

Let Us Enjoy the Night

I knew Josh thought we would sleep together at night because we had gotten a hotel room together, and also because we had slept together in the past. I had no intention. I was very intent on not.

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I picked him up from New Orleans airport. I sat in the cell phone lot and cleaned out my car from all the crap I had collected during my road trip. Mostly, it was receipts and bags. Things surrounding goods and services. The goal of my trip was to see the country a little before I started looking for a job. By the looks of the receipts, I'd been to about seventy different Walgreens.

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"Good to see you, Mars," he said. He looked pale from Maryland winter. Immediately he turned on the radio. "Have you found the classic radio stations yet?" he asked.

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We argued about how to get to our hotel. He argued he was right because he had been to the city before. I argued because I had a map and knew I was right. I had already gone from Maryland to California to Louisiana with nothing but a road atlas and a compass, and I had only gotten lost once in the Research Triangle in North Carolina. I was right, but he wanted to be an expert.

The hotel was in the French Quarter, and he had stayed there one time before with his best friend Simon, who I'd slept with. I've slept with them both--not at the same time but consecutively in the same evening, at Simon's parents' pool. Simon followed by Josh. I just couldn't do one without the other--that's how it goes with best friends. It was a matter of

balance, I felt at the time. I was really intent on leaving that jazz behind me. However, I did indeed try to rekindle something with just Simon in L.A. He said I could stay with him so I did, but it was no good, in the end, because he was probably a sociopath. That's my answer for everything these days. When I have a bad exchange with a cashier or someone--sociopath.

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The hotel was booked in Josh's name. A few weeks ago, before I went on the first leg by myself, he came up with the idea. He said I should swing by New Orleans on my trip, and he'd meet me there and show me around. And we thought it'd be funny to pretend to be a married couple. I mean not pretend--I should have clarified that. In name only. I had never been called "Mrs" anything and was years away from anyone calling me "ma'am" in public. A valet named Eric took my car away. I was glad I had cleaned it. Eric was tall and had the good trapezoid shoulders. I wanted to tell him that I wasn't really Mrs. Klein.

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The double bed looked too small. There wasn't a couch or a loveseat. I had just recently slept on Simon's loveseat out of anger, so I know it can be done. I didn't say any of this out loud. Josh looked happy with the room, and I let him be. The room had a balcony to the hotel's courtyard and pool, covered for spring. To us it was beautiful and warm, but not to the city, so the pool was covered. "Should we smoke a j before dinner?" he asked. He opened his suitcase on the bed. His clothes looked like they had been packed by the elder Mrs. Klein. I said I would take a hit. I knew he was trying to do his thing.

Sometimes he texted on his phone while we settled in, and I knew it was with Simon. He smoked a cigarette on our balcony while I changed my clothes in the bathroom. I'd imagined all this crazy shit--him disappointed that I wouldn't change in front of him. I could never tell if I

was perceptive or just self-centered. I knew he'd seen me naked and been inside me. I categorized everything differently.

While I was changing and thinking about this, I decided to poop. I considered opening the door and carrying on a conversation with him. He's trying all these ways to seduce me, and I'm scheming how to subtly disgust him. That's a type of balance.

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I came out and Josh was watching the TV on mute. "The A-Team is so strange on mute," he said. He was watching a local old man channel, the one for people like my dad who are holding out against cable. "We could stay here, just watch Colombo. What do you think?" he asked.

"Seems a waste, isn't it?"

"Yes, but worth an ask."

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Above my lashes, I made a line on top of a line. I tried to make them look like the same line. It was the greatest pleasure for me. I never put any liner under my eyes because I have tendencies to look tired anyway. But I did, just a little. I wanted to be sexy for the entire city. I imagined people thinking, "Who is that girl?" I imagined Eric nodding in the lobby while we went out.

