

MURDER CLUB CANDY
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MURDER CLUB CANDY
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Text sampled from
Henry David Thoreau
Stevie Wonder
Suzanne
@withtake
Pulp Fiction

Titles by Matthew Temple
MURDER CLUB CANDY
CAMP LAKE
THINGS SAID IN DREAMS
SNOWBUNNY
12 PLAYS

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*The only way to catch tiger cubs
is to go into the tiger's den.*

—Fortune cookie

Liss

“Liss! We’re leaving!”

The bar is called Sharks.

“Okay.”

That’s where my dad works.

“Liss! We gotta go.”

That’s where he met her.

“But I’m reading about *cuniculus*.”

Her name is Candy.

“Bring it with you.”

They have a real shark behind the bar. It’s in a cage.

“I’m out of power!”

“Liss. Right now.”

It’s very small. It’s about as long as my arm.

“Is there a plug there?”

“We’ll find one.”

Candy is the bartender. She serves my dad drinks.

“There better be a plug.”

Candy is maybe twenty.

“Liss. I’m late.”

My dad is fifty-two.

—[illustration]—

“I’m late. I’m late.” My dad was always late.

“Why can’t you work in Hollywood?”
“Because. That’s not where the money is.”
“I need to find a plug when we get there.”
“Do you have enough power for the drive?”
“I might, I might not; I’m not sure—look, I have one bar.”
“Get your toothbrush.”
“Why do I have to get my *toothbrush*?”
“Because. Alice. Liss. We’re leaving now.”
“What about my toothbrush?”
“Forget it. Liss. We’re outta time.”

—[illustration]—

Daddy does the work. He’s the one who’s always working. Me and Edy have all the fun. Mom gets in the way.

—[illustration]—

“Hannah. This isn’t what we talked about. I thought you had Pilates on Saturday.”
“Liss has Pilates on Saturday. I have Pilates today.”
“Why can’t you go together.”
“They’re different classes.”
“What is it,” my dad says, “that makes Pilates for children different than Pilates for adults?”

—[illustration]—

“How many bars do you have now?”

I stare at him. “One.”

He’s opening the ashtray.

“I already told you it was one.”

Now he has a cigarette between his lips. “I’m just checking in with you. I wanna make sure you have what you need.”

“It was one before. How could it be anything but one or zero now?”

“I’m trying to make sure”—the unlit cigarette bobs—
“that it’s not zero.”

He looks over. We’re stopped on the 101. I have his lighter in my hand.

“Can I have that?”

I twiddle it in my fingers. “Looking for something?”

“Liss. Thanks.”

My finger is on the window button. Index finger, down.

—[illustration]—

Cars are stopped. There’s a carnival, there. They have a balloon slide inflated next to the gas station. No one’s on it.

“You might want to get gas.” I’m looking out the window.

“Liss, can I have my lighter.”

“There’s a gas station right there.”

“Thanks, Liss, just, can I have that.”

I’m lighting it, the flame between me and the driver of the next car. It’s a girl, she’s got her mirror out, smacking her lips. Done. I stick my tongue out. She doesn’t notice. I make my face to the side-mirror of our car.

“Liss, can I have my lighter.”

“It’s almost out. You need to get gas.”

“Oh fuck. Can I get over?” Dad lays on the horn. He’s

smacking the steering wheel, looking over at the girl like *whaaa?* She doesn't even give us the finger. She just puts her car in park and takes out her mirror again. "Liss. Am I clear?"

The highway is stopped. There's a half a car length in front of Makeup before a truck of Mexicans. It's a work truck. My dad always says whenever you see two or more Mexicans together the chances are they'll be moving a couch. I look down at the road, then peek back at Dad. I drop the lighter on the highway and we can hear it click. "What was that? Liss."

I press the unlock button but Dad presses lock.

"It fell."

Dad smacks the horn. Then he has his phone out.

"How many bars do *you* have?" I ask.

He says: "Four."

He hands me the cigarette, which I throw out the window.

"I really wish you hadn't done that," he says, and he's squeezing us between Makeup and the Mexicans, and we're creeping over to the right side of the highway, where the exit is.

—[illustration]—

The bar is called Sharks.

That's where my dad works.

Candy is maybe twenty.

My dad is fifty-two.

"We need an outlet. Can you plug her in?"

"It's USB."

Candy's face is perfect. We could lick it. She shines, especially her lips. Some high-gloss finishing.

“What do you call those boxes?”

“What boxes?”

“Dad, the boxes we get at Sushi.”

“Bento boxes.”

That’s Candy’s lips. A bento box.

“Can I touch the shark?”

“Come’on, Liss.”

“You want to touch it?” That’s Candy.

“Yeah.”

—[illustration]—

The shark is very quiet. His cage is labeled. It says, “SHARK!” It’s labeled for safety. Sharks bite, even very small ones. “Have you ever had a shark attack?” “No.” Candy opens the top of the cage. She sets it on the bar. My dad is over there looking at the menu. It’s like 10am. “Pet him gently.” “I will.” “And the scales—the skin—it only goes one way, so—like this. Go front to back.” “Liss, be quick. What do you want for breakfast?” “Mexican Benedict,” I say. Mexican Benedict is the best. “He won’t bite.” “Has he ever bitten anyone?” “Not that I know of. His mouth is too small.” “But his teeth are still sharp. What about baby snakes?” I ask. “What about them?” Candy says. “They have more poison than their adult counterparts.” “Do they?” she asks. “Of course they do, haven’t you ever heard that?” I say, but Candy is over with my dad laying out our napkins.

Baby shark, tiny shark, what can you do for me? Do you answer prayers? If I wrap up a sushi roll and drop it in your cage will you eat it? I feed my dog mozzarella

cheese and beef, which is strange to imagine a dog dining on a cow in the wild, so would this work? Would a shark eat a shark if he was especially hungry? What if you disguised the shark as a cake and fed it to him? Would he fall for it? I think this SHARK! needs a birthday hat. He needs one. Pink to go with his blue. A pointy hat, with elastic to hold it on him.

“What’s his birthday?”

Candy’s typing on a plastic screen, ordering our food.
“What?”

I tap on the glass. “His birthday.”

“I don’t know,” she screams to the back, “Pila, what’s his birthday?”

(Pila is pronounced *Pillah*.)

Pila yells back: “What?”

“SHARK! What’s his birthday?”

“Candy, what’s our Facebook password? I need you to log me on.”

“I will, but when’s SHARK!’s birthday?”

Silence.

“Pila?!”

“I need to get online. Does Tara know the password? Candy. It’s half-price night. Half-price bottles. I gotta put the—can you get me on Facebook?”

“Tell me SHARK!’s birthday first.”

“What the fuck. Can—” Pila’s coming up the bar. “Liss!” He looks over at my dad. Dad holds up his hand and goes back to his work.

Candy’s got a bottle of Don Julio in one hand. She’s pouring for my dad. “SHARK!’s birthday.”

Pila leans across the bar and touches my elbow. He’s bald. “You wanna know his birthday?”

“Is he a he?”

Pila looks at SHARK! “I don’t know.”

“He looks like a he,” I say. “It’s hard to tell.”

“I can tell you his store birthday. Candy I need my Facebook password.”

“Tell her his birthday first.”

“His birthday..is on Facebook.”

“SHARK! is on Facebook!?”

“No—he doesn’t—he doesn’t have his own page—”

“He should.”

“Candy.”

“What.”

“He should have his own page,” Pila is saying.

Candy is squirting orange juice in my dad’s marguerita.

“When you finish that would you please go look up SHARK!’s birthday on Facebook?”

“I thought you said he didn’t have a page.”

“I want you to make him a page. He doesn’t. I posted the day we got him. He does look like a him, doesn’t he?”

“Yes,” I say.

But my dad has it. He looks up from his screen. “October 30, 2010. So he’s..what..twenty months?”

“He’s a baby.” I would pinch his cheeks if he had them.

“That’s just his store birthday,” Pila says.

“Store birthday,” I say, “is good enough.”

And Candy gives my dad his drink.

“What do you want for breakfast, Liss?”

“Mexican Benedict.”

“I’ve got it.”

“What do you want to drink?”

I look over at my dad. “A virgin red-headed slut.” My dad looks at me.

I’m not backing down.

—[illustration]—

A virgin red-headed slut, with cream, cream swirling, the way Candy makes it, red and white mixed together. I like it in the angular glass. The cream swirls like smoke.

Angles of the glass coming together like legs, then that long stem. Red-headed slut, a virgin. Cream coming together, swish it in my mouth, swig it, lick the top of the glass with my tongue. "More cream." "Sure." Then you're back talking with my dad, and he's ogling you. I'm sure he doesn't see it that way, but if you're not careful it won't just be Dad who's late, it'll be Candy too, and then Pilates arrangements back in Hollywood will become even more difficult.

Concentrate on what you are doing. At all times. Concentrate. Use the entire body. Focus. Breathe. There is nothing more critical than focus. And focus should be intense. Focus should be burning. It should pierce. Pierce. Nothing about our Method is haphazard. You must be in control of every aspect of every movement. Control-ology. That is the name of our game. Tighten the buttocks. Mind your inner thighs. We're building a powerhouse. Concentrate your mental focus with every movement, lest improper control leads to the loss of every vital benefit we pursue. Clean your body. Clean your house. Circulate the blood. Breathe. Breathe. This above all else: Pilates is learning to breathe.

I wonder if you can teach a shark to breathe above the water.

"Candy, will you bring me a bowl?"

Maybe we'll find out.

Dad

I DID THE WORK, I DID THE WORK, I RAN. I ran on a treadmill 40 minutes in the morning, sometimes at lunch. I drove. I drove. I drove to Westlake because that's where the money is. We live in Hollywood and pay more than I would pay for the same apartment in Chelsea and we can't afford to live next to where I work. I could rent a house across the highway I guess but if I'm gonna rent I'm not gonna rent one of those houses.

Coming home I can time it. 3:00. Or about 7:30. Sometimes there's a window. Without Liss I stop at Red Robin if the traffic is too bad. There's some guys there we watch football and they talk shit about the bogus business deals they're doing next and I sit quietly and perfect my ability to order the perfect appetizer at a burger joint.

The first time I did that drive I thought I would die.

No sane person would do that drive every day.

If you took every person on the 101 and had their head examined you wouldn't find a sane one in the bunch.

And there are thousands of us.

There are tens of thousands.

It's a smaller group than you think.

If you drive that way every day you see the same people.

Same cars.

Same bumper stickers.

Some are on my Facebook.

They tell me about the bars. Guys from Atlanta in for the week telling me about some bar I never heard of that's right up the road from me. Always these accolades, how great the place is. But always it boils down to some hot waitress befriending you for tips. And she's never that hot.

She's like, *twenty-hot*. Which is how hot most girls are at twenty. Then they slide. Somehow *twenty-hot* seems hotter when you're 52 than it did when you were twenty.

Liss may have mentioned that.

When you go to these places with these guys, it turns out not to be the greatest bar you've ever been to. It turns out it's in a strip mall. For me, that precludes the bar being the greatest bar you've ever been too, regardless of what's on the inside, but I guess for some people that isn't the case.

I don't drink a lot in bars.

I drink the normal amount.

I drink like a long-haul trucker. One mile at a time.

I don't flirt with the waitresses either. Some *twenty-hot* girl that ain't going home with me? Anyway I'm married.

Hannah has affairs.

We have an agreement.

I mean we've had threesomes together in the past. That was before the kids. But we're in it for the kids. We love each other. We're *realistic*. You can't be getting divorced just because you want to have sex with someone else. It's not fair to the kids. Plus, marriage is about more than infatuation. It's about more than just lust. Maybe it's about being married to your best friend, maybe it is, but it's more like being married to the person who used to be your best friend. Now you're something more. You're part of the fabric. You're part of the glue. You can't get married just because you like the sex and you can't get divorced just because you like it somewhere else.

Me and Hannah have an agreement.

She may exercise it more than I do, but we both have the option.

You don't have to exercise an option for it to have benefit.

You have to know it's there.

Candy is a major option.

Candy is there.

Pila told me when he hired her. Candy was in with her friends. Four of them at a table. They drank six bottles of wine, then they came to the bar for cocktails. I wasn't there. This is what Pila says. He says it was safer for him to keep her behind the bar. He could keep an eye on her. She drinks there too. She drinks with me. This isn't a bar where you get fired for drinking with the customers. Candy'll set up a shot for me and leave the extra in a metal cup, pour herself some, give me the rest of the mixer later, keep mimosas going all day. The busboys don't drink. Sometimes the servers do. The bartenders, if it's slow. If it's really slow, definitely. Sunday morning is my favorite time to come. Saturday or Sunday morning. Before brunch. The 10 to 12 slot. I can't remember when I started coming here.

When Candy moves it's like ice. It's like terror. Liss is right she's like lacquer but she's also like ice. Long hair, tragedy of dying, somewhere between brown and dirty streaks. Candy's bar skills are prime. The napkins she makes, the garnish. She cuts with concentration. Her lemon sculptures are almost blue—something about them—yellow turning almost blue in her hands. Thin fingers, sickle nails. Thin body, the kind you'd like to fuck, always some skin showing, too much maybe, and really nothing, nothing, nothing about her that's nice.

There are sunny girls. There are nappy girls. There are lovely girls. There are delicate girls. There are dainty girls. There are daffodil girls. There are buttercup. There are beautiful women, graceful ones, there are polished, ancient works of art.

Candy isn't one of them.

Here's who we have at the bar. We have Ash. She's a lesbian, she manages the place. If I was stuck on a desert island with any of these people, it would be Ash. Ash is loving with a sense of humor. And some perspective. Ash is my age. Maybe 10 years younger. Then you have Tara. Tara has beautiful hair, black, and she's the right size for a woman, the size women were when I was young. Not like today. Tara's pretty. She could be a pin-up girl. Candy isn't like that. Tara comes in on her day off, her and her sister. They have classic beauty, if not classic clothing. Their dad comes in after work. He drinks a shot and a Corona, then he leaves. He's a cop. Then you have some guy bartenders and you have some male and female servers and you have the kitchen, which is all Mexicans, and the busboys, who are all Mexicans, and you have the hostesses, who are all jailbait that even I'm smart enough to stay away from. Description of them would cause this story to be unpublishable in North American markets (hence my hesitation).

Then you have Candy. Candy is new. This is the third time I've seen her. We've never really talked, but I can tell. There's a kind of hunger in the way she sets out the napkins. The little hostesses fold them with disregard, with cluelessness. Candy presses like an iron. Like she's in barracks. She's making the bed *and* she's doing the inspection.

Her lemons: precision.

She cuts the entire lemon peel away from the fruit in one slice.

When she's done she wraps the peel around a straw and holds it under a plate for like half an hour. Then she has the most perfect garnish in the world.

Tara comes on shift she drinks and we tell stories.

Candy comes on she takes every vase off every shelf, polishes the invisible side of the counter, and segment-by-segment removes every goddamn bottle from every area of the bar, wipes down the place where the bottle sat,

then she sterilizes the outside of the bottle.

Then she steams the glasses.

This is that kind of bar.

This bar isn't in a strip mall.

This bar is beside a lake.

The lake is hard to get to.

You don't just *happen by* this lake.

The houses on this lake, they don't belong to just anybody.

Like: that house over there: that's Judge *Judy's*.

They shoot shows at this bar. Guys with money show up here. They park in the tow-away zone next to the dumpster. But they park Lamborghinis, and Candy steams their glasses.

This is the kind of conversation me and Tara have:

"You workin' today?"

"Yeah, Chris's shooting a commercial. Do a shot of Jäger with me?"

"You know it."

"Don't you ever feel hung over?"

"Every day."

This is the kind of conversation me and Candy have:

(Candy leans across the bar and takes a slice of avocado off my Mexican Benedict. Her skinny little tits are showing; no bra. She looks over her shoulder, paranoid, scoping out Pila, who's sitting by the TV watching his game. She cranes her face back around to me, reaches over, picks up my phone in slow motion.)

I'm watching Liss play with the shark.

Candy scrolls through my texts and she sees some stuff she likes. She smiles. She brings her phone out of her back pocket. She shows it to me. She smiles again. The text says:

RED AND WHITE

"Do you know what that means?"

Liss is reaching for the shark.

I'm nodding.

Candy shows another text:

SOMA THAT PEPPEMYNT :it says.

“You know what that peppermint is.”

“Yeah,” I say. I know.

“I knew you did,” she says. She gives my phone back and she takes her phone back and she looks at Pila and she creases my napkins and Candy is bubbling over with smiles. “I knew,” she says, “from the moment I saw you, that you and I were bad news. Even my boyfriend,” she says, “he doesn’t know about it. People like you and me,” she says, “we have to stick together. We,” she says, “keep this very very quiet.” Her face cranes back around, surveys her boss, then she cranes it back to me. “Does Pila know about you?” “No. Does Pila know about you?” “Hell no. Let me make you another one of these. Is that Don Julio? Give me twenty minutes until my break and then I’ll take you out to my car and show you some really, really good shit.”

Liss

Dad and Candy are talking.
This is what they say.
(Candy leans into Dad.)
Whisper whisper whisper.
(Dad shows Candy his phone.)
Giggle giggle giggle.
Now Candy takes Dad's phone.
They're scrolling together.
They have a secret on their phone.

—[illustration]—

A peck at my elbow.
¡Idios Mio!
¡Idios Mio! ¡Idios Mio! Mama mio mia idios mio!
He's hugging me. My hands around his neck.
"Mama mio mia idios mio."
"Mama mio mi amigo. Quesqu'il faire?"
I look at my dad and Candy.
"Il a conversar."
"Baha lobos," my Idios Mio says, "Baha lobos. Ay dios mio." He pushes my plate of Mexican Benedict onto the napkin.
I hug him again. "Je t'aime mi idios mio. Je beaucoup

t'aime. Forever."

Idios Mio has the pepper shaker over my Mexican Benedict.

I stop him. I've got to ask this while you're here. "Quesqu'il'dit—comment dire—comment dire le—le—qu'il faire?" I'm pointing at the phone secret bitches. "Ques'que—comment—le qu'il fait?"

"Do you want your pepper?" Idios Mio is asking me.

"Do you want your pepper?"

I point to the steak segments. "Did you take one?"

Idios Mio shakes his head.

I shake mine.

I put my hand on his shoulder.

"Idios Mio, mi Idios Mio, quesque le comment non?"

I'm wagging the piece of steak in his face.

Idios Mio puts down the pepper shaker.

"You need to eat your steak." I give it to him. "Manger la miercoles, Idios Mio, and tell me—comment dire—how do you say—" I'm motioning to Dad and Candy. "How do you say..?"

"Modo aumentado," mi Idios Mio says, and he eats his steak.

—[illustration]—

I send him on his way.

I don't want any pepper.

Mi Idios Mio, mi Idios Mio, mi amour, my friend, my only friend.

Sometimes I wish I would wrap you in a napkin and take you home.

When I got there I would make a place setting with mi Idios Mio in it.

Right in its middle.

Mi Idios Mio, mi Mio, come to my house and live.

—[illustration]—

Modo aumentado. Enhanced mode. That's what Candy and Dad are talking about. I've seen it before. I've seen it in Dad. Augmented mode. From augment. To make something bigger by adding to it.

To make something *greater*.

Modo aumentado.

To *increase*.

That's what they're talking about.

—[illustration]—

Mom does augmented mode.

She does it.

She does it with candy—a different kind of candy—and she does it with coffee.

She does it with sugar.

She does it with Facebook.

She does it with phone calls.

She does it with drama.

Mom does augmented mode with Dad.

She does it.

She does it underhanded.

She does it sly.

Mom tells us about it before he gets there, sometimes.

Not exactly.

She tells us what she's going to do.
We know what is going to happen before it does.

Mom does augmented mode.

—[illustration]—

Edy does augmented mode.
She does it with energy.
Edy is a ball of wow.
She's kinetically inclined.
Edy stores it—she packs it—then she lets it go.
I hate when Edy's mode is aumentado.
C'est past bien.
Way past.

—[illustration]—

I do modo aumentado.
Sometimes.
I do enhanced mode.
Sometimes.

Sometimes it's because I'm angry.
And what makes a person angry?

I suppose.
It's when a person doesn't get what they want.

That's when I get angry.
That's when I enter enhanced mode.

A person does not need very much.
They don't.

They need a few things.
They need to eat.
They need clothes.
They need to be safe.
Absent those three a person gets angry.

Modo aumentado.
Tends to happen.
Then.

—[illustration]—

“Candy.”
Candy turns.
“I’ll take my pepper now.”
Candy was talking with my dad.
“I’ll take my pepper now.”
Candy comes to me.
“Didn’t Hector bring it to you?”
“Il Idios Mio! Il Idios Mio! Il est mi *idios mio!*”
“Right. Well. I’ll get your pepper.”
Candy is talking with Pila.
“Everything alright Liss? You good? Everything good?”
Pila always wants to make sure everything’s good.
I give him the thumbs-up.
“Good. Good,” Pila says. “Richard. Richard. Every-
thing good?”
Dad holds up his fork.
Candy is back with the pepper.
“Why didn’t Hector give you any?”
“Il Idios Mio.” I’m grave.
“Didn’t il idios mio bring it to you?”

I point to the spot on my Mexican Benedict where I want the pepper.

Hector is watching this.

I make Candy pour the pepper. I can't stand when people in restaurants make Mexicans do all the pepper.

"And Candy."

"Huh?"

"Bring me my bowl."

—[illustration]—

Pila helps me.

"What do you want to see again?"

"Whether he can breathe out of water."

Candy is filling the bowl at the tap.

Some guy is talking.

"It's Candy, right?"

Candy shuts off the water.

"*Candy cane*. I'll take uh Long Island."

Me and Pila look at each other.

"Candy. Give me the bowl. He's kind of used to his cage."

"Just for a minute."

Pila looks at my dad.

"Is this alright with you?"

"He's your shark."

"Uh Long Island. Like a double. Can you do a double?"

Candy's with the guy. "I can make you two."

The guy scratches the inside of his leg.

"They're already—there's like—"

Pila says: "There's five types of liquor in 'em." Pila's eyeing the guy. "Haven't I seen you in here before?"

The guy says: "Naw."

Pila looks doubtful.

Pila has the SHARK! cage in two hands.

I'm holding the bowl.

"I know that guy's been in here before," Pila says to me. Pila's about to pour SHARK!

"He's the guy who lost his watch," I say, and Pila tries to stop Candy but she's already making his drink.

—[illustration]—

"Candy," the guy's saying, "*Candy cane*." Then he looks at my dad. "She should have a boyfriend. Don't you think?"

My dad barely looks up. "She does have a boyfriend," my dad says.

Candy says, "He's rich."

The guy takes possession of his Long Island. "Does 'e have guns like these?" He rolls up his sleeve.

"Please take your elbow off the bar." That's Pila.

"Oh. Sorry. Sorry." He lifts his drink, and bows his head at the same time, to Pila.

Pila says, "Candy, I need to talk to you."

Then it's just me and Dad and this guy at the bar.

"Sweet piece 'a ass."

My dad says nothing.

The guy cracks up laughing. His head is on the bar.

If Pila was here he'd tell the guy to get his head off the bar.

"That is one sweet piece *uh* ass." The guy is talking to himself. Then he raises his head and goes back talking to my dad. "I got her number when I waz here last."

"Oh yeah."

"Yeah." The guy cracks up laughing. "Then I lef muh phone." He takes the straw out of his Long Island and slurps around the ice. "Her number was in the phone. Lef muh watch too. Drove home drunk. Didn't realize till I got home that her number was in mah phone!"

“But you remembered to take your keys.”

“What?”

“You left your phone. You left your watch. But you remembered to take your keys.”

“Well. Like I said. I was drunk.”

“Ask Pila.”

“Pillah?”

“Maybe he’s got your watch.”

“Ask that girl to marry me is what I’m gonna do.” He yells: “Candy! You got a boyfriend or you jest lyin’?”

“I have a boyfriend,” Candy says. Pila’s coming to help me with the shark. Candy is back behind the bar.

“Show me the ring. You make the best drinks in here. Show it to me, go ahead, I know how you girls be. You gotta ring? Or you wear a fake one? Make me another Long Island, okay, I’m almost done with this one. Stop me at three. Stop me at three. I can’t drink more than four of these. What’s in it again? Is that a shark? Lemme see. Lemme see. That a fake ring?”

Candy is holding out her hand.

The guy takes it.

“Is this engagement or marriage?”

He drops her hand.

“I don’t believe you really got a boyfriend.”

“I do,” she says, “I do.” And she points at my dad.

She takes her skinny little finger and she crooks it and she points it across the bar at my dad.

“I do have a boyfriend,” Candy says. “And that’s him. That’s him right there.”

—[illustration]—

Pila’s next to me.

He talks in a low voice.

“That guy was in here before,” he says.

Pila is stirring the shark bowl.

“Why are you stirring it?”

“I want to make sure there’s plenty of oxygen. Candy, did you pour this from the tap?”

She nods.

“Gimme some of those Ty Nants.”

“Pila, you’re insane.”

“Just give me ‘em.”

Candy has them in her fingers but she says: “For a science project?!”

She sets the bottles down.

Pila’s talking low.

“That guy was in here before. He left his watch. He left his phone. He left some change on his table.”

“Was he here alone?”

“No,” Pila says, “he was here with a friend. They skipped their bill. His friend gets up and leaves through this gate.” Pila shows me the gate. “This guy”—Pila’s eyeing him—“disappears. He leaves his watch and his phone and some change on the table.”

“He was very drunk?”

“Yes.”

“He forgot his phone?”

“No.” Pila’s squinting at the guy. “He paid with it.”

—[illustration]—

The guy is on his second Long Island, which is mostly water and fruit juice per Pila’s instruction. Candy makes it while the guy goes to the bathroom.

“He’ll probably shit all over the place.”

“If he does, I’ll fucking rub his face in it. That’s the guy who left his watch.”

“*That’s* the guy?”

“Yeah.”

“Do we still have it?”

“It’s in the back room.”

“Should I give it to him?”

“Fuck no. If he orders another drink I’ll kick him out. If he won’t leave, I’m calling fucking Bryan.”

“Serious?”

“Yeah.”

“What do I say if he asks me for it?”

Pila leans up over the bar. “He hasn’t asked you for it yet?”

“No.”

“Tell him to fuck himself. If he asks for it I’ll slice that fucker up the back of his neck.” Pila takes a grapefruit scooper.

“Give me that.”

“It’s my bar, motherfucker.” But Pila throws the grapefruit scooper behind the bar. “If he asks for another drink I’m’onna piss in it. Is he still in the bathroom? Fuck. I’m calling Bryan. Give me the phone.”

But Candy has her phone out.

“You have his number?”

Candy holds up her finger.

She’s dialing it.

The guy comes out and he’s looking at my dad and he’s all: “Fuck, man, all that time. That’s not right to do. All that time *you* were her boyfriend, and you two—I’m embarrassed. I’m embarrassed. I made a fool of myself, and you just sat there. Why didn’t you—? *You* were her boyfriend *the whole time* and you just *sat there*? I feel so stupid. I’m serious, man. You’re a lucky fucker. How long y’all been together? I don’t *believe this!* I feel so *stupid*. Don’t play—don’t *play* with me like that. I wouldn’t’a been talking to her if I *knew—if I knew!*”

“It’s okay,” Candy says, “we play this game all the time.” And she goes to my dad and puts her hand on his.

Dad

VOICE.

It's Jacobi.

"How aaaaarrrrreeee you man?"

Silence.

"Are you there? Richard?"

"I'm here."

"How areeeeeeee you?"

Silence.

"You'll never guess where I am, man."

Silence.

"Richard. Are you there?"

"You're right, I'll never guess."

"I'm at home. Where are you?"

Silence.

"Can you come pick me up? I need a ride, man. I fucked this girl last night, I think you know her."

"Did you tell Shonda?"

"No. No. Shonda just left. I can't drive, man."

"Do you know you have a meeting scheduled at ten?"

This time the silence is from the other end. From Jacobi's end.

"Jacobi, man, do you know you have a meeting scheduled at ten?"

"What meeting?"

"You scheduled a development meeting. It's at 10am. You're leading the meeting."

"Are people there?"

“I have no idea.”
“You’re not there?”
“No.”
“Dude, can you come pick me up, I really can’t drive. I fucked this girl like seven times.”
“Why can’t you drive? Does Shonda have the car?”
“Is anybody at the meeting? Can you call over there?”
“No,” I say. “I can’t. Why don’t you call.”
“Okay but can you pick me up?”
“Why can’t you drive?”
“I was up with this girl like all night—”
“Yeah, okay. You wanna call the office and let people know you’re late?”
“Sure, thanks. Thanks for this. I’ll see ya soon.”
End of call.
“Candy. I need you to watch Liss for a minute. Liss, you okay with that?”
My daughter nods. She has a mouth full of Mexican Benedict.
“Virgin only,” I say.
“But red-headed sluts,” Candy says.
“Just make it virgin. Pila?”
“That’s why I’m here,” he says, “I’ll keep an eye on ‘em. How long you gonna be gone?” Pila’s coming toward my place setting.
“Twenty minutes.” I’m shaking my head.
“You want me to put this in the oven for you?” His hand is on my plate.
“No, no,” I’m saying.
“Actually,” Pila says, “Fuck that. We’ll make you a new one. Twenty minutes? Hector, have Varo make him a new..what is this..Mexican Benedict, steak extra rare, with avocado, right? Good, good, we’ll see you in twenty minutes. Take care of what you have to take care of, Rich, we’ll see you in a minute.”
I’m out the door.

Winnie

Our office is quiet usually at this hour
The boys (I think of them as my boys) get in around ten
They work late; they work incredible hours for Steve
Sometimes they're on call for releases late at night

Stephen always pays for pizza when we're working late
Or *they* (when *they're* working late)
I take care of them. I think of them as my boys
If I met the right person, I could see having boys

Some people work in stiff offices; I've worked in one of those
I get money from my family; but I work, too
My money is my spending money
Today is Yoga, leaving early

I'm on top of it
Fee is in my pocket
Folded
I'll hand it to Robert (some call him Bob)

This Saturday I'll hike
Get to my vista
Everyone needs a vista

Office empty; lights on; this is my quiet time
Take my book out; it's not the one you can get at Barnes

& Noble

It's a vintage one; the cover is tattered

It has a cloth bookmark; the whole thing has patina

Breathe out

Sit straight

Yoga is about breathing

Open my book

Press the pages flat

Set the bookmark out

*I pumped my fellow-prisoner as dry as I could,
for fear I should never see him again;
but at length he showed me which was my bed,
and left me to blow out the lamp.*

Turn the page;

Dad

THIS IS HOW WE WORK. THIS IS HOW WE WORK. We've got an office set up in Jacobi's condo. Guys I work with—this is guys from a company we sell to—actually call Jacobi a jackass. “The guy is a jackass.” That's the Colonel—exact words. He's our contact with the TSA and he describes our point of contact—my coworker—as a jackass. Fuck. Fuck. You get these aging queens—this guy is forty-eight, gay (except he doesn't know it)—bitter as all hell, still married, wife hates him, she has affairs, he brags constantly about some little waitress he fucked last night but the catch is:

I know these bars.

You don't fuck a waitress in Westlake without Pila, or Tara (and by extension me) knowing about it.

So I get these calls in the middle of the night—this jackass calls me on my cell phone—and he's telling me about where he's been and how he can't go home now and will I come meet him up in Westlake so he can sober up, if he goes home now Shonda will know he's drunk etcetera etcetera etcetera etcetera. Fuck. I don't care if you're gay but don't be bragging all the time about all the pussy you're getting. Just gender-switch the pronouns and have an honest conversation. I don't really care which little busboy you're sucking off I just wish you'd show up to meetings on time.

Winnie

Press my reading flat
When I go to Yoga today I will hand my money to Bob
I am centered now like I am centered in that studio
Turn the page;

*In the morning, our breakfasts were put through
the hole in the door,
in small oblong-square tin pans, made to fit,
and holding a pint of chocolate, with brown
bread,
and an iron spoon.*

Wooden spoon cracking in hot water
Wooden spoon cracking with age;
Chocolate cake when I was younger
Licking the bowl with my sister and dipping our fingers

*When they called for the vessels again,
I was green enough to return what bread I had
left;
but my comrade seized it,
and said that I should lay that up for lunch
or dinner.*

If I was a prisoner, perhaps of this nation
—If our nation went to war—
I would help the ones around me
None of my friends would starve

*Soon after he was let out to work at haying
in a neighboring field,
whither he went every day, and would not be
back till noon;
so he bade me good-day,
saying that he doubted if he should see me
again.*

I want to find a copy of that Andrew Wyeth painting
I want to get a print of that, frame it
Maybe I'll do that today after studio up on Westlake
Boulevard
There's that Michael's on the other side where I can have
it framed

Dad

“THANKS MAN, THANKS.”

“Did you call the office?”

“I thought you could call ‘em for me.” This faggot is getting in my car, he’s fucking huge.

My car dips when he sits down.

“Jesus, man.”

“I know: soda.”

“You didn’t call ‘em?”

Jacobi reaches for the air. “My phone..it’s..I left it inside.”

I hand him mine.

“I think I left it on last night. You should have seen this bitch.”

“Speed-dial 1.”

This fag looks at me. “Shouldn’t 1 be your wife?”

“Fuck you,” I say. 1 is the office.

Winnie

Turn the page;

However,

The phone is ringing

*the government does not concern me much,
and I shall bestow the fewest possible thoughts
on it.*

Two more rings before it goes to voicemail

*It is not many moments that I live under a
government,*

“Good morning, SolutionSoft.”

even in this world.

“SolutionSoft, how can I help you?”

