

-SYLVIA-

Now I'm outside his house. My back is up against his stone-mortar wall. His house is somewhere behind me. Now I'm a stalker. It's official.

Last night could not have gone better. The bitches were all in heat, and ready to get it on. The owners may know about fertility drugs, LHRH or something like that to induce heat. Shoot a bitch up with some, her hormones spike and she'll be shitting out puppies-or pools of blood. Said puppies will be thoroughbred with papers that I provide. Depending on if they are kept or sold, they'll still be worth a lot of money. I don't even want to think of it because it makes my studding scam small cashews. I like cashews better than peanuts.

It went down like this: The Kennel closed up at five and I worked the night shift. Come in, clean up, feed, go home. It's a huge Kennel. It was at one time an airfield - A fucking airfield. The owners refurbished the hangers to have dog pens, and left the dirt runway to overgrow and make a big play yard. It's the area's most extravagant Kennel. I finish all my chores by 7:30. At 8:00 Sasha's owners arrived and paid me \$525 tax-free. Twenty-five tip, nice of them, but still a crappy tip. I introduced Sasha to Perry. Westies are incredibly annoying quirk-driven little white mops, but they are very perceptive. Perry gets the smell of Sasha's backside and he knows it's on. It wasn't longer than five minutes of playful fighting that Sasha lays down and looks over both shoulders for Perry. He starts to pound her and the whimpering head bobbing and jolting began.

I head outside the pen and give Sasha's owners the thumbs up, and they smile widely. I head to the copy machine in the office and Xerox the pedigree. They'll have an official one made later. I hand them the paper just about the time Perry's getting it off. Picking up Sasha from the ground is like hefting a wet bag of potatoes. She lays limp and still out of breath. They're all out the door by a quarter to nine.

Emma's owners arrive at 9:05. They're as button-down and brown as the dog they bring in. They dress in that ugly grayish brown crap that people wear in Sherlock Holmes movies. German Shepherd studding is a bit more pricey. I stuff \$730 cash into my pocket and bring her in to meet Epi. Shepherds are notorious harassing bark machines, and as soon as I open the kennel area where he's held, he starts with the barking immediately. I put Emma near the wide Pen however, and the loud bastard shuts up. They nose each other through the chain-link fence. Epirious - I have no idea - started to pace back and forth, whimpering in anticipation. Emma goes into the cage, and I head off to hose down a few more pens. The same process goes according to plan with Browning and Sable. I wrote down that they were Shetlands, but actually they were English Sheepdogs. I don't know how I got that mixed up. It was just a little confusion in my budget paperwork. At least they were the same breed. That's what really matters in the end. Don't watch English Sheepdogs fuck. It looks like two giant thrashing mops.

Great night. Great profit. \$1885.

Today I skipped school and went out photographing.

I just made damn near two grand in one night, What the hell are you gonna do to me?

I hadn't photographed crowds in a while; I'm trying to develop my zeroing ability. I want to be able to pick just one person out of a crowd, wait for the right moment, right angle and with a shot make one person in a crowd the clear focus of the shot. It's tough, but it develops your eye. Out of one of these said crowds I spotted him.

Loopy. I'll be damned.

'Revenge.' I thought, 'The Black Flag kind.' I followed him. He was groomed better than the last I saw him, and he was carrying a briefcase. I planned to nail him just as he was pulling a job, but he wasn't walking towards the store or the crowds, he was walking away from them. We end up in front of a big business building with an open field parking lot. I catch some cover to see what his game was, see what he was going to steal. He was talking to someone at a desk. He was gorgeous. I was shooting from 50 yards with my 30x optical zoom. From here, it's still the perfect picture. The depth of his blonde hair, the way his shirt can't conceal his cut, ripped body. I can tell by his frame. Even sitting. When Loopy left I stayed. I don't even remember when he left. I was just glad he was out of the shot, finally. The parking lot had some large stones off to the side that had a bit better angle, and made for good cover and I set up my tripod to shoot like a jungle documentary.