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Eric wasn't in the lobby when we went down. Josh asked the woman who checked us in for a restaurant recommendation. "Mrs. Klein and I are looking for dinner," he said, not even looking at me, but smiling. He was very funny at times. He was big, bearish, wearing a large silver star of David necklace. He wore a hat because he was balding. Simon had taken up the habit, too, and I tried to talk him out of it, because Simon is not balding. But some men just

like to wear hats at this age. A big collection of stupid hats. One day they'll be bald and old and horrible, and they'll wish they hadn't wasted their twenties wearing Cuban revolutionary hats.

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The street was wet and black, and the air was muggy. Mardi Gras had been a month before. The restaurant was above a bar, up a narrow staircase. They didn't take our name but the girl wrote something down on a list. We decided to get drinks in the bar downstairs. The stairs made me realize I was a little buzzed from the smoke.

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Everyone in the bar seemed to know each other. It was full of mismatched pairs pretending to be couples. I ordered a cranberry and vodka and leaned down into the bar, down and open. The bartender was nobody special. I could see a mirror behind all the liquor bottles in their bleacher seats. I could see the tops of my eyebrows beyond the jagged picket fence of the bottle tops, the pourer spouts. Josh got us a perch near the band, the piano player and the drummer. They were old men wearing stupid hats, the puffy denim newsboy hat.

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"What should we do while we wait?" he said. "Oh, you're a planner."

"A planter?"

"A planner," I said, pantomiming someone writing with a quill. He Ahh'd.

"I am up for anything," I said. What a lie!

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What I really wanted was not quite possible yet. Josh and I hung out in Maryland, smoking weed in his mom's basement and watching torrented movies on his laptop. I hit the space bar so often to pause the movies and talk with him. One time he remarked on my bra color, glimpsed through the dumb gap in my button-down shirt. I tried not to wear button-

downs around him since then. I don't assign him any blame. He's a gentle giant who needs to get laid, and he has a reasonable belief he can make it with me.

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After the band took a break, he went to go talk to the drummer. What do musicians say to each other? Hi, I'm a musician.

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Crab ravioli upstairs. Our table was near an open window with a tree I didn't remember seeing downstairs. Outside, a bead necklace leftover from Mardi Gras tangled in the branch. I could reach outside and get it, I said. Josh said, "You should." But I wanted other people to see it. Other people have had this same conversation, I thought. Other girls on dates with fake husbands, wearing hats. I wanted that train to go on forever. I shrugged because I didn't him to know about it.

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We went back downstairs for more drinks. I pressed myself into the bar again. I held onto the bar and tipped myself backwards, like I was going up a roller coaster. Josh said, "What are you doing?"

"Getting a feel for the place," I said. He let me say things like this. He placed a flat, healing-type hand on my back. "Put it on my tab," he said. I looked up and to the left at him, but he was talking to the bartender. He thought he was in a movie.

"So who are you?" The bartender asked him. I laughed and immediately poured my drink into my mouth.

"And what's so funny to you, little wife?" The band had stopped playing, so the words were painted on the walls in childish yellow letters. A man to my right looked over at me, like he wanted to know, too.

Then I saw Simon in the corner, but what the wild fuck--that isn't Simon. That man doesn't even look like him, apart from the hair. Hair makes a man, I wanted to say to Josh. I wanted to press the space bar and pause the entire room so we could banter. I even put my palm down and tapped the bar with my two fingers.

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Isn't this normal? Doesn't everyone have this experience?

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Josh and Simon had known each other forever. They were matched in the womb. The first time I saw Simon was at an awkward fourth of July picnic when we were teenagers. When he smiled, it was lopsided, like pulling one cord but not the other on venetian blinds. He could just draw it up like that.

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We all knew each other in high schools from overlapping circles. Josh and Simon and other Jewish boys from one high school, and the shiksas in my high school. The boys were funny and smart and some of them had striking coloring. They appreciated bosoms of all shapes and sizes and didn't mind if we were a little ugly or a little overweight.

