



THE FURY OF ME

Volume 1: The Sound Of My Mind

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Embodied

There is this new girl I'm fucking. She's not completely new, I've fucked her before, but not for a while.

She currently is wearing a 500 dollar necklace. Her boyfriend bought it for her a week ago. She's been dating this dude for less than a week and she doesn't really like him, or maybe she does like him but not enough to not fuck me while dating him. Not enough to not betray his trust.

I made her wear the necklace while we fucked.

A five hundred dollar necklace. And this girl's boyfriend bought it for her for Christmas. He told her he loved her and handed her a box, and she opened it and was happy. It had diamonds in it, and later on while he wasn't around she looked up similar necklaces by the same company online and it turned out the cost was five hundred dollars. Black diamonds and shit.

And here this girl was, in my bed naked, lying next to me. It wasn't the first time this girl had been next to me naked. It wasn't the first time we were smoking cigarettes together after sex. And it wasn't the first boyfriend she cheated on with me.

But it was the first boyfriend whom had told her he loved her with a five hundred dollar necklace, which was the only thing she kept on while we fucked. And it was the only thing she had on now, smoking our cigarettes and ashing in the same ashtray, balancing on the covers where above her thighs on her pussy. She held the necklace in her free hand and turned it over, examining it. It only had a small give around her neck, so she couldn't pull it that far. It got tangled in her blonde hair.

"He bought me the necklace before we even started dating. He's fucking in love with me." She said it and I felt nothing. I always felt nothing when she talked about her boyfriends. I felt no remorse, I felt no evil inside me. I knew there was evil inside me. I knew I should feel remorse. But I've fucked so many girls with boyfriends I think it must have hardened, my heart or something, and I felt nothing. I knew this girl better than I knew most people, and I knew her well enough to know that this wouldn't last like most of her boyfriends. This one just happened to fuck up early and spend a lot of money on her. He'll learn his lesson pretty soon, I guess.

Her phone vibrated. He had been texting all night. She was texting him back, only taking breaks to have sex with me. She opened the text and made absolutely no effort to hide it from me. It was him, her boyfriend, at work asking if he wanted her to bring home any food ("a wrap, chicken parm, salad, anything..?") telling her he loved her.

She sighed and I rolled back on top of her.

We played games kissing. I would ask for a short kiss, then a medium length kiss, then a long kiss. Then we would switch it up. I'd ask for a long kiss, long kiss, medium, short, long. Always ending on the long kisses. They were my favorite. She loved this game.

I felt bad for feeling not bad, so I tried to make her feel bad.

"Why do you do this?" I asked her.

“Because you’re cute and funny. And very charming.”

Ego boost, effective, but not what I was looking for. I knew she knew what I was really asking and just playing stupid, but I really wanted to know. I responded, “No, I mean... why do you cheat on your boyfriends with me?”

“He’s only been my boyfriend for a week.”

Still avoiding the question, “All your boyfriends. We’ve known each other for years and years and you always cheat on them with me. I’m not judging you babe. I just want to know why. Or, if you know you can’t be in a monogamous relationship, why even try? Why make these poor guys your boyfriends if you’re just going to come back to me?”

She took a drag of her cigarette and put it out. “You want to know the real reason?”

I wasn’t sure I did. I prayed it was going to be something nice. It wasn’t.

“Your friends stopped calling you. Your father is getting older and doesn’t have much time left.” All facts. She continued, getting louder, “Your brothers and sisters don’t give a fuck about you. Neither do your aunts and uncles. You’ve been depressed for fucking months.”

All facts again. I put on a sad voice. I responded, “So...that’s why you fuck me? You feel sorry for me?” “If I left you, what would you have?”

I thought about this one. Nothing came to mind.

She continued, “I’m not fucking you because I don’t care about my boyfriends. I’m not even here to fuck you. I’m here to hang out with you. I,” and she got quiet after she said that, “I am all you have left.”

