

*Vicodin and Water, Whisky and Woodcarving*

Wed, 4/27, 6:00 am.

It is a dreary morning. I stand on my front porch in a frilly white bathrobe, looking out across the lawn. A car slows down as it passes, staring at the metal cow in the front yard. I take a drag on my cigarette. The sky looks as hung over as I do. I exhale slowly, blowing smoke rings. As the smoke leaves my body I can feel my bowels start to move — the opiates are leaving my system. I look once again to the overcast sky; a cloud laughs at me. I turn to go inside and sleep.

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Tues, 3/24 7:45p.m.

She opens the door with a smile on her face that makes me want to hit her. The last time I was here it was different. I shuffle in, hunched over, hands close to my stomach. She asks if I'm alright. I say yes even though we both know it's not true. To answer no would lead to explanation which would end in some sort of outburst involving the phrase junkie piece of shit and possibly some broken glass.

Her house looks the same. She says she's changed, though. She's on a whole new diet. Absolutely no dairy. How interesting I say as she bustles about making a salad. She puts a salad in front of me. My first forkful spears a tomato and a bunch of mozzarella cheese. I think about how much of a fucking liar she is. There's a bowl on the table too — not the kind for eating — I don't mention it, she'll only deny its purpose.

I had some friends staying here, she says, as if she can hear me thinking. I feign ignorance, a look of startled bewilderment covers my face. I saw you looking at it, she says. You knew already, anyway, remember? I got it from you. The other night, when I stopped by.

How could I forget? I'm two weeks out of rehab and she comes by asking for pot. Not that pot's my problem — it isn't. I prefer the harder stuff. I've always treated weed as a cash crop. Yeah I smoke like a chimney, but I treat it like a cigarette. I don't even feel it anymore really. It just helps to regularize things — breaking the day into sections with a healthy amount of spliffs. She, on the other hand, seems to view marijuana as some sort of evil temptress, come to lure me further into the dark side. Why she is impervious to its effects and therefore allowed to break her own rules has always been a mystery to me. Still, when she shows up and asks for drugs I can't help but remember how I felt the first time I met her, and I give in.

The clouds were purple with rain that day. Not angry or hung over, more like swelling with liquid due to kidney stones developed during a life of too much drinking. Sitting on the mountain top in my cow suit I thought about how much it would suck if one or all of these clouds passed their kidney stones. Then I would have been left on a mountain side with only two choices of apparel for the hike down: my birthday suit or a waterlogged, three hundred pound synthetic heifer skin. Of course, it may seem silly that I wore the cow suit in the first place, but not to me. It's one of my favorite outfits to hike in, and will continue to be so until I manage to procure some sort of mountain lion get up. I enjoy dressing as wildlife and acting like a human — it elicits strange reactions from bystanders, human and otherwise.

One of the clouds let out a moan. I was jerked back to reality just in time to not get out of the rain. Unwilling to make the hike down with the added weight of my waterlogged apparel, I cut my losses and stuck the top half of the suit up in a tree. I'd come back for it later. I then proceeded to hike back down; half man, half aqueous bovine, if you will. I turned a corner in the trail and forded a small but swiftly moving creek.

The embankment on the opposite side of the creek was rather devoid of roots and therefore somewhat of a treacherous climb, however upon reaching the top and the continuation of the trail I found myself faced with a rather enchanting image. Two girls on a log. One looked odd and pretty, a curly red Mohawk zigzagging across the top of her head. The curls dangled in the breeze so as to soften the impact of the Mohawk on those she encountered. The other small and angry looking, like a constipated munchkin.

Oh look, someone's coming, the Mohawk giggled as I approached on the path. She farted and made attempts to waft the smell in my direction. She and the friend broke out into a fit of laughter — the friend going so far as to fall off the log and squirm in the mud.

Hullo, I said as they regained their positions on the log. Wonderful day to pas gas isn't it. Though smell doesn't seem to travel very well when it's so wet out. I raised a hand to the collect the water falling from the sky and then flung some playfully at the girls on the log.

Mohawk girl was amused. Howdy, home skillet, she stated emphatically. Home skillet. What a terrible nomenclature to be given by someone you think you may be attracted to. That almost did it. I almost cut my losses and continued my trot to the car.

However, just as I was turning on my heels she played to my most significant of flaws by starting a conversation concerned primarily with myself.

You live at the cow house don't you? She asked as I stopped in my tacks and turned to face her again.