A cough; someone coughing

Closing Thoreau, I can smell the pages

“Gwen, is the conference room empty?”; it’s Jacobi

Jacobi

iS anyone even there yEt? no?
sWiFt. rULe. i Told you no
one was gonna be theRe.
dRiVe. dRiVe. sTop Me. bUrn
a cIg. fUKc. FUKc. gWen
whose theRe. wHUt. i
Thought you said it was short
for guinevere gwen whatever
gwendolYn. NO? fUKc. sHe
says not in her caSe.
fUUUUKKKc. SO. rObert
says i have a ten-thirty
meetiNg. yEAh. wELL. iS
anyone theRe? kAmeSh? pUt
him On. mEsh meeting's at
eleven no wait what time is it
meeting's at twelVe. cAn you
tell the guYs. pUt gwendolyn
On. wHat's it short for thEn?
mErican bastardization
spelling of whAt? rIchaRd.
rICh. cAn you talk to hEr?
sHe's not making any senSe.
gEt your coffee gwEn.

Liss

Dad is with Jacobi.
That's not good.
Dad and Jacobi can be a bad combination.
Bad seeds.

—[illustration]—

“Liss, unplug, come'on, thanks for watching her.”
Pila says: “We had fun. Didn't we Liss.”
“How many bars do you have?”
“Full. Where are we going?”
“Office.”
“Hi Jacobi.”
Jacobi says hi.
He does it by waving.
Jacobi is a freak.
I mean there's something wrong with him.
God loves him, but..
You wouldn't want him around your kids.
With Jacobi, it doesn't add up.
He's one burger short of a combo meal.
(Or two tacos short of a fiesta meal, depending on how
you count it.)
If he had another brain, it would be lonely.

He's proof that evolution *can* go in reverse.
The guy is one Brady short of a Bunch.
He's lost contact with the mothership.
If Jacobi is Houston, then we have a problem.

—[illustration]—

“Hi Jacobi.”

“Hi.”

When Jacobi speaks, a different thing is going on in the inside than on the outside.

On the outside, Jacobi says: “Hi.”

On the inside, Jacobi says: “HI.”

On the outside, Jacobi says: “Is that your new Apple?”

On the inside, Jacobi says: “iS that your new appLe?”

On the outside, Jacobi says: “These have superior battery life over the A4.”

On the inside, Jacobi says: “nIckle hydriDe. jOIn. sQueAk! sMalltalk iodiDe. vINg! vING! vING!”

“Hi Jacobi.”

“Hi.”

—[illustration]—

“Pila, I'll get you later for the—”

“Don't worry about it. Do your thing.”

“Candy..”

“Call me.” She's speaking to my father.

“Oh, crap, I forgot about this—”

“Don't worry,” Pila says, “We'll feed it to the ducks.”

“I'll be back.”

Candy's holding the USB. “Take your charger.”

That's Sharks. That's in building one.

SolutionSoft is in building five.

Jacobi goes first.

He keeps trying to slow down to get between Dad and me.

But Dad won't let him.

When Jacobi slows down.

We slow down more.

Jacobi is a real jackass.

"I like that place. The girls look nice. What's that girl's name? Whatever it is, I like her. Do you go there a lot now? I remember when you used to go there a lot. You should come out with Mesh and I. Thursday night. That English pub..uh.."

He doesn't even know the name of the English pub.

"Why don't you ever come out with us anymore. You used to play poker. Did Ling scare you off? We can lower the buy-in. I cleaned Ling out the other night. Why don't you ever come anymore? It's not that far."

My dad can beat Ling's ass in poker.

Jacobi they would just clean out in the process.

I'm not always 100% a fan of my dad.

But.

There are certain things you don't want to mess with my dad in.

Poker is one of those things.

—[illustration]—

Jacobi doesn't play poker, he talks about it.

That's what my dad says.

“So..like..give us a chance sometime. I'll buy the cigarettes. Do you still eat shrimp? I crashed my bike again. Did you see it? Crashed it. Four black guys picked me up off the road. Nicest guys. Shonda doesn't eat shrimp. I was wearing my jacket. You know that exoskeleton I wear? Destroyed. These four black guys—nicest guys—they pick me up off the road. There's that curve there? I was going about ninety and there was this layer of black skid. You know black skid. You know black ice? Black skid is like the summer version of black ice. Nicest guys..”

That's what it sounds like on the outside.
On the inside it sounds like this:

Jacobi

mESh. lICk. fUKc.
sLUt. fUKc. sKEL. nIneTy.
bLack iCe.
nIggeRs.
pOkEr.
gIve us a chance sometime.

Liss

You don't want to hate idiots just 'cause they're idiots.
They can't help themselves.

I press the up button on the elevator.

"I usually take the stairs," Jacobi says, "For exercise."

I can almost hear what my dad is thinking on that one.

—[illustration]—

Winnie holds the door for us. "Hey, sweetie."

"Good morning, Winnie."

Sometimes I go formal like that.

"Is that your new tablet?"

"Yes," I say, "It has an excellent program for stargazing."

"Has Stephen called?" my dad asks.

"No," Winnie says.

"See," Jacobi says, "I told you."

"Liss. You wanna sit here?"

"Winnie can watch me."

"She has work to do, too, though. You have the wireless password?"

I nod.

Dad and Jacobi go into the conference room.

Winnie is in the break room, putting pretzels into a basket.

“You want a bagel?”

“No.”

Jacobi comes out and wipes his face with his hand. His desk has fried chicken crumbs on it.

When he sits down the chair is lopsided.

He was a leprechaun for Halloween.

The ones who guard the pot of gold?

He was that.

Jacobi takes a pill off his desk and goes back into the conference room.

My dad motions to the door.

Jacobi gets up and closes it.

Winnie is looking at Jacobi’s desk, looking right past me.

“Was that ecstasy?” I say it without looking up from my tablet.

“Yes,” Winnie says, arranging the bagels, “I think it was.”

—[illustration]—

When it’s time for the meeting, Winnie calls downstairs.

“Oh shit,” she says.

“Phone busy?”

“Yes,” she says.

Winnie cusses very proper.

When she says *s’s* they’re choppy, like *sh*. Or *ch*.

“Oh *shit*,” she says.

“Want me to get him?”

I stand.

Stephen’s office is downstairs.

It’s the corner office.

It’s on the lake.

Below him, they give sailing classes.

Twenty sailboats on the water, little tiny ones.

Sometimes the kids knock them over on purpose, then
the instructor comes to help them.
This is on the end without Judge Judy.
I'm not sure whose houses are over here.
Probably Kanye.

—[illustration]—

I knock on Stephen's door.
He leans forward and sees me.
He motions me inside.
I sit.
He's watching *Go Fug Yourself*.
I put my tablet on the couch beside me and I watch TV.
"Are you ready to go?"
"You have a nice couch."
"My friends say I should be a therapist."
"How do you like your tablet?" He's pointing at mine.
"I like it," I say.
He says: "I have the same one. Is your dad upstairs?"
"Yeah."
"Is Jacobi with him?"
I nod.
Stephen stands. He lets me out the door.
Stephen pretends not to know about the things Jacobi
does.
And the things my dad does.
But he knows.

Stephen leaves the door to the conference room open.
Winnie is wiping down Jacobi's desk with a towel.
Jacobi's standing at the window of the conference room,
looking out. "I'd prefer you didn't do that."
"Sit down." That's Stephen.
"I'd prefer she didn't do that. I have a certain chi about

that desk.”

“Too bad that chi isn’t helping us with Methanex,” Stephen says.

“Hey,” Jacobi smiles, “Hey. Methanex is fine.”

This is how their meeting goes.

“Is Kamesh here?”

“He’s downstairs.”

“Why is he downstairs? He should be upstairs. Also, where were you? I thought this meeting was supposed to be at ten.”

“Me?”

“You, yeah; who am I talking to? Where were you?”

“Richard had to come pick me up..‘cause..my bike..”

“You picked him up?”

My dad says: “Yeah.”

“Well that was nice of you.”

“My bike is totaled,” Jacobi says.

Stephen says: “I hope you’re alright.”

Then Jacobi goes on for about five minutes about his exoskeleton.

He has to get a new one.

It’s a good thing he was wearing it.

These four black guys came along and helped him.

They were the nicest guys.

“Do you need to go home?”

“No, but—Lance is sick.”

Stephen tosses his phone on the table. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

“He’s having trouble shitting,” Jacobi says.

“I’m so sorry.”

“He can hardly sit down. It hurts him. I have a picture.”

Lance is Jacobi’s dog.

Stephen doesn’t want to see the picture.

Jacobi has his phone out.

He’s showing it to him anyway.

“That’s terrible. Jack. If you need to go home—”

“No I’m fine.”

“Alright, well, if you need to go home..” Stephen trails off.

Jacobi is standing at the window. He’s knocking. He gets Winnie’s attention. Jacobi is holding up a cup, shaking it, pointing.

Winnie comes to the door.

“Winnie, please.”

“Are you thirsty?”

Jacobi hands her the cup.

Winnie goes and gets Jacobi water.

“Anyway,” Stephen says: “Methanex.”

“It’s done.”

Jacobi spins around in his chair.

“It’s done?”

Jacobi is facing the conference room wall.

“It’s done.”

Stephen looks to my dad. “Well. This is good news.”

My dad closes his screen. “Not exactly.”

Jacobi puts his feet on the wall. “What isn’t done about it? What isn’t done?”

“Hold on a minute,” Stephen says, “Didn’t Kamesh do a lot of the work on this?”

No one says anything.

Stephen presses a button on the speakerphone. “Winnie. Can you get Kamesh up here? Jacobi. Why is Kamesh downstairs?”

Jacobi shrugs.

“Isn’t this your meeting?”

Stephen looks at my dad.

My dad looks at the back of Jacobi’s chair.

Jacobi’s hands are stretched out like he’s measuring a spiderweb.

“There are a couple of items that are undone,” my dad says.

Jacobi says: “No they’re aren’t.”

“Is Kamesh coming?”

I hear Winnie both with and without the speakerphone.

“I pinged him, Stephen.”

Stephen presses the button. He’s looking at the phone.

“Did he ping back?”

Winnie presses cancel on her speakerphone. She talks to Stephen through the open conference room door.

“No,” she says, “he didn’t.”

“Will you go downstairs and get him?”

Winnie starts out.

“Jacobi. Would you go downstairs and get Kamesh?”

Stephen kicks Jacobi’s chair.

Jacobi drops the spiderweb.

“Wha—? Sure.”

Winnie holds the door for him.

Stephen asks my dad: “So what items are left undone?”

Are we gonna make Methanex?”

My dad says: “No.”

“No?”

“By August 1st?” my dad says. “No.”

“No?”

“No,” my dad says. “Not gonna make it.”

The door slams. Winnie is standing by it. Stephen looks over his shoulder.

Then he slumps in his seat.

“Why aren’t we gonna make it?”

“Because,” my dad says, “The number of hours remaining on outstanding items is greater than the number of hours between now and August 1st.”

That’s all he says. I love when my dad breaks it down.

Dad

“LISS, GET YOUR THINGS. Liss. Let’s go. Winnie..”

“You want me to give Jacobi a message?”

“Bye Winnie.”

“Bye Liss. You want me to give Jacobi a message?”

“Not really. No.”

We’re headed out the door.

“Winnie, you were going to show me a picture of your vista.”

Winnie looks at me, then at Liss. “I’ll text it to you.”

“So what’s Winnie’s vista?”

It’s me and Liss in the elevator.

“It’s this place she goes. She goes hiking.”

Everyone needs a vista.

“Does Winnie have your number?”

Liss nods. “I gave it to her.”

“You want sushi?”

Liss nods again.

We’re at Sushi Row. This guy named Dan is making our stuff. “Tiger roll..and..a Special Dan Roll—”

“With extra Special Dan Sauce,” Liss says, and coming from my nine-year-old, this makes me cringe.

“Difficult day at the office, Mr. Richard?” Then he says: “Your eyes,” before I can even ask him how he knows.

Everyone needs a vista.

Everyone needs that silent place, that place where the light goes out forever, where dirt touches sky, and there

is no one else around. Our lives don't allow it, and I don't know how it is in other countries, but you can't be fully American without a vista. Without a peak. Without the desert, canyon, sky. Without the West. You actually have to drive west once in a while to remain an American, or to become one. You can't just *be west*. You have to be east, then go west, to be an American. Once you do that you can go east again. But after a while of being east, you have to renew it by going west again. It's like those emergency beacons in submarines. If you don't reset it every 24 hours, it dislodges from the ship and goes away.

Floating to the top.

Flashing for help from some sky above the ocean.

Rocked on the seas, that point below Argentina.

Some tiny flicker, tiny flashlight floating on the waves for a day.

"Where is Winnie's vista?"

"What?" Liss has the sushi trays.

"Where is Winnie's vista?"

"It's over there." Liss points with her face. "Above the lake."

I look outside.

In the middle of the day, in the heat, in the sun, this guy is coming across the face of Sushi Row. I can tell it's a guy: hairy legs sticking out of board shorts, feet in Texas. The top half of him is a rabbit, pink fur, plush suit. His head turns and looks at us inside Sushi Row and I can't tell if the guy can see or not—through giant black eyes.

"Mr. Richard. Your credit card."

The rabbit is ahead of us, and as we get closer to Sharks, I can tell he's going the same place we are.

The back of the suit has a tail.

The legs are unzipped, plush dragging.

Giant ears: one straight-up, one flopped-over.

Somebody's having a party.

"Liss?"

"Dad?"

“Do you mind if we hang out a while?”

“No problem for me.” She has sushi in her mouth and almost drops the trays.

“How many of those do you have under there?”

“Six. Fine with me if we hang out.” My daughter finishes chewing. “I gotta give Candy her Barbarian roll.”

“How much was all this?”

“You can take it out of my savings,” Liss says, going into Sharks. “Candy.” Liss is pointing at the tray, which she’s opened and borrowed pieces from.

Pila’s gone.

Candy comes over and the two of them are shuffling around pieces of sushi.

I make myself a drink.

The rabbit comes out of the bathroom. He sits at the bar. Candy slides up on the marble and puts her ass in his direction. The rabbit shuffles up Candy’s shirt, easing both sides up, showing her skin.

Furry paws upon her.

“Do you want anything?” I’ve got Tang 10 shots set up on the bar.

“Richard,” Candy says, taking off the rabbit’s head-piece. “This is my boyfriend. Cock: Richard. Richard: Cock.”

And I’m shaking a rabbit’s hand.

Cock has maybe a \$10,000 watch.

“You drinking?”

Cock throws down a yellow pad. “Yeah.” He kisses Candy’s chest. “Is this guy the fucking bartender? Fucking bartender in a suit.”

“Drink up jackfuck, before it thaws. Liss.”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t repeat that. Sometimes word.”

“Jackfuck? Got it.”

Candy takes the Tang 10 from me. “I’ll do that.” She slides off the bar.

“Fucking bartender in a suit. Who the fuck *are* you?”

Liss is of course quietly munching sushi, minding her own business.

I hop over the bar. Now Cock and I are seated about the corner. I drink my shot. Cock isn't drinking his. I drink his. Candy pours me another from the mixer cup, straining it. There are only tiny bits of ice. "I'm Richard. Who the fuck are you?"

"Richard's one of my regulars. You two will like each other. You're the only two men I know who know how to drink."

"And what the fuck do you do?" This is Cock talking to me.

"Fucking. Work with retarded children."

"That's true," Liss says.

"Aren't you gonna ask me what I do?" Cock says.

I say: "Not really," and I'm feeling the Tang 10 slide down my throat.

Candy makes me another one.

Cock says: "I like this guy already."

"WHAT ARE THEY DRINKING?"

"Barbarian rolls."

"No they're not. *What* are they drinking?"

"Barbarian rolls. Wait. There's no such thing."

Then Cock has his arm around the back of my head and he slaps it. "I fucking love this guy. Where the hell did you come from?"

Liss is inside. Candy is watching her. Cock and I are on a bench in front of Sharks.

Cock has two new cigarettes lit for us and I take mine.

I flick my current one into the rock garden.

"That's disrespectful," Cock says.

I say: "It's been that kind of day."

"You should come to the pool with us," Cock says. He leans inside Sharks and grabs a handful of match boxes. He's relighting an already-lit cigarette, covering its tip

with another flame, sleeves of the rabbit suit hanging off the edge of the bench. “How did you and Candy meet?”

“I come in here a lot.”

“Did she come on to you?”

“Not—” I’m stuck at the word.

“Not as much as you wanted her too yeah yeah she’s like that fucking cunt—but I love ‘er—fuck. I love that girl. You see how we are.”

“Yeah.”

“Right?”

“Yeah.”

“Candy!” Cock stands up. “Bring us another motherfucking *drink!*”

Candy yells from inside. Pila must be on an errand. “What the fuck do you want?”

Cock looks at me.

“G & Ts.”

“GIN and TONICS, bitch,” Cock says, “Get us some gin and tonics.”

“You want more of the same?”

Cock throws his matchbox at the opposite wall. That’s a Morgan Stanley. Over there. That side of the courtyard is Morgan Stanley. Cock is leaning inside Sharks. “Does the bear have a fucking pointy hat? Yeah. More of the same.”

“I wasn’t asking you,” Candy says. “I was asking Richard.”

“Yeah.” I stand. “Liss: y’allright?” (Liss nods.)

“She’s fine. We’re fine, aren’t we?” Candy says. “Why don’t you light me a cigarette?”

“Come out,” I say, “Smoke this one.”

Cock is looking at me. “She’s gonna smoke that one?” I just laugh.

“My girlfriend..is gonna smoke your cigarette?”

“Yeah,” I say—and then I lower my voice: “What do you think we’ve been doing all this time, waiting for you to get here? Drink gin and tonics?”

“She sucks a mean cock doesn’t she?”

“Yeah,” I say.

“She’s never sucked your cock, has she?” Cock asks.

“It’s not for a lack of trying,” I say.

“What?” Cock says. He legitimately doesn’t hear me.

“I said,”—I flick my cigarette and it sparks on the Morgan Stanley window—“I said it’s not for a fucking lack of trying.”

For a second Cock is trying to figure out whether to believe me. And for a second I’m trying to figure out just how crazy Cock is. Then he puts his arms around my waist—and this rabbit is huge—and he picks me up—this guy is fifteen years younger than me—and he’s lifting me up above his shoulders and twirling us both around in the rock garden and this Morgan Stanley lackey is pulling down his shades and Candy brings the drinks out and she’s sitting on top of us both in the rock garden and there’s my little daughter standing in the doorway to Sharks and she’s holding up a fish in her hand and the fish is dripping and flopping around and Liss is gripping it in both hands and Candy spills the drinks and I’m not actually sure who is licking up some Tanqueray 10 off my arm and Cock is whispering in Candy’s ear “Let him come to the pool with us” and Candy’s like “I already invited him to the pool” and I’m like “Is *he* invited?” and Candy is the first of us to realize that Liss has SHARK! out of his cage and the poor fucker is trying to breathe out of water and I’m lying there with Cock while the camera turns sideways and Candy has spills all over her and she’s working with Liss on the fish and there’s a guy on the balcony looking down at the rock garden and Cock is standing there throwing matchbooks up at the guy and yelling about getting his inventory in and how he’ll fax it in an hour and it’s Friday afternoon and produce doesn’t have to be in ‘till Monday at noon and nobody ever checks it anyway and the guy is ducking matchboxes as Cock chucks them upstairs even through the guy’s open door after he goes back inside.

“Fucking asshole.”

“Shut up! Baby! Help me here!” Candy’s squealing. “Didn’t you just sign an extension with that mother-fucker?”

“Fuck him!” Cock is saying. He dips down and picks up a rock from the rock garden. He throws it at the guy’s door and it lands somewhere inside the office. “Ronnie. Fuck yourself. I’ll fax it to you on Monday. I’ll fax you the fucking thing. I’ll fax it to you in an hour. Fucking guy.” Cock sits in the rock garden and fishes around for his cigarette, which is still burning in the pebbles.

This is when I realize the Morgan Stanley guy is watching me from the side of his window. And his secretary is watching us from the other side of the window. I slam my elbow through the glass, and part of my arm is inside their office. There’s glass on the copier. Something’s printing so I grab a sheet and take it with me. It’s page 10 of 17. I fish around on the copy table. There’s a red button on the front. I press it. “Save you some power,” I say.

Liss

Sharks cannot breathe out of water.
No, they decidedly cannot.
My dad is a shark.
So is Cock.

—[illustration]—

Sharks need water to breathe.
I am not a shark.

—[illustration]—

Sharks prance on fins.
I prance on feet.

—[illustration]—

Sharks swim in schools.

They can never be alone.
I can't do flocking behavior.
Even at school, I am always one.

—[illustration]—

Some people always need to have a twin.
They look at you like looking through a mirror.
They need what's on the other side to be the same as
what is on the one.
I am not a shark.

—[illustration]—

I just thought we should establish that before we go any
further.
I feel better now.
Are there other things we might establish before going
any further?
No.
I am not a shark.
That is all you need to know.

—[illustration]—

I do not belong to the family *chondrichthyes*, as sharks
do.
About three-hundred fifty kinds of sharks are known to
mankind.

Only one type of me is known.
A shark does not have a single bone in its body.
I have two-hundred and eight.
A shark's teeth are replaced every eight days.
Mine are only replaced once.
Sharks never get cancer.
I might.
The Mako shark is said to be able to swim at more than
sixty miles per hour.
I cannot swim. (I can tread.)
I call the Mako shark *The Great White Attack Shark*.
Sharks attack their prey like a pack of wild dogs.
I have a dog.
I call my dog Ponce de León. Juan for short.
Sharks grow ten inches per annum.
Per annum, I grow only one.
I am not a shark.

—[illustration]—

My flocking behavior is questionable.
There must be fish who never learn to flock.
If fish never flocked they wouldn't be photographed as
much.
There must be a fish right at the middle of the school.
Who has never been outside the school.
He has lived his entire life.
Surrounded.

—[illustration]—

He would be like a city person in the country.

Like someone from Jersey who's never pumped his own gas.
Then he would go to Montana.
And he would have to pump his own gas.
He wouldn't know what to do at first.
He would sit in his car.
Like someone who's only ever seen a butterfly in a book.
He wouldn't know what to do with it.
He wouldn't know that it's squishy.
That it has powder covering its body.
That it tickles.
He wouldn't know about that.
I had a caterpillar once that I let die.
I wanted to see what it's like when something stops breathing.

—[illustration]—

If you take something out of its cage it usually doesn't do too well.
I have discovered that.

Maybe that's why cages exist.
The creatures get dependent on their cage.
When you take them out.
Usually they die.

—[illustration]—

Shark had to go back into his.
His aquarium.
Pila helped me.

Hi SHARK!

Hi.

Are you glad to be back in your cage?

Tap tap tap.

Hi SHARK!

Hungry? Want some sushi?

Feed him.

Feed him a little bit.

He'll just take a little piece.

Feed him a piece of the Barbarian roll.

Lift the top.

No one looking.

Drop.

It floats all the way to the bottom.

I wonder what happens when a shark eats sushi?

Maybe it's okay if he eats certain kinds.

Like if sharks stick to octopus.

And octopi stick to California rolls.

There's a degree of separation beyond which it is okay.

Within which it disrupts a delicate balance.

SHARK! doesn't notice.

He doesn't even notice.

Maybe he knows it will disrupt things.

Smart SHARK!

Smart.

You're a very smart shark.

Unlike some people I know.

Dad and Candy are flirting while the bunny goes to the bathroom.

That is not smart.

Not-smart shark. Not-smart shark.

Pila's watching them.

He knows.

The rabbit comes out of the bathroom and they're on their own sides of the bar.

Before they were meeting in the middle.

Candy leaning over.

Dad leaning over.

That's what a not-smart shark and a not-smart shark will tend to do.

When they get together.

You take a shark from this cage and a shark from that cage and you put them in a cage together.

One not-smart shark. Plus another not-smart shark.

You put them in a cage together.

I am not a shark.

—[illustration]—

“Liss, you don't mind if we go to Candy's pool party.”

“Who's gonna drive?”

“You can if you want to!”

Dad and Candy crack up laughing.

—[illustration]—

Very funny.

“Who's driving?”

Dad gets his keys out and puts them on the bar.

“Pila's going to drive us.”

“No I'm not.”

“SHARK! can drive.”

“What?”

Candy's laughing, not even looking at me. “She said SHARK! can drive us.”

Dad comes to sit with me.

“Did you feed him sushi?”

“You can't drive to the party.”

“I won't, I won't. Here, hold the keys.”

I'm not taking 'em.

“Is the bunny coming?”

“Candy.”

“What.”

Dad tilts his head.

Candy comes over. She touches my hands.

“It’s the bunny’s pool,” she says. She takes Dad’s keys and puts them on other other side of the bar. “You’re very smart not to want us driving drunk,” she says.

I put my foot down. “Then who’s driving?”

Candy looks at Pila but he’s gone. “We’ll take a cab.”

“How expensive is that gonna be?”

“Don’t you want to come to the pool?”

“Does it have a chlorine monitor?”

“I don’t know. Baby!” Candy yells into the bathroom.

The bunny sticks his head out. He has the mask on.

It’s just his head sticking around the door.

Huge black sockets for eyes.

“Do you have a pool monitor?”

The rabbit scratches his ears.

“A pool monitor.”

The rabbit shrugs.

I stand up on my chair. My arm is on Dad.

“Do you have a chlorine monitor for your pool?”

The rabbit nods.

No sound comes from his mouth.

Just a giant, slow nod.

“That’s all.”

I say it. The rabbit ducks behind the door.

Candy’s leaning over the bar at my dad.

I put my hand on Candy’s head.

I wipe her hair back.

I look down.

The two of them: not-smart shark and not-smart shark.

And they want to take me to their pool.

“I need to speak to Dad alone.”

—[illustration]—

“Are you having an affair?”

“No!”

“Are you and Mom getting divorced?”

“No!”

“I don’t care. I just want to know.”

“We’re just going to their house.”

“But you like her.”

“Candy?”

“It’s okay, I know about you and Mom’s ‘arrangement.’ I just wanna know if you’re executing it.”

“Liss. No. This is optional. We don’t have to go. It’s only if you want to.”

“We’re already going. I know we’re going. I wanna get the ground rules straight.”

“Of course.”

I’m thinking of the rules. “One—is this a sleepover?”

“It’s not a sleepover. It’s an afternoon. It’s like..an hour.”

“Two. I need a suit. We’re stopping at the store on the way.”

“What’s three?”

“Three is the bunny has to say his real name. It freaks me out when people call him Cock.”

“Done.”

“I know you can’t guarantee three. And we gotta get toothbrushes at the store. And I get to pick the dinner. And I’m not,” I say, “I’m not sleeping with anyone else in the same room with me. Even..even Candy. You get me a couch somewhere or I’ll sleep in the car, understood?”

“I told you it’s not a sleepover. Liss.”

I’m wobbling my tooth.

“And I don’t want to hear about you and Mom’s arrangement.”

My dad is nodding.

“Or the exceptions and executions thereof.”

“Understood.”

“And I need some Gummy Worms.”

“We’ll get them at the grocery store.”

“And I need to be back in Hollywood for Pilates tomorrow. That’s an absolute. Are you telling Mom where we’re going?”

My dad has his phone out. He dials Mom.

There’s a wobble in my tooth.

Snapdragon.

I’m wiggling it back and forth.

That’s why I need the Gummy Worms.

Darn darn darn I didn’t want this to be happening right now.

Dad is on the phone with Mom.

Snapdragon twice.

I’m looking out over the railing by the lake. There’s fish in there.

“Hannah. Hey, it’s me. Me and Liss are going by the store..”

I can feel it. Feel it with my tongue.

Snapdragon times three.

I’m gonna lose this tooth.

Dad

I FELT GUILTY. I DID. I felt guilty about being happy.

I had been taught to accept such limited ideas of happiness. Some of that teaching had been done by others. Some of that teaching had been done by myself.

Liss was my favorite. Liss was my blessing. Liss was my favorite part of Hannah, she really was. You love everyone in your family but some people are just cut from more of the same cloth. You know how it is.

I was happy for little moments with Liss, little moments with Hannah, little moments with everyone. I can even be happy certain moments with Jacobi. At work, sometimes, there's a tiny moment of okay-ness with Jacobi. When I remember that he's human. That he hurts. Jacobi hurts. I have to remember that.

"Pick out your toothbrush."

"Can I get electric?"

"It's only for one night."

"You said this wasn't a sleepover."

"Get those flosser things, too. I'll meet you at the swimuits."

"Dad. I'm not buying a swimsuit *here*."

"It's only for one night. Let's not spend a fortune."

"Flosser things are expensive."

"What do you want for dinner?"

"I don't know yet."

"Well think about it."

Liss is off down the toothbrush aisle.

I'm thumbing through my texts. There's one from Candy. It says: "gyyd shyt". I text back: "call me". She texts back: "why".

Because I'm fifty-two fucking years old, that's why.

Because I can't type on this keyboard.

I need to get one of those new chorded ones. It's like six keys. You can type whatever you want.

My phone is ringing.

"What."

"You never told us the address."

"You can follow me and Cock there."

"Where are you and Cock."

"We're in the car. Did you get swimsuits? What? Cock says you can wear his. What?"

"Where are you and Cock."

"Yeah. Don't buy new ones. Cock has a pair of board shorts."

"We're getting one for Liss. How can I meet you?"

"What? Where are you now?"

"Costco."

"Where?"

"Fucking Costco!" I'm yelling this in the middle of Costco.

"Meet us at Rosa's. Do you like Bloody Marys?"

"You have reservations?"

"My friend works there. If I call ahead, when we get there, there will be three Bloody Marys set out on the counter, waiting for us. Did Liss find a swimsuit?"

"Have them make Liss something. I mean, you know, have *four* things sitting on the counter, please. Do I sound like an old man?"

"Of course, no, yes, four Bloody Marys. This guy..I'll call now. Meet us there in twenty minutes. He'll have them sitting on the counter. You remember what we talked about? What?! Nothing! Shut up I'm talking to my friend. You remember what we talked about? Yeah. That's still going to happen. I'll text you. Okay?"

You find yourself having these conversations in the middle of Costco. You never know when these conversations will happen. In my twenties—in my early twenties—these conversations would happen more often. They're like rabbit holes—that you might just fall into. In my twenties it was more like one continuous rabbit hole, so it was harder to tell what you fell into. These rabbit holes can open up anywhere, anytime. They're all around us. They suck time. It's like there's normal space and there's rabbit-hole space. Normal space is a rabbit-hole too. Normal space is the rabbit hole you're most used to, and sometimes, it's *leaving* normal space that shocks you into realization. Sometimes it's normal space that was the dream. Which is very dangerous. Because it makes it easy to spend your life dreaming, and never know it. Some people wake up at the last minute.

And it's only when you wake up—or when you go to sleep—that you know that you were sleeping—or that you were awake.

“Dad. Is this okay?”

Liss picked out a swimsuit.

“Will you be comfortable in it?”

Liss nods.

“Do you need a towel?”

“Don't they *have* towels?”

“Do you want to get your own? If you want one, get it.”

“I can use their towels. Dad. Let's go. I want to swim before it's dark.”

Which is exactly the problem. The *instant* you try to chase the light—the light is gone.

ROSA'S.

Candy wasn't lying.

There are four Bloody Marys set out on the counter. One of them has a pink straw.

“Liss.”

“This is virgin?”

Candy’s friend—this kid Joey—pushes it to my daughter.

“Tell me what you think.”

“It’s sweet.”

“Too sweet?”

Liss takes another sip. She wipes her mouth. “No, I like it.”

Candy slaps me on the back. “See?”

Then it’s me and Cock in conversation.

Candy swaps with Cock, so it’s Liss, Candy, Cock, me.

Candy is still texting me this whole time.

That’s why I live in the darkness.

That’s why I live in spite.

Today I might.

Now.

That’s why I’m *right now*. For a moment. Gander at a text.

Next.

That’s why I gander at a text.

And Cock is lying.

“He’s in distribution. That guy. *I’m* in distribution. That guy. This is a very small town. I mean. You’re talking. The Valley? That’s very small. That Whole Foods? Know this guy—*this* guy—guy’s throwing up the bathroom of a Whole Foods. Know those drinks? Those ones with active enzymes in them? Bacteria. Those ones. That’s the guy I’m talking about. This guy has a farm for teacup chihuahuas. Teacups! Fuck Paris Hilton. Fuck her. I’m talking *teacups*. Guy is sitting at Whole Foods with his dog and people keep coming up to *ask* him if he’ll sell it. This is his dog! Fuckers are coming up *asking* him if he wants to sell his dog. That’s what I’m talking about. That’s Los Angeles. *That’s* Los Angeles. I’m talking greatness. That’s what I’m talking about. I’m saying *greatness*, I’m talking about people with nicknames, I’m talking *moviestars*. That’s what I

mean. You follow me? That's what I'm *talking about*. Guy has a gun rack. This is Los Angeles. Guy has a gun rack. This is Beverly Hills. Guy sees *Robin Williams* riding a bicycle..Santa Monica Boulevard. Little hotel at beach front. End of the road. This is a town.."—Cock grabs my arm—" *This* is a town..where..they have fuck-ing shoe shops—shoe shops!—you can get real leather. I'm talking real leather shoe shops and old-style diners like Mexico. Can I get another drink? I'm saying like *Mexico*. Okay? This is like..*right here*. Fucking dine-in on the Santa Monica with like..the tiniest little parking lot you've ever seen. And these clubs. These clubs. Guy takes your order you'll never *see* him again. He's out. He's out like trout. That's what I'm talking about. *That's* Los Angeles. That's Los Angeles."

That's what Cock lies about.

Lying about.

And this is Candy's text:

PEPPERMINT

WHOT

THE RED AND THE WHITE

WHOT

THAT:S THAT PEPPERMYNT

WHOT

THA:S WHAT I:M TALKYNG ABOUT

WHOT

THA:S THA:S PEPPERMYNT

OH

I see how it is.

Snarling kat.

Terrible diamond.

Muffynfucker.

Snout.

WHY ARE YOU SO NYCE? :this is what she texts me.

SO THAT YOU'll KEEP TALKING :this is what I text.

I'm existing on multiple times, multiple timetables, this is where it's at.

YOU KNOW YOU CAN ALWAYS STAY WITH ME: that's Candy.