I was waiting for the right moment; waiting for him to get up. When he did he went right out the door. Faster than I could have rehearsed it, my camera and tripod were in the bag. He was getting into his car. I moved to the street, and it was a miracle, a taxi was there.

No, I didn't know who he is.

No, I didn't know where he is going.

I only knew that I had to get some shots of him.

Yes, I mean those kinds of shots.

His grey Audi TT Rolls around the corner. Without thought or regret, I handed \$100 to the cabbie-This was out of the studding cash that I still had not deposited.

"Pursue him."

That's the exact word. We followed him as he drove out of the city, out into very rich residential territory. When he turned into a no-outlet street, I told the driver to stop, and I went on foot from there. Bastard made \$60 tip off me.

Walking down the sidewalk of huge, sprawling mansion I just told myself 'He either lives here,

or he's going to have to come back down this road.' I've got him cornered. It's a five minute walk, when I see the glinting silver of his car high atop his driveway. That's when I hug the wall, and I wondered if it's worth trespassing.

I decide it is.

I find some good hand grips on the stone wall in a blind corner, and I make my way over. The front of his house is an attempt at a medieval castle look. The exterior is cut stone, rough and uneven. The front door is at the base of what looks like a giant turret. It's three stories high, and aside from the castle façade, it looks like your normal house. I hope it's a façade. I didn't come here expecting the fucking Bastille or whatever. In the shaded bushes of the wall, I drop off my camera bag, and my tripod. Using the lens, I zoom up and scan for security cameras, and I think it's clear, so I set the lens back with the rest of my gear. I grab my lock pick, just in case I'll need it. I creep around the inside wall, to stay hidden. It's uphill broad daylight, and I charge. When I'm done, I'm out of breath, and hugging the outside wall of the house. Inching to a corner, I glance around: backyard.

It has a hot tub, and a pool. There's a tennis court, A fountain. It springs up and meanders down to the pool water along an artificial brook of smooth concrete. There are two hot-tubs. I didn't see the second one earlier. One towards the house the other extended from the pool with a flowing waterfall, all its own. There's a full garden, even though this is autumn, it's packed with flowers. The entire back yard patio is a Mediterranean homage. It has tiled walkways Arches, unfluted Corinthian columns that support domes to make shaded poolside table areas. There are Growing vines along the perimeter wall. Stairs lead to a second patio nearer the house with deck chairs and a permanent BBQ grill and fire pit.

I need to take a picture of this. In the fading red of the dusk sky I snap off a few, and I know that the lighting and balance are all off, and it's going to look like some amateur tourist shot. Even so, I need this place. I need this moment. I've never dreamed of a place like this.

I make my way up the stairs and hug up against the windowed patio door. Looking in I see that the light on the security system panel is green. He hasn't turned it on. I know he's in there.

Testing the patio door, it's locked. I reach into my pocket for the lock-pick. I shove the tools into the slot, fast and hard. Considering raking the lock-because I'm in a hurry-I take three deep breaths, and press my ear to the door, listening to the clicking pins.

It's impossible, I know, but it feels more spacious inside than out. The den, down the hall seems like it can hold a basketball court. I was scrubbing and spraying out dog piss yesterday and here I am in the biggest house I've ever seen. The banister is gleaming with polish, and it's either mahogany or red wood. The first few stairs look like marble. With a landing and stairwell that elegantly ascends to the second floor.

I walk up these steps, with the ornate carpet, and when I reach the top of the steps I hear him

shuffling through his room.

What am I expecting to do here? Can I really get a hidden shot from him? Do I really plan to meet him and get him to pose for me? This is the dumbest thing I've ever done. Even so, I can't stop now. I have to go for whatever it is I am going for.

I lean up against his door, and hear him opening a door within. Next thing I hear is running water.

Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Oh, my God.

He's going to take a shower. I've got him.