Why yes, I do, I replied, a bit surprised at her knowledge.

Are you related to the cow in the yard? She asked, glancing sidelong at my splotchy, hooved legs.

I said that I wasn't, we were just friends. This in turn led to a brief conversation concerning how we might know each other.

I mentioned a few undesirables and the friend rolled her eyes. I could tell she thought I was a nut bag and not worth talking to. She was right. The Mohawk girl, unluckily enough for the both of us, did not share those feelings and continued to talk to me as her friend surged on ahead of us. An angry little woman, marching along arms swinging by her side. I thought to myself I had certainly made the right choice.

We had met before. I had seen her at parties, some of them at my house. She was a friend of friends. We had never been formally introduced. By this time our small group was nearing the bottom of the hill. I asked what she was doing for dinner and she said asparagus. A sort of non answer that seemed to say "not tonight, but keep trying." We reached the end of the trail and I turned towards her. As I faltered in coming up with parting words she took the initiative and mentioned how interesting she found me. She had seen my house, she said, and she wouldn't mind seeing it again.

This is weird. I say, snapping out of my recollection. I stand up to leave. She rises from her chair and moves close to me. I don't want you to go, she says and puts her

arms around me. Like a sign from above the withdrawals do their job and I start to puke. She gets hit by the first spurt, but dodges the rest. As I run to the bathroom, the insults start. The only thing right about us is how wrong we are for each other. Maybe we thrive on dysfunction. Locked in an endless downward spiral like two masochists in a bath tub with wrist guards and razorblades.

I know she still has problems. I know I still have problems. The difference is she lied. She lied about big things, not just being dope sick. Through all my bullshit I always told her the truth — when it mattered — no matter how fucked up it was. She was the liar. Lying about how much she cares, lying about not smoking, about being better than me. She uses me for nothing more than an emotional crutch — someone to make her feel better about herself. I'm never going to change and neither is she.

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Wed 3/25, 2:15 am

The bathroom door at the all-night diner slams behind me as I walk towards my seat at the counter, drying my clean hands on grimy, puke-stained jeans. I sit at the counter waiting for my pork chops and scrambled eggs. What the hell was I doing there in the first place? It's like I enjoy it. Every time I leave her house I feel like she's poked me full of holes, forced me to drink gallons of water, and laughed when I got all wet.

The enamel I've been picking at with my car keys gives way, making the carving of the counter top exponentially easier. Maybe she's right and this is all too much. I need this change in my life. Some sort of catalyst, the first grain of sand needs to fall through the hour glass. Could that grain of sand be sobriety? That's the angel on my shoulder talking. By the time my breakfast arrives two demons have ventured over from

the other side of my torso and successfully forced a sack over the head of the bothersome cherubim — silencing his ridiculous blabber of reason.

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Wed, 3/25 3:00pm.

I roll over in bed, pack a bowl, smoke it, and lie there for a few minutes, contemplating the day, the night before. My life as a whole. Exhaling a large cloud of smoke I grab the razor blade that sits next to my desk and begin to carve. The not so smooth sounds of Thelonious Monk reach my ears as I start to systematically peel away at the layer of enamel covering the fake wood that is my bedside table.

An out-of-tune trumpet blares and the razor blade touches the wood grain enamel. I pull it towards me and think about how much of a fucking nut job she is. She says I need to leave and move on and then freaks out when I do. All this passive aggressive bullshit. The blade sinks far into the pressboard.

Is she so perfect? The blade is becoming stuck due to the amount of pressure I'm applying. I take a deep breath and start over. From the top down I start a pyramid of bubbles. I would like to think these bubbles represent evil thoughts, and maybe they do. As I construct the pyramid I care more about the uniformity of the bubbles than the thoughts of her that are coursing through my brain. Eventually the thoughts of her are gone and I have found a temporary sort of peace. With the next set — a series of rectangles increasing in size — I started to think about other things that mattered. School. Rent. My parents. Paying the lawyer. All very important things that I cannot afford to forget due to some nutty love interest.

I used to carve on the walls at my parents' house. That's how it all started. Drunk, high, or just plain frustrated; slicing away at the shitty yellow paint that covered the walls of my room in the basement. It's not so much the carving as the designs, I think, that calms my mind. Interlocking shapes and lines, boxes and rough looking circles — circles are hard to make with a razor blade, the turns always end up too angular — the designs spelled out the nonsense in my head, made room for reason. In rehab I carved until they put me on suicide watch — In a brightly lit, empty room, with no books, pencils, nothing. In jail, after trading a pill I had up my ass for a blade, I began etching designs on the concrete wall, under the bed. They were rough, unfinished — unwelcome scratches on a hard and unfriendly wall. These etchings were my therapy, how I spent my day, how I avoided fights, or stayed away from drugs and anything else that might result in an extended stay.