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Josh talked to the drummer again during the band's break. The drummer had a withered auburn goatee. He took off his jean pouf hat and he had a withered crown of hair to match. He looked intensely friendly, perhaps the nicest drummer I could imagine. Josh played the drums, too, and was very good. He might be like this man. I watched them talk a little bit and I ordered another drink for myself. I couldn't remember if I ordered a double, but it was barely pink. I realized every single person in the room was drunk. I'd never had that sensation in a public space. A group of women, tight red shirts to hold it together, stretchy

black hostess pants, left the bar with their drinks. In New Orleans, you could drink on the street. Drinks were served in plastic cups. It must cripple the barback union. Why would there be a barback union?

“What?” said a man next to me.

“Sorry?”

“What’s a bar-be-cue-nion?” His hair was overgelled, and he was anywhere from 20-38.

“Were you reading my mind?”

You are talking out loud,” he said as I realized I had been talking out loud.

“Did you hear me thinking about Josh?”

“No,” he said. He looked disappointed. “What do you think of him?”

“Oh you know,” I said to my drink. “The usual. What do you think?”

“I don’t know who he is, but if he’s breaking your heart, girl, he’s not worth it.”

Josh and I were outside the bar, smoking cigarettes. This area was not really the French Quarter. It was to the right of it--the East. Josh had told me, “This was what Bourbon Street used to be like, before the tourists.” There was no way that he knew that firsthand. He was like a tightly curated book of quotations.

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I’m not doing a good job explaining him. I cared about him a lot. Even though he was pretending to be a Grateful Dead roadie, I saw through it. He was intensely sensitive. Something that we both were thinking, often, was that he and I had already slept together. We were in Simon’s backyard pool, about three years ago, the three of us. Simon had always intrigued me, and I think it was mutual, but I could never crack him. Josh I could actually talk to. If they were one person, I would have eloped. We smoked up to the clouds.

They both took off their swimsuit trunks, playing the part of the carefree Jewish boys who make no secret of their horniness. Jewish boys are very playful about it. They never pressure you, they just take out their dicks and say, Don't mind me, I'd just like to get a little air.

Simon said, "Please feel free to take off your top."

I said, "I would, but my tits are slightly uneven. I don't like to show them off." Simon said, "Let me see," like a doctor, like a junior camp counselor.

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We walked back towards our hotel. I said, "Let's go towards Bourbon Street." Josh groaned, and I grabbed his forearm, thick as a sofa arm. "I'm mostly kidding." I gave him my best, most even smile. I directed the pleading to travel from my face down through my fingers, so he could feel how sorry I was.

There was no street for cars in Bourbon Street, just a long pedestrian path with curbs as obstacles. The signs above the bars and shops advertised voodoo and jazz, but people walked in and out of the places as if they were all different rooms of the same house.

Drunk, open tourists walked in pairs or occasionally in groups, a row of women followed by a row of men. They were distinctly adults, mostly in their late 30s and early forties. The men wearing striped button downs tucked into khakis, their faces runny with sweat. The women swayed together, in sleeveless shirts of a high quality.

I watched two women facing each other as they walked, each gripping the others' wrists. "I go to an Asian woman," one said to each other. "I will definitely give me--give you her name when we get back to the hotel."

"Please do," the other said, as they walked sideways into Sonny's Jazz.

Josh moved so he was in front of me. "Listen," he said. "We are not going into any of these places." But by saying it he had already admitted he could be persuaded.

"Just one, that one."

"I'm not going in any place playing 'Sweet Home Alabama.'"

"No it's a jazz lounge."

"That's what they say but these tourists come and they want the jazz experience but they don't actually like jazz. They want 'Sweet Home Alabama' and 'Hit the Road Jack.'"

"Don't say you wouldn't dance with me to that." I walked us towards Sonny's Jazz. There was no door, per se. A wall missing, guarded by several equipped bouncers. Nothing to do with Josh, who was as big as them and, despite the hat, very tough- looking.