I peek inside on his lavish deep carpet golden colored walls, and his big screen TV. His bed is a king size with an elaborate dragon image complete with Celtic knots. He has a Blu-Ray player and every gaming system ever. There are Shelves of vinyl records, and DVDs on his entertainment center's bookshelf. His Violin rests on a stand in the corner. If I could live in this house I'd never have to tend to mother's little habits and needs in her little cramped, costly cripple apartment.

Heaven on earth.

What I am here for, though is not this house. I am here for him. He's it. The cherry on top of this sundae. I always eat the cherry first.

I have my camera ready. I reach up to push the door open. Without even a creaking sound the door swings out.

"Whoa! Whoa!" He says. "Who's there!?"

He's shouting at me, and he's about to get into the shower. So he's probably facing me, and probably not wearing anything. I swing the door open all the way.

He's unbuttoned his shirt and he stands there looking at me, as I shoot a picture as fast as I can. I can feel a heavy, painful breath leave me when I see him. Just as I pictured him. Tight washboard abs, his arms are so cut but not at all bulky. Perfect pectoral muscles, and he has the cutest little belly button. With I smile, and a lingering glance I turn and I run downstairs. Back down to the landing then around and out to the patio. I race to the corner of the house, and then sprint my way down the hill. I'm laughing as I go. I get to the bushes, and place my camera and lock kit in my bag. With one toss it all goes over the wall. It's foam lined so nothing will break. Maybe the zoom lens, but I hope not.

It takes me some effort but I get over the fence with a climb, and hop down to the other side. I grab my bag, and once again I'm running. Running for the road at the end of the lane. I'm losing my breath just as the end is in sight, when from behind me I hear a horn honking. My

speed drops and I don't even bother looking back. He pulls past me, and stops before the intersection with the main road.

Where the hell was I supposed to go anyway? This was stupid. Oh, well, even if he has me arrested I'll see him daily in court. He's stepping out, and he's walking toward me, buttoning up his shirt in the cool fall air.

“What do you think you were doing?”

“I picked your lock,” I say “I got inside and then ran away.”

“Whatever you stole, give it back to me.”

I rummage through my bag, until I find my camera. By the time I do he's standing right in front of me, and I turn on the image display, and hold it up. I look away from him, I can't seem to look him in the eye.

“That's it?” He asks.

“It's all I wanted.”

My name's Sylvia. I want to tell him. I've got to tell him.

-DAVE-

The phone rang last night. I figure it's Arthur, ready to strike a deal. It was ringing through my new cell phone, which has been an exception to my always pawn the swag rule. I should not covet. So, I clicked on, expecting to start my negotiations.

"I take it you've made the sale."

"Loopy?" She asked

"Arthur?" I asked back. Which is, of course, retarded.

"No-I-No, wait. I just- I'm...Hold on a second."

She hung up, leaving me to look at the dead phone in disbelief. I could swear I'd heard that voice before.

It just didn't hit me. Loopy.

The phone rings again, and I pick up, still confused.

"Hello?" It's the same girl.

"Yes?"

"This isn't Loopy? Is it?"

"Is this that girl with the camera?" How the hell was that possible, I don't know, "Sidney?"

"Sylvia!"

"Sylvia, how did you get this number?"

"Because I tracked you down, that's how."

"Tracked me down?" I say with a condescending air.

"I found you, you little weasel."

"Good for you."

“Nobody else uses this phone, right?”
That’s a weird question I thought.

“No, and what difference would that make?”

“You’re not lying to me are you?”

The only people that know my phone number are trade dealers and pawn shops. Just in case anybody’s looking for specific merchandise. Occasionally I’ll pass it off to some cutie for a rendezvous. I don’t know how she found me through one of those.

“Sylvia...Go away.”

I get set to hang up.

“No! No! Hold on!” I hear her speak back, “What are you doing tomorrow?”

I couldn’t believe it.

“Look, I’ve got plans.”

“Yeah? What? Tell me.”

“Why do you give a fuck? Good. Bye.”

“But Loopy.”

“Stop calling me that. My name’s not Loopy.”

“Yeah? Well what is it then?”

Dead silent. No. I will not give her the luxury of knowing my name. But I wasn’t quick enough to even say John or Bill or something.