When I started living in rentals, carving paint off the walls began to seem like a rather expensive habit. That's when I discovered how easily the fake finish peels off of the particle board that so much of my life is made out of. The desk: carveable. The bedside table: carveable. Dresser, bookshelf, probably about ninety percent of the furniture in the house — not counting couches and chairs.

This morning the bedside table is my canvas. Accepting the tortured patterns of my mind and displaying them in a sort of intricate dance — unimastakably something to the untrained eye, but most significant only to me.

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Wednesday, 4/27 Around mid-night

Work goes late tonight. The guests didn't leave till a little after midnight, which means I wouldn't get out until at least two. I never have a standard time of departure. Working at an event center, you typically have to stay as long as the people want to party. Tonight the wedding runs late. The guests were all hammered — big surprise. Love seems to have that effect on people, whether it's working out or not.

The last bag of trash flies from my hand and smacks into the dumpster. Glass shatters inside. I take a swig off my flask and sit down, out of sight behind the dumpster where no one will look for me. Glass crunches beneath my feet as I get comfortable in the crevice between the dumpster and the back wall of the center. The whisky stings my throat, and I contemplate smoking a bowl, but decide better of it.

I haven't talked to her for weeks. I like it. There's a new girl. She actually lives across the street from her — an added bonus. Creates jealousy and whatnot. This new girl is different, not so clean and proper and out to please. Doesn't shower much, dread locks — your typical dirty hippy. Comfortable in her own skin — even if it's the wrong skin. She knows who she thinks she is and doesn't waste time debating it. It also helps that we share the same pastimes. Our first date was the two of us curled up in a log smoking DMT and remembering why we were born.

A girl who likes to eat drugs without telling me how bad they are. This is something I have yet to encounter in my lifetime. I have a tendency to pursue the girls who want to make me into something better. They see me as a project. Perhaps I should continue in this vein of enablers — I seem to have better luck.

The van screeches to a halt. I can feel the gravel shift under the wheels. I get out and make a loud bird noise to let off some aggression. My boss — a small, leprechaun of a man with red hair, a pointy beard and pink shirt — clicks his heels and tells me I can leave after the next load, thank you sir. The van smells rank of barbecue and it doesn't help much when I spill a tray on the way back up. Distracted by a buzzing in my pocket I ran the van into a small ditch. Orange and red lights flashed in the interior of the van. Funny how the emergency lights work but the breaks don't. Chevy's really got their priorities in order, let me tell you what.

The buzzing starts again. I know it isn't Dread Locks. She doesn't call me much. I usually call her, and had already. I was going to meet her at her place around three a.m. when she got back from some trance party. I flip open my talking device and the words "ONE MISSED CALL" shine brightly on the screen. I click "OK" and the call log appears. "DON'T ANSWER" speaks loudly like the warning I had intended it to be. I throw the van into gear and smile inwardly at how terrible I am for myself, how crazy she makes me. The warning worked. I hadn't answered. That didn't mean I wouldn't call her back. I was terrible for myself, but what's so wrong with that?

After the auto accident I felt a little on edge. After he helped me get the van out of the ditch, I score some H from Juan the dishwasher and proceed to tie one off at the vacant cabins on the ridge. Blood rushes into the chamber as the plunger reaches the top and I think how great it would be if this was where I lived. I wouldn't have to worry about anything on top of a mountain. One time this lady said that to me. Told me she hated being around people, and she only came to town cause this was her niece's wedding. Worked for the man twenty seven years she had and now she owned her little

mountain top, or so she said. I said that was nice and she told me I'd have my own some day. She was sure of it.

Pictures of the future start to flood my dopefilled brain. There is a woman in it, faceless and without a name. I know not who she is, but what she represents. Just before the nods start I lunge forward in the rocking chair, empowered with some unknown desire to see what happens on the way to this future. I take out my phone and scroll to the Dont's.

As soon as the ringing stops the questions start. Where are you she asked in an accusatory tone.

Work. I reply in a flat, sedated voice. She asks what I'm doing later. I say nothing and she goes on about some stupid soup she made. I say I've got some places to go and she starts whining about how I'm gonna get there when she's already asleep. Juan says something to me in Spanish. I cut her off to answer him.

