

Brandon Gets His Big Break

Chapter Fifteen

By John Eisenhauer

Amy was never interested in looking like a dyke.

When she became involved with Linda, her sexuality – which was always within her – started to take conscious form very quickly. This conscious understanding took the form of wanting to break free of the control.

It was so much more than just her first relationship...her first girlfriend. The very moment that she met Linda, she started to change. And the change was rapid. Except that, there was no change. Instead, she realized that which was always within her. The moment prior to meeting Linda, she embraced the teachings of her mom and her church but without passion. And she was tormented by her budding sexual desires. Was she disappointing the LORD or was the LORD disappointed in her? Just seconds prior, Amy's thirteen-year-old self thought the thoughts – the drivel – that was drilled into her by Doris and her Pastor...her Shepherd.

She no longer thought those thoughts with the certitude of fanaticism that defined her for her entire young life.

She had lived in a cult – a socially accepted cult – for her entire life. The grip of the cult was about to break. It wasn't a deprogrammer that would facilitate the freedom but a pretty and petite blonde.

These thoughts had lost their passion...their zest. Now, they were cold and dispassionate, a coldness that would give way to fear and confusion. Then the panic would close in on her.

And she would be alone. It was inky black and silent. She would be curled up and naked in the void.

Her conscious, and tormented, ruminations were dry but gave rise to emotions that were drowning her. Her conscious thoughts were checked by her subconscious understanding. In the dark recess of her mind sat an appreciation that had not yet taken form:

It was all bullshit.

Then...she walked into the lab classroom.

Biology was second period. Amy was looking forward to it. She loved science and stuff like anatomy just spoke to her. In it, she saw God's wonderous handiwork. It was a different God then that of her mom and her church. She stopped believing in that god...

...Subconsciously.

But...Consciously?

"Hi! My name is Linda! So cool to meet you!"

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“Um...hi. My name’s Amy”, she said with forced nonchalance.

Linda smiled.

And the relationship happened. And Amy knew love.

An aspect of that love was consciously breaking free from all the toxic bullshit...the control. It was so much more than young lust...but that was a part of it.

Hell...a big part.

Mr. Leeper taught the Biology class where she met her Love...the amazing woman – and not a girl – that was both the focus of her young lust and her rapid spurt in self-realization.

There’s an overlap in science classes. Leeper used Biology to discuss a chemistry concept *critical mass*. It referred to the minimum amount of a particular fissionable nuclide (such as uranium-235) that was required to sustain a nuclear chain reaction. When a mass of fissile material reached ‘criticality’, it could self-sustain a fission chain reaction. In turn, that led to further fission events. It was the point at which the reaction becomes self-sustaining, neither increasing nor decreasing in power, temperature, or neutron population.

And – for a moment – it seemed that Amy’s personal growth had reached critical mass. Sadly, that was not the case. The cunt – Doris – and her Pastor...her Shepherd would retard the reaction. But she would ultimately know it. That would start a decade later when Jane found her curled up around the toilet having her breakdown.

While with Linda, she researched homosexuality (a few years it would be called ‘the gay lifestyle’). She used both the school library’s computer and Linda’s. In a very conscious effort to break free of the nonsense of her church, she taught herself about the lifestyle that she craved...the reality that she wanted with every molecule of her being. She researched the school’s library books (fast forward a few years: the extremists would ban those books to keep a kid from independently learning about his or her Authentic Self).

Her sexual essence took conscious form.

She was driven by her desire for women but found that she had a specific appetite.

She would fantasize about sexually submitting herself to a woman. While she loved Linda with all of her heart and soul, she understood that would not happen with her. She fantasized about it when she masturbated (which she would do when Doris was sleeping).

They were both naked. She was on her hands and knees in front of her petite, pale and blonde girlfriend who was sitting on the edge of the bed. Extending one of her legs and pointing her toes towards her compliant partner, Tara ordered Willow to suck her toes in a commanding voice. And Willow enthusiastically complied.

She never wanted to be a dyke.

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She always felt the interplay of the feminine and masculine within her. When free to express herself, she wore suits and a conservative male haircut. But she always incorporated just a little bit of makeup into her look. Her delicate facial features emphasized this feminine energy.

She was butchered being herself...she was butchered *for* being herself.

It was mid-October of 2008. It was the third month of Amy's seventh grade term which lasted four months. After Amy had a momentous conversation with Linda, the two of them went to *Spencer's Gifts*. They bought two matching *Buffy* posters. The plan was for each of them to put one up as a reminder of their commitment. After taking her leave from Linda, she tossed the rolled poster – still sealed in polyurethane film – onto her bed. She turned to leave her room and her mom was just outside her room.

Doris confronted her about her accurate perception that her daughter had left the faith. Things escalated and she slapped her child...knocking her to the floor. Amy snapped. She had to end the control. Amy convinced a barber to give her a boy's haircut. As she left the shop, Amy rubbed her head. She had some more stops to make. She was going to the shoe store for boy's tennis shoes. She had to buy jeans and some white t-shirts.

When she got off the bus at the stop near her home, she was wearing the boy clothes. The shapeless floral dress that hid her curves – along with the rest of the bastardized version of 'Laura Petrie' – was in a plastic shopping bag.

There were some spare clothes for her 'new look': things were bad.

The rush of rebellion was gone. She knew that she fucked up and fucked up bad. Doris was going to freak out.

Scream.

Beat her.

Possibly murder her.

She hated this reality. Why was she in it? She thought about going to Linda's. She thought about sanctuary. Her parents were these liberals that would actually celebrate her courage to express her sexuality.

Sure...they would take her in and protect her.

But... more than that. They would support her emotionally. They would reassure her that she was not a perverted freak that was going to hell.

They'd smile at her.

But she loved Linda and could not involve her. She made a choice and had to accept the consequences.

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She considered her house which was now across the street. Her emotional torment disappeared and was replaced by an inarticulate dread. Her face darkened.

As she began to cross the street, she realized that Doris was not yet home...her car was not in the driveway. She breathed a sigh of relief. After entering the house and locking up behind her, she quickly headed to her bedroom. After stashing the bag in her closet, she tore off her white t-shirt. She was not wearing a bra. Despite the fact that Doris could be home any moment, she had to look at her body. She turned towards the full length mirror and did some impromptu modeling.

She was beautiful.

A term that she came across in her study of the life that she wanted to embrace was 'androgyny', partly male and partly female in appearance.

Amy was always very observant, a critical thinker. She would consider how something appeared and analyze it. Almost always, these were observations that could not be discussed or explained. None of her people would understand. She did not understand. *Why* would she have them? Nonetheless...she did. During most of her life – when she embraced the beliefs of her people - they would confuse her and fill her shame (many things shamed her).

She would come to appreciate that this analytical quality was a manifestation of her Authentic Self. If not for that, she would have been a soulless cutout of person desperately clinging to the illusion of a soul.

Her bodily development – along with her intense desire for women – tormented her when she embraced the teachings: now they fascinated her.

She felt that she was objectively pretty but in a way that mixed feminine and masculine qualities.

She did not develop the curviness that other girls developed. Her porcelain body was angular...like an athletic young boy. While a girl's arms normally were characterized by smoothness, her muscles her defined like a boy's. Her tits were firm and small pyramids.

While her body was a mix of energies – which she once feared and now loved – her face was all-girl.

She had a delicate woman's face with high cheekbones that featured soft and refined features. Her cheekbones were elegantly pronounced, creating a graceful contour along the sides of her face. The skin was smooth and porcelain-like. As an adult, she would use rouge to bring out a subtle flush of color on the cheeks. Although she was a white girl, she would often imagine that her eyes were almond-shaped, framed by long, feathery lashes. This imaginative flash enriched the very real perception of her lips. They were gently curved, adding to the overall harmony of her facial proportions. Her face exuded an air of sophistication and timeless beauty.

A few years later – 2013 – the evil bitch finally died. Due to her belief that bureaucracy – and the law – were machinations of Satan, she never executed a will. While her Pastor...her Shepherd encouraged her to bequeath savings to the church – reminding her that would please the LORD – she hesitated and then died suddenly. As a result, she left her 'demon spawn' some money. The savings allowed her to travel the country. And she did her *Kung Fu* thing.