“Forget that you know this number or I’ll e-mail all your pictures to your school principal.”

“Fuck you. I’ll call the cops. I know where you live, asshole.”

“Goddamn you.” Forgive me, father.

“OK, Then I’m coming over right now.”

“I’m not even home. I’m out.”

“Yeah, well, I’ll let myself in then.”

“Shut up. I’m doing something right now, but I’m free tomorrow. Can you come over at 10:00?”

“I’d love to!”

“Great, just don’t break into my house or anything until then. Deal?”

“Yeah. Yeah. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I uttered the “F” word, and hung up the phone.

Then Kagura knocked on the door.

“Are you finished?” She asked

“Almost.” I poured myself a cup of water from her bathroom sink, and gulped it quickly. I’d worked up a powerful thirst. After I had done my little briefcase extortion on Mr. DeLobb, I went back to the Thai restaurant and hit on my waitress. She was Hot, hot, hot but she wasn’t Thai. She just lived in the area and nobody around town can really tell the difference between the different nations of oriental people.

I turned and opened the door for her. She had these cute slitted almond eyes and feathery dark brown hair. She entered nude, except that she had put her glasses back on. It’s fitting because I was naked too. She was a doll. Her sides were curvy and her belly had a slight and adorable little tummy. Her breasts were large, and full while her nipples were hardly bigger than a quarter.

She moved past me, to get her meds. Kagura is 24 and Japanese. She said her name means dance of the gods. It’s a very fitting name. She does that dance pretty well. I’d give her 8 out of 10 stars.

“Sorry I took so long. I just had to take that call.”

“Who was it?” She asked looking at me by the reflection of the mirror.

“Nobody.” I say, “My sister.”

When she stopped looking at my reflection, I crossed myself.

“I’ve got some movies on DVD she says. Want to see some?”

“Are they in Japanese?”

“Some of them, but they have subtitles.”

She shook a few of the pills into her hand.

“Hey,” I say “You want to go to church with me on Sunday?”

She looked back at the reflection with a coy smile.

“You're kidding right?”

She chuckled a little and while she did, swallowed her pills, followed by a gulp of water. While she'd been doing this she was closing her eyes, so I sneaked up behind her and wrapped my arm around her belly and hoisted her up. I walked her back into the bedroom, over my shoulder.

She was laughing.

“Stop you asshole! I'm gonna spill my water!”

“Oh, really?” I navigated her over to the dresser, “Set 'er down right there.” She did, and then I lined up and tossed her onto the bed.

She was holding her hands on her face.

“If you break my glasses, you're dead.”

I jump next to her, and we stare at each other for a bit. She leans over, and kisses my forehead.

“You're silly.”

“Oh, am I?” I ask. I put my hand on her shoulder and leaned her back into me.

This was yesterday today I need to make money. Today I need to bargain with a pawnshop broker. Today I don't need any interference. Today I'm with Sylvia.

While I look through the pendants, she taps my shoulder and points.

“I like that one.” She says

This is my local pawnshop. Everything here is likely either stolen, sold to support a

habit, or both.

I point to a piece of jewelry in the case.

“That one, please.” I say with my poker face on.

“Oh, gross!” Sylvia whines

It's a silver, burgundy porcelain cameo. It's valued at \$15. I look at the old bearded white grizzly bear of a man selling this junk wearing a John Deere hat and a Bud Light T-shirt wrapped in flannel his eyes are still keen and sharp. He's very No-nonsense. I've been coming here for two years, still don't know his name. I tell the cashier to give it to me for twelve. He says fourteen. I say thirteen and a half.

“Thirteen and a half? Deal.”

I hand him the cash out of the wad I just got from him. It's not a very big dent. I'm trying to launder back some of the money from all the shit I've been stealing throughout the week. I give them the consumer junk-watches-camcorders-MP3players-they give me the money. I give them the money, they give me the old crap-Pendants-shoes-chess sets. He gets to flush out the knick-nacks, and get some material that actually sells. I get antiques. It's mutually beneficial, but I know for a fact that I'm coming out on top.

