

Why Are We Doing This? Oh That's Right Rock N' Roll, and Love, and Drugs and Especially Best
Friends! Let's Live Forever.

A Novella – Live. Smoke. Try Again.

A Feature Film – If Not This

Corbin Louis Bugni

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington

2017

Committee:

Rebecca Brown

Ted Hiebert

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, Bothell

©Copyright 2017

Corbin Louis Bugni

University of Washington

Abstract

Why Are We Doing This? Oh That's Right Rock N' Roll, and Love, and Drugs and Especially Best

Friends! Let's Live Forever.

**

A Novella – Live. Smoke. Try Again.

A Feature Film – If Not This

Corbin Louis Bugni

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Associate Professor Ted Hiebert

Why Are We Doing This? Oh That's Right Rock N' Roll, and Love, and Drugs, and Especially Best Friends! Let's Live Forever. is a two part collection including the novella *Live. Smoke. Try Again.* and the feature film *If Not This*. These works are mirrored documents of the human spirit; A film about getting high and a novella about a film about getting high. But if you look deeper really it's about surviving illness and heartbreak and hanging out with friends and raging into the fires of self and culture. Which are sites of ineffable suffering. Each project is a love letter—to friends—that says, 'Fuck the suffering. We live.'

Live. Smoke. Try Again.



Corbin Louis

Artist Statement

I began 2017 grappling with heavy drug use and chronic nerve pain. The migraines and loneliness were giving me a kind of writer's block, so I started going out with friends every night and filming it all on my iPhone. My premise was: fuck writing if it's not adding joy to my existence—life is inherently a frenzied art—a wild performance of identity and secrets, and all an artist must do is capture the spirit of their time, as a way to reflect, honor and challenge existence. This turned out to be a vapid premise. An artist has to do a lot more than record on an iPhone and 'capture' moments to convey anything insightful or alluring. But never the less, I saw such immense beauty in my friends and city that I went on ingesting drugs and socializing with an iPhone pointed at everyone's face. The results are two artworks, a feature film and a novella about getting high and recording a feature film.

My rediscovered pill habit, on the other hand, was the result of crisis; Bipolar II. A failed hip surgery. Growing up in the American suburbs where I was prescribed Ritalin at 6, and addicted to benzos by 15. But I was 26. In Seattle. And the winter was relentlessly gray. I can't tell you how many times I nodded out on opiates. Never really resting. Waking up off three-hours of sleep. Sweaty and thirsty. Alone. The sound of rain and construction pounding against the window of my 150-square-foot microstudio. Thinking about that winter always reminds me of who I am. A depressed fuck boy who genuinely hates life. But I love life. To the point I film everything. Chasing experience with a club. In alleyways and fire escapes and in little baggies or rocks. A lot of people call that love hate polarity manic-depression. Which is a name that doesn't fit right. For me it's just being. Terrible and euphoric and entirely fucked up.

This erratic sensibility is so overwhelming—glorious, tragic—that I've always turned to art. Not just to capture life, but to resist its agony and multiply the joy. That my friends' beauty be exalted. That my suffering be shared as a joke and a song worth repeating. There are so many

reasons to write and cut movies. Doing so is a celebration. A tribute. It's a missile of energy shot in the face of everything oppressive. "Fuck off you cunt!" says the artworks, pointing at self and culture and corporations, all of which mindlessly eat themselves and leave a trail of waste. But no! The act of making art is a refusal of entropy. A chance to do better. To fly.

However, I wasn't thinking this way at the time. Maybe intuitively. But I was spending my conscious efforts high on Tramadol and seriously contemplating suicide. The hip surgery in June made me crippled. Sleepless. My girlfriend had just left me in January. I begged her to stay. Tried to keep her with poems about futures selves wearing halos. But she vaguely hated Seattle, had finished school and moved back to NYC. I guess being with a druggie artist on unemployment wasn't part of the plan. That's fine. It wasn't part of my plan either. I don't blame her for leaving. But I also don't blame myself. Illness is an elusive beast that alters your personality and starts dictating behavior. Depression, addiction, chronic pain. Whatever you want to call it, they're all related and deadly and I've been trying to wrap language around them my entire adult life. Physicians and shrinks have been trying the same for much longer. Giving symptoms various names. Creating categories, then revising the terms each year; Bipolar I and II, Borderline Personality Disorder, Fibromyalgia. These are all diagnoses that vaguely signify behaviors and sensations, all of which are so various and deeply personal that language and medicine both fail to alleviate their lived consequences.

Consequences that, more often than not, resemble choice. Like the time I broke into Andrew's house, 4am, blacked out on Temazepam and pulling out every drawer in the kitchen. Drooling on myself and looking for something that didn't exist. Pills or money or some way to get out of being human. Abusing drugs is about escape. Trying to alter your self. To opt out of uncontrolled emotions and the shitty behavior that follows. But behavior is not entirely synonymous to choice. In fact, an accurate definition of mental illness is pathological thinking that an individual cannot control. Which means their behaviors and habits are, to a large degree, at the mercy of

impulse and culture and family. But try explaining that to a judge. One of the problems with being American is that we are ruggedly individualistic and brazen. We claim fixed identities at every possible opportunity; job titles, social media, fashion, gender. Ultimately this means that in America a mentally ill drug addict is equivalent to fucked up piece of shit that should be more responsible. And while there is some merit to that outlook, suicide and addiction are more complicated than an individual's personality flaws. But very few people in this country are willing to take on and share the burden of behavioral dysfunction. In fact the institution of America typically forces the ill to double down on the burden of their symptoms. Court dates, jail time, hospital bills, interest. These are all ways that dysfunction is systemically shamed, corralled and punished.

Such perils of illness are the reason art making has become my primary tool for coping and survival. I use art to document and validate my struggle. To pry open the indistinguishable borders of self and culture—using image and sound and paragraph, with the hopes that one of these techniques will provide agency and awareness in the fistfight of illness. And what is that illness? An existential quandary or self-imposed narrative? In my case I believe it's a nervous system disorder related to malfunctioning nociceptors and a lack of opiod receptors. Disabling chronic pain. But I'm not a neurologist and an MRI can't confirm disrupted neurotransmitters anyways. But what I know for sure is the state denied me disability and no doctor will provide a clear diagnosis. The stigmatized and indefinable nature of illness has everything to do with how I make art. Uncertainty necessitates more than one way to investigate. Throw cultural shame and immobility in the mix and you've really got to get versatile with how you process. So often writing fails to describe the pain and effort of life. As does film. But I use both to diversify style and create a tapestry of expressions that communicate a constellation of ever changing motives. What that means is I write manifestos to advocate political change. I make movies to document the joy of friends and youth. I write poems to feel free. I make songs to dance. Etcetera. The point is each one of my creative acts has a correlating

reason, whether intuitive or meticulous. Intention has a way of being paradoxical and mystic. Just like illness. Just like breathing.

I've written a dozen artist statements and every one of them refers to ego death, sublimation, healing and transcendence. All of which are vital, inseparable and very much at work in these projects. I'm not going to rehash all my ideas on these lofty concepts. I've come to find the point of creating art is so that it can work its fluid magic in an infinite number of ways. Ambiguous and electric. But I will say that these projects are about learning to stand on joy and critique instead of dysfunction. That writing and filming, two methods of the same pursuit, might afford me some empathy. For myself. From the world.

But empathy is hard to come by when you're stuck in the same mistakes. Like Kevin, shooting a needle in his arm, repeatedly, three times a day, because the depression and dope sickness were winning. Rest in peace brother. I know first hand sickness makes you crave death. And you need a strong community to stop those cravings. The symptoms I face take a toll on my family and friends. But they've been there anyways. They've paid bail. Driven to the ER. Picked up the phone. Shredded the suicide notes of my longing. All of it. And the only reason I've gone this far on my creative path is because of the people in my life. They are so fascinating and strong that I decided it was more important to make a movie and book about them than to be crippled by dysfunction. Plus everyone I know looks really good on camera. If that sounds shallow it's not. Beauty is a good enough reason to film. As in, "Stop! Just look at this abandoned shopping cart! Look at this glass building and crowd and pretty son of a bitch I call my friend! Dope right?!" Which is a rhetorical question. Of course it's dope. That's why I filmed everyone. But the most important thing about these people; Richard, Shea, Amanda, so many more. They know how to love. That's the best word we have for it. Affection and care. A type of being that allows proximity and survey and failure. And

I've come to believe that love physically binds the universe together. Makes awareness gravitate into itself, suspended, flickering in the bright light of being.

This is what I have found through illness and heartbreak and drug abuse. That love be the thing worth writing for. That a thought-out indictment of culture and suffering is a call for joy. That we are literally nothing without our friends. Who hype. Who cherish and rail lines. Who celebrate and chin check and peel off the unreachable layers of agony on each other's backs. Creating these projects kept me alive. Because the people that inspired them kept me alive. The weight of that fact is way more than I can fit into a PDF or .mp4. But I made these projects as an attempt at housing gratitude. To show that we have lived. Burned. Crackled under the pressure but rose each time. With laughter rolling through our bodies. Here is the proof.

Live. Smoke. Try Again.

to my friends.

Smoking a cigarette is a serious endeavor. I mean to really smoke it right and enjoy every last drag. It's an art. Smoking mindlessly is a waste, that's why I prefer smoking alone. If you light a cigarette and start talking to someone you'll probably forget you're even smoking and all the cancer and tar is for nothing, just mindless death clouds and conversation and no real way to focus on the nicotine buzz. Conversation and cigarettes are a great combination don't get me wrong. But to fully soak up the nicotine buzz and subsequent release, I like to be alone, smoking slowly and contemplating my fucked up existence while hastening its immanent destruction beneath the perpetually wet Seattle sky.

The sad thing is I just quit smoking in November. Which was not fucking easy, considering I was hooked on pain pills and in the middle of this 'about-to-end' relationship with the love of my life Helen, who ended up moving to New York in January. But here I am. It's February 23rd and I'm smoking a Korean Marlboro outside Odegaard Library on a Thursday night. Actually I just bummed the cigarette off a stranger who wasn't even smoking when I asked if he had one. Good karma. And this cigarette is particularly enjoyable because I'm high on 10mgs of Adderall. So I poke it slow, hold the smoke in my chest like a freshly discharged double barrel shotgun and try to forget the hopeless promise that I'd quit today.

10-minutes before coming to Odegaard to do 'grad work' I traded Shamir 20 Tramadol for five Adderall in a Safeway parking lot. A four-to-one pill exchange is a steal for Shamir, but I didn't think twice about the trade because Adderalls are hard to come by and I have a Tramadol prescription and 280 pills saved up. My massive pill stash is the result of long-term chronic spine slash hip pain, and a south Seattle doctor who seems more than happy to keep feeding me narcotics. Having a copious amount of drugs is, as far as I can tell, the only benefit to being ill. Definitely a double edge sword though. I feel pretty terrible about the drug abuse and cigarettes, especially because I'm 26, bipolar and have been battling addiction for a long fucking time. But really the

cigarettes are a lot worse than the pills. At least if you're thinking in terms of give and take.

Cigarettes don't provide shit for a high and I think smoking hurts a lot more than pills. But I guess it's irrelevant because I'm using both cigarettes and pills, which is usually the case for anybody who is into that kind of thing.