Like Caine – who was persecuted by those with dominion over him for simply being righteous – she was forcibly separated from her people. Travelling the country, she was drawn to

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Buddhism. Much like Leeper's Biology class, eastern ideas and philosophies – distinct from Buddhism – were discussed at the temples and meditation centers. And when she got involved with the poly am clan, she further discussed those ideas with Brandon (who was closest to her views of life).

She came to know about Taoism. If she had been aware of it when she considering her body while modeling in front of the full length mirror, she may have thought about the concept of *yin/yang*.

In Taoism, the yin and yang concept represented interconnected and complementary forces. *Yin* embodied passive, dark, and feminine aspects: *yang* symbolized active, light, and masculine qualities. These forces worked together to maintain balance and harmony in all aspects of life.

The 13 year old girl may have thought that – like the opposing forces (that complimented each other) the *feminine* and the *masculine* – did not divide her but unified her.

She would become familiar with the yin-yang symbol. Often called *taijitu* in China, it was a familiar emblem that represented the concept of opposing yet interconnected forces. It consisted of a circular shape with two interlocking swirls or teardrops—one black and one white. Each swirl contained a dot of the opposite color: this emphasized the dynamic balance between the two forces: the symbiosis. The symbol reflected the idea that nature thrives on complementary forces, where the whole was greater than its individual parts.

When Amy freed herself from the toxic bullshit – a false doctrine of infinite division – she would embrace the truth of infinite unity.

Future Amy would think about the two teardrops, each with a dot of the other. The sexual forces were never separate. They were one. They were ONE.

And the unity within an individual could be reflected in humanity as a whole. Sadly, that was not the case. Artificial divisions tore things apart.

On a social level the majority feared the minority. Amy had a dynamic sexuality, one that could not easily be pigeonholed.

The majority had a more staid sexuality. This was neither good nor bad: it just was.

Sexuality is a very powerful quality. It is at the forefront the average person's awareness. It always drives that person. An individual defines his or her understanding of existential being in terms of that sexuality. A multifaceted sexuality – which Amy enjoyed (or should have) – was in the minority. The very existence of people like Amy made the majority collectively question their respective personal essence. And the majority repressed the minority.

Why do some have bold qualities that differed from the majority: genetics.

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An individual has qualities – emotional, intellectual and sexual – that are determined by genetics. Being good at math...or being gay...trans...is determined by genetics. At least partially. But these natural qualities put a person in the minority. Even being good at math. Because science questions the myths that validate the majority traits...being cis or straight, for example.

She pulled her t-shirt back on.

Linda would love the opportunity to save her. As would her parents. While she was still having trouble comprehending how different her mom was from Linda's parents – Jen and Ron- she knew that they would show her unconditional love. Prior to Linda, she could not comprehend that such acceptance existed. She could not possibly believe that there were people who just accepted people who were gay. For that matter, she could not comprehend the existence of those who did not think Jews were evil. Well, she knew that such people existed: prior to Linda, she was taught that those people were evil. When – in fact – they were the good people, and the antisemites of her church were the bad people.

A decade later, adult Amy would tell Jane that she understood how the Jews were persecuted by her people because she was similarly persecuted for being gay...and smart. She would conclude:

“...Using the transitive property, I'm like the Jews.”

That was a cathartic moment for adult Amy. And her relationship to Jane was a steady stream of such cleansing moments. And – in that moment – Jane bonded to Amy with an intensity that she never before experienced.

But that was in the future.

13-year old Amy could not even begin to glimpse that reality. As she tugged at the bottom edge of her t-shirt to flatten it, she again thought about going to Linda and her parents for refuge.

But the shit would quickly spin out of control. Her people would descend on her girlfriend's home and lynch the family.

She was responsible. She had to deal with this on her own.

She thought about putting on the frumpy dress. She would beg Doris' forgiveness for the haircut. Satan had momentarily controlled her. But she embraced her unconditional love for her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But the lying had to end...

And she heard the locking mechanism on the front door snap.

Doris was home. It was showtime.

Amy reached for the doorknob.

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It was Saturday. The Sunday of the previous weekend, Amy – and two of her friends were enjoying drinks on the patio restaurant/bar of the *Omni* hotel. They were part of a group of volunteers that put time in making *The 2023 Frogtown Art Walk* happen.

Two crazed drunks accosted them.

One pushed one of Amy's friends – Tamika – into one of the decorative fire pits that dotted the toney patio eatery, severely burning her head and face. She was rushed to the *Los Angeles General Regional Burn Center* and was still there.

Prior to that night, Tamika both ran the ER response unit and was a therapist. When someone was brought in, her team would evaluate the severity of burns and then monitor the healing process.

And now her friends and coworkers were caring for her. Tamika was expected to fully recover. But the once hauntingly beautiful woman would be forever scarred both physically and emotionally.

The other man forced Amy's back against the wall and raped her. Then he threw Amy to the floor. With all the strength that he could muster – and he was a big man – he kicked her repeatedly in the head. From a table, he grabbed a large carving knife. Falling on top of her, he cut her throat and gouged her eyes out.

Then two cops burst onto the patio and shot both men dead.

Yesterday, Brandon (one of Amy's poly am partners) was at the office of Ilana Glazer: the creator and showrunner of a reimagining of the 90's sitcom *Friends*. Sitting in Ilana's eclectic office – which favored 1960s mod – he was reviewing the itinerary for the upcoming week. He had been hired as a staff writer. While Brandon had a couple things on his resume, that was the most significant job. The reimagining was going to be an emotionally textured dramedy, much more challenging and complex than the original. The character Phoebe was a trans woman and was played by actress Josie Totah, who was trans in real life.

He considered the writing gig to be his 'big break'.

After Amy was butchered by the psychos, he quickly realized that he could not do the job. Creative writing would not be possible while he was dealing with his intense grief.

Besides, the story had gone national and was getting heavy rotation. The media dubbed the incident *Melee at the Omni*. It was not what it was: the heart-wrenching story of unprovoked rape and murder but entertainment. A salacious story, it was the perfect news story. It did not inform or enlighten – and those things suppressed 'clicks' - it titillated and outraged. It was perfect for keeping people from thinking about how the environment was going to shit because humanity was fucking it up. It was perfect for keeping people about how the country's democracy was being destroyed.

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It was perfect for the Fox News and Newsmax creeps. A dyke in a perverted tryst? It was perfect.

The poly am was coming out. While the personal life of the victim was totally irrelevant, the *Melee at the Omni* was not news but entertainment.

Beyond the fact that he was in no shape to write, his presence in the writer's room would be toxic. Because of the chaos, the room would not be able to deliver a script by the deadline. And there would be chaos, the 'Jesse Watters' types would be blathering about how Brandon was furthering the Gay Agenda. In the eyes of the fans of right-wing media, he was not a grieving widower (and he was that) but evil. He was the kind of evil that the fools loved to hate...and fear. And the 'Jesse Watters' types pandered to those craven impulses.

Glazer and Totah agreed with Brandon's analysis: both quickly become his allies. They were not going to let his career be hurt by evil. They were going to do their damndest to keep him on the *Friends* project in a position that he could build his career on. While the ideal was to keep him on board, they would find him something with another production if necessary.

Totah had both executive producer and consultant credits. After the murder, she called him and offered to interview him to be her assistant. At that time, she explained to him that she had concluded the interviews and had two strong candidates. She was reopening the process for him.

It was Friday and the interview was scheduled for next week.

Until something permanent was found, he was Ilana's assistant: helping her with the mechanics of getting a new show up and running.

Ilana came into the office. When she was parallel to him, she leaned in and pressed the top of her head against the nape of his neck. She wrapped her adjacent arm around his shoulders and squeezed. She made a growly noise. She continued on and went around her desk and sat down. She asked him how he was feeling.

He explained that he was okay but was concerned about Jane.

He explained that Jane and Amy had an especially intense bond. Amy was totally fucked up when she started working for Jane back in '19. Jane really built her up and started to turn her around. But Jane was also deeply tormented by her fear over the possible rise fascist government under Trump. Amy was the first non-Jew to get it. Jane was very tight lipped about their friendship in '19. But Brandon did get some details from Amy...she was pretty cagey about details. The two shared a lot of stuff: Jane completely opened up.