But I don't want to leave you in the dark. I wouldn't do that to my audience. So I'm going to tell you what we're talking about. Tell you about the peppermint. There's two guys—they're talking—they're talking in their balcony—and they're like:

"Right down there..that used to be a needle drop-off."

"It used to be a wat?"

"CNN."

"For real."

"Yeah. And these junkies. They keep coming by. They think it's still CNN!"

And some cop drives by.

And it's me. It's me on some Thursday night, and Liss's sleeping in her bed. And she's knowing nothing. And Jacobi's out fucking some waitress trying to convince himself he's straight.

And what am I doing?

I'm over at some former CNN location, and some two guys are leaning out their balcony talking about me and they're like: "Yeah, this used to be a CNN." And I'm like: "Where the fuck is the CNN?"

Some cop following me.

And I didn't take a cab this time.

These are the rabbit holes.

These are the ones.

RED and the WHITE.

Peppermint.

What we're talking about here is blood. Blood and crystal meth. Mixing. Mixing in pipes. Mixing in your veins. Comprehensive research. This kind of research you can't *pay* for. It's not available in a store. It's not coming soon..near you.

Candy's texting me.

She's telling me it's in the bathroom.

I'm going to put it underneath the towels. It's in the guest bathroom under the hand towels.

Blood.

I'm gonna leave it for you there.

You go in.

Don't take too long.

You go in.

You find it underneath the towels.

I was on a bus one time. I had just bought it. This was 30 years ago.

My car's around the corner.

And Candy's telling me:

YOU GO IN. YOU FIND THE TOWELS. YOU LOOK UNDER THEM. YOU LOOK FOR THE VERY BOTTOM OF THE TOWELS. IT'S THERE. DON'T TAKE TOO LONG. COCK DOESN'T KNOW. DON'T FORGET. IT'S JUST ME AND YOU. I'LL SMOKE IT. THEN YOU GO. I'LL TAP YOU. THEN YOU SMOKE IT. YOU GO. I'LL KEEP IT HIDDEN UNDERNEATH THE BOTTOM TOWEL IN THE GUEST BATHROOM. COCK DOESN'T KNOW. HE WOULD KILL ME, COCK WOULD KILL ME. PEOPLE LIKE YOU AND ME, WE HAVE TO KEEP THIS QUIET. WE KNOW. YOU SMOKE IT. I'LL TAP YOU AND THEN YOU cOME IN FROMTHE POOL AND YOU SMOKE IT. THIS IS HOW IT IS.

And Candy taps me.

And we're leaving Rosa's.

Liss's in the parking lot.

Little girl.

My daughter.

Candy and Cock are fighting.

I'm not sure Cock can drive.

Candy's threatening to leave him.

And Cock is confiding in me.

He's asking for my help.

Candy is off and sits in the parking divider.

It's like 4 o'clock.

And if anyone ever asked me.

I'd be pressed to say that this is what happiness is.

Liss

They drank too much.
They drank too much.
How else can I say it?
They drank too much.

—[illustration]—

How many Bloody Marys does a person need?
Two? Three? Five?
They drank too much.
I'm never drinking that much when I'm old.
Never.

—[illustration]—

I say when you're sitting in a parking lot and your friend's
daughter is holding your hair out of your face so you don't
get vomit in it—
That you drank too much.
"You drank too much."
"Thanks, I know."

“Candycane.”
“You don’t have to do that.” Candy explodes again.
“Did you call me Candycane?”
There, there. I pet her back. She’s my little Candycane.
“Hold on one second.” Candycane gets up.
Candycane staggers over to Cock.
She takes a swing at him.
She misses.
She takes off her shoe.
She goes over to Cock’s Escalade.
She puts her shoe through the window of the Escalade.
Cock is waving his hands in the air.
“Hey! Hey! What was that for?”
My dad is holding the bunny helmet.
Cock has the bunny sleeves tied around his waist.
He takes off his Teyva.
He puts it through the other window.
“Is this what we’re doing now? Is this the game? You’re a spoiled bitch..is what you are. You’ve never *not* had nice things. You’ve never *not*. You’re a spoiled fucking bitch and you can’t give head.”
“I CAN’T GIVE HEAD?! I CAN’t GIVE HEAD??
Who the fuck are we talking about that can’t give head?”
Candy goes to my dad.
“This motherfucker. That motherfucker right there. Do you know how long it takes this motherfucker to cum?”
Cock has off his other Teyva. He launches it across the parking lot.
“This motherfucker. First day I met him. Sucked his cock for half an hour.”
“All I wanted to do was take you home.”
“Sucked his fucking cock for half an hour!”
“She had on this crazytight little dress. Why don’t you wear that dress anymore?”
“Because you fucking ripped it.”
“Oh yeah, that’s right.”
“I don’t think you ever even came the first time we had sex together.”

“No—wait—no I didn’t.”

“Takes this motherfucker *forever* to cum.”

“Baby. Look what you did to my car.”

“Look what you fucking did to it.”

“I wanna leave you right here.”

Cock is shaking his head.

“I wanna leave you right here. You know that? Just to show you that you don’t break people’s nice things. You don’t have a job, so you don’t know about that.”

“I have a job!”

“Candy, I’m talking about a real job. You sit up at Sharks drinking drinks with this motherfucker. That’s not a real job. This motherfucker—” (He means my dad.) “—this motherfucker has a real job. You don’t know what it’s like to *have* a real job ‘cause you’ve never *had* a real job.”

Candy’s kicking the side of the Escalade.

“How about that?” she says.

How about it.

“Liss, come’ere. Help me tear this motherfucker’s shit apart.”

“Leave you right here.”

I’m looking at my dad. Can I?

“Go ahead!” Cock says. “If it’s okay with you.”

Dad motions to the Escalade.

“Come’ere Liss. Let’s have a girl party.”

“Oh yeah, that’s some girl party!”

Candy digs her ring into the side of the Escalade.

“Oh! That’s fucking great! This bitch is one in a million.

I *bought you* that fucking ring!”

My dad is laughing.

Candy takes off the ring and gives it to me. “Scratch it.”

I look at my dad.

“Don’t lose it.”

“Candy. What the fuck. Why’d you take off that ring.”

“Because I don’t love you anymore.”

“Candy, get in the car. Can we please just fucking *go*? Look. The sun is setting. Look, see. It’s almost dark.

Liss wants to go swimming—” Cock is bouncing up and down “—before dark! You’re messing up a little girl’s fun. Fucking girl party.”

“Give me that.” Candy takes the ring.

“You still want to go swimming?” Cock asks my dad.

“Or is this whole thing..ruined?”

Then Candy cocks back and she throws the ring across the parking lot.

The bunny is mortified.

Lapin mort.

The bunny is speechless.

He and my dad are looking at each other.

“Well,” my dad says, smiling. “Let’s go.”

—[illustration]—

This is us driving around the parking lot in Cock’s busted Escalade.

—[illustration]—

This is Candy getting out of the car.

—[illustration]—

Cock doesn’t speak the entire time.

—[illustration]—

My dad and I sit in the back seat.

—[illustration: SHARK!, in a bowl—or jumping out of one!, sits next to Liss]—

Candy finally finds it.

—[illustration]—

“It’s dark now. See? It’s dark. You’re messing up Liss’s fun.”

But they didn’t mess up my fun.

I like swimming in the dark, too.

Cock’s house is amazing.

It has statues in the front.

One is broken.

—[illustration]—

“We broke that last week. Me and Mega Cock. We almost lit the house on fire.”

Cock’s living room has a pool table.

There’s a bar.

The house has hardly any furniture.

There’s a giant TV.

The living room opens onto the pool.

“Mega Cock!! Are you here? Becca?”

Cock opens the refrigerator.
The only thing in it is beer.
“Y’all want something to drink?”
But I’m out with the pool.
I sit on the edge.
The pool looks over the top side of Los Angeles.
It’s a vista.

—[illustration: SHARK! swims freely in the pool]—

If Winnie were here she would love it.
I take a picture.

—[illustration]—

You can see everything.
You can see so far.
You can almost see to the ocean.
You can see where the lights stop.

And inbetween.
Inbetween.
So many lights.
So many people.
And everyone’s doing their thing.
Everyone’s in their little houses, watching TV.
That’s where all those shows get watched.
That’s why there’s so many Starbucks.
All those people.
All those lights.
Quiet night. Simple night. Night by the pool.
Blue light.

Ripples.

I put my feet in. My shoes are in the Escalade.

Tickle my toes, tickle my toes.

I'm breathing.

I can move my fingers.

Some people are stuck in beds in hospitals.

Some people are locked in.

I can move my toes, can feel them.

I can lick my hair.

I don't mind the wind.

It blows my hair into my mouth.

But some people can't even do that. Some people can't lick their hair.

The inventor of Pilates, Joesph, was sick as a child.

Tickle my toes.

Wave them back and forth.

Inside the house, there's my dad and Cock and Candy.

They're doing shots.

Naturally.

—[illustration]—

This is how they do them:

Candy gets on Cock's back.

Cock is pouring the shots.

Cock knocks over a statue.

He is motioning to Dad.

Dad climbs up on Candy.

Candy grabs the bunny hat.

She puts it on my dad.

Dad lifts it up to do his shot.

Candy's hand is on my dad.

Cock almost falls over.

Cock hands Candy a glass.

Candy drinks it.

Then.

The bunny staggers. Candy grabs my Dad. Dad is falling back. His arm catches on a statue. The statue breaks. Bunny falling. Candy falling. All of them in a puddle on the kitchen floor. Arms reaching out to grab things. Pieces of statue. A glass. Cock is slapping my dad. My dad is slapping him back. They're slapping each other's faces. They're both red. They're not angry. They're slapping each other's faces. In joy. I suppose. I guess it's joy. Candy jumps up and does a pile driver on her boyfriend. She slams her elbow into him. He's reeling. Candy kicks my dad. My dad falls back. His head hits a statue. Then my dad takes it. He takes the statue. He lifts it over his head. He's standing. Candybunny is below him. My dad lifts this statue—it's one of those Greek-looking guys—he lifts the statue. Candy has her hand up. Guarding. Terror. Like how you would look right before Pompeii. Lava floating down on you. Holding that hand up like it's going to stop it. A river of lava. A mountain. And at that last minute, you throw your hands out in front of your face. Like that's going to stop it. Dad lifts the statue. Cock is laughing. He's laughing. That bunny is laughing. He's asking my dad to drop it. To break his statue. He wants it. The bunny wants to be crushed. So does Penny Candy. That's all she is. A little piece of penny candy. I know she's planning something with my dad. After Cock falls asleep. She's going to drug him. Drug her cock. Put him out. Then she's going to do something with my dad. You can never trust a piece of penny candy. She's nothing but a penny. Candy's looking at him *like that*. Lying back in Cock's arms, but she's got that look. Horrible piece of penny candy. Those stupid shorts. I hate cutoffs. And Cock is a bad bunny; what's his real name? I don't trust someone who goes by the name of "Cock". Why does he do that? Is he trying to be a man? His hand is on

his Candy. It's giant. He holds her like a racket. And who's that other man in there, that man they call my dad. Who's holding the statue. This is what they do for fun. And Cock is begging for it, he's saying it, he's telling my dad to do it. I should pre-call the ambulance. "Hello? Hi. Yes. There's a bunny here got a statue broke over his head. Come quick."

Dad

COCK'S HALLWAY, WHERE CANDY SAID SHE PUT IT. The first bathroom. And there's Cock's office. Low desk. Two computers. Tons of paper.

Cock is lying on the kitchen floor.

He's fine.

The whole fucking garage is filled with broken statues.

Pilates tomorrow. Gotta get Liss home by like 8.

Candy's gonna keep him entertained. She said she'd give him pills. He'll pass out. Liss will go to sleep. Then we'll go smoke by the pool or on Cock's Camaro. Candy said she'd drive. Until then it's in the bathroom.

Hidden under some towels.

I have to take a shit.

Candy told me she put it under the second to the last towel. Said there's a stack in there. Said to put everything back like I found it. It's one of those bathrooms could only have been put together by a housewife or a maid. Little shell soaps. Straight out of Home Depot. It's the bathroom you always hoped you'd have, when you had a real grown-up house someday. Maybe it's the bathroom you knew you'd have to have to keep your wife happy. Our bathrooms aren't like this. Hannah's a free spirit.

"Did you find it?"

This is Candy yelling back at me.

She means the bathroom.

"Yeah," I say. As soon as I close that door I'm on

a clock. I have to be in there for exactly the amount of time that it takes to piss, to take a shit, to do whatever I would be expected to be doing in Cock's bathroom for about three minutes.

Close. Click. The light is on.

There's those towels.

I pick them up, all but the last one.

There's nothing there.

I'm looking around the bathroom. It's fucking pristine. I hate this kind of bathroom. I bet no one even uses the shower.

It's got lights like a dressing-room mirror.

"Cock would kill me," Candy was saying. "He would fucking kill me if he knew. If he knew we were doing it in his house—he would kill you too."

"Won't he smell it?"

"No," she says. "He never goes in there. I'll put it in the guest bathroom. It's the first room on the right, after the hallway turns. There's a stack of towels. It's right by the sink. I'll go in before you. You talk to him. I'll go smoke. Then you go back. You smoke." Candy's grabbing my arm. She's giddy like a four-year-old. "I know you're gonna love it. I get good shit."

Everyone always thinks their shit is the best.

I pick up the last towel.

It's there.

It's not between the last and the second-to-last towel.

It's at the very bottom.

Faux-wicker basket.

It's really plastic.

You find yourself in these places in Hollywood—and I used to ride my bike everywhere—there's people who do drugs and there's people who don't. You might be riding your bike out over some bus stop and there's some old man talking to you and he doesn't do drugs—he's got a family—he's got grandkids. Then you might be a block down, 2am. Some guy got you the stem. He knows the seller. The seller drives around the street in

some bulletproof SUV. He won't talk to you. He'll talk to this homeless guy. And they can get you ecstasy—but it's not real ecstasy. You have to be careful with those guys. But if you just want to smoke some crack, that's no problem.

Candy has it ready.

She already smoked it.

There's a white film at the bottom of the pipe.

I put the towels down next to the sink.

There's one of those stupid decorative stoppers. It's in the shape of Poseidon, with his spear.

I'm on the edge of the sink, my back to the mirror.

She's got a torch; nice big lighter.

I flick it.

And I go.

First time I smoked crystal meth, with my neighbors, when I was twenty—this is in Hollywood. In LA we refer to *buildings* as having drug problems. It's not about one person. The Standard—the strip?—it has a cocaine problem. The *building* does. It's like how servers always smoke pot? It's part of the restaurant business. The Standard has a coke problem. The Alto Nido—where I used to live—it has a meth problem.

First time I smoked it it was like a lightness in my lungs.

Like flight.

You walk up and down the hallways—all you smell is meth. The Alto Nido: that's the building in the opening shot of Sunset Blvd. Know that film?

I check the door.

I don't lock it.

It's closed.

I'm up on the counter. This is how we do it. I've got the stem.

I spark it: nice, slow flame.

It's boiling.

Fuck. You always fuck up your hands doing this.

It's melting.

Twist it.
Twist the stem.
A cauldron.
White.
Smoke. It's turning.
Turn it. There we go.
I take a breath.
Pilates is about breathing.
There it is.
White smoke.
Saliva catching—throat catch.
It's not there yet.
I see myself in the mirror—reflection catches me.
He doesn't like to look at himself—times like these.
He looks away. He has things to do. He'll deal with
that later.
It's not necessary to reflect.
Just melt it.
Bitter.
“You okay back there?” That's Candy's voice.
“Yeah. I'm fine.”
“Did you see those shorts I left you?”
“Board shorts? Yeah.” There they are.
Then Cock: he's saying something about *why do I
need shorts*.
“You're drunk, baby. You're drunk. Where's that
order?”
“I dunno I had it—where *is* that order?”
I lean out the door. “Is Liss okay?”
“Liss is fine.”
Candy is with me. “You need to close that door.”
“Are you watching her?”
“She placed the order. She placed Chinese. Those
board shorts should fit you fine. Give me a hit. Give me a
hit. Go. Shut up.” She grabs my dick. Grabs the trunk.
It's not even sexual. Elephants shaking hands. “Give me
one real quick.” Candy's on the counter. Frayed jeans.
I can see the edge of everything. That mirror.

I touch it.

“Oh, baby, are you doing that? Don’t look at it. Here. Take a hit.”

“Where’s Cock?”

“He’s fuckin’—passed out. He’s with Liss.”

“Who is Mega Cock?”

Candy is rolling the stem.

She hits it. She makes me hit it. She touches my dick again.

“How does that feel?”

“Wonderful.”

“Change into those shorts. Put this back. Put it under the second-to-last towel. Come out. Liss is by the pool.”

“What did you order?”

“Chinese. And we used your credit card.”

“Good.”

“Candy.”

I grab her.

“They’ll know.”

She puts her fingers on my chin.

“They won’t know. They won’t. How do I look?”

“Fine.”

“Just don’t say anything. Come to the pool. Okay? Come to the pool. You feel that? That’s nyce, huh? Told you I got the guud shyyt. Cock’ll pass out. Get some dinner. Liss is by the pool. Come out..in one..second.”

Candy’s gone.

I’m left with the mirror.

That reflection.

Pink bunny.

Oh my god.

Liss is by the pool.

Don’t say anything.

How can they not smell it?

They won’t know.

Cock.

HE WOULD KILL ME IF HE KNEW.

I take another hit.
I heat it up.
It had gotten cold.
My thumb is raw. Holding the lighter.
One more hit.
One more.
I don't feel it yet.
Their shit is never as good as they say.
I look in the mirror.
Don't.

Do not do that. Look at the shower. Look at the seashells. Look at the dressing lights. Bright. With a reflexure. Light lines in wire. Bold relief. And I can feel it. That sexual feeling. I hope it stays. I'm up on the counter, soaking wet, knees pulled in, pipe in hand, running that lighter. Thumbs raw. Switching to the other one. She has more. She has more in her car. This isn't the last of it. Get it liquid. Candy's out there. What if I smoke the last of her shit? Candy might be mad at me. Cock might be mad. Cock is going to find out. You have to know that. Cock is going to find out. You can't just smoke meth in some motherfucker's bathroom and have him not find out.

Put the everything back.
Put it back.
That's all you can smoke for now.
Candy has more.
I'll come back for another trip to the bathroom.
Get it really high.
This is just the first trip.
Go out there.
Put the towels back.
Put it where Candy says.
No.
Put it where Candy'll look for it.
Put it under the last towel.
Bottom of the wicker basket.
Grab those board shorts.

Close the door.
Hallway.
There's Cock's office.
There's the bedroom.
Candy is kneeling on Cock in the middle of the kitchen.
"How are those shorts?" she asks.
I place them on the marble counter. "The shorts are fine."
"Good," Candy says. She gets off Cock.
Liss is by the pool.
Her feet are in.
She's looking out over Los Angeles.
Cock looks blissfully, perfectly happy.
He rolls up and searches in his cabinets.
Medical jar there; prescription bottle.
"You want some of this?"
He's tapping out a line.
"You want some of this?"
He's got a huge bottle of cocaine. It's like—half a pound.
"I don't really use it," Cock says. "I just keep it around for company."
The doorbell rings.
Candy goes to get it.
It's Chinese.
"You want a line?"
"Liss! Dinner!"
"Wait. Do this before she gets here."
Cock does one with me.
Liss is inside.
That really is good shit.
"I got you shrimp," she says.
The coke is hitting.
The bunny serves me up lo mein.
I press it aside.
"You want another shot?"
"I'm not all that hungry."

“Yeah, I know,” Cock says, in front of my daughter,
“when I do coke I’m never all that hungry either.”

The doorbell rings.

“Oh good,” Cock says. “Mega Cock. I’m glad for you
to meet him.”

The bunny smiles.

Candy

*llllll*ET”S (gET) fUcKIng S:T O O P i d, *shaLL*
wE?

Come **hERe** Mega COCK, *come here.*

Dance witha girl. **S w i r l !**

“**Tiny** fucking **mega** cock.” That’s it. **Dance** with a
motherfucker.

“**SHAKE THAT LITTLE COCK!**”

“It’s *M:e:g:a* Cock!”

“**SHAKE THAT MEGA COCK!**”

Shake **thAt**. You kNow **you** *want to* sHake that **l i t t**
l e cOck.

(You **know** you *want to* **shake** it.)

I’m **grabbing** the kid.

’IM SHAkING *him.*

You know you want to *shake that* fucking mEga cock.

..

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Some PEOPLE SAY ‘*to never shake a baby.*’

They wrong.

(WhAt yoU **WANT To Do**) is **s h a k e** that baby
hard.

Gimme the baby.

“IT’S MY BABY!”

Gimme **that mOtherfUckin’ kiD.**

Dance with **m o m m a.**

THIS KID HAS MOVES!!

Shake that motherfuckin' kid.

Never shake a baby.

sHaKe *that kid* like you MEAN IT.

Shake THAT baby hard.

..

..

..

“Becca, Becca, **THANK YOU**. You can *GO* now
Becca.”

“*NO!* Have her (*stay and do a line*) **WITH US!**”
THAT’S Cock.

“You **CAN’T GO**, Becca. YOU can’t *go*.
Stay-and-do-a-line.”

“*Oh, no* Mr. Cock, I have to *CATCH the bus*.”

“You’re **NOT catching the bus**.

Becca.

R e m e m b e r what we **TALKED** about.

Stay and do a line.”

“No (**thank**) you Mr. Cock.”

“Where **did you take my kid** anyway?”

“I tOOk him **to** the store.”

“We were HERE. **WHERE** were you? You two
DIS-a-p-p-eared!”

“Richard! D(*ance*)!”

You’re **not SCARED TO DANCE** with a *l i t t l e*
cock (are you)?”

“**Becca. Sit DOWN.** Have a *fucking seat*.

Take a LOAD off.

Becca—hey!—Hey!!

CanDYCane.

Never shake a baby.”

..

..

..

“**Shake a cock. Shake a cock. Shake a cock. SHAKE a**
cock. Richard!

Richard! **Get YOUR ass OVER here Richard!**

SHAKE a baby. Shake a COCK.

Mega Cock. MEGA Cock. Mega Cock. Mega Cock.

Mega m e g a MEGA mega mega mEga cock.

Liss hold this LITTLE cock while I DANCE with
your p a p a .

Yeah. Yeah. THERE 'S a cock. Ooooh!"

"Are you GRABBing his fucking cock!"

Smiling.

Burn THAT motherfucker.

Press my lips toGETher.

I can MAKE YOU so jealous.

"Becca. Get your ass over HERE. Grab my cock."

"Oh Mr.—"

"Liss. (Get your ass) OVER here and d (a n c e)
WTh us."

"Mega Cock. Please.

Would everyone

::please::

GET THEIR ASSES (in the living room) for the
dance party.

We're trying to D O something here.

Becca, you too.

You can go home AFTER this.

DID YOU DO YOUr LINE?

Becca.

What the fuck IS this.

Do your fucking line."

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..

DANCE mix.

Shake that MOTHERFUCKING COCK.

Elephynt trynk.

F u c k yeah.

You LOOK AT ME.

Richard.

You look at me.

SHAKE THAT mother f u c k i n g cock.

S w e a t .

Touch **THAT** arm.
Yeah.
PUT your arms **there**.
Yeah.
Elephynt trynk.
Fuck.
Turn it up.
D a n c e .
We're gonna **B U R N** this.
BURN IT to the floor.
SticK that cOck.
StIck it.
y.
..
..
..
ReMIX *that* sWEat.
Drip it.
LiCK it.
I'm'onna **MAKE YOU** cum.
Turn it up.
Up.
After Cock goes to sleep.
I'm gonna **sit ON THAT** shit.
Roll it.
Face.
Get here.
Get here.
Look :at: me.
You LOOK AT MY fucking face.
You *like* **THAT**?
Yeah.
Fucking stick it.
Gimme that baby.
SHAKE that fucking baby.
You better **SHAKE THAT BABY**.
SHAKE it.
(Top) it.

Drop it off.

SHAKE it.

Drop it.

(Top) it off.

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..

That's (**HOW WE DO IT.**)

GIMME THAT Becca.

Do it.

GIMME THAT maid.

FUCK YOU you're going home.

Fuck you.

Catch the bus.

Catch THIS bus.

GET with *this* train.

Fucking catch **no fucking** bus.

(You're) with US.

Gimme that **gimme** THAT *GIMME* that m o r e .

“SHAKE THAT **FUCKING ASS.**”

“What.”

In her ear:

“I said s h a k e . That. **FUCKING. Ass.**”

THAT'S right.

Maid.

Shake it.

You fucking s h a k e that shit.

Yeah.

Yeah.

S w e a t that dress.

You're not YET.

..

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Now **gimme** MY man.

GIMME that Cock.

Yeah, *you.*

Fuck **that** man.

Fuck **that** man **UNTIL** he cums.

Gimme that Cock.

Take that.

Take.

It.

Yeah.

PULL that dress.

Here.

Pull that.

Screw **you.**

FUCKING COCK.

M y **FUCKING** man.

..

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..

Let that **white SWIRL** around *in a b u b b l e .*

Get **another HIT** of that.

I'm gonna DO A *LINE.*

Smash it. **BREAK** that shit.

Break it up.

SpArk!

Hit that pipE.

I'm cracked.

Float-CRACKed.

F l o a t wonder. Wonderfloat. *S m o k e .*

Motherfucker.

Wiping my nose.

A little *t e a r .*

Crack **THIS** float-fuck. **SMACK** that line. I'm gonna shoot this.

I'm gonna SING **THIS** like a song.

Cloud t w i g g l e .

Swirl thAt **BUBBle** around.

Drink it.

dRINK that *smoke.*

This fucking shit'll **make** me cry.

Hollow.

You're gonna fuck *that motherfucker.*

Pointing *in the mirror*.
“No you’re not.”
SMACK that mirror.
“Don’t do it.”
Wag that finger *back and forth*.
Wipe my nose.
S y c .
DON’T gyt syc. Don’t do yt.
Fuck that motherfucker.
Sneak-fuck him.
Sneakfuck.
You’re **gonna sneakfuck that motherfucker WITH**
HIS KID in the next room.
MAYBE SHE CAN SLEEP by the pool.
Sneakyfuck.
SNEAK that fuck.
Never SHAKE a baby.
You **should NEVER, EVER** shake a baby.
Where’s my line?
I’m (maJorly) **crAck (e) d**.
Light.
Roll on the bathmat.
G r a b that *pipe*.
Roll it.
Crack MY throat.
L i g h t n e s s .
He *HAS TO SMELL* it.
EVERYONE can smell it.
Unbutton my *shorts*.
PULL OFF this dress.
I can’t wear THIS thing!
It has a **rip IN IT!**
THROW it *in the trashcan*.
NO.
Take it out.
Throw **it IN the bathtub**.
Turn the *water*.
Put **my hand in**.

Kneel.
Do that fucking line.
Burn me!
BURN ME
Take me to the ground
Burn this house down
I'll **watch** (from the pool)
I'm'onna *PACK THIS PIPE* and *take it out there* with
me
No
I'm gonna (**smash**) some **MORE OF THIS** and take
it with me
No
Let's **not** FUCK AROUND, cANDy
Let's NOT fuck around
You **know** **WHAT** you want to do
You've taken it this far
He's (**not**) going to CATCH YOU
You **can get** 'em: go
They're IN the *back* of the Camaro
They're IN the **other** bag
You **can** get 'em
::Go::
Come on cANDy, **you** don't HAVE to *lock it*
Don't **clean** it up
Just be quick
Turn the **light** OFF
Run to the garage
They're **dancing** in the living **room**
Richard is in *Cock's* lap
(They **see** me run)
"What are you **getting**?"
"Nothing!"
"cANDy—"
"Just—don't **worry** *about* it okay?"
Lights are on
Lean in the **side** of the car
Trunk

Bag.
 Bring the **bag** with me.
 Walking **strictly in FROM** the garage
 Becca's *g o n e*
 Liss is **playing** pool
 Richard is sitting in Cock's lap.
Turn
 Be *casual*
Grab my shot
Take my shot to go
 "What, **are you** drinking back *there now?*"
 "*I'm taking a shower.*"
 "Well by **all means**..take your **drink** with you!"
 Walk down **the** hallway
 Have **my** bag
 Lock **it THIS TIME**
 A *I R* in my chest—**lightness**
 Oh my **god** I'm doing **THIS** again
Stash it UNDER THE SINK *when you're done.*
 The shower's still on
 I'll **do it IN MY TOE** this time, **they WON'T** see
 that
 I'll **DO IT RIGHT** *in the back* of the *ankle*
 Sometimes **it makes me c u m**
 ..
 ..
 ..
Where **WAS the baby**
 Becca *must* **HAVE** him
MAYBE *she's* still here
 ..
 ..
 ..
SQUISHing my ANKle
PRESSing the vein
 Yep, **that's THE one**
That's where we're *goin'* **IN**
This is what'll really **GET** you

You *have to do it* THIS way
There's *nothing* like IT
My ass *is on* THE floor
I'm by **THE** sink
Shower's **RUNning**
Get **THAT** vein
Be *real* still
Keep **THAT** **foot** still
That's IT

..
..
..

SquEEZE some water on tHERE
White disSOLVing
Stir it WITH the TIP of the NEEDle
It all DISSolved

..
..
..

Where's **my other** hAnD?
It's **shaking**
My lEGS are shaking
Relax
RelAx
You're sTill here
This *isn't* gonna **hURt** you
CarefUl
Don't drOp it

..
..
..

******(F, .u::C/k)—['

..
..
..

I'm *clench*ING
Don't — cleNCH
Relax

S m e l l — o f — i t
 Smell of it , (d I S S o l v e d
 Like — nothing else.
 Some people have to TIE off their vein.
 I don't.
 I can just **CONTROL** the vein.
 Rest the foot on the **BASE** of the tub.
 Touch my leg
 Maybe I'll go in *here*
 N o
 He'll SEE it
 After I DO this I'll be **flying**
 Just *get it done*
 The first time's ALWAYS **the** hardest
 After this I WON'T EVEN NOTICE I'm doing it
 After this I **think** I REALLY WILL **take** a shower
 That WILL be *nice*
 Nice *high* shower
 Then I'll **dip** in the pool
 That will be nice
 D o i t
 PUT the needle in
 Stick the skin
 Roll that **handle** BACK A *LITTLE*
 BLOOD **cloud**
 Falling *into the white*
 THERE IS *NOTHING MORE intimate* you do with
 yourself
 Not even **cumming**
 It's like **you** *take out the engine*
 And make changes
 You **make** yourself do this
 You make yourself cum
 Pull that handle back a little
 Take my BLOOD **out** of me
 Mix it
 And PUT **it** back in
 G o

Go
Slow
Push it
Push THAT handle
Is it in?
It's in
It's in right
THIS WILL DO IT to me
I'm NOT GONNA SMOKE *any more* after this
Push it in
I can FEEL IT
It comes on slow—slower than coke
I'm clenCHinG
It's *all the way in* now
Pull out the needle
Set it down
It's by my foot
I'll GET THAT in a minute
O h
This is WHAT I'm doing now
This is *the only way* to do this
There it comes
Don't clench
My *god*
There it is
I feel it now
..
..
..
Light
A i r
A bird
F r e e d o m
Running
Clenching— *don't* clench
This is great
Little while, I'll take a shower
Most e x c e l l e n t life

Most Excellent
T o u c h—and just b r e a t h i n g
D i a m o n d s in my throat
R e l a x your mouth
It's like my s k i n is *breathing*
L i k e e v e r y thing is a i r
I'm—*wonderful*
D e s e r v e to feel
T o *f e e l* bliss
F o r *e v e r*

..

..

..

“SO *you'rE* TAKing ::a show*Er::?*”

“Don't COME IN here!”

“((We *won't*, we *wON't*)) we just
WONDERED—when are you *c o m i n g* out?”

“aRE YOU DOING SHOTs?”

Cock LAUGHS. “Are we—? Yeah, baby, *this*
motherfUCKer's a *stallion*.”

“I'll MEET you at the POOL.”

“O!K!A!Y. We just wanted to *check on* you.”

“ I ' m *f i N e* . ”

..

..

..

I'm *f i N E* .

..

..

..

F o r *o N c e* I'm reALLy *fiNe* .

Liss

Modo aumentado. That's what mi Idios Mio called it.
I wish I had mi Idios Mio here.
I get my blanket.
It's an afghan from the couch.
Mi Idios Mio is watching TV somewhere.
Maybe Idios Mio and Winnie could watch shows together?
What would they watch?
When they turned on the television they would probably
see our house.
The circus.
That's what they would watch.
It would be like Bad Girls Tokyo, with cameras mounted
in the house.
Cut to camera one.

—[illustration]—

Candy walking down the hallway.
Cut to camera two.

—[illustration]—

An underwater picture of SHARK!
Go: camera three.

—[illustration]—

The rest of us at the pool.
Click.
Click.
Camera seven?

—[illustration]—

Nope.
Kitchen cam.

—[illustration]—

Nope.
Give me the living room.

—[illustration: Mega Cock lying on the pool table]—

Yep. There he is.
Found that baby.
Just like Bad Girls Tokyo.

—[illustration: Liss reaches down and pets SHARK!]

“You wanna buy this watch?”

Cock holds up his hand.

“Well not *this* one. I can get you one just like it.”

My dad looks at it.

“No, I don’t think I *need* it.”

“You don’t *need* it?” Cock laughs.

Candy comes out. She gives Cock a pill.

Cock offers it to my dad.

“You want one?”

“Um, sure,” my dad says.

Candy’s giving my dad a look.

She gives Cock two of the pills. She sets the pillbox next to Cock.

“You got a drink? Honey, bring my friend a drink. How’s he gonna take this?”

Candy takes my dad’s glass.

She brings him back some whiskey.

Cock and Dad are talking.

Candy comes and sits by me by the pool.

“Are you cold?”

“Where’s your baby?”

“He’s sleeping. This blanket’s wet.”

“It’s fine.”

“He’s not my baby.”

I look back at Cock.

“Then whose baby is he?”

“This wench Brandy. His wife. Well. His ex-wife. Aren’t you cold?”

