

I XI Media

Entertainment on the Edge

BOOKS BY **Geoffrey A. Citron**

The Coldwater Diaries Volume One: *Conflicting Personalities*

The Coldwater Diaries Volume Two: *Merging Lanes*

Left Turn on Red: Collected Short Stories

The.
Coldwater.
Diaries

Volume One: Conflicting
Personalities

GEORGE A. CITRON

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For Mom...

*A remarkable woman with a heart like none other;
Capable of a love so strong, once she invited me in its embrace
She refused to let me go...
No matter how hard I pushed away.*

And

*Harrison Sissel
Part-Two of the 'Adopted Jew Crew'
A Brilliant Writer, Genuine Friend,
And above all
The Brother I never Had*

I Still Don't Want You To Buy This Book!

An Author's Note on this Updated Volume

Earlier this year I released a print version of **The Coldwater Diaries Volume One: Conflicting Personalities** with an author's note titled '*I Don't Want You To Buy This Book!*' – A statement I meant wholeheartedly for quite a few reasons...

For starters, as evident by this *new version*, the original first volume (although at the time I thought differently) wasn't quite ready in terms of where I wanted to go regarding **The Coldwater Diaries** project as a whole. As explained in my first *Author's Note*, **The Coldwater Diaries** overall was originally intended to be an '*Online Novel*' of sorts - with chapters updated and available free on a weekly basis. Mind you this intention and strategy dates back to 2007 when what is now **The Coldwater Diaries** went from a piece of flash-fiction to a weekly blog called **The Shitty Pipe Diaries**. The idea was to tell a story about young people in LA, letting us into their lives by way of choppy entries written in *Blog* form.

From its original conception back in '07 to the first publication of Volume One earlier this year I had been battling through the up's and downs that come with reforming a once chaotic lifestyle that ultimately served as the driving inspiration behind **Coldwater**. In other words, despite always having a clear idea of what kind of story to tell and how to go about telling it, the very lifestyle that

inspired the work got in the way – prolonging one way or the other the journey I had planned to take with **The Coldwater Diaries**.

In the previous Author's Note I explained life getting in the way of **Coldwater** like this—

In the very beginning **The Coldwater Diaries** started out as a piece of flash-fiction I had done to kill time while doing blow in a Brentwood High-Rise with a China-girl named Cheri around nine in the morning on a Wednesday or Tuesday in the Fall of '07. *Less than Zero* was playing somewhere in the background and my life was a complete disaster and the idea was to write of a different kind of LA through the eyes of a bitter young cat named *Donnie*. A few more lines of writing (and blow) later another character came to mind, then another, and then another. The next thing I knew I had an entire group of people plotted out and living in this version of Los Angeles written by a writer in the midst of tail-ending into a brick-wall of rock-bottom in his (my) own chaotic life.

The first eight chapters were written within the first week of conceiving the original *idea* of *Coldwater Diaries*. At that time I was still living quite fast and the work reflects this. Shortly thereafter life and karma got in the way of my writing endeavors and I went through a paradigm-shift of sorts and spent a beat of time purging myself both as a human-being and (subsequently) a writer as well. A year later I came back to the world of *Coldwater* as it was always fresh in my mind only now with more wisdom from a past laden with follies and fuck-ups while at last living a more structured, solid, and for lack of a better word, boring lifestyle.

The first eight chapters I mentioned in the first introduction haven't changed from the day I first wrote them back in '07. When I returned to the project and ultimately released the first print version, I followed up the original eight with another six chapters - which like the preceding eight - were all written *on the fly* without edit within the span of a week's time. To this day, every chapter I've written for the **Coldwater** project has followed the same style

without exception – on the fly, no edits, and almost always without any real idea of what to write – despite breaks here and there, the intention hasn't changed – to tell a story on the fly, in blog format, as if written by the characters themselves.

Once I released the first print version back in January, the idea was to have a PDF version of the first volume available to download free of charge (with the option to buy a print version available). With the first volume complete and available, the idea was to release one chapter at a time of what would become "*Volume Two*" each week on the **Coldwater Website** – presenting to readers a way of storytelling more similar to television than the typical novel... an organic piece to tune into each week – constantly evolving along with the writer himself.

That was the idea anyway...

But again, life got in the way.

And with life banging on my door yet again, the pledge of weekly entries was another empty-promise and failed delivery – thus leaving the world of **The Coldwater Diaries** once again stagnate, idle, and stale – an imagined world in the back regions of my mind fermenting to a degree well over one-hundred-proof, patiently awaiting the day I'd be able to pop the top of the bottle and hatch the hooch of my creativity.

And after a day turned into a week and a week turned into a month and the months kept on rolling to the point I couldn't keep track something inside me clicked yet again – sharing a pay-by-the-week shit-hole nestled uncomfortably in the armpit of Hollywood with my friend turned brother Harrison Sissel (A writer as well) – I plunged head first into the world of **Coldwater** and without even realizing it managed to crank out nineteen chapters within a week's time – maybe a little more. And as I was writing these chapters I found my characters developing on their own – going places I never

intended – resulting in my toying with the idea of veering away from my originally intended method of storytelling (online blog on the fly that is) and just write **Coldwater** as a full novel. This idea was short lived – especially after finding my second volume had exceeded the word-count of the first volume by just around ten-thousand words.

Giving the overall project another once-over I decided to make a few changes. For starters, the first six chapters of what was intended for the second volume seemed to me (structure-wise) better suited for the first volume... hence this new volume. The following 13 chapters (although not intentional) picked up at just the right time and followed a perfect arc for all of my characters in terms of where I intended to take them...

And with that all said, by complete accident, staying true to my *on-the-fly* style of writing, I in a sense accidently re-wrote the first volume and pretty much had volume two fall into my lap. And no matter how much I toyed with the notion of ditching the internet idea and writing **Coldwater** as a complete work instead there was still one lingering hindrance – the word count...

Between both volumes one and two combined I was well over 100,000 words and with so much story remaining, I wasn't looking to write *War and Peace*.

Bringing me now to the explanation of not only this volume but the way in which I plan to tell the story of **The Coldwater Diaries** as a complete project.

As originally intended the first volume will be available both in print and PDF form – the print form of course has to be purchased – yet as before, a free version of the book will be available to download to introduce readers to the misfits inhabiting the twisted world of **Coldwater**. The Second Volume: **Merging Lanes** will be available in *print-form* from beginning to end – while at the same time chapters

will be available free of cost by way of weekly online entries (as I had originally sought out to do).

Now back to the basics of my original Author's Note, while reading the initial chapters of Volume One – keep in mind they were written two years ago, in a different place by a different writer – where as the chapters progress later on, so had I as a writer and person.

Individually think of this first volume as introduction to the world of **The Coldwater Diaries** and all the maniacs living inside. Once you've met our characters in this first volume, chapter updates can be found on the website.

www.TheColdwaterDiaries.com

While reading this Volume (and all to follow) keep in mind the way each chapter was written, posted, etc... where I as the writer was in my life while writing one chapter as opposed to another (e.g. Chapter One being written in that High-Rise on Blow with the China-Girl and the Final Chapter of Volume one being written well over a year later with different eyes).

All the above said, I'd like to thank you for actually reading this book and starting the journey of what will be quite a story. Of course a lot of what you'll read has been pulled from my past and experiences in this wonderful city of Los Angeles – but in no way should be construed as Non-Fiction or a representation of how things really are in this fine sunny city.

Always keep in mind you're simply embarking on a journey through the eyes of a group of very unstable characters whom were created by an even more unstable, cognitively-retarded, borderline insane, drug-addict and alcoholic of a writer...

Sure I've shaped up... but the characters of **The Coldwater Diaries** are just getting started.

Again if you purchased the first volume of this book I thank you – but again wish you hadn't...

This is now the second first Volume I've released for this project... A project I know back and front, I just have to get it right...

Geoffrey A. Citron
Hollywood, September 2009

Be sure to visit www.TheColdwaterDiaries.com regularly for chapter updates, short-films based on "Coldwater", and other here's-and-there's that come to my all-over-the-place mind

**www.TheColdwaterDiaries.com
www.GeoffreyCitron.com**

*"This Diamond Ring doesn't shine for me anymore, and this
Diamond Ring doesn't mean what it did before..."*

--Gary Lewis and the Playboys, "This Diamond Ring"

*"There was this thing called Heaven; but all the same they used to
drink enormous quantities of alcohol..."*

--Aldus Huxley's "Brave New World"

Donnie

The blow's in the living room and the blowjobs are upstairs – chicks on dicks, and dicks on dicks all the same – anything to get “ahead”, anything to nail the deal, anything to make a name for themselves. Everyone's a whore. Everyone checked their morals at the door the minute they crossed over the Los Angeles border. Don't let the billboards fool you, this city has no angels. And if it ever had, they're not at this fucking party.

Going on six years transplanted from Chicago and nothing is new. I'm doing the same shit I was the day I came in, and despite promising myself things will change tomorrow, they never do. Rent comes up, life gets in the way, and the wheels on the bus just have to go round and round.

While the Persians work the backyard selling bunko coke and speed to over-tanned, fuck-twig actresses, I'm working the living room area looking for the next schmuck to rope. Like little ol' Goldilocks – I have to make sure he's just right – not some transplant living the hard life trying to make it big in the biz. Those kids have a rough enough time with the day-to-day grind as it is – no need making their shit rougher with another one of my scams. I'm not looking for a stray, my ropes are always the ripest – a trust-fund douche-fag with little brains and zero to offer – fresh meat that's spoiled

just enough to take the bait and go down with only one flush and no wiping.

The ticket to ripping a fish in this city – bait their strongest and most commonly shared character trait: Greed.

If done with enough style, one could literally hand over the shovel, and wearing a pearly smile, they're sure to dig their own grave – manicured hands and all – all the while thinking it was their idea from the word go.

It's not a complex science. Nor is it an art form by any means. Simply get the chair comfortable enough so they won't feel the thump when the rug gets pulled out from under... That's what I do, and have been doing six-years-running now since the mom-n-pop sent me curbside before I was even old enough to drive (not that I'm playing victim here, as I'm sure you can tell by now, I probably deserved it).

Good as I may be, I'm not looking to do this shit forever. A cat can't keep running the alleyways forever. Legs get sore, wits get dull, and sooner or later, no matter how many times they may have ran the same alley, one day a truck comes by too fast, too big to dodge, and all that's left to do is put on a dull face and say "It was nice while it lasted" – I'm not looking to go out that way – oh no. If I'm a cat, I know I'm running on nine-out-of-nine. Playtime is over, the promises of tomorrow mean not a shit, it's officially fuck or walk time. Tonight I'll find my rope and when I do, his bank is officially broken. I'm not looking to run a hustle again. It's gotten so I can't recognize myself any longer. At twenty-four years old, that's a sick prospect. This next rope, sad to say, will in fact be the last. With the money I pull, even on a worst case scenario, I'd still have enough to spend two years worry free focusing on what really matters... what brought me out to this shit-hole city in the first place... my writing.

After scanning the scene I've finally found the right rope. A Bruce named Cal Went. A real daddy's boy. Hasn't worked a moment in his vain life and has spent the last three years shelling out old money to drug dealers and fancy restaurants in the endless pursuit of pussy. This guy lies, cheats, and takes advantage of anyone foolish enough to have a dream – and uses the dream to exploit, degrade, and hang people out to dry. A walking, breathing, flesh-covered representation of the very city we all inhabit. A vampire of the human soul and spirit...

A Vampire I'll be taking out into the light sooner rather than later...

I make my way to the main sitting area where Cal's whispering god-knows-what to this actress we all know named Stacy Lane, she's not going to get anywhere with this guy, but she'll probably suck him off all the same just to add another notch on the belt. In fact, I had a few opportunities to stick my tube down her throat but never capitalized, she's a little too thick around the rims for me.

Cal and Stacy both see me on the approach and offer their everyday bullshit LA mugs – the type of look that asks one to “come on by and have a chat” with their smile, while their eyes are telling the true story by asking you to kindly fuck off until you can produce the goods. Lucky for me, my poker-face trumps the LA Grin, and these fucks won't even see me coming. Then again I can care two shits about Stacy, she probably already knows I'm on the grift... It's Cal I worry about, and that three-quarter closet-queen doesn't have the nose to sniff me out.

“Donnie! Donnie fucking Ramo! What's the good word there buddy?” Cal says to me in his deafening frat-boy yelp – while drinking cheap scotch with one hand and finger-banging Stacy with the other.

“Don't know if there is a good word Cal. All these parties are starting to look the same to me.”

“I hear ya buddy!” He offers even though I know he doesn’t hear shit outside his own voice. “Every time I get to one of these things I see all the same faces and all the same drugs and always ask myself, what the hell am I doing here?”

“You ever come up with an answer?” I ask while lighting a Lucky Strike.

“What the hell else is there to do in this town?” He explodes into an obnoxious, almost gag-inspiring, laughter.

Everyone within an earshot follows suit with Cal, laughing for reasons I’m sure each of them aren’t close to being aware of. To laugh-along for these drones is no different than taking another line – forget having any real reason when everyone else is doing it. Failing to be just another smiling face I stay solid – lacking the will to fake any enthusiasm – which I now realize could be bad for business, so I pour myself a belt of Cal’s cheap Scotch to loosen up.

Stacy is saying something to me that I can’t really hear so I inch a bit closer. I get her half-way into whatever bile she’s spitting this time, “...and then we realized that the club wasn’t even open that night. And Jill was like so pissed off. I mean this guy told us at Sugar that he’d put us up and totally flaked out on us! I mean we like came all the way from Vegas! And didn’t have a place to stay cause of this guy! Can you like believe this shit! I swear I’m never listening to another guy at a club. They’re so full of shit.” She takes a pause for a moment, possibly realizing half of the people around her fit that category, but probably not because she’s a box of rocks. Then she offers, “So it’s a good thing I met Cal. He’s... taking care of me”.

Cal shoots me a sleaze-fuck wink-and-smile combo the minute “taking care of me” left Stacy’s botoxed-to-shit lips. God I can’t wait to rake this kid over the fucking coals. Then he faces me and says, “So what sort of things have you got going on? Mel told me

something about you being able to get Macbooks for close to nothing?”

“Mel’s a nancy-boy rich kid who can’t keep his fucking trap shut on account he’s under the impression hot-air will fill up the bullshit-balloons in this town.”

Cal puts on a blank-face and a silence fills the air. Maybe he knows I’m passive-aggressively talking about him, but I doubt it. He takes a drink, smiles, and asks like the moron he is, “So can you like, get the Macbooks?”

I’m too tired and bored to put on an attitude so I simply say as cool as possible, “Yeah I can get them”, then I pause – careful not to blow the hook – and ask, “Why do you want to get your hands on one?”

“I don’t know. I was hoping to get more than one...” he smiles as all the blood rushes to my cock after roping him so damn easy.

“I may be able to help you out. We’ll talk later.”

“For sure!” he exclaims.

The scene goes numb for a beat. Everything to talk about but nothing to say. Finally some fuck-twig next to Stacy breaks the ice my way, “So Donnie, I hear you’re a writer or something? What’s with this Macbook stuff? Is it like, a day job?”

The chick might as well have given me a hand-job with a sandpaper glove. Instead of getting red at her question, which basically forces me to realize what little I’ve done in the way of aspirations of the future, I decide to keep things mellow by saying, “Well a writer is what I am but not what I do right now. For instance, like with your acting. You are an actress aren’t you?”

Her eyes go wide and then she explodes with, “Ohmygod! How did you know?”

Every inch of my being shakes and rocks in keeping back from saying something like, *I’m no psychic sweet-heart, you’re just unoriginal*, but I resist, and simply say, “I can just tell”.

The atmosphere cools down again and I want out before the next ice-breaking, no-brainer question pops. I see Mel Carpenter at another end of the party by himself nursing a New Castle and a quiet Oxycontin addiction. I’ve already done what I need with Cal and really don’t want to get laid by any of these Scarecrows so I excuse myself without a word.

After passing through a couple dozen herds of aspiring somethings I finally reach Mel. He’s in his own fucking world on account of the 80 he just shoveled into his nose. I pat his back, careful to stay as cool as possible, and ask him loudly over the music “What’s the temperature like with your buddy Cal?”

Mel jumps out of his skin for a second and then calms once his eyes adjust to my face. “Fuck Donnie, you scared the Christ out of me! What’s up man? What do you mean? Whose buddy Cal?”

The guy’s drugged to the gills. Although normally not the brightest bulb in the box, 80mg of the world’s strongest pharmaceutical grade opiate surly doesn’t help. At this moment, as anger rushes to my brain and intolerance envelopes my heart, I can’t for the life of me figure why I bother with these Hollywood brats.

“What do I mean? What’s the deal with Cal? Is he a fish worth catching or a waste of time?” I ask under the music, but loud enough for Mel to hear each word clearly.

“I still don’t know what you’re talking about?” He offers, stoned beyond belief.

I snatch the bottle of Oxy out his coat pocket and give him a small slap on the chin even though he's quite a bit bigger than me and say, "The fucking guy's over there asking me about Macbooks? He said he received the tip from you? Leading one to believe you're either roping him for me or blowing shit up on account you're stoned to all hell. Don't make me think it's the latter..."

He puts on a blank face for a beat and finally manages to say, "What do you mean... what ladder? There's no ladder here? Are you talking about Xanax?"

"Fuck it I say" truly disappointed but not willing to drag it out on account I understand what I'm dealing with: a moron.

I see there's no point in going on with him and for once, I can almost begin to emphasize with our God – understanding a celestial level of disappointment one must feel while looking down at his mirror-image-product and see just how little has been done in the name of progress and forward movement. Mel and the people that surround me at every turn in this City, in this party, in this fucking living room serve absolutely no purpose. There's no light at the end of the tunnel. No hope. Despite they walk and breathe and bleed and shake hands and laugh... there is no substance. No life. Nothing short of a disappointment.

Filled with nothing other than zombies this party is for lack of a better word dead. The people all around offer me nothing and I sure as shit don't want to fuck any of the girls here but anything, even mind numbing-rhetoric about auditions and clothing lines is better than my alternative – loneliness – an empty studio apartment in Brentwood with nothing to keep me warm but my own bitterness and isolation.

All these things considered, I take stock of what's available to me and weigh all options...

Walling the flowers with Mel the junky is an option, then again so is swallowing cyanide tablets. I pass. I can rub-shoulders with Cal and the fuck-twigs back in the living room but remember to myself how well that went before and again consider cyanide tablets. Through the pane-glass doors leading into the back-yard courtyard I see Persian's passing around blow (while at the same time noticing this girl everyone knows named Sonya palming a couple bags of blow behind the main Persian's back. Nice grab I think to myself, great tits).

This night, I realize like many of my days, has ended before even beginning. Around me there is nothing to cool the icy waters in my veins. All hope lost.

Refusing to dwell any longer at present circumstance and grimacing at the thought of jumping in my car and combating the ulcer-bleeding traffic of Los Angeles' freeways I decide to make the best of what's around.

I take Mel's New Castle as he's nodding so hard he's about to drop it and say as cool and calm as possible, "Fuck it. Let me get one of your Oxy's. I'm having a shit night."

Take the pill. Take a breath. Exhaust another day.

Fuck it.

Ending is better than mending...

Andrew

Although I've always known it would happen being here now and seeing all this around me I can't believe it, here I am finally at a real LA party. Sure, I don't know a soul here but that's bound to change soon. I've only been in town a day over two weeks after all and networking isn't something that happens over night. That's why I'm here now – to network myself into a strong group of people that are likeminded and on the way up. Sure acting is a one man game, I understand that, but at the same time, most any actors you see today that are successful had a strong group of friends on their way to the top. Understanding that is half the battle toward success – copying a model that's worked for someone else. And as I said before that's my only reason for being at this party tonight. So what if Lauren can't understand that and chooses to brood by herself in our new apartment (that she hates for the record) while I'm out here grinding it out for both of us? What does she know about a place like this anyway?

Christ, she thinks I've changed in the two weeks we've been here. Whatever that means? Shows how little she knows.

Before the two of us got together she was living in the sticks --- some population zero town with no future in sight. Now we live in the center of all things hip! The sky's the limit! And If I hadn't swooped in and took her away she'd still be working in that run-of-

the-mill gas station – shelling reheated pizza’s to factory workers splurging on a Friday evening.

And as far as “home” is concerned, that dipshit town of hers, she was born there. I was forced to live there. She never knew the guy I was before moving down to the sticks – a result of mistakes I made in the city. She met the guy after the fact. The recovered junky. The kid with a future and dreams to pursue. And when we lived in the sticks and all I had was dreams, she was fine. Today, now in a new phase where the dreams can materialize soon and become common place, I’m suddenly the bad guy. I’m the one that’s changed.

Please, like she knows a thing anyway. She couldn’t expect to keep me cooped up in that town forever. I stayed as long as I could. Why? For her! Now it’s due time for Andrew to work on Andrew, and in turn work on us both. If she can’t see the forest from the trees and support my being out here, moving both of us out here, to better OUR lives... then fuck her!

Well actually, I don’t mean fuck her...

I get ahead of myself sometimes. The emotion envelops my brain, cutting off reason. I guess you can say I have a short temper. You can’t blame me though. I’m an actor. It’s in my blood... my genetic make-up.

I can’t let myself get out of control when I’m in situations like this... the party that is. Despite how emotional of a creature I am, I have to learn how to maintain my control. That is the professional thing to do after all. I’ve heard stories of actors throwing fits on set all the time, but that isn’t until after they’ve already established a name in town. Right now I’m nobody... sure that’s all gonna change, but in the meantime I have to project the best personality possible.

Take this party for example. I can't walk around here throwing weight around like I'm the big dick on campus... hell no! Maybe when I'm in the apartment with Lauren I can get away with that shit, but that's my turf. This thing, this place, this castle, it's a whole other world for me. It's a lot to take in all at once, but at the same time, I'm sure all of this is going to be common practice after I hit it big. So it's best I get adjusted first... then bring Lauren around when she's more comfortable.

Lauren would be offended by the scene anyway. At least I think she would. Everywhere I look there's a Playboy-worthy woman prancing around in her birthday suit... especially the pool! And the drugs! Don't get me started on the drugs! Lucky for me I'm a recovered drug addict... and I mean that with all seriousness. If I hadn't gotten "in the program" a few years back I'd be a sitting duck in a place like this. But now I'm a rock with a focused eye on the prize... I know it and that's all that matters. Sooner or later she'll have to realize the image of who she thinks I am and was isn't who I am at all. She says I've changed since leaving home. I say I've finally come home. I'm finally myself. And Lauren will have to learn to accept that. End of story.

I'm supposed to meet my friend Tad who I met on one of my extra jobs but I don't see him anywhere around. He was supposed to introduce me to a writer friend of his that has all the right friends in all the right places... I think his name is Donnie or something of the like. Anyway it's no matter right now. This isn't the sort of party where people wear nametags. I'm just going have to sift through the herd to find Tad... which shouldn't take too long I hope.

I make my way through a large courtyard with the biggest and bluest swimming pool I've ever seen. A group of young model-types are taking their clothes off while doing lines of what looks like coke being given to them by mid-eastern guys... I think they're Persian or something. There actually seems to be a lot of Persians in this town – or at least more than I'm used to back home. I've also noticed

most of these Persian guys all look the same – not like Asian’s do with the same little faces – the Persian’s in and around LA look like the same “person”, if that makes any sense. They all wear the same clothes, the same white-pointy shoes, the same fake Breitling watches, with the same haircuts, and the same black BMW’s parked out front. I’m wondering if that’s a cultural thing, or maybe the city of LA? I sure hope it’s not the city. If LA has the power to influence an entire culture of people, I’m in a whole world of trouble. After all I’m not a trend-setter. I’m an actor.

I’ve been navigating through the crowded courtyard for what feels like an hour and I’m still only half-way to the main house where it seems “my type” is hanging out. I see a table on the way to the house covered by an endless sea of expensive imported beer bottles. I know I’ve been in the program for a couple years and I really shouldn’t have a one, but drinking isn’t like doing drugs. And the beer’s so damn fancy... plus how can I be expected to network without doing a little casual drinking?

I weigh my options for all but twenty seconds and grab the first beer I can. It’s something German and wouldn’t be able to pronounce it if my life depended on it. The bottle is frosted and numbs my fingertips at the touch. The bottle’s neck sweats condensation inside my palm as I bring it to my lips. The first rush of beer is cool and smooth in my mouth – starting an orgasmic Oktoberfest amongst a group of born-again taste-buds that haven’t had the pleasure in over six-hundred days. My throat opens up almost mechanically and lets the sweet, dark, German elixir tunnel down into my stomach which will eventually lead the business-ingredients into my bloodstream...

Within minutes I can feel the beer going to work.

Since getting into town my panic-attacks have been getting worse every day. Yet at this moment something in the Alcohol is putting

it all at bay. I can no longer feel my heart beating out of my chest or the club-soda in my brain. Everything is calmed down. Chilled out...

I can see myself doing the beer thing a little more often. As long as I-

“I think I know you...” A beautiful-brunette (in fact one of the most beautiful brunettes I’ve ever seen) says to me with a smile on her face.

Feeling my knees come dangerously close to giving underneath me I realize there’s no way this girl can know me. She looks like a movie star. So I tell her probably while blushing uncontrollably, “I um, really don’t think so. I’m new in town”.

“Me too... just about everyone at this party is ‘new in town’!” She opens her beautiful mouth and lets out the most innocent giggle I’ve ever heard – almost putting me in a daze. “I think I heard somewhere that the average life-span of a young person trying to make it in Hollywood is six months. I’ve been here three weeks and am losing my mind”.

She continues to talk to me as if she’s genuinely interested in having a conversation. She’s not like the rest of these people. She’s not cold. She seems... happy? But I still don’t know why she’s talking to me. Guys like me don’t know girls like this. I want to say something to this girl but don’t know how. I’m half intimidated, half scared she’ll realize she doesn’t really know me and I’ll have to go back to hunting for Tad in a sea of strangers.

“I know where I know you from now! I’m such a dunce!” She says as her wide-brown eyes light up. “You were the guy at the set of Skylab a few days ago! You were one of townspeople extras. You kept asking what a SAG Voucher was.” She laughs.

Fuck, I think to myself. This girl does know me. This angel. This first crush I've had in a long time knows me from the day I make the biggest ass out of myself since getting into town. It all comes to light for her now. I'm not anyone worth talking to. I'm just another "extra"... and an extra that really didn't know what a SAG Voucher was to boot.

"I didn't know what a SAG Voucher was when I first got here either" She offers, actually calming me down some. "I thought you just come to LA, call up an agency, and tell them you want to be famous!" She starts laughing again, "I had no idea there was all this red-tape behind it all."

I begin to calm down a bit. This girl is just like me. We're soldiers in the same war. My drink is dead so I walk over to the table for another, without thinking I just left the girl alone. No matter though, she's actually following me! I open myself a beer and hand it to her. She takes. I open one for myself. She offers cheers. I take. We share a smile. Then, now more comfortable in my cheap-ass shoes I say-

"You know when I first got into town I did exactly that... called up a few agencies asking them to represent me. I didn't even have headshots."

She starts to giggle, spitting up some of her German Beer. While laughing she asks, "Are you serious?"

"I wouldn't lie to you. I just busted out the yellow pages in my hotel room and started cold-calling all the way down the list. I didn't even have an apartment yet. I figured I should get an acting job first before finding an apartment." I say all of this with a new-found confidence. I'm actually enjoying myself. Normally in social situations I frog up – which isn't all that uncommon amongst actors – I shy away into the corner and normally only talk to people I know. And if I do talk to anyone, they don't look like this girl. This is

the type of girl that would have me shaking in my boots. I would run the other way for fear of making a total fool of myself. But this is different. I'm smiling, engaging, and looking her right in the eye. I can't put my finger on it, but there's something different about me. I've gone through a change since first stepping foot into this party. Maybe I'm acting and not even knowing it? Perhaps the scenery is so close to what I always dreamed things would be like if I hit it big, that somewhere deep in my subconscious I'm taking on the role of an actor... and then it hits me... I realize what's attributed to this newer, bolder, and more confident me...

It's the cold, sweaty bottle resting comfortably in the palm of my hand. It's the cool froth going down my throat. It's the alcohol in my blood. Two drinks into the night and I'm a new man. The panic attacks are gone. My confidence is skyrocketing. And for once in my life, I impress someone worth impressing.

I can see this beer thing becoming a regular fixture in my day-to-day. I take a final swig off my second bottle and before I can say anything, this porcelain-skinned brunette beauty before me exchanges my beer for another and offers the cutest wink this side of Colorado.

"So this is really embarrassing but I figure I have to ask being as we're talking and getting along so well" She says as my heart flutters – anxious to hear what this is going to be, and then she humbly says with a smile, "I don't even know your name".

I laugh and offer cooler than ever, "It's cool. I don't know your name either."

We both laugh. Take swigs. Share a silence. Then...

We lock eyes. Fireworks blow-off in my belly the moment our pupils align. My heart races, in a good way. With one glance, I feel more alive than I ever have. I think she feels it too, even though I

can't understand why. We're in our own world together. The rest of the party is only background music. Then finally our shared silence hits its climax when she smiles and says, "Rachael... my name is Rachael".

I'm in a daze for god-knows how long. Her name rings in between my ears over and over. Rachael. Rachael.

I get over it. Compose myself. Take a sip and say, "I'm Andrew... Andrew Lloyd."

"Well Andrew Lloyd" She says with a seductive smile, "Being you're the first person I've really *talked to* since getting into town, we should keep-"

Just before she could finish she's stopped by an intruding body cutting in between us. At first I thought it was a stranger who had too many, then I realize its Tad... and he looks like shit.

"Hey Tad are you alright?" I ask.

He doesn't answer for minute. He doesn't look good at all. Defiantly not the brooding, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, leading-man type I met and befriended on my last few extra jobs. The Tad before me looks exhausted, his once dark complexion is left gray and scaly, I don't think he's slept much, and aside from the sandbags under his eyes (if my experience in rehab has taught me anything) I'd say he's been hitting the pixie dust pretty hard.

"Sorry I've had a rough night. I didn't mean to invite you to a party and leave you all alone with strangers. How long have you been here?" He says.

"Not too long. Not really a problem." I introduce Rachael into the mix while shooting her a confident smile, "Rachael here has been keeping me entertained."

Rachael softly shakes Tad's unstable hand and says, "I think I've seen you around a few extra jobs."

Empty, distant, and mind-wandering Tad responds, "Yeah... I think I've seen you around..."

The three of us share nods, a moment of uncomfortable silence, and then Tad changes gears, "Listen Andrew I'd hate to do this to you but I..." He takes a moment to compose himself, "I just can't stay here. I've had a really bad... I'll call you."

He takes off without another word, well before I can say anything to rebut. I'm having a fine enough time with Rachael so I shrug it off and get back to her. "That was... interesting" I say.

She polishes off her beer and pops another. "Welcome to LA."

"You're probably right, and we've only been here a couple weeks, you and I."

"Which reminds me, I was going to say before your friend crashed in here, we should I don't know... exchange numbers or something. It's good to have a friend in a town like this, and I'm sure we'll be doing the same extra jobs. Maybe we can, I don't know... carpool, hangout, whatever?"

I can't believe my ears. I would pay good money on a magazine if there was a picture of this girl inside it, just so I could hang it on the wall. I mean she's a knock-out... and it runs deeper than looks. She's genuine. She's beautiful. And she's actually interested in me... Then I realize, maybe that's what I have that the other guys around this party don't, I actually want to know this girl. I'm genuinely interested...

“I mean it’s so cold on those sets, if you know what I mean. It would be nice to have someone to talk to” She says.

“I totally agree with you. I couldn’t think of anything better than being paid to have a chat like this again while pretending to be students in a high school.”

She laughs, and then says “Who knows, maybe if we get close enough we can play high school sweethearts in the background”.

She’s flirting with me and I’m grooving with it. The drink’s working wonders with me. This chick’s into me, and I’m totally into her. With the drink in my hand and this girl near my arm, the city of Los Angeles is looking a lot better than it did a few hours ago. I mean this moment is what day-dreams are made of. It couldn’t be more perfect.

We pop another couple of beers and go to work. She starts talking about just getting into town and whatnot – regular “get to know you” chat. Half of me is listening and nodding while the other half can’t help to wonder: If Lauren wasn’t back in our shit apartment hating every minute of this town, how happy could I be as an overall unit with a girl like Rachael?

It’s definitely something worth pursuing. I may have something here so I’ve got to play it smart. I’m not saying I’ll dump Lauren for something better, not after the sacrifices she’s made for me, I’m not that type of person... that’s an LA thing.

I’m just weighing out my options.

Tad

I just got to the party and already I'm dealing with assholes. I shouldn't have invited my friend Andrew from set earlier to this place – it's a shark pool. He's a sweet corn-fed kid from some college football-type state and hasn't grown his rough LA skin yet. Sure he can handle some of the dogs, but this party is something you have to work your way up to.

Take this jerk Donnie Ramo for example, whenever it's just the two of us together he's cool as a bag of ice. He talks about wanting to be a writer, sometimes even shows me some of his stuff if he's sauced enough... it's not bad. We talk about things that matter, you know? We talk about the future, about collaborating – me with my acting and him with his stories. There's never a dull conversation between the two of us.

But that all goes to shit once another cook is added to the mix. Something comes over him, he becomes ice-cold. It's like a shadow casts over him. He becomes this dark cat and completely shuts himself off from anyone else around him. It's almost as if he has two personalities. I think someone should do him a favor and write a script up for Depakote – the guy does enough pills as it; adding another can't do too much damage. Especially if the guy needs it, which he does, a classic case of bipolar if I've ever seen one.

I don't mean to be so sore on the guy right now, but he just treated me like walking shit a minute ago. I'm like that I guess; find it hard to let things go that really grit my teeth. I mean I wasn't in the wrong or anything. I saw him at the other end of the hall and figured I'd say hi to the cat. I invited a new friend of mine that hasn't got here yet just so he could meet Donnie. So I take him aside to tell him and the fucking guy just brushes me off like we're perfect strangers.

At first I thought he didn't notice me. Then I thought maybe he was in one of his moods – where he's in his own world. But right now I can see him talking to that whore Stacy and her flavor of the day Cal. That just tells me he flat out didn't care to talk to me. And I didn't do dime one to the guy. I'm pretty heated about it.

But whatever, I'll get over it...

Right now I've got bigger fish to fry – rent's due in three days and I'm dried out like a prune in the bread department. Extra-work pays, sure, but most of those kids are in their early twenties. I may not look it, but I'm a thirty-two year-old man. I've got expenses. And at fifty-eight bucks a day, extra-work can barely keep the heat on.

Empty pockets aren't really a new thing for me; acting's a feast-or-famine business. This isn't my first ride on the rollercoaster, I can tell you that much. I always have things waiting in pipeline in case shit hits the fan. I have people to call, things I can do, and the status is always cooled by the first of the month. Do I like doing what I have to do? Of course not, it's a hustle... and hustles are hassles. But what else am I supposed to do? All the catering jobs are dried up.

I hatch a super-strong Vodka-Cranberry in one gulp and pour myself another, almost instinctually. I don't normally get too sauced before doing "a job" but today my nerves are going a bit

faster than usual. It's probably that fucker Donnie Ramo still. I've gotta let things pass easier. I'll work on that.