The silver lining to the cigarettes and drug abuse is that I'm alive. I am—standing in the freezing cold, young and reckless and breathing. What I'm saying is that any problem is a good problem to have because it means you're still in this thing, alive and fighting and maybe even capable of changing. Plus, I got more good news. A text message from Kyle. He just bought the two of us tickets to L.A. for March 3rd, and we're flying out to meet with Shamir for the weekend who will be in Southern California for a wedding. But just like the pills, the trip isn't justified. I'm dead broke and have been doing literally nothing besides partying and side-stepping suicidal depression. But fuck it. We're 26. I'm single and high and coming out of a six-month post-surgical depression that almost claimed my life. I still find it hard to function. Joint pain, panic attacks. A micro-studio that's crammed with the residue of bad nights. There's no words. Living with bipolar and chronic pain is such a thoroughly monumental effort, that right now, I will take any pill, girl or airplane ticket that comes my way.

Kyle hands me a vaporizer in the back of an Uber and I take a massive pull then cough up the mist while Muddy Waters plays on the speakers. It's a Friday night in Seattle and we're heading to a party in Sodo, absently moving through time on a light dose of benzos and talking about our hopes for L.A.

“What night is the wedding?” Kyle says to Shamir who's sitting shotgun.

“I don’t know yet.”

“What’d you mean you don’t know you fly out in a week.”

“Bro that’s seven whole days to figure shit out, I could draw up blueprints to country in that time.”

“Nobody creates a country out of blueprints,” I say.

“Then how are they organized?” Shamir challenges.

“Racism.”

“Yo I’m definitely gonna fuck one of the bridesmaids though,” says Kyle.

“I support that idea. I just wanna take Adderall and drive down Sunset Boulevard searching for Ron Howard,” I say.

“As long we’re bumping Future and smoking vape the entire time,” Kyle says.

“This is it right here,” Shamir says to the Uber driver.

We get out of the Lexus and find ourselves standing in a street full of warehouses and dirt lots. After walking in various circles for about 7-minutes, and Kyle sending several texts to Swerve Z, we find Rocky at a warehouse entrance. He’s clearly stoned, and probably high on Promethazine. Rocky fake punches Kyle multiple times and says, ‘whatup, whatup, whatup.’ We go inside the ultra-clean and recently-renovated-due-to-gentrification matte blue warehouse. Everything smells like sawdust and disinfectant.

The soiree is an album listening party for Swerve Z’s new record *Swerve Z*, in a surprisingly state of the art recording studio. I met Swerve only once at the Crocodile where he opened up for Mobb Deep and told me, “Thanks for coming out tonight breh, I’ll be sure to check out your shit.” As soon as I step into the studio I feel positive Swerve doesn’t remember our interaction and never looked up *my shit*. No hard feelings though, there’s a lot of people trying to hopelessly share their rap music in Seattle, which has ultimately transformed the internet into a vacuum-like void where

everybody is screaming to themselves and uselessly re-affirming their hyper-constructed and largely hollow identities. We are not rock stars and prophets. We are confused meat sacks pretending to be magicians. But I guess there's no real difference.

There's about 12 people at the party, all of whom are, it could be argued, objectively cool. The only people I know are Kyle, Shamir and Rocky, who is a prominent Seattle singer and pianist. By prominent I mean Rocky consistently abuses prescription drugs and plays the keyboard really fucking well, doing backup vocals and hooks for 4 different bands. Kyle and Shamir are by the mixing station greeting friends and introducing themselves to new friends who are all smoking joints and pouring Champaign into plastic flutes. I feel awkward. Even being high, I feel isolated and removed like a ten year-old refrigerator that was never taken out of the bubble wrap. 'Very strange,' I think, 'I feel like an unplugged inanimate object that is unaware of anything. Or I'm aware of nothing.' Benzodiazepines are like that sometimes.

I immediately move over to the snack bar, make a plate of cheese, chips and salsa, and position my body in what I think is the least awkward position possible. After a vague number of minutes this brunette girl comes up to me handing over a plastic flute of Champagne.

"Cheers," she says, lifting her glass to mine and me spilling cold liquid into my shirtsleeve.

"Shit," I say. There's this really short moment of weirdness but it passes like everything else in life, incomprehensible and fleeting.

"What's your name?" She asks in a very interrogative voice.

"I'm Jake."

"Well good to meet you Jake. You a friend of Swerve?"

"No, Rocky. We went to grade school together."

"Isn't he incredible? I love the keys he did on *Only Right*, have you heard that song?"

"Yeah that was the single Swerve put out right?"

“Yeah.”

Then there’s a pause in our exchange and time expands into this elongated field of weirdness and bodily discomfort and I try with maximum effort to think of what to say.

“It’s nice to meet you, thanks for the Champagne.”

She smiles tightly, a very tight and disappointed smile.

“Yeah,” turning her shoulder.

“Wait,” I say. “What was your name?”

“Aerial.”

“Cheers,” I say lifting my glass. She keeps her disappointed and now self-conscious expression while connecting our plastic flutes. I don’t spill any Champagne. I drink the whole thing at once.

20-minutes later I’m mostly blacked out, but presently aware, but certain I won’t remember much detail tomorrow. Everyone is intently listening to track 2 of *Swerve Z*, while passing three blunts around a semi-circle of couches. However, Swerve Z, Rocky, the engineer Marcus and Aerial are standing separately in the mixing station, really feeling the song and looking as if they’ve accomplished something historic and godlike, which maybe they have. I’m too inebriated and irrepressibly jealous to judge how historic the song is. The mix is really full and Swerve raps like a freight train that could go half-a-mile without tracks. Very forceful.

Shamir passes me the blunt and I shake my head no.

By the end of the third song everyone is talking over the album, except Swerve, Rocky, Marcus and Aerial who are still diligently listening to every kick drum like it’s scripture. It’s obvious they are the coolest people in the room. Seems like everybody knows this. And I think it’s fair to say some people are straight up cooler, more natural and visibly driven than others. I think probably

coolness has a lot to do with purpose, passion and a pervasive layer of calm. I'm not like that, I'm angry and hysterical but at least those are still forms of passion.

People start to shuffle around the room between songs. By the fifth track I'm sitting next to a girl who's just introduced herself as Maria L, or Maria Ell, I'm not sure how she spells it. Maria asks if I have a cigarette and I say, 'yes is there somewhere we can smoke?'

"There's a balcony at the end of the hall, come with me."

"Cool."

"What do you smoke?"

"Marb Lights, I literally have to quit though, I'm gonna quit after my trip to L.A."

"What are you doing in L.A.?" she asks.

"Uh, just gonna be smoking Marb Lights and preparing to quit." She has no response to that. We're walking down a strangely clean matte blue hallway. Thankfully, because we are headed to a set destination, our shared silence feels ok.

"So you've been to L.A.?" I ask.

"Yeah my sister lives down there, in Echo Park."

"Is it worth checking out?"

"Yeah, if you're into bar hopping it gets pretty active," says Maria.

"Did you ever watch any David Lynch films?"

"Yeah, like Mulholland Drive right?"

"Yeah," I say.

"Why did you ask that?" Maria takes me through this kind of common room and onto a balcony which is definitely more of a terrace made of concrete tiles. I give her a Marb Light and pack of matches.

“You know, I just imagine L.A. like a David Lynch movie, or I want it to be very Lynchian and surreal and everything having warm colors.”

“There’s definitely a lot of warm colors in Echo Park,” she tells me.

“I think my biggest problem with Seattle is the colors. I mean it’s not a colorful place, in terms of like physical color.”

“Yeah it’s gray as fuck,” Maria drags what is now her cigarette.

“People always talk about the gray as this weather thing, but for me it’s about like the visual aesthetic, the sensory experience of grayness you know, it sucks.”

“I think the issue is that it’s always wet,” she says.

“But I’m saying the wetness isn’t even as bad as the lack of color.”

“Well if you want color go to Echo Park and take some acid,” she suggests.

“I’ve got an eighth of mushrooms but I’m worried about bringing them onto a plane.”

“Just put them in your bag check in a Shampoo bottle.”

“Yeah but I’m flying Spirit Airlines and they don’t do bag check.”

“Ha. Spirit Airlines is the worst.”

“Is it that bad?”

“Yes.”

“Damn, I’ve never taken it,” I kind of sigh.

“But listen, if you want acid or mushrooms down there my friend Lester is always selling.”

“That would be fucking awesome. Can I get his number or something?”

“Yeah, let me find it,” she says. I take the last drag of my Marb Light without, until now, realizing the cigarette is already finished. Maria takes my iPhone and punches in Lester’s number.

“So can I get your phone number too?” I ask.

She pauses for a split second, concentrates deeply, then tucks a strand of hair behind her ear and says,

“Sure.”

“You know, just incase I need advice about bar hopping in Echo Park.”

“For sure, text me now so I have your number.”

“Cool,” I say. “Very cool.”

It’s been several days since the Swerve Z listening party and I’m at Odegaard library high on pain pills and, I think, really spiraling down. What happened was, after the soiree, I drunkenly kicked over a bucket of gasoline, forgetting how damaged my hip is due to a surgery in June. So now my hip has really flared up and I’m taking pain pills to deal with it. It’s really unbelievable how fast things can fall apart, especially for a bipolar drug addict. For example, I quit both cigarettes and pain pills in November. And I mean I really fucking quit, like 10-day opiate withdrawal, diarrhea and vomit, clear lungs after several days of coughing up phlegm. Quit quit. But then I smoked my first cigar in Portland with Kyle and Shamir at the beginning of February and slowly got hooked back on nicotine. Then of course I took some Adderall and Klonopin for fun, kicked over a gasoline bucket really hard, hurt my hip and started taking pain pills again. This is bad news. Like actually the worst kind of trouble, right next to felony charges, which I’ve also narrowly dodged thanks to being white. But medical issues and depressive episodes are deeply serious forms of misfortune, mostly because nobody can bail you out. If you’re hooked on Tramadol and Marb Lights no one can help you with that shit besides yourself. Not god, not parents and certainly not AA. At best those things are a placeholder or crutch. Disease or not, whatever you want to call it, addiction and mood disorders are

on you. You live with them, you embody them, and you're the one that has to navigate accordingly.
Good times.

I'm looking at my iPhone and thinking through all this shit, pretty high, when I get a text from Jessica Lee. It says,

“Hey! I'm going to a laser show at the Science Center on Friday. Do you want to meet up after, around 11?”

I'm pretty apathetic about the text, because, first of all why would you tell someone about a laser show, not invite them, then ask to hang out in the dead middle of Friday night, as a kind of afterthought? I just think 11pm on a Friday is a pretty weird time to ask somebody on a date. Plus I'm kind of baffled by the text because I was seeing Jessica at the beginning of February but she stopped texting after three dates. I reply that, 'I'll be in L.A. that night but have fun.' She sends me airplane emojis and I go outside for another cigarette.

Kyle and I pull up to Sea-Tac Airport in the back of a Honda SUV and exit the \$40 Lyft ride with our backpacks and sunglasses on. It's 48 degrees and dark in Seattle but I'm wearing sunglasses because I'm high on 150mgs of Tramadol and want to, for once in my life, feel like a rock star instead of a 26-year-old depressive who only works part time. I have no idea why Kyle is also wearing his sunglasses. Probably because he likes to have a good time. Being high at an airport wearing almost matching sunglasses with your best friend and a considerable amount of narcotics in your backpack is exactly how I imagine fame. The trip is off to an excellent start.

Before entering the airport Kyle and I search for the smoking section where I have a Marb Light and Snapchat the two of us blowing smoke into the air. I've got this USB iPhone charger

hanging across the front of my body. The cord connects my phone to an external battery pack that I plan to use all weekend in order to film the whole trip. So far I've got several monologues about taking opiates and going to L.A. for fame which I view as satire but is clearly somewhat earnest and real. At a certain point being a drug-addicted-artist becomes such a thoroughly sad joke that your entire personality transforms into a parody you learn to play with and enjoy. But deep down it's all very fucked up. I don't recommend drugs or art. Sincerely. Poetry and addiction will get you nowhere. Especially in a hyper-functional product based capitalist-economy. Just go work for Amazon like Kyle.

