

J.H.C.

Nature, being the wicked thing that she is, endowed upon us a disdain for darkness. Since the day we crawled out of the ocean, we've been hopelessly trying to quell the fear, the rider that rides alongside darkness. Check the locks, put on the porch light. Every night is a battle. The outcome always predictable. Surrender unconditional. Our bodies enter into a false stasis, hoping with more than a hint of desperation that if we say our prayers and live like good people, no evil will find us. It's all for nothing really.



Look down upon thy enemies. Offer them no quarter. For they are beyond forgiveness.



I need a night-light.



Immobilized by fear and rope. Wrist bound to wrist, foot bound to foot, sweating like a pig, even though the room's not the least bit balmy. Cool and dry like a fall evening in southern Arizona. Sweat rolls down the forehead forming into beads before drip, drip, dripping to the floor. Coalescing into a coagulation of dirt and sodium and chloride and water and whatever else perspiration is made up of. Miniscule puddles. Tiny transitory ecosystems. Little salty souls, lightly corrupted, slightly corrupted, both foul and sweet, waiting for their ascent into the heavens, ready at any moment to be reunited with their creator. Normally he sweats like this when sitting in the sauna after a gun-blasting work-out. There was no workout today though, just the darkness.



His mouth is stuffed full of Subway sandwich wrapping paper, sealed shut by duct tape. He can tell it's from Subway because he's eaten there a million times plus one. Many years ago while fantasizing about right-wing news channel anchor-women, a commercial came on the television. Normally he never paid much attention to the commercials during his long and arduous Foxy news masturbation sessions, but something was different

this day. With a sense of fury he quickly pulled the Tommy Lee Jones action figure out of his ass, leaned forward, and turned up the volume on his television set. The commercial discussed how some obese nerd, similar to himself in many ways, lost a bunch of weight by eating Subway sandwiches three goddamn times a day. He decided right then and there that he was tired of masturbating. He made an oath to himself, and Subway, and his shit-stained Tommy Lee Jones action figurine that he would consume their product no less than three times a day.



The helpless man is a follower, always has been as long as he can remember. But he is no longer a fat-ass. The Subway diet worked. Big arms, pecs, lats, traps, small legs though. Forever small legs. Muscles are his armor. A façade that the scared little fat boy hides behind. "Fat Boy, Fat Boy", they used to call him. They called him that so often he started to believe that was his name. *"I AM Fat Boy. Fuck them. Kill 'em all."*

Fat Boy never manifested his rage toward the antagonizers, but he didn't bottle it up either. He paid it forward, humiliating those whom he saw as weak. His harassers were not weak. They were strong, handsome, popular, everything he wished he could be. He finally became somewhat popular his senior year of high-school when he did that thing, that nasty, nasty, thing. They still called him Fat Boy, but they let him in the circle. Not the inner-inner circle, but they let him hang around. It felt good.

"It was worth it," he periodically reminded himself. The nightmares even stopped after a while, and eventually he got to the point where he could live with what he had done.



Fat Boy's shredded abs are his most prized possession. He likes to go to clubs and pull his shirt up to impress girls. He calls himself 'The Circumstance', like his favorite celebrity on MTV. He would love nothing more than to go to New Jersey and meet said celebrity, maybe hang out at some bitchin' club. Fat Boy likes to make it clear he isn't a gay, and believes that gay people should all be sent to the island of Madagascar or better yet, executed. He loves banging hot chicks.



There's a foul taste in his mouth now, tuna fish with banana peppers maybe. He can breathe through his nose, but not very well which can be attributed to his deviated septum. Fat Boy surveys the room. Unfamiliar surroundings. He feels like a baby zebra stolen from its mother, placed on display in a Parisian petting zoo. No one's here to see the baby zebra. It's night time. There's no mother zebra. No other animals. Only him.



Fat Boy tries in vain to shed his constraints, but soon realizes the circumstances necessary for an escape are without prospect, uncompromising, unattainable. To flee is no longer an option.

"Oh god, Jesus H. Christ. Fuck, Fuck Fuck", he screams through the wrapping paper, with each *Fuck* sounding more shrill than the last. Anxiety. Fat Boy will die today. He's an asshole. He falls forward onto his stomach. The ménage à trois of bone and flesh and concrete is both shocking and painful. Fat Boy manages to roll to his side. He thinks he may be able to get his feet free if he tries hard enough. He will not. He is FUCKED! Whoever did this to him knows how to tie shit really well. He hears a door open. The zookeeper has arrived.