I didn’t say anything back. I didn’t want to. There was nothing I could say back. I turned away from her. “Thanks.” I said. And I meant it. And I started to feel something again.

I slid myself back inside of her. Her necklace bounced up and down on her breasts and she let out sweet soft moans. I reached behind her neck, pulled back her hair and took the necklace off. I threw it on the side of the bed. Then I put my arm over my face and turned it sideways toward the pillow I was laying on, because there were tear streaming from it, and I couldn’t get them to stop.

And I looked at the necklace lying in a jumbled pile next to us while she rode on top of me. Five hundred dollars.

I moved my arm and she saw me crying. She didn’t stop fucking me, she didn’t wipe away my tears, she didn’t try comforting me, she just kept riding and moaning. She might be as empty as I am inside, I thought to myself.

I thought that to myself, but I knew, she knew, my old friends whom didn’t call, my father, my dead mother, my ex-girlfriends, my entire family knew. She wasn’t as empty as I was.

No one was.

Haunted

She says there's a room in our house that is haunted. She grew up in a catholic family, her mother and mother's mother have had plenty of haunted rooms. They would invite priests or bless the room themselves. It was common, I guess. I hear about it a lot, but I don't like to think of it.

The room in my house that might be haunted, is the one that my father used to get up in, each morning before work he'd have his coffee and cigarettes in that room. My mother would wake up with him, early, although she stayed home all day. They would have their coffee and talk and watch the weather and be old and past the point of love. They loved each other more than anything, but I watched it happen. They transcended love and eventually just became part of one another. Needing each other.

It is the room where my mother spent her final weeks, bedridden. My father, by her side. Nurses and doctors would come over every once in a while, to give her pills, or to check pressures.

Eventually, the nurses' and doctors' visits decreased, I was told that I should say my final words to her. My dad left me alone, in my room, and I thought for a solid twenty minutes, I had nothing to say. I walked downstairs into that dimly lit room and I told her, I loved her. She couldn't talk, but she squeezed my hand telling me she'd heard. I don't know what she was thinking, or if she could hear me crying. The rest of what I said to her was complete lies. She squeezed my hand.

A day later, my dad woke me up, he was sitting on the foot of my bed, crying, and he told me. I left my house immediately and I drove –

She says there is a room in our house that is haunted. I tell her not to be stupid. Sometimes, I tell her I don't want to talk about it.

I never tell her I know.

That room is so cold now. For about a year after my mom died, I would have terrible nightmares about it. My father would describe his dreams, the ones in which mom appeared, and they would be so different from mine. His dreams were pleasant and cheerful.

"I saw Mom again last night." And he would have a huge smile on his face.

Whenever I saw Mom during dreams, something terrible would happen, and I would wake up at three A.M. each time. After that, I had lost my ability to sleep.

It's been almost a year, and I still run into that room yelling for her, because I have something to tell her. Before, I realize that I can't talk to her anymore, that I'll never be able to talk to her again.

She says I should get the house blessed, but I would never do that to my father. When he passes, I can pray and hope and wish with all my heart and soul, that my mother will be there to lead him to whatever, but I will never get that room blessed. I will spread his ashes where we spread her ashes. I will do what I can, I guess. I can't tell if it's a ghost story or a love letter.

But, my father still wakes up and has coffee at five A.M. before he goes to work, and sometimes when I can't sleep, I hear him talking. I can't make out what he's saying, but I can imagine.

His eyes are shut, there are still pillows lining a porch chair with her in it, there are still two cups of warm coffee, there are still two lit cigarettes being smoked at the same time, and it is either going to be cold or warm outside, so bundle up or wear short sleeves. We need to do something about our son. He is so smart, but he is wasting his life, and I think he's on drugs, okay, maybe not on drugs, but if we could get him into a college. I made you a doctor's appointment for tomorrow at noon, but if you start to feel better you don't have to go. Here I'll go fill up your coffee, I have time for another cup, I don't want to go either, haha, but it's going to be a busy day, because of the sale. So, I have to get going soon sweetheart. I'll see you when I get home, okay? I love you, muah, goodbye.

