

Creator

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Staring at the ceiling of my bedroom, I laid in my boxers half-stoned and thought of her; whispered the strangely tumbling syllables of her name over and over again into the transcendent silence. Sierra Sierra! Their echoes would conjure her image for me. Translucence, the whisper of smoke, that's all she was anyway. I could form her; the water vapor from my hot breath could shape her body right here. I could, I could, I could! It was the beginning; Adam giving of himself, his body, bringing existence to clay-shaped Eve.

She was my Eve. We could enter the garden as though our reprise had never happened. Lying there, with baited breath, I waited.

This was truth to me then.

Sometimes I feel parameters shifting. All over it happens. Not a lot of people notice. It's like a housefly walking across the fake background of a movie. Black static, a blurb in the system, it's a pair of electric wings crawling all over New York City's skyline while the latest prince charming proposes to the paparazzi's favorite weekly flavor of flesh in the foreground; the moment when you realize what is, isn't.

Things just don't stand still very often.

I don't want to think about it.

One time I found a picture in the newspaper. It was of her. The grey and white photo showed a smiling tightly-sweatered student body president and a table with a brightly colored banner reading "K.I.D.S.!" which spilled over with donated care items, some canned foods, deodorants, shampoos, unmarked boxes, and even two neat little rows of shirts. I almost couldn't see her at first, these things almost blocking out her body, but she's there. Arms tightly crossed, back pressed up against the wall, she's there. There are some other women lined up by the wall too, forms almost out of the picture. They look broken, faded somehow and I'm glad Sierra is there helping them.

It was the quietest I felt in a long time, holding my breath while I cut out the newspaper clipping, separating her face from national issues, news of a local charity, symbols no longer important, clumsy and scared as a child with a pair of bright blue kid scissors cutting a window out of the world. She was there, planets in her eyes.

Carefully folding the picture back up along the already indented seams, I put the newsprint back in my wallet. I'm going to Chris' so I make sure I still have a fifty in my wallet too before I set it down on my bedroom dresser to I can pull on and zip up my pants; blue jeans, some off-brand. I grab a shirt too from the third drawer, cursing the left plastic gold handle when that side sticks and makes the right side jut out so far that it almost spills its contents all over my already messy room. Not that it matters. The clothes are dirty. Everything in this house is.

I tucked the faded brown leather into my back pocket. My old man gave the wallet to me after the bad time, when I got better and was better for a while, finally ready to leave white walls and move out. I had set up a lease to get a shitty room in a house down-town last year so I could go to school here and my dad came to help me move everything in. He had taken the day off for it and everything, kind of whistling under his breath when I parked the car in the driveway of some broken down muddy looking place, brown paint peeling under the shape of concaved rafters. He didn't say anything protesting the place though, just pulled out something small from his jacket pocket

before he left, a brown paper covered package knotted together with coarse string. I opened it, saw the wallet. He had showed me the little engravings of initials on the back, so proud of himself. W.K.G., H.J.G., A.E.G. My old man had smoothed one tired finger over the amber leather, eyes closed. William Kane Geoffs, Hazen Joseph Geoffs, Annie Elizabeth Geoffs. He had cleared his throat, patted me gruffly on the back, telling me that he had her initials put on there too because she would have been proud of me. Fuck, proud. What a joke. I tug on a dark green hoodie, my favorite. I'm out the door.

The usual crowd is there. None of the guys that show up week after week have a face, just hoods. Hoods and smoke. Chris deals. Black hood, the only one down and hunched around his shoulders, he's the only one seen. His face has a golden-like quality, light eyes, blond hair. He's beautiful but his face is carved, wooden and hollow except for the hard mouth everyone is turned towards. Waiting. Here you go fuckers, the blood and the body. He says this almost under his breath, he doesn't smile at this, neither do we. I pay for my sins, Andrew Jackson in exchange for redemption in a plastic bag. My last dealer overcharged me whatever he could but here I pay \$25 for mids, collecting my share of a new life, a fresh start, at least for a couple of hours. Chris sits down encompassing everything and looking at no one. A blunt is rolled, we wait for Chris to toke up, send it around the rest of us, the twelve gathered around him, anxious for what we've come for.

