

# Kit and Billy

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## Part I.

*Dear Professor Matrka,*

*I hope you've had a good summer so far. I've been trying to keep busy, trying to keep up on my work and to develop some new ideas. I've been thinking about some big topic stuff, like regardless of who or what created humanity, I find myself wondering why there is a need for a creature like us in such a cruel world. Why force something with empathy and memory into such brutality? I suppose it's a bit childish to say that things aren't fair, and my point isn't about whether or not anything is fair, it's about having to be aware that things are unfair when other creatures seem oblivious. The internal experience, knowing what I know, the onslaught of sadness for things I can not change, to feel pain for things that happened a long time ago to people I never met, what's the point? Anyway, here is a poem to that end, I hope it finds you well:*

Why does my heartbreak over and over?

Because I'm weak, still a child,  
forever lost and deeply beguiled  
By a world that seems to thrive on cruelty

I'm like a tree that's forced to bend,  
Defenseless to the howling wind  
I'm shaking from the throws of all my sadness.

Because I'm sick, like a leper  
Drawn to a flame that burns forever  
Marking the ceaseless burden of living.

I feel some truth, I see some pain,  
My thoughts scream faster than a train  
that's running wild from station to station

Love is not enough to stop that wicked sword.  
God can cut me down, but he is not forgiven.

*Dear Katerina,*

*This is good work, some nice imagery and the meter is very lyrical. As for the topic, I like hearing you talk about it, I too have spent some time shaking my fist at an imperfect god or creator. I think the form here could use some refinement, either more repetition or less, it's living in no man's land right now. Thanks for continuing to focus and write this summer, it's been a hot slog and this humidity seems to have made a home here in our fair city for the foreseeable future.*

*Fairness is a concept both ridiculous and innate, of course life isn't fair, but it seems like a sense of justice is born into many of us. Kit, you're young, feisty, angry, clever and forlorn. Please, keep writing, but also find a way to balance the scale in your life, not the whole world, but the slice of earth in front of your face. Try and fix the dripping faucet of misery. To observe and suffer is your right, you do it well, just don't let it crush you without at least trying to make your life better.*

*Sincerely,*

*Dr. Dan Matrka*

## Chapter 1, Billy.

Billy laid on his couch in a state of humid delusion, sweaty and disoriented. The cacophony of trash falling into a garbage truck and the subsequent backup beep of the massive diesel had startled Billy out of an unintended slumber and he struggled to find purchase on reality. The television flickered feebly through muted commercials as he sat up on the couch in his dim and stagnant living room. He tried to wipe the imprint from the pillow's ribbed fabric of the side of his face and felt a mix of sweat, drool and grime from work in his stubbled cheek. With great effort he rose and sauntered sleepily into the kitchen where a glass of water began his return into the world of the living. A second glass drank sloppily over the sink with a splash from the cold tap furthered his rejuvenation.

He'd napped after work while watching a Simpsons rerun and drinking a beer. Whatever dream that had been interrupted by the bangs from the dumpster had dissipated, leaving him unsatisfied as he tried to hold onto the fleeting imagery. He accepted the loss and grabbed another beer from the fridge before walking through his dusty and strangely illuminated dining room towards the answering machine. A red blinking light indicated that he had messages and he hoped there was something going on later that night.

The yellowed blinds of the westward windows cast vividly triangular beams of light across his plaster walls in dramatic variegation and Billy squinted as he passed between layers of intense sunset and shadow. Work had been dirty and physical but he felt excited for a night out as the beer and movement shook off the remaining grog. He bent down to press the answering machine's play button with hopeful anticipation.

Beep.

"Hey Billy, It's Josie. I got your message, I can't hang out tonight, I'm bartending tonight at the Tropicana, not sure who's playing. Stop by if you want but no worries if not, I'm free tomorrow if you want to catch up. Give me a ring tomorrow, bye!"

Beep.

"Hi Billy, it's mom. I hope work today wasn't too bad. Your dad seemed especially tired and dirty. I'm making a vegan squash risotto and will drop off some leftovers tomorrow. Bye!"

Beep.

"Hey dude, I picked up a shift at Little Miami tonight and didn't get a chance to hit the store. Sorry, I couldn't say no to Joaquin. Can we go tomorrow afternoon instead? See ya!"

Beep.

"This call is for the current resident of 25 East Patterson. We're offering special introductory rates on cable television..."

Billy reached down and skipped the message, only to hear that it was the last call he'd gotten and he didn't have any solid plans. His roommate Bruce had taken a new job at a high end gay bar that he was excited about so he wasn't mad that they weren't going to the store, he felt like eating out anyway. He sat back down on the couch, lit a cigarette and flipped through the channels while finishing his beer. He knew there was nothing on but used the brief distraction to suck down a smoke before going to take a shower.

The half double he shared with Bruce was a dilapidated but relatively neat and simple living situation. The floors, walls and windows were in desperate need of replacement or repair but they kept the house clean, if not a little dusty. An upright piano sat against the dining room wall and Billy strolled over to it, set his almost empty beer on top and played a few chords. He had the sheet music for Ruby My Dear, a Thelonius Monk piece he liked, sitting expectantly on the piano's built in stand. He fumbled through the first bar, struggling to make the complex chords move with decent timing and feel. He held down a particularly nice chord, proud and satisfied with the ringing notes despite his inability to take the melody further.

He hopped in the shower, noticing the strange silence of his empty house and feeling restless. After washing off the chimney soot and dust he turned the faucet so that the water got increasingly cold, hoping to suck some of the heat and burn from his skin. He'd been up on a roof with his dad all day cutting out mortar joints on a giant chimney with an angle grinder, absorbing the abrasive cloud of sanded dust and trying to concentrate over the whir of the ferocious little motor. It had been satisfying to complete the terrible task, to rinse the chimney and roof off and see the neatly patterned grooves they had made. They would fill them in with new mortar the next day, a repetitive but simple and low stress task that paired well with a radio and would accommodate a hangover.

He got dressed, donning tight jeans and a western style button up that was paper thin. He grabbed his wallet and smokes and headed out into the hot and steamy evening, lighting a cigarette and considering his dining options. From his front porch he could almost see the Mount, a greasy restaurant with a fantastic bar. He also had craving for a falafel gyro from Campus Donuts and decided to head that way and see if there was a show at Danny's Subterranean.