“No,” I say.

But I am. I’m freezing.

“Does Brandy help take care of the kid?”

“I don’t wanna talk about that bitch. Okay?”

Candy pats my leg.

“Good. Thanks. I really don’t want to talk about that bitch. Bitch has psychological problems. Emotional prob-

lems. *Personal* problems. I'm not gonna go into it because you're too young to hear about it—how old are you?"

"Nine."

"Oh! That's old enough. Does your dad let you watch R-rated movies?"

"PG-13."

"Well, this bitch doesn't know when she's had enough. See that burn spot up there? By the b-ball net?"

I'm looking.

"See that real dark spot on the wood? That's where Cock almost burned down the house."

"Why?"

"Because Brandy wants it! That bitch takes half his money and now she wants the house! She has no interest in the kid! I'm stuck with that bitch's kid—" Candy is hissing "—*this* motherfucker won't do anything about her. I mean he's taking her to court.."

"How long were they married?"

"They were together for like twenty years! I really don't want to talk about her. If you don't mind. Cock! How long were you and Brandy together?"

"What?"

"How long were you and that bitch—"

"No. I heard you." Cock stands up. "Why the fuck are you asking me about Brandy."

Cock and my dad are saying something.

Cock is coming toward the pool.

"You know," he says to my dad, "A motherfucker tries to have a relaxing evening. *This* motherfucker—" Cock drags my dad (on his chair) with him toward the pool "—*This* motherfucker here buys your ass dinner. Whose credit card did we put this on, Candy?"

Candy bows her head. "His."

"I *know* it was his. Who bought you those Bloody Marys?"

"You."

"I *know* I bought them. That's what I'm talking about. Get up."

My dad says: “What?”

“Get up. I want this chair. Have you bought *anything* tonight, Candy? Or do you just expect that little ass to pay for everything?”

“It does,” she says.

My dad is standing.

Cock kicks that chair into the pool.

SHARK! is startled.

—[illustration]—

He sniffs it.

—[illustration: SHARK! investigating the chair]—

“Go ahead.”

Cock slides his own chair toward my dad.

“Go ahead.”

Candy stands. “Cock. You’re fucking stupid.”

“Are you gonna back me up on this shit?” That’s Cock talking to my dad. Cock puts out his fist. “Bro.”

Candy runs around the pool. “He’s not even your bro! You just met him today! He’s *my* friend! You’re *my* friend, aren’t you?!”

My dad steps back.

“See!” Cock says. “He don’t want no part of you!”

Cock pushes Candy in the pool.

She comes up.

Her finger points at Cock. “You fucking nigger. You *nigger*.”

“Candy. Please.”

Candy looks at me. “Excuse me. But he is.”

—[illustration]—

“How’s he doin’?”

Dad’s keeling beside me.

I pet SHARK!

“He’s fine.”

“Is he tired?”

“No.”

“Does he want to go home?”

“He can’t. The bar’s closed.”

“What about you?”

I shake my head.

“You want to sleep on the couch?”

“I’m fine here.”

“I’ll get you a pillow.”

That’s my dad. He’s pretty much the silent type.

—[illustration]—

“I love you baby.”

“You do?”

“I love you.”

“You aren’t gonna fuck that motherfucker after I go to bed?”

“I’m going to fuck you.”

“I know. But after that. You’re not gonna fuck that motherfucker?”

“I’m going to fuck *you*.”

That’s how they talk.

It’s incredible.

That's how those motherfuckers really talk.
(Just sayin'.)

Cock will call Candy a whore.

Then Candy calls Brenda a whore.

Or: Brandy. Whatever.

Then Cock is sad.

Then Candy feels bad.

"You want me to make us another batch of mojitos?"

Cock tells my dad: "She makes the best mojitos. My baby makes the best mojitos."

"I know."

"You *know*?"

Candy says: "We're *drinking* them!"

My dad says: "I drink them all the time."

Cock says: "Oh."

Then Cock feels stupid.

Then he says something else to make Candy feel bad.

"What about your baby?"

Candy and Cock look over.

I point inside the house.

"What about Brenda's baby?" I ask.

They both say: "Brandy."

"I really don't want to talk about that bitch."

"I don't want to talk about her either."

"Do you want me to call Becca back?"

"No," Candy says, "I'll get him. Stay," Candy says. She holds Cock back. "I'll get him. Have fun with your friend."

"He was your friend first."

"He's your friend, too."

"He was yours first, though. I acknowledge that. I acknowledge it, okay baby? Just don't fuck him."

Candy's walking toward the house.

Cock is yelling after her: "I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT HE WAS YOUR FRIEND FIRST!!"

My dad comes out. He's holding the baby.

"There there."

"I was gonna get him. I thought you'd be..busy." Candy grabs my dad's cock. Cock doesn't see it. I do.

"What would he be busy doing?" Cock leans up in his chair. "Candy. What would he be busy doing?"

"Nobody asked you. Shut up."

"Bring me my kid." Cock is waving. "Bring me my kid. Would you please call Becca? Take the Cam. Go get her, okay. Richard's got to..watch his kid and we've got to—or I've got to—I've got to watch—"

"He's not *my* kid."

"Just call Becca, please. I didn't say he was."

Cock has the baby. He's rocking him.

"He's a good kid, isn't he?"

My dad says: "Yeah."

My dad has a pillow in his hand.

"Yeah," Cock is saying, "He's my little Mega Cock."

"So you want me to take the Camaro?"

"Shhh. Take care of it, please."

"I'm not goin' alone."

"Mega Cock."

"Richard you want to come with me?"

"Candy don't start with that."

"Here's your pillow."

"It's soft."

"Do you want me to bring you another blanket?"

"Dad. I'm fine."

"Mega Cock. Mega Cock. You're my little Mega Cock."

"So you want me to take the Camaro?"

"Are you gonna go with Candy?"

"I already told you to take it."

"Just for a little while."

"I'll be right back."

"Take Richard with you."

"Goodnight Dad."

"Aren't you worried I'm going to fuck him?"

"Candy, just take him. See you in a minute, man."

“I’m not going to fuck her.”
“You don’t know that,” Cock says. “You don’t know.”
“We’ll be back in a minute. Goodnight Liss.”
“Just make her drive the speed limit.”
“Night Liss! Sweet dreams!”
“See you later Candy.”
“Richard. Coming?”
“Mega Cock. Mega Cock. You’re my little Mega Cock.”
The father is rocking his son.
My Dad’s over at the pool.
“Richard!”
The father rocks his son on his shoulder.
Candy and Cock are having a silent conversation.
Everything they say is with their eyes.
Candy says: *I’m not going to fuck him.*
Cock says: *I don’t care.*
Candy says: *I love you baby.*
Cock says: *That’s fine.*
Candy says: *Don’t you love me back?*
Cock says: *I’m rocking my baby.*
Candy says: *I hate that bitch.*
Cock says: *I hate her too.*
Candy says: *I hate her more than you do.*
Cock says: *No you don’t. You don’t, Candy. You could never hate her more than I do. You hate her in a different way. I’m trying to rock my baby, okay? I’m rocking my baby. You might hate that bitch but this is my son, okay? Acknowledge that he’s my son.* “Mega Cock. Mega Cock. Who’s my little Mega Cock?”
And Candy says: “RICHARD!!??”
The reason she says this is my dad is hauling back with one of the deck chairs and he’s standing at the edge of the vista and he swings around and launches the deck chair into the vista.
Candy steps forward.
For the moment there is only silence.
And then the sound of glass.
Cock squints his eyes.

He doesn't look.

Candy is yelling at my dad. "WHY DID YOU DO THAT!!?"

Cock rocks his baby.

"What did it hit?"

I look into the vista.

It hit a skylight.

"What the fuck did you do that for?"

Candy grabs my dad's hand.

My dad says: "I didn't think he needed it."

Then Cock is grinning. *He really is the silent type.*

Dad

WHERE DID SHE COME FROM?

Where was she before?

She was inside of me.

She was underneath my skin.

It's crazy what this does to you.

Slam down the road. Go forward. Drive.

"Where does she live?"

"Where does who live?"

"Becca. The maid!"

"She's not a maid. She's a homecare professional.

Okay she's the maid."

"Can this car go any faster?" I ask.

Candy says: "I thought you'd never ask."

Fuck me. The 101. Making love to the highway in this bomb Camaro.

"Do you have more of that stuff?"

Candy looks at me.

Look at the road. Look at the road!

"It's in my bag." She's rummaging between my legs. Rummaging in the bag. "Fuck!" She has one hand on the steering wheel. "You're gonna have to get it. Get it. Shoot it. Are you high?"

This time it is I who look at Candy.

She rubs my leg.

She presses down.

"Good," she says, "Good."

She drives.

I rummage through her bag. You know what I do. What I do is already signed, sealed, and delivered. “Would you please drive steady?”

“Want me to stop?”

“No.”

“I’ll stop at this gas station.”

It’s the same one Liss and I stopped at this morning. The one with the huge inflatable Slip ‘n Slide. The carnival slide. The carnival with no children. There’s never anyone on that slide. How much money could they make?

“Stay here.” Candy’s leaning into the car. “Stay here.”

“Where should I do it?”

“Right here. Go. No one’s looking.”

Lying back under the gas station canopy, covered roof, attendant in a box. Candy’s buying Cheetos—the flaming hot ones. They’re hot with lime. Flamin’ Hot Limón. The bag says “MEGA GRAB”. Candy’s laughing with the attendant; they’re making hand signs. Knowing her she’ll probably take him with us, and me and him and Candy and the maid will have a foursome. She’s a *homecare professional*. Yeah right. She’s a slave. It’s just a different name for slave. I shoot this up. It’s in my shoulders, in my lungs. It’s blue ice, under green light, with a glass-encased attendant, hand-signs, and a giant inflatable slide, bouncing in the wind. I feel it in my tongue. Feel ice on my brain. And when the wind blows, the slide sways back and forth beside the highway. Windshear. The weather cauldron. This needle is in my vein. The whole world is one big weather cauldron. Pull that needle out. Set it on the floor of the car. Weather—smoke—swirling around us as we live inside this giant weather cauldron.

We’re moving again.

Candy’s driving.

“Did you get gas?”

We’re headed north on the 101.

These are the game studios, the secret bars, the mansions. People who would never live in LA. For people watching Wheel of Fortune, “beautiful Burbank California” is a dream. If you live here, Burbank is a dump, all that airport noise. Bunch of fucking Mexicans. In Hollywood you get a knife stuck in your neck for no reason. Paralyzed, loss of motion in your right arm. Downtown Los Angeles? That’s a joke. I can’t even remember the last time I was there. And east LA, if you’re white: that’s like climbing into your own casket and lowering the lid. But yeah, we’ve got Wheel of Fortune. Dr. Phil. Fuck it.

Candy’s hand on my leg. Crystal tintinnabulation. Crystal light. Holy fuck. I’m flying. Reduced to structure. Hollow. Just the casing. What we came in, before that frame was dipped in soul.

I might never return.

“Are you good, baby?”

“Yeah.” Candy. “I’m good.”

That’s good. She says this. Then she takes out my dick.

Purple fabric, the boxers. And it’s not even sex.

It’s just these little personal folds of flesh.

In the mirror I’m not even human.

I’m 17. I’m 80. I’m 52.

“I have to shit.”

“Shit at Becca’s house,” I say.

And Candy says: “You’re really high, aren’t you.”

I stretch my neck. We’re speeding. “I’m *insane*,” I say.

Candy checks the rear-view. “You’re insanely high?”

“No.” That’s not what I meant. “I’m insane.”

“Are you getting ready to fuck?” she asks.

“That’s,” I say, “Not all I’m ready for.”

Candy looks confused. Afraid.

For a moment, from her point of view, I wonder if she should be.

There's an exit up ahead. This is how I drive every day. It's Lindero Canyon Road. If you go left, you get to Sharks. If you go right, you get to Costco and the Four Seasons and strip malls.

"Where are we going?"

"We're getting Becca."

"Oh yeah."

Candy pops up the exit and we're sitting at a red light. She waits for it to turn green. Then we sit through another cycle. There are no cars. We sit at the exit. Candy looks left. She looks right. There is no one behind us. It's still air. July. But cool now. I love California. Oxnard is up there, and Santa Barbara. Candy turns on a green, midway through the cycle.

"Be careful of cops," I say.

There's a sprinkler. The roadside sprinklers are on. All along both sides of the road. Around every curve. Mist in streetlight. Damp asphalt. Black tires on a black road. Soft surface of the road, always new up here. Clean. Parking lot of the Costco, acres of silence. I can feel the sprinklers on my hand. Frosting my cheek. Dewing the side of the car.

"Are you driving us extra-close to it?"

"Yeah."

She isn't.

She's driving us extra-slow.

Waving my hand in fields of mist

Conducting it

Fields of grain

Strands

Grass

A cloud of mist

"Are you driving us extra-close?"

"Yeah." Candy puts my hand on the wheel.

"Look, see." And she's feeling the mist too.

She can't be.

But she is.

"How are you doing this?"

There's mist on her.

There can't be.

But there is.

"How are you making it mist..there..and here..at the same time?"

"It's not happening at the same time."

I'm looking behind us. There's not a car as far as the eye can see.

Candy is driving us in this extreme ribbon, coiled snake.

It's a nighttime Camaro sidewinder in Westlake.

She's misting one side, then the other.

Candy takes us in a circle.

I feel like throwing up. "But you won't," Candy says. But I feel like I will. "But you won't." She finishes her circle.

"Just keep me close to it."

"You like the mist?" she says.

But I'm silent.

She takes us down the road. She stops at every light. The parking lots are empty, a few spots in the outland. People might never come back for some of those cars. Some of those people are high, just like us. Some of those people have to work tomorrow, in restaurants, in banks, on Saturday.

"Do you work tomorrow?"

"Yeah," she says. "Are you coming in?"

"After I take Liss to Pilates, yeah."

"You won't sleep," she says. "I love working when I'm high. I'll keep some in the car and you can come out with me and we'll smoke during my breaks. Order all your drinks from me. Don't order from Tara. I need the tips this week."

"Is Tara working tomorrow?"

"Or Ash. I don't know. Did you think you'd be doing this this morning? When you came in? You and I hardly knew each other until today. Okay," Candy says, "Wait here." She jumps over the door. We're in this

subdivision. It looks familiar. This corner, this dead end, that's the fence.

"What? Are you okay?"

"I know this place."

"Just stay here. I'll get her."

"This is where Becca lives?"

"Shhh, yeah, it's like her and one other family. Quiet. There's a dog."

"What kind of dog is it?"

"It's a big one."

"Does he shit a lot?"

"What? Just stay here I'll get her."

We've been talking to each other across the lawn. I know this lawn. Candy is at the door of this condominium and we're talking to each other across the lawn, like we're right next to each other.

"Lance?" I say.

Lance is at the window.

I know that dog.

"Richard, would you stay in the fucking car? We're about to go."

Candy is knocking on the condo door, having tried the doorbell.

That's Lance. That's Lance's house.

Lance is getting excited.

He's up at the window.

Hey buddy.

"Richard, what the fuck! Hi Becca we need you to come over." Becca's leaning out her door, watching me. I'm kneeling at Lance's window. He's wagging. He's got his paw on the glass. Giant tail.

I wonder if Lance is still sick.

Becca runs out on the lawn in her nightgown.

I've never seen her hair down before.

She is my age; she's beautiful.

"Becca, hi!"

But Lance's door is opening.

"I'm sorry Mr. Meyers. I'm sorry to disturb you. They're my friends. Let me get my bag. I'll come with you. Becca's looking at her neighbor. Lance has come outside. He's licking my face. I'm lying in the grass. I love this dog.

"Dude. Dude," her neighbor is saying. "You'll get wet. Lance, get inside."

"No," I say, "Don't make him go inside. Is he still shitting?"

"Becca," Candy says, "I need to use your bathroom."

"You're lying in some of his shit right now."

Jacobi reaches out his hand.

"Are you drunk? Richard. Tell the truth. Who's this?"

But Candy is going inside Becca's house.

Lance goes up to Becca and stops.

"Lance. Get inside."

The dog does.

"Hot car."

I'm looking around me for the shit.

"There's nothing on you," Jacobi says. "Did you come to get me?"

"No," I say. "Why are you up?"

"I'm up because you're here. Becca. This is my friend Richard. We work together."

"Hi Becca."

"Where are the babies?" she says.

"Oh," Jacobi says, "Do you two know each other?"

Liss

The victor spoils.
The fruitless toils.
Tightrope dancer.
Tambourine.

Announcing!
The circus!
There's a slight Middle-Eastern boy on the tightrope bi-
cycle.
Upside-down.
Terrible dragon!
He's just a snake. Is he fake?

Chorus!
Entr'acte!
Perhaps a clarinet.
Or an oboe! Maracas!

—[illustration]—

I'm in the tent.
Behind the cage.
What is in it?
A devil!

A devil!
An Anglican Devil-Nacht!
He is sparking!
He can see me!
Serrated tail!
He flips it! He flips his tail.
That's what I need. I need a tail like that.

—[illustration]—

Spiky tail!
Saucy tail!
Ooooohhh I want that tail!

—[illustration]—

I can bargain for it.
I can trade.
Oh priory devil what can I give you?
Oh little fart!
That's what he's like!
He's a pinch of spice.
Cayenne, nutmeg, and sulphur!
He's a solid fart!
Striped with yellow and red.
Oh sulphur fart! I want that tail!

—[illustration]—

What can I do to get it!
The trampoline rider comes flying by! He is done with
his act.
Who is on now? Butterflies! and Angels! and Spies!
Oh devil-nacht what do you want?
I can let you out of your cage?
No? You don't want that? You can let yourself out.
Oh devil-nacht! Why would you keep yourself locked in
if you could get out!
Silly devil-nacht.
What else can I give you?
You already have butterflies?!
Where do you keep them? There are no butterflies in
your cage.
Can I give you Angels! and Spies!
You already keep them.
You mean this whole tent is yours?
A whole circus owned by a fart in a cage!
A devil who keeps himself locked behind the stage!
What can you get for such a thing!
I want that tail.

—[illustration]—

I can bring you music!
I can bring you sights!
I can bring you things you cannot see underneath this
tent!
What can you bring?
I can bring you a picture of the ocean.
I will draw you a picture of the sea.
Have you ever seen the sea?
I will draw you pictures of sailboats.
You have never seen a sailboat.
I have got you!

You have never seen the sea.
That's what I can bring you, little devil! That's what
you will see.
I want that tail.

—[illustration]—

Oooooohhh! Oooooohhh. Oh devil.
Where did you get that tail.
Ringmaster tail.
With that tail I could whip all the players of the circus!
I would whip them into time.
They wouldn't even have to see it whipped.
They would simply see it on me.
And they would be in time.
They would be proper.
They would scare.
Scare down players, scare down. Too much havok. Too
much time.
Ooooooh I want that tail.

—[illustration]—

Do you think this devil might bite?
I don't think he will.
He looks like he's afraid of me. He looks scared.
I put my hand out to him.
He puts his fuzzy cheek against it.
This devil isn't bad!
He rubs me. He takes my hand.
This devil has peach fuzz on him!
I'm jumping up and down.

This isn't even a devil! He's a babbit.
He's a babbit or a bobbit, I'm not sure.
He's dressed for Halloween!
I want that tail.

—[illustration]—

And now the music's ending!
Don't take down that tent!
Don't wrap that line!
This is not your circus! This is mine!
Oh no Angels! Spies! Not the butterflies!
Devil make them stop!
Can you make them?
You said this was your circus! Make them put it up!
This is not the circus ending!
Stop the orchestra from ending!
Make them maraca. Make them tambourine.
Oh no, not the oboe! Not the clarinet! Sir, you can't go.
Who will the cello have to play with?
You can't have just *a* string!
Please don't go.

—[illustration]—

See what you've done bad creature.
Now you see what you've done?
The tent no longer covers up the sky.
Look! Look! The violin is crying!
Take your maracas!
Keep your tail!
Wander off into the woods, into some other fairy-tale.

Badd lizard. Badd skunk. Badd yellow-and-red fart.
Just a devil in a cage.
Was there naught I could bring you?
For that powerful spiky tail.

—[illustration]—

And now I'm waking from my dream.
You can always tell.
In your dreams you can remember everything.
When you wake up you start to forget.

In your dream everything is reachable.
When you wake it starts to slip.

I'm by the pool.
This isn't a circus. I know it's not a circus.
There's no Anglican Devil-Nacht here.
There's no Middle-Eastern circus pony. He's not here.

—[illustration]—

See how dreams ending will lie to you?

—[illustration]—

Because there is a big fat bunny. He's right there.
And there's my SHARK!

—[illustration]—

Waking up will always lie to you.

I think that devil-nacht was hungry.
I wonder what he eats.

My blanket was probably the circus tent.
See: now my blanket's soaked.
I can probably sneak past that big fat bunny.
And sleep on the couch.
SHARK! are you gonna be okay by yourself? Good.

I'm not even sure sharks have nerves.
But I do.

Cock is holding the baby.
The baby is awake.
Cock's hand is gripping the arm of the deck chair.
That's his one hand.
Cock's other arm is around the baby.
The baby is awake.

He's looking at me.
He's alert.
He looks like a smart one.
He's propped against Cock's chest.
He's like gripping to stay alive.
Cock is out so deep he's not snoring.
Cock is out so deep he's hardly *breathing*.
I'm gonna snatch that baby.
I'm gonna save him.

Slip my arms in.
Cock's eye is half open.
My mother sleeps that way. It freaks me out.
His other eye is closed.

Something wrong with that. Something wrong with these people.

Maybe me too. (I'm with them.)

Slip that arm in, between Cock and the baby.

I'm gonna have to figure out his real name.

Cock's a sweaty sleeper.

Gonna have to get this one a real name.

I'm slipping my arm in.

The baby's watching my hand.

He looks like a Thomas. Maybe John or Percy. William is too formal. He's not a prince. Maybe Woodrow. Or Woodruff. Ruff! Ruff! He's like a dog, a Spaniel maybe. Pietro?

Come'ere baby.

You shoulda been born Italian.

To some nice family.

Come'ere.

Maybe I'll name you after my dad.

Little Richard. Or is that taken?

Come'ere little boy. That's right! Hi! Hi! You don't mind if I hold you for a while? No! You don't! You're so alert! What a beautiful baby (considering). What a beautiful boy.

Take you over by the pool.

Your daddy's sleeping.

My daddy's sleeping, too.

Perhaps.

At least we know where your daddy is!

Yeah! You just wanted some attention. Beautiful baby boy. Why did they name you what they named you? You definitely should have been born Italian.

Or with us.

You could have been born with us.

Feel the water? Yeah! Yeah. Oh, baby we're gonna be just fine.

Are you cold? You have to be.

What's wrong with this family?

Where's Dad?

Feel this water baby.

I'll just call you Little Richard anyway. Do you feel this water? Yeah. Yeah. Good baby.

Weird. Baby sleeping quietly in passed-out dad's arm.

He's prob'ly used to it.

"Your dad is sleeping."

The pool compressor kicks on.

There's my vista. It's cold now, though, it's cold and gone. All the houses are quiet. I guess that's LA down there. It's an empty hallway. Throw a pool chair at a skylight the police don't even come.

Did the people even call them?

Or did they have better things to do.

Quiet little baby. Little baby boy.

Cock moves on the chair behind me.

He's saying something in his sleep about Brenda.

You and me are gonna wait this out together.

Shhh. Shhh. Quiet. Beautiful baby boy.

Richard is a nice name. It works for my dad.

I suppose it will work for you.

Cock is kicking things.

What is that?

The jug of mojitos.

Candy makes the best kiwi mojito north of Guantánamo.

Or so I've heard.

Cock is kicking this plastic pitcher with dried kiwi in it.

Maybe he wants his baby.

You never know with these people.

Cock might wake up and want his baby.

But I'm gonna save this kid.

Cock might wake up and come towards me.

I'd have my back against the pool.

There'd be my vista behind me.

And Cock would wake up angry and he would want his

baby back.
I might have to employ all-access tactics.
I might have to float him in the pool.
Like Moses.
Or maybe I'd carry him down the stairs.
Down into the vista.
See if the skylight people could help.

"Her name's not Brend," Cock is saying.
And his foot moves.

I shouldn't have taken this baby.
"Should I?" I ask him.
Little Richard flexes his fingers and smiles.
I don't think this kid is ruined after all.

There are lights on his face.
The lights are red and blue.
Oh good: the cops.
There's cop-light in front of the house.
I wonder where my dad is.
Maybe he's with them!
Front or back seat?
It's too late to put this baby back now!
Cock will probably be happy.
He'll be glad I took him.
They could have had an accident.
All I have to do is not have an accident between now and
when the cops take him, and everything will be okay.
I might even leave a note for the skylight people.

Just don't drop the baby in the water.
He's not Moses.
He's Little Richard.

Cock's doorbell rings.
Ding-dong!
I wonder if he had that put in special.

It doesn't wake him.
Be quiet baby.
The cops don't knock.
The bell doesn't ring again.
Don't they bust in the door now?
Here's a flashlight, coming around the side. That cop is
messing with the fence. There's a lock. He's jiggling it.
Now Cock starts moving.
I better move.
Cock is gripping the other side of his chair.
He looks down. He sees the kiwi pitcher.
He taps it with his foot.
I'm looking at Little Richard. Be quiet baby.
The cop's flashlight is still. It's pointed at the ground.
Cock sees the police light. "What the hell?"
He whispers it. He doesn't see it.
Just a little longer baby.
Cock stands.
He kicks the chair.
The police light shines up.
"Who's there?" Cock says.
I take the baby. I take him. I'm tip-toeing around the
pool, around its edge, where SHARK! is doing laps. I'm
holding baby with me and I think he understands. We
have to hide. Sometimes people get shot. Just don't trip!
Don't trip, Liss.
I doubt that cop knows baby CPR.
So don't trip.
Hold the baby. Look at Cock. Does Cock see us? No.
How can you fall asleep with a baby in your arms and
forget it?
I don't know.
Cock is saying "Jimmy? Is that you?"
And Jimmy says: "Yeah."
I'm standing on the edge. One foot up. One foot up.
Standing on the edge of my vista. Everyone needs a
vista. I'm up where the hedge is, on a brick fence. Hold
on baby. Hold on. Cock is unlocking it for Jimmy. "Why

didn't you ring the bell." "I did." Cock opens the lock. I'm up on the fence. Jimmy comes in. I'm over the wall. Jimmy shines his light around. "Cock, what the fuck. Your neighbors called again." I'm down. Hold on Richard, hold on. Slide down. Stairs here. They go down the terrace. So you can get to your neighbors'. I bet the skylight people never come up here. If they do they sneak up, at night, and watch them party.

I'm looking over the edge.

Rocking my baby.

I lower my head.

I can't even see him.

I put my face down and let him grab my hair.

"Yeah, baby."

He pulls hard.

I just watch.

Jimmy—this cop—comes in the gate after Cock gets it open for him.

Cock is looking around like he forgot something.

"How you doin', man?"

"Those motherfuckers called again?"

Jimmy sits down. He shines his light in the pool. "Yeah," he says.

Cock is behind him.

Cock looks into the kitchen.

He puts his hand on Jimmy's shoulder.

"You want a line?"

Rock that baby.

"What?" Jimmy turns around.

"You want a line." Cock says it with a deeper voice this time.

Jimmy looks back in my direction.

I don't move.

"Yeah," the cop says. He switches off his light. "Why not." He gets up. He goes with Cock to the kitchen. "Do you know what time it is?"

That's the last thing I hear. Cock closes the door.

And then it's just the two of them.

All the house lights on.
Shades open.
Everything facing the vista.
And Cock brings out his medicine bottle.
Hold that baby.
Do not move a muscle.
Pinch yourself.
Pinch yourself.
Maybe this is just a dream.

Dad

CANDY SWERVING. She's trying to lose him.

"Why did you invite him?"

"I didn't! He just came! Fuck! Can you lose him?"

"I'm trying."

Candy pops the Camaro up. If there's police here they'll get us. She fucks it. She fucks the road. Fucks the exit.

"Fuck!"

"Lose that motherfucker!"

Becca's gripping the seat.

Candy squeaks us right, through a red light. She's pumping it, she's fucking the road. She's fucking laws. She's fucking chance. She's fucking Cock and Cock's Camaro and she's fucking the three of us in it. Boom!

Jacobi's still behind us.

"What's wrong with this motherfucker?"

"He's probl'y just lonely!"

"Can't you call him?"

"I am! He won't pick up!"

Candy fucks another red light. She fucks a neighborhood watch. She fucks a school zone and we're up on the grass—corner of a playground—but Jacobi's bike outdoes us in every category. It's the thrust-to-weight ratio, the torque, something—Jacobi's always telling me about it.

Jacobi's fat belly is hanging off his bike. He's cornering it.

Didn't even hit the playground at all.

Hopefully there's a cop up here. He can stop us all. How we got Becca into this I don't know. Why did we need her again? Oh wait. I hope there's not a cop. I forgot. This chrys is wearing off. When I get home I'm gonna do another shot.

Candy's in third gear. I know she wants to do second.
"Don't do it."

Candy's punching the rear-view.

Jacobi's on us. Right behind.

Candy pops it into second.

This is a neighborhood. It's 2:31.

Candy punches out the mirror.

It falls.

The whole enclosure falls from the windshield.

"You *work* with this guy?!" Candy accuses me. Then Candy accuses Becca: "And *you* live next to 'im?!" Then she's back to me: "*You're* dealing with him. When we get there. You fucking deal with this bitch!" Candy looks up for the rear-view but it's not there anymore.

She grabs it.

She turns around, one hand on the wheel.

We're swerving.

Candy throws the mirror at Jacobi.

He swerves it. That fat motherfucker swerves it. He's fine.

I'm gonna take care of this when we get home.

"Candy! Watch out!" Becca shouts.

Candy's screeching it. She screeches to a halt.

"You *deal* with that motherfucker when we get back." It's a middle-aged man, a man my age, who's looking at us where we stop. Candy crawls over the seats and over the back of the Camaro. She steps on Becca's leg. I'm looking at the middle-aged man. He's out for a walk. Jacobi takes his helmet off. Candy smacks it out of his hands. She's kicking him. "Stupid fucking queer! You know this is a kids' neighborhood?!! Did you see how

you're driving! Did you see the sign? They have kids here!!" Candy's kicking Jacobi's tailpipe.

I'm back over the Camaro, careful not to step on Becca. "Jacobi. You can't be here. Did you see the sign?" I'm holding back Candy. She's flailing. "You can't drive like that in this neighborhood. There's kids here."

All Jacobi says is: "How'd she know I'm queer?"

Candy's making some nonsense words. She sits on the street. She lights a cigarette. I take it from her. She lights another. I'm smoking it.

This walking guy is just standing there, watching us.

Candy gives his ass the finger.

He stares.

"Look. Jacobi. Everyone knows."

Candy shakes her head.

Becca's looking at us.

The street guy is looking at us.

Jacobi whimpers: "Even Winnie?"

"Yeah. Man. It doesn't matter—"

"But how did she know?"

Candy talks through the cigarette: "It's fucking obvious."

"Jacobi, you've got to go home."

"But what are you guys doing? Is it like a party?"

Candy shakes her head and stands. She glares at the neighborhood dude. I think if he had his phone he'd call the cops.

"It's not a party, man, we've gotta get this babysitter to her kid."

Jacobi looks to Candy for confirmation.

"That's right, man." Candy's getting back inside the car. "We've got. To get. This fucking. Babysitter! To my fucking kid! Fuck!" She hits the dash.

"It's not a party?"

"No."

Jacobi's off his bike. He's getting his helmet. "I think," he says, "if you gave me a chance. That you'd

see I'm an okay guy."

Candy lays on the horn. Becca tries to get her to stop. Candy ignores her.

"We've got to go," I tell Jacobi.

"Did you get rid of him?" Candy doesn't turn around.

"I'll see you at work tomorrow, okay? We'll talk then."

"Tomorrow's Saturday."

"I'll see you Monday."

"I know you're going to a party," Jacobi says. "She's not a babysitter."

"Yes I am!" Becca shouts. She's standing up in the back seat of the Camaro and Candy almost shits a brick laughing.

"That's right, Becca. *Cap* that nigger."

"Can you please not say nigger?!" I yell.

"Look faggot." Candy stands. She's got one leg over the side of the car. "Go. Home." She signs like he's a retard.

"Drive safe, okay?"

"Why don't you call me for drinks sometime?" Jacobi says.

Candy signs it for him: "He's not gay. He doesn't want to have drinks with you. Richard! Let's go!" She motions to the walking guy. "Call *this* fucker for drinks, he's available now." Candy honks the horn.

"She's drunk."

"I know."

"Drive safe, okay. Drive slow. I'll see you Monday."

Jacobi lingers. "It's not a party?"

"No."

"How long have you known..that I'm.."

"Seventeen years. See you Monday."

I'm back in the Camaro.

"Did we lose him?"

Becca is the only one of us who's looking back.

"I think so," I say.

Candy quotes Pulp Fiction. “We don’t wanna think,” she says, “We wanna know.”

It’s the sound of the bike whining back along the road.

The walking guy starts walking again.

Candy drives real slow beside him.

“You’re gonna forget you saw this,” she says.

The guy looks straight ahead.

Candy stays on it.

“Mr. Abbott. Hey, fuckhead, I’m talking to you.”

Candy’s lights shine in the darkness.

“Mr. Abbott. You remember me?”

The guy says: “Yeah.”

“Well I remember you, too. I remember where you live. How’s Mrs. Abbott?”

The guy looks at her. “She’s dead.”

“What’s your first name?”

The guy’s face is sour. “It’s Carl.”

“Right. Carl. Forget what you saw here. What’s the matter with you, you can’t sleep? You know what I always do for that?” Candy says.

But I say: “Leave him alone.”

Becca is mortified. She won’t look at any of us.

“Wha’d you see out on your walk tonight, Carl?”

“Nothing,” Carl says.

And Candy says: “That’s right.”

