

## -SYLVIA-

I don't pity him. Not even one bit.

Now he's national news. Him and his little penis.

My greatest aspiration came true. I'm a famous photographer.

If I open my mouth for a second I'm going to be famous. If anyone finds out; I'm going to juvie.

What have I done?

My world has become surreal. I'm at the center of all of this and nobody knows it. I'm like that guy who said online that he would blow up football stadiums. The thing is he got caught and I will not. I was using two second hand proxies and a phantom e-mail client, along with the I.P. mask. The only thing that can give me away is me. Well, me and the fags. I walk down the hallway and the principal, Mr. Lynch, is being interviewed by a camera crew from channel 5.

"We are still unsure as to how the perpetrator obtained all the e-mail addresses that he did. We are well aware that it is most likely that he was operating from inside the school. I want to assure the community that I am taking every step to look into the faculty. If any one of the school employees is responsible for this, we will take drastic action."

"Have you seen the image yourself, sir?" the interviewer asks

"I have."

"Do you have any solid ideas as to who may be responsible for it?"

It's at that moment that I cross into the line of site for the camera and I look into the lens. I keep walking.

I replay the event in my head. How will it look on the news? Mom is going to see it.

"Who may be responsible for it?"

I walk into frame.

"Who may be responsible for it?"

I turn my head to the camera. I froze.

“Who may be responsible for it?”

Did I smile?

“I can only assure you and the parents of every student here at Lakeland that we are doing our best to route out the perpetrator.”

Yeah, I drilled a pen into his arm. I feel fucking great. He had it coming. He's all the school talks about now.

In the cafeteria some girls were saying how one of the art teachers was gay, and he has a collection of gay porn. What he was trying to do was e-mail the photo to his NAMBLA friends. A guy in study hall said that his ex-girlfriend used to take pictures of him before they would do it. It's all over the news. He was taking steroids, lots of people are saying that he just went all roid-rage and did this to himself for attention.

Nobody is talking about me, and that's fantastic. There are only two guys I'm worried about. I make my way through the hallway, and I find them both together, talking, and going silent when they see me; Mitch and Cliff.

“Hi, guys. I'm doing a report for the school newspaper about what happened to Cuffer. Do you have anything you'd like to say?”

“I don't have anything to say to you.” Mitch tells me

I turn to Cliff.

“Would you like to come out with a statement, Cliff?”

“It was you, right? You spying on us in the locker rooms with a hidden camera?”

“That's absurd, and you know it.” I say very seriously. “But could you imagine if it were true? What kind of photos would I have? I'd have the whole team, and you two especially. I'd know some things that you wouldn't want anybody to know.”

Mitch speaks up “So you know about us?”

“I keep my secrets. It's very crazy right now. The newspapers just want a story. I'm going to publish one myself. If there's anything you want me to put in the article, let me know.”

“What happened to his arm?” Cliff asks

“Huh?”

“He wouldn't talk about it. Do you know what happened to his arm?”

“I heard he fell down and caught it on a door frame.”

“Yeah. I heard that too.”

“It's just a rumor.” Mitch speaks up.

“Well then,” I say “I guess we'll never know.”

I get no response from them. I've never had people look at me scared before. I stuff my notebook under my arm and walk away. I'm going to write this newspaper article for the school. I just don't know what to include and what to leave out. I know the whole story, so I have to be the one to tell it.

On Tuesday I was making up a banner for the basketball team. Cuffer came in and molested me and I stabbed him with a pen. I went home that night and sent naked pictures of him to the whole school.

On Wednesday the pictures were copied, sent shared, and viewed by every one at school, and it was sent out on other message boards. Nobody knew who did it, but they were all angry and wanted to know who was behind it. Some kids were being dicks about it and telling stupid jokes. Cuffer did not take it well. He left school when he saw that there were going to be police and news crews there. Some of the teachers tried to find him, but he got out, and went home. He locked himself in his room and drank a bottle of anti-freeze, along with sleeping pills. His parents found him hours later.