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There was no bar that met Josh's approval, so we kept walking towards the water, back to our hotel. We got one drink in Sonny's and carried it over to another place, and then I don't remember, and then we decided to leave. We each carried a drink. Josh talked now and then about racism or music when it struck him. I kept thinking about taking my shoes off. The thought intruded repeatedly.

"Are you having a good time?" he asked.

I didn't understand how those words hung together. I had to say it slowly under my breath, while Josh looked at my mouth.

"I keep thinking about taking off my shoes."

"I could just carry you."

"Oh go ahead, then," I said, slipping into a British accent. I started laughing. He picked me up, his hands under my back and knees. The laugh fell out of me and I felt like I lost my voice. After a block I tapped his head and he put me down.

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I didn't know why he didn't pull the trigger and ask me out. We got along well.

Unfortunately, every time I thought about him and Simon conferring on the phone, about the best way to rub me--worse than the hats. Pure contempt. Still, a small part of me liked the idea of being a puzzle, to someone. Which is a toy, an object, but at least it's a *puzzling* object.

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On the street Josh was talking about racism something something while we walked. We passed three young guys in polos. Imagine being with three, I told myself.

“Hey,” one of them said, one in a blue polo. He came up to Josh. “Shabbat shalom.”

“Shabbat shalom,” Josh said back, and they clasped hands as if arm wrestling.

“Oh you’re a Jew?” came a voice from the side. We all turned around to a short man in his forties, smiling with his mouth open. “Jews are the good people on this earth. Let me shake your hand,” he said, and the three polos and I watched as the man, a good foot shorter and beaming like something’s unhinged, shook Josh’s hand like he met Magic Johnson.

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If I am very very honest, I do not remember every minute of my time with Josh, though it was only three years ago. I feel like he expects me to remember more. I was floating on my back in the water while Josh held my hips. Simon was out of the pool, facing away and looking out at the yard. He was using my towel around his waist. I heard you are supposed to have a flood of hormones after sex. But I was out of hormones. I looked back at Josh, who had an expression like he was playing a serious and religious game of pinball. I worried very much that he had seen me watching Simon. But he held that pinball expression. He was there, there, and I was floating around. He was focusing so hard with his whole body, pumping like he could keep me from drifting towards Simon, which he couldn't.

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The man Hugo invited the two of us--the polos left--to his apartment to smoke and talk. After Josh gave a look to me (I shrugged and raised my eyebrows--why the fuck not) we left with Hugo.

He lived around the corner and was on his way home from his shift. "I'm a doctor," he said. Hugo talked to Josh with both of his hands, and paid little attention to me. I studied the back of his head.

I never thought much about wrought iron before I went to New Orleans, but now I was thinking about it all the time. Hugo's gate, to Hugo's weedy garden filled with some porch furniture that might be Hugo's.

"I got out of rehab today, and then I worked a full day."

"That's crazy, man. You got out today?" Josh turned to me: Is he for real?

For a moment I had forgot I was really there. Josh's look caught me and I smiled. I was a little happy to know I was still around. A shaved cat followed us up the stairs to Hugo's apartment. His head and tail were unshaved, and the remaining hair looked geometric and dense.

"Don't mind Bunny. He got his spring haircut."

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Hugo had a roommate, who wore sweatpants cut into shorts and sat on a red futon, legs crossed, facing a turned-off television.

"Todd, you don't mind I brought these people here? I was hoping we could smoke some of your weed. I always say," he faced Josh again, "get a good gay roommate. They're the best." I looked to Todd to see if he was normal or if he was like Hugo.

The room seemed dim, low-ceilinged to me, layered with beige throw rugs. Todd did not stand up at all, but waved to us in a way we knew he had done before.

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Hugo told Josh again about his rehab, said he was actually a nurse but sometimes told people he was a doctor. I sat next to Todd, thinking of some way to apologize for everything I had ever done in my life. I flexed my feet, happy to be off them.

