

## -SYLVIA-

We're reading "As I Lay Dying" by William Faulkner. I'm supposed to be impressed with it.

It's a class reading day, so we're all seated and quiet; trying to soak in the southern Renaissance drawl of slowly dying on a hot summer day. Talk about confusing.

It's not that I'm a slow reader. I'm already on page 80, getting toward the last 10 minutes of class. That's better than 2 pages a minute.

"My mother is a fish."

So there's a shitload of Mississippi hicks. They all tell the same story, and every time there's a new chapter someone else is talking. Come on. I need some clarity here.

It's like watching a relay race where the runners go into the stands and start passing the baton to random sports fans, and they just run with it.

Jewel, Cash, Darl: The sons, I guess.

Then you've got the Lazy ass husband who makes them do all the work. Oh, and Addie. Addie's dying. She's gasping for air in the bedroom of the house. She can't move.

And I'm thinking about mom.

In the book you have dying Addie surrounded by friends and family members she's close to. In the real world Dorothy Jenks is stuck on her couch surrounded by her familiar faces. Those being the news, sitcoms, reruns, dramas, the QVC people and reality TV.

In the book "My mother is a fish." Is a whole chapter.

The youngest son, Varndaman (or something) catches a fish kills it, guts it, and then his mom dies. I don't know. Maybe he's feeling guilty over that. He can't face it. Whatever-It's fucking depressing.

I shut the book and open the sealed envelope I got in the mailbox this morning.

'Hello, Angel.

I'm almost there, Sylvia. I feel it a bit more every day. I'm getting up strong, and working the whole day long. We're pouring foundations for a new Ice-skating rink out here in Colorado. The pay is good, and I'm making extra cash with some guitar lessons. Do you have any more photos, Sylvia? I keep them all up here on my wall as proof that I knew Sylvia Doolittle before she was the big-shot photographer.'

My father's last name is Doolittle. My mother's last name is Jenks. I Switch them around. Up to the divorce I was Sylvia Jenks Doolittle after the divorce she changed me to Sylvia Doolittle Jenks.

'Enclosed is a cheque that would equal paternity. Do what you want with it, but keep it hush.'

He never gives the money to mom, not for a while anyway. I call him a deadbeat, but only because he's never around for my birthday.

“My mother is a fish?” I still don't get it.

I guess it has something to do with never confronting death. For a book about dying they don't actually use the word death very often. They may say rest, or laid down, passed on. I think they said it when it actually happens on page 54. That's about it. No one wants to say it because it is very obvious, and it is too painful.

I scribble on my loose leaf paper. 'Sylvia Doolittle Jenks' Sylvia Jenks Doolittle. My actual middle and last names are up for grabs. I'll have to change again when I get married. No: if.

Forget this book. I tuck it under my desk. The real goods are in the \$300 check payable to me.

'Remember, Sylvia, one day it's just going to be you and me. Maybe a fiancée but only if you like her.'

My dad is so cool.

“All my love.

-Dad”

Still, I have to admit this 'together forever' shit worked better on me about three years ago. I'm 17, if I can find a way to help out mom, I'll be moving out. Graduation is coming up in June, and I don't have much to worry about. Then I've got to find another job. Really I'm just sick of hearing about college. One kid's going to Illinois State, another Minnesota, someone else is going to Cornell, everybody is heading off to big schools hundreds of miles away, or just past downtown.

I might have qualified for a scholarship I suppose, but I'm needed elsewhere.

As for dad and his talk of him being a prince to whisk me off where we can live happily ever after? Well, that's just a fairy-tale now.

The bell rings and I head to my locker. While I'm putting my stuff in my book bag Lori taps my

shoulder. I don't ever have to look to know it's her.

“Hey, Silvie.” She's the only person who can call me Silvie.

I'm short, Lori's chubby. I look like a kid, she looks like a nerd who still has unicorn bedsheets-and she does. She's actually got that voluptuous body-type, but nobody knows this, because she only wears sweaters and baggy shirts. That's why I respect her. Her glasses are a round John Lennonish type. She doesn't wear anything fake. Just as she likes it.

Full of guts. That's from the book too.