The stranger is wearing strange pants. The kind with glow-in-the-dark neon colors, possibly a floral pattern. That's never a good sign.



A room minimally lit. One light bulb flickers dimly as it hangs overhead, wrapped around an industrial beam. The bulb is not the correct wattage.

"I bet its one of those damn energy saving bulbs." Fat Boy can't see shit; only his dried sweat stains on the floor are visible. His sense of smell is strong. He smells the urine on his clothes. His scent is a recipe of urine mixed with sweat topped off with a pinch of shit.



Fat Boy's captor stands motionless at the far end of the room. A silhouette shrouded in shadow. Fat Boy knows he's being watched. He can feel it. It causes him to wet himself, just like he did at night when he was an adolescent. His father was an angry man to say the least. He would wake Fat Boy up in the early morning hours sometimes by using a police taser on his sleeping body. The taser always made him wet himself. It was a horrible feeling.



The new arrival walks over to another part of the room. Fat Boy hears a clanging. Music starts playing. He recognizes the guitar riff. The track is called "Rumble". "Rumble" was released in 1958 by Link Wray & His Ray Men. Purely an instrumental track. According to grandmother's Encyclopedia Britannica, "Rumble utilized largely unexplored techniques like distortion and feedback." The song was banned from radio play shortly after its release. America is such a strange fucking place.



The music is loud now, really loud. The captor moves slowly toward Fat Boy. Playing an air guitar. Strumming the invisible guitar. Raising a hand high above the head, wiggling fingers, and then strumming again, playing right along with the music. Fat Boy watches with eyes wide open like an Australian marsupial, eating a banana or whatever it is those things eat, high up in a tree, always on the lookout for predators. One moment of complacency, one slip-up, a single mistake, can summon certain demise. Traumatic, gruesome, revolting death. The kind of death that's neither natural nor romantic. Mother Nature's a very naughty wicked girl. She's like a rebellious teenage daughter. Defying her father. Having sex with the devil.



Has this become my truth? Or does it belong to someone else. All I hear is an echo in my head. A place of great mystery and even greater misery. A world without reply, devoid of retort, absent absolution. Empty expressions traveling into unknown territory ultimately reaching a Herculean phalanx of resistance. Come back to me my friend, my lover. Every night paralysis sets in. I self-medicate. I make a pact with god. Pain and question and question and pain fade away. Wash. Rinse. Repeat cycle.



The captor stands over Fat Boy now. A rucksack drops to the floor, resting near the incarcerator's feet; sounds of metal touching metal resonate from within the sack, twisted voices ringing out in unison. AMEN BROTHER!!! Like an unholy choir made up of individuals whose spirits reside in damnation trapped in a world without time, without end. Centuries of mournful petitioning and sobbing have turned what once were voices into unintelligible noise. The confiner reaches into the bag and takes out a pair of scissors. Rusty scissors. Maybe wire cutters. Fat Boy doesn't know for sure. He's not much of a handyman. Fat Boy spends all of his excess time in the gym attaining larger arms, loving himself in self-absorption, or chasing tail. The captor leans forward and proceeds to rip off the duct tape covering Fat Boy's mouth. Fat Boy spits out the wrapper. "That hurt, faggot!"



Fat Boy is soooooooooo brave. So very, very, brave he is. He learned how to be brave when he was in ROTC, smoking underclassmen. "Smoking" someone is an Army phrase which basically means to make a person of lower rank perform calisthenics until they can no longer move. Fat Boy loved hazing the new recruits. Every semester when the fresh meat arrived for training, he would take them out to the volleyball pit and make them do calisthenics until they begged him to stop. He got off on that shit. Literally. He would get a hard-on watching their bodies break, watching them regurgitate their overly processed meals. Immediately after the sessions, Fat Boy would rush back to his room and 'beat his dick.' He would beat the flying fuck out of the little bastard. He beat that dick so hard for so many

hours straight, it'd get red as a motherfucker, looking like a goddamn piece of hamburger meat afterwards.



The person is looking at him, eyeballing him. The captor's face is obstructed. Cloaked by a hoodie. A hand grabs Fat Boy by the shirt and drags him over to what looks like a drain in the floor.

"Shit this asshole is strong. Tossed me like a rag-doll, and I'm two-hundred-and fifteen fucking pounds of muscle, twelve percent body fat."

The captor squats down, rusty scissors/hedge clippers in hand.

"What are you going to do to me?"

"I'm going to fucking kill you. Before that happens though, I'm going to cut some things off."

"Oh Jesus Christ help me."