He passed along college flop house parties where similarly dressed young men drank frothy keg beer, shouting intermittently and distributing high fives with reckless abandon. He passed by a strangely elegant Japanese restaurant that catered mostly to international students but offered the more daring locals complicated and potent variations of seafood. He passed by a courtyard of stout brick bilevel apartments with generous porches and balconies tucked between storefronts and sheltered by a massive oak tree from the busy street.

Foot traffic on the wide and gum mottled sidewalk increased as he neared his destination as students milled from dorms and apartments to bars and varied eateries. Billy would not be distracted by the many burgers, burritos, cheesesteaks or pizza available because he was laser focused on the gyro with a donut chaser. He passed by Remi's, a hip little bohemian bar with a stage for poetry readings and a pool table. The door was propped open and he cast a glance inward to see if he should stop by after dinner; the emptiness and solitude emanating from within dissuaded that notion.

Once within the bright and timeless confines of the Greek diner and donut shop he ordered his meal from the sweetly familiar middle aged woman behind the counter. She wrote the order down in illegible shorthand, spiked and spun the ticket on the rack for the short order cook to see and took Billy's money. He sat at the window, watching passers by and waiting for his food.

He watched a young couple in conversation, walking with shoulders touching shoulders and holding hands. The young man said something that made the woman laugh and she laid her head on him endearingly. When her laugh resolved into a smile, they looked at each other joyfully and kissed before giggling their way beyond Billy's field of vision. The tableaux induced longing into Billy that he would temper with alcohol and weed. Loneliness plagued him in spats and the distractions of flings and one night stands had begun to wear thin. He felt like his friends were all pairing off, that increasingly his nights out were solo missions, fruitless endeavors that only emboldened his descent into dissociative abandon.

## Chapter 2, Kit.

Kit slid quickly across the dimly lit and tightly packed dining room with a tray balanced on her flattened hand. She retrieved a small stand from behind a booth, opened the legs and stooped gracefully to deliver the precarious load onto the waiting straps. She distributed the dishes precisely, feeling strongly about where to grab the plate and how to present each entree. She was not particularly warm to the patrons, she was efficiently serious with an attention to detail that included knowing when she was not wanted. She herself, when dining out, preferred the experience of the staff being present but not part of the conversation, quick with a refill but never lingering.

She despised small talk, accepted it as part of her job but never propagated it and spoke with polite finality, creating opportunities for the mundanity to end with each statement. She had noticed that her coworker Cindy, roughly twenty years her senior and practically a polar opposite from her, took great amusement in Kit's clever way of making tipsy businessmen trip over their words and gravitate towards silence. Kit had watched Cindy work, admiring how she seemingly enjoyed an endless banter with a tinge of un-pursuable flirtation. Kit was sure she received better tips as a result, though she gladly sacrificed the slight gratuity as a means for making the work more tolerable. She didn't despise the patrons, at least not most of them, and even had several regulars with which she would gladly converse.

After she confirmed the food was correct and that drinks were filled, Kit retreated to the bright and clean kitchen to see if her salads were ready for a two top of early thirties professionals on a first date. She had watched the awkwardness and palpable nerves with a sense of compassion mixed with distrust. The man was meek and polite while the woman was loud and flustered. She wondered what they'd be like once they got to know each other, would they be a good fit? She doubted it, sensing that the man's passivity was actually a ruse and that a malice lied beneath the frumpy surface.

The salads sat waiting at the expo line and Kit ferried them to the waiting couple, setting them on to the darkly stained wooden table. She tried to glean more from their body language, the woman was talking about her work and the man sat listening, sipping a coke from a straw and leaning deeply into the plush maroon cushioning. The woman spoke rapidly and with increasing volume despite the story being not particularly interesting. Kit thought they'd have a better chance if they'd ordered alcohol.

She interrupted their conversation briefly to set the salads down and the couple tried to take refuge by engaging her in conversation. She redirected the man's inquiry to his date with practiced subtlety and resumed her rounds, seating new customers and cashing out diners as they completed their meal. As she continued her well practiced routine she stole glances at the clock above the bar, wishing the hands would move magically like in movie montages to when her shift was over.

A slight feeling of annoyance gripped Kit, almost physically manifesting as a tightness in her shoulders. She remembered that she had reluctantly agreed to meet her roommate Nikki after work at the Mount for drinks. She wasn't in the mood and Nikki hadn't persisted, but Kit was keenly aware of the number of times she'd refused her invitations and felt obligated to accept. She was actually grateful that Nikki included her into her active social life because Kit barely knew anyone in Columbus. She was also appreciative that Nikki was persistent because it always took a bit of cajoling to get her out the door and to a party or bar. She'd only been in town for a few months and knew she needed to be around people despite her innate reticence to socializing.

She'd spent the last few years after graduating from college living a half life, working at a low end chain restaurant with no friends while living with her nightmare of a mother in a small town outside Toledo. Her mother decided to sell the house and move to North Carolina with some guy she'd been dating and Kit was forced to relocate and jump-start her life. She had actually found that the man her mother was seeing was pleasant, respectful and distant. She didn't understand what he saw in her mom and figured it would end badly in the near future, but it didn't really matter what happened with

her mom and boyfriend, the move was enough to sever the last tie of a fractured relationship. She left Swanton with a certainty that she'd never go back.

The shift persisted on and Kit wished her boss Frank was around, he always made work more enjoyable. She liked how smooth and relaxed he was, how he was caring without being needy and fatherly without being patronizing. When she'd interviewed for the job they'd talked about all kinds of things, he seemed genuinely interested in her for reasons she didn't understand. She asked him questions but he deflected, redirected and sidestepped so deftly that Kit hardly knew a thing about him without realizing she hardly knew a thing about him. She would think back later at how impenetrable his privacy was, his greatest defense seemed to be making the questioner begin talking about themselves. Kit knew that most people liked to talk about themselves but felt embarrassed that she'd fallen into his trap.

On her first day at work she noticed him keeping an eye on her, even drifting by for no obvious reason as she took orders or brought the checks out to her tables. When she clocked out he had the bartender pour two beers. He said something like welcome aboard before clinking his glass to hers. She told him that she thought she'd already been hired and he said something cool like, don't know till you know. His confidence in her had helped pull her out of a deep sadness, cracking the ice she'd gotten trapped under.

### Chapter 3, Billy.

After he finished eating, Billy left a few bucks next the neatly stacked ruins of his meal and shouldered the heavy glass door. The bells jangled with his departure and the heavy hot air wafted into the diner briefly as Billy walked away. He lit up and drifted down the boulevard with a full stomach and a thirst for alcohol.