I love you, muah, goodbye.

Every love story has a happy ending, but sometimes you have to wait until you're both gone, to experience it.

Hemmingway Shitfaced

There has been beauty I have cut down unknowingly: Golden brown threads of hair on every rest in every room I have been in. And they have thrown their hearts at me when it ended. I took it in, the chance to see what they were hiding all along, a creature inside of them doing push-ups and building itself up whilst it waited, whom knew the right time to attack and knew exactly when it would be all over. One of them is still focused on me a month after its cage was unlocked. She had shitty guards and it took half of one hundred men to hold her beast back but soon I couldn't be held back anymore and years and years of not being loved just right took me, and waves crashed down and I hadn't seen a tide like that since I was younger (George), and you were not there to jump over them with me.

You were not there to jump over them with me,

You were not,

These locks of whichever colored hair I do not feel for, they were birds and I am still so full of pellets its hard for me to miss them. They took a little bit out of me, and I was glad I could help but they did not take much more than that.

On the other hand, when I write, at least a thousand words a day, we need a translator. If the subject is on you, which it truly is most of the time, the prose comes out Russian. I have written for years and all other muses came out American literature, maybe late sixties, the sun was in the sky and we both were in the park. (And I dipped my thumb out to the road near us and a car slowed down, California bound!) But you! The sun was. And we both were. (Fuck Kerouac.) And there is a translator here to deconstruct all the attempted richness in metaphor. For you I am attempting to channel some magic that is beyond me. Of Nabakov, of Tolstoy (and I am in no way saying I could even share a boat with them, I think, and I hope you think as well that the proper procedure had that situation ever arisen would be for me to ask, no to beg of them to hold my head under the water, to eat my flesh for sustenance). But do you think they would oblige? Nabakov, maybe. And it doesn't come out mostly wrong per say, but after a year or so of serious writing I have yet to be able to inform an audience what I feel when I think of you. I have yet to be able to put those moments into words, when I would lie next to you and the room would bleed light blue sunlight. I have yet to craft a sentence even close to what your beauty means to me.

Although, on the other hand, I do believe I have gotten down this hopelessness to a point where you all too can feel it. It has been you that has inspired situations of not feeling an ounce of good in other stories I have penned. If you're wondering where that comes from, you now know. I dream of you, and when I wake up you aren't there. When the other one tells me of stories of you and wolves, she tells them out of spite and my heart drops. I have never lacked self-awareness and I have always been living on this planet. I have seen the greens and blues some see every day when they look at what is around them but the picture I often paint is grey, or pitch black. And there are no colors because there are no colors when I think of you unless I think of us, and I think of you all the time.

You have been blessed with something your friend wishes she had, which is the ability to destroy everything I built up with just a few words. You did it last night with disastrous results, and I think it means nothing to you, but to me it means most of my day. And my life is good, I have a lot going for me. I could go to the bar and take someone home but I choose not to, and this sounds stupid, this whole thing sounds stupid, but it's because of a promise we made that I have only broken twice. I've heard stories of that promise being smashed over and over again by you, constantly, like it was never there at all. But it was there for me and meant everything to me.

So quick question, are you running out to find a boyfriend? Because we both know he won't be better than me for you. You should hang out with me first, because we both know we're perfect together. Call me again and we'll both prove it again. You don't have to be drunk to feel amazing on the phone with me. I wish you didn't have to be drunk to allow yourself to.