Anyways, despite the ills of addiction and our collective capitalist frenzy, I'm committed to it, or rather, entirely bound up in the cycle of commodity culture and mental illness. For instance, I just bought an Aquafina for \$6. I'm standing in the T.S.A. line with 10 pills of Adderall in my bag. All of which are illegal and buried in a bottle of Hydroxyzine. I'm also carrying a full bottle of Tramadol and a dozen other prescribed meds (Lamictal, Gabapentin, Seroquel), so I feel fairly certain there's little chance T.S.A. is going to dig through all my pills and find the Adderalls. The key to abusing drugs without penalty is this: Be 1) white 2) rich and 3) legitimated by the law, i.e. prescription narcotics. Luckily I make two of these three requirements. So does Kyle. He's got three full bottles of benzos in his bag. We make it through security in less than 10-minutes. After which Kyle immediately hands me a .5mg Xanax. It's the shape of an orange football. I pop the *Football* in my mouth right behind T.S.A. and Snapchat a video of myself swallowing the pill and throwing up a middle finger.

We walk down the long spaceship-like corridors of SeaTac and I imagine myself as a re-incarnated being who's come here solely to bear witness to the meaningless charade of work, drug abuse and \$6 Aquafinas. I feel the Xanax loosen my face. 'Global capitalism is a cosmic role-playing

simulation where every action is directly correlated to every other action through the distribution of wealth,' I think. Kyle stops in front of the departure screen.

"Looks like our flight's delayed an hour," he says.

"That's alright, I wanna eat."

"Ok. Let's check out our gate first," says Kyle. He leads the way to A6. I walk a few feet behind Kyle and look at all the neon signs and travelers in amazement.

"The planet is a corporation now," I say staring at an airport Arby's.

"No it's not."

"Yeah think about making love in your bedroom. That costs rent. Or saying hi to a stranger on the sidewalk. That's like a municipal space, like some kind of governmental zone regulated by laws and commodity."

"Just because there's laws and commodities doesn't mean the entire planet is a corporation."

"Well then what does it mean? All the authority and consumerism?" I ask, pointing to another security checkpoint and McDonalds.

"It means people like McDonalds. They choose to eat there. Just like they choose the laws that govern America."

"Oh I so disagree with that. I think people eat McDonalds because it's available and cheap, not because they like it. And if they do 'like it' it's because their taste has been engineered and programmed by culture," I argue.

"You don't need to be programmed to enjoy a Big Mac. It just fucking tastes good. Humans invented McDonalds and they keep going there because they choose that. People just like fast food."

"I think it's more complicated than that," I say.

"Then how?" asks Kyle.

"I'll articulate it after we eat."

“Well where do you want to eat?”

“McDonalds,” I say grinning.

It takes me three-minutes to convince Kyle I don’t actually want to eat at McDonalds for reasons other than forfeiting the argument.

“It was a joke about the irony of capitalism. What I want is a drink—at a bar. Let’s go there,” I say nodding at a swanky lounge.

“*The Africa Lounge*,” says Kyle mockingly. “A whole lot more progressive than McDonalds right? I mean all the countries in Africa are the same anyways. Might as well just base the restaurant off a whole continent.”

“Jesus,” I laugh, “the fucking *Africa Lounge*.” There’s a short and joyful pause as we walk into the *Africa Lounge*. We’re both extremely high.

“Think about it,” I say. “You would never see a *European Lounge* in this airport. Maybe an O’Malley’s or Italian Bistro. But not just a *European Lounge*. White people would never generalize themselves like that. It’s called exoticism you know. Exploitation.”

“Yeah dude the *Africa Lounge* is racist as fuck,” says Kyle nonchalantly as we seat ourselves at a bar table. A waiter promptly comes by. He’s like 35 and white, balding and, it seems, very overworked. ‘A really nice guy though,’ I think, ‘this is how America is, the *Africa Lounge*.’

“What are you having man?” The waiter asks.

“I’ll take Buffalo wings and a Jameson please.”

“You wanna make it a double for an extra \$3?”

“Uhhh. Yes,” I say.

“You got it,” the waiter walks away.

“Did you order?” I ask Kyle.

“Yes.”

“Oh shit,” I pause. “What did you order?”

“Chicken strips.”

A few minutes later I’m pounding Buffalo wings, ranch and Jameson while looking at the Wikipedia page for ‘Exoticism’.

“Exoticism is described as having, ‘the charm of the unfamiliar,’” I say swallowing a piece of ranch covered drumstick. Kyle is in autopilot, inhaling his French fries and scrolling down a Reddit thread. Next I Google, ‘is exoticism racist?’ A couple articles come up saying yes it is. ‘Orientalism has been asserted as one of the three pillars of White Supremacy,’ writes Andrea Smith, who is a white woman. This is all very confusing to me. Probably because I’m now drunk. ‘What are the other pillars of White Supremacy?’ I wonder. Big pharma should be up for consideration. That shit is strictly a drug cartel for people who can afford to play.

We leave the *Africa Lounge*. Probably for good. Never to be seen again just like all the bizarre and unknowable destinations that connect life is a string of cosmic uncertainty. ‘We are born knowing nothing and all that we learn is a fleeting series of sensory revelations. Therefore, ranch sauce is a kind of knowledge,’ I think.

At gate A6 I hand Kyle three Tramadol and put a massive wad of Grizzly Wintergreen chewing tobacco in my lip.

“Where are you gonna spit?” Kyle asks.

“Fuck,” I say. “Hold on.”

I ask a young couple if I can use their empty Starbucks cup for dip spit. They say yes and laugh. I laugh and say thank you. Life is like that. Pretty funny and uncomfortable.

I swallow two more Tramadol with the dip in my mouth, without swallowing any chew, because I am a fucking pro. The plane doesn’t board for another 30-minutes. Which is fine. The pills

and tobacco soak into my nervous system like a warm electric current swirling in miniature-hurricane-esque circles. I feel like I'm in a 102-degree hot tub that never gets too hot.

“How you feel?” asks Kyle.

“Really fucking good. How bout you?”

“Yeah. Good.”

“Yo,” I say. “We’re gonna be in L.A. in like three hours.”

On the plane Kyle and I share headphones and listen to non-stop Future songs while I draw various patterns in blue ink and he plays *Marvel vs. Capcom* on PSP-2000.

“I mean it’s pretty self-explanatory. You can put it in Sport Mode or Triptronic which is always fun. There’s a Bluetooth port in there and a little instruction book in the dash. And yeah. I think that’s it,” says a guy who we met on the app Turo—as he hands Kyle BMW 6 Series keys.

“Thank you so much man. We’ll take really good care of her,” Kyle is beaming.

“Yeah thank you,” I say, now wearing a hat.

“Enjoy you guys.” The man walks off into L.A.X. and I have no idea what his name is but we are now driving his drop-top all black M6 through the streets of Los Angeles.

“Yo, my buddy Casey from the New School says we can come through to a party in Long Beach.”

“Let’s do it.”

Kyle whips the car around a corner, dipping beneath an intersecting on-ramp and bridge and throwing the BMW up a small hill covered in mist. The Bluetooth playback is obnoxiously fuzzy through the radio, and navigating L.A. is confusing anyways so I cut the music and try to help Kyle get to Long Beach.

“Wait. Wait. Wait. That’s the wrong turn,” says Kyle.

“Fuck. Sorry dude. I’m extremely high.”

“Hold on. Can I take a left here?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t know.”

“Just go,” I say. A sedan honks at us as we peel across four lanes onto highway 405.

It takes us maybe seven-minutes to find parking in front of the house in Long Beach. Just circling around the warm mist. Neither of us have ever been to this neighborhood. We’re trying to decide what it’s all about.

“There’s a lot of laundromats and liquor stores though. Like multiple liquor stores on every block. Look,” I say.

“Yeah but then look how nice some of these houses are,” Kyle slows down and points at a house with massive palm trees obscuring a terracotta roof.

“Are they nice though? I can’t tell.” I say.

“I think so yeah. They are nice.”

“Yo, a spot right there,” I say spitting Grizz dip into an empty bottle of 5-hour Energy.

“Oh yup.” Kyle parallel parks into the notably tight spot on the first try because he is a fucking pro.

Literally Casey’s silhouette looms onto the front porch. Seeing him as a shadowy figure for the first time in six years reminds me exactly of a long lost, but finally returning, character from an Alexandre Dumas novel.

“YOOOO,” I yell into the street.

“What’s good Jake?”

Casey is about 6’7” and looks and acts exactly the same as the last time I saw him November 2010 in New York City right before I dropped out of the New School due to being arrested for heroin in Seattle a few days later on Thanksgiving.

“Bro. I really thought I would never see you again,” I say.

“Yeah I was starting to wonder.”

“Six years Casey. Yo this is my friend Kyle.”

“Whaddup man, thanks for having us,” says Kyle giving Casey daps which turns into a hug.

“Good to meet you.”

“So let’s smoke Marb Lights and drink a bunch of Coronas yeah?” I say as we step into the California house party.

“We just have Heineken,” Casey says in a firstly disappointed but overall excited tone.

As soon as we walk past the foyer I glimpse into a tapestry covered bedroom and see three girls snorting coke off what appears to be a ‘coke mirror’ (it’s a 6-inch circular mirror with a gold rim

that encloses the sides, presumably securing the cocaine) one of which is my old friend Lucy who I also haven't seen since leaving New School.

"Is that Lucy?" I say both shouting into the room and gesturing toward Casey as a simultaneously genuine question and surprised realization.

"Who is that?" She calls back. I step closer to the cracked door.

"It's Jake. From New School remember."

"Holy shit come in here!" Lucy scurries to the door and kind of secretly lets the 3 of us enter.

"Dude where have you been?" asks Lucy.

"I don't know like, astral projecting and dropping L inside of dimly lit buildings you know?" I say energetically.

"I'd expect nothing less Jake," she smiles.

"No but I'm up in Seattle. Things are good," *the lie detector test determined, that was a lie* *Maury Povich voice*. "How are you? Fuck it's good to see you."

"Awesome yeah. Fuck. Wow. Hey, these are my friends Merissa and Kate," says Lucy.

"I'm Kyle."

"Hey."

"Hi."

"That's Lucy by the way," I say.

"Kyle." They shake hands daintily but in a way that feels very positive, like a well-understood social interaction that will establish a long-term friendship.

"So uhhh," I pause briefly. "How you feel about letting me do a line?" The room falls totally silent, time suspends itself and the house party becomes a pocket-like vortex mutating into the shape of a question mark. All matter stands still....

“Yes,” says Lucy.

Then suddenly time resumes its fluid hilarity and Kyle and I are bent over a ‘coke mirror’ with twenty dollar bills in our noses simultaneously snorting lines, which feels like the friendship equivalent of a high-powered chest-bump or secret handshake.

“Did I say that it’s good to see you?” I ask Lucy while pulling my face up from the mirror in a way that feels like I’m channeling Macho Man Randy Savage.

“Haha, yeah man. So what’s the deal? You doing art? You got a girlfriend? What’s been going on?”

“Uhh. Yeah all of that. Well my girlfriend just left me to live in New York actually. But we came to L.A. to film the trip and make a documentary. Is it ok if I record you?”

“Don’t record us doing cocaine,” Kate says sitting cross-legged on the bed next to the blow.

“Sorry to hear about your girlfriend. How long were you together?” asks Lucy.

