shadowdancer

r. deravakian

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Contents

shadowdancer....1

dawn....7

1. pch....8
2. enter the twin riders....15
3. gig....18
4. hush....28
5. little tokyo....41
6. lions and porcupines....49
7. judy....56
8. minotaur....66
9. weho....69
10. march 3rd, 2003....77
11. who's that girl?....78
12. jules....89

Ezekiel 23....108

14. june 6th, 2016....112
15. hauling wood....125
16. money shot....134
17. ghost....142
18. ruby slippers....151
19. gq....164
20. enter m.m.....173
21. raa paa maa ozz....189
22. savannah woman....202
23. throwing shade....209
24. judas....225
25. bffs....236
26. breaking bad....251
27. the tale of the desert and sea: dawn....269
28. the tale of the desert and sea: noon....277
29. clark gable....283
30. bear costumes....298
31. politics… eww!....312
32. home is where the heart is....319
33. the tale of the desert and sea: dusk....334

34. el murciélago 343
35. the hills have eyes 358
36. touched 373
37. night call: opening 380
38. assyrian boys 391
39. night call: closing 405
40. sanctuary 426
writer 436
synopsis 437

this is a work of fiction.
r. deravakian.

jeremiah 17:9
the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can understand it?

dawn

1. pch

on a night of a full moon off the pacific ocean rim. on a meandering lost highway that seemingly comes and goes from nowhere to nowhere yet, a woman sits at the backseat of a silver pearl prius; her eyes directed out the window; his eyes directed right onto her. all feels very hitchcockian; all feels very mellow and melancholic, while 'the birds, part one' plays over the radio. there's darkness all around, except for what the lampposts on this stretch choose to highlight. it's some unaccounted hour passed midnight. and the full moon stands high over dark waters, like a lowercase i; burning white hot, while everything else cools in blackness; a vigilant custodian, sitting on top of a very high chair, watching and recording all the independent sights, stories and sounds, of all the sins and vices in town. and before all those wicked, wicked souls are able to give that somber and forever-stalking, single eye in the sky the slip. what's your name? asks the uber driver. what's yours? asks the woman, back. it's the pch; a suicidal road, winding all along the banks of the pacific coast; a long stretch of travel that is the malibu strip. and the ride is doing something over 60 mph: moving fast, yet, feeling as if hardly moving at all. maybe just for the woman's senses, since her senses are disembodied right now and embodied someplace else.

i'm ray. finally lets out the uber driver.
as she… lets out nothing.

a minute passes, and now she's feeling a bit gracious. jezebel. she now lets out. now, her eyes on him, in the rearview mirror; momentum builds, while pupils lock, while precautions stray off with the wind being blown in and out of the car, through a slit of the back-passenger side window. my name is jezebel singer. then, eyes back out the window towards the nothingness outside. pretty name. he grins all tongue-in-cheek. is that your hollywood name? no. that's my real mom and dad given name. she nonchalants. what do you do? i dance. do you also sing? no. and with this next question, ray shows some tiger stripes, and decides to pounce: then why don't you call yourself jezebel dancer? and that almost gets ms. singer going, as her inhibitions begin to give way, as she can't help but to grow a little receptive. because… because… that would be silly. i guess? she guesses. well, you dance! don't sing. name is singer. just saying, it might give people in this city the wrong impression. i'm not changing my name to jezebel dancer just so people can know i'm a dancer and not a singer. why not? ray dares. no! stop! that's just so…? and now she can't help but to laugh a little. hmm, how's your singing voice? ray

continues. ms. singer now finds herself struggling to smile and speak at the same time. the vibes in the vehicle are feeling very whimsical and lightheaded, as a cool transpacific breeze flows in and cools the insides. although, there's also the vibes ray's giving off, his vibes feeling warm and tasting sweet: like fresh green mediterranean grapes. ray was bronzed for the summer. and had a bit of a receding hairline, which he kept fine and faded short. but that wasn't something jezebel would find off putting. he was wearing a white denim jacket, which looked on fleek on him. but, then again, maybe a little too fleek. and maybe a little too fleece. uber driver or not, he seemed like he wanted to stand out, or at least be more eyegrabbing than even his uber clients. best feature was his eyes, or at least what jezebel could collect from what she saw reversed in the rearview mirror. all in all, he's an attractive man. singer thinks, admitting it to herself, so the thought wouldn't later go on to rearend her before it's given the chance. my singing voice… i don't know. she blushes. sing for me! but, with that, singer now shakes her head; sweet tasting grapes or not, a sour part is starting to give a bad aftertaste. i'm kidding. i'm kidding. ray gives.

then sighs….

unmistakably, there's an attraction brewing inside the car. which both parties feel fully conscious of. yet, singer still holds reservations; not wanting to make eye contact again, at least not yet. ray having eyes like a brooding sagittarius in waiting with bow and arrow at hand; eyes like arrows that feel sharp, which also happen to feel maybe a little too sharp for her. where you from? he asks. tennessee. she answers. usually something she willingly wouldn't. but, with ray, she willingly does. so, how do you like it out here? singer hesitates. she could answer him how she'd answer anyone else that would ask that question. but, since she's beginning to like him, she's unable to at the moment. "it's great!" she could say. "there's so much to do and see out here!" she could continue. small talk. but, really, meaningless rhetoric, she'd give anybody. but that's the problem with rhetoric, it's something you'd say when you don't have anything to say, really, and neither do you want to. i… i… don't know. i guess i like it. the moon now seems a bit aggravating for singer; it's a big and beautiful moon, most definitely! but, maybe a little too big and beautiful. and something big and beautiful in this part of the world seems to have a dislikeable and disagreeable aesthetic about it. which is something singer never got back east. you coming from a party in malibu? ray asks. you get that a lot? asks singer, back. what, picking up people from malibu house parties? yes!

directs singer. well, yeah… yeah, i do. and other stuff ubering. says ray. tell me some stories. asks singer. but now, ray seems not so eager to participate. though, there's intrigue, like a cat hidden under a sofa eyeing up at a caged canary. but, when it comes to stories coming from the pch: much can be experienced, while less can be explained; the pch having that way about itself; a special characteristic onto itself; a beachside front where one can find hawaiian pagan gods gracing the mainland coast, with all their might and mischief. stories…? rubs ray. also, while rubbing the back of his neck with his left hand in the flamingo position. well…? goes singer. well, there's nothing really coming to mind, to be honest. mostly, there's just a lot of weird stuff i get working out here. especially just about every time i… pick up pretty girls up from malibu. can't really explain it. i can imagine. admits singer. also, aware that that was an indirect compliment towards her. whatever the stories are, ray has singer in mind. and… he's right to do so. and with no stories being brought up by ray, truth is, none are needed.

and now, something monumental is asked:
what are you doing out here? concerns ray.

it's monumental, because, it comes from a caring place. californians, for singer, have mostly been the type of lot never to ask anything so intrusive; californians being a very "just treading lightly" breed of people; they have their bubble, and to them the bubble is something sacred, and something strictly taboo for outsiders to breach. i want to dance. all that singer lets out. does it mean that much to you? yes! ray looks into the rearview mirror. singer does the same. although, blank stares are all that are mutually distributed. and, although, even though, ms. singer is definitely an assertive girl by the looks of it, right now she is being not so much giving an answer. the ride continues. now, into santa monica: a city where la people come to pretend not to be la people; a quaint little coastal city, that's really too big to be that. but, like the inhabitants, likes to also pretend to be quaint and not over-capacitating its welcome. ray continues to rub the back of his neck. jezebel watches him do so. no other words are exchanged by the two for the rest of the trip, as ray drives her back to where she currently holds residence: somewhere in north hollywood. ray drives through santa monica on the 10, with all the pretty spectacles of people and places experienced only on the surface. now cutting through the walled off hills on the 405. now into the escapes of the valley. now eastbound. now a bit more driving. and now, here: her place. lower middle-class condominium where singer shares an apartment with three other women.

somewhere just a bit north of universal studios, around toluca lake. all that driving, and, depressingly enough, not another word is uttered. and not a single sentiment is addressed. even when so much was promised. and, by the time singer feels ready to say "goodnight" to ray, ray's already gone, off to tend to his next client.

i'm never going to see him again.

thank you… i was worried something might come of that. jezebel whispers to the air.

after the night she's been having, she has had her fill of enough unwanted sexual thoughts going through her head. last thing she needed was to meet someone she would actually feel willing to choose to satisfy them all with. a temptation she feared might choose to go against her better judgement, and satisfy itself, while taking jesse along for the ride.

stop thinking about him! she whispers, again. this time, nothing to do with ray.

ms. singer now eyes about the neighborhood: it's a nice area to live in; nice and gentrified enough for a girl like singer not to feel it would be too sketchy for the likes of her and her taste. but, that's the problem with gentrification: her apartment complex really is a bit of a dump. leading her to live in a building that was built around the 1970s, which she now has to share to cover the rent, and with rent prices as if the building had been built at least sometime within this century. she eyes it a little, her dump… err… pad… then a little around it. then catches the sight of phil; phil's a nice kid she once met some months ago at a peet's coffee and tea; nice beta black kid, that tried hitting on her, with all his depressing, indirect, beta tactics. phil's sleeping in his nissan sentra, which is parked right on the same street as her building. forced to do so after being dropped by the local art college he was attending at, which he used to be housed by. said he wanted to go into designing video games. sad, really! just sad. but, what can he do? he doesn't want to go back home to kansas. but he has no job to be paying rent in a renter's market like this. so, now, he sleeps in his car. and uses the local 24-hour fitness location to do his toiletry. jezebel has even caught him a few times at that gym, sometime after 3am, sleeping on a bench just outside the sauna of the facility.

no. shut up! singer thinks, now. as much as friendzoning the poor guy was hard, the last thing she needs now is to be badgered by pity to hit him up and take him in; pity can be such a self-righteous jerk, especially with guilt-tripping moments like these.

singer decides to walk on, now, and head in. in through the gated structure. into the dingy elevator. up to the 3rd floor. and now she's at her apartment door. apt. 302. now inside, as ms. singer looks about in the dark. and, it's funny! the inside of the apartment just glows of noho, as if she's still standing there: outside, on the corner of magnolia and lankershim. no, phil, you wouldn't be getting much of an upgrade if i had you sleeping on the couch in here. she thinks. as she looks at the walls, that have scum covered finger marks all over them, especially just above the black leather couch. and on that wall, there's a patrick nagel like poster hung up, of a raven-haired dame wearing a diamond necklace… and nothing else. coincidently enough, practically a deadringer for jezebel singer: green eyes, milky skin, pixie cut black hair and all. what being the chances? but, of course: naked. light streaming in in the color of 5 o'clock shadow blue, that's being cut up by the venetian blinds of the southward window. making the poster seem somewhat like a women's prison scene from a degrading d grade movie. that, or of some brian de palma thriller, where a perverted creep might be standing just outside the window, peering in, peeping at the pigskins of this damsel of the night. and: not a fun thought! thinks singer. not wanting to entertain the voyeuristic possibilities. especially with her standing there. now staring at a harloted reimagining of herself; one that would live up to the jezebel name. i hate that poster. she thinks.

i'm home! announces singer. loud.
i'm home! announces, again. louder!

doing such, since… she has to! she just has to! since living with roommates of the likes of jennifer, jessica and judy, it's better to let the girls know she's home, so there won't be any surprises; singer is a gorgeous girl, and, unfortunately enough, so are those three. which means no matter how many times jezebel has had to wipe up all the dirty finger marks that are cascaded all over the apartment walls, just in a day or two, more will soon pop up, which jezebel will no longer feel keen to clean again. i give up! she had thought, after the fifth week of living here.

how is it that i'm living in an apartment with three other girls with names that start with j? thinks jezebel. wondering what such a premonition is supposed to say and say about her, considering the letter that her name also starts with. and, therefore, deep down, dreading what might actually be meant.

good, they're not here! jezebel thinks.

however, there's enough tacky zebra and tiger and leopard striped and spotted underwear lying about, letting ms. singer know, they ain't too far off. especially judy, whom jesse found as the more formidable one of the three. the other two really just bland, bland and more bland; the only remarkable moments experienced from the jessica/jennifer combo was hearing them once explain how they would only date boys with a six-pack. that was it! really, those two were just vapid cases. judy at least seemed to have a more stronger sense of her own prowess and personality. so much that judy romero at least had a last name to jess. not even remembering the other two's. but the other two were far less harmful and more harmless. jesse always found herself in heated encounters with judy the most. whom, she also shared a room being roommates with. judy really being jesse's counterpart: judy a midday blonde and jesse a midnight hair colored girl. at the moment, it didn't seem like any of the three were around, however jesse was sure she'd eventually have to deal with judy or the other two skanks in the morning.

jezebel then headed to her room. undressed. headed into the shower. washed herself thoroughly. finished. then heads to her bed to call it a night. although, before bedtime, walks over to the blinds of her bedroom window. and closes them. shut. immediately! and now goes to her bed to sleep.

but then it starts again….

jezebel holds her throwrug tight with both hands under her chin. and stares up at the spanish laced ceiling; a geographical landscape of an undiscovered world just above her; her eyes lost in that drywall wilderness; she sees herself up there, upside-down, unsure of where she is, how she got there, and how to escape and find anywhere else that would give her a semblance of home.

don't focus on it! don't! she presses, herself. but she's already lost in its mindlessness:

breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe o—…? stop!
however, she's already stuck.

since childhood, she would do this. all of a sudden, her mind would focus on her respiratory system. and, once it did, she'd find herself stuck manually breathing. in her thoughts, she'd begin to contemplate over the larger scheme of things; how everything she'd experience of reality was something she was either aware of or unaware of. like her breathing. or blinking. or anything she had no direct control of; it was something she would never have to preoccupy herself to do willingly, she just would. but with her breathing, once she'd focus in, anxiety from awareness of it would grip her. and, she'd become terrified over the thought of… what if, one day, all of a sudden, it would stop? and once focused in, she'd find herself locked in, having to laboriously breathe and breathe. like, if, she was to stop, she would stop. and as she'd try to escape it, try to force it to go back to being done autonomously by her respiratory without her efforts, she'd find herself unable. and she'd go on and on and on, sometimes, doing it all night long, until the rise of morning. stop it! please, God, take over. just take over! please, let me sleep! let me sleep, and not have to spend all night stuck with this craziness! and then, she did, she became unstuck, as she felt her mind break away, and felt her breathing fall in sync with the greater scheme of things.

the greater scheme of things. she thought, to herself.
the greater….

2. enter the twin riders

what if i was to tell you, that there's a spiritual world inside everything? an invisible someone speaks in the 'scapes of black canvas.

what if i was to tell you… that demons are real… angels are real… and hell and heaven exists all around us?

jezebel singer shakes her head. and now, having done so, she sees herself in all this. the black canvas begins to draw her contours out in white pencil. and, she is born. she's born into this world. and she sees herself with her hands over her ears. mouth un-jawed and extended open, fully. and a maniacal element grows and grows to fear itself. they're coming for you! the invisible someone mentions. they won't find me here. jesse speaks. yes, they will! mentions, again. and now, the white outlines that are jezebel singer, draws in color; her eyes, with pupils colored in yellow.

they.
they.
they!
and then a million amputated hands appear to outline the rest of the schemes on this totally black canvas. where only one hand had been subcontracted to sketch in jezebel at the bottom lefthanded corner, millions are contracted to do the same, and, for:

them!

no! stop! please! rushes out the words on this two-dimensional surface.

although, it's too late. all those millions of hands are at full onslaught depicting the presence of they into this world: the twin riders. both tailored in glossy black leather; the sort of thick hide leather that almost breathes as its wearer maneuvers in its format. and the illustration is well detailed and well depicted and fully realized. off at some invisible horizon, a neon light shines on through the center of the black canvas. and from the widespread, the twins are then borne into the frame, shooting out of this two-dimensional plane, into a newly realized 3d world.

what were the spirits telling you about the man, ray, whom you met earlier? the

invisible voice asks.
i liked him… i think? jezebel says.

do you wish you had sex with him?
no! jezebel constitutes.

then why are you still thinking about him?
because… he was nice. that's all! that's all! i didn't have thoughts of sex just by being around him. a man! i didn't! not like just about every other man i have to—

lies!
the voice says.

no, they're not lies! jezebel confirms. and then this unknown voice begins to formulate its presence. no longer so incognito. the voice is reminding jezebel of someone now. someone direly familiar. how do you think i feel about ray? and it's him now. jezebel is now confirmed. it's him. him, and his brother. would you like it if i had his blood on my hands? no! no, please, don't make it into this! screams jezebel. you wanted to have sex with him—don't lie to me! the voice echoes, back. jezebel falls silent. no longer with yellow eyes, for now, they're erased and drawn shut; she doesn't want to see them; doesn't want to look; let them stay invisible: better that way. if you had decided to have sex with him…

i would have killed him! billy continues to speak.

jezebel then tries to extend her hand out. but, she is still in two-dimensions. and they're not. i'm telling you, now, jesse, i would have killed him! you know that, right? jesse says nothing. and if i had caught him with you in the act, like i did with you once before: i would have come up behind him and slit his throat in the middle of it. shut up! shut…? you know how i feel about this? billy asks. i know. jesse is all but able to grapple with. good! keep it that way.

and at this instant, she opens her eyes. cold sweat permeates around her, and she feels how her bed sheets are soaked in it. the night vision has ended. and, there, jezebel, in her bed, stays silent; she's unable to move; it's the dead of night: but she's used to this. all the concern now was, was if the breathing thing was to start right again. but, it doesn't. she isn't feeling that depeche mode, trying to seize her.

but a thought does seize her: was it them? she fears. are they coming for me? she goes on to ponder. and it really did feel like she was just speaking to billy. and. here was the thing:

billy's dead. soothes jezebel, to herself.
he's dead. and, so is his brother.

but jezebel knows better than to be steered with such a nonburdensome yoke. because jezebel damn well knows what the invisible voice had stated: was an absolute fact.

ghosts are real. she says to herself in secret.

and, it's only a matter of time, before the twins catch up to her, her in this city; those two finding her here in la; one place she had been desperately hoping… they wouldn't.

3. gig

downtown la. high noon. jezebel drives her old but shiny silver '96 camaro down a street, as her palms feel to melt against the black skinned roulette in her hands. it's a hot one in a city whose heat exudes from more places and objects than just the sun. it's a hot midday start for jesse, having woken up just a few hours ago. and, she has a photo shoot to attend to. great, where are those fumes coming from? wonders jezebel. her camaro is dispelling white smoke from the passenger side of the hood, from between the cracks. great! just great! she thinks. as mechanically inclined to car repair as she is (not much), here is an issue she's put off longer than she should have: her v6 camaro has a profusive oil leak. just a month ago, jezebel had had a male buddy of hers take a look under her camaro's hood, and, had found a leaky valve gasket, which needed to be replaced. jezebel had just had an oil change the month prior. and. now. here was her car, almost bone dry, making clanking noises coming from her unlubricated, engine block pistons. "how hard is it to change the valve gasket?" jezebel had asked this buddy. "you know anything about car repair?" the buddy had questionably asked. "i know a thing or two." fancied jesse. but this buddy of hers then began telling her everything she needed to know. "okay, well, first off, with this car, you have to start by removing the alternator, since it's in the way, then…—"

but that was already enough information for her to know she was mechanically out of her league. and that buddy of hers went on for another 3 mins, almost exact, continuing to explain more stuff she would have to do. the most jesse had up to that point been able to pride herself in accomplishing, was a tune up job she once did on one of her dad's cars back home in nashville, where her father ran a mechanic shop. whom had taught jesse a thing or two. but replacing a bunch of wires and sparkplugs didn't involve disassembling and reassembling the car's engine in any way. so, now, all she could do was add 10w-30 conventional every couple of days, to keep it from going completely bone dry and damaging itself, eventually leading to the engine blowing out (at which point, no other solution but to junk the ol' whip). and, for the last month, that is all she has had to do to keep up with such dismal attempts at auto maintenance. that, and deal with the white smoke, which had kept her busybody worried over more driver anxiousness. she knew the white smoke had to be coming from the oil that leaked out of the valve gasket, burning up, as it dripped onto the exhaust manifold; exactly as what her buddy said how the smoke was being created. but, is it that, or, are there further mechanical problems with the car that i'm not aware of? jezebel would encumber herself with; she didn't know and couldn't exactly tell. i really hate this

car, sometimes. felt jezebel. but, ubering everywhere, she knew, would eventually get too expensive. so, she had to drive the camaro whenever necessary. and, it really is astounding how jezebel had already driven the car something over 5,000 miles, just driving the car from tennessee to southern california. and not all in a straight line from start to finish. but had driven in so many more miles on the way. the car was originally her brothers. but that was before tom, her brother, had upgraded to a 5th generation bumblebee camaro. and had second-handed the car into her possession. just so she could have a point a to b car to get her places. but jezebel had really grown into the a-to-ber. it now truly was hers. and only hers. and considering everything she had survived through in the course of the last year of her 27-year-old life. where am i? thinks jezebel, as she changes gears in her head from worrying over one matter to worrying over another: midday or way later? jezebel couldn't tell at the moment, considering how much driving she had been doing all day. plus, dealing with the timesinking affairs of combating la traffic; so many hours doing such, and, right now, she didn't know what time it was. and whether when getting to the shoot, if she'd be late or not. downtown la had a certain tainted yellow glow about her, that was making jezebel think it was way later than she imagined it was. wait…? and now, jezebel checked her iphone, to see what time it was. 1:05pm, it said. and there you have it, it wasn't as late as jezebel feared it would be; she was still making good time trying to reach the shoot, even when it didn't feel that way. it was just the ugly yellowness the city of la was shining in; so drab and dingy and hot rusted, rusted metal solid; the residues left over from a day dying young; only seeming like it was mere hours before nighttime would clock in and clock out the daytime setting.

a song then comes onto the radio, kiss fm: it's that one chainsmokers' song called 'side effects,' she likes this song. a month ago, she was driving on wilshire blvd around beverly hills, this song came on, and she had a vision. all of a sudden, everything went 80s cartoon mode; 80s intro cartoon mode, and jesse was self-glamorized as 2019's jem, she loved that cartoon! first time she saw it on tv she was 7 years old and fully remembered it. but, years and years later, it became her el dorado of long-lost memories, since she didn't remember the name (considering she was 7 the last time she saw it). and for years, into her teenage years, she tried to look it up and find it. what was the name of that cartoon? what was the damn name? but she couldn't remember. but then that terrible remake movie of it came out. and, it looked familiar. and, when she looked up the cartoon on youtube, bam! jesse was 7, again. and getting the wind tunnel effect of

nostalgia overload; a backdraft that totally blew her mind now at 27 as it did at 7. and it was marvelous! damn! she loved that feeling that vision graced her with; felt yearning to have it again, and again, and again, and again. but life is just too fleeting when it comes to the good stuff like that. pity! i swear, the shoot better not be in some gross, beat up, abandoned fashion district sowing factory like last time. jezebel thought. unable to stand the idea if it was. downtown la, in of itself, was a gross place for any form of exhibition; this was the old part of town, no new coat of paint could ever freshen up enough. downtown la was just that old and broken down and yellow walled; the walls yellow like the yellow that's accumulated from enough nicotine being blown against a surface until the yellow begins to turn brown. this was smoked city. tarnished all over with disgusting cement bricking that just made everything seem like an uninhabitable mess; with no amount of reinforced gentrification could fix. you could throw as much money against these old town walls as you wanted, none would ever stick. i really need to stop accepting blind gigs from craigslist. thinks jezebel. anxious towards what she would find once she found the right spot for the photo shoot.

skid row!

oh, crap. damn! get me out of here. just turning a corner, and jezebel found herself here: tent city. here, more homelessness of la. but there was a horror in these streets you couldn't find anywhere else. there were hundreds and hundreds of them scattered all over like landmines, which jezebel had to drive out of lanes just to avoid. and, sometimes, more like naval mines in water, they would then eye her and her camaro, and become magnetically locked on, as they'd start to drift towards her car, while pulling the chain and anchor beneath them. and, one time, jezebel had to drive onto the pavement, just to avoid one seeming to want to jump in front of her camaro and end himself.

after a couple of turns, she was out of the gauntlet. and, she was here.

what is this? jezebel was now on a street completely void of all life. it was, as expected and regretted, a deserted area of downtown la; a ghosttown dab smack in the middle of the largest metropolitan area of the us west coast. and as for the building she was now sizing up which she needed to enter: it was just a drab reskinning of everything else here around it in this abandoned commercial center; an old and rotted building that hadn't seen its heyday since the ike administration.

a sight, that only some hipster dipshit would marvel at its historic architectural novelty, even when there was never one drafted by the likes of frank lloyd wright from back in the day. and flw, himself, would absolutely detest this structure, and want to see a wrecking ball demolish it. and would smack the smartphone out of the lumbersexual man's hands who'd want to take a selfie with this monstrosity behind him. no amount of outdoor accent light fixtures were ever going to make this into a money shot scene. is this it? it can't be it! but, what else could it be? this is exactly where the gps had brought her. and she had already validated the address with the crew she was to work with over text messaging. since she had messed up the address before leaving her home. and had driven for a half an hour in the wrong direction. heading towards san bernardino, before discovering her error. fine, let's see what we got here. luckily, there were no parking signs on the street. so, jezebel felt she might be able to park right at the front of this site. but, seeing how no other cars were parked anywhere on this extended street, she feared how her camaro might then stick out like a sore thumb. and. therefore. decided to park in a narrow alley, behind a dumpster, perfectly out of sight. if she was to get ticketed, so be it, better to have lapd discover her vehicle compared to anyone else that might try to break in and steal whatever they can from the inside.

click, clack, click, clack….
went her high heels across the pavement. as the sound resonated throughout the alley, like sos morris codes signaling off of a deserted island in the south pacific. except for her velvet purple high heels, the only other thing she wore today on her legs were her black fishnet stockings. jezebel, being a dancer, had pretty long legs. very long. and she knew how to walk and strut and dance them. so, of course she was to make them her spectacle. and as for the rest of her attire: above her legs, jezebel wore a purple short-fringed skirt; and above that, a purple shoulderless blouse; and above that, nothing else but her black pearled necklace. except for maybe her thick eyeshadow, which you could argue is something worn compared to just being applied (her makeup being so thickly textured, it might as well be constituted as a garment). standing at about 6 feet (jesse, herself, 5'8, with a pair of 4-inch stiletto heels), she was quite a majestic amethyst vase on top of a lengthy obsidian pedestal. looking quite pretty in purple. but modest in an 80s sensibility that of a john hughes' movie, with a soundtrack to tears for fears. might not have been the straight fire (trendy)! but, jesse understood, fashion was about you! and what you brought to the game. eyeing around. hmm? i don't want to be here. jezebel squeaked.

she was way too pretty for a drab place such as this, like a fair skinned toddler running naked across a drab cemetery, then coming across a tombstone with no name, just a date, and it's the day of this particular child's birth, and the date of the death is yet to be disclosed. everywhere jezebel stepped, was a spot she felt as if she superstitiously shouldn't. now, in front of the building, on the sidewalk, she looked up: the building was at least four stories high. and, there were no entrances she could spot anywhere. great! a site with no doors. as if whatever this building was built to house, was meant to be kept in and never to be let out, nor anything or anyone outside being led in. what they got in here, a dragon guarding a mountain of treasure? great, i guest that now makes me bilbo "barrel rider" baggins! jesse joked in her thoughts. so, jesse, what do you know about these cats? she then thought, referring to the people that referred her to come here, curious of her intuition's notions. although, her intuition, from the get-go, had already absolutely demanded her to heed it as a danger and forewarning; yet, ms. singer, here, had disregarded it; so, now, here, at the eye of this storm, what else could they say that they hadn't already? craigslist, by no means, was the best strategy to snag a gig. but there was just so much naked opportunity present in it to deny. jezebel had already caught the drift in this city what modeling or acting or dancing or anything agencies' bottom agenda was: there always, always, being an admissions fee. and figuring in the 4 digits and up. that. then wave after wave of gatekeepers she had to entice (by all means necessary) before finding herself here. what craigslist could offer with just 24% battery powered text messaging, in comparison. of course, the downside of craigslist was the sturgeon's law of dealmaking (although, so can be said with the agencies): there was always 90% chance of "hell nos" that she would have to sort through, before she felt like she was finally finding something genuine, a genuine full honest gig! and nothing that had to do with some strange guy promising top-drawer networking, considering how "nimble" jesse was, considering all of her dancing prowess. just about half of the potential gigs jesse had to sift through kept promising loads of money and high heaven, but would then send her a picture of a naked woman squatting down and… doing something disgusting and totally perverted. the catch being, what they wanted was jesse to send a photo back, of herself, reenacting the vile scene. just about 50% of them being just that. a 40% of gigs also the same. but not as perverted: sexual in nature, yes! naked, yes! erotic, yes! but this time, softcore perversion, which might eventually lead her to topless dancing in a strip joint, somewhere, in oxnard, or someplace. and as for the final 10% of possibilities for

a woman finding something decent in a city like this: still no guaranteed promises whatsoever! but, really, just a whole lot of ambiguousness of the nature of the gig she was getting a "yes" and "no" feels from. however, jesse knew ahead that, that, was the best she was going to get; if you considered uncertainty being anything or something to be certain about. for all she knew, this gig was going to lead her to….

actually, no!
right now, she didn't want to entertain the thought. so, now, all she needed to do was find a door, and find her way in, and hope for the best. fingers crossed! please tell me i don't have to go back down that creepy alley just to find a way in from some backdoor, please? she thought. but then, she had a prayer answered; one she hadn't yet made, but now felt thankful of. hey! said a woman like her that just now popped up on jesse's left. hey. said jesse, greeting back. hi… oh my… i love your fishnet stockings! she went on, a bit ditsy like, but still more welcoming than anything else jesse was finding in this part of town. you're here for the photo shoot! indexed jezebel, with index finger and all. yes, yes! and you? jesse then just nodded. but then felt a delayed startlement reaction. wait, wow, where you come up from? oh, i just got dropped off by an uber one street down that way. and she then pointed down a street crossing the one they were on, and down where jesse wouldn't have caught the sight of it. oh, thank you for being here with me—oh my gosh—this is so sketchy. she then added. then eyed up at the drab building, herself, and began pouting a bit. she was a pretty blonde, of course! mostly in abercrombie and finch shorts and attire. that, or guess, jezebel guessed. looking like the postergirl girlfriend of some generic surfer dude from redondo beach. pretty, yes, but a little too girly-girl for a girl like jesse's taste. as pretty as jezebel liked to make herself out, she at least prided over the fact of how meticulous and detail oriented and smart her fashion choices were made to be; there was a style to what jezebel wore. not something she'd leave the house in which she had slept in the night before. daisy dukes and a flannel knotted top was just so… lazy. eww!

all right, enough, jesse! she then thought, as she became aware how judgmental she was all of a sudden becoming with…—
wait, excuse me… what's your name?
joy. joy amber stevenson!
with joy, here.

funny girl, though! even did a lil' curtsy while finishing off saying the "stevenson" part in her name. and jezebel was anything but royalty. jezebel now eyed joy with eyes slit, but decided just to be a good girly-girl, back, and like her; pillar up a feminist agenda before continuing to think as harsh. oh, wow, this place is just so sketchy, what are two pretty girls like us doing here? joy continued. with a sense of very minimal intricacy in her sheepish eyes; no mind that could ever have the patience and methodical aspects to sit down and put together a 3,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. and, honestly…—
stop! jesse thought. trying to undo her initial impression of joy, considering how it now seemingly didn't want to stop interrupting what was more important to have her thoughts to be set on. joy, your clue is as good as mine. clicked jezebel, with a click and a wink, very stylishly and colored all west side story-ish. and joy now liked hearing her say that, seeing how much more personality jezebel had compared to—
enough!
listen, what do you know about this shoot? asked jesse, as she eyed joy. joy just shook her head.

so, you think it's legit, or… we got some creepy dudes to deal with?
yeah… my money is on… creepy dudes. -_-

answered joy with a sigh, and then had that look in her eyes. which jezebel couldn't help but to release a short and minute giggle.

but then a door opened up where both girls never saw a door, but it was there now. and out came a 5'6 ma—… person… with silver emo hair and black as tar simple plain t-shirt and skinny jeans. and said: ladies, do enter. and did that hand and body gesture to show hospitality and permission for the two to do so, and enter, that is. and, so, the two did. and this person, being a "person," and not a he or she, was an instantaneous sign for the two to feel relieved that the gig definitely was legit. so, into what looked like a merry-go-round clothing store from back before anyone present was even born; a place of neverending cobwebs, where even all the spiders that had made them all, had long ago abandoned. up a flight of stairs, where—
watch out! some steps might give way! the person noted. then up another. yes, yes, i know, why have a photo shoot in such a sketchy joint like this? but, trust me, if it was the other way around, and, we were at a mcmansion, above the 101: that's

when you'd know your concerns would be justified. illustrated the person. and both girls now knew immediately what the person was referring to. jezebel, herself, had already been in one, and on mulholland drive, even; never had she been in such a gigantic open-air space, with such vast sizing rooms, where the stench of marijuana and sweat didn't permeate. an establishment, as immediately as she had found herself heading in, she had found herself wanting to hightail it out. her first big glaring no-no sign being how all the women there (tons of them) were completely butt naked. so many cowgirls herded together like cattle, while the cowboys of the establishment were all tanned, tribal tattooed and fully clothed.

oh my gosh, what's your name, again? asks joy to jesse.
jezebel. jesse answers.
thinking how joy had never asked to begin with, now asking to be reminded.
oh, that's such a pretty name, why don't i see more girls with that name? joy entertains.
because…

it's a name that derives from a biblical whore.

jesse acknowledges to herself, but, says nothing. jezebel's parents were nonreligious hippies, and that is all that needs to be said about that. i must add, jezebel? said the person. yes? asked jesse. you look like a particular. jesse now guessed the person meant she seemed to remind the person of a—maybe—famous person? and, jesse was sorta used to this. since, almost always one name seemed to pop up every other time. please don't say katy perry. i've heard katy perry. and i don't think i look anything like katy perry. jesse forlorned. no, no, that is just so broad and ghastly inaccurate, might i add. not to make katy perry, nor you, seem less attractive, but, the face is different. whoever said that has no understanding of facial structure and photogenics and beauty. the person mentioned.

ta!
jesse now found this intriguing. jesse, being a pretty girl, did have a vanity thing about her. so, now she felt like inflating it some by hearing this person out. i'd say, you look as to be a cross between… isabella adjani and fairuza balk. jesse had no idea who those two were. jesse said nothing. but the person then figured more

explaining was necessary from jesse's not-doing-so. your face is all mademoiselle adjani, who in her earlier years, i'd say, probably one of the most beautiful french actresses in existence. i love, love, love her in queen margot: fantastical film. fantastic! that really caught jesse's keen interest. but, your eyes are almost 100% fairuza unmistakably. a very beautiful woman, i will say. but… i think her movie roles and characters ended up leaving her with a much more… scarier personality than i would have been fond with. jesse now understood she definitely needed to google image those two women up to see the resemblance.

oh, you know what? i have one more name i will throw in. mentions the person. and now, really seems to be looking into jesse's eyes, and straight right through them, also. and, for whatever reason, jesse got scared now. now, this name isn't as much based on looks, maybe in the eyes, though, again. maybe? not looks but definitely feel. in vibes. who? asked jesse, knowing, this one, was definitely going to nail it.

fiona apple… from… that one music video of hers from the 90s, i'd say. hmm, how am i forgetting its name?

and, hearing that name, jesse's eyes blew up. unlike the other two, jesse knew damn well who that artist was. damn well! and also knew exactly which music video the person was referring to, by name. jesse kept silent.

oh, do me next!
do me next! rejoiced joy.

which wasn't exactly the best way to word it with jesse and especially the person here. well…? went the person, with eyes watching her bounce up and down, up and down. i guess… a much fairer and slenderer version of jayne mansfield, i'd say. joy seemed astatic. and, now not. since, now, jesse could imagine she had no clue who that was, either. but, why should jesse think something of it? neither did she, nor who adjani nor balk had been. so, there was that.

and then, finally, they reached what now looked like a totally legit photo shoot. and, everything that preceded was everything jezebel was hoping for: no surprises! no stories she'd need to lock up in her closet, which guys like ray would be concerned with asking about later. and after it was all said and done, they all exited.

everyone got everyone's number. and they all went home. but, before jesse could, she did joy a favor, and drove her all the way down to torrance. and then, drove all the way back up to north hollywood (needing to replenish her car with more oil on the way, that is). when she arrived home, it was already nighttime. and now, all she had to think about was what possibilities the photo shoot could open up for her. and, she was simply glad that that was that.

this was a good day.

4. hush

so, jesse, question time:
do you honestly… think… i approve of what you did earlier today? asks the invisible voice.

but, now, jesse knows it's him. it just is. it could be no one else. and if he was around, his brother couldn't be too far off.

tell me, jesse, do you honestly—
i don't care what you approve of or what you don't approve of. i wasn't selling myself like some…? yes! you were! you were whoring yourself, and like your words (words you weren't willing to finish using): a piece-of-meat! and don't interrupt me, again. and now, jesse feels as her voice begins to break. it's black canvas time. and she is all that's been penciled in on this hour of judgment.

the shoot was… it was… it…?
what's the cat got your tongue trying to word out? "respectable?" or, "good taste," maybe…? a full honest "respectable" gig, huh? one in "good taste," huh? yeah, that's why that faggot photographer had you in some laced underwear from the waist down, lying on your stomach, looking back at the camera all "suggestively." yeah, "suggestive," i'm guessing you'd avoid using that word to describe it. especially since you and i and that suggestive look have history, and i remember you only giving it to me... just before i'd come up behind you and…—
hey! enraged jesse. you cannot fool me, i know how you women think. everything is a cover up! you will mask everything you do. you will do what you do that you flat out know that it's wrong. but, pretend you did something else. and pretend it was right. but i have eyes all around you and inside of you and i see nothing but the truth!

it's the following day now.
and, that's just about everything she remembered of the night she slept prior. that, and the entire time felt stuck in sleep paralysis; her stuck in that world of cold sweat and tears; her, and with her ever-persistent breathing. just so agonizing and exhausting to deal with. was she asleep through much of it? half asleep? or really awake, fully? she didn't know. she couldn't tell. the thing with sleep paralysis was: it wasn't that easy to rationalize it. if they're here. i'm not leaving la, like i left all those other towns they chased me out of! all i want to do is dance. that's all! that

is all! commands jezebel, putting her foot down. and, not giving into the hysteria, again. not again! not this time.

since tennessee…
since leaving the city of her birth of nashville, she had first tried to get the hell out of dodge by leaving not too far off: just to memphis. and to see if that was all that was needed to leave behind the life she had lived before all of this had begun. but the brothers found her there and terrorized her from that town. she had then driven all the way to iowa: again, someplace, to hide, just hide, and start anew. but they once again came and terrorized her out from there. from there, to wyoming. then down to new mexico. to utah. arizona. city after city. town after town. she'd escape to, only to come across the path of the twin riders again.

and again.
and again.
and again.

it's been 4 hours!
it's been 4 hours and some minutes, she's been lying on her white tiled bathroom floor, in her white underwear, staring at nothing. how she got here? she can't tell you. what was she doing before? she no longer remembers. rubbing her hands back and forth over the sense of her fishnet stockings all slow and sensually….

why is everything so red?

slow. and sensually.
slow. and sensually.
slow… and such and such.
back. forth.
and.
back. forth….

at one point,
accidently running her hand between her legs, to give herself something to change this feeling (or was it accidental?). but….

no. no. no. no. no!

don't start that! don't start that!

she doesn't.

afraid, later, tonight, billy would then bring it up… and berate her all over again.

although….
doing it, never gave her any sense of poise and peace, like every other time she told herself it would. soothing and soothing and soothing and… no!

sensuality being a sin!

did nothing but make everything feel quite the opposite; as it would sharpen all her senses and sensitivity; making everything experienced seem much more laceratingly pleasing than they had been to start with. turning the pleasure into pain. the pain into fury. and the fury into fire: hellish fire!

no!
just wasn't worth it.

it's been at least four hours now she's been hanging her head down, down here, low, where she's been mostly mellowing out. pounding out the doldrum moments. music coming from outside her bathroom window to her right. her bathroom illuminated with a red-light fixture that made the atmosphere very reminiscent of a roaring 20s suicide scene, with hot jazz playing over plastic eyes. the melody dwindling from glad to sad. and, oh, so sad now. miserable. as the record begins skipping. and now it won't stop, just won't stop, since its audience has been rendered dead. deceased. i don't know! jesse says and thinks. something very, very hellishly beautiful in all its art deco beauty.

yet also nauseating.

not from the window, though. the window was streaming in the color of white, and how white should be white. and the music echoing through this certain part of noho, with musical notes draping its windy path like a royal drape, was much more majestic. sad, still. but sad in ways how jesse could at least relate with. none

of that jazz. but jade. just jade. mortal. and not immortally drawn out. seemed like jesse had a neighbor that really liked listening to the weeknd. and just as much as jesse did. who? who knew. pity. right now, the song playing was abel's 'the birds, part two.' the second installment from the one jesse first heard back in the uber with ray. but before that, back in 2012, hearing it for the first time, she knew immediately no other musician in the '10s were gonna be this good. an immediate recognition of greatness.

i think of him as the anti-taylor swift… and… no, tay tay, the 10s don't belong to you! eww, hell no!

at least when it came to her taste and her taste's verdict. there's a hung of melody and sadness in it all. that at least feels slow, and not rushed.

rush! rush! rush!
it all feels, the madness, the neverending madness of all that jazz! ugh! i hate jazz! just above her head.
so, hush! hush, now… just hush….

and stay down here. until all the angry spirits that are towering above her, lose interest, and decide to go away. God, how much longer? how much longer must i put up with this? she asks above, but, of course… gets no answer.

and, maybe, for now… it's for the best.

of course, she knows that the spirit world is real! of course, she does! she's known it and experienced it since childhood. ever since being visited by an angel that taught her to dance. no, not a dream! but something she truly did experience. and, the last thing she was ever thankful of. and nothing else truly since.

outside her bathroom, jesse hears it's jessica. not sure where the other two are. and she's laughing and laughing while not a joke has yet to be made. there's, maybe, two guys with her from the sounds of it. two strange guys jezebel has never met. and never again will meet. just another two different strangers in a couple of days. three maybe then, afterwards. and just maybe one after that. ships, ships, so many ships, passing in the night. and not a single titanic anywhere in the fleet. there's the usual stench of southern comfort and pot in the air. and, jezebel

knows she's going to need to keep herself away from the crowd as best as she can; they'll try to liquor her up again! of course, they'll try! so, maybe, it's better to be here, than out there?

actually…?
forget this! i'm getting something to eat. jesse thinks. then gets up, and exits the bathroom (still in her underwear):

big mistake!

and now, here's these two idiot guys, staring all directly at her with a drunken stupor; straight up ogling all her goods since they're all in display. one begins to laugh, chuckling like a chainsaw trying to rev up. the other, flashes some predatory eyes, streaming fast, and now seems to want to make a move on her.

what the hell? thinks jesse.
oh, crap!
he's one of "those" types.

hands coming out all ballistic.

but then, slammed on—quick! as jesse escapes out of reach, into her bedroom, and then slams the door shut! as a hard-knocking thud comes from the jerk that tried to make a fast one on her. ahh! she stubbed my fingers! ouch! who was that? she's savage! no, she ain't savage! don't mind her. that's just jesse, for ye. she's a good girl. so, let's all pretend that when she comes out. okay? ha! answers jessica, to the douche with the meat hooks for hands. and since it's just jessica and the two, jezebel is sure one is going to luck out getting some action; probably the one with the freddy krueger hands. are you kidding me? jezebel thinks. the things guys will do when they think there's rest assuredness in getting laid. jesse now gets herself dressed more decently to get out into the open air. she exits the room, again. flashes a stare across like a lighthouse with so, so many jagged rocks within her panoramic scene. and flashes a sight at all the mindless and soulless programming written on the walls in 1s and 0s. there's jessica, sitting there on the couch. there's laughing boy. and there's the one with the sights on her now baring some teeth. but, teeth out of some fight or flight mechanism coming from a place of resentment and fear and cold piss. lots of cold piss. and jesse is a mindreader

when it comes to this heathenistic mindlessness and can read all their thoughts. especially the one that tried to sic onto her, last, now thinking:

"oh hell, she's hot! hotter than jessica sitting there. damn! i'm thirsty, now. make a move, again, quick! confidence! women like confidence! just show her that, and she's yours!"

but, before the dumbass is able to come up with a smooth operator line to do the trick, jezebel is already walking fast. and out. and now, out the apartment door. and once again then: slam! the door goes, shut, again. and, wouldn't you know it? smashing the idiot's fingers a second time. shit! what a thot! the same dumbass regurgitates at her, on the other side of the door. sorry, captain meathooks, too slow, better luck next time! why don't you take your confidence… and shove it up your—you know what!

you freakin' rapist! i know that's what you are, deep down inside! saw it in your eyes, i did, you piece-of...—

and these thoughts are now speeding so fast, with no handle, jesse isn't even sure if they're just in her head or being done out loud in full volume. but, doesn't matter. little chance she'll see him again, tonight. if there's anything commendable about her three roommates, they don't like sleepovers. not anymore, at least. although, jesse's sure one of those (if not both) guys will hook-up with jessica, later. but there's been enough nights that have passed where a guy, one of the three would hooked-up with, woke up puking all over, on the couch, carpet, everywhere! and it was then the three finally decided to make the rule (never a rule made in the process that they'll at least have jesse partake in), to kick out any boytoy after the three freaks have had their way with them. therefore, good! the only problem now is, it'll be at least 3 in the morning before jesse can go back. and, now, she's got some time to burn. fine, then, let me have a night out all to myself. and treat myself to something better. she thinks. while headed towards the elevator to use it to go down to the garage basement. and then, to the car. and then, where to… who knows. jesse feels like surprising herself on the way there.

now on magnolia heading towards burbank. she was feeling starved for some $12 ramen. and, that was exactly what she was to be getting. burbank was probably one of the nicer cities in la county; a place to actually feel keen to settle and raise

kids in. and, that was exactly what most socals did there. that, and work for more of the major studios in that city. so, it had its polarizing vibes of not sure if it wanted to be a family oriented or business-as-usual oriented city. it was definitely a prime locale for most ex-porn stars to settle and try to forget what they did in another lifetime. so, you'd find a lot of your red-light wolves in soccer mom's clothing. at a local starbucks in burbank. but not dressed like any soccer mom. but wearing pink sweats, the forever 21 kind; worn by a woman now in her late 40s. maybe even early 50s. hopefully nowhere 60s, hopefully! all bitch faced out to cover up any look of dread of the possible thought of being anything but inconspicuous in a scene like this. in a place like this. a crowd like this. full of mostly men and women and children dressed in earth tones and looking like they just got out of church. plus, one or two other ex-porkers like her, dressed exactly like her, and pretending like her, how they don't notice her, as much as she doesn't notice them, as much as anyone else isn't noticing anybody—right back! "crap, i should have gone into coffee bean, no one ever really gives a damn in there!" she would then think. while waiting for the barista to finish making her drink so she can leave. while fidgeting around with her pink sweats discreetly around her buttocks, so they don't hug around her curves—too much! so much, as everyone else would also then begin hugging them—and with their eyes!

"oh, crap, i know they can see my camelt—…
from back ther—…
crap, crap!"

and now = "mission failed!"

for she's now the biggest spectacle in the room. once again. and everyone has the same look in their eyes, once again. as they always did when she had everyone's attention with the scene she was making. and it's kinda funny, because, it's all so very coincidentally metaphorical to how "trying too hard to cover up as many ass-ended, past embarrassments, would eventually lead to—this!" and now, breathe! and, breathe.

deep breaths.
deep breaths.
deep… but, wait? it's not her breath she feels exiting her lungs. but, what she can only imagine to be the cold-showered breath of a 8 year old child, fresh out of

sunday school, on her left cheek, getting a sneak peek at all that his prepubescent years will be about in coming years. "shit!" so now, quick, with the prada sunglasses! quick with the drink! quick with the gtf-out the door! and all about as quickly as everything else in her life has gone from such a fast-forwarded lifestyle. much like a candle lit and burning from both ends.

and… damn it… "a candle lit from both ends…?"

and now, even the metaphors are chasing her around town with something sounding very reminiscent of her heydays. and they're metaphors inside metaphors! so, it's like the attack of the christopher nolan movies!

so, there you go! thought jess. this all being really thoughts she would have for herself.

that was burbank in a nutshell for any out-of-towners: a great place for anyone to sweep as much dirt under the rug as had been accumulated over the years, and pretend their lot had always been this spotlessly clean. even now with very, very lumpy carpeting… for some reason.

why can't i stop throwing around so much shade?

jesse then thought. and over that whole and entire thought process. upset now. since, it was the fact that she was doing it not to anyone directly, but, the judgmental ideas of persons which she personally had never even met.

i just keep thinking about gratuitous crap like this.
so, tell me why, oh, why… i…?

jesse's head was beginning to hurt. she really did think way too much over matters like these. these, and nothing else. but, deep down, she knew her reasons. it wasn't as much her thoughts over a matter. but a mentality that had eventually rubbed off on her what used to be his.

theirs.

she was at the restaurant now and eating. sorta felt good to be treating herself like

this, but, also, sorta not so good, since she was completely alone sitting here. and when every other patron in the place was sitting and eating with company around. and seemed to be having a good time. and now, jesse, here, was feeling quite embarrassingly alone as a bonus. but she was used to this. plus… so, so… many other things.

she was done eating.

she paid the bill. and before getting up, at that instant, her heart sank. and sank, bad. really bad! as if her heart had fallen down into her stomach, and now being eaten away by the acids. and the feeling was worse than she felt she was able to deal with at the moment. what's happening? she thought. she had never felt anything so depressing, not for a while, at least. the feeling churned within her.

oh God, what is this?

then manifested itself as a demon almost, inside of her. like some demonic parasite. like the alien from aliens, and jesse as the incubator. and now it was fighting for control. control of jesse. jesse felt afraid.

no, no, no… what demon? there is no demon… it's just a feeling.

and now felt morose. like the feeling of a cemetery in a 60s techicolor photo. like forest lawn cemetery, that wasn't too far from where jesse was at; the place where elizabeth taylor and michael jackson were buried. her eyes then panned towards the ambient lighting above her table; it was such a dull yellowish color; the color was now the embodiment of pure sorrow. she didn't want to go home, she couldn't just yet. not with jessica, her hookup, and maybe even captain meathooks still there. but there were still so many hours to waste, what could she do? but, before getting up, she then noticed her iphone was in her hands. she hadn't been using it, she had spent the last hour sitting and eating. also, her phone must have come on, by itself, and been unlocked, also all by itself. and, it was in her contacts, and, specifically on phil's number, somehow.

no, no… i don't want to…

but, then again…

why not? she still had lots of time to kill. it was only 9pm at the moment, so maybe some company could be beneficial for her right now? and, why not phil's? fine, if this is serendipitous, or something… fine! so be it. of course, jesse had phil's number, and phil didn't have her number, even when he had finally built up the courage to ask. she had rejected him, of course, but had taken his number just to "throw a dog a bone." anyways, that scary melancholic rush she had experienced a moment ago had really unsettled her, and she was now fearing a reprisal. maybe company was the only medicine she could take to keep that feeling at bay? so, she called him, still seated at the booth she had been eating. phil answered, then got really, really excited when he learned jezebel was calling him. ugh! >.>

you in your car right now? jesse asked.
no, i'm staying over with friends.
friends? jesse thought, now becoming very apprehensive about the idea. knowing phil, if he was with a bunch of his nerdy video gamer friends, if she was to now hang out with phil and his company, she was to be the only skirt at the sausage fest—no doubt about it! double ugh! oh, stop thinking that way! stop being so assumptive about people. maybe they're cool?

hey, phil, i was bored… and—
oh, really, come over! phil exclaimed. that was not a good idea. umm, not really interested in being inside. i feel like going out someplace, maybe, somewhere i've never been, you feel like hanging out? jezebel strained herself to string the words together. this was difficult for her. very anxiety-riddled and difficult.

hang out, huh?
you mean like a—…? but then phil caught himself before saying the "d" word. good thing too, that would have been an immediate rejection. not that jesse wanted to be so strict with such things. but, hell no! hey, i feel ye. i feel ye. umm… ever been to little tokyo? phil asked on the phone. jesse had never heard of that place. where is that? jesse asked. oh, you'll love it. i swear, you'll love it. let's go. and, that was definitely a place she had never been to. so, why not? why not? oh, can my friends come… umm… can they come too? phil squeaked. that wasn't a good idea, either.

but then again, it was someplace outside. so, what if she had never really hung out with a group of dudes before? and, if phil's friends were anything like him, and not like the guys she had to deal with when it comes to the three wicked stepsisters she'd been living with… why not? they should be harmless. so, jesse agreed. awesome! awesome! phil rejoiced. the desperation was just so eminent for jesse. enough to roll her eyes. but, then again: who am i kidding, jesse, you're really just a loser, yourself, right now. and definitely desperate for some company. crap, i really need to stop being this picky. and, truth was, she was! since moving to la, she hadn't really developed much of a social life. besides the evil stepsisters, the only other peeps she had grown acquainted with were the girls at the pandora club: a club of dancers like her. and she wasn't even really friends with any of them, they were just networking assets to each other. all in all, those were the only lifelines she had at the moment: zero friends, and tons and tons and tons of acquaintances. and that illusion she was selling to all her 52.2k followers on instagram and twitter. i really am just a friendless social media fugazi right now, am i? and with a dose of such humility, taking a big bite of that humble pie: she now felt all for hanging out with nerds. the hell with it!

okay, little tokyo, it is! jesse answered.
awesome. phil rejoiced again.
so… where is it? oh… it's near downtown la. that wasn't good. umm, i hate parking in this city. maybe that's a little bit of a way? jesse answered. no, we can take the subway from north hollywood straight there. la has a subway? jesse baffled. first she had heard of it. yeah. all right, i guess we'll meet… there? and now it was a done deal, as jesse got the rest of the intel on when, where and how to meet up. in north hollywood. jesse then left the ramen place. got to her car she had parked at the local mall on magnolia. and began making her way home. getting there, she parked her car at the garage of her apartment complex. then, ubered a trip to the rendezvous' point.

and once there, she saw how they had already been there waiting. getting out, she now finally met the gang. hey, guys, this is my friend, jezebel. phil introduced. finally meeting the gang. the big bang theory gang, that is! and, yup! they were nerds. but jesse didn't care anymore.

oh!
went one, then shined a flash of insecurity. and when he did, the rest also took a

look at the female. and, boom, it was owl city! and now jesse found herself caring. yeah, this is jezebel. phil introduced, again. as if she was the female jay-z, needing reintroductions. shock! oh, crap… this is getting awkward really fast! thought jesse. it had been just 10 seconds of getting to know each other, and, not one of them had yet blinked. yeah, guys, this is jezebel, and she'd like to see little tokyo. introduced phil a third time.

but then jesse got really pissy with all this timorous behavior and dashed straight towards them, going fully locomotive. two of them jumped out of the way before being run down. and now, she was dashing for the subway. no, she wasn't making a run for the hills! jesse knew the only tactic dealing with loads of misplaced awkward crap was to be savagely direct. she then turned her head towards them, all were beside themselves with "wtfs." come on, come on! i'm getting bored! jesse said. and the rest hopped to it and started tagging. there was a long staircase going underground. jesse then stopped, and then they stopped! she looked at them, they were all now just following her lead; she kinda felt like a general leading men to war. they were in a subway car now. they had bought tickets. actually, one of phil's friends bought her ticket. and after a couple of minutes of dead silence waiting, they were in. now, there was just the dead silence of the party she was riding with. besides phil, there were three other guys, two mexicans and a whitey like jesse: one of them had a flannel shirt with a hoody; one of them was wearing just a black hoody with letters n7 on it (whatever that meant); and the last guy, also a hoody, but one with the affliction brand on that had a bunch of skulls and wings illustrated all over (jesse guessing he was the alpha of this litter… as alpha as they get). and that was all she was able to gather from the gang: garments as substitute of the void of a defining personality. and it was this way almost for the entire ride to little tokyo; nothing but dead silence, and all four sitting there like a group of high school teenagers just outside the principal's office.

hey, what's your names? jesse asked.
geraldo!
juan!
donald!
and then back to silence. awkward, awkward silence. but jesse was starting to grow immune to the infectious disease. so, jesse sat back, and closed her eyes, and imagined being somewhere else. of course, keeping just a teensy bit of attention on the four, as they kept trying to sneak a peek at her naked legs and warm thighs:

as to be expected. for a second there, jesse felt like being a tease, and trying to accentuate the scene she was making, just to mess with the guys: crossing her legs like sharon stone in basic instinct and leaning her head back and making a yawn… which sounded more like a moan. he, he! she giggled. oh, what's funny? asked phil. nothing. jesse answered. and with that, phil had finally broken the ice… at least somewhat. hey, you cosplay? asked the guy with the n7 hoody. no, what's that? and then the n7 dude, or donald, went on into a lengthy description. good, jesse thought. let them talk about geeky stuff, it'll at least ease the tension a little to where i'm not dealing with four mannequins, hopefully. and from the looks of it, it was working. although, going on way longer than jesse planned. of course, jesse knew what cosplay was and what comicon in san diego was and avengers' movies and all that stuff; not at the length as these four here would, but, enough. jesse just kept her gaze out the window watching things rush passed, while the four grew more and more human with their interactions.

hey, i think you'd look great as samus aran.
huh… what? went she.

feeling like she just woke up from a trance. the n7 dude then showed a google picture on his smartphone what he was talking about. jesse looked, and: as to be expected! some video game character with blonde hair and a blue jump suit worn over impossible to obtain features. and why blonde?

nah, my boobs are too small. jesse joked.

but that turned into a two-steps forward, one-step back deal, as the four grew awkwardly silent again.

all the way to little tokyo.

5. little tokyo

you know i'm watching you!

that woke jesse up.

and, looking around, she saw the four standing. jezebel, we're here. said phil. and, jesse got up. and now stood with them. and as the doors opened, they exited. looking at her smartphone, it was now 11:30pm-ish, and there was still way too much time to burn.

after making some track, the five were now here, in little tokyo. and it was just how jesse imagined it would be. little tokyo was that "nice to have a stroll around the block" type of spot; one giant attraction to have while walking around and looking at stuff; a lot of commercial shops that were all architecturally designed to simulate being in some far east city: a lot of paper looking walls and things made to look like bamboo. no actual materials of paper or bamboo being used in the construction work. just whatever made to look that way. plus, lots of oriental writing all around. it was a spectacle. kinda boring for jesse, since this was more of a hangout spot more for introverts, not extroverts like her. here, you wouldn't get too bored if there were no conversations being had between a group of friends, since you could just keep your mind distracted on all the pretty scenery, instead of distracted on each other for something stimulant. and, little tokyo, was definitely that. but, then again, this was california. so, exactly where was there a spot here where the scenery wasn't made to be anything but one, giant distraction? well, at least when it came to the coastal cities in the golden state. this wasn't bakersfield. but, whatever! and, it was somewhat nice seeing how jesse and the boys were to spend time aloofly and absentmindedly to oneself while being as quiet as ever. and on the upside, now, there was at least a much more peaceful quality generating from the boys' centers; a much more natural quality with all of its "go with the flow" type of vibes: sharing comfortable silences instead of awkward ones. a pity because of the silence, still, for jess. but she'd make do. these were the modes the four boys seemed to feel the most spiritually connected to their higher something. and jesse made do. could only now imagine what it was that made boys this way, be this way; to be so disconnected from reality and connected to a concept of what reality would be in their heads. must have had something to do with the upbringing; a lot of it spent placed in front of a viewing box while the parents spent their time ignoring the child, just as the boys were

ignoring jesse, now. this was a generation that was raised by tv and video games; so, to them, everything seemed real and genuine when mathematical and lifeless. jesse could just imagine what the boys would have done on this friday night at home without her; a glorious friday night spent sitting on the carpet playing some mortal kombat game, like his brother tom used to do, on his super nintendo, back when he was twelve; hours and hours spent fighting and fighting each other with ridiculously imagined barbaric avatars on the screen; fighting and absolutely murdering each other, but, never questioning what all that digital brutality said about their psyches. and this was the only way they'd openly relate with one another in a meaningful manner. this was a chaos theory generation. a hive mind that's stuck in the evolutionary processes that could only be realized through millions and millions of years of passage. stuck in a devil's matrix. probably still stuck in some infantile jurassic phase, back when lizard monsters roamed the earth and waged arms wars to see who would come out on top, all survival mode, with the biggest and sharpest teeth. boys stuck in an oubliette perpetually playing with dinosaur toys. if some reptile right now was to crawl out of a sewage drain, the four's minds would probably then instantaneously go into mr. spock mode; all fascinated by its biological anatomy and mating cycles and survival traits, by the will of science. carrying more fascination in some critter than jesse. for them, jesse, was just a creature of ill logic; an object whose main function was for sexual reproduction and recreation and nothing else. but, more than anything, what she was to them was a nuisance, with no identity and no soul. just a millisecond flash of light some billion lightyears away in some undiscovered universe; an unimportant phenomenal distraction that disrupted their eons of observation of the cosmos. but, thankfully, it would soon end, and, this night would soon end, and the boys could go back to recording all the countless millennias to pass without her. without thought. without sense. without discourse. without passion. without love. without soul. and, especially without jesse, here. back to their satisfactory state, of never actually living life, as beings, made for so much more than just… this.

boys… say something! jesse finally broke out. unable to just "make do" of this. not, no more. but the boys seemed way too involved with what was only going on in their own worlds; a boy's only club, to the likes of jezebel singer, respectively. i give up! thought jesse. as she felt not wanting to make do with anything. just feeling so depressed.

but then: hey, jezebel…
ever heard of a kappa demon? asks the one with the affliction hoody. no. says jesse, and makes nothing of it. but, wait a minute, maybe he's onto something, here? jesse now listens, just listens:

in japanese folklore… it's supposed to be a water spirit.

and now, something interesting, especially for jess, begins to brew:

they're like water imps, that are supposed to live in rivers and ponds. they're known to look like children, since being the size of a child, but having green skin that's all scaly and slimy. also having webbed feet and hands, and a shell on their backs, like a turtle. funny, jesse could now somewhat imagine such a creature, and she couldn't tell why she found it fascinating. but she did. but she was. she'd imagine some pudgy and evil charlie brown character crossed with a ninja turtle, standing knee deep in a river, with a sinister grin on its face. what do they do? jesse intrigues. well, being imps, they're troublemakers. tricksters, that like to commit mischief with humans around. like loki… from the avengers' movie? jesse guesses.

exactly!

and then something unexpected occurs. jesse is now sharing a moment with… juan here? this is the first anyone from the big bang theory gang has made actual eye contact with jesse. and jesse now feels head over feet sharing a kin moment. and, is taken in by it. wow, why didn't i see this before: juan's actually kinda cute. thinks jesse. and, truth is, juan kinda actually is. juan's a brunet kid that has a bit of a wavy side parted pompadour. mexican highlights and with green eyes, but not hazy green but crystal-clear green. like spherical caves embodying stalactites and stalagmites covered with algae and flourishing greenery. yeah, the kappas were water imps, and, funny enough, the top of their heads were, umm… kinda bowl like. bowl like? asked jesse. yeah, i mean, not like a dome, it was more like a bowl to fill stuff with. okay…? giggled jesse. yeah, but, they're bad! they're evil spirits, that really want to lure children so they could pull them into the water and drown them. funny how the creepier the details got, the more enthralled jesse felt to want to hear the rest. oh, and this is the funny part, the best way to beat a kappa was to bow. bow…? went jesse. yeah, bow, bow as how japanese people greet each

other. you see, their power was the water they kept inside the bowls in their heads. and, a weakness of theirs was politeness. so, the best way to deal with one was to bow, so then, the kappa would bow, back, and when the water spilled out of the bowl in its head, it would become severely weakened. this was all just too funny and delightful in a bizarre and creepy and silly sort of way. yeah, they were mostly folklore stuff for japanese kids, for their parents to scare them with, so they wouldn't get too close to any bodies of water, they could fall in and drown. continued the n7 dude, or, donald, was it? and donald was doing that thing he did: speaking fast without any breaks; how he did back in the subway train over that whole samus aran and cosplay matter. donald was an okay looking, bit of a heavy-set kid, that had a very rural way of carrying himself. although, also trying to hide it. donald, where are you from? jesse asked. donald then got a little edged finding how he had caught jesse's attention. juan seemed to be the more confident one to have that. but then: oh, um… texas, originally. amarillo, texas. jesse figured. oh, and, here's something else, without the water in its head, it wouldn't be able to do nothing until it was filled again. and, if you filled the bowl, that would make you the imp's master, and, it would do whatever you wanted it to do. continued juan, taking over from donald.

and after all that, silence fell again. but this time it was different. this time, jesse didn't feel so excluded as last time. and, now, she was enjoying a moment in little tokyo, for the first time. and they continued strolling through little tokyo, since, it was the place to do such things; just absorbing the sights and feels around them, as jesse started to become more spiritually open here. i've closed that part off for a good time now. she thought. having her reasons to do so. but now she felt like opening it up again; opening up to sights and feels and have them not just drifting in and out of her life, but, becoming her life; something she could see as being hers, like her camaro had been.

and then a moment flashed before her of a long-forgotten memory: she was a child then, holding onto her mother's hand. this was before she had separated from her dad. and, at this time, was going through a dark spell. she'd leave the house and wander the neighborhood streets; wander the streets sometimes aimlessly, for hours on end. and, with jesse at hand. this one time, in the middle of a stroll around wedgewood and brandsford, her mom spoke and said: "someone has kidnapped a reindeer in this neighborhood." "a reindeer?" jesse asked. "yes, so keep your eyes on the windows to the houses we pass, if you see

one, let me know, and we'll call the police to come and save her." and then, jesse remembered spending that entire stroll enamored with saving that reindeer, as she'd keep her eyes on the windows to the houses they'd pass, while her mom kept her thoughts someplace else. and, where? i never really got to know. jesse thought. wow, why did i remember that just now? funny. she thought, and then wrote it off as some greater scheme of things. whatever they'd be, only God knew. yeah, spirits aren't things people really talk about anymore, but, i believe they're real. said juan, and then stood, very ominously. jesse smiled at him, but then noticed something else. oh, crap! and then jesse noticed how phil was getting a little jealous with juan. actually, a lot jealous. jesse picked up on this, quickly now, and it seemed quicker than phil was able to pick it up for himself. from himself. as phil seemed to anguish a bit from jesse and juan having a much more blossoming dialogue than phil ever had with her. as he grabbed his chest a little, and seemed to be having a mild heart attack. and all this while being very immature about his own emotions, as he pined and pined, and wondered what was wrong. and if jesse was to ask what was wrong, phil would say, "nothing," denying himself something being wrong, more than he'd be denying jesse that. simply put: this could get problematic, if jesse allowed it to play its course. so, it was probably best if jesse broke off from juan. and, finally, there was also the fact that jesse wasn't at all interested in juan. but since none of the boys here seemed mature enough in their understanding of human relationships, she worried they might read it as if jesse was. since any little positive feedback from jesse for them equaled:

"yeah, she's got the hots for me."

and that notion almost always would lead to guys becoming jerks and acting cocky. annoyingly cocky! and that was the point jesse would draw the li—….
stop!
stop!
don't get so ahead of yourself over this. don't think everything will turn out like that. jesse argued, within herself, with herself. maybe that was a little too much worrying over nothing? with her crowd, definitely something to worry about, considering how her crowd operated. this was not her crowd, and, she shouldn't expect the same. not like phil would later lose it and… no! she now didn't see that happening.

and… if anything… they were too beta to be so bold.

you know, they're all around us. invisible, but, around. and they're always influencing us, as we're also influencing them. juan now went on. yeah, i always got that from student housing, when i had it. and now phil was chiming in. how so? jesse asked. then phil looked up at la city hall; a building that was something of la's golden age; a building you'd expect in black and white photos, back when fedoras were a staple for all men to wear, and women chased after glamour and glory, instead of political empowerment. when i was in student housing, my roommates were total potheads. and, i got a lot of weird vibes from that environment. a lot of weird nuances. you mean when you were rooming with freddy and his boys? asked geraldo. yeah. answered phil. hey, jess, freddy and company… um? you know the type of guys that have a tattoo of an ex-girlfriend's name on their necks? geraldo went on. jesse looked up and thought. yeah, she did! she knew exactly the type of guys he was referring to. i think so, hehe. jesse said. then realized this was the first time she was nicknamed by the four. yeah, that's the type of guys we're talking about. said phil. ha, ha, yeah, and every time i've personally seen them in the computer labs at school, they're always on macs, editing videos of… let's just say, thicc, as in, thick women… to the soundtrack of some mumble rapper singing: "versace versace," over and over again. geraldo elaborated. ah, i see. jesse knew exactly the type. phil followed suit: yeah, also, they were more like scene kids, in a way. or would be back when my chemical romance was still the thing. as geraldo did the same: they were also skaters. and, yeah, you're right on the money with that, 2019 scene kids, with flat billed caps and neck tattoos. jesse was now having a ball with this. what do you mean by weird? jesse asked phil. oh, i mean, i only smoked with them, once. and never again. why, what… what was it? phil now had a terrified look in his eyes. i don't know, all of a sudden, i started envisioning stuff, stuff like hearts being sawed in half. and i got a whole lot of demonic vibes, then. practically went into the bathroom and locked myself in there. and didn't want to come out until the effects wore off. and that now started to unnerve jesse; she knew exactly what phil was talking about; she knew it all too well.

hey, jesse, were you a scene queen in middle to high school? asked juan. jesse shook her head. no…? went juan. and then jesse felt like being truthful. nope… emo girl. what? all four blew up. yup, emo. jesse didn't want to bring something like that up. since, she remembered all the flank she took for being one at the

time. jesse then eyed the boys. but, oh, wow! what had she done? they were now definitely all turned on by her more than ever. but then, thankfully, it went away.

hmm, there was a soothing quality at play now that didn't make jesse feel totally unedged. and neither the boys.

yeah, freddy and his boys never gave me good vibes. there was something really sketchy about them that i just didn't like. juan added. seemed like all four boys knew the same dude and his boys, and jesse was now getting a window into that world.

and then a bomb dropped:
dude, you do know that freddy has murdered someone before, right? went phil.
what? went juan.

there was a pause now.

what do you mean? asked juan.
back when i first moved in. that night. freddy got really high with the boys and told me a story. and, i could just tell how freaky it would be with all the clouds in the air. pot clouds, i mean. you see, he had to kill his dad. who, at the time, was trying to kill his mom. and, when he was 14 years old, he picked up a knife and stabbed him fifty times in the chest. he never saw any juvi time, since, his mom vouched for her kid that it was done out of self-defense on her part. phil added.

another long pause.

wait, why you call it "murder," if it was self-defense? jesse asked. and now phil had the same look in his eyes as before. because… fifty times? stabbing him that much? seems excessive, don't you think? answered phil, and then gave off a really creepy vibe, and gave it straight to jesse, with his eyes. but jesse didn't get scared by it, since, she could tell, it wasn't a ghost phil personally carried, but, a ghost he himself was handed down, whenever this freddy character had first told him the story. like the videocassette from the movie ring; a horror passed down from person to person. so, what type of spirits you think freddy was surrounded by? asked geraldo, seeming the most skeptical of the group about all this. not good ones, i'll say that much. concluded phil. and now, an opportunity opened up for

jezebel singer. she realized: maybe i should talk about him now. them? but then shook it off. since, that was a spirit she preferred if it stayed in her closet. locked away. boarded up. bricked and cemented up so it could never see the light of day.

and then jesse heard a telltale sound that made her almost completely panic:

zoom!

she heard the roar of a sportster motorcycle. her eyes then flashed a sight at the street where it was coming from, and then, she saw it: a man on his bike, pulling a wheelie, and blazing off and passed her and the four boys. right passed them! now, they could all practically and personally feel every explosion of the pistons, with this bat out of hell blowing up, in their ears and brains. as it jackhammered everyone's nerves almost to the breaking point.

freakin' road hog! juan answered to it.

the boys began to laugh. phil then looked at jesse, and smirked. ha, ha, yeah, jess, i think that was meant for you. you got a stalker now. phil joked. but jesse wasn't finding this funny—not at all! they do it on purpose, you know, sneak up behind you and—
i want to go back. i need to go back! i… i…?
you all right, jess? juan asked.

i… i…?
i was just kidding about the stalker part. phil added.

no… let's just go back. i've had a rough day. and i'd…?
and the boys began to grow worrisome, seeing her like this. and decided to heed.

fine, no trouble at all… was a good night. let's go.

and they did.

6. lions and porcupines

jesse had had a very bizarre dream that night. cute. but, bizarre. very cartoonish in nuance and nature. in it, a cupid was seen appearing in the middle of nowhere, first. blank white canvas, this time. and, as cupids, he was a chubby, little, naked, laughing faced being. with a bit of a plump, stomach sticking out. but, how tubby 2-year-olds tend to look when at that age. just this cute little fat thing, that was also apparently quite, quite mischievous. with a bow and arrow. and arrows with rosy-red-heart-shaped tips all in one hand, and a gyro prepared by its mommy, venus, in the other. and, the little greek child, on this now visually manifesting greek island, surrounded by the waters of the mediterranean, seemed to have been up to some naughty-little-devil, childish work. jesse now stood there, also on this manifesting white island, surrounded by blue seas, as the cupid brought forth a lion and a porcupine; pushing them to stand next to one another. now, the lion looked at that porcupine as the porcupine looked at the lion. jesse looked at all this and thought, "what the hell is going on here?" as now, the bewildered curiosity spread to the lion and porcupine. as they also looked at each other and then to jesse. wondering: "wtf?" and now, nothing but question marks blinking all about, over all three parties' heads. and then… and only then… jesse chose to look into the face of this little imp child. and it was then that jesse understood: "oh… hell no!" for: "oh yes!" for it seemed as if the cupid had gone full "prankster mode" savage; jesse standing in front of this hellenic simplistic creature and realizing its careless and cruel intentions. jesse then shouted at the lion and the porcupine:

"run, run—you silly mortal fools—the cupid has gone mad! and the imp plans to make the both of you fall in love with one another!"

terror now struck the lion and the porcupine. terror! simply terror! and as for the little rascally imp, he was jumping around left to right. clapping, clapping, clapping. with this most mischievously evil grin, only a little thing like it could make and possess. as for the rest of the dream, it was just very silly. very, very silly! all had nothing to do but having the lion and the porcupine running around and around this little greek island, in sheer fear; avoiding all attempts the cupid made to shoot his rosy-red-heart-shape-tipped arrows into their chests. and right through the center of their hearts. a match made in such a beautiful mediterranean landscape and seascape of islands and oceans; a match made in such a hellenic hell, such as this one. jesse later awoke. and then thought: what the hell was that

riddle of that about? for, at the ends, a riddle was asked by an unknown female voice. unknown at first, but not afterwards. now jesse was in another blank white canvas. and then, she appeared. and then asking:

"does love choose for us, or… do we do?"

that was it.

jesse didn't mind allowing phil to sleep at her place over the night. on the couch, of course! it was nice to have a man in the house she didn't need to feel apprehensive with. and phil was simply content with joy having any roof over him, and not a car roof. although, secretly, jesse couldn't deny another reason she decided to help a guy out wasn't as noble, and had more to do with sticking it to the evil stepsisters, and their golden rule. at the time, jesse felt she was killing two birds with one stone: a good bird and an evil bird. balancing out the good and bad she did. but it didn't come to fruition, since none of the girls were home when jesse and phil got to her place around 2am. and neither did they appear anytime that night to catch phil on the couch. but, jesse, shrugged it off, and decided: it was for the best! breaking the golden rule was her being foolhearted enough to purposely try to create drama with the stepsisters, and that would not have turned out well in the end. no secret there!

and, jesse had a good night sleep for once... (except for that one silly dream of hers). none of that breathing business. no sleep paralysis. and no—him. them! good! maybe if phil moved in, the other girls would move out? jesse then pondered. but, no! phil had no job, so, how would he pay half the rent money, if all three girls left, and left only him and jesse with the rent? jesse wasn't very shrewd when it came to money; she wasn't really very good with it, with any of her instagram and twitter followers. and photo shoots were where practically most of her bread came from. since she had an eye for photography: an eye to catch other eyes. and, since she was what could be considered as pretty (gorgeous, maybe even), also helped her out with getting clickbait. but, money made dancing? now, that would have been something! it would mean she would be a professional. jesse knew how to dance. she did! very, very well! but it was as if God didn't want for it to happen for the moment; she believed God had to have put her on this earth for that: He must have… right? she could dance like no one could. she didn't even need to choregraph or work at it; didn't have to spend hours upon hours in

front of some mirror, getting very sweaty and very frustrated with herself in aerobic wear, like all the other girls had to do at the pandora club. actually, the thing was, she had only showed her moves, there, at the club, once (and she really held a ton of it back), but it was enough to cause nothing but drama and extreme jealousy. as she saw all the mouths of all the girls that were there, drop. eyes devastated. and hopes and dreams of being the main bitch at the club smashed to pieces. when you're that good, people will start to hate you. loath you! and wanting to see you taken out of the picture. or maybe i'm just imagining that? she thought.

she did have some friends from the club. well, as mentioned before, networking assets. but michelle was still kind to her, right? dominque was too, right? and of course catherine? at least her…? that or they just pretended to be…! she thought then. but decided not to entertain it any further. it was now morning of the following day, saturday, which meant tonight she would go partying at west hollywood. and play the swinger's gambit. like all saturdays for jesse. but jesse wasn't looking forward to it, not really anymore. just a few weeks, ago she was at the 24-hour fitness that phil sometimes sleeps in. she was using the sauna. and so were some hollywood producers from what she got from the conversations between each other: they were laughing up all the nasty business about the life; a lot of nasty details, not meant for jesse's ears. but she was there to hear them. who's sleeping with who. who's got a coke or smack addiction. and then about cattle calls. and then a word was used that jesse immediately realized it was meant for her lot in this city.

"leeches" they called them.
all the nobodies in town that want to be somebodies.

talking about this stupid girl, and that stupid girl, and the stuff they would do, just to get recognized. "yeah, this lana chick bob picked up in west hollywood, man, bob told me he finally found someone willing to get a golden shower." "is bob even into that stuff?" one of them asked. "no, of course not… maybe? honestly, i think it's more of a sport for him, now. since his divorce from that money sucking harpy of a woman, i can tell he absolutely hates women. so, more to do it out of spite." "did the leech really give in?" "yeah, she did." "bob, with him?" "yeah, with that ugly turd." "hey, as they say on the internet: pics… or it didn't happen." the guy that was talking about bob now smiled. jesse didn't see him

smile, because of all the steam in the sauna. but she could just tell the pig was smiling. "don't worry, fellas, he's got more than just pics, i'll show you the vid later." they all then had a good laugh. and jesse was feeling way too disgusted to stay any longer and listen to them. got up and left. and never did any of them notice her there the entire time, nor when she left.

phil was gone. it was 9am, and, jesse saw how he had left before she woke up. jesse was now alone in her apartment. and she wasn't sure what to do until later tonight. so now, once again, with time to burn. however, that sinking feeling she felt yesterday was seemingly bubbling up again. and that made jesse feel anxious. so, she text phil to see where he was at.

after a good hour of just wasting time on the phone on her couch, she got a reply back; he said he was with the boys again from last night. said he was there to cook something special. cook? seemed that phil had some culinary skills; grew up around iranians and knew how to make persian food. jesse had never had persian food. hey, would it be too much if you came here to cook? jesse texted. umm… let me talk to the guys. several minutes later: no, they'd be down for that.

and some time later the four were now at her place; they had brought all the groceries needed. and jesse just felt glad to have normal people around her. hey, jess, what was it about last night that really spooked you? phil asked. obviously, jesse didn't want to say. but, said something, anyways. and said how she didn't know; that panic attacks were random for her, and the cyclist had probably just triggered them. umm… would it be too personal to ask, when you started having panic attacks? phil built up the nerve to ask then. jezebel just shrugged. then went and sat on the couch, as the four began goofing around with each other. odd! something felt off today. nothing felt like last night. and whatever themes there were yesterday, that made the day feel good, were no longer around. even with the boys. jezebel just sat there now, as if waiting for something to happen. which, she didn't know what.

hey, did you hear? freddy, you know, freddy, from last night, he got kicked out of school today. said juan to phil.
what, really, what happened? phil asked.
dude, he was caught using school property shooting amateur porn from his student housing.

what, you kidding?
no.

wait, did he get kicked out for shooting porn or kicked out for using school property? i know that the school doesn't like it when we use it for professional reasons. since, a lot of the software they have are student licensed. phil added. i guess that. whatever the thing was. he's out now. that sucks, though. he was good at what he did, shady character or not. and close to graduating. and now he's 80 grand in debt, with no degree. yeah, that really does suck to think about it. concluded phil. wow, 80 grand. thought jesse. as she could just feel all the passive vibes the boys were now emitting; a lot of uncertainty of the future types. since, their futures pretty much also saw possibly spending an entire lifetime paying off such loans. one of those moments of living in the now, and not wanting tomorrow to come. dreading to see it come. and seeing all that it had in store for them. so, better enjoy the now while it lasted: eat some good food, laugh a little, and hope that this day won't end.

but then something happened jesse didn't plan, stupidly enough, that made it feel like this day was going to come to an end, sooner than she at least hoped. the apartment door opened, and it was judy romero. crap! and immediately, judy's eyes flew at the boys, like a blind sighted insect would, flying into the windshield of a car; her eyes then flew directly at jezebel, and her thoughts were immediate, as her head went dutch angle. the boys had sorta gotten used to jesse, since jesse was a much more open person. judy was anything but open, ever! and the boys now had the same look from last night, when they first met jesse, at the noho subway station. judy then stormed into her bedroom, and slammed it shut. double crap! jesse had to now go in there and see how judy would take this. but, not all immediately, to not make a scene with the boys, as if something was terribly off. that is, if judy storming off and slamming the bedroom door behind her, wasn't a gross enough scene, already. umm… i'm guessing that's your roommate… is she all right with us…? went phil. getting the sense that this was all a bad idea. no, no, that's just judy. she's… always like that. and that wasn't exactly much of a lie, either. or a cover up. that really was just judy; that really was how she was most of the time. whether around jezebel or anyone. even around the other two girls that lived in the apartment, that she got along with better. except guys (guys she'd like). she was a total floozy then.

jesse then made a straight shot… to the bathroom. and closed it. then opened a slit, watching to see who might be watching, and snuck into her bedroom, which she shared with judy. and, judy's reactions were once again immediate, but now there were also words attached:

who are those gilipollas, you invited them here? assaulted judy.
crap! she was cussing in spanish. she had to be really mad now. but jesse then felt mad, herself. mad, because: you're being hypocritical. said jesse. what? exploded judy. i've never brought one guy here, and with you, i lost count a long, long time ago. so, what's the problem? jesse said. judy's reactions then fidgeted between anger, and that feeling people get, getting caught with their pants down. look…! said judy… and wasn't able to come up with something, anything, that could lead her back to making jezebel into the bad guy. what, they're just nice guys. they're cooking food. food! you like food. it's better than what you've brought in the past. jesse reasoned. but then there was a look in judy's eyes, like she had something for jesse, to turn the tables. wait… did they spend the night here? triple crap! jesse had to lie. she had to! she had to! jesse realized now this was something judy could use against her. even as far as getting her kicked out of the apartment.

no…? jesse went.

jesse could sometimes be a master at screwing up lies; she was just that terrible at it. especially under pressure. judy caught on to this and started doing the index finger thing. you're lying! i can tell! no. jesse went. knowing the best course out of this was being persistent with her denials. it was all she could do.

no… you're—
no, no, no! i'm not lying! jesse reinforced. but, then again, it was only ¼ of a lie, really. since all four boys hadn't really spent the night here. just phil. judy wanted to add to that. but then realized something. and got pissed. and, it then occurred to jesse what that was: she had no proof they did! she wasn't here to know that. all she had was her intuition now telling her jesse was lying. but, no proof. judy now began to simmer down a little; knowing she could no longer use that angle. listen, they're just nice guys and—
no, they're incels! you brought incels into our place! judy now fired out. and, jesse had no idea what she was talking about. um, i don't speak spanish. that's not spanish! then what does that mean? judy then gave a look of smug annoyance.

looking at jesse, and how much of an ignorant, silly girl she, seemed to her. jesse didn't care anymore. she was getting sick of this. i… don't know what you're talking about, but…—
incels are psychos! you haven't heard about them? it's all over the news these days! they kill girls like us. psychos! judy added. yeah… jesse was really getting sick of this discussion. sick and tired! sick and tired! and also, now, feeling mighty offended for the boy's sake.

judy… you know what? you're just a stupid,
shallow
bitch!
jesse fired back.

and: bullseye!

it hit dead center! though jesse didn't care anymore. not anymore. let this bitch find a way to get her kicked out, somehow. not like she couldn't find another place. which, on the positive note, meant she no longer would need to deal with judy, here. nor the other two girls. this was a long time coming.

judy romero was devastated. angry still, but those were a ton of bricks crashing down on her head. more than a ton. and now she was stuck under the rubble, and unable to crawl her way back out in a timely fashion. as said: this was a long time coming, since they were all bricks jesse had been collecting up from the three for the passed six months of living here, which they had one by one tossed in her direction. and now, she had sixteen tons of them, all on her shoulders, and jesse felt this was the perfect time to let 'em drop! jesse now decided to leave her like this. however, first, chose to go out of her way, to serve judy one last, cold dish, of in-your-face-ness, with a perfectly timed smirk.

te-he!
and then left the room.
and once back into the main spaces, she now felt… delighted. renewed! best feeling she had felt in a long, long till.

so, where's the food? jesse cheered.