You miss me, I'm handsome; you've said this. It's funny that you told your friend you thought I was cute and she went "...come on" negatively, and then went and tried dating me. That is funny, right? This won't help because nothing will, and for now there will always be an excuse as to why we would have so much fun together. There will be times when you say you miss me, and you really will, So what is the point of this wall you have crafted? You painted it in the pattern of bricks but I know you wish it wasn't there, and it doesn't have to be. I'm not going to write any more about this because I am drunk, like Hemingway shitfaced, and I tried to make something Russian lit-y but it turned out nothing like I wanted. I still see a point in all this, I promise I do. Honestly I have to see a point, because without this there is no light in anything else. There is no art website, there is no time to hone my craft. There is just a light and a tunnel, and neither of them are painted on. They are the real thing.

Nothing To Feel

'I hate myself, Dress it up in whatever way you need to avoid melodrama, but I hate myself so fucking much. I should not be doing this.' Thoughts raced through Bill's mind with no end. 'This is a collision. This is Dale Earnhardt's final lap, it's Princess Diana's head moving through the dashboard into a brick wall. Jesus Christ, if Jeff finds out...there is so much at stake here.'

There was a storefront at stake, a beautiful coffee shop called Sips, pressed between a pizza place and a bank. After years of laboring, proposals, funding and false starts it had opened around a month ago. It started out as an idea: a dream relegated only to Bill's frontal lobe, spoken out loud to Jeff at a bar, drunk, without reason. Five months ago, the dream began to mold into something resembling reality, a something that could happen if Jeff and Bill put their minds to it. Some act of God, some miracle of paperwork, some money coming in, possibly reality became reality. Bill and Jeff opened up a coffee shop in their town. More than that, they opened a successful one.

Let's move forward, a month, Jeff went out of town and there Bill was lying, staring at the ceiling; Jeff's girlfriend semi-nude at his side. Everything always starts out innocent: a shared beer, reminiscence, now shrouded in irony and betrayal, over a mutual love for Jeff. The concept or possibility that, Sarah, Jeff's Sarah, would even consider Bill a person she could kiss had never occurred, until that night. Impossible reality became reality. They pulled their lips apart. There was silence, but the inside of Bill's head was screaming.

Sarah looked down. Bill looked away.

"I should go," Sarah said.

"I'm so sorry, okay? I'm sorry." And Bill was.

"It was completely me. It was my fault." Sarah said with a chilling level of calmness, and she left without looking back at Bill.

The following Monday Bill's head still wasn't shutting the fuck up. 'She's going to tell him, obviously going to fucking tell him. Fuck, I should tell him, I am so stupid. She's gonna feel guilty, and she's going to think "oh god, I have to be honest! I have to hold on to a shred of dignity!" and she's going to tell him. She is going to think that she is more important than the fucking store Jeff and I opened together. We tried so hard to open this coffee shop, it took so fucking long, and she's going to ruin it because she is so fucking selfish. God. Fuck. Fucking shit. Jeff is going to think it was my fucking fault, when really it was Sarah who made the first move. God I'm going to kill her.'

Bill opened the door to the shop and saw Jeff sitting behind the counter flipping through a magazine. Jeff looked up at him.

"Hey buddy." Jeff said.

Bill tried to act normal. "Hey Jeff."

Jeff bought it. Then he responded, "I picked you up something on the way here."

He reached into his bag and brought out a box. Bill's heart sank as soon as he saw what it was. It was a bust of Dr. Doom, the comic book character: Something that Bill had been hunting down for a while but, after numerous failed eBay attempts, had given up. Jeff must have found it somewhere when he was out of town.

Jeff was a great friend. Bill should have been excited (and he faked it pretty well), but inside of his heart he was dying. Because, Jeff was a great friend.

They talked. They got through the day together without Jeff stabbing Bill, and they got through five more consecutive days together as well. It seemed like Sarah didn't tell Jeff. Bill was relieved, but he knew it was around the corner; next time Sarah had too much to drink, next time they got into a fight, next time whatever. It was right there, waiting to pounce.

But it never did.

It was Friday night and Bill's phone vibrated on his bedside table. He put his book down and looked at the screen. It was Sarah.

"I miss you."

"Where is Jeff?"

"Don't worry, he's sleeping. I'll delete the texts. This is between you and me." Sarah's words sat on the screen, unmoving. This was the first time they had talked since they kissed.