"Don't say Jesus Christ. He was a skinny little man that died on a funny looking tree two thousand years ago. He won't save you. He couldn't even save himself."

The captor grabs Fat Boy's skinny-jeans, and undoes the buttons with vehemence. Fat Boy struggles, screams. Fat Boy's jeans are pulled off. This motherfucker is beyond strong, Fat Boy realizes, because those jeans were on super-tight. They are form-fitting jeans, for men. Fat Boy doesn't think they're feminine though.

"Please don't do this! Please!"

"Your cock is reaaallly small Faaaaaat Booooooy. That happens to a cock when someone is scared. A person might have a really big cock, but when they get scared it shrivels up, kind of like when you whip your cock out in really cold weather, or when you're peeing in urinal, and then a black man with a huge dick steps into the urinal next to you and you feel embarrassed because your own little white dick is so small.



"That's so nasty. Goddamn, dicks make me sick. I mean I have a hard enough time looking at the things normally, so yeah this is really grossing me out right now."

Snip. Snip. The torturer tosses an object over the shoulder. Fat Boy feels like he is losing consciousness. Fat Boy's face is slapped like your stereotypical street pimp would slap one of his bitches. The sting brings him back.

"You're in shock right now, but don't worry, you're not going to die yet. I'm going to do some really bad things to you first, and then I'm going to drink a can of my favorite soda, while I sit and watch you slowly die. Do you have anything you'd like to say before we begin?"



I recognize you.



"Yeah I got one question."

"And what would that be, please do ask."

Fat boy spits some blood out of his mouth. Clears his throat, and asks his question.



Fat Boy's body was discovered by a homeless transient some time later. The medical examiner was unable to determine the exact cause of death, mainly because the body was in such an advanced state of decay. But also because there were so many wounds, mutilations, missing appendages, etc., he couldn't say for sure which one or ones were the ones that did the

poor bastard in. Fat Boy's orifices had been violated, but the medical examiner felt like that information best be kept to himself.

The police questioned the homeless man for days until he finally broke down and admitted to being the killer. The case was closed, and the good Christian small town folk felt safe once again. The ladies spoke in hushed voices about the crime at their beauty salons and P.T.A. meetings. The old men in murmurs over morning coffee, shaking their heads, looking down at their withered hands, wondering how someone could do something like that. A few of the old men were veterans. They'd fought in Vietnam, Korea, a couple had even fought in the Pacific during WWII. They saw and did some bad shit, collected some war trophies, but that was war, and those were Japs. *You learn to live with it. You convince yourself that what you done was justified. You believe it. You get a job. Find a woman. Buy a house. Raise kids. Go to church. Vote. You dream about it though. You got no control over that. What you dream about, that is. That's when you see faces. Staring at you. Judging you. Waiting for you. Where are they? Why are they just standing there, looking at me? Don't they have somewhere to be? Fuck 'em. Let 'em wait.* People in THEIR town died of old age. Not like that. Thoughts buried in the past crept back into idle minds. Thoughts once thought to be long gone. Deceased memories floating face down, slowly sinking to the bottom of some putrid pond. Thoughts about a boy that had also died before his time.



I have this recurring dream. In it I'm swimming. Moving along in an unfamiliar body of water. I don't know where I'm going or the direction that I'm facing. I'm not even sure if what I'm swimming in is actually water. It just feels like water. Immersed in the liquid. Looking to my left and to my right I realize there are others. Others on the same course as I. They have faces like mine, but the faces are slightly distorted. They never seem to notice when I watch them. Their focus remains only on reaching the unknown objective. Gradually the others around me start to fall behind. I will not stop for them. Press forward, press forward, press forward. Driven by instinct. An instinct > sexual desire. I am alone now. I feel no fear. A light appears in the distance, soft at first. It grows larger. The light so bright, blinding. I break through the water. Only light. A sensation is felt

*throughout my body. I wake up from the dream. A pot of coffee is brewed.
A cigarette smoked. It's 3:53 a.m.*

Sam

"Sam, whatcha workin on?"

"Goddamnit", Sam thinks to himself. "Can't they just not fuck with me for one day. Where's Corey? Why isn't he here?"

Sam likens homeroom to twenty-five minutes of hell. Sam is small for eighteen, but he's ripped, and has great stamina from all the walking he does. His hair is shaggy, dirty blonde. His face is handsome, although he wouldn't know it. He is poorly treated by the products of incest he attends school with. In terms of physical appearance, Sam is the opposite of his father. Sam thinks his father is built like Shrek, but much more menacing than any fictional ogre could ever be. Mustache and 80s style feather hair parted down the middle, a part as unbending as the part Moses used to cross the Red Sea with his Hebrews. Sam has never seen his father fix his hair, it just seems to conform naturally, too naturally, to 1985. Sam's an atheist, which is something his father would not approve of if Sam had the courage to tell him.