There's thirteen of us in all counting Chris. Thirteen. The age awkward adolescents are thrust into their teenage years, the age I first kissed a girl with my tongue. The age I was when I tried my first cigarette, bloodied a boy's face with my fist. Thirteen was the age I was when I found out. Stopped talking for a while, went away. It is the number of ill omens and bad luck. The only number most hotels skip over when numbering rooms that most skyscrapers refuse to have a floor for. It is the number Egyptians believed was the final step from death into everlasting life.

I look around the thirteen of us now, slouched in a circle. Darkly colored sweatshirts overflow two plaid couches, and three overstuffed grease-darkened beige chairs. One nameless guy I know only as 'freshman' sits on the floor, back leaned against a couch, face hunched over his legs. Chris is at the head of the circle, legs and body spread wide on a crimson high-backed leather chair with scrolled arms, the leather curling into tight O's at the ends. He is the one rolling the blunt. Chris does not speak and so neither does anyone else. I can hear the others breathing; fast, slow, shallow, and deep and haggard. He moves his chair closer to the living room table, a cheap wood covered with marked lines forming innumerable "fuck yous," scrawled lyrics, countless drawings of penises illustrated with a range of artistic ability, one spiraling line of "destination wherever" repeated over and over until finally trailing off and drowning on the table's edge. Chris is the first, takes a hit before passing the joint to his left, blowing smoke crowns over his head, geometrical infinities escaping into the secrets of chipped plaster walls, framing a room ornamented with a flat panel TV, a hot PS3, a colorless carpet, and one Bob Marley poster.

I look around. I am waiting. I watch the second, the third, the fourth passing the blunt, immersed, baptized. I wait still and I think again about the thirteen, about what the Egyptians believe. A gray hood beside me coughs, passes me the blunt. I grasp the weed, hungry for heaven.

I take the 50 home late. I am alone. There is one other person on the bus, towards the front, someone black, someone old, and he doesn't look at me. I'm in the back, white, a high-on, a stoner. In the present we are never the same. I stare out the window but I don't want to see my reflection, corporate America swimming furiously across my features as we pass. As 'I,' rather than 'we' pass, I tell myself. Two Banks, apartment complexes, a Meijer, a BK, the silhouettes burn against a few choking trees as I sit alone in a metal box that moves for me. Through the glass, I watch scattered leaves trying to breath through regurgitated sulfur.

I saw a tree get struck by lightning once. I was nine, it was the most horrible beautiful thing I had ever seen. I remember it held its arms outstretched to heaven for weeks, charred and pleading. I watched its prayers.

Our neighbor cut it down. Nothing stands still. I don't want to think about it.

I get back to the house, the room and the kitchen that I am paying rent for in someone else's home, the olive green kitchen grounded in faux-wood paneled floors that stretch from the first floor to my upstairs bedroom.

Now I just want to lie in bed and smoke, form Sierra right here, I want to, I need to, I need to! We have one class together, twice a week. One hour and forty minutes in total every seven days. I sit in the back, my body leaned forward, contorting myself in half over a cheap classroom desk, skin perspiring, waiting. I watch her.

It's not enough.

I climb up the stairs to enter my room, running one hand across the previous owner's floral printed wallpaper, reading Braille in the petals and cheap wallpapering creases, the mistakes. Lying in bed, I pull out my wallet, toying with the flaps until my hand grasps inside the smooth folds of leather, seeking and withdrawing her. My mind begins spiraling randomly like a frenzied afterimage, I suffer immediately. She is the staccato of what burns white-hot under blind eyelids, nymph-embers dissipating fluid, out of reach, out of realm.