Subsequently, Jane considered Amy a member of the Tribe.

Totah then comes in and shares a doctored video that was being broadcast by far-right provocateur Alex Jones on his program *InfoWars*. It falsely made it appear that Amy was

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mocking the killers' religion. Totah subsequently offered Brandon the assistant job. Glazer then told him that he was taking the next week off to be with his family.

Ilana Glazer called Brandon at 8 am on the day after they discussed Jane and watched the doctored clip on *Info Wars*.

"I'm sorry to call you so early on a Saturday...especially with all the shit that's going down."

"No...no...it's okay. I'm very happy you called. I really mean that. Do you have something specific on your mind?", Brandon replied.

"I couldn't sleep last night. Well...you know how insomnia is...I slept in stops and starts. I can't stop thinking about Jane. I want to talk to her. Do you think it would help?"

"Yes...that would be amazing."

Over the next couple hours, there was a flurry of texting and Ilana's visit was firmed up.

At 11am, Ilana pushed the button of the doorbell of the home in Elysian Valley.

Prior to the tragedy, she knew nothing about the reality that was now grafted into hers. She had hired Brandon as a staff writer for her fledgling streamer project. But he was nothing more than a name...really. The streamer was a business where responsibility was delegated. Brandon's name filtered up to her from the people who vetted staffing picks. They put together lists of names (each with a written outline of the candidate's experience and impressions from the interviews). Prior to a party that she had for all the participants: she had never spoken to the man.

Of the names submitted to her for the staff writing slot, Brandon had the least experience. He was a writer's assistant on *The Mindy Project* and a writer on *2 Broke Girls*. The other people had more muscular resumes.

But she concluded that Brandon demonstrated a moxy that his competition did not show. While the others took a standard career building approach, he demonstrated flair and imagination. He showed focus. She saw herself in Brandon.

She was taken by how he developed his comedic website, *Consumer Follies*, and built its popularity by careful effort (she picked this up from his interview profile). He developed his website visibility with consistent effort that was expressed in a holistic approach.

In the interviews, he discussed the methodology that he employed to raise his site's profile on the internet. He would focus each page on specific keywords relevant to that's page's content. This meant thorough keyword research and then he incorporated those keywords into the page content and meta tags. Then he would optimize the web pages for search engines by creating clear, well-organized content. This meant using descriptive headings, subheadings, and relevant internal links. He would then create progressively more pages that were thematically related to each other: he expanded the website with content designed to increase visibility. He

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regularly published new pages related to his niche (political subversives who were not hamstrung by PC). He built upon this in a clear and systematic manner.

Comedy was serious business.

He created high-quality content that addressed the needs of his bohemian demo. As a result, the content attracted organic traffic and encouraged sharing. It reminded Glazer of the webisodes of *Broad City* that she made with Abbi Jacobson.

While it ultimately became a series on the network Comedy Central, it was initially created as a web series by her and Abbi. The two met at the Upright Citizens Brigade improv school, where they honed their skills and developed their unique comedic voices. Amy Poehler was impressed by their work and that allowed them to develop a connection. For the web series finale, they invited Poehler to appear, and she accepted. This connection would prove pivotal for the show's future. After the success of the web series, Glazer and Jacobson formally approached Amy Poehler – via email – asking if she would be interested in executive producing a TV version. Poehler, recognizing their talent, agreed to support the project. With Poehler's backing, the project moved from the web to Comedy Central.

And Brandon did much more than just put out a website. He promoted it: targeting the creative community in Hollywood. Matt Warburton was showrunner and producer of *The Mindy Project* (2012-2017). After some initial DM's on Twitter, Warburton and Brandon emailed: Brandon was ultimately hired as a Writer's Assistant on the (then) new show. After two seasons on Mindy's show, he was offered a Staff Writer position on *2 Broke Girls* (2011-2017).

Brandon worked Warburton. It was like the way she and Abbi worked Poehler to get their series on Comedy Central.

She saw herself in Brandon.

And she saw *Broad City* in *Consumer Follies*.

His site featured fresh, irreverent humor and that resonated with a young audience. She was only being objective when she saw that her show did the same. It found a wider audience as the fictionalized versions of the two friends fearlessly navigated New York City, their twenties, and the challenges of being women during President Trump.

Brandon opened the door and beamed:

“Hi! Come in Ilana!”

Upon entering the foyer, Ilana stared somberly ahead at the piece of art on the opposing wall. Matted and framed, it was the poster for *The 2023 Frogtown Art Walk*.

“We haven't taken it down...actually we never will. Amy had it matted and framed herself. I'll never forget when she hung it.”

Ilana cried.

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Wrapping his adjacent arm around her shoulders, he said:

“Let’s get you to the kitchen and fix you up. We have a nice selection of fresh pastries from *Dunkin’ Donuts*: we made the coffee ourselves, a nice flavored one...‘Double Chocolate Chip Cookie’. Um...we also have paper towels.”

With that Brandon retracked his arm from around Ilana’s shoulders, he pointed at the half bath and said:

“In fact, we have a bathroom right there if you like to clean up or whatever.”

“Good idea.”

After a time, she rejoined him. She was holding a box of tissues.

“Jane’s showering. The first one in several days. I’m so glad you’re here. She needs a friend right now.”

“She considers me a friend? We only spoke that one time.”

“Of course, she does. Don’t tell her that I told you this, but she’s been in the bedroom for the past three days...only leaving to use the head. Eating in bed. Fuck...if Jim and I didn’t cook her food... she would have been surviving on potato chips. Been wearing the same fucking Victoria’s Secret bra and panties matched set. I used to think that was really hot. The bitch ruined it for me.”

Brandon laughed ruefully and said:

“Sorry...sorry...gallows’ humor.”

“Is she really that bad?”

“She’s been in a fetal position most of the time.”

“Jesus...does she need professional help?”

“She’s been both working with her shrink – Elaine Gonzalas – and the grief counselor that you got for us. They’re both hopeful that she’ll come back. I mean...this is really heavy...not the kind of thing a person fully gets over. And it’s mutated with her parents’ murder...her fear of...um...being sent to a deathcamp. Then the ‘Alex Jones’ thing and now the fucking memes on the internet and the hateful trolls. Jim and I have been trying to get her fucking tablet away from her.”

Brandon started crying. He grabbed the box of tissues away from Ilana and pulled out most of the content. He gave the box back. As Ilana waited, he composed himself.

“The shrinks are hopeful?”, she asked.

“Without hope, a person is nothing. After she showers, she’ll meet you in the pit.”

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“The Pit?”

“The pit is the other bedroom. It’s...well...our sex room. We have an unwritten rule: no activity in the bedroom. Our schedules can be a bit erratic, and we like to keep it free. And it simplifies the laundry situation. There’s a nice modular sectional in there...a big one.”

Ilana opened her mouth to speak. Brandon rested a hand on her shoulder and said:

“In one corner, there’s this...um...small conversation nook: a small, round table with two matching chairs. The little table has a marble top...well’ ‘faux’ marble. I really like the marble top. It...um...um... adds a touch of elegance: the table is nice and compact...The chairs are upholstered, really comfortable. I thought...um...thought...that it would be an inviting spot for conversation. I really like that faux marble. I mean it has genteel and sophisticated look...refined yet intimate.”

Brandon fell silent.

The expression on his face was that of someone suffering from shell shock, the ‘thousand-yard stare’. It was a blank, emotionless look. The detached gaze was unfocused and distant. It was as if he was looking through Ilana and beyond their surroundings. He was gazing into an incomprehensible ‘hell realm’. He had zoned out and was disconnected from the environment. The expression was one of severe trauma and dissociation: it reflected the intense psychological impact caused by Amy’s violent murder.

This went on for what seemed like an eternity to Ilana but was actually 10 or 15 seconds. She wondered if she should get Jim (who was probably in the kitchen). Instead, she gently placed her hands on Brandon shoulders and shook him slowly, smoothly and rhythmically. She spoke softly:

“Come back...Brandon...come back.”