“Let's go to the mall” She says. Her hair is straight, short and redish, but mostly brown. While I had put a cute little ponytail that arched off the back of my head. Nobody fucking noticed, dammit.

“OK,” I say “Just let me get changed at my house. I have to drop this bag off over there, anyway.”

“Want to see that 'Beloved, Betrayal' movie”

“No way!”

“Why not?” she asks. I can't handle gore.

“I heard what happens in that movie. After he finds out about the betrayal she puts an empty wine glass in his mouth and shatters it with a hammer.”

“Eeeeeew. Gross.”

“So he starts spitting out blood and broken glass saying 'I wish I could make you happy.’”

“Now I so want to see it. Meet me at the Coolness Issues in front of the candy store.”

“I'll be there in an hour” I say, flinging my bag over my shoulder.

So I leave her, head down the stairs, out the door and I'm walking home. I pull the purple scrunchy out of my hair. Shit.

She's waiting for me now. Sitting there, helpless. She's not a fish. She's a potato. I come to my house and I look down my street, and I see him. He sees me. He doesn't waste any time. He just comes right at me from my apartment stoop.

My mother is Addie Bundren.

The Three Weasels 2-3

<http://www.14rivers.com/threeweasels.htm>

“How the fuck do you know Arthur DeLobb?” He asks.

My eyes open, and I cock my head sideways.

“You mean you know Arthur too?”

“Well.” while clearing his throat, he tightens his cheeks a bit. “I just met him the other day.”

## -DAVE-

“So here's the situation as I see it.”

Arthur glances to his right to be sure the door to the next office is closed. I look out the window. We're up here on the fifth floor of his building, in some kind of meeting room. The view from up here is pretty good. The city looks more like a forest spotted with buildings, because all those sparse trees along the landscape seem to line up over a distance. They're all differently colored red and orange. God, what a good day you have given.

“So you found out that I steal for a living.” I shrug. “Ok, fair enough.”

I still think she's hiding something. I couldn't make her crack, though. She just brushed me off. All I could do was tell her that my information could put both him and her in jail for a very long time.

She called me a liar.

“I don't give false testimony” I said “If you are involved with him, if he pays you one dime, then I can fuck you both over.”

Truth is I don't know how Sylvia knows Arthur. I do have a guess.

He's such a little pretty boy. Perfect hair and smile. Glinting rhinestone in his pierced ear. Designer threads and watch.

It makes me sick.

It made me sick the first time I saw him. But I was so cool in that moment. I wanted to tell him right there he was nothing but a thief. He is just like me. Even now behind his polished desk and his feet sunk in twelve hundred dollar shoes he is a crook.

God have mercy. I am jealous. I am angry.

When a two-bit hood robs a gas station he gets about 500-If he's lucky. In doing this he could risk up to twenty years in maximum security. However, some guy on some board of directors somewhere embezzles something like \$50,000 into a private account and claims it was just a paperwork mix up. He walks away with a five month stay in a minimum security Hilton. How is that fair, just because one thief has no choice but to use a gun?

There is no justice in justice in this world. This is why I am a thief.

Anyway, that was my feeling when I first met him. Now I'm more neutral. He's a thief. I'm a thief. We both know it.

Atheist prick.

Just two weasels.

I turn to him from the window.

“Just don't think you have the upper hand in all this. I still have that briefcase. I still know everything.”

He doesn't say a word. He only stares me down. I swallow and exhale deeply because I don't want to say this part.

“Forget the money in that stock. Keep it. Just know that you are no better than I am.”

When he smirks I get the urge to just fucking deck him. I picture a giant white flag waving above my head, with taps playing in the background.

He huffs through an even broader smile, and I approach the desk.

“Just tell me one thing. How do you know Sylvia?”

He blinks and his lips curl up as though he is about to mouth the letter “W” even before he says anything. He holds this letter for a bit. Lost.

“Wait a minute.” He points at me “So you're...Are you Loopy?”

Fuck.

“Who? Who are you talking about?”

All these dots are falling a little too close to my line.