The entrance to Danny's Subterranean beckoned ahead, a custard colored marquee sliced into the skyline and denoted the evening's agenda. Billy read the band names with no sense of recognition but sauntered down the stairs regardless. At the first landing, a mural had been painted many years before of a corseted woman in a Victorian cafe. Her bosom and open arms thrust outwards and beckoned the viewer into her Viennese nightscape; where bespectacled men congregated in the background and long cigarettes dangled over chaliced cocktails. This alluring woman, with her delicate red curls falling across her silky smooth skin, had no obvious connection to the dank and low ceilinged cellar beyond.

Billy stepped into the hallway below, nodded at the vaguely familiar doorman and saddled up to the bar before scanning the stage for clues regarding the type music that would be happening. Punk kids with Mohawks and a few guys in makeshift zoot suits let Billy know it was probably a ska band up next and he anticipated an early exit. The bartender came his way, a giant of a man who Billy had been afraid of until actually talking to him and finding out he was pretty funny and not threatening.

"Shot and a beer"

The man nodded and turned away to procure the drinks. It was slow and he came back right away. Billy downed the shot and the bartender lingered.

"You here for the show tonight?"

"Nah, just out walking and wasn't sure who was playing. I think I'm headed to Charlie's but I wanted a drink before heading back that way."

"You know the shows are listed in the paper, right?" He teased.

"Yeah, but I was down here getting a gyro anyway so I figured I'd drop in. I thought you might be lonely."

"Me? Never, not when I've got assholes like you to keep me company. Who's playing at Charlies, wait, let me guess, you don't know?"

"Guilty as charged" said Billy, paying for the drinks and guzzling the beer. The bartender ambled towards an eager woman with face piercings and pink hair who looked all of fifteen. Billy watched as she procured her ID and the bartender was satisfied, reaching down into the cooler for her beer. He waved goodbye after finishing his drinks and nodded to the wildly stoned doorman on his way out.

The night air was still an oppressively wet heat and the smell of peppers and onions blasted Billy from a street vendor's grill. He began the long walk North towards Charlie's and his house, smoking feverishly while sticking his hands in his pockets. As he passed Lane Avenue and stepped out of the bright lights from the shops, he saw a figure sprawled on the concrete ahead. A thick blanket laid atop a mostly covered man's body, feet stuck out absurdly and a row of malt liquor tallboys stood vigil over the sleeping form. Billy eyed a styrofoam cup with some change in it and fished a few quarters out of his pocket. He dropped them in the cup with a tinny thud and kept moving, although his thoughts remained with the homeless man.

He was always so bothered by the way society had developed and allowed for homelessness to persist. It had been something he thought about for a long time because his mother worked at a community center and did outreach in that community. When he talked to her about the problem, he often felt helpless and confused. She only knew how to help an individual, she admitted that the problem was systemic but she had no agency over the entirety of anything. Billy found that frustrating

but she said there was value in helping the individual, that big changes would start with small acts. Billy wondered if putting a coin into the man's cup counted or if it made things worse.

Steve, Billy's father, had very different opinions than his mother Sandy. Steve had become hardened to the problem after failing to prevent his brother's descent into debilitating alcoholism and rugged homelessness. After his brother died, Steve was overwhelmed with guilt. Sometimes Billy heard his parents arguing, Steve would say that Sandy's ideas of helping the individual faltered when the individual refused help. She would say that you can choose to save someone, but you can't choose who you save. That didn't make Steve feel any better, although Billy could see that it was true. They worked through it, Sandy had incredible compassion and navigated her own stance while keeping Steve close and cared for through the ordeal.

Billy had been young when his uncle died, only twelve. He and his brother Adam didn't understand the situation and had always been a little scared of their uncle. He could be a little funny and charming, but was also prone to intense mood swings. Steve would be grumpy for days after each visit and Billy felt a sense of guilty relief when it was all over. He remembered seeing his cousin Tony at the funeral after a few years of him having been away, he'd been living in Florida with his mother. Billy couldn't stand him but knew his life had been really unfair and terrible.

Tony was a bully, he'd taken Billy and Adam's toys, pushed them around and intimidated them when Billy's parents weren't around. For reasons Billy understood but resented, Steve let Tony move in with them for a year after Donny died before finally kicking him out. Thankfully for Billy and Adam, Billy had hit a growth spurt and was bigger than Tony, he could protect himself and his brother. He was only a few years older than Billy, but had slipped into the kind of drinking and drug abuse that aged him rapidly. He did several stints in jail for small crimes and eventually wore out his welcome with family and friends to the point where he was living on the street for most of the year. Somehow in their adulthood, Billy and Tony's relationship had shifted to where Billy found himself looking out for Tony when he could, despite his distaste for spending time with him.

Billy's thoughts had carried him to the door of Charlies as if no time had passed and he felt almost surprised when he looked at the sign swinging above the entryway in the slightly burgeoning breeze. He shook off the memories and walked in the bar with gusto, seeing some acquaintances and looking forward to having a drink.

## Chapter 4, Nikki.

Nikki looked at herself in the mirror as she used a curler on her hair. She had put the bulk of her bright red hair into a high bun but had let several locks down on either side of her face in a slightly asymmetrical shape. She enjoyed dressing up, going out and looking a certain way. Despite what people in her hipster orbit assumed, she did it for herself more than for anyone else. She knew that she had chosen to ingratiate herself into a somewhat shallow world of mostly affluent suburbanites, but she loved the music and the bars regardless of a wildly different upbringing than many of her peers.

She had grown up poor in rural Indiana with no access to culture or decent education. She moved to Columbus for the University and couldn't believe how different the city was from what she'd experienced. All she'd ever known was an abusive home where she was forced to be surrogate mother to her three little sisters from the time she was eight. At first she resented the other kids in the scene, but over time she had learned that while many of her friends seemed to have had easy lives, just about no-one goes unscathed through childhood and even the suburbs have their own sets of problems.

Kit was an unexpected twist into her admittedly directionless post college life. She let her move into her apartment without having ever met her, based solely out of need and one phone conversation in which she gleaned that Kit was serious, private and responsible. She had mentioned to a friend that she needed a roommate and they said someone from grad school had sent an email looking for a room. She followed up and determined there wasn't likely to be a better option and after a week of awkward exchanges and over politeness, they began opening up and forming a real friendship.