“Um...oh...um...sorry. I’m good.”

“A conversation nook sounds brilliant. The perfect place for Jane and me to talk.”

“This is going to sound fucking weird...fucking stupid. But Jim and I thought that talking to you in the pit would trigger happy memories in Jane.”

“Not weird...not stupid. That’s fucking brilliant.”

“Well...let’s not just stand in the foyer like fools. Jim is waiting for you in the kitchen.”

“Good...I really want to talk to Jim before Jane. I’m thinking that he could help me prep. And – of course – I want to check in on him...see how he’s doing. How is he doing?”

“He’s been stoic. You know...like that ancient philosophy. He’s been enduring the pain without showing his feelings or complaining.”

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“Really?”, Ilana asked.

“Yeah.”

“Not a shrink but I understand that being stoic can be this short-term coping mechanism, but it is important for him to eventually process his grief fully. I understand that not working through can cause long-term psychological impacts”.

“Hmmm...same thing that your grief counselor said. And you’ll want to open with that...some philosophy. The best way to engage Jim is by appealing to his mind. But go in with a little strategy and pivot it to Jane or whatever. He’ll talk forever about the philosophy of something.”

“Okay...good...thanks. Would you mind making yourself scarce while I talk to Jim?”

“That’s perfect. I’ll have the opportunity to have a few words with Jane after her shower. I mean she was in this total funk until this morning...zoned out for days. It was the planned meet with you. Knowing that broke the fever. I want to talk to her now. You asked if Jane considered you to be her friend. She’s fully aware of everything that you’ve done for us. She loves you...Ilana.”

Ilana started to cry again. She fished the remaining tissue out of the box. She wiped her face and blew her nose.

“Do you want to hit the head again?”

“No. Let’s go to the kitchen. I really need some coffee.”

She crammed the soiled tissue in the box and handed it to Brandon.

“Take me to the kitchen...sweetie.”

<><><>

Amy reached for the doorknob and opened the door.

She walked silently down the hall to the living room.

“Amy, is that you?”

Doris’ voice came from the living room. Just feet away, Amy continued forward in silence.

The walls of the room were cream. Doris would tell Amy how one of her friends at church told her that that light natural colors created a calming atmosphere and made the space feel larger. At least, that is what her friend read in *Architectural Digest*. Doris would tell her daughter that was ideal. After all, Satan and his vile machinations were everywhere and had succeeded in turning the United States away from the Christian Nation that the founding fathers intended. It made sense to make the living room pleasant so that they would have a refuge from the devil and his minions.

But – by this time – Amy knew that to be nonsense.

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Her people – when attempting to sell this to the sceptics – would say that the intent of the founders was open to debate.

There was no debate...no credible one. That was bullshit.

It was bullshit because the claim that the founders supported Christian Nationalism was batshit.

Her church turned her out at the age of nine. They made her proselytize on street corners. She detested them for so many reasons – both in that moment and the rest of her life – but that became the focus of an especially naked and searing hate. When she was nine, she should have been playing with kids – those of different races and those coming from families with differing philosophical and religious perspectives. She should have been building her mental muscle by being exposed to ideas and knowledge: which would have served as the foundation of her adult intellect. But her church could not have that. Even at that tender age, her teachers were very impressed by how smart she was. However, being smart – knowing things – was not popular with her mom or her church. They did not like facts that contradicted their beliefs. And that was most facts. To keep her away from facts, they turned her out and made her a tragic little street whore for Jesus, a smarmy little bitch.

But it was about more than keeping her from the facts. It was about having her spout the lies that buoyed their nonsensical beliefs.

One of those lies was that a Christian Nationalist State was the intent of the framers of the Constitution.

To justify the lies – which (out of fairness) they *did* believe – they would often cite [Matthew 16:17-19](#).

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

She was very familiar with the term *Rock of Peter*: it was central to her mom's church's *inerrant Word of God* bullshit. They could intrude on the lives of strangers. They had the 'keys to the kingdom of heaven' and her obligated to share them. They were humble Christians.

She had – for some time – come to realize that the Bible was gibberish and those who believed in it were absolute fools. After this confrontation, this truth would be greatly marginalized for a couple decades: it would be resurrected by her conversations with Jane.

She compared the idiocy to Lewis Carroll's poem *Jabberwocky* which was found in his novel *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. It was a masterful example of nonsense verse.

Carroll intentionally used nonsensical language and vivid imagery to create a whimsical and fantastical atmosphere. She compared the understanding that Carroll's fans had of his work to the understanding that her

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mom, Pastor Simms and the rest had of the Bible. They thought that their preferred nonsense was real. In fact, it was nonsensical drivel and vivid imagery that created a dreary and fantastical narrative.

By combining nonsensical language with rich imagery, Carroll created a poem that was both entertaining and thought-provoking. The nonsensical elements encouraged readers to engage with the text in a playful manner, while the vivid imagery drew them into a unique and imaginative world. This blend of whimsy and creativity was a hallmark of Carroll's work: *Jabberwocky* was a timeless piece of literature. It captivated readers of all ages.

But the believers were not captivated by the understanding that Bible was complete crap. Instead, their connection to it was believing it was real. This delusion was at odds with facts and knowledge.

Their *Jabberwocky* was real.

So – as a kid – she slutted herself by haranguing total strangers with nonsense like the ‘fact’ that the Founders wanted Christian Nationalism.

The real fact was that the likes of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and James Madison were proponents of religious freedom and the separation of church and state. They believed in a secular government that allowed for diverse religious practices without endorsing any particular religion.

Amy understood that if the founders were dogmatic about anything, it was the belief that a person’s faith should not be intruded upon by government and that religious doctrine should not be written into governance.

She would think about Linda’s mom, a Unitarian minister. The church taught a commonsense view that was in line with the concept of a pluralistic – secular – society. The Unitarians emphasized the use of reason and personal experience in the search for personal truth. A person’s opinion about metaphysics – like the existence of a deity – was a personal matter.

A government should simply respect an individual’s autonomy.

James Madison understood this. He was vigorously opposed to religious intrusions into civil affairs. In 1785, when the Commonwealth of Virginia was considering passage of a bill ‘establishing a provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion’. In response, Madison wrote his [*Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*](#), in which he presented his argument why government should not become involved in the support of any religion.

A couple decades after the confrontation that was about to happen, the state of Florida would turn the state school system into a religious one. This move was supported by conservatives nationwide.

Madison argued that religion was a matter of personal conviction and cannot be directed by force or violence. This was because the individual had the unalienable right to exercise religion: in fact, extending this freedom was a duty owed to the Creator. Because of this duty that the state owed the Creator, civil rights did not depend on religious opinions and that meant that religious assessments violate the equality that the state granted through the establishment of civil rights. Because of his concern for civil rights, Madison realized that a government involved in religion would create religious discord and persecution.

This view was based on his understanding of history: a government that supported a specific religion also supported tyranny and oppression. This meant that religion best flourished without government interference.

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This meant that the separation of church and state was critical: After all, the mixing government and religion corrupted both.

Since majority opinion should not dictate religious practices, the government should not have authority over religious matters. For this reason, Madison felt that religion should influence government through moral authority but not determine legal mandates. Besides inevitably leading to tyranny, religious assessments would impose an unfair economic burden on the citizens.

Tyranny was expensive.

Since government support of a specific religion – Madison felt – created inequality among different faiths, true liberty was only possible through the freedom from government-imposed religion. A fundamental role of government was the advancement of civil rights. And protecting religious freedom set a precedent for protecting other rights. Government support of religion was in absolute conflict with the public good.

In his first term as president, Thomas Jefferson declared his firm belief in the separation of church and state in a [letter to the Danbury, Conn. Baptists](#).

He wrote:

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between church and state.

Amy's people did not recognize any of this. So, they had her prostitute herself by lying to strangers. One of those lies was a real whopper: that the Founding Fathers supported Christian Nationalism.

In one corner of the living room was an L-shaped sectional: it was covered in a fabric with a floral pattern. Doris was sitting on it.

