

DESCENT

Written by Erik Smith

Edited by Beth Smith

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Front and Rear Covers by Erik J Smith

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<http://pondbrain.com/descent>

This book has not been professionally edited. I apologize.

ALL CHARACTERS IN THIS BOOK ARE FICTITIOUS.

ALL RESEMBLANCE TO ANY PEOPLE OR EVENTS IS COMPLETE COINCIDENCE.

Story based in the "Pondiverse" Alternate History Timeline.

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Nine Inch Nails . <http://nin.com>

Daveed Diggs . <http://www.daveeddiggs.com>

Marilyn Manson . <http://www.marilynmanson.com>

Sublime . <http://sublimelbc.com/#>

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Notorious B.I.G. . <http://www.notoriousonline.org>

Ice Cube . <http://icecube.com>

Squarepusher . <http://www.squarepusher.net>

Pinionist . <http://www.pinionist.net>

Aphex Twin . <https://warp.net/artists/aphex-twin>

Autechre . www.ae-store.ws

Symphony of Noise . <http://symphonyofnoise.com>

I wasn't keeping track as I wrote the book. The above list may be short.

Descent . Note From The Author

Thanks to everyone who helped read through and pick out things that desperately needed changed. This book has not been edited professionally, so I apologize in advance for anything that doesn't make sense. My grammar isn't always the best, and I apologize.

For clarity, the italic text are thoughts from the first person. This book is written in First Person, from the perspective of James Freeman. I added this note because a couple people weren't clear on that, and I am a fan of clarity. I hope you enjoy!

Regarding editing, I had a small army of proof readers and early readers giving feedback. They helped me find errors and format problems. We may have missed things, as none of them were or are editors. Nor did I ask any of them to analyze it with an editorial eye. I requested any glaring problems be reported. I know it will be painful for so-called 'grammar Nazis' to read this without wincing from time to time. Perhaps one day there will be funding to pay for a professional editor. But for now, I hope it is polished enough for even the grammar Nazis to enjoy. <3

Thanks

Beth, Jami, Josh, Courtney, Greg, Ryan, Bill, Katy, Nate, Jon, Natalie, Josie, James, John, David, Mark, Scott, and everyone else who helped proof read and give feedback along the way. Without all of your help, this would never have been seen by the eyes of strangers.

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Descent . Preface

I feel your presence. My focus shifts from the ceiling fan to the bedroom door on the center of the wall to my right. *Things are pretty interesting, I tell you. I don't remember if I locked the door. It's okay though. I've had a good bit to drink and I'm a little tipsy. I'm not drunk, by any means. I know I can get up at any time and walk without any fear of falling. I'm certain I appear sober to anybody that would observe me or engage me in conversation.*

I do feel your presence, though. How are you? My focus moves from the bedroom door to the closet doors on the left half of the wall directly across the bedroom. While waiting for a response I look over the wide dresser between the closet doors and the wall to my right. There is a high and wide mirror on the wall between the wide dresser and the ceiling. *I don't hear a response, so if you answered me I apologize.*

My name is James Freeman. It's nice to have somebody with me. I've always had thoughts that some people can view life through another's eyes. Never really thought it would be the mind's eye, though. My focus now shifts from the far wall to the California King bed in the center of the room. The head of the bed is between the two windows on the wall to the left. There are eight or ten feet of floor space on either side of the bed and a good four feet between the foot of the bed and the wall. The wall to the right has some portrait arrangements of various people in the Burk family.

You've joined me in the middle of a house party. I hope you enjoy watching what's going on through my eyes. If you're an authority figure, or whatever, please don't use me to get anybody here in trouble. The people running the party make sure that anything going wrong gets corrected. If people don't want to stop being assholes or try stealing anything or hurt anyone, they get removed. It doesn't matter what's going on and who's having fun themselves between those of us who care – someone WILL stop the fun they're having and fix a problem.

I realize I've been staring at the portraits of the Burk family for a creepy amount of time and my gaze returns to the ceiling fan. *I'm not very worried, though. I do find it amusing how, depending on how you look at it, the ceiling fan seems to be moving at different speeds. Anyway, I know I'm a little strange. And I don't hear or see any sort of response from you. I'm probably just going crazier than I already am and don't realize it.*

Crazy. That's relative. I find religion to be pretty crazy. This one believes in a person that created everything in seven days? I mean, EVERYTHING? Everything in space and on earth? Another fully believes a guy had gold plates with scripture on it that only he saw, yet dictated it to someone who wrote it all down? And nobody worries that the gold plates just disappeared, apparently? What about Scientology? WRITTEN BY A FORMER SCIENCE FICTION WRITER? HELLO? IS ANYONE LISTENING? Whatever.

I find myself excessively sane compared to all religions I'm aware of. But that's another story. I feel like I'm talking to myself. As that thought crosses my mind, I feel a warm hand on each thigh. If I wasn't aware of what was going on, the two hands making contact with me would seriously freak me out.

I should explain what's going on here so it makes more sense. Not overall, just at this moment. You see, five months or so ago I was at a different party. A friend of a friend named Tamara was complaining to my friend Jean about being bad at blowjobs. Jean was trying to comfort her and ask about the issues she thinks she has. Tamara said her mouth is just too small.

Jean comforted her and told her she just needs practice. Tamara responded with a laugh and saying if she only had a realistic flesh dildo to work with. Jean said she has one she could use whenever she wanted. Tamara said it would be strange but I want to learn. Jean pointed at me and said "He's clean, and he's nice enough to not expect anything."

I jumped out of my skin but the whole thing unraveled one after another. I didn't mind. I would stop her and work with her while she was doing it. At first she was tooth heavy and it was entirely because of the angle she placed her head. Once she got the hang of angles, she was quite good. After that, Tamara told a couple of her friends about it.

The deal that is made going into this is I won't take advantage of the situation to get sex out of it. Even if they are so turned on in the middle of it that they start begging for it. Tamara and I agreed to that and even still, half way through she wanted to fuck. I think that was part of what inspired her friend to push through her nerves and approach me. I also think that helped make others feel safe to do the same.

I had worries of STDs. I brought it up with Tamara and I brought it up with everyone after. I choose to trust them when they say they've been

careful and have had tests show negative. One recently admitted she has one so I respectfully declined to take part. It felt a little strange. I think it was the right thing to do and stand by it.

One of Tamara's friends wanted to borrow me later on. Then a different friend after that. Over the past five months I tutored several through getting better at handling a larger penis orally. Right now I am with Karen. She's used me a few times for practice. She has built quite the skill set since our first time doing this. I'll stop rambling as I'm starting to have trouble focusing on this explanation.

Descent . Practice

I admire her beautiful blonde hair as her head tilts to the side. It is soft and just past the tops of her shoulders. There are bleach white streaks through the layers, giving it more visual texture. She keeps brushing it back behind her ears as various strands find freedom before her face.

I see her look up at me out of the corner of her eye. I reach out to run my right pointer finger down her jawline. Her breath increases slightly. I take a moment to observe her beautiful shoulders and breasts. Her shoulders are fairly large for female shoulders, though wonderful in form. Her breasts are large, though perky and fit her curves and frame. She leans forward, balancing herself with her left hand on my right thigh and wraps her right hand around the base of my fully erect penis.

I feel anxious as she leans forward, opening her mouth. She stops as her lips meet the head of my dick. I rest my hands on her shoulders and lean my head back, closing my eyes. Her body squirms as the tip of her tongue flicks on the shaft just below the head. I notice she pauses every time I touch or caress her.

I stop teasing her and let her focus on the task at hand. She shifts her weight a little onto differently positioned legs and moves her left hand to gently cup my balls. Her hands which were cold earlier are now warm after the short time on my thigh. Her breathing slows down as she slowly runs her tongue from the base of my dick up to the head.

She rises up and I get nervous thinking she's going to try to transition to sex. For some reason I'm comfortable getting blow jobs and am more than happy giving oral back if requested. She told me earlier that she wants to practice using a dick of my size because she is confident that if she can do well with me, she can do better with people down the road.

My train of thought gets derailed when her surprisingly perky breasts end up on each side of my dick. She leans forward and kisses my stomach as she moves her hands onto the outsides of her breasts to apply pressure against my dick, now between them. She nibbles on me while she starts moving them up and down the length of my shaft.

I chose the word surprisingly before perky because she's fairly chubby in the hips and midsection. And I'm very superficial when it comes to appearance. I'm not proud of it but I feel honesty is always the best policy. She smells amazing though and I've been talking to this girl for most of the party. I must say, her shape is excellent. Chubby doesn't matter with the ass she has and her smile. The dimples in her cheeks, which have high cheekbones, are appealing to me as well. And like I said, the upward point of her nipples, 45 degree angle down on the tops of her

breasts and full quarter spheres underneath are just astoundingly appealing.

Focus becomes difficult again as she moves her mouth back down to the job. She uses her lips and wraps them around the bottom half of my dick. She moves them from the bottom of the head down to the shaft and back again. After her lips get back up to the head, her hands return to the base and balls. Her mouth opens and she takes the head in.

“Are you enjoying this so far?” she asks, voice a little deeper than I recalled it being earlier. I think quickly of how to respond in a way that I hope alleviates any possible discomfort or questions about her performance. Just in case that’s the reason her voice sounds deeper.

“Every step of the way!” I say, caressing her shoulder again in an attempted soothing way rather than a rude ‘shut up and blow me’ kind of gesture.

Her stunning smile spreads across her face again as she leans forward, mouth open. She takes a little more than the head into her mouth. I try to hide my rising nerves by focusing on the facial expressions I make. My nerves are high during blow jobs because I have had too many people scrape far too much, too many times. I really don’t blame anybody who does. I have a thicker than average penis and I understand that. It’s not soda can thick. I don’t know many people who would even attempt a blow job on a dick as thick as a soda can. But the base is as wide as the narrow side of a credit card, and it’s as long as two of them end to end.

Again my focus wanes as I notice she is joining the rest with inability to keep teeth off skin. I’ve had a few use teeth in a teasing and gentle way. A good pain kind of way. But often it’s failed attempts at only lip contact, as is the case in this situation. It is easy enough to ignore though with the skill possessed in her hand work. Her handiwork, if you will.

One hand is going back and forth between massaging my balls and gripping my inner thigh as she writhes a little. The other is gripping my base as she either pulsates her grip or slowly jerks up and down. Instinctively one of my hands moves from her shoulder down to a breast. On the way I brush my fingertips over her skin in an attempt to give her a little thrill.

Fortunately the thrill translated into a pleasurable and quiet moan in her throat. Unfortunately it disrupted her concentration just enough to get a good scrape in a couple inches down my shaft. My immediately opened eyes and looking forward appears to confirm to her any possible suspicions about what just happened. She slowly slips her mouth off me and whispers “Sorry” as she returns the head and part of my shaft into her mouth. I quietly say “it’s fine” and gently massage her breast. I smile

and watch as she slips her lips up and down over the top third of my shaft, slowly increasing the speed and length of shaft the hand on the base massages.

I slide my left hand from her shoulder to her neck and start very gently teasing the nape of her neck behind her ear as her head starts rotating a little with every rise and fall. She's so focused now she doesn't break stride, but groans in approval of my teasing. My right hand still massaging her left breast, I feel her tongue starting to work my boner more as she keeps at it. I brush my hand over her now rock hard nipples, pleased with all of this turning her on as well.

I must squeeze her breast a little too hard as I near orgasm because she shifts her body to slip it out of my hand. She intuitively starts gripping the base harder in one hand and massages the balls in her other a little more quickly. I close my eyes after I move both hands to her biceps and squeeze a little as she starts humming. This pushes me over the edge and as the first pump from my balls hits her mouth she pulls away. Before my brain can register her mouth released, the hand working the base starts pumping the entire bottom half of my dick with the perfect amount of pressure and speed. My balls pulse several times as I hear her moaning quietly in approval. Her now free hand massages my balls as the final several pulsations of my orgasm conclude.

Once I finish I open my eyes and realize she made me cum all over her chest. The smile on her face as both of her hands now on my slowly decreasing erection twisted and massages onward.

"That was damn good, Karen" I say as I try to regain composure.

"Thank you," she says sincerely as she leans forward to brush my dick with her breasts. "Even with all the scraping?" she asks with concern. She stands up and looks around the room.

"Use my boxers," I say instinctively. "Even with all the scraping. You're great with your hands, really," I respond, trying to comfort her. She looks at me quizzically before picking up the boxers. "It's ok, I have enough to spare," I assure her.

She leans forward and takes my boxers off the floor near the couch I'm sitting on. She starts cleaning off her breasts as she sits down next to me. "Sorry if this was too forward," she says softly with a smile.

"I expect nothing less," I say while meeting her smile. "I've gotten used to anybody who knows Jean being entirely honest and saying anything that comes to mind."

Her smile moves in a slightly more devious direction as she asks "How did you know I was Jean's friend?"

"This is her party," I respond. She doesn't say anything more as she starts rubbing her clit through her jean shorts.

I realize the blinds on the window in this room are open. I wouldn't

say I'm paranoid. I would however say that I always like to try and be aware of anyone who is in line of sight of me. Or anyone who could be. I check to see if there's any cleanup required on my end and realize she did a really good job of getting all of it on her. I look and realize her shorts have been unzipped and her hand is now more directly working her clit. She notices me observing her and smiles. I return the smile and my gaze returns to her breasts.

"Sure you don't want to fuck?" she says, gaze returning to my now only half hard penis.

"Yes I'm sorry, I know I'm weird about that," I say, feeling slight remorse over my decision.

She makes a moaning sound and nods as her back arches, fingers working fast and hard under her panties.

I lick my lips and say "Want me to return the favor?"

"No," she says in almost a pant. My eyebrow goes up a little in confusion. "I know I need a shower first," she barely gets out before her hips start gyrating a little against her own fingers.

"Then let me help in this way," I say as I move closer to her, leaning in towards her neck. She leans her head away from me giving me better access. I balance myself with my left hand between her right arm and side and start lashing at her neck with my tongue. I feel the couch shaking as she thrusts her fingers into her. I pull her a little closer as I suck harder on her neck - but out of respect not hard enough to leave a mark.

"Nice," she mutters as I can hear moisture building in her movements down below. I kiss and suck down to her collarbone, then nibble it gently for a little while. I feel her quivering hard and she moans quite loudly.

I shift my weight to my right hand and use my left to gently massage her breasts and tease her upper chest and other side of her neck with my fingertips. Her orgasm continues as her fingers are more still. I take her still rock hard nipple in my mouth and hold it gently between my lips. I lick her nipple through my lips and start sucking on her nipple gently. She moans fairly loud and starts slowing her finger action down.

With a deep satisfied sigh she says "Thanks, that wouldn't have been as good if you hadn't joined in."

I smile and say "It was the least I could do."

We both lean back on the couch peacefully for a few minutes. I start noticing the flat dark brown color of the couch isn't exactly flat. There are staggered diagonal designs that are very slightly different shades of dark brown every other thread. I start following the design from one side of the cushion next to me to the other, seeing if there is any

variation.

“Think anybody is still awake?” Karen asks, pulling me out of my analyzing.

“I hear music,” I respond. I slip my pants back on and walk over to look out the window. I don’t see anyone near the window though a few people could have theoretically watched what was going on from the pool, or the far side of the pool.

“I could use a few more drinks,” she says aloud as she picks up her bra. I look back quick to see those bare breasts before they’re covered once more. She catches the glance and wiggles a little, causing them to cutely shake around for a moment. I smile as she slips her bra on.

“ Seriously great tits. And there are a lot more people out back now,” I say. “I’m surprised nobody has come in this room.”

“Someone tried,” she says. “I locked the door. Plus thank you! Also, you didn’t hear someone try the handle?”

“No, I guess I was distracted,” I say with a smile.

“James, distracted?” she says with a laugh. “No way!”

I shake my head and smile. I look back out the window and notice our friend’s brother Galen.

“You have my number in your phone, right?” she asks.

“Naturally,” I say, reaching into my pocket to pull my phone out. Checking to see if I got her information saved I ask “were you planning to go with us to the nails concert in a few weeks?”

Karen shifts to thought for a second as she leans to tie her shoes. “No I have to work,” she finally answers.

“Damn,” I say. “It’s all good, let’s go get some more drinks!” She nods and tidies up her hair quick as she moves towards the door with me.

“I’m going to want to do this again to see if I can do it without scraping, you know,” Karen stresses as I reach out to open the door.

“Will you use the girls again?” I ask, smiling broadly and looking down at her chest.

“It’s a package deal,” she replies with a wide smile and flirtatious eyes.

Descent . Gathering

As soon as we exit the master bedroom one of the guys she was trying to avoid approaches to meet her. Before I can decide whether or not to help her, Jean intercepts him.

"That was close," Karen says as we both get to the ice chest full of beer in the middle of the family room. "Did you notice Mel around?"

"Melissa?" I ask.

"Yes, I didn't see her," she says opening a bottle of Zima.

"She was by the front door standing with a couple people I don't recognize," I say opening a bud light.

Karen leans forward and kisses my cheek and says "Thanks hun, later!" as she turns and heads down the stairs to the landing where Melissa is standing.

I watch her leave before exiting through the dining room to the back porch. Thankfully Galen was still standing on the porch and was easy to navigate to. Approaching him I see he's not engaged in or paying attention to the conversation the people he's standing with are having. He sees me and nods in acknowledgment

"Sup man," I say. A big grin spreads across his face and he motions for me to follow him more towards the hill which rises up sharply in his backyard.

His house is set up fairly wide and narrow. It is about thirty feet from front to back. From side to side, though, it is at least a hundred and twenty feet. The majority of the back yard has a half above, half below ground pool. Looking at the back of the house, there is a porch level with the right side of the pool. It wraps around the pool and has a good eight feet of space between the pool and the sides. On the left side of the house, there are stairs connecting the porch to the concrete patio outside of the living room.

There are stairs on the patio rising up to a sliding glass door off of the patio into the living room. There is also a sliding glass door up on the porch around the pool which goes into the dining room. Windows down the back of the house from right to left go to the dining room, kitchen, storage room, bathroom, master bedroom and living room. Walking to the front yard around the left side of the house there is a descent in the yard down to the driveway and the street. On the right side of the house there is another, more narrow sidewalk connecting to stairs down from the porch across from the dining room. The yard between the edge of the porch and the far hill is at least forty feet deep and probably a couple hundred feet from fence to fence, separating the neighboring yards. Currently the yard has several dozen people standing in groups of three to ten, with some scattered around on the porch and in the pool.

“How was Karen?” he asks with an even larger grin.

“Fuck man, does everybody know everything?” I say dipping into a quick laugh.

“No,” he says with a slight laugh. “But Jean does!”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” I say, surveying the growing crowd between our position and the back of the house. To my astonishment the yard seems mostly free of debris from what I can see between shifting people.

“So, how was she?” he repeats.

“Teeth man,” I say solemnly before taking another drink.

“Story of your life,” he muses. “Looking forward to the concert?”

“Man you have no idea,” I almost shout in excitement. “It’s been a year since they’ve been in Omaha and I haven’t gotten to see them yet!”

“That’s why I’m making sure you make it this time,” he assures me with his charming tilted smile. Galen is about six three with medium long blonde hair and tired but kind eyes. He has long arms and legs and he is very slender. He used to skate but still dresses the part. He stands tall but sometimes slouches when smoking. He’s wearing a slightly baggy Grateful Dead shirt and baggy jeans held up with a black belt. A thick chain comes out of his back pocket and attaches to a belt loop above his right front pocket.

“I appreciate it, man,” I say with adoration in my voice. I’ve known Galen and his sister for a couple years now. We’ve taken multiple opportunities to save each other from jams. I met Jean in high school and met him through her. From then on I’ve been introduced through their circles of friends and their friends’ circles of friends.

Before that I hopped from placement to placement in lockup. But as I got back into the swing of freedom I was very lucky to make friends with them. I have to admit I wouldn’t be having the fun I am right now without them. Though I feel I’ve paid back that benefit with bailing them out of multiple unfortunate situations. Perhaps that’s why I’ve been so openly welcomed further into related groups of friends.

“Shithead!” I hear sharply to my right out of the darkness. I jump a good two inches off the ground in total surprise. The voice I now recognize as Jean’s switches to heavy laughter. Galen joins her in laughing.

Jean is about five foot four and has brown eyes. Her hair has been dyed so many times nobody has any clue what the original color was. She has been doing it since she was eight and nobody can find any pictures of her from before the dye started. Even in the dark you can make out some purple and green shades. Most of it looks brown and black, as those were the most recent two shades dyed. She probably weighs 270 pounds or so, but you would never know it by the way she

acts. She's always up and moving around doing something. She can run as fast as me and takes longer to run out of breath than me. She has had several boyfriends and has no trouble at all attracting those she decides to go after. She's one of the coolest people I've ever met. When she smiles it's as bright as anybody else's ever has been. Her eyes light up like fireworks when she's excited or feeling ornery. She's a master practical joker.

"I hate you," I say breathing heavily. "Always fucking scaring me," I continue with a laugh of my own.

"She said you choked her!" Jean said. Galen stops laughing and his staple eyebrow raise met Jean's attention. "Not with his hands!" she said with more laughter.

Galen's face slowly rises with high amusement. When Galen's face lights up he instantly looks five years younger and it's a pretty awesome thing to witness. It has an almost cartoonish level of animation to it. "Nice!" he says loudly with several nods of his head.

My face turns deeply red. "I seriously didn't notice," I said. "She didn't deep throat so I am surprised she said that."

"You whore!" Jean says with a playful smile.

"Slut!" I respond with a laugh. "I am a slut, damn you! Whores charge money!" I continue.

"Did you at least eat her taco?" she asks. Galen laughs and puts his hand on my shoulder to balance himself as he drinks more from his glass.

"No, she said..." I trail off.

"Why!?" Jean interrupts.

"No, I offered," I say. "I did, but she didn't want me to." I decide not to throw in there that she didn't have a shower recently enough. I figure she was nice and more than chill enough to warrant me keeping that to myself.

"That's good, she probably tastes like feet anyway," Jean shares with another laugh.

"Why? Feet?" I ask, confused. *Now that I think about it. the smell when Karen started getting off did hit me as a little rank. But feet? No, no. Not feet. Not that bad.*

"They were at Westroads all day shopping," Jean adds. "She was dancing for a half hour before you showed up, too."

"Ahhh," I say in an almost sigh of relief. *I actually thought about just getting her shorts off and tongue wrestling Karen's clit without a word. Now I'm really glad I didn't do that.*

One of Galen's friends in the small group he was previously standing with motions for him to come back over with them and he obliges. As he walks away I realize my beer bottle is empty and Jean

suddenly looks worried.

“What’s wrong?” I ask.

“Patricia” Jean says in almost a whisper, raising her hand to point to someone walking down the sidewalk on the right edge of the house.

The beer in my hand now descends to my side as my jaw tightens.

“Want me to get rid of her?” Jean asks.

“No, I’ll be fine,” I answer.

“Alright, I’m going to get inside then,” Jean says with a sound of wanting to help still.

“It’s all good, I promise,” I said. “She’s calmed down since I broke it off.” Patricia and I had been dating for a while. I ended up breaking it off because I was getting into trouble with the antics she pulled me into constantly. I am not interested in getting back into the judicial system. I feared that if I kept things up with her that was more than a possibility.

“Alright,” Jean says as she turns. “Yell if you need us.”

Jean casually enters and somehow disappears into the groups of people between the hill and the house. I choose to stand with my empty beer in hopes Patricia doesn’t even notice me. Surveying the people, I start to notice the music has gotten louder but no lights have come on in nearby houses. *Normally I’m the type who would carefully ease towards the volume control and slowly turn it down to keep the party going as long as possible so police don’t show up. Not tonight. In fact, after work tomorrow I’m going to spend the time off partying here ignoring all of my previous barriers. What could go wrong?*

I decide to not feel like a babysitter and start moving back towards the nearest location of more beer. No sooner do I take two steps than I jump out of my skin.

“Hi James,” a sweet voice shatters through the quiet to my right. I almost drop my empty beer and my arms travel half way up my chest. Even the perfectly shaped face and sexy little frame on her couldn’t settle the shock of how quickly she ended up both seeing me and approaching me from a blind side.

The girl now standing before me is wearing tight white jeans that come up to just below the top of her pelvic bones. Her tight, bright pink shirt with short feminine sleeves shows midriff between the bottom of her ribs and the pant line. All I can think every time I see pants like this is a comedian who joked about them and kept saying “Three inches from pussy!”

“Surprised to see you Patricia,” I say with inability to keep from obviously being startled. My eyes travel from her model quality face down to her cleavage. She’s a small boned, petite girl but her C cups on the tiny frame sure appear large.

“Don’t act like you didn’t know Jean would get me here. She’s all about making peace,” she says with a glare in her eyes and curled spiteful lips. She shifts her weight to one foot which causes her curves to be more prominent. My eyes can’t help but travel down her hips and legs. *What the fuck? She’s wearing sandals? She never wears sandals.*

Though I found out the week since we’ve been broken up that she’d been having sex with a few different people the whole time, it is hard for me to hold anger against that considering her bedroom skill set. “She doesn’t know the right times for attempting peace,” I hear myself say. My eyes go wider as the combination of me hearing myself say it and observing Patricia’s reaction. Her beautiful brown skin, perfectly smooth, as she crosses her arms and leans her head forward in a strong glare.

“After what you did?” She begins.

I stop listening entirely. She’s five foot four and her straightened hair goes down to the middle of her shoulder blades. Her skin is an amazing light chocolate cream color and it’s as smooth as it looks. At least it was every time I ever touched her. Her body is trim and toned and she shaves every inch of herself below her neck. Her waist isn’t tiny but her hips and chest makes it look tiny, even though her breasts are a low C. Her ass is high and tight with strong thighs. The most important thing to me about her visually is her perfectly shaped shoulders, accented collar bone and long beautiful neck. A close second is her long V shaped face with high cheek bones and big beautiful brown eyes. She has done a lot of modeling already and she’s only eighteen. Nobody that finds this out about her is surprised at all. Her lips are a little thicker than you would expect on a little package frame like hers but they’re amazing. I’m not just saying that from experience in kissing and foreplay, either. They’re beautiful in how she uses them for singing and conversation, as well.

“Seriously, tell me why you thought breaking up with me was a good idea,” she demands. I probably have an empty look on my face. Let’s take a gamble, here.

“Because you really hurt my feelings and I wasn’t pretending like it was OK anymore,” I say feeling I didn’t miss a beat.

“I never wanted to be exclusive!” she interjects instantly after I finish the word anymore. “You’re cute! And I hate seeing you sad so I couldn’t say no!”

At that my head cocked to one side. “Did you not realize I am a social whore who talks to people in multiple social circles at school? Besides, I never even knew you cheated on me until AFTER we broke up” I again, heard myself saying out loud without any approval at all from my mind. Based on how quickly her forehead wrinkled and eyebrows folded forward I knew this was going to get worse before it got better.

“You know I love fucking and you know I like variety,” she starts in

while raising her pointer finger to hammer points home. "You've met carrot and tall, you think they're cute."

"If I fucked everybody I thought was cute I'm pretty sure I would have quite a few kids by now," I hear spewing forth from my lips. I actually jerk my head back a little in shock at these words. "Plus, again, I didn't break up with you because you were cheating on me. Those fights happened after I broke up with you and learned the people you'd fucked while with me," I add.

"Well, you fucked me a lot!" she almost shouts. "I've never been pregnant!" she continues.

Hearing her say that brought multiple instances where she said fuck and me in close proximity to each other. As the fleeting memories rush by my eyes wander down her jawline and neck to her chest.

"Did you hear me mention I didn't break up with you for cheating on me?" I say a little louder than I meant to.

She notices me incoherently staring at her chest and a corner of her mouth curls up in a cute half grin. Her amusement irritates me and my mouth chimes back in.

"Fucking was never the problem. I don't want to get locked up again," I snap at her. "Plus you don't know the difference between horseplay and mild physical abuse."

"Says the person who has bruised my inner thighs, ass and back countless times during sex!" she almost screams.

I look over my left shoulder to quickly survey the crowd to see if anyone noticed at all. Yeah. Looks like most people noticed. One of which being Karen. I notice her hand on her chest and a look of excitement on her face. Before I can debate the merits of this in my head I am interrupted again.

"This fight seems to make no sense at all, if you've noticed," I mumble, starting to shake a little in anger.

"Want to run?" Patricia almost whispers. The fact it was said so quietly startled me, as I am sure was intended.

"I do," I say, leaning forward to appear less startled than I am.

"You always do," she says in a slightly deeper whisper. Hearing that, for some reason, stopped me in my tracks. I stand up straight and lock eye contact with her. In all her beauty she looks uglier than ever to me. I feel like crying, though I know that's not in my favor right now. "I'll leave," she offers.

"I think you should," I whisper. I glance as best I can to my left and see most people have gone back to their previous conversations. "I think you should leave," I repeat.

All visible muscles tense, Patricia stomps off in the direction from which she came. I look down at my long empty and now warm beer

bottle. I feel like the world is spinning very slowly, only because of rage and not alcohol. *I could have broken this over her head. No, no no. I'm not like that. But fuck, sometimes I wish I was.*

"Are you ok?" a female voice says, again startling me and shattering perceived silence.

"Oh?" I respond while trying to ascertain the origin of the question. "Oh, yes Karen I'm good," I say tilting the bottle up with surprise that nothing is in it.

"Want more beer?" she says while raising her arm with two unopened beers in hand.

I smile and almost cry as I take one from her and nod. "Thanks," I say.

She stands silently. She stares at me as if expecting a conversation. I feel too clammed up and uncomfortable at the moment to have the foggiest idea what to say. She moves a little closer to almost be touching shoulder to shoulder as she joins my gaze out into the remaining group of people. "She's a bitch," she states.

I nod solemnly and confirm with the words "I know." I glance over at her and take note of how big her chest is. *It's like they're bigger now than when I saw them earlier. And her stomach looks flatter. Is rage making people look more attractive than they are? What the fuck.*

"Want to talk about it?" she inquires. I look her in the eyes while chugging the bottle of beer. I open my mouth to start to respond and she says "No, that is a no. I don't blame you!" She throws her arms around me in a quick hug. *They even feel bigger against my chest than they were in my hands. What the fuck.* While I'm not sure if it's the chill in the air or something else, her nipples were noticeable through her bra and tank top.

"Thanks," I say with gratitude in my voice. "I think I'm going to go crash for work tomorrow, though."

"Probably a wise decision," she states with a look of relief in her eyes.

"Text me later this week, we'll see what's going on," I ask of her.

"Either that or we'll bump into each other again at one of these things!" she adds with a gesture towards the party. "I'll be dropping in off and on through the course of the upcoming marathon party."

"I look forward to seeing you again, for fun or for practice, all is good," I say. She smiles and turns around, walking off towards the dining room side of the porch.

I smile and slip to the side of the crowd opposite of the direction Patricia went. I follow the edge of the yard towards the sidewalk which goes down the left side of the house she didn't travel. Not more than five strides down the concrete along the side of the house and I hit a dead stop with a voice hitting me.

“James!” I hear from a window just to my left. “Wait, I’m coming out!” I didn’t get a look at who it was. I didn’t see anything at all. The voice sounded attractive though so I feel obligated to stand uncomfortably and wait. Yes, we established I’m a sort of shallow. Though, considering I’ve stood or sat and waited for sunsets and sunrises many dozens of times... I personally feel it’s an affinity towards beauty. But I’ll accept the label of shallow.

Lost in thought I did not see or hear the approach of said voice. Nor did I see the leap and hug coming. Luckily I held my balance as arms and legs wrapped around me from behind.

“Where have you been!?” she shouted into my ear. A wet kiss lands on my right cheek and hair as the smell of alcohol and perfume lands in my nose.

“I’ve been around,” I say starting to realize she’s hanging on to me, completely off the ground. I kneel down so she can easily get her feet on the ground and I turn around to face her. Suddenly I realize the small breasts that were just against my back and voice that graced me into standing still belong to Melissa. She’s one of Jean’s friends. She’s pretty cool but I think she’s equally as depressed as I am inside my own head but not as good at hiding it.

“Are you going to spend a week out here starting Tuesday?” she asks with a hint of either falling asleep in her eyes or alcohol making gravity run a number on her.

“I believe so. Assuming I can get to bed and get through work in the morning. Just a dozen or so of us right?” I ask, hoping it’s not going to be a week long party of this magnitude.

“Yes,” she begins. “Just Jean, myself, a few different friends coming and going through the week.” That makes me comfortable because I’ve heard that same plan for the last month. I always tend to triple and quadruple check plans before I agree to them when they relate to Jean. She’s awesome but sometimes meeting her at the Old Market for some pasta turns into a two day long house party at a place I had never been before. Which, I mean, is pretty fun in and of itself. But sometimes it requires someone or another getting rescued from trouble.

“I’m down with the clown,” I state. At that moment Jean approaches from behind Melissa.

“You guys taking a shit?” Jean asks in a slight slur, followed by a giggle.

“I did behind your shed!” I exclaimed. Melissa lets out a slow sigh and smirks at Jean.

“Aaaaaanyway,” Jean says in a stretched out way. “Jake and the guys want to hear your story about the burning pumpkin.”

My head immediately leans forward because I always worry I’ll tell

the story and be overheard by a policeman or something. "Alright." I say while following Jean who already started walking towards their location. I look back and Melissa is following.

We get to a group of five people standing on the concrete porch off of the living room. There are three women I don't recognize at all and two guys. One of the guys is Jake, a friend from high school who we've had some interesting, trust building situations with. The other is Jake's sidekick who always seems to be with him for parties but is consistently smart enough to be absent when things go ugly. Jake looks like a poor man's Brendan Fraser while his friend looks strikingly similar to Jamie Kennedy.

"Hey," I say with a nod as the group settles into a circle. "So I hear Goodbuys came up?"

Of the three girls, one is a tall blonde girl with a matching blue tank top and knee long shorts. The other two are brunettes. One is in blue jean overalls with apparently nothing at all underneath. The other has on a sun dress that fits her surprisingly curvy but small body snugly. She seems to be cold.

"Yeah man!" Jake shouts. "What happened!? I heard a fire extinguisher came to play!"

"Talking about St. Alberts cloudy day in the sunshine or the cart fire?" I share with a smirk and a laugh. Jean's eyes light up and she turns to face me.

"I still can't believe that was you!" Jean gushes with an almost shrill laugh to follow. "You have to tell them both stories!"

"Fine, fine. I'm tired so I'll give the shorter versions," I respond. "Alright, so Michael, his girlfriend Erin, my girlfriend at the time Zoe and I were cruising around on Halloween in his Jeep. I had some foam pumpkins and a can of WD-40 in the back."

"This was planned?" Jake asks with a look of confusion.

"Not at all," I begin. "We had the WD-40 for Michael's fishing pole. It just happened to come in handy for the first pumpkin we set on fire down in the old market some days prior." At this point Jean started laughing and nodding her head in remembrance.

"So we were up in a higher class part of Council Bluffs, in the hills," I go on. "We decided a tall plastic decorations that were a ghost light and a cat sitting on 3 stacked skulls needed liberated. So we stopped and Erin jumped out to grab them. She got the ghost light under one arm and the skulls one under the other. By the time she got it in the back of the Jeep the tall chubby owner was running out of the house. The hot little blonde following him joined him in yelling at us. Zoe tossed the ghost one out of the back of the jeep to get them to stop and grab it as we drove away."

“Yeah? They throw anything at the Jeep?” the girl in the overalls asks.

“Actually no,” I reply. “Just dirty looks and yelling which we couldn’t hear.” The girls laugh and Jake nods in acknowledgment, waiting for the story to continue.

“So we drive down to Goodbuys for some reason and we realize the membership card to get in wasn’t on Michael. So we found a cart on the far side where only parking spots are and started fucking around with it,” I continue. Everybody but Jean looks lost as to what the hell we were doing. So I gesture with my hands as to say ‘calm down, it’ll make sense soon.’

“So we put one of the larger foam pumpkins in the cart. Well, actually I did,” I admit. “We’re all standing around bullshitting, trying to decide what to do next. Talking about the victory and deciding if we should duck away somewhere in case the guy called the cops. About that time Michael looked over and I had sprayed WD-40 on this pumpkin and lit it on fire.” The blonde and the girl in the sun dress were laughing, as well as Jake and his friend. *It’s not really that funny, but hell, if cute girls are laughing, I’ll keep talking.*

“What did that defenseless cart do to you?” Jake quips with a small laugh.

“Oh man, that cart,” I start to reply. “That fucking cart killed half of my family.” The exaggeration kept those who were laughing wound up in laughter. “But that was the moment Michael informed me the cart was made of plastic and we should probably get out of there.” Even the girl in the overalls joins in the laughter.

“And we did,” I explain. “We drove to a house nearby to see if an all-around mutual friend was home, which he wasn’t.”

“Oh shit! Did you get arrested!?” Jake’s friend ponders, smiling largely while waiting for a response.

“No actually,” I respond. “We drove out of the mall area. Maybe five minutes later we swung around the neighborhoods in the area. We drove down the road that has a view down to the mall. The cart was on fire up the side of the building, it appeared.” At this point the laughter stopped as, I assume, they were expecting to hear that I burned down the store.

“It was crazy to see,” I elaborate. “One worker was standing with a bewildered look on their face while another ran back down the front of the store. But the side of the building was thick concrete and nothing at all happened beside the death of a dear cart and the black spot on the ground under it.” The girls and Jake start laughing at the dear cart remark.

“How did you guys know if anything was damaged?” Jake’s friend asks.

"Well, we didn't. We didn't want to be anywhere near there for a couple days," I explain. "We happened to be there to buy something a few days later. We drove around by that side of the building in the approach so we could survey. All we saw was the black spot on the ground. It was quite small."

"Oh alright, it wasn't even much bigger than the footprint of the cart?" Jake inquires.

"Nope, the guy who ran up the face of the store must have retrieved an extinguisher," I postulate. "Fire probably was put out pretty fast after that."

Jean interrupts and shouts "St. Alberts Cloud! This story is so much better!"

"Fair enough, fair enough," I agree.

"That's my school!" the girl in the sun dress reveals.

"Oh, really?" I insert with a smirk. Without giving my eyes the command, my eyes traveled down her body to her feet and back up to her face. Her smirk appears to approve of the path my eyes took as I ponder her wearing sketchers with a sun dress. *Sometimes I wonder if I'm actually a woman in a man's body. Just because of shit that passes through my mind.*

"Yes!" she responds perkily. "I'm a senior!"

I look at Jean and smile. Looking back at the girl in the sundress I ask "What's your name?"

"Makayla!" she responds happily.

"Beautiful name!" I say with a little more flirty of a tone than intended. My hair starts getting in my face because of slightly increasing breeze and I brush my hair behind my ears. "What about you two?" I ask, gesturing towards the others.

"Alison," answers the girl in the overalls. I nod with a smile in acknowledgment as the next girl is answering.

"Terry!," the girl in blue responds while smiling very directly at Jake's friend.

"Nice to meet you all," I say with a deeper than intended nod. Michael often makes fun of me when we're out and about, claiming that I bow to people a lot. *Fucking Michael! I love him.*

"So Michael and I were, like always is the case," I start with a grin growing so large it's hard to keep from laughing. "driving around in his Jeep."

"What kind of Jeep is it? I love Jeeps!" Terry asks.

"It's a Cherokee," I reply.

"That sounds right," she states. "I was trying to imagine four people in a little Wrangler and it wasn't sounding possible. Sorry, go on!"

"No worries," I assure her. "So we stopped at his school to see an old

classmate of his. Teachers were grieving us for being there so he grabbed one of the large extinguishers. He said something about claiming it for Gondor or something.” Jake laughs at the reference, as he’s a pretty big Tolkien fan. The rest just ignored it seeming to not catch it.

“So we go to try to catch Jean after St. Albert’s lets out. I had said I think she usually slips out early so we’ll sweep her up before the rush of people.” I go on. “But she didn’t. Michael was laughing and said well fuck it then. He drove out towards the exit. Half way there he tore off into the open part of the lot at the top of the hill above the football field. He started doing cookies and I took the extinguisher and started spraying it into the air above us.”

“Oh shit, that was you!?” Makayla interjects with a tone of astonishment and excitement.

“Yes ma’am,” I say while nodding my head.

“You guys started the biggest senior prank war of most people’s memories!” she says quickly before I can continue.”

“Really?” I ask. All three girls and Jean start nodding their heads quickly in confirmation. “Jesus Christ,” I add. “So, we get out of there. At the bottom of the hill I look back and start howling in laughter.” At this point Jake’s friend has to walk away to sit down on the stairs going up to the pool deck, he is laughing so hard.

“What made you start laughing that hard?” Alison asks.

“Well,” I start but have to pause for a second to chuckle. “We couldn’t see St. Albert’s.”

“We couldn’t see anything but white, by the way” Jean added just before erupting in laughter also. “We couldn’t see the sky or the trees across the street.”

“Yeah?” I ask, though believing her. “But the entire top of that hill was a white cloud and we couldn’t see the school at all.”

“That’s hilarious,” Makayla says before walking over to a nearby cooler to grab a beer. As she turns around I notice her ass looks as good as everything visible from the front. She has a seriously charming smile. She has braces and shoulder length dark brown hair. “Do you want one before you leave?” she asks while a glance back at me catches me looking at her ass.

“I really hate to do this but I was on my way out when Melissa said hi to me,” I explained, nodding to Melissa as I said her name. “So no thank you, Makayla.”

“Oh!” Melissa exclaims. “I didn’t mean to stop you from leaving!”

“Not at all a problem,” I say reaching over to put my hand on her shoulder. “Love you guys,” I add, looking over Jean and Jake as well.

I start to turn to leave and Makayla follows.

“James!” she says. I stop a little faster than I probably should because I don’t remember telling her my name.

“Yes Ms. Makayla?” I ask, seeing the apparent joy go across her face at the moment she heard me repeat her name.

“You need my number in your phone,” she asserts with confidence. She reaches her hand out, palm up, and fires off that stunning smile of hers.

I raise an eyebrow at her and try to keep a stern, inquisitive face but she is so stunningly cute and looks to be in such amazing form in that perfectly fitting dress, the look of appreciation most definitely creeps in. I silently reach in my pocket and pull out my droid and pass it to her.

She takes my phone and turns it on. When she goes to swipe the screen to unlock it she looks at me and asks “What’s the password?” I smile and say my four digit code. She looks surprised that I actually gave it to her. She looks down with determined focus and works to put in her information.

“You have fast and accurate fingers!” I observe.

“They’ve been busy lately, unfortunately,” she seems to say in an escaped thought. As the words finish exiting her mouth her face rises as if in uncomfortable embarrassment as the thought of how they may be interpreted cross her mind. I base that on exactly what I pictured her doing with her fingers as she said it.

“Apparently in this case the ends justify the means!” I joke with a large grin. I run my fingers through my hair to try to keep it under control as the wind starts picking up. With as red a face as I can see in the dim light, she hands me back my phone smiling, turns and walks away.

I watch her form move as she disappears into the people behind the house. In a matter of moments I climb into my car which is parked a half block away.

Descent . Dark

Pulling into the spot in front of my bedroom window, I feel apprehension. I live with my grandma and grandpa. They live on the bottom level of an apartment complex. Grandma doesn't care what time it is when I come and go. Grandpa, however, doesn't like it when I am traveling around in the middle of the night. He does worry about me but I know he also worries about the truck he gave me.

The clock on my dashboard says 3:25 just before I turn off the engine. I survey the living room window and the grandparents' bedroom window looking for motion. It looks clear so I exit my truck, closing the door slowly as to try to be silent. It sounds like I slammed it contrasted against the silence surrounding.

My truck is a 1986 Dodge Dakota. It's dark brown with a light brown stripe that's about two feet tall down the sides. The interior is completely tan and has a bench seat. It had 120k miles on it when passed to me as Grandpa stopped driving. At 160k I've beaten the hell out of it. It's my first car and I only recently learned not to speed through puddles on streets I am not familiar with. Those puddles sometimes have car killing pot holes under them.

I try to open the sliding glass door on the porch to no avail. Luckily I have the key on me to open the front door. I use the access code to get into the building and approach the front door. I open the door to complete darkness, which relieves me a little. Inside the front door is a small hallway where the coat closet and washer and dryer enclosure is. A right turn brings you to the guest bathroom at the right and face to face with my door. An immediate left turn brings you into the living room and dining room area.

On the way to my room I hear nothing and succeed at remaining almost completely silent. At least, according to my drunk state. Since my grandma likes to snoop, my grandpa allowed me to put a lock on my bedroom door. I gave my grandpa a key just in case of a number of situations, including him needing to kick my ass. I acknowledge this is his house and accept that. So I am thankful he allowed me to keep grandma's random cleaning out of my room. Her random cleaning resulted in things that were not trash at all, being thrown away. Though her random cleaning is not completely stopped as I forget to lock the door from time to time.

My room is a small rectangular bedroom with a door and my bed against one of the smaller sides. A couch stretches down one of the longer sides with a recliner between that and the far wall. A TV sits under a window facing me on the bed. The opposite long wall has a wide folding door closet. Between the closet and where the door swings open is a five

drawer dresser. Between my bed and the couch on the floor is my journal, a bottle of Jack Daniels and a cup with assorted pens and pencils.

I grab my blue hardback journal and a pen. I lie on my bed and turn to the first blank page towards the middle of the book. I use the remote to turn on the television and reach to take a couple swigs out of my bottle of Jack. I begin to write in my book.

**death circling overhead
with the vulture's eye
vengeful stares upon my soul
with shattered feelings here i lye**

I look at the television and see an increasingly blurry Donna Reed. I wonder briefly what time it is and if my Grandpa will be awake soon. I start thinking about Zoe, having told a story which she was present for earlier at the party.

My life has leaded me through a series of unfortunate events. A couple years ago I moved in with a girl I dated for the better part of a year named Zoe Sierra. A beautiful redhead, also five foot seven like me. She has mid shoulder blade length copper red hair. Her shoulders are a little huskier than I like but her breasts, stomach, thighs and ass are all top notch. At least as far as my judgment goes.

Things went bad at my Mother's house where I lived while Zoe and I dated. I ended up leaving there and had no place to go. It wasn't planned so there was nothing lined up. My grandparents lived in a slightly assisted living apartment structure at the time. They let me move in with the expectation I wouldn't be staying long. Shortly after moving in, Zoe broke up with me. Then when I quit the job I had, they told me to go.

That's when Zoe, trying to be a good friend, invited me to come live in her basement while I tried to get back on my feet. Her mom hesitantly agreed. I think she only agreed because she trusts Zoe and was told we not only never had sex, but were now no longer dating. Either way, after breaking up and being deeply saddened, I moved in.

I would lay in bed downstairs writing about her, my love for her, self-hating for all the mistakes I made leading up to this and cry myself to sleep. I'm sure, in hindsight, this didn't help my cause. And trying to think about the relationships I had before which didn't work out because of things the others did was of no condolence at all.

The worst was the last six months I was there. On one hand I had to see Zoe dating other people. On the other, the only bathroom in the house was in between two bedrooms. Hers or her brother's. Her brother hated me. He always has and after I moved out he hated me all the more. At first it wasn't so bad because he was living with a girlfriend. Then I

could cut through his room to use the restroom. But after a few weeks he moved back in with his girlfriend. This caused me to have to cut through Zoe's room to use the bathroom.

One night she had a date home and her brother had his girlfriend there. It was very clear fucking was going on in both rooms. I lived underneath them, after all. And I had quite a lot of alcohol in me.

I started drinking before Zoe got home and after her brother started fucking his girlfriend. The fucking going on in her brother's room was enough to make me want to depart sobriety for the rest of the night. I didn't have to work until the next day, anyway. I decide to write another piece of the poem:

**it swoops down towards me
yet i refuse to believe
i shall ever be received
spiraling towards me while so intrigued**

Zoe's friend Erin, who was also in the story with Michael and the flaming cart, is the sole reason sex never happened. One night on the couch at Erin's, the topic of sex came up. Erin had a horror story about her first time with a guy who had a six inch penis.

I have an eight inch penis. Eight inches and one millimeter, if I want to be picky. I know that's not massive. Though, for Council Bluffs, that apparently is perceived as massive. But that's not the part that seems to have caused me to be a Blow job Challenge in some groups of friends. The circumference is seven and a half inches. That's too thick to fit inside a toilet paper roll, for perspective. It's not quite as wide as a pop can, thankfully. But it's far from small.

Erin talked about how he tried to start without any foreplay and it hurt her. So she talked him into going down on her, which he did. He also used a couple different toys on her. When they tried again after all that, she tore and bled for a little while.

The look on Zoe's face was terror as she stared at my crotch. Erin took but a moment to put two and two together. Erin looked at me and said "I'm sorry, but." Then she looked at Zoe and said "You need to start with a guy who's four to five inches long and about this wide." She held up two fingers. Her ring and pinky finger.

I leaned forward and covered my eyes with both hands. Time to write a bit more.

**the vulture swoops down wearily
yet i refuse to just believe
that i could ever be received**

spiraling towards me while so intrigued

The most frustrating thing seemed to be the fact that we would kiss a lot. No, not even that. We were great kissers but not even that was the worst. We would strip each other down to our underwear. Her panties and my boxers. And eventually my boxers would come off and we would do everything short of oral sex (she didn't like it and wouldn't let me do it to her.) Usually the most sexual part was when she would pin me on my back and grind against my dick with her pussy and clit. Still wearing panties, mind you. But she would cum so much that it felt like it was one accidental movement away from the panties sliding over and my erection slipping in.

I dreamed of that. And I don't know if the open wound, bleeding in my mind to this day, would have been easier to heal if we had just fucked the shit out of each other a few times.

**i vainly block my sanity
the pitch black claws keep ripping me
the pain still hurts so vividly
my happy life a memory
the future promised i cannot see
this dizzying sorrow must have to be**

Her amazing smile, though. That's what I always see. Her laugh, too. I mean, if I had to be a dick and try to find faults, it wasn't hard. Her tits, while far more than a hand full each were widely set apart. Her teeth had a large gap in the front which she referenced as character. And most of all I really hate cigarettes. Weed, yeah, sure. I mean, the weed that smells sweet. And there's a lot of that around. But cigarettes I find to be horrible.

But for her... For her I would ignore that. Even her constant demanding that she not need entertain concepts of working on some of the more massive faults in her personality. She said, she is who she is and fuck 'em if they don't like her. Which, sure. That's cool. But at the age of 18, accept that and choose not to try to better yourself? Seriously? I found that fucking infuriating.

**those tears must belong on everything
my feared death flirts with reality
they will not let me speak my peace
this tortures me incredibly**

For her I ignored all of that. And I don't even know why, looking back. I don't know why I accepted these flaws and kept moving forward. I actually had the money saved up to move out at the time she was dating and fucking other people. But I held on to the hope that maybe one day she would realize they were horrible for her - and many of them were. I hoped she would come back to me.

I turn off the TV and put headphones on. I choose Nine Inch Nails' The Downward Spiral as listening material.

That's another thing, now that I think about it. When The Fragile came out and I spent eighty bucks on different versions of it, she freaked out. I spent as much on my favorite band's new release as she spends on cigarettes in two weeks and she went crazy about it. I hadn't spent money on anything, including liquor, for months. I had been working and saving it all.

And the song Take it to the Limit. Fuck that song. I think at one point she played it once every couple hours just to watch me sit in the living room and fume. The first third of that song was fine. The last two thirds where they repeat 'take it to the limit one more time' should be stricken from the earth for eternity.

**i felt Satan's frigid touch
it didn't seem to matter much
his evilness didn't seem as such
and i shattered his pathetic clutch**

I think a big part of why I loved her so much, though, was the level of happiness she brought me. We did quite a lot for each other in the first several months of dating. I would hold her while she cried, talking about things I don't even repeat to myself in thought. She would listen and pick my brain about problems I had with my mother and my job at the time. We complimented each other nicely.

Michael says I stuck with it so long out of hating to lose. Hating to lose? He thinks it was me wanting to win and actually seal the deal with sex. He said that the only reason I moved in with her besides back with mom was because I believed I could smooth things over. He thought it was a stupid move but he knew I wouldn't listen.

Her telling me towards the end that she felt sorry for me and didn't kick me out because she thought I was too pathetic was the first seriously large laceration on my soul. Then her calling me and telling me she missed me but didn't trust me enough to hang out for a little was salt. And hearing through mutual friends that she hates me and doesn't know why she talks to me anymore was an additional laceration.

**god and his gang of righteous perfect angels
sang their religious songs and rang their holy bells
the blessed me then hugged me wishing me well
so i dished them out their pieces of hell**

I would be telling lies if I claimed I wasn't suicidal. But I would never admit that. Not to Michael or Jean or anyone else. I know there was a period of time long before Zoe even where I would say I was suicidal. But that was very clearly attention grabbing. It was wrong of me and I regret it. I tried to make it up to the people involved at the time, for sure. But this time I believe it's a more serious danger.

I reach down and take another fairly large drink from the bottle of Jack.

I don't know. I think it's more my own head fucking with me. I love the fun and trouble I get myself into. I really want to fuck about nine tenths of all the women I meet. I mean, only if it's mutual, for sure. I could never hurt anyone knowingly. But I also worry about pregnancy - I can't deal with having to be a father.

But there is also the not wanting to get into another serious relationship. The most recent one with Patricia ended horribly. And that lasted much shorter than a year.

As if she was listening, a text comes in.

03:39 . Patricia: Sorry I talked to you at the party.

I sit staring at the text for several seconds trying to decide between throwing up, sending her a picture of my ass hole, or replying like a dick. I choose the latter, with honesty.

James: No you're not.

Patricia: You're right, I missed you and wanted to talk to you.

James: You missed pissing me off?

Patricia: No, I missed your voice.

James: How many people's voices do you miss on a daily basis?

Patricia: Fuck you.

James: Only if you don't stop.

Patricia: Seriously?

I think for a moment. *What if she would actually want me to drop by her place and fuck? It's been a while. I mean, since I had sex. And that's the one thing she's really, really good at. I could hate fuck her, you know? ...*

James: I don't have any condoms left, anyway. Don't even get paid for a few days.

Patricia: I still have your bag of tricks.

For reference, the bag of tricks she references is actually a physical bag with some lubes, a small box of condoms, a couple sex toys and a few lengths of silk rope. It's actually very useful and I didn't want to leave it there. And also, tempting to go fuck, get my bag back and try to never talk to her again.

James: You're not on the rag, right?

It's a valid question. One of the first times we fucked around, it was in a hotel room. We were making out and I was caressing her six pack. Always have a weakness when I'm with somebody with a body like that. She kept inching around so my hand would go lower so I figured it was time to try for digital penetration. And she came a hell of a lot.

Well, it felt that way. When she started telling me to fuck her, I was changing positions to get her pants and panties off and I realized my first three fingers were covered in blood up to the biggest knuckles. I mean, covered. With clots.

Though I now feel nausea thinking about it, it pales in comparison to what I felt at the time. I got up and went straight to the bathroom and washed my hand off. She asked why I stopped. She tried to get me to come in there and get back to it. She sincerely didn't seem to understand why I wasn't interested at all. She seemed disgusted with me, even.

Patricia: You know I promised I would never do that again.

I laugh at reading this. Then a picture message comes in. I immediately fill with dread and realize I don't want anything to do with her. Before opening it I add to the poem in progress.

**death's evil hand has reached in my direction
causing me pain distress and loss of erection
it elected my time without much reaction
my hopes dreams and thoughts left out of selection
i have been decided on with no personal discretion
reluctantly it took this action to teach me now this golden lesson
it took my soul's destruction to realize this fragile message**

I open the image and see a mirror shot of her absurdly sexy smile, petite little shoulders, C cup breasts looking perky as ever, perfectly

formed ribs and abs going down out of view behind the counter in her bathroom. I immediately have a nearing full erection and send a text back before thinking.

James: I need a shower.

Patricia: We'll take one here.

I turn my car on and realize I didn't tie my shoes. Fuck it, I don't need them tied to safely drive. Several minutes later I ring the doorbell at Patricia's house. She lives in a one level three bedroom Victorian. She talked about wanting one in high school. When her mother died she used the inheritance money to buy one. Looking at the picture she sent one more time on the phone before she answers the door, I try to convince myself this is a good idea.

The door opens and in the doorway now stands Patricia. She's in tightly knit thigh high fishnets held up by a garter belt. The lack of panties allows me to see her totally shaven vagina with a small heart shaped patch of hair just above her clit. My eyes travel up her abs, which happen to look like she's just finished a few sets of crunches before I arrived.

I smile and she reaches out, causing her breasts to almost come out of her bra, pulling me into her house.

No sooner does the door close behind me than a guy standing at least a foot above me steps out from the hallway to my left.

"You fucked up," he says, raising a fist back.

No. I'm not going to chance this.

James: I'm sorry. I'm a pussy. It's too soon, I can't.

Patricia: Fine.

I try to write more to the book, aiming to feel like the piece is complete.

**the lights around me now begin to dim
no longer could i simply run on a whim
death no longer a thought out upon a limb
nothing can seem to conquer over him**

**this time there are no helpful hints
and it is in his destiny to devour and win
because to him keeping alive is a sin
he darted at me, crushing my mind just like tin**

Another image comes in. I open it and it's just a pic of her in a thick robe, flipping off the camera through the mirror. Suddenly any question about the choice to avoid that drama in exchange for my bag of goodies and probably some great sex, faded. I decide to try to finish the poem in one final flow of thought.

**this completely personal destructive measure
surely can't bring you such divine writhing pleasure
when it's my soul you savagely rip shred and tether
how you so enjoy bringing about such unpleasant weather
you so proudly spread your dark and fearful feathers
when you don't realize it's your dignity smother
so in death you die realizing myself and all others
and everything i was shall manifest your shell forever**

My phone starts ringing. I look down at it hoping with all my might that it's not Patricia. Holy shit! It's after four in the morning! I see it's my mother and skip the call. Do you think that was wrong of me? I was in the room, in the second bed, pretending to sleep for hours of my mom and her new husband's honeymoon. Get it? I was eight. Don't judge me on screening a call from my mother.

Suddenly a wave of fatigue sweeps over me. I make sure The Downward Spiral is on repeat and put my things on the floor just in time for my head to hit my pillow.

Descent . You Turn

The sky is full of fluffy white clouds. I stand on top of a grassy hill not far from the neighborhood I grew up in. I look down over the trees blocking the view of that specific section of housing. I scan the horizon across the lower hills and dipping treetops in which are deep ravines. I used to spend hours and hours climbing and exploring those areas.

I reach in my pocket and pull out an original game boy. The screen is gone and the shell is hollow though the buttons feel like they operate as normal. I lower myself until I am sitting on the ground. I rest the game boy on the grass next to me.

I look back up at the clouds and realize they are moving faster than normal. I pay no more attention to that and begin ripping handfuls of grass out of the ground from each side of me, throwing it on the game boy. I continue doing this until some patches of dirt become visible as the game boy becomes entirely obscured from sight.

Once the game boy is buried in grass I look back up and see the clouds have now entirely blotted out the sun. I stand up, debating if I should walk back to my car. *My car? Don't I have a truck? Oh, no. I got rid of that years ago. Fucking thing started cutting out in the middle of driving. Never figured out what the problem was.*

My thoughts are interrupted by a strike of lightning and the realization the clouds are now almost dark enough to block out all light. I turn away from the view towards my old neighborhood and run for the parking lot. I see the lot and developments beyond it are gone and now all that can be seen is water and debris lapping up into sight from somewhere slightly below.

I stop and feel my body filling with a panic. I run towards the edge of the ground I'm standing on to peer into what once was nearby civilization. Once to the edge I see a flow of dark brown water, only visible with the persistent and stunningly bright lightning.

Suddenly a torrential rain begins and my clothes are instantly saturated with water. The ground around me begins to give way to the pressure of the increasingly rushing water before me. I turn to run and see huge fires raising up into the sky from what was once the area I used to live and play in.

A natural urge takes over my body. I feel a sensation flow through me as I slowly swim against the air around me. I rise up ever so slightly above the ground and start to focus on the sensation. I swim ever so carefully with cautious and deliberate movements and feel the speed of ascent increase.

A violent crackle surrounds me as lightning streaks by. I observe in horror as the hill I was just standing on gets eaten by the liquid force of

nature raging below. The water from the north now freely crashes and pops against the raging inferno of everything that was precious to me when I was young. The steam starts filling my field of vision as I frantically try to force myself upward.

The more that fear grips me, I find myself ever less successful at increasing my speed. In fact, as the rain making me feel weighed and fatigued now has hail coming down with it, all hope starts to fade. The ascent turns to a descent as I fall through the now swirling clouds of steam.

A freezing cold slap attacks my entire body as I crash down into the chaotic water flow. I feel myself sink through the current as if pulled by an unseen force. Suddenly a shift in motion causes my arm to go from low at my side to above my head. The forced movement also twists it, causing sharp pains to fire through my bones.

Instantly I find myself awake and laying on my side with my arm above my head. The arm is asleep and a strong pain is centered at the point which the shooting pain originated in my dream. I roll out of bed, landing on my feet, and stumble to the window. I separate the blinds with my pointer and middle fingers and peer out, hoping I don't see anything abnormal.

All is quiet. But the sky is far lighter than I imagined it should be. I close the blinds and squint to force my eyes to adjust to the difference in light between outside and inside so I can check the clock. 6:18am. Holy shit! I slept a little longer than I wanted to allow myself and have to be at work in 42 minutes. As I grab some clothes out of my closet and reach to open my bedroom door I think I should probably write down that dream so I don't forget it in six seconds.

Moments later I'm in the shower scrubbing shampoo into my hair and thinking about the to-do list I have in front of me at work. I work at Toys R Us at the moment. Sounds lame but I am the back end leader. What that means is I'm the one who gets yelled at when any of the new people mess up in the store room. It's not hard to train people but the turnover is quite high. Sadly I still make about the same as any new hires do. But, I see it as progress so I shut up and move forward.

The first year I worked there I hated the boss. She would give us lists that would take 3 work days to complete and tell us to try to have it done by the end of the day. Later I figured out it was more of a challenge than anything actually expected. But by then I was in the habit of showing up and plowing as hard as I could into the list. I was proud of myself when I could get more than half way through the list.

I realize I've been thinking about work and scrubbing my head for a couple minutes. I grab the loofah, a strange word I always love to say out loud, and soap it up. I've been using the Softsoap Vanilla body wash

for years now. I sadly have skin that gets too greasy, for lack of a more accurate word. This soap cleans it and dries it out a little, giving me several more hours before I feel like I really want to take another shower. Sometimes I'll take two showers a day on days I don't even work. The humidity in Omaha all year, but for the deep of winter, really multiplies the speed at which my skin oils up.

Drying myself in front of the mirror I inspect my skin for anything I may need to apply medication to, regarding acne. I used to have a bit of a problem, as many have, with acne. Thankfully I've been introduced to a simple concoction that kicks it directly in the cunt, as long as I apply it early in formation. Drying my balls I feel like I really want to decompress that section of my being. Sadly I need to have left the house two minutes ago.

I brush my hair, parting it down the middle. I look it over to make sure the sides and back of my head are buzzed short enough that it doesn't stick through my parted hair as it rests down the sides of my head. When the hair on the sides and back of my head get long enough they don't lay down but stand through the downward combed hair. very frustrating. It pisses me off a lot more than it should.

I look myself in the eyes and see they are light gray today. My eyes go from gray to a very rich baby blue and I'm not too sure what it means at whichever shade. Some friends have their theories but I've seen all the shades in any given mood or level of fatigue. I look over my body in the mirror. I'm happy with how small I am, though my thighs are much bigger than I wish they were. I have some chub in my stomach, but I love food too much to really get down to abs. I accept that. I look over my penis and balls and decide I really need to get the fuck out of here.

Throwing on clothes and shutting off the fan and light in the bathroom, I head back into my bedroom. Grandpa is asleep in his chair and Grandma is nowhere to be seen. I put my shoes on and lock my door as I leave down the hall towards the exit.

Descent . Work Work

As a rather uneventful drive comes to an end and I pull into the parking lot, I see one of the seasonal guys isn't there yet. I usually get there five to ten minutes late because I have a hard time caring about getting to work on time. Part of that lack of caring comes from never leaving work less than one to two hours late. Nobody cares about me being late because of this. The boss doesn't care, nor do the seasonal people. Sometimes I'll clock out and still work a few hours if there is a large enough to-do list.

Getting out of my truck I believe I hear the rumble of dipfuck's mustang in the distance. The store I work at is located in what was once a wide riverbed for when the Mighty Mo would overflow in the spring. That was before mankind "tamed" it. Apparently every few years the entire valley between the bluffs would flood. It's a pretty large area. The area reaches from eastern Omaha all the way through toward the center of Council Bluffs.

Stepping in the front door I see multiple pallets lining both the west and east edge of the Imaginarium. The Imaginarium is what we at Toys R Us calls the section with our creative stock. The Imaginarium consists of things like Legos, Lincoln Logs, Play-dough, Learning electronics, paint and Crayons. I always visually survey what's there because that's the section I always work when stocking.

"Welcome to work!" I hear Sal say sarcastically from somewhere in the Girl's section.

"Dive into go fuck yourself canyon!" I instruct as I walk to the price scanner I use to clock in. 6:35. Five minutes late. What would I be if not always a little late?

"Your mom is here?" I hear Sal respond.

I crack a smile as I take my time card out of my wallet and swipe it under the scanner. Three attempts later I hear the beep I am looking for and turn to go back towards the Imaginarium to get started.

"Do you have an extra box knife on you?" a female voice asks from behind me.

"Second drawer down in the returns desk," I say without even looking to see which girl asked the question. I heard a soft but happy "Thanks!" as she turned to walk away.

I approach the nearest pallet of Imaginarium stuff and pick up a box. I open and shelve contents, break down the box to a flat existence

and stack it on a U-boat. U-boats are mobile carts. They are four feet long and about a foot wide. You can put a handle on both sides that look like they would attach to the bottom of a dolly. This is what gives them the U-boat name. They are useful for many things, including keeping boxes together and moving them around.

Before I know it my chest and back are sweaty and all of my filled boxes are now empty and flattened in 2 highly stacked U-boats. I look out the window and can tell by the shadows that the sun is much higher on the horizon. I look around at the coworkers in line of sight and notice they are both more and less energetic. They are more energetic because work is closing to an end. They are also less energetic because of all the work they just did. I can hear talk of fresh weed from a section across the store. I haven't touched any with anybody that works with me but I have been tempted to. It's been a while since I've smoked any at all.

At that moment I realize I felt my phone vibrate several times. I have a pretty long standing habit of fully ignoring my phone while in work mode. Actually, in any heavily focused mode. On a roll in a video game? Fucking? Driving? Shopping? When I shop, I enter, I get from point A to B to C as fast as I can and get out. When partying I usually am easily distracted. Not just because eye candy is present. I am also easily distracted at parties because I'm usually uncomfortable. The only time I am fully comfortable other than alone is when I'm surrounded by people I have known for a long time.

I look at my phone and see the following messages.

Michael: I'll be at the casino with the psychotic Indian after work.

The psychotic Indian is a dude who has had several jobs for years. He usually always has at least two jobs. He does whatever he can to stay busy and out of his house. He loves his family and his wife but his wife drives him literally insane. I pop a text back.

James: Cool man, let me know when you get home."

Makayla: Can you give me a ride home from work today?

Holy shit. I would love to see her again. And in the light! Hmmm

James: What time?

.. I do hope it's a time I can swing. I should be done with everything I know is going on by at least 3pm. I doubt she gets off work before 3. As I recall, she worked first shift today too.

Mom: Any chance you can mow the lawn this week?

Fuck. It has been a couple weeks. I'll probably pay Hal 20 bucks to do it for me. Dude looks like Gandalf without the beard but he's more energetic than I'll ever be.

"Want to make sure none of the seasonal folks kill themselves in the compactor?" my boss Sheryl asks out of nowhere. I look over and see her standing in the small door way into the side store room just off the side of my Imaginarium.

"Will do, done here so I'm on my way back there," I say with a nod and movement towards my U-boats.

"Thanks," she says with a smile before disappearing back through the door into the storeroom. Our storeroom setup lets her fire around from the front of the store all the way to almost the break room on the opposite corner of the store. It's quite nice. You can also see from the storeroom into the store at multiple points around that perimeter. Very handy if you're needing to do things in the back and keep track of new people on the floor at the same time.

Arriving in the store room I observe two of the seasonal guys standing next to each other in front of the compactor. One was showing the other something on their phone. I pretend I don't see them and move their empty U-boats out of the way. I start putting cardboard into the box compactor and the one guy shoves his phone in his pocket and the other stands there looking dumbfounded.

"Hey man, you coming to Jerry's house after work?" the phone shower asks. I would learn their names but that requires me to typically end up attached to them and then disappointed when they quit or get fired at the end of the season.

"Fuck yeah, man. I helped her carry in the beer she had last weekend," I say with a smirk. I always seem to infer that her and I fuck. I don't mean to. It's just because I find her short little spunky redhead ass entirely attractive. And she has really short hair. I usually don't dig on short hair.

"Yeah?" the guy who was being shown something on the phone

says.

“Yeah dude, how old are you?” I ask, observing to myself that he sure looks like he learned how to walk a few days ago.

“Nineteen,” he responds, standing proud.

“Shit man I don’t think we have juice at her place,” I say while thinking aloud and running an inventory in my head. He laughs.

“Want to see who can drink who under the table?” he asks with continuing confidence.

“You probably can,” I say. “I’m actually a lightweight. I just like fucking with people.”

“Fucking, or fucking with?” the phone shower asks.

“Depending on the person, sometimes both,” I answer with a large grin. Both guys start laughing as I finish stuffing the last of my broken down boxes into the compactor. I push the button, triggering the mechanism’s process. I smile and nod to the two guys. I hope the nod is received as a gesture saying it’s clear for them to find something to do. I put the two U-boats away down one of the rear warehouse aisles. When I return to the receiving area the two guys are almost done stacking up empty pallets and sweeping. Thankfully.

After seeing the two guys I probably most need to watch are cleaning up properly I turn down an uninhabited aisle and pull my phone out again. Two texts, this time.

Michael: Mother fucker threw up in my Jeep.

Makayla: Maybe a few minutes after.

James: Dude, I would drop him off somewhere and make him walk home after that shit. Oh, want to hit Jerry’s house for the last couple hours before you go to bed? And seriously, make dude walk home.

I am making sure to try my best to influence his making that dude suffer. He who I shall not name was at a party with Michael once. Was actually my birthday party now that I think about it. He spent the whole time hitting on my girlfriend. I didn’t mind that much but the fact she had to switch what room she was in no less than fifteen times is what bothered me. *Time to respond to Makayla!*

James: I’ll be there. If I have to wait, it’s no worries at all.

Michael: He's already home. I'll be there. I'm in the neighborhood anyway.

WEED! Hmm. If he's in her neighborhood that must mean he's getting some more green. I might have to break my long streak and enjoy a little. "10-4 good buddy," I respond textually.

James: An Indian puking in a Cherokee, that's a little poetic isn't it?

Michael: Get fucked.

hahahaha. I do love me some Michael.

"Everything done?" I hear Sheryl's voice saying behind me. I realize I jumped a little when the voice registered in my ears.

"Almost," I say with a broken voice tone. I clear my throat as she stands tall, smiling. "I need to scan in overstock but I was waiting a little while the last people took care of their trash and cleared out." She smiles and nods before scurrying back into the vast unknowns she resides in between periods of popping out and scaring the fuck out of me.

She's my favorite manager I've ever had, don't get me wrong. The dude above her is amazing, too. But she is slightly above him on the totem pole in my mind. He'll come out and pull off some amazing shit. But she even has him under her finger. It's not a bad thing. Sometimes he has to pull rank and get her to do shit but usually it seems like she runs the show. But that's mainly relating to morning crew things. It may very well be an entirely different story in all other situations.

I quietly move back to the receiving area. I still hear people compacting boxes and throwing things into the trash compactor. As soon as I turn the corner the first thing I see is the tiny little ass. I stare at it for a brief moment of deep admiration. Such a great little ass and the shape of her back and legs just makes it all better. Her thighs aren't twiggy and waist is small, which I never notice with how her shirt hangs when she's standing up. But her shoulders are amazing. I've seen her in a bikini from the ribs up many times when we had a hotel party a few months back. Tits are pretty small but she's fucking tiny, and when she smiles she's like a crazy cute little elf chick. She's awesome.

I've wanted to fuck her for the better part of a year now. As you'll notice, I want to fuck a lot of people. Even smokers, though I hate

cigarettes. There was a nine month stretch where I was dating a girl named Elizabeth who previously worked with us. It started as hanging out and Jerry told me to be careful. When Elizabeth started telling Jerry I was always on her mind, I was told by Jerry to stop because she saw no way it could end well.

It didn't look plausible because Elizabeth was dating someone. Though, I was told multiple times how horrible the guy was and was given dozens of examples why. The one that got my ear the most was their horrible sex life. She eventually provided photographs of his penis. It was the same width and length as one of those big kid crayons. The thick ones, you know? Well, he had a normal shaped head compared to the rest. But seriously, it was barely longer than my middle finger and no thicker.

So naturally I had to imply I didn't have that problem. Through that conversation I mentioned it was probably as thick as her wrist. She didn't believe me, which is entirely understandable. I took one of her hands and found the place on her wrist that was exactly as thick as the base of my penis when fully erect. I wrapped her hand around it and said "That's exactly how thick I am. In all honesty." The beauty of that was I was able to confirm what Jerry had said about her thinking about me a lot. Once I showed her that, I caught her with the same hand around that spot of her wrist. Not just once. I caught her multiple times doing it while a lost daydream look was plastered on her face.

One afternoon we decided to try to sit through Napoleon Dynamite in its entirety. She had heard it was a great movie. I told her I couldn't stand it and thought I had probably seen it all in 20 minute increments. That is, if you edited all my memories together. When we got to roughly the middle of the movie, we were having to redirect each to stop bullshitting and focus.

During the credits we were discussing how horrible we both agreed the movie was. She liked the dance scene. I only liked when he got raked by his bike and when he got kicked in the pocket where the tater tots were. Then in the middle of me talking about some stories I've heard about how amazing the movie supposedly is, she interrupted me.

"Are you serious about what you said?" she asked, speaking quickly. I wasn't immediately sure what she was talking about until I noticed her hand around that part of her wrist again.

I responded with "You can check, if you want." A short blow job and a few minute quickie on the floor followed directly after.

Jerry turned out to be right about it not going well. Elizabeth and I had amazing sex for eight of those nine months. Even after the fourth month when she moved into a new house with her then fiancé. We fucked in every single room at least several times. I bent her over his office chair. We fucked on all their furniture including the kitchen table, counters, their main bed and spare bed in the basement. I never regretted it. It was amazing, and the dude... Just, I don't feel guilty. I know I should but I can't.

I used to have an online Journal that was password protected. She left it open a lot, apparently. I let her read it because she thought it would be hot to read stories about our sexual adventures. Not only that, but she liked knowing what was going on in my life other than that. Later I found out her guy was also reading it religiously. He always thought I was just a coworker who liked her reading his fantasies. Then, the moment of realization that it was actually happening came.

I had picked Marilyn Manson's Antichrist Superstar to listen to while we fucked. We crashed about 3am. She woke up about 5am and shut it off. She said she couldn't take it anymore. It was her fiancé's CD. After reading that, he got up to go see if it was still in the CD player - which it was. He hadn't heard it in over a year and he knew she didn't put it in there. She hates Marilyn Manson, so he was nice enough to never make her listen. Shit hit the fan and Elizabeth ended up quitting Toys R Us. So I don't blame Jerry at all for not wanting to get involved with me.

"Think we can keep shit calm and get everybody out of the house before 3?" Jerry asks, noticing me.

"Yeah. Daughter going to be home then?" I ask, thinking I already know the answer.

"Yeah," she responds with her cute little elf looking smile. "And knowing some of the guys who said they are coming, I'll need to clean up a little before the bus pulls up."

"I'll make sure they are and help you clean," I say trying to comfort her. This party was partially my fault from a comment some weeks ago. Plus I think if I need to pick up Makayla I'll need to be out of there by 3 as it is.

"Good," she barely more than whispers. "I really need to unwind but I've been to parties with you," she continues with a massive smirk growing through the last few words.

"No worries," I assure her. "I only let fires and three digit occupancy happen when I have the whole next day off and money to

make things right.” She smiles and nods as I help her finish getting rid of her trash.

“Everybody else is gone,” she informs me. “I figured you would be about to go make sure they’re gone.”

“Yeah, I was just about to, actually,” I confirm. *Now to just get all the overstock I see sitting on a few U-boats thrown into the bays and scanned in.*

“I’ll help you finish this stuff up so we can go,” she tells me, as if she can read what I was thinking.

“I’ve been working with you too long,” I say with a smile. We get done crushing her cardboard and getting all the plastic into the compactor. Then we tag team the couple hundred boxes in a matter of minutes.

“Everything done?” Sheryl asks the moment Jerry scans the last box we’re working.

“As of this second!” I respond. “Your ninja skills are at maximum,” I tell her with a grin.

“Thanks! You guys going to be here Saturday?” she asks looking back and forth between Jerry and I. Jerry nods in conformation. “Good! Have a good party!” she says before turning to run off.

“Wait, I won’t be here. I have a bunch of time off. I’ll be back in a couple weeks,” I say before she makes it out of the store room.

“I know, just trying to see if I could get you here Saturday anyway!” Sheryl says as she disappears around a corner.

“She must have hidden cameras everywhere,” Jerry whispers. I nod in agreement as we leave.

Descent . Uncover

No more than 20 minutes later I pull into Jerry's driveway just behind her. I walk over to the back of her car and hear her trunk pop. I lift it open and take a case of soda and wait for her to get to the back of the car.

"Awww, you're so nice," she says with her dimple filled smile. *God I'd fuck that smile so fucking hard.*

"I know, it's a curse," I tell her with my best attempt at forcing a look of sadness. She laughs as she takes the two small boxes of stuff she had picked up from Costco. We get to her front door and I put the soda case down and offer to take the boxes off her hands. She hands them over with a smile and opens the door. I look at her ass for a moment before she turns to take the boxes back. *She knows I want her, it's cool she ignores it and still chills with me.*

Once we get everything to the kitchen we tag team getting the beer chest and everything set up. I look at her and say "Quickie?" She leans her head forward so she can look at me over her glasses, raising her eyebrows. "No?" I guess while laughing a little. She shakes her head and smiles without a word. "Always worth a try!" Then we both hear a car pull up.

"See, not like we had time anyway," she teases with another small laugh. *I'd fuck her in front of everybody coming over. I think it's more fun just wanting to fuck her and knowing I can't than the possible trouble that could come from it. A relationship that ends badly, coworker or not, is never fun for me.*

"Don't underestimate my ability to squeeze a quickie into five seconds!" I fire back before going to open the door. I don't look to see if she reacts but in my mind's eye I see her shaking her head and smiling again. Peeking through the window in the last couple steps I see Cody, Justine and Emma getting out of Cody's car.

Cody drives an 80s model Camaro. Very clean and has some aftermarket rims and exhaust on it. Looks very cool and sounds even cooler. He has two bench seats instead of what came stock. He also has a different back window and trunk to make more leg room in the back seat. Lots of modifications that make it seem like a Camaro I would even own if I had the money.

Emma is a tiny little brunette girl with long straight black hair. She has a cute long oval face with always clear complexion and is very soft

spoken. She's probably five foot even but looks even shorter next to Cody who is only five foot eight but is generally muscular. I say generally because he looks muscular compared to most skinny and chubby people but little more than toned compared to actual weight lifters. Cody and Emma have been secretly dating for three weeks. I am watching with amusement because it's a bigger time bomb than the one I was in with Elizabeth. It's bigger because Emma is sisters with Teresa. And both are daughters of the ninja who goes by the name of Sheryl. Plus Emma is freshly 19 and Cody is 26. Legal, but explosive if Sheryl finds out. She always seems to find out everything, so I'm sure it'll happen any day now.

Justine, to me, is by far the most physically perfect person who works at Toys R Us. She has great legs and a perfect ass but isn't skinny enough to have a gap. Though, her stomach looks flat and sexy, she only looks like she has a six pack if she's been doing a couple hundred crunches and isn't slouching. Not that I've seen her just after. Ok, I have.

Her breasts are perky Cs, even without a bra. Not that I've seen them outside of pictures her ex showed me. But dear god, I want to. She has the most perfect shoulders and back I've ever seen. She has a long neck and a slender face with arguably the cutest smile most people have seen. She has large misshapen teeth which is the only flaw I've ever heard mentioned of her besides some arguments about her being a little chubby. When considering everything about her, nobody seems to hold the teeth against her.

She's on my list of things that will never happen. I'm not privy as to why, though. I'm just aware that I am on hers. The only reason I'm aware of it is because I've often tried to invite her out to do things with only two of us being involved. She's always very kind about sternly declining. I assume it's because she's advancing towards a relationship with somebody who works at Toys R Us. And considering his black hair and blue eyes, I can understand her motivation. He's an artist, like her. But Jesus, her charm and appearance... It's very hard not to make advancements where I feel it appropriate.

"Hey guys!" I say opening the door. Justine, with her bright eyed wide smile, like she knows I've already fucked her more in my head than I've actually fucked some girlfriends. A small chorus of the rest greet me as they walk in. "There should already be some shit to drink cooling off in the kitchen."

I hear the chatter begin in the kitchen as I scour the living room, picking up missed toys and clutter, putting them back where they came

from. I know it annoys Jerry when she sees me tidying up but she's so preoccupied it should be fine. I also know it drives her crazy when she starts noticing clutter when others are visiting.

I hear another car pull up and see Sal get out with his girlfriend Fran. They are a visually cute couple because both Fran and Sal are very short. Sal actually wears size medium shirts from the boys section. He's about five foot four and she's still more petite and a few inches shorter than him.

I open the door and smile.

"Hey fag!" he says as he pats my shoulder, passing into the kitchen.

"Sup, man" Fran says as she smiles and hands me an 18 pack of natural ice.

"Thanks," I say taking it from her. While she has an insanely tiny body her probably B cups still look huge on her. And her smile is fucking adorable.

I follow them into the kitchen and dining room area, putting the beer in the last open part at the bottom of the fridge. They all greet each other as I slip back into the living room and continue tidying up. I finish just before they start making their way into the living room with their drinks. I over hear them talking about managers moving from our store to the Dodge street location.

"James," I hear Justine begin. "Do you know if Sheryl is going to go to Dodge with Darren?"

"She says no but I've heard Darren talking her into it," I respond. "She sounds like she can't do the drive but I know if he offers her more money she'll jump on it."

"Like Sunday morning," Jerry blurts out. We all laugh though I am locked onto Justine's smile.

"I'd go take morning lead if he asked me," I add while shifting my focus to Jerry.

"You would blow me for the right money," Sal muses, ending in a laugh.

"I'd blow you after the right number of shots," I add with a laugh as it spreads through everybody else. I'm trying hard to ignore how gorgeous Justine is. *Lucky ass Taylor. If they end up together I'll be unable to deny jealousy. I've been accused of it from time to time but it's not noticeable at the moment. But I know it'll crop up if they get there.*

All of the sudden I am aware Jerry has started glaring at me.

“What?” I ask her, truly feeling like I’m missing something. She points towards the window. I look out and see Natalie and her new short boyfriend Brad approaching the house.

“Better be the last people!” she says threateningly and shifting her pointed finger at me.

“I didn’t tell Natalie!” I say both amused and defensively.

“I did,” Sal admits. “She was complaining about not having anything to do between School and her StarCraft tourney tonight so I said come on over.”

“You’re lucky!” Jerry says to me before starting in on Sal. “Did you know I wanted to keep this on the low?” she asks Sal. I get up to go be close to the front door.

“I did,” Sal repeats. “She’s hot though” he says while getting immediately punched in the thigh by Fran. We all laugh.

“She’s dating your best friend!” Fran squeals in amusement.

“Doesn’t mean I don’t notice she’s hot!” Sal says with a smirk.

“Your dad is hot,” Fran says with a little wiggle of defiance.

“Didn’t you meet Sal’s dad before you met Sal?” Justine asks with an impossible to ignore tone of mischief in her voice. Sal turns to watch Fran’s response with a raised eyebrow.

“Justine!” Fran says, now sitting up entirely straight.

“Oh?” Sal inquires before drinking some more of his beer.

“Yes!” Fran states getting uncomfortable, the more entertained the rest of us become. “I met him at the Christmas party last year. He works with my parents.”

Sal nods in a gesture for her to continue the story. Fran looks worried and since I’ve never heard this story before, I motion with my hand for her to continue as well.

“You guys just like to watch me squirm!” Fran accuses playfully.

“I know I do,” Ben says making a flirty smile at her and looking down her body. Sam flips him off without looking in his direction as Fran continues.

“See, we were playing Limbo and he gave me a pass every time my breasts hit the bar.” she explains just as she downs the rest of her mixed drink.

“Yeah?” Sal says with a nervous smile.

“Then when we were playing spades he put me on his team and called us Power Slam,” she says, her face now turning red. We all stare expectantly, all excited about what she’s going to say next. Beside maybe

Sal, as he looks a little irritated now. “Naturally I asked what made him choose Power Slam and he said it was his signature sex move.”

I open the door just as everyone but Sal and Fran bursts into laughter. I only see Natalie. “Welcome!” I say as she smiles and enters the house. “Where’s Brad?”

“Oh he just dropped me off, he has to work tonight,” she answers. I catch a glimpse of her slightly baggy pants and wonder what her ass looks like. I’ve never actually seen it.

“That sucks,” I say. “He is a chill dude, I wanted to give him a couple shots before I leave.”

“What are they all laughing about?” Natalie asks as she continues toward the living room.

“Sal’s dad hit on Fran once,” I say as her jaw drops. “What do you want to drink?” I inquire.

“Oh my god,” she whispers followed by “any liquor.” I smile and nod, turning toward the kitchen. I had brought a bottle of jack just in case any liquor drinkers showed up. Good thing!

I know she doesn’t care much for ice so I pour her half a glass straight. I take it out to her as Fran wraps up a recap of the story for Natalie. I hand her the drink and she smiles in thanks, eyes wide in amazement as she listens. “And that’s where Sal came in,” Fran concludes.

“Where did Sal go?” I ask, realizing he’s no longer in the room.

Fran points towards the back of the house as Natalie asks “Is this the first Sal heard about this?”

Jerry walks over to me and leans in. “You should go calm Sal down,” she whispers.

“Alright, I’m going to duck out soon to go pick up Makayla,” I inform her.

“Not going to stay help clean after they leave?” she asks, looking hurt and lied to.

“I’m really sorry. I trust these guys to not make a mess. Plus I’ll plant an idea in Sal’s head to stay and help. It really should be fine,” I assure her, trying to make up for my ditching out to take a shower before going to pick up Makayla.

“So which Makayla is it? Silver or Reynolds?” she asks.

“Neither, not sure what her last name is,” I respond.

Jerry rolls her eyes and turns to walk back to her seat. I wonder why she rolled her eyes? I slip out as I hear the conversation lead to

something about Sal getting angry. I open the back door and find Sal standing on the edge of the porch smoking a cigarette.

“You alright man?” I ask, hoping he’s not too angry. I don’t want to leave him alone if he hasn’t gone back inside before I leave.

“My dad tried to fuck my girlfriend, man,” he confides before taking another drag.

“Yeah but he didn’t,” I attempt to console him. “Shit dude, we all think she’s fuckable. Plus you guys didn’t even know each other at the time he hit on her. Also, you know everybody at work flirts with each other all the time.” His demeanor both softens a little and seems to twinge at being reminded we all flirt anyway. I disregard the twinge because I expect that when me and flirting is together in any sentence. I have a pretty long history of fucking people I shouldn’t.

“That’s true...” he says, trailing off into another drag of his now almost depleted cigarette. “But you haven’t ever hit on her as much as my dad,” he concludes.

“That’s fair,” I admit. “I barely even flirt with people at work if they’re dating another coworker.”

“Yeah,” he agrees. “Plus I would stab you.”

“Fuck!” I say with a laugh. “You would probably shoot me.”

Sal nods in agreement.

“Or have Cody grab me and let you kick me in the balls repeatedly,” I continue.

He laughs and nods in further agreement. “Yeah,” he agrees. “I would definitely kick you in the balls. Probably not for flirting. If you made out with Fran, I would. I’m not Aaron.”

“Thank fuck you’re not Aaron,” I muse, joining him in looking down at the ground in thought.

This time I wince a little. Everybody, including myself, thinks Aaron should have at least beat my ass. If not, disfigured or dismembered me. Granted, I was greatly misled by Elizabeth. But still, I knew she was engaged and I knew they moved in together. Everything I was told by her, I watched going the opposite direction. I knew. But the sex was so good, I didn’t want to believe it.

“I have to go in a bit, but I’m worried a mess might get left for Jerry to have to clean up quick before the kids get home. That’s my problem, in case you wanted to know,” I say with a partial smirk and a look of worry.

“Oh don’t fret over that. I’ll stay with Fran and clean up if anything gets messy before her kids get home,” Sal says. I smile and pat him on

the back.

“I love you man. Hopefully you’re not fucked up about your dad being a horny old man,” I say with a smile. He nods slowly and looks out over the back yard.

“Thanks. I’m sure I’m going to grow up just like him,” Sal says with a slightly depressed looking smirk.

“I know I will. I’m going to go, man,” I say while observing his reaction. I want him to be chill before I leave. I don’t know why I try to keep things stable so often at parties besides just being quiet and drinking.

“Cool,” Sal says while pulling out another cigarette. “I’m going to go back in after this.”

“Natalie’s in there, maybe you can get her to dance again,” I ponder, sending both of us into ear to ear grins.

Natalie was dancing on an island counter at a house party some days ago. For being as tiny skinny and tall as she is, her dancing is distractingly seductive. She can dance in several different ways including hip-hop, rave, belly and hula. And she’s amazing at all of them.

I step back inside to see Natalie is already half way through the bottle of Jack Daniels. Everybody else is talking over three different conversations. I walk over to Jerry’s side and wait for her to get to a stopping point in her conversation. I notice my phone vibrate.

Makayla: Hey I get off in twenty minutes!

James: Want me to bring a towel? :P

Makayla: HA!

Makayla: Are you going to make me walk?

James: I’ll be there, don’t worry. Hey, what’s your name again?

Makayla: WHAT? You forgot already!?

James: No Makayla, your last name. I will never forget your first name.

Makayla: Oh. Faulk.

James: Are you faulking kidding me?

Makayla: So original!

James: I’ll see you about 3:30.

Makayla: You better!

“Sexting?” I hear Jerry whisper snidely and playfully. Totally surprised me, as I was off in my own world. I about jumped out of my skin,

but think I kept my cool.

“You never respond to my texts or I would,” I reply with a smile. She flips me off with her bony little Skeletor hands.

“You going to sneak out?” she asks, knowing it’s about that time.

“Yeah, Sal should be fine.” I say adding that piece of information.

“Are you sure?” she whispers with concern in her eyes.

“Yeah, he’s just too much like his dad. Plus he said he’d stay with Fran and help you clean up if needed” I respond while slipping my phone back in my pocket.

“Yeah, he is too much like his dad. And thanks,” she whispers with eyebrows raising and an evil grin.

“Later cutie,” I say while walking around through the kitchen, taking a quiet route to the front door.

“James, hold up!” I hear Justine shout as I start to close the front door behind me. I let the door go just before it closes so it stays cracked and move to the side of the front porch. Justine comes through the door quickly and closes it behind her. She stands across from me and leans her back against the wall and begins talking.

“You do some photography, right?” she asks with a playful look in her eyes. *Not sure what that’s about or where this is going... but... The pictures of her in my mind right now are reason enough to confirm.*

“Yeah, why? Need anything?” I ask with various things I would love to do for her flashing through my mind, one after another.

“Cool, I have your phone number so I’ll text you what I’m thinking later,” she says with the most flirty smile I think I’ve ever seen from her.

“Alright, no problem” I say as I turn to leave. *So glad I didn’t chub up there. So glad.*

Descent . Pickup

I drive into the parking lot of the nursing home Makayla works at and park in a spot facing away from the front door. I look over the building and think it looks like it has the unmistakable aura of death. It might be the aging paint and dirty window sills. The grass and bushes are all lush and green. The trees are even full and look free from any sort of issues. All is well trimmed. But the building just looks as if it houses pain and suffering. Probably just the negative outlook I have on nursing homes. I should text her.

James: I'm here.

Makayla: I'll be out, let me change out of the scrubs.

James: Cool

I check through my email while I wait and find nothing but junk. Look, political shit. And here are some advertisements for places I haven't shopped at in months. Penis enlargement? No thanks. Everybody jokes about getting this shit but it seems to really happen. Some music news I flag so I'll notice and read it later.

The passenger side door to my truck opens and Makayla steps into my car with a huge ear to ear smile on her face. She has an oval face, shoulder length very dark brown hair, brown eyes and perfect teeth. I do not have perfect teeth. I do wish I did DEAR LORD her cleavage. I knew her body was crazy in the dress she was in but this black and white horizontally striped tank top, holy shit. Low cut as fuck, and almost short enough to be daisy duke jean shorts. Fuck. Whole body is a medium brown and I know she's a white girl. Crazy hot. Turns out that dress didn't show off her chest at all.

"Are you going to stare all day or are you going to get me out of here?" she asks with a sly smile.

"Oh shit, sorry, yeah. Wait, how did you know which vehicle was mine?" I ask, wondering how she knew to come to this car.

"I think my first clue was seeing you sitting in the driver's seat," she says, leaning her head against her hand and smiling at me coyly.

"Where do you want to go?" I ask, sitting up straight, trying and probably failing to emulate a hired driver.

"Los Angeles, please" she says, fluttering her eyes, putting her hands together and leaning forward, apparently pushing out her cleavage

more. Jesus Christ, I'm under glorious visual assault here. So much I want to memorize and so little time.

"Ma'am I am only contractually allowed to drive you somewhere in the Omaha Metro area," I say in the most official voice I can muster.

"Well then I demand to be driven home," she huffs. She is obviously trying to hold back a smile so it's extra cute, but the voice tone sounded creepily convincing. "Why are we not moving?" she says in a pushed up, snooty voice.

"I..." I begin quietly. "... don't know where you live."

"Oh no!" she gasps. "I don't either! What kind of a hired driver are you?" she howls while leaning forward, covering her face with both hands.

"I actually killed the hired driver and I'm here to take advantage of you," I say in a raspy creeper voice I am ashamed I can do this well.

"Oh, well, in that case It's just up the street to the left, I'll show you," she says in a well done New Yorker accent. We both laugh a little as I begin driving. *It's hard to focus with those legs just to my right and squarely in the side of my vision.*

I'm trying not to hit anybody as I'm driving. All I can do is imagine if there are any tan lines under her clothes. *Are her nipples small? large? Are her areolas massive or proportionate to the nipples and breasts? And her lips! I know it was dark outside but her lips are thicker than Patricia's and she was partially black!*

"Your conversation is riveting," she says, with a smirk as she's leaning her elbow against the door and propping her head up on her hand again. *Jesus, her hair is so thick and perfectly straight.*

"Not just my conversation," I insert with a smirk.

"Did you just claim to be boring and quiet in bed?" she asks with an even bigger smirk.

"Oh I wouldn't know, I'm actually completely a virgin," I assert while trying to keep an absolutely straight face. "I've seen some lingerie pictures in the ads but I've never even seen pornography."

Her face explodes in an open mouthed and loud laugh. Her eyes, wide open with laughter and hair falling forward to cover them as she laughs harder. *Fuck I should pay attention to the road. I would hate to kill her in an accident during our first time alone.*

"Yeah, I bet," she says with sarcasm while resting back into her elbow propped position. The smile still strong on her face as I look over to make eye contact. She's nodding slowly with her eyebrows up, eyes locked on to mine. I turn my head to look back at the road and catch her

eyes drop from mine down towards either my lap or the wires coming out of my ash tray leading to the speakers behind my seat.

“Soooo,” I say, starting to be filled with self-doubt and anxiety. “Am I getting close?” I ask, hoping we didn’t just talk our way into passing her street.

“Nope, just turn right after that empty lot of grass up ahead” she instructs. “My dad won’t be home for a half hour, so you can come in and have a soda if you want.”

“Did Jean tell you I like soda?” I ask just out of curiosity.

“Jean didn’t, I just know soda teeth when I see them,” she informs me as my dread inside quadruples.

“Ahhhh,” I say, hopefully not sounding like I feel. *Soon as she hinted at having noticed my teeth I felt like all chances of us exploring each other faded. Feels bad, man.*

“Don’t worry, I don’t judge anybody for indulging in what they enjoy,” she comforts while taking her lower lip between her teeth for a nibble. *Ok, well, there’s that hope creeping back with an even more focused dread. Fuck.*

“Well you obviously don’t indulge in junk food,” I say with a smile, looking over to visibly run my eyes from her legs up her body to holy shit her neck and shoulders are fucking PERFECT. Dear lord --

“No but you’re going to want to turn right!” she says sounding like I’m going to miss it. I don’t, without looking up I turn to the right, aware of where I am and making the turn smoothly. Not perfectly, because I came a little too close to the car waiting at the stop sign at the intersection. She laughs in what sounds like a mixture of excitement and discomfort.

“Yes ma’am” I agree with a bigger smile, looking at her teeth, lips then eyes. Huge brown eyes, it’s insane. I look back at the road and before I can ask which house is hers she tells me.

“It’s the one with the trampoline in back,” while leaning over towards me a little pointing. God she smells good. And Jesus, that’s not just a push up bra, those things are fucking huge. How can someone with such a fit little body have such huge breasts? Focus!

“Alright, do you want me to park in the street or in the driveway?” I ask, trying to plan just in case there is a certain place everyone likes to park.

“Street. Our side,” she says gesturing to an empty area at the end of her driveway on the curb. I nod and pass by her house, making a U-turn fast enough to press her against the passenger door. A smirk

spreads across her face as I park forward far enough that I won't have to parallel park. I suck at that. Big time.

"Alright, thanks!" she says climbing out of my truck then closing the door. Seems a little fast, so I hesitate to turn off the engine and get out myself. She turns around and leans into the window, breasts bulging inward and says "Are you coming?" A smirk spreads across her face as I briefly hesitate to answer.

"I could use a drink," I state with as warm a smile as I can muster. She stands up and taps the bottom of my open window with her hands and a gorgeous smile. She turns and walks up the driveway, ass swaying in a way I can only imagine is done on purpose.

So glad I don't have a boner. Sucks being horny all the time. Very irritating. And then trying to be kind and gentlemanly while navigating hormones... It's not easy. Should I roll my windows up? Fuck it she left her front door open.

After what feels like a couple strides I'm standing in her house's foyer. I wonder where she went as I hear the door close behind me. I turn my head to see she was between the door and the wall so she could close it once I got in. I turn my whole body to face her and she bites her lower lip while smiling. I step forward towards her and she reaches out to grab my arms and pull her the rest of the way towards me.

I hear her exhale hard as I lean forward to whisper in her ear. "Thirty minutes?" I say, hoping she was pulling my chain and had the house to herself for most of the evening.

"At the most" she says in a whisper. She moves her hands to my waist and pulls me closer to her as she backs to the wall. I feel her breasts press against my ribs as I notice myself get fully hard without any chance for me to mentally intervene. One of her hands drops down from my waist to the crotch of my pants without hesitation.

I close my eyes and lean my head back as her hand strokes me fast through my jeans. A few seconds later I feel my pants get pulled completely off at the same time as my underwear. I instinctively step one foot up after another as she slides them to our side between the wall and the rug. The feel of her breasts disappears from my chest and I open my eyes.

I look down and see her mouth envelop me all the way to the base. I feel the head of my dick forced down her throat and am stunned she doesn't gag at all. I don't even hear the all too common gagging sound I'm used to hearing if someone even attempts it. She squeezes my

balls with one hand and I see her other hand reach down and rub her pussy through her shorts.

In one motion she stands up and pulls down her shorts and panties. "We have plenty of time" she says with a huge smile as she jumps up putting her hands on my shoulders and throws her legs around me and pins my penis upright between us. After a brief moment of fear that her or both of us may fall to the ground I realize she has turned us and her back is against the door. On top of that I note we are completely stable.

I involuntarily moan a little out of sheer excitement as she squeezes with her legs, rising her up just enough for the head of my penis to run down her clit and lips. I feel a large amount of moisture completely cover the head of my penis as it rubs down her, just before she thrusts her pelvis forward, forcing me into her. Her pussy is tighter than the grip she had with her hands earlier.

I lean my head back and let out a louder moan as I put my hands on her hips and pull her against me. She thrusts her hips forward and back again. I feel my penis penetrating and bending as the angle forces it in and out with pressure on the middle of my shaft. I try to regain composure and notice her shirt came off at some point. Now she is only wearing a thin, see through bra. I lean forward and start sucking on her chest, just above her breast as she begins to moan.

I feel liquid starting to run down my inner thighs as her thrusts increase in speed. I quickly move my hands down beneath her ass and grip each cheek tightly. I pull her towards me with every thrust to force myself a little deeper each time. I step back a little to get her angled a bit better and focus more on keeping her held up. She lifts her legs back so they're up my chest and on each side of my head.

Her shoulders are now the only part in contact with the door. I have a death grip on her ass, holding her up as I fuck her hard and fast. Her arms wrapped around her legs and my torso, making it easy for me to control the speed. Every couple thrusts I hear liquid landing on the floor that isn't among the liquid running down my legs. Her eyes are squinted closed and mouth wide open, breathing heavily.

Her head pushes back against the door a little as she starts shouting out. I keep my grip and slow my thrusts outward and push as hard as I can each time I go back in. I keep doing this as her shouts get louder. Once I feel her shifting to a full orgasm instead of cumming repeatedly, I feel a flush of water spray my pelvis and ricochet off my

balls, all over my legs and the floor. I was under the impression she had an orgasm or two already.

The sound level of her screams is now almost deafening as her muscles start loosening, causing me to have to shift focus from timing thrusts to increase her orgasmic potency to not letting her fall to the floor. Her legs start shifting and I move so she can get one after the other on the floor. Her legs move towards a standing position as my penis slides out and I step back.

I look down and am proud of myself for not getting off and being as hard as I can possibly be. I look up and see her head leaning forward, sweat formed on her breasts as she wobbles on her feet. I lean forward and wrap my arms behind her embracing her and launching into passionate kissing. I break the kiss and whisper "Here."

She opens her eyes and has an eyebrow movement as if silently saying "What?" before reengaging the kiss. I pull my hands from behind her and massage her breasts a little causing her to be distracted from her end of the passionate kiss. I move her and rotate her to facing the wall next to the door. I hear her groan a little in anticipation as I put one hand on her waist, wrapping around so my pointer finger is on her pelvic bone. I place my other hand on her left shoulder, gripping firmly.

She moans a little as I bend my knees and slip back into her now extremely warm and drenched pussy. I can feel that it has throbbed up between her getting back on her feet and now. She leans her head forward fast, bumping her head on the wall before laughing a little. I move my hand from her shoulder to opposite the same spot the other hand is around her waist. I pull her back a little, forcing me further in. She makes a small yelping sound before moaning loudly.

She puts her hands flat on the wall, pushing us both back a couple steps. She almost makes me slide on some liquid on the wood floor before I regain traction and start fucking her hard and fast. I worry now a little about making her lose her traction. I'm carefully moving her a little forward and back by her waist. I shift to pinning her in position and pounding as hard and fast as I can. I feel her cum several times before I slow down.

She starts breathing slower and deeper as I fuck slower and slower. She starts pulling forward like she wants to stop so I let myself slide out a little. As soon as I'm out she moves herself down a little and almost jams me squarely into her ass hole.

"Switch holes?" I ask, never having actually given anal before.

She nods quickly, bumping her head on the wall again and sighing.

I grip her waist again in a slightly different position and put the head of my penis squarely on her anus. She quickly pushes herself backwards away from the wall and lets out a quick moan. Now that she's forced herself all the way down to my base, her legs begin trembling and her breath increases. The momentary worry about lube was warrantless considering the sheer amount of moisture on both of us.

I think for a moment about how I've never really done anal before and never thought I would enjoy giving it. Nor do I remember anyone I've been with enjoying receiving-

My ability to think is destroyed by the moans coming from her throat. They are loud enough that I can feel the vibrations in my body and hear them echoing through the house. Her amazing little ass slides off my dick and slams back around it repeatedly. I would worry about it hurting her but by the speed in which she is rocking back and forth having totally taken control of the, I have no doubt she's enjoying it.

Suddenly she lunges forward far enough, flattening herself against the wall for a moment before very quickly moving to the rug. She moves some clothes out of the way and gets positioned on all fours. She swings her hair in front of her and turns to look back at me, gritting her teeth. She wiggles her ass back and forth as I stand there observing in awe. I shake my head and smile and drop to my knees just behind her. She turns forward and puts her head down as I grip her waist. She wiggles her ass again as I reach with one hand to position my cock for anal entry.

She shifts a little so I'm about to enter her pussy instead. At first I grip her waist and hold her still as I adjust just outside her ass, feeling heat from her pussy radiating upward on the bottom of my dick. Then I hear her trying to say something between gasping for air and involuntarily moaning. I slow down a little and she gets a couple quick whispers out. "Pussy, pussy."

Personally her pussy felt better to me so I don't hesitate in slowly positioning it outside her pussy. She thrusts back and forces me most of the way in. She keeps moving her hair around and I start to wonder. I start slowly running my fingertips from her gorgeous ass cheeks up and down her back. Every few times I do it I feel her cum again so I try to slow it down a little. I slowly get her close to cumming again several times then when her breathing starts picking up again I grip a cheek in each hand and fuck her as hard and fast as I can.

Her head leans forward and her legs start to tremble as I go

harder and harder. Her shoulders start to come together and her arms start folding, lowering herself forward. I feel her starting to get more drenched and hear her moans slowly increasing in loudness and tone. She starts moving her hair around like before so I carefully reach forward and grip a lot of it in my hand and gently pull. She instantly shifts from moaning to screaming and I feel her internally pulsing hard and fast, liquid splashing against my balls. I feel my knee traction starting to get slippery as the liquid is collecting on the rug. She leans her head forward a little to force her hair to get pulled a little harder as she starts moving her pelvis in quick circular motions. The way it forces my dick to rotate in angles inside her as I pound her as hard as I can feels fucking amazing.

She starts winding down and pulls forward, collapsing forward on the floor, hair slipping out of my hands. Fuck, I don't feel like I'm even close to getting off. I let myself slide out and start massaging her back, not realizing her cum is dripping all over her ass off of my dick. I look at the door she was facing before we went to the rug and start laughing loudly.

"What" she barely gets out, still breathing fairly heavily.