I fall asleep clutching her photograph, the newsprint crushed like moth wings in my palm. My dreams shift and shake.

Monday. Biology 103, Psychology 101, Intro to Spanish. I toss off my comforter and reach for the jeans I wore yesterday. I'm going to Chris'.

Chris doesn't look up when I walk in, he knew it was me, recognized me by my three quick knocks and he doesn't acknowledge my presence. We both understand this. He is in his chair, back domed over showing how skinny he has started to become, spokes of bone circling through his black t-shirt up his arched spine, a halo of blond covering his face as he crushes up pot leaves with a butter knife on the living room table in front of him. I pull out what I bought from him the day before but today he shakes his head silently at me, and smokes me down instead. The blunt is rolled. Neither of us speak. We smoke until I cannot see clearly through the haze.

Tuesday passes, Thursday passes. Sierra has not been in class. When I notice this, I don't get past the classroom's doorframe. I go to Chris'. I start going two times a day instead of smoking by myself, I smoke more and more, pot crystals like candles on an altar. Bowls are packed, leaves are crushed, sometimes I don't leave. The pattern is repetitive, calming; like memorizing a bible-verse by repeating the words over and over in your head. The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want. My dad used to say that to me before bed, when I started having nightmares and asking for a mommy. The nightmares didn't stop, but I quit asking. The last part... I shall not want is rewritten in my brain, I want, I want, I WANT! I get baked, high and dry, fucked up until I feel like the earth is brand new. Smoking until I feel Sierra only as a shadow of flight.

Chris changes this pattern one day, tells me he is having people over the upcoming weekend, that the chick I've got it for has told a buddy of his she's going to make it out. I don't eat dinner that night. Andrew Jackson buys me more redemption. I consume the substance which consumes me, I meet with the twelve, thirteen in total counting Chris. I am ascending, fighting for footing on the thirteenth step. I stop sleeping. I make believe I am praying though god is surely dead. I have made new gods. Language has abandoned me, one word left seared into my skull; Sierra.

'I'm not dealing anymore.' I feel something slack in my jaw. Chris had been leaving his house the same time I was seeking its refuge. We had intersected on a street corner. We had no true location. Why I asked him. because I'm tired. I'm leaving. I'm going to China. I asked him why he was going. I didn't understand. He looked away before answering. Pulled a cigarette from his Carhart's pocket, shielding the flame tenderly as one would shield a child from the cold as he lit up. Cig glowing, he met my eyes for the first time since I had started worshipping him, understanding what his way of life could mean for me. I don't wanna die in this machine. I take this in, take it all in; the grind, the grey. Cigarette halfway smoked, Chris pulls it from his lips, two fingers flick-

ing the bud to the ground. I watch the glow of burning ash start to cease, suffocating on the dirty pavement, smoke melting away on tiptoe. But why China? I am meek, I am nothing, but I must ask. I do not understand. Hell. He is exasperated he is looking through me and then at me and then through me again, as though he is looking at something I don't recognize within my own face. His hard mouth forms a silent O while he exhales, Hell, he says again, Haze, everybody needs something.

It is the first time I've ever heard him acknowledge my name.

'Freshman' told me today that even though Chris's going to be gone, his party is still going to be on. It's planned for this Saturday. I wonder if he knows where Chris is going, if he talked to Chris about leaving, or if he just found out as a heads up, to find a new dealer. It doesn't matter, Chris already left. I don't know when. I smoke all that I have left from him. I don't get out of bed. I hold my wallet and my news clipping in each clutched hand. I am talking to her. I am waiting for her. I memorize what she is wearing in the picture. I pretend she is on her way to see me. She loves me and I love her.