Dane is making his way toward me and he couldn't look any faggier. He's got more leather than four cows and his pirate-shirt can use a few more buttons. He sees me from across the room and flashes me this sickening predatory smile. I want to puke. As he gets closer I can see he's wearing make-up even. A little bit of mascara around the eyes and a shit-load of blush on his cheeks. The fags in this city never cease to amaze. I mean with what I have to do from time to time I get used to them, but there's always a Queen out there that will take me by surprise... and Dane knows all of them.

Dane glides right up next to me and puts his faggot hand on my thigh, not too far away from my soft-as-a-pillow cock. He leans in close to my neck – spewing his hot, onion-and-booze breath onto the soft skin of my perfectly tanned neck. I'm about to get sick. I back off.

“What is it Dane?”

“Jesus, you're hostile tonight...” he says in a faggy whine.

“I'm not hostile, I'm just tired. You know the score.” I look around to make sure no one's looking – especially Donnie – god knows how he'd use this shit against me in the future. I put on a tough-guy act, lean into Dane, and say, “Plus, I can't have your fag ass draping all over me in front of this crowd. We're not far from West Hollywood but far enough if you catch my drift”.

“Reelax babe”, he says, “I've got good news for you”.

“There's no such thing as good news from you Dane.”

“Okay...” he turns away, grabs a drink, and says, “then don’t call me again next time you need a favor.”

He’s about to leave. I stop him. As much as I don’t want to admit it, I need his help again.

“I’m sorry Dane. I don’t mean to be so bitter, I’m just really... stressed out, you know?”

“Yeah I know. But you put yourself in this position honey. I’m just trying to help”.

“I understand. I just hate doing this shit.”

“Oh it’s not that bad... you make out okay. It’s not like you’re bottoming out, if you know what I mean?”

Red rushes to my face. He crossed the line. He may be helping me out, but with queens like Dane, sometimes you have to crack the whip – let them know who’s really wearing the balls.

I grab his collar and bring him real close and say, “Don’t fucking say that shit again. Not at a place like this. You’re my present, these people are my future. You dig?”

I push him away. He’s like a scared cat. He composes himself and says to me with a bitchy fear in his eyes, “Yeah well, I’m a present that’s going on ten years running. This future you’re always going on about never seems to come. So if I were you I’d play nice with what you have in the here and now.”

He’s right and knows it... the air gets uncomfortable for a beat. He drinks his queenie-fruit-drink in quiet. I have to break the ice...

“Speaking of the here and now...” I swallow hard, not wanting to ask, “Do you have anything for me?”

He smiles huge... the little fuck thinks he has me in the palm of his hand. "I've got two guys you can choose from. Used to have three but the last one backed out once I told him you needed a DVD player in the room."

"Did you tell the fag it's the only way I can get hard?"

"Yeah I told the GUY you needed it to get hard... careful with the name calling..." he grazes my leg with his own, "you never know who you may offend."

I don't even bother getting mad at the guy. The sooner I'm done with this the better. "So you've got two lined up? Are they upstairs?"

"You know it... ready and waiting."

"I bet... what's the cash like?"

"Same as usual, unless you change your ways the price will always stay the same."

"I told you a million times I'm no fag."

"Yeah, what you do doesn't make you gay..." he takes a sip with a smug grin and says, "You're just ACTING... I forgot."

If I didn't need the six-bills I'd kick this fags teeth right down his cock-swallowing throat. But I do need him, so I relax, polish my drink, and pop one of my last Viagra's to get me ready for show-time.

"You have the cash?" I ask him.

"Shouldn't you get to work first?"

“Last time I worked on the nose for you I got stiffed.”

“Wasn’t that the point?” he says and giggles uncontrollably. He sees I’m not laughing and composes himself out of fear. Then the fag apologizes, “I’m sorry. It was only a joke.”

“I’m not laughing” I say cold as ice.

“I can see that.” He says.

He pulls a wad of six hundreds out of his jacket pocket and slides it across the bar to me. I count it and put it in my pocket. Part of me just wants to take the cash and leave, but the other part of me knows this probably won’t be the last time I ask Dane for a favor.

“You got anything else for me?” I ask.

“What do you mean?”

I gesture under my nose for some coke. He picks it up in a heartbeat and hands me a twenty-bag. “This should get you started” he says, “They have plenty more upstairs. Believe me.”

I pour myself another drink and hatch it in one gulp. Liquid courage.

“Don’t look so upset Tad” he says, “Look at the bright side, you’re getting paid to get what most straight guys have to pay out the nose for.”

“I am a straight guy... we usually get head from chicks.”

“You’ve got your little DVD player. Or hell, you are an actor... just close your eyes and pretend he’s a she.”

“What do you think I’ve been doing all these years?” I say as I gather my courage and make my way to the stairs. Then something occurs to me and I ask, “By the way, did you give them a name?”

“Of course I did... Daniel.” He smiles and winks.

I don’t respond. Daniel’s fine... tells the queens I only take head and never give it. I look straight-ahead careful not to look anyone in the eye. What I do is my business. I’m acting, not gay. Just paying the damn bills.

On my way to the stairs I remember my friend Andrew. I forgot all about him when I set all this shit up. Poor guy’s not going to know what to do when he gets here. No matter though, he’ll have to fend on his own. It’s not like getting head takes up the whole evening. As long as I don’t get too crazy with the fairy-dust I should be back down within the next sixty ticks.

The stairs aren’t too far away. Once I hit that first step its game-time. I make a mental picture of every slut I pass on the way – careful to remember all the nooks-and-crannies: the tits, the ass, the thongs, anything to keep me hard when the fags roping my hook... anything to stay professional.

All I have to do is maintain, stay in character, and remember to drink enough tonight where all of this will be a distant memory.

I approach the stairs and lock eyes with Donnie Ramo for a beat. The bastard smiles at me. He’s not stupid, he knows the score. But rather than feel for me, he probably gets off on my misery. Your typical fucking writer. He’d be such a perfect guy if he didn’t try so hard to be apathetic... if he didn’t try so hard to be cold. He doesn’t think anyone knows, in fact they probably don’t... but I do. I understand Donnie better than he does. He hates himself and tries so hard to have others do the same. But I could never hate Donnie... we’re too alike.

I brush Donnie off, block my mind off, and get into character. It's go time. Nothing else matters. All that matters is the money in my pocket and the mantra in my head... I'm not a fag, I'm just acting... this isn't who I am, it's what I do...

I'm not a fag. I'm acting.

This isn't what I am, it's what I do...

Sonya

Stacy's with that sleaze Cal and I'm bored out of my mind. Sure there's plenty of blow but when is it not around? Really, I can only take so many of these things before they start getting tired. I'm feeling like the girl dressed for the ball and I end up at the bowery. There's no one here over twenty-five and I'd be lucky to find a guy with his own money. Just a bunch of trust-fund babies and scrubs living off of credit and flash – anyone worth talking to is on the other side of the hill.

My phone goes nuts and I'm bored so I take a look. It's a text from Stacy. Cal wants to produce a low-budget movie and have her star in it. Real original. I really should save her from this guy but I figure she's got to learn one way or another. Plus I'm bored but not *that* bored.

When I first got here I ran into this green-chick Rachael and couldn't help but to laugh at the "fresh off the bus" look she had on her face when she first walked in. It was as if she hasn't ever seen a swimming pool before. Pathetic. I think she even drove up in a beat up Kia or something... might as well have taken the bus with this crowd. At the same time I don't know why I even give a shit, she won't ever be able to offer me a single thing in this town. I can tell after watching her for twenty-eight seconds. Like right now for example, she's laughing it up with some loser-actor type by the

beer table; completely oblivious to the twenty-some-odd guys giving her the “fuck me eyes” all of whom are worth over mid-six-figures each.

Her loss, not mine... she’s not even worth getting twisted over.

I’m still not feeling the party and the booze is weak so I figure I’ll head to the courtyard and do one of the Persian’s blow. Last time I was at one of these things some fucker Ali stiffed me with a batch that was so damn speedy I thought I’d have to wear a mouth-guard for a fucking week. I swear to Christ if that shit happens again I’m going to stay home the next time I get a Myspace message inviting me to one of these fag-fests.

Walking into the courtyard I can’t help but to be a little turned off when I see only Ali and his “crew” of “bro’s” shoveling shit up the noses of the “nameless slut clan”. I’m actually thinking of blowing this place off all together. I haven’t even had the energy to put up a fake smile so why even bother. In fact the only person here worth talking to after the blow hits my membrane is that guy Donnie Ramo. I’ve seen him from time to time and couldn’t help but to notice he’s about as happy as I am to be hanging out at a place like this. In fact, I saw him with Cal and Stacy a minute ago and it seemed they were completely blind to the fact Donnie despised both of them. I actually remember hearing from someone, Maybe Mel, that Donnie liked ripping off rich kids to pay the bills but that might have actually been this faboulus-boy Dean Mel was talking about. Whatever... I can’t remember. And I don’t even remember why I cared in the first place.

I get into the sweaty mix of the courtyard and become relieved when I see Vallah passing out blow to a select few of his friends. He knows Ali but doesn’t hang with him all that much. In fact, I think he’s the one that sells Ali the speed he cuts his shit with.

I walk up to Vallah in a fashion that shows I'm not impressed by his valley-trash wanna-be gangster ass and ask him for a couple lines. He winks to his buddies in a way that suggests he actually thinks he's going to bust my pantie-line and I can't help but to laugh. A) I don't fuck with the Middle East guys – they're sleazy, assholes, and they don't respect women at all. B) they're pathetic as all fucking hell. They act like they own this town and fail to see how completely unoriginal every last one of their curry-reeking asses are.

But fuck it, I need to get high before I go ape.

"So are you guys gonna keep winking at each other or are you going to help me out?" I say, careful to let them know how bored I am.

Vallah takes a second. Fronts a smug smile like he's the captain of all things shady. I want to throw up.

"Yeah baby-girl, whatcha need? Can't one of your white-boys help you out? Think you better off with 'dem..." He says like a fucking three year-old.

"I think you mean 'them' Vallah."

"The name's V, girl."

"Oh I'm sorry V... you going to give me a fucking line or continue this Alpha-Dog shit?"

He smiles... probably trying to hide the fact that I fucking own him. Then he says like the putz he is, "Relax girl... Damn you got an edge on you... I can tell you need."

I want to give him another timely remark but decide not to. I've already lost enough IQ points as it is trying to mix with these fucking Neanderthals.

He lays out a few lines and I give it a go – completely ignoring the fact that these grease-ball fucks are staring at my ass. The coke goes up smooth but smells and tastes too much like ether. I don't have any other options so I vacuum up the rest – leaving the last line over to dip a Parliament in and do an ice-bump.

I pull a Parliament from my purse and scoop the remaining pile of powder into its recessed filter. One of Vallah's grease-balls gives me the Jewish eyes but I blow it off. Fuck him.

I snort the last bump out of the cigarette's filter and light up. The first drag enters my mouth cold, crisp, and surprisingly tasty. My mouth lumps up and numbs out as if the dentist laid the shit out himself. A couple drags into the smoke the drip starts to lay out on my membrane... its bitter-sweet tang makes my eyes water and my clit wetten. I'm actually surprised... the shit's not half that bad.

Before I can truly enjoy my high I'm taken back to reality from a smug smile Vallah's flashing my way. I never noticed until now that he's missing a tooth – probably from malnutrition – and I'm repulsed by him now more than ever, to the point of possibly sicking all over the carefully tailored lawn at my feet.

"So babe... whatcha think?" Vallah asks as if he actually thinks this was something more than me trying to cop free shit.

"What do you mean?" I ask, annoyed that I have to waste the peak of my high with this fuck-buck.

"You ready to hang?" He asks, wet with hope.

“With you guys...” I say with a sour-look, “No thanks”. And with that I leave them behind without acknowledging that they’re alive. His shit is good yes, I’m stoned yes, I’m even bored to the point of tears. But that doesn’t mean I’ll reduce myself to hanging out with those middle-eastern fags for any longer than I have to. I’m not green in this town like the rest of the girls here. I’ve put plenty of coins in the meter. I’m paid up.

A green-bitch like my friend Stacy would have been all over these guys for free shit or even a shot at a comped night on the strip. Not me. I’m beyond that shit. A novice in LA waits for someone to “do for them”... a shark like myself sees the angles before they happen and know exactly what to do when the time comes.

Take what just happened for example. While Vallah (or V) and his cronies were busy scoping my ass – thinking I was gratefully sucking up my free lines – my hands were deep into his stash, picking out three-or-four twenty-bags to get me through the night.

While all the girls in LA are waiting for a Man to give them something, I’m in the shadows finding what I can take. It’s no ancient secret... this shit has worked since the birth of the dollar. It’s a dog eat dog world, and the dog willing to take his meal rather than beg for it sleeps the soundest at night.

To my surprise the high is peaking more than expected. Maybe it was the cigarette, or it could be the rush of successfully pocketing three bags for myself off that sweaty skinned fuck. Whatever the case may be, this party isn’t lagging as much as earlier.

I make my way back to the house and see Stacy and Cal have ditched... I suspect Stacy’s upstairs snorting coke off Cal’s pasty-cock while he puts on a sleazy face. Part of me finds comfort in not having to listen to their shit while I’m this high but there’s another part of me that’s slightly irritated that I may not have anyone to talk to while I ride this snow-slope.

Any irritation I feel is swept away when I get closer to the couches and notice Donnie slumped over by himself. I know the guy is just as sleazy as the rest of these cattle in his own way – but he does it with style. As human as it may seem, I feel a connection to the guy. Not that I would ever fuck him – or he me for that matter – it’s just I feel like we’re on the same team. Comrades.

I head over to the couch and sit next to him. He doesn’t notice at all. His eyelids open and shut at tortoise speed. His neck creeks his head back and forth, and for the first time that I can remember, he allows a boyish smile to crack between his lips. He’s definitely drugged up to his neck – I suspect Oxycontin.

I’m bored and want to chat and can’t help myself on account he looks so helpless so I tickle his side to get his attention. He stirs around for a spell, like a little boy being awoken for the first day of class.

“What the fuck?” he asks groggily.

“You’re stoned aren’t you?” I ask, probably with a pathetic smile.

“Who isn’t at this fucking shack? I can’t stand the people here. I don’t even know why I bother.”

“From what I understand you can’t stand people in general... so you should be used to the feeling by now.”

“I guess you’re right...” he says as he lights a Lucky Strike like he just doesn’t give a fuck. “Maybe I should move to the country or something. Nothing around but me and the animals I raise for food.”

“I don’t think you could hack it. As much as you pretend to hate everyone, you still need them...”

“You think so huh?”

“I know so.”

“How’s that?” he asks.

“Same reason I need people around... They make me feel better about myself... seeing how numb and brainless they are.”

He takes a beat to let what I said sink in. That or he’s so stoned he nodded out before I could make my point – which normally would piss me off but whatever, I’m stoned. Then he says, “Maybe you’re right... no one’s ever put it that way to me before... there is another way to look at it though...”

“Please tell...” I say, three-quarters interested, which uncommon for me.

“Maybe... it’s them that’s okay, you know? Maybe they’re the ones that are getting it right... and we’re sitting alone on the couch THINKING we’ve got all the answers... when in reality, when it’s just as lonely and cold outside as it is in our beds, we realize that we’re the losers. We’re the ones that did it all wrong...” He loses whatever train-of-thought he may have had and drifts away.

I take a minute to think it all over. He could have a point. Maybe Stacy and the rest of the OC-Twigs outside have it right – maybe I’m the one that has it backwards? Who knows, one day I wake up and I’m fifty and I have no one – every bridge burned from the past – and the girls I stiff behind their back now, grew up to have children and a white fence to call their own... while I’m left with nothing but leather skin, a bad job, three kids that hate me, and a bad batting average with abusive guys...

Whatever... I'm coming down off the coke and the last thing I want is a "Confucius Says" session with Donnie fucking Ramo.

I lean in close to Donnie and whisper in his ear, "I jacked three bags of coke from one of the Persians out back... wanna go find a place to chill on it?"

He leans back, looks me in the eye, and says, "Fuck it... why not. I have to come back up anyway. All this talking has been buzzing my kill if you know what I mean..."

I take the cigarette from his lips and finish it off. I want to say something but don't have the will to craft any words together. The coke's in my pocket and I'm with the one person at this place that doesn't give me an ulcer every time I see them.

I stand up and gesture for the stairs. He gets the cue and follows suit.

As we approach the stairs, ready to go up and do the rest of my blow and do god knows what else it finally hits me... what I wanted to say to Donnie just a moment ago... the thought that went through my head...

I couldn't agree with you more... You understand me, and I understand you.

Donnie's Black Sunday

My nose is plugged to shit and whistles if I breathe too hard. I haven't opened my eyes yet but I can only imagine the scene. The head's swimming in Bacardi, my breath tastes like pussy, and my cock is sore as all hell. It's obvious I fucked last night and fucked hard. I'm pretty sure it's that apathetic-slut Sonya which actually kind of irritates me. I didn't want to fuck any of the broads at this place and not only did I do that, but I ended up spending the night at this fucking dump... That's just not my style.

Another part of me can't help but to be slightly turned on. As much of a cunt Sonya may be, she is a fucking knockout that I'll be jerking off to in the bathroom for months to come. Dark-hair which I love. Soft tits that aren't too big but not too small. Great glass-cutting nipples. And an ass like butter that cups perfectly in my hand...

Now that I think of it, I didn't do too poorly. The only thing the bitch lacks is personality... and these days personality doesn't rank too high on my importance-meter anyway. At my age, who has time for personality?

The shame's gone so I open my eyes. Sonya's next to me passed out like a narcoleptic; I think she'd sleep through a thirty-minute Rictor-Shuffle if she had to. Even asleep after a hard night of partying she doesn't look all that bad. The mid-afternoon Los

Angeles sun is hitting her just right and I could almost see myself rubbing one off right here and now if I didn't turn in my pervert-papers 'x' amount of years ago.

I scan the scene for a cigarette to get the cunt-juice taste out of my mouth, but I come up short everywhere I look. I don't run much of a risk in waking Sonya up so I slide out of bed for a better look around the room. I strike gold a few seconds into the search when I find Sonya's open-purse laid out messily on the carpet. I steal two of her Nigger-breath-mint Newport's and light one up. The first drag comes close to bringing up three meals when the Menthol hits my throat but I choke it down like a man. The second and third drags go down smoother so I sit down and decide to enjoy the nicotine while it can still offer a first-of-the-day buzz. My head's still swimming from the booze last night and I notice a bottle of Jameson (my favorite) less than an arm's reach away. There are no glasses so I pull straight from the bottle. The whiskey burns going down and makes my empty, early-afternoon stomach rumble uncontrollably. I'm beyond getting sick from booze, but it still gets me on edge from time to time.

I take a few more pulls and finish my cigarette as the alcohol just starts to get to work in my bloodstream. The hangover is on a slow way out and I should be able to drink myself sober within the next fifteen.

The only question is: do I stay in this room for the next fifteen minutes? Or do I pack up the shop and head for my place?

I feel like walking shit right now and the last thing I want to do is drive down Sunset in fucking deadlock. I'd rather eat a Silver-Bullet-Sandwich than deal with the bright sun and dull drivers of this city. But on the other end, if by some miracle of the heavens Sonya actually manages to wake up I don't want to have to deal with any post-fuck shit from her. I really am not in the mood for any awkward looks or silences. And I especially don't want to deal with

that whole naked-scramble that occurs between two people that really don't feel comfortable being nude near each other. It's fucking dirty and an uncomfortable memory in the event it ever pops up while I'm playing it in the Spank-Bank-Theater months down the road.

Another fear is that she'll want to talk... or worse, have lunch or something. It's all too awful to think about so I light another one of her cigarettes and continue to go to work on the Jameson.

I zone out for an amount of time I'm not sure of, thinking of too many things to register clearly. My mind is all kinds of hazy – which happens a lot for me. Sometimes it all swims around so fast I have to slow everything down through outside elements. The booze helps, but not enough. I notice more blow laid out on the small mirror we stole last night and figure a couple bumps is better for my ulcer than a cup of coffee so I go to town. Twenty minutes pass wake-up and I've already got nicotine, blow, and booze coursing through my veins.

Another day in LA started off on the wrong foot and I have no one to blame but myself...

It's been this way since I first got here – constantly telling myself tomorrow will be a new day, tomorrow I'll turn it all around, tomorrow will be the first day of the rest of my life... sadly though, tomorrow has yet to show its face around Donnie-ville.

I get sick of thinking of my failures and take another pull from the Jameson. The buzz is kicking in full swing and I can feel the warm alcoholic-wave wrap itself around my nervous system. The warm rush makes its way up and envelops itself around my brain. Any fears make their way down the escalator and a flow of overworked endorphins make it easier for me to Zen out, forget about the present, and dream of a better future... as faggy of a move that might be.

I've had quite a few mornings like this before, so it's nothing new. After shoveling chemicals into my system day in and day out, the brain eventually grows-tired from delivering unnatural amounts of pleasure and takes a break at the corner deli. When that happens, an ungodly depression clouds over me – making it close to impossible to get right now matter what drugs I put in my stomach. It's a rough few hours where I'm forced to sit in neck-deep-shit that's so thick my body refuses to will itself to move. Everything comes back at once: who I've hurt, how I've fucked up, the lies I've told, the tears I'm responsible for – it all comes at the speed of lightning and there isn't a pink cloud in sight to hide under.

In some circles what I'm experiencing is referred to as a "Black Sunday". I actually dig the term and will probably use it on that day that may never come where I get my shit together and focus on what needs to be focused on. Usually a Black Sunday only shows its face once a month for the average Joe. But here lately, it seems every few days are a Black Sunday for me. And they are lasting longer and longer, bleeding into my afternoons and evening to the point I just want to close my eyes and wake up as a child again – a chance to do it all over and unfuck what's been fucked...

But that Quantum Leap shit doesn't happen in the real-life-show, and if it ever did, I doubt it would happen to an asshole like me.

I finish off the Jameson and do another line of shit. My minds still going and I don't like all the soul-searching shit so I steal another cigarette to give myself an excuse to take a few deep breaths.

I smoke my third cigarette in silence and become aware of the time. An hour has passed since I first woke up and since I've done nothing but get lost in thought while drinking myself sober. The Whiskey has washed the Black Sunday away for the most part but I still find myself searching for thoughts. I look at Sonya as she sleeps in the afternoon-sun and can't understand why I'm still here. Traffic

is bad but not that bad. I'm just buzzed enough to handle the short ride down Sunset to Brentwood. But I'm still here? Smoking a cigarette and staring at a girl I wouldn't normally grace with a mutual stare while passing her on the street. So why the fuck am I here?

Is it the blow? No... I can just take the rest of it out of her purse, disappear, and forget I know her if we ever run into each other around the strip. It can't be the smokes either, I have Lucky Strikes in the car. Something is keeping me here and I don't even like thinking about it. I decide after this cigarette I'm going to cowboy up and hit the road... probably even take the broads blow, smokes, and whatever cash she has just so she knows we're not taking this any further.

But as I finish planning out my larceny I can't even force myself to smile. I can't get the wheels moving. It's as if I'm scared to go outside... to leave this room – as if I only feel comfortable inside these walls, with that slut on the bed.

But it can't be... what kind of person is scared to walk outside and face the world? Not me... it's just not my style.

I'm tired of the Dr. Phil session in my head so I force myself to ice-up and hit the bricks. I walk to the mirror and rail-up the rest of the blow. Then I pick-up Sonya's purse and take her cigarettes along with close to eighty bucks in cash.

I make my way to the door where I remember the twenty-bag we kept aside on the dresser by Sonya. I almost don't want to take the risk in waking her up but I figure I'll be jonesing for more blow when I get home where I know there's no blow.

I walk to the dresser and lift the twenty-bag – careful as a mouse not to wake the chick. She seems to be sleeping peacefully so I make my way out the door completely guilt free.

I put my hand on the doorknob, twist, and then out of nowhere—

“You didn’t take the last of the blow did you?” She says as if she hasn’t been sleeping at all.

I debate ignoring her and leaving without a word but I don’t know what to expect outside the door and don’t want any drama. I’m getting back to normal slowly but still have a small headache that doesn’t much appreciate guff. I decide to play it cool. I turn around to face her and look her right in the eye for a beat. I’m careful not to show any emotion which is pretty easy on account I really don’t think I’m feeling much at the moment but really don’t know.

We share a stare for a minute or two and I’m really surprised by the way this is all unfolding. She’s just looking back at me like she’s expecting an answer. Usually the girls frog up when I pull this shit and I go about my way. This is different and I don’t like it so I ask her in the most annoyed tone I can muster, “What?”

“The blow asshole... did you take the last of it?” She says.

“I... I don’t know.” I sharpen myself up, take a step closer and ask, “Does it matter?”

She falls back into the bed and chuckles to herself... obviously a private joke. Then she says, “I don’t even know... whatever.”

Her naked chest bumps up and down as she continues to enjoy her private joke – obviously me as the punch-line. I’m at a loss of words by the whole situation and want nothing more than to get out of here.

“So are we like... cool?” I ask.

She smiles and lights up a cigarette that she had to have hidden in her twot or something close to it. She takes two puffs, smiles, and says “Yeah Donnie we’re cool. Go do whatever it is you do.”

This all would be too good to be true if she means any of it so I ask again, “We’re cool then.”

“Jesus Christ Donnie, yes we’re cool...” She says genuinely annoyed.

“Okay then... I guess I’ll see you around.” I say as I make my way out.

“Whatever, just uh, you know... drive safe.”

For some reason I don’t understand, I want to say something in the lines of “thanks” or something like it but can’t force the words pass my lips. Instead I leave and shut the door behind me.

I’m home free but don’t feel like it. I avoided a scene and didn’t have to say more than ten words to the chick yet for some reason I feel like I lost out and I don’t know why.

This feeling I have, the sense of losing out on something but not knowing what it is, this is all something new... or at least a feeling I haven’t had for quite some time. Whatever this is, I don’t like it.

I make my way down an empty hallway leading to the exit when all of a sudden it hits me... this feeling I have, this emptiness, I know what it is...

Respect.

Andrew's Jacket

Lauren's pacing all over the place and I can already tell she's been rehearsing whatever it is she plans to say all day. Right now I'm pretending to be asleep, which is something I haven't pulled since I'm in the sixth grade. I know whatever shit is about to go down is going to be huge and I'm really not prepared for it right now. It seems since we first moved out here we've been fighting regularly... and I don't mean pussy-shit fights, these are up until the sun comes up type of fights. I'm still really hung-over from last night and the last thing my fragile body needs right now is drama. Nine times out of ten I'm all for drama – it helps prepare me as an actor... but at the same time a man can only take so much.

She's pissed for two reasons, the first being the most obvious – coming home last night reeking of a gin mill after being “in the program” for just around two years. The second reason, the biggest of all, would be the fact my jacket smelled vaguely like the perfume aisle at Macy's. Lauren's got it in her head that I was a little too close for comfort to a member of the opposite of sex. I tried telling her before calling lights-out that LA-type get-togethers include a large amount of women – all of which are decked to the neck in all sorts of fragrances. That said, if a well-intentioned cat like myself is to walk amongst these gals, a scent is bound to rub off here and there. No matter what I was telling Lauren, she wasn't buying... and I can't really blame her. Before Lauren met me, she had gotten over

a string of sour relationships that always ended the same way – with the man of the “ship” cheating on her. I’ve told her time and time again that whatever those cats did is on them... I’m not like that. As they say, that shit’s a “them problem” not a “me problem”.

I can hear her pacing back and forth and it’s only getting worse as the minutes drip off the clock. There’s a faint mumble coming from under her breath which tells me she *really is* rehearsing and now I’m faced with quite the fork: I can act as if I’m just waking up and eat my shit like a man or I can continue to front this charade and possibly risk allowing her more time to strengthen her cache of ammo against me. I decide the latter is not only extremely likely but also the more uncomfortable of choices so I begin to stir out of bed. I kick my leg out and give off a long sigh. Lauren’s footsteps stop, she’s looking right at me, and not buying into any of my shit... The chick’s been with me almost a year, she’s hip to all of the tricks.

“You finally decided to show me you’re awake?” she says with fire in her eyes.

“What are you talking about?” I try to ask as genuine as possible.

“Don’t act with me Andrew... I know you weren’t sleeping.”

I don’t know if she’s trying to fish anything out of me so I step out of bed looking as offended as possible and ask, “Where is all of this coming from? I just woke up. You’re not still thinking about last night are you?”

“Don’t give me the ‘oh golly’ routine. We never finished what we were talking about.”

“Okay that may be true, but I just woke up. Can’t you give me time to at least brush my teeth?”

“Let’s not get off on the wrong foot. You and I both know you weren’t sleeping...”

“Oh yeah... what makes you so sure of that?”

“Andrew, people don’t swallow when they’re sleeping. It’s something they teach you in 9th grade biology. You’ve been swallowing hard for the past thirty-minutes.”

I don’t know how to respond to that. I try to think back to 9th grade but come up empty – I was pretty stoned all of the time back then. I realize a bulk of time has passed since she’s made her little observation so (like an idiot) I say, “So... I mean... wait is that true?”

“Jesus Christ Andrew...” She says showing just how fed up with me she is and then after a long pause she offers, “Can we talk like a couple adults for a second here?”

I already know this is going to be too deep for this early hour so I head to our mini-fridge where I stashed a four-pack of Boddingtons English Ale when I got home last night. I open the fridge, pop a can, and let the alcoholic elixir slide its way down my throat. Lauren looks at me as if I’ve been carrying typhus for three years so I ask as innocently as possible, “What?”

She lets the moment sit for a few ticks, then asks “So you’re drinking now?”

“Please Lauren; I can only take so much shit in a morning.”

“How is that shit? You said it yourself, when you drink or do shit you change...”

“It’s different with this... The booze calms my panic attacks.”

“You’re having a panic attack right now? Usually that happens when you’re doing things you’re not supposed to be doing...”

I’m starting to get fed-up. She’s lucky I love her. I keep my anger at bay and ask as calmly as possible, “Now what is that supposed to mean?”

“You tell me?”

“Look...” I say, “I know shit’s been tough moving here... I know you hate it here and you’re roughing it up on my account... I dig that, and I love you for it. But at the same time, you have to realize, in all the time we’ve been together we haven’t gone at it like we have the past few days. I love you to death babe but it’s been something new every day... I come home smelling of booze and you assume I’m out there raping teenagers. My jacket smells like perfume and all of a sudden I’m fucking models left and right. All this shit is so fucking taxing... and if you’re mad at something else looking for an outlet, this is the wrong fucking way to go about it. I mean shit Lauren, I know I came home late last night and I was doing a bit of the drinking but what’s the big snake over... I mean really?”

There isn’t an answer for god-knows how long. The room is thick with uncomfortable and she refuses to look me in the eye. She lets out a sigh and drops down onto the futon with a defeated look painted on her face. I hadn’t realized until now how draining just being in Los Angeles probably is for her. A part of me feels so bad and wants nothing more than to hug her hard so she may cry on whatever shoulder she wants... but there’s this other part of me, perhaps the new one she’s talking about, that can’t help but to be irritated by her. I’ve done nothing wrong since we stepped into town, yet she continues to have this nervous breakdown reminiscent of Charlize Theron’s character in “The Devil’s Advocate” (personal favorite of mine, Pacino is the tops). These empty mornings are getting old fast and despite how much I love this girl, I don’t know how much longer I can put up with it.

I take a few more swigs of my Boddingtons (which helps with the hang-over) and can no longer handle the silence, so I ask her, "Are you just going to sit there? I mean wasn't this your fight to begin with?"

"I never intended it to be a fight Andrew."

"You could have fooled me last night..."

"Last night you came home reeking of booze and women's perfume!"

"I was at a party Lauren... an industry party at that. You wouldn't understand."

"And you would? You've been here two weeks Andrew."

"Right and in two weeks I'm already networking."

"Networking? Andrew that party was probably filled with hundreds of other kids just like you chasing a dream. Networking doesn't involve drinking."

"Jesus Lauren..."

"Seriously Andrew... who did you meet last night? What kind of big-time networking did you do? Get any numbers Andrew? Thicken up the Rolodex, did you?"

"I don't know why you're being such a bitch about all of this. What do you want from me? Would you prefer I don't go out at all? I did invite you to the party after all didn't I? It's not like I'm going out behind your back."

"That's not the point Andrew!"

“Then what is the point, Lauren?” I pause for a beat to open another Boddingtons, then say, “Because like I said it’s something new every day. I’m going to be out there a lot trying to further my career... don’t put me in a position where I have to feel guilty every second of the day for something I shouldn’t.”

Tears form in Lauren’s eyes. I don’t think anything I said would have warranted such a reaction but the water’s flowing anyway. She can’t look me in the eye – her hair buried between her legs. The tears get stronger and stronger and I haven’t the slightest idea what to do. I just stand here... sipping my Boddingtons... trying to figure what it is I’ve done.

As her cries grow louder and louder I know I have to do something “boyfriendly”. She needs me, and perhaps this can be a breakthrough to prevent future tussles.

I say her name softly make my way next to her on the futon. I wrap my arm around her warm body and she doesn’t turn me away – in fact she embraces me. She shifts her body to interlock with mine and hugs my mid-section harder than I’ve ever been before. It’s a weird, very comforting hug, where her arms hold on tight but the embrace of her soft skin fits neatly into my own making me feel completely at peace. I can remember why I love this girl so much. We fit.

Despite our holding one another her crying continues. I can feel her salty tears and warm breath bounce off the soft skin of my neck. It’s a feeling hard to put into words, soft and warm – almost orgasmic – while at the same time dirty on account I am the cause of the tears downpour. And even after the smoke clears, the fight will forever change our relationship to the point having things the “way they used to be” close to impossible.

The cries down-grade to light snuffles and Lauren pulls away from our beautiful hug-session. She looks me in the eye and offers a weak smile – almost more out of pity than anything else. I wipe a tear away from her cheek with the back of my hand and she allows a more loving smile... but something's still on her mind.

"It's just..." she says while choking away the last of her tears, "it's just I get scared sometimes. I've been scared... since even before we got here."

"I don't understand Lauren... what's there to be scared of?"

The tears make their way out her eyes... here we go again. "I don't know, I'm just terrified that you're changing... that you're going to change... and we just... we just won't be us anymore."

"I don't understand what makes you think that? We've been best-friends forever. It's always been the Lauren and Andrew show. Nothing's changed..."

"You have." She says softly – almost defeated.

"How? What is it the beer? I told you it mellows the attacks. It's not like I'm doing dope anymore." I say with a choke, as I can actually *feel* Lauren's heartache and knowing deep in my mind there's nothing I can do to change how she feels, heart-ache ensues within my own self.

"But that's right now. Today it's the beer, tomorrow it's rum in the morning, then it's pot, then you're back to your old-self."

Without warning frustration makes its way up my neck and into my brain replacing feelings of sadness and powerlessness. I feel for Lauren and know she's been crying so I try my hardest not to be too mean. I say as calmly as possible, "First of all Lauren, you didn't know my 'old-self'. If you recall the whole reason we met in your

bum-fuck town was on account I was drying out in a recovery home. You met me after all the bad shit... so how can you say anything about me becoming 'my old-self'?"

"I know the stories, you've told me all of them... plus, I know you."

"You obviously don't" I say, "If you think having a beer here and there and going to a party is going to change me for the worse than you must not know me at all. Don't you understand that acting is all I want besides you? I'm not going to do anything to jeopardize any of that! I mean, do you just not trust me? Because that's the tune I'm hearing from you... do you honestly not trust me to make the best decisions possible for both of us? You know me babe, you know I'd never let anyone change who I am. I've been a leader since the day we met."