Sam has a good heart. Becky knows this. She knows she occupies a special place in Sam's heart. A place that belongs exclusively to Sam and Becky. A place that will always belong to Sam and Becky. She hopes to marry Sam after they graduate from high school. Sam doesn't love her like that. He hasn't told her yet. He cares about her too much to do that. He doesn't want to hurt her. She can hang on to the fantasy a little while longer.



Sam has tried to love Becky like boys and girls love each other. He even fucks her sometimes, but every time does, he has to think about other things to make himself cum. Last time when Sam fucked Becky, he thought about a certain someone, and he came so hard he felt like old faithful erupting in front of a gaggle of tourists. Becky likes that. It always makes

her feel good about herself when he cums like that. When they fuck she throws her legs back as far as she can and pulls him in. She grabs his ass, squeezes and scratches him and moans. Sometimes Becky even bites him. Sam is just like *whatever, I'll fuck her to make her happy, if she wants me to choke her, I'll even do that. It's what good friends do for each other.*



Becky's mom is a tweeker. She lives in the same trailer park as Sam and his father. Her mother's only cares about one thing: dope. The townies all know about Becky's mother, and give Becky plenty of shit about her. They've nicknamed her Rhonda Glassburner. If you need your dick sucked, find Rhonda, and boy is she good at it. Rhonda loves dope. She's a dope fiend. Rhonda steals to get dope, sucks dick to get dope. She even tried to pimp Becky out one time in order to get her hands on some dope. Becky doesn't know shit about her father. She has a couple pictures, but that's it. Her mom doesn't talk about him very much either. Never, as a matter of fact. She asked her mom about him once. Rhonda said he was dead. Killed himself when Becky was a toddler. Motherfucker went crazy. Started seeing shit that wasn't there, hearing shit that wasn't said, believing in things that didn't exist. After that Becky stopped asking Rhonda about her father.



Becky spends most of her nights in Sam's trailer. His father is always on the road, traveling around, spreading the word of Jesus. Taking money from the dumb-masses. *Self-righteous motherfucker.* Becky and Sam like to lie in bed and watch TV. Their favorite show to watch is an anime program called *Dragonpower Alpha*. Becky and Sam imagine themselves as characters on the show with super powers. They don't reside in the show's universe though, they live in their own.

Becky wants to use her powers to destroy everyone that has ever done her and Sam wrong. She'd start with Rhonda first. Kill off the bitch quick. Put her down like the dog she is. Next she'd kill Sam's dad. She has her reasons. After that she'd take out all those dumb-fucks at school. They call her white trash. She'd show them white trash. Lastly she would use her powers to locate her father's corpse. She'd employ the power of Necromancy to resurrect him from the dead just like Jesus did Lazarus.

She'd introduce herself to him, maybe say a few words. Then, she'd kill him. She thought a lot about how the conversation with her father might go. *"Hi dad! It's me Becky! You know, your daughter. You know, the little girl that you left behind, to be cared for and looked after by a meth-head. All because you had some shit you felt like you couldn't deal with. Guess what? We've all got shit to deal with."*

All Sam really wanted was the power of flight. He'd spread his wings and fly to Orlando, Florida. Sam had heard about a school there called Half Sail that offered degrees in screenwriting. *How exciting.* If only he could fly.



Sam is gay, but he's the only one that knows. In Sam's church the pastor likes to say that there are practicing and non-practicing gays. Therefore, Sam would fall into the non-practicing gay category. Sam's gaydar is pretty certain that the pastor himself is a non-practicing gay. He looks at Sam with lust-filled eyes. He longs for a moment alone with Sam. Regardless, Sam thinks it's all bullshit. *Gay is gay, and you're born that way.* At least that's the way Sam feels about himself. Sam has never had gay sex. Not because he doesn't want to, but because for one, there are no openly gay people in his Bible-belt town, and two, there's only one person that he wants in that way.



"Hey Sam where's Fat Boy?"

"How should I know Dylan?"

"Because birds of a feather fly together."

"Ha!"