After Todd had passed the joint back to Hugo, he motioned me into the kitchen. "You look like you need some orange juice, like I do."

Todd had a long wheat curl creeping down the back of his neck, almost like a rat-tail. He poured himself some orange juice in the same Garfield mug I had at home. I used it for oatmeal.

"What kind of cup suits you?" He did a Vanna White on an open cupboard full of mugs and glasses. A blue tumbler reminded me of the one I used when I was in Josh's basement watching movies. "Have you ever put ice your OJ?" he asked.

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Todd then put vanilla vodka in our cups and took me on a tour of the apartment. From the living room I heard Hugo say, "But the politics are just little salt crystals left over. That doesn't matter a fucking bit." Josh looked up at me as we passed by, and I gave a wave. He looked down over my body. Hugo kept on, occasionally touching his kneecaps with the balls of his hands for emphasis.

Todd's room was brighter and neater than the living room, but still shabby, like my college dorm. What did I expect? Some lush satiny room like the inside of a jewel box?

"So are you two really married?" he asked.

"Oh no. We had sex a few years ago."

“Right. And this is his little fantasy vacation!” He laughed. “Now it makes sense.”

“I had sex with his best friend, too, at the same time.”

“Holy shit?”

“Sometimes I feel glamorous,” I said. “But it hangs around us.”

“It follows you around.”

“I think I’ve, like, outsmarted it and left it behind. But he whips it out again every time he looks at me.”

“You’re still fucking that friend, aren’t you?”

“Todd, how did you know? What are you?”

Todd shrugged. “I teach at a Charter school a few miles away.”

“I feel like I want to give you a present.” Outside the window I heard a meowing. Todd got up and peeked through the blinds.

“Bunny, get away.” He pulled on the cord. Bunny clawed at the bottom corner of the screen window and cried in long wails. “He thinks this place is the fucking place for him.” Todd swatted at the screen but Bunny continued. “Like it’s not a heap of trash. Ugh--Bun I love you, you whore, I’m going to spritz you until you understand. Be right back.” Todd left me sitting on the edge of the bed. I looked around the room like there might be something I could give to Todd for knowing me.

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Back in the main room, the air felt thinner, or thicker. It came more easily into my lungs. On top of a bookcase I hadn’t noticed before, I saw a collection of rocks, organized neatly by size. I walked over to them.

“Don’t touch those,” Hugo said from the futon. “Can you tell her to back away?”

“Mars,” Josh said, but I didn’t need it. I thought about giving him the finger but I

gave him the peace sign instead.

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Hugo said he had a gift for us that he was keeping in the bedroom. He returned with two walking sticks in his hands. They were made of pale gray wood, beautifully smooth. "I made both of these myself," he said. He handed the tall one to Josh. Todd was texting on the white futon.

Josh accepted it with both hands. "Out of what?" The stick was straight, but forked up into the air with joy. A length of yellow cord had been wound loosely at the top.

"Things by the river. Driftwood and ropes. I'd like you to have them. Josh, and your wife." Hugo handed me the shorter stick, decorated at the top with a thicker black rope. It felt nice to hold.

I watched my hand run itself along the cord. "We're not married," I said. Josh's face, I could have cross-stitched that onto a pillow. I could have put it on a mug for my oatmeal. But he didn't say anything. He just stared at me, and not angrily. He stared with the glorious plainsong of complete shock.

"By any other name," Hugo said. He tried to light a glass blue-swirled pipe, but could not coordinate his fingers on the lighter. Hugo was on Saturn and did not comment further. If Josh were quick, I thought, he'd take advantage of this. He had a gold Zippo in his pocket.

Josh sat up with a creak from the futon. He pulled out the Zippo and lit the pipe for Hugo. Now he should say something about the Zippo. It was from his grandfather and was inscribed with the grandfather's name. The stories he could spin from that. But nothing came besides the haggard puffs of our host.