Bill stared at his phone. The voice in his head started up again: 'So, fucking, lonely. I don't want to do this. I can't want to do this. She's so fucking cute, but I can't. This is my best friend's. There is so much at stake.'

Bill thought about Sips and how good it was doing. He thought about the regulars, and how those regulars had usuals. He thought about how much trouble he and Jeff went through to even open the fucking shop.

While he was thinking this, his phone vibrated again. "I'm drunk." Sarah said. No shit.

He texted her back. "You're going to regret this. You're going to tell Jeff, and you're going to ruin Sips." Bill pushed send.

It wasn't even a minute before his phone vibrated again. "I haven't told him yet, have I? Come on Bill. You are so cute."

The voice got louder. It was saying all the same shit. Bill zoned it out. His phone vibrated again. It was a picture of an ass in a thong, from Sarah. Her ass was perfect. Bill tried to tell himself that that was neither here nor there, but that didn't work. Her ass was indeed great and it could be here and not there. That did it for Bill: he had always thought Sarah was cute, but obviously could not act on it. Maybe he could get away with it? Maybe Sarah actually wouldn't tell Jeff? Bill and Sarah could fuck once, and then move on? It would be like it never happened. A war was going on inside of

Bill's mind. It was the ass that finally won Bill over.
He texted Sarah back. "What would we be doing if you were here?"

Weeks went by and it was the same story. Eventually, Sarah didn't have to be drunk to text Bill. She started texting every night. Sometimes they would text until early in the morning. Sarah would always stay up for as late as Bill wanted her too. She never said goodbye first. She started calling him babe. The texts got more and more graphic and turned into phone calls. Sarah would wait until Jeff went to sleep, call Bill, and masturbate on the phone with him. Bill would masturbate too. Bill balanced the guilt with the loneliness, and eventually they cancelled each other out.

Bill saw Jeff almost every day at work. They talked normally and Bill saw no sign at all in Jeff that he knew. Because, Jeff didn't know, Bill thought. Sarah was sneaky. She kept to her word. She had not told Jeff anything.

A few weeks later Jeff went out of town to visit his parents and Sarah came over to Bill's apartment. It was late. The sun was dipping below the rooftops in their small city. Sarah bought a box of wine.

There they lay, naked, in bed. They hadn't fucked yet, but Bill had his hand inside Sarah. He kept it there. They were conversing about droll shit. Every time Sarah talked, Bill went a little bit deeper in her, and she let out tiny little moans in between words. This was the cutest thing Bill had ever been a part of. He never wanted it to stop.

Jeff did not cross his mind at all.

Bill had his laptop open on his stomach and they were watching Netflix. Sarah asked Bill if she could show him something on the computer, and without letting Bill answer lifted it off of his stomach and placed it onto hers. She paused, the Netflix movie and opened a new tab. She typed in a URL and hit enter. It was a blog. She scrolled down, and Bill saw all these amateur naked photos of a girl. Her face was cropped out at the top of the photos, but Bill recognized her as Sarah.

Sarah laughed and looked at Bill. "Do you like them?" She said. "Jeff helped me shoot them." Bill smiled, said nothing, and leaned over to kiss Sarah. He didn't have words. He didn't care. Life was fucking stupid anyway.. He lifted the laptop off of Sarah with his free hand, put it on the bed next to them, and rolled Sarah over so that she was on top. Bill put his head in between her shoulder and hair and kissed her neck.

"Sarah." Bill said.

"Yeah?"

Bill had nothing to say. He was hoping Sarah wouldn't respond. Maybe she would be too busy kissing him to respond? Maybe she wouldn't hear him? Maybe Bill's

apartment would catch on fire and they would both burn alive, and they would feel that feeling for the rest of eternity because they were both fucking devils, they were both demons and the sun finally disappeared and Bill hadn't turned his lamp on yet so they were covered in darkness and their eyes hadn't adjusted so they couldn't see each other and it was best that way because Bill didn't want to see her and Bill didn't want Sarah to see him and they were in the dark where they belonged, with the rest of the devils, the snakes and the rats.