"Whatcha writing about Sam?" Dylan asked him. *Like Dylan actually gives a shit about what Sam is writing.*

Dylan the fucking meathead. Popular. Left-tackle on the football team. He's big and smells musky, like someone trying to cover up vinegar with cologne. Dylan always gives Sam a hard time, especially when Corey not there to be the target of the bullying. Dylan likes to talk about his late-

night transgressions with some of the school's females. This perplexes Sam. Everyone knows who Dylan had fucked the day after he fucks them. Yet girls continue to allow him to deflower them. *Maybe he has a huge dick or something.* He's tall, at least six-foot two, and has a thick build. Dylan wears shirts that are too tight which showcases his large nipples, like he's proud of them or something. His hair is short, close-cropped, and always looking wet. Sam can't tell if that's caused by applying water and lots of hair gel or just natural unwashed greasiness. Either way, Sam doesn't care. He still thinks Dylan is beautiful.



Sam likes to write in homeroom, he spends that time working on his screenplay. Historical fiction. A sad love story, kind of like how Sam feels about his life. Sam has never shared his screenplay with anyone, certainly not with any of the local yokels. He wants to share the story with Becky, but is afraid to do so because he doesn't want the homo-erotic scenes to tip her off about his own sexuality. Sam hopes to get the courage to tell her about himself someday, he just isn't ready to do that yet.



Be the man that holds it all together.



A Screenplay

"I saw you in a dream you know", the smaller man says to the stronger man.

"What did you see?"

The stronger man spits on his hand and then rubs the spit on himself. The other man is lying face down on the bed.

"I was a boy, age twelve or thirteen maybe. I was walking home from the library..." He pauses briefly and lets out a grunt as the stronger man enters him. "Please, take it slow," the weaker man says, his voice quivering.

The stronger man slowly glides his hips back and forth.

"As I was saying, I was walking home from the library. It was late, dusk, and I should have been home already, but I got wrapped up in the art section like I always do. I was afraid that my father would be angry with me for coming home so late. He did really bad things to me when I made him angry. Anyway, I started thinking about some of the things he would do to me, and that made me cry. I went into an alley so no one would see me..."

The stronger man pushes in deeper now. The weaker man lets out a gasp.

"Is that too deep?"

"No." The man on bottom looks down at the bed sheet. It's soaked with his Aryan cum. The strong man pulls out and finishes himself off. The weaker man feels the warmth running down his back. It makes him feel safe. Five minutes later the men sit in bed next to each other sharing a cigarette. The stronger man strokes the lighter-skinned man's black hair, brushing it out of his eyes.



"Tell me the rest of the story Adolf."

"Another time my friend. It's getting late Christo. You'd better go. Your show starts soon."



A singer sings a song.

"Holding back the years"

Adolf walks into the lounge, wearing a white button-up shirt, buttoned up save for the top two. His jet black hair, swooped to the side of his head, matches the color of his ebony slacks.

"Thinking of the fear I've had so long"

He sits alone at a table in a corner of the room.

"When somebody hears"

He crosses his legs. He sips his Whiskey Sour. He lights a cigarette. Closing his eyes. Savoring the taste. Drinking the music.

"Listen to the fear that's gone"

He opens his eyes. The lounge singer notices him. Smiles. He tilts his head forward in approval. The hint of a smile creeps across his face.

I'll keep holding on

I'll keep holding on

I'll keep holding on

holding, holding, holding

The audience wants more. He does too.



"Your voice is intoxicating Christo."

"You're intoxicating Adolf."

"How did you learn to sing like that? I thought you were just a carpenter?"

"Are you just a painter Adolf?"



Adolf opens up to Christo. "I was in the alley crying. I was looking at the ground with my head in my hands. All of a sudden I felt a hand on my shoulder. I looked up, and that's when I saw your face. You looked into my eyes. You smiled, and then walked away. All of my sadness and my fear, you took it with you. When I arrived home that night my father was not there. I went to bed, half-frightened he would return home and beat me. In the morning my mother told me he was dead."

"Our lord works in strange ways Adolf."



The man stood up. Adolf admires his physique, his toned abs, ripped arms. Adonis in the flesh.

"Where are you going," Adolf asks the man.

"I have work to do."

"Why do you have to work today?"

"I have to do some re-work on the synagogue."

"How can you stand being around those filthy people Christo?"

"Those filthy people pay me. They've already paid me for this job. I just have to go back and fix a couple of things they're unhappy with."

"To hell with the swine. You don't owe them anything."

"I do Adolf, and I'm a man of my word."

"Can I see you tomorrow? I want to paint you."

"Yes Adolf, I'll see you soon. Oh one more thing..."

"What Christo?"

"Would you still love me if I was one of those swine?"

"Ha! I love your sense of humor."