“What are you getting all this stuff for anyway? It's all junk.” Sylvia bemoans

“One man's trash.”

“One man's trash, what?” I turn, cockeyed. “You don't know that expression?”

“No.”

“You must be living under a fucking rock.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“One mans trash is another man's treasure.”

She gets that look of realization.

“Oh, yeah. Wait. I've heard that one before. Just didn't click.”

Idiot.

She walks over and picks a guitar up from a wall mount. I've got it out of her hands real quick. The polish on the wood is faded, and there's a bit of buckle-rash on the backside of it. Other than that it only has a few bumps and nicks. I look inside the bottom hole. Amazingly, the guitar still has its serial number. I inspect the neck, looking down the strings from the base of the guitar. It's a little bit bowed out on the bottom part, but not by much. It's solid. The guys working here don't know shit.

"Oh, man." I snort, disapprovingly. The guitar is priced at \$110. It's an old style cello body that you never see anymore. It's not electric, which is why it's not over 150, like many of the other guitars. I lay it down on the glass case.

"Well" I sigh, "I'll give you 80 bucks for it."

"80 bucks? You insane?" He asks

"No. The instrument is bowed on the bottom. It won't play right. It's only real value is in its collectability, and it's not that big an item."

"I can give it to you for 100, even."

"Ninety five dollars."

"You little prick, are you gonna snoot me for a measly five dollars?"

"Uh..." I roll my tongue behind my lips "Yeah."

He sighs deeply, and shakes his head.

"Fine. You got a deal. Still gonna be over a hundred with taxes, though, Tough guy."

I make my transaction and turn with the instrument under my arms. I kept the case from the last guitar I stole, so I can sell this one inside that.

"You can play guitar?" Sylvia asks

"Yeah. Like this." I put my fingers on the frets carelessly and wang on the strings with horrible sound.

"Yeah, you're cool." She snides sarcastically. She looks back in the jewelry case, while I head over to the clothing rack.

I'm flipping past old "Alf" shirts and Stained 1970-style button-ups and I happen upon a leather jacket.

“Hey!” I hear her call to me “Buy me this bracelet.”

“Shut up, Sylvia.” I say back.

“Come on, Loopy, it's only twenty dollars.”

I look at the bracelet. It's a chinsey ball-locking gold bracelet.

“It's not twenty dollars. It's twelve twenty five.”

“I can get you for 18.” Says the cashier.

“How about fifteen fifty?”

His lips curl up, one side higher than the other. It's a sneer, with a dash of defeat.

“Fine, son. Deal.”

I turn to Sylvia.

“You're paying for half, you know.”

“Huh?” She asks.

“Hey, I didn't want you on this. This is business. It's not a date.”

“Ok, fine.” She relents, propping he clutch purse on the glass counter.

After tax it came to 17.42.

“OK, so I divide by two and it should be 8.76, right?”

“Seventy one.” I reply.

“Oh, yeah.” I pay my half and lay the leather jacket on the counter. The label says \$38. She gets the hinge joint bracelet locked around her wrist.

“Nice jacket.” She says.

Oh, fuck. Bullshit.

She actually says that, the very second before I buy it.

“I'll give you twenty five for it.”

“That one didn't get labeled right. It's supposed to be fifty five.” The cashier smiles.

“Fifty five?” I ask, facetiously “that's a big jump.”

“It's a nice Jacket.”

He smiles, slightly but enough to glance at the yellow of his teeth, I look away, then back at him. Now he sneers and squints a little, both on the right side of his face.

“You're a nice kid, how about fifty, even.”

“Deal.”

This is a first. Usually I say the last, lowest number I can get, and he says deal. The final price was my call.

This will not do.

“Good choice,” she says “Suits you.”

“Let's get out of here.” I say.

“Well, sir, thank you. I'm Sylvia, by the way.”

“Stephen.” He replies.

“Alright, Stephen, and this is...” She gestures towards me

The awkward silence is as long as I want to make it.