"I know" she says as she wipes the tears, "But it's not you I'm afraid of. It's these people, the people in this town. Don't you understand Andy? I'm not afraid of you... I'm afraid for you."

The tears start again and I can almost see why. Her saying what she just said, the humility, the message practically painted on her head: I love you so much. I suddenly realize clearly what all of this is about. She loves me more than life itself. She through the whole life she knew back home away because she's banking on the fact we'll be together forever. She's rolling the dice but wants to make sure she's on the winning side. She doesn't want to lose the guy she fell in love with two years ago. She doesn't want to lose the guy she was willing to leave everything behind for. She doesn't want to see me change.

I can't help but to see the innocence in Lauren and my heart immediately melts for her. She's the most beautiful woman in the world and loves me more than my own family. She is my family. She's my everything.

“Hey” I whisper into her ear, “You’ll never lose me. I promise”.

Before she can say anything I lay her down on the futon and kiss her with the same passion as our first kiss. I taste her breath, fondle her body, and enjoy every second of it.

She kisses my neck and sucks on my ear – sending vibrations all throughout my body. I grope her sweet spot and the horses are off at the races – clothes come off, sweat begins to pour, and we do what we do best.

We haven’t been this passionate since we first got out here. I love this girl and feeling her warm naked body against my own only solidifies it.

Our fight’s over... its official. We got over a hump and lived through it... things can only get better for the two of us.

Just as I insert myself into Lauren a thought hits me—an image I wish would go away but only gets stronger every time Lauren kisses me or gyrates up and down...

It’s the thought of a brown haired beauty. It’s the thought of someone else in my bed other than Lauren...

It’s a thought of Rachael... and despite how much I think I love Lauren...

I wish it was Rachael here in bed with me now...

Cal

I've been here at the W Hotel in Westwood waiting for this asshole Donnie Ramo for what seems like an entire afternoon. I hate Westwood... really. The only reason I came out here is on account Donnie asked me to meet here. I guess living in Brentwood, Westwood isn't too bad of a trek for him. But Jesus it's been at least three hours! Even if the jerk was walking he'd have been here an hour ago.

Anytime I try to call the phone rings twice then goes to voicemail. I suspect he's ignoring my calls but still manage to maintain my anger and stick around. That's the funny thing about cellphones – if the thing goes straight to voicemail then the phone is probably off. But if it rings a couple times and switches to voicemail you know whatever asshole you're trying to get on the line is avoiding you. I mean, it's not like people leave their cellphones at home. The whole point of the things is to make sure you're always in a contacts range. I know Donnie didn't leave his shit at home, he's a pretty sharp guy. So I know he's ignoring me... whatever, there must be a good reason.

Over by the bar some red-head slut keeps trying to meet eyes with me – most likely in the hopes I'll smile back. Maybe she knows me, I wouldn't doubt it. She could have been one of the Orange County chicks I was fucking a few months back, or maybe even one of the

Daddie's-girl cunts from Santa Barbara. Whatever the case may be, if she knows me, she can't have anything too fond in the memory department. But who knows... maybe she's just a floozy that sees cash and wants to take a ride on the Cal train.

No matter what's going through her mind, I don't want any part of it. I'm here for business.

At the opposite end of the restaurant I can see one of Donnie's buddies Mel sitting under a black-and-white photo of Julia Roberts. He's rubbing on some black-chick's thunder-thigh and whispering what-have-you's into her charcoal-colored-ear. I've never really got into the jungle-fever but if it works for Mel so be it. He's kind of a schmuck so whatever he can get, more power to him.

Part of me wants to get Mel's attention to see if he may have the skinny on where Donnie may be. It was Mel afterall that told me about Donnie's hook in the electronic department, but at the same time, I don't want to step on any toes. Donnie's especially.

From what I know about Donnie he seems to be a straight cat but he has this slightly intimidating way of carrying himself. It's as if he's constantly judging people and really doesn't give one or the other what other people think or feel. Case in point, my current situation. Sure he's going to show up eventually, but he has no regard for other people... he's the type that handles things on his own time.

I drink another tumbler of Scotch (probably my fourth) and gain a bit of courage. I decide to stand up and see if Hal's got any info in the Donnie department. If it pisses anyone off so be it – I'm here to do business after all.

I walk up to Mel's table but he doesn't notice me since his face is buried in the jungle-girls neck. I clear my throat and after a beat of giggling Mel finally looks up at my direction. He fronts a look like he

doesn't recognize me so I offer, "Mel it's Cal. I'm supposed to meet Donnie here a few hours ago and he's MIA."

Mel takes a beat. I suspect he's drugged to the gills on Oxy which has become a favorite around his circle of folk. After a moment the daze clears and recognition flashes in his eyes.

"Oh yeah Cal!" he says, "I don't know what Donnie's up to right now but I remember him mentioning something about meeting up with you earlier today."

"Oh so you've talked to him recently?"

"A few hours back... the chat was short-lived though. He seemed a bit on edge."

Mel's acting way too casual to be full of shit so I allow myself to relax a bit – if he says Donnie was on edge then maybe something came up. It occurs to me that Mel may be a bit closer to Donnie so I ask, "Do you think maybe you can give him a ring for me? Just let him know you saw me here and that I've been waiting?"

Mel offers me a look that suggests he doesn't want to go out of his way. I don't feed into it so he eventually sighs and says, "Yeah I'll ring him up. But if I have to eat any shit from him you're gonna hold onto the muddy part of the stick. Cool?"

I can't imagine what kind of "shit he would eat" but agree and make my way back to the table. Before I can put in a few steps Mel calls out for me. I can't quite hear him so I turn around and ask, "Did you say something?"

"Yeah let me holler at you for a second. Aren't you the cat that produces independent flicks?"

Fuck. Normally I would be up for any conversation concerning my jaunt into independent filmmaking but the sad fact of the matter is there really isn't one. I mean I front myself off to countless people as an up-and-coming player but the truth of the matter is there's really nothing going on my way. I know it's a cliché amongst LA folk to be bullshitters but I never really intended to become one. It's just with lying, once you get used to it, the lies tend to come at the speed of thought. Sometimes the bullshit flows out of my mouth and by the time I realize what's going on I've dug myself so deep the only way to get out is to keep digging and hope it all gets kosher by the time the sun comes up.

On the other hand there's so many advantages to bullshitting with the title of "emerging producer". I mean it's not like writing, acting, or directing where you have to have solid material to bring to the table. A producer just has to put the pieces together and hope they all fit at the end. If bullshitting can make that happen then I don't see an issue. In fact it may not even have to be considered lying. I can almost think of myself as a director using special effects in a movie... even though what I show you may not be real (in a sense), as long as the outcome is magic then there's no complainers.

My problem is I never come through on what I promise – probably because my lies are so damn extravagant. And after enough time passes, everyone can smell the scent of my bullshit and the run for their lives. I just hope I don't burn all my bridges before I'm ready to cross them.

I don't want to say anything to Mel, he works with Donnie and the last thing I want is to come across as an asshole to those guys. The truth of the matter is, the average shelf-life of one of my friends is no longer than a couple months (and that's on a good day). After enough time passes people get the idea how full of shit I am and take it on the arches. The last thing I want to do is start another flow of shit that will eventually (and lets be serious here) will go nowhere.

Mel's still fishing for an answer and I have no idea how much time has passed so I say, "I mean I'm involved with a few projects right now but not at the capacity where I could help you out or anything..."

"What sort of things are you involved in?" The black-chick with Mel asks – which actually pisses me off because I really don't want to answer but now I think I have to just to keep a good rep with Donnie.

"Oh just a few things, music videos and whatnot – I'm actually working on going union so right now every job I catch is freelance, and if you know the biz, everything with that is up in the air."

"Oh yeah tell me about it..." the black-chick says as if she knows what I'm talking about which actually shrinks my balls major. "I came out here to be an actress but nothing worked for me so I did every grunt job behind the scenes I could. I mean, I did every thing from audience coordination to assistant to the assistant and I still haven't put in enough time for my DGA. A couple weeks ago I caught a break because my friend Sonya met a guy over there... Erik Drew I think his name is... I guess he's pretty big over there and he's gonna get my resume on the top of the stack... you don't know him do you?"

Name-droppers... I can't stand them. Usually I just front a nod or spew out a story and move on but in this case I actually do know the guy she's rapping about. In fact, the fucking guy hates me. I made too many promises I couldn't keep and he started giving me the cold-shoulder-routine as soon as the last straw broke his Camel's back. I think maybe I ran into him on Vine a few weeks back and even chatted with him through the passenger-side of my Benz but I'm pretty sure he hauled-ass out of there like he was swimming away from Katrina.

I rap the pro's and con's of answering the darkies question in my head and realize it's best to jump ship. God-forbid she runs into Erik anytime soon and finds out how much of a bullshitter I really am.

I realize the best way out of here is a proper diversion so I reach into my pocket and pretend my Blackberry is ringing. I ask them to hold on for a tick while at the same time I'm holding the volume button on the side of the phone to mute it in the event someone calls while I'm fronting being on the phone.

"Hello?" I say into an empty phone. I wait a beat and then say, "You're kidding me? So are we on for tonight or what?" I wait again, pretending to listen. "Okay great, set it up for tonight, I think I'm prepared enough to get some things in motion... Actually it just occurred to me I'm with other people..."

"Don't let us keep you." Mel offers genuinely.

I hold the mic of the phone and say to Mel, "Oh don't worry, just let me take this call and we'll finish what we're doing."

"No worries" Mel casually says as I realize I completely owned him with my act.

"I'll finish this call and get right back to you." I say. "If Donnie calls just let him know I'll be sticking around if anything comes up.

Mel raises his glass without a word and I head for my table. Once there, I continue the phone charade for close to ten minutes and occasionally shoot Mel a wink or the thumbs up. He's not too concerned with what's going on over at my end. He's got his chocolate-loving to play with.

Once I finally drop the phone I can't help but to be sickened with myself. Every day I tell myself I'm going to start being honest and

drop this bullshit routine I've played since before I can remember... but something keeps me going and I can't stop it, regardless if I can identify and understand it. It's hard to put into words, but it's as if there's this tick in my brain that goes off that tells me I have to impress someone the moment I meet them. I know it's all bullshit but I keep the ball rolling. It's the only thing inside me that I hate, and believe me I hate it... That little voice in my head that says, "You have to let them know what you can DO for them right away. Otherwise they won't respect you."

I know how wrong it is for me to think this way and I want to change it more than anything in the world. It's getting to the point I can't stand what I see in the mirror. And to top that, after so many years lying to everyone I meet, it's gotten to the point where I can't even go to McDonald's without bumping into someone I hurt, someone I've lied to, someone that reminds me just how much of a dick I am.

That's why I'm sticking around here. That's why I don't care about waiting for Donnie. That's why I'm willing to dump whatever money I can into these Macbooks. You see, for a guy like Donnie what we're doing together is only business... to me it's something that can change my life!

With the money I can potentially make off this deal, I can back my dreams and aspirations... the money I make can get me to the point where I'm walking the walk, not talking it.

This deal here is not only going to change my life, but change who I am as a person as well. There won't be a reason to bullshit any longer. I'll be the real deal – and once everything is said and done, I'll be living the first day of the rest of my life...

The first day of the rest of my life... it has a wonderful ring.

Playing my cards right with someone like Donnie will lead to the dream I've had all my life – to be a man my father can be proud of... a guy who started at the ground and ended up in a skyscraper... and it's only because of that dream that keeps me in this seat waiting for Donnie...

He may not know it yet, but he's helping me in more ways than he'll ever know...

Things have been rough for me the past few months. I'm down to the last dollar with nothing else coming in.

People around the block may say sour shit about Donnie...

But to me, he's my savior...

The one guy who'll change my life...

Work-A-Day Donnie

I toss my keys to the half-a-fag valet and make my way into the hotel. Cal's been waiting for me all day and I can care less. Mel's stupid jungle-loving ass calls me up a few ticks back giving me the litany on Cal and his waiting as if I should give a shit. I had to put Mel in check as I have so many times in the past. This is MY FISH, and I'll rope the fucker MY WAY. And that's why Mel is busy blowing his wad on Oxy and Nigger-chicks... he's an idiot. He couldn't grasp in a thousand years why I would string along a potential mark for as long as I did Cal today. He doesn't see the angles... I (for instance) am a chess player, Mel's lucky to be a checkers guy at best. I can see four-to-five moves ahead at all times...

For instance the Cal situation...

I know that by making Cal sweat for a few hours, I'll be able to judge exactly what kind of fish I'm dealing with. If he sits it out and waits for my arrive, then he's a pushover and I can start roping him on the ASAP. If he gets up and walks after thirty, then I know this guy thinks I need him more than he needs me; which makes me switch up the game-plan.

I've had all kinds, but in this case (as I approach the bar) I can see Cal's one of the pushovers. After stiffing him for over three hours

he's still sitting there at my table. He notices me on the approach and shoots me the thumbs-up. By the looks of his facial expressions and the empty glasses on the table I'm getting the feeling Cal dumped half the fucking bar into his stomach while waiting for me.

I'm semi-irritated that he's sitting at my table and milking the bar but I let it go... keeping in mind how much I'm going to take this daddies-boy bullshit artist for allows a lot of room for annoyance.

I take a seat at the table while ignoring whatever the fuck Cal's saying to me. I need to be spared with the how-you-do's right now. Just looking at this guy makes me want a stiff drink down the throat on the ASAP.

I snap my fingers at the waitresses direction and call out the word, "nurse". She blushes, thinks it's cute (possibly me too), and asks what I'll be having. I tell her New Castle, two of them. She nods and walks away. I look at her ass - wouldn't mind cupping it between the sheets - maybe if Cal doesn't get on my nerves too much, I think to myself, I may just stick around and try to earn myself a much needed bed-mate.

I'm wandering off in my mind thinking of fucking the waitress and then remembering fucking Sonya and then wondering how hard it would be to convince both Sonya and the waitress to fuck each other while letting me watch...

My fantasy suddenly comes to a halt the moment I realize Cal's been talking this entire time. As I watch his drunken lips go up and down I feel myself overwhelmed with the urge to just punch the lame-o-fuck right in the lip and take his wallet. Not that I'm a violent man, in fact I despise violence and the meat-heads that practice it. But at the same time, as much as I may hate on a given day, I really don't think I've ever met a person I hate more than this Cal cat in my entire life... and the fucked thing is I don't even know this guy... or why I hate him for that matter...

"... and that's why I thought maybe it was traffic or something", Cal says, pulling me from my train of thought.

"What?" I ask in a manner that should show just how much this fucking asshole annoys me.

"I was just saying..." He offers timidly, then says after a pause, "Well you're a few hours late... So I uh, you know, assumed you hit traffic or something."

"Yeah, Traffic or whatever... you know LA." I say as I light up my last Lucky Strike.

"Oh you don't have to tell me about the traffic..." he offers uncomfortably, then says, "You know, speaking of California, I don't think you're supposed to smoke inside."

I look at the moron for what seems like forever. He's sweating bullets - afraid I may be pissed at him or something along those lines. I can't help but to think to myself how easy this guy is going to be to rope. A real mommy's-boy type of cat. Fresh meat all the way.

I ash my Lucky Strike into one of his glasses and finally respond to his lame-o question, "Yeah I know, but it's cool here. They know me." I blow a cloud of smoke into his face as he forces a bullshit "cool dude" of type smile.

"That's awesome man. You must have a lot of pull around here then..." He sucks up.

"I guess you could say that..." I want to say something cool but can't find the words so I take another drag from my Lucky and put it out in another one of Cal's cups that I think he was actually drinking out of. The funny thing is, what Cal will never know, is I

don't have any pull in this place - none whatsoever. In fact, nine-out-of-ten of these rich pricks would love nothing more than to come up to my blue-collar ass and rip the cigarette out of my mouth but they don't... not even the fuckers that own the joint... and you know why? Because they don't know who I MAY BE...

That's the beauty of this town and the key to survival... act as if.

Act as if you fucking own the joint. Act as if you're a hot-shit producer's kid with a trust fund that can limp out the biggest dick in Dubai. Act as if whatever you may choose, just act it well.

In reality I'm a blue-collar boy from the other-side of the tracks grinding it out in a rich man's world. But they don't know that. For all these fucks know I'm from the Rockefeller Bloodline... and I'll let them keep thinking that. From the busboys all the way up, all of them are thinking to themselves "if this kid's smoking he must have pull", when the truth of the matter is I'm nothing... just a boy who never grew up and never stopped playing make-believe...

Somehow I've been drinking a New Castle I don't remember arriving and Cal's been talking about some chick he fucked or some person he met at a party or something like that and I realize I must have zoned out again. I could easily pretend for Cal's sake that I've been listening all this time but I realize he's not worth the effort so I simply ask him in the most annoyed tone I can muster, "What the fuck are you talking about?".

He pauses for a beat, probably offended but I can care less, and then pathetically says, "I was just telling a story... you know, about the party the other night."

"That party was full of shit and I wager your story is too. Spare me with it okay? I've had a cunt of a day."

Cal's eyes float around the restaurant. He doesn't know how to

respond. I swear the guy is like a broad. I get tired of all the pussy-footing around so I step to the plate and say, "I don't mean any disrespect, but we are here for business after all, aren't we? So lets talk some business. I don't have all fucking night."

Cal puts on a "music-to-his-ears smile" and says, "I hear you" then after a small beat he asks, "So how does this work?"

"It's all pretty cut-and-dry. I've got a guy back home in Chicago that can get me almost any type of electronic good on the market at bottom-rate prices. We prefer Macbooks because they move fast and don't give us any trouble in the re-route process." I say as I have to so many people like Cal in the past.

"What's a re-route process?" He interrupts.

"It's something you don't have to worry about. Bottom-line is we can pretty much handle any order you need. But I'm not looking to get fucked without a reach-over, if you know what I mean? We'll start with a test run, something around five to ten. If all goes fine, we can go bigger."

"How much bigger?" He asks, feeding right into my grift without any problems.

"It depends. A, how big are you looking to go? And B, can you afford it?"

"Well that depends too? How much per?"

I know I don't want to blow this grift before it gets started on account of greed. That's where the talent comes in; each fish is different and it's up to the con to decide exactly how much they can rope. The whole point of this con is I get them wet at cost the first time, and then on the second order I stiff them completely for ten times the amount of the first order. Cal looks like he can handle

some heavy green but I don't want to blow my load too fast so I ask, "Well how much are you looking to go per unit?"

"If you can get black Macbooks I'm looking to pay around a grand per". He says with much more confidence than he had presented when we first met.

"A grand per is fine with me for the first order if you can lock into five."

"I can put that together." He says with a smug-fuck smile.

"Okay, well at 1K per I'm gonna need you to commit to at least ten for the second order."

"That's right around where I wanted to be anyway..."

"And after the second, can I expect a third?"

"That all really depends on how the first two go." He says as if he actually believes he's in control.

"Fair enough" I say as I can almost feel my cock getting harder and harder. There will never be a third order anyway, that's just something I say to all the fish... and this fish was the easiest to rope to date. When this is all said and done I'll have made an easy ten-grand off this Daddy's boy fuck without lifting a finger. Not bad for a week's work.

Step one, get the money. Step two, invest with one of my Credit Card cats and get the computers at a few hundred less than a grand per. Step three, come through - if the fish walks then, I still have a grand profit for my time. Step four (my favorite) set up another deal, take the money, and never come through.

It's an easy scam. A cake-walk...

And this kid is perfect for it.

"Alright" I say, "Get together the five for the first batch and we'll exchange cash for product on the spot so there's no trust issues. Then, if all goes well, we'll talk about round two."

"Round two is what I'm waiting for" He says.

"Yeah" I say, then smile, "I know".

He smiles. Raises his glass.

I smile back. Raise mine.

Another fish on the line. Another day at the office. Cal has a look about him that suggest he's thinking behind those full-of-shit eyes of him that he's taken advantage of another sucker in the City of Angels. I know better.

If he could read my smile he would know that mine comes from relief... A smile born from the death of the hustle...

I'm tired. I've been at this game for too long. And I don't think I have another one in me...

It's been the same song sang wrong, "I'm gonna pull this last one. Save the cash. And work on my writing"... yet somewhere along the line life gets in the way and I end up blowing the money on ways to forget how many times I've fucked up in this life of mine... and how many people I've ruined in the process...

I can't count it on ten hands...

But this time will be different. This time I'm going to finally walk away from it all clean. With what I have put away added to what I'll

be able to fleece from Cal, I'll have enough to do nothing but write and focus on my dreams for two or three years.

To this daddy's boy motherfuck this is all business...

To me, Cal's helping me start the first day of the rest of my life.

Andrew on the Job

Jesus Christ this background-work is about to pop a vessel in my brain! I can't stand this shit any longer and it's only been a little over two weeks.

At first glance it's a perfect gig for the aspiring actor. The bulk of our work-day (if you can call it that) is spent idle in some dark corner of the studio while a series of meatheads prep a shot for six hours. While waiting, we're paid to eat the cast and crew's leftovers (which is still top-shit food), and socialize amongst ourselves until called upon to perform simple tasks any kid with down-syndrome and half-decent motor-skills could pull-off without dropping a single bead of sweat.

My first day on set I was there sixteen hours. I was wide-eyed and full of optimism from being on my first studio lot. On top of my boyish glee, my first scene gave me what the regular extras call "face-time". Basically I'm the guy *acting* as if I'm an everyday consumer waiting for a latte' while Hugh Jackman orders coffee in a fifteen-second scene that takes fifty-minutes and twenty-one takes to shoot.

That first day on set I was wet with the cliché, dime-a-dozen pipe-dream of some director hitting the ceiling full of praise upon noticing the choices I made while playing my *Guy at Coffee Shop*

role... A delusion that quickly passed after my second day on the job.

I soon realized extra-work is maybe half a peg up on the totem-pole from asking “would you like fries with that” through a drive-through window at McDonald’s... and we’re reminded of this by the cast, crew, and interns at every possible moment. The whole process has *Big Brother* written all over it. Each night before work we’re given our “instructions” (where to go, how to dress, what to do, what not to do, etc) from a degrading automated message left by some former hall monitor with the need to milk the small sense of authority he/she is mental enough to believe they have. Even still, being treated like a resident of Camp Auschwitz by the higher ups is something I can handle -- It’s the other extras working beside me that really push me over the edge...

It’s High School all over again. Everywhere you turn there’s a clique packed with phony-apathetic vultures exuding a deluded sense of status that constantly brings about a need to gag myself. Watching these narcissistic flesh-robots communicate with one another, they appear to possess all qualities of a normal grouping of friends but its all smoke and mirrors, these folk stopped pumping blood eons ago.

These flesh-covered drones have no concept of loyalty or friendship. They’d just as soon stab their closest friend in the neck with a bread knife for the chance of ninety seconds of “face-time” or the chance to obtain the coveted golden ticket of the background-industry – a SAG Voucher – a simple slip of paper I learned hard but quickly is the only way to procure a decent acting job... if nothing else at least bump the \$54 we’re paid to \$120 a day.

These drones lack the passion for the craft of acting. They could give fuck-one about the artistic aspects and many complexities in

which make acting such a beautiful form of storytelling. They just want to be famous and stick their meat-logs in Paris Hilton.

The whole scene is enough to get the Columbine juice pumping in my usually Zen body...

And again, it's only been a little over two weeks.

Lucky for me I met Tad a week or so ago on the set of the new Michael Douglas movie. Befriending a guy like Tad makes the work-day and our surroundings somewhat tolerable. The guy's in his early thirties (even though you'd never be able to tell) and quite possibly the nicest and most humble guy you'd ever meet in a town inhabited by such vultures. Despite my suspicions of his extra-curricular activities beyond the set, he's the only stable medium in a work environment (and city for that matter) gone mad.

With that said, I can halfway explain the edge I have coursing through my veins as I sit in the only lone corner in the crowded box the AD's have been gracious enough to assign to us extras. Usually around this time I have Tad to bounce off of and vent to. But as of right now he's MIA.

Under normal circumstances I'd be able to cool myself down on my own. But today, like none-other I've had since meeting Tad, I don't only find myself in a position to appreciate his generous and sympathetic ear but I long for it. I need someone to vent on soon or I may blow.

Today was supposed to be a good day. Fifteen hours ago, if you can believe it or not, I was actually looking forward to coming to work – it started with a text message—

It was from Rachael.

And at first it lifted me up while down.

I had spent the better half of the day in question fighting with Lauren yet again, over the same subject – LA changing who I am or who she thought I was...

I of course defended myself and fought her off with words like: passion, dream, art, love, us, sacrifice, etc... And after hours of chasing our tails through fruitless dialogue, I finally submitted.

The air in the apartment finally mellowed out. We were watching television. Then the text arrived...

Rachael telling me she was going to be on set today and couldn't wait to hang out.

I of course was about to propel to the ceiling (for reasons that scare me to dare speculate on) but I still managed to keep my cool. Lauren casually inquired on the sender of the text. I (being an actor) said as calmly as possible, careful not to raise suspicion, "It's just a work thing." She then pressed, "If it's a work thing, why are you so giddy?" To which I immediately replied without a trace of emotion "Because I don't have to be on set until eight. I get two more hours of sleep. Is that a problem?"

She kept her eyes on me for what seemed like hours but I didn't break. And by the time whatever reality 'I love the 80's' bullshit on VH1 we were watching came back on, she dropped the whole thing.

On skin-surface, it was business as usual. But inside I was butterflies and fireworks.

Since meeting Rachael she's been the only thing on my mind. Any passion I once had for my future or for Lauren has all been devoted to this brown eyed angel. She represents to me all of my dreams manifested. It's a girl like Rachael I had always envisioned myself

beside while day-dreaming my future as a successful actor. She's smart, she's talented (at least I think she is), and she has that knock out presence that would make any man buckle to wear her on the arm.

Unlike Lauren with her country innocence, Rachael's got the red carpet written all over her.

The passion I feel for Rachael – in essence a complete stranger – eclipses anything I felt for Lauren even in the beginning stages of our relationship. Rachael has invaded not only my daydreams but my REM as well. Her smile. Her skin. The endless possibilities that can be us.

The small region of my mind still in reality knows it's silly to be so smitten by Rachael. I hardly know her. And perhaps she's nothing how I have her built up in my mind. We only spent a few hours at a party after all. I could be more in love with the idea of her than the girl herself. But then again, how am I to know any better without spending more time with her? Sure I once thought the same way about Lauren way back when, but that was the past, I'm growing now and as unfair as it may be for Lauren, I may be ready for a—

“What, are you stoned Andrew?” Tad asks as he pulls me out of my haze. “I've been flagging you down from the Kraft Services van for five minutes”.

Tad takes a swig from a gallon of Arrow-Springs water which is standard issue for the health freak. I detect a small amount of cover-up under his eyes, most likely to conceal bags born from a long weekend of partying... a true LA-vet, actor/make-up artist.

He replaces the cap on his water and says, “I haven't heard from you since the party. Sorry I had to bail on you like that. Some shit came up.”

I think back to the last image of Tad at the party when he interrupted my 'get to know you time' with Rachael: he was a complete mess, mind occupied with god-knows-what, and nose rose-red from blow. He was a mess, and judging by his current appearance, whatever he was into that night bled into the rest of the weekend. "It's no big deal. I managed by myself just fine." I said.

"Good, I was worried there for a second. It takes a trained eye to sift through the shit one finds at a party like that. Part of me was sure you'd get eaten alive."

"I'm a big boy Tad. It's not like I came straight from Dorothy's Kansas... I know a few tricks myself." I say with a degree of confidence that's unusual for me.

"Yeah that may be true, but you still have a lot to learn about this town. It's destroyed many men stronger than you."

The scene goes quiet for a beat. Tad pulls back another swig from his water – most likely taking a trip down the memory freeway recalling the many up's and down's peppered about the ten years he's already lived here. I can only imagine the shit he's seen and learned... which brings me back to why I had wanted to talk to Tad in the first place...

The Rachael situation.

Being stowed away in the apartment with Lauren I've had no one to report my feelings to but my own inner ear. There's no mirror looking from the outside to tell me if I'm mad or on the right track. Here I am, completely infatuated with the image of this stranger, so much so I'm willing to throw everything that once meant something to me away, just in the blind hope that attaining a girl like Rachael would make all that I've dreamt of my entire life more

attainable. I ever I was in need of being slapped into reality its now... and if anyone could knock some sense into me, it's Tad.

Right on cue, almost as if he can read my mind, Tad says, "I saw you had no problem making nice with the chicks at that party. Who was the girl you were with? That wasn't the girlfriend you've told me about was it? I thought the party wasn't her scene?"

And with that one question Tad has finally opened the door in which will make Rachael and my feelings for her a reality rather than something securely stowed away in the most private regions of my mind. "No Lauren stayed back at home. The chick at the party was..." My mind goes flush. How do I put her into words? "She was just..."

"One of those huh?" Tad says with a 'say-no-more' type of smile. "Be careful young Skywalker."

"What are you talking about?" I choked out pathetically.

"I may have been pretty out of it at the party, but I wasn't blind. You were all kinds of glazed over for that girl. You weren't even listening when I told you I had to jet. Shit you were so hung on her, she could have told you she was fresh off Chlamydia treatment and you still would have giggled like a giddy little schoolboy anxiously preparing to ask a crush to the dance."

Tad's perception comes as a shock to me. Despite his experience in this town and the wisdom he has gained that goes hand-in-hand with a hard-lived-life, I've always taken him for kind of a moron. A pretty face so vain and deluded he may have a shot at soap operas but no more... yet here he is, reading me like a big-print book.

I try to respond to Tad's observation but the ability to form sentences escapes me. Tad picks up from where he left off—

“You’ve got a good thing back at home Drew. Don’t go down that other road unless you’re willing to pay the toll.”

“I was just making a new friend, just like everyone else at the party.” I defend myself fruitlessly.

“People usually don’t make friends at parties like that one, Andrew. It’s at places like that where bridges are burned. Cherries that should never get popped are popped, and souls are propped on the auction block.”

“Well I’m not from around here. Neither is she. We were just, you know, talking.”

“You may be an actor bud but you’re shit at hiding emotions. You’re crushing hard on someone. And I’m betting it’s not your steady squeeze back home. It took me five minutes to get your attention just a moment ago. Believe me buddy; you might as well have a little arrow pointing out your chest.”

Part of me wants to dance around the subject a little longer. We have all the time in the world. It doesn’t look like the scene is starting anytime soon and Rachael is nowhere in sight. Then again I’m tired of harboring all these feelings. Tad’s been right on the money so far... and he’s the only open ear I can expect to find in this zip-code.

“Okay she is cute as all hell, I’ll give you that” I say. “But shit, I have a perfectly good girlfriend at home. It’s not like I’m going to do anything with the chick.”

“Did you get her number?” He says with a dip-shit smile after getting me to crack.

“Yeah but that doesn’t mean anything. She’s new in town too. She could be a good person to know.”

“I’m a good person to know kiddo. Remember *When Harry Met Sally*? Guys don’t take chicks numbers so they can get together and play a game of RISK. If any game’s gonna be played, it’ll be twister.”

“And you’re so sure of this? Every circumstance doesn’t have to follow the same pattern.”

“Yeah well” He smiles, “This is LA. People tend to fit the same mold.”

Tad takes a moment to clear out his water. He tosses the empty gallon to the side and remains silent with a little smile cracking between his lips. I figure he’s waiting for me to say something.

“It’s hard to explain Tad” I start, searching for the best way to communicate what’s been going on in my head since that party. “I mean there I was at this party – feeling all kinds of foreign – and in walks this chick. This unbelievably gorgeous girl that wouldn’t give me the time of day back east and she’s talking to me. She’s interested in what I have to say... and most of all I’m completely at ease in a situation that normally I’d buckle up and run the other way.”

“You have a girl like that at home too.” He challenges.

“It’s not the same Tad. This chick, she’s different. I mean, all my life I’ve always dreamt of coming out here to become an actor. And peppered over that dream, was the fantasy of having the perfect girl at my side... This girl dude, this girl is the very image of that fantasy. I mean to every detail. I can’t get her out of my mind.”

“What did you spend with her? A whole two hours?” He says in a tone that’s dangerously close to patronizing.

“It doesn’t matter bro. I can just tell. This chick, she’s the next step for me. It’s like we’re made for each other.”

“It always seems that way in the beginning. For everyone. You’re not special brother. I’m sure you felt the same way about the girl you have right now when you first met.”

“That was different. I was in a different place back then. Now I’ve grown.” I think of Lauren pathetically sitting back in the apartment – afraid to walk out the door and wishing she was back in the sticks and can’t help but to shudder. “Lauren’s got nothing to offer me anymore. She doesn’t even want to be here—“

“Yet she is... why do you think that is?”

“Because of me.”

“Doesn’t that tell you something?”

“Yeah sure she loves me” I say, “But she doesn’t have a life of her own. She has no dreams. No aspirations. I’m her entire world. It’s annoying.”

“And you’re so much better? Dude you’re a movie extra. You just moved into town. Don’t get all Kid Notorious too fast. I know it’s tough, but you have to stay in reality.”

There’s that word. Reality... and with it, my mind slows and sobers. I humbly allow Tad to finish his point.

“You’ll meet a dozen chicks a week in this town. Don’t let the idea of one jade you out. I’ve never met Lauren before, but from what you’ve told me the last few times we’ve worked together, I’d say she’s a keeper. This chick dropped life as she knew it so you could come out here and chase a dream. She deserves credit for that. Just because she *doesn’t have a dream*, doesn’t make her any less a

person than you or me. You're probably just too young to see it, but her dream is *you*. Besides, it's not like you're all that unique chasing the bright lights of Hollywood. Look around you..." Tad gestures toward the thousand plus identical-looking movie extras huddled about the lot. All of them dressed the same. All of them checking themselves out in the mirror. All of them empty shells of a former self that once had a dream. "...wanting to be an actor and chasing a dream makes you the same as everyone under this roof. It's the girl you have back at your apartment and the love you share that makes you different. Don't throw that away after meeting some chick at one of the thousand parties you'll end up going to in this town."

Tad's words, although spoken so casually, shake the very ground under my feet. He's right. Lauren and the love we share is what makes us special. It's her love that should drive me forward as I pursue my dreams – not some daydream I have over a perfect stranger. I'm reminded of the day I first met Lauren in the sticks two years ago. I remember the rockets in my stomach. Back in that time, Lauren was the only thing in life I wanted. I fought and scrapped long and hard to finally call her mine. And after a year we were finally together. I hadn't realized it until just now, but Lauren was the first of my dreams to ever come true.

To ever become a reality.

Tempted to jump up and wrap myself around Tad, I take a deep breath and compose myself. My head bobs up-and-down in agreement. "You're right" I say, "You're a pretty insightful cat."

"What have I been telling you?" Tad says with a wink and smile.

Lauren. How could I have been so selfish not to recognize her sacrifice was born of love? How could I have been so bitter to resent her for moving out here solely for me? To lay out like that, to leave her entire life behind, I can now see how loving of a being

she is... and at the same time I can't help but to hate the fact I could never love anyone more than myself enough to make a sacrifice like she has... it's just not in my makeup... and knowing that, I realize I need Lauren for more reasons than I had once thought... She's my heart.

"Glad I was able to knock some sense into you" Tad says. "Just out of curiosity, what was the chick's name you were so gaga over at the party?"