Nikki knew better than to pry, but Kit was hiding something. Or hiding from something. It didn't feel dangerous, at least not for Nikki. It was more that Kit was managing a subsurface despair, a heightened startle reflex and the overwhelming sensation that something bad was going to happen to her. Nikki resolved to let Kit explain her maladies in her own time, knowing from her own life how dangerous it can feel to share the pain that has been inflicted upon one's self.

The phone rang and she carefully set the curler down and ran to the kitchen.

"Hello?"

"Hey Nikki, it's Stephanie, what time do you want to meet up?"

"Hey Steph, I'll be ready in ten."

"Great, I'm super hungry. I'll see you soon!"

"See ya" she said, hanging up and going back to the bathroom to finish her hair. Before she left, she wrote a note for Kit on the table.

*Hey Kit, heading to the Mount. Hope you can make it. I'll have my car so can drive us home.*

*-Nikki*

When Nikki turned the key to her dark red Ford Taurus station wagon, she said a little prayer, asking anyone who was listening for her car to start. To her relief, the gods had shown her mercy and the engine turned over. She crossed the river with the windows rolled down, the Breeders blasting from the stereo. Her good luck continued as she found a parking spot right out front. As she stepped out of the car she saw Billy.

"Hey Billy, whatcha up to!"

"Oh hey Nikki, not much, was just having a drink at Charlie's and was thinking about heading home." He said while fishing a cigarette out of his pocket. Nikki could tell he was already bit drunk. She gave him a once over as he lowered his head, dipping the cigarette into flame. His curly black hair flopped over his thick eyebrows and was wet with sweat around the ears. She liked his style, classic and simple and had considered dating him at one point before deciding to stick with dating women. She still considered herself Bi but had been less interested in men with each passing year.

“Here, light mine” asked Nikki after procuring her own cigarette. He obliged and Nikki cupped her hands around his, pulling the flame gently into the tightly packed leaf.

“Sure, but tell me this. How come we never ended up going out?” Nikki laughed.

“Oh Billy, you know why. You missed your shot, I drove all the way out to the suburbs and kissed you on New Year’s eve and you waited a full month before calling me. I moved on.”

“I guess I played it too cool, although it wasn’t on purpose, I didn’t have your number and it was cold out. Winter kept us apart.”

“Yeah I know, I started seeing Rena right around then, she was just in the next bedroom over so I saw her all the time.”

“Oh yeah, we went to high school together. Well if you change your mind, you know where to find me.” Nikki laughed again, flattered by Billy and enjoying his drunken flirtation.

“Don’t hold your breath honey. You want to come get a drink with us?”

“Who’s us? But yeah, most likely yes.” Said Billy as they began walking towards the Mount.

“Greg and Stephanie, and my roommate is coming after work.”

“Rena? I thought she moved to Portland?”

“She did, I got a new roomie, her name is Kit. You’ll like her, she doesn’t fuck around. She says what’s on her mind and she’s super cute.”

“Oh great, I can make a fool of myself in front of a beautiful woman!”

“Wouldn’t be the first time.”

“It’s kind of my speciality.” He said in a silly voice.

“Oh Billy, you’re something. Let’s get a drink!” She said, pulling his arm and teetering on her heels as she burst into the restaurant.

## Chapter 5, Billy.

Billy held on to Nikki's arm as they pushed through the swinging door that separated the small entry foyer from the dining room. Music blared from the glowing jukebox and smoke filled the thick and greasy air. Christmas lights were strung loosely from booth to booth, illuminating the painted tile ceiling and glimmering across the bottle tops of the long and well stocked bar.

"Looks like we're the first ones here. Let's have drink here while we wait for the stragglers." Proposed Nikki and Billy obliged. He liked walking in with her on his arm, even if she'd snubbed his advances. She was very beautiful and her flamboyant floral print dress clung tightly to every curve. Her skin was almost golden, he'd never asked but thought she might be Japanese. Billy had noticed that Nikki was cagey about her past and wasn't entirely sure where she'd lived before coming to Columbus.

"Hey Bonnie" said Billy.

"Hey Billy, hey Nikki."

"Hey" said Nikki coolly and Billy noticed the harsh tone. After they ordered drinks and Bonnie walked away, Billy turned to Nikki, and asked her something quietly.

"What was that about?"

"Bonnie blames me for Rena moving out West."

"Why? I thought the break up wasn't that bad."

"It wasn't for her, Rena had planned on moving to Portland before we even started dating, a detail I wish she would've divulged before I fell in love with her."

"Shit, that sounds messy."

"It is, Bonnie blames me, I blame Rena, Rena acts like nothing happened and that we were just a fling. That's what I get for being a romantic that tries to act cool."

"Huh, I had no idea. Sorry." Said Billy, wanting to change the subject since it was clearly upsetting Nikki to talk about Rena. He began thinking about what she'd said earlier.

"So you just took in a new roommate sight unseen? What if she was a psycho or something?"

"Yeah, I guess I was nervous but it worked out. Some of us don't know half the damn town so we have to take a few risks here and there." She said.

"Sure, sure, but what if she does weird shit like lick your food when you're gone?" Teased Billy.

"Gross Billy, Kit doesn't lick my food. What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Fuck if I know. And I don't know half the damn town, maybe three eighths or something but not half."

"Close enough, especially around here."

Bonnie came by with their drinks and addressed Billy without looking Nikki's way.

"Hey Billy, how are your folks doing?"

"Good! Dad and I are still working together, it was a hot one today."

"Sure was. I gave up my lunch shift so I haven't seen them for a while, tell Steve and Sandy I said hello!"

"Will do Bonnie!" Replied Billy after taking a big sip from his beer.

"See, you know everybody" said Nikki and Billy shrugged.

"You know her too."

"Ok, bad example." She was going to elaborate further but Greg and Stephanie walked in and Nikki rose from her stool to greet them.

"Hey guys I found Billy out on the sidewalk." Said Nikki excitedly and Billy turned to greet everyone. They squeezed into a booth, Nikki sliding in with Billy while Greg and Stephanie sat across the table. Bonnie came out from behind the bar and took their drink order.

"Nikki, please tell me the rumor I heard at work today isn't true" said Greg.

"Yep, I quit this morning. I got into it with Rob and, well, I guess I said some stuff that makes it hard to come back from." Billy wasn't all that surprised to hear that Nikki had quit working at the natural foods store.

"Shit, I'm going to miss you, everyone always leaves."