7. judy

a good hour had now come and gone. all eating. the food was… interesting. a lot of marinated skinless chicken: kabobs. served with rice that was only yellow with the top portion. phil told everyone that persians had a thing with the rice being yellow at the top, for reasons he couldn't put his finger on what that was. odd! as for the meat, the trick was to have it marinated for an extended amount of time before being cooked; since persians never, never, never ate any meat with the skin, supposedly. a total reversal of how people in america would imagine how chicken should be cooked and served. so, to make the meat extra juicy, it required a whole lot of marinating. not hours… days! and, eating it now, the chicken was so lean, you could practically cut it with the edge of your pinky. really good that way, though!

a good hour had come and gone. but then judy came out.
hey, guys! smiled judy.

now, the boys didn't know judy; not more than five seconds from the time she first came into the apartment and then stormed into the bedroom. but jesse knew judy well. this was not judy. not judy, no! what, you didn't save any for me? i was just fixing my hair in the bedroom all this time. she was being ditzy and cute. even did a curly thing with her finger in her hair, when mentioning her hair. who the hell is this? thought jesse, speechless. oh my gosh, that looks so delicious. what is that? what is that? practically bouncing up and down, up and down, excited. and then jesse noticed something else, hitting her right between the eyes.

wait, what the hell is she wearing?
are those my fishnet stockings?

she doesn't have a pair! gasped jesse in her thoughts. judy was wearing what she would normally wear, when heading out on saturday nights, to snag a bro to hook up with later: black and shiny knee-high stiletto boots, jesse's fishnet black stockings, a black biker jacket with shiny pins and zippers, a bra—just a bra, and her denim shorts that were short enough to be considered lingerie, almost. she was dressed like a slutty biker chick, at a biker bar, where thirty biker dudes would beat the absolute crap out of one another: just to come out as the one, the only one, with the chance to ask this pig-skinned chick out in a date. jesse then panned her eyes at the boys, and, they had a look on their faces, like that samus aran

character from their video games had come to life. speechless. but—hooked! umm… it's… persian food…? squeaked phil. dead pan and lost. why you looking at me like that, jesse? phil asked. jesse was practically pleading with phil with her eyes to shut his, immediately. jesse had no clue what judy was scheming. but it couldn't be good. not whatsoever! judy then sat down. still smiling. then said: well, you boys going to serve me, or what? and started pigeoning her head, in a mean d'italian from sopranos' joysee sort-of-away. two of the boys then practically jumped up at the same time, to practically knock each other out, as they clobbered their heads together.

bingo-bango-bongo!

it was juan and donald. and, now they looked like they wanted to fight each other. hey… let me… let me get it! juan argued with donald. donald then sat down. juan eyed judy, again. and, damn was he intimidated by the sight of judy. just damn!

jesse then decided to close her eyes instead; she didn't want to see any more of this. but then thought it would be weird for her to just sit there, with her eyes closed, the rest of the time judy was making her comeback. so, she opened them up, again, and got extremely anxious. and now found herself lost falling in a vortex of anxiety. and now, she felt like she was the one trying to crawl her way out of the rubble. judy smiled. then shoveled some chicken in her mouth. but it was fresh out of the pot and still hot! ouch, ouch, ouch! she went, as she started fanning her mouth. um, let me get water. let me get…? went juan. and then tried getting up as donald tried getting up and… back to this again. no, no, sit down! went judy. and both donald and juan sat down—like snap!

and, for the next half hour, life for jesse was absolutely excruciating. as judy continued this performance of trying to get the boys as hooked as possible. since her opening, she had come out about as open as jesse had ever seen her. but, now, she was mostly closed up, enjoying the food. of course, enjoying it a little too much with all her yummy sounds… that could be misinterpreted as something else with your eyes closed. ahem! a long, long, long half hour of witnessing this. and now, jesse just couldn't sit there anymore. and also, she had been holding it, and now she really needed to use the bathroom. so, she got up. and left the table. and went to the bathroom to do her business.

she had now been sitting there for another half hour. and, it had been a good twenty-nine minutes since she had finished using the toilet. i got to go out there! i have to go out there! i must go out there! i can't sit here the entire time the boys are here with her. jesse could only imagine what that skank had now done the entire time, only imagine and fear. get up, now! and with that, jesse got up, now. finally. and was now ready to step out… and check the damage.

and then as jesse got out there to see what was what… crap…? again, she had closed her eyes, and was now in the middle of the room, with eyes closed. this again! i don't want to open them. i don't! i…? but then she heard giggling. and not just from judy. she opened them. what the…? judy was in a chair, and the boys were all around her; juan was giving her a massage; all parties were smiling and having a good time. jesse was speechless again.

they should like… have a train underwater… like going from la to hawaii. i really like hawaii, do you?

judy was being her floozy self, but with a completely different crowd. that would be… interesting. expressed juan. smiling. and then it hit jesse how she was doing this: she's being stupid, really stupid. too stupid! even for judy. and all to make the boys feel smart, to calm them down. and get them on her level. oh, what is this bitch going to do? crap! hey, jesse, you like hawaii, right? honolulu is just so nice, right? wouldn't that be such an awesome idea? judy directed at jezebel singer. and now, jezebel's eyes went owl city; finding herself the awkward one in the group. the boys saw the beta eyes, recognized it, since it was their thing, and not her thing, and did what most girls do to them in situations like these: began to ignore jesse. i would so dig riding in a train going from la to hawaii underwater, like in a bond movie.

the trip itself would be the shiznit! he he!
the shiznit? thought jesse. arg!

all four boys cracked a laugh to that. though laughing more at her than with her, though enjoying it all the same. it was all very reminiscent of marilyn monroe in the seven year itch. and, the boys were lapping it up. just lapping it up. jesse then walked over to the couch and sat down like a librarian; crossed up her arms to hold herself with; closing herself up, as she sat there, witnessing what else was to

come of this. technically, i know you're probably thinking of the channel tunnel that goes between london to paris. but, the distance between those two cities going underground is like only somewhere around 10 to 40 miles. to have a tunnel going from los angeles to honolulu under the pacific ocean…? that would be a feat of ingenuity unseen in human history. the price alone would be astronomical, to say the least. donald now added. judy probably knows all that—you idiot! jesse felt like screaming out. but said nothing. no, i don't wanna go underground. i want to go underwater, i wanna see the fishys and whales and stuff. can't that be done? oh, for jesse, this was painful! geraldo than gave juan a look, like: wow, this chick is dumb! as he did that elbow nudging gesture. which jesse picked up on. it could be done, maybe, like… really into the future. but, not now. when then? maybe when we've colonized space, like in star trek, maybe? smiled and said donald. how long would that take? i want one now. now! what… like a year or two? judy added. the boys just looked at each other, again. wow! juan then gave a look that really didn't please jesse to see; being the one massaging her, he was getting turned on by this. well, we've already been to the moon. maybe not too long. added juan. oh, don't stop! you're good at this. you've got magic hands. i didn't know i had a chiropractor in the house. he he! giggled judy. i'm not a chiropractor. juan humbled. well, you should be! and turned around and slapped juan on the chest; juan grew bashful and began blushing. and now the other boys gave a look like they wanted to hit this, also. thank you so much for doing this. my neck was just so, ugh! let me know when you're like certified and we'll exchange numbers. and you can be my personal bi-weekly masseuse. ahh! moaned judy, at the end. and that excited the boys to hear even more. i… i… i'm kinda trained in the massaging arts, myself. my grandpa used to do it for boxers. added phil. "massaging arts?" thought jesse. realizing judy's stupidity was becoming infectious. but the boys seemed to feel like they could be as stupid as they now wanted to be. didn't matter. not around judy. okay, that's enough. then judy got up. and looked straight at jezebel. it was a stare, a short minute, in-your-face stare: evil! letting jezebel know this wasn't over by a long shot.

hey, jesse, you ready? judy asked.
wait… what?
jesse didn't respond. uh, judy said you girls were to go shopping, at the beverly hills mall. and…? yeah, and, i invited the boys to come with us. this will be just so neat. she giggled. first jesse had heard of this. judy then got up immediately and started getting her things: purse, smartphone (which she had set to charge). here's

your charger, thank you, phil. oh… it's nothing. nothing at all. phil rejoiced.

traitor! blasted jesse.

in her mind, and not with words. it was now becoming apparent to jesse: her outrage wasn't just with judy for doing this, not anymore. it was starting to turn on the boys. they just kept lapping it up. lapping it up! like dogs, with their tongues out. and really, it was all just a great scheme, intended to spite jesse with, and using her own friends, no less. the bitch! hey, jesse, forget your silly camaro, let's just take my escalade. my daddy let me borrow it for the week. please? begged judy. judy's dad was in florida; her rich daddy had let her borrow it two years ago; when it was driven out for her, using a commercial hauler, to go from miami to la; nothing judy said now was anything of truth: it was all an illusion, a con, a trick, a sting operation, and jesse was now smoldering with wrath. don't show it. don't! thought jesse.

do so! let 'em have it….
and that wasn't jesse's thinking. but it felt like it was. oh, no! no, no, please! i don't want this to start now.

where's my keys? judy couldn't find her keys; she was at the moment going through a hamper set next to the couch jesse was sitting at; she was bent over half in and half out of the thing; jesse looked over… she had her butt up in the air, dancing it around, while sorting through her messy stuff. the boys? their eyes couldn't get enough of it. where are my keys? phil, look in my purse, again, please? phil then immediately grabbed her purse and put it on the ground and started sorting through the mess inside. yeah, judy was a pig! and this place would turn into a pigsty, if jesse and the other girls gave her ample opportunity; gave her enough rope, to where she didn't just hang herself, but everyone else living there in the process: gallows galore! phil was rushing through her purse, pulling out a whole bunch of girly-girl stuff. but, with judy, a lot of items, boys don't tend to be used to. especially these boys. phil was arms deep in thongs and bras, perfumes, lipsticks, and God knows what else the perv kept in there. phil then came up with a handful of junk, and the keys nestled in the tarp. i got it! said phil. then did something he shouldn't have. one of her tapestried victoria secret items was clinging onto his pinky. and, the boy accidentally took a whiff. ooh! phil went. jesse then felt like puking in her mouth. as her gag reflexes started acting up. oh.

don't! don't do that. i don't want you to turn naughty on me all of a sudden. he he! giggled judy, doing a "shame on you" index finger swag thing, as she walked up and picked up the keys, and jammed all her belongings back into her purse set on the ground. not bending at the knees, again, mind you. and now, her womanhood was mere inches from phil's pelvis; looking like it wanted to… bop… into it; really trying hard to do so, like it was a separate entity to judy, teasing phil and the boys. phil now looked like he was twelve, in middle school, eyeing his milf elementary teacher, ms. jasmine, as she called him up to do a problem on the board. and phil didn't want to get up for… obvious reasons. the other boys now looked like they wished they were the ones arms deep in the purse instead of phil; had gotten a whiff of what he did, and now in phil's position, with judy bent over next to him. jesse… just felt depressed. depleted. and defeated!

jesse tagged along.

they were in the escalade now, having a similar conversation as before: judy being really, really dumb, and the boys feeling more and more rectified as men. they were no longer acting like their old selves; they were now laughing boy and captain meathooks, respectively, in soul and spirit. so, was this your scheme, judy? to turn them into this, and make me hate them? obviously, it was. whatever good spirits the boys possessed before were no longer there. and, jesse was missing them. they were in the mall now, beverly hills mall, and judy was being her 12-year-old self; like a silly window-shopping, gaga-eyed barbie doll. oh my goodness! oh my goodness! look at those shoes, so pretty! she bounced up and down. she was now doing her best carrie bradshaw impression. and now, all of a sudden, this all became very reminiscent of marilyn monroe doing the "diamonds are a girl's best friend" song and dance number; nothing but pink on pink on pink on a lot of black and now something sparkly! and with the boys standing all around flashing scenes of being such tuxedo-wearing, playboy suiters, all at the whips of this material girl's diamond shining whims and world. let's go in! and they all went in. jesse… just followed them like the walking dead; zombified by the horror of it all; watching and waiting to see what catastrophe was to come of, next. oh my gosh! oh my gosh! look at those. judy marveled. then straight-lined over to them. oh, would you be interested in trying them on. said some female store clerk. yes!

there was a 20-minute span of time that now passed. jesse felt comatose watching judy try on one pair, then another pair, then another pair, as sometimes her legs

would go straight up and start to show off how te-he pretty they could be, as she'd bicycle them around, trying to get these pair of boots on. then that pair. and just going on and on and on, as the boys now looked like they wanted to bow down and begin worshipping. idolizing judy. longing for her womanhood half, to join their own halves, and find oneness. find completion. and now, it was a done deal. these weren't boys no more. nor playboys. they were now slaves. just slaves! slaves to this succubus-whore-demon, which the boys were now occult to. and now, judy had fully—won!

i hate them, now. i hate them, and i want nothing to do with them anymore. i'm finished with these animals.

jezebel was about to get up and just leave. uber home. crawl up in her bed and sleep till sunday morning. but then shrugged and took another look at this trainwreck, finding in herself a macabre fascination to see if she could spot any more gore jammed up in the metal machinery. oh, my goodness! i need this pair. pouted judy. how much are they? she asked the store clerk. those, they're on sale. and, honestly, you're in luck! how much? five hundred, as of now. but the deal is only for this week. fine, judy, get your rich daddy's credit card out and pay it and let's—go! thought jesse. oh, i am so glad, i found these. these will look abfab with this get up i got. judy went. oh… good. i would love to see it. said juan.

and then, it got worse:
ma'am, excuse me… i'm sorry to say, but your credit isn't processing. said the store clerk at the register. what? gasped judy. yes. i've run the credit a couple times. and the machine is coming up saying it's no good. fine, judy, your dad's got like a million credit cards lined up for you. use another one. thought jesse. growing tired and weary.

oh… my! oh… my! judy went.

causing a scene. she was going into panic. what is she doing? even the cashier thought. jesse reading her mind. my dad's finally done it! he's finally done it! he's cut me off. panicked judy. and now the boys panicked with her; a semiotic response coming from the hive minded queen. oh, what are you going to do now? enraged jesse. realizing the bitch wasn't done just yet; she was going to take it even further than what jesse was to imagine. is there anything we can do? said phil. do?

do what? what can you do? if her daddy's cut her off, what can you do, huh? you stupid idiot! you going to go beat up her dad or something? enraged jesse. listen, i need these shoes, i need them, bad! why? went geraldo. thank you, geraldo! thought jesse. "why," is a good question! thank you, and for your skeptical nature. thank you for ringing in!

i need them, because, i got a dance rehearsal at the pandora club tonight. and, there's going to be agents there. and… these shoes would be just perfect! lied judy.

and—that was it!
jesse left the store then.

stormed out and felt her mind going in circles at what she had just heard. now, she damn-well knew exactly what this evil bitch was doing. you don't even dance! that's my thing. you're the one trying to be an actor. you stole my story and made it your own. jesse just walked. and walked. and walked. she was now at judy's escalade. and felt like keying the vehicle. or doing something else to it. no, i'm saving that wrath for phil and the boys, later! i'm gonna—kill—them if they get suckered into paying for her shoes. i need a cigarette! jesse then opened the car and pulled out judy's cigarettes. and started puffing a whirlwind. leaning against the vehicle.

you fools aren't rich. i can tell! she can tell! she is! and you're allowing yourselves to get doped in like this? is it enough you dopes got doped by that art college? now, this vixen? and… you… phil? i swear! i swear! i will straight up—murderize—you, if you even dare hand her a single dollar. you sleep in your freakin' car! so, you don't have money to spend on that impossibility! and now, jesse's mind couldn't help it, as all the sexual images of her with them came storming in. and jesse felt like gagging again. it's not going to happen—never gonna happen—hell no! you're all a bunch of loser-beta-nobodies! you're garbage to her eyes, garbage! freakin' basura! the second you buy that bitch the shoes, she's gonna get cold to you guys, quick! and ignore you suckers the rest of the ride home. then dump your stupid asses at the first pavement she feels.

it was a wait.
a bit of a long wait…
she was now on judy's third marlboro red. and then, her mind went to places it

hadn't done in a while.

God…?
why did you allow that to happen to me?
why?
why?
why?
she was remembering her stunt in the memphis psych ward, all four months of it. and how lost and terrified beyond reckoning she had felt the entire time she was there. and then her eyes caught onto the escalade's side mirror. jesse looked into her own eyes in the mirror, her evil green eyes. and felt that old terror again.

she was now mesmerized by them, as those demonic words again started entering her head.

bo…. rep… dabe… ahwa!

she couldn't make sense of them at the moment; she had forgotten the language that demon inside that psych ward had taught her. no, no, no! i don't want to remember! i don't want to remember! no! no!

nooooo!

and that last "no" came screaming out; the parking structure was now echoing with it. and, now, some more hypnotic effects.

and…

she no longer knew where she was anymore. am i still there? is this a dream? is this reality? it must be reality. she was next to judy's escalade.

yes?
yes!
she was.

no, she wasn't in that memphis psych ward like she had been all those three (two… wait… she didn't remember) years ago. oh, thank you, i'm not there! thank you!

thank you, God!

8. minotaur

when judy and her entourage had returned, the look was all over the boys' faces: sad, lost, unsure of exactly what had happened. jesse, although, no longer cared; they meant nothing to her now; they weren't hers anymore: bought and paid for and damned, by judy. it was all over their faces, like children lost in some ralph's supermarket, unsure at what point their parent's hand had left theirs. judy, had her ray-ban shades on, now smoking one of her cigarettes, blowing the smoke out the window. hey, judy, umm… what's the pandora club? asked juan, their spokesperson. judy didn't answer. now, more looks of utter loss. although, jesse, no longer cared. as well as herself, feeling bought and paid for, even damned, by judy. she was joining back with her lot. for better hers than theirs, right at this moment. hey, judy, can we come to the pandora club? juan dared to ask.

ha, ha! jezebel laughed.

not judy. jezebel. all wickedly, as her skin started turning green. the boy's eyes were now on jezebel, not judy, and then, it hit them! and now, it was like children at some ralph's supermarket, realizing they hadn't really lost their parents; their parents had actually abandoned them there, as they now sunk into that sunken place. and lost themselves in the misery of it all. where do you boys live? asked judy. the boys… didn't answer. just gps it for me, so i can get you boys back, please? pouted judy.

realizing the boys were now onto her.

earlier than she hoped they would. jesse then looked at judy, and then saw it: fear! worry! good! jesse smiled now, but then a thought was implanted:

boys… rape the bitch, i'll watch!
and, wait…?

where did that come from? thought jesse.
and got scared herself.

did i think that?
did i…?
that was beyond evil, even for her; she became very self-aware now. and started

feeling the fear judy was: what if they'd try to do the same to me, even? now, jesse, was unnerved. this wasn't a good ride back home. not one at all.

boys, please give me your gps, i need to get you all home. now! judy feared.

and, the boys noticed… she was afraid… for a reason…?

their eyes went slit. and jesse noticed, with eyes she now grew on the back of her head. both judy and jesse were both getting terrifying vibes now, coming from behind; all three sitting back there, not saying a word, as the two girls sat up front. jesse and judy both looked at each other, flashing some doe eyes; pupils going totally black and losing its whites.

here!
said juan. and gave judy his cellphone with their place gpsed.
oh… thank God! both judy and jesse felt, together.

as for the rest of the ride, jesse's and judy's eyes felt as though they had lost themselves running in a maze, in their heads, hearing a sound of a… minotaur? fresh on their heels. breathing red flashes through its nostrils. judy's teeth then began to chatter.

keep it together, judy, keep it together! the ride is almost over. jesse thought.

the girls dropped the boys off.
and… a second later… judy began to panic.
breathe in…
breathe out…
breathe in… breathe out….

while shivering so badly, even her eyes shivered. even her bloodshot eyes!

keep it together, judy, just drive us home. we're out of the maze. we're safe no—
oh my God!
oh my God!
judy was now truly panicking.
keep it together, judy, just drive us—

i'm sorry!
i'm sorry!
i'm—
shut up! jesse bellowed. showing her teeth at this stupid, disgusting, lil' tramp! the tendons in her neck were tensing up, and about to blow out a gasket; eyes, bloodshot, shivering, just shivering, in her sockets. hers now. and the dam about to give way.

i'm sorry, jesse, i shouldn't have done that! i wasn't thinking. i wasn't myself. i wasn't—
shut up! judy was now shivering all over, terrified out of her mind.

watch it! screamed jesse, as judy almost rearended a mercedes, up front. jesse needed to take control. this wasn't good.

park on the side over here, get out of the driver seat, i'm driving us—
i'm…?
just do it! judy then heeded jesse, right away. stopped at the side. got out. jesse took over the driver seat. and drove them home. while judy sat in the backseat. and began profusely crying her eyes out.

jesse…? just silenced it out in her mind. she didn't want to hear any of it. she was feeling beyond disgusted with judy.

9. weho

judy romero had spent another five hours crying in the bathroom; she had locked herself in there. jesse? she just sat at the table, enjoying some more of that delicious food phil had prepared earlier. she didn't care. maybe she should. but, why? judy had brought it upon herself. let her deal with it, her and her higher… whatever she believed.

ahhhhaaaa! wailed judy.
he, he! giggled jezebel. as judy let out a wild one in the bathroom. but then a thought intervened that she didn't like: what if she does something to herself in there? ah crap! jesse then got up, and, walked over to the bathroom door. then asked: hey, you don't have any knives or scissors or something sharp in there with you, right? what… no, why? nothing. said jezebel. then went into the bedroom and sat at the dresser mirror. it was getting late. it was around 7pm. jezebel didn't know where the other two skanks were; probably up to their own wicked works; now facing the music, themselves, in a bathroom, like the one judy was in. jezebel… wouldn't be surprised. gotta get to west hollywood. gotta meet my girls… and…? she then looked into the mirror. into her green eyes. and got mad. i didn't do nothing wrong! i tried to be the good person in this. what do i have to feel guilty of? jesse was getting mad. she then looked again into the mirror, her greens, she now needed a good stern talking with herself:

i just want to dance!
i just want to dance!
that's what i was made to do. i want none of the crap that's right now going on in that bathroom. i got to look after a number one, right here, me! as for her night attire: jezebel was wearing white, all white, like the gates to heaven had opened up; looking both very modest and also sexy, in a contradictory/complementary fashion; tapestried like a bra along all the fringes; shoulderless and thighless; white stockings with white going all vertical and lining the curves of her bottom ladies; and white pumps fitted with souls with cold steel, so when she clicked and clacked into a room, she'd be the female fred astaire of tap shoein', where no one would be able to escape the rhythm of her beat. her perfume, french, too french, and just too good for this world. and she now had the unique aroma of a 19th century guilded lady, ready to dance the night away in this vapid early 21st century dreamscape; turn heads, strike a pose, and awe the crowd with her graciousness and white gold. she was stunning. i'm an angel! time to draw swords and go

vanquish the demons of this city. time to go and show them what i'm made of. now felt oneness with herself, and oneness, with her eyes. they were beautiful green eyes. why hate them so much? she got up.

this was hollywood.
what could she do?

this was just how it was. there's always somebody trying to take advantage of somebody. every day! judy wouldn't be the first. nor would be the last. and with the karma she had set herself up for, was going to get that dirty end of a stick, eventually. all jezebel could do now was look after a number one: herself. just herself. to make sure she didn't find herself facing the dirty end of the stick, getting wagged in front of her. time now to go face the leeches. but, as she passed by the bathroom door again. jezebel remembered her old self, back in nashville, with him. them!

who was she kidding?

judy… you want to go out with me tonight? she asked.
judy said nothing.

come on, i don't hate you. put on those shoes you have now. and… let's put them to use. jesse said, blowing up at her hair.
i'm not coming. judy moped.
stop… oh, forget it!
jesse left.

she was in an uber now. was hoping… well… ray.
but no!
no chance in seeing that. and sighed. the radio was tuned to kiss fm, playing its usual line up of taylor, rihanna, cardi b, taylor again. the uber driver then tried to change stations. and then, it went from one taylor song on one station to another taylor song on another. ugh! the uber driver shook his head, but allowed tay tay to do her thing. jesse…? well, jesse then blew up in her head:

grr!
damn you!

grr!
hiss!
growl!
not everyone gives a damn about your stupid, silly, self-centered, vapid reputation you keep trying to force on all of us, going "don't cry for me, argentina," your highness. so, cry me more crocodile tears, the length of the nile river, you big dumb baby! yeah, queenie, maybe you're the one forcing it on us, and not the other way around. maybe if you didn't have such a ginormous sized ego, you might have been able to take a snide remark made now and then about your "boy problem" with a grain of salt. but: noooooooo! "oh, i was a good girl once, but now i'm bad… look what you made me.…" grr! good girl gone bad—my ass! rihanna is a good girl gone bad. you're just a great pretender, playing make-believe, but mostly just fooling yourself!

barbara walters had you figured from the start, on how you'll never be accepted in, by the in-crowd. and you know which "in-crowd" i refer to. nothing to do with grammys nor sold out concerts nor mile high clubs. the one that only God can choose, who is and isn't accepted in. like that high school clique you can never join, since you're no longer in high school. like that cool kids' club. you? accepted in? eww! next! one you can never! never-never-never-ever! and no matter how many stupid girl posses you form in compensation and comparison. nor how many stupid, stupid 13s you keep doodling on your hands, feet and forehead.

nor how you… *you*… **grr**!
i hate her!
i hate her!
i…—?

but then that one old but goody swedish house mafia classic came on and changed jesse's mood. jesse now went from a ☹ to a ☺. she liked this song.

now, 9pm. in west hollywood: city of the leeches. best way to explain the dynamics of what this part of town was about, was to understand a 90s movie called swingers; it's the only movie you needed to watch to understand the point of coming to a place like west hollywood, and dealing with the thousands and thousands of other leeches, like yourself; hoping the stars would line up for you; you could meet all the right people, that you could meet. and, if you showed that

special something they were looking for. you could stop blood sucking all the other blood suckers around you, down here in the pits. and find yourself lucky to get taken to the big leagues: a lucky ol' leech vampire parasite, to start sucking blood out of all the high ups, up in the hills of hollywood, instead. at just the right party. at just the right time. and that, ladies and gentlemen: was the swinger's gambit. back when she was nineteen, jezebel had watched that movie over 50 times; she didn't know why at the time she found it so fascinating, but seeing how she was living that life now, that's when all the puzzle pieces started falling into place.

then there was the lgbtq element here. and… for an outsider, it seemed like such a wholesome place to go and watch two male couples holding hands and in love. tweedy birds chirping and bees buzzing and… but, no, that was just a front. all fake. just a fugazi. basically put. not saying lgbtq was fake. that was real. but you had to understand, they owned weho, and they ran it like the mafia. truth was, what it was, was, a union in disguised. but, to join that union. like the cosa nostra. the italian mob, to becoming a "made guy," you had to be one of their kind. you wouldn't see italians taking in irish, or germans, or blacks, or hispanics, into their leagues. no! italians only took in italians, which they had to verify, with your family line going all the way back to the old country. hopefully sicily. 100%! simply put: to be lgbtq you had to prove you were lgbtq! you had to have your records. and with jezebel's case, she had to have a girlfriend! had sex with that girlfriend. and had proof that she did. a vid. sex tape. a sex tape was a good strategy. they loved it there. and to really piss off lgbtq, you had to be a straight arrow trying to fly through that part of town, pretending you didn't, just to reap from the political benefits. although, that didn't stop people from trying. so, you had a lot of straight people sucking it up and taking one, for team me. jezebel had already had her fill of having women coming up to her, and trying to put the moves on her, without even her consent. getting groped and felt up and having women trying to stick their fingers into her no-no zone, were the type of stuff she couldn't do nothing about. and she could tell it was coming from another straight woman trying to do this. and straight on straight trying to put moves on one another…? grr! but, all in all, she hated it. she hated the mentality that came with it. the sense of everyone aware of how wrong all of it was, but won't accept it, because, it's not meant to be accepted. i mean, it's not rape! it's not rape! women don't rape women! that's not a thing. jezebel had to take it and look the other way. and if jezebel was to put her foot down and ask the sluts to stop it: blacklisted! even worse, they brand you

as a homophobe, and chase you out of town, by those means. all your twitter and instagram followers: say goodbye!

wait, is that homophobic? fine, it hasn't happened to me like that. i mean, women coming up and being touchy/feely, yes! but. maybe the whole thing with looking at them like the mob was a bit much? i don't know. thought jesse.

oh my gosh, jesse, you look so savage in that dress! went michelle.

the girls were waiting for jesse on santa monica and la cienega: michelle, domonique and the usual suspects. jezebel's eyes went slit, but then, she smiled. time to be all girly-girl. oh… my goodness, michelle, your…? think of something. think of something, quick! something you like about her outfit. hurry, hurry! your beaded dress. so… unique...? rushed jezebel. now michelle's eyes went slit. but she had gotten used to jesse's deadpan sense of friendly welcomings; jezebel was the dry vodka martini bitch of the group, with lots of green olives, lots! so, the girls went back to ignoring her, and now it was time for the swinger's gambit to open up for bets. so, where are we going? asked jesse. michelle was looking up and down santa monica blvd. left, right! she didn't seem sure. come on, come on! just bet on a lucky table and let's go play some blackjack. said jesse. let's just go to the attic, again. said dominque, with her french accent. she was a beautiful dark-skinned algerian girl from monte carlo. that towered over the other girls: 6'2! very gal gadot in vibe and visual. michelle rolled her eyes. what's the attic? there is no attic… are you thinking about the—
yahhwwwww! cat called some chin strapping, goatee sportin' dude, from an h3, with bulging tanned muscles and a muscle shirt.

d'accord, i mean, there! indicated dominque.
yeah, might as well. bought michelle.
no, not there, again! no! no! thought jesse.
girls are savage! bellowed another diamond-eared, guido looking dude, in a lamborghini diablo.

jesse had grown sick and tired of going to the bar dominque was referring to; they had been there two weeks ago. and two weeks before that. and the one before that. but jesse felt like dominque was trying to fake lgbt id her way in there; it was a rainbow flag establishment, through and through; flying the rainbow flag high

and proud. jesse was now dreading another night of striking out at a dead party going nowhere; where she'd shot glass her way to 2am, to finding some bozo mexican chick next to her, slamming her drunken face into hers, and trying to slip some tongue down jezebel's boca; that tasted and smelled like it was one shot of tequila away from puking in her mouth. if it happens again, i am the one puking down her mouth, this time! thought jezebel, all vindictively. yeah, jezebel had had that happen to her a two months ago. tongue. puke. and jezebel then spending an hour in the girl's restroom puking and dry heaving her intestines out.

damn, dat ass!
black dude in a black mustang. looking straight at jezebel. nothing seen of inside the car nor him, except the whites of his eyes and teeth. jezebel then eyed his eyes, eyed her backside… this made no sense! he started biting his lips and drove off. yeah, jesse had a cute little cherry tush… but… no juicy pair of yello' watermelons back there. so, what the hell was he getting all sir mix-a-lot about?

wait, is that racist?

sorry, pal, get with the program! ford and chevy people don't mix. joked jesse, with a whisper among her posse.
he, he! what? went dominque.
nevermind.

it had now been two hours the girls were at the attic. i mean the… wait… is it the attic? thought jesse. this was so dyslexic of her, and even for dominque. jesse also kept thinking of this place as the attic; her eyes would gaze on the neon sign up front. and, it was like that mandela effect thing jesse had read about online. weird! anyways, two hours being in there. and, the place was dead; hundreds of hundreds of leeches, but without a drop of blood found in there to suckle on. jesse was now playing the swinger's movie in her head: what they needed to do now, was, get up, go to another bar or club, and wait a good 20 or so minutes, and, if that was dead, too—next place! and rinse and repeat until they found themselves in an establishment that was finally kickin'. but, after the first hour, jesse had pleaded with the girls to stop beating this dead horse and move on, but, no! michelle and her: "what if we leave and the party here all of a sudden gets lit?" "no, let's wait!" there were stars lining up somewhere in west hollywood over a bar or club, shining starlight on that chosen turf, as jiminy cricket started singing his bit; and, jesse,

felt like pulling her hair out, imagining it, and missing out on all that disneyland wonder.

another hour passed.

jezebel looked bitterly at michelle: a redhead in her 30somethings, that had skin too fair for such a sun-soaking, cloudless city, like la; that seemed to age a week for every day she'd spend basking in it. sunny california was maybe a little too sunny for a pennsylvania girl like her. now, with skin seemingly in its 50somethings. great dancer. but an old and tired looking gal, jesse always felt jaded with. maybe she's doing this on purpose? thought jesse. wasting everyone's time here in this deadbeat joint. michelle, the attic is dead. i'm starting to get forest lawn cemetery vibes from here. let's get out of here before we find ourselves having a drinking contest with the ghost of liberace. went jesse. what…? went michelle, with eyes in stupor. crap! she was getting tipsy. wait, her and jesse were both! double crap! and way too tipsy just for the lightheaded buzz, that would allow them to continue playing the swinger's gambit; jesse could tell by michelle's lindsey lohan eyes, and jesse, herself, losing her inner monologue and branding everyone with her overly elaborate humor. liberace… who… what are you talking…? her head was beginning to sway a little. looked like she was about to fall out of her seat, seated at the bar, on these tiny circular stools (that felt purposely designed this way, to mess with drunk people, trying to keep their balance on them). we need to get out of here. now! but where to go? and then jezebel thought of the place. the perfect place.

girls, let's go to the **chateau marmont**.

it was just one of those fixtures in hollywood, on the sunset strip, that couldn't be denied recognition; it was elegant in a sense, society for a long time now had forgotten what it meant; jesse couldn't remember a single moment she hadn't seen nothing less than a gorgeous woman coming out of there, wearing an elegant black dress. and always black. always. even when they were not. the girls hesitated to respond. you want to get discovered. that's where to go to get discovered. you want hollywood. that's hollywood! but, that's a hotel? what you want us to do, go rent a room, there? baffled michelle. oh, come on! went jesse in her head. but then dominque chimed in: unity is open tonight. i've heard they're doing a video recording there for youtube. jesse was beside herself. really, then what are we

doing here? gasped jesse. but then michelle's eyes went fixed, as she started eyeing herself in the mirror that was facing her, behind the bar shelves stacked with bottles. and, jezebel understood what that meant. but, right now, didn't care. come on! let's go! let's go! hasted jesse. and then michelle looked like she wanted to let jesse have it: look, jesse, i know it looks like we've all welcomed you in the club. but i don't want to…! but then her head was… whoa… she was tipsy. what michelle is trying to say is, you haven't exactly been paying your dues. concluded dominque, for michelle. yeah, some of the girls think you're only there for yourself, and, you don't ever dance with any of us. we're a team, here. you know. sisters!

and… you just seem to be there only for yourself.

this was now catherine speaking. catherine and casey, and ginger, the other three girls that were with them; more tag alongs, when it came to the meet. but catherine was the more fairchild one of the bunch: innocent eyes, with a ponytail, and ballet slippers. jesse always respected her honesty, whenever she decided to speak. she was direct. very, very direct. just how jesse herself fashioned to be. what is it, you think you're better than the rest of us? went michelle. holding her hand out, as if holding a dish, and staring at it. no, no. i…? jezebel hesitated. listen, a lot of us think that there's something really, really special about your dancing. you got some raw talent. almost too raw. and we like to see more of it. they say you've only danced, once, and you blew everyone's minds away. i haven't seen it, yet, and… i'd like to, you know? catherine added. it seems like you only want to go there, because there's a camera crew there. so, are you gonna dance? you gonna show us more of what you got, or, are you just going to try and network? and leave us high and dry? accused michelle. and, wow…! that really hit jesse dead center. jezebel now got direct, looked michelle in the eyes, and said:

i want to dance tonight. you wanna see what i got? let's do it.

michelle smiled, as they got an uber then. and were now out of that micky-mouse joint.

10. march 3rd, 2003

a tennessee girl, stands, at her father's gazebo, out in the backyard woods of his family home. it's moonlight territory; blue in ways blue has never felt so refreshing; moonlight shines on the little girl's face. and then, behold, an angel appears before her.

"do not be afraid." the angel says.
"i'm not afraid." the little girl responds.

and, truth be told, she isn't. what a keen spirit she is, seeing into more than what has already been revealed. but a special girl, she is, even though nothing really special about her. prettiness, that, there is. it is there. but nothing too pretty. character, there, also, but… also the same. as well as everything else about her. all that is special is this one moment.

"do you know why i'm here?" asks the angel.
"yes." says the little girl. "you've come to teach me how to dance." and, truth she speaks, for, that is exactly why the angel has come to her.

and the angel then does exactly that; teaches her to dance, how no one has ever danced. only a few short lessons are all that's needed. and, the little girl learns, and learns to fall in love, and learns to show love in her dancing. for, this is what she was put on this earth to do: to dance, to dance, like no one before could ever do. the angel then leaves, but, before he does, he says to her:

"tonight, you danced in the shadows of the night. but, the day will come, you will dance in the light.

never forget that. never!"

then leaves the little girl, to her lonesome.
and, never appears before her, again.

or, hasn't at least since.

11. who's that girl?

i gotta ask, jesse, where'd you learn to dance? asks michelle. not eyeing her, but, more at the thoughts she's guidelining her questioning. jesse cringes in thought. as she displays a blank display. says nothing, but then: i don't know… i guess… dancing… is very important to me… and…? jesse strings together (barely). did you like take dancing classes? ballet? what? inquires michelle. not really. indicates jesse. and adds nothing else to the discussion. doesn't seem like michelle is favoring jesse being so closed up within her cocoon; unwilling to come out and show the girls her pretty wings she had been now born again with; keeping such things to herself: guarding them! as if too good for this world. and too good for the girls, themselves. dancing, for me… is work! let's out michelle. i too love dancing. i love it! i've always wanted to do the things i'd see people do in music videos and tv. janet jackson in rhythm nation. insights michelle. oh, my gosh, mine too. dominque adds. but, it's work! to be the best, requires so much time and effort. blood, sweat and tears! many, many tears, especially. continues michelle. i know. agrees jesse, haphazardly. i mean, i got no life, i feel. my boyfriend doesn't like it. my family thinks it's a waste of time and farfetched. think i should go into nursing. or something.

jesse was getting grilled by michelle. and, she didn't like it. michelle tended to have a very defeatist attitude about a lot of stuff: always negative. as if that negative was where she got the strength to make a positive. which, could be done. but, didn't seem like it was for michelle. jesse just couldn't stand this attitude; it was very saturnine and stale and rigid; an old devil pounding out its regiment for every situation to solve all its problems in life: 1, 2, 3, 4! and a 1, 2, 3, 4! and again, 2, 3, 4! then smacking the ruler down. and demanding everyone try harder. hard work! hard work! making it excruciatingly laborious, not with farmer's hands but feet; spending all day sitting and trying to churn 50 gallons of milk into butter; or 50 tons of straw into gold. if there was no pain, there was no gain. this was where jesse and michelle didn't get along the most: jesse being too easy going, and michelle just being a hardass. why don't you practice with us, jesse? went on, michelle. jesse was growing anxious. i'm not trying to be mean right now. but if you say you love dancing. it seems like you're always saying it, but never showing it. finishes michelle. although, michelle was like this with everyone. so, jesse didn't take it too personally. if you did ten hours' worth of practicing. she would do ten and five more. then stick it to everyone for not trying hard enough. jesse and michelle were just two polar opposites when it came to this; both, very ambitious,

but, with two different dueling attitudes when it came to expressing it.

they were there.
a dance studio near venice beach. outside, tons of pretty and nimble girls standing around: it was a commotion. there was something big going on, tonight, on those old wooden dance boards, that creaked and cracked whenever the girls applied pressure to its wear. but it gave the dance studio its character. its signature. entering, the girls saw a mass of camera equipment and lights and ambients and its crew. all in black. tonight's aesthetic: vipers and vixens. this was a night to go hard, or, not at all. it was a mean night. and there were tons of girls there cladded practically in their underwear, to shake all they had, and, hope those stars would line up when they did. everyone was feeling the pressure. the tension. and the high demand for excellence. tonight, was truly special; not a night to miss out for all the world to see. michelle, why did we go to west hollywood and waste so much time there, when this was the place to be, this night, of all nights! blasted jezebel. feeling completely bastardized at the thought of having almost missed out on all of this. but then, looking into michelle's eyes, she realized, the girl was intimidated: too much, too much, and just not up to the task. ugh! there's that defeatist attitude, again. what's good about all that hard work, when you're just going to get scared at the ends, and call it quits, and before reaping from all that which you have sowed, huh? thought jezebel, mightily disappointed. mightily, mightily so! not like you're ready for it. michelle detested, in whisper. doing that catty thing girls sometimes do, of saying something so quietly, as if they didn't say it at all: as if it's your vivid imagination thinking they did, but didn't, even though they most certainly did. grr! what, you hoping i'm going to fail to step up to the challenge? okay... we'll see, we'll see… won't we? thought jezebel. looking away.

there was nothing to vie for here.

she had this in the bag.

she already knew it.

but then got anxious. very, very anxious. as she heard a vroom sound coming from outside; sounding like a sport bike blasting into the next dimension. there were other forces at work tonight. but, no! thought jesse. this was her night. she'd been putting this off for far too long; fearing what would happen when she did

step out of her cocoon; to show off her beautiful, beautiful wings. too beautiful, maybe. but now, she just didn't feel like hiding them anymore.

God…
is this the night i get to dance in the light? is this it? what i was promised….

she didn't know. her abilities to dance were nothing short of miraculous. she knew it. they didn't. no one around her had any clue they were sharing company with something not of this world; a gift, that was above and beyond this world; something of purely concentrated starlight. and more. and something much, much more.

and that was what was really scaring her the most.

luke 12:48
but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

it was a verse she knew by heart. and feared. jesse, when it came to her faith, hadn't been the good christian she felt God would want her to be. her parents were nonreligious; only her aunt was on her dad's side: very, very religious. and much of her religiousness came from her. she believed, but… every time she would pick up the good book and read, every passage she'd read, would scare her. frighten her. and make her start worrying over that eternal judgement. back in nashville, back when she was with billy, when he was still alive, she wasn't the best human being. actually, she was absolutely the worst; living up to expectations of the name she was given. really bad! and bad… with them. i'm trying to be a better person now. i am! i'm not that girl anymore, how i was, with them. i'm not that… evil! anymore. but she had been. she had! and there was not a day that passed, where she didn't feel haunted for all the sins she had committed. plus, there was they, and they, were now two ghosts in her life, that remembered her wicked days, and made sure jesse would remember them, also. two ghosts… or demons… that were never going to let her forget!

the dancing had begun.
three girls would go up, music would start, cameras would start rolling, and, they'd

do their stuff. once done, next three, and then the same! there was a lot of cheering among those sitting and watching; all their eyes painstakingly repeating in their heads the sequences, over and over, again and again; nothing less than perfection would be tolerated tonight.

yawn! went jezebel, a billion leagues ahead of them.
and knowing perfectly she was exactly = that!

all i see is… just a lot of over accentuation and exaggeration. girls shaking their jelly and juice. every move, trying to conjure thoughts of sexual intercourse. in every position imaginable. they're just doing what all girls do now, being seductive, and making it seem as if it's something beautiful. as ugly as it really is. no. it's not beautiful. it's repulsive! there's no grace in their movements.

no passion.
no love.
no love.
only hate.
to them, dancing is war!
anger!
loathing!
and disgust.

and disgust of oneself! this isn't dancing they're doing. twerking isn't dancing. no one likes it. no one wants it. but we're all forced to be this way. copycats to copycats. if only this generation, my generation, were able to even have a glimpse into what i had once been shown. they would know… <u>love is a real thing!</u> beauty is a real thing, godsent, and righteous. so many doors would open up, too much too much! behold, the gates of heaven. watch, as the angels dance, and love vanquishes evil. into that pit of forever burning.

i pity them.

you see, these are my sisters! and, i want to say to the world! that, we're beautiful. we're smart. and when together as one, we, are empowered! strong! confident. no one can touch us. no one can hold us back! no one can…—
oh, pipe down, samantha! thought jezebel. growing annoyed. samantha was doing

what samantha loved to do best: get up in front of a camera and make speeches. but she just didn't have the knack for it; a very, very insecure girl, that was all about that bias: one side vs. the other side (because they're "different" than we are) politics.

the world is a rough place for every last one of us… samantha….

everyone has things they're privileged to have in this world and things they're prohibited from. all have their unique blessings and also their unique curses. everyone has their lot in life, but the world is also the type of place where a poor man can live happily with not a cent to his name, and a rich man can be miserable with all the wealth in the world. and it's only God's grace that makes it so. so what difference does it make with what you have or don't have, if it isn't what matters in the end?

maybe God made some of us men or women for a reason?
maybe God made some of us rich or poor for a reason?
maybe God made some of us black or white or other for a reason?
maybe God made some of us lgbt or straight for a reason?

and some of us… gifted… in ways no one else can ever be…?

but how are you going to know what those reasons are, when you choose to only focus on what you don't have and what others do. and almost never what you do have and what others don't. only seeing yourself having been victimized by your own demons. but never how others have been victimized by theirs. and, trust me, with demons, better those you know than those you don't. because, you really have no idea what other people are going through. what they're really going through, unless you were them. don't underestimate other people's woesome lot. since, in this world, this evil, evil world, everyone gets taken advantage of by somebody or another. somehow or another. and everyone, in that regard, is oppressed. maybe if you got out of your power puff girl bubble, samantha, and took a look into the lives of others, show some true empathy for others for a change, and not just people you can relate with or want to relate with, but those you can't and don't, you'd see that! walked a day in their shoes.

because, you don't know what it's like to be the girl behind green eyes.

no, the problem isn't your wokeness, samantha. but, simply for the fact that you're not being woke enough. enough to see what's really going on. you're right to see as there being something truly, truly wrong with this world. but… the establishment… is just a mask.

a…. mask… hiding a face that's much more eviler underneath.

oh, yes… the Devil… exists.
he exists.
and he's the reason the world is the way it is.

samantha was a black girl that sorta reminded her of scary spice from the spice girls; no matter what she wore, here, she'd always come in with something camouflaged. as if, some soldier of hip-hop fortune.

and as for all the naysayers,

i, want to let you all know, no! no! no! we are powerful! we are empowered! we… are empowered! what are we girls:

empowered!
what are we girls?
empowered!
wooooohoooooo!

key word here: "empowered!" that's right, ladies and gents, let's not forget that! now, it's go time! captain marvel, she's our hero, gonna take the patriarchy down to zero! ugh! humored jezebel to herself (but without her inner monologue… and loud enough for someone to hear).

jesse, you just don't belong here, you know that, right? said catherine.

gasp…?
oh…?
oh…!
thank goodness it was only you.

yet… ugh!

i don't know….
i don't have all the answers. i'm not even sure if the answers i do have are correct or not, for i see how much of the world is full of lies, lies, everyday lies. both black and white, and some gray, even. some even brown, blue, yellow, and plaid even. and i can't let people know what i'm thinking, because then they'll judge. since, for all they can see, they can't see the routes and bounds and journeys i've taken. the obstacles. the moments of utterly being lost. lost for days and days on end. weeks on end. months… even years… some do seem.

they cannot see what i've been through, and where i've come from.
they can only see where i am, now, here, where i stand.
my life's journey having been led to this.

and i feel set up.
set up!
to become the bad guy in the end.

i have nothing to offer anyone except my own confusion….

and i can only look at the world in the perspective i've been given, and to do whatever i see as being right or wrong. for the world is a mess. a big mess. a big, big mess. and i just wish…

i just want to dance!

although….
damn catherine. her and her uncanny clairvoyancy!
i guess we're all gifted with something. thought jesse.

but maybe this wasn't the time for jesse to be showing hers off? was this the right time? was she in the right state of doing things? jesse wondered. worrying whether she was putting a gift to good use, or, something else? it scared her to think she wouldn't be; selling out her God given abilities… and for what? just for her sake? or, something in the greater scheme of things? the upsetting part was, it felt like she was only doing this for her own sake.

and no one else.

jesse, just get up there! said catherine.
what…?
stop holding it back. just get up there. don't be afraid of—
what? what? gasped jesse (out loud).

this was now becoming too uncanny. catherine's eyes gleamed.

she knew.
somehow, she knew.

jesse… what good is a gift, if you never use it? she said.

and nothing else.

jesse got up.
she was the last to dance.
she had no entourage.
but she didn't need one.

jesse was now terrified. her sweat glands were firing, and she hadn't even raised a pinky. the lights were hot. the camera was aimed and focused in.

it was time.

it felt like seconds before an earthquake was to start shaking things up; birds outside, getting the wind of it, and taking off in multitudes, up into the clouds; the sounds of their squawks of terror filling the airs. jesse knew, this wasn't just her moment, this was something beyond her. all she was, was a vessel to a higher glory. a temple, to a greater Spirit. about to do what mere mortals cannot do. she couldn't even do. if she had not been chosen to do such.

anyways….
if to do this, she now had to do this, right. so, she went to the booth where music was selected, to hand in her selection. michelle was in there. okay… they got 'i'm

so tired' by lauv and troye sivan, lined up for you, okay? jesse shook her head. what? you like that song? michelle gasped. like it? yes! perfect song for my moment? no! jesse answered. if i'm to do this, i want to do this the right way. the right way…

and my way!

and i have the perfect song for this. jesse established. michelle began pouting. jesse now knew what her opposition would be. how old is the song? michelle asked, with eyes closed. knowing jesse could get very nostalgic over the matter. even with music she was never born to listen to, and to get so fondly with. since, the music itself predated her. jesse, how old? it's by the eurythmics. jesse mentioned. while fidgeting with her body language. michelle had no clue what she was talking about.

you know… the 80s. jesse squeaked.
the 1980s, are you serious?
no, michelle, the 1880s! i'm about to go all out, "gone with the wind" style, in a victorian era dress, popping and locking on—dat ass! you like that?

michelle made a face. jesse, this is supposed to be a vid for hunt for new talent, this isn't supposed to be an archeological dig. jesse was now growing annoyed. just play it, i'll take the hit, if it isn't welcomed, do we understand? jesse barked, but not at michelle, this time, but at the one handling the music on the system. hey, don't bite my head off, it's your coronation! the person behind the system mentioned.

she was up there now.
alone.
all alone.
and then, 'who's that girl' by the eurythmics began to play.

and…
now…
she truly began.

anyways….

here's the thing:
to best explain jesse's dancing… would be impossible! all dancers try to reach this peak. all will try! but, as hard as they might try, all will fail. either they'll fail to move the right way, or, vibe the right way! all will fall short of the glory of God.

but… when it came to dancing… not jesse.

now, with jesse, what she did, and how she did it, best way to describe it, would be to say, what she did was nothing short of express emotions. pure emotions. pure, fully concentrated emotions; shooting out of her being, and grabbing everyone's hearts and minds and souls; clenching it—tight—and making them feel as if though they were phasing and phasing and phasing, again and again: as doors!

so, so, many, many doors… began opening up to them.

half the women were now crying. crying. sobbing. sobbing hysterically. never, never having experienced anything like this.

view.
view this girl.
who is this girl?
but, don't ask.
just witness!
view this girl dance. dance and dance. view how she is in love now. love like morning in its morning years of life. love how love which all children experience when expressed what is shown to them. and only them. but then. view now, as the heart shifts. and shifts gears into noon. as life gears into its noon years. no longer in love. but, in wrath. in anger. in rage. and. in uproar. and the audience, also now, no longer cries tears of forgotten childhood lost. but of adulthood found. such harsh, harsh realities of adulthood found! no longer crying, but raging, and raging. one girl begins grabbing her hair from her head and tears two lofts off and discards it. and now, view then! view this. view the heart as the heart now sings songs of a woman in evening. in those bitter cold and callous and lonely evening years.

sad.
tis.
very, very sad. so sad. so alone. but, yet: so proud. but a pride that now hides behind a porcelain shell; a shell that then begins to crack. and with a woman that is now out of time and out of tone. crying turns to raging. raging turns back to crying. now, both crying and raging, combine, like sadness and madness; both turning hearts of mortals not made to love and love forever, but to lose one day, all things under heaven and earth which are shown.

jesse now stops.

and all the spirits and spirits around, scream and scream and scream for more! encore! encore! again and again. but… an encore, that is never to come.

nevermore! quotes the raven.

as the spirits in the dance hall rage and rage and rage out white, hot, hell-heated light… and then the lights explode.

12. jules

so, you finally let the world know what you're made of, huh? asked the invisible voice. jesse paused. she didn't want to answer. you blew everyone out of the water, huh? with that gift of yours. those sluts couldn't believe what they were seeing.

go away.
no.
please, go away.

no.
we once made a promise to each other. i was yours and you were mine. and, how did you hold that vow? it wasn't a vow! we were not married. we were just being young and stupid and—

it was a vow to me!

me! and don't give me that "young fools rush in," line. i was an adult, and i understood these things perfectly well. and even if you were younger than me, you were still old enough to make that choice. adult enough. and to understand the implementations and implications and ramifications. you looked me in the eyes, and said it. you gave yourself to me.

you'd… dance... for me!
only me.
and no one else.

and now you're just whoring yourself out to the world. don't say that! it is what it is! we had something special. and now, you're whoring this special thing of ours out to everybody else. you think… He, up there, agrees? she didn't speak now. did you or did you not, by your choice, your own free will, promise yourself to me? did you or did you—
yes! jesse was almost in tears now. do you think i'm being mean to you? do you think i want to be this harsh? cruel? no! but, do not forget! do not! you are the one responsible for what you did to me. me, and my brother, no less. you took us both on a wild ride—straight to hell! and now, me and my brother are practically there, burning! because of you! no, jesse, this isn't me being harsh. this isn't me being mean nor unfair nor unjust. this is your reckoning! this is judgement! a

judgment, i, in my heart, don't want to hold you against. but, we're coming for you, jesse. you're gonna be judged, for your sins. and you're gonna suffer.

there will be hell to suffer, mark my words….
hell to suffer, there will be!
where are you? where are you two?
….
what can you two do, that you haven't already done… and to me? jesse woke up then. cold sweat. terrified. she didn't know which way was up. nor down. what day was it today? wednesday? no. friday? no. it was sunday! yes. sunday morning. then, a phone call came in. jesse hesitated to answer; she watched herself, in 3rd person, as she looked to be having a seizure. was this out of body? no, no it wasn't. and then that ringing noise in her ears, again. and now, she came to her senses.

ring… ring.
she answered.

hello, is this… jesse? said a man's voice she had never heard before.
yes. she answered.

and then… she knew.

listen, honey, mind if i call you honey? i'm a babyboomer. my generation were more keen to terms of endearment. so, forgive me if that isn't how you'd like your cup of tea to be served. he he. said the voice. he was… strangely delightful to listen to.

no. i'm not that petty.
oh, good, good.

a pause.

listen, i saw your video. funny, i was woken up at 3am in the morning, and i was like, "are you kidding me, at this hour?" but the fellas on the other line, they were dumbfounded with what they had experienced. said he. he had a bit of a cranky voice. hefty, hoarse, but jolly in a way. but also smooth in another way. listen, my name is julius rosenberg. call me jules, if you please. and, to put it simply, i think

your stars have finally lined up for ye, kiddo. and, from what i saw, i damn well gotta meet ye. jesse was speechless.

just one dance, on video. that's all it took…?

i… i… i'm dumbfounded, myself, from what i saw. i need to meet you. we need to talk. pronto!

you know the chateau marmont?
yes.
can we meet today?
um… yes.

good, at 1pm, today. ask for me at the concierge. i'll be waiting. then hung up. jesse, put the phone down. she still needed a minute; none of this had yet fully sank in. she got up. got dressed. and left.

outside, it was a gray cloudy day, here in sunny southern california. a bit cold, even for this city; clouds were very low, and, moving fast. very fast. as if with a lot of other things along with it.

she was now at the chateau marmont. she had driven there with her camaro (which she had to stop halfway to replenish the car with more oil) and had given the keys to the valet at the entrance. no need to deal with la parking in here. although the vehicle seemed out of place in this establishment, considering how poor and redneck it was held in its standards. funny, so many times, she had passed this place. this castle on the hill. yet, now, finally, she was here. the place always gave her an ambiguous sense. like familiarity. like, she belonged here. or, at least part of her did.

something also scared her about this place.

it was a quiet place. not that it was quiet. but the vibe was quiet, and slow and… secretive? thoughts coming and going. where they came from? who knew. where they went? no idea as to the direction. what were they? that was the question now that needed answering. nuanced! it was all so very nuanced. and how the word would carry itself in a discreet sense, and not the overly disclosed one, which it's

taken on to do so, now that everybody can't shut up using that word. for, the best way to deprive anything of its uncommon uniqueness, is by making it commonplace. for, like blood and water, purity and popularity, can never, never mix! everything is coming down to this moment. thought jezebel. six months of living in la. and now, a door had opened: one she expected. but, one that she had no clue where it would lead to. wind blew. quiet. very quiet. and soft. as if unsure of its own self.

she was at the concierge now. she asked for jules.
she was at the patio now. where she was directed to go.

and there, now, at a table, sat a man: silver, white hair; shades; one that had a dashing sense about him, with his simple white undershirt unbuttoned; also wearing an alabaster blazer with a pair of alabaster leggings, to match. he dressed like a babyboomer. and had that swagger of a playboy gent. but, not as aloof as one would tend to be. so uncouth. and, so uncaring. no. this one seemed kind! this one seemed different.

hmm… sorta reminds me of scott bakula… from an old favorite show of mine, quantum leap. thought jess.

hello, my name is jules. as i said on the phone. please to meet you.

definitely was a babyboomer. jesse couldn't remember the last time, having met a man, that got up to greet a lady, with a smile and a handshake. he had too much etiquette to be anything but. a generation or two priors, and he'd probably would be kissing her hand right about now. jesse smiled. then sat. jezebel singer, is it? yes. wait a second, do you also sing? jezebel couldn't help but smile, again; this was reminding her of the conversation she had with ray. i'm just kidding. he followed, with a quick wink. wow, been a while since she had been around a man, seeming this confident and comfortable around females. definitely not a millennial. definitely! all right, great to finally meet you. that was an interesting thing to say: "finally?" thought jesse. and jules then picked up on that. yes, finally. he reaffirmed. it was finally settling in with jesse, everything that was now happening. he did say: "your stars have lined up." all because of one dance, one small dance, from last night. jesse was becoming more awoke since waking earlier. all right, let me get straight to the point. jules shot. and now, jesse was at her most

alert. honey, i've been in this business. for a very… very… long time. he sure did seem to love stretching his sentences. but it worked for him.

and….
a pause.
in all my years. believe me when i say, i've never seen dancing like that. he said and smiled out. jesse smiled, a third time. what else could she do? thank you. she said. also, eurythmics? thank you for that. seriously! been years since i heard them, you got great taste in music.

another pause.
here's some context: i've been in this business for 45 years. started this back in the 70s. so, i've been doing this for a very long time now. bit of a fossil in this city. but, don't let these old bones fool you, you're probably not going to meet anyone this high in the hollywood food chain, this early on. really? said jesse. jules smiled. don't worry. don't worry. that's about as flamboyant as i get, about myself. deep down, i'm not the sort. i can be the most modest guy. but if you were only willing to give me the chance. he he! he joked, while holding both hands with fingers intertwined, and doing a comical pleading/placating gesture.

he he! jesse laughed, but sorta didn't know what was funny about it. but it came off funny, none the less.

another pause.
jesse now saw he was being methodical. honey, from what i saw, i think your dancing is phenomenal. thank you. jesse said.

but saw how he was still being methodical.

as he kept stroking his chin with his left hand. something seemed off. honestly… maybe a little too phenomenal… if you mind me saying. he said and smiled. and his head was in the defensive position. with eyes hanging off the cliffs of his brow. no, thanks, thanks. i'm… glad? you liked it that much…? and now came a question, one in which it seemed he really wanted to ask: honey, i have to ask, where did you learn to dance like that? and, that was a question, jesse feared to answer. i mean, how could she? how could she? jesse then realized she was showing her dread in her eyes. jules was noticing this. but seeming calm, all the

same.

well…? said jesse.
now, his head: in the offensive!

go, ahead! go, ahead, honey, i'm all ears. jesse then opened her mouth. but not a word came out. she wasn't answering. jules though, didn't seem put off by it. did you use to take classes? did you learn from a school? did you learn from that… pandora club, was it? jesse then realized, she still hadn't shut her mouth; it had been open for a good 10 seconds. she now shut it. jezebel, jess, pardon me, what do you like people to call you? oh, "jesse," would be fine. all right, jesse, go on. jesse then opened her mouth… and… nothing came out again. and, this time, she shut it, immediately.

she was getting anxious.

the more calm and comfortable, and also confident, jules was coming off, the more of the opposite, was what jesse now felt. and now, she had been sitting there for a good minute. and had zero to say. wow, was she feeling anxious. i'm sorry, jesse, i'm not making you nervous… am—
no, no! not nervous! she interrupted. jules paused. i mean, i get a lot of first meetings, where people, might get intimidated by me, like i'm… grading them... or something. no, no. jesse said. you know this isn't a test, right, jesse? he said, smilingly. jesse then realized she had her mouth open again. as if waiting for a fly to fly in. and now, anxiety galore! jesse, please calm down! please, this isn't a test. i'm not testing you.

look into my eyes.
jesse looked into his eyes.

you, believe, i'm here for you, not against you, correct?

and now her anxiety went away.
just like that. this guy… wow?

honey….
you should see your eyes right about now, you look like the bride of frankenstein.

he he! he joked. he, he. and now jesse was laughing at jules making fun of her. and about another detail, she wasn't aware of: first her mouth, now her eyes! telling jules secrets, that jesse, herself, wasn't aware of. all right, let me talk. let me talk. you, just sit back. and be comfortable. and just listen. let the pressure now be on me. okay? asked jules. okay…! giggled jesse. unsure why she giggled, but… okay? first though, i have to say: you kids, today, get anxious over nothing! spilled milk! he, he. he chuckled. okay, duly noted…? jesse thought but didn't say. so… where to begin…?

a pause.
and then he seemed to know where: i've been in this business for 45 years, and, in all that time, i've seen, a lot of talent. a lot of talented young men and women, come and go. he started. jesse was now all ears. sad. really. really sad. this city, it can be a tough one. jules said. jesse nodded. what's interesting is, so much talent, so many young faces, coming and going, and one thing they all had in common, was they all believed they had that special something, that would put them over the top. put them ahead of the rest. but, for, whatever reason, what they had, what they had to offer, all that talent, and i do mean "talent!" i was there. i saw what they were capable of. it's not as if they were just a bunch of egotistical cases. self-centered. and had nothing more than delusions of grandeur. no, they were talented! but the thing was, with all that raw talent, for, whatever reason, what they had, was never enough, for it to stick. do you understand what i am saying? asked jules. jesse had no answer. no need to answer. said jules. and jesse felt fine giving none. you see, talent, is good! even being gifted, is good! but, being in this business for 45 years… my experience has been, that, that just isn't what it takes. then, what does it take? asked jesse. totally enthralled. jules now had a very keen eye. very keen. and also, very coy in a way. one which jesse was unsure of what to make of.

let me put it like this. you like movies? jules asked.
yes.
good.

ever seen the movie, back to the future? jesse thought back, not for a long time. i… yes, i have. she answered. good. you remember marty mcfly's character in that movie, right? jesse wasn't the best at movie trivia. is that… who michael j…? yes, yes, michael j. fox. marty mcfly was the character he played in that movie. he said.

okay…? i'm sorry i'm not bringing up movies more of your generation, like, mean girls, or…? no, go on. all right. now, let me ask you this: you know who leonardo dicaprio is, right? jesse's eyes went slit. how could she not? of course, you do. of course, you do. what girl of your generation, doesn't know that actor? he, he! all right, go on. thought jesse, now getting a wee impatient. let me ask you this, leo… is a good actor, right? yes. said jesse. unsure where this was going.

better actor than michael j. fox is?

jesse didn't know mjf that well. but, she felt like saying: "yes!" and did. yes. okay. let me ask you this: do you think leo could ever play the role of marty mcfly… better… than michael did? jules quizzed, with fingers intertwined, again. and while having this air about him, of christopher lee, in a 60s sci fi horror movie, of that of a scientist.

interesting question.
she thought about it. she remembered the movie. now, very well. now that she'd had some time to think. but… something seemed off.

no. jesse said and realized.
jules smiled.

you did say leo is a better actor than michael, correct? yes. so, why is it that leo, could never, be, marty mcfly? and jesse now knew. leo is a good actor, yes! but, michael j. fox was—he was marty mcfly! it's like his character, his funny, unsure of himself character.

in spirit!
exactly! let out jules. in spirit!

another pause.
you see, jesse, in this business, it's not about talent. it's not about… i don't know! or, "je ne sais quoi," as they say in french. but what it is about: is being perfect! perfect? retorted jesse. yes, perfect. something that none of us really are. and, can never be. but, how can you be perfect? asked jesse. and then jules let jesse have it:

i don't know... you… tell me?

and had serious eyes for her now. jesse still had no clue where he was truly going with this. but, now knew it was about her. and her dancing. and, he wanted to know where it came from.

jesse, do you… believe… in magic?

jesse's eyes extended from that word. "magic…?" yes, magic. and jules once again had serious eyes for her, that grew the evermore stern with each take. but, it wasn't intimidating her, not this time. what type of magic? jesse asked. well, i don't mean: david copperfield, david blaine, "watch me levitate your card out of this deck," magic. okay. jesse went. and i guess i also don't mean gandalf the wizard "magic," either.

maybe the word, "magic," is the wrong word.

i mean, something… miraculous.
jesse's eyes were now fixed.

"miraculous!"
being perfect at something. coming in at the right place, and, at right time, and being the right person to do so, like you were chosen. destined. perfect! just like michael j. fox was perfect, to play, marty mcfly, as if chosen. not by us. but, by some greater scheme to things.

jesse… was speechless, again.
jules eyed her more methodically, then went on: one of the reasons i'm still employed after all these years. i'm 66 years old. i should be retired right now. but, people today, don't seem to have any sense about stuff like this, anymore. your generation. though, not you, not saying, "you," personally. you could be a unique individual, all to yourself. but, your millennials, today, i mean. if they remade back to the future, today….

(well, today, but not with today's leo, he's no spring rooster anymore, to play a character that's still supposed to be in high school, hehe!)

if titanic's leo was to show interest, your generation might say: "heck, he's a good

actor—great actor—he should be able to play the role!" people today absolutely have no sense. no sense in this stuff, whatsoever. their logic is just so terribly, terribly flawed. rambled jules. going off on a personal-vendetta-tangent. which was kinda funny listening to. jules sounded to be from the east coast. and jesse was now getting more of his unique character. especially with that terrible sounding gravelly voice; he was like a smooth-talking gilbert gottfried. if such a thing was even possible to exist. he! let out jesse. it was funny listening to him, just how he talked. i'm glad you're finding my personality funny. he smiled and said. yeah, jesse really liked him.

let me now tell you a story. and, i, would like, you to bear with me, in this. because, it might start going places. and places, you wouldn't think it would go. all right? jesse nodded. all right, then…!

then went on:
back in the 70s, when i first started out. (i'm from new jersey. by the way). but anyways. when i first moved out here and got started in this business, i knew a girl. a dancer. someone… someone… who now reminds me a lot of you. jesse's eyes opened, wider. fantastic dancer, absolutely fantastic. and, something very, very, special, about her, too. i didn't know how to put my finger on it. she was 27 at the time, 27 years old. how old are you now? same. jesse said. same, really, the same age… okay…? and then gave a look, one that jesse didn't know how to interpret.

what's your birthday? jules asked.
oh, february 11, 1992.
jules now seemed invested with it, as if juggling horoscopes, with his accountant hand. jesse grew a bit weirded by this. but then jules shook his head.

anyways, i took her in. i helped her get really acquainted with this city. even though, just starting out, myself, i was still going places very quickly. i don't know how.

actually, i do… but… i'll explain that another time.

anyways, i guess it was a gift, almost, of mine, to do so. jesse's mind went elsewhere, just for a sec. something bothered me though. something bothered me.

she was just… too different. from any other dancer i'd meet. just like you. i saw the entire video. especially of the other dancers you were with. you all seemed as you wanted to… to burn bras…? actually, nevermind that, now! you didn't hear that. jules griped, with a clumsy stupor. okay...? loled jesse, as her eyes went port to starboard. not exactly sure what jules meant by… actually… now she did! i saw how the other girls danced. they all did what all girls today do. talent? yes! but something just missing. this girl i knew in the 70s, her name was penelope felix. penelope, stood out from all the other dancers. and, her dancing! her dancing! there was something mysteriously pastiche about it. and. i had to know her story. i had to know! there were gears in the back my head turning, when thinking. i felt like i knew something! something extraordinary.

like, i knew something was very, very special about her story.

and, therefore, i needed to know what it was. do you want to know what her story was, jesse? and then, a wind blew in. where it came from? jesse didn't know. where it was headed, she knew much less. but, something was now changing. as if the wind, itself, was changing: was coming in from one direction, but now the opposite direction. and jesse could now vividly and virtually see an old-fashioned weathercock, made of brass, rotating in her head; the windvane making a lot of rustic sounds as it did so. penelope told me, when she was young. a little girl. she used to live with her mom in pasadena. in a one-bedroom apartment. no dad. her dad had died in the korean war. but this isn't about her dad. anyways, she told me, next to her apartment, there was an apartment, where a woman used to live. she'd go into that apartment. and, this woman that lived there, used to once be a dancer. and, she liked this little girl. and, she decided to teach her how to dance. the story was starting to sound somewhat familiar for jesse. i asked her who this woman was. she gave a name. i decided to look up the name. you know what i found out? no, what? asked jesse. this woman used to be a big thing, back in the day. back in the 20s, actually. i looked her up. i looked up her dancing. and, wouldn't you know it, this woman's dancing from the 20s, was spot on from what i saw of penelope felix, who i knew. big thing back in the 20s. especially in france. in ol' gay paree! i saw all the old reels. i had to go digging for them.

anyways, then i found out something else.
and now, the wind, again.

this woman was dead. but...!
jules then folded his legs the opposite way.
she hadn't died recently. no!

she had died a long time ago. sometime in the 30s. she had overdosed on medications. jules now eyed jesse. as the story got intense. penelope felix was not old enough to have been alive in the 1930s. so, i asked myself, how could she know this woman? could it be true penelope felix would know this woman, that was long dead, and before penelope was ever born? i confronted penelope about this. i asked, i demanded, if she was making it up. penelope, told me, "it's not possible." how did she say it wasn't possible? asked jesse. and then jules went into his blazer's back pocket. and, pulled out something folded. he then put it on the table the two were sitting at. a wind blew in, again. jesse picked it up. it was… seemed to be a picture taken some time in the 60s; there was a little girl in it, smiling, and she was being held by an older black woman. although, the older woman, seemed, hazy, in a way. that little girl was penelope felix, in the 60s. that woman, was the woman, i had seen in the old-time reels from the 20s, from france. the picture was taken by penelope's mother. and jesse now knew, somehow, this jules rosenberg knew. but how much he knew, and what he exactly knew, that was still something left to be revealed.

i gotta be straight with you now…
what, what, what… was that flash of light… i saw in the vid?

what? gasped jesse.
after you danced, like someone, i've never seen dance before, all of a sudden, the lights got really, really hot. it got intense. intensely bright. and then everything went to dark! directed jules at jesse. and now, he wanted a straight answer. i don't know. jesse said. you don't know? what do you mean, you don't know? you were there. you didn't—
no, i did see it. but—
but what? but then jules realized he was being a little too firm with jesse, and backed off. wanna know something interesting? asked jules. what? gasped jesse. a dream, i've been having, for the last three years: a reoccurring dream.

a pause.
in this dream, i'm at a hollywood party, up in the hills, somewhere. i don't know

where. i've been to a billion of them. and, like the billions i've been to: it's boring. nothing is happening. but then, i would see a flash of light…! jesse's eyes widened. i'd see a flash of light, really hot, white, and bright. it would scare me. and, i'd look, and, i'd see the white silhouette of a girl, shining out.

i... would then run after her.
and, i'd run. and run. and run. into the crowd. and the crowd would feel elbow to elbow deep. and then i'd feel lost. and then, i'd realize… i had lost her. described jules.

a pause.
a year ago, i had told a friend of mine, name is sal sullivan. told him about my dream. you want to know what happened last night? asked jules. what? sal calls me up, at 3am. going, "oh my God, oh my God." but i'm tired. drowsy. and then he tells me: "you know that dream you once told me about? well, i just saw a video, that was given to me by james, that was given to him by davy, that was given to him by… the people that were part of the crew recording the dancing at the pandora club. and, when i saw this video, this girl—this girl! i couldn't believe her dancing. and then i saw a flash of light. and it made me think of the dream you once told me about. so, i want you. you! to see this!" jules was now flashing hot steel at jesse. this is my story, of how, i got introduced, to you.

by a dream.

so, tell me, what happened there?
i don't know what happened. jesse exclaimed. you don't know. no. jesse addressed. jules now seemed to want to let go. jesse, now, in her mind, couldn't stop firing off all its pistons, at once. she remembered the flash of light. everyone there did. the lights got very hot at the ends of her dancing. and then, a power outage. that! that was the effect she had had. was it her? or, something else? now, life was a destiny. she didn't know why the lights did that; she had danced her dances before, but they never had supernatural effects to where the power emanating could do things like that. why did it? jesse had thought, when she finished her dance. but now, she knew. i've seen a lot of dancers come and go. great dancers. great! but, never did they have that perfect something, that would stick. penelope felix was one of those diamonds in the ruff. but things got sad with her later. i've seen many, many dancers… don't want to sound like a broken record, but, been doing

this for 45 years... i've seen so many. so, so many dancers. come and go. but, in the end, it's always been a copy of a copy. even penelope felix's dancing, was a copy of just another person. a ghost. i guess?

but, here's the thing, your dancing… and let me use this word…

was almost angelic!

jesse said nothing.
am i on to something here? yes, no?
still nothing.

when those lights got hot, i got scared, i really, really got scared! i did. it was my dream. and, something else. it was like the gates of heaven opening up. it was like the ark of the covenant! ever seen the movie, raiders of the lost ark? jesse shook her head. the light was like the power of God, and, i got scared, i got really scared, like i had to close my eyes, or, God was going kill me! jesse felt confused. that's something from the movie i just mentioned… nevermind.

maybe i should tell him? no, i should! i can't hide this anymore. i'm sick and tired of hiding it! i mean…?

the thing was, with jesse…
that thing… that had happened to her, so, so many years ago….

now, in today's world, part of her didn't know whether to believe it or not. although, she did, she still did believe. but. it also all seemed so fantastical now. so far away. and so farfetched. and all jesse felt of it was the sense of being forlorn of its fading into memory.

jesse…?
jesse…?
if i told you, more stories, more stories, of the things i've seen, i'm interested to know if you'd believe them or not.

jesse, i need to know your story. i need to know. because, if it has gates of heaven type of stuff involved.

and then he said it:

i'd bet… Satan… and his demons… won't be too far off!

i will not take you in, if you don't tell me. jesse was terrified. her teeth almost felt to chatter. like judy had done that one day; yesterday, to be exact. and now, jesse, i'm going to tell you my last story for today. and, after this!...
(and then, he looked straight at her! and pointed!)

after this, you must tell me the truth.

this one goes back to the 80s.
were you born in the 80s?
jesse shook her head. well, being 27 years old, that would mean? and then he did a thing with his fingers; counting down the years down to jesse's birthday. okay, born in the 90s. wait, you also told me you were born in 1992, already. he he. forgot about that for a second.

jesse rolled her eyed out of anxiety. and as much as she was the type of person to roll her eyes, never had she done so, out of anxiety.

jules' mind now seemed very much wrapped up in all this; like he had been plotting his words to jesse from the beginning; that scared jesse to think, as she started to feel mistrust towards jules. and, she didn't want that.

back in the 80s, i also used to do child actors. child actors were big in the 80s, in this city. everyone wanted to be the next webster. or the next gary coleman. "what you talkin' about, willis?" sort of thing. anyways, there was this one kid. absolutely adorable. he was. and. i felt keenly about him. i had my old feeling. which is what has always served me well in the business. all 45 years' worth. anyways. i chose to bring this next child protégé to my house. i needed to show my wife the kid. he was just too adorable. i had to! i just had to.

that, then later became, the biggest mistake, i had ever made in my life.
he seemed sad now: lost, in his ways, thinking back to that day.

how would i know, how would i… know! what that would lead to…? what? asked jesse. getting taken in. two weeks passed. and, i remember i was shaving. i had taken a shower, to get all the hair follicles to open up, nice and easy for the shave. i was in my towel, in the bathroom, looking into the mirror. and then, i saw something….

i saw, that kid, i had brought over to my house. but the face was different. completely different. but, the same, still. and, it was evil looking. and then it spoke to me. he said, "hi, i'm now your son's new friend. i like him. i like playing with him. but, we don't like your daughter. and, i think we're gonna have to get rid of her. if it's okay with you, mr. rosenberg?" and then, i freaked, i looked behind me, where i thought he would be standing.

and, that demon child, was no longer there.

a week later.
i remember, i heard my 8-month-old daughter scream in her crib. she'd scream every time she'd want her milk. but this scream was different. i ran. something in me told me to run. i ran to the crib. you know what i saw? jesse felt too afraid to ask. i saw my son. my 8-year-old son. standing over her sister. and the boy was trying to smother her to death with a pillow. i grabbed him then. i was mad. i was beyond mad. i was enraged. so enraged by what i had come to see, i smacked him around a couple of times. he then looked like he had just woken up, and started to cry. i didn't care. i felt like killing the little mongrel, after what i caught him trying to do in there.

me and my wife took the boy to all the shrinks in town. trying to figure out what was wrong with him. they couldn't figure it out. he had no memory of what had happened. shrinks? thinks jesse, but then realizes, it's probably an old slang term for psychiatrist. they knew nothing! nothing! didn't know how to do nothing nor fix nothing, but they'd charge us an arm and a leg, to give their best tries and guesses. me and my wife had to do something… else. we took him to a priest. shrinks, with all their modern science and technology: couldn't do squat! a priest, a special priest, that dealt in matters like these, with his 2,000-year-old bible. and exorcism… boy, were we surprised what he came up with.

it was interesting seeing an exorcism done in real life. not like the movies. it's

different. the priest just had something special about the way he spoke. a God gift, you can say. there was something genuine in his voice, and good: very tranquil, very likeable, but not for that demon inside.

the demon started cursing out:
"no. i'm not coming out. and, for doing this to me and my friend, james," james being my son's name….

"when it comes to our sister…

we're gonna take her head…

and, you're never gonna see us and her head again."

it went on like this for over an hour. the demon cursing more and more. and saying more things. more threats. how he would get james to hurt himself. or, try to hurt us, his parents, while we were asleep. the priest then said he could do nothing about it. i asked, "why?" and the priest said, "it isn't just the demon that's like this, he's influenced your son, too. and. your son is now like this. and he doesn't want the demon to go. and, if he doesn't want the demon to go, not even God, Himself, would cast him out." the priest said it had something to do with free choice. something God gave man, and would never take away. that's how he explained it. after that, our son pretty much lived in the attic. we'd keep him there. and lock it from the outside.

although…
after some time, i guess, the demon, itself, chose to leave my son.
that was that, you were free of it, then? jesse asked.
no… no we weren't.

we took the kid to the same priest, again. the priest, confirmed, the demon had left, by its own will. we were free. but we never trusted our son ever again. but, then again, it wasn't our son we had to worry about.

you see, that demon was still around. and, it didn't want to leave the neighborhood. not until it took its revenge on us.

sometime later, a year later, my wife had decided to take my son to see the grandparents. what happened? asked jesse. jules now seemed depressed. i had a night terror, that night. i woke up. it was quiet. too quiet. so… i went to check on my daughter, now 1 year old and 8 months.

her… head… was missing.

it couldn't have been my son. he was in oklahoma city, where my wife's parents were. the window was broken. blood, all over the floor. cops? they couldn't figure who could do something this… unbelievable.

a week later, i was, i was… i….
not working, at the time. i remember, i was, going out, i don't remember where. i left the driveway. and, behind me, there was a kid on his bike. neighborhood kid. name was micky something. parents were some really big names, too. i looked at the kid. "what did he want?" but then, he looked me straight in the eyes. and started laughing. and, i remembered that laugh, i remembered it, well. because, when my son was dealing with an exorcism, the demon would laugh, just like that, too. the same cackle. the exact same!

you're saying the demon left your son… and went into that other kid?
that's what my best guess was.

you see, i made the mistake, of bringing this child actor, into my home. a guess this kid actor was the first host.

so now, in my life, when it comes to stuff like this, i need to know. when it comes to my clients and… whatever they got! if i get the sense, that special sense, i need to know, then, pronto, what their story is. i won't take them in, unless they tell me. at least so i know what i'm dealing with.

jesse… you did a stunt in memphis, in a psych ward, didn't you? asked jules.

wait… huh? this surprised jesse. this came out of nowhere.

i…?
i know how places like that are like. i've never been committed to one. but, i've

been in one for a client of mine. also… and… someone else. but anyways, you've been in one, and, a lot of… demons… there, you think? jesse just nodded, again. all she could do. especially after the story jules had told. and, that was a certified truth, there were a lot; a copious amount of them; as if infested, almost, of the sort.

all right… that tells me, jesse, you have demons… maybe not inside you… but at least around you.

jesse panned her glance away.

so, now, you…
tell me your story.
tell me your full story. tell me your story about your gift from God.

and, then, tell me, from your understanding… what role has Satan played a part in all this!

Ezekiel 23

1 The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying,
2 Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother:
3 And they committed whoredoms in Egypt, they committed whoredoms in their youth: there were their breasts pressed, and there they bruised the teats of their virginity.
4 And the names of them were Aholah the elder, and Aholibah her sister: and they were mine, and they bare sons and daughters. Thus were their names, Samaria is Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah.
5 And Aholah played the harlot when she was mine, and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours,
6 Which were clothed with blue, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses.
7 Thus she committed her whoredoms with them, with all them that were the chosen men of Assyria, and with all on whom she doted: with all their idols she defiled herself.
8 Neither left she her whoredoms brought from Egypt: for in her youth they lay with her, and they bruised the breasts of her virginity, and poured their whoredom upon her.
9 Wherefore I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, upon whom she doted.
10 These discovered her nakedness: they took her sons and her daughters, and slew her with the sword: and she became famous among women, for they had executed judgment upon her.
11 And when her sister Aholibah saw this, she was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she, and in her whoredoms more than her sister in her whoredoms.
12 She doted upon the Assyrians her neighbours, captains and rulers clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men.
13 Then I saw that she was defiled, that they took both one way,
14 And that she increased her whoredoms: for when she saw men pourtrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans pourtrayed with vermilion,
15 Girded with girdles upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads, all of them princes to look to, after the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, the land of their nativity:
16 And as soon as she saw them with her eyes, she doted upon them, and sent messengers unto them into Chaldea.

17 And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their whoredom, and she was polluted with them, and her mind was alienated from them.
18 So she discovered her whoredoms, and discovered her nakedness: then my mind was alienated from her, like as my mind was alienated from her sister.
19 Yet she multiplied her whoredoms, in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt.
20 For she doted upon their paramours, whose flesh is as the flesh of asses, and whose issue is like the issue of horses.
21 Thus thou calledst to remembrance the lewdness of thy youth, in bruising thy teats by the Egyptians for the paps of thy youth.
22 Therefore, O Aholibah, thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will raise up thy lovers against thee, from whom thy mind is alienated, and I will bring them against thee on every side,
23 The Babylonians, and all the Chaldeans, Pekod, and Shoa, and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them: all of them desirable young men, captains and rulers, great lords and renowned, all of them riding upon horses.
24 And they shall come against thee with chariots, wagons, and wheels, and with an assembly of people, which shall set against thee buckler and shield and helmet round about: and I will set judgment before them, and they shall judge thee according to their judgments.
25 And I will set my jealousy against thee, and they shall deal furiously with thee: they shall take away thy nose and thine ears, and thy remnant shall fall by the sword: they shall take thy sons and thy daughters, and thy residue shall be devoured by the fire.
26 They shall also strip thee out of thy clothes, and take away thy fair jewels.
27 Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease from thee, and thy whoredom brought from the land of Egypt: so that thou shalt not lift up thine eyes unto them, nor remember Egypt any more.
28 For thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will deliver thee into the hand of them whom thou hatest, into the hand of them from whom thy mind is alienated:
29 And they shall deal with thee hatefully, and shall take away all thy labour, and shall leave thee naked and bare: and the nakedness of thy whoredoms shall be discovered, both thy lewdness and thy whoredoms.
30 I will do these things unto thee, because thou hast gone a whoring after the heathen, and because thou art polluted with their idols.

31 Thou hast walked in the way of thy sister, therefore will I give her cup into thine hand.
32 Thus saith the Lord GOD, Thou shalt drink of thy sister's cup deep and large: thou shalt be laughed to scorn and had in derision, it containeth much.
33 Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation, with the cup of thy sister Samaria.
34 Thou shalt even drink it and suck it out, and thou shalt break the sherds thereof, and pluck off thine own breasts: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD.
35 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Because thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms.
36 The LORD said moreover unto me, Son of man, wilt thou judge Aholah and Aholibah? yea, declare unto them their abominations,
37 That they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire, to devour them.
38 Moreover this they have done unto me: they have defiled my sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my sabbaths.
39 For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it, and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of mine house.
40 And furthermore, that ye have sent for men to come from far, unto whom a messenger wassent, and, lo, they came: for whom thou didst wash thyself, paintedst thy eyes, and deckedst thyself with ornaments,
41 And satest upon a stately bed, and a table prepared before it, whereupon thou hast set mine incense and mine oil.
42 And a voice of a multitude being at ease was with her: and with the men of the common sort were brought Sabeans from the wilderness, which put bracelets upon their hands, and beautiful crowns upon their heads.
43 Then said I unto her that was old in adulteries, Will they now commit whoredoms with her, and she with them?
44 Yet they went in unto her, as they go in unto a woman that playeth the harlot: so went they in unto Aholah and unto Aholibah, the lewd women.
45 And the righteous men, they shall judge them after the manner of adulteresses, and after the manner of women that shed blood, because they are adulteresses, and blood is in their hands.

46 For thus saith the Lord GOD, I will bring up a company upon them, and will give them to be removed and spoiled.
47 And the company shall stone them with stones, and dispatch them with their swords, they shall slay their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses with fire.
48 Thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness.
49 And they shall recompense your lewdness upon you, and ye shall bear the sins of your idols: and ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

14. june 6th, 2016

"so, jezebel, tell us why you're here?" asked a female doctor, modestly dressed; a timidness in her, which jesse had long forgotten how it felt. jesse didn't answer. eyes strayed out a window to freedom, a freedom, she now feared being lost and lonesome in. the open skies were now a dangerous place to fall into. "i can't leave here." jesse said, now facing the board of doctors she was being interviewed by. "why is it that you feel you can't leave here?" asked dr. wong. she wore prescription glasses that made her eyes seem smaller than they actually were. "because, i just don't want to."

outside,
was now a terrifying place. outside. in the open. in the wild. "as long as i'm here, there's rules, there's walls, there's… i don't know…?" "structure?" guessed dr. wong. jesse looked into her small eyes again and nodded. "jesse, you're not going to be able to stay here forever." informed dr. wong. jesse began relapsing into those thoughts, again. "we get a lot of patients that come here, we do, and, they feel safe here. because the outside world just seems too big and too brutal for them. but… don't you want a life on the outside, one day, when you're free?"

"free… free to do what?" barked jesse.

dr. wong seemed confused. but, also seemed to have an answer. "jesse, nobody is perfect, everyone falls down and has to get up again. everyone goes through… terrifying experiences in life. but we have to live the life we are given. and, it can be beautiful. but, as long as there's the freedom to make it that way." but jesse felt like she knew better. also, she was finding dr. wong's words a little too platitudinous. "in these walls, there's security, yes! but, one day, these walls will feel less and less like a safe place, and more and more like a prison." explained dr. wong. "i rather be in a prison…!" and then jesse looked straight at the woman she was speaking to, and said:

"than hell!"
"hell, why hell?" inquired dr. wong.

and now jesse felt like getting to the point.
"what if… what i'm capable of… isn't beautiful? what if, what i'm capable of, can result in nothing but destruction? destroying things. defiling things. taking

something good and turning it into something bad?" illustrated jesse. dr. wong didn't seem to have an answer to that, immediately.

it had been over a year now, for jesse, since meeting him, meeting them! since their ultimate influence began to run her life in a totally uncharted and unchained direction. jesse, had been mostly a good girl before this year. but, that was an identity, she no longer felt relatable with. she had changed, because, her view of this world had changed; which had now become a more and more cruel and careless landscape, the deeper she fell into this uniquely devised sin of her own creation.

his name was billy lane.

good looking boy, with a twin brother, that had ridden into town, and ridden into her life, from somewhere up north. And, billy and his brother, jimmy, had become the abyss, she had fallen into. all her life, before the two, for jesse, it all felt like a waiting game; life was structured; it had rules and regulations, and, nothing outside these boundaries would exist to her.

but then they started to.

self-discovery became a window into oneself; a window into one's own eyes, to see what really lived in that house in that attic. and there was nothing but freedom now, to move about in any directions imaginable; there was now freedom to run and to stumble and fall. especially fall. having no grace. being chaotic, but, being totally free. and importantly: carefree.

just so… Devil-may-care….

and there were multitude of emotions felt in every evolved sense. and, this, was the masterpiece, this new age had brought to her. jesse had been having a sort of reoccurring dream for a good time at the time, and even way before meeting billy and jimmy; having a dream, an ambiguous dream, full of no words, but a lot of sights; stuck in a building of large white walls, with many halls and many set pieces: a museum. an art museum, it really was. and jesse, herself, would be in this place of expression and exhibit, and, as a critic, going from one piece to the next. and then, to the next. and on and on. so and so forth. it was a museum that was

her life, with pictures of her times on the walls, done up like paintings, of the life she was living: a dream inside a living and breathing photo album. and the dream always ended at the sight of a large marble statue, in massive shape and size and scale, a la venus de milo. but of jezebel singer. this: was a museum of the self. but, after meeting the boys, billy and jimmy, that is when things began to change; art pieces began to change; a photo album changing as newer pictures were added to its assembly. with new templates. themes. and colors.

billy lane was just bad. bad! very bad. very violent and very wild inside; jesse had never met a male so much in turmoil, from the inside and out. he had a chin of an aries: high held and regretless. and these were the qualities which drew a girl like jezebel to billy. he seemed: free! just so free. of everything. which made experiencing life for jesse, now all the more abundant. there was a joy in being so happy-go-lucky capricious, as her whims began to go out of control, as they'd rear sharply in one direction, and then the next. and, it was exciting; life was now not so still and stale but energetic and exciting.

"jesse, when the police had picked you up, you said something that didn't make sense to them. actually, it was first taken as a grave worry. of, a boyfriend? that wanted to hurt you?" asked dr. wong.
"i saw ghosts." jesse finally let out.

she was still in the memphis mental hospital. and, there was no longer any point in trying to pretend to be sane, like she did when she hadn't yet been brought to a place like this, and would be around non doctors and non-patients; with normal people on the outside, that would rather keep the insanity, inside, and not out. keep it mum. although, here, sanity was no longer something that would work, in a place meant for the other sort.

"actual ghosts?
metaphorical ghosts?
or… psychological?"
"i don't understand what that means." said jesse. dr. wong readjusted her tactic. "let me ask you this: do you believe ghosts are real?" she asked. jesse shook her head. "so, you think these are ghosts in your head?" "no." dr. wong was now confused. "jesse, that's sort of a contradiction, either you believe, or…?" "i don't want to believe!" disclosed jesse, with terror in her eyes. and now dr. wong

understood: it was better to be insane with having experienced what she did, than not be insane, and totally sane, experiencing her worst fears come to life. "i have a boyfriend, that's dead now. and… i'm sorta responsible… if there are such things as ghosts. well, do you see what i'm saying here?" explained jesse. "what do you mean, sorta responsible?" questioned dr. wong, as her tiny eyes squinted and got tinier. but that was a matter jesse would not go into.

as for the story of the boys, all that jesse had discovered, what their lives were about, were things jesse had never encountered ever in her days; their lives were the lives of legends; living a life fully born and realized out of chaos. and so much so, it was a work of art, in of itself. the boys themselves artists…

but not of choice, but of circumstances.

both were twin brothers, one loud and lewd and the other quiet, mostly just quiet. supposedly, since the age of twelve, they had decided to be runaways.

"how was that like?" jesse once asked billy, while they were in together.
"umm… we both had mullets at the time." joked billy.
"really, how old are you two?"

come to find out, way older than she originally thought. but maybe that was just jesse's street sign: only green-lighting those 29 and up. truthfully, they were both from two very separate worlds, which you could guess by their taste in music: jesse growing up on lady gaga, while billy and jimmy did the same to metallica, ac/dc and guns n' roses. their mother had been long dead from unknown reasons; their father, a vietnam vet, drunk, that was always abusive and violent towards them. supposedly, all this household drama originating from michigan. so, one night, the boys had snuck into their father's bedroom, while the old man was asleep; they had stolen his wallet and car keys. a camera. plus, something else. and then ran away. and, when they ran, their feet had hit the asphalt, and had never stopped. they were boys that had then started a life on the outside, them and their dad's old dodge. now, the road was their home. and never again did they find themselves behind four walls, and a roof to sleep in, of their own: no place of their own, an actual home, no! they really became nomads. drifters. years and years, going by, and, still, no home, like the sort jesse was raised in. they were lost boys. and the tales of their lives were now also stuff of legends. since they were now always

living life on the outside. traveling everywhere and wherever. their younger days, mostly being petty thieves, and sometimes not so petty, to get by. in later years, working stunts in a roadhouse bar in oklahoma; a gun store in montana; a car garage in iowa; a strip club somewhere in texas that was below a highway overpass. zigzagging all over the country with no sense of direction, and just doing whatever it took to scrap by with enough money, before making their exits to their next opportunistic destinations. and then, there next.

it was this romance that first drew jezebel to them; seeing how different they were to anything she had ever encountered. boys, in her neighborhood, didn't have stories like these. neither any stories worth holding a candle, for a girl like jezebel and her attention. hers was a world of twilight and harry potter books. theirs… wouldn't be caught dead around such silver spoon fed, pampered "thumbsuckery," (a word billy had made up, to describe a certain type (millennials), something he found humor in, or… at least with his unique sense of corny humor. ugh!). although, jesse didn't mind the fact that it was that plainly obvious, that the both of them might not click well together. no matter! jezebel had now grown into an age, where she felt tired of seeing life being lived so structured; these two twins had now become her antidote to something far, far more unruly and unreal and unkept. they were both her elders, both born sometime in the mid-70s instead of the mid-90s; they were x-gens, she was a y-gen: bad combination. bad, just bad! so, they both had a lot of years and a lot of mileage over her on their wear and tear. although it gave them their unique rugged and rigid glow, that would attract all the sort of women that it would attract.

and, of course there were women. lots of women. lots and lots of them. all sorts of women. coming and going into their lives. but, jesse, as boring of a girl as she had been at this turning point, there was also something special about her, that made her, not their first, but, definitely their last. first meeting: a shady bar somewhere in chattanooga. type of place that was made of all wood, where the bar seemed to have been slowly chiseled out of an old and huge sycamore tree. inside and out. and, what it was, was her dancing; it was her dancing that drew them to her; the boys were way too out of a smallminded girl like jesse's league, for them to find something to fancy in her. so, there had to be something very, very, very different about her, that would distinguish jesse, over the hundreds and hundreds of women they had clocked in and out in their time.