"You left tit prints on the wall" I say, gesturing pointlessly as she's forehead down on the rug. Jesus, this rug is soft and comfortable besides where it's saturated. I hear her laughing and see her looking over at the door. Then her eyes go wide. "What?" I ask.

"Look at the door" she says, slowly rolling over on her back. Jesus, she looks amazing, Her breasts even look huge when she's on her back. I've never even seen any that look that good in porn. Damn. Not for that size, anyway. I turn and look at the door and see various moist hand prints and liquid all down the face of it. I also notice what appears to be imprints of her shoulder in the wall where we started.

"Oh holy shit" I say, just as she crawls around in front of me and knocks me on my back, splashing a little on the rug. I bump my head on the floor as I land but don't care at all.

"I'm going to finish you off" she says, climbing on and positioning over me. She reaches down and grips the base of my dick hard, which doesn't make me any harder because I haven't lessened in firmness.

"Good luck" I say, not meaning to be insulting but unable to think clearly with her breasts firmly in my face. She scowls a little as she slowly lowers herself down around me. I reach up and take her waist in my hands as she shifts her weight onto one hand. Her other hand reaches between my hands and starts rubbing her clit as she finishes her descent.

“Fuck, James” she says as her eyes close and she simultaneously rubs her clit and starts thrusting her hips. I’m not sure if I prefer gyrating and grinding or this forward and backward thrusting she seems to love. But it does feel good with how much control she has over her vaginal muscles.

I lean my head back as she starts shifting to rising and crashing down over and over. I move my hands from her hips to her breasts as she starts groaning and whimpering. Suddenly her pussy muscles start pulsating and squeezing in a bunch of quick patterns as she rises and falls quicker and quicker. I feel the buildup in my balls as I feel amazement. *Holy shit, how did she make this happen?*

She descends completely to the base of my dick and sits up, thrusting forward and back a short distance with each motion and at a pace so fast her breasts jiggle under my grip. Her head goes back and both of her hands balance herself on my thighs as she grips them strong enough to hurt.

I feel the squeezing patterns of her vaginal muscles continue as I take my turn moving my head around and bumping it hard into the floor underneath me. At least I had a rug besides the door. I move a hand from her right breast down to her clit and rub it hard and fast. I lose my train of thought as I start pumping burst after burst into her and scream quite loud myself. I can’t tell if I actually yelled Makayla’s name several times while I was getting off or if that was in my head. I know most of the screaming had to be unintelligible.

Room spinning a little I see her slide off me quick and collect her clothes. Her eyes look huge and terrified as I sit up and try to get back towards reality.

“Just grab your clothes and back door, that way” she whispers waving her finger towards a doorway in the living room. “Hurry!” she commands. Directly after she says that I hear a car door close.

I look around and find my shorts with my boxers still in them and jump onto them. Luckily my feet land in the leg holes and I pull them up fast, catching my penis in the unzipped zipper. I bite my cheek and blurt out an indiscernible “Fuck” as I look around the room.

Makayla also almost fully dressed kisses my cheek, hair brushing my nose then whispers “go.” She points toward the kitchen just down the hall beyond the foyer. “Sliding door in the dining room” she whispers sounding fully panicked. What feels like half a second later I’m fiddling with and unlocking the back door. Then I’m half way across the yard and

gone through the far tree line.

Behind the row of houses on her street there is a tree line separating them from the neighborhood a turn further down North Broadway. Luckily for me there is a stream with a dirt walking trail up the side of it running through the center of the tree line. I run up the trail and plan to casually walk back down the street in a little while. I figure that will be slick enough that I can just get in my truck and leave. Still feeling generally numb and wrecked with post orgasmic bliss, I am amazed I am moving this fast. I still barely have composure.

Descent . Adrenaline

The path breaks off through some trees, away from the stream. It ends in a grassy field. It takes but a moment to realize this is a park and there is a small parking lot at the top end of Makayla's street. *What luck, what fucking luck. I can fuck around up here and go get my car as if I parked at the bottom of the street and walked to and from the park. Awesome.*

Makayla: Come get your truck.

James: Yeah?

Makayla: Come get your truck.

James: Alright.

What the fuck? I wonder why she repeated herself without saying anything more? Hmmm.

James: Everything cool?

Makayla: Cool. Come get your truck.

Well what the fuck. Whatever. I look down the street and can't see my truck thanks to a small curve half way down. Well. Now my heart is pumping fiercely. Was that her? Was that her dad? Is he telling her to make me come back? Does he have a gun? How big is this dude? I start walking down the street so I can see my truck.

Makayla: Are you coming?

Hmmm. Should I make some shit up and lay low? Could be her dad.

James: I'm not near your house, can I drop by later and pick it up?"

Makayla: You are close. Come get your truck.

Ok now I'm quite nervous. My pace quickens a little. I don't want to just sprint down the sidewalk in case someone is standing somewhere watching, waiting. I want to still feel like I have a little bit of deniability that I had anything to do with anything in that house.

As I approach the curve I see broken glass in the street close to where my truck is parked. *FUCK.* I walk out between two parked cars and peek further down the street I see a man standing on my hood, pointing at

me. I can't tell how tall he is or really how big he is from this distance. I see he is holding a baseball bat, though. *FUCK. Fuck. FUCK!*

I move back as low as I can toward the sidewalk and run up towards the park again. Not twenty paces later I hear the squeal of tires down the street. I feel like I could black out based on how hard my blood is pumping. My run turns into a sprint filled with all the energy I can push into it. I feel I make damn good time to the path beyond the tree line at the edge of the park. I decide to run down the path towards the main street. Maybe I can get in sight of other people and not get murdered.

The sun dims as clouds slowly roll into the area. *Fuck, the clouds look like they're low and dark gray. Great. If it rains while I'm outside on foot this is going to suck. I know little Jean lives near here. But I don't remember where.*

I stop just before I get into plain sight of Makayla's back porch. I can hear a vehicle tearing down the street from the park. I hear it screech to a stop at what sounds like the stop sign at the intersection of her street and North Broadway. I was thinking I could head to the right a bit to the small business cluster to take shelter. I hear more squealing as the vehicle sounds to take a U-turn, traveling back up the street towards the park. I take this chance to run as fast as I can down the path to the sidewalk on this side of North Broadway. I sprint the last length of the path a little faster than I should have. *I really hope I didn't just fuck a muscle up. Better than dead, I suppose.*

Once to the sidewalk I look both ways and it happens to be clear enough for me to sprint across. I hear the sound of squealing tires from what sounds like the right distance away to be in the parking lot of the park. As I hear them blend into the sound of a revving engine I run across the street safely to the other side. I continue to run up the street in the opposite direction from her house and towards the businesses. Hopefully I can find a place up there to lay low. *I guess the way my truck ended in the dream was wrong.*

I'm a couple blocks up North Broadway and haven't seen any cars driving crazily. I really wish I had hid in a bush and gotten a look at what the car speeding up and down her street looked like FUCK. Fuck. Fuck fuck. It's too late to go back now. I'm almost down to the business cluster.

Only two cars sitting in the gas station parking lot but nobody parked in front of the comic book store. Hmmmm. Comic store it is. At least they have a bunch of music and video games to look at. Never been much of a comic book person, but if I have to I'll dig through them too. I do miss reading superman stuff before he "died" and came back in 20 different versions.

I open the door and the mounted bells that ring actually cause me to jump. *I really hate being this on edge. I especially hate it when I'm trying to act normal and blend.*

"Anything I can help you find?" a kind looking man asks. He looks at me and I feel as if he can see right through me. As if he can clearly see that something is horribly wrong. But I try to act like I'm just here chilling.

"Just browsing, thanks" I respond. *Fuck. I can hear the terror in my own voice.*

"Well, let me know. We have a water fountain back in the hallway by the bathrooms," he states as gesturing toward the back corner. *I never did notice that little hallway before. Just the larger one leading through the curtains that I always wondered if it lead to a porn viewing booth or some shit.*

"Alright, I appreciate it" I say in all honesty. *I might just go fucking hide in the bathroom for two hours. Here in this spot, though, I can see out the windows and at least have a couple second warning to maybe jump under a table and kiss my own ass goodbye.*

"You alright, son?" the guy asks. *Fuck, I didn't think he was THAT much older than me!*

"Yeah, I'm just looking for some music" I say feeling it's probably terribly obvious as I'm now looking around trying to remember where the music even is.

"We haven't sold music or video games here in years" he says with a growing look of concern. "We have a few reading rooms back behind that curtain if you want to go browse some certain comics. You know, to decide if you want to add them to your collection." He gestures toward the draped hallway.

"Yeah that sounds great" I say, indiscriminately grabbing a hand full of comics as carefully as I can and walking quickly toward the curtains. As my hand reaches to brush the curtains aside, I pass through, hearing a familiar vehicle approaching. I hurry and pick the furthest room on the left.

Fuck! Fuck, did he see me in here? No, no I doubt it, he'll have to sweep the area and look through the businesses. Even if he does start here, I should be able to hear him and maybe FUCK, there's just a couch in here. Smells clean though, but fuck. I lift up the couch to see if maybe I can lay under it and be hidden but the bottom is covered in cloth and I can see the inside is mostly springs and uninhabitable. *FUCK.*

I hear the bells ring and my heart jumps through my throat. I sit down very carefully as to not make any noise and set all the comics on the cushion next to me. I realize the walls are a medium gray. and the couch is a dark brown. A bunch of comic characters, most of which I don't

recognize, adorning the walls and ceiling in well-spaced posters attached to the walls in a way I can't really make out. *Glue? Wallpaper?*

"Do you have, have... This?" I hear a small male voice ask.

"Yes we do! Let me show you," I hear the man respond.

A huge wave of relief washes over me as I relax in the cushions a little. Those bells, those are fucking great. And I'm glad I can make out voices enough from back here. Enough to at least have an idea, anyway.

The bells ring again. An even bigger wave of panic and rise in blood pressure accompanies hearing it. Fuck, calm the fuck down. That dude seemed to have understood I was in a panic and might actually cover for me.

"Hey, Ronald!" a more adult male voice says. Ronald, that's my dad's name. Nice. Comic book guy Ronald.

"Howdy, John. What brings you in here?" Ronald asks with a sound of concern in his voice.

"Oh just looking for some little corpse," John says. *WHAT THE FUCK? Holy fuck, I'm getting light headed, shut up shut the fuck up and listen.. fucking shhh, quiet in your head mother fucker, be quiet.*

"What? Seems I'm a magnet for worked up people today," Ronald states with a growing sound of concern in his voice.

"Worked up people?" John asks, sounding closer to the hallway entry. There is no response from Ronald or further words from the other voice. I decide to squeeze myself as small as I can on the opposite side of the couch from the entry to this small room and hope for the best. *Fuck THE COMICS! I reach up and grab them and hold them next to me. I have no idea if my arm or a part of my leg is visible without walking into the room but all I can do at this point is -*

"These rooms are empty, god dammit" I hear Ronald say. "That kid must have stolen those comics. I need to get a goddam tone on this" he continues as I hear a push bar operated door open. *Was there a fucking exit door at the FUCK THERE IS. Fuck I didn't even notice that, that hallway is so dark. I just wanted to get in a fucking room FUCK.*

"You go right I'll go left?" I hear John say, sounding like he is standing exactly in the doorway.

"Stand here, I'll lock the front door" Ronald says as he I hear his footsteps heading down the short hallway towards the store face.

I hear heavy breathing from what still sounds like the doorway to the room. I hear a door hinge sounding like it's supporting a door slowly swinging a little one way to the other. It's amazing to me how I feel like I have super human hearing at the moment.. Trying to ignore my heart feeling like it's about to blow through my ribcage.

"Can you wait here? We need to leave the store for a moment" I hear Ronald ask.

“Yes sir” the young mousey voice replies. Before the word sir is completed I hear footsteps running down the hallway again and I hear the door bar impacted again. I hear footsteps landing heavily on the concrete outside and can’t tell what direction they’re going but I hear them both getting further and further from the door.

Holy fuck is it even possible they didn't see me? I must have compressed myself a lot smaller than I imagined with sheer force of terror. Without thinking I jump up on the couch and with two steps leap off the couch into the hallway.

I hear a small voice ask “Hello?” but ignore it. I go to run out the back door but it feels like it is barred or otherwise blocked from the outside. *Oh Jesus fuck what do I do? Surely at least one of them will be in view of the front of the store momentarily. ROOF! Must be roof access somewhere.* I look around at the ceilings in the dark hallway and reading rooms but see nothing. I walk out into the store and a very small child who is probably in his teens but looks like he could be passed off as an eight year old looks at me with wide, confused eyes.

“Just here working on some pipes” I blurt out, probably looking terrified and about to pass out. He seems to accept it and buries his face back in the comic he was reading before I interrupted him.

Bathrooms! I look at the narrow hallway with a drinking fountain built into the wall. *Nothing on that ceiling. Check the male bathroom, nothing. FUCK.* I come back out and check the other door. *Shit it's locked! This isn't a female bathroom this is a closet or store room. Has to be in here.* I pull my phone out and turn on the flashlight and shine it into the crack in the door. *OH FUCK YES.*

I slip my phone back in my pocket as fast as I can and pull out my wallet so fast I almost drop it. I open it and get an old PayPal card out and quickly slip it in the door. I shift the card around, having seen the door’s closing mechanism and pop the door open. *Fucking love handle locks with poor installation on a door that opens inward besides outward. So stupid easy to get into.*

“Sir?” the boy asks sounding terrified himself now. *FUCK, Didn't even remember the kid was in a direct line of sight.* I jump in what appears to be a utility room. *FUCK NO ROOF ACCESS FUCK. Fuck.* I shut the door and lock it as I can hear the boy starting to walk down the hallway. Balls on that shy kid, for sure. *FUCK. Fuck. All words are falling out of my mind but fuck. Fuck is all I can fucking think about. What am .. Is that a utility access panel?*

I run across the seven feet wide room or so and try to open the panel. *Ahh of course this fucker is locked.* I pull my phone back out and almost blind myself with the light. *Shit it's darker back here than I noticed*

in my panic. And this lock is a bolt I can't just card. Fuck. I swivel around to put my back against the wall and slide down to a sitting position.

Well fuck. Now what the fuck? I point my flashlight around the room and find a small tool bench. I jump up and walk over to it and see nothing but screwdrivers, hammers, some nails and crap you would assume could be used to fix or otherwise alter tables and display racks. Shelves, shit like that. *!!!! A bunch of keys on hooks hang just above the pegboard!*

I turn quickly and inspect the lock as far in as I can see, which isn't far. I look back at the keys and grab the 3 that look similar and rush back to the locked panel. *First one, crap, too thick. That's what she said. REALLY? Jokes when SHUT UP. Second one, WORKS NICE.*

I pull open the panel and realize this is a ladder down, not a utility panel or a ladder up, or another room with an electric box... Or an electric box. I shine my light down and realize instantly what this is. This is access to the tunnel network under old town Council Bluffs. I was confused why it would exist here until I remembered this is the north business district that has dwindled down in business saturation. *NICE!* I vaguely remember a map of the utility tunnels under the town.

I realize there is a knob on the back side of the panel so I can re-lock it and I return the keys to the hooks as fast as I can. I almost jump into the panel and gladly land in a controlled way on the ladder. I turn and close the panel as fast but as quietly as I can. I put the corner of my phone in my mouth and hope to fuck I don't scratch my precious's screen as I hold the ladder with one hand and lock the access door with my other.

Should I wait and listen and see if they come back and search the store more thoroughly? Should I get the fuck down in the tunnels and crawl my ass as fast as I can toward downtown and come out at my old church? Or anywhere down there? Far from here? Fuck. What if they came down to the tunnels from another entry? That's terrifying, nobody would hear screams of any kind down there. I better wait right here. Then I'll at least feel like I have a choice to flee back into and through the store as they climb up the 15 feet or so, or jump down and flee if they open the utility room door.

Let's not stay at Jerry's. Why would I do that? People I like, somebody I'll never get a chance with who I could flirt with pointlessly and mentally undress all day? Sal's the shit, I could have talked to him an hour alone right there I'm sure. Yeah, REAL glad I got to make Makayla cum everywhere and almost lose control three times but now I'm being hunted by someone who apparently has friends enough places to grab them and join him in the hunt? FUCK.

God her body was amazing though. Easily the best I've been with. Fuck, I hope this gamble ends up being worth it. I look down the ladder into the total darkness and wonder. Fuck, there are probably spiders up the ass all over this entire passage. FUCK. I try to recall the map and remember vividly a main passage down the length of the canal that is underground just off of where I am now. Shit, that has to be big enough to walk in until it reaches the main line the subway used to be in under downtown.

This is kind of exciting now that I think about it.

I hear a very faint sound of the bells. Jesus fuck I didn't realize how thick this wall is I'm behind. This must be between the comic place and the bar. Shit. I look down and debate just going down now. What if Ronald came back to the store to open it up in case they think I'd come back for some reason? And John is down in the tunnels? What the fuck happened to my truck? Shit. So many questions... What the fuck do I do?

I stay very still and shift my weight and grip from one hand and foot to the other. If I alternate for a while I should be able to stay clung to this ladder for a good while. I feel a vibration on my thigh and think, there's no way I'm checking what that text says. If dude is down in the tunnel below moving around quietly enough for me to not hear him the light will announce my position instantly.

Wait, my fucking cell phone. I should text Michael and see what he's doing. Maybe he can come grab some comics and text me positions so I can know what I need to do. He wasn't at the party by the time I left. Maybe he's there.

James: Michael! You at Jerry's?

Michael: Dick! You're not!

James: Yeah, got myself in a jam.

Michael: A dick in a jam? No!

James: Fuck you!

Michael: Where are you?

James: Under the comic place up by Christy Cream.

Michael: Crying about Superman?

James: FUCK YOU THAT WAS SHIT

Michael: What's the jam?

James: Can you come and act like you're buying

I hit send, shut vibration off and shove the phone back in my pocket as I hear the utility room door being unlocked.

"I don't know why those boys can't stay out of trouble" I hear an older female voice muttering to herself. "I wish for one month they could just stay out of jail. That's where they're going. They're going to jail. They're going to jail. They always go to jail."

I now feel terror rising again as I realize *they BOTH could be down in the tunnels looking for me. Or they could both be realizing I'm not in the area above ground and will soon be heading down to the tunnels. Maybe I can pop out and ask her if she can help me get away. I really want to explore the tunnels but I would much rather have a better chance to live without getting pummeled to death in darkness.*

As if I didn't make a decision and my hand had its own agenda, I feel a hand rise up, unlocking the panel and opening it.

"What? Robert you shouldn't come up here. You know I'm watching your store for you" the woman says. *HOLY FUCK, somebody's looking for me in the tunnels good fucking show, hand!*

"Ma'am?" I say, slowly opening the access door. I can hear my voice crack as I say the single word. "I need help." *Fuck I feel like such a fucking pussy.*

"Oh! Dear boy!" she says sounding like a sweet old woman. "They're looking for you?" she asks, sounding surprised.

"Yes, I did something I thought was good but turned out to be a mistake" I respond. I get footing on the concrete floor and feel like I've been hanging on to that ladder for hours, though I know it's only been minutes.

"I hear that!" she says with a kind sounding laugh. "I have an idea how to get you safe." *Can I trust her? Shit. Do I have a choice? I have to ask, if for no other reason than curiosity.*

"Tell me what I need to do" I request. *Shit, what if she stabs me or something and holds me for them?*

She reaches in her pocket and pulls out car keys. *Really? Giving me a car? What?* She pushes a button on the key fob and says "Get in my trunk, no, seriously." Her eyes look both happy and pleading. "You'll be safe there. If one of them comes back, I'll still have time where I can get you safely out of here."

This sounds strangely reasonable. What are my options? At least one of them is in the tunnels. FUCK. She seems so nice. Fuck. "Alright, which car is yours?" I ask. She laughs, sounding ever more like a kind old woman.

"The only one out front as far as I know," she says in a tone I have only heard from innocent old ladies. The type I always feel driven to mow the lawn for on request. "The trunk will be partially open, hurry! John should be up the street checking Christy Cream right now!"

Without thinking my legs move me out of the utility closet, down the narrow hallway and through the store. I feel my hands hit the bar of the door and it flies open stronger than I meant it to. The bells ringing louder than ever. I glance frantically in all directions and see nobody but

people at the gas station. I see a trunk indeed an inch or so open just in front of me.

She backed in to the comic store spot? That seems a little strange but I really don't see a choice. I lift up the trunk lid and jump in. *Very clean, empty. I pull it shut and the moment it closes I think FUCK, FUCK, I COULD HAVE RUN TO WHERE PEOPLE ARE AT THE GAS STATION. Oh Jesus fuck.* I pull my phone out quickly and turn the flashlight back on, looking for any trunk release I can find.

"What is going on?" I faintly hear the small boy in the comic book store asking. I hear the bells again followed almost instantly by a real loud whistle.

"He's here!" I hear a ragged sounding woman yell. *What? FUCK! Jesus I'm fucking stupid, I'm so gullible. What the fuck, really? Yeah let's get in the fucking trunk, what a great plan.* "He's here!" I hear repeated in a slightly louder yell. I hear some haggard laughter and the female muttering from before saying "How stupid, how stupid, how stupid." I hear bells again and return to trying to focus on finding a release for the trunk.

Then the trunk clicks and opens. *What the fuck? Do I fucking move? Now would be a great time for a fatal heart attack. I'd rather die naturally than be raped with an axe and left to bleed out somewhere, or whatever the fuck this -*

My thought is interrupted by the trunk opening and MICHAEL! I see a blur of my friend and feel pain on the side of my ribs as he grabs me with one arm. I feel a sharp pain on the side of my head and a flash of light as everything gets blurry. The pain in my ribs lessens a little and I hear what sounds to me like a cat getting skinned alive. Only with words that sound like hurry or holy or dearie.

I feel pain in my shoulder as the blur gets darker and hear thumps with heavy reverb followed by tire squealing. This time it's not several dozen feet away from me but right under me and the dizziness from the vibration underneath me makes me nauseous.

"They put you in their trunk?" I hear Michael ask in what sounds like three different voices. "How did they get you in their trunk?" I hear him ask again.

I try to make words in response but just mumble.

"Shit your head is bleeding" he says as I feel pressure on the side of my head.

I start to make out his hand with a t-shirt pressed against the side of my head. *Shit, I feel wet on my face. How much am I bleeding?* I close my eyes and try to focus on staying conscious. *Jesus Michael. acts fast. .*

Descent . Drink The Pain Away

“Alright we’re going to park here and make sure you’re not going to die” Michael says. I hear the engine left on as he gets out of the car and walks around to the rear passenger door, opening it. I feel something peel off the side of my head, now more of a sting than numb. “That’s not a deep cut at all you pussy” he informs me as he wipes the side of my head with a cold wet cloth of some sort. It stings quite a lot so I pull away a little and try to sit up.

“Thanks man” I say clearly with surprise. “How long were you there before you got me out of there?”

“Hold on” he demands while pushing me back down on my side and continuing to wipe the side of my head with a now warmer wet cloth.

“I love you man” I say, feeling like I am going to cry. *DO. NOT. CRY. Already going to get made fun of enough for willingly climbing into the back of some fuck’s trunk. Jesus what the fuck was I thinking.*

“You should be fine” Michael says, pulling me up into a sitting position by my arm and laughing.

“Thanks, I owe you huge” I admit, while carefully touching the side of my head. I look around and realize we’re in the Wal-Mart parking lot by Toys R Us, on the opposite side of town from Makayla’s house. “Did you drive the whole way here with one hand on my head?” I ask.

“How did they get you in that trunk? You seemed awake already when I opened it,” Michael states.

“How did you open it?” I inquire, somewhat at a loss. He giggles as he closes the car door and runs around to jump in the driver seat again. Once he gets in, he reaches to the floor of the passenger side and pulls up a little remote of some sort. He wiggles it around and giggles more.

“Told you, I picked this up last week” he reminds me, as I recognize it. *It is the frequency scanner.* “Just happened to be pulling in and had turned it on as she opened the trunk for you to get in.” I feel a much smaller panic than I’ve grown accustomed to rush through me again.

“You saw me climb in?” I ask in a little more than a whisper. He responds with an annoyed sounding giggle. *Fuck, Jesus I’m never going to live this mother fucker down. Hello, my name is James and I willingly climb into trunks and shut myself in those bitches. FUCK.*

“Yes I did” he confirms as he shifts into drive and starts us out of the parking lot. “What the fuck were you jumping in trunks for?” he asks, now sounding more amused than annoyed.

I sit up and get my seatbelt on. *I love Michael, but he can get a little crazy with his driving. Which at this moment I’m sure will have no*

effect at all in my current mental state. Holy fuck, now I'm starting to focus on what the fuck happened to my truck. I know at least some of the windows are broken out and I can only assume the hood is dented up, as he was standing on it.

"Why did you, though? Climb in the trunk" he asks, as the question must have surely been digging in his mind from the moment he saw me climb in under my own power.

"I fucked Makayla" I say, sounding a lot more remorseful than I would ever imagine I could.

"Okay?" he asks, not making the link of how that leads to me in someone's trunk.

"I need to drink, man" I inform him, as I feel a headache coming on fast and strong. I lean my head forward and close my eyes, propping my head up with my hand over my forehead.

"We're going back to where Jerry's house was, first" Michael states with a worried voice.

"What? Was?" I ask slowly raising my head up and opening my eyes. *Fuck it's bright outside. That sun needs to fuck off.*

"Well, now it's a smoke pit" Michael says, accelerating a little faster.

"What? Now it's my turn to ask what happened" I say with anxiety rising again.

"Natalie was dancing on her coffee table and knocked over Sal's vodka" he begins. "And candles were already lit on the table, so it was a pretty quick start of a fire."

"Oh holy fuck" I blurt out realizing what's probably coming next. Being Ben dumping his everclear on it.

"Ben dumped his -" Michael begins.

"Everclear on it?" I interrupt.

"Yes, and it spread to the carpet instantly" he continues. "That carpet is really flammable and we were getting people out as fast as we could."

"Were her kids home!?" I yell while trying as hard as I can not to cry. I can't believe this happened to Jerry's house.

"No, she had them taken to her mom's house for the night so they weren't there since the party was getting crazy" he concludes. His hands grip the steering wheel tight as he slows down a little and eyeballs his rear view mirror.

"Tell me there aren't cops behind us," I ask quietly.

"No, just checking" he replies, while scanning the road ahead.

Fuck. Today took the biggest U-turn, in the biggest way I've ever experienced. Jesus, Jerry's going to kill me. That party was my idea. I've got to text Jean and see if she can meet us there.

James: Can you meet us at Jerry's?

Jean: Already on the way. Did you start a fire?

James: No, I was in the trunk.

Jean: Huh?

James: Don't worry, Michael will tell you soon.

Jean: Oh is that what his text meant?

James: What text?

Jean: He said you ARE the junk in the trunk.

I start laughing hard and fast, then quickly stop and rest my right palm against the side of my head.

"Headache?" Michael muses with a smile.

"Fuck you, I love you" I say while closing my eyes.

I see smoke on the horizon. A column of white smoke that's much thinner at the bottom than towards the top. It's getting too dark to make out at which point up the column or downwind the smoke transitions to black, so I can get an idea of how long ago the fire started.

Michael lets out a deep sigh and states "She's not happy, but nobody left as far as I know."

"Alright" I say, trying to adjust my hair to cover the cut on the side of my head. I pull down the vanity mirror and look. *No blood in my hair?* I look over at Michael and he nods.

"You're beautiful, don't worry honey" he says with a big shit eating grin.

"Thanks baby" I say, brushing my hair with my fingers. A fingernail on my right hand brushes against the cut and I wince.

"Quit fingering your gash" Michael says as we both laugh.

"Fuck, man. it hurts" I say.

We turn in to the street where Jerry's house is and see the fire trucks. There is a group of people gathered across the street, watching helplessly. We park a bit down and climb out of his jeep before closing his doors. We look at each other, then back at the group of our friends. I don't see Sal or Fran with them.

"Sal and Francine leave?" I ask nobody in particular.

"This was too much for them, they had to go home" Justine answers.

"Sal was still freaking out inside his head when it happened" Ben injects.

"Sucks man" I say, feeling shitty for having left without being sure Sal felt better.

"Don't worry, you tried" Justine says stepping next to me and putting her arm around me, squeezing me in a little sideways hug. *I can't*

help but be excited her fine ass is touching me. Fucking focus, James. Focus.

“You alright?” I ask Jerry, seeing tears down her cheeks. She doesn’t respond and walks across the street towards a few firemen.

“She doesn’t blame you” Emma tells me. “Her and Sal were talking about the overall situation before Sal left. She said she doesn’t blame anybody at all, it was her idea to throw the party.”

I instantly feel worse. *This was MY idea to try to make JERRY feel better and decompress. Fuck, I promised her it would be a small party. I see four people who weren’t here before I left, excluding Michael. Holy shit, my truck got the shit beat out of it and a house burned down today just so I could get some fucking pussy. How the fuck do I manage to get everything this fucked up? It’s not bad enough I don’t put my foot down when parties start expanding beyond planned just to make sure shit like this doesn’t happen. But I ditch out early and go bang somebody when I know god damn good and well there isn’t a fucking big enough window for it to happen in? And the little fucking kid who had to see all kinds of crazy shit going on around him when all he wanted to do was comic shit? Are you fucking kidding me right now?*

I feel Michael’s hand on my arm, leading me towards his jeep with Jean and Justine in tow. *What the fuck? Where are we going? Are we going to fucking go burn somebody else’s down and get Michael’s Jeep busted up too? Maybe we can go up to fucking Zoe’s neighborhood and find a bunch of people to give some weed to in exchange for them raping Justine and destroying my heart further. Then Michael can tell me he just hangs out with me to meet other people since I am a dirty social whore who will chill with any group and babysit after fucking parties. Usually, when I’m not fucking expanding them to literally burning down. The roof, the roof, the roof is on fire. Wait, no the roof was on fire now it’s ashes. Awesome. Looks like the mother fucker burned.*

Jesus we’re half way to Jean’s house. Are her parents even gone? Jesus I can’t talk to Theil like this. Jean’s mom’s name is Theil. I can never remember her dad’s name. Though I know his profession and history. Holy shit.

“Here” Michael says, passing me a 20oz of Coca-Cola. I take it and open it and drink it, realizing I’m quite thirsty. *HOLY JESUS this is Rum and Coke!* I chug the rest of it before setting it down between my feet. I feel a hand rest on my right knee and look to see Justine’s hand. *Don’t get a boner, dumb ass.* I look up front to see Jean and Michael are oblivious, talking quietly among themselves.

Justine’s not fucking interested in me. Besides, I just fucked somebody for a half hour. I’m pretty sure I’m going straight to fucking hell. If I even kissed her, I’m sure she would get some disease I wasn’t aware

of having. She'd probably blossom into an infected mess. That amazingly perfect face of hers would decay to puss and bursting pimples. There's no way I could do that to her. Taylor doesn't deserve that. He's a good dude and if he could be saved from knowing his woman had been urinated all over by a fuck like me, more power to him.

"Here" Michael says, handing me another 20oz. *What the fuck? This one is open and the one by my feet is gone.*

"Do you have Rum and Coke bottles up there?" I ask in a total state of confusion. Both Michael and Jean start laughing as Justine leans her head over and joins in. I shake my head, take the bottle and chug it as we pull into Jean's neighborhood.

"You need to calm down" Justine says, rubbing from my knee to just above it and back. "This isn't your fault."

I lean over and smell how crazy good her scent is. *Perfume? Has to be. FOCUS you fucking ass hole.* "I pushed her into that party" I admit while trying to hold back tears. She squeezes my leg a little and looks like her slight happiness washes over with a sadness to accompany mine.

Michael pulls up in front of Jean's house and the three others exit. I open my door and put my leg out hoping I'm OK to at least appear sober and stable, approaching the house with them. When I stand up I realize the 40 ounces of whatever I drank hasn't hit me yet. Jean is ahead of the other two and opening her garage. Nice, we must be going in the garage door to Galen's room.

I keep step not far behind Justine's sobbingly amazing ass, which is right behind Michael. We go into the basement and Jean closes the garage door. I am still keenly aware that the side of my head hurts as we all make our way down the short hallway under the stairs and into Galen's room. I sit on the bean bag chair under the window and Justine joins Jean who is sitting on the bed. Michael closes the bedroom door and opens the closet door.

"What happened to your head?" Justine asks getting up and walking over to me. She reaches over and parts my hair on the side of my head to inspect the cut.

Michael picks a couple bottles of Vodka up off a shelf in the closet and starts laughing. Jean and Justine both look at him as he turns around and opens his mouth.

"Not right now, not right fucking now" I blurt out sounding a lot more pissed than I meant to. Michael's mouth closes as he gives me a disapproving look.

"Dick" he says, walking towards the mini fridge at the foot of Galen's bed. He opens it and takes out an unopened gallon of Orange Juice. He walks to the card table on the wall between the fridge and closet, putting it all down.

“Thanks” I say looking at Michael. I turn to the others and say “I’ll explain later but right now I need to get the fuck out of here, conscious wise” I say looking back to Michael.

Justine stops pulling my hair apart and goes back to sitting on the bed, looking all together concerned. She pulls out her cell phone and starts messing with it as Jean follows suit. Michael walks over with 3 glasses of screwdriver, handing one to each of us. He goes back to the table and sits down, taking a large swig out of the bottle.

“Thanks for the girl drink” I say raising the glass, then emptying it into my mouth. Michael raises the bottle of vodka and takes another couple swigs as the girls raise their glasses. The ladies sip theirs much more slowly than I drank mine.

We sit there looking back and forth between each other for a minute as I try to get up to walk over to the fridge. I would rather make myself a few drinks in a row. Better than expecting others to spend time making some over and over for me. I sit right back down and realize the drinks from the jeep have reached my mind. I look up and see all three smirking, looking back and forth at one another.

“I got it” Michael says, coming to retrieve my glass. “Don’t worry about it” he says, looking as if he wants to scold me but wouldn’t dare to at this time. *I fucking deserve it.* He returns a bigger glass to me, filled with screwdriver.

“Thanks man” I say, drinking a fourth of it. I pull my phone out to join them in isolating inside the screen and notice my own screen is cracked from corner to corner. I drop my phone on the carpet and immediately start crying. I don’t notice the three of them quietly leaving the room, so I can cry in peace.

Descent . Fuck Frankie

I wake up sitting in the bean bag chair where I last remember being. I am sitting in pretty much the same position I was at the time as well. Now I have a splitting headache and it is completely dark outside. I notice my back hurts a little and I realize I'm leaning a little to the right at an awkward angle. I realize I also have a trail of half dried drool up my cheek and into my hair. I quickly realize Justine is laying on her back in Galen's bed reading a book. She has reading glasses on. *Dear god, she looks even sexier in those little wire frame glasses. I've never seen her in those.*

"Good morning handsome" she says, not making eye contact, though a smirk spreads across her face.

"Hurrerrzl." I say. *What? What the fuck did I say? That didn't sound at all like hello. I should probably wait to say anything else until... Fuck I need to sit up.* I struggle a little to get to an upright, straight back position.

"Need some pain killers?" she says, putting the book down and propping herself up on her elbows.

Holy shit she's only wearing a bra and basketball shorts. She doesn't have abs or anything but her body shape is still outstanding. Fuck. Oh, pain killers. "Yes please, and a five gallon jug of water" I request, moving a hand to my forehead.

She gets up and walks over to the fridge removing a 16oz bottle of water. On her way across the room to the fridge, her shorts fall down and she walks right out of them. She doesn't seem to take notice of the shorts coming down at all. When she turns around to walk the water to me, they are plainly in her line of sight. She walks right pass them, still not giving any response to them coming off. *Oh Jesus Christ, form fitting lace panties! Oh my head, there's no way I can focus on that, must ... must get back to sleep.*

"Here honey" she whispers, reaching out to hand me the pills. I take the pills from her and toss them in my mouth. She passes me the bottle of water. I swallow them quickly without water as I unscrew the bottle cap and start sipping it. I don't want to chug it because I'm unaware of my stomach's conditions. "You can lay down in bed if you want, none of us wanted to move you"

She gestures to the bed and puts her wait on one foot, bending

the other leg as she rests her hands on her hip bones. Jesus Christ, she's sexy. She doesn't have quite as good of a body as Makayla. Though, when taking into consideration how dizzyingly attractive her face is and the overall form of her, she is more attractive by a mile. That's not even factoring in her adorable mannerisms and sense of humor. Plus, how artistic and creative she is... It boggles my mind.

"Alright" I say, starting to get up but not making much progress. She leans forward and grips my arms by the triceps and lifts. That assistance both lands her breasts in my face, which smell amazing might I add. Even though, just a little sweaty. With her help, I make it to my feet. Watching her beautiful breasts get further from my face is both a tragedy and a blessing.

It's a blessing because I'm not sure if my stomach is my friend or enemy and a tragedy because my lips want to play. My dry, dry lips. *Jesus I feel like shit I need to lay down.* She helps me walk to the bed. I glance down and realize I have a full erection. I'm wearing boxers I don't recognize and no pants at all. *Where the fuck are my pants? I don't care.*

The last thing I see is Justine's ass as she's walking back towards the closet, just before my head hits the pillow and I black out once more.

I feel something strange on my penis and wake up. I see a sexy back with shoulders I recognize immediately wearing only a black lace bra. Hair up over a pillow and a neck *Oh shit that's Justine!* Then I notice my penis is sticking out of these boxers. It is perfectly nestled between her ass cheeks, with the head against her lower back. *What the fuck? Fully erect, headache almost gone and she's reading.* She's lying with her left leg bent upward and the right leg she's laying on straight. I stay very still and try to take stock of my situation. I'm on my side in Galen's bed. I have a flag full staff. She has her ass against said flagpole and she has to be aware of this. I am suddenly wide awake and feeling perfectly buzzed, but can't detect much of a hangover. My headache is at a stage where either I will never see it again or it could come back quickly.

I look back down at that ass I've fantasized about countless times while with her, at home alone and scribbling horrible shit down in my journal. *God it looks even better at this angle. Tight black lace panties,*

or not. What do I do? Hmmmm. Well.

I shift my weight a little so my position moves my penis in a way it travels down the center of her cheeks. She moves her ass around a little and makes a light moaning sound. I stop moving and she pauses. Then she gyrates her ass a little more making my penis go up and back down against it a few inches in either direction. I feel myself get a little harder. She keeps reading as if this has happened multiple times already while I was sleeping.

I decide to make it more obvious I'm awake. I brush my right pointer finger from the top of her neck down her spine to where the bra clasps. She slowly closes the book and leans her head forward. I hear her say "Do you feel alright?" I shift my weight a little again to move my penis down in a way where it flops onto the straight leg's thigh. She bends both of her legs forward causing the length of my penis to shift against her ass and pussy.

"Pretty sure I am" I say quietly while running my finger from the bottom of her bra down her spine to the top of her panties. She gyrates a little again, rubbing the top of my shaft and the head of my penis against her pussy and ass through her panties. Then she jerks in a quick motion, moving herself around to face me and backing me closer towards the wall.

"Did that motion make you nauseous at all?" she asks looking genuinely concerned and absolutely sexy.

"Not at all, surprisingly" I say, taking stock in all the non-sexual feelings I can mentally observe.

Without a word she shoves once strongly against the center of my chest, knocking me onto my back. She stands up above me and wiggles her hips around a little with a large smile, messed up teeth and all. She lifts a leg up, puts it down quickly. Then the other just as fast and her panties are off. She comes down to straddle me so fast. *I think she's definitely going to rack me.*

She doesn't, but instead her hair is all over my face and her lips are at my neck. While doing so, she slowly moves us both towards the center of the bed. *Is this fucking happening?* No sooner do I think that than do I feel a mix of tension and a lot of moisture envelops my dick. *Holy hell, really?* I feel the lips on my neck turn to teeth and the tension reaching the base of my dick. Only the tension gets a whole lot tighter, the harder she bites.

"I feel a little pain there" I say, sounding perfectly sarcastic and

entirely aroused. She presses her hips hard against me, forcing every last millimeter into her, as her bite loosens to release a quiet moan. I feel her hands shift from the bed to my shoulders as she pushes herself up to a 45 degree angle. I reach up and massage her breasts through her bra. God they're fucking perfect. They look big for her body size. Actually, they fit more perfectly for her body size than I really noticed while she was clothed. Even in the face of all the months I've spent fantasizing about her.

Her hands slide off to each side of my head on the pillow as she comes back forward. "Too thick" she blurts out in a quick breath. She grinds a little more.

"No, perfect" I whisper. "Fucking perfect, perky, shaped amazing, sexy little nipples"

She gyrates a little more and groans. "Your cock, not my tits" she says in a groan before gyrating a little more. "Your cock is too thick for this, let me try..." She trails off as she lifts off me. Her pussy makes a little Tupperware pop when she makes it all the way off me and she takes a deep breath.

I feel like I don't know how to react as she turns to face away from me. I was worried it was over as fast as it happened, before I see that totally bald pussy lower back down around my dick. It looks like it's stretching more than most I've ever seen, but she keeps descending 'till she's around the base. I see her shoulder blades sticking out and can tell she's struggling a little. She tilts her ass a little to raise herself off a bit. She then tilts back to force it back in.

She takes a deep breath again and starts gyrating in that position. I feel the tightness pulsating and notice liquid coming down my dick. *Jesus Fuck Almighty, really? Is she cumming already?* The gyration goes faster as it actually starts obviously beginning to feel pain. Her muscles are crazy strong, and the liquid is building fast. *Holy shit.*

Suddenly she shifts and sits up straight, forcing me a little further in than the previous position. Her hands move from in front of her on the bed, to on the back of her head as she raises up. She almost pulls herself totally off of me. Then she slams down, hitting my balls with her clit and pounding her ass into my pelvis. *God it fucking hurt, but that ass, I could give a fuck if she kills me with it.*

She rises up again with her thighs flexing on the outside of my hips, then comes down hard again. The sharp pain as her ass hits my pelvis is contrasted by how awesome it feels as her clit slams into my

balls. She does it again but no harder than before. Her head starts to tilt to one side as she goes faster.

I lean my head back and close my eyes, bracing for pain. Her speed rising up and slamming down increases, and with it, a slight increase in how hard she slams down. With that increased velocity comes a little more pain. But based on the amount of liquid my longest running fantasy is generating, my pain is completely worth it for both of us... Like I said, she could kill me like this and I would die with no regrets.

She leans forward a little to grip just above my knees as she bounces up and down with her hips, just a few inches at a time, essentially keeping most of my cock slamming around variously inside of her. She leans her head forward then throws it back, sending her luscious hair back and bouncing around on her shoulders, like a hair commercial. All that hair with her sexy little shoulders visible on either side, amazing ass bouncing and moving all around... This must be what the Christian heaven is like.

I feel myself building up so I start fucking upward from underneath. She grips my ankles hard and drops herself down totally, holding me in place. She slowly starts grinding faster, pussy drying up a little and breathing slower. Does she hate when I do that?

Then she twists around, black lace covered breast coming into view. I look up from her breast and see her empty eye sockets and long forked tongue sticking out, just as I feel her pussy flex. Huge pain travels through my body, originating from my penis, as I feel her fingernails dig deep into the skin above my knees.

I struggle to try and move free of her, but her pussy starts feeling like it has sprung metal teeth, as blood mixes with all of her liquids. She opens her mouth further, revealing that her previously clean, but badly formed teeth are now long and sharp. I try to raise my arms to do something, but they lay helplessly on the bed on either side of me.

She squeezes her ass cheeks together, sending a sharp throbbing pain down my legs. She closes her eyes and when her eyes reopen, blood pours down her cheeks. I hear her begin growling from deep within her chest. I feel nothing from my waist down as her hair slowly changes to jet black. It starts getting longer, running down her back towards her ass. As the hair approaches her ass it begins looking more and more like little snakes which writhe around.

“Fuck Frankie” I hear in a guttural voice that reminds me of death

metal I find horrible. "Say it" she repeats. Blood now starts dripping out of her mouth.

"Fuck... Fuck.." I try to say, but cannot get the next word out.

"Say it, Fuck Frankie, Fuck Frankie" she repeats more understandable, but much louder. "Say fuck Frankie"

"Fuck..." I try to get it all out. I can't. Pain starts in my abdomen. I feel small shots of pain firing through my body like lightning. It originates from my groin and rockets up my neck into my head. It shoots down one arm, then down a leg.

"Fuck Frankie" she demands in a loud, primal scream.

Everything in the room starts to turn red. I try to understand what's going on as everything becomes dark red. Her hair now looks like five foot long garden snakes, though jet black and defying gravity. Their mouths all begin breathing fire in a hundred different directions. The entire room starts to shake, and a deafening demonic laugh bellows out from her. I hear bottles rattling and falling off the shelves in the closet. Screams of all ages and genders emanate from outside the room. After it starts blending to a white noise, I feel my whole body begin vibrating.

Descent . Breakfast in Dead

I jerk quickly and my eyes open. I am under three blankets and the sun is low in the sky. It is in the east so I must have slept through the night. I quickly reach down and realize my penis is not only inside my boxers, but attached. *And needs washed, bad. Feels like crusted cum and sweat. Just ... no.*

I squint and look around the room, seeing nobody. I do see 2 tall glasses with OJ residue in them and a few assorted shot glasses. I don't remember seeing them when I first entered the room. The closet door is open and I can hear the cover of "I Put A Spell On You" by Marilyn Manson playing. *Ahhh fuck. That explains the fucking Fuck Frankie shit.*

I look around and find my pants, just off the head of the bed. I reach in the pocket and pull out my phone. *Dead. Oh FUCK.. and cracked. Fuck. Oh well, at least it isn't a fucking iPhone. Would have cracked many times a long time ago. Two years old, time for a new one anyway.*

I pull the blankets down and pull my pants on. I swivel around to sit on the edge of the bed and realize I still have quite the buzz. *Jesus. Jerry's house. I don't even know if she had any sort of insurance. What insurance would cover a fire at a party? Fuck. I dropped a couple paychecks on Makaila Reynolds' Ford Escort to repair the body I crashed into the pole on accident after Metallica... But Jerry's house and everything in it would be ... years. Shit.*

I will have plenty of time to think about this later. I really need a shower. I'll use the one in the bathroom across the basement. Galen's a little taller than me so I'll borrow some of his clothes to change into. I raid his dresser and happen to find a black t-shirt. I also happen to find some black knee length shorts. *Fuck, this dude and I are too similar. Love this guy.*

I slowly stroll, still partially tipsy, across the open area in the basement between Galen's room and the bathroom. I notice a small red gym bag with black straps in the corner. I pay little notice to it and continue to the bathroom door on the opposite side of the room.

Opening the door I notice the air flowing out of the bathroom is moist and warm. That wasn't fast enough for my mind to recognize a shower had very recently ended. A wet and naked Justine, leaning forward with a foot up on the toilet lid rubbing lotion all over her leg, stands before me. I freeze for a second wondering if this is some other dream, or something worse.

She stands up straight, wearing only panties and breasts not nearly as perky without a bra on as I imagined they would be in the dream. Stomach more pochy than I imagined, but still a fucking stunner.

“Are you the masseuse I ordered?” she says with a comfortable smile, reaching for a towel and wrapping it around her.

“Shower, wait, ok” I stammer, turning around as she carefully closes the door behind me. I go on autopilot as I save every angle I just saw to my spunk bank and realize I am now sitting on the edge of the bed. I probably have the facial expression of a stroke victim right now. *No knock? Shower, wait ok? Really?* I straighten out and lay down, falling back asleep, still holding Galen’s clothes I planned to wear after the shower.

I push to get the last bit of shit I can feel bellowing around in my bowels. I feel it come out and feel a little water splash on my ass.

“Fuck, so annoying” I mutter while grabbing a bunch of toilet paper and wipe all the water off my cheeks before repeating the wipe process for the dirtier center area. I get done and pull my pants up, looking in the mirror. Proper amount of eye shadow, hair looks thick and in place. I run my fingers through it a little just to make sure it still feels soft. I head bang a little bit and throw my head back up for a proper check and my hair falls back into place properly.

A loud banging on the door makes me jump a little. “Thirty seconds” I hear a voice from the other side yell. “Hurry the fuck up” it continues.

“Yeah fuck off” I yell back. “Fucking your mom in here.”

“Twenty five seconds, hurry the fuck up” it yells louder.

“Fuck” I mumble. I open the door and see them running down the hallway and around the corner. I run after them and meet up with them by the side of a door that’s opened into blackness.

“Ten seconds” the woman whispers. She pats me on the back and I see her shape fade through the door and off to the left somewhere. I walk out into the darkness and take my spot on a little glowing green dot on the floor, which is almost invisible.

Suddenly the intro to Return to Feeling by Symphony of Noise begins and the lights slowly fade on. Cheering erupts from the crowd. I don’t recognize the small arena I’m in, though the people look like the general people I saw when visiting Chicago. Am I back in Chicago? Why the fuck did I get stuck in a smaller arena?

The drums start in and I step forward to the synth before me. As I play the riffs, the crowd gets louder. I make eye contact with different parts of the crowd with every successive riff, causing those sections to be louder than the rest.

As if in fast forward, the whole concert goes through and I'm drenched in sweat. The lights fall and the crowd erupts again as I jog off stage. A few girls which my head of security plucked from the crowd are sitting comfortably on a couch, just off stage. They stand up as I walk by and I pull a marker out of my pocket. This is my signal to security that I really don't want to deal with anybody tonight.

A security guard steps over with 5 boxes which have the Symphony of Noise logo on them. I sign them and ask the girls' names. "Alright, Stephany, Meegan and Amber" I say aloud as I sign a box for each of them. I sign the other two boxes and give them to Amber and Stephany, because I'm judgmental and they're by far more attractive than Meegan. Plus Meegan isn't a real name like Meghan.

I hear the two I gave two boxes to sounding extremely happy in whatever words they are saying while the third is sounding angry. A few seconds later I'm walking about as fast as I can down the hallway. A few more seconds it feels like and I'm climbing into a huge tour bus with some of the light and sound directors.

I smile and nod at them, walking to the back where a little Asian girl is sitting naked on a chair next to my bed, smiling ear to ear. I close the door to the back and sit on my bed next to her. She smiles knowingly. I lean over and put my arms around her. She puts an arm around me and we hold each other in complete silence. Neither of us move for a long time. We feel the bus get loaded, fire up and drive away. We hold each other through multiple red lights and turns. We keep holding each other as the bus gets on an interstate and holds a fairly high speed for a while.

I pick her up and lay her down in bed with me. She puts an arm around me and presses her lips against my cheek. I turn my head and kiss her cheek in return. We lay there staring up at the bus ceiling with no words. I slowly drift to sleep.

Descent . Back to the Living

“Picking out my clothes?” I hear, waking up to Galen’s voice and the beautiful sound of Grateful Dead which is now coming from the stereo speakers in his walls.

“I was going to wear these” I respond. *Fuck, NOW I can talk.* “Sorry man, I would have asked” -

He interrupts with “No worries man, I was just fucking with you.” His large dopey but adorable smile spreads across his face as he leans forward. He pulls a box of cigarettes out of his back pocket, retrieving a cigarette and putting it in his mouth. “So you burned down Jerry’s house?” he says with a chuckle as he lights his cigarette.

I cover my eyes with my arms and involuntarily tear up. He puts his hand on my shoulder in a gesture of comfort. I let some tears out and catch my breath.

“I left for pussy” I admit. “I fucked Makayla Faulk” I say, as if it’s the worst thing in the world.

“Her dad didn’t nuke you from orbit?” Galen asks, with a serious look on his face.

I uncover my eyes and make eye contact with him. “Did everyone know her dad was psychotic besides me?” I ask.

“Oh” he begins but stops for a moment of laughter. “He’s gone to jail for nearly killing two different exes of hers. But it was at the same time, so it was tried as one incident of drunk and disorderly, somehow.” My face goes blank and nobody says anything for several seconds.

“Time machine” I mutter, before silence returns for several more seconds. I look over and Galen is nodding slowly and knowingly.

“So, what happened? I just know you ended up willingly climbing in a trunk” he confides while looking like he is prepared for me to get angry. As I prop myself up into a sitting position with my back to the wall, he gets up and walks over to a white plastic bag that is resting on his fridge. He pulls out three plastic containers. One contains plastic forks, and the other two contain a lot of eggs, hash browns and steak mixed together. He hands me the one containing food and a fork.

“Fuck, thanks man” I say as I position it on my lap. “I picked her up from work. She had me take her home, invited me in. She wore short jean shorts and a tight low cut tank top. I was helpless.” Galen laughs a little and nodded.

“So I went in when she invited me. She was behind the door and the wall. She closed it behind me, once I was in. We fucked like crazy, all over her foyer” I continued. As I tell the story to Galen my voice gets quieter and quieter, as if her dad would dive in through the window to stab me in the chest. “She came all over the door, various places on the floor,

left shoulder prints in the wall behind the door and all over half of the expensive looking animal skin rug.”

“So you celebrated by jumping in a trunk?” Galen muses with a huge grin.

“Your anus will grow shut” I snap at him with a smirk. “She finished me off on the rug, just in time for her dad to get home. We scrambled for our clothes and by the time I got mine on, I guess he was halfway to the door. I shot out the back door and ran to the park I didn’t know was up the street. I tried to be sneaky and walk down the sidewalk, as if I wasn’t involved at all. Got about to the curve in her street and saw him standing on my hood with a baseball bat” -

“Holy shit!” he shrieks with a laugh and some food in his mouth. “Sorry, go on” he insists. I let out a sigh.

“I turned and ran back up the street to the park. I went back into the path through the trees and down the stream. He sped up and down the street several times but I crossed north Broadway and ran up to the businesses by that bar and gas station. I went into the comic store and the dude, Ronald I guess, let me go chill in one of the reading rooms. But John came in. I guess Ronald and Makayla’s dad knew each-other. So I hid behind the couch.”

“Wait you actually weren’t found behind a couch?” Galen barely gets out before laughing.

“Amazingly not. I must have sucked myself into a few cubic inches, well out of sight. Anyway, I ended up breaking into the utility closet there and found a tunnel entrance to the underground passages beneath Council Bluffs. I waited on that ladder so I could choose which way to go, if I had to. Some lady came into the utility room unaware I was there. So I announced myself once I thought she was sick of the guys who were chasing me. She was mumbling about them always getting themselves in trouble. She suggested I climb in her trunk, so she could sneak me out later.”

Instantly upon hearing this Galen starts howling with laughter. I lower my head, feeling my face turning dark red. He forces himself to stop and repeats how sorry he is, several times before making a hand gesture for me to continue.

I sigh then continue. “Next thing I know the trunk is opening, Michael is grabbing me and I find out about Jerry’s house. We go there, leave, I drink a lot, and here I am.” I eat another bite of this actually quite bland steak and eggs breakfast. *I’ll be damned if I look a gift horse in the mouth. It’s still tasty, really. And I’m seriously fucking hungry. I think I’m eating a little too fast. Fuck, I’m hungry.*

“Was the sex good at least?” he asks, looking fully interested.

“Oh my god, she came at least eight or ten times in the twenty minutes we went at it. I know for sure that she had three huge orgasms. One while she had her back against the wall, one was all over the door and the other was all over the rug” I explain. “Could have been more for all I know.”

“How did it get on the different spots on the floor and down the wall?” he asks while clearly trying to figure it out in his head.

“Well in all the position changes she was cumming quite a lot and liquid was pretty steadily running out of her” I add. “I’m pretty surprised she could move as well as she did, when her dad pulled in. Not to suck my own dick or anything.”

“Man, if only we could” he imagines aloud while drifting off into thought. I nod in agreement and also drift to wondering what I would actually do. Also, how often, if I figured out how to do it.

“What time is it, man?” I ask realizing I have totally lost track of what time or day it is.

“A little after four” Galen informs me. “Just Jean and I here right now. Everybody else is gone.”

“Yeah? Anybody know I’m here?” I ask hoping for an answer like, nobody.

“Oh everyone knows you’re here” he answers. “This is the start of the two weeks we have the house to ourselves.”

I feel my spirits rise. That means after tomorrow my two week break starts. It was also the last time I work with Sheryl for a couple weeks. I totally forgot about that. That explains why Sheryl was messing with me before Jerry’s party. Holy shit, this means that starting tomorrow I can drink for at least a week and hopefully keep myself calm enough to absorb all of this shit.

“Mind if I take a shower?” I ask, hoping I don’t hear anything about the vast expansion of spank bank material provided by actually getting to see Justine mostly naked.

“Yeah man it’s all yours,” he says. “You can use my clothes too!” he says with a game show style gesture. *I love him!*

“Thanks man” I tell him with full gratitude. I pause for a moment with him to listen to a jam break on this Grateful Dead track.

He continues listening as I pick up the pile of his clothes that fell to the floor as I blacked out. *Jerry’s ashes, my truck’s current state and wondering if Justine told anyone I saw her naked. What the fuck was Ben doing? He should have been close enough to think fast enough to stop that fire instantly. I know there were blankets on the back of two of those couches. Fuck.*

Don't worry about that. I wasn't there. I ... That's right. I wasn't there. No, I can't stop everything. I can't be everywhere. Shut the fuck up and clean yourself, you'll feel better.

I close the bathroom door and turn on the shower. I stand facing the same direction in the same place Justine was earlier. *On one hand, I wish she would have smiled and walked to me and essentially raped me right there. On the other hand I would have had to have been sober enough to perform. And not mentally destroyed like I know I was at that moment.*

I turn the shower on and sit on the toilet while I wait for the hot water to get through the pipes. All the thoughts in my head coalesce in an overwhelming wave to the point my face falls into my hands and I start crying. Wave after wave of tears held back enough to be quiet but huffing out enough to be unstoppable flow through me.

I haven't cried in years. I usually don't. I usually find other ways to get it out. Creativity is usually the outlet. Sometimes it's other forms of therapeutic release. But this time I couldn't keep it contained. What happened to Makayla? I need to see if we can all go down in Jean's car as a group and see if my truck is even still there. I better get this damn shower done. I disrobe and get in the now hot shower.

Getting dressed and drying off I hear the laughter of two female voices. I immediately recognize one as Melissa Sherman. The plump but cute friend of Jean's who hangs out with her a lot more often than me. Jean stays over at Melissa's house quite a lot, and vice versa. I hear talking and recognize the other voice as Lisa Farnam. God she's a hot little redhead but she's Galen's as far as I'm concerned. He's been in love with her since long before I even met everybody.

Pulling on Galen's shirt and pants I realize we're much closer to the same size of clothes than I thought. He's taller and skinnier than me but the height difference seems to make his clothes fit just as baggy on me as I like to wear my own clothes. I stand and stare in the mirror at myself and think, *for all that's gone on the last two days, not too bad. Hair doesn't really even need brushed, looks good having just dried it off and combed through it with my fingers. Eyes aren't too baggy. Wish my nose wasn't so big though, fuck. Eyes are blue-gray today, which I have never figured out anything consistent with what it correlates with.*

I jump as rapid knocks on the door followed by Galen yelling "Gotta piss, girl! Hurry up!"

"On my way out" I say, grabbing my shit.

"This isn't a closet!" Jean yells. *I love these fuckers. Even going crazy in my mind they can make me smile.*

I step out of the bathroom with clothes in arm and see nobody. I walk across the room to Galen's room and nobody is there either. I find an

empty plastic grocery bag next to the refrigerator and stuff my clothes into it. I hear a loud and short laugh from upstairs and slip my shoes back on and head up.

As I reach the top of the steps I hear they are on the deck just outside of the dining room. I hear a splash from the pool. I stop by the fridge and check, finding a full shelf of various beers. I grab the water, I mean Bud Light and head towards the deck. I hear laughter again just before I open the sliding door.

Opening the door and stepping onto the porch everyone's face goes silent as they force straight faces and turn towards me.

"Oh guys what the fuck," I start while smiling. "Don't be like that" I conclude with a laugh.

"So you're not tore up about your truck burning down to the frame?" Galen asks, stepping onto the deck just behind me.

"Burned to the frame? It was set on fire, too?" I ask. Adrenaline starts flowing like I was standing at up the street looking down at the broken out windows all over again. Galen pulls out his cell phone and tinkers a little as I watch him. *What the fuck? Just going to say that and play with your phone? Oh.* He makes eye contact with me and begins turning the phone towards me.

"Here" he says in a comforting voice as I realize he pulled a news video up. I couldn't hear the audio but the headline on the bottom was "Angry father arrested for destructive rampage." The footage showed an aerial shot of my burning truck. The next shot is of the strip mall which houses the comic book store, completely on fire. The shot after that is the bar shortly up the street on fire ending with a shot of the police dragging her father towards an opened swat van.

I look at Galen and Jean with huge wide eyes. I have no clue what to say or do. The police have to be looking for me for questioning.

"Makayla wouldn't tell him who you were and by the time he realized your name and address would be on your registration the truck was already burning" Galen says. "She took his car and drove away. He was grabbing his hand gun when she realized he was snapping. She called the police as soon as she turned the corner. They took almost an hour to arrive and only because the strip mall started burning."

"Holy fuck" I mutter, totally stunned.

"The bar only started in flames after the swat team went in" Galen informs me. "There is a little bit of a fuss about whether or not the swat team or John started the fire. But yeah, Makayla told the police your name as to who the truck belonged to so you'll probably have a call from them on your cell."

My eyes feel like they're wider than they've ever been. I look around and see Lisa sitting on the edge of the pool listening intently.

Melissa and Alison Gale are sitting at the deck table with a guy I don't recognize. I look back at Galen. I still have no words. Oh wait, my phone!

"Did I manage to plug my phone in somewhere before I blacked out again?" I ask, totally oblivious as to when I even actually fell back asleep. Jean steps out onto the deck next to Galen.

"No but I saw it and plugged it in on the kitchen counter" Melissa adds in. I look over at her and smile. I walk over to her and lean forward to hug her. "We'll make you forget any of this happened by the end of the week" Melissa says as she returns the hug.

Once the embrace is over I look towards Jean and Galen and raise a finger gesturing for them to wait a moment. I walk into the house and over into the kitchen, grabbing my phone off the table. Three voice mails and three times as many texts? Jesus Christ, how long was I asleep?

I go back out on the porch and Galen says "Don't mind us, I'm sure you have messages and shit."

"Thanks guys" I say nodding and scanning across everyone visually. "Oddly enough I'm in a great mood."

"You're always in a great mood" Lisa says with a big smile. I smile back at her and flip her off. It's all in good fun, they know I get raged out sometimes. But, anxiety aside and all the worries, I do feel pretty good. Must just be the huge amount of sleep.

I walk back into the house and through the dining room. I walk down the long hallway to the opposite end of the house where the living room is. This room also has a sliding door to the deck but also has a few couches and a large television. I get comfortable on a couch and turn on my phone.

I check the texts first.

Jerry: Fuck! Natalie started a fire! Come back!

Jerry: Nevermind, fire actually spread and we couldn't put it out.

Jerry: You ever coming up for air? Let the girl have a break!

Michael: Your truck is on fire! And on the news!

Jerry: Oh shit I saw the news. Text me when you get this.

Angel: Was that your car on the news on fire?

Mom: Tell me that wasn't your truck on fire. Hope you are ok. Yard is getting tall.

Michael: You alive?

Michael: DO I HAVE TO COME HOLD YOU AT GALEN'S?

Michael: Because I will.

Michael: I'm standing over you. You are curled up like a girl. I should pee on you. See you tomorrow.

Jean: I'll be back home soon with some people. Parents leave at 4pm. Dad is concerned about you but they said they would let you sleep and talk to you when they get back.

Jean: Don't worry, dad just wants to give you legal advice in case anything comes of the bonfire and chase.

Michael: I won't be there until day after tomorrow, I forgot I have to pull a double shift. Don't cry. Wake up.

Melissa: We're picking up liquor. Do you want anything?

Jean: Wake up! Galen says you smell like sex and sweat!

Well fuck. That's what I get for crashing for about a day. It's about 5pm now so that means Jerry is probably somewhere with her kids.. I'll respond to her first.

Me (to Jerry): Sorry I didn't respond sooner. I'm so sorry I wasn't there to babysit Natalie and everybody. Let me know what's going on with your living situation.

Me (to Michael): They said I smelled like sex. Did you fuck me while I was asleep?

Me (to Angel): Unfortunately so. I have a few thousand in savings I can throw as a down payment on something. I'll still be able to drive you to temple every Saturday!

Me (to Mom): Yes unfortunately it was. I'll mow in the next couple days I promise.

Well fuck. I guess now it's time for voice mail. This should be a riot.

First Voice mail from last night @ 16:24 "Fucking Natalie!" *Ahh, this is Jerry's voice.* "She knocked over a candle that fell on the floor! It started the couch on fucking fire, James! Cody tried to put it out with his LIQUOR!" She almost screams liquor. "So we all got out of there instinctively and I called 911. Didn't take long for the whole house to be on fire. Guess that carpet wasn't fireproof."

Ohhhh, she spent a lot of time finding affordable fireproof carpet. That must make her crazy. But, maybe that'll be enough to offset the fact a fire started during a party. Fuck I feel terrible for not being there for that.

Second Voice mail from last night @ 20:19 "Hello this is the Council Bluffs Police Department. We regret to inform you of having impounded your vehicle. Please call this number for further information."

I guess that makes sense. Can't just leave a burnt husk of a vehicle on the street. I wonder why they didn't mention it had been set on fire. And it doesn't sound like they want me to come in for questioning or anything. Just that I need to do something with that car I guess. Whatever. That's generally unnerving though, that it wasn't mentioned. Shit.

Third Voice mail, this one today@ 11:29 "Erik" *Fuck, it's mom. Great.* "I know you're probably mad at me but please call me. I am worried to death that your car was on fire and you died somehow. That they couldn't identify your body in the car. Please call your mother."

Sigh. I guess I didn't think to call people before I blacked out once I got here. I guess I was too fucked up over everything that was going on. I hope mom doesn't think I was blowing her off that whole time then just sent a pacifying text. Shit. What do I do?

I choose to dial the police department. After two rings there is an answer.

"Pottawatomie County Courthouse how may I direct your call?" the older female voice says.

"I got a call from this number about an impounded car?" I say confused that the caller didn't leave a direct number.

"One moment," she says as I hear a series of clicks and another series of rings.

"Impound," the male voice says.

"Hello I had a burned out truck towed yes-" I start before being interrupted.

"Yes is this James?" the man asks.

"Yes," I respond.

"Alright here is the story. You will not have any fees involved with the impound and everything is being taken care of regarding disposal" he informs me. "Also the legal paperwork has been completed by folks at your lawyer's office."

"Steve?" I ask, curious if there was some mystery lawyer involved or if the family lawyer got involved.

"Yes" he responds sounding a little annoyed. "Contact them if you have more questions as we have already gone over everything with them."

"Thank you," I say just before I hear the line disconnect. *Strange. But, I'm glad there doesn't seem to be any problems for me legally in this so far. I should call mom and see if she knows anything more since the message she left.* After a few seconds her phone is ringing.

"Hello?" she asks sounding as if she had been crying.

"What's wrong Mom?" I ask sounding concerned.

"James!" she exclaims. "Did Steve talk to you?"

"No, what's going on?" I ask probably sounding more excited about the situation than worried.

"Nothing, now. They were trying to find you at first" she explains. "They were going to bring you in for questioning but ... Makayla was it? Her dad? He took full responsibility and Steve immediately played on that

to have all fines and charges relating to the truck's fire and disposal applied to him. Steve had no problem making that happen."

"I love Steve" I say with a laugh.

"You should" mom says with a firm voice. "There were a lot of fines you were looking at if he hadn't done that. Pumpkin can you mow my lawn soon?"

"Yeah, I'll be out that way after work tomorrow" I tell her.

"Thank you" she says with a sound of relief in her voice. "The grass has been getting tall. And Patricia was here looking for you yesterday."

"Oh?" I ask, curious about what the fuck she was doing there.

"Yes. She was worried" she informs me. "She left a stack of letters for you."

Jesus Christ, there's always something up her sleeve. "What kind of letters?" I ask feeling anxiety creeping up again.

"I don't know, they are in a box that is taped up" she answers.

"Alright" I say. "I'll take those off your hands after I mow tomorrow."

"Thanks pumpkin, I love you" she says.

"Love you too" I return before ending the call.

Fuck it's been so long, I can't believe Patricia hasn't let it go yet. I need to ask Galen or Jean if one of them can take me to work tomorrow, too. Maybe one of them will still be up and won't have to wake up at the asscrack of dawn. I shut off my phone and place it in my pocket as I go on to the porch through the sliding glass door.

Once I close the door behind me the porch is silent again as well as the now four people in the pool. "Oh fuck off" I say as I smile and raise a middle finger up. I start waving it around from person to person while I laugh.

"Everything cool?" Galen asks right before sipping his drink.

"Cool as Lisa's nipples" I muse while gesturing towards her. Everybody looks and the pink redhead skin on her face blushes. She uncomfortably laughs as Jean walks towards me to hand me a bottle of Bud Light. "Thanks" I tell her.

"Good to know you're okay" she says quietly as I take the bottle from her.

Descent . Tear the Roof Off

“So you think you’ll talk to Makayla again?” Galen asks while sipping on his screwdriver.

“Yeah I probably will” I respond. “Her dad is going to be in jail for several years so I’ll have plenty of time without that nuisance.”

Galen laughs and takes another sip of his drink. “Yeah, that does seem bothersome.”

We’re standing on the edge of the porch off of the dining room. We’re both leaning backwards against the railing while some of Lisa’s friends dance near the center of the porch. Jean and Melissa are in the pool with Ally and her boyfriend in the shallow end. A few girls are in the deep end playing shark with little Jean. We call her Little Jean because she’s a little person. As in she’s a midget. She doesn’t care what people call her. But we call her little Jean because it’s obvious. Since she’s around we tend to call the other big Jean. They look nothing at all alike, though.

“We need louder music” Galen says before finishing the last several drinks of his screwdriver. He sets the drink down on the ledge and walks into the dining room through the now left open doorway. Moments later the sounds of the Notorious B.I.G. become much louder. Not loud enough to feel the bass vibration but a much more clear volume and loud enough that we can’t hear the footsteps of the people dancing on the porch.

“James?” I hear from my side, unaware of anyone approaching as I was starting to zone out to the music.

“Yes?” I respond turning to look. I observe a fairly attractive blonde girl a little shorter than me and wearing a one piece bathing suit.

“Hello” she says with a very meek looking but large smile just before turning and walking up the side of the pool. *Strange. People are strange. Even when you’re a stranger. Especially when you’re a stranger.*

“Hello” I say quietly as I see her now sitting on the edge of the pool and dangling her legs into it.

“Hello?” Galen says returning to grab his glass.

“Hello” I say again with a smart ass smile.

“Hello, sir!” he says loudly before bowing and walking back into the kitchen.

Sir. Like a fucking sir. Good old internet.

“Helooooo!” Jean yells from the opposite side of the pool before jumping in. I look back at the girl who said hello to me and she’s smiling and blushing, looking down into the water of the pool. *I hope all that hello repeating after she said it to me didn’t dishearten her from talking to me again. Shit. I better walk over there and say hi.*

I kick my shoes off and slip off my socks, putting them in my shoes. I see she is still staring at the water as I walk over and sit next to her, putting my feet in the pool. “Friend of Jean’s?” I ask looking over at her and smiling. My hair gets in my face as a breeze comes through and I sweep it back behind my ear.

“Friend of Lisa’s” she says gesturing over towards Lisa Farnam.

“Ahhh” I say smiling and nodding.

“Not a friend of hers?” she asks with a smirk. She has a huge mouth which reminds me of Liv Tyler. *Not sure I’ve seen anyone with a mouth that big before outside of the girl who Michael and I met on the BBS years back. Long story.*

“Well,” I say trying to bring myself back from a second of daydreaming while staring at her lips. “She’s cool but I keep my distance so we don’t talk much.” As the words come out I am now the one looking down into the water. *Shit, I should talk to Lisa more.*

“Why keep a distance?” she asks shaking her head a little, making her beautiful hair wave a little down her back. *Didn’t realize how long her hair was, nice. I have always had a softer spot for long hair than short hair. Probably just because I grew up around everybody having long hair.*

“Not sure” I begin. “Probably because I find her ungodly attractive and Galen has had his heart thumping for her since before I even met her.” As I finish that sentence she begins a quiet laugh. I wonder why for just a moment.

“Guy code in action!” she exclaims. “Very admirable. I just fuck my friends boyfriends and push through friends too fast.”

My eyebrows go up and I nod slowly. “Not the worst reason to go through friends, I guess,” I say now taking notice that she has a pretty decent body, too. Great body, really. Not really in that place in my head to be thinking about any of that though so I guess I didn’t automatically notice.

“Right?” she asks with another light laugh. “If only all the drama was worth all the quickies and disappointments.”

I nod slowly and smirk. *Fuck you brain, that’s not a challenge. You stop it.* “Quickies are bad?” I ask without the question being cleared

in my brain's filter.

"Not when they talk about being all weekend masters of the bedroom!" she says quietly but in a way that sounds loud just before breaking out in louder laughter.

I smile and nod some more and look back into the water. "Masters of the bedroom" I say quietly as her laughter returns.

"I've heard it all" she says in a more dire sounding voice. It sounds like it was forced to sound that way and not as serious. "Twelve inches but only six hard. Hurts like a fisting but can barely feel it and I can get off with just one finger. Loves eating clam but licks twice and wants to go to sex. All very sad," she concludes.

"You sure are open for having just met me," I say playfully while shaking my head and smiling as warmly as I can.

"Lisa said you were one of the biggest perverts on the planet," she said with a playful laugh and shooting a glance over at Lisa. I turn and look and Lisa is staring at us with a huge dimple filled shit eating grin. *God dammit Lisa.*

"I don't think my pastor would appreciate that," I say before reaching an arm around her lower back and slipping her off into the pool. Just as I do that and as her scream of surprise disappears under the water I hear Nine Inch Nails starting to blare from inside the house. As I get up to wander off to get more alcohol I notice her dry ass print on the generally moist ground looks amazing. I'll try to remember to take a look at that later. Fuck, I never got her name.

"Not fair!" I hear her say out of the water as I pass through the dining room into the kitchen. I can hear other people laughing as I open the freezer to grab some Jack Daniels. I see the two thirds full bottle I left in Galen's room not too long ago tucked in a back corner and grab it. I take several large drinks and close the freezer. I take a couple more drinks and think about having to stay sober enough to get to that last day of work in the morning. Just then I feel ice water pour down my back. I turn around to see the unknown girl smiling with an empty glass.

"Stranger girl makes the move with the ice water!" I say with a smile before taking another drink of Jack.

"Stranger girl!" she laughs. "I like that!" She turns around and walks quickly through the living room and back out onto the deck.

Fuck, I should have asked what her name is. Ass looks good, too. I drink a little more Jack and realize it's getting to me more than I thought it would.

“Dad just texted me, we gotta go.” Galen says walking around the corner and tapping my shoulder.

“Go where?” I ask.

“To pick up your car!” he says with his huge goofy but confident grin.

“Uhhh,” I begin as he grabs my arm and pulls me towards the door. I break free and stop causing him to turn and look confused. “I can’t drive, man. Can we drag Jean along to drive mine?”

“Jean!” he shouts just before the expression on his face changes to apparently realizing nobody outside can hear him since he turned the radio up.

“Yes?” I hear from behind me. We turn and look and see Jean happened to just be entering the dining room with an empty glass.

“How much have you drank?” I ask briskly.

“Just started, dad,” she responds with a playful defiant look on her face.

“Can you drive?” I ask with a bit of worry that she might actually be too drunk.

“Oh, yeah” she responds with a comfort that I know she wouldn’t have if she questioned how much she had drank.

“Sweet” Galen says. “Dad just texted us that his friend is giving James the spookmobile.”

“Spookmobile?” I ask.

“Fuck yeah!” Jean shouts. “You lucky son of a bitch!” she continues before punching me in the shoulder.

“Spookmobile?” I repeat.

“You’ll see,” Galen says in a playful but slightly wavering voice as he turns and runs down the stairs. Jean smiles and follows him.

I look down at the floor and try to remember if I’ve ever been told about this car. *I can’t think of one time I heard it even come up in a conversation.* I turn and look outside through the kitchen window and see stranger girl quickly turning her head from this direction to the pool. I look back down at the floor then turn and head down the stairs. *Spookmobile? What?*

Descent . Spookmobile

Pulling up to a garage in the South End of Council Bluffs I start to wonder if I'm not just being taken to pick up a 1980s rust bucket that is terrifying to drive. I analyze Jean's face and she looks excited and a little anxious. Galen has most of the same shit eating grin he's had on his face since he got the text from his father.

"Will I need to wear a fire suit while I drive this?" I ask, showing my nerves are fraying me a little.

"You will need to wear a helmet," Galen says in a serious voice. *Fuck, a helmet? Does it have a tricky ejection seat or something? What the fuck.*

"What?" I ask in a much higher voice than intended. Jean and Galen both start laughing. "Shut up!" I demand while feeling a little more worried.

"Shut up and wait to see," Jean says while reaching forward from the back seat to pat me on the shoulder. "Don't worry about it."

"It doesn't have racist stuff all over it on the body does it?" I ask. "Is that the type of spookmobile it is?" I ask. They just laugh and say nothing. *I really shouldn't complain, I guess. Even not seeing it I know it's a gift from their father and at worst I can just paint it if needed.*

As that thought crosses my head we turn a corner. As the view out my window changes a fairly old hearse that almost looks like the batmobile had a baby with the ghostbusters vehicle steals my vision. *Oh dear fuck please tell me this is the spookmobile.*

"Feel better?" Galen says while pointing at the black car with fairly black tinted windows.

The excitement in me builds quickly as I look at Galen. "Are you serious?" I ask while turning to look back at the spookmobile. *I fully accept this name for a vehicle. It's not that it looks spooky to me but the fact it's a hearse I'm sure will seem spooky to most people who see me driving it around.*

"Yeah, you lucky son of a bitch," Galen states while actually sounding a little irritated.

"I take it you wanted it?" I ask feeling a little bad.

"No, I just spent a lot of time helping to restore and upgrade it" he says with a full smile coming to his face.

"Fair point, sir," I respond.

"You're going to let me drive this," she insists. *No problem there. I think she forgot she's here to drive it back to her place! I definitely feel too inebriated to drive.*

"I might let you drive me to work at the end of this week" I tell her with a grin.

“Fuck you!” she shouts, punching my shoulder. It’s probably good I’ve been drinking because I actually probably would have a lot of pain in my shoulder after two punches. She doesn’t punch softly.

“I thought you came to drive him back home in it?” Galen asks sounding confused. I shoot a look at him quick and he realizes I was messing with her. Boom, another punch on the shoulder. *It is actually starting to hurt a little now that I think about it.*

“Asshole!” Jean says before laughing a little.

“Always a pleasure,” I say looking back at her and smiling.

I brush my hair behind my ears as we get out of the car. Galen walks to the driver door and pulls it open. He looks inside then looks at me smiling. “Keys are in it” he says with a nod to Jean. He pushes a button on the inside of the door and I hear all the doors click.

“Power locks?” I ask, actually surprised a car that looks like this has that.

“And windows,” he says with a nod. “It also has power steering of course, disc brakes and lojack.”

“Lojack, really?” I ask. “Wait, is that a manual transmission?” Jean and Galen both nod.

“I’ll teach you,” Jean assures me. “but not today. I only just started drinking with no intentions of taking a break.”

“Shit, we took a break?” I said while walking quickly to the other side of the car.

“Fuck!” Galen shouts. “That’s true!” He turns and runs at a fast sprint back to his car and jumps in. Moments later Jean and I are in the spookmobile. Galen fires down the street in his car as Jean starts the car we’re in.

Holy shit, the engine sounds beastly. Jean shifts into what I have to assume is reverse and presses on the gas. The motor revs and we fire backwards. The stop and gear shift takes but a brief moment as she fires back down the street in the same direction Galen just went. I pull my phone out and text Michael.

James: Dude you won’t believe what I’m going to be driving.

Michael: I took tonight off. I’ll be at Jean’s soon.

James: Fuck yeah. You and Jean will be teaching me stick soon.

Michael: I don’t want you to touch my stick.

James: Then quit painting it neon colors to draw my attention.

I decide to shoot Natalie a text as well.

James: You know Jean, right?

Natalie: Yes.

James: Want to come chill with us at her house party this week?

Natalie: No.

James: You alright?

Natalie: I burned Jerry's house down, I'm never partying again.

"What would you say if I told you Natalie said she's never partying again?" I ask Jean.

"I would say that is walking all the way to the ocean to put out a cigarette level crazy," she responds. We live in the middle of the country so she uses that example as her top level of insanity. Even though while high I asked her once why she uses that since a cigarette would never stay lit that long anyway. She just uses flash as a reference point for human land speed.

"She just told me she's never partying again," I inform her.

"Bullshit, let's go pick her up." Jean says.

"Hmm" I say looking in the back. The interior is dark gray and a false leather. It's of the type that I don't think legs would stick to very well. The front two seats are bucket seats. There is a bench seat behind them with two doors on each side. Behind the bench seat is a large surface plenty big enough to house a gurney or other device to transport a corpse or human of any height. The vehicle is probably longer than even a station wagon. But from the inside it looks a lot bigger in length than I thought it did from the outside.

"We could kidnap her and throw her in the back, hogtied" I think out loud. Jean looks at me with wide eyes.

"You could have an orgy back there!" she says while looking into the rear view. "Did Galen seriously neglect to ever mention this car to you?"

"Not once," I answer while still visually scanning the car's interior. "I'm just happy it has an aux input for my phone." I point at the input and she starts smiling.

"This is the best thing about this car," she states while grabbing her phone out of her pocket. She fiddles with the screen a little before the stereo interface on the console blinks twice. Then the song "Poppin' Off" by Watch the Duck starts blaring through the speakers crystal clear.

"Holy fuck," I say while trying to look over the back seat to attempt spotting any speakers. I take my seatbelt off and climb over the side of my seat trying not to kick Jean as I get into the back seat. As I settle into leaning over the back seat I realize there are three 12 inch speakers on each side of the back cargo area. Realizing what fabric they covered them with I notice a few four inch speakers along the perimeter of the roof. *Fucking amazing.*

I climb back up into the front seat and put my seatbelt back on. “Who am I going to have to start blowing on a regular basis to pay off this car?” I ask while still fully dumbfounded.

“Remember when Galen overdosed on acid and was in a coma for a week?” Jean asks without taking her eyes off the road ahead.

“Yes,” I respond. “I also remember Wendy getting into that big fight with her boyfriend in two different lobbies.”

“Oh!” she exclaims. “I forgot about that! But yeah. Dad was going to give this car to him before that happened. His punishment was being told this car was going to go to somebody as a good deed instead of to him for his 18th birthday.”

“Yeah? So he’s just excited to see this thing getting used instead of sitting in some garage somewhere?” I ponder aloud.

“Yep,” she answers.

“So where did he even get the car?” I ask unable to remember ever hearing about this, still.

“Dad pulled some strings to buy it for a few thousand off a repo auction,” she responds.

“Well fuck,” I mumble while falling into silence. *This just doesn't feel right to me. I know I've been around to help keep Jean and Galen sane. I also know they've been around for me a lot when I needed somebody. I can also think of times when I haven't been there to help when I really wish I had been. Fuck, I just ducked out of a party that ended in Jerry's house burning down. My karma is fucked. Something is fucking going on.*

“If it makes you feel any better,” Jean begins before taking a deep breath. “He was worried he would end up selling it. You’re like a brother to us.” She pauses and takes a deep breath. “And a second son to both mom and dad.”

I reach my arm over and rest my hand on her shoulder. “I appreciate that a lot,” I say while feeling the well inside me wanting to overflow. I’m not one to cry. She sniffs and sits up straight, obviously trying to force the tears back again. I pull my phone out quick, having an idea. I start to text Michael.

James: You should grab Natalie and see if Jerry wants to come too. Make sure those two are cool.

Michael: already have Jerry. Her kids are at her mom’s. Her mom actually said get out of here for the night to calm down. Plus Jerry just said she loves Natalie and to pick her up. Will surprise Natalie.

I look over at Jean and say “Texted Michael and he has Jerry.” Jean turns and interrupts me saying “Where are they staying?”

“With her mom,” I inform her. “Her mom’s going to babysit the kids and she’s going to come out and blow off some steam. Michael is going to see if they can surprise pick up Natalie and bring her along.”

“Good! We have a whole lot of Vodka downstairs in the pantry,” Jean seems to be thinking out loud. “We’ll get her mind off of what happened.”

I doubt that. I hope we can just keep Jerry happy. I’d love to get her to smile at least five or ten times. If I can do that she’ll feel endlessly better. And in turn that would make me feel better too.

James: Yeah, Jean is all about you getting both of them here.

Michael: I’ll be bringing a few bottles of liquor, too.

James: Happen to have more Jack?

Michael: Come on.

James: Ok, that’s a fair point.

Suddenly Jean swings around into a large strip mall parking lot. I turn and look at her, figuring I know what she’s going to do.

“Your nerves are dull right now and I’m here to punch you if you do something stupid,” she says, jumping out of the driver’s side. She scurries around the front of the car and pulls my passenger door open. “Get out,” she demands in her best attempt at sounding terrifying.

I step out of the car and walk around the front. I hear her door shut and realize it sounds pretty solid. *I’ve heard some car doors close which sound like a tin can dropping on a concrete floor. Just terrible.*

“Alright,” I say as I close my door. “I watched you do this so let’s see...” I move the gear shift from park to neutral and press down the clutch. I look over and Jean is nodding slowly. I let go of the clutch and try to shift into first gear. A god awful grinding noise happens so I move it back to neutral and press the clutch back down. I look over at Jean and her lips are puffed out and eyes squinted, turning her head slowly side to side.

“Bad, James” she says while shaking her finger at me.

“Your anus is going to leak, be nice!” I say while trying to focus. I keep the clutch held in as I shift into first. I slowly start driving around the parking lot, playing with going into and out of second gear as I’m in the shorter straightaways.

“Very good,” Jean says. “Now drive us back to my house.”

“I still don’t feel sober enough,” I say trying to convince her to drive again. She just raises an eyebrow and looks at me.

“Your nerves didn’t kick back in once you got in the driver’s seat, sobering you up? Right?” she asks with a mother knows best look on her face.

“Huh,” I respond while analyzing myself further. “You’re right, fuck.”

“Fucking accurate, as usual,” she states proudly.

I carefully pull up to the parking lot exit and grind again dropping down into first. Jean just laughs as I realize what I did wrong. Once a break in traffic comes I pull out and get up into third gear pretty fast without any issues. The rest of the drive back to her house goes quite smoothly with less and less gear grinds per couple miles.

Descent . Regroup

“Not bad at all,” Jean says kindly. “I wasn’t able to park without fucking it up my first time. You even remembered the emergency brake!”

“I have to give credit where it is due,” I begin, with a sly smirk breaking onto my face without any approval at all. “I got most of that from San Francisco Rush.”

“Oh Jesus!” she exclaims. “That game you dropped most of your paychecks in when you skipped school back at A.L.?”

“Yeah, that had a stick you could toggle,” I remind her. “I did it a few times and figured out the manual way how to drive, mostly. Only it didn’t have an emergency brake. I just happened to have noticed everybody driving a stick do it before we got out.”

“Smart man,” she says in the most official sounding voice she could. “Let’s go get sloshed.”

I look up the street towards the living room windows and see people dancing in the living room. “Looks like more people have arrived,” I observe.

“No shit?” Jean says playfully while making a sweeping hand gesture. “All these cars weren’t evidence enough?”

“Oh, fuck,” I say taking mental note of the increase of cars up and down the street. “Are we going to have to start kicking people out before the sun even goes down?”

“No,” Jean says. “Galen already is.” She gestures towards the front door as we get out of the car. I see Galen behind three people walking down the front sidewalk. He’s yelling at them and pointing up the street. I can’t make out what he’s saying though.

“Oh shit,” I say as one guy turns around looking like he’s going to swing. Jean and I run up and as he raises his arm he sees us. He says some inaudible things and turns with his friends, running through the grass towards some cars just up the street.

“Nice timing,” Galen says while adjusting his shirt. “I saw you drove that,” he notes with a smile and approving nod.

“Jean made me,” I say in an impression of a child in trouble. I wave my right pointer finger at Jean a little. She laughs and shakes her head.

“Michael just got here with Natalie and Jerry,” Galen informs me. “Those guys were asking Jerry if her kids died in the fire and both her and Natalie started freaking out.”

Hearing that I turn and instantly walk inside and see both Natalie and Jerry sitting in the family room off of the entry way. I walk in and sit down quickly next to Natalie. Jerry is sitting in an adjacent chair. Galen sits on the other side of me on the couch and Jean comes in and sits in a chair across the room.

“You two ok?” I say as their hushed conversation stops and they notice we’re here.

“I am,” they both say looking at me, then each other. They smile and Jerry puts her hand out to rest on Natalie’s knee.

“Need me to chase any ass down to beat?” I ask, looking back and forth between them as I say it.

“Just one of the firefighters,” Jerry states with a rising look of irritation on her face.

“Why?” I ask, not remembering any commentary so far about any unruly firemen.

“I was crying and he ended up getting me to cry on his shoulder,” Jerry begins. “Then I felt one of his hands cupping my ass.”

I instinctively nod as I think ‘of course, that’s a sweet tiny little ass.’

“No, not good!” she says with a smile hitting her face. “I was so pissed off, I punched him in his chest but the thick jacket actually hurt my hand. Some of the other guys came over and pulled me away and the rest is kind of a blur until the kids and I got to mom’s.”

“How did you get there, anyway?” I ask. “Ben?”

“No, I told them to leave so it was just me and the firemen for a moment,” she almost whispers as her voice and facial expression sinks. “The commander on scene took me. He had me explain what happened on the way. From what he said it sounds like they have had problems with that guy for a while now.”

“What was your mom’s reaction?” I ask with full sincerity and curiosity.

“She pulled me back into her bedroom,” Jerry begins. “Her first several questions were about whether my friends or myself got hurt. She asked a lot of questions regarding various insurance options. But other than that she didn’t seem upset.”

“Sounds like what I would have guessed,” I say.

“What’s with you?” Michael says while looking at me.

“What?” I ask, not realizing anything was immediately with me.

“You seem stressed and focused on something,” he states. “At first I thought it was because of the fucks we kicked out. But it’s still

present on you.”

“Don’t worry,” I respond. “You cool?” I say while shifting my attention to Natalie.

“Yes,” she says in a meek voice. “Jerry and I have had a little time to talk. I’m glad she doesn’t hate me and nobody is angry with me.” Her head raises a little higher. She smiles and looks at those of us sitting in the room. “Thank you guys for not being furious with me for being so clumsy.”

All of us say variations of “no problem” and “it’s alright,” among others. Natalie smiles and looks to be tearing up a little. Jean moves closer to her and puts her hand on Natalie’s shoulder. Jerry approaches and puts her arm around her other shoulder giving her a hug. Everyone in the room sits quietly and it feels to me that a little tension lifts away.

“It’ll just be a story we end up telling people later,” I say with a smirk. Natalie opens her eyes and makes eye contact with me and looks like she might laugh. She smiles and nods and hugs Jerry back.

I look over and Jean is staring at me with a huge smile on her face.

“What?” I ask, feeling like I missed something. I look down and check to verify my zipper is up.

“Tell Michael what you drove here in,” she says while looking back over at him.

“Oh,” I say while trying to decide how to tell him and if I should fuck with him. I look at him and he is now staring at me with an inquisitive look on his face.

“Dick!” he says as he flips me off.

“Uhh,” I say, still unsure how to go about telling him. Much less how I am going to explain to him that we’re not going to get to build a car together. We planned to do that as a replacement for my truck because it was getting old. And now that he knows it’s destroyed I hope he isn’t set on doing it. I mean shit, we still can.

“Dick!” he repeats louder than before.

“Oh, Galen and Jean’s dad gave me a car he and Galen had been working on while it sat with no plans in storage,” I say fairly fast. I blurted it out in hopes I could get it all out before he said anything in response.

“Is it here?” he asks looking more excited than angry.

“Yeah,” I respond right as I hear yelling in rage fire up from somewhere in the back yard. Galen and Jean jump up and run through the dining room and out across the porch. I stand up as a guy I recall meeting some time ago runs up the hallway then out through the dining

room exit. Michael and I stand up and make our way out the dining room door just in time to see Galen tackle someone and Jean push two girls back a few feet.

“Jesus,” I mumble as Michael looks between the altercation and myself.

“I think they have this under control,” Michael says.

“Yeah, it looks like it. Want to go look at the car?” I ask while feeling uninterested in getting involved in any more drama right now.

“Lets,” he says as he walks around the north side of the house. I follow him and we get out to the front yard as we hear some noise behind us. I turn to look and see Galen dragging a guy through the grass in our direction.

Michael and I stop and stand towards the north edge of the front yard as Galen drags the guy towards us. He passes us and gets to the front sidewalk dragging the guy by one ankle using two hands.

“Do you need help into whichever car you came here in?” Galen asks while dropping the guy’s leg on the ground. He puts his hands behind his back and waits for a response.

“Fuck off,” the guy says while starting to get up.

Michael and I start to approach and only get a couple steps before Galen lifts a hand towards us, palm out, gesturing for us to hang back.

“Want a vehicle to come pick you up from right here? Cab? Ambulance?” Galen says while seeming to remain quite calm.

“I’m going back to talk to my friends,” the guy says. Now on his feet he starts to walk off the sidewalk and back the direction he was drug from. No sooner does his foot move over the grass does Galen shift his weight and raise a hand up. Galen’s hand lands in the middle of the guy’s chest and with one motion the guy falls backwards onto the sidewalk.

The moment the guy hits the ground he lets out a girlish sounding yelp. I see Galen’s other hand coming from behind the guy’s head.

“Awww, he saved the guy’s head from hitting the concrete,” I whisper to Michael.

“I would have let it hit,” Michael replies.

“Car you came in, cab or ambulance?” Galen asks in an intimidating voice.

“Car,” the guy says, looking almost shell shocked by how fast he went down to the ground. He looks like he may actually have had the wind knocked out of him when he landed.

“Alright,” Galen says while standing up and dusting off his pant

legs. He steps back a couple steps as the guy gets on his feet and jogs up the street and out of sight. Galen then slowly turns towards us, hands clasped behind his lower back again. He looks at the house then looks at us with his tilted grin and approaches us.

“Shall we drink?” Galen asks while leaning forward a little on the word drink.

“Yeah, I’ll be practicing tonight for how much I’ll drink tomorrow night,” I say, still trying to stay up to my word that I’ll go cut mom’s grass.

“Why?” Galen asks as Michael gives me another inquisitive look.

“Well I have to get up early tomorrow and go take care of mom’s yard,” I answer.

“I have an elaborate plan to keep you jolly well drunk until you have to go to work in a few days,” Galen admits. He looks over at Michael who is now nodding, then back to me. His face looks serious. Doesn’t look like he’s joking.

“I could run over there and do it right now?” I muse aloud.

“I’ll go with you,” Michael says, looking over at Galen as if he expects a similar statement from him.

“Oh I’m in,” Galen agrees.

“What about the peace here?” I ask, gesturing towards the house.

“Oh that guy was the last guy I had any concern about. I was hoping he would give me a reason to kick him out.” Galen says with a large knowing smile spreading across his face.

“What happened out there, anyway?” I ask as the three of us start making our way towards Michael’s jeep.

“One of the girls was making fun of his dick size to her friend and he came out to yell at her,” he explains. “You know, little dick problems.” He leans towards Michael and nudges him.

“Satisfied your mom and sister at the same time with it,” Michael fires back with a menacing smile.

“Impossible,” Galen says. “Mom’s never satisfied.”

All three of us laugh as we climb into Michael’s big black Jeep Cherokee.

Descent . Green Desolation

Michael pulls his jeep into the driveway at my mother's house. Galen and I look at each other before both of us look at Michael. All three of us nod simultaneously. We get out of the jeep and stand in the front yard for a moment, looking back and forth between us and out around the yard.

"You mow," Michael says pointing at me. "I'll run around and use the weed eater around the edges and Galen will get the hedges with the clippers in the shed."

Galen and I nod as the three of us scatter in different directions. I head straight towards the shed and grab the mower. The grass has reached about eight inches and is seeding so I'm glad we're doing this in the evening rather than the morning. It's much nicer to run the mower through dry grass than wet. Scooping out wet grass with my hands is not my favorite thing to do with the mower.

"Hey, baby," I hear Galen saying behind me. I turn around to see him walking with hedge clippers I hadn't seen before. They were held between his legs by his thighs and sticking out from the center of his crotch. Pretty professionally done, if you ask me.

"Penetration time?" I ask as I unscrew the gas cap of the mower.

"Every time is humping time," he responds while making humping motions. The motions get faster and his facial expressions grow more serious looking as mom's neighbor Sheryl follows her two dogs out her back door.

"Hey!" I say to her loud enough for her to hear, waving a hand.

"Hi, boys!" she exclaims.

Sheryl trains dogs and is pretty cool. Mom and I sat on the deck attached to her garage and bullshitted with her as the sun went down on multiple occasions. One time she even came over to chill in the pool while Mom had one. Eye candy and interesting? Rare.

"Hello, ma'am!" Galen says in a very respectable voice, waving kindly yet still humping and gyrating with the clippers in a phallic way before him.

"Who's your friend?" Sheryl asks with an ear to ear smile, slightly chuckling.

"Sheryl, this is Galen," I say, gesturing from Sheryl to Galen. "Galen, Sheryl."

"Pleasure to meet you!" Galen states while waving and humping as he walks back towards the front of the house.

"I see that!" Sheryl calls out as she continues laughing. She shakes her head a little and waves at me as she walks towards her back yard to start exercising her dogs.

I lean down and screw the cap back on. I look over at Sheryl and see she's still smiling a lot more than she was when she came out her back door. Then I look down at the lawn mower and pull the cord to start it. To my amazement, it starts the first try.

Closing the shed I look around and realize we made such fast work of the yard I am not sure the sun even moved many degrees through the sky. I turn the locking mechanism on the door to the shed and turn to hurry back to the front yard and almost crash head first into my mother. Without hesitation she leans forward and throws her arms around me in a hug.

"Thank you!" she says as she continues the hug.

"No worries," I respond. "I have to smell horrible, though."

"It's ok pumpkin," she assures. "I was worried you would get distracted and forget for a week. The grass was seeding as it is."

"I noticed," I say. "The bushes also looked like they were growing in the wild."

"Galen made them look nice!" she informs me.

"Thank you!" Galen says from behind her as he approaches.

"You're welcome!" mom says. "You also did very well with the edging!" she adds while smiling and nodding to Michael.

"Thanks!" Michael says while starting to grin.

"What?" mom says while looking from Michael to me.

"We're going to get your son sloppy drunk," Michael says with an even bigger grin.

"Alright, but make sure he doesn't drive," she insists. "Did your dad go through with it?" she asks Galen.

"Yes," he says nodding and looking at me.

"Go through with what?" I ask looking back and forth between them.

"She knew about the car," Galen says while he starts to smile.

"Oh, you knew about that?" I inquire while looking directly at mom.

"Yes," she said. "his dad called me to make sure I didn't have any plans in motion before he made it happen. I told him I was really at a loss as to what to do and he told me it was taken care of. When he described the car to me I knew you would like it so I was happy."

"I helped with some of the engine work before I knew they were giving it to you," Michael informs me with a slow nod.

"I wanted to put an automatic transmission in it but he refused to change it from what classically is in that model," Galen informs me with a sly grin fired off at Michael.

At that moment Galen Michael and myself notice mom hunch over a few inches forward.

“Are you alright?” I ask, making notice verbally.

“Yes, my fibro is just acting up is all. Damn weather changes,” she says while starting to shift her posture back to where it was.

“Need anything from the store?” I ask, hoping we can help a little further before disappearing for a few days.

“No I just went the other day and should be stocked for a few weeks,” she tells us as she looks around the yard. “You guys really did a good job! Especially how dark it’s getting already!”

“Thanks,” we all repeat in unison.

“They’re better at the jobs they did than I am at them,” I admit.

“Well I’m going to go back in and lay down,” mom says to us.

“Be well!” Galen says as the three of us start walking down the driveway towards the front of the house.

“Bye Galen!” we hear come from a window in Sheryl’s house. We slow down and look over and see her approach the window, now wearing a sun dress and that smile she had as he was goofing off.

“Bye!” he says waving and smiling. We get around the front of the house and out of earshot and Galen says “She didn’t look that good earlier!”

“Oh dude,” I respond. “You should see her in a bathing suit. She’s a stunner, you wouldn’t normally notice.”

We climb into Michael’s jeep and he begins driving.

“Yeah?” Galen asks. “That good?”

“That smile and perfect hair, chest as you saw and her body down below is not chubby at all,” I inform him. “Not that I’ve spent much time checking her out.”

“But more time than checking out your sister?” Michael asks. He starts laughing before I can even respond. Galen also starts laughing.

“I should never have fucking told you that,” I say while amused but still annoyed a little.

“I can still picture her abs from your description,” Galen adds while still laughing.

“Fuck both of you cock swallows,” I toss out verbally. “You should have sat up front Galen.” Galen reaches forward and rubs my hair, messing it up.

“Don’t be so sour,” he says, still laughing a bit.

“Sour is what I do,” I say. “I feel like I owe your dad something for that car,” I confide while feeling a little shy about bringing it up.

“Don’t, man,” Galen insists. “I have a car now anyway. I ended up getting one when I thought he was going to sell it after I pissed him off. I’m just glad I get to see it a lot.”

“And I’m glad I got to drive it before James gets it destroyed by an angry father,” Michael interjects.

“Fuck you!” I blurt out before looking back at Galen. “It’s hard not to feel like I owe him, though.”

“Just don’t let our house burn down over the next few days and I’m sure he’ll feel you’ve done a large enough service to deserve the car,” Galen assures me.

“But we left Natalie there with everyone!” I say jokingly. Galen and Michael both stay silent after I finish the statement. I notice Michael is slowly accelerating. Galen turns his attention from me to the speedometer as he notices as well. All three of us start laughing.

What feels like moments pass and we’re driving up the street towards Galen’s house. I look back at him and he’s steadily watching out the window. He looks focused and curious. Maybe my joke wasn’t in good taste after all. As we approach we see the number of cars has gone down a bit. There is no smoke rising from the house.

“Oh, good,” Galen says in a relieved sigh. “Nothing is on fire and the party isn’t six times bigger than it was when we left.” Michael and I look at each other and nod. He pulls up into a spot on the side of the street right behind my apparently new ride.

“Why not park closer?” I ask, gesturing towards several now open places further ahead closer to his house.

“Very sneaky sneaky, sir,” he says with a mischievous voice while rubbing his palms together and grinning wickedly.

Michael and myself follow Galen up the sidewalk, driveway and eventually into the garage. Galen opens the door to the house quietly. Not that he needed to, considering the radio is still generously loud.

I anticipated him turning up the stairs but he instead went towards and into his room. We followed him and he closed the door carefully. Michael and I are now standing watching him, as he rubs his palms together and grins evilly again.

“Thoughts?” I ask, curious what his plans are. He turns and opens a compartment behind a couple of liquor bottles on a shelf and pulls out a little bag of marijuana with a small pipe in it. I turn and look at Michael as both he and my own faces light up.

Michael and I sit down on Galen’s bed. Galen sits down in the chair off the head and loads the pipe.

“No words needed,” I say with a smile. Galen smiles and lights his lighter. He holds the flame over the weed and inhales. He moves the flame around to get a good even burn across the surface. He lets the lighter shut off and holds his breath in for several seconds while passing the pipe to me.

I always know Galen has sources that don't mix anything into the weed. I also know his taste of what weeds he appreciates matches mine. He likes a sweet and potent variety, as do I. Michael shares our likes on this matter as well.

I take the pipe and light it. I inhale and hold it in also as I pass to Michael. Galen lets his blow out. Michael begins as I exhale mine. Before I even exhale I can feel it in my chest and arms. My head gets a little light.

I was thinking about asking if he was holding. Alcohol is nice to calm my nerves but weed has always been something that makes me calm and happy for a much longer period of time. I've also never had a hang-over or anything really negative from it. So I tend not to hesitate if it comes up at a time when I have a long enough period to be fully functional before work.

Galen finishes another hit and passes it to me. I take in more this time than I did last time knowing this will be my second and last hit. I can feel it down in my feet and to the top of my head before I am passed this, so I know it'll be enough for me. I finish and hand it to Michael.

I stand up and realize I am pleasantly light headed. Galen looks up and smiles at me as I carefully open his door. I close his door and as I turn around I almost run into Jean.

"What the fuck!" she exclaims with wide eyes. "When did you guys get back?"

"Just a minute ago," I answer. "Need a piss." I stand there and wait quietly hoping she walks off. She stands there and stares at me with a slowly changing expression.

"Why am I not smoking with you guys?" she asks as she walks by me and into Galen's room.

I know Galen doesn't care if Jean smokes with him, as they smoke with each other all the time. However, I know he doesn't have enough to smoke out the whole party and probably wants to try to keep it secret. Though Jean will want to smoke with some other people upstairs once she gets high.

I stop daydreaming and get back into motion. I walk across the open downstairs room into the bathroom and begin taking a piss. Half way through I realize I didn't close the door and push myself to finish. Once done I put myself away and wash my hands. After I wash my hands I realize nobody has been downstairs in a minute or so and head back to Galen's room.

I open the door and stand inside, closing the door behind me. I lean against the wall just to the side of the doorway and smile. I observe Michael taking another hit just before passing it to Galen. Michael gestures he's done as he flops back onto the bed and takes a deep breath. Jean laughs as she watches Michael lay back.

"You done, too?" Jean asks as she turns to face me.

"Yeah," I answer with the smile on my face expanding a little.

"Good," she says while taking the pipe passed from Galen. "We still have a lot left and Galen and I are almost done, too."

I walk over to Galen's little bar and pick up a bottle of Jack Daniels. I unscrew the top as I hear Jean start to cough a little.

"Pussy," Galen says while pushing her shoulder a little. Jean falls onto her back on the bed next to Michael and starts laughing.

I lift the bottle up, tilting it back as I drink a few swallows of Jack. I screw the cap back on. As I go to put it back I hear Galen stand up from behind me.

"No!" he says quietly, but in a way that sounds loud somehow.

"What?" I say as the bottle rests back on the shelf from where I got it.

"Finish that tonight!" he insists, gesturing to the bottle. I look back at it and return my look to Galen.

"But there's one that size in the freezer that's half full still?" I say.

"True," Galen says while thinking a moment. "So put that one in the freezer, and start in on the one in the freezer!" he says while raising his hands up as if he's had the best idea of the day.