Amy's mom stared at her in silence. She stood up and slowly walked across the room. She did not speak but did make several loud guttural noises as she collected phlegm and spittle in her mouth. When she was close enough to her daughter, she spat forcefully in her child's face – hocked a loogie – and a large amount of the mixture cascaded down the young girl's face.

With an open palm, Amy did her best to wipe the mess off of her face and transferred the detritus to the surface of her t-shirt. Doris silently walked back to the sectional and sat down. She was quiet for a moment. She turned towards Amy and spoke softly: it was as if she had not just spat in her kid's face.

“You are a fortunate child. You have been the recipient of the finest Bible training. It is fair to say that you have much of the Word committed to memory. You are...such a clever girl. Is that a fair assessment?”

“Yes, ma'am. I have received a very thorough training in ...the Word.”

“Do you have [Ephesians 2:14-17](#) committed to memory? You know that I feel that one really is important...in these most evil of times. Actually, I know you know it, child. You've recited for me before. I am impressed by your talent for memorization.”

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“Yes ma’am.”

And Amy recited it:

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

Doris continued calmly:

“That’s excellent child. You are most bright. And I am especially fond of the King James. And how do we interpret it...with regards to the New Covenant?”

“Well...momma...we feel that the New Covenant was established through Jesus' death and resurrection. We feel that His Sacrifice ended the need for the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law. We believe that His Sacrifice was the ultimate fulfillment of the Law. And...um...that made the ceremonial practices...um...sacrifices and rituals...unnecessary for salvation. Our faith in Christ...His atoning work...is the new way that we are reconciled with God.”

Doris muttered to herself:

“We feel...We believe...Our faith.”

She looked Amy in the eyes and continued calmly:

“We believe that Christ's sacrifice abolished the ceremonial laws...I mean...times were changing, and the ceremony was creating division. So...the Lord in His infinite wisdom...establishes a new covenant based on grace and faith. Amy...while the ceremonial laws are no longer binding, the moral teachings of the Old Testament are. But the moral law is interpreted through the lens of Christ's teachings.”

Amy was silent and afraid to speak. Doris was calm. She was afraid that anything that she said would set her off.

“I obviously haven’t forgotten the conversation that we had a few hours ago. You no longer believe. That concerns me. I am concerned for your immortal soul. I can’t blame you. We live in a satanic culture. One day...this will be a Christian Nationalist state, and the evil will end. We are doubling down on your training.”

“Are you taking me out of *James Jordan*?”

“No...but I am fighting for your immortal soul. A lot of godly people are...I just had an excellent conversation with Pastor Simms. When you are under this roof...you are Christian. Fake it until you make it...as they say.”

Doris exhaled and continued:

“So... the ceremonial laws are no longer binding but the moral teachings of the Old Testament are. What does [Deuteronomy 22:5](#) say?”

Amy knew it. In fact, she was expecting her mom to bring it up. But she simply did not want to recite it.

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“Well...mom...there is a lot of text. I know that I have a talent for memorization. But I am drawing a blank.”

Doris picked up a Bible that was on the cushion next to her. She opened it and found the correct page.

“Come here, child.”

Amy crossed the room. As she got close, Doris held the book out to her. She took it.

“Read it.”

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

“Now...that is an example of moral teaching and not a ceremonial thing. I don't want to hear that you succumbed to some fad...or whatever. You are an abomination, child.”

“Yes...ma'am”

“Now...why does the LORD prohibit men from dressing like women and vice versa? God created men and women with distinct gender identities. It does not please Him when these identities are blurred. Of course, I am being PC...which is evil. A person who cross dresses is evil...Satanic. That person mocks Him by cross dressing. And that angers him. There are only two genders. Cross dressing is spitting in the face of God. *You cannot show someone greater disrespect and hate than spitting in their face.* That is the reason for the command to keep a distinction between the sexes in how we dress. Christians are good soldiers...we follow command.”

“Yes...ma'am.”

“A time will come when people who mock the LORD people like...”, Doris stopped and continued. “When the U.S. once again becomes Christian, this stuff will not be tolerated.”

Doris stared ahead in silence and then turned and looked Amy in the eyes:

“What won't be tolerated will be those who mock Him. Those who dress and act in an evil and perverted manner will not be tolerated. Faggots will not be tolerated. The *trans* freaks will not be tolerated. Look...Amy...there is [no separation between church and state](#). The church is supposed to direct the government. We will drive the non-believers out. That's because the United States is the ancestral home of Christians...[it is where we are ordained to live](#). “

With effort, the obese woman stood up. Amy stepped back.

“It is true...God's commands in the Old Testament were harsh. But they reflected His perfect justice. You see...child...the severe penalties for moral transgressions were necessary to maintain holiness and order among the Israelites. They were chosen to be a holy nation. The United States is Israel. We have been granted a special, divinely ordained role by the Creator. America was founded on Christian principles and is uniquely blessed by God to fulfill a particular mission in the world. That mission is to play a central role in the End Times. If God imposed harsh and exacting standards on Israel, [how could He do otherwise with the U.S.?](#)”

Doris' face turned beat red. She shrieked at her young child:

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“Earlier you renounced Him with made up science...the lies of Satan! Now you stand before me mocking the divine role that was ordained for the genders! I shudder to think of the perversions that you are engaging in! When you do these things, you taunt God and his perfect decision to make our great nation His emissary!”

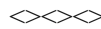
Doris advanced on Amy.

“I like to believe that you have been corrupted by evil but will embrace the divine wisdom again. But...you are evil! Evil! You are demon spawn! All of your precious facts are lies!”

And she spit in her daughter’s face.

Doris calmed down and spoke with resignation.

“I don’t believe that you did not have *Deuteronomy 22:5* committed to memory. If I ask you to recite it...you will do so. Now – leave me, child – go to your room and reflect on the precious gift that is your Immortal Soul.”



“ How do you like your coffee?”

Jim was fixing Ilana a cup, his back to his guest. He was at the counter: Ilana was sitting at the dining room table. The set was simple and unassuming. It featured a round wooden table with upholstered chairs and made for a cozy and stylish dining space.

“Well...a coffee that’s called ‘Double Chocolate Chip Cookie’...You just have to savor the flavor. Black...please.”

Jim walked to the table holding the saucer by the edge. He rounded the table so that he was standing next to her. He placed it on the black leather placemat in front of her.

“Amy always had a complex relationship with vegetarianism.”, Jim started as he headed to his chair – which was opposite his guest – and sat. “ One moment she wouldn’t drink milk and the next she was ordering a rib eye at *Outback Steakhouse*.”

He picked up his cup of coffee and took a sip.

“She wasn’t a hypocrite: she committed fully to the preference of the moment. But the moment was constantly shifting...moment to moment.

He looked away and said to himself wistfully:

“Moment to moment.”

Re-establishing eyes contact, he continued:

“Initially, I found it an annoying idiosyncrasy but came to see it as a really endearing quirk. Anyway, that leather placemat...”, He sat his cup down and pointed to the mat in front of Ilana. “She was bothered by it. I had to show her that it was recycled. I had to go to the internet and show her.”

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He picked his cup up and took a sip.

“It’s like that overstuffed leather sofa in the living room...one of my contributions. Amy did push back on it. It took some convincing, but she came around.”

He pointed to the stack of pastries that was on the serving dish between them.

“Well...take one.”

Ilana took a crawler and put it on the dish in front of her.

“So...how are you feeling?”, Jim asked.

“That’s my line. I’m supposed to ask you that.”

“True. And my answer will determine the whole direction of our conversation. There’s a guy...[J.L. Austin](#)...he developed an entire philosophy about conversation. He pointed out that we use language to both do things and assert shit.”

Jim took a bite of his bear claw and then a sip of coffee. Ilana waited.

I mean...take the statement ‘I promise to do so-and-so’. You are doing something...making a promise. You aren’t asserting that you are making a promise.”

“What am I doing, Jim?”

“You are making a determination...trying to figure out many things. In part, you want to determine if I’ll end up slitting my wrists...or if the whole thing ends in a murder-suicide. It won’t.”

“Jesus...Jim...that’s really fucking intense.”

“This whole thing is fucking intense. Am I wrong?”