Who the fuck is that? She sneers into the receiver and proceeds to accuse me of being everything that I am. I hang up the phone.

By the time I get to Dread Lock's she's already asleep. I still haven't actually *slept* at her house. Not wanting to push it I pack my things, snort the part of the pill she didn't finish and quietly slip out the door and onto her porch. The lighter clicks shut and the smoke from my cigarette rises towards an eerie moonless sky. A small beam of light shines through the trees at the end of the yard. There are houses behind, a whole neighborhood actually, just through the trees. Many houses stand there, but only one knows me well.

Like a moth I walk towards the light — not sure whether I'm nearing a good situation or a bad one. I lose my footing and fall in the mud. My hands hit first and I feel the moist and cool grit of the grass ripped from the ground by my shoes. I feel this way a lot, when my life falls apart and I play with the pieces in my hand. Dirty, tattered, used up pieces that will eventually wither and turn brown, fueling the birth of something better — or at least different.

The light in her living room is on. I can see the T.V. screen through the window as I came to the edge of the trees. *Project Runway* re-runs, she's sure to be awake. Maybe this time I'll tell her. Tell her if she can't deal with all my shit than I'm done with this halfway stuff. She'll say how we're terrible for each other and we know it. That she wants me here for my company, not for anything romantic. I ring her doorbell and wait. As she takes ten minutes to answer the door I think about what a spoiled bitch she is, living in her parents five bedroom vacation house and refusing to share it with her vagabond boyfriend. She answers the door and lets me in. Dropping my bag by the brass lion guarding the doorway, I head to the kitchen. She lags behind.

Are you sure you don't want to sit in the living room, she asks, perhaps sensing what lies ahead. She doesn't want to follow me into the kitchen because that's where we have all our bad fights. If we're in the kitchen at the same time, something bad will inevitably come up, it's just in the atmosphere. I can bring you a drink in here, she tries again, starting into the living room. I press on towards the kitchen, unwilling to succumb to her efforts to delay the inevitable.

I stand by the breakfast bar. She's making coffee. "Thresher" by Neil Young plays in the background. My legs are restless — the hit I got from Juan earlier is starting

to wear off. I want to be high so bad — I would wrestle a thresher for a fix, spinning metal blades and all. Suddenly I get the feeling that the situation isn't right. The atmosphere is too tense with apprehensive grief on her part and guilt on mine.

I am not me, and she is not her, everything is wrong. The emotions are in control, they needed to be dulled, but there is no way to accomplish this, trapped in her suburban kitchen ten miles from a fix. The track lights mounted on the ceiling start to give me a headache; I decide to get it over with. I tell her I have to stop this, that it isn't healthy. She looks at me like a baby seal might look at the person who is about to club it. A face that begs for your soul on a silver platter. A face that makes the prospect of living the rest of your life as her depressingly sober and mentally abused love slave somewhat appealing. This makes me angry and I start to throw insults—bringing up the guy from the summer before and the mysterious lack of condoms in her dresser drawer.

She doesn't want to listen, only fight back. She's prepared, too—asking me about the girl across the street and the naked pictures in my phone. She hardly even seems mad, but that's on purpose. She loves to make me feel like shit. Like I'm the one with all the problems. I've had enough of this. I move for the door, ready to forget. Her coffee cup flies past my head and shatters on the wall. Instantly regretting her action, she moves in front of me. I pick her up and placed her gently to one side, as one would move a box or a statue that stood in their way.

On the way to the car I think I might go wake Dread Locks up and see what happens. However, I really want a Vicodin and water and it might be better if I keep to myself that night. The best response to the situation is one of utter intoxication. Nine whiskey gingers and two Vicodin and waters later and I have sufficiently forgotten what I

meant to forget. Now, in the morning, with a fairly level head, I carve, and I remember. After a night out, I feel terrible. However, I am finished forgetting, and that is the hard part. The remembering is in process, and the healing will follow. The blade I am using is dull and warped. I can't find the titanium one I stole from Lowes, what a pity. This bears a sort of resemblance to my current situation, however. Oh, well, the dull blade makes easier curves anyway.

*The Bright Eyed Chronicles: Tales of the Captain*

The Captain didn't remain in control for long. At one point, just before we officially graduated, he applied for a job with benefits, working in a chemical warehouse. As would be expected, the job required that he pass a drug test, and this meant smoking less weed. To Max, the remedy to this problem was easy.