Displacement

“Brandon, come inside and pack up all your stuff,” the man down the street says. “Come on. I mean it. Come pack up your shit and go live with the nigger across the street.”

I can't see the man. He's hidden in the shadows of his home (I call it the Redneck House). Brandon, the little blonde boy, stands at the doorway outside. Even from this distance I can see the lost look on his face.

“If you wanna play with niggers, you can live with em.”

I drop the bag of garbage in the dumpster. I linger, staring over at the Redneck House, over at Brandon. His siblings, some older and some younger, sit silently in the yard, tinkering with toys and bikes as the man inside, presumably their father, continues to yell.

I slowly walk back towards my front door. I imagine all the things I wish I could do-- run over there, storm inside the house and knock the man to the ground, break a few of his fingers, bust his nose, and threaten that if he ever says anything like that again I'll pry his teeth out one-by-one with a rusty pair of pliers.

But that will never happen. I'm a coward, a silent observer.

I open the front door and step back inside my house. It's the first day back after a three day stay at my dad's one bedroom apartment. Right now, it's more of a construction zone than it is a home.

The carpet's gone, cement floors left behind. The stairs are a mess of dusty wood and old nails. The walls are half-painted, old white creeping up from under new portobello brown. A musty smell of mildew and mold loiters beneath my nose. A pile of new bamboo flooring sits in the dining room, not even out of the box-- a taunting reminder of what was supposed to be.

“Congratulations on purchasing a premium bamboo floor!” each identical box reads.

I sink down on the sofa, next to the piles of pillows, blankets, and clothes I've yet to put away. I trace the brown water spots etched along the concrete with my eyes. The rest of the furniture is gone, tightly packed away in the storage unit outside. It should all be back now, a nice new floor glistening up at me.

The dogs sniff around my feet. They know something's changed. They can't quite place their paws on it, but there's something different, and if I'm to be the judge, I'd say they don't like it.

I look over to where the aquarium used to be. It now sits in the Redneck House's yard. All but two of the fish died when we drained it. Mom and I put the survivors in a vase and drove them down to the tiny retention pond by the house. I waited in the car as Mom let them out.

She got back in the car smiling.

“The algae eater looked so happy,” she told me. “He just went to eating away.”

I smiled back.

I wake up in the morning to the roofer banging on the door.

“Cracked tiles,” he tells Mom. “That’s your problem. That’s where the water’s coming from. You’ve got forty-nine cracked tiles up there. I’ll draw up an estimate and we’ll see if the insurance company bites. You’ll probably hear from me by Tuesday.”

Mom spends the rest of the morning pulling the vines off the wall outside. I help until slimy tree frogs start leaping from the leaves. I spring far away like a dog spooked by thunder. Ever since I was a little kid I’ve been terrified of frogs and toads. I resort to watching nervously from a distance as they jump into the bushes and dive into flower pots, disappearing from sight.

At night I open the door to take out the trash. I ritualistically turn my head to the right to inspect how many frogs have perched themselves beneath the porch light, eagerly awaiting a moth or mosquito to fly by so they can swallow it down.

But there’s no frogs there tonight. They’re all gone. The wall is barren beyond a few straggling leaves and twigs. I toss the trash in the dumpster and look down the street to the Redneck House. Surprisingly, no one is outside. Usually, someone can always be found pacing up and down the driveway at all hours, habitually sucking down cigarettes.

I turn around and go back inside only to lead the dogs out the backdoor. I walk out past Mom’s landscaping work and unzip my shorts and go to pissing as the dogs frolic through the darkness.