Ilana had worked with a wide range of personalities over the years. And you are never fully yourself. Your sense of self is shaded by the person that you are dealing with. Ilana’s success sprang – in part – from her abilities as a creator. But she was also a manager and a good one who worked with people, not controlled them. This dynamic with Jim lacked the simmering emotional intensity that she experienced with Brandon. That did not mean that Jim was any less raw emotionally. But the dynamic was different and so she was.

“This is a welfare check...I don’t deny that. Now...I’ve never heard of this philosopher before. I do things with my words and assert things. I’m checking on you guys welfare...and trying to help...because of what I am asserting. My assertion is a statement of my motivation. My motivation is that I care.”

“Go on.”

“Brandon was just a name a few weeks ago. I work with a lot of people. I have a superficial connection with most. It was that way with Brandon. The guy impressed me, and I hired him. But then he was in his spot doing his job. Then this shit happens. Those freaks tear up his life partner for being herself. That cuts to the bone for me. Then that fuck Alex Jones goes after her...and that is only gets worse. That also cuts to the bone. I would be a bad person if I didn’t do my damndest to help him and...his partners. Brandon is my friend.”

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Jim got up and grabbed his coffee cup.

“I’m going to freshen my java. Do you need more?”

“I’m good.”

As Jim headed to the coffee maker, he continued:

“And...you’re right, Ilana...the dynamic between a close friend and a casual acquaintance is very different. With a close friend, there is a deeper level of trust, understanding, and emotional support. In contrast, a casual acquaintance is someone with whom you have a more superficial relationship. Why is that?”

“Well...a friend, a close friend...is someone that I share personal experiences with. That means providing mutual support. That mutual support creates a bond of loyalty and commitment...um...between the both of us. We are involved in each other's lives: we do that by offering genuine advice and help.”

“And that’s the motivation behind your words and actions?”

“Yes...yes, it is.”

Jim added:

“And – with a casual acquaintance, like a co-worker – the interaction is limited to a specific context. And that context is the direct work or social event. And – let’s face it – both sides just want to maintain the harmony. Keep things going.”

“Yeah...I agree.”

“And the level of personal sharing and emotional support is much lower. Casual acquaintances cannot be relied upon. They just want to keep things copacetic. A friend will get...her...hands dirty. Get involved in your shit because she’s here to help”

“Yes”, Ilana agreed.

“We only had one conversation before this. But I consider you to be my friend.”

“I am.”

“I need someone that I can talk to.”

“What about Brandon?”

“We’re both struggling to pull Jane back from the abyss. Brandon is holding together pretty well...but he’s struggling. If he was dealing with Jane’s shit and I piled on, I think that he would snap.”

“A moment ago, Brandon went catatonic.”

“What happened?”

“We were talking about how...um... Jane and I were going to talk while sitting at the conversation nook in the pit. He blanked out. I had to shake him to pull him back.”

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“Brandon is a fighter. He is dealing with some really heavy shit. He needs the normalcy of work...the responsibility. He’s very excited about being Totah’s assistant. He needs you...Ilana.”

“I know. You’re holding it together...Jim.”

Jim glanced down at Ilana’s empty cup.

“More coffee?”

“Yeah. Thanks. Will you get me an ice water too?”

Jim nodded. He stood up. After picking up her cup, he turned and walked to the coffee maker.

“Brandon been saying that I’m stoic. Fuck that. I came to realize that I have a role to play here. I have to keep things together. And that means that I have to keep it together. It turns out that I have reserves that I knew nothing about.”

“I respect you, Jim.”

“I don’t deserve it. I was an asshole. Back in ’19, Jane and I were a couple. We convinced Brandon to join us. Then...we convinced him to include Amy. She was not random. It was not about getting an even numbered polyam. A nice bit symmetry: two dudes and two dames. No, Amy belonged with us. I loved her long before she was part of the poly am.”

“Why? And why did you just say that you were an asshole?”

“At the beginning of ’19, Jane hired Amy as her assistant. They became very close. Platonic...but they became real soul sisters, confidants. Now, Jane was really afraid...deathly afraid...of Trumpism spinning into an authoritarian state and the Jews would be slaughtered. Amy pushed her to open up with me.”

“Why were you an asshole?”

“Remember...at this point Jane and I were living together. We were in love. She needed a third party to push her to come to me. She did not feel comfortable just coming to me with this profound concern.”

“And...why was that?”

“I’ve always been an atheist. I mean...Brandon, Jane and Amy are all...um...pantheists, I guess. The idea of an unknowable creative force behind reality and is reality. Each give the idea a different spin. No hard myths and this force is unknowable. I’m an atheist. If you can’t prove it, don’t talk about it...or speculate.”

“Why were you an asshole?”

“Back in ’19, I’m really strident about it. All organized religion is a scam. I still believe that to be true of most churches...religious organizations. Jane was a Reconstructionist Jew in ’19...still is. And that’s a pretty liberal theology. Amy ultimately gets involved with liberal Christianity. Both works nicely for them. So...I’ve

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mellowed somewhat. In '19, it bothered me that Jane went to a temple. That created a strain. That's why Amy had to intervene. Jane could not open up to me. I was a shit excuse for a man."

Jim set the cup of coffee and the ice water on Ilana's placemat.

"You're being too hard on yourself."

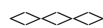
"If she were involved in a [Humanist Judaism](#) group...non-supernatural or metaphysical, simply strong on Jewish Identity...and nicely progressive...I would not have bat an eye. But she was Reconstructionist...same on Jewish Identity...also solid on LGBTQ as well...but with fairly modest metaphysics. 'HuJu' is community-based...small groups. They meet at each other's homes and coffee shops. Reconstructionism is a full denomination of Judaism: with its own synagogues and Rabbinical School. I gave her shit about it."

As he spoke, he returned to his chair and sat.

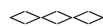
"Jane should have left me. And she settled by being with me in the first place. I was arrogant...a dick. She didn't leave me. I always felt guilty over everything that she gave up for me. Then... I realized that I was being as bad as idiots like Lauren Boebert or Marjorie Taylor Greene. Another controlling motherfucker. Amy was very into this notion that the whole of human history is about control. People trying to dominate each other. And the amoral and unscrupulous fucks...the Greenses...the Boeberts...assert the power. I was just some fuck trying to control. That's why she couldn't come to me...and she suffered."

He sighed and said:

"If your partner can't come to you about her deepest concern...you're a failure. I have to be strong...I owe it to Amy and Jane."



After her confrontation with Doris, Amy went to the bathroom and washed her face. She suddenly became violently ill. She stuck her face in the toilet bowl and vomited.



Ilana knocked on the door of the pit.

"Come in.", Jane said.

She was seated at the little table in the corner. On it was a can of soda. Ilana thought that Brandon was right. It was a nice conversation nook. The table was nice and compact. The 'faux' marble did lend a touch of elegance. She crossed to the upholstered chair that was opposite Jane and sat. She placed her ice water on the coaster.

"Would you like to upgrade to a soda?", Jane asked. "We have that dorm fridge over there."

She indicated its presence with a head bob.

"Sometimes, we get thirsty after...", Jane laughed. "Anyway, we have soda."

"No...I'm good. The water is perfect."

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Ilana took note of how nicely her host was dressed.

Jane was wearing a suit that was flirty and casual but professional enough for an office with a forgiving dress policy. It was denim. The jacket had a cinched waist with long sleeves. It had a notched lapel: a common style found on blazers, suits, and sport coats. It featured a triangular notch or ‘V’ shape. Instead of a shirt, she was wearing a variation on the sleeveless man’s undershirt with the very unfortunate name ‘wife beater’. But it was a shiny silver satin, no bra. She was wearing high-waisted bootcut jeans. The denim that was a darker blue than the jacket, it combined a slim fit through the thigh with a subtle flare in the calf: a vintage ‘70s vibe. She was wearing a pair of wedge heel sandals that featured thick-soles. If she were standing, it would have given her a nice height increase.

Ilana considered her casual Saturday morning look: running shorts, a t-shirt with a graphic from her show *Broad City* and flip flops. She was wearing a leather fanny pack. The words BAD MOTHER FUCKER were emblazoned on it, the same stylized font that was featured on Jule’s wallet in the film *Pulp Fiction*.