"Done," I say while picking the bottle back up. His arms still up in the air, almost like the great cornholio, he turns and walks back over to sit in his chair.

I walk with the bottle towards the door as he pulls his cell phone out of his pocket and peers into it. As I close the door behind me I hear Michael say something to Jean before all 3 of them start laughing. The door closes behind me and I walk up the stairs with my now second fifth of jack.

I reach the fridge in the kitchen and look out the back window. The same people who were here before we went to get the car now remain with a few additional folks. Thankfully as it's getting dark, a lot of the people who had been here in the afternoon are now gone. I see the girl I tossed in the pool standing with Lisa Farnam. They appear deep in conversation.

I turn back to the fridge and open the freezer. There it sits, the bottle of jack I was working on earlier in the day. I take it out and observe it's down to about a quarter full. No worries, this is a party. I can always go buy more if needed, also.

I put the warm bottle in its place and close the freezer. I look back out the window and Lisa is still deep in conversation with her friend. I hear Sublime playing from the living room. I choose to walk down the hallway to the living room and pull out my phone. No messages, good. Everybody I tend to text is here anyway.

Descent . Confessions

I step into the living room and see Natalie sitting on the couch reading. She is too into her book to notice me. I walk around her and sit on the couch next to her. I look out the window and see Jerry sitting with Ben. Cool, didn't know Ben was coming here.

"I hate life," Natalie says, interrupting my train of thought. She puts her book down and looks me in the eyes. She has beautiful blue eyes, it's awesome.

"Want to move into the living room so it's much quieter?" I ask, trying to avoid a conversation in front of a large and loud stereo.

"Sure," she answers.

I put my hand out and she takes it, helping her up onto her feet. I take care to not let the Jack bottle bump her. Not that she needed the help, as she's freakishly strong for being a tall skinny person. I walk back down the hall as she follows and we plop down on the large couch in the family room off from the dining room. The music is still generally loud though quiet enough from this side of the house that we can speak normally.

"So, why do you hate life?" I ask, sincerely curious. I have to assume it has something to do with the fire.

"Every time I have fun, something terrible happens." she confides in me. "Did you know I was the last kiss for someone who killed themselves a couple months ago?" she asks.

"No!" I answer a little louder than I meant to. I have never heard anything about this.

"Well," she says, looking out the window to and over her shoulder towards the hallway in an apparent attempt to check if we're alone. "Was a guy I played StarCraft with," she continues. "He came over with his computer and we were practicing different approaches on a new map. I helped him carry his stuff to his car. We talked and joked next to his car and I kissed him for a few minutes before he left. I invited him back up to my room because I didn't want him to leave."

She looks like she's about to cry so I place a hand on her shoulder. She closes her eyes and shifts her weight around where she's sitting. Once she finishes trying to get comfortable she takes a deep breath. I squeeze her shoulder and lean forward a little so she doesn't have to talk as loud.

"Thanks for listening," she says, looking up at me and wiping a

tear from her cheek.

“Shit, you know me,” I say trying to remain calm and collected. “Go on,” I say, trying to sound comforting.

“He was supposed to get on Skype when he got home so we could do some matches before he went to bed,” she continues. “I didn’t know he had a gun but apparently there was one in his car. He stopped in a Wal-Mart parking lot and set a timed email for the next day. He hated what his life had become and decided he would go see what comes next is what his email said essentially. He sent it to everybody he knew in one shot. There was no mention of me beyond not even taking pleasure in video games anymore.”

She leans forward and starts weeping quietly as I squeeze her shoulder again. She twists a little so her back is almost facing me. She leans her head back so it’s on my shoulder. I put my hands on my lap and remember how often I end up being in the emotional support role. I don’t mind, it just seems strange to me because most of the time I feel like an ass hole.

“He closed with a comment on how he finds suicide to be a weak way out and what more fitting a place to bitch out than a terrible Wal-Mart property?” She laughs a little and then wipes another tear away.

“Maybe your kiss was the best thing for him,” I begin. “Maybe it was one last great thing before he made the decision to leave.”

“Maybe,” she says. “Then before that my mom invited me over for dinner. Being a poor college kid I never turn down free food. But she didn’t tell me it was going to be a full table of her church friends and that they were going to spend the entire evening interrupting everything I said with derogatory commentary about my being atheist.”

“That shit, again?” I ask a little surprised that her mom is revisiting this reversion movement she used to punch after quite a lot.

“Yes,” Natalie says.

She turns her head so she can look up at me and the way her shirt twists allows me to see cleavage. Not intentional though, and I feel like a dirt bag for taking a peek for a moment. She wasn’t making eye contact at the moment I noticed, at least.

“So they eventually made me run out of the house in tears,” she continues. “They kept spinning what they were focusing on. It was my drinking to video games to refusing to go to a Christian church and premarital sex. Everything was presented in a way that reminded me how much mom would cry over all of it.”

“What happened to not judging? Isn’t guilt tripping a sin?” I ask, knowing the answer but mainly getting a little frustration out verbally.

“It should be a ten commandment,” Natalie states. “It would be nice if they had a ‘don’t be a fucking asshole’ commandment in there. Or a ‘don’t push things on other people’ commandment. I might respect organized religion more.”

“Really?” I ask with a lot of surprise on my voice.

“No,” she replies as we both start laughing a little. “but I did bitch at God for when my car burned itself to death.”

“When was that?” I ask, unable to remember yet another thing. People blame Marijuana, and I do have quite a buzz going, but I’ve had a bad memory for quite a long while before I started. I blame it on long running lack of sleep.

“Couple weeks ago,” she answers. She sits up and starts getting animated as she continues the story. “Fucking thing started stalling at red lights. So I tried to take routes with fewer red lights. Then it died on the interstate. As I slowed on the shoulder, I noticed the engine was overheating and I could see hints of steam coming from the edges of the hood.”

“No shit? Is that why people have been mentioning you being picked up in stories besides driving?” I ask, not realizing that she hasn’t been driving herself.

“No shit,” she responds. “So I get out of my car and realize it’s not steam, it’s smoke. I reached in and popped the hood and a lot of smoke started coming out of the hood, then out from under the car. I ran down the street a little and called 911 as flames spread under the firewall and lit up the rest of the car.”

“No fuckin shit?” I say, at a total loss for words.

“Indeed,” she confirms. “I tried to ask my mechanic if he would look at it and figure out what the problem was but by then the insurance company had already scrapped it. Nobody seems to have any idea what would start an engine fire that was strong enough to spread through the whole car.”

“Make sure to ask Michael,” I tell her. “He’s great with cars and he might be able to figure it out.”

“Alright,” she agrees. “That won’t bring my car back, though.”

“It’s true,” I agree, nodding slowly.

“See what I mean by terrible luck?” she asked, inching back towards her inward sulking.

“Yes,” I answer her. “You know you’re surrounded by people who care about you and are here to distract you from all that,” I say with a smile and full sincerity.

“Thankfully,” she says. “It is a huge help, you have no idea. I really don’t mean to require anybody’s help with calming down my crazy brain.”

“Always a pleasure,” I say, smiling and nodding.

“Thank you,” she says. “I just don’t want to be a burden any more than I already have been. I mean, Jerry lost some things she’s never going to get back.”

“You stop,” I demand as kindly as I can. “We know it was an accident. Most importantly she knows. She is so sure it was an accident she had a fairly easy time convincing me of it and you know me. I’m not easily convinced of anything.”

“I know,” Natalie says. “You want to be my StarCraft practice buddy?” she asks with a glimmer of playfulness and a hint of sadness in her eyes.

We both laugh, though hers sounds uncomfortable. I lean over and spread my arms offering a hug and she melts into them hugging me. I embrace her a minute and shake my head a little.

“What?” she asks.

“I fucking suck at StarCraft,” I admit. “I really do.” We both laugh as we break the embrace and she starts crying a little heavier.

“You do,” she agrees. “I could teach you,” she adds.

“I know, you probably could,” I say. “I just don’t have enough free time to get as good as you need.”

“I know, it was a sad bluff” she states before sniffing.

“Never know unless you ask!” I say. “You going to be okay?” I ask with hope she feels a lot better than she did before I found her in the living room.

“Yeah, I should be.” she says. “You smell like weed.”

“I know!” I say, standing up in excitement. Still feel quite the buzz from that. I can feel it very separately from the alcohol. And the alcohol buzz is pretty strong in its own right. I sit back down.

“I have a bikini on under here,” she states. “I should swim now that it’s darker and I won’t be so self-conscious.”

“Self-conscious, why?” I ask. Midway through the question I remember she doesn’t find herself as attractive as almost everyone else does. But, the fact almost all women are this way should be sunk in my

head by now.

“I have half a normal person’s body,” she tells me. My face freezes as I realize she’s right. She really does have about half the physical size as practically anyone else. Though, when she dances it’s so sexy I doubt anyone thinks about how small she is. Mainly when it’s windy or she’s moving something around that’s massive. Her strength is always impressive. And people worry she will literally blow away when it’s gusty.

“You really do,” I say. “You really, really do.” We both laugh and she reaches to put her hand on my shoulder this time.

“Seriously,” she says, now smiling. “Thanks.”

“Not a fucking problem,” I say, unscrewing the top of my Jack bottle, still very cold. “Want some?”

She nods, reaching out and taking it from me. She leans it back and takes multiple gulps draining the fifth from a fourth full to under an eighth full. Pretty impressive! She hands it back to me and stands up perfectly.

“Very nice,” I say. I finish the bottle off as she starts walking through the dining room towards the back door. I stand up and realize the last bit of alcohol is reminding the rest of the alcohol there’s a party inside me. I walk into the dining room and toss the now empty bottle into the trash. I jump back to the freezer and grab the warm bottle of Jack. Then I follow her tracks out the back door where everyone is now congregating.

Descent . Oblivion

“You guys done fucking?” I hear from the pool. I look at Natalie and she’s flipping the bird in the pool’s direction. I look over at the pool and see Taylor Jazzlinko and Justine Newman in the pool. God damn, she needs to always be wet and above water from the stomach up.

“Just took a break so I’d be ready for Justine,” I say with my middle finger going up to join the one Natalie is still flying. I look and Justine has the corner of her mouth curled upward in a smirk. Her big beautiful amber eyes fixed on me, Hair wetted down to the sides of her face. I really am going to have to focus on not staring at her all night.

“Just as long as I get to be behind you the whole time,” Taylor says while pointing at me and smiling. Justine and I still fixed in eye contact. I break and walk towards Jean and Galen who are now standing with Jerry and Ben in the middle of the grass between the pool and the back wall of earth going up to the neighbor’s house some thirty feet higher in elevation. Natalie is following not far behind me.

I survey the people in and around the back yard. Other than Taylor and Justine in the pool along with Alison Gale and her boyfriend I’ve never learned the name of, only Lisa and her friend I tossed in the pool are swimming. Wendy is sitting at the table across the pool by the living room door with Michael and little Jean. Surprised they’re sitting there talking considering how loud the radio is.

Now standing in a circle of Jean, Galen, Jerry, Ben, Natalie and myself, I pull my phone out after feeling it vibrate. Jean and Jerry are talking about the alcohol they need from the store. Ben is drinking a bud light and Galen is smoking a cigarette. I look at my phone and see a text from Makayla.

Makayla: You ok?

James: Yeah. You? What did your mom say?

Makayla: She asked why I didn’t keep you in my room besides making a mess in the entry way.

James: That’s it?

Makayla: Well, and she thinks that’s the first time I had sex.

James: Is it?

Makayla: No, third. Just never outside of a bed.

James: Did you like it?

Makayla: Enough! Are you sure you’re ok?

James: Yes. My truck isn’t.

Makayla: I’m so sorry about that. I’m so, so sorry.

James: Okay Tennant.

Makayla: Ha! Seriously. I’m sorry.

James: It's ok. It was worth it.

Makayla: Was it? So you would meet me again?

James: As long as your dad is in jail. or on a different continent. Yes.

Makayla: Let's move to Switzerland!

James: You're crazy.

"Too cool to talk to us?" Jean says, startling me. I had entirely quit listening to what anyone around me was saying.

"No. Makayla texted me," I say. Whatever Natalie and Ben were talking about stopped and everyone right near me turned to stare at me in silence.

"Well?" Natalie says while looking fully engaged.

"Nothing, really," I say without a clue what to tell them. "Just told her I'd be willing to meet ag-"

I am interrupted by a slap across the back of the head by Galen. Very surprised he was able to reach across and around to pull that off. He looks pretty high. And I'm surprised I was able to keep my balance and stay standing.

"What!?" I say while rubbing the back of my head which now stings.

"You're not taking the spookmobile," Jean says before Galen can speak.

"Truth," Galen says while lifting his cigarette from his lips up into the air above his head and nodding.

"Guys, she was one of the best fucks I've had so far," I confess, nervous that I'll have another smack incoming.

"I'm sure you can find someone else that good at fucking," Natalie informs me. "One that doesn't have psychotic family that will chase you around a neighborhood and burn your car to the frame."

"Yeah," I say, hoping my sinking mood doesn't show on my face. I take a few swigs from the Jack Daniels bottle I've been carrying.

"Just be glad you've had good sex recently," Natalie adds as an afterthought.

Galen and Ben nod slowly in apparent deep thought and agreement.

"I guess you're right," I say. I can feel the alcohol creeping back up on me now that I've been out of any serious situations long enough for my brain to relax.

"Besides, I think Lisa's friend is here to test drive you anyway," Jean interjects.

I turn and look back at the pool and can only see people's heads. But as I do, I see Lisa's friend turn her head from our direction back towards Lisa's.

"Maybe you're right," I respond to Jean.

"Not maybe," she says. "She asked about when you would be back several times while you guys were at your mom's house."

"Yeah?" I say in unison with Galen.

"Yes," Jean asserts.

"Lucky ass hole," Ben says.

"Why?" I ask, still being entirely oblivious to what that girl's name even is.

"Remember Daniel?" Jean asks.

"Wallace?" I ask. Daniel Wallace is my childhood friend of many years.

"No, Daniel Ewing," Jean answers.

"Not that I remember," I say.

"Dude would talk about how she could blow him and make him fire off five or six times in just an hour," Ben says. My eyes go wide and Galen nods as if he's heard these stories before.

"Yeah?" I ask, wondering if there's more.

"She'd blow him for an hour after school all the time," Galen added.

"Hmm," I say. I look at Jean and she's shaking her head at Galen.

"What?" Galen asks, looking at Jean as she continues shaking her head.

"Do you know everyone's sex lives out of our friends?" she asks with a highly amused voice and a smile.

"You tell me most of it!" Galen says while waving his cigarette around. Ben and I turn to Jerry and nod knowingly as she looks like she's wondering if we're all crazy.

"I need to have sex more," Natalie says. "You guys sound like you've had enough action in a year to match what I've done my whole life."

"Michael is having a few friends from his work come drink tonight," I inform her. "Why not drag one into a room and bang him silly?"

"I just might," she says, taking her shirt off to reveal a bikini top. "But right now I'm going swimming," she states firmly as she starts walking up the stairs back towards the pool.

"Jesus she's toned," Jerry says watching Natalie walk away, wide eyed.

"She's tiny, I don't know that she has any other option than to be toned," I say while looking also.

"Look!" Jerry says while taking her shirt off revealing she's wearing a one piece. She drops her jeans too and I realize she's tiny but not very toned. "I've been trying to get toned like her for years!" She gestures

again towards Natalie and I look just before she jumps in the pool. She is night and day different than Jerry tone wise. Both look great, though.

“I hate all if you,” Jean says, gripping her stomach in both hands while shaking it around. She makes a grumpy face. Then her face lights up and she moves her hands up to her boobs and starts shaking those around in her palms. “But I have these!” She then starts doing a little dance.

“They’re epic!” Jerry says while jumping over in front of Jean and they dance together.

Galen laughs and shakes his head while I take another drink from my now mostly empty and still warm Jack bottle. Ben smiles as he looks Jerry’s body up and down as she dances. Galen and Ben look at each other and smile. I turn and catch Lisa’s friend looking away from me quickly again. I feel another vibration from my phone and look down at it.

Makayla: So are you!

James: How so?

Makayla: You would see the girl again whose father burned your car and chased you around the neighborhood.

James: That is a damn good point. When do you want to meet up again?

Makayla: I say Saturday night. Mom will be on a work trip and I’ll have the house to myself well into Sunday. No need to worry about anybody interrupting anything.

James: I wasn’t planning on being sober enough to drive Saturday, but I bet I can make that happen.

I look up and Ben and Galen are now sitting against an outcropping on the wall at the back of the yard. Jerry and Jean are up on the deck next to the pool dancing and Natalie sounds to be swimming laps back and forth between the shallow and deep end.

I walk up and sit in a chair at the small table on our side of the pool near where Jean and Jerry are dancing. The flood lights provide enough light to be able to read in any part of the yard as long as you’re in line of sight of them. After the response they had regarding me talking to Makayla again I’ve had a hugely deep sinking feeling in my chest.

Fucking hate when all of my friends are in opposite sync of something I think is a good idea. They have yet to turn out wrong when that is the case. Fuck I wish Makayla wasn’t so amazing of a fuck. And I wish I wasn’t so addicted to sex that I wasn’t fully willing to be at her house in a few days when Saturday night came.

What could go wrong? Her mom being out of town and her dad being in jail for at least a few months. Does she have psychotic exes? Is

she psychotic? Does her dad have friends who would come check on me and turn out as nuts as he did? Fuck. What if she gets pregnant? Her dad might hire a hit squad of some sort to come destroy my anus.

"Deep in thought?" I hear, startling me and causing me to jump. "Sorry," the beautiful voice says again. I look to my left and see the girl I pushed into the pool sitting down in a chair next to me.

"Yes," I say, feeling entirely uncomfortable. Weighing the pros and cons of fucking one girl while one who's been staring at me all night walks up in plain sight and sits next to me. I feel like a dick. I feel like a dick so often I should be used to it by now.

"What about?" she asks, sounding genuinely concerned.

"Trying to remember what your name is," I say, hoping the bluff pays off.

"Tiffany," she says reaching her hand out towards me. I turn, reach out and shake her hand.

"James," I say. "But I think you already know me. And you have very soft skin," I say realizing half way through that she's been in the pool a lot so she's probably going to have really soft skin right now.

"Thanks, four hours in chlorine will do that for a person," she says with a warm smile.

"Ahhh, that's true," I say. I'm fucking stupid. I laugh a little, though not at or with her but at myself.

"Are you alright?" she asks while still looking concerned.

"That question has been going around a lot the last day or two," I say while trying to avoid the conversation.

"It's cool if you don't want to talk about it," she says trying to comfort me. "I just noticed you seemed like you were spacing off and unhappy."

"Spacing off is one of my talents," I say, forcing a smile.

"I hear your nick name is captain distracto," she says with a cute little laugh.

"Did Galen tell you that," I ask while looking over at him. He is standing with Ben and staring at me with the biggest shit eating grin on his face I think I've ever seen.

"Yes, so did Jean and Lisa," she says while looking proud.

"I'm a little afraid of what else they've said," I say while finishing off the Jack Daniels. I screw the top on and set it on the porch to my left, between Tiffany and I.

"Well, Galen and Jean haven't said much more," she says as her face turns red.

"Ok now you have to continue," I say sounding like more of a dick than I intended. I got anxious when I saw her face turn red and blurted it out without weighing my voice tone first.

“Just that you’ve had more lips around your dick than a breathalyzer machine,” she says sounding entirely sheepish and unsure.

“That’s actually an awesome way to put it,” I say trying to sound confident and unmoved.

“They said you are like the community challenge,” she adds.

“Well, not sure how much of a challenge it is,” I say trying to be modest. “Maybe the bicycle some people ride to make sure they’re still capable.”

“Oh you’re the neighborhood bicycle?” she quips before bursting into laughter.

“Fuck,” I say under my breath. “I should have seen that coming.

“Yeah,” she says. “Yeah you should have. You sure you’re alright?”

“Is anyone ever alright?” I ask while the sound of wanting to cry slips into my voice. What the fuck is that? Am I really going to open up to someone who seems to hold me in high regard and attraction? I really don’t want to.

“No,” she answers. “But I do a better job of pretending I am.”

I slowly nod. I look her in the eye and she looks completely confident in her statement. She does look like she feels great. Could she be as depressed as I usually am? I don’t know. I see her reach down and pick up my bottle.

“Empty, sorry,” I say. “Want me to -”

“Don’t worry, I’m just going to throw this away and see what else is in there,” she interrupts while standing up and walking towards the house. She’s clearly chubby but her shape is fucking awesome. Her body is like Alison’s but she has better curves. Great ass.

“Thank you,” I say loud enough for her to hear before the noise of the screen door sliding open begins. What the fuck. Maybe I should open up to her. I’ll have to take her in the family room though. I really don’t want to end up spilling my guts and saying anything I don’t want someone else in earshot to hear. Hopefully she doesn’t keep on that conversation though. I feel my phone vibrate again.

Makayla: Good! How long can you maintain as you did in my entry way?

James: Hours

Makayla: Saturday night you might just fuck me into oblivion.

James: Just try not to die

Makayla: I never thought that sentence would turn me on.

“Girlfriend?” I hear as I look over and see a large black cup in Tiffany’s hand, presented to me. I take it and she sits back down next to me.

“No,” I say. I look in the cup and it looks like ice and water.

“Boyfriend?” she says with a big smile. “Just kidding, these are screwdrivers by the way.” She reaches her cup over and bumps it against mine saying “Cheers!”

“Cheers,” I say while lifting the cup up to my lips. I smell the vodka in it and can’t detect any orange juice at all. I take a few drinks.

“Well,” she says before a little cough. “Well it’s Vodka colored with OJ.”

“I noticed,” I say before taking another few gulps.

“James!” I hear from my left. I look over and see Galen gesturing for me to come over there.

“Excuse me for a moment please,” I say to Tiffany as I set my cup down to the left of the chair. “I’ll be right back Tiffany.”

“Alright,” she says with a smile before drinking some from her cup.

I walk a few steps towards the stairs and realize I need to take my time drinking that screwdriver. I make it down the stairs just fine and cross the yard to where Galen and Ben are standing. I look back at the pool and see nobody’s really paying attention, just in case I have to puke or something out of nowhere. It happens to all of us from time to time at parties. It still makes me feel embarrassed though. So I always try to plan to expel stomach contents out of sight of any other people.

“We need to make a beer run,” Ben says. “Jean has some guys coming over but they’re only bringing a couple cases and we don’t want to run out or leave again through tomorrow and Friday.”

Galen nods once and smiles. “Alright,” I say. “I’ll come so we can have 3 guys to make one trip from the curb to the kitchen.”

“Bad ass,” Galen says loudly. Michael’s head perks up and looks in our direction.

“Maybe we can take Michael, too,” I muse.

“I like that idea,” Ben says. “More muscle, more liquor.”

I walk around the edge of the pool to the table Michael is sitting at. I lean forward and steady myself on his shoulder. “Four man alcohol run? Stock up for a few day binge?” I ask knowing what his answer will be.

With no words he stands up and makes the “round ‘em up” circle with a finger in the air. Ben and Galen, apparently far more sober than myself, jog over to meet us as we enter the house through the living room. The stereo seems far louder, I assume, than I realized. The sound makes my head start to spin very slowly. Nothing I can’t handle, though. Basic shit.

Descent . Into the Night

I can do this. It's only about 100 pounds. Alright, have the case of bud light bottles on top of the case of mixed Mike's hard variety pack. Doubled plastic bags of various bottles of liquor hanging from each wrist. Alright. Standing up, all is good. Walking. Damn tipsy. Walking just fine.

I look back over my shoulder to see if Michael's doing OK with the 3 cases he's carrying. He's already walking behind me and looking at me as if I need to speed up considerably. Fuck, the act of looking back caused me to get a little mix of normal dizzy from that motion and alcohol dizzy. Ok, focusing on the front porch. If I can make it there without tripping over anything in the dark, I'll be good.

Feet ascending the steps and crossing the porch, I feel victorious. I hear Michael directly behind me so I keep moving into the kitchen. I almost run over Lisa who is drinking water by the sink. I manage to get the small tower to land on the counter beside Lisa without her spilling water or me dropping anything.

"Welcome back, guys," Lisa says with a big awkward smile. She looks at us with a mixture of unease, happiness and fatigue.

"Thanks, everything alright?" I ask while watching Michael masterfully place the cases of beer across the table in a way that doesn't throw the table off balance. "Are you alright, Lisa?"

"Well," she says trailing off. She looks back and forth at us then turns to look out the window. I notice Michael's eyes go to Lisa's ass the moment mine do. Then we look up almost instantly after to see her pointing out to the pool. We all move closer and look. I notice Lisa smells like alcohol, cigarettes and a little sweaty. Somehow sexier than usual even though I really don't like cigarette smoke.

"What... the fuck?" I ask as I realize Alison is being fucked in the shallow end of the pool by her boyfriend. About the time I finish the word fuck, Lisa turns and smiles, nodding slowly.

"Well, that's one way to keep the pool warm at night," Michael says with the very height of amusement in his voice. Ben and Galen walk in carrying several plastic bags full of liquor. setting them down in an oblong pile in front of the freezer.

"Are they," Galen begins before turning around amused, pointing out the window himself. "They're fucking!"

"Nope," Lisa responds. "Michael pointed out they're helping keep the pool warm."

“I don’t know how warm he can keep it with that dick,” I say gesturing to get everyone to look out the window one more time. All five of us look out again just in time to see him stand up in the shallow end high enough to put his dick out of the water. She leans forward to take it in his mouth. It’s about four inches long, max. His balls are nowhere to be seen and his shaft is about half as thick as his head.

“Saw that earlier,” Lisa says while turning around and walking out of the kitchen.

“Must be why you looked so disturbed and sad,” Ben says while starting to move bottles of liquor into the freezer.

“Throw out that shit,” Galen says now focused on the freezer and turned towards Ben.

“What? the bags?” Ben asks.

Michael and I move to the border of the kitchen and dining room to watch Galen move over to the freezer. He takes handful after handful of frozen peas and pizza rolls, throwing them into the trash can. I look over at Michael and he is trying as hard as he can to keep from laughing.

“That shit can’t get us drunk,” I say while barely keeping a straight face. “Best to get rid of it all.”

“Fucking right!” Galen almost shouts, throwing a box of lasagna into the trash.

I start laughing quite hard at that moment. So hard in fact that I don’t realize for several seconds that it was a lot harder than other people around me. After a few more seconds of laughter I quiet down and see everyone staring at me smiling.

“You’re finally loosened up!” I hear from behind me. I turn around quickly and see Jean standing with a cup in each hand. She drinks from one and reaches the other out towards me. “Keep drinking!” she insists.

I take the cup from her and start drinking it. I hear Galen say something and Michael respond but can’t make it out much. Apparently the act of simply drinking the extra alcohol activated a lot of what was already inside me. I hear laughter and see Jean smiling at me. I turn and sit on the chair next to the kitchen table.

“You’ll be fine,” Jean says sounding like she’s accomplished her mission.

“Thanks,” I slur. Didn’t know I could slur one word sentences.

“How much has he had to drink?” Lisa asks, handing me a glass of water.

“Thanks,” I slur a little less. I start sipping on the water and try to

find focus points around the room. "Water is good."

"He's had about five times normal at this point," Michael answers from behind. "What did he start with, beers or liquor?"

"A whole bottle of Jack," Galen and Jean say at the same time. Galen continues "If you add up the contents he drank out of three fully different bottles."

Three? Were there three? Shit, I only remember the one that originated in Galen's freezer and the one that originated in the kitchen freezer. But with the amount of empty liquor bottles that have been collecting in the various trash cans in and outside of the house, I can't pretend like I've kept good enough track of all of them.

"You've been on beer mostly the last half of the night," Jean tells me.

I look up at her and smile, then go back to focusing on a point I found just to the side of the sliding glass door which people haven't been walking by. Everything looks like it's getting more stable and I feel incredibly better after the water.

The sliding door opens and Alison enters the dining room followed by her blushing boyfriend. He's back in his shorts and she's back in her bathing suit. She smiles in a way that looks like she's actually thankful they had an audience.

"I'm going to drop him off and come right back," she tells Jean.

"That's cool," Jean says looking more annoyed than anything. Not sure why, I know she's fucked in the pool a hundred times and she invited Alison herself.

"He's not far, so twenty minutes or so," she says looking at Galen.

"That's cool," Galen says, looking at Jean then smiling at Alison.

"Be back," Alison says just as they start going down the stairs towards the front door.

"Did anyone else see his dick?" Ben asks, walking out of the darkness of the hallway and into the kitchen.

"Yes," everyone said in unison, including a couple people out of sight in the darkness elsewhere in the house.

I start laughing, which I see startles a couple people. How long have I been silent? Were there big moments of silence where people were drinking multiple drinks instead of my perceived sipping on the same one from the time I started drinking water? I wonder how long it's been since Alison left. And just as I thought that she walked in from the other side of the kitchen.

“Back!” she says as a couple people welcome her back with slightly slurred hellos.

I’m not going to say anything. I first wanted to ask if she forgot her keys, but realized I did hear her pick up her purse down the stairs just before leaving. She must have left for sure. She’s standing next to Lisa whispering. What the hell? Now the two are heading down the hallway of darkness towards the now quiet living room.

Galen sits at the table in the dining room and gestures for Michael to sit next to him. I watch as Galen makes several gestures in front of him as if he were about to perform a magic trick. Once he stops dramatically Grateful Dead starts playing. Galen’s eyes light up and Michael laughs and claps like an excited eight year old. I smile and get up to walk to the sink.

I fill my glass with more water and realize the room is now spinning at a very slow rate. Much better than the almost fast pace it was dancing at when I drank the rest of whatever was in Jean’s cup. I see Galen doing the magician thing again as I sip water. I don’t know what they use for their well filter but it’s fucking good. They’re just far enough outside of town that they use well water. I’ve never actually seen in their well.

Galen’s magician thing concludes again but this time a pipe appears in his hand. Michael’s eyes light up this time. Galen pulls a small bag out of his pocket and Michael scoots closer. I drink more water and observe as Galen and Michael pass the pipe back and forth. I feel the contact high creep up after a couple of their rounds. All this alcohol in my system and I can still get a cheap contact high off of second hand smoke. I love my system sometimes.

“Those moves are amazing!” I hear Lisa say a little loudly from the living room.

“Thanks,” I barely make out from Alison.

I look at Michael and Galen and see they aren’t paying any attention. Where did Ben and Jerry go? Holy shit, Ben and Jerry. And they are at parties together a lot. Truly never noticed that before. I should probably pay closer attention.

I stand up with no issues and decide I need to grab a beer out of the fridge. As I walk down the hallway I see the shadow of someone dancing. I carefully position the glass of water in one hand so I can take the cap off my beer and toss it in my pocket. As I enter the living room I see Lisa waving a couple bills at Alison.

Alison is dancing a lot more sensually than I've ever seen her dance. I take a seat on the arm of the couch near the end of the hallway and observe. I look out the sliding door and see Ben, Natalie and Jerry sitting at the table outside drinking and smoking. Guess they didn't leave after all! Looks like everybody is still here who was here before we went to pick up more alcohol.

Now Lisa joins Alison in dancing. Lisa is awkward at dancing but being as beautiful as she is, it's still good to watch. Alison really stuns me with how sexy her dancing is. Seeing her fucking in the pool looked clunky and strange. Must be because of the tiny device she had to use. Strange.

"You look lost in your own head," I hear from my side. I look over and see Galen nursing a glass of some sort of mixed drink.

"I am," I say quietly as to not interrupt the dancing going on.

"Good or bad mind storm?" he asks looking concerned.

"Oh, all good man," I answer.

"Good!" he says, slowly walking to sit on the couch next to me. "You know you're supposed to two fist alcohol, right? Not water and alcohol."

"Maintenance, my good sir," I say, taking a sip of water then a drink of beer.

I see Natalie look inside and her face lights up.

"Have a fire extinguisher ready?" I say quiet enough for only Galen to hear me.

"Evil," he says with a huge smile and shaking his head from side to side slowly.

The sliding door opens and Natalie dances up to Lisa and Alison. I did not see this coming. Natalie's overly sexy dancing mixed with what I now realize is Alison's ability to dance sexily. I think it's time to go find Jean.

"Where did Jean go?" I ask Galen.

"She went to take Melissa home, she was feeling sick and she didn't drink much at all," he says looking concerned.

"Did they eat anything unusual?" I ask.

"I said it was probably the Runza. She always feels that way when she has Runza," Galen says while nodding slowly.

"Ahhh, that's why I always get mushroom burgers when I'm there," I say, suddenly hungry for something from a place that's not even open right now.

“We’re probably going to jump ship, too” I hear Ben say as he enters with Natalie and Jerry coming in behind him.

“I’m staying, though,” I hear Natalie say.

“Love you, girl” Jerry says to Natalie as she grabs her for a quick hug. Natalie says some things I can’t hear through the music. They smile and talk for a few sentences before Jerry and Ben pick up the couple things of theirs sitting to the side in the living room.

“Later, man. Better show up day after tomorrow,” he says reaching his hand out to shake mine. We shake hands and do a quick one arm hug without me falling over. It is glorious.

“I’ll be there,” I assure him. “Can’t leave those new guys to fuck shit up.”

“Not without tasing them for it,” he says with a huge smile.

“Fucking right,” I say as Jerry and Ben wave and head down the hall toward the front door.

“Where did Tiffany go?” I ask, realizing I hadn’t seen her since before we made the beer run.

“She’s outside talking with someone on her phone,” Galen says.

“Natalie, do you want me to get you anything?” I ask as she sets her purse and phone down in the corner that apparently has been designated for such things. There are already three purses and an assortment of shoes and other belongings piled up to the side of the sliding door in the corner next to one of the stereo speakers.

“Already on it,” she says before walking quickly by and down the hall toward the kitchen.

“Cool,” I say to myself as I finish off the glass of water. I look over and watch Alison dance onward. Nobody’s dancing with her anymore and Lisa is looking at her phone. None of that seems to matter. The Dead are still playing on the stereo. She clearly enjoys it.

Descent . The Greatest Urges

Angel: You still want to take me to temple Sunday?

James: Fuck it's almost 1am

Angel: Hey, James, it's almost 1am.

James: Thanks. Fuck haha, Yes, I'm going to try.

Angel: Why just try?

James: Will be drinking heavily from Wednesday afternoon into the middle of next week.

Angel: Oh. I ask because Dad wanted to take me.

James: God works in mysterious ways.

Angel: I thought so, but you don't have to Mr. Atheist.

James: You know me so well. <3

"Girlfriend, again?" Tiffany says, startling me.

"A girl, who is a friend," I respond. "Sorry, tried to sneak out here to get some fresh air," I say, completely lying. "How can you swim in that pool knowing two people fucked in it just a short time ago?"

"All the chemicals in this," she begins with a straight face. "All the shit that blows in from the air and that we breathe in both inside and outside, all the crap we eat. A little bodily fluid diluted by this much water which is being filtered constantly. I'm not worried." She smiles and dips under the water. I see the motion of small waves indicating she's swimming further away from me into the pool.

"Smart girl," I say out loud before looking down into the pool.

Angel: I'm glad you kept coming to temple with me after you ended up completing the shift into being Atheist.

James: Anything for a friend. Plus, I find Mormons more interesting than any other religion.

Angel: You just go to flirt with the girls.

James: Well, that's a perk.

Angel: It's after 1am now.

James: Thanks, sweetie.

Angel: No problem, darling!

"So why be out here and not in there?" Tiffany asks, startling me as I didn't hear her come back above the surface of the water.

"The Burks do love getting me trashed," I say in a voice that almost sounds like an unintentional thought slipped out through my lips.

"The Burks?" she asks.

"Jean and Galen's last name is Burk," I say. "I'm just now getting

down to tipsy from the border of too drunk and sick.”

“Oh, so you have fallen below drunk enough to be easily taken advantage of?” she asks, bursting into a smile while biting her lip.

“That would be a challenge right now, I think” I say while back in the low voice that sounds like thoughts leaking.

“Why?” she asks, climbing out of the pool. My brain shuts off as I see her body wet this time, instead of just in a close fitting one piece. I don’t know what it is, but someone who’s wet is so much more visually attractive than someone of equal beauty. Her breasts look larger than I remember seeing them, her body more perfect and curvy. Then I start catching myself staring at not only her body but more directly at her clear pussy. Every little curve and tuck of it is perfectly visible as whatever materiel her suit is made of is clinging to it at what almost appears to be a painted on level. “I don’t think it would be much of a challenge honey,” she says, sitting down next to me and picking up a towel off the ground on the opposite side of her from where I am.

“Because I’ve had incredible fallout after sexual experiences lately,” I say in a less quiet voice.

“Your truck being set on fire?” she asks, sounding like she’s already heard every detail of that situation.

“Yes, for starters,” I state.

“Wait,” she says, freezing in place but looking at me out of the corner of her eye. “You don’t have an STD do you?”

At the moment the letters STD come out of her mouth I start laughing. She looks at me both confused and worried. “No, thankfully not,” I say. She smiles and tilts her head as if I’m being silly. “Do you?”

“Not that I know of,” Tiffany says before putting the towel down and standing up. “I need a drink, do you want anything while I’m in the kitchen?”

“Can you see if there’s any whiskey?” I hear myself ask without intending to. Fucking mouth, silence yourself!

“Anything you want,” she says as she enters the dining room.

Fuck. There isn’t anything I like more than either being seduced or seducing someone I find attractive. The problem is I really don’t think I could do anyone proper service in the attention and pleasure department. What if I’m going down on them and doing my motions I’ve done so many times I go into autopilot? I don’t want to be fingering and nibbling at the same time then start crying because I’ve been drifting off to mental current events.

Or worse, what if I'm in control and my mind starts drifting away to somewhere that makes me furiously angry and I start getting far too rough? The last thing I want is to hurt someone when I intend to be cascading pleasure across their entire being. I've had dreams where I would freak out and punch or strangle people after drifting to negative daydreams. There's no way I want anything like that to permeate into reality.

"Look who I found," Michael says as he exits the dining room carrying a colt 40oz beer bottle that looks to be filled with some sort of mixed drink.

"Hayyyy," Tiffany says stepping out from behind Michael and making a ta-da style pose. She is still mostly wet, though not dripping anymore. There is a bottle of a Michael's hard product I don't recognize in one hand and a glass with ice and liquid I can't identify in the other.

Michael walks over to the pool and drops directly into it landing squarely on both feet. It doesn't look like his drink spills a drop as he holds it high above the water. I see his face become a little more focused as he looked admirably in Tiffany's direction.

I look over at Tiffany and she had set her drinks on the deck railing near her. Her bathing suit was falling to the deck floor as she reached to pick up her drinks again. I feel a furnace turning on in my lap and begin starting to mentally talk it off the ledge. She walks over and leans over to hand Michael her drinks. He sets his concoction down and takes them from her with an ear to ear smile. I clearly see she is completely shaved before she straightens up and dives into the pool. Michael looks at me and nods his head slowly as I start to grin.

"Did the front look as good as the back when she straightened up like a statue before she dove in?" I ask, still seeing it clearly in my mind.

"Yes," he says in a whisper. "Yes yes yes," he repeats.

"Beer me!" she says while breaking through the surface of the water and standing up, now on the opposite side of Michael.

"Yes ma'am," he says before passing her the Michael's bottle and sets the glass poolside.

"Thank you darling," she says leaning her head forward, looking up at him through dripping water before throwing her head back to drink most of the bottle. She points at the glass, then points at me and says "That's for him." She carefully sets it down next to Michael and jumps further into the pool. Her body curves forward beneath the surface and the last thing seen is her ass peeking above the water before

disappearing.

“I have a full flagpole right now,” Michael admits while nodding.

“I’m at war with keeping my flag down,” I say while staring down at my crotch.

“My balls are tingling,” Michael states calmly as he looks down at the water on each side of him. “I’m not even near a jet. Awesome.”

“I would come get that glass but I’m scared if the fabric brushes it at all,” I begin.

“I understand,” he interrupts with a quick nod. “Besides, we might influence her to carry it to you, drenched and naked.”

“That’s a good point. Did you say anything? Or did she say anything before you guys came out?” I ask, now in figure-it-out mode relating to how she ended up going from a kitchen run to naked in the pool.

“All I know is I was mixing my drink on the counter and she walked, grabbed the mike’s hard lemonade and mixed..” he begins before trailing off. “I wasn’t paying attention. Some mixed drink.”

“Yeah?” I ask, hoping there is more.

“Yeah?” Tiffany says popping out of the water a couple feet away from Michael, now on the original side she entered the pool from. She takes a few deep breaths, breasts rising and falling as she replenishes the air in her lungs.

“Oh, yeah,” I say in the deepest voice I can muster, smiling and nodding my head slowly while looking directly at her breasts.

“Oh, yeah” she returns, shaking her breasts back and forth before turning and repeating the dive which puts her ass above the water’s surface for a moment.

“Still full flagpole?” I ask.

“More of a countdown to blastoff at this point,” he states as calmly and quietly as he can. Though, he did not see Tiffany slowly rising behind him before he started talking.

“Which planet are we going to?” she asks, smirking and slowly moving towards Michael.

“Uranus,” he states without missing a beat. I let out a quick laugh that’s far louder than I intended and she pauses her advance to laugh a little.

“I will need a rocket to ride,” she informs us with a playful smile as she starts getting closer to Michael. He doesn’t turn around at all as he is now looking at me like he’s a little worried. I smile back with the best

comforting, everything is alright smile I can muster.

"The biggest rocket I'm aware of in a twenty mile radius is Michael's tongue," I say while starting into the smile.

"Oh?" she asks while quickly closing the room between herself and Michael. She throws her arms around him and laughs softly.

"He's right," he says with full confidence.

"I have to see," she says in almost a quiet shriek.

"First, you have to take James his drink since I am now incapable of getting out of the pool," he says in a voice that gets quieter as the sentence progresses.

"Ahhh, only just now?" she says while moving away from him and lifting herself up over the edge of the pool. She walks between us to the side where the drinks are resting. She turns to face Michael and slowly leans forward so her breasts are almost in his face and picks up the glass. She then picks up the bottle and stands up straight before finishing it. Turning towards me she winks and hands me the glass. Then she turns around and slowly jogs back to the pool, jumping in carefully to land just behind Michael to his side. After she lands she swivels around and presses against him from behind, wrapping her arms around him.

"I think she's cold," Michael says, sounding partially sarcastic and partially serious.

"Nope!" she says, bouncing up and down a little with a slight giggle.

"Thank you, ma'am" I say, taking a few drinks from the glass. Fuck, this is considerably stronger than any drink I've had in a long time. I had better take this slow.

"I'm dry!" she says in a forced sounding distressed voice.

"I can assure you, she isn't," Michael says, with a satisfied smile on his face. I laugh and she moves a little so she can look at him with a forced disapproving frown from his side.

"James doesn't want to get me more to drink," she says while still forcing a frown and looking at Michael from the side.

"Yes ma'am," I say while standing up and realizing I'm keeping myself from even getting a partial erection.

"Thaaaaank you," she says while moving away from Michael and swimming back under the water.

"I wish there was a vagina in the wall of this pool," Michael says as I enter the dining room.

Holy shit, I hope she doesn't just tease Michael with that level of

physical contact. Would be cool if he gets to introduce her inner abdomen to his tongue. Alright, 2 Mike's and 2 waters, err, Bud Light chasers for me so I can live through that drink. I set the drinks down on the counter and step out into the hallway to look towards the living room. I see the side of Natalie and hear a few different conversations going on. I notice the music has been turned down to an easier to converse level.

Descent . Some Mistakes

I notice the master bedroom door on the left of the hallway is now open, as is the door to Jean's bedroom. Both of them were closed earlier. I quietly walk down the hall and look into the main bedroom and see Ally lying on her back with her legs spread. I pause for a moment to let my eyes adjust to the darkness and realize she's a couple fingers deep inside herself. As I try to keep any reactions going on to a minimum within myself I realize she's smiling and looking directly at me. She raises a hand and motions with a finger for me to come in.

I walk into the room quietly and sit on the far side of the bed from her. She doesn't stop her fingers for even a moment. She keeps eye contact with me and smiles more broadly.

"You have balls rubbing one out while the door is open," I whisper, feeling like it's a lot louder than it actually sounds.

"They have thought I was asleep for a half hour now," she says in almost a pant. Her smile starts to break into more of an open mouthed heavier breathing.

"You're good at dancing," I think aloud while I watch her fingers go into herself faster and faster.

"Thanks," she whispers while her head pushes back into the pillow. She starts thrusting her hips against her hand and I can hear squishing sounds with each hand motion.

"I need to get the drinks I promised back outside," I tell her.

"Are you seriously going to make me finish up alone?" she asks, sounding a little hurt.

"I have whiskey dick," I whisper, starting to get up. I feel bad for coming in here just to sit nearer to her and then walk away when she starts discussing joining her.

"Let me try," she begs, sounding like she might cry. I notice I can smell the distinct odor of alcohol breath and can't tell if it's from me or from her. My hesitation as I breathe through my nose, attempting identification seems to have been interpreted as affirmation of her desire to be joined. I am apparently buzzed enough that I didn't feel her starting to move.

She knocks me on my back and I hear myself say "I have two minutes," as if I would fail a test if I didn't get back out there with alcohol soon.

"I'll finish in one," she says, breathing heavily and already having

my pants and boxers down around my ankles.

“Ambitious,” I say, feeling her mouth closing around my now partially chubby dick. When I’m almost completely soft I easily fit in anyone’s mouth, at any skill level.

“Hmm,” she hums, going between licking and putting me entirely in her mouth for a few seconds.

“Hmm?” I return with a questioning tone.

“I heard stories about you,” she says between licking and covering me with her mouth.

“Don’t count them out before I’m hard,” I whisper, feeling the effects of the couple swallows of that mixed drink compounding the alcohol already coursing through my veins.

“Mmm,” she hums in full approval. She starts fingering herself again while she works me with her entire mouth. The suction is amazing considering the amount of motion she’s doing up and down my quickly hardening dick. Her teeth are barely grazing the skin between strokes with her lips. Her tongue is moving side to side quickly, which is the largest factor driving my stiffening.

“At about thirty seconds,” I say, now fully hard. I’m impressed she’s still able to get me almost entirely in her mouth without choking at all. It’s something I don’t see very often.

“Keep counting,” she whispers with full confidence as she stands up, faces away from me and appears to fall forward. I start to jump, intending to try to stop her from flying off the bed. Her hands land firmly on my shins and force me to return flat on the bed. She descends backwards quickly while gripping the base of my dick with the hand that was on my left shin. Within moments I feel the head of my dick push through what feels like a pussy that’s trying to be held closed.

After she gets down to the base, her legs start trembling hard and both hands return to my shins. She leans forward and starts raising her ass a couple inches and slamming it back down repeatedly. My dick stays at the exact same angle as she makes this motion a few dozen times, legs shaking harder and harder. She slams down one more time and holds in place while it sounds like she’s biting a small pile of blankets in front of her.

“Not even two minutes,” she whispers in words broken by heavy breathing.

“Damn,” I whisper, as her cum runs down the crack of my ass in a small stream.

“Th-” she tries to say, before gyrating her hips a little, driving me around inside of her. “Thank you,” she concludes. I debate on what words to use as she slowly slides off me and falls to the left, landing short of the pillow she was using. I am now wondering if I should make any comments about the fact I’m nowhere near getting off.

Before I finish that string of thoughts I hear a light snoring and slowly move off the bed, pants still around my ankles. I carefully pull them up and tuck my still fully hard boner under the waistband. My heart is still racing, not expecting this at all when simply trying to be nosy about what’s going on in this part of the house.

I carefully close the door and look around the corner into the living room, seeing Lisa on one of the couches sitting next to Galen. Galen smiling ear to ear and Lisa oblivious to my presence. Natalie smiles at me as I look back towards her before disappearing from their site down the hallway.

I grab the four bottles off the counter, two in each hand, and head back to the sliding door in the dining room. I manage to open it easily with the tip of my foot and step onto the deck. To my surprise, Tiffany is on her back on the edge of the pool with her legs slung over either side of Michael’s shoulders. One arm is holding her empty Mike’s bottle off to the side and her other is trying to grip the bottom of a chair, apparently without moving it.

“Good looking menu,” I say as quietly as I can, setting the two Mike’s down next to her.

“Thanks,” she says looking me in the eye and smiling before going back to watching Michael. He’s now sucking on her clit while banging her with the middle finger on his right hand. His left hand is out of sight below the water. Go Michael!

“Mind if I watch?” I ask, expecting to be told no by one of the two. I sit down in the chair closer to the side of the pool her drinks were sitting on previously.

“I was hoping you would join in,” Tiffany says in a pant. Michael looks up and over at me and winks with his eyes looking entirely happy.

“Yeah?” I ask, halfway to her and halfway to him. I’m still mostly hard and figure, regardless of anything I’ve thought over the last several hours, I would love to get off. Michael breaks his lip lock on her clit long enough to look over at me.

“Do it,” he says, sounding like Gustavo Fring.

“Yeah?” I repeat again, this time looking directly at Tiffany. She

picks up one of the bottles I brought her and tips it back. She drinks the whole thing without more than a couple breaths. Michael looks on in astonishment, only appearing hornier having witnessed it.

“You’re delicious, and can drink!” he exclaims before resuming his clitoral lip lock. Only this time, he goes from his middle finger to both his middle and ring finger.

“You heard Michael,” she says, sounding more buzzed before setting the now empty beer bottle down as far towards me as she could reach.

“Let me do a quick lap,” I say, standing up and getting my pants and boxers off, followed by my shirt. I quickly move around the pool side a few feet down the far side from them and slip in. I get under water and swim towards the opposite corner of the deep end, rubbing my dick as fast and as carefully as i can so I can hopefully have no feeling of anything relating to Ally anywhere around it. I come up to the surface out of fear of hitting the wall head first and realize I’m only half way across. I take this time to sink underwater and wipe out my crack. This has to be the least awesome thing I’ve ever done in the deep end of this pool.

Now fully hard, though I don’t know how, I continue swimming my best one armed underwater swimming style back towards the edge of the pool. I feel like my cock’n’balls is properly rubbed clean as I rise to the surface. I see Tiffany’s head turned and facing me, licking her lips. That vision alone caps off my erection to full. I get out of the pool and start walking back around the side to where they are just as Galen comes through the dining room door.

I stop at the corner of the pool and turn to face him. His eyebrow goes up and smile breaks to full grin status as he looks directly at my erection.

“It’s that kind of party?” he says, sounding like he is barely keeping from laughing.

“This is not the back yard you’re looking for,” I say, before waving my hand with the palm out, in front of him doing my best Jedi impression. I then turn and walk the last few feet to where Tiffany is. I set one beer down on the ground near the table closest to the dining room. Galen’s eyebrow which is raised goes from one to the other a couple times before he laughs quietly and turns around, going back inside.

Approaching Tiffany the look of desire in her eyes seems to increase. Her hips now rolling from side to side with Michael’s cranial movements. I notice both bottles are now as far away from her as she

could get them. I pick them up with my free hand and move them over to the table closest to the dining room.

“Get over here,” she demands in a half moan, half whisper. I look over and nod in compliance. I walk to her and kneel next to her. She cups my balls in one hand and guides me, walking on my knees now, beside her head. Her lips move to wrap around my dick and I realize they are a lot bigger than Ally’s lips.

“Wait,” Michael says. My heart sinks, desperately not wanting to cut in on his fun time.

“What?” Tiffany and I ask at the same time. He slips his fingers out of her and stands up.

“Bend over and kiss me, and let him fuck you from behind,” he says in a calm, ordering way. Before he can even finish she swivels around on her towel and is on all fours, wiggling her ass back and forth in front of me. She lets out a throaty moan before locking lips with Michael. I start rubbing the head of my dick up and down the length of her engorged and drenched pussy. Michael did an amazing job, it feels like.

She breaks the kiss for a moment and I feel uncomfortable, hoping she doesn’t freak out or any number of comments neither Michael or I want to hear.

“Just make sure to switch to my ass when you feel like you’re about to cum,” she says in a half whisper, half moan. Then her lips return to Michael’s as she quickly jerks backwards, artfully forcing the front third of my dick into her. She breaks the kiss again to squeal briefly. Her lips meet Michael’s again as his hands find her breasts.

I move the hand that was guiding my dick up and down the outside of her pussy onto her waist. She is now in full control of the speed at which she is traveling forward and back around my dick. I finish my beer and debate on what to do with it as to not fuck up the flow of things.

“So you like anal?” I ask without permitting my lips to speak the words. Without a word she shifts her weight from one hand to the arm she throws around Michael. The hand she took the weight off of now moves around behind her, rubbing her anus in small circles. “I guess that’s a yes,” I say sounding a lot happier than I can recall hearing myself in a long time.

“Love,” she says while breaking the kiss with Michael briefly. She slips her index finger into her ass and I can feel it against my dick as she

pushes backwards harder and harder each time. Her arm around Michael helps keep their kiss intact as he leans forward and back a little with each of her motions.

I move my hand from her waist to her ass near where her finger is working her ass hole. She takes her finger out and grips her other cheek, and I replace it with my middle finger. She breaks the kiss with Michael again to let out a small moan. The moment the moan is over she starts kissing him again. I fuck her ass with my finger as she moves slightly faster around me.

I realize the glass of alcohol is within reach of me on the ground next to the chair I was sitting in and I set my bottle down for a moment. I grab the glass and drink a third of it before putting it back down and picking up the bottle. I realize the backing into me has slowed a bit and see the kissing is growing more passionate. Never noticed Michael was that good of a kisser. Awesome!

I slip another finger in her rectum as she starts thrusting back faster. I slip my fingers out of her and grip her other ass cheek as she moves the hand on her own ass to help balance her as she thrusts backwards faster. I move my hand from her ass to her waist and hold her in place. She makes a confused whimper sound, but keeps kissing Michael.

Feeling the alcohol kicking up a notch, I decide the best decision is to rub the tip of the now empty beer bottle against her currently untouched ass hole. She wiggles a little, moving my dick back and forth inside of her. I rub it in circles around the outside rim of her anus and she starts shifting weight around as if she wants it centered.

I try centering it and holding her still. She not only quickly complies but positions herself so she's only around the tip of my dick vaginally. I lean back so I can hold the bottle square with her ass and she slips back, forcing the neck of the bottle into her ass and my dick further into her pussy. She breaks her kiss to let out a surprisingly loud moan.

I expected the pressure of the bottle inside her to cause a problem for me and my trying not to cum. Thankfully I have such a focused buzz going on I don't feel it very much. All I feel is moisture and a numb humming in my legs and arms. My legs and lower back start feeling a little warm which I assume are my muscles getting angry at this position. I slowly pull my dick out and start fucking her in the ass a lot harder and faster with the bottle.

Her and Michael kiss harder and more passionately as she

whimpers the faster I fuck her ass with the beer bottle. I see her break the kiss with Michael and push her face into his chest, muffling loud moans. Her legs begin shaking and I see cum start running down her legs. After it subsides and she catches her breath she resumes kissing Michael. I carefully slide the bottle out and set it as far away from me as I can before lining my dick back up with her pussy.

She feels me bump her on accident and thrusts backwards hard, forcing me all the way in to the base. Her legs tremble again as she moves both hands onto Michael's shoulders and rocks backwards into me hard and fast. I feel cum running down my legs as she starts shaking a lot harder. Luckily the tremors start subsiding as I feel I'm about to cum. I put my hand on the middle of her back between her shoulder blades and she repositions to be face to face with Michael again.

I slide out of her pussy and grip her ass with one cheek in each hand. I slip my penis into her ass and she starts kissing Michael passionately again. I tighten my grip and start fucking her ass hard and fast. I feel my balls slapping her pussy over and over before I grit my teeth. I clench my jaw as hard as I can while I start getting taken over by an orgasm. I close my eyes hard and push all the way in, holding it there as I feel her clenching her ass to the rhythm of my orgasm.

I open my eyes as I finish and see Michael stepped a little away from her and has a huge smile on his face. Her asshole tightens up stronger than as I was cumming and she moves forward, releasing my dick. I see none of my cum at all come out of her as she rolls onto her back on the towel. I position myself away from her as I see her push the cum out and let it run the short distance down her crack onto the towel.

"Charming," I say, sounding completely out of breath. She smiles a little then bites her lip. Michael, still smiling ear to ear, moves further into the pool before bouncing off his feet and swimming into the deep end.

"That side is now full of fish!" he says between strokes, almost to the far end of the pool. Tiffany and I laugh, as I look around for a second towel.

"Here, this side is clean but for pool water," she says, lifting up the side that was to my left earlier. She moves off it and tries to stand up but ends up repositioning her weight into a nearby chair. I nod and use the towel to wipe my now half hard penis off. I set the towel back down and pick up the glass, smiling at Tiffany.

"Not how I expected that to go," I say quietly enough for only

Tiffany to hear.

“Went better than I ever dreamed,” she says as she grips one arm of the chair as if she’s trying not to fly off the planet. Her other hand finds its way to her lap and lays palm down over her pussy.

“You feel good?” I ask, finishing off the glass of whatever she put in it.

“I don’t know how I’m going to get dressed,” she says as if thinking aloud. We look over hearing a sound and see Michael climbing out of the deep end of the pool, climbing into clothes I don’t think either of us knew were over there. I stand up and walk over to mine, getting into them quickly. I hear the a little giggle, then the living room sliding door open and close and see Michael is gone from sight.

“Don’t worry about it,” I say, seeing she’s looking at her clothes and probably trying to mentally figure out how to get into them while shaking in the throes of post-orgasmic bliss.

Descent . Fade to Black

I walk back to her, now fully dressed, and pick her clothes up off the ground. She looks confused as I carefully put her feet into her suit and slide it up her legs. I put an arm under her and lift her up so I can slip it over her ass. She smiles as I take my arm out from under her. She leans forward as I slide the suit up her torso and over her breasts. She takes over and puts her arms through and adjusts her breasts according to her comfort.

"I've never had someone help me get dressed after sex before," she whispers. "You're nicer than the rumors."

"What?" I ask, instantly feeling dread and anger sweep over me. Fuck, James, calm the fuck down.

"I just heard you were a misogynist who was nominated by the girls to be the blow-job challenge because of how thick you are," she says quietly, with an air of trying to comfort.

"Misogynist? Where did they get that?" I asked sounding exactly as irritated, even angry, as I actually am.

"I'm sorry," she says sounding like she is now getting sad. "I'm trying to tell you I don't think you are at all."

"That doesn't make me feel better," I stress, trying to stop the multiple streams of rage flowing in my head.

"You're as good as I've heard, if not more adventurous," she says while leaning towards me a little. Michael comes out of the dining room end of the house carrying a bottle of gin in one hand. two bud lights and a mike's in the other. "and we have Michael here who I only knew was a gentle giant. Didn't know his tongue was that of the gods."

"Gentle giant?" he asks, looking amused. He hands me the two beers before giving Tiffany the mike's. He opens the gin and takes a drink.

"He has a nine inch tongue and breathes through his ears, I always say" I state confidently.

"Thanks, Michael" she says as she takes the cap off of her bottle. "Thank both of you, I really needed that."

"You're welcome," I say while nodding slowly. I open a bud light and chug the whole thing. Really needed the 'water' to offset the chemical mixture that was in the glass I am strongly feeling.

"You were a good appetizer," Michael says with a playful smile.

"Thanks! And I experienced two firsts," she begins before taking a

drink from her bottle. “Never had a three-way before and I never had my ass warmed up with a beer bottle before.”

“Sorry about that,” I say, still a little worried about having done that. Mostly amused, but a little worried it would be a negative in hindsight.

“Oh, don’t, it felt really good,” she assures me. “I’m glad you took your dick out and focused on the bottle, though. Both together stung a lot.”

“I thought it was the coolest thing I’ve seen in my entire life,” Michael says while holding up his bottle in a gesture of cheers. He then takes a couple more drinks out of it.

“Tell James he’s not a misogynist,” she demands, sounding a little sad again as she says it.

Michael’s face goes straight as he looks from her, to me. “Who said he’s a misogynist?” he asks while sounding unconvincing of not knowing an answer himself. He looks at her as she looks at him, both appearing to have things to say but being unsure how to say them.

“Fuck that shit,” I blurt out, looking Michael in the eyes. “Just tell me what I do that makes people think I’m a misogynist.”

Michael slowly turns from looking at me to looking out into the dark waters of the pool. He looks like he’s deep in thought as the nerves in me continue to rise. I feel like the negative buzz of frayed nerves is to the same level of the alcohol’s soft hum. And that hum is quite high. It’s surely shortening an already small fuse between calm and furious.

“I think it’s because you’re flirt crazy,” he says quietly. Tiffany looks at him as if a little confused. “I mean, you flirt with every half attractive person you meet. You compliment everything you like, all the time. You joke with close friends without shame regarding people you’ve thought about fucking.”

He continues and I do not hear what he says. I am realizing how one thing after another could sound from the unknowing perspective of a passerby. I am calculating just how many people I’ve joked and talked about things within earshot of who are judgment jumping gossipers. The sheer number of people who I can picture being nearby and showing attention to my conversations grows by several digits with every example he gives.

“and I’ve heard complaints that you won’t fuck people after they’ve gotten you off with blow-jobs,” Michael concludes.

“What the fuck?” I blurt out at comprehending the last bit. “I’ve

made it clear I hold blow-jobs separate from sex and am only willing to offer myself for blowie practice under that condition.”

“To everyone?” Michael asks, with another look of knowing the answer ahead of time. I sit and run through the various people I can recall having had said experience with. Did, didn’t, did, didn’t, didn’t, did... didn’t. didn’t...

“Fuck,” I think aloud. “Fuck, man.”

“See,” he says softly. “Some of them I hear went into it thinking it would lead to the usual conclusion of sex.”

“Just some of them?” I ask, feeling like I both want to cry and punch walls.

“Well, I usually overhear them talking to Jean,” he says. “I would ask her, she seems to be the central hub for everything anyone has ever said.” Tiffany looks over at him with raised eyebrows and a slow nod, as if she is taking a mental note.

“Alright,” I say while continuing to run through people back through time, straining to recall if I had made said conditions clear in any way at all. “I’ve had my penis in too many mouths,” I intend to think to myself but realize came out of my mouth. I look over at Tiffany and she’s giving me a quizzical look.

“How many?” she asks, clearly expecting an honest number without regard to how stunning it may be.

“Hundred and ten? Hundred and twenty-five?” I say, feeling fairly confident in the number.

“Are you serious?” she asks with an elevated voice.

“If it makes you feel any better I get checked every 3 months, regardless if I’ve been active or not,” I state in an attempt to soften the blow of a number I hadn’t really attempted calculating before.

“And?” she asks in an irritated tone.

“Oh, clean every time so far. They do blood, swab and culture,” I explain.

“Culture? Is that different than swab?” Michael asks looking more amused than anything.

“I believe so,” I say. “I just let them take whatever they want. The more ways they test, the more comfortable I feel. But I think I’ve been good since I’ve only actually fucked eighteen people or so.”

“Only eighteen?” she asks in an almost mocking voice.

“Well, it was less before tonight,” I state in a slightly matter of fact tone.

Michael starts laughing and then stops, making a sad face at the bottle he's been drinking out of. He tilts it from one side to another, taking note that it's already ? of the way gone.

"What are you fuckers talking about?" I hear from the yard off the side of the deck near us. All three of us turn to look. All I can make out is a large shadow moving around towards the stairs on the far end of the pool by where Michael got out.

"World peace, and pieces of ass," I answer after several seconds of trying to tell who it is. I can't get the voice by replaying it mentally.

"Natalie's getting a piece of ass right now," I hear the female voice say as the form walks up the steps and comes into the light. Jean! How drunk am I that I couldn't tell who's voice that is?

"Oh?" Michael asks with a raised eyebrow and multiple questions on deck voice.

"Remember communist Russia from the market?" she asks, looking at Michael with a slightly amused expression.

"Yes, he gave me hope in humanity," Michael responds. He looks at me and we nod knowingly at each other. That Russian dude is chill folk.

"Well, him and a friend came over to swim," she begins, face transforming to a highly amused expression. "But you two were building a church out here with her." She gestures at Tiffany and laughs a little.

"A church?" she asks, entertained at the comment but slightly confused.

"If Michael and I had high fived while we were on either side of you that is called steepling," I say quietly while keeping eye contact with Jean, who is now standing off the corner of the pool.

"Ahh," Tiffany says quietly as Jean continues.

"So they joined us in the living room and he sat next to Natalie on the love seat. She scooted closer and closer to him as he told a story about the party they were at that got busted by the cops," she explains. As her story goes on she looks like she's starting to get tired. "After a few minutes her leg was over his. A few minutes later he was rubbing her thigh. She asked if she could sleep in my room and after I said yes, knowing what she was thinking, she asked him if he had any stories he could tell her as she was drifting off. That was about thirty minutes ago and they were still going at it when I went out front to smoke a cigarette and came back here."

"Good for her," I say. "She's had a shit week too, she needs to have some fun."

“She really does,” Michael agrees.

“I did, too” Tiffany adds.

“I bet you did,” Jean says in a playful teasing voice. All four of us laugh, though Tiffany laughs a little uncomfortably.

“How many people noticed?” Tiffany asked sheepishly.

“Well, Galen did because he was about to come out back to smoke,” she says, voice rising to almost laughter towards the end. She regains composure before continuing. “He pointed it out and the rest of us watched for a couple minutes. We all turned around and went back to what we were doing when Anheuser Busch showed up to the party.”

Tiffany’s face falls forward into her hands and she bursts into uncomfortable laughter. Michael looks at me with a huge grin and begins nodding slowly again. I feel myself blush and notice my rage has calmed to a slow rolling boil. My alcohol buzz is still up near the levels of rotational viewing of the world.

“It’s ok honey, it looked like you were getting pampered the whole time,” Jean adds with a hint of jealousy.

“Hey Jean how good of a mood are you in?” I ask, hoping she’s in a chill mood. When she’s in a chill mood you can get her talk about pretty much anything that would normally make her uncomfortable or upset.

“Why?” she asks, showing that she’s not 100% as chill as I would hope. I’m going to still ask anyway, knowing it might get ugly for me. Sometimes she can get combative because of unrelated underlying issues. It is understandable, even when it gets pointed at uninvolved people.

“I’m curious to hear about how many people went into an oral test with me not knowing sex was off the table,” I ask with visible unease.

“You told people sex was off the table?” Jean questions while displaying a deeply sarcastic smile. I lean my head forward and feel anger and disappointment geared towards myself begin flooding my psyche. I hear a few more words and look up, trying to replay them in my head but realizing I completely stopped listening.

“Did you tell them my policy when they were venting about it later?” I ask, hoping but not expecting that she had my back. *It’s unfair to expect anyone else to cover for me. I learned long ago that I can’t expect everyone to react the same way I do in every situation. Hell, even half of the situations. Or any situations for that matter. I used to get disappointed in multiple situations because people didn’t react precisely how I would have. But I still wish everyone did.*

“Did you hear my answer?” Jean asks.

“No, I’m sorry, sorry,” I respond with as much sincerity as I can force into my voice. “Sorry, I’m lost in my own head.”

“It’s ok, are you with us now?” Jean asks with a little annoyance in her tone.

“Yes, sorry,” I answer.

“Sometimes I did, sometimes I didn’t and sometimes they were venting and not in the mood to listen,” she explains. “But I made sure I mitigated any damage I could.”

“I heard you expect girls you meet to blow you within a certain amount of time,” Tiffany says before her face explodes in shock. “I don’t know why I told you that.”

“Are you serious? Who the fuck would say something like that?” I say in a groaning voice. I realize it sounded much more pointed and angry than I meant for it to.

“Yes, I heard if people don’t, you tend to ignore them over time,” she tells me.

“Jesus,” I whisper, entering a loss for words.

“Am I the first to tell you people think that?” Tiffany asks with concern.

“First I’ve even thought it, honestly,” I answer truthfully.

“I probably would have kept that to myself if I thought you hadn’t heard that somewhere,” she says in a sheepishly quiet voice.

“Don’t worry about it,” Jean says. “He’ll be curious about things forever if he doesn’t think he was getting honest answers.

“It’s true,” I say just louder than a whisper.

Tiffany looks from me to Jean and back again. Michael stares off into the pool and Jean turns her head towards the water to join him. I look over at Jean, then further to my left at Tiffany. I look to my right at Michael then down at the deck between myself and the pool. *What the fuck is going on with me? How can I assume people know the score when I don’t even attempt explaining? It seems so obvious. How did I miss it? Now I just want to curl up somewhere and go to sleep. I feel like I’ve bummed out all three of the people around me just by pulling the cover off of a wound everybody knew something about but me. Sounds like Jean’s bed is getting used. I know the master bedroom is in use. I don’t know if anyone is in Galen’s room. I could always sneak into the walk in closet in the master bedroom and sleep there. Might be a little weird if I thought about it but if I manage to get in there unseen, nobody would have to*

know.

Fuck. If I did that though and I just disappeared from existence without anyone knowing, it might make people try to find me. And what if they didn't find me? Would they expand the search to out in the neighborhood? Or worse, start calling around? Fuck that.

"Might sleep," I blurt out in a little louder than a whisper.

"I was thinking the same," Jean says.

"What time is it, anyway?" Michael asks patting the side of his waist where his phone would usually be. I look at my phone and see it's almost 2am.

"It's only 2," I tell Michael in a surprised voice. "I was guessing 3 or 4."

"So was I," Tiffany says.

I look from Tiffany to Michael. Tiffany is still looking down and forward and Michael is still staring off into the water. I look over at Jean and see she is also still staring off into the water.

"I wish I was more sober," I think out loud in a little over a whisper again.

"Why?" Michael and Jean ask at the same time.

"I wouldn't mind driving around in the spookmobile," I answer.

"I haven't been drinking in a while," Jean says. Without pausing I stand up and walk over to her. She gives me a look with a raised eyebrow and I lean forward to put my face in front of her face. "What?"

"Breathe into my nose," I say. She blows into my face and I smell her breath. All I can smell is a faint scent of weed among a lot of spicy salsa. "There's salsa?"

Michael and Tiffany laugh as Jean slowly morphs into a huge smile. "It's in the fridge," she says.

I smile and nod, turning towards the dining room door. I hear a sigh come from Tiffany's direction as I pull open the door. I leave the door open and walk into the kitchen. I look over my shoulder into the family room and see two figures almost on top of each other on the longer couch. I turn back to facing the fridge and pause for a moment. Do I really need to eat? Spicy salsa sounds really good but I've had so much to drink and eat already today. Fuck it.

I open the fridge and stand there a moment staring into it. My mind goes back to the conversation moments ago. It makes sense, I guess. The first thing I usually ask when someone is talking about a female is if she's hot or not. I care about it a lot more than I realize I

should. But I also stop quite often when I see a stunning sunset, or cloud formation, or view of any sort in nature. I'll stop mid conversation and analyze a painting on a wall without realizing it. I'm straight and I've lost train of thought seeing stunningly attractive guys, even.

The fridge is almost completely filled with various types of beers and wine coolers. I can't see anything other than that at first. I open the crisper and find a bunch of more normal food crammed in. I spot a partial package of hot dogs and the container that must have the dip in it. I pull out the container and open it seeing it is in fact salsa. Then I reach in and take out the package of hot dogs with three remaining.

Closing the fridge I turn to my left and look out the window. I see Jean standing on the railing looking out into the darkness and Michael making out with Tiffany again. It's cool that he's having this much fun, considering I assumed we would have drank ourselves into oblivion by this time. I look down and decide the best course of action is to just dip the hotdogs directly into the salsa without bothering to include bread.

Chewing on the hot dog I realize the salsa is really fucking delicious. Not as spicy as I hoped but still pretty good. I wonder what Jean is thinking. I wonder if Michael has a boner. I'm sure he does. I take another bite of the hot dog after dipping it in salsa and look down into the sink. What the fuck, is that a used condom? Holy shit, that's a used condom. I take my finger and dip it in the salsa, figuring it'll be gone by the time I'm done with it anyway. I rub a little of it on the edge and tip of the condom. Looks more like blood than I thought it would. Awesome.

Finishing the last hot dog with the last bit of salsa I carefully set the bowl in the other half of the sink as to not disturb the condom. I look back outside and don't see Jean. I lean forward and try to look to the right and see nothing. A loud sound to the right makes me almost fill my pants with piss.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Jean asks from a few inches to my left.

"Was looking for you, douche throat," I say short of breath.

"Sure you weren't beating it? Having a hard time breathing?" she says in a laugh.

"Fuck yourself," I say sounding more pissed than playful. What's wrong with me? Fuck.

"Huh," she says sounding offended. "Ok then." She turns and starts to walk out of the kitchen.

"No, stop," I say quietly, getting embarrassed about being such a

whine-tit. She stops in her tracks and I walk the couple steps to close the distance. "Sorry for being an ass hole."

"Sorry, or apologize?" she says, whipping around to face me.

"Sorry," I confirm.

"Good," she says before turning back around and walking into the family room. I hear her making playful moaning sounds as she walks by the people on the couch into the hallway towards the living room. I turn back to the fridge and take out a bud light before following her tracks.

As I get halfway down the hall I realize Jean's bedroom door is open. Unable to resist the urge, I glance into her room as I pass and see the silhouette of Natalie rising up and down slowly. *Fuck, I wonder how long she's been at it? Good for her.* As I enter the living room I hear a whimper come from the bedroom. I turn to look at the couch Galen and Lisa are now sitting on and see both of them looking at me with huge shit-eating grins.

"Hey fuckers," I say before sitting on the small couch to the right when entering the room.

"Have fun at church?" Galen says.

"It was biblical," I respond. Jean sits in the chair cater-corner across the room from me and I look at Galen. "How long have they been at it?" I say while gesturing behind me in the direction of Jean's room.

"Don't know, but when she went to the bathroom she hurried back in so fast she forgot to shut the door," he explains. "He's the loud one, too. She has actually been pretty quiet."

Lisa says something to Galen which prompts him to respond. Jean pulls out her smart phone and starts using it. They pick up on an apparent previous conversation and I fade off into my own world again.

But how does my being selfless regarding sex factor in? I couldn't count how many times I've gone for an hour or more without getting off until the partner was satisfied. So many times I've cum enough that I wasn't going to get off again, but didn't stop. It's pretty common for me to do that with partners.

And what about the ever growing list of friends, some male even, who have me give them shoulder and back massages on a pretty regular basis? Who am I kidding, there are about twenty females to every one guy. Fuck.

I just... I don't see myself as a misogynist. I really don't. I'll wear the shoe if it fits, though. It just doesn't look like it fits in any perceivable way at all from my perspective.

I can see how it fits from multiple outside perspectives. I need to attempt focusing on making myself more clear in communication. I need to try and carry myself in a way that people correctly interpret. I also realize that I am an open book and have a really hard time reacting differently than I am accustomed to.

Isn't that an argument in favor of being a misogynist? It really sounds like one. If I'm an open book, doesn't that mean the common interpretation is the correct one?

Descent . Into the Void

"You shouldn't talk to me anymore," Zoe states with an angry, firm facial expression.

"Why? What did I do?" I say in almost a whimper. "What can I do to fix this?"

"You shouldn't talk to me, either," I hear from my left. I look and see that voice belongs to Kristy. What the fuck? Why is everyone ganging up on me?

"We talked about this and we're done with you," I hear from my right. I turn and see that Patricia is also here.

"What did I do to you all?" I ask, feeling like crying is unavoidable.

"You're a selfish ass hole," Kristy states harshly.

"And you're psychotic," Zoe adds.

"You're psychotic, you really are," Patricia agrees.

"You're possessive too," Kristy throws on the pile.

I try to gain composure and look around the room. It's only a couple dozen feet wide and has no windows. The walls and the ceiling are the same type of roll on texture. The light filling the room is coming from above my head. I turn around to see what's behind me and realize we're standing in the end of a hallway so long I can't see the end of it. There are white doors slightly inlaid in evenly spaced distances across from each other for as far as I can see.

I turn back to face the trio of angry women I used to date at different times of my life. All three have moved next to each other and have their arms crossed as if it's a poorly scripted sit-com. Kristy looks thinner than I remember and Patricia looks better than ever. Zoe has gained weight in her body but her face looks bonier and much like her mother did last I saw her.

"Well?" Zoe says, being the one standing in the center. She's the biggest love and deepest heart break I've had. So I guess it makes sense she's the voice of this action.

"I just want to know what I did," I ask again. All three women raise their arms at the same time and extend their pointer fingers. At first I think they're pointing at me and wait for a moment, expecting words to follow.

"They will add answers to your question," Zoe says slowly and deliberately.

I turn around and see the doors start opening all the way down my line of sight. Through each door steps several people from my past. Friends, family, all the women who have gone down on me. Every person I've had a one night stand with. All the coworkers I've annoyed or otherwise pissed off. People I vaguely remember being an ass hole to in public.

I turn back to say something to Zoe. When I turn around I see Zoe, Patricia and Kristy exiting through a door I didn't even see on the wall behind where they were standing. I start to try and follow them through but it closes too fast behind them. I reach for the handle and find none.

Turning around to face the hallway I see a crowd of people rushing towards me. The floor seems to darken with the mass of bodies blocking out the light from the ceiling above. A strong rush of panic sweeps over me as I start to dash towards them.

As I approach, the crowd seems to slow and split to surround me. I don't stop moving and begin passing through them all. There's the girl I fucked on her apartment floor as her boyfriend was on his way over. And there is the guy at Office Max I described a coworker's ass to that I couldn't get enough of looking at who turned out to be his wife.

I run as hard as I can through the people. I pass the grade school girl I masturbated to in my mind most nights before bed. A girl in school whose shoulder I used to rub with my hand from time to time that I got in trouble for because I misread signals and she didn't like it. The woman who ran a few sections of Toys R Us who overheard me talking about how skinny and unattractive she grew after she switched store locations.

My panic expands and desire to run fades the more faces I recognize. My neighbor who I started trying to date as I went into puberty and realized she had an amazing body. My other neighbor who had a cute face and was athletic that I also tried to date. Her older sister who I would space out while staring at while she was working as a lifeguard.

Then I stopped in cold dread and stood in front of the guy who terrorized me for several years of my childhood. The people I had just passed amass behind me and a circle of familiar faces closes around me. The cold dread shatters to pure survival mode as I turn and punch to my right as I realize a door is just beyond them. The punch lands on a wrinkled old woman's face and I hear bone crack.

As she hits the floor I realize it is the woman I adored who worked at Children's Square. She's the one who tried getting into a room I was tearing apart. The door had opened and I only saw that movement so I went to slam it. I did not, however, see her arm pushed through the crack in an attempt to keep me from closing it. It bruised her arm terribly. And I just cracked her in the face, a fraction of a moment before she lands on the ground.

Already through the door which was behind her, the terror of what I just did adds to the pile of horrible memories brought up by those flooding into the hallway. As those in the hallway pause to help her, I slam the door closed and am left in a room that has absolutely no light in it. There is no light coming from under the door, much less anywhere else.

“Fuck,” I whisper as quietly as I can, unable to keep the word silent and in my mind. I step several feet into the room and notice nothing. I keep walking as straight forward from the door I just passed through as I can. I hear the door open behind me but the light from the hallway does little but light the floor directly in front of it.

I start running forward as fast as I can. I look back over my shoulder and see hundreds of people have poured into whatever area this is. Am I outside? Am I in a warehouse or gymnasium? Some sort of stadium? I can't see anything but the flat light gray floor that is exactly the same as the hallway I came out of.

Shouts start coming out of the people behind me. I can't make out what the words are but none of them sound happy and all of them sound like they are getting closer. I run as hard as I can. I take another second to glance back and only see the dimly backlit heads of everyone chasing me. The only light still coming from that open door and even then it is too far away to do me any good where I am now. There are no sources of light anywhere before me in the seemingly flat, infinite darkness I am dashing thoughtlessly into.

Shouts start turning to white noise as the volume increases and the distance decreases. The level of panic in me reaches fever pitch as I start getting dizzyed by it. I step wrong in a stride and trip. I feel the ground hit my arms and the side of my face as I feel multiple hands gripping the backs of my arms, legs and neck.

I jerk strongly and my eyes open. I try to focus and am breathing heavily. The room is filled with light that is blinding at first. As my eyes adjust and my surroundings become identifiable I realize I am laying on a padded concrete slab much like in the detention center in Council Bluffs.

“What... the... fuck?” I say out loud, voice echoing. I look around and see the cinder block walls on all four sides. The room is very small. If the size of the room didn't tell me I was in a cell, the heavy looking steel door would have. It has a small window in the center which appears to be the same thick glass window used near the top of the wall opposite of it. The glass is so thick I can't really make anything on the other side of it out. The light comes through a strange thick plastic panel in the ceiling which has metal grating protecting it.

I stand up and realize I am completely naked and have the standard fully hard morning wood. I look down at it and am slightly amused by the full erection in these surroundings. I raise my right arm slightly and swing carefully, slapping the head of my penis slightly so it swings back and forth gently.

“Fuck,” I say out loud again, looking up at the window in the door. I walk up and press my face against the window, failing to see anything in any direction but shapes too dark and too distorted to identify. Failing to remember how I got in here or anything that has happened in recent days at all, I walk back over to the padded concrete slab and lay down. I look up at the almost blindingly bright light coming in from above. Why so bright? It’s obviously dark outside and beyond this door. Why so bright in here?

I look over the walls and see nothing interesting at all. They are painted the same light gray color as the floor and the ceiling outside of that blinding panel. They’re also the same gray as the hallway was in the dream. I wonder if that’s related.

The faint sound of footsteps approaches down what sounds to be a hallway beyond the door. I jump up, morning wood slapping me in the thigh then the stomach and run the whole few feet to the door. I press my ear against the door and listen to what sounds like someone in heels walk by the door and continue in the other direction.

“Fuck,” I say out loud again. Well, at least I know I wasn’t thrown in some cell and left for dead. I walk back over to the slab and analyze the pad. I find I can lift it off of the slab and it is a vinyl so thick there’s no hope of tearing it apart if I wanted to. Not without something sharp to cut into it, at least. It’s a dark cyan color I don’t like at all. I pick it up off the slab and lay it on the floor against it. I lay down on it and roll onto my side. I try to lay my leg up on the slab but it’s just a few inches too high.

I roll over onto my back and sigh. I close my eyes and try to go back to sleep, but the light is just too bright. I wonder how I ever got to sleep as it is. I try to focus on how I feel and how I felt when I was walking around the room. I don’t feel sick in any way. I don’t feel high, I don’t feel drunk. I don’t even feel hungry or thirsty. In fact, I don’t feel anything at all but cold. The pad is cool, the air is colder and the concrete is really frigid. The pad must be the warmest inanimate object because i have been laying on it.

I still can’t think of anything before I woke up at all. I can remember the dream, though I’m trying to shake it. But I can’t think back beyond that. How long have I been locked up? Much less in solitary? Why am I naked? I open my eyes and sit up, looking over my body. Fingernails and toenails are really long. Not freak show long, but at least a month has gone by since these were cut. They are clean, though. In fact my skin is quite clean. And that makes me wonder, considering I sweat a lot when I sleep.

I look closely at my hands and they don’t seem very old. I can still remember some things from my childhood. I can remember my family. I can remember everything about all the people in my dream. How long

ago was Patricia? It feels like years have passed since then. My body feels weak and worn down now that I think about it. I do feel tired. I wonder if I can even do a push up anymore.

I roll enough to end up on the concrete and position myself face down. I put my palms flat on the floor and tense my body to do a push up. I realize I didn't take into account how freezing cold the concrete is. I do a quick and proper push up before rolling back over onto the much warmer mat.

"I should have thought that through," I say out loud. Damn the echo in here is bad. These walls must be two cinder blocks thick. I've been in small closets that have cinder block walls that didn't have reverb like this. Fuck.

I close my eyes again and realize I'm actually starting to get quite cold. Why aren't there any pillows or blankets in here? I really wish I remembered why I don't even have clothes. How the fuck did I get in here?

I start becoming a combination of angry and deeply depressed. I notice the anger alone seems to be raising my temperature as my heart rate increases. I squeeze my eyes closed and try to shift my thoughts to Patricia. Patricia? Well, fine. I focus on how great her body is and how warm it felt last time I held her before shit went bad.

Oh, the party! Not the party where I met Makayla that Patricia was at. Fuck that party. Oooh, Makayla. I should think about her instead. Jean's party! What happened after that? Wait, I don't even remember the end of that.

Suddenly three hard knocks come to the door. I stand up quick enough that I feel dizzy. I realize my morning wood is completely gone now and my penis looks like the pathetic limp grower self it is when it's fully limp. Three more loud knocks come, reverberating through the room at a harsh, deafening tone.

"Come in" I say, realizing how stupid that sounds immediately after speaking it.

The door opens and it's a tired looking overweight man at least seven feet tall. He ducks and steps through the doorway. He has a syringe with something in it in one hand and a police baton in the other. He's wearing a dark gray button up dickies shirt and black dickies pants. His hair is a few inches long and a little messy but balding on the top. He has a thick mustache and is now standing right in front of me.

"Hello," I say. I can hear the terror in my voice. What's he doing with -

I feel a sharp pain in my left bicep and suddenly the room gets dark and I feel air going across my face as I realize I'm falling to the ground.

I regain consciousness but my eyes are still closed. I try hard not to open them and realize the room is lit but nowhere near as bright as the cell was. I very carefully open my right eye and it immediately hurts from the light. I open my left eye and take the mild pain as they adjust.

As the room comes into focus I am delighted to realize I am lying on a carpeted floor. Not only is it a carpeted floor, but it's Jean's floor! I slowly look around the room and realize Ben is asleep on the loveseat I must have fallen asleep on. I thought he left? I momentarily wonder how I ended up on the floor but quickly don't care. I feel rested and am definitely not in a jail cell. I'm also not in a crowd of people in a hallway, for whatever reason.

I analyze the room further and see Natalie and the Russian cuddled up and asleep on the bigger couch just across the hallway. I see Galen's bare shoulder and arm on top of a blanket and Lisa's head sticking out of it next to his. Are they naked under there!? And they appear to be on an air mattress. I wonder why they're not down in his room? I also notice the chair Jean was sitting in now has the pile of purses and miscellaneous items that were on the floor. I look and see the master bedroom door is now closed.

I realize the rested feeling was only relief and start drifting back to sleep. The last thought I have before fading back out of consciousness is wondering whether or not I have to work today.

Descent . No Call

I open my eyes and find myself with neck and back pain. I am laying on the same part of the floor off of the loveseat that i was laying on earlier. My phone is just above my head and is vibrating. I reach and pick it up with my right hand. I push the power button and swipe to unlock it and the first text I see is:

Makayla: You need to come over. Rubbing them out isn't doing it since I had you. I'm off work today. Mom works all day. Let me know.

Sigh. My dick is still a little sore from last night. That's odd, I didn't think either sexual encounter was dry or long enough for my dick to be sore. Whatever. I look back and see Ben's phone is sitting on the arm of the loveseat but he is not there. Lisa is still asleep under the blanket which is pulled up to her neck. Natalie and the Russian dude I will never remember the name of are asleep on the couch. I realize I'm under a blanket and have no pants on at all. I look around briefly and find them on the floor between the loveseat and the corner of the room.

Carefully moving over with the blanket over my lower half I get Galen's pants which I've been wearing. I realize they smell of chlorine and sex but put them on anyway. Succeeding in getting dressed under the blanket without anything showing I stand up and lay the blanket where my pants were.

The smell of bacon guides me down the hallway. I pause and look into Jean's room and see she is now sleeping in her own bed. I look into the master bedroom and see a messy bed with nobody around. I continue down the hall and the bathroom door is closed with the light on, visible under the door. I continue to the opening where the kitchen, family room and stairs meet. I look into the kitchen and find Ben with Galen and Jerry. Ben and Galen are cooking while Jerry is standing across from them talking with them.

"That's why I vote for cartoon characters," she says sounding like it is a conclusion to a much longer story.

"I voted for George Carlin in 2000," I add, not having a clue what they were even talking about.

"Nice!" Galen says before flipping a pancake. I realize there is a pan with a huge stack of pancakes already made. Behind that is a pan full of bacon that looks to have been baked instead of fried.

"Good morning, sleepsex," Ben says.

"What?" I ask, a little worried.

"Alison was getting ready to leave and took advantage of your morning wood for," Ben states before pausing to think.

“At least ten minutes,” Galen says. “It was probably a half hour. People were already falling asleep and the few of us who were awake started doing whisper commentary.”

“Yeah,” Ben says with his face lighting up. “I was the funny one and Galen was the serious one.”

“I thought you left?” I asked looking at Ben then turning to look at Jerry.

“I was told to get out since I was expected to be gone to tonight,” Jerry says in an annoyed voice I know isn’t meant for anyone in this house.

“Pissy babysitter?” I ask. She nods and makes a sour face before shaking her head from side to side a little.

“It worked out,” she says, shaking her ass a little. “Viktor was here and I’ve been thinking about him a lot,” she states while her voice slowly transitions to sounding horny. *Never heard her like that. I was starting to assume she was some sort of asexual being. Even though, of course, she’s crazy attractive.*

“Oh?” I ask, wondering if she’ll continue a story.

“Oh!” she says playfully before continuing. “We saw each other and he walked to me without either of us saying a word. We started kissing and I looked at Galen. He smiled and nodded, knowing what I was thinking. We went down to Galen’s room and don’t let me forget to change the sheets,” she demands while raising a finger to point at Galen.

“You’ll do it before you eat,” he says with the most stern facial expression he can muster. She nods and pulls her extended pointer back before turning and quickly walking down past me and down the stairs.

“Huh,” I say, walking to the dining room and sitting in a chair facing the kitchen.

“Don’t worry, you didn’t get off,” Ben says. I was thrown for a moment.

“yeah?” I ask, hoping he also elaborates.

“When she climbed off and wobbled down the hallway to the bathroom to shower before she left for work you were harder than you were before she found you,” he says, slowly morphing into almost laughter as he continues the story. “But I went into the linen closet and grabbed you a blanket to cover up your shame.”

“Shame, fuck you” I say in a laugh while flipping him the bird.

“I take it Viktor is Russian dude’s friend?” I ask, trying to remember who Viktor is.

“Yep,” Galen says, flipping a very large pancake.

“Well that’s good times,” I say, pulling my phone back out and trying to decide what I should respond to Makayla.

James: You woke me up, thanks.

Makayla: This is here for you all day. <Picture Attachment>

I see her body lying on black sheets in the thumbnail. I select it and open it while letting out a deep sigh. Her pussy looks better than any I've ever seen. Even fully engorged it looks stunning. Her smooth body and perfect breasts down to the nipples looks almost irresistible. Can't see high enough to see the neck since it's a shot of her from her thighs up to the top of her breasts. But it's still quite tempting.

James: I can't, I'm pretty sure I'm going to get fired if I don't run to work.

Makayla: Aww

James: Sorry. But I definitely want a round two with you. Look more amazing, the more I actually see of you.

Makayla: You're too sweet!

I stand up and walk into the kitchen where Ben and Galen are talking about baseball. I don't care at all about baseball and am not going to pretend I know what they're talking about.

"Mind if I grab a couple of the cooler pancakes and run to work?" I ask. Before I get to the word Run, Galen hands me a few pancakes rolled up like a strange burrito. I nod and hold them up in a brief thankful gesture and pat my right pocket.

"I put the keys in the night stand next to the bean bag chair" he says, knowing exactly what I was thinking.

"Thanks man," I say, quickly walking down the stairs and across the small room to Galen's door. Not thinking about it I open it and see Jerry with her hand on Viktor's shoulders, riding him hard. She turns and slows down a minute with a look of combined surprise and ecstasy.

"I'm really sorry," I say hurrying to the nightstand and opening it, seeing a key ring with a skeleton bone on it and several keys. This must be it. I grab it and close the door. I look at them again and smile, hurrying out of the room. I close the door quietly and hear the bed start shaking quickly again.

I laugh quietly to myself as I exit into the garage.

"They still going at it?" the Russian guy asks before taking a puff of his cigarette.

"yeah man," I say, smiling and nodding.

"See you around, James" he says, waving his cigarette at me and smiling. Fuck, he knows my name and I never knew his. Shit, I don't even know who knows his. I bet Jerry does, I'll have to ask her.

I get down the sidewalk and look up and down the street. I remember I parked several spots down and head towards it. I analyze the bone and realize it is made of plastic and has a few buttons on it. Upon closer inspection I see the icons inlay-ed of lock, unlock and alarm. I carefully press the unlock button and the lights on the car blink three times.

I climb in and sit down carefully on the seat. It's insanely comfortable and I lean my head back. The feeling of fatigue is still heavy as I haven't been awake long enough to shake it. I lift my head up and turn the key to start the car. I notice my foot is operating the clutch as it should be, though I haven't had much practice driving a manual. I reach over and turn on the stereo which I see has synced with my phone already. Splendid.

I stop at the stop sign and see nobody is in sight behind me in the rear view. I start up Ice Cube's Pushin' Weight and am curious what the bass can do. The beginning sequence starts as I continue into the drive. When the song kicks off it sounds better than I can remember hearing it. Quite good, honestly. I roll down the windows even though it's a little chilly and the fear starts to creep in deeply regarding if I'm going to catch my 2nd to last write up for being this late.

The stress of worrying about having maybe even lost my job makes the dozen minute drive to work seem like an instant. The music from War and Peace's War Disc doesn't hurt, either. I pull in and don't see Sheryl's car anywhere. I do see Darren's. Holy shit, am I really that lucky? Is Darren the only manager here? There are a smattering of customer cars already here as well as the new guy's Mustang I can't really stand yet.

Wasn't Ben supposed to work today? Oh well, I can't remember. I didn't even remember to get up on time. A little scared to get out I sit and listen to the last section of Fuck Dyin'. As I shut the car off and start to get out I see Darren come out of the front door. He's making a bee line straight to my car and as he sees who I am, his face turns to that of total confusion. I roll my window down as he gets close.

"What the fuck?" he says with squinting, confused eyes.

"Uhh, hello there Darren," I say, not having a clue what to even say. Before his lips start moving to speak what I can see forming in his mind I blurt out "I work today, right? I'm sorry."

"What the fuck?" he says again with a very small smirk on his lips, among the rest of his confused facial expressions.

"What? I ask as he's looking around the inside and outside of the car. "Oh, this car. Yeah, it's called the Spookmobile."

"I know what it's called, it was in the paper once. Judge Burk and his kid were rebuilding it as a family project," he states as if he had been following it for years.

"Yeah? That's who gave it to me, but I didn't know it was in the papers," I say, now almost just thinking out loud.

"Oh, and yeah you fucker, you're supposed to have been here four hours ago," he informs me sounding more irritated.

"I'm sorry man, have had a hell of a long few days since last I worked," I say in almost an exhaled whisper. I put my hand over my forehead as I realize I have a pretty strong headache.

"Yeah. Speaking of the paper, I wondered who would bring you since I saw your truck in the paper," he says in a comforting style.

"Fuck, my fucking truck fire was in the paper?" I ask, not having heard about it at all.

"Yep, it was a still image from the news broadcast. Second page, had a pretty big picture," he explains with a now amused look on his face.

"Can I just call in right now and say I'm recovering from something or other?" I ask, hoping he gives me the green light.

"I actually already told the rest of the crew you had called in last night," he reveals as he pats the top of the car. "And now you have a hand print." He turns and walks towards the store without another word.

"Thanks, man," I say loud enough for him to hear. He raises his hand in a see ya later, no problem motion and continues inside. I put both hands on the top of the steering wheel and rest my head on them. Fucking love that guy. If it was Sheryl she might have helped me out but I'm sure some sort of notation would have been on the record. She's awesome but she's far more by the book than he is.

Well fuck. Now I have quite a few days off in a row. And I really fucking need a shower. I smell like pussy, chlorine and alcohol. I guess I could run home and take a shower and see if Grandpa needs anything before I disappear for another several days solid. Surprised he hasn't called me. I know he listens to the news three times a day.

I switch music over to Squarepusher's Burning'n Tree. I decide to take a route home with a longer straight away that's generally out of the prying eye of the law. I learn the car can reach at least 100 miles an hour without batting an eye. Glorious! I may use this on Kansas City road trips.

Excitement of Squarepusher and driving a car I know can beat out my previous car's speed without trying lands me in the parking lot of my Grandpa's apartments in what feels like seconds. I sit the last few seconds of track 7 and shut off the car before the glorious 8th track starts. I get out of the car and push the lock button on the key fob. The lights strobe for about a second and no horn. I can live with that.

Descent . Cleansing

Alright, it's almost exactly ten in the morning. I know Grandpa will be awake and I'm sure Grandma will be in the bedroom watching her soaps. I walk across the porch and open the sliding door slowly. I hear Grandpa start to get up from his chair.

"Hello?" I say, announcing myself before I move the blinds to the side. Upon doing so I see Grandpa in his overalls with a cigarette, standing and facing the door. "You didn't have to rise, this is your courtroom after all," I state while smiling.

"Your grandma was worried about you the other night," he says, pointing at me and looking entirely unhappy.

"I know, everything happened so fast that by the time Michael saved me I blacked out at Jean's," I say, trying to think of better ways to soften my not thinking to have made phone calls to family before falling asleep.

"Your mother called us and told us what was going on as soon as she knew you were okay on Tuesday morning," he informs me. "Whose clothes are those?" he asks, looking me over.

"Oh, when I woke up the morning after all that happened Galen told me to grab some of his clothes since we're the same size," I explain. He nods slowly and silently. I sit down on the couch across the living room from him as he sits down in his chair. "Do you need anything done or picked up before I go to Jean's for a week? She's having a series of parties and I've been helping her police them where I can," I say, stressing myself a little while expecting him to lecture me.

"Galen and Jean are both going to be there?" he asks sounding a little more optimistic than I expected. Grouchy, but the very small hint of curious is more optimism than he usually has.

"Yes. They took me down to pick up the car their dad gave me," I say.

"They gave you a car?" he asks sounding both annoyed and angry.

"Both of their parents have told me multiple times that I've helped keep Galen and Jean out of endless trouble," I begin, not sure myself why they decided to give me a really nice, expensive car. "I was really stunned when I was given it considering the whole ride down I was told by Galen about all the work he had put into it. They have spent many thousands revamping it and rebuilding the engine. They put in high end electronics and sound systems in it. From what I understand they essentially strung two separate sound systems in the front and back of the car. Wired it all up so it would be one giant sound cannon."

“Huh,” he says quietly, sounding like he doesn’t believe it either. I don’t, though. I don’t really believe it. Something just seems wrong about the whole thing. Doesn’t feel right being given such a cool car for my taste when I’ve taken shit care of all I’ve had to this point and still primarily live with my grandparents.

We both sit quietly and look at each other and at the TV. I pull out my phone and start looking through it and see a new message from Makayla.

Makayla: What time do you get off work?

Ugh. Only fucked her once and a large chunk of my life changed. That whole day was full of fucking strange. Maybe it was the day and it happened to quite a few people? Maybe today will be another normal day where I happen to have mind blowing sex? I don’t know.

“You smell like chlorine and whiskey,” Grandpa says quietly as if it was a thought that he did not mean to verbalize.

“Yeah I should take a shower. Do you need any errands ran or anything from the store before I spend the next week or so at Jean’s?” I ask, ready for any string of things he needs done.

“Just talk to your Grandmother before you leave,” he asks, sounding as if he knows he’ll never hear the end of it if I don’t.

“Will do,” I say while feeling shitty for not calling them as soon as Michael got me to Galen’s place.

“Thanks,” he says, putting out his cigarette in his ashtray before lighting another one.

I almost go into their room to talk to Grandma before realizing I probably smell terrible. If Grandpa can smell me across the room I’m sure Grandma will the moment I walk in the room. I walk into my room instead and get some clothes out of my dresser. I notice things around the room aren’t exactly in the same spot but am not irritated at all. I’d probably go looking through my grand-kid’s room too if I heard something terrible might have happened to him.

I feel my phone vibrate and look to see a video message. I open it and it’s from Makayla. It’s a video of her holding the phone out as far as she can with her arm, giving the view of her free hand’s two fingers fucking her as fast as she can do it while still holding the camera steady. Her pussy is fully engorged and she’s whimpering a little. At the end of the thirty second video she says “I can’t even make myself cum right anymore! Get over here!”

James: I’ll be there about 1pm.

What the fuck did I just send? Whatever. I think I knew all day that I was going to go over there as soon as I found out she's going to be alone. I shouldn't be thinking about any of this while I feel so uncomfortable from desperately needing a shower.

Entering the bathroom I set my clothes down on the back of the toilet and turn the water on in the sink to let the water get hot. I close the door and turn the fan on to vent the steam. After brushing my teeth I jump in the shower with mouthwash in my mouth.

I don't remember when it started but I've been using mouthwash instead of coconut oil for oil pulling. Probably bad for me considering the bottle says to do it for 90 seconds or whatever before spitting it out. I tend to swish it around my mouth for most of my shower before the saliva build-up doesn't leave any more room in my mouth, mixed with the bubbles. But since I've started doing this, my mouth and breath have been quite awesome. Seems to be much more effective than simply using it for 45 seconds or whatever I was actually using it for previously.

I get out of the shower and move towards the sink. As I put on my deodorant I realize I have hickies on my chest. I pause and reflect on the previous couple days. I can't remember anybody doing that to me? I can't even remember anyone kissing my chest. I surely don't remember anyone spending that much time on it to leave hickies. I don't mark easily.

I dry off and put my clothes on before pausing to stare at myself in the mirror a bit. I decide it's a good idea to brush my hair. While brushing my hair I think about what I'm going to say to Grandma. She loves to worry and she talks more than I do, I'm sure she'll control the entire flow of the conversation. I hope she's not too upset.

At that thought I start laughing for a moment. I calm down and catch my breath and think yeah, not too upset. Grandma. The statue of everything cool, calm, and collected.

I open the bathroom door and feel a wave of cool air rush in from the rest of the apartment. I go into my bedroom and put my clothes in my dirty clothes hamper and see it's only about a third of the way full. While I don't mind when I don't have to do my own laundry, it makes me feel bad because I know I should be doing it myself. I know Grandma gets bored. I just like to pay rent and try to do everything myself. It's not like she has to come clean up after me or anything. I am pretty good about cleaning up after myself and not leaving messes behind me.

Closing my bedroom door and checking my pockets for everything, I walk across the apartment to their room. I peek my head in and see Grandma sitting in her chair in the far corner of the room, watching the TV. perched beyond the foot of the bed. It's loud enough that I won't accidentally make any sounds she'll be able to hear. She doesn't notice me as she is currently deep in her soap operas.

I walk down the walkway between both beds and sit on the bed across from hers so I am facing her. A commercial comes on and she slowly pans over until she sees me. Her face lights up and she jumps out of her seat. She walks around her bed to where I am sitting on Grandpa's. She starts laughing happily and reaches towards me. I reach my arms out to give her a hug before realizing she's raising her hands to pinch my cheeks and wiggle my head around a bit.

I laugh with her a little and stand up. We hug and she turns to walk back to sit in her chair. I sit back down as she does. Her face then turns stern as she raises a finger up to shake it at me.

"I was worried sick, you know?" she says in a kind of angry voice. "I saw your truck on the news! Then my phone started ringing off the hook because people who remember it being your Grandpa's were worried it was him. Why didn't you call?" she said in a now sad voice as she sounds as if she's surely going to cry.

"I went from trying to get away from that guy, to so tired I could barely walk. Michael took me to Galen's and I pretty much said three sentences and fell asleep," I explain, hoping she calms down. I don't want to leave if she's upset. Usually when that happens it is Grandpa who has to deal with her through the course of her unrest.

She sits quietly in her chair and stares at me. It looks like she's grinding her teeth again but the television is so loud it's hard to tell. She smiles and nods. "I'm glad you're okay," she states sounding annoyed but accepting that it's over. She stands up and makes another overjoyed smile and motions for me to come to her. I walk over and we hug each other again. "You're still going to spend the week at Galen's?" she asks as her face turns back towards stern and concerned.

"Yes," I answer, intentionally not providing more details in case she starts to worry again.

"Who is going to pick you up?" she asks, gaze probing into me.

"Oh," I begin, realizing that I told Grandpa but not Grandma. "Galen and Jean's dad gave me a car. It's actually leaps and bounds better than the truck Grandpa had given me."

"Oh! That's marvelous!" she shrieks, throwing her arms up and eyes going so wide it almost looks like they are as wide as her glasses.

"I'll have to show you sometime after dinner," I say, knowing there's no way she'll pull herself fully away from her soaps.

"Are you going to be back this weekend?" she asks, looking like she's slipping into her pity me please because I am lonely mode.

"A week from Friday I'll be back," I say while bracing myself for impact. I love her to death but she worries quite a lot more than even I do when I'm at my worst.

“Alright! My soaps are coming back on,” she says while shifting focus to the television. I smile and slowly stand up and turn to leave the room. She seems intensely focused on the TV. now, so I continue back out into the living room where Grandpa is now watching CNBC.

I stand in the area between the dining room and the living room and watch with him. I think about asking him how some of his stocks are doing but I know it might turn into a several hour conversation. He looks over at me as I’m thinking to myself and smiles while nodding to me.

“Grandma okay?” he asks, sounding honestly concerned.

“Yes, she’s happy that everything is smooth,” I respond. He smiles and nods. His face goes stern again as he starts to speak.

“You be more careful this week off, alright?” he asks insistently.

“I promise,” I respond with confidence. “I’ve had enough drama to last me a few months,” I say while remembering I’m apparently planning to go back over to Makayla’s house.

“A few months?” he says while laughing. “I have yet to anger someone enough to set my car on fire and chase me through town!” He laughs a little more and shakes his head. “Make it a few years, will you?” he asks, with another little laugh to wind down.

“You’re right, I hope it’s at least a few years,” I say while laughing a little myself and raising my hand in a wave. “Later Grandpa,” I say while feeling loved and nervous at the same time. He waves back and slowly turns back to CNBC.

Descent . Gliding

I sit in the spookmobile and look at the sliding door to the apartment. I can make out the shape of Grandpa shuffling towards the kitchen. I look down at the dash and realize there are gauges for everything I could ever want to know about the car. Digital readings for pressure in all four tires, oil pressure, gas level, miles driven since last fueling, miles remaining, brake pad levels, tire tread levels, temperatures in the engine, fluid levels as well as temperatures for those fluids. I wasn't even aware there were sensors for half of those things.

I pull out my phone and check the clock against the dashboard. Both say 12:15. I set my phone in the drink holder between the front two bucket seats and think about what I'm actually going to do next. I really missed the bus when I took the shower. I should have squeezed one out so I had a more clear mind regarding hormones.