Jacobi

aDministrative executive
decisioNs. tHat's what we
call thEm. tHat's when
the person reading your mail
holds back a pieCe.
tHat's when
the person counting
the drawEr. kEeps a fiVe.
cOKe! fRieNd!
bLack iCe!!
cAll grEg. gEt another piLl.
FcccUUUUUK!
nO parTy.
tHere IS a parTy.
rIchard has piLs. hE has To.
hE wouLd. i'LL FCKUU!!
tHat's what i'll Do.
sHow you richaRd.
sHow yOu.
dOn's judge peopLe.
i'l empty your fcKUUing
mailbOx.
nEver get a mSg.
agaIn.
sLap dOg. cOCK. sWAg.
aRchivAl.
rEmove aLl.

dONe.
aDministrative executiVe.
dEcisiOn.
yOUR ASS.

Cock

Jimmy would come over sometimes. This guy's kitchen is full of pills. Open a drawer. It should be knives. It's pharmaceutical. He sucked my dick once. I was over there. We were watching HBO. This fool starts sucking a dick. Does that make me gay? Or just high? I don't even do coke—a few lines a day. Some people have a problem with it. Like that bitch Candi. Can't you limit yourself? Come on, buy a house. Or like this guy. Jimmy. He's got problems. But the guy has a *job*. Fuck. Do a little coke now and then. You really gotta get into real estate. I get it from my sister. She lives in New York. It's the only way to make money. Jimmy's sucking that coke—sucking that shit up his nose. Police hat is out on the table. He hates when I touch it. I touch it anyway. Jimmy's tricky. You gotta feed him the right stuff in the right order. Like if I offer Jimmy drinks first he'll shake his hand like *no, I would never drink that*. He'll wave you off. You can't invite him out for drinks, either. He'll never come. You gotta *trick* motherfuckers like this, *sneak* 'em over your house with some crazy call like you gotta—and this is risky—but you gotta *trick* these motherfuckers over. You gotta call

'em. Like from a neighbor's phone. Or from a restaurant. We're always doing that down at the Costco. Trick those bitches into letting us use their fax machine. Faxing in orders at the Costco. Fucking Jimmy. Get this guy another line he'll be sucking *Mega Cock's* dick. Where's my kid? Candy prob'ly has 'em. Get this guy another line.

Mega Cock

Da da dada da da dada
Da da dah
Da da *dah*
Dee dee dee
Dee dee *dee*
Dee da da dee da de dee!
Da da dah
Da da da dah
Da da
Da *da*
Da da dah

—[hiccup]—

Da dah dah dah
De dah dah dah
Da da da
Da da *da*
Dee da dah
Dee da dah
Da da *da* da da *da* da
Da da
Do da da do da da dah
Dah dah dah!

Liss

Come'ere baby
Be still
This is not how it will be your whole life
Your life will be
Your life will be
Beautiful
You'll learn
You'll love
You'll study in Europe
You'll study at Oxford
You'll be a historian
You'll meet a woman
She'll be Italian
She'll be from out of this world
She'll wear aprons and wrap you up in them
She'll rock you to sleep
You can write me
I'll be a Pilates instructor
And I will tell you the story of this night

There will be a land
It might even be this one
Where cops don't do drugs with giant bunnies
In their kitchens

I'm sorry Mega Cock
Are you cold?

I wish I had a blanket for you
Pretty baby
Why'd they name you Mega Cock?

You'll study in Oxford
Perhaps you'll study law
No, I wouldn't want you to be stupid
What subjects are left?

Let's get that blanket
Let's go inside
Let's just get the blanket
I don't think Cock and his friend will notice
We'll sit by the pool.
That's what we'll do.

I'm sorry you're cold.
I'm sorry Mega Cock.

Step onto the deck
Leave my vista behind
I think you'll like Oxford
Grab the blanket from the pool.

You and me will warm this up together
I'm not thirsty enough to drink mojitos
Babies shouldn't drink chlorine.
Damn you, bunny.
Damn you, Candycane.
They took my dad away.

Stay here baby I'm gonna get us some water.
If I have to go inside I will.
I'll just be like: hello Cock, hello cop.
I need some water.
No need to get it.
I know where the sink is.
Shouldn't you be on duty?

Where is your son?

On second thought let's go with this fountain
That fountain should be clean enough
Stay there Mega Cock
I know
I'll be right back
Gotta wash this pitcher out

Mega Cock

Ting tah
Ting tah
Ting ting
Ting ting tah
Ding ding ding ding
Ding ta
Ding ta ding ta
Ding ta
Ding ding ta

—[cough]—

Ding ta ding ta
Ding da ding
Ding da ding
Ding da ding
Ding da ding
Daaaaahh daaa daaaaaaa
Ding ta dah!
Ding ding *ding* da ding
Ding ding dah
Da da *da* da
Ding *ding* aaaaaa!

Liss

So this is what adults do when they get together
A bunny and a cop
I have heard my mom and dad talk about it
I have seen it on the web
Hannah and Richard don't do it anymore
I guess it's saved for Cock and Cop
Candy and dad are probably doing it now
As part of "The Arrangement"

It doesn't seem that complicated
It doesn't need to be
The bunny seems so serious
It doesn't interest me

That crazy bunny and his bunny costume
And now this man in a cop costume
He isn't really a cop
He just plays one on TV
Real cops don't snort coke with bunnies
I don't think they sit next to them on couches, either
Pretending to watch TV

Real candies don't steal fathers
Or maybe it's right
Candy is sweet
But it rots your stomach
Sugar likes your tongue

It doesn't like your teeth

The cop looks happy
I can see the bunny head
The cop looks very happy
I want that bunny dead

What kind of arrangement do they have I wonder?
The kind that makes it okay to smash a skylight?
I want that bunny dead

Hold on Mega Cock
Shut up
Shut up Mega Cock
Water's on its way

Maybe I'll take a dip
No one's watching
Mega Cock won't care
Come here little baby
Shuffle
No one cares
Take off my shirt
The bunny isn't looking
Come'ere baby
Come'ere little Cock
I'm leaving your diaper on
Make sure it's tight.
Slide in this pool with me
Yeah! Splash!
Go ahead and scream!
No one's listening, baby Cock!
No one knows about us anymore!
Whoah!
Watch out baby Cock!
Did I hit your head?
See, you're fine. You're fine!
We'll just swim until my dad gets here.

You like the water don't you!
Don't worry about my little fish.
He's a friend from another world.
He won't bite you, he's friendly. See?
You want to try going underwater?
I can tread the both of us.
Fly you in and under!
Fly you up above!
Why aren't the adults swimming?
Adults are very strange

Mega Cock

Blub blub
Blub blub
Clonk clonk clonk clonk
Bling blah blah
Zoom blub zoom blub
Zoom zoom aaaaa!

—[say hi!]

La la la la
Lee la la
Lee la la
La la la
Club club club
Clonk
Club clonk
Club clonk
Clonk clonk clonk
Clonk-a-clonk!
Club club laaaaaaaaaa!

Cock

Oh *shiiiiit*. Jimmy. You gotta help me with this bitch. She's gotta be like re-*appropriated* or something. Don't you have a program for that? Can't somebody rehab this bitch and send her back to me with a proper coke habit? Can't somebody do that? Somebody should do that. You know what somebody else should do? Lock down this neighborhood. Lock down the top side of the hill. Above a certain street. Can't we have a fence or something? That's ideal. Gate, cardkey, high-hedges and like a minimum income requirement. I'm not even sure you're gonna be able to live here anymore, Jimmy! Maybe let you here to work, but I think cops should have a maximum income no matter where they work. Jimmy. Nose like a hurricane. Cover your other nostril bro. I'm not sure I'm'onna let this bitch change my channels. You can't watch just anything you want. This isn't Disney World. Might have to kill this cop. Jimmy. Want a drink now? Yeah. You're in it. Pop that gun right off your belt when you're not looking. Watch TV. Go ahead. Keep his drink full. These fuckers are so simple. Where the fuck is Candy? Fuck-ing: *Richard*. Might have to get Richard to

help me kill my childhood friend. What kind of thought is that? I'm gonna have to introduce *Richard* to *Jimmy*? That's what's wrong with these parties. People keep showing up. That's why we need a fence. Might'n'a even have to *ask* Candy to help. She hates cops. What the fuck time is it? Where's Becca? Get that bitch a guest house. Keep her around. Now you're thinking about fucking your maid. Don't do that. Fucking Jimmy. Don't do that.

Jacobi

bRing briNg!
aCcount destroyEd!
fCKUUUck rIchaRd!
wHy do you thiNk
yOur projeCt
iS laTe!
i'M the smartest man aliVe!
fCKu'emm!
aCcount goNe.
gONe.
tHat's how we woRk.
sOlution soFt.
sOfT solutioNs.
tEll stephEn.
eNd you richaRd.
sTephEn. rIchaRd is out
tOdAy.
hE fCKus pRositutEs
iN an allEy.
hE's addictEd.
nEeds heLp.
i'M worried about hIm.
i'M worried about yOu.
rIchaRd.
hE needs heLp.
hE needs my heLp.
tHat was no babysittEr.

rIchaRd.
yOu never invite Me.
yOu shouLd.
sOmetimEs.

Liss

Family family family family.
Family family.
Goon.

Mega Cock needs a diaper change.

Family family family family.
Family family.
Goon.

What's behind door number three?
I'm scared to think.
Here's one. They look respectable.
They look neighbor-hoody.

Family family family family.
Family Family.
(—)

Mega Cock, come on, let's get your diaper changed.
Knock knock knock.
Knock knock.
This better not be a goon.
Ring ring!
Ding dong.
Knock.
Knock.

Goon.

No lights are on.

Here's what we passed before this:

1. House with Hot Wheels in front—multiples—we passed them 'cause they already have enough kids to take care of
2. House where I couldn't reach the door
3. House that scared me for no reason. I trusted my intuition

Now we're at door number four.

Knock knock knock.

Hold on baby. Hold on.

Here's a light. Here.

Hallway light. I can see into the room.

This guy comes rolling out. He's in a wheelchair.

Oh, no, I didn't mean to disturb a guy in a wheelchair.

Mega Cock. You're too much trouble.

Leave him here.

No, you can't do that.

Leave a baby on a doorstep. For some guy in a wheelchair.

You can't do that.

He's looking.

He sees us.

He has a remote that opens the door.

"Hi."

"Well hello there."

"We need help."

"Come in," the guy says, "Come in."

His house is big. It's bigger than Cock's.

Cock's house is kindof tacky. This guy's house has panache.

This guy's house has statues, too, but they're not broken.

"Nice statues."

"Thank you. What was that?"

"I said nice statues." I'm tapping my foot. "We need a diaper change."

The guy presses forward on his wheelchair.

Zeeeeeeeeeeengh. He rolls toward me.

“Is that your baby?”

“He’s my mom’s.”

“Where’s your mom?”

“She’s sleeping. Sorry if we woke you. Were you sleeping?”

“Yes,” the guy says, “I was.”

Cock is wailing.

“I don’t have any diapers,” the guy says. “Do you want me to call someone? Maybe the police?”

“No,” I say. That won’t be necessary. “The police already came.”

“Oh,” the guy says. Grief, the guy’s in his pajamas.

“I need to borrow..like..a t-shirt..and some tape.”

The guy nods.

“Do you have masking tape?”

He nods again.

“Also,” I say, “This is going to make a mess. Do you have anywhere that I could make a mess?”

The guy points out back. “By the pool,” he says.

I put Mega Cock on the kitchen floor.

The guy zooooooms along behind us.

“I’ll just use right here if that’s okay,” I say.

He doesn’t object.

How could he?

How could he.

I’m imagining Candy and Cock and Dad showing up here in the middle of the night.

Some guy in a wheelchair.

They’d prob’ly kill him.

Just for fun.

“So your mom’s sleeping?” the guy asks.

“Did I say she was? Actually,” I say, “I don’t know where my mom is.”

At home, in bed. I wonder if Richard called her.

"I doubt it," I say out loud.

"What?"

"I said I doubt he called her."

The wheelchair guy has everything in the lower cabinets.

He gets me a plastic bag.

"You can cut it," he suggests.

"You know what this baby needs?" I smile.

The guy doesn't know.

I say: "Breathing holes."

You don't want to wrap a baby in plastic—even his bum.

It could disallow the skin to breathe.

"How do you like your vista?" I ask the guy.

"My vista?"

"How do you like your view? Or can't you see—I'm sorry."

"I can see. I can see. The vista..it's wonderful. It's why I moved here."

"Where did you live before?"

"I was..in the vista. Too far down. I couldn't see."

"That must have sucked," I say, poking holes in a trash bag.

"Use a Zip-Loc," the guy offers.

"Are you sure? I know they're expensive."

"They're what—a dollar?" He's admiring my craftsmanship. "You've already come this far."

"And I woke you up. Do you have a wife?"

"No, I'm.."

"Are you gay? It's okay. I have progressive parents."

"Your parents are progressives, huh?"

"So..are you? I mean is that why you don't have a wife?"

"No," he says, "I just like..to be alone."

"Why?"

"Because it's quiet."

"Except when neighbors knock on your door to change a diaper."

"Do you live around here?"

"I could use a little more quiet. From time to time," I

say. "I haven't been getting enough lately. How long have you been alone?"

The guy opens a water. "Thirty years?"

"Well, that's good. I'm going to be alone someday. After tonight. I gotta get this baby back."

The guy has his phone out.

"Don't bother," I say.

"What shouldn't I bother with?"

"Calling the cops. We're them. I mean..it's us. We're all the same."

The guy shakes his head. "You..want a water? You want some water for.."

"Him. Yeah. He's a he. Sure. Tha'd be great." I look at him.

He zooms off.

"Thanks man."

And now the diaper's done.

It's a contraption.

It's a mousetrap.

It's a Rube Goldberg—if you know what that is.

It's like the diaper Apollo 13 astronauts would have designed on the fly.

With whatever materials they had available.

Square peg/round hole.

I love that shit.

You've got five minutes.

Go.

You can take:

1. A water heater
2. Four tubes of Crest
3. This beat-up copy of Eat, Pray, Love

You have to make a diaper that will:

1. Withstand temperatures to 4000 °K
2. Fit babies up to age seven and as low as minus a month
3. Allow the baby's butt to breathe

Failure to meet these specifications will result in imme-

diate elimination.
Of your project.

—[illustration]—

“Is he tired?” The guy hands me a water. “Do you want to sleep?”

There’s a plush couch in the living room.

“You can stay for a minute and rest him.”

“You’re not gonna call the police?”

He swigs his water. “We’re us, they’re them, remember?”

“You don’t seem like a pervert,” I say. “But no, I gotta get him back. Thanks for the help. For the record: are you a pervert? Don’t answer. It’s rude of me to ask. Thanks for the bag and—” I’m struggling with Mega Cock. “—the water. Thanks. Thanks for being nice. Not everyone is.”

“I know,” the guy says.

And I’m heading for the door.

“I’ll leave it unlocked. The phone’s right here.”

He sets it on a giant statue.

This one’s of a lion lying down.

Reclining. Perfectly nice statue.

“Why don’t you break yours?” I ask.

But I don’t hear his answer.

I’m looking in the side-wing.

This is the house.

I didn’t recognize it from eye-level.

“Oh man, I’m so sorry.”

“Why?”

The roof to his side-wing is all glass. Skylights.

There would have been four.

Now there are mostly three.

Little frags of glass everywhere.

At least the guy doesn't have to step on the floor.
"My bunny did that," I admit.
The guy zooms his chair up to the door.
He's peering at my baby.
"Is that Mega Cock?" he asks.
"Yeah," I say. "I gotta go."

House house house house.
House house.
Zoo.

Mega Cock's diaper is crinkling.
If you're in NASA it doesn't matter what your diaper is
made out of.
In space there is no sound.
Stars shining down on me.
Black sky.
We broke that guy's *skylight*.
A guy in a wheelchair!
I have to talk to Dad.
We have to pay for it.
At the very least we have to pay for it.

House house house house.
House house.
Zoo!

But I got my quiet.
It's quiet now.
Step step step step.
Back up the vista.
Up to the top of the hill.
We picked a good house, didn't we baby!
We picked a good house.
That could have been much worse.
We'll have to at least write that guy a *thank you note*.
At the very least we'll do that.
You like your diaper don't you!

We're lucky we have friends here.
This is a big neighborhood little baby.
But we're safe. We're safe. We've got each other.
Don't you worry little Mega Mega, we'll get you up this
hill.
Nothing's gonna happen to you.
Look! There's a sprinkler!
It'll be morning soon.
Up this step with me Mega Mega. Up. And up a step.
There we go.
Let's turn around and look.
There's my vista.
What time is it Mega Mega? Do you have the time?
There's the road.
There's no cars on it. Not one.
There's no one swimming.
There's no dawn in that sky.
What time is it my little baby?
I'm cold. Are you cold?
You're heavy, baby.
Wait, is it this way?
Where am I?
Oh, baby, we shoulda walked the road!
This is the path!
This is it, right?!
Don't worry.
We can always go back. That way is the man in the
wheelchair.
There's the house I have a bad feeling about.
We must be on the trail.
Next we have to find the house where I couldn't reach
the door.
I don't see it!
Oh, baby, don't fret now, I've got you. Hold on baby.
How's that diaper?
Mega Mega.
Who's my little Mega Mega?
Then we have to find the house with the Hot Wheels.

Which I don't see either.
It's okay, Mega.
We're fine.
Oh look! Mega! There's a kitty!
She can lead our way!
"Here little kitty."
She sees us.
"Hi little kitty!"
She doesn't like the way you smell.
You do smell kinda bad Mega Mega.
Mainly your..everything.
"Come'ere kitty. Come'ere. What's your name?"
Putting down Mega Mega for a second.
"Just: sit. Okay?"
He's so quiet. I wish he would cry.
Cry like a normal baby, Mega Mega. Didn't you learn to cry?
And here's my little kitty. "Come'ere little one? Are you lost? Where's your home? Do you have a momma kitty?
It's okay."
Putting out my hand to her.
She's sniffing me.
I think she can tell there's something wrong with us.
She doesn't look friendly up close.
She's the right size for a cute kitty but without the cuteness.
Of course Mega Mega's messing everything up.
The kitty turns away.
"Oh, kitty."
She doesn't hear me.
I meow.
Come back, kitty.
Come back.
But she doesn't.
The kitty goes away.

Dad

CANDY WAS SHIT STONE PERFECT.

Like you've never had.

When you're young you wonder if beautiful people fuck better. Some children think they do. Which of course is not true. But there is a truth in there sideways: all sex is not the same. It's not better because you're beautiful. It's better because you're a freak.

Candy was a freak.

She wasn't thinking. In her mind—she wasn't there. It was wrong, what we were doing. And not just because we were doing it. Because of *how* we did it. You know those five questions—the basic ones—the ones they teach in kindergarten? Who, what, when, where, and why? The five Ws. (And one H: *how*.) It's really the H that matters.

With Candy the H was everything.

With Candy the H was slow where it could have been fast. It was reversed when it could have been head-on. With Candy it was over when it could have continued. At the place where others stop, Candy's how kept going. It was on where it could have been off. It was interval when it could have been continuous. It was integral..where it could have been derivative.

Or this could be the drugs talking.

Yeah, it might be the drugs talking.

Have you ever taken crystal meth? No? Well let me tell you.

Here's how Candy describes it:

"I can start to understand..you know..I can start to understand how you'd be willing to go to jail for the rest of your life..just to fuck someone. I can start to understand what it must be like to be a guy. To care for that little girl. But to want to rape her. And to do it. To put her desires aside and do it anyway. I can start to understand that. Do you think I'm crazy?" Candy says.

And I say: "No."

Candy is in the dark. Candy is moving. We're in the dark.

"For me," I say, "it's like..it's like I'm not even human when I'm on it. I look at things. Like.."

Candy's how is moving in the dark.

"..I look at things that I would never look at when I'm sober. Like.."

"Tell me," she says. She wants to know.

"Terrible things."

She's biting me.

"Terrible things."

"I want to know."

"I look at pictures I would never look at. Movies. I don't care if they get hurt. I don't care..if they die. They're not there. They're there for me. They just fucking need to..they just need to make me cum."

"But you can't."

"Of course you can't."

"I like how this feels."

"You can never cum. You can never—"

But Candy brings me back to the present.

"You can cum later. I'll make you."

"I *can't* cum on this stuff. But not-cumming is better than normal cumming. And these pictures. I think there's something wrong with me. I'm a serial killer or something. When I'm looking at this stuff the next day I'm like—who *am* I? Who is this guy that looks at this? That *likes* this? That thinks that this is fun. Who *is*

that guy? I mean how can I like that? Watching someone else's pain?"

And Candy says: "We'll look at porn at Cock's house." She's off of me. She's standing up. The lights are on. "Where?"

Candy's standing by the door.

"Inside. Let's go." And she flips off the light.

I'm in the Camaro, driver's seat.

We're inside Cock's garage.

How long have we been in here?

We've been in here the whole time.

"Candy. Where's Becca?"

But Candy's gone.

WHAT'S INSIDE IS HARD.

It's Becca.

Candy is between me and them.

Behind her is Cock.

The TV is on.

The TV is playing.

It's playing gay porn.

There's a cop in the house.

There's a fucking cop.

He's got his pants off.

Are they just playing?

It's a real cop.

Rebecca is with them.

She's handcuffed to the entertainment center.

There's this bar. She's handcuffed to that.

Her arm is twisted weird.

Cock is completely naked.

All the lights are on.

It's still dark.

Cock has a taser. He's holding it to his dick.

"SHOULD I DO IT?" he shouts. "SHOULD I DO IT?"

Candy makes a motion toward him.

Cock holds the taser in the air. He's swinging free.
I'm in the house.

There's a cop there with his pants off and he's pulling up his underwear when I come in.

The kitchen counter has Chinese cartons, cocaine, and a gun.

"Where's Liss?"

"Where's *Mega Cock!!?*" That's Candy.

Cock isn't listening.

Becca's pointing at the door.

"Where's Liss?" I say.

Rebecca's pointing at the door.

"Mega Cock has her, I GUESS," Cock says. He tases his wall. Nothing happens.

I'm looking at the door.

"She was there a second ago," Becca says.

Candy says: "Take her out of the handcuffs!"

The doorbell rings.

"I'm getting the door."

"Cock. Where is the key?"

"Jimmy threw it over there."

"The key is WHERE???"

"Over there."

"Be more specific??"

Jimmy says: "They're in the sink. Near the sink."

Candy's up in Jimmy's face. "WERE YOU SUCKING MY BOYFRIEND'S COCK??!!!" She knees him. She goes to Cock and starts to say something but Cock has the taser in her face.

I'm at the door: it's my little girl!

By the time I get back *Candy* has the taser.

Liss has *Mega Cock*.

"Is he okay?"

"Yeah," Liss says, "He's fine." She takes *Mega Cock* to the pool table and sets him down. He's wearing a trash bag. "You might want to change that," Liss says. She goes past all of us, she goes outside.

She closes the door behind her.

She sits by the pool.

“NOW! You wanna go take care of your baby! Did she have him?”

“He’s on the pool table.”

“Why don’t you go get your baby off the *pool table*. Yeah. I’ll hold onto this.” She pockets the taser. “Grab his gun.”

I see it on the counter.

“Grab it. He’s not a real cop.”

I take the gun.

“Now Jimmy.” Candy has his nuts in striking distance. “You wanna unlock my maid?”

Jimmy’s watching me with the gun.

His lips are dry; he’s totally coked-out.

This half-naked cop rooting around the trash trying to find the key.

“Becca. You alright? Sorry about this.”

Becca says: “I’m fine.”

“Did they hurt you?”

“We didn’t hurt her!” Cock yells.

“Did they hurt you?”

“We just wanted her to watch!” Cock says. He’s back with the baby.

“Jimmy! How’s that key?”

Jimmy mumbles. Fucking cop with his slacks at his ankles.

“You can go after this,” Candy says. “I’m so sorry.”

“That’s okay.” Becca holds her hand up. “I can stay.”

“Could you? I mean once we let you out. Once..*Jimmy here*..lets you out. Motherfuckin’: did he suck your dick?” Candy hits Cock, even though he has the baby. “Or did you suck his?” Candy looks at me: “Stupid question, huh?”

“Yeah.” Stupid question.

“How’s my little Mega Cock?”

“Find that key??!”

“I’mma check on Liss.”

“Go ahead. Take that gun.” Jimmy looks up. “Jimmy. Do you really think you’re in any shape to be holding a *gun*? Why’d you come, anyway?”

“Neighbors called.”

I’m at the door.

“Why’d the neighbors call *this time*?”

“Chair.” Both Cock and Jimmy say it.

Oh yeah.

Candy says: “Thanks.”

I close the door. I’m out with Liss.

I sit next to her and put the Glock on the edge of the pool.

There’s a shark in the pool. That’s SHARK! He’s this black-green shot. Shooting. Shooting around the pool.

“We’re gonna have to take him out soon.”

“Is he a saltwater shark?”

“No,” Liss says. “The chlorine.”

“Oh.” I stand. “I’ll get a bucket.”

Liss ignores me. I think she’s mad.

I leave her at the pool and go inside.

“Does anybody have a bucket?”

Candy is on the one couch. She’s smoking.

Cock and Mega Cock and the cop are on the other couch.

Becca has the handcuff off. She’s sitting on the floor.

Candy pats the cushion next to her.

I’m thinking about making a trip to the bathroom.

“Richard. Have a seat.”

“Jimmy: this is Richard. Richard: Jimmy.”

“Hi.”

“Hello.”

“So why are you here, Jimmy?”

“The neighbors called the cops.”

“Was it Mr. Abbott?”

“No it was—”

“Shut up Jimmy. Just shut up.” Candy motions to Becca. “Lock him up. You still got that gun? Good.”

I never have a chance to tell her I don’t have it.

“Jimmy. Grab some floor.”

“Candy. What are you doing?”

“Becca. Lock ‘im up. Don’t resist Jimmy. You know what the punishment is for resisting arrest around here.”

“Candy. I was just going.”

“Yeah,” Cock says, “He was just going.”

“What did he tell you?” Candy stands and prods Jimmy to the entertainment center. She never even takes the taser out.

Becca handcuffs Jimmy to the bar.

Candy checks the handcuffs.

She sticks her face in his. “What. Did. He. Tell. You.”

“Who?”

“Candy, don’t fuck with him—”

Candy goes for the taser.

“What did *who* tell me?”

“Mr. Abbott. What did that fucker say?”

“I don’t even know who Mr. Abbott is!”

“Mr. Abbott!! 19 Shady Tree Lane!! You know who Mr. Abbott is!!”

“Candy. Just..chill.” That’s Cock.

Becca goes to the kitchen. She opens a drawer. She takes out a serving spoon. She gets herself a plate. She scoops cold lo mein from a box. She puts the plate in the microwave. She throws the spoon in the sink. There’s so much stuff in the sink it doesn’t even clank. It makes a muted sound.

Candy has the taser on Jimmy’s neck.

“What did Mr. Abbott say?”

“Is Mr. Abbott the guy in the wheelchair?”

Liss pulls the door closed behind her.

I guess we’ll deal with that shark later.

“No,” Candy says. “Mr. Abbott isn’t in a wheelchair. We just saw him running. Now—” She kicks Jimmy in the face. “—Here’s-a-what we’re gonna do—”

But Liss has the Glock. She’s got it in both hands.

“No,” my daughter says, “*This* is what we’re gonna do.”

Candy

“Now **GET** into the bathroom!”

She was **TELLING** us.

This little BITCH was telling us.

I didn't take her **SERIOUSLY**.

She's a **kid**; **WHAT**ever.

I went into the **bathroom**; she had the **GLOCK**.

I mean **that LITTLE girl HAD A GLOCK IN MY**
FACE.

It was **FUNNY**.

..

..

..

“That's how **YOU TEACH YOUR KID?**”

“Liss. Gimme **the gun.**”

“No. I don't think **so. GET IN THE**
BATHROOM.

get **IN.**”

..

..

..

She had us SCRUB.

I **LOVE** to scrub.

Little kids.

“Silly girl.”

“What?”

“**I love to scrub! Why'd you leave**
the fucking GUN outside

Richard
Why'd you **do** that?"
She had our **PHONEs**.
"When I come back I **WANT THESE**
COUNTERS SCRUBBED."
Right, **okay, I GOT YOU** *bitch*.
I love scrubbing counters **ANYWAY.**

..

..

..

Red flecks.

"Richard **GET YOUR ELBOW INTO IT.** Kiss me.
Fuck. Does she *like to CLEAN OR*
SOMETHING?"

"**I HEARD THAT.**"

That's LISS from the next room.

Who knows **what she's doing** in there.

"Richard, **KISS** me. Kiss **my DICK.**"

"You don't **have** a dick."

"How **the fuck** do you know? Kiss **IT.**"

"I don't want any **FOREPLAY going on** in there."

That's Liss from the **other** room.

"How **can** she **HEAR us?**"

Because you're **screaming.**

"Because you're **sCREAMing**, Richard,
you're **SCREAMing**. Now lick **MY DICK.**"

It's **right there**, Richie Rich.

SUCK MY DICK."

..

..

..

"**NO FOREPLAY!!**"

..

..

..

Alright al**RIGHT.**

"How **does she even know** what **FOREPLAY** is.

Richard.

There's **THROW UP** matter in this countertop.

Richard look at THIS.

Did **you** *throw UP* IN HERE?

No?

Do **YOU** see **that**?

It's there.

Look, **they're EVERYWHERE!**

Someone **threw up** in this bathroom.

Sneak the door closed.

Shush it. **Shush** it.

We're gonna HIT ANOTHER HIT of chrys."

..

..

..

"NO CHRYS!"

..

..

..

"Hey, *Tricky*. **HOW DOES SHE KNOW** what chrys is?"

"Cause **you're SCREAMing!**"

"Was I?" **I didn't mean** to.

Liss **is BACK** with the gun.

She's got the gun in my **EYE**.

"Stop LICKING it!!"

That gun is in my eye. Tastes like **CRACKERS**.

"Liss."

Richard's **LAUGHING**.

I'm gonna **FUCKING LICK** that gun.

"Gimme the gun."

"Just **GRAB it!** **She's gonna shoot** me!"

I'm sSTILL licking it though.

I just **want)liss(** to **LEAVE**.

"Look what **we FOUND** on this counter.

THROW up.

Liss **IS** leaving.

"THAT'S not throw up."

"Well what is it?"

“Just **KEEP** cleaning.”
“It’s [garble garble] **in the counter**, Candy.”
“**What? Richard**, wha’d she say?”
Rich’s hand is **on** my **COCK** now.
Tongue. Neck. Face.
Rich’s **finger on** the counter.
Eye**BALL**.
My eyeball is **down there**.
“**It’s just flecks** on the counter!”
“It’s flecks **of vomit**, see!”
“They don’t come **off**.”
“That’s cause **you need to SCRAPE** harder.”
“They don’t **come off, Candy**; they’re flecks!”
“That’s what I **said!**”
“**You told me** they were vomit!”
“I told you **THEY WERE FLECKS like 30**
minutes ago!”
You’re **on** me.
You’re on me **HUFFING**.
You’re ON me like a horse.
I’m going **UNDER** the towels.
“Get **IN!**”
“I **am** in.”
“Get **REALLY** in.”
“You **want me** deeper?”
“Yeah. You’re so *technical*, **Richard**.”
You’re SO technical.
“**Is she coming** back?”
I don’t even **THINK** you know.
Richard.
I don’t even think you **KNOW** anymore.
“Smoke this.”
“What are you **two** doing.”
Liss **STAMPS** her foot.
“I **told you NO** foreplay.”
Now WE’RE in trouble.

..
..

..

Now Liss is **SERIOUS**.
I *can't stop LAUGHING* about those *flecks*.
It's **not funny** laughter though.
It's **serious**.
We're **all serious** now.
Liss has **our pipes**.
She has **like six** of them.

“Richard. Dixon Maxx. When **YOU NEED TO
START a pipe
YOU LET ME KNOW**.
I'll start 'em **for ya'**.
You're **WASTING** glass.”
“Is **THAT** what that is? Glass?
Candy
Tell me that's not glass.
**IN MY HOUSE
WITH my BABY!!**”
Cock is ready to *cry* now.
This **time** he's ready to **cry**.
Jimmy is **watching** TV.
It's **not** gay porn anymore.
It's **QVC**. They're **selling MORMONS**.
“You remember **when those Mormons stopped by
the other day?**”
“Awwwww **Candy you're fucked** up.
Awwwww..**Richard**. Are you on this **shit too?**
Awwwww..**Richard**.
Now I don't even care that **you fucked him**.
Now I don't even **CARE**.
Becca, bring **me Mega Cock**.”
Becca doesn't **think** so.
Becca and Liss have some sort of **arrangement**.
They're **arranging** things.
They're *whisper whisper*.
Liss is *saying stuff* **THAT I DON'T
UNDERSTAND**.
“**Liss**. You've got to speak more **SLOWLY**.”