“jesse, i know the mind can play tricks on us. but, ghost aren’t real. you will not be able to live a normal life, if you choose to make yourself believe they are.” said dr. wong. “what do you mean, choose? i didn’t choose this!” frustrated jesse. dr. wong then held it in contemplation for a moment, to give jesse a better response. “jesse, simply put, ghosts are not real.” “is God not real?” barked jesse. testing her. dr. wong then realized where jesse was taking this; trying to make it into not as much of an existential debate, but a political one; a matter she couldn’t win in, when it came to proof and research. “i believe… it might be possible. but, that’s not what’s important.” jesse shook her head. to jesse, people who chose to not believe in things like these, were in a world of denial. jesse spent four months in that memphis mental hospital, hiding from the outside world, and, from her own self. also them. and, in that time, the legions of demons she experienced at that place, was as if she might as well be in hell. actually, she was there. she was! she just didn’t know it, at the time. which is what eventually drove her to leave. the doctors didn’t help. the medications didn’t help. actually, some of the medications made things worse, and made jesse addicted to things she had never been addicted to before: like benzos. and, she wondered why the hell they would do such a thing, if it was only going to worsen her condition. “jesse, you cannot allow yourself to believe in something that isn’t there. when you make yourself believe in something you can’t see, whatever you imagine, in your mind, becomes real to you and—"
“i’ve seen them!” jesse barked out. dr. wong grew unsettled; this was worse than she hoped. “you hallucinated them?” dr. wong asked. jesse took that as patronization. “no, i didn’t hallucinate them, i saw them!” she uttered again. dr. wong chose not to continue.

“i see you eyeing me and my brother from across the bar.”
said this 39-year-old man.
“you did?”
said this 23-year-old woman.

“yes, i did!” nodded billy. then smiled. jesse gave dreamy eyes. “is that a crime?” asked jesse, at a jukebox, trying to make a selection. “not a crime, but, definitely a damn shame.” snapped billy. “how’s that?” jesse flirted. “well, there’s two of us and one of you, so, unless you got a sister here with you today, i wouldn’t want you to get brokenhearted, with all your window shopping… with stuff you’re never gonna get to try on for size.” dished billy. yes, billy, was smooth. very, very smooth. and beyond jesse’s verbiage, really. billy had then walked back and sat

with his brother; they were at a far booth looking towards the entrance of the establishment; funny though, how they didn't sit opposite each other at the booth, but, next together; both facing the bar, completely, as if both wanting to get an eye fill of the joint at all times, and never lose any track of nothing. they seemed very territorial. both wearing leatherware from jackets to pants, and they had biker helmets with shields, which were off at the time, and placed on the table. both looked like two evil justin timberlakes. well, that's how jesse perceived them: wanted to perceive them! all for her own fancies. both with short dirty blonde hair and haunting eyes; their eyes were otherworldly; having seemed like having something very, very wrong with them.

like… they were damaged.

they were cataracted and clouded; they had the eyes of the planet neptune; with so, so many storms brewing over the expanses, of what could only be seen on the surface, and not to be seen underneath. although, physically, they seemed to see everything just fine, for it wasn't a visual impairment. so, it was hardly ever brought up, as glaring of a distraction as they were. and then, at that moment, jesse noticed something else: they were now ignoring her. she then sneered at them: realizing that, that there, wasn't billy just now trying to put the moves on her, but, that there, was him, blowing her off. she realized, these boys were different. they had too much experience over her, and she couldn't play hardball, and get them chasing after her; no, they were the ones playing hardball, and, jesse had to be the one doing all the chasing; she had to be the one to lure them in, and not the other way around. wow, what would i need to do to…?

but then, it hit her.
she was already put at a jukebox.
her dancing had to be it.

her dancing: it was the perfect trick needed to make magic. her dancing! something she'd rarely do in public in front of other peoples' eyes, considering the scene she'd always, always cause. but, it was now essential to cause one, to alter the destinies of all parties at play; reroute lifetime journeys, so jesse could bring these two hard-to-gets into her life. and, to do it at this crossroad, before missing the chance; to where they'd leave the joint, and to where she would then never see them again. that angel jesse had met as a child, that was the last time life felt so

free and worthwhile; life had been very drab for her, since then, as she felt like she had been abandoned in all that time, and now she wasn't going to let these two boys abandon her, until someone else came along to fill in the shoes.

so, she put on an older track called 'somebody i used to know' by gotye and began to dance.

and, just like that, that was all the trick that was needed.

although, once the dance was done, and, she had then definitely leveled the playing field, now that both brothers had her in their sights, once done, it was then a feeling came over her, she had never experienced before: a feeling of "bearing nakedness." this was something profoundly good within her. but, had she put it to good use? dancing was something she felt was pure, but, now, as if something… tainted.

"tell me what happened when you saw the ghosts of your ex-boyfriend and his brother, jesse." asked dr wong. jesse didn't want to think about it; those thoughts had put her into panic and trauma mode; and she had come to a mental hospital so she would never again deal with that panic and trauma: the doctor wasn't helping.

"did they try to attack you?"
"no."
"no…? rape you?"
jesse shook her head.
"is that it? do you—"
"i don't know." answered jesse. "jesse, let me put this in a rational sense, suspending the disbelief of ghosts existing: if i was a ghost, and, i saw you responsible of my death. i feel like i'd be angry with you. and, i would purposely go out of my way to haunt you. to punish you for your crimes and sins." elaborated dr wong. that was a eureka moment for the doctor, jesse saw, as her eyes opened up like a camara lens. "jesse, ghosts don't exist. and i think this has more to do with guilt. you're angry at yourself, and, i feel like you'd like to see yourself punished, for your sins, and what you're doing right now is projecting that vengeance seeking into your hallucinations. they're becoming the embodiments of justice being served. and, served against you." jesse felt like dr.

wong was onto something, since that was also very perceptive of her to see it that way. but, jesse saw no eureka in it, since, again with the hallucinations? "they're not imaginary figures. they're real!" shouted jesse. jesse now decided on something: if she was to get her way and try to stay at this psych ward as long as she could, she now had to act out the part of the stereotypical crazy person. so, she'd be kept in and never let out. dr. wong then perceived and acknowledged how jesse was doing all this now, intentionally, since the doctor had seen other patience do it before, from her experiences at the hospital, and shook her head.

the dancing had worked, and now, she was sitting at the booth they were at, facing away from the joint. billy would talk a lot, very openly and extrovertedly. jimmy would just sit there quietly, and the only words jesse had heard him say that day were to ask a barmaid for another beer. "beer, please." lifting up the empty one already in his hand. and, when he got it, he just sat there with his beer, as if all the world was in that bottle, with all the time in it to spend to come. this was all she would get out of jimmy: just so introverted. so, both, were the sort of twins, with dueling personalities. although, with his brother, in secret, jimmy would talk just like billy. one time, jesse had caught the two interacting, and, it was interesting hearing them:

"man, that's shredded!" jimmy said.
"i know!" billy said.
"man, all sucked up and spat out! rampaged! looks putrid, bro." jimmy said.
"yea, 'cause i got reasons to be beatin' chests." billy said.
"damn, mad gorilla man!" jimmy said.
"hey, just be swingin' from vine to vine… looking for my jane." billy said.
"bro, what you talkin'? you ain't no tarzan. you a mothersucking gorilla, let's not forget. a hun! so, stick to sticking yo' own species." jimmy said.
"i'll make her into my species." billy said.
"ha, ha!
ha, ha!"
they both went.

what the hell… what the… are they talking about me? jesse had thought. hearing them speak to one another; having stepped in, in the middle of it, with no grasp of context or subject matter to speak of; whatever they were shooting the bull over, they had a language all to themselves, and jesse was caught lost in translation.

billy would talk, and talk, and talk, to jesse. and then, all jimmy would do is stare at her, like a creep, and scare her. then stare away. although, a creep, yes! but, something also very exciting in its morbid nature, and the way jimmy did it, compared to most creeps jesse had had to deal with. something dangerous—excitingly dangerous! "so, you're a writer?" asked jesse. "yes!" answered billy. "why a writer?" jesse asked. "well, me and my brother, as i told you, we're both sorta wanderers. and we've seen a lot of things. like, things… you wouldn't believe." "can i read some, maybe? he, he!" giggled jesse. billy then gave a remote look and looked away. "so, what does your brother do?" asked jesse. asking billy, since she got the sense jimmy wouldn't answer for himself. "oh, he takes the pictures of the things i tend to write about." informed billy, with a dastardly smile. and a dastardly smile that caught jesse off center: why dastardly? what type of material would the boys premeditatedly cook up, for billy to later write about, after jimmy was done with the photo taking, that would make them smile like this? jimmy then held up a camera; a really old and black and gray steel camera, and took a picture of jesse, with a photo jesse wasn't ready for to be taken. and it almost felt like it took her soul with the snap. "wow, that's an… interesting camera." said jesse, feeling a bit awkward. but, also curious about the camera, seeing how it was not a smartphone camera, but an actual photographer's camera, you'd expect from the ansel adam figurative types. "that's because it's a ФЗД-2." "a, what, now?" "it's a soviet camera, from back in the ussr days. jimmy, here…!" billy then smacked jimmy upside his head, which got jimmy's attention, that was at the time focused out the window, very desolately. "jimmy, here, stole it from our pops. pops got it in the war he was in, in the 70s. in vietnam. so, it's like an heirloom now." "that's interesting." said jesse, since she couldn't think of anything else to say.

"hey, jezebel….
"yes?"
"are you an angel?" billy smiled out.

and that smile, that one smile, delivered with the line he gave, was the beginning of their relationship, as jesse had nothing but dreamy eyes for him.

"so, what do you write on, ancient babylonian tablets?" joked jesse. and then billy gave a very wicked grin; just full of so much joy, coming from a place of insults, which billy found humor in. "no, i write on gas station rolled up paper towels."

“what?” “yeah, whenever we’re at one, i tend to go in to steal, and, i use it later, to write on.” informed billy. “what… why?” gasped jesse. “i don’t know. i was at an internet café some years ago, and i saw something on… youtube… is it?” billy was extremely behind in technology. so were they, both. “yeah, this video about my favorite writer, jack kerouac, and how he wrote stuff he’d experience on the road. ‘on the road,’ which was also a title of one of his books. how he wrote the same way. not sure if the paper was an actual roll of towel paper. but he’d just write on a roll of paper… then make his editor’s life a living nightmare. ha!” billy joked in the end. for jesse, besides mentioning youtube, she had absolutely no idea about anything billy was talking about: maybe it was something of a generational gap? maybe something of a gender one? but it didn’t matter, the world billy and jimmy came from, was still all the more enticing. now, jesse, wanting this archaic way of doing things, to become a part of her world, just to see what it would later grow to represent. little did she know… leading to where she had now ended up in.

“i’m sorry, but, how did both these… brothers… die? i just want to understand, how is it, that you see yourself personally responsible of all this.” asked dr. wong. jesse consoled a bit, then calculated, then spoke: “they were already guys living on the edge, but, since our relationship wasn’t working out, i got spiteful, and decided to push them over that edge. and that’s what did it.” disclosed jesse. “what went wrong in the relationship, for it to not work out?” she asked jesse now. the truth was, the problem was, the relationship was just too carnal. and that one dance, had become the pivotal moment that incarnated something fowl within their relationship, which had totally changed everything from the better to the worse; and had not only altered things with the relationship, but with things with jesse. the dance had always had something to do with something sacred, but jesse had perverted it, and had used it to seduce, instead. and, for that sin, it became a pivotal moment in her life, with a relationship to be held in contempt. the dance was the peak of their relationship, and all left now was the fall. the first time they had sex, jesse lost her virginity; jesse hadn’t told billy she was a virgin, since she was afraid to tell, since she understood how a boy like billy would feel about a girl like her.

“jesse, um…?”
he then made a smirk, a bad boy smirk, and the sort that would instantaneously fill anyone with dread and dire, of just how mortifying the level of his malice was

now going to be.
“jesse…
haha!
are you a—?”
“no!”
billy gave a look. then his eyes wandered.
“jesse… um…?”
jesse grew aghast then, that she was going to get dumped right then and there. billy, was a nasty boy: she had caught billy watching pornos, and the faces he’d make, with the way he’d stick his tongue out, which said everything she needed to know about him. “jesse… i don’t…?” jesse had then been the one to make the move. she had to. she felt she just had to!

and… her deflowering experience…?
after coming from such a high place of white innocents, of how white should be white.

billy… was black.
and in ways black—shouldn’t—be black.

she cried like she had never cried before, when it happened, and not for how great it was.

as for the rest of the times, what she had, continued to be no good; the relationship was just too carnal; nothing seemed to come out of it, except everything only experienced and expressed physically. and in no ways else, metaphysically. and even in their platonic loving moments, billy just wasn’t the tender one. not the cuddly type. not how jesse would have wished. since his nature was just so animalistic, so was everything else. and with her sex life with him, jesse quickly learned, as fiery and ferocious as the experience was, it just wasn’t hers. and, it could never be. sad. sad for jesse. she would have wanted a fruitful relationship with billy to work out; she really would have. both boys were interesting people. with billy, as vile and vicious as he was, he was still a fascinating soul, jesse would have absolutely loved to have made hers. but, after the dance, and, after sex, it just wasn’t going to go there. and the two were now left feeling like they were living life in two separate universes. which the frustration of doing so, would lead to jesse and billy to fight as much. fighting became the point of

contact, which brought jesse and billy into a universe where they could both exist in. jesse's first strike was the dance. her second, the fornicated sex she had had. and now, all that was waiting was the third. and then, that was what it became, practically: a game of baseball. and in this case, a game of two strikes, and a hundred foul balls, with no third strike anywhere in sight. and as for the hopes of a hit or even, God forbid, a homerun, to jesse, that felt like that was a thing, God would never accept and allow to happen; it was a relationship made never to be. but jesse had taken the "no" for no answer. and, now, she was stuck in this rut. which she had become unable to escape.

"how did they die?" dr. wong asked again.

but jesse never answered her.

15. hauling wood

twins, you say? went jules.

yes.

oh, great, twins… i'm afraid to go on already. twins! he retorted. then had a comical look of dread, that which a comedian would make, being chased around by a man in a gorilla suit, in some lighthearted black and white comedy. jesse just didn't have the energy to continue to never mention this part of her life; the story had become an old pain; one which jesse up until now had only spoken about with doctors. now, a hollywood agent? but, why not? jules rosenberg seemed to have a keener understanding of such things, than any of the doctors at the memphis mental hospital ever did. honey, honestly, this isn't my first rodeo. i've been in this business for 45 years. and, i have 45 years' worth of stories, just like the ones i told you, and more. and. in all this time here, i've had to deal with this. that's how i was able to almost be a mindreader, with matters, i'm guessing, you would at first think, a stranger like me would never get, in a million years. it was true, this was all just so uncanny; how simply jules had a sense about something that existed outside of common senses, with material so unimaginable, as it was unreasonable. i think it's because, as you've been chosen in life to dance, i was chosen, too, but to deal with all the kids with raw gifts coming in, just to deal with the demons they all came with. i guess, i've just been destined to do such. no other idea why, would make sense, to me. jules shrugged. can this all be real? wondered jesse. and then jules went on to say something else: i think you've noticed, maybe, maybe, i've had this discussion before, with other prospected talents? noticing how well thought out and also direct to the point my words were to you. if you guess that, you'd be correct. so, he had plotted all this, from the beginning. thought jesse. but, if anything all my years here and the experiences i have had has taught me, is how to deal with these things. i'm the go to hollywood guru of bad spiritual behavior. i'm the go to guy when it comes to the spiritual side of things, and the occult. jesse smirked at him with those words; he was trying to be funny, again. although, got to say… an angel? a real angel? yes! admitted jesse. wow… wow! he was fidgeting with his eyes and expressions. that, i've not heard. ghosts? yes. demons? yes! but you also have stories with angels involved? yes. said and smiled jesse. all while enjoying this bit of a whimsical interactions, she was getting from all this. the wind blew in again, as the clouds above seemed to be ramping up in their accelerations across the skies again. and now, something jesse had yet to disclose:

jesse, how did the brothers actually die? asked jules.
jesse didn't seem to want to answer.

jesse, this is the most important part of the discussion. please, tell me! please, i need to know. i'm sorry for all the scary stories i told you. but, i do it, so, my clients understand—that i understand! when people go through things like these, they're afraid. forget it, straight up traumatized. and they're mostly afraid to talk. who would believe them? in this day and age, people are all so wrapped up in factchecking and netflix, that when extraordinary things happen, in a world that's figured mostly to be nothing more than ordinary, they tend to look the other way. leading people that have experienced extraordinary things, to do the same. to stop staring at the ghost sitting at the kitchen table, and pretend it's not there. lock up as many ghosts in an attic as they possibly can, and hope nobody will ever find out about them. thinking about attics, something came to jesse's thoughts: jules, might i ask? go ahead. whatever happened to your son? jules gave a distant and distraught look. then answered: i don't know, he's now some heroin addict in seattle. a total na reject. and, honestly speaking, i don't care. he then eyed jesse and scared her with the harshness in those eyes and words.

he chose who he serves a long, long time ago.

and, if it ends him up in hell, i don't give a damn if it does…

and you're now changing the subject. jesse's eyes gleamed. i can't help you, jesse, until i know what i'm dealing with. explained jules.

it was a relationship that was never meant to be.

after some time, it became very apparent, especially the longer that jesse and billy tried to stall it out, and pretend nothing was wrong. what was strange, was, how a lot of the reoccurring dreams jesse was having, ended up playing a monumental role in the descent of their time together. as if, all the opposing forces at work, began to direct the experience into the dream; like a director, with the dream being made into the theater, that was set in real life… or, maybe, real life, that was really set in this dream theater (whether art was inspired by life, or life inspired by art)…? whatever it was, whatever jesse and billy had, was a very carnal relationship, which their physical bodies became more of the partakers of, then

they, themselves, that inhabited them.

jesse had small breasts, billy's eyes would observe, and jesse would pick up on when they would. as for the observations jesse would make, billy had very tiny fingernails; they seemed so abnormal to jesse, with such brittle nails and fat tips, that they eventually became off putting. all these little details would present themselves forward, as both billy and jesse would find driving a sharp wedge, between the little they already had for each other. and, there was growing anger in all this. judgmental anger. leading to hatred. leading for the two to start looking in other directions. which, in of itself, caused more friction. one day at a bar in east nashville, in an area called inglewood (nashville's inglewood, not la's), billy went to use the toilet. some guy then came up and tried to hit on jesse. at first, she blew him off. but then, she noticed his fingernails seemed normal to her. even well pedicured. and, strangely enough, jesse began to find him attractive. billy came out, noticed this, noticed jesse was now flirting with him, also noticed she had noticed he was standing there watching all this. and, she was now ignoring him, intentionally. billy then got mad. then grabbed the guy from the back slack of his jacket, and flung him to the ground. then began thrashing at him. as for jesse, she grew outraged, seeing how volatile and quick to violence he was, and began directing her wrath towards him. with moments like these now occurring more and more frequently, a sense of bitterness developed from the postmortem of each and every fight they had; like a cancer, a bitterness that only grew bigger and bigger from the letdown of their failing relationship. and there was to be no grace in any of it, as it became a cycle, with fights that only made the bitterness grow worse, and bitterness that only made the fights grow worse. and through all this unraveling, there stood the other brother.

jimmy!
like a satellite, orbiting these two planetary bodies from a good distance away; watching worlds collide, with his stupid esoteric nature, and his stupid camera, like some wernhor von braun, simply there to observe, and collect scientific data. simply that and nothing else!

but then, this happened:
jesse went to the trailer the twins were staying in to meet billy. but billy wasn't there. the place was a dump; there was nothing there but crushed beer cans and dirty clothes and overfilled ashtrays. and then jesse's eyes caught onto a roll of

towel paper. jesse then got curious of billy's writing for the first time since getting to know him. so, she picked it up and began to read.

so many stories with girls named stephanie and sondra and sheila. one story involving, what billy called, "his proudest moment." where he picked up this native american girl on a reservation, named jenoa. his pickup line? no line. all he did, was he simply broke the table the girl was sitting at, with his head. terrified her shitless. but, knew, just knew, by sheer sense, the girl would get turned on by the sheer violence. and after a moment of the girl screaming at him, all of a sudden: "eye contact." billy's words. and a half hour later, he was banging her at her place. ugh! jesse had thought. reading all this. as she began gnashing her teeth. so many girls' names written, with so many stories. yet not a single one about jesse.

"silly lil' sandy,
really was randy.
and 'handy,'
face like a catcher's mitt,
caught a face full of my d—"
oh… billy!
you're just so… ugh!

although, there was the name "jezebel" mentioned, in a short and strange passage; not in the form of a story about jesse; the writing was more seemingly metaphysical:

"a jezebel spirit sits and cries in a desert. but she has no eyes. no eyes to cry with."

jesse had no clue what to make of it. but then behind her she heard the sound of a photo snap: it was jimmy. and between the eerie sense she was getting from what she just read, and jimmy, still being mum, as if though he understood something better than jesse or even billy ever would, jesse went off, and began berating him. and she was about to walk up and smack that wordless look on his face, until jimmy caught it. then asked:

"tell me what you think it means."

jesse didn't answer right away. but then noticed something else: she felt strangely attracted to him. this didn't feel anything of how she felt about billy; this felt different. just different. and also, very revealing in an unrevealing way.

fine, i understand that this is maybe too difficult for you, so, i'm just going to start making estimated guesses, and you tell me, if i'm getting hot or cold. lets out jules. okay. agrees jesse. first, a basic question: the twins were guys you knew in real life, yes? yes, i mean, "hot," jesse answered. jules made an unorthodox smirk to that. and now he was in his head. this is the part that's most difficult for me to figure out. since, i've had it in the past, are you experiencing ghosts … or demons? interesting. jesse never thought about this. or had she? neither did she know what it meant. is it better or worse? asked jesse. jules then eyed her. it depends, if they're ghost, depends on how things panned out between you two, three, i mean, before they died. demons will just be demons. they're just all about doing bad and wicked stuff, and nothing else. ghost of someone, if they cared about you before, they'll care about you now, in the hereafter. if they don't, and despise you, then, they'll most likely despise you now. and might seek retribution. what were the two boys like and how was your relationship like with them when they were alive? jesse grew distraught, jules noticed. didn't leave in good terms, huh? no. jesse said, looking down. do you think they'd seek revenge? jesse paused, then nodded.

all right, another basic question:
billy was the one you had a relationship with?
hot. answered jesse.
did he fool around with other girls during the relationship?
umm… lukewarm…?
what does that mean? baffled jules. but then jules realized: it wasn't something openly revealed to jesse, since the nature of cheating never is.
did you foo—
lukewarm!
jesse, i get how you never learned if billy was or wasn't, but…? i fooled around. but, it wasn't what you'd think, and not why you'd think. why… wait…? and now jules got it; seeing the game jesse was probably playing. you fooled around with guys, which you tried to make your boyfriend jealous over?

and after a short shameful pause, jesse:
hot.

jules shook his head, and jesse got untethered. no, no! i'm not judging. not judging! for a second there, jesse mistook it as if he was; it was enough dealing with her own self-judging nature.

ok… this is a hard one, but, gotta ask: did the boys ever pose any threat to you in any shape or fashion?
that made jesse's eyes waiver.
honey, i'm getting the sense that…—
no. cold. answered jesse.

although… jules didn't know if he could believe her.

you directly had nothing to do with their…?
deaths? cold. meaning, no, i didn't. jesse answered with her eyes closed.
were there other parties involved?
cold.
this confused jules.
jesse, you just said in so many words, that you were fooling around, because you thought that billy might have been fooling around, to start drama. yeah but…? how are there no additional parties involved? oh, i mean, there was but…? but, wha—….? and then it donned on jules what jesse was trying to respond with. and, having done such, jules reworded the question: when it came to you fooling around with other guys, there weren't really other guys. there were no strangers involved. everything was, "in house."

hot.
you slept with the brother… and…? jules guessed. and now jesse let out as much as she could, and couldn't hold out on: billy caught us two. he didn't like it. really didn't. since the two had always had a competitive nature between each other. they started fighting. we were behind the trailer they lived in, near a bunch of cars and engines and engine parts scattered all over the ground when it happened. jimmy then rammed in and sacked billy, billy hit his head when he fell, cracking his skull open on the edge of an automatic transmission, that just happened to be on the ground. there was blood everywhere. billy closed his eyes, and never opened them again. described jesse. jules went silent. both went silent. jesse then felt like this should be the moment to shed tears, since she never did when she grieved for him then. but, she didn't. why can't i still shed a tear? why? she thought. but, she

damn well knew why. i see. what happened to jimmy, then, how did he die? jimmy, when he realized what he had done, he then gave me a look, i'll never forget. and now jesse's eyes mimicked jimmy's at the time, and jules could see them, see the anger and wrath and guilt on jesse's part, for having caused all this. honey, it was an accident, from what you're describing. and, i can see, you blame yourself. you can't do that! jesse didn't resume. but the story wasn't finished. jesse… how did…? but jules now got the sense, maybe, this was enough for now; he had just now met jesse, and, he had been prying into her personal and private life all day; there was no need to know all the details. all right, i think i'm done… for today. he finished. and, what an extraordinary day it had been for jesse, up to this point; she felt bare; feeling the weathering effects on her, from all the internal storms that had been brewing.

so, do you want me to be your—
yes. jesse accepted. he nodded. i'd thought you'd say that. he smiled then. then said: all right, then, i think i can give you this. here, take it. a key card? asked jesse, while looking at it. yes, you got a suite here. i rented it out. i don't know how your living situation is now. but, you got a place here. jules added. and one final thing, take this. jesse squinted, looked it over, and spoke:

this is… a list.

a list of names. some, i don't know. and some are really big-name celebrities. what's this? jesse inquired. you want to know? yes. what is this? it's a list of people, i strongly urge you, to stay away from. and then his pupils sorta dilated, almost. why? for a moment there, he didn't answer, as he seemed to have grown weary of all the talk. he talked, well. but this had drawn out for far too long, and both jesse and jules felt like ending it here and continuing some other time. but then jules decided to add one more thing: all right, i guess we need to have this talk, sooner than i expected. listen, here, remember when i was speaking about marty mcfly, and being perfect for a role? yes. jesse acknowledged. okay. this is something you will be exposed to, considering the track i see you now on. you see, in this city. in hollywood, there's a lot of big names, that became big, not because they were chosen to perfectly play out a part by a higher scheme of things. there are also big names of people in this town, that weren't. all right…? jesse said. you see, there are those here, that were not chosen by God, perfect, to play a role. those, that are in no ways gifted, and not even talented, through hard work or anything. but,

yet, they still found themselves being raised to such heights, as if though they had been. so, how did they do that? jesse asked. ever heard of the parable, not one from the good book, but, one that might as well be…

of the man who sold his soul to Satan, for fame and fortune, and all worldly desires of the world? jules added.

jesse thought. she did. then said: yes. well, that's how. jules added. so, they're…? yes, exactly. like my son, they were people, that when faced with devils, and thee Devil, decided they didn't want to be free of them.

…?

honey, straight up, these people are dangerous. forget harvey weinstein. or, the harvey types. stay away from the harvey types, too. but i think your womanly intuition will warn you of them. don't expect it to warn you of these people. they're on a whole different level of being evil. will i find any of them here? jesse asked. maybe. jules replied. honey, like they say, "better the demons that you know than the demons that you don't." truly, it's better with no demons whatsoever, but you get the point. do not underestimate other people's demons. it might just cost you both your life… and soul. jules got up then, and now seemed to want to leave. he turned around, but then stopped dead in his tracks; he needed to add a bit more for jesse, it seemed:

i'll tell you one other thing about hollywood…
since h. j. whitley stood on the hills behind us, here, wondering what to call this part of town, and an oriental man came around pulling a wagon, h. j. asked what he was doing, the oriental man said:

"hauling wood…"

since then, this city has had a lot of demons. since the very beginning. since the golden era of errol flynn and all his sexually immoral escapades. up to the straight up Satan worshipping days of roman polanski and charles manson. up to now. it just does. people come here, with their dreams, and their passions, and desires, sinful desires, and that sense of not wanting to hear a "no" for an answer. like in a mental hospital, there's a cesspool of demons here. so, don't allow yourself to

fall into a situation, where you pick up more demons than you can bear with. it does happen. and it can happen. and it—will—happen, if you allow it. elaborated jules.

oh, and i guess one other thing, is it just those two, the twin riders? asked jules, and this seemed like really to be his last words for today. what do you mean? i mean, is that all you know of demons around you? or, ghosts, maybe in this case. yeah, that's it. only two. good. he turned around now and was ready to leave. but now jesse had to add something:

but, are they demons… or the ghosts of billy and jimmy? jesse asked.

and, this was important. honestly, from the fact you knew them in real life, i think ghosts. kinda like the story of penelope felix. jesse felt somewhat relieved; she liked the penelope story, way better than the one with jules' son, james, and what happened to his daughter. but i'd say it doesn't matter. you should still stay away from them. especially if they themselves blame you for everything. and now he seemed done. i'll talk more about that another time, i'll be seeing you. he then made a smile, and a wink. and left.

16. money shot

'hotel california' by the eagles, was the song playing inside the room of jesse's new suite, at the chateau marmont: jesse didn't like this song. jesse didn't like it, at all. at the psych ward she had spent 4 months in, in memphis, there was a music room, where patients would sit to listen to the radio, and this song would always come on for whatever reason. and always the second she'd enter the music room to sit down. listen to ed sheehan, maybe? or drake? or lady gaga, even? not all the time. the staff at that ward didn't seem to like pop music of the last decade; preferred old classic songs, jesse didn't really listen to, or had ever really heard of. besides 80s music, of course. but now she'd listen, since, she had no choice but to. and she had memorized all the lyrics to 'hotel california,' and she'd spend hours and hours in her mind, trying to decipher the meaning of the words.

wow, so, now i'm here, i'm at the chateau marmont, and everything is going perfectly peachy. why not? jesse thought. seeing this new station in life she was entering. but, deep down, still stuck in the old one; part of her still stuck in those psych ward days, stuck in it, like the singer of 'hotel california,' was stuck in that song.

"you can check out any time you want, but you can never leave."

life is funny, you can be stuck somewhere and going places at the same time. jesse remembered the cold showers she'd take at the ward; there were no hot nor cold turning knobs in there, since, supposedly, someone tried to kill themselves by scorching themselves with hot water, for a good hour. therefore, there were no knobs, which jesse could use to adjust the hot with the cold. and showers were always cold. but the cold showers wouldn't be what her mind would be all wrapped up in. it was the thoughts of wanting to kill herself, by stabbing herself with a plastic toothbrush into her jugular. the hell boys had really terrified her, good. really did! to put her in a place like this; somewhere she'd never expected herself to ever find herself in. they had showed up, in full body and soul, on a dark street in memphis, baring knives. jesse wasn't in her car, so, she ran. and ran. and ran. but, can you really run from ghosts? can you? jesse wasn't sure, but she ran all the same, screaming her head off. she had seen them. actually seen them. much of the time in the shower was spent like this: jesse with a somewhat sharp or pick like object, wondering if it was better to end herself now, or be ended, later, by them two. so, she'd spend her time in there flipflopping back and forth,

over the decision. what if i go there? and they're there. what if i'm in here? and they appear. it was dread being built up on top of more dread being built up on top of even more. but then: "dinner time." the staff at the psych ward would call. and she was now feeling hungry. maybe she'll stab herself in the neck tomorrow? there's always a tomorrow! always! right?

so, done showering, now eating, and now watching other mental patients deal with their own reoccurring insights, into their own personal hells:

there was this one guy that always made her feel sad to watch; his demon around him was a real pest; the guy was overall mostly nice, really nice, even sweet in his ways; seemed to be in his late 50s, and had a funny mustache and a funny brooklyn accent, and, of course, from brooklyn; kinda sad lonely type, that hadn't had a girl in a long, long till. or, an incel, as judy put it. seemed so sweet. but he had a malignant inferiority complex, which his personal demon loved to remind him of. he'd been triggered by one of the doctors; he was a self-conflicted man, that had taken something a doctor had said to him, violently personal: supposedly, the doctor was on the phone, and here was this guy walking up to ask something nicely, but the doctor blew him off and said "you, give me a minute." but, this nice man from brooklyn didn't take it how jesse or an actual normal person would take it. "you" to him meant "loser, nothing, waste-of skin" and "give me a minute" meant, "go cry in some corner and die." so, what did he do? he'd start pacing a lot. he'd pace up and down, up and down, up and down, replaying the imaginary insults the doctor had flung at him in his head.

"what did you mean, 'you?' huh, what is that supposed to mean? what are you saying? what are you saying… hey, asshole! tell me, tell me what you really think! tell me! tell me! what did you mean 'you?' you know or don't know? you know or don't care? you… 'hey, asshole! say what you mean to my…!"

six hours!
six hours of that.
enraged.

and the demon in his ear telling him things he never heard spoken to him, once. it was sad to jesse, because, he seemed so nice. at times, pacing up and down, he would even stop and apologize to everyone, about all the ruckus he was putting

out. and then go right back to this morbid regiment of his. i mean, so nice. yet. why couldn't he just stay that way? why this? imaginary insults to him were like a drug: the type you hate, the type that doesn't even feel good, but, you feel it so often, you begin to find ecstasy in it; like an ich, you scratch. and scratch, and now you pull out a lighter and burn the ich a little; feels so good, even when you're really just burning yourself.

then there was the "cackle lady" as jesse nicknamed her; she would mostly spend her time in the music room, not listening to music. no! but it was like she was trying to outdo with her loudness, the music, and even herself, in cackling like a banshee. and not like an angry banshee, but a happy banshee, if you can imagine such a thing. not listening to music. just cackling. and cackling. like some evil woman in a disney cartoon. and when you'd interrupt her, she'd switch over to being as gracious as a nun named marie. jesse would remember passing by her room on her way to somewhere at 3am, and her room light would be on. and, she'd have a blanket over her face. and, again with the cackling! why even… who knew! who knew!

and then there was this one really cute boy, of all things. he'd walk up and down looking at the light fixtures, calling himself "fisher king jr." but when he was not doing that, he acted as normal as could be. jesse eventually built up the nerve to talk to him; the boy said he'd do that to escape the thoughts of the horrors of hell. hell? why hell? the boy said God was going to send him there, for not marrying a specific girl he was destined to do so. "why would you think God would do such a thing?" jesse had asked. "it's not because i won't, it's because i was destined to do so, and… i won't." jesse was confused. "i've messed with destiny. i've ruined the greater scheme of things! i had to marry her. i had to—i just had to! but, i didn't! and, for that, i've committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and, i will now be going to hell as a result." although, the boy then went on to say how he wasn't sure if he had "blasphemed the Holy Spirit." and the not knowing had created a strange ocd, that involved the boy opening and closing, opening and closing, a bible, over and over and over again. jesse asked about that, and the boy said, if it kept opening in a certain sequence to the verses that had to do with blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, it meant he had committed it; he seemed truly afraid about the matter, and, this was how he was trying to figure it out. jesse then got curious over one other matter:

“why… didn’t you want to marry her?”
….
“what didn’t you like about this girl that—”
“because she was fat and ugly… and God wants to punish me for being this vain over the matter.”

jesse then frowned, she didn’t know how to respond to that.

the mental hospital was a horrifyingly fascinating place; it was like being in an elevator going down to hell; spending an eternity just to get there, and all you could do was dread the thought, while simultaneously finding the elevator music as just “meh” to you. that, and then there were benzos, and that, there, were another insanely, frustrating matter, onto themselves. so, yeah! this suite is still a hundred times better than rooming with the wicked stepsisters. and at least a thousand times better than rooming at chateau memphis. but then jesse heard a scream in the room on the other side of the wall, a woman’s scream. and then a “no, no,” and now jesse decided—"the hell with this idea!” and stepped out.

but then… boom!
oh crap! she thought. jesse was now facing a famous singer stepping towards her direction. and—her—of all people! why her? why now? crap, crap! oh, please don’t show her you hate her. please don’t do that! be nice! taylor swift then sees jesse as she’s trying to pass by in the hall. smiles. seems to like jesse. don’t show her you… but then—too late! jesse shows her some feline teeth and nearly hisses at her like a brooding cat. taylor notices. and walks off with her hand over the side of her temple. as if: “who the hell…?” jesse then lingers a bit in the moment. first a little ashamed. but then extends a smile. and thinks: i did enjoy it, though, i won’t deny. jesse doesn’t deny herself. but then a notion is whispered in her ear. could she be? jesse looks at the list and… wow!

so, taylor swift… is a satanist… who knew?

funny enough, a part of jesse didn’t feel surprised. actually, more than just a part, more like: her entire being! jesse now felt content with her absolute hatred of that woman, and now fully justified for doing so, to boot! hoot!

jesse then got to the valet. got her car. she wanted to go home. she had a lot of

thinking to do. but as she sits in her camaro… the hell with it! she decides to go to santa monica pier instead; she needs a breath of salty-sea-encrusted, fresh air. and drives. gets to the santa monica mall. she parks. steps out. now decides to get something sweet from a frozen yogurt spot. now inside the mall. getting there, boom! she's in a mental hospital again. no, not the one in memphis, she was in back in '16. some guy is shirtless and shoeless in there with a bucket, having a pair a clippers hooked up to a wall outlet, and, he's shaving his head. i didn't know santa monica has an outdoor nuthouse? she thinks. the employees of the yogurt place look scared and are huddled together. and beckoning with their eyes for jesse to leave. but, jesse has already had her share of dealing with whackos before. so, she ignores him, and gets her some sweets. pays. and leaves. as a mall cop pops up to deal with the "phantom barber of santa monica mall" inside.

the mall isn't much far from the pier. and now, she's there, after having crossed a couple streets. and now walks down to the end of the pier. and now: there!

thinking.
just thinking.

wait a second? i'm signed now? i have an agent? practically? that magically almost knew all my fears. because, he's been in the business for 45 years. that, and marty mcfly. huh, didn't expect any of that to happen today. she thinks. and stares out over the ocean.

tis the cursed tale of… oh!
i don't want to entertain that thought, now. no!

gets lost in a moment… while losing all track of thought and time.

and it's night out, now:
the pacific ocean can do that to you, especially when you allow it to sneak up behind ye. he he!

jesse was now walking along the coast, along the sand; something in her doesn't want her to go home, yet. she looks out towards the moon over a watery horizon: the scene having a very van gogh like quality to it; painted with the sort of nocturnal haze that would slowly drip and drip like marmalade; making jesse feel

very much drenched and drowned in all its nocturnal majesty. funny, only 12 hours ago, jesse was standing right-side up facing the sun. but, the earth had turned since then, and jesse was now upside down, on the dark side of the globe, facing something that wasn't the sun. but reflecting enough of its glow, as if pretending to be so. glow! glow! glow! it goes. as jesse glares and glares and glares at it. and while at it, she then hears him speak to her:

i find it very revealing how easily you were taken in by him. panders the invisible voice.

jesse… gets mad. and, she's still facing the moon, and now the moon somehow takes on billy's identity. it's one thing to have to hear this while asleep, and another while awake. what does that mean? shouts jesse at billy, all while really just shouting at the moon. don't fool me. and, don't fool yourself, to start. you liked him. an older man. still, not bad looking for his age, quite a silver fox, huh? now jesse felt assured this was the ghost of billy; this was reminding jesse of the countless arguments and accusations they'd have as a couple. what is it with women falling for older men? is it that sense of security they seem to provide, compared to someone younger? billy thought out loud. although, same can be said about you when you were with me. yet, i was anything but safe, wasn't i? he he! but jesse had something for billy: you don't like him, do you, i wonder why? how's that? billy asks. because, what he represents, and to you! indicates jesse. a silence passes. oh, i get it now, didn't until i really thought about it, you saying that i should be afraid of him? yes! blasts jesse, through her teeth, through to the moon. jesse, he's a hollywood agent, not a holy water carrying priest, so explain why i should be afraid of him, again? that knocked the wind out of jesse; billy was now out rationalizing her, and being comical to boot. honestly, jess, i think you entrusted him too easily. shut up, billy, just shut it! went jesse. i know, i know. he was charming. a young girl doesn't get that much in this day: a charming older man, she feels, secure with. and then jesse felt like squashing this. it's not like that! get that through your head! and stop harassing me over every man i just happen to come across, that you can't seem to help but get jealous over. so, no? goes billy. no. answers jesse.

i'm close, now, very close. discloses billy.

i don't care. come, we'll be ready for you. is that right? asks billy. he might not be

a priest. but we'll be ready. he's dealt with your type before.

that, or, maybe… he's never dealt with—your—type before, huh? snaps billy.

that scares jesse, again. maybe he trusts you too much? and, we know how you are. how you really are! i mean, you didn't exactly tell him everything that happened the day—
shut up! barks jesse. at the moon. i'll tell you this right now, because, there's a part of me, that still loves you, no matter what you did to us. indicates billy. what? don't feed me that. don't! i don't even know if you're really the billy i knew. billy is dead, maybe you're just voices i'm hearing in my head? maybe, i hallucinated you, every time i saw you and your brother? jesse points out. yes, i am billy. and, yes, i am dead. and all thanks to who? corrects billy. jesse goes into a short silence; she knows how silly it is with her arguing with the moon. but, what else can she do right now? i'm saying this, because, there's a part of me, that still, does, love you, jesse. he's not to be trusted. you were just lapping up that song and act and sob story of his, like a stupid mutt. him and his poor, poor daughter. and all that happened to her. elaborates billy. and that infuriates jesse: that's disgusting! what if it was all made up? it all seemed so elaborate and well-rehearsed, don't you think? he even confessed how it was, just to give himself an alibi, with how offputting it all felt. when was the last time you had a complete stranger just completely bare their souls out to you like that? even when me and you first met, we didn't just bare each other's stories out like that. it took a while to get to know one another. and we were in a relationship. people don't just do that, unless, they're trying to sell you a bunch of b.s., so they can get what they really want out of you. makes sense, don't it? billy rationalizes. and again, with the air being knocked out of her windbasket, with jesse. jesse says nothing for a short moment. but then something strikes her as odd. wait, how do you know all these things? these details? inquires jesse. he, he! billy then answers her, with a small chuckle. and then goes on: i don't know, maybe, i have a little birdie tell me things. and things going on around you. wouldn't you like to know who that is? wouldn't you like to know? flaunts billy. but jesse figures that's just him messing with her head. he's not to be trusted. he's hollywood scum. directs billy. but, jesse smiles, and says: still, i trust him, and more than i trust you. and now something occurs to jesse: the moon's glow… what was it reflecting? wait a second, where are you, where are you, both? i said, close. he he! chuckles billy. jesse's eyes then go slit, as she eyes the moon: big, glowing, white. and then asks one final question. what

exactly does "close" mean? she asks. and then, dread! as the answer hits her.

close, as in—right behind you, you stupid woman!

and as she whisks her head around in sweat chugging dread, to look behind her, she looks out over the sandy beach, and now, sees them! they're riding. riding. riding on high, right towards her. both then go into their signature maneuver as both go out with wheelies. jesse feels sheer fear grab her and choke her up by the throat, after witnessing this. both coming up like a high wave of twin fangs, shooting out of a cobra's head, out from the darkness. both on their japanese bikes. both all in leather from head to toe. and both with masked up faces, with biker bullet helmets, with shields shut, completely. and, reaching her, they zip on by, and pass her, from both sides: her left and right. and now, they ride out into the moon's orchestrated sun. and then, disappear. jesse then sees a fire track made by the two, that trails over the sand and even onwards over and across the water, to where both billy and jimmy disappeared. are they just hallucinations? she then wonders. she now walks over to the flames that blaze on, on the sand. kneels down and touches it. ahh! she quickly detracts her burnt hand from the flame. no… they are real.

they're gone now. but, no matter, jesse will see them soon enough again.

17. ghost

after the deaths and burials, something came over jesse, as the city of nashville started reminding her too much of the boys. and then there was the sense she received of being stalked by them in that city. at the time, in nashville, the streets took on billy and jimmy's names. and on every street, they reminded her of a certain memory of them together; she felt the streets of nashville taking on the forms of their eyes in the shades and shadows, and only their eyes at first. and their eyes all focused directly onto her, and nothing else; stalking her day and night to undiscovered places for undisclosed reasons. the sad part was: even though her relationship with billy never blossomed into a real loving relationship, never did it mean she didn't actually love him in any other ways. she did! and her thoughts about moving to memphis, had then seemed like the only ticket out of this lonely track of perpetual grieving. especially since she had a lot to do with why billy and jimmy weren't around anymore in their living and breathing forms.

and more than she was willing to admit to herself. and others.

it was in nashville that the two had first appeared before her in their new flesh and new forms; forms that seemed to highlight everything formidable about their qualities of their origins; they were now in battle stances, riding out, to wage war and vengeance with all those responsible of their deaths. which all meant in this particular case and scenario: solely jesse. was it them, though? was it, or a pair of bikers who resembled them? jesse didn't know. and it's not like every day you'll see twin bikers that would dress the same, move the same, walk the same and especially ride the same. it was too much. seeing them was the last straw for jess and her hometown life in nashville; the city was now theirs, not hers, even if they were never originally from there, and she was. so, she left, and moved west, to memphis. at the time, hoping it was just a hallucination or something of that nature. but the second time seeing them in ghostrider form was in memphis. and now she felt confirmed it had to be them: it was their aura this time. their vibe. their feel. and jesse, having grown so close to the boys in life, knew their feel, well, and there was no mistaking it. that encounter of them in memphis, had then made her go mad with hysteria and hyperbolic fear; had driven her into that psych ward, and had then later driven her away again, and this time, drove her out of tennessee, the state she had been born and raised in. but after she left memphis, none were better. everywhere else, everything else, now seemed to play out the same reoccurring themes, done over and over again, slowly working her over to

get her at her most dreariest and weariest. although, this time, just seeing them ride up and out and towards the pacific ocean, jesse felt a contrast that wasn't there before; before, to see such an embodiment would leave her with dread. now, what was this? what had happened? thought jesse. now, there was no more dread, but, a feeling, a certain feeling, of what could only be described as "warped excitement." it was enthralling to see them like that again. enthralling. simply enthralling! and energizing. in her mind's eye, she saw herself, then cut to them, then cut to her, then them. and now cue lightning and thunder, even when there was no lightning and thunder around when it happened. ha… that scene had me hearing rammstein in my head, of all things. du hast mich! german techno. and now, it's freddy and his flatbilled cap crew of 2019 scene kids, wearing a whole bunch of hyperbeast crap, while editing the money shot scenes, with their student licensed final cut pros, on a new but dirty skater-sticker covered imac; and now, freddy bites his botton lip as he cuts back to jesse, and her lips, her cherry red lipstick garnished lips, as a white foamy substance begins to drip out.

okay… stop!
jesse, you silly girl. i get you haven't exactly had… and for a while now too… but don't start remembering billy—in those ways!
(dreamy eyes)
all elongated… and tensed up… and all bulging red and veiny and violent and—
stop it!

and, one other thing: also very reminiscent. reminiscent of all those qualities, that had first attracted her to them and their wild and nomadic ways. and, jesse now didn't know if this was something better or something worse. now, what is this perversion? she felt. seeing them like that felt: glorious? and she kinda now felt like she wanted to see them again. then again. again and again. feeling a certain itch in which, she finally chose to scratch, as the feeling got excited, and then demanded more and more of said attention. but scratched harder this time. much, much harder. much more fiercely! making it bleed and scar so it would totally leave a mark.

jesse was at her north hollywood home. alone. the girls were someplace… didn't matter. the chateau marmont still felt way too odd for her to be there; she now felt like she needed familiar surroundings. and that was what the north hollywood pad was to her, and had been so for the passed 6 months living here. fine, let her

deal with the girls and their succubus ways, and their meathooked army of boyfriends, she was at least used to them. jesse felt strange stuff at the marmont. strange! stuff she didn't know what to extrapolate from. so, as they say: "better the demon you know than the demon you don't!" but, if all this was really happening, if she was really being discovered; had really found a top tier agent that could take her places… if… this was finally going to be the chance to dance in the light, and no longer in the shadows, then….

so be it! jesse said unmuted.
this is what she'd been preparing for all her life, almost. it's where she was destined to belong.

jesse was now sitting on a couch watching netflix, and just chilling, by herself, watching it on their wall mounted 40-inch flatscreen tv. and, oddly enough, she had clicked to watch an old ghost movie, she had never seen, also named: ghost! which, by its name, had caught her interest, for obvious reason. it starred patrick swayze and demi moore; some 90s movie, that was now making jesse nostalgic of her 90s childhood; some love story, oddly enough, between a woman and the ghost of her ex-boyfriend lover. so, maybe a sign of something, specifically intended for me? thought jesse. she believed in signs. she did. and she was now wondering what this sign was supposed to say about the greater scheme to things. she didn't know. but, found the story being born of a new romance in her of…? no! not possible! she thought.

and then, looking to her left…
billy now stood there.
with knife at hand.

jesse looked…
looked more…
but something was off.

so, her eyes went back to the movie on the screen. she… didn't care anymore? her heart was different now; something reborn and renewed and feeling unprecedented. the world around her had paused, and paused how a movie on vhs would pause, showing white stretch lines and off-screen white static; paused at a frame, at this heightened state of anticipation; a demon captured inside a box.

and now, inside this box, all that the demon could do was rage and rage and rage… yet… do nothing else of substantial difference, until the one holding the box decided to open it again. time now, time to wait, until she did. where's suzanna? jesse asked. eyeing the blade billy was carrying, from the corner of her unadulterated left eye. she's… on vacation… to cancun. said billy. jesse wasn't sure if he was wanting to joke or not. didn't matter, this was to be a somber moment.

if you're gonna kill me, do it! get your revenge, i'm sick and tired of running from you two. she told the ghost of billy.

billy didn't answer. still with his leather biker get up. still with his biker helmet on with the shield down; with a shield as opaque black, as the sights of what a corpse has to see, inside its coffin grave, for all of eternity. and then all of a sudden, something spawned from the shield: there was electricity now being zapped around on its glossy surface, and something was forming on it. and then, a face was incarnated on the shield, with the lightning bolts that were dancing around all over the mask. it was like an extension of billy's old face, borne into this new one. although, it wasn't an exact representation of billy's old and long-gone face, since it was completely cartoonish in nature. like a happy face, made of electricity. it was a jack o' lantern face! and not one happy face… but mad. and then this newly incarnated face spoke:

maybe i don't want to! he said.
then don't! she said.

now looking straight at this new face that was appearing. now, the other brother appeared, same as billy. same gear. same mask. and now, same face. but not mad, but sad. and quiet. mum! just as jimmy had always been in life. also brandishing a weapon of mort. if you're expecting terror, and me screaming my head off, begging "no, no, please no," like in some slasher movie, don't! i already played out all those horrors in my head, for the four months at that memphis psych ward, you two assholes put me in. so, sorry to disappoint you two, but, not happening! jesse clicked. fancifully and full of sass. as her eyes went slit, with such a challenging exchange. billy then walked up, and stood, right between her and the tv screen. now close, with the butcher knife at hand. jesse…? just turned her head at dutch angle. and now smiled. she smiled! actually smiled. and said:

go ahead, asshole, do it!
billy didn't move.
if no?
then… fuck off… please? i'm watching a movie here. and you're in the way.

jesse snapped and taunted the hellish figure. billy got closer. jezebel, although, just held her stance. billy then stopped frowning and looking mad with his new face. now smiled and said:

that's my girl!

he then stepped out of the way, so jesse could resume watching the movie. and she had missed an important scene. damn! she thought. as the ghosts of billy and jimmy began to walk away, through the door leading out of the apartment. and now, they were nowhere to be seen again. huh? how disappointing! thought jesse. she felt like she sorta missed that warped excitement, the boys had made her feel, on that night-soaked beach of santa monica; it was a real money shot the boys had made. now they were just being pesky beta dudes, looking for attention. the movie ended. how disappointing that was, too! thought jesse. and what disappointed her was how it ended: it was just another romance about a forbidden love. which is what jesse got out of it with her new sensibilities. it was funny! she just realized she now felt free of something. and all she could feel afterwards was disappointment. really, she was hoping patrick swayze's ghost character could continue the romance with demi moore's character. but, no! he was dead. and had to move on. and move on into the light. strange…! felt jesse. and now jesse felt a new sense of loneliness she hadn't felt ever.

the door to her apartment then opened. and jessica and jennifer entered. and, they seemed to be having some guests over, again.

and… oh, no! oh, no! laughing boy and captain meathooks, again?

this was the first time the girls had ever brought the same dudes to this apartment, twice. and of all people, why these two? jesse's face froze over with contempt with the parties that had now entered. honestly, would have been a more interesting night with billy and jimmy's ghosts, if those two spooks had sat down to watch

that ghost movie with her; they might have had a really interesting conversation at least, afterwards. i mean, they're dead. so, how is the other side like? are you two able to possess people, really? show me! now that would have been an entertaining night to have. plus, better the demons you know than the demons you don't! once again. laughing boy and captain meathooks now seemed more formidable to jesse; she didn't know what to expect from these two. but at least with jessica being around, with jennifer, with these two boys, jesse wouldn't have to worry about captain meathooks, there, trying to get his meat hooks into her, to have a booty call for tonight.

ha, ha! ha, ha! they were all laughing. and the alcohol could be smelled from where jesse sat. and then they all noticed jesse sitting there. all went quiet. a pause, and now back to: ha, ha! ha, ha! them all laughing again, amongst their own group. hey, i know you! burp. went laughing boy, pointing at jesse. jesse now shrunk down in presence. oh, yeah, boys, this is jesse. and she's just basic. so, ignore her, and let's all have a good time, all right? went jennifer. reintroducing these two schmoes to jesse. and now jennifer eyed jesse, in a "go away" aspect. so, calling her a basic bitch, just to piss her off, and make her leave for the bedroom, so they can enjoy their time in the living room, huh? and then, later on, say something there, while she's there, to scoot her out of there, from her own damn, freakin' room? oh, hell no! thought jesse, able to read minds again. since there was never much going on in the evil stepsisters' minds, left to the imagination. the hell with that notion, i'm standing my ground right here, even though while seated, but with my stance, standing, all the same. if i can stand it with phantoms in my circle, branding knives and hatchets, i can stand these losers. she thought. and smiled to herself. so, she cemented her butt to the couch, and decided to ride out this storm. they'll all eventually head to their bedrooms, to do their last bit of business. and, jesse definitely wasn't going to be in the bedrooms with them, when they did. whenever jessica and jennifer were the only ones around, with jesse and judy being out, they wouldn't share their bedroom, and jennifer would use judy's bed to elope with a guy for the night. and there had even been nights, jennifer had the audacity to:

"ah, ah,
ahh!"
jesse then:
yawn, what's going on, i'm slee—oh… hell no!
hell yes!

which meant, it was now best for jesse to sleep on the couch. and not partake another night of musical beds (meaning "musical chairs," but with beds, obviously) with her roomies. so, being 11pm, for the next 3 to 4 hours, she was stuck here. so, might as well make herself comfortable.

the party with all the drinking and laughing continued within the group. in the kitchen. then them all sitting at the dining table.

and now, great!
laughing boy and captain meathooks decided to sit between jesse on the couch. the girls went to the bathroom to do… whatever! and jesse was now here stuck with these two guys. and, dread was building. more dread than having the ghost boys around. hey, what you watching? asked laughing boy. actually, not even jesse knew. she had clicked on the first thing her absent mind had clicked to watch on netflix, and she hadn't even paid any attention to what that was: her mind right now was elsewhere. oh, i know this, it's that russian doll, something. that girl's sorta hot. said laughing boy. laughing boy then eyed jesse, then seemed to familiarize her with something. and, once he looked up at the patrick nagel poster on the wall. ah crap! he realized what it was. whoa… is that you naked? you're hot! ugh! jesse buried her face in her under elbow: the embarrassment! and it was all judy's doing; that was her stupid poster, and jesse swore judy got it to mess with her.

hey, cutie, what's with the long face? cappie boy flirted.

jesse said nothing. hey, hey… anyone there? he then began waving his hand around jesse's face to get her attention. jesse now posed over like a mannequin, not moving an inch. hey, i'm talking to you, anyone home? he joked. jesse grew mad. what the hell does he want? he's got his hookup for tonight. what does he now want with me? what, a threesome? jesse now sneered at that idea. hey, you might like me if you gave me the chance! in your dreams, pal! actually, not even in your dreams! i swear, if you use my likeness in that shithole you call a brain, i'll file a lawsuit and sue! she thought. and now, jesse didn't seem to be the only frowny face of the bunch; cappie was also frowning, and at her. and, seemed to be growing mad with jesse for giving him the cold shoulder. crap, this was getting tense. as jesse got tense. and now, the tension wasn't just being felt between jesse

and cappie, as jesse also sorta felt it coming from laughing boy; he'd been secretly paying more attention to jesse and cappie's dialogue than the dialogue from the netflix movie; his vibes were more of a cowardly, passive aggressive feel, compared to cappie, and his directly aggressive ones.

oh, no! billy, save me! jesse thought.
he, he! he, he! went the girls, coming out of the bathroom, finally.

and that was a sigh of relief. hey, boys, get up! jesse is a lost cause, come on now. come on! jennifer tempted the boys. the boys now redirected their attention on her and jessica. and found something welcoming to them and their needs. got up. and they all went to their respective stations. sigh! sighed jesse, another sigh of relief. then changed what she was watching to something else, since she was never even into that russian doll thing. and, now she just had to wait the rest out, until the girls kicked the boys out and they left. forget this arrangement, i'm not spending another night here. chateau marmont, it is! she thought. as she settled on watching birdbox.

but then he appeared again; stepping through the outside door, in.
billy, what do you…!

but then realized it wasn't billy alone; the face on the mask looked forlorn and melancholy riddled; the outlines of flashes of energy emanating a more sullen and sluggishly anguished vibe: it was jimmy. and now, just him standing there, mum again.

jimmy… what do you… what do you want?

it was much, much, much more difficult for her to speak to jimmy, than billy. jimmy didn't respond, just continued to anguish away, in his uniquely morbid, yet, harmonious way. jesse was becoming wooed by the melancholia, as she did a dreamy-eyed sway. then shook it off. please… if you don't have anything to say, then… leave? anguished jesse. his quiet ways always so infectious. yet, he still stood there. he was waiting for her to ask.

and now she did:
ask me! she asked.

why did you do it? he asked.
jesse's spine tensed up.
why did you do it? asked again.
jesse was now shivering all over while chattering her teeth.
why did you—
i don't know! i don't know! jesse spasmed.

did you really want us that badly out of your life? were we really that nothing to you? was i? asked jimmy. sad! always sad. a sadness jesse couldn't help the feeling of loving how heartbroken it felt. one tear rolled down jesse's face. just one.

jimmy stood there still.

then left.

18. ruby slippers

cry, little sister
thou shall not fall
come, come to your brother
thou shall not die
unchain me, sister
thou shall not fear
love, is with your brother
thou shall not kill

you boys are so pathetic. you know that, do you? said an unfamiliar invisible voice. wait, who is this? thought jesse. sure, fine… you got what you wanted. but, did you, really? this was a female voice, jesse had never heard.

did you really?

you know why i rejected you two? it's not because i wasn't interested in having sex. no! just not with a pair of soy boy losers like you two. i like men. real men. that will grab a lady, look her in the eyes, and not be afraid to do so. you got to be domineering. when a cave woman sends a cave man to hunt for dinner, she expects her man to bring home some real bacon. and, let's face it, you two couldn't even hold a bow and arrow and shoot it straight, if your lives depended on it.

who the hell is this?

who are you… and who are you speaking to? shouted jesse. completely feeling oblivious to what the hell was going on. come on, boys, you want to prove me something, show me the spears you plan to hunt with. he. giggled jesse, just once, since this was so insane, it was practically funny. wait… you kidding me? those aren't spears. those are toothpicks. you plan on hunting some wild game with toothpicks, really? you boys are a bigger lost cause than i imagined you two would be. go home. just go home. back to your parent's basement… and just play video games, or do whatever! i find the sight of you two just sad. and it's making me depressed. just leave, before i really get depressed, and i'm not even game to go find me some real men, to please my passions, and replace you two scrubs with.

jesse then opened her eyes. she was on the couch, still; she had passed out on the

couch. what the hell was that? she thought. and now she heard noises. and….

it was jennifer and jessica. wait, what time is it? the clock on the wall near the dining table said 2am. and jesse now fully realized what was going on and where she was at and—
those two girls aren't done with the boys, yet? she was now pissed. and she felt like getting up and leaving. that's it, i'm leaving now. i'm not spending another minute in this—bordello! i'm going to the chateau marmont! now! but then she realized, she couldn't just get up and leave, not without her clothes, not without the rest of her stuff that was still here. and, she felt like taking a shower at least before leaving… she was stuck here.

cry, little sister
thou shall not fall
come, come to your….

wait, what is… what movie is netflix on right now? the lost boys…? how… when… oh, whatever!
click.

yup, jesse was stuck. stuck now. and how ever long the thing with the girls and those two douchbags was to precede itself. and, with that, she was stuck on that couch until 7am in the morning. and, with that in addition, the girls had practically broken their own golden rule, which they had set, with them and them alone. after waking up around 2am, she had selected another flick from netflix, and had then raised the volume to drown out the noises coming from the bedrooms. but she could still hear it coming for at least another hour before it stopped. and, that hour was the most excruciating. now, 7am, and the boys had pretty much slept in their beds. or, one even in jesse's bed. eww! and it was now around this morning hour, that the boys finally stepped out of the bedrooms to leave: lb was the first to pass by jesse, and he didn't even look at her sitting there, and with the dragon face she was making: bloody red-eyed and with smoke blowing out of her nostrils. good! and now passed cm. although cm did look at her. and stopped. i swear, if you call me cutie, again, i'll kill you with my bare hands. jesse thought. but now his face seemed to be mirroring her own. and now outdoing jesse's smoldering demeanor: red hot pokers for eyes! as jesse lost her stripes. wait… why is he…? he was now giving her the evil eye, straight up. and jesse now grew scared. didn't know how he had built up this much anger and animosity, and towards her. please

leave! please leave! please just…!

a second more, and now he did.

something was going on…?
but… nah! better if jesse didn't look deep into it.

i don't care. once i'm' packed, i'm never coming back here again. jesse now ran to her room to pack. she didn't even plan to sleep a little in her own bed for a few hours; she just wanted to leave, and leave, now, and for good. jesse packed her things, as jennifer snored in judy's bed, like a rhinoceros. and, seeing how jesse's bed was now a mess, and considering how she always made her bed in the mornings, this all could only mean one thing, and: eww—how disgusting! thought jesse, as she decided to leave her sheets and blankets and pillows of hers here; making a donation to the wicked stepsister's sleepover club. she packed her things, which took all but two suitcases, since, she was never very materialistic (quality wise: yes! quantity: no!) to keep so much stuff. she took a shower. got dressed.

and as she got out with her suitcases and made it to the living room—
where… where you going? asked judy.

having just stepped in from outside. and now seeing jesse packed with suitcases at hand. i… got a different place. jesse simply answered. judy said nothing. jesse then made it to the door.

but then, this happened:

hey… jesse?

jesse turned around, what the hell does she…? but then realized she seemed sad to see her departure.

i… never hated you, either. keep in touch… please?

she asked. and, almost teary eyed even. wow. for the first time in this place, jesse finally felt a human connection, with one of the girls. she had to say something now. she had to. simply had! i will. said jesse, smiled, and then left. actually, before

leaving, there was one final matter to speak about:

oh, and, judy?
what?
jesse then just pointed towards their bedroom with her thumb: thumbing over her right shoulder, towards the direction of jesse's and judy's room (ex-room, now, for jess). and with an awkward look on her face.

oh, let me guess… jennifer is sleeping in my bed…

snoring like a caged tasmanian devil in heat.
yes, that! said jesse, then felt like giggling, but didn't, and now left for real. and with that, it now seemed like judy had also gotten her fill of this place.

jesse got into her car in the garage. and, as she exited the gate, she saw phil, with his car that was parked on the opposite side of the street the apartment was on; he was sorting through stuff in his trunk compartment. jesse sighed. it seemed like there was one last goodbye to make before she was done with this place. jesse now pulled up parallel to phil's car. phil noticed. and now: owl city! now intimidated like his boys were with jesse before. but, with phil, as if he was meeting her for the first time ever. and there was the stench of embarrassment in the air, and it was easy for jesse to figure why. hey, phil? jesse called out. phil fidgeted, didn't say nothing. but, jesse wanted a response; she didn't have time for awkward moments. so, she stared him down, until he got the balls to speak. um… um… what? he finally let out.

go back home to kansas! she practically ordered.
um… i?
how much money did you give to judy? she now asked. phil looked distraught. how much? she demanded. i… 200 dollars. then hung his head low. jesse didn't expect it to be that much, not from him, solely him. jesse got pissed again, pissed like before. in her head, jesse did the math: with four boys paying for 500-dollar shoes, even though having the least to spare, phil would have coughed up the largest amount, practically double, and without counting the taxes paid. yup… jesse was thoroughly pissed, again. phil, you sleep in your freakin' car, which means you got hardly any cash, and you gave her 200 dollars… are you serious? she scolded.

i… i… um…?
go back home to kansas!
i… i…?
i said, go back home! she now fully ordered. phil just nodded his head then, with eyes closed. and once she felt she got through to phil, jesse left.

you dumb—chump!

idiot.
fucking… grr!

jesse was now on the 101 heading south. and then, a phone call came in, jesse answered without looking up the caller id. hi…? hey, jesse, it's jules. jules said. oh, hi, umm… thank you for the room and everything. what's up? asked jesse. something felt different speaking to him again today; maybe just bad reception? and not the call's, just jesse's. well, it's just that it seems like you didn't stay in the marmont last night. and that worried me whether you're getting cold feet. said jules. it seemed like he was in a bit of a hurry, but why? no, no cold feet. okay, good. said jules. it's just that, honestly, this is all a little… well…? went jesse. oh, i get it, it's all happening way too quickly, all of a sudden. and, it's got your head maybe spinning a bit. and just staying in a place like the marmont, was a bit much, much too soon. i get it! resumed jules, where jesse left off. exactly! jesse said. well, i'm not trying to rush you, but…? but, what? thought jesse, finding herself reluctantly feeling annoyed with jules, which was not something she'd want. and now, it did sound like he was trying to rush her, just for mentioning it. i guess i'm just trying to look after you. he concluded. okay… thanks? jesse replied. anyways, honey, i got things to do. talk later, k? he finished. k! jesse finished.

look after me, what do you mean, "look after me?" what do you worry might happen, i get sucked into some cult like scientology, what? thought jesse, as she continued driving.

but then, on the 101, now passed the hills, and now somewhere near the hollywood bowl, another call came in; jesse picked it up, and, it was jules rosenberg again. this was getting weird. jesse answered it.

hey. said jesse.
hey, how you doing? said jules.

umm… is there something wrong? asked jesse. oh, no, no, no! nothing is wrong. nothing is wrong. he simply added. jesse said nothing. if he called, there had to be something else he wanted to say or ask, so, jesse waited to see what that was. i mean, i know we just spoke a couple of seconds ago. and, i don't want to weird you out on why again. but, i was thinking just now, and, maybe, it's better i lay some of my cards on the table. i mean, if i'm to take you in, this is something important that we must speak about. is that okay with you?

jesse didn't answer.
i think, you need to know something about me, if we are to go on, and i'm to represent you, as your agent, all right? asked jules. there was an uncertainty, this time, jesse sensed in jules' voice. jesse wanted to follow up with an acknowledgement. but chose not to. and stayed silent. at least to hear him out more, before doing so. she felt. anyways, this is very important. very important. and, when it comes to me. you see, if i'm to start representing you, and, people start to see you with me, you're going to notice a lot of heads turning, and some might just come up and ask,

"hold the horses… you're being represented by goldfinger, really?"

what? baffles jesse.
exactly, honey, i'll explain. i'll explain. give me a second, i'll lay it out for you, but just let me say a few things first, all right?
jesse said nothing. but then gave in:

all right… go on.
all right.

first off, right off the bat, i wasn't intended to represent you. remember me mentioning a guy called sal sullivan? yes. well, yeah, he was the agent that wanted you. he's an agent, too. and, if he hadn't even mentioned about that whole flash of light, and the reoccurring dream i had been having, right now, we wouldn't be speaking. you might have been speaking to sal, and, not me. that dream is the only thing that led me to you. and, of course, when i saw that video of you dancing,

and that light at the end: that was it! that's when i knew i had to get back into being an agent again. what do you mean, "being an agent, again?" asks jesse, sensing a contradiction, but unsure of what to make of it. i mean, straight off the bat, i haven't represented anyone as an agent now, i'd say, for over ten years. i'll explain. i'll explain. jules went. okay… go on. went jesse. i mean, being an agent is what i've been all my time here in hollywood. but it isn't exactly what hollywood, mostly, and mostly the music side, uses me for. i've had good to moderate success here as an agent over the years. but, it's not what has made me into a legend. jesse was lost.

and, yeah, legend…
not trying to blow smoke up your butt, but, yes! a legend. he! jules acclaimed. he… okay…? jesse sorta giggled, and sorta didn't. it's like this, honey, you'll see it, once i start representing you, you're gonna see a lot of people coming up to you, asking you a bunch of questions. i'm gonna be like the ghost in the room, nobody will talk about, as long as i'm with you. but will, when i'm not. and, i'm pretty sure it'll get weird. really weird. especially when you see big names coming up, and they're acting more surprised to meet you, because of me, of course, than you're supposed to be surprised to meet them. explained jules. jesse was now enthralled. you see, i'm not exactly a big name, but, i'm very renowned, if you catch my drift. why? asked jesse. okay…! said jules, and then paused, and it now seemed like he was trying to formulate his sentences, as best as he could. what… who exactly do you mean by… big names…? asked jesse, feeling the urge to interact more with the talk she was having with jules, instead of just staying quiet, and only listening. it's exactly as it sounds. maybe, not with the new batch of celebrities in hollywood, except maybe on the music side. but, definitely with those that have clocked in, at least more than half the time in this industry as i have. answered jules. okay. you heard me say "goldfinger," correct? well, yeah! in and around hollywood, that's the nickname i'm given. sometimes i've even been called "goldeneye," by a few. although, i've yet to be called, "the man with the golden gun." but i'm not holding out for it. he said. jesse was lost. you never seen a james bond movie? older ones, i mean? sorry, sorry, i don't want to confuse you anymore than i guess i am already. he he! he laughed at the end. but jesse's silence gave him the sense, maybe, better speed this up and get to the point. all right, it's like this, you remember when we were speaking about your God gift? well, coincidently enough, you're not the only one with one! i'm also someone, in this town, mostly renown for the ability i have, which no one else in the game possesses. and this is what i'm majorly used for.

and this is all the reason i'm seen as some legend. you're saying people are going to come up to me, asking about this? jesse threw in. only thing she figured she could, seeing how jules was making her feel anxious, of such encounters. they will. i'm not blowing smoke up your butt, trying to make myself sound more than i am. i'm not selling you nothing! they will! they just will! all right, can you tell me at least why that is? jesse asked. it's like this, let me give you an example, pretty sure this will fill in most of the blanks.

back in the late 80s…
a fellow agent called me up, asking, "excuse me, sorry to bother you, but, i was referred to you by some high ups, and i've heard some… really interesting things." and i said, "well, i'll tell you, if you're wondering, probably everything they said about me, is completely true." he said, "really, you can do that? you can just… do that?" and i said, "yes." he got really excited then. really, really excited. and he asked me to come up to seattle, and, take a look at a kid, and, see what i think.

jules then paused, then continued.
so, i went up, i met the agent, he then had us go to some bar, kinda crummy, to meet the kid. and the kid was performing that night. once finished with his band, so i then get introduced to him.

and i shook his hand.

and then… that gift i told you about, did its magic.

we left, and outside, his agent asked me, "so, what do you think, goldfinger, you think i got something here, or not?" i said, "wow, boy, do you got something here." "really," he asked. "really," i confirmed. "so, is he going to be big?" he asked. and then i said what i had for him, "son, wow, this guy, is going to be a game-changer." he got kinda stupid, then, and said, "so, big, or not?" and i put it like this, "honestly, i think you found, probably the biggest talent, we'll all see in the 90s."

the future? jesse baffles.

that agent, had just so happened, had introduced me to kurt cobain. you know kurt cobain from—

yes! nirvana. jesse interrupts. shocked. and unsure what to make of this. jesse, that is what this industry, mostly uses me for. to spot, not just talent, but future gold! hence, the nickname, "goldfinger." and now jesse felt like asking a whole bunch of questions. wait a minute, you're saying, you touch someone's hand, and they later on become famous? baffles jesse. no, no, no! that's not how it works. i touch their hand, and, i either get this vision of them, and who they'll become. or, i don't. i get contracted to do this a lot. and with about 95% of the times, i get nothing, and i tell them they're nobodies. sometimes the agents get mad, and still sign them in, thinking they can prove me wrong. but, they still get zilch.

as for that 5%...
i will get this vision in my head. and with the music industry, i've yet to be proven wrong. jesse was at awe. how do you do it? asks she. but then jules grew a little modest. well, honey, honestly, i don't do anything. except touch their hand. i don't say a prayer beforehand, or do some incantation. it just happens, or doesn't happen. jules explains. jesse had then missed a turn, trying to exit the 101 onto sunset blvd., and now found her gps being rerouted. but, obviously, her mind was elsewhere. wait, you've been doing this a long time, who else have you discovered? she asked. honey, i don't discover them. which is one of the gimmicks about this special gift. okay… who else? she asked now. wanting names—all of them! i don't know. you ask me, and, i'll tell you if i met them or not, before they became famous. jules pointed out. jesse then tried to think of a name, a big name; the biggest name she could think of. although, maybe trying too hard at it. and, by doing so, came up with nothing. i… umm….? then thought of her. no, no, no, the hell with her. ask me. said jules. justin timberlake? she now asked. yes. jules answered. funny enough, this is also an interesting story. back in the early 90s, disney called me up to do my magic. they introduced me to the whole micky mouse club. but it was the first three i met, that it happened. justin, britney spears, christina aguilera. and they were only little kids back then. and it was, "yes, yes, yes!" all in a row. that was the first time i hit three homeruns, in a single game, consecutively. wait… wasn't ryan gosling… wasn't he…? no, it doesn't work with those that become actors. i don't know why. but only those that go on to become future grammy award winners. when did you discover this gift? jesse asks. first time? well, i started in the business in the 70s, but, it wasn't until the early 80s, like, just when the decade began, that it happened for the first time ever.

i was in the uk at the time. a buddy of mine took me to some party. and, boom! i

bumped into bono. and it happened! wait… u2? yes! funny enough, this was the only time, i heard music: his music. and the war album hadn't even come out yet. the first time and the only time. the friend of mine was like, "what's wrong?" i said to him, "those guys musicians?" he said, "yeah, you know their music?" i then sang the words, well… whatever bits and pieces of it i heard:

"broken bottles…
bodies strewn across…
heed the battle call... back up… back up against the wall…

sunday, bloody sunday…?"

he got confused, though. this was still 1980. then in 1983, when the album came out. this same friend called me up. he remembered! he remembered! and he was completely dumbfounded, considering how i knew lyrics to a song, that hadn't even been written yet. and, he told a whole bunch of people in the industry and… and the rest is history. and then a thought comes to jesse: so, you're saying, if you touched—my hand…? but then jesse completely got the sense from jules that there was a catch to all this. jesse, it never works with people i represent. i mean, there's a reason i'm well known throughout the industry, but not famous, myself, such as the likes of quincy jones. why not? i don't know.

so, where does this put me and you? jesse asks.
not wanting to be self-centered. but, if he was to be hers, she felt like this was something she needed to understand better.

i don't know.

honey, this is a God given gift. i firmly believe that now in my life. but, like everything that comes from Him, there's terms. rules. a greater scheme to things. that you nor i will probably ever understand in our entire lives. but you just got to go along with it. and go wherever it takes you.

with you… you're the only one… the only one… ever… i've met that was trained to dance by an angel, from beyond.

i honestly have no clue what that means. all i know is, because of the dream, and

that flash of light, i was chosen to meet you. to do what, i don't exactly know yet. who else have you discovered? i mean, well… you know! jesse asks. sorta feeling let down. but, wanting to hear more of jules' story. i'll tell you another time. i feel like time is short right now. and what's important is, i giving to you the necessary information. whatever comes to mind, that i feel like, you need to hear right now. you don't mind that, do you? no. jesse says. jules' story had captivated her thoughts. and, she felt more wanting to stick to them and hear what else he'd share. jesse, now i gotta be straightforward with you, if i'm to represent you, i got three rules, and you have to abide to these rules. or, this isn't going to work. jesse didn't like hearing this. as delightful it was listening to jules speak. she also knew there was also always something else about him, she couldn't yet put her finger on what that was. first rule, you remember that list i gave you? yes. you see, honey, i guess… if i had never become goldfinger, i probably would never had made it this far in this industry. all 45 years' worth. it's the one thing that's sustained me this entire time. because, as you know, when it comes to those i represent, i haven't exactly had the best experiences. you know which story i'm referring to. he directs.

and, jesse did.

truth is, as i said before, this industry isn't all rainbows and sunshine. there is an ugly underbelly to it, that has a lot of dark figures, you just absolutely do not want to cross with. i've crossed these people in my time. and. they don't like me! and. i don't like them! you know what i'm talking about, right? asks jules. jesse doesn't answer, but she does catch the drift. these people would really like to get rid of me, because, we've crossed paths, and, if i hadn't become goldfinger, they probably would have succeeded by now. this is the rule, jesse, do not interact with these people. in time, i will point out more. do not interact with them. because, if you do, that tells me, you might be interested in what the Devil has got for you more.

you understand?
jesse doesn't answer.
honey, do you—
yes! she finally does.
good.

i'm not saying you can't interact with these people at all—never! you will be

exposed to these people a lot. so, it's impossible for me to tell you to avoid them at all cost. but, as long as it's professional. and it's not them asking you to come with them, to a certain party up in the hills. one that, you'll never be the same afterwards, if you do attend. jesse then thought of her. jesse, you haven't met anyone yet, that's on that list, have you? jesse says nothing. have you?

no.
good.

a pause follows. and then jules continues.

second rule, those demons of yours, the twins, they haven't appeared to you yet, have they? and then jesse feels her spine tense up, as it did with them around. you haven't, have you? no. jesse lies. and, she's lost now. lost somewhere in la. she's been driving, and has not been paying any attention to her gps, and, she has no idea where she is now. around usc? she guesses. but, not sure. good. good. but, if you do, you know how i'd feel if you begin interacting with them, do you? asks jules. jesse thinks of what jules said about his son. yes. jesse answers. good, then you don't need me to speak to you any more about that. good. i covered all that yesterday… uh… this is exhausting, isn't it? jesse nods. but says nothing. third, and final rule, everything i've been telling you, tell nobody! okay? and finally, a rule, jesse doesn't feel as if she's already broken. no, no! of course. nothing. i'll say nothing. jesse almost promises. good.

that's it. jules exclaims. jesse's relieved.

although, i guess it's fair to ask this, fair to you, now that i've told you all this. you… do still want me to represent you, correct? i mean, i can't promise to be goldfinger for you. all i can promise to do is, whatever the greater plan is, to all this, that brought us two together, which i will do whatever i can to get you where you need to be. all right? jules asks.

although, jesse feels like she needs a minute to think about all this; it seemed like, when it came to whom jules had represented, as their agent, nothing turned out how it would and should; there really wasn't all that much that was promising. and now, a whole bunch of rules. and finally, of course, jesse had no idea what that greater plan was of God's. and neither did jules. but, if it had to be, then, so be it.

yes, i still want you to represent me. good, thank you. thank you. jules rejoices. but, jesse doesn't like hearing him rejoice as he just did; there was a stir of desperation, she felt, in all this. and in jules. and jesse wasn't sure what it was: maybe how, as jules had put it, how he hadn't really worked as an agent, himself, in ten years, and how it seemed how everyone he represented, didn't turn out so well… but… maybe… she didn't want to think about it.

is there… anything else? jesse asks.
no, i'm done. i'm done. no more long stories. no more third or fourth calls. i don't want to come off as just another la wacko, since there's enough of those in this city, as there is, he he! jules says and jokes at the end with a laugh.

although, jesse doesn't find it funny. but, with jules, jesse feels it's nothing to worry about, really.

so, i'll let you be.

bye. jesse says.
okay… bye. jules says.
and hangs up.

19. gq

when jezebel singer had reentered her chateau marmont hotel suite, instantaneously, she heard the music again, same as before, yesterday:

> mirrors on the ceiling
> the pink champagne on ice
> and she said "we are all just prisoners here, of our own device"
> and in the master's chambers
> they gathered for the feast
> they stab it with their steely knives
> but they just can't kill the beast
>
> last thing i remember
> i was running for the door
> i had to find the passage back to the place i was before
> "relax," said the night man
> "we are programmed to receive
> you can check-out any time you like
>
> but you can never leave!"

jesse felt enraged, so, she ran over to where the song was coming from; trying to pinpoint the exact location, which wasn't easy, since the suite was a vast and decadently large in-housing: so much cream-colored walls. everything had a mood of cream-colored. jesse found it mellow, but not peacefully mellow, but deceased mellow. a morose mellow, like there was a corpse still hidden in here, somewhere, of the last occupant; probably under the mattress, where jesse was to sleep. or—in—the mattress? the pad also had a very rococo approach to furniture, making it feel as if a museum piece, more than a place of habitation; you weren't here to sit on a couch, the couch was only here just to be viewed by you, from a short distance; the bed not being a cozy and warm spot to lay one's head down, and turn in for the night; but, once again, just another display, for you to imagine some 200 year ago epoch, and the people of that time, that would. jesse was home now, but not home. she was a stranger here. a stranger in her own new home. came as a stranger, and would eventually leave as a stranger. and it all felt so vaguely familiar. there it is! jesse now found the source of her madness, and, it was an old, obstruct alarm radio, with those giant, red slab, stonehenge-seeming, digital

number set pieces, that lit up jarring red leds, to show you the time. and, it was a juxtaposed sight, totally out of its elements: it was a stingy, k-mart bought alarm clock, that lower class blue-collar types would spend under 20 dollars for, for the cheapest and most disposable purchase they could get; the type that would break down in a year, or, even with its first-time use, the second you put batteries in it, or plugged it to a wall, and the lights got stuck on 12:00, never to be reset again. and, this was what 'hotel california' was playing on. this all felt eerie. jesse turned it off. and now, the cream-colored sights all around her were too dead. jesse sat on the floor. but then got up and decided to go take a shower; the feel of hot water against her face had a therapeutic touch to it, and jesse felt like having it.

jesse was now sitting on the bathroom floor, in her underwear. and, she had now been sitting there for the passed 4 hours. billy? jesse called out now. eyeing all around her surroundings, wondering, is he here? are they? but, she felt assured she was going to see them again. since, unfortunately, the boys seemed to have very distinguished sense of timing, for when to show themselves, and when not to. question now was: what did they do with their time, while jesse wasn't aware of them? where would they go? did they go? or, were they always around jesse, unbeknownst to her, and in her immediate vicinity? billy! jesse called out, again. but heard nothing.

another hour had now passed.
jesse really had no sense of what to do, as she just sat there, bare, now wishing she did have someone's attention, and not just her own. life could be so much more simpler, when it was left to others to safeguard your shortcomings, than for you to be left doing so yourself. i mean… that's the thing about a shortcoming: if you were able to keep an eye on one, it would no longer be one! since a shortcoming is something you're not supposed to be aware of. so, when you're looking to one side to what you could see, question was, what lay hidden on the other side, which you could not? jesse was now sitting. just sitting. rubbing the palm of her hand up and down her legs. and then….

no. no. no! that's not going to make things better! grr!
jesse got up now.

once jules had hung up, jesse had been lost: lost somewhere in la, in a totally unfamiliar part. was it culver city? no. not by a long shot. it was inglewood. and

how the hell she got all the way down there, she had no clue as to such; much of it had to do with dealing with all the bothersome feelings, she was left with, while heeding jules, and his rules, while simultaneously keeping her eye on the gps, and its routed call outs. and, it was something she was already terrible at: she'd miss a turn, then another one. then find herself driving in the wrong direction for a good 10 minutes, before realizing this shortcoming. this isn't to say jesse was a bad driver, no! but bad at taking directions to a place she had never actually been to, nor driven to. or, in other words, jesse just couldn't stand backseat driving; if she was at the helm of the wheel, she wanted to make the decisions of where to go, and where not to; when to turn, and when not to; the woulds and coulds and shoulds, based on her choosing, and hers alone. and, once jules hung up, and now with jesse, stuck in inglewood, with only 5% left of her smartphone's battery, before it was to shut down: what should have been a mostly 3-hour drive from her old pad to her new one, turned into 8 hours of driving lost in la. senselessly and directionlessly lost. meh… at least i enjoyed a good roscoe's chicken 'n waffles while i was down there.

it was way passed 9pm when she finally made it to the marmont. and, now here, but, what to do next?

am i going to become famous now? she wondered.

and wondered what it would mean in the long run. or even just, just for right now. jesse felt out of place, and out of time, yet, perfectly situated to where everything would work out well in the end. even when something simply being "well," wasn't something she was well with; meaning: the problem with living a life that one could only dream, was, now, one might feel like the dream was way too dreamy, and not real. and, part of you felt like it would have been better if you just decided to instead forget the dream: stop chasing waterfalls, stick to the rivers and the lakes that you're used to.

do i even want to become famous… do i… or, do i just think i do, since, it's what everyone else also thinks is what they want, also? what if i don't like it? what if i hate it? that's the problem with people that spend so much time with their thoughts wrapped up on what they have and don't have, and think about nothing but what "privileges" they have and don't have, imagining that the grass really is greener on the other side of the hill… when it really isn't. or, is, but there's other

stuff to it, more to it, then just pretty scenery; with stuff that wasn't taken into consideration: on one side of the hill, you might get fed up with all the gnat flies and mosquitoes buzzing around you, and biting you; but once you decided to travel to the other side, you traveled there, and, no more gnat flies and mosquitoes, but now, you found yourself crossing the path of a wolf. and, he looks hungry. very, very hungry. famished. desperate, even. and now your lot is way, way worse than what you had from the start.

i miss nashville.

jesse then realized: she was homesick. but, nashville was a long ways from here. and, here, here now: jesse was home. and nashville was no longer her home. was she better off, or worse off, than what she had from the start? too late to worry about that now. for she was here, in la, in this life, with whatever God (or, the Devil) had in store for her. and, she had to make do.

your hesitation speaks of me louder than million words per minute
i was born to this life you're living, in this game, oh yea
jesse was listening to the weeknd, again.
all you girls try to be saints, i'll make you wanna sin

you know, billy, if you are around listening right now, know this: i remember how you'd make fun of me for being some dumb hannah montana type. some pampered little princess. well, guess what? i'm not that anymore. you tried me. you tested me. and now… i'm standing…—?
does it make you strong?
do you feel like you can take the planet on, oh girl
stop it jess, stop! the lyrics are not a direct message to—
did i seem to give you a little bit more love
to your lonely life, to your empty life
little life, little life, oh yea
billy?
jesse was breaking up.
did you feel like you got your money's worth
cause if you did, this rounds on me
just promise that you'll come back to me,
feed me, baby, feed me, baby

billy! jesse yelped.
but she didn't receive his answer.
but maybe it was better that way.

jesse then got up from the bed she had been sitting, got better dressed, and, decided just to walk about the hotel, and see whatever she was meant to see.

jesse was now roaming the hallways, aimlessly. the space was vacant. but, not vacant how a motel 6 would be vacant, with no one there, that stayed there, that actually wanted to be there. this wasn't a cheap motel. the hallways were absent of people, but, there were people, there were! and in their rooms. within every door, jesse now passed. and they were enjoying whatever privacy that they now had. privacy always felt like an alien thing to jesse; privacy was always something other people seemed to enjoy having, and something never for jesse to enjoy, for herself. why is it that way? she thought. she didn't know. hmm… if i was a ghost. i could go into their rooms, and see, whatever it is they do, they wouldn't want anyone to see. thought jesse. as she made a sinister grin. she wondered exactly what it would be like, and what it would be that she would see, if she was a ghost. and, would it make sense to her. people can be very unidentifiable, when they're no longer doing what they would set themselves to do, around other people; and doing whatever it is the voices in their heads tell them to. something jesse learned in the psych ward, realizing that the crazy she saw there in others, was the crazy that had finally decided to let go of the illusion of normality, and to just be itself, at its most natural state. hell, there was a craziness jesse saw in herself there, and, here's the thing: it felt so… liberating! just to be that side and let go. jesse now remembered the man that was cutting his hair with clippers, inside that yogurt place. so odd! but, why? why? why? and now, jesse began to imagine her life with a more hedonistic tilt: what can i do now? she thought. maybe… take off all my clothes, and walk naked, in these naked halls. then, choose which door to knock on, next. hmm? she then wondered what that would lead to….

oh, cut it out, jesse! the hell with the brothers, you need a boyfriend right now.

and now, jesse felt, maybe, if she kept roaming around looking for one, she might find one.

sigh! don't kid yourself, jess. jess thought. today's boys are all a bunch of sob sorts.

and why would i ever settle with something like that? they're all just so depressing. jesse preferred being depressed with just her lonesome self, in solitude, than to be depressed with others around; the whole stupid point with being with a significant other, or simply, with friendly company, was so she wouldn't feel so depressed all the time; if you're depressed, better to be alone with your misery, than to share your misery with other people's misery. and, with so much misery in a room, it would all feel like being neck deep in a room flooded with tears, as the water level rose with each additional sob sort thrown into the place; added into the mix.

hey, billy, i'm going to do it! i'm going to take off all my clothes. and with the first man i come across… well… you know! jesse said out loud and giggled.

but this was becoming pointless. and, she wasn't exactly pleased with where her mind was going, with such idle hands swinging by, and wanting to give way. there was a self-realized identity of hers she needed to preserve, and protect, and not lose herself to her own abstract whims, of attention seeking; identity was a thing that mattered a lot to jesse, since, it wasn't easy; not something that came easily, but something she had to put a lot of hard work into, to cultivate and create. and with all the blood and sweat and tears and time it took to do so… something way too valuable to give out. especially, "put out," to the first swinging dick, that just so happened to cross her path. ugh! especially if the dick was a wolf. double ugh! so, what to do? what to do? jesse then decided to step out onto the patio where she met jules, and, just sit there, and, stare at the moon for a while. and see if she could get her conscious mind stuck on something otherworldly, since this world was now seeming very depressingly familiar.

she was out there, now. and now, she realized a shortcoming: i'm just doing all this, all this, everything… just to run and hide, still… am i?

hey. said someone.

jesse now turned her head and, bam! now starstruck meeting a famous actor. no, jess, hell no! don't do the dreamy eye thing. don't! don't! he was a bit of an older actor (to jesse's unfortunate luck), and yet, ten times more attractive in real life, than what jesse had seen in his movies. hey. jesse retorted. then looked away. excuse me, is it all right if i sit with you? he asked, charmingly. yea, i guess. she

said, eyes away. he then sat down, next. and now a strange vibe: as much as he could tell from jesse's forced passiveness, how she was most definitely starstruck, he seemed more intrigued to meet her than she would be to meet him. i'm sorry, but…? and now he smiled. very handsomely. yes? jesse asked. trying her best to keep this as nonchalant as she vehemently could. i'm sorry, but yesterday… i saw you! he said and pointed with index. jesse now made a grave error and looked right into his eyes, and now: owl city for her silly head! yea, i saw you! and, i saw you with someone. he explained. and now jesse realized exactly what the context of this encounter with this big name was going to be about. yea… i was with… someone. she nervously stringed together. you were with—him! jesse didn't respond. i've never seen anyone… well, your age, around him. he described. jesse kept her silence. and then a dire worry came to her: crap! was he one of the actors on that list? i don't remember! the list was still in her room. and, even at hand, she couldn't just pull it out now, and in front of him.

you were with goldfinger. he simply added.

seeming very intrigued, and not at all shy over her shyness: not good! yes. jesse finally let out, hoping that could be the end of it. do you know… i don't know you… but, do you know who he is? he asked now. no, not really. she moused. this actor now leaned in. i gotta say, when it comes to goldfinger, for years! years and years! i've heard so much about the guy. and, he's like a ghost in this industry, almost. he explained. ghost? asked jesse. not sure what he meant by that exactly, considering the sort she had now grown accustomed with. yes. he's, well, he's like one of those guys, at the top, a lot of top people know. but, they never say. i've been seeing him for years. and, i've always been fascinated to find out, who is he! who is he? she retorted. jesse began to feel her mind go parrot.

do you know?
do i know?
yes!
but she already answered this question. and now her mind stopped going into overload with anxiety, and started to think. the actor was still sitting there, quietly, like a child in front of a tv, watching cartoons; just being so still and absorbent of everything. you're wondering if i know something… i shouldn't say? she asked. while trying to be sly and clever; feeling this was the best footing to take, to climb out of this. and now his eyes went slit and secretive. you're new to the industry,

aren't you? he guessed. what do you mean? jesse asked. what's your name? he asked. jezebel singer. jesse replied. unsure if she should have. jezebel, wow! jezebel! he fancied. that is, quite a… striking name. jesse didn't like where this was going. i was born with that name. that's not a… well… you know… famous person's made-up name. yup!

there was a pause, a grave pause. even with all the clockwork still in full effect. and then… he went on to say something that completely threw jesse off.

well, i guess your name would be jezebel, seeing as how you were sitting with a man…

a man, gossip in this city… says is the Devil.

jesse eyes then caught on fire. but, said nothing. nothing! that's an old hollywood legend, though. well, not 'gone with the wind,' old. but something people have been saying for the last 30 years, almost. he went on. jesse felt like she needed to hear more of this; so unable to resist, she now spoke: wait, what do you mean by that? and the actor could sense in jesse's eyes, he was getting to her. well, it's more on the music side, but, it's just gossip that goes on. i, personally, don't listen to gossip. i can't stand the whole tmz format. but that one is a special one. he mentions. although, too vague for jesse's taste. wait, i need to know why? why? yes, why is it that they say that? jesse inquires. you want to hear the long version? he asks. yea, i think i'd like to hear the long one. i've never heard that. and then the actor went on: it's like this. back in the 90s. at a grammy's after party, madonna and—
wait, madonna?
yes, her. well, her, and… i don't remember what the other big-name singer was. well, they were both talking. and. madonna saw goldfinger pass by. goldfinger is one of those guys, everyone seems to know, but no one seems to know what he does exactly, and why he's around. supposedly, a modest agent, and nobody behind anyone really big. but, then there's that whole "goldfinger" aspect. especially among a lot of high-ups. what do you mean, high-ups? jesse asked. but the actor just gave her a look, as if, "better to not go into too much detail." anyways, madonna then turned to this other woman, and said….