I decide, at least, to go drive around downtown Omaha while I think about it. This car is pretty awesome and I haven't rolled the windows down and really pushed the speakers yet. I pick up my phone and flip through my MP3s and find my Pinionist folder. I load up A Time for Greater Things and start the car.

I wait to turn the volume up until I am away from the apartments and on the road heading towards the interstate. I slowly turn the volume up until the deep piano hits can be felt in my body. As I approach a group of high school joggers before turning up the viaduct near Lewis Central, I turn it up just a little more. A couple turn around and give "what the fuck?" looks at the car and get other people's attention. They all turn as I pass and look over the car. I realize the windows are tinted enough on the sides that they can't see in. I'm probably going to have fun in this car.

I turn onto the viaduct heading towards I29 and the south expressway and test the acceleration now that I don't have anyone else in the car to judge my stupidity. I see no traffic on the half mile stretch before me and close it up quickly. I watch the car break past the 100mph mark and creep up towards 125 before I need to start slowing down.

I debate for a moment on trying to take the curve and the downward slope before the red lights at 100. The thought of sliding into the median and flipping off the far side of the road towards the golf course doesn't sound appealing, so I drop to about 65. I've done this part of the drive enough times to be comfortable with close to 70.

Overjoyed with how this car performs I keep the speed of about 65 going while I approach the lights next to Lakeview. I know the school has an officer wandering around these days, so I decide to turn right and head up the South Expressway. I stay about 60 through the entire turn, which I make wide enough to land me in the inner of the two lanes. I get back up

to 65 and am lucky enough that the lights are green all the way to the bridge portion. I hit 95 as I travel down the bridge and see a cop on the opposite side going past me. I drop to 40 as soon as he gets past me and before I get to the descending curve towards downtown Council Bluffs.

I'm glad I did because once I come into sight of that curve I see a police car sitting in the parking lot below. The car is pointed out to the street and it's clear they're radaring right there. But, they can't have detected me from beyond the hill so I don't worry about him. I do worry, however, about the car who saw me at close to 100 radioing to the car below. Either way, it's too late if they do so I turn left at the far side of the parking lot onto the first road I come to off of the South Expressway. I head west into the neighborhoods at the posted speeds of 25 and 35, respectively.

I am now watching my rear view mirror diligently. I see no police officers crossing the street on other roads or turning onto this one to follow me. I decide to turn right and get to the more main 5th avenue. I turn left onto that and go the posted 40 miles an hour all the way to 35th street where I turn north to get to Broadway. I take Broadway to the small stretch of interstate which crosses the Missouri River. I get off immediately on Dodge street and turn the music up a little more.

What should I do? It's now almost 12:30 and if I want to get back to Makayla's house by 1 I'm not going to want to drive very far into Omaha. I could really use some more of that action, though. She's insanely attractive. And insane, now that I think that. I could use a really good couple hour fuck, though. That quickie by the pool and if you can even call it a quickie before that were fun and all but not satisfying. And if Alison actually did ride me in the living room before she left for work while I was sleeping, it didn't help me feel satisfied at all.

Fuck it. I turn left onto the side streets next to Kennedy Freeway and then turn left again onto Douglas. I drive that back to the interstate. I take the interstate to I29 and get off on 24th street. I really don't know why they don't put an exit on 16th. I know it would be a little difficult as they have a strange interchange of sorts there. I'm confident engineers could figure it out.

Daydreaming about what fucking her in an actual bed might be like, I realize I'm already heading over Elliot by where mom lives in Marshall Ave. I wonder if we'll make it out of the entry way?

I slam my brakes as someone rides a bike out of one of the new developments up on top of the hill. I stop just before hitting them and they yell something I can't possibly hear. They turn and drive down the side of the street in the direction I'm going but in the wrong lane. I inch forward as they turn back and yell more. I honk because I see a car coming

quickly around the turn ahead, bicycle rider still in that lane. The rider is still turned back yelling at me over his shoulder.

I honk more and point, hoping he turns around and sees the car coming. The car then stops as the bicyclist continues looking back. I slow to a stop as the bike crashes directly into the car, flipping the rider off of it and against the windshield. I can see a woman in the driver's seat and her hands go over her face, eyes wide in surprise. The bicyclist, now laying on the windshield facing forward, starts to move a little as his bike settles off the far side of the road from me against the steep rising hard in front of a residence.

The woman slowly removes the hands from her face, staring at the bicyclist. She starts to open the door as the bicyclist starts to roll himself over to get off of the hood. He twitches and freezes in place once he moves from the passenger side of the hood over to the driver's side. I see him yell out. I am unsure if it was words or not so I turn down my music to maybe try to hear. I roll forward slowly until my car is in the lane next to her car.

"Oh my god! Are you alright!" I hear her yell as she gets out of her car, clearly in a panic. I can hear the guy mumbling something incoherently. I cannot make out any words, though. He does sound like he's in a lot of pain. I see the woman turn from looking at him to looking at me. She walks over, door of her car wide open, and stops next to my driver's window.

"Want me to turn around and park?" I ask as I pick up my phone, dialing 911.

"No, that's ok. Did you call the police?" she asks, putting her hands back over her face and looking back at her car.

"I am right now," I say, holding the phone up to my ear. She nods and turns around to run back to the side of her hood.

"911 what is your emergency?" the woman on the phone says.

"I just saw a bicyclist crash directly into the hood of a car that had stopped. He doesn't look good," I say, trying to hold back rising laughter that was trying to burst out as I briefly explained that the bike hit a sitting car.

The call seems to fly by, me giving the information requested and them letting me go so they could move on to the next call. I pull forward a bit more so she was right outside my window. A couple cars have gathered behind me, looking angry and confused about what's going on.

"They have units coming, are you sure you don't want me to stop?" I ask, feeling like I should just pull into a driveway and wait anyway.

"No, there is too much traffic building up," she says, gesturing behind her car and behind my car. I nod in agreement and drive forward,

freeing up a path for the cars behind her to go around once I'm through, along with the cars behind me.

I quickly weigh driving away and possibly being in trouble for fleeing the scene of a hit and run, though I didn't hit anybody. I compare it against replaying some of the best sex I've ever had. How long might it take for the police to even arrive? The woman seemed confident I didn't have to stay, though. What if the police that respond overheard the call of a speeder and they have my car description?

As I think about it I watch myself, almost as if in third person, driving the last several blocks to Makayla's house. When her street comes up I switch from the useless debating on if I'm going to go back to the scene of a dumbass bicyclist hitting a car because he was running a stop sign, to where should I park. I pass her street and decide to continue to the Kristy Kreme or whatever it's called, donut shop. I've eaten there with friends several times but can't remember its name. I know it's not the same as the national chain.

Oh, Christy Creme. I was close. Surprised with the amount of racist craziness around these parts they didn't do it Plattsmouth style. Kass Kounty King Korn Karnival, yeah. King Korn Karnival. That's real clever. Nobody thinks that's KKK related at all. Aren't they so smooth. Slipped that right under everyone's radar, guys.

I park the car at the far side of the small parking lot from the building. I get out of my car and look towards the people standing in line for food and nobody's looking in this direction. I check across the street at the businesses there and nobody seems to be around. I start walking down the edge of the parking lot to the sidewalk and nobody seems to take any notice. If anyone is, I can't see it.

This might work out. Very few people know I have that car, or any car for that matter. I'm still worried somebody I can't see happened to notice me get out of this car and is taking note, making a phone call, something shady. I always feel like shit's going to happen, though. So honestly it's not quite out of character. I really need to condition myself out of this mental behavior.

I arrive at the street Makayla lives on and begin pivoting up the street. I freeze in my tracks and feel awkwardly watched. I look around and see nothing out of the ordinary. I decide to turn around and walk back down the street I just walked down. I turn up the tree line up the middle of the neighborhood which I previously used as cover during my escape from Makayla's dad.

Once to the property Makayla lives on I paused and survey everything in my line of sight. I see someone doing dishes three houses up the street and nothing but grass and leaves swaying in the breeze. I carefully leave the general cover of the tree line and walk through

Makayla's back yard to the foot of her porch. I listen and hear Portishead coming out of a room upstairs. I pull out my phone to text her.

James: May I enter your back door?

What feels like seconds later I see movement in a window and see her peek her head through the blinds. Her face lights up and she disappears from sight. What feels like an instant later, the same door I fled from off the dining room flies open. She's wearing a tight light blue tank top and black leggings that go down to just above her knees. She gestures for me to come in and turns to run back into the house. I get a fleeting glimpse of her ass, looking amazing in those shorts, as she disappears into the house. I approach and enter, sliding the door closed behind me.

I walk to the edge of the kitchen where the entry way, hallway and living room all intersect. I see the leggings and tank top tossed out of a room towards the end of the hall, landing on the floor. I step into the hallway and pause, hearing the Portishead turned up louder. I pause for a few more seconds and feel a vibration in my pocket. I pull out my phone and see a text from Makayla.

Makayla: What are you waiting for?

Before I can even think, my feet carry me down the hall and through the door from which the clothing flew earlier. As I turn the corner into the room I see her laying across the width of the bed, feet flat and legs spread with the look of excitement on her face and one hand's fingertips rubbing fast circles against her clit. My body automatically goes on autopilot as I observe myself walk across the room, get down on my knees and start licking up and down her lips as she continues rubbing her clit.

Descent . Hum of Nerves

Sitting on the edge of Makayla's bed, whole body tired but relaxed, I pick up my phone and look at the time. Fuck, it's later than I thought. I knew it was getting dark but I didn't know it was almost 9pm. I see I have unread texts and decide to open them while Makayla is in the bathroom.

Galen: Are you ever getting off work?

Jean: It's getting busy here and I have a couple people I want to introduce you to. Get back here!

Galen: Are you ever getting off work?

Michael: I like when I get to a party you are at, but you aren't.

Jean: We called your work young man. Where are you sonny boy!

Galen: You called in! We're grounding you. Fifty shots to get ungrounded. By morning.

Natalie: Not coming to the party tonight, meeting Marat for dinner and... Hope you have fun! Thanks for letting me vent!

Marat? Is that the Russian dude's name? Or is that the Russian guy's friend's name? I don't want to ask. I should have known these guys' names months ago. Fuck.

I guess I did say I would be back shortly after work, and dropping home. Well don't I feel like a dick. I don't think I really planned on spending this much time with Makayla. I guess too many hour or two visits with people in the past left me with low expectations.

"Thank you," I hear while simultaneously being jerked around by her plopping down on the bed between myself and the wall.

"Want to come to Galen's with me?" I ask without thinking, feeling obligated somehow.

"No, I'm surprised I made it to the bathroom and back so easily," she says almost breathlessly. "I need to sleep. I have to be at work just before 5."

"Alright," I say. I feel awkward. I mean, I don't mind showing up and fucking all evening and leaving. But Jesus, I don't usually feel this completely satisfied after. I know it's not love or even really lust I am filled with. I recognize it as simple satisfaction. Maybe not simple. Maybe deep, pure satisfaction. But still, not love or anything in that arena. It just feels damn good.

I look at her and begin to open my mouth to speak, then realize she's already sound asleep. I let out a slow, deep sigh. I stand up and walk across the room to shut off the lamp I don't even recall being turned on. Looking at the dresser on the far side of the room from the mirror we

used to watch ourselves in various positions, I briefly inspect everything that got knocked on the floor. Nothing looks broken as I shut off the lamp. I wait a few seconds to allow my eyes time to adjust to the dimming light coming in from outside.

I decide to go take a shower in her master bathroom. I figure I'm probably going to be up all night and don't want to stink of several hours of sweaty sex. Once out I go back and check on Makayla and see an arm hanging off the bed, still fully asleep.

Out of habit I walk to the back door and close it before locking it. I then lock the front door and close it behind me as I leave. I check it one last time to make sure it's locked. Locked. I walk down through the yard to the sidewalk and follow it all the way back to my car.

I inspect the spookmobile carefully before unlocking and entering it. The tires look fine, nothing seems to be on the ground that could puncture the tires and I don't see any scratches or damage. I do however notice a piece of paper under the windshield wiper.

"This car looks amazing. It brought in a lot of customers that just asked about it. So we didn't call to have it towed," the note reads. That's pretty cool. A feeling of accomplishment washes over me. And then a feeling of awkwardness, probably from the fact I really did nothing but attempted to hide my car in plain sight.

I get in the car and thumb through my phone, looking for what to listen to on the drive across town to Jean's. Nine Inch Nails, The Fragile? Done. I skip directly to The Way Out is Through on the first track of the disc Right. I slowly pull out of the parking lot and head down North Broadway in the direction of Jean's house.

The crescendo of the song washes through me and I am overcome by a sudden wave of depression. I feel tears well up in my eyes and pull into the Super Saver parking lot. I drive through the strip mall on the side of the grocery store and head toward the back corner of the lot by Kirn. It's always quite dark and uninhabited back there.

I get the car turned off just as the piano at the end fades away into the next song. Into The Void begins and I begin crying heavily. I feel confusion as I pull my shirt up to wipe tears away even though they're still continuing. I feel utterly alone and feel like I'm on my way to be alone surrounded by people who I can never admit that I feel alone. Even when I'm in a crowd of people who outwardly show adoration or otherwise respect and admire me I feel absolutely alone.

I turn the stereo up louder as the Trent Reznor round of "Tried to save myself but myself keeps slipping" starts building. Deeper rising waves of anger and self-hate start pulsating upward towards the surface as the crying starts to die down. *There's no reason for me to feel like this,*

I just had a few hours of amazing sex and made her cum so much that, for a few minutes, I could hear her cum dripping off the side of the bed into a puddle on the floor.

I feel a sudden urge to get to Jean's as soon as possible so I don't have to leave again for a few days. That way I can pummel my brain constantly with various levels of alcohol and weed. *I might actually start out with weed - it has been a good while and I could use calmed down.*

As I begin to reach my hand up to turn the car on I am shocked by a sudden visual assault of flashing lights. I freeze in place as I see a shadow silhouetted by the lights approaching my car. I make out a police officer through my tears, approaching the driver's window of the car. I wipe my face off as well as I can and turn the radio down and roll down the window.

"Everything alright?" the taller than the silhouette revealed officer asks. He looks like he's old enough to have been on the force for a couple decades though I can't remember ever seeing him around town.

"Yes, just having a bit of a bad evening," I respond in a voice that sounds like stepped-on death.

"Well there was a disturbance here earlier and I am keeping an eye on the parking lot," the officer informs me.

"It wasn't my Nails, was it?" I ask, voice sounding a little better.

"Your what?" he asks again, leaning forward a little more and peering into the car.

"Nine Inch Nails, hopefully my music wasn't too loud," I elaborate.

"Oh, no, it's fine. I did hear it and that's why I came over here. I wanted to see why someone was parked in the shadows. It wasn't loud enough to cause any concerns over loudness," he explains.

"Thanks, and I hope your night goes smoothly," I say with a nod, hoping that's all and he leaves me alone again.

"Have a good night," he says while raising a hand and walking away.

That wasn't too bad. I reach up and turn down the radio a bit. I keep an eye on the officer as he walks back towards his car. He enters it and turns the lights off before backing away towards the front of the store.

I decide that the next few days will not be spent inside my head but outside it as much as possible. *Maybe I'll make it through and everything will be fine for a while.*

The Mark Has Been Made begins as I begin the drive to Jean's. I pull out onto the street and feel a rush of tears rising again. I do not feel like parking every half a block and crying is going to benefit me at all. I keep driving and force the tears to stay back. They well up in my eyes and occasionally roll down my cheek, over my jaw and down my neck.

I manage to succeed in simultaneously holding back tears and arriving at Jean's house. There are quite a lot of cars lining the street at her house and I am forced to park down the hill on a neighboring street and walking up to her house. It bothers me leaving the spookmobile that far out of earshot. From what I recall of the plans for the next twelve hours, I won't be able to hear anything outside anyway.

I am a few houses away from theirs walking down the sidewalk and can hear the bass from their party. For a moment I wonder if it's going to be too loud but recall the neighbors for several houses in any direction are either also partiers, are very old or not home often enough to care. *Shit, this could be the perfect storm for getting out of my head for several solid days. Considering the full body feeling of impending doom which reminds me of the shakes I get which can't be explained moments before something terrible happens.. I welcome this possibility.*

I notice myself walking at almost a jog in anticipation of this possibility, now turning up the sidewalk to the open front door.

Stepping onto Jean's porch I nod in acknowledgment of the people on the porch. One tall fellow raises his cup in hello as the others briefly make eye contact and nothing more. I enter the house and see a lot of people standing around by the window in the family room and sitting around the dining room table. Everyone is talking loudly to be heard over the other voices and the loud music.

I also see people standing around the kitchen and catch glimpses of multiple people outside on the back porch around the pool. I notice a tiny girl standing by herself against the wall in the room at the edge of the dining room and family room. She is gazing over the people around the table through the sliding door. I can hear the sound of the ice scoop in the freezer as I walk into the hallway as I advance towards the living room. As I pass the closed bathroom door I hear urination and walk around the couple people waiting in line outside.

Passing the master bedroom I see a huge pile of purses and jackets on the bed. Didn't think it was cool enough outside for jackets but I do live in the Midwest, after all. Glancing into Jean's room I see two people standing near the doorway and the shape of a couple people on the bed wrapped around each other.

Entering the living room I see a lot of people dancing in the larger side between the hallway entry and the door to the porch. Several people are standing and talking in front of the room by the forward windows. I notice the group dancing is mostly comprised of females and the group talking is mostly comprised of males.

I want to go outside without having to weave through dancing people so I turn and return down the hallway. As I turn around I almost run

head first into a group of three girls who must have entered behind me down the hall.

"I'm sorry," I say loudly as I swiftly move toward the side of the hall to not crash into them.

"It's okay James," the one in front says. I freeze up for a moment against the wall as I don't know these three. At least, I don't remember them.

"Cool," I say starting to walk down the hall. As I dart away I realize the middle girl was beginning to open her mouth to speak. I feel a little shitty for a moment for not noticing it earlier. I decide it's high time to hit the kitchen for drinks before my emotions try coming up in front of everyone.

I glance back down the hallway and see all three looking at me while talking amongst themselves as I turn the corner into the kitchen. A small break in the people standing around exists in front of the cupboard where I recall seeing Galen put backup bottles of liquor intended to replace the ones in the freezer should they run out. I walk through the people and retrieve a room temperature bottle of Jack Daniels Honey.

I stand up and reevaluate the room and notice nothing much has changed but the girl alone on the wall is now looking at the ground in front of her, noticeably irritated. I look at the people around the table and nobody seems to be paying mind to her. I see an older gentleman by the freezer who also looks irritated but a couple people around him seem to be keeping him occupied in conversation.

I glance out the kitchen window and see Galen standing with a dude he worked with at a hotel whom we used to play risk with. I hurry out through the people and onto the porch. Once out the door I see Jean in the grass with a score of her friends looking very concerned. Approaching Galen and Brandon I see Jean spot me and begin her approach.

"Sup, gentlemen," I say before realizing Galen was mid-sentence.

"Oh, hey man," Galen says after breaking his previous sentence while Brandon nods to me in acknowledgment.

"Quiet night, as expected," I say in a sarcastic and almost questioning tone.

"Barely anybody showed," Brandon states dryly.

"I'm surprised the outside lights are even on," Galen says. He starts to say another word as Jean causes him to be interrupted again.

"James you won't," she begins in a tone of panic.

"No, no." I say holding a finger up and interrupting her strongly enough to stop her mid-sentence. "I don't care, this is a time for silencing the monsters," I say as she glares. She starts to open her mouth again to resume and I turn quickly, walking back to the dining room door.

I tune out her voice so I don't hear what she says and do well enough that I honestly only hear her voice tone and don't make out words. Once inside I slide the glass door closed as I hear her footsteps and voice shortly behind me get drowned out. I dart around the people near the table and through the family room before heading down the stairs to the basement. Several people are standing around the empty room between Galen's room, the garage and the downstairs bathroom. I navigate through them to a corner on the bathroom side and open my bottle.

I squeeze my eyes closed and throw the bottle back. I swallow multiple large amounts of Jack and feel like I phase out of reality for just a moment. Once I tip the bottle back down and screw the lid back on, I open my eyes. Jean stands before me looking even more panicked than seconds ago.

"Did you," she begins in a frantic voice. I raise my hand up and cover her mouth, sending her eyes from panic to a form of rage.

"Please," I say very softly. Her eyes shift from a form of rage to a mixture of anger and confusion. "Please leave whatever you are going to tell me until either it comes to me the hard way or until days from now. Whichever comes first."

I feel her mouth start to move a couple times during my sentences but hold it shut and don't stop speaking. Once I pull my hand off of her mouth, in a huffy voice she says "Fine."

"Thank you," I say in almost desperation. A glance of heavy annoyance flashes across her face as she turns around and walks away quickly. A couple people around the room are obviously listening as they flash glances in my direction out of the corner of their eyes but nobody turns to say anything. I pay little attention to this and unscrew the cap to drink more.

Screwing the cap back on I look down to see I have just drank a fourth of a fresh fifth of honey Jack. I look around the room to see nobody seems to be paying any attention to anything but their own conversations, save for a couple pulled out cell phones. I notice Galen's room is open so I walk over to it and find a couple people on his chair making out. They don't notice me, though.

I walk by them to the fridge by Galen's bed and open it, hoping to find a cold fifth inside. Sure enough, there is. It's only half full, but that's fine. I grip the bottle's neck to see if it's cold and indeed it is. I pull it out and rest the one I've been working on in its place. I close the fridge and notice the girl leaning back in the chair's eyes are fixed on me as the guy sucks on the center of her chest above her low neckline. I smile and nod to the girl as I walk out of the room.

Stopping just outside of the door I unscrew the cap and drink some more Jack. I realize this one isn't the honey variety but it is cold and does taste more delicious. Screwing the cap back on I realize an alcohol buzz is gently rising within me. While debating whether to return to the corner of this room to drink or head back up to talk with Galen, the trio from the hallway enters the room and walks to me.

"I'm friends with Tiffany," the girl who was in the center, now in the lead, states proudly. Tiffany... I instantly get a little uncomfortable recalling having warmed up her back door with an empty beer bottle.

"I'm sorry I walked off as you tried to talk," I blurt out, trying to brush off the needless guilt of it. I also feel the alcohol creeping up, thankfully, to a stronger degree.

"Not a problem, the music is loud," she assures me, looking over at her other two friends in a smile. The two friends give her a "Good luck" eye heavy smile as they turn and head back up the stairs.

"Glad it's cool," I say, getting uncomfortable as to what this conversation is going to entail. *Is this what Jean was frantically trying to warn me about? Did these three piss off that guy who was being consoled it looked like by the freezer? What did Tiffany tell them? Is this woman going to be the fuck or not to fuck choice of the evening? Am I about to get bitched out? Did they do something to the alone girl in the family room area?*

"So, you were the other guy?" she says.

"Sorry, I'm James, what was your name?" I ask, trying to possibly drive the conversation.

"I'm Lauren," she says with a huge smile while standing up a little straighter and pulling her shoulders back. Her seriously low cut shirt almost looks like a sleeved vest with how low it is but is obviously a form of blouse. Great body and cute face, long and thick brown hair that looks to have been straightened with very dark brown eyes. *Her posture change succeeded in the assumed attempt to bait me into checking out her body. Old trick but a good trick.*

"Nice to meet you Lauren," I say while reaching out to take hers. She raises her right hand up and I take it softly, leaning forward to kiss the back of her hand. A huge smirk spreads across her face and she shifts all of her weight onto one foot, moving her waist to the side. She laughs a little in a way I can't tell is happily embarrassed or awkward.

"I've never had someone actually do that in person before," she says in a whisper while beginning to blush.

"Yeah? I'm glad I did," I say while stopping afraid if I should comment on how soft her skin is.

"Why?" she asks, obviously taking note that I was going to say more.

“Very soft skin,” I say with a forced smile. Fuck, I hope that smile didn’t look creepy.

“Thank you,” she says, face blushing even darker.

“So, how is Tiffany?” I ask. *What the fuck? Is asking a question about something you’re trying to avoid the way to avoid it? Yeah James, that makes perfect fucking sense. Well done.*

“Her and Michael are out back drinking and talking,” she says, looking a little surprised for some reason. “She is determined to get him alone with her without having anybody else involved.”

My heart jumps into my throat and I start feeling the monsters rising inside once more. *Holy shit, was Tiffany angry about my involvement that night? What did she tell Lauren? Lauren. Remember this name. Lauren. Might end up being important later. Probably will. Fuck.*

“It’s okay, she got off hard and often with the two of you,” Lauren states. I stop my string of thoughts and look up from the floor I apparently locked eyes with and make eye contact with her.

“Yeah?” I ask, trying to keep my eyes from looking desperate for approval and comfort. She looks a little awkward now and forces a smile and nods.

“Yes. I just wanted to meet you because it was mad cool that you did that for your friend,” she concludes.

“Yeah, I often turn down the chance to get a gorgeous person off,” I say playfully with a more sarcastic tone than intended. She laughs what can only be interpreted as a genuine laugh and shifts her weight onto her other foot while putting her left hand on her hip and reaching out with her right hand to tap my arm, nodding her head.

“She told us you are funny,” she says as if thinking it out loud. Her laughter and smile fades a little as my smile increases.

“Nice to meet you,” I say reaching my right hand out to touch the elbow on her folded arm before darting into Galen’s room. I open his closet and grab things to put on – hoping they fit. Leaving the room with fresh clothes in hand, luckily the downstairs bathroom is unoccupied. On my way through the center room I pass a confused and slightly irritated looking Lauren. “I’m sorry, I need to shower something fierce,” I blurt out as I disappear into the bathroom behind the now closed door.

I feel waves of depression rising up again as I throw the shower on. I strip out of my sweaty, tear moistened, cum smelling clothes and jump into the shower before it’s even close to warm. I sob quietly and stand motionless in the shower for what feels like an eternity until it subsides. After several rounds of people knocking on the door, I quickly wash myself up and jump out.

As I get myself dried off with a towel I soon temporarily stash under the sink with my dirty clothes, pressed into the corner near the

toilet, I throw on the pants and shirt I grabbed out of Galen's closet. Thankfully they fit just fine and in realizing I grabbed no socks or underwear. I reach under the sink and pull the socks and underwear out from the wadded up stash. I smell the underwear briefly and twitch. *No, no not clean at all fuck, that gamble was bad.* I toss it back into the pile and smell the socks. Oddly enough, they smell quite clean. I throw them on and pull the pants back up. I look in the mirror to check my hair. After a few run-throughs with my fingers, it's parted and decent enough. I know it'll be fine once it finishes drying, so I'm not worried about it.

Opening the door I almost walk straight into a guy standing, staring off into space with an angry expression on his face.

"About fucking time," he mutters as he pushes past me into the bathroom. I stop and stand for a moment as the door closes. Various people are standing around now in the center room downstairs. Nobody seems to have noticed the guy who just entered the bathroom. Nobody notices me, for that matter. I walk into Galen's room and open his freezer, grabbing the half full bottle of jack. I notice that the girl who was kissing the guy's chest is now riding him hard, making the chair creak with each descent. I laugh and head out into the central room, then up the stairs.

Where am I going? I continue up the stairs, gripping my cold bottle of Jack tightly. At the top of the steps I glance down the hallway and see the group of people dancing can now be seen from here. I look into the kitchen and then to the family room to see nothing much has changed here, including the girl standing grim faced against the wall. Her tiny frame, smaller than anybody else in my field of vision, sharply catches my attention.

I find my feet walking straight towards her. She looks up, seeing me approach, and her long beautiful face slowly changes from grim to more of a facial glare. My feet take me past her and to the sliding glass door which is now reopened along with the screen. I walk through the door and see Galen and Brandon are now on the opposite side of the pool standing with Jean and Melissa. I walk down the porch and stand beside them.

"But he should be warned, you should have just yelled and told him," Galen says to Jean before realizing I have stopped beside them.

"Tell him," Jean demands, raising a finger to point at me while looking at Galen, clearly panicked.

"I really want to let it hit me without warning, or not at all," I blurt out while turning and walking quickly back the way I came. I walk into the dining room quickly and as I enter the family room realize the tiny girl is watching me approach.

"Apologies," I hear in a soft voice while I start to turn, intending to go down the hallway.

Descent . Approach Isolation

“No need to apologize,” I say to the increasingly adorable looking girl who is now forcing a smile. She looks about five two and is wearing some sort of form fitting dark gray cloth leggings that look like they’re held together just above the knees with threaded green string. She’s wearing a low cut black tank top and her hair is in loose pigtails that go down to the middle of her shoulder blades.

“I shouldn’t have looked at you so rudely,” she says in an ever softer, almost sad sounding voice.

“It’s understandable,” I assure her. “I was rocketing up the stairs, and after pausing, started quickly in your direction. I probably didn’t have a very pleasant facial expression either. I tend to always look pissed when I’m not.” Her forced smile seems to morph into a real smile as she laughs softly, still looking absurdly sad in her eyes.

“I don’t mean to laugh at you,” she says, laugh falling off of her face and returning to a more stern, focused expression.

“Stop apologizing!” I demand with a smile.

She lowers her head in a sheepish smile and puts her hands behind her, leaning back against the wall. “Thanks, I’ve had a long day,” she says.

“Is that why you’re by yourself and look rather unhappy? I noticed and was coming to investigate the first time I passed you by and went outside,” I think aloud without it passing through any filters.

“I actually came with someone,” she confesses, still looking downward. “She disappeared into a bedroom downstairs with a guy she met here about an hour ago and I don’t know anybody else here.”

“I’m James,” I say, reaching my right hand out and standing up straight. I put my left hand which is holding the bottle up behind my back and smile broadly. She slowly looks up with a half grin, eyes lightening up a little. She pulls her right hand out from behind her back and shakes mine.

“I’m Isobel,” she says gripping my hand tightly and shaking it a few more times before quickly returning her hand behind her back.

“Are you drinking?” I ask, pulling my Jack out from behind my back and lifting it up like a toast.

“I was planning on it before I was left alone,” she says, voice going soft again and sounding saddened.

“May I fetch you something?” I ask, prepared to set mine down

next to her and run to prepare her something. After I ask her right hand comes out from behind her again and she takes the bottle from me, unscrewing it with her pointer finger and thumb while holding it against her palm with her other 3 fingers. She flips the lid between her pointer and ring finger as she tips the bottle up, drinking a few swallows. She goes to flip the lid back over and barely misses. I luckily throw my left hand out to catch the falling lid and wink at her.

“I’m a ninja, by the way,” I say with a mischievous grin while screwing the lid on quickly while she holds it tightly. She hands it to me once I finish.

“Thanks,” she says as she smiles, eyes lit up happily for the first time I’ve seen.

“Glad to see a full smile,” I say, smiling in return. Her smile descends to a sheepish one as her gaze returns to the floor. “Want to go sit somewhere and drink with me while I drown the monsters?”

“Drown the monsters?” she asks, smile exploding back onto her face with a raised eyebrow.

“I’ll explain after you let me pick your head,” I say with a smirk that I’m sure looks more arrogant than I ever want to look.

“Deal,” she says standing up straight and looking like she’s ready to follow my lead. *Shit, where to walk?* I rifle through every place to sit or stand in my head from having been around the house a bit and realize the garage door was shut from the inside and outside, leading me to assume that’s probably where they stashed some of the furniture I didn’t see present in the living room or in the family room.

“Come with me,” I say, reaching my hand out. She takes mine and I lead her at a reasonably fast pace through the family room, down the stairs to the landing at the front door where she stops.

“I really don’t want to go downstairs,” she says.

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep you from the room your friend went to in case they’re still in there,” I say, knowing they were being quiet. I figure out a way to get us into the garage. “Go stand in front of the garage door outside and I’ll go to it from inside and open it. It’ll be quiet there.”

“Done,” she says, face lighting up like she’s about to go on an adventure. I smile in reaction thinking how much of an adventure going to a garage with crap in it might be.

I walk down the stairs as she goes out the front door. I cut through the people in the middle room downstairs and go through the door into the garage. I turn the light on and sure enough, no cars in the

garage and a bunch of furniture and boxes. I walk over to the pull release for the door to pull it off the automated chain, then walk over to manually open it.

“You’re fast,” she says with a playful smile. I smile in response and walk to the back of the garage and turn the workbench light on.

“Only when appropriate,” I say flirtatiously, smiling even wider. She tilts her head playfully, still smiling. “Do you want the door open or closed?” I ask.

“Closed,” she answers before I even finish the word closed. I nod and oblige her by closing the garage door.

“Did it manually so the whole house didn’t hear and feel the machine pulling it open and draw attention to us. I’m kind of avoiding whatever it is people are trying to warn me about tonight,” I explain, realizing I’m delivering unrequested information.

“It’s fine,” she says, now standing in front of me facing the workbench. The light illuminates her stunning blue eyes in a way that silences me and puts me in what feels like a trance as I stare into them. She is also making eye contact with me. I am locked to the point I don’t notice her smile slowly getting bigger and bigger into a quite large grin. Her eyes move up to my hair. “I thought about swimming, too. I was just going to get drunk and swim in my underwear. I saw others doing that already so nobody would care if I did it.”

“Oh, I took a quick shower,” I respond before taking a big swig out of the Jack bottle.

“You must know the hosts extremely well,” she says with a small smirk.

“Yeah, we’ve been down for a bit. Now I’m going to say sorry. Your eyes are entrancing. Sorry if I stare” I say before shaking my head quickly from side to side, trying to literally shake it off of my mind. She laughs and leans her head to the side, shaking it slightly.

“No need to apologize,” she says comforting me. “But I can’t see your eyes very well, so I have yet to form an opinion.” I instinctively put my right hand on her waist and realize how soft the shirt she’s wearing is as I guide her into changing positions with me, putting her back against the workbench.

“There you go,” I say, face dropping from a smile into a very slight frown. Her face lights up with a slightly open mouthed smile and a series of shallow nods.

“Yeah, your eyes are an awesome shade of blue gray,” she says

with slightly deeper nods. “Where did your smile go?” she asks.

“Now I can’t clearly make out how amazing your eyes are,” I say in a pouty voice. Her facial expression changes to a “poor baby” look as she shrugs briefly. “I think I can fix this,” I say, turning around quickly and walking to the wall switch. I throw the switch and the two bulbs in the ceiling light up, flooding the room with pale yellow light. Unacceptable, as the light from the workbench is florescent white which I’m sure aided in making her beautiful eyes pop.

I turn those off and walk over to the electric door opener and flip the switch on it, activating the lights on the front and back of it. They are the same white florescent as the workbench and to my surprise, are quite bright. I whip around and see a playful and amused expression on her face as she leans more comfortably back against the workbench, now crossing one foot over the other.

“Beautiful,” I say, instinctively running my eyes from hers, down her body and back up.

“Are you going to just stand there and stare at me all night or let me have some more jack?” she says animatedly. She talks with her hands, though only her right hand was active during the previous sentence. Her facial expressions are quite animated. Her face has so many laugh, smile and frown lines between different expressions that go away entirely, leaving a completely smooth face when idling. It’s exciting to observe.

“Why not do both?” I ask, walking back over to her and passing the bottle of Jack. She takes it, holding it in her right hand and uses her left hand to unscrew the lid this time. She takes several swigs out of it and hands it to me. I take several swigs and hand it back so she can put the lid on.

“Does your buddy ditch you very often?” I ask, bringing the subject back to when it was much louder and we were upstairs.

She sighs and responds “Yes, every time we go somewhere. Though usually I am at least introduced to a few people so I’m not alone and disappointed.”

“Have you ever ditched her, turning the table?” I ask as she hands the bottle back to me, lid tightly secured.

“No, but I should” she says. “She does it to me often enough. Not much of a story beyond that. What about these monsters of yours?”

“Right to it, eh?” I ask, unscrewing the jack and taking a few large drinks. She reaches out and takes it from me before I can put the lid back

on and throws it back a little further than before. While I see her throat swallowing drink after drink my eyes travel down her body again. Neck is so long and elegant. Her collarbone and shoulders are fucking perfect. My mouth starts watering like crazy. I have to swallow saliva as my eyes travel down the sides of her body, analyzing her surprisingly curvy body for how tiny she is. She can't weigh more than 100 pounds. I could be off, but I doubt by much.

"Well?" she says, interrupting my eye's journey past her hips and to her thighs. I look up and see her high cheekbones in a full grin and eyebrows up in amusement.

"Oh, right. Well, my brain is a dick and I've had a rough last few weeks and one way I can calm my brain down is to drown everybody up there with liquor," I respond, taking the bottle back from her and drinking the last sixth or so of it.

"Ahh," she says, grinning still but not quite as broadly. Still leaning back against the workbench she crosses her arms and says "You're cute."

"And out of alcohol, any requests?" I respond, walking over to the 55 gallon trash can and placing the bottle into it quietly.

"Tequila," she says, uncrossing her arms and leaning back against the workbench, resting on her elbows. My eyes travel down to her chest, which is sexy as hell for how absolutely miniature she is.

"Dangerous, are you sure?" I ask with a smirk. Her right eyebrow goes up and she smiles, nodding in confirmation.

I open the door into the house and quickly navigate through the people still in the middle room, into Galen's room to his fridge and open it. I carefully feel around inside it and recognize the tequila bottle. I lift it a little and since it feels full, take it. Turning around to leave I realize the two people on the chair aren't there anymore.

Back in the garage I close the door carefully, seemingly not drawing any attention to myself in my little trek.

"That too, was fast," she says, nodding and now running her eyes down me. I wait for her to finish, standing by the door, and hold an eyebrow raised with a large grin until she notices. When she does she laughs quietly and says "Hey, I had to see, too."

"My view is better," I say, walking to the workbench and leaning against it next to her. "The bedroom downstairs wasn't occupied when I grabbed this out of the fridge there."

"Oh?" she says, eyebrow going up and gaze moving from my eyes to staring blankly into the garage while smiling.

“I didn’t see her in the middle room downstairs, either,” I think aloud. “Don’t know if you want to go see if you can find her in case she gets worried.” She steps forward a couple paces and pulls a cell phone out of the back pocket of her jeans.

The moment she stepped forward my eyes were on the back of her neck visible between her loose pigtails. Her dirty blonde colored hair hanging midway down her shoulder blades ends right above where the back of her tank top begins just below her shoulder blades across her back. The tank top is thin and form fitting against her perfectly shaped body - even for how tiny she is. Her ass looks like the result of extensive yoga and strong physical exercise.

“How do you keep in shape?” I hear myself ask before my facial expression changes to surprise. Where the fuck are you, filter?

“Why do you ask?” she asks, leaning back again with the return of her large half smile smirk.

“Oh, you know, perfection is usually shaped and not gifted,” I blurt out, still not having an active filter I can recognize.

“You are too sweet,” she says with a light laugh. “I’m glad my friend ditched out on me.”

“I am too,” I say, leaning sideways to gently bump her shoulder with my shoulder. “I figure yoga and something involving a lot of aerobic activity.”

“Lately the only strenuous activity I’ve been taking part in is parsing trigonometry,” she says, eyes sinking and body starting to slouch a bit.

“And here I’ve just been parsing your geometric properties,” I mumble, throat tensing up on the last word in fear I said too much. As I ponder my possible mistakes in the conversation so far I realize her posture has perked up and she is now looking at me with a massive smile and bright lit up eyes.

“You have been exposed to the maths?” she asks with an inquisitive and rightfully skeptical gaze of anticipation.

“You’re going to laugh at me,” I respond feeling as if I’m about to be ridiculed and terrified this will be the garage clearing segment of conversation.

“I promise I won’t,” she states while getting comfortable against the workbench, the skeptical inquisitive look gains more focus.

“I crash coursed calculus so I could have a menial understanding to help friends try to figure out how to make warp drive theory work with

today's technology," I reply in a soft and vulnerable monotone voice. Her eyebrows slowly rise as we travel through my explanation together. I eye lock to the garage floor while I wait for her next words.

"That's adorable!" she squeaks while smiling and eyes squinting in amusement.

"I think the most important thing I learned was that I'm \sin^2x and you're \cos^2x , and together we are 1," I recite from memory. She leans forward and covers her face with both hands, laughing heartily. "What?" I ask, wondering if I placed something wrong.

"The cheesy MIT pickup line? That's not something I expected to hear tonight!" she says while catching her breath. "How are we going to drink tequila without salt and lime wedges?" she asks, putting a hand on her hip and raising an eyebrow adorably.

"Oh, you're right, hold on," I say seconds before disappearing back into the house. The middle room downstairs is now empty. Which now that I think about it, I really need to learn what they call it so I don't just keep thinking of it as the middle room. I fire up the stairs and see a solid wall of people dancing in the living room and it looks like everybody who was in the middle room now standing and talking in the family room. I see nobody I recognize as I open the fridge and open the crisper to find only two limes. Fuck. The tray of pre-cut limes disappeared.

I grab one of the limes and close the crisper and the fridge. I open the cupboard to the left of the fridge where we have stored several fresh containers of margarita salt. Three containers remain so I grab one. I figure margarita salt will be better than table salt because it has a better flavor. I start to leave the kitchen and realize I don't have a knife or anything clean to cut it on. I twist around quickly and pull a knife out of the drawer and grab a saucer out of the cupboard before firing off down the stairs with my pillaged goods.

Descent . Drown the Monsters

On the way to the garage I peek my head in Galen's room and see it's fully empty, so I shut his door so I have more chances of having a reasonably sure bet for a place to crash. I'm sure the party upstairs is going to go on well past dawn and I haven't had much sleep in what feels like days. Opening the door to the garage I see Isobel leaning against the workbench gently smiling at her phone and shaking her head.

"What?" I ask, instantly realizing I'm being nosy.

"Friend texted me to ask where I was and I told her I went home with Tarren," she answers with a chuckle. "Now she's walking to her car and leaving," she concludes.

"You're evil," I say with a playful smile.

"Never doubt a woman's ability for revenge," she states in a monotone voice with a menacing smile.

I arrange the plate, salt, lime and knife on the table next to where the bottle of tequila is sitting. Without a moment's hesitation Isobel picks up the bottle and unscrews the lid taking a swig.

"Definitely needs salt and lime, yeah?" I say as her face puckers up intensely.

"Absolutely," she agrees before taking a deep breath in, leaning her head forward and looking at me through some loose strands of hair.

I take the knife and carefully cut the lime into 4 quarters, then wedge the quarters off into a 24 wedges.

"Think that'll work out?" I ask. Without words she nods and licks the skin between her thumb and pointer finger. She dabs some salt on it, licks the salt off, takes a big shot and places a wedge in her mouth, eyes squinting a lot less than her last drink.

I smile and follow her lead, applying and licking the salt off my hand, taking a few swigs and sticking a wedge in my mouth to suck the juice out of.

"You smile," she blurts out, facial expression jumping to that of thinking, then pauses.

"That sounded like a question, go on," I say, curious about where she's going.

"But your eyes haven't smiled once all night," Isobel states carefully.

"Well," I say, drinking a few more swigs of tequila without the process before putting the bottle back on the table. "That's why I'm

drinking.”

“Thanks for stopping to talk to me, really,” she says with a comforting smile and small nods of her head. “It means a lot, I was feeling entirely abandoned and truly uncomfortable.”

“I could tell,” I assure her, as she does the tequila shot process without the shot glass.

“Are you always nice to strangers?” she asks, sounding slightly vulnerable.

“Yes, even to my own peril,” I say in all honesty.

“Well, I hope they showed appreciation as well,” she says while moving the bottle a little towards me on the table.

“Not very often but I don’t expect thanks for my impulsive actions,” I say, trying to measure my balance while taking into account fatigue, the energy spent at Makayla’s house and holy shit I haven’t eaten since Grandpa’s house.

“Well I’ll help you smile,” she says, picking up the a lime wedge and handing it to me. “Have you ever done a shiver shot?”

“Certainly,” I respond without hesitation. My eyes travel on autopilot down her jaw line, neck, body and realize one of her legs are bent with a knee almost touching mine. Shit, she’s digging me? I just wanted to get away from people and I found one. She’s intensely cute though, fuck.

“Here,” she says, putting the lime in my mouth peel first. “Hold steady,” she instructs before licking her fingers and rubbing the saliva on my neck. She uses a couple fingers to apply some margarita salt to my neck and quickly leans forward, sucking the salt off slowly over the period of a dozen seconds. Then she stands up, takes a couple swigs of the tequila, slams it on the workbench and returns forward. Her lips meet mine and she kisses me a little, wedge disappearing into her mouth. She kisses me hard and I don’t feel where her hands are before she leans back and stands up straight, wedge now bit down on with the peel on the outside of her lips.

“Fuck,” I say, clearly feeling the alcohol and a half chub brewing in my pants. Well, that was a little late noticing she’s digging you big guy. Way to be on the ball.

“Your turn,” she says while standing with her hands clasped behind her, resting on the small of her back.

Shifting to auto pilot I lean forward, lick from the lowermost bare part of her chest between the tops of her breasts up to just above the

center of her collarbone, and apply some salt up the length of the moisture. I then take the tequila bottle in my left hand while leaning over and kissing and licking my way up the path I just created. I stand up and take a huge few gulps of tequila as I realize I forgot the lime wedge. Once I go to put the bottle on the workbench after the drinks I see a fresh wedge is in her mouth, fruit side out. I lean forward and bite the wedge out of her mouth.

Isobel looks slightly disappointed as I put a hand on the workbench and slowly lower myself to sitting Indian style on the floor.

“Are you alright?” she asks, facial expression shifting from disappointment to concern.

“I am but I have realized I am heavily drinking on an empty stomach and very little sleep,” I reply, debating to myself if I should go raid the kitchen for some food which I don’t know even exists.

“My turn,” she says, skipping towards the door into the house. The door opens and closes behind her.

Shit. My dick hurts a little still from earlier and I could pass out in any second. Where is she going? Does she know something I don’t? I really need to retire into Galen’s room and go to sleep as soon as she gets back.

The door into the house opens and Isobel enters carrying a loaf of bread, a package of some sort of sliced meat and a whip cream can. She smiles and does a strange little dance before closing the door behind her and running over to me. She sits in front of me and grabs the saucer off of the workbench.

She slides the remaining wedges to the edge and sets a piece of bread diagonally against it. She then grabs some meat and piles it on the bread carefully while tilting the saucer as to balance everything. She adds another piece of bread and some more meat before placing a third piece of bread on top. Then she laughs, presents me the sandwich without spilling any wedges and sprays a lot of whip cream into her mouth, swallowing it with a smile.

“Shit, I didn’t even have to say make me a Sammy,” I say with a wry grin. She lunges forward and I jump, almost dropping said sandwich. She reaches up with both hands and pinches both of my cheeks.

“Aren’t you cute! Aren’t you cute!” she repeats with a mischievous smile on her face.

“Yes, yes I am,” I say while forcing a smile as she settles back into a sitting position across from me. I take a bite from the sandwich and

realize the meat is turkey and it actually tastes pretty good. "You're going to have to excuse me," I slightly beg of her before pigging out on the sandwich.

"It's fine," she says before spraying more whip cream in her mouth and then standing up with the plate of wedges, placing it back on the workbench.

Chewing on too many bites of sandwich at a time I look up and am face level with her ass as she turns to take another shot with salt and lime. Damn that's a supreme ass. I really can't break my stare.

"That's fine," I say, yet another thing getting out of my mouth without being analyzed by the filter.

"What?" she says, sitting down and smiling at me. She leans her head back and sprays more whip cream in her mouth.

"Want some meat?" I ask while gesturing at the package sitting to the side of us.

"I actually do," she says with the return of her mischievous smile, eyes dropping from mine and pointing directly at my crotch.

"My eyes are up here!" I state while breaking into uncomfortable laughter. Why am I uncomfortable? Because I'm certain I would black out as we were getting naked? Fuck, I should have just let Jean tell me whatever it was she was trying to tell me and deal with drama instead of drinking.

"But the meat is down there!" she says while now pointing at it as well. She laughs and I feel my laugh becoming more genuine than uncomfortable.

"Want to continue drinking in a bedroom so if I pass out it's in a bed instead of on cold concrete?" I ask, feeling the buzz of fatigue joining the wavering buzz of alcohol.

"Yeah, can I sleep too and maybe get a ride tomorrow?" she asks, caulking her head and raising her eyebrows, pouting out her lips a little.

"Sure, I can do that for you," I say getting up to my feet with less of a problem than I expected. She stands up with me and grabs the saucer, and whip cream as I grab the tequila and salt. We turn around and walk at a surprisingly to my tired ass pace back into the middle room. She closes the door to the garage behind me as I note the door to Galen's room is still closed.

"Alright, where to?" she asks, smile of satisfaction on her face.

I carefully open the door to Galen's room and see it is empty. I quickly walk over and sit on the bed. Isobel shuts the door behind her and

turns the light on. She sets the whip cream can by the head of the bed on the floor and puts the saucer of wedges on the bed next to me.

"To think I was planning on reading tonight," Isobel says with a smile. She does another shot with salt, tequila and lime.

"I was all about partying with as many people and alcohols as I could get my hands on," I state. I think about that for a moment then realize how rude that must sound. "No, wait, it didn't get interrupted by you. The moment I got here a couple friends approached me immediately like they had bad news of some sort. I cut them off and they tried a couple more times, so I'm really glad you came out and offered me an escape of sorts," I elaborate, trying to comfort any possible negative reaction my previous plans may have triggered.

"I was about to say, sorry to get in the way of your good time! Jesus!" she says in a higher octave before laughing happily.

"Sorry, it sounded perfectly fine until it came out of my mouth," I say, feeling relieved it didn't make her feel like she was getting in my way of a good time. "You've been more entertaining to talk to than I probably would have had in best circumstances being a dumb ass and watching other people act ridiculous," I add, thinking out loud more than anything.

"So, how long ago did you name the ones in your head monsters?" Isobel asks, putting a hand on my shoulder. A feeling of slight distress starts radiating from my chest and disappointment from my stomach against the comfort from my shoulder. *I guess I could talk to her about this. I would really rather just flirt and drink, though.*

"Few years ago. I had a girlfriend break up with me and go full silent out of nowhere. A psycho friend of hers was the way I gained confirmation that it was over and riddled with insults. So the month or two it took getting over that was where the Monsters were born," I begin.

"Why did she break up with you?" she asks with a concerned face.

"She was fucking somebody else and I wasn't doing very well with finding work I could stick with," I reply. I stand up and walk to the fridge and pull out a full fifth of three olives vodka. I open it and drink a good inch out of it before walking back over and sitting on the bed next to Isobel again.

"That figures," she says with a look of slight guilt on her face.

"Done that yourself?" I ask, guessing the cause of that slight guilty expression.

"Yes. Not having a job just isn't sexy, I'm sorry," she says in an almost confessional sounding voice. "No offense if you don't have one."

"I do, and none taken," I add. "Just a bit more on the monsters, to get it all out. When the huge amount of fallout covered my mind after my 3rd girlfriend and I broke up, the monsters seemed to really take on their own identities as far as feeling like there are multiple specific sources of self-hate and ridicule in my head. I'm not actually crazy, I swear."

"There are multiple? And how long did it take to get over her?" she asks, looking genuinely interested and putting emphasis on 'are.'

"Oh I'm not over her," I say as I take the lid off the vodka and drink another inch of it, gulp after gulp. I screw the lid back on and continue the sentence. "And yes, there are definitely still multiple in my head it feels like. I've taken to referring to it as the war going on in my head. Feels like countless oppositional forces vs. my own panel."

"Panel?" she asks, looking more curious than ever. Slightly amused, even.

"Yes, I hear I'm not alone, too," I say feeling amused now, myself. "Ever have a thought or reaction to something and immediately respond to it again in your head as if from a different point of view? Example being where you would say something is a good idea then immediately interrupt yourself with 'no, no it's not, and you're stupid.' Then, perhaps, have a small argument in your head debating the pros and cons of said idea?"

Half way through the explanation her smile grew into small bursts of snickering and once I got done she was giggling solidly. I make eye contact with her and smile, waiting for her to finish laughing.

"Sorry, I do that all the time and always wonder if it's crazy so I've never told anyone," she confides in me as her hand returns to my shoulder. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have laughed."

"It's cool. I dished. You never did say how you stay in such good shape - I'm always looking for a workout plan I can actually stick with for more than a week," I say, still curious how she got her muscles formed in that way.

"I dance. For fun, for ballet, in groups, at the gym. It gets pretty intense between two different practice cycles at once and rocking out to music at home," she says, corner of her mouth slowly rising to a grin as she talks. *I wonder if she is grinning because my eyes keep peeking down at her body or if she ... who am i kidding, she's caught me checking her body out variously since i first noticed it in the garage.*

"Shit, I can't dance!" I blurt out before laughing. I go to unscrew the vodka again and she moves her hand from my shoulder to the hand above the bottle.

“Here, do a shiver shot,” she insists while grabbing some salt between her fingers and rubbing it up the side of her neck. She takes a lime and carefully bites the peel side and raises an eyebrow.

“Yes ma’am,” I agree while putting down the bottle of vodka and picking up the bottle of tequila. I make eye contact with her for a minute and at that second all the nerves and depression inside melts away. *Those eyes. Those eyes are beautiful.* The eyebrow lowers as the other one raises. Then from that back to the other. A smile breaks across her face as I lean forward, carefully running my tongue from the base of her neck up to the bottom of her jaw. I went a little further before and after where the salt was because, Jesus she’s beautiful.

I lean back, throw a few swigs of tequila back and lean forward to get the lime. As I lean forward I feel butterflies and fatigue playing with my brain. My lips touch hers briefly as my teeth clench the lime wedge. I lean back to a straight sitting position as I suck the lime out, eyes now closed. The world starts getting a little wobbly and the butterflies fade.

“My turn,” she says, leaning forward to lash my neck with her tongue briefly. She pinches some salt and spreads it on my neck. I open my eyes and look over to see her picking up one of the last few lime wedges. Her mouth is open a little and eyes look focused. She holds the lime up and her whole face erupts into a huge smile, head slightly tilted, eyes wide and eyebrows up. I open my mouth and she positions it peel first in my mouth where I hold it gently with my teeth.

Isobel leans forward, throwing her arms around me and covering the entire side of my neck with her lips around where the salt is. I feel her tongue working all the salt off of my neck as she sucks on it for a second. She breaks the lip lock on my neck and sits up straight for a second bumping her breasts into my arm. She takes a few large drinks out of the tequila bottle and sets it on the floor. She leans forward and bites my upper lip as she pushes the lime wedge into her lower lip enough to hold it. She sits up again and sucks the juice out of the wedge.

“Thanks for the hand,” she says with a smile, putting the spent wedge off to the side of the saucer then moving it to the floor. *So.... are we done drinking? ... or? ...* She throws her arms back around me and resumes sucking on the side of my neck. I lean my head slowly to the side, opening up more of my neck. I reach to her with my left hand and brush my fingers just under the bottom of her tank top from her far left side all the way to her belly button. I hear a quiet moan of approval as the kissing on my neck intensifies.

Descent . Room World

"Like I would deny a beautiful woman's will to give me a shiver shot," I say in a whisper as my left hand goes a tiny bit further under her tank top, gripping her waist. *Fuck, her body is so firm. Can't just be because of how tiny she is. She's a lot more muscular than she even looks. Fuck, I'm tired.*

"Have you had enough?" she asks sounding a little winded.

"Alcohol or," I ask, trailing off and moving over a little to make eye contact with her. Her head is leaning forward a little and the half smile and locked eyes tell me she's not talking about alcohol. "I'm good on alcohol, probably more -"

My sentence was interrupted by her leaning forward and biting my upper lip gently. I close my eyes and grab her lower lip with my lips. I open them and see her eyes are wide open and eyebrows up with the look of triumph on her face.

"Is this going in the direction that I'm going to want condoms in arm's reach soon?" I whisper before moving my lips back to her neck. I hear a deep breath and a small groan of pleasure before she uses the rest of her breath to speak.

"Condoms? Multiple? Yes," she says before gripping my forehead in her hand and forcing my head back a little while replacing her lips on my neck. She breaks the kiss for a second to say "It looks like we're both making great decisions tonight," before kissing down to my shoulder and biting it decently hard.

I take her by the sides of her rib cage and move her to a laying position on her back, quickly moving to kiss a little on her stomach. Without a word I jump up, go to the closet where I know Galen has a bucket full of condoms and pull out the ones I know and trust.

"Stealing your buddy's condoms?" she says with a bit of a laugh. "I built this stash for him back when I was trying to hook him up with a friend who I didn't want him to fuck it up with. She's a no-go if there's no condoms so there are a few stashes like this around the house," I explain as getting back over to the bed. I lay the handful of condoms on the ground next to the bed as I make a twirling gesture with my finger.

"What? On my stomach?" she asks. I smile and nod as she obliges. I put my hands up the back of her shirt and start massaging her muscles, feeling out the ones that are the most tense and working them through. I see her body relaxing as I continue. She lifts herself up a little and takes her tank top off, and I unsnap her bra.

“Just relax,” I say, feeling rushes of adrenaline flowing through me as my eyes survey her back, shoulders and neck. During my third time massaging down to her lower back she lifts her ass up. I take the directive and slip her leggings off with her panties down past her feet. As I move down to make room to remove them I stand up on the side of the bed for better leverage during the massage.

“This is unexpected,” she says in a whisper as I massage her amazing ass, strong legs and feet. I go back and forth from toes to scalp several times, taking every chance to purposefully brush my fingers over nerves to trigger additional arousal. I see it is working as her labia are inflamed visibly through her gap. I lean forward after I can’t find any tense muscles anywhere and start kissing from the base of her spine up to the base of her neck.

Fuck, this is dangerous. I am intellectually and physically attracted and I’m doing everything in my power to remain single. This chick seems like she would take years to learn a lot about. Don’t. Don’t, James. Calm down.

As I get to the base of her neck she rolls around onto her back in one smooth motion. I am frozen for a second as I take in how perfectly proportioned her body is. Her thighs and arms, hands, breasts, head, hair... It’s all perfect. Nothing is too big or too small and everything is toned to a spectacular degree. Her breasts are perfectly curved and nipples are small and perfect. Her shoulders and entire bone structure for that matter is petite and perfectly formed as if created in a 3d modeling program to portray the ideal shape of woman.

“Oh my god, do I terrify you?” Isobel asks slowly rising up off the bed on her elbows and eyebrows rising up in worry.

“No, oh no not at all,” I say softly trying to comfort her while leaning forward. “Even though I’ve been checking you out all night I had no idea how beautiful you are.”

She falls back flat onto the bed and bites her lower lip as her entire face lights up in a smile. I lean forward and lash one nipple with my tongue then go to the other and grip it between my lips. I begin sucking on it and nibbling in small circles around them on her breasts. Her left hand finds its way down to her further engorged lips and brushes them from bottom to top and back again, causing herself to breathe heavier.

I start kissing a path from one nipple to the other and back again as her fingertips start disappearing periodically into herself. As I approach her belly button she has one finger pumping into herself. As her

finger gains speed I kiss down the middle of her body until I reach her clit. Her finger doesn't miss a beat as I tilt my head to the side, licking and pushing on her clit with my tongue. Her hand returns to her side as my tongue takes the place of her finger. I push in and out with my tongue and lick around the walls inside and lips outside while beginning to rub and massage her clit with my fingers.

She starts gyrating against my tongue as I start mentally taking into account how incredibly tight it is around my tongue. I've never been good at judging how tight someone is with my tongue so I shift my tongue to her clit and try to slip two fingers into her. No go. *Holy shit, are you serious right now?*

I begin getting nervous as I rub her g-spot with one finger and try to work side to side to loosen her vaginal muscles up a little bit. Her head pushes back into the pillow and she is gnashing her teeth as I feel her legs begin to tremble. *Damn, an orgasm already? This is going to be a lot of fun.*

"What are you doing to me," she whimpers as her hands go under the pillow and wrap it as far around the bottom of her little head as she can. "Fuck me," she whispers sounding almost out of breath before anything has even started. "Fuck me," she repeats.

I start kissing gently up the center of her body as both of my hands support me just under each side of her waist. I hold my hands in place while her waist gyrates and her body tries to twist in anticipation. Once my lips work their way up to her neck I carefully lock on with my teeth.

While being careful enough to not break skin I carefully bring one arm from her side to pull a hand from hers out from under the pillow. I lead it above her head and pin it above her. Balancing my weight on her hand, the base of my dick against her clit and my knees against the bed, I quickly take her other hand in mine and pin them both above her together. She arches her head back and opens her mouth wide, taking in a deep breath.

I release the gentle teeth lock on her neck and nibble my way down the length of her jaw to her chin. She jerks her head to force a kiss as I pin both of her hands above her head with one hand and move my other down to her waist to grip it, keeping her body more still. Once I grip her waist she starts trying to wiggle more, twisting her pelvis deeper into the bed in what I assume are attempts to angle my dick more towards her now drenched pussy. I can feel the moisture dripping off of the base of

my balls the more she writhes.

Suddenly I feel her break the kiss as her knees brush my sides. She grips my waist with her thighs and moves me downward slightly. She holds me in place just as my totally hard penis slips down the drenched lips of her pussy. I realize I am distracted when my grip on her hands is proven to be too weak as both of her hands slip out and whip around to firmly grip my ass. My gaze shifts from her perfectly formed breasts up to her face to see her looking down the space between our bodies.

In the moment I debate between fighting to pin her again to continue teasing and letting her continue, one of her hands whips around from gripping my ass to between our pelvises. I glance down with her to see what's going on right as her hand finds my dick. It bumps the head before softly wrapping around it. I look up at her face and see her eyes go wide.

"Holy, great decisions" she says sounding halfway out of breath. Still stunned by how fast I realized I wasn't in as much control as I thought I was, her hand shifts to grip the base of my dick as I feel the head get pressed hard against her drenched lips. I look down to see her hand gripping the base hard and feel her other hand gripping my ass while both are trying to pull my pelvis forward.

"God damn," I mutter, looking up at her face. Her eyes wide but still showing intense focus and mouth open wide as her breathing intensifies, I feel more pressure put on both the base of my dick and my posterior. Suddenly I feel a small jerk and her pussy wraps around the head of my dick. The grip on my ass remains but the pressure instantly stops as the hand that was around the base of my dick whips around to join the grip on my ass.

She whimpers quietly during a very slow exhale as I feel her muscles pulsating on my dick, legs trembling and liquid running down my balls. I lean forward and start kissing her, breaking her exhale. She kisses back passionately for a moment before breaking the kiss to breathe heavier.

The grip on my ass with both hands tightens as I feel her pelvis starting to slowly thrust forwards and back. She leans up to re-engage me in the previously broken kiss. I move both of my hands under her shoulders and lift her upper torso off the bed. I break the kiss for my lips to travel down her neck to her collar bone. The pressure she's applying has me pushed two thirds into her as the moisture seems to only increase within her.

I feel the grip loosening as her pelvis starts gyrating and forcing me to go between one third and two thirds into her. Her head starts moving from side to side as her breathing further increases. Her hands slowly start moving from my ass up to my waist as I grip her shoulders, pulling her a little further off the bed. Keeping my body very still, I continue kissing and gently biting my way around her chest. Every so often I'll pause to suck on her nipples for a little longer until they return to fully hard.

"Fuck," she whispers in a half moan. I slowly lower her back down onto the bed and shift my weight from my elbows onto the palms of my hands. I then shift it all to one hand and reach down, grabbing her ass and taking control of the speed of things.

I hold her ass firmly as I slowly push in to the base of my dick. Her breathing slows and her facial expression is starting to shift from extreme pleasure to moderate pain. I lean forward and nibble on her earlobe a little.

"Harder?" I whisper before starting to suck on her neck, hearing her breathe in deep.

"Fuck," she says in a loud whisper. "Me," she adds.

The pure rush of energy that floods me upon hearing that causes me release her ass and carefully sit up straight, making sure to mostly stay inside her. I reach under her taking her ass in both hands and lift it off the bed a little. Her eyes open wide and a smile flashes across her face as I slide all the way back in to the base. I slide very slowly all the way to the point which only the head is inside her. She looks at me and wrinkles her nose.

"Yes ma'am," I say before plunging all the way in hard to the base.

"Ow, no, harder," she says in a burst of words. "Ignore me, don't stop," she begs.

I grip her ass harder to the point of worrying a little that it hurts her while still being comfortable it won't. I slip half way out before plunging all the way back in. Each time I do I feel a surface inside bumping the head of my dick quite hard.

I decide to reposition myself a little and move my hands up the underside of her legs to beneath her knees. I lift them up and back towards her chest, holding them together. It is done so easily I am honestly surprised for a moment. But only a moment as I recall she said something about dancing a lot. The motion caused me to slip most of the way out of her so I very carefully push all the way back in. Once as far in

as I can get against my pelvis I take note that the angle change has caused me to miss whatever I was hitting before.

Suddenly I feel the alcohol hitting me overwhelmingly hard. I fight through it feeling Isobel squirming as I slowly slide all the way out, letting her feel every inch. I try to focus on the far wall as I slowly push it all the way back in. I feel her legs start trembling again so I slowly pick up the pace, holding her knees together towards her chest. Her whimpers turn to moans, turn to yelling. The excitement of feeling her pulsating and gushing down my legs as I go harder and faster, balls slapping her ass hole harder and harder, starts making me feel a little less drunk.

Her hands fly from up by her head to my ass as she grips and slaps me to a held position, fully inside her. Her body vibrates as the muscles in her grip me hard and repeatedly to the point it is making my penis sore. Amazing strength.

“Your back,” Isobel commands in a firm voice, slapping the side of my ass a couple times before pulling away quickly and twisting herself off of the bed, landing on her feet and standing up. She wobbles a little but ends upright, throwing her hands into the air and smiling. I freeze a moment, on my knees on the bed, penis dripping with her juices.

“Your wish,” I begin to say as she grabs me and twists me onto my back. She climbs on and grips the base of my dick again positioning herself at the tip and sliding down quickly. Once in a rhythm she puts her feet flat on the bed, leaning back at a steep angle while balancing on her hands. She starts shifting forward and back forcing me almost all the way in. I can feel the top third of my dick rubbing almost painfully hard against the inside of the front of her pelvic bone.

“Oh my god,” she starts repeating over and over in a soft voice. I start rubbing her inner thighs and rushing my fingertips back and forth across her abs and up and down the insides of her legs, causing her to fuck faster the longer I do it. The moment I feel her starting to cum again I start massaging her clit very softly. I feel the pulsating start again but it feels a little less strong as before. I start rubbing her clit harder and liquid almost instantly starts running down the sides of my waist.

“Oh my fucking god,” she repeats, louder than she was before. I rub the clit even harder and reach under her to massage and squeeze her ass while she somehow rides me in this position even faster. “Oh my god, Holy fuck, holy fuck,” she begins repeating as her legs can barely hold her up. I try to help her balance by holding her up by her ass, guiding her at the speed as her orgasm dies down.

“Not done yet,” I say, stopping rubbing her clit and hold both of her sexy little cheeks and guide her back to the faster pace she was going at. Her voice starts picking up more as I become sure I can keep the pace up with one hand and return my other to applying pressure to her clit. I feel the pulsating begin again and fast.

She leans her head forward to make eye contact with me and mouth the words “Oh my god” before throwing her head back. I grip her from above and below while rubbing her clit harder and guiding her hard enough that I can feel the shape of her sweet ass hitting my balls over and over.

Once the orgasm winds down I lean up and help guide her down on her back. I crawl over next to her and put an arm over her body as her breathing slows down.

“You alright?” I ask, as her slowed breathing is still a lot faster than it has been the whole time I’ve observed her tonight.

“You have no idea,” she says, moving an arm down to lay on my still fully hard dick.

“No, seriously though,” I say, feeling a little concerned.

“Yes, I’m fine,” she assures me, looking at me and fully smiling from her chin through her lips, eyes and eyebrows.

“Good,” I say, returning the smile. “Have enough energy left for doggystyle?”

We both burst into laughter as her other hand runs up her stomach to her breast and squeezes it a little, pinching her nipple and biting her lower lip.

“I think that could be -” she begins before being interrupted by the sound of heavy feet coming down the stairs.

“James,” I hear a voice yelling. Sounds like Jean but maybe not. “James,” I hear again.

“Shit, hold that thought,” I say jumping out of bed and pulling clothes on quickly.

“James she’s coming,” I clearly hear Jean yell from the other side of the door.

I check to make sure both of my shoes are tied in case I have to run for it. I check to make sure Isobel had covered up while I was getting dressed but she is still fully naked with a curious look on her face, propping her head up on her elbow.

I open the door a crack just in time to see Patricia get to the bottom of the stairs and quickly walk around Jean. I nod to Jean in thanks

for the multiple attempts at heads up.

“Who are you fucking now?” Patricia yells while pointing over my shoulder at Isobel.

“Anybody but you, you psycho fuck,” I fire back, surprised to hear the words and realizing I’m very much drunk.

“Fuck you white boy,” she yells, swinging at me once. She misses but Jean grabs her and swivels her out into the middle room downstairs.

“Whoa,” I hear Isobel say from behind.

“I’m sorry, psycho ex. I’ll be back as soon as I clean this trash up,” I say exiting the room and closing the door behind me.

I walk to the foot of the stairs and Jean jumps between Patricia and the bedroom door.

“So who is this?” Patricia yells, pointing at the now closed door.

“You’re going to have to follow me outside to talk,” I say turning up the stairs and walking before she has a chance to respond.

Descent . Fall to Darkness

I step out onto the porch, away from the louder music inside the house. I reach back to shut the door behind me but Patricia is mere steps behind me.

“So who was that?” Patricia screams while pointing towards Galen’s room.

“She’s actually very chill, very cool,” I say. I start to say more but she interrupts me.

“Did you just meet her? Known her a while?” she yells as a question.

“Did you come here to yell at me for partying at a party?” I ask in just above a whisper.

“No, I got a video from somebody I’ve been at odds with for years,” she says while pulling out her phone. She navigates through her screen then holds the screen up to me. It’s video of Makayla and I fucking in her room earlier in the day. *What the fuck? Was there a fucking camera?* Trying to analyze the positioning of the camera and I figure it had to be behind the mirror on her wall aimed down towards the bed and floor. *Fuck. She did this shit to me? Are you fucking serious? Used me for revenge against fucking Patricia?*

“I, well,” I start to say something but forget. *What the fuck? I don’t even believe this.*

“Well, you are single and all. I guess I really can’t get that upset,” she says in a fairly convincing voice with a forced smile.

“Yeah, you would think,” I say, trying not to launch into an angry tirade.

“I really want to make it work again,” Patricia says while I notice her conveniently crossing her arms to push her breasts upward, wiping what looks to be forced tears from the tops of her cheeks. Maybe a year ago that shit would have worked to distract me from an argument, but not now.

“I said it inside in front of a dozen people I’m sick of your shit and I’ve been trying to get away from you for fucking months now,” I shout, more angry than I ever like to be.

“I’ve only been nice to you!” she yells back, sounding more like the Patricia I am used to.

“Yeah, since I broke up with you,” I remind her.

“You broke my heart!” she yells a little louder. Her fake tears already seem to be drying as her face shifts towards rage.

“What? So breaking your heart makes you be nice?” I say in a quieter voice.

“No, I was mean to you when you broke up with me because you broke my heart!” she almost screams. “I love you and you won’t even try!”

“Are you listening? I said you only started being nice to me again the day after I broke up with you,” I attempt at clarifying. I’m sure this will only get worse.

“What are you talking about! I was a total bitch the weeks after we broke up!” she yells.

“Is that right? You were so much nicer to me as soon as I broke up with you,” I inform her. “So does that mean you were being a massive cunt before to make the total cunt that came after seem like kindness?” I continue. The moment cunt came out the second time I realized I made a mistake.

Patricia starts leaning forward with her upper body but moving back with the shoulder furthest from me. I start to turn to run down the sidewalk away from the house because I am not interested in a fist fight with someone half my size and found attractive by every non racist guy at the party. Luckily as I turn around I notice Jean running up the stairs of the porch past me to intercept Patricia’s initial swing.

“Leave, I got this” I barely hear Jean saying less than a second before I hear her collide with Patricia.

Already several steps through the grass towards the sidewalk, I don’t slow down. Jean isn’t just three times bigger than Patricia. She’s at least forty times stronger and less susceptible to pain. I look back once about 4 houses down the block and see Jean has Patricia pinned on the porch and looks to have her mouth near Patricia’s ear. I slow my run down to a fast walk knowing the situation is now under control.

I do not, however, slow below a fast walk. My nerves are far too rich to allow any less speed. Not until I get a few miles closer to home, that is. I’m only about thirty minutes of fast paced walking away from home and I would like to cut that down to twenty. Not too bad, if you ask me. Especially considering once this adrenaline buzz wears off I’ll be realizing how much I’ve actually had to drink.

I could have walked down to my car but I don’t know if she has somebody there to keep me from leaving. She’s cunning and I’m not interested in walking into any of her easily placed traps. I know she’s the type who would loosen lug nuts before approaching me for a fight, just to have the last action if things don’t go her way. Keep walking. I hope very dearly Galen or Jean, somebody, makes sure Isobel is safe from anything Patricia is thinking about doing.

I can’t even fucking believe she decided to swing on me. I know she’s desperate to try and get me back. I heard all about the several two week long boyfriends she’s had since we broke it off damn near a year ago. And I hate that some of the rumors going around say that all the

people who dated her were just using her for sex. Her sex isn't even that amazing. She's certainly no Ms. Thomas. Only stories I told anybody that I know who fucked her were of how psychotic she got and all the people she cheated on me with.

No. I can't focus on this. I need to get home and sleep this shit off. I'm sure I'll think about this plenty tomorrow since I have the day off. Plus I'm already about half way home. Surprised how far I've traveled while lost in my own head.

"What.... the fuck?" I whisper aloud. There is a huge tree about six feet in diameter laying across the road about a block ahead. At least I think that's what it is. The street lights are out on this block and the block beyond it. But based on the shape of the shadow, pretty sure that's what it is. Hmmm.

I approach it more slowly as I can see a little more detail confirming my suspicion that it's a downed tree. I try to make out which side is the base and which has the branches as the entire length crossing the street looks to be entirely below where the branches start. I can't even remember a tree being on either side of the street that would be tall enough to go three lanes including parking without the branches starting.

I get within 20 feet of it and as my eyes adjust to the darkness I can see the branches envelop the two houses on either side of it to my right and that it was uprooted to my left. I don't really feel like walking that close to someone's house if I go around the roots. It looks like there may be room to get around the tree that way. But I don't want to be standing here when anybody in the two houses where the branches most likely did damage happens to come out to investigate, either. Fuck.

My thoughts get interrupted by the sound of a dog running rapidly through the darkness to my left. I turn to look back towards the area the roots are and make out the relatively small form of a medium sized dog barreling towards me. I move quickly away from the tree to hopefully allow the dog to pass by, assuming it's not going to try and eat my legs.

*The dog runs right by me like I wasn't there, turns slightly to its left and runs right through the top of the tree where the branches begin coming out. The dog passes through the tree like it isn't even there. Suddenly my whole body is flooded with both adrenaline and near debilitating fear. *What the actual fuck is going on here? Am I fucking imagining this tree?* I can hear the dog's barks echoing from down the street. It sounds like it is several blocks ahead.*

*Standing still and peering in all directions I try to spot another dog or anything else that might be coming to fuck with me. *What on earth had I drank tonight? Did Patricia get in my head to the point of hallucinating? This just doesn't seem real. Did I pass out and now I'm dreaming?**

I decide to try and feel this tree. Let me know it's real and I'm only partially crazy. I step forward carefully in case something is in the pitch black at my feet. After all, I can only see things off in the distance and gently silhouetted things around me.

As my hand descends, palm out, to touch the tree, my anxiety rises even further. I fleetingly imagine what I'll do if I feel nothing. *What if I feel something? How did the dog run through it?*

My hand passes through where I perceive the edge of the tree to rest. I slowly step forward pushing my hand even further into where I am absolutely certain is well behind where anything physical could possibly be to be blocking light from down the road. Hand goes right through.

I am unaware of any period of my life where my blood is pumping this hard without my having an orgasm happening at the same time. And this feeling is anything but good. I have to know if I can walk through this like the dog did. I slowly inch forward in quarter baby step distances, but with legs spread about shoulder width apart, in front of and behind me.

Suddenly I feel the toe of my shoe isn't on solid ground. I freeze entirely in place. *What THE. ACTUAL. FUCK? How the fuck?* I pull my foot back and decide it's a great plan to raise my forward foot up in the air. I kick it around as if in defiance of the tree I plainly make out right where my leg should be.

Going to put my foot back on the ground where I am certain is solid ground proves folly. My foot finds no such ground and I try to jerk myself back towards the ground my rear foot is standing on. Instead I knock my grounded leg loose and fall towards the perceived tree. I fall forward and in the process of trying to regain balance on any sort of surface I slam the grounded leg's knee solidly on the ground where the foot beneath it was. In the sharp pain's travel through my mind I don't realize I have simultaneously lost footing and gained rapid air flow.

Gripping the knee I slammed against the concrete while I assume I was flailing around helplessly in a panic, I realize I am falling and slowly beginning to spin. I try to ninja twist back towards where I was standing when I realize I have been falling too many milliseconds to have any chance of reaching that. Feeling I must clearly then be any instant from slamming into the ground I instinctively hug myself into the smallest ball I can imagine folding myself to.

Just a handful of seconds of holding myself in a way I could almost kiss my own ass goodbye I start wondering if I actually am having some sort of acid trip. I clearly don't remember touching anything other than alcohol. I didn't get a blowjob or any sort of physical contact where acid could have been involved on a hidden level.

I snap back to reality realizing I am still falling, real or not. I reach into my mind and realize the way skydivers keep their speed lower than

any alternative is to flatten out. But this also tends to move them in a direction. I would love to feel a fucking wall, even if it means I pinball around and die right now rather than after... I have no fucking idea. All options truly suck at this moment.

I try to first figure out which direction I am falling since I seem to be spinning and can't really tell. Once I feel I have a general handle on things I start flattening out. I feel myself fire off in the direction the top of my head is facing and grit my teeth. I fully expect to ram into a jagged wall and instantly die but I never pull off hitting one.

On the up side, I learn fairly promptly how to feel like I'm steering myself around like a self-aware falling piece of paper. I try to fly in a snake pattern, not making any full circles. I also start losing anxiety and gaining excitement. Fuck, I feel like I'm learning how to skydive the moment before I die!

I roll myself back up tight and feel the air speed increase all around me. I try to flatten myself to superman straight downward a little haphazardly and am not careful enough sending me back into another spin. This time it is much faster and feels more brutal than before. Perhaps because I had calmed down considerably between the period leading up to and just after I began to fall. I went from feeling overall under control to feeling like I totally lost control again.

As I try to regain control it does nothing but make me start to feel more stressed and nauseous. I feel like my shoulders and hips are starting to strain. I also start to noticing the air I'm breathing seems thinner than it had. Am I falling upward? That's silly. There's no way. Is there? I honestly wasn't paying any attention to what was in my field of vision as much as my feeling of falling. No, that's insane. It isn't a cloudy night anyway and stars, not to mention lights on the ---

I feel a sharp pain across my entire body and everything goes away.

I open my eyes and realize thanks to aid from a very gentle breeze that I am entirely naked. But worse, I am lying on what feels like semi-solid fire. I move to stand up and get away and as I pull my head up off what feels like a heavily sticky ground I realize it is still entirely black. I try to lift my arms or even legs and feel like everything is almost glued to a flat, rubbery surface.

Moments of struggling allows me to free my right arm. I try to keep my face off the almost paste covered, rubbery surface. The more I am able to discern the texture from the horrible burning sensation it feels

more like the substance sticky hands you fling against things are made of. Only thicker, and covered in thick acidic liquid.

I am driven enough to get myself unstuck and up on my feet. I feel like and fear that I am or may imminently be sinking into this surface so I fall back to my knees and hands to try to keep steady. The pain makes me want to risk standing back up and sinking but first I try to quickly glance around and see anything that isn't totally lacking light.

I manage to find a faint horizontal strip that may be absolutely nothing a hundred yards off. I decide to risk it and start crawling in that direction. Not three strides on hands and knees and I conclude there is absolutely no apparent chance the burning substance is an isolated puddle where I landed.

I scurry to my feet yelling broken sentences filled with profanity which I am not even able to translate into anything coherent. As I start trying to make steps on this surface my feet sink just far enough down to trip me at my toes. I fall down entirely landing flat on my stomach and legs. I scream out in a girlish shriek as it feels like it it's burning all the way to bone. A partial second later my shriek is silenced by my face planting in the surface as well.

I lift my head back up and off from the strange texture. My shriek is now quieted to a heavy sobbing. As if by a second force I find the will to get up to my hands and knees and crawl as fast as I believe I've ever crawled toward the horizontal beam of light.

It feels like twenty hours of painful crawling through what has seeded pain all the way to the bones of my knees, feet and hands before I feel the ground starting to harden. But I have to question if this is hardening ground or all feeling fading near the points I am touching the ground.

This fear is followed by feeling dread of realization that perhaps that is the case as the sharp pain associated with physically contacting the ground starts feeling cool. Do I try touching another part of my body against it. How do I do that without risking losing my posture and never regaining it again? Getting stuck to the ground until I die from pain or whatever terrible effect the surface is having on my flesh?

As I think about all of these possibilities I feel that I am now on what appears to be a rocky surface. And better yet what is now clearly almost blinding light entering my vision from underneath a door is nearly within reach. I realize I am over reacting and the light starts dimming as my eyes adjust. I then quickly realize it's not so awesome being on all fours, naked, crawling fairly fast still over rock.

I get to my feet and feel like I had been swimming for hours. As in, the weight of me feels like something I have never had to hold up with only two legs. I struggle trying to balance the pain of my feet squishing

against what now feels like absurdly sharp edged stone and trying not to fall back down.

I hear what sounds like a glass door sliding and see a vertical shaft of light expanding. I then remember I'm naked and realize the expanding light is the doorway opening. I try to quickly and quietly move to the side of the door. I really want don't want whoever or whatever it may be to see me. This place is too dark and horrible to knowingly take chances.

Instead I fall to my side, bouncing off my hip and whipping my head down to the rocky floor.

I feel a thin blanket over me and starkly cold air brushing over me. I open my eyes and go to sit up but realize I am in a room that looks like it is entirely made out of black stone. The material on what I assume is the bed I am laying on looks impossibly dark. It seems to consume the small amounts of light that enter the room from what looks to be a doorway.

I look around the room and observe the presence of what has to be medical equipment. Some small hand held electronics that look similar to but not exactly like a stereoscope. Or, that screened tool they peek into your ears with. Some things that look like bastardizations of stirrups used in gynecological examinations. Other things that just look sharp and useless based on my almost nonexistent medical knowledge.

The most notable thing to me is that everything I can see in this room, and even just outside what looks like a tall pointed top doorway, is black. I am interested in working up the nerve to move around and touch things. I know it sounds infantile but after what I woke up in outside this room.. I am interested. And, assuming I am even in the room I saw light coming out of.

The more I try to understand that which is around me the more I realize there is no movement at all besides the air brushing across me and that of my own. I start analyzing different possibilities for what may be causing the air to move. I hear no fans. In fact the sound of this soft and thin blanket is quite loud among the silence.

I begin to realize I am still somewhat tipsy which tells me that a relatively small amount of time has passed between being in surroundings I understand and ending up here. I also realize I am more tired than I was when i was hurrying home. I decide whatever put me in this bed probably isn't going to kill me. I choose to close my eyes and with a small amount of fear, allow fatigue to win.

Descent . Opening

A loud blowing sound wakes me up out of what feels to have been a hundred years of sleep. I sit up, causing a thin cloth-like film that was quite warm to slide down my body into my lap. Looking around I realize I am in a different room, though all surfaces are still shades of black and dark grays. I look around and see a flat square outcropping from the wall that looks like a table. There are no chairs around it and it is at waist height.

I realize I am fully naked. I feel my skin and it is clean, save for some sweat that accumulated while I was sleeping. I look around to try and find my clothes. I see nothing that resembles cloth besides the strangely warm film that was laying on me like a blanket.

The doorway appears to be smooth around all three edges and the floor. It doesn't look like there are any actual doors that can be closed. I see no curtains or markings on any walls or the floor indicating any functionality for any reason may exist. It just looks like four walls, a ceiling, floor, the bed-like surface I'm lying on, that doorway and the outcropping from the wall that resembles a square table.

Outside the room I see a wall roughly twenty feet across from the doorway type opening in the room. I am too nervous to get up and go investigate.

Then, my nerves start twisting even harder as I hear the sound of movement coming towards the doorway. A figure that looks about six feet tall turns the corner from the hallway into the room. Its body looks to have a torso, arms and legs as a human but is very, very thin. The head is almost normal in size. The skin is abnormally smooth, not unlike plastic. The eyes look larger than normal and the ears are but small holes.

"Have you absorbed enough energy through rest?" I hear in a very soft, feminine voice which I cannot peg as male or female. I can't even tell if it's young or old sounding to me. *There was no echo at all. Not even the very slight echo from being in a room made of stone or dry wall. Simply a smooth voice as if it was recorded in a soundproof booth. Strange.*

"That is because you are hearing me with your mind and not your ears," it says.

"What is your name?" I ask, sound booming and echoing off of the walls as I imagined a voice should. *Strange. It does kind of remind me of when I was with Shanna and Patricia's cousin for a while and started being able to hear their thoughts. Actually, now that I play the voice back,*

it's exactly like that.

"I am Carnorra. I chose to help you transition," the voice responds.

"Transition?" I ask, starting to calm down a little bit. *I must be dreaming.*

"We have chosen you to work with us," the voice states.

"How did you choose me?" I ask, now very much more curious than nervous.

"We place an obstacle hologram that shouldn't be in someone's way. If they approach it to investigate, they will find hollow ground beneath it. Some carefully try to climb in, or get a rope. You jumped in. Instead of blacking out instantly as many do while falling in darkness, you had fun with it," the voice explains.

"Strange," I mumble. *What kind of test is this? I can easily understand it's function for weeding out the weak but...*

"The weak are altered to not remember and are placed on the ground near the test area," the voice says. *What the hell? Oh, mind reading makes sense I guess.*

"The method of conscious thinking on earth today is a form of telepathy," Carnorra says.

Alright. Are my clothes nearby?

"I will fetch them for you if you need them," Carnorra says.

I wonder if they are male or female.

"Would it make a difference?" Carnorra asks.

Oh. No, I suppose not. Fuck, I forgot my thoughts are essentially audible. Don't mind me then, I often talk to myself and think out loud inside my own head, In this way.

Carnorra slowly turns and exits the room, turning right to head back from the direction they came. I notice no leg movement while they walk. *Maybe they're some sort of ethereal being. I've read about such things in older texts. Not to mention good old video games. Because, you know, those are real.*

In mere moments Carnorra returns with all my clothes draped over their arm. They move to the table and drop them there. *I wonder if I'm going to be left alone to get dressed. Would be nice if -*

"I can. Just exit and walk to the right until you see us," Carnorra says before turning and leaving the room.

Fuck, that's right. Thought conversation and all. Sorry about that.

"Understandable," Carnorra says just after going out of sight.

Well Jesus. I put my clothes on a little quicker than I usually do unless someone's parents are getting home while partaking in sexytime. I reach over and touch the thin material I was covered up in.

Alright, I guess this is what the score is. Try not to think, try not to think. I walk slowly into the hallway and look to the left and right. Yes. *It is indeed a hallway.* The black color fades slowly to gray in either direction. I turn right and continue walking slowly past a few other doorways. The doorways on the left and right are not straight across from each other as I pass. The first to the left looks like a room with more narrow and much longer outcroppings that I guess would be easily used as seating. The next room is to the right and has rows of empty shelving lining the walls.

The next room is to the right and I see Carnorra standing in the center of it. The room is empty. I step into it and stand in front facing Carnorra, trying to remain calm.

"Welcome," I hear, as I take note of a single syringe looking instrument laying by itself on the only small shelf looking outcropping sticking out at waist length on the wall.

What is the syringe for?

"Very good. You didn't think anything but your communication. Are you already mastering only using that form of thought when communicating?" Carnorra asks.

Apparently. To my surprise I can function normally without talking to myself in my head.

"Impressive. The syringe is here in case you decide to go back," Carnorra answers.

Decide to go back? The look of concentration spreads across my face and probably a noticeable sense of worry.

"There is someone I would like to introduce you to. You two will have a lot to talk about. You will have the option to decide to go back to your life with no memory of this, or to remember," Carnorra says.

Alright, I'm excited and curious. This feels unreal though I know it's happening.

"You are not easily startled and that is respectable," a much deeper voice booms. I look around and see nothing around me.

Only when startled by loud noises unexpectedly. I smirk and look around my surroundings once more in search of a figure other than Carnorra.

"You have lost faith," the booming voice states. I look at Carnorra

with an inquisitive glance.

In humanity? Or? I feel very confused.

“You were raised Lutheran, yet now you believe in nothing,” the voice says. As the voice spoke, Carnorra slowly exited the room. I remain fixed where I stand.

A deep feeling of disappointment and confusion floods me. *Is this some sort of hyper elaborate trickery?*

“No. Religion has been placed on earth and updated, altered and otherwise restarted to keep human traffic ultimately controlled,” the booming voice states.

Religion? As in, all of it? Or a specific one?

“All of them. It is clear inside you that you accept there are higher powers. Why don’t you still follow a religion?” the voice asks, sounding slightly angry.

If you can see that, can’t you see my observance of countless contradictions and unbelievable assertions?

“Yes,” the voice states.

I stand quietly and expect more than simply yes to my response. Nothing comes. *So?*

“It seems no matter the effort, humans find ways to quickly and completely corrupt our guidance,” it states with a thick sound of disappointment.

So you’ve noticed the creative takes on things?

“Yes,” the voice responds.

I stand patiently. After several seconds I realize it is another waiting period with no fruits coming my way. *So you know about the ways religion has originated on earth?*

“Yes. We created it,” the voice states.

You said ‘we created it.’ Can you elaborate?

“Yes. We saw how the humans who lived here acted and took their best traits and formed religions based on them. We do not see life as sacred as Humans see their own. So we couldn’t give them our directives and expect them to understand and follow it,” the voice explains.

Lived?

“Yes. There were only one type of human here at the time. We helped the humans on Mars transition here as the inner solar system was rearranged with the arrival of what you call Venus. Their planet became uninhabitable and this one was transitioning to what they were used to,”

the voice details.

Really.

“Does this surprise you?” the voice questions.

No. But it makes sense.

“Why does this make sense to you?” the voice questions in what I interpret as sounding slightly bewildered.

I'm not good at explaining things in detail. I've always sensed there are three different varieties of humans. Two at least. Seems more likely that there are three.

“Care to explain?” the voice asks.

I always felt like Black, White and Asian. From what I've read in history to personal and existential interaction. It has seemed all other races can be traced back to combinations of any of the three.

“Only two, but you are close,” the voice says.

Oh? Which two, if I may ask?

“Black and White. Black originated here and was the only species for thousands of years. White came here from Mars. That was their home planet, where they had existed in forms that resemble today's Arabian and Oriental inhabitants. The planet you know as Venus came into the solar system and threw planets out of their previous orbits. Earth and Mars were pushed out of their closer orbits to their current positions. That's why we helped move as many people from Mars to Earth as possible,” the voice explains.

This is a lot to process. How did I get down here, again? Can you explain further?

“We periodically go to levels close to the surface and monitor from person to person. Sometimes we find one that peaks our interest. We plant dreams to observe responses. Your cataclysmic dreams of late have become unimaginably worse, right? Including loved ones and whole sections of populations being wiped entirely out?” the voice asks.

Yes. It has been strange.

“What has been strange? The magnitude of disaster in the dreams or your relative calm to it?” the voice asks with a hint of audible amusement.

Actually... I didn't think about that. I always have odd dreams so they didn't alarm me. My imagination doesn't tend to be much worse than any dream I've had recently.

“That is no surprise. Your brain does seem to act differently than others we have encountered from the surface. We dug a hole to the

surface. We have an operative who was able to cause a situation where you went down the street we wanted you to. We didn't expect you to go on foot. That did turn out to be a bonus. We were not surprised you came to the tree to investigate. We were worried the dog would scare you off," the voice explains.

Operative? Who is the operative? Can you tell me?

"No. Though I can tell you everything unfolded as we hoped. They followed instructions and improvised impressively," the voice explains.

But how did I not die through the fall? That is my biggest curiosity.

"We have a wind donut we had to configure in case you tried to move much side to side, which you did," the voice answers.

Wind donut? Side to side?

"Yes. We knew you had skydived a few times in the past so we had to be ready for you to move yourself in a direction other than downward as you fell. You only really had a two hundred foot free-fall and the rest was simulated in the chamber we built under the bluff," the voice tells me. "The device we used is shaped like a donut. It uses particles in the air to move it as a whole magnetically without making noise. There are enough trace elements in Earth's air to move it sufficiently without simply causing tiny missiles to shred life forms," the voice concludes.

That makes sense, I suppose. And the side to side motion started happening because I was bored. It didn't feel real after a while and I always tend to mess around.

"This we know. I am going to use a suit to walk you through this complex," the voice says. I begin to feel nervous as I hear soft footsteps coming from down the hallway.

Descent . Introduction

A gray humanoid with a large oval face and black oval eyes glides around the corner and enters the room through the doorway.

“Carnorra?” I ask, a little confused.

“No, though the suit is the same variety,” the voice responds.

What do I call this person? They are not Carnorra but I do not know what to call them otherwise. Voice?

“You may call me Panacea,” the voice responds.

“Goddess of Healing?” I ask with a smirk, trying not to laugh. *This seems silly. Greek mythology?*

“Yes, Greek mythology. Yes, Goddess of Healing. After what you have just experienced so far, does this bother or surprise you?” Panacea asks, sounding slightly annoyed.

Oh yes, telepathy. Physically standing next to someone, I reverted to old habits. I suppose I should not mock.

“It is alright. Your mockery Band-Aid philosophy came up in our research as well. Are you prepared for a tour of the world underneath your world?” Panacea asks.

Without a word I nod and look over the face of the gray figure before me. Memories of the book and movie Communion flood my mind.

“Yes, we are friends with Wesley,” Panacea states as I start following her out of the room.

“You can see what my memories are as I see them?” I ask, confused and uncomfortable.

“All forms of telepathy. Visual, audible and all feelings. We are all connected. Humans on the surface may have lost their skill to communicate this way but the rest of us have not,” she states calmly. “You will have time for more questions later. We need to travel from this outpost to the city under Omaha.”

We stop by a square opening in the wall. It looks like the start of a hallway that is met with what looks like the edge of a cylinder. Within seconds of our motion halting the curved wall moves quickly and opens to reveal a thick tube. The side of the tube shifts and a space roughly five feet wide and eight or ten feet tall opens inside. Panacea moves inside and stands with her back to the wall. Her head turns to face me.

“Come. Stand against the wall across from me and be still,” she directs me. I enter and do as she says as the door closes. I feel no change in motion and hear but a small barely audible hum begin.

“What is this?” I ask, speaking instead of verbally thinking because it satisfies me.

“This is a transport tube. We have them built through the entire earth. You may think of it as a more advanced technology related to the bank teller tubes. Only, these use magnetism and travel many hundreds of miles an hour. There is an inner and outer field. The inner field keeps us from feeling anything while maintaining pressure. The outer field propels us to the desired location through a calculated path,” she answers.

“Why are there no seats?” I ask, looking around and seeing nothing but an empty cylinder it appears we are standing inside of.

“Sitting is not healthy. You will not find chairs here. If people are not standing, they are laying down to sleep. That is how all are trained. It keeps the body stronger and doesn’t damage the lower back,” she explains.

“I suppose that makes sense,” I say. I fall into thought about all the times I’ve sat at a computer for more than a few hours at a time. Every time I get up my back feels worse than it did when I sat down.

“Here we are,” Panacea says as the door capsule opens. Before my eyes is a sweeping expanse of elevated surfaces that I assume are tables. They fill an area that looks to be several football fields in size. Many thousands of humans standing at the tables eating or are coming to and from serving stations along the walls. There are a lot of archways at all parts of the perimeter going into darker areas I can’t make out through the closest of them.

“What is this?” I ask, gesturing towards the huge number of people.

“This is part of the battle group that will be taking Omaha,” she says calmly with a hint of pride in her voice. “There are a few dozen of these scattered around the structure beneath Omaha. There are thousands like it under every continent in the world.”

I no longer feel the ability to talk or think. I am struck with fear I do not know how to approach. *Why would they need armies?*

“We have fed and nurtured the technology of the humans that live topside. The need for us passed almost a century ago and it is approaching a tipping point in sustainability. Not for them, but for us. Technology is close to where civilizations will begin detecting our presence within the planet,” she says with a quieting voice. “You know how the surface humans react to discovering new life.”

“So is it a martial law thing? Overthrowing the government? Kill everything?” I ask, taking guesses at what the use would be.

“It will appear to be Martial Law. We will overthrow governments quietly just before and carefully replace all other government in a matter of moments. During the operation we will throw the world back a hundred years in technology. If we are not successful we will simply purge the surface,” she explains grimly.

“Purge? Just shoot everyone?” I ask, getting annoyed that I am even being told any of this.

“No, burn everything on it. Including the soldiers we groomed to send up. The plan is for them to remain topside for the rest of their lives anyway,” she explains coldly.

“Where did all of these people come from? Were they taken from the surface?” I ask, still quite curious.

“We grew them. We artificially grew them to the age of five in a matter of months. Then we programmed them with a hundred years of knowledge and began physically training them from then on. Most of them are between the ages of thirty and thirty-five. All of them are lethal and fully versed in telepathy with all around them and those of us they need to communicate with to operate accurately under our directives,” Panacea explains.

“Goddess of Healing, huh?” I ask, rage and confusion flowing through me.

“Be calm. Healing is relative. You watch the media. None of this should surprise you that a purge of forms is coming,” she says in a cold and almost menacing voice.

I remain silent and slowly let out a deep sigh. She begins moving again down the hall and I follow. At the end of the walkway we pass through the doorway. It is another hallway that ramps down towards the dining area in one direction and off into a large cavern like opening full of light and motion far to the left. We turn to the right, to my disappointment.

Once down at the level of the dining area there is a hallway that breaks off immediately to the left. We turn down that and proceed at a rapid pace. Every fifty feet or so there are rooms full of cots that appear to be floating above the ground without anything propping them up. We continue down the hallway to another fork in the hallway. We turn right.

There are no doorways in this hall. At the end is what looks like a large plain room with an elevated section at the far side. We enter this and she stands on what, upon closer inspection, looks like a small stage.

“We have an empty warehouse in Phoenix I would like to set you up in. It is going to be a distribution center that sells Newegg and Amazon customers. It will also be used as an entry point into the southern Phoenix metro. We just need a crew to remain there so there are no questions regarding vibrations going on while we get the structure beneath it built. Thousands of pounds being moved around and dropped in a warehouse the size of four city blocks is just what we need,” she reveals.

“How come you need cover to dig there, when you did it here under houses and nobody noticed a thing?” I ask, trying to work the logistics out in my head.

“This is soft clay dirt. Phoenix is built on very hard stone. Drilling through dirt is very much like a hot knife through butter. Where under phoenix that very knife would do little,” she explains. “So commotion and vibrations from industrial work with trains coming and going constantly would cover that perfectly.”

“Ok so, say I don’t want to be involved, what then,” I ask without giving any approval from my filter.

“We kill you,” she states firmly without hesitation. Strangely enough, I don’t feel a rise in fear or anxiety hearing this.

“And what would I be doing if I agreed?” I ask, more curious than anything.

“Running the building. You have warehousing experience and you can put together whatever team you want for the distribution operations. We will have a security team there making sure the property and secrets built into it are safe,” she explains.

“And what do I tell them? Hey, guys. Time to leave your families to come work in Phoenix for a business you’ve never even heard of?” I ask, sarcasm seeping out.

“Pay each of them 300k a year. Do you think that would motivate them?” she asks, sounding both amused and bored.

I am frozen in place for a moment. “How much would you pay me for doing all of this?” I ask, starting to get both excited and terrified.

“500k a year. You and everyone you get on board will be given a 50k sign on bonus. Anyone you pick will have three weeks to train their replacements while we train you on system functionality in the warehouse. It may be empty now but all the equipment and infrastructure is in place,” she explains.

“I’m in, fuck it,” I blurt out without realizing it. My eyes go wide in

surprise that I was so easily convinced to leave everything I know for some non-human being I just met.

“We have an apartment complex that is opening soon with free reign on resident sign-ups. If you want, I can take you there now and you can get settled in. We can start training you tomorrow,” Panacea states confidently.

“Wait, how many people on the surface know of this all being down here?” I ask while gesturing towards the area we came from.

“Millions. Worldwide? Millions. Which isn’t much. Just enough to make sure we keep plugged in,” she explains. She gestures to the door as she moves around me and exits the room.

“How long will it take to get to Phoenix from here and when can I come back?” I ask. The moment I finish asking when I can come back she turns around and faces me with her almost fake looking skin. Upon much closer inspection in better light I see features ranging from bone structure to even nipples and a small concave where a belly button could be imagined on the body. Or suit, as she called it.

“We had not planned on you returning to this area,” she states.

“I want to say goodbye to some people and would need to talk to the group I want to hire face to face. It would be easier for them to believe rather than just calling each one. I don’t even know most of their contact information,” I explain.

“Then you can spend two weeks for the first section of training. After that you can leave Phoenix and come back to Omaha to do your recruiting,” she states in a very cold and almost cruel tone.

“And say goodbye to people?” I ask.

“Yes. It is a very simple story. You met someone while leaving the house and they offered you a job. One thing lead to another and you didn’t get back to see anyone for three weeks,” she instructs.

“Easy enough,” I say as we traverse one hallway after another. Some rooms look like libraries. Some look like showers with drains in the floor but no visible shower-heads. Finally we arrive at a large circular room with indentations that look like one back where we entered my first tube. Looks like there are dozens of tubes all around the perimeter of this room.

“Here,” she states as we approach one just to the right of the room’s entrance. We stop in the indentation in front of the curved wall as it opens before us. Without a word or a thought we both walk in and stand with our backs to the wall as the door, or wall, closes. While

watching the wall close I see it looks like it is a couple feet thick and layered with machinery and metal. Though I do not have a clue how it all works, I am interested in hopefully learning.

“You never told me how long the trip will be,” I point out.

“Shorter than the conversation we had in the conference room,” she states knowingly.

“Why not get a businessman type who has been in management for years?” I ask.

“Can you imagine any of the district or regional managers you’ve met being able to comprehend or go along with anything you’ve learned in the last hours?” she asks.

I stop and look down at my shoes. I run various people through my head I’ve met that were in any position of power. “No,” I whisper.

The door opens and I see a small room that looks like the conference room we were in what feels like seconds ago. We walk into it as the capsule closes behind us. I see two hallways side by side, going out of the conference room in different directions at 45 degree angles.

“This way,” she states as her movement leads us down the corridor to the right. In a matter of minutes we weave through various intersections and end up in a small room with a single, small capsule entrance before us. She gestures for me to walk forward, so I do.

“Alone?” I ask.

“Yes, someone will be with you above. I will find you from time to time for more questions and answers,” she states as she stands motionless.

The tube opens and I step into it. It is about three times as big inside as I need to stand comfortably. I lean against the wall across from the door as it closes. A couple seconds later the capsule opens. I step out of the capsule and a strong young man who appears to be my age is standing facing me.

“Hi, James,” the man says as the capsule closes behind me. A false wall closes as well, hiding the existence of said capsule.

“Hello,” I respond without making eye contact at all. I am looking around what appears to be a large office with double doors leading into what appears to be a large hallway. Possibly an executive or some sort of manager.

“I am Alejo. Come with me, I am to take you to your apartment,” he states while kindly gesturing to the doorway as he walks ahead of me.

“Alright,” I answer, going with the flow and feeling increasingly

uneasy. We walk down a broad carpeted hallway in what is now clear to be a law firm. Other offices with double doors line both sides. At the far end of the hallway we pass through what looks like a lavish waiting room. Once the doorman opens the large door for us a wave of hot dry air hits me.

“It may take a second to get used to this air,” he states as the doorman looks at him strangely.

“No problem” I state, actually enjoying the feel of the air on my always moist skin. The sun is high and looks brighter and feels hotter than any other time I’ve seen it.

Descent . Dig Site

“This will be your dig-site,” Alejo states as we get out of his car and walk up a sidewalk to a large apartment building.

“Dig-site?” I ask, a little confused. I scan the area briefly and see no sign of archaeological activity.

“Oh,” he says while squinting for a moment. “This will be your new apartment. Your new digs. Dig-site is a term my friends and I use for a new apartment while we’re digging in,” he clarifies. We both laugh as he unlocks the door.

Stepping inside I see the inner layout is full of interesting and inviting angles. The kitchen is large and has a counter above the sink. Above that is a cupboard. You can look through that into the living and dining room area. To the right of the front door is a short hallway to bedroom and bathroom. Just around the corner from those rooms down the same hallway is a master bedroom on the other side of the kitchen.

“Nice,” I say quietly. He nods and smiles.

“They treat us really well for what we do,” he states with a knowing nod and smile.

“I’m learning this,” I say, making eye contact with him.

“Here are your keys,” he says while digging a ring of several keys with a Dodge car remote and key and a gray box with a button on it.

“What’s this?” I ask, taking the keys and pointing at the small gray box.

“It opens the gate to get in and out of the complex as well as other things I will show you later,” he answers. “For now though, get settled in here. I will call this phone when I am on the way to pick you up for orientation tomorrow,” he tells me while pointing to a cell phone laying on the kitchen table.

“Alright” I say, walking over to it and picking it up. I turn it on and swipe to open it and it looks exactly like my phone, though it seems to be a newer model.

“You are not to call anyone you know, only receive calls,” he states as I turn and find him very close to my side.

“I promise,” I say, fully understanding and agreeing with myself that I won’t even try to sneak any calls or contact.

“Good, no calls or contact,” he says as he begins walking towards the entry.

“Telepathy?” I ask, feeling slightly alarmed that he just repeated a

wording used in my thoughts.

“Telepathy,” he repeats back to me as he closes what apparently is my front door.

I set the phone down on the table and look at the four chairs surrounding it. Dark brown wood with black fabric on the back and seat. The table is the same color of dark brown wood. There is a very large flat screen TV on the far wall. A three person couch facing it with a love seat on the side of the room below the large front window. I look over and there is a large window by the dining room table overlooking a pool.

I walk into the kitchen and look through the cupboards. Plates, silverware, dry food, cereal and every manner of ingredient. I open the fridge and the bottom shelf is all beer. I open the freezer and there are a couple bottles of Jack Daniels. There are frozen pizzas and some various frozen meats. I close the freezer and fridge and open the folding doors I see across the hallway from the kitchen. Washer and dryer! I’m in fucking heaven!