A green hood smokes me down before anyone shows up Saturday, I buy some booze beforehand too, I'm not 21 yet but it doesn't matter at Eastman's. The twelve of us are the first at Chris', showing up with brown bags and bottles, Five O'Clock, tequila, and even some five-finger discounted patron spilling over the dirty living room table as we pour and drink and drink. Someone brought a beer bong and another someone in grey kneels before him pounding natty ice. We talk words that don't matter, Ratatat moving around the room from the speaker, no one sits in the blood-red chair. Freshman stills sits on the ground, working through a six pack of bud in front of him, his back against the front of the couch. We don't wait too long and people come in herds. The place gets packed wall-to-wall.

The PS3 has already gone missing but everyone smiles real big or else drinks real fast and by now, disorientation has already become another line crossed, spun, and re-crossed. Music crawls up my vertebrae, pulsing, pulsing. I am searching, the faces shine like glass, shattering and breaking the surface of a blur of acid colors but I seek only one.

And then, there she is; an echo of light, a constellation of freckles over a map of skin stretched tight. I see her, close, press against bodies to find a place near her, find her skin weaving over broken bird-bones contorted by scoliosis, as though she is built painfully; all angles, clavicle, elbow, a jutting ribcage kissing a spine always yet facing away from me, streaming up a torso to join the hard knots blooming under a sweater too big for her.

She turns, a half-empty bottle in her hand catching the light and splaying the walls with underwater blue.

Her footsteps leave silver puddles in the hallway.

I follow.

I wait outside the bathroom for her, clutching this moment as a fantastic catalyst close and dear in butterfly palms, my ear pressed up against the door because she is alive, existing so close to me. I need to hear her breathe. The toilet flushes and she pushes the door open far harder than necessary, her feet at awkward angles as she considers me, eyes heavy-lidded with lust. She didn't see me follow her but it doesn't mater. I kill myself a thousand times within a split second, electric, to rise to touch her hand. Feel her respond. And just through that touch, I know. I know that we can be sound and shape and spill together over what we don't want to see and what we choose to be real.

Chris' room is to the left, first door down the hall before the bathroom. Her hand is soft, my mouth is hard, hungry. I clutch the doorknob, twisting, entering. I enter with her, she loves me. We are the creators.

Oh God! Breath caught sharp in my throat, I stumble out into the hallway, out of Chris' room, away from Sierra still sprawled out heavy across the bed. Oh God! There had been buttons and

zippers and a shirt over the head and underwear slid to the floor as unveiled her. But then I shattered and stopped, there were bruises! Pale skin and goosebumps, I saw bruises. Bruises. Handprints, fingertips, branches jagged around her throat, clasped on her left forearm, a purple flower drunken-bloomed poison on a lower lip I had loved once when we had been in Eden.

And I wondered how I had never seen them before. And she had had tears in her eyes as I stared at her now; angry and naked and clumsy and scared behind some stranger's closed bedroom door and she told me Fuck you! Because I was just a boy on a bed at a party. Looking at her. Looking at her hungry the way someone had looked at her hungry and torn her apart. And maybe it wasn't me that had given her bruises, but maybe it could have been. Maybe it would have been if she had been my daughter or my girlfriend or just a girl I could have taken into my arms and lied to.

I turned around, ran out into the hallway, something infinite had been encased. Every fiber of my being began disengaging and then reforming, renewing and burning, exploding! One of Chris hooded disciples looked at me smug, Sierra, huh? He smirked, Like a deer caught in the headlights he said, his body swaying a bit as he said this, brown alcohol tipping onto his jeans.

I didn't like when he said that, didn't like the thought, a doe, clumsy and scared, held in the trance of apathetic metal seconds before its limbs, such jumbled porcelain limbs, were to be smashed and bloodied; a tangle of teeth and tires and a squeal of wheels on the road. But she was the animal with the wet eyes, limbs arranged before the slaughter. I loved her for this. Everyone loves what they can destroy.

And then realizing this, the bad thing came back, came back sharp and hard and fast. Like at thirteen when I found out, the day I stopped talking because I was thinking and thinking and thinking and thinking about a corpse, a carcass dissected! He/she flesh on a tray. My dad talking to me for the first time about my mom, about my mom's heart disease. That he was sorry I had found out that way, a black-lettered coroner's report out on his desk. He told me I hadn't done it on purpose, that she knew it was a risk.