"that guy is funny, i remember once meeting him back when i was still struggling

in new york. the people i was working with wanted to introduce me to him. and, it got weird, because, they really, really wanted me to shake his hand. and, i said, 'what if i don't want to?' and, the people i was with, they got worried, and practically begged me to do so. eventually i was like, 'fine, whatever! if that's all you want me to do, i'll do it.' i mean, not like they wanted me to sleep with the guy."

jesse said nothing. more! she needed to hear more! the actor then continued: well, when madonna mentioned all this, this other woman… (name still escapes me), she said, "are you kidding me, that happened to you too, and with him?" and, from that moment out: a lot, and, I do mean "a lot," of other big names in the music industry, began to also support that story. claiming, they also had the exact same experience. being introduced to him, once, and, the key here is, "before they were famous!" shaking his hand, and then never meeting him again. this was all but backing up exactly what she had learned from jules. except, for that one part… that one last part… that was now sticking out.

so, why… think he's the Devil? jesse asked.

the actor's eyes then went somber. you haven't shaken his hand, have you? gasp! jesse had a terrible short-term memory, when it came to moments like these. no! no… i… no! why? and now the actor's eyes lingered a bit, in fiendish fancy. well, what gossip eventually decided to make of all this, was, if you shook his hand, you would be trading your soul in, for fame and fortune. hence, why everyone of those big names he shook hands with, became big, back when they still weren't big… do you see what i'm getting at? he elaborated. jesse nodded. the actor then smiled. held it.

then got up, to bid adieu.
but before leaving:
listen, it's just a crazy old story, from a bunch of egotistical vanity cases, that have had too much wine, and are chattering away the night… have… to kill the time and boredom. i mean, there's no such thing as a Devil, right? he now asked.
that got jesse's attention.
he wanted an answer.
yes…. jesse answered.
all right, jezebel, i guess i'll see you around, maybe? then left.

20. enter m.m.

so, i have a question: let's just say, if you did, if you did decide, to strip completely bare, to your bare ass, and pranced around the hallways of the chateau marmont, and you came across that devilishly handsome and well-known actor… what would you have done then, jesse, what would you have done then? went the invisible voice. jesse didn't speak. like many of her old fights with billy: billy always with a question, that ended with jealous wonder.

i'll tell you what daddy would have done!
daddy, would have done, what he did to a naughty girl, like you, the last time, and put her over one knee, and belted her bottom red all over. he he! billy ridiculed and rubbed in.

this was true, billy had humiliated jesse in this exact fashion one night. one night, back when they were together, back when billy and jimmy were still alive, billy and jesse were going to a frat party; jesse going there to meet a sorority girl she was high school friends with. "jesse, tonight, i'm not putting up with it, you get three strikes, if a guy comes up and hits on you, and… i know, i know, you're a pretty girl, and guys will come up and hit on you, regardless of whether you're showing any interest or not… but, as long as you blow them off, we're good! however… if you don't…?" billy had then glared into jezebel's eyes, and told her in a menacing manner, what would happen if she did. and he guaranteed her—it would happen! if she disobeyed him. jezebel was pissed, thoroughly pissed hearing this, and she decided at the party, she would allow guys to flirt with her, on purpose, just to taunt billy, to see if he'd be ballsy enough to do it.

later that night, at the trailer the brothers rented out of, billy was sitting on the ground (since the place was a dump, with hardly any furnishing), drinking beer, and watching tv. jimmy wasn't around, so, it was just billy, and jesse. jezebel thought, "huh, figures!" billy had never gotten physical with her at this point. and seeing billy not even paying attention to her (even though jesse had been working on her eighth strike that night before leaving), jesse now figured: billy wasn't going to live up to his word. he was in his own world right now. jesse was then about to leave to go home, and… that's when it happened. billy instantaneously ran up and got her over one knee, and took his belt off. jesse screamed, and cursed and clawed her way out of billy's hold. billy looked dead into her eyes and said:

“no, jesse, it’s going to happen, you’re not getting out of this…

Daddy…

is gonna make sure of that!”

billy then tackled jesse and got her on the ground. he was now wrestling with jesse. jesse screamed and cried and hollered for help, but the trailer was out in the sticks, somewhere in the outskirts of mt. juliet. so, there wasn’t going to be anyone to hear any of her cries for help. after a while of wrestling, jesse was winded, breathing heavily, and sweaty all over. billy then tried to get her into position, to get belted again, but jesse clawed and hit and bit her way out, once more. back to wrestling, as billy dragged her all over the floor, doing everything to make jesse as exhausted as he could get her. and once he figured he did—back to position! and jesse back to fighting her way out. this lasted an hour. a whole hour. a whole entire hour. and, after an hour, jesse had zero strength anymore to do anything; she had been crying mad cries for the entire time. but billy just wasn’t going to back out; he was going to get her, get her into position, and make sure what jesse was to experience, would be the most embarrassing experience she had ever gotten, in her entire life. jesse was dead exhausted, yet, billy, magically kept seeming to be getting his second, third, fourth, fifth winds, to continue, until it was over with. at this point, jesse no longer cared, she had no more fight or strength left in her. billy then bent her over his knee, took his belt and…—
whap!
“ahhah!”
whap!
“no, no, please don’t! please—"
whap!
“stop it! it hurts! it hurts… it—"
whap!
“ahahaaaa!”
belted her bottom blush red. that night, the rest of the entire night, jesse cried and cried and cried and sobbed a million tears, all bawled up in a corner, while billy went back to watching tv, and drinking the rest of his six-pack. at one point, even asking jesse nonchalantly to lower her volume, while he raised the volume of the tv, as he continued watching his game of thrones, on hbo.

come on, jesse, you were so much fun that one night, at your old pad. last night, to be exact. now you don't seem so fun anymore. seem kinda, troubled. unsure of a lot of things. billy taunted. jesse still chose her silence. jesse, i specifically told you, he was hollywood scum. everyone here is scum. you wouldn't believe the things i see. i see, here, when nobody is even aware that i'm watching them. seriously, jess, what type of messed up place did you bring me and my brother to? jesse kept to herself, and kept to the dark. that guy, that agent, of yours, nobody just calls someone the Devil, because they're good people. honestly, i'd take that as a grave, grave warning, if i was you. jesse was growing annoyed. and i know, i know, all you want to do is dance! but, let's be frank, that isn't all the reason why you came to a city like this. he paused then, as if waiting for jesse to reply. but then went on when he sensed jesse was just going to continue doing what all women do, when they have no reasoning in anything, they got to think or do or say: being judgmentally hush, while giving you the coldshoulder treatment! you want to know why you came here, jesse? jesse, don't kid me, dancing in the light, ain't your style. from the first dance i ever saw you dance, from that moment on, i knew… you like dancing in the shadows. judy, what she did to those boys, you got mad, but you didn't get mad on behalf of them. you got mad on your own behalf. because, you didn't think of doing it first, yourself. you could do with some really nice and expensive pair of footwear, couldn't you?

jesse!
jesse!
jesse… open your eyes. jesse then opened her eyes.
and… billy was standing over her.

that face, that hellish, violently shimmering and shining face, cascading across the visor of his black motorcycle helmet. jesse now jerked seeing him. so close, so sudden! and tensed up as the tension shot into her left leg, as it almost snapped at the knee, being bent the wrong direction, as her calf muscle spasmed and gave her a charlie horse. jesse then sat up in bed, while massaging the pain, while watching her calf muscle violently pianoing the tendons inside. and once it stopped, now she was enraged to finally learn: every time, every single time, she'd be asleep, there, unconscious, and totally vulnerable of her surroundings…

this asshole had been standing over her, speaking to her, in her dreams.

she was now awake. and very, very angry. what do you want, billy? jesse yelled. billy said nothing; still with that face, that repulsive face; not his face, but a face she had to now deal with. since it was now his. damn you, billy—get out! she yelled. billy did not. although, he did draw a grin, seeing how fiercely and furiously mad she now was towards him. what do you want, billy? jesse begged. what do i want? billy retorted. yes! demanded jesse. billy then stood in silence.

i don't know. he then expressed.

do you still want to kill me for what i did?
i don't know. billy said, again.

then lowered his head; flashes of his externalized face, anguishing in fits of pauses and raptures, over whatever it was going on tempestuously inside. and then raised it, and said: jesse, tell me. jesse said nothing, trying to regain more of her audacity, and composure she had last seeing him. jesse? billy went.

what?
tell me.
what do you want me to tell you?
maybe… tell me that you still love me? he said.

mad. always mad. but, like billy in life, yearning for that mad love mirroring his mirrored half, to merge itself with; to again feel whole and sane with, again. but jesse grew enraged even more hearing billy ask her this.

tell me that—
no! she screamed.
billy then just disappeared.

billy… no! i don't love you! i never loved you! she screamed out. wherever he was now, she wanted him to hear it. but then jesse got upset and felt that sunken feeling, she had had once before; upset and strung out and oblivious, just oblivious. i wanted to, but…? curse, be it. it was never meant to be. she knew it from the get-go, yet, she played it out, exhausting all of her energy into something she herself devised to be what it was never meant to be. which was, in itself, all the reasons why jesse and billy fought when together… and… now again.

it had been four days now that she had been here. now friday. at the castle. much of the time spent falling in and out of phasing moments, of changes taking place; changes of things inside, changing her inside and out. she hadn't gone nowhere. hadn't stepped out much. hadn't done much. practically nothing. her mind, nowhere, yet, here, waiting for the next phasing to begin orchestrating her sense of self, with her surroundings. she didn't feel like stepping out anymore, and meeting anymore actors, singers, celebrities, agents, or people in general. truth be: she felt like she had already gotten her fill of hollywood, and its allures, and now simply wanted to go—
but where…? i have no home. she thought.

wait what am i watching on tv now… the elvira show? elvira? who's that? this show looks like something from the 80s. why am i seeing this now? why are moments like these, like this! it's always something you've never seen nor heard of coming on. and… she looks like a witch in all black. wow… she's….
"let's see, lorraine, what do the spirits have in store for you today…"
and… no, jesse! no messages. they're not a straight message to—
"do you know a… bill?"
….
"girl, you gotta get out of the house more.
….
"now, for only $99.95, you can get my special deluxe love kit, guaranteed to give you a lifetime of matrimonial bliss, with the man of your dreams."
God… don't do this! don't torture me like this. please don't. please—…?
"and… uh… wouldn't it be worth an extra 20 bucks, for him to be faithful?"
….
"now, what you do, ms. wiesner, is you drink this little bottle of love potion, then you get naked, and you dance around this little red candle like crazy, until you work up a real good sweat."
jesse… felt beside herself.

jesse looked at the clock. but, that thing had been destroyed days ago. she then went for her iphone. it was 4am in the morning.

last thing i remember
i was running for the door

i had to find the passage back to the place i was before
"relax," said the night man
"we are programmed to receive
you can check-out any time you like
but you can never leave!"

it had been a tuesday night, that stupid, piece-of-crap alarm clock, had turned on. this time, in the middle of the night, while jesse slept. by itself! playing that hellish nightmare of a song. jesse figured, "oh, you think you're hilarious, do you?" but the joke was on the radio—this time—and not on jesse; jesse had then went to her car, and had dug through the tools his brother had left in her silver camaro; tools he used to use mostly for car repair, which jesse kept around, just in case; and, behold, there it was: this dashingly debonair and gorgeous mallet, kept in the toolbox, inside the trunk compartment. which that junky radio had no clue whatsoever, what jesse planned to have it be used for next:

smash!
smash!
smash!

ah, the galore, of watching that junky evil thing, destroyed into hundreds and hundreds of itty-bitty pieces, flying in every which direction; such beauty, beheld, taking in such vistas of delight. it felt so good, jesse needed a drag to commemorate her v-day. so, she stepped outside, and realized: wait, i don't always smoke. jesse wasn't a smoker, per se. socially, yes! occasionally at times of excitement and turmoil, that too! but, not a true smoker, to be keeping a pack always handy. but, luckily, there was a bellboy outside, trying to sneak a quick one, before an establishment like the chateau, knew what he was doing, in such plain view of any guests that would arrive.

"excuse me…?"
"shit!"
the bellboy was startled from behind. "i… can i bum one?" and luckily, he had a square to spare. and now both jesse and the boy stood there, under the arched marmont gateway, enjoying the twilight morning's air. but then jesse caught a sight of something wacko. "umm… wait? am i right now seeing a naked woman, doing yoga in the middle of the road, over there?" she asked the bellboy. the bellboy

then eyed jesse (seemed to be eyeing her up, at first), then answered: "yeah, that's sandy. she's one of the marilyn girl rejects." he simply answered, as if something he'd routinely see out here, on marmont lane and monteel street. usually when it came to la wackos, jesse had grown to become very live and let—get the hell away from me, you psycho! about the matter. now, jesse, deep down, had a good heart; when it came to people suffering, she did truly deep-down feel pain and pity. but, when it came to the breed of wackos la tended to breed, there was something very, almost, "loony toon"-ish about them. in order to feel such things as pity and anguish for a fellow human being, there had to be a sense of empathy involved, sensing another person's anguish. but, that was the thing with la wackos: no sense of anguish. these cartoon characters acting, as if, they liked being this out of their freakin' heads! jesse now getting that sense from this la wacko, on the street now. but, the thing was, she was feeling way too curious! the woman seemed to be in her 40s, was slim, and had a fine figure. although, oddly, not at all attractive while naked; there was something very bony about her features; she looked like an attractive woman, that had been skinned, then the skin itself having been sewn back up, and then filled to the brim with half eaten chicken bones, that stuck out all over; and her leathery skin looked like it had been laying out in the death valley sun for two days, beforehand. even her face was oddly bony, as if suffering from a very, very mild case of elephantiasis, that didn't make her face out to be an abominable monstrosity, but enough to accentuate it, to where, you just couldn't put your finger on what was exactly wrong with it to look at. basically, the face of a female william dafoe, just freakier! jesse now went: "umm… excuse me?"

"smoking is disgustingly bad for you, baby doll, you need to quit that shit!" she barked at jesse.

then continued with her yoga; sweaty all over, and she had just started. jesse was stupefied. part of her now was telling herself, "okay, walk away, walk away, and… slowly!" but there was some weird vibe she was getting from all this, that made her feel like she needed to continue, to continue prying into this odd woman's affairs. like that boy at hotel memphis, the one who thought he was going to hell for not marrying a certain woman God wanted him to marry, jesse had to continue asking away, until she got to the bottom of what was up. "excuse me, i heard that you're a marilyn girl, right?" jesse asked, on that tuesday morning.

and, it was then, things got too weird, for jesse to not see as questionable.

one of those: greater scheme of things, moments, where, it got too, too weird, and way too surreal to write off. the woman's eyes blew up like balloons, blown up to their max capacity, and about to pop. she then spoke:
"oh, my goodness, why didn't i see this before? you can be a marilyn girl, too."
jesse didn't speak.
"i see it in your eyes, i see it, you can see ghosts, too, can you?"
"wha—…?" jesse went.
"you got these evil green eyes of envy, and, i bet they can also come out of your head, and fly around the sky and watch things, right?" she continued. oh, my, what have i got myself into? thought jesse, then. "i know it, i can see it, you're like me, you used to idolize marilyn as a teen, too!" she said, then began crying tears of… jesse had no clue what. "marilyn, who?" jesse asked. "marilyn monroe, who else, silly?" and she did a ditsy thing. jesse was now even more stupefied by this, then she was able to handle. "listen, i lost my chance. friday mornings, at 6:30am, sharp! go to the bar of the marmont, here. sit at the bar, and you won't see her, she'll see you. good luck!" and it was at that moment, a group of marmont security stepped up before jesse, and began handling the situation. "ms., go back inside, please, we'll handle this." one spoke to jesse. "come on, sandy, come on! please, go home! please? marilyn doesn't want to see you anymore." "get away from me, you mongrel men! evil men! don't you dare try and put this baby in a corner!" she raged at the guards in black. though, her "baby in a corner" line, was fanciful to hear, and peer at: hands on hips, so—you "go girl"-ish, about it! "please, sandy… marilyn … just please!" "don't you daaaarrrrreee give me that! i bet you're all trump supporters, too, aren't you—aren't you? you should be ashamed of yourselves!" and then, sandy got up, and began screaming at the top of her lungs towards the marmont, as if, to try and reach marilyn, waiting for her inside:

"marilyn! marilyn! please take me back! please!"

but, alas, crying and crying with all her might, but to no avail. as she sank back down to her knees. sandy then got depressed. so, so very much depressed, oozing with sorrow. and seemed like she now wanted to begin with the weeping. but then, snarled up, watching the guards again. "grr, the patriarchy, so… we meet again, do we?" she then said. then growled at the team circling her. "no, sandy, we're on your side—on your side! please believe us, please? please!" but then sandy got up, and then ran right at the guards, and seemed to want to knee drop the first man

she flew at. but then three of the guards sacked her to the ground, and began holding her still. while sandy continued screaming a barrage of curses and hell and profanity at them. jesse now left and went back inside.

having a quick drag just didn't feel worth it anymore.

so, that was tuesday. and now, it was friday. zero minus a couple of minutes before jesse was to entertain the most bizzaro request a person had ever made for her to do, in her 27-year-old life. but, jesse had grown bored, and, then, there was the whole billy thing. also, goldfinger as the Devil, thing. also… why not? why not? jesse felt keen in making her life even more bonkers than it already was. so, there she sat now, at the bar of the marmont. and of this hour. maybe not as appropriately dressed as to meet probably one of the biggest female names in the history of hollywood: dressed much too retro grungy with her red flannel shirt tied around her waist, laced up choker necklace, string laced tank top, backwards dope cap (obvious bad choice to represent anything grungy, but… "meh."), simple denim shorts, and a specialty pair of timberlands that came up to just below her knees. but it was strange. it was as if she wanted to ruin the possible encounter. maybe because she was up at this early hour, and….

no! not possible! marilyn monroe, thee marilyn? really…?

so, billy, am i gonna meet this chick, or what? jesse sorta quietly mumbled to herself.

who's billy?

said a strangely familiar female voice; one; jesse had never heard in person. but, still, an exact match. jesse turned her head to her right; there was now a woman sitting there. and, a woman not at all dressed in the manner anyone would expect someone to dress, in the last 70 aught years.

it was unexpectedly strange. how did she know? how? how did that sandy lady know, jesse, back at the age of 14 years of age… yes! it was a sort of steamy, summer infatuation, that had gone on; just one summer, that, even to this day, jesse still dearly held as a monumentally important, life altering experience, and close to her heart. and almost as much as being visited by that angel had been.

and, with marilyn, at least for her in her pubescent sense of self-discovery. pubescent years, being as they are: a nomansland of emotional upheaval and upgrade (or, what at least appears to be an upgrade!), taking a little girl, and then, soul shatteringly redefining her into what would mold her into a woman. and, with such an endeavor, what was most required then, was having a template, as to what to redefine this little girl into. simply put: a role model! and this, one summer, marilyn monroe had become her—that! jesse didn't exactly have a joyous preteens and teens in life. mostly dark waters. mostly just a mold that had the likes of tim burton shaping her, what only a dweeby and creepy man like he could mold a woman into: dark! very dark. and nothing at all this bright and brilliant and colorful. perfect! absolutely perfect. at least almost. in every single way. jesse sensed the spirit of monroe enter her, not by her heart, not with her mind, but, through a nether place. and, that nether place then became like an oven, baking something hot, which jesse had absolutely no clue as to what. actually, it even scared her to think why it felt so warm down there, why so warm? one night, in a dream, a sprite entered her, and shivered and shined, and glowed and glistened; a sprite, in no real human form, just whatever form the mind's eye will extrapolate from it, with what it sees and doesn't see; sometimes what it chooses to see and doesn't see, and sometimes not by choice but by circumstances; just a being of love and light and thought; like a key, which only sole task is to enter you, and open whatever locked doors are there in one's own consciousness, preventing to see what lays beyond all closed doors of the mind. one night, in a dream, this being was made manifest in jesse; one emanating a particular smile from its center, with a distinct vibe from her still to be manifested form, of her still to be manifested identifiable face. it wasn't until a short time later, jesse then saw that face, manifest, on tv, of that woman, which she then recognized to be as that sprite, all along. jesse was now not her own, but, her own, that woman's own, marilyn's. that summer, she was hers!

one summer, then gone. whisked away, where, someplace unknowable! like the wind coming and going. where from, where to? only God can answer.

but then, jesse was 18 years of age. and had decided to watch one of her movies again: the seven year inch. probably, now, for her 50th time in her life. but something had changed, this time, and this time, all jesse could think was: what the hell did i ever see in this ditsy broad, anyways? the age of 18 years was jesse's kurt cobain year. like most of her ages between 8-18, beside marilyn, dark, and

now dark and cynical about just about everything; a lot of things had ceased to impress her as they did. and this all made her feel very, very, very let down and disappointed.

although, this was far from disappointing her now. jesse was in awe!

so, tell me about him? marilyn, thee marilyn, asked jesse now. jesse couldn't speak; this was beyond just being starstruck from some actor of today; this was a legend. who? she was finally able to let out. not even in her mind wondering "who?" who-ing like a hooting owl, which jesse cynical side immediately picked up on. jesse felt like she just had to reply with something, anything, that stood in the context of what was asked. although, if jesse could now spend 5 straight hours staring at this apparition, like staring into the pacific ocean, and feeling lost in its majesty: she would!

billy, you just mentioned the fella, so, tell me about him?

oh my…, no, no, no, no… wait?
yes, yes, yes… it is!

it's marilyn monroe! jesse thought. and now, jesse felt like she really did need to be sitting here for the next 5 hours straight, staring at this woman. she needed that now. crazy, yes! but, since speaking to a legend that had been dead long before jesse was ever born, was something beyond crazy, in of itself, already, so, what else was she to make of this?

so, what was billy like? marilyn asked.
but jesse kept staring weird stares at her.

oh, don't tell me… one of those types, huh? marilyn monroe said.

no, this was not an actor impersonating her. no, no cgi, here. jesse remembered very distinctly how that sprite felt inside of her all those years ago; like a mother or father, someone very, very familiar, that cannot be mistaken, and it can only be them! what do you mean, those types? jesse asked now. still unable to truly talk and think at the same time; only able to relay what she could to this marilyn monroe, as her mind went into autopilot. you know, you turn around, and all of

a sudden, you see a thing rising out of a swamp, all staring at you, googly eyed, like the creature from the black lagoon. said marilyn. and she did that distinct thing marilyn did, that whole ditsy-eyed, oblivious stare, jesse remembered precisely from the seven year itch; a mannerism in which women of today just didn't have anymore, not even women a generation prior to jesse's, only women of that era; a very distinct characterization only found in the vacuums of an age long locked away in a vault, that had long passed. but now, reopened. and, rebound. wait, you mean "creepy?" no, no, billy wasn't… although… his twin brother was a bit. answered jesse. wait, marilyn monroe is asking about billy. jesse thought. finally, able to catch up to the conversation in a more conscious sense. they were twins? wow? so, how dreamy was that experience? marilyn monroe went. still a bit ditsy. and oblivious. not much. jesse answered. wait, not much to what? thought jesse, needing to now remind herself exactly what the context of this conversation was about, again. wait, oh, she's talking about jimmy, right. right! i first mentioned billy. marilyn monroe, thee marilyn monroe, got curious about him. and, somehow, i mentioned they were twins. and she asked how dreamy… um… hot, was that? jesse reenacted the conversation in her head, to catch up. oh, i know now, billy was a wolf, wasn't he? i'm getting the sense he was, wasn't he? marilyn monroe dogged. hmm, marilyn monroe was talking to her without any eye contact. and now the gears in jesse's mind began to turn and function. well, sorta. a wolf, like… a bad boy? jesse asked. unsure what marilyn monroe's timepiece vernacular would mean exactly. jesse now reminded herself. and, it was best, jesse thought, not to use words like "thirsty" or "savage." damn me and my generations' idiotic slang! jesse thought. especially, something as idiotic as "thirsty," since marilyn monroe might then turn to the bartender, and ask him to get a glass of water for jesse to drink. wait, can the bartender see this right now? jesse turned towards him in a corner; he didn't seem like he was noticing any of these transactions. well, with wolves, there's two types: the naughty ones, that can't seem to keep their paws to themselves, then, of course, the fun ones, the ones you just want those paws… all over you. marilyn monroe went, in her special way.

ha, twins! that must have been the cat's pajamas.
???
oh, sorry about that.
sorry for what?
nothing… "cat's pajamas." how silly of me. using such an outdated term such as that. don't want you to start thinking i'm some silly headed, bohemian, flapper

girl… from the roaring 20s, or something.

umm… i wouldn't know… going that far back. all that jesse could say to address that.

gee, so, honey, tell me about yourself? what's bringing a pretty bird like you to a dive like this, and at this hour? marilyn monroe asked. i don't know. someone told me you'd be here. jesse answered. as she finally found herself able to keep up. oh, nuts, it wasn't that sandy lady, was it? poor dear. marilyn said. um… is that bad? no, no, you seem, different. maybe like you've probably spent a bit too much time as a book worm in a library. arthur was like that. i tried that. but, not really a place for a woman to find herself. unless you want to see 30 years of your life go by, sucked in and spat out, and now, an old maid. that's just unfortunate. marilyn described. and fortunately enough, jesse didn't just know marilyn from her movies. arthur miller… your third husband? jesse guessed. but marilyn didn't answer.

and it got quiet now.
jesse figured it was probably best now not to continue staring at her like the "creature from the black lagoon," as she put it. but then things got too quiet. but, then again: good! this was now giving jesse time to regain her sense of self after being blown away by this woman's… ghost's presence. now, marilyn felt like a woman. a real woman. the silence was beginning to humanize this experience. although, now regaining her sense of self, jesse began to do what she did with everyone: judge them by the way they dressed. not something she could help but to do, since not wanting to be so judgmental. but, it was just how jesse ticked. marilyn monroe wasn't dressed in anything iconic for her; no white sensuous dress and white all over to match her hair color. she was wearing a gray suit and a knee-length gray skirt with black trimming; how women wore suits in the 50s; very monotone in color and stature; coming off as some prudish governess or an old english nannie; very modest for someone as voluptuous and sex themed as marilyn monroe was, or maybe how she'd dress when she was still married to the likes of her second husband, joe dimaggio? but then jesse realized this was strictly casual wear for women in that era, more sunday church going casual. and before the mid to late 60s, and the colorful psychedelic explosion that that decade had on the world of fashion. then jesse remembered how this was iconic (somewhat) to what marilyn monroe wore in the movie 'how to marry a millionaire.' she even

had those 50s cats-eyed shades, not wearing them, but set on the table. plus, gray gloves, to match everything else that was gray about her. and at her feet, simple flat heels colored black.

for a moment there, nothing had been said, as jesse continued to evaluate everything that was happening with the current moment, with this current somebody. whom, in no ways, would be current, today. so, all the gray wear, maybe, a display of such? exactly what she was? a ghost. but then marilyn monroe said something that totally caught jesse off guard:

you're an angry girl.
said, simply, and her mode of speech had changed.

excuse me?
jesse asked.

you heard me.
said simply, again.

this was different. and, unexpected. and then marilyn monroe didn't seem as ditsy as she had forever been characterized in movies, and spoke as a person: at first, i got curious, i mean, i sensed an anger in you the very second i saw you, almost lightning fast. and at first, i wondered why. maybe, the jealous type? but i've been around the jealous types. they all hate me and will tell lies about me, because they're afraid i might steal their boyfriends away, or their husbands away, or something. even when i was just little ol' orphan norma jean, and not marilyn, yet. but, that's just my life story.

funny, the moment marilyn monroe said her real name, "norma jean," as in "norma jean mortenson," everything changed for jesse. and now, jesse no longer saw some silverscreen goddess. but, someone very ordinary. no, you're not that type. you've been beaming at me this entire time, but, you're not doing that to compare yourself to me. why are you saying these things? jesse asked. marilyn monroe now looked directly into her eyes for the first time, jesse got terrified she was going to lose it, considering who this was. but that didn't happen. sorry, i don't want to seem rude, you sorta make me feel like being myself more, and, truly, i can be overly analytical. said norma jean. and now jesse started to see

something behind the legend. now, i gotta say, you mysteriously remind me of someone. said marilyn. who? asked jesse. joan crawford. marilyn said. that sounded like someone jesse should know. i… don't know who that is. jesse honestly admitted. and now marilyn seemed shocked. you don't know who joan crawford is? gasped marilyn, shocked. making jesse realize, how that name was as big a deal to marilyn, as how angelina jolie would be to jesse, here. unfortunately, marilyn monroe was the only celebrity of that era, jesse had ever really looked into; she knew a name, here or there! and especially a name like "james dean," or a "marlon brando." but nothing beyond mostly just a name and a face, and a simple backstory that could be summarized for jesse with: he/she famous! and beyond that, just being names with hardly any face or story behind them. like joe dimaggio, only knowing he was a baseball player, a really famous one, and was marilyn monroe's second husband. and that's it.

no. i… i don't know a lot of actors during your time. jesse admitted.

honey, joan crawford wasn't an actor… she was an *actress*. he! said and giggled at the end, marilyn did.

and there was also a strange quality to it.

now, i'm curious, i must say. i wonder where that anger comes from. went marilyn.

crap!
she's not as dumb as i imagined she was or would be! jesse realized. seeing how the woman had really been able to better size up jesse, than jesse had been able to size up marilyn, this entire time.

so, tell me something about your boy, billy?
but jesse didn't want to talk about that. not one bit!

don't want to talk… that bad, huh? i get the sense it's a sad story, and…

pardon me for being so direct…

but, a sad story… ending in death.

marilyn said and looked directly into jesse's eyes, faintly though, when mentioning "death." honey, i feel your pain. story of my life, too. were you in love with this billy? asked marilyn. and jesse could now really just be herself, also. no. jesse added. love is so fleeting, isn't it? asked marilyn, as jesse got a sad sense from her, very sad, like that's all love had been to her. but not jesse. no. it's so, demanding! and also, unfair! jesse expressed. only things that directly came to mind, coming from her immediate emotions. marilyn turned towards her, and there was now a kinship made in the moment.

i like you. marilyn said.
and nothing else.

and then it seemed… it was now time for this supernatural affair, to come to a close.

i got somewhere to go to. and, i don't want to be fashionably late. people in this city are so: rush, rush! expecting so much from you. i gotta go before i end up angering some people, that i have a morning brunch invitation with. she just said. they always think i'm bored to tears, really though, i'm just a bit of an anxious clots. he! talk to you later….

oh, i'm sorry, how rude of me, what is your name?
jesse… i mean... jezebel. jezebel singer.
oh, wow, that's a hell of a hollywood name. see you soon. marilyn excited.

then got up, putting on her shades as she did.
bye, now. she said.
and now left.

21. raa paa maa ozz

not since jesse had met that angel at a very tender age, had she experienced anything… anything… like this! she had become totally absorbed by the woman, almost to the point of falling in love. in her room, jesse then got hysterically curious about one thing marilyn mentioned: joan crawford? jesse had then instantly google pictured her up, to see how this joan woman would strike any resemblance to herself. now looking at crawford… interesting! at first, jesse didn't find her as an attractive woman, which momentarily scared her to think marilyn was basically saying jesse was unattractive. but, interesting, how she held herself, really did speak highly to jesse; how joan crawford posed and held herself in a highly dignified and proud manner; how she balanced her aura with the lights and shadows around her. jesse also felt keen, very much so, to this woman in shadows: very dark, and… hmm! jesse then ran through her own photos on instagram and: bullseye! wow, i can now see myself, why i would remind marilyn, of joan! jesse thought. but there were also things jesse didn't seem to like, how this joan crawford woman never seemed to smile much; always stone faced, in contrast to how exuberantly marilyn monroe was able to smile and vibrate. hmm… then a weird notion ran through jesse, imagining herself wanting to get close to marilyn, or, norma jean. but, similar to how marilyn said the word "fleeting," jesse also got that sense from monroe, herself. jesse didn't like, "fleeting," she could imagine herself wanting to get close to marilyn, and marilyn taking that as an act of desperation, that would make her decide to drift away. but maybe that was just too much thought being misplaced? jesse wondered. no matter.

jesse felt like getting up and getting out, again. she had been imprisoning herself to this suite for far too long; she needed more sunlight exposure. not sure where to go, mostly being by herself. but, what else was there to do? at one point, she felt like sitting around and watching joan crawford movies, on netflix. but, damn netflix! they never had any of the movies jesse wanted to see on their playlist, at any given time. but, then again, those old black and white movies tended to bore the hell out of jesse; movies back then had way too much dialogue, that just seemed to titter off into melodrama. that, and jesse didn't have the sensibilities of people of 70 years ago, so, she'd probably would have grown bored and wanted to leave to get some fresh air, anyways.

hmm… i'm hungry… but what to eat?
tommy's? eww.

in-and-out…? no no… too overrated!
king taco…? too greasy.
pink's? as if that's any less greasy.
grr! went her stomach.

jesse now stepped out of her room, and, within that second of doing so, a girl popped up, and began walking directly in her direction: jesse got scared. oh my gosh, oh my gosh, you saw her, didn't you? said this young girl. and, her eyes! just, her eyes! this was what the creature from the black lagoon would get creeped out by, and want to run in terror in the other direction. um… who? jesse got stupid. and now preferred to stay that way. what do you mean, who? her! the girl shivered in speech at the end. i…? listen, i saw you, where she tends to show up, at the exact time, and… i saw you! and, you were talking to someone on your right, that wasn't there! she marveled. what was terrifying jesse the most right this moment, was the fact that she could tell, this girl had probably been standing outside her door, for maybe a couple of hours, just waiting for jesse to step out. she was a very pretty blond. dressed in white. with hot red lipstick. and, a little too hot for this morning hour. her face sorta reminded jesse of taylor swift. hiss! snarl! and jesse felt her first response to that being scratching this girl's eyes out. but, of course, didn't. seen marilyn…? i might have. all that jesse decided to give out.

it had been a good minute of silence, and, this girl had had her mouth open the entire time, smiling. jesse, really needed to exit this wacko scene. i… gotta go. no, no, no, wait? what? listen, my name is janine singleton. and, i'm here to honor you with a message. here! she then gave jesse a note. what's this? jesse asked. at 6pm, later today, just appear at the door on the note, okay? i can sense it. i can! if you saw marilyn monroe, then you were destined to join the girls. said janine. another girl with a j in her name. jesse knew what she was speaking of now, since sandy. but something told jesse this was more than just a bad idea. the janine girl now left. and then jesse realized something else as she looked at the note, the room number! it was room 209. she remembered it! out of all the names on the list jules had given her, there were also rooms specifically noted not to enter. i don't know what to do now! worried jesse.

jesse had decided to go for more 12-dollar ramen today. she had driven out. now, somewhere in la brea area, jewishtown. sitting at a way too hipstery ramen spot; mostly just ignoring all the hipster company around her, checking out this single,

white female, at a table, all to herself. i hate hipsters! jesse thought. but they kept looking over at her, pretending not to look. she knew she was committing a cardinal offense to their likes, committing social suicide: sitting alone.

but! privacy, assholes! give me some f-ing privacy! don't make me stab you all to death with these chopsticks at hand—grr!

wow, i really am an angry girl! thought jesse. never imagining how astute marilyn could be about all this; almost scary in a way, now she thought about it. jesse now looked out of the window at some jewish boys passing by; all dressed in that fashion: black on black on black! dressed in a style, even marilyn monroe would gasp by how ancient and old-worldy they seemed. looking like 19th century pallbearers at abraham lincoln's funeral. actually, more like the funeral of edgar allen poe, even. considering how macabre and morbid the vibes their attire gave. hmm… is that antisemitic? jesse thought. no matter.

jesse was about to get up and get out, but then, it hit her again. a ghost flew into her. one, she had no awareness of visibly, and hit her hard! bam! and jesse felt dizzy and her soul spiral into a horror. into an abyss. and now she felt terminal velocity spiraling into it. oh God! she said, as she sat back down, and felt like sitting down more. but she was already seated. she felt like crashing down on the ground and crashing further down, crashing and crashing straight to hell. and then she heard a sorrowful spirit scream and cry, in horrifying sadness and misery. jesse opened her eyes, and… she could now hear marilyn screaming in horror in this abyss.

aaaaaahhhhhhhhh!!!
jesse felt a panic. she felt to panic. she felt to scream and spasm and tear this ramen establishment to pieces, and with all the patrons hereof. scream! scream! shout! the madness shook her. excuse me, you okay? one of those manbun dudes asked. you're covered in sweat and…? he seemed scared just to see how scared jesse was. jesse got up! ran, almost. she was in her camaro now.

what the hell was that? she thought.

she almost felt like calling 9-1-1 and screaming and screaming at whoever picked up the phone. and continue doing so until she was dragged into a mental hospital.

no, no more mental hospitals! no more! she thought. oh, she was exhausted. then, a memory came to jesse, but this was no memory of hers: jesse imagined being in this old white house. and, her hearing this thud and screaming and laughing upstairs by a woman. there were other people in the house, and, they told jesse to be a good girl. jesse asked what was wrong with her mother. they said nothing was wrong. but then they dragged her mother into a mental hospital and…

no! no! no! those are not my memories! what the hell is going on here? she thought.

jesse was in her room now.
in bed.
simply, in bed.
and she simply wanted to be nowhere else.

she was up for nothing. really would like to just sleep, but, she felt way too restless to do so. jesse now glanced over to her bed tablecounter and just eyed pointlessly at her medications. back at the north hollywood pad, since jesse shared a room with judy, she would always keep her meds out of plain sight, locked away in a suitcase with a padlock. not that she felt ashamed, she just didn't want the girls there knowing details about her that they might try eventually to use against her. but, since she was alone here, the sole occupant of this room here at the marmont, there was a greater relief now enjoyed, having all the discreet details of her life placed out in the open. they were psych meds. jesse now began to remember her hellish time in memphis hospital. before able to get her meds just right, with her antidepressant and antipsychotic, she had to endure the "experimental phase." there was this one antipsychotic, jesse felt very much assured she was going to succeed killing herself, considering the effects it had: she'd rise out of bed all of a sudden, and began pacing up and down, up and down, the nightlit psych ward hallways, for hours and hours, hours and hours. and, having the most horrible thoughts her deranged mind had ever concocted.

"oh my God, oh my God!

if i get out, i gotta find a cop. pull his gun out when he's not looking. and shoot him in the leg! shoot him in the leg! that'll send me to prison. and, they'll lock me up for good then.

fuck!!!

not for life!
not for life!
i have to kill him to get that!!!

kill him!!! dead!!! dead!!!!"

the psych med made her thoroughly feel she was absolutely possessed; her hands would jump out, and dance around her as she continued pacing and pacing and pacing. and then that demon would begin to speak to her directly:

loo… waa… ahbaa… kaa!

she'll never until the end of her days forget that one heart wrenching moment: looking into the glass of the medication distribution counter while passing it while pacing, she saw herself in the reflection; seeing now this deranged ghost of a woman, in the reflection, which she didn't recognize anymore; it broke her heart at that very moment, and jesse began to cry, cry and cry.

raa…. paa… maa… ozz! then spoke the demon in her ear. what? what? thought jesse.

raa paa maa ozz
raa paat ma oz
ri paat ma oz
rip aat ma oyz
rip oot my eyz
rip oot my eyez
rip out my eyes
rip out my eyes
rip out my eyes!

what do you mean by that? no, i don't want to rip out my eyes!
no!
no!

no!
no!
noooooooooo!!!
then jesse felt her hands jump out and rampage towards her eyes. her green eyes. her evil green eyes. they no longer cared what jesse wanted or didn't want; they were going to rip them out, and jesse just had to accept it. once jesse felt her nails clawing into her sockets, and felt the pain, she screamed like no one at that hospital had ever screamed before.

it was a scream that could wake the dead.

at least three muscles at the ward instantaneously jumped on her and grabbed her and grabbed her hands and tore them away from her eyes. her eyes were bleeding as if jesse had cried crimson tears of blood. for a good three days straight, jesse was then tied up in the quiet room; having a one-on-one with a muscle, that sat watching her all three days and nights straight (not the same guy, throughout, three of them to be exact, taking shifts watching her), making sure she didn't get the chance to free her hands and try ripping her eyes out again.

wait, have i taken my meds today? she thought. staring at her meds. in bed. no longer in memphis. here in hollywood. with a new chance at life. meds? thought she. and now decided to take them.

an hour later….
in bed, she glared at her meds again. and, again she thought: wait, did i already take them? did i? i don't know if i'm remembering having done so today, or, from yesterday. since memphis, jesse's memory just wasn't the same anymore. before, the world seemed to have much more vibrance and semblance. now, everything just felt abandoned; all the buildings around jesse felt uninhabited; objects such as cars, tvs, smartphones, pots and pans and alarm clocks, no longer had purpose or use; even people seemed soulless and adrift in the nothingness, as they hurried from one place to another, with no sense of purpose, as nothing they did seemed to matter; the world and the people in it all felt unconnected from each other. the doctors at memphis thought it had something to do with the meds, but jesse understood, this wasn't a biological nor chemical problem, this was a spiritual one; her memory was fading into nothingness, because her world was fading away the same way; nothing in life no longer seemed worth remembering. there were only

two paths that stood out in her mind, both long stretches of highway, like driving across west texas.

one: her dancing and finding heaven.
the other: dealing with the twins and jesse's reckoning for her sins in hell.

unfortunately, though, when jesse had come to this fork in the road of life, there were no signs telling her which path would lead to which. or, maybe, there were signs? but jesse didn't remember anymore which route she chose to take, since her memory couldn't be trusted anymore. and i can't even trust my damn self, anymore! and even though, hell or heaven, logically, the choice might seem obvious to any; that was the problem with meaninglessness, being a victim to such, meant that neither good things nor bad things made any difference from one another.

logically it might
logically it might!
but… when the heart isn't in the right place, the mind definitely won't be.

and jesse's heart was no longer in the right place.

logic… needs a sense of bearing. take dr. spock's logic from star trek. in it, all that is considered logical, is based on the lifelong goal of "living long and prospering." but, what if, that ideal was no more? and living long and prospering mattered no more. and even decay and destruction began to seem like worthy alternatives? "how can that be?" one might ask.

but… when all has been rendered meaningless… it can become that way.

heaven or hell, hell or heaven?
which road to choose, which?
and now, on the road she had chosen, on that long stretch of flat, empty texas desert, and jesse driving through the long haul, unsure where she'd end up when she had finally reached her final destination. but, now, there seemed to be a third path: that sprite. that sprite that had come to jesse, once, which was the premature manifestation of marilyn monroe, had now come back into her life again. blown in by the wind coming from unbeknownst where from leading to an unbeknownst

where to. it was at least another option; an alternative route out of this linear road she was on. she was feeling the sprite and its energy; it was giving her life and worth and something worthy to remember…

giving her meaning… in all the meaninglessness.

making jesse feel alive, just as she once did with the experience she had had at 14 years of age. this was something, and it felt like something more than what that angel brought, considering how longer ago that was and felt; for jesse, so long ago, that, it might as well have never happened. jesse now had to go to that room that janine girl had invited her to. she had to! at least for the chance of finding something different, jesse would maybe want. and no longer deal with this forced commitment to a road she was on, on demand, with her to stick with to the end. a path to stay faithful to. stay loyal to. but, what good is loyalty or faith, if there isn't any choice allowed to be made to commit to it willingly? jesse wanted out. and wanted out, now. she didn't know and didn't want to know where this would lead to, and what meaning it would eventually bring further down the road. now! meaning now! was her will. she had always had trust issues. always had. which was probably the source of where a lot of her anger came from to begin with. and, jesse was angry at God. she was angry. what had she done to deserve all this? and after all that was promised? she could never forget how terrifying it felt at that moment, when she almost ripped her own eyes out, something so unthinkable and so unimaginable.

and for what?

but… why did i do it?
why, oh, why?
is that why all this has been allowed to happen to me? jesse then realized, how she wasn't exactly pleased with what God's will was for her, since, it also meant dealing with a sin, that was so over her head, she felt no reason to feel responsible of what had been committed. as if, she never did such a thing. how could she do such a thing? she would—never! impossible! but… no… it did happen. jesse didn't know why she did it.

why?
why?

why?
why?
why?

why she turned on billy and jimmy while they were brutalizing each other at that faithful moment. why she took out that 1911 of billy's, which she had snuck away from the boys. and why, why, why, why… she then chose to shoot both boys in the head.

no, i did not! i did not do—such a thing! i could never… oh my God! i did, didn't i?

the museum! that was all that made sense to her when it came to her motives; that reoccurring dream of that museum of jezebel singer's life. but how so, jesse still didn't quite know.

roo… daaa… haa… nee… k! seee ! neee! see x! went the demon.

shut up! jesse screamed.
in her bed.
terrified beyond hope if it was to start again.

i'm a murderer… that's all there is to it.

jesse admitted to herself. i should be in prison right now for what i did. but jesse got lucky; she got off the hook. her dad's sister, being as religious for all that law and order stuff, as she was about her sunday practices, she immediately became paranoid over things like these when the boys' bodies were discovered. and, luckily, she had a friend in the npd, which she telephoned, told this person the alibi of how her niece was with her of the day of the shooting. and, that was that. she was never seen going to nor coming from the trailer the boys lived in, since it was so far out in the sticks. the investigation into the deaths were ruled as a homicide/suicide. from the scene, it was very obvious to see the boys had gotten into a skirmish with one another. therefore, one must have led to shooting his brother. then shooting himself, over grief of what he had done. and, with that, jesse never needed to confront her crimes when it came to the justice system. but, maybe the justice system here on earth. but not where God stood in all this before

the white throne.

maybe that long drive through west texas, for jesse, never had a fork in the road?

maybe, both roads would have led to the same final destination?

jesse now thought about the story jules had spoken of, not the horrible one with his daughter, but that of penelope felix, and the ghost mother she had had. she liked that story. jesse really, truthfully, had no friends now. nobody. which was all making her wishful of something, something of kinship, and something of the supernatural sense.

jesse was now out, it was around 6pm, she was going to answer that invitation, just to see where it would lead her. just to see, for now, and nothing else. now, at the door, door to room 209. jesse knocked. door opened. hi, jezebel, come in. said janine, as her creepy smile had to now be taken as something welcoming to jesse. it had to. she was now here, so, what else could she do? once entering the room, it was immediate to jess. oh no, what am i doing, look at this! she said to herself in her own head. it was so immediate for her to see what this was, what the marilyn girls were.

and… yup… they were a cult!

hi.
hi.
hi.

greeted three separate girls, all three all seeming in sync and well-choregraphed to do so, one right after another after another. all three in white. all three blonde. and all three with that oblivious stare and soul chomping smiles. this was a damn cult! a kooky cult. jesse felt like she had stepped into an episode of scooby doo, but how else would it have been fashioned, seeing who these girls minion-ed themselves after? jesse entered, and… wow! there was a ton of girls here, all pretty, all blonde, all in white dresses and all with the same smile. it was like the clone factory next door had shut down and had opened up all the cages, allowing all the test subjects free into the hollywood wilds; they were copies of a copy, but not one of them seemed to stick out of the bunch as the original. these were definitely

the girls of marilyn. these were the girls from brazil. but, unfortunately, even with all of the marilyn girls present, marilyn prime, didn't seem to be anywhere in sight. she wasn't here, and they were. and now, jesse was the only brunette head of the bunch, questioning herself, just what exactly she expected to get from all this? hi, so, you're the new girl. a marilyn clone said to her. she then beamed at jesse hairstyle and hair color of choice, and was now silently judging jesse, in a manner that was yet to be made apparent. yeah… wow! there's a lot of girls here. jesse noted. while taking another gander of the herd. yeah, there is! said and smiled the marilyn clone. jesse looked into her eyes, and no one seemed to be at home up there; the light in the attic was turned on, and it could be seen from the outside, by the outside window; question now was: who was up there to switch it in the on position? wow, y'all really look like her. jesse noted (as her accent slipped out a bit for the first time in a while). but also, haphazardly trying to express her bewilderment on why, the reasoning why, for all this. and, please, with no kooky responses! oh, well… yeah! she's our inspiration in life. i mean, can i be boldly honest? the clone asked. sure, sure… why not? jesse went. since she was sensing something much more explanatory to go with all this. if you're here, that means you saw, her, at the bar, at the exact hour and day you were meant to see her, am i correct? she asked, seeming more reasonable, but, the buggy eyes and mouth flapping like it had a broken hinge, not making it seem too likely.

umm… yes! jesse acknowledged. at first wondering if she should or shouldn't. well, there you go! then you were chosen to be here. you were predestined. she went on to say.

but, why this? jesse now asked.
what do you mean?
i mean… i'm sorry, i don't want to pry but…?

oh, i get it! she said. yet, jesse wasn't sure if she was mentally capable of doing such. it didn't start out this way. most of us, like you, saw her, met her, talked to her, and… our lives just couldn't go back to the way they were before. she explained. jesse was now enthralled to hear more. i mean, we didn't all start off blonde and dressing like her. good. said jesse. as part of her began wondering if just next door, there was an elvis' boys meeting taking place. the chateau marmont's vibes from the outside were weird enough, jesse didn't need these types of details, to understand just how much the inside could vastly surpass on

the wacko scale.

but, after time, all of us who had met her, wanting to see her again, it eventually led to this. a bunch of us would sit and wait for her exactly when and where we had first met her. and, seeing how we were all on the same page, with marilyn being a lifelong inspiration and role model for us, eventually, there were so many of us waiting around, we decided, to rent this room every friday, and have this! the clone then displayed the room with her left hand, like the female presenters you'd find on gameshows. so, what do y'all… you all… all you guys do here? jesse asked. crap, why is my accent slipping this bad? but, then jesse got the sense, as to why that might be. the girl jesse was standing with then got silent.

sorry, is that asking too much?
no, no, no. it's just that… well…? she now seemed distraught. i mean, here's the thing… just about all of us have seen her once. just once. but, never again. the marilyn clone explained.

oh!
and this didn't sit well with jesse, as her heart sank. and now she didn't feel so polarized by everyone here. do you see that girl over there? this marilyn person asked, and pointed at one wearing what looked to be a transfigured white robe, beads around her head, seeming very ancient world-ish. seeming like one out of something celtic in nature: a druid? yes. jesse responded, as she eyed her. well, that's gertrud, she's a medium. she's sorta our window to the world of the dead, and, the window to marilyn now. so, she speaks to spirits? jesse asked. yes. the girl answered jesse. jesse now felt a little more familiarized with the marilyn clone present, and, felt it would be rude to continue thinking of her in that way, and tried being formal: oh, what's your name? jesse asked. oh, bianca. bianca answered. then did a bit of a curtsy. cute, and not as kooky and offbeat as jesse felt like she should be taking it. can i… sit with you… through all this? jesse asked. jesse now needed something that felt normal around her, and bianca seemed to be the only one to be that here. oh, wouldn't you want to sit with janine, she's the one that…? but then jesse made a face. and, bianca, seemed to understand. yeah… janine? she's nice, really nice, really pretty, but, tends to have that "creature from the black lagoon" quality, which, she isn't aware of, but, it can be off-putting. bianca said. and that was enough for jesse to know, she needed to hold onto bianca's arm, and hold on, tight, if she was to survive all this. yeah, i still like to

know more, why… this? why make yourself up to look like her? jesse asked. jesse just felt most peaceful when reasoning was present. so, she now asked to see if she could get it. well, it's like this, i know from an outsider looking in, it's weird. but, this has been going on for two years now. and, well, after a period of time, and, after a time of not seeing her, some of us felt we needed to show her, maybe, how much we cared. bianca explained. okay. jesse needed more context. i mean, we all love her, if we didn't, we wouldn't do all this.

i mean, we're not a… cult, or something.
good. jesse exclaimed.

bianca noticed, and accepted how it really did seem that way to jesse. we just love her. we want to know her. we want to see her again. we want her in our lives. a lot of us are pretty much… lost girls. i guess you can say.

so, one of us after a while decided, maybe, we needed to show how much devotion we had for her. so, one of us dyed her hair like hers, and did her hair like hers. of course, you know how catty and competitive girls can get. one of us then had to take it further, and dress like her. then, talk and walk like her. then, claudia over there, even decided to get… plastic surgery. bianca whispered the last part; this was a secret. bianca then pointed at her own nose and chin, and finally, her boobs, letting jesse know all the nip/tuck secrets. wow… that's… that's kinda…? the word jesse was now thinking being "sad," but chose not to say it. after a while, it was… well… yeah! what you see now before you. bianca finished explaining. jesse now didn't know how to feel about all this; all this, was a bit, mixed. but she was here, now, so she might as well see what came next.

oh, it's starting, you can sit here with me on the couch.
what's… what's gonna happen?
you'll see. bianca whispered.

22. savannah woman

not all of the time, that jesse had the honor of the brother's presence, had been so dreary and deranged. when it came to the first few months of jesse's and billy's relations, there were times of mystery and mysticism. and a bit of magic. jesse was really just a homebody girl. and, what that meant was, everywhere she looked, all she saw were doors, that were closed to her. besides the doors leading home. the world on the outside was a walled off place to her, keeping her out of what wonders, even terrors, that laid beyond. like the times she was very small, at her mother's hand, walking the residential streets of nashville's berry hill, looking into the windows of the houses she passed; wanting so dearly to find that reindeer, that had been kidnapped and held captive. since then, jesse always had an affinity of what lay beyond all those doors, that were closed to her; she didn't want to live a life on a street with nothing but people's doors closed to her; she wanted in, to see, and see who lived there, what they were like, and… to love, really. when it came to the first few months of jesse's time with billy, it was as if, all those doors that used to be closed to her, were finally opened. or, at least all the doors closed to her. but not billy and jimmy. and, she was correct to wonder just what wonders laid beyond, what she could see with her homebody eyes. she was correct. after a week or so of just texting and talking on the phone, they finally had their first date; billy didn't do what the other boys might do: take her to a movie, or a restaurant, make her walk the same downtown nashville streets, filled with doors that were closed to her, as she had all her life dealt with growing up and being raised there. the two were no homebody boys; they were boys on the outside; outside, living in the real world; outside the box, which jesse had spent her entire life living in. first date, it wasn't to somewhere all homebody people would go, since, they're cowardly people, really; anxious people, living all pampered and placated within a society that kept them cowardly, anxious and pampered and placated. and well mannered. no. "jesse, ever been to arizona?" billy had asked. "what?" jesse responded. "arizona." the only cities which jesse had visited up to that point, were all the local stateside cities and towns in tennessee. that, and that one time she had gone to florida with her parents; traveling wasn't a thing in her family's household; something her parents did a lot of back in their hippy days, which they absolutely no longer felt fond of reliving; her parents weren't really much fond of traveling, which now meant, jesse really wasn't, either. at least at that point in her life. "wait, you want us to go to arizona, what's in arizona?" jesse had asked. billy then looked into her eyes, as jesse looked into his otherworldly cataracted and misty ones, that both seemed to be from a place of fright and frolic

and adventure, as he said….

“an open door… to another universe.”

jesse was captivated. as she got dreamy-eyed. at that moment, she had found her reindeer. and the reindeer had spoken to her, asked her to hop onto its back, and to take her away to another place. another place. another place. “but, i got a job, i can’t take any time—,” “jesse, you work in a gap store, part-time, making minimum wage, dealing with co-workers, you can’t seem to stop complaining about, being a bunch of plastics, from that mean girls movie… so, are you really choosing that, in comparison to this?” billy was a mastermind at knowing how to frame a sentence, perfectly, to serve his point. perfectly! bold, direct, confident, and going right for the throat. “can i at least call and let them—.” “no,” billy forwarded, and gave jesse his signature bad boy smile. which, jesse now decided to borrow. “call them and lie that i’m sick and…?” “no… plus, jesse, you’re terrible at lying, from what i gather, so, what’s the point?” billy answered, holding onto that sprite that made him glow how he did inside. jesse now thought, and, now knew how she’d get a “yes” from him, “call them, let them know, i’m ditching time off work to drive out to arizona with my boyfriend, and that i’d like to still get paid for the abrupt time off. and if they don’t like it, they can go… fuck themselves.” billy now smiled at jesse, much more brilliantly, as the mist behind his eyes began to part way, and give jesse a true window into the boy’s soul. “that’s my girl.” billy answered. smiled even more brilliantly. and… wow! jesse was now tripping, tripping, tripping, head over heels, and it seemed as if she’d been holding her breath out for all the wrong angels, when this angel before her, was already here for her, right here and right now, and wasn’t the type that would immediately abandon her, and disappear as he had appeared.

although, the drive wasn’t an easy one for jesse, since she had never driven so blindly, this far out into the world. on the i10, once passed san antonio, texas, headed towards el paso, with all its flat desert, all 500 aught miles or so, there was a side of jesse, that awoke, which she didn’t like; an unconscious, that became conscious, and with all that flat desert with all its emptiness, which made jesse go into a panic. “i think you got agoraphobia.” billy diagnosed. “what… what…?” “you’re afraid of too much openness, that’s why you’re getting this way, just close your eyes, and don’t look at it, we’ll get through this, don’t worry.” jimmy this time answered. since the boys were so inseparable, jimmy had to tag along for the ride.

but, jimmy knew immediately whenever jesse and billy needed "just us" time. and, he'd wander away, and be back whenever he felt the "just us" time had run its course. which he was so well aware and well timed about it, too. jesse had acknowledged. as if the boys were linked in some ways. interlocked. and, intertwined. and with more than just between themselves. jesse had then closed her eyes, all 500 miles of that empty desert, but the void she felt within herself and saw within her eyelids, made her feel like she had been shot out into space. and with the vast vacant void she saw behind those lids, it wasn't helping much with dealing with her phobia. so, all jesse saw she could do then was to talk a lot, to keep her mind off falling too deeply into that abyss of dire delirium. "so, you two been doing this practically all your lives?" jesse asked, now wanting to hear some stories the boys would have to offer. "yeah, since we ditched dear old pops, this has been it."

"why, why did you leave home?" jesse asked.

there was a moment, jesse felt, as the boys seemed to want to avoid that question, that story, that answer. but, after a spell, billy now seemed to want to talk about it, at least a little:

"pops, he had… a lot of demons, a lot!
one, specifically, we saw a lot of.

and, after some time, it was like that's all there was to him. he was already a shell of a person, and his demons were all that were left of him." "what type of demons?" jesse asked, knowing this had to be a difficult subject matter; nobody just talks about the "horned people," unless they really want to expose to the world who they really are. "demons, he got from 'nam, he brought home from 'nam, and since our mother passed away, were all that were left of him, trying to raise us." "what were they like?" "it's… hard to explain." "why?" "because, demons just aren't the direct types. they're there, but, they never really want you to know much about them, and what their agendas are for being around. not even our pop knew or understood much about them. but what we had to deal with was the man, every time, he got under their influence.

once the Devil reared its ugly head.

and it was then, and only then, we saw the truth of that side of our pops coming out. an evil that had a foothold within the man, unbeknownst to him, and everyone else around. and, you can spend your entire life getting to know someone. and, a father and a mother, are the sort of people you'd think you'd know all about. but… it's like this… all we knew of our pops was what we saw of him after the war, and we were never there in life, to see what he went through, to get them. and, he never talked about them, and… he never needed to." up to this point in life, "demons," weren't things jesse had grown all that familiar with. beside the angel that had graced her, that was all the exposure she had ever had to those that came from that other place—that other place—beyond all doors. which were all locked away. and, sometimes like a door to an attic, where what lay beyond, might not be something seen as beautiful and good, but ugly and wicked.

"you believe in that stuff?" jesse had asked.
"of course, we do!" billy had answered.

"so, how was life as runaways?" jesse asked.
"terrifying, extremely terrifying." billy disclosed, almost jokingly.
and that answer gave jesse the sense, their stories were all but real.

"you know how they say, 'better the demons you know than the demons you don't,' well, everywhere we went, we saw examples of that. up until that point, all we knew, were the demons, our pops had with him. we didn't know of any out in the world, just yet. but, out in the world, beyond our horizons, seeing that side, changed us. now in life, it's almost like a dream. i mean, we were still kids, not even teenagers, when we ran. best to explain it, our memory of those days, are like the memories of wolves. we were no longer human. we were now wild animals, out in the wilds, running from place to place. looking for food and scraps. whatever bad we did, we did. when you're an animal, there's no longer any sense of right and wrong, since you're just trying to survive one day leading to the next. there's not much understanding of what's going on, either. we've stolen. we've fought. we've… we've… done everything." didn't seem as if billy wanted to lay down all his cards, just yet. maybe, some sins were best left between him and his Maker.

"ever read the book, blood meridian, by cormac mccarty?" jimmy now asked jesse. "no." "well, you should, that book, i honestly think, does a good job

explaining how that type of lifestyle is like." jimmy concluded, and went back to silent contemplation. "yeah, your understanding of that, is that of wolves. it's cold. it's a bit warmer now. then it's freezing cold. it's the dead of night. you're at a place that's familiar, now not. you come across another animal, then… blood. lots of blood! and, you don't exactly know if it's yours or theirs. no matter. just move on. keep moving on! keep…!" but then billy realized, he was beginning to scare jesse, exposing her to more than it was preferable. "i'll tell you more tamed stories. more to do with arizona." "what's in arizona?" jesse asked, now with a scarf she had tied over her eyes around her head, to keep from peeping out into the open vastness all around. "interesting spirits." billy all but gave out. "some really bad ones, but, ones that don't got nothing on us two, so, you won't have to worry about them, when we're there. he, he." and it was at this point that jesse began to grow unsure and uneasy of the idea of this whole road trip to begin with. maybe, this was a door to a universe, better left closed?

"is it about suzanna?" jimmy asked billy. "yup." billy answered. "who's suzanna?" jesse now asked. then, at the back seat of this '08 ford mustang, with outdated utah license plates, which jesse really had no idea when and how the boys came to acquire (probably better if she didn't)! there, sitting, jesse felt an object bounce off her thighs, one that billy must have tossed. jesse picked it up: it was metallic, long, and big. big! really, really, really big! also, very, very heavy for its size. it was a knife sheath in a buckskin scabbard. and from the size, a bowie knife. actually, even bigger than that. this object, jesse felt, could make a machete even feel inadequate. actually, it—would—make one feel that way! "what the hell… this thing is absolutely humongous!" jesse said. "that's what she said," billy joked. ha, ha, cheap shot! but oh so trite. "wait a minute… suzanna is a knife, you boys name your knives?" jesse gasped and tried to get fresh with the boys. the story behind this now didn't feel as haunting as somewhat comical. "we didn't name it, our pops did. or, our grandpa did when he bought it first from savannah, georgia. this ol' gal has been in our family for three generations. it's a family heirloom, i guess." "really." said jesse.

"yup, grandpa mars… i mean… lane."

there was a moment had with that. a moment of uncertainty. "i guess, suzanna used to have a twin sis' as well." billy told. "what, a twin?" jesse gasped. "yes, that knife is lost now." "what was the name of that knife?" jesse asked. but it seemed

like the boys didn't know. "but, for our pops, it was a tried and true tested steel he went and brought back with from 'nam, his beloved rambo knife, and suzanna has a bunch of confirmed kills. a boatload. don't ask for a story behind those, we don't even know. he, he!" billy told and laughed. "so, do i have anything to worry about with her?" jesse asked, jokingly. the boys didn't seem to follow. "i mean, am i in for some steep competition with her? she might not want to share you two with me, just asking?" jesse went on. but, the two were now silent and unresponsive. jesse giggled again, entertaining that thought, but then….

it all didn't feel so comical.

and then, a ghost passed through jesse, a devil she had never been truly acquainted to before. the radio station was picking up a tune, an old tune, off an old tune playing radio station. the doors 'riders on the storm' and the details of the lyrics in the song ran a cold wraith through jesse, and now, details began making the spirits around her clear of something:

> there's a killer on the road
> his brain is squirmin' like a toad
> take a long holiday
> let your children play
> if you give this man a ride, sweet family will die
> killer on the road

maybe… she shouldn't have come with these two? they were still strangers to her and…! "jesse, don't get scared!" "what?" jesse gasped, as she realized the boys also had felt that malevolent spirit. billy then turned the radio off immediately. "don't get scared, we sensed that, too. we are not that! not! not!" "what?" jesse's voice was trembling and about to implode on itself. the malevolent spirit which jesse now sensed, first off, as a sprite, a dark sprite, which identity and details had yet to be beknownst to her. yet, with no true form, it was beginning to shape itself and all that it detailed. "jesse, listen to my voice!" "no!" she shouted, as she tried to shut her eyes. but they were already shut. "listen to my voice, don't listen to that spirit, that just passed, don't try to make sense of what it's trying to tell you." "what the hell are you…?" but then she heard it:

daa vaa taa raap ya ah ka ya!

“what the hell said that?” jesse panicked.
“don’t listen to it, don’t! close your ears, close them.”
“no, i gotta know what it—”
daa vaa taa raap ya ah ka ya!
thaa waa taa raap ya an ka ya!
thaay waan taa raap ya an kal ya!
thay waant taa raape ya an kall ya!
“what????”
“jesse, close them, please!” billy now begged. and jesse now did; she shut her ears… and after a moment, the spirit left. and it left her and left with it the words it had to bring.

23. throwing shade

this is the cursed tale of he.
and the cursed tale of she.
forever searching for one another in an endless world of desert and sea.

jesse remembered, she remembered, now, standing at the end of santa monica pier. sometime around 3am in the morning, she now needed a breather of some of this fresh sea breeze air after the night she had had; she needed it after all the dampness and depression, and disappointment, she ended up feeling after leaving room 209. that place of that kooky cult. bianca saying it wasn't that. but, it was! so many pretty, pretty, girls there… yet, so, so, very, very sad. back when she was younger, jesse's aunt had practically dragged her to church over 1,000 times, as jesse would practically kick and scream about it. this was the problem for her: she didn't like the idea of the invisible! when it came to the other side, jesse didn't want what she had seen from the marilyn girls, or what she had seen with all those churchgoers; jesse remembered how her aunt would mingle with those groups, and force introductions, onto jesse, over people she really didn't care much about. sad. sad and lonely people. which didn't exactly help jesse deal with her own feelings of such. like room 209, and like her aunt's church, both parties were parties for an invisible host. an invisible guest. which they were all there to worship. jesse didn't like the idea of the invisible; if she was to speak to someone, she wanted that someone to speak back. hence why, seeing the ghost of marilyn monroe, had now come to mean a lot to her; millions and millions of women in the world, and, marilyn had appeared to jesse… and also to all those young and dumb things of room 209 (of course). so, when jesse saw how the girls were practically worshipping marilyn, like some feminist Jesus, she got the sense of what to make of it. and, after the third hour of sitting there, listening to that medium try to desperately call to have the spirit of marilyn monroe materialize, went unanswered, jesse had had enough. truthfully, they were girls, much like jesse; pretty girls, feeling very alone in the world, needing something, someone, there, in their lives, to give them guidance. "i now call upon the spirit world, the world beyond all worlds, hear us, marilyn, hear us, we are your children! hear us, dear marilyn, come to us. come and show yourself to us, and guide us in these harvey weinstein times, how to better deal with a world at large, that hates us, just for being pretty." that kookyheaded medium, gertrud, had incanted. "yes, yes, hear us." the rest of the marilyn girls followed up. three hours! three long and painstaking hours, jesse had to deal with that. and then a whole lot of self-pity

that got the entire room pouring their salty tears out. “we love you marilyn, we need you marilyn! please, please come to us again. and illuminate our paths, to show us how to best live our lives to your pleasing!” that sillyface gertrud continued. then sobbed with the rest of her sillyface marilyn crowd. but jesse, deep down, understood them. marilyn monroe! just like them, she was a pretty girl, all alone in the world. but, she had something the girls of room 209 were desperately, desperately seeking: confirmation of their own existence! unlike the girls of 209, marilyn was someone made! immortalized. and would be remembered forever. in life, marilyn knew what it was like to be one of them; she lived her life, did what she did, survived all the wolves and betrayers, and doing so, had become a legend. and especially, not to forget, did it back when it was way, way, way much more harder, for a pretty woman to do so in a city like this: 50s hollywood, ugh! kinda like that one tex avery cartoon about little red riding hood, dealing with the 50s hollywood wolves in producers’ and execs’ clothing. howl! forget today’s feminist celebrity heroines, she could definitely make tay tay and even angelina jolie seem like bratty kindergardeners, with ms. monroe, their kindergarden teacher, in comparison. there was a lot her spirit could have taught the marilyn girls. a lot! especially here in today’s hollywood. not easy to be a pretty young thing, still naïve, and a little unsure of what to make of a city like this. her experiences and sharing of such experiences on how to deal with all that to the marilyn girls, would have been worth its weight in gold. and, if not just that, just her spirit, just to be close to it, be near it, still, would have been enough. when a light shines brightly and brilliantly, a moth falls in love, and feels willing to draw near to it, at all cost; throwing its own mortal life at it, just to escape the darkness all around, and feel alive again. but, once the light goes out, where does the moth then go? no one seems to know… and no one seems to… care.

that’s the thing about pretty, pretty girls, most just don’t seem to get. truth is, it really is one of the saddest and loneliest experiences. if not thee saddest and loneliest. and the only requirement is to be beautiful… and absolutely despised for it! sure, many might think that beauty would create the opposite reaction. beauty = love. while. ugly = hate. so, therefore, pretty girls should all but receive nothing but endless, endless love… in a perfect world! maybe? but, this world, jesse’s world, was not a perfect world. in this world, this wicked wicked world, beauty was valued like everything else: a finite commodity. and like any form of commodity, consumption was the end result. soulless consumption. therefore beauty, was seen as another form of wealth; something that can be valued

numerically with a price tag.

are rich people majorly loved by society for their riches?
no, they're not, are they?
they're majorly despised.
coveted! the key word being.
so are people that have physical riches.
despised!
and sought after… to be plundered of such.

if anything, ugliness had a way of gaining more admiration through pity, than beauty did by its own standards.

no one knows what it's like to be the bad girl, the sad girl, behind pretty green eyes. jesse did, though. since, that was just her lot!

this is the cursed tale of he.
and the cursed tale of she.
forever searching for one another in an endless world of desert and sea.

i will say, billy, it would have been a beautiful story, if you ever had gotten the chance to fully realize it, and had the chance to finish writing it. jesse thought. but, then, of course, there was the other half of it. jesse now remembered that part, her part, the part billy entrusted her with, with the story he told her in the arizona desert. no, i don't want to think about that right now. she then felt. jesse then took another panoramic viewing out towards the water, and felt it was enough. she wasn't planning to wait out here…

until the fish king spirit of the sea…

finally made itself known to jesse, to let her know, what the riddle of the story happened to be. no, not now. not tonight. jesse felt she had already done enough standing here and entertaining those spirits, billy had introduced her to in the desert. right now, she had other plans.

it was now 6:30am saturday morning. jesse sat at the same bar of the chateau marmont, as she had before; sitting there, not wearing any of the grungy wear

she was in last. actually, in a cute blue dress. just cute and simple. jesse was now kicking herself. what am i doing here, what am i expecting? she felt. she then checked on her makeup, firecracker red wasn't really the lipstick of her choice, but it did still look cute on her. so…? she's not coming. it's supposed to happen on a friday morning, not saturday. she kicked herself, again. but jesse chose to wait another thirty minutes. just to see. just that!

she didn't come. jesse now left.

now, 6:30 on a sunday morning.
now, on a monday.
then, a tuesday.
thursday.

and now a friday.
6:05am.
jesse sat at the bar, kicking herself even more. this time she had chosen to get a white dress. she had gone out to beverly hills, and… it was so nice of jules rosenberg for what he had done: renting a room for however long in an indefinite amount of time at the chateau marmont, as he had done. having obviously noted the difficulties of a working-class girl like jesse, and her necessity for money; necessity for a job that paid her well enough to survive in a city like this. now that she was in the process of being "discovered," craigslist and trying to route shooting gigs, just didn't feel like an option, she had the will and drive to dedicate herself to, since she had had her fair share of the so-so to "run like hell" experiences in getting them. jesse felt done. jesse was now retired of that life. so nice and kind of jules, renting a place for her, and getting her an envelope sent to her room, that had a credit card entrusted to her disposal, with a 10 grand spending limit. so, beverly hills rodeo drive on a wednesday morning—it was! white wasn't really jesse's color of taste in dresses; she saw it more as a default color, you would then choose to have color added. but the dress wasn't for her. it was for her hopes of seeing if lightning could strike twice, on a second friday 6:30am morning.

jesse, they told you—they told you specifically—that is just not how she works. jesse scolded herself. damn you for spending 2grand on a single dress. a single stupid white dress, that isn't even in your style. she continued to scold.

now, 6:24am.
jesse felt about as red-hot poker mad at herself, as she felt chillingly desperate.

they told you! they did. why do you think so many of them were doing all that in that room? and now, you're becoming as desperate as they were? a white dress, really, jess? you actually went ahead and bought it? there was also a moment jesse had passed by a hair salon, had taken a look inside, and, in the front window glass reflection, had taken a concerned look at her raven black hair. and, wondered if a blonde hairdo could also work on her. but, she would do it for herself. not marilyn, no! herself! and not for the girls of room 209. herself! because, she wanted to. she had never gone blonde. so, why not give it a try?

why not…?
why…?

!!!

shut up!
shut it, jesse, who the hell do you think you're kidding, you stupid, stupid girl? jesse then felt like bashing her head into the reflection, in the glass of this rodeo drive beauty boutique. that. or throw a brick through it. bash it! demolish it! she craved to see glass shattering and shattering hard! but, not exactly a good idea, considering the part of town she was at. nope! she just kicked herself in the head, and walked off. stomped away. stormed out! and, with no more window-shopping quick second glances; no more accidentally getting a glimpse of herself in the reflection, for she'd be damned to take a doubletake of herself, with her hair imagined taylor swift blonde. ugh!

it was now 6:42am.
and… as expected.

the fickle hearted bitch wasn't coming.

another two hours she waited there. hoping. just hoping! but then the bartender finally got the nerve to speak: never happens twice. trust me! never does. he wasn't even looking at her; head turned away restocking the beer cabinet with miller

lights. a single sad and sorrowful yelp escaped and flew out of the poor girls' lips. and then jesse ran out of the bar, before fearing tears would be next.

as for the rest of her friday morning, and, most of the day, until later that night, jesse just sat around in her suite. and… spent it watching a whole lot of joan crawford movies. practically all of them she could find on the internet.

dignity!
dignity, i say!
that's what's missing in the world today. especially in women.

not since that tramp made her debut in the film world, and infested it with her floozy, frolicky, ficklehearted antics! dignity! if i make it really big, i'll be the one to bring it—back! i'll show the world. i'll show 'em! can't expect a simpleton like tay tay to do it. that girl wouldn't know what dignity was, if it was the name of the goose, that crawled up her ass—and laid a golden egg! jesse rambled on in her thoughts. she had bought a carton of marlboro reds. now, sitting there in the consolidated smoke, and whispering shadows, simply chain-smoking away the afternoon hours; holding her cigarettes, just as ms. crawford would in her old black and whites.

"how many men have you forgotten?" said the male love interest.
"as many women as you've remembered." said joan's character.

oh, wow, so melodramatic! but, why do i now love it so? it wasn't until jesse got to the movie mommie dearest (not one starring joan, but, about her), that jesse began questioning her new sense of loyalty to this new idol of worship.

oh, great! she was a psycho lady! just what i need right now. jesse then decided to leave this new infatuation of hers right there, and, maybe never again pick it up.

it was around 5pm now. jesse was aching with boredom and restlessness. aching all over. especially on her tush, for having sat so long in this monotone in color and vibes room; such an unlively and unconscious room, that gave the sense that jesse was stuck in a desolate place, stuck in time. and all was still in a nightmarish aspect, that of a hell where progression of time didn't exist, and jesse along with it; jesse could be stuck sitting there for a million years, and nothing would change,

nothing would change at all. all felt like an 80s midnight special on hbo. with tons of static. tons. and demons manifesting in all the white and black lines.

come 6pm, she knew what she needed to do: she was going back to room 209. but not to partake another stale and kooky night with a bunch of silly, young women, pretending to speak in sermons, and conduct worship, as some class of kindergarteners would, pretending to do shakespeare in the park. no! but, as a sign of rebelliousness towards everything marilyn monroe had come to represent for jesse, in the course of the last week. she was going there to snag bianca out of the mouth of that minnie mouse leviathan, before she lost her soul in the belly of that beast. jesse found herself liking bianca, since, like jesse, she had a good sense about her, and an understanding of deadpan humor. which meant a good prospect for friendship material for jess.

jess was now in room 209, with the marilyn girls, her second week attending. and, the girls were right now just mingling:

ugh! i absolutely hate that joan crawford woman. did you know, she once tried to pretend to be a friend to marilyn. but, later, when marilyn was attending the oscars, joan went to the tabloids, and bitch be throwing shade on our baby girl, calling her a slut and a thot, seeing as to what she wore that night!

no… did she?
yeah, she did!

jesse found something grotesquely fascinating, listening to 20something dumb dumbs of today, talking about hollywood legends from the 50s, and using words like "thot" and "throwing shade." seemed like no matter what era you lived in, one thing was ever constant, and that was how hell had no fury, than a woman's scorn towards her fellow woman. the lingo might have changed, but drama was always drama. this is one reason why jesse could never be a feminist: she had absolutely zero faith in her fellow likes. that's not to say she had any faith or trusted men either, she didn't! she knew damn well toxic masculinity was a real certified horror that existed, she knew. and, knew personally, since, she spent a year in a relationship with it. and, it wasn't just one toxic masculinity case she had to deal with, but: twins! it was like dealing with twin marlon brandos, from that character he played in a streetcar named desire. but at least she'd never have to

deal with feuding when it came to the opposite sex. although, lgbt was an entirely different story. so, with women, there were three things, jesse saw as forever handicapping feminism, from achieving the honor and glory of heralding a utopian society.

one: feuding.
two: generally most women simply being lazy.

this was now reminding jesse of the night she met ray, and had attended a party on the cliffs of malibu. at the time, in westwood, she had thought she was being speakeasy-ed into a bonified actors-hobnobbing-with-other-actors' party. but, nope! unfortunately, it turned out to be a golddiggers party instead; a party full of illustrious bachelor men looking for trophy wives; only qualification on the men's part is if they're filthy rich, and the women's, if they're kim kardashian-ish looking enough. once jesse was there, one of the eligible bachelors looked at her, and seemed to think he had found a match; spent all night just talking about how much money he had, and all the fun stuff he was able to do with it. and later, got to what he really wanted to speak with jesse about: "hey, how do you feel about a brazilian butt lift?" "what?" went jesse. "yeah, you won't have to pay for it, if you… well… you know… strike gold! if you do, your man might manage to get that done for you. *wink, wink!*" meaning he would. it was at this moment, jesse felt a higher calling, to slap this little, ugly, balding man silly. no, mr., sorry, personally, i prefer to hold onto the liberties and freedoms, that comes with being limber enough, to step through doorways, without getting stuck in the frame, by my big, fat hippopotamus hips. thought jesse, at the time. what was really informative about the party was also the women there; jesse swore at least 70% of them were former or soon to be former ucla or usc students; the sort that aimed high when it came to their education, imagining themselves as future hillary rodham clintons. but then got lay-z, like they were a triple platinum selling rapper, got dropped, and now just figured: "the hell with it, a rich hubby, it is! so now i can live the sort of luxurious lifestyle, i personally never earned. and if the rich bastard is fugly, there's always persian lovers from westwood on the side, and celebrity swinger parties up here in malibu. will smith? hell yeah, i'd hit that! so, why not? why not?" the first warning sign jesse got it was going to be that type of party, was the other women she ended up sharing an uber over there with. she got in, then the driver picked up three women near ucla: gorgeous women, of course. and the rest of the drive up there spent watching these women stuffing

kleenex in their bras, and adjusting it to where it didn't look like they had gotten a bad boob job down in mexico; that would have been a giant disqualifier, marked up with a red marker.

wait, is any of that misogynistic?
or misandristic?

oh, whatever, truth is, i'm almost a misanthrope, practically, now in life. not blue nor red pilled. i'm straight up black pilled! everybody sucks! and everybody deserves all the contempt and condemnation that they get. women can be whores. men can also be whores, too, and the ones that should be the most ashamed about it. ugh! i remember in the 2000s how "pimps" were idolized by men. what type of messed up world would idolize such a despicable and loathsome creature? kinda like my brother, tom, i remember his "wankster" phase in that decade.

oh yeah, there was a third reason to that whole feminism handicap… and as for that:

when it came to men, women… other!

didn't matter.

everyone sucks! period.

now, another memory game to jesse…
jesse was remembering when she first moved to la, something over six months ago; she was in glendale, in the glendale galleria, sitting in the food court, mostly apartment hunting online on her iphone. about to call it a day and go back to a cheap motel she was staying at in that city. but then she met a boy, one that didn't seem to want to hit on her; he just wanted to be friendly, and sit next, since, this was a food court, and a pretty crowded one at that time. so, jesse smiled and accepted him.

"what's your name?"
"ramik."
jesse had never heard a name like that before; the boy noticed and then told jesse he was an armenian.

“armenian?”
at this moment, jesse experienced white anxiety (unsure what to think or say to not seem racist because of one’s ignorance). the boy smiled then, and went on to tell her stuff about himself and his people. and, with armenians… eventually the matter over the armenian genocide came up.

“you’re telling me, they pretty much murdered over a million of your people during wwi, and practically got away with it, without justice being served?”
“yes.”
“how does that make you feel?” all jesse could ask.

since… with genocide… when it comes to the evils one group of people can commit towards another, it doesn’t get any worse than that!