I turn to go into the master bedroom and there is a king sized bed, a large television and a couple dressers. I look in the master bathroom and it has a stand up shower, a huge mirror that goes from the ceiling to about hip level all the way across and a huge counter. I walk back into the bedroom and open the diagonal mirror that I correctly assume to be a closet door. There is a huge walk in closet with a hang bar going down each side.

“Fucking awesome,” I blurt out before turning to go back into the hallway. I walk down the hallway to see what’s in the other room. I find a large L shaped computer desk with 3 big monitors and a proper speaker system with a speaker in every corner of the room. There is a stereo on the opposite side of the room from the computer and the closet looks to have double sliding mirror access. I open it and find a library of computer hardware, video game consoles and assorted other electronic goodies.

I walk into the living room and sit on the large couch. I look out of the window in the living room and see empty apartments in the building across the way. *Oh, that’s right. This is a new complex and I’m betting very few people live here so far.*

I stand up and walk over to the table, picking up the phone. I carry the phone to the bedroom and look around until I find the remote for the TV in that room. I find none. I open my phone and thumb around through the folders and find a home media app. After a few seconds of that I find it controls virtually everything in the apartment. I turn on the television and

flip through some channels until I find Comedy Central which is playing Scrubs.

With Scrubs in the background I lay on the bed and stare at the ceiling. *This is fucked. All I know about Phoenix is crazy Sheriff Joe and dust storms. And a few million people inhabited a place where humans simply shouldn't be. Like, fuck you nature. We do what we want. This is insane.*

I sit and worry about what I'm agreeing to be part of. I spend hours piecing together the team I want to try and get. I think about what they'll be leaving behind if they accept. I think about how I'm even going to approach the subject with most of them. I plan out every variation of every conversation I can imagine. I make a short list of people I want to find and say goodbye to without saying goodbye. To my surprise Isobel is on that list. She seemed like a million page book series I would never fully understand in just the short time I was near her.

My grandparents. My sister. Galen and Jean and everybody I work with. My job. I've been working my way up the ladder for a nice amount of time. I feel like I'm going to violate trust and favors. I've seen crazy shit in the last several hours. I'm reasonably certain that it was just a passing glance. I'm endlessly curious to learn more.

I start plotting out positions to fit Jean and Galen into. Michael instantly gets put as receiving lead as he did just that at the store he works at. I'm sure he can adjust to the massive multiplication in scale. He's been involved in some huge Eve clans, I'm sure he'll do fine. That's where my list of friends falls short. Nobody else can arguably fit into a distribution center environment without my willingness to gamble functionality. If this isn't bullshit I'm going to want to do a good job.

I come out of my river of thoughts and notice it's after 9pm and I don't even know what day it is. My stomach has resorted to sucking in other parts of my body to feed and I'm getting really tired. I turn my new phone back on and look at the contacts to see what's in it. Alejo, Artem, Carnorra, Farahi, Intef, Panacea, Santino and Vinson. I don't know any of these people but there are short bits of information in each of their contact profiles. I make a mental note of this and go to the apps.

Grubhub! I open the Grubhub app and find there is already payment information punched into the account, along with what I assume to be this address. I get up and walk to the front door. I open it and look for where the number is, finding it on the wall nearby. Matches the number in the Grubhub address. Closing and locking the front door I walk

back to the couch and lay down.

I look for pizza places then switch to Chinese. I see a place right across the street and 2 dollar delivery and quickly order some cashew chicken. I throw in some egg foo young to throw in the fridge for breakfast. When I go to submit the order it asks if I want to save it for tomorrow and notes that the delivery is closed for the night. *Fuck!*

I backtrack to the pizza place I saw had 24 hour delivery and order pizza. At checkout it asked if I wanted to add beer to the order and I absolutely added two cases. Because, honestly, if I'm going to be cramming for a week I had better be able to blow off some nerves at the end of the night.

After the order is submitted and everything seems to be in order I set the phone beside me and instantly drift back into strategy mode. What are people going to think after all that went on the few days before? Are they going to think Makayla had me murdered or something? Patricia? Isobel's friend turned out crazy and maybe dragged me away? Suicide?

I settle on the truth, after a fashion. I'll tell them that on my way home I bumped into somebody and a conversation took place. One where I was awkwardly accepting a massive paying job where I could try to whisk away several people to work for me? And giving them massive pay, relatively, as well? I'm sure some will think I'm crazier than they previously measured. I expect that.

The doorbell rings. I am a little surprised until I look at the phone and realize I ordered it twenty minutes ago. It just doesn't seem like that long ago.

The delivery guy has two cases of beer with the pizza boxes on top. He brought them in on a dolly, which is commendable.

"Hey, man," I say as he smiles and nods in acknowledgment.

"Where do you want this?" he asks peeking into the apartment.

"Right this way," I say, holding the door open and walking towards the kitchen. He navigates the dolly around the corner, into the hallway then around another corner into the kitchen. He rests the cases and pulls the dolly away.

"That should be everything!" he says, starting to turn around.

"Hey, sorry I don't have any cash to tip," I blurt out, feeling guilty for not making sure I had cash to tip.

"No problem. The receipt," he says while raising his hand to point at it taped to the box. "It shows the 25 percent tip you applied to the credit card order."

“Oh that’s right, my brain is fried,” I admit feeling a little ashamed I forgot something so recent.

“No problem,” he says with an awkward smile as he turns and walks out of the apartment. I sheepishly follow him and close the door softly behind him. I don’t lock it right away out of a strange courtesy to not want anyone leaving to feel uncomfortable that a door is very quickly locked right behind them.

I walk back into the kitchen and open the fridge, filling up the little remaining space on the bottom shelf to fully stuff it with beer. I move what’s left in the two cases to the front of the door I noticed just beyond the kitchen on the side of the dining room. As I set it in place against the wall I notice there’s a deck. There is also a sliding glass door from the master bedroom onto the deck. Nice.

I grab a plate out of the cupboard and pile pizza on it before returning to the living room. I set it on an end table I didn’t notice in the empty square space at the ends of the two couches. Then I return to grab two beer bottles in each hand.

I sit down and get lost in thought again, scenario version after scenario version. I glance at the TV and see the Colbert Report is on. I can remember seeing these scenes already and recall that and the Daily Show having played already. I look up and see it’s almost midnight. The last thing I remember before falling asleep on the couch is looking at the table and realizing I’d gone back for four more beers, making eight empty bottles.

Descent . Orientation

“Good morning,” booms a deep voice from above me. I open my eyes and feel some of my hair sticking to my eyelid. I brush it away and look up. I can’t make out who it is so I sit up and rub the sleep out of my eyes.

“Good morning,” I say back, voice crackling and deep from just being woke up.

“We have to go, get your shoes on,” the voice booms.

“Can I shower first?” I ask, feeling like I could use one but not absolutely needing one as I don’t seem to have sweat much overnight. Which is rare, considering I usually wake up in a partial puddle.

“No time. I am running late and you should have been ready by now,” the voice booms. My eyes start gaining the ability to focus and I do not recognize this person at all. From where I lay he must be at least six feet tall.

“I’m James, what is your name?” I ask as I stand up and look around for my shoes.

“I am Intef. Head of Security for Elecstri,” he explains.

“Elecstri? Is that the company I’m going to be working for?” I ask.

“Yes,” he responds while walking to stand next to the front door, looking at me expectantly. I locate my shoes on the floor in the kitchen, for whatever reason, and put them on. I quickly exit the front door as he is already walking down the sidewalk. Judging by how close his head was to the top of the front door I am going to guess he’s taller than six feet. I swing around and make sure the door is fully shut before jogging to catch up.

“May we stop somewhere for food on the way?” I ask, very hungry. He simply turns his head slowly until he makes eye contact with me before turning back to face the sidewalk.

We get into a large white Cadillac. The interior is white cloth and very comfortable. The entire interior is shades of light gray and white. He turns on the radio and it’s soft classical music. *Great, a massive psycho.*

“If you want to see how psycho I can be, keep calling me that,” he states strongly.

“Ahhh, telepathy is rampant I see?” I observe.

“We make great security guards, topside. It’s amazing how our reviews show us sweepingly outperforming every other security group we’ve been put up against. It’s much easier when you can hear people planning in their head while they smile to your face,” he explains.

“That sounds like a great edge, honestly,” I say, imagining it in my head. So many things would be so much easier with the ability to hear people’s thoughts. He glances over at me with a “no shit” expression and moves his eyes back to the road.

We sit in near silence but for the sound of the engine and soft classical music. I’ve always loved classical music. It just doesn’t feel right when I’m thinking about aiding in the end of the world as I know it. I need Aphex Twin or something. Autechre would be good. I start trying to remember all of the Autechre music videos I’ve seen through the years.

“You have some disturbing memories,” Intef says.

“Thank you,” I say with a smile. He gives me the same slow turn to eye contact before slowly returning his eyes forward. “Does it ever get old being able to hear everybody’s thoughts?”

“Does it get old hearing every little thing forced to make noise by the breeze? All the sounds of people talking and walking about in crowded places? Constantly being able to hear yourself breathe through it all? It is as all else is. White noise fixes all,” he explains in a slow, deliberate voice.

“Fair,” I respond. I feel my brain clear out and a sort of peace as I watch the road before us.

We pull up to a gate with a security guard. We barely slow before the guard waves to Intef and we pass through. The parking lot is almost fully empty but for a handful near the main office looking area. The front side of the warehouse I can make out appears to have several dozen dock doors on it. It looks like at least fifty. The side looks to have a few and the warehouse extends back for a good quarter mile.

“This place is huge,” I say with a little awe in my voice. Still analyzing the building I can make out Intef nodding knowingly out of the corner of my eye.

We park in front of the office portion and he motions for me to follow. I get out of the car and follow him into the glass doors. Beyond the glass doors is a wide looking hallway with multiple desks set up. Every desk has two monitors, a phone and all the supplies one who works with paper would expect. At the back of one side of the hall is a bank of hand held scanner guns. On the other is a door, presumably to the warehouse. By the warehouse door there is a wide stairway going upwards.

I follow him across the hallway to a smaller hallway. One door enters a kitchen area and the other a large conference room that looks to

double as the office cafeteria. He goes through the door into the cafeteria and points to a chair. I sit down quietly. He keeps walking and exits a door on the far side of the conference room that looks like goes into the warehouse. I hear a bell ring in two short bursts. He enters the room and sits at a table across the way from me.

Moments later two more guys enter the room from the warehouse door Intef just popped out and back in through. Both men are tall and muscular, like Intef. They both look strikingly similar, as well. Intef rises to greet the men and they all turn to face me.

“This man next to me is Artem. He is the construction leader. He will run you through the layout options and underground construction going on. The man next to him is Farahi. He is the technical lead and will be teaching you the inventory and accounting systems. And to remind you, I am Intef. I am in charge of all security. I will speak first,” he states as the other two take seats at tables on either side of me.

“I am speaking first because I am in charge of the glue that will make or break this entire operation,” he begins, clearly preparing himself for a long speech. “If I fail in keeping the building locked down during the overnight hours, keeping unauthorized people out of or free from detecting what we’re doing underground, we all lose. At best we have the ability to fully remove anybody who violates these if we detect it fast enough. But at worst, we miss it and our cover is blown on a global scale. There are thousands of fully operational sites around the world. This one is not yet operational. That is the hardest accomplishment as we must do it under the nose of watchful technology that has grown far beyond our influence of control.

“As I believe you have been told, we plan to move incredible volume in and out of this warehouse. We plan to have a few hundred workers and a fully operational plant in the quarter of this complex that is above the most pivotal location of our upward digging. The core of this building is roughly three hundred feet squared. We plan to have steel door access to it on three different points. These will all be guarded from the inside by one of our personnel at all times.

“Inside this core is currently a small transport tube. That alone is dangerous for anyone to discover. As time passes and our construction completes on the heavy transport shaft, it will be impossible to camouflage. Instead of a series of hallways and rooms it will be a large, high ceiling, open room with a very obvious and very wide hole in the ground. That hole will be ringed with technology nobody on the surface

has seen before. So the time between now and then, we will perfect keeping everybody who works here fully disinterested in bothering with whatever is in the center construct.

“Your job will be to keep the workforce happy. All of it. Your job will be to find other people to help you pick and cull the workers to a perfect harmony that will be here for the next six years. The pay will remain remarkable as long as the results remain sustainable. If for any reason deterioration in work and mentality of the work force begins slipping, your pay will stop entirely. If it is not picked up, we may fire everyone. We are not leaving anything to chance.

“The backup plan is workable, but the plan we are setting in motion right now is ideal. We want this to work. It will do two things. It will distribute our altered products into the populace at a rapid pace and cover the sound of tunneling,” he continues.

“Altered products?” I interrupt, raising a finger in a gesture of pardon me please.

“I am not at liberty to discuss that further. You may ask Carnorra next time you speak with them. If it is for you to know, she will explain it to you. I was wrong to mention it,” he states while standing up straighter. “Now, Artem will discuss what has been built and what is to be built to accommodate our distribution operations.”

“Good day,” Artem begins while standing up and walking to the front of the room where Intef was just speaking.

The next days become a blur of layout schematic revisions and furious construction. Faint memories of menu layouts and actions on the scanner guns. Functionality of billing, auditing, receiving and picking of all things product related. Various methods of keeping track of hours and even scheduling are discussed. Arguments are had about the number of workers over what number of hours will work for the amount of activity they want to push through the warehouse.

The last day is filled with explaining every detail I can remember to Intef as he sits and uses a tablet looking device to dig up research on everybody I want to bring in. All are accepted but Cody.

“Why not?” I ask.

“He is not to be allowed near the complex. Not even to visit. Not to visit your apartment. Do not even tell him you are in Arizona at all,” he demands. “This is not open for discussion.”

I sit silent while he continues working with his tablet. Finally he sets it down on the table.

“All looks to be in order. Let us go to the tube. Alejo has arrived and is waiting for you,” Intef instructs.

We both stand together and gather our things. I am allowed once again to carry a phone, a pen, marker, set of keys, box cutter and wallet. These have been my standard pocket contents for a decade. We walk through the warehouse. As we pass through I observe the hundreds of rows of steel racks five shelves high. Each shelf has steel beams and grates for pallets of any weight.

The receiving area has been lit and spaced in a way we all believe twenty trucks can be unloaded at a time while smoothly being split into storage bays. The cafeteria and locker area I talked them into building in the far corner by the each and single package shipping area will be done long before I get back in a week with everyone I can talk into coming.

As we approach the transport tube he stops and faces me proudly.

“I told Panacea I would give her an honest evaluation of you. I am proud to say it will be positive. I have no doubt you can pull this off,” Intef declares.

“I deeply appreciate that,” I state. I feel a touch of doubt but think nothing. I have trained myself to be silent in mind when not communicating. I feel thoughts and ideas come much faster and smoother. It surprises me on levels I cannot articulate.

“Hello,” Alejo says while looking between myself and Intef. Intef and I both nod at Alejo. Alejo stands to the side and gestures for me to enter the tube. I nod at him in agreement.

“How have you been?” I ask as Alejo stands opposite from me in the tube.

“Quite well. You?” he asks, looking at me with great interest.

“Quite well also,” I respond. I look at the panel Alejo made a glance at but did not touch before the door closed and we clearly began moving. I can sense our movement a lot better now than previously. I am not sure why.

“You seem incredibly focused,” Alejo observes.

“Thank you,” I say with a feeling of happiness for a moment.

“No, you really do. Almost robotic,” Alejo insists.

“I have had a lot to learn and even more to consider,” I state calmly.

Both of us stand quietly for several more seconds before I sense the tube is stationary. The door swivels open and he allows me to exit first. I find we are back in the structure built beneath Omaha and Council

Bluffs. I follow Alejo through the maze of corridors and we stop in what looks like the same room I first spoke with him. The bedding exactly as I had left it.

“Must I disrobe?” I ask. Alejo laughs and shakes his head.

“No. Carnorra would like to speak with you before I take you to the closest tube to your initial testing area,” he informs me.

I laugh a little and say “Initial testing area. That is still an amusing thing to hear considering the test.”

“I imagine so,” Alejo says with a smirk. He turns and walks out of the room but I hear his footsteps stop mere feet down the hallway.

“You seem more focused than we calculated you would be,” I hear Carnorra’s voice say.

“I’ve been hearing that a lot today,” I say.

“You are speaking verbally?” I hear her ask.

“Yes. It is comfortable to me and everyone seems to find it acceptable,” I explain.

“Alright. How confident are you in pulling off your task?” she inquires.

“Reasonably. I would say greatly but I want to be comfortable with my answers. With the task ahead of me, I feel reasonably optimistic,” I respond.

“That is as good as we could ask for. You’re the youngest candidate we researched. We chose you because of your coldly logical outlook on everything regarding humanity,” she reveals.

“Even though I go into rages and am passionate about so many things?” I ask in confusion.

“The passion and fury inside you is the fuel that gives us our confidence. We have seen you chase down the right thing even if the people on the wrong end of things are long standing friends. That’s exactly what we need,” Carnorra explains. I nod knowingly and don’t think or say anything for several moments.

“I’m ready to go up and begin,” I state.

“Please refrain from spending too much time socializing. Remember we are always watching,” she says in the most kind and soft voice I believe she can muster.

“Understood,” I respond.

“Let’s go,” Alejo states as he pops into sight in the doorway. As soon as he finishes the statement he turns and heads down the hall. Without hesitation I follow him.

Once to a room with a transport tube indentation, he puts his hand out.

“What?” I ask, feeling like I’m forgetting something.

“The phone we gave you. You will not need it once you get your phone back top side. It will already have our numbers in it,” he says softly. I reach in my pocket and give him the phone I got once arriving at the apartment in Phoenix.

“Cool,” I say, stepping towards the tube as it swivels open.

“Good luck,” I hear from Alejo as the door swivels closed without him entering. I feel surprise that I’m not worried or nervous. After just a couple seconds I sense the tube is stopping. The door swivels open and I see a light colored wood panel. I carefully touch it and figure out it pops free.

After I pop it out I feel it fall forward so I grab it by each side of the panel. I hold it in place and go around it, carefully popping it back into place. I turn around and see a carpeted, empty basement. This room has two wood panel walls and two painted drywall covered walls. I step out into the basement and see an L shaped center area. Across from the room I entered is a bedroom and the room next to that is washroom with a shower, toilet, washer and dryer. Behind me now is a stair well. I see no signs of any items anywhere as I head up the stairs.

Descent . Outside

At the top of the stairs is an opening to a kitchen on the left and a door on the right. I open the door and see a fully empty garage. I close that door and go through the kitchen and into another L shaped room. I look out the front window and see a lot of grass and trees. This obviously isn't Phoenix anymore. I step outside onto the large wooden porch and look around. I'm halfway up a bluff with a large tree in the front yard. There is a for sale sign in the front yard. I close the door behind me and hear a magnetic lock hold it in place.

"We have this house on the market and will not sell it unless to one of our own. We tour it once in a while but that's as far as it goes. I'll be with you, by the way," I hear Carnorra say.

"Alright," I say. "I have so many questions, still. Who is better to talk to about my vast curiosities? You or Panacea?"

"Ask me. Panacea is very busy and has a much wider focus than I. My focus is here. I know a great deal more about Earth and everything going on than she," Carnorra says.

"I will," I agree. I look around the porch and find the box Intef sent with the paperwork, plane tickets and cash. I see he sent it through UPS, addressed to me and has the instruction "LEAVE ON PORCH, NO SIGNATURE" attached. I pick it up and walk through the grass to the front sidewalk. As I walk down the sidewalk towards the main road I see just down the hill I realize I am not far at all from Makayla's house.

Approaching the main street a taxi drives around the corner and pulls up to me.

"James Freeman?" the driver asks as he rolls down his window.

"Yes," I respond. Not very curious about why he's come to pick me up, considering everything.

"Get in," he instructs as he gestures towards the back door. I open it and climb in.

"Thanks," I say. *Riding is better than walking.*

"Where to?" he asks.

"Well, first I need to get my phone and stuff," I tell him before giving him the address to Jean's house. He flips an impressively narrow U-Turn and starts out on the way. I try to block out any thoughts and planning as the ride continues. I don't want to over-think any more than I have on what I'm going to say to everyone. In unbelievable situations like these I always seem to do better with a minimal amount of conversational planning.

"Need me to wait?" he asks.

"Yes. After this I am going to have you take me to a rental car place," I explain.

"No problem," he responds and gets comfortable.

I exit the cab and before I get half way through the front yard Jean runs out to greet me.

"Where the fuck have you been?" she asks. Her face looks stern and stressed. Just as she finishes the question I see Galen come outside through the front door and walk down to us.

"It's a really long story. Did everything end up ok the night I left?" I ask, deeply concerned ever since I left.

"Patricia stormed off and walked around the neighborhood looking for your truck. Apparently she doesn't watch the news," Jean begins. "When she left Galen and I came back to the house to make sure everything else was cool. The only person who noticed anything was going on was Isobel."

"Isobel stayed here after you left, waiting for your return," Galen tells me with a semi-scolding look towards me.

"Yeah, want to go inside?" I ask, pointing up at the house.

"Yes," they both say together. We walk up and into the house, taking seats in the family room.

"So, what the fuck?" Jean says as she settles.

"Short story is in my walk home I met somebody with a job offer," I say sheepishly, not doing very well at sounding confident and absolutely honest.

"What? In the middle of the night?" Galen asks, looking understandably skeptical.

"Yes. I was confused at first and didn't believe it," I begin. "I even ended up at his place, because I was curious. I talked to him, because I was curious. He offered to fly me out of town the very next morning. I did, because I was curious. It all happened so fast."

"And now?" Jean asks looking somewhat hurt.

"Well, I didn't have my phone or anybody's numbers. I didn't have internet access or anything like that. This is the first place I came to since this is where I left and I wanted to apologize to everyone," I state, picturing Isobel in my head as I said it.

"Thanks," Galen says, nodding his head with an expression of deep gratitude and relief.

"I need to go tell work I'm taking another job," I say, glancing out the window at the cab.

"Are you leaving already?" Jean asks, sounding annoyed. Galen looks from Jean to me, and also looks generally bothered.

"I am sorry. I have a lot to do and an infinitely small time to do it, I'm afraid," I explain. "This is unexpected but the money and experience offered is unparalleled and I can't turn it down."

"Damn, dude," Galen says. "I've never seen you this focused and

driven. Why are you going back to the cab? Don't you want to drive the Spook?"

"I usually am, but try and hide it," I explain. "But it's usually geared toward my own selfish artistic works or self-destruction, or sex."

"Sex, usually," Jean says with a small laugh.

"No, you deserve the Spook, man. I will be able to have my own car and have a level of appreciation for what your family offered to give me in regards to the Spook. That was unexpected and a huge deal to me. Especially considering how much I know you were looking forward to it."

"True. Thanks man," Galen says with a tear building in his eye.

"Where is my phone? I promise I'll keep in touch and come visit often," I say with all honesty.

"I'll get it," Galen says jumping up and running through the room and down the stairs.

"We have to tell you what happened that night," Jean begins with the same grim look she's had since she came out of the house. "After Patricia couldn't find you, she went to Makayla's house. Makayla was still home alone, and Patricia killed her."

"Are you serious?" I ask, a little disturbed about my lack of caring since I know she secretly recorded us fucking and gave it to Patricia.

"Here you go, dude," Galen says handing me my phone and grabbing my other hand. He pulls me up to a standing position and gives me a hug. "You're the craziest dude I know and this level of nuts couldn't happen to anybody more suited for it."

"Telling him about that night" Jean says, interrupting Galen.

"Oh, fuck," Galen mumbles as sitting back down and returning to the same sort of grim look he had while falling silent.

"There's more," Jean says while sounding like she's getting choked up. "Patricia came back here to look for you again. You weren't here, but Isobel was. She went down into Galen's room and nobody was there. Isobel went down after hearing someone go down the stairs to see if it was you. I heard a scream and then a muffled scream, so I went down to check."

Tears start coming out of Jean's eyes as Galen jumps over to sit next to her and put a hand on her back for support.

"Isobel was on the floor, bleeding from multiple stab wounds to the chest and abdomen," she says, sniffing and trying to keep composure. "I yelled for Galen and punched Patricia as hard as I could, knocking her out cold. I took the knife and pinned her while Galen called the cops and tried to patch up Isobel.

"There was nothing we could do," Galen says, now also tearing up.

"Jesus, I have to go," I say, starting to panic and stand up.

"I'm sorry man, we didn't know she would come back," Galen says while standing up and giving me a pretty strong hug.

"No worries, it's all fucked up, I wish I had never met Patricia," I say before Galen lets me go and I give Jean a hug.

"It sucks, it fucking sucks," Jean says as she gives me a hug.

"Thanks guys, wish me luck," I say as I hug Jean. I hear them both saying good luck as I exit the front door and jog through the grass to the cab.

"Here's the address for the rental car place," I say, giving him my phone. *This is all so fucking insane.*

"Sure thing," he says, punching it into his GPS and giving me back the phone.

"Are you going to be okay with the Isobel news?" I hear Carnorra ask.

I don't know. I'm certain I will be fine.

"I know it's not going to be easy, but I'm here to help you," I hear her say in an effort to comfort me.

If anyone is used to feeling alone, it's me. At least this way I feel like I'm helping do something that I've known deep down needs done all my life.

"What is that?" I hear her ask, sounding like she already knows the answer.

Wipe out most of the human race.

Descent . Scour

My first stop is Toys R Us. I pull up and park with the employee cars out of habit. The moment I walk in I see Darren pointing at me while scowling. He points towards the office, puts down products he was working into a display and walks briskly. I pick up my pace and follow him to the office, where he is standing with the door open.

“Get out,” I hear him say to the evening manager who was working at the computer. She stands up, gathers a couple things and leaves quickly as I step in. I stand at the end of the office by the door as he walks to the opposite side. He leans his ass against the counter and crosses his arms, shaking his head.

“I’m sorry,” I begin before being interrupted.

“No, I’m talking right now,” he interrupts, holding an index finger up. He crosses his arms again and resumes shaking his head. “What the fuck? I covered for you for three full days you were scheduled. Then on the fourth day I had to admit, as the whole crew knew you were missing, that you weren’t actually helping your uncle. He’s in Fort Calhoun, right?”

“Yes,” I respond.

“No, you don’t talk yet,” he demands angrily. “I love you man, and I’m glad to see you but you really needed to fucking call me. We can’t take you back now because the paperwork went in already for no call. You have so many numbers to fucking reach me at.’

“May I?” I ask, hoping he lets me talk now. He gestures for me to go ahead. “I bumped into someone that legitimately offered me a six figure sign on bonus to run a warehouse for them.”

“Bullshit,” he says, looking half serious and half curious.

“No, look at the camera,” I say pointing out the black Mercedes I rented.

“Come,” he says, bolting past me out of the office. I sigh and try to keep up. He walks outside and straight for the car. I follow. ‘Open it,” he yells. I use the remote and unlock it. He opens the driver’s door and stands, staring inside.

“Believe me?’ I ask.

“Maybe,” he says. “Text me a picture of the place next time you’re there.”

“Alright. I came here to apologize before leaving,” I say, stern faced and serious. I don’t think I’ve let a sarcastic, joking smile out at all since I’ve come to the surface. It feels weird being absolutely serious and calm at all times.

"I appreciate it but we were fucking worried sick about you," he says while leaning forward to give me a hug. I stand cold and unmoved, to my surprise.

"Thanks, man," I say with a sigh.

"Get the fuck out of here, I have to go back in and finish this set," he says waving me away and chuckling a little. I nod and get into my rental car.

I feel no emotion one way or another regarding his varied reactions. I think I would have been worried about that previously, but am not at all right now. I push the button to activate the engine and head straight to the Farnam warehouse which is nearby.

Pulling in I see some familiar faces outside at break. I ignore them as I walk straight into the office. Riley sees me and says hi to me in excitement but I turn and go straight up the stairs without acknowledging her. I feel a little shitty about it but I have no time for pleasantries.

"Larry," I say, stepping into his office and closing the door behind me. I did not notice but he is currently on his phone. I sit in the chair across from him and wait for him to finish.

"What have you been up to?" he asks once hanging up the phone.

"I've been supremely busy," I answer while settling into the chair. Larry's initial look of amusement at seeing me slowly changes to confusion.

"That's good, right?" he asks.

"Yes. I came here to make you and most of your workers an offer," I reveal, watching his look of confusion slowly morph back to amusement. My face remains stern and free from any sort of smirk.

"Let's hear it," he says with a smile.

"I came to offer you, Hillary and Nancy 250,000 to move down to Phoenix," I begin as Larry's smirk turns into a laugh. "I'm going to offer Bud, Don and Stevie 175,000 and everybody else 100,000 to come down as well." I sit and stare at him without breaking eye contact. His look of amusement slowly changes to a more serious tone.

"Wait, you're serious?" he asks, leaning forward and crossing his hands.

Without a word I reach in my back pocket and pull out a stack of neatly folded checks. I fan them out and lay them carefully down on his desk so he can make out several names on them. The checks are official and already made out to them individually. He leans forward and thumbs through them. As he does so, his face grows grim.

"I am dead serious," I state calmly.

"How did this come about?" he asks, now fully serious. I give my revised story of the meeting in the middle of the night followed by a touched up version of the meeting underground. I explain the warehouse functions and size with intentions to vastly expand both throughput and staff.

"What about lodging? Are we supposed to use this to sit in hotel rooms while we save up for houses? Or are we just going to rent while we're there or what?" he asks, obviously weighing things as words come out.

"We are providing a luxury apartment free of charge for the first year. That will be plenty of time to save up money for anything anybody would want," I explain.

"Alright, alright," he says, clearly in thought.

"Does this sound like something we could get everyone in on?" I ask, making a sweeping gesture towards his warehouse.

"I don't know. We should go run this by Nancy," he states in an almost whisper.

"Agreed," I say, collecting the checks and rising to my feet. He looks up and nods his head. We walk together through the warehouse to the side Nancy's production floor resides in. The whole way through, people say hi to us and neither of us say anything beyond a nod or a wave. "Do you think she'll be interested?" I ask.

"For that money? I'm sure she will. Why isn't Stevie being offered the same amount?" Larry asks with a genuinely concerned expression.

"I have someone for receiving manager," I explain. "I would give Stevie receiving lead. Bud will be offered shipping lead and Don will be offered small parcel lead. You and Nancy's roles will remain the same," I say. Larry's head is lowered and eyes watching the ground ahead of him as he is clearly deep in thought the entire time I talk.

"But the only person above us would be you, instead of a whole corporate division?" he asks, eyebrows going up.

"That's exactly right," I confirm. He slowly nods his head and I catch a smile break across his face for a brief moment. We enter the production area and walk down the lines. We don't see Nancy anywhere so we make our way to the offices.

"Hey hun, holy shit hello James," Nancy says as she walks around a corner and stops in front of us.

"Have a few minutes?" Larry asks while gesturing to her office.

“Yeah, what’s wrong?” she asks with her eyebrows tilted inward, as she seems to be fifty percent of the time.

“I have something,” I say, also gesturing. She gives me a slightly crazy look and turns to walk into her office. I look at Larry and he shoots me a quick smile as we enter behind her.

“Alright?” she asks, sitting down and gesturing for me to take the chair. I sit down and Larry paces back and forth on the side of the room, picking at his lips nervously.

I explain the story from front to back as I told it to Larry. Her face goes from amused to a little worried and confused to stern. When I get to the amount of money for each group of people her eyebrow goes up and she smirks. I pull out the checks and hand them to her. She thumbs through them carefully. She even holds a few up to the light to see the watermarks in the paper. Larry steps over and takes a few from her to do the same, not having done it before.

“The serious look you came in with made me think you were going to try pressing charges on us for something,” she admits with a small huff. “I’m in, what did you tell him?” she asks while looking at Larry.

“I said nothing without talking to you first,” he answers. “But I’m in, too.”

“Do you two think we’ll have much luck pulling everybody in?’ I ask, sounding worried. I am worried. I don’t expect to get half of the workers. But I didn’t expect to get both Larry and Nancy either.

“Stevie’s going to be pissed he’s not getting the same as us,” Nancy admits. Larry slowly nods.

“I told him that, too,” Larry. adds.

“I know, I might talk to my people and see if we can’t get him bumped up,” I tell them.

“We can,” I hear Intef say inside my head.

“I mean, I know we can, there’s really no question I will make sure to get the extra check cut once he gets down there,” I blurt out.

“Alright, I’ll call him and Hillary in so you can use this office to talk to them. If you can get them both, everybody else will fall in,” Nancy tells me. She motions to Larry and they leave the office together.

“Hey, can you have Bud come in as well?” I ask before they make it out the door. “With him, there’s no question the rest I want will come.”

“Yeah I’ll have him come too,” Nancy says with a forced smile as she closes the door. I walk around to sit in her chair and put my head down on her desk. *Thanks, Intef.*

“No problem, it’s nothing at all,” I hear Intef say in my head.

After a few moments Stevie walks into the office. He looks a little terrified and he nods to me.

“Hey, man.” I say, gesturing to the chair. “Have a seat, two more people are coming before we begin.”

“Alright, may I ask what’s going on?” he asks looking squeamish.

“It’s complicated man, but it’s fine. No worries,” I say while forcing a smile. A few uncomfortable minutes later Bud and Hillary come into the office and stand near the door.

“Thanks guys, this is going to sound very strange coming from me,” I begin. The three of them stand quietly as I go through the entire speech.

“I’m in,” Bud blurts out before any of them say a word. Stevie and Hillary look at him in shock.

“Really?” I ask.

“Yes. Plus Larry and Nancy told me they were in and I should listen. If they’re that confident, I’m in as well,” he answers.

Stevie and Hillary look at each other as if communicating telepathically. Stevie looks at me and shrugs.

“I’m in, too, then,” Stevie says confidently. He laughs a little before adding “I never thought you would be bringing something like this to us.”

“Me either, man. I certainly never would have guessed this,” I say very quietly.

“I’m not in,” Hillary states strongly with a look of fear on her face. Bud and Stevie turn their heads quickly to look at her.

“It’s ok, but may i ask why?” I ask, gesturing for Stevie and Bud to calm a little. They both look shocked and a little annoyed at her statement.

“I just have too much going on here. I can’t leave my family and I know they won’t just leave their jobs to go sit with me down in the inferno,” she explains.

“Inferno?” I ask, instantly becoming lost.

“Haven’t been there for a summer yet?” she asks.

“No,” I answer truthfully.

“You’ll see,” she states emphatically.

“Alright, I had to try though as you’ve always been impressive at your job,” I say confidently.

“I appreciate that but I have to decline,” she says smiling at me.

She nods to Stevie and Bud as she exits the office.

"It's alright, she's been a bitch lately anyway," Stevie says. Bud laughs and Stevie joins him in laughter.

"Yeah?" I ask, unaware of this development.

"Yeah, don't worry about it. She got engaged a few months ago and nothing has been going her way. She can't take it out on her fiancé because he makes crazy money," Stevie explains.

"Ahhh, makes sense I guess," I say.

"Son, I knew you were headed for greatness when I watched you work in the each room," Bud says loudly.

"Yeah?" I ask, skeptical.

"You worked circles around somebody who has been there for over a decade. And in your first couple months," he says, walking over to pat me on the shoulder.

"He's right, your work was high velocity," Stevie adds.

"Thanks guys, I appreciate that," I say to them feeling less stressed.

"I don't doubt Larry's decision after listening to you. You seem more focused and driven than you did back when you worked here," Bud continues. "And you were pretty fucking driven then, let me tell you."

"So you guys think you can get all the drivers on board?" I ask, starting to feel the nerves pulling at me again.

"Absolutely, for what they make in several years given to them in one burst? Absolutely," Bud tells me.

"I have no doubts either," Stevie says confidently, nodding to Bud in agreement.

"You're already with being the receiving leader besides the receiving manager?" I ask Stevie, hoping he's cool with it all.

"Yes. Larry's boss here anyway, so it wouldn't be much of a change. As long as your guy is good," he asks.

"I guarantee he's good, you two see things the same. You'll see," I respond with my nerves probably showing.

"We'll see," he says standing up and also patting my shoulder.

"Thanks guys," I say as we all exit the office.

I sneak out the production office door and walk around to the rental car outside. I drive to Michael's house, knowing he's going to be asleep. Once I arrive his mother greets me at the door.

"I thought that might be you," she says, grabbing me for a hug.

"Sorry I disappeared," I say, feeling like a shit head for not figuring

out a way to get a hold of people sooner.

"It's okay, he's off tonight so he's downstairs on his computer," she tells me, holding the door open for me.

"Thanks a lot, I appreciate it," I say as I enter the house and head downstairs.

"Well what the fuck," Michael says as I walk up to him.

"Yeah, sorry," I say, standing there feeling like a total dick.

"You should, where the fuck did you disappear to?" he asks while turning his chair to face me. He crosses his arms and judging by his facial expression, is trying not to jump up and punch me right now.

I explain the whole story and add in the details I heard from Galen and Jean regarding the murders. He looks skeptical the whole way through. I pull out the checks and give them to him to look through.

"Well. The craziest shit does always seem to happen to you. So I guess this shouldn't surprise me," he says. He still looks skeptical. I stand up and hold the blinds open near his desk.

"Look at the car in the driveway," I tell him. He stands up and comes over to look out the window.

"Huh," he says as the look of skepticism fades from his face. He crosses his arms and stands there looking out the window, shaking his head.

"So, are you in?" I ask, feeling worried he might not be able to because of his family.

"Oh, I'm in," he says. "I'll go down to work and let them have my two week notice."

"Can you get it shorter than that? Maybe tomorrow?" I ask, feeling demanding. He laughs and looks at me with surprise.

"I don't think so but I'll see what I can do," he informs me. I nod and take the checks back from him.

"I don't get that now?" he asks.

"No, they will be waiting for you at your apartments," I inform him. He nods and looks over at his computer.

"Alright," he says. I nod and quickly leave his house before his mother can see me.

Descent . Questions

The moment I step out after returning the rental car I see Alejo pull up. I get in and nod to him as he drives away.

“There’s a tube near here,” he informs me.

“Thanks man,” I say, staying quiet and feeling mentally exhausted. We pull up to a power station with an attached building. He parks and we both get out of the car. He silently leads me inside and gestures towards a tube. I smile at him and walk towards it. It opens before me and I step inside.

“Not coming with?” I ask.

“Not this time,” he says with a smile as the tube closes.

After a few moments the tube opens and I am in a beautiful underground structure I have not previously seen. The room before me is broad and circular. The floor and ceiling are a white stone color with bright glowing blue marble inlay. The walls are solid light gray stone and everything is lit entirely from the glowing marble. It surprises me how much light is being provided through the marbling.

There is a hall exiting the room straight before me and one to the left. I choose to walk down the hall before me and find a massively wide and tall cave-like area with a large rock formation in the middle. A fountain comes out of the top and parts of the sides of the rock. Water flows down it into a circular pool at the bottom. A number of people stand around it smiling and laughing with no spoken words.

I see people walking side by side all around this area and multiple groups of people standing around. Some groups have serious expressions on their faces and others are laughing and cheerful. Almost all of the people I see are the same paleness. Not quite albino white, but close. Once in a while I see people with color, ranging across all races.

“You’ve been standing here observing for several minutes,” I hear Carnorra state in a calm, amused fashion.

Everything seems to be in order. I swept up all the people I wanted but one. That was more than I expected.

“I know, I’m focusing on you. Remember?” I hear Carnorra say.

Yes. I recall. I am just anxious about the line of questions I want to pursue.

“Do not be. I already expect many of them,” she says in a comforting way.

Can you tell me more about why the surface of earth is to be

cleared off?

“The humans on the surface are violent,” Carnorra begins. They are controlled by their own fear. At no point in human history has anyone been able to adequately control the surface dwellers. There is energy that hits the surface of the earth that helps maintain the unstable mentality. That’s why the humans we take care of below ground are so much more stable and receptive. That’s why they have more control of their minds and abilities. The humans topside were never really altered to lose the abilities enjoyed by those below. They just destroyed themselves through so many cycles it was dropped out of practice and long forgotten.

“Now, granted, a few of those destruction cycles were initiated by us. The pressure placed on certain portions of the earth to cause global tidal waves to cover the whole in water for periods of time. A few strains of virus that wiped out the majority of the population,” she concludes.

So why not wipe them out instead of sending up massive armies to subdue them?

“Honestly, we have differing views on what to do,” she begins. “I just want to use a virus again, and wipe out the entirety quickly. Panacea wants to send them to a nuclear war with themselves and do it that way. Our problem with that is the surface would be uninhabitable for centuries. Eris, who you haven’t spoken with, wants to drop protection and signal for other cultures in the galaxy to have free reign on earth. That, though, would sacrifice everyone below the surface as well. We can’t have that.

“Since I’ve heard you wonder this, I’ll just skip to it. The reason why the surface needs cleansed is because it’s on the brink of exploring the galaxy. Part of the previously stated protection from the other galactic cultures is a treaty. Part of that treaty, we created to protect Earth and at the time Mars, is the inhabitants of the planets will not venture out of their own solar system. So far we’ve been able to write off probes sent off as curious exploration. But humans on ships leaving the solar system would violate the treaty and lead to Eris’s wishes coming to pass.

Alright. That actually makes sense. Is there any way I can save anyone I care about?

“You can bring one person. We decided to reach out and speak with Michael, Nancy and Larry since we need them to help Intef keep everyone pacified that the center area is simply uninteresting and away from it. Nancy and Larry want to bring their two kids, so we counted that since we typically let everyone bring one. Michael said he’ll decide that

closer to the time he needs to,” Carnorra explains. “Would you like to move on to the religious questions?”

I have a lot of those. So many.

“I know. The reason there is such a large, ever expanding number of religions is because we install new ones to grip populations that have fallen faithless to the others,” she begins, sounding like she’s explained this so many times that it is coming out on auto-pilot. “We do not dictate the entire thing to people. We find people, as you have joked in the past, who think about writing a bible and seeing if they become another deity figure a few hundred years down the road. We approach them and discuss it with them. This is how both the Old and New Testament were written. Each book was comprised of events they had seen or heard about enough to write in detail. As they wrote about it they tied it to god’s will. Even Genesis was just stories that people taught their children as to where everything came from during the path to becoming adults.

“We also didn’t intend for religions to war with one another. We always try to influence peace and unity. In fact, the new testament and the Qur’an both started out with no combative parts at all. Both were entirely positive and welcomed life alongside other religions. It was rulers that edited in all of the vitriol and combative language. At least the Christians, overall, have selectively ignored the vitriol in their weekly teachings.

“We do not step in and alter these texts to the originals because Panacea forbids it. We can influence creation of culture and religion but once it is instituted we are not to touch it. Nor are we to stop alterations by rulers. I personally don’t agree with this approach but Panacea has support from multiple points. I am but one of a small number who disagree,” she concludes.

So it’s okay to enslave or wipe out billions of people but not ok to step in so religions are returned to their intended purity?

“We never enslaved anyone. Nor will we. The forces held at bay would without hesitation if given the chance,” she states, sounding mildly offended.

What do you call the attempt that I’m actually excited to help with? Countless soldiers taking control of the surface? What will that be if not slavery?

“Not slavery. We will not be forcing anybody into work. Merely imposing law and order. There will be no more war. There will be no more leaving the planet. That is all. There will be no guns or violence

that is not instantly and finally dealt with," she snaps in response.

I almost asked how you will instantly deal with violence. Telepathy.

"Telepathy," she repeats. "Telepathy is the edge the people below have to use in dealing with the surface."

What is the plan for explaining why so many died during the takeover? Or exchange of power. Whichever.

"We are not going to explain. We are simply going to wipe out a long list of those we know will never be able to live under change. This didn't just come to our minds and get set in motion. This plan has been executed multiple times on countless planets. We carefully examine every human being, collectively. Humans are much like radio receivers. Some simply can't operate at required frequencies. This is how we are able to tell who will never leave the past, and who will prosper in the new human future."

What you're telling me is many might see loved ones die, while being expected to just start following new laws without any explanation as to what is going on?

"We're not going to explain why people had to die. What we explain is the events leading up to the cultural reset and the plans for the future. Events leading up to it, as I mentioned, involving the treaties, religions, past cataclysmic events and the origins of everything related," she answers calmly. "The future will be utopian beyond the imaginations of anyone currently living on the surface. This is how it was in what is referred to in fantasy as Atlantis. Tiny references still remain about that place. It is the most recent reincarnation of Humanity that began as the human existence will be reset to shortly."

I think I understand. So that section of the army I saw. They all looked awfully familiar. I believe you said you grew them. Clones?

"Not clones," she retorts quickly. "They are lab grown from test subjects, using actual sperm and eggs. It is a more controlled process that allows us to feed all of them the exact same nutrients. We have been using the technology humans are only now developing again where certain genetic flags can be turned on or off to our specifications. It allows us to guarantee there are no birth defects. This results in a more uniformed appearance as there are no tainted periods of growth. The aging process in them is also accelerated between birth and release. During that time they are connected to what you would understand to be computers and fed information."

So like clones, but unique.

“I would say not clones as there are several thousand fathers and mothers. I could agree that they are perceived as clone like, due to the process. I could also agree because they are given a very similar life experience and conditioned identically, they could be perceived as clones,” she explains.

Why do you need to cover the sound of tunneling up under south Phoenix but nobody noticed you tunneling underneath a neighborhood?

“You come from an area where the ground is comprised of very weak clay. That is fast and easy to tunnel through. Phoenix is built on rock that is noisy and time consuming to dig through without being detected. So we need cover,” she replies.

I was told to come below when the move to the surface is made. I was also told it would be almost exactly 3 years from now. The mass transit tube being installed into the warehouse I'll be running will be done in a year. Will we be operational from the completion to the move upward?

“Yes. Remember, you are distributing altered electronics that will be pivotal in the take-over. It will disrupt all forms of electronics on the surface that are not sufficiently protected against it. It will end any conceivable form of communication for any response by a government or military body. It will also disable all vehicles,” she details.

So, how do I know where the tubes are if I'm not near work?

“You will be at work when it happens. Stick to your schedule.” she says in a commanding voice.

When I return to Phoenix, I agreed I would never return near the Omaha metro. What are the rules I'm expected to follow regarding contacting anyone there once I'm in Phoenix.

“You may do what you want regarding contact, as long as you never return,” she instructs. “That will be the safest distance you can keep. You can have people come visit but you can never take them to where you work. You can have people visit your apartment and your coworkers at the apartments for as long as they are there. Also, feel free to explore the city. There is a lot to do. Keep yourself, and any guests you invite down, busy.”

What about exploring the country in the south and west?

“We don't want you to leave Phoenix. You must be able to get to work in case you're needed. And in a way that people who might be with you would believe. We can't just have you ditch out friends in the north

and tube over. Once you reconnect more fully with your friends, that would be too noticeable,” she answers calmly. “Once things become routine at Elecstri, you may explore further out into the southwest.”

Do you mind if I look around down here?

“Not right now. You need to go back to your apartment and wait to be called by Alejo, he was instructed to pick you up tomorrow morning. You should get some sleep,” she instructs. “You will have countless years to explore down here when the time comes.”

Descent . Time is Cruel

Getting back into the apartment I head straight to the fridge. I open it and grab a beer and a box of left over pizza. I run them to the end table in the living room and set them down. I begin sitting and realize I'm going to need more beer. I run back into the kitchen and grab 2 in each hand. After setting them all on the end table I sit down and pop the first one.

I pull out my phone and decide now is the best time to see what I missed the weeks I was gone. *What the fuck day is it, even? Let me swipe down and see... Sunday? Fuck.*

Jean: Isobel is good people. She's here waiting for you.

Galen: Let me know if you need me to come find you.

Michael: Where are you! I got off work early and came to the party and you're gone.

Isobel: I hope you are well. I appreciate you. You made me happy when I was sure to be sad for weeks to come. I've been having a hard time lately, and you lifted me up.

Oh Jesus fucking Christ. This is too hard. I put my phone on the end table and slam two beers in a row. I balance the beers on the pizza box and carry them to the computer room. I slam one more beer then throw the four empty bottles into a trash can near the desk.

I throw open the computer and rifle through the games. I start Wolfenstein, The New Order on one of the screens. I've loved this franchise since Wolf3d and figure I'll give the new game a go since it's right in front of me. I notice there is another one called The Old Blood, as well. Exciting. I check for Trillian and don't find it, so I install it. After logging in I see Michael is online and message him.

James: Think you can fly down tonight or tomorrow? Plus, today I learned Patricia killed Makayla and Isobel.

Michael: Sorry to hear that, man. How did you meet Isobel? I met her the night you disappeared, before I went home to crash out. I wasn't there long.

James: I also met her at the party the night I disappeared. Patricia walked in on us fucking and came back to kill her after she killed Makayla later that night. I need to decompress but know nobody down here.

Michael: I can't, I have to finish up here with my parents before I leave. Tuesday will be the earliest. I heard about Isobel and Makayla. Sorry, man.

James: I understand, man. It's all good

Michael: Sorry. I can't just leave them. You know if I hated them like you hate your mother I could come down immediately.

James: I know, I don't blame you at all

Michael: Go bar hopping? I know you're good at meeting people. I'm going to pass out soon. Talk to you tomorrow.

James: Later

I see The New Order's menu screen and look over at the monitor I have a web browser open on. I throw open Facebook and type the name Isobel in. I scroll through the list until I find someone attractive and say hello in a message.

I keep scrolling then realize it's only showing me people in the Phoenix Metro. I narrow the search to Council Bluffs, Iowa, and immediately see a profile image that says RIP.

Clicking on that profile, I see the only thing that is public is the profile, timeline image, and a small post saying she was murdered and several links to news stories. I crack one of the two remaining beers open and take a few drinks. Then I ctrl+click on each link to open them in separate tabs.

I read through the first story, heart sinking to the floor. I switch to the second and there is a picture of Patricia in handcuffs being lead into the police station. I can see blood all over her legs and she's screaming at the officer who's leading her. Typical.

The third story is much more detailed and tells how the mother discovered Makayla the next morning. It talks about how the party was cleared out and no minors were found in possession, which I find awesome. That's the last thing Galen's family needs. It talks about Isobel's family and how they are having problems coping with the death.

I finish off the partial beer and crack open the last, chugging it entirely. I throw them in the trash and go back to the Facebook page. I send her account a friend request and close that tab, also. I turn off all monitors but the one with Wolfenstein on it and go retrieve four more beers to tide me over for a little while of what will surely be Nazi killing glory.

Getting out of the psychiatric ward in the game, I feel my phone vibrate. I look at it and see it's a response from the local Isobel.

Isobel: Do I know you?

James: No. I was looking for a friend with the same name and saw your profile. You looked interesting so I figured I would simply say hello.

Isobel: Oh. Thank you! Did you find your friend?

James: I did. Thanks for asking.

Isobel: You are welcome! Sorry I can't talk longer, I'm meeting friends at Tempe Marketplace this evening.

James: It's cool. I'll have to look up where Tempe Marketplace is, I just moved here.

Isobel: Awesome! Welcome to the valley! Remind me sometime to tell you about the attractions around here!

Should I ever tell her how I looked her up? Naw. Fuck that. Nazi killing time. I delve back into the game. Every time my mind wanders towards darkness I try to focus harder on the game and push faster through it. Several hours and multiple beers later, I find myself in a Nazi prison and too tired to continue.

I should take a nap before work tomorrow. Hopefully the dream world will be kind to me tonight. I barely feel like I'm alive as I realize I'm already pulling the covers over me.

Descent . Ever After

Laying in a huge bed in a massive room, fully naked and erect while laying on my back. I'm looking up at the ceiling with has two fans directly above me. Patricia is standing off the bed to my right, wearing white lingerie and white fishnets which looks amazing against her dark skin. Isobel is standing to my left in all black lingerie and black fishnets, looking equally amazing against her pale skin. Patricia sensually crawls into bed and leans forward towards my penis. She bites the base of it gently, causing my leg to twitch. I look over and Isobel smiles, then bites her lip.

Patricia moves to put her mouth over the head of my penis. She slowly and carefully takes it all the way into her mouth and throat to the base. I close my eyes and enjoy that feeling of my head pressing against the insides of a throat canal.

Suddenly pain shoots through my body as she bites it completely off in one motion. Her eyes look up at me with wild fury as she reaches into her mouth and pulls it out. She coughs a little and slaps it hard against my stomach. I try to sit up but realize I've been tied to the bed by all four limbs.

I look over and Isobel looks terrified. She turns to run but Patricia leaps off me, tackling her to the ground. I hear punches landing and then see her stand up, pulling Isobel up by her hair. Isobel puts her hands in the air in surrender as Patricia lands a hard hit to the back of Isobel's head.

Isobel falls to the ground unconscious. Patricia stands up and wipes the blood from her mouth which she acquired during my penis removal. I look down and blood is still pumping out of the base of where my penis used to be. As I felt my erection of what was still attached below the base fade, the blood-flow picked up.

Patricia runs around the bed and picks up a griddle that looks like has been heated to over 400 degrees. She runs over and presses it hard against the base of where my penis used to be. It burns the bleeding to a stop and sears my abdomen and thighs as well. She drops it on the ground and walks around the bed, grinning ear to ear.

She picks up a bat that I keep behind the dresser and jumps up on the foot of the bed. She swings it upward and breaks all of the arms off of the fan over the foot of the bed. After that she jumps up and hangs off of it, laughing hysterically. Once she lowers herself she walks around to where Isobel is laying.

"Think I'm stupid, pussy boy?" she asks me with menacing eyes. She picks up Isobel and lays her across the foot of the bed. I am stunned into speechlessness. Patricia reaches under the bed and grabs more

rope. She strings it around the broken fan's suspension and ties it around Isobel's chest.

"Why are you doing this?" I ask. As I finish the question Patricia's heel meets my forehead and everything goes black.

I open my eyes and see I am hung from underneath my armpits, tied around my chest, hands tied behind my back. Isobel is before me, awake and gagged. Her arms are also tied behind her back and hung from underneath her armpits. Both her and I have our legs tied together at the knees and ankles. I nod to her that I'm awake and coherent. I look around and see Makayla tied up and gagged in a chair facing us. I look at her and she starts crying immediately.

"I see you're all awake," Patricia says, walking into the room pushing a gray rolling cart with various knives and drill bits on it. "That's good. I will stop every time one of you passes out and it will only make this take longer. Any time someone screams, I will gag all of you again and slowly cut one piece of skin off after another."

Patricia walks around and takes the gags off of Makayla, myself then Isobel.

"Why are you doing this to us?" Makayla asks. "You promised me if I helped you, I could have Shawn to myself."

"You wanted James to pay, now he will pay," Patricia responds.

"What did I even do to you, Makayla?" I ask, looking at Makayla with puzzlement and anger.

"You never gave me the time of day until you saw me out of work clothes and school clothes, you fucking ass hole. All you care about," she explains until Patricia punches her in the cheek.

"No arguing," Patricia shouts. She points at the pile of gags and raises an eyebrow.

I look down at the burned clots that cover where my penis used to be. I look up at Isobel hanging there and see her head turned, looking at me with huge pleading eyes, tears running down her cheeks. I look at Makayla and see her also looking at me but filled with rage and hatred.

Patricia smiles, observing these transactions. She walks over to her cart and picks up a small knife. She walks over to Makayla and brushes the blade back and forth across her cheeks. Makayla's rageful look slowly turns to Patricia.

"I fucking helped you," Makayla says. She is cut off by Patricia forcing her hand into Makayla's mouth. She pulls her tongue out a little and makes a couple slicing motions with the scalpel. Makayla begins screaming and throwing her head from side to side.

“Shut the fuck up,” Patricia shrieks as she runs to grab a ball and some bandana looking strips of cloth. She jumps over to Makayla and jams the ball in her mouth, wrapping the cord around her head. She also wraps a cloth around her head to help keep the ball in place.

“She’s going to choke on her own blood,” I say. Patricia shoots me a look then looks at Makayla.

“Keep swallowing. You can die if you want but I’m not done with you,” she snarls before cutting a slice from her shoulder down over her collarbone and halfway through her breast to her nipple. Makayla’s eyes close and her head starts to wobble a little. Blood is flowing down the front side of her body at a pretty fast rate.

Patricia’s facial expressions start showing more and more rage in a manner that seems to be slipping from her control. She quickly moves over to the cart and grabs a fairly large knife. She walks back to Makayla and stabs her in the stomach multiple times, over and over.

I feel my stomach turning and try to look away. I hear a few footsteps and feel a wet, cold slap of metal on the side of my face. I look and see Patricia with her knife, feeling blood running down my cheek and neck though feel no cut.

“This is your fault,” she yells. “You will watch.”

I feel tears welling up in my face as I look and see Makayla’s head back, fully limp. There is no more motion coming from her and her stomach is now chunks of skin and too bloody to see any skin tone. Small pieces of what looks like intestines are hanging out in a few places.

Patricia walks back over and begins sawing at Makayla’s breasts, cutting them off one at a time along with the bloody cloth of the lingerie. I look over and see Isobel staring at me with wide, terrified eyes. Her cheeks are wet with tears and her arms, though tied behind her back, are visibly trembling.

Suddenly I see Patricia jump onto the bed and start hitting Isobel with the base of the knife. She lands blows to her arms, stomach and legs. Isobel starts screaming for help in almost incoherent words.

“What did I say?” Patricia screams, jumping off the bed and grabbing another gag. She jumps up and gags Isobel quickly. “No fucking noise.”

I am now locked onto Patricia, staring and trying desperately to think of a way to break free and kill her. For a moment I wonder why I wasn’t feeling like this while things were happening to Makayla. Perhaps because she betrayed me so directly. But seeing this happen to Isobel begins flooding me with anger.

“Want to do something, pussy boy?” Patricia says, jumping down off the bed and walking over to pick up the scalpel again from the table.

She walks to me and leans over with her face close to my side and I feel carving in my hip.

"I'm going to kill you," I whisper. She stops carving for long enough to stab me once quick in my thigh. I make a quick movement in a knee-jerk reaction and she wraps her arms around me to stabilize me. She returns to carving what feels like letters into my thigh while blood runs down my leg.

"There," she says, as I feel the carving stop. "Now you are marked as pussy boy," she states proudly. She walks a couple steps over to Isobel. Isobel is squeezing her beautiful eyes closed.

"I'm going to kill you," I repeat.

"You know, pussy boy? You care so much for her, let me put you inside her for the rest of eternity," she says with a sound of seething hate in her tone. She jumps off the bed again and runs over to pick up my penis. She runs back over to the bed and cuts the panties off of Isobel. She starts squirming and trying to make sounds, though barely can through the gag.

Patricia wipes blood from the base of the penis and rubs it on Isobel for a tiny bit of lube. She then reaches up and wipes some tears off of Isobel and adds that to the attempted lubrication. She tries to force the penis into Isobel but has little luck. Starting to visibly get madder she starts to stab Isobel repeatedly in the vagina.

Isobel's eyes open wide in terror as a solid sound of panic starts from her throat. Her eyes lock on mine and I feel tears running down my cheek. As her eyes start fading I see Patricia stop the stabbing motions with the scalpel and pushes the penis up into Isobel's abdomen.

Patricia throws the scalpel across the room. Isobel's head begins moving around as if she is losing consciousness. Patricia jumps off the bed across the room a bit and grabs the griddle once more. She jumps onto the bed and with one arm drapes Isobel's knees over a shoulder. She pushes Isobel's knees upward. She then takes the griddle and holds it against Isobel's ass. Isobel's almost shredded, bloody pussy, ass and thighs make a very audible sizzling sound as the griddle is pressed firmly against it. Her eyes roll back in her head and she falls limp.

After several moments Patricia throws the griddle across the room. My eyes are running freely with tears, making it harder and harder to see. Patricia jumps off the bed and picks up the baseball bat. She points it at me and yells some things I can't even hear. The rage inside me is so strong it is causing additional blur to my vision and ringing in my ears so loud I hear nothing else.

Patricia jumps on the bed and starts beating me repeatedly with the bat. Blows to the legs, stomach and arms. Hitting my hands

repeatedly until I can't even feel them anymore. As the bat swings towards my face, I feel a strong twitch.

Descent . Shaken and Stirred

I sit up in bed, covered in sweat. I feel wetness all over my face. I brush my face with the palm of my hand and inspect it to identify the liquid. I smell it and identify it as tears. I look around, heartbeat racing.

“What the fuck? What the fuck? What the fuck?” I repeat, looking around the room. I am fully unsure what I’m looking for. I feel numb and furious. I realize it was just a dream. But it wasn’t a dream, as she did kill them in real life.

“Holy fuck, Jesus fuck,” I say, standing up with wobbly legs. I walk into the bathroom and fall to my knees halfway to the toilet. I weep uncontrollably as I try in vain to wipe the tears from my eyes. I wipe faster and faster as if getting it all away from me quick enough will cause the crying and pain to stop.

I move the rugs on the floor away from me and remove my clothes, still crying. I lay as flat as I can on the linoleum, trying to cool down. I think if I cool myself a bit, it’ll help calm me down. I feel like the tears never stop coming.

“What the hell are you doing?” Alejo asks in a worried voice.

“What?” I ask, sitting up and realizing I’m naked with clothes and rugs strewn about the bathroom. “Oh, shit” I mumble, scurrying to grab my clothes. Alejo turns away and shakes his head a little.

“Today will be my last day with you,” he says in an embarrassed voice. “Not because of this, but because I will be taking you to the car lot and dropping you off. That way you can pick a car you want and drive yourself around.”

“Thanks,” I say sheepishly as I finish getting dressed. “I’m taking a quick shower, make yourself at home” as I close the door, almost hitting him with the handle.

I think I might hear a voice on the other side of the door but jump in the shower anyway. *Sorry man. I’m sure you know telepathy, but I absolutely must shower after the dream I had last night.*

“It’s fine. I am early, anyway,” I hear Alejo say in my head.

What the fuck time is it?

“Just after noon. I suspect tomorrow will be an early start, so be prepared. Artef should coordinate with you today before you head back home,” Alejo says telepathically.

“Sorry man,” I say, stepping out of the bathroom in fresh clothes I had stashed under the sink. *Old habit from the party pad days.*

“It’s no problem. If anything, it woke me up a little more. Surprises can do that,” he says with a smirk.

“So what is the plan with buying a vehicle?” I ask, following Alejo through the front door and down the sidewalk.

“In the wallet they gave you is a credit card, as well as a debit card. Each one has enough money on it that you don’t have to worry about any limits being reached. Just pick which car you want, and inform them you’re paying for it on the spot. No problems,” Alejo explains. “Which lot should I drop you off at?”

“Let me think about it,” I say, running through all the options that popped into my head at once. We climb into his car and are off onto Baseline Road in a matter of moments. *Shit, I’ve always wanted a sports car. I really don’t want anything too flashy, though. There is a lot of rough terrain around these parts. Maybe I should get a hummer or some sort of off-road capable vehicle.* “What is close by?” I ask.

“Mazda, Honda, Hyundai, Jeep,” he lists off before being interrupted.

“Jeep!” I blurt out. *Michael has a Jeep Cherokee. He has had it for the longest time. I’m going to grab a Jeep Wrangler. Plus, with this being a desert and all, I’m sure I’ll get plenty of chances to drive it off road.*

“Probably a great choice. I was expecting you to stop me at one of the more expensive dealerships,” he admits.

“No, I would rather keep a much lower profile,” I state confidently.

“Why? You’re aware of what’s coming down the road in a short time relative to how much surface life you had left. Why not have a blast on the way?” he asks. I feel the confidence drain from me. He pulls off the interstate and onto a road named Elliot.

“Well, you’re right enough. I just didn’t want to grow a big group of outstretched hands and get distracted from the greater job, you know?” I say, feeling a little more confident as the sentence progresses.

“Good answer,” he says, pulling into a large auto mall section of town.

“Thanks, I try,” I mumble, observing lot after lot as we proceed. After a bit he pulls into the Jeep lot and lets me out.

“Have fun,” he says as I close the door. I pull my new phone out and look at the date. *Monday. Of course. All things start firing off on Mondays.*

“All’s set!” the kind man who was just practically handed an expensive sale says with a huge smile, handing me the keys.

“Thanks, I appreciate it,” I respond, reaching out to shake his hand. He takes my hand and somehow his smile grows even further.

“No, I appreciate it,” he says.

I climb into the fully loaded, all black Wrangler, including a roll cage and extra lift kit with weight stabilization. As I drive away I see him still standing there and smiling at me. *Later, guy.*

I pull into the Wal-Mart parking lot across the way and park at the back of the lot. I pick up my cell phone and look at the bookmarks in the maps hoping it’s marked. The warehouse is indeed marked. I look up the location and set out to drive there. Thankfully, everything is really close together regarding the apartment complex they chose, the warehouse and anything we could conceivably want. *It feels strange having to learn how to get somewhere I’ve been awake most of the day the past several days. I wonder how many places those tubes go directly into.*

I pull in and see a placard with my name on it. The words “site manager” are under my name. That feels weird. I pull into the spot and get out of my car. I stop for a moment and look over the new vehicle.

Black soft top, roll cage, black tinted windows, black trim, black paint, black rims, lift kit, step bars on each side and a winch on the front and back just in case I get myself fucked into places I need to pull myself out of. The front license plate is a pirate skull and bones because we don’t have to have front plates in AZ they told me. The back is going to be the black cardinals plate, even though I don’t care about sports at all.

I enter the office and nobody is inside. I pass through and walk into the warehouse. Taking a route where I can see various places discussed in the most recent meeting, I am impressed by the amount of work that has been completed in the short time I’m gone. Racks have been added on top of existing for more capacity. The each room has been rearranged to the specifications I asked for, including the extra entrance through the aisle on the side as well as widening them on both ends.

Passing the divide between the shipping and receiving sides, I see they are leaving it mostly untouched until Michael arrives to direct its setting. I walk to the section where the production lines were under way and find it all almost completed.

“Hey, James,” I hear from my side. I look over and see Artem approaching.

“Hello, Artem,” I say, ending my fast stride.

“Follow me,” he says, walking past me. I follow as instructed. “We have a situation and I want to know what you think,” he says in a quiet voice as his pace quickens.

“No problem,” I say without a worry.

"We learned the joint connecting pipes between here," he says, pointing at a drain from a huge mixing vat," and here, are leaking."

"We have to fix it, we can't have leaks for any reason," I say.

"If we do that, it will set production back a month," he says, looking at me as if he hopes I agree we can overlook it.

"Make it happen in two weeks," I instruct sternly. "Let me know the price and if any extra crews will be required to make that goal."

"Yes sir," he replies before walking away.

"And without us needing to help by giving you instructions, very nice," I hear Carnorra say.

Thanks. I'm sure leaks could complicate the work below once the surface is reached.

"That is correct," I hear Carnorra say. "I was about to tell you not to let the leak slide, especially with the chemicals that will be going to waste storage through that pipe but you handled it properly."

Thanks. I continue walking back and down the path I had planned in my head. I pass outside and see the fence rebuild under way. It is not nearly as far along as I assumed it would be. I also observe the cameras on the corners and spaced around the building are in place. At least the shaded wells are in place, which is good enough to start.

I walk around the building and go back into the office. I head up the stairs to the second floor offices and enter mine. I see things haven't arrived I ordered.

I have to hire an HR person, right? Or is Security doing that?

"Security is taking care of all HR, though nobody should know the HR person is with security. And they are taking care of financials as well. We trust them with everything topside. Once things are established and flowing freely, we may pass off some HR duties and bring in a Safety Director," I hear Carnorra say.

Alright. Any chance I can learn to hear other people's thinking?

"We unlocked the part of your brain to allow your hearing us. But we kept the lower frequencies of humans on the surface silent to you," I hear her say in a comforting voice.

Is it that bad?

"To the untrained, you would hear everybody within a quarter mile in any direction. In even sparsely crowded places that is very loud until you are able to focus with your mind as you can with your eyes," I hear her say gently.

That makes sense. I figured I would ask.

"It never hurts to ask. You will have time to learn that once you are underneath, with us" I hear her say as I take a seat at the desk.

I look up at the wall clock and see it is just after 4pm. *Where the fuck did today go?*

My mind keeps flashing back to the dream I had. I turn on my computer. While my computer boots up I turn my chair around and look out of the window on the back wall of my office. It runs from the arm level of the chair up to the ceiling and spans the entire wall. The same setup exists in the manager offices in Production and Receiving. There is an office next door with a window overlooking receiving for Larry as well. I look down at the widened aisle for where forklifts will be parked at the end of the day. All of the pallet wrapping machines are already stocked. Everything looks to be in near perfect order.

I turn back to face the desk and begin configuring the computer to how I prefer using it. I'll be glad when the second monitor gets here.

Descent . Faces in the Clouds

Once everything is in order, Chrome is installed, security software is tweaked and Trillian is running I open up a Facebook tab. Once I log in I see Isobel sent me a good morning message. *I wonder why my messenger app didn't inform me of this. Hmmm.* I respond with a hope that her day goes well.

I skim through recent posts and see I have a couple other messages. One is from Michael, telling me he'll be able to come in two days from now. That's pretty great. The next one is from a World of Warcraft buddy who lives in town and wants to go out for drinks tomorrow night. *Fucking cool. I forgot he lived in Phoenix.*

"Will be there. The Devil's Den sounds like my kind of place," I respond.

Fuck. Isobel. Visions of her on her feet and hands gliding forward and backwards enter my head. *I've never been fucked like that before and she did it out of nowhere, and didn't stop. It felt amazing. It made her cum repeatedly. I wish I hadn't run. Even with all that's happened since.*

"Were you wanting to back out?" I hear Carnorra say.

No, sorry. Just thinking.

"I'll leave you alone with your thoughts. Just think my name and I'll focus back on you," she says before I feel her presence leave me. *I didn't realize I could feel her presence until it was gone. That is interesting.*

I see a new message notification on Facebook and open it. It's the recent Isobel! As soon as I see the name, though I know it's not the previous one, my heart sinks. I open the message to see she said "Welcome to Phoenix! I sent you a friend request so I can look at your profile."

I close the message and see there is indeed a friend request. I accept it and drift off into thought about the previous Isobel and I's conversation in the garage. How animated her hand motions and facial expressions were. How adorable her smile and smirk was. How perfect her hair was no matter how she moved about.

I see her hair through the two sexual positions we did and realize it didn't get messed up then, either. The pigtails always remained perfectly straight. Never got frizzy or full of knots. Her orgasm face was as cute as any other face I saw her make. It wasn't strange or even ugly like other orgasm faces I'd seen in the past.

I hear my text alert on my phone and take a look.

Intef : Can you be here at 8am? I have a handful of your guys coming in tomorrow. I can start a slow stream of shipments from suppliers.

James: Yes, that's fine.

"You are interested in a lot of the same music I am," a new message from Isobel reads. I click on her profile and scroll through her likes. Marilyn Manson, Linkin Park, Nine Inch Nails, Tool. *Fuck, we do share a lot of music in common.* Then another message comes in from her which reads "I pulled your cell number off your info. Now when you text me, I will have your information saved already!"

Crafty. I navigate to her information and punch her information into my phone. I scroll through and realize almost everyone I ever talked to is still synced to my Google account when I logged into this after it was given to me. I love you, Google.

James: I see that. Did you see 300 yet?

Isobel: Are you asking me out on a date?

James: Yes. I suppose so. None of my friends get down here for a few days and work is slow.

Isobel: Oh so I'm just filler until your friends get here? :-)

James: Are you kidding? I was just thinking for tonight.

Isobel: Damn!

James: No, I'm really joking. I just like getting to know people more in person than online. Feel them out for friends or prospective employees or vocalists or people to turn in for my FBI quota.

Isobel: It is easier in person. Beyond that, your message just spawns so many questions it must be sarcasm.

James: Oh shit! You speak sarcasm! Do you mind profanity?

Isobel: I worry about people who mind profanity.

James: I am instantly glad I popped you a message.

Isobel: And no, I have not seen 300. Though I would like to.

James: Busy tonight?

Isobel: Not with anything I can't put off until tomorrow.

Shit. I'm kind of bluffing. But this is exciting.

James: There is a showing in about an hour. Do you even live near south Tempe?

Isobel: I live in Arcadia. Just southeast of Camelback. I pulled your phone number off Facebook and just texted you my address.

James: Excellent. I will be there in 40 minutes?

Shit, I was totally bluffing.

Isobel: I have three roommates, so no funny business! :-P

Me: Never crossed my mind.

I head out to my car and make the few minute drive home. I walk straight into the bathroom and take a nervous piss. *Shit, what am I doing? The last two girls I messed with were murdered by a crazy ex. I really should swear off women. Forever. Shit. Shit shit.* I look in the closet and find some black pants and a brand new Nine Inch Nails shirt I never even saw before. I put on some black tennis shoes and head out while making a mental note to go through the closet and dressers more closely soon.

I pull up and shut off the jeep. I climb out and before I get around the front of the car I see her, taller than I thought, walking down the sidewalk. Her beautiful copper colored hair is pulled back in a tight ponytail and flows neatly down the center of her back to the bottom of her shoulder blades. She's wearing a low cut black tank top and form fitting blue jeans. Her belt is wide and studded with double holes in it all the way around. She's wearing black shoes with multicolored shoelaces. She obviously brought the girls out to play today because her cleavage is notably present.

I open the passenger door and she shoots me a huge ear to ear smile before she quickly climbs in.

"Been in jeeps before?" I ask, impressed with how quickly she got into the passenger seat.

"No, but I've always wanted to so I had entering one already worked out in my head," she says, pulling the seatbelt on.

I carefully close the door and walk around the front of the jeep. I see her looking me over as I get to the driver side and climb in.

"So, drive through first?" she asks, looking at me with her bottom lip pouted out and forced sad eyes.

"You don't have to beg, dammit," I say with a smile. We pull away and with luck I still remember the way to the theater from here. "Are there any places you like near here?"

"Just stop at Jack in the Box," she says pointing for me to turn right. I turn right and after a couple seconds I make out a big red sign that says Jack on it.

"I've never even seen a Jack in the Box before today," I say.

"Really fresh off the boat, huh?" she asks, looking at me like a dog looking up at an airplane for the first time.

"I really am," I admit, nodding slowly.

"Filibertos? Carl's Jr? Smashburger? Five Guys?" she asks.

"I think Carl's Jr is up north only it's called Hardee's there," I say, fairly confident in my answer. She pulls up a Carl's Jr logo on her phone and shows me. "Yes, same place as Hardee's," I say. *Go go, memory!*

I look over and notice how cute and tiny her nose is. Her whole head, for that matter. She has a long beautiful neck, petite little shoulders and her collarbone couldn't be more perfectly formed. Her head is more round than oval and though her jawline isn't V shaped her chin is as little and cute as her nose. Her lips are a little above small and look better in person than in pictures.

"Tell me what to order for us for my first time," I say in a soft, child-like voice. "And be gentle," I add.

She laughs, thankfully, and says "Just get two number ones with Coke."

After we get our food I drive around to an empty spot and park. She passes out the food and I eat mine quite fast. She's only half way done by the time I finish.

"Did you taste that?" she asks with a small laugh, putting a hand up to her mouth to cover.

"I taste everything that touches my lips," I say with a smirk, wiping the sides of my mouth to make sure nothing remains.

"You can drive while I finish, I promise not to spill," she says, breaking into another wide, toothy smile that lights up the whole world. At that moment I feel my heart start to sink with the thought of what's to come for everybody I've ever known. I force that thought back and focus on that amazing smile. I also force a smile in return.

"Alright," I say as she lifts another fry up to her mouth and does a little miniature wiggle dance in the seat. I notice the light glowing indicating the passenger airbag is off. I look over and realize her ass is about half as wide as the seat she's sitting on. Dear god, she's tiny.

Approaching the movie theater she starts packing our empty containers and used napkins neatly into the bag and folds it up. She puts it on the floor and I can see her taking mental note to not leave it when she gets out.

I get out and walk around to her side of the car, but she is already on the ground and closing the door.

"Don't worry, I can open doors myself," she says with a smile, bright eyes and a little bit of a laugh. *Her eyes are an amazing shade of blue. I like people who are independent but it feels weird not being expected to open doors. Patricia, Zoe and Jill, shit even Lillian though we weren't actually dating, preferred if I opened doors and paid for everything.*

The hesitation while looking in her eyes causes me to fall behind. She's a few steps behind me as I push the button in my pocket to lock the

jeep. I see the shadows light up a little with the flashing lights indicating a successful lock procedure. Immediately after I notice that my eyes focus ahead of me on the tiny little ass of Isobel's. Her ass is more full and shapely than the dearly departed. Comparing them in my head makes my heart sink again. *Focus, focus.* And I do. My eyes travel from her ass up her sides to her shoulders. Her shape isn't as muscular and toned as the previous Isobel but her shape is far sexier.

Where there was toned angle there is feminine beauty. Instead of tiny, strong thighs she has more full, tapered thighs yet still look strong. Her ass I'm sure she would refer to as a bubble but, but it's more round and ass-like all around than angular and small. Looks like it would be more form fitted to a cupping of each hand than firm and bone-like. Her shoulders are sexy without protruding as much. Her arms are a little bigger than fits the rest of her body but that's easily overlooked. *Pretty damn good only seeing one flaw.*

I notice her pace slowing a bit so I speed up a little to get next to her. She flashes me a smile to the side and raises her eyebrows a bit. I smile back as her smile descends to a smirk. *Ahh, she knew I was checking her out from behind. Clever girl.*

Through the course of the movie our hands go from at our sides, to held. Neither of us talk from the time the opening credits roll to the closing credits. On the way out we compare notes on things we loved about the movie. Neither have any complaints.

I take her home and she invites me in. I sit on her couch and she sits next to me. One of her roommates comes out a few times and makes uncomfortable small talk before retreating to the room. The other two whom don't speak very good English stay in their room the entire time. For long periods of time there are no words, only comfortable silence between us. She gets cold and grabs a sponge bob blanket and covers our legs with it.

We continue to sit in comfortable silence, smiling and being calm, picking pieces of lint off of the blanket. After a while more her roommate who i have figured out is also a close friend comes out again and asks if they can go get ice cream after I leave. I take the hint after the friend retreats back to the room again and say goodbyes with her and promise we'll go out again soon.

Descent . Bodies in the Air

I get home and look at the clock. 3:12am. *Fuck. Why do I always do this to myself.* I get out of my clothes and jump into bed. Then I think for a moment. *there is a pool outside that is heated and ready to roll but nobody really lives here.* That is the last thing I think before I fade off to sleep.

Standing in my office looking out into the heavily active warehouse I take a sip of coffee. I hear two trucks back into docks with a little more force than I like to hear. I turn and set my coffee down on the desk and continue observing out of the window. The drivers come in pretty close to one another and talk to Chris, who is in charge of checking people's load pulls and coordinating loads being picked up.

Bud drives over on his forklift and Chris points to a couple dock doors. Bud nods and drives off. Bud is one of the loaders and the distribution lead. He assigns orders to be pulled and trailers to be loaded to other distribution workers. He drives over to another loader and tells him some instructions. They both drive off and begin grabbing pallets, presumably to load onto trailers.

Chris walks over to one trailer, opening it. The door gets halfway up and I hear a couple silenced gunshots. Chris falls to the floor dead as dozens of men in black soldier gear enter the warehouse from that trailer. One runs over and opens the dock door to the other trailer. They fire on everyone in sight as they fan out into the warehouse.

Pulling myself out of it I run out of my office and turn to hurry down the hall to the stairwell. Jannis and Daryl come out of their offices at the same time asking what is going on. I ignore them and continue down the hall and turn to go down the stairs. Three of the soldiers are coming up the stairs and I freeze in place.

They maneuver around me and the last one pats me on the back a couple times. As the top two reach the floor I hear more silenced gunfire and a couple brief sounds from Deryl. I run down the stairs and through the bottom floor of the office to the front door. The front door is guarded by one soldier who moves to the side as I approach. I run through and down the sidewalk to my car. The sounds of crashing now come from the warehouse, as if a forklift rolled into a rack after the driver was shot.

Turning on my car I head to the gate and see a couple soldiers manning the guard station. They nod to me and I see the gate open. Heading through the gate I see some people walking on the street and they don't seem to be alarmed at all, telling me the operation is going on

smoothly. I drive towards the hospital Isobel works at to pick her up and take her to the nearest tube I know of in the mall down the street from her.

I hear my phone alarm start going off so I pull it out and hit snooze. Setting it on the seat next to me I proceed through traffic, abusing the carpool lane even though I'm alone in my car. Traffic on the highway seems to be normal at the moment for being just after noon. I make my way through easily enough until the exit I need. Once at the lights I see a backup from the light-rail construction going on a few blocks ahead.

I feel an arm grab my arm and look in the back. Michael is in the back laying down.

"Pull over," he says in an angry voice just above a whisper.

"We're almost there," I bark out with a rich sound of desperation in my voice.

"I don't give a fuck, pull over in this lot," he demands, pointing at an apartment complex. I pull in and he very quickly unlatches the roof, throwing it off. He reaches forward and detaches my seatbelt.

"What the?" I start to ask, starting to be filled with fear. He grabs me by my shoulders and stands me up, steering wheel between my knees.

"You were going to fucking leave me to die?" he roars, pulling me with him as he leaps out of the jeep. While going through the air he morphs into a muscular black bear with a human-like head and dark brown scaled skin on his face. I feel the crunch of my body slamming into the concrete as we land. He lands on his feet next to me.

He grabs me by the chest of my shirt and pulls me up. Leaning into my face, teeth now fangs covered in thick liquid he breathes heavily on me. The smell is horrid and his now clawed hands are slowly tearing my shirt. He rests me on my feet, backing off a little.

"You were going to fucking leave me? Answer me," he roars even louder, raising a claw-like hand, about to strike.

"They weren't going to kill you, I made sure of it?" I say, voice wavering in terror.

"Bullshit, I saw them kill the security and sneak around to your car. They would have killed me if they saw me," he shouts before swinging down. I feel him connect with my face and feel blood instantly begin running down the side of my neck and chest.

"They had to have let you run, they have eyes everywhere," I insist in a weeping voice. The pain is excruciating and it feels like an acid is burning in the fresh lacerations.

"Fuck you, you were running, you left everyone to die," he shouts even louder while raising his claw-like hand. After he concludes the sentence it descends with great speed.

I sit up in bed, covered in sweat. *Why the fuck would they be coming in from trucks? What the fuck brain. What the fuck, Jesus Christ.* I rub my eyes and try to slow my breathing. *Carnorra? Carnorra?* I repeat quickly in my head.

“Yes?” I hear her say, calmly.

“Can you promise me Michael and I will not be at the warehouse when the rising happens?” I ask, voice deep and cracking in typical morning fashion.

“Yes. I’ll make sure you have ample time to get out. I see he is like a brother to you, so you can bring him down when it happens.

“What about Galen and Jean?” I ask, voice cracking a little more. I desperately need water. I climb out of bed and walk to the kitchen to get some water out of the water cooler near the door to the porch.

“We will see,” I hear her respond quietly. I feel my already shaken nerves from the dream get joined by an all too familiar sinking depression.

Alright. That dream was a little more than I think I was ready for.

“We wanted to see how you reacted,” I hear Carnorra say.

What do you mean? You planted that dream?

“We walked you through that dream, yes,” she says firmly. “Panacea wanted me to see how you would react before we began later today.”

Why come in from trucks? Isn’t the invasion happening from the transport?

“The waves will be brought here through the transport. The warehouse needs locked down first so we can take out the walls for speedy insertion,” I hear her answer me, voice still firm. “We have operatives on the surface that will trigger things before it all begins. We have to clear the buildings at cover sites like the one you’ll be leading.”

Fuck, I guess I just didn’t realize everybody would be killed right away.

“We need the element of surprise and can’t chance people figuring out what’s going on and alerting anyone outside of the property before the right time,” I hear her explain.

Can’t the invasion happen overnight when they’re all at home?

“There will be overnight shifts running as soon as possible, remember? We planned on splitting up the guys you brought in to lead the new hires through the entire day cycle,” I hear her say in what is now a much softer voice.

Alright. I’ll talk to you later.

“Call for me again when you need,” I hear her say before I feel her presence leave me again. The feeling of depression sinks even further. I

look up at the clock and see it's only 5:10am. I walk back into the bedroom and enter the closet. I stand looking through all of the clothes, taking mental inventory. I feel the depression sinking as I fall to my knees on the floor.

I carefully lay down in the closet and let the tears take me. I cry and think about how all of my greatest fears were not as bad as the reality as I now know it. I don't try to hold back and weep heavily.

As I calm down, I help the rising comfort of having cried with the thoughts of how I have brought people to a new part of the country and given them prosperity. Even though it will be short lived, their last days will be better than it otherwise would have.

I stand up after catching my breath, wiping my face free of tears. Door to the closet still open, I look out and observe the pool. I decide to grab the swimming trunks I noticed in the dresser the other day and go out to the pool. I exit through the porch and jump the side.

Walking around to the gate I realize I need a key to get in. Instead of going back for the key I climb up and jump over the sharply topped iron fencing. Landing with a bit of a sting on the concrete I walk to the edge of the pool. I see I am by the deeper section of the pool and jump in.

The water is warm and relaxing. I come up for air before swimming underwater from this side of the pool to the other. Coming up for air again I repeat back across. I continue this cycle until the light has risen outside.

Getting out of the pool I hear a familiar voice calling out to me. I look over and realize it's Larry and Nancy. We mutually approach the fence on the shallow end side of the pool.

"We're heading to the warehouse," Larry says reaching his hand through the gate. I reach out and shake his hand.

"I'm about to get dressed and go in myself," I say, smiling and feeling a little uncomfortable.

"We want to thank you, sincerely, for getting us in on this project," Nancy states sincerely. "We weren't sure it was real at first."

"Understandable, I wasn't either," I respond, dripping on the concrete. I move my hair back behind my ears and press it down so it is held temporarily against my head by the water.

"After we realized it was real it made sense to us," Larry says with a warm smile and knowing nod. "You were always below the pay grade you deserve."

"I appreciate that a lot," I say in a soft, stunned voice. "I will probably be coming to you for advice at one point or another. You are a great leader."

“We have faith in you. We’re excited to see what you do next,” Nancy says reaching her hand out to also shake mine. I reach out and shake hers as well.

“I’m going to go get ready and join you down there,” I say, smiling and nodding as I turn around to walk to the apartment.

I get back on my porch and glance around, seeing nobody. I peel off my swim trunks and leave them on the porch. I enter the bedroom and grab some fresh underwear and pants out of the dresser. Entering the closet I look at the floor where I was crying moments before and brush off returning depression. I grab a dark blue collared shirt and get dressed.

Descent . Boots on the Ground

Walking into the office I see Sherry arranging her desk. Her desk is just inside the entry to the left. It's positioned so she can greet and deal with people who are having order issues. Looking at her to the left are the offices of the IT specialist who isn't here yet and the inventory specialist who should be here tomorrow. She sees me and quickly stands up.

"James!" she exclaims, extending her arms for a hug. I walk over and give her a hug.

"Nice to see you were able to do this," I say before breaking the hug.

"I couldn't turn down this nice weather. I like heat, so the summers will be fine," she assures me. "How did you come into this opportunity?"

"Honestly, I was offered it in the middle of the night after a party. It sounds unbelievable but it's true," I say, feeling guilty for not being able to be fully honest. "I just hope I don't disappoint anyone."

"Nobody I talked to is worried. We're all excited about this," she says without a hint of doubt in her voice.

"I do appreciate it," I say smiling. "I'm going to get out there and get to it."

Sherry nods in acknowledgment and goes back to what she was doing at her desk. Exiting the office into the distribution center I see Bud is already here. He is standing in the middle of the staging and loading area next to Larry.

"This is smooth," Bud says with wild eyes. It is sometimes hard to tell if he is happy or upset because he has the same wild eyes in most moods. Usually he is only going into a rage when he is also scowling.

"Thanks man," I say approaching him and reaching my hand out. He takes mine in an extremely firm, almost painful handshake.

"Did you have this set up like my last warehouse on purpose?" Larry asks.

"The location system, yes," I respond with a smile. "I figured that way the transition will be easy. The guns are set up similarly too but that is mainly due to using the SAP system here as well."

"Shit man, there are twice as many docks here," Bud shouts in excitement. Then his face goes a little more grim. "Are we going to have more workers to help? The warehouse is twice as big too."

"Yes, but at first the volume will be light. Then there will be a series of stress tests and we will bring people in as we need them ramping up," I reply.

"That sounds fair," Larry says, arms crossed and head nodding. Bud's face looks grim for a moment until he starts nodding as well.

“Okay, okay,” Bud mutters as though he is thinking out loud. “You might do alright, kid” he states while patting me in the middle of my back.

“Fuck man, I hope so,” I say while nodding, then shaking my head from side to side. “I’m going to get to it,” I say again. They both nod and return to talking amongst themselves as I walk into the warehouse.

I walk straight to the production area. Nancy is standing talking with the contractors. I approach and stand next to them as they talk.

“That’s not a problem. We can run the dry lines until the wet ones are ready,” she says to the contractor.

“Thank you for understanding, we should have this fixed in a week,” he tells her.

“Artem talked to you about the initial 3 week estimate?” I ask, butting in and nodding in acknowledgment and apology to Nancy.

“Yes, we hired a second crew and are running 24/7 now,” he says raising a hand towards me in a calming manner.

“I’m glad, the three week estimate had me worried,” I say with a sigh of relief.

“We have a clean room for board assembly lines in the back we can keep everyone busy with. Then we can bring people in to get them both running,” Nancy informs me. “It won’t be too big of a deal.”

“Good to hear,” I respond. “We’re going to have a systems meeting in the conference room at 10am, which isn’t too far off.”

“Is the receiving manager going to be there so we can meet him?” she asks, looking a little irritated in her eyes. I know they are a little bothered by the friend of their family who has been their receiving manager for so many years is being demoted to receiving floor lead.

“No, but he’ll be connected through video conferencing so he can follow along as well,” I say. “he’ll be flying out overnight to be here by morning.”

“Alright,” Nancy says before going back into conversation with the contractor.

I turn and walk through the receiving area to the office structure on that side. I enter that and look around, not having been in it yet. I look around downstairs and see the offices for the QA people are ready. There is a desk prepared for the person we need to hire to do the receiving side support in the same place the outbound side is.

I head upstairs to look at the Security offices on the outer side of the hallway. It looks like everybody has their offices set up though I have only met Intef so far. I walk over to Michael’s office which is overlooking the receiving area in the same way mine is overlooking the outbound side. I see a pad of post-it notes and leave dirty comments in hidden places all over his office.

I pull out my phone and see it's almost 10am. There is also a text so I open it while walking to the receiving forklift storage area.

Isobel: Want to pick me up for dinner tonight at 6?

James: I have plans with a friend and his girlfriend. Want to accompany me to the bar with them?

Isobel: I can do that.

James: Six it is, then. I'll let you know if I'm going to be late because of work.

Isobel: Alright!

Arriving at the parked forklifts I climb into one of the green Clarks. I look around and see all of them have keys in their ignitions. Glorious. I knock on the propane tank and it sounds full. I open the tank, turn it on and drive it through the warehouse to the office side of outbound.

"Ahh, picked out a forklift already?" Bud yells as I approach.

"Fuck no, just stole this one to be lazy," I yell back with a laugh. He nods sarcastically and throws me a thumbs up. I drive by him and park up the aisle which is properly widened for forklift parking during breaks. I close off the propane tank and get off the forklift. Bud is standing next to me.

"Not to be a softy, but you saved some of our guys' asses," he says quietly.

"Yeah? What do you mean?" I ask, being unaware of any current events going on with the guys I used to work with.

"Paul's house was about to be foreclosed out from under him," he informs me with all seriousness in his eyes. "Donny is buried by medical bills for something from a decade ago that was nearing federal collections."

"Shit man, do you know how much he owes? Can I pitch in any? He's a cool dude," I blurt out in a surprised hurry.

"No he's got it covered from his sign on bonus here," he says quietly, patting me on the shoulder. "It's just he wasn't making enough with us before."

"Good, that's good," I say, taking a deep breath. I really should have kept in touch with these guys when I left.

"We got lucky, is all I'm saying," Bud repeated before turning to walk to the conference room. I stayed standing in place for a moment thinking about what's coming down the road. I shake it off and walk into the conference room.

Larry and Nancy are sitting at the table close to the front where a projector is being set up by Farahi. Bud is standing at the counter where donuts are laid out. Other people are scattered around the tables, eating

donuts and drinking sodas. I walk over to the soda machine and get a 20oz soda and approach Farahi.

“Nice to see you again,” Farahi says with a smile.

“Same. Any luck getting Michael up?” I ask hoping Michael didn’t miss the setup appointment a few minutes ago.

“Got me up just fine,” I hear from a laptop off to the side on a table. I turn and walk over to it.

“Good to see,” I say, smiling at the screen and waving.

“I’ll be there tomorrow morning at 6am if you can pick me up,” Michael asks before sticking his tongue out.

“Yeah man, Intef gave me the itinerary already,” I say before waving and walking over to the side of the room. I hear the door to the conference room open from the warehouse side and turn to see Intef entering.

“The last driver is coming in after a bit, we can begin,” Intef says to Farahi.

“Splendid, be seated everyone,” Farahi says loud enough to fill the room.

Moments later Ryan walks in. He sees me and waves before sitting at a table near Larry. I walk to the side of the room and stand, observing as Farahi begins. He starts with his presentation of the software, then hardware systems. Larry and Michael are the most engaged with asking questions as they will ultimately be the most responsible for understanding it to help people with it. Farahi begins elaborating how all of the hardware is set up and running through the functionality of the guns.

At noon we break and get word Jimmy Johns is pulling up to the front with several dozen sandwiches. Ryan gets up and follows me to help carry it all into the conference room.

“How did a pud-whacker like you end up running a huge place like this?” he asks as we walk through the office to the front door. I stop and he stops behind me as I turn and look him in the eye.

“Did you really think I was a shitty worker?” I ask in a serious voice, probably visibly annoyed.

“No, you were a great worker from all I saw. You just fucked around a lot when there was no work to do,” he says with full confidence giving no signs of joking.

“But as a worker, when I was working, you thought I was great?” I say making air quotes before the word great.

“You seem surprisingly more focused now, if that makes you happy,” he says with a small laugh, walking around me to unlock the front door. I stand and turn to remain facing him as he walks by me.

“What the fuck,” I mumble, remembering how much he would get under my skin before. *I wish I had remembered that while I was brainstorming who all I would want to bring with Larry. You know, up in fucking Omaha.*

“Do you want me to fire him and send him back north with his sign-on bonus as a thank you?” I hear Intef say in my head.

No. Are you always listening?

“Always. I’ll be listening to everyone in this building, always,” I hear him say strongly.

Fair enough. I shake my head and sigh as I hurry to catch up with Ryan. I reach him as soon as he gets to the curb where the Jimmy Johns car is parked. The driver unloads a couple boxes, handing one to me and one to Ryan.

“I have the third one, following you,” the driver says while picking up the last box in his car.

“All paid up, right?” I ask, recalling this being set up in advance.

“All paid up,” he says as we turn to follow Ryan, already halfway to the building.

After lunch, the next couple hours are spent with details of the software functionality. Once Farahi finishes his Q&A session Intef steps up to the front and goes through his security presentation. He walks around and hands everyone ID cards on bright blue lanyards, including myself. I take mine and instantly put it around my neck. I watch out of the corner of my eye and see most people putting theirs on their neck immediately as well.

He spends an hour talking about the history of his security company. Some of it is new to me. Once he is done Artem comes out and talks about the construction that has been done and outlines remaining projects. He engages Michael directly and shows him different schematics. Michael picks the one he likes most and he calls over the radio to initiate that setup since we’re moving to start tomorrow instead of next week.

Artem then speaks with Larry and Nancy. He opens the floor to questions and repeats some of the things he already covered to driver questions. Larry looks at them with annoyance, realizing they weren’t paying full attention.

“Thanks, everybody,” I say as Artem is wrapping up. Everyone starts getting up and cleaning up their areas. Larry and Nancy approach me and stand on either side of me.

“This is pretty complex,” Nancy whispers with a touch of unease in her voice.

“It seems that way but it’ll smooth out with action,” I assure her.

“That’s what I told her,” Larry says while reaching around me to playfully bump Nancy’s arm.

“Sure, sure,” she says, smiling in a sarcastic and unsure manner. She rolls her eyes and shakes her head in apparent slight disbelief.

“I think it’ll be okay,” Larry says.

“I really do too, it’s mostly similar to what you guys are used to,” I reinforce. “The only difference is it’ll all be computerized without paperwork.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” she says a little louder and more worried sounding than her whisper.

“I’ll make sure you’re comfortable before tomorrow morning,” Larry says, turning to walk up to Farahi.

“Can I have a gun to help Nancy get comfortable with the system?” he asks Farahi.

“No problem,” Farahi says while handing a gun to Larry. He picks up a second gun and gestures towards Nancy before walking to us.

“Thank you,” Nancy says, visibly annoyed.

“Not a problem,” Farahi says handing a gun to her. “I’ll give you both guns and write down logins for you so he can follow through the procedures with you.”

“Thanks, Farahi,” Larry says while putting a hand on Nancy’s shoulder in comfort.

“Really not a problem,” Farahi says before walking back to the table with his hardware on it. He writes on a piece of paper and picks up two extra batteries before returning to us.

“Thanks,” Larry says while taking the batteries and paper, putting it all in his pocket.

“Call me if you have any questions, you have my number,” Farahi says with a smile before returning to his table.

“Smooth, I promise,” I say to Nancy, feeling a little nervous for the first time regarding functionality.

“You damn well better,” Nancy says with a forced smile before Larry leads her out of the conference room.

“We’ll be grouping up on the outbound dock tomorrow morning at 8am, sorry it’s so early but this is happening faster than planned,” I say loudly enough for everyone to hear, moving up to the front of the room. “I’ll be helping both receiving and shipping sides tomorrow. I’m going to be learning and getting used to the flow of everything with all of you.” As I say that I also look and see Michael is still listening intently. He nods to me as he sees where I am looking. Nobody looks intimidated at all, besides Nancy earlier.

“I emailed you a schedule proposal for everyone while Farahi was doing his presentation before lunch,” Intef says quietly, now standing next to me.

“Alright, I’ll go check it out while helping schedule trucks upstairs,” I respond making a gesture to Deryl and Jannis who I notice are watching me expectantly. Everybody else is scattering as Deryl and Jannis get up and follow me out of the conference room to my office.

“Have a seat,” I say, gesturing towards the chairs opposite my desk.

Descent . Everything Burns

Driving down the interstate towards the airport my head spins a little from not having woke up at all. *The last twelve hours or so have been an insane blur.* I look at the clock and it's almost 11:30. *I meant to be at the airport by now in case the plane lands early.* Just having that cross my mind I hear a text alert. I pull my phone out and glance at it.

Michael: We're taxiing in.

Fuck. At least the airport isn't far away. I pull in and drive slowly around both sides of the terminal in the brilliant circle they designed. After a few loops I see Michael come out with only a carryon bag.

"Did you know Intef arranged for a moving company to bring down anything I wanted from home?" Michael asks as he climbs into the passenger seat.

"Yeah man, everybody who's down here had most of their shit set up in their apartments before they even got to them," I explain to him.

"That's really helpful," he says while repositioning in the seat. "I'm surprised they're doing that."

"Even with the sign on bonus?" I ask.

"Oh. I'm not surprised anymore," he says bursting into laughter.

"Shit yeah man, I couldn't refuse," I add.

"So are we going straight to the warehouse or are we going to the apartment first?" Michael asks, looking wide awake and alert for having just gotten off a plane.

"Your apartment first," I say. "Need to stop by the office and get a remote for the gate for both of us."

"Remote for the gate?" he asks, eyebrow raised.

"Yeah, it only opens by remote," I add, raising my eyebrows a few times at him.

"Damn. Nice," he whispers. "And these are free of rent to us?"

"Yep. Our workers from up north all have apartments there. We get to stay for a year free of rent then we either have to pay monthly after that or move somewhere else," I tell him.

"That works for me, bankroll," Michael says. "Where did you get this jeep?"

"Bought it with my advance," I say. "The rest are having their cars shipped down, right?"

"Mine is. I assume everyone else's are too," he responds. "Though with the advance I'm getting I might as well buy a new one for fun," he seems to think aloud as he's looking around the inside of the car.

“Cool. Your apartment is next to mine even though the entrances are oddly separated,” I tell him.

“Why would that happen to me? I can’t live near you,” he says jokingly. “What do you mean oddly?”

“All of the apartment entries are meant to feel private. Even though most have stairs right outside going to the apartment above,” I explain. “Even though after you pass the stairway it does feel pretty private.”

“That’s cool,” he says nodding slowly.

“Our decks are pretty much touching,” I say, picturing the pool and wondering how that’s going to look once more people move in.

“Our dicks are touching?” he says quickly before bursting into laughter. I join him in laughter once I replay what I said in my head.

“Shit,” I say, stopping myself from continuing laughing. “But seriously, we can drink on the porch and bullshit after work or whatever. Plus we’re facing the pool.”

Once to the apartments I let myself into the office and grab a couple remotes for the gate. After that we stop in front of the apartments without parking and I walk him inside. I show him around the apartment and check in his fridge, seeing nothing. I don’t tell him mine came fully stocked and we take off to the warehouse.

Michael follows me inside and we walk straight through the office to the shipping area. I take him on a tour of the place in the half an hour we have left before the 1pm meeting. He doesn’t start showing excitement until we get to the receiving area.

“This is fucking perfect,” he says looking around. We stand for a bit longer in the middle of the dock area of receiving while he eyeballs everything. “This looks better in person than it did on this schematic version.”

“This is the first I’m seeing it like this,” I say, also looking around in awe. “They waited to do most of the setup until they talked to you. They planned on waiting for you to get here today but the push was made to get started receiving and training in the warehouse this afternoon.”

“Why the hurry?” Michael asks, looking at me with skepticism in his eyes.

“You know corporations, man,” I say. He nods knowingly as we walk into the offices. “Do you know what you plan to say to the receiving guys that are here regarding the plan for unloading trucks? Did you study the diagrams?”

“You worry too much, I told you I’d be prepared,” Michael says with a smile and a pat on my back. I show him around those and then we head back to the outbound floor. As we approach with five minutes to spare, most everyone is already present.

Michael recognizes Larry and Nancy, shaking both of their hands and greeting them. Intef and Farahi approach and shake Michael's hand.

"Alright, I've gathered you all here because there is a need for the best, and you are all the best," I say, looking across all of their faces as I say it. "We will be tested, and we will be stressed. Things may get heated but I am confident we can keep our cool." The last sentence I said looking directly at Bud. He nods slowly and calmly, seeming to fully understand what I'm saying in subtext.

"First trucks will be here in fifteen minutes with inventory," Deryl says while Jannis nods in agreement next to him.

"Thanks guys," I say, making an introductory gesture towards Michael.

"Hey everyone, I'm Michael. I believe I was the robot yesterday at the meeting?" he says while looking over at Farahi.

"Robot disguised as a laptop," Farahi says.

"Well, I wanted a robot but a laptop will work," Michael says exchanging smiles with Farahi. "Let's talk and walk."

Michael goes over the general plan, noting he will show exact places when we get to receiving. The receiving guys seem to be following perfectly. Larry pipes in that the shipping department will be pulling mock orders from the inventory we will have. Everybody seems confident and comfortable with the plans for the day.

Once to the receiving docks, Larry and Michael compare notes on forklift traffic. They are both on the same page and everybody seems happy and comfortable still. Michael asks if everyone is prepared to get started and nobody objects. Just as he starts analyzing nonverbal responses, the first truck backs up to a dock door.

"James, this is Laura," Intef says as a short Asian woman who doesn't look any older than 25 approaches us.

"Hello, Nice to meet you" I say, reaching my hand out and shaking hers gently. She smiles and nods. Michael extends his hand and shakes her hand, also.

"She's our QA score," Intef says proudly.

"Score?" Michael says, looking at me.

"Intef?" I say, letting him explain.

"James couldn't get his pick from up north so I poached local talent that has an outstanding record," Intef explains.

"Thank you Intef, I appreciate it," Laura says while blushing.

Chris walks over to let the driver in, checking his Bill of Lading. He nods to Michael and walks the bill over to Michael.

"Who's got first?" Michael asks.

"I do," Vincent says while raising his hand and stepping out of the group. *I honestly hadn't seen him here until just now. Dude is short but I*

guess I've been too focused on operational things to really do a head count of who's here.

"Good, go," Michael says as we all walk over to a taped off walkway and observe. Vincent jogs over to a forklift and jumps in, opening up the gas and turning it on. We watch as he quickly unloads the trailer and stages it in a straight line down the side of the receiving area. He drives over, tilts his forks down and turns off his gas before getting off the forklift.

Once he gets to us I see Laura immediately walk a little ways back towards the receiving offices and pull a cart with various tools on it over to the just unloaded pallets. Chris walks over and hands the signed Bill of Lading to the driver. The driver thanks Chris and exits the building.

Laura starts analyzing the pallets and we all watch. Once she's done she gives the thumbs up to Larry. Larry nods and smiles at Vincent. He jogs back over to the forklift, checks the scanner attached to the forklift and drives off. He grabs one pallet after another and puts them in racks. Once he returns Michael pulls out his phone and uses it to bring up the inventory.

"Yep, in the system in those locations," he says. All of us burst into a round of cheering as Intef looks at us like we're all crazy.

"Told you guys, smooth and easy," I say with a short laugh.

"And you were worried we would crash and burn" Michael says with a smirk. Larry and Intef look at him with the same raised eyebrow.

"I admit I was a bit worried early on," I say solemnly. "Alright guys, go pick your forklifts," I yell with excitement.

Everybody but Laura, Intef and Farahi go climb on forklifts and get situated. One forklift after another turns on. They drive them out, into and around the warehouse to get familiar with the layout. Laura and Farahi go back into the QA office to study the system while Intef and I walk around the warehouse observing use of safety protocols regarding blind corners and driving speed.

"What are you thinking?" I ask Intef inside my head with a quick sideways glance.

"I'm thinking this was a good idea," I hear him respond coldly.

"Didn't think so originally?" I ask mentally, a little intrigued by his coldness in response.

"No, I didn't," I hear him say in my head. "I said build up out of town and roll in. Panacea and Carnorra said this society would be easier to take from within the borders."

"Next truck is backing in," I hear Michael say over the receiving loudspeaker. Moments later I see Vincent drive by Intef and I towards receiving.

I think I was right, though. I mean, in the end. Everything burns.

“Everything burns,” I hear Intef say with amusement. We reach the shipping offices and he breaks off and walks down the aisle towards the ‘each’ section while I enter the shipping offices. I pull out my phone while walking up the stairs and call Bud.

“Yup,” I hear Bud say over the phone.