"I need that whole bottle," he said as he slammed a dirty, unorganized fist of bills onto the table.

"This one?" I replied, holding up quart sized jar with upwards of fifty doses in it.

"That oughta do it," he nodded, licking his lips. I could see the wheels in his head starting to turn.

"You know you can't take that shit every day, right?" I knew it was a stupid question. He knew he couldn't, not every day.

"Uh Uh." The Captain shook his head as he fought to unscrew the top on the jar of pills. He looked comical to me — underweight in an overlarge Hawaiian shirt, giant wire rimmed glasses and a stereotypically Jewish nose and eyebrows. He finally got the jar open and proceeded to dose himself with three. I usually took one at the most. I shot him a slightly disapproving look.

"It's cool, I've got everything under control. I'm the Captain, motherfucker, and don't you forget it!" I didn't feel like arguing. Looking down at his small frame, his beady eyes made to look huge by his glasses, I thought to myself that I could crush him. I could have pounded his head in right there and probably would have been a lot better

off for it too. But I didn't. I just shook my head and clicked my tongue. I never was good at standing up to my friends, even when I thought it might do them some good.

I got the call to pick him up at battle zone around eleven at night on a Saturday. I was at my girlfriend's, pretending I didn't do drugs. The phone rang while I was in her hot tub; she brought it to me with a towel. I fumbled, almost dropping the phone in the tub. Jen didn't know it, but I was faced: three Percocet's and a tab of blue acid to the wind, and I barely made it to her house. She asked if I was alright and I said yes, more interested in answering the phone. When I answered I could hear gunshots and lasers in the background.

"I told you not to call me here," I said, a little perturbed. "I've got the prepaid, you can call that."

"You didn't answer." Max's voice was frantic, uncontrolled. He was most certainly not the Captain.

"How did you get this number anyway?" I wasn't ready to deal with him yet.

"Database. Her dad's a gamer. Comes in on Sundays. Calls himself Hellraker — DIE NAZI SCUM!!!" — I could hear lasers and bomb sound effects in the background. "You wanna come get me man?" Max continued, more lasers in the background. The phone was muffled as Max presumably held it between his face and shoulder. "I'm really flippin' out here," he went on, breathing heavily. This was no surprise. I'd been getting these calls about once every two weeks since I sold him his second bottle. Most of the time he could handle himself, but occasionally, when the end

of a binge coincided with a double shift at Battlezone, things got ugly. He sounded more depressed than freaked out, so I figured he was just low on serotonin.

On the way to battle zone I stopped at GNC to grab some 5htp. Luckily, the receptionist was the cute girl that knows me, and she gave me a few off the top of the whole sale crate for free. “When you gonna call me?” she asked as I walked towards the door. She had a smirk on her face as she said it. Like she was daring me not to.

“I’m just a busy man, that’s all,” I said, shaking the pill bottle in my hand and slapping my wallet pocket with the other. She rolled her eyes and walked back behind the counter. As I left the store my cell phone started buzzing, it was Jen. I pressed ignore and smiled to myself. I’d talk to her later, this qualified as work.

From the outside, Battlezone looked normal — the corner unit of a large, brick shopping center located in front of one of those pre-fab upper middle class neighborhoods that are all too popular in Raleigh. The only thing that might hint at the type of madness found inside was the giant mural of a scuba diver. What does scuba diving have to do with laser tag? I’ll never know.

I walked through the front doors and a wall of cacophonous, pre-teen screaming met my ears; I inserted my ear plugs. The usual prick was working the front desk, chatting up some underage girl who no doubt thought he was just soo cool he got the high score in all of today’s rounds. Most of time he makes some attempt at telling me I have to pay, but I don’t listen. Max is in charge, and once I find his disheveled ass, it won’t matter what the pedophile at the front desk says. On my way to the arena I accidentally plow through a group of small children. Their mom gives me a disapproving look. I keep

walking and she keeps staring. “Hey, what’re you gonna do?” I say, turning on my heel to face her. “Tell ‘em not to be me when they grow up. Then they won’t get high, or have any fun, and Jesus will be their number one priority.” The mom looked at me, her head cocked to the side with her mouth slightly agape. Her left hand reached for her purse as her right ushered the three kids behind her legs.