I lean over to her. “Let's go.”

We leave the shop with the guitar slung under my right arm, the pendant in my left hand and I'm wearing the jacket. What she's wearing is a simple black and white polka-dot dress. I look into her blah gray eyes.

“I am never taking you pawn shopping with me ever again”

“What? What did I do?”

“You complimented the material. Don't you see that? You never compliment the material. Never say you want something. You never show any interest at all. Look at something with scorn. Name a number smaller than the one on the tag. Argue

until you meet the man in the middle. That's all you do.”
“What's that for? I don't get it.”

“If I look at something like I want it, then he knows I want it. He keeps the price high. If I look like I hate it, but I'm a spendthrift who likes to throw money away, I've got a better chance for a good price. He'd rather have my money in his register than junk on his shelf.”

She pushes me in the stomach. If she was my height she probably would have gone for my shoulder.

“Don't give me that crap. All you did was buy garbage. What are you going to do with an old, ugly locket, a guitar you can't play and a jacket that's way too cool for you?”

“I have my reasons.”

We get back to my place, and we're in the den, where she crashes on my beanbag chair. I go to work on the computer.

“Look at it from my angle. I don't get it. I love my camera. I use it all the time. I saved up for months to get just the one I wanted, and still keep a good bank account. Now, if you had gotten your grubby mits on it, then you would have just sold it to Stephen, and used the profit to buy useless crap nobody wants.”

“Yep.”

“So I don't get it. Why take the stuff people work so hard for and care so much about to buy things that are pointless, and which you have really no interest in?”

I type away at the computer.

“I'll tell you if you tell me why you shoot pictures of locker-room boys.”

“Shit that's easy.” I turn my head, looking at her. She's a tiny child wearing television static, her eyes closed and leaning her head off to one side. “They're hotties. I do what I have to do. Recently I found out just how far I would go.”

“So that's it?”

“Yeah. I'm just building a collection of hot guys, while you're building a junk collection.”

“One man's trash.” I smile. For a while, I do my work, while she reclines.

“Everything I bought today will be going up for auction online.”

She opens her eyes and looks at me.

“Really?”

I turn the screen to face her, and she walks over, tilting the screen down.

-Vintage Grestch all-acoustic archtop. Extremely Rare. Still plays great.
\$2,500.00

-Queen Elizabeth cameo 1946 post-war celebratory edition.
Unique Find. \$1,200.00

-James Dean 1956 Leather jacket. Still in extremely good condition. No Rips!
Inspired directly from the film “Rebel Without a Cause.” 800.00

She draws back.

“Holy crap.”

“I guarantee that everything here will sell for more than the prices shown. I'm willing to bet double on th cameo.”

“No way.” she says.

“I can send you the addresses. You can watch the auctions yourself.”

“No, that's alright. How much did you spend today?”

“What? Little over 180 bucks.”

“That's going to get you thousands of dollars?”

“Just have an eye for junk. Buy it. Sell it. Steal it.”

“Huh.” She says and wanders back to the beanbag chair where she flops down.

“That's pretty cool. What are you doing tomorrow?”

I finish up on the last updates to my auctions, I turn to her. The look I'm giving her is supposed to communicate 'How could you even ask me that?'

“Tomorrow is Sunday!”

-ARTHUR-

Ken is right. Opiates are for atheists.

In front of me is a line of speedball. It's a powder comprised of heroin and cocaine in a 10/90 mix. Yes, Very risky stuff. I bend down the tip of my flexi straw and lower to the coffee table. I snort back hard. The coke hits me fast and hard like an adrenaline rush, and the heroin settles to my brain with euphoric purity.

I rise off the couch and Martha, who was on my shoulder, slides down to where I was sitting.

"Oh. Yeah. Fucking."

Sweet Christ on a rocket.

Chad works for a hardware store. On the side he's the resident chemist. After scoring some cheap street smack, he distilled the drug, then dissolved it in a solvent, and froze the solution. Heroin flakes come out of the solution like fine snow crystals and the stuff goes to nearly 99% pure.