Still thinking back on Lauren I have to ask Tad to repeat himself. He does. I answer his question. And then it happens—

The scent of fresh strawberries finds its way in our space and the symphonic voice I've been longing for the entire weekend says from behind us, "Did someone just say my name?"

I turn around and almost hit my back against the floor. Rachael stands before me looking more beautiful than any image I've stored away in my mind from the party. Her brown eyes sink deep into my own. Her smile sets my heart at a rapid pace. Even casually dressed in shorts and a tee-shirt she sets my soul on fire. Her porcelain-white legs stretch on and on under a tight pair of black shorts. Her tee-shirt fits neatly around her perfectly proportioned yet still petite torso. Every inch of her begs for my arms. It takes every gallon of whatever will I have left inside not to wrap myself around her and melt.

The dreams of a future with this angel before me take hold of my brain. Any weight of reality rolls off my shoulders and I begin to float.

Tad can see it.

Rachael probably sees it and I could care less.

All I can think of is how Rachael would smell in bed on an early Sunday morning. I look at her beautiful legs and imagine them wrapped around my body. Marveling at her stunning body, I'm completely beyond fantasizing about anything sexual. Her perfectly rounded breasts fail to call the attention of my eyes. I respect her too much. It's her smile I'm concerned with. The browns of her eyes.

A thousand thoughts and dreams of a life with Rachael flood every bank of my mind...

... and for the life of me, I can't remember what Tad and I were talking about just a moment ago.

Lauren

Two weeks. Two weeks I've been in this apartment and I feel trapped. I shouldn't feel this way – not in my own home. But then again, this isn't home. I may reside under this roof, in this awful city, but I'll never live here. I'm a guest. Foreign. Scared.

I thought it would be easier. It was supposed to be different. But he's changed in so short a time. I don't recognize the boy who lies next to me every night. I can't locate the heart I fell in love with. I can't even recognize my own self when I find my reflection in the mirror.

I have Cat Power's "The Greatest" playing on the stereo. The song used to mean so much to me. It used to be *our* song. The lyrics once moved me – taking me back to many nights where Andrew and I sat on the roof-top of his old apartment back home. He was so innocent back then. So charming. So smitten by everything I did. And I would sit next to him, smoking a joint, listening to his dreams – knowing he wanted nothing more than to kiss me while I played hard to get. It took a year before we finally slept together. We were best friends first, lovers second. I really made him work for it... maybe I'm being punished for that? Maybe if I had given myself to Andrew sooner, this wouldn't be happening now.

He says I'm crazy to think this, but I fear I'm losing him. And Part of me, in the softest area of my heart, thinks I may already have.

I just can't adapt as quickly as he expects. That shouldn't be something I'm shunned for. It's only natural. I'm not strong like Andrew. He's been around. He grew up in cities his whole life. With an exception for that one time the two of us went to New York, I had never been out of the town I was born in.

That's another thing I know he just won't ever let me live down – the New York trip. He's told me over and over again he had gotten over it – that he didn't care – but I know that just can't be true. I'll never be able to forgive myself for New York. And now, sitting in this apartment, in this awful city, I can't help but to wonder what might have happened for us if I had stayed? We'd probably be together right now. Who knows? My mind's a mess. I'm a mess.

About six-months back we tried this once before. Andrew was all primed to move out to New York. I was terrified. I didn't want to leave my family – especially my dad – but Andrew would have gone sooner or later, with or without me, and I loved him... I still love him.

We left behind the house I had lived in and worked hard to maintain for five years, packed up a U-Haul with the essentials, and took off for New York in the span of a weekend. I hardly had enough time to say goodbye to all my friends.

The drive from Central Illinois to New York took one night. I drove the whole way. Andrew didn't have a license at the time.

He was so cute in the passenger seat – like a puppy going out for a drive in the country. He had a little handheld camera during the whole trip and almost everything we passed was film-worthy. The grime of Indianapolis, the hills of Pennsylvania, and eventually our entering New York through the Lincoln Tunnel (I think that's what it was called).

His eyes lit up the minute we hit the city. You could tell he was finally home again. It was a look I had never seen in him before. Yet as ecstatic as he may have been, I was the polar opposite. Every aspect of the city shook my core in the most awful of ways describable. I could hardly maintain my driving. I felt a rush of vertigo. The buildings towering above me had a trapping presence about them. I forgot that the sun existed. The sea of people all around, walking to who-knows-where with absolutely no regard for the others around them... all those strangers... all those separate lives working at such a rapid pace... I was terrified. I knew I could never live like that. I would never want to – even with the love of my life by my side – because after all, what kind of life would that be?

Despite my rapid heartbeat I willed myself to keep driving to what was intended to be our apartment. The skies were dark gray and scorn with pollution. Homeless were scattered about, treating the streets like their own private toilet-bowls for everyone in the world to see.

I wanted so desperately to make it work but I knew deep inside I couldn't. I wanted to go home. I wanted to see my dad. I wanted things to be how they used to – Andrew in his apartment *dreaming* of doing bigger and better things – but not actually following through. When they're no more than dreams things are safe and familiar. It's the journey into the unknown that shook me to the bone.

When we arrived to the apartment I had finally lost it. The tears kept flowing. I fell to the floor and apologized – telling Andrew there was no way I could stay. I was sick to my stomach. Terrified he would leave me behind right then and there; in a place I was truly terrified.

But he didn't.

I didn't have to ask him twice. He simply gave me a hug, helped me up from the floor, and within an hour we were in a hotel in New Jersey getting some rest before the drive back to Central Illinois.

"I love New York" he said, "But I love you more. I'll take you any way and anywhere I can get you."

I fell apart. As happy as I was to be going home and to have a boyfriend who loved me so much he'd sacrifice his dreams just to have me satisfied – I couldn't forgive myself for shattering whatever hopes and aspirations he may have had. I kept thinking back on the look of his face when we drove into the city and contrasted it with the look on his face as we made our way out... I sprawled out on the bed in my jeans crying the entire night. I couldn't even look him in the eyes. Even as he sat above me brushing his fingers through my hair, whispering into my ear that everything would be alright, that he loved me – I knew what I had taken from him, what I had asked him to give up, would be something he'd never be able to forget.

On the drive home I felt better with every mile we got closer to Illinois. We must have hit every rest-stop on the way to make-out more passionately than we ever had before. He kept assuring me that he was fine, that he loved me and that we would work something out. It would be okay he said.

Somewhere about ten miles outside my Dad's hometown the look came over him – a darkness and sadness that far eclipsed my own when we had arrived in New York. I saw in his eyes that as much as I loathed the city and everything it represented, Andrew felt ten-fold about what I had known as home for my entire life. I reached for his hand and he held onto me tightly. He was quiet for awhile, and then while staring straight ahead he said in the calmest of fashions, "I don't think I can take this town much longer Lauren. We're going to have to go somewhere else. I don't know where and I don't know when, but I'm going to have to leave soon."

And that was all he had said. He mentioned nothing about taking me with him. Nothing about needing me with him. He was simply going to have to leave sometime soon.

It was then I knew that I'd have to go with him the second time around. I owed him that much. I had to make the sacrifice he had made for me. It was only fair. That's how it works when two people are in love.

And in love I was.

And in love I still am.

Despite the hardships we're encountering right now, I'm sure we'll get over the hump. That's what people do in relationships – find a mutual compromise. Andrew left New York with me and endured what I knew as home longer than he had to. Surely I can extend him the same compromise. After all, how long can it possibly take for him to get famous? I've never seen him act before but I know he had to be good at it. Why else would he pursue it with such passion? He's sure to make it big. All it takes is a little bit of determination... and he's chock-full of that.

And then who knows what will happen? Maybe after he gets an acting job we can move back to Central Illinois. He can come back here when he gets a job or something... yeah, that's what we can do. That's why actors have agents isn't it? His agent can get him work from here in Los Angeles and we can live out our lives back home... on a little piece of land not too far from my dad's place. I can take care of the house and dress it up for him while he prepares for his acting jobs. It sounds like a fair compromise. Very doable. Sure he isn't too into country life right now, but I'm sure he'll learn to love it. And besides, all of Los Angeles can't be that bad. Maybe we can get a house on the beach and live there during

the summer time. I've never seen the beach before but I've always wanted to live by it.

That's what we'll do. I just have to rough it out a little longer and things will be back to how they used to be... better than they used to be!

I start to feel a little better about everything and decide to change the music. Cat Power brings back too many memories – although good memories, I can't bear to recall so many wonderful nights while things hurt so bad right now. I need to assign new songs to this new part of our life – maybe *The Clientele*. And who knows, some day in the future I'll listen to one of their albums like *Suburban Light* and be able to look back on this dark time with a smile on my face.

I put on *The Clientele's We Could Walk Together* and turn up the volume. I close my eyes and sway in place. I envision Andrew and me dancing by a fireplace on a quiet Midwestern night. We're drinking wine (since he's back to drinking now) and he's rubbing my belly because I just found out I'm pregnant. The phone is off the hook and we're completely cut off from the world around. All that exists is us and the new life we'll bring into the world. There's no late-night parties, no networking possibilities, no fifteen-hour days for meager pay... no fights.

I fall back on the futon and allow my mind to relax. I chase all my suspicions and worries away and replace them with daydreams of my future with Andrew... a future where both of us are happy. I reach over to the night table and find my wooden stash-box Andrew bought for me at a record store a year ago on the college campus. I bring it to my nose and draw in its scent – remembering the times in which it came from. I become intoxicated by it.

The mellow sounds of *The Clientele* drown out the chaos of the city beyond the walls of our apartment. For the first time since our

arrival, I've managed to find myself at peace. I assure myself whatever it is Andrew has done since we've arrived and whatever it is he's doing now is for us. It's selfish of me to think otherwise. I'm sure it's hard for him to have me sitting idle in the apartment, not bringing in any money, just because I'm scared of the city around us. He can't enjoy sitting on a movie set for hours on end for less than minimum wage. He's working hard toward his dreams – and in turn – working toward our future together.

I touch myself and smile, realizing how in love I still am with Andrew. I decide when he returns I'll tell him how sorry I am. How wrong I was to doubt him. We've known each other for two years now. There's been far too much good to be outweighed by two short weeks... two short weeks in which my ramped mind has probably caused more trouble than any amount of late-night parties ever could.

I open the stash-box and pull out a half-smoked joint leftover from last-night. Our first week here Andrew drove around for two hours trying to find me a bag of pot – and he doesn't even smoke. How could I have forgotten about that? And speaking of the grass, however much I may hate Los Angeles, I've never in my life smoked stuff this good.

I bring a flame to the joint and breath in the course smoke and hold it into my lungs until there's nothing left to exhale. After two or three drags the drug starts to work at full effect – The sounds of the music around me envelope my entire body. I close my eyes and the movie theater inside my frontal lobe plays back memories of smoking on Andrew's roof. Memories of making love to him. Memories of kissing him.

This has been my first high in California not laden with paranoia and panic. All and all it's been a good day.

I let the high ride and plan out how I'm going to attack Andrew the moment he walks in the door. He won't even have a moment to say hello. His belt will be off and pants on the floor before he even realizes what happened. Afterward I'll apologize for the way I've behaved the past two weeks and assure him things will be different from here on out. From this moment on, he'll never want for my support again.

God I love that boy!

As I put out the joint my cell phone dances on the night-table. I pick it up and read the display. I've received a text message. It's from Andrew. It reads:

Shoot's been extended. Working past midnight. Getting paid double. Can't make calls on set. Will text with updates. Luv A.

For a moment a rush of panic floods over me. Almost instinctually a list of worst-case scenarios runs rapidly over my mind but I quickly dismiss them. Today's a new day and Andrew has certainly earned the benefit of the doubt. Of course there's nothing to worry about. He's working hard for both of us.

I replace my phone on the night table, lean back on the futon, and let a smile grace my face for the first time in weeks. Today I feel luckier than ever before... and despite Andrew's late schedule tonight, nothing has changed in regards to my plans for the evening. I don't care if he gets home at three in the morning and has to wake up at six; he's getting the fuck of a lifetime.

I begin to giggle at how uncharacteristically naughty I am being just as my cell phone vibrates to life again. Someone's calling. It has to be Andrew!

I quickly rush to the phone and see a number I don't recognize with a 323 area code. Probably a payphone on the set.

“Hello!” I answer, longing to hear Andrew’s voice.

“Uh yeah, is this Lauren?” A nervous voice I don’t recognize asks.

“This is” I respond – unable to shield the disappointment from my rhetoric.

“This is Tad, a friend of Andrew’s...” He says.

My heart sinks. Here I wanted nothing more than to hear the voice of the boy I love and tell him how sorry I am... and instead I’m stuck with one of Andrew’s new *friends* – the very reason behind all the trouble we’ve had lately.

“I’m sorry to bother you. Andrew gave me your number as a second way to get a hold of him when we first met on set. I’ve tried calling his cell phone but it goes straight to voice mail...”

Of course his phone goes straight to voicemail; I think to myself, he’s working. For some reason, I automatically assume this stranger is a potential bad influence for Andrew so I decline giving him any information. I simply stay silent and wait for him to state his business.

“... anyway, we’re supposed to go out tonight and he was going to meet me at my place. I gave him my address and all but something’s come up so I’m not going to be at my apartment for about forty minutes.” He explains, completely confusing me as I know Andrew’s on set all night tonight. Whoever this Tad guy is, he has to be mistaken. “I know he’s taking the subway to his car and his mailbox is full so I was wondering if you could call him and let him know I’ll be thirty-minutes late so he won’t be sitting around wondering where I am.”

“I guess I could call him for you but I don’t think it will do much good. He’s going to be at work all night. They extended his shoot.” I tell this Tad guy as calmly as possible – fighting every urge in my body to tell this jerk to lose mine and my boyfriend’s number.

“No we got off about twenty minutes ago. We don’t have to go back until Wednesday. That’s why Rachael invited us to the fashion show at Boulevard 3.” He says casually as if I missed a memo.

“No you’re mistaken. I just got a text from him...” I start just as key words of what this Tad had just said begin to sink in. My mind races. I compose myself and calmly ask, “Wait a minute, did you just say you were *on set* with Andrew?”

“Yeah!” he exclaims as one would after a second grade student spells a word right for the first time, “and his mail box is full. I’ll be tied up for the next thirty and won’t even be able to use my phone. Just tell him to wait for me in the lobby of my building. I’ll try to get there as soon as possible.”

“The two of you are going to some fashion show tonight?” I ask as the blood rushes to my head.

“Yeah it starts at nine but we’re going to hang at my place for a few.”

“And you said a girl named Rachael invited the two of you?”

“Yeah! Rachael from the party Saturday night.”

My hands begin to shake. I become light headed. If I weren’t sitting down, I probably would have fainted. “He just sent me a text message!” I say, unable to hide the rage in my voice. “He said he’s going to be working late tonight! Why would he tell me that if he wasn’t going to be working? Why would my boyfriend of two years lie to me?”

“Umm...” Realizing he’s said too much, Tad pathetically attempts to put out his fire by offering, “maybe he’s uh, you know, trying to surprise you... because he’s going to, like, take you as his date or something.”

Without thinking I launch the phone against the wall. It shatters into five or six pieces. Great, I think to myself, there goes my only way of calling Andrew. Now it’s going to be a real chore keeping him from going to this thing tonight....

Then I think to myself, why even try to stop him? If some fashion show with this Tad and Rachael is where he wants to be, how the hell am I going to change that? Even if he doesn’t go, it will only be because I stopped him. All night he’ll be wishing he was somewhere else and hating every moment he’s with me. Then I’m sure we’ll get into a fight... a fight that will end with him weaseling his way into making me out into the bad guy. But I’m not the bad guy, he is.

Two weeks! Two short weeks and he’s already lying to me! God only knows what he’s been up to. Why I didn’t trust my initial instincts I’ll never know. And here I was just a moment ago giving him the benefit of the doubt. I was stupid to think things are going to be perfect. Things are only going to get worse.

I lost Andrew the minute we left Illinois. Hell, I lost Andrew the minute we left New York.

I should leave. Why should I even bother? What can I even do to make things better? Threaten to leave? Andrew wouldn’t care. It’s demented to think he would just pack up and leave just because, yet again, Lauren isn’t happy and wants to go home.

This isn’t New York... LA is a whole other animal...

Donnie and Some Kind of Feeling

Slim Charles my black credit card guy suggested we make our exchange during a Fashion Show some girl he's fucking is putting on at Boulevard 3 and I'm here now and quickly realizing I'm way too sober to bear this rampa-room bullshit. The girls are walking clones of one another—fembots molded after countless episodes of MTV shit-fests like The Hills or The Real World where the general impression given off to the young budding teenage girls of the Americas is show off your ass to any horny greasy-haired fuck that has zero respect for you and maybe you'll get dinner, be loved, or better yet, become famous. The guys at this place are mostly Queen, that or straight guys that may as well be Queen on account their general mannerisms and pathetic attempts to get fucked are in a word a disgrace to the male reproductive organ, and because of them, I'm ashamed to have one. The house music shaking the walls all sounds the same to me and is making my ears literally feel as if they've sprung a leak of crimson blood. The only upside I can think of is the free booze, problem is the only hard shit I can see is cut with Apple Flavoring and the beer they have is some pro-environment bullshit organic sludge that always goes down rough for me and if I were to have any right now, it would probably get my stomach all kinds of queasy being as I've been popping Adderall all day and haven't ingested anything solid since the other night.

The place is absolutely packed and I can't find Slim anywhere but I suspect he's up on the tier level so I make my way over there – pushing some liberal bleeding-heart-type wannabe almost on his ass as he crowds me while pathetically trying to pick up on some big-titted blonde I think I may have done coke with months ago but can't remember. Jesus, I can't believe how hard the Adderall is still hitting me hours after seizing my self-medication procedure. My thoughts, although quite clear and focused, are coming at far too much a rapid pace and I silently wish I had a Xanax or an Ativan or even a Valium. Maybe someone will have one here? Who wants to bother with these cretins though? I can't believe how many people (I'm sure I hate without even meeting) are crammed into this faggy club. It will take hours to find Slim at the rate I'm going.

I squeeze myself past a number of people—failing to be sucked into any type of conversation. This scene is one I was completely over years ago. There's no allure between these walls for me now. While making my way through the club, still looking for Slim without any results worth reporting, I realize how easily one could sum a scene like this up for a greenhorn or someone that's not from around these parts. All it takes is a trained eye. Each clique scattered about various parts of the club provides a part to the overall whole that is the mess I'm surrounded by at every turn—Outside by the ropes are the low-IQ fuck-twigs with absolutely no clue as to how the world works and swollen twots after selling the tender region between their legs to some balding middle-aged casting-couch asshole that drives a Saturn and promises to “launch” their careers. Over by the smaller bar outside the main room with all the free Bellini's are the “Hipsters” (by far the worst group) each with the same jaded sense of anti-conformist fashion & shared pension for the same barber—armed with only a jagged razorblade and more angst and self-contempt than talent. Each of these “Scene-Queens” (as I like to call both the men and women of this clique) confuses themselves into believing they're a unique, irreplaceable contribution to society—when in reality they're nothing more than a fad, destined to be long forgotten when the next one comes to

step into place. Don't let the bangs and tight blackjeans fool you—these cattle are **ordinary**—borrowing from decades they never belonged to and could never understand in the hopes to craft something they've been lacking since day one... an identity. By the private booths is another group whose mothers should have done the world a favor by stabbing their children in the hearts with a straightened out coat-hanger while still in the fetal form... the Fasha-Nazis—who are basically a Xerox of the Hipsters only rather than jerking each other off through a mix of shit clothes, talentless and vain photography efforts, and cookie cutter music that makes Raffie seem like a real rocker; the fasha-nazis stick exclusively to fashion fads that come and go faster than a peepshow girl for a twenty-five cent John. They are also known to keep their cliques smaller and rarely speak unless whatever they have to say is, as they put it, totally random. Followed closely to the hipsters and fasha-nazis is the scenesters, aspiring filmmakers, budding producers, black kids from nice families who present themselves as coming from the Ghetto, white kids acting black, middle-eastern kids acting black, black kids acting white, ravers, candy-kids, and greenhorns... all surrounding me and contributing to a din (that added with the house music that still refuses to stop) is bringing me dangerously close to vomiting.

After wading in and out of large, sweaty masses of the above mentioned social groups, I finally get a look at Slim and his “crew” on the tier level (as I originally suspected they'd be). Although I can sit on the ground level and allow my inner-dialogue to run ramped with social commentary— I decide to let the surge of cynical remarks pass as I am nowhere daft enough not to attribute this sudden urge to observe surroundings that, under normal circumstances, mean so little to me I hardly expend enough energy to say I hate, to the Adderall I've been eating like white-chocolate. I grab the first Sierra Nevada I've been lucky enough to encounter since getting here and let it whisk swiftly down my throat.

Making my way past the main floor and over to the roped off stairway leading to the tier level, I bump into at least half a dozen sweaty twentysomethings dancing furiously to the ulcer-bleeding house music that pangs my eardrums at every corner. In bumping into these mindless drones, I can't help but to feel a brief surge of sadness pass through me—born off a sense of not belonging. Although I can sit here and easily rip on the many inconsistencies and hypocrisies these cattle present at any given moment, the truth of the matter remains—these people are the 98-percentile. They are, as they say, what makes the world go round. And in saying that, and cutting it with my logic, I have to succumb to the realization that it's these people who allow the other 2-percent of the population (the group I like to consider myself part of) function and flourish. As much as I'd like to degrade these cunts for their lack of creativity and propensity to compromise and take the easy way out of nothing more than a sheer need to survive (the PC term known as "*The American Dream*"), I can't help but to realize that their bullshitting, their endless pursuits toward repopulation (by way of drugs, alcohol, shady business dealings, and second mortgages) is what makes the world go round. And in coming to that conclusion, I can't help but to wonder if what I once thought made me unique and special (being as I've never fit the mold) actually makes me a degenerative contribution to the axis of the planet. Maybe I'm not the anti-hero I've always dreamed of being (and used drugs and alcohol to forget any thoughts toward the contrary). Maybe I am the eighth man out. Maybe I am a guest in the everyman's world. Maybe they *don't need me*. Maybe, after all this sacrificing of my morals and my soul in the hopes it will serve a greater good, I've alienated myself so much from the world, that whatever message I have to articulate when it's all said and done will be so far removed from the everyday world, no one will ever understand my message (if that makes any sense?). Does that make all of my mistakes, shattered relationships, and scattered broken hearts all vain occurrences of a meaningless past? I immediately write these thoughts off as a result of the Adderall and assure myself things will be A-Okay once out of this dump... but

part of me down deep can't help but to whisper into my ear *"This is not your world Donnie. You're a stranger. You may convince yourself that you understand what's going on around you... but the world, the majority, the number that matters, they could never understand you."* I feel like a monster and wish I had more Sierra Nevada to wash down the reality I'm faced with, when all of a sudden—

"The Doctor! How it is muthafucka?" Slim Charles poses while offering me a high-five in which I instinctively accept—still unclear as to how I got up on the tier level.

I compose myself, then ask, "What the fuck is that supposed to mean? The Doctor?" I pull a Lucky Strike to light. Slim Charles knocks it away.

"That your initials dog. D.R... The muthafuckin' Doctor" Slim says with any amount of brotherly love a borderline sociopath can manage.

"Oh I get it" I say as I watch my cigarette roll off the marble floor of the tier level down to the generic floor of the main area below. "You're giving me a nickname. Like a street thing. Because we're like... *homeboys.*"

To this Slim and his posse respond with scattered laughter and words in which I can't seem to allow myself to listen or comprehend. Despite the free-flowing pharmaceutical-grade Amphetamines still rolling through my system, I can't for the life of me manage to focus on anything going on in the physical space I inhabit. I'm completely locked inside my own mind. Whatever it is that's happening around me is merely background din free of any substance. I can, right here and now, feel myself slipping. The world around me is something scary and foreign. It's never been more clear as to how much I *don't belong* anywhere on this planet, if not the entire universe. Whatever business I have here at this place

with Slim means *nothing to me*. These hustles, this shit I do, once had a purpose. The once was light at the end of the tunnel. All of this evil was once acceptable as it was to lead to an eventual goal. Now that goal is lost and forgotten. The person who once had dreams is gone. And I fear I'll never find him again. I'm a shell. Whatever I do now serves only one thing for me – survival. Why should I even bother? What remains in my life to survive for? What's the point? Tempted to dive face-first off the tier, I restrain myself, knowing full well these thoughts are born off a lack of serotonin in my brains after weeks upon weeks of drug and drink binging. If I can just maintain, I should be fine in a—

“... if you wasn't my favorite white-boy-project” Slim continues on, removing me from my funk, “I'da done thumped yo' punk ass two fuckin' years ago. Believe 'dat!”

Although Slim and I maintain eye contact with one another and I think I'm nodding along with what he's saying and what goes on between us has all the necessary attributes of a conversation I simply can't bring myself to respond to this man. I'm not here.

“Yo Donnie!” Slim says, snapping his fingers before my eyes, “where the fuck are you dog?”

“Sorry” I manage, snapping back to the scene, “I one could say I'm not exactly a happy unit right now.”

“I feel you. This aint my scene either. All these fuckin' white boys and bitches rubbin' on each other.” Slim says, completely missing the thesis of my previous statement.

“So why are we doing this here?” I ask.

Slim motions to a totally fuckable blonde chick – skinny, great tan, brown eyes, and perky tits – and says, “The girl's showing her shit

off to a couple peeps tonight. ‘Posed to be some big deal. What you gonna do right?’

“I guess once one of you people get a hot white girl you have to do what you can to maintain that.”

“Shit boy. When one of *my people* starts makin the cheese, there’s three things they go out and get day one: an Escalade, Ice, and a white woman. I got’s all three.” Slim says with a smile, then goes cold to say, “And you cool it with that ‘*you people*’ bullshit. That’s the same kinda shit I’m sayin’ gonna get you thumped.”

“Well I don’t want that” I say as empty as possible.

“Yeah... I bet you don’t. Come on clown. Sit yo’ ass down at my Tabe and let’s handle this” Slim starts toward a roped off table littered in bottles of New Castle and tumblers of what looks like rocking scotch.

I follow Slim and his posse. We arrange ourselves at his table. Down at the opposite corner of the tier, three fuck-twigs flowering the walls shoot me the fuck-me eyes – most likely wondering who I am and what I can maybe do for them in exchange for a fuck-fest.

Slim hands me a tumbler of neat scotch. I accept with a shaking hand. Why am I shaking? Adderall? Maybe a DT on account of not having enough to drink?

“Drink that shit. Shit’ll get you feelin’ right in a minute. Real talk” Slim says.

“Thanks” I say, realizing just how right he is. With one sip, the scotch makes its way into my stomach immediately and in true placebo-like form, takes me immediately outside of myself and back to what matters. My depression fades out, and I’m back to my old self. Those Scottish fucks know how to brew a whiskey.

“This is good shit” I say with a smirk.

“No doubt dog. You not gonna find this shit downstairs. Only that white girl shit them *Sex and the City* bitches be drinking.” Slim says.

The table goes quiet for a beat. I hatch the entire tumbler and without asking help myself to another that sits untouched on the table. Slim’s posse has been speechless since we sat down. It’s obvious they’re having an awful time. If feel their pain.

“So” Slim finally breaks the silence, “How’s about we get down to it then?”

“For sure” I say in ebonic fashion so he can understand me, “I’m going to need 4 full profiles and 6 basic”.

Slim simply nods his head. In the beginning stages of any transaction between us, Slim tends to never acknowledge anything I say if it suggests something illegal is taking place. He’s a smart criminal. Realizing my mistake I rephrase my need, “I mean, I need you to hook me up with four of your homies and let me take out six bitches you met at the club.”

“Four homies? You got a big partied planned? Usually you stick strictly to the bitches. You aint goin’ fag on us is you?” Slim laughs and his posse immediately parrots.

“I’m planning on having a big couple of weeks and then maybe laying off for awhile. It’s long overdue.”

“Shee-it” Slim says, “You know well as I do there aint no break in the game till you got no reason for it no more.”

“Maybe I don’t” I rebut.

“Always gonna be a reason for it if you aint hit your break yet. I wager that writing shit of yours has been in the backyard since you been worrying about survivin’.”

“Yeah maybe your right... but I figure it’s time to take a minute off and spend some time in my garage working again. I don’t know, lately I feel a pressing need to drop out of the game. In the beginning I was a writer doing this for cash. Now it’s gotten to the point I feel like a straight crook with a little writing habit on the side.”

“I feel you. After awhile the game gets you. I don’t gotta tell you how long it’s been since I got my black ass into a studio a laid out a track. Way I figure I gots to worry about today... there’s always tomorrow to get my ass in the studio.”

“Problem with me is” I say, “Tomorrow has been waiting to come for two fucking years.”

“I feel you. But as you always sayin’ to people, *that’s a you problem*. You want tomorrow to pop up, you gotta make that happen. That kinda shit, that don’t come on its own. You feel me?”

“Yeah” I say, accessing every inch of my will not to shake uncontrollably as Slim’s words shake me to the fucking core, “I feel you.”

“Then you gotta do what you gotta do.” Slim offers like a ghetto prophet.

I gotta do what I gotta do. Simple as the advice may be, it’s worth its weight in fucking platinum. Slim, in spite of his ghetto-rig bullshit style and personality, the guy has his way of ringing true in the simplest of forms. In my adventures the past few years, I’ve grown to have the upmost of respect for the criminal mindset. In a world (or in my case a city) full of backstabbers and double crossers –

people unable to be genuine and put what is real out on the table. One can't help but to respect a guy like Slim. With Slim there's no bullshit, no broken promises, no shit to sift through. If a guy like Slim doesn't like you... you know it. If he wants something... he takes it. Bottomline, if I had to choose between dealing with some West Hollywood douchebag who bombards anyone in whom he comes in contact with false promises and bullshit smiles – taking six months to eventually tell a person to fuck off; or the guy who sticks a pistol in your face and takes your money – I'd take the guy with the pistol any day of the week. At least the guy with the pistol tells you how it is from the beginning. There's never any sugar-coated bullshit. To quote Slim and his contemporaries – *They keep it real.*

Reflecting on the underrated virtues of the criminal, I polish off yet another one of the neat Scotch tumblers sitting untouched on the table. I don't know how long I've been reflecting – maybe a minute? But there hasn't been a word spoken by a single person. I realize Slim's waiting on me. I take his cue, reach into my pocket, and plop a roll of twenties equating a thousand bucks on the table. Slim prefers twenties. Says they're easier to use on a night out. Party Coupons I think is what he calls them.

Without missing a beat, as if rehearsed, one of Slim's cronies scoops up the cash, counts it quickly, puts it in his own pocket (as Slim never likes to take money himself) and says, "It's all there dog. We cool."

Slim motions to another one of his cronies and almost instantaneously presents a USB Jumpdrive before me. I take it. Place it in my pocket. I know the score.

"That's all you'll need." Slim finally breaks from his paranoia and informs me, "That there actually has five homies and five bitches. Figure the fifth bitch is on the house... You intentions seem 'aight so I's don't mind spottin you on the other homie. And I'm sure you don't mind takin one?"

“Fuck no” I say, while at the same time realizing with an extra “Homie” (which is a full credit profile as opposed to the “bitch” which is just a single credit card number with cardholder information).

“My boy did something new with that there USB shit.” Slim says as he hypocritically lights up a Swisher I speculate is packed with weed. Part of me wants to light up a Lucky but I know he’ll tell me not to smoke and go on toking on his blunt. He takes a few puffs and passes the grass to one of his cronies, perfectly aware I never smoke the shit, and continues to say, “instead of just a regular text with the business on it, he done put on a file. For the five bitches, you got all the electronic data of the card. You dig what I’m trying to say?”

“I think so...” I offer, knowing full well what he’s trying to say as I’ve practically invented new forms of Credit fraud over the years but for business sake, sometimes I tend to humor Slim by playing the role of “stupid whiteboy”.

“You think so huh?” Slim says with a pretentious grin, “Well how’s about’s I fill you in just in case? With the data, you go get yourself a scanner and a card writer like companies use to make passkeys for their employee’s and shit – and you stamp that data shit onto a blank card – you got a fucking clone of the card. You can go buy gas and shit with the motherfucker. Thing is you gots to make sure you palm the card so the register motherfucker cant see you holding a motherfucking blank. You dig?”

“I dig” I say, “but you know how I operate – I don’t ever use physicals. But thanks anyway. Maybe I can pass the bitches on if I don’t and up needing them.”

“Yeah, Yeah. I know how you do” Slim says as one of his cronies passes a now half-smoked blunt back to him. He tokes then

continues, "Speaking of which, I want to pull on your coat on some shit I'm picking up on the streets."

Although he's a rapper wannabe and appears to be just another rich black kid fronting the ghetto persona, Slim's a consummate professional with an ear to the streets that's second to none. With the above mentioned in mind, I lean in closer to express without speaking my interest.

"Not that it's any of my business" he leans in closer to me and says in a 'down-low' fashion, "you wouldn't happen to be rippin' that white motherfucker Cal with that house on Laurel Canyon, would you?"

Just how and the fuck does he know, I wonder to myself, and who the fuck has his ear? I speculate Mel's hick ass opened his big mouth but despite my need to flip over the table and throw a fit, I restrain myself and simply say calmly as possible, "What makes you ask?"

"You know me dog, how a man makes his tender is his business. Especially when it comes to you. We known each other since we was both green here. You may fuck a fool over, but you always straight with fam... I dig that. I just feel inclined to whisper if your ear if it's warranted. You dig?"

"For sure" ebonics again, for his sake.

"Reason I ask, I'm getting feedback on a few fools that is tellin' me that Cal motherfucker may be out on the streets writin' a few checks his ass may not be able to cash if you smell what I'm steppin'"

"I may be familiar with the guy..." I say, obviously reaching.

“Well regardless, word is he’s out there doin’ a spell of talking to some Persian cats that may be a league or two above what he may be used to dealin’ with.”

“Persains!?” I say, unable to hold back a chuckle.

“I know, I know. But some of these motherfuckers aint no joke” He says.

“They’re fucking wannabes. Daddies-boys who watch too much BET. No offense.”

“I feel you. I feel you. At the same time though my brother, it’s the wannabe gangster who’s more dangerous than the real deal – these cats are the type that think they have something to prove. And when dealing with a white-bread motherfucker like this Cal, I’m sure they would have problem none in dispatching a motherfucker if he can’t come through with the goods. And not to speculate too much, if a guy like Cal expects to get something off you my brother, something tells me he aint gonna have when it’s time to give. You feel me?”

“Absolutely” I say, silently wondering to myself how any of this concerns me.

“Again I aint the type of man to jump on a mans commerce. Thing is though, if this boy is your next rip, and something happens to him on account he can’t come through” Slim pauses for a second, thinking how to craft his words or maybe even he lost his train of thought on account of the grass. Who knows. A bulb lights over his head and he continues on, “that kinda shit aint the sort of thing you want weighing down on your conscience in the middle of the night. You dig?”

“Yeah I dig you” I say, then coldly as possible and meaning every word I say, “But between us, my conscience is the last thing you have to worry about. Simply because there isn’t one.”

Slim laughs. Finally puts his blunt out. Hatches his drink. Leans in. Says, “You can keep fronting that shit to the Bev-kids. But I knows better. No one feels more than your white ass.”

“What makes you say that?” I ask, terrified how easily Slim is able to break through barriers I’ve spent years building.