I look up at the night sky as I zip up. The stars wink at me like the intrusive eyes of overly-curious gods. I often find myself at this very spot, doing the exact thing. The stars make me feel small, but it’s a feeling I’ve come to enjoy. During the times I fear for my future-- which is gradually becoming all the time-- I seek refuge in the stars to remind myself how miniscule we and the things we do are.

A pinprick existence.

I wonder how much longer I’ll be able to do this. A plane streaks by overhead, reminding me of the flight attendant position I plan on putting in for. It’s funny, I’ve always been so scared of flying. Every plane ride I’ve been on has been a grueling experience, filled with tightened throats, fluttering hearts, and uneven breathing. But this seems like the best way to run.

During a late night swim in the pool at my dad’s apartment complex, I realized I’ve got to leave this small town as fast as possible. I need to pick up these dragging feet.

Planes fly by all the time and even with how nervous they make me, I always wish to be aboard-- to be carried away to somewhere new. The destination hardly ever matters. As long as its new ground and unfamiliar territory.

I turn around to the light bleeding onto the porch from the inside of the house. It’s not usually like this. There’s usually a curtain to hide Mom’s glass sliding door from the world, but now I can see directly inside. The light comes from the bathroom. Mom’s hunched over the sink, brushing her teeth before it’s time for her to crawl onto the couch, which serves as her new bed, so she can be up for work in the morning.

I whistle the dogs in and make my way up the haggard stairs and into bed. My room is a maze of piled junk from all over the house. Something as simple as walking to

the bathroom has become an arduous chore. I close my eyes. I imagined the stars beyond my window shimmering on the backs of my eyelids, each glimmering speck a possible future, an outlandish creation of my overactive imagination, conjuring could-be lives and feel-good fantasies.

I travel to one of the stars and find myself pushing a cart up a narrow airplane aisle. "Ma'am, would you like something to drink?" I ask. I wear a smile for the whole flight until we land, then I walk the streets of a foreign city. Perhaps it's Hanoi, possibly Paris or London. From a hotel window I stare down on people I've only become to understand, ready to turn in for the night and find myself somewhere new and refreshing the next day.

I bounce to another star. I'm sitting across from Conan O'Brien, maybe Jon Stewart. I'm talking to them about my new book, about the Pulitzer Prize and if I've sold the movie rights yet. We laugh with the audience. Commercial break.

New star, new life. I'm exploring the bodies of unobtainable women. I'm punching vile people like Brandon's dad to a pulp and making them promise to never hurt again. I'm making millions. I'm supporting my family. My parents are proud.

New star, new life. Everyone loves me. I'm dead, but hardly forgotten. My memory has achieved immortality.

New star, but it's time to wake up. My eyes open, the stars vanishing and giving way to a popcorn ceiling. I pull myself out of bed and make my way downstairs, back through the hectic, cluttered construction zone.

I make my way into Mom's room. I fill a bucket with bleach and water. I dip a mop in and slap it against the concrete floor. My eyes burn as I scrub furiously, watching the brown water stains slowly rub away like the imagined stars in my eyes. I look out the glass sliding door and see a plane tearing across the sky. I watch it as I mop, following it until it disappears in the clouds.

I smile.

Conscience

"Do you think he's the one?"

"Do you ever know if they are the one? I've lost the feeling of security, where you are sure of the person, only to realize... you change your mind."

They sat together in silence, their feet dangling.

"Well, it's hard to tell since it's so soon, and you don't want to be hasty. Especially after what you're still going through."

"Yes, I need to take my time. It's a bit difficult when you really like the person, though... But at least, with every relationship you learn something new and something about yourself. You're a little more cautious, despite your feelings telling you to dive in."

"Do you know what he thinks?"

"Not completely, no. I know enough to trust him. But I'm still safe, safe with my feelings and my heart. So if he were ever to be disloyal about what he says, I know I can go on. But I can see that he's true."

"Men complicate things so. We would be so much better not being involved with any man. But, now we wouldn't ever be happy, would we? And I can't help but feel that it is our destiny to do so. Not because we have to, but, because nature expects it to be so..."