“Well I know he’s *my* number one priority, that’s for sure,” said Jason, one of the owners, as he seemingly appeared from behind an arcade machine. He ran one hand through his short cropped hair, and presented the soccer mom with the other, apologizing profusely for any inconvenience I might have caused. “I really don’t know what got into him, he’ll be sent home immediately.”

“How are you gonna do that, Dickcheese?” I spat at him. “I don’t even work here,” Jason’s cheeks began to redden, and it looked like he was starting to say something. “Shows what kind of ship you’re running here, doesn’t it? You don’t even know who works for you when you live right the fuck upstairs.” With that I ducked through the small, hidden door next to the pinball machine that led to the arena.

Once inside the ear plugs were little help. I found myself bombarded by an array of colorful lasers and a barrage of war themed sound effects. Max was curled up in a hole behind one of the false walls the gamers use to ambush birthday parties that don’t know the ropes. When I found him he was muttering to himself and frantically pressing the self destruct button on his vest. He looked up at me with pale, watery eyes.

“Time to go,” I said turning my head slightly to the side. I didn’t like to look at him when he was in this state. I’d been there, feeling hopeless and terrible, like some child abandoned in the snow. I led Max out of the maze by his vest, he was rather brain-

dead the whole time, following me like a mindless drone. He even ran into a wall once when we came around the corner, just kept on walking forward, expecting me to turn for him. We made it into the equipment room and he silently hung his pack in the glass case with the name word CAPTAIN spray painted in yellow on the top. I went for the door, but he just collapsed into a corner, hugging his knees and rocking back and forth. I let him sit there for a while. I thought this might happen, so I had brought a headlamp and a book. We were in that room for forty-five minutes until Jason kicked us out because he had a birthday party scheduled. While we were going to the car he kept shouting about how this was the last straw, and he'd really need to talk to Max in the morning. I knew he was full of shit — the place would close without Max, drugged up or not, he was the only one who knew what he was doing.

In the car on the way back to his apartment, Max fell asleep. When we got there I woke him up and fed him 1000mics of 5HTP. He veged on the couch for a few hours while I played some first person shooter on the computer he'd dropped the bulk of his inheritance money to build. Every now and then I'd run down to the parking lot to do a deal or two. Normally, I'd just tell them to come up and take care of everything inside, but Thomas could be home any minute, and I didn't want to jeopardize Max's living situation.

By midnight Max was back to normal and wanted to eat some more. We all ate some — Thomas, Max and Lampshade and me. I ate about fifteen mics, everyone else about forty.

“It's time to go!” The Captain was out the window in a flash, completely missing the balcony and landing in an awkward roll at the bottom of the building, about fifteen

feet below. I thought for a second he might be hurt, but the thought was neutralized as I watch him get to his feet and start a mad dash across the parking lot to the 24-hour Gas-and-Go on the other side of the road. I turned back away from the window and looked around the room I was standing in. Lampshade sat in the computer chair, back to the screen, focused more on the powerball — a glowing blue strength toy — he had in his hand.

“Been doin’ this for a while,” he said in a low voice. “Arms about to fall off. Gotta love this power ball, I can’t wait till I get the chance to choke a motherfucker.” I heard a crash from the back room and Thomas emerged with a cardboard box on his head and a flower pot in his right hand. He was complaining that he couldn’t get his weed out — we’d been through this before — and I told him to just put it down and we’d fix it in the morning. He threw the watering can at me and grabbed the lamp next to breakfast bar at his right. After a miserable attempt at making the lamp into a dance partner, Thomas settled for pinning it against the wall and humping it until he fell over in a fit of laughter. The laughs quickly deteriorated into hiccups. I looked at Lampshade, he shrugged his shoulders and kept spinning the powerball. I heard a noise at the front door down the hall to the left and soon enough The Captain burst through the door, waving a bag full of burritos and frozen personal pizzas.

“Lampshade!” The Captain shouted in an authoritative voice. “How much does a human baby weigh?” He stopped at the edge of the kitchen, leaning on the counter and staring at Lampshade across the room.

“What?” The powerball stopped spinning in Lampshades hand. He stared back at The Captain with doubt in his eyes.

“How much does a human baby weigh?” The reply was slow. Deliberate. Lampshade shrugged and turned to the computer.

“Average is seven pounds,” he replied after a moment. “Why the fuck do you need to know?”