Slim takes a beat to look me over. He fails to answer me – or very easily refuses to. He manages to chuckle again to himself and finally says, “Don’t worry about it. Just if you can, take the advice I’m shellin’. If this Cal boy here is your rip, cool. If you gotta take him, do your thing. I can only offer my suggestions. And if I was you, I’d at least tell the boy not to make any promises until he knows he can keep them. You dig me my brother?”

“For sure” I tell him, this time enunciating ‘for’ and ‘sure’ perfectly as to illustrate my whiteness and satirize the ebonic culture that has sadly become mainstream for White American Youth.

At the far end of the Tier Slim’s hot fashion designer girlfriend gestures for him to come over to her and chat it up with her pretentious Mac using and Jetta driving friends. I speculate she feels the need to show off her politically correct interracial relationship – cunt she is. Slim takes the cues from his whore-of-a-girlfriend and says, “Well that takes care of our shit. I’d chat around and shit but my girl be callin’ my black ass. I’d offer for you to stay and chill with the boys but something tells me you don’t wanna be with this herd here.”

Again, I think to myself, the insight Slim possesses into my soul continues to perplex me. What he may not know however, is whatever feelings of depression I dealt with when first arriving

here, with hat tipped to the Scotch, are completely gone and forgotten. *I don't belong here...* come on Donnie. Shut the fuck up and buck it. It's great to be back.

Slim leaves and I can't even remember if I said goodbye to him. Fuck it. His cronies remain sitting probably because Slim hasn't given them instructions to do otherwise. To stay true to form, I fail to say goodbye to them as well and make my way toward the stairs.

The alcohol has made its way into my stream at full speed and already I can tell cognitively that the Adderall has lost its grasp on my brain. I'm more clear in a physical sense. Rather than sharp attention to the mental aspect of my daily doings, I'm completely in the physical space I occupy. The cunt-rags dancing around me do absolutely nothing to my self-esteem. The sense of not belonging – now completely non-existent. Rather than feeling like a minnow in a pool of piranhas, I feel like a shark; fully aware of the piranhas but unaffected by their presence. If in my way, sure I may get a few nicks and cuts here and there; yet at the same time, any of them daft enough to swim in my path will end up in my belly.

As I pass the security cat on the top of the stairs manning the ropes he offers the standard non-verbal “what's up” nod to me in which I completely ignore. Waling down the stairs a group of fuck-twigs I sold coke to a few weeks back for three times what I bought it for attempt to get my attention. Again, I ignore them as well. The venom is back in my veins and I couldn't feel better. The itinerary for the night has certainly changed. Now I plan to hit up a Ralphs on the way back to Brentwood where I'll buy a steak and a six pack of either New Castle or Peroni or even some Stella Artois as a change of pace. In processing my beer choices, I come to the conclusion that a premium Belgian beer such as Stella Artois is actually the best option. With it's Sprite-like crispness, not only will I be able to get drunk enough to pass out but I'll also be able to negate the cotton mouth I'm currently experiencing out of a combination of

both excessive lying and the ingestion of a large number of pharmaceutical-grade amphetamines.

This night, after a short chat with Slim and a little bit of business, has quickly gone from one extreme to another. Where I once wanted to silver-bullet it in the mouth, I now want nothing more to get shit-faced, maybe jerk off, and pass-out with the TV still rolling back in Brentwood. Unlike the fucking jackals all around me, I don't feel the pressing need to *go out* every fucking weekend. A nice night alone at the pad is just what the doctor ordered.

Making my way past the main floor and out the front door my feelings of invincibility immediately subside upon the sight of something – or more like someone – Sonya.

I can see her ahead, like me, desperately attempting to get the fuck out of this place. With her is this okay looking brunette chick I'm almost certain I saw at Cal's party the other night. Oh shit! Cal's party... I'm immediately reminded of the last night I shared with Sonya and some of the feelings that overcame me the morning after. That emptiness. The feeling in the pit of my stomach when she confronted me on the bag of blow. The need and want to say something without knowing what to say... all of these feelings engulf me in a typhoon's scale and I almost fall to the floor. She hasn't seen me yet, but if and when she does, I wouldn't even know where to begin. What do I do?

What the fuck am I even feeling?

As I watch her walk toward the exit, dressed so classy and strutting with such confidence, I can't help but to be choked by a weakness that hits me right at the knees. I haven't felt anywhere near this since I first saw Marrison Tomei in *My Cousin Vinny* when I was in second grade. Could this be love? Fuck no. Maybe respect – just like I felt at the end of our Sunday morning together, but nothing beyond that.

I tell myself this is the alcohol talking... or maybe even the last remaining scraps of the Adderall ticking at my brain. Surly I'm not into this chick. I haven't been like this since I'm a teenager. Plus, I can't look around the fact that, as much I don't want to admit this, Sonya is essentially a female version of me. And there's no way I can be that into myself that I'm starting to fall her simply for that reason.

And then that gets me thinking again... *There's no way I can be that into myself?* How could I have said anything like that after having had some of the thoughts I had when first walking into this joint? I don't love myself at all. Shit, just half an hour ago I was wondering why the fuck I even bother trying to survive... why I even bother going on. I was ready to call it a day... on account I had absolutely no reason to live...

And then this happens. I see Sonya.

Everything is in slow-motion.

She turns around with her average looking friend in tow.

And Sonya and I meet eyes.

And she smiles. I follow suit.

And as she opens her beautiful mouth to smile upon seeing me, I can't help but to point out to myself the following—

If I ever go back into the depressive funk I was in not too long ago, and I needed a reason to wake up in the morning, this is just the sort of girl to give me that reason...

Sonya (however it happened is beyond me) has become the light of a life eclipsed with darkness.

Sonya.

The light of my life.

At the same time however, I can't help but to wonder, as great as all this feels seeing her before me...

... why is it I'm so fucking scared?

Rachael

All this waiting around is becoming very tired. I swear, with an exception of the house party Saturday, I spend more time waiting behind the ropes than I do inside these things. Today I'm waiting on Sunset to get into some fashion-show my friend Stacy told me about. She's the one who invites me to all these things. She moved out here to be an actress a year or so ago and has had some success – at least with networking. It was her coming out here that actually lit the fire under me. She gave me a couch to crash in her place (that is way too expensive for her to be paying the rent on her own) in West Hollywood. It took me a week to find my own place (which is nowhere as nice as hers) and since moment one it seems as if Stacy's got one party or event after the other to go to. I can't honestly tell if she wants me around, I'm thinking she's just inviting me here in the beginning to be nice. Outside of the invites, all the parties I've gone to I wasn't able to find Stacy to say one word to her. Once she gets to wherever we're going, I'm on my own.

Today it's Boulevard 3.

Stacy assured me I was “on the list” earlier when she told me about this thing last minute. An hour ago, I learned the hard way that I wasn't on this magical list. I called her up, she told me to mention her name to the six-foot guy holding the ropes, I did, he told me

she wasn't on the list either. After telling this to Stacy, she told me to sit tight and wait for her and a friend of hers whose name escapes me. That was almost two hours ago.

Now here I am in a line that goes all the way down Sunset, sweating it out in my new Vera Wang black-pleated ottoman-wrap short-sleeve stole dress that I bought at Vionnet on Robertson just for this event. It's itchy all over and very uncomfortable. Added to that, it's nowhere near as cute as some of dresses the other girls are wearing... and I'm sure these girls didn't have to break their Visa limit for whatever they have on. They probably have closets full of things I can only dream of. As hard as it is at times to see the other girls and feel an air of competition between us, I can't bring myself down. I'm fresh in town after all. I'm sure after a few months I'll have more than I need.

Stacy's nowhere to be seen and she's not answering her phone. Every few minutes the guy at the ropes lets another group of people in. The people walking in pay him absolutely no attention, it's as if he's not even there. Yet for me, he's holding all of the power.

I'm not the only girl waiting though. Behind me is at least fifty other girls, all dressed to the nines, chirping away on their iPhones and furiously chain-smoking cigarettes while they wait to be let in. There's something sad about the girls around me that I can't quite put a finger on. They have this look about them that suggests they're always sizing up and judging any girl that walks before their fields of vision. They look onto each other (and me) with immediate distaste – As if they're threatened by the presence of another female. I understand the competition involved in The Industry with young girls – we only have so many shots. But to immediately shun a stranger just on the basis they might not be able to “do for you” – that just seems like a hard way to get ahead.

At this exact moment, a girl who can't be more than twenty-one years old is literally burning a hole into my chest with her eyes. I don't know if it's the dress on my shoulders or the cigarette I just lit, but something I've done has rubbed her the wrong way. I can tell this girl has already made up her mind about me just from one look. No matter how much we may have in common or what goals and dreams we may share there will never be a friendship between the two of us. To her, I'm the enemy. A distraction from herself.

Again, not that I worry myself with what other people think, I just find it a lonely way to go about our mutual grind trying to make it in this town. And she's not the only one setting me ablaze with judgmental eyes. All of these girls are giving a once-over to each other.

I bet the biggest reason these girls are so threatened by one another is because they're so alike. There's not an original look in the whole herd of waiting girls behind me. In one way or another, they're all dressed the same; they all have the same tan, the same handbags, watches, and cell phones. They're clones of one another with nothing original to offer this town. A dime a dozen as they say. And apart from their physical similarities, I've noticed they're all the same on the inside as well. Each girl concerned with one thing alone – fame – and all the material that comes with it.

As these girls chatter between themselves and look enviously onto the privileged few being let over the ropes, they're not thinking of networking and making friends. They're wondering if tonight will be the night they meet a person that will snap their fingers and "make them a star" overnight.

Looking at these girls, I've come to grips with a sad fact about this day and age. With things like reality television and YouTube, it's gotten to the point where fame can be acquired with zero talent and no work. For the select few that gain their 15 minutes, they've laid out a new mold for thousands of girls to fruitlessly follow.

They've burned the impression into every girl that's ever been called pretty that just being pretty is enough to have a television show, big house, and all the toys life has to offer. When the truth is, without talent, passion, and hard-work, there's no future for these girls outside of one day either working the food-service industry or becoming a professional divorcee'.

I finish my cigarette and take a deep breath of the Los Angeles night. I clear my mind – realizing I'm being just as judgmental as the next girl. I need to keep track of my thoughts; careful not to fall into any clichés. As evident by this crowd outside, the only way I can assure success is by separating myself from the pack and presenting myself as something unique and never been seen before. A trend setter.

I check my watch and realize that guy from set, I think his name's Andrew, is going to be showing up in a little bit with his other friend from the party on Saturday. I almost completely forgot about inviting them. When I was on set earlier, Stacy told me I was on the list so I figured it wouldn't be a problem inviting a couple people. The way I figured, Stacy would be MIA the whole night anyway, so having a couple familiars to talk to wouldn't be so bad. Now it looks like I may never get inside. And if Andrew shows up with his friend just to stand in line, I'll feel like a complete retard.

I pull out my phone to text Andrew but it starts ringing before I can even pull up my contacts. It's Stacy calling. Finally!

"I'm so sorry Rachael. Traffic's a bitch. We're on Bronson turning on Sunset right now. We'll be there in like two minutes." Stacy chirps without taking a breath, "we don't have to worry about parking. Sonya knows the valet guy."

They were supposed to know the guy at the ropes, I think to myself, and that hasn't helped me any. Stacy's been real nice since

my getting out here and she means well so instead I say, "Okay I'm outside by the ropes. I'm sure you won't be able to miss me."

"Oh yeah we're going to tear that jerk at the door a new one for not letting you in. He's some douche that makes minimum wage pretending he's in charge or something. Guys like that are just pissed our lives are so much better than theirs so they take it out on people like you..." Stacy continues on but I'm not listening, then, "Okay, okay we're pulling to the Valet. I see you standing by the door. Your dress is so cute!"

"Hang up the phone Stacy. You'll see your girlfriend in a second. I can't take your shrieking any longer." A cool, calm, smoky voice says from beyond the phone. Stacy's friend Sonya no doubt.

The phone goes dead without a goodbye. Before I can put it in my purse Stacy rushes me. Her friend whispers something to the Valet.

"Ohmygod Rachael your dress is so fucking cute!" Stacy screams. "Where did you get it?"

"Vionnet on Robertson. Do you really like it? I'm thinking of returning it. I feel like an old woman compared to the other girls."

"Fuck those lesbians Rachael. You look amazing! Just like the Breakfast at Tiffany's Girl!"

Stacy takes a few deep breaths and goes silent. Her eyes beg me to mention her dress, which I think, like mine, is a Vera Wang – only hers is a Lavender Label from the Fall Collection... probably three times as much as mine. How Stacy can afford a green quintain-jacquard dress with a black-satin twill neck and matching hem-panel jacket with a layered silver fox collar, and not have a day-job, I'll never know... "I love your dress" I finally decide to appease her, "is it Vera Wang too?"

“Of course! Turquoise Label. I saw it at a show just like this one two weeks ago. Been waiting for the right time to wear—”

“Are we ready to go in yet Stacy? Or are you just going to chat it up on the sidewalk with your friend here?” Stacy’s friend says in annoyed tone.

“Sorry, yeah, let’s go in. Rachael’s been out here waiting for almost two hours.” Stacy says with a frown.

Before I can say anything, without eye-contact, Stacy’s friend Sonya says, “Well maybe you shouldn’t invite your friends to the dance so fucking early. If she had met up with us at my place I wouldn’t have had to rush to get here. It’s not even going to get hot for another hour at least”.

Stacy opened her mouth to offer an apology but too late. Sonya is already on her way to the guy at the ropes. Once Sonya gets within an arms distance from the ponytailed bouncer, he lights up and drops whatever it was he was doing... and for good reason. One girl appreciating the beauty of another, Sonya is absolutely stunning. Apart from myself, she’s the only girl here (at least from the looks of the outside) dressed with some class and dignity. She has on a tight crème colored blouse that hardly reveals anything outside of the curvy shape of her chest (but no skin). Her skirt hangs almost to her knees, exposing only an inch of perfectly tanned skin before a gorgeous pair of Italian-leather knee-high boots takes over with the rest of her long legs. She presents herself with her head up high – it’s obvious she answers to no one. The other girls around the ropes that once burned holes into me cower away from Sonya, unable to meet her eyes, almost as if they’re scared of the very idea of her.

And they should be.

After a few words and a smile, the ponytail at the ropes gestures for Sonya to enter the party. Before moving an inch she points to Stacy and I and whispers something else to the bouncer. He nods his head. Sonya waves the both of us over. I can't believe it. In less than a minute this Sonya girl has achieved what hours of waiting probably could never do for me.

There was nothing to it for her.

I walk pass the ponytail and try to meet his eyes but he looks away. He most likely realizes his mistake in not letting me inside earlier and doesn't want to have to deal with it. No big deal. At least I'm on my way in.

"Sorry about that dick" Sonya starts, then realizes something, "what's your name again honey? I'm sorry?"

"Rachael!" Stacy exclaims before I can move my lips. Sonya scorns her with annoyed eyes. Stacy calms down and says timidly, "her name is Rachael."

"Right... Rachael" Sonya says, "Sorry about that dick at the door. He usually doesn't do the weekday events here. He knows your face now, so any time you come here even without me you should be cool. Just ask him about his girlfriend or something. He likes it when he's paid attention to."

I don't know how to respond to Sonya. In fact, part of me is afraid to speak. Sonya seems like the right kind of person to know and the last thing I want to do is burn a bridge before I've built it. Stacy's dead quiet too. There has to be a reason for that.

The outside "Garden Area" leading into the main building is absolutely stunning, yet Sonya walks as if she's been here a thousand times. I want to appear to be just as matter-of-fact about my surroundings, but I just can't hide some of my awe. The lighting

in the Garden is something out of a movie. A beautiful fountain leads into a small pool where everyone gathers around for cigarettes. It looks like the front of a European Palace.

Scattered fireplaces house small groups of fashionable females talking with their pretty-boy male counterparts. Everyone seems so numb to their surroundings, as if this sort of thing occurs for them every day. They smoke, drink, share gossip, and completely ignore a beautiful layout of hors d'oeuvres. There isn't a giggle amongst any group on the outside, and despite some people trying to get Sonya's attention, she just mows right passed them.

"I really can't stand this place" Sonya says while speed walking past the garden and toward the main building, "you'll find that once you've come to one of these things, you've been to all of them."

I've already caught on to that, I think to myself, struggling to keep up with Sonya's frantic pace. We march right through the front foyer – ignoring the scenery and the scattered cliques chatting away mindlessly.

Unlike Sonya, Stacy is booming. The social scene around her is just what the doctor ordered. Like a third grader who forgot to take his/her Ritalin, she pinballs from group to group shrieking her hellos and remarking on what everyone is wearing.

I look over toward Stacy wondering if I should join her. Maybe she'll introduce me to some people? Probably not. Before the thought totally registers Sonya's smooth hand graces my shoulder and her dark eyes meet mine with a soft roll, "Don't bother" she says, "She'll busy herself for hours. Meanwhile if I don't hit the ladies soon I'm going to freak".

And with that Sonya gestures for me to follow. Together, without sharing a word with one another, we plow through a stream of people on our way to the bathrooms. My head is spinning. As much

as I want put on the brakes and take in my surroundings even if only for a half-second, I don't want to miss a beat with Sonya.

As we approach the ladies room two dozen cute boys run their eyes over Sonya... then me. Probably by default of association. This I can get used to.

We get to the hall leading to the bathroom with little trouble and Sonya says casually, "at least there's no fucking wait. Come on."

The bathroom is what I imagine Ivanka Trump's looks like in her apartment – Beautiful wallpaper, lush paintings, a whole set-up of perfume for guests to sample as they please, and candies I've never seen before in my life. Candies in a bathroom? A first.

Sonya locks the door behind us and I can hear muffled complaints from the girls in the hall. Sonya brushes it off and heads straight for the sinks. Grabs my wrist and pulls me with her.

"So you stood outside for two hours waiting?" She asks while checking herself out in the mirror.

"Yeah" I answer humiliated... probably blushing.

"So what, this is like, what, your second week in town?" She asks, now delicately picking through her handbag.

"About that long, yeah" I say.

"Well let me tell you something honey, you'll spend a lot of time waiting to get into places if you keep toting around with Stacy. I know she's sweet and all, but she's an ice-bucket if you know what I mean."

To this I chuckle despite not quite getting the *ice bucket* reference. Sonya most likely sees this. Still picking at her bag she continues,

“You’re a cute girl and you seem smart enough. You’ll have this place figured out in no time. It only took me a couple weeks to get my act together. Not for everyone though, something tells me our little puppy Stacy is a lost cause”. Sonya finds what she’s been picking for – a glass vial filled to the top with white powder – for once she allows a smile. “I don’t imagine you medicated yourself while you were out there?” She inquires, referencing the Cocaine.

“Oh no. I mean I smoked a lot of cigarettes. But not... I mean I’ve never tried that. It’s not really my thing.” I say pointing to the coke, wondering if I sound like an afterschool special to Sonya.

Sonya shovels two mounds into each nostril using a beautiful sterling silver mini-spoon – I question if Tiffany’s makes such things for this exact purpose. “Sweetie” she says between sniffs, “out here this is everyone’s thing. Even if they don’t like it.”

She offers me the vial. I take it. Look at her pathetically. With her eyes she tells me to ‘just do it’. I comply. Same thing as Sonya. Two mounds in each nostril. It kind of burns but I go with it. Don’t want to come across as...

“Run some water over your fingers and sniff it into your nose. Trust me. It will make it better.” She says as she demonstrates her suggestion before me. I follow suit.

Silence for a beat. I can feel Sonya studying me. Possibly awaiting my reaction to the drug.

“Don’t tell me you’re doing movie extra gigs.” She finally breaks the silence. “Please don’t tell me you’re doing that shit. You’re way too cute to be doing that.”

Before answering I take a breath in through my nose and feel a rush of sour hit the back of my throat. I almost gag. Sonya cracks up. “What the hell was that!” I yelp.

“Oh you’ll find out in a second babe.” She says with a smile, she studies me again, and then says as if just realizing something, “I think you may have a bit of potential Rachael...”

“Okay” I say, not really knowing what that means. My heart pounding for reasons I don’t know why.

“We should ditch this place... Stacy too. She’ll be fine on her own. Probably not even realize we’ve gone... I can, I don’t know” she smiles, “give you your first real night on the town.”

“But isn’t this supposed to be some big party we’re at right now?” I ask as I feel an almost orgasmic rush of tickles envelope my brain and set my skin on fire in a good way.

“Please, this thing was dead before it even started” She says while taking what I presume to be her last snort of Cocaine for the moment.

“Well I get the impression that your opinion is the one to listen to... I mean when it comes between you and Stacy, even though I hardly know you, well I don’t know you at all, well I mean we just met, even though we just met, I’d rather stick with you. I’ve been with Stacy before. She’s probably already forgotten I’m here... plus for some reason I feel really comfortable around—”

“Shhh” Sonya says with a wink, “I get the idea sweetie... We’ll have a good time I promise. Something tells me you’re doing just fine right in here.”

And with that I realize I’ve been going a million miles a minute on account of the Cocaine. I’ve seen it happen to others. Now me. If I want to keep up appearances for Sonya here, I better chill myself. But Christ I feel good!

Sonya offers me a final mound and I take it without question. She screws her stash shut and replaces it in her bag. She gives our reflections a quickie in the mirror and without saying a thing directs us out of the bathroom. I put up no fuss at all.

Making our way out Boulevard 3 we haven't talked to a single person – and Sonya's wanted it that way. I feel the rush of the Cocaine coming on a little strong and wouldn't mind one of the free drinks being passed around but Sonya assured me its dead at this place. And if what I see all around me is *dead* I can't wait to see what alive looks like.

She mentioned something about going to a place called Avalon but mentioned it being too early. It's 10 o'clock now. The fashion show is just about to start and we're on our way out. Sonya and I haven't said much to one another at this point. I'm just following her for the ride. I think she likes that. Maybe feels like she's doing a good deed. As an actress, I just want to absorb as much as I can from a girl that moves like this. We make our way pass the garden toward Sunset Blvd when out of nowhere Sonya stops and breaks her silence and determined march toward the street..."what are you doing at a fashion show?" She asks playfully to someone I cannot see.

"Fucking friend asked me to come for a minute. I'm on the way out. You?" A male's voice responds. I still can't see, but whoever he is, he sounds relaxed and smooth... but at the same time, a little raspy and experienced.

"Ditto. I can't believe I came in the first place. Managed to rescue a friend of Stacy's from all this. She's new in town..."

Sonya spins me around gracefully with her hand and presents me to the boy she's talking to and I almost die the moment we meet

eyes. My heart triples the beat and only half of it is coming from the coke. This boy is beautiful. Not like the rest of the Cachi's here. One look, just one second and you can see he's his own person. Not your typical pretty boy... granted his face is absolutely gorgeous but not in your typical GQ way. He's scruffier. A small beard covers his soft skin. His disheveled dark-brown hair reaches to his cheekbones but hardly hides the mystery and beauty in his eyes... those eyes. Eyes that have seen a thing or two... this is the type of boy who I could lose myself for hours listening to his stories... I don't know why, but something tells me he's—

"We're thinking Avalon later." Sonya says, breaking me out of my spell that I'm not quite sure how long I've been in.

"What day is it?" my future husband asks while lighting up a cigarette, "Tuesday? Wednesday? Who the fuck wants to go there on a weekday?"

"Coming from a real corporate warrior? Don't listen to a word Donnie says Rachael" Sonya says to me, "He gets off on putting on this anti-hero façade. Little does he know, he's just as full of shit as everyone else in this town."

"Smelling our own again aren't we Sonya?" He asks with a smug grin. Then, nothing. A moment is shared between Sonya and this Donnie boy. There's definitely a history between these two but I have no right to get jealous. I don't even know this boy... and certainly not as well as Sonya no doubt does...

"Maybe we'll see you there later tonight?" Sonya asks as she rushes both of us away from him toward Sunset. He doesn't follow. Nor does he answer. Although I wish he did... god that voice...

"Avalon gets hot around 1 or 2ish so we've got a bit of time to kill. I've got my car so we'll head up the hill or something. We'll figure it out...." Sonya drones on and on but I can't hear a word; Donnie's

still swirling around in my mind. Definitely wouldn't mind bumping into him wherever our night takes us. The valet brings the car up to us and I'm zoning out like crazy. Sonya has to wave her arms at me like one would a child to gesture for me to get into the car. I want to think some of this is coming from the drug, even though I know it can't be. Somewhere in the background I think a boy is yelling my name but I write it off. No one knows me yet... that will of course change tonight with Sonya.

Sonya... the kind of girl that walks right in, that can hush an entire room, that can share a moment with a boy like that Donnie...

Sonya... a girl I wouldn't mind aspiring to be. A girl who the actress in me wouldn't mind molding herself after.

I get situated in the seat and think about where this night may take us. Realize how it's really the beginning of a new chapter. Sonya will in one night educate me to a world that would have taken years to explore on my own.

Sonya starts the car up and bums down Sunset and I'm ready for anything... wouldn't mind some more blow... definitely wouldn't mind some more Donnie... whatever happens though, I'm okay with....

It's not like I'm breaking any special plans with anyone... the nights all open... in fact, the whole week's free.

Burned by Rachael, Andrew's Heart's Ablaze

"She probably didn't see you bro" Tad offers pathetically, further worsening the situation at hand.

"She walked right fucking past me, not even a hello." I can't even believe I'm saying this.

"I'm telling you she didn't see you bro. Besides, I'm sure she wasn't leaving. I know the girl she was with. She's the type never to pass up a party." Tad continues to offer his wisdom while we wait for a free beer at the bar.

"How can you say she didn't see me? I was yelling her name!"

"I don't know guy? Maybe she didn't recognize you?"

"Didn't recognize me! She invited me to this fucking thing in the first place!" I yell over the house music playing in the main room. Tad hears me, but is more focused on getting the bartender's attention.

I can't believe this is happening. For starters, I took a huge risk to my personal sanity in coming here in the first place. Just as I had feared from the beginning, Lauren found a way to extract the truth out of the situation. Despite my telling her I would be working late,

somehow (and I really have Tad to thank for this) she was informed of the fashion show and my invite here. Of course she calls me after hearing the news and plays dumb – waiting for me to hang myself in a web of my own lies. I take the bait like a true dumb fuck, and she kicks the chair from under me. The following is transcribed from our phone conversation earlier:

Lauren: What the fuck Andrew? If it's nothing for me to worry about, why did you lie?

Me: I didn't want to hear any shit from you.

Lauren: But that's exactly my point Andrew, love of my life (sarcastic), if you're not doing anything wrong, then there wouldn't be any reason to eat any shit would there? (Traffic and homeless are sounding in her background over the phone).

Me: What's all that shit in the background? Where are you?

Lauren: I'm on a payphone. Broke my cell. Don't ask. Back to my point, you understand my concern right?

Me: Yeah, I mean no, I mean, I don't know anymore. Look, it wasn't my intention to lie, it's just, I knew I'd have to eat shit from you if you thought I was out partying all night. That's all. I just didn't want you to think I'm out having a grand ol' time why you're rotting away in the apartment.

Lauren: Well isn't that the case here?

Me: What? (Genuinely confused and perhaps elsewhere with my thoughts)

Lauren: Never mind, Andrew. Whatever I say isn't going to change shit... you go to your fucking fashion show, what can I do? I just

think... I don't know, I think we should have a serious discussion when you get back from your little show.

Me: See! That's exactly why I lied in the first place. What's there to talk about? I'm not out fucking around or anything. This is a networking opportunity. That's all.

Lauren: Really. Then who's Rachael. (fuck me)

Me: What? (Pathetically)

Lauren: Rachael... who the fuck is Rachael? Another networking opportunity I suppose? Maybe she's the one that likes to wear Emporio Armani and get it all over your fucking jacket...

This went on and on until she ran out of change for the payphone and was disconnected. We haven't spoken since. And now here I am, thinking the only thing that would have made all this drama worth it is a night out with Rachael and she completely blows me off.

Tad surfaces with two beers in hand. I take one. Can't drink it fast enough.

"I'm sure she'll be right back dude." Tad says, not really paying attention to the scene around us. His mind obviously somewhere else.

My frustration both with Lauren and Rachael's leaving me out in the cold propels my dialogue into an unintelligible stream of thoughts that not even the beer I've polished off in three swigs can sway away, "It doesn't even make any sense dude. I mean, she invited me, us, right? It's not like we're crashing or anything. Even when the dude at the door wouldn't let us in at first, did I call her? Fuck no! I should have, maybe this wouldn't have happened. But I didn't. And now here we are, I mean, we're walking in, she's

walking out... I must have yelled her name twenty-fucking-times, and what do I get? Cold fucking shoulder! And now to boot, I've got to deal with Lauren's shit? Sure she hasn't called but her phone's broken – probably my fault and another thing I'll have to hear about – and with all this shit on the table, what do I have to show for it? Not a fucking thing!"

Without having to ask, the bartender replenishes my once empty bottle of beer with a full counterpart. With the same mechanical reflexes the barkeep presented in filling my drink, I implement in emptying it. Tad, keeping up with the trend of the entire night, is somewhere else completely – leaving my rant without an audience.

"Tad!" at this point I can't help but to scream – tempted to shake him awake. To my elevated rhetoric he's unresponsive.

After finishing my second beer in less than four swigs, I take the seemingly untouched beer from Tad's hand and go to work. This of course gets his attention. "What the fuck?" Tad manages to say.

"I've got an issue here!" I say, realizing I'm whining, "I don't think she's coming back!"

"So what do you want to do then?" Tad asks casually as if my issues are far too trivial to concern himself with, "I thought you wanted to network? Who cares if she's not here? Correct me if I'm wrong, but don't you have a pretty banging girlfriend back at your apartment desperately awaiting your return?"

"That's not an issue, how banging she is I mean, because if she is anxiously awaiting my arrival it's not to fuck or anything. She's pissed dude!"

"So what are you saying?"

“I’m saying I want to make tonight worth all the shit I’m going to eat when I get home. If Rachael were here—”

“Which she isn’t” Tad interrupts, and then poses in an irritated manner, “So what now?”

“I don’t know” I say, feeling my brain begin to sponge the alcohol I’ve instinctually pounded in the past 8 minutes. I try to recall just how many I’ve drank, but a solid count fails to present itself. Being as the beer’s free, I have no gauge as to how many have been acquired. I am certain of one thing; I’m on my way to getting quite drunk.

Tad checks the time on his cell phone then says, “Well you better figure something out. I have no problem hanging out with you tonight, Andrew. But if you’re not feeling this place or if nothing’s keeping you here, I know a couple other places we can make a night out of. This is LA after all.”

Something in Tad’s tone suggests he may be baiting me to follow him to whatever it is that has occupied his thoughts since our arrival. He’s been distant all night, and it’s obvious he has other prospects out there. With Rachael MIA, I’d imagine this fashion show is one of the last places he wants to be... especially with me whining on about what must be trivial nonsense to him. Detecting a buzz creeping its way up my neck, agitated at Lauren for failing to allow me to grow, and feeling like a round peg in a square hole at this Fashion Show without Rachael, I’m up for almost anything. I finish off my last beer and say, “What do you have in mind?”

We’ve only been away from the Fashion Show at Boulevard 3 for about ten minutes and already I can tell Tad’s calmed down some – but not completely. There’s still an edge about him – similar to the way he was acting the night at the house party. Shaken. Erratic.

Pre-occupied. Slipping away from any semblance of self-control. Again, I suspect cocaine use.

Unlike Tad, I've managed to become more anxious since our departure from the Show. Not only is my mind racing with fears of my inevitable fight with Lauren, I find myself turning over in my mind the many of possible scenarios that would explain the could-shoulder Rachael turned to me earlier. Could she have really *not* heard me? I was yelling at the top of my lungs. I even distinctly remember her turning my way in acknowledgment to hearing her name in a crowd of strangers. Maybe she couldn't find me? Who knows? I contemplate calling her but refrain. In the event she did blow me off... it would seem weird for me to be calling. After all, we hardly know one another.

Which makes my racing thoughts and free-flowing anxiety even more absurd. I need to relax.

Tad turns up the radio, a jumpy song called *Change in the Weather* by some chick-band *The Concretes* jams on and I'm reminded of nights back east with Lauren where she'd get stoned and listen to me drone on and on about my dreams and aspirations of becoming the *great actor*. I miss those nights. The simplicity. Back then she was all I needed. The dream of *making it big* was merely something I wanted. Now I can't help but to notice part of what Lauren fears has become a reality, that that part of me is slipping – the ability to appreciate the simple. It seems as soon as my desires bled their way into my needs I've become a different person – putting whatever it is I already have aside in the pursuit of what I don't have, what isn't real... and may never be.

The buzz I caught at the fashion show is rapidly fading away – replaced by a self-loathing and depression I don't want to feel. Not tonight. I'm confused. For someone who once thought he had it all figured out, I sure am lost. I thought this is all I needed. This city.

This dream. It was supposed to be easy once I got here. Now I come to find everything more complicated.

I want to forget it all tonight. I want it all to fade away. Tonight I want to forget about Andrew Larson past and present and perhaps with the help of some drinking and possible debauchery, get a hold on the Andrew of tomorrow.

"I should probably clue you in on a few things before we get to where we're going." Tad says, thankfully pulling me from my depressing self-reflection-session. "This party has a different feel than the last one on Saturday or the fashion show today. It's a little more" Tad pauses to find the right words, "Low key."

"I'm sure I can handle it." I say with confidence, wanting to point out to Tad I'm not some farm kid who hasn't been around the block, but I refrain.

"This is a different group of guys. They're a little older, I guess you could say more mature. None of them are in the industry, so networking is out of the question. Most of these guys are in real-estate, advertising, shit like that. I know it's not the preferred spot, but for now it serves our needs."

"What exactly are our needs?" I ask, genuinely interested.

"To get a buzz on" Tad says with a forced smile. "The night's still young. I figure we show up, stay for a few drinks, maybe do some blow, and then see where the night takes us."

At the very mention of the word blow my stomach turns on end. Just a moment ago I finally see some of the turns for the worse I've taken since coming into town and Tad has to bring up blow. No way am I touching that. Over a year sober (except for the booze which doesn't really count) I'll be goddamned if I'm going to put *anything* up my nose.

“I’m not sure how down I am with doing blow but you can help yourself” I say.

“I thought you were having a shit night?” Tad says.

“I was... am. But trust me, blow will only make it worse. I don’t know if I told you this or not, but I’m actually a recovering drug addict. I went to rehab and everything. Been clean over a year.”

“Clean? Didn’t you just pound close to five beers at that fashion show?” Tad asks behind a chuckle.

“Yeah that’s different. I just started with the drinking again. It’s not the same. I had a drug problem – emphasis on drug.”

“If you have a problem with coke you’re in the wrong city dude.”

“I never had a coke problem. I’m from the east coast. Skag was my demon. It doesn’t matter though. I know I’m not going to do any. I just wanted to put it out there for you... so don’t like, I don’t know, try to force any on me.”

“Don’t worry bro, I’m glad you told me” Tad says. A silence fills the car. *Off the Rails* by *The Notwist* is playing. Tad searches for anything to cut the silence and says, “Christ man you’re too young to have already been to rehab.”

“That’s what I hear” I smile.

“Well whatever” Tad says, “Just have a few drinks, enjoy yourself, and try and forget this shit going on with the chicks. Being older than you I can see what you’re going through is no big deal. You’re in lust with Rachael dude. You hardly know her. The real thing is waiting for you back home. Maybe after a night out and a few beers you’ll realize that.”

“I already know that” I say, realizing I actually half-mean it.