“how do i feel… i’m at peace with it.”
“what do you mean, you’re at peace? how can you be at peace with something like that?”

and then ramik went on to explain:

“because, i don’t want justice, personally. how do you get justice with something that horrible being committed?

in the end, i feel like all justice will be served by God.

so, for me right now, i just want to forgive and forget. and move on! the people that committed this act against my people, the turks, there’s over 80 million of them in today’s world. i’m not going to hate on over 80 million people. that’s a hell of a lot of toxic hatred and bitterness, i don’t want to hold onto in my life.

so… in my heart… i have forgiven them all of what they did.” ramik concluded.

yup, definitely black pilled. jesse thought. everyone was guilty of something or another. and like what ramik had said, to go around looking for justice in this evil, evil world, would be like saving a poison for others, you ended up drinking yourself. there was too much committed! too much! and too much to do anything

about it. at least for us mere human beings.

so, with justice… better to leave it to the One that could do it right!

although, with me being black pilled, reading up on what it means in google search, i don't know about that whole incel thing judy was talking about.

huh!
funny… part of me wishes i was one, though.
then i wouldn't have to get hit on all the damn time.
just so sick of it!
i guess that makes me a vocel…?

jesse then saw bianca, she had just arrived. jesse now went up to her; wanting first to extend her friendship. but, her eyes were saying a different story to the girl. hey, jesse, how you doing? jesse said nothing. her eyes were babbling away too much of the details right now, to ease into talks about ditching the marilyn girls. so, how's your week been? bianca asked, growing weirded. honestly, terrible. just terrible. jesse chose to confess. why… what's wrong? jesse now understood she couldn't just say how she felt about all of this, this "cult," she was losing her wording. bianca, let me just be direct. i don't think this is working. what do you mean? bianca asked. i don't know if… this! is the answer. i mean, really, marilyn has yet to appear before any of us, twice, correct? jesse asked. bianca didn't seem like she wanted to go into this topic. not one bit. she did promise, me, and… well… from everything i've heard, everyone here heard marilyn say, "see you later," in some form or fashion. bianca argued. jesse then remembered, she did! she did say the same thing to jesse. but that didn't mean anything. bianca, everyone says, "see you later," or "see you around," when people part ways. but that doesn't mean it so! it's not something that's exactly meant to be literarily taken. jesse argued back.

so, what are you saying, that marilyn has abandoned us?

she doesn't care about us? that, all that we've done here means nothing to her? bianca was getting defensive. and jesse was feeling, maybe, this was a lost cause. jesse then said something that she then later felt had crossed the line with these girls: bianca, marilyn, from the sense i got from her, she seemed fickle. bianca's

eyes blew up now. i'm sorry to say it. beautiful? yes. a joy to be around? yes. really remarkably intelligent… which was something i didn't expect. also, yes. but you can't have faith in someone that can't have any faith in you or anybody else. i remember her telling me how she felt about love, she said, "love is fleeting." to me, that isn't a good sign. all that means is, she's not the type that will commit herself to any relationship. usually when people say something like that, they'll think of others, but really, they're projecting something they feel deep within. for her, it's just a momentary thing, and, when it's gone, it's gone. therefore, all this dedication the marilyn girls are showing her, to her, in the end, is dirt you're trying to fill a bottomless pit with. because, she's a bottomless pit. jesse explained. aaaaaahhhhhhhhh!!!
but then jesse felt that panic she had felt at that la brea ramen establishment again. and, it threw her off center. and, now jesse caught herself remembering her answer to marilyn about love. how it was: "demanding and unfair." and now, this created a new worry, making her wonder what negative qualities jesse had because of her pessimistic views of love. so, do you honestly think she's fickle? bianca asked. jesse now wanted to shout "yes." but then something struck her strange. wait, did i say demanding and unfair, or did she say that? did i say fleeting, or did she say that? jesse's memory felt like it was playing tricks on her again. like the medications. she was confused now. jesse, honestly, i think you got things in reverse. bianca let out. and, jesse didn't know how to respond. but then jesse saw she was getting a call coming in, she took a look at her iphone, it was jules. sorry, um… i need to take this. she said. and stepped out of the room and into the hallway.

hey, jesse, how's your week been? jules asked. but, being now asked this question a second time, jesse didn't feel no answer coming to her. um… great? she simply said. oh, good, good! i'm sorry if it seemed i've been ignoring you or something. especially after everything we spoke about. jules explained. but now jesse remembered something, something a famous actor told jesse, about jules, not very long ago; this made her grow weary to speak with him. listen, i mostly felt like, maybe, you needed some room to grow into this new lifestyle, i was implanting you in. "implanting," being the word, i guess. so, i thought, i should give you some "you time," to grow into it, and set some roots. so, that's why we haven't spoken for a while. actually, to jesse, she didn't even notice his absence. anyways, here's the deal. tonight, there might be a party up in the hollywood hills, which i may be able to get you in. he explained. really, like… with a lot of high ups there? jesse

excited. ignoring the whole, "he's the damn Devil" notion. yeah! exactly, which is exactly why i want to try and see if i can squeeze you in.

listen, it'll be a while before i can tell you. might be way later on tonight. and i don't want to get your hopes up too soon. maybe not even tonight, at all. but, i'm gonna try! jules explained. jesse didn't like hearing this; now jules seemed fickle to her. so, i'm supposed to wait? jesse snapped. no, don't wait, do what you would have done tonight. it's a friday night. go out into town, and paint it red. do what you'd always do. jules explained. wha—… what… paint it red? jesse baffled. never heard that expression. oh, sorry, generational gap thing, maybe, you kids don't say things like that anymore. but, anyways, do whatever. but if i do get you in. i can also guarantee you this, bring a friend along, too. that is, if it suits you. jules explained. fine, i guess i'll bring bianca with me, if she bites. jesse thought.

oh… umm… this is kinda hard. jules said.
what?
umm… you know that michelle girlfriend of yours? jules asked. where the hell is he going with this? jesse thought. yeah, she's my friend from the pandora club, why? well, i don't want to start drama. but, after speaking with her, i'd hesitate inviting her to a place where there will be a lot of big names. plus, with you, so better not bring her to the party. wait… what? what drama? what are you talking about? jesse gasped. well, you see, when i first called you, i had to get your number from someone. the pandora club had no info on you, as for a phone number, or place of address. supposedly, you're not even a member of the club. anyways, i called the club to ask about you. they told me what i just said. but they also gave me three girls' numbers, that they knew were friends of yours. asking me to call them and see if they'd have your intel. jules explained. okay? first, i called michelle, and… i didn't like the response i got from her, involving you. jules informed. what? jesse was getting extremely annoyed now. she told me that i shouldn't consider you.

told me, you… well… that you're really a stripper. and that you prostitute yourself. wait… she said—what? you serious?

jesse was now enraged. listen, i've dealt with shade throwing, i guess your gen puts it, like this before. i've been around for a while. so, it's nothing new to me. jealousy is a major killer in this business. a major one. although, little did she know, in this

day in age, that might come out as more of a plus to you, than a minus. since that cardi b girl got big. that is, if you were all that. jules explained. jesse was growing tired.

anyways, then i called dominque, she said she didn't have your—
she has my number! she does! she does! she's lying! damn her, i'll kill her!

i'll… stupid, big giraffe of a… ahh! jesse raged.

hey, hold your horses! calm down! calm down! she said something about accidentally dropping her phone in the toilet, and losing all the info in it. that's all! and, i honestly believed her. jules explained. and jesse now felt a little guilty. dominque really was a clumsy big oaf. in one month, jesse remembered, her breaking two separate cell phones and jesse seeing her with three different phones in her hand just that month alone. plus, dominque asking again and again for jesse to text her, her number, every time she got a new one. jesse now went hush. honey, i gotta say… wow! you got a hell of a temper. jules indicated, somewhat anxiously. anyways, i'll let you know if i can get you to that party in the hills. and, if anyone, bring that catherine girl. she seemed really sweet. had your number and everything, and said something about how she always felt you were the one to make it big from the pandora club. anyways, i'll be in touch. ciao! jules then hung up.

jesse sighed. and now, she wasn't sure what to do. out there standing in the hallway. not sure if she wanted to head back into room 209. if anything. the list jules had given jesse specifically warned her not to ever go into that room. but something felt off. he said that people on that list were satanist. what does all this marilyn girls' business have anything to do with that? so, she figured she'll sit this one out, if not to see the ghost of marilyn appear, at least for the entertainment value; there were some real comedy gold moments, watching all those sillyheads in there, with their efforts to try and necronomicon their way into opening a gateway to the nether realm. jesse could now just imagine that mew mew face, taylor swift, trying to do the same with Lucifer up at her mansion; in a candlelit living room with a pentagram drawn on the ground, in pink crayon; half the time spent pulling away one of her 50 cats aside, to have a stern talk with, to get them to stop trying to step over the damn thing, while "mommy" is doing her summoning. it would be such a tragedy, if fefe, does it at the wrong time, and gets teleported to

somewhere between the middle of the tundra wastes of siberia, and the fifth sector of hell.

“no, fefe, noooo!”
“meowwwww…?”

jesse now began laughing hysterically, imagining taylor bawling her eyes out over fefe’s loss. and now, jesse decided to go in, before her imagination decided to run away with itself, over tay tay’s misadventures at a pet cemetery.

once entering the room, jesse was struck with a different sense. she, at this point, had mostly felt like a ghost herself in room 209 communing with all these sad spirits, alive and unalive; jesse sharing each and everyone’s misery, yet, sharing nothing mutually good; no good fruits, here, just a handful of bad ones like sour grapes, that are too sour to even be enjoyed for their sour taste, which you eventually find yourself spitting out and discarding the whole batch. now, there was no taste of sorrowful grapes in the air. but grapes of wrath. and something very, very foul emanating from its center. this was weird. jesse panned her eyes at everyone: no one was looking at anyone, yet, they were, and on only one that was present here, in particular. jesse began to feel edgy. then jesse saw bianca, and what she had to express, seemed more open. but what those open details said… didn’t seem to be anything good: she seemed worrisome. but, worrisome, of what? jesse now went and sat next to her.

hey…. jesse said.
bianca, didn’t respond.

a few minutes later, gertrud got up, but, the lights weren’t then dimmed as they were the last time she got up, and began doing her medium business. and then, gertrud looked straight at jesse, and beamed firelight at her, and at that very second, bianca got up and went rushing over to seat herself somewhere else. and even chose to sit next to that creepy janine girl, even.

oh, crap! jesse now knew exactly what was about to happen.

girls… before we get started with tonight’s session. first, it seems like we have another sandy in our midst, we got to deal with. said gertrud and started beaming

at jesse again.

24. judas

well, that was fair.
team joan crawford: one chick.
team marilyn: forty of them chicken hawks!

jesse felt beyond humiliated. she had never been tarred and feathered out of a group before. but, that had practically been exactly what had happened. not literally tarred and feathered, but all but metaphorically. she felt so humiliated, she didn't even feel as mad as she felt she should with such ignominy; being an angry girl, she expected to be really, really angry right about now. but, maybe, she wasn't angry enough in life? she needed more work at it! this was a new "growl, hiss, snarl" moment for her, and she had yet to learn how to take it. "i'm just saying, you're all practically worshiping her…—" "this isn't a cult, jesse, don't you dare use that word in here." gertrud had scolded jesse. even though she was the one that practically used the word "cult," several, several times, and jesse had never even uttered the "c" word, once. and all this in the middle of it. but after the 10th time that someone, all anonymously, blurted out "judas" at her, amongst their kooky mob, jesse felt done arguing about it over the kooky matter. thanks, bianca, thanks for being a friend, and sticking to the back, and watching me put through all that! fleeting bitch!

jesse was out on the patio, it was now purplish twilight outside, like the hour a celestial emperor had decided to retire to his bedchambers, old and alone. yet, the day for jesse had yet to begin. jesse wasn't even sitting at any of the poolside seats and tables; just standing in the middle of it all, feeling quite mardy, while chainsmoking; someone had to "get it" after what she was put through. and, right now, her lungs seemed way too prissy about the details; so, jesse was going to make them the ones to pay for it! all right, jesse, stop acting all joan crawford about this, and stop holding your cigarette like she would. no, this is no time for an instagram selfie. the hell with those 52.2k followers. no! you silly vapid girl! but then, him, him again. no, not billy, him. him as that gq actor, him. the one she met that one night. whose name was mysteriously escaping her memory again. he was approaching her, straight towards her, and, jesse then saw it: he had wolves in his eyes! wolves that seemed well-tamed, well-mannered, yet, wolves all the same. jesse already knew where this was going.

oh, no… he wants sex….

jesse said to herself. she could tell. she could just tell. that quickly and that easily. it must have been another God given gift of jesse's, to spot a player this simply; no matter how sly or dashingly daring or methodical or diabolically master-mindful they were… even pitiful… there was no fooling her; he could be the man of a thousand masks, with all of his masks worn at the same time; every mask covering up the next, and then the next, and then the next. but, no matter, jesse would still be able to tell which of the masks this man was wearing, just so happened to be his true face. not a mask, but his actual face, beneath it all. vibes! it had all to do with jesse and the vibes she was getting. and. that's why players were all bores to jess, since: they were too easy! yeah, but he's too good looking! and i haven't really gotten my rocks off since… well….

billy!
since billy.
since billy was around.
wait… jimmy…?
oh, whatever!

crap! and now it looked like jesse needed to keep up the joan act for a little bit longer; just to last through this tempest storm coming at her. it got dark, now. very, very dark. and it wasn't just from the shadow that tall, dark and handsome, over there, was casting. the clouds also seemed in on it. hey, you seem mad today. he said and smiled out. yeah, i guess so. joan took over. why's that? he asked.

i don't know, someone recently told me i was an angry girl, so, i guess i'm out here, acting out the part, wouldn't want to disappoint my fans now, would i? jesse dished.

wow, jesse was never a smooth talker. not her style. seemed like all those hours of joannie rubbed off on her well. like a glove.

there was a pause.

jesse then looked into his eyes again. yup, the wolves were now out and circling. he liked that response. and a little too well! i've seen your video. he said and pointed at jesse, with his index. you have? jesse answered. yes. i've never seen

anyone dance like that. he mentioned. and then just smiled. but jesse caught on quick, since, what he just said was meant to be a cul-de-sac complement. and not of jesse, but for himself, just to show off how confidently he could complement women, and not make a big thing out of it. yup. jesse could read him like a book. but, still, damn, was he good looking! damn you, billy, for turning my love life into a carnal circus! jesse remembered those moments, where she'd revert back to some freudian phallic state of 3 to 6 years of age, and existentially sense nothing else outside of her body. and right now, only sense her heart. and in her mind's eye, see her heart, blowing up and blowing down like a balloon, while going chug, chug, chug, chug, with rivers of blood through her inner ecosphere. her heart going:
thump.
thump!
thump!!
thump!!!
thump!!!!
"ahhhhhh!" she'd scream. what's going on? what's happening? why is my heart pounding this hard? is it going to explode? no, no, don't explode, don't—what's going on? then she'd look back and see how billy was back there, and only then realize where she was. what was going on. and going on with her.
"aaaaahhhhhh!"
it was now all those hours of hot and heavy breathing, and drenched with sweat moments, of screaming and moaning and growling and roaring, with a boy like billy, that came rushing back to jesse: the lovemaking of barracudas! forget being thirsty, jesse was now growing hysterically famished. she needed sustenance. meaty sustenance—now! as her eyes went predatory. don't look at his fingernails! i don't want to know about his magic hands. no, i do not! do not! wow, you've got an animal in you. the man said to jesse, as one of his masks slipped a bit, and jesse got another peek at his true face.

so, tell me about yourself? he said.
no, how about you? jesse beamed.

that was very unexpected for him: someone as big as him, wasn't exactly used to someone as small as jesse, acting that way around him, in this city. his city. and with that, a mask fell out of one of his pockets. also, jesse made sure not to make it sound rude, since, she would have lost the battle then: being the first one to

lose their cool. well… seems like you have something in mind. what would you like to hear about me? he said. jesse now smiled, a bit sinisterly. well, let me think? he, he! jesse then giggled, a bit girlishly. on purpose though. now leading him on. ask away. he said. but jesse didn't have any intentions to do so. not yet, at least. which is why she chose to get all girly all of a sudden, to make herself seem timid and a little too timid to ask. which made gq know, the question wasn't going to be an arbitrary one. something quite the opposite, actually. and then a pair of masks fell out of his pocket, with that acknowledgement. there was a pause now. an awkward pause. but it was exactly what jesse intended it to be. ha… players! i'm no silly headed tay tay when it comes to this. she thought. the awkward pause continued. as jesse continued smiling girlishly, and not saying anything. the hot lights were still on gq it seemed, gq now understood this.

so, what's on your mind?
he he! he he! i… don't know.

jesse now dropped the girlish aspect and started beaming at him with a more serious face; she was now testing to see how good his mindreading skills were, switching around her demeanor so quickly from hot to cold, hot to cold. a few more masks fell out.

ask. he said again.
no. jesse said.

just to let gq now know, she was making this awkward on purpose. four masks! all right, now you know i'm not a silly girl underneath, trying to hide how head over heels i am. being attracted, doesn't mean its deer hunting season, for you. i've ran with wolves in my life, mr. actor man, what have you really done in life as raw and real, that you didn't pretend to do in a movie? all right, no more games, tell me what's really on your mind? the actor said, more sternly this time. and with that, jesse had him where she needed him. the fact was, jesse was angry at this man for a specific reason; jesse had had tons a hit-ons and catcalls and other stuff, so she felt it would be petty of her to get angry over something like that. and beneath her. so, that wasn't what angered jesse. this man wasn't as clever as he might have thought he was. the last meeting? it took a while for jesse to digest everything he said, didn't say, and everything he meant to say between the lines. but, once she had, she knew for a fact that she was probably going to bump into

him again: something was being set up. this man knew something. something he didn't want to share. and probably something jesse needed him to share.

what are you—
five!

and there it was!
gq finally lost his cool and veneer; he wasn't standing tall, dark and such and such; his posture was now slipping; he was swaying, and not swaging anymore. and now, had a look of curiosity on his face. actual curiosity. and not fake curiosity. jesse had got to him. and now she could work with this. i don't know. i'm still… new, to all this. a lot for a girl. so, since you brought this subject matter up before, tell me about him? jesse asked. who? he said. then smiled, to try and regain some of his composure, after the mistake he made. and he was back to smiling. but then, jesse started firing off darts from her eyes and said:

the Devil.

and, with that, six different masks all fell out of his pocket, at once. you mean, when we were talking about goldfinger, your agent? no…. said jesse. and now she was smiling, how she could imagine, he would smile, at her, earlier on. the actor got it now.

there was a pause, again.

the actor turned away, as twelve other masks fell out of his other pocket. he was laughing now. fake laughing.

well? jesse pressured.

and once gq turned around, while still fake laughing, he made one last mistake, by looking into jesse's eyes directly, and, boom: owl city! and he dropped that fake laugh in a heartbeat. and with that, it was over, jesse had won. that easily. the actor decided now to put away all his masks; realizing he wasn't getting this pixie haired girl in her birthday suit, later on; which he definitely seemed to have errol flynn peeping eyes for. and now, he was going to be genuine. but not for the sake of being genuine. just for the sake of preserving as much of his monstrous ego, that

had been like a blimp, sprouting holes all over, being wounded by this experience; he was going to settle. i've never met him. he simply said. okay. acknowledged jesse, and believed him. but i will say, here in hollywood, there's those that have. he let out. and, no more masks. just a sinister grin. which was definitely his. why did you tell me that whole goldfinger being the Devil story? jesse redirected. she didn't feel like she was done playing with this mouse, here, now that she had become the cat in this game. you know, i was just playing with you. he tried to joke. yeah, yeah, i get it. scare me, so this damsel in distress, might start looking out for a white knight, to come along and save the day. player's class 101. i know the act. i know. dumb dumb. go on. jesse thought but didn't say. what do you really know about him, jules? jesse instead asked. since she was curious about that matter; jules… was no player; she got that sense since the second she met him. but there was a lot of unaddressed details she felt about him, which she didn't know the answers to, but also didn't know the questions of. from what i've heard from the top, he's got a gift to spot talent. real talent, before they're made. that's it. i can't tell you how he does it. but, considering all the names in this city that have met him over the years, it must be true. he led out. nothing that jesse didn't already know. is that all? jesse asked. the man now looked up. and he didn't seem to be finding anything else up there in his head, to say. he then simply nodded. jesse now had a different question in mind: how did you come about to see my dance video? jesse asked. since, he had brought it up. he didn't show me, if that's what you're wondering. just people. he led out. who? jesse asked. and now he got serious.

jesse, people, i wouldn't mess with, if i was you. he let out.

and that scared her a bit. who? i'm not telling. he said, and he was stern about that. stern with his eyes. and that now said a lot. what can you tell me about that? jesse asked. i'll say this, i'm not telling, because, there's certain people that are dangerous in this city. and, they're the types that have to know what they have to know. what does that mean? jesse asked.

jesse, hollywood is like any other city, it has its ugly underbelly. and, there's powers that be, that, well… it's like this….

he then paused to consolidate his intel, on what to say and what not to, while it all came to mind. jesse waited. it's important of them to have their hands on

everything. so, nothing gets away from them. concerning hollywood, they won't just accept any fresh talent. they'll only do so, if it fits their agenda. and the way you dance, well… they might see a danger in it.

what? jesse gasped.
what if i was to tell you this…?
and now, he began:

what if, all the way at the top, there was the Devil, the Devil himself, in charge of everything? and, all the people under him, the hollywood directors and producers, were just his minions. and, when i say the Devil, i mean, him, really him: Lucifer, Beelzebub, the Ruler of the power of the air, Satan, Kayser Söze, even. and hollywood, all it was, was his greater scheme of things, when it came to the power and influence it has on the rest of the world. he explained. this was becoming more than jesse felt she could take in, all at once. so, what exactly are you saying? jesse asked. what i'm saying is, all the Devil cares about, in the end, is to see society go to hell. become as degenerated as possible. to become reprobate. to become unsalvageable. and, therefore, become the ever easier to control. hollywood shapes people's minds and dreams of the world. it shapes their imaginations. also, their sense of morality. moralities, most importantly. it does that! there's a lot of, influence, it can have. and not just in this country, but the entire world.

and now he stepped forward as jesse stepped back: you, the Devil, wouldn't like to see become big. why? jesse gasped. because, you dance like an angel. dancing today has become… perverted… let's just say. there's hardly any beauty in any of it. it's one of the Devil's oldest tricks to corrupt people: making something ugly seem beautiful. and something beautiful into something ugly. beauty is a threat to the Devil. and, since you dance so beautifully, too beautifully, i must add, you can be damn sure the Devil isn't going to like it.

and now, it started to make sense.

take it as you may. jules is a good man. but he's got a lot of enemies in this city, for being that. honestly, if i was you, i'd leave this city. forget about fame and fortune, unless… you choose to rather play the Devil's part in all this, whatever that might be. but, right now, i'd be careful, if i was you. what could they do though? jesse asked. well, if you continue showing your God gift, and try to bring

back beauty, into this gallery of shit, which the Devil would rather have on display, they might try to do something about it.

especially a woman of your beauty and stature:
i've seen it, i've seen how it's done. it usually starts off at a photo shoot, you'll be at, where the photographer gradually tries to get you to reveal more and more skin, to your reluctance. and then, boom—a part in a movie! but it requires a nude scene. or, a sex scene, and they'll do you like they did sharon stone, in basic instinct, in that one famous scene of hers… she never did really give her consent to take place, in the end, did she? and if you really have a problem with it, they'll say, "no, it's not objectification, if you own up to your sexuality." and they'll do some mental gymnastics on why you feel so uneasy, making it out to be a matter of a patriarchal society, trying to shame you, of your beauty, to get you to willingly shame yourself. "no, there's no such thing as being a whore," they'll say, as they try to get you to twerk your bare ass in front of a camera. make you think you're combating some oppressive system, even though they're the ones treating you like cattle, and trying to milk you of all your worth.

that phased jesse, as she saw the road leading to it, and how it wasn't as different from the road she had been on.

i mean, it's taken a long time to get hollywood to this point. the Devil has had to deal with a lot of setbacks over the decades. but now, things are finally coming to fruition for him. he's finally able to get it to a point he can really start letting the shit show to hit the fan. sex and violence have always been issues of what to show and what not to. the Devil, himself, would rather let it all slide, so society can slide with it, straight into the gutter. that's just the ugly truth of us human beings and our fascination with sin, to tell you the truth. it just wants more and more and more of it! like an itch to scratch, but, the more you scratch, the more it itches. in the next fifty to hundred years, who knows, you'll probably be seeing movies of orgies and straight up pornography, and accepted, as real art. and not how the pornographic industry right now is still condemned for it. after that, comes the real ugly stuff. take the aztecs or mayans, to them, human sacrifices were considered entertaining and works of art. and if you'd take offense to that idea since all it does is it make the indigenous nonwhite people of americas seem evil. well, fine, then take the romans, they saw sacrificing humans just as entertaining. no plot, no story, nothing of what a movie today is expected to show, they'd just

drop human beings to the animals and gladiators in the arenas and coliseums, just to watch them brutally murdered in every shape or fashion. and the crowds would cheer, and cheer, and cheer, and cry for—more! society has been that way before, and, it can be that way again. and, they'll call it progress! homosexuality as something accepted by society, isn't anything new. it was done by the greeks thousands of years ago. it was accepted! and let's not forget pedophilia amongst them was also accepted, too. so, i guess they were more advanced back then than we are today, so tell me now, what does that tell you about today's progressive agenda? people in the end are shortsighted, they like to think of how advanced they are at the current moment, and how simple and dumb people were in the past. yet, they'll go on to commit the exact same mistakes made in history, and think things will turn out differently this time. and, hey, if all does turn to shit later, well… at least they'll probably be dead by then when it gets that bad. but, that's just human stupidity, that never seems to cease, no matter what period of time in history, no matter even today nor the future. but the Devil has a deeper understanding of us. and has masterminded a nearly perfect scheme on how to drag us down to hell, where he's supposed to belong. deep down, he knows, what people want! and what they really, really want, is to no longer be enslaved by any higher sense of morality. the freedom to do everything we want, whenever we want, and, to be accepted and praised for it. as for hollywood right now, the problem is, people in the end don't want fakeness, they don't want acting, they want something real! make cgi and special effects as realistic as you want, but, as long as it's still fakery, they'll never truly be satisfied. what they want is real sex, real blood, and real drama, comedy and tragedy! and the more perverse it is, the more they'll see it as something great and profound and liberating. so, maybe we'll see people being raped and murdered and mutilated in movies eventually one day. and people by then will be so debased of any higher moral code, they'll see absolutely nothing wrong with it. no acting. no cgi needed. for real, this time. and they might even give those directors academy awards for making such abominations, that they call art. and to call it an abomination, you're the one they will point at and call the bad guy.

part of me feels like we're already there, in today's world. i see the rage today. one side screaming out "nazi." and the other "commie." and that scares me, because the last time a war took place between two groups with those names, it was wwii, the eastern front. and the death toll was somewhere around 30 million! 30 million lives lost! imagine that! so for things to get to the point where you'll have a society

wanting blood, this is the way to do it. keep raging. just keep raging. and hating the other side. when you're slaughtering a group of people that society has deemed inhuman, deemed as the bad guys, the monsters—it becomes easy! but, if you're the one wanting blood, wouldn't that make you the real monsters?

i mean, let me pose this simple question:
whatever your politics, how would you feel if you were given the chance to watch the other side trialed and executed, a la french revolution reign of terror, with guillotines, and heads rolling, and all, and done so before your own eyes as witness…

how would it make you feel?

if you found your immediate feelings showing satisfaction watching such barbarism on display, well: there you go! that's the truth right there! now you know who and what you really are, truly inside. now you know if you're on the right or wrong side of history.

personally, i can't stand the man we right now got in the oval office. but, i feel like i would be a disgusting human being, wanting to see the man wrongfully trialed… just for being a mean ol' meanie… he! the actor joked at the end.

anyways, as for right now, for the Devil, to keep things sliding as they are, people like you… must be dealt with.

what?
not sure what they might do. i don't want to scare you that much… just saying. and he concluded with that. it was now over.

that was a lot to take in for jesse; not that she didn't understand any of it, she just couldn't imagine how her dancing had anything to do with it all. she didn't want to seem self-centered and only caring for herself, but, what could she do about… all that? jesse now realized, she had a lot of thinking to do. all she wanted to do was dance. just dance. why such a high price for doing what she loved?

so… what are you doing later tonight?

he said and now gave the same vibe he'd been giving.
and now… back to wanting sex again.
jesse's jaw dropped.

wait… oh… you gotta be kidding me! thought jesse.

after everything he just said… back to this again? are you kidding me? was all that just an overly elaborate play, on your part, to still find a way to get me to sleep with you? did he even really believe any of the stuff he was saying? or, he thinks, i'm some red state, yahoo, buckle of the bible belt baptist raised, uneducated simpleton, from "yeeha" ten-ass-say, and stories of hollywood and "da Devil, i tell ye, da Devil," and, "oh, i'm not really for that stuff! i really hate hollywood. i just work here," was his way for me to buy into him? jesse now felt like this man really did deserve an academy award, if that's all it was! still wanting sex. but he wasn't smiling anymore a fake smile; he seemed kinda sad and just desperate, especially after his spiel, which meant he was probably using his real emotions now, to lure her into his bed. after all the masks and dashing-ness and daringness, then tragedy, and stories of the evils of the world; now that none of that worked, now, just straight up pity! an a list actor renowned around the world, now begging for pity sex! but jesse couldn't see any pity in it, since: no, no, no! an actor as a list material as him, from the last few decades? he'd gotten too much action in life; he didn't need this piece of ass that badly. jesse just smiled a tender smile at him. and walked away.

all right, jesse, new rule:
actors…?
hell no!
never. not even for a single date. if they talk and talk and talk, let them, and then, just walk away.

25. bffs

wow, so… you're basically telling me, you got hit on, what gq magazine once hailed, as the number one sexiest man alive!... and you turned him down? judy questioned. judy, sexiest man, or not, he got desperate at the end! jesse replied. jesse, guys as big a name as him, don't get desperate. to them, women like us, are menu items at a seafood diet restaurant. they choose us, they get served, and they eat. it's that simple. fine, well, i just didn't feel like being some king crab dinner, flown in from alaska, is that all right with you? jesse barked. it's all right, it's all right! fine! i get it. you don't seem like you—get it! don't even seem like you even believe me. no, i believe you. you're terrible at lying. and, i'm getting no lie from this.

the girls now got silent in their uber ride for a moment.
but then:

although now, i see why you're so thirsty af! i'm not thirsty! stop saying that! jesse, you're thirsty! you're hungry! you're… i've never seen you like this. judy added. jesse now saw that their driver was eyeing the girls, especially jesse, big time. no ray. just some fat neckbearded guy, jesse didn't have the time for. excuse me, sir, please stop trying to make eye contact with me. i'm thirsty, but, i'm not—that—thirsty, all right? jesse barked now at the uber driver. no, no! i… i…! went the uber driver. okay, fine, apology accepted. just drive! it got quiet again. that was, wow… terribly rude and savage of you! and not savage in a good way. judy whisperingly added. i don't care. after the week i've had. jesse whisperingly added, back. judy wasn't at all jesse's first choice to bring along; they had been bitter but passive enemies, for going on six months, sharing rooms, living together. but, in the end, judy became the only choice. of course, jesse's first choice was catherine: she was sweet, she was kind. but then when jesse called her up, catherine, realizing what type of party she was being invited to, ended up with cold feet. "what do you mean, you just want to be a pandora club girl, and, you prefer 'low-sailing,' as you put it?" jesse gasped. "jesse, listen, i love you, but a party like that makes me feel, well… fearful of heights." "stop getting metaphorical on me, what are you talking about?" but then jesse realized, it was too much for her; she was an honest-to-goodness homegirl, and she liked keeping it that way; jesse was getting shot way too high for a modest girl like catherine, that really didn't care all that much about all that glamor and glory, of mingling with all those stars up there in the sky; keeping her feet on the ground, and enjoying what little she had, was enough for

her.

wow, you're saying that this guy, jules, is your agent now… and he can get you to some really topdrawer get-togethers in town… and you brought me along? judy gasped. what? but then jesse realized, judy was growing on her. don't make a big thing out of it. i still don't like what you did to those boys at the beverly hills' mall. jesse threw at judy's face. oh, come on, i said i was sorry. i even returned those shoes. did you get the money back to those boys? jesse asked. now judy was growing mad. no, i wasn't going to hunt those boys down, and give them their money back. no! i felt bad enough at the end. i wasn't going to be putting myself through that walk of shame. just so awkward—ugh! judy pouted. fine. jesse just said while quietly judging her. jesse, get the f off your high horse, okay? if you're that morally high minded, why don't you now apologize to the—
shut up! jesse exploded. judy was smiling now, enjoying this. judy then thought of how to make this even more uncomfortable for jesse, and whispered: what, come on, maybe you'd like circling your fingers in that neckbeard of—
shut up! he can hear us.
no, he can't.
shut up!
if anything, jesse could now make of their uber driver: he'd be astatic to be getting rid of these two vapidheads, clucking at each other, in the backseat of his jetta. the hell with women! i'm proudly sticking to my ps4 and my video game console collection, and never looking their way again. begone, skanks! you're no longer needed in our lives. mgtow, it is! of course, michelle was out of the question. after what the double-crossing bitch had done. as for dominque? nah! now that she thought about it, the only reason jesse and michelle ever dragged that giraffe along, was how exotic she made their posse feel; she was the only non-pasty white, white girl of the bunch, that brought a lot of indirect comedy, jesse and michelle never really acknowledged out loud, but definitely did in secret; dominque was a catcalling magnet, being darker skinned, and she attracted the more nonwhite variety of attention from men the group got; making it more comfortable for them to hoot and holler and make the experience as unexpectedly entertaining as it was. no joke: as much as the girls would smack talk about all the attention. deep down—they loved it! plus, attracting nonwhite creepers kept the white ones somewhat at bay. say what you want about that black dude and his "damn dat ass!" comments. it was at least direct. the problem with the white creepers were: more not being direct jackasses, but, more being the type of dude that's been

staring at you from across the bar, for the last hour. and now you just noticed it. and now he noticed you noticed. and now he smiles, when there's no reason to smile. and then the horror sets in. and, come 3am in the morning, waking up in a cold sweat, you check outside your bedroom window, all anxiously, pulling the curtains back, ever so slowly, to make sure… well, you know!

but, besides that, dominque really had nothing much else to offer; way more minuses than pluses to deal with, really; she'd sometimes start speaking french a lot, leading her to also end up making all the other girls invisible to be around. then, of course, there was her infamous clumsiness around the girls, all tripping toppling over or into them, while drunk. then, having to listen to her gallingly ask you to use your cell phone, for the fifth time straight, in a drunken stupor. since, she either got 0% on hers, or, she broke hers, again. nope, just wasn't worth it. jesse now took a good look at judy, and then realized—fine! i guess just the two of us, it is! they had already been bitter enemies, maybe now was the time to experience something on the opposite spectrum? fact was! jesse now realized, as heated as things got between her and judy, it wouldn't matter; there was a sense of comfort that, it could get to that point: both jesse and judy could be in the middle of sunset blvd, in the middle of the night, clawing and ripping each other's hairs out, while one of them had a wardrobe malfunction, and the other, everyone noticed, wasn't wearing any underwear; guys all around, hooting and hollering, and snapchatting the experience, to all their peers; no matter how bad it got, it didn't matter! the next day, they'd be back to acting like nothing happened; maybe even joke about it, between each other, in a week or two. this was something in the making better than the ghost of marilyn: an actual friendship. one that would last! i swear, when jessica and jennifer find out about the party the two of us were at, they're gonna hate our guts foreeevver! judy excited with a sinister grin, as jesse now adopted the same.

yup, jesse could now tell, it was definitely gonna be 'one of those.'

as for tonight, until jules called to let the two girls know what's up, the girls had decided to go to the bungalow. more just jesse, and jesse dragging judy along. but still: decided! a little too touristy for santa monica, but, that was the thing about being somewhere touristy: no matter what happened there, there was little chance you'd see the same group of people, there, ever again in your life, to have an ugly déjà vu moment. so, it was anything goes, like vegas, without being in vegas. the

bungalow was a place where girls, who thought they had class, could go; sit, and joan crawford up the night, in the most boringly dignified black dress they owned; could do so all they wanted, and wouldn't ever get picked on, since, everyone else there was being just as vapid and highbrow and full of themselves. so, nobody there had to worry much about being exposed, since everyone there was already just as much of an uncultured fake as they were.

jesse, i hate, hate, hate this place! judy now snapped.

why, what's wrong with it? judy now gave jesse a dirty look. because, there's way too many overly attractive people here, that are way too afraid to talk to one another, that's why! it was at this moment jesse noticed something about judy, like marilyn, she was a lot more perceptive than she made herself out to be. what's wrong with that, you don't like looking at pretty people all night? talking to, yes! this, no! this is boring. this place is more for girls like you, that just want to sit around all night, acting like they're too good for everyone here. and since everyone here is like that, no one ever says anything to anyone. judy pouted, while ordering another white russian. damn her, maybe a little too perceptive. jesse now thought.
i mean, how are we gonna get you laid in a—
i don't want to get laid.
judy now gave jesse a look.

okay, honest question, since we were hating each other before as roommates, never to have the nerve to have this talk, but, when was the last time you got your rocks off? judy asked. jesse was now holding her sex on the beach, a little too firmly; now afraid the glass might shatter in her hand, if judy continued. i know christian girls, who are all like, "no, no, no! Jesus won't approve unless i'm married." but i know you're not really the type. how do you know? i just know! and judy eyed her in a way, all squinty in one eye. i can feel these things. just feel them.

you got some demon ex-boyfriends around you.

jesse now almost freaked, as she lost all her joan crawford cool, and looked straight at judy, very owl-city-wise.

ah-ha, i knew it! judy rejoiced.

there was a long silence that followed after this; very long, and very uncomfortable, for jesse. jesse now realized, judy was holding it, until jesse would get desperate, to find out how she knew and what she knew, exactly. is she that astute to these things, and i never knew it? jesse questioned. the boys were, in life, very astute, leagues and leagues beyond jesse. so, now, just what was there about judy, jesse wasn't aware of? after a while, jesse gave in, and finally asked: please just tell me, how do you know that? judy said nothing. tell me… please? then judy turned around and said: so, how gorgeous was that bad boy from the wrong side of the tracks? what? listen, i'm not a mindreader. but i can tell, just… i don't know how, i can just feel it in my bones, when it comes to boys like that. i can see their signature on a girl. and, you got it written all over you. judy pointed out. okay, at least no supernatural abilities in figuring it out. that would have really been worrisome to jess. okay, i think i know now, with you especially, how i could tell, you want to hear me out? jesse first said nothing, then said: continue. okay, it's like this, every time, i see a boy pass by that's cute, you do this thing, like, you'd sneer at them, but not get all pouty and upset, which would mean you're secretly crushing over them. but, like you're thinking, "oh, you know what, my ex-boyfriend could kick your ass! so, whatever, loser!" jesse said nothing. she had no awareness she was doing that, until now. that's your problem, jesse, you need to get rid of the ghost of that ex-boyfriend of yours, or, you're never gonna find someone to be happy with. crap! a new bff or not, jesse was now regretting not bringing dominque along, instead for tonight; at least that big dumb dumb was never this clever to be this way with anyone. not even herself. jesse now remembered that one night at a denny's, all the girls sat around and spent wondering for dominque, if she was in love with some boy she knew in france. or not. since she couldn't even understand, coming from her own direct emotions. and, that was one hairpulling-ly long talk everyone had with her; completely exhausted at the ends from the lassitude. since domdom wouldn't stop asking one stupid question after another. and, it didn't matter what you'd tell her, she'd still go over it, again and again. "but, alors, i don't know, i don't know, can you fall in love with a man, for only being really good at oral sex, or, is that too shallow of a thing?" and the worse and most uncomfortable part was, when it got religious. "but, alors, i'm muslim, would it be okay with my people?" why the hell you asking us that? it's your religion! no, dominque, no, it won't be okay! they'll stone you to death for that. stone! it was just excruciating.

so, you're telling me, you can tell all that, just by a quick microaggression i make, really? jesse scuffed. yes, really, i've seen that look before. i had a friend. she had a bad boy that was in her life, that turned out to be really, really hard to get rid of. i met the guy. bad! really, really bad. and, you're giving off the same vibes and looks as she would, when cute boys pass by. jesse said nothing, just kept it to herself. jules would be calling soon, and then, they could leave. jesse, come on, i'm getting sick of looking at all these plastic people. judy pouted. i mean, this city is already full of pretty palm trees. i stare at them all day, and, right now, i really don't have the patience to be staring at them all night. ugh… no más, con esta mala leche! joder! pouted that last bit, and now fell quiet. good.

what did you just say?
judy didn't answer.

for the next two hours, jesse had some peace. although, both judy and jesse were bored. so, some heavy drinking followed those two hours. and more than necessary. this is b.s., jesse, as much as i like to drink you under the table right about now, where's that jules guy, and his phone call? judy now finally let out. what's wrong, judy, missing out on all those hot actor boys, at that party, you're hoping to be their quick lobster bisque, before they move on to their main course? jesse now thought, snapping at judy with. but, decided not to verbalize it. she wasn't hating her as much right now to say such. so, better save that juicy line for later. jesse thought. although, this really was sorta b.s., jesse now felt. maybe as jules had put it, just not tonight, ol' girl. not tonight.

and then a famous singer passed the two, looked at them, but, both girls weren't starstruck at all. more pissed.

oh look, jesse, it's ariana grande. let's run for the hills, before this little tramp, tries to steal our boyfriends away, just to get a sense of vindication, that she's a "big girl" now, in her 4'8 size. oh, wait, we're also tramps and have no real boyfriends. i forgot. speak for yourself, ms. romero. jesse rubbed in. judy just shrugged it off. though, gotta say, and i thought i was a little girl… what a church mouse! hehe! how tall are you again? jesse asked. judy didn't answer. judy then felt like going on a bit more. although, if it was demi lavato, will say, if it was that woman, you'd have to hold my earrings and hairpiece. i would take that bitch down! wow, it's like that, huh? uttered jesse. yeah, it's like that! a pause.

how tall are you again?
oh, shut up. i'm not saying.
sorry.
….
not sorry. said jesse and smiled.

you cut that shit out, jesse. i ain't joking about that. said judy. jesse frowned. fake frowned. i'm serious, if that thot was to come around right now, i'd straight up knock that b out, cold! damn savage! ridiculed jesse. what's with all the hate? it's not hate. i just know how latinas are like. i grew up in florida. just about 99.9% of the time, they're all bark with no teeth. lots of barking. lots and lots of barking! and they will not stop until you're forced to lay them out, flat. but, as said, no teeth, so if you do sock them in their big, fat mouths, they'll grow terrified beyond belief, and they'll run like capybaras, in fear, before you. there's only 1 michelle rodriguez to every 999 demis. although, me and the michelle types tend to see eye-to-eye, and get along. might even start kickin' it like two og chola thelma and louise. and, it was a moment like this, jesse looked at judy, while listening to her, that judy really began to shine. shine in jesse's eye. jesse could only grow a quaint smirk to address it.

i mean, with that girl, with her, i'd tape up my fists with kale, cut up cucumbers and romaine lettuce, and give that thot a vegan knuckle sandwich—to go!

and now, jesse was all lols.

from one shorty to another, demi… no love for you—camarada!

you wear a hairpiece? jesse gasped, while looking at all that platinum blonde hair. no. i'm a whitey, i don't need to. judy put it. all that is…? yes, it's all real! i'm fully scandinavian on my mom's side. and dad's a spainard. celtic spainard, mind you. so, carry on with that jealousy of yours, will you?

hey, jesse, who would you want to break every one of your fingernails with? you mean, who's ass i'd like to kick? yes. and don't say tay tay, i know you have an unbridled hatred for that woman. well, yeah, that thot can kiss my ass. i know, i know! but who would be your second choice?

another pause.
iggy azalea. jesse now let out.

nice. i can see that! judy was enjoying this. hey, jesse, maybe we should start a cat fight club, you down? jesse couldn't help but draw a sinister grin after some contemplation. she'd would be down.

another hour came and went.
wow, this was boring! jesse felt. as she started to share judy's sentiment of the bungalow. looking at judy, jesse now thought. and thought about the last couple of details she had brought up: stuff about home. her home, to be exact. so, jesse decided to start up another conversation and talk about matters like that. idle chitchat, sure! but, what else was there to do? so, you grew up in miami? jesse asked. yes. tell me about mom and dad. asked jesse. well, dad was illustrious diplomat. from barcelona, spain. plus spoke 5 languages, and thanks to that, i grew up in a household, with four kids, with never any money problems. there was four of you? jesse asked. yes. all of us sisters. so, if you think me and you go at it, you should see me and my three other siblings. and we all look almost exactly alike, too. eww! thought jesse. mom was a swedish beauty named ingrid, with an unpronounceable maiden name. no imagination needed. what do you mean? i mean, how it sounds. whatever stereotypical thought comes to mind: that was mommy. that caught jesse's thoughts. hmm, first thought that comes to me, is a swedish bikini girl, that travels the world, with other swedish bikini girls. and not a not platinum blonde head in the group. bingo! mom was funny though. how so? well, she spoke english and swedish. or, really, understood english perfectly, and only spoke swedish. i speak english, swedish and spanish. and, must note, miami and cubans are nothing like mexicans here in la. okay? well, mexicans are actually modest and shy people. cubans are anything but that. so, you don't speak anything but spanish in miami. any other language is a sin in that city. mom took that as a challenge. and decided to spend the rest of her life there only speaking swedish, to mess with everyone. well, at least mostly people she didn't know. what… really? yes. i had to go everywhere with her, to interpret for her, since i was the only one of her kids, that spoke spanish, and, yeah… even when i never needed to. although, not a lot of fun, with all the cuban men, licking their lips, at her, wanting to hit on her. and, i'm eleven, and expected to interpret all that. yeesh! thought jesse. judy seemed done now, and it seemed to be jesse's turn. so, you're a

tennessean? yup. both parents were former hippies. my condolences. said judy. go on. well, in the 80s, when they realized money was now good, at least dad did, they changed. and dad was lucky, since his family are country bumkins, and have three different car mechanic shops, all over the outskirts of nashville city limits. wait, i thought you said your family was poor? judy asked. no, mom was poor. my mom came to nashville, to be an aspiring country singer, fantasizing herself being the next stevie nicks. never went anywhere. and married a bumpkin, when she gave up. but then realized what she had done. and separated from dad. so, tom, my brother, went to live with dad. and with me, at the hand of a dreamer, that was too proud and dumb, to accept child alimony. judy now made a frowny face to match jesse's. don't worry. growing up with money isn't all it's cracked up to be. how so? well, the problem with people with money, is they always want more money. we were not exactly a happy family. plus, mom and dad were not exactly high school sweetheart lovers. after their marriage, dad had his honeymoon in greece, and mom in the bahamas. jesse glazed her eyes at that.

yeah, jesse, after a while, at age fourteen, i was certifiably my mom's own pimp, considering all the cute cuban boys, i got that nymphomaniac of a woman, hooked up with.

not an ideal childhood!

both then sighed thinking about such days. and felt done. and after a couple more intoxications, they were done.

them now outside, which took a bit of stumbling, as judy actually fell into jesse's arms for a second; jesse caught her and held her up, as they now stood on wilshire blvd, outside the bungalow. judy called an uber, it was her turn to make a call. and now, they waited. jesse, thank you for one hell of a boring and disappointing night. you suck! we should do this again. judy pouted and stuck it to jesse. a silver pearl car pulled up, and jesse helped judy get in. now in the backseat. jesse tried putting on her—
stop it! stop mothering me, we're in the back seat! i'm not wearing a seatbelt for the backseat! said judy. fine! said jesse. and hung her head back. but, then, déjà vu. but, what did it mean? she thought. and once judy whispered it, it was then, and only then, jesse knew.

jesse, this uber driver is cute as hell. hit on him!

and… oh no! she now knew who that meant. jesse, is that you? he smiled. good smile. not like that actor. a genuine one. genuinely happy to see her. it was ray. out of all the uber drivers in this city, God must have had a real sense of humor, to do this now. jesse, you know him? talk back to him. this might be your night. jesse was now terrified. she now knew she was going to get laid, tonight. and, there was nothing she could do to stop this. she looked into his eyes. and almost squirmed. and, she wasn't going to stop herself. she was going into heat; it got hot as hell down there. and she could feel all the motions to come, already. jesse, talk to him. i can feel it, myself.

this is hot steaming sex in the shower, knocking on your door.
open the damn door! judy whispered.

no, i can't. what the hell is wrong with you? hot steaming sex. knocking! open it! jesse went silent. this was to be the longest uber ride of her life. judy now got mad. and then said something terribly, terribly wicked of her! the bitch! jesse, i swear, if you don't open this door…

i will!
i will have hot steaming shower sex with him. and i'll tell you all about it in the morning.
what are you girls talking about? ray asked, jokingly.

and then she spoke, jesse was now toast!
haa see wii hiiim!
seee x.
seee x.
seeeex!
so, how's the night been treating a couple of cats like you? ray said. delicate voice. rejoicingly. not, no ruff and tuff boy like jesse's ol' boy. and not perpetually sad how jimmy ended up. how jesse always wanted it, to get it, from a man; looking at his magic hands on the roulette, perfect fingernails: jesse was toast! with tons of butter now being spread all over her. meow! judy joked back at ray.

ah… hahaahaa! jesse moaned.

and moaned a little too into it now. now marilyn was down there in her nether region in a tight lumberjack outfit only she could wear; chopping down a forest of trees, and throwing all that wood—into the fire! jesse, what's going on? judy whispered. this was now going to get ugly.

hey, ray, can i ask you a question? jesse shot out.
what?

ray said and looked right into her eyes in the rearview mirror; eyes that were brown like the earth's crust, but then growing hotter as it got closer to the magma fiery center. and there, stood the twin cores: blazing hot metal, colored in solid gold. oh, yes! very, very ugly. very, very!

hey, ray, soooo, a smooth boy like you, how do you do it? jesse started.
what? judy whispered.

….
….
…???

i mean, how do you do it? i've been wrenching all night. actually, for a while now. i haven't gotten laid in nearly four years. jesse, what the hell are you doing? judy didn't say with her mouth, but, her eyes. i mean it, how do you do it, ray? do what? ray simply asked.

i'm horny af right now. so, i wanna know, how did you do it?

….
….
oh. very, very ugly. very, very!

i mean it. i'm horny af right now! actually, judy is horny af, too. would you like to have her, too? judy now grabbed jesse by the arm, and squeezed, like she couldn't squeeze enough. though, the pain, just made jesse hotter. and thirstier than ever. four years, wandering in a sahara desert, and now, at this mirage of an oasis; she was going to plunge her mouth into the sand, and drink it like water. i mean it,

but first, tell me, you hot for it? ray said nothing.

come on. you've had hot sex with like 20 girls this month alone, right? can me and judy be number 21 and 22?

….
….
….!!!@$$%^^&&**((((¯\(°_o)/¯))!!!!!))!!!!!

please? please, daddy, please?
jesse, i'm gonna—kill—you. judy blurted out.

and, not caring if ray heard it or not. actually, jesse was now getting mad, just thinking about that. ray was that guy! that would have tons and tons of sex with any woman he wanted; he wasn't a player, not one bit; he was a really good guy, any girl would want to fall head over heels in love with: which is what made him so perfect at playing the game! come on, ray, tell me about it? jesse ordered. umm…? ray was smiling. smiling. no awkwardness, no matter how hard jesse was trying to make this as awkward af! no matter! perfect! simply perfect! she now knew she was going to get laid with him, no matter what she did. so, might as well get all of her fight out now, all of them psycho demons out, as brutal as it got, and have make up sex, afterwards. and judy was joining!

come on, ray, you think judy is hot?
umm… i don't know, she's definitely cute. but… i don't know. ray said.

oh, come on, throw her a bone, will ye? judy now bit jesse in the shoulder. bit! come on, ray, no pillow talk, until you answer my question? what question? how many girls have you smashed just this week alone? ray said nothing. come on! how many! don't play modest and nice! don't be a beta bitch! tell me! umm… i'm not like that. he was rubbing his neck again. jesse now ran her hand up and started rubbing for him.

judy… was now traumatized.

come on, ray.

ray ray….

you're not having the two of us, until you tell me how many? jesse was just growing furious. furious! that she damn well knew, she, and even judy, weren't going to be probably the best threesome he had had. furious! i… what makes you think i get laid all the time? bullshit! don't lie to me! how many? how many?

umm… can i interject something?
shut up, judy, no you cannot! jesse exploded.
what, let her talk. ray said.

and now, jesse zipped it! damn! he's smooth! yeah, i think, ray, is… yeah! he's cute. but, maybe only you two should get a room and leave me—
no, bitch! you're coming! you got me into this. and now, you're coming along. and you're not getting out of this, until ray gets his fill of you. you're not escaping this threesome! if i have to drag you in kicking and screaming! judy now seemed to want to jump out of the car. but they were going 44 mph on wilshire blvd. so, no chance in that happening right now. ray, if you don't tell me right now, how many chicks you've been slinging dick with, in just this week, alone, i swear! you think this is psycho bitch time! you haven't seen nothing yet! i don't think you're psycho. ray said.

shut up, ray, i'm a psycho bitch. i've killed people! and you don't want to fuck with this!

and… that did it! that finally did it! now jesse began bawling her eyes out.
bawling!
bawling!
bawling!
and by far, never had there been, a crazier uber ride, in the history of la… than this!

jesse, now, felt out of body, considering how mind-shatteringly insane things had gotten; she was now just looking at herself, seeing herself, crying, so profusely, and wondering to herself: is this real? is this really real?

oh, it was!

and she cried all the way to the chateau marmont.

ray, i am so, so sorry, for all of this. please, don't contact the uber people, and have us barred, or something. please? judy simply said. and before they could leave, ray now had something to say:

hey, just to be clear, i haven't been laid in a long, long while, myself. a really long time.

not since… not since i knocked up a japanese girl while i was in the navy, stationed in japan. and ditched her, when i found out about it. she said she was pregnant. i don't know.

that was 2002… just to give you an idea of "how long" i mean.

and God has punished me for that sin ever since.

i think about her now and then, but… too late for that now. ray confessed. now in life, i get, a lot of divine comedy, i guess you get to call it. i get women, sometimes extremely beautiful women, throwing themselves at me, so, don't worry, nothing new i saw there. but, as much as i want to, i can't, and i won't. unless it's right. and it won't be right, unless He says it is. which might be never. looked up, as he spoke of Him. if you want to know my secret. that's my secret, take it as you may. ray then gave a broken look, but, peaceful and self-defining. life's strange. but it all made perfect sense now. the two were out. judy holding onto jesse with all her strength, as jesse would not stop crying. and now, to get this girl, to where she could not be seen by the outside world ever again. where's your room, bitch? tell me, or i'm just going to leave you right here. jesse cried it out. jesse, please stop crying! i really have no idea what the hell is wrong with you. but, please stop! i can't take this anymore. is there something wrong with—
shut up, beta bellboy! or, i will kill you, too, after i'm done killing this bitch, in her room! all right? judy said, monotone, but serious! the boy then zipped it. and said nothing. then judy said the same to the concierge, and then to a maid. and everyone else she passed to get this girl to her room. hey, jesse, is this it? ah-ha! fine…! the two just looked at each other then. truth was, judy had already had this number done to her. and, jesse had done the same. so, now, there was no escaping

this madness.

definitely now bffs, and truly forever!

judy sighed, realizing the hell this bitch was now going to put her through, for years and years to come. then just nodded. and accepted it, in resignation.

later jesse. if jules calls. you have to now take me. you have to!
jesse nodded.
judy left.

26. breaking bad

jesse was now in, been in for a bit. had stopped crying. but, she had a lot of thinking to do.

this now felt important. that was a really, really good cry! type of cries she wanted. but the sad thing was, she didn't really feel it. not that she wanted to be that hysterical sob sort, that bawled her eyes, at everything, since that would just cheapen the experience; cries were good when they came, when they went, and when they wanted to. not you! jesse understood that.

she was sobering up. and, now, it seemed like she needed an hour to have a bit of soulsearching. and of everything and anything, life, like a museum, needed a theme. so, with all the artwork, there would be sense of cohesion, going from piece to piece.

funny, in my mind's eye, i see myself… wait, where am i?
rooms. rooms. so many rooms. it's a japanese house.
wait, is this little tokyo again?
no.
where is this…?
jesse saw herself, inside what looked like a medieval shogun castle. lots of paper walls and cherry wooden furnishing. and the creaking and cracking sound of wood. it was a dark space. at nighttime. or, was the spaces inside only creating an artificial night? this was like a dream of a museum she had had before. but this was a different building.

it was a japanese night gallery.
jesse had never been in this building before.
and now a host stepped up to her.
a creepy looking man with fisheyes.
"hello, my name is peter."
he said, with a very particular voice, jesse was, and but wasn't, sure she was recognizing from someplace. and now, this host showed her an art piece.

jesse looked at the art piece, it was over the subject matter jesse was already thinking about: love.

and now, it felt like the right time to be doing some soulsearching, and the hour of such was to be over the subject matter of love, since love was always the main subject matter to jesse; everything revolved around it, and, everything else was a sub to it. but, now, when it came to love, and what it's worth, jesse understood, what ray meant: he was a romantic, that valued greatly that special encounter, that meant something worth its weight in gold. most people don't want to put any worth into anything; they just want it, and want it now. and, if they get it, they tend to just look at it funny, like they don't even know what they got. that's because they have no sense of value. nobody, in the end, not even the ficklehearted, really want to give their heart to someone, with no sense of value; they want the ones that do. do value! and the more they do, the more they shine. that was what made ray shine and made him so desirable. nobody wants to give their pearls to dogs and swine; what good would it be, if all they do is trample it under their feet, and then look at you, and get confused as to why you're feeling hurt? jesse had dealt with enough worthless people, countless, countless times! and that was a major factor which really made her as much of an angry girl as she was.

also, then there was the big bang theory gang, the problem with them wasn't their misunderstanding of worth. they saw worth. but, to them, worth, they only saw as an object of worship; pedestalling such a thing to such heights, it was a sin to them to love it then. even look at it! ugh! jesse had no time to be turned into a samus aran doll, forever kept in her original package; never to be opened and played with and felt loved.

take the marilyn girls. what pissed jesse off the most at the end with them was, they were exactly the same: wanting to worship someone, instead of actually loving them. jesse didn't want to worship marilyn, she wanted to love her. be with her. grow with her. that's what she wanted. and it enraged her to feel that way, and see her completely abandon jesse, afterwards. ghost of her or not! if she can appear once, she can do it again! and the fact that the marilyn girls, seemed content to endlessly chase after someone, that would never chase them back, that was when they had come to find themselves as being truly and completely lost! having been abandoned, themselves, by themselves. a kooky cult, too kooky to have any real semblance about anything. which, come to think of it, maybe that's why all their prays of her to appear, appear to have fallen on marilyn's deaf ears, again and again and again? jesse wanted something that would be the now and here and—love me! that was what she wanted. even ray became a disappointment,

since, for him, everything had turned into a perfect stars' alignment thing. and, that's not what's always gonna happen! only when you're lucky. take me, if God never chose me to be taught by an angel to dance, i would have been another michelle, endlessly working and working and working at it. and, all for nothing. but, then again, if you really had put that much work into it, then, it wasn't nothing, it was something. maybe not valuable to the whole world. but, at least then to just the right people. as beautifully as jesse danced, never did she ever once feel the need to find someone to match her on that level, to have a reason to want to love them.

it was sometime around 3am in the morning, of this saturday night. hell night. now, in this hotel california room, and it felt too ominous: cream-colored walls, still cream, and still stale in taste and spectacle. sitting here, in this completely different museum piece, counting breaths in a living museum, that now seemed to want to grow teeth from the floor and ceiling, and begin chewing up jesse, and then spit her out, having grown sick of her fleshy taste and presence; it was a room where no human being of life and love were allowed, just dead spirits, that were all wretched and wrathful, and wanting to complain of all the ruckus and racket, the living around them kept making, while they just slept the eternity away. i hate this room! jesse thought. even with the lights out, it still felt bright in here; it was just that solitary and spacious, that it still found some source of light, to trap with its blackhole pull of gravity, and suck it into this vortex, of room 113's nether center. yes, room 13.

tay tay's number—ugh!

jesse didn't want to think too much about it. it was just a number. just a number. but one that was starting to make itself apparent, and apparent that nothing good was to come of here. nothing loving and carefree. just drab. lots of drab. lots and lots of it. but not stained in stale yellow, just bland and boring cream.

where are you, billy? i haven't seen you in a while. come, entertain me! tell me more about how much you love me. and, how much… i really don't care!

and then, jesse felt his presence.

but, not as before. now, she felt his sprite, she felt his black hearted sprite, shine

and shimmer with nether color. and now, it flew around jesse's vision. not seen, but, unseen vision. and then, it flew right into jesse's left ear. jesse got up. and smacked her left ear, as if a fly had flown in there. and, it felt terrible and trepidatious.

jesse ran over to her bathroom mirror to check to see what was going on. she turned the light on: drab, cream colors, and something so very Devil-may-care. what the hell was that? jesse thought. now looking into her eyes. her green eyes. or… wait? it seemed as if mist was forming around the colors. mist coming in, making her eyes seemed cataracted. and then, she heard a voice, not a disembodied invisible voice. but, embodied, and in her head:

so, entertainment is what you want, is it? you want me to entertain you. because, that's all i am to you. all right, i'll bite. i'll bite. so, here i am! billy said.

jesse didn't know what this was, this was different; this wasn't the ghost of billy, per se, not how she'd been dealing with him; this felt just like him, incarnated, in vibe and precedence and soul, but directly in her mind this time, and not outside of it.

you're different!
am i?
yes… this is different.
how so?
it just is. it was one of those "can't put my finger on it" distinctions. a, "je ne sais quoi." but she could just tell it was. fine jesse, fine. i'm not here to play any "guess who" games with you. i'll just tell you, simply, and directly, what's different this time. getting tired of you trying to figure it out. this is what dr. wong once called, "psychological ghosts," manifesting.

so, you're just in my head? jesse thought.
yeah, just in your head. billy said.
roo… daaa… haa… nee… k! seee ! neee! see x!
and then that happened, very out of body, in contrast. oh, but, don't think this means i'm harmless. don't think that at all, jesse. because, in here, now i know what you're thinking, what you're really thinking. now, give me the cold shoulder all you want, you can't hide nothing from me. nothing! although, jesse didn't seem

too taken by that. well, you should be. here, i'll give you an example of what i'm talking about. fine, asshole, bring it? jesse thought. not sure what to make of this yet. but, nah! not so bad. why do you think you cried so much in that uber ride with judy and ray? jesse, didn't know; she had already forgotten what had set it off. yeah, you don't know. i do! this was different, very different. as if in her, he could now understand things she didn't. and, also remember things she didn't. she didn't remember what set it off; she remembered crying and crying and crying as she did, almost uncanny like; it wasn't her in a sense, but a long-lost side of her finally awakening and opening her tear ducts, and finally letting it out! jesse, fact was, you were also very drunk last night, that's why your poor short-term memory was in an even worser state. billy informed. that made sense. oh wow, you're actually helpful now. jesse joked in her thoughts. billy didn't care, it was now time to make this silly girl know just how bad it was, for him being here, and her now having to deal with it.

good girl, huh?
you care more than the average joe on the street?
you'd like to think that about yourself, would you?

but, wouldn't you like to know how ficklehearted you really are, and not even aware of it. that immediately got jesse's attention, she didn't like that. yeah, it should get your attention, you stupid woman. now, i'm gonna give you something you haven't really had in life. wouldn't you like to learn what it is? wouldn't you like to? jesse, didn't want to bite. jesse, don't be an idiot. in here, i don't need you to bite. nor say anything. in here, you're not hiding anything from me ever again. this is chess now, bitch, not checkers, and, i'm a hundred moves ahead of you, and i've already won the game. all i need is you to make one single move. just gotta keep pushing and pushing you to make one, just one, move. and, once that, me kicking your ass up and down these walls you call a skull of a brain. once that, it can all begin.

jesse wasn't sure of what yet to think of this. you don't, jesse, because you're really a very silly girl! but you then make yourself all puffed up and angry to save your ego and make yourself feel wronged by the world. really, you're the one wronging others. being angry doesn't make you smart. actually, it makes you a complete moron with a self-righteous sense of vindication for feeling this way. you're like a fool with a vendetta. dangerous! but the vendetta isn't real. but since the fool is,

now everyone has to deal with her wrongly vindicated spitefulness. jesse kept staring into the mirror. it was his eyes now, not hers, she was looking at. but green cataracted eyes, instead of his blue ones. jesse, wasn't sure what to think. yeah, you're not sure, because you're a stupid, stupid woman! jesse felt mad. yeah, jesse, get mad, that will show the world. mad equals "me smart and righteous now!" right, jesse? shut up, billy! no, i won't, you're hearing this now, bitch! time for me to sit your ass down. school your hannah montana dumbass! and finally give you something you haven't really had before: a sense of self-awareness. jesse felt mad. jesse, didn't i just tell you mad does not equal anything except how wrong you are? don't be this much of a rockheaded idiot. please, let me help you grow a brain finally in this empty, empty skull of yours. fine, fine… but you're boring me. no, jesse, you like me to think that. and, you know damn well i was no beta in life. daddy's coming, jesse, daddy's coming to set all things right now! that word began to make jesse feel irked in ways she hadn't before. fine, give it to me! tell me something i don't know. rub it in. get it to where you're finally able to get me over one knee and show this woman—what you got!
roo… daaa… haa… nee… k! seee ! neee! see x!
roo… daaa… haa… nee… k! seee ! neee! see x!
roo… daaa… haa… nee… k! seee ! neee! see x!

that… although, was another thing.

fine, jesse, i know why you shot billy and jimmy in the head in real life now. that scared jesse. oh, fear, huh? daddy can work with this. daddy can work with mad, too. but he likes to see what he can do with this, first.

okay, check this out… what if i was to tell you, you did it for one reason and one reason alone, for your ego. no, i did not! but now jesse was in uncharted territory. she couldn't say she didn't if she didn't exactly know herself. think hard, jesse, think really hard! and this time, don't just gloss over details. acknowledge them. and when it comes to the murders of billy and jimmy lane, you know exactly where to start: that precious, precious museum of yours!

and then that peter host again, and he was showing jesse another piece.

and now, jesse received a revelation:
her museum.

her museum from those reoccurring dreams, so beautiful and blissful and pure it all was, to marvel at. but then, they came, and, the art pieces in the museum changed: no longer displaying scenes from jesse's earlier bliss, but now displaying scenes of jealousy, aggression, violence and turmoil; the paintings were now ugly to look at: they were ugly! and that ugliness began to do something to jesse, that made her grow angrier and more consumed with wrath, than she had ever been in her entire life. oh, the venus de milo statue! her beautiful, beautiful venus! it had also changed, as it aged, and grew dull and decrepit. and stained. and now, this one statue, was no longer alone. now, there were twin statues that stood next to her, side by opposite side: twin michelangelo's statues of david accompanying her venus de milo. and the more the museum became run down and dilapidated, with black stains all over the walls and trash littered everywhere, with wherever jesse drew breath and sight, the more the paintings began to depict jesse's and the brother's dysfunctional relationship. jezebel's venus de milo now began to crack up, and crumble apart, becoming unbalanced. and, yet, when it came to the brothers' statues, they didn't seem to be affected by any of this in the slightest; truly, if anything, they seemed to be aging like wine, as jesse's continued to age like milk, as it grew the ever more sour; here was jesse's statue falling apart, yet, not with the boys' statues. and it wasn't fair. wasn't fair, at all. jesse felt. not in the least. "jesse, you brought us into your life. we didn't try to make any advancements on you, to bring you into ours, you did it to us! and now that you have us… you think, you think, you can just get rid of us, because nothing turned out how your selfish wants thought they'd be?" billy in life had, sometime at the ends, framed for jesse. the way jesse eventually came to interpret it was:

she had gone camping, and, despite all the warning signs, she had decided to feed the two wolves she had come across on the road. and now, wolves being wolves, they followed her home, and wanted more and more of what jesse had to offer. and now that they were in, they didn't want out. and now, jesse had a wolf problem, that was bigger and more dangerous than what she was capable of dealing with.

since the wolves wouldn't leave.
she had to shoot them.
she had to finally decide to put the two animals down.

simple fact was, the boys were white trash, and she was tired of seeing them trash

her beautiful museum, how they did. which made jesse have to live with the degeneracy of what her life had now become. but, what she did, what she did… was just murder! pure and simple. so much to rue for. and now jesse felt she'd rather burn down her own museum, herself, if only she could get a do over. if only she could get another chance. jesse no longer had dreams in the gallery of the self. and no longer cared for it. just to have one do over, and undo what she had done. she would do anything. matter of fact was, she should have right now been in prison; she should have been, since, that is the penalty for murder: life imprisonment, or worse.

the revelation then ended.

and with that, this new malevolent entity took over where the memory left off: jesse, you killed two people, because, you value nothing! you value nobody, really. what if i was to tell you, marilyn is the one that said, "love is demanding" and you're the one that said, "it's fleeting?" jesse, didn't think. no, jesse, not thinking is no longer going to just solve all your problems anymore. daddy doesn't like dumb dumb crap! and daddy is now going to do something about it. did i? it was weird, she didn't know what to make of this; that matter had really perplexed her; why didn't she remember which one she said and which one marilyn said?

roo… daaa… haa… nee… k! seee ! neee! see x!
roo… daaa… haa… nee… k! seee ! neee! see x!
who the hell is saying that? jesse shouted out loud, looking around her.

and, that, most of all, terrified her!
that made her do things.
she'd have no control of.

don't worry about that, jesse, that's just your reckoning. gonna be served up to you, later! once i'm done. you'll see what that demon has in store for you. what demon? which…? jesse was bewildered. ghosts, demons, sprites, spirits, either in her head or out: there was way too much going on around her. and she didn't know what to concentrate on; she had no focus; like an army of Satan's minions, all around her, tag-teaming her, getting her to just the right moment. and then, boom! jesse, what if i was to tell you, marilyn spirit doesn't always abandon her girls? she just abandons the girls that she sees as a waste of time and energy.

because they're really just ficklehearted. and not worth the commitment. like sandy. and, guess who's the new sandy, guess! i'm not that! jesse held. what makes you think you're not? i would never abandon anyone. really, i quite remember a different story… you abandoning two white trash boys, out in the middle of the sticks, with holes in their heads, which you put, just so you didn't have to deal with their white trash ways any longer. hmm, i wonder what dr. wong would say about that session of guilt-tripping? oh, i know what she would say, "well, jesse, i was thinking you were wrong to see yourself guilty in all this, since, i didn't exactly know what part you played in the boys' deaths.

but since you actually did murder the two boys.

wow!
that's different.

yes, jesse, now i think you deserve all the feelings of guilt you have. and more. actually, you deserve to be in prison right now. and, maybe even the death penalty, to boot!" so, what you gotta say about that, hannah montana, you think you still deserve to be contracted by disney after all that?

roo… daaa… haa… nee… k! seee ! neee! see x!

and the most messed up part is, why you did it. you didn't do it because they mortally scared you. they threatened you. they had raped you or anything. no! do you ever remember just simply telling the boys you're done with them? "go, away!" no, you never even did that.

yes, i did!
yes, i did! i told them several, several times…—

did i?

no, jesse, you didn't. you did what most spineless girls do at times like that, you mostly just gave billy the cold shoulder.

you ghosted him.

hoping he might just "get a clue" and "go away." of course, while still fucking his brother! yeah, you weren't done smashing that.

since that hit different.

he'd tap that ass, and he made you feel a whole bunch of other hedonistic crap, you were enjoying, and, learning to enjoy. actually, it wasn't that you were too spineless to just tell billy, "it's over." you didn't want to, because, then, jimmy might also leave the picture. and you weren't done jumping his dick, not just yet!

oh… oh… what am i feeling? jesse squirmed now. and then she realized what it was:

disgust towards herself.

all of it was true. every single bit of it. of course, once you did feel done jumping jimmy's dick, you still just couldn't say the magic words. still couldn't! for a second there, jesse got dumb over what the magic word was, but, then….

yes, jesse, "then"… you realized—you do that a lot! play dumb every time you have a moment of retrospection and introspection, and it looks like a detail might pop up to make you look bad. playing dumb, to escape your own conscience taking over from there.

jesse felt demolished now. utterly demolished.

you're a murderer, jesse, a murderer. and you did it all for what they did to you and your precious, precious world. and not your real world, but your stupid dream world. museum of the self…??? how egotistical can a person be? and you didn't do it for what they did purposely to it, but simply because of their white trash ways. "how dare i defile myself with these lowly heathen mongrels? something must be done of it!" and you didn't even have the sense to take that wrath on yourself. you put it on them! and took it out on them! all for messing up that pretty, pretty museum of the self in your head. think about it, you killed two boys for trashing a museum of your big maniacal ego? how messed up is that? tell me that isn't being a truly heartless piece of work? you are the whore of babylon! the evilest woman and most wretched woman to ever exist on the earth! you deserve

being thrown to the bottom of the bottomless pit in the lowest sector of hell! and you're too hannah montana pretty, self-righteous and stupid to even get it. jesse was now having another out of body, crying, crying, crying again. and, she didn't know why. she must have, she saw it in her cataracted eyes.

you think you value people? no, you value what they give you. it's just take, take, take! no, marilyn didn't want you, not because you value love and she's fickle. you're fickle and she values love. you value shit! not even human lives are worth nothing to you. jesse didn't know what to make of this. yeah, that's because you're a heartless murdering bitch, and a moron. there's no end to how much of a terrible human being you are. no end! think about this, you want to know why you cried your eyes out in the backseat of ray's car? or why you're doing it right now, not even aware why? i'm not crying…! jesse cried out. yeah, jesse… you're not! you're not! those are not tears you visibly can see in your eyes in the mirror. can i go on? jesse said nothing. she didn't want to hear herself cry it out again. you finally came to the realization of how terrible you really are. and, it was so not you, you felt out of body, like, who is this woman and why is she crying? you're that heartless, even when you finally grow a heart, you can't even see it as being yours. you're that much of a waste of time. and that's why you get no, and, don't deserve no, love! marilyn monroe's ghost saw that immediately. that's why she ditched your ass with all those other heartless kooky girls of room 209. and, she only said "see you around" to spite you, for being so heartless, and now wanting you to waste her time giving you something you're not worth having! jesse didn't know what to make of this. that's because you're just that heartless! forget it jesse, i'm done. right now, i can see, it hasn't really sunk in yet. not completely. not how it should! and, i'm not going to waste my time with you until it finally does sink in. and, when it does, and when it finally hits you how rotten you really, really are? and then when you cry, this time, you'll be crying for real, because you hate yourself, and you've finally come to terms what that means. you will be in hell, but, the hell of the self!

no! i don't want that. i want love! love! love! and now, she felt herself crying. she was beginning to feel her disconnected black heart connect with her soul. and…?

oooooooooooohhh! the pain and sorrow she felt! jesse was shivering now. and, billy now felt ready to close shop: you don't deserve love! your black heart doesn't deserve it! it deserves reckoning!

and, baby!
that's when i'll be—back!
daddy's coming home.

no, you're not real.
yes i am, jesse.
jesse than tried to run. run where? it mattered not. just run. run out of the apartment door.
you're not real. you're not. you're—
but then his form appeared, physically, in the leather bikerware billy and jimmy always would wear. but white this time. completely white. he had his biker helmet on. but no face. he grabbed jesse by the arm—firmly.
you fucking bitch!
you think i'm a joke? you think reckoning is a joke? it's hell. firey, firey hell. hell!
and then:
burn!
his leathered hand grew as hot as a red poker taken from the fire, throbbing with heat. and… jesse then… felt hellfire for the first time.
aaahhhh

and now, jesse was truly awake.

Daddy… is home.

to settle with you. and now you can cry and cry all you want, i'm just gonna sit back, and enjoy watching you suffer every minute of it, on the side!

and then, when you just can't take it anymore. and grab a knife. and try to slit your own throat. i'm gonna grab that out of your hands, and say, "no, baby, you're not done suffering just yet. not until daddy says you are!" and then i'll fuck you like a dog! and when finished, i'll then beat the ever-loving shit out of you! so bad, so bad, bloody red and bruise all over, you'll be too terrified of trying to off yourself too soon, again! taking away all this reckoning i still gots for you!

cry, cry, cry… then. cry, cry, cry!
do it, baby! do it! feed me!

all daddy will do just then is laugh, laugh, and laugh! and want to see you take that suffering to the next level! so wonderful, it'll be, then, finding out what deeper level of hell we can both put you through, throw you deeper into that endless fire and hear you weeping and weeping and gnashing your teeth!

but, not too much!
since, i now like to watch me some breaking bad, again!

yeahhhh, boye, that's what i'm talking about. i love me some breaking bad! walter white, heisenberg—is my hero!

i just can't get enough of it, can't get enough, watching that show over and over again, on netflix. so, now that i'm done "entertaining you," i want to have some "me" time right now, so, keep it down, while i'm keeping myself entertained, for a change, with this.

cry. cry. cry!
cry. cry. cry!
cry. cry. cry!
jesse… what did i just tell you? breaking bad is on… shut up!

cry. cry—
i said—shut the fuck up!

stupid… fucking… disgusting whore….

and now, having experienced the horror, the absolute new horror, of a new demon taking residence in jesse's own mind. jesse lost it. she was naked now, in the shower, masturbating. but she felt nothing.

roo… daaa… haa… nee… k! seee ! neee! see x!
roo… daaa… haa… nee… k! seee ! neee! see x!

roo daaa haa nee k! seee ! neee! see x!
roo daa haal neek! seex! need! seex!
room tha hals neeked! seex! need! seex!
roam tha hals naaked. sex! need! sex!
roam the halls naked. sex! need! sex!
roam the halls naked. sex! need! sex!
roam the halls naked. sex! need! sex!

now, 5am saturday morning, she was outside her room, naked; a ghost and terrified specter of the nightmarish mindscape of the self; she found herself deranged, wandering the halls of the chateau marmont, desperately looking for love, while knocking on people's doors. but, even with a naked and drenched beauty, through the peepholes, the people inside the rooms saw what a wretch was wanting to come into their bed of love. and, they saw her too wretched to allow her in.

and now, it was that great actor. that one from before. the gq sexiest man at one point.

jesse… what are you doing? he said.
fuck me.
….
make love to me….
….
please! please?

but then he looked into himself, and denied himself of this, and then closed the door.

so, she wandered, and wandered, the halls naked.

and, then, the security appeared. they put a blanket over her. now, she was in a van, still just a ghost, herself. fearing, fearing, fearing, of hearing billy incarnated in her own mind, speak to her again. she was being driven somewhere. where to, she didn't know. didn't care.

now, she was at the los angeles psych ward. once again, back here, again.

jezebel, do you have thoughts of hurting yourself or hurting others? the doctor asked. jesse reached her hand out to him, to touch his face. the man grabbed her hand and pulled it aside. jezebel, tell me what's wrong? fuck me! was all jesse said. ms. singer, please, tell me what's—
fuck me!

she was in a room now. back to this room. empty room locked from the outside. just a rubber bed on the side. but she couldn't sleep. couldn't sleep. was it day? was it night? she didn't know. but, no sleep. and her, there, counting her breaths to a million. and then on.

now, she was in… jules' car? how and when did she end up here so soon? she was in a psych ward. what's going on?

honey, i had to get you out of there.

jesse said nothing. but a question came to mind. where are you taking me? jesse asked. jules didn't say anything for a minute. right now, i got you a place. where? well, after what you did at the marmont. they won't take you back. actually, they put out word around town, to all the other big-name hotels, how they had another "brentwood hello" case gone wild on their hands. what? jules didn't seem to want to answer the meaning behind that hollywood code; jesse really didn't want to know: no more hollywood codes. no more!

jesse then saw jules was sidebarring his eyes at something on her person, doing

so concernedly. jesse looked at what he was looking at, and saw something on her person, she hadn't up until this conscious point.

a welt.
of a hand mark in red.
on her arm.

anyways, now, the only place i could find for you, was a motel 6, near the airport. but, don't worry, it's actually a really nice one. and, until i can make a case for you saying you won't be doing that again… well… we'll see.

another pause. i don't want to go to the hotel. no more hotels! i want to go back to the psych ward. jules got mad and said nothing. i want to go—
no, you do not want to go back. mental hospitals don't make you better the longer you stick it out, they make it worse. trust me, my wife got this way for a spell back in the 80s. after, well, you know the story. what you need now is to get back into living life as normally as you can. and not be thinking about psych wards, and ghosts and demons or whatever! jesse said nothing; better to be dead then go back to living, after her new awareness of what she was now. honey, don't lose yourself in it! don't! just don't! you need to get back on the horse. trust me, this is the only medicine that will work. the only one! nothing else will!

no!
don't say no! jules ordered. and, being a man, jesse, a woman, she accepted it; she needed this sense of security right now; better to hear from jules than billy. as for the rest of the drive on the 405, jesse just watched the city pass her by; she was growing weary of these hills; they seemed so stagnant and never moving; always the same, same hills same spots; the town drab and dirty and too expensive to live in. yet, all these ants in the colony didn't seem to mind; drab and dirty was just the world they lived in; that was how it was and there was nothing to do about it. she saw lax on the right, now, felt like flying away. where? didn't matter, somewhere no longer in this huge and soulless city.

she was at the motel now.
not bad.
as jules made out. also, reason i'm putting you here is, get your mind cleared up. sometimes, 5-star hotel suites can be… too pretty. if that makes sense. like it isn't

a place to live in. just visit like an art gallery on melrose blvd. trust me, i know. this will feel more like an actual place where simple people tend to live. all right? jesse nodded. but before jules could leave, jesse had to ask one thing:

jules?
what's up, honey?

am i… fickle?

that weirded jules out to hear. but it seemed like it mattered to jesse a lot, like, it was a moment of grave self-importance. so, jules knew it was an important question now to her. that's something a person shouldn't think about. jules answered. but, not exactly a direct answer. what do you mean, jules? jesse asked. and now it looked like jules had to explain it. honey, those are one of those difficult matters, everyone asks themselves at one time: what exactly is their own worth, when it comes to loving people, and in the end, loving God? do not, do not, think about it. if you find people loving you at least. and i mean, you for being you, then you're doing something right. jesse now felt unloved. jules saw it.

i don't want to just give you platitudes, but… damn it.
jesse, you're now putting me in a spot, i'm getting anxious wanting to speak on.

what do you mean?
in a way, i love ye! he said.
but that was sorta awkward.

i mean not in a romantic sense. it's not because i want to have sex with you or something—not everything is about sex! i'm too old for that crap, and you're way too young for me. never gonna work out like that. i mean, as a human sense, person to person. platonic is the word. people today seem to get so wrapped up in things like sex, attraction, genders… anything! that i guess what i speak of is a quality that people just don't see anymore. platonic means something spiritual. something more. something that can't be understood so simply. something eternal. and something that can't be gained physically, but metaphysically. not visibly, but invisibly. it's something you have to just believe in. because it can never be fully understood nor physically seen nor grasped.

like an art piece… in your own mind's eye.

and having faith in it is all you can have to eventually obtain it. when i say "love ye," i mean, you're a lovable person. i have some love now for you now, and i will have more, given enough time. that isn't difficult for me to say. i just know it might be something difficult for you to understand. and that's why it might seem awkward to you. but, don't worry, age tends to smooth things out. in years to come, you'll come to understand what i mean better. all right? jules smiled, genuinely. jesse really did feel foolish and naïve. but, also not. actually, she did know what he was talking about. she did know it, well. and, it was just reaffirming hearing it from him. jesse smiled back.

all right?
yes.
good. i'll see you later. he said, he then put on his shades. got back into his car. and drove off.

but then billy, still listening patiently in jesse's head, just had to perfectly time what to say now, to ruin it: hey, hanna montana, don't get girly girl with him just yet. let him first find out you're really a murderer. and you're not so terrible at lying… well, sometimes you're not… ha ha!
….
yeah, just saying, he might not like you anymore… learning that about you.
….

no, jesse, no… you're not getting out of this until—i say so! not until daddy says so!

27. the tale of the desert and sea: dawn

crossing texas blind with a scarf jesse had tied around her eyes was ballistic, if that word could make sense of the unnatural feeling, of firing across the i10, for over 500 miles of empty, empty terrain, completely without one of your five senses. and a very important one at that. some would consider, the most important. although, when one sense is handicapped, the others tend to become heightened and exertive and exact enough, in order to haul the extra haul. strange thought came to jesse, now understanding how legendary musicians like ray charles and stevie wonder, seemed to have a unique gift in understanding music, one in which only they could have. there was a certain point after van horn, texas, jesse swore, the sound of a lowkey hum, bouncing off the flatness, followed by a certain ancient manure smell, that was too old to smell displeasing: jesse swore, if she ever came upon it again, she would know exactly where she was at, and without needing her eyes or a gps to have it figured. also, the vibes! just the vibes! that sixth sense, that some just discard as nonexistent (usually boys that become really, really creepy. since they chose to disregard the notion of a sixth sense, and now, they have zero understanding to their unbeknownst vibes saying to a girl like jess, "i enjoy stealing women's underwear while they're asleep, and creating a scratch and sniff gallery in my home, in the bedroom, where i do a lot of my meditations, about old mommy dearest!" in which case, a girl like jess would then vibe back to them, "the only way you're getting my panties from me, is if it's attached to a grenade, and i can pull the pin, and shove it all down your throat, got it?" but they never get it, since, they don't get vibes, or believe in them. sigh). fact was, there was just so many vibes jesse was getting from everywhere. everywhere. of the spiritual world, that lived and breathed within the confines of the worldly one. and, with everything going ballistic, jesse was able to now feel her senses heightened and heightened to their max awareness. so, this is what happens when you choose to put down your stupid, vapid and vacuous, self-absorbing, mind-numbing, simulacrum institutionalizing and strongholding smartphone… and just decide to actual live how human life is meant to be lived, huh?

they had passed el paso, texas, and passing that city felt somewhat victorious, like they took on texas, and won. messed with that big fat cowgirl named berta rae, all big fat 810 miles from east and west of her hip size; hogtied the twanging bitch, with an apple in her mouth. and now, on to greener pastures. although, new mexico, wasn't exactly "greener pastures," even though called the land of

enchantment. though, mostly felt like a place native americans were forced into, such reservations, a century ago. and now, they called it a place of "enchantment," to give the state more magic and mystery, than there really was anything of such to do with. this place felt like a snakeoil salesman con. really, nothing enchanting, just a boring desert. a place where desert dwelling people settled with, after feeling the exhaust of the west texas barren gauntlet. and now, too exhausted to continue heading west, to find a better destination, to manifest destiny their new american lives. one, jesse felt glad she didn't have to look at mostly, since no longer with the blindfold on; being 3am at night now, so it was too dark to see anything really (this also being a major factor for jesse's disappointment with nm, since it was so dark, jesse might have as well kept the blindfold on). and, now, came the hours of morning, and the rise of the sun, and, they were finally in arizona.

jesse found herself liking arizona. not really a desert gal, but, this she liked; to her childish fantasy, it had a more of a saturday morning cartoonish flintstone's feel, at first: with all the rock pile formations, with rocks on top of one another, in an order and assortment, that looked as if they were purposely stacked up high that way; making it all seem like some manmade metropolitan city, in its non-manmade naturally formed beauty; a city of rocks, with many, many interesting spirits being its inhabitants. now, this felt like an enchanting place; a place for a girl like jezebel singer, to manifest destiny an alternative life as a horse rancher and lover and whisperer. horses! horses! magnificent and gracious and beautiful horses! such sensitive creatures, like a man all woman ache and ache in their hearts to marry. jesse could now imagine herself gallivanting across this dreamlike, desert, fairytale landscape, and birth a new soul for herself, riding in and riding out with the high and dry desert winds; this was now jesse's johnny guitar; a place of long, long black western dresses, where jesse could shift, and shift, left foot, then right foot, then pose, as if dancing in synchronized stylings and candid complements with the spirts in the arid air. "you like it here, don't you?" billy asked jesse. since billy saw how she was giving off all the right vibes that said she would. "yes, i do!" jesse said. and smiled, seeing this new door to a new universe open to her.

but, then, jesse looked at the boys. one face, then the other. and, they seemed out of it, and not here enjoying what they had brought jesse to enjoy. they brought her here. this place was beautiful. yet, to them, it was something different. jesse didn't like this. she felt a certain love here, which she wanted to now share. and share with the boys. they brought her here. they should know about the here and

what that love meant. there shouldn't be anything lost in transcendence.

jesse didn't like this. she wanted to thank the boys for bringing her here. but now, it seemed to be the best way of doing that, was to help them join in with her, and the joy she felt. looks like miley cyrus needed to wrecking ball some walls down. jesse felt (a bit corny for me, but, why not?), "if being on the road was that bad, why… why was going back just not an option?" jesse asked. it was the only question jesse felt keen to ask; the only one that stood out the most; this, she felt, was the weak spot, of all the walls that they had put up, and she needed to go there.

the boys didn't say anything.
and, for a good half hour they continued to not.

now, jesse wasn't able to enjoy arizona; the boy's subconscious whatevers were making drastic changes to the weather of this desert place; clouds were blowing in, and hard rain seemed to want to fall.

5 minutes later, and now jesse pressed on with another: "boys, just tell me why?" and finally, jimmy answered: "because of pops…."

another 5 minutes passed.

"what was wrong with pops?" jesse now asked. billy then took over: "like i told you, jesse, there was him, and then there were his demons. one we loved. the others…?" billy just shook his head. jesse understood! parents were parents; they were there as your guardians. but, in the end, the child would have to later on grow up to learn they still weren't perfect people. "i get into it with my dad, sometimes. he's, well, like mom would say: demanding and unfair! mom hated him for that. and then there's all the things wrong with my mom and…." and now jesse felt like she needed a minute, while shaking her head. she understood. she did! she felt she did. but then she saw how billy seemed to be sneering at jesse's attempt to relate. jesse didn't like this. "i want to know." "no, jesse, you're… not...?" "what?" jesse really didn't like this now. "no, jesse." "what, i understand family drama!" and now, the boys really started annoying jesse, with their disconnect and delay. and acting as if their life experiences were grander. "don't act like i'm some stupid child that wouldn't understand. i find that

condescending." billy got mad. and seemed to now want to let jesse have it. "fine…! we'll tell ye. if you think you're a big girl, we'll tell you." "that's condescending." jesse said out. not something adults partake in, if they want to be taken as adults.

"it's like this, jesse: there was pops. and then… there was daddy." said billy.

but that word, though, and the way he said it, "daddy." jesse, at this point, found funny. "he, he! okay…?" jesse giggled. "please don't say daddy… don't say that name." jimmy let out. and seemed traumatized. and since it was jimmy that let out that emotion, jesse started to feel differently with where this was going. "what, jimmy… you didn't like it when daddy started speaking?" billy ridiculed his brother. "no, i didn't!" "come on, daddy… wants to teach you boys, how to be men!" billy continued. "remember when he caught that squirrel, jimmy? and showed us that magic trick of his." "shut up, i don't want to remember!"

"i didn't know such a little critter, could cry like that."

jimmy just shook his head, and stared trancelike out the window. jesse, although, became very "hear no evil" about it, as her mind went blank, with what was just said, and didn't understand it that second. "you boys are weird." jesse joked now. this was too silly for her. the boys said nothing. but jesse was starting to have fun with this. "weirdos. you boys are 'weirdos.'" jesse jested. "okay, fine, whatever, hannah montana. i guess life is so sweet and pure and good, when living on a disney program. compared to the michigan, whitetrash household, we were born and raised in." "that's condescending." jesse rebutted, again. "no, jesse, you're just ignorant." billy directed. and looked into the rearview mirror, and scolded jesse's infantile eyes. jesse grew mad. "fine, then tell me." jimmy sighed, and now decided to speak more: "we loved pops. we did. but eventually he wasn't raising us anymore. all of a sudden, the old sargent came out. daddy!" jesse sorta just shrugged at that. jimmy now talking more or not, none of this seem too out of mind, she'd feel, where she wouldn't understand. billy continued:

"jesse, what do people do in war?"
"is that a dumb question?" jesse went.

getting the sense, they were just making her out to be an idiot; not something at

all jesse liked to hear; she'd even rather be called out as a bitch than a fool; jesse didn't like fools and being fooled and being taken for a fool. "no, what do you think they do? just, explain to me, in your understanding, what soldiers at war, go and do?" "what, they go and fight and serve their country." jesse simply answered. coming from the volunteered state. jesse felt proud for the likes of service men and women. but then billy started to get eerie with his vibes over the topic:

"so, they don't murder people, right?"

jesse didn't like that. "that's not murder, that's war." "jesse, let me ask you a question. if you were ordered, ordered, to go into a village, and told to murder everyone there, because of some guy called 'charlie.' and, you do that, and, in the end, there's a problem! you already murdered all the men and women and old folks… but, there's kids now. also, babies. and with babies, best way to deal quickly and painlessly with them, is to grab them by the feet, and swing them hard and fast, and smash their heads in against a wall. one second, crying. next… silence…!" billy explained and beamed once again into jesse's eyes, in the rearview mirror. jesse, now, jesse wasn't as scared of hearing such horrific depictions, but mad. just mad.

"so… is that… just serving your country… or is there more to it than that?"

"what the hell?" to her, it seemed like these boys had seen way too many horror movies, and were now trying to make up stuff, to feed jesse with. stuff she didn't want to hear. and, stuff, that they purposely tried to make it sound as wicked as they possibly could. jesse took this as sordid and morbid humor, which she found absolutely no reason to laugh about. "no, seriously, jesse, is that good service to one's country, or murder, pure murder?" jesse now shook her head.

this sounded, treasonous, in a sense.

and deplorable and despicable. billy was beaming at her, in the rearview mirror. but it all but made her feel the evermore mad. "jesse, i'm not saying these things, to bad mouth people in service, quite the opposite… just for you to come to terms, with what real sacrifice means. these men, in service, it's not just their lives they end up sacrificing, and not even their innocents. sometimes…

it's their souls.

that's just the harsh reality of war, and being a warrior. nothing you'll ever see in movies, especially now-a-days." but jesse felt done listening to this. "wow, i can see, your mind, just can't grasp such things. you are so lucky! God protected: lucky! stick to your hannah montana, girl. you'll be blissfully ignorant. but happier that way." jesse was pissed. she felt done. she wasn't hearing this. now, not liking the boys one bit; they were ruining arizona for her; a place they brought her to, to feel good vibes. not this!