“Oh no it’s fine,” I say. “Heartbreak is a powerful thing like, that shit alters your DNA. Totally of redefines you. I feel super motivated you know, just to go out and like, fly down to L.A. and do this shit.”

“Yeah I hear that,” she says. “Glad you came.”

“Let’s go outside for a smoke Jake,” says Casey.

“Yes. I’m trying to smoke unlimited cigarettes with you bro.”

In the backyard Casey, Kyle and I smoke Marb Lights beneath maybe four or five palm trees that are being lit up by a slow moving L.E.D. light machine. Casey pulls two freezing cold Heinekens out of a cooler and hands them to Kyle and I.

“Oh no thanks, I don’t drink,” says Kyle.

“Wait, so you do coke but you don’t drink?” asks Casey.

“I know, it’s weird.”

“That is weird.”

“Well I usually don’t do coke either, but we’re at a party in Long Beach and it seemed like the right thing to do,” says Kyle. I pat his back and say,

“Down for the fucking cause.”

“It’s good to have friends like that. Who support your vision,” Casey says to me.

“Speaking of which, can I film you pounding a beer beneath these LED lights or something?”

“Uhh, I’d rather have you not,” Casey shakes his head.

“Fair answer.”

In the living room, which reminds me exactly of a scene from *The Big Lebowski* (I’m starting to really feel like we are on an adventure to nowhere), specifically the part where Dude is in Julianne Moore’s art studio trying to figure out why he’s there, Marissa burns a stick of incense then lights a joint, coughs and, I think, accidentally blows smoke directly into Kyle’s face. Seems egregiously coincidental though. Kyle takes the entire cloud of smoke into the eyes and nose at a distance of approximately 2-inches. This means he is now high on upwards of four narcotics (I didn’t mention that I gave him half a 10mg Adderall while listening to Kevin Gates on the 405).

There are several other people in the living room, one of which is a more-than-likely blacked out hipster slash bro (an incredibly strange and arguably dangerous fusion) wearing a leopard print robe, who periodically stands up and says, ‘where you from man?’ staring in the general direction of either Kyle and I with unfocused eyes. I’m sitting between James and Zadie who I met outside. They are boyfriend and girlfriend and I feel like an unusually old adopted child who is being subsumed

into a force field of love by sitting between them. Actually, now that I think about it, they're probably trying to three-way with me because outside James said they've been trying to three-way. 'No,' I think, 'Not tonight.' Zadio reaches over me for a beer, brushing my crotch. 'Well actually...'

A second joint is being passed around the grimy, painting and sculpture covered living room with all its windows blacked out by tapestries and things like Egyptian-looking maps. Zadio hands me the joint and I shake my head no. The coke is wearing off. I slowly move a second beer toward my mouth and tell Marissa how my goal is to play Sublime and Red Hot Chili Peppers the entire trip.

"Let's hear it now!" She says.

"Don't change the song. Anybody," says Mark in the leopard print robe.

"We're changing it," Casey declares. 'An honorable friend,' I think. It's exactly *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

Actually the whole night has a lot to do with honor, past mistakes and long forgotten histories that unearth themselves into seemingly orchestrated moments of clarity.

Mark shuts up and I plug my phone into an aux cord and put on *Can't Stop* where Anthony Kiedis rhymes shin big with win big. It's a great song and everybody loves it. Or at least I love it and my subsequent positive energy is, I hope, raising the vibration of the room.

"Dude Rex expected us at like 1am and it's 3 now," mentions Kyle.

"Shit," I say. A terrible revelation. The plan is to stay at Rex's house who is, kind of ironically, a hardcore Christian.

"We should really go," Kyle says.

"Ok five-minutes," I say standing up and then crouching next to Casey. "Yo this is a long shot but I thought I might as well ask. Is there anyway we can buy some molly?"

“Hold on, let me ask someone,” Casey gets up and walks to the backyard. After three-minutes he comes back with Kate and they signal me into the bedroom.

“Ok so you want some drugs,” says Kate. She is dead gorgeous and makes no eye contact and appears to be somewhat unsure where she is.

“Yes please.”

“I can sell you four pills for \$60,” Kate says.

“Perfect. Holdup, is there any chance you’d do five pills for \$80?” I ask.

“I can only sell you four dude. We’re all going to CSSR tomorrow and these pills are for everyone.”

“For sure. I really really appreciate the plug. And thanks for having us.”

“Anytime man,” says Kate—kind of swiveling her head upwards and making split-second eye contact for the first time. She drops four pills into my hand, all of which are pressed into the shape of *White Oreos*.

“It’s really good ecstasy,” confirms Casey. I put three twenties on Kate’s dresser next to a pile of Amethyst and Quartz where she keeps her drugs hidden in a jade box.

“I think we’re gonna take em at Disneyland. Can’t wait,” I say.

“Brilliant.”

Now everything is happening very fast and Kyle is in a hurry to leave and Zadie gives me ‘their’ number and for no reason at all, other than excitement and maybe befuddlement, I’m handing out upwards of 10 cigarettes to three or four of my new friends. Kyle and I are walking out the door, smoking Marb Lights on the street, when I turn back around one last time and hug Casey on the porch.

“Let’s try and make it less than six years next time hugh?”

“Come live down here man, there’s a whole community waiting for you,” says Casey.

“It means a lot bro. You mean a lot,” I disengage the hug and run towards the growling BMW.

“Peace brother,” shouts Casey. I jump in shotgun.

“Have fun at CSSR,” I say as Kyle pulls off into the now perfectly clear roads.

When we pull into Rex’s gated community, in Harbor City, he’s waiting for us in the driveway wearing Batman pajamas. Kyle introduces me and the three of us discuss an extremely censored version of our night where there were no drug deals, cocaine or would-be-three-ways. Rex shows us to our room, which is fucking perfect because, it’s free, and a basement with a mattress, couch and flat screen television. I put on basketball shorts and Kyle gives me a 15mg Temazepam, which knocks me out before I get a chance to take one last Grizz dip.

In the morning Rex is, what feels like, aggressively chipper, whereas I am the shell of a body whose ghostlike personality has been significantly damaged due to the effect of heavy drug use on neurotransmitters. ‘Oh well,’ I think, ‘been this way a long time.’ I pop two 10mg Adderalls, take a shower, go outside to smoke a Marb Light and feel fine. I even feel ‘young’ and ‘erudite’ I think, adjusting my hat as sunlight hits my dark glasses and cigarette smoke dissipates into curving lanes of the gated community.

“Are you wearing a Fedora right now?” asks Rex.

“Yeah it’s my L.A. look, what’d you think?”

“Whatever makes you happy guy,” teases Rex. “Hey Kyle, let’s go.” Kyle steps out of the garage wearing his hair in a bun and these ripped up light wash jeans and I feel like we’ve got a really solid ‘L.A. look’ going and that finally, for once, my life is arguably awesome and not a disintegrating behavior pattern that inevitably results in canceled therapy sessions and ex-girlfriends that I can only keep for four to six months.

“You guys look ridiculous,” says Rex.

“If by ridiculous you mean famous then yes, we do look ridiculous,” I say.

“If you don’t got haters you’re not popping,” Kyle adds.

The 20mg of Adderall starts to take effect in the back of Rex’s massive-all-white F-150. I’m feeling very focused and ‘erudite’ while filming the streets of Torrance, which are spread out and rolling into what can only be described as ‘the void.’ Rex is driving us to get deli sandwiches at his favorite place *Scardino’s Italian Deli*.

We get the sandwiches. They are delicious.

After *Scardino’s Italian Deli* the three of us drive around Torrance in the F-150 with Rex as our tour guide. We stop at a Wayfarers chapel, which is a cathedral made of glass, built at the edge of a bluff with light pouring through the crystal panels as if the universe is saying, ‘I am unraveling into infinite possibility.’ I film the cathedral with supreme focus and pretend I am simultaneously Christian Bale, Terrance Malik and Emmanuel Lubezski who made a movie about being lost in L.A. called *Knight of Cups* which I have seen five times. Rex says some vague thing about how he’s supposed to take his wife here, and never has, and feels bad about bringing us instead. I run to an edge of the bluff and get a shot of branches. Kyle seems distant. Maybe agitated with how high and fucking crazy I am. I’m self conscious about the whole thing. But any negativity I feel is continually

overpowered by the Adderall and dopamine shooting off in my brain like a never-ending Saturn missile.

A lot is happening. Fast motion. I smoke maybe three or four Marb Lights at a beach somewhere. Then we go to pick up Rex's wife Meredith at a Target, who is a scientist and PhD student at USC, and I try and talk to her about academia and the challenges of navigating 'the institution' in a way that I perceive as 'erudite' and 'calm.' I'm somewhat certain Kyle is the only one who knows I'm high and that I can talk freely about being an artist whose goal is to capture the spirit of being untethered and young. Although now I feel myself talking very fast and excitedly about movies no one has seen.

"Nicolas Cage is the worst actor of all time," Rex argues at a red light. "Like fucking Face-Off is only a cult class because it's so bad."

"No but that's the point. The 'bad acting,' like, he turns that on. He's an extremely intentional artist."

"No way," says Rex.

"Yes dude, think about Adaptation, Leaving Las Vegas, Raising Arizona—I mean Bad Lieutenant come on. He kills all of those rolls."

"Yeaah," Rex mumbles.

"Also no one does as many movies as him. My theory is that Nic Cage is an experimental artist who only takes shitty roles so he can get rich and prove that Hollywood is more concerned with kitsch and profit than anything else."

"Yeah that's a stretch dude," says Kyle.

"Maybe," I say. The car is silent.

"Wild At Heart though..." I mutter.

Kyle and I somehow, maybe a bit awkwardly but mostly in a way that's tactful, tell Rex we're off to do our own thing. 'Our own thing' consists of driving the BMW towards Venice Beach, listening to Future and mixing three kinds of pharmaceuticals while smoking cigarettes and taking dip at the same time. Actually that's just what I'm doing. Kyle is dead sober today.

Kyle puts the roof down and we hit 110 to the 405 as I cathartically scream Future lyrics and film Kyle's hair blowing in the wind.

"I just need my giiiiirllfriiennd. I just need my giiiiirllfriiennd," I repeatedly shout. Kyle smiles. We pass a 'Jesus Saves' billboard and a plastic bag flies over the car and it seems that we are driving into a collective history in which all our desires and mistakes are met with a perpetual tide of tattoo parlors, first dates, x-rays, hickies, street lights, detox and weekends. All of life passing by in a senseless barrage that, at this moment, begins to look like shreds of light re-configuring themselves in a hyper-active grid of suffering and escape. Bumper to bumper traffic. The matrix has us both. I'm not sure if Kyle knows this. 'Fucking capitalism,' I think. I light a cigarette.

Kyle pays seven dollars for us to park at Venice Beach. He's really putting down and making the whole trip happen. And what a trip. It's like a fucked-up, but brotherly, arts grant. Or it's like *Make A Wish Foundation* except I don't have cancer, just Borderline Personality Disorder and, what is arguably terminal, suicidal tendencies.

"This is research. We're doing research. For grad school. It's all very academic," I say to Kyle—pointing my iPhone at his face and then the Venice Beach boardwalk. I record a shot of me pulling out two 50mg Tramadol's from a shitty bag where I'm keeping all my drugs. The bag is shitty

because it's like some ripped up and un-enclosable plastic sleeve from an IKEA set. I have no idea how I got this bag. Probably last night at Kate's party or Rex's basement. It still works though. The bag that is. And the drugs. Actually everything is working.