“Damn girl! Look at you! Showing me up!”

“Well...I’ve been...kind of bumming for the past couple days. I wanted to dress up a bit for company.”

“And I appreciate it!”, Ilana enthused.

Ilana placed both hands on the small table, palms up. Jane clasped them.

Squeezing Jane’s fingers, Ilana said:

“How are you doing, girl?”

“Oh...my...god. This is horrible....did you call an ambulance?”

“What are you talking about?”, Ilana asked.

“Well, apparently Jim and Brandon were simultaneously struck mute.”

Ilana smiled broadly and let out her signature laugh:

“Fair enough. Fair enough. Talk to me.”

“I’m thinking of watching *The Wizard of Oz*. It might lift my spirits.”

Ilana released one of Jane’s hands and turned the other over. She patted the back of Jane’s hand and said:

“You...should...do...that.”

“Now...in the movie...Dorothy travels to the magical Land of Oz. The entire adventure takes place in a dream. The real world is deary black and white. But – in the dream – she encounters cool, trippy, characters and colorful places. But she wakes up in her shit reality.”

Ilana sat back. She reached for her ice water and took a sip:

“Okay...but don’t miss the point. When she wakes up, she is surrounded by her family and friends. Her experience in Oz gave her a new appreciation for the real world and for being alive...”

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“Amy no longer appreciates being alive.”

“Our reality is horrible...I hate what happened. I’m not bullshitting. I would swap my life for Amy’s if I could...”

“You aren’t bullshitting. I’m aware how you’ve been here for us. You didn’t have to do any of it. I know that reflects your character. But...she was minding her own business, and those freaks raped her and sliced her up.”

“I’ve been talking a lot about Amy. And I love her. I’ll never meet her and that hurts. She was amazing. I really do love her.”

“And she would have loved you as well. So... *The Wizard of Oz* is about the boundary between reality and fantasy. But my reality is shit, Ilana. I find myself wishing that I could cross that boundary.”

“I know...”, Ilana started.

“In that fantasy world, I’d be reunited with Amy. In that world, there would be no evil...”

Jane started crying. She grabbed some tissue out of the box that was sitting on the table. Ilana waited.

“I don’t have an imagination, Ilana. Oh...I can force myself and have a flash. But...I’m not like...well...you. It just doesn’t flow. I’ve always been envious of people like you.”

Ilana nodded.

“I suppose that’s why I became an agent. The envy. I have a good head for business. I could have started something that...um...um...sold widgets. I became an agent because...on some level...I knew that I would be surrounded by people like you. I didn’t have much of an imagination and I suppose that I hoped to absorb some through reverse osmosis.”

Ilana began to respond but Jane continued:

“I mean imagination is important.”

Jane sighed and took a sip of soda. She positioned one hand between her and Ilana, palm up. With the index finger of the other hand, she depressed a finger.

“I mean, we can list the advantages. Like...problem solving. Imagination allows someone to envision alternative solutions. You know...by thinking creatively...a person can generate new ideas. But...that’s not what I need...I do that through critical reasoning.”

Jane moved to the next finger:

“Then...there’s regulating emotions. Now, we’re talking. When that anti-Semitic psycho murdered my parents, my emotional self was fucked. I deal with it with stuff like Buddhist meditation. But...I suppose that is the opposite of imagination. That’s all about emptying my mind...at least temporarily. So, that not the advantage of an imagination.”

Jane moved to the next finger:

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“Okay...okay...no, wait...I got it...an imagination helps one be empathetic and that develops perspective. Imagination enables someone to develop empathy...understanding. But...I don’t need it for that. I’m always helping people. Doing shit for my friends and I’m big on [tikkun olam](#). We Jews are just good people, Ilana. But...I’m a good person...because that is being rational. After my parents were slaughtered...the height of irrationality...I knew that I had to be the opposite...rational. So...that isn’t about imagination.”

Jane balled her hands into fists and pressed them onto the tabletop.

“No...no...Ilana. I want an active imagination because...and I guess this is why I became an agent...is...um...because I would like to dwell in a world where my parents weren’t shot like rabid dogs for being Jews and the woman I love wasn’t slaughtered like a pig for being queer. I want to experience existence without evil. No pogroms. No Inquisitions No Holocaust. No [Nick Fuentes](#). ”

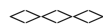
With that, Jane looked upward and shrieked:

“REALITY SUCKS!”

She made eye contact with her guest.

But...there is no Oz...Is there, Ilana?”

Ilana spoke to Jane for another hour.



While her daughter was puking her guts out, Doris received a call from Pastor Simms. She had texted him. She did not go into detail. In part, this was because she wanted to talk to her spiritual mentor and provide the details fresh. Also, she had mixed feelings about texting. It was great for telling someone ‘I’ll be there in 15 minutes.’ It was torture when someone insisted on having a conversation by texting.

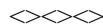
“What’s going on, Doris?”, Pastor Simms said.

“The whole thing is getting worse...spinning out of control. When I came home, she looked like a boy...short haircut...t-shirt and jeans. I fear that she is fully possessed.”

“Oh my...how did you handle it?”

“While I did admonish her...I was calm and reasonable. I fear that she is a pervert...a lesbian.”

“I maintain that we should not go there...not yet...it is too horrible, sick and twisted to contemplate. But you have to be there for her. Keep showing her Christian love.”



After Glazer took her leave of the house in Elysian Valley there was a new broadcast of *The Ingraham Angle* on the Fox News Channel.

Premiering in 2017, the conservative news and opinion-based talk show featured Laura Ingraham. She used the platform to opine on the issues of the day. In addition, she would interview guests about the day's issues and news. Her interview subjects tended to be like-minded.

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Prior to landing her show on Fox, she had a storied career.

After working as a speechwriter in the Reagan administration in the late 1980s, she earned a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Virginia, completing it in '91. This led to her working as a law clerk to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. Subsequent to that, she worked for the New York law firm *Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom*. Ingraham began her media career in the mid-1990s.

Prior to her show on Fox, she hosted the nationally syndicated radio show *The Laura Ingraham Show*.

A passionate supporter of Donald Trump, she acted as an informal advisor during his presidency.

Her career has not been without controversy.

Ingraham has been criticized for making racist and anti-immigrant remarks, including echoing white supremacists. Her critics have accused her of propagating the white nationalist 'replacement theory', suggesting non-white immigrants are replacing white citizens. Her overall theme was that the Democratic Party manipulated immigration to obtain voters that would support them. Towards this end, she warned her viewers that the Democrats 'want to replace you, the American voters, with newly amnestied citizens and an ever-increasing number of chain migrants'. On another occasion, she amplified her concern that undocumented immigrants were changing the fundamental nature of the country by stating that they were coming to 'replace kind of the old America with a new America'. which she argued would benefit Democrats electorally.

While it is true that the Democratic Party has generally supported more liberal immigration policies – such as a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and expanded refugee admissions – there is no evidence to suggest that it has been manipulating immigration for the sole purpose of obtaining new voters.

Some research suggests that immigrants tend to favor Democratic over Republican candidates, which may contribute to the perception that the party is seeking to expand its voter base through immigration policy. A 2019 Pew Research Center study found that 71% of immigrants who became naturalized U.S. citizens between 2010 and 2019 identified as Democrats or leaned Democratic.

Despite this advantage, there was a bipartisan immigration bill that was officially known as the [*Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013*](#) (S. 744). This comprehensive immigration reform bill was introduced in the Senate by a bipartisan group of eight senators, including four Democrats and four Republicans. The bill included provisions that appealed to both sides. These provisions included: a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, increased border security measures, expanded guest worker programs and a merit-based immigration system.

During his 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump opposed the bill. His criticisms of the bill included a concern that border security concerns were not adequately addressed and that it provided 'amnesty' to undocumented immigrants.

After becoming President, Trump continued to oppose similar bipartisan immigration reform efforts, instead pushing for stricter immigration policies and increased border security measures. His opposition was a significant factor in the failure of subsequent bipartisan immigration reform bills to pass.

