter how strong she is. Or how many rats she kills.

I dream terrible nightmares about that place. "The bins.", as she calls it. A collection of mismatched sheds, graineries and rotten wood silos, erected in rows like tombstones, in a graveyard of old implements and decomposing car bodies, the sharp and unforgiving spear grass growing up from between their ribs, swaying psychedelic in the wind like it's spirit moved. Mac used to go out there to play. To hide. Among the broken glass and rust, in that hellscape, she saw beauty. Found safety
alone, treading atop ten thousand years of dead Indians' bones, her little worn out canvas Vans slithered and snapped across by the black garter snakes in the prickly grass, under a fallout sky. She makes me scared of everything, quaking naked under the buzzing hum of a bare light bulb.

I pull her head to my chest and hold her. Mac finally relents, and her body molds to mine, and she just holds me back.

"Describe it.", I say to her, stroking her hair. "What was it like? Make me be there."

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