On the Venice Beach boardwalk a troop of black guys are doing this massive performance where they jump over people and make racial jokes with a megaphone. Kyle and I stand and watch what is likely one of the most critical acts of the performance, where the troop lines up 12 people of all different genders and races and yells out synchronized commands and chants while the main MC kind of threatens and explains that the youngest member of his team will jump over everybody. The joke goes on for a really long time. I think I've seen this exact same act in NYC at Union Square, which is really weird to me, how dreamlike and interconnected but mostly vague and foggy everything is. Anyways, the 20mgs of Adderall starts to wear down. Kyle and I walk off before the performance is over. I have a feeling the young kid never jumps over the line of 12 people. But I'm really not sure.

On the beach I ingest 10mgs of Adderall and Kyle mans my iPhone and external battery pack while I walk towards the ocean and give a 10-minute speech about defiance and emptiness. A flock of seagulls flies perfectly through the shot.

“And when you come to a new place, it's as if you're stepping into a new set of ideas, a new culture, a new architecture and structure of beliefs. So to come to a different city, in a sense, is to abandon yourself. To abandon a culture idea, and enter a new one. So this is Venice Beach...” I'm rattling off into the camera.

“I'm walking around with multiple narcotics on me, acting like an idiot, but this is about freedom and holding onto the last minute of youth,” I'm on a roll, all spur of the moment.

“We're trying to find something, trying to find something I haven't seen before, but you know wherever you go, all you end up finding is yourself. That's all there ever is. The subjective final

plateau. Your relationship to something you can't understand. Which is culture, cosmology, god, death, birth, these are words that indicate something we don't fully comprehend. The way that things can affect us without our knowledge. I believe we don't know ourselves. I think Socrates said some shit like that. The more you know the more you don't know. So I'm out high on Venice Beach and I don't know shit. I almost don't even know where I am, I don't know who I am. Sure I said I was 26 but fuck. If my cells have been cycling through the universe I could be as old as time. And I feel as old as time. I am time."

This is word for word the speech I give on camera, to Kyle, who is killing the shot because he is a fucking professional. I get into a whole sermon about emptiness, or Sunyata, before discussing defiance. Walking along the tide now. The water appears as a broth of foam refracting a diamond blue sheen into the distance.

"The moon is something you can't even see right now yet it has an entire pull over the ocean. It just goes to show there are always forces at work you can't see. Our perception is so narrow that we don't even know our own limitations. But the thing about the human spirit is we're trying to break our limitations, the whole time. To defy limitation is what it means to be human. I've dealt a lot with depression and drug addiction, but to defy your past habits, to defy your tendencies, that's what growth is. To me, the spiritual pursuit is defiance. A hurricane comes, knocks your city out, you rebuild that shit. That's an act of rebellion against the universe. Fuck the universe man. The universe is a dangerous place. And I think man's objective has always been to outsmart and re-engineer reality. Build a house you know. We used to freeze to death in the winters. But no, let's resist the cold. Defy the disease. That's what poetry is. And that's what creation is. To make something new." Kyle keeps the iPhone rolling for 30-seconds before I tell him I'm done. It's a decent speech and I plan to cut a movie with all the random lofi footage on Adobe Premiere.

After the drugged out rambling Kyle orders Korean tacos and, because of the amphetamines, I don't eat but smoke Marl Lights on the sand. Kyle scarfs the food and we share a *Football* next to a watchtower with an American flag waving toward the Pacific.

"So what's up, are you still dating June?" I ask. Kyle pulls out his vape and sucks the metal tip causing the cylinder to moan.

"No man, we just kind of stopped texting. I'm still seeing Lisa—and June is too much to deal with on top of work," Kyle blows out vapor.

"That's too bad. I really like June. Always gives me eye-contact and nice hugs."

"Yeah," Kyle pauses. "How's the break-up with Helen? You fucked anybody else yet?"

"I put such a sincere effort into getting laid February, but no good, I just can't read the whole Jessica thing."

"Yeah." We stare into the horizon.

"Bro Helen changed my life completely," I say, getting emotional and lighting a cigarette.

"Like how?"

"It's hard to explain. First of all that was the best pussy I'll ever get. I'm convinced. Like four hours of her peeing on me and screaming into the night. See that shit, that's love. Disgusting, fucking unbridled intimacy. I would straight up go to war for that girl dude."

"That's wild," Kyle says. We pause. "So the sex was the biggest thing huh? That changed you I mean?"

"Not even though. She showed me like. No woman wants to hear about non-stop chronic pain. Or depression. You've gotta be a man. Or it's not about gender roles. Just nobody wants to deal with toxic neuroticism. So I learned to repress it all. At least around her. But it's the same with keeping friends. If you want love you've gotta be positive. Healthy even. Nobody loves the sick. Like

you can't be a life suck and keep a girlfriend. But fuck it's hard. To deal with that kind of agony every day."

"Yeah but I don't think it's healthy to repress all your feelings in a relationship," says Kyle.

"For sure," a pause. "But there's times when I'm shopping at QFC and almost collapse on the floor from hip pain."

"Damn."

"And dating at 26. Nobody tolerates that kind of dysfunction. You gotta take the pain, get high when you can I guess," I say.

"I guess so."

"Man. Fucking crazy. Dating Helen like, being in love, it showed me what parts of myself I've gotta kill. And then you learn what parts of yourself will never change."

"But even if you don't change you'll find someone. Remember that's one girl. It was never gonna work out with her like, come on, she has a sugar daddy. How you gonna find stability with someone that fucks for money dude?" says Kyle.

"Nah see this is why it's so fucked up. Her sugar daddy was the most secure part of our relationship. He paid for the house we were living in. I got to live there alone for a month it was lit, like, god bless that man. I only met her because he paid for her school in Seattle. That's magic if you ask me. Money. It determines everything. Sad we gotta fuck and die for it though.

"Bro understand that's one situation. Money is not the deciding factor in every relationship," Kyle argues.

"But all I have are my experiences. And every one of um comes down to money. I've been hospitalized three times since 2012. And the only reason I'm not homeless is because my parents can afford to help me with rent and medications. If it wasn't for privilege I would be literally dead from capitalism. Homeless. And I probably will be. Like I'm at the point where I applied for

disability. And it's almost the same thing with Helen. Where would she be? Without privilege and looks. I bet she wouldn't be wearing Gucci making art fulltime. Money is everything dude. Health, love, stability, name it. And if money isn't everything itself it definitely mediates everything.

Determines life like this tide of function and luck," I'm practically yelling.

"Are you finished?"

"Probably not," I say.

"Well I don't think that's how the world works. There's more to it than capital, for instance family. And fuck you dude I would never let you be homeless. Do you not know that?"

His words hang over me like some kind of uncertain revelation, about love and survival and how in the end, they're exactly the same thing. I wipe my eyes and don't cry.

"I'm proud of you though."

"Yeah I don't know. I've really damaged myself with drugs dude. But fuck. The way I look at it, I've been suicidal since 12. I mean I've gone six months without drugs and felt a lot worse than when I use."

"Yeah but you've gotta give sobriety a fair chance. Six months isn't long enough to know how it'll feel," Kyle tenderly suggests.

"I'm sure you're right. But I don't know. For whatever reason I can't do it. I've had a mood disorder my whole life, and now with the chronic pain, I just fucking lose my mind. It's like I need a release from all that. At least every once in a while."

"Well that's why we're down here," Kyle pats my back.

"Fucking god damn dude," I say smiling. "Really just smoking and getting high and chasing down America with a club you know. Epic. What you wanna do tonight?" I ask.

"I wanna go shop at WeHo—then you wanna hit *The Standard* right?"

"Yeah. Let's mob out now?"

“Yup.”

In WeHo Kyle and I find an antique store which is more of a junkyard labyrinth. The owners are two Mexican guys who hug us and point to the free water. The aisles are made of broken mannequins and old slot machines rusting between the mirrors and bar signs. Kyle films me walking through the maze of treasures while brushing my fingers against the metal and chipped paint.

In the car I pop half a 10mg Adderall and try to convince Kyle to eat the rest, but he declines so I light a cigarette and ingest 100mg of Tramadol because my back is giving out.

There is an 80-person line outside of *Supreme*. Kyle decides against waiting and leads us through a series of boutiques that are interconnected through alleys and walkways and of course, most of all, money.

Across the street from *Supreme* the blacked-out BMW looks like the shadow of a goblin beneath the setting sun. I buy a Rockstar at 7-11 before jumping in the passenger seat and taking off to *The Standard*. At dusk L.A. begins to shine in a slowly rising frenzy of chance encounters and neon lights.

Kyle circles downtown L.A. four times before deciding to pull into a parking garage. It's 6pm. We're both crashing hard. There's not enough drugs in the world to outrun the exhaustion of traveling, and partying, and recording the whole thing in an empathic and fragmented monologue full of windmill-like hand gestures. On the fourth level (or layer) of the parking garage I film myself

saying, 'Parking garage. This is the modern catacomb'—wearing sunglasses and a fedora and an unlit cigarette hanging from my mouth.

Kyle is stoic and, probably, fatigued but still records me walking through an ornate string of hotel lobbies, pointing at different chandeliers and statues and trying to articulate something about capitalism and the religion of money, how in America materialism is divinity, or at least it's, arguably, the most valued cultural facet including healthcare and human life. Meanwhile I'm texting Shamir and Brett, who is an MFA student at CalArts that I know from my commitment to poetry in Seattle.

Walking into *The Standard*, outfitted in what I, over the course of time, now know is a solid 'L.A. look', feels like entering a neon temple of greed and possibility and, fingers crossed, sexual intercourse. The up-escalator ascends into a tunnel of mirrors which glistens and multiplies the blue and pink light in every direction.

On the main floor of *The Standard* dozens of 20 and 30 something's laugh, drink multi-colored cocktails, and play Ping-Pong in what is an entire room full of Ping-Pong tables. Apparently 'the standard' for L.A. hotels is very fucking high and aristocratic. The room reminds me exactly of every unfulfilled wish I've ever had about being drugged out and famous and chasing down something I will never find. Kyle plops on a leather couch in front of a flat screen that's playing the L.A. Kings game. At the bar I order a Jameson on the rocks and go sit next to Kyle. The room is buzzing with conversation and a sense of unrequited desire. A wave of exhaustion, which would actually be better described as death, hits me and, apparently, Kyle both.

"We've got to rally," I suggest.

"We got this," Kyle smiles. "What does Shamir say?"

"He's not texting back. Probably still at the wedding."

"Well whatsup with your friend Brett?" ask Kyle.

“I think he’s gonna meet us here in like 30-minutes.” We sit in silence and I realize drinking a glass of Jameson without more uppers is a terrible fucking mistake.

“Hold my spot,” I say.

“Who the fuck is gonna take your spot dude?” laughs Kyle.

In the hyper-shiny, sci-fi looking bathroom I step into a blue-metal stall and swallow a *White Oreo* ecstasy pill. A bathroom attendant stands at the sink, somehow repressing what I can only imagine as an infinite reservoir of rage and wordily disgust. I feel guilty about being privileged and high and not standing six-to-eight hours in a row handing out towels. I can’t even imagine that shit. Under no circumstances would any amount of Tramadol allow me to withstand that job. Then I think about what a guy named Ricco told me in jail, ‘You’d be surprised what you’re able to endure.’ I smile at the bathroom attendant, give him a dollar and realize that, every day, I am surprised at what I can endure. Mostly myself.

Kyle sits on the leather couch smiling, almost radiating, while talking to a brunette whose holding a vodka cranberry.

“So what would you do if you were in L.A. for one night?” he asks. She is kind of permanently blushing and tucking hair behind her ear and swirling the ice around her glass. Answering quickly. There’re really getting into it.