"Oh, why do we always have to go so in depth? Why can't we be as simple as any other person, one who doesn't care enough to think about these things."

"But you have to, it's who you are, remember? And you know that's one of the reasons why you like him. You need someone who thinks beyond than what's on the surface. And you know he's different."

"Yes, but as much as I love it, it's what I come to hate about myself as well."

"Why?"

"Why? Well, because... because it complicates things that sometimes shouldn't be as complicated." "But you love the complexity of everything, even small things."

"Yes, yes, but... okay, no more."

Silence again. They sighed heavily.

"You just have to be selfish. Okay? Do that for both of us. And there's nothing wrong with being selfish in a relationship. We've learned that from your past experience."

"Yes.... yes. Why does life make us think we've found the perfect person, and then decides it's not? It's a horrible way to go around things. Someone always gets hurt. And if we really are too young to know now, when will we know what age is our age to know?"

"There's not a set age, time just comes to you. Sometimes it's the worst time, sometimes it's the best. Usually the worst, though."

"Oh, what men do to us."

"And what we women do to them. Sometimes it seems it's just as bad."

You See, Mercy

On cold nights like this I usually stay in, but times change, tradition breaks. Parties have become stale, drinking proceeded with regrets, and one night stands lost virility. What once was exciting became outrageous. I didn't know how to handle myself anymore, as if I had a fire inside burn all of the old ways out of me. The ashes that remained were being swept away, out of sight and out of mind. I peeked out my windows to see the many others who sheepishly follow the nomad to their car. My room was at the southern corner of Kern Hall, which gave me the best view to see all of the partiers stumble home. On almost every Friday night, Scholars Lane hosts some of the most idiotic individuals. Despite all of the reasons of why I shouldn't go, I went to the party anyway. I got dressed and followed my shepherd.

The night was long and dark. I tried my best to not shiver; muscles so tense veins began to appear on my neck, the only skin that was exposed. I yelled, "Derek, hurry up! My nipples are so hard they're gonna tear through my shirt."

Derek quickened his dragging feet. "Yeah, yeah." His left hand went up and he unlocked the car. "There, better?"

We all jumped in. It was the last Friday before vacation, to which there were myriad parties occurring. Travis in front, Rane, Alex, Boe, in middle, myself and Kyle in the trunk. Derek hopped into the driver's seat and immediately started the car. The air was so thin steam evaporated from the hood of the car. Merced winters are aggressive, and somewhat bipolar. Merced's sky has a love-hate relationship with the clouds; most nights it is clear and vast, other times it becomes abysmal. It was the latter.

I looked around while everyone else chattered, trying to contain as much warmth as possible. Rane and Boe, on the outside of the backseats, provided a second barrier for Alex. "Most people hate the middle seat, but, tonight, it feels good, man," he calmly bragged. Kyle retorted, "Yeah, but I got the leg room you wish you had."

The car began to move. We exited the parking lot and soon I saw Tenya Hall fade. The school was the only light source for miles; surrounded by shadows, it was almost welcoming to see it. Leaning on the backside of the seats I faced the shrinking landscape of Bellevue Road. The few houses that boarded the long the narrow road were gone as suddenly as they came into my view. Kyle turned around to project his voice to the rest of rowdy car. I talked, but I kept facing the scene flying by.

I have walked that road before. It was astonishing. How eerie, yet calming that road is. There was nothing to fear, however you can't subside the worry. The road's length isn't the issue, the objects on it is what concerned me. When I traversed across it, the car headlights had only moments before it gained the attention of the driver. Sometimes they were shocked to see me walking. I could tell by the little swerves they made when they were close enough. I kept on though. The crippling blackness slowed down time while it simultaneously forwarded my watch. No light existed. No sense of direction. Just space and brittle air. That night I had a new appreciation for that road; as dark as it is, it made what little light that shines that much brighter.

Now I always have to look back into the darkness. Instead of it coming towards

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