"Sorry honey, maybe you should join the club?"

"I don't know, maybe. You got a plan on where you're going next?"

"Not yet, I'll start the search tomorrow." Replied Nikki.

Billy mostly listened as they talked about work, he shopped at the grocery but had never worked there. He didn't have a lot to add and felt pretty tipsy. He just kept riding the feeling, looking around at the people in other booths and listening to the music.

"Kit should be coming a little later, I'm surprised she agreed to come out." Said Nikki and Billy realized she was talking to him.

"Oh yeah, is she kind of a home body or whatever?" He asked, slurring his speech a bit and realizing it had been a while since he said anything out loud.

"Maybe, I mean she's not shy, she just keeps to herself."

"That gives her more time to lick your food and rearrange your sock drawer." Said Billy and Nikki laughed.

"What are you talking about Billy?" Asked Stephanie.

"Billy thinks he's funny, he keeps insinuating that my roommate is crazy, even though he lives with Bruce who is totally certifiable." Said Nikki.

"Bruce would never do such a thing, or he would, but it would be arty and cool." protested Billy.

"You live with Bruce?" Asked Greg.

"Yeah, he moved in with me a few months ago when my brother and his friend moved out. We actually lived together in high school too."

"Really? How did that work?" Asked Stephanie.

"He moved in with my family during our junior year. Long story short, his parents aren't cool with him being gay, his dad got a job offer in Arizona and an arrangement was made where he moved in with us."

"Jesus Billy, that's devastating, but thank god he had you guys." Said Nikki.

"Maybe, I mean Bruce and I are best friends so I think we thought it was awesome, his parents suck."

"Maybe they suck, but they're his parents and they just left him with your family, that's abandonment." Said Stephanie.

"I guess, you'll have to ask Bruce. We had a fucking blast, but maybe it bothered him."

"Where did your brother move to?" Asked Greg.

"Ithaca, he's doing grad school out there." Answered Billy, surprised to have become the focal point of the conversation. Bonnie drifted by and took another order of drinks, Billy ordered a shot and a beer then stumbled to the bathroom. While taking the kind of long and voluminous piss often associated with beer drinkers, Billy looked down at a small piece of graffiti on the tile wall.

*"Susan Balfor is a slut"*

Billy laughed because that particular tag had been painted over and rewritten several times. Poor Susan Balfor was a local news anchor and soccer mom, probably not a slut and probably completely unaware of her name being besmirched in the men's room of the Mount.

When Billy got back to the booth, his drinks were waiting and the conversation had returned to stories about the natural foods store that they all worked at, or previously worked at in Nikki's case. Billy felt like the room got incrementally darker and smokier and their booth had quickly become a

repository of bottles, cans and crowded ash trays. Billy found himself getting sleepy and the thought of slipping out and going home started to sound really nice. He was about to announce his departure when he heard the beginning of the John Coltrane version of "My Favorite Things".

"God I love this song" said Billy.

"Yeah, but someone's always playing it on the jukebox here." Complained Nikki.

"I know, but every time I listen to it I hear something different, it's incredible."

"What do you mean?" Asked Stephanie.

"Listen to the ride cymbal, the pattern is always varying, and the chords are so dense but simple in this part." Said Billy, McCoy Tyner was taking a piano solo.

"It sounds nice but I don't know what to listen for with the ride cymbal." Said Stephanie.

"That's cool, I can try and explain it. It's the soft and warm percussive sound, hear how it kind of goes between triplets and straight time without ever leaving the groove, how it's always swinging?"

"Not really, but I don't know what you meant by triplets. Sorry Billy, I think I listen to music differently than you." Admitted Stephanie.

"That's fine, I kind of get into the weeds with music stuff." Said Billy.

"I don't mind this song, but I'm not super big into Jazz." Said Stephanie.

"If you like this song than you probably need to focus on cool jazz, like Miles Davis and Bill Evans and Coltrane, but specifically this era because some of their later stuff is different, and their early stuff is more bop which is cool too." Said Greg, Billy nodded in agreement.

"Kind of Blue is a classic album that is super approachable." Added Billy.

"You ever hear his version of It Never Entered My Mind?" Asked Greg.

"Of course, Red Garland has that hypnotic triplet piano line-" said Billy

"Again with the triplets!" Interrupted Nikki and Billy laughed, acknowledging the niche direction the conversation was going.

"Sorry Nikki. I'll have Greg over sometime and we can discuss Jazz privately, and actually, I don't think he's playing triplets now that I think of it." Said Billy and Nikki rolled her eyes.

"How romantic and informative. Now use your local celebrity status to get Bonnie's attention so we can get some more drinks!" Billy chuckled at Nikki, not minding that she was ribbing into him and knowing she was trying to avoid talking to Bonnie. He turned and leaned out of the booth a bit so he could see where Bonnie was. She was taking a couple's order a few booths down and saw Billy's strangely contorted torso, giving him a nod to let him know she got the message.

She came by shortly thereafter and got everyone's order before heading off to the next table. Billy downed the remainder of whiskey from his glass and had enough of a buzz that the alcohol had almost no bite. He rolled the fluid around in his mouth, enjoying the mid level quality of the drink he'd ordered before swallowing. His beer had one last sip in it that he downed before Bonnie came back with new drinks and a tray to clear some of the empties. Billy took a sip from the strong and aromatic IPA he'd ordered while Stephanie told a story about her roommate.

"So she called me when I was at work the other day, I was there early for a brunch shift and she asked if I had a guy stay over at the house. She knows Greg obviously so I wasn't sure what she meant because Greg was visiting his brother in Wisconsin that weekend. I told her no and she said that's weird because there's some random guy passed out on the couch! While she's talking to me the guy wakes up and she started freaking out."

"Holy shit Steph, who was he?" Asked Nikki.

"We didn't know at first. She told him she was on the phone with the police, which kind of made me laugh even though it was scary, and the guy was saying sorry or whatever and ran out the door. Anyway, it turns out it's this guy that lives a few doors down. My roommate Kendra ran into him the next day, he got super drunk and went up to the wrong house. He felt really bad and left a six pack of beer on the porch as an apology."

"Do your houses look similar?" Asked Nikki.

“A little, and I guess we must’ve left the front door unlocked, it was pretty fucking weird. Kendra is being nice about it but I know it freaked her out. Greg put that chain thing on the door.” Said Steph.

Billy finished his beer as the conversation continued on about weird things people do when they’re really drunk. Normally he’d have a lot to add from both personal experiences and things he’d seen, but he was really tired and just listened.