“Obviously this place is pretty fun. Have you checked out the hookah bars?”

“No, what the fuck. Everybody’s told us they’re popping. Hey this is my friend I told you about, Jake.”

“Hey.”

“Hi, I’m Christy.”

“Is that Christy, like Christ, like an Anglo-Saxon Jesus thing?” I ask. Kyle looks at me dead serious from behind Christy and shakes his head ‘stop.’

“What?” she says.

“Nothing. It’s good to meet you. From L.A.?”

“Yeah I live in Echo Park.”

“Awesome, we really wanted to check that out tomorrow, but I think we’re going to Disneyland instead.”

“Oh that’ll be so fun!”

“It’s supposed to rain tomorrow so we figure it’d be a good day to go,” says Kyle. Christy turns toward Kyle, puts her hand on his thigh, and starts, what can only be, a private conversation.

A few minutes later Christy introduces us to her painfully introverted brother who is here with a group of programmers that all work for Expedia. His name is Roger. Roger disappears after two-minutes and the three of us take a metallic-space-pod-like elevator onto the roof.

The roof is exactly a manifestation of America’s collective longing for an external mediation of unobtainable happiness. There’s a DJ, pool, and mattresses. Everything is neatly organized beneath the flickering L.E.Ds. It’s so popping. And despite the aristocracy, I’m uncontrollably stoked to be here with my best friend who, at the very least, is getting Christy’s number. The three of us find a U-shaped couch wrapped around patio heater and Kyle asks Christy if she wants a drink.

“Oh thank you. I’d love a vodka soda.” Kyle gets up and heads to the bar. Christy and I talk about L.A. and design (which she does for a living) for several minutes and it appears I’m also charming her, most likely because my solid ‘L.A. look.’ However a middle aged woman, who is sitting near us on the U-shaped couch, starts attacking my character by saying things like,

“Are you ok sweetie?” to Christy, and, “Make sure he doesn’t drink anymore.”

“I promise you we’re all good and that I’ve had one drink tonight,” I say. The woman says more things that seem extremely calculated and piercing and I put on my sunglasses, realizing I don’t

give a fuck about any of these people, and right then I start peaking on ecstasy and hear Brett's voice over the EDM music.

"Jake," he says very matter-of-factly.

"YOOOO," I shout into the cities electric skyline. 'Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.' I stand up and start slapping Brett's hands, saying things like, 'Fucking L.A. dude. *The Standard*. It's all happening.' Brett smiles deeply and has this kind of sustained chuckle beneath the surface of his beard and grin. We hug.

Brett sits down and I introduce him to Christy and Kyle comes back holding two drinks, one of which, only I know, is non-alcoholic, and the four of us laugh and get to know each other while I mostly roll back into the couch with sunglasses on at 8pm. At some point I tell Brett,

"I'm peaking so hard on ecstasy right now." This is a statement I view as a poetical ethos about non-conformity—and nihilistic disregard for reality—and I think he gets that. Brett usually gets it. The whole thing about being young and sick in a patriarchal system that backfires even on men and ends up resulting in a kind of schizophrenic war-culture. It has something to do with Deleuze I think. Brett mentioned Deleuze once or fifty times. All I know is that life is absurdly painful and short and if I can't stop the destruction of capitalism with poetry (which I've decided is a futile pursuit, poetry means almost nothing) then I'm going to enjoy its destruction of me with four shots of tequila on the roof of *The Standard*, with two of my best friends and Christy.

Brett and I are alone at the bar drinking a fourth shot of tequila, with money from student loans, when he begins to talk about L.A. and other things like death.

"It's an infinite labyrinth here. A maze with no exit. Where did you go today?"

"We did Venice Beach and WeHo."

"Haa, classic. How did you like that spectacle?"

"It's all one big illusion you know? Very pretty."

“Yeah Venice man. A total illusion. Especially WeHo, very fascist over there. Wait till you see Beverly Hills tonight.”

“Haha what?” I say sipping a Pacifico, which I forgot, until just now, I ordered.

“Yeah boutique shops man. It’s all fascist. Property is exactly about a divisional hierarchy of need. You spend three hundred dollars on a T-shirt in WeHo while children in Laos can’t afford to eat with the money they earn from making that T-shirt. Fucking fascist.”

“That is fascist,” I say handing Brett a Marb Light. “I don’t think the boutique shops make their clothes in the third-world though. Not sure.”

“Either way, a division of access. But definitely the best part is factory labor. You know the cultural prisons that are abstracted from our regional conscious, so that way, the eco-system of industrial subjugation feels entirely, not real. We should just keep buying T-shirts and computers.”

“Yes. We should. Obviously. Can we please see what Kyle and Christy think about this?”

“Oh I’ll get into it.”

Kyle and Christy are standing in a crook of the roof along the silver railing, smiling and laughing at each other above the incessant traffic, which is inaudible over the pounding music. Brett and I linger between the pool and DJ and catch up on each other’s creative work when I earnestly say,

“I’ve literally not been working. I’m worried. I just run around Seattle ingesting drugs, and film the whole thing.”

“That is the work,” Brett reassures.

“I guess. Feels lazy.”

“Just read. Always be reading,” Brett tells me. “What are you reading now?”

“Artaud.”

“That’s perfect for you. Magic and cruelty and that other thing you love so much.

“What?” I ask.

“Mania.”

“Always.” I finish what’s left in my shot glass and take a pull of Pacifico and hand Brett the beer.

“What do you got going on? How is *Double Negative*?” *Double Negative* is a, 50-minute and counting, movie about artist Michael Heizer’s massive Las Vegas land sculpture which Brett slept in for five nights, recording, and getting shots of cellphones flying in the air.

“*Double Negative*?” repeats Brett in a characteristic, overly excited, grin that suggests a sincere vision and sense of cosmic hilarity to the whole pursuit of art.

“Yeah, how is it?”

“I don’t know. It’s 50-minutes man. It’s art you know. I’m not sure if the world cares about that sort of thing.”

“Yeah I care about it though. Fucking *Double Negative*,” I light a cigarette. “And fuck the world anyways.” Brett can be either extremely modest or cocky, depending on his mood. Which makes sense because he’s a hyper-prolific writer and visual artist who’s going into a PhD next fall. Total genius. In other words, a sick-fuck and complete psychopath.

“What’s going on guys?” asks Kyle. Christy bashfully grins, looks at Brett and I, then subtly lets go of Kyle’s hand.

“Uhh. I’m peaking on ecstasy,” I say as an objective truth.

“What are *you* doing man?” teases Brett. “Why are you guys in L.A.?”

“Jake’s doing research. For grad school.” Kyle says.

“That’s right, he was telling me all about your guys’ investigation,” Brett chuckles deeply.

“What are you in grad school for?” asks Christy.

“Poetry,” I say.

“Which should actually just be called poverty,” says Brett.

“I think that’s so cool. Doing what you love,” says Christy.

“No I don’t really love it. It’s just something I kind of have to do. Part of a larger neurosis.”

“Sooo, these are my friends,” says Kyle laughing.

“Let’s get a drink yeah?” I suggest.

At the bar I order three shots of well tequila and make a toast.

“To Kyle who brought me out here. To Brett who is our mystic Shepard. And to Christy. New friends.” The four of us drink. Partynextdoor plays in the background. I think about kissing Helen this time last year in front of her house.

After ordering more beers the four of us walk around the swimming pool. I forget to record any of it. Kyle and Christy pretend to push each other in the water. Random people shout, ‘DO IT.’ Brett disappears then taps my shoulder and shows me a GIF he just made on his iPhone of Christy and Kyle dancing between threads of blue light.

“Hey. You guys wanna go to a party in Beverly Hills? It’s rich people stuff, you’ll love it.” says Brett to the group. The four of us look at each other in, what feels like, utter excitement and a kind of galactic YES. But on second thought I’m high on ecstasy so I doubt it felt that way to anybody else.

Christy decided to stay at *The Standard* with her anti-social brother —and Kyle and I, at some point, had an automatic and shared realization that we will never see her again. That all people come and go, at various intervals, and the ones you hold onto longest are the only thing worth living for.

Brett, Kyle and I drive along Sunset Boulevard with the top down, bumping Future, and I pass Brett half the 10mg Adderall that Kyle refused earlier while I scream,

“WHERE THE FUCK IS RON HOWARD?” Kyle, finally, laughs hysterically and misses a turn. We double back and drive down a road of sagging trees that continually guide and open into more trees and road and I feel certain that we are entering a wormhole of infinity, that is, a moment so impenetrably filled with joy that it might as well be dense as eternity.

We arrive to a white-compound that looks exactly like a house from the video game *Grand Theft Auto*. Specifically a house that your character earns after 50 missions of murder and drug deals. Before going in to the party Kyle pops three 1mg Klonopin and offers Brett some, who declines because he doesn't like downers.

“You're a downer dude,” I say energetically.

“Fuck you, you're a drug addict.”

“Accurate,” I confirm. Outside the BMW we all share a Marb Light. It's the last one in my pack.

“We're fucked,” I say responding to this realization, somewhat earnestly losing it.

“We got the vape. You'll be fine,” says Kyle.

“True, true,” I reply, vaguely realizing how much Kyle has been taking on by driving all day and helping me film, what can only be understood as, drug-induced non-sense.

Inside the house party there are roughly 20 people circulating in and out of the living room and back patio, which is less of a backyard and more of a stake in some real estate or banking dynasty. Brett goes to find his girlfriend Lola. Kyle and I are too sedated on drugs (i.e. slumped) to socialize with strangers. Luckily nobody questions us. This is obviously because we have a solid ‘L.A. look’ that, I now know, functions as both camouflage and cause for criticism. Kyle and I make our way to the snack bar and start filling up glass plates with shrimp, cheese skewers, steak bites and

cups of Pierre. It seems important that the plates are made of glass. Especially in light of the Swerve Z's listening party, which was elusive, but had paper plates, but still feels part of the same cultural continuum where everybody is chasing something that isn't real. Or it's not that snack bars, swimming pools and plastic Champaign flutes aren't real, it's that maybe we need different collective rituals to shed our identities and attain prolonged states of euphoria. If it were up to me I'd vote on normalized drug orgy slash poetry readings. But this party seems fine.

On the patio Brett and Lola find us eating shrimp and vaping next to a seven-foot electronic fire that is being projected out of a glass cage.

"Hey. Kyle and Jake this is Lola, I think you two met in Seattle," Brett says to me.

"Yeah, good to see you again," I say, both cheeks stuffed with Havarti cheese and cocktail sauce. Lola makes a motion that I've got sauce on my face. This is the moment I realize I've attained my goal of being 'untethered and young.' I grab a napkin off Kyle's plate, wipe my beard and suck on the vaporizer.

"So what do you think about L.A.?" asks Lola. My mouth is now full of beef.

"Love it. First time here, it's like a massive party slash wasteland," says Kyle.

"That's a very accurate description," says Lola. "You guys fit right in."

"It's cause our 'L.A. look,'" I say chewing on steak and, I think, garlic.

"Yeah nice hat by the way," says Brett.

"Thank you. It's a fedora." I say as a joke that, probably only I know, is about try hard-guys that wear fedoras.

"Uhh, so you're a painter Lola?" I ask.

"Yeah I paint," she nods modestly.

"I've only met three painters in my life which seems really unfortunate. But," I say dropping a skewer back onto my plate. "That means you're the best painter I know."

“How do you know I’m the best one?” she asks.

“Instagram. Obviously. Your page is lit.”