"what was wrong with daddy?"
"what, you're not listening?"
"if you loved your pops…?" jesse argued.

and now, the details started to come out, as it got darker.

"jesse, want to know why we got… suzanna?

you see…
originally…

the idea wasn't to run away with it, and play 'peter pan and the lost boys,' out in the open road." billy answered.
"what are you talking about?"
"what billy is saying is… we could never go back. because, we loved pops too much." jimmy forlorned.

"we didn't want to kill him." jimmy concluded.
"what the hell!"

that was it, that was enough! jesse was now extremely pissed. and disgusted.

"daddy had to die!" billy told.
"what?"
"daddy had to die! we, had decided, to murder that piece of shit!"

"but we loved pops too much. that's why we ran. and ran. and ran. and never

looked back." jimmy now decided to finish saying.

"wait, you wanted to murder your own father?"
"don't you get on a high horse with us. daddy was not pops. he was an evil piece of shit. and, if you ever met him. death, killing him, dead, was the only answer!

until you've had murderous intent for a person that madly, and justified being so, after the evil they—put—into you! executing reckoning would be the only righteous choice! you'd understand, then. trust me, when you're twelve, twelve! and you're thinking of straight up patricide, and, you can't decide, then you must have gone through some really messed up shit to get to that point. don't you think?" billy elaborated. jesse just shook her head.

"murder is the best way to deal with murderers! got it, jesse?"

but billy was now losing her. maybe to where he could never again reclaim her. "you can judge us all you want about that! i don't care, jesse, your hannah montana mind just—" "stop—saying that! i'm…? what was that bad about daddy?" jessed asked now. "besides being a mass child murderer during his proud time, which he got lots of medals for, lots?" billy scolded. "no, towards you two? did he want to murder you both, too?" jesse went. jimmy continued:

"he was the type of demon that would turn us against each other. use our guilt. to destroy us! from the inside."

billy:
"in the end, all a murderer wants to do, is turn you into one, too. so, he can smile in your face. because, now, he's going to hell, and so are you. and, he's gonna love the company. and love to hurt you with the guilt of what you've done. even though, he's the same piece of shit, himself. make it seem like it's okay with him to be that way, but not you! not you! you gotta pay! gotta suffer, as should he suffer. but, it's all on you now, and he's gonna enjoy watching you do so!"

"we didn't want to be murderers!" jimmy now truly concluded.

and, no more talk. no more. arizona was almost completely ruined for jesse, as she now felt too mad, and also frightful, to stare out and enjoy the scenery. jesse

was lucky, though, these were doors still closed to her; she might have now heard the stories of what happened beyond those doors. but, she hadn't yet lived through them in person. and experience them, to make those experiences her own; she was still too innocent to be a part of that.

28. the tale of the desert and sea: noon

an hour passed. and, so did the downpour. even though, not a physical cloud had yet to show itself, over the arizona skies that day, for the people in this utah state ford mustang. jesse wasn't even born yet when billy and jimmy made their run; it now seemed like ancient history to her. it was 2015 now. jesse felt keener to live in this year, than some year in the late 80s, in which these boys had descended from.

and now, they had passed phoenix arizona on the i10, and it was not much of a city to look at. jesse found more romanticized simply by the desert, than a city in the desert. tucson wasn't even on the road map for her. it came and went and was forgotten before she knew where they were at. phoenix, not such. but she realized it wouldn't be a city to live in. jesse understood the necessity of something rural in life. tennessee was rural and not so rural. nashville, the music city, had its city comforts of living. but the woods of tennessee were the places that captured her imagination. the thick woodland trees of the state, covered entirely in forests. for, that was the place where all the elves and fairies hid themselves from jesse and the rest of her kind. it would be captivating to wander the arizona desert, to find what fantasies lied here; given this desert theme, very different from the woodland themes back home. "don't think about it, jesse, we never meant to tell you any of that. that's not why we brought you out here." "why did you bring it up, then?" jesse scolded. the boys just looked at each other. "jesse, you got a bad memory." "what, why?" "because you're the one that asked us." billy sorta joked at the end. jesse's eyes blew up. she did ask! that was foolish of her, she felt mad, and mad at herself. jesse was a bit too much of an angry girl, and too much for one to be turning on her own self; with a temper like hers, better to be not so self-aware, unless she was to become self-destructive. "it feels different now." jesse led out. all that was left of the drive was from phoenix to california. and the drive now and the surroundings took on a different property of the state. this didn't feel as much romantic as… jesse didn't know how to explain it. "yeah, it does feel different, doesn't it?" billy said. and, looked again into her eyes.

and then, her agoraphobia came back. "crap! i gotta blindfold this stupid scarf around my eyes again." "don't!" "what?" "just don't!" billy ordered. eyes in rearview mirror again. "why not, i'm feeling anxious, it's weirdly open out here and, i see those islands of mountains in the distance, and the drive across all the way to them is… weird!" "just don't, this is why we brought you out here."

“what?” “listen, just take it as an adventure.” “what do you mean?” “jesse, an adventure isn’t an adventure…

if there’s no sense of fear nor danger involved.

there are interesting spirits along this route, trust me, scary at first. but, once you see him, it’ll be worth it.” “who, what?”

“atreyu.” jimmy gave away.
“who’s… huh?”
“just go with it for now.”

and now began the tale:

tis is the cursed tale of he.
and the cursed tale of she.
forever searching for one another in an endless world of desert and sea.

scorched! scorned! sands. and. fire. this is the feel and touch of a world that's gone barren, bare like a newborn child. but no child born of innocents, not even from its navel beginnings. no! none of such. this is an abandoned place, whose memory of the measurements of its own time passing, through the cycles, from its alpha beginnings, have long been lost. and lost too in its omega, as if, both alpha and the omega, have been linked from head to tail like an ouroboros. unknown! unmeasured. and. uncertain. desert is this, vast, void, and vacant. peer out with your own eyes, towards this unimagined land, with its emptiness, so hollow to look into, that the hollowness would then hollow you away down to your soul; hollow away any virginity and vibrancy you might have had within once. to leave your soul as dropless as its own thirsty faith; this is no place of water, and water, here, is nothing less than a forgotten legend; a story of something untold in a world such as this. so, peer out, peer out, if you dare, with your own eyes, towards this waterless nothing, this flat nothing, of high desolate planes of crackling earth; broken apart, torn apart, divided up, into divisions and divisions; falling into lesser and lesser selves, again, and again. peer out with your own eyes and all you’ll see are jagged rocks cutting across the landscape, mountainous formations of jagged ends, ripping and tearing across the expanses. this is a hostile world. a cruel reality. a vicious place that devours any semblance of hope,

leaving behind nothing to the imagination. devours it with jagged, pointy-ended teeth.

"so, what do you think?" billy asked. jesse had no clue what was happening right now; it felt like a daydream in her head, but manifested into the real world; this was a place of dreamcatching. "i don't know… it's like…?" "like what?" jimmy asked. "like, a vision. i think that was a vision. and, it felt so real. do you know what i was seeing?" asked jesse. the boys didn't speak. "what was that name you said, atreyu? i think i've heard of something like that." and now jesse was getting scared. and, it was now west arizona's turn to traumatize her with its landscape. "i'm putting my blinds back on." "no, you're not." "what, why not?" "just go with it!" now, even without her blinds, her sixth sense could sense everything else becoming heightened around her. now, her senses were being heightened way passed their maximum threshold, and spirits, so, so many spirits, were beginning to make themselves known to her. and almost to the point where jesse swore she could almost see them, physically. the invisible, now visible.

an hour passed. jesse was shivering all over, her agoraphobia was going into overdrive; she was panicking, yet, not panicking; screaming, yet not screaming; she was now hating the boys for putting her through this hell; it all felt like an overblown fear of heights, yet, with all four wheels on the ground. and there was a rush to it. islands. islands of mountains, in the distance, and nothing underneath; she watched those islands ever so slowly and so painstakingly drift closer, drift near, and drift passed. hissssssssssssssssss! screeched a rattlesnake, as they drove on. and with jesse's senses so heightened as to this extent, the snake felt to be sitting on her lap, when it did, even when it was outside, far from the car and just to the right of the road. jesse had jumped, from that encounter, as her head banged up against the ceiling. "fuck." jesse cursed! and now it was too much for her. and then, an out of body, jesse looked at herself, from outside. she was screaming and screaming and screaming, and trashing around like a mad woman. is this real? she thought. and, she was there, watching herself do so, for a good 20 minutes. the boys didn't seem to mind at all.

and then jesse looked out the window, and saw atreyu:

so, blazes forth. so, does he. firing through the dips and highs and the crosslands. so, with sword drawn high, sword of brilliant silver and gold; tapestried with long

told tales untold of the boy hero to eventually become king. he jots forth, as heat permeates and prances and peeks around him, and melts, motions and waivers! to look upon him, tears will form in your eyes, hot springs of water raging out, as you weep to his glory, weep for all he stands for; an infinity of time spent with desolate deserts: hardships and horrors and tragedies! and now, the boy rides, no longer afraid of the world; no longer afraid of the desert, and the dissonance and desolation and despair. rides with fire, and with blazing steed, blazing across all the lands of misery and madness. no longer afraid. no longer just a small boy. no longer haunted and hounded and hunted by the reptile people. for now, he is no longer afraid. now, he's the hunter. and the reptiles of the desert are no longer his predators, but prey. ride, boy, ride! ride out and bring hope. bring brilliance. bring balance, to this world with no past, but now, possibly, a future! ride out with shining eyes, and ears, and nose, and armor. that burns with violence and vengeance. to look upon his armor, look upon: gold! shivering gold! hot hellish fire breathing gold, that will scorch your eyes to do so upon, immediately then relieved by the wet tears to follow; eyes burned with heat and pain, but now relieved from the wet tears formed by his wake; tears, for now, finally… finally… here stands a chance at hope, in a world that before this would have found lost. bring forth hope. bring forth promises! bring back love! begs a female voice, that groans and moans and wallows in weariness. her world, her world, where she is an empress of the desert. of tragedy. bring it back! begs the reptile queen, for the hero of the hour to come and…?

ahhhh laaaa yaaaa!
"who said that?"
"who said what?" billy asked jesse.

ahhhh laaaa yaaaa!
ahhhh laaaa yaaaa!
ahhhh laaaa yaaaa!

the group was now somewhere at a stop; a sort of camp site for travelers, to stop and ease away from all the dreariness of driving, along the i10. billy and jimmy and jesse stood out some distance further, more into the desert; it now felt like the time to have a good talk.

"so, you saw him?" billy asked. jesse didn't respond, she had no clue what to make

of this vision she was having. “you know, there was a good twenty minutes, you were straight up going out of your mind, screaming, right?” billy jests. but jesse doesn’t find it funny. “if i was screaming, why did you boys do nothing?” the boys don’t answer. jesse is mad. “you think it’s funny, i’m screaming my head off, for twenty minutes?” “you were all right.” all billy lets out. jesse grows madder. “no, someone screaming for twenty minutes in hysteria, is not all right! all right?” jesse scolds. “no, you were all right!” and billy now gives jesse a wink. jesse just stares at him and shakes her head.

but now jesse was coming to terms: she was all right! she survived it. terror, there was! but she survived it. and, as if not really her, just someone she ended up watching in a movie.

“who’s atreyu?” jesse now wanted to ask.
“did you see him?” billy asked.

jesse looked into herself. she did. “yes!” “how was he?” jimmy now asked. “i’ve… never seen anything so… beautiful! he’s atreyu? that’s his name?” billy started to snicker a bit. “no, that’s just the name we gave him. it’s the only name that made sense to us. it’s a name, actually, from our childhood. a movie, actually, me and jimmy have always been very fond of. you’re the first girl we’ve ever brought out here, that’s seen him.” billy lets out. “what?” “we’ve brought a lot of girls out here. we’ve had fun, but, never did they envision what we hoped they would. you’re the first.” “what?” “it’s like this, jesse, the first time we came across the story of the desert and sea, we were still twelve. when we left home, first place we thought of going to was california. and, in 1988, we had, the exact same experience, you just had here in west arizona.” billy explained and smiled at jesse.

“it’s a story?”
“yes, a story of….

the cursed tale of he.
and the cursed tale of she.

forever searching for one another in an endless world of desert and sea.” jimmy told.

jesse was now captivated.

29. clark gable

this is the cursed tale of he.
and the cursed tale of she.
forever searching for one another in an endless world of desert and sea.

they had to deal with the reptile queen.
and i'm to deal with the fish king.

jesse now stood at the santa monica pier, once again. looking out into the water. waiting, just waiting, for her vision to begin. to continue the story the boys left off. since, she's the only one that could. crazy! crazy! i'm not going to get into a boat, and go floating out into the middle of the pacific. then just wait until the rest of the vision is shown to me. jesse thought. "you're chosen to do it, it's the only reason we can think of, that you saw the same vision we did, in 1988, out here in the deserts of west arizona." billy had said. "why can't you boys do it?" jesse had asked. "because, the story of the desert and the reptile queen is meant to be a man's story. the story of the sea and the fish king, of a woman's. that's a story, we can't see, because, we're guys. we can't see it. it's not meant for us." "then, if, that's true, how was i able to see your story of the reptile queen and the desert?" jesse had asked. "because, we shared it with you. well, you're the first we've been allowed to share it with. and, when you go to the pacific, and have your story envisioned, you can then come to us and share yours." jimmy had responded. crazy! jesse thought. standing out there, looking at the water. plus, since the boys dealt with reptile people, jesse now didn't feel keen to be dealing with fish people; fish, in general, always creeped her out; something in those eyes, forever giving a thousand-yard stare, creeped her out, big time! and the idea of a fish king was very reminiscent of, as marilyn monroe would put it "the creature from the black lagoon." eww! no. she didn't need any fish king jumping up now from the pacific, and grabbing her from the pier, and dragging her to the ocean bottoms below; just to lock her away in some underwater palace chamber, (the only one that isn't flooded with water, and left open aired, just for her to breathe). trapped down there, under billions and billions, if not trillions, of gallons of ocean saltwater. trapped forever. forever afraid. and. forever alone. "why can't you boys just go to the pacific, and, just see if you get a vision, like the one you shared with me?" jesse had asked. the boys had then looked at each other, very thousand-yard stare-ish. "because, we've never been to california. at the ends of the vision we got in arizona, we wanted to go to california, since, the rest of the vision is supposed to

continue on the santa monica pier, but, then this… sprite… flew into my ear, and told me something, which jimmy also heard, saying, 'you'll never see california alive.'" the boys said that scared them, and then they decided to not enter california, let alone, reach santa monica pier; they figured, that's where their mortal destinies were meant to end. so, never, out of all the states in the union, had the boys been to california. ever! one major reason jesse finally chose to come here, hoping the vengeance seeking ghosts of the boys, wouldn't follow. ugh… stupid, stupid me… they're not alive anymore, so why did I think that? jesse now scolded herself. seeing how, yup, the boys were definitely here now. although, since they had a hero in their vision, i guess i'm to have my own. i wonder what childhood character, from a movie, i'd give her. jesse thought. now trying to find humor and intrigue behind all this. ariel? no. bella? no. jasmine? no. mulan… okay, enough disney princesses!

helena! and… jesse liked that.

jesse now took one last look at the pacific; she thought of billy, and felt like saying something: billy, i remember what you told me about your dad now. that story, of how he was like. and, after some thought, i can see, just as i've been hounded by the ghost of you, you were always hounded by the one of daddy. which is why you ran so much in your life. as, i have now. but… you're not daddy. you weren't, and, you never wanted to be that. i see now why you say a creature like that needs to be offed. it must be dealt with. i guess, i'm now really dealing with the ghost of your daddy, you passed onto me. i don't blame you, though. i know that, when you take people into your life, you take them for the good and the bad.

unfortunately, you just had a lot of bad.

and more than what i was able to deal with.

and, maybe, that bad got to me, and made me do what i did. "murder is the best way to deal with murderers! got it, jesse?" i remember you saying that to me on that trip to arizona. damn! i guess i took that to heart, more than i should have. seeing as to what i did later on. jesse now released one tear. she did. but only one; feeling herself finally mourning this properly (or was she?). i guess i tried to kill daddy for you. and, you two were in the way. since, he was in the both of you. jesse acknowledged.

yes, billy… i love you. i'm sorry for everything i did. but i always wanted to love you and…!

i'm not fickle, i'm not! so, i do… love you!

that did feel forced, though. but, she chose to accept it. and then a sense of peace came into her. she had had some time now to think about this, sort this through, and, this now, felt like peace. jesse now left the santa monica pier. got in her car. and drove back to the motel 6 she was staying in. jules was right, a week in a crappy motel 6, was all she needed to feel normal again. it was now friday, and, a week of slumming had done the trick for her; something about being around mundane and ordinary surroundings, brought back the sense of ordinary in her life, that really did chase away a lot of those spirits she gathered in the chateau marmont. she did what jules said, tried to live normally, went to a local peet's coffee and tea, and even just watching hipsters and technocrats being their self-absorbed selves, felt better than dealing with kooky cults, and gq magazine sexiest men, and worrying about a list with names of satanists occupying rooms next to her room 13. although, then jules said something to her on the phone, that really pissed her off with him about that list. "what do you mean it was fake?" jesse asked on the phone. "i'm sorry, i'm sorry, i did it to, well… i gave you that list to try and learn something about you. how do i explain it? i guess, it's like a parent with a kid, that takes their kid to a playground, that then goes and sits on a bench, to watch their kid from a distance play. and, what they really want to do is, watch which kids theirs chooses to play with. it's really a learning experience, to see if they have things to worry about, or not. depending which kids theirs chooses to play with. the good or the bad. the ripe or the rotten. i gave you the list to see which celebrities you'd choose to affiliate with." jules explained. "so, no one on that list is…?" "no, the list was really just names of people that were in and around the marmont, at the time that the people at the desk wrote up for me. and i had the staff watch you to see what you'd do."

bastard!

i still like him, though. but that was just a dick move. jesse thought. not liking the idea of being "parented."

“so, you’re telling me tay tay really isn’t a satanist?”
“what, you mean taylor swift? no, no! she’s really just a sweet girl and….”

growl! went jesse, and hung up on him immediately.

but then realized that was too direct, and too silly of a reason, to be hanging up on people (damn her and her grudge with that girl), and then called him up again, just to tell him she’s really all right, and doing better. and, she was looking forward to the party he was now going to invite her to, on friday night. up in the hollywood hills, again. but, with no hiccups like last week’s.

hey, judy?
what?
party in the hollywood hills, you in?
like flynn.
what?
nevermind.

jesse was now in jules’ lexus. driving up the 405, now somewhere around venice beach. seemed like jules’ was to have a good talk with jesse, before picking up judy from north hollywood. and finally getting everyone to the party on mulholland dr. it was 8pm. nighttime. jules really seemed like a good long talk was now deserved, to get the air cleared up, about a lot of stuff. so, you met the ghost of marilyn monroe, huh? he asked. yes. jesse said. it got quiet then. thanks for… everything. jesse said. but jules’ didn’t reply. jesse, room 209, was the one place on the list, i really would have liked if you hadn’t entered. jules said. the list might have been fake. but that room…? jesse said nothing. honey, just curious. but why you ask if you’re fickle? jules now asked. jesse thought. now responded: has to do with the conversation i had with marilyn monroe’s ghost. really, how so? i guess it has something to do with being committed or non-committed. i’ve never liked the idea of being non-committed. you can either see love as fleeting or demanding. that’s why. hmm, might if i say something about that? go on. that’s what i’d call: a vicious cycle. what do you mean? i mean, everyone goes through times of being committed or non-committed. no one is just one way. it’s a vicious cycle, because, demanding people will chase the fickle, demanding commitment. and fickle people will do what fickle people do and run away. but, eventually, the roles will change, as people change, and the fickle will choose not to be fickle

anymore, but all they'll end up doing is chasing after the same people they used to be. do you see what i'm saying? jesse felt a bit confused. life goes in cycles, jesse, no one is perfect. i think almost everyone at one point in life wants love, then gets sick of it, then wants it again. and what happens is, every time they take the role of one, everyone around them somehow takes on the role of the other. and that's why it's a vicious cycle, of people chasing a love, that they just can never seem to get, from a significant other. you see what i mean?

funny, reminds me of a dream i once had a long, long time ago. jules now brought up. about what? jesse asked. jules fidgeted a bit telling her. but then did: i had a bizarre dream, where, i was shown a scenario. of what? i don't want to embellish you with details. but the point is, at the end, i was in a white canvas space, and… a sphinx appeared. what? jules just shrugged at first, then nodded. this now reminded jesse of a white canvas dream she had had, not too long ago. anyways, the sphinx asked me a riddle. of what? the same question you did right now, basically. basically asked:

"to whom does true love deserve the most, the committed, or noncommitted?"

anyways, i got other matters i need to talk to you about. jules now noted. does it have to do with what i did? not directly, but what i feel eventually led to you, to wander the halls of the chateau marmont… how you did. that cult! ever since that kooky cult started. and it's not just at the marmont, there's one at the beverly hills and one at the roosevelt. but, ever since it did, the suicide rates in the city amongst pretty, young girls, has quadrupled in the last two years. jules informed. jesse said nothing. but remembering how sad those girls were, didn't make her question what jules was saying now. thinking about marilyn, jules then felt like speaking about her for a bit: you know… i've held marilyn monroe in fascination for years, decades, really. i even felt like i fell in love with the woman behind the legend. so, i read that my story book, that was meant to be an autobiography. and, i've read it over and over again through the years. truth is, norma jean, in the end, lived a very sad and lonely and difficult life. all she ever did was work and work and work, and then get taken advantage of. at age twelve, she had already blossomed into a bombshell, and she was constantly hounded by wolves and haters. so bad, it got, she first got married at fifteen, so, the boys would stop hounding her. since, back then, the ring meant "off limits," not like now you can go to a swinger's party, and have all bets be off for one night. didn't even marry a man she loved, just did

it so she could take herself off the market. and then divorced and married and divorced and married and divorced again. she never really found the love she had for people in anyone, unfortunately. in the greater scheme of just her life, she was really chasing after the ghost of a deadbeat dad, that left her and her mother, at the time of her birth, and died in new york city, from an automobile accident. and, poor norma jean, with a mother in the mental hospital, and a ghost of a father, she spent an entire lifetime idolizing. which, she had a picture of, which reminded her of clark gable, which she felt her father resembled. that made her chase after the hollywood dream. and, even after becoming the biggest actress, ever, you can say, she never found happiness and love. never even got to finish that autobiography of her story, after her untimely suicide. sad and lonely norma jean. tragic. and what did hollywood stardom do? what impression did she leave in the greater scheme of things? most point to her as the downfall of women, when hollywood really began to objectify them. before her, every movie you'd see, practically always would pass the bechdel test. after her, hardly any. so, what good did her stardom bring to the world, and poor, poor, sad and lonely norma jean, in the end? you see, we all play a part in the greater scheme of things. we're all meant to. but, whether it's a good part or a bad part, i believe, that depends on God's will vs. our own will in life. maybe God's will for norma jean was to have her marry, that one boy that was a farmer in ohio, before she made it big. she wrote about that boy, seemed like she was very much afraid she'd find happiness in a nobody. but, if it brought her happiness and love, wouldn't that ordinary life been better than the life she ended up living, filled with presidents, and baseball legends, and feuds with joan crawford, and getting passed around like a prostitute by the likes of frank sinatra? plus the mobs and mobs of wolves in hollywood executives' and producers' clothing, lining up to get her on the casting couch. gotta wonder about that.

what are you saying? jesse now asked. i'm saying, now, for you, we gotta wonder what God's will is meant to be. maybe God's will wasn't for norma jean to be famous, but, maybe yours is. what do you bring to the greater scheme of things. you dance like no one dances, you were taught by angels. think about that! think about it! but i can't say if hollywood stardom is or isn't what God's plan is for you. all i can do is help you find out. but i can't do that, if you're gonna get tempted by the Devil, and choose to play his role for you here in hollywood. i can't. all right? jules let out.

jules waited for a response… but, none seemed to be coming. and, with peripherals, he distinctly saw jesse roll her eyes. jules now sighed; seeing how tough this nut was going to be to crack. silence then. now, passing the bel air hills on the 405, towards the valley.

jules then felt like continuing: those marilyn girls. they're messed up in the head, and, it's that spirit of monroe, that's done it too them. i don't know if it's the ghost of marilyn monroe, or a doppelganger. a doppelganger? jesse gasped. yes, that does exist. jules informed. that was something jesse had never thought about. the whole time, she had met marilyn… not being really her? can't say if it's monroe's real self as a ghost, or, something pretending to be her. kinda like the problem you got with your twins now. a doppelganger: a demon pretending to be her. i don't understand all of it, myself, really. but, from what i've gathered, especially from eyewitnesses of the cult: that does happen. but, then again, marilyn really was a sad person in life. and with her real-life influences, i don't see as being anymore positive, considering how she went. so, you saying, i might not have really met marilyn monroe? i can't say, jesse, i'm not God, i don't see and know everything that goes on. i can only make estimated guesses, from my understanding and experience. jesse felt depressed, very much so; she really wanted it to be her. really did! really and truly! don't be sad, though. said jules. don't think about it.

i'd like to have been friends….
what, with marilyn… with a ghost?
yes. jesse said.

and now it seemed jules wanted to go into one more long discussion about that matter: honey, i'm going to tell you one more story. because i sense that, when it comes to you and the spiritual world, you're still very naïve about it. and you think being communed to that world can be good to you… jesse, it can't!

back in the 90s, this time a 90s story, i was trying to represent this musician named jack axton, he really was an artist of every form of art imaginable. he could dance, sing, write, write music, play six different musical instruments, draw, paint, act… there wasn't a thing i couldn't find he couldn't do. and everything he did, he was insanely gifted at. insanely. and, never had i met a man that the women would adore, like this man. he was a very good-looking kid, too. astonishingly good

looking. and, i had felt a lot of promise in him the minute i met him. so kind. so generous. so… adorable. even i was taken by him. and, no, i'm not that way. the only thing i found, off, i guess i could say, was the boy's tattoos. i mean, today, everyone has a hundred tattoos, even on their necks and faces and wherever. but, in the 90s, you'd see tattoos on people, but not like it is today. and not like it was with jack. and, here's the thing, all of the tattoos he had, were demonic beast looking things. like the dogs of hell. covered in them from his neck to his ankles, almost. except one. when i saw the tattoos, i had that feeling. like, i needed to have that talk. that talk you and i had, when we met. i asked him, "you got a lot of demons?" he said, "yeah, everyone does." but then i said, "no, i mean, real demons." and i gave him a firm look. at first, he didn't get it. but i kept my stare on him, i made it uncomfortable. i did, so, he would know… i wasn't talking about psychological types. and, after a minute, it clicked with him. he then got upset. he said, "what, what do you want me to say, that i got real demons, like real spirit kinds that can possess people, like in movies?" and i nodded. he then just started crying, crying, bad. and then he told me his story. not his full story, just yet, but enough. he said, all his life he'd been terrorized by them. i said "what?" he said to look at his tattoos, and see. all of them like animals, demonic animals, that would tempt him with thoughts of violence. i then asked him why he would have them tattooed all over him. and then he said, "they're my friends." he said, "sure, it was bad." but, eventually, he started to see how demons were no different from people. "they have feelings, like we do. sure, there's evil in them. but, isn't there in anybody?" he then said "today, in life, i have control over them."

how he say he had control? jesse asked.
interesting you'd ask that.

he showed me one last tattoo i had not seen. on his back, he had a tattoo of a man with horns, in a tuxedo, and a top hat. personally, sorta reminded me of alice cooper, from my day. i asked him who he was. he said, his name is "mr. incubus." and, he was a demon, that eventually came to him, and, made a deal. he'd keep all the other demons at bay, all jack axton had to do was idolize him. become him. become jack's new identity. supposedly, being an artist, himself, itself… whatever. also, most importantly, a musical artist, that knew how to soothe all the savage beasts, jack had inside of him. so, jack agreed. the demon then told him to get all those tattoos, to commemorate their covenant together. his on the back, as some keystone, of a bridge he was making for him, into a better life. the story goes on,

and, it gets really dark from here.

sometime later, after getting to know each other. and, i, taking him to meet people and stuff, he slowly began telling me more skeletons he had in his closet. he said it felt therapeutic talking to me about these things. one day, he told me, when he was a child, about 8 years old, he was in his bedroom at night, and he had heard a window break. he went to the window, saw it was broken. he then heard a woman scream. he went to his mother's bedroom to see what it was.

oh my…? jesse gasped, realizing where this was going.

he saw, a man, over his mother, that had her stripped naked and held down and…! oh my God, he saw something like that as a child? yes. he did. he said, it scarred him for life. really did. at the time, the man that was raping his mother, he never saw the kid, the mother did. and jack said his mother made a motion with her eyes, for him to go back to his room. a motion she'd always do, to tell him to do so. so, he left his mother in that room. went to his bedroom. his mother survived it, though. the man didn't kill her in the end. but she was traumatized for life, as jack was, as a little boy. then, sometime later, he finally disclosed a really dark part of his life, that, till this day, i still can't believe that it's true. what? he told me, back when he was with a certain girl, when they were fourteen years of age, they were wildly in love together. and, it was some of the best days in his life. although, jack… didn't have good feelings about sex. because of things he had experienced from childhood, that had traumatized him. one day, jack told me, his mr. incubus spoke to him. he instructed him to get with this girl, and take acid together, and watch horror movies. supposedly, jack and this girl were big time horror movie fans. they loved it: freddy krueger, jason, michael myers, chuckie, you name it. so, jack thought it would be a neat idea. jack said, after they took acid, and were watching like their third horror movie, this girl, i forget her name, asked him to do something.

she asked him, she asked him to… rape her.
what?

jack refused. she then demanded he do so! jack began crying. but then the girl smacked the absolute crap out of him, and jack went off.

and did it!

then jack went on to say something else. you see, jack didn't come from a rich family. jack wasn't exactly working at this time, but, he was living in a new york penthouse suite. and also, had one here in la. it didn't make since. he wasn't a rich musician, just yet. i was still working on that. it was the 90s, and jack was really into music like tool, nine inch nails, alice-in-chains, marylyn manson, rob zombie, stuff like that. but he hadn't been made yet. yet, he lived the luxury life like he had been. so, where did he get his money, then? jack eventually told me a secret, that he didn't want me to tell anyone else. the way he makes all this dough, was by helping women.

how? jesse asked.

he said, women pay a lot for him, and his "services." and he stressed how this was "helping women." at the time, i thought, was he being a gigolo? what's that? a male prostitute. anyways, i asked him, and he said "no, not technically." i asked, what do you mean "not technically?" he then said this, "you know when a person is suffering from a phobia, like arachnophobia, what do they do to deal with that fear?" i thought and said, "i guess, confront their fears?" he said, "exactly." he then said, he helps women confront their fears. wait… what… i? jesse was confused, and didn't like where this was going. he said there's a lot of women out there, that are terrified of the fear, of being stalked and raped. and, it's a fear that's almost debilitating to them. his job was to help them get over—

by what, raping them? jesse said and got mad.

he said, women would pay him top dollar for this. top! and then he said something that really pissed me off. he called it "consented rape." what? yes. i got mad, too. i was like, "wait a second, you rape women?" he said, "yes, it's consented rape." i yelled at him and said, "there is no such thing. the whole thing that makes rape what it is, is the fact it's not consented!" but he said, i wasn't looking at this in the right perspective. jules now saw how jesse didn't seem to be buying it. demons you know and demons you don't, but this one just seemed way too unimaginable. what the hell is behind certain closed doors, i still don't know about? jesse felt. i'm not lying to you. this guy truly and genuinely believed he was helping them. and the fact he had a whole lot of clients that paid him to do this, top dollar, just

makes you think. how did it work? jesse asked. i was also curious, so, i asked. he said, it was a deal never directly made through him. and women would never see him, or meet him, from the start. just later, when the day came, he would strike. they'd pay some friend of his to set up an arrangement. and, what he would do then was, wait a certain period of time, sometimes he'd wait a few weeks, sometimes months., and once he said almost a year. he had it all scheduled perfectly. like role play, but as some stalker, at first, making her somewhat aware, to creep her out. since if it happened right after the deal, the woman would surely guess it's him. the point being, the way he explained, the fact that the women never knew him, in their minds, they'd figure there was either a chance it was the guy this paid to do this service, or, a chance they were being raped by a real perpetrator. that not knowing, is where the terror part would come in. women paid…? yes, he told me one woman, some old 5th avenue richy rich type, paid him a million, cold, to do it!

he said, there's a lot of women out there, a whole lot of women, a market, really, so it's not just him, where they're completely fixated by the rush. kinda like asphyxiation during sex. something about the danger of it all, that made it exciting. and for a woman, suffering from panic disorders and paranoia, the chance to face their fears, and try to overcome them. he seriously, in his warped mind, thought so. i think it was that mr. ink that was twisting his mind around to make him think he was. wait, mr. ink? he started calling mr. incubus, mr. ink, at some point. he chose to make it his professional musician name. and since at the time there was a band that came out called, "incubus," and before he made a name, he didn't want to seem unoriginal. plus, tattoo, ink, get the drift? but this isn't how the story ends.

jesse really didn't feel like listening anymore. this was too much.

one day, i get a call from him at 4am in the morning. he's crying and being hysterical. absolutely hysterical and out of his mind. i asked him what was wrong, and he said mr. ink abandoned him, abandoned him with all the demons he has. he said, he was in the middle of it, assault and rape. and then, all of a sudden, he saw mr. ink depart from him. and leave him. and leave him with all the demons mr. ink was meant to keep at bay. his whole body was covered with tattoos of demons, all over. hundreds. he said when mr. ink left him, all those demons came out, and took over. he completely went wild and psychotically driven mad and

murdered the woman he was raping.

he even ripped her apart and ate her.

this was beyond what he would do. this was not part of the plan. jack was crying hysterically at me,

"i'm in hell, i'm in hell, i'm in hell! i've locked myself up in my apartment and now the demons are hungry for me!" then hung up.

and now here's the final chapter of the demise of jack axton.

i went to his place, i had a key, i went in, and found his corpse.

his corpse was completely mutilated.

what do you mean? i mean, those tattoos, his so-called "friends," eventually turned on him, and lacerated him to death. he looked like some monster had chewed him up, and spat him out. the coroner eventually ruled it as a death from loss of blood brought about by a wild animal attack. a cougar, he noted, no less. yeah, as if a cougar found its way to the 6th floor of a westwood penthouse suite, got into his room, and tried to eat him alive, then left, without no one noticing the damn animal.

also, one of his tattoos was missing. he was on his stomach when i found him, and his back was turned towards me. and, there was a tattoo, i knew about, that was no longer there.

mr. ink? jesse guessed.
exactly.

that keystone art piece of mr. ink on his back, just wasn't there anymore. and i don't mean the flesh got ripped off or so lacerated that you couldn't make it out or see it anymore. you plainly could see his skin, skin that was still barely attached to him, and, he just wasn't there anymore. jesse, i've never told this one story to anyone. i've told all my others. but never this. i'm telling you this now, because, with demons? there's no such thing as making friends with them. they're not

meant to be sympathized. they're all going to end up in hell, eventually. and their only sole task now on this earth is to drag as many souls down with them, as they can.

do you understand me?

if you decided to make friends with those demons of yours, sympathize with them, through, "oh, it's my ex-boyfriend, and.…" no! not going to happen! and if you get the crazy notion that you can control them, outside of getting help from the hand of God, it might seem that way for a time, but that time is just part of the trick they play, on you, to get you too comfortable with them around. until, one day, it's too late. if you try to do any of these things, i guarantee you, your story will turn out probably just like jack axton's did. you got me?

honey, because demons and demon possession aren't how it is like in movies. not like the exorcist, making you puke pea soup and have your head spinning around like a top, making a whole bunch of commotion, and getting everybody and the town drunk's attention. which leads people to immediately take the possessed to a priest. even the skeptical atheist in town is like: "just do it!" no! demons are like the mob, they like things to be quiet and discreet. ever seen the usual suspects? they're like Keyser Söze, with the greatest trick the Devil ever pulling was to make the world believe he didn't exist. they take their time, like the hands of a clock, ticking and ticking and ticking and working you over, by manipulating you, over the course. starting small by making you enjoy a perverted joke, more than you think you should, all the way to the point you're on the internet, looking up child pornography. feeding you ideas in your ear, and making it seem like you're the one that came up with it. setting you up, like a bomb, with a detonator, until you're triggered to blow. making it seem like there's nothing bad going your way, and then as you turn a corner, comes the sudden drop, and then the eternal fall—straight to hell—and all the horror and terror that it brings. that's how they are!

jules finished.

but, jesse… still felt like jules was missing the point.

okay, i hope… i hope…?
but then jesse fired back:

they're not demons!
what? jules said.
my de—… it's billy and jimmy! it's them. it's really them. it's like the penelope story. it's their ghosts. jesse argued.

jules now looked exasperated.

jesse….
it doesn't matter! just stay away.
no! jesse established.

jesse now felt like making a commitment. she loved billy. she always wanted that love. even though it felt like it slipped through her fingers. but, you gotta be committed, to make it work. not fickle. committed! to the end. even passed the point of death doing each other a part. but jules was now growing sick of this: what do you mean, no? jesse didn't answer. now jules was mad. what, these stories i'm telling you, you think i'm just bored and want to entertain you with some campsite spooky tales, that go bump in the night? you think this is… this is… like some episode of are you afraid of the dark, you used to watch as a kid on nickelodeon? no! these are real stories and of people i knew, and lost, and buried, and had to mourn for. stories that have scarred me for life. my daughter! my beautiful, precious daughter! and i'm worn out, now. i'm worn out. i'm telling you these things to warn you. don't let them in your life. get them out of your life. whether ghosts or demons.

jesse shook her head.

honey….
they're dead.
they're dead!
okay?

and, when it comes to the world of the living and the dead, maybe, there's a reason God tends to keep them separate. do you understand me? stick to the living. let the dead be dead! whether ghosts or demons, i don't see you coming out of all this in one piece.

….
jesse… that welt on your arm…?
jesse grabbed her arm that had that mark on her. as if, the mark of the beast.
where did you get that, jesse? when did you get that?
….
did those ghost lovers do that to you…?
jesse went into denial, as she began shaking her head.
jesse, if you don't put their funerals behind you… they'll eventually come back around, and turn it into—your funeral!

you're a grown woman, you decide.

and if you're not going to heed anything i say anymore, then i can't be a part of this anymore. not anymore! you got it?

jesse… didn't answer.

30. bear costumes

oh, my goodness, you're cute, like some father figure, aren't you? it was judy meeting jules; this was going to be entertaining.

hi, my name is judy romero.
jules rosenberg. jules just said.

as much as jules loved good chatter, jesse had been wearing on him, immensely. therefore, jules didn't quite yet seem himself meeting judy. feeling somewhat morose. and now, just wanting to take these girls to the party. and hope for the best. although, judy had her ambitions, and she wanted to see what to make of jules, and the party later. so, jules, where we going? tell me all about the cute actor boys we're going to meet today. judy said. sly little girl. jules now couldn't help it, judy was more fitting for his chatty personality. you're not meeting anyone. jules said, sorta monotone, but, also jokingly.

what? yes, i am!
no, you're not!
why not?

because, judy, all those boys are dogs! dogs! dogs! you get it? jules argued. so, i like dogs! judy said. sly little girl. okay, do you like wolves? jules asked now. oh, are you kidding me, wolves are better! dogs are still just silly, domesticated, beta animals. wolves are the real deal alphas. my type of animal! judy announced. jules now had his mouth open, a bit dumbstruck. okay, fine, how about bears, you like bears? jules now put it. what… eww! judy went. okay, then, there's probably going to be more hollywood people there, that are behind the silverscreen, than in front of it. and, when it comes to hollywood executives and producers, they don't tend to be a beautiful animal like a wolf. they tend to be ugly animals. like bears. you get me? jules explained. judy now made a pouty ☹. no tall, dark and handsome and dangerous. just big, fat and ugly and dangerous. like good ol' uncle harvey wein— fine, fine! you don't have to over explain it. i get it. i get it! judy had lost this battle. jules smiled seeing him getting his win out of this. oh, jesse, i should let you know, i got his number. judy informed jesse. jesse was confused. wait… who? what do you mean, who? ray. and, it hadn't even been five minutes judy was now around. yet, jesse was already regretting bringing her. wait, how did you get his number? what do you mean, how, i had to get a ride back. i didn't turn the meter off. i made

him wait until i got back. you know it's more expensive if you hail another uber, compared to using the same one. okay, but that didn't explain certain things. judy, after the night we put him through, you—
what do you mean, we? you were the one that went off! wait, who's ray? now jules wanted in. oh, some guy, jesse wanted to drag me into a threesome with. judy simply said. simply! wait… huh? jules went. ah-ha! judy went. not even five minutes, yet, jesse was now severely regretting this decision. why, why, why, have jules listen to all this? couldn't judy save this between her and jesse, some other time? it was like judy absolutely loved having too much fun at other people's expense. and, have it so, other people should really be having fun with it, too, even when the fun judy would put out, wasn't geared for that; judy was just that theatrical! listen, i did it for you, jesse. judy said. stop, please, judy, stop! jesse went. i mean, i had a nice talk with him, since, he was enjoyable to be around. but, not really my type. he's too sad. like you. so, you two would be perfectly sad together. judy explained.

okay, now five minutes in, let's see what judy was going to put jesse and jules through, for the next fight minutes, shall we? jesse, in the end, when it comes to men, they're either keepers, or non-keepers. and the non-types tend to be the majority of them. i might even settle with him, if you don't want to, okay? judy explained. now jules wanted to ask something: so, what's with all the friendzoning women do? jules, friendzoning is just a pervasive attitude, that only exists in men's heads, over the fact that they can't sleep with every woman they come across. i'm friendzoned with jesse, i don't want to sleep with her… (even though she might be coveting some desire to sleep with me). judy let out at the end. what? jesse went. well, you did say you wanted to drag me into that threesome, kicking and screaming, so, what else am i supposed to make of that? okay, i'm not gonna go there over the threesome thing, but… what do you mean by "pervasive attitude?" jules asked. i mean, you can't just sleep with every girl! judy rang in. but jesse had something for her now: okay, judy, then why do you try to sleep with almost every boy? at this point, jules realized, he really didn't need to be in the middle of this catfight. because, yup! it was going there.

jesse, bite me! judy let out.

gotta say, you millennials are different than us babyboomers. jules added. how so? asked judy. you guys all remind me of my parent's generation, just prudes and

melodramatics. but, yet, also nothing like that at all. really just unforgiving and picky. jules observed. i take offense to that. judy pouted. honey, i'm not targeting you directly, or jesse. everyone is an individual in the end. but, as a generation, as a whole, we were never picky. we didn't make lists of qualifications in a mate. find nothing substantial. then ditch the list, and hook up with anybody, with what now could only be meaningless sex. we just wanted to make whoopie. just express love to one another. is that so bad? jules asked. but judy had a more deeper analysis to that to give: well, maybe if you boom-booms weren't such pathological, uncommitted whoopie makers, like everyone was your soulmate, we wouldn't double down, with finding the perfect mate. jules didn't know how to rebound from that.

but this made jesse think of someone related to judy: you thinking of your uncommitted mother, judy? jesse inquired, whisperingly to judy. crap! that's an extremely inappropriate question! jesse then realized her shortcoming. judy didn't respond for a moment. all pouty face. then said none whisperingly: my mom wasn't old like your parents, jesse, she had her girls young. she was an x-gen. and, trust me, only an x-gen could be that much of an unapologetic monster. jules rolled his eyes and commented: you hit the nail on the head with that, when it comes to x-gens. i remember how they were in their "juvenile delinquent" years. a bunch of unapologetic mongrels and nomads they all were. your generation will sport pink fauxhawks, and work at the apple store, because you think it looks cool. those punks would sport the real thing, because they wanted to scare people into thinking, they were trying to live up to the name: "mohawk." and what it means in the iroquoian language. which is: "maneater." i remember once getting mugged at knife point in downtown la, in '84, by some punk kid, that had a swastika tattooed on his forehead. and i got the idea the kid didn't have one because he was some neonazi skinhead, something, but had it just to mess with people, and mess with people, alone. of course, that was my fault, i was on the street at night, and in the 80s, you did not want to be outside in downtown la, at night. no, if, ands, or buts, about it. your gen loves using the word "savage." you're not savage, x-gen was savage. don't believe me, look at the crime rate in america in the 80s and 90s. a generation of straight up hooligans.

sorry… that kinda got dark. jules finished. this reminded jesse of her too old lovers: definitely x-gens, they were. that and the story of mr. ink. all parties then fell silent. but then jesse noticed something, and even though, this was a pandora's

box, she couldn't help but open up the matter:

judy, you seriously wearing my fishnet stockings again?
what, they look good on me!
yeah, but they also look good on me, too. and since they're mine, hand them over!

jesse blasted and did a grabby thing with her left hand. judy looked, got mad, and started taking them off. fine, but, just to warn you, jules, going to have to take my panties off, to get them off, so no trying to peek at my hoo-haa, in the rearview mirror. honey, trust me, nothing i haven't seen before, you're not scaring me with any mythological seamonsters, you got crawling down there, or nothing. jules tried to be funny again. but, maybe a little too funny. honey? don't call me honey, i'm a feminist, how dare you! judy was now waving her face around all prissy and puffy, while fluffing her hair. jules just looked back and made a gross face. okay, you know what, jesse, i really, really like this girl. you need to bring her every time now. jules rejoiced.

yes, yes, jesse does! went judy.
no, no, i don't! went jesse, and started massaging her forehead with her hand.

judy went back to taking off her panties.

hey, i said no—peeking!
no, i did not! no, i did not! you know, you're something else!

and finally, now, the comedy hour was over. nothing jesse couldn't stand more, than when the comedy started to get contrived and forced. and it was starting to feel that way at the ends. but… nah, still enjoyed it, for the while it lasted. truth was, jesse needed some comedy right now in life; more yukes and much less "me is angry girl, hear me roar." here, take your stockings, they're yours. but they smell of you now. jesse pouted. jesse, didn't even need to get them near her face. but judy was already well known for her womanly odor; she really needed to wash up more down there. what do you mean, smell of me, more fish jokes? jesse said nothing. good, now maybe boys will want to smell you down there more. are you done? are you done? jesse doubled up. yes, yes, finished! jesse sighed.

not like ray found a reason to complain about the smell down there, last week, at

my place. he, he, he! judy cheap shotted.

jesse now sighed again in utter defeat and buried her face in her hands. judy, although, grew some big pearly teeth, and began wiggling her eyebrows at no one. except, maybe, for all those judy like-minded kindred spirits, that were around her; whom all looked and thought and walked and talked and quacked, exactly like judy. now all giving her an applause.

you wouldn't, did you?
no, jesse, no! what do you take me for?

mulholland drive was one of the more scenic drives up into the hills, that almost everyone drove, and got the sense they were someplace special in the city. la, all of it, had a tendency, that once you got a little too close to any hill, the roads would become more and more windy, the further up you got, and narrower and narrower. even though same can be said with any hill in any city, in la, the experience had a unique precedence. and, then, you would be lost, unsure of whether to turn right, or turn left, or continue going straight. and either you were going to be led to where you were heading, where you weren't. that, or a dead end. up here, there would be too many crossroads, and too many to choose from. except for the drives going up and down these hills, the rest of la wasn't as difficult to maneuver around, and master in contrast. what it was, was, the hills. just the hills. something unquestioned and unanswered about what made them what they were. to best understand the hills in this city, would be best to understand the nature of a riddle, and what makes a riddle what it is and what it isn't; a riddle is a depiction that is made of something being seen, that, which the riddler makes, and, the one being made to, must then imagine and imagine correctly, what's being depicted; it is like trying to describe to a blind man, only that which can be understood, by the one that can see.

take the ancient old riddle of the sphinx:

"what creature is it that walks on four legs at dawn, on two legs at noon, and at dusk passes away the evening hours on three?"

right there, a depiction is made by a riddler, of something he or she sees, which you cannot, as of yet; their seeing eyes sees what your blind ones must now guess.

and, as you try to imagine what exactly it is that is being depicted, your mind then finds itself going this direction, then that direction, guessing this, then guessing that, imagining this, then that; making all those windy turns in so many directions. but, only one of those directions is the correct direction. and, only one of those houses on the hills of la, is the correct house. where what needs to be seen inside, is what's expected from you. so, what is it that walks on four, then two, and then three, over the course of a day? is it a single day? or is the day in a figurative sense, of more than that? a lifetime? so, a lifetime! so, what creature does it happen to be, that would go from four to two to three? now, you must imagine what that is.

the answer of course is "man."

- at birth, he crawls on four.
- then sometime in the middle of his years, he walks on two.
- and later, near and close to death, a cane is needed, to make the weary walk in life, to the end of his days.

that, is the answer to that riddle. but, just how many guesses would it have taken you, to eventually come to just this single answer? the hills of la are a riddle; so many places you can go up and down to on those drives. yet, only one would be the correct way. and, only one house, the correct answer. and the hills of hollywood and the rest of la, aren't just the precedencies of one riddle, but millions and millions of them, all being asked by millions and millions of riddlers. but only one riddler, for each person living in this city, to lead that person to one answer.

jesse also felt she hated these hills. especially the hollywood hills; just so much ambiguousness behind each and every one of them; anywhere else you'd drive to in the city, didn't feel as such: go to burbank, go to venice beach, pasadena, culver city, glendale, encino, brentwood, westwood, hollywood, north hollywood, west hollywood, little armenia.

speaking of armenians, here, jesse had found a group of people, she had never in her life been acquainted with; had never crossed their paths; she had never met an armenian all her life anywhere, except here. the only armenian that she could think of before, was the one half armenian, which was the booty of la: kim kardashian, herself. but, never the less, she found them an interesting group of

people; very old and proud and romantically sad group, that originated from somewhere in the middle east. but they weren't middle eastern. or, were they? but weren't muslim, like most of all middle easterners were, and were originally the first nation of people to make christianity their father religion. characteristically, they came off as italians, to jesse, for what italians are to new york in the east, as to what armenians are to la here in the west; they even looked like italians, with their very heavyset mediterranean features; very dark haired and tick eye browed and overall hairy and olive oiled in skin and taste and flavor and color. and their mannerisms were very oldworldly and brutish and direct: men were men, and women were women. and no ways in between. she remembered one armenian boy that hit on her in burbank, that made such a suspiciously arrogant claim, that lgbt in armenians didn't exist. and, seeing how every armenian boy acted, with their wifebeater tank tops and gym shorts, and a whole group of them always standing outside a 7-11, at 2am in the morning, huddled around a group of bmws, looking very territorial and toxic masculine, and way too callous for the likes of jesse, in a dreadfully misogynistic way, like they had been going on for hours arguing and arguing the night away, over the best techniques in beating their wives and girlfriends, in a language that sounded to be a cross between arabic and russian and vampirine… well? that was just the impression jesse would get. they were a funny group of people too; extremely jokey and callous and rude and direct, very direct! then, the mood would change, and they would then become just so polarizingly sad, in ways, jesse could never having imagined, surpassing southern people's defeatist attitude of tragedy and sorrow. jesse remembered this one girl from pandora club, a nadia girl, good dancer, but she had this extremely super white skin, with super, super dark hair; jesse had never seen a girl with that white of skin and that black of hair; irish vampires would never get this white, and an albanian streetwalker's hair would never get this black. type of hair to put bebe rexha's hair color (true hair color) put to shame, in just how beautifully black it was. with hair so black in contrast with white flesh, she looked like the daughter of dracula, of the black hair people, of the southern caucasian highlands. she didn't know what to describe what she was seeing; she never met people like this before; seeming so lively, sometimes, and at other times, universally mute. but the point is, over time, she got to know them, like knowing anyone. and, in glendale, where most of their bunch could be found, she could be driving through the streets looking at houses, and tell if there was an armenian family in the building, inviting another armenian family over, for some armenian cognac and shish kebabs, as they got very loud and lively in talks about rumors of neighbors, and

attitudes of armenians, here in america, in comparison to what they remembered from the old country. and how life here had made a lot of changes to them. glendale was full of those neighborhood vibes, where what you'd expect in old america, back when kids would only date kids, of their family's friends and neighbors. and no one else. but, drive through van nuys, a much more lower renter's market, and, you'd see armenians, that had to downsize to live there; van nuys was a much poorer city, just north of the more home-away-from-home, hobnob of hollywood business talk extravagances, of sherman oaks; just a poorer and more boring and sadder city. and, armenians living there, instead of those in glendale, or even little armenia, all felt a little bit different; a little bit more depressed. and not the type to invite neighbors over day and night, and talk and talk and drink and eat… none of that. van nuys was just a much more undesirable place to live in. also, one of the only places in the city, you could find a single bedroom apartment, under 1,200 dollars a month.

all this, is pretty much a small handful of what is understood in one part of la. now, go to culver city, you'd find a different group of people and a different sense and different story. go to koreatown, and you'd have another. a more oriental feel this time around, of course.

point of this all being: the city of la, like anywhere in the world, had streets and neighborhoods, to where if you spent enough time in, you'd get to know the places and people, and get to know what they were about: their good and their sins.

everywhere in la, except the hills of la.

in the hills. you had no clue what to expect, of anything about the people that lived here. who they were and what they did and what they were about. nothing! ambiguous. and something very seemingly, seemingly… disturbing.

you look at one house and think: who lives here, what do they do? to another: same question. and then another, and now you get the sense there were ghosts and spirits there, not even God would know what to do with, or what to make of.

the point being, the hills were the escapes of the city, where people who didn't want other people to know anything about them, could escape, and never be

found; where they could be lost in a riddle; lost in millions and millions of riddles; all asked by an all seeking eye, to a blind person, unsure of what to make of the multitude and multitude of depictions, of things being thrown at them. rich people. powerful people. scary people. so many hills in la, with so many riddles. and now, here in mulholland drive, jesse felt no simple riddler, she was to be facing, making her guess, of what creature did what and looked like what within what circumstances. mulholland drive was a place, all riddles came from no mere riddler.

but, the sphinx, herself.
being asked by that one ancient demon.

and, don't forget, now, when it comes to the myth of the legendary sphinx, it is best to give that malevolent being its answer to its riddle, right away. simple and straight and no diddle-daddling. because, if you don't, it was the sphinx's prerogative to do what she did to all her victims, that failed to pass her tests: grow enraged and devour them. you only had three guesses, and if you guessed incorrectly, all three times, the punishment was that: eaten alive by that one giant monster. so, guess wisely!

why would anyone want to live in these hills? the roads are so stupidly narrow. i tried to back up, once, up here. almost drove into some rich dudes living room. i tried to drive up a bit forward, almost drove off a cliff. i have never in my life driving, have been stuck between a guy's living room, and a cliff, considering how stupidly narrow everything is here. does anyone ever look at these streets, and just wonder, "how the hell do they get uhauls up through here?" or do rich white people just hire a bunch of mexicans, from home depot, and have them piggyback all their stuff up? i can just imagine a long caravan line of mexicans climbing up these hills, with a kitchen table on one guy's back, a mattress on another, and the next guy carrying a chandelier. judy was going off. complaining. also somewhat making jokes with her unique corky and kooky sense of humor. but jesse knew exactly what she was driving at.

judy, i'm guessing you get the sense: if you're made in hollywood, you live here and nowhere else. jules explained. yeah, but i've been in rich neighborhoods in the oc's laguna beach, down south. i think… yeah! that's more of my type of spot. i'll take desperate housewives over this any day. you live in an area like this, jules?

asked jesse. yes. jules said. okay, tell me how is it like? well, i've lived in the same house near the observatory at griffith for 35 years now. i got a neighbor i've been seeing, for 35 years, also living next to me. i still don't know his first name. you want to know what it's like living here. like that! that's just weird. in miami, i lived in a rich neighborhood, too. and, people liked to mostly be secretive, too. but everyone at least knew everyone's first name.

also, who was sleeping with who. and who was having what sex party at what house and… mostly only that. everyone knew my mother, though. judy noted. yeah, this isn't miami, honey. said jules. best way to explain it is… ever seen the movie: the shining? might be a little too old for you two kids. no. no. both girls answered. okay, well, spoiler warnings, but, there's this scene, shelley duvall's character, is running around this giant scary hotel in the colorado mountains. and, she's being chased by jack nicholson's character, that's her husband. why is she being chased? asked judy. because it's a horror movie, and he wants to kill her. jules answered. oh! anyways, there's this part in the movie, shelley duvall's character is running crazy, out of her mind, through the hotel, and she comes across a room with an open door. and… well… there's a man in a bear suit, that looks like he's giving sexual favors to some "laurence olivia vanderbilt" named looking character. what the… eww! went judy. i don't know if i want to see this movie. well, yeah, the point of that scene is, it makes you think, "what the hell is going on in there? what in God's name is…?" you get the point. so, what are you saying? asked jesse. what i'm saying is, that's how the houses of the hills here in hollywood are like. a lot of "what the hell is going on in there?" but, thankfully, all the neighbor's doors are closed. and, you don't have to worry about seeing nothing, with people in bear suits, giving sexual favors, and stuff. just that! both judy and jesse gave each other a look, as if wondering: where the hell is this man bringing us? both simultaneously thinking that in their heads. but, don't worry, you won't see no party here, with any creepy dudes, in bear costumes, type of crap. you're safe with jules, so, don't worry.

they now pulled up to the gate of the house the three were expected at. jules spoke into a voicebox at the gate. and, now they were in.

as for the mansion they were at, it felt very "chateau marmont"-ish. but cheap! a lot of cream-colored everything, to spend hours and hours staring at and wonder in an hour, "wait, what house am i at, again?" that's another thing about

hollywood, up here in the hills: everything here looked very posh and slick and minimalistic, and very frank lloyd wright inspired, in its postmodern architecture. but with no sense of fluidity or flow of design, that of how flw would probably dedicate an entire month, trying to simply mastermind the designs, of one single house, at a time, to give it a unique life and soul; no real one-on-one time spent, giving no real passion or personality and personal intimacy, to the feel of these structures. all the houses here all looked flw inspired, but copypasted, over and over again, until every one of these mcmansions, were nothing more than a frankenstein-ing of one another, with all the stitching having been masked away; just a lot of high end architectural bodyparts chopped up, and festooned all around, with no soul, anywhere left in their corpses' vicinity. simply put: it all looked very slick, very minimalistic, very cream-colored, yet very pretty, on the outside, and yet so very ugly inside. and also dead.

one last bit of info…. jules said. any of you trump supporters?
….
good, if anyone asks, don't say anything, and if they get direct about it, talk about how upset you were when hillary lost. is it that important? jesse asked. yeah, it is, if you think being blacklisted in this town is, also. none of you are republicans, either? my dad keeps telling me, how they're really the same party, just flip sides of a single coin, pretending not to be. judy answered. good, good, your dad's smart… but don't say that either. just say democrat. not even centrist. when you girls get kanye big, then you can open up with the red maga hats, and take on all of tinseltown. but not before. i'm already aware of this. i know how politics is in this city. judy put. both judy and jules looked at jesse now. jesse now let her southern accent fly and said:

what…? i'm just a tennessee girl, like my baby girl, tay tay, and she told me marsha blackburn was bad, and if i was back home, i would have voted for the other guy… whatever his name is.

oh, good. play stupid. good. that'll work too. jules put.

and now, they were in.

and, wow… really? the feelings of immediate disappointment, this quickly? jesse thought. so, this was what years and years of watching that swingers' movie, about

hobnobbing in la's high scale parties, would accumulate towards? all those years fantasizing herself up there, with the stars, no longer among the leeches of the city of west hollywood. this was her graduation day. and, here, a valedictorian, up at the podium, and with no speech coming to mind; one she did spend years and years drawing up in her head. but, now, it didn't really seem all that worth it. jesse, you didn't come to this city to hobnob, you came to dance! remember that! it's about the dancing, everything else is just one step taken at a time, to get to what you really love to do most! jesse reminded herself. and now, felt, "okay… let's do this!"

oh, jesse, look… it's your favorite nashville bred singer in all the world! judy posed. huh… what?

oh, great! judy was right. she was also here! but, enough of that. even jesse was feeling tired of this personal one-sided feud she had with her.

all right, girls, go do your thing. i'll see who i can introduce you to. and, if you get some weirdo guys coming up wanting to promise you stuff… i think you'd know what to do! yeah, yeah, yeah… we get that enough in west hollywood, don't we, jesse? judy joked. they did. jesse now decided to walk around and be all… joan crawford, again? meh, why not? so, she grabbed some champagne, from some server, and started just drifting about, getting the sense of things. wow, jesse's all time nashville favorite, wasn't the only big name in here. actually, this really was a high scale hollywood get together.

hey, wait… did i just see you come in here with goldfinger? some singer asked jesse, some 2000's big name. now a has-been. no. jesse answered. and walked away.

hey, did you come in here with… was that goldfinger?
no.

hey… did i just see you in here with—
no. it's not him.
no, that's him. what's your name? asked james franco. jesse didn't want to give this one particular actor her name; she'd heard some stories about him, especially in malibu. hey, i'm sorry, i don't want to seem rude but…? james continued. oh, i'm… anastasia palace. jesse said, and followed up with. wait, what name did i just

give? what the hell name did i just make up? crap! move it! move it, girl! and she did. jesse now ran, and, needed to go somewhere she wouldn't get that question asked every couple of minutes. until enough time had passed, to where people here, were no longer thinking about what people just came in with whom, with what entourage. jesse was now near the kitchen, where the servers were mostly huddled around, working on their distribution of whatever carryouts. judy came up. jesse, why did i just have two different people ask me if i came up with someone called, "goldfinger" and one of them i swear was benedict cumberbatch? jesse's eyes blew up. say nothing! she simply answered. what? trust me, that's between me and jules, and i guess you now. it didn't happen. it's a ghost. jesse directed. judy's eyes twitched. but, decided to follow with what jesse just instructed her to do, exactly.

after a while, that now seemed to blow over. that's the thing about any party: very short attention spans, yet nothing that would escape anyone's long-term memory. and now, back to being a nobody, again. good! she felt more secure this way. must say, there sure were a lot of big ego cases here. jesse had never been to a party, with this much hot air hovering about. shoot a jet of some cold breeze, and, tornado warnings might start going off, in a city that never tended to get them. although, it was also sorta fun watching so much hot air around, jesse now didn't know if she had entered a house in the hollywood hills, or a goodyear blimp factory; sorta fun watching all these blimps of people's personalities, all crammed in here; wanting to find an exit to fly out the door and go circling around the homes in beverly glen.

it was then jesse came up to two hollywood exec types, and heard a very interesting conversation: i heard there was another "jezebel hello" case going around at the roosevelt. said one. and that caught jesse's interest. they seemed younger. not the big, fat and ugly and dangerous exec types, jules was warning judy about. but, very bland and blank and so-so tempered to be around, and look at. not bad, though. just "two-minute-boys" for jesse. which meant, she could have a normal human conversation with them, for a good two minutes. but after that two-minute marker, best to ditch them. or… the boys might get the false sense, that all this attention being given, might mean she was starting to come on to them, and looking for a hookup. and, by then, it would be too late, as it would get hairier and hairier, as they'd close their tinder apps on their smartphones, and start to drink more, and get drunk, and eye her from a distance, with the ever increasingly

creepier and creepier stares. with jesse then being forced to spend the rest of the night, completely avoiding them, and their tries to lure her to their pads, for some netflix and chill. but they seemed tame right now. although, one seemed to be needing a quick rush to the nearest bathroom, to shoot up on more coke, since the dilation in his eyes was beginning to wear. wait… what did you just say? jesse asked the two. oh, just hollywood gossip. there's this new trend starting up at hotels across the city, called a "jezebel hello." said the other. what's that? jesse asked. well, from what i heard, at one of the big ones, i think it was the beverly hills hotel, some girl was seen walking naked through the hallways, knocking on doors, offering sex to anyone that would open. and, everyone is now talking about it. and, because of that, there's been copycats. jesse was now standing beside herself. are you serious? she gasped. yes, yes! supposedly the name "jezebel" is either from the actual girl that did it first. and i've even heard she was like a mental case. or, i've even heard wild gossip about it being an evil spirit. jesse was now petrified. yes, i'm serious! some jezebel spirit or succubus. which, of course, is just dark fantasy. but. the "jezebel hello" thing and girls doing it? that's a thing now. they're even snapchatting it, with girls doing it. just snapchat it, and see! yup, they were talking about her. and the stunt she pulled at the chateau marmont. thankfully, no mention of her, directly. or, much of the info, such as the actual hotel that it happened in, being correct. but…? so, no one knows how this really started, and who started it, right? jesse asked, more with her ballooning eyes, than mouth. umm… no. not really. i mean, a lot of it is that: "this-guy-heard-from-this-guy-heard-from-such-and-such," so, the information is always going to get mutilated.

now, with her standing there, and the two kinda seeming to think jesse was cute, meant that this was her two-minute marker, to best make an exit.

hey, what's your name? one exec asked jesse with a smile. and, jesse just ditched the two like that.

i hate this city.
i really, really hate this city! jesse now thought to herself.
jezebel walking off, of course, with no introductions.

31. politics... eww!

two hours in, and now, it was just jesse, and judy, together; just the two of them, in their own little worlds, with no one else around nor near. but it suited. jesse loved moments like these. "forget the world, it's just us two, now!" of course, jules had happened to introduce jesse to a few people. people she didn't know. seemed nice… but old! but jesse also felt like she liked old people more than people of her own generation. being a joan crawford girl at heart, she valued respect. and, that was what old people valued. so, jesse got them. so, once jules introduced jesse to this one old dude she was to impress, she did her thing, of being respectful, and simply trying to be charming, and the old man got a real kick in the head from all that. then she did a sly thing on her part; knowing how fond old people tend to be about old stuff, jezebel singer spoke about old hollywood, with a quick and simple "grace kelly" name dropping. and, really, that was all it took to completely win the old man's heart. "ms. singer, you're enchanting." he said. "oh, yesterday, i saw this movie, called rear window. really old movie. and really creepy in a way. but i loved that woman, grace kelly, in it. i didn't know women can be so… um… graceful!" and that silly headed girly-girl delivered line was it! that was all she needed to say. just drop an old film star name. boom! you were in like flynn, with the old dogs, that really ran this town. just that simple. later on, jules was like: "oh, you are clever! clever, clever, clever! no joke! you're going places!"

so, you're playing politics, huh? judy said.

what do you mean, politics? jesse, politics is when you hide your true agenda, and act like you like people, and believe in stuff other people believe in, just so you can win your way with them, and better serve what you really want, to get in the end. judy explained. why are you telling me all this? jesse asked. just saying, be careful of that.

politics is the game of the Devil.

it's all about hiding true intent. one of the reasons why i'm not a feminist. really dumb girls are like "oh, i just want equality," the smart ones in secret will think "no, i want more than that." of course, they won't say that, and will say they want exactly what all the dumb girls will say they want. judy, my intent is to be a dancer. nothing else. so, i was really, really nice to an old man, i can't be genuine about that? sorry, as i told you once. my dad is a diplomat. so, i know politics. it's not

pretty. and, it can get you in a lot of trouble, when you're claiming things, and they're not exactly true. a lie isn't something you want to be caught in. it's just that simple. jesse felt like judy was overthinking stuff. judy, all i claimed was, i once saw grace kelly in an old movie. that is true, i did, and, it was exactly the movie i mentioned. yeah, but, like with that whole trump matter jules brought up in the car, you pretended to be a dumb girl about it. and you can get only so far with playing dumb. especially with lies involved. oh crap! this all reminded jesse how judy had acted with phil and his boys. being a "dumb girl," trying to win over the boys. and it was true how she now put it.

but… judy… i think you're still overthinking this, really! judy then thought, then had eyes go slit. okay, maybe i am. sorry, i guess… wow! i'm really bored being here! i would never think that in a party like this. judy put.

a minute passed.
ugh! politics! thought jesse, judy seemed to be the type to completely invest in all her thoughts in the matter; jesse, just hating it all with a passion, and also found the subject matter boring. "omg, trump is so evil?" jesse would get a lot of tweet and instagram messages from her followers, about that matter. a lot! a super ton of a lot!

umm… okay?
jesse would respond in her head to, and not give a damn.

"omg, i cried and cried and cried when hrc lost back in 2016, makes me so teary eyed, just now thinking about it!" #notfairnotfair.

umm… okay?

jesse would just blow them off. "omg, i just had a creepy thought, yelp! what if he gets reelected in 2020? yikes, hold me!" #thehorrorthehorror!

umm… okay?

"omg… hold on, are you even listening to anything from us? us, your beloved fans, are crying our eyes out, and you seem just so… fickle?" #undercovermagabitch!

and it was at this point, jesse had—had it!

"oh stfu, all of you! what will crying like a beta bitch do? want me to get my ex-b/f's ol' bowie knife, named suzanna, go to a trump rally, and decapitate the mofo, in front of the world? not sure if the ss will let me get that far, but will try, if it will shut all you stupid clucking hoes up!" #peace!"

that did it though, that did it. all those stupid, kooky dumbdumbs, on twitter and instagram, zipped it then; jesse, being herself, at her best, psychomatic-ed all the kooky lot shut! at the time, jesse was worried, this might mean losing half her followers. but, actually, it almost got it doubled after that. and then a bunch of: "yeah, girlfriend, slay!" and "#suzanna4nov2020!" was all the rage on jesse's feed. such tumultuous times, she felt she was living in. so much rancor.

as for jesse's personal feelings about the 45th, besides the initial vibe of him being one old and legendary, chauvinistic pig of a man, of his day. one she would definitely have never wanted to come across, back in his 10 grand-a-night hooker thirsting after days, in his city of 80s manhattan; them proud wolf of wall street, patrick bateman, or gordon gecko "lust is good" cocaine fueled, power-whoring days! in between marriages, also during. besides that, jesse didn't think he was really all that evil of a man, everyone was making him out to be; just really a big, fat, ugly, and slutty bear of a man. and not really dangerous. if anything, only dangerous thing about him, to a girl like jesse, would be: his checkbook! which reminded jesse of one big, fat, ugly, slut of a hollywood producer, in west hollywood, jesse had said an immediate "no" to. and then the man immediately made out a check, with a number, and three zeros at the end of it. an older man, obviously, since he broke out with paper checks and a ballpoint pen and all. and, jesse was like, "damn, i could really use that money, since i'm short on rent right now. curse you, uber eats!" the 45th at least seemed to be the direct ones. since, jesse could deal with the direct "dam dat ass" catcallers and mansluts. what jesse couldn't deal with was the 3am windowshoppers, with her waking up in the middle of the night, terrified to open one's window curtains, and seeing that creepy old woman, hrc, staring at jesse, and wondering if bill would like jesse on the breakfast menu, with some fava beans and a nice chianti. yeah, that woman and her family really creeped her out. jesse knew how southerners were really like. she knew.

truth was, with jesse, with how she saw the 45th, in the world today, trump was the mirror in the movie billy had introduced her to, back around 2015: the neverending story. in the movie, the protagonist, atreyu, at one point, was facing a trial of character. where he came across a mirror, that would reflect back, not what was seen visibly, but invisibly. not physically. but metaphysically. of what was truly within. what you could dub, a "mirror of irony." "kind people find that they are cruel, brave men discover that they are really cowards, confronted with their true selves, most men run away—screaming!" and with trump, anytime, anyone regarded him, like a mirror, what they ended up seeing in their mind's eye, was the ugliness—truly—found within. and this was where most of the trump derangement syndrome actually came from. projection! a word used a lot in today's world of the 2010s. just as much as "love yourself," "mental health," and "thirsty" were. and just like the movie, this mirrorgate was a trial, you were either going to pass through, or not pass through. fail, or not. jesse, at first glance, saw a sexually perverted creep in the 45th. and…

and, yup… as judy put it, "good christian girl waiting for marriage?" i'm definitely not the type.

that… was how you'd pass the test:
acceptance!
and seeing how everyone was reacting on the left… obviously wasn't!

no, i'm not a conservative. or a republican. or a magabitch—or whatever! can't i just dislike both sides, and not get pigeonholed into being one or the other? please… can i have a choice, in a free country, where i'm supposedly allowed to have one? because it seems like that's all people do today.

"if you're not with us, you're against us!"

fine, if it's like that, then i'm against all of you! all! because those are Jesus' words, and, i don't think there's a single one of you, that can fill those shoes, and deserve any of my trust! you all suck! you're all liars. all deceitful. and corrupt. so, cast stones, all you want, for i hope, your sins eventually lead for all those stones getting tossed right back! you're all in the wrong! fooled by the politics, that demands participation to a lie, that isn't for any good, if you think good equals dividing us all, and war is the only thing i see coming as a result. no, i'm not

choosing sides, this is how wars get started. and i don't want to hate one side or the other. but i will hate, absolutely hate, you all—y'all—for letting it get to this, where blood will be next, and it'll be on all your hands.

but not mine!

fools! maniacs!
look at what you're doing!
am i the only one that sees this… am i the only one…?

choosing sides only adds fuel to the fire, you're not on the right side of history—if it leads to war! not when it fucking starts a war, that might consume us all! and real wars are nothing like the movies, there are no avengers or captain americas, and when it gets to the point where babies get swung, head first, into walls, it'll be then, and only then, you'll realize what you maniacs, fucking maniacs, have done!

you're with us, or against us…?
fine….
if that's what it comes down to, then—i'm against all of you!

to jesse, politics was like driving, and coming upon a row of houses, with signs set up on the lawn, saying, "vote this, vote that!" but, as judy put it, "hiding true intent." jesse didn't wonder about the sign set up upfront, she wondered about who lived in that house behind the closed door; jesse understood, there was always an inside place. and, with that inside place, what went on there, was what was really important, and not the sign they had in display upfront. it was like something she had learned in high school, by her 11th grade history teacher, mr. brubaker. jesse remembered the man, he had robin williams from the dead poet's society written all over him; a man with green eyes like jesse and really curly dirty blond hair; used to do a bit of boxing when he was younger, he said. also, had done some prison time. so, there was a lot to learn from this man, jesse felt. since, he was like billy and jimmy, a man who hadn't spent most of this life in the pampered safety and security of the box that society made him live in. he was the only teacher that would still wear a buttoned-up shirt with a tie, and a buttoned-up shirt he would actually have tucked into his pants. would go in wild and whimsical tangents speaking about history. and historical figures, not as history

figures, but real-life human beings, as ones you could relate with; not legends, but the true characters behind them; like in the movie, the wizard of oz, not really caring much about all the lightning and thunder and bells and whistles coming from the wizard in front of the curtains. no! but really just caring more about what the deal was with the man hiding behind them. she remembered during the month when the subject matter was about the ancient greeks; he had brought up something done by plato called…

the allegory of the cave.

supposedly, it was a scenario introduced, showing an example into the human condition. the scenario being: imagine a man born and raised in a cave, and never being taken out to see the real outside world under the sun. and him being raised, in chains, facing a cave wall, his entire life; staring at shadows, casted by a puppeteer, with shadow puppets. all. all. all the world to this man, being those shadows, made by those shadow puppets, by an unknown figure behind him, whom the man in the cave had never seen nor met. and the shadow puppetry was all he'd ever see and was all the world to him. now, what if one day, he was taken out of that cave, and showed the real world outside. the question is: what would he think then?

funny. it was '08. jesse was 16, then. and that entire year, after hearing about that whole allegory of a cave thing from her teacher, she had a reoccurring dream, where her mom would be driving her home from school; and jesse would stare at houses, as she'd pass them by, with signs put up on their front lawns, since, that was an election year; signs, signs so many signs, of obama, mccain, didn't matter for whom. and eventually, since this was a dream, she did something completely different to what she'd do when awake; jesse was growing really sick of seeing so many signs, in front of doors that were closed to her. so, the car then stopped. jesse got out of her car. went to the door. opened it. and, boom! she was in that cave of plato's. and inside, saw a family sitting on a couch, chained to the couch, staring at shadowpuppets done up on the cave wall, which the family were sitting in front of.

and, of course, jesse also saw something else.

unlike the family sitting on the couch.

she saw the Puppeteer.
standing behind them.
and it was exactly who you'd think it would be.

so, when it came to politics… eww! jesse didn't have time to scream and shout and pull her hair out, over whatever narrative those shadow puppets were creating on the cave wall. that would be idiotic. if anything, she saw it being more befitting, to scream and shout at the Puppeteer.

32. home is where the heart is

after a moment….
jesse then looked at judy, and thought about something else. judy, why did you exactly play dumb with the boys, i brought over that day? jesse asked. ugh, don't tell me you still feel sorry for those boys? judy said. then rolled her eyes. what, what was wrong with them? judy gave jesse a look. and then, seemed like she wanted to bring up a story. remember when i told you i had three other sisters? yes. well, one of my sisters, helga, was once engaged to those types. judy paused, as she seemed to want to gloss over the tale, and bring it up, the best way to put it to jess. helga, was the oldest sister. also, unlike her younger siblings, us, the least able to, well… let's just say: keep up. keep up? the one, if she was to lose some weight, do her makeup right, her hair right, and wear something less nerdier, compared to all that hot topic crap she would, basically, get her act together, she might have found a guy, better than the guy, she ended up almost marrying. what was wrong with the guy she almost married? judy gave a blank look, stale and sullen. nothing, at first. nothing… but then helga brought the boy to meet my family. me, heidi and cindy, and it was over before she even knew it. jesse now began picturing the story judy was drawing up. at first, not getting it. but then, adding some of the details judy had brought up. especially seeing how judy had made helga into the "ugly duckling" type. and it was then, it hit her what must have happened.

oh… no!
yes, jesse, yes!

his eyes blew up when he saw the three of us: me, heidi and cindy. especially cindy! and for helga, poor helga, it was all downhill from there. before, helga would come to us, tell us how much in love she was. so happy. so, so happy. she had found someone. and we were all happy for her. even cindy was. seeing as to how difficult it had been for her to do so, up to that point. but, once he saw the rest of us, it was immediate for me, heidi, and cindy, how their relationship was going to play out. how did it play out? jesse asked. well, now, he would come over more. he was geeky how helga was geeky. but, the problem with geeks is, they don't tend to like each other, much. and they tend not to want to settle with someone, just as much of a loser, as they are. now, shane, which was his name, would come to our house more often. but not for helga, but for us three. he'd start ignoring helga. and trying to flirt with the rest of us. where did this lead to?

jesse asked. well, besides the end of their engagement, and besides that little weasel, breaking my sister's heart? i'll say this much, we had to call the cops on him at the ends. oh… what he do? judy now grew in wrath, looked right into jesse's eyes, and told her. one morning, there was a scream in our house. cindy screaming. the rest of us ran to see what had happened. the little peeping tom, seems like, had been hiding in the bathroom, watching cindy showering naked. oh… no! shamed jesse, as her eyes cringed shut and looked away. judy, nodded. just stood their nodding. my sister has yet to find another relationship with a man. she's almost given up faith in men, now… and it's heartbreaking.

i… hate… nerds!

i hate how they're made into the heroes now in movies. "oh, they're nice guys! so nice!" but they're mostly nice, not because they like you, it's because they're afraid of you. intimidated by girls like us. they're diffident. and the biggest problem with them is, they got no backbone. all those losers you see at comicons, and going to see avenger's and star war's movies and doing cosplay, forget 'em! in the end, all those mouthbreathing losers are, are the type of boys, that will sell out their own mothers, sisters, girlfriends, wives and even daughters… just for a one-night stand, with a woman like angelina jolie. judy said while shaking her head. and, in movies today, always the hero! always. but, then again, seeing what type of men most hollywood execs and producers tend to be here, i can see why. mostly the type that came here, to make movies, about their woes in life, of having been a loser in high school, that never got any attention from girls like us. but, they can cry me a river for all i care, because, there's a reason they didn't!

although, i like the movie "can't buy me love." 80s movie. but a lot more accurate in how it's really like.

so… yeah! forget them. that made jesse think. were the boys that i brought over really like that, though? judy peered back into jesse's eyes. and concluded it:

you saw how they looked at me, when i came out dressed the way i was… how did it make you feel?

jesse's answer was immediate:
betrayed….

i felt betrayed.
yup. said judy, and then decided to shake that thought off.

a pause.
jesse now… although… felt another vibe from judy, and decided to address it:

so… was that the onnnnnly reason you did it?
what do you mean?
jesse now smiled at her.

oh… what? yeah, i really did it for you. so you could see the type of boys they really were. i mean, i don't want to judge. i might have been wrong, and they might have turned out to be completely different. but, they weren't. you saw their reactions! how they ignored you the entire time i was suckering them up. so the proof is in the pudding.

jesse gleamed at her now.
judy now got where jesse was going with this. oh, shut up! you know damn well why i did it.

you called me a stupid bitch!

and i wanted to spite you for that… you stupid bitch! judy put. also smiled at the end. smiled, because she just couldn't help it. and you hurt my feelings. judy made a pouty face then.

oh… you like me. jesse made fun.
no, i dooooon't! judy pouted all sad face.
nonsense.

just two girls, in their own little world. and, really, that's all they needed.

hey jesse, just be honest… you a lesbian?
jesse was… wait, what?
just kidding, you dumb girl. you're so easy to do this with. he, he!
jesse's eyes went slit.

so, your dad was a diplomat? jesse asked.
yeah, and yours was a pumpkin farmer, correct?
no, i said he was a country bumpkin and—
i know, i'm still messing with you. he, he! you dumby! it was obvious to jesse now, this was just judy's way of dealing with boredom.

although you are a lesbian, right? judy went again.

yes, judy, i am. we will both definitely be having hot steaming sex in the shower together, someday. rest assured, one day, i will give you that pleasure. jesse said.

okay, thank you for letting me know, i will now count the days until you make those dreams of mine finally come true. judy answered.

another silence….

and now judy was holding a champagne glass how jesse would; all joan crawford style and full of herself. but it was starting to grow on judy. hey, jesse? no, judy! no hot steaming sex with me with you, tonight. actually, i really just—
no, bitch! i want to talk about something else.

actually, have an important conversation with you. judy explained.

and, it did seem like she really did want to talk about something important; a real subject matter, and no ambiguous jokes, jesse wasn't fully sure if they were or weren't. okay, what is it? jesse asked. judy then made a face, she was going deep, jesse could now tell. it's interesting, jesse, i remember all that time living with you as a roommate. i remember you talking with your dad. actually, at first, you were trying to hide the conversations from me. since, personal! then, hide the tennessean accent he got out of you, and how dumb you felt about him. then, eventually, you were like "f it!" not hiding nothing, and, you'd get country as hell with him. and you seemed to be at your most natural state that way. okay, so… i also remember the talks you had with your dad. all in spanish. but, I could tell, extremely formal, even with a father and daughter relations. and, speaking like you're always walking on eggshells with him. and, i got the sense, not just because i was in the room listening to you. and that was you being at your most natural.

judy gave a weary look to that.

a pause.
judy, what are you bringing up? jesse, all the time i knew you as a roommate. when we were pretending to be disney villainesses, hating each other, i never remember you ever speaking with your mother. judy put it. so, i don't exactly remember you, either. jesse now put.

and—boom! there it was!

both girls fell silent again; both now realized, this was a freudian moment; seemed to be some grave, grave mommie dearest feelings going on, inside. both grabbed more champaign. more! damn it—more! hey, what you two girls—
beat it, beta boy, girls having an important talk right now. don't make us grab butcher knives from the kitchen, and slay you like naked, heathen women, with a lamb—in front of all these people! judy assaulted james franco with.

james… just got depressed… and left.

fine, it's time to have out with it! jesse said.
yes, tis! judy noted.
you first!
judy, i disowned my mother back when i was still 19 years old. jesse let out.
yes, i did, too. exact same age! judy let out.

oh yeah! this was gonna get freudian!
well, when my mom and my dad split, from then on out, it was me with my mom, and my brother with dad. at the time, me and mom lived in a one bedroom, in a not-so-great neighborhood, in nashville. which has been gentrified since then. so, not a bad place to live at, now. jesse began. go on. judy said. mom, well… was a dreamer, simply put. really, really into stevie nicks. oh, i love stevie nicks! judy added. jesse although just sneered at the thought. go on. mom, had a lot of spirits around her. and just her! what type of spirits? judy asked.

the type that wanted to drag her away, into the woods, and make her into an elf princess.

what? judy went. yes. i guess, in her hippie days, she had read one too many jrr tolkien type of fairytales and stories. now, it was all the spirits she attracted, the wood elves and fairies and enchanters and prince's kind. wow, that… sounds beautiful! judy said. it was, at first, but, the problem with spirits like those are, they want to drag you more and more away from reality. until, they have you lost in the woods. and, too lost to then find your way back home. she'd get that way? judy asked. jesse gave judy a weary look. and nodded. judy, spirits like those are: no good! they like to be elusive. too elusive. at first, my mom would get into renaissance fair gowns. and go out there, wanting the spirits to teach her to be a poet. teach her how to sing, and sing, most beautifully. they were enchanting times, though. i will give it that. and, when my mom wasn't being a waitress at a diner to pay the rent, and, i wasn't trying to do schoolwork, she'd grab my hand, and say, "they're calling to us, the elves are calling to us." i'd then get up with her, and, put on a white gown like hers, and go out barefoot into the woods with her. i saw beautiful things out there. i did. i won't lie. more beautiful things than i've ever seen. but, unlike mom, i only faintly heard the voices she swore she would hear out there. strange woman! you know, she eventually taught herself how to speak gaelic, and how to play the harp? oh… wow! ha! judy went, now imagining it. jesse went on:

judy, she would do this and do this and do this and do this!

eventually, i was growing tired. at this point, i would look at dad, and feel happy for the fact that he at least finally gave up such stupid hippie minded pursuits. and decided to stop chasing his own dwarf cities and magic. a simple mechanic, that got the food on the table, mind you! and i was starting to grow jealous of tom, my brother, having that, and me stuck with this. those spirits my mom were chasing, in the end, i realized, never wanted to be found. they just wanted you to chase them and chase them, endlessly in the woods. they enjoyed watching you sacrifice your normal life, to want to be with them, and, enjoyed watching you lose your mind for them, as well.

and that eventually became my mother, sylvas singer's faith.

wait, how far did this go? judy asked. to the point, i finally, at 17 years of age, got my own job, and emancipated myself, and got my own place. but that, what i did, did something to mom, sylvas, though. it really, really angered her. she felt like i

abandoned her. like i chose to reject her.

why did you? judy asked.

because, i wanted to be an example to her! i was sick of it! i didn't want to deal with spirits anymore! i didn't want something invisible. i wanted something real and in front of me and someone that would love me. and, i wanted to put that into her. to wake that stupid hippie woman up! but… it didn't. it seemed like i, in the end, was her only true lifeline to reality. and, when i left, that's when she began to really lose herself, in that elusive fantasy world of hers. and those spirits got demonic on her, to see just how far they can make her lose herself. she'd call me a lot, "honey, the elf prince, i finally heard his voice in the woods today, he's finally accepting me, and he wants to take me to this elvish palace! come! come! this is our ticket to a better life!" i'd… would just hang up on her then. she'd call me again. "honey, i was naked in the woods last night, and, i was sleeping in the grass…!" and then i'd cry at her, "don't sleep naked out in the woods, mom, don't do that, with all those critters and animals out there." eww! judy went. oh yeah! walking around barefooted out in the woods of tennessee? not a fun idea. i can't tell you how many times i stepped on a giant bug or spider or millipede. one time, a wolf spider, and all her babies on its back trying to run up my leg. not a fun experience for a 14-year-old girl, not exactly fond of creepy things, to begin with! why barefooted? judy asked. jesse rolled her eyes and answered: that's just some hippie nonsense, having to do with being more connected with the earth below our feet. our spirit and the earth spirit being… a bunch of shamanistic or druidic whatevers. or, really, a hippie white woman's understanding of such. mom would make me do it. she'd insist. sometimes forcibly. but i stopped after the whole wolf spider thing, and my mom didn't say anything, knowing there was no way she could make me do it after that. jesse then shook her head.