“This burrito is larger than a human baby.” The Captain pulled a large, torpedo shaped object from the bag and held it out so that we could all bask in its bean filled glory. “The Bomb Burrito. Eight Pounds of meat and beans, more than an average human baby, is about to be put into my stomach,” A huge grin spread across The Captain’s face as he said it. Thomas moaned in the corner where he was wedged in a very uncomfortable looking manner — his arm up behind his head, and his whole torso kind of shoved up into the corner with his legs out behind — chewing on the lamppost. He moaned something about being hungry and the Captain hurled a pizza in his direction. The night had taken a turn—it was time to eat.

“Remove from box, microwave for five and a half minutes, let cool, and eat that shit,” the Captain said curtly as he turned away from the microwave. It was a good ten minutes before Thomas managed to get himself up and away from the lamp, and another fifteen before he figured out how to microwave the pizza. By the time it came out of the microwave — piping hot and rubbery — he was more than significantly nauseous due to the tremendous amount of physical effort involved in the making of the pizza. The Captain, by this time, was seated comfortably on the couch; half of the burrito had made it in to his stomach, the other half rested in his lap. His head swiveled back and forth, surveying the room. He was no longer focused on hunger, he could have fun again. By this time, Thomas had finished inhaling the pizza and was dragging his body in a low,

reptilian crawl towards the middle of the room. Once he had reached this destination he paused, folded his legs beneath him and started to reel back and forth in a motion that strongly resembled some sort of bobble head doll.

\ I could tell it was coming before it happened. The reeling was my first clue, then Thomas started to moan about a goat in his belly that wanted to tear his intestines out. He started to pound on his stomach. Doubling over, his face contorted with effort as all the muscles in his body tightened and he started to spasm. With each jerk, his body came closer to expelling what it sought to, and after a matter of seconds the pizza, which had been piping hot and presentable a moment before was sitting in the middle of the carpet; reconstituted into an inch high pile of red and yellow goop.

Unwilling to clean up the foul pile of reconstituted, semi-nutritious food substitute, I went onto the balcony to smoke a cigarette. While I was out there I heard the Mexicans below. They were having a party, I could hear the mariachi music from here. They were a family — two kids and six adults — and they had great cocaine. I remember thinking that I should go see if they had any when Lampshade opened the door and asked me if I had a shovel in my car.

I walked back into the room to find the Captain industriously crafting a scooping device out of the little cardboard trays that come with the frozen pizzas for coking them in the microwave.

“As you can see,” Lampshade said, waving his arm in a sweeping motion across the scene in front of us. “Max is trying...” he was laughing now as he said it, hunched over and grinning from ear to ear. “...to fashion some sort a shovel out of cardboard.” He finished, shaking his head and sitting back down at the computer.

“It’s the Captain, thank you!” The reply came fast and hard across the room, the Captain looking up, fixing Lampshade with a cold stare as he said it — his eyes wide and wild, full of purpose and validation, but unsure what it was really for. “More importantly,” the Captain went on, “What are we gonna do about this?” He looked towards Thomas who was sitting next to the pile of puke on the floor haphazardly scooping it with the pizza trays.

“This isn’t working,” he whined, as he held the limp pieces of cardboard in his hand, puke dribbling onto his leg.

The Captain looked at the rug, up to me, then over to Thomas. “I’m sayin’, fuck the rug man.” Thomas cocked his head to the side raising his hands towards his face he managed, after considerable effort, to utter the word “What?”

The Captain bent down, hands on his knees, looking Thomas straight in the face, “I’m *saying* FUCK. THE. RUG. You know?” He paused for a moment, there was no response from Thomas other than a blank stare. Lampshade was giggling in the background, powerball still spinning in his hand. “Let’s just toss the shit. We’re moving soon. I don’t want it and neither do you, right?” Thomas shook his head. “All right,” The Captain continued, “Let’s get this shit outside then.” With that he grabbed the edge of the rug as Thomas scrambled to move out of the way. Within minutes the rug was rolled and ready to be taken out to the dumpster. The rug was too big for just Thomas and the Captain — Lampshade crossed his arms and stood giggling in the corner, refusing to help — so I put a shoulder underneath the foul smelling afghan and we started our perilous journey to the parking lot.

The apartment was located on the top floor, and the only way down was a set of rickety wooden stairs. The parking lot was surprisingly busy for four o'clock in the morning. A white van playing Arabian music drove past us slowly — the driver mean mugging us like you wouldn't believe — and the Mexicans from the party below shouted something in Spanish as we trudged past their balcony. I'm not good with Spanish, but I'm pretty sure he was offering us a line. The Captain, however, thought he heard different and immediately began concocting a reality in which the Mexicans, Arabs, and everyone else in the apartment complex was out to get us.