Christo leaves. It is the last time Adolf sees him. The days they shared together had been the best days of Adolf's life.



REST OF THE STORY

"Where's my notebook!?" Sam feels like he's having a heart attack. He left his screenplay in homeroom the day before. Different scenarios play out in his mind, none of them promising. Maybe the teacher has it. Maybe somebody picked it up, but didn't read it. He asks around. No one seemed to have it.



"Oh my god. This is good. This is real good."



"Morning Sam."

"Hello Corey."

"Hey Sam, does your dad still smoke?"

"That's none of your freaking business."

"Whoa, don't be so defensive."

"Why do you want to know anyway?"

"Dylan asked me for some grass."

"Dylan smokes?"

"Well no. He doesn't, but he wants to smoke."

Sam thought about Dylan. It made his heart race. "Yeah I have some pot."

"Awesome! Can we have some?"

"I guess so, but don't tell anyone where you got it. Okay?"

"I know how to keep a secret Sam," Corey says with a wink.



"Where are you going?" Becky asks with a puzzled look.

"The rock quarry."

"Don't you think it's a little late to be heading out there?"

"I'm going to hang out with some friends."

"What friends?"

"When did I start having to answer to you?"

Becky didn't like his tone. "You don't have to answer to me."

"Sorry Becky, I didn't mean to be harsh."

"It's okay."

"Let me go grab some of my mom's beers before we head out."

"I'm going alone."

"Why?"

"It's just going to be a guy thing."

"Oh, okay." His words made Becky's insides hurt.



Dylan walks out of the woods. Sam's heart starts to beat faster.

"Sup Sam?"

"Hi Dylan."

"Did you bring the stuff?"

"Yeah I got it." Sam reaches into his satchel and pulls out a bowl and dime-bag.

"Have you ever smoked before Dylan?"

"No."

"Are you nervous?"

"A little nervous."

"Me too."



The two young men smoke and talk for what seems like an eternity. It's a beautiful night. Sam thinks the stars look brighter tonight.

"Oh my god Sam. This is some good shit." Dylan takes a hit off the bowl.

"Hold it. Hold it. Don't breathe out yet. Okay now let it out."

Dylan coughs like an 80 year old woman at a bingo party. Sam smiles at Dylan. He smiles back. Dylan rubs Sam's head in a playful way.

"So what made you decide you want to smoke?" Sam asks.

"I don't know, I've just been feeling a lot of stress lately, with football, my parents' shit. Sometimes I feel like I'm pretending to be someone else. You know what I mean?"

"I know exactly what you mean."

"Cheer up man."

"Yeah you're right." Sam tickles Dylan. He laughs. "Hey where's Fat Boy?"

"Oh, Corey?" Sam asks, confused at first since he never calls Corey Fat Boy.

"Yeah, where is he?"

"I don't know."

"He's the one that told me to come here, that you had some grass."

"Yeah he told me to come here too. Said you wanted to smoke."

"Oh well. His loss."



"Hey! Hey! Boys!"

"Jesus, Corey! You scared the shit out of me."

"We are way too high right now for that shit Fat Boy."

Sam and Dylan are not amused. Neither teenager really likes Fat Boy. Sam thinking he's an annoying prick. Dylan feels sorry for him.

"We've been out here for a while."

"We smoked up most of it, but there's a few nuggets left if you want some."

"How thoughtful of you Sam, but no thanks."

"Suit yourself."

"Where've you been?"

"I've been at home. Reading."

"Reading?" Sam and Dylan look at each other and share a laugh.

"Yeah right Corey, like you read."

"I don't, but I think I'm going to start. I found a nice little piece of fiction that really grabbed my attention. I mean, I just couldn't put it down."

Sam notices for the first time that Corey is holding something. He isn't sure how he missed it before then.

"Ahem." Corey cleared his throat. Held up the notebook. Opening it slowly.

"I saw you in a dream you know.' 'What did you see?'" Fat Boy's voice sounded like the devil. "Oh there's a part in here about you too Dylan."

Sam reaches for the notebook. Fat Boy jerks the book back.

Dylan grabs Sam by the wrist. "Let him read it Sam."