It's pure enough for a straight shot into my nose with a coke chaser. That's speedball. Normally injected, I snort it. I live dangerously. If the mix is off I'm dead. My skull fries itself and I go insane, then go into a coma, before my diaphragm paralyzes and I asphyxiate. If the mix is right: what a fucking rush - a bullet train brain in the first class cabin. I'm too high. Way too high. Good mix.

"Where's Chad?" We're all at Chad's house, so I'm asking the whole room. "I gotta find him. Where's Chad?"

I'm there, some of his friends and Martha, but Chad is not present. We had all hit a techno club, and hit up some D's. Fast action pills. Nothing as whacked out as ecstasy, just short burst reds and downers, some speed. I think they were red and orange, I know they were the shit.

I dropped a high and a low in one gulp; Fits my personality just right. Working on the high I was out on the dance floor, but I wasn't dancing. I was just there. I was absorbing their energy, absorbing the sound, the light, the sweat. I was the center of it all. It was pushing me, propelling me. That's what it was all there for. It was made to feed me. There was a gleaming cascade of photons and sonic pulses and human emotion, flowing into me like I was the basin of a waterfall.

Then the low would kick in. It was a dream. I'm not the center; I'm just as fake as all of it. Drowning. Pulled back. Like looking up into the night sky from the top of a hill, and feeling yourself weightless, lifting, unfettered. You fall into space. You fall forever. Drawing back to the corner, everything was black and white. The energy doesn't flow into me. I am it's prisoner. All of us were, trapped in a cage that had hypnotized us with stimuli. The only sound the constant thump of a drum-beat. Over and over again you feel it from ribs to toes. Like the imaginings of the heartbeats of gods. Trapped in the box of darkness and light; loud-horrible music Shouting and pounding fury. The dancing became the riots of prisoners, fighting out of the sound and sight, but pulled ever further into it. Then the high would kick in again.

Pretty much back and forth like that up until an hour ago when they wore off. Then back to Chad's to crash. Watch some cartoons. Everyone is strung out, watching the TV-wasted. Two of them collapsed on the shag rug in front of the tube. The girl's in all white, the guy's in all black. More of them adorn tabletops and the stairwell, passing a joint. Almost all of them have makeup, too much at that. We had a cross-dresser along, but he would have been too easy. The best way to not get it is to just yell for it subversively without having the balls to own up. That's what I think anyway. I've got other plans. First, where is Chad?

"Where the fuck is Chad?"

The girl on the stairwell looks up. Her Blue streaks flash to the jet black of her all-dyed hair whenever the light from the TV changes, along with the glint of her silver nose-ring. Her shirt is white, and in black lettering reads "JUST SAY DRUGS TO KNOW."

"I think he went to the kitchen."

"Oh, shit." I turn and go. "Chad! Oh, shit, Chad!" Before I get to the kitchen door I see in the hall a 16-year old bastard lounging out.

"Who in purgatory are you?"

"I'm Cliff. Mary's little brother."

I'm staring him down.

"What?" He asks, innocuously enough.

"You piss me off."

When I get in the kitchen, the door to the garage is opening and Chad comes in with a silver tank.

"Chad." I say, "Chad! You rock! This speedball is the shit. I am s-s-s-s-s-SO high right now."

"Chill dude, chill, you need to lighten up." He hands me a gas mask leading from the canister. "Hit this up."

With my face into the mask, he cranks the nozzle. A light gust of air blows over my numbing cheeks. I take in a deep huff.

Oh, my God.

My head goes light as a balloon. Poof. Nitrous Oxide. I start laughing and I can't stop.

"Isn't that the shit?" He asks.

I'm high on at least three things at this point. The feeling is increasingly detached from accepted reality. I'm a little angry because I promised myself I wouldn't let myself go this far. I just had to. There was too much shit this week: Ken blackmails me then my house gets broken into so some girl can shoot me naked, my dad's still hassling me. No. No. I'm out. The urge to do something drastic has been building for three days. Last night I played the violin from 7:00 until 3:00 AM. I woke up four hours later feeling just fine. Tonight's destructive energies are to counter last night's creative ones.