“Obviously not, because you’re still bumming” Tad says.

“You would bum too if you had a fight like I do waiting for me at home”.

“That’s just it kid! The fight is waiting for you – it hasn’t happened yet. Say tonight you sauce it up, come to a revelation and suddenly realize how stupid you’ve been in regards to your steady chick versus the crush. You go home having realized your mistake, you open the door, your chicks ready to go nuts on you, and BAM it happens!”

“What happens?” I ask.

“Before she can even get a word in you pummel her with love. You tell her how much you’ve fucked up, shit even be honest about Rachael, then you tell her how much you learned from your mistakes and all this drama you two have been going through was worth it on account of how much you’ve grown and how much you realize now that you love her” Tad says without taking his eyes off the road. All focus.

“That’s a pretty good line dude. Speaking from experience, are you?”

“Of course I’m speaking from experience; I’m ten years older than you. But it isn’t a line... at least it shouldn’t be. It’s only a line if you don’t really come to a realization and see the black and white right in front of your face.”

“You’re right” I say as I shake inside – because he is. Not a thing he just said didn’t ring true. The very term he used hit the nail on the

head – I'm in lust with Rachael... When it comes to Lauren I'm in love...

Tad turns the car onto Sunset Plaza Drive and we make the trek up the hill toward the party. *Sarah Slean's California* hums through the speakers and I allow myself to zone out to the melodic and very appropriate lyrics of the song.

The black and white is right in front of my face and it has been all the time. For every way I thought Lauren was holding me back I realized tonight that she was actually helping me. Alone, in a city like this, I'd be lost. It would only be a matter of time before I'd fall to all the seductive evils the city has to offer. I'd lose sight on everything and eventually myself...

With Lauren at my side however, I'm protected. She helps me remember the boy I once was and through my dreams and her companionship, guides me into becoming the man I'm destined to be.

More than a muse Lauren is my angel...

She's my past...

My present...

And my future...

And after a couple with beers with Tad I'm going to forget about tonight, go home, and tell Lauren just how much she's loved.

Today is the first day of the rest of my life.

Donnie's Unexpected House Guest

All the lights are off in my apartment including the TV and I'm three-belts into a bottle of Jameson and zoning out to the scene of the city lights below and the view – twenty-three-stories above the concrete – somehow has struck me in a way emotionally that I'm nowhere near close enough to being able to understand and for reasons completely unknown to me, I find myself dangerously close to crying.

I attempt to wash away this frightening razor-sharp-choke lodged in my throat by way of a two-gulper of Jameson to no avail – the booze clears into my stomach and the sting of impending tears remains – surprisingly growing in strength – and although I hardly believe any of this is happening I notice that my lips are *actually trembling!* After hatching another belt of Irish Whiskey it becomes clear to me, if I could actually remember how to, I'd fall to the floor crying...

These sudden thoughts that manage to come and go as they please (as of late), these God-awful surges of unexpected emotion, all this uninvited self-reflection – a complete mystery to me – Their exact origins a total fucking enigma.

As the days bleed on to the next, I find the grip on my identity loosening more and more... and as another tear forms that I fail to

chase away, I can't help but to wonder if I've ever known myself to begin with...

Simply refusing to think and feel these things, I place my drink down and make way for the bathroom. Once inside, I pop the med-cab and take stock of my inventory: Valium 10mg, Oxycontin 80mg, Norco 10mg, Adderall XR 30mg and 25mg, Amphetamine Salts 20mg and 10mg, a variety of Xanax from 2mg bars to .5 mg tablets, and a cache of nameless SSRI's, MAOI's, anti-psychotics and anti-depressants I vaguely remember stashing and never plan on taking... With endless possibilities before me, given my current mental and emotional state, the rational choice would be taking any one of the many Benzodiazepines I have at my disposal on account of their uncanny ability to efficiently leave ones emotional faculties completely and utterly useless.

Without thinking twice I acquisition a 2mg bar of Xanax, drop it underneath my tongue, and within seconds the pill begins to dissolve over my salivary gland – the taste – bitter yet comfortable in an oh so familiar way. Within moments, with the chalky-chemical sting building up in the back of my throat I feel instant comfort and a genuine sense of well being.

The area where tears once threatened to show themselves has become dry. The stingy lump lodged near my Adams Apple weakens on its way toward non-existence. I'm myself again... at least the part I'm most comfortable with... the part I've tricked myself into believing is real. With all of those awful unexplainable emotional surges kicked to the curb I've finally regained control over my shell.

Again I am cold.

Again I am distant.

Again, I am completely indifferent... free of all of those simple feelings that make life so hard for the average bear.

The pill has done its duty. And although I'm aware the healthy response after feeling an unexplained surge of depression is to address the issue in hopes of finding a remedy, I can't help but to fall back on a passage from Huxley's *Brave New World* that has over time become a mantra for me –

Ending is better than mending...

The story of my life.

Making my way through the living room, now not only half-in-the-bag but also feeling the initial onsets of the Xanax, I'm tempted to change what's currently playing out of my iTunes Library, *Mercury Rev's Holes* album to something a little more rugged – something from a time in my life where I was completely clueless – jaded into thinking I had it all figured out. I'm thinking perhaps *Paul Westerberg's Stereo*.

Next to the bottle of Jameson is the remote to my Mac. In a matter of seconds I switch to *Only Lie Worth Telling* by Mr. Westerberg and make my way back toward my previously abandoned tumbler of Jameson. The ice in the tumbler has melted – leaving the glass frosted over with condensation beads. Although I'm tempted to gather more ice, I decide to stay put as *Paul Westerberg's* lyrics fill the living room: *The only lie worth telling is I'm in love with you...*

I fall into my recliner and polish off my now watered-down tumbler while enjoying sounds representing a better time. A more naive, unaware, and optimistic time...

I relax, finish off the business parts of the tumbler, and for the first time in awhile, I smile. Music on the box. Booze in the belly. Not a

soul in sight. It's moments like this that make the endless grind worth it.

Then out of nowhere it happens—

KNOCK.

KNOCK.

KNOCK.

What the Christ!?! I expect no one tonight— any night for that fact! The few people actually aware of where I hang my hat are nowhere near daft enough to show themselves sans notice. So who could this be? Possibly a disgruntled neighbor, I think to myself, or maybe even the building security guard I score grams off of from time to time? Perhaps the music is too loud? It's possible a complaint has been filed? Or better yet, maybe this is just a case of someone knocking on the wrong door?

Then it happens again—

KNOCK.

KNOCK.

With the last knock, louder and frustrated, a sudden rush of panic overcomes my nervous system and clogs my thoughts: what if today's the day? The day that's always been a pink-elephant-type possibility so horrifying I've simply refused to ever prepare for— the day the men in blue march in to judge me for all the misdeeds of my past and present.

Could it really be the police?

Uncontrollable fear takes over my nervous system as I erratically search for the remote to my computer. I find it. Shaking like an epileptic, I finally manage to mute the system. The air in the apartment becomes still. I refuse to breathe.

For a moment there's nothing – not a sound. Definitely a mistaken apartment, I think to myself. Then to my horror it happens again. This time more urgent. More furious. Whoever they are, they mean business.

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.

Whoever my guest is, I realize, they're not leaving. With the music blasting earlier and now muffled, it would be ridiculous to assume my visitor, whoever the hell they are, actually believes I'm not home. I shudder to realize, if it is the police, I've only a minute before they kick the door down. I contemplate rushing to the bathroom so I can flush the pills and, if I'm really lucky, get into the bedroom quickly enough to burn the countless credit reports and other incriminating documentation that is scattered all about the—

“Open the door Donnie. I know you're inside stupid” a drowsy female voice calls from behind the door. A voice I vaguely recognize but simply can't be...

“I'm not leaving until you open the fucking door. Don't make me start screaming... we both know you won't like that” the voice behind the door says – at which point I immediately identify my mysterious caller and curse myself for staying in tonight...

Sasha.

Fucking Sasha.

The biggest mistake of my life.

Flustered and recovering from a fear so strong my Xanax and Jameson failed tame, I pathetically without thinking yelp, “Sasha?”

“Yeah it’s fuggin’ Sasha. Who else? Open the fuggin’ door” she says, obviously drugged to the follicles.

At the sound of her voice a multitude of bad times roll through my memory banks at a rapid rate. My heart rate increases. Breathing becomes shallow. Palms sweaty.

“What uh” what the hell am I supposed to say, why the hell did she come here? I have to think of something. My mind’s all twisted. Completely off of my game, in hopes to turn her away, I pathetically say through the door, “Who are you looking for? I think you may have the wrong apartment.”

“Cut the shit Donnie. I know it’s you.”

“There’s no Donnie here ma’am. I’m afraid you have the wrong apartment” I say, realizing in real-time just how pathetic I sound.

“How did you know my name was Sasha a minute ago?” She asks, making a stellar point.

“I... I don’t know what you’re... your name is Sasha too? I thought you were someone else. Not someone else, but you know, a different Sasha” I say while realizing I’m way too fucked up on downs and booze to effectively navigate my way around this SNAFU. Desperately, as if with my last dying breath, I pathetically offer, “There’s no Donnie here.” Fingers crossed.

Silence for a beat.

Then, very calmly, Sasha says “Donnie. If you don’t open the door in five seconds I’m going to start punching myself in the nose and run to your nearest neighbor in tears telling them stories of how you beat me after I refused to fuck you.”

Same old Sasha.

Knowing full well how evil of a cunt Sasha can be and (I imagine) still is, I refuse to take what she’s just posed as an empty threat and make my way to the door in defeat. I’m just going to open the door and talk to her; I vow to myself, there’s no fucking way she’s coming in here.

“You have until the count of two, Donnie. My fists are already balled” she warns.

“I’m coming” I say, hoping to God I unlock the door in time before she starts flipping.

Why, I wonder on my way to the door, of all nights, did this blonde-hair/ blue-eyed succubus have to show up on my step? I try to remember the last time our paths have crossed and come up empty. At least a year, I think to myself, and what a shitty time in my life that was.

I reach the door. Unlock it. Swing it open.

And there she is in all her fucking glory – blonde hair frazzled all over the place, blue eyes dragging on account of her not-so-quiet heroin dependency, a knock-out body that never quits but isn’t worth the trouble...

My first girlfriend in LA...

And as stated previously – the biggest mistake of my fucking life.

“Just what in the hell are you doing here?” I say, unable to snuff my body from shaking out of both frustration and fear.

“I was in the neighborhood” she says as her head drops and eyes roll back – stoned on heroin – big surprise.

“You’re always in the neighborhood Sasha. Your mom lives in Brentwood.” I say while standing firm at the threshold of the apartment – there’s no way this chick is coming inside.

“She kicked me out” She says in her semi-retarded heroin drool.

“That’s a shocker.”

“Don’t be an asshole.” She says, raising her voice and my blood-pressure at the same time. “Let me in, I have nowhere else to go tonight”.

“Not my problem” I say coldly as possible – in my usual way.

If Sasha had fangs she’d show them. Her eyes bulge out. Snaps immediately out of her heroin spell and shrieks, “I fucking hate it when you say that!”

Terrified she may wake up the entire floor; I pull her into my apartment and shut the door behind her. Somewhere in the journey, she loses her footing and falls to the ground laughing. “It’s not possible for you to act like a human-being for even three minutes, is it?” I ask her – attempting to lift her from the floor to little avail.

To my surprise, Sasha manages to bring herself to her feet with little to no trouble. She draws a breath, laboriously balances her body, and finally becomes a friend of gravity again. Slowly she widens her eyes and focuses around the apartment. She giggles

and then says, “Why is it so dark in here? What, were you like, sleeping or something?” she laughs to the point of tears.

“I had hoped to have a quiet night alone” I say lamely.

“On a Friday night?” She asks as if I told her the world was four-minutes away from imploding.

“Not all of us are like you Sasha” I say on my high horse.

“Yeah, you’re a real fucking choirboy. Give me a break”, she says while attempting a ‘jerk-off-motion’ with what appears to be a very heavy fist.

She pushes past me as if in her own home and stumbles her way around the apartment, grabbing onto anything in sight to maintain balance, while fruitlessly searching for my couch which is actually on the *other side* of where she has directed herself in her drug-fueled-blindness. If I actually cared, I’d steer her in the correct direction – but I don’t. I’d actually enjoy nothing more than to see her trip and tumble out of my floor-to-ceiling-window leading to a twenty-three-story-drop but realize the odds of her crashing the glass are close to zero if not less – she only weighs about 95 pounds.

“Where is everything?!” She screams, “Turn on the lights or something. We’re not all vampires like you Donnie.”

“And when was the last time you went out while the sun is still up? As I recall the morning hours are part of your regularly scheduled bedtime... oh wait! I forgot, Skid row serves at ten in the morning these days.” I can’t help myself to say with a slight smirk.

“Keep being a smartass and I’ll have cops here in twelve minutes ready to wrap a warm blanket around me a cuffs around you.” She

says like the cunt she is while continuing to stumble around a usually easy-to-navigate living room. “Where is the fucking couch?”

“It’s exactly where it should be, in the living room” I say patronizingly, “You my dear, are in the kitchen.”

Sasha stops in her tracks. Swaying to and fro, she laboriously attempts to focus in on her surroundings. After quite a bit of time she notices she is in fact located inside the kitchen and an expression overcomes her over-drugged face as if to say, “By George I am in the kitchen! However did I stumble my way into here?”

“Well if you left some fucking lights on I wouldn’t have this problem” She says annoyed.

“I wasn’t expecting guests.”

“That’s because you don’t have any friends” she says on her way to the couch (How she managed not to see it from moment one, I’ll never know). Finally at her destination, she plops down as if every muscle in her body collectively decided to punch out for the day, giving two shifts if another shift is on the way. Once comfortably sprawled out on the couch in all sorts of different directions, she carelessly tosses her purse somewhere near the kitchen (probably under the impression she tossed it on the coffee table).

She lets out a large gasp and makes herself right at home.

I’m furious – silently thanking the Gods for putting me in a position to eat a Xanax moments before she got here. Had that not happened, city workers may already be scraping her nipples off of a sewer cap while Detectives take me aside to inquire just how she had “lost her footing” off my balcony.

“You need more furniture” Sasha says casually – completely ignoring how uncomfortable our two being together is.

“What?” I ask, still getting over the fact she’s even here. This woman, in more ways than one, ruined every aspect of whatever innocence I once possessed. She is pure evil disguised by a drop-dead face and unbelievable body.

“Furniture... you need more furniture, Donnie. Maybe a table or something. I don’t know.”

“I hardly entertain...” I say, trying to be playful but careful to lace my tone with enough anger for her to pick up on.

“I bet... Mr. Lonely-hearts over here. Are you still spooning your pillows at night?” She asks with a giggle.

“What are you doing here?” I manage to ask with a trembling voice as I rush toward the Jameson – wondering if I should prepare a belt or just drink straight from the bottle.

“I told you, my mom kicked me out and I need a place to crash for the night.”

Not fucking happening, I think to myself. Not for one second! The fact Sasha had the audacity to even consider me as an option for a sleep over has my blood boiling at such a high rate it’s a wonder I haven’t passed out. Somehow, and don’t ask how, I manage to calm myself and ask as civilly as possible, “And you couldn’t find a more... I don’t know.... Appropriate place to hang your hat?”

“You were the closest.”

“But you have credit cards? Why not go to Shutters or something? Daddy keeps your credit healthy. I know that for a fact.”

“Things have changed since we’ve last been together Donnie, love of my life” she says with a yawn, “I was cut-off months ago. At least by my Dad anyway. My mom’s on the verge. She called the fucking cops on me last week when I took her car... had to spend a night in the Beverly Hills lock-up. I thought I caught Staph. It really sucked.”

“I bet” I say not caring at all, “Why would your mom call the cops for taking a car out?”

“She didn’t want me driving without a license. It was revoked a few months back.”

“So uh...” I almost choke up my Whiskey – terrified she may have in fact led cops to my pad, “how did you get here?”

“Not with my Mom’s car don’t worry. No cops are coming here. I took a cab.”

“Let me guess” my blood’s boiling, I know what ‘took a cab’ means in Sasha’s language, “You ditched the fucking thing?”

“Of course” she says nonchalantly.

“Christ nothing changes with you!” I stand up and make my way toward her – prepping to drag the bitch out by her hair.

“Relax Donnie. I ditched the thing way down Wilshire. Believe it or not, I actually walked a ways to get here. I actually forgot how to get here to be honest.”

“That I can believe” I say, slightly calmer, I take a seat beside her.

She rolls her head back on the armrest and plops her legs above my lap. Although I truly do hate this girl with all of my life, I can’t help but to get hard. She notices it. Giggles. Too high to do much else,

she rubs her legs back and forth over my cock. It gets harder and harder. God I hate this chick.

“At least some things stay the same” she manages to say, still rubbing my cock with her legs.

“Don’t read too much into it” I say. “The thing will get hard in an elevator if the feeling’s right. It doesn’t know any better... doesn’t have some of the memories I do.”

Her legs stop moving but stay rested on my lap. She lets out another sigh. I speculate if she could manage to move, she would. “Don’t pull that victim shit with me Donnie. We may not have seen each other in over a year but I’ve heard plenty about what you’ve been up to.”

“And what is that supposed to mean?” I ask, genuinely interested.

“Come on. Your friends are my friends. I hear things.”

“I don’t have any friends, remember? Neither do you.”

“You know what I mean” she somehow manages to swing her legs from my lap and plants them on the floor – now sitting upright on the couch – she scans the scene for her purse – coming up empty she says, “Where the fuck is my purse?”

“You tossed it in the kitchen.”

“Get it for me” she snaps.

Again I’m thinking about the window and a city worker scraping her perfectly tanned torso off the sidewalk but realize I need another drink and don’t want to ruin how uncharacteristically mellow she is so I stand up and start for the kitchen without protest.

In the kitchen I find her purse – the contents spilled out about the floor – wallet (empty I'm sure), pack of cigarettes, lighter, and the real business part – four hypos and a bag of heroin that probably cost more than a plane ticket to Manhattan.

Tempted to take the bag and sell it off to Mel I resist – knowing full well Sasha will set my entire building on fire for such an act of larceny. I gather all of her goods in the purse, sling it over my shoulder, and pick up the close-to-empty bottle of Jameson I left atop my counter. Fuck a tumbler and ice, I think to myself, the situation calls for straight-from-the-bottle.

“What exactly did you mean by ‘you’ve heard plenty’?” I ask as I make my way for the couch – purse still slung over my shoulder.

Sasha breaks down in laughter. “Shouldn’t you be in West Hollywood with that purse Nancy?”

Hating every inch of this girl and wishing she was Sonya (which is something I can’t understand) I toss the purse straight at Sasha’s midsection. Due to her being skagged to the brain, she fails to prevent it from banging against her chest. After the purse thumps, her eyes get bloody and her fangs start to show. “You fucking asshole! I’ll break everything in this fucking apartment if you don’t say sorry now!”

“Sorry” I say, taking a seat beside her – bottle in hand.

Sasha ignores my apology and rummages through her purse. It’s obvious she’s getting ready to rig up. My fatigue coupled with the fear of awakening the beast I know to reside in Sasha, I refrain from making a fuss. I take a pull straight from the bottle. My nerves calm almost immediately. Sasha notices nothing outside of the world of her purse. To break the silence, again I inquire, “What did you mean by, ‘you heard stories’ or whatever it was you said?”

“You have to ask?” she says as she’s already put a rig on my coffee table and is in process of spreading out a hit of skag. “We may not have friends Donnie, sure. But word gets around.”

“What kind of word?”

“Please. I’ve heard so many stories I refuse to even try and rap all of them to you.”

“Give me one or two examples” I say as I furiously watch on as Sasha prepares to cook a batch of narco-soup on my goddamn coffee table.

“Let’s see” she says as she pulls a bottle of water from her purse to add to the various other paraphernalia she’s already removed, “apart from the half-dozen Westwood girls still trying to fix their credit, there’s got to be twice as many girls still wondering why you haven’t called them back. And don’t even get me started on the Beverly Boys still waiting for computers.”

None of this should be news to Sasha, I think to myself while sporting a devilish grin.

Sasha carefully arranges the tools of her trade on my coffee table: spoon, bottle of blood-laced water, rig, lighter, cotton, etc. She dumps some dope into her spoon, paying no attention to me, and says “Let’s just say I’ve heard how busy you’ve been.”

“And this shit is really, I don’t know, like a big surprise? It’s nothing really too new.” I say – dangerously close to finishing off the entire Jameson bottle – a bottle I purchased only hours ago mind you.

“Some of it isn’t anything new, sure” she says – now actually cooking her shit, “but when we were together the things you did were on a smaller scale. People never got... I don’t know... hurt. It just seems like a year later, you’ve become... worse.”

“And why do you suppose that is?” I ask.

“Don’t put that shit on me” she says, the dope now simmering in the spoon. She blows on it.

“Why shouldn’t I?” I ask, “I’m a different person since you... since moving out here. I don’t even know who I am anymore.”

The dope on her spoon cools. She drops a cotton and lets it soak. Puts the spoon on the table. Preps her rig.

“Please Donnie” she says, “You’ve always been that guy. You wouldn’t have been with me in the first place. I haven’t changed... I’ve just gotten worse. Same thing goes with you... People like us, we attract each other. After that...”

Her train of thought stops. All attention on her dope. She ties her arm off and preps the rig. Finds a vein...

I’m on the edge of my seat. For some reason I have to hear what she was going to say... I have to understand her fucking point.

“After that what?” I ask.

Blood finds the chamber and she shoots the dope home. Pulls on the slack of the Versace bandana she used to tie off her arm. Her head falls back into my lap. A smile graces her face. She’s on the H-Train again. Out of commission.

“After that what?” I ask again, this time with more urgency in my tone, “You were trying to make a point and then you just... well you disappeared on me. After that what?”

“What” she asks – eyes in the back of her head – smile across her face.

“You were saying something like... fuck I can’t remember” I search my banks, she was getting somewhere and then lost herself. I swig my bottle, then it hits me “You said something like people like us attract one another and then after that.... After that what?”

“Oh” she says with a smile – I hope born of realization rather than narcotic haze – and says, “After that we either grow together for the better or fall apart for the worse.” She pauses for a moment, shuts her eyes while managing a sigh of pleasure, and then sluggishly says, “I don’t know... I really don’t remember what I was talking about...” and with that her head leans back and she’s out for the count. And although Sasha’s attention span doesn’t last longer than the time it takes to cook a batch of dope, I find myself following exactly what it was she was trying to say...

At least I think I do.

With my Jameson now tapped, I head to the fridge for a Stella and make my way back to the window – looking down at the city below – right where I was before madness made its way into my home. This time however, reflecting on something completely different – something more clear...

People like us.

Grow together for the better. Fall apart for the worse.

Labels simple in a Sasha sort of way, yes, but for me, these words have opened an entire flood of realizations. When she had first appeared at my door I could strangle her. For the past year I’ve blamed her for the way I am now – so distant and cold. I’ve blamed her for all the awful things I’ve experienced in this town that have indivertibly caused me to forget and leave behind whatever dreams I once had that drove me to this place. Thanks to some heroin-laced wisdom from my ex-girlfriend, I realize now whatever shit I’ve sifted through, whatever hardships, whatever morals I’ve had to

sacrifice – all of it – especially in a city like this – for *a person like me* is inevitable.

People like us she said...

With over a year in the books, having come close to losing my soul after marching through countless alleyways of emotional and spiritual darkness, I'm still standing. Colder maybe, but at the same time stronger and better equipped to handle whatever hardship I may have to face down the road – that is if I don't avoid them altogether.

And where is Sasha now? Hunched over and drooling all over my leather couch on a deep heroin-ride just waiting for her last. At the core she's the same – she's only grown new layers – sicker, more out of control, lost, confused – destined to be swallowed up by the bowels of this city.

Grow together for the better, she said. Fall apart for the worse, she said.

This dance called life is one big struggle laid out to better prepare us for the next struggle to follow. Sometimes along the road we meet people, sure, and Sasha would say the people we encounter down the freeway of life will either help us grow or bury us. But as I sip my beer now – while Sasha turns over on her side mumbling some sort of incomprehensible junky-gibberish in her skag-nap I find a deeper way of looking at all of this.

To build or to crumble, one of the two for any person is inevitable, no matter whom one may encounter in his/her life.

Grow together for the better, she said. Fall apart for the worse, she said...

And for our tale, the Donnie and Sasha show, she had it all wrong. In our situation it wasn't required for us to grow *together*, on account now I see I was the one that grew while she fell apart. Sure we meet people for better or worse, but I see clearly now some people are just destined to be that stone the other steps on and crushes in order to lay a path for the future ahead.

People like us, she said.

For Sasha and I, there is no "people like us" – as she isn't part of my mold. Whatever it is inside me, wherever that coldness came from to help protect me after my relationship with her, wherever that soulless desire to survive came from after the fiasco with my Father so many years ago – that ability to adapt no matter what – that's just not in Sasha's makeup. She's a stone – not the destructive window shattering stone I once thought her to be – but merely a barely solid entity used temporarily to keep my footing and balance as I crossed the furious waters of the river of life.

Swigging the dying buds of my Stella I turn away from the city lights to take a final look at Sasha – still zonked out on my sofa. I can't help but to smile. This one person who once had so much power over me, over my mind, over my heart – now seeing her with wiser eyes – is nothing short of pathetic to me. Sasha and all the other blame-everyone-else-but-themselves self-help-junkies like her are simply guests in this town. Stepping stones. I on the other hand belong here...

People like us, she said.

People like me, I said.

Lighting a Lucky Strike I turn the words *people like me* over in my mind and for some reason I don't quite understand I think about Sonya. Out of the two character types I've outlined through recent observation, I silently wonder (although I really don't think I care)

which of the two groups Sonya would fit under. It doesn't take long. Hard as it may be to admit, Sonya is for better or worse, my female counterpart. Between the two of us, the number of people that have fallen to serve our own selfish needs could break a scale in two...

And then those words come back to me...

People like us. Grow together. Fall apart.

Maybe my problem all along has been not ever finding someone in whom I could truly grow with. I've always been an 'A' to another's 'B'. Never have I meshed with my own kind. Out of nowhere, an image of Sonya and Myself becoming a single unit flows from my heart and appears before my mind's eye – and for some shocking reason, our union seems like a good prospect. In fact, together having experienced and gotten through most of the same things, we could help one another move on to a better life. But at the same time trends could be followed and one of us may end up being the stone stepped on by the other. Crushed for life.

And if we were to get together, Sonya and I, and we failed, who would be the one to crumble?

Or could we actually be capable of moving forward together? I know I'm tired of where my life has led. Is Sonya? Could our joining together fix the mess we've created in each of our lives? Apart we've been losers, despite any growth. Together, maybe we could flourish....

And then it hits me – that unexplained panic and urge to cry hysterically.

I'm reminded of the other night with Sonya. Stoned on the couch while she tried to make small talk and then I had made a

realization, a comment, something that affected us the same way in which our only reaction was to blow lines and fuck...

What if we, I, have had it all wrong?

What if we're the ones actually falling apart? What if we're the ones losing in the end?

I turn back to face Sasha as she's still passed out on the skag. I just now notice the needle is still in her arm, and rather than giggle in triumph and rejoice in how pathetic she looks... so vulnerable and weak – I want to cry in defeat, because somewhere in the red regions of my heart I know I'm responsible for the scene. I did this. If my philosophy is right, if Sasha was merely a stepping stone for my *growth*, then I shudder to wonder if it was really worth it. And not just for Sasha, but for all of those people. All the people I've hurt, all the people I've made cry, all the people who've stayed up late at night with worry I had brought into their lives just so I could temporarily better mine in the hopes one day I'd do great things and make it all up to the world.

These people who I've considered stepping stones to my future are now presented to me in a different light that for the life of me I can't seem to chase away. Victims.

I haven't grown. I've merely survived at the behest of others, leaving behind a mess for them to clean up. I'm not a human. I'm a virus. And all the past hosts, now broken and delayed in living their own lives on account of my bullshit, I wonder, maybe would they have done more than I have now if roles were reversed? Who am I kidding? With my life, for all those fallen bodies, I have done absolutely nothing to justify them.

The lump in my throat returns.

The tremble in my lips is back in action.

And by God, I can feel the salty sting of tears begin to form.

I think of all the time I've wasted – all the people who have fallen in vain – all in the hopes of a fruitless dream. Sure at one point I had a dream, something worth sifting through a little bit of shit for. But that dream now is not only gone but long forgotten. I'm so far removed from the boy I once was I wouldn't know where to begin even if I managed to make things right and pick the pieces back up again. And even if I were able to somehow feign a regular human lifestyle and interactions, it would all be synthetic and extremely short-lived – sniffed out as bullshit in no time. For since coming into this place, I've completely lost my soul. And rather than growing, which I've tricked myself into thinking all this darkness has been in pursuit of, I realize I've only aided in others losing their own souls as well. I'm not the only one at fault here; I think to myself, it's this fucking city as well.

My knees buckle so hard I fall to the floor. My emotions coupled with the obscene amount of Alcohol I've consumed in such short a time period has my stomach seconds away from spewing stinging vomit all over the floor. Not wanting to stain my pearl-white carpet I quickly manage to get to my feet and open the floor-to-ceiling windows that lead to a balcony overlooking the city and just barely manage to hang my head over the railing and spew half a gallon of undigested alcohol and drug-laced bile onto the streets of Wilshire.

Right where it belongs.

Once done vomiting I fall to my knees. The winds press against my face coming from the ocean a few blocks west. Despite vomiting, the lump in my throat remains. I think of all the people I've hurt. I reflect on the mistakes of my life, but more than anything, I look out in sadness to a cityscape below that once made me smile.

I think of all the young people out there fresh off the bus. I think of all the people I once was like. I think of the wide-eyes, the tall dreams, and the illusion of a city that can deliver anyone's dreams on a silver platter. I think of the allure of the city's underbelly and the pain of being weak enough to fall for it.

Then I think of the lies. I think of the betrayal. I think of the drugs. That first line. The first infidelity. The first shady deal. The moment the dreams stop and reality kicks in...

The moment one trades all that is real and tangible in the pursuit of something synthetic, artificial, and void of substance.

Despite the weather, this city is one cold fucking place...

Shaking in the Los Angeles night out on my balcony, I hug my knees against my chest and feel for the people below...

... I think of all those poor young souls that have come into this city of lost angels in pursuit of dream, only to find a nightmare...

And although I once thought it to be impossible...

... I can't help but to break down and cry.

Lauren, a Stranger in a Strange Land

Since first coming into town, the 7-11 by the corner of our apartment building is the farthest I've dared to venture in this city. Yet being alone in that stuffy apartment, with Andrew out doing God-knows-what to God-knows-who, I felt an uncharacteristic urge to explore the very city in which Andrew finds to be such a paradise. And honestly, while making my way down Hollywood Blvd, I just can't understand what he and so many others see in this dump.

Hollywood Blvd, a place that should be built from dreams is nothing short of a nightmare. Outside the countless stars on the concrete representing those long forgotten all I see around me is endless hordes of dirtied young homeless kids, leather-skinned veterans stained by a tortured and failed life, and a wide assortment of various of other types that belong (to me) in a county jail holding cell rather than out on the streets. This entire city is surrounded by ghosts.

This place is a jungle. A shithole. And yet these very streets in which I'm walking manage to lure thousands of young-people just like Andrew only to eat them up and spit them out. This isn't the light at the end of the tunnel like so many see it as. But rather quite the contrary – this city, so clear to me now, is nothing more than a representation of how every single life can manage to go wrong.

At the end of every few blocks I can see swarms of girls all dressed the same desperately waiting to get into a nightclub that from the outside looks no different than the one on the other block. I can't help but to wonder, seeing these seemingly soulless girls dressed in miserable excuses for proper clothing and wonder: is this the type of girl Andrew wishes me to be?

Is that what he wants? A body rather than a soul?

A silicone implant rather than a heart?

A shot of botox rather than a genuine smile?

A ninety-minute pre-packaged Hollywood Romantic-comedy rather than good old fashioned heart-pumping and stomach-twisting love?

For someone I once believed to be so genuine, pure, and real... it seems with each clicking minute off the clock I'm losing him to the synthetic – a popcorn and celluloid world where nothing is three dimensional or tangible – but rather a series of illusions destined to fade away into the darkness once the projector runs out of the allotted time.

I pass a major street called Highland and see a circus of various street performers dressed as their favorite icons of old, seducing unsuspecting tourists into a five dollar a pop photo op. More ghosts. More illusions. One deviation from the truth after another. At least the tourists go home after their brief tryst into darkness in this city of lost angels. I on the other hand am stuck here.

Stuck until I'm able to let go.

Stuck until I finally give up.

Shaking, lost, and frightened I turn around and make way back to our apartment. Picking up my pace, I want out of this circus as soon as humanly possible.

I pass a old homeless man whose legs cut off at the knees. At this late hour, for no reason in particular (surely not to panhandle) he laboriously slaves away at the stars on Hollywood Blvd – carefully wiping away the dirt and grime that have been tracked over his beloved walk of fame. And although I'd like to say I couldn't understand this man and his strange habit for the life of me, the sad fact is I feel his plight maybe more than I'd like to admit.

Here's this man – down on one of the dirtiest concretes in any American city – cut off at the knees from some tragedy of the past – and homeless with all the time in the world, he spends every waking hour cleaning up and polishing the one thing that gives his life purpose... the one thing that gives it meaning... the one thing (although it may only be something real and true in the privacy of his dreams) that completes him – no matter how many people coldly walk past him. No matter how many deviates spit on the stars as they march forth – or flick cigarette butts or throw up or deface his stars in any other way – he keeps on cleaning on hands and knees asking nothing from no one.

Fighting the urge to cry for this man I accelerate my pace even more – wanting nothing more than to rid myself of these images and to flee off these god awful streets and find refuge in the one corner of this city of madness I can consider home.

I pass another night club called Geisha House (I think) and again can't help but to remark on the seemingly endless swarm of generic fake bodied women freezing while waiting impatiently to be admitted pass a small vinyl rope that for some reason holds so much power. Each girl I pass has a look about them that suggests (as hard it is for me to make this judgment) they've no soul. Hard as it may be to put into words, in each of these girls I find something

intangible lacking... it's a sparkle that should be around the pupils that I just can't find in any of them. It's that little twinkle that shines whenever one is having fun, whenever one is enjoying themselves. With each of these girls – these perfectly tanned and shaped zombies – I see no joy, no love, no life. I wonder at first what the point is for these girls? Could their misery be remedied through admittance into the club? Or will admittance serve as a drug to the girls – a quick fix to provide a few seconds of joy only to be replaced by another want, need, and desire?

For girls like this, does happiness lay behind those ropes? Or once behind those ropes and inside yet another (in I'm sure a line of many) nightclub does another desire come before them? Another drink? Another man? Another way to the top?

Funny but sad at the same time, something as simple as a girl waiting to enter a night club is a complete fucking enigma to me, a thought process and moral set I could never assimilate to or understand – yet a man cut off at the knees, slaving away at unforgiving city streets because of his love I understand completely.

My empathy for this legless hobo rather than the girls is quite simple – although he may not be as pretty as the girls or attractive to the eyes for any manner – at least he has a pulse. At least I can say with confidence that he's human. That he lives.

Unable to understand the girls I see swarming every corner of the street I wonder if they're just a certain breed of girl – of human – that is bred all over the world, and they come here to Los Angeles when good and ready to the only place they can call home...