*I move in the shadows. I listen. Watching. Waiting. I'm going to kill them.
All of them.*



Sam's body was found on the 20th of April. A couple teenagers skinny dipping in the rock quarry pond were the first ones to spot him. When they got home one of them told his mother, who notified the authorities. Later that day rescue divers were sent in to recover the body. Sam's corpse was badly bruised. His skull was severely crushed. The medical examiner performed an autopsy along with a toxicology exam. The results from the toxicology report stated that Sam had high levels of THC in his system at the time of death. The medical examiner ruled the death accidental. Cause of death: head trauma from the fall. The bruising? Well teenage boys get a lot of bumps and bruises. Case closed. Sam had a small funeral. His father had his remains cremated. Sam's mother, whom Becky had never met, attended the funeral, along with Becky and Rhonda. Becky asked Sam's father if she could take Sam's ashes to Orlando, Florida. She wanted to

spread the ashes in the ocean. She said it's what Sam would have wanted. Sam's father said no.

3:53 a.m.

He sits at the bar. He looks down at the empty glass in front of him.

"I need another drink."

The bar is a hole in the wall, a dive bar. It's called The Golden Lounge. *There's nothing golden about this place.* He picks up his drink and quickly finishes it off.

"Another!"

This is where he spends most of his nights. A defeated man.

"Don't you think you'd best take it easy Dylan?"

The bartender is at least twenty years older than Dylan. He looks like an old Hell's Angel, but his eyes are kind. Like a puppy-dog's eyes.

"I'm fine. Just give me another."

"Okay boss, but don't blame me if you get a DWI."

"Who's gonna pull me over?"

"Ha! You got a point I guess."

Dylan is one of two active duty cops in the small town. After he got out of the Army he came back home. There was some trouble readjusting. The shit that he saw over there along with some other things fucked with his head. He learned how to deal with it; alcohol, mind-numbing pills, sex. Lots of sex without love. Never love. He's only ever really loved one person. A love that came and went. Lost in time forever.



"I'm turning in buddy. You can stay here as long as you need to. You know the drill. Turn the sign off. Lock the door on your way out."

"Thanks boss."

Dylan sits alone with a bottle and glass, in silence.



*Holding back the years
Thinking of the fear I've had so long
I'll keep holding on
Listen to the fear that's gone
I'll keep holding on
I'll keep holding on
When somebody hears*

The sound of music takes him by surprise. Dylan lifts his head up off the bar top. He isn't sure how long he's been out. The blackouts have been occurring more frequently these days. He turns around to where the music is coming from. A woman standing at the juke box. She wears a form-fitting strapless black dress. He thinks it's odd she's wearing tennis shoes. She has a muscular back, broad shoulders, and toned arms, especially for a woman. Her hair pinned up to the back of her head. Dylan feels woozy.

"I didn't hear you come in."

The woman turns slowly and meets his gaze.

"Hi."

"Hi."

"I'm Dylan."

"Nice to meet you Dylan."

"I don't think I've seen you in here before."

Dylan isn't sure, but he feels a sense of familiarity when he looks at the woman. The music continues to play as the stranger makes her way over to the bar. She sits down next to Dylan, pulling her bar stool close to his.

"What are we drinking tonight Dylan?"

"What do you want, I'll make it for you."

"I'll take a whiskey sour."



Dylan turns off the neon sign that hangs outside the Golden Lounge. He locks the door. The woman and Dylan walk to her car. She leads the way. He stumbles as he enters the passenger's side of the vehicle. Normally when he gets this drunk he loads up his gun, goes outside and shoots for a while, before passing out. Tonight is different. Something about this strange woman excites him. Makes him feel high. She asked him to come home with her which he readily accepted. He's been feeling especially lonely lately. They drive for a while absent of conversation, Dylan losing track of time.



Dylan looks over at the woman, "Where are we going?"

"To my house, but first I want to take you somewhere."



"I know this place."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah, we used to come here as kids."

"What did you all do here?"

"You know, stuff teenagers do."

"Like what?"

"Hang out, drink, smoke pot. You know, that kind of stuff."

Dylan feels a wave of regret wash over him. "I haven't been here in years. What are we doing here? How do you know about this place?"

"I'll tell you in a second. First I've got to pee."

"Okay."

"Well I'm not going to pee right here."

"Of course. Sure."

The woman turns and heads for the trees. Dylan watches her disappear into the darkness. Something about her demeanor has a sobering effect on him.



He walks to the edge of the bluff overlooking the black water at the bottom of the quarry. He thinks about the last time he was here. He thinks about that often. After a while he hears rustling in the trees. He forgot how long the woman has been gone. He moves away from the edge, turning his body to face the tree line. He thinks the stars seem bright this evening. Brighter than he could ever remember.



The woman emerges from the shadow of the trees, stepping into the moonlight, looking like someone else. His sobriety returns to him in full force, bringing along with it his memory. "I thought I recognized your face. Becky."