Why'd you **do** that?"
 I feel **like** *throwing UP*.
 I **feel** *skinny* in my stomach.
 "Why'd you go and do **that Liss**?"
 She's gone and **handcuffed Cock** to the
TV STATION!!
 "That's **what I've been trying to tell you, Candy.**"
 That's **Cock**.
 He looks *real serious* and **he's pleading** now.
 "You're **FUCKed** up baby.
 I told you **not to touch** that shit.
Becca, let us out."
 But *Becca's not paying ATTENTION*.
 She's *putting Chinese cartons* in the *dishwasher*.
 Cardboard **doesn't go** in there
 ..
 ..
 ..
 It's **real** slow
 It's **me** and Richard **on the pool** table
 Someone turned **all the lights on**
 It's **medical**
 Liss **has** the **devices**
 We **can't MOVE**
 There's **examination** coming **THROUGH** us
 Liss **has the** controls
 The **bright** light
My eye is PERMANENT open
 There's **another man** here
 Rich is talking **to** him
They're **not saying anything**
 ::Mimetic::
 They're **not BEING** examined
 They're **chatting** it up
 They're **off a CLIFF**
 Liss has the *devices* and **she's** examining **me**
 Under *bright lights*
DOCTOR OXYgen

There's a **RED** light
 LaSeR!
 Red spot
 Close **eyes**
 Liss is *making* it
 I can see **across** her **VISTA**
 She's communicating with **the** neighbors
 THEY'VE got a code
 Liss is **HAVING** **me** arrested
 She's *SNEAKing it* **PAST** me
If she does it **slowly enough** *I won't KNOW* it
 She's *sneaking* **ME**
 Oh **damn**
 I'm getting sneaked **by this** little girl
 She **won't** move me
 It *comes*
 It comes **from** the *sides*
 They're **under** the table
 There's no moving for **me**
 It's *like* a *rock*
 It's like **heavy** water
 And *then* she's got **LIGHT!**
 Everyone CAN see!
 Everything is
 Bright
 "Brightness Richard!"
 He doesn't **know** it's happening.
 He's making **this** his little **GAME**.
 I'm supposed to find the **meaning**.
Richard's **HIDDEN** meaning within **THIS** room.
 My goal is **to find it**.
 There's a man smoking **white**
 Whiteness *LCLOUD*
 He's **sick**.
 This man is **dying**.
 He's **fat** in bed.
 He can never get up.
 He's **making a demonstration**.

This is what **NOT** to do.
 They've got the pipes **cleaned**.
 "Did **you** do it?"
 Richard says "yes".
HOW did **you** do it Richard?
 They've got this **FAT** man here so he can **show me**.
 He's showing me **what NOT** to do.
 "Did you **make** this, Richard?"
 Did you make **this**, Liss?"
 "Aaaaaaawwwwww **Fuck** Candy."
 That's **cock** in the **OTHER** room.
 They've got this **fat man here** and he's showing me
 what will happen."
 "Are you **PART** of the **demonstration**?"
 "What?" He's *shaking his* head.
 He **DOESN'T** know what I'M **talking** about.
 He's *part* of the **demonstration**.
You're not **ALLOWED** to say it.
 "I'm not allowed **to** smoke."
 I **CRAWL** into Richard's lap.
 "You can **smoke** it."
 "I'm **not** allowed to **SMOKE**."
 Richard gives **ME the pipe**.
I give it back
 "I don't want to mess with **the demonstration**."
 "This isn't a demonstration."
 "I know **you can't talk about** it."
 The fatty has **the pipe**
 "I know that **if you tTELL me** about it
that it WON'T have the same effect."
 He's a *cop*
 He won't **get better**
He's already got that smoke
IN HIM
 He's a **LOST** cause
 He knows it
 Richard and him are **CHATTING IT UP**
 Like Fireside

“Where is Cocky?”
 “He’s **in the Fireside** room.”
 “What’s the fireside room?”
 “What’s the *what*? **You’re not making** any sense.
 Are you taking your **medication**?”
 It’s the fat man.
 “Do you take any medication?”
 “Not usually, **no**. We’ll I do take something for
 ANxIETY”
 “Well **you should** take your pills.”
 ; “Why is he telling me to take pills”?
 “He’s **just** encouraging *you* to **maintain a schedule**
for your meDiCaTion.”
 Technical.
You’re so technical Richard.
 “You’re so **TECHNICAL!**”
 They’re **laughing**.
 Becca has the **baby**.
I can’t remember his name.
 Becca’s **rocking him in her arms**.
 That’s good.
 Liss is sitting at the bar.
She has the gun.
 That’s good.
 She **should be the one** to take it.
 She’s the best one **to look after** it right now.
 “Who’s **your friend** Richard?”
 “**You MET him.**”
 Who’s **your friend**.
 “You **met him** on the road, **remember**?”
 No, I don’t. “Really.”
 “**His name** is *BO*by?”
 “Close enough.”
 “But tell me what **his name really is.**”
 “**We told you.**”
 “Am **I** acting weird?”
 “No.”
 “Did you get those flecks out of the cabinet?”

“Why don’t you go check?”
“I’ll be right back. I’m gonna go to the bathroom.
Richard. Can I get you anything?”
“I already got it.”
“You two are so *hush hush* about everything.”
The fat man has a cigarette.
“Can I smoke that?”
I just take it.
Richard and him are smoking cigarettes.
“Where’s the pipe?”
“The PIPES? **Why don’t you** go to the bathroom.”
“What’s the PIPE?”
That’s the fat man.
Smoke is all around him.
“Can we turn some of **these**))lights off in here?”
“**Lights** stay on.” That’s Liss.
..
..
..
I’m in the bath.
There’s no flecks on this counter.
I mean *there’s no flecks at ALL!*
Who is there?
Look in the hallway.
There’s no one there.
Close the door.
Lock it.
It’s not **supposed** to be the LAST towel Richard!
IT’s supposed to be the *next to the last towel.*
Fix that.
Unstop the sink.
This bathroom is perfectly clean.
Who’s out there.
It’s EIGHT **people** out there
It’s those (two boys) in the living room
They’re watching Tv
It’s those **two** boys in the front room
Smoking **fireside** jackets

It's a Lady and an Infant
They're basically **MADE** for each other
It's that **STINKING** little gyrl
I can smell that girl from here
How many is that?
That's six.
That's **seven.**
Then there's us.
In here.
Check the pipe 'again.
It's perfectly in **PLACE.**
NO flecks.
So that's::like eight.
But there's the doorbell.
That's plus one.
So nine.

Liss

You got my text!

“You got my text.”

“I got your text.”

“I have the gun!” I’m showing it to Winnie.

Winnie looks around.

She looks pretty, even this time of night.

A nightgown is tucked inside her boots.

Dad looks up.

Jacobi says: “Oh now *you’re* here?”

“Hello Jacobi.”

Dad stands up and offers Winnie something to drink.

“I better not,” she says.

Yes! There’s someone sane.

There’s someone sane.

We’ve been looking all night for someone sane.

“I tried the neighbors,” I tell Winnie. “I tried several houses down.”

“And did you say the police were here?”

“Come here,” I tell Winnie. Let’s have a look around.

—[illustration]—

Okay here you have Dad and Jacobi.

Which is a bad sign.

Whenever you get Dad and Jacobi together bad things happen.

Notice the smoke.

That's just cigarette smoke.

As distinguished from Candy, which we'll get to later.

Notice the fatness.

Notice the borrowed suit.

"Those are board shorts!" Cock shouts from the next room.

"Who's that?" Winnie asks.

"That's Cock," I say. That's Cock. "He owns the house."

"I'm RENTING!" Cock shouts.

I think we're done in here.

Jacobi's standing.

Gets all that fat to stand.

"Winnie! Grab some *Chinois!* It's in the fridge!"

"It's in the fridge in the garage," Dad says. "You want me to get you some?"

"I think I'm fine." That's what Winnie says.

She's quite sensible.

—[illustration]—

"In here you have the boys." (That's what I like to call them.)

"Can you change the channel?"

"What do you want to watch?" I ask.

I have it on the cooking channel.

"Anything but this. Can you get us the remote?"

Winnie's looking at Cock and Jimmy.

I'm shuffling the gun and the remote.

Two boys.

Handcuffed to the entertainment center.

"What do you want? How about like this?"

It's *Carrie*. I would think they would like this.

“No please..just..Liss..give us the remote.”

Winnie’s turning away. She’s not used to seeing a half-naked cop chained to a television.

“They were watching porn earlier! Oh. Oh. How about this?” I say.

It’s my favorite show.

Bad Girls Tokyo.

—[illustration]—

“Can we please have something else?”

“No,” I say.

And I take Winnie down the hall.

“What’s back here?”

“Mega Cock and Candy,” I say.

I push open the door to the bedroom.

It’s Becca, and Mega Cock.

Mega Cock is sleeping.

“Becca, this is my friend Winnie. She works with Dad.”

“Hi Becca.”

Becca shushes us and comes into the hallway.

She pulls the bedroom door behind her.

“I’m going to take Liss home.”

Becca’s eyes brighten. “Do you have a car?”

“Yes, yes, but whose baby is that?”

“That’s Mr. Cock’s baby.”

Winnie turns to me. “Which one is Cock?”

“He’s the one chained to the TV who’s not a cop.”

Now Winnie’s talking with Becca:

“And that’s..the cop?”

“He is a friend of Señor Cock’s.”

“And who are you?” Winnie seems confused.

“This is Cock’s maid. She’s the babysitter!” I’m saying.

I have to make her understand.

“Winnie. Dad and Candy went to get Becca, because

Mega Cock was crying. They had him on the *pool table!*
So I went next door to get Mega Cock a diaper and that
guy was in a wheelchair and he *knows* Mega Cock!"

I think she's getting it now.

"Then Candy had a taser but I had a gun."

"Right. Give me that."

I give it to her.

"Becca. I'm leaving. You want to bring..the baby..I'll
take you home."

"But what about Mr. Cock?"

Winnie says: "What about him?"

Winnie gets to the end of the hall. She stops. I bump
into her.

She smells like Tommy True Star.

Winnie looks at me like she's confused again.

"Who's Candy?"

Winnie's smart. Winnie's smart. She doesn't miss a
thing.

I push open the bathroom door.

"That's Candy."

That's my little Candycane.

She's in the shower.

She's cut herself. Or picked herself. She's somehow
bleeding.

The shower door is closed.

The water running.

Candycane is bleeding.

She's humming.

She's singing.

The whole place is steamy.

"Candycane?"

Candy sings back her response: "L-L-Liss! Oh baby how
are you?"

"I'm fine."

That's my little Candycane.

Beyond pale—she's whiter than white.

What she's singing sounds like opera.

Her voice is like a tunnel.

Like she's far away.
Winnie steps inside the bathroom.
She sets the gun on the sink.
"Do you need help?"
Candy keeps singing.
"Do you need help?"
Candy puts her hands on the shower door.
They're covered in blood.
We can see the prints.
Candy is still singing.
She takes her hands away and blood drips down.
She lets it drip.
Her hands are on her self.
She leans against the back of the stall.
"Who's with you Liss? Is that Becca?"
"No, this is Winnie."
Candy opens the door.
"Do you want to take a shower Winnie?"
Winnie picks up the gun.

—[illustration]—

"See, I told you," I'm saying.
We're walking down the hallway. We get to the living room.
The boys are watching my show.
Winnie clomps into the front room.
It's me, it's her, Winnie's got the gun, her bedtime hair is wisps. Falling out of a ponytail. Nightshirt tucked in her boots.
She motions with the gun.
"You realize you've got a cop chained to the TV. You realize that. You realize you've got...a..*infant*..sleeping with the maid. If she even *is* the maid! I got a call from Pila earlier—the office got a call—their shark is missing? Somebody knocked out a window at an office next

to Sharks..the trading people? Police are coming up to Stephen asking if he knows where you are. There's a *boat* missing from the landing!"

My Dad stops her.

"I didn't have anything to do with any boat."

But Jacobi says: "I did."

My dad says: "*What!?*"

"It's no big deal. I took this waitress—Candy prob'ly knows 'er." Jacobi swirls around his scotch. "This is a *fine* piece of ass. I was telling her about my boat and she wanted to know if we could go out on it and I was like—"

"Jacobi. You don't *have* a boat."

Jacobi thinks of saying something more but settles on: "Exactly."

My Dad and Jacobi start bickering about the boat.

I tell Winnie that SHARK! is in the pool.

"Go get him."

"What do I take him in?"

"How did you get him here?"

"A cage, but it's broke."

Winnie's shaking her head.

Broken statues everywhere.

"Um..Richard! Hey Richard." Then she says to me: "Put him in a bag or something. Hey Richard! I'm taking your daughter. I'm taking Liss. Unless you want to come along—"

"What about me?" Jacobi whines.

"How did you get here?"

"My bike!"

"Ride your bike home. Liss, hurry. We're leaving now. Richard."

"What?"

"Sober up. Call me. I'll take you home."

"You better leave that here," my dad says.

I hear Winnie set the gun on the bar in the front room.

It's marble. It makes a hollow sound.

"Richard."

“Uhh?”

“Be at work on Monday.” She lowers her voice. “You’ve got a *cop*..handcuffed to..whoever that is..in there. Take care of this. Make it go away. Get a shower. Text me. I’ll take the baby. Who’s baby is that? Cock? Okay, right, whatever. Monday morning, 10am—”

“I’ll be there at 11,” Jacobi says.

“I wasn’t talking to you.”

“But I’ll be there at 11,” Jacobi says.

“No you won’t.”

“You’re right,” Jacobi says, “I’ll be there at 12!!!”

“Stephen fired you,” Candy says, “So..you won’t be there at 12.”

“I have a fucking key bitch!”

“We changed the locks. This afternoon.” Candy hands my dad a key.

My dad looks at Jacobi and just laughs.

—[illustration]—

I hear him laughing from the pool.

The sliding door is open.

Come’ere SHARK!

Come’ere.

We’re going home.

He’s a stubborn one. Get the net.

He’s a little large for the mojito pitcher but if I place him upright..

It should be enough to get him back to Sharks.

Candy Candy.

Candycane.

That steam in the bathroom wasn’t just steam.

It was the other kind of smoke.

Winnie smelled it.

But she doesn’t know it’s crystal.

I asked my dad what pot smelled like one time.
He said it smelled like nature..after it rains.
Candy and Dad's smoke is more like cake..or icing.
Dad and Candy's smoke is like convection. Like bubble
gum.
Sour apple.
Pixy Stix.
Get in here SHARK!
Bad Girls sounds terrible if you're not watching it.
It's just a bunch of people screaming.
Grab that..yeah. Come on. SHARK! We're going home.
Maybe I can sleep on Winnie's couch.
Maybe she'll take me home.
Sharks doesn't open 'till later.
Oh fuck SHARK!
The stupid fish isn't even going to have enough oxygen!
Winnie will solve it.
Just get him in the net.
I bet Winnie's house is all beige.
I can quiz her on Pilates.
We'll do Yoga.

—[illustration]—

This is what I'm thinking: all this and Bad Girls.
SHARK! is almost in his cage.
Then it's not just Bad Girls screaming.
It's Candy. Candycane.
Jimmy's squealing and Cock is saying: "NO!"
Then it's Candycane.
Cock is wailing "Awwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww."
Candycane slides the porch door closed behind her.
I hear it slide shut.
I hear the click.
Then Winnie's at the door. She's pulling.

Candycane is naked.
Footprints, blood.
She's got the taser.
I'm running backward.
'Void the pool!
Candy's crawling up on the fence with me, at the vista.
I drop the net.
Candy's crawling at me like a spider.
Hair stringing down.
I throw the mojito pitcher over the vista. "HHHEEEEL-
LLPPP!"
I never hear it land.
RIB-CRUSH! SPIKING! CUT MY HEAD!
SHE SPARKS MY ARM!
MAKING FISTS
I'M DEAD
Winnie screaming at her and she's dripping her candy-
cane blood on my leg.

Dad

THIS WAS PROGRESS.

We were making progress now.

I had Winnie in the bathroom.

She was in the shower stall.

I was in there with her.

If she tried to move, I pinned her.

I was wearing the board shorts.

Winnie had on her nightgown. We took the boots off.

Winnie and me are friends.

“Let’s talk about Methanex.”

Winnie is trying to hold her breath.

“Want some?”

“No.”

She doesn’t like the smoke.

“Winnie, come on. In terms of billable hours. Where are we?”

Smoke is swirling. It isn’t steam this time. Winnie holds her breath, she puts her hand over her mouth backwards, she eyes the pipe from the bottom of her sight, she squirms in the tub, she tries to stand.

I stop her.

“Winnie. Billable hours.”

Winnie sits down.

Candy is outside with the taser. She’s out there somewhere.

You can’t get out of this house. You can’t get out if you tried.

We were running around it—*running* around it—earlier, and we couldn't get out. There's a certain distance around the house: if you bump against it, it sends you back. It's subtle.

Winnie has to be breathing it now.

You can't avoid it.

Contact high.

"I still don't have Jacobi's hours."

I take the pipe away from my mouth. "This is why Methanex is fucked."

"This is why everything is fucked." Winnie takes the pipe from me.

She drops it.

"Careful. It's hot."

"Yeah!" she says, "I see that!" Winnie's digging for the pipe. It rolls over next to my leg. Quick look at me, then she picks it up.

"Candy tased your daughter."

"I don't think Candy would do that."

There's a tear in Winnie's eye.

"What's that for?"

Winnie wipes it away with the back of her hand. She's looking at the pipe. She's twirling it in her fingers. She bites her lip. She looks at me. She puts her hand on my leg. She hands me the pipe.

"This. It's for this. You wanna do billable hours? Go. I've got yours. Kamesh is useless since he got back. Stephen's hours are in. Jacobi.." Winnie has another tear. "...Jacobi, what do you want me to say?"

"He turn in his timesheet?"

Winnie punches my leg. "What do you think?" She keeps her hand there. "What do you think?"

Winnie has a way about her. It's a bedroom way. Her hair is *unwashed*, matte tones.

"Is this what you always wear to bed?"

"Richard, I have a boyfriend."

"Smoke some of this."

Winnie laughs.

“Tell me about him. What’s he like? What does he sleep in?”

Candy tries to get up again but I stop her.

She acts like she’s apologizing: “I gotta go home.”

“Sit down.” I’m above her. My knees are on her. Ruffles of the nightshirt. “Hold this.” I give her the pipe. My hands are on her shoulders. She’s straining. Push her back. Take the pipe. “You’ll like this.” Spark it. Spark it. Flame. “It’s like..it’s like..” I’ve got to find the word. It matters that I find the word. Winnie is shifting. I have the lighter now. It’s going. Rock it. Twist it. Twist it back and forth. “Richard, I don’t smoke.” “This isn’t smoking.” “I’ll do a line of coke with you.” “You will?” “If you’ll get off me!” “You’ve done coke?” “Richard, this is Los Angeles.” “But you’ve never done this?” Her face says no. Her eyes say no. “Richard, get back.” “Switch places with me.” She gets in the part under the faucet. It’s dripping, it’s still dripping from the showerhead. Winnie takes the drip like a champ. She pushes her hair back. She settles. “We’ll do the coke after this,” I say. “After that I wanna drive you *home*,” Winnie says. I put my leg on her. “You don’t mind?” She puts my hand on her leg, on the skin. “I don’t mind.” I’m looking at her. “I don’t mind.” She moves my fingers. “That’s why this is hard. To see you like this. You always have it so..together. I live in West Hollywood, you know. Not far from Vine. I mean it’s like twenty blocks down. I’ve seen your address on payroll.” She’s practically begging. Pleading. Winnie’s hands are down my front.

She’s shaking her head but she’s touching me.

“Smoke this first.”

“But after that we’re going *home*.”

I smile.

Winnie makes a go for it. “I’ve got to check on the *baby*!!”

Candy’s voice from outside: “Is she being any TROUBLE?”

I look at Winnie. “No.”
“Candy. Check on Liss. Check on Mega Cock.”
“Mega Cock is fine. Liss..is torturing the cop.”
Winnie’s eyes look worried.
“*What’s* she doing?”
“Don’t worry about it are you two almost *done*?”
“Be right out. We gotta get these billable hours for Methanex.”
Candy leans in. “Is she *smoking* it?”
“She’s about to.”
Candy looks us over, tangled in the tub. Candy’s eyes are wild. Her fingers are tight. She’s clenching.
“Why don’t you set down the taser.”
She looks around. “I need this.”
Candy’s gone.
Winnie looks nervous.
“Don’t worry, it’s fine. I’ll do it to you.” It’s ready.
I take a breath. I breathe it in. I open Winnie’s mouth.
I breathe on her. Breathe in her.
She closes her eyes.
“That’s what *inspire* means in Latin. To breathe into.”
Winnie corrects me: “Life.”
“What’s that?”
“To breathe *life* into.”
She’s wretching. Holding her throat.
“Let it. Let it.” I spark the pipe and twist it.
I put it to her mouth.
“Don’t touch it. The tip’s hot. Breathe a little.”
She makes an ‘o’ and inhales. Her hand is gripping my leg.
“There you go. Sit back. Enjoy it.”
Her hands are on her chest. She feels it. She feels it in her chest.
She lightens.
Her face lightens.
Her eyes. Her mouth.
Winnie smiles. “It feels so..light.”

I spark the pipe for her and twist it. She takes another hit.

“*Oh!*” she says. “It’s nothing like cocaine.”

“No,” I say.

Winnie rises up. She rises on her knees. She is lightness. She is rise. I see her whole carriage lengthen, neck, spine, all the way to the base of her. Pops out, extended. Her arms are longer, fingertips. Her face exudes. Her hands on me, comfortable.

I take her nightshirt up, pull it above her breasts.

Lick her: circle, nip.

Lick her all the way up her chest.

Check her face: she’s looking up at the showerhead, both eyes open.

She’s gripping both my arms—talons—while I lick her.

“Now,” she says—trickle from her mouth—“Methanex.”

“OPEN THAT WINDOW, MOVE IT OVER, no I can’t see.” “Do you want this one?” Candy’s pointing. Cock says: “Hold on, I think I know what he wants. Pull that window over here.” Winnie’s sliding. Liss comes in. “I want to go home.” “Liss! We’ll go home in a minute! Shut the door!” Liss goes, but none of us gets up and the door stays open. Cock’s office. Paper everywhere. “Why do you use a printer?” “How’s this?” Cock says. He’s got the windows set up correctly now.

In Window 1 we have a chat that Winnie is carrying on with a girl from Scandinavia.

In Window 2 we have what Candy and I are watching. It’s this El Salvadoran guy in a beige room and he’s fucking this girl that’s like twelve. Maybe twelve. And he’s entering her. And she protests. She’s saying something in Spanish that none of us understand. The girl is like pleading with him, and it looks like he’s her father. Or it looks like she got kidnapped. But really it looks like it’s her father. And this guy is fucking her.

It's hard for him to get his dick in. Winnie's hand moves over on my cock. She's massaging it. Candy's hand is on it too, thumbing the tip. "Cock: where's that one with the two girls kissing, pink and yellow.." "The one with the vibrator? Where she's laughing?" "No," I say, "The one in the bathroom. Where they're just kissing." "I see what you like," Winnie says. "Switch me." Winnie and Candy switch. Winnie's mostly on my lap and Candy drapes all over Cock. Cock spansks Candy and she feeds him a hit of the chrys. Cock leans over and licks my nipple. His hands are on my chest. He's touching the other one. We're watching a girl get raped. "Yeah," Candy says, "But she wants it. Look at her." Even Winnie agrees: "She needs it."

That was Window 2. I'm not bragging about this I'm just telling you what happened. This is what you're like on meth. You're watching some kidnapped girl from El Salvador getting raped on the internet and you and your neighbors and your boss decide that it's okay not to feed your kids or yourselves and you stop caring if you die. You stop caring if you die. You don't care about that anymore. Don't ever let anyone tell you drugs don't feel good. What would it take for you to throw away your life over..say..the next day? To take everything you have, everything you hold dear, and to throw it away over the span of 24 hours? What would someone have to give you in return? Drug addicts aren't stupid. They're making a trade. To understand it you have to think of it from this angle: everything you think an addict is *giving up*..all that is good in life..imagine if, by comparison to something else, every pleasure you'd ever felt was suddenly eclipsed. And make no mistake: it's all relative. You only think an orgasm feels good because it's the best thing you've ever felt. You only find comfort in closeness with your friend because you've never felt closer. The warmth of life is what it is because the universe is cold. It's cold out there, and it's empty, and it's big. The addict's problem is not that they're foolishly

giving up everything that's good. It's that they've been shown something better. They've been cursed—and it is a curse—with knowing that we're quieting ourselves with lies.

Window number 3 is two girls kissing. It's simple. We pass the pipe. Refresh the high. One is dressed in yellow. One is dressed in pink. We've got it on the big monitor. Cock's inventory orders are all over the place. Candy's writing on the back of them: it makes no sense. Cock and I are sucking each other's dicks. No one can cum. Everyone's fucking everyone. Winnie is riding Cock. Winnie—the fucking Emerson-reading secretary from work—is fucking Cock, a guy I just met today. Her top is off. Her hair is down now. It's floating. Her hair is floating. Specks everywhere. Liss too afraid to check on us. Becca watching the baby. She's used to this. I think we handcuffed Jacobi to the television. And Candy needs it. And she needs it hard. And Cock doesn't care if I fuck her. He likes my young secretary. She's cute. Unspoiled. At least she was before today. She was in my mind. But she's always like this. She's always been this way. We all have. The rest is costume. Two girls kissing, one pink, one yellow. Lying on a mirror. They can't get each other pregnant. Neither is diseased. One is prettier than the other. The pretty one undresses the other; then the other pleasures the one. And we're watching. El Salvador is in the window. We have it on repeat. There's this part that would sicken me to my core if I was sober. Now we watch it together. Even Winnie understands. She needs it. She does. She needs to get raped. She needs to die. And she will. She'll die in El Salvador, having never seen LA, having never seen Tokyo, having never really had a *first kiss*. We *take*. We *take*. We *take* from her, just as that man is taking: the whole world: extracted, distilled, combined, delivered.

And on repeat.

Playing for us in windows.

Through glass.

I think I'll fuck my Wynne now.
It isn't short for Winifred.
It's Welsh.
I think I'll fuck my secretary.

Liss

You want some lo mein?
You want some crab rangoon?
Here doggy.
Here doggy number two.
The adults are playing.
You can have some food.

—[illustration]—

Here doggy number one.
Munch it up.
Here doggy number two.

—[illustration]—

“Tell them to unlock me.” That’s fat doggy number two.
Ummmm.. “Je pense que *non*.”
I push the plate at fat doggy number two.
With my foot.
“Can I have a *fork*?”
Je pense que non.

Hand the plate to cop doggy one.
Cop doggy number one takes it and throws the food
aside.
Sesame chicken hits the wall.
He grabs my wrist.
“TELL THEM. TO GET. HIS FUCKING COCK. OUT
HERE.”
Pinching me.
I stamp my foot on doggy’s lap.
“BAD DOG!!”
I pull my wrist free.
“Bring me a BUMP then!” The cop rails against the
entertainment center. It’s not going anywhere. Metal
of the handcuff; metal of the bar. One is silver and the
other is gold.
I step back.
The handcuff slides along the bar.
Jacobi wipes a crab rangoon through lo mein juice. He
eats it.
“Want me to get you some red sauce.”
Jacobi’s eyes brighten. “Do you have some?”
The cop jumps up. “COCK!! THIS IS *STRAINING*..THE
FRIENDSHIP!”
I pick up the plate he threw and wipe up the biggest
pieces of chicken.
The cop is screaming at me: “YOU. *FUCKING. BITCH.*”
“Don’t call me that.”
Jacobi admonishes him: “No food for doggy number
two.”
I correct him: “*You’re* doggy number two. *He’s* doggy
number one.”
“How come I have to be doggy number two?”
Jimmy says: “Because I got here first.” And he kicks the
entertainment center.

Go through the hallway.
Be careful to avoid the adult playroom.
There’s sounds in there like it’s eight people.

Cock's voice says: "You're doing what? Gimme back my keyboard."

My dad's voice says: "I'm Craigslisting these bitches."

Candy says: "I like this one."

But Winnie says: "I like the one with the cowboy hat."

"This one here! She's too young."

My dad says she looks old enough.

Cock exclaiming: "You're gonna *Craigslist* bitches..to come suck you off..while you shoot coke."

But Candy says he's wrong.

"It's just one bitch, dear."

To the back hallway, to the bedroom.

Push open the door.

Becca. Baby Cock.

They're both sleeping.

I pull the door.

Coming back to the living room Jimmy is yelling at me.

I don't make eye contact with him.

I take the remote off the kitchen counter.

I turn the volume up real loud.

Tignanello

For the Ladies on Your List

Pebble Leather Convertible Organizer

3 Ways to Wear It

TODAY'S SPECIAL VALUE

What Do Girls Want?

Ask Winnie back there.

Turn it up real loud.

—[illustration]—

Roll a ball across the pool table.

Too much light in here.

Check the dimmer.
Rack the balls.
It's better with the lights low.
To depressing with them on.
Something wrong about all that light.
It's four in the morning, you've got all the lights on.
And I'm stuck here.
With these goons.
Block out Jimmy's yelling.
He can't arrest you now.
He'll lose his job. He'll lose his job in the morning. Don't
cops have GPS?
Maybe that guy in the wheelchair.
Turn the lights down low.
Turn them almost all the way off.
I like our building better.
If I was there.
I would go see Jon with the pit bulls.
Jon is beautiful. He goes so well with his pit bulls.
Jon would never let this happen.
I don't think.
He definitely works out.
Or maybe Mr. Lecher at the end of the hall. Downstairs.
With the secret apartment. That you can never go in.
But that carpet, that little swatch of it you can see when
he opens the door.
He has nice stuff, you can tell.
I don't think Mr. Lecher has a dog.
He doesn't work. Unless he works at home.
But I do not think he works at all.
He always wears pajamas.
I'm sleepy now.
Tired.
I'm gonna call my mom.

—[illustration]—

I'm outside.
The grass is cool.
The moon is full.
I'm going to the Escalade.
It's unlocked.
I crawl into the back.
There's a sweatshirt here.
It smells like Candycane.
Just think of Winnie.
I texted her.
She came.
They're in a whirlpool.
Someone needs to wake them up.
It's only four.
It's 4:01.
We can make it to my class by ten.
That's six hours.
Minus one minute.
Why does every minute sound the same?
Put the sweatshirt all around me.
Wrap the arms around my legs.
Tie it. Tie it there.
No one will find me inside this Escalade.
Not until morning.
Not until I wake.
Then I'll walk home.
I'll go along the road.
I'll go over by the highway.
I'll hitch a ride.
Maybe I should call her.
But it's almost day.
Winnie needs help.
No, she's twenty-four.
You don't need help at twenty-four.
You don't need someone to help you.
She likes my dad.

It's okay.
This is the quietest time of the morning.
It's the quietest time of day.
Night people are already sleeping.
Day people are not yet awake.
This is the time when people deliver papers.
When ambulances are quiet.
And a shark.
A little baby shark.
Swims quietly in the bottom of a rabbit's pool.
Blue water.
Fathoms.
Deep.
Pull the neck of the sweatshirt up.
Above my knees.
Of all the things I am.
I am definitely not a shark.
And there's that tooth.
It wiggles me.
I am definitely not a shark, swimming below the deep.
Wiggle it with my tongue.
It's ready.
This tooth will go today.
Will it grow back?
Someday it won't.
Someday a tooth will be the last.
It will come out.
It will leave a hole.
It will stay empty.
Wiggle it more.
Put my finger on it.
Swimming below the sea.
What if I leave it in the Escalade?
If I pull it here.
I might forget it.
There might be an Escalade driving around LA.
With a tooth in the back.
Someone will buy it.

They'll buy the car.
They'll clean it out.
Maybe the tooth will stay.
And then someday they'll sell it.
And someone will find it.
They'll be cleaning out the back.
They won't even know what they find.
"Is this a tooth?"
Yes.
It's some little girl's and she lost it one night at 4:08
or 4:09 on Saturday morning. She wiggled it with her
tongue.
She gripped it with her fingers.
She thought she could feel the nerve.
When the person finds it they will still be able to see my
blood.
Dried on the sharp part near the root.
I grip it between my fingers.
I squint my eyes.
I'm not gonna take it with me.
I'm leaving it here.
For them to find.
It might be a child just like me.
If it is.
They'll know what they find.
It's ready now.
It's time.
Deep breath.
Pilates is about breathing.
Let it dry.
Suck the air out of it.
Let it dry.
Wipe my finger on the sweatshirt.
Wipe my thumb.
Breathe out.
No moisture.
Breathe in.
Grip it one last time.

Look at the moon.
Look at the sky.
Become your SHARK!
Don't let your breath out.
Learn how to breathe underwater.
Learn how to lie.

Winnie

F l y i n g
The l i g h t n e s s of ego
The terror of k n o w i n g
F a c e s, eyes, surrounding

We were put on this e a r t h to fart around
Who said t h a t ?
O h y e s : Kurt
Mr. Vonne g u t

We were put here to r e a d
F o r s e n s a t i o n
U n d e r all, delight
Why would I f e a r dying?

I'm here to t r y
Nothing that i s is wrong
H e a v e n on Earth
Heaven on E a r t h

Dad

THAT THING IS NOTHING. I'VE SEEN IT UP CLOSE. I've been there. It's nothing. It's flaps of skin. It's heat, water, hole, tunnel, tube, and then it goes the other way. I need it fresh. I use the powder. White powder, like a baby. Keep it fresh. She's fresh inside. Apply it. Go. Go again. Apply it. She's the freshest—suck it—change the channel. “What?” “Change the channel?” “What do you want?” Cock asks, “You're getting weird.” “He is weird, baby, I told you he was weird earlier today. Winnie should have been for drinks with us.” “Well she's here now.” “What are you doing with that powder?” “No, give me some of that. I want to try that.” Freshness. Keep it clean. This is the first time this pussy has ever been used. It's the first time it's ever been fucked. This is the tip. This tip right here. In. That was the first time it was ever used. The first time it ever went in. Get me that powder again. “You guys are weird.” “No, try this baby. Try this with me.” And then they see. Powder droplets, on the outer lips. Blow. Arrange the freshness. Reset. And put it in. Put the head in, first time it's been touched. Fuck it for one second. Take it out. One stroke. Reset. “Pass me that powder.” Pass it in silence. Watch the screen. This is purity. “It's pure.” This is the purest one I've ever seen. Chanting that: me and Cock: “This is the purest I've ever seen.” Powder it up. Lace it. Blow. Wipe a finger. This is the purest I've ever seen. It was meant to be used. It was meant to be gone inside. It was

meant to create life. It was meant to get you off. It was meant to spit, and spit upon. Blood envelope. Sprayed in powder. Wipe the lips. Reset. "This is the purest I've ever seen." "This is the purest I've ever seen." Pass the powder. Lace it up. Now you go. Cock. Now you go. Richard. Winnie. Candy. Lying there. They're watching the screen. I could get off just as much watching Candy's face as I could watching Winnie's. Watching the screen. Looking up. Bathed in blue. Cock puts the powder on Winnie. And I'm touching his dick. My hands are on Candy and I'm grabbing Cock's dick.