“We’re going to have orders for some of the stuff as it gets put away. We’ll get them pulled today and schedule shipping for late this afternoon and start a full rotation both out and in tomorrow,” I inform him.

“Yup,” he says.

“We’ll be having more come from up north tomorrow too. I’ll get them oriented in the conference room and bring them out in the afternoon,” I add.

“Sounds good, thanks James,” he says, sounding remarkably chipper.

I hang up and dial Isobel, skipping the usual text routine.

“Hey!” I hear her answer.

“Nothing is burning, want to celebrate with my other two friends and I, tonight?” I ask.

“What time?” she asks.

“I’ll probably leave here at 6. I think they wanted to meet at 7, So, 7?” I ask with enthusiasm.

“Sounds good, I’ll be ready and waiting,” she responds sounding happier than the first word I heard her speak.

Descent . The Den

Walking out to my car just before 5:30 I feel like the world is spinning. Everything moved so fast today that I'm not confident at all that it's all coming together. It feels like we took sixteen puzzles and threw them up in the air. It feels like we told everyone that the puzzles had to be put together by morning, instead of the week we all thought we had.

I get in my car and lean my head back against the seat. I look at my phone and see a message from Kyle.

Kyle: We're already here, getting started early.

Shit, I didn't even think to ask him if I could bring Isobel. I hope he's not offended at all.

James: Is it cool if I bring a friend?

Kyle: The more the merrier!

James: Alright, it's somebody I met down here and she seems chill as hell.

Kyle: Somebody for Kate to talk to while we catch up.

I remember I should make sure Isobel is going to be ready to leave early.

James: Things are kicking off early, can I pick you up in a few?

She doesn't respond right away as I drive out of the parking lot. I start getting nervous and start wondering if I should actually call her directly instead. As my thoughts start to move faster I feel my phone vibrate.

Isobel . I'll be waiting at the curb!

James: Sweet, on my way.

Pshhh. And I was worried. At the first red light I reach in the glove compartment and grab the deodorant I stashed and try to freshen up. Several minutes later I arrive at Isobel's. She's sitting on the curb using her phone. She sees me coming and stands up, stashing the phone in her front purse pocket and waves at me. Today she's wearing a black skirt that goes down to her ankles and black boots. She has on a form fitting t-shirt with a graphic I can't quite make out.

"Hello again," she says, opening the door and climbing in.

"Nice to see you again," I say. Oh, she's wearing a Godsmack T-Shirt. Awesome!

“What’s the plan for tonight?” she asks, getting buckled in.

“We’re going to jump over to University and Mill and meet my friend at Devil’s Den. I’ve never actually met him in person or his girlfriend,” I admit. “So hopefully they’re not too terrifying.

“How do you know them?” she asks as I begin to drive.

“I played an online game with him for a year or so,” I answer.

“Trust him not to kill us?” she asks with the cutest smile.

“Never worried,” I say, resting my arm on the center compartment between the seats. She smiles again, only bigger showing all of her teeth and eyes glowing wide. She takes my hand and looks forward as we continue. I feel a bit of comfort finally at the moment she touches my hand with hers. As if the stress of the day slowly starts lifting away.

A few turns and red lights later we pull into the area I show the Devil’s Den to be in. I find a parking spot and we get out.

“I know where it is,” she says confidently as she poses cutely while pointing down the street.

“Awesome,” I say, locking the jeep and walking around to her side. She takes off at a fast pace down the sidewalk and I keep up just behind her. We cross a street and approach another as I briefly begin to wonder

“It’s on the corner of the building here,” she says pointing to the windows we are now walking past.

“James!” I hear from just ahead as we approach a tall and seriously skinny guy.

“Hey Kyle,” I say, recognizing him from Facebook pictures.

“Kate is inside eating cheese sticks,” Kyle says before taking another drag off of his cigarette.

“Cheese sticks!” Isobel says in a cute voice poking my shoulder.

“Kyle, this is Isobel, Isobel this is Kyle,” I say looking back and forth between them.

“Nice to meet you,” Kyle says reaching his hand out.

“Nice to meet you as well!” Isobel says, shaking his hand.

“Come on, I’ll introduce you two to Kate,” he says flicking his cigarette away. He enters the bar as we follow. A tiny woman sitting at a table halfway across the bar starts waving as we approach.

“Kate, this is James and Isobel,” Kyle says as he gestures from myself to Isobel.

“Nice to meet you,” she says, standing up and shaking Isobel and I’s hands.

We all sit down around the table and Kate starts talking about some new cactus that was planted outside her work. Kyle tells her about the fake grass they planted outside his work. I catch Isobel glancing at me every so often while their conversation continues.

“You work at a game store, right Kyle?” I ask.

“Yep,” he responds before drinking some beer.

“What about you? He’s never told me where you work,” I ask, looking at Kate.

“I work at a group home taking care of a bunch of kids,” she answers before taking a drink out of her glass.

“Seriously?” I ask, getting excited.

“Yes. Why? You sound like you approve of my line of work,” she says with the first smile I’ve seen. Her eyes and smile are entrancing but her nose is a little off somehow. I catch myself checking her out as she’s in a thin shape fitting dress. Her shoulders and neck are perfect. I first noticed when I saw Isobel looking at her with a smirk while Kate was talking to Kyle.

“I have experience with the field and always enjoy related topics,” I answer as the waitress comes to take Isobel and my orders.

“What experience do you have?” she asks, looking curious.

“I worked in one that had some mentally handicapped people for a few months between jobs,” I explain.

“Yeah? Why just between jobs?” she asks, now fully engaged. Isobel is also listening intently.

“Wasn’t that like the blind leading the blind?” Kyle asks with a small laugh.

“I think that was my line, but yes,” I say, joining in the laughter. “I was asked to come help someone who was short staffed. After he got the people hired and trained he needed I went to work elsewhere.”

“Did you enjoy it?” Kate asks.

“I loved it. I would get back into it if things were different,” I respond.

“One of my guys is having troubles with school,” Kate begins. “He’s gotten kicked out a few times and we had to pick him up. We’re out of things to try for redirection.”

“What have you tried?” I ask, interested in seeing if I have any suggestions.

“Raiding Icecrown Citadel!” Kyle pipes in. “Are you raiding in Cataclysm?” Isobel looks at Kyle then at me. Kate looks down at some of the cheese sticks she has left as if this is normal process and the conversation is over.

“Uhhh,” I say, stammering and surprised that he cut in with video game related stuff. “No, I quit mostly.” I feel my pocket vibrate and realize Isobel had just been doing something with her phone. In case she texted me something sneakily I don’t want to blow her cover.

“Ahh, I thought so,” Kyle says as he smiles and takes a drink of soda. I look over at Kate and she’s looking off into nothingness. “What about you, Isobel? Where do you work?”

"I work at Target in the Pharmacy," she answers.

"Can you get me drugs?" Kyle asks with obvious sarcasm. The question is met with a sideways glance of annoyance by Kate.

"How much Tylenol would you want?" Isobel answers without missing a beat.

I pull my phone out and see the text "What an ass hole, cutting her off like that," from Isobel. I look at her and smile, timed perfectly with the Tylenol response to cover it being a response from her text.

As the evening goes on the level of conversation from Kate slowly disappears as the level of conversation between Kyle and I increases to exclusivity. Kate has a few small conversations with Isobel but eventually ends up sitting silent. The only breaks in silence are obviously forced laughs to things Kyle says.

At the end of the night, Kyle and Kate say their goodbyes and walk to the north as Isobel and I walk to the east, returning to the jeep.

"So, that's your friend?" Isobel says with a smile.

"Well, sure," I answer, wore out from the day.

"I'm just messing with you," Isobel says while putting her arm around me as we walk.

"She was interesting at least," I say, trying not to talk shit about Kyle after only meeting him face to face for the first time.

"She was really cool when she was able to talk freely," she blurts out.

"She was tiny," I mention.

"She wasn't really cute but something about her was..." Isobel trails off.

"Attractive as fuck?" I say, attempting to complete the sentence.

"Yeah," Isobel agrees. "She's a little homely but her attitude is sexy, for sure."

"Ok I'm not the only one who noticed that, then," I agree.

"She's enough of a reason to hang out with them again," she says with a sideways smile.

"I can deal with that," I say with a slow series of nods.

"Did you see her legs?" she asks me.

"No, I didn't, but I saw her shoulders and neck," I say.

"So did I, she has an elegance about her for looking mostly like a toned skeleton," she says as we both laugh.

"Still, something really, really sexy about her," I repeat.

“Yeah, for sure,” Isobel agrees again. “You were really nervous when she went to give you a hug as we were leaving.” Isobel laughs as I blush.

“I know, she’s so attractive i get nervous, sorry,” I admit as I blush harder.

“You got nervous like that the first day we met,” she says with a mischievous smile. “No don’t be sorry, it’s ok. Just because we’re getting serious doesn’t mean we have to pretend to be blind. She’s awesome,” Isobel says comfortingly as we get into the jeep.

I turn the jeep on and look over at her. “You’re beautiful too, you know,” I say.

“Whatever you say,” Isobel says with a smile.

Descent . Words

After a few minutes I stop at a red light near where I would either continue straight to my apartment or turn to drop her off.

"I'm far too sober," I say under my breath.

"Yeah? Too hard to get a buzz around them?" Isobel asks with a smile, leaning her head on her hand and waiting for my response.

"I tried, I thought it would help him be less annoying," I say with a bit of a sigh. "I don't think it worked at all. I think the more I tried to drink, the more annoying he became.

"Do you want to drink more?" she asks, knowing the answer is going to be yes.

"Yes, of course. With how smooth today went I don't expect tomorrow to be much less than a disaster," I admit with a touch of fright in my voice.

"Well, instead of drinking to relax how about you let me give you a massage?" she asks with raised eyebrows.

"How much do I have to pay you?" I question her with a sarcastic smile.

"You can't afford me!" she exclaims as she begins to laugh.

The light turns green and I drive forward towards my apartment. Isobel leans forward and scrolls through my music until she gets to Marilyn Manson's Golden Age of Grottesque. I notice her cleavage and my eyes travel down her body, taking note how small her legs and torso are compared to the breast size. She starts it on This Is The New Shit. She turns it up until the bass rattles the seat-belts and I notice her singing along, though I cannot hear.

She's so awesome. Patricia wasn't even into the same music as me. She also had smaller breasts in comparison though she had a similarly tiny body. This woman can hold a conversation for more than six seconds without wanting to jump to sex. She also doesn't get annoying to me after several minutes of speaking. Doesn't annoy me with how ignorant and childish she is as Patricia did.

We get to the apartment complex and I reach for the remote to open the gate. Her hand is already down there and I end up resting my hand on hers as she hammers the button to open it. The gate receiver beeps as the gate starts to open. She looks over and shoots me her wide mouthed, big eyed smile that's cute as hell. I smile back and our hands return to our laps. I drive into the complex.

Pulling in we climb out and meet quickly behind the jeep. She grabs my hand and we walk up to my apartment. She lets my hand go as I unlock and open the door. I hold the door open and laugh as she passes me and stands in the entryway. I close the door and enter but she doesn't move. As soon as I shut the door, she leans forward to kiss me. I put my hands on her waist and guide her backwards to the wall.

"What should we drink?" I ask, leaning forward to kiss her on the cheek before breaking physical contact and walking around the corner into the kitchen.

"Depends. Do you want to remain in control of your limbs? Or would you rather remain in control of your bowels? How about the ability to speak?" she asks with an ever increasing smirk.

"I wouldn't mind my nerves being drowned out while still able to walk to and from the bathroom," I decide.

"Alright. That would be alcohol, then," she informs me.

"What would it be if I wanted to lose control of everything but my limbs?" I ask, curious about the answer.

"Well, if I remember correctly, that would be alcohol," she says with a playful smirk.

"And if I want to lose control of my bowels?" I ask, feeling like I have a grasp on what the answer will be.

"That would be all the alcohol in a short period of time," she says around a small laugh.

"Alright, I'll make sure to take it slower than chugging," I say while pulling the Orange Juice out of the fridge.

"Can you make me some girly drinks like I had at the bar?" she asks, setting her purse down next to the couch and getting comfortable.

"Definitely. Sorry about the apartment, there's not too many decorations yet. Pretty brand new at the moment," I say, feeling self-conscious about the contents of the dwelling.

I mix a large 64oz cup of screwdriver for myself. I make it about ? 3 olives vodka and ? Roberts orange juice. I pour a little grenadine in there for extra sweetness. I grab a 32oz beer mug, take some OJ and mix in a decent amount of coconut rum. I put some Grenadine and a shot of tequila in it as well. I taste a sip and add a little more grenadine. I take another sip and pour a tiny bit of milk in it. One more sip shows it's the strange fruity concoction I imagined and carry it to her.

"Thank you," Isobel says while carefully drinking a little of it. She smiles, signaling it's something she can drink before I turn around and

walk back to the kitchen to carry in mine.

"I think this'll be a good start," I say, sitting down on the larger couch. I look over and see her glance at the space next to her on the love seat.

"So, are you going to be sober enough to drive me home?" she asks, reaching for her cell phone.

"No, I honestly don't plan to be," I admit before taking a large series of drinks out of my cup.

"Alright, I'm going to text Amanda and let her know I'm not going to be back until tomorrow," she says with a soft smile.

"Cool. Want me to get a blanket and pillow ready for you out here in case blackouts sneak up on is?" I ask, looking up at the clock and realizing it's already after midnight and I have to be at work at 6am tomorrow.

"Awww, I have to sleep on the couch?" she asks with a flirty, joking smile.

"I don't let bisexuals in bed with me," I say while being unable to hold off a clearly lying smile.

"It's ok, I only date one person at a time," she laughs with a tilted head.

"Oh, that's a waste of favorable settings," I say with a half-smile and drinking some more from my cup.

"I know, it all works out though," she says with a smile, drinking some more herself and looking over at the television which is off.

"Want me to turn on a movie or some music or something?" I ask, looking around to find the remote. I see she already has it in her hand.

"Movie leads to sleep, music leads to talking," she says while holding up the remote cutely, smiling knowingly.

"I need to sleep but want to talk. So, your call," I say, giving her control of the situation. She nods and smiles as she turns the TV on. She flips through channels until she finds the audio portion and flips to instrumental drum and bass. She turns it down so it's loud enough to hear everything going on but quiet enough to talk over.

"Tell me a secret," she says, setting her drink down on the end table next to her. She crosses her legs and points herself towards me, listening intently.

"What kind of secret?" I ask, drinking my cup to the halfway point.

"Something you're certain you've never told anyone," she says with focused eyes.

“Well,” I begin, delving into the closed files in my head. I drift through things with Mandy, Angel, Angel’s sister, Trevor, some family shit.

“If you don’t want to, you don’t have to,” she says with a raised eyebrow, looking like she would accept me declining but also appearing to be interested and hopeful in an answer.

“No I just have a pretty big arsenal to draw from,” I blurt out, instantly wishing I hadn’t. My eyes feel wide and her eyes are widening too, with a smile to match.

“Oh really, now?” she muses in an entertained voice. She laughs a little then grips composure as she seems to sense my discomfort. “Sorry,” she adds.

“Yeah, but it’s cool. I think I have one,” I say, taking a drink out of my now ? full cup. It’s been such a long day, though, I don’t feel anything.

“Alright,” she says, leaning back into the couch. Her t-shirt slipping up a little revealing a flat, gently toned stomach. Wow. I did not see that coming. She seems a little too far from toned in an overall sense to have a stomach like that. Damn.

“I was friends with a guy when i was a kid. Kid as in, 10-13 or so,” I say. I drift into thoughts regarding which I should pick from and see her locked into what I’m saying.

“Alright,” she says softly, sounding vulnerable herself now.

“There are a lot of blacked out memories from back then. I hear things like him and his brother strung me up from a tree and I was upside down. I heard that Grandma had to come help me get down. Whole neighborhood knew about it. Though I have no memory. But what I do have memory of is a time when they handcuffed me to the inside of a batting cage,” I begin, taking a deep breath. I reach over and finish off what’s in the cup.

“I saw how you made that, I’ll make you more. Go on,” she says, standing up and taking my cup as she passes towards the kitchen.

“Alright,” I say, sitting up straight and speaking up a little as I continue. “They is Trevor and an 8 year old kid. I was 13 i think. Kid was tiny, skinny. He had me swing on me here and there and they berated me a lot. After a bit Trevor uncuffed me and moved to block the exit. He said I had to fight the kid. I think he knew I was nice. Too nice to beat the shit out of a skinny little kid that couldn’t hit worth shit.”

“That’s a good thing, though,” she says, handing me a refilled cup of screwdriver. I taste it and look up at her with a look of surprise. “Like it?” she asks with a smile and sits down next to me.

“Yeah, what’s the other taste in it?” I ask, taking another sip.

“I added a little tequila and lemon to it,” she says.

“Alright, nice,” I tell her while drinking about an eighth of it before continuing. “So after a bit his older brother came to join in. His brother took the spot blocking the exit and Trevor came in to get a few shots off on me. His actually hurt a bit, even though he wasn’t doing it as hard as he could. After a bit of that the kid said he had to go so they let me have my pants back and scattered.

“I put my pants back on and dusted myself off and went home. When I got home I told my grandma what happened and filed a police report but there was no proof of anything so nothing came of it. I guess there had been quite a few reports on him around the neighborhood but never any proof to hang him on,” I continue before drinking more screwdriver. I could feel the alcohol starting to hit me. Fatigue was creeping up along with it.

“I’m sorry to hear that, I really am,” she says putting her hand on my thigh. Instead of what I would expect to normally happen, being a rush of being turned on running through me, it was a rush of numbness and cold. I feel strange about that and try to analyze why. All I can come up with is fear of causing someone else to be killed or fear of falling for her but not being able to bring her below in a few years.

“It’s fine, you didn’t do it. Now that I’ve made myself feel as uncomfortable as possible, your turn to do the same,” I say shooting her a forced smile and pat her thigh twice.

“Alright, let me think,” she says with an introspective look which shifts down towards the floor in front of us. “I witnessed a rape when the person who did it thought I was asleep. It lasted longer than I can possibly measure and nobody believed me or the person who actually got raped when we tried to report it to people,” she said, feeling deeply uncomfortable,”

“Damn,” I say, crossing my arms and joining her at looking at the floor. “So now we both feel shitty,” I insert, glancing at her with a smirk. I see a smile slowly creep onto her face.

“It’s okay, I planned it. Now, tell me your happiest memory no matter what it is,” she says with a smile as she sits up straight and leans back. She takes a deep breath and exhales slowly.

“Oh, I had one come to mind immediately but I don’t want you to be jealous,” I say without thinking.

“I can’t be jealous of anything that happened before I even met

you,” she says with a laugh. “Don’t worry, I’m not that type at all.”

“Alright,” I whisper, taking a deep breath. “I was fucking a co-worker who was engaged and when I figured out how to make her spray, the two days after where she was actually getting worried because she was still tingling with pleasure were some of the happiest moments of my life.”

“Ha! Really?” she asks, sitting up straight with wide eyes and a highly amused smile.

“That was the happiest moment I ever felt with the longest residual happiness from a single event,” I ramble off. I realize I should probably have picked something else as her smile broadens. “What about you? What’s your happiest memory?”

“I broke a horse after months of trying every day,” she says with a shrinking smile and repeated nods. My eyes slide from observing her face down to inspecting her legs again. She notices and lifts her skirt up her thigh and flexes. “That’s right, that’s why my legs are like this.”

“And your stomach?” I ask, eyes going back up her body to her stomach.

“Oh, you noticed that?” she says with a blush.

“Don’t blush, you’re sexy as hell,” I blurt out quickly. I look forward and down at the carpet, feeling like my filter is failing me.

Descent . Slurs

“Sorry, I don’t feel like we know each other well enough at all for me to be flirting so shamelessly with you,” I say knowing my vulnerability is showing clearly.

“Why apologize? I think you’re pretty amazing too,” she says while staring into my eyes. I look up from the floor and catch her eyes glancing down at my crotch.

“I just don’t want more bad things to happen in the wake of things that are vastly enjoyable,” I almost whisper just before tipping the cup up and drinking until it is empty. I gaze sadly into the bottom of the glass as I take measure of how much alcohol is affecting me. I see a wrinkled hand take my glass and see Isobel’s skirt streak by as she heads into the kitchen. *What was that? Are her hands wrinkled like an elderly person?*

“I’ll fix this,” she says with a sound of determination in her voice. I look over and see her mixing a screwdriver that is very light in vodka. I feel a little warmth in my chest as I realize she can tell I’ve had quite a lot to drink and she’s sneakily cutting me back while trying to give me the feeling that I have 64 more ounces of screwdriver to chug.

“Thank you,” I say, being careful to not be too loud while still being audible to her. She carefully returns to me and hands the cup over to me. The seriously cold orange juice now also has ice and looks more purple than red, as I expected it to look with the grenadine in it.

“It’s what I do!” she almost sings while posing in some sort of half curtsy.

“Why is it this color?” I ask while taking a sip. Tastes like what I made but with a hint of grape that makes it even sweeter.

“Secret ingredient for above average boys that don’t know how much they mean to new friends,” she says with a heartfelt smile while sitting down next to me.

“Above average,” I laugh quietly, losing my focus as I look back into the cup. I lick the remainder of the liquid off my lips and start picturing the face of the previous Isobel and Makayla. I see some flashes of the dream I had the time I slept after learning the news of their demise.

“What happened?” she asks, getting comfortable on the couch while facing me.

“You came home to drink with a dark soul,” I mumbled, once again saying something that wasn’t cleared by any sort of filter.

“We’re all dark souls, James,” she says while reaching over to put a hand on my arm.

“Did you ever have the first and second most recent people you fucked get killed by the last person you seriously dated?” I ask while looking at her, tears welling up in my eyes.

“What?” she asks, sitting up a little straighter again and body tensing up a bit.

“Want the cliff notes or long story?” I ask, drinking some of what she mixed me.

“Somewhere in the middle?” she asks, glancing down at the cup. I nod slowly, acknowledging the level of alcohol in me I assume she’s pointing out.

“I dated a girl named Patricia for a while,” I begin, taking a break to finish off the drink. I catch my breath, not having been ready for how much was still in the cup, and set it on an end table to my left. I take another deep breath and as I continue I make eye contact with her. She looks concerned, wide awake and honestly curious.

“Everything went pretty well. I didn’t realize how racist people were in some groups of friends I had and at school towards the end there,” I continue.

“What race was she?” Isobel asks.

“Half black, one quarter native American and one quarter white,” I answer.

“That sounds like a beautiful combination,” she says quietly.

“She has high cheekbones, brown eyes, thick hair, petite build and thick lips. Small ears, small hands, great body and nice tits but small. Not tiny, just mid-range Bs. Pretty nice sized for her body, at least,” I answer. “We fucked at a park near school until we started moving into places we could be alone. We fucked all the time. But she was getting physical.”

“Physical?” she asks as I realize I didn’t elaborate at all.

“Yes. As in, she would softly hit my arm or something and call me a pussy. She’d get rougher and rougher and once bruising started on my arms I started distancing myself from her,” I recall aloud. “The sex was still amazing but that was getting rougher too and I kept getting bruised up on my hips and waist from her slamming into me repeatedly. It was hot, but it was painful and outside of all of that she was getting us into trouble.”

“I have to ask, what trouble?” Isobel injects looking more concerned than curious now.

“She was in foster care. She was saying the family wasn’t being fair with her at all. So I helped her run away,” I tell her. “As she got aid to

get her own place once she turned 19, she was drinking too often and getting rowdy, very loud. I'm over 21 so I could have been charged for that even though I never bought her anything. I didn't want to get in the legal system so I ended up getting away from her."

"I don't blame you," she says, putting her hand on my thigh and squeezing a little.

"Thanks," I say, taking a deep breath. "After that I started partying a lot in my free time and over time ended up getting set up by the 2nd to last person i fucked. She put a camera in her room to fuck with Patricia I guess. Patricia was jealous other people were fucking me and from what I understand, Makayla wanted to rub it in her face.

"When Patricia saw the tape she immediately came to confront me. Unfortunately the person I met and was getting close to happened to be there when Patricia arrived. I didn't think about it and at the time but the situation ended up with a friend tackling Patricia and my vacating the party. I found out later that Patricia followed the girl who was with me home. She went to talk to Makayla. Ended up killing Makayla then coming back to kill the girl from the party."

"Do you not remember her name?" Isobel asks.

"The girl from the party?" I ask, hoping she's talking about someone else but knowing better.

"Yes," Isobel says, looking a little confused. Maybe a little worried.

"Her name was Isobel too," I say. "I was actually looking for her Facebook profile when I happened to see yours," I add quickly before she has much time to react.

"Huh," Isobel says before sitting in quiet contemplation. She spaces off as her field of view changes slowly from me, to my legs to the floor. I feel dread and sorrow come over me as I wonder if I'm about to lose someone else. Not to death, but to my own stupidity and hope that everything will work out in the end without having to explain all the little things. I feel I need to add something to this to make it a little less weird.

"Sorry, it's probably weird but you seem pretty awesome in all your own ways so I don't regret it one bit" I say, breaking a few moments of silence in a row.

"It's not that so much as my name will always remind you of two people who were murdered," she says softly.

"Didn't think of it like that," I say, feeling all that alcohol I chugged before the brief story hitting me at the same time. "Sorry I'm so depressed and dismal tonight," I admit.

“You seem like you’re pretty happy at the bar and when with me before you got this much alcohol in you,” Isobel says with a sound of happiness in her voice again. Her beautiful blue eyes lock with mine as her crazy cute natural smile seeps back across her face.

“Thank you, I try to enjoy myself when I have the chance,” I say, forcing a smile that I’m sure doesn’t look half as gorgeous as hers.

“How long ago was this?” she asks.

“Are you asking how long it’s been since I’ve had sex?” I blurt out with a sarcastic smirk. We both laugh and she puts a hand over her face. “An actual facepalm, I like it,” I add as we both laugh again.

“No, but I guess I will learn that too,” Isobel says with a little residual laughter.

“I think it was two or three weeks ago,” I say as I do the math in my head as best I can remember.

“Holy shit, so you left your friends and family as you moved to Tempe, opened a new warehouse, had two people die you’ve been intimate with which were killed by someone else you’ve been intimate with, met me and some friends you’ve never seen in person for the first time all in this short of a time?” she recaps in what sounded like one breath.

“Yeah, you could say that,” I concur. Her beautiful eyes go wide as I start feeling uncomfortable. What she’s going to say next, I have no idea.

“Trying to sort all that out in my head,” she says softly, sounding like she can’t tell if she wants to laugh, cry, or talk about something else.

“It’s ok, I should probably take you home anyway,” I say without thinking it through.

“No, you’re slurring quite badly,” she informs me with an entirely concerned glare.

“Am I?” I blurt out, analyzing words I’ve spoken recently. I notice almost immediately that I slurred those two words a little, even. I can hear in the playback within my mind the various slurs which I missed coming out riddling various sentences.

“Yes, you really are,” she informs me putting a hand on my shoulder.

“Ok, well that sinks my planboat,” slips out of my mouth, yet another thing which wasn’t cleared by a filter.

“What was your plan?” she asks, sounding curious again.

“I feel like I should be alone,” I admit.

“Can we be alone together?” she asks in a forced flirty voice, leaning over and kissing my cheek, then my jawbone, putting her hand on my knee and then moving it up to my thigh.

“I’m sorry,” I blurt out, leaning away and taking her hand in mine. “I can’t even imagine what would happen inside my head if for some reason you ended up dead because of me too.” I stand up and feel like I’m going to fall over, but remain on my feet.

“I’m sorry, I understand. How about I make sure you get to your room alright and shut the door so you can be alone and I’ll watch TV out here?” she offers, looking like she’s going to tear up a little as I glance over at her.

“I really appreciate that. Sorry, how amazing you look I normally would have already had the blinds closed and we would never have made it out of the living room,” I explain, feeling both depressed, amused and terrified at the same time. As I finish speaking she smiles and tears up a little. She stands up and gives me a hug, kissing me on the cheek again. I can barely feel it, though, as my nerves are vibrating to the point I am almost numb. I’m sure the alcohol isn’t helping my feeling’s acuteness either.

“It’s the least I can do,” she tells me as we begin walking down the hallway.

I smile at her as I immediately feel like an elderly person. I take careful step after careful step, far dizzier than I recall being any time recently. Even at Jean’s party I didn’t feel this far beyond the line of drunk towards everything coming back up. We make it into the bedroom and she holds my hand to help me balance as I sit down on the bed. Eye level with her cleavage I smile and look up at her.

“At least I saw something sexy and beautiful just before blacking out,” I say as I lean back onto the bed. I make out her body’s curves, skirt waving gently as she walks out of the room. I make out a smile on her face from the shape of her cheek as she pulls the door closed behind her. I look up and fatigue takes me just as the ceiling slowly starts rotating.

Descent . Sunrise

“James, I am your alarm,” I hear softly in my ear. I feel warm breath on my ear and on my neck. I open my eyes and see the beautiful Isobel leaning over me. I turn my head and see straight down her shirt before she stands up straight. She leans her weight on one foot and looks at me with a smile. It spreads to a forced, but unnervingly cute huge toothy smile with wide eyes.

“I’ve never seen an alarm with tits before,” I mumble in my deep morning voice. I rub my forehead and realize I didn’t get a hangover though I feel considerably tipsy still.

“I guessed that,” she says with a small cute laugh as her face returns to the forced huge smile with wide eyes. *So fucking cute. I bet she gets her way with that all the time.* I feel warmth in my chest that reminds me of happiness but could be from the alcohol last night. She puts her hand out and I take it, swinging around and standing up.

As soon as I get on my feet I realize I had kicked my pants off at some point in the night and am in my shorts. Not only that, but full morning wood is in effect. I sit back down quickly and Isobel breaks into laughter. I feel a little anxiety rise.

“Aww, you don’t have to laugh at it,” I blurt out, feeling some embarrassment as well.

“Oh there’s nothing at all to feel the need to hide,” she says in a sweet voice as she puts her hands on my shoulders, leaning over again. My eyes travel down once more to her cleavage, which causes her to smirk. “I already checked out what you’re carrying down there while you were driving,” she admits with a laugh.

“Oh?” I ask, feeling doubt because she seems so sweet.

“Are you the only one who can check the other out?” she says with a laugh as she stands back up. She puts her hand out again and says “Shower and take me home.”

“Yes ma’am,” I say, standing up. She smiles and turns to leave the room as I get clothes together and take a quick shower.

A couple intersections away from dropping Isobel off I look over and see her staring at me with a smile on her face. Not a huge forced wide eyed heart grabbing smile but a normal, comfortable, happy smile.

“You’re going to have to stop that,” I say, giving her a forced stern facial expression.

“You can’t make me,” she says, sticking her tongue out. I start slowing the car down, causing cars behind me to go around.

“Yes, I can,” I say in a deeper voice and with a sterner face. I keep slowing to almost a stop before losing control of my face and laughing.

“See, can’t make me,” she says, wiggling around in the chair and sticking her tongue out again. She joins me in laughter as we approach a red light.

“I may need you to babysit me more often,” I tell her, feeling a little worried that it’ll sound weird having only known each other for a short period of time and after her learning she was found while I was looking for someone else’s profile.

“You really do need adult supervision on a permanent basis,” she says in a serious, official tone while nodding in agreement. I laugh pretty hard and she looks over seeming slightly amused but admittedly alarmed.

“You really have no idea,” I blurt out while laughing hard a little more. She leans her head on her hand and looks at me with a raised eyebrow.

“Is there more I don’t know?” she asks, smirking with the eyebrow up a little more.

“Oh honey you’ve only heard a cliff’s notes of the recent madness in my life,” I tell her with a sharp burst of laughter. I stop laughing and grip my composure, looking at her more alarmed, amused and curious expression. “I’m totally normal though, no worries,” I say with laughter rising. I hold it back successfully and keep an eye on her as I make the turn onto her street.

“You’re a strange one, Mr. Freeman,” she says while shaking her head a little. “But I’ve never been more interested in learning about a dude in my life.”

“You’re goddamn right,” I say nodding sharply with a serious expression. “You’re god damn fucking right.”

“See you soon,” she says with a smile, still shaking her head as she gets out of the jeep. She stands on the ground a moment and fiddles with her purse before closing the door. During that time the rising sun shadows the black cloth of her skirt being held against her by the breeze. The light is illuminating the curves of her sweet ass. My eyes travel her thighs, ass and waist before she turns to close the door. *Fuck, her body’s perfect. Not too firm, shaped amazingly. definitely skinny. crazy.*

“Not going to say goodbye?” she says waving and laughing softly.

“What?” I ask, slightly confused.

“I said see you soon and you didn’t say goodbye! Damn you!” she says while shaking her fist playfully.

“Talk to you soon,” I say back with a smile. She smiles back and turns to go inside.

I drive around the block to head back towards work. I think about the tipsy nature of my existence and how I should have quite a strong

hangover right now. The mix of drinks I know I had plus the volume divided by the time I spent pouring it down my throat should absolutely equal a huge headache.

As I pass Jack in the Box I decide to pull through and grab two breakfast jacks. Once through the line I notice I have 30 minutes left before I wanted to get to work so I pull into the Albertson's parking lot and park facing the sunrise. I can see the four peaks mountains in the distance and the contrails being the only cloud-like bodies in the sky to provide contrast.

After I finish the sandwiches I pack the wrappers back in the bag and roll it up. I put it in the container under the rear seat so I can throw it away when I get home. I watch the sun rise and observe the traffic and people walking around. *I think I really like this area. Everything about it seems multiples better than around Omaha. I hear people complain a lot about it being so brown, but I don't have a problem with that. What, should a desert be green?*

The sun is higher and fairly bright as the time approaches for me to head in. I get out into traffic and as I do Foreign Beggars' Hit That Gash starts blaring out of my speakers. 35 miles per hour quickly surpasses 65 as I turn onto Kyrene. I continue south until I am at work and take those corners at 50. First person here, save for Intef and possibly the other lead managers. It varies on which of us gets there first. Usually it's either myself or Michael, so far.

"We have a new hire for the safety manager position starting today," I hear Intef say in my head.

Oh yeah? they taking the last office in the upstairs area of shipping?

"Yes, she'll be here in a few minutes," Intef informs me.

Cool, I'll make sure I'm ready. What's she going to be doing?

"The first week she'll be observing," he replies. "The second week will be spent in and out of meetings with you managers and the third week will be implementation of any additional safety measures to keep us current with international standards."

Sounds fair. Are we all going to get bulletproof vests? I laugh a little and a smile remains afterward.

"No," Intef states coldly.

Always so serious.

"Yes," he states, once again coldly. He sounds slightly irritated.

I get to my office and look out to see Bud arranging the forklifts so everybody can fire off to work as soon as they get here. I wave to him and he puts his arm up straight with one finger up. I smile as he continues moving the forklifts around. He had mentioned trying to think of places for

everyone to park so there wasn't a traffic jam right at the beginning and end of the day. I wonder if this is a dress rehearsal for forklift placement.

Firing through my email I see a few from Laura regarding lot numbers not being pulled properly, throwing our inventory off. I let out a deep sigh and try and figure out how to approach it. I send a group text to Michael, Bud, and Larry.

James: We need to brainstorm on how to reign in correct lot cycling. It's not going out to the customer in line with the packing slip.

I don't expect a response so I finish up the emails and walk down to the shipping floor to check everything out before today starts flowing.

"What is this bullshit?" Bud asks while showing me my text on his phone.

"I know man, it sucked doing it before and it'll suck getting it flowing properly here," I admit.

"We're having so many orders and so much is getting forced into the space we have, how are we going to make lot numbers work?" he asks, voice raising. I really didn't expect to have this conversation already and certainly not one on one with Bud. *Fuck, I need a pot of coffee in me for this.*

"We'll brainstorm later man," I assure him. "Don't worry about it, we'll plan it through and make it happen."

"Like hell we will," he mumbles as he storms off towards the next parked forklift to move.

"Come back to the office, she's pulling up," I hear Intef say.

No shit, already? I turn around and start back towards the shipping offices and actually wonder for a moment why Intef doesn't say any more. I guess it makes sense. Why respond to a stupid question at all?

I step into the office and immediately see a very tall woman with long straight hair pulled back in a ponytail standing before me. I smile and put my hand out. She shakes it and smiles. *Wow, she looks like a cuter version of Anne Hathaway with a different nose.*

"Hello, I'm Destiny," she says while still shaking my hand.

"Hopefully our Destiny will be good," I blurt out. "Have you been shown where your office is going to be?" I ask while feeling my face well into a blush.

"Yes, thank you," she says with another smile before turning and heading up the stairs with her briefcase.

I stand in the same spot for several seconds, analyzing mental images of her face. She has huge breasts for how insanely slender she is. Her ass is high and tight and quite tiny. Her slacks were loose but tight

enough to tell the gentle curves of her tiny body with her movement. *Great find.*

“Her resume is impeccable. She’s going to bring a lot of change to our operation,” Intef says in a matter of fact manner.

Hearing this immediately makes me nervous about what sort of things are not up to the type of code which I’m used to. I start wondering if shit like safety goggles, harnesses, always wearing seat-belts in the forklifts and hard hats are going to come into play. There are quite a lot of things, the more I think about it, that could be forced into the system.

“Are you lost?” Sherry asks, passing me as she goes into the small break room to start the coffee. I follow her in and pull myself out of my daydreaming.

“I wouldn’t mind being lost,” I mumble in my standard pre-9am dialogue.

“Everything alright?” Sherry asks while pouring in coffee grounds. “You were standing in the middle of the office staring into space.”

“Yeah it’s actually going more smoothly than my imagined best case scenarios so far,” I admit.

“It seems like the same job but in a different city,” she seems to be thinking aloud.

“That’s why I picked you guys,” I say. “I wanted it to be as smooth as possible and I knew you all would fit in this machine perfectly.” After I finish the sentence she turns to face me and smiles. Her eyes look wide and tired but it’s clear she appreciated what I just said.

“That means a lot, really,” she says before moving quickly over to hug me. As she embraces me and I put my arms around her to embrace her back, I realize I’ve never even shaken her hand before this moment.

“It means a lot that you guys are doing all of this so well,” I assure her.

“Thanks again,” she says as she breaks the embrace and slowly walks to her desk.

I walk back out onto the shipping floor and navigate through the warehouse, inspecting thermometers and first aid stations as I move on. Everything seems to be in order as I make it through to the end of my circuit. Shipping, receiving, production, storage and the each room all seem to be in perfect order. We’re expecting to have a near capacity volume of shipments today. We’re also expecting to have more volume tomorrow than we’re going to have today.

“Want to walk with me for my initial inspection?” I hear a voice I’m unfamiliar with say from behind as I approach the main shipping floor’s entrance to the offices. I turn around and see the new safety person approaching me. *It’s going to be really hard trying to remain professional.*

She makes other tens I've seen in the time I've been in Tempe look like eights.

“Of course, you can bounce any ideas and observations off me if you want,” I say as I change my route to end up walking with her. We walk through the package shipping room as she scribbles notes down in a thick pad of paper. *Fuck, this might be awful.*

Descent . Meeting Comes

“Mind if I close the door?” I ask, feeling like I may very well be yelling within the next five minutes. I note her looking fully unmoved by the question.

“Absolutely,” Destiny answers. *Huh. Maybe she knows she’s going to have a fight? Or is she comfortable that there won’t be any problems so she has no issues with the door closed?* I make sure the door closes softly and when I turn around she’s sitting comfortably and not even looking down at her notes.

“Alright, what do you think?” I ask as I sit at the desk. Today she’s wearing a modestly low cut blouse that doesn’t show much cleavage but shows just enough that she clearly has quite large breasts for how tiny her body is. Her arms are as sleek and toned as her legs. Her hair is pulled back in a low pony tail and the hair is neat and together down the middle of her back. Her skirt is form fitting and goes down to just above her knees. Her incredibly long legs remind me how much taller than me she is.

“I actually witnessed two people bumping their heads on the bottom rack as they pulled product from the pallets on the floor,” she says while keeping eye contact with me. “I see a lot of pallets that aren’t in prime condition, all of which are being handled with bare hands across the board. The receiving guys shove pallets into spots that pallets are too big to fit in. Usually the top boxes take a little deformation for the pallets to fit. There are shreds of plastic and wood flying around when people cut plastic off of pallets and tug the tied wrap loose from the pallet.”

“So I’m hearing gloves, hard hat and safety glasses?” I say as she flips the cover to her notepad and looks in.

“Yes. For starters,” she says. She raises her eyebrow at me and for a moment I remember she’s fucking hot. I shake my head and know I’m visibly annoyed but nod for her to continue. “We need to train people to be first responders in case there is an accident or anyone needs Band-Aids or any sort of minor treatment on the fly.”

“There are four people I know right now received that training at their last warehouses. We can equip them with med kits again and refresh their training if you want,” I interject.

“That would be a good start. I want one trained for every five people on a forklift,” she adds.

“No problem,” I say. “Let’s talk about Waivers.”

“Waivers?” she asks with a tilted head.

“I know some of the guys aren’t going to be slightly interested in a helmet or safety glasses,” I begin while keeping eye contact with her. In a stern voice I continue. “Is there any way we can offer them waivers, in conjunction with our company’s insurance not covering them for any injuries on the job which result in declining whichever PPE?”

“I can write up the papers,” she says. “They will include declining anything that might come up down the road from not wearing the equipment, you know that right?”

“I take it back braces will be on the list?” I ask while leaning my head forward into my hands as I rub my temples.

“Back braces, yes. Also required lifting methods,” she states.

“Required lifting methods?” I ask, looking up through my hands to watch her as she explains.

“Keeping the back straight, using the legs to lift and so on,” she states slowly and clearly. I can tell she’s a little annoyed with the disconnect between what she sees that can be improved on and my belief in the staff actually considering the changes.

“What would the suggested options for people not signing waivers be who break the lifting rules?” I ask, nerves rising about what the answer is as I’m completing the sentence.

“Verbal warning followed by written warnings that could result in firing ultimately,” she says quietly as if she’s expecting me to get angry hearing the answer.

“That’s fair enough,” I say, understanding the importance of correct lifting having actually damaged my back twice in the past.

“I can comb through the surveillance from time to time to have more of a chance to actually see people lifting,” she elaborates.

“We’re going to have to give and take on the methods though,” I blurt out while I put my hands back down on the desk.

“What do you mean?” she asks, looking interested and a little confused.

“Speed is absolutely crucial. I respect safety. I do, I really do. I told you while we were walking the floor that I hurt my back twice. I get it,” I begin, getting more animated as the words keep flowing. “But if we go 100% by the book on every proper lifting method we’re going to slash our pull times considerably.”

“I know, I have been trying to work that out in my head,” she says with a quick couple of nods. “I think we can get that down.”

“Alright. Back braces?” I throw back into the conversation.

“Yes. Anybody who is pulling product that’s over 75 pounds should absolutely be wearing a back brace,” she states firmly.

“Will that be able to be waived?” I ask, holding my breath once I finish the question.

“Yes, fine, we can do that,” she says while making notes.

“Alright,” I say, losing myself analyzing everything she’s said so far.

“Seatbelts,” she says quietly with a bit of a smirk.

“Really?” I ask, pulling out of my own head and making eye contact with her again while my eyes slowly open wider and wider.

“No,” she laughs, putting her hand up in a ‘no, calm down’ type gesture. “I’m sorry, I just wanted to see what you would say.”

“You’re fucked,” I blurt out just before taking a few deep breaths and feeling my chest.

“Not in a long time,” she whispers before looking down at my desk and turning tomato red from her hairline down to her blouse.

“I worked at a small warehouse that made us wear seat-belts while the forklifts were moving and it was the worst thing in the world,” I ramble before my brain replayed what she whispered.

“I know, I’ve seen it in action and it’s the least productive thing you can do,” she says in a very professional voice.

“Oh Jesus, you really just about gave me a full scale heart attack though,” I say while still feeling a bit short of breath. I push my chair back a bit and stand up, turning around to look out the window. The moment I do I see several people in the warehouse turn to face away and begin walking in various directions. *Huh. They must be worried shit’s going down up here.*

“I’m sorry,” she says before having a short, sweet sounding laugh.

“So are there any individual things you would like to see pushed through, besides the first responders we both agree on?” I ask, still standing and observing the shipping department out the window.

“I really want to push for better lifting standards,” she says sounding like she is almost begging. “The eye and head protection, I’m sure everyone will sign waivers for but I really want the lifting to improve one way or another.”

“I can agree with that. I’ll try to influence as many people as I can to follow that instead of signing a waiver on it,” I say before turning around to stand and face Destiny.

“I would actually like for that being left out of the waiver,” she says quietly while making intense eye contact. We hold eye contact as if we’re in a Mexican standoff. I cross my arms and turn back to face the shipping floor again. A couple people were watching up here and talking until I turned back around. They scatter again, only a little faster than before.

I turn around to face her again before pushing a button on the back side of the desk. It causes the windows to tint, which causes Destiny to tilt her head again. I cross my arms and make eye contact with her once more. She looks confused now more than determined.

“Mirror activation?” she asks, raising an eyebrow again.

“Yes. They’re distracted by watching us up here,” I say in a leveled voice, still mulling over exclusion of the lifting rules from the waiver.

“So nobody can see in?” she says while a smirk crosses her face for a fraction of a second. I nod in agreement and start pacing back and forth between my chair and the window. She leans back a little more comfortably in her chair and crosses her legs.

“Not right now,” I say, feeling comfortable with what I’m going to say next. “We have to think of a system for reinforcing proper lifting that’s not 4 steps from people getting fired,” I insist.

“That is reasonable,” she echoes back to me.

“Yeah?” I ask, starting to feel excited that our conversation seems to be moving forward overall.

“Far more reasonable than seat-belts,” she says with a sly grin.

“Yeah, glad you weren’t serious,” I say with a sigh of relief.

“I’m sorry, I’ve joked about that before and had people jump directly to yelling at me,” she tells me with a look of slight disbelief in her eyes.

“Yeah, some people are a lot tighter wound than I am,” I say, taking a seat again in my chair.

“I could tell that,” she says with a comforting smile.

“Yeah?” I ask, feeling like I must have looked like I was about to start screaming at any time.

“Yes. I dumped a lot of things I would ideally like to see in operation in a very short time instead of stating an elaborate case for each individual thing and delivering it softly,” she explains with a look of admiration.

“I prefer straight forward,” I say while we make eye contact again. “I am grateful you got right to it rather than dragging it out for a half hour.”

“So what do you think about the reception of the waiver?” she

asks with her facial expression shifting back to business.

"I would imagine almost everybody will be overjoyed they get the option to sign away those changes," I respond.

"Even though it might mean any injuries are on their dime?" she asks with a clear voice of concern.

"Some might grumble about it but I'm pretty sure most would rather take that risk than have to be uncomfortable while they work," I explain.

"Understandable," she says while taking more notes.

"I want to make sure you know I'm highly appreciative of you agreeing to even think about a waiver," I say while leaning forward a little. She sits up straight and smiles. Her shift in position allows me to see quite a bit more cleavage. I stand back up and say "Seriously. I was worried I was going to have little choice other than dealing with an angry crew for a while."

"I try to be as flexible as possible," she says. This time I'm the one who flashes a smirk and quickly suppresses it.

"I'm always trying to be more flexible," I say, trying to silence the multiple perverted comments that shot through my mind in that instant.

"Having a stretching partner helps," she says with a large warm smile. Her smile transforms her face from soft and gorgeous to vibrant and cute.

"Ha," I say with a smile. My smile fades as I return to thinking about how to present this information to the workers. I figure I'll hammer it out with the managers in a meeting.

"That reminds me, one thing I really want provided is gym memberships so people have the option to stay in better shape beyond just the physical work here," she states in a way that sounds to me like she almost forgot about it.

"That's a good plan, I was thinking about finding a gym down here anyway," I say while thinking out loud.

"You can come with me to mine after work," she says with that playful smile again. "They tend to have plenty of equipment open at their busiest times, I'm sure they could absorb any volume we throw at them."

"No time," I blurt out coldly. "I'm sorry, I mean, I have a lot on my plate and haven't been leaving here until later in the evenings most nights."

"It's alright, I know what you mean," she says. "You've slept here a couple nights according to Bud."

“Yeah?” I ask, trying to figure out which times Bud would have even had a clue I slept here.

“It shows dedication,” she says with a warm smile.

“Is dedication the same as terror revolving around not wanting to fuck something up?” I ask in an unchecked verbal thought.

“Same difference,” she says comfortably.

“Cool,” I say, sitting down at my desk and typing a quick email to the managers about wanting to have a quick meeting before they leave.

“How old are you, if you don’t mind me asking?” she questions with a smile.

“Under 30,” I say quietly.

“Really?” she asks with clearly audible surprise. “I figured you were my age.”

“No, I’m older than 22,” I think aloud as I type a single email to Michael explaining what’s coming so he can have a heads up. As I click send I think how it’s not really fair that I tell him more information first before the other managers get it. I make a mental note to try not to do that again. I notice Destiny has been laughing since the previous sentence and try to remember what I said.

“Honey I’m over a decade older than 22,” she informs me.

“No shit?” I say, looking from the computer to her beautiful brown eyes.

“Oh yeah,” she says with an assuring expression.

“33?” I ask, eyes habitually scanning her face and body again trying to see what I missed regarding her age.

“Under 40,” she says with a playful smile followed by a small almost mocking laugh.

“Well played,” I say with a smile and a slow acknowledging nod.

I hear the bell toll for lunch and look at the clock on my computer screen. I notice Destiny has her notes closed and her pen has disappeared from sight.

“We’ll talk more tomorrow,” she says while standing up. “I’ll get these notes converted into more concise information and draw up a few waiver variations.”

“Alright I appreciate it,” I say standing up and putting my hand out habitually. She smiles warmly and reaches out to shake my hand. Her skin is incredibly soft but firm at the same time. Her grip is surprisingly strong. She says nothing as she walks to the door and carefully opens it. I find myself staring at how her ass moves in her skirt. I recognize her head

turning back with a smirk to catch me looking but I am transfixed. She turns the corner and goes out of sight before I snap out of the gaze.

Descent . Psychosis

Michael and Stevie arrive to the meeting first. They sit at the table with me. Shortly after Larry, Bud and Nancy come in and sit at a nearby table. Don and Intef come in and sit at a nearby table as well.

"Thanks guys, I'll make this quick," I say, getting comfortable in the chair as opposed to standing up to hopefully help keep them a bit calmer. "We're going to have training classes for some of the guys so we have emergency first responders out and about."

Nobody says anything. Bud is looking at me with a half listening and half-crazy face. This is his normal meeting face. Everybody else is listening intently. Intef is sitting with his hands in his lap, back entirely straight, and face expressionless as usual.

"We're going to have to have a building wide meeting in the coming work days about safety rules including back braces, gloves, hard hats and protective eyewear," I tell them.

"You're shitting me," Bud blurts out the moment I finish the word eyewear. I raise my hand in a gesture of holding on.

"Additionally, all of those things just stated in the meeting will have the ability for anyone who doesn't want to take part, to sign a waiver," I add. Bud's tenseness fades a little as he nods as if he just won a small victory. "The only thing that we're going to have to do is have training classes for everyone on both proper and acceptable lifting." I raise my hand to Bud again before he starts talking, causing him to shoot a crazy smile at me.

"There won't be a waiver for having to properly lift but we're going to figure out a functional system to enforce it. I don't have to tell anyone in this room there's a lot of thoughtless, potentially self destructive physical activity going on," I continue.

"I think we're all guilty of that, actually," Don interjects.

"Myself included," I add while nodding to Don in thanks.

"So, what, cut our speed in half?" Bud asks with questioning and wild eyes.

"No, that is part of why I chose the word acceptable," I answer. "I think we all agree that we want to both be safe and just as fast, if not faster, than we already are."

"Back injuries are productivity killers," Larry adds in his soft spoken voice. We all turn and nod solemnly. *I think all of us have had a back injury or witnessed one taking someone out.*

I look around and see Larry and Stevie looking at Bud as if they're hoping he agrees with them. They look at me and nod as if they entirely agree. Michael, Nancy and Intef all appear to be entirely behind the sentiment.

“Alright everyone, thanks for stopping in here quick before leaving,” I say while standing up. Everyone looks relieved and we all go our own ways hurriedly. Everybody leaves but Intef and I.

“Did you expect that to go worse?” Intef asks me.

“Honestly, yes. I expected Stevie and Bud to fight everything that was said,” I tell him.

“Stevie wasn’t thinking about it but Bud was holding back a lot of arguing,” he informs me. I nod knowingly and feel grateful for Intef’s ability to fill me in on thoughts. It felt dirty the first few days but I got over that quite fast with the heads up I received multiple times, allowing me to appear to be all knowing and all planning.

I stand up at the same time as Intef. The beauty of him being able to hear my thoughts is we don’t have to say hello and goodbye unless other people are around. I head back up to my office and lose a few hours working at my desk.

“James,” I hear over the walkie talkie on my side.

“Yes,” I respond into it.

“‘Alex Jones’ is here,” I hear the voice which I now recognize as Chris say.

“Joshua? On my way,” I say into the talkie.

“Yep, yep yep,” Chris answers.

This fucking guy. Can't we just shoot him, Intef?

“Not the best idea. Can't just kill everybody you don't like, you know,” I hear Intef say.

Yeah that's one thing. This fucker would be justified, though.

“If everybody who had someone who fully disagreed with them wiped off the planet, nobody would be on the planet,” I hear Intef say.

Fuck I wish I could argue with that.

I step out on the shipping room floor just as the door opens and Matteo steps inside. I don't make eye contact and keep walking towards Chris.

“Hey, boss man,” I hear Matteo say as a business smile spreads across his face.

“You're always here when I'm out here,” I say acknowledging him with a nod as I continue walking to Chris.

“We're destined to be business partners,” Matteo says as he signs in at Chris's desk.

“Yes it appears so,” I say to Matteo with the straightest face I can keep without scowling at him. I turn my attention to Chris and ask “Are the checks looking good so far today?”

“Pretty good, I'll catch up with you in a minute on that,” Chris responds before taking paperwork to hand to Matteo to be signed.

“So you boys looking forward to CHRISTmas?” Matteo asks Chris and I, putting heavy emphasis on the Christ part of Christmas.

“Yeah, we have Holiday plans,” Chris says looking at me as he answers Matteo. Chris takes the paperwork and points to Bud to start loading Josheo's trailer. Chris hands Matteo the load manifest and nods to me.

“Hey lets go outside so these guys can work, alright?” I say leading Matteo to the door. Matteo doesn't move.

“Glad to hear you have Holiday plans. Did you make Christmas plans too?” he asks, getting firm faced and crossing his arms while he tilts his head and waits for Chris to answer.

“Hey, he's busy. Let's go outside,” I say more firmly to Matteo. Matteo turns to me, head still tilted. He turns his head back towards Chris then returns to me.

“Yeah, alright,” Matteo says as he follows me out the door to the wide sidewalk leading down to the dock approaches outside.

“You know there are more holidays than just Christmas, right?” I ask as the door to the shipping floor closes behind us.

“But Christ is the reason for the season,” Matteo says in a conceited, unapproachable accurate tone.

“For you, sure,” I begin. He starts to interrupt but I hold up a finger and keep talking. “There are at least a half dozen holidays between Halloween and new years. Each of which are celebrated by millions of people in this country, some of which by billions around the world.”

“Yeah but this is a Christian nation,” he says standing up straight and crossing his arms again.

“Oh, I guess I was taught wrong about this being a free country founded to escape religious persecution,” I bark back, tone sounding a lot less friendly and much more irritated. “Freedom of religion includes freedom from religion. You've preached founding fathers talking points enough. Did you not read any of their notes on the subject where they firmly pushed for all religions including atheism and agnostics being intended to feel safe and comfortable here?”

“That's not true, the founding fathers -” he begins. I put my hand up and start to walk back to the door. “Don't want to be proven wrong, huh? Alright.”

“Take care Matteo,” I say unlocking the door and going back onto the shipping floor. I hear him start saying something as I yell out “We'll unlock the trailer once it's loaded so you can go.” As I finish the sentence I hear the door close and lock.

“We appreciate you taking that heat off us,” Bud says waiting for me just inside. He pats me on the back then turns around to see several outbound guys looking at him as if they're seeing him for the first time. “See you bunch of slacks? If you treated me nicer like that I wouldn't hate you all so much,” he belts out angrily as most scurry back to work. He swings a glance back to me and winks as he continues back to his forklift.

I sign the sixth new hire over in a week from being a temp to full time. I look over dozens of applications forwarded to me from Intef who received them from the temp service. I look at the calendar and realize we've been running a 12 to 1 ratio of workers to first responders for the last several weeks and are about to make the ratio worse.

I fire an email off to Destiny to ask her if she has any people in mind to train to expand the first responders. I also take note that it's 9pm and I still have shit I want to get done tonight. I look at my phone and see a text from Isobel.

Isobel: Haven't seen you often enough. Are you still alive?

James: Depends on your definition of alive.

I open a spreadsheet detailing our lines shipped for the last week and scan them. I throw open an inventory window and copy/paste some things from one to the other to run searches.

Isobel: You responded, so that's alive enough!

James: I'm sorry, it looks like things should be slowing down for me soon. Our volume is leveled off and all we need is a few more temps and it should be totally stable.

Isobel: I know. Last time we hung out I tried to point out some stuff on your laptop that looked like there weren't any increases for a while.

James: Oh yeah. That's true. I could sleep for a month.

Isobel: Call me tomorrow after I get off work.

James: Yes ma'am.

I continue working at the computer until I see it's closing in on midnight. I kick my chair away and lay on the floor right where the chair was.

Just after two pm I get back up to my office. I glance at my cell phone and see it's about time for the first few interviews to be getting done.

"The first two couldn't be more different than their resumes," I hear Intef say.

"That's pretty much the last thing I wanted to hear," I mumble to myself as I scan through emails.

"The next one should be here soon. Do you agree with me calling in the three backups?" I hear Intef ask.

"Absolutely, if they're what their applications look like, it has to be better than the two you just interviewed right?" I unintelligibly mumble while leaning my head forward onto my desk.

"This is my assumption as well," I hear Intef state emphatically.

I lift my head back up and make a slow rolling farting sound as I minimize my email and open my Facebook tab in my browser. I click around until I am looking through Isobel's profile pictures. *So fucking cute. I am looking forward to spending more time with her.* My phone starts ringing. I look at the ID and see it's a customer we've been having too many issues with for no reason but their own madness. I let it ring to voicemail. I decide to text Isobel.

James: I'm starting to wish I hadn't taken this job.

Isobel: Oh stop. You enjoy it.

James: There are a lot of things I enjoy in this world, but working 90 hours a week and feeling like I'm getting nowhere isn't one of them.

Isobel: What are some things you enjoy that you've been missing a while?

James: Having sex where the other person is smiling.

Isobel: Why wouldn't the other person be smiling during sex?

James: Do you?

Isobel: Well, yeah! When having sex, how can you stop smiling?

James: I'll remember that.

Isobel: You have to woo me and have more than six seconds of free time if you think we're ever going to have sex, mister.

James: Like I'll have trouble wooing you!

Isobel: Confident, aren't you!

James: It's ok, I'll never get more than this minute I've made appear to text you anyway.

Isobel: Yes you will! It will be fun!

The phone starts ringing again and I look down at the ID. Then again. *Fuck are you fucking serious right now?*

James: Fucktards calling, I'll call to you soon

Isobel: Promises!

"Alright fuckers, it's noon on Saturday and we're caught up to where we should be mid-morning day after tomorrow. You know, Monday," I announce over the intercom system. I hear cheers echo from all sections of the warehouse. "Let's take Sunday off. Let's get the fuck out of here," I add before hanging the phone up, cutting off the intercom. I jump back on the forklift I've been using since 6am and drive towards receiving as everybody else is driving to park theirs. Bursts of cheering and howling echo through the warehouse every few seconds.

"Fuck yeah!" I hear yelled from one of the temps as he passes me. I shoot him a stern look just as he notices I heard him. I glance in my rear view and see him stiffen up as he continues forward. A smirk of entertainment spreads across my face.

"Later man," another voice says as I hear an electric reach truck drive by. *Didn't see who that was.* As I get to receiving I park near the receiving office and get out of the forklift

"We have eight broken pallets off the west wall," Michael says quickly approaching me from the open dock door.

"Broken full pallets or actually broken boards?" I ask, hoping it's broken boards on pallets. Michael's laughter is the only response I get as he walks by me.

I follow him through some aisles as the warehouse falls silent. We turn a corner and I immediately see what looks to me closer to a dozen pallets with the plastic removed and several cases removed.

"Fuck are you fucking serious," I yell as I kick the side of a pallet with my steel toe shoe.

"Yeah, it's doing that shit again," Michael says as he turns around to walk back the direction we came from.

"I'll get Farahi on that shit, we can't be having this happen again," I promise Michael.

"You're right. We wanted to use the space that mess is in for a trailer we're unloading Monday morning," he tells me.

"Alright, I'll get on the county to see if we can build that additional warehouse to take the stress off of our space," I tell him while I pat his shoulder.

"I'll suck your dick," he says while giving me crazy eyes.

"Shit man I'll suck my own dick if I pull that off," I tell him with all honesty.

“You would go home and never come out of your room if you could suck your own dick,” Michael jokes with a laugh.

“Shit man, so would you,” I say with confidence.

“Absolutely,” he says in his Lara Croft impression.

“I’ll stay and get this shit sorted out, you go home. This won’t take long,” I tell him as I turn around and jog away.

“Are you sure?” he yells after me.

“God damn sure, go see your peoples,” I yell, knowing he wants to hang out with his woman.

“Six hours is the most we’ve hung out in any single week since the night we met Kate,” Isobel says in a longing voice over the phone.

“I know, we’ve had some hiccups lately but I’m reasonably sure this downswing in craziness is leveling out to business as usual and sustainable without me needing to be there more than a normal 10 or 11 hour shift each day,” I say in as assuring a voice as I can.

“A few weeks turned into over two months,” she reminds me.

“Yeah, I know. I promise I’ll have a lot more time off. Starting this next weekend even. We’re not working on Saturday and I won’t be coming in with a skeleton crew to get things lined up on Sunday,” I tell her for the first time in what feels like an eternity.

“Yeah? So I can have you all weekend?” she asks sounding happier than I’ve heard in a long time.

“And Friday night,” I inform her. “So just make it through the next few days and everything should seem to be more like the first couple days after we met.”

“Promises, promises,” she says sounding both playful and slightly sad.

“I do promise,” I repeat. A few moments of silence follow and I additionally promise myself that I’ll make this happen.

“Seven more days. I can deal with that,” Isobel says in a sad voice.

“Almost five more days, it’s Sunday night after all,” I remind her.

“Yeah yeah, silver lining,” she says in a voice I can hear a smile through. “Kate tells me Kyle wants us to come out with them again soon. Maybe the Casino since he has become skilled on the blackjack table.”

“Yeah?” I ask, picturing Kate’s little attractive self.

“Certainly. I started talking to her on Facebook after we met them,” Isobel states, sounding happy.

“Nice. Any nudes?” I ask playfully.

“Yep,” she answers. I feel excitement and doubt rise simultaneously.

“Oh?” I ask.

“No. Just in my imagination,” she says with a sigh. We both laugh.

“It’s Monday and we’ve been here every day for three weeks,” Michael says to me while catching his breath. “I’m going to kill anybody who calls in today.”

“Can we torture them first?” I say before I knock on the propane tank on Michael’s forklift.

“Fuck, mother fucker is low already?” he says as he knocks on it several more times after me.

“Sounded like you were halfway sputtering as you drove up,” I say with a forced, animated frown.

“Mother fucking Mondays,” Michael says as he drives towards the far end of the shipping floor where the propane tanks are stored. I stand and listen as he drives away in case he dies nearby. He sounds like he makes it the majority of the way, so I turn around facing the receiving floor and begin walking slowly towards production.

“This is the test week right?” Stevie says appearing around a corner, scaring the shit out of me.

“I haven’t had six pots of coffee yet, don’t scare me like that,” I say in a whisper as my heart races out of my chest.

“Sorry,” he says with a hearty chuckle and his big chubby cheeked smile. “This is the week where we should have everybody up to speed and the maximum possible inbound and outbound capacity, yes?”

“Yeah. If this week goes smoothly everything after should become clockwork and painless,” I concur. “I’m not at all worried, some of our new guys have impressive numbers in training.”

“Good, I may not have to threaten anyone’s life under my breath,” Stevie says with a bigger smile before turning and walking towards his forklift. I finish catching my breath and walk over to the production floor. They tend to start earlier these days so most of the full timers and a few temps are already running some lines.

“We have one call-in,” Nancy says from my left. I jump out of my skin again, not having seen her and how loud she said it covered all other sounds completely.

“Do you fuckers take special care to make me jump out of my skin once a week?” I ask having to catch my breath again. “I swear I’m going to have to get up at 2am just to be awake enough to not get scared by all of you natives!”

"It's a skill we brought with us to help your blood pressure stay high," she says with her mischievous grin. "Can I have Intef go beat the shit out of that little son of a bitch for calling in?"

"Don't worry, Michael and I have a side plan for anyone who calls in this week," I assure her with an involuntary evil grin.

"Good," she says raising both of her hands up with her palms facing me. "Good, I don't want to know."

"What?" I ask, smiling and holding back a small chuckle.

"I've learned enough of you two's antics towards temps that annoy you," she says as she shambles away laughing.

"Hey, is it Coren?" I ask, realizing I wasn't even given a name.

"It was, how did you guess?" she says with a scoff. We all kind of thought he was going to flake out during training.

"No worries, it will be sweet," I assure her as she raises a hand again signaling how she doesn't want to know.

As soon as I get out of sight I pull my cell phone out and send a group text to Michael, Intef and the personal investigator we hired which says "Go on Coren."

Michael and I picked four of the most likely to call in temps across all three sections and sent information to the investigator beforehand. Coren was our only guess from the Production side. We're having the investigator go take pictures of whoever calls in at any time this week and report back to us what they were doing. Hey, it may be expensive but it's also legal.

Michael: Imagine that shit.

James: Yeah, right?

I enter the break room just as covered in sweat as anybody else and go straight to the soda machine. I put three dollars in and buy three 20oz mountain dew's. I sit down and start chugging the first one.

"Fuck, man, do the dew?" Rhonda says, sitting down next to me with a vinyl and cloth cooler. She opens it and pulls out two sandwiches and a bottle of water.

"Without dew, it will not do," I say as I finish off the first one and open the second one.

"Everybody's glad you're helping us this week," she says before unwrapping and taking a bite out of a sandwich.

"All my work is caught up, so I'm doing what I can," I say as I get to the center of the second bottle. I lift the neck of my shirt up over my

mouth and burp into my shirt. Rhonda smiles and laughs a little before taking another bite.

“No need to kiss ass,” Bud says sharply as he opens the fridge to get a three layer fish sandwich out of the fridge. He gives Rhonda his staple mean mug as she looks up at him, taking him seriously. She looks like she’s put in her place and I flash Bud a smile of amusement while she’s looking down at her sandwich.

“Are we looking good for clearing today?” I ask Bud before I finish out the second bottle of mountain dew.

“It’s pretty close,” he says. “We have some half-assers out there, so if everybody was giving it a big push we’d be ahead.”

“Yeah, I’ve noticed a lot of that,” I agree as I open my third bottle.

“Holy shit man, you’re going to get diabetes,” Betty says, entering the break room from the small package side of the warehouse.

“Especially if you and your husband keep bringing in cookies,” I say before tipping the bottle back to start on the third bottle.

“Hey, why does nobody ever tell me when these events happen anymore?” Bud says while waving a hand around, flashing his glare.

“Because you’re always too angry for anything sweet,” Betty says shooing him with hand gestures.

“Because I never get told about cookies!” he howls, shoving his sandwich into his mouth and taking a big bite out of it. I see Rhonda observing the interaction between Betty and Bud and taking notes about his mannerisms between someone he’s worked with for years before coming down to Phoenix. I can see some dots connecting regarding how Bud messing with people but not really being serious about it.

“It’s fucking seven pm!” I hear Ryan yelling from across the shipping floor.

“We just fucking got here!” Johnny yells while flipping a U-turn before returning into the aisle he shot out of, American flag waving behind his forklift as he speeds away.

“You girls almost done?” Bud yells as I walk towards him, Ryan zipping by us towards the office to put his paperwork on Sherry’s desk.

“Like a blackened steak,” Ryan yells as the office door closes behind him.

“Hump day!” I hear Johnny yelling as his forklift speeds into the receiving area.

“These guys are insane,” Paul says quietly as he gives Chris his paperwork to check the order he just pulled before he takes it to Sherry’s desk.

“Yes they are,” Chris says while smiling at Bud. Sometimes I wonder if Chris doesn’t secretly, or openly have a crush on Bud.

“Like these children have humped a day in their life,” Bud grumbles while walking towards a shrink wrapping machine which is out of wrap.

“Always the grouch,” Chris says while approaching Paul’s pulled pallets with the paperwork.

“Is this going to be Wednesday?” Paul asks with a worried facial expression looking at me.

“No, our computers were down overnight and maintenance got pushed into the morning. So all we had was orders that were already printed before Sherry left yesterday,” I say raising a hand in a calming and nonverbal comforting manner.

“Alright, because this is no fun,” he says.

“I know man, I was only able to pull a couple small orders today because I’ve been trying to help coordinate IT and our contractor to make sure we have a fully functional backup,” I explain, feeling myself rambling.

“Paul, this,” Chris yells out with an outstretched finger pointing at part of a pallet. Paul jogs over to meet Chris by his pulled pallets.

“We’re running low on wrap,” Bud says to me as he walks over to see what Chris is showing Paul.

“I got it, man,” I say walking over to jump on an unoccupied forklift so I can run over and grab a couple cases of wrap.

Descent . Slowing

On the way home I stop by the car wash gas station convenience store at the north end of Kyrene. I walk in and go straight to the cases of beer and grab a 24pack of bottles. Setting it on the counter I notice the cashier I've seen here a thousand times is in a tank top and wearing different glasses than usual.

"Off the clock?" I ask, reaching in my back pocket pulling out my ID.

"Yeah, but I like helping regulars before I leave sometimes," she says with a smile. I give her my ID and she punches in some numbers off it before returning it to me. She leans forward with her elbows flat on the counter and waits for me to find my debit card.

"I appreciate it, the skinny kid who just went out the back door always wants to talk for an hour," I say while handing her my debit card. As I hand it to her I notice her breasts are fucking massive. I never noticed before with the button up shirt they all have to wear. It's fairly baggy and not flattering at all.

"Debit like usual?" she says as she punches the button before I respond. I nod slowly in agreement as my eyes inspect down her body past her surprisingly large breasts. Her stomach is chubby and her waist is narrower than her hips. I always just thought she was chubby on the fat end as opposed to the sexy end. Her face is oval and a little chubby but her absurdly sexy lips, cutely shaped mid-sized nose and huge brown eyes always lock eyes with me through her large black framed glasses. She looks like a more voluptuous and sexier Alicia Silverstone in her prime. Only with better curves, far bigger tits, and bigger sexier lips.

"Alright, here you go," she says handing me the receipt and leaning back onto her elbows on the counter. Her cleavage bulges out again as she smiles and tilts her head.

"I'm really glad you helped me, never saw you out of uniform," I say with a smile and feeling deeply shy.

"I know, that's why I helped you," she says as she laughs and stands up straight. She turns around to reach up and grab her purse from on top of the cabinets and I see how nice her ass looks in the tight blue jeans she's in now. I knew she had wide hips but now in the context of her body I can see how refreshingly fuckable she is.

"See you around," I say as she spins back around to smile at me again. I notice the name-tag on the strap of her purse says Mackenzie.

"I know you will," she says with a kind smile, turning to walk towards the rear exit.

Jesus Christ, I need to give in and fuck the shit out of Isobel soon. I pick up the case of beer and take it out to the passenger seat of the jeep. I strap it in like it's a child and walk around to the driver's side.

Once home I see one of the groundskeepers and wave before unbuckling my beer baby. I get it out and close my jeep. On the way into the apartment I think about how nice the last few days have been at work. We've been getting the balance right between heavy work-flow and the needed amount of trained workers to make it pretty close to effortless.

The groundskeeper appears from around the corner the opposite way I walked at my apartment. "Want me to unlock that?" he says reaching in his pocket.

"Sure man, that would be cool," I say before I was going to set the case down to get my own keys out. He slips by me and uses his master key to open my front door. "Thanks man," I say as he returns the keys to his picket. He nods and walks down the sidewalk and out of sight.

I get inside and set the case of beer on the counter next to the refrigerator. I open it up and pull open the crisper on the bottom, filling it with already chilled beer. I take a few out of the case after closing the fridge and walk to the computer room. I turn on the screen and open up World of Warcraft. I pop open a bottle of beer and drink half of it before logging in.

"You fucking pandas are awful," I say, looking at the Pandaria loading screen. I log in and run my auctions while drinking beer and skimming Facebook posts. I hear my cell phone go off and look to see a text from Michael.

Michael: This shit is going really smooth lately, not counting Tuesday night's computer crash.

James: I was thinking that on the way home. First time it has been this smooth since we started this down here, I think.

Michael: I didn't notice how smooth it was until Bud was talking to me in the break room after work.

James: You and Bud still going hunting for javelinas a weekend or two a month?

Michael: Yes. I can't seem to kill one for every two he gets though.

James: You'll catch up. He's got a psychic connection with murder.

I chuckle to myself after sending that and think about the stories I used to hear working with them up north. He used to catch a dozen fish to most other people's two or three when they would go ice fishing. They said it seemed like the fish were giving themselves to him.

Michael: Maybe. He can't beat me at fishing though.

James: No shit? Where have you guys fished?

I love Michael but I need to verify that with Bud and see what he says. I know Michael loves fishing but so did a lot of people who Bud would destroy in numbers of caught fish.

Michael: We have fished at a few lakes around here. He found them the first week we were here and I started joining him about a month in. And fuck yeah. Almost neck and neck but I always come out with a couple more than him in the end.

James: You know that's an accomplishment, right? Have you heard his history with ice fishing?

Michael: Yes. His license plate was Icebrkr, remember? That's how I started talking to him to begin with regarding hunting and fishing.

James: That makes sense I guess.

Michael: The first time we did anything, it was a challenge of who could catch the most fish.

James: Who won that one?

Michael: He barely me. But I researched and figured out some tricks he was using and learned some others. Go Google!

James: Cool man.

I finish up my auctions and realize it's only a little after 7pm though it feels like midnight to me. I decide I haven't taken an early night in a long time and I really could use the sleep. I decide to text Isobel before bed.

James: How has your day been, cute?

Isobel: Busy. Finals week is coming up and I should graduate on time.

James: Yeah? But I won't be dating a college girl anymore.

Isobel: Poor you!

James: You're damn right! Work's starting to slow down so I don't know if there'll be many more month or week long spans of working 14 hours a day.

Isobel: What are we going to do with all that free time?

James: I figured we would need to find other people to date to fill in all that extra time.

Isobel: Ha! You think?

James: What could we do to fill all that time?

I've been intentionally floating windows for her to make perverted or otherwise sexual flirtation all week. As soon as our last few temps started getting comfortable at work and I had hopes of free time again in the future.

Isobel: I have a few ideas. If you think you're up for it.

James: I think I can handle it.

Isobel: We'll see!

My body starts agreeing with me regarding sleeping early so I shut the screen off on the computer. I stand up and put my phone in my pocket. I finish off the second bottle I brought into the computer room with me and carry them into the kitchen. I throw them into the kitchen trash can and grab a third one out of the case. It still feels reasonably cold so I chug it right where I stand. I look out the window towards the pool and see Michael and Laura standing next to the pool talking.

Good for him! Fucking a! I didn't know they were hanging out openly outside work now. Michael has been attracted to Asians for as long as I've known him. Usually people say he's the sweetest guy they've ever met but never give him a chance for anything beyond maybe letting him go down on them. He's eaten more pussy than any five people I can think of combined.

I drink most of the bottle I have as I watch their nonverbal flirting. I enjoy viewing each of them smiling as the other speaks. It goes back and forth like an enjoyable ping pong game in slow facial expression motion.

I finish off the bottle in my hand and throw it away with the other two. I take a fourth out and walk into the bedroom. I pull my phone out and notice another text from Isobel.

James: I'm pretty sure I'm seconds from blacking out.

Isobel: Goodnight James. I hope I can see you soon.

James: I miss your smile, cute.

Isobel: You should!

James: Goodnight, sleep tight.

I open the beer and drink some before plugging my phone in. I set it on the end table near my bed and drink the beer down to a third full. I finally feel a buzz coming on as I look outside and see Michael and Laura in the pool kissing. *Fucking awesome!* I can't remember ever actually seeing him having such a romantic time with someone. I feel a whole lot of happiness for him.

I lean to the side, pick up the beer, and finish the last third of it. I underhand it to a trash can in the bathroom and actually make it. I look

out towards the pool to see if they happened to hear it as the bottle landing in the plastic basket was quite loud. Neither of them seem to have heard a thing as they're still kissing. I lay back and put my head on the pillow. I feel the happiness and alcohol buzz rising at the same time as I fade off to sleep.

Descent . Visitor

I wake up to the sound of a doorbell. I feel a little drunk and lift myself up to a sitting position. I look out to the pool and see still water. The slightly brighter lights activated by motion are off and all that light the area are the dimmer decorative variation.

I hear the doorbell ring and know it's not a dream. I stand up and tuck my ever present post-sleep boner under the waistband of my shorts. I look at the microwave clock and see it's only 10:45 as I pass to the front door. I open it and see Mackenzie standing there in her tank top and jeans. I look her top to bottom and see she's in white tennis shoes and see her hair is now pulled back in a tight pony tail. At the convenience store earlier it was loose and cascading over her shoulders.

"I'm so sorry if I woke you up," Mackenzie says, looking both beautiful and slightly panicked.

"It's no problem, are you alright?" I ask, wondering what she's doing here.

"Alright? Oh, yes I'm great! I met Someone! At the Baseline Pub and he works with you! I've been drinking and he told me where you live," she says. As the sentence went on she was visibly more panicked and even embarrassed.

"Oh yeah? I'll have to fire him," I say with as much of a joking voice tone as I can.

"How do you know it wasn't someone above you instead of below you?" she asks with a smile, leaning against the wall and playing with her lips with a finger.

"I run that whole building, nobody in any department is above me," I mumble, feeling like I could fall right back asleep.

"Holy shit, you run an entire business?" she asks, looking less embarrassed and more excited now.

"Well not the whole thing, just the location we work at," I explain.

"Mind if I come in?" she asks, hand that she was using to play with her lips now resting with an open palm against her neck.

"Oh yeah, of course. All I have is most of that case of beer left and a bunch of liquor," I offer, moving so she can come in. I gesture towards the living room and she stands right in front of me.

"Liquor, please," she requests before breathing in deeply through her nose. She exhales slowly with a growing smile on her face.

"Alright," I say, feeling tired and a combination of dizzy from alcohol and fatigue. I gesture for her to have a seat in the living room.

She walks into the darkness and I lean in quick to turn the corner lamp on from the switch before I turn and walk into the kitchen. I open the freezer and look over what liquors are in the door. "I have cold Vodka, Gin, Tequila, Coconut Rum and -"

"Tequila! Do you have salt?" she interrupts, a little louder than I was prepared for. I jumped a little from being startled. I glance over to see if she saw it happen but she's looking through the books that have been accumulating on the bookshelf built into a wall in the living room.

"Done, and no margarita salt but I have table salt," I inform her. I suddenly become self-conscious of my hair feeling like it's a mess. I feel the top of my head and confirm that it's zig zagged back and forth across my head. I run my fingers through it a few times and use both hands to adjust the part down the middle so it's mostly correct. I run my fingers through it under each side again to make sure it's as straight as it can be without a brush.

"Table salt will have to do!" she responds while I'm fixing my hair.. "Any lime or lemon?" she adds.

"None," I say. I look out and see a look of slight disappointment. "I have lemon lime flavoring for cooking though," I add, holding up the lime shaped bottle.

"I know what to do!" she says as she walks through the edge of the dining room and into the kitchen. She takes the tequila bottle and lime shaped bottle and sets them in front of her on the stove. "What about shot glasses?" she asks while giving me a playful 'well?' look.

"Oh! Good point," I say while pivoting towards the sink. I open the cupboard and pull out two shot glasses. I set them in front of her on the stove next to the other two bottles. "So what made you think I'd just let you in?" I ask while the thought of how awkward this would be if I wasn't attracted to her passes through my mind.

"I saw your eyes explore my goodies a few times today, and you're always happy to see me before you saw my body," she admits to me.

"Ahh, you saw that huh?" I say while feeling my face turn an unknown shade of red.

"You're not sneaky," she says with a smile and a little bounce. I see her breasts jiggle a little before her hands take the tequila bottle and pour two shots. I smile and shake my head a little. "Saw that too, even though I can't see your eyes," she adds.

"Saw what?" I ask, acting like I wasn't just watching her cleavage jiggle after she bounced.

“Checking out my tits just now,” she reveals, licking her fingers and wiping the moisture off on her left cheek. She takes the lime bottle and pushes it against her right cheek before tipping it up slightly for a split second. She puts it down and rubs the liquid into her right cheek a little.

“Lick the salt, take a shot, lick the lime,” she orders, standing up straight and closing her eyes.

“Skip all the formalities and lick your face, huh?” I say with a smirk. Her eyes slowly open and her head lowers a little as she looks up at me.

“Well,” she says softly, looking at my torso. Her hands reach out and grip the sides of my ribs as she steps forward. She tilts her head back and leans up. I instinctively lean forward, eyes fixated on her thick as hell lips. We kiss hard and passionately for a few seconds. “Looks like I was right,” she says in almost a whimper. She flattens back out on her feet and takes a deep breath.

I lean forward, lick the salt off her cheek, take a shot and lean forward again to lick the lime juice off her cheek. I stand up straight as the tastes resonate in my mouth. Surprisingly similar to a traditional margarita salt, tequila and lime wedge shot.

“Am I right?” she asks proudly.

“We’ll see,” I say as I take my shirt off. I see her eyes widen a little as I lick my fingers and moisten on my right pec between my nipple and collar bone. I apply some salt and put the bottle of lime against my left pec at the same place. She looks up at me and smiles before leaning forward and sucking the salt off for a few seconds. She nibbles with her teeth a little before taking the shot. She sucks the lime juice off my other pec before biting me gently.

I pick up the tequila bottle in my right hand and reach for her hand. She smiles while biting her lower lip. *Fuck, her lips are sexy as hell.* She grabs the lime bottle and salt in her other hand as I lead her to the bedroom. I turn the lamp on the dresser on and close the blinds as she pulls her jeans off and takes her tank top off. She’s wearing pink panties that ride high up her hips and a lighter pink bra. The bra barely comes above her nipples and I note it has three clasps on the front.

I step towards her and take a swig of tequila before setting it on the end-table next to my phone. She licks her hand and rubs the liquid on the top of one of her breasts. She carefully puts some lime on the other and I lean forward to suck off the salt. I pick up the bottle again and take a bigger swig. She takes the bottle from me as I suck the juice off of her

other breast. I take both of her breasts in my hands and squeeze them gently as I carefully nibble and suck on the tops of them.

When I stop she leans forward and licks and nibbles on my shoulders before applying salt to one and lime to the other. She sucks the salt off of one, takes a few big swigs of tequila and spends a little more time sucking and nibbling on the other shoulder where the lime was applied. When she's done she kisses down my chest and stomach until she gets to my shorts. My hands are on her shoulders as she pulls my shorts off.

My morning wood remained until the kitchen when it became a full boner and I realize she could probably see the tip sticking out the moment I took my shirt off. Her huge and sexy lips carefully kiss and are run up and down the length of my dick before she starts licking it. One of her hands grips the side of my hip while the other starts massaging my balls. I notice my balls seem a little bigger than the cup her hand can make. She nibbles on the base of my dick before starting to suck on my balls.

I move my hands to under her arms and lift her up. I lift her off the floor and put her down a little harder than I intended on the bed. The sides of her mouth curve up in a bit of a smile, even though she is now breathing heavily. Her hands go flat on the bed as I lean forward and start kissing from just under her bra down her stomach. I take the sides of her panties in my fingers and she lifts her ass off the bed. I pull her panties down and she rests her ass down as her legs are raised. I remove her panties and notice her legs are a little chubby but formed just as sexily as the rest of her.

I skip teasing her, seeing her pussy is moderately engorged already and my lips find her clit. I nibble gently with my lips until she starts breathing heavier. Her hands run through my hair and hold it behind my head as my tongue finds its way up and down her pussy lips. I start rubbing her clit with my thumb as my sadly shorter than I wish it was tongue starts pushing into her pussy repeatedly. I take note how crazy tight her pussy is and switch my mouth to working her clit as I slip a finger into her.

She grips my finger with her muscles. I look up at her and her eyes are locked onto me with puckered lips. I fuck her hard with one finger until I feel juice running down the rest of my fingers. I nibble on her pelvis and inner thighs between licking and sucking on her clit before I slip a second finger in. I slowly run my index and middle finger in and out of her until it feels relaxed enough for me to now fuck her quicker and

harder with two fingers instead of one. I focus my lips on kissing around her lower abdomen so I'm not bumping myself in the chin repeatedly.

She starts pulling upwards on my shoulders. I take her hands and pin them up above her head, positioning myself so my knees are balancing my forward movement against the edge of the bed. I dig my feet into the floor as I start kissing her. I feel the resistance in her hands against being held above her head start to fade as the kissing gets more heated. I can feel her drenched pussy against my balls as I realize my dick is dripping on her stomach.

I break the kiss to start sucking hard on her neck as I position my pelvis to get my dick lined up with her. I feel her hips thrust as the tip of the head of my dick gets drenched by her pussy, but the sides of the head don't make it inside her. I reposition her hands so I can firmly keep them pinned above her with only one hand. I reach down and grip the base of my dick so I can rub the head up and down the length of her pussy. She keeps trying to buck and force me into her so I pull away from her.

"Stop teasing me and fuck me," she demands, lips staying open after she says me as she breathes heavily. I lose myself a moment staring at her sexy lips before standing up. Her hands lift her torso and huge breasts up off the bed as confusion spreads across her face.

"Don't move," I say in as commanding and soft of a voice as I can before quickly moving into the closet. I grab three ties and come back into the bedroom. She looks at me with even more confusion as I tie the three ties together, end to end. I see a smirk spread across her face as I approach her with them.

"Didn't like me trying to speed things along?" she asks in a flirtatious, playful voice. Without a word I set the tie at the foot of the bed and move her so her head is by the corner of the bed furthest from the wall. I pick up the tie and hold them above her head near the corner of the bed. I wrap them around her wrists at the center of the tie and put a knot in the tie before tying the ends around the leg of the bed. She tests the give in them and realizes she can't move her hands much further than her forehead.

I get back in bed and wrap my arms around her thighs as my lips find their way back to her clit. I suck on it a little as her labia puffs out considerably. I run my tongue up the center of her body until I get to her bra. I unclip it and expect her breasts to fall to each side quite a ways considering their size. Instead they pretty much stay where they are and I feel my dick get harder at that sight alone. I shift my weight to my left

elbow and knees as I start sucking on her fully erect, nicely sized nipples. I take my dick in my right hand and rub it up and down the length of her pussy several more times. I push a little harder as it passes by the hole to help get it used to the size.

I sit up straight as I hear her starting to whisper “Fuck me, please fuck me,” under her breath. I spread her legs a little more and grip her waist firmly with my left hand as I very carefully slip into her. The tightness of her pussy combined with how wet my dick got rubbing up and down her causes me to feel like I might have to worry about cumming earlier than I would like to.

As I get it into her all the way to the base I start realizing her legs are gripping my sides and trying to guide me faster. I start running my fingertips over now mostly flat and still totally sexy looking stomach as fuck her a tiny bit faster every several strokes. I slowly pull almost all the way out and push back in a little faster each time. I’m not even midway through the speed I want to get to as she’s moaning and I feel her cum running down my balls.

I start massaging her breasts softly as I fuck a little faster at a time. In a matter of moments I feel another steady stream of cum running down my balls and inner thighs as her moans get louder and louder. I feel my balls starting to tingle as I already feel disappointed in myself.

“Harder,” I hear her whisper, so I slow down a bit. She whispers it again but I slow down further and as she starts whimpering and making whining sound I begin pounding her hard and fast. She starts yelling loudly and pulls her knees up towards her chest as I feel almost painful gripping on my dick by her pussy muscles repeatedly. I squeeze her breasts a little harder than I meant to before moving my hands down to support my weight to take the job off my back and knees.

I fuck her harder and harder as I realize there’s no turning back from me joining her in this orgasm. I feel her muscles mostly stopped in convulsions before I pull out and cum all over her stomach repeatedly. I see her trying to get her hands free but failing. As I force to hold my composure against ever rising fatigue and alcohol shaking my reality, I stand up and walk to the corner her hands are tied to. I lift it up with two hands until she notices what I’m doing and moves her hands so there is slack. I slip it down off the leg of the bed and kick it loose.

Before I can set the bed back down she’s moving, causing the bed to slam down a little hard. She climbs out of the bed and with her wrists still tied together grabs my dick with both hands. She falls to her knees

and wraps those huge sexy lips around it halfway down and I feel her tongue working the bottom of it under the head. I lean my head back and feel the little loss of erection since the orgasm fade quickly. Her teeth start having a little harder time not touching my dick as the erection fills out completely.

She breaks contact with my dick and moves around me, grabbing the tequila and pouring some into her mouth. She turns towards me as I am now facing her and stands up. I take the bottle from her and drink some of it before pushing her back onto the bed. I get on top of her again and suck a little hard on her tits, causing her to moan in a way that sounded like it hurt a little but in no way a desire for me to stop.

I pin her hands above her head easily as I fuck her a lot harder than I did before. In what feels like a few seconds, though it had to be longer, I feel her pussy pulsing again and cum collecting under her ass and down by my knees. I fuck her as hard as I can as the orgasm fades away. Once it feels like it's almost completely gone I shift my weight to free the hand not holding hers above her head and start rubbing her clit, fucking her the last little bit harder that I can. I feel her legs twitch and her hips move like she's trying to get my fingers away from her clit.

I rub her clit harder as her breathing picks up and whimpers gain in volume. I slow my fucking a little and increase the pressure on her clit. I feel her pussy starting to clench again and I pick back up to as hard as I can fuck and just a bit more pressure on her clit in circular motions with the bottoms of my fingers.

"Oh holy fuck, oh my god," she starts almost yelling but mixed in with the now loud whimpers. Her legs are now fully shaking uncontrollably as I feel a sharp pain in my dick as her pussy starts exploding in another orgasm already. This time I feel splashes and look down. I realize as I'm rubbing her clit and pushing hard in and out of her she's starting to squirt. I double up the pressure on her clit and lean back and tilt my pelvis a little to put as much pressure on the top of her pussy with my dick as I can.

After a few large blasts of liquid out of her that splash off of my pelvis thighs, the liquid slows to a stop and her breathing starts to almost turn to panting. I completely stop pressure on her clit. My fucking slows down to slowly pulling my dick all the way out of her and slowly pushing back inside to the base. Once her breathing slowly recedes to normal I pull out and lay next to her on my back.

"I'm so sorry, I don't know what that was," she whispers. I look over at her and her face is read and she looks deeply embarrassed.

“Why? Have you never squirted before?” I ask, feeling a huge sense of pride sweep over me.

“Is that what squirting is like? I thought I was peeing on you while I came! It was so powerful I thought I lost all control,” she asks, seeming unsure about my assessment of the situation. I analyze the smell as best I can and only detect the smell of sex. Absolutely no urine at all.

“If it was pee, would I do this?” I ask while moving around and getting down between her legs with my face. I run my tongue from the inside of her ass cheek up her inner thigh, licking off all the liquid still there.

“Oh my god, you better not do that if you’re not going to keep fucking me,” she says in a desperate sounding whisper. I immediately do the same on the other side of her inner thighs and she starts breathing heavy again. I test the waters of her sensitivity by running my tongue from one inner thigh, over her still engorged labia and to her other inner thigh. The only result is her pelvis moving around a little.

I stand up to reveal I’m still mostly hard to her. She sits up and leans forward, taking my dick in both hands again and wrapping those huge sexy lips around it. She sucks on the head and runs her hands up and down the length of it, squeezing a little. I stop her hands and untie them, tossing the tie across the room and noticing her tank top is in a different stop.

I use her hands to guide her to her feet and she looks a little confused until I turn her around and guide her onto her knees on the bed. Now knowing where this is going she gets on all fours and moves forward a little on the bed. I get behind her and put my hands on the sexy curves of her waist. I run my hands over her hips and big but sexy as hell ass. I grip the cheeks of the bottom innards of her ass and slip my dick into her.

She gasps and then moans as I pick up the speed. I feel her highly aroused clit bumping my balls with every completion of a thrust. As her breath starts picking up I feel fatigue and alcoholic dizziness taking over with force. I start feeling desperation of my own to continue as the light in the room starts to fade.

Descent . Friday

I open my eyes, lying on my back diagonally on my bed looking up at the ceiling. I look to both sides of me and see the bed is empty. I sit up and look around on the floor and see nothing that wasn't there when I went to bed. I realize there is an excess of moisture in my shorts and I'm wearing the same shirt I had on when I fell asleep.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," I say out loud in full annoyance and in my deep crackling morning voice. I stand up and feel even more moisture press against the skin of my crotch inside my shorts. With the light coming in from outside I can see well enough as I pull my shorts open and look inside to identify at least one orgasm worth of cum.

I sigh and walk straight into the bathroom, turning the shower on. I sigh again as I strip out of my clothes and get into the shower. I put my arm against the shower wall and lean my head against it. I let the water start to rinse the front of my body as I sigh again.

"You're here early," Destiny says while peeking her head in my office.

"I had an eventful morning. Wait, why are you here so early?" I ask, not remembering any time she had come in this early in the past.

"I always come in this early," she states sounding completely honest.

"It's true," I hear Intef say in my mind.

"Really, I didn't know," I say. "When I get here in the morning, the only other people I ever see if I'm not first are Intef, Michael, Larry and his wife or Bud."

"I get here about a half hour before anybody but Intef now because my husband drops me off before going in to work," she explains.

"No shit? How long have you not had a car?" I ask, feeling like a dick for not noticing.

"Few weeks. Transmission died and we didn't want to replace it yet," she answers. "You see me come in around eight because I walk over to the diner for breakfast after I check email and jot down notes for the day," she adds.

"Ahh, that makes sense," I say before reaching up and rubbing my temples.

"Talk to you later," she says as she disappears from my doorway.

I spend what feels like an eternity going through emails and reading through spreadsheets covering everything from productivity to planning and progress on aged goals. I'm surprised each time I see

indications of our location outperforming distribution centers that have been in operation for several decades. We also have twice the customer growth as all other locations. I think Bud and his guys are blowing things out the door more accurately than even I expected.

I read an email concerning a customer complaint about several poorly built pallets. They collapsed in transit. I immediately have a short list of people I've observed building poor pallets. I jot down some notes and lock my computer before leaving the office.

Passing through the upstairs shipping office I see the Jannis and Darrel in a focused conversation. Not used to seeing them in the same office for more than a brief word before going back to their own offices, I step in.

"We can't get those two routers to coordinate though so we're going to have to schedule them and track them ourselves," Darrel states in a way that sounds like it's not the first time he's said it. "Hello James," he adds quietly with a nod of acknowledgment. I nod back and look to Jannis for what she's going to say.

"We'll have to," she says nodding to him in agreement before looking at me and nodding in acknowledgment as well.

"Which two companies?" I ask, feeling like I get the gist of the conversation.

"Expressit and OHL," Darrel answers while looking into space in front of him, deep in thought.

"Expressit being the one not good at communication?" I ask, having become familiar with them within the first couple weeks of operation.

"Easy guess," Jannis says with a smirk before turning back to her desk to type frantically at her computer.

"Yeah, we'll have to babysit," Darrel informs me, crossing his arms.

"What's getting done?" I ask, curious about which project they're working on.

"The consolidation of raw materials to our hazmat building from the west and south," Darrel answers. I was just reading emails about the end goal of this project.

"Do you think this can be done by the end of next week?" I ask, feeling a little nervous as I recall there are close to three dozen sources of materials we're pulling from.

"Absolutely," Darren responds confidently. I catch Jannis shooting him a slightly doubtful glance before continuing typing.

"Let me know if I can help with this," I ask. Darren nods and Jannis looks up at me.

"You may very well be getting a list of pro numbers to keep an eye on," Jannis says quickly as her typing doesn't cease.

"Not a problem," I say, feeling confident I can be useful helping them babysit. Darren and I exit her office and go in separate directions silently. I'm sure he has an hour long to-do list he's about to knock out end to end.

The trip through the warehouse and production sections feels like a blur of small talk everything being in acceptable order. I make a third loop through all the offices and everything starts feeling colorless until I see Destiny reaching up to check a thermometer and see her slacks gripping her ass tightly. I involuntarily stop and stare until she completes the task. I pick back up to the speed I was going previous to her motion.

"Hello James," she says with a smirk. *Shit, did she see me? I am not slick at all.*

"She saw you clearly," I hear Intef say in my head. *Thanks.* I think in as sarcastic a tone as I can muster.

"How are you, Destiny?" I ask, walking in a way that is clear I'm not planning on stopping to talk.

"Good, as long as readings keep looking this perfect," she answers.

"It's nice when things are in order, isn't it?" I say as I continue walking to the front of the shipping side. I know we're getting pretty close to done with work we could even do Saturday. I see a few guys looking stressed, most of which being Bud.

"Give me a truckload," I say as I approach Bud.

"Yeah? Think you can do 12 pallets before the end of the day?" he asks.

"Fuck yes. I had the best lunch possible," I inform him.

"Did you have pussy and steak?" he asks with a huge smile.

"Better than that, I smoked some crack from back home, shot up some pure heroin then smoked a metric ton of crystal meth," I say while jumping back and forth between two spots like I'm warming up for a fight.

"That will do," he says while shaking his head and handing me an order.

"Thanks man," I say scanning the order to load it into my scanner gun. I jog over to a forklift and knock it out in about 3 hours. All the while, other forklift drivers look comforted and happy to see me sweating my ass off and kicking out a big order with them.

At 3pm on the dot I get on the intercom and make an announcement.

"Attention everybody. I'll give you a few moments to turn off your forklifts. Alright, everybody can clock out early and we'll make sure to pay you 'till 5," I say. "You've all done extremely well. New hires and original

location launchers alike. Everybody's done extremely well. I'm proud of you all, and I'll see you Monday."

I shut off the Intercom and hear cheers and hollering coming from all corners of the warehouse.

"No Saturday?" Bud asks coming over to me with a look of confusion and excitement combined.

"No Saturday," I respond. "Not even a Saturday or Sunday prep."

"I can see that working," he says with the happiest smile I've ever seen from him before he pats me on my back several times and walks back to his forklift. "Get the fuck out! Get the fuck out!" he starts yelling as he drives around the shipping floor, appearing to sneer angrily.

I stand there a minute with a smile I can't stop from spreading across my face. Everybody finishes up what they're doing and starts herding towards the time clock. Couple guys see me standing off on the side by the phone I used to speak over the intercom and nod in acknowledgment and thanks.

As the crowd starts to thin I sneak through into the shipping office and go to my desk. I sit down and rifle through any halfway important emails until everything that warrants response today is taken care of. I pull out my phone and text Isobel.

James: Like I promised, I'm going to be free all weekend.

Isobel: Oh, no! I'm on my way to Arkansas! Did you really end up with the whole weekend off?

I feel my heart sink and regret of some of the work we could have gotten done to get ahead instead of caught up start piling up quickly. I put my head down on my wrist for a moment and take a few deep breaths.

"That was nice what you did," I hear Destiny's voice say. I look up and see her leaning against the doorway. I instinctively take off her clothes with my eyes and lose track of what she even said as I look over her body from head to toe.

"Thanks," I blurt out, recalling her having said something that resembles a compliment. She smiles and starts to turn around towards her office. "Hey, have you seen anybody lifting dangerously lately?" I ask quickly.

"Nope, everything has been pleasantly acceptable," I hear her sweet voice say as she walks back to her office.

Isobel: I'm just kidding. I've been ready since Noon in case you got off before 6pm.

James: I can leave in a few minutes. And you're evil.

Isobel: Good! You can buy me dinner! I haven't had lunch yet because of finals and I'm starving.

James: What do you want to eat.

Isobel: Whatever you want.

James: Pizza?

Isobel: If you want. I could go for Chinese but Pizza works too.

"Sir?" I hear a voice I'm unfamiliar with say from the doorway. I look up and see one of the new hires that's usually quiet named Gary standing uncomfortably.

"Yeah man, what's up?" I ask, leaning back in the chair and putting my phone down so I can give him my entire attention.

"Do you have a minute?" he asks, looking like he's banking on me saying yes.

"No," I say keeping as straight a face as possible. I cross my arms and try as hard as I can to keep a straight face.

"Alright, sorry," he says as he starts to turn to leave.

"No man come on in, you can shut the door if you want," I say, sitting up straighter and putting my hands on my desk. "I'm actually sorry, come on in," I repeat as he carefully closes the door while looking out into the hall until the door closes.

"Thank you," he says walking around to sit in the chair in front of my desk.

"Would you like a drink or anything?" I ask, gesturing towards the small fridge in the rear corner of the room under the bookshelf.

"No thanks, I'm here to get something off my chest," he says sounding as if he's been working up the courage to do this for weeks. I start feeling more concerned and have no more issues trying to keep a straight face.

"Go ahead, anything you need to say. I'll mirror the windows in case anything out in the warehouse might distract us," I say bumping the button to activate the glass.

"Roy and Brian have been giving me a really hard time the last couple weeks since I got signed on to full time," he says in one breath. He takes a deep breath and continues. "I got along with Roy really well while I was a temp. Brian never talked until I was hired on full time."

"Can you give me examples of what they've been doing?" I ask, well aware of how Roy and Brian mess with people as they become more legit and long term. I went through it with them too but I figured out Roy was bullshitting early on. I'm quite sarcastic and fuck around a lot myself so I can spot somebody bullshitting pretty quickly.

"He whispers things and mimics the facial expressions I make when I'm nervous," he states with a strong demeanor.

“Alright, what does he whisper?” I ask, a little concerned Roy may have gone too far with this guy.

“He’ll say things like ‘nobody make a sound, somebody is getting close so we have to pretend to be invisible’ and ‘if i don’t talk to anybody nobody can see me, right?’” he responds. As he finishes the sentence he leans his head forward and looks like his shyness is overpowering him.

“Listen,” I say, fully understanding being shy and having problems having to stand up and try to defend myself if I feel I’m being treated unfairly. “I’m going to very quietly take care of this for you and make sure things are smoother for you, alright?”

“No, I don’t want you to,” he says a little louder. “I just wanted to talk to you so you knew what was going on.”

“Alright, just know I’ll be able to make things comfortable for you if it ever gets too far for you,” I assure him. I pull out a notepad and write down my cell phone number. I tear the paper off and hand it to him. “Seriously, text or call me. Leave me a voicemail. Let me know what’s going on if you don’t see me or don’t find me in the office. I always have the cell phone on me.”

“Thank you, it means a lot,” he says as he pulls his own cell phone out and programs the number immediately.

“It’s the least I can do. We were happy with you as a temp and you seem to only have excelled since you have been signed on full time,” I bluff, not really being fully aware of how he’s done beyond never hearing any complaints about him. In Nancy terms, not complaining about someone is a high compliment. Even Roy and Brian, who have been with her for decades, get complained about on a monthly basis.

“Thank you, that is always good to hear,” he says as he stands up, extending his hand. I take his hand and shake it firmly. I smile and nod as he turns and opens my door carefully.

“Take care, have a good weekend,” I say, genuinely hoping he has a really relaxing weekend.

“You too,” he says as he turns and disappears silently down the hallway towards the stairs.

I immediately pull out my phone and send a text to Roy.

James: Hey man, you know who Gary is right?

Roy: I’ll stop. I knew I went too far today.

James: That was fast. And Jesus man you’re going to make these kids cry

Roy: It puts hair on their balls

James: I’m sure he’ll get more comfortable

Roy: He comes out of his shell with the girls on the spray bottle lines

James: Alright, if he comes to me again I'm going to fuck with you in front of him

Roy: Don't make me give you a swirly

James: I actually believe you would, you fuck

Roy: I would, and you would like it

I laugh and turn off my screen before looking at my email again to make sure everything's clear. I open up my browser and tab through the different cameras to see who all is still in the building. I see Michael and Laura standing in front of each other holding hands laughing and talking in the main receiving office entry way. Nobody else is in that office but I see Bud locking all the doors on the shipping side.

James: Want me to pick you up whenever I get out of here and take a shower?

Isobel: I can just come wait for you in your living room if you want?

James: That works too, I'll text you when I actually leave work.

I smile as I shut the screen off on my phone again and start the shutdown process for my desktop. Smiling feels weird to me. I surely haven't smiled honestly all that many times since coming down here. And I know I almost never actually smiled while I was up in Omaha. But something about Isobel warms my heart more than I even felt with Zoe. That's also a strange thing to realize.

Descent . An Undercity

An email hits my phone so I open it and it's from Intef which has the subject "Stealing from the break room." I see screenshots from the camera in the break room where you can clearly see Tommy taking other people's stuff out of the fridge and using a wired credit card to get free sodas out of the soda machine. Tommy is a brand new temp who had rave reviews from the agency. I cross my arms on my desk and slam my head down several times. Each time I slam my head down I say the words "fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck." *I better get the fuck out of here before I get stuck here forever. I should text Isobel though.*

When I lift my head up after several seconds of this activity I see Michael standing in the doorway with his arms crossed, shaking his head and smiling.

"Fuck off," I say while flipping him the middle finger.

"So you have some time?" he asks, looking around the top floor before entering. He closes the door behind him.

"Yeah, I do, sorry. Tommy has been stealing and Intef hooked me up with screenshots," I reveal to Michael.

"I heard about that," he says as he takes a seat in front of my desk. "Intef warned us and production the same day I think he initially warned you."

"Cool. Glad there is proof though. If he was sneaky about it I would have been quite a bit more upset. I fucking hate having to spend a lot of time making sure somebody gets busted for shit like that. It's nice when they serve themselves up," I state while straightening up some papers on my desk.

"So, I have a serious question," he asks quietly.

"Hit me," I ask, marking the email in my phone as read before shutting the screen back off.

"How did you really end up with this gig?" he asks in an even quieter voice. I turn and face him, putting my hands on my desk. *I've known him for over a decade. Considering I'm trying to get Carnorra to allow him to come down with Isobel and I, I figure I should be able to tell him the truth. Am I right?*

"Do you have any problem with that Intef?" I hear Carnorra ask.