“You know what it looks like we're doing, don't you?” his words were frantic, not quite the Captain, not quite Max. You could tell he was losing control. Thomas moaned the word “body,” I remained silent.

“It looks like we're carrying a fucking body to the dumpster,” Max completed the sentence. I could tell he was Max because his shoulders slumped a little. The confidence was completely gone from his voice and he had even dropped his end of the rug slightly, as if he had suddenly lost his resolve. We had stopped about halfway to the dumpster when Max had the realization about the appearance of the rug.

We stood in the middle of the parking lot, swaying back and forth in almost perfect unison, holding a rug on our shoulders at an increasingly downward angle. I was in the front, Thomas behind me and Max behind him. Max's end was completely collapsed at this point, as he was now disillusioned with his idea to move the rug, and heading towards crisis mode. Thomas was doing his part, but still obviously too drunk and high to be doing any sort of strenuous physical labor. By the time he and I had managed to drag the rug the remaining three hundred yards to the dumpster, Max had lost

it. Closing the door to the large metal receptacle, I turned to see Thomas pointing in the direction of the bushes, where Max was crouched low, muttering something I couldn't make out from across the parking lot.

“They sent the fucking clowns,” Max said in a low, depressed voice. The words were not muffled, but definite and depressed. He said the words without looking at me. Instead he sat, staring into the parking lot with dead eyes. “See. There.” He pointed to a beat up Geo at the left corner of the parking lot, in front of one of the other buildings. “They’re convening behind that. Every now and they’ll pop out—see, there’s one, with the umbrella, over there.” I didn’t see anything, but Max was obviously distraught. From Max’s position and slight movements backward I could only infer that the clowns were on the offensive, leaving the cover of the car and approaching our position at a steady pace. I tried to help Max to a better position behind the stairs where I could convince him that the clowns were all in his head, but before I could get him any significant distance from the pinto he bolted at it, his head lowered in a ramming position. With a sickening thud his head made contact with the rusted side panel and he rolled to the side, rubbing his forehead and looking around rather confused for a second. It did not take long for him to regain his composure and scramble to his feet, looking back in my direction and then sprinting out of the parking lot and across the street. The last I saw of Max that night was the flash of a headlight on his bright green tennis shoes as they followed the rest of his body into a drainage ditch.

Before I could say anything, I heard Lampshade shout a warning from the balcony above me as Thomas wobbled drunkenly across the road — his hands held up in a

pretentious, girly manner, and his tongue lolling out to the side — to me he looked like some sort of rabid dog.

Six hours later I rolled over on the floor. Opening my eyes I was confronted with the image of a large watering can and an overpowering aroma of marijuana. After helping myself to some of Thomas's stash, I checked my messages and found out that, miraculously, Thomas and Max were fine, and had been discovered in the kitchen of a mutual friend's parent's at six in the morning trying to fry eggs without a pan. They were currently complaining about not having transportation and wanting waffles. The message had been left about thirty minutes prior, so I figured I would still be able to find them at Brian's parents, where they had no doubt overstayed their welcome.

I pulled up to the oversized house on an undersized lot in one of those treeless suburban neighborhoods. Thomas was on the porch, napping with a lit cigarette in his left hand, his head lolling to the right. I found Max inside situated in front of the families computer. Dr. Junto and his wife stood behind him. The doctor had his arms crossed, his wife was tapping her foot and playing nervously with her hair. They both glanced in my direction as I walked through the door and into the living room situated to the right of the entrance hall. From the look on their faces I could see that sitting down and having a conversation and a cup of tea was out of the question. Instead I grabbed Max by the collar and pulled off of the piano bench in the direction of the door.

"I guess I'll finish with the rest of 'Moonlight Sonata in G' later," Max said, the screen door slamming shut behind us. Whether he knew it or not, he had been playing chopsticks, not Beethoven's best. On the way to Your House Diner for waffles, bacon and a side of pork brains for Max — I don't know how he eats that shit, especially being

Jewish — Max fell asleep in the backseat and Thomas lost himself counting how many cars passed that were made before 1995. I lit a cigarette as I waited at the stoplight about a half mile from the diner. Max mumbled something in his sleep about a battlebeast. To me, that's the happiest he ever seemed. The light changed and Thomas started to laugh uncontrollably. I smiled and accelerated past the GM kit car that had caused him to do so.