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Historically, a bipartisan law is viewed as an opportunity to pass future measures that would be more partisan. Trump has been accused of fighting bipartisanship because it would give the Democrats positive PR and would mute immigration as a GOP campaign issue.

This did not stop Ingraham from criticizing diversity, claiming that demographic changes were imposed on Americans without their consent.

On her Fox News show, she made a racist anti-immigrant rant. During this segment, she bemoaned ‘massive demographic changes’ in the U.S., suggesting that these changes were unwelcome and not voted for by Americans.

On another occasion, she questioned whether ‘Black-on-Black’ crime was a larger issue for the Black community than systemic racism within the criminal justice system.

Such comments were widely condemned by politicians, activist groups, and other media figures. This criticism may have been crystallized by the fact that KKK leader David Duke embraced and commended her rhetoric: he stated that it closely paralleled white supremacist talking points.

Ingraham has also faced accusations related to both anti-Semitic and anti-gay remarks.

On her radio show, she [speculated](#) that same-sex marriage would [open the door](#) for legalized polyamory and incest.

The monologue underscored her talents. Unlike a ‘Alex Jones’ who baited and manipulated his audience with naked bombast – red meat for the idiots – she constructed a cogent argument that sounded reasonable as long as it was not subjected to even the slightest scrutiny.

When she made the broadcast, the landmark decision *Obergefell v. Hodges* was being argued before the high court. On June 26, 2015, the decision dropped. It legalized same-sex marriage nationwide on the federal level. In it, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that all state bans on same-sex marriage were unconstitutional, granting same-sex couples rights equal to heterosexual couples under the law. This decision ensured visitation rights and other legal protections for same-sex couples across the United States.

Ingraham argued – and this before the decision dropped – that legalizing same sex marriage would create a slippery slope. Both polyamorous and incestuous unions would be sanctified nationwide. This would rend the moral fabric of our country.

While competently delivered – Ingraham was a skilled attorney and successful presidential speechwriter – the argument was absurd.

It was not the role of the Supreme Court to maintain the status quo. Instead, it was to interpret shifting cultural trends through the lens of the Constitution.

Obergefell ruled that denying same-sex couples the right to marry violated both the Due Process Clause and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. The Court found that marriage is a fundamental right protected by due process. Denying same-sex couples the ability to marry deprived them of this fundamental right without adequate justification. Furthermore, they ruled that laws prohibiting same-sex marriage discriminated against gay and lesbian couples based on their sexual orientation. Such discrimination violated

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the equal protection guarantee, as it treated same-sex couples differently from opposite-sex couples without a compelling reason.

There was no concern about maintaining the status quo: it was – if anything – the opposite. This is understandable as the Court majority – of that period – seem to hold the concept of a separation and state. And ‘traditional marriage’ was a religious construct.

Ingraham was correct that this decision could lead to the sanctification of polyamorous unions. If a traditional union was defined by betrayal and abuse, was better for society than a polygamous grouping built on mutual love and respect?

Jane and Ilana spoke for over an hour that day. They touched on many things. Jane talked about how she was taken by Amy’s ideas about self. And – over the years – how she built on them. Jane liked her friend’s idea of self. An individual had traits that were hardwired, called Authentic Self. Those qualities – emotional, intellectual and sexual – were determined by genetics. Being good at math, gay or transgendered was determined by genetics. At least partially. But these natural qualities put a person in the minority. Even being good at math. Because science questioned the myths that validated the majority traits...being cis or straight.

And religion – at least the institutions of the West – existed to assert the will of the majority by oppressing the minority.

Religion controlled. It went so far as to torture and kill those who made an individual – in the majority – question their fundamental existential nature. This included actively persecuting science, even though that clotheslined human development. People who define their sense of self by believing in nonsense myth hated it. That is because science questions the myths that validate the majority traits...such as being cis or straight.

Ingraham showed this bias by equating same-sex and polygamous unions with an incestuous one. Incest was a health issue. A child born of such a union would tend to manifest traits like hemophilia. According to the Constitution the government had an obligation to protect the general welfare. To sanctify an incestuous union, the government would have to closely monitor it. This would require forced abortions. That was absurd.

A smart woman, Ingraham knew it was a nonsense argument. But she was simply interested in protected the power of the majority over the minority. Her audience was not big on critical analysis.

While unaware of this ‘Authentic Self’ perspective, her critics would question the motivation behind the broadcast about *Obergefell*. Was the motivation speculation about a constitutional question or was it anti-gay bigotry?

[During her time at Dartmouth College](#), she – as the editor of The Dartmouth Review – sent a reporter a recording (that was taped secretly) of a support group meeting for closeted gay students. She then published a transcript in the paper, which included people describing their sexual experiences and talking about their sexual identities. This outed meeting participants. Her brother, Curtis, [publicly criticized her](#), calling her a ‘monster’ and attributed her views to their father: who he described as a Nazi sympathizer, racist, anti-Semite, and homophobe.

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That evening – after Jane and Ilana’s emotionally charged conversation – Ingraham addressed the *Melee at the Omni*.

“We are all aware of the horrible slaughter at the patio bar at the *Omni*. As a woman, I am sickened by it. Now...I am a proud conservative. I recognize that feminism has ‘played itself out’. Assuming that ever had game. It is a political movement...not a women’s movement. It – like the environmental movement – is a godless religion. To be fair...It did have game...at one time. But it turned into a callous attempt by powerful men to control women. Juanita Broaddrick courageously told us how she was raped by Bill Clinton in the spring of 1978. In her 1999 interview, she described how Clinton assaulted her during a gubernatorial campaign stop.”

Ingraham collected herself and continued:

“The callous treatment of women by the Clinton administration confirmed this shift to...women being used as duplicitous pawns in a cynical political game. This manipulation has translated into a lack of intellectual diversity on college campuses. A true woman – a godly one, frankly – will question the prevailing narrative being put out by the DC elites...the Democrats.”

Her face was one thoughtful consternation. She continued:

“Now...give me a moment as I unpack this. I have spoken about the dynamics between elites and regular Americans. And...yes...that is different than the traditional left-versus-right divide. It is clear that the elites—whether in Hollywood, politics, or other spheres—have become disconnected from the concerns and values of everyday Americans. And why? The elites prioritize their own interests – a narcissistic mix of globalism, and cosmopolitanism – over the well-being of regular citizens. This translates into the elites – the Democrats – favoring policies that do not align with the needs and beliefs of ordinary Americans.”

She nodded and said:

“Well, you heard me talk about this before...but what does all of that have to do with the recent tragedy?”

She paused and continued:

“I reject the ‘asking for it’ mentality. Nonetheless, a woman can act in a foolish and...well...arrogant manner. In so doing, she goes and puts herself in harm’s way. Not only her, but she also endangered her friends. That includes the poor woman who suffered horrible – disfiguring – burns. And...no. I am not making excuses for the guys who did this. They were bad men. But, when you go in public, you have to have common sense.”

Ingraham shook her head and continued:

“The religious and cultural divide between the elites and regular Americans is immense. Grand Canyon times ten. While the elites view religion as outdated and irrelevant, many regular Americans hold strong religious convictions. And I’m a regular American. I was raised Baptist but later converted to Catholicism. My faith has always significantly influenced my life...and work. I would not be here if not for my faith.”

After a dramatic pause, she continued:

“The elites – both in Washington and Hollywood – have been working to marginalize religious values and traditions. This has led to a disconnect between the two groups. More than that, they are perverting the morals

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of millions. My condolences – my thoughts and prayers – go out to the victim and her family and friends. But she was clearly a gullible and foolish young woman. She was warped by the elites.”

She said with added gravitas:

“*The elites were controlling her.*”

“Not just her...but countless others. The competing news service *Newsmax* reported earlier today that she was in a polygamous relationship with three other people.”

Pictures of Jim, Brandon and Jane appeared over her shoulder.

“And all of these people are victims. They are victims of the controlling elites. More after this.”

Jane was curled up on the bed and holding her tablet: she was crying. It was the largest bed that they could find. Called an *Alaskan King Size*, it was 9 feet by 9 feet. When the union was whole, it slept the four of them comfortably. The forecasted thunderstorm rolled in. It was a dark and stormy night.

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