"None at all," I hear Intef respond.

"Alright," I begin, looking Michael in the eye. "On the way out the night Patricia showed up and I took off, I was reached out to by the civilization that lives under the surface of the earth." I pause for a second

or two and gauge his reactions. He seems fully unmoved, so I continue. “I was asked a series of questions and told a long list of things that they have observed. They talked about my persona and psyche and made observations about ways I’ve managed situations both at home and at jobs.

“They told me they reached out to me because of this specific job they needed done down here. Both for their surface operations and surfacing operation going on underneath. By surfacing operations I mean, the center of this building isn’t filled up with servers and mechanical shit. There is a small few man transport tube in there currently and a massive one is being built. The reason for that is the beings that manage this part of the universe need to keep this planet contained onto itself.

“As we both know, we’re sending out satellites and eventually will travel off the planet ourselves. Part of the agreement made with beings that would love to destroy or take resources from this planet is we stay confined to it. The only way they can do that is to wipe the surface off from time to time when it gets this advanced. So they’re setting up infrastructure to flood the surface with soldiers to wipe it back a few centuries.”

I take a deep breath and lean back in my chair. *Was that adequate, or too much information?*

“No,” I hear Intef say in my head.

“I agree, that was not too much information,” I hear Carnorra add.

“You know,” Michael says after several seconds of silence. “That’s actually a lot more believable than you met someone in the middle of the night who happened to give you a dream job with massive responsibility without even knowing you.”

“Yeah, that’s why I didn’t tell anybody that on-the-fly story but you, Jean, and Galen,” I reply.

“So, we’re all going to die,” he mutters under his breath.

“I have permission to take you and Isobel down, just before it goes down,” I say in a bluff, hoping nobody corrects me.

“Yeah?” Michael asks, looking a little more upbeat since hearing and thinking about what I’ve just said.

“Yeah,” I confirm.

“You can take him down and explore with him for a couple hours if you want,” I hear Carnorra say.

“As long as Alejo accompanies them,” I hear Intef quickly add.

“Want to go look around down there?” I ask, standing up from my

desk. "We have to come back in an hour so I can spend the weekend with Isobel, though."

"Yeah?" he asks, standing up and starting to look nervous.

"Yeah man, let's go," I say as I walk around the desk and gesture for him to follow. We walk through the warehouse and into the center area. He looks around as we traverse the intricate maze like hallways. He stays completely silent as we enter the room with the indentation where the tube opens. It opens and Alejo is standing inside it.

"We can fit in here as long as we hug our backs against the walls," Alejo says softly, keeping an eye on Michael.

"Alright," I say, gesturing for Michael to go ahead and enter. He does and stands flat against the back, staring out the door. He looks a little afraid now. I enter and stand on the right, across from Alejo. The door swivels shut and I can tell we're moving. I look at Michael and ask "Can you feel it moving?"

"No," he says, starting to look around curiously, inspecting the walls, doorway, floor, and ceiling.

"We're almost there," Alejo says moments before the door swivels open again.

Before us is a wide open city that looks nothing like anything I've seen before. It reminds me of a huge cavern I would have seen the Technodrome in on the Ninja Turtles. Only, this is many times bigger with what looks like a few Chicago downtowns in it. All the skyscrapers start at the ground and continue into the cavern ceiling, far above. There is no visible smog and there is a perfectly lit ambience to it.

"Holy shit," Michael mutters.

"I haven't been here before, right?" I ask, looking at Alejo.

"No. This is one of the many living and working quarters that are more home-feeling for surface dwellers," Alejo answers.

"Holy shit," Michael mutters again. I pat him on the back as we follow Alejo out onto the streets.

The store windows look like most things on the surface, only instead of huge flashy signage that is meant to draw attention, everything is evenly marked and labeled with what is in the buildings. The addresses are all identical in font type, size, and position. People who look like humans walk around orderly and calmly. Some are straight faced and some are smiling but none look angry or like they've had a bad day anywhere in recent memory.

"Would we live in a place like this when we leave the surface?" I

ask, looking over at Alejo.

“Yes, we would not put you in military or science quarters as you have seen,” he responds looking back at me.

“How deep are we?” Michael asks, looking up as he walks.

“This city is under the eastern Pacific Ocean about twelve miles. It’s close enough to the core to remain an eternally stable temperature and far enough from the surface to be detected by any technology they currently use,” Alejo answers politely.

“I’ve seen a couple restaurants but no fast food places,” I observe, looking in as many buildings as I can.

“Yes, we do not have unhealthy things like that down here. However, the food is generated very quickly and you do not wait for ten minutes after you order, like the surface,” Alejo answers.

“Generated?” I ask, as Michael and I shoot each other curious looks.

“It is similar in use to the replicators in Star Trek lore. Only, its specific functionality as to how it accomplishes it is very different. It is more like the plastic-like 3d printers on the surface than it is generating food out of energy on the fly,” Alejo explains.

“Strange, what does it taste like?” Michael asks, fully engaged.

“Like anything comparable on the surface,” Alejo answers confidently. “It is food, identical to anything grown. It is just printed quickly, atom by atom, ending up an exact replica.”

We see a library and Michael stops and stares in the windows. All ground levels of structures here are entirely transparent. I would guess something related to plate glass, because that’s the only thing I can liken it to on the surface. I do not know specifically.

“I want to go look at books,” Michael says. Alejo nods and we walk in through the front doors. They slide open horizontally like many of our automated doors on the surface, only it does so with no visible runs on the bottom or top, nor with any sound.

We spend forty minutes thumbing through books written in various languages we can’t understand. Michael and I find books and bring them to each other, some with pictures in them that look like open squares through the pages to other planets, though you cannot reach into them.

“It is getting close to an hour since we have been down here, James,” Alejo says quietly into my ear.

“Can I stay down here for a while? I don’t have plans until later,” Michael asks Alejo.

“Yes, that is fine,” Alejo says after a few seconds of hesitation. “Do you remember how to get back to the transport tube?” he says while shifting his eye contact to me.

“Sure do,” I say comfortably as we simply exited and walked straight to the right down the street we came out on.

I smile and nod in acknowledgment to various people as I pass. Most of them smile back but have a look of “This person is different” on their faces. I get back to the transport tube without issue and go in. I sense it moving and the door opens in what feels like no time. I exit back at the warehouse and start walking back to my office to ensure everything’s shut down.

James: I’m going to leave in a bit.

Isobel: I’m already in your apartment watching TV.

James: Word.

Descent . Dusk

Getting out of the shower I look at my phone and see it's just after 6pm. Feels weird being home and already prepared for whatever the evening brings this early. I can hear the television on in the living room and I hurry up and get dressed. I throw on deodorant and brush my hair as perfectly as I can get it.

Walking into the bedroom from the bathroom in only my boxers and a t-shirt, I rifle through my pants drawer to find the black carpenter pants that I like. I finally locate them and throw them on as I hear Isobel laughing at something on the TV. I slip some black socks on and walk out into the living room.

"You take longer to shower than anybody I've ever met," she says with a partial mouthful.

"What are you eating," I ask, wondering what I missed while I was taking a shower.

"Pizza!" she says gleefully. "I know you like pizza and I wanted to stay in with you tonight."

"Oh, ok. I would have just closed the blinds and came out from the shower naked," I say in a teasing voice. She smiles and shakes her head as she gets up to go to the table.

"I got meat lovers, or whatever Venezias calls it. I also got boneless wings and cheesy bread sticks," she says before popping a boneless wing in her mouth.

"Cool," I say walking over and putting my hand on her lower back. "This is a lot of food."

"Always prepare for all possibilities!" she says before wiggling her ass a little back and forth. She takes a plate from the small pile she sat next to the food and puts a couple more wings on it along with a cheesy bread stick and a couple slices of pizza.

"That's how I roll," I say in as deep a voice as I can muster. She sits on the loveseat as I get some food on a plate for myself.

"I brought another case of bud light and a gallon of premixed margarita for myself," she says while chewing food.

"Your manners will never stop impressing me," I say with sarcasm and a broad smile as I walk into the kitchen to grab a couple beers. Once my hands are completely full I go into the living room and sit down on the long couch on the end closest to her.

"You love it," she says just after shoving a little more pizza in her mouth for effect. Her eyes go wide for a second as she chews differently.

I see her swallow forcefully then smile confidently.

“As much as I would love any reason to put my lips on yours, getting chunks of food unlodged from your throat isn’t on my list of hopes,” I say while playfully shaking my head disapprovingly. She smiles and keeps eating.

I turn and look at the screen to see what she’s watching, as my eyes haven’t come off her since I got out here. That 70’s Show. Acceptable.

“I can turn on something else,” she says with a temporarily empty mouth. “I figured we could watch something we haven’t seen yet on Netflix.”

“Anything in mind you haven’t seen that you want to see?” I ask, taking another bite of pizza. I catch her eyes glance down at my crotch for a split second as she opens her mouth to respond.

“I’ve been wanting to watch a movie called Let Me In,” she responds with widening eyes.

“Why the eyes? Is it scary?” I ask, not being aware of the movie.

“Yes,” she says before flashing her toothy, wide eyed irresistible smile.

“Alright, we can watch that,” I say while being fully uninterested in horror movies. I figure we’ll sit next to each other while we watch. Typically par for the course when watching a movie with a gorgeous girl like her anyway. Much more so the case during a scary movie. I pick up the remote and switch to the internet mode and launch the Netflix app. Let Me In isn’t available for streaming.

“Oh, what!” she says, glaring at the screen and then laughing.

“No worries, I got this,” I say, setting my plate with very little left on it onto the couch and running into the computer room. I throw open pirate bay and start a highly seeded download of the movie before running back into the living room. Once back to the couch I turn the television back to That 70’s show.

“Ok?” she asks, looking curious.

“When it’s not streamed on Netflix, I count that as honest. So I’m going to stream it anyway,” I say with a smartass smile before taking the last couple bites of my pizza.

“Take a minute to load?” she asks with a look of admiration.

“Yes ma’am,” I say with a mouth full. I make verbal noises chomping around the food before trying not to laugh. She tries to look annoyed but fails. She falls into laughter.

“You’re weird,” she says with a smile.

“I know,” I say, drinking some beer to wash down the last of the food I ate. My eyes become locked on her eyes as she finishes the piece of pizza she was working on. “They’re beautiful,” I mumble without realizing it was out loud.

“What are?” Isobel says, looking down at her chest.

“No, no, I mean your eyes,” I say as she looks back up at me and resumes eye contact.

“What? They’re not beautiful?” she says as she cups her breasts and squeezes them gently a few times. We laugh together for a second.

“Oh they are, but I meant your eyes,” I say, still locked into the beautiful blues of hers.

“Thank you,” she says, tilting her head and fluttering her eyelids.

“So cute,” I say, shaking my head and standing up. “Let’s see if it’s done.”

I walk into the computer room and check, 100%. Right on. I figured it would go that fast with how many seeds it had. I walk back out into the living room and switch to file playing mode on the TV. I browse the local network until I get to the file and load it. The movie begins to play. I finish off my second beer and walk back into the kitchen to grab four of them. As I close the fridge and turn to walk back into the living room Isobel is right behind me.

“I like your eyes too,” she says, leaning forward and kissing me on the lips. We make eye contact again and I turn as she walks by me. She stops halfway around me and we face each other.

“No, thank you,” I say, leaning forward. She takes a half second before leaning forward as well. We stand and kiss for a moment before I break the kiss to return to the living room. I didn’t want to have a boner while holding four beers.

I get back to the big couch and sit on the side closest to the loveseat again. I set my four beers on the end table off the side of the couch and loveseat.

“Can you set this by your beers?” Isobel asks handing me a tall glass of Margarita. Before handing it to me she drinks it down a few inches.

“No problem,” I tell her as I take it and set it next to my beers. She gets comfortable next to me on the couch as the movie starts.

As the plot gets more tense she leans against me more. After a couple, in my opinion, very clichéd scary parts drift by, she has her arms

wrapped around my left arm. I rest my left hand on the top of her right thigh and continue watching. By the midway point of the movie I'm not even paying attention and looking over her cleavage out of the corner of my eye. I start rubbing the top of her thigh from the middle down to just above her knee.

"Stop it," she says towards the end of the movie as I start rubbing and squeezing her thigh again.

"Why?" I ask in a whisper.

"You're turning me on," she says sounding a little amused but mostly trying to still listen to the movie. I look at her face to measure her facial expressions and it's clear she's not bothered by it at all.

"Yes ma'am," I say. I slow to just running my hand very, very slowly from her knee up her leg and back again.

"Can you rub my back after this?" she asks with pouty eyes and lips.

"Yeah, sure. It hurts I take it?" I ask, feeling immediately as if it were a stupid question.

"It's hurt pretty bad today. I think I lifted too much at school in the printing room," she says softly as she starts getting focused on the movie again.

"Oh shit!" she exclaims, twitching and leaning fully into me as body parts start getting tossed into the pool in the movie. I smile and enjoy the breasts against my left arm as her arms are now around my front and back. Her hair rests on my shoulder as she watches the last few scenes of the movie.

"You can stay in that position if you want," I say as she leans back up into a sitting position. She looks at me and gives me a cute "I see what you did there" expression as I get up and carry my empty bottles and her empty cup into the kitchen. Rinsing out the cup I see Isobel animatedly tiptoeing down the hall past the kitchen and into the bedroom.

I grab one more beer out of the fridge before stepping around the corner into the bedroom. I enter the bedroom and see Isobel laying on the bed face first. I immediately notice how great her ass looks in the tight pants she's wearing, even when laying down. I go over to her and stand next to the bed. Her hands are under the pillow her head is resting on.

"Here," I say, guiding her to scoot closer to the edge of the bed. I start rubbing her shoulders and neck first. She makes various degrees of throaty noises of approval as I rub out a few different small knots. I work down to her back and find all sorts of knots on the shoulder blades

themselves and down either side of her spine.

"You're good at this," she says, sounding a little surprised.

"I'm as good as I can be with cloth in the way," I say, hoping it's not received as a play to get her out of clothes. However much I want that, I'm still deeply worried that somehow the next time I'm with someone, they're going to get murdered terribly somehow.

"I can fix that," she says as she sits up to remove her shirt.

"Alright," I say, starting to turn around to leave the room so she has some privacy.

"Where are you going?" she asks, sounding a little put off at my movement.

"Was going to give you some privacy to get out of however many clothes you want so I can give you a better massage," I say, back still turned.

"You really don't have to," she says with an almost laugh in her voice. I turn around very slowly in slight sarcasm and see she paused in her removal of clothes until I was watching. She strips off her shirt and bra before laying back down. I see her breasts and the cutest little nipples before she lays back flat. I catch a smile before she lays her head back down on and her hands back under the pillow.

"You're my favorite," I say with a short laugh before returning to work on her back. "Mind if I use oil? I saw baby oil under the sink."

"Go for it," she says before taking a deep, relaxing breath. I turn and head into the bathroom to grab the baby oil. I see scented body oil next to it and pick that up. I open it and smell it and it's a mix of vanilla and a fruit

"Do you like vanilla type scents?" I ask.

"Who doesn't?" she responds. I nod to myself and carry the small bottle of body oil into the bedroom. I apply it to my hands before rubbing it on her back to try and warm it up a little.

"How long has it been since you've had a back massage?" I ask, finding a crazy amount of knots all over her back.

"I don't remember," she says softly as if she's about to fall asleep.

"Feels like you've never had one," I add.

"I know the guy I dated before molly gave them to me sometimes, but usually foot massages," she elaborates.

"I can give you a full body massage if you want," I offer.

"You're trying to get me in bed!" she says in a clear joking voice.

"You're already topless in my bed!" I immediately respond. We

both laugh as I start running my palms carefully and strongly up and down the length of her spine on either side.

"You can take my pants off so you can do my legs," she says while turning her head so I can see her face. She's smiling and has an eyebrow raised as she makes eye contact with and informs me of this.

"Yes ma'am," I say, running my fingertips down her back. I purposefully end at a part of her upper back so I can tease specific points on her back on my hands' way down to resume massage on her lower back.

"That's not nice," she whispers. I ignore her and continue massaging her back. I grip her waist and lift her midsection up as I reach under her with both hands and unclasp her belt. It took me a moment as I didn't realize it has two pins instead of one. I get both buttons undone on her pants and unzip them as I pull them, along with her panties, down towards her knees. She lowers her midsection and I easily finish removing the pants and panties past her knees and the rest of the way off her legs.

"There we go," I say as my eyes lock onto her ass and before she puts her legs back together and flat I catch a glimpse of a fully shaven vagina.

"I thought I would need to help you get my pants off," she says with a smile as she catches me staring at her now bare ass.

"David Copperfield learns from me," I say with a smile as I gather her clothes and pile them up on the end table nearby.

"I bet," she says. She shoots me her toothy, wide eyed smile before laying her head back down on the pillow and closing her eyes. I resume applying oil to my hands and then to her body. I massage her lower back more as I have better access. I work my way through her ass and by the time I even get to her thighs I am fully aroused. I find a moment when she's not paying attention and reach into my pants. I adjust my boner's position and move it so it's safely tucked under my waistline.

"Never had a leg massage?" I ask, finding countless more knots in her leg muscles than I did in her back.

"Nope," she says in a gasp. I continue down her legs to her feet. I bend one leg at a time once I get past her calves and massage the arches of her feet. I pop her toes and stretch out her muscles by carefully bending her feet one way and then the other.

Once done with both feet I work up the outside of her legs. I give a quick massage over her entire back and shoulders again before doing

her arms and hands. She gives me a bit of a strange look as I start massaging her left hand but quickly returns to normal as she realizes how good it feels. I don't even ask if she's had her hands massaged before based on her reactions. It's obvious she hasn't.

I give a quick once over across her back, ass and legs again as I start massaging up the inside of her legs.

"Going for it?" she says in a playful voice.

"No, I still have the front to do," I say straight faced and seriously. She raises an eyebrow and I catch a smile as she turns her head back forward. I get up to the inner thighs and she spreads her legs into a V to give me access. I notice a puddle under her pussy and realize she's been massively drenched this entire time. I smile with satisfaction before getting the back and sides of her legs entirely done.

"Ready for me to roll over?" she asks. I respond with a nod and step back a minute. As she adjusts and prepares to roll over. As she gets to her back I notice her nipples are double the size they were earlier but still smaller than most I've seen, and rock hard. Very cute considering her various other cute features. She has a cute little nose, tiny toenails I noticed, little toes and her little belly button is pierced. When she gets comfortable on her back she straightens out her small jeweled chain piercing, which is a couple inches long, so it's straight down her stomach.

"I thought you said you weren't cold?" I say, smiling and nodding my head towards her breasts. She smiles knowingly and doesn't give me any verbal responses. I massage her neck and breasts. I continue down her ribs and her abdomen. I massage her hip bone area and she jumps.

"That tickles!" she says in almost a squeal. I smile and continue down her hips and thighs. I massage the fronts of her thighs and do a quick once over up the outsides of her legs and then the insides of her legs again. This time when she puts her legs into a V, her pussy is partially engorged and her lips are starting to flower. I try as hard as I can to ignore it as I massage back up her stomach and breasts. This time, once to her breasts, she thrusts herself up onto her elbows and starts kissing me.

"Hello there," I say, breaking the kiss for a moment. She shifts her weight onto the elbow closest to me and reaches up with the other hand to brush my hair back behind my ear and kisses me more passionately.

"Hello," she says in a gasp as she gets into a sitting position.

"You made a mess," I whisper, gesturing with my hand towards the little puddle on the bed.

"You have to start somewhere," she whispers before pulling my shirt off. I smile at her as she starts kissing me again immediately. She pushes herself up so she's sitting on the bed on her knees and leans forward, pressing her surprisingly warm breasts against my chest, never breaking the kiss.

Descent . First

I land on my back on the bed as Isobel pulls my pants off. She takes a sock off each foot then crawls onto me. She kisses my chest and neck. She brushes my hair behind each of my ears and starts kissing me passionately. I carefully guide her onto her back and kiss her neck and shoulders. Her hands end up flat against the bed, arms outward. I kiss down the middle of her chest and stomach, licking around her belly button piercing. I hear her breathing heavier as my tongue goes straight to her clit and starts lashing it from side to side slowly.

I carefully reach under the bed and find the condoms I spread out and separated in case anything happened and I needed one on the fly. I split one open while I nibble gently with my teeth on the insides of her thighs. I roll it down my cock to the base before I kiss right back up her body to her neck. I don't spend much time on foreplay as she's insanely wet already. I go between kissing her neck and jawline and kissing her passionately as her hands find their way to my body. They run all over my back and as the head of my penis teases her fully aroused labia she grips my ass and attempts pulling me into her.

"When did you put that on?" she asks with an adorable, mischievous smile while looking down at my dick.

"I was born with one on, cute," I respond with a big smile.

I start nibbling her jawline and neck the harder she tries. Finally I slowly allow myself to enter her as her hands grip my ass firmly. I slide slowly all the way into her as I feel her muscles gripping my dick over and over. I look into her eyes as I feel liquid pouring down my balls.

"Jesus, already?" I whisper as she grabs my ass and grips, grinding me into her with gyrations of her hips. With no words she closes her eyes and gyrates faster and faster.

I shift balance to one hand on the bed and grip her waist to hold her still with the other. She gasps and gives me a "how dare you" look as I start fucking her hard and fast. Her eyes close again as she presses her head back into the mattress. Her breathing increases as I feel her muscles gripping me in pulsating cycles once again.

I watch how her facial muscles loosen, allow her mouth to open slightly. The shape of her lips and facial expression are a whole different sort of deep beauty that I've never seen on her before. One of her hands lifts up and I feel her finger tips barely touching my support arm's elbow.

"Fuck me," she says in just over a whisper. The soft and vulnerable tone in her voice causes my already hard dick to feel like its firmness is bolstered. I slow my speed and grip her waist a little harder. Her mouth opens a little further and eyebrows curl slightly inward. I push all the way in and hold it at the base before quickly pulling out just a little

and jamming it back in, keeping the widest part of my cock just inside her. I angle my waist so my pelvis grinds her clit.

Each thrust I feel her cervix rubbing the top of my dick, just behind the head. Each thrust I feel heavy resistance from her A-Spot. Each thrust I see her mouth open a tiny bit more, returning to the previous position as I pull out just a little, relieving all pressure on her A-Spot. I feel her other hand rest her fingertips on my other arm.

I watch as her eyes squint and feel her fingernails start scratching down my elbows and forearm. I feel her legs shake a little as I start pulling out a little further each time. Her mouth slowly opens further, lips still looking sexier than I've ever seen them.

"Oh," I hear her moan quietly, then eyes open with a look of surprise. I squeeze her waist a little and smile at her as I thrust back into her and hold as deep as I can get it.

"I said fuck me," she whispers, eyes closing again and her liquid continuing her slow stream down my balls which has been going on from the moment I slid into her. As I pull out about a fourth of the way and push in as hard as I can, her hands grip my triceps. I feel her pulling me towards her as if to harness my cock and guide it into her consistently deeper.

"Yes ma'am," I say, starting to pound myself into her quicker and quicker. I feel her labia brushing just above the base of my dick and to the sides, making me want to look down. Her slow flow of moisture starts building to multiple streams as I feel her thighs starting to tremble. I lean back some and shift my weight from the hand on the bed to my knees and legs. I grip her waist with both hands and fuck her as hard as I can. I watch her amazing breasts, a little big for the size of her body, perky and cute little nipples hard as glass, as they bounce forward and back slowly with each pelvic collision. I look up and her mouth is open wider now, breathing heavier.

"Oh, fuck me," I hear her plea, with a mixture of sheer pleasure and a touch of fear. I slip us back to the edge of the bed so her ass is hanging off it slightly, still gripping her waist tight, forcing her to stay in place. Her hands grip my wrists and eyes open for a moment, insanely hard erection never coming out of her more than half way. To my pleasure my feet land perfectly on the floor and I am able to attain balance instantly.

It looks like she's starting to say something else as I start fucking her as hard as I can, now with the leverage to move my hands to under her legs. I force my hands out of her dual grasp, carefully moving my hands underneath her knees. I carefully bend her knees up to her chest, holding her legs together. I slowly push my dick all the way into her, holding her legs together, knees against her perfect tits.

“Oh,” she moans quietly again. I start pulling my dick out to just about the head, her drenched pussy gripping me repeatedly as I push it so far into her until her inner thighs disappear against my pelvis and lower abdomen. I hold my abdomen against her thighs as my hands keep a firm but not too firm grip on her legs just below her knees. “Oh fuck,” she moans as her hands find my wrists.

I start fucking her again by pulling out just an inch or so, keeping the girthiest base of my dick in her, and pounding it back into her. In this position, her cervix feels to be rubbing back and forth just below the point of my cock where it tapers to the widest part below my head at the point the smoothness becomes thicker and more textured. The tip of my dick feels a little pained with how much pressure it’s putting against the back of her amazingly wet pussy. The amount of pressure on the tip and base as her muscles grip me hard makes me feel like I might cum.

“Oh fuck,” she repeats again in more of a pained sound than a moan. Her hands move from my wrists to my hips and grip them as I cut the distance I pull out to about a half inch, feeling like I’m basically vibrating my dick as deep into her as I can. I feel the amount of liquid running down my thighs increase. She starts almost yelling unintelligible words as I angle myself a little more downward, putting a lot more pressure on the head of my dick without her cervix touching my shaft at all.

“Oh my god,” I blurt out as my breathing increases. Her fingernails dig into my waist for a moment before she repositions her grip to dig fingertips into the skin of my thighs. I feel my balls slapping her ass as I realize I’m now pulling out a couple inches before thrusting back into her as hard and deep as I can. She’s cumming so much and griping the base of my dick so hard I feel myself join her in the orgasm.

“Fuck me,” she yells in-between multiple other unintelligible words. “Oh fuck,” she yells as her hands go limp to her sides. I look around over her legs to see her mouth fully open and eyes closed loosely, breathing slowing down. My balls pump the last few of the orgasm and I stay inside her, feeling the tingling of still being fully hard. I slowly pull out to the head and push back in to the base as her legs tremble.

“God damn,” I whisper, looking over her rising and descending breasts as she breathes more normally now.

“That was good,” she gently pants. “I didn’t expect that,” she adds before lifting her head up to look at me and smile.

“I’m not done,” I say with a smile as I carefully pull all the way out. Her lips are flowered out in the sexiest way I’ve ever seen a pussy look. Her clit is fully at attention as her legs come down, slightly spread, and feet rest on the floor.

I move quickly into the bathroom, pull my condom off into the toilet

and grab another from the drawer. I realize I'm still almost fully hard so I move over to the toilet, wipe as much liquid as I can off my dick and roll on a second one.

With wide eyes and a half smile, half open mouth, she watches as I enter the room and return to the bed. She scooches over and pats on the bed next to her, eyes fixed on my full erection my whole approach.

"Do you want more?" I ask, worried maybe she was done. Her mouth goes a little more slack, lips looking normal again but still sexy. I look into her eyes and see a fiery passion. She pats the bed next to her harder and doesn't break eye contact. I follow her directions and sit next to her, pressure on my balls from my thighs making my cock seem to bolster slightly.

Without a word she puts her hand flat on my chest and pushes me back. I land on the bed and before I realize it, she's straddling me and looking back and forth between my abs and legs. Her body is fucking amazing. Until this moment I never noticed how tight and toned her body is. I've lost weight since I've been down here so I have a little muscle tone all over my body, but hers are amazing. Her torso looks strikingly similar to Britney Spears' in the Toxic video. *Did I really just compare her to Britney Spears?*

I feel a hand grip my cock gently. It runs down to the base and moves to grip my balls. She slowly squeezes them and rubs them around as her legs get situated. I feel her still drenched and somehow tighter feeling pussy slowly slide down me to my balls. As my eyes are fixated on her abs. My eyes slowly move up her mind-blowingly great body to her perky, perfect tits. They look even more perfect than they did in any of the clothes I've seen her in to date. They defy gravity, even as she slides up me about half way. One of her hands spreads out and takes position on my lower abdomen. Her other hand reaches behind her and grips my thigh. Her mouth is slightly open again, lips looking extremely sexy and fully different like before.

My left hand is hopelessly lost off to my left as my right reaches up and rests on the center of her abs. I reach up and run my spread out fingertips down from her upper chest, over the insides of her breasts and down her ribs. I continue down to her abs until I get to her pelvic bone. I raise my hand up and rub them down her abs, then back up to her ribs.

Her hands feel like they're gripping my less impressive abs and thigh even though it's mainly just her weight on them. It feels like I'm immeasurably deeper inside her than when I was on top. Her hips thrust forward, forcing my dick a little deeper into her. She starts grinding on me, forward and back, over and over as her liquids slowly build on my pelvis and below me on the bed.

My left hand finds purpose, moving to rest at the top of the inside

of her thigh. The fingers spread out and take station across her pelvis as my thumb slowly presses against her clit. I feel her hand grip my thigh as I start rubbing light circles against it, pussy gripping my dick in another bout of increased liquid flow.

The speed of her grind increases with the pressure my thumb puts on her clit. My right hand's fingertips still exploring every valley of her dizzyingly sexy torso. Over her abs, up the outsides of her breasts and down the middle. They travel down the center of her abs to her pelvic bone, then out to her waist where it grips her. She grinds harder, perhaps thinking she has to fight an incoming attempt at controlling her speed. Instead of leaving my right hand on her waist it slowly moves up to her breast. I massage it gently, thumb on the bottom and fingers wrapping around the outside. I grip and squeeze it gently as her head tilts to the side, grinding slowly adding rising and falling. My left hand seems to be in danger as her speed and angles start shifting erratically.

She slowly starts leaning forward as the rising and falling takes more of the motions than the grinding. My hands move from her breast and clit to each side of her waist. Her hands quickly shift as her weight lands on each side of my head. Her breasts now swaying forward and back above my face, I lean up to lick her nipples. I hear her cry out as she is now sliding herself halfway off my cock and slamming back around it. I feel surprising amounts of moisture running down the sides of my pelvis and down my ass. I move my hands from her waist around to her ass and grip it as she fucks me faster and faster.

Suddenly she sits up straight again, returning to a hard grind. Both of her hands position on my abs as she grinds hard. There is so much weight on my pelvis and thighs that it hurts a little but the hardness of her nipples, grip of her pussy and moisture flowing over me tells me to ignore it. I return to rubbing her clit with my left thumb and she cries out again. I start thrusting up into her, throwing her speed off. She moves her hands to my waist to grip me as she grinds harder. She doesn't feel balanced anymore so I help her with my hand in the middle of her chest, which she leans against. Soon she isn't even grinding into me anymore as I fuck her from underneath.

She breathes hard, moaning loudly, as I feel my balls slapping the insides of her sweet little ass. I move both of my hands to cradle her breasts, palms against her ribs to help support her weight. I move them to grip the outsides of her ribs as she's not holding herself up very well anymore, lost in an orgasm.

"I want you to cum," she moans quietly, looking like she's running out of energy.

"Not yet, I want to make you cum one other way," I say as I feel her finishing up.

She lifts herself up until I flop out of her. She almost falls down as she tries to get herself onto her back next to me on the bed.

"I'm not sure I can take anymore," she pants.

"Let me bend you over the side of the bed," I ask, fearing rejecting as I really want to see that ass, back and shoulders bent over in front of me. Before I even finish the sentence she scurries clumsily off the bed and bends over it. Her eyes wide with desire and biting her bottom lip. *I really want to ask if she's sure but, now she's shaking her ass.*

No sooner do I see her shaking her ass back and forth do I crawl off the bed, hard on now down to just under rock hard. I notice this but pay no attention as it's still fully stiff, veins still puffed out a little and head fully erect. As I position myself behind her she wiggles it from side to side again. *Holy Christ, her pussy is still puffed out and not red at all. Her ass looks so good, her back looks perfect. Her curves look more amazing like this than when she was even in that dress with the wind blowing the thin cloth against her. And she looked fucking amazing then, too.*

She pauses shaking her ass from side to side and lunges back, causing my head to enter her.

"Oh fuck," I say, pulled from my analyzing every inch of her glorious body that's in view. I rest my hands on her waist, looking down at her stunning round, perfect ass as I see my cock slowly disappear into her as she continues pushing backwards. I grip her waist and push her forward, causing me to slip most of the way out. I lean forward and put weight on her so she falls forward onto the bed. I hear her gasp as I start fucking her, pushing her a little into the bed.

I feel my balls slapping her fully aroused clit as I try to control my hands from gripping her waist too hard. I feel gentle grips from inside her pussy and hope she's going to be able to get off again. I notice my hands instinctively moving up her back and massaging her back as I continue pounding my now 100% hard dick into her. I feel her amazing little ass bumping my pelvis every time my balls slap her clit. I massage her shoulders and rotate which hand massages her neck again a little. Her head leans from one side to the other as whichever hand works her neck from top to bottom. I feel her pushing back a little every thrust as I continue steadily. Her head starts leaning forward as her breathing increases.

I slowly massage down her body as I hear her beginning throaty moans. My hands get to her waist as I still find myself staring at her amazing ass. I move my hands down so my thumbs are gripping just inside the small parts of her ass above the thighs, fingers spread across her smooth skin. I grip as I watch my dick, pulling out almost all the way now before thrusting back in.

Her throaty moans rise to what sounds like a slow rolling yell as I

start pulling out less and less of my dick. I get to the point I'm only pulling a little of the base out again as I feel like I am now deep inside her and pounding her clit with my balls. I feel her legs start shaking as more liquid than ever runs down the fronts of my legs. She buries her face in the bed as she screams repeatedly. I don't slow at all as I watch her hands gripping and pulling on the sheets. Before I realize it she's piling forward, making me slip out about half way and slamming back, balls hitting her clit hard enough to sting a little each time.

Even with her face pushed into the bed, I hear her screaming repeatedly at a loud volume. Liquid isn't running down my leg quite as much but her pulsations are still firm around the center down to the base of my cock. Her ass and legs start trembling more as she starts slowing down.

I carefully grip her thighs and hold her in position as her muscles start going limp. I hold her in place as I fuck her hard, pussy still drenched but with no liquid running down me at all anymore. I feel her pussy gripping me a little again and shift one of my hands back to her seriously sweet as. I feel an orgasm of my own building up as I fuck her as hard as I can. I feel a little more liquid coming down my legs again as I start to blow off. I lean my head back and feel my balls pump several times before the orgasm dies down. Before I slide all the way out she collapses forward, finishing my exit. Her ass looks amazing as I note her labia isn't flowered out anymore, but her pussy is dark pink and her thighs and my bed are drenched. I carefully roll her over onto her back on the end of the bed nearest to the sliding glass door.

I position myself over her, kissing her abs, ribs and nibbling on her breasts.

"I can't take anymore, please say you're done," she begs, sounding completely out of breath.

"I'm done, are you good?" I ask. Her eyes open wide and she laughs a little.

"Oh I'm good," she responds, draping an arm over her eyes and letting out a cute little sigh. I return to sucking on her nipples. She slaps my arm a little hard several times and repeats "stop! Stop!"

"Alright," I agree, moving over and rolling onto my back. I cringe for a moment realizing I just rolled into all of her liquids. *That must be why she reacted the way she did when I pushed her down onto the bed. I pushed her right into most of this mess!*

"See why I jumped?" she pants in just above a whisper. We both start laughing together as I stand up. I was going to go grab a towel, but turn back to look at her again. My eyes travel over her slowly rising and lowering breasts, her little stomach and down her sexy, strong legs. *I can see now what riding horses really does for a body, holy fuck.* "Do you

have a towel?" she asks.

"Oh, sorry, yeah," I answer, turning and moving into the bathroom. I quickly remove my condom and see I'm still well over three quarters hard. *Damn man, thanks for showing up this strong.* I give a thumbs up to my dick before wiping it off with some toilet paper and flushing the toilet. I turn and grab two towels and take them into the bedroom. I hand one to her and use the other to start wiping up the bed as best I can.

"Jesus," she gasps, arm still draped over her eyes. She lets out a deep sigh and I notice her labia is halfway flowered out again.

"Thinking about our quickie?" I ask with a smirk, though I know she can't see it.

"Quickie?" she blurts out loudly. "That was a quickie?" she asks with a concerned voice.

"Look," I offer boldly. She moves her arm from her eyes and looks, seeing my mostly hard dick still, condom free.

"Mmm," she says in a sexy, soft voice. She lays her head back down, draping her arm back over her eyes.

"I need to stop picturing you in all of those positions," I mumble as I finish wiping up as much as I can.

"Why? I can still feel you inside me," she says in a soft voice that sounds unintentional. Her arm doesn't move and her sexy lips don't offer anymore words. I look at her breasts, nipples now less hard, as they rise and fall with her breathing.

"God damn," I say quietly as I open the closet door and toss the towel into the basket.

Descent . Outward Bound

I wake up and quickly look to my right to make sure Isobel is actually next to me. I feel sadness and agony rising until I identify she is in fact wrapped in blankets in my bed. I realize I am fully naked and uncovered. I look down and see I am half hard and feel dried cum all over my stomach and legs. I roll over to put my arm over her and realize the bed is still moist from last night.

She is sleeping peacefully and only her head is sticking out from the blankets, resting comfortably on one of my pillows. I carefully get out of bed and go into the bathroom. I notice the moment of watching her sleep woke my penis up all the way so I lean forward and tilt my erection downward to piss. Once done I turn and start the shower. As I get in I hear the bathroom door open. Isobel opens the shower and climbs in with me. She casually throws her arms around me and starts kissing me again, nipples already hard as she presses herself against me.

"Want to go explore the mountains around Tucson?" I ask, putting a plate down in front of Isobel.

"Yeah? Get out of town?" she asks looking skeptical.

"Absolutely," I say as I walk back into the kitchen to grab my plate. I take mine and set it down at the table next to hers.

"I could go for that," she says as she begins to eat. I go back into the kitchen to get a couple glasses of milk and set them in front of each of our plates.

"I've been looking at maps and that area has the biggest mountains nearby. I've never driven around on top of an actual mountain so I figured that would be fun," I say as I sit down and start eating.

"Never been to Colorado?" she asks, smiling at me and taking another bite.

"Nope. Only around Omaha and Kansas City all of my life, sadly," I state before drinking some milk.

"That's a shame. I've never seen the ones around Tucson though, so that should be fun," she says with another smile. We continue eating in silence and she puts her left hand on my knee. I flip through my phone and inspect maps so I don't need to look at them as we're driving.

I look over at the tight black tank top she is wearing. I can see the black bra straps alongside the black tank top straps, but I cannot see any other sign of the bra. Her cleavage is in full show and form fitting clothes making everything else as appealing as I've ever seen it. Her tank top opens a few inches down in the front, tied up with a length of string that

seems to be old and straining to hold. I take another bite and my eyes travel down her black stretchy-jean covered thighs. I start flashing back to different positions I observed her thighs in last night.

"Are you going to eat me?" Isobel asks in a cute, meek voice.

"What?" I ask, snapping out of staring and thinking about her.

"You're staring at me like I'm on the menu," she says more playfully, squeezing my knee.

"Oh, no, sorry. Was checking you out and faded out to thinking about last night," I admit.

"Mmmm," she says, smiling wide enough to light up her dimples.

"You did good," she adds.

"Oh, hey thanks," I say in a higher, silly voice.

"So you like my butt?" Isobel asks with a smirk and sideways glance.

"I didn't even notice you have one," I say calmly while keeping my eyes on the road in front of me. She smiles and slowly nods her head in a "yeah, sure sure," kind of way. "It's a seriously sweet ass, to borrow a line from *The Whole Nine Yards*," I admit.

"I'm glad somebody thinks so," she says in what sounds like an afterthought.

"It's really great. Amazing shape, firm, responsive, quite pleasing to the eye," I explain.

"Responsive?" she asks looking at me and smiling again.

"Yeah, while massaging you I used some of the points I like to tease and it worked as smoothly as I hoped it would," I explain, wondering if I shouldn't give my secrets away so early.

"You're such a whore," she says while laughing and shaking her head.

"No, no, I'm a slut. Whores charge and I don't," I defend with a laugh.

Approaching Casa Grande exits I notice I am at half a tank of gas. I decide to pull off and get gas so I don't have to fuel up until we get back into Tempe, whenever we decide to come back.

"Stopping for a piss already?" she asks, leaning her head against her hand and smiling broadly.

"Such a dirty mouth," I say with a little chuckle. I stop at the red light and check for traffic before turning right towards the closest gas station I can see.

"I don't have any Orbit, so your kiss will have to do," she says before leaning over quickly and stealing a kiss.

"Did I tell you I charge minutely?" I ask with a forced stern face.

"I bet you do, slut because you don't charge," she says with a laugh while picking up a 20oz of Pepsi she has in the drink holder in the door. She unscrews it and drinks from it. I realize I'm staring at her lips and almost miss the turn. I make it close enough that she doesn't seem to notice I almost drive right by.

"Now that's a great ass," she says with great excitement while pointing at a girl walking by in front of us.

"That's your ass!" I exclaim quite loudly. "Same ass! Told you, you had a perfect ass!"

"Whatever," Isobel says with a laugh as we open our doors and get out. As I close the door I notice the girl Isobel pointed out is smiling at us, clearly having heard what was said.

"Do you think she has a great ass?" I say loudly but not so loud as to draw attention to the girl Isobel pointed out.

"What?" the girl says, changing her direction so she walks to us.

"Isobel, this is stranger, stranger, this is Isobel," I say gesturing from one to the other as Isobel stands with a blush and a bit of a smirk.

"I'm Angela," the girl says reaching her hand out to shake Isobel's hand.

"Nice to meet you," Isobel says with a deeper red blush.

"Don't be embarrassed, what you said is very sweet," Angela says. "Turn around, let me see if he's right."

"Right about what?" Isobel says, clearly trying to play stupid.

"I heard what you said and what he said before you guys got out of the car," Angela says with a comforting and amused smile.

"Oh," Isobel says. She slowly turns around and holds a good upright posture.

"Wow, you're right, that's a good ass," Angela says looking at me and laughing softly.

"Thank you," Isobel says turning around. "We were talking about my ass earlier and I didn't think mine looks good. You have a pretty phenomenal ass, though. So if mine looks like yours, I am going to have to be happy with mine."

"Here, let me settle this," I say while pulling out my cell phone. Angela raises her eyebrow and Isobel laughs.

"He's crazy," Isobel says, shaking her head and gesturing towards Angela in a "don't mind him" fashion.

"It's alright, I'm interested actually," she says making a "come here" gesture towards Isobel.

"Oh god," Isobel says with her face flushing again, walking over to Angela. They both stand with arms in front of themselves, side by side. I focus the camera on my phone and take a few pictures.

"Alright," I say, opening the best picture and zooming in to get a good view of both of their asses.

"Hold on, do one like this too," Isobel says, bending her knees and leaning forward.

"Oh alright," Angela says while now blushing herself, and joins Isobel in the pose. I take a few more pictures and they both turn and walk to either side of me to look while I flip back to the best focused one of the first set.

"Shit," Isobel says while her face blushes again.

"I guess," Angela says. They're both blushing a little and now smiling at each other while I flip through to find the best of the leaning posture ones.

"Wow," I say, feeling like I could spring forward at any time. "Very nice."

"Alright," Isobel says with a pause. "I can't deny we have a great ass."

"Yeah! I guess I have to agree," Angela says. Angela steps back a couple steps and Isobel turns. Angela gives Isobel a high five and they both laugh a little.

"Can you forward me those pictures?" Isobel asks, pulling her phone out.

"Me too!" Angela says.

"Here, put your number in my phone," Isobel says, handing Angela her phone.

"Alright," Angela says happily while tapping around on Isobel's phone.

I shake my head and smile while I attach the best focus of each image to Isobel. "Done," I say before slipping my phone back in my pocket.

"Done too," Angela says while smiling and handing Isobel back her phone. "I have to run, nice to meet you both," she says while waving and scurrying off to the gas station.

"That was strange and awesome," I say quietly while opening the gas door and getting ready to start pumping gas.

"Was it? That's my everyday life," Isobel says with her huge toothy wide eyed super-cute smile.

"I love you," I blurt out, my eyes going wide in surprise.

"Aww," Isobel says leaning in to kiss me quick. "I love you too," she says before turning and walking towards the gas station herself.

After a couple minutes I'm sitting back in the driver's seat while I wait for Isobel to come back. I check through my phone and see an email from Intef. I open it and it explains his having to go get a bird out of the

warehouse. I fire back a message wishing him luck as Isobel gets back and into the jeep.

"Got my number put in her phone, too," Isobel says with a look of triumph as she gets buckled in and puts a bunch of gum in her purse.

"Orbit?" I ask.

"A girl has to keep her mouth clean," she says in the best British accent she can muster. She laughs and takes another drink out of her 20oz. "I grabbed you some diet mountain dew and a couple more diet Pepsis for me."

"Thank you," I say as I begin to drive back to the interstate.

I pull in to park at an overlook at the top of Mt Lemmon. We get out and walk up to the railed ledge.

"That's pretty awesome, even though it looks like a dirty surface more than a city," I observe, looking out over Tucson.

"It kind of does, doesn't it," Isobel says looking more towards the mountains in the other direction. "Those mountains look beautiful from here though," she says, gesturing in that direction.

"Everything in sight is pretty beautiful," I say, looking over her facial features.

"Your charm doesn't work on me," she says in an innocent voice and smiling softly.

"That's not what you said last night," I whisper before slapping her ass softly and walking up the walkway a bit so I can get a better view of the mountains to the north.

"Hey," she exclaims before a short laugh and walking to keep up with me.

We stand and look in awe over the view to the north / northwest. She takes my hand and we both stand and observe. After a few minutes we walk together, hand in hand, back to the jeep. I drive further into the mountains and we stop at another lookout looking to the north and east into a pretty untouched looking valley.

"It almost looks like grass down there, I wonder if it's grass," Isobel thinks out loud.

"I'm wondering where the road goes," I say, tempted to pull out my phone but too busy being happy with the view to do so. We stand looking outward for a few minutes as an old couple comes to look out from the same spot. The guy pulls out his cell phone and starts taking pictures of his wife in various pinup girl poses. We smile and look at each other as we observe them, obviously well aged, happy and having fun.

"I'm hungry," Isobel says as she leans her head over on my shoulder.

"Alright, there's a diner up by a ski resort I saw on the map. We'll go up there and get something," I say as we get back in the car and continue up the mountain.

I pull onto the street and see the diner is half empty so we park and go in. We are seated right away and are given menus. We rub our legs against each other while we eat and she talks about her job in the pharmacy. I tell her some stories about what has gone on at work recently as we finish up.

"She thinks you're cute," Isobel says as I fill out the tip and return the receipt to the fiber tray it was attached to.

"Who, the waitress? She's probably three times our age," I say quietly as I double check my mental math to make sure I'm tipping about 50%.

"No, Angela," Isobel says with a smirk and raised eyebrows.

"Oh, your ass twin?" I ask, taking a moment to remember who Angela is.

"Yes, you forgot her name already?" she asks while smiling at me and trying not to laugh.

"You know me by now, it was more than five minutes ago," I say while putting my cell phone back in my pocket.

"Yes, this is true," she says while tapping away on her phone.

"Chatting with her?" I ask, again realizing it's probably a stupid question.

"I am, is that okay with you?" she asks with a playful smirk.

"Nothing is okay with me," I say with a loving smile as the waitress approaches.

"What? Was something wrong with the food?" the kind woman asks while picking up the fiber try.

"Oh no everything was great, I was just being sarcastic with something unrelated," I say trying to assure her.

"Good," she exclaims. "Remember, sarcasm is anger's ugly cousin!"

"Yes ma'am," I concur as she turns to walk away to finish up the bill.

"See, sarcasm is bad," Isobel says with the same playful smirk on her face.

"I know, it's terrible," I say sarcastically while we both laugh briefly together. "And that was an Anger Management quote I'm pretty sure," I add.

"It was," Isobel concurs while nodding slowly in agreement.

We get up from the table and make our way out to the car. Climbing in she says she wants to go back down to Tucson because it's time most places allow you to check into hotels. We finish scaling the winding roads after what only feels like a couple minutes of flirty conversation. Driving closer towards town she says she wants me to try and find a room near the university of Arizona campus off speedway and Campbell. I pull open Google maps on my phone and get my bearings straight before we get to many intersections.

"Alright, I see an adobe bed and breakfast southeast of there. I'll direct you when we get close," Isobel says while fiddling with her phone.

"Cool. We can get set up and go hit whatever you want to do next," I say, curious where the day is going to go.

"Want to have drinks with Angela at four?" Isobel asks while typing on her phone.

"Day drinking? Fuck yeah," I respond with a smile. *Shit, I should ask her what she thinks about including others.*

"What do you think about sex with more than one person in the room?" Isobel asks with an uncomfortable expression.

"Are you sure you can't read minds?" I inquire with a sideways smile.

"It's always better to make sure bases are covered, right?" she states with a cute laugh.

"Seems like yesterday Michael and I were on either side of someone," I think aloud, words sneaking right by my filter. She turns to look at me as an eyebrow raises.

"Oh yeah? How did that go?" she asks, looking curious and not remotely jealous. *Interesting, hearing that after dating and sharing feelings for and with each other for a few months. She didn't twitch at all hearing that.*

"I went out on the deck surrounding a pool and he was making out with her," I began. "They stopped me and said I should join them and before I knew it I had her bent over, beer bottle in her ass with Michael on the other side of her."

"Beer bottle?" Isobel shrieks, bursting into laughter.

"Well, she wanted me in her ass if I recall, and I was enjoying her pussy," I respond. Trying to remember exactly how it happened, I continue. "I saw an empty beer bottle in arm's reach and I instinctively picked it up. Playing with her ass hole with the mouth of the bottle, she leaned back into it. I was inside her so she had to know whatever it was wasn't my dick or fingers as I'm not made of glass. She seemed to really dig it."

“That actually doesn’t sound bad. I mean, the glass part,” Isobel ponders verbally. “I’m not a fan of buttplay but I’ve definitely experimented with strange objects before.”

“Yeah? Like what?” I ask, getting curious.

“I think the strangest was a remote with rounded off sharp edges. I threw a condom on and fucked myself with it for a half hour or so,” she states. “It didn’t break, I didn’t break and I came a few times.”

“Remote control orgasm?” I muse, causing us both to laugh for a moment.

“Ok, turn right,” she instructs, crossing our location with the hotel she wants to look at.

We arrive at what appears to me to be a large complex of one story adobes. I thought at first it was just a neighborhood we were going to pass. There is a fence surrounding and both sides of the street are mostly filled with parked cars.

“After we check in, there is a secure parking lot behind a fence somewhere. They’ll give directions,” Isobel informs me as she grabs some stuff out of the back seat.

“Alright,” I respond. We get out of the jeep and walk a few hundred feet. We see the fence fall back as a similar looking adobe comes into view on this side of the fence. It becomes clear this is the office as Isobel turns and flashes her absurdly cute full smile at me.

“I can read maps!” she says in a risen voice.

“Gorgeous and talented,” I say as I hold the door open for her.

“Thank you,” she says, walking by. My gaze travels down to her amazing ass as she passes by. *Fuck, I never intend to hold doors open to check people out but god damn that view is magnetic.*

“Hello, how may I help you?” a kind looking older gentlemen asks, standing behind a wide counter.

“I reserved a room?” Isobel pipes in before I can open my mouth.

“Yeah?” I whisper into Isobel’s ear, leaning over.

“Wonderful, name?” the gentleman asks.

“Isobel Brennan,” she answers in a voice I haven’t heard from her before.

“Got it,” the man in his 60s, easily, responds confidently. “What will your method of payment be,” he adds.

“Debit card,” I inject, handing him my card. Isobel puts her wallet back as I am now reaching across her path.

“Thanks,” she whispers, returning the lean.

“Splendid, sign here please,” the man requests while placing a printout in front of me. He brushes his well-groomed hair off of his eyebrows, up and across his forehead.

“No problem,” I say as I sign the piece of paper and slide it back towards him. He takes it and files it away out of sight. He picks up a small envelope and passes it to Isobel.

“Here are the two keys and some information,” he informs her. “Your room number is 123 and you may consult the map inside the envelope for the room location.”

“Thank you so much,” Isobel responds in that same voice. It sounds more high pitched and powerful than usual. Her words are slightly more clear and well-formed than other times I’ve heard her talk.

We turn and walk out of the hotel office. I hold the door open for her again while we walk back towards my Jeep. We both climb in as I look over at her to make sure she has no problems climbing up.

“It’s on the opposite side and there’s a little remote in here,” Isobel says while peering into the envelope. “It will open a gate so we can park right outside the room.”

“Alright, that’s weird but alright,” I think aloud, never having heard of parking provided for hotel rooms behind a remote control privacy fence.

“Right! That’s the main reason I picked this place,” Isobel adds.

She hands me the gate button as I make another turn based on the direction she gives me. She is looking at her phone and raises a finger to point off to the gate to our left. I push the button on the opener and see the gate recess inward, then slide to the side.

“Alright, that’s actually pretty cool,” I state as I watch the gate section continue sliding out of sight.

“That is. I didn’t expect it to be well hidden as well,” Isobel says while also being clearly impressed. “I see why they gave us a map instead of just a gate number.”

“Yeah no kidding,” I agree. “I was wondering where all the gates were. I can tell there are dozens of suite units in this place by the online listing you showed me. We must have passed a handful of gates and never realized it.”

“This is really nice,” I say, cutting through the dining room section of the suite and approaching the bathroom. I look in the mirror as I walk past and see my hair is blown around a considerable amount. I brush it with my fingers while I piss. After I finish I move over to look at my hair more closely. *I am so glad I don’t have to do much to keep my hair parted and lying down nicely. I wonder how it will react to the air in the cities underground.* As soon as that thought crosses my mind, I feel depression knocking on my door.

"It should be, it's \$450 a night," Isobel says with a smirk as I exit the bathroom. She leans her head against her hand while sitting at the adequately sized but small table in the dining room area, watching me. Her cute little face is steadily smirking.

"That makes sense," I answer without thinking twice.

"Not upset?" Isobel asks, engrossed in watching my responses.

"No, I figured we would blow a bunch of money when we finally went exploring," I respond calmly.

"How much money do you actually make?" she asks in a tone of disbelief and surprise.

"Isn't that supposed to be a personal question or something?" I fire back playfully.

"You've made me cum so many times I worry I'll forget my name," Isobel responds while maintaining the smirk and raising an eyebrow.

"That's a good point, I suppose," I admit. I look around the suite.

"That's a cool story," she quips as her smirk shifts to a smile. The smile is brief and her eyes sparkle for that moment before her face returns to the smirk.

"More than I know what to do with," I mumble, realizing what her nonverbals have been about.

"Well, I guess I assumed you made a lot less because you live in a Mark Taylor apartment complex besides one of the mansions in Scottsdale," Isobel says softly, sounding as if she's being honest without intending offense.

"Honestly I thought about finding a house but I don't know how long this job is going to last," I explain. "I don't know if I'm going to stay down here. I figure I will bank the money and use the apartment they gave me."

"They gave you the apartment?" Isobel asks, putting emphasis on the word gave.

"Yes. Everybody they moved down from the Omaha metro was given the option to find their own place or take a company apartment," I inform her. "I think everyone took the apartment option rather than finding their own place. A lot of people brought their own cars down, though. Some chose to spend their advance on a new car."

"Your Jeep looks really new. Did you buy that or bring it?" she asks.

"I bought it as soon as I got down here," I answer.

"What did you drive up in Omaha?" she asks, looking curious.

"I had an old Dodge Dakota that was destroyed, if you recall the story, by an angry father," I begin.

"Yes I recall that," she states, listening intently. I walk to the opposite side of the table and sit down.

"After that I had that Spookmobile for a day or so," I say.

"Oh, right. I remember hearing about that," she tells me. "I guess we talked about this already."

"No worries," I say, eyes wandering to her cleavage in that black tank top.

"So what do you want to do while visiting here?" she asks.

"I kind of want to drink," I admit. "But I also kind of want to see nature around here," I add.

"I don't know," she says, still smirking.

"What are you thinking?" I ask, curious why the smirk remains strong after the conversation.

"I'm falling in love with a rich guy," she says in what I assume is an attempt at a ritzy accent.

"Sure, you say that after finally being serviced," I joke, growing a smirk of my own.

"Oh, I've felt it for a little while," she says in a slightly defensive but still cute voice tone. "I just didn't want to let that paint dry without knowing if you had anything to offer in the bedroom."

"Bedroom is but one environment," I reply with a smirk. I turn my head and look out of the windows to the small private in-ground hot tub located just outside.

"I'll remember that later," she informs me with a smile spreading out of her smirk. She pulls her phone out and appears to be reading a text. "We could meet Angela for lunch? She's going to be eating at a Chinese place a few miles away soon," she adds

"Angela? The ass twin?" I ask, forgetting what her name was.

"Yes! She invited us to lunch with her before she goes hiking," she elaborates.

"Shit, I wore my steel toed shoes. They don't have very good outdoor traction. Want to go buy shoes and meet her at the Chinese place?" I ask.

"Sure, will you buy me shoes too? I am pretty sure black tennis shoes aren't the best for hiking," she says.

"Absolutely," I agree.

"You can eat four plates?" Angela asks. I sit down and look at her white blouse. It is fluffy looking and thin, but appears to somehow have thirty independent, floating layers. It is low cut but with a narrow opening. You can still make out cleavage through the slit.

"You're god damn right I can," I reply as I sit down and take a first bite of the fresh plate in one fluid motion.

"It's true, I only ate date style the first date of ours," Isobel comments. "After seeing him not give a fuck at all and down a whole day's worth of how much I eat in one sitting, I no longer pretended like I don't eat. He doesn't even taste his food"

"It's delicious," I say with food in my mouth. I make a silly face to illustrate my knowledge of how disgusting it is to talk with a mouth full.

"I bet," Angela says with a cute smile, using her fork to move around the lo-mien on her plate. She's wearing a tight white skirt that goes down to her knees that matches her blouse perfectly. The blouse doesn't look like something huge that Prince would wear. It just perplexes me with the appearance of each piece of textured silky fabric being its own layer.

"Sorry, he has a staring problem today," Isobel tells Angela, flashing her super cute toothy, wide-eyed smile in support.

"No, I-" I begin before being cut off.

"Oh it's okay, I've been checking you two out too," Angela interjects.

"am perplexed by the make-up of your shirt," I conclude. As the sentence finishes the tone drops after hearing what Angela said. "Well, and checking you out," I admit.

"What? I have make-up on my shirt?" Angela says jokingly without looking down to check.

"It looks like there are a million different layers making up the pattern," I say, looking over her blouse for the fifteenth time.

"I'll let you play with it when I change," she tells me.

"Awesome" I say before taking another bite of food.

"Why are you so dressed up? You weren't wearing that at the gas station earlier," Isobel asks in a curious tone before taking another bite herself.

"That period of time I wasn't texting?" Angela asks before taking a bite. Isobel, keeping eye contact with her, nods in acknowledgement. "I was in an interview," she concludes before taking another bite.

"Oh wow. I'd hire you," Isobel says as her own eyes travel down the visible portion of Angela's upper half.

"I would be a hard worker," Angela says in what sounds like a professional business voice. I catch Angela's eyes take a glance at Isobel's cleavage before her soft, cute smile spreads across her face.

"You're going to hike in yoga pants?" I ask, realizing I should sound excited instead of skeptical the moment the sentence finishes coming out of my mouth.

"You're going to wear black pants and a black t-shirt?" Angela asks with a playful smile.

"She's right," Isobel adds with another dimple filled, bright eyed smile.

"So what is the place you like to hike called?" I ask, climbing into the driver's seat of my Jeep. It feels like several moments pass before any doors open. I look over and see Isobel and Angela with arms around each other, kissing outside the passenger side of the Jeep. I smile so hard my cheeks hurt as joy rises in me. *Speaking of feeling love. Shit.*

"Sorry," Isobel whispers while getting into the front passenger seat. Angela climbs into the small rear bench seat and slides over to the middle, throwing the center child belt over her waist and clicking it.

"Oh I fully understand," I respond, glancing back and smiling at Angela who is looking slightly nervous.

"I wanted to sample your girlfriend," Angela reveals with a shy and embarrassed expression. Her face begins to flush as I keep eye contact with her in the rear view mirror.

"Sample all you want," I say in almost a laugh. "Trust me it's fine, I'm not the jealous type it turns out."

"Yeah?" Isobel asks, sounding somewhat skeptical.

"I felt happiness and pride in my choice of companionship when I saw that out the side windows," I say, leaning over to kiss Isobel.

"Awww, that's so sweet," Angela swoons.

"Where am I going?" I ask, trying to get back to business as I turn the Jeep on.

"Drive that way and turn left on North Grande Avenue. I'll tell you each step from there," Angela tells me.

"Cool," I say. "What's the plan for the hike though?" I ask, trying to sound chill and not crazy.

"There is a parking lot near the bottom of the northeast face of the hill. We'll go up the easy trail and enjoy the view!" Angela explains. I look over at Isobel and she flashes me her wide forced smile. I smile involuntarily, feelings of adoration and happiness always happening after her smiles.

I reach North Grande Avenue and turn left. After a couple blocks she points to the right onto Congress, and I follow her direction. As her arm pulls back to the back seat I smell her perfume. It smells like a mixture of Vanilla and another pleasing scent I can't identify. As I contemplate the smell she indicates a left turn. As the road begins to curve she points into a strange looking parking lot with oddly shaped concrete walls a few feet high. I see some other construction debris.

"This isn't a trailhead but we park here a lot to hike," Angela informs me.

"No problem, just over here where this driveway looking outcropping cuts off?" I ask, pulling into it anyway.

"Looks good!" she says as she stashes her handbag under the back seat.

We close our doors and start off into the sand towards the mountain. I double press the lock doors button on my keychain, hearing the horn honk twice in confirmation that the alarm is armed. *I probably won't be able to hear it anywhere near the top of this hill mountain thing. Whatever, still going to arm it.*

Several seconds later I pull out of my own head and realize two amazing asses with beautifully shaped thighs are right in front of me. In mere moments I have to start fighting off the feeling of an oncoming erection.

"Take the left trail," Angela instructs. "The right trail goes along the base of the hill to the road that goes up it. The left makes its way up and over. It crosses the road a few times but it picks up directly on the other side."

"This doesn't look as steep as I thought it would," Isobel yells so we can hear her from behind.

"This is the easy one," Angela answers. "There is one on the opposite side that goes almost straight up the steepest side. There are points where you have to climb straight up for a dozen feet if you want to continue the trail.

"Hey, thanks for not taking us up that one," I say louder than I intended.

"Out of shape?" Angela says. I can hear the smirk on her face, though all I can see is her rear half.

"Sadly so," I respond.

"No he's not," Isobel pipes in. "He's definitely lying," she adds.

"Yeah?" Angela says, shooting back a smile. Her smile increases when she catches me staring at her ass during our ascent.

"I think I am, but I can keep up with Isobel so I guess I'm not as bad as I'm letting on," I answer.

"I'll be the judge of that," Angela barks before zipping around Isobel and heading up the trail with twice the speed.

Isobel and I keep up without any effort. I expect to fall behind as I know Isobel is in far better shape than me. Time and ascension passes without that happening. I observe my engine having fuel poured into it by the view of the two women ascending before me. It is like liquid horny being transmuted to adrenaline. I do not complain.

It doesn't feel like more than a few minutes before we cross a road and make the final ascent. We reach the top, where a monument and some higher parts rise above. We start wandering around on our own,

taking photos with our smart phones. The three of us end up at the peak just above the monument which appears to be the highest point anywhere on this small mountain.

“What’s that to the north? Is that the climb me squeeze me mountain of lemons?” I ask, pointing at a far larger mountain range to the north.

“Yes. That’s Mount Lemmon. There are some pretty cool views from up there. There is a lake stashed among the trees half way up,” Angela answers.

“We’ll have to go see that sometime, if we can,” I say while glancing over at Isobel. She nods and smiles at me.

“I’ve seen some of that,” Isobel says. “My family used to come here to vacation in the area,” she adds.

“Did your family see the gun fighting and attractions out at Tombstone?” Angela asks, smiling broadly and appearing to be looking over Isobel’s body as she asks. *Isobel does look extra good today.*

“Yes, though I wasn’t too into it,” Isobel admits with a sheepish tone.

“I was drug to it by mine and also didn’t care too much. So, are you prepared for the walk down?” Angela asks with an overly confident expression.

“How much harder could it be?” I ask with a smile. Isobel raises an eyebrow at me as we group up closer. This time I end up behind Angela. Isobel files behind me as I chase Angela down the same trail we just ascended.

As we drop from level to level, pattering down the trails and catching strange looks from drivers as we cross the zigzagging streets, I notice the fronts of my thighs burning. To my surprise my muscles are hurting more and faster going down than they did going up.

“Shit you weren’t joking,” I mumble as we start taking the last third of the trail towards the bottom.

“Do you need a nap?” Angela barks back at me playfully.

“Depends on the company?” I joke, smirking through the building sweat.

“I think three people make the most comfortable position for sleep,” Isobel adds from behind, voice shaking with each step.

The sound of rattlesnakes clicking off to either side catches my attention as we near the bottom of the trail. The ground levels out and we begin walking towards the car.

“I expected you to freak out about snakes the whole way up and down,” Isobel playfully says to me as she stretches her legs. Angela begins stretching her legs as well once next to the car.

"I only heard them towards the end," I admit giving them both a quizzical look.

"Oh I heard them the whole way," Angela says while nodding to Isobel.

"No shit?" I ask, a little disturbed I hadn't heard them.

"No shit," Angela confirms.

We climb back in the car and I notice Isobel is in the back seat with Angela. I smile and start the car.

"Where are we off to?" I ask, backing out of the area we parked in. I get out on the street and start driving back towards the area our room is in.

"Your room? Isobel mentioned you planned to pick up alcohol for tonight," Angela answers. I look in the rear view mirror and see Isobel flashing her irresistible smile at me.

"Sounds good to me," I admit.

"I need you to get back to the warehouse as soon as possible," I hear Intef say in my head.

"Fuck," I mutter under my breath. *You can't be serious.*

"We need to make a couple hundred additional full truck shipments appear overnight. We also have to double our incoming freight for a long time," I hear Carnorra say.

"What?" Isobel asks, looking confused. She shares a confused glance with Angela.

"Oh, sorry, nothing," I answer as happily as I can. *Can someone call me so I can have this conversation out loud so I have a good out?*

No sooner do I think that does my phone start ringing. I stop at a red light and look over at Isobel. "Chinese fire drill?" I ask, as I open my door.

"Okay," Isobel responds throwing her door open. We both jump out and run around the car, getting in each other's previous seats. We shut our doors as the light turns green and Isobel proceeds back to the hotel.

"Hello?" I ask after punching accept call on my phone.

"We need you back at the Warehouse," Intef informs me.

"I'm kind of on a weekend vacation out of town," I say, hoping he doesn't get mad but continues normally. The last thing I want to do is have him think I wanted to have him call so I could shoot him down verbally instead of privately.

"Things went from chill to inferno over the last hour. We need everybody we can get here as soon as possible. Yesterday, if we could," he tells me.

"I can't really drive back, can you send a car or something?" I ask, giving him a window to send a cab to take me to the nearest tube.

“What? You have to go back?” Isobel asks sounding disappointed. I raise a finger and mouth the words “Wait a minute, sorry,” in response.

“We can send a car. Where should it meet you?” Intef asks.

“I’ll text you the address we’re headed to,” I tell him.

“Done,” he says before disconnecting.

“You guys can party without me right?” I ask in a defeated tone.

“I mean,” Angela begins. “I was hoping the three of us could unwind but I mean, I think we could manage.” She looks from me to Isobel and then bites her lip.

“Cool, I wish I could too but I make too much money to tell them to fuck off,” I state.

“Yeah? It’s cool?” Isobel asks sounding slightly surprised.

“Completely, I think all will be fine. Too much needs done at work and I won’t punish anyone else for it,” I say with a smirk.

What feels like a three second drive passes and we are back at the room. A yellow cab is waiting for me just outside the entrance. I get out and hug Isobel. Angela comes and grabs me in a hug.

“Make it up to us later,” I hear Angela whisper in my ear, moving a hand from behind me to pinch my ass.

“I can try,” I say with a smile before turning to jog to the cab waiting for me.

Descent . Months of Pain

“What the fuck is this?” Bud yells at me as I enter the shipping floor from the offices.

“I don’t know man, I just got here,” I respond.

“Full weekend off, eh? Back to normal huh?” he yells.

“I got pulled out of Tucson, I’m pretty fucking irritated too,” I fire back.

“This wasn’t your call?” Bud asks, sounding more surprised than angry.

“No, I got orders from up the chain and here I am,” I yell, almost out of vocal range as I scurry to a forklift so I can speed through the warehouse to receiving. *Artem, how long do you think it would take to get the warehouse to the north operational if we buy the existing racks from them before the occupants leave?*

“Probably less than a week. I could bring in the previous contractors and have them duplicate the data infrastructure that they did here. We can configure different shelving if we need as the first sections are filled up. Shouldn’t be a problem,” I hear him respond in my head.

Intef, do you think it would be any problem at all to get the same perimeter security set up there in that time? Fucking Weekends.

“Probably could be done in a couple days after the data infrastructure is up,” I hear Intef reply.

Alright, I’ll let you two know if you don’t catch the response from the property manager.

I arrive in Receiving and see Michael throwing pallets around. *Awesome. This weekend just got awesome.*

I feel my phone vibrate and check to see who it is from. Isobel. Have to check. I open it and see a photo taken looking down from her breasts. I see her abdomen, engorged clit and from the top lip up of Angela’s face. Angela is grinning ear to ear and her tongue is partially in site.

“Why did you just moan?” Tim asks, tossing boxes onto his pallet.

“Fuck, did I?” I ask, not being aware of making any noises at all.

“It sounded like it!” he answers with a laugh.

“Fuck man, sorry. Today is fucking weird,” I answer before jumping back in my forklift and heading to the next bay I need to pull from.

"It's still Monday, isn't it," Michael says under his breath as he reads the piece of paper I handed him.

"Fucking seems like it," I say taking the paper back and slipping it into where it came from on the clipboard I'm carrying. "It might as well still be Saturday for how much I've slept."

"So, Wednesday is getting all of what we usually got in two full days? Instead of splitting it between today and tomorrow?" Michael asks in almost a whining voice.

"Oh, Thursday. Look at what's coming tomorrow," I say rifling through sheets on my clipboard and finding the overview of manifests for tomorrow. I hand it to him and flash a quick smile.

"Holy fuck are you serious," Michael says with wide eyes.

"Yes. It's that bad outbound on shipping too right now," I say trying to make him feel better.

"Can we get more guys in here? Oh, and more forklifts? Oh and another warehouse? Oh and double the propane tanks and charging stations?" Michael asks as I'm bracing for another pallet to get destroyed.

"No, I've been told we should be able to do this easily as a lot of the new in and out will be full pallets," I say with confidence.

"Fuck, why not drop off trailers and have other tractors come pick them up and leave us out of it?" Michael says before driving off.

"That may not be a bad idea, actually," I say to the space that was occupied by Michael's forklift moments ago. I look at the second sheet into what's on my clipboard which is my to do list and cross off talking to Michael. Next is going over to talk to Nancy about adding one more production line using the same staff she has now. *Fuck*.

"James," I hear over the intercom.

"What, yes? Yes?" I say, not meaning to say What as my first response.

"'Alex Jones' is here again," I hear Bud say.

"Fuck, alright," I say as I turn and jog back towards the shipping floor.

Moments later I find myself in the office and try to straighten up my hair as if I didn't just jog through the warehouse to appear as if I'm just now getting out there. I open the door and walk straight towards the wrapping machines.

"There you are!" I hear shouting over from Chris's desk. I look over and wave to Michael.

"You really don't want to talk to him today, do you," I hear Bud say over the earpiece I now wear so not everybody can hear what's on the walkie. I shake my head no in response to Bud as he looks in my direction from across the shipping floor.

“Hey,” I yell back to Michael before walking behind the pallet wrappers and standing out of sight for a moment. I bang my head on the back of the wrappers a few times.

“Yes, that's right,” I hear Chris say over the walkie as I can make out Joshua's voice running nonstop. I bang my head a few more times on the back of the wrappers before walking forward and back into view.

“He getting you all squared away?” I ask as I approach Chris's desk.

“Yeah we've been done for a minute or so,” Chris says as he stands up and quickly walks with pulled orders in his hands to go check pallets.

“Want to walk me out?” Joshua says as he goes to the door.

“Anything else I can do for you?” I ask, standing in place and hoping he doesn't ask me to go outside again. I'm driven to try and be a good business partner but I know it'll just end in an argument as it always does.

“No, thanks. I understand you're busy,” Joshua says as he turns with a hurt puppy dog face and leaves the building.

“Don't you just want to put him down?” I hear Bud say over the walkie talkie.

“You have no idea,” I fire back. Then quickly adding “how valued a customer they are.” I deeply sigh before walking back into the shipping offices. No sooner do I get to my office than does Bud text me.

Bud: If you have a few hours free, we have an open forklift and an ever growing stack of orders.

James: I'll be out in about ten minutes to go talk to Nancy then I'll come pound out orders with you.

Bud: Thank you.

“I'm sure he's cheating on me,” Laura states with full confidence. Her little eyebrows curl downward in anger and frustration.

“I am telling you, there's no way. He adores you and talks about you for at least a little while every time we hang out,” I try and assure her.

“We would hang out within an hour after work almost every day,” she begins. “Sometimes we would leave together, and not be apart until the next day when we got to work. We would talk on the phone a lot of the time we weren't actually going to be together. I was loving him being addicted to me.”

“Did you know he used to drive around for hours after work in the

mornings? And he wouldn't get home until after noon sometimes even though he got off at 8am?" I ask, trying to calm her and inform her of things she may not know about him.

"No, I didn't know that," she answers, tears welling up in her eyes.

"He's really a great guy, his only two flaws, which I share with him among my many flaws, are he needs alone time and he tends to keep too much to himself," I add. *Intef, are you listening? If so, Michael isn't doing anything like this right? Driving around or whatever is what he's doing right? Sucks being this unsure, as I didn't even know he was doing anything other than hang out with Laura.*

"He's exploring below for a few hours most days after work," I hear Intef respond in my head. "Nothing more," he concludes. *Yeah?* "Yes. He's seen most of several of the largest cities and he's excited to move down there. Ecstatic is a better word for it."

"Thanks, this is actually helping me calm down," Laura states in a low voice, tear running down her cheek.

"Then why are you crying?" I ask, feeling a mixture of relieved by the news from Intef and uncomfortable from seeing Laura cry.

"I just wish he didn't feel like he needed alone time," she states.

"It's just how he's wired. I need it too. I've sat alone in my office after everyone has left several times, just to have some time alone. I don't even work. I'll stare at the wall and just permit myself to become lost in my own head," I explain.

"No words? You don't even talk to anyone or chat on Facebook?" she asks, seeming fully confused.

"Not a single word," I inform her. *Has it been decided if she can be taken below with him? And if so is she able to see it before hand?*

"She is cleared to come down with him at the end, but not before," I hear Intef respond.

"Here comes your favorite guy," I hear Bud announce over the intercom.

"Nobody fucking deal with this guy, I'm on the way," I fire back over the walkie talkies, raising a hand to Nancy and turning to run out of Production. I jump into my forklift and turn the ignition. I fire backwards without looking, gladly not hitting anyone or anything. I don't even turn my

forklift around, twisted to watch behind me as I fly through the warehouse in reverse.

“He’s half way up the sidewalk,” I barely hear Chris chirp through the walkie before I almost flip my forklift making a fast 90 degree turn in reverse down the center rack aisle on the shipping floor. One of the guys is driving towards me and hugs to one side. I carefully steer and fly between him and the racks towards the front of the distribution center.

“He’s knocking,” Chris chirps over the walkie. I don’t respond as I am focusing with all my energy on not hitting anything or anyone as I slowly make a wide angle turn across the shipping floor, altering my trajectory a little to the left and right to avoid pallets and people stopping, knowing I’m darting through.

“This fucking guy,” I mutter, throwing the parking brake on and jumping out of my forklift.

“Forklift is still on,” Chris informs me, meeting my outstretched hand with his sign-in clipboard with Joshua’s manifest clipped onto it.

“Thanks,” I say, jogging from where Chris is standing to the door. I throw the door open and let it hit the outer wall.

“Is that how you greet someone you work with?” Joshua says condescendingly with a sneer. He walks into the distribution center and takes his sunglasses off.

“It’s how I greet someone who lectured one of my guys on weight loss earlier in the week,” I bark out, furious with him.

“What? We were talking about effective strategies. I was a little overweight once. I figured some of my tactics could get him started on his goals,” Joshua barks back, now joining me in looking irritated.

“How did that conversation start, again?” I ask, handing him the clipboard.

“I don’t remember,” Joshua mutters as he scribbles his information into the required fields.

“Couldn’t have been started by you asking what he had for lunch, right?” I begin. “Followed maybe by him responding Arby’s BBQ sandwiches, which you fired off about being terrible for his body. I think after that you said something about it being why he’s closer to a beach ball shape than a human?”

“Beach ball?” Joshua asks loudly. “I thought I said softball,” he adds.

“Yeah that’s better, isn’t it,” I quip sarcastically. “Your manifest is clipped to the back.”

“Thanks buddy,” he snaps. “Permission to leave?” he asks as he stands up straight and fires a salute.

“Get the fuck out of here Matt,” I say in an unintentionally deep voice. I see his face tense up. *Yeah fucker, complain about me not using your full name you piece of shit. See how mean I can really be.*

“Later,” he says in a wavering voice as he bangs out of the door. I look over and see Chris closing the dock door to his truck. I look behind me and see Bud giving a thumbs up, signaling the trailer is loaded. I sigh and walk over to the door.

“Keep walking you piece of shit,” I mutter under my breath as I watch his hands raise and fall slowly at his sides, clearly taking deep breaths as he walks back to his cab.

“See you bunch of fuckers, I called that last month,” I hear Bud yelling as I buy a 20oz of Diet Mountain Dew from the soda machine. I walk into the door on the freight shipping side of the break room to listen. “I said it would keep spreading in all directions,” he adds.

“I can’t even believe this,” Chris says, standing next to the radio on the break room counter. Bud and several of the shipping guys are also standing nearby.

“Wow, Texas is closed off now?” Donny asks while making eye contact with Chris.

“Yes. It stretches from the Carolinas all the way over to almost Amarillo,” Bud answers quietly, trying to listen to the radio.

I walk up and stand off the back of the group, also listening to the radio.

“The U.S. Military is pulling the last troops from aiding NATO in Israel. They will join U.N. troops at the Clayton forward base in eastern New Mexico,” the voice on the radio states. “The concentration of forces across southern Kentucky and southern Virginia have contained the fighting to the south but has done little to quell the spread of the fighting westward.”

“What the fuck?” I ask, not having been following the news at all

lately.

"It might be here in a few weeks," Bud states quietly. We all nod in acknowledgement.

"Think they will expand Martial Law nationwide before much longer?" Donny asks.

"They don't have the manpower," I mumble. Bud shoots me a curious look, and rightfully so. I hadn't been paying attention to the situation until recently when it rolled over into Texas.

"James is right," Bud agrees. "The U.N. has been ordering swat teams from around the country to come join the fight since every branch of the military is there."

"The world watches as the troop wall strategy is being attempted along the New Mexico border," the voice on the radio continues. "It has been said that a hundred thousand troops will be spread from southern Colorado to the Mexican border by the week's end. A force made up of American military and police as well as soldiers from the European Union army and the U.N. peace force will begin an eastward wave."

"Hey, maybe it won't get here!" I halfway joke.

"I hope not," Bud agrees.

"I never understood why foreign troops got involved," Donny mumbles.

"Are you joking?" Bud barks. "They were immediately labeled domestic terrorists. Everyone that has joined them are labeled terrorists. You know the world's stance on terrorists."

"Yeah," Donny says quietly.

"My wife tells me traffic and businesses around town aren't anywhere near as busy as they were a month ago," Chris says quietly.

"Well yeah," Bud blurts out. "Everybody's joining the fight, regardless of which side."

"I've had family who returned to Mexico years ago come join the Military to help out," Vincent informs us. Bud whips his head around and glares at him, eyes twinkling in anger.

"Alright, we've been here nine hours and have a lot to do, we should get back to it," I state loudly, trying to diffuse what may or may not be about to happen.

"Yes, let's kill it," Bud says firmly, still locked to Vincent's eyes until the break room door starts closing as he heads back to his forklift. I follow

him out.

“Speaking of New Mexico,” I begin, getting Bud’s attention.

“Give me bad news and I swear I’m going home,” Bud almost yells.

“If Albuquerque stops being able to ship, we’re going to be even busier,” I tell him. “I was talking with upper management today and they told me that. Even though Albuquerque is half our size, it would still be a painful burst of additional work for us.”

“Yeah. Good thing the north warehouse is only half filled,” Bud growls as he drives off in his forklift.

“So we’re going to have to start having some trucks unloaded by shipping guys. Put away too. I know, I know, it’s bullshit. The issue is more because you guys are doing too good shipping stuff out and receiving can’t keep up. That’s a good thing,” I say to an ever increasingly angry crowd.

“Can’t we just help them put away every so often like we were?” Bud barks from somewhere in the crowd of people I can’t even identify.

“That would work if it weren’t for the fact waves of incoming shipments have no choice but to schedule in a way they can’t possibly only be unloaded in receiving’s docks,” I answer while nervously shuffling papers in front of me.

“Wait, how many trailers are showing up at a time?” Michael asks, not having seen the numbers I’ve seen just before this meeting.

“Uhhh, double,” I respond.

“Double normal? Or double...” he begins to ask but trails off realizing he doesn’t want to know.

“Well,” I begin, pausing because even I don’t want to say it out loud. “Double the most we’ve ever received in one day.”

“Fucking like, eighty?” Michael asks sounding both annoyed and shocked.

“Oh was the most we ever really received in a day forty?” I respond, flipping through to look at upcoming manifest counts. “Ok so, well over double,” I inform them in just over a whisper. The group erupts in quiet but angry voices, talking among themselves.

“The other warehouse is live, right?” Bud asks with what I would think is tears in his eyes if I didn’t know better.

“Yes. It took longer than I wanted but it’s live,” I answer.

“We’re gonna flood that fucker,” Bud yells, gesturing to guys waiting to start unloading trucks.

“Michael, watch out for speeding shipping guys over on the fresh space,” I send in a voice message through my phone.

“Bud was just flying around looking at where we were putting stuff in there,” I receive in a voice message from Michael.

“Can somebody help this guy? He’s going crazy,” I hear a voice I don’t recognize plead over the walkies.

“Who? Where?” I ask, in the middle of the warehouse and knowing I can get anywhere pretty fast. *Today is fucked, I could use a target anyway.*

“Some bald guy yelling at us in shipping. He says we have a load for him but we haven’t pulled anything yet, still finishing unloading everybody,” the voice informs me.

“On my way,” I bark into the walkie as I spin my forklift around and launch off into their direction. What feels like seconds later and an exponential growth in adrenaline and pulse, I am throwing my forklift into park and pulling the emergency brake up.

“Oh, they sent you,” Joshua says sarcastically.

“I know for sure you’re not scheduled for a pickup for another two hours,” I almost scream at him, closing the last few dozen feet between him and where I parked in a matter of moments.

“Hey, hey, calm down,” Joshua pleads, suddenly having a kinder tone to his voice.

“Well? Can I get back to work?” I ask, wanting him to just turn around and leave so I don’t stab him repeatedly with my box knife.

“Usually you guys are good about having everything ready in case we get here early. I thought I would come grab the load early to get the day started,” Joshua says a little more slowly than I would have liked. I shoot a look over at the kid who I assume called over the walkie for help.

“Oh, I told him it would be a couple hours and let him know we were currently unloading all of these trailers,” the kid explains to me, gesturing to the eight or ten shipping doors currently being actively unloaded.

“Is this the receiving floor now?” Joshua asks sounding more sarcastic than curious.

“I should get paid for saying this, but get the fuck out of here and come back in two hours,” I bark at Joshua. “Next time you don’t listen to my guys when they try to help you, we’re going to have some serious problems.

“Or, what?” Joshua asks in an almost threatening tone. He takes his shades off and squints at me through the generally dim warehouse light.

“Or what?” I ask, taking a few steps towards him until I am looking straight up his nose. “Are you fucking serious right now?” I ask, putting my hand in my pocket and gripping my box knife.

“Hey guys, everything going alright?” I hear Bud asking, jumping off of his forklift and letting it slowly roll to a stop off the side of us.

“I don’t know, I haven’t decided how to answer just yet,” I say while thumbing the box knife in my pocket.

“I think it will be alright when I come back in a couple hours,” Joshua says, sniffing and putting his shades back on.

“Feel free to send someone else,” I say in what comes out as a growl.

Joshua looks at me, then turns to look at Bud. He nods to bud and then turns back towards me before whipping around and stomping out of the building.

I sit on my idling forklift, staring at the text on my phone. “You guys need to increase your output for the rest of this week,” is what it says. It’s Tuesday. *We have been at this shit for fucking weeks now. Months maybe. I’ve been here fifteen hours a day, every day. Some days more. And we’re being told to increase output? How? Hire a bunch of fucking machines?*

“Are you alright?” I hear asked to me from my left. I do not attempt to identify them or respond to them. I bump the gear stick on my forklift and turn to look behind me. Driving backwards, carrying a tall pallet in front of me, I speed off through the warehouse.

Descent . Fires Burn Out

“Alright everyone,” I begin, putting a hand on each side of the podium and gripping. “Thanks for joining me here in stopping our action for a half hour or so. That should cover everything I wanted to touch base on for our second quarterly meeting. Is there anything I’ve forgotten about or anything you guys want to touch on?” I ask, looking over at the other managers and leaders sitting off to the side of the front.

“You haven’t forgotten about the doorbell, right?” Bud asks, looking stern and serious which probably means he’s not serious at all. I give him a quizzical look for a few moments. He makes gestures of doing something with his hands. He jumps a little and looks off to the side then nods as if he’s being beckoned and I immediately recall what he’s talking about.

“Fuck off,” I say raising a middle finger to him with a smirk. I look out at the several dozen people assembled in the chairs in front of me and realize thankfully almost none of them know what he’s talking about. “That should be it then, yeah?” I say, looking over everybody and ignoring Bud.

“So you remember?” Bud says loudly with a mischievous smile. Chris and Larry both start laughing as a couple others who are from Omaha smile silently. I cover my face with my palm and shake my head. “Speech!” Chris yells from towards the back of the crowd.

“I’m not telling that story,” I say as Bud stands up and walks over to the podium. I shake my head and start to blush as I move aside from the podium.

“No problem buddy, I’ll tell them about this as a closer,” Bud says loud enough for the microphone to amplify it for all.

“After this, we can all get back to work,” I say leaning into the microphone quick and raising my hand in a wave before walking over to sit next to the other managers.

“Hey guys,” Bud says as he gets comfortable standing at the podium. “As most of you know, I’m Bud, I help Larry run the shipping floor. I worked with James up north before a lot of us came down here to help out. While we were up there, we had a cheap doorbell on the shipping entrance for the drivers. When it got below 30 degrees the button outside wouldn’t work very well.

“One day James said he wanted to try and fix it so we gave him some screwdrivers and said knock yourself out. He took it off the outside

wall and was working on it by Chris's computer. After a few seconds we heard the doorbell go off. James ignored it and kept working on the button. He took it apart and reassembled it a couple times and one time he was assembling it the doorbell went off again. This time, though, he set down the things in his hands and went to answer the door!

"Chris and I looked at each other to see if James would make it all the way to the door before realizing he is the one who rang the doorbell. Sure enough," Bud continues before pausing to laugh a second. "Sure enough, James answered the door and then looked into the warehouse to see if anybody noticed it."

At this point Chris is in the back almost howling in laughter. Bud is turning red trying to continue the story without laughing and half of the crowd is snickering and listening intently. My face, I'm sure, is dark red.

"Several of us happened to see it happen and we all waved and laughed at him," Bud concludes. "It was a great day. Thanks guys," he says waving and walking back over to the other managers. Most of the room is laughing, including Michael. Michael may be laughing the hardest out of everyone but Chris. I flip off Michael as he stares at me and continues laughing.

Everybody starts getting up and walking back to their respective work areas as Michael and I stay seated.

"Thanks for letting me tell that story buddy," Bud says getting back over to us. He pats me on the shoulder a few times and smiles at me as him, Larry and Nancy start walking together towards the shipping area.

"Man," Michael says while still trying to catch his breath. "I really wish I could have seen that."

"Up your ass," I say while standing up and smiling, face still red.

"Oh come on, that was funny," Michael says standing up with me. We start walking towards the receiving offices as a couple of the temps start folding up all the chairs.

"Yeah, that's the only reason I let him come up and tell the story," I say, feeling my face get a little less red the greater distance we put between us and where we held the meeting in the middle of the receiving floor.

"I'm going to have to find out what kind of doorbell that was and buy one to hide in your office," Michael says before bursting back into laughter.

"I hope you get herpes," I say before patting him on the back and turning back towards shipping. He enters the receiving offices and closes

the door behind him. I can still hear the laughter as he starts going up the stairs to his office.

I sit down at the table in the break room that I've made out of four tables and wait a few moments. Larry, Nancy, Michael, Intef, Bud, Stevie and Roy come in and sit down. I wait for everyone to get situated.

"I've called you all here to compare notes on how we're doing at full capacity," I begin, looking over everyone's facial expressions. "I walk around in the mornings and see very few pallet spots empty yet Receiving is still bringing on dozens of trailers a day, sometimes an hour, and they're finding homes as dozens of trailers are being filled up and sent out at the same time."

"Thanks for acknowledging that," Stevie says with a deeply grateful smile. "It means a lot."

I look around and see everybody in both Receiving and Shipping nodding at the same time in agreement. I gesture to Nancy and say "You guys have been keeping up on work orders pushing even more pallets into the warehouses as they cycle around."

"Yes, yes we have," she says nodding and listening. For a moment it feels very strange being in this position.

"I appreciate you guys keeping on top of things without anything going wrong," I add while making eye contact with Roy.

"We have all new equipment here. Brian and I don't anticipate anything breaking down for a few years but some seals and things we have stock of that can be swapped out in a pinch," Roy replies.

"That's really good to hear. Is Artem working with you any time adjustments need made to keep everything up to speed with changes in orders and production requirements?" I ask, thumbing through some notes from conversations I've had with Artem.

"It's been productive," Nancy answers as Roy opens then closes his mouth. "I've had to step in from time to time when they don't see eye to eye but it's been smooth," she adds.

"I am not used to some of the customer requests that we haven't done before," Roy admits, with a rare look of shame on his face.

"It's fine, as long as it all gets worked out quickly like it has been," I assure him. "Anything anybody has relating to requests? It's looking like we're running not just at our personnel capacity but our framework and production capacity on the property as well." I look around and nobody has anything to say. I nod and write down some notes.

"Can we have a weeklong vacation in February?" Bud asks. Everybody laughs but me as I look up from my notes.

"You can. I can cover anybody for a week as long as only one goes at a time," I say, looking from person to person as I say it. "I just ask that not more than one goes at a time. If more than one of you are gone at a time, it's going to be up to your own department to figure out how that role is filled."

"Seriously? I want to go to North Dakota and ice fish," Bud says with a boyish glow in his eyes.

"Yes, you can. Just let me know a couple weeks in advance of what the actual dates are and I'll take care of it," I confirm.

"So we're going to get the fuck out of town then Saturday since we have a full weekend off? I really need to get away from anything that includes people or electricity," I hear Michael spit out as soon as he enters my office.

"You know, I could really go for that. Take off midday?" I ask, imagining I'll need sleep after the first full night with Isobel in a while which I'm sure is coming Friday night.

"I say we get out of here as soon as we can," he says, sitting down and pulling his phone out.

"Alright, I have enough caffeine within reach of me most days to make pretty much anything happen," I respond. I try and make a mental note that I'm going to need to pick up more 5 hour energies before going home Friday.

"That is true," Michael says taking his pointer and middle finger on his right arm and slapping them hard against his left inner elbow several times. "Poke me with that sweet caffeine needle," he says before looking up from his phone.

“What did you have in mind?” I ask.

“I figured you just liquefied pure caffeine and shot up with that,” he says with a smile.

“No smartass, for Saturday?” I laugh.

“I heard about and looked into a suicide trail that leads the suicide way past some hidden lakes and up to a big lake I want to throw my pole into,” he says with a chuckle.

“Alright. I could go for some real danger besides just danger of maybe snapping and killing dumbass drivers,” I say thinking about a certain bald douche bag.

“He was talking shit about you the other day while you were out to lunch,” Michael blurts out while looking at his phone again. Once he finishes the sentence he looks up with the expression “did I just say that out loud?” on his face.

“Yeah. Fuck that guy,” I blurt out before skimming over new emails.

Isobel: Remember me?

James: This is James, do you have the right number?

Isobel: Very funny

James: What are you up to?

Isobel: Masturbating. Again.

James: Pics or it didn't happen.

I receive a text with a video attachment and turn my volume down most of the way before playing it. It's a front camera video of her face looking racked with pleasure. The video pans down her tank top adorned chest and reveals her being bare from midsection down. Her fingers working herself vigorously comes into view for a few seconds before the end of the video.

James: Looks like it happened.

Isobel: When will I get to replace my fingers with that distant memory of a dick of yours?

James: Actually, we've been getting closer to normal the last few days and next week's shipments look almost normal. Especially

compared to the last few months.

Isobel: Is this like last time you told me this, when I get a lot of time with you to fall in love with you then am left alone again with my fingers and toys?

James: What happened to Angela?

Isobel: I think I wore her tongue out to the point she quit calling me.

James: Damn. I promised Michael we could get the fuck out of town Saturday, by the way. So I'll be all night bam damn then thank you ma'aming out in the morning.

Isobel: You mean I get a full night with you Friday?

James: Yeah, tomorrow night.

A few moments pass and I get another attachment. I open it and she pans down from her face, down her now nude body to where 3 fingers pounding herself comes into frame. I hear her start moaning "Need to work myself up to be able to handle you again."

James: Not to sound like I've just missed your sex, but I've really missed your sex.

Descent . Setting Out

I wake up and look at the clock. Six fifteen? I look over at Isobel and see her beautiful naked abdomen slowly rising and falling. Her nipples hard and a little drool coming out of her mouth, running down her cheek. I reach over and lay my hand on her stomach. She feels quite cold. I slip out of bed and go into the closet. Since she's laying on all the blankets and sheets, I get a fresh one and go back into the bedroom. As I drape it over her, she slowly rolls back and forth as she tucks it under her, cocooning herself.

I stand for a moment and observe her cute little face. I check out the huge pile of hair draped over the pillow behind her head and onto the bed. My eyes travel over the shape of her little shoulders and curve of her waist. I take a deep breath and accept for a moment that I am overjoyed. I am surprisingly content.

I pick my cell phone off of the end table next to the bed before beginning into the kitchen. Walking into the kitchen I look out into the pool and see Bud. At first I'm startled because I really don't want to see him in only swimming trunks. Then I realize he actually has pretty toned arms, a built chest and shoulders. As he jumps forward into the water to begin swimming I see his beer belly and smile. Not because he has a beer belly but because I am entertained by my assuming he wasn't pretty well built in the chest, arms, and shoulder. I figure he should be considering he has been working Warehousing for the last twenty years or so.

I mix a 64oz cup of protein shake and blended in ice. I found a couple months into this warehouse manager gig that I do a lot better through the day if I do protein vitamin shakes in the morning. Apparently pizza and beer in the morning isn't the most beneficial mixture for alertness. I stand in the kitchen and sip the shake in the darkness. After a few minutes I feel more awake and carry the last 32 ounces or so of my shake into the computer room.

Remoting into the desktop at work I run through my email and skim through incoming and scheduled outgoing shipments for the following week. *Everything looks the same as it's been the last few weeks. Can I expect that to continue, Carnorra, or is that going to ramp up even further?*

"If anything, it's a little higher than we need. But we won't be ramping up any further from your location. Sorry for the lack of notification in the past," I hear her say comfortingly in my head. "You've done well getting all of this flowing. You picked some great people. It's

better than our most optimistic outlooks hoped for. Honestly.”

I do appreciate that. I was pretty nervous it would all fall apart at several different points.

“We know. Thanks,” I hear as the voice starts to trail off.

I space out looking down at my keyboard while my memories of how fast everything ramped up, volume wise. I think about the very few but horrible people we had to fire. I think about the relationship Michael has found himself in. They’re talking amongst themselves of getting married here in a few weeks. Michael and I even figured out a daring and exciting series of things to make it happen in quite an awesome way. I’m all for it.

Isobel and I look forward to having a crazy amount of fun having full weekends together for the next couple months. Since I’ve met her, we’ve seen so much of the area from San Francisco to Mexico over to the white sands area east of Albuquerque. We’ve seen from El Paso up to Denver and across Utah and Nevada. After Carnorra gave me the clear to leave the metro we started leaving on most Friday nights and coming back late Sunday. You can see a hell of a lot in two days if you hardcore it. Until the recent few months of horror, that is.

“Are you typing in your mind?” I hear, causing me to jump in my chair. I look over and see Isobel wearing one of my shirts, legs looking amazing.

“Yes, I’m almost done,” I say as seriously as I can before turning back to try my hardest to look at my keyboard as I was when she walked in.

“I bet,” she says with a laugh. “Are you going to drive me to work?”

“I can. Do you work tomorrow?” I ask, returning to looking at her legs.

“Yes. Here you go,” she says before turning around, lifting her shirt up to show her amazing ass. She shakes it back and forth slowly before letting the shirt fall down and walking back to the bedroom. *Fuck I love her.*

I hear the master bathroom door close as I throw open Google maps to look around and try and figure out what Michael was talking about for the suicide trail. It doesn’t take long going between googling keywords and scanning through the maps to find the Apache Trail. Looks pretty fun, actually.

James: So what time are we heading out? I've been up an hour or so.

Michael: I can take off here in a bit.

James: Cool. Apache Trail right?

Michael: Yep, looks fun doesn't it?

James: I'm down as fuck.

Michael: Alright, I'll be ready in a half hour or so.

James: Alright baby

Michael: Smoochie Boochies

It's funny when people chill with us outside of work and realize how Michael and I actually talk to each other. Isobel comes out of the bathroom dressed already and I grab my keys.

"Buying me breakfast on the way?" Isobel asks before shooting her toothy huge and beyond cute smile.

"Yeah I can," I say as we walk outside towards my jeep.

Getting back from dropping off Isobel I park my Wrangler near Michael's new Subaru and walk over to it.

James: I'm pissing on your tires.

Michael: But I don't have a Cadillac, do I?

James: Shit, good point.

Michael comes into view walking down the sidewalk and laughing, looking at his phone. I hear the doors unlock so I get into his passenger seat. I slip my phone back into my pocket and feel it vibrate.

"Hellooooooo," Michael says in a forced deeper voice as he climbs in the driver's side and puts his stuff down around places in the car.

"Some douche bag just texted me but I refuse to read it since my phone is already in my pocket," I say, assuming it was him.

"It wasn't me, I didn't respond to the good point text," Michael assures me.

"Oh, shit," I say, leaning to my right and pulling my phone out of my left front pocket. I open it up and check the text.

Michael: Dick!

“Dick,” I read aloud. I look at him and he gives me his signature ‘Ha! Fuck you!’ crazy smile before turning on his car.

“So where am I headed? I figured you would study the maps after I mentioned where-abouts I wanted to go” Michael says while heading out onto Baseline road.

“Hit highway 60, go east to exit 196 onto idapimp i mean Idaho street, turn north, it’ll have an angled turn to the right onto 88. easy peasy ” I ask, shoving the cell phone back in my pocket.

“Alright, let me get gas first,” Michael says. He drives down Baseline and pulls into the big circle k on the corner of Priest. There aren't any pumps open so he parks in front. I go in to buy a couple bags of ice as he continues searching for an open pump. On my way out I see him sitting in the passenger side. I gesture to the trunk and he reaches over to pop it. After putting the ice in the cooler then setting the resealed backs in the trunk I climb into the driver's seat.

“Surprised you’re letting me drive this already,” I say with a raised eyebrow.

“Easier than you navigating,” he says with a nerd smile and a snort.

“This is true,” I say as I turn the car on and put it in gear. “No pumps opened up?”

“No, we can just get gas somewhere on the way,” he says.

“Cool, I’ll stop somewhere between Apache Junction and the lake. I’m sure we’ll see gas stations after getting off the 60,” I say confidently.

“I’m not worried about the gas,” he says calmly. “Still have a quarter tank anyway. Plus you drive like my mom,” he says with a shit eating grin.

“Shit, motherfucker,” I say with a smile as I fire out into traffic and through the yellow light towards the I10.

“See, I would have jumped the curb and the light would have been red,” he says while chuckling a little.

“Sad thing is, I’m sure that’s true,” I say while nodding slowly. I fire through traffic onto the eastbound 60 from I10. We make observational small talk about the vehicles around us and I point out that I didn't know a water park was in mesa on the north side of the 60. After a few minutes and a couple scares passing police while doing 30 over the speed limit I pull off on exit 196. I explain to him about all the stories I've heard about racist white folks all over Apache Junction.

We decide he'll do all the talking since he's well versed in

backwoods, just in case somebody stops us. I feel worried for a moment that I won't remember the street just as I see the sign for 88. I turn onto that and head out. I keep an eye out for gas stations but don't see any as we start getting into rising and dipping roadways cutting through the desert towards mountains ahead.

"This is a paved road that goes straight there, right?" he asks with a nervous smile and raised eyebrows.

"Yeah, it's a numbered highway like the ones going north and south and those are both paved," I say without worry. "It'll be cool, man."

"Yeah like by Beaver Crossing," he says with an evil cackle.

"Shit, don't remind me of that," I say in a quiet voice, instantly feeling uncomfortable just hearing the town name. My memory drifts some years back we were driving west from Omaha and there was a pretty beautiful storm in front of us. I was excited because I had been out of town and hadn't seen any storms in a while. I had said when I got back to town I really want to experience a thunderstorm. I was saying I was going through withdrawals.

As we approached the cloud his mom texted us and asked if we were going to avoid the storm. Then my mother started texting us too. They were talking about how softball sized hail was south of page heading north, northeast. Well, that was right before us. So I told him to take off the road and head north. It was too far south and moving too close to us to go straight through or try cutting back to the south. Backtracking wasn't an option for us.

We got off on the first exit that came up as we were staring clouds with green bottoms at us in the face. It started raining pretty heavily and I advised him to speed up and head as far north as we could get. We passed an intersection as hail began. The next intersection he turned to the east and tried to find shelter under a tree. A truck with a trailer was also there.

I told him it's probably not a good idea to sit under a tree in a hail storm and with the winds picking up like they were. Adding tree branches to the equation with hail didn't sound good to me. Plus the further north we got the more we should have been able to escape the hail. He pulled back onto the street and went northbound as the hail hits were sounding more and more severe.

He looked over and saw the truck off the side of a barn under a much bigger, sturdier looking tree and pulled into the property. There were various structures and a house on the property. He tried to hug up against

the barn which revealed itself as a pole shed once we approached it. An old gentleman stepped out to see what we were doing.

I remember getting out of the car and asking if it was okay we stayed on his property while the storm passed. He said it would be fine. Michael got out of the car and came over to us. We were talking about the storm and the older gentleman was telling us he wanted to go see his wife in a nearby county once the storm subsided. Eventually the hail gave way a moment and he moved his truck out of the pole shed and instructed Michael to park in it.

“Oooo, a lake,” Michael says, pulling me out of my memories for a moment.

“Oh, yeah by the way man, there's a series of lakes along this river stream thing because there are a couple dams up here,” I explain.

“Are they god dams?” he asks as we both laugh.

“Big damn god dams,” I respond as I drift back into memories.

While we were taking cover in the older gentleman's pole shed, Michael and I observed a few storage racks full of posts and lumber. I mentioned to Michael that I was uncomfortable being around a bunch of potential missiles and a combine behind us. He agreed but it felt safer than sitting out in his car while golf ball sized hail beat the shit out of it.

About that time as the wind died down, Michael pointed at the small wind vane that stopped spinning, flipped the opposite direction as the wind started blowing again. Michael and the older gentleman looked at each other with interest. I was fully freaking out internally and didn't want to acknowledge what we all just saw.

The older gentleman told us he didn't care much for that truck and he wanted Michael's new Subaru to be safe. Once the storm calmed down he wished us well and said we could take shelter as long as we felt we needed. After he left I got reception on my phone and mom called me. She asked me if we were alright because tornadoes were spotted all over and had done a massive amount of damage to Beaver Crossing. I gave her my GPS coordinates and she started freaking out. Apparently we were just one interstate exit away from where the town got hit and tornadoes were in the neighborhood we were in.

I told her about the wind change and that everything looked to be west of us now but for some light rain. It felt like hours before we were back on the interstate and heading west toward our destination. We saw a lot of downed trees and flipped cars along the first legs of our exit from where we were.

“Check this place out,” I say, feeling like I'm coming back to reality as I notice the old west looking buildings down in the valley lining the right side of the street. We both scan the people coming and going.

“I would do the talking if we stopped here,” Michael says, nodding and smiling.

“You're god damn right you would,” I say with an uncomfortable laugh. I don't do good around redneck looking folks. And that's pretty much all we identify here.

I look down at the gas gauge and see it's at about an eighth of a tank. I look at Michael and see he's taking a peek too, as we are approaching a cut off where the concrete turns to dirt.

“Did you see anything that looked like civilization up ahead on the maps?” Michael asks, sounding slightly concerned.

“I recall there being a boat dock or something about half way between this group of yeehaw, and the dam,” I answer.

“Alright fuck it, there was nothing for a long way behind us anyway,” Michael thinks aloud.

Descent . Apache Trail

Moments after we finish staring at the folks outside the old west looking buildings I continue down the road to where it turns to dirt.

“Yeah, looks paved all the way,” Michael says sarcastically.

“I noticed, sorry man,” I say with an uncomfortable smile.

“No problem, just be careful,” he asks in a fatherly tone as he pats the dashboard lovingly.

I continue forward onto the gravel from the pavement and the car shakes harshly at the same time we hear a loud thunk.

“Oh my poor sweet baby,” he says excited with a laugh as he pats his dashboard with both hands.

“Fuck man, that didn't look like a pot hole or drop off or anything,” I say, slowing down to about ten miles an hour and proceeding carefully.

“It's okay, it looked flat to me too,” Michael says while patting his dashboard a few more times. He settles back in his seat and checks his seatbelt. I drive carefully down what is now very clearly a two lane gravel road. In some spots it rides like a dirt road with very little gravel at all.