Winnie

B l u s h
i n g
S o a r
i n g

F a r s t a r
C o n s t e l l a t i o n
R i s e
W h e n e v e r I w a n t

H o l l o w
H a l l o w e d
H e i g h t e n e d
H o l y

B e i n h a r m o n y w i t h m e
M m m m o o v e m e n t
F e e l feeling and *b l o w* blowing and *b e* being and
l o v e loving
T o *c a r e* is to be care - f u l l
T o *s t a r t* is to be start - *l e d*
I f I *l e a d* you to start you are s t a r t - l e d
A *q u e s t* is a quest - *i o n*
T o *s e e k* is to seek - w i n c e

O h *dear*

My sequence of *questioning* has become
a *question* of sequencing

Dad

IT'S AN INFINITE SEQUENCE OF CUMMING, dappled by work and traffic and gasoline. Where night extends forever, where the sun is only a flashlight. Even morality is the webbing between something else, and a something that is more. Even identity, and gravity. Even time. Laid out in sequence, satisfaction lengthening it and lack of satisfaction shortening it, sucking away at what you have left, at what remains. Plastic lip, cock reaching. Forward, up. To the next. As it should. As it fuck-ing should. Half of culture stalls us, someone press fast-forward. See what this will become. Ants. Collecting, carrying, storing, mixing. Table, discard, make notes, acquire, manage supplies, inventory, assets. Assets. Control. Assets get up and walk away. Not-controlled. Assets stay put. Assets like powder. It doesn't matter Cock is a guy. It's shape, and hole, and shaft. It's just like mine. He must be feeling the same thing. We must all be the same. I can tell what Candy's feeling. I touch his cock. I pour powder on it, wipe it on Candy. Candy doesn't know if it's my finger or Cock's finger. All Candy knows is purity and skin. The inside. Cock is pussy explorer. Sending back messages, colonizing. Pussy is hostess, mother, home. Mineral. Fertile soil. Couch. And this one's pure. Outer lips: dry. Veneer. Flattened. Wiped. I'm taking care of—tended. Ready. Cock's dick is ready now. Viscous. Tip. Base. Trunk. Hot. And balls cool. Candy's pussy is ready now. It's the freshest

I've ever seen. Put that in now. Go. In tip. Breaking.
In all the way. Candy watching screen. Touching herself.
Her nipples are bleeding. Touching herself. So much.
Her nipples are bleeding.

Winnie

I want it more again
Bring it to me
While I lie back
Give it to my veins

Delight
In artificial
This really is supremacy (*supre - Macy*)
Will we remember it Richard? (We will.)

Will we remember this tomorrow?
Will we remember how it feels?
This has been what I've been seeking.
And it doesn't go away.

What a weekend,
What a day,
What a life to have had.
Now crawl over to me and delight once more

Dad

WINNIE AT HER FACEBOOK WINDOW. She's showing us her friend. Candy is cock-hoarding my dick. I've got a Bic pen up my ass. Candy is jerking my ballsac. Her ass is in the air. She's under the desk. Cock takes the pen out and now he's fingering me. Winnie's telling us stories. About her friend Macy. On Facebook. There's a picture of Macy in panties that look like a diaper. I like that one. There's a bulge in the front of her panties that looks like a dick if you think about it the right way. It's her mound. She has a big mound. And thick lips. Winnie is telling us this. She tells the story directly in my ear, in whispers. That's our way of communicating. That's what we've decided we like. I tickle her and she tickles me. She doesn't like to speak. I don't like to go inside her. We prefer to keep it on the surface. We keep it soft. Winnie tells me a story about her and Macy taking a bath. Candy's tongue is on the tip of my Cock. I pre-cum. My hand is on the mouse. Candy grabs my balls. I'm touching Cock's nipple. That's all he wants. Candy shared all his secrets. You touch his left nipple—the one to *your* left if you're facing him—Candy's left—and you make him cum. It's perfectly simple. She wishes he'd told her on their first date. In Winnie's story—which is told in verse—there's a lot of soap and rubbing. There are bubbles. There is lace. Winnie and Macy can make things wet and make things dry at will, somehow. They're in the bath. They're on a bed. Winnie makes me restart this video and I can't tell

what's Facebook and what's the video and there's people from the video in the room. There's people from this video in that video—cross'd over, underneath the screen. Somewhere out there I can hear the television. Hear the show. Somewhere there's a baby crying. I think Liss had the remote control. Macy is sitting on top of Winnie and she's holding her down. Their tickling becomes pressing and it's no longer play. I think Winnie is leaving. I think I need to go outside. Candy/Cock is coming with me. Take Macy's hand. Macy with nothing but her diaper. Take my hand.

We're in streetlight. There's the curb.

Broken marble statue.

Fragment.

Tone.

Winnie

R o l l i n g
L i c k i n g the g r a s s
Texture *e v e r y t h i n g*
H a l l o w e d ground

There's a c r u s h cum
Made of m a y berries
Freshly the m o n t h of may
Salivate, h a i r , nakedness, room
All around m e everywhere

Rich h a r d

Did you s e e that?
C a n you see?
T h e y ' r e here

M a y flies
Descending in the a i r
Mayflies, Rich a r d
There's one on y o u
T h e r e

Liss

Wake up to light
And it's not the streetlight
Wake up to singing
They're singing?
Grip my tooth
Taking this with me.
It sounds like four part harmony.
The sweatshirt's off.
I need to brush my teeth.
Yeah. Yeah. That's definitely four-part harmony.
Kneeling up, rising to the window.

—[illustration]—

All the lamps are in the yard.
They're lying face down.
They're singing at the grass.
There's the giant bunny. His suit is on now. A grown
man.
Lying face-down in his own front yard.
Singing to the grass.
Naked from the waist down.

—[illustration]—

They've brought all the lamps from the house outside.
They've got them strung up: power strips, an orange
cord.

They say orange is the color of insanity.
(I just thought you should know.)

They say that orange is insane.

What have they done with my Winnie!

She's smoking.

She has a cigarette in her hand.

She's graceful dancing through the forest, though the
lamps.

She swirls around a lamp and stops, peeking.

What's around the other side?

She's hunting.

She's hunting in a forest made of lamps in the front yard!

And Candy.

Candycane.

She's on my dad, her arms around him.

She's licking his neck.

Not kissing.

Licking.

—[illustration]—

Dad is in a towel.

He needs to work out more.

And they're singing four-part harmony!

Winnie stares at the lampshade.

She's wiping it off.

She picks at it. Something's stuck to it. She takes it off.

She looks underneath.

She's staring at the light.

She's staring directly at it.
She takes the lampshade off and throws it in the air.
She twirls it.
It doesn't float down like she expected.
It flops sideways.
It doesn't roll.
Winnie kicks it.
It hits Cock's back.
He takes off the bunny helmet.
He looks at my dad.
"Hey! Hey!"
The bunny is up.
He takes Candy's arms off my dad.
"I didn't say this could become a permanent thing!"
Candy swipes at the bunny.
She goes back to licking my dad.
The bunny reaches down, he grabs his Candy's legs, he pulls her off my dad and he drags her across the lawn.
"Stop! Cock!"
Away from the lamps.
"Cock! Cock!"
Almost into the street.
They're right next to the Escalade.
"Cock. You don't know when to stop. You never know when to stop."
"I don't know when to stop. I don't know when to stop? How 'bout you fucking my friend! How 'bout you chaining me to the entertainment center!"
"It wasn't chains."
"Pffft."
"And he's my friend too."
"Oh, *great!*" Cock turns his back on Candy. "Richard. I think you should leave."
Winnie looks up from her hunting. She looks concerned.
"It's been a blast—"
"You're kicking him out? You can't *kick him out!*"
"It's my house, Candy, why don't you go inside and let Jimmy and what's-his-name out of the..uh..the..uh.."

That's when Candy sees me.
Winnie says: "Richard, we should leave."
But Candy pushes past Cock when she sees me.
She's got this look in her eye like one of those children
raised with wolves.
She smacks the glass. "Fuck!"
"Candy, get in the fucking house."
She's around the back of the car. Trying the door.
Back one's locked.
I spring up.
I'm about to press the door-lock button but it doesn't
matter.
The windows are smashed out, remember?
"There's that little *demon* in here!"
Candy reaches through the glass. She roots around.
She's inside the car.
"That's my *fucking* sweatshirt!!" Candy pulls it off me.
She pulls my hair.
"What is she doing?"
My dad says: "I don't know."
Then Dad and Cock are on the street and Dad just in
his towel with his not-skinny belly and Cock and him are
trying to pull Candy off me.
But they can't.
Candy's got my neck in her grip. She's dragging me by
it. She kicks the door.
"—The *fuck* away from me."
She kicks it so hard it closes back.
Candy's smashing the window more and her ankle is
bleeding when she pulls me out of the Escalade.
Cock and Dad have their hands up. "Candy. Chill."
And she's dragging me through the yard.
Winnie sideways.
Cock is holding my dad back. "Trust me. Let me handle
this."
Winnie holding my dad's arm.
Dad is saying: "Is she joking?"
Winnie and Cock are telling him no.

There goes the pool table.
“Candy. Just. Be reasonable.”
There goes Jacobi. There goes the cop.

—[illustration]—

She’s scraping me on the concrete. She doesn’t care.
I’m slapping her. Slapping her head.
She spits. That Candycane spits in my mouth.
I’m trying to spit it out.
Turning my head sideways.
Sticking my tongue out.
Wiping it on my shirt.
There’s Dad right behind us. “Candy. What are you
doing? Stop.”
But I’m underwater.

—[illustration]—

I’m under here with SHARK!
My head is.
One of my arms.
My ass and the rest of my body is still dry.
Fingers on my neck.
Digging in.
Squeezing.
Like she’s squeezing out a swimsuit.
Get all the water out of this.
Squeeze it dry.
‘Cept in my case it’s not the water.
There’s a hand on my elbow, pulling me.
Candy’s nail is pinching into the back of my head, grip-
ping me.

My face is on the tile—smooth tile at the top of the pool.
My neck is on concrete.
That fine-grained concrete. My Adam's apple is pressed
into my neck.
It's not supposed to go that far.
It's pressing the concrete.
I'm not breathing.

—[illustration]—

Bad things can happen to people who aren't breathing.
I once read:
You can go three weeks without food,
three days without water,
and three seconds without blood.
I'm not sure how you can remove someone's blood in less
than three seconds, so that you can then measure how
long it takes them to die without blood.
So I was never really sure about that book.
They didn't give a measurement for air.

—[illustration]—

Books can't tell you everything.
Books are just a guide.
If they did have a measurement for air, they would have
to take it out.
Because of David Blaine.

—[illustration]—

Where are you buddy?
Where are you friend?
Sharks breathe underwater.
I am not a shark.

—[illustration]—

Swallowing water.
Swallowing chlorine.
Kicking.
I'm kicking someone.
I think it might be Dad.
I try to open my eyes.
I do.
I shut them.
Choking.
I want to see SHARK! this one last time.
But I can't.
I can't even open my eyes.
There's too much chlorine.
I'm pretty sure if you squeeze someone's neck too hard
they die.
All I want.
All I really wanted.
Was to see my SHARK! one last time.
Swallowing water.
I'm swallowing water.
Dive.
I'm scraping at the pool with my one hand.
Trying to dive.
Something breaks free!
I'm underwater.
There's no more hands on me.

I'm free.
I dropped it!
I'm upside-down.
I had to use my hand!
Candy's body is there.
I'm sinking.
Tooth: swipe it!
Climb!
It's getting away.
Sinking.
My tooth is gone.
Never to be found in written history.
And now my eyes are open. I can see. There's SHARK!
He's right below me. There's that little Candycane. There's
Cock! My dad! Dad is pulling Candy cane! I'm up! I'm
up! I'm choking! Splash! I hold my heart. Cough!
We're fine! We're all fine! I check my heart: it's beating!
I didn't have cardiac arrest! This is good. Liss, this is
very good. Now to get that Candy cane. She's pulled
underwater! She's pulled there by my dad! Becca has
Mega Cock and she's out screaming! "Becca! Call an
ambulance! Liss are you okay?" "You want me call an
ambulance?" "Liss are you okay?" Then Candy's ris-
ing, beating Dad. "I'll kill that little demon!!" My dad
comes up. He's gasping. Candy grabs his head. She's
got her legs around him! "Demon! I'm free!" Dad grabs
her by the hair but Candy sees me. She's coming my
way! The edge, SHARK! Swim for the edge! GASP and
I'm CHOKING. I might have thrown up. It might have
been spit. If I choke I can get that candy spit out of me!
Swim! She gets me underwater! I'm grabbing her shirt.
Oh, no, Candycane. Not this time. She fucks my wind-
pipe! She fucks it with her hand! And I'm not breathing.
Cock's voice from above the water: "Caaaaaaannnnnd-
dddyyy!" And Becca's screaming. This might be the
last thing I hear. SHARK! you've got to help me. I'm
praying to you, SHARK! bite that candy cane. If ever
I needed help, this is the time SHARK! Remember me!

Bite that Candy cane!

But I don't even see him.
What's the use of a shark that never bites?
Mega Cock isn't crying.
I would like to hear him cry, once more.
Can't I get my wish?
SHARK!
He's swimming there below me.
He looks calm.
Candy's hands are not upon me.
There are no hands on me anymore.
There's my SHARK!
There he is.
Baby.
Baby.
Swimming softly.
What you have to say?

Shark swims.
He's not even looking.
When I give him back to Pila I will say:
"Here's your shark! He's broken."
Open my mouth underwater:
Scream:
"SHAAARRK!"

Then those arms around me.
Those can only be my dad's.
There's that pudgy belly and the strength of the legs.
Kicking.
Kicking.
Swim.
Now we're up and Candy's screeching right before me.
"Liss are you okay?"
I'm breathing.
Yes I am okay.
There's that stupid Candy screaming: "Deeeemon! Deeeem—

”

“Shut the fuck up Candy. Richard, come this way.”

Dad’s voice in my ear. His arms around me. “Liss are you okay?”

I’m nodding.

Spit that saliva out of my mouth.

I’m treading.

I can tread okay.

“Grab this Richard.”

Dad has his arms around me.

I’m treading anyway.

My dad has his arm out.

Candy can’t get to us now.

Cock is poking her in the neck with a pole.

It’s the back of the pool net.

Cock is poking her away.

“Stop it you fuck!” She hits my dad away.

His arms fall from me.

There’s nothing around me.

Water.

Skinny me.

Kicking my legs.

“You poked my eye!”

“Candy, will you *chill*. There’s nothing here.”

But there is something.

I’m treading.

There is something, right before me.

Reach out my hand.

Grab it.

Where’s the button?

Candy’s there.

There’s the button.

Candy’s coming toward me.

She’s reaching for my hair!

I grab that floating plastic.

Candy’s reaching for it!

But I’m taking a deep breath.

I got it.

Dad is reaching for me. Candy poked his eye.
I take the plastic underwater.
Candy's there.
You sent me what I needed!
You heard my prayer!
I grip it.
THANK YOU SHARK!
Candy's like a crazy pixie!
She scrapes!
She swipes!
Her mouth is open! Eyes are wide!
I poke it in her mouth.
She bites!
I'm thumbing for the button.
Let's see how this bad boy works underwater.
I push it in.
It's at her throat!
Candy's shouting "DEEEEEEMMOON!"
Bubbles coming out her nose!
Let's see what happens when I press this button.
I punch it!
Candy stares.
That candy cane goes rigid!
I hold that button in.
I hold my breath.
Who says I can't breathe underwater?!
I press that taser in her.
Who says.
You press that button in.
Thank you sharky devil!
You came for me, I swear!
That candy cane is dead now.
Press it again!
That Candy's still.
Frozen!
I have protective coating on the outside of my body!
What do YOU have!!
Her arms are up like she wants to get me.

But now that candy's still.
I'm a shark!
She's looking at me.
What are you.
Then my dad is pulling me up.
I'm not even breathing.
I *hold* my breath.
What are *you.*
She blinks.
Both eyes.
She sees me going up.
She sees that I'm above the water.
Then stiff candy. That's the last thing she ever knows.

—[illustration]—

Dad

STIFF BODY. STIFF WHITE BODY.

Reptile eyes.

That bitch is dead.

I mean she's fucked/dead.

Glassy film, Cock pressing her chest.

1 and 2 and 1 and—that bitch is dead.

Holding Liss. Cock won't look at me. "Becca! Get an ambulance!"

"You want me to get the ambulance?"

"Yes you fuck—" Cock stands. He grabs a chair. He throws it. It cracks the back door, sliding glass, spider web. Pop! Cracks running all the way up the wall.

Candy's dead.

Jimmy and Jacobi are craning up, trying to look.

"Where's Winnie?"

I look around.

"Where the fuck is Winnie?" Cock beats the ground. "Is she calling the cops!!?"

Becca doesn't know.

"Richard. Find her. She doesn't make any phone calls."

He's right.

"We'll clean this up ourselves."

"Liss. Becca. Pool room. Don't leave." I take Liss with me. I drag Becca. I put them in the pool room. "Don't go anywhere. Don't LEAVE THIS ROOM!!!" I'm searching the house. Liss and Becca hold each other.

She's not in the bedroom. She's not in the bath.
Look outside. She's in the lamps.
The lamp forest.
Liss is crying in the front room.
Becca is telling her she didn't do anything wrong.
"Are you okay?"
Liss wails: "*No!*"
I'm outside. The forest is empty. All the lights on.
It's beautiful.

Winnie's in her Honda.
The passenger door is open.
She's trying to start the car.
Winnie's beating her head against the wheel.
She turns the key.
She's not giving it any gas.
The engine just turns..scrapes. She tries again.
That machine is broken. It's never go'ing to run
again.

I crawl in the passenger seat and Winnie screams!!
She screams like bloody murder. She turns the key all
the way in! The engine scrapes.

I'm reaching for the key. Winnie slaps me away.
She's choking. Coughs. She can't breathe.
She's holding her heart. She's checking her own pulse.
She clenches.
She's got her hand on her neck. She's pressing.
She checks the other side.
"I CAN'T FEEL IT!!!"

Then she's out the door and she's scraping the street
for her keys.

I crawl across the inside. Across the seats. I'm out
the door. A light turns on in a house across the street.
They're coming. Winnie's face is scraped: up the chin.
Up her mouth. Up her lip. She doesn't know it. She's
rolling. He hand on her wrist. The nails press in. She
presses. The thumb is halfway through her wrist. "Fuck..Winnie.."

"Feel this!" She grabs me. Got my fingers. Dragging
me in. "Feel this? Feel it??"

“No!”

“*Get me to a hospital!*” She’s pleading. Then she’s running down the street! She goes to the streetlight. She turns around. She runs to the other streetlight. She turns around. “You’ve got—” she says. She’s running. “—to help me.”

“Winnie. What.”

She makes another lap. “If I. Stop. Running.” She holds her wrist. She checks her neck. She tries another spot. She says: “I’ll. Die. *If I stop running I’ll die!! I’ll DIE!!*”

“I don’t think you will.” I try to catch her. I check my pulse. I sit. This is how people die. I’m feeling my pulse. It’s there. It’s slow. It’s slowing down. Winnie, running. I press my neck. Wait. Wait.

Wait.

It’s there. It’s slowing down.

Try the other side.

Press the vein.

.....pump..

It’s still there.

I stand.

She’s right.

I jump.

I feel my pulse.

It’s there.

It’s faster.

I jump again.

There it is. I make it beat.

I’m walking fast.

Winnie passes me.

I run.

I get to the end.

I check my pulse. It’s there. It’s faster. “You’ve got the right idea.”

“I know! Run! *WHERE’S YOUR PHONE???*!”

I left it in the house.

Winnie’s running.

She stops.

She checks it.

She shakes her head.

It's not there.

She puts her hands in front of her face. She's seeing something. She reaches. She grasps. It slips through. It falls out. It's gone. What are you seeing?

"I'm seeing white, Richard. I'm gonna die."

I'm with her. I feel her hand.

She bats it away. "I have to keep running!" And she does. She runs for her life. If she stops she will die. Her heart rate is slowing. We've done it to ourselves this time.

"What did you *see*?" I want to know. I check my pulse. Beat. It's weak. It's there. It's weak. I've got to get my phone.

"You've got to *call*!"

I know. "Keep *running*!"

She does. I run. I hit the step. I fall. I'm slowing down. My heart is slowing down. That's it. It stopped. I have to get us to a hospital. We have to go. I can't tell Becca. I can't tell Liss. My Liss! What did I do to her?! What does she know!! This is her *father*. That is what I am. She'll live a life knowing that her dad's heart stopped because of dirt! Because of dirty drugs! That is what is happening today. That is what this is. That is what she'll know. In an hour. In a minute. She'll know. We have to hide it. Throw it out. They'll do a tox screen. They won't. Why would they!!!? You're crazy. You have to think. Why would they do a tox screen? They won't!! Just hide it! Throw it out!! Where is it?! It's in the bathroom. It's under the towel. It's all still there. Get it. Put it in the car. Find a dumpster on the way to the hospital. Get Winnie. She still there? My heart has stopped. It's done. I've got to run!!

It stopped.

It did.

I hit the ground.

Beat.

It beat again.

I hit the ground and my heart beat again!

One beat.

I got that one.

Now stand! And run! Feel the neck. I'm jumping up!

"Did you get it!@#?#!@#" Winnie's screaming. She stopped in the middle of the road. "*Did you get your phone?*"

She's kneeling. Looking up at the light.

She sees it. She sees it coming. It opens up. It was always just around the corner. It was always there. And right inside is Liss. And what did I do? I had time. I was given time. I was given this moment. I had a quarter. And a dime. I spent them. On this. On chaos. We made terror. We took all the lamps into the yard. And this is how they'll find us. And they'll know what happened. They'll know. They won't have to do a tox screen. They'll do one, though. And the first shock of us finding us dead—then Hannah gets an envelope. Trace elements. LD50. Why did Dad go this way? *Modo aumentado*. Liss will be right. And *I* would care if *she* died—I would be lost. But why did my dad do this to himself? I care. I love my father! Why doesn't my father love *himself*. There was a time at a pool—a water park! It's there. Blue sun. A slide! We rode the slide. We drove. We drove in the car together. And I smoked! So simple! But we know it causes cancer, and we do it anyway! Time was there! We had it! It slipped away. We called. We decided not to call! Sometimes we decided not to say anything!! Why did we do that? I had that choice. *I had it!* We could have loved! And where is Hannah! She'll call my dad. He'll find out on the phone. Why is my dad in another city? We're not even near each other! We can't touch. We can't time! There's no heart. We never say! We never will. There was a shuffle, in the sand, back there, when we were all together. In the light for a minute. Shining! We had it! We looked.

We knew each other! There was a second where a hand
touched a hand and I took you in my fingers, took you in
my fingers to tend you—and what was loved, bloomed!
And touch is lost.

Liss

My dad was in
My dad was in
They put themselves
They put themselves in a tunnel where they couldn't get
out

That's modo aumentado
That's what mi Idios Mio says
Once you get yourself in sometimes you can't get out
That's enhanced mode
That's augmentation
Some things you take out of the box
They don't go back

It's like a hat
Sometimes you outgrow it
And it never fits again

—[illustration]—

I hugged my dad
I hugged my dad
Sometimes that's what people need
A simple hug

—[illustration]—

I hugged him left
I hugged him right
There's that dad
There he is
He's inside
He's here
"Becca: can you drive a stick?"
Winnie's Honda is a stick
"I'm not breathing!"
"I can't *drive* a stick!" Becca says.
Calm down. Calm down.
We're fine.
Où est mi Idios Mio?
Où est.
"Dad, we're gonna take you to the hospital."
"I have to get some things."
"See! You're breathing. You're breathing just fine."
"My heart stopped!"
Becca's taking his pulse. "Your heart is fine, Mr. Richard."
Your heart is fine.
"Check Winnie!!" My dad starts freaking out.
"I'll go get her, Mr. Richard."
"Dad, where are Winnie's keys?"
"They're in the car."
I have him. I'm helping him up.
"Dad. We've got to go."
"One second! One second!" He stands.
"Your heart is fine."
"I'm telling you! It stopped! When I hit the pavement
it started again!"
"Richard, are you having fun with Candy?"
"Richard!" :that's the cop.

“Find the handcuff key!” Dad grabs me. “Liss! Find the key!”

“It’s on the counter you dumbasses.”

“Let them out!” My dad runs to the back of the house.

“And then we’re gonna go!”

“Are they wiggling out?” Cock says. He’s shaking his head.

He’s in the kitchen drinking shot after shot of whiskey.

He’s going to kill himself.

He drinks a shot.

He pours.

He drinks a shot.

He pours.

It spills on the counter.

He drinks it.

He slams down the glass.

His Candycane is lying by the pool.

She’s looking at the sky.

Soaked. Still. She’s not moving.

Cock looks at me.

I’m going for the key.

He takes it.

“You wanna get out of this?” Cock is talking to Jimmy.

“Jimmy, you want to go home?” He pushes me aside.

He kicks Jacobi. He’s unlocking him. “Get up, fatfuck.

It’s time to go.” Cock’s ass is in Jimmy’s face. Cock

talks over his shoulder: “You’ve been a real help tonight,

Jimmy. Aren’t you supposed to be on *patrol* or something?”

Jimmy starts to answer—Cock hits him.

He knocks him out.

It takes a couple hits.

He slams Jimmy’s head into the bar.

It shakes the entertainment center.

Jacobi runs out to Candy and continues CPR.

“I tried it! I tried it,” Cock says. He kicks Jimmy’s body.

“I tried it.”

Then Cock turns off the television. He’s real quiet: con-

sidering.
Jacobi's huge body pressing down on Candy, tiny little
Candy Cane.
She seems less menacing now.
Menace means to threaten, especially in a malignant or
hostile manner.
I get perfect scores in vocabulary.
I only *get* perfects there.
Jacobi heaving and pressing her.
I think he'll break a rib.
Cock turns to me. He says: "Did you want that on?"
He means the TV.
I shake my head.
Cock is quiet now. I've never *seen* that bunny that quiet.
His Candy gone.
"I'm sorry," I say.
I've never seen a bunny so unhappy.
He goes outside.
He takes the ring off Candy's finger.
"Jacobi—right? Is that your name? Jacobi, stop. Stop.
Can you drive?"
Jacobi nods.
"Then drive. Go home."
The sun is rising.
There it is!
I can see the pink around the edges!
It's morning-time.

—[illustration]—

I'm back with Dad.
I'm back with Dad!
The dad is digging through the bathroom towels.
He's got a bag.
There's a used tissue on the floor.

He picks it up.
It's soaked with blood.
He puts it in the bag.
"Dad, let's go."
"I've got to get some things! Liss—" He grabs me. "—
Liss. You're on my side! Baby. Look! I hate this. All
this!"
Dad throws up tissue. He throws it in the air.
"Dad, we've got to go."
"Okay, one second." He's digging in the bag.
"Dad!"
"I gotta get *one thing!*"
"What do you *gotta* get?"
He has it. He holds it up. "This!"
"Let's *go*."
"No."
It's Candy's torch.
"Alright, let's go."
He sparks it.
He puts it in the bag.
Tissues flame, they cringle. They're too soaked to burn.
"Hold this. Liss. Hold it."
I hold the bag.
Dad throws a bunch of junk in with the tissues.
A glass pipe.
Some of the hand towels.
"Alright," he says, "Let's go."
Cock is at the end of the hall. He's got the statue.
It's the statue from earlier—the one my dad threw?
Cock doesn't look happy.
He looks a little mad.
Cock reels back. My dad covers me. Cock launches the
statue.
It crackles, everywhere, pieces of faux-marble.
It's wire-mesh—plaster. Fake.
Cock, screaming.
"You bought me *Chinese*, Richard. That may have cov-
ered you until about 2am. But it did NOT—COVER—

THIS!"

Dad grabs me and we're out through the garage.

Dad bolts the door. Cock kicking!!

I back into the Camaro.

Cock is coming through that door.

"Hit the door opener!"

But we hit it twice.

"Dad. Let me."

I pause the door. I press again.

It's slowly grinding upward.

There's a space.

"Go on."

"Dad!!"

"Go on." He drops the plastic bag in the Camaro.

He undoes the *gas cap!*

"*Dad!!*" There's enough space now. *Come on!*

My dad is digging for the lighter.

Oh my god.

There he goes! He's going for the lighter! He's got it!

Graceful, like ballet!

One hand is stuffing tissues into the gas tank!

A foot in the air!

Peril!

I have never seen such acrobatics!

Never such stunts!

Outside my dreams!

Cock kicking!

Splintering!

Splintering the door!

And Dad runs!

Did he light it?

I think he did!

—[illustration]—

Cock breaks the door!
He comes through!
He sees the fire!
“My car!”
He’s swaap-ing it!
He’s swaap-ing at the flames!
Now he might get it!
There’s my Winnie!
“Alice, dear!”
“Wynne!” I hug her waist.
She bends to me.
“Liss! I stopped breathing!”
I pinch her ears. “We fixed my dad’s!”
Winnie looks at Richard.
He’s backing us away from the house.
And here’s that man!
My diaper buddy in the wheelchair!
You helped me out!
When I was in trouble!
A needed friend.
I needed you!
You bought supplies!
“I’m breathing, Richard!”
“We’ll get you home.”
“Becca, can you drive a stick?”
“My car: I’ll drive!”
“No you won’t.”
Zeeeeerrrrrrmmm. My friend is coming up the street.

—[illustration]—

Delight of fire! We’ll have a show!
Everyone take their seats.
Thank you, thank you; there you are.
I traded you, Devil! Now can I have my show?

My Anglican Devil-Nacht! He is inside me!
Check my tail!
It's there! It's there inside me. I have his fangs!
I have points!
"I HAVE MY TAIL!"
I'm jumping and pointing at it when Cock goes back inside through the house and IT EXPLODES!!
IT BLOWS!
It HITS the SKY!
TErrIBLE WoNDeR!
We hit the street! We're standing!
"Oh my." That, Winnie says. *Oh my.*
Isn't it delightful! My devil made a show!
The garage door is in pieces! It's hardly there!
There's a tire..
My delightful god!
You heard my prayer!
Is Cock dead..
And what about that cop!
Zeeeeeeeeerrrrrrmmmmmm..glunk. My man stops beside us!
"The diaper held!"
Where's Cock?
They're inside!
We killed a baby!
Oh my.
Then crying from behind me. That baby whine!
Rebecca's already out here. She's across the street!
And that stupid little doll! That baby! He cries! He finally fucking cries
Like a baby is supposed to
If I turn you over
If I pour you out
Will you cry like you're supposed to?
Time will tell.
And there's that bunny rabbit. There's that Cockatoo.
He's got Jacobi! The fat man lives!
I hope you had insurance.

Bunny house is burning!
Dad coughing! Arms around Winnie!
Now we're ducking in the car!
And Jacobi's talking with the wheelchair!
They're shaking hands.
Oh *yes*, it's so nice to meet you. (And you!)
This is how we meet each other.
I'm the neighbor? You're the slave!
Then BOOM!!

—[illustration]—

It goes again.
It HITS the SKY!
You broke that bunny's house!
Daaaaaddd!
And Candy's sleeping.
Noises of the cops. Their sirens running.
But who's inside?
"Jimmy!" Dad yells. Cock pulls him back.
You cannot go inside.
Smoke from the door! Blackness! No more garage!
"But what about your statues?"
Cock says: "I'll get more."
Fire, crackling.
Smoke: a plume!
And sirens wailing. The lights are on!
This neighborhood is finally waking up! I see the dawn!
It's Mr. Abbott! Car!
They're coming for us. We've got a fire!
It's Jimmy's friends! Two cars!
They're out the door!
Squaacck! (That's the sound they make.)
On their radio: Squaaaacker. Squack. Squack-em, squack-em, Squack!

The smell of bodies burning!

Squack-em talk-em.

Candy's too wet to burn.

You would think—

Squack-em talk-em.

—you would think—

Squack squack.

—you would think—honestly—that cops would have GPS—
you would think—really—that Jimmy burning would scream—

you would think that Jacobi and the wheelchair would
wait until when houses were not burning to introduce
themselves!—you would think—you would think this, and
you would think many other things—and you would be
wrong

“What’s going on here!”

“We’ve got a fire.”

And Winnie sits down. She sits down right in the street.
There’s cops swarming around us, and fire. And now the
trucks are arriving. Now it’s light. Now the daylight’s
coming.

—you would think by now we’d hear from Jimmy—

But you’d be wrong.

He must have died from inhalation.

The fireboys go inside!

They risk their lives!

Jimmy never makes a sound.

No bodies are brought on stretchers.

As far as they get is the pool table—There’s too much
flame

I would have thought their equipment would let them
walk through fire

But it doesn’t

If you’ve ever seen firemen at a fire they’re kind of help-
less

They watch it burn.

They mean well.

Their job is to do something.

When there is no something that can be done.
They're brave.
They face the flames!

Winnie's sitting in the street cross-legged
She closed her eyes

Those boys have brought their best ambitions
Bunny's house is gonna burn

Dad

“I’M GONNA TELL YOU WHAT HAPPENED.”

“Why don’t you do that.”

“I work with that guy.”

“The fat one?”

“Yeah, Jacobi.”

“Do you know Mr. Knowles?”

“Cock?”

“His name is Dennis Knowles.”

“We call him Cock.”

“Yeah: Cock, Candy: we know this house. Why don’t you tell me what happened?”

They’re taking the baby away in the background. There’s Cock. Mega Cock is going away in someone else’s arms. Dennis Knowles. He’s cussing someone out. They take the baby anyway. I wonder what his name is.

“What happened is me and Candy—”

“You and Candy and your daughter—”

“Right: Liss.”

“And who’s this Wynne Maddox?”

“She works with me.”

“And do you all work with Mr. Knowles?”

“We were here..socially.”

“Right..”

The guy is making notes. On an old-fashioned clipboard.