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Simon, on the other hand, was a fantastic liar. He was a devil-hearted dickbag who exhaled lies. In Los Angeles, he took me to In-N-Out. We went three times in two days before it fell apart.

The last time, while we stood in line, an overweight woman wearing very tight, very thin cotton pants came right up to Simon. “Did you see him? Have you met him?” I expected church words to follow, since those people can usually spot Jews and athiests so easily.

“Who?” Simon had said, acting earnest.

“The man I left with. He’s the same as the man we came together with.”

“I myself am looking for him. What name does he go by?” Simon scratched his cheek and then opened his palm towards her, as if asking for a tip.

“To me, he knows we’re watched, so he goes by Walter Cronkite.” “Yes, Walter. He left a message saying to meet him at the hospital.”

“I don’t trust hospitals.”

“That was the message Walter gave me.” Others in line were listening now. “Ok. He’s a snake sometimes with those things.”

“Absolutely. Aren’t we all sometimes? Best of luck to you.” Then he shook her hand and she left.

“L.A. is full of nutties,” he said, and I thought, he is a nutty, this is his nuttiest. But then I could not have foreseen that he would be so terrible later that night.

Two nights in a row he had creped his hand over to my side of the bed, and that led onto other things, and I welcomed it. I had forgotten about the pool and felt there was a very good balance. The sex was fine, but mostly it felt honest. I can never see my own bullshit. But that night after the nutty, while we were in bed I creped my hand over. He said, “I think this is a bad idea.”

I yelled a hot fireball and slept in his living room. Except for the loveseat where I curled up, the whole room was furnished with nothing but black rectangular Ikea furniture. I thought I would never stop hating Ikea furniture.

I slept well, and thought about leaving before he woke up, but I wanted to yell at him more. I did, but it didn't go well, because he's a snake sometimes with those things. He spun it so.

"I see you getting attached," he said.

"I do not fall in love with everyone I've fucked," I said, and I quickly reviewed to make sure that was true. It was! I had slept with five people, two of them in the same night, and I had never been in love with any of them.

"I know you've been interested in me since the pool." He was making cereal, like a true puckery asshole.

"Fuck, no. You have it backwards. I was interested in you *before* the pool, and thus we had sex *at* the pool."

"Not everything is so logical, Mars." This is what you say if you want to make someone feel crazy.

"If I was all in lovey-love with you, then why did I fuck Josh?" I believe I meant it as a rhetorical question. But I really do not know the answer.

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And then I left L.A. and finally felt at home driving the freeway. L.A. drivers must all be scorned. And then here I was, watching Josh stare into middle distance. Hugo was talking about what it means to be a prince, and what it means to go through time--as opposed to going with time.

He started crying, but he seemed unaware of it. "The ancient Indians, from India

Indians, knew about the stars, and which ones kept us straight.” He wiped his eyes with his sleeve.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“You both don’t understand how much I care about this moment, this immediate moment. I know you’re listening, but do you understand?”

Josh threw me an irritating panicked look. So I picked up the reins. “Absolutely,” I said. “I’ve had the same thoughts. You’re saying them in a way I never thought of.” Hugo bobbed his upper body in rhythmic chokes.

“When I left rehab, I thought, ‘today the gods will show me a new door.’” “Doors open, doors close,” I said. “There’s always something new to restore balance.” Even I believed it. Josh, his feet flat on the ground, hands on his thighs, eyes straight into me, he believed it too.

Hugo turned to him. “Your wife says some smart things sometimes.”

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When Josh went to the bathroom, I followed him and shut the door behind us. The room did not quite accommodate us. I was trying not to touch Josh and I nearly knocked a Buddha off the toilet tank. “We have to get out of here,” I whispered.

“You do it,” he said.

“No, you need to. He dislikes me.”

“He loves you!” Josh whisper-shouted.

“I can’t tell. We have to get out of here. He tried to touch my boob,” I said, a lie. It poured out like a stream of smoke.