“This was unexpected,” I state while maintaining a slow 10 miles an hour. Up ahead I see dust. A white truck with dual rear wheels rolls through doing about 40 miles an hour.

“So, the locals aren't nervous at least,” Michael observes.

“That seems to be,” I say as I ease up to a smooth 20 miles an hour. The road rises and as I gain a bit of altitude the road turns to the left. A sign says “one lane road ahead.” We travel onward and the road narrows to one lane as the sign says, then back out to two lanes. This continues a couple more times as Michael and I look at each other for a moment before back out to the road.

“You're nervous though,” Michael says, looking at my hands on the steering wheel.

“I am a little,” I admit, though I feel mostly comfortable. We approach another one lane road ahead sign as I slow down to about 15 miles an hour. The lanes narrow to one lane as we start zigging and zagging around mountainsides more. The one lane narrows down to a very fine line on the map on my phone.

“Did you look very closely at this?” Michael asks, looking at the map on the phone I'm using for GPS.

“No not really, I saw the zig zags but it looked like all the other ones that were two lanes and paved,” I admit, now feeling very nervous

indeed.

“Oh shit,” Michael says as we approach a sharp curve that looks like a cliff drop if we go forward and totally blind otherwise. I honk the horn twice, taking the curve to the right at five miles an hour. I roll down the windows so I can hear if anybody else is coming or honking back.

“Ok Now I'm really nervous,” I admit while continuing at about five to ten miles an hour. The road is now mostly about two feet wider than the car. The majority of the time on one side is a cliff wall and the other is a steep drop off. More often than not there is not even a guard wire strung between posts. Just a steep drop off.

“Holy shit we're going to die,” Michael says before laughing.

“No no, this is fine,” I say feeling like I just told a lie. We approach a utility truck of some sort off to the side on a section of the road which is wider. I carefully navigate between the truck and the wall. We wave to each other as I carefully pass.

“If somebody comes flying through we're fucked,” Michael says.

“Hopefully we just don't see anybody else,” I say while glancing down at the gas gauge which is now slipping under an eighth of a tank.

“Plus, gas,” Michael says making a gesture towards the gauge I keep looking at.

“Yeah, we've gone too far to turn around and get to the closest one I know of back there,” I admit sounding more scared than I want to hear myself.

“I thought about that as soon as we hit the invisible wall after the old west buildings,” Michael admits.

“Well, this was mentioned as being a death trail or whatever, right?” I say uncomfortably.

“Yeah but it is funnier when we're not on it hoping somebody doesn't speed by and knock us off to our death,” Michael says just under normal speaking voice as to keep anyone else from hearing and getting ideas.

A never ending series of blind turns and Cliffside drop-offs proceed to add terror to the otherwise amazing views of rocky valleys and beautiful Cliffside bodies of water visible off below to the side of us. Once every few dozen turns we pass somebody sitting off to the side. One was a utility seeming to be looking over a wire I didn't notice had been run over the rocks here and across the water down the way.

Another person we passed looked like an older man who had been hiking around with his camera, now reading a book in his car with his gear strewn about his back seat. At one point we pulled aside in a wider part of the thin lane to allow an F350 sized ford pulling a boat to go by.

“Jesus Christ that guy has balls,” I say, observing how close he cuts the turns and how near to us he came as he flew by about three times faster than we’ve been driving out here at any point.

“He probably does this every week though,” Michael observes as he watches the truck swing around a blind turn not far behind us.

“I don’t think I would ever get that comfortable considering how far the drop is next to us,” I say, glancing over at the cliff drop just beyond where the truck had flown by us.

“I don’t think I would either actually,” Michael agrees.

After several minutes we see a fork in the road and a sign reading Marina, pointing to the left. I turn that way and proceed.

“Let’s hope there is gas there,” Michael says.

“That is what I’m thinking, you would think there would have to be,” I say as I glance down and see we’re to about 1/16th of a tank now.

We arrive down at the Marina and realize it looks pretty empty. We drive around and find a sign that says fuel. It is just outside a trailer. All we can see for pumps is a hand pump attached to what looks like a propane tank just away from the back of the trailer. I park and go up to the door of the trailer and find the office, or whatever it is, is closed.

“Fuck,” I say as I walk by the car to go check around the building to see what I can see. I find nothing and make my way back to the car, climbing in the driver side.

“Nothing?” Michael asks, sounding a little annoyed.

“Nothing. Should have gotten gas at one of the other nearby stations by home,” I think out loud, disappointed in myself.

“What about over there?” Michael asks, gesturing to a fenced in area down the way. I put the car back in drive and we go to investigate.

All we find is a few dumpsters behind privacy fence and nothing more. We drive down by where the boats go out onto the water and find nobody and no signs of other fuel sources. I drive back up to the trailer and right to the propane looking pump.

“That’s an oil fuel mixture for boats,” Michael says while pointing to a chemical number and sign group off the side of the pump.

“Fuck,” I say. We look at each other, then at the fuel gage.

“Well, we better keep going and hope we find something near the dam,” Michael says.

We pull out and follow the exit road down past the ramps into the water again. I glance out over the beautiful blue water at the tall smooth brownish orange rock cliffs across the way. I slowly come to a stop and turn the car off. Michael looks at me and I gesture for him to wait a moment as I climb out of the car and walk closer to the water.

I think I just changed the location of the wedding for Michael. I pull my phone out and take various pictures around the water. I start daydreaming for a moment about the possibility of making a big floating platform out on the water and doing the wedding there. Images go through my head regarding helicopter entrance and exits, or a speed boat entrance and helicopter exit for the bride and or bride and groom.

“What are you doing?” Michael asks through the open windows, sitting in the car.

“Come out here,” I request, gesturing with my hand. Michael gets out of his car and walks over to me.

“You know it spends more fuel to start a car than to idle for a minute right?” he asks.

“I know I’m sorry, look though,” I say, pointing out at the water.

“Water, right?” he asks sarcastically. We both laugh and I shake my head at him.

“Yes but, what if we built a floating platform out there and had your wedding there?” I ask, hoping he doesn’t think the idea is as crazy as I realize it sounds saying it out loud.

“Hmm,” he says, looking over the water and back at the marina. I see him analyzing the ramps and back out to the water. “Could work, actually.”

“Right? I was thinking have everybody gather out there and have her come out on a speedboat from off that way,” I say gesturing up stream. “Then you guys leave after the ceremony on a platform taken away by a helicopter over the mountains to the hotel room back over in Mesa or wherever.”

Michael stands there looking out at the water lost in thought for several seconds. “Heh,” he blurts out, breaking the silence. “That’s probably the best idea you’ve ever had.”

“Right!” I agree, not taking offense but laughing about how happy I am to have pulled this out of my ass while glancing out here in the middle of being scared about gas. *Fuck, that’s right. Gas.* I turn slowly and walk back to the car. After getting in and sitting for a moment, Michael stops staring out over the water and comes over into the passenger seat. I look over at him and nod as I start the car and head back out.

We continue quietly towards the dam. The roads from the fork to

the dam are a little wider, up to actually being two lanes in parts. It makes the drive a little less stressful now that we're worried about the gas as well. Then the gas light turns on.

"Fuck, man," I say nodding towards the light on the dash.

"I see that, but I don't think there is much more to the dam if I'm looking at this map right," he says flipping around on his phone.

"I hope not. Do you know how long your car goes on the gas light?" I ask getting nervous again.

"I don't. But I think most get forty miles or so once the light turns on and I would be surprised if we can't find one within even twenty miles of the dam," he assures me. He fiddles with his phone some more then says "Alright, turn right just past the dam and there should be a gas station on the far side of the lake."

"Ok, schweet," I say, using an alternate version of sweet, hoping we make it. Suddenly the road turns to pavement as we get within sight of the top of the dam.

"Is this a god dam?" Michael says, causing both of us to start laughing.

"Fuck, that movie never gets old," I say with a sigh. At the stop sign I turn right onto what looks like a highway. I see the gas station off the side of the highway and lake quite a bit ahead.

"Worst case either of us could make that walk without trouble," Michael says pointing out the gas station now being in sight.

"I didn't think of that but I'm just glad to see one with my eyes," I state while my nerves start loosening up again.

Descent . Standard Edition

“Did you guys have fun?” Isobel asks me as I make my shake for the day, standing in the kitchen shortly after I had climbed out of bed.

“Yeah we did. I’m running late though, I have to chug this shit and shower quick,” I say in what I think are English words. I lift my head up and look at her, hoping she looks like she understood a word I said.

“It’s fine,” she says with a smile. She walks over and kisses me on the cheek. I catch a glance down her tank top as she leans forward, chest popping out of her red and white silk robe for a moment.

“I’d rather stay with you though,” I say, looking from her inviting cleavage up at her cute little face.

“I would too but I have to go work a double today,” she sighs.

“Damn,” I say as I shake my head. I start chugging my completed shake. Once I finish I notice she’s in the dining room sitting down in front of a half-eaten bowl of cereal.

“Shit’s about to get crazy,” Bud says, putting heavy emphasis on crazy. I ignore him and keep walking by to do my morning run through the warehouse to look at all the things I compulsively make sure are on the up and up every morning.

“I don’t think so, I really don’t think so,” Chris says. “It’s just media bullshit. They always make things sound scarier than they are.”

“Bullshit,” is the last thing I hear Bud say as I exit earshot. I pay no attention to whatever they’re talking about as I pull my phone out to take a picture of a pallet in the racks almost diagonally. *Fucking Christ guys, I know ya’all put shit up in a hurry but this is retarded.* I take a couple pictures and resume my walk.

James: Are you in your office?

Destiny: Yeah.

James: Do you have a few?

Destiny: Yeah.

I go into the shipping offices and head upstairs. I walk into my office and grab a bottle of water out of the fridge. I open it and start

drinking it as I walk over into Destiny's office. The door is mostly closed but since it is cracked I open it and enter anyway.

"Oh, hey," Destiny says sitting up straight in her chair. She adjusts her hair and fiddles with some papers on the desk which she doesn't appear to even recognize.

"Uhh, I can come back if you want?" I ask, feeling like I am interrupting something.

"No, it's fine, what do you need?" she asks, sounding flustered.

"Do you have somebody under the desk?" I ask with a sarcastic, playful tone.

"Oh, I wish," she says with a wanting sigh.

"Oh? Wait, before we go back to that, I need to show you this," I assert as I swipe through my phone to pull up the photo of the diagonal pallets. I hand her the phone and gesture it's okay for her to look. "Have you noticed this going on much lately?"

"Yes," she says slightly out of breath. She takes a couple deep breaths and continues "I've talked to Bud and Michael about that in the last couple work days."

"You sure you're alright?" I ask, now more interested in what she was doing just before I walked in. I notice her white blouse is a little sweaty. Her chest is glistening with beads of sweat and I see her skirt is a little disheveled.

"Yes, I just have had a long few weeks and could use a break," she says in a cute softer than usual voice.

"Hopefully you figure out a way, let me know if I can do anything for you. Let me know if you see pallets like that again okay? Text me the location and I'll go right to it," I say. *Was she rubbing one out? Intef?*

"Yes," he responds dryly and immediately.

"Thank you," Destiny responds. She smiles warmly at me as she turns to her computer and turns the screen on. I nod and turn to the door to leave.

"She has a toy in right now," Intef adds. I stop in my tracks and turn back around.

"What sort of break do you need, anyway? I can easily make a week of vacation appear for you," I offer warmly.

"Oh, not that kind of break," she responds sheepishly. "Forget I said anything."

I smile at her and raise an eyebrow. "Do you," I begin before pausing a few seconds. "Need a kit kat bar?" I finish with a huge grin.

"Well, something like that," she says before reaching over to shut her screen off again. "Do you really want to know?"

"Something has you worked up and I love to help where I can," I say, unable to stop my eyes from scanning down her less glistening body.

"A moment of discretion?" she asks.

"Everything is discreet with me," I say confidently. "You should have picked up on that by now," I add with a warm smile.

She stands up from her desk and straightens out her skirt. She nods and walks around me to the door. She slowly reaches up, as if thinking through things to herself, and locks it. She slowly turns around and says "Just in case anybody comes in and overhears me. This is hard to talk about."

"Alright, go ahead and take your time," I say while taking a seat in the chair in front of her desk.

"So, the last couple months," she begins, stopping just in front of me and sitting back against the edge of the desk. "I have had to get used to abruptly going from passion between my husband and I every day, to once a month. And instead of him usually starting it, I had to. Not only that, but he hasn't been into it at all."

"What? Why do you think that is?" I ask, immediately assuming he's been having sex with someone else and isn't interested in or doesn't have energy for her anymore.

"I don't know. I just know I've ended up picking up a new toy to try and fill that hole in my life every couple weeks," she explains solemnly. She caulks her head as she notices me smirking. "Fill that hole, yeah unintentional pun."

"I'm sorry, my brain is evil," I admit shaking my head at my reaction.

"Anyway, so I've been trying to cope with that," she concludes.

"Well, again if there's anything I can do for you let me know," I say in as much of a bluff as anything ever was. Without a word she leans forward and starts kissing me. I stand up not sure whether to do this right here or suggest a different time and place.

"She isn't ovulating and I'll tell you if anybody even considers going to her office," I hear Intef say in my head.

"I have an idea," Destiny says lifting her right leg up to rub the inside of it against my left side. I put my hand just up her skirt on her right thigh and look into her eyes. *God dammit Intef you're not making this decision easier.*

"You made the decision as soon as you thought she might have been masturbating," I hear Intef say confidently.

"I think I can help with that," I say quietly, leaning forward and kissing Destiny's chest.

"I'm a long way past foreplay," she says in a gasp, turning her back to me and leaning forward over her desk. She reaches back and lifts her skirt up over her ass and slowly pulls out a vibrator she had inserted into her to the base. She carefully puts it on the side of her desk and bumps her ass backwards into me.

"Jesus Christ," I mumble, looking at her tan line free ass.

"What?" she gasps, sounding worried.

"No, it's just that I didn't expect someone as tanned as you to not have any tanlines at all," I say in as much English as I can muster. Her legs spread a little, not that she needed to with how wide her gap is naturally. Her elbows position on the desk in front of her and her back arches.

"Do you need help to get started?" she asks sounding a little bothered that I'm not already balls deep inside her.

"No, just trying to wrap my head around the view," I say as she bumps her ass back into me again. This time, it bumps into a full erection through the cloth in my pants. Within what feels to be the blink of an eye my pants and boxers are on the floor and I'm rubbing the head of my dick up and down her fully flowered labia.

I hear her say something in words I don't think I could make out if I played back a recording a thousand times. The moisture already built up on and inside her causes so much lubrication I slip inside her before I intend to. No sooner does this happen than she pushes backwards, forcing herself around me down to my pelvis.

"Jesus," I say, noting how bony her ass feels hitting me. She shivers a little and slowly slides forward most of the way off me. I run both hands up her skirt and grip her by the waist and start fucking her hard and fast. I feel her pussy gripping me in hard and fast pulsations. "Jesus," I

repeat as it feels like her clit is puffing out even further each time my balls slap it.

“Oh god,” she mumbles in barely audible or understandable words. I feel liquid running down my thighs and hurry to get my feet out of my pants so I can push them out of the way. I look down and realize cum is about to get on the carpet. But I don’t stop. In fact, I grip harder and fuck harder.

As her pussy throbs and grips me harder and more frequently, her legs start to wobble. I lift her up a bit so her legs come out from under her and push her torso flat against the desk. I think for a moment, trying to remember how sturdy her type of desk is but luckily it holds up as her knees spread and knock against the desk. I keep fucking her as I hear plastic break. I look up from her almost too skinny ass and waist and see she has broken a plastic pen in her mouth. As I notice she spits the pieces out and replaces it with a bigger and less likely to break sharpie and bites down hard.

I feel her pulsations slowing as I myself decide to start slowing. Once she tapers to the end of her orgasm I slowly start pulling out almost entirely before pushing all the way back in to the base. She shivers every so often I do this favorite old move, until I finally pull out all the way.

“Didn’t you?” she asks, looking back at me. Seeing her legs still spread and laying forward on her desk like she is, looking back at me with those desperate eyes, I add feeling like I could possibly get off soon to my already having a rock hard erection.

“No, Not sure I was even close,” I answer slipping my hands down to squeeze her tiny little ass. I look down again and notice it looks like she has a sweet, well-formed ass, even though the legs and thighs just look too skinny for my tastes.

“Use my ass if you want, it’s only fair you get off too,” she says. I look down at her ass and it looks a little brown and used. Not like there is shit on it but as if it’s seen a few days in the sun. She leans her head forward and holds the sharpie in her left hand as I rub the head of my cock against her pussy one more time. I feel it’s still drenched so I slip it back in her. “Want me to do the work?” she asks again as she whips her head back to look at me again.

Without a word I sit back in the chair I had been in, figuring maybe her legs are starting to get sore holding the position she was in. Without

a word she slips her clothes off and tosses them over onto my pants . I pull my shirt off and toss it over onto the rest. She looks down at my shoulders and lets out a small moan as she climbs onto my lap in the chair. I look at her shoulders and arms which, unclothed, look as almost scrawny as her legs and waist. I look down and realize her breasts, though very tear drop shaped, are still strangely big for her body with perfectly portioned nipples. As my eyes make it to her sexy, six pack, I feel her lowering herself around me. I fall to tunnel vision on her six pack, as it is on the level of either other Isobel.

“Damn,” I gasp, as her sexy stomach goes out of sight behind her breasts as she throws her arms around me and starts grinding me into her abdomen hard and fast. It feels like skilled hands start massaging and squeezing my dick as she rides up and down while grinding in circular as well as sometimes forward and backward gyrations.

Before I know it I can feel my balls filling up. Then I make eye contact with her and see how eager she is to finish me off, smirk and all. “I’m about to blow, however you want to,” I start to say. Interrupting me she climbs off quick and hits her knees. Her mouth covers the head, then half of the shaft of my dick. Her hands interlock around the base of the shaft and with somehow more pleasurable precision than her internal muscles were just massaging it, tops off the tanks in my testes.

My head leans back in the chair as I empty with gush after gush into her mouth. I grip the sides of the chair feeling as if I might fly right out of my chair and through the window out into the parking lot below. I grit my teeth so hard I feel like I’m going to crack them out of my mouth. I start to relax as I notice my orgasm is subsiding and her grip has loosened, lips and tongue traveling up and down the majority of my now less rigid erection.

“Worth it,” she says with a smile, standing up and walking over towards the clothes pile. *I look at her naked body as it stands from behind and realize, though looking crazy skinny, to the scrawny, almost sickly levels in the heat of the moment, when standing up and relaxed she just looks slender and smooth as hell. And fucking tall. Maybe that’s the post orgasm bliss glossing things over.*

“So you’re feeling better?” I ask, hoping it’s a positive answer.

“Toys can’t make me feel like this. I’m good for a while,” she says in a soft, kind voice.

“Good,” I say feeling satisfied I helped.

James: Remember Destiny? The new safety chick?

Isobel: Yes. Finally get some of that?

James: Did I sound like I wanted to that badly when we talked about her?

Isobel: You really did. I think you spaced out picturing some of the stuff she’s worn in the middle of the conversation.

James: Oh I believe that. Yeah, quickie in her office a little while ago.

Isobel: Don’t tell Angela. She still expects a weekend out of us. I think she would be whining if she heard somebody else got some before she did. She expected to ‘unwind’ with the both of us that weekend.

James: How many times did she mention the word unwind before I had to go?

Isobel: I don’t know. Several in text and several more in person while her and I were discussing what we were all down for.

James: Damn. Well, going to finish up and come home.

Isobel: Alright! I should be getting home about 6pm and I’m bringing home Church’s Chicken because I’m craving it. So you can plan to eat that with me or do whatever.

“James, he’s being an ass hole again,” I hear Chris say in almost an entire sigh over the walkie.

“Alright, be down in a second,” I say. I lean forward as much as I can and take a deep whiff, hoping sex isn’t easily smelled on me. It seems pretty clear but I grab a couple paper towels and wet them in the sink, wiping up as much as I can in another quick pass before heading down.

“Oh, called down your heathen leader again to help?” Joshua says in a rude, snarky tone to Chris.

“Thanks,” I say nodding to Chris. “Outside,” I say to Joshua, raising my hand to point to the door. When my hand goes up he jumps, then regains composure.

“Why do I need to go outside?” Joshua asks.

“Josh we’re going to fucking go outside now,” I say, starting to walk to the door.

“Joshua,” he says, standing in place.

I whip around and quickly approach him. “I’m going to fucking call you sparkles from now on if you refuse to stop being an asshole to me and my workers and follow me outside, getting out of the space of my guys,” I yell, finger ever closer to his nose as I finish the sentence.

Without a word Joshua follows me outside. I keep walking down the ramp to the fronts of the trucks and walk all the way to his. I stand by the door and point up at it.

“What?” he says, arms up in the air as if he thinks he’s going to start being threatening.

“Get in your fucking truck. I’ll stand with you until they come out with the finished paperwork,” I demand. I stand pointing up at his truck until he carefully climbs up into it. He leaves his door open and leans out, head calked as if he’s waiting for me to say more.

“Anything else, fuhrer?” he asks snidely.

“No, as long as you’re not making my guys uncomfortable, angry, or both,” I say.

“I never mean to. I just comment on what Hannity has said lately,” he states, now calm.

“What has he been talking about today? Dare I ask?” I hear myself say. As soon as the sentences complete I feel irritated because I really don’t want to know.

“He was talking about how life will be once the entitlements are removed. We’re going to get rid of them when the administration switches over after this war is over,” he states confidently.

“War? Nevermind, I don’t care. I thought you said a thousand times you were Christian?” I ask, confused about why people would want to end all the safety net programs while also claiming to be a good Christian.

“My faith has nothing to do with my wallet,” he says sounding a little defensive.

“Oh, you don’t bother with the collection plate?” I ask, feeling a little surprised.

“I give my tithe, but they don’t force me to give it,” he states as a matter-of-factly.

“So what do you think people who can’t afford food or health insurance or any of that are supposed to do? Just die in the streets or what?” I ask, partially curious and partially mocking him.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” he begins. “Nobody wants people to die in the streets. My church, every church I know of has soup kitchens and helps support half way houses and homeless shelters.”

“What about people who don’t believe? Or believe in gods that would keep them from getting helped if those helping found out they were, say, Muslims?” I ask.

“I don’t concern myself with Muslims,” he states in what sounds like an unintended knee jerk reaction.

“Sounds pretty Christian of you,” I say very intentionally.

“Do you like paying half of your paychecks to people who refuse to work?” he asks, looking confident that he is making a great point.

“I don’t, so I don’t worry about it,” I snap back quickly.

“What do you mean? You don’t pay taxes?” he asks, slightly confused.

“Oh I pay my taxes. I just understand the majority of it goes to wars and corporate subsidies. Very little of our taxes goes to low income welfare, and less than half of that at any given time goes to people who just don’t want to work,” I say calmly while observing his reactions. He gets slightly more irritated with every few words that come out of my mouth.

“You made that up,” he says in a statement that almost sounded to be the tone of a question.

“I did not. I actually looked into this subject one of the six other times you were in the warehouse loudly whining about paying for lazy people. Turns out a little less than half at any given time are abusing the system. But over decades, it’s down to about a fifth because the rest use it and get off while that fifth rides it for as long as they possibly can,” I explain.

“A fifth,” he laughs, dismissively. “A fifth of vodka for each lazy leech on the system,” he remarks feeling confident.

“So where do you get your information? Have you spent time going through figures relating to the budget and usage data?” I query.

"I listen to the news, the people who can be trusted," he responds, crossing his arms and sitting up straight while keeping eye contact, looking down at me.

"So you haven't actually looked at the hard numbers?" I ask, a little surprised he tries to assert himself so factually without having actually looked at the data.

"You can't trust the padded numbers of the government," he says in a 'you don't know what you're talking about' tone.

"Oh, but talking heads on radio stations and a cable station that are regularly destroyed by fact checking are totally reliable, huh?" I ask.

"More trustworthy than our communist president," he asserts.

"Right," I say, unwilling to waste many more words on somebody so painfully detached from reality.

"I just pray to god next election we bring the bible back into the white house," he mumbles as he fidgets in his cab.

"Yeah, need to keep forcing that religion into the country," I say loudly, getting annoyed at the conversation as a whole and wanting to get back inside. "Paperwork about done?" I bark into the walkie, hoping they come out to give it to him soon. *They quit loading the truck a few minutes ago, shit should be done soon.*

"Yes, replacing the printer toner right now," Chris says sheepishly over the walkie. *Oh for fuck sakes, the toner is fucking up again?*

"Feel free to print it off again to the office printer, or my office, anywhere you can get it done," I bark into the walkie.

"Want me out of here that badly, huh?" he asks with a shit eating grin on his face.

"I never wanted you to come back but your boss said he didn't have anybody else to send at the times we need your shipping company. And my boss told me we can't drop you guys because of some contract," I respond.

"Wow," he blurts out, shaking his head and pushing a forced smile.

"Yeah, I went up both chains," I said loudly. "Every time you come here you manage to piss one or more people off. I'd rather just never see you again, as would the majority of my staff."

"You are the only one I have a problem with, your staff is always pretty professional with me," he states, seeming to fully believe it.

“Yeah? You think so? Is that why the moment you start talking to any of my guys or are seen approaching they immediately call me down? It isn’t because I like you,” I begin. Joshua starts opening his mouth but I push forward. “I don’t just force these little meetings because I enjoy taking shit out on you. I do it so I don’t have to hear my employees whine or vent their anger and frustration about your racist, homophobic, rude bullshit on a near daily basis. I would rather absorb it myself and drink it off later.”

“Racist? What the fuck do you mean racist?” he yells.

“Brown? Martin? OJ? That dude at the Mesa gas station you were cheering on getting beat down?” I blurt out, trying to stop myself before I go on and on.

“Oh, you mean those little thugs who got what they deserved?” he responds now showing amusement and contempt.

“Yeah, that’s another thing. Your little alternate reality news fans don’t seem to understand the entire world knows exactly what thugs means in your usage,” I add.

“Thugs just means thugs. Little gang banger criminals,” Joshua says with a smug assurance.

“No it means Nigger, you know it, I know it, everybody outside of your little pocket of super clever insanity knows it,” I state sternly.

“You have problems,” he says dismissively.

“Yeah? If I’m so wrong, name one white thug,” I dare him.

“Eminem,” he says, not seeming very sure of himself.

“Oh, a white rapper. That’s clever. How about in the same black criminal context you’ve been using it the last six hundred times I’ve heard about it from you,” I beckon. “Take all the time you need.”

He looks at me as if he’s about to speak, but does not for several seconds. Chris comes up and hands me the papers and abruptly turns to walk away.

“Do I really bother you guys?” Joshua yells to Chris. Chris ignores him and keeps walking. “Chris, man! I’m asking you!” Chris keeps walking and doesn’t look back once.

“You really fucking bother all of us. I’m still waiting for the name of a white thug in the same context,” I repeat.

“Have a nice day,” he says starting to shut his door.

“Just a bunch of niggers coming to mind, huh Josh?” I yell plenty loud enough for him to hear.

“Joshua,” he yells through the closed window. He flips me off as he starts gnashing the gas pedal into the ground, racing forward faster and faster as momentum builds.

“Way to fail every single time you open your mouth,” I shout at the top of my lungs. My heart is racing so hard I contemplate running alongside, shouting more at him.

Descent . Acceptance

I wake up and the first thing I picture is that mother fucker Joshua's face. I feel my heart rate increase instantly. I feel the weight lifting as the adrenaline flows through me. I sit up and look around, seeing no Isobel. I feel disappointed for a second until I remember she had to go to work early this-morning.

I go take a shower and all I can hear in my head the entire time is "I'm not a fucking Nazi. You're the bald hateful son of a bitch who'd be absolutely fine with millions dying if they're 'too lazy to get off their asses and get jobs' or 'won't take help from the church.' You're the one who throws around horrible labels that aren't even close to accurate." Every few words, though, "I'm not a fucking Nazi" repeats.

Once to work I do my usual routine of emails, scouring spreadsheets and walking around the warehouse. On my way back through the shipping area I don't realize my hands are in my pockets and I'm mainly spacing off at the floor in front of me.

"Find any cracks?" Bud asks in a whisper as he leans towards me.

"What?" I ask, stopping and standing up straight, removing hands from pockets.

"What is fucking with you?" he asks quietly, standing close to me. I jerk my head slightly towards the break room and begin walking. He follows me.

"I'm still pissed off about Joshua," I admit.

"You know that was three days ago, right?" Bud says in a rare concerned tone.

"I know, but I'm still angry enough that I'd love to fucking stab him right in the throat," I admit.

"Do it," I hear Carnorra say.

"I agree," I hear Intef add.

"What the fuck," I mumble under my breath, rubbing my forehead.

"It's alright," Bud says, patting me on my shoulder. "Get your shit taken care of." He nods and I see his back stiffen up a little more, like he normally is, before he exits back to the shipping floor.

I've never killed anyone before.

"I know you haven't. You can do it without consequences now, though. You believe he deserves it. We know he deserves it," I hear Intef explain.

What do you mean you know he deserves it?

"He's beaten and raped enough people in his life, his soul would

be captured and tortured forever anyway," I hear Carnorra inject.

"That's correct," I hear Intef agree.

Let me think about it.

"Think about it all you need. When you're ready, I'll tell you when and how," I hear Intef explain.

Alright

Isobel: I'm working a double. Want me to come shower at your place? I won't get off until 11 or 12.

James: Yes. I'm sure I'll want you there.

Isobel: Is there a doubt?

James: No, no. Just the usual tension and stress.

Isobel: Good. See you tonight.

Yeah, fuck it. Is there time tonight? I wait several seconds. *Intef?*

"Yes. Sorry. I was not focused at the time," I hear Intef respond.

I'm down. We're done here and I'm about to leave. Should I go home or drive somewhere else or what?

"Go home. Get ready. Get your gun and a few clips. I can provide tranquilizer ammo if you want," I hear Intef say.

Alright. I would like a clip of those. You know my gun type.

"I do. I won't be going with you so come to my office before you leave," I hear him say.

Will do. I'm actually more excited than I am scared or concerned I will back out. I've been deeply frustrated with Joshua for a long time. I've tolerated him, though, because we profit from his will-call pickups. We actually profit quite a bit. He runs a lot of product from our warehouse to his company. That's no excuse for him to feel free to throw around horrible insults, though.

I keep thinking along these lines repetitively until I find myself sitting on my couch at home. I realize for a moment I have no memory of driving home, much less walking inside. I sit gently tapping the barrel of my 9mm against my knee. I keep doing this for what feels like a few minutes.

"Alejo is pulling into your complex. He will be waiting in a van near your car. He will have your instructions," I hear Intef inform me.

I take a deep breath and stand up, putting my gun in the holster

on my side. I slip the clips into the clip holders along the belt holding my holster. I snap the cover over the section of the handle that keeps it more secure from anyone who might run up and try to grab it easily.

I step out of my apartment and confidently walk to my jeep. Alejo is standing next to my jeep as I approach.

“Here you go,” he says, handing me a cell phone. “This is a map of where he’s going to be and there are marks where he will be out of sight of all cameras to pick him up. You’ll be driving the van so any blood will be on or near the van and not your car. Once it’s done I’ll drive the van to be taken care of and you can leave in your car.”

“Alright,” I say, more calmly and straight faced than I expected I would be. I climb in the van and watch how carefully Alejo gets into my jeep. He looks at me and nods. I instinctively take the back off my personal phone and pull the battery out. I return the back to the phone and place the battery in my left back pocket. I then place my phone in the front left pocket it’s usually in.

I turn the key and the van starts up with no issues. I monitor it as I pull through the parking lot. I wait for a big enough clearing on Baseline to pull out with a bit of speed. It accelerates faster than I would have guessed a van that looks like a cheap Volvo package delivery van would normally accelerate.

I look at the phone Alejo handed me and realize I’m going the wrong way. I pull a U-Turn in the middle. Passing the exit to the apartments I see Alejo in my jeep, waiting for me to pass. Once I pass he pulls out behind me and I continue down the path on the GPS. I get off of the 60 at the same exit I took going with Michael to the Apache Trail. The nerves from that memory rise but fall quickly once I see the turn off from where I drove before. I turn on to a long winding road between Filly’s Roadhouse and Lost Dutchman Blvd. I get to the first dot for the day and pull over on the outer side of the road’s turn and park.

“At seven ten, turn on your emergency lights and stand in the middle of the road At seven twelve, pop the flare. He cuts through here quickly and will need to see you from a hundred feet or so to slow down enough to keep from hitting you,” I hear Intef say.

Alright.

“If he doesn’t come this way, go to spot two and wait for seven thirty,” I hear Intef add. I sit patiently and feel rage rise in me through the calmness. The facial expression Joshua had the moment he realized I told Chris that he was listening to ‘Hate Radio’ comes to mind. I feel my

muscles tense up. I observe my heart rate increasing. I find myself breathing more heavily.

I space off at the phone Alejo gave me until I snap out of it when the time hits ten after seven. I turn the emergency lights on and take note of some leather gloves in the plastic tray under the center console. I instinctively slip those on before getting out of the van. I walk to the back of the van and open the two doors that open from center. Opening them I look around and find a tool box on the left. I look inside it and find a bunch of emergency supplies. Among those supplies are three flares.

I take all three flares and close the van's rear doors. I see the light of a car illuminating the top of cacti and bushes off in the distance. The vehicle is coming from the direction Joshua should be coming from. I pop one flare and try to toss to the ground. It lands on the edge of the road to the left of me. I pop the second flare and toss it a bit ahead of me so it's roughly in line with the right side of the van.

Walking out to the center of the road just before the curve I pop the third flare in my right hand. I wave it around above and in front of me. As is usual in Arizona, there is no wind. No breeze at all. So all the flare sparks are falling past my gloved hand, straight towards the ground. I switch the flare to my left hand as the white truck in front of me comes to a stop. *Is it him?*

"Yes," I hear Intef say calmly and briefly.

I turn briefly to look back at the van. As I do so, I pop the guard off the rear of my pistol. I turn back and begin walking towards the now stopped truck. *I put the tranquilizer ammunition in, right? Was it the live ammunition? We'll find out.*

"You alright?" I hear Joshua say as he puts his arm up to try and block the light of my flare from his eyes. He climbs down out of his truck and takes several steps towards me. As soon as he recognizes me, his eyes go wide and his eyebrows rise up. His body tenses up and he quickly takes a couple steps back.

"I am," I say while quickly pulling my pistol. Before I finish saying the second word I have pointed it at him and fired a shot into his chest. He starts to lunge at me as his face turns from surprise to rage. He lifts his arm up to swing at me as I jump sideways, out into the dirt road.

"You son of a," he begins to say as his voice trails off. His arm comes forward as if he's swinging a punch downward. His shoulders follow his fist as he collapses forward onto the ground. *I'm glad that worked fast.*

I hear no response from anyone as I drag Joshua into the back of the van. I close the doors and turn to go move the truck further to the side of the road.

"Leave the truck exactly as it is," I hear Intef order firmly. I nod and follow his instructions. I turn to walk back to the van and climb in the driver's side. I look at the cell phone given to me and flip to the coordinates for the activity at hand. I drive down Gold Rush Road until the path takes me off the road to the south. *Is this right?*

"Yes. There is a path there you will see once your headlights are on it," I hear Intef say confidently. *Alright. What about the light I see up ahead? Looks like buildings.*

"It is. There's nobody there. Nobody will be there until tomorrow. You have all night," I hear Intef say. *Understood.*

I take the turn and the van bumps around as I would expect to happen turning from a gravel road onto a poorly kept dirt trail. I drive down it, through the zigs and zags until just before I reach the dot. The dirt road ends in a small V shaped clearing that opens up to the bottom of a rocky rise. I put the van in park and get out. Walking around to the back of the van I feel a flood of adrenaline. I open the back doors a little more quickly and forcefully than I intend.

I grab Joshua's ankles and drag him half way out of the van in one jerking motion. His head bounces back and forth on the metal ridges of the floor inside. I put his feet together and drag him out of the van. His torso, head and arms crash into the ground, causing me to stop forward motion. I look back, seeing his eyes open halfway for a moment before closing again. I continue dragging him towards the bushes and cacti lining the base of the rocky uprising. I stop just before it and see a foot path towards a large flat rock face. I drag him down that, hearing his clothes getting caught here and there on rocks. I hear the cloth tear away in small pieces until I reach the end of the small footpath.

A few feet away, among the bushes and various cacti, I see a roughly twelve foot tall Saguaro cacti. I walk over to it and kick it as hard as I can. The skin sinks in where I kick it and I hop around a second. I carefully pull my foot off the cactus, shaking the pieces off my leg, grateful I didn't get poked at all. I pull out the cell phone given to me and use the flashlight to check my leg to make sure there aren't any sticking in my pants. Confident I'm clear I shut off the light and put the phone back in my pocket.

I walk the few feet back to where I left Joshua and stand over him.

My heart races and I feel furiously angry as I think about other options besides the planned tying him up to something and beating him for a few hours until he blacks out.

I grab his feet and drag him back up the path to the center of the clearing. I lean forward and slap him across the face a couple times. I raise my foot up and rest my heel in his crotch. I lean forward slowly, adding more pressure every few seconds. Once I feel most of my weight on his balls, I grind my heel back and forth a few times before standing back up straight. I see no reaction.

I jog to the tip of the clearing where I left the van. Running to the back of the van I rummage around the toolbox and find a coil of yellow rope. I assume it's at least 50 to 75 feet long. More than enough. I run back to where Joshua lays and he's in the exact same position. I lay the rope on the ground. *How long before he comes out of it? Do you think I have enough time to get him tied up without shooting another tranq round into him?*

"Try tying him up," I hear Intef say slowly. Even though I don't feel totally comfortable he's sure, I roll Joshua onto his stomach. I move his hands behind his back and begin tying him up. I tie the cord around his wrists, then ankles. I continue tying it around his wrists and ankles while bringing the loop up around his neck a few times mid-process. I tie a couple loops around his thighs and upper arms. He stays entirely limp the whole time I work.

Once done I roll him onto his side and walk across to the van. I sit in the driver's seat and pull the phone out. 8pm.

"Jesus," I mutter to myself. "I've been fucking at this already for an hour?" *Where do you want this phone?*

"Toss it in the passenger seat," I hear Intef instruct. I do so, and lean back in the chair. Suddenly I see a light blue mist begin forming five feet or so in front of the direction Joshua is laying. I throw the door of the van open and jog towards it.

The mist continues building and glows slightly. As it accumulates it takes two separate forms. *What is this?*

"Carnorra and Eris are coming," I hear Intef say calmly. Playing his voice again in my head, it almost sounds amused.

The mist now has shapes which could easily be interpreted as angels. The forms appear to be humanoids wearing flowing light blue robes. Their faces look soft and genderless. The appearance of high and wide wings made of the same blue mist that appears to solid and yet still

fog-like aids the angelic appearance. *Which of you are Eris and which is Carnorra?*

"I am Carnorra," I hear from the form closest to me. "This is Eris," the form says, arm raising briefly towards the other. I nod solemnly. I am surprised at how normal I am taking all of this.

"Wake," Eris says in a deep male sounding voice, extending an arm towards Joshua. I look down and see Joshua's eyes opening slowly. Scratches on his face and small tears in his cloth from dragging him over the less friendly rocks down the smaller footpath and back again become visible as the area glows gently in soft blue light.

"What is this?" he says, sounding tired and bewildered.

"I had you brought here, Matt," Eris says in an almost mischievous voice.

"Why? Who the fuck are you? What are you?" Joshua asks, eyes seeming to take a bit of time focusing on his surroundings.

"I am Eris, an angel sent to talk to you about what you've been doing in your life," he says. The face of Eris starts taking a slightly more humanoid male face and slowly looks angrier and angrier.

"I am Carnorra, the head angel over Earth," she says, face also taking form but much more feminine. *Angels? Playing the faith card?*

"Yes, listen," I hear Carnorra say inside my head.

"I, I always believed," Joshua says while trying to move his arms and realizing he is tied up. "Why am I bound?"

"You have wronged too many in your life. You have treated others with hate and prejudice while holding your head up high as a religious hero," Eris says harshly. The more words he speaks, the louder his voice booms. "I have been summoned here to render judgment upon you while you are still in your earthly form."

"Why? I have only followed God's teachings and done what the bible says is right," Joshua blurts out, sounding like he is on the verge of crying. "You, why are you here James?" he howls as he finally takes his eyes off the other two long enough to recognize me.

"I was," I begin before being cut off by a raised arm from Carnorra and the voice of Eris.

"We brought him to carry out the separation of your soul from your human body," Eris booms in a deep voice. As he speaks his form leans forward, wings slowly folding forward and shade of blue darkening to a purple. Eris's form begins moving in circles around Joshua.

"You raped your first babysitter your parents ever left you alone

with,” Eris begins in a soft but deep voice that seems to rattle the pebbles around us. “You killed your first several dogs and you mentally harassed every woman who has ever opened themselves to you. You have physically assaulted more people than you can even remember, including family and friends. You emotionally terrorize and launch arguments against everything that is sacred while preaching the word of the lord in the same instances. This ends tonight.”

“It’s not often I give approval to early terminations,” Carnorra says in a voice that sounds so soft in contrast to Eris’s it startles me. “You crossed the path of our friend here. He has done wonders for us and we cannot have him distracted. I gave approval to get him back on track and to remove your negative force from the lives of all those around you.”

“What? Most people I work with love me,” Joshua shouts, now in anger. “My kids love me, my new wife loves me and my family loves me. How dare you claim I’m a negative force on anyone around me but this jackass.”

As soon as the word jackass comes out of his mouth I step forward and swing my right foot into his knees. He yelps in a deep voice and fixates his glare on me.

“Patience,” Eris says quietly, lifting an arm towards me. The arm stays elevated then slowly moves towards Joshua. “Do you call raping your wife a cause for love?”

“I don’t rape my wife, she is my wife,” Joshua says in a snarl turning his attention back to Eris.

“She begged for you to stick to her vagina during intercourse. Not only did you refuse to listen but you pinned her down and did it anyway,” Eris begins, voice slowly elevating again. “Not only that but you started choking her when she wasn’t listening to your demands of silence.”

“A wife is supposed to obey,” Joshua barks back. Eris raises an arm towards me and I instinctively take that as an invitation to kick him in the knees again. Joshua’s gaze fixates on me once more as he adds “This one doesn’t even believe in you.”

“You aren’t in a position to tell anyone who believes and doesn’t believe,” Eris booms so loudly that I actually feel the vibration in my chest plate. “I am done with this one,” he says while turning towards Carnorra.

“That is understandable. Render your judgment,” Carnorra says as her form fades away entirely.

“Joshua,” Eris begins in the loud booming voice that has enough force to vibrate my chest. “For a lifetime of increasing mental instability

and cruel outward actions, all the while wearing a smile and believing you're above your peers, I sentence you to whatever method of death my faithful subject sees fit to deliver. I will begin your final punishment once you reach the other side."

While Eris spoke his color changed from the purple to a bright red. As he spoke the words final punishment he glowed bright like a fire. Once the last word was spoken he disappeared in an instant yellow flash. Darkness followed, with silence only broken by slow deep breaths by Joshua and my own shuffling feet.

"I'm going to break free and kill you," Joshua shouts with such force it makes his voice break. "I'm going to beat you to death."

I stand in silence over him, debating on what I should do first. He starts to struggle and has no luck getting his hands or legs free. The more he struggles the tighter the cord around his neck gets. As he stops struggling it loosens up slightly. A trick I learned in cub scouts for securing loads in the back of a truck. Before I talk to him I walk over to the van and turn on the headlights.

Descent . Blind Rage

“You called me a fucking Nazi,” I whisper, starting to breathe heavier. “Your ignorance is so stunning that I couldn’t even respond to you. Your constant refusal to look into anything anybody informs you of only makes you that much more of a fuckhead.”

“Says the Nazi,” Joshua says with a smirk before spitting at me. A respectable amount of spit lands on my pants. I jump forward and kick him in his stomach.

“Nazis were staunch conservatives you ignorant fuck,” I yell, leaning forward. “What part of that can’t you fucking understand? Can you not read? Did you sleep through school? Ever read a book or research any of these massive claims you spout at people?”

“Fuck you, Josh,” I say in a deep voice. I kick him a few more times in the stomach and in the chest as I shout incoherently at him.

“Nazis are Socialist, I told you,” he yells in a growing rage. “You’re the fucking socialist. You’re the Democrat.”

I pull my leg back and kick him hard in the forehead with my steel toe boot. He blacks out immediately. I kick him a couple more times in the stomach before walking to the van. I climb in the back and look through the toolbox. There’s nothing of interest so I jump back out of the van and walk back to Joshua. I pace back and forth while I wait for him to wake up.

“Wakey wakey, Josh” I whisper into his ear. I pull the box knife out of my pocket and start making small cuts on his arms. “Wakey wakey, you fucking ass hole.”

“I’m going to kill you,” he whispers in reply as his eyes start to blink open. I stand back up and back up a little.

“Call me a Nazi one more time,” I whisper, starting to shake in fury.

“Fuck you,” Joshua says. I walk around his feet and stand behind him. He starts trying to fight his binds again and ends up flipping himself around to face me.

“Do it you piece of shit,” I demand in a speaking voice. “Call me a Nazi.”

“Denying you’re a socialist?” Joshua says. I lift my foot up and hold it in the air. He tries to move forward to knock me down as I stomp down on his hip. He yells in pain for a moment.

“Socialism and Conservatism can co-exist. It’s not exclusive to Liberalism. You should have paid attention in school,” I say with a voice

now shaking in rage. I jump and come down square on his hip with both feet. The moment I impact I hear an audible deep cracking sound. I fall backwards and land on my ass and lower back as he yells in pain.

“You’re wrong, and you’re wrong about being capable to kill me,” Joshua says in a series of hard breaths. Sick of hearing his voice I jog back to the van where I recall seeing a roll of duct tape. Getting to the back of the van I jump in surprise as I catch my jeep with Alejo leaning against the hood.

“I have a gift for you,” he says with an ear to ear smile.

“Yeah?” I ask, opening the back of the van and taking the roll of tape out of the toolbox.

“Here,” Alejo says walking to me with a large book in his right hand. He lifts it up and presents it to me with both hands.

“A fucking Bible, I love you,” I say while I take it in my left hand. “I need to grab something.” I carry the tape and bible to my jeep. I open the driver’s door and reach behind the seat to grab the tire iron. Alejo observes what I’m doing and smiles as I put the iron and tape on the bible and carry it all over to where Joshua is trying to struggle free of the cords. I stand observing his essentially strangling himself before I put the items on the ground.

“I’m going to fucking kill him,” I hear him mumbling as I see his wrists getting a little loose but still too restrained to get free. I pick up the bible and circle around the back of the van so I can try and quietly walk behind him. Unfortunately, I step on a pebble that scrapes under my foot and Joshua looks over and sees me.

“I have some reality for you before I hit you with some reality,” I say as I walk more naturally and noisily around his legs, positioning myself behind him.

“Finally admitting you’re a Nazi?” he says with a tone which suggests he’s amused saying it and thinks he’s being clever. I slide the bible which weighs at least eight pounds down in my hands until I am holding it by the bottom. I raise it up in the air and slam it down into his ribs and arm.

“Your favorite book,” I yell feeling rage turn me numb. “Here you go mother fucking prick.” I hit him squarely in the ribs with it several times, hearing cracks the last couple times. I shift my blows to his arm until I hear his elbow pop out of place.

“Nazi, fucking Nazi piece of shit democrat socialist pig,” he starts yelling out in fury. I walk around his head and stand in front of him as a

tear runs down my cheek.

“One more time, I love hearing how much of a piece of shit you are,” I say, shaking hard enough that he can clearly see the bible vibrating.

“Oh you’re crying, you pussy Nazi,” he yells in an intimidating voice.

“You’re right, I am being a pussy about this,” I say. I begin to say more but am interrupted.

“You are a pussy, you’ve always been a pussy,” he starts yelling. His voice is beginning to show coarseness. “I should have beat your ass in front of all your liberal socialist coworkers.”

Before I realize what I’m doing I watch the bible descending quickly in front of me with my hand gripping it strongly on each side of the bottom. I feel like I’m watching it descend squarely onto the side of his face until I hear a loud combination of a crack and a slap. I watch the bible get raised up and slammed down repeatedly until I realize there is blood splattered all over my arms and face. I feel pain in my lower back having been leaning forward, using my back to support all the weight of lifting up and slamming down the bible into Joshua’s head.

I toss the bible off to the side and stand up. I put my hands on my lower back and massage it a little.

“Fucking pussy Nazi,” I hear Joshua mumble. His voice is slurred and it sounds like he’s talking with a mouth full of soup and sand. I sprint the few steps to where I set the tape and crowbar. I barely think the thought ‘I never taped his mouth’ as I grab the crowbar.

“Bigot piece of shit,” I shriek in a high pitched voice, tears filling my eyes as I put all my weight into swinging the large roughly 15 pound crow bar into and through Joshua’s skull. I pull it out of what is now a caved in pile of bone and flesh and swing it over and over. I keep swinging and slamming it into different parts of his head until there’s nothing but a pile of broken bones and blood with slush that used to be flesh and brains.

I step back a bit to take a different angled swing right into his thigh. It doesn’t break his pants or skin from what I can see and I am even angrier that I missed his balls. I pull it back and swing again, missing again. I drop the crowbar and pull the box knife back out of my pocket. I spot Alejo out of the corner of my eye moving to the side of the van with an expression of confusion and alarm. He stops by the van and freezes in place.

I jump over Joshua and lean forward to cut the binds free from him. A few attempts to cut it reveals how strong the cord is. The last attempt on the cord results in the blade slipping away and almost cutting me on my arm. In a burst of anger I grip just above his elbow and start sawing at his flesh just under his shoulder socket. Once cutting most of his flesh away from the shoulder socket I roll him onto his stomach and repeat the process on his other shoulder. Then I drop my box knife on the ground next to him and grab the crowbar.

I slam the crowbar into his shoulder sockets a few times each until they shatter. I toss his arms, still tied at the hands, down towards his feet. I roll him over onto his back. I spread his knees apart then start bashing the crowbar into his balls repeatedly. Once blood fully saturates his pants and the lower part of his shirt I shift my focus to his chest. After the twentieth hit or so on his chest the crow bar has punched through the shirt. Several more hits and it starts breaking skin and passing through the surface. Blood and stomach acid splash with every swing as I start yelling every exhale. Every hit into any part of his body now splashes bright red blood, illuminated by the headlights.

I drop the crow bar and start jumping up and down in his now open chest and abdominal cavity. I almost fall a few times on his spine until it is broken in so many places it just crunches into the rocky dirt beneath,

I stop and carefully step over the edges of his chest which have some of the bigger pieces of rib sticking out and walk a few steps away. I lean forward, hands on my knees, as I try to catch my breath. I try to breathe in, count to four. Breathe out, count to four.

Once I calm down a little and look over at Alejo who is standing exactly where he was before. The difference is now his jaw is entirely slack and his eyes are wide as hell.

"What now," I ask, slowly walking towards him. He looks terrified as if I'm going to kill him next.

"Uhh, I uhh," he stammers.

"I'm sorry you had to see that. I didn't expect to lose control like that," I say softly. I can hear that I want to cry in my voice but hope he doesn't detect it.

"There is a bag on the passenger seat of the jeep. It has a change of clothes, different shoes, a towel and a container of wet wipes. I'm not sure I brought enough wet wipes," he says, looking me from top to bottom.

“Thanks,” I say gratefully. I start slowly walking towards the jeep. I notice feeling coming back to my skin as I continue to settle down. I feel aches in my legs, ankles and wrists. Not surprising when weighing them against what I just did.

I strip out of my clothes and leave them in a pile on the ground by the passenger door. I look at my chest and arms, all covered in blood. I look over and see Alejo also realizes this. He walks over to me and reaches into the jeep to pass me the bag.

“Thanks man,” I say, taking the bag from him. I set it down on the ground a few feet away from the jeep. He hands me the container of wet wipes and nods his head solemnly. He takes the large towel out of the jeep and sets it down on the ground near the bag of clothes. I spend the next several minutes trying to get as much blood off me as possible.

I walk up in front of the van as Alejo stands before the pile of blood flesh and bones, contrasted by the arms and legs tied together. The arms and legs are the only things identifiable as human from the thighs and mid biceps on. I look at Alejo and see the terror back in his eyes as he looks over the mess. I assume he’s analyzing it so he can figure out how to clean it up. I turn to the headlights and seek out any blood still on my naked body. I see my hands and arms are pretty well wiped off save for some staining I’ll have to scrub off in the shower.

I walk back over to the jeep and look at the dash. 8:18. Holy fuck, all of that happened really fast. I pick up the towel and wipe myself down more until it feels like I’m just rubbing a dry towel against my sore skin. I open the bag and throw on the clothes. Black pants and a black shirt with black socks and my black and white striped hiking shoes. He knows me so well already. I pull all of that on and realize my phone is in parts in the back pockets of my pants.

I use the towel to carefully carry my clothes to the front of the van. I pick apart the clothes to get to the back of my pants. With relief I see that the back of my pants got almost no blood on them, save for what was on the shirt laid on top of it. I carefully retrieve the battery from the back pocket and slip it in the back pocket of the pants I’m wearing. I wipe the blood off the pocket the phone is in and carefully open it using the towel. I reach in with a couple fingers and pull the phone out without getting any blood on it.

“You can just drop that on the ground and I’ll take care of that too,” Alejo says gesturing to the towel and pants. I do so and it makes it easier to put the phone in my pocket. “Jeep keys are in the ignition. Get out of

here, man.”

“Thanks Alejo,” I say with a seriously appreciative smile. I nod and walk back to the jeep.

Descent . Night Sweats

I wake up, seeing the bloody and broken up remains of Joshua before me in the headlight lit desert. I feel my boxers and cloth clinging to me, drenched in sweat. I wake up and look over at Isobel, bound up in a thousand blankets or whatever she uses these days, sound asleep. I catch my breath, realizing I am also breathing heavily. I climb out of bed and walk into the bathroom. I stand, leaning against the counter, staring at myself in the mirror. Dark grey bags beneath my eyes cause me to evaluate how long it's been since I've had a good night's sleep.

I walk back into the bedroom and realize I am backlit by the bathroom and the blinds are completely open. At the same time, two human figures are visible around the pool though I cannot identify them. I can't even tell how old or what gender they are. I reach down and grab my phone before walking a little faster back into the bathroom.

I stand staring at myself in the mirror again and notice Isobel left a couple hickies on my upper chest last night. Or tonight. Or whatever time it is. I look at my cell phone and see it's only 2am.

I reach into the shower and turn it on, leaning in to drink from the faucet head. After several large mouth-fulls of water I shut it back off and return to gazing at myself in the mirror.

Standing on the shore, watching the last of the floating platforms being secured in place, I look at my phone and realize people are going to start showing up with truckloads of chairs and tables to set up.

"Are we going to do a dry run with the helicopter and the speedboat?" Michael asks me from behind. I turn around and look him over, proud to see him looking so fucking dapper in his tux.

"The speed boat, yes. Want to see how fast he can approach while still stopping smoothly and not splashing everyone, not crashing, able to get docked properly in one shot," I begin to answer. "The helicopter, no. I saw photos of the platform and video of them testing the takeoff, dropoff, and landing with it. All smooth looking. They're coming from north phoenix so they said to try it out here, then leave, then return later would take more time than they had to rent it out for today."

“Fair enough. Did you drive out or take the shuttle from guest parking?” Michael asks with a smirk.

“Shuttle, fuck that shit,” I say without hesitation, followed by a laugh.

“Alright. Who’s riding on the speedboat with her dad in the test run? He’s going to drive up to the point they’re launching from in about five minutes,” Michael asks.

“I am,” I answer, lowering my head.

“Why? That sounds fun. I would do it but I don’t have to,” he says with a laugh.

“I’m driving up there and back with Intef’s car, since the shuttle isn’t going to drive down that little dive towards the shore,” I respond with an eye twitch in the middle of the sentence.

“Ha!” Michael blurts out followed by forcing his face from an amused smile to a concerned grimace.

“Yeah, super worried about me I can tell,” I joke as I look back at Intef’s car to make sure he didn’t drive off or something.

“I can’t drive off, I already gave you my keys,” I hear Intef say. *Oh, I guess. Just stressed.* “I bet you are,” he adds.

“I’m taking the next boat to the platform to give it a look over,” Michael says as the shuttle boat approaches the dock down the way from us.

“Alright man,” I say, reaching into my pocket to make sure Intef’s keys are still actually in my pocket. “Text me if shit isn’t right.”

“No need, you will hear me screaming,” he informs me as he holds the same shit eating grin the entire time he walks to and boards the shuttle boat.

“Alright then,” I say under my breath as I turn and walk towards Intef’s car.

Sitting on the seat next to the speedboat driver I look down and see if there is a seatbelt.

“You’re playing the part of the wife to be, is that correct?” the driver asks while checking dials and throwing switches on the console.

“Yeah, why?” I ask, determining there aren’t seat belts.

“She’s going to be standing here,” he says, pointing at a flat portion in the middle of the boat just behind the seats. I look at where he’s pointing then look slowly back at him, then try to look from where we are to where the platform is. Forgot this is chosen as a launch site because it is out of site of the platform. But it is a good jaunt away.

“Alright,” I say quietly. He smiles at me and taps the spot with the palm of his hand. I nod and stand there, looking down at him hoping he was going to strap me down somehow.

“You’re going to want to spread your feet, put one foot here and one here,” he says pointing to opposite corners of the area. “It’ll keep you steady and be cake.”

“Alright,” I repeat, taking the suggested position. I start feeling queasy once the engine fires up. As the boat starts moving I notice the sturdiness is indeed present.

“Doing fine?” he asks, shooting a glance back in one of his mirrors.

“Yeah man,” I respond, feeling more confident.

He nails the throttle and the front of the boat lurches upward. I fear for a moment that I am going to be thrown off the boat but focus on my footing and stay firm. He swings the boat to the left, turning towards the platform which is now in line of sight. I am surprisingly able to keep my footing as he turns various patterns from one side of the water to the other.

Swinging more widely as we get closely, he cuts one more hard left, causing the boat to approach the docks in a slowing fashion. The wake splashes mostly off the bow, stern and port sides. The starboard side bumps softly against the platform where an usher lifts and positions a piece of the same materiel the flooring is made of onto the boat, bridging the gap between where I am standing and the platform.

“Easy as pie,” the boat driver says, gesturing to the platform.

“Yeah, now back to the shore so I can get Intef’s car,” I say with a chuckle. I step back and let the usher remove the bridging piece before the boat driver takes off again. I stand in the spot again as we return. This time a little slower, and more straight.

“Do you know how to surf?” I ask Laura as she arrives at the small prep area off of where the speedboat is departing from.

“Yes, I’ve surfed most of my life,” she responds.

“Oh, really? I didn’t know that,” I state with a look of surprise.

“I knew that,” the speedboat driver interjects with a smirk and a short laugh. I turn and shoot a look at him, catching what all just happened.

“I’ll be damned,” I say as the realization completes.

“I’ll be damned,” he says, walking over to pat me on the shoulder a few times. “you don’t surf I take it?”

“Never have, but it looks fun,” I admit.

“You did really well for never having surfed before,” he assures me.

“Thanks man,” I say.

“You made him ride in my spot in the middle of the boat?” Laura asks with a laugh.

“Didn’t make him, but told him where you were riding and he hesitated. But he got up there before I decided if I was going to tell him he didn’t have to,” the speedboat driver says before bursting into laughter. “He handled it perfectly, I was impressed.”

“Fuck you guys,” I say with a smile as they both laugh and nod to me.

“See you on the other side,” Laura says, now slipping into a more straight faced expression.

“On the other side,” I say, nodding to her before going back to Intef’s car.

Descent . The Wedding

Standing on a large platform in the center of Canyon Lake, I wait next to Michael, Isobel, Laura's bridesmaids and Michael's groomsmen. The seats on one side of the floating platform are filled with family Michael flew down to be here. The other side is filled with Laura's family and both sides have a scattering of people from work. There are rows of tables across the back where food has been picked at for the last hour.

A backdrop of stone cliffs springing up from the lake is behind the raised stage we are standing on. The seating is all padded folding chairs and white plastic columns up and down the edge of the floating platform gives the impression that we're in some sort of structure. There are speakers up front so the crowd towards the back can hear clearly without everyone having to yell.

The song Just Like You Imagined starts playing as we hear the sound of a speedboat firing up a distance away. We hear the speedboat rev and approach. It comes into view just beyond an outcropping of rocks, bride standing on the center, arms spread out, hair blowing majestically behind her. The boat zig zags around through the water, making a wide turn, slowing to a rest exactly at the end of the platform.

Laura is escorted down the center of the tables, then down the aisle by her father. Michael watches her in amazement as her dress is now carefully carried behind her by her mother. Michael and I glance at each other, I think we realize her and her mother look like they could be sisters at the same time. Isobel is tearing up, trying to hide it.

Laura gets to Michael's side and the ceremony begins.

"Family and friends," the priest begins. "Thank you for gathering here to witness this merging of Michael Superior and Laura Aquino. Welcome to the ceremony in the heart of the Apache Trail's very own Canyon Lake.

"From this location you can see the beautiful lake and canyon walls, forming the breathtaking view all around us. We come here, removed from the busy lives we all have, to create peace among peaceful surroundings.

"To all their guests, they are happy to share this moment with you. They have known most of you for several years. You watched them grow up, you went to school with them, or you worked with them. Because you are the ones who have supported them and known them so very well, it is only fitting that you are here to share this once in a lifetime moment with them.

"The plan is for a quick, beautiful wedding followed by a long celebration and an eternity of happiness together - so now we shall hear the vows of love towards one another."

The priest hands the microphone to Michael and stands solemnly.

“Laura,” Michael begins, taking her hand in his. “We have known each other for a while now. I see no end in the love I feel for you. I promise to be with you whenever you need me until the day I die. I will travel with you to every part of this earth. We will collect all the wants and needs along with every memory that you could ever desire. Your smile makes the most beautiful day more glorious and I promise to keep that smile on your face for all eternity.”

The priest steps forward with a smile, taking the microphone from Michael and hands it to Laura who is beaming ear to ear.

“Michael,” Laura begins. “You have made everything more interesting than I ever thought it could be from the second I walked into your life. You have turned the same day repeating endlessly to a new adventure with every sunrise. The ways and magnitudes at which you make me laugh surprise at every turn. I can’t imagine my life without you and I look forward to sharing it with you forever.”

The priest takes the microphone from Laura and smiles as they are now locked in eye contact with each other. Sniffles can be heard coming from both sides of the crowd.

“Michael, do you take Laura to be your lawful wedded wife?” the priest asks.

“I do,” Michael answers happily. He holds up Laura’s hand and puts a beautiful wedding ring around her finger.

“And Laura, do you take Michael to be your lawfully wedded husband?” the priest asks with an even bigger smile.

“I do,” Laura answers with a glow. She holds up Michael’s hand and slides his wedding band on.

“I now pronounce you husband and wife,” the priest says loudly without using the microphone. Michael and Laura begin kissing passionately before he even finishes the sentence. The crowd rises to their feet and myself along with everyone else breaks into cheering.

Michael and Laura turn to begin walking slowly down the aisle as “Everybody Got Their Something” by Nikka Costa starts blaring out of the speakers. When the beat starts about 20 seconds in Isobel and I start dancing down the aisle behind them. At the same time Michael and Laura start dancing as they walk as well. One pair after another behind join us in dancing down the aisle.

The crowd slowly joins in and before long everybody, including the priest, is on the other side of the floating platform dancing. The photographer keeps running around taking pictures of us as the sun is setting behind the mountains to the west.

After the Nikka Costa song finishes a series of top 40 songs begin as Michael and Laura begin competing in dollar dances. Laura wins by the end of the 3rd song with 22 dollars. Michael earns 14 dollars.

Once Laura is declared the winner, she gathers all the women where the chairs once were, now removed to a stack at the edge of the platform. She turns her back and throws the bouquet. Isobel catches it, even though she's standing off to the side and wasn't really interested. Michael and Bud look at me, cheering.

Michael walks over and kneels in front of Laura. She puts her foot up on his knee as he reaches up her leg, rolling off the garter. Since Isobel got the bouquet I didn't go join the single guys. He tosses it over his shoulder and it lands on Vincent's shoulder, without falling to the ground. He happened to be talking to one of Laura's cousins and didn't notice until everyone was laughing and cheering at him.

Laura puts her leg back down as Michael stands up and grabs her for another passionate kiss.

One of the new temps who is about a foot taller than Vincent walks over to him. She's a foot taller than him, looks native American and has a great body. Her hair is long, black, and always worn back in a thick ponytail. The only thing everybody seems to notice though is she appears to have a mustache. I inch my way over to be in earshot, nosy as hell.

"You're single? I didn't know that," Rhonda asks Vincent with a big smile.

"Yeah girl, why do you think I smile at you so much at work?" he responds, running his eyes up and down her body quick in an obvious fashion.

I start tuning them out because of how obvious it's going. I pull my phone out quick and see it's almost time for the departure so I go and stand near the metal plate with 2 V bars coming off it and a pole on each side with various rings. I look it over making sure it's in order and I think how surprised I am nobody has asked about it yet.

"Alright everyone, it's been fun," Michael says loudly, leading Laura to the metal plate. They stand on it and the priest brings over a harness for Michael, which he puts on. Laura pulls some pieces off of her wedding dress revealing some loops she hooks carabiners to. Everyone is looking on in confusion as I walk over to get them wired to the poles on the side of the plate.

"Thanks for coming everyone, we love all of you," she says as a Chinook helicopter approaches around one of the canyon walls. It flies to us, causing water to mist up just enough to be felt. Four cables lower down from inside the open bottomed helicopter. The priest and I hook the cables to the posts on the plate and give thumbs up signals.

Laura and Michael hold onto the poles on each side of the plate with one hand and wave to the now shocked and excited wedding attendees. The cables start pulling them up until the plate becomes flush with the bottom of the helicopter. The Chinook lifts up and takes off towards Phoenix. As it leaves it swings around, releasing a banner that reads "JUST MARRIED!" which now trails behind it.

The crowd, including the priest and I, burst into applause as everyone starts to realize what they saw actually just happened. For a moment my applause dims as realization of what's ever closer to us passes into my mind. I notice Isobel looking at me out of the corner of her eye.

"What the fuck was that, huh?" Bud asks walking to me and patting me on the back. "Totally crazy, totally crazy," he mumbles while chuckling, walking back over to his wife.

"You alright?" Isobel says, taking my hand.

"Yeah, just remembered something I wish I could fix at work," I respond. She squeezes my hand before releasing it and walking over to pick up a conversation she was having with Laura's mother.

As the helicopter passes over the mountains and out of sight into the dimming night skies, some transport boats travel from the docks to our platform.

"Bud and I thought you were going to get married a few months ago," Larry says, approaching my side and sipping a drink.

"Yeah? Why is that?" I ask, curious.

"From the moment you walked up to us in Omaha before we came down, we thought you had matured 30 years in the time we hadn't seen you," he explains quietly.

"Really?" I ask, slightly dumbfounded.

"Really," he confirms. "You were, and have continued to be, intensely focused and not nearly as hyper and distractible as you used to be."

"Really?" I ask, not realizing a change at all from my perspective.

"Really," he says again in confirmation. "We talked about if we were actually going to come down and work for you, for a little while, after we agreed with you to do it. We all agreed to it because we were stunned how focused and driven you had become. But after the details were given to us and we looked it over, it appeared to be a perfect storm. We are all really impressed with you and figured you would also get married soon after all of this was moving smoothly. And this wedding was amazing."

"I appreciate that a lot," I say, feeling like I'm going to cry a bit.

"Cheers," he says, raising his glass and taking a few drinks as he walks back to his wife

Descent . Crumble

Isobel and I get into the apartment and put our shoes in the closet just inside the door. We both walk straight back to the bedroom to take our dress clothes off and put them on top of the dresser.

“We should have rough honeymoon sex,” she says, shaking her ass around as she rolls off her pantyhose.

“You know we’re not the ones who just got married, right?” I ask, now in just my boxers and a black t shirt.

“I know, but I’m still horny like we are,” she says, standing with her hands on her hips and looking as amazing as ever.

“I’m actually incredibly tired,” I say, walking over and kissing her on her neck gently.

“That’s not fair, you can’t add fuel to my fire if you’re going to bed,” she says in a soft voice.

“I know, I’m sorry. It just looks so good finally being able to see your shoulders as well as your neck,” I respond.

“Where are they even going, do you know what they decided on?” Isobel asks, slipping into pajama pants.

“After they land they’re walking over to a plane and going to Japan. She’s Filipino but they both have always wanted to go to Japan,” I explain. “It’s like the mother-ship for all of the anime they’re in love with.”

“Makes sense. Plus they’ll be twenty foot tall giants there,” Isobel says before putting on an over-sized t shirt that actually used to be Michael’s.

“We still have three days off since we closed down the warehouse for today and Monday, you know,” I remind Isobel.

“What are you saying?” she asks, leaning against the doorway and smiling.

“We could fly out of here tomorrow morning and spend the weekend somewhere. Or we could go do a stay-cation in Scottsdale or something,” I say, smiling and wishing I was awake enough to grab her and toss her on the bed.

“I can’t, I have to work this weekend,” she says with a sigh.

“Ahh that’s right, I’m sorry,” I say feeling kind of shitty for forgetting.

“It’s ok,” she assures me before jumping over to kiss me on the cheek. She walks out to the living room after, ass looking awesome as she does. Even in baggy pajama pants her ass looks stellar.

I step over to the bed and lay down on the bedspread. In moments I fall asleep.

I walk with Isobel down a really long hallway. We make eye contact a few times.

"This is strange," she says. We look at each other again and nod in agreement. She reaches her hand out and I take it in mine. We keep walking, smooth unfinished white drywall on each side and spackled ceiling above with inlets which have what looks like 60 watt curly-que light bulbs.

Finally we reach a cheap wood door with no handle at the end of the hallway. I reach out and push it open as our hands stay tight. I enter a large dark room which I can't see the edges of. Out ahead I see a lot of people laying down in the middle of the floor.

"Stay with me," I whisper to Isobel as we continue forward.

"You don't have to tell me twice," she says, inching closer to me as we approach the still bodies.

Getting close I realize all the bodies on the ground are alive but lying fairly still. I identify the one in the middle who is holding a baby as Lilee, the only person I've been with that I know of who got pregnant. She's holding an infant female baby and is wearing no tops. I notice everybody has black pajama looking pants on and no shirts. I look at Isobel and she looks confused and is looking over everyone.

The next person I identify is Kristy Anderson, the first person I dated. After that is Zoe, the one I dated and did everything but sex and oral with who I fell madly in love with. Also the one I never got over and who broke my heart horribly, though I did deserve it. Before I looked next to her I expected to see exactly who I see. The tiny chick I faked an orgasm with to excuse my going limp. Then I scan over more and realize it's everybody I've ever dated or had sex with.

"What is this," Isobel whispers.

"Everybody I've ever dated or fucked," I say. Once I finish that sentence Isobel slowly starts walking toward the Isobel from Jean's house. She takes her shirt and bra off, tossing them to my feet and lays down next to her.

Suddenly, a ring of lights turns on around them, then another and another outwardly until I find myself in an endlessly large warehouse looking structure. There's a circle of people surrounding us completely. The people in the center are about 150 yards from the edge of the circle.

I turn to look at the door we came out of and can't locate it. The entire circle of people start closing in, walking towards us very, very slow.

"Isobel, let's get out of here!" I yell, trying to look for a way to run through them in any direction at all. I look at Isobel and she's looking at me out of the corner of her eyes. I also notice the other Isobel's eyes are open and she is also watching me out of the corner of her eye.

I look around frantically at the others laying down and all of them have their eyes open and are staring at me, as well as the baby Lilee is holding. I notice Shanna is holding a boy baby as well as the Sara I was with one time from one of my first few jobs. All three babies reach their arms out for me as I look up and see the circle of people is closing in on us.

I turn and run back in the direction I recall us coming out of the door from. I don't slow down, hoping the people move out of my way. None do but I pass through them as if they're not there. I stop and my heart is pounding so hard against my chest I worry my ribs will shatter.

Suddenly I realize all the people walking through me are people I've argued with, fought with, knowingly did things to fuck over or otherwise undermine or insulted. I turn back and head to the people on the floor. *There can't possibly be this many people?*

I recognize almost all of them. I carefully step through the people lying on the ground and stand in between the Isobels and Lilee. Once everybody manages to get to the edges of the people lying on the ground, they raise their arms. Hands go as far as I can see. All of their faces which I recognize start morphing to faceless mannequins.

"What is this about?" I yell, feeling like I'm about to black out from panic.

"This is what you've done," I hear whispered from everybody, including those on the floor.

All the arms in the air come down at the same time. Once they all are down everybody, including those on the ground, disappears. The roof support starts rumbling moments before the floor starts as well.

I turn looking in all directions, hoping to spot an exit. All I see is what seems like an endless warehouse in all directions which I can't even see the edges of. Explosions start bringing down support crossbeams and insulation. Above the holes I see blackness. No stars, no light of any kind.

The ground starts to crack and crumble, falling away. The ground I'm standing on starts shaking as the roof above me explodes. Pieces fall towards me as the floor falls out from under me. I find myself falling with chunks of concrete and metal cross-work all around me.

I wake up and look around, realizing I am lying in bed. I don't see Isobel next to me and the room is spinning as if I have been drinking for days. I can't raise my arms or my head, and my eyes close once more.

I find myself spinning and falling. The clouds appear to be below me, rotating in tune with how fast I feel like I am spinning. I realize I am falling and try to turn myself around so I am falling forward instead of backwards. In doing so, I start tumbling faster and faster, head over feet. The spinning gets faster the more I try to level myself out one direction or another.

The sky is blue, peppered with various white clouds. It looks like it would be midday based on the tone of blue but I can see no sun. The horizon in all directions is a solid inferno of bright red and yellow fire. I cannot make out what is burning, though everything below the sky definitely is.

The light blue peppered with white becomes more of a blur, as does the lapping red and yellow across from it. My head starts to hurt and ears feel closer and closer to popping as the wind noise increases. Am I falling or flying forward? Am I rising? I cannot tell.

"James, wake up," I hear. "Wake up," I hear again, now with a hand on my chest shaking me.

"What? Hello?" I ask, not sure what's going on.

"You were screaming," I hear, now clearly Isobel's voice.

"What was I screaming?" I ask, starting to become coherent. I open my eyes and see the Isobel from Galen's party. Her face is gone and chunks of her skull are missing, visible through holes in her face and neck.

"You weren't screaming words. You were just screaming, howling maybe," she explains, leaning forward and trying to smile at me. The smile didn't work very well as strings of skin are hanging from parts of her face. Only the left side of her lips are intact.

"Where am I?" I ask, trying to think of anything but what I am seeing in front of me.

“Oh, honey. You’re not,” she answers in her sweet voice I still miss from time to time.

“What do you mean?” I ask, curious as to what I’m seeing now. I feel aware that I am dreaming, though am not certain.

“You’ve died. You died a long time ago. Before you met me. I was one of the angels who tried to let you know,” she states with a maternal voice shift. “I got your attention and tried to get through to you, but you only wanted sex.”

“What do I not remember you trying to tell me?” I ask, certain I didn’t ignore anything she said at any point.

“When I was leaning back against the work bench and your mind got lost as your eyes fucked every inch of me before I could even finish the sentence,” she says, now sounding annoyed.

As she said this, my eyes started travelling downward too. She is naked, and her breasts are gone. Her chest has a few ribs sticking out and her stomach is half way hanging through her skin. Bile is pumping out and running down over whatever one would call the gore between there and the tops of her thighs.

“Are you even listening now?” she asks, tilting her head and moving a little closer to me. Blood starts dripping out of her face onto my chest and jaw. I am nearly unable to form words.

“I yes,” I blurt out, able to find two syllables to push through my lips.

“See, you never listen. Looking at my body again,” she shouts angrily. Her arms raise up. Her forearms are severed just beyond the elbow. Her whole body floats up above me as blood and bile, among other liquids I can’t identify, drip and otherwise pour out of her all over my body and now face.

Purples, blues and deep reds fill my vision as my flesh starts to burn.

I sit up straight in bed and see Isobel brushing her teeth in the bathroom. I look at the clock and see it is just after 6am. Isobel is surely about to leave for work and I know I need to get a move on myself. I look at my phone and see a total lack of lights. *Fuck, did that fucker die? I totally forgot to plug that bitch in.*

I get out of bed and realize I am drenched in sweat. I look back at the sheets and realize there is a wet outline of where I was lying.

“Yeah, you had nightmares again,” Isobel says with a mouth full of toothpaste. She leans forward and spits into the sink.

“Spitters never get ahead,” I say a lot louder than I intended to.

She playfully sneers at me before spitting more.

Standing in the shower, letting the hot water run over me, I run through some of the dream segments I can remember.

“What the fuck are you doing to me, brain,” I mumble to myself before I throw soap all over the place.

Walking up the stairs to my office, I pass Destiny as she’s coming down. She’s wearing knee-high black stockings visible through the slit in her ankle length skirt. She has a form fitting black blouse that shows just a little cleavage and covers most of her arms.

“Ma’am,” I say with an uncontrollably sly smirk.

“Sir,” she returns with a smirk and a raised hand which she uses to brush the bare skin on my arm as she walks by.

I feel my balls sending my brain signals that say something along the tingling lines of “HEY MAN, REMEMBER THAT? WE SHOULD GO TO THAT PARTY AGAIN,” but I ignore it as I need to make sure the day is going to be going smoothly.

I get into my office and flip the lights on, walking around to sit in front of the computer. I turn and look out the window. I pull my chair around and sit down.

Descent . Splinters

I sit staring out into the shipping floor. Chris is busy checking orders and Bud has all of the pallet wrappers going. The Armenian temp Bud brought in a month ago is outperforming everybody we brought down from Omaha. It's really quite impressive to watch. A bunch of the outbound guys believe Bud just gives him too many full pallets to pull. But in reality he just doesn't talk to people and builds pallets fast as hell. It's unbelievable.

Michael: Thanks for keeping that exit a secret.

James: Thanks for making me your best man.

Michael: I thought about having Vincent do it but he is the same size as my dick and I didn't want to know what something the size of my dick would look like in a suit.

James: And I just pictured your dick in a suit, thanks.

Michael: You are welcome!

James: Did you guys get back to town ok? Your flight lands this morning, right?

Michael: Yes. She's waiting for her bag right now. I'll be coming in to work in a few minutes.

James: You don't have to today if you don't want.

Michael: Stevie and I have been talking about one of the temps that has been pissing him off all day. It's Monday and the whole four days last week I hear he was driving Stevie crazy.

James: I heard about that. I made him stick to his promise to you not to fire any temps until you got back.

Michael: Yep! That's why I'm coming in to fire him as soon as I can.

James: Cool man, see you when you get here.

Michael: I have a bunch of pictures of the honeymoon.

James: Did you guys get an escort for any of the days?

Michael: You'll see pictures

Pretty awesome. I think about how after learning about Isobel and I doing things with other people on the sheets, Laura admitted to Michael that she had always wanted to try something with another woman. They found somebody that was interested at a bar in Scottsdale. After that they've been on that bandwagon as well. We just never swapped because we don't want to chance making things weird.

Seeing the guy who's been driving Bud crazy drive through the outbound floor, knowing he's supposed to be in receiving, I toss a text about it to Michael.

James: FYI, just saw the dumb ass driving around outbound for no apparent reason. Looked like he was creeping and looking around aimlessly.

Michael: Noted.

I pick up my coffee off my desk and stand in front of the window. *Everything burns.*

“Do we need Intef with us?” Michael asks as he is now standing in my office doorway. At the time I hear his voice I was starting to take a drink of coffee. He startled me and I jerked, but did not spill any.

“No,” I hear Intef say in my head.

“No,” I repeat out loud to Michael.

“Are you sure? because I might kill him with my box knife,” Michael says as he gestures for me to follow.

“I’ll meet you two in receiving,” I hear Intef say in my head.

“Hey, maybe he’ll be there anyway,” I say, standing up and walking around my desk to follow Michael through the warehouse. We go down the stairs and out through the office door towards the each room and small package shipping area.

“James, can you stop by for a bit later?” I hear Betty say as she pops her head out of the each area to get my attention. I raise my thumb and nod to her. She smiles and returns a thumbs up and goes back into the each room.

“Fuck her yet?” Michael asks.

“Fuck off, she has big tits but she also has bad knees and is married to somebody running for governor,” I whisper in response.

“So you’re saying you have?” Michael asks with a smirk.

“Fuck off,” I say, punching his arm.

“I saw that if you need to file a report,” Donny yells from down an aisle we are passing. I flip him off just before we go out of site and can hear him laughing.

“I am filing that report,” Michael says.

“Just put it on my desk,” I say as we get to the passage crossing over into the receiving half. Stevie notices us walk in and drives his forklift across the warehouse to us.

“I haven’t seen him all day,” he says as he drives up.

“What the shit? I just saw him creeping around on his forklift in fucking outbound,” I say, pointing towards the front area of outbound.

“What? I would have had him helping unload trailers earlier,” Stevie barks, looking over our shoulder to presumably try to catch a glimpse of him running around shipping.

Where is he, Intef?

“Sitting on his forklift playing on his phone in the old motherboard storage area behind the each room,” I hear Intef respond in my head.

“Stevie, I bet he’s hiding behind the each room where the old motherboard pallets are,” I say, pointing back in that direction. “Have him come meet us in the small conference room over in the receiving offices.’

“Will do,” he says, driving around us and heading towards that part of the warehouse.

“How did you know that,” Michael asks, shooting me a sideways glance as we walk towards the doorway into the receiving offices.

“I counted everybody that should be in shipping as we were walking through but heard a forklift shut off back in that aisle,” I pull out of my ass in response.

“Oh, nice,” he says.

We stop once we get to the office door and wait for Stevie.

“When Stevie drove off, Jeff drove over to the docks by the package ups room and left the building,’ I hear Intef say in my head. I take a deep breath and look over at Michael. He has pulled his phone out and is checking his email.

You might want to page Michael and let him know.

“Alright,” I hear Intef reply in my head.

“Michael, call 600 please,” Intef says over the intercom.

“Oh now what the fuck,” Michael says as he shoves his phone in his pocket and walks into the office saying “Be right back.”

I stand there and look around, waiting for Stevie to drive up. After a few moments he does and parks his forklift off the side of the door. Getting out he shuts off the computer mounted on the lift.

“He said he’d be right over,” Stevie says confidently walking over to me. Once he reaches me and we turn to enter the office, the door flies open and Michael runs by us.

“That motherfucker,” he yells, walking into the warehouse a dozen steps. He picks up a full sized brand new pallet. He lifts it above his head and slams it down into the concrete floor. I look over at Stevie and he raises his eyebrows in a mixture of what looks like amusement and fear.

“What?” I yell loud enough for him to hear me.

“That motherfucker walked out and didn’t even shut his forklift off,” he yells, raising the now cracked pallet up over his head and slamming it into the ground several more times. He keeps repeatedly slamming it into the ground until pieces of wood are all around him. He now holds the pallet by two boards as the rest is broken away.

“You alright?” I yell, concerned he might fuck himself up or go jump in his car and drive to the kid’s house.

“Yeah, I should be fine,” he says, walking towards the closet off the side of the office. He grabs a stiff bristled push broom and carries it towards the pieces of pallet.

“Never seen him that angry,” Stevie whispers to me.

“Yeah man, it happens,” I whisper in response.

‘He’s done that before?’ he asks, now just looking amused.

“Oh yeah,” I confirm. “He’s left a lot of stuff, as have I, in our wakes.’

“Remind me not to piss either of you off,” he suggests

“I don’t think that’s going to be a problem,” I whisper to him, patting him on the shoulder. “I’m going to go see what Betty wanted,” I yell loud enough to not be too loud for Stevie but so Michael can hear me. Michael responds with a quick wave of the hand as he continues sweeping up the pallet pieces.

Descent . Waves

Walking through the warehouse I pass the wall splitting Receiving and Shipping. A few aisles into Shipping I start hearing the words "Everyone Below. Everyone Below." I look around and see nobody else reacting. I pass Donny and his American flag hanging from his forklift.

"Sorry, I'm a witness on that report," I hear him say at the same time I hear 'Everyone Below' repeating again.

"I know you are, man. I'll remember that," I say as I point at him and smile, walking onward. Intef runs full speed around the corner in the direction I'm walking in, stern faced, and passes me. I turn to look and see him running towards the wall divide, turning and running into the central area. "What the fuck," I mumble.

"You better leave the surface on the next tube," I barely hear Intef say in my head.

What the fuck is going on?

"I told you, I told you fucks this was going to happen," I can hear Bud's voice yelling, booming in echoes through the warehouse. I start to feel panicked and pull my phone out. I see a text from Jean.

Jean: I love you man. I wish I could have come down with you. I'll never forget you.

James: What's going on?

Directly after I send that text I receive a text from mom.

Mom: I'll see you on the other side. I'm praying for you.

James: What are you talking about?

I don't hit send and press the call button instead. I put the phone up to my ear and hear nothing. I look at my phone and see the error message "All circuits are busy." *What the fuck?* A wave of panic washes over me as I break into a sprint towards the shipping office. I get into my office and open up a web browser. I open drudgereport.com. The following is the headline.

SEE THAT GRAY IN THE SKIES? THAT'S OUR FUTURE'S LOST HOPE

Underneath that is a color picture of a city skyline I don't recognize. The trees are green and sky is an ashy gray. I run at full speed out of my office, down the stairs and out the front door. Everybody from the office and several shipping people are standing in the middle of the

parking lot, hands over mouths. I look northward, as they all are, and see a mushroom cloud far off in the distance. If I had to guess I would bet an explosion happened over Cave Creek in the northeast portion of the Phoenix metro.

I run full speed down the sidewalk and get into my jeep. I honk a few times and back up, luckily not hitting everyone as they quickly moved out of the way. I speed through the gate that is wide open at this time of day and onto the street. I know Isobel isn't getting off work for a couple hours and is only a 5 minute drive going the speed limit.

I slow down a little to carefully blow through red lights. Almost nobody else is on the road, which for this time of day is very, very strange. I wonder what sort of thing was going over the radio but am gripping my steering wheel too tightly to want to turn it on.

Getting on the Interstate it is almost fully empty. I see some people pulled over and crying, but beyond that it's a ghost town. Entering the tunnel under downtown phoenix, an almost blindingly bright flash of light illuminates everything around me. I slow to a stop in the middle of the tunnel as a massive amount of debris blows through the tunnel from behind me. Some of it cracks my jeep's rear window as I duck down as far as I can.

"Why are you still on the surface? Didn't you hear the clear signal?" I hear Carnorra say.

Well it's a little late now I think. The exit that is usually fifty feet or so in front of me is now covered in huge pieces of buildings and cement, mostly burning. I open my car door and feel intense heat blow into my car.

"No it's not. Walk ahead a couple dozen feet. There's a door on the right. It will be unlocked. There is a tube on the left, inside," I hear Carnorra instruct.

Okay. The heat feels almost unbearable as I switch from a careful walk to a full sprint forward. I worry there's not going to be a door just as a gray one, the same color as the walls in the tunnel, comes into view. I dash from a sprint to a run harder than I believe I've ever ran before. Getting to the door I try it and it's unlocked.

"Hurry," I hear Carnorra say. I open and enter the door, slamming it closed behind me. I turn to the left and it's just a cinder block walled hallway. "Pull," I hear Carnorra say.

"I don't see shit," I mumble, feeling around on the wall. Suddenly I make out there are edges on some of them. I carefully try to pull and feel it give. I pull harder and a panel about the size of the wood one in the Council Bluffs basement comes loose. I carelessly move it off to the side and it breaks to crumbles.

"Don't worry about that now," I hear Carnorra say as the tube opens in front of me. "Get in, hurry."

I jump into the tube as it turns closed behind me. I feel the tube begin traveling as I hear the rumbling and crashes outside instantly fade away. I feel waves of depression hitting me all at once as I fall to my knees in tears. Mere seconds pass as the tube swivels open.

“Get out, we need this tube elsewhere,” I hear Carnorra order angrily. I find the will to jerk myself so I fall forward and out of the tube. It swivels closed just behind me, almost clipping me in the ass. Wave after wave of loud weeping flows out of me uncontrollably.

I feel hands grab under my arms and am aware of being drug. I am crying too heavily to see who grabbed me or where I’m going. I am crying too loudly to hear the words being spoken to me or anything else in my surroundings.

I feel a few slaps land on my cheek. The crying does not subside at all as I have flashes of Isobel’s face over the last year rush through my mind. I feel another slap on my cheek and angrily wipe my eyes clear, revealing Intef towering over me. I jump to my feet.

“Why the fuck didn’t you get us off the fucking surface?” I start screaming as I repeatedly swing, trying to punch him in the face over and over again. He calmly dodges every single punch before grabbing both of my wrists and holding me still.

“Carnorra will be here in a moment,” he says firmly. In this small room his voice booms louder than usual. He thrusts me down and I fall to my knees. I begin weeping heavily again. He turns and walks across the room and down a fairly narrow hallway. After a few minutes he returns with a crate and rests it in the room near me. “Sit on this.”

I force myself to stand up, sniffing. I walk over, legs feeling like jello, and body feeling like numb fuzz. I sit down and try to regain composure. A part of me feels like if I go off on Carnorra I’ll be struck dead. Or tortured for an eternity. Or worse.

“We did not do this,” I hear Carnorra’s voice say from my left. I look and see her stepping out of the transport tube.

Descent . Answers

“What the fuck happened, then?” I ask, furious and devastated at the same time.

“Do you follow world events, at all?” Carnorra asks, sounding slightly annoyed.

“No, I quit following the news, overall, years ago,” I respond.

“Did you know we were butting heads with Russia over old territories of theirs?” she asks.

“Vaguely, but nothing I was worried about,” I tell her.

“Russia mounted a full invasion of both the Ukraine and Georgia this morning,” Carnorra begins. “There was a military response to the Ukraine invasion but the only response the United States could muster for Georgia was a small tactical nuclear missile launched from Poland. The response was a few full yield nuclear missiles launched out of Russia against Poland. That triggered multiple launches out of Britain itself and our subs on Russia. While those were in the air Russia fully opened up on the whole world. When Russia opened up on the whole world, we triggered the order to clear the surface.”

“Is that why the voice was repeating ‘everyone below’?” I ask.

“Yes, I realize I never explained the global emergency procedures with you,” she says in a deeply sad voice.

“I didn’t either,” Intef confesses.

I sit numb, as Carnorra and Intef stand on either side of me silently. I break down into tears again as I hear Carnorra and Intef speaking amongst themselves. I stand up and walk across the room, feeling like I want to be alone, and lean my head against the wall weeping.

Images of my mother, hated or not, start going through my head. My grandma and grandpa, sister, friends. I fall to the ground and continue crying heavily.

“James,” I hear Carnorra say. I barely hear her as I continue bawling.

“James,” I hear Carnorra and Intef say together, quite loud. I focus on getting myself together and stand myself up using the wall as support. I face away from them as I am deeply embarrassed with this inability to cope with what has just happened. Especially considering I knew something like this was coming down the road anyway. Maybe I just never believed it would happen.

“I grabbed Michael and his wife. I brought them down with me as the missiles took flight,” Intef says while patting me on the shoulder softly. It is the first time Intef ever touched me in any way that wasn’t procedural, like a handshake.

“Thank you,” I say, sniffing and fighting back another wave of tears.

“I might have a way you can go back a few days and save Isobel,” Carnorra says. I feel a burst of hope and wonder, barely creeping up through all the rage and horror inside me.

“What do you mean?” I say, voice sounding horrible after all the crying.

“We have a portal device we use between a few of our main cities and some of our other planets,” she explains, not sounding very confident at all.

“Ok?” I ask, wondering if she wants me to go running around other planets. All I can think about is how much I want to die now.

“We theorize we can alter them to enable one way time travel back in time to any given location,” she says slowly as if she is choosing her words carefully.

“Let’s try it then,” I say getting hopeful and walking straight over to the transport tube.

“We don’t know if it actually works, though,” Intef says. “Everybody that has gone in has never left us any clues that it works, nor can we track them.”

“I don’t care. I don’t care if it sends me into the middle of nowhere and I die,” I blurt out, feeling tears rising up again.

“Seriously, we don’t know if,” Carnorra begins before getting interrupted.

“I don’t give a fuck, I’ve just been happy for the first time of my life that I can remember,” I start screaming as my tears are winning against my holding them back. “I met someone that is everything I’ve ever wanted, I was enjoying the progress we were making at the job you guys gave me. We were seeing the fucking world.”

Intef’s face looks stern but confused as he looks between Carnorra and I. I can’t make out emotions on Carnorra’s face as there isn’t really any facial expression on the gray suit.

“Please, do this for me,” I whisper in a shaking, broken voice.

“Alright. It’s the least I can do since I didn’t make sure you and your people got off the surface in time,” Carnorra says. The tube opens and Intef stays still as Carnorra approaches.

“I’m going to take the next one. I have things to do before I head home,” he says, raising his hand in a sort of wave, stern faced as ever. I step into the transport tube, followed by Carnorra. I turn and see his hand is still in the air. I slowly nod to him, tears running down my face, as the door swivels closed.

I walk with Carnorra down a long corridor lined with windows. Through the windows I see whole cityscapes in the distance in each direction. It appears the corridor we are walking down is elevated hundreds of feet above the ground below. The enormous cavern ceiling above the city has various balls of light which gently illuminate everything below. It makes everything appear to be in perpetual dusk.

I see Carnorra's head turn to face me every so often. I say nothing as I am worried I will speak and instantly start crying again. I want nothing more than to see Isobel alive once again. We reach the end of the corridor and we stop.

"Everything alright?" I ask out loud, voice barely above a whisper.

"I must get permission from Panacea to do this," I hear Carnorra respond in my head. "Panacea has to open the door, also. Right now her and Eris are arguing over the fate of the humans underneath the surface."

I think and say nothing as fear and depression overtake me. It feels as if thousand pound sandbags are weighing down every limb and it takes everything to focus on standing in place. What feels like an eternity passes as my legs start feeling like jello.

"Alright," Carnorra says aloud as the door hisses and slowly opens straight up into the ceiling above. Before us is a huge chamber with what looks like almost a stargate portal. Only, there is a ramp on all four sides going into it and nothing holding it in place.

"Ok, so how does this work?" I ask. I felt a brief twinge of being nervous but that went away very quickly as I imagined never seeing Isobel or Michael again.

"I've altered it again, so when you step through it should send you to six hours previous to the time the weapons started going off on the surface," Carnorra says. "You simply need to go up the ramp and walk into the portal."

Without a word I find myself sprinting away from Carnorra and up the ramp. The feeling I have in me is complete hope of death as the light envelops me.

I open my eyes and find myself laying on the sidewalk just outside of my apartment. I feel the burn of the sun as I adjust to the light. Standing up I feel my pockets and realize everything I had before running into the portal is still on me. I walk up to the door and put the key in the lock. I try to turn it but it doesn't work. I feel a wave of panic as I try again. I pull the key out and look over all of my keys making sure I used the right one.

Giving up on the key I try to turn the handle and open the door. It does not open. *Carnorra, what is going on here?* I stand staring at the door. I slowly look down at the ground. *Carnorra? I need to talk to you.* I stand in silence for a few seconds and hear nothing.

The door before me opens and an older black woman is standing in the doorway smiling. "May I help you, son?" she asks kindly.

"I'm confused, I'm sorry. I thought I lived in this apartment," I mumble quietly.

"Oh honey, I just moved in here a week ago," she says with a laugh. She reaches an arm out and pats me on the shoulder before closing her door.

I turn around and walk out of the complex. I go to the covered parking spot assigned to me and see a different car in it. I walk through the parking lot and hit the button to unlock the jeep. I hear and see nothing flashing anywhere.

I keep walking to the entrance and use my remote for the gate. It beeps and the gate opens. *What the hell is going on here?*

I think briefly about walking the whole complex looking to see if I can find my jeep. I pull out my phone and see it is a time where I would be at work. I also make mental note that I have four bars of 4g. I open my contacts and find Isobel.

James: Can you call me ASAP?

I feel a wild rush of hope as I decide I'm going to walk to work. I should be able to pull it off in a good hour walk. I launch off at a brisk pace and make it two blocks before I feel my cell phone go off.

Isobel: Who is this?

What the fuck? Who is this?

James: I am James. Is this not Isobel?

Isobel: I'm Levon.

James: Alright.

What the actual mother fuck? I break into a jog as I continue towards work. What feels like an eternity of absolute agony and terror shed away as I approach work and see my jeep parked nearby. I run up to it and hit the key fob to unlock the doors. The lights blink!

I run up and open the door. I jump in and put the key in the ignition. It does not turn!

"You have got to be fucking kidding me," I yell at the top of my lungs before punching the steering wheel a couple times.

"Step out of the car please," I hear Intef command in a loud voice.

"Intef! I fucking love you, man!" I yell jumping out of the jeep. He stands stoically, as he always does. Only now, he looks at me with complete confusion and appears completely guarded.

"How do you know my name?" he asks.

How do you think I know your name? Do you not know me?

"How did you know I could hear your thoughts?" he asks in a much quieter voice.

"I was sent here to run this place while Carnorra's people connected the mass transit tunnel from below," I say quietly. His eyes go to worry and he looks fully surprised.

"I was not told about this," he says as he seems to be talking with someone telepathically.

"No, not right now. I mean, a year ago," I inject quickly, fearing for my life.

"Why were you in this vehicle?" he asks, looking curious. It is strange seeing him have facial expressions that are animated.

"I thought it was my car. I need to get to my girlfriend within the hour," I say in a voice that sounds like I may as well be on my hands and knees begging.

"Listen, take one of the company cars," he says, reaching in a pouch in his vest. He hands me a set of keys. "It's the middle one," he tells me while pointing down the parking lot a bit.

I nod and jog over to the car, unlocking it and jumping in. I try starting the car and it starts instantly. Time seems to speed up as I get out onto the interstate. The 10 still looks the same. I get up to the exit for the 17 and see it is called the 21. *This is very strange. I knew it would be off a little but none of this feels right. I really hope Isobel still works in the same place.*

Descent . Reunion

When did they get company cars? That's not something we had. Doesn't matter. There is a pretty normal amount of traffic on the road for this time of day. It takes me almost exactly an hour, as I planned, to get to Isobel's workplace.

I park in the guest parking and jog up the sidewalk. I ring the bell and the same voice that I recalled being the security guy asks me what he can do for me.

"Is Isobel at work today?" I ask, as normal a voice I can muster.

"May I ask who this is?" the security guard asks.

"This is a friend of hers. I have important news for her," I say, feeling like I sound convincing. I stand for what feels like six lifetimes waiting for a response. Suddenly the door opens.

"Isobel!" I yell, taking her in my arms and holding her. I feel myself crying and barely able to stand.

"Do you know this person?" the security guard asks. I open my eyes, tears dripping, and see him holding the door open waiting for an answer.

"Uh, oh, yeah. It's fine," she says. Her voice sounds a little deeper than normal. "Come," she says with a hand on my shoulder, leading me down the sidewalk away from the building.

"Sorry, I'm sorry. You don't know me?" I ask, trying to hold back tears.

"Not a clue," she says. "Let's sit," she instructs while walking to a bench a little way down the sidewalk.

"Sorry. I was told things would be strange, but I didn't realize everything might as well have been totally different," I think aloud without any permission from my brain.

"Things would be strange?" she asks, sounding a little curious but mostly disturbed.

"Let me start back a little," I say, feeling like I have composure. "I met you on Facebook a year ago."

"I've never made a Facebook account," she interrupts. "I got married two years ago and left MySpace. I never joined another social network."

"Ok, sorry. I met someone on Facebook in another time and place. Everything got crazy and I went back in time to try to save her and my best friend," I say. As soon as I say best friend I realize I may have been able to save Michael if I had seen if he was there before driving away.

I look up at her and see her walking away. I jump up and as I do, her arms cross and she walks faster. I see the security guard run out of the front door and I freeze in place.

“He’s crazy, please let me back inside,” she yells as she sprints towards the door. He turns around and lets her in before turning towards me.

I run the short distance between where I stand and the Electricity company car. I jump in and very quickly drive out of the area. I see an IHOP nearby and pull into the parking lot. I turn the car off and fall sideways into the passenger seat. I cry harder and longer than I’ve ever cried before.

As the waves of weeping tone down, I slowly regain composure. I pull my phone out and see the battery is only at 8%. I send a mass message to 20 people at a time asking “Do you know James Freeman?”

I sit and read text after text of “No. Who is this?” I feel debilitating agony starting to rise up and tears welling up. Finally a text of “Yes, I think he killed himself in high school” comes through.

James: Who is this?

Texter: Jean Strobene.

James: Any relation to Trevor Strobene?

Texter: That’s my husband. I used to be Jean Burk

My head spins and I lean over into the passenger seat again. This time I don’t cry, I puke onto the floor. I wipe my mouth on the seat, unable to care and fully aware nuclear war is about to destroy everyone on earth.

For a brief moment I think, what if I’m stuck here and there is no war? I open a browser on my phone, laying sideways with the right side of my head resting on the seat where I just wiped my mouth. I try opening drudgereport.com and it works.

RUSSIA INVADES ON TWO FRONTS

Well that sure looks like how everything starts. I decide to sit up and force myself to drive into the heart of Cave Creek.

Descent . Eternal Glow

I park the car in the back of a Wal-Mart parking lot by the street. I choose this spot because I figure it's far enough out in the open that the heat from a blast anywhere near here should be enough to incinerate me without being blocked by nearby buildings.

I get out of the car and sit on the hood. A strange feeling of comfort and satisfaction overtakes the deep mourning I felt the entire drive here. I pull my phone out of my pocket and see there is still 2% battery life. I have five bars of 4g so I open drudgereport.com again.

DO YOU SEE THE GRAY IN THE SKY? THAT'S OUR FUTURE'S LOST HOPE

Close enough. Slightly different skyline, but same color photo with fairly dark gray sky. I lay back on the hood and put the phone next to me. I think about Isobel and I's year we had together. I think about how much fun Michael had at the new job down in Tempe. I run the differences between the people in general between the Omaha metro and the Phoenix metro.

I remember how crazy I thought it was that you could see a 10, male or female, taking the bus at any given bus stop at any given time of the year down here. And how almost nobody took the bus up north in Omaha. I imagine what Omaha might have been like with a light rail system connecting it all, including the surrounding towns.

The sky goes bright. I sit up and expect to evaporate at any second.

The sky dims back to normal and I jump off of the hood. I look around and see a mushroom cloud rising to the west, far away from where I am now. *What the fuck?* After several seconds I hear a long lasting sound that reminds me of a bowling ball hitting the alley floor. After that I hear what reminds me of a thousand strings of black cats being set off at once. *Why am I not dead? Why didn't it hit here?*

I think back to when the first one hit before, standing outside of work. *Fuck, this is bullshit. How did I fuck that up?* I realize the first nuke hit in the same place this did. I didn't see it explode over Cave Creek. I saw it exploding over Luke Air Force Base.

I hear people screaming all around me and the bit of traffic left out on the road swerves in towards businesses. I look towards the south, remembering the one that hit near downtown as I was entering the tunnel.

I walk around to the side of the car facing south and lean my back against it. If I recall I have a couple minutes until the next one hits. A small

breeze blows through the area that smells awful. Like a mixture of sulfur and natural gas. I feel a strange tingle on my skin.

I get lost in thought again about Isobel. Then I drift back to the one night I learned a little about the other Isobel. I think about Makayla. I think about the times when Patricia wasn't insane. I remember the heartache I felt for years after I fucked it up with Zoe. I feel tears running down my face.

I wipe the tears away and try to remain strong in my last moments. I take off my shoes and kick them under the car. No need for them. I look around and see that I can't find any cars moving around or people out and about on foot. I decide to take my shirt and pants off too and walk towards the south in my boxers.

A blinding white light erupts and everything goes dark. I raise my arms to the side and blink. I blink a few more times and realize I can see light around the outer edges of my eyes. I look around without moving my head and realize there is a massive blind spot at the front of each of my eyes. I feel no rise in heat or anything out of the ordinary but for the blindness.

I hear a repeat of the bowling ball and fire cracker series of sounds. *I can't even fucking kill myself right.* I fall to the ground, not even sure where I am, and begin weeping again. I land on my side and roll myself over onto my face. At first while I cry I push my forehead into the concrete.

Once my nose starts hurting I turn and hold my cheek against the concrete. The more I cry the more wet I can feel the hard concrete become. I start hitting the side of my head against the concrete in rage against myself. I can detect the huge black blind spot at the front of my eyes slowly going away, as if I looked at the sun too long and a dot exists but only for a period of time.

Suddenly a flash of light causes everything to go black, and causes me to cry even harder. My skin feels hotter than at any time walking between the jeep and the door down on the 10 inside the tunnel. I feel myself lift off the ground and everything bursts into color.

I can see the ground rushing away from me. I turn my head and see Wal-Mart getting smaller and smaller beneath me, as everything else around it comes into view. I look and see a massive burning crater under a still expanding mushroom cloud high over downtown Phoenix. I look over and see a huge fire enveloping everything in the west valley.

I turn to look north and watch the mountains north of Phoenix growing smaller and smaller. I realize I am moving very fast to the east as I pass over Four Peaks Mountain, then Roosevelt Lake. The faster I go the less I can hear or feel anything.

“I can’t believe how lucky I was to meet you,” I hear Isobel say faintly as the earth starts getting more and more colorful. The sky turns brilliant shades of blues and purples. Rays of orange and red start shooting across the sky as I begin spinning. The earth and sky begin to blur as tears pour out of my eyes one last time. I feel my ears popping and extreme pain tearing my very being apart. I see small pieces of me flying away in all directions, burning and flinging blood. Everything quickly begins going black. When the last bit of light goes away I feel no pain.

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(Note: the table of contents after chapter Eternal Glow was a diversion.)

(The book is over, by the way. I hope you enjoyed it!)

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Keep looking to see if anything is ahead. Nothing is ahead.

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Seriously. what are you looking for?

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I don't know the secret of life. It's not here.

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Okay, maybe I do.

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The secret of life is...

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Live like tomorrow is your last day.

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Do any little thing you can to help others, any chance you get.

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This will fill your life beyond your expectations.

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You may not notice it right away...

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But in hindsight, it will be clear.

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Being a selfish prick will only leave you dead in the desert.

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You don't want to die young, in a desert, do you?

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Maybe die young in a dessert

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That may not be too bad.

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Take care. I hope you enjoyed the book.

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