Chad sprawls out on the kitchen linoleum. Pressing his face into the mask, he giggles, slightly contorting and getting breaths of fresh air.

"Dude." He says "Awesome."

I turn it off. We'll save the rest for later.

"Yeah, conserve. Just leave me here for a while, I'm good." His glassy eyes beam out to nowhere, gazing up at the ceiling.

When I turn around I know I'm going to find him laying there asleep in the morning. Scratch that - In the afternoon. When I go out the door Cliff is still sitting there in his chair, nodding. I tap him on the shoulder.

"Cliff, get up."

This should be a good demonstration of my destructive nature in action. Not too rough, though.

I move to the dining room, and close the lattice door to the den, then I go back and I wave

him in. His eyes are glazed like everyone's probably just a hit of weed, though. I can see he's a lightweight. When he comes in I close the door to the hall.

"What is it, sir?" He asks. I poke him in the chest.

"Don't you call me "sir." Got that? My name is Arthur."

"Ok, Arthur."

"Like King Arthur."

"Yeah. I know. I know. What do you want man?" He asks. I turn him around, and push him until he sits on the dining room table. "What the hell do you want, man?" he starts up again.

"I want you to talk to me about cars."

"Huh?" I place my hands on his blue jean knees. I gently stroke his thighs.

"Muscle cars, man. Dodge viper? Mustangs and Chargers of the '60's?" His eyes seem a lot less glazy now. "Well, maybe you like sporty cars. What do you think about a sleek Porsche 911? Old-school I know. It can't beat the BMW Z3 in horsepower, but it springs to life in the 0-60." One of my hands goes up to his shoulder. "Have you ever been in a Mitsubishi Eclipse?"

C'mon. Talk macho to me. You little bitch. He looks down at my hand on his jeans, going up, up, up. He stops it.

"What the fuck are you doing? There are people here!"

My other hand goes to his shoulder and I press him down on the table.

"I drive an Audi TT, myself. That whore purrs. V-8, all wheel drive, manual transmission.

I touch his forehead, then talk in Whispers.

"Duel."

I touch his cheek.

"Overhead."

I pinch down on his chin.

"Cam."

I'm pretty sure at this point that I have his undivided attention. I put my other hand on his chest.

"But there are people here. I was watching you, Cliff. You were watching me. Every time I looked at you, you looked away. Every time I turned you turned away. You always were looking for some girl to glare at, so I wouldn't notice, but you couldn't have made it more obvious. You checked me out behind my back, and pissed me off."

"Dude...Not cool."

"Tell me about yourself, Cliff."

"I'm not fucking gay."

"Oh. I'm sorry. My mistake."

I pull my hands off. "Goodbye." I say as I turn and leave. I hide in the blind spot of the door.

1, Alabama, 2, Alabama, 3, Alabama, 4, Alabama, 5, Alabama.

I go back in the door frame. He hasn't moved. He's breathing a lot harder, though.

"You're about as straight as a broken spring." I walk back up to him, with my hand on his cheek again.

"You know what, Cliff?" Now I slap him hard. "I hate people like you. Not gay people, I'm very into that scene. But I can't suffer a coward. Get your shit."

"What?"

I sneer, and clench down on his shoulder. "Get your shit and get the fuck out of here. You understand me? I don't want to see you again. If I ever do, then you better be ready to take me on."

I drag him by his shirt to the front door, and toss the garbage out onto the lawn. I take in a deep breath, and let it out fast.

I'm still getting higher.

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I turn to Martha, almost asleep on the couch. "Hey, Martha."

As she hears my voice, she looks up, very responsive.

"Let's go upstairs, OK?"

"Sure." she says. We walk over the idiots on the stairwell, and I'm taking her clothes off as we head for the master bedroom.

I don't know how late it was, but we fucked until the sun came up.

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

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