Cock’s house is halfway to the ground. You can see the pool from the front yard. It’s sunny now. Today is

going to be a beautiful day in LA. Saturday. It might be a good day to eat outside. Maybe at that little Italian place I love in Hollywood. Yeah. Eat outside. Get a table. Maybe Wynne can come along.

“Here’s the problem,” this guy is saying. “I need a statement from you.”

“Okay.”

“We’ve got a dead cop here. A girl drown’d.”

Cock is in the background screaming.

They’re taking him away.

They don’t put him in handcuffs.

He’s gesturing with the officer. They disagree. Then somebody says something and the officer opens the back of his cruiser. Cock gets in, no cuffs, the officer shaking his head. Cock says something to the officer. The officer drives Cock away.

“So you know this house.”

“Yeah.”

“Cock seems okay.”

“Yeah. That’s ‘cause he’s high.” The officer is looking in my eyes, looking at my face. What’s he see? “In about a day, Cock—Mr. Knowles—Dennis there is gonna sober up and realize his girlfriend is dead—got drowned in a pool..and then..Mr. Knowles is gonna go right back to doing what he always does, okay? It’s my job to make sure you and..Liss..don’t end up back here again.”

“I just met Cock today.”

“What about Candy?”

“What *about* Candy?”

“How did you say she died?”

“How do *you* say she died?”

The guy gives me a long look. Liss is playing by the hydrant. Water is leaking. Winnie sits in her Honda, waiting, staring at her nails.

“Is Cock going to jail?”

“Right now he is! He’ll be out by noon. Cock..has..friends. There’s no reason he shoulda killed this girl, but he’s not going to jail for *that*. Our job is to keep these moth-

erfuckers *safe*. We can't have that guy roaming around this morning, while he's high. He'll kill somebody else."

"You think he killed Candy?"

"I don't think he *meant* to! He may not have killed her in the *traditional* sense," this cop is saying. "Look. We're at fault too here." The cop shakes his head. Jimmy. "One a *ours*.." The cop shakes his head. "This neighborhood has a problem. This whole side of the hill. From the exit up..this whole cul-de-sac. It's meth everywhere."

"What about Jimmy?"

The cop is angry: "What *about* Jimmy?"

"Who chained him to the TV?"

"You tell *me*. You were here, motherfucker! Did you *see* that asshole chain him to the TV?"

I shake my head.

"*Candy* prob'ly did it, you ask me—but that's not my *job*. You *saw* somebody do it, you speak the fuck up."

He waits.

He looks at the house.

"I'm gonna tell you something now." I start speaking. I start speaking about the night. I start speaking about Candy. I tell him how we met. I talk about the shark, about meeting at Rosa's, about the Escalade. I tell him about Becca, going to get her—about how we needed someone to look at the baby ("His name is Callis."—"You know Cock's baby's name?"—"I said I know this house.") "...so Callis is crying, we need someone to watch him, we drive to Westlake, we get Jacobi."

"That doesn't make sense."

"Jacobi lives *next to* Becca!"

"What a coincidence."

"Jacobi *chases* us over here—did you get any calls about high-speed chases last night?"

"No."

I tell him everything. I tell him *my version* though. I leave out that we're shooting speed. I leave out everything involving Liss. I tell him about the fighting. I tell

him we ordered Chinese. I tell him about the blow.

“Yeah. We know about that,” the guy says. “Were you doing anything else?”

I tell him no.

“Did you have sex with Candy? Yeah? Well you might want to get yourself checked, my man.”

“Are you guys doing fingerprints on the taser?”

Whoops.

The guy puts down his clipboard.

“What do you have to say about the taser?” The guy motions to his friend to come over.

Liss’s prints are on the taser. They have to be. I’ve seen CSI. They can get prints from underwater. Why did I say that? I’m clenching.

The other cop sits down.

“So. The taser.”

The other cop waits.

I’m watching Liss play in the water.

It sprays from the fire hydrant.

She has her shoes off.

She smacks her foot into the puddle.

It was self-defense. “It was in defense,” I say. It was in defense. “I was..”

They wait.

They have their clipboard.

I look them in the eyes.

“They were going crazy. We all did, okay?” I know I’m clenching. “Candy was trying to *kill* my daughter, she was dragging her in the pool! Right! So I had Jimmy’s taser—”

“Fuckin’ Jimmy lost his taser,” the one says to the other.

“—she was trying to *kill* my daughter.”

“Did you tase her in the pool? Was she in the water?”

I dip my head.

The one cop takes the other’s clipboard. “That would do it.” He takes the top sheet of paper off, straightens

the remaining sheets, re-clips it. He hands the clipboard back to his friend.

“So she drowned.”

“Yeah.”

This is the two of them talking.

“Jimmy got chained to the TV by..”

They’re asking me.

“Candy,” I say. I think it’s true.

“*Candy?* You’re sure.”

They wait.

“Yeah,” I say.

“Fantastic fucking night,” the one guy says.

“Yeah,” and the other cop leaves.

“Where’s your car?”

“Winnie’s driving me.”

“That’s not what I asked you. Where’s your car.”

“It’s at work.”

“You mind if we take a look in your car?”

“No. I don’t mind.”

“Tell me where you work.”

I tell him.

“We’re gonna search your car. Am I gonna find anything in there?”

“No.”

“Good deal.” He stands.

I stand too. I can hardly move. Everything creaks.

“You alright?”

“Yeah.” My muscles feel like they flexed for a week.

“Pretty girl.”

I don’t know if he’s talking about Winnie or Liss.

I don’t know. But he’s right. Winnie sitting in her Honda. There’s nothing wrong. She’s wearing her own clothes again. She’s wrinkled, but fine. That black hair. Those amazing eyes. We should all be on a mountain somewhere, herding goats, instead of here.

And Liss. My Liss. I’m never doing this again. Liss is simple enough as she is—simple enough and good. We don’t need any more terror for her. Jumping in the water

fountain. Streaking water out with her foot. Making a system of waterways, all of which eventually sink back to the source. She looks at me. She sees me standing with the cop. I'm free. We'll take her to Pilates. I'll sleep. Someday, I'll sleep. On Monday I'll go to the doctor. I'll get a check up. He'll check a few things. I might stop drinking—no, I will. If you're not gonna do hard drugs then what's the point of drinking? Never smoke another cigarette again. Start running. Get healthy for Hannah. Lose this belly. We'll have to move. We'll have to get a better place to live. We might have to move to Montana, someplace clean. Somewhere with clean water, somewhere with open skies. We have to have a simple life.

And Liss looks at me. And her face is open. She smiles. She smiles! Children have a way of smiling, when they do simple things. Like when Liss puts on sunglasses, every time, she smiles—like it's the most delightful thing that could happen—putting on sunglasses! Getting out of the car at the beach! Opening a car door in a giant parking lot in Santa Monica! Like that's the most beautiful thing in the world.. And maybe to her it is. Maybe to her the sand, and the sun, is really all there is. I was like that the first time I went up the PCH, for a minute. Driving along that coast. The world is so simple. Mountains on one side. The ocean on the other. Some railroad track. A thin beach—some strip of sand. Light. Sandals. Bare feet. Sun. And smiling. Smiling 'cause the sun's so bright you squint your eyes. It warms you. Warms your shoulders. Looking at the edges of some minor waves. Too weak to surf. Just children, and blankets, and women, and wives. Just husbands, and boyfriends, and coolers, and beer. Restaurant up the coast. Train crossing. Cutting us off from the highway. For a moment, this is all there is: just Liss, and me, and puddles. Just Liss, my girl! My beach book—looking over the pages. Wonder! Kids! New friends. And playing. Simple playing. And miles and miles of sand.

“Liss. Let’s go.”
I’m in the car with Winnie.
Liss is on my lap.
Winnie turns the key. It starts with no problem.
Becca’s in the back. She lies down. “Becca’s sleeping.”
“Okay,” I say. Liss is smoothing out my hands. She’s keeping them from clenching.
“You can drive?”
Winnie gives me a look.
She pulls us through the engines and an ambulance.
Jacobi makes a few steps over to us.
He’s only muffled sounds from through the glass.
The clock on the dash says 6:08.

Liss

Sharks is closed
The parking lot is empty
The only people here this time of day are the Morgan
Stanley people
They have to cover east coast markets

I open the door.
I start to get out.
Winnie and Dad are just sitting there.
I root around in the glove compartment for my sun-
glasses.
Maybe Dad and Winnie have things to talk about.
I take my sunglasses.
I put them on.
I smile.

—[illustration]—

I'm out of the car
I'm on my way.
I leave the passenger door open.
I don't look back.

—[illustration]—

Dad shuts the door.
He rolls down the window.
He and Winnie are talking.
I walk to Sharks, to the courtyard in between.
The rock garden is still messed up from yesterday.
There's tape over the Morgan Stanley window.
The guy is in there on the phone.
Stern look on his face. (He's a bear.)
They have bulls and bears. That one seems more like a
bear.
I think the bulls are mostly on the east coast.
Or in middle America. I don't know.
I step into the rocks.

—[illustration]—

The bear doesn't see me.
He's looking at his screen.
I see a duck!
I see a duck.
I run to the lake.
Foggy water. You wouldn't want to swim in it.
There's Judge Judy's house.
They're building one next to it. Maybe for a rapper.
The ducks are standing on a boat!
Lines in the water.
Sail half-up.
Cabin door open.
There's food trash in the water next to it.
Floating.
I think that's part of a burger.
It looks like a box from Sushi Row!

I didn't know Jacobi ate sushi.
His girlfriend might.
It's chaos of lines, birds everywhere.
Birdcrap on the seats.
And the boat, shored (or up against a wall).
The point of its front sticking through the railing.
Across the path.
Where you're supposed to walk.
Jacobi must have come ashore here.

—[illustration]—

With his girlfriend.

—[illustration]—

Air blows across me.
Across my face.
Cold skies.
Forecast: rainy: with a chance of beautiful.
100%.
It never rains that long in California.
I'll get to class.
When Dad's done talking.
I'll even let him get cigarettes on the way.
Why not? He deserves them.
This boat is supposed to be on the other side of the lake.

—[illustration]—

Crunching.
Creaking.
Someone's walking on the rocks!
I peek around. I can't see. It might be fat Jacobi.
No.

—[illustration]—

Creepy.
Creeping.
Over the bench.
Through the tunnel of stairs.
There's light on in the bathrooms. Janitors are here.
I peek around the corner.
The door to Sharks is open.
Whose tail do I see?
Mi Idios Mio!

—[illustration]—

I know those sneaks!
I know that hair!
I know that fat.
And short.
And round.
Belly.
¡Oh *Mama Mia!* ¡*Mi Idios Mio!* Mi Idios Mer.

—[illustration]—

I kick a foot inside the doorframe but mi Idios Mio is there.
He wouldn't close the door upon me.
Mi Idios Mio cares.

—[illustration]—

Sharks is empty.
Lights off.
Chairs on tables.
Stools upside down on the bar.
Idios Mio switches on the light.
“Que pasa?”
I look up. “Bien.” I look away. “Normal.”
I go into Sharks.
“Qué pasa with you?”
“Nada.”
“Où est ta père?”
I'm lingering near the bar. “Il a à la voiture.” I peer over the marble, through the stools.
Mi Idios Mio takes one down for me.
“They were doing ‘Mode augmentée.’ ”
“Modo aumentado?”
“Oui.”
Mi Idios Mio uses the fountain. He gives me a glass of water.
“Has dormido?”
I shake my head.
“N'avez pas dormir?”
I drink my water.
“Ma petit poire. Ma petit poire. Mondo marcio, eh?”
“What's that mean?” I put the glass down.
Idios Mio leans across the bar.

I can tell by the look in his eyes he's not going to tell me.
He cups my hands.
He says: "El desayuno."

—[illustration]—

Mi Idios Mio makes Mexican Benedict.
He doesn't make it very well.
He's not a cook. He's a bus boy.
Mi Idios Mio makes it with avocado like I like it.
The avocado is mushy.
It's old.
There's brown spots in it.
He puts down all the stools from the bar.
He takes down all the chairs.
He aligns the backs of the chairs at a certain angle from
the tables.
That's part of what makes Sharks Sharks.
Every time you go to a chair.
Every time you go to the bar.
The chair, the bar stool, is at an exact angle from the
table.
You pull it out.
It helps you get into your chair easily.
Mi Idios Mio mops.
He cleans the bar.
My Mexican Benedict is lopsided.
It has too many tortillas.
He forgot to put the beans.
I love it.
It's my favorite Mexican Benedict I've ever tasted.
I clean my plate.

—[illustration]—

Dad comes in.

Winnie's with him.

Dad plugs in his tablet.

"You get your breakfast?"

"Do you want me to make you some?"

"Hector. No." My dad grabs two Ty Nants.

Winnie swings backward in her chair and puts her back against the bar.

Dad's tapping away at the keys.

"And..fuck!" he says. He slams the tablet on the bar.

Winnie wanders toward the bathroom, holding her Ty Nant water.

Dad pushes his tablet toward the back of the bar.

"Liss. You got your phone? Hector. You want breakfast? I'll get you a sandwich?"

"No thanks señor."

"Hector, make me a margarita. Please don't call me señor."

"You want it with Don Julio?"

"Please. Make it two."

"You want the Blanco?"

Then Dad forgets what he's saying. He wanders down the bathroom hallway and he and Winnie are kissing. Well not really kissing. They're touching each other in this light way, above the clothes. Winnie leans against the wall. Then Dad remembers.

"Hector. It's too early for the Blanco."

Hector has the mixer ready. "You want with orange juice?"

It's like an hour before Dad answers. It's like time has opened up for him and Winnie, they're off on Mars. Cracked. Broken. Devastated. Destroyed. They've brought that smoke back with them. It'll be days before they're back to normal. Hector makes their drinks anyway. From where they're coming from, a margarita is normal, is air. It's three or four minutes, literally, be-

fore Dad answers. He says: “Of course.”

—[illustration]—

Dad and Winnie are hooking up in the bathroom when Pila arrives.

Pila sees two margaritas on the bar, Dad’s tablet, and Hector washing glasses.

“Hector.”

Mi Idios Mio looks around. He’s standing on a ladder.

“What the fuck is this?”

Hector says nothing.

“Hi Liss. Everything good? You good? Everything okay?”

I smile.

Pila goes into the bathroom.

“What the fuck is this? Who’s your friend?”

My dad says something muffled.

“Well,” Pila says, “We open at ten.”

Pila comes back out.

“Do you want me to leave?”

“Liss. No. Sit down. What is this?” Pila sips one of the margaritas. “You guys having a slumber party?”

“We just got here,” I explain.

“Hector. Call Candy. Why are you doing that? That’s Candy’s job. Is she late again?”

“She comes in at noon.”

“Well call her and tell her to get her ass in here and help you. Hector. Put down the glass. That’s Candy’s job. You have her number?”

“I have it,” I say, “But—”

“Hector, use her phone.”

“I *have* Candy’s number.”

“Go pick her up if you have to. Richard! She needs to get her ass in here is what she needs to do.” Pila bangs

on the bathroom wall. “Richard. Come’on. I have to pee.”

“Candy can’t come to work today,” I say.

“Also..Richard: please clean up after yourself in there. I’m not paying..Hector..to wash cum up off the seats. Sorry Liss. This one guy, he goes in there, it looks like he parted the Black Sea of toilet paper. Richard! What did you say?”

Both Hector and Pila are looking at me.

“Candy can’t make her shift today.”

I tilt my head to the side. I can’t look at them.

“Richard!”

“Where is she?” But Pila tells Hector not to ask.

He doesn’t want to involve me.

Pila’s going ‘round the side of the bar.

He sees SHARK!’s cage: empty.

“Richard!!”

Pila bends at the knees.

He looks through murky water.

There’s nothing there.

—[illustration]—

Pila’s sitting down.

My dad’s punching his screen while Pila interrogates him.

Winnie slurps the marguerita out the side of her mouth.

“He stole my email.”

Winnie says: “I told ya.”

“And where’s my shark?”

“He deleted everything. He said he would.”

“Don’t we have a backup?”

“It’s at his house.”

“So *where’s* my shark?”

“The shark is—*why?*”

Winnie shrugs.

“It’s at his *house*?”

“Yup.”

“Your shark—your shark is fine.”

“Stephen’s been trying to get him to move it for *months*.”

“He’s fine?”

“That’s not the only thing that’s at his house.”

“What else? Your shark is fine.”

“Methanex.”

“Richard. Where?”

“He’s in a swimming pool.”

“And where the fuck is Candy?”

My dad just tells him straight out: “Candy’s dead.”

I text Pila the address.

He gets it. “What’s this? Candy’s dead.”

“That’s the address of the swimming pool.”

“So all the backups are at Jacobi’s house?”

Winnie takes over my dad’s marguerita. “Yep.”

My dad places his computer neatly on the bar. Zero messages in inbox.

“Did you just say that Candy’s dead?”

My dad looks at Pila. “She died in a swimming pool.”

Hector’s not surprised. He knew this was going to happen. Eventually.

Pila uses the bar hose to pour himself a rocks glass of fizzy water.

He sticks his nail into a lemon peel, then gives up. He sets it down.

“So Candy’s not coming in today.”

Hector goes back to washing the glasses.

Dad

GLACIAL CALM.

Walking the balconies.

Looking over the lake.

Jacobi's boat.

He really did take it.

Coming 'round: Stephen's office: door open. Books, outside, on the walkway, software boxes. A couch cushion.

Liss picks it up and takes it inside. She steps over Stephen.

Winnie leans on the rail. She smokes a cigarette.

Stephen looks her over. "I didn't know you smoked." Winnie's skirt is the same from yesterday. Her hair's poofed. She's not wearing pantyhose. "Guess he didn't take the news too well," Stephen says.

Winnie's looking at the boats. "Guess not."

I kneel down and pick up Stephen's copy of *The C Programming Language (Second Edition)*. It's been stepped on.

"I have a new key for you," Stephen says.

"I got it."

Winnie takes long drags off her cigarette.

Liss arranges Stephen's couch.

Stephen looks up at me, still kneeling. "Have you heard from him?"

I hesitate.

"Because I've been getting all these strange texts."

“My email is deleted,” I say.

Stephen says: “So’s mine. Winnie?”

But Winnie doesn’t answer.

“He wiped the Xen boxes.”

“Oh really. I couldn’t log in.”

“No, they’re gone,” Stephen says. “They’re gone. I’ve been getting calls from the TSA.”

“Production’s down?”

“No,” Stephen corrects: “Production is *gone*.”

We clean up the books. Me and Stephen. Liss watches TV. Winnie waits for me. She chain-smokes a box and a half of Kamel Reds. When she runs out she goes downstairs and gets the second box.

Stephen and I are crawling around the balcony, collecting broken things. I borrow a vacuum cleaner and go over the carpet once Stephen’s gotten most of the larger fragments of glass.

“Were you there when she told ‘im?”

“Yeah.”

“Did Winnie tell you what happened?”

“With Jacobi?”

“I finally made a decision,” Stephen tells me. “Yesterday afternoon. He was trying to find you. Did he find you?”

“Eventually.”

“Did you invite him to a party?”

“He wasn’t invited,” I say.

Stephen says: “I don’t blame you.” He lowers his voice. He doesn’t want Liss to hear. “So he comes in here. He’s pissed. He starts asking me questions about the backup box.”

“The one at his house.”

“Yeah,” Stephen says, “and you know there’s TSA data on there, plus who knows what else.”

“Jacobi’s game development studio.”

“He’s using that box for game development?”

“Well,” I say, “Yes. And it’s not just one box.”

Stephen sees another piece of glass. He bends. He picks it up. He turns it in his hand. "How many boxes is it? Don't tell me. He's doing *game development* over there?"

"Yeah," I say.

And Winnie says: "It's an RPG."

"Do we at least have *timesheet* information for Jacobi..that's up to date?"

Winnie laughs. She lights another cigarette. She doesn't look at Stephen or me while she does this.

"What about Methanex? What about," Stephen asks, "new development? Is that in the office? When Kamesh does work, where is that being done? I hope not on the boxes at Jacobi's house."

Winnie walks away. She goes downstairs. She goes away.

I'm watching Liss. Liss doesn't even see Winnie go.

"So is Kamesh doing development on the boxes at Jacobi's house?"

I hear Winnie laugh as she's going down the stairs.

She lets is all out.

She slaps the stair rail.

She coughs.

"Winnie, you okay?"

She doesn't answer.

"Is she laughing at what I just said? About Kamesh doing development at Jacobi's house? She knows we can SSH into those machines, right?"

"She's laughing," I say, "about Kamesh *doing* development."

We go on. Stephen and me go on for a while. We sit at his desk. Stephen shows me a bottle of vodka. "I found that in Jacobi's desk." "You went through his desk?" "Well," Stephen says, "I figure *I* own it." Stephen tries to log into our Methanex development box. It times out. "You're telling me this box is at Jacobi's house?" "Or was," I say. "Have you been to his apartment?" Stephen asks. "Yes. Have you?" He says: "I never have." He tries

logging into *ss-tsa-2*, our TSA production box. Nothing happens. "This is all backed up onsite, I assume." I just look at him. I've been trying to get this asshole to do onsite backups of Jacobi's house for years..like..literally seven or eight years. "And you're saying Jacobi's doing *game development* when he's not here?" I look at Stephen. He says: "I know. I know. I see it up on his screen when I come in. It's one thing that he's not fully committed to what we're doing here. And this TSA stuff. This is bad. For him to use *company resources* to do this game development project..is.. We have to figure this out. I don't know what your schedule is like, but.."

"Does DHS know?"

"I got a call from the Colonel at 6am."

"What did he say?"

"I haven't called him back. First I wanted to come up here and see what was going on."

"Well," I say, "I've got to take Liss to Pilates but after that I'll look into it, see what I can figure out."

"Great," Stephen says, "The first thing I need you to do is go to Jacobi's house and get whatever machines he has..out of there. Do you want me to come with you?"

"No," I say, "I'll do it."

CLIMBING THE HILL.

"Is this where it is?"

"It's up this way."

I'm going first, I'm sweating, I can already feel the sun.

Liss is behind me. I check. She's right there.

Down the hill there's a tree looks like it came out of Sir Lancelot.

Up here there's a fence, it evens out.

High rocks and a reservoir.

It's fenced in. It's drinking water. They want to keep it clean.

You can stand at the edge of the fence, though. You can look inside. You can see this place where no one ever goes, or you'll get arrested. Warning signs on the fence. No houses in there, no paths, just woods, downward-sloping hills, this reservoir, and beyond that it goes down to the ocean. Down that way, that's Malibu. Up here is just this lake, where no one ever goes, that we drink from. That's where we're headed.

That's Winnie's vista.

I've seen it before. I lived here as a kid.

I used to climb up here. I'd ride my bike. You can get all the way to that fence and then it stops. No more paths. No more trails. I've seen rock formations up there—they look prehistoric, arranged by ancestors. Before language. I sometimes think that—I would find rocks, stacked, or in a row. At first it looked like someone stacked them..someone hiking before..but then you realize it was one big rock, and what is left was left there by years of wind. It's not a stack of rocks..it's many rocks..from one rock..that was blasted by the wind. Over years the wind eroded weaker parts until what's left looks like a bunch of rocks..a family.. They look like they go together. Their material is the same. They're sitting on one another. They're no longer connected. And all the soft parts have been blown away so instead of one big rock, it's a whole bunch of little ones.

"Liss. Is this the way?"

"This is the *general direction*. I don't know exactly where it is. Why don't we call Winnie and *ask* her?"

"Are you tired?"

"I'm okay. Do you think we can get a signal up here?"

"Yeah, probably," I say. "THERE IS NO NATURE LEFT!"

It echoes down the hill.

And down there: are houses, and busboys, and owners of companies picking up tiny pieces of glass from their carpets. And stepping on pieces so tiny that they get stuck in their shoes, or in their skin, without them ever

knowing about it.

I hold Liss.

I hold her shoulders.

Behind us is that lake. We're not gonna make it up that far.

Not today.

Someday I'm going to go camping up there, climb over that fence, go hiking by the reservoir. See what land is like when hardly anyone has been there in, say, fifty years.

You can see the parking lot from here. You can see the landing. I can see the corner of our building, where Stephen's office is. We're above all the giant houses. They're tiny from here. There's two roads that meet, in the corner of the lake, a spillway there. There's that tennis club. You can see Judge Judy's house.

And down there is our lake, where the boats are kept.

The one we look at while we're working.

Where we're not supposed to feed the ducks.

Where we have dinner at Sharks and into which I once threw my phone..nickel-metal hydride battery dissolving, killing fish. This is Winnie's vista. This is where she comes to read. This place with rattlesnakes and wild dogs and where as far into nature as you can get..you still have cell phone service.

We never should have had kids here. My daughter grows up to this?

I'm holding her head; I'm brushing her hair.

She's almost too old to do that to.

She's got her foot hiked up on a rock like some explorer.

My little girl.

She was shorter than my arm, when she was born.

This head was in my palm.

Would she mind if I kiss that head..

one more time..

before she's grown..

She leans on my chest.

Would she mind if I apologize..
for having broken
those impressions..
She lets me kiss her head.
That life is simple.
That life is always good.
That we're strong.

Liss

We stopped at the giant slide to get cigarettes
I had to buy them. Dad was distracted
It was orange, and it was red, and it was purple, and it
was blue
Plastic whipping in the wind
My stomach felt empty
Hollow, cold

Then it came to the highway
There were hardly any cars compared to usual
And we go to drive
Fast

It felt like a different town
My dad got Cheetos. Flamin' Hot Limón.
We shared.

I opened my window
Dad put the top down

Apartments passed us
Whole Foods
That exit that goes to Santa Monica
Our exit is further up

We live where the bright houses and the buildings
Where the hill

With TV Guide and CNN
And Cinerama
And the neon
Our sign says: "Some Perfection is Debatable."
Then it blinks.
"Some is Not."
Patrón.
That's our building.

I'm shifting in my seat.
We're almost home.

Just a peek in the apartment
Quick grab!
Run in my bedroom
Grab my bag..
..and I'm *out*

It's 9:41.
I'll get my shower later.
This afternoon.

"Liss. Lunch later?"
I tell him yes.
I'm getting the Gorgonzola.

We park.
I'm running up the stairs.
"Liss—"
"I'm late!" We all have things to do.
The elevator door closing in slow motion.
I'll be *out* this house before he's even there.
I'm up! and up! and up! and there.
Scatter across the carpet.
Open the door.

—[illustration]—

Edy. "Hey baby."
Toys are everywhere.
"Whatcha been doing without me?"
I kiss her then put her down.
Hannah's back to me. She's sitting with her paper and her coffee.
"Have you considered.." she starts.
I'm in my bedroom. Close the door. Under-bed cabinets and I'm getting my leotard. Black. Capezio tights. In the bag. 9:46. I took too long hugging Edy. She needs a hug, though. Edy is a non-factor. I can smell the coffee. I think that coffee's getting closer. That black hair. That newspaper! Shuffling down the hall..
My door opens.
I feel the air.
Snag my dance bag and—
Shoes!
Turn and she's there.

—[illustration]—

Mug in that one hand—those stupid clear mugs.
How do you drink coffee out of that?
"Have you ever *considered*—"
"Mom, I have to go."
"I was just *wondering*—"
I bring out my phone. It's 9:4—*Smack!*

Oh.
My phone is in my hand.
My face.
A hand goes up.
It's burning.

It's 9:48.
She didn't hit the phone.
She hit my face.

I'm staring up at her.

"When you are *doing things*.." She looks over her shoulder. "...do you ever *consider*.."
I hear my dad come in the door. Edy squeals.
He's picking her up.
Hannah's not looking at me.
She's muttering.
She's looking down the hall.
She needs to speak more clearly.
If she wants people to understand.

Is she going to talk to him?
He walks by.
He's holding Edy.
He sees my face.
He looks at Hannah.
Hannah just says: "What do you expect?"
Dad comes into my room.
He puts Edy on the bed.
He goes out.
Their bedroom door opens.
Hannah takes her coffee.
She follows.
I wipe my face.
Edy doesn't care.
She's blissfully ignorant.
I kneel by the bed and pinch the other side of my face.
Get both cheeks the same color.
I don't think I can slap myself that hard.
How's this Edy?
Check the phone.
One side is even, the other side is hardly red at all.
If I had an older sister she could slap me.

She could slap the other side.
I pat my face. Progressively harder. Until I'm slapping
my face!
Slap! Slap! Slap slap slap!
Check the phone.
That's actually better.
That's pretty close.
Dad slams the door.
We have thick walls here. It's not cheap.
I can't hear the words.
But it's my dad telling Hannah she better not ever fuckin'
slap his daughter again or he'll kick her out of the house.
He's kicked her out before.
He throws something.
Sounds like the docking station.
It's got about the right weight to be the docking station.
Hannah cries.
She's faking.
Guess who falls for it.
It isn't me.
Oh Edy. Oh Edy baby. I have to go.
See my phone?
I have eleven minutes baby.
Something else hits the wall.
That sounded like a lamp.
That's okay.
They've got two of those.
We're very close to the Bed Bath & Beyond.
I'll give you three minutes, Edy.
I can spare three.
Come'ere fatso.
Snug Factory.
Fartnugget.
Stupid baby names.
It's time I called you properly.
Oh my god is this what I started out as?
I'm not even sure there's anything in there.
Just stink, and stupid.

But I love you Edy baby.
Come'ere.
From now on I'll call you by your name.
And now that bitch is lying.
She's saying she was up all night.
She wasn't up all night.
Not with worry.
They come out the door.
"Do you want to *spy* on me?"
"Hannah, I'm just saying—"
"*I* wasn't doing anything."
Dad is at my door.
"Liss. Pilates."
"I know."
Dad takes Edy. "Hannah. Hannah. Come here."
I check my face.
It's cooling down.
"I'll get you after, for lunch—"
"I'll meet you there."
"You want your usual?"
I nod.
I've got my bag.
Phone.
Check.
Get out the door!
Miss Leslie doesn't like lateness.
I'm out the door!
Leave the condo open—let them get it!—ripping down
the stairs!
Step step step step step step step step.
You have to see beyond the clock!
You have to bend time.
Miss Leslie is late.
She's stuck on the 405.
Will it so.
Push open the glass.
Heavy, heavy door.
And Vine!

My street!
Running down Vine!
There's the hot dog place that's never open!
There's that hole in the roof!
A perfectly-cut hole, wide enough for a person, looking
straight up.

—[illustration]—

Liss, there isn't time!
Running!
The hotel!
Molly's! (Is my old man working? No! He isn't there!)
No traffic! Don't wait for the light!
Skipping!
I'm going to make it!
The Bed Bath & Beyond.
Their doors are open!
It's okay, it's Saturday
Today they start at nine
Now here's a homeless man! The scary kind!
Just don't ever become an alcoholic!
Then you'll be fine!

Echoes
Tall buildings
I like this place empty
When it's stripped of its purpose
Not at night though
Night is its purpose, this neighborhood
And what about the lake?
I like it in the morning
When it's trash
And empty streets
Cracks, concrete

You don't want to go to Hollywood in the afternoon
It's depressing
I'm almost there
Just two more blocks
We pass my Dome
We pass the Baja Fresh
No time for coffee just now
I'm headed to the Crossroads of the World!
Looming
What do they do in there
No one here knows
Tourists take pictures of it
I think it's a religion
And now I'm here

—[illustration]—

It's above the Authorized Apple Reseller
I'm up the stairs
There's people talking
Dingy stairs
I'm up this little hallway
Handprints on the wall—in dirt
I don't have my payment
I think we owe
Miss Leslie won't collect it
She'll forget
I'll tell her we can pay it next time
Top of the stairs
"It's Dawn!"
"Hey gurl."
"Hey *girrr!*"
We bump shoulders.
Micah's also there. "Good morning, Micah."
He stares at the floor.

“Is Miss Leslie here?”

Micah turns the door handle. It’s locked.

“She’ll come, Micah, don’t worry, she’ll come.”

Micah has his leotard on. His sneaks are busted. He lives on Melrose.

“Micah, do you mind if I change in front of you?”

He shakes his head. Micah isn’t a pervert or anything, but I don’t want to make him uncomfortable. Micah’s sensitive. If he blushes he might be uncomfortable.

Micah goes and stands by the window.

I drop my bag.

“Do you think she’s coming?”

“She would have called.”

Micah’s looking out the window, at Sunset street.

I’m digging in my bag.

“Look, Dawn, I have to tell you something.”

“She’ll come, she’ll come, don’t worry.”

“I’m not worried.” I put my hand on Dawn’s arm, balancing, putting on my tights.

Dawn looks over my shoulder. She says: “He’s not looking.”

“Dawn, I just want to tell you something.”

I pull up my tights and I’m putting on my leotard.

I flash my eyes at Dawn.

She shakes her head: Micah’s not looking.

I yawn.

Dawn says: “Let me fix your hair.”

“Okay, Micah, thanks, you can turn around.”

But Micah stares. My little boy. You can see his butt in those tights, they’re a little too large, and he’s got his hands on the windowsill, looking out.

Someday that boy is going to be master of something.

Dawn pulls my hair. “What did you want to tell me?”

She pulls again. She straps the rubber band.

She taps my head. “All done.”

I turn to Dawn.

I put my hands on her shoulders.

Dawn is one year younger than me.

“Just—” I smooth her top. “Don’t be crazy.”

In some ways that’s all I have to tell you about that night

I wish I hadn’t had to kill Candy

I wish we hadn’t lost SHARK!

Pila got him back, but he didn’t live for very long

Some things are unavoidable

I wonder what I’ll name my baby

I won’t name him Cock

Or Mega Cock

Or anything else weird

“What time is it?”

“It’s 10:08.”

I close my eyes.

“What do you mean,” Dawn brushes back a wisp of my hair. “Don’t be crazy.”

“I just mean—”

And before the door opens. And before I hear Miss Leslie’s camping boots on the stairs, and before I peek over the banister to see if she brought her dog with her this time—packed him in that tiny bag—like you pack your lunch!—

Micah turns.

“She’s here.”