The teachers, and students and police and reporters all want to know who did it. They all want to know who did this awful thing, sending those pictures to the school. It doesn't matter though; because he's dead.

The only way I can keep going now is to tell myself that he had it coming. I have to keep going, and I feel like a murderer. I can't do anything more to him. He had it coming and I don't feel sad.

If I'd have known he was going to commit suicide, I-

## -DAVE-

We're staking out Sylvia's apartment. We're in Arthur's Audi across from the complex, ticking down minutes before she gets home. About half an hour ago I asked him what we were going to do once we finally did find Sylvia. He gave no answer. However, when he asks me questions to kill time, I seem to be more than happy to tell him what movies I like, my favorite bands, where I go on the weekends, getting to know you crap. He wants to save gas, so we're sitting here with no heater, just bundling up against the encroaching cold of the growing winter outside. Our breath puffs out in steamy plumes, and forms little ice-crystals on the windows which I have to scrape back every now and then to see what's going on out there.

"What time is it?" He asks me

"It's 4:30 PM, o'clock."

"I've got to take my meds."

The pillbox he pulls out from his back seat is not logical. Some days have been popped open, others closed. There's no order in the days he's been taking his drugs. He pops open one of the slots.

"It's Thursday afternoon. Some of my relatives are flying into town. Next week is thanksgiving."

"Huh." I say.

I've not had a thanksgiving since I was a teenager. Seven years.

"I've kind of switched off holidays, except for Easter and Christmas."

I never steal on those holidays.

"I hate thanksgiving." He says "It's just so hard to be thankful. Give me some of that bottled water."

The bottle I pick up from the floor of the car has got a trace of liquid in it and ice crystals are forming on the edges of the bottle. When I tilt the bottle upright a slant of ice, like a long dagger protrudes upward against the liquid which pools at the bottom. Arthur opens the bottle and drowns his pill.

'Hard to be thankful.' I think to myself. This is how you become when you don't say grace before dinner. You can't find thankfulness in a life devoid of gratefulness.

They are not the same thing. Be grateful unto God. Be thankful unto men. To be honest, though, I hate thanksgiving too.

“Maybe one of us should call her.” I say.

“Give it another 15.”

In the passenger seat, nervously running my fingers through my hair, it's like that Ramones song. I can't control my thoughts or my hands. I can't control myself. I imagine Sylvia telling everyone about the doomsday fund after they're done grilling her about her porn habits. A warrant gets placed for Arthur, then another for me. I can't control what's going on. I have to let it all go. It's beyond me. It's with the Lord.

It's just like the tides and the setting of the sun. This grants me calm for a few moments, until I come to grasp the magnitude of it.

I have absolutely no control. Everything I've done for years sits on the teetering edge of a razor suspended above chaos and justice. How many times have I told myself that punishment coming upon me would be a good thing? That I am in my heart a knowing criminal who deserves to go to jail. I know it so well, but when confronted with the reality of it I just cannot bring myself to care.

“Let's switch. You drive.”

We get out and swap seats. When I go outside there is no difference in the temperature, only that there is wind outside.

I'm in the drivers seat, which is really no different than the passenger seat, seeing as we are parked. Something is going on with Arthur. He's got his eyes closed and he rolls his head from side to side while breathing deeply.

“You OK, man?”

“Blissful.”

“You seem kind of, I don't know, spaced out.”

“It's called ecstasy.”

I force myself to close my eyes and look away from him.

“You just took a hit of ecstasy?”

“Correctamundo.”

Everything from my chest to my forehead goes flushed red and hot.

“Fuck you. You dip shit.”

I start the car.

“Where are we going?”

I slap him across the head.

“Fuck man! Chill out.”

“We are trying to silence a seventeen year old girl who just landed herself on front page news. How is this a good time to drop some fucking X?”

“I was just getting too tense, that's all I just wanted to relax.”

“I'm gonna take you home and then we'll-Goddammit.”