“Shit. I can’t deal with this. Shit.”

“I know,” I said. “But just pretend you’re a horrible evil liar.”

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We weren't far from the hotel, in the end. Eric the bellboy was smoking in the middle of the hotel courtyard, behind a locked gate. He regarded us and our giant driftwood sticks. He seemed to recognize us.

"Please let us in," Josh said through the gate. I kept expecting Hugo to appear. When we left, Hugo was asleep on the couch. "He is not awake," I had said. I tried to say goodbye to Todd. "He left a while ago," Josh had said. "God, me too," I said. We grabbed our sticks and left. I practically walked to the hotel backwards.

"Being chased by the night?" Eric said, and when I turned around he was smiling at me, and everything familiar came back.

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What I mean is that I was much more fucked up than I realized. The hallway to our room was too red, and I felt it made a mockery of my situation.

"I'm going to throw up on this carpet," I said.

"We're almost there, I think, hold on." He checked the keycard, though, to make sure of the room number. I had actually forgotten the rooms were numbered.

"No I'm going to throw up on this carpet because I hate it." "Oh, that's fine."

"But now I really am going to throw up for real."

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He stood in the doorway of the bathroom until I asked him to leave. All together, I only yakked three times. "Oh Bunny," I said into the toilet.

When I washed my face, Josh reappeared. "Are you okay?"

"Now I'm better." He seemed to fall asleep against the doorframe and I went straight for the bed. It still looked way too small, but he had smoothed the covers.

"It was a pretty good night," he said. "We've had some good times, Mars."

I think, I could just sleep with him.

“Remember the pool?” he said, lying next to me. We both were still in our clothes. He’s been working so hard, doing all he can. I could just do it as a show of friendship. I would not know anything.

“We could do it like the pool again,” he said. “But you wouldn’t shiver at all.”

“What? I don’t remember shivering,” I said. “You lie.”

“No I don’t. You were so cold later, your teeth were chattering when you tried to talk. You went to the grass and laid down between some towels. You really forgot all that?”

“No, I remember that.” I remember the sky was so black I thought I was choking. I remember my legs sticking out and touching the lawn. Simon's parents lived in the country suburbs, meaning the houses were large and far apart but not too much. There was, of course, a light on in the next house, and the window was open. I thought I saw a man in the window. I didn’t want to tell Josh or Simon. That man had watched us fuck in the pool in Simon's backyard. He watched me have sex with Simon, the devil, lose myself and find myself again, dovetailing with him. The man had seen me do that, and he had seen how I was. Then he saw Josh swim over, wordless and huge like a barge. He saw me do it all again with Josh but he knew I was faking it. I lay on the grass on my side, in bed between the two towels and watched the window in the neighbor's McMansion, waiting to see if the man would come back. That's what I remember.

“It would be different,” Josh said. It just about killed me. I thought he might drift off, but that rarely happens when there’s a chance for scoring. Still, he looked close to asleep.

“We’re too sick.” It was all I could say, and it wasn't completely false.

“Why don't we just watch this,” I said, and I got up. I nearly stumbled on my way to the TV. He didn’t say anything and I didn't look back at him.

The TV was still muted, on the old man channel. There was a lawyer ad, with a lawyer whose face looked like it was taxidermied.

After that there was an ad for a prescription, some joint disease I didn't even know existed. And here it was, more ill in the world. Without sound, though, the world seemed perfect. No voice listing side effects--or even explaining the disease. An older couple was in love, and they were taking ballroom dancing lessons. The woman had mid-length gray hair, flattering, and sweet blue eyes. Her ruggedly handsome husband had a broad, crinkly smile, and a full head of salt-and-pepper hair. Then suddenly they were hiking through the woods, attractively outfitted in hiking gear. They paused by a tree and crouched down, examining a caterpillar. The woods led to the beach, where they took off their gear and their shoes, and walked together on the sand. Then suddenly they sat on the sand. There's no reason to think it won't continue on like this.