## -ARTHUR-

With a swing of the racket the blue rubber sphere nicks off and buzzes past her. The sound of the ball hitting the far wall is still an echoing light thud that seems to absorb into every side of the closed off court. Reverberating into silence.

I pick up the racquetball, and tap it into the air, letting it arch gracefully into my hand.

“Arthur! I suck at this.” she says.

“Your reach may be short, Sylvia, but I hit that right to you. It was an easy return.”

“Just switch with me.”

“Nope. You have to get a better service. That last one was pretty good. Give it another shot.”

“Arthur!”

“Serve it, Sylvia.”

With a pout she turns and pauses. Bouncing the ball off the floor once she lines up and her feet are off-center. She whacks the ball straight ahead. In observance of Newtonian physics it bounces straight back at her.

“Hey!” She turns, and it tags her on the back, skewing off left.

“Dammit.” she yells, and from all around the echo dissipates “DammitDammitDammit”

I'm actually having a good time.

I'm with Sylvia today to figure out how she knows Ken. This whole thing stinks. All the same, it all adds up. Ken knew ahead of time that there would be more than a measly 80 grand involved. I'm sure of it. Sylvia wasn't at my house the first time to get a look at me. She wants the money too. She scopes out my digs looking for more dirt that the two of them can profit on, like the goddamn D-day folder.

I'm only upset because I should have seen this at the start.

It would all be so ingenious except for the visit he payed me yesterday. He's got me on the run, he knows about the contacts and the embezzlement, the inside trading. How is this a good time for him to show up at my office and tip his hand? It just doesn't add up. Not

without Sylvia in the picture. When I realized that, it all hit me at once.

Sylvia's playing double-agent.

Loopy doesn't even exist. Ken gets Sylvia to make me chase this Loopy phantom, knowing that whatever information I give her will just help the both of them. As of now I'm supposed to believe that I am safe. Ken comes in all wounded-duck like I beat him. No, just false security.

It's so cool. What a great plan. Too bad I was able to see right through it.

So I'm playing along. I'm supposed to be grateful to Sylvia for helping me ferret out the joker, so I took her on a date to the health club. Sylvia alone can put the whole picture together, I'm sure. I only have one advantage. She has a vagina. My best countermeasure is to seduce her. Then we cut Ken out of the picture which gives me time to regroup and destroy the evidence. I'll dump Sylvia and it's all easy. So I started with racquetball. Just seemed like a fitting start, because you play against someone without having to look them in the eye.

She hits it strong, and on the line. It bounces off the far wall at the center of the court, and I give it a good return. Her next hit sends it too far to my side, and it bounces off the left wall.

“Shit, man. I had that!”

“It's OK, Sylvia. I'll serve.”

The door opens. “Look who's here.” I hear from behind me.

Martha, her tall frame and coal-black drapes for hair dropping below her shoulder. Everything about her-except for her surprisingly ample breasts-is tall and thin, even her face and nose. I rarely see her in good lighting, so when I do, it's like I take in a whole new picture. Even here at the Gym she's in all black. She's clipped her hip dog-chain to her workout shorts.

“Hey, Arthur.” She says “What's going on?”

Maybe I should have avoided screwing her that last time out; Fucking drugs, my lunatic mind. She's just the local college goth. Gets wasted and writes death poetry. Page after page of it.

I'm manic-depressive I've read her bullshit and I know I have a better grasp of depression. Real depression isn't slumped over in a dark room with trolls scraping your back with razorblades. Real depression is a liberating, sunny day with blue skies soaring high above you. Its when everything should be right and perfect and all the while you wish you were

never born. Wish that you could be unmade. Smiles are fake and plastic. Even playing children are hollow, stupid, pointless. Real depression doesn't happen at night.

“Hey, Martha.” I say to her.

“Teaching racquetball, huh?” She must be stalking me. Why else would she be here? She glances at Sylvia.

“Who's this?” Martha asks.

When I am baked and wasted, when I'm drunk, manic or horny, or when I'm in the mood for shitty poetry that's the only time I ever really want to see Martha. God, just go away.

“She's a friend of a friend.” I say.

Send questions, Comments, thoughts to  
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More Chapters will be made available. <http://14rivers.com/threeweasels.htm>

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