I see Sylvia. She's across the street walking to her apartment with her bag slung over her shoulder and a blank stare across her face.

“I see her, man.”

“Oh, yeah? Go get her.”

“Shut up and sit back, I'm getting you out of here.”

“Ken, we've been sitting here all this time. Let's just, I dunno, talk.”

“We'll get you home and call it a day, you fucking jerk.”

I put on my blinker and get set to put the car in gear. I check my blind spot.

“Man this sucks.” I say, “I was hoping to see Sylvia again, too.”

“Then fucking get her! She's right there!”

I can't believe what I just said aloud. While I'm checking my blind spot I find I'm looking at her as she gets ready to open the door to her place.

I shut down the car and cross the street just as she is about to open the door.

“Sylvia!” I scream at her, to which she turns and looks back at me. “Yeah, Dave?”

“Follow me.” I say as I walk back to the car.

“My mom is expecting me, you know.”

“We need to talk.” I say this without turning, and I get to the other side of the car. Sylvia has already run to the passenger side, and thrown it open. She buries her head into Arthur's chest.

“Arthur! I killed him! I didn't mean to! He's dead because of me. He's dead.”

I open my door, and start the engine. “Just get in. I'm taking us all out to dinner.”

“Arthur.” She sobs, raking her fingers across his chest.

He looks down at her with glassy eyes, and pats her head.

“Your hair is really soft.”

## -ARTHUR-

The room is so alive.

Life flows through everything. It flows through all of us. I can feel it warm on the glittery smooth finish of the diner table. I love everything.

There are seven levels.

Joy/Sorrow  
Create/Destroy  
Love/Hate  
Mother/Father  
Motion/Stillness  
Matter/Energy  
Time/Space

All of us flow through them. They are us and we are them.

It's absurd. It's divine.

"Don't be sad." I tell Sylvia "Creation and destruction is just a part of us all. Sacrificing for love is the cosmic essence of the universe."

It's rolling. It rolls higher and higher.

Ecstasy is wanting to be there on the top and wanting to savor every shattering moment on the way up. Hence the name.

Our waitress leans toward me from the side.

"Are you alright sir?"

I'm beading sweat and touching my face. Soft caress. Rolling higher and higher.

Sylvia is beyond consolation. I'm supposed to be shutting her up about the money.

It's the feeling of being on a first class plane ride. You watch out the window and clear the cloud line. The light of the sun blasts in on you, and it stays bright and true. That's the feeling. Just the pure sun over an endless cloudscape. Everything as soft as air, and as wonderful as light. No airplane. I'm the one flying.

"I'm fine." I tell the waitress.

“He's just having a mild allergic reaction.” Ken says

Sylvia is crying softly.

“You call this mild?” the waitress asks.

“Yes. Usually he starts to swell up. He took his adrenaline shot, so he should be just fine in a few minutes.”

“What's he allergic to?”

“Parakeets. Don't worry. He'll be just fine. Look; He wanted a strawberry shortcake, I wanted a Reuben, and she wanted spaghetti and meatballs. Just let us know when it's ready.”

The waitress smirks and walks away. I take a big gulp of my ice water. It's so cool. Oh, it's heaven.

“How many lies did I just tell for you, Arthur? Do you know how much I hate lying?”

“It's OK, Dave.” I say “I've just had a wonderful Idea. I like the both of you a lot. You're both just...Special. So much has happened that only we know about. I think it would be wrong if we lost each other. This past week I got an idea. It's a plan. Together we are going to make a shit load of money.” I wipe away the beads of sweat clinging to my forehead “Each one of us will have a role. Sylvia, it starts with you.”

She looks up and cleanses her eyes from crying. Every so often I see how adorable she is.

“You're cute, Sylvia. Please smile.”

Through her pain and sorrow for having killed her classmate she purses her lips and her teeth gleam through in bright sunshine beyond the clouds.

Send questions, Comments, thoughts to

[Author@14rivers.com](mailto:Author@14rivers.com)

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