“Hey guys, I think I’m going to head out, I’m beat.”

“Yeah, I thought you’d already fallen asleep over there a few times” said Nikki. “I wanted you to meet Kit though, I really think you two would get along. I still can’t believe you haven’t met Kit, you know everyone!”

“Yeah, that’s strange, I’m surprised I haven’t seen her around.”

“Have I met her yet?” Asked Stephanie.

“Yeah, she was at that show we went to at the Tropicana a few weeks ago.”

“What does she look like?” Asked Stephanie, trying to remember who was at that show.

“She’s short, she has freckles and kind of a pixie cut.”

“Oh yeah, she’s beautiful. I like the way she dresses too.”

“How does she dress? asked Billy.

“Um, like an artsy factory woman from the 1950s?” Said Stephanie, her and Nikki laughed.

“That’s a great description. Let me try” said Nikki and she seemed to be thinking for a moment before adding, “I guess she dresses like a European art dealer on the weekend.”

“Or maybe a junior architect doing a site visit at a high end bungalow in San Francisco for a famous client who likes to stay casual?” Gussed Greg and Stephanie let out a big laugh. They were drunk and having a good time. Billy was lost but laughed along with the group anyway.

“Exactly! She’s got classic style, very mature. Kind of like you Billy, expect the mature part. And the classy part.” Said Nikki and Stephanie laughed while Billy rolled his eyes..

“Very funny, when is she coming?” Asked Billy. Nikki looked up at the clock above the bar and saw that it wasn’t even midnight yet.

“Oh honey, she’s probably still an hour from getting here. Tell you what, come to a party with me and Kit in a few days, it’s over by the Tropicana at Kim’s place. You two should come as well” said Nikki to Greg and Stephanie.

“Yeah, I think Bruce mentioned that party. That sounds good, I’ll see you there. Good seeing you all!” He said with a little mustered enthusiasm that had more to do with the idea of getting into bed than going to a party. He slid out of the booth and went to the bar. He waited for Bonnie to make a couple of Manhattan’s then gave her a twenty to settle his tab.

“Hey Bonnie, can you do a favor for me?”

“What is it honey?”

“Can you cut Nikki some slack? Rena broke her heart when she left. I know you miss her, but Rena decided to move out west when we were still in high school, it wasn’t Nikki.”

“Damn it Billy, she never told me that! I’m sorry, I like Nikki, I just thought it was bad news when they shifted from roommates to girlfriends.”

“Yeah, that was probably a bad idea, but try not to hold it against her, she’s pretty upset about the whole thing. I think she really cares about Rena.”

“Alright Billy, get out of here, I’ve got drinks to deliver.” She said with the hint of sadness behind her normally gruff affect, pushing the tip money he’d left back to him and walking away briskly.

When he stepped outside the fresh air woke him up, the once heavy humid air had been swept out by a stiff breeze. It smelled faintly of rain and he lit what he guessed would be his second to last cigarette of the night. He noticed a young woman approaching from up the street. She had her hands in her pockets and was looking down at the sidewalk. She walked smoothly but with determination.

He slowed and watched, she had short chestnut hair and freckles on her cheeks and wore a thin denim blouse over what might have been a pair of men's Jeans. She looked up as they neared and Billy found himself staring into a pair of giant hypnotic emerald eyes. Flecks of gold and purple lined the pupil as if displaying a heretofore unnamed cosmic event. She gave a polite smile, barely moving her dark red lips but softening her face from the tense concentration it had been modeling before. Billy took a few steps past her before turning to look at her again.

Something about her seemed familiar and he thought about the description Nikki had given of her roommate. He watched her pull the door to the Mount open and the blue neon lights from the window made her face shimmer with silver clarity. Before she stepped into the bar, she turned and returned Billy's gaze stoically. She hung in the door for a split second then slipped into the dark entryway and out of sight. Billy stared at the space she had just occupied for a little while before resuming his journey. He wondered if that was Kit, even though Nikki thought she'd be there later. He hoped it was and was actually feeling excited about going to the party. He even considered walking back into the Mount to see if that was indeed Nikki's roommate, but decided it would be too awkward.

Those eyes, he could tell that she had been thinking about something before she looked at him. When she turned her gaze up to acknowledge him he felt disarmed, secondary, stunned. Her face was so beautiful, strong and yet soft. Billy was surprised by his sudden fascination with the woman and kept thinking about her face. If only he had said something so he could have heard her voice, even it was only to tell him to fuck off, that would've given him more information. He thought about the confident and penetrating look she'd given him before disappearing into the bar and walked aimlessly, finding himself at his front door without having been aware of the last two hundred yards of footsteps. A feeling of longing overwhelmed him, the alcohol magnified rather than numbed the sensation. He used to quip that he was alone, not lonely. That felt like a lie, Billy was aware that he wanted to be with someone and had to work hard to shake the sudden wave of emotions that seeing the beautiful woman had caused.

He snapped out of the intoxicating reverie, chalking up his sudden infatuation to a combination of alcohol, exhaustion and the perfect lighting from the Mount's ancient neon signage falling gracefully onto her gently upturned face. Of course he was going to get lost in her pale porcelain smoothness, of course he was going to lose himself temporarily in the infinite depths of her jade green eyes. He hoped he'd see her again, but decided that even if that was to be the only time, that he would be able to recall the image for the rest of his life. He knew what song he wanted to hear and fumbled with his keys while thinking about the woman.

Once inside his dark and silent apartment he grabbed a beer and went back to the living room, flipping through the records and finding Bob Dylan's Blood On The Tracks. He counted the grooves and dropped the needle down. A few pops and a hiss, then the jangly and perfect acoustic guitar started playing Shelter from The Storm. He smoked his last smoke of the night and waited for the line that he'd been thinking of.

*"Beauty walks a razor's edge, someday I'll make it mine"*

He sang along, finishing his beer and laughing at himself. His tiredness melted with the infinite burgeoning thoughts and longing the woman had inspired. He went to the kitchen and poured himself a mugful of mid shelf whiskey and went back to the record player, looking for songs that would help define his mood as he took his inebriation past functional and into the staggers. He smoked and drank until the room was spinning faster than the record on the platter, eventually steering his body slowly towards his room and into bed.