"honey, i swore, the elf prince came and made love to me while i was asleep out there. you might be having a sister now. and, he will definitely take us all in, maybe even tom can come." how did tom feel about all this? judy asked. tom, when it came to that crazy shit, wouldn't touch the matter with a ten-foot pole. whenever he'd come over with me and mom at our one bedroom to visit. and whenever mom would get all elvish on us, he'd get up, and leave, and go straight home to dad. tom eventually became my best example of how to deal with the crazy elf woman. eventually, dad got involved. my dad and mom never really divorced. i

think, deep down, my mom always knew she might end up going back to him. one reason she'd go chasing after elf princes in the woods so much. but dad had to now get involved. she had no more job. was making no money. and needed money for rent and food and other expenses. but mom would now take it and think, "oh, well, i'm gonna be living in an elf palace, with a prince, pretty soon, so, no matter!" how bad did it get? judy asked. feeling sad for the woman. dad had to now get involved. mom would spend more and more time out in the woods, being lost. really lost! and that would scare us. since, you don't want to be out there, in the rain, and snow, some nights. and all the wild animals around. dad would call, "honey, mom is lost out in the woods again, you know better where she likes to go." so, me and dad would drive out, and search for her. find her naked someplace, with bugs in her hair, and needing to see a hospital from the bite sores and pain. one time, she was attacked by a coyote, but she was lucky a woodsman was around, that shot the animal before it could kill her. every time, we'd find her out there, straight to the hospital with her suffering from more animal bites and bug bites and hypothermia! what drove it over the edge with you? judy asked. the last time this happened, dad called me up, "honey, mom is lost again in the woods, we need to go find her." so, we went out. this was a gray day. a really long and rainy and damp and drab and disgustingly gray day, for me and dad, looking for her in the woods. and it took 6 hours of all that searching, for her in the woods, until we found her. i found her first. and, it was at this point, at this… point! i was now feeling like i just couldn't take this anymore. at this point, me, when i found her, naked. here, some 60something woman, naked in the woods, with bugs in her hair, and a bewildered and insane look in her eyes, like the elf prince would soon whisk down, and take her away from all this. it was then, when i found her, with a fawn in her hands. and she was like, "honey, it's like bambi, she's lost her mother, this is a test from the elf prince, to see how loving i can be. come!" and, my mom was naked, with this stupid, stupid animal, in her hands. which probably was just as confused as she was, suckling on her tit.

your mother was breastfeeding a fawn? judy gasped.

maybe a little too loudly. seemed like some people heard it. yeah, she was. she was. i don't know with what milk. since those udders dried up a long, long time ago. but she was. and, it was at this point, and once my mom asked me to bare my own breast, and feed the stupid animal in her hands, and when she started screaming and cursing at me in gaelic, when i refused: i had enough! the hell with this woman!

enough! dad came, saw this ridiculous scene for himself. and now, even he had had enough. something drastic needed to be done. dad's idea of how to deal with it was a lot more constructive than mine. he finally took her in, and, got it to where the doctors had the woman committed to him, with conservatorship as a guardian. and, he just locked her up in his attic, with all the screaming and cursing of hers in gaelic! he chose to take on that responsibility, to save the woman, from her own damn self. and her madness. and her elf spirits. and, once that was that, and i no longer had to deal with running around in the forest looking for her again. i just chose to never speak to the woman again. and… i haven't.

the girls now fell silent.

but then became more self-aware of their surroundings, and noticed some hollywood exec types seemed to be listening in. yeah, jesse, let's go find some "us space," if it's now my turn. judy noted. and they did. they were now standing near the kitchen again; better to have nobody servers listening in, than hollywood people, jesse and judy felt. all right. that was my story. tell me yours. jesse now asked. judy made a face. oh, wow! how batshit crazy was your mom? jesse asked. my mom wasn't batshit… just evil. this story is going to be different. judy plotted. and so, she began:

yeah, i don't know about spirits, but i will tell you this about ingrid, if there was one, the only thing i can imagine, is she probably got visited in sweden, as a young woman, by some succubus one night, that taught her its trade secrets of,

"i am woman, fuck me!"

and, my mom must have really taken that life philosophy of being a woman to heart. because, she took it, and ran with it. none stop! oh, my goodness, baby doll, your mother was a hussy, too? so was mine. oh, such a scandalous tramp she turned into, in mexico city and—
excuse me, server boy, this is between me and my friend here! so, don't make me bust out some chancla on that ass, all right? judy scolded a very feminine mexican boy server; very bronzed james charles in appearance. good eyeshadow technique, though! the mexican james charles then beat it. go on. jesse asked. my mom loved her sex life. she did. she really, really did. a beautiful woman like her, she could get the hottest guys, and have the hottest sex, other people would only drool for. and

i think that all went to her head. my mother, as i said, was a straight up nymphomaniac. and a sexually amoral woman. but what she eventually did was just a crime. she was just so scandalous about her sex life, after a point, simply renting a room with a man at some fancy hotel wasn't enough for her. my mom was becoming one of those women, where she found a thrill in having sex in places of zero privacy. something about the danger and scandal of it all attracted her. jesse knew of these women; sex was all that existed for them. that was it, all the time, always sweaty and always in heat; mad with sweat and heat and demanding it 24/7. not even with judy nor the girls at her old hollywood pad, were things quite like that. more amateurs. thinking about how much of a whore jesse used to make judy out into, now made her feel guilty; she was more than that. you said what she did was a crime? jesse asked. yeah, jesse, what she did. crime! not just a sin. a crime! she deserves to be in prison! judy explained, uncaringly. also, very judgmentally. this was a different sense jesse felt, compared to herself and her relations with her own mom. even after everything sylvas put jesse through, jesse didn't feel like executing judgement on her. in the end, sylvas was really just a sad and delusional woman, that had gone insane. how do you take it to a point, where having lots of sex with men, is a crime? jesse asked. let me explain. judy went on. you see, she knew how the rest of us girls felt about her. me, and heide and helga… but then there was cindy. oh, cindy. the one girl in the family, that just had to take after mommie dearest. judy riddled. yes, riddled. jesse didn't like where this was going. mom didn't like judgmental stares. she didn't like how people looked at her. she was doing what she loved to do in life. a hot woman having lots and lots and lots of hot sex. it's the life everyone in miami aspires to achieve. miami isn't like la. people here want sex, but they want sex with their big fat egos, really. it's different here than it is there. miami heat is all about the lifestyle of sex. the fantasy, you can say. they don't worship fame there, just sex. the most hottest and most steamiest sex imaginable. and, mom, just so happened, had crowned herself the queen of the nymphs of that city. yeah, jesse, she was the hottest woman in miami. simply the hottest. that made a lot of cuban girls and their nonplatinum blonde hair absolutely hate with a passion of a thousand suns. but, that's just trying to explain to you that world my mother lived in. and, there was nothing shameful about it. no! "so… so what if i decided to go down on some hot cuban boy, in a neon lit dance club, in the middle of the dance floor? so what? look at all those people with their jaws dropped off their faces, unable to believe how hot this all looks. oh, no reason to judge, they'll all be headed home later, to try and get some, just as hot as this. but—never like this!" that, jesse, was

how my mom would think. i heard a story at one club, some cuban dark-haired camila cabello type, tried to also match a scene like that, with a boy my mom was with.

my mom went over to her in the middle of the crowd, she beat the absolute shit out of her. and ripped all her clothes off, and chased her out of the club, naked and crying and with her tail between her legs, in total shame.

then had sex with the boy she was with, in the middle of the club. then the boy the camila girl had come in with. then that camila's brother, that just so happened to be there. and eventually found herself on a yacht in miami harbor, having an orgy, with five other men from that club. it was at that point, the city of miami, hailed her as the jezebel queen. and, no bitch was ever going to dethrone her from that.

what? jesse gasped.

judy looked into jesse's eyes. honey, you don't exactly have a name that's… i think you know. judy put. jesse knew. wait, public indecency? is that what you mean…? jesse, public indecency, as a crime, in miami, doesn't exist. in a city like that, it's like saying, wearing a baiting suit on a hot summer day, on the beach, should be a crime. every girl wears one, it's not! or, in this case, doesn't, and… you get the point. judy, sex in the middle of the club, with everyone watching? jesse gasped. yeah, jesse, the queen of miami will do, what the queen of miami wants to do! so, how dare you judge the queen, and what she deems herself to fancy? and, if some poor dark-haired cuban girl subject does, it's the queen's right and duty, to then discipline that subject of hers, in the middle of the queen's court, while everyone, everyone, all her subjects, are watching! and now, everyone—bow! bow your culos down! and worship her, as she consummates the night, by having sex in front of everyone, of which ever man she seeks as being worthy. and now feel worthy of just being graced by the music she makes, as she moans and moans and moans the night away. that's my mother, jesse, that's my mother. wait, you said before your mom would drag you places to interpret for her, right? jesse gasped. no, not to clubs though. not to a place where she was going to make a scene like that. judy put it.

although, when it came to us girls. our judgmental stares were the ones, i guess,

she felt most betrayed by.

and it got her to do what she eventually did. jesse had no clue what to make of this.

“look, girls, look at what mommie dearest does best! this is what being a woman is about! now watch how far i can spread my legs, and how long i can hold a cord!” judy interpreted.

wait, what are you talking about? jesse gasped. eventually, mom, didn’t feel this should be just a life in the clubs, or in some fancy hotel, or on some yacht, hidden from her girls, and a secret. it would just go against her idea, that this was who she was, and what everyone should praise her for. jesse, eventually, my mom, would bring this lifestyle home. and in the house, she took it to a point, whether it was the maid, or the gardener, or the pool boy, that caught her bent over a kitchen table, with another man, that wasn't hers… no longer mattered. not even if dad caught her a bunch of times. not even if we did. you serious! jesse went. yes. i've caught my mom having sex with other men before, many, many times. and not always with just one. first time, i was nine, and with our family attorney, in the study room. we've all caught her. we all have. at the beginnings, mom would at least stop when she got caught by us. but later, i remember one time, i caught her in the middle of the driveway, while i was pulling up to our house, with our neighbor, mr. ramirez. and when i stopped in front of them, and got out of the car, and told her to:

“stop it, stop it!”
she just told mr. ramirez:
“don't worry, judy girl has seen this before, don't stop now!”

and she started laughing at me, as i walked around them, and went inside. that is disgusting. jesse said. yeah... but that didn't turn into the length of how disgusting she got.

one night, everyone in the house was out of town, but me, my mom, and cindy. i wasn’t expected to show up at all that night, since i lied to her, and told her, me and a friend had driven up to new york for a week. so, i got home late, walked into the living room, and: boom! saw mom naked on her knees, going down on

mr. ramirez. him again! mr. ramirez liked to fashion himself as an amateur pornographer. and, he was standing over her, with a high-end digital recorder. but he wasn't videotaping what my mom was doing to him. no. i then moved to look at what exactly it was he was recording. i then saw two men naked on the couch, at opposite ends, facing each other, but, with some distance between the two. they were sweaty with sex on their face. but i couldn't tell what exactly was between them getting them that way. no one had seen me at this point. and, this was the one time, i'm definitely sure, my mom would have absolutely not wanted anyone in the house to catch her. i don't like the sound of this. who was between those two guys on the couch? jesse asked. even though, all so apparent now. jesse, i moved to where the couch wasn't facing away from me to see: cindy, my sister, was the one being videotaped, being double penetrated by two men.

and, jesse, cindy… was the little one in the house. and, she was only 12 years old at the time. judy paused.

that is… wow! jesse gasped. judy continued: well, cindy would be the one. she lost her virginity at ten. and continued to try and match what mommie dearest loved to do best, continuously. so, she would be the one in the family. yeah, but, now your mom is…? yes, jesse, i know! i know! prostituting her own girls. and ones that aren't even of the right age, yet. when the party all saw i was there, mom freaked. this was beyond evil, even for her. she screamed and got up from mr. ramirez, and ran up naked towards me, and begged me for forgiveness, and not to tell anyone. this was it! queen or no queen! i didn't see her that way anymore. my judgment of her, and my sisters' judgment, was the one that not even she could escape the feelings of guilt from. mom begged and begged and begged….

but i just smacked the taste out of her mouth, and then spat right in her eye, and told her to "go to hell."

at first, i felt like grabbing cindy and getting her out of there. but, cindy... damn her! i just left. i went to my car then, drove off, stopped somewhere, and started crying for an hour. then, i called up the police, and told an officer fitzgerald, that i had caught my mother and sister in the middle of a child pornography ring. did she go to prison for what she did? jesse asked. no, jesse, she didn't. what do you mean, she didn't? no one collaborated on what they saw. neither did cindy, since, she was always a little tramp, and probably thought that there was nothing wrong

with what they put her through. when you live in a house as sexually immoral as mine, you'd understand. plus, the tape was never found. and when i called dad and told him, he... just fell silent. then told me he was sorry for what i saw. but, maybe, better if i never told anyone else about it. in the end, this was a scandal, i don't think dad would want to hurt his diplomatic career. child pornography? that would be too much. the last time i talked to my mom, she called me up, and the first thing that came to my lips was to tell her i never wanted to talk to her again. but she said, "fine, i don't care, i just want to tell you, you need to go and live in sweden for a year." i asked her what the hell she was talking about, and "no." she said "no, you have to," i asked "why," and she said…

that she didn't want to find me dead one day.

are you kidding me, what? jesse gasped. it seemed like she had had a talk with mr. ramirez, and he seemed very, very paranoid, i might continue to press charges, about him and his child pornography tape of my sister. i guess the slimebag was still holding onto the tape, until he could find a buyer. so, she feared he might hire a man to kill me. so, best to spend a year far away, until she could have it settled with him, that i'll never bring up the matter again. even though sex wasn't a thing for my mother of concern, prison, and death to one of her kids, or herself, definitely was. although, for a second, i got terrified, she might be even plotting something against me. but... nah! at least she wasn't that evil. last thing i said to her was how i didn't want to go to sweden, "send me to spain." i mean, i know spanish, so? so, i spent a year in barcelona, with my dad's side of the family. at first, afraid, and looking over my shoulder. but i got over it. and it wasn't a bad year. had a really sweet catalonian boyfriend there... i sometimes miss.

no way in hell was i going to malmö, sweden to my mom's side, they're all freaks! i mean, my aunt is a professional dominatrix with a "fisting" fetish. and i ain't having none of that bad milk.

and that's my story.

the two then continued to just stand there, and try and take all of this in; not as much one and the other's story, but, mostly their own. the story of their mommie dearest, and what it meant to them, as human beings, in the long run. the two then just looked at each other. then realized how getting all this stuff off one's

chest, really wasn't working as well as they thought it would. not that it didn't make them feel far more or less connected, but these were just those types of things, all the answers weren't going to come from just talking about them. but, from silence. and time restoring old wounds and pains. judy now left jesse, and went to the closest bathroom. jesse could now imagine, so judy would maybe spend an hour, just looking at herself, in the mirror, and aimlessly fixing her makeup. no more "us time," it was now all "me time" that was needed; to do that thing people in the 90s spoke about doing: "soulsearching." jesse now just stood in the middle of the party, joan crawford-ing up a storm. and then, one of the hollywood execs, jesse swore had been listening to her story, came up.

listen, what's your name? jesse didn't have the nerve and patience to make one up right now. singer. jesse said. all right, singer, i was listening to that story you told of your mother. her and stevie nicks, and the elf prince in the woods. i loved it, singer, i loved it. i'd like to see if i can get a screenwriter to work on it with your permission. and, who knows? we might make a lot of money selling the—
slap!
the exec was petrified.

yeah, whoever you are, i'm not sure if you're aware, but, that, what i just did, was basically what you can most certainly imagine, and never misconstrue, as anything but a "no" answer. got any questions?

the man shook his head.

good!

he left now.

yeah, there are just some stories… better left untold. jesse felt.

33. the tale of the desert and sea: dusk

they were now making trek back through the desert. there hadn't been enough time, jesse felt, spent out here in arizona; she had come to find a love completely of its own out here. and jesse felt disappointed, that there wasn't to be enough time spent out here, to fully come to realize that love, and see where it would lead her. but, it seemed, this journey to arizona, wasn't really a journey as much for jesse, but, the boys, also; this was a journey of the telling of their story: who they were and what made them so. like jesse's mother, the boys had a spiritual journey in life, leading them to something that existed on the other side; the deserts of arizona being the backdrop for the boys, to what the woods of tennessee were to jesse's mother. but, unlike jesse's mother, the boys were with their spirits; unlike jesse's mother, they weren't chasing their spirits, their spirits were chasing them; there was a sense of spiritual completion to all this, jesse never saw her mother achieve, in all the years she desperately spent wandering around in the woods. in mere days, for these two, back some time before jesse was even born, spiritual completion was something that had been achieved. of course, not of choice, but of circumstances. now, it felt like, this was something jesse always deep down wished for her mother, and felt sadness thereof. but the boys had an entirely different journey in life; jesse was captivated by the two; she was just head over heels captivated. the deserts of arizona seemed much different now; these were no longer any opening morning hours of life experienced out here; these were now the closing evening hours. and now, time for retirement. there was a hue of lonesome yellow in the air; a long and drawn out one. but a yellowish sense of peace and time worthily spent, that phased the yellow into gold. a brewing sense of longing to see the evening hours spent, as drawn out as long as possible. but as the minutes ticked, it wasn't to be. so, enjoy these last few moments, enjoy them, staring at the landscape of jagged rocks, disappearing and reappearing, on this yellow and flat outstretching canvas, like brigadoon islands, phasing in and out into other worlds and into other epochs. now, jesse could only hope, these majestic rocky islands, could again reappear for her one day. and, on that day, jesse now imagined, she'd be on her black stallion, riding these desert plains. to meet her johnny guitar. on that one-day, years and years, if not decades away, to come.

so, bid adieu to your future self. until we can meet once, next time.

"billy, tell me exactly what the story of the desert and the sea is?" jesse now asked. she'd been hearing handfuls of it, that had been rationalized and evenly and

modestly distributed to her. now, she just wanted to know the rundown. "well, it's kinda hard to do so." billy said. "why?" jesse asked. "because, jesse, the story is a riddle. it's a story, like any story, and like any, it's meant to teach you something you need to know. the story begins with:

this is the cursed tale of he.
and the cursed tale of she.
forever searching for one another in an endless world of desert and sea.

and, from our hearing, leading to the middle of the story, it ends with:

this is the cursed tale of he.
and the cursed tale of she.
forever searching for one another in an endless world of desert and sea."

jesse now felt she needed to understand more of the boys' side of this. "all right, well, from what you two have gathered, can you at least give me the cliff notes?" jesse asked. billy snickered. "jesse, we've spent all our lives with our half, and you just want cliff notes? that's cheap." billy expressed. "oh, come on. you want me to spend a lifetime figuring it out, too?" "no, no, that's going to be the part you're now being entrusted with, i guess. we'll tell you all we know." and now, billy began:

"the story begins how we said it begins, and, from what we've gathered, from the spirits, almost all here in arizona, it's a fantasy world that begins as nothing but an entire globe of desert. that's it. just a dropless hell, where water doesn't even exist.

and this world of the desert is ruled by the reptile queen."

"who is the reptile queen?" jesse asked. the boys hesitated. "we don't know. anyways, all that exists in this world, is the reptile queen, her droves and droves of minions, that are the reptile people. and, a hero." "your atreyu." jesse noted. "yes, exactly." "so, go on!" "the hero starts off as a terrified boy, spending his entire childhood, being hunted by the reptile people, that are doing the reptile queen's bidding." "wait a minute, where does he come from? if everything else in this world of the desert is a reptile, where is his family?" "he has no family. jesse, it's a fantasy. he was born out of dust. he had no evolutionary journey, leading to this point. no mom and dad. not even a childhood before the age of eight years

old." "why eight?" jesse asked. "i don't know. jesse, stop asking questions that are not necessary to this story." billy noted. "okay, go on." "well, that's it, he's born into this world. the only human boy alive. and forever hunted by the reptile people. that just want to kill him and devour him. he starts off afraid and alone and unsure of himself. a prey of the reptiles. but, as he grows into a young man, now, he's no longer afraid anymore. now, he's angry. now, he doesn't want to be a prey anymore.

now, he wants to be the hunter!

and, he now will spend the rest of his days in the desert, waging war against the reptile people. until he finally reaches the palace of the reptile queen. and slays the evil woman, for having him put through all this."

ahh laa yaa!
this had now been the third time jesse had ever heard this voice in her head.

"it's not a voice in your head, we heard it, too." jimmy said.
"what?" expressed jesse.

some time now passed. and, no longer the evening hours, out here in the arizona desert. now nighttime. "so, what happens when he does finally reach the reptile queen?" jesse now asked. "what, you heard the spirits tell you, right?" billy said. "what the… 'ah la ya?'" jesse went. "yes, that." "the hero is also unable to understand what the reptile queen is telling him. she just keeps saying that over and over again:

ahh laa yaa!
ahh laa yaa!

but the hero has had it, he wants to rid the world of reptiles. so, he cuts the reptile queen's head off. and throws her head down a well, in the middle of the reptile queen's palace. one that goes all the way down to the core of this world. then, something else happens."

"what?"

“water starts spewing out of the well like a spring. tons and tons of water. and, the hero, sees writing appear on the wall.”
“what do they say?” asks jesse, eyeing out the window to the dark nothing.
“you already know, jesse, we told you:

this is the cursed tale of he.
and the cursed tale of she.
forever searching for one another in an endless world of desert and sea.”

some more time passed as jesse began putting together the story she was hearing. “what happens then?” “we don’t know, jesse, that’s where the story of the hero ends. all we can tell you is, the rest of it, doesn’t require a hero. but, a heroine. the first part is a story about manhood. the rest is a story of womanhood. the spirits won’t tell us anymore how that story goes. since, we’re not women. it’s no longer our story, it’s not our part. it’s yours.” and it was now jesse realized, how this really was to be her part. although, the idea scared her. she’d seen how far her mother would go, chasing after fairytales; she didn’t want to now find her part, chasing her own. “all we can tell you, from this moment on, is the rest is a world of sea. nothing but sea. the globe is now one giant sea. and, it’s a heroine’s tale. and, she has to deal with what we can only guess the fish people.

and, in the end… the fish king.

these are things we mostly pieced together ourselves.”

“how am i supposed to figure that part out?” jesse asked. “we found ours in the desert, here in arizona. you have to go to the sea and find out. i’m guessing, if you keep going to california, out near the santa monica pier. that’s where your journey will begin.” “how do you know it’s santa monica pier? what if i decided to go to san francisco? or seattle? or the atlantic ocean? how about a cruise to the bahamas?” jesse was making jokes. “well, jesse, the sanora desert isn’t the only desert in the world. not even in america. just here in the union, there’s a desert in nevada. one in the utah area. new mexico and west texas. we drove through those two areas. we’ve all been to these places. but why didn’t we get to hear the story of the desert out there? jesse, you have to be, where just the right spirits are, to tell you these things. if you’re not, you won’t get to hear anything.” billy elaborated. jesse made a frowny face; she didn’t like being outsmarted. but she

had something for them now. “okay, but if the spirits didn’t tell you about my story, and didn’t tell you it will continue at the santa monica pier. how do you know that it will?” jesse asked. billy… hesitated. “it’s just the sense we got, jesse. a lot of it happened on the i10. so, where does the i10 end? the spirits didn’t tell us anything, directly, but they left us with a sense. i guess so we could then pass this story to a female, so she can continue the spiritual journey. maybe you do have to go to seattle, and get a rowboat, and row out into the middle of the pacific. but, what do you think?” yeah. jesse now felt this really had to be an i10 journey. and, she knew that the i10 only ended in one place. “umm… the i10 does end in jacksonville, fl, also. he he.” jesse joked. but now billy didn’t need to explain further: going from a desert, directly to a sea? only one direction on the i10 did that. jesse was frowning again.

an hour passed. jesse had now spent this entire time internalizing the story of the hero, and his life and journeys in the world of nothing but desert. and, it was now that jesse understood, this really was the story of the boys, and their journey into manhood: afraid and alone on the road; not always desert, considering where they ended up. but, in a spiritual sense, it was always desert. not in the physical. but metaphysical. jesse felt like wanting to know what it was like, to be a prey to the reptile people.

“billy, tell me something right now, because i need to know, because, i get the sense, you’ve been forced to be a part of something… so, what is that something?” jesse said.
“like what?” billy asked.

“did you need to kill people to survive?” jesse finally let out.

she finally did. finally! the boys hesitated.

but then:
“yes.” jimmy simply answered.

“first man we had to kill was a trucker named ernie bogner.” billy let out. “why, what happened?” jesse asked. the boys looked at each other. then, got weird. “hey, jimmy, how much you bet, that song comes on the radio, again, if we turn it on?” billy joked. jimmy shook his head. “how much you bet?” billy asked again. “a

dollar." jimmy answered. "want me to do the honor?" "go ahead." jimmy answered. "wait, what song?" jesse asked. billy turned around and stared at her, with his cataracted blue eyes. "you heard the song. the one we didn't want you to listen to. but i guess, you have to, now, listen to the lyrics." billy then turned on the radio. and, surely enough, 'riders on the storm' by the doors, was playing. jesse now remembered. but… how? "wait, you boys are playing games. that's a cd!" jesse let out. "no, it's not!" billy said. jesse reached forward and hit the eject button for the car's cd player. nothing came out. then played with the radio to see… crap! it really was the radio. jesse was bewildered. "no, how did you do that?" jesse gasped. "do what? we did nothing. we have no supernatural power over the radio, and what song will play, when and where." billy explained. "then how did you do it?" jesse gasped. jimmy now looked at jesse with his cataracted blue eyes. and said:

"because… we know how God works.

not everything.

but, we know what He wants us to know."
"wait… um…?"
"just listen to the song on the radio. and listen to the lyrics, specifically."

and now hearing the song, and hearing it for its lyrics, jesse realized, she didn't like this song.

"we were still twelve years old out here in the desert in 1988. our dad's dodge had… i don't know what happened to it. it just stopped. we didn't understand mechanical car stuff at that time. we were out in the middle of the desert. terrified. and then we met a trucker on the road." billy explained. "he seemed like a nice man. had a gut sticking out under his shirt, that was covered in dirt, from probably having to bend over the fenders, of his semi-truck, to do repairs. balding. bad teeth. but, a nice smile. he seemed nice. everyone else we came across on the i10, which we tried to wave down, just gave us the creepshows. he didn't, though. 'hey, boyz, where ye frum?' he asked. we didn't answer. 'boyz like dr. pepper?' we were thirsty, so we drank." jesse now knew where this story was headed. and, didn't even feel like she wanted to know all the details leading to what happened; she'd seen movies about stuff like this before: especially involving hitchhiking. there

was no need for a build up to it, and especially since the boys had already told her, this was their first kill.

“billy, skip to the end, i already think i know where this is going.” jesse said. billy did. “yeah, well, later, we wake up. and, we find ourselves tied up at some abandoned gas station. there was already the stench of death in the air. so, we already got the sense, truckers used this spot, to do what they did. it was a gas station, in utah. but, we didn’t find out about that until later.” “what was in the dr. pepper he gave you two?” jesse asked. “whatever it was that put us to sleep. i don’t know. what do you think?” billy answered. “so, what happened next?” jesse asked.

“not many details needed, he came in and grabbed jimmy.

took him to another room. did what he did to him…!”

“oh God!” jesse led out.
jesse than whipped her head to the back of jimmy’s head. and eyed him, from back there, as her heart shriveled up.

now she knew why jimmy was the quiet one.

“i found something sharp to cut myself free: broken glass. the idiot had set us down at a spot with broken glass, if you can believe. i got out. i first ran to his truck, because i knew i needed something. i couldn’t just rush in and attack him, while he did what he did to jimmy. i found, this, amongst his possessions, in the truck” billy then held up suzanna; gleamed, it did, a bit; held it up proud and strong. “i guess he liked my knife, he got from my backpack, and now wanted to make it his. i went back to where he had tied me. he came out with jimmy, and saw how i wasn’t where he left me. i was… in the shadows. Waiting. for the right moment. he started yelling at jimmy, demanding to know where i was. stupid idiot. jimmy would know just as much as he would, since he was with him the entire time. so, why yell at jimmy? and, just as he began to turn towards me, i began to run up, and at that perfect opportune moment… i stabbed him dead in the chest.

gotta say, though, killing people… isn’t how it is in movies.

since, in movies, people that make them, have no idea of nothing. like boys playing

with toys. besides the plastic figures they play with at hand, they have no idea how it feels like to kill something with a soul.

how… the earth comes alive.

and with wretched souls, sometimes.

this was my first, but not last. sometimes, when you kill someone, they don't immediately die. sometimes, they will still try to fight you, even after you've stabbed them over 100 times. sometimes, they will die, then come back to life, and you'll have to kill them, again. and then there's the crap we've been through, seeing as to what doors are open to us. sometimes, when you take a person's head, their head doesn't just die immediately, it still beams at you, and curses you to hell for a while, before the soul departs. sometimes, you take the head, but the ghost doesn't depart the body, and the body still chases you around for a while, blindly seeking revenge.

but, sometimes, most times, the death is immediate. i remember a knife fight i had with someone in nebraska, all he did was look at me, with a peaceful look, and said: 'i'm glad now, i can finally sleep,' and just laid his head down, and did. ernie died immediately.

ever read the book of joshua?" billy asked.

"umm… huh?" jesse had no idea where this was going.

"in the book of joshua. after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. eventually, the people of abraham, isaac and jacob, had to wage war with the inhabitants of the lands they were promised to take. and to exterminate the heathen lot, that already inhabited them. and, at one point, they were then facing the heathen kings, which the jews felt afraid of, since, at this point, the jews had been nothing but drifters. and slaves to the egyptians, beforehand. so, on that day, when joshua and the jews had captured the five kings of the amorites, before executing those heathen kings, joshua told his lieutenants to come hither. he then told them basically, 'do not be afraid of them, they, should be afraid of you.' and he told them to put their feet on their necks, which was a sign now to them, that, no longer did they have to fear.

now, they were to be the masters of people who would be their masters.

now, they were the hunters, and people like these, would be their prey.

jimmy didn't feel content with just seeing me kill ernie bogner. neither did he feel content, to take suzanna from my hand, and stab him… i can't tell you how many times more. he needed more vindication, that he wasn't a prey to a man like this. and that a man like this, was now nothing to him. so, he held suzanna, at his neck, and cut ernie's head off." jesse now really had no clue where this was going. but, it seemed like billy was to take it all the way. "ernie had a dog he'd keep at the back of his truck. jimmy wanted to feed the head to the dog, but, that's the thing about dogs. once they choose loyalty to a master. they're loyal, to the end. so, we waited out there in the desert, until morning. buzzards came around, since they probably would frequent this one abandoned gas stop. old. really old. like from the 40s. on a road no one drove to and from anymore.

jimmy fed the head of ernie boger to the buzzards.

and, we sat there for an hour and watched, while meditating, as the animals picked the flesh out of his head, until there was—"
"that's sick! that's disgusting!" jesse blew up. she didn't want to hear any more of this. billy and jimmy lane fell silent. "fine, i understand killing him. but, cutting his head off and feeding it to the buzzards? what the hell is—"
"jesse, shut up!" billy said.
"no!"
"have you ever been raped by a man before, jesse?" jimmy said.
jesse went quiet.
"well, until you've had a man like that, put the—evils—that he does into you… you'd understand… okay?"

34. el murciélago

it was just judy and just jesse again. the party was now feeling like it was stepping on fertile soil, but with no seeds at hand to be distributed; nothing to sow with and nothing to reap with, even with all this fertility, it didn't matter; the valuable earth under the girl's feet was still useless. jesse, thank you for another boring and disappointing night. you suck, we should do this again sometime. judy joked. the same one from the other night. you're really blaming me for this? no, no. of course not. i know this was the best you or jules could do for a nobody like me. i just wished finally getting to a party like this could be more… fruitful… or even meaningful. i guess. both girls now hung a frown. and watched all the celebrities around them do what they did. why do you hate her so much? judy asked, eyeing the girl that was there; seemingly being hit on by another boy. and then jesse finally admitted something, she felt it was time to do, with not just judy, but, with herself:

what if i don't hate her at all… maybe the problem is i like her too much?

that wasn't something judy was expecting. yeah, judy… what if that? then looked at her directly and then away. judy didn't seem to get it. okay… so, so? but then judy started to get it, just by picking up the vibes she was getting from jesse, and asked this question correctly: okay, seems now you like her a lot, then what is it that infuriates you to the point that—
because she's the type of person that will sing songs about falling in love with james dean, when she's probably never even seen a movie with james dean in it. jesse explained.

judy seemed intrigued.

this last week, staying at a motel 6. i kinda got into old movies. like, really old. and, i was watching all three movies that james dean had been in. well, i never would have imagined, just how awkward the guy was. i mean, for the 50s, even for his iconic looks, today, i can only imagine him as a creepy boy trying to hit on me. especially in the movie, giant, where he gets so creepy over elizabeth taylor's character, he holds a lifelong obsession, to the point he's willing to hook up with the daughter of elizabeth's character in the movie, just to finally get to elizabeth, herself. oh, wow… that is creepy. judy put. and, i'm not saying he doesn't have that heartthrob thing women fell in love with. but, watching him, him actually, and not just fantasizing about the icon, made me really see things differently. i

want something real. not something made up. you get me? judy got it, but seemed to need more context to solidify it. i think i know, like me saying there's two types of boys: keepers and nonkeepers. and until you really know someone, you won't know which is which. judy looked at jesse. you think james dean was not a keeper? kinda feels unfair, just basing that on his movies, compared to him, personally. jesse thought for a second. now a story about him in real life came up: ever heard of what happened between him and marlon brando? judy didn't even know who marlon brando was. but, it didn't matter; jesse could really be good at wording this; she had been taught by the best: imagine leo and brad at a party, back in the early 2000s, leo is all in heat over brad, and looks up to him, also wants to hit that and—
wait, you saying james dean swung both ways? that's what i heard about both james, and that marlon guy, you don't know of. jesse put it. wait, how did you dig it up? judy asked. i have my ways. jesse informed. since, jesse was now the type of person, that preferred a back door, compared to the one set up front. anyways, leo decides to impress brad at that party, dressing up as brad in fight club, with the whole red shades and red leather jacket look, and begins acting all tyler durden in front of him, giving the whole "i don't want to die without any scars" line. judy now cringed up and looked at jesse and gasped:

james dean was… eww!
yes, judy, that pathetic.

which is just what marlon brando felt, when he saw the boy trying to dress like him, in the wild ones. practically disowned him then. point is, judy… if you ever came across james dean knowing a fact like that, would it turn you completely off? judy frowned and said: funny, as long as he still liked girls, no! but, like you said, i would also want to get to know him exponentially more now, to know what i'm to deal with. judy put. exactly, that's the thing, with a guy like james dean, in the movie giant, per se, i, in the end, would want to know how much of jett rink was really james dean, and how much it was not. just a role in a movie or not…

sometimes it isn't you that chooses the role, sometimes it's the role that chooses you.

and in that case, i would never get with a guy, that would ever try to hook up with my daughter, just to get the vindicated sense, he finally got one off over on me.

it's like that one scene where james dean's jett rink is talking to the daughter, and the stupid girl keeps giggling and giggling, completely unaware the reasons he's even flirting, and being nice to her. and with her, in that regards, what i can't stand is, what she represents. and what she represents is that of a stupid and silly 8-year-old girl, with a flower in her hands, standing next to the Devil, that's in disguised as a handsome young man. and, she's handing Lucifer her pretty, completely oblivious to what she is doing, and how much danger she is in.

representation is more than you or me or even that girl over there. it's like something jules told me: to be famous, it's not just about us, and how important we are. not about our big, fat and ugly and dangerous egos. it's about the part we play in the bigger scheme of things. what influence we leave behind. we're just actors stepping in and out of a stage. but, it's not about the performance. it's what influence the performance leaves the audience with. you don't even need to be a great actor, just great at what only you can do best.

like… marty mcfly.
who? asked judy.
nevermind.

jesse looked one last time at taylor swift and added one last bit:

that girl… is me.

stupid, silly girl, living in a fantasy world, living in a bubble. running around with flowers in her hair, and one at hand, wanting to give her pretty… to the Devil in disguise.

and she has no idea what she's getting herself into.

maybe i'm projecting too much of myself into her… i don't know.

the girls then fell into silence again.

oh, jesse, i got a james dean, as a jett rink, staring me down, right now. judy then let out. where… who? jesse went. judy then turned, but, turned in a way, which jesse immediately understood, she was giving that boy her 6 o' clock window. jesse

then looked over judy's shoulder, and, bingo! now she saw who. jesse's eyes exploded. oh… wow! that's no james dean. no, no, no, no—no! jesse went. what, he's cute. judy said. jesse just gave judy a—"don't you dare say that," look! what, he's kinda cute.

no, judy, he's the creepiest boy in here.

jesse put out. oh, whatever! it's like what you're saying, don't you want to know the boy behind the creepiness? jesse looked right at judy, and shook her head, in silence. plus, i think i know something about him. judy put. what? that boy, his family, they're like the barrymores of this city. jesse didn't know what to make of that, or who or what a barrymore happened to be (funny how selective jesse and judy could be over such things). what? i mean, his family, are like hollywood royalty. don't you keep up with who's who in hollywood now, and not just the obvious stuff? judy asked. jesse didn't. i think, i'm going to go over there, and find out. no, judy, don't! i really, really don't like what that boy is putting out. my creature from the black lagoon alarms are going into defcon 1. cocked pistol, fully loaded, and all, and nuclear holocaust at its most eminent. what? bad, judy, bad! really, really bad. judy now went into silence within herself; cast of shadows going across her eyes, as she looked up at jesse, all studying wise. this paused for a moment, then she gave jesse her 6 o', and now asked her something:

do you want ray or not?
what?
ray, the uber driver we met. i got his number, do you want it or not? judy asked. jesse hesitated to answer. judy now turned and looked right into jesse's eyes. girlfriend, i love you, but! this is becoming sudden death hour. i need an answer. judy put. what… why? jesse asked. because, i don't want to hurt you or lose you over ray. judy added. wait, i thought you said ray wasn't even your type. he's too sad, as you put it. jesse reasoned. yeah, but, maybe i need that in my life. i'm too instantaneous. i need a boy to anchor me and teach me how to love, for once.

so, you have to make a choice, right now! because, i don't want to walk on eggshells over this anymore. i need confirmation. and, bitch, if you snooze, you lose. judy elaborated. jesse now realized how serious judy was being about this; she was smoldering in it. and, how direct she was being with jesse, really was the best and most respectful way as a friend to put this out. jesse didn't know how to

answer, she wasn't sure. okay, jesse, i'm going to make this harder for you, just so i can get a response from you. i love you, but, i gotta do this.

if i get with him, know…
there will be tons and tons of hot steaming sex with him in the shower.
oh… please, judy, don't—
no! there will be tons and tons of hot steaming sex, you'll never get from him, and i will! and this is the keystone of all this, jesse, so listen up! judy now had jesse's full and undivided attention. i'm not gonna do it for just sex, i'm doing it, so ray can freakin' forget that stupid, long ago, japanese girlfriend, he's still holding onto. i mean, 2002, are you freaking kidding me? i'm gonna nail him so bad and long and hard, he's gonna forget that woman, and see how there's a woman, here, that wants to be with him, and love him, and… so, do you want him or—
yes! yes! yes! jesse blew up, and felt exhausted.

okay, thank you for being truthful.
now, i guess christian grey it is, then.

judy said, and faced the creepy boy, she had mostly been avoiding making any eye contact with. now, doing so. no, no… how about… let's just both not wanting ray? how about that? jesse desperated. judy turned around again, and jesse felt intimidated by her eyes even more. no, jesse. i know girls like to think that, and how that makes their bffs stronger… it doesn't! oh, just us two in the world—heavens to betsy! jesse, that doesn't make it stronger, that's really just pussying out! that's when bffs don't have the strength to admit, there will always be boys in their lives, that are or aren't going to be off limits. and they say that, because, they really don't trust their bffs, or even themselves, enough, with a male, and the promise of love and great sex it brings. because, they're afraid, when a boy does enter their lives, they will betray each other. being afraid of a bff's betrayal, isn't the hallmark to a better and stronger relationship. it's quite the opposite. it's the hallmark to its dismal downfall. get me? yeah… but… christian grey over there, really? jesse asked. meh, i've done worse. judy, he's creepy as hell! jesse said. oh, come on, jesse, grow up! he's a richie rich boy. all boys that come from a rich family are creepy as hell. all of them! i should know, i come from a rich family, and was raised around rich families.

just imagine a recently orphaned, young, master bruce wayne, in a dark and dreary

attic in his family estate, capturing and torturing bats, far from the eyes of alfred, his butler.

and from that description, it sounded like judy really did know what she was talking about. yeah, but, saying "christian grey," are you kidding? that just tells me, you're not really being an adult about this, thinking your anastasia palace now, too. jesse explained. anastasia, what? judy went. ah, crap! that's where that name came from! jesse thought. hey, might be kinky. judy said, and smiled out. jesse was growing fed up. judy, kinky… really? after everything you told me about your mother, and sex. you're really going to think like that right now? jesse put.

shut up… please?
that woman messed me up, just as much as she messed up cindy.

and, i don't do it for why she did. i don't want to flaunt it. i just need it. okay? judy said. sad. jesse frowned. i need it! now jesse felt really desperate; this boy just wasn't giving jesse the right vibes, not at all. fine, take ray. take him! jesse said. nope… too late for that. you spoke your peace. judy now walked over to this absolute fish king of a creepshow. and, began mingling with him. oh, you! jesse was pissed. more than pissed. afraid out of her mind! this boy was really that icky. she needed more champagne. and, she walked over to the kitchen to get some.

champagne—now! she ordered the mexicans.
please, would be nice. said that one charles beaner looking boy.

jesse didn't know how to say that; not that she didn't want to; just, didn't know how to, at the current moment. so, she eyed them all, very psychotic like. with one single eye twitch. with her right. okay, baby girl… no hard feelings! i totally capiche. but, if you're gonna need to really murder someone, start with james franco, please? he's been annoying all the girls here, and he needs to get it the most, out of everyone. the server said. and got jesse her sustenance. jesse didn't even go back to see how judy was doing, since she was too afraid to; she could only hope it all went sour. but the way judy put it, it kinda also sounded like all that "mo' money" that barrymore boy had, was really just making judy: dollar signs seeing stupid and thirsty. jesse now found jules, and walked up to him, and hung around him, with old hollywood people. besides a quick formal introduction… nothing… this was boring.

jesse now looked at her iphone: 10mins? that's how long since judy started…? damn, more champagne! here you go, baby doll. that server… wow! what a mind reader. hey, jesse, this is arnold holden. please to meet you, young dear. he said. he, he! jesse stringed together. terrible introduction. jules now seemed to get jesse was in her own world, with some undesirable thinking to do. so, he made her less and less lit in the group. and now, 20 mins! damn! jesse stormed over to where judy was with the boy. she wasn't with him anymore. and jesse didn't know if this was better or worse. another round of champagne, brought by you-knows-truly. and now jules came up to jesse. he didn't seem peachy. actually, very rotten apple-y. like he knew something. what, what…? jesse went. umm… jesse? said jules. and now jesse knew it: this was bad! jesse, i just had judy text message me, not to worry about a ride home. that she was leaving with someone. someone named "gishner." jules simply put. what, what…? jesse went again.

jesse, i'm sorry.
sorry about what?

and then he said it:
i should have let you and judy know about, not everyone, but actually… just one boy here. jesse's eyes blew up. oh my God! how bad is it? and then he began: jesse, you know the list, of people it's really, really best, to avoid in this city? jesse's eyes blew up wider. the gishners… are old hollywood. hollywood royalty, really. really old. and really, really dangerous. how bad is it? jules didn't seem to know how to put this. ever seen the movie, eyes wide shut? jules asked. no. okay, jesse, you need to contact judy, and let her know, "no!" she needs to get the hell away from that boy. if i had seen her with that boy, trust me, i would have made a scene walking over there, and grabbing her hand, and yanking her away. and, even if she started screaming "rape" i would not let go. that's how bad this is. who are the gishners? jesse asked. she needed to know. jules didn't seem to want to let out everything.

they're called the boyars in this city.

and… you didn't hear that, unless you're someone as old, and have been around, as long as i have. they're some of the original families here in hollywood, since the early 1900s. jesse, i don't want to spend a lot of time explaining this, but if she is with the nebuchadnezzar prince, then…? then… wait, what? what did you

call him? nebu—… prince, huh? jesse baffled. that's just what the boy likes to fancy calling himself. why? asked jesse. and then jules made an unnecessary funny face. because he's an idiot. jules then shrugged with his eyes, while solemnly shaking his head about the boy. like jules knew him, personally. what do you want me to do? jules redirected his eyes onto jesse.

call her! call her! now! text her! anything!
no. tell me just what type of mess she—
jules now got mad and grabbed jesse's arm, and pulled her near him; he seemed frantic and freaked out. but, he had to put it into jesse, just how bad this was: if you ever want to see your friend alive again, and, in one piece, you call her, and scream, and curse at her—to get the hell out! if she has to jump out of that boy's car… out! jesse now felt terrified for judy's life, beyond all reckoning. what do we do? what do we do? there has to be something else! i'm thinking about it! i'm thinking about it! said jules. don't think, do! said jesse. okay, okay… i guess i have to call the gishner estate now. shit! but they owe me a soul for a soul. maybe, i can trade in those chips. what the hell are you talking about? jesse exploded. this got people's attention. back… back in the early 80s….

and this now seemed to pain him to bring up, as his eyes ached with the thought.

i, at the time, didn't know anything about how bad they were. therefore, i gave the family one of my clients. one, that i never saw again. and, it wasn't until years later, i learned what i had done. it was penelope felix. God, penelope. poor girl. sorry what i did. i didn't know. festered jules, within himself. okay, okay, will that work? jules seemed down, depressed and uncertain. okay, let's drive there! jesse phoned. to the gishner estate? not happening! said jules. then paused. and now went into the details of the gishners, and what they were capable of: that place? is heavily armed. no matter how we try to enter. jesse, it won't work. you can be leonardo dicaprio wanting to go in. no matter. if they felt like it, they'd shoot him, dead, and pay off the cops, and the corners, and district attorney's office, and even the studios and what have you, and play it off, as just another tragic case, of a great actor with a medication overdose/suicide, like that of heath ledger. even though with a bullet in his head, they'd play the story out, however they'd choose to. the family is that big and that powerful in town, and that influential, and that evil. you get me? are you serious! jesse exploded. this was unbelievable. more attention. jules nodded his head. he was. judy had really stepped on a landmine of a creepy

boy, this time. jesse now panicked; she ran out to the patio of the house she was at. and, started calling….

she didn't pick up.
shit!
shit!
a minute later, a text came in:
jesse, i got like 2% on my phone, what is it?
oh, of all the stupid bad luck! jesse thought. jesse now texted back:

get the hell away from that gishner boy! he's a psycho killer! get out! get out!

she waited a minute. judy replied:
oh, shut up! psycho killer? please. fine, i get it. he's really creepy. i think your womanly intuition needs to get checked by a doctor. just don't turn this into something, because you feel guilty about getting ray, and i getting el murciélago, instead. i mean, he's a lot sweeter now. that's just initial boy awkwardness. grow up, jess! judy texted.

of all the times a woman doesn't listen to another woman, over this type of intuition: it has to be now!

no, no, stupid bitch! jules told me he's a psycho killer! and jules would know about these things! get out! get out! jesse texted.

jesse waited.

and now… this was taking too long! maybe, she didn't get her last text? she said she only had 2% left. crap! crap! oh, please, no! jesse didn't know what to do; jesse felt like crying now.

don't cry, jess, judy will be fine. said and smiled billy.

jesse's eyes widened to see him; it had been a while since seeing him last. and, he was out here on the patio, of this mulholland house party. jesse said nothing, as she fixated on this apparition in a spot with a crowd all around. it was a big patio space; the type that had a terrific view of hollywood underneath; almost

accidentally, for such a boring mansion such as this, to have a view this good; many peeps and celebs up and out and about, mingling, and now: billy had returned. what did you say? jesse whispered. not sure anyone was seeing billy here. but, how could they not? not like every day, you'd see a boy dressed in a totally black leather getup, with a motorcycle helmet, with the shield down. and let's not forget a neon face drawn on the plate, while speaking out of that face. i said, nothing is going to happen to her. billy said and smiled again. oh, thank God! you're gonna do something? jesse yelped. no. we're not. me and jimmy can't. but, don't worry. billy informed. jesse now looked around at all the people here: they were minding their own business; in no ways aware of this specter here. they can't see me, jess, they don't have eyes to. for your eyes only, right now! billy informed, while wiggling his eyebrows. jesse, didn't feel like trusting this; something wasn't adding up; maybe this was the billy she had experienced in her head? the sprite in her head. and just there. jesse, i'm real. don't look at me like i'm not. billy said. how? jesse gasped. you want me to prove it? billy asked with his brow. weird still looking at a cartoonish face of something drawn on a motorcycle helmet visor. but, that didn't matter right now. you want me to? i mean, if i do appear in front of someone here, i don't think they're gonna like seeing something as freaky as this, now looking directly right back. it'll be like the mother of all jump scares. you're used to being haunted by me, and these people are not. jesse didn't reply. if what billy was saying was true, if judy was safe, if this billy wasn't in her head: she needed proof. fine, jess, i'll show myself to someone here.

but… there's going to be a lot of screaming… just to waaaarn you!

billy was teasing in a perverse way. billy now eyed around the group here at the patio. then, found just the right person to appear himself to. billy looked at jesse, and grew a sinister smirk: flashes of lightning excited with glee.

no, don't do it to her… please, not her! jesse whispered.

no, jess, i think a part of you might enjoy this for a second. but, don't worry, i'll only give her a peek. one that might have her screaming all the way to a local hospital. but, she'll get over it. billy jested. jerk. why jest? jesse thought.

billy now walked over to where she was standing at; she was being hit on by another boy; she was just facing towards hollywood underneath like some

primadonna, just fashioning all this hollywood girl zeal; loving all the attention she was getting, which she didn't plan to give any back. but, this was going to be much more attention than she was ever gonna want, in her entire mortal and mental life.

billy was now facing—right at her!
and!
this was going to get ugly.

for… that face! that horrifyingly hellbound psychotic ghost of a face. a frantic wailing sound grew from it, as it went into harbinger mode, with its mouth parting ways like hell's gates. and inside, revealing a hellhole; wider and wider, bigger and bigger, deeper and deeper; a black cauldron now churning with whirlpools of knives for teeth, going around and around, and down and down….

and, deep-down, there, at rock bottom, in that bloody bed of murder, where one has made one's bed and is made to sleep in, behold: a consummated anti-womb of sin. giving birth to a spawn of faces upon faces upon countless such and such; spewing and soaring and screaming out all those delicate and deadly moments, before the deathblow; spewing out hundreds and hundreds of dancing devils off the tip of billy's tongue, to a midnight melody, before the chorus.

she wasn't yet seeing any of this. billy was timing it perfectly.

and then—boom! as both their eyes made contact!
ohhhhh, God! whaaaahhhhh!

taylor swift then spasmed and dropped straight to the ground, and almost to where she'd snap her knee to one side, to where the bone would pop out the other. now, she was no longer smiling enjoying the glamorous and glorious and carefree life; she was screaming in horror like a mental case.

ooh my God! whawhadaa? whawadaa? ooh my God!

she was now smacking herself, actually smacking herself, hard, screaming insane! everyone, everyone, there, rushed to pick her up. rushed to help her! rushed to save her! but, from what?

billy was laughing now. he was laughing! actually laughing! enjoying what he did, immensely, like nothing could ever measure up. his face was creepier than five thousand times of that gishner boy. though, jesse was now used to it; she had already had her four months stay at the memphis kook motel, from dealing with this apparition, haunting her every step. billy was now back to being hidden in the shadows of everyone's cornea, but jesse's. billy walked over to jess. jess felt like smacking him with all her might. you piece-of… why did you do that? jesse whispered. still not wanting the attention of everyone here. but, if she was to start screaming herself now, it would be no match to the screaming of the poor girl over there was making.

ohhh myyy God … demon demon… help me, Godddd!!!

he, he, he, he!
shut up! piece-of… go away!
no.
go away!
no!

billy said as his alterface went mum and slit. oh, don't be so touchy. you don't even like that woman. you enjoyed that.
no… no! bastard! no, i—
you want to talk about what i did, or, judy? that girl can survive what i did. judy is more of a concern right now, don't you think? billy reasoned. jesse's eyes blew up. but, he had her attention. what, pretty sure she has dealt with a creep or two before, considering her attention seeking line of work. though, never the king of all creepshow monsters, like your boy, here!
…! jesse began gnashing her teeth.
boo hoo, tay tay didn't like me. billy now made a boo hoo face, fake boo hoo face.
i guess it's because i'm a trump supporter. he, he!
stop gloating about that. how do you know?
know what, judy?
yes.

call it ghostly intuition. billy jested.
with a face.

jesse had no time for billy's jokes; always at the most inopportune time. how do you know? and no more stupid corny jokes. i don't have the nerve for it! jesse ordered. you calling me corny? shut up and tell me! jesse got a bit louder than she should, and got someone's attention. excuse me, are you all right, too? franco put. fine, franky, go away. but jesse realized, maybe, better if she did. jesse now left the patio, went through the house, and was now outside the party; got to where no one could see her interact with billy's ghost; billy was waiting for her looking away: hush and contemplative.

how do you—
because, jesse, God doesn't work that way. he just said. jesse didn't know what that meant. and felt like she didn't have the time for this. what are you saying? i'm not saying she's not going to experience something like taylor there did. much worse. much, much worse, and more scarring and more scarier. she's definitely going to get the worse experience she has ever gotten, and will ever get. how do you know judy is going to be fine? jesse put again. listen, this was all predestined to happen: only 2% battery, judy not paying attention to your cries of womanly intuition about a psycho boy, and, meeting a gishner, out of everyone at this party, of all people, him, really? billy reasoned. it all did seem kind of forced in a way. don't worry, her number isn't gonna come up at that house, that gishner boy is taking her to. that isn't what is meant to happen.

just… an instigator… a catalyst… of events to come.

therefore, it had to happen. billy elaborated. what events? jesse asked. billy shook his head. then said: that is yet to be revealed. not everything is understood at all times. do you think i saw this happening the last time we spoke? that met jesse curious. when… was… the last time we spoke? jesse questioned, with the turn of her eye, thinking about the events at the chateau marmont, leading to what she did there. thinking about daddy. jesse, there's me, right here standing, the ghost of your old billy.

then… i don't know.

what other versions of me have you been seeing or speaking to? he asked, turning his head at dutch angle. i didn't see, i only heard. billy then looked at jess's welt,

then nodded. oh, i get it, gotta be careful… of this! billy said and indexed the temple of his motorcycle helmet, twice. the mind is a plane of an entirely different spiritual world of sprites and spirits and demons being manifested, although, just in your own head. we should talk about that, sometime. billy detailed. jesse now got the sense, that wasn't necessary. at the house, the gishner house, what can you exactly tell me that's going to happen? asked jesse. billy shook his head. please, please… tell me! jesse beseeched. i don't know. then how do you know exactly whether she's gonna be all right or not? billy made another sick grin. stop grinning like that, it doesn't exactly help make you seem trustworthy. jesse confessed. billy held his head in the opposite angle. jesse, you always saw how we had a certain intuition to things beyond you, or anyone you've ever met. can't that be a reason enough to trust me? no! i want her security. jesse demanded. i can't do anything. billy let out. oh, shut up! mr. rider on the storm. maybe you can and don't want to? jesse put. but now, came the most important bit: fine, i'll tell you this much from what i know about them…

those people are satanists, straight up. it's a place swarming with demons, and the stuff that goes on in there, is the stuff of the human sacrificial variety.

and now, jesse understood. and now, jesse grew scared. very, very scared. oh my God! you have to do something, you have to! me and jimmy, i know we look bad. and can take on everything. not that! not that much evil in there. suzanna has got her limits. there's really only the two of us, and hundreds of demons in there, demons beyond evil and imagining. billy informed now. please, please… promise me she's…? jesse went. i promise, jesse. she will be all right. billy said and looked to one side. jesse looked to the other. jesse, i can see you only have two options now.

one, you can choose to believe me, and, wait to see her all right after its done.

or…?
i want option two! jesse said immediately.

billy seemed disappointed. jesse, like i said, this was all predestined to happen. billy put. by whom? billy then just looked up, suggestively.

that enraged her, to think, He was behind all this.

fine, i guess it's option two, then. but, here's the thing, there's things in there, your eyes weren't meant to see. billy said. then how will i see them now, from here, you're asking me to go in there, when neither jules, nor even you, nor jimmy, can? jesse reasoned. you want to see what is going to happen to her, or, don't? billy reasoned. jesse… nodded. okay, just letting you know once more, your eyes were not meant for this. what judy's eyes were meant to see, were predestined to see. but, not truly by yours. so, how you take it, is how you choose to take it.

wait… my eyes? what do you—
i think… you already know.

listen to my instructions: go to jules, get the keys to his car. smack him and yell at him and do whatever you have to, just get it from him. then, drive to the house judy and the gishner will be at. billy instructed. how will i know which one is their house?

you'll know… when you get there.
anyways, then, lay back, close your eyes.
and… turn on the radio.

35. the hills have eyes

asshole! jesse thought. thinking over the matter of billy's latest debut in her life, in these highlighted days. jesse was embittered with anger and angst. but, mostly anger. she still did not approve whatsoever what he did—she didn't! billy absolutely terrified that woman half to death, almost. he was right, the party had come to a complete stop after her outburst, and an ambulance was called immediately, immediately taking her to the hospital, after the fright she was put through. and, this is what bothered jesse the most: was this now jesse's one and only billy? or… something else? she was remembering everything jules had spoken about, when it came to matters like these. and, question: ghost or demon? billy in life, was a jerk! he was! he simply and unapologetically was. and a monster, to boot. as judy and jules summed up, just the details of his generation, and what type of people they were. plus, billy and jimmy, both, were more than that; they were messed up in more ways than one. but, beneath their wretched molds, jesse knew there were better angels within their nature, regardless of all the wicked games they'd play; their wicked games were just the offshoots of a wicked upbringing and lifestyle, they had to be put through, being traumatized themselves by. jesse loved both billy and jimmy in life. but, could she love… and trust… this? she didn't know. she now felt like she didn't know.

trust… ha! i don't know if i can. it was a very simple thing billy needed to do at that party, to prove he was real. and, that really could have all been accomplished, if he just walked behind someone, and tapped them on the shoulder.

had them startled for a second.
not screaming hysterically out of their minds!

ghostly intuition…? jerk. asshole! him and his evil and childish sense of humor, which, he always had. but now it was just too pervasive. jesse had managed to get the keys of jules' car; she told him she wasn't going to where judy was: promised him! since jules was all but sure that was her intent. she lied though. purported how she just felt very anxious and wanted to sit in the car and wait it out. jules trusted her and gave her the car keys. of course, she then went ahead and drove off, breaking that promise. jesse was in jules' car, driving westward, on mulholland drive. driving blind. and, she was to trust billy, and her serendipitously finding the gishner estate. i've never been to this house! i hate these hollywood hills, and their mazelike courses. where am i going? she thought. but then, struck by a vibe, now

staring at a peculiar estate. she eyed it all sideways. but… no! but, how was it a "no?" she didn't know. there was just that "je ne sais quoi" feeling, that told her so. so, she drove and drove and drove and… damn these cliffs! felt like she was going to drive right off of one, and go screaming towards that vertical horizon, to somewhere/someplace else. and then, struck again, but… still no! she didn't know how to make any sense of this; there was a greater scheme to this riddle; one that she had absolutely no idea what to get out of; like guessing the answer to a riddle, when the riddle itself hadn't been told yet.

and then this one.
boom!
it was wayne manor.

and now, her eyes shot towards it, and began festering on its gothic details. oh, this has to be it! this must be it! it can't be any other house… can it? this was now her third guess. and, she didn't like this; realizing she was now probably playing the sphinx's game, of guessing and guessing and guessing again… and, this was now her third and last guess. she felt if she moved on, there wouldn't be any more guesses: it had to be it!

are you sure? hearkened the sphinx.

are you—
yes, yes! quoted jesse.

but now what?

jesse, although, now knew exactly what. but, could it be trusted? jesse turned on the radio; it was on a dead station with nothing but shifting static; jules radio seemed to have a spinner for tuning onto radio stations; she now needed to spin, and find out. okay. okay…? so, i'm supposed to listen to some song. and then what? but, something in her felt like she already knew. a vision now came to her mind, or, really, a memory, of herself, in the mental ward, in memphis: in the music room. sitting there. and, she was remembering one moment in time, when battling insomnia; anything the doctors gave her didn't work to put her to sleep. and, she had then spent 5 agonizing days without a wink. but… now she knew what song it had to be playing; the only one song she heard, and heard in those 5

days straight, that slowly became something better than any sleep meds. that song was a somber and drowsy one… yet corny, since, it was an 80s song. yet, also, pretty and melodic, in a way. but, after some time there, it became something much better than any dosage of melatonin. is it going to be that song? damn, it would be a song recommended by billy, that was a song by a guy also named billy. and, fact also being: the two sorta looked and dressed and acted alike. damn, x-gens, are now in cahoots! jesse thought. she then spun the wheel. closed her eyes. a radio dj was on, speaking; sounded like an old rock station. wait a minute… i don't want to fall asleep! i can't fall asleep, not right now! what will this have anything to do with…?

and then that one particular song came on.

and, it was 'eyes without a face' by billy idol.

wait… no… i don't want to… i don't want to… boom! she phased out of consciousness. and fell asleep.

and now, her eyes were eyes wide shut. and, she could see her eyes. her eyes! those two ladies of the night; those two wicked biblical sisters. and, just those two. smiling at each other: time for a girl's night out. jesse's eyes were staring at their own reflections in the rearview mirror. but, eyes without a face nor head nor body. is this a dream? she thought. where's the rest of me? where…? she realized now she could move them, float them around, place to place; had full control and full flight. and now, out the car, and, now towards that manor; she was saliently whisking from place to place to place with eyes here and eyes there: watching! just watching, the hollywood hills around her. fine, i don't understand and don't care to understand, just go in and see what you'll see in there, for your eyes only. jesse's eyes thought. and began moving towards the manor. now, saw an open window. and, she went in. her eyes now stalking the corridors and halls and passages; jesse felt like a parasite roaming about the insides of a corpse of a giant eldritch being; it was a magnificently gothic beauty of a manor; this was charles foster kane's hollywood getaway, where he'd bring her mistresses and lovers to: and not for the purposes expected by loving men. where are they… where is anyone? her eyes thought.

omg… you are ridiculous! it was judy.

jesse's green eyes rushed to where she heard her speaking.
but, how would eyes without a head with ears… oh, nevermind!

no need to know the specific details of what to make of all this; better to not be questioning too much into this black sorcery, and work it! work it, girl, work! and however jesse deemed necessary. she came upon them now. but her eyes grew skittish, could they see her eyes floating as they were? better to not find out. they were in a room full of dresses and gowns; mostly old gowns, and, there, judy with the nebuchadnezzar prince. stupid name! why are you dressed that way? what the hell are you doing? judy gasped, all drunk, with stupor of sweat and laughter. the boy just eyed her, in his getup. come on, what is this, 19th century cosplay? judy gasped. no, no cosplay. the gishner boy spoke. voice very timid, and shelter seeking; voice like a mouse in a hole, eyeing all the cats all around, playing how cats play. so, tell me about yourself… abraham lincoln? he, he! judy joked. and, the funny part was, judy wasn't even making funny, he really did dress like one; all the gothic black vestiges and especially a top hat; looked stupid and out-of-place and out-of-time. why? this wasn't as much horrific to look at. actually, not at all. but comedic. the boy didn't speak; he was timid towards her. which could be seen as endearing. but, jesse had eyes for the truth of something of that nature, which judy obviously now didn't.

this room… my grandmother… she loves this room. gishner spoke.
why, is this where she, i don't know… mascarades with ghouls and goblins and ghosts and… hehe! judy was trying to be funny with directionless drunkenness.

yes. said gishner, with these certain eyes.
eyes, jesse had eyes for now in life to see, knowing what they meant, which judy was right now: "see no evil" about.

gishner was nervous. very, very nervous. oh, come on! out with it! stop being such an incel! judy joked. that didn't sit well with gishner, not at all. oh, don't get mad. you're just being way too awkwardly shy. judy said to him. it was obvious, judy was interpreting it this way, way differently from how jesse's eyes were; jesse didn't like this awkwardness: it was too awkward. like, more awkward towards things to come, compared to the things of the now. and, judy, was a "now girl," and shortsighted by all these future prospects; she seemed to think she was fancying

an intimate moment with the boy. but, no! not the case at all. girls, honey, let me tell you something about girls. for instance, i'm a "direct girl." and, if you want to love all of this, i gots here…? judy grabbed her girls, and did that seductive and silly jiggly thing, you might see marilyn do in saucy and sexy comedies like: some like it hot; that is to say, if the hays code was or wasn't going to find it as problematic. the boy eyed her do it, but, strangely enough, very passively. when it comes to girls, let me teach you something about how to seduce them back, for a change. maybe it will calm you down. okay? no, judy, no! don't try to teach this boy how to be a man. that's not ever possible. not with someone—damn! i'm just eyes! i'm just eyes! i can't do anything. judy, please, get out of here! i get the sense, this is just the eye of the storm moment. don't… but what am i to do?

okay…. said gishner.
okay, first off, why are you dressed like this? judy asked gishner. gishner said nothing. come on, i'm not going to judge. don't get even more awkward, that i'm confused by all this. i'll understand, if you explain it to me. i'm an "understanding girl," okay? okay. gishner said. but didn't answer. there was some fidgeting now.

now judy seemed to be getting bored. but then gishner spoke.

i… i always fancied 19th century gothic appeal.

okay, that's something to work with. judy let out. but, how you want me now, in a gown, like vivian leigh, in gone with the wind, or something? judy asked. no. gishner said.

i guess family is something very important to me. gishner then said very abruptly.

okay… that's good! i understand when it comes to family. my family, well… umm… actually, my family sucks. so, let's forget about that. judy said. gishner was now standing stiff as a plank just there; likened to the likes of a wax figure, almost, especially with the outdated wear he had on. okay, this is… okay...? okay, how to make a man desirable to a woman. you want to listen to this? judy asked.

gishner shrugged.

well, mr. gishner, i—

don't call me gishner. gishner was now being direct. judy, jesse could now tell, was growing a bit weary of all this awkwardness. but she was here. so, might as well make the best of it. what do you want me to call you? judy asked. i'm sorry, i know your family name. i don't know yours. what's your name? judy was now trying to be formal. the awkwardness was now making her more self-guilt-trippingly formal. gishner didn't answer immediately. well… call me the… nebuchadnezzar prince. he said.

judy was now totally weirded out by that.

can i call you something in short? judy pleaded. umm, you can call me nebbie. i've had girls call me that before. he answered. okay, nebbie, let's get down to basics…? and it was at this point, jesse now understood, judy was going to mostly dwell in her own words, in her own head. so, to find cohesiveness with everything witnessed here. she wasn't even speaking directly to nebbie anymore; just looking at all the pretty timepiece gowns, and walking around towards them, and lifting them up, and feeling their fabric, and trying to skirt them over to herself to see how they'd look on her. there was a lot of pretty gowns here, very, very pretty; very sensitive and secretive in a way.

so, it's like this, a lot of incels… i'm sorry, that's not offensive towards you, is it? judy being proper. gishner didn't answer. okay, a lot of… wimpy men, let's just call them… will always brag and brag and brag how women just want a chad. or, some football quarterback, or womanizing prick. but, that's not what women want. want to know what women will want? gishner didn't answer. it's like this. nobody is perfect. so, you can't be perfect being with people. or, boys being with women. some guys get really good at it. but those are the wolves. wolves can be fun, but they can also be very detrimental. judy put it. judy, just get the hell out of here. please!

listen, i had this boyfriend one time tell me how he used to want to be a "ladykiller"….

and now jesse's saw gishner's eyes grow stagnant and stalking and large the second judy used that one "l" word. jesse saw, judy had her back to the boy, and didn't. he said, he'd try everything to win women over. "oh, they want a confident guy, i'll show them confident." and, he said he got over his awkwardness. but now

women were just taking him for a jerk. and all the confidence in the world, was even making him even more unappealing in that way. anyways…? judy now walked over to a cute and blue flapper dress: a 20s hallmark. oh my God, this is beautiful. gishner now went over to a drawer, since judy wasn't paying any attention. jesse was! gishner went in and pulled out a box; the box looked old and decayed and decrepit; it was a real antique, dusty and drab and all. and it required a key. gishner then pulled out a necklace from under his vestiges' neckline; a gold key with a red ribbon tied to it. he opened the box. jesse's eyes now immediately rushed over to see what was in the box.

what the hell is that?
a… oh, this is bad, really bad!

it's a mask.

anyways, this boy i knew, eventually, he got mad. really, really mad at girls, for not finding him desirable. "i mean, i'm good looking…" and, he was, he was good looking. i won't deny that. but, he continued, "i should be desirable, why don't girls find me desirable?" the idea made him angry.

then he said certain things that scared me.
what? gishner asked.

turning his body at 6 o'clock to the box with the mask in it. gishner and judy now had each other's attention, judy eyed him for a second, a bit confused. but… no! "couldn't be." she thought. okay, he said, he remembered looking one day into his face in the mirror. and, he didn't recognize his face anymore.

it was like… like he was now wearing a mask… he couldn't take off.

judy… pleeeassseee! get out now! jesse eyes' thought.
interesting. said gishner. go on.
ah, crap! he's finding the story interesting now. jesse's eyes feared.

judy then turned back to the dresses and went on: the boy told me, that, it was like… a demonic face. judy let out. what did the demonic face want with this boy? gishner intrigued. he said, well… "terrifying things." "really, really terrifying

things." which he didn't even want to share with me.

he said, now, he really felt like a ladykiller… reborn.

and, it scared him. it terrified him. since, he didn't want to be that. so, he said, "no, no! i don't want to become this! i don't want it! i just want to love women! that's all." and it was saying those things, that eventually got the mask to be taken off of him. not all at once, but with time. he still suffered bad episodes. especially driving near clubs and bars and looking at all the "pretty and dumb girls," as he put it, laughing and laughing, which, he admitted, he hated not being with them, to enjoy that time spent.

i see the girls walk by
dressed in their summer clothes
i have to turn my head
until my darkness goes

jesse now had that one rolling stones song playing in her thoughts.

but, and this is what's important. judy now turned to gishner and directed this part to him: he said, now that he realized he wanted to just love women. that's when he changed. no longer wanting to be a chad. and, now, he was beginning to grow to love women more. he found himself, becoming something better. now. it was different, women wanted to be with him. just by emoting this new sense of passion. he had no problem with girls anymore. he no longer had girls wanting to run away from him, but run towards him.

he realized something about "love," in itself, it wasn't about wanting to be loved or wanting even to give love.

but, being "love."

that's what made it different. love isn't currency. it's not a gift. it's not work, like with a job you go to because you have to go to. a lot of people, if you ask them to tell you, "say you love me." they won't. they'll then grow mad and point at everything they have done and sacrificed for. and, the point is, a lot of people, just don't understand how love is a state of being. that's what that old boyfriend of mine learned in life.

and… he found happiness.
just not… with me.
judy said… sighed… and now smiled at gishner. but then grew sad as she realized the story she was telling, wasn't making him feel the same. or, seemingly anything at all.

gishner then held up the mask.

what's that? judy asked.
my grandfather.

gishner simply answered. that's a… mask… of your grandfather? judy asked. a little scared now. but gishner didn't answer. gishner then spoke: that's a… pretty story. but, don't know why you told it to me. gishner said, very mutely. judy looked confused.

i told you that because… i don't know… to help you?

gishner now looked directly at this woman and said:

i don't think a weho leech like you can ever help me with anything.

now judy was feeling mad. all right, let me tell you a story about what i see in all this. gishner said. judy didn't answer. you see, me, i'll tell you what i love to do. judy now grew scared. i'm not into women. i'm not really into them. so, really, that's why i saw no point in the story you told. judy looked confused again. and said: are you into… men? gishner shook his head. then what are you into? gishner now smiled: i love… i guess… to serve. judy seemed to have no idea where this was going. you see, family means a lot to me. and, when it comes to my family, there's a lot of services that's needed to be done. gishner said.

to Whom? judy asked.

growing more scared. well, to the one that sustains us. said he, and now looked at this silly, stupid leech. well, all right, that's good. service is good. i like boys that serve. boys in the military. actually, i got one in mind that i used to date and…? judy now felt like not bringing him up. judy walked closer to gishner; she now

seemed like she was growing a little too weary of all this, and wanted answers. okay, i have a question, if you don't like boys or girls, but, love to serve… umm… umm… can you explain a bit more about this? because i'm lost. judy said.

judy… question:
in service, what does a general do with his men? gishner asked.
he… sends them into battle…? judy answered.
precisely.

it's as simple as this, i serve my family. my family serves someone else. and in order for my family to maintain our good lives: people of subordinate class… well… sacrifices need to be made. he then looked with vicious eyes at judy. it's as simple as that.

wait, what do you mean sacrifices?
what are you talking about?

and now she got mad and began to start asking the most important question of the hour:

you don't like boys and you don't like girls.
yes, i guess… i'm asexual.

judy grew madder. and finally asked it:
then why… why did you bring me here?

gishner now placed the mask on.
why are you putting that on?

your grandfather… what does that mean?

honestly, i felt afraid of the game he once showed me. at first, at least.

judy was too terrified to ask.

i… i was only eight at the time. he then grabbed my face and said, "listen, you need to stop looking at this with your whimpering and weakling eyes… look with

mine. hold a strong face! be a man! it will help you learn how to enjoy this."

judy didn't speak. but then she just had to ask: wha—… what… what do you mean sacrifices? gishner snickered and grew a sinister grin. what do you want to do to me? she barely scrapped together. gishner snickered again and gave eyes of an omega filled with jealousy.

please… please… tell me.
i'm sorry, judy, it's like this… i once had a bizarre dream in a white canvas space. i was shown a scenario. details i won't entertain you with. but, at the end, i was confronted with a sphinx, that asked me a riddle. the nebuchadnezzar prince said. judy said nothing.

the sphinx asked me:
"does the slave choose the master, or, does the master choose the slave?"

judy looked up. she didn't know how to respond to that. gishner snickered more freely now. and the mouse now seemed to be wanting to creep out of its hole. what are you gonna do to me? judy was crying now. gishner just snickered again. and then said: well, i'll see you in a little bit. and then gishner walked out of the room. and, closed the door behind him.

and then the screaming began….

jesse didn't even see them coming; four men then jumped out, brutish, bulging, powerful men; men in all black with executioner masks on their faces. and subdued judy in mere seconds.

whaats gooin on! stoppp! stoppp!

one man smashed her onto her stomach. as the other men ripped all her clothes off until she was completely naked. jesse freaked. she didn't know what to do; she could only watch this like in some horror movie: no control, no influence, just watch! the men then tied her hands behind her back and tied up her legs together, and then tied a knot from the ropes between her hands and legs, and had her wishboned up in positioned.

gett off of me! geettt off, gettt of—
then they taped over her mouth, and one of the men grabbed the rope that knotted it all together, and dragged her across the room.

dragged her out of the room.
dragged her down the stairs.
dragged, dragged, dragged!
across the hallway.
now, to a door leading down, underground. jesse, she could do nothing. but follow. but watch. they dragged her down. and down. and down. and now into what looked like a ceremonious room, with a giant circular pit. these spaces felt otherworldly, and old worldly, with an ancient precedence of evil better left buried in the sands of time; yet here, all felt excavated, with a sort of primordial demonic terror, where even demons of young ran in terror, from these unsurfaced demons of old; for if evil was a face, you'd find a face covered with thousands and thousands of masks, and to take away each mask after mask, closer and closer you'd find yourself reaching what true evil's face would actually be like, until you found no devils, but, thee Devil, himself. they then cut all ropes, except for the ones that bonded her hands. they then threw judy down the pit, which was a 14-foot drop; judy fell on her hands and knees, but with not enough sustained tension to hold herself up, as she then bashed head down against the ground; which ripped deep, as blood started spewing from her temple. she got up and huddled over to a corner naked and feeble in the feeble position. above the pit, there were seats all around it. and, there, the nebuchadnezzar prince sat, in a heathen-like manner, while grapes were brought to him. still with that leathery face of his grandfather's face. then, three other women were brought in the same manner as judy. all blonde. all also terrified out of their minds. all also naked. brought out, same as judy. one, seemed to be no older than twelve. they did the same to those girls and threw all three down. the girls were all huddled together now and crying; mostly all now feeling motherly protective of the little one, as they kept her in their center, walled off by their bodies.

you skanks can take off the tapes over your mouths, now. the nebuchadnezzar prince said.

they were all crying and too afraid to. but judy then did take hers off. what are you doing? what's going on? stop crying, stop crying. there will be reason enough to

cry in a minute. the nebuchadnezzar prince answered. judy now grew silent. jesse watched. all she could do was watch. with her disembodied eyes. nothing else. now, jesse understood why billy said that this wouldn't be for her eyes. but he lied! he lied! bastard lied! and now, what was to happen to judy? and those three other girls.

and then jesse saw something else.
in the corner of her eyes.
she watched them.
them! them all! a multitude of them. crawling all out of nothingness. but now here. what is that! oh my God! what are—
shut up! the nebuchadnezzar prince shouted. scream when they get to you. not before! then grinned. then locked fingers in a methodical and meditative manner. this all now began to remind jesse of what jules spoke about, with the story of mr. ink: beasts! hell beasts! a multitude of them were now stepping out of the shadows; all powerful and predatory and monstrous.

and all with humongous members….

jesse was now terrified just looking at their humongous members. these were demon animals. yet they had human like forms and features in ways and ways not, that were abnormal and abominable like. they were circling the girls now. all girls still protective of the little one in the center; all girls were screaming and screaming and crying, seeing these apparitions. and now, look at their members.

look at their cocks!

see them, fear them, of the purposes behind them; why equipped with such monstrosities like these, for what monstrosities to come? might i ask you skanks… ever, in your darkest fears, have you imagined, being raped by creatures like these? the nebuchadnezzar prince asked, boisterously and bounteously. smiled. and began eating grapes. the hell beasts continued to circle, rushing fast and fiercely and viciously amongst their numbers.

and then.
and then.
and then.

came sights… jesse, in her wildest terrors… could have never phantomed. they were animals, all right: vicious, savage, howling and whaling animals. time stopped making sense. time did. space did. sense didn't. jesse's eyes felt like phasing and phasing and phasing from one frame to another to another, with the sights she was now seeing; like frames of pictures, taken, by a killer, of a blind woman in her home; a timid, fair, and funny faced blind woman, that gave the air of audrey hepburn.

1st frame: her face uncertain of "who goes there?"
2nd frame: a slight acknowledgement of a deadly precedence.
3rd: the terror that her senses, besides the one without, are not deceiving her.
4th: her now in terror.
5th: the one behind the camera stepping forth.
6th: all that is seen is a close up, of her mouth open wide, with teeth and fleshy insides and a shivering and dandling uvula at the back.

now frames of blood. now gore. now gore one could no longer decipher one part from another part, and what part coming from which part of the woman's which. all frames cast by a projector, on a cream-colored wall. in a dark room. no sound. no windows. and especially, no doors. no fresh air from the outside to breathe and breathe and breathe and breathe. one you never remember stepping into. one, unsure, if ever to step out of. now here. now locked in here. now in a special form of voyeuristic hell, of watching snippets, of such terrors, over and over again. locked away in such an oubliette, for all of eternity, to view this reel again and again and again. as then the 2d frames on the cream-colored wall form a 3d face pushing and pushing out and out with its death-throes, trying to breach the surface, yet, unable to, as the face finally dies with a grieving grimace.

but then a door opened from this hellbound room, jesse felt her eyes were encumbered and imprisoned in. and then, she saw judy step out. there was something different about judy, in all this gore and rape and massacre. and devouring. there was a light in her eyes, casting out all anti-light; eyes blazing out white light, making all the darkness unsure of what to make of her, making them step away; making them unable to approach; making them afraid to approach. although, the other girls? even the little one? jesse couldn't make sense of them anymore, since they were no longer in one piece, mostly in hundreds of pieces.

one of them still being raped by three of those hell beasts, even without a head and the bottom of her torso having been torn off. all their members raping what little that were left of the people their fleshy ruins used to be, all at the same time. the little one… her flesh was completely being devoured now. jesse saw a leg here, an eye there, and other parts she couldn't gain a sense of what they were. one demon dog then ran up and lapped up the eye of the little one's, and gulped it up,, full and plentifully. all girls, but one, raped, ripped apart and now devoured like food. all that stood in place of all this pit of red was one white light in the middle: untouched. the nebuchadnezzar prince was confused. he stood up. looked at judy. grew mad. grew teeth.

what the hell is going on here? he barked and beckoned.

scowling his eyes around furiously. angered. lost. confused. then had death in his eyes for judy's eyes below. but then, one of the executioner masked men stepped to him and spoke in his ear.

monty's here?

he's outside, wanting entrance.
the man in the mask spoke to gishner, but much louder now for jesse to hear.

ten minutes passed.

and now came down a man jesse had never seen before: a man wearing a black cuban collar shirt, with black dockers, black wingtip shoes. and the man had long black hair reaching his buttocks almost. the man looked to have been molded out of volcanic glass. he stood there, looking directly at the nebuchadnezzar prince, then stepped forward, near the boy's ear and spoke; spoke while pointing down at naked judy, covered in blood. but, unharmed, except for a laceration on her temple. what do you… what do you mean she has to be let…? this one now grabbed him by the back of the nebuchadnezzar prince's neck. and now spoke what felt much more harsher words. the nebuchadnezzar prince felt angered and lost. but, then intimidated. and now complied.

36. touched

after everything that had happened, now, it was strange. and also, frightful. but, such a relief for jesse to have judy in jules' car, sitting next to her. after everything. everything! to have her safe and sound sitting here: unreal, it was, the feeling, truth be told. but, still a major relief. the second judy had stepped off the premises of the gishner manor, was the second jesse truly opened her eyes. and, no longer some disembodied ghostly presence, but herself. just her, in the car. she then saw judy stepping out with a blanket over her. barefooted. and naked underneath.

jesse, how did you know where to find this place? judy asked. jesse didn't answer. judy looked into jesse's eyes.

then something else:
i saw your eyes.
what? jesse gasped.

i saw your eyes… looking up from that… pit. said judy, and there was a disturbed and distilled quality in her voice. but that, jesse, could expect. what wasn't expected, actually, was how remarkable it was hearing her speak at all; after everything she witnessed, and was put through, jesse would expect judy to be in a catatonic state right about now. and, end up staying that way, in a mental ward, for a very, very long time, or more. not like this now speaking, and seemingly able to handle everything. if anything, jesse felt more catatonic then judy did. and, she had only just witnessed it, not lived it, and had been in mortal danger, as judy was. something truly phenomenal was at work here; something truly unreal and unexpected. you saw my… eyes? jesse asked. judy just looked at her. but said nothing. jesse was now planning on driving her to a hospital. if not for the traumatic experience, at least for the laceration on her temple; judy might even have had a concussion.

he spoke of you. judy all but monotone, noted.
what? jesse gasped.

the other guy in there. judy mentioned. jesse was now somewhat curious. and also, definitely somewhat fearful, having anyone from that house, now mention her. who was he? jesse asked. i don't know.

monty.
who's monty?
i don't know.

he exited me out of there. put a blanket on me. said he was sorry he didn't have any footwear and—
sorry. he was sorry! jesse blew up.
calm down. judy said. calm down!

what type of people are these? what type of disgustingly evil human beings—monsters! fuc—
i said, "calm down." judy repeated.

jesse felt anger. she felt rage. but not yet fully embodied in her. that was coming, though! it was coming.

wrath was coming.
wrath was coming.
coming!

jesse gnashed her teeth thinking about everything. wrath would soon be here. the man, that other man, he pulled me aside before i got out. and said, "let jezebel singer know, nothing will come of me, and her, by the gishner's, although… as long as she speaks not a word to no one."

bullshit! bull, what type of people are these? can people seriously be that unbelievably evil? jesse blew up.

judy just shrugged.
out of it.
but, here.
seeming more consolidated than jesse.

he knows me, that other man…?
yes, he does.

he also said, "let ms. singer know, this is a gift from me to her." what, what gift?

jesse got dumb. judy looked into jesse's eyes again. me, jesse, me! coming out of this in one piece. that's the gift. judy answered. jesse just waxed her eyes over the thought: no, no gift, you don't just have something like that happen, and call being spared from it: a "gift." as if a killer going into a family home, murdering the husband, children, and even killing the dog, and telling the now childless widow that's left, it was a "gift," her life was spared. no gift! but then judy said something that completely threw jesse off:

don't worry, jess, i've been in a situation like this before.
what… what?

jesse now stared at judy. jesse, watch where you're driving. judy noted. jesse then realized she was about to rearended a ford, right now, here on forest lawn drive, headed for providence st. joseph maternity. shhheee! went the car, as she came to a screeching halt. as if, jesse's nerves weren't already on their fritz and wits end. after a moment, jesse asked: what do you mean, a situation like this? judy now came up with a faint, very faint, but still there, smile. i don't mean, i've experienced… those things in there! i mean, i've been in a somewhat absolutely terrifying experience like this before.

couple of years ago, i was, with a guy…
we were camping in yellowstone. i hate camping. his stupid idea. but i went with him. go on! jesse said. enthralled to hear this story. i got lost in the woods, at one point. and then i saw something out there in the forest. what? well, no demon hounds. just… just a bear. a grizzly bear. speaking of bears. eww! he! jesse blew out an unexpected snicker. judy took a gulp of anticipation. it was a grizzly bear. that boy told me there shouldn't be grizzly bears, that they're more north into canada. but here was a grizzly bear, and i wasn't with the boy i came with. i hate camping. and, yeah, i think finding myself facing a wild animal, like that, alone, is good reason to say, "i hate camping." judy was trying to turn this into something/somewhat comical, obviously with no intentions of it working out. jesse, i was out there, then, with that thing! at that point, i had never been more terrified in my entire life. i had, at that point, never faced anything, as ugly, and as absolutely terrifying, as an animal like that… not until now. what happened? jesse asked. what happened? the grizzly charged at me. that's what happened. looked like it wanted to maul me and tear me a part and eat me. it's a grizzly bear. what would you expect? i was stiff solid in fear, absolutely afraid of seeing something

like that…

but than an angel came down and—
what? jesse asked.

and now, a story began to form an arc.
i never saw… the angel.
but i felt it… it had to be one.

nothing can feel that… immensely beautiful… and also righteously good. and so powerful.

the animal that was charging at me was really, really close now, still relentlessly charging forward, making a whole bunch of noises. and then i felt that angel put his hands on my shoulders behind me—and i heard him say: "don't be afraid, it has more reason to be afraid of you, than you of it." jesse was flabbergasted with this knowledge. it felt like, that angel, was doing this, to strengthen me. as if, preparing me for something to eventually to come later. judy's eyes now wandered a bit around the areas near griffith park. tonight, when i faced those hounds of hell, it felt exactly—exactly—how that one moment in yellowstone felt. when that grizzly got too close, it was then… i don't know what happened. something shot out of my eyes: a light! or something. and then, here was this 5'4 little missy, scaring an 800-pound animal off. once that moment happened, and that bear looked right into my eyes, when all this was happening, the animal freaked, and came to a halt, turned around, and ran away, frightened off, like no animal i've ever seen frightened by something as little as me do so, before. judy said.

she was now smiling.

i turned around then, to look at what it was that had graced me like that. and spoken to me. judy looked at jesse, with eyes brilliant. with eyes calm. and not afraid. in peace. he wasn't there anymore. but after i had experienced him and what he did for me, he didn't need to be. don't worry, jess, i guess this must have been all predestined. or something. and, no, honey, i'm a tough cookie, and it takes a lot more than that to phase me. concluded judy.

um… 5'4?
yeah.
that's not really short, for a girl.
well, it feels that way around you, at least. how tall are you, again? sheesh!

….

but now came the wrath, and, not by jesse, but from the lips of judy:

jesse.
what?
that boy… that nebb—whatever! he needs to pay. and i mean—pay!

those other girls. they were almost like my sisters. i felt it. they were. and, they were not as lucky as me. and, if this wasn't that nebbie boy's first rodeo with something as unspeakable as doing something like that. now, all i can think is… i can see why an all-loving God, would create a place like hell, and cast pieces-of-shit like him, and anyone like him, into that fiery pit. and make sure he and people like him, suffer in agonizing burning pain, for all of eterni—…?

shatter!

the rearview mirror now shattered. the glass shattered. jesse had been looking fiercely into her own green eyes, in the mirror, hearing judy say these things. and now, this happened. although judy didn't seem to care about anymore anomalies like these, since she had already had her fill of otherworldly aspects, and nothing was shocking to her anymore. judy grabbed jesse's hand on the roulette. squeezed it hard. and now… jesse knew exactly what she had to do.

pay, jesse… pay!

jesse dropped judy off at the hospital.

jesse was now returning the car to jules; she felt like she owed him that much. oh, jesse, just go home for now. i ubered back from that party. i'll be by sometime in the afternoon period, to pick it up, at the motel 6, all right? jules had said. all right. jesse answered on the phone. but then jules had to bring up the matter. you're

telling me, judy, is all right, after that? you went to the house, and they simply let her go? yes. jesse answered. unsure of what info to give jules or not. how did you know… actually, that house has "dracula residence" written all over it. but, jesse, i called the gishner estate of the "soul-for-a-soul" thing, i explained. they never answered to my request. how did she…? but then he figured it was best to not look a gift horse in the mouth. it's a major relief, jesse, i'm sorry… i'm sorry! i should have specifically told you two and pointed that boy out, that he was out-of-the-question!

yes, you should have. jesse barked at jules under her breath.

things got quiet for a second. and jules seemed to be dealing with some self-mortifying guilt after jesse's lashing remark. although, that was a bit much, jesse was now no longer wrathseeking. jules: it wasn't his fault! actually, he might have worried doing something like that, and pointing out gishner as a "no-no," and, jesse, knowing how vapid girls can be, they might have taken jules' words as a challenge. although, there was also the fact the gishner boy didn't really require any early warnings; he was that much of a creep to look at and admire; it should have been a given with any woman, with their intuition over these things screwed on properly. damn, judy! how did you not see it!

jesse now realized:

the wrath was coming. it was coming, and she needed to be careful of how to play with such matches, and make sure only the one particular in this story got burned, and not everyone else as collateral.

jesse, i'm sorry. i'm just glad she's all right. that's short of a miracle. but, i got one more question. jules said on the phone. now jesse wasn't as mad, as feeling a sharp blade enter her backbone; she already saw the forewarnings into it, and dreaded what this question would be about: considering everything. jesse, what do you know about what happened at the party? jules asked. jesse took a big gulp of dread. but decided to play stupid. what…? i mean, before leaving with my car to get judy, after you… i mean, you didn't notice that girl in there screaming her head off, and like judy, needing to be rushed to a hospital? if jesse was to tell the truth, jules would now see how jesse was breaking one of jules' cardinal rules, of his services, and what being paramount with his friendship and guidance. i did. jesse

told a half-truth. so, you know nothing about that, do you? no. jesse now completed the half-lied part. a pause. all right, kiddo, go home, sleep the night off, it's 4am now. i'm tired right now, myself. i'll come and speak with you later today. noonish, i'd say. jesse dreaded how that sounded.

all right. goodnight.

37. night call: opening

it was the afternoon on this saturday. jesse was sitting in bed of the motel's 4th story room. tv on. she wasn't watching. actually, of the course of 4 hours, she had stepped back to reality, just to notice the tv was on. then phased out. then in, and noticed again the tv was on, again.

out, in, tv on.
out, in, tv on.
although, never once in any of those episodes, did her tuning in, pick up exactly what she had been watching all those hours, not one single program. and neither if she had done any channel changing in those phasing out and in periods. one thing captured her attention: the clock on the bedside table stand, same as the one in the chateau marmont, just no demon tuning.