“Oh,” she smiles at Brett. Looks at me. “Thank you.” The four of us shoot the shit like this for awhile and say nothing important but our kinetic exchange and proximate bodies feels meaningful—and collectively Brett and I bum three to four cigarettes, drink Manhattans and plan to hang out tomorrow night before Kyle says,

“Let’s not keep Rex waiting again.”

“Yeah. Brett, Lola,” I say.

“You guys taking off?” Brett asks.

“Yeah we gotta get back to our host’s house before 1am. He’s a Christian.”

“That’s too bad. We were gonna snort pentagrams of blow later and worship Satan,” says Brett.

“I’ve been worshipping Satan all day dude. I’ve gotta get up and do it again tomorrow.”

“Understood,” says Brett, keeping a serious face as to continue the joke’s both satire and sincerity.

“Great to meet you two. Jake, Kyle. Have fun at Disneyland tomorrow. Come kick it anytime,” says Lola, making eye-contact and giving us nice hugs. Kyle and I walk onto the seemingly never-ending street.

“I like her,” I say.

“Who Lola?”

“Yeah.”

That night at Rex's house Kyle and I lay around the basement in our basketball shorts drinking orange Emergen-C and taking Grizz dips, spitting in the water bottles we just drank Emergen-C out of. Kyle gives me a 15mg Temazepam and 1mg Klonopin and I tell him about a dream from last week where I'm on a plateau and can't tell if I'm running with or from a pack of white wolves.

"It's probably both," says Kyle.

"What? How?"

"A lot of times we live amongst the things we're trying to escape."

"Agents in our own persecution huh? Hunting ourselves."

"Something like that," says Kyle.

Rex lets an over-easy egg slide onto my plate from the pan and says,

"You guys have fun last night?"

"The most man. Thanks for having us. We needed this vacation so bad."

"Seriously," I say.

"Anytime, anytime guys. Meredith and I are gonna be up in Seattle in March so we'll be expecting bed and breakfast as well," says Rex. Rex is a real jokester. Or totally aware he's housing a junky and subsequently regretful? I can't tell. Fuck it. We're going to pick up Shamir and get high at Disneyland.

The sun breaks through patches of clouds and pours across the vast network of freeways. I pop two 10mg Adderalls and 50mgs of Tramadol and take a dip instead of smoking because the top

of the BMW is up. For no discernable reason Kyle dumps a handful of various benzos into my palm. Xanax, Klonopin, Temazepam. For the sake of my nervous system I try and avoid using both uppers and downers at the same time but this is, what can only be called, an all out free-for-all and buffet. I ingest 3mg of Klonopin. The car hits 80mph on the 405 leaving Harbor City and the ocean west of our destination.

In the parking lot of Best Western Golden Sails, Shamir and his mom Azar are standing in the sun. Kyle and I hop out of the car, smiling and loudly saying hi as the four of us hug and communicate a sense of excitement more than actual words. I ask Azar to take a picture of us, which instead of doing, takes a video that I later screenshot and upload to Instagram with the caption, ‘Young L.A. angel boyz.’ By uploading the picture, my main hope is that Helen sees I’m healthy, loveable, in a BMW and now own a hat. I could give a fuck what anybody else thinks.

Before jumping in shotgun, Azar hugs me again and tenderly asks,

“How’s your pain?”

“Good. Thanks for asking. Think I’ve finally turned a corner.”

“Good, I’m glad,” she says. As the car pulls off I realize I’ve never told Azar about my chronic pain, that Shamir must have mentioned it, and that she cares enough to ask. Moments like that—small things go so far that, eventually, you realize they’re the opposite of small. For as rare and distant as love can be, it’s always heavy, substantial.

On the freeway I hand Shamir 30mg of Tramadol, take pulls off his vape and play Future and THEY. off my Spotify. Kyle is, I think, happier than he was sitting in gate A6 or trying to fuck Christy last night. He laughs and puts the roof down.

“I want to get a shot of you two in the front seat,” I say swiveling around with my iPhone.

“For sure,” Shamir yells over the music and wind.

We make it to Anaheim without hitting any traffic. I film a sequence of exit signs flying overhead. The Adderalls are making the movie more than I am.

In the parking garage of Disneyland I record a shot of my drug bag and explain to the camera how many drugs I have. It's a lot. I hand Shamir the iPhone and he records a monologue where I talk about popping ecstasy and say, "Fuck employment history, fuck all you guys. Hunter S. Thompson did it, Mick Jagger did it, and I'ma fucking do it."

"Huughh," Shamir growls from behind the camera. I hold the *White Oreo* up to the iPhone and say,

"This is what we call an ecstasy pill, and we're in Disneyland and I'm gonna get high on ecstasy." I swallow the *White Oreo* and say, "That's what I'm trying to talk about. This is rock and roll baby."

"Rooolling," says Shamir and cuts the shot.

"Here ya go ya'll," I say handing Kyle and Shamir ecstasy pills.

"*Percocet, Molly Percocet*," Shamir quotes the Future line and swallows his drugs.

"Yo don't ever listen to Future if you want to quit drugs," advises Kyle.

"God damnit, no fucking joke," laughs Shamir.

"I'm never going to quit drugs and I'm exclusively listening to Future for the rest of the trip," I say firmly. The statement is made with no opposition.

The ecstasy starts to hit on the tram into Disneyland. There are no changes in color or bodily sensation but the world begins to feel like a story or dream that you write yourself into. Decidedly this is a pleasant effect because it means I can, if only temporarily, write myself into any emotion I want. 'Joy. I choose joy,' I say to myself. I think about sharing a 10mg Adderall with Shamir but he's the one who gave them to me in exchange for a shit-ton of Tramadol, and I'll

probably be asking him for more by mid March. Besides, he got free Xanax and Tramadol in the car. He's high as shit.

Tickets to Disneyland are \$110. Luckily I've spent exactly zero dollars on food this trip, so therefore can afford the ticket and last nights tequila shots. The three of us go through security check. I empty my pockets except for the bag of drugs. A girl manually scans me with a metal detector and for some reason the pocket with drugs keeps buzzing.

"Do you have anything in that pocket?" She asks. I look her dead in the face.

"No."

"Alright. Enjoy your time at Disneyland."

"Thank you," I say, feeling this massive relief and skipping off into the theme park and throwing my arms around Kyle and Shamir who were already twenty feet head.

At this point I'm filming everything. All the shots are perfectly constructed, framing Kyle and Shamir walking into rays of sunlight with the Matterhorn ascending into the background. On my request, we head straight to the line for Indiana Jones.

"Super high," I say.

"Just gotta ride the wave."

"You ease into it. If the heart starts beating, you're just like, yeeah. Relax into it," says Shamir.

"Straight into the belly of the cultural beast. The empire of Disney. I got Walt turning in his grave," I say into the iPhone.

"No I got Walt doing exactly what Walt wants," says Kyle.

"This is what he envisioned bro," Shamir smiles into the camera.

"Ok so tribute to Walt you guys?" I ask. Kyle looks into the camera and says,

"Yeah. Whatup Walt, sorry about your anti-Semitism."

Shamir is cracking up.

“Still had great characters though,” I say.

“Yeah, yeah, every genius is tortured. He was just tortured by uhh...self hate.”

We’re all kind of yelling about drugs and Temple of Doom and fucking on the second date and everywhere around us are families and teenagers and just a whole lot of people but nobody cares because everyone is here to have a good time and it seems that almost nothing could interrupt that. Rain starts to fall between the synthetic canopy and corrals of bamboo. There’re two Mexican guys behind us, this huge dude covered in tattoos and his friend who is maybe 20. Shamir starts talking to them. I’m busy filming what I think is an ‘inherently poetic’ shot of raindrops falling onto the heads of children. We’ve been in line for 10 or 20-minutes, but it feels fast. Everything about this weekend feels fast and ungraspable. I’m rolling very hard. I want a cigarette.

10-minutes later all three of us are talking to the two Mexican guys in line with a highly emotive and bizarrely personal tone that is characteristic of MDMA’s psychedelic and speedlike effects.

“The weed culture is cool up there,” says Kyle. “It’s like drinking at a bar, it’s everywhere.”

“It’s a different story down here. But in Mexicali, we get everything. My prima has whole acres. Weed. Coke. Anything,” says the dude with tattoos.

“You been to Seattle?” I ask.

“No,” he says. “But the weed though. Easy to get hugh?”

“In Seattle it’s easier to get weed than alcohol man,” says Shamir.

“At any store?” he asks.

“No it’s like liquor stores,” explains Shamir.

“If you’re in L.A. just go to any looking black and Mexican community, and there’s a liquor store on every fucking corner.”

“Yeah we noticed that in Long Beach kind of. Different world down here,” I say.

“Yo, what’s your guys’ names?” asks Shamir.

“Mikey,” says our friend with tattoos.

“I’m Juan.”

“Are ya’ll cousins?” asks Shamir.

“Yeah this my big cousin,” says Juan. “He woke my ass up, I was dead passed out, smoking, he comes in the door...”

“Wake up bitch we’re going to Disneyland,” Mikey cuts in. The five of us laugh. We all exchange daps and pounds as if having vaguely grown up in the same cultural spectrum of drugs, rap music and the unwavering desire for women and some kind of place in the world. The line for Indiana Jones inches along and we start to really get into it. Now discussing various parties:

“That’s the only bad thing about Mexicali, in the mornings, it looks like they recorded *The Walking Dead* up in that bitch.”

“Like *The Hangover*, I say.

“No, no fuck *The Hangover*, you’ll see nothing but tweakers.” Mikey does a zombie impression.

“Yo I’m telling you the coke in Seattle is horrible man, not even worth it,” I say to Mikey.

“No fuck the coke. The tweak. The meth. You’ll be power walking through the desert, 125 degrees.”

“Climbing mountains and shit,” I say.

“Trust me when you’re on meth, you’ll do all kinds of shit. I was smoking an eight ball a day before I got locked up. One time when I was on meth, I blacked the fuck out I was so drunk. Then I did coke, meth. I woke up dude, in a little desert, there was like a little mountain, you know those mounds from the trucks, they put it there and covered it with a whole bunch of dirt, so we were in a

fucking hole,” say Mikey widely gesticulating. This is a story that makes almost zero sense to me, but I understand it on the base level of continually blacking out and waking up in situations that also make zero sense. We talk exclusively about women and drugs and Juan vaguely mentions he drinks non-stop Actavis, showing me, several times, saved videos from his Snapchat in which he is drinking all different kinds of Promethazine. The line finally moves into the Indiana Jones Temple and the five of us rush through the manufactured archaic-looking passageways like gleeful children, which we all are.

“I’m peaking now,” says Kyle. The ride’s safety bar clamps down and the three of us are shot into a cave of green lasers and holographic snakes that jump out of trap doors as the rollercoaster swings through bitch black corners and lava pits with steam rolling off their whirlpools. I film the whole ride without dropping my iPhone. Mikey and Juan scream behind us saying things like, ‘Holy fuck. Look at that one,’ and ‘Watch your back dog.’

After the Indiana Jones Ride the five of us step into the rain laughing and smiling and, it seems clear to me, feeling as if we’ve collectively experienced something transcendent.

“Yo, let’s go smoke a cigarette Mikey,” I say turning around. Mikey already has a Marb Red in his mouth.

“I’m way ahead of you bro,” he says. Everybody explodes with laughter. Mikey and Juan tell us we should go get ‘fast passes’ which, we learn, are tickets you can obtain every hour that allow you to skip the line of a certain ride. Our five person crew speed-walks to Thunder Mountain, prints fast passes, heads to the smoking section, smokes Marb Lights and Marb Reds, and all share a handful of *Footballs*, except for Mikey who can’t because he is on probation.