## Chapter 6, Kit.

Kit stepped into the Mount, escaping the bright lights and street noise of the hot and humid summer night. She paused in the small and quiet wood paneled foyer to let her eyes adjust to the dimness and to prepare herself for the influx of stimulus opening the inner door would bring forth. She looked at the show flyers tacked to the cork board on the sidewall without focusing, instead thinking about the man outside and the intense way he had stared at her.

She had a thought of going back outside and asking him what his problem was, why had he been looking at her like that? She decided that he wasn't being crude or lascivious or even intimidating, but he had still managed to unsettle her. Her eyes settled on a poorly copied flyer with a childlike drawing of a dog urinating on the Whitehouse and information for a protest rally downtown. She laughed at the irreverence of the drawing before pushing the old wooden door into the restaurant open and letting the smoky atmosphere spread into the quiet foyer momentarily.

The music was loud and moody, some kind of cool jazz that she enjoyed but couldn't name. Nikki stood and waved, emanating a tractor beam of affection across the dim expanse towards Kit who shook the last vestiges of her reticence off her narrow shoulders. She walked towards her, aware that she was on display to all the other patrons who would watch each newcomer as they entered, evaluating them for attractiveness, availability or general hipness. It always made her uncomfortable to be watched, she hardly knew anyone in Columbus so felt like the scenester women scowled at her while the men analyzed her like she was fresh meat. She was slightly offended by the whole experience because she didn't want anything from the scene, she preferred being alone and had tried to cast herself as an outsider with no status.

Nikki gave her a warm hug before sliding back into the booth and making room for Kit to sit down. Kit sat in the exact spot where Billy had been only minutes before, but with all the drinks, sounds and laughter, the group failed to acknowledge the quick exchange from Billy to Kit in their midst. After cursory greetings, Nikki resumed a story she had been telling while Kit ordered a beer from Bonnie, who had just swung by upon seeing Kit walk in. A large pile of glasses had accumulated at the table and twinkled as the Christmas lights swayed in the small breeze afforded by dusty ceiling fans. Kit listened while lighting a cigarette, letting her shoulder touch Nikki's arm and absorbing the mellow warmth of the evening. As Nikki continued on animatedly, the group listened gleefully and laughed and smiled, letting a closeness and mild intoxication fuel their vibrant conversation.

Kit saw so much kindness and pleasure, part of her wanted to be cynical but another part of her wanted to believe that maybe she was wrong about people, maybe some level of caring and love exists without an undercurrent of need and manipulation. Nikki turned to Kit and Kit blushed, not having been focused on what was being said and hoping she wasn't being rude.

"How was work tonight Kit, rough shift? You haven't hardly said a thing since you got here."

"It was ok a little slow, sorry if I'm out of it. I've been thinking about all the stuff I need to prepare for my advisor and keep getting distracted."

"Who's your advisor again?" asked Stephanie. She and Kit were both at the university but Stephanie was in a different department.

"I'm with Dr. Matrka." Answered Kit, raising her voice a bit to be heard across the table.

"Oh yeah, I've read some of his stuff. He's a good writer, kind of old school. What's he like to work with?"

"He's ok, a little vague or generic with his feedback sometimes but he can be very insightful too, I'm not sure what causes him to engage or to check out. Sometimes he'll ask a really complicated question, then listen to me stumble through what feels like bullshit for a while before responding, but the responses he gives me are usually positive so I'm trying to get used to his demeanor and not let it get to me."

“Oh boy do I get that, I feel like my professors love to let me talk myself out of the right answer and into some meandering crap that everyone can pounce on. The other students are so competitive, it can be brutal.”

“Oh, that sounds like a nightmare. My cohort isn’t competitive, we’re a bunch of softies. We prefer to talk shit behind each other’s backs rather than do anything confrontational.” Said Kit and Stephanie laughed. Stephanie began talking to Greg about a story she remembered him telling from his time studying computer science and engineering and Greg laughed before launching into a story of young men behaving badly but in a nerdy way.

Kit listened politely while letting her mind wander to a short story she had been working on over the summer. She needed to send it to her advisor in the next few days and had read and reread it so many times she couldn’t tell if it was any good anymore. She considered getting a bit drunk and high and then reading it after coming out of the inevitable hangover. Something about breaking her psyche down and resetting about seemed logical so she ordered a shot and a beer when Bonnie came back to see if they wanted another round.

“I’ll have a shot too” said Nikki, excited that Kit wanted to tie one on.

“You two in?” Asked Bonnie and Greg shook his head.

“No thanks, I’m driving.”

“I’ll take one” chirped Stephanie and Bonnie nodded before heading to the bar to get the order started.

“You hear about the new Lavender store opening soon?” Asked Greg.

“Yeah, that’ll fuck the Campy up.” Replied Nikki.

“What’s Lavender?” Asked Kit.

“It’s a big chain grocery store that’s like a corporate version of Campy.”

“Oh, that sucks.” Said Kit, having a predisposed dislike of corporate entities.

“Where is it going to be?” Asked Stephanie.

“Just behind Canadian Coffees in that big building by the ravine.” Answered Greg.

“Yeah, that’s really close. I hope the Campy doesn’t close!” Exclaimed Stephanie, she was looking at Greg worriedly but he didn’t seem to care.

“I liked it better before I worked there” said Nikki and Greg nodded knowingly. Bonnie approached the table with a tray full of shot glasses and beer bottles. Drinks were passed around and Bonnie left to check on the next booth while everyone except Greg put their shot glasses up for a toast.

“If the Campy must die, then let it be honorable and painless, and if it finds a way to survive, then let us learn from its humble resilience.” Said Kit. The clinked glasses and drank their cheap whiskey quickly before chasing the liquid with beer.

“Where did that toast come from?” Asked Greg.

“Kit always makes the best toasts, it’s kind of her thing” said Nikki and Kit blushed.

They fell back into conversations about politics and Kit listened to Nikki drive home a point about how capitalism requires some amount of a homeless population in order to keep low income workers in line. Kit considered what she was saying then thought about the diatribes her father used to go on at the dinner table when she was in high school. He was a bitter conservative and a terrible alcoholic, everything he said was wrapped in malice and hopelessness. Kit found it hard to know how to engage in politics because he had been so angry and domineering that any opposing opinion was met with scorn and derision. Her older brother had left the home before graduating high school but Kit remembered their arguments. She knew her father was wrong, scared and generally ignorant, but she had no idea how to communicate with someone so abrasive and entrenched in their own misery.