12:24pm, now. jules called.
i'm downstairs.

jesse was now down at the outdoor parking complex. now and then noticing planes whisking by above her head, from here to lax, which was a very short distance away; the skies, they seemed so easily forgetful, like the memories of blind children; the place was on w century blvd, just east of the 405. jesse gave jules his keys. but, looking into his eyes, she saw how this wasn't the end of it. jesse, tell me the truth, what is going on? jules let out. jesse hesitated. jules said nothing. a moment. now jules had something for jesse: you know, taylor made a description in the hospital of the thing she saw. even though she only got a momentary quick glimpse at it, she was still able to make a description. jesse's eyes blew up. jules focused on them. she said she saw something that looked to be a strikingly young man in black leather, looking like some biker. with a motorcycle helmet on. and this most sinisterly vivid face on the shield of the mask plate. and the face was alive. jules directed. jesse said nothing.

does this remind you of anything? jules asked.
jesse's eyes grew bigger. jules looked away.

honey, if the boys are stalking you, let me know, so i can do something about it. what can you do, huh, what? jesse blew up with eyes savage at jules. jules looked away and answered: i don't know. it would be something. a start! you haven't told

me if the boys are still following you. i can take you to a priest and—
ha! a priest. jesse interrupted. jules laughed out once with scorn at that. no, let's take you to a mental hospital. have all the doctors there get freudian on you. tell you "ghosts and demons aren't real," while the ghost or demons of your ex-lovers, wait outside the hospital, counting the hands ticking on the watch clocks. then when the shrinks in their have shrank your brain into a size of a peanut, with numbing medication, and false reassurances, and they let you out: "hello, good to see you out and about, jesse, now let's pick up where we last left off!" says the ghost or demon of your ex-lover and his brother, smiling at you like a psycho killer. and putting you through this again and again. only difference, the doctor decided to up the dosage of your meds. "gee, gosh, darn-diggidy, doing that enough, should eventually work, right?" jules seemed to be getting a headache. listen, jesse, i'm not saying people like that can't help. i understand, they want to mostly help. and, that's a good thing. but, like any problem in life, you can't just trim the leaves and branches, and think—that is it! you need to go to the root of a problem, and yank the whole thing out. and, difficult to do that, when doctors are professionally advised not to acknowledge such things. and their professional careers are hung with such strings to do so. and, you need to acknowledge them, if you want to get to the root of a problem. clinical professionals can't help you, jess. i've spoken to most. most tell me they see all the ghosts and demons and terrors inside a ward, and are still told not to acknowledge them. there's a lot of politics involved, with that stuff in hospitals and professionals. sorta how all doctors are in today's world told by hospitals, never to acknowledge the sex of any child that is brought in for checkups. parents, today, (who won't even do it for their outward reasons, but smile, greedily, when they hear the doctor say "how are you, little boy or girl," and see cha-ching $$ signs in all this) will sue the hospital, by doing such, because, it might confuse the child of their sexual or—…. it's a bunch of bullshit! but it is what it is! so, you think if doctors are told to turn a blind eye at a child's gender in today's world, they won't with your real problems, and how to deal with them? jules put. then sighed. then looked at jesse, with less of his own wrath. then said: sorry, this is putting me into the days i dealt with all this, with my wife, after what she had to go through with mental hospitals, and doctors, in the 80s. sorry. sighed again and felt done. how is your wife, now? jesse asked. jules sighed a third time. divorced from me. that's how…! better off, though, she's now in chicago, remarried. after everything that happened to us in that decade in this city, she just couldn't be here anymore. and, since i felt like i had something godsent to do here, she left me. it's okay, though. that's life! and

now back to the question: jesse, was it them! that did what they did to that poor taylor girl, at that party last night? jesse, couldn't, she just couldn't answer this just yet; she needed them now more than ever. jesse lied and shook her head. okay, i see. i'll be in touch. said jules, and left. but jesse did pick up on his last sentiment: he wasn't happy with jesse's reply, not at all. and jesse now could tell he knew he was being lied to. but… no matter.

for….

tonight!
tonight!
tonight… is the night!

now, 8pm. now, there standing. on the beaches, just north of santa monica pier. tonight, the night that jezebel singer's wrath was to finally make its debut, into the world.

billy! jesse cried out.

making a direct call on this la hotline, that ran a wire from jesse, to the sub ocean depths of the pacific. moon high above, somehow full again, as if somehow now stuck this way: blood moon, it was! blood red, as with everything else that was being carried by the night's procedence; the colors of tonight's schematics drenched with the voids of black and the crimson tales of blood red. she wore a black dress. black eyeshadow, very thick and cascading and haunting black eyeshadow, over green eyes. black lipstick. black nailpolish. and black high pumps. and black everything else. fishnets worn so tight over legs all steaming hot and tense and stalkingly sexy. but it was now her turn to fancy a play of cosplay, and have some fun. billy… jimmy… come to me! cold-dialed jesse, again. all very loud and long distanced, as if doing so, would have the call reaching their graves, to wake the dead.

and then:
spin! jesse did, then.
spun once. and spun the air around her; danced the winds around her, in a cyclonic motion. and now, jesse's dancing, began manifesting, as the vortex continued turning and turning; churning up sands and spits and the sounds of

jesse's voice, echoing within the heart of these maddened winds; maddened cries for billy and jimmy to now arise. jesse watched the cyclone, winds coming and coming and coming again and again. and going nowhere, yet. but now, drifting off, and carrying away jesse's cries seaward. from within the heart of this dust devil.

my God… promises… oh so wasted on myself.

"billy… jimmy… come… billy… jimmy… come—to me!"

and as the twisting magic reached as far as jesse could see and hear. one last "billy… jimmy… come to me!" was blasted out. and, now, they came! on their black kawasaki ninjas. came forth, with the blasting of fire and brimstone, stretched by their trails; jesse saw them coming at her, driving from the sea, over and across the sea, sent in by the fish king, himself. both then roared up all riotous and rampaged. came, they did, on high on wheelies; driven as such, as if no such other ways of riding the night, could and would and should be constituted. tonight, was the night, for the wraith twins, to come and do this woman in black's bidding. came forth. stopped. and now, one disembarked from his metal steed. billy, now, on the beaches, walked up to this woman being blown gone with the wind, like wind blowing out a thousand candlelit tributes, bestowed across the surface of these sandy beaches. and now, the demons… or… ghosts? or whatever boys. her boys. hers! stood at their jezebel queen.

what's your bidding, ms. singer? billy began.

jezebel gnashed teeth, as the wind blew, as the night's nothingness sacrificed another minute of whatever innocents within her that was still left. but, she smiled to this, a gleaming and desperate and despicable smile, and sank her long black nails into her thighs, and drew blood; impassioned to have these two phantom knights of hers, now do her will. billy grinned now. grinned most viciously and ulta-violently; faceplate spasming with neon deluge and delight. what is your…? but then jesse had a moment of error. looked sideways, at her ghostlovers. and needed to know one thing.

who are you, really, who are you two? jesse ordered an answer.
billy said nothing, as jimmy got off his metal steed, as well.

who are we?
yes, who are you two? tell me the truth!

billy looked at the moon and back. and said: you know who i am.
prove it.
prove it… how else do you want me to do that? questioned billy.

jesse thought. then she knew.

why do you two now always wear those helmets, and always with the shields down, and always with these faces? jesse inquired. billy shook his head. no, tell me, or… or i won't give you the pleasure, i have for you two, tonight. billy smiled, but, felt wordy: jesse, you don't want to see what's under this.

it's like… closed casket.

billy then panned his leather gloved hand down the shield mask of his masked face like a scanner darkly. this face, you see now, take it as a gift, for not seeing what's really underneath. with the pain and sorrow, you left us two, and even yourself, with. this face, now… it's funny… i used to draw it all the time as an 8-year-old kid. still mortal. jimmy did, too. i think it was the movie, the wraith, we saw back then, that left an impression on us. and, you know how kids are, they'll start drawing whatever they eye in their mind's eye. and, with us, silly crayoned in drawings, of bikers, with jack-o-lantern faces, of the future would be us, not yet realized. i guess you can poetically put it.

like… we even back then knew.
all so predestined to turn out this way.

jesse grew dim. and teary eyed. as the melancholy wooed her some. but she needed to see. i want to see your face, your real face. please, billy. i need to see it. billy sighed and grew concerned for jesse, then knelt down on his one knee. but why kneel? jesse couldn't tell. but all ceremonious like. and the second he took off his helmet.

oh God! jesse turned around and began tearing up anew. as she now knew.

oh God!
oh…?
i told you this image wasn't the sight for you.

as she now knew:
it was his face.

it was his. his! the face jesse had spent a good year long looking at, what she had heartachingly wished and wished and prayed and grieved she could fall in love with, within ways, only God, Himself, would choose to deny. i told you, you wouldn't want to see it. oh God! the worse part was, it was exactly as she last remembered it; just after she had put a hole in it; now fully there and fully stigmatized, and sealed behind seven seals, forever and ever.

you want jimmy to also take his…?
no!

jesse now remembered in her memory, how much worse his was to look at, since his bullet wound had been made through his left eye. and, the gore then was too much to look at. and would be now.

close the casket! jesse ordered.

billy turned around, as he did so. but having seen him kneeled before her, something deep down was now understood: "does the slave choose the master, or the master choose the slave?" whatever the answer to that riddle was, the truth was, the boys were, jesse now understood after considering what she had done to them: she was now the master, and, they were now her slaves. but, now, there were more important matters to tend to. billy got up, with the face he and jimmy used to draw on lined paper with, as kids. and smiled at her; he knew what she wanted from him, he knew. and then billy pulled it out. you remember this? billy said and held it high. the harkings of steel death; highly remastered and highly highlighted and skylighted.

suzanna. jesse said.
that's riiiiiggggggghhhhht… suzanna!

that's riiiiggght, suzanna, the daddykiller. the daddyslayer. so, tell us, madame warlock… what you want us to do with this ol' lady, from the lady, of the black lake? billy teased. he knew. but, needed to tease, since, that was just billy. jesse made a face. billy now cut the theatrics. fine, i know, time for that nebuchadnezzar prince to get what's coming to him. pay! pay! and pay again some more!

death… to the nebuchadnezzar prince, don't you think?

jesse said nothing. she was now getting the sense, this would be more than she was going to bargain for. question, want us to take the boyar boy out to utah, you remember our talks about utah, right? jesse said nothing. nah, i guess, keep this in house, cali style, huh? you boys would use that gas stop in utah? jesse asked, suspiciously. yeah. of course! nice and neat and quiet place, sometimes best needed, to off someone. don't need to bury the bones, buzzards and coyotes out there will do it for you. and, when 'em coyots want to hide bones, they go "bigfoot," and you're never gonna see them again, ever! should have met these two hells angels, we once had to take up there, and off one night. ugly ass zz top looking, as you and judy would put it, "eww" pair of bear men. them harley boys were only sad about one thing and one thing only: getting offed by jap bikers like us, ha! yeah, i guess hog and ricerocket bikers don't mix. billy said with ☹. jesse eyed them more over this; she didn't like now hearing this detail; after everything billy told her about what happened to them that one night in '88. oh, come on! when dealing with drug cartels and women and child for rape traffickers, it can get that way. the utah highway cops didn't mind. i mean, in utah, even they would use that ol' long and forgotten ernie bogner 40s pitstop. actually knew a uhp out there. a uhip named officer malachiid. we used to give each other "mornins" to and "mornins" back, passing each other by, going about our business there, dragging what we dragged in plastic bags. i liked ted malchiid, remember him, jimmy… that mustachioed, son-of-a-tooth, pokerplaying cardcheat? ha! billy went. jimmy said nothing; was to be all mute this night, it seemed, completely. jesse decided not to think too much into it.

you want to anoint the lady? billy smeared.
what do you mean?
billy held up suzanna, again.
wait… what?
kiss it.

i'm not kissing it.
do it! billy the slave ordered.

jesse then kissed her index finger, and then touched the steel. that's my girl. billy reamed. and, it was steel. real steel. not, no ghost steel. but real. and sharp. and deadly. this was no imaginings, and what waited for the gishner boy, jesse now realized, was real. having second thoughts? asked billy, all dutch angle. maybe. said jesse, eyes dancing in the moonlight. billy drew back, and had simple words for her. fine, jesse, it's gonna be like this: we're now going to get back on our bikes, we're gonna ride out, find the boy….
how you gonna find him? jesse asked.
call it… ghostly intuit—
shut up, billy, no more stupid jokes. tell me. jesse demanded. does it matter? billy put it. jesse now realized, it didn't. we, have eyes, jesse, like yours, in a way. and they're always drifting here and there, and seeing everything. like your girls now in your head. so, we know. usually, on a saturday night, that nebbie idiot likes to hang around rodeo drive, in beverly. we'll find him. and make sure he doesn't get back home, safe. jesse now did a faint shaking of her head. fine, jesse, maybe we won't straight up kill him. maybe, that premeditated blood, is a little too much, now that your hands are going to be stained with it. he deserves every bit of it, and a hell of a lot more. but, not by your hands… maybe? jesse was listening. jesse, we'll still give him something to remember it by. remember… judy. she lived. like he will live. but, scarred definitely until the end of his mortal days. sounds fair? billy asked. jesse didn't reply; this was all now too much.

plus… "warlock?" why did he call her that?

didn't know what that meant; she didn't like this, the more she saw and heard. and, seeing how all this bloody wrath was going to be just as real as she had imagined it, all in her vengeance seeking heart. we'll make it simple for you, jess, we're now going to get on our bikes, roll out, hunt the animal down, stalk him, and do what's coming to him. it's gonna be a hot time in the ol' town, tonight. he, he! but billy then saw more hesitation in jesse's eyes. billy now made it plainer and simpler:

fine, i'll put it to you like this: we're doing this, jesse, but we're doing this as long as you don't tell us: "not to do it."

what?
if you don't want us to do it, tell us not to do it. tell us!
but, jesse, at this moment, said nothing.
not telling us, staying hush, hush! means you do.
jesse said nothing, again.

here's the catch, once we're on our bikes, we're going. and we're doing this. no stopping then. jesse looked to one side. billy understood. also, you have another option, another pair of choices: choose to see what is about to happen, or choose not to. same as before, for your eyes only. you decide, woman. but, if you want to come and follow after we leave, get in your silver camaro that's parked here, at that parking lot, at the beach. and what… spin the wheel of radio fortune and…? jesse went. he! billy chuckled. no, no, you don't have to do that every time. everything and anything done, wherever and whenever, has its purpose, in the greater scheme of things. so, it would be just too silly now and redundant. but you will still need to have eyes wide shut, to follow us with them. pretty. that one special song. pretty sure you have it on your iphone. just put in some earplugs. start the song. close your eyes. and it should once again work its magic. get it?

how do i do it?
what?
i mean… my eyes… how? jesse asked.
billy looked at jimmy, then back, then explained it:
it's like astral projection, jesse.
jesse was confused.

you know, when someone finally reaches their death bed. but, not yet the hour, they're supposed to go. you hear people who had near death experience, explain this phenomenon, of, all of a sudden, coming out of their bodies, and watching, just watching, all the doctors and nurses go to work, on the flesh on display. work, work, work: to bring them back to life. that is how. but, with you, it's special. it's no nde with you. and, it's not a projection of your whole body, it's just your eyes, as if those are the only parts of you that matter. that's how you do it. billy explained. jesse now grew more curious. how did you know i could? billy smiled and said: we've seen you do it before. when? jesse gasped. in… well, not arizona, it was around new mexico, when we saw it. almost texas. in the desert. billy explained. back in 2015? jesse gasped. yeah, since then, we've known. at the time,

it was nighttime, one very starry night, driving back to tennessee. you were asleep in the car, when we pulled up to las cruces. we went into a pilot on the way, about to enter el paso, soon. wanted to take a shower and get some doritos, or something. but, on the side, we saw something… interesting. jesse waited for him to go on. you, your eyes, we saw them, out further out, more into the desert. so, we walked over to them. we saw the projections of your eyes out there. and we could see them, too. green eyes. your green eyes, and you were watching something…!

and then jesse remembered.

you were—
i was watching a tarantula fighting a centipede! jesse remembered.
billy smiled.

i thought that was a dream. a vivid… and horrid… dream. yes. billy answered. we then had to go back to your actual body, to see what was up with you, in person. you were still asleep. and, guess what song was on the radio? now she knew. interesting, isn't it, all the gifts we can possess? knowing, and sometimes not. billy now turned around and went back to his bike. jimmy, yet, still stood there, eyeing jesse. forlorn as always. looking at jess. no, jimmy, don't get me this way right now! jesse thought. she obviously was still holding a torch for all this love-triangle affair. billy got on his bike as jimmy then spoke:

God doesn't want you to do this.
what?
you heard me. vengeance is supposed to be His, not yours!
jesse grew terrified.
say, you don't want this.
jesse…?
say!
but… jesse said nothing.
say now!
but… she did not. for now jesse was no longer "speak no evil" about, in her unspoken ways.

a second later, jimmy now dolefully turned, and also got back on his bike. and…

and… and…?

no!
no more chances. no changing this. they were now off. jesse then turned and watched them ride off; the madame warlock now watched, impassioned… also slightly embittered; mostly just unsure. and unsure of what to think of all this. as with the roaring of both their engines, billy and jimmy's, then going into signature wheelies, then racing off towards the city, while jesse grew in her wrath!

grew in wrath!
grew in wrath!
for the thrill of this kill and all its excitement.
she wanted this!
she… needed this!

yet, forever unsure. as she began digging her black nails, again, into her thighs, like black teeth, long and deep; now blood streaming wildly out with her legs, all blood drenched.

38. assyrian boys

blaze! flash! flame! rage! and. rapture. watch them ride. watch them blast forth, from here to eternity, to the twilight zone, and here back once again. here on wilshire. somewhere wilshire blvd and somewhere crossing bundy. but, truly, still out there, somewhere, far more into the depths of the desert, far passed california to the east. still there. still stuck out there, on that road, forever afraid, forever alone, and forever hearing the call of the hordes and hordes of highway borne killers, riding those storms, over and across those arizona peaks. watch them, but, do not cry for these two unfortunate souls. for their souls are now lost, wretched, and rotten. and loving the desert calls of the reptile queen's raging for them to do her bidding. not by no hero now to arise. and not by no anti-hero. but, a straight up set of twin chillin' villains. watch them. just watch. nothing much else can the jezebel spirit do so, with those two eyes of those two biblical heathen-loving women, she races with; watching such ghosts of hades' own captains and rulers, both desirable young assyrian twin men; metal horsemen riding upon metal horses. but men not of legends and gold. but horrors and madness!

they ride.
ride.
ride.
and ride again. a couple of pair of x-gen boys' ghosts. actually, not ghosts. actually, truly and completely, a couple of psychotic demons, pretending to be jess' ol' billy and jimmy lane (spoiler warning!?!? ha, ha, ha! >:D). whaling and hooting and hollering across these santa monica streets, towards east towards beverly. and them boys love their 80s synthesizer tunes, of retro new wave beats, they be playing on their kawasaki radios. and now, eye him, him, that one korean boy, over there, turning the corner of wilshire and san vicente. pretty boy, very bruce lee in love and stature. him on his own ninja, passing the santa monica clubs and bars; passing girls, as girls pass kisses at his ol' 2010s boyishly handsome heart: pretty desirable korean boy. all riggggghhhttt! challenge accepted! quoted the raven. pretty boy, but… soon to be no longer! billy now draws his beloved long-time love, of his ol' childhood sweetheart: yeeaaah! suzanna! riiiggghhht! it be suzanna! as the synthesizes roar at her wake, glistening and glowing under these nocturnal streets.

wait, what is he doing? the eyes of jesse gasp.

she pans her eyes in the sky to eye billy's eyes. and, behold, Satan incarnate. neon

demonic faces flashes with neon 80s technokiller beats! all flash, with the face of billy gone full lethal and leviathan strong and savage, as his face is now drawn to life, in much more devilish detail; with his doodled-up face manifesting pupils circling inside his eyesockets, like upside-down slot machines, with no desire in anyone's goodwilled heart, to see giving out any jackpots, anytime soon, with horrors of hells held deep within him untold. now to be out with and be told and be heard, in ultra-deadly and ultra-diabolical technicolor spectrum.

soooooo… you there….
all you film studio lounge lizards and harvey boys and incognito child rapists in hollywood execs' and producers' clothing, have now talks with all your networked pals and buddies, from the weho leeches, to the Devil worshipping boyar hell heights, of this all-new thriller silverscreen sensation, brought to you written and produced and directed, not by stanley kubrick. but by kcirbuk yelnats, his ol' mirrored other helter skelter brother.

wait… what is he doing!!!
the poor, poor handsome and rugged living (spoiler warning: soon not to be!) korean boy, now sees this. this. his faith now on this earth, matched with these deathdealing creatures. tears. tears. tears! brought forth by his eyes.

wait… whhhhhaatt is he doinngggggg!!!

slash!
jousts the apex hunter.
off with the motherfucker's head!

his head now cut clean right off his timid neck, once having crossed their paths, as it bleeds and bleeds, and his bike spirals into horizontal breaks and bashes, across these santa monica streets; as the girls all around having witnessed this begin to scream and scream, in unbeknownst and unbridled terror! as the head of the poor dead soul runs under a semitruck, and is demolished underneath.
oh my God!
my God!
my God!
what have i done?
what have i unleashed?

these can't be my billy and jimmy… these must be their daddy-loving demons! doppelgangers of them in disguised. demons, demons, demons! thinketh the eyes of jesse. this creature of billy then exhausts flames up and out of his gullet, and tosses up high, and passes suzanna, into the catching hands of jimmy, riding right beside him. no, please God, no! no more! no more! the eyes of jesse beckon. then jimmy turns his head around to face up and left to the eyes of jesse: slit eyes passing a notion to eyes slit. jimmy then looks back towards the streets stretching upfront. then stashes ol' suzanna away. now, jesse's ghosting eyes truly seek to close themselves fully shut; no longer willing to see such sights befall in front of her, and wills to close them shut, completely! but, with what eyelids?

though, the rest of the ride to beverly is a null one.

now, there. somewhere at a bar where wilshire and santa monica blvd cross paths, and switch gears flying low and high through the rest of la, eastbound. the feeling for jesse is no longer the feelings of exuberance, but the feelings of exhaust. being numb. numbed by what she had not long ago encountered. though, better to not think too much into it: emotions of wrath, like juggernauts, simply cannot be halted, once they had been bound with as much momentum as this. all that was now left was the race to the finish line, finishing at the throat of the nebuchadnezzar prince. the boys now stood, lounging with all these posh and pretty loungers; their states stationed somewhere in the back near the doors, where the waiters and waitresses entered and exited the kitchen; both standing in between both doors, keeping their backs to the wall and their fronts to everything else visible; both pacing themselves in wait. still. totally still. waiting, just waiting… for the boyar to appear. jesse's eyes nestled somewhere up near the ceiling; she wasn't sure how well her abilities as ghosteyes could handle hiding in the shadows of the corneas of all these other eyes in the establishment; it was best for her not to find out, and found out, and be seen.

a half hour now passed.
and now another half hour.

jesse's eyes had already fidgeted from one nestle to another. though the boys have yet to move an inch: they might as well have been ghostly statues in there; the type of statues you stare at, and wonder, if they might be possibly staring back. and, having kept your eyes on them long enough, once decided enough is enough,

you'd try to tuck your sights away. but, then, and only then, they'd turn towards you and look. or… was that just your imaginings?

twenty more minutes.
and now, there!
there! points at the nebuchadnezzar prince, jimmy does, with ol' suzzie. points him out, not for himself, but, for jesse to know he is now here.

but now, more waiting.

although, this becomes a moment of meditation, of time spent for jesse, to observe and absorb the boyar, while growing with curiosity. and, also, condemnation. jesse now wondering:

just what type of creature is he?
just exactly what?
doing such unspeakable things that he'll do.

kill him! kill him! jesse seeks.
she can't help it.

she just can't help spending this much time around this fish animal, and not seeing it gutted from its fin to its throat. and all is insides ripped out, and fed into a garbage disposal unit, switched to the "on" position. kill him! but then billy nays jesse's eyes with his gloved index finger, it's not yet that hour.

an hour has now passed. watching. just watching. the boyar. sit there. crammed into a corner. and there hasn't been a single moment, jesse has not watched him eye a pretty female, and not have eyes she wished billy or jimmy would slash out of the boy's face; smearing and smearing and scolding eyes, continuously and continuously. so hedonistically. and, also, so misogynistically. and now, eyeing some pretty mexican girl, a mere foot in distance of him, as the girl eyes back. but then, the girl makes all efforts of a deer in the midst of wolves, in the woods, to stand as still as possible, hopefully, to where the howling creatures would lose sight of her. but then, something else, as, the nerve of this boy steps in, as he reaches his hand up, and out, and gropes her left breast, right then and there.

what the hell are you—
terror now.
the mexican girl now in terror.

it's not like every day, a girl comes across such a creature, so proudly able to stand by at being such a vehemently sadistic creep. and what really disgusts jesse is the understanding: he didn't do that because he sought to get his rocks off in some sexual manner.

how he got his rocks off, was being a creep, and a creep, alone.

those horrors in the mexican girls' eyes, seeing him do this, is what gives him all the gratification he needs; she then panics, at just how unashamedly sinister he is, and tries the leave. blaaa! blaaa! cries an unbeknownst entity in the mexican girl's vicinity, which jesse, the mexican girl, the boyar, billy and jimmy, all, are able to hear. this startles the girl. what was that? but before exiting, a phantom notion enters and exits her, raising all the hairs on the back of her neck.

is he still watching me?
she turns to see.
and—he is!
the nebuchadnezzar prince then slithers a line with an index finger across his own throat, letting her know what wonderful wonders he had planned for her. then sticks his tongue out, far and wide. the girl now truly panics and leaves.

1, mississippi,
2, mississippi,
3, 4… 9, 10!
the boyar counts, then gets up: let the games begin! jesse eyes billy, billy with that face, somber for the moment, as he nods. the boys exit and jesse follows. outside. jesse sees the boyar boy stalking the nothingness up front: it is a game to him. he turns a corner, walks. another turn. then another. he obviously isn't at all sure where the girl went. but, it's like a "hide and go seek" game to him: more fun to come across her unknowingly than knowingly. time passes, as the boyar blindly stalks the girl, all while jesse and the boys stalk him not so blindly back. this continues a bit more. but now, it's apparent, the woman has won this round of "hide and go seek." pity! maybe next time. maybe?

now, the boyar is driving his '29 rolls-royce phantom ii. and, of course this would be a vehicle of his choosing! and he seems to be driving just as directionlessly through the streets of beverly hills, towards downtown la, as he had been stalking that mexican girl. jesse is now beginning to grow fed up with this. but, these were the followings, of billy and jimmy, in their natural state; the boys knew well how to stalk their prey, since, being boys, jesse once remembered how billy claimed how much he enjoyed hunting deer in the woods: not with a rifle, nor even a gun, no bow and arrow, but just with suzanna, alone. and, imagining how much process and patience and proceedings, would be required to do that, with such a skittish and nimble creature… and with nothing but a knife at hand? well… makes you wonder.

now: skid row.
lines of tents all along this ugly and drab and dirty part, of an un-gentrify-able section of downtown la. being here, now, scared jesse, with the presence of this prince of the boyars here, himself, and what he intended to do now, that he was to deal with the most decrepit souls of this city. the rolls-royce then stopped in front of one tent, specifically; half open, with a woman half sticking out, and the smell of her piss and defecation not that far off. and now, jesse saw something she had never seen in this part of town before; now, with these ghostly eyes, she no longer saw souls lost in their own heads; but, souls, lost in the presence of so many of their own demons. she could see them now. see them, the demons. those demons that spent their time haunting the souls of these derelicts and drug-addicts. see them, not just in her mind's eye, but the eyes of her mind. and their demons were just as skeletal and shoddy as they were, with leathered skin, that seemed to be itching with maggots and moles and blisters, beneath it. and, with this one tent, jesse now saw a 50something black woman, sitting half in and half out of her tent. topless. with eyes bulging in and out of her skull, as if breathing. while a doppelganger demon of herself sat near and near her ear. like a sister. an only soul sister. in all the world. all of which felt very color purple. as the doppelganger fed her words, that entered her brain, like roaches on parade. and not just words, but also actual roaches: big and fat and disgusting roaches. jesse watched the roaches enter her ear, then one coming out of her nose, then another one out of her mouth. ahhaaahaa! she whimpered and whaled, as twenty came rushing out from between her legs. then proceeded to either scatter outwards, out into the open gutter; or, up and back in, into anymore of her orifices. the

nebuchadnezzar prince got out of his rolls-royce, and walked straight to her.

shaaa maaa!
said the doppelganger demon, of this woman sitting next, hissingly at the boyar boy.
shaaa ma—
shut up! said the boyar. the doppelganger then stirred a bit, anxiously, as it realized the boyar had all sense of knowing and seeing it; the doppelganger, probably having not for a while, come across anyone that could visibly see her invisible self. besides the woman she had been working over, infesting her soul with all forms of demonic insects.

shaaa maaa!
i said—shut up!

what does he want to do here? jesse's eyes wondered. maybe billy and jimmy would know. so, she lowered her disembodied eyes down behind and between the two boys.

kill him! jesse ordered.
no, not yet! billy answered.
plus… i thought you didn't want that.

what is he doing?
what he always does around here.
what?
you'll see. billy answered. that angered jesse. this wasn't part of the plan. plus, she didn't like how it seemed the boys were just letting him do whatever right now. don't worry, you'll get your revenge. it's like gishner, himself. he understands one thing about things like these: if you really want to get your rocks off torturing and terrorizing a soul to death, it's all about timing. getting someone to the right moment in their psyche, in which, once the horror strikes, then they'll be screaming at their loudest. answered billy, as he faced towards jesse's disembodied eyes. and grew a grin: face all warped, as if, the lightening shooting across his facemask, highlighted more of the contours of his dipping brows, crooked smirk and hollow eyes; his face as though an artwork in vivid display, being drawn and redrawn, over a process of trying to emanate a human expression or emotion. or,

as human as this face of billy's could get. the boyar then lifted his left hand, and panned it back to his car behind him. then made a "come hither" motion, to whatever it was inside his vehicle. and now, jesse realized, the boyar didn't just keep around demon hounds, back at the gishner estate; he'd drive around with them in his car; one particular hell hound now approached him and stood at his heels. i don't like this, i don't like this. jesse said.

wha—… what is that? what's that thing? the homeless black woman now gasped, seeing this creature standing next to gishner. what's this? the answers to your prayers. quoted gishner. what… what… what do you mean? the woman asked.

would you like to finally die tonight?

the woman fell silent.
tell me you haven't grown sick of all those cockroaches around you and in you? gishner asked.
who… who are you?
i'm the angel of death… here to show you something you've lacked in all your long, long years… mercy!

there was a pause. but the woman now understood: she was in winter; all the world a freezing tundra, and snow, and the encroaching dark; holding onto a mum flicker of light, and one she was now being given the chance to snuff out, herself. and instead of spending so much more time agonizing its eventual demise. the woman now began weeping. profusely weeping.

just tell me "yes," and, tonight, i will—
shaa maa!
shut up! she's mine now! gishner barked at the doppelganger demon of this woman.

why is he asking her that? jesse asked.
because, that woman is a slave, already, to a master, to that doppelganger of hers. his hellhound won't attack unless the woman relinquishes loyalty. i don't understand. jesse said. billy now followed suit: simply put…

Satan can't cast out Satan!

um… i still don't—
a demon can't cast out another demon. it doesn't work that way. they're all on the same side. and that woman is already the property of her doppelganger. and, as you can see, the doppelganger of hers doesn't want to relinquish the woman, yet. it still wants to continue torturing her for as long as it can. but if the woman relinquishes herself of her master, once relinquished, by the woman's own volition, or even by the doppelganger, itself, then the boyar can claim her with his hellhound. and do what he enjoys watching what his hell dogs do. do you understand? how does she relinquish herself, though? i don't understand these things. jesse asked. jesse, can i ask you a question? in a world where demons exist, ever wonder why they don't all just show themselves, and begin murdering everything in sight? billy asked. jesse had no answer; this was the first she was getting any insight into these things, and how they functioned, how they worked. you see, jesse, it's all like a game of chess, between God and Satan. now, when it comes to demons and angels, you might think they would be all the chess pieces, such as the pawns, bishops, kings, queens and rooks… they're not.

mortals are!
you are, jesse, you are! said billy.

and it was then that jesse awoke.
opening her eyes, as if she had them shut this entire time. and what she saw was, herself, and her eyes, mere inches away, of staring at only a tiny fixture, of a larger painting at work.

who are you?
"i told you who i am before."
peter?
he nodded.
"i am the lord of this castle, and, here, the lord of hosts."

she was in that japanese castle again, and, another painting, in this night gallery, and a humongous artwork—it was! and now she felt her eyes without a face pan back and back, being given the chance to see just how enormous this painting in the dark happened to be. which she had only spent, what feels, all her life, only focused on a fraction of; all felt very similar to the revelation experienced, as jesse stepped out of her own cave of allegories. and now, truly saw the world outside

the box.

the artwork was of God and Satan, sitting and playing chess.

you see, just like a game of chess, or, any game, really, there has to be rules involved. billy continued. you can't just do whatever. can't just have a rook make a move how a bishop could nor vice versa. all the pieces have to be in the right order. and, with God and Satan, it has to be their move. things have to be commissioned for things to happen, for beings, all of a sudden, outside the game, like ghosts and angels and demons, to enter.

wait… this is a game?
yes.
all a game?
yes. just look at it like that. a game of chess. and there's pieces like you and gishner, there: mortals. and then there's phantom pieces like me and jimmy, that doppelganger, and that demon hound. chess pieces you won't see, until, it's time for you to see. and… always at that jump scare moment, when—boom! they're all of a sudden—there! the door to that world now opened up to you. and now you have to deal with it, coming in, like a thief in the night. billy explained, growing a bit giddy explaining these things. this sorta made jesse think of what he did to that girl at the party last night. of course, don't take the "chess game" idea too literally. the game God and Satan are actually playing, is a million times more complex, than any chess game you've ever played. and, as for right now, between the nebuchadnezzar prince and that woman, this is what's up: right now, this woman, like chest pieces, can make certain moves in life. and, in the position she is in right now, she's allowed to pick her harbinger of death. or, in other words, basically, to pick her poison: a quickly enacting poison or a slow and steady one. she could either choose that doppelganger, which i'm sure she is much more familiar in dealing with, which i know, has spent decades with her. or she could choose gishner's hellhound. and now jesse felt as if she was struck with an insurmountable number of questions: wait… wait…? too many for her right now to handle.

wait a second… wait a second… you telling me people choose this?
yes.
this faith?

yes… you'd be surprised to see what people would. this is absolutely horrible! jesse expressed. well, that's the thing about horror, the horror, with enough time spent in the state, you will eventually get used to it. and then, maybe even, like an itch to scratch, find something to enjoy out of it all. and that now made jesse go mum. but then she asked: so, there are no other options? maybe, there is, maybe, there isn't. no, explain. billy now sighed. remembering this aspect of jesse, he had grown more than accustomed to in life: her and her "whys?" her endless number of "whys." okay, look at it this way: how did you think i knew nothing would happen to judy? billy said and directed at jesse. that was a good question. jesse, judy, out of all the other girls that died that night, unlike them, she had value. and also, paramount to her, judy understood her own value. that's why she wasn't touched. she wouldn't be intimidated by no hellhounds, to give her soul away. that's why she survived. for those that have much to value, more will be given. and for those that don't have much, even what they have, will be taken away. right now, nebbie here is hoping this woman isn't aware of what value she has. that it all comes down to just two choices. both leading to death. but in different ways….

(truth be, she also has one other choice, but… we won't get into that right now).

this is bullshit. jesse then said.
what?
this is bull… this poor woman… God and Satan are playing a game of—
poor woman? billy retorted. then snickered. then looked back at jesse, with one neon eyebrow raised in condescension, at jesse and her childlike mindset. yes, poor woman, and God is supposed to be all good, yet, he's playing this good woman like a pawn and…? and then billy said it: what makes you think she's good? that now phased jesse. as she took a gulp of dread. and now saw where this was going.

what makes you think she's good… because she's… and she's… and she's… he! billy executed a chuckle.

and now jimmy spoke:
back when she was but an early teen, still practically a preteen, around 13 years of age, she used to have a twin sister. and, a little brother. the two girls, they saw how weak bodied and weak willed their little pipsqueak brother was. so, they bullied him to the point he killed himself. jesse, even with no throat nor saliva, took

another gulp of dread. yeah, jesse, nobody is good. nobody.

all… have fallen short.

jesse spoke: but, but… maybe they didn't know they were going to do that? they were just little girls and…? jesse, the two girls made bets to see which one could do it first. jesse went mum again. the other sister won the bet. and then, five years later, God punished her, and had her run over by a semitruck. once the vehicle finally came to a halt, she went from 5'4, to 504, feet in length. that made jesse think of what she saw most recently. now, here's the other sister… and, she never got over the loss of her other half.

anyways….
continued billy.

as for gishner, as for right now, he's trying to manipulate her, into thinking the reckoning he's offering, is a better choice, compared to the one that's waiting for her, here, on skid row. this, here, is what the nebuchadnezzar prince gets his rocks off doing the most: playing with people's souls, like a general plays with their troops in battle. he is right now "gaslighting," you can say, her into thinking the demise he's offering is better. that it's better the demons that you don't know, rather than the demons that you do, get it? now, with gishner, this is really what this boy likes to do in this arena, he likes to see himself as a businessman, a barterer and a bargainer.

a donald trump, you can even say, he he!

right now, he's trying to sell this woman his hellhound. a quick death! his type of death! over the one that doppelganger has in store for her. which is the life you see her living before you now, as long as she still breathes on this earth. a slow, horrid and agonizing death. billy explained. i thought he liked to serve. jesse said, now remembering that part. what… no. hell no! if he said something like that, he's lying. you don't call yourself a prince, if all you want to do is serve others. get it? and with that, with this new perspective, jesse watched the nebuchadnezzar prince continue to do his thing:

be honest with me… you like this, you like all of this, this wretched living?

you are absolutely disgusting. maybe you don't see it anymore. but i still do. your world is a world of shit. a sea of shit, and one, you're eventually going to drown in. look at yourself! look around you! wake up! the woman now looked around. looked at gishner. then his hell dog. and then looked at her doppelganger; the one that had been feeding her garbage, shit and insects, all this time, since she lost her other half. come on, right now! i can end this, just say "yes." you'll be dead in seconds, and not having to live this miserable life any longer. what do you say? asked he. this devil boy with a flower in his hands. but not a pretty flower. but wanting to feed this woman, a black rose of death. come on! said the nebuchadnezzar prince. the woman eyed up at him, breathing with her eyes, long and hard and deep, aching inches forward, then backing up a few.

come on, then, what do you…—
but then the woman retracted. and shook her head. she felt like she'd rather stick it out, with what hell she was living in, here on skid row, then take up on the hell being offered. the nebuchadnezzar prince then sprung forth with teeth towards her, but, stopped short. and didn't bite.

then… gave up. as he threw his arms up. and walked back to his car, stood there, as the hound…

wait…

the hound didn't seem to be following him. the nebuchadnezzar prince looked back at the hound. come on! he ordered. but the hell hound grew grayish, all of a sudden. a wind blew in, in this cold bitter starless night. in. then out. where it came from, who knew? where to, wouldn't you like to guess! what's going on? asked jesse. simple, the winds are changing. and, the nebuchadnezzar prince's time of reign is drawing near. and a door for us is about to be opened, one between us and him! said billy. a door to us? jesse enquired, rhetorically. we're still ghosts, me and jimmy, we can't just deal with anyone, unless the commission is fully contracted. once both God and Satan finish the paperwork with this chess piece's life. once then, the door to us will open. he'll then see us, and it's then we'll go in! and, unlike that woman there, gushy boy won't have any choices. even though that woman might have demons having her eat cockroaches and her own shit. the nebuchadnezzar prince truly is a piece-of-shit. and once the paperwork on his

mortal life is finished, it's then, we'll go in… quote the raven! he, he, he! billy relished. jesse now had one last question in mind.

anyone else's name on that paperwork?
billy didn't respond, all of a sudden.
i mean?
billy then looked at jesse, did his signature hellboy grin and said: besides God and Satan, you mean…? billy knew exactly what she was asking, and why she was asking this. jesse grew ominously frightened of what door to what sin she was now opening to enter into her life; ominously frightened, of what at first, came condemnation, then judgement, and then, the reckoning that would follow. you're keeping track on this stuff, i see, aren't you? billy taunted. jesse grew in dread. umm… not exactly. jesse said, playing dumb. very, very dumb. billy said nothing at first, but then said: you damn well know who! and then, another wind blew in. two winds. the nebuchadnezzar prince, up to now, had been having a very bewildering experience. something felt off for him. and the second wind had made his skin and spine shiver in ways, he'd never felt before. he was postured very crookedly now. very crooked. something was leaving him. and, now, this christian grey, began to grow gray himself. it was at this weird hour, weirdly, jesse began to view this monster of a boy, but, as she would someone she'd eye up at moments of attraction; he was a good-looking boy, no james dean or christian grey handsome, but, enough, to where he really shouldn't be like this; jesse knew, with good looking boys, there was always something in that libido, they got from good looks, that made them, never this much of a woman hating monster. at least, not like this! ladykillers, sure! but, how real ladykillers are and operate! it was now especially disturbing for jesse to think this way, and have thoughts of these, flooding in. but, looking at his boyish evil river phoenix hair and face, his proportionally slim boyish body, and those hands of his, with that boyishly slim magic like fingers.

39. night call: closing

you know, in wwi, in turkey, back when the armenians were being driven from their lands, and slaughtered in the millions in the process, there's this one account: some turkish soldiers had taken a group of beautiful armenian women, had them stripped bare to their bare asses, and had told them to:

dance.

the women… begged them not to do, what they planned to do, next.
no, dance. they said.
please no! they begged again.
dance!
so, the women danced.

the turkish soldiers then began pouring gasoline over the women, as the women danced, and cried, and danced, and cried, and danced.

once finished.
the soldiers applauded.

then they lit a match, and burned the women alive.

billy?
….
billy?
….
why did you tell me that? jesse was horrified beyond reckoning, after hearing an account, such as that. and, she only had one question for billy. one. and one, alone. why, why, why… did you? billy then began to snicker. not even looking at jesse's eyes. just stood there watching the boyar in bewilderment. why? but, billy answered not. but did continue to snicker.

and now, a third wind.
and… billy… something happened to him, something changed: he now seemed different. the nebuchadnezzar prince was facing away. but it was as if he now knew something was around. and he seemed too afraid to look back and see what that was. billy now, opened his mouth, and spoke, but spoke not how he would

usually speak:

dee to dee neebaakkaanaaa pree! dee commm bwaaa bleh aaa faaa!

oh my God, it's the demon language. she knew of this. exactly how it sounded. exactly! now, it seemed like the nebuchadnezzar prince didn't seem so bewildered in these downtown la skid row streets, and seemed very much aware of what was happening; dead reckoningly assured of all that was afoot. jesse then caught the sight of the woman in the tent with her doppelganger, the two eyed billy and jimmy and also the eyes of jesse. they could see them now. and the last thing seen was the whites of the woman's eyes. as… she shut the curtains of her tent, then.

dee to dee neebaakkaanaaa pree! dee commm bwaaa bleh aaa faaa!

who goes there? cried out the nebuchadnezzar prince. like a maddened and now newly terrified man, seeming to start the guessing process, of the riddle at hand. who is that out there? the nebuchadnezzar prince continued to hearken. but it seemed like all he needed to do was look back to see. come on, it's not fun, when you don't look back to see reckoning! said billy, in regular voice. or, as regular as a voice coming from a neon stick figured face can make. billy? jesse went, whisperingly. quiet, the door is now open. all the idiot has to do is look back and see us.

billy?
damn it, jess, what now?
when did you learn how to talk in that language? jesse asked.
billy frowned, and didn't answer.

dee to dee neebaakkaanaaa pree! dee commm bwaaa bleh aaa faaa!

and that last one had the nebuchadnezzar prince sent wild, as he grew enraged at hearing this, and began facing all around and about. shouting! but, not shouting at what stood behind waiting on him.

Satan!
what is going on? what is this! what have i done wrong? nebuchadnezzar prince shouted, with echoes going all throughout skid row, as it got the attention of

many of its tented residence: many, many curtains of tents opened. and many, many faces peered out. but, all was quiet. as if now, a theater! a theater, all had understood, which was but a theater, and one for them to enjoy and watch. Satan, please, i can still serve you. please, i still have a lot i can do for you. he bargained with the Prince of the power of the ruler of the air, who didn't seem around right now and much to care. hey, jimmy, should we just go in? billy asked jimmy. i would. jimmy said. but where we taking him to? billy looked around, back, forth, looked up the sides of buildings. Satan, please, please… save me, Satan. hurry up, billy, my gut's turning just listening to this turd beg like this. shut up! looking for an alley… or? then, boom! he saw where.

Satan! don't leave me, please.
don't!

mr. ink… are you at least there? the nebuchadnezzar prince then asked. what he say? gasped jesse. she was confused again. wait, he knows who mr. ink is? jesse's eyes inquired. of course, he does, who do you think, with whom, what devil, he met and chose to sell, and sold his soul to, once choosing to make a pact with Satan? billy answered. where you think he gets all those rapey hellhounds from, huh? this was the fool mr. ink chose to possess after abandoning jack axton. a big downgrade for mr. ink, i think, but, the nebuchadnezzar prince had his usefulness. billy explained to jesse. please, mr. ink, i can still serve you, please don't leave me. the nebuchadnezzar prince begged.

still not choosing to look back at whom went there.

came here.

what twin ravens were to be his last moments left with on earth.

come on, billy, where we doing this? jimmy asked again. billy then looked back. and there. showed where with his eyes. and smiled. jimmy looked back, and then said:

you kidding me?
no.
really?

yes.
up there?
yes.
jimmy was now shaking his head.

i love being me! said billy, and smiled that smile only his stick figured drawing face could make. jesse got curious, and looked back to where billy had his eyes directed. and… just saw the buildings of downtown la. one of them, the us bank tower. jesse was confused (and starting to get pissed of being confused all the damn time: stupid, stupid me!). should i do the demon speak thing again? billy asked jimmy. he's too much of a coward to look back, just grab him, and let's take him up there. jimmy answered. no. said billy. i know how to get his attention. time to make a night call for the nebuchadnezzar prince. really, that again? jimmy asked. what, i like his stuff, it's good murder music.

let me have my "me time," okay, james? billy asked.
fine, fine. all you now, william. answered jimmy.

and now began a greater scheme of events, one opening one door to one other; night call now made, yet, unanswered, as music streamed and sang and danced and dotted across the stretch of things, between billy, the raven, and the nebuchadnezzar prince, his worm.

dee to dee neebaakkaanaaa pree! dee commm bwaaa bleh aaa faaa! quoted the raven.

quoted he, who quotes and sings of songs of, not of kings and queens, but a God to be and a god to never be. and, as for mere mortals, for these pawns, and kings and undead knights: sing songs of demise and tragedy. songs of sorrow and vengeance. songs of dogs, cats, wolves, coyotes, bears, fishes, reptiles, tarantulas and centipedes, and of course buzzards and of course ravens, plus join in lions and porcupines (mostly keeping away from one another). from here to eternity to heaven to hell and to earth and to... simply other places. seen and unseen. except all that is seen by the all-seeing omnipresent Eyes, and no other shortsighted eyes, else. all come, to play their parts, in these "15 minutes" thing called life, for all we truly are, are but dust in the wind; not players, ourselves, but what's being played, on that chessboard that only God and Satan will play. for, forget games of thrones

of mortal kings and queens, only God and the false god.

dance! the animals come.
dance! the animals play.
dance! the animals stop.
dance! and then the animals do so and go into a trance and dance and dance all bloody and naked and dance with animals of predators and dance with animals of prey. and then: behold, something now truly, truly wicked this way comes. behold, the shadowdancer cometh! behold, madame warlock, Satan's main squeeze and only true mistress. behold, just behold, cometh she, to dance and dance and dance the night away. till days of kingdom come to days of kingdom past! then come again! behold! dance! calls the night call.

dee to dee neebaakkaanaaa pree! dee commm bwaaa bleh aaa faaa!
dance!
stage one:
the boyar goes into denial.

dea to da neebaakkaanaaa prii! dea com baa waa of blah and faaa!
dance!
stage two:
the boyar becomes enraged.

dea to da nebuckaanaaa priin! dea com baa waa of blah and faaa!
dance!
stage three:
the boyar goes into desperate acts of begging and pleading.

deat to tha nebuchaaneear princ! deat com by way of blad and fal!
dance!
stage four:
the boyar goes into depression.

and finally:
death to the nebuchadnezzar prince! death come by way of blade and fall!

stage five: the boyar goes into acceptance. as the song of the night call ends, now

finally answered. all the tented men and women of skid row now with eyes white fade to black. now, shut their tents. now go to bed… to have good dreams. the nebuchadnezzar prince now in peace. and… as he slowly turns around…

now… eye contact!

phantom knight takes bitch-ass wouldbe king! billy screams.

and then, behold, two massive fireballs shoot and shine and scream out of his eyes, at the nebuchadnezzar bitch, as billy and jimmy blast off like blazing bullets of bane and butchery. and catch the hollywood boyar, before those two fireballs can do the nebbie boy in.

drag.
drag.
drag.
billy does, holding onto the whaling and weeping and teeth gnashing nebbie boy. then turns. then shoots out towards the mazing streets, at polarizing and pulverizing speeds, through downtown la. now reaching the us bank tower. now reaching its vertical climb. now with the drag and drag and drag, not going down and down, but up and upwards; billy, on his kawasaki ninja, firing up its vertical up-and-up, of the building's 1,018 feet climb, towards outer darkness. jimmy now reaches the building. looks up… but then makes a roll of the cartoon eyes, and starts shaking his helmet head. and then also makes his horizontal ascension up the building's vertical horizon.

what the hell is he…? thinks the eyes of jesse, now also catching up.
what the…?

umm… yup! thinks the eyes of jesse.
now i'm sure this can't be a demon.

only billy, only my billy, would be corny enough to make a show and scene like this. yet still not completely settled in her ways, with everything madame warlock has had to witness, with these ghost/demon slave boys, with their theatrics and exhibitions and silliness. but, keenly, she knew this side of the boy in life; knew and grew to love, and also absolutely, absolutely hate—all too well! like a lover's

touch, that touches a face, now known all too well! only the boy, billy lane, in his blessed x-gen heart, would ever want to pull a ridiculous stunt like this; mr. badass mofo now saying: "step back, while i make, and break, a badass scene, to top all badass scenes!" popped collar, burn rubber, sunglasses at night, bump and style and all! so badass, it was almost too badass. how many times had she needed to shake her head, to this side of the boy's wildness and craziness and corniness and silliness and badassness? ugh! how many times? so unapologetically—enough is enough!

did you see what i did?
did you?
did you see… yeeeaaaahh! billy excited, in front of jimmy and jesse's eyes catching up. "oh no, here we go!" thought jesse and jimmy. billy, what exactly made you choose this building? jimmy asked now. what? well? billy looked grumpy. what, it's the tallest building in downtown la, what? billy went. jimmy shook his head at him. what? i know how you think! independence day, the movie, was a very, very long time ago now. the us bank tower isn't the tallest building in la anymore. dumbass! billy, that… that over there, the wilshire grand center, is the tallest building in la now! jimmy explained, as he pointed at it. billy now got uppity, as he looked at what building jimmy pointed to, then all stick face ☹. billy now looked at the nebuchadnezzar prince, pissing his pants from everything experienced. well, how about you, what did you think about what—
Satan! help me, Satan! help me, help me, help—
shut up! billy wailed. firing up and out more fireworks; letting nebbie boy know, shooting fire and brimstone out of eyes and mouth, and possibly other places, were also an abilities he had, to wield and deal at will. billy now walked over to him, who was all very petrified and purple. billy knelt down: time to have a talk, it seemed. so, where did you keep the tattoo of the ink man? billy asked. the nebuchadnezzar's eyes fixed, fixing a motion to his right calf. billy caught the sight of this motion, and pulled up his cuffs of the pants of his right leg to see if… nope, no longer there! the nebuchadnezzar prince was now demoralized and dismantled, finding this out. so, mr. ink left you too, eh? he tends to do that. sorry you had to learn that the hard way. but, then again, not sorry! since, you suck anyways. the nebuchadnezzar's eyes were fixed now onto him. anyways…?

audi me, daemon!
what? billy went.

ego tibi praecipio ut servias mihi in virtute Satanae!
what the…?
ego—
shut up! billy blasted.

as his angry face started smoldering up smoke from his mummed mouth; better to stay mum, since dealing with where there is smoke, there would always be…! then asked: is that latin? the boyar boy said nothing. what makes you think a michigan white trash ghost like me would know latin? billy explained. with a bit more of a grin.

also… ego nemini servio! ite edunt cacas et mori! billy said, and grinned more.

now the boyar wanted to speak english:

who… who are you?
billy didn't answer.
you… just tell—
my boyfriend's back and you're gonna be in troublllllllllleeeeee…!

and…
billy was now back to being this corny again ☹; grinning a very grimly grim grin.
no, billy, go back to being serious. your corny ass isn't working right now. said jimmy.
what?
nevermind…!

anyways, before we attend to tonight's business… first, i have some curiosity, i liked to be quenched. you see, in hollywood, gossip amongst the living isn't like the gossip amongst the dead. when we get together and chitchat about stuff, we hear a lot about details of stuff that goes on behind all, and i mean—all—closed doors. so, and when it comes to you gishners, i'm really curious to know, if all the devilish details, of just how messed up your family is, is all true. billy began. yet, the boyar boy didn't seem too pleased to want to say anything as of late. so, when it comes to your family story, all those details behind closed doors… tell me, is a true…

about the gishner matriarch?

the boyar boy's eyes now widened. anyways, i'll go over details… you? say or don't say. no matter, i'm a mindreader, so, i'll know the truth, just by watching the way you think.

the matriarch?
what a murderously evil bitch she is, huh? don't you think? nebbie began cringing up with teeth. beautiful woman, beautiful, i heard, she was, back in her prime. though, like all beautiful women, too stuck on their vain ways, i guess are always the stories you'll hear of the highs and lows they'll go, to keep things the way they are, the way they are. and, since only a catch back in the 30s. a real, real velvet eyed elisabeth taylor, of her day! not, no made actress, but, didn't need to be, to become the jezebel queen of la. needed no fame, to have all the harlots of hollywood, at the time, bow down before her feet, to pay respect: hayworth, bacall, turner, gardner, leigh, lake, ball… even davis and crawford. all mere leeches, in comparison! i mean, such notoriety and name! but those days having passed, and, it tends to get hard for a woman to continue with such vanity, when age steps in, and… well… you know? odd bit of curiosity this became, as now jesse also found herself enthralled to hear this out, before the boy's reckoning fully came to pass. seems like your mother, helena troy gishner, was also a real beauty, back when she was alive. is it true what happened with that mommie deariest tale of the two? if you're gonna kill me… just—
i'm not going to kill you yet, okay? not yet… maybe… not at all. we'll find out, soon enough, won't we? billy then redirected his vicious glare at the eyes of jesse. and now, the nebbie boy caught onto the sight of these phantom eyes, and spoke: the eyes of kilrogg! ghosted nebbie. that blew everyone off. what the… what the hell is… kilrogg? where the hell did you get that from? billy gasped. then shrugged. then exhausted a single chuckle from that line. you incels are funny people.

although, i kinda feel sorry about your particular boohoo incel tale, now, that's really messed up! really, really messed up! what that matriarch bitch did. nebbie grew fade, he knew all his family's details, "so, out with them!" his eyes spoke. so, the story goes like this: sometime, in the… 90s? your grandmother, esmeree, was in her bathtub, bathing in the blood of any virgin women, or child actors, either from weho leeches, or whatever your family was able to buy, from the slave-

trafficking market, here or south of here. and, mad, just mad, since, it seems as if though, it just wasn't doing it anymore: an old practice passed down by the old heathen queens, and princesses, and duchesses, since biblical times. a practice she had now spent decades practicing in her bathing chambers. but, then, she'd rise above the blood, and step to her mirror, naked, to see: nope! just wasn't working anymore. seemed like grandfather time, that asshole patriarch, had said: "enough is enough! you had your time, old woman, now try… try… to age with some grace and dignity." but, no, not with your old grandmommie deariest! no, that, was something she wouldn't let it be so!

i guess, being such a murderous woman as she was, so murderous, and such a monumental misandrist, after having murdered your grandfather, someone i believe you used to look up to. also, your father, and, just about every other man in hollywood, from legends to leeches, to just anyone that caught her libido, at that time of heat and whim… she was, just that murderously mad, to do what she decided to do next. storming out of her bathing chamber, she then, all of a sudden, began to hear… moaning noises… while passing a particular room. aroused by the noises made, she then crept the door open, and silently snuck in, and there, caught the sight of something she had long, long sorrowfully missed in life: the wild sex and passions of youth.

seems like your mother was also a deadringer of your grandmother, very much of a french actress, in beauty and stature, and also love making. beautiful milky white skin. beautiful, beautiful dark, as heart-of-darkness, black hair. black slashes wild on top of a white naked body, while going up and down on top of a man. making the sort of love making, to a man, that can just stop an old witches' heart. especially of that of your grandmother, esmeree. i guess it was too much for her. it was a deadringer scene, of her own youth, in those long, long ago years, when she was also such a head turner, and passionate, passionate sinful love maker, like your mother was. so, that's when Satan, himself, snuck into her heart, and, told her… what she needed to do, if she wanted to have that again. she waited in the shadows, watching, for what felt like hours upon hours. then, finally. the two lovers went asleep.

so, adrian gishner, did what happen next, really happen?

billy now asked adrian, this boy's true name; adrian seemed numbed by all this,

and just wanting to retire. so, branding a knife, she then stepped to the man sleeping next to her. cut his throat, quickly, while holding a pillow over his face. he died not instantly, but at least quietly. then your grandmother, watching your mother, asleep, took off her bathing robes, and then, got on top of her. and sat on top of her, as if she was the man she had slept with. as if, in another dark region in her heart, felt, maybe, "hmm?" like the riddle of the twin swedish sisters, in bed with one another, wondering, "so, so pretty we both happen to be, why shouldn't we have this form of love with one another, don't you think? he he!" billy teased. adrian gishner continued to gnash away his teeth. but then jimmy spoke: billy, those twins weren't swedish, the ones you're thinking about. billy did a haphazard smirk/frown-ish something, eyeing to one side; the boys were doing their thing, again. anyways, before i was so—rudely interrupted…! continued billy. your mother felt this presence. didn't know yet what had happened to the man she slept with, nor who this was on top of her. she smiled, with eyes wide shut. then said, "baby, i'm tired, we can do this later in the morning." grandmommie dearest then said, "no, helen baby, open your eyes." terrified, recognizing now who was on top of her, naked, knowing her mother's own voice, and what type of woman she really was, behind closed doors, she opened her eyes. and, was immediately slain by the woman. oh my God…? jesse thought. this was beyond anything she'd imagine. so, dead now, your grandmother grabbed your mother by her ankles, dragging her, dragging her, on and on, all the way to her bathing chambers. she had stabbed your mother in the heart, plunged the knife, deep, and had instantly killed her. but she kept the blade in, so, all that blood wouldn't then spill out. not one drop! was your grandmother willing to afford to lose.

bravo! bravo! said Satan. bravo! he applauded her then.

what a masterful performance! even to the sight of such an ancient evil as him. been a while since Satan had come across a woman willing to be this dedicated, and desperate, and despicable, to be this vain and wicked. and, i guess… that's where you come in, as a boy.

aaahhh—
shut up!

you get no sympathy from me! billy bellowed at adrian. billy eyed him for a while; watching this worm, worm, for the pain he received that day. but, no matter, he

was a monster, himself, now, too, needing no sympathy; could no longer claim victimhood, since, he was now a victimizer, himself.

i guess, when you, at, whatever age you were, stepped in... at this point, she had already bathed in all of your mother's blood. now, madam saturn, simply decided to chop her up and devour her own child's body, from head to toe. give Satan more of a show! encore! encore! beckoned Satan. might even get an oscar from the academy. since, everyone else in hollywood is really that evil. well, maybe not that much. but, close enough. he, he! went billy. yet, Satan did foreworn her. told her, "it wouldn't work again." though, she got what she wanted, then, got her youth back. but, not her prime from the 30s, and more of what she had in the 60s: just barely young enough to still be somewhat desirable, and barely old enough to also not be. expecting to see her young bobcat days, instead of her aging cougar ones, which she had only missed a few decades, prior. ha! i guess when she begged Satan for youth, she should have been more specific of how young, exactly! but, that, didn't stop her, though, once her aging hag years caught up to her, again. you used to have more siblings, correct? five sisters. all five with beautiful milky white skin, and dark as night hair. now only three. even when she did the same to those two of her granddaughters, as Satan told her, wouldn't work again, would it?

anyways, back to the main story….
esmeree was in the middle of cutting up your mother, her daughter, and eating her in the bathtub. and it was then you stepped in, seeing what grandmommie dearest had done to your mother. your grandmother, at the time, eating what looked to be a human liver. and you, now staring at your mother, while your mother's head, that was now placed on top of a toilet seat… stared back at… well… not you… since your mother was no longer able to stare at anything anymore. i guess, it was then, finally, you spoke like a man for once. and told her, you'd kill her, for what she had done. that, and, all the other men in your family she had offed. got rid of. mostly kept you, since, she never took you for much of a man to begin with. must ask now, curiosity is striking this cat, yet again, what was exactly the deal mr. ink offered you, for your soul?

est satis, daemon impius! screeched adrian.
no, shut up! you will hear this, the pain of hearing this, is only just part of your reckoning i gots for you! billy quoted.

oh, wait, i think i know what it might be, he he!
nolo audire amplius! cried adrian again.

and began weeping, but not tears though; he was no longer human anymore, and there was no more water left in his eyes left within him; eyes cracked and dried, and dropless, as a desert world, where he was raised in by his own reptile queen matriarch. so, since she still saw use in you as a slave, to deal with such toxic masculinity, she needed to do something! something, still, to correct how terribly you had reacted towards her.

was it… what mr. ink offered… your manhood back?
wait… what does he mean by that? feared jesse. even though, it was now plainly obvious, what it was! so, tell me, now, adrian? what is the answer of that stupid riddle of yours, again…?

"does a slave choose its master or does the master choose its slave?"
adrian stayed silent.

now, a fourth wind blew in. the nebuchadnezzar prince grew even grayer. yet, billy and jimmy, grew the ever more violently vivid in color. and now, time for reckoning. so, adrian, as the judge, jury, and… executioner… in these proceedings, here is the verdict i have for you:

guilty!

for, no, just no! you can't claim victim status, since, you've become a victimizer, yourself. you have a lot of women's blood on your hands. like your grandmother, you've also now been bathing, not yourself, but, having your own demons, bathe in the blood of women. the sin of your grandmother's misandry, eventually turned to the sin of your misogynistic ones. such, such wicked poetic injustice! so much poetry, not coming from choice, but by circumstance. so, now, you have no prayers to be answered. billy then took his gloved hand, and crept it towards adrian gishner. adrian wormed seeing this. stop, stop! i'm not like that, so, don't worry. i just want to see if it's true. since you won't answer me, and keep wanting to call me a demon, or something. he then ran his hand over to adrian gishner's pants, and yanked them down. jesse now couldn't watch anymore: not, no more!

not, no more! she just turned her eyes away; turned her eyes around and looked away. yet, with no ears, she continued to listen.

wow, that really is messed up. the beans and the frank, too. she really wanted to leave you with nothing intact.

dude… bruh… she turned you into a eunuch!
castration!
and i heard she now keeps your real manhood in a special jar in her bedchambers…?

like wow, how evil can a woman get, huh? billy sympathized. the best he could with a creature like this. okay, this is what's going to happen. since you showed me yours, now, i guess, it's time for me to show you mine.

and now, jesse had to watch. had to! had to!

riiiiiiggggggghhhhhhhtt!
suzanna came forth now, branded high. a true reptile queen, any toxic man would looooooveeee… to worship. oh yes, 19 inches of cold steel, it won't treat you gently. the girls love it, though. having that flesh of the flesh of asses, and the issue of the issue of horses. makes them wanna drop to their knees and beg for it. "please, please, daddy, please!" not suzanna, here, though. the one more suited for them, my other 19-inch piece. ha! not like this one, which i got only suited for you. and now pointed the 19-inch suzanna at nebbie.

Satan, Satan, please, save me! went adrian.

billy now looked down. then up. then around. nothing! you really are an idiot, as much as most have branded you as. you do know… Satan… saving people? not exactly something, i do believe one can expect on his resume. you do know that, right? adrian gishner began gnashing his teeth again. okay, time to conduct business: this is what i'm going to do, and scream and yell and cry all you want, nothing you do is going to change it. i'm gonna take suzanna here, and, i'm going to do, what you only can watch demon hounds do, but never you. since, well, we both saw what you have to offer to women. he he! bastard! thought jesse. as much as she hated that piece-of-shit, there, this was just too ungodly. at first, i thought

it would be fair, if i made you watch someone you're related to, have this happen to them. but, since all the men in your house were murdered by that evil matriarch of yours. and, since you're such a misogynistic piece-of-shit now, yourself, all the women of the gishner house, aren't exactly people you like. forget the matriarch, even those three sisters left, mostly since they happened to follow more of your matriarch in lifestyle and villainy. which is why i guess they are the only three spared. thought of doing them in, and having you watch. since, your only sin is to watch. but, who am i kidding? that would be more like answering your prayers, now. not sentencing judgment, which is what you really deserve. plus, why should they pay, for sins only you committed, as evil as those three sisters of yours might be. no, i'm just gonna jump ahead, and just do it to you.

save me G—…?
and, a wind changed.
he now… but.

no.

adrian chose not to call to Him.

and then, a gray moment, a very, very gray moment. and the full moon, up above, like a photo negative sun. wow… do you know what just happened? billy asked, watching the black heavens above.

His Holy Ghost has left.
His Spirit is no longer watching.

you actually had a chance to be spared from all this, and, you're still choosing blasphemy towards the Spirit's offer, to the end. so, now, death, of the flesh, and the second death, of your immortal soul, in endless fiery destruction, is all that's waiting for you. billy said, while shaking his head. shaking. just shaking. a ghost mirroring a ghost in front of him. adrian, although, hissed… he didn't care… he had made up his mind, who he'd rather serve, a long, long time ago.

billy, went back to the nebuchadnezzar's reckoning, as he edged forward towards him….

but then adrian got desperate, and said something, even jesse found very stupid, and angeringly so. money… money… i can…? billy almost stabbed him dead—right there! hearing him feed that line. money? i'm a ghost! so what purpose do i have for such worldly things like those, since, i don't exactly live in the real world anymore, to enjoy them, huh? wow, you're an idiot.

so, let's count the ways, of how i'm gonna do this. i would like to ask how many women you have put to death, in your time. how many tossed to that pit, to have them raped. then ripped apart and eaten, as your mother and two of your sisters had once been. i wanted to ask you how many women and little girls you've had sacrificed. but, no, i know you'd figure then why i would ask. and you wouldn't be that stupid. and, you would say something like "two," even though i already know, from my intel, you tried to have it done to four, lately, and only got away with three.

so, time for some vegas action, texas style, for lady luck to decide your "ass raping by a knife this big" faith.

billy now unzipped his jacket halfway, and pulled something out. they were, dice. pink dice? jesse didn't remembered billy nor jimmy with these items ever. billy then showed them to the nebuchadnezzar prince, smiled, and got chatty again: hey, wanna know the story of these pink dice, i got here, huh? way too feminine for me to carry, true. but, the story isn't. billy then drew close, adrian gishner cowered away a bit from him, shivering. but, billy then grew even more chatty and corny, in the ways he tended to get, and began wiggling his eyebrows. well, whatever those neon lit lights on his face, he considered as eyebrows, happened to be.

hey.
i knew a girl.
in texas.

damn, do i love me some of that texas twang. love! love! love! anyways, when i was working in a strip joint. there was this rugged beauty i knew, and, never have i seen that tan of hide, and that blonde of hair. she'd never even dye it that color though, not even down there. but, damn, it would make me wild. more of the genius blonde bimbo, downstairs, compared the to the dumb one, upstairs.

although, funny, i guess that's where all blondies keep their real brains at! ha! jimmy now stepped forward, and seemed to want to interact, finally. anyways, this girl fell head over heels and love with me, and, as a sign of love, she gave me these. she said, "these are my lucky dice, i always let the boys borrow—but never keep," i asked her "what makes them so lucky," and then she said, "because, i like to keep them hidden away in one specific place, all boys think of, when they think of luck, and, whenever they try them out, the dice never fail." yeah, this woman loved me that much. something you will never in a million years understand. boohoo! but, anyways. loved me so much, she didn't just let me borrow them, she gave them to me. but then billy stopped being so corny over this, and felt jimmy standing behind him; jimmy was smiling, him now, and not a sight seen much often. so, even jesse forgot about the reckoning part in all this, and wanted to see the boys interact. but, unfortunately, probably just more of the boys being their douchy selves. and, completely insensitive pricks, jesse could now figure. jimmy now spoke:

seems like your memory deceives you, william, i was the one she gave them to. jimmy finally interjected.

what, no way?
yes, way!
bullshit!
ha, ha! jimmy finished.

jesse was feeling more and more numb. and, she didn't know if she could handle watching, when they started. anyways, these twins i call my "calamity janes," which was her stage name. billy informed. billy, get the hell on with it, you're even starting to bore me, with your longwinded shit. you, boring—me! billy looked back, he was starting to get angry with jimmy.

k… whatever, beta half. billy lashed.
you're the beta! jimmy lashed.
you are, bitch!
you!
jesse then understood why they were doing this; they were riling each other up, to get some, soon enough. a wind blew in. yet, no wind was felt; like judgement felt not of the now, but the one to come.

so, let's now see how many, calamity jane, has in store for you. billy said.
and rolled.
clack, clack! went the dice. but…?
what the fu—
ha! snake eyes! beta bitch brother. jimmy answered. billy was back to ☹!

shut up!
you!
no, you!
you!
shut up! the both of y'all! just do it already! jesse screamed, with tennessee accents galore.

sick of this. sick of the nebuchadnezzar prince. sick of also them. ghosts or demons. this was too much. yet, this was her doing. the warlock had done her summoning. and now, these slaves, she couldn't judge, doing the bidding of their master, here, that had bid of them to do. adrian now began worming a bit.

oh, don't crawl away, don't, come here, come here—daddy wants some action!

and then he did it:
once.
twice!
aaahhhhhh!
a lot of screaming and whaling now coming from adrian. a lot of blood. lots! lots! jesse watched it all; this was now blood on her hands; she couldn't just watch away and wash off. billy got up. then jesse got terrified out of her mind knowing billy… was never anywhere as horrifying to deal with…

as jimmy was!
jimmy now stepped up to the plate.

give me suzanna, and give me my dice, calamity jane gave to—me!
no, me.
me! jimmy blew, and blew up, with smoke, now rising from the corners of both sides of his mouth; billy, now, cowered away from him; something jesse had never

seen before: billy scared for once. now jimmy, just jimmy, and those forlorn eyes of his; eyes of the worse type of horror! jimmy rolled.

clack, clack! went the dice.
and came up with twelve.

no time for crying for adrian not to have this happen. just like that, came the execution:
once!
twice!
three times!
four times!
five!
six, seven, eight, nine… ten… eleven!

and he stopped now. adrian gishner was in absolutely the worse type of pain in his life. but this was all a very coldstone moment for the rest, even jesse, in a way: executioners being executioners, numb being numb, and all this precision being so precise. they were ready to proceed. one more needed. but jimmy was hesitating. adrian gishner shivering, in sheering pain, stopped for a second, to face his last word.

so, gotta ask, has it only been women and little girls you've done that too? boys… ever had little 12-year-old boys raped? jimmy asked.

deadpan. and dread all over. but, all dread for jimmy, and none by him, personally. this one, almost nothing scared him. jesse felt suzanna go through it, her heart, just hearing jimmy bring this up. too much! too much! and, the worse part was, jesse had no clue where jimmy was taking this. tell me! commanded the raven. adrian stalked eyes at jimmy, then eyes into his own wicked heart, and nodded. then, jimmy blew up, face grinning, proud, and now came his most darkest reckoning in all this:

i figured.
and… now you know what it feels like.
me too.
me too.

although, you don't always take it up the ass.

sometimes…

you have to take one in the—mouth!

and stuck suzanna into his gullet, ripping his way in, deepthroating that sharp and fast and big and deep, and now had adrian gishner puking up so much blood, so much, and also ¾ of his tongue and other fleshy parts from inside his mouth. and one part jesse could definitely, definitely tell was his uvula.

funny, funny boys.
despicable.
yet, they thought this was all so funny; death was funny to them; killing was something they'd do routinely in life, and now in death. so, better make jokes to pass all the guilt, and horror, and feelings of deep remorse, that comes with it. jesse was now completely sick.

sick.
sick!
of all this.

wow, jimmy… bravo. simply bravo. you out did me. spoke billy. and he clapped. clapped! jimmy grinned.

though, he's probably not going to survive this. billy addressed.

so?
we were not supposed to kill him.
so?
so… what do you mean, so? billy baffled. he might survive. jimmy answered. adrian spat up with more blood and began shivering bad. you think so? billy asked. yeah. jimmy answered. funny, funny boys: jesse now wondered if killing them both was really all that terrible of a thing; now remembering the moments she felt for them, before pulling the trigger, and ending both their lives; now, not so much with feelings of regret within herself from everything she did, feeling so much guilt. quite the opposite now.

i mean, guilt, for what?
for these two monsters?

i don't think he's gonna survive… he's in shock now. billy said, faking concern. trust me, i'm confident he will. jimmy said and smiled up at his brother, confidently. and with that sentiment, billy then grabbed the last, and soon to be late, adrian gishner, the nebuchadnezzar prince, dragged him over to the side of the us bank tower.

and threw his ass over the edge. >:D

and after a 1,018 feet plummet, jesse heard the splatter below. both brothers now stepped to the edge. looked down.

how about now, you still confident he'll survive that, jimmy? billy asked again.

jimmy just shook his head at him, but not to answer his question. how much you bet he will? billy asked, while wiggling his eyebrows.

jimmy looked at him and said: a dollar.

40. sanctuary

to say jesse was feeling absolutely disgusted and disturbed and also numbed by all that, would be a complete sin of an understatement. she was in a church now. she had to be. had to be! and now, felt like these walls, should be her new motel memphis walls; her prison away from the rest of the world, and billy, and jimmy, and even her own wicked self. no more boys! no more pretty, pretty boys, wanting to show her ugly, ugly things! it was a beautiful catholic church; one of the only churches that had ever caught her eye in the six months of living in this city; it was the st. charles borromeo catholic church, on lankershim and moorpark, in toluca lake, north hollywood. this now was: sanctuary! therefore, say nothing about her being in a church, all you heathen people, who hate Jesus, and want to fill heads about monkey people and lizard monsters, that roamed the earth millions of millions of years, before adam and eve and that tree of knowledge of good and evil took place. for jesse, if she wasn't there, millions and millions of years ago, to see all that, she didn't care! simple as that! and even though she wasn't there in the garden of eden to see adam and eve either, nor noah's ark and the deluge, nor moses and parting of red seas, nor whatever in the world ezekiel saw, when being risen into the sky to see God, in a chariot, being pulled by four angels, with four wings, and four faces, of that of a man and a lion and an ox and a… what is going on here? but, if anything, jesse understood in life:

she knew good and evil existed.

really saw and really knew! and the bible seemed to be the only book that existed, that seemed to have any real, strongly held grasp, about it. that, to jesse, was enough! all the porcupine beta incel boys, could keep their star wars and star trek, and using them as their holy scriptures, to understand whatever… as judy would put it, about all that, with all them porcupine boys with dinosaur toys: "eww! next?" and even if cupid was to finally catch up with jesse, the lioness, and whatever porcupine boy, like phil, the mad imp had in store for her. then! "please, please, please, have it be a porcupine, that still has its manhood intact, that doesn't have some matriarch dearest bitch, keeping them in a jar? okay, please? thank you!" because, when it came to that flesh of the flesh of asses and issue of the issue of horses, jesse understood damn well what her biblical baby doll, ezekiel, was talking about! damn, damn well! so, the nonbelievers today could keep their star trek and worshipping captain kirk, having sex with green skin martian ladies; jesse didn't know what the hell any of that meant, and, what they had to offer,

and neither did she want to. donkeys and horses, unlike martian bitches, nor million/million years ago lizard monsters, and monkey people—did exist! today! here and alive and in front of her and—love me! and, when it came to flesh of flesh and issue of issue? jesse knew dagnammit well, what that was all about! so, back off, and let her have her desirable young assyrian-twin-lover-metalhorsemen riding on metalhorses! fantasy? sure! but, unlike her mom's fantasy, jesse was seeing this stuff: she wasn't chasing after her twin elf princes; her twin elf princes were chasing after—her! jesse was the type of girl, that absolutely hated jurassic park, the movie: it was boring. she didn't want to watch t-rexes roaring at her on that silverscreen. people tend to lose a sense of fantasy and fiction, with their "suspension of disbelief." she wanted to ride a t-rex, through these hollywood streets, butt naked, with a bible in her hands, while issuing God's white throne "reckoning," to all these disgusting and disturbing, evil, evil spooky fish eyed people, of this city, by way of fefe here. yes, tay tay! jesse being a t-rex lady, and not a pussycat lady, this animal was a patriarch, she'd accept in her household, that she wouldn't ever, ever have spade, and would be her beloved "fefe." yes! and that would now make for pretty, pretty nicely!

yes, fefe, yes!
now, look, look… it's harvey weinstein, over there!
sic, fefe, sic!
feast, baby, feast!
not one drop, fefe, not one—drop!
eat!
goooooood!

good, fefe, good!

now roar!
roar for your mommie deariest!
roar for mommy!

all right, jesse now felt it was best and proper, to step out of this fantasy, she was enjoying in her own mind. and before… yes! let's not put a pink bow around fefe's neck, and start applying pink nail polish, to his 7inch long and jagged and pointy toenails, shall we? jesse now looked around her catholic surroundings. hmm, why not… i guess? since, we all can see what type of girl jesse is! as many times as

jesse got dragged by her aunt to a church kicking and screaming. she liked being in churches. always did then, and always will now. well… mostly… catholic churches now. no more buckle of the bible belt "yeha ten-ass-say" type southern baptists type of, "accept the love of Jesus, or… hell, fire and brimstone, and weeping and gnashing of teeth, in outer darkness, forever and ever," type of stuff! catholic churches were just pretty. pretty! just that! that! with men and boys all dressed pretty, speaking in pretty latin: a romance language. and, a dead language, which of course, jesse didn't understand. and didn't understand a thing about Jesus and what He expected of her as a pawn in this chess game called "life." since, the bible here spoke latin, Jesus here spoke latin, and all the pretty dressed men and boys did too, and jesse didn't understand a word they were saying. so, she was going to heaven, by default, since: how can you reckon a poor confused girl, lost in translation, when she doesn't understand a single thing that's expected of her, to start? she felt like a foreigner here, and happy to be so! simply that! and simply put.

"dominus blah-blah tus, ecte recte!"
what?
"dominus blah-blah tus—…!"
what?
"dominus—…!"
can the gates of heaven just open, already, and can i go in?
"domi… yeah, go ahead!"

i just want to dance! dance! who the hell is the reptile queen, and who the hell is the fish king, and what the hell does any of this have to do with me, and God, and Satan, and ghosts, and demons, and angels, and my love of dancing? it was like that horrid vision she had had in las crucis new mexico, of that tarantula and centipede fighting; that first time having an out of body, eyes without a face, astral projection—whatever! just so "eww!" and all she wanted to see, were them two creepy crawly "eww" animals to—stop! sitting at the aisles at this church, sitting there, just sitting, jesse then caught the eye of a king james.

oh… no! jesse was terrified.

she now realized, she could deal with all the latin, "dominus, blah-blah" whatever! not this. this wouldn't be in latin. but, king james english. which, being a

shakespearean lover, thanks to her unblessed heart, she would understand. the last time she had cracked open one of these, was in tucson, arizona. back, in her running days, similar to the boys running days, in the late 80s. jesse had finally settled on arizona, before moving onto california; the boys weren't showing up then. and, she felt, peace, finally now able to start a new life; here and with her new love "johnny guitar." her new boyfriend, the desert. but, wasn't to be. she had a panic, without the boys, thanks to good ol' king james, sitting over here, as he had been sitting over there, at that church in tucson she had entered. she was curious, sitting in the church, in tucson, wondering if she was finally free of the boys and their hunt. so, she decided to see what good ol' king james would tell, about what God would tell, and she cracked it opened and read.

matthew 12:43-45:
when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. then he saith, i will return into my house from whence i came out, and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first. even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

and, that, there, was Jesus speaking. the so-and-so called loving Jesus, Himself. not the hippie docile version you get to know from cartoons like south park. the absolutely terrifying One, you get to know, the Son of man, behind the legend and icon, you get to know directly from the bible; the type of terrifying God, that shoots blisteringly white light out of His eyes and mouth, as He goes full wrath and hell and fire and brimstone vengeance seeking mode. and then pulls swords, 3 times the length of suzanna out of His mouth, and kills you—dead! with just His Word! and, that was all it took at the time. jesse went into sudden panic! absolute panic, and almost ran out of the church, screaming, reading that! as if, her conditions weren't already worse enough. with two wicked spirits haunting her. 1 x 7 = 7! yet now, with 2 x 7= 14? jesse remembered the story of that poor, poor soul in the bible, having to deal with legion! that terrified her beyond belief, as a girl reading that. and now with jesse, herself, dealing with demons, of that multitude and magnitude, wanting all to enter her, and possess her, and turn her into something 14 times worse than what that black woman on skid row was dealing with, with just her one doppelganger spirit? no boys appearing this time! the terror of that alone in her imaginations, was enough to almost make her want

to check herself into a hotel tucson psych ward resort and spa, and off herself, with a plastic toothbrush through her jugular—truly—this time! no more corny elevator rides down to hell with corny music; just a straight shot right to—hell! nope, seemed like johnny guitar, was another love, never to be! damn you! "california, here i come." it was, then. yeah… no thank you, king james! you can keep your romeo and juliet stories, to yourself! thought jesse. and, felt like this was enough. not much of a sanctuary, this place felt, with the fish king james sitting there: eyeing her, creature for the black lagoon style! asking if she'd like him to tell her about another haunting bible verse, of what happens to people a part of a wicked generation. especially like the wicked millennials, jesse was a part of. jesse got up, like a moth seeing no light in all this, here, and decided to leave, and see what other light source she could find, elsewhere.

then, petrified. and stood still.

there, standing there. outside. in the sun. oh no! a lot of fishy eyed staring progressed now.

then jesse blew up:
go away! i want nothing to do with you two any…? but, wait. forlorn eyes. oh no, again! and, it was just him—alone! more fishy eyed staring. but, not by him standing there, outside the doors to st. charles borromeo catholic church. those were never the type of creepy eyes jesse had to deal with, with him; she needed to say something, since he wasn't the type to say something, first, she had to!

what do you want, jimmy? jesse asked.
more forlorn eyes!

the hell with this, jesse was now mad: go away! for good this time! i don't want to be some warlock or whatever anymore. not after everything i saw last night. she said to him.

jimmy didn't speak.
please, go away! i'm sorry… please!
jimmy still didn't speak.
where's… where's…?
billy…?

crap! jesse thought. now she didn't want to hear him speak. just go away.

we did what you wanted us to do. jimmy said. not like that! jesse blew up. that was sadistic and evil and cruel, just cruel! but jimmy had an answer to all that, all that did take place last night:

i told you, God didn't want you to take vengeance on that boy. i told you.

jesse grew upset.

maybe… maybe… there's a reason, vengeance is only meant to be His, and not ours? you wanted us to torture that boy. and torture him to—
no, i didn't! but… jesse in her heart, knew that she did. she knew. she knew! she damn well knew. that was all her doing. all of it! since, billy and jimmy were only following orders. and in her heart, she enjoyed every minute of watching that boy squirm and squeal, as he did. and everything that happened, was on her hands and conscience.

God, forgive me! jesse thought.

but then, then a good breeze blew in. and, jesse now remembered. how, when jimmy did want to speak more freely and openly, especially without his asshole other half, he was a lot more endearing to be around. a lot more. not that jesse preferred jimmy that much more than billy… but this at least hit different.

jesse, stuff is now changing. things are changing. and you're gonna get that prayer being answered. he simply answered. what? jesse quickly looked around to see if anyone was around: no one was. good! seemed like jesse wanted to now hear this.

jesse, that boy…?
what… what?
you know what boy!

jesse felt like she knew and also didn't know. and now jimmy began: his name was johnny pak. jesse's eyes widened. billy and me, we knew him. that wasn't a random encounter, with two parties, that had never crossed each other's paths before. what? jesse now knew exactly who jimmy was talking about. we knew him, in las

vegas. back in '06. i don't want to say he was a bad person now. seemed… different… seeing him last night. but, billy really had a thing against him, back in '06. really bad! how so? jesse asked. jimmy didn't seem to want to get into it, but then did a little: let's just say, if you met johnny pak, how we first met him, behind the palms' casino, doing what we caught him doing to a girl, you wouldn't be feeling like such innocent blood was on your hands, unlike the blood of adrian gishner. johnny pak thinking that old life of his was gone and buried, just old bones in the closet, that he thought that God would no longer hold against him. as unrepenting as he was. that wasn't murder, that was reckoning. but… maybe… reckoning that came too soon. since you summoned us, a reckoning, you also partook in, indirectly. but still. jesse eyes widened more. i don't know if i…? trust me! he's dead now. his death in the la times, or some news article, should pop up. jimmy explained, and nothing else. and now it seemed like jimmy wanted to leave; his eyes went back to being forlorn; jesse now couldn't let this happen.

what do you mean that my prayer is now going to be answered? jesse gasped.

knowing and not knowing, at the same time, again. the condition of his eyes got worse. what i mean is, no more phantom knights, stalking you, anymore. no more us, me and billy. that time is coming to a quick close, very quickly. you're only going to see us both once more, faintly: first billy, then me, and then, never again in this life. he explained, then seemed like he wanted to walk away again. and, like a lover's touch, jesse was now back to this, feeling this touch again. by jimmy. jesse was back to dreamy eyes. stop. stop running away from me! she grieved at him. jimmy smiled and said something else:

jesse, you know, back at that bar in chattanooga, tennessee, when you first met us, i remember at the time, billy turned to me and said, "look at this one dumb hannah montana staring at us, want me to go chase her off?" he asked.

but i knew what he was really thinking. i didn't say nothing. and, billy, did what billy does best, blowing people off. especially women. since, billy finds it funny, giving girls the same treatment, most girls tend to give the boys. so, he walked up, said some stupid smooth operator line to you. throwing this miley cyrus dog, a bone. and, "ha, ha!" that was that, he figured. jesse didn't like hearing this interpretation of her and the boys first encounter, since, that is exactly the vibe she got from billy. and, knowing billy, now, more than then, he really would be

that unforgiving towards some floozy like her. want to know why we took you to arizona? jimmy now said to jesse. jesse was enthralled; she knew it really had nothing to do with no arizona guitar lessons, she knew. truth is, we didn't even take you out there, for that whole desert and sea thing. i mean, we did, but… we didn't know if it would work. it hadn't before. we didn't think anyone like you would get the same vision we did in '88… life is strange, though, i guess. jesse now asked: why did you take me out there? asking now with her own forlorn eyes; face all sideways, feeling a desert breeze; the last one to be felt, for a hot and dry sun-cracking day like this.

jesse… we're killers. simply killers.
jesse got depressed.

we wanted to tell you a bunch of scary stuff, and scary stuff, about ernie bogners, and feeding heads to buzzards, to scare you away. jesse understood now. we've… since… well, since dealing with our old man, really, have always meant to be put into a world like that. running away from wanting to become killers, ourselves, like the old man. but, no! i guess it was always predestined to turn out that way. jesse felt like tearing up. but, feeling way to jaded by everything. we're killers, were in life. and, now, ghosts for hire, still killers. to the end. jimmy explained. and seemed to want to—
why are you leaving me! jesse gasped. this was coming to be the last jesse was to hear jimmy speak to her; she now felt this sprite come into her, tell her, with no demonic talk, and she now immediately knew. it's like how billy explained. life is one giant game of chess, played by God and Satan. you ever play chess? yes… i've played. i suck at it! suck at it, bad! but i know enough about how the game is played, to know how pieces move, and… how… one minute you're worried about losing a pawn, then a rook, then a bishop, and then a…? jesse was overexplaining. but she didn't want to come off as dumb. she had played! she knew the rules of the game. maybe not the game God and Satan were playing. but, still…?

well, jesse, just how you explained. take it in that sense, one-minute, worrying about losing a pawn, then a rook, then a bishop. pieces on the board are never in the same positions, after every turn, and after every play. one minute, you're a pawn, worrying about dealing with two phantom knights. next minute, no more. the phantom knights stop appearing before you. since they were always phantom pieces and never meant to be there, anyways. our time crossing your path as a

pawn, has come and gone. and now, you have to move on, to other stuff. and worrying about other pieces, you have to now deal with. and… ones that aren't phantoms. jesse didn't like hearing this. don't worry, jesse, i know you're just a pawn in all this, really terrible at the game. but, just be that pawn. only moving forward. taking one step at a time. since, that's all you're able to do. no, no… why do you two have to…? now she didn't want to lose them, this scared her. for as terrible as they had been, losing them felt even more terrible. wait, what do i have to deal with now, in game, in chess? but, not in some chess game, but, as in, right now, at this point i'm at, in this vicious game called simply "life." and now she felt too ominous; getting that knowing and not knowing sense even more. you know. jimmy said. no more phantom knights stepping into your life, and flipflopping around, as unfriendly to friendly chess pieces. not anymore.

now… even as a simple pawn…

you got a queen to deal with.
and… then a king. quote jimmy.
and now left.

shadowdancer book series:
-dawn
-noon
-dusk
-midnight
-darkest hour

i hope you enjoyed dawn… see you at noon.

writer

i owe everything to God.

synopsis

all jezebel singer wants to do is dance. just dance. a tennessee girl now living to the whims and temptations of hollywood. but she has a role to play here. as a pawn, in a game, with a special God given gift to dance like no one ever before. for when jesse dances, doors open to worlds seen and unseen. but there's a devil in this city that sees her gifts, and wills to use jesse for ulterior motives. so, question is, will this devil, or devils, be able to tempt jesse away from the light, and tempt her into the dark. and take her deeper and deeper into the shadows. falling into the darkest of pits, into that abyss that leads straight into the haunts of hell. that, only time will tell. that... and jesse.