Or like me, were they once just regular girls. Girls with dreams. Girls with passion. Girls with loves...

... and it wasn't until this damned city injected its fangs into them that their hearts stopped beating?

Sonya and the Greenhorn

So we're only two blocks down Sunset and I'm already over this night. What was I thinking taking in a stray? I mean seriously, who is this Rachael chick? Although I can't come up with any real reason, I just flat can't stand her. She's so, I don't know, lame. The way she's hanging her head out the window all wide-eyed and beaming and panting at everything passing makes me feel like I'm taking a Schnauzer to the park... pathetic.

Plus I'm almost certain she's a lesbian.

I so need another bump. Not holding out too much hope though, I'm all blah. My brain, my heart, my soul (if there is such a thing) is set to do not disturb. It's like a bad Xanax coma.

I don't know anymore. But whatever, I'm over it.

Why is this person in my car? I can't get over it. Did I want to get away from Stacy and the other drones at that fashion show *that* bad? And if so, where else is there to go any better? And why bring this stranger along?

Aside from scanning my brain for ways to ditch this chick on the ASAP, I keep asking myself what Donnie was doing at that shithole? Probably scoring drugs. He actually wasn't looking too bad with that whole *scruffy-bad-boy-look* all the fag actors in town try so

hard for, where he just has naturally (I'd wager without knowing or caring about). Whatever though, he's still a total asshole. Like I didn't catch the whole stale awkward air and not wanting to meet eyes thing he (and every other male on the planet) does. Spare me. Like I'm the type to actually expect any sexual reprieve from a guy after a coke-blazing one-night? Or like I care? I can fuck Donnie or any other guy tonight and walk the next morning care free (hopefully disease free) and completely emotionally vacant. I'm like a guy in that respect – no problem using my body (or someone else's) to get exactly what I want and then split. Since the day I grew tits I've never had an issue getting what I want.

Finding what it is I really want, however, there's the problem.

"... never really been this far out west before. Wasn't that the hotel there on the left?" the mousy sounds of Rachael's voice chime in – interrupting my train of thought – as I realize she very well may have been speaking this entire time.

"What?" I ask her, careful to sound distant and not up for conversation.

"You said we were going to a hotel called *The Standard*?" She points behind us, "Wasn't that it?"

The Standard disappears in the rearview and I curse myself. *The Standard*, would have been the best place to ditch the chick but now I realize I hate *The Standard* so no big deal. Ignoring Rachael, who is still awaiting a response from me – I press the pedal with my new *Jimmy Choo Orchid-Leather Knee-Highs* some music promoter bought me while out for lunch earlier and keep west with no particular destination in mind.

It's a big city, I think to myself, there are plenty of places to ditch a stray.

Have I mentioned by the way how badly I need another bump?

Unable to remember where my purse is I ask Rachael-the-cabbage if she can check behind her seat. She does this with an energetic-gee akin to a lame virgin teacher's assistant with no life and bad hair. I hold back a gag.

After a beat she emerges with my *black crocodile-embossed Alexander McQueen bag* – which I actually stole from Stacy hours ago as an interesting side note – and places it on her lap. Then, in true *off-the-bus* fashion chirps, “Omygod, your bag! Isn't this an Alexander *McQuinn* bag? These are like a thousand dollars! I can't wait until I'm famous so I can afford a bag like this.”

I want to strangle her. *When I get famous?* Are you kidding me? That moronic and inhumanly optimistic phrase has been to me a song the radio never stops playing and sadly I doubt it ever will. Rapper, actor, writer, painter, designer... you pick the flavor, they've all got a *when I get famous* story – yet not a one can explain how they plan on getting there. A city of dreamers oblivious to one simple fact – Nothing real comes from closing your eyes and drifting to sleep. Only dreams. The minds way of fooling its host to wake to another day.

I'm so over thinking and haven't stopped hating the stranger beside me so I snap, “I fucking hate it when people say that, *when I get famous?* What are you nine? Don't you know naïve shit like that gives every jerk-off in town the green light to fuck us over?” Still without a bump I'm getting edgier by the second and can't stay on track with my rant so sigh and conclude, “I don't know... it's just, like, fucking stupid. You're not stupid are you?”

To this she says nothing. Taken aback I suppose. Maybe even hurt. Who cares? The light's red and Rachael is catatonic. I grab my bag from her lap and before the light goes green I've already dosed the nose.

Rachael has been dead quiet throughout all of this – eyes at her feet like a recently reamed-out child. It's all a sad and pathetic sight and although I should feel something in the lines of bad or apologetic, I don't.

My membrane starts to get dusty and I can taste the drip. I find a Newport and light it. Inhale. Exhale. Another red light. Rachael's still silent. I feel so much better.

"And who says you have to be able afford anything?" I say, breaking the dead air in the car with a uncharacteristically calmer (and even sisterly) tone.

She waits a beat and then very matter-of-factly says, "Price tags".

I can't place it but there's something in the way she responded to me I respect. Maybe I'm just high but I think I may have had this chick figured wrong. Sure she's green and maybe a little lame but she's no rollover. After my little rant she could have just sat there like a timid cat but instead she decides to be a little smart-ass. I think I can respect that.

"Funny" I say, not quite sure what to say next, hating the dead silence that occurs between two people who've just met but don't really have anything to talk about – I come up with, "You want another bump of shit?"

"I don't know" she responds, "The bathroom back there was really my first time. Drugs really never do much for me."

"Drugs never do much for anyone, sweetheart. They're just there. And first time or whatever, it felt good didn't it?"

“Oh yeah...” she pauses, “at least I think it did. It’s not really like pot where everything tickles and changes. I don’t know, it’s just different...”

Did she just say pot? Who is this chick? With the here and there moment I see potential she has to go and throw a lame stick in the spokes - further tempting me to find a corner on Sunset to ditch her. With traffic tightening up the further west we go and me still unsure where to go with the night I almost sigh out, “Do you want some coke or not? It’s in my purse.”

She chews on my question for a beat and finally swallows. Without a word she digs through my bag and comes up with the vial. Probably not wanting to embarrass herself by exposing any lack of knowledge or experience, she gauges out herself a monster mound of sniff (that would even have me wired for sound) and vacuums it all in one swift movement.

She gags instantly and I can’t help but to laugh.

“Eck!” her face contorts and neck-veins bulge and eyes sweat, “that’s gross!”

“That’s the drip sweetheart”.

“Whatever it’s fucking gross.” She says in a way making me cool with the fact she pathetically did the blow just to impress me. A beat passes and then she says, “Man I really want a cigarette. This feels totally different than the bathroom. I mean it’s the same but different. I don’t know am I making any sense? Do you have any cigarettes?”

With the amount of blow Rachael put into her nose she’ll be yapping at close to light speed for I’d wager the remainder of the evening – and in realizing this fact something startling occurs to me – I really don’t mind.

Here I was just minutes ago desperately seeking a place to ditch the chick and now I'm not even blinking at the prospect of hearing her go on and on in a cocaine-fueled verbal rampage.

What just happened here? It's got to be the coke. I'm sure once I come down I'll be singing a different tune.

And then it hits me – the whole reason why I invited this stranger out with me in the first place – and I can't really put a finger on it. Maybe it's the innocence. Maybe it's her smile. Maybe it's her style. Whatever. Point is, all things that usually bug me about other girls in town I'm okay with for some reason.

There's something unique about this girl.

Once on the road I instantly regretted inviting Rachael out for the night, but I never thought to wonder how she managed to get into the car in the first place. Now it's all so clear to me. At first glance this chick is one of a kind.

In a town full of dime-a-dozen moronic single-serving sluts, a girl like Rachael provides a blue-moon contrast. Rachael isn't the type a guy would just want to fuck; she's the type a guy would want to love.

Stupid as I may feel inside to admit it, but Rachael possesses a likeness akin to Audrey Hepburn – a woman entirely unique to those around her – exuding class and innocence that can't help but to inspire and melt the coldest of hearts at first glance.

Sure I've got what it takes to trick a guy into loving me but sooner or later they figure my shit out. With Rachael on the right hand however – meshed with the right kind of grooming on my end – who knows where we could take this.

Rachael goes on and on about how menthol cigarettes taste better when she's on coke and how she felt tired earlier and now can't wait to take on the rest of the night with me. How she can't wait for me to show her around. Show her how things work.

I light myself another Newport and smile.

I can't wait to show her how things work either.

This girl has no clue how lucky she is...

If only everyone had someone to show them the ins-and-outs fresh off the bus like Rachael here, maybe LA wouldn't be such a fucked up place.

Tad's Tricks of the Trade

Andrew hasn't stopped bitching since that Rachael girl ditched him at Boulevard 3 and I guess he's having troubles with his girlfriend Lauren and can't go home so I'm stuck taking him out. Just managing to get out of all the traffic on Sunset I head north on Vine with no clue where to go from here. And Andrew with all his whining isn't making matters any easier for me.

Fuck, what I wouldn't give to have his twenty-year problems? He has no idea.

Crushing on a stranger and fighting with his girlfriend? Spare me. I'd like to see this tike deal with my life for just a day. Just one single day, I bet he doesn't make it to dinner without jumping off a building, or hanging himself, or tossing a handful of pills, or even dropping a toaster in the bathtub. Bottom-line, the kid has a lot of growing up to do if he wants to tough it out in this city.

Scared of losing a girlfriend? They've got the same problems in Minnesota. In this city, you've got to fight from losing your soul.

Los Angeles takes a part of everyone foolish enough to chase the dream it promises. And once that part has been taken, a person tends to forget whatever dreams they had been searching for.

I don't fool myself into thinking my soul is still intact, because it isn't. I'd just like to believe I'm one of the few that still remember their dreams... and the person they once were.

"She's a bitch anyway. Fuck it." Andrew says after stewing in silence for a very short-lived moment.

"Who's a bitch, your girl or the one that ditched you?" I inquire.

"Both of them" he says, "Fuck it, all of them. Where are we going?"

"I thought we were going to Boulevard 3" I fuck with him, "You're the captain of this ship tonight."

"Don't be an asshole. I just want to go somewhere, anywhere... just not back home with Lauren, not yet." He takes a beat to reflect on something, what I don't know, then, "I don't know, you're the one that's lived here for awhile. Let's just do whatever you usually do at night."

Although he has no way of knowing, *what I would usually do at night* is exactly what I'm looking to avoid. In fact I purposely switched off my phone knowing full-well that Dane-the-faggot would have it vibrating off the hook. The amount of queens in LA willing to pay good money to suck a guy off is astronomical – no matter the time or day of the week.

Tonight was supposed to be different. At least that's what the hope was for the – just a regular-type night with regular type kids fresh in town trying to *break in* to a business and city where good friends and innocence are commodities close to impossible to come by. For a change, all I wanted was a drama-free night to forget who I've become and remember who I once was. And then I remember where I am, Los Angeles, a city that thrives off of drama – and if there isn't any to be found, it has no problem creating it.

I avoid traffic on Hollywood and head west on Franklin – still unsure how to swing the night. If we make way to any of my regulars, it will only be a matter of time before one of my skeletons drop on by – where any hope to shield the inconvenient truth of what this city can do to ones soul almost impossible from the young Andrew.

At the same time I can't remove the image of an empty wallet from my mind – my wallet – and the tank to my car is in the red-zone. As much as I'd like to dive into this fantasy – playing the role of the young aspiring something in the big city – reality simply won't allow it.

It's not as if I'm new to any of this. I've been able to juggle two balls at once hundreds of nights before. Why not tonight? Fully aware of the discretion it will require I clear my throat and suggest to a quiet yet eager Andrew, "I know of a few private house parties going on around Coldwater Canyon. Not like the last party we went to, the people here are a bit older, but good... I don't know, for networking."

"I'm up for anything." Andrew says deflated. "I just don't want to think about women."

The irony of Andrew's last statement makes my body quake. I have to take a couple breaths before saying, "I wouldn't worry. Probably won't be too many chicks where we're going."

Why I'm doing this, I'll never know. Naïve and new to town Andrew may be, but he's not stupid. One look at any one of the houses I plan to take him he'll figure the score out in short time. Maybe he won't quite catch on to what I do... but if nothing else he'll suspect me to be queer.

Which I'm not by the way.

I'm just an actor. I'm just acting. I'm just getting by.

I look over at Andrew who is still dead-quiet – I suspect stewing over this little love-triangle he has going on (of his own design mind you) – and I envy his innocence – and with that glowing innocence impossible to ignore, I curse myself for what I'm about to do to him...

What I'm about to expose him to.

Whether I'm doing it on purpose or not I really don't know, but the moment I decided to drive up the hill and check out one of my many prospects, I chose to expose this little kid filled-to-the-brim with dreams and optimism to a dark and ever-so-present element of this city in which it truly represents.

People around the world may think they already know, but they have no idea until it's right before them – until it becomes a part of their lives. The soullessness of this city and the sacrifices we all make to be allowed to live under her cold shadow.

Girl trouble? He doesn't know the half of it.

I veer right onto Coldwater Canyon and turn the radio up to compensate for the silence in the car. Beautiful houses everywhere you look. Andrew may try to hide it, but I can see his eyes widen. Whatever's going through his young mind now has skewed away from women and is now in full-gear day-dream mode. Everywhere he looks he finds massive stone and brick representations of the very dream we all relentlessly crave once we touchdown in this city...

And pursue no matter the cost to our souls.

Andrew's only just beginning to lose a part of himself I couldn't remember losing if I tried...

Whatever that part was and whenever I lost it means nothing for me, it's gone, and cursed by bad memories impossible to chase away, it will never come back. And for Andrew next to me, he too will have to face that fork in the road and choose which way to take. And knowing the powerful allure of this city, I'd wager whichever path he chooses, will not only be the wrong one, but the last path he'll ever have a choice to go down.

Infidelity, crime, drug-use, prostitution, betrayal, deceit... whatever the case may be – whatever it is you've always said you'd never do in a thousand years – the minute it's in front of your face with a promise of a brighter tomorrow, to serve a greater good, you'll ten-times-out-of-ten head down that dirt path...

You tell yourself *it'll only be this one time*. Just one sacrifice I'll make to secure a better future. My future. My dreams. But it's never the case. Those of us with tainted souls never find dreams at the end of the night... only nightmares.

Since the first time I gave in I've been waiting for that better tomorrow to come. And from my nightmares I always awake to another today, waiting for a better tomorrow.

"You know, now that I think about it", I say to Andrew, "I don't think any of these parties will be your flavor. Maybe we should just go to some dive bar or something. Maybe even back to my place? Guys night in sort of thing? Have a couple beers or something?"

Andrew takes a beat to respond – still captivated by the surrounding castles on the hill – probably turning over in his mind his own little back-stories for each home. Who lives there? Who's lived there? What do they do? When will he himself live in one of these homes?

“Are you kidding?” Andrew finally says, still entranced by the scene, “A house party in the hills? Didn’t you say it’s a great networking opportunity?”

I sigh. What the hell am I doing?

“I mean there’s going to be a lot of older professionals there” I say, “But like I said before, I don’t really know if it’s your scene.”

“Well aren’t older-professionals more likely to get me work than a bunch of young-people at some gay-ass fashion-show? This is the type of shit I should be doing rather than worrying about a couple of chicks. I mean women and all that stuff will always be there right? Why not work on myself instead? These guys sound like the type that can make something happen for me. My mind’s made up for sure.”

I’ve already done it, planted that seed. There’s no turning back for him now. The fire that burns inside this kid is far too strong – kind of reminds me of myself at his age – and there’s no telling what, how, and when he’ll lose all that drives him toward that dream that most likely will never come.

“I mean come on man” Andrew beams through a voice of gleeful-excitement I haven’t heard from him since the beginning of the night, “I’m counting on you man.”

“Counting on me?” I ask, fingers trembling.

“Yeah, you know, to be like a mentor or something.” He says, “You’ve been around. You know this town. Maybe you can like, I don’t know, point me in the right directions. Keep me from making some of the same mistakes everyone else does when they’re fresh in town. Keep me from fucking up.”

Andrew leaves it at that and I'm not sure if he's expecting a response from me. If he is, I'm in no way, shape, or form capable of providing one. The light he obviously sees in me and the blind faith, hope, and trust he's obviously put in me as a friend (or worse *mentor*) shakes me to the core. How can I tell him what this city does to people? How can I possibly put it out there and prepare him for what's sure to come. As it happens to all of us...

Do I cite what happened with Rachael? Do I stop the car right now and turn around? Do I tell him the truth? Will he even listen?

It pains me to no end just looking at Andrew. Not so much because I fear for his future, but more on account I'm reminded of myself. The dreams I once had. The innocence I've since lost. The faith I had in other people... all of it.

And above all things, this young kid beside me serves as a mirror on the wall, constantly mocking me for the time I've wasted. The opportunities I never took. The life I've led and the potential future I've let pass me by.

Whether it's been not working as hard as I should be toward my acting or letting some West Hollywood scum-bag suck me off for three-hundred bucks, I've always promised myself tomorrow will be the day I put an end to all the shit.

These fucking mantra's I've used day in and day out to get me by – like the alcoholic takes a drink to chase the demons away – don't mean a shit. Not when the bottom end of the hour glass has reached the point of having more sand than the top.

The time I've wasted. The promises I've made to myself and have not once kept.

I'm not a fag. I'm just acting.

Today I'm getting by. Tomorrow I'll turn it all around.

This isn't who I am. This is what I do.

It's all bullshit. All of it! And with this kid next to me destined to go through the same shit. Destined to be a pawn. Destined to spoil and go stagnate... this poor kid chooses me to be his guide.

More sober than I've been in a long time I can see it all so clear.
Help me from making mistakes, he said, keep me from fucking up.

And then I see it all so clearly. Fate has put this kid in my life for a reason. Alone I've done nothing with my life. With someone under my wing – someone to be *responsible* for – someone counting on me... with that, perhaps I can at long last grow.

Alone Andrew and all the kids like him coming off the bus every day don't stand a chance. The struggle of this city is sure to find its way into his veins sooner rather than later. Simply warning him of this truth is hardly enough. But to be there as it happens, to guide him the right way, this is my – and Andrew's as well – only hope.

As the twelve-steppers of the world use eleven-steps to help themselves and use the last step to help someone else, I can in my own way prevent Andrew from having to lose those parts of his soul that I'll never get back.

And at the same time, with Andrew and all his youth and optimism, I can perhaps channel that energy into myself and finally stop worrying about the trivial problems of today and work to a better tomorrow.

Alone we die. Together we live.

Never in my life have I had someone else to take care of – someone else to think about other than myself. Today, tonight, Andrew has presented me with that opportunity.

An opportunity I hardly plan to foil.

“You know something” I say, completely unaware of how much time may have passed since Andrew’s proposal of sorts, “There is a lot you can learn from me.”

“Fucking-A” Andrew says with a smile, “You’ve been there and done that.”

“I sure have” I say.

“I’ve been around the block myself... grew up a little too fast. But that doesn’t mean I know everything. I know we all fuck up. But outside of Lauren, I’ve always been alone. I mean look at what happened with that chick Rachael – stupid to bring it up I know – but it proves something.”

“What’s that?”

“A town like this, good friends are hard to come by.”

“They sure are kiddo.” I say, unable to shake my smile.

This is my project now. This is that chance to change the path I’ve chosen. We can help one another. Andrew may need a mentor sure, but I need a glimmer of something I haven’t seen in years – and Andrew provides that to me – hope.

Andrew hasn’t spoken and there’s so much I want to say and do I don’t know where to start. Forget about tomorrow. Tonight I’ll change both of our lives.

“LA is a city where people meet people, but never really find friends.” I say, “You know what I mean?”

“Sure. Like I said look at what happened with Rachael.”

“Forget about Rachael. That’s not what I mean.” I say, remembering his calling onto me earlier as mentor, and at the same time recalling how badly I searched for one myself in all the wrong places, “Meeting people is a weird thing. You’ll meet hundreds of people who seem just fine in the beginning, only after time find out they’re complete nut-bags.”

“Believe me I know that” Andrew says with a smile, most likely thinking about his girlfriend.

“Not in the way I’m talking about you don’t” I say. To this Andrew says nothing, maybe waiting for me to make a point. “The first thing I can tell you about this city as far as people you’ll meet along the way is always watch your back. Be careful of not only who you trust, but also who you let into your life. Because the sad truth is, and this can be said about the whole world but more so here in LA, everybody is out to get something.”

Andrew nods his head and I think, or at least I hope, he’s really listening.

“I can’t tell you how many people I put my trust in when I was your age and ended up getting fucked in the end.” I continue on, “you always have to question someone’s intentions from the get-go. Always...”

“I trust you man.” Andrew says like the kid he is, already missing my point.

“And I appreciate that. I’m just trying to say you’re lucky is all. Luckier than I was at your age at least.”

“Why? Because now I’ve got you?” he says almost sarcastically.

I take a beat to choose my words just right, playing back all those awful years behind me that Andrew has yet to experience – recalling all those people I trusted only to be left alone in the dust.

And then I say-

“It’s not hard to find someone willing to take you under their wing as you go through life. Problem is you never know until it’s too late whether the wings you chose were those of an angel... or those of a dragon.”

Rachael's Education

So this night is so not what I expected when it first began waiting like a moron to be let in that dumb fashion-show. FYI, Stacy hasn't even called once to ask where I disappeared off to. Some friend she's turning out to be. But it's okay. I'm not upset or anything. That's stupid. In fact I couldn't be happier with how the nights panned out so far. Sonya is awesome.

And I don't care if I sound like a little kid to say that because it's the truth. Call me a loser or a lesbo if you have to, but Sonya is so far the best thing I've encountered since moving out here. She's like, I don't know, a real woman in a world of girls. If that makes any sense at all, I don't know? My mind is like totally racing off the coke I can't believe I did but don't regret for a second.

At first we were going to this place called *Avalon* but Sonya changed her mind last minute. In fact I think her exact words were "I don't know why I even suggested *Avalon*, that scene is awful – Unless you're into chinks and fucking ecstasy." And then she just switched gears (literally) and said we're going to some hotel in Beverly Hills. Whatever, I'm up for anything.

I know I'm sounding stupid and girlish or whatever but when Sonya said she wanted to change up from *Avalon* part of me wanted to protest on account I think I remember her telling that Donnie guy she'd be heading there and quite frankly, nothing would make the

night better than seeing him and getting to know him and kissing him and playing with his hair and whatever else I could—

“What are you doing all quiet over there?” Sonya asks me to which I don’t quite know how to respond. What am I supposed to say? I’m thinking about a boy? Please. I’m trying to make this girl respect me.

“I don’t know” I say, searching for something, anything that won’t make me seem lame, “I guess I’m just like, zoning on the blow.”

To this Sonya laughs, then says, “Ten minutes ago I couldn’t get you to shut up. You must be coming down. Help yourself to whatever if you want. Trust me; it won’t be a problem getting more.”

Not wanting to bite the hand that feeds me – and also not really minding the way I’m feeling – I go through Sonya’s unbelievable handbag and pull out the vial. I scoop two mounds in each nostril and chase them with a few drops of *Fiji Water* just like Sonya taught me. The drip finds its way down my throat and I actually love the way it tastes now – where before it tasted like drain cleaner. I immediately take one of Sonya’s *Newports* and enjoy the ride. I’ve heard the term *comedown* before but never really had one. Now I can see what she meant. I feel so much, like, better.

“Come on now don’t forget mommy, dear” Sonya says, I suspect referencing the coke.

“Here” I hand her the vial as she drives.

“Forget that move, we’re on Santa Monica like two blocks from the Beverly Hills Police Department. They’re all over looking for DUI’s. I need both hands on the wheel. Just scoop some and put it under my nose. Don’t worry honey, I drive smooth.”

Everything you do is smooth, I think to myself as I load a bump on her sterling-silver spoon and carefully place it under her right nostril as she drives. She Hoovers it up in one swoop, smiles, then says, “Now don’t let the other one feel left out”.

Picking up on the cue I oblige by medicating her second nostril without a thought and replace the vial in her purse.

“You know” she says, “You have to have the steadiest hands in LA.” She takes a second to light a Newport and roll down the window, then says, “That’ll change once we get you drinking more.”

I don’t really get what she means by that but smile anyway. For a moment I realize that Sonya, to someone else, would seem like the kid mom-and-dad warn you about. Like a bad influence – with the whole casual approach to alcohol, drugs, partying, and I’d imagine sex – but to me she’s the ideal woman. And I put my emphasis on woman.

I know we’re like supposed to think of ourselves as independent when we leave home for college or whatever but I think there’s a point where a girl changes into a woman. I mean like, half the people I went to High School with are still living back at home after getting out of college and doing the same shit they were at sixteen. Yet here you have someone like Sonya, pretty much the same age, living in a large city on her own, fending for herself, and asking for no handouts. And most amazing of all, she’s been here for awhile – suggesting she probably started out on her own at like eighteen or something. I can’t help but to respect that... if not envy that.

From the moment I met her I knew I wanted to be her. And I will be. This is my goal. With my training as an actress I’ve already picked up on some of the physical attributes that make Sonya unique, her mannerisms and general way of going about things. That confidence and smoothness – combined with this hard to

explain demeanor that suggests she just doesn't care one way or another – if that makes any sense at all?

Sonya's her own woman and never has to make excuses for anything she says or does. It's clear to me now, especially after going to some of these clubs and parties and whatever, there's two breeds of girls/women – the Stacy's of the world and the Sonya's. And sad fact of the matter is, and this spans around the world, most women – probably a good ninety-percent of them – fit in the *Stacy* category.

I'm not looking to be dependent on a man nor am I looking to ride the coattails of someone else or become another in a long line of women that consider *raising a family* their call to life.

Sonya wouldn't settle for that. Neither would I.

Although I don't know where we are I assume we're at our destination as Sonya pulls into the lot of a beautiful hotel and instinctively gets out of the car and relinquishes the car to a gorgeous valet guy – I'm used to crusty Mexican's.

"Grab coke out of my purse will you?" Sonya says without any regard to what the Valet may hear or think or judge and then says, "Just the coke. I don't want to drag my purse around this place."

Before I can raise the question, as if reading my mind, she says, "It's not like we're going to have to worry about spending any money in here."

With that she cruises her way into the hotel lobby and I follow at her side – careful to walk with the same confidence and in the same manner she does. Where once before I would always feel some sort of obligation to inform employees what I'm doing at their establishment – like I had to answer to someone or something

– Now I glide like Sonya, as if to say by walking alone that whatever I’m up to is none of their business.

I notice with Sonya, whenever she’s walking into anywhere, she has her own language. In regards to whoever she’s with she says nothing – walking in a more furious pace than I’m used to – as if she’s on a carefully plotted mission.

In the hands of Sonya, I feel no need to ask any questions. I’m confident whatever we’ve got going on is under control. There isn’t a single aspect of the night Sonya isn’t fully aware of.

“Beverly Hills sucks to party at” Sonya says to me in a smoky whisper, “unless you’re at a private house-party or something. Everything here closes down early and there’s like, no night life” she talks as she walks through the hotel lobby and brings us into a dim-lit lounge area where scattered well-dressed beautiful people – both young and older alike – sip drinks and share conversation, “but the people on the other hand are always top shelf and top dollar. Plus the guys our age here aren’t at a club for a reason, they think Beverly Hills and whatever money they pretend doesn’t come from their parent’s is enough to get a girl to want to fuck them. That’s what we’re banking on.”

We take a seat in a corner booth some guy led us to and Sonya whispers something into his ear. He laughs and points out to Sonya a few people in the lounge. After a beat of conversation he scampers off to the bar and Sonya leans back into the booth – which has room for four by the way – in complete control.

“It shouldn’t be long” She says smugly.

“For what?”

“Our drinks.”

And almost as if in a movie the drinks arrive, in fact an entire bottle – along with a bucket of ice and three glass containers filled with cranberry juice, orange juice, and soda water. The bottle – Belvidere Vodka, chilled. The cute guy that brought us the set-up (by the way everyone in this place is fucking unbelievably good-looking) asks me how I want my drink. I tell him to just make it with orange juice. He does it for me. Star treatment. Very chic, very chilled out. Sonya asks for her usual which is a whole lot of vodka with a little bit of both orange juice and cranberry juice. The waiter/bartender/male-model leaves us to the bottle and Sonya raises her glass.

“To a ladies night out and new friends” She says, causing me to blush uncontrollably no doubt, and we enjoy our drinks.

The liquor goes down smoother than ever before and meshed with whatever the coke’s doing to my body feels good. I have an indescribable urge to get up and move around, while Sonya on the other hand is completely relaxed and taking in the scene.

After a beat of silence, although against my better judgment I let my curiosity get the best of me and ask Sonya who’s paying for the set-up. To this she calmly responds, “I don’t know yet. We’ll figure it out.”

I get what she means but I don’t believe it. The confidence she has – somehow certain by the end of the night someone other than us will end up picking up our bill – which I’d wager is astronomical.

“You mean like one of the guys here?” I ask, “It’s that easy for you?”

“It’s easy for any of us. All you need is tits and a smile. Shit” she says grinning, “you don’t even have to be bright. The smart ones act dumb and the dumb ones just act like themselves.”

For Sonya it's all so simple. So easy. So matter of fact. But I just can't wrap my mind around it. It's all so methodical and almost diabolical. Turning it all over in my mind I eventually weakly say, "Don't you ever, I don't know, feel bad?"

"For what?" Sonya asks truly taken aback.

"I don't know, I guess for like using people and all." I say – sure I seem like an ignorant child to Sonya.

"Please Rachael, like men don't use us! Spare me." Sonya says with a white-smile and roll of the eyes as she finishes her drink and mechanically fixes herself another. "Believe me and I'm not just saying this because I'm full of myself or anything – the minute we walked in this place everything with a dick not only eyeballed us, but in their minds have come up with ways to get us into their bed – whether they're wearing a ring or not. It doesn't matter. All of them only have one thing on their mind and they're willing to do anything it takes to get it – save for being honest that is."

"You seem pretty confident in your philosophy there" I say in a tone suggesting the drink has loosened me up a bit.

"It's not a philosophy sweetheart. This is science – fact."

Don't ask me why but I think of Donnie from earlier. I think about his eyes and his hair and that voice of his. I think back on all the classic romantic-comedy's I used to admire when I was younger. I think about love – and all the magic that can come with it – and for more reasons than one, can't quite bring myself to Sonya's level on this one... Although I'm sure Sonya, why with her experience and all, probably has good reason to think the way she does.

"I'm sure a lot of what you're saying is true. But at the same time you have to admit the possibility of there being a few exceptions out there" I say, as I too polish of my drink and prep number two.

“Exceptions?” she says with a smack of the lips, “What like your *soul mate*? *Prince Charming*? That’s all bullshit.”

“So love is bullshit then?”

“It’s less than bullshit, it flat out doesn’t exist.”

“Come on now” I say, certain at this point I look and sound pathetic to this strong and capable woman.

“Love is nothing more than an illusion – a series of stages that ultimately lead to the same end-result. Obligation and misery.”

“How optimistic and cheery you are...”

“How lippy and loose you get with a couple in you” Sonya snaps at me, sending my heart-rate up a few notches until she graces me with a ‘just-kidding-smile’. I smile back and Sonya goes on to say, “Love is bullshit, at least when you think about how we as humans treat it – kind of believing in an invisible man that is listening to you – we treat love like it’s some sort of force that once we’re hit with it there’s no turning back for better or worse.”

“Well isn’t that basically what it is?”

“No dear. Love is a series of stages – like getting addicted to a drug” she says passionately, as for whatever reason (probably the coke), she’s really getting into this, “Like with drugs, first love is all fun and games right? Then the deeper you get, or *fall as they call it*, love becomes a habit, then you reach a point where maintaining this *love* becomes a job. After awhile you wake up one day next to someone you can’t stand and by then it’s too late, you’re just flat-out obligated.”

As hard as I want to disagree with Sonya I can't ignore how valid everything she has to say seems. Yet on the other hand, and again I'm a total nerd for this, I think of Donnie or anyone else I may meet in the future for that fact, and can't see around the tragedy it would be to never give falling in love a chance. Personally, I want to be swept off my feet... to be *Sleepless in Seattle* or meet a Harry to my Sally or a Jonny to my June.

"I just couldn't, like you know, write love off completely from my life" I say, unable to come up with anything of more substance.

"It's easy once you see it for what it all really is. Like one big advertising campaign tricking people into believing this magical state of being can serve as an end-all to all their problems."

"I don't really think that's how it's perceived or presented."

"Really" she says, "take a look around the lounge and tell me what you see."

The theme is pretty consistent: couples at tables, singles commiserating around the bar, obnoxious drunks dressed in Armani hitting on bartenders dressed in Gucci – your typical night-scene just with classier trim.

"Every person in this room is chasing the same bullshit dream, that illusion of love. And they do it over and over – and what's worse, they live their entire lives around it without even knowing. In the beginning it starts at places like this or coffee shops or whatever – the whole *meeting people thing*. You think the guys here in their twenties work forty-to-fifty hours a week because they have a passion for what they do? Please. Outside of basic survival, every penny they make goes toward the close they wear out and the drinks they buy at the clubs or the fancy dinners or the opera shows or whatever... all of this for love. Even the assholes that just want to fuck, whatever, sooner or later they'll want to get married

so it always boils down the same no matter how you cook it. With every sip, with every smile, with every lame fucking pick-up line, with every swipe of the plastic, all of these people are after the same thing – love. And the worst part of it all is it’s always repeating itself – trial and error – repeating the same bullshit, going about it all the same way, over and over until one day it finally hits. All of this for love. Why? Because they’ve all been at some point in their lives programmed into thinking love is the end-all, the meaning of life.”

Sonya takes a breath and so do I.

I let everything Sonya laid out soak in for a beat – her point-of-view and arguments bombarding everything I’ve always believed – and in truth – really held dear. It’s the magic I experienced as a little girl watching those old love-tales that made me want to be an actress in the first place. I wanted to be able to fall in love over and over again with different men in different ways for a living – even if it was all make-believe and scripted. I wanted to feel that mystic spark – the same charge that surged through my body when I first met eyes with Donnie – all the time. And now, listening to this girl whose opinion really matters to me – regardless of our just meeting – I don’t know what to believe.

I know what’s in my heart, sure. But I haven’t been through what Sonya may have been – that’s for sure. At the same time though, in loves defense, maybe she hasn’t fallen in love herself.

My mind spinning the only thing I can manage close to a rebuttal is a in form of a question, “Say you’re right and everyone is being duped – assuming we’re tricked into believing love is the primary meaning of life – assuming that’s all wrong, then what’s right? The meaning of life I mean, why live if not for love?”

“You wanna know the meaning of life sweetheart?” Sonya poses as she puts her drink down.

I lean in close as to say I'm ready and waiting to which she responds by saying very matter-of-factly, "Survival sweetheart, survival is the meaning of life. And for some of us, it's to survive by the most comfortable means available."

Somehow, I wager with the assistance of the coke in my brain, I'm able to match together everything Sonya's said so far and challenge it almost instantly with, "But wouldn't having someone by your side at all times, someone you loved with all your heart, wouldn't having that union make survival all the more comfortable?"

"No sweetie it doesn't", Sonya says cold-yet-confident while pouring her third drink, "Love doesn't make survival more comfortable. It makes it more complicated."

And with that Sonya switched her attention to another end of the lounge as if to say she's done with the conversation – point made. And despite all my those fairytale dreams I had as a little girl and even still do now, I can't ignore the logic in everything this force of a woman just laid out for me. It feels as if the rug has just been pulled from under me and I question everything I once believed.