Heart disease. Heart Complications. She died while in childbirth. Her heart stopped so that mine could beat. Life was too big for her to cling to so she gave it to my mewling mouth, blind newborns, pink and paralyzed yet yearn, still soft in the yolk of existence. She took from her body to feed me, the destruction of one for the creation of another, and I was hungry, greedy. And I took it.

I killed her.

I threw my body against the front door, falling onto the grass. Where was my wallet? I pulled out my news clipping. Where was Sierra? What had I seen? Where was she? I scanned the top of the article titled "K.I.D.S., the Local Charity for Kids in Distress Services." Looked at her photograph, chin jutted, arms tightly crossed. She was in line for aid with the other women and their kids, not running it for them. I saw for the first time what I had rewritten in my head; a victim rather than the redeemer, the separation, of good and evil, of families, of idealism and reality, the despair rather than the smug smile on the blond student-body president's face. It was the first day I can ever remember where I felt solidity, the heaviness of gravity the concrete machine and its grind beneath me.

The destruction of one for the creation of another, except this time I had created her, my Frankenstein, on a cross, hung so that I could have a Christ, created so that the nails that pierced her skin could be the wounds that freed me. Everybody needs something.

My body began to shake violently, quaking with the weight of an existence I stole, the fall from a world I had wrongly created, my love, my idol destroyed! My God, my religion. My false-sense of salvation had been a lie. A reality I invented.

Creation. Destruction. I needed to purify, baptize, become reborn. Binding ethereal domes create, create, and collide when what is, isn't. I wanted to cleanse, cleanse myself from the human race, a monster, a murderer! Mass had baptized me with water in the past, but I still stood, as terribly human as we all are! I had baptized myself with earth, cannabis leaves leaving me in a haze, transcending the world yet only falsely, only in detachment, denial! I needed a purifying force,

farther than water and earth...Fire! The fire of the holy spirit, it was all I had for hope of redemption. Sweating in the grass, I picked myself up, organs choking and beating strangely as though I had recently discovered the operation of my stolen body, I fell and crawled, back to my house, back to where a wood-paneled drawer held the three last matches. I kissed the top of each, the divine trinity; the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit, or maybe it was Sierra, my mother, and Chris.

And as I struck them against the sandpaper, I wondered vastly where the soil was... the soil from whence I was supposed to have come and where Sierra or my mother or whoever anyone ever loved without really seeing them; that girl, that beautiful person (but lord don't we all try and wish to be beautiful! Don't we, oh please lord, we try)! had been shaped, I wondered where was the clay...

I woke up in St. Joseph's hospital March 13. Thirteen, the number of ill omens, a focal point for superstitions but also the last step in the Egyptian's belief of transcending from death to everlasting life. I woke up swimming in white sheets, brown dirty hair escaping from white bandages covering my forehead from when I fell to convulsions on the floor, flesh still crawling with flames. Convulsions like I had before, the bad time, when I was thirteen and had to be admitted for a while. It was the time I found out about my mom, saw the coroner's report for the first time, and stopped talking. Hurt myself. Now I am wrapped up too tightly to try. My doctor says I qualify for some new medication and we are working on my sense of stability, my faith in human nature.

I'm going to be away for a while.

I wake up screaming sometimes, because I remember. And because I remember, I light myself on fire again and again in my dreams, my third-degree burns and seared flesh strangling the rest of me so that I am the suffering. Almost consumed by that which I had attempted to completely consume me.

The doctor said I am getting skin grafts. He explained that they were going to take out what is dead and charred and are using the skin that is healthy and alive for something new to grow. I have become the tree that was struck by lightning, the one I watched pray for new life, except in this case, I held the lightning rod and I'm scared that now I've destroyed the god who would hear my plees.