After Nikki had finished her point, Greg seemed eager to agree and posited an argument that was remarkably similar to what Nikki had just said but with a focus on non governmental secular community groups rather than state funded safety net programs. Kit wasn’t sure if she thought community groups could do enough against a massive problem like homelessness, but didn’t feel like

chiming into the conversation because it seemed like governmental programs were failing too, it felt hopeless. She often became paralyzed by the enormity of problems and struggled to take any action other than feeling obliquely sad. Stephanie seemed to be about to respond when Bonnie returned to the table and they ordered another round. Kit was feeling a buzz but ordered another shot and a beer, wanting to take the intoxication further.

When the drinks arrived, Kit downed the shot and waited to take a sip of beer, feeling the power and bite of the whiskey from a slightly numbed position. Eventually she sipped the beer and could feel the alcohol rising up from her chest and seeping mysteriously into the rest of her body.

She didn't need very much alcohol to get drunk and was contentedly sleepy. She put her head on Nikki's shoulder and listened to the music. It had transitioned away from jazz and had been bouncing between the Pixies, the Smiths and Morphine when a staccato snare drum cut through the room after an Indian style guitar riff. Paint It Black blasted through the smoke and Kit found herself tapping the table to the beat. She sat back up and lit a cigarette, not paying attention to the conversation at all and letting the music fill and shape her mood.

In the giant mirrors behind the bar she could see an older couple dancing by the jukebox and singing along. She watched the heavily tattooed woman pound the top of the nearby booth while the man shuffled his feet, still hunched over the jukebox and making more selections. She waited anxiously for their next song, liking how happy they seemed.

"What's got you all hot and bothered?" Asked Nikki.

"Oh, I was just watching the couple by the jukebox. I love that Stones song, and it was really cute, they were dancing, look!" Said Kit and Nikki turned as the couple continued a small tight dance in the narrow aisle between the last booth and the jukebox. They had played Urge Overkill's version of Girl, You'll Be A Woman Soon and were acting like John Travolta and Uma Thurman from Pulp Fiction. They were drunk and fearless, Nikki watched them and laughed along with Kit.

"You guys about ready to head out?" Asked Greg.

"Of course honey, it's late." Said Nikki as she finished her beer. Kit stood up and Nikki slid out, grabbed Kit into an embrace and made her dance with her for a few bars. Kit was just drunk enough to go along with it and Bonnie came up behind them gracefully to start clearing the table.

"Don't let me stop you girls, the world needs more dancing." She said with surprising sweetness as Kit steered Nikki out of her way. They laughed, knowing they were being monitored by the endlessly judgmental cool kids, but it was late and it felt good to let go of all the worries for a minute. The couple by the jukebox were watching them, enjoying that they'd started a commotion. Nikki was never afraid to make a scene. She spun Kit then held her back and leaned her into a dip before pulling her into a hug.

"Oh Nikki, that was fun, but I thought you were going to lose me for a second there"

"I'd never let you fall babes, I've got you." She said while still laughing but Kit knew she meant it. Maybe it was because she was drunk, but for Kit it felt so good to hear something like that, she didn't think anyone, friend or family, had said something so sweet and meaningful to her for a very long time. Her eyes became glassy with just the hint of a tear and she hugged Nikki tightly.

After the moment was over they paid their tab, the rest of the bar had moved on from their scene and a new song was playing. Nikki took Kit's hand and they walked back outside into a much cooler and slightly breezy night. They leaned against the bright blue facade and lit cigarettes while waiting for Greg and Stephanie to come outside. Once the group was all together again they said their goodbyes and split up, heading in opposite directions to the respective apartments.

When they got back, Nikki asked Kit if she could take a bath, saying she'd pull the curtain if Kit needed to use the bathroom. Kit agreed happily and went to her room to change. She felt too exhausted to write and too drunk to read so she went to the bathroom to brush her teeth.

"You have fun tonight babes?" Asked Nikki from behind the curtain.

"I did, I needed to shake things up, thanks for inviting me out."

“Sorry you didn’t get to meet Billy.”

“Who?”

“My friend Billy, he was with us earlier but took off a little before you got there.” Said Nikki, not realizing that they had actually crossed paths. Kit had already forgot about the man outside the bar and failed to make the connection as well.

“Oh, that’s cool. Are you guys dating?”

“Who, me and Billy?”

“Yeah”

“Billy’s great, but I’m not looking to date someone like him right now.”

“In what way?”

“I don’t know, just a feeling. He’s a cool guy, we have a lot of the same friends and he’s good looking. I’m sure the sex would be nice, maybe even great, but I don’t want to date a guy from the scene just for kicks then deal with the backlash if it doesn’t work out.”

“Yeah, I could see that.” Said Kit with a mouth full of toothpaste. She spit into the sink, rinsed her mouth then sat down to use the bathroom.

“Honestly I think I’m more in the mood for women right now; I just feel like men are mostly the same, overly confident and hung up on stupid stuff. I haven’t been with a man for a few years now.” Nikki stood up in the bath, pulled the drain and Kit saw a pink and steaming arm appear from behind the curtain to grab a towel from the back of the door.

“Oh, I guess I wasn’t sure, I’ve heard you talk about ex-boyfriends and ex-girlfriends. I suppose it’s complicated, or maybe not, I don’t really know how being Bi works.

“For me it’s not as much about being Bi, it’s about each person. Most people think Bi means bouncing around and having threesomes, that’s not my thing, I just am willing to date or sleep with men and women.”

“Wow, that’s a really great way of putting it, sorry if I’m being nosy or naive. And stop me if this sounds dumb, but sometimes I wish I preferred women, men can be so terrible.”

“So can women, but I know what you mean. Men can hurt in ways that women are less likely to be capable of, at least physically. Men can, and often do the horrible things. The problem is, you can’t fake attraction or love, the heart wants what the heart wants and a lot of straight women break lesbians hearts trying to find themselves.” Kit thought Nikki might be speaking from experience but didn’t want to pry. “Want to smoke a bowl?” Asked Nikki as she bent over the sink and brushed her teeth.

“Yeah, I’ve got some weed, I’ll be right back.” Kit skipped into the Kitchen and grabbed some weed and her cigarettes from her purse before going back to the bathroom. She packed the bowl that was sitting on the window sill then offered it to Nikki.

“Thanks babes” said Nikki and Kit lit a cigarette. They leaned against each other, passed the bowl and cigarette back and forth, blowing smoke out the small window and watching the plumes get carried off into the quiet summer night with the breeze.