Could it be, I wonder, this outlook of Sonya's – this seemingly adult and well thought out theory of hers – is what makes her so unique? Where once before I saw Sonya as something out of this world and almost more a character in a novel rather than a real person, I wonder if maybe I had it all wrong, and maybe Sonya is just one of the select few walking the earth that really has it all figured out.

My mind's spinning and for the life of me I can't remember what even brought this conversation about – and although I see Sonya is obviously distracted by something at the other end of the lounge, what I don't know – I can't resist asking her permission to go to the bathroom and do some more coke. I do this and she flashes a smile that almost suggests she's proud of me for some reason and tells

me to just *bump it* at the table. Apparently nobody in the lounge will make a fuss.

As I prepare myself to do a bump Sonya tells me she'll be right back and I don't question her. She leaves. I do two bumps.

And then drink number three.

In short time Sonya returns to the booth sporting an almost diabolical grin. She inches close to me and with her smoky whisper says, "So this guy I know Cal is going to pay for our bottle and help us finish the rest of thing off. Then we're going back to his place, well actually not his place, it's his father's but he bought it for him – anyway we're going to finish the bottle here and then do some blow at his place. Plus I'm sure he'll give us like an eight-ball for free because he's such a loser."

I'm hearing this and I can't really believe it. I mean first its bottle service and now it's going back to some guy's house and getting free blow? Sonya doesn't strike me as the type that would go out of her way just to score drugs, and I'm certain she's not going to sleep with this guy – although I haven't seen him he could be pretty hot I'm sure – just to have a bottle paid for at a lounge. There has to be something else behind this? Then I think about our conversation moments ago, how Sonya had not only laid out her facts solidly but with the type of passion suggesting she not only believes this but lives by it. Whatever's going on I'm sure Sonya has her reasons, but at the same time I don't want to get into something with both eyes shut. Not wanting to piss Sonya off but still wanting to extract some information I Google my brain for the right thing to say and come up with, "I'm really not that interested in scoring more blow."

"*Scoring more blow*, listen to you", Sonya says mockingly, "Like we're really going over there to do his blow? Spare me. We walk into a club on the East-side we'll get free blow. Point is Cal's going to give us a ball for starters and god-knows what else the two of us

will be able to relieve him of when we're over there. Take a look at us, shit take a look at you honey, he won't know what to do with himself."

Sonya starts laughing and fixes herself another drink. She asks me if there's more blow left. I give it to her. She does two bumps. All smiles. She's really getting a kick out of all of this and for some reason, I'm not.

"So if we can get free coke from guys anywhere why does it matter that he's giving us an *eight-ball*?"

"Please honey in this town cocaine is currency. He might as well be giving us cash. Plus for whatever reason, don't ask me how because he's such a loser, Cal gets really good coke."

"So we're just going to hang out with him for his drugs? Isn't that kinda, I don't know, trashy?" I say, instantly regretting accusing Sonya for doing anything in the likes of trashy. Luckily she doesn't appear to be offended. In fact to the word trashy she laughs and literally (I'm not joking here) pinches my cheeks.

"God you're green. Like I give a fuck about Cal's eight-ball? Despite how good it is I can only get tops 150 dollars for it. I just told him we needed to go sell some tonight and he offered so we'd go straight home with him. I'm more concerned about what else we can get from him."

"You mean like" I pause, not wanting to sound lame but wanting to be clear I'm grasping what's going on here at the same time, "rob him?"

"Jesus, Rachael not rob him. I mean maybe we'll take something here and there, but the point is we've got a great opportunity to take advantage of the prick. In one way, shape, or form – whether

we benefit tonight or sometime in the future. We're walking out with something."

"I just don't get it. We're gonna spend the night taking advantage of a guy?"

"Haven't you listened to a thing I've told you all night?" she says half frustrated/half smug, "He's invited us over, so we've already accomplished what usually takes an entire night."

"I still don't understand? I thought we were just going out?"

"Right sweetie, and what do people usually do when they go out?"

"I don't know. This."

"This works. Going to nightclubs all that right?"

"Yeah"

"And usually men and women end up hooking up right?"

"Sure, but I'm not saying that's the intention of this evening" I say, still confused.

"Right, but say it was just for the sake of argument okay?"

"Okay..."

"Say you're out and a guy invites you over or you invite a guy over or whatever the case may be, sure you'll have some fun and fool around, but in the end, only one of you will end up fucked."

Even with Sonya's vulgarity and skewed morals, she still captivates. And although I'm only half understanding what she's telling me, it's making a lot of sense.

“So taking into consideration what we’ve talked about”, she goes on, “and knowing full well Cal intends to fuck both of us tonight just because he’s that type of asshole, why shouldn’t we come out on top at the end of the night? Why shouldn’t we fuck him over for a change? Because it’s going to happen to one side or the other, why not have our side win for a change.”

A feminist of the information age, Sonya has a way of delivering a message. At first I thought she was just someone who knew just a little more than the rest of us, now I can see it runs deeper than that, this girl is on a mission... a crusade.

“But don’t you ever feel bad about, I don’t know, using guys like that?” I ask.

“Why should I consider it for a single moment – taking into account how much he and every other asshole guy like him uses and abuses and tosses away god-only-knows how many girls night after night – all for a *piece of ass*?” She gestures toward Cal across the lounge, “Look at that asshole”.

She points out Cal and puts on a smile. He sees us and raises his glass and winks at us. Then he gives me a real sleazy look, almost as if he’s licking his lips and undressing me with his mind. And during all of this, he’s surrounded by three laughing girls. Sonya’s right. It’s impossible to ignore how much of a dick this guy is.

“How many girls do you think that fucker has used and tossed away like it was nothing?” she poses to me, “All for one night of ass which leads to two weeks of tears for the poor chick stupid enough to listen to his shit. Guys like Cal are emotional assassins and probably one of the biggest reasons there are so many fucked up chicks out there. Think about it, how many girls do you know that have a Cal story?”

A fuck-load I think to myself.

Sonya puts her hand on mine, leans in close, winks, then says, “Think of it this way, we’re just going to tax this asshole Cal for all the trouble he’s caused to countless girls all over the city – if not the country – his father’s loaded.”

Across the lounge Cal catches my stare and winks to me – then get this – the jerk-off actually blows me a kiss. He whispers something into the ears of whatever girls he’s with, stands up, and makes his way toward our table.

“That means he’s done with those girls” Sonya says, “He’ll probably call them up tomorrow and fuck over at least one of them. At least with us he thinks he has a sure thing.”

Usually I’m pretty easy going but in the case of this Cal guy – and maybe it’s the drugs or Sonya’s speeches or a mixture of both – I hate him.

“He’s on his way over right now, so it’s time to make up your mind. You down to give this jerk-off a taste of his own medicine?”

Decision time and Cal’s making his way. A thousand thoughts flash in my mind. I think of everything Sonya’s told me in the short time we’ve known one another. I think of Stacy and all the sob stories I’ve heard from her by the hand of asshole guys. I think about the way Sonya delivered every word to me, the passion in her voice, and how apparent it is that she actually believes she’s *doing* something. And how can’t another woman understand her point of view? Seriously, how many times have I been fucked over? And if we can profit from a guy like they do us why not?

Everything Sonya’s told me soaks in deep and as I watch this jerk Cal approach closer and closer I figure why not.

Sonya obviously knows what she's doing.

Besides, haven't I been saying since the night began I'm up for anything?

Cal sits down. Sonya half-hugs him as if to say, *this is all you get for now*. And with a very neutral, yet very sexy and sophisticated smile she says, "This is my friend Rachael".

Cal puts out his hand.

And in true actress form I mimic Sonya's exact smile/half-hug combo and say, "Hi it's nice to meet you, I'm Rachael."

Cal's Gals

Two unbelievable chicks back at the pad doing blow and drinking champagne – what can be better? I ran into this chick everybody knows, Sonya, at a lounge in Beverly Hills. She's bomb as all hell. Seriously! Ass like you wouldn't believe. Great tits. Legs like there's no tomorrow. I mean this girl is fucking stacked.

I was with three girls I met earlier at Shutters who I later brought to the lounge for drinks to talk about possibly putting them in my independent feature once I get it off the ground. They were flighty as fuck but god did they look good. Plus they were all from out of town and live in the Valley so Beverly Hills for drinks and back to a house on Coldwater Canyon would have been huge for them.

But then Sonya came around... changing the night completely.

It's not every day a girl like Sonya hits you up. Believe me. I've heard all the stories about her sure, I know she's ferocious as fuck – and not that I want to admit it – smarter than probably ninety-percent of the country. Sky-rocket IQ always in mind, meshed with her killer fucking body, I know to be on my guard at all times.

Then again, it all made sense. I mean who goes out to a lounge in Beverly Hills that late at night? It just so happened she was bored

and we knew each other and now she's at my place kicking it, that's how shit happens.

Right now they're in the living room doing lines and drinking and laughing and getting to know one another because I guess Sonya just met the other girl Rachael at a fashion show earlier in the night. Which by the way, Rachael, holy fuck! That's all I have to say. Unbelievable.

I can't even put into words this Rachael chick. Seriously. She makes Sonya look like the ugly friend – but like in a different way. Not that I'm a fag or anything, but back in the day I used to watch old flicks with my old man (asshole he is) and we used to watch *Sabrina* and *Charade* non-stop. I remember being a kid and seeing that Hepburn chick on screen being all cutesy and whatnot and thinking *that's the type of chick I want to marry*. What made it worse was that she was dead and all – which actually makes my point a little better – not saying this Rachael chick is dead by any means – but I get the same feeling watching her move around the room... like she's this one of a kind type of girl that it's impossible to *get*. I don't know, she's like, not the type of chick you take home and fuck or take out to dinner and leave with the check. She's the type of girl you start at a relationship with or something. You know? Meet on a street corner by happenstance rather than pick up at a club.

Whatever, I'm over it. Not gonna go on and on about how pimp my situation is. Bottom-line, I've got probably the two hottest girls in LA in my fucking living room and we're about to have a blast.

Plus I'm already shitfaced to boot.

I walk into the living room with a bottle of Champagne and the girls are sitting together on the love seat. Fuck I was hoping they'd take the couch so the three of us could all chill. Whatever, I'm over it, I'm sure I'll be tagging one of the two by night's end. Let them have the fucking love seat if they want for now.

For some reason they're acting like they haven't even noticed me walk into the room. It literally takes like thirty seconds for Sonya to notice me and then like the bitch she can be starts laughing and says, "Champagne, are you serious!?"

I have no idea what she's talking about so say, "What are you talking about?"

"We just had a bottle of *Belvidere* nerd. Who drinks Champagne after tanking a bottle of vodka?"

I still have no fucking clue what this chick is talking about – probably just fucking with me. I sit down on the couch across from the girls and wink at them and say, "It's Cristal."

Sonya turns to face Rachael and Rachael doesn't say anything but Sonya's smiling and then Sonya cracks up and says, "Cristal! Are you kidding me? What did you get that idea from some fucking rap song! You know Cristal is shit Champagne? It's only popular because those rap-fucks don't know any better and the stupid people that listen to them can't afford good shit."

"I listen to rap music" I say, and then gesturing around the house, "I can afford good champagne."

"Your daddy can afford good champagne Cal, let's be realistic while we're parting here. You know, we're all friends here. We don't have to lie to hang. Just you know" she pauses to laugh, then, "drink your Cristal and hang out with us."

God Sonya can be a real cunt. Again I've heard the stories but never really hung out with her alone like this. She was at my party last week – where I think Donnie fucked her, which is cool since we're tight and whatnot – but other than parties and clubs, I never really chill with her.

“Can you put on some music maybe?” Rachael finally speaks, and god her voice is like a song. Total opposite of Sonya – sweet, kind, and innocent.

“Sure” I say, realizing all I really have is rap and don’t want to get Sonya started so I turn on the TV and switch to one of the *Music Choice* Channels. I turn on the electronic station. Girls dig that shit. Gets them all kinds of horny.

“Jesus Cal, we’re doing coke not ecstasy. What is this shit?” Sonya says just before doing a line of *my blow*.

Rachael widens her beautiful almond-eyes and asks me as sweet as possible, “Can I see the remote and put something on we like? Something tells me Sonya will probably agree with my taste in music a little better.”

How can anyone say no to a face and voice like that? I hand her the remote. She switches it to some station that plays chilled-out chick-type music. Whatever. The song on right now is by some chick I’ve never heard of named Björk – whatever the fuck kind of name that is – and I can’t even tell if the chick’s singing in English. Whatever.

“Oh Wanderlust, I love this song!” Rachael says just before doing a line.

“Me too” I say, “Bee-jorck is fucking awesome.”

Of course Sonya starts laughing again. “Bee-jorck! Why are you such a fucking liar Cal!? I mean even over stupid shit that no one cares about like whether you know a song or not?”

Jesus this chick never quits. If Donnie fucked her for real the night of my party I believe it, he’s gotta be the only guy in town that could put this chick in her place. Freaked out by how she may call

me out again I decide to play it cool and say, “So what if I lied about liking a song? I was just trying to make conversation... you know, something other than you tearing into me.”

“I wouldn’t *tear into you* if you didn’t give me so many reasons to. And whatever, I don’t even care about the song. I’m just saying you’re full of shit. Everyone knows it anyway.”

I gave up three chicks for this? Maybe I fucked up after all. Sonya is so not worth this headache. But Rachael’s quiet and seems to be okay with everything so rather than fucking with Sonya I bite my tongue and keep the room cool. “So what made you two decide to go out to Beverly Hills tonight?”

“We already told you, Hollywood was dead” Sonya says.

“Plus I’ve never really been.” Rachael chimes in.

“That’s right you’re new in town?” I keep it going, praying to any god with open ears that Sonya chills for a moment.

“Yeah, been here just over two weeks.”

“How do you like it so far?” I ask.

“Are you kidding? I’m never leaving this city. It’s wonderful!” she says cute as can be, then, “You’re so lucky you grew up here, you have no idea!”

“Only people that didn’t grow up here say that, it’s not really what everyone thinks – you know – like Kelly and Dylan type shit. Everything gets old fast. Same shit every day. Same people. You know...”

Sonya finishes off her tumbler and slams it on the glass coffee table then says, “Okay I’ve gotta pee. You just made a fucking 90210

reference and that's now my official cue to pee. Where's the bathroom?"

"It's down the hall, you know that." I say kinda snappy, tired of Sonya's shit.

"Uh-uh" she says, "Where's your bedroom?"

Under any other circumstance I'd give my left nut to have Sonya ask me that question but in light of how things have been going thus far, I'm kinda shaded out. "What the fuck do you want to do in my bedroom?" I ask.

"Pee moron" she says, wasted I'm sure.

"What like..." I'm at a total loss of fucking words, "you're not gonna pee on my fucking bed are you?"

"As much as I'd like to, I'm afraid not. Way I figure, why with all the girls you have coming in and out of here, the bathroom in your bedroom is probably the cleanest. You know... to keep up appearances for all your ladies Cachi."

Hard as it may be for me to admit, there is some logic behind her request. Same time on the flip-side to that coin, following the same logic, the bathroom in my bedroom would be the most prone to disease why with all the snatch that spreads over that lid. Fuck I don't even want to think about it.

"Whatever, my bedroom is the last one down the hall on the top floor. Not to be confused with the room you spent the night in last week with our friend" —

"It would be best if you shut the fuck up immediately." Sonya cuts me off.

I catch her drift and wink at her to calm her down – chicks love my wink – and she makes way to the stairs.

“Plus with me gone now you can spend some time alone with Rachael. Talk to her about Bee-Jorck and 90210 some more. Dork” Sonya says while walking up the stairs. Fucking cunt.

At long last I’m alone with Rachael. God she’s beautiful. I feel like a moron with Sonya tearing me up every two seconds in front of this girl but for some reason she doesn’t seem effected. The whole time she’s just been sitting back in that love seat, taking lines, and drinking. Smile on her face the entire time – definitely digging the view – two weeks in from god-knows-where, she’s hooked for sure. My view always does it.

“Ever see that view since you moved out here?” I ask her as I approach the love seat and sit beside her. She doesn’t seem to mind.

“Actually yes, I was uh” she lets out a cute little giggle and covers her mouth, “I was actually at your party last weekend?”

“You’re kidding” I say without even thinking. I’m shocked I didn’t notice this girl. How did I miss this girl?

“Yeah I uh was actually right out there”, she points by the pool, “pretty much the entire time. That’s where all the weird foreign beer was, plus I met this guy and we got to talking so yeah... I never came inside.”

God she’s cute. Fucking beautiful. Only half-listening to her a second ago, I only picked up the word *guy* and have to ask, “You said you met a guy?”

“Yeah an actor, his name is Andrew I think. Nice guy. New in town like me.”

“An actor huh? Is he a *slash actor* or a real actor?” I ask.

“What’s a *slash actor*?” She asks, again with a giggle.

“It’s a little term I invented for all the people in town claiming to be actors but really work for an insurance firm or Kinko’s or whatever” I say, feeling for some reason she’s not yet following so I elaborate, “you know how people are always saying like, *writer-slash-producer* or *actor-slash-director* when they’re talking about stars and whatnot?”

“Sure” she says, then cute as all can be asks, “is it okay if I do another line? I feel bad. We’ve done a lot and Sonya said it was cool but I... I don’t know, feel bad not asking.”

I would marry you today, I think to myself, I would leave everything behind and move to a farm in Idaho if I had to. I would do anything apart from dying to have you. God you’re so enchanting. She’s so not the type of girl to get fucked up and just have my way with either. I’m frozen. What do I say? Shit, what did she just say? Oh yeah she asked if it was *okay to do some blow...* do you know how many chicks do that? Zero! My god this girl can’t be from this planet. I manage to pull myself together and at long last say, “Of course, what’s mine is yours. Once you get to know me a little better you’ll see that’s how I roll with everyone.”

“What’s yours is mine, huh?” she says – this time in a tone and way different from every other time she’s spoken – maybe I’m just paranoid off the coke, but for some reason she sounded, I don’t know, different. Whatever.

“Of course, you especially” I say with a wink, did I mention chicks love my wink?

She smiles. Wink verified.

She does a line. Takes a drink. Then says, “Okay finish what you were saying.”

“I honestly don’t even remember what I was saying” I say – for a change actually telling a chick the truth.

“You were telling me the difference between a real actor and a *slash actor*.”

“That’s right, I remember now!” I say, unable to take my eyes away from this creature, “It’s actually kind of stupid, but whatever. Like I was saying you know how like Clint Eastwood is labeled a *actor-slash-director* or like Matt Damon is a *writer-slash-actor*?”

“Matt Damon is a writer too?”

“Are you kidding? *Goodwill Hunting*! One of the best fucking scripts ever written!” I say a little too loud.

“I never knew he wrote that” she says.

“Yeah, it made his career. Anyway you know how they do that right? The slash thing?” she nods, I continue, “Well in LA you always get these kids saying they’re actors but really they work in insurance or Kinko’s or something.”

“Didn’t we already do this?” she says.

“Did we?”

“I think we did” she says, “In fact you worded it the same way.”

“Really?” I ask, obviously fucked up or in love or both. Probably both.

“Yeah, but it’s cool though we’re both getting drunk and doing coke and you know how it goes. But I get it, the whole *slash actor* thing. It’s funny.”

Taking my eyes off her so I can do a line I begin to recall why we had started talking about this in the first place and say, “So the guy you met, is he a *slash actor* or a real actor?”

“I really don’t know. He works as an extra for *Central Casting*. What would that make him? A real actor or *slash actor*? Because being an extra technically he’s acting.”

You’ve got to be kidding me! This fucking goddess spent her night with a fucking movie extra – the biggest losers in town. Infuriated by the idea of a movie extra, or *background artist* as they like to call it, took this girl away from me during *my party*, I say after a swig of Cristal, “I don’t even know how to answer that one to be honest” she starts laughing, I’m on a roll, “I honestly couldn’t group extra’s in either category. I mean you can’t call them actors really because they’re not really acting – they just walk around or whatever. And you can’t even consider what they do a job either. I think they make like fifty bucks a day or something? I don’t know, I guess if I’d have to call them anything I’d say fucking losers.”

I laugh. She doesn’t. In fact, she looks kind of pissed.

“I’m a movie extra” she says, “oh wait I’m sorry no I’m not, what was the technical name you gave what I do? Oh that’s it, *fucking loser*.”

Why does this always happen to me? How do I manage to fuck everything up when I meet the perfect girl? This is why I always say honesty won’t ever make you any friends.

“I didn’t know...” I fumble, “I mean I didn’t mean it literally. I was just, you know, fucking around.”

“Yeah maybe” she said, “But despite your not knowing I do extra work, I did tell you I met a nice person who you have never met and you call them a fucking loser?”

I want to jump in the pool and never come back up. I don't know what to say. The room is dead silent. Then, out of nowhere (and by the grace of god), Rachael explodes into laughter. I don't know whether I should laugh along with her or not so I opt to just stay frozen. Then-

“Whatever I don't care! I'm just messing with you. I know extra work is bogus. I've been in town two weeks.” She beams with smiles and giggles.

Relief washes over me and I pathetically say, “Oh that was a good one. You really had me going. I was scared I made you mad or something.”

“Please, like I care. Can I do another line?” she says.

“Stop asking that! God you're cute. I told you what's mine is yours.”

“That's right, what's yours is mine” she says without any follow up. Does a line. Makes another drink. Chills out. Room is quiet again.

During this uncomfortable silence, it occurs to me Sonya's been away for a pretty long time. At least longer than it takes for a chick to pee. Part of me suspects she's upstairs robbing me while Rachael distracts me with her charm. I wouldn't put it past Sonya, but this girl would never be game. Rather than worry I use the situation as a way to break the uncomfortable silence between the two of us and say, “Boy Sonya takes a long time to pee.”

“She has been drinking all night” Rachael says casually and returns to her drink.

Another two minutes pass and just as I get out of the love seat to check on Sonya she struts down the stairs. God the things I would do to those legs of hers. What a knock out.

“That was a long pee” I say, “Should I check to make sure the silverware is still in place?”

“Silverware in a bathroom?” she says, “God you are so fucking lame.”

“Well you said you were going up there to pee ten minutes ago” I say.

“I’m aware of this” she says, “but when one goes to the bathroom other things may pop up while you’re in there if you catch my drift.”

I have no idea what she’s talking about. She knows this. Then says-

“Christ Cal, if you must know I thought it would be more lady-like to say I have to pee rather than say *I have to take a shit where’s the bathroom*” she says as she makes her way back to the love seat, preventing me from sitting next to Rachael again – cunt she is.

“Whatever” I say, regretting ditching the three sluts for Sonya, “how did that all work out for you?”

“It was awesome” she says just before doing yet another one of my lines that were provided to her free of charge.

The room goes dead again and I’ve done too much coke today and am starting to feel like shit and need to fuck soon, or if anything else, take a Xanax and drink a little more and get close to fucking. This scene here just isn’t cutting it. I should have waited until the end of the night to give Sonya that eight-ball seeing as not only will

I probably not be getting laid tonight, but all the blow on my coffee table they're sucking up back and forth is separate from the eight-ball. Between the ball, the coke on the table, the Cristal they won't drink, the bottle at the lounge, and shit-happens money I'm down like fifteen hundred dollars with nothing more than a pair of blue balls to show for it.

After god-only-knows how much time of silence, Sonya finally breaks the ice with, "So Cal, what are you up to these days? You know, like what do you do?"

I so badly want to put this bitch in check by asking her the same question being as work is a foreign term to her but refrain, intending to keep the air civil.

"I'm actually putting together an independent feature – a vampire film - just working out the final kinks with financing. It's a lot of standard industry stuff, red-tape, honestly it would bore you" I say, knowing full well Sonya's moments away to give me more shit. Why couldn't I have met this Rachael in a bar alone? She would have been push-over.

"You mean that same *independent feature* you've been putting together since you were like eighteen? What's it called, *Teenage Vampires in Lust* or something like that?" Sonya says – of course laughing.

"Well actually" I begin, wondering how Sonya knew the original title to my project, "I've since changed the title to *Vampyrez*. You know, Vampires only with a 'y and a z'."

Sonya and Rachael are speechless. Then Rachael, cute as she is, asks, "You mean like spelled with a y and z?"

"Yeah" I say, and then spell the thing out for her.

“So *Vampyrez*?” Rachael asks again, “Spelled v-a-m-p-y-r-e-z?”

“Yeah”

“So wouldn’t that be pronounced Vamp-eye-rez?” Rachael asks.

I think on it for a minute. Shit, I think she may be right. Fuck, I think to myself, I’ve gotta come up with another fucking title.

“Vamp-eye-rez” now of course Sonya chimes in, “What did you like change the letters around to be cool or something? Is it a rap thing with the y, or are you trying to appeal to audiences abroad?”

“I can never tell if you’re being sarcastic, Sonya” I say, truly meaning it.

“Are you serious?” she says, “You tell people you’re putting together an independent movie named *Vampyrez*, *with a y and a z*, and you really have to ask if I’m being fucking sarcastic?”

“Why do I even bother?” I say in a deflated tone – half-hoping Rachael feels sorry for me and possibly may want to fuck later because of it.

“What’s the movie about?” Rachael says, not sure if she’s genuinely interested or just trying to cheer me up, I’ll take whatever I can get.

“It’s a lot of things really. Sort of hard to put all into words, but basically there’s these vampires living in a special school just for vampires – on a secret island somewhere in the Atlantic – and there’s sort of two feuding groups within the school and all that kind of stuff, *but*, here’s the twist. They’re all musicians. So at the end there’s a battle between their bands along with a vampire battle and whatnot.” I say and they’re speechless, then I remember, “Oh yeah and all the female vampires are lesbians.”

The girls are speechless and at long last I finally managed to shut Sonya up. Whenever I'm in a bind I can always rely on my creativity – whether it's artistic or just coming up with bullshit. In this case – my artistic side wins the chicks over.

After quite a bit of silence Sonya finally says, “So it's like Harry Potter only with lesbian vampires and it's spelled with a y and a z?”

“Basically yes” I reply.

“And this isn't another one of your lies? You actually plan on *making* this movie?” She says.

“Well I don't *plan* on making it; I am going to make it. Like I said, we're just going through the final financial negotiations.”

“And who exactly is this *we* you speak of? Like your father?” Sonya says.

“No not my father, this is *my* project. I'm fully capable of putting together a production. I've been dreaming of this my entire life.” I say with a little smile shot toward Rachael – chicks love guys with dreams.

“Well” Sonya begins, “If I'm you I'd keep dreaming because even with all your Daddy's money I doubt anyone would be retarded enough to make your movie. Vamp-eye-rez or whatever the fuck you call it.”

“I told you we're already working out the financial kinks” I say, getting furious and defensive – angered to no end Sonya has to do this kind of shit in front of Rachael – who by the way seems to want Sonya to shut her mouth as well. “And how many times do I have to tell you I don't need my father's money. I'm doing this myself.”

“Cal sweetie, people like you aren’t capable of living without your “father’s money”. You and all your pals never grow up. That’s the problem. What’s worse is eventually you spread your seed and another generation of spoiled, conceited, narcissistic, morons come along and keep the cycle going.” Sonya says in a manner suggesting to me not only is she completely serious, but she’s had this opinion for some time.

“Why are you being such a bitch right now Sonya?” I say, looking over to Rachael for support.

“Because you’re fucking dangerous, that’s why.” Sonya says.

“Oh I’m dangerous now?” I say, “First I’m a liar and now I’m dangerous? Which one is it?”

“You’re dangerous because you’re the type of liar that actually believes their own bullshit.” She says, “Unless all of what you told me is one big joke, I can’t see you as anything else outside of insane.”

“Well” I say, “Most geniuses are confused as being insane before their work is appreciated?”

“Cal sweetie” Sonya says, “You’re far from a genius. In fact you’re a moron. A pathological, obscenely wealthy, moron.”

I’m raging. Never do I allow anyone to speak to me like Sonya is right now, and in my house, drinking my booze, and doing my coke – no way. And above all things some slut is telling me the facts of life. Not happening.

“And the worst part is the fact your parents have money” Sonya continues, this time setting her glass down and breaking down every aspect of my soul with a deep pair of once brown eyes now a solid oily black, “Normally a mind like yours isn’t supported and

people like you end up in jail or padded room. But in your case, with all your family's money, not only has your fucked up pattern of living gone unsupervised, but it's actually been encouraged. I bet your parents tell you you're a genius all the time?"

"As a matter of fact when my mother was around she always used to say that." I say as literally have to sit on my fists to keep from knocking Sonya the fuck out.

"Well she was lying. And she's to blame for the way you've turned out." Sonya says coldly. Then she actually takes another one of my lines, makes another drink, and makes herself more comfortable in the loveseat. Rachael who is beside her is speechless. So am I. And although normally Rachael's sympathy would be a cool thing for me to play off of and eventually use to sleep with her, sex is the last thing on my mind right now.

"Come on Sonya" Rachael at long last chimes in, "we've all had a little too much to drink and it's been a long night so we're all talking nonsense. You know how alcohol can make people get... saying things they don't really mean"

"Right the *Mel Gibson* line." Sonya says with a laugh, "Someone's gotta break the news to Cal – otherwise he'll stay in that fucked up fantasy world of his and just get worse."

My mind is a complete blank right now. Everything Sonya says comes out in slow motion – knives to my chest. I see Rachael watching this all unfold and feel an inch tall. Never in my life have I allowed myself to be this mutilated. Normally in control of my surroundings and the people I let into my world, Sonya's come like a hurricane and left what once thrived in my heart and soul in ruins. This, I think to myself, is why it's better never to tell anyone what's really going on – it'll just give another reason and another way to break you apart. To tear you down. To tell you how much you'll never make it. Just like the old man.

“... they call that enabling Rachael” Sonya keeps talking but I’ve zoned her out – frozen in space and time by this brunette succubus of a cunt, “How else can you explain how he’s operated like this for so long?”

In my pocket I reach for the lump of my keychain – where attached is a stainless steel pill-case. Tuning out Sonya who’s still going strong with her little rant, I open the pill case and find two Xanax ladders. Normally where I only take a half-pill to come down, I was down both full pills with what’s left of the bottle of Champagne I’ve been drinking solo. I just want this fucking night to end. I want to black it all out. Tomorrow I want to wake up and forget none of this ever took place. I want to forget about Sonya. I want to forget about my father. I want to forget about the past.

All I’m focused on is the future.

In minutes hopefully a Xanax blackout and tomorrow I’ll start my deal with Donnie. When it’s all said and done I’ll have done something on my own – finally able to shut everyone up.

Nothing I do is ever good enough. One way or the other I’m always in the wrong. And then people ask why I lie all the time? Why shouldn’t I? It’s the only way to make everybody happy.

All four milligrams of the Xanax get to work early and I find comfort in knowing soon this will all be a bad dream.

With the sounds of Sonya rambling still in the background I fall back in the couch and let the spell of the drug overcome me. I think about Rachael and somehow manage to focus my eyes on her – wanting her to be the last thing I see tonight.

And just before total blackout a thought comes to mind –

So what if I'm a liar? At least I'm not a movie-extra...

My day will come soon enough—

Andrew Hopes for a Better Tomorrow

I asked for a night out on the town and I got it – that’s for damn sure. We’re bumming down the 101 southbound toward Hollywood where Tad plans on dropping me off at my place where I’m in for god-knows-what in terms of Lauren. I’m sure she’s been up all night, rocking back and forth like the pathetic country girl she is. No worries – I too have been up all night – only in a whole different way entirely.

With the night behind me and the sun on its way up I feel as if despite being homebound to at long last fall asleep – I’ve at the same time have had in the past few hours – one hell of a wakeup call.

This city and everything that comes with it – for all I once thought I knew and expected – clearly to me now was all just a vague understanding of how this overall machine truly cranks on and on.

This city, this place, these people, and the dreams we all are chasing – none of it is the same for me now. And never will be.

The things I’ve seen and heard and wasn’t supposed to see and hear but did, they’ve changed me. Not for better not for worse in the traditional sense. But a significant change has taken place.

It's definitely not all going to be as easy as I had once pathetically believed. It's not all that simple. For me, to achieve my dreams, it's clear now not only will I need the support of someone like Tad – but will have to be willing to make certain sacrifices as well.

But sacrifice, especially with the intentions of serving something greater, are hardly a sacrifice at all rather than a necessary step. What makes it a sacrifice however, is the act of doing what I never thought capable of feasible.

I know now that this is merely the beginning. I also note the vow Tad and I had made to one another, to keep each other in check. I see now, after having seen what I had just moments ago and all throughout the night that temptation is everywhere. And changes will be made and presented to me at every turn.

The point is, the important thing, is that I never allow myself to fall too deep. And through the help of Tad and all those I'm to encounter in the future willing to be positive influences in my growth I'll be sure not to make some of the mistakes so many already have.

I won't be one of those people that loses themselves trying to find a place in the world.

And as much as it may hurt – I now am fully capable and willing to remove whatever may be in my life that's holding me back.

Aside from the drugs, and the parties, and the evils, and the fact (although this really doesn't matter) that Tad may be a fag... whatever the case may be, I've learned something from all the madness behind me—

That temptation will surround me at every corner – that this all will be a challenge in which I must remain strong. And although something may feel right in the moment, I always have to keep in

mind that one day, what or whoever that thing is in my life that feels right but isn't, will simply have to go.

So tonight we fucked up – according to Tad at least. Tonight we made the mistake that ruins so many. Tonight we went backwards not forwards. And with this mistake, I've learned from it.

So what if I fucked up tonight. So what if Rachael's a bitch and Lauren very well may be a selfish hick doing no more than holding me back? I've learned a lesson. I've moved on. I've thickened my skin.

And although I fucked up today, the beauty of life is there's always tomorrow.

Tonight I went through a necessary learning phase – and what I learned will be applied toward the choices I make tomorrow.

Tonight was a wash.

Tomorrow is the start of my new life.

For better or for worse.

Be Glad I Opted for the Shortened Version...

I must have written four drafts in as many hours on this very page to best outline where **The Coldwater Diaries** will go from here. In the first Print Version of this Volume I promised chapter updates on the site, video-clips, interactive writing, and all that jazz...

That was before things changed and I've gone another route since.

Rather than waste page after page ranting on how I originally intended to tell the story, how things have changed, and where I'm going now – I defer to the short and simple route.

The Coldwater Diaries is an organic story I'm experimenting a new form of storytelling with.

The rest of the story along with what was to originally occupy this page – detailing the whole scheme – can be found by visiting –

www.TheColdwaterDiaries.com

What you've read is only the beginning. Visit the site for the real ride... it's going to be wild.

About the Author

Geoffrey A. Citron is an extremely-flawed carbon-based being who happens to write. Another in a line of been-there-done-that-writers who base their writing on past years filled to the brim with fuck-ups and follies too numerous to mention. He suffers from panic-attacks and social-anxiety-disorder along with a Texas-sized case of Obsessive-Compulsive-Disorder. His drink of choice is New Castle and he has a quiet love affair with Adderall. He is currently single and seeking any brunettes of the female gender with over a 120 IQ and (preferably but not required) a British Accent.

He currently resides in Los Angeles where he laboriously slaves away at his large writing cache of screenplays, novels, and short stories. His often edgy writing excludes no subject – from the dark and the bizarre all the way to heartfelt and inspiring – if you haven't thought of a way to tell a story, he probably has.

He infrequently updates his blog **www.GeoffreyCitron.com** and of course the very site in which this book was born and coincides **www.TheColdwaterDiaries.com**