"Yeah I figured you might once you sobered up a little bit."

Dylan notices that she has changed out of her dress. Now she has on some kind of spandex outfit. Pants with glow-in-the-dark patterns, possibly floral.

"Don't look so surprised Dylan."

"Well, I'm just trying to figure out what the hell is going on."

Becky moves closer to Dylan.

"Jesus Christ Becky, where have you been? No one's seen you since..." His words trail off, headed for some unknown place where unsaid words die or live forever, like a purgatory of unspoken sounds.

"I've been around. It's been a rough twelve years. After Sam died, I fell on hard times. The doctors locked me up for a while. They said I was

seeing things that didn't exist, hearing voices that weren't there, but I'm all better now."

"It's been rough for me too."



Dylan looks down at the dirt.

"Why'd you come back Becky?"

"I don't know Dylan. I haven't been able to grow as a person I think. I guess I just felt like there was this part of my life that needed closure, before I could move on. That's why I came back."

"I understand how you feel. Sometimes I feel the same way too."

"No I don't think so."

Dylan can sense the anger, rage, pain in Becky's voice. Dylan sits down on a rock placing his head in his hands. Becky soon walks over and joins him. Dylan raises his head. She can see that he is crying.

"Becky I'm sorry about Sam."

"I know you are Dylan." She places her hand on his back.

"If I could go back and change what Fat Boy and I did to him. I would."

"I know Dylan."

"I think about it every day Becky. I see his face in my dreams. I see it when I make love. I see it in my cereal for Christ's sake."

"I do too Dylan."

"Look Fat Boy and I beat him up, and that was wrong, and I know that now. I just did it so Fat Boy wouldn't call me a fag. What a stupid reason to hurt someone. Sam was a good person Becky, and I loved him, I just didn't realize it at the time."

"He loved you too Dylan. I loved him, but he didn't love me. He loved you."

"I know Becky, and I swear to you that Corey and I did not kill him."

"I know that Dylan."

Dylan and Becky cry together.



Dylan feels some comfort, some relief, for the first time in many years. He and Becky sit together in silence for a while looking at the stars that hang high over the darkness below. Dylan finally breaks the silence, "did you hear about Corey?"

"Yeah I did."

"Some nasty shit."

"Yeah no kidding. I mean can you believe they cut off his dick Dylan?"

Dylan's heart starts to race. *How the fuck does she know that?* Becky stands up. She walks over to the edge of the overlook.

"Why did you change clothes Becky?"

"Cause I'm a fucking super-hero."

She brings her arms up from her sides, standing there on the edge looking like an Olympic diver.

"Becky get back from the edge!" Dylan hops up from the rock he'd been sitting on. It gives him a head rush.

"Becky!"

He moves closer to her.

"Becky step back!"

Becky is swaying now, toes hanging over the edge. Dylan moves closer. He places a hand on her shoulder. Becky lowers her arms and turns to face Dylan. She looks into his eyes. He thinks her eyes look wild, like they belong to John the Baptist, not her.

"Before I killed Fat Boy, before it got to the point where he was begging me to make it stop, I told him he could ask me one question, and

no matter what it was, I would answer it. You want to know what he asked me?"

Dylan takes a step back.

"He asked me what I was doing in the woods the night Sam died."



The bodies of Dylan and Becky were discovered the next day by some illegal immigrants. The medical examiner couldn't determine if the cause of death was from drowning or from the fall. The autopsies indicated Dylan had consumed a large amount of alcohol that evening. Becky had alcohol and anti-psychotics in her system, and a small amount of anabolic steroids, which surprised the medical examiner. He ruled that both deaths were accidents, with the time of death for each being around 3:53 a.m. Case closed.



THE END

"Becky, I didn't know you were here," Sam says as he spits the blood out of his mouth.

"I've been in the woods Sam. I saw it all go down. Heard it all."

"Help me up. Can you believe what they did to me?"

Becky turns her back to Sam. She bends over and picks something up. She turns around and moves toward him. He's still on the ground. She stands over him.

"What are you doing Becky?"

She raises the rock above her head.

"I loved you Sam." She says, with tears rolling down her cheeks.



"Sir, the Russians are closing in. We have to leave now."

"Go! Save your family."

"But ...we have to..."

"Go! Get the hell out of here! Don't worry about me. I'm ready to die today."



He locks himself in the deepest room of the bunker. He sits in a chair. In front of the chair there is a box. He opens the box. It holds two items: a pistol and a painting. He looks at his watch. It's 3:53 a.m.