We get in line for the Finding Nemo Submarine, which was undemocratically Mikey’s decision. In fact there was exactly zero discussion about doing the Finding Nemo Submarine, we just kind of ended up here with Mikey in the front of the line saying, “My daughter will love this,” as

he films plastic characters with his Android. Juan, who has been almost entirely silent all afternoon, is now overtly emotional and talkative. Probably because he ate 3 *Orange Footballs*.

“So how old are you then?” Shamir asks Juan.

“21 dog.”

“Young gun,” Kyle says.

“That’s what I’m saying, be careful, do your drugs but make sure, lock it in,” I advise.

“These next four years are crucial bro, this is when people burn out, don’t burn out. You got this,” says Shamir.

“This boy just got out of jail,” Mikey tells us.

“What? What happened?” Kyle is, maybe because the ecstasy or his general ability to connect with people on a sincere level, deeply invested.

“They took me in for nothing bro. They said attempted murder. I didn’t do shit. I’m still fighting the case so like, don’t put any of this online,” Juan says gesturing to my iPhone, which is in everybody’s face.

“No, I won’t,” I say.

“How long were you in for?” asks Shamir.

“Like twenty days,” Juan says.

“Did you fight?” Mikey asks his cousin.

“I got in over 10 fights,” he says. “I had to.”

“Jesus, the whole system is so fucked. All the prisons are private man, it’s a business. I mean how the fuck is smoking weed or heroin a crime, but Adderall and Xanax are perfectly legal? Oxy and heroin are virtually the same chemical, why is only one a crime you know? It’s about power and fucking slavery dude,” I say with the iPhone put away. Mikey and Juan solemnly shake their heads in agreement. They’re well aware.

The five of us descend into the Finding Nemo Submarine amongst a line of mostly all children. Different vibe than Indiana Jones, which is obviously, objectively, the best ride in Disneyland. Kyle turns to me and says,

“That ecstasy wears off fast huh?”

“Yeah sadly. Super clean though right? Easy come down,” I respond.

“That’s true.”

Mikey and I sit next to each other on the submarine. We both film the entire ride, getting shots of sharks and puffer fish flickering in the color changing water. All around me are kids squealing in joy, telling their moms, ‘Look! Look!’ and ‘Wow.’ So we’re mid-ride and kids are screaming the entire time and for a split second I feel my identity slip away beneath some kind of magnetic force field of laughter and what I can only name as innocence, but is actually, I somehow know, the fabric of all consciousness—some kind of inalterable purity that remains after the trauma and accumulation of our lives is stripped down by death.

“Yo these bubbles are just from between the glass panes. Not real,” says Juan. This is a devastating insight, but I still feel that we’re some place cosmic. The submarine ride climaxes in a slight rumble and Nemo appears in a wreath of coral and light and all his friends who are celebrating their, endlessly looping and mechanical, journey. Obviously the ‘real ride’ was the combined effect of Tramadol, Xanax, Adderall, ecstasy and seven-minutes of kids screaming in non-stop amazement.

After the Finding Nemo Submarine we go directly to an elevated smoking session where I chain smoke two to three Marb Lights and make Mikey promise me he won’t break his probation.

“It’s for my daughter man. My family. I can’t fuck up again,” he says, after letting go of what is a two-minute handshake.

“Where’s she now?” I ask.

“In Mexicali,” he pauses. “I want to bring her out here so bad. To see Mickey and all that shit.”

“You can do it. Just focus up,” I advise, offering him a drag of Marb Light.

“No,” he declines. Kyle and Shamir share a THC wax pen with Juan, who exhales the smoke into his black jacket. Mikey and I keep talking and eventually I film a complete breakdown of his Nortenos prison tattoos, of which he has four. Between cigarettes, Juan and Mikey offer everybody snacks and I drink blue Gatorade and Kyle eats Mikey’s entire bag of Cheetos.

“Oh shit, I killed it,” Kyle confesses.

“Don’t worry I got more in the car,” says Mikey.

The sun breaks out around 4:30 and hoards of people continue to relentlessly shuffle around the small city of churro stands and gift shops. On the march over to Thunder Mountain Kyle says,

“We’ve got dinner with Rex at 6:30. You coming Shamir?”

“Hell yeah.”

“Juan. On our way out to the car I got a handful of Tramadol’s for you,” I say. Juan’s response to this is to repeatedly tell me he’s got two ‘Mickey’s’ or ‘Mike Harders’ in their car, continually switching, and or forgetting, exactly what beverages he has. As the five of us load onto the Thunder Mountain track, Juan says for the third time,

“Trust me, I’ve got two beers, well two Mike’s Harder lemonades, if you take em with a little one, like a little Tramie or something, chug that shit, you’ll be good.”

“I’m gonna need more than a little Tramie bro,” I say, sitting in the car with Kyle and turning to Juan behind me. The rollercoaster shoots off into a series of goldmines and hilltops all laced with electric lights and boxes of TNT exploding at every turn. Mikey’s got his own car in the front. The five of us fly through the California air with our arms extended to a patchwork of clouds, which open and close like a membrane or gateway into a kind of distance that can’t be understood.

After Thunder Mountain we smoke cigarettes. I ingest 10mg of Adderall and wash it down with blue Gatorade. The crew agrees to go piss at the nearest Cafeteria. Inside, Kyle orders an \$8 pizza and I buy a Monster, drinking the can in one motion with a zero enthusiasm. The halls of the cafeteria are made of blue-and-green holographic panels. Everything in Disneyland looks obsessively multi-dimensional, teeming with detail and color. Perfect place to be high. Nothing but happy families all gathered for a singular and shared goal—American pleasure. By the water fountain I hand Juan two Tramadol.

“More later,” I say.

Kyle tells Mikey and Juan we have time for one more ride and what should it be? The group, by popular vote, decides on Buzz Lightyears’s Space Ranger Spin. The line is 30-minutes, with a wait-clock always changing like the DMV. I record myself talking into the iPhone,

“This is how America is. The all-pervasive line. A whole country made for waiting. 9-to-5 traffic. DMVs. Disneyland. Even the emergency room’s got a line. Reminds me of factory farming. Like sheep waiting to die.”

After 30-minutes of Mexican sex jokes, Juan showing me videos of Snapchat, Shamir smoking wax pen indoors, Mikey eating Funyuns, and me filming the whole thing with an amphetamine induced grin, we board the ride. It’s a two-person neon green car equipped with active laser guns. To my complete joy, and what at first prompts surprise but is actually obvious and natural, Juan starts waving his laser gun and shouting Future lyrics,

“I got that Draco, who wants to fucking see,” he says, then rapping, “Draco season with the bookbag, rat-tat got a little kickback, you ain’t never ever get your bitch back.”

During the ride I shoot with my iPhone instead of laser gun. This really upsets Juan because, I later learn, he wanted to compete for a highscore, which is apparently the whole point of

Buzzlightyear's Space Ranger Spin. The entire ride is spent with me absently filming and Juan angrily saying,

"You got to really shoot dog. Aim!"

"I know man, I just wanna film," I say, experiencing my body as an immobile and wet shell that's only function is to absorb chemicals and excrete soft moans.

After Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin it's nighttime and the entire park is lit up in purple and red lights that accent the space-age buildings of Tomorrowland. Our crew walks beneath the alien statues and florescent glow of a night that feels perfectly aligned to the energy we carried into this place. Kyle tells me Rocky texted him, who is in Brooklyn, and I respond by saying I have jealousy issues with Rocky, that, if I boil down are a personal insecurity.

"If you're confident with yourself and happy with what you're doing, you can understand other people and just, not sweat it." says Kyle. I nod my head and light a cigarette in the middle of the park because we're leaving anyways.

The five of us take a tram back to the parking garage and it dawns on Shamir, Kyle and me that we have no idea where the BMW is. It's 6:30 and Rex is, I'm sure, very irritated by our somewhat out of control behavior. Kyle and Shamir go vigorously search for the car and tell me 'just wait here' because I'm too high and burnt out to function and they have accepted my self-selected role as a maniac who's sole intent is to ingest drugs and film, what ends up being, shaky and almost indiscernible shots. So I lean against Mikey's car in the parking lot, pounding a Mike's Harder Raspberry Lemonade with Juan. Kyle and Shamir shout down to us from the level above.

"Car's up here."

From the trunk of the BMW I drop five Tramadol's into Juan's hand and happily receive his gift of the second, and mostly full, Mike's Harder Lemonade. The five of us slap hands and hug and tell each other to, 'be good', which obviously we won't because we are collectively a group of

criminals and drug addicts and generally human beings who can't help but destroy things in an endless succession of choices with no distinct consequence.

“Be good Mikey,” I say again. “For your daughter.” Kyle honks the horn goodbye and as the car pulls out of Disneyland I think, ‘maybe we can do better.’

At Gen Korean BBQ it's 7:35pm and Rex is somewhat passive-aggressive but mostly forgiving as Kyle, Shamir and I sit down to a booth, of Rex, Meredith and three strangers, that has a steaming cooker full of five different meats. Everyone at the table introduces themselves and, upon my request, Rex orders me a pitcher of IPA, which he and I split with a girl named Karen. Because of the ecstasy and Adderall I have exactly zero appetite but, out of respect, force myself to eat over 4 plates of pork and steak. The conversation goes, I think, exceptionally well. However I start to re-evaluate the term ‘well’ when Rex calls me out for being high.

“So Jake's high,” he says at some point. To which I respond with a series of four-to-six toasts exclusively to Rex, by repeatedly raising my pint glass towards his face. Still, despite me being what I conceptualize as, ‘a celestial and necessary wildcard,’ I think everyone is having a good time. The group sits around chatting about life, work, travel and photography, for maybe two hours. After everyone decides it's physically impossible to eat more meat, Rex and Kyle fight over the check and I absently think about smoking a Marb Light and trying to fuck Jessica Lee by mid-next-week. Everybody stands up to leave Gen Korean BBQ. Meanwhile Shamir and I hang in back of the group and he says,

“It's so swank in L.A. Like we're in a strip mall and the restaurant looks like a Rihanna concert.”

“Everything is spaceship,” I say, mostly to myself. “We’re observers.”

Outside I immediately smoke a Marb Light but toss out half the cigarette because everyone is waiting on me to get in the BMW. Rex rides shotgun with us in the BMW back to his house. It’s our last night in L.A. and the sprawling streets roll and roll into things I can’t imagine.

As soon as we get back to Rex’s house it’s obvious we’re not going out to any hookah bars or to meet Brett and his freak artist friends that I’ve read about in several stories. This is too bad because I have two 10mg Adderalls left that hold the promise of an infinite night of high-fives and blowjobs. Shamir, Kyle and I are crashing to the point Rex says,

“You guys look really tired. Shamir feel free to stay here tonight.”

“I think I will, thank you.” Even though we’re staying in, I go to the bathroom and pop 20mg of Adderall anyways—probably because I gave up on my health after a third psych hospitalization in August. Also because I like to have fun. On the couch I look to Shamir and Kyle:

“California baby! Fuck it all right?!” Kyle and Shamir respond with a tired and ambiguous expression that I read as, ‘I guess man.’ After 10-minutes of talking on the couch the three of us say goodnight and goodbye to Rex. He hugs me sincerely and I want him to know that, after a failed surgery and hospitalization and psych-visit and suicide attempt and breakup, this trip was everything I needed, a kind of interior survival and escape from the rat wheel gravity of living in chronic pain. Instead, I tell him,

“Thank you so much for having me.”

In Rex's basement I lay on the couch, reviewing my iPhone footage, violently high on Adderall with a Grizz dip in my mouth, while Kyle and Shamir play trivia.

"What is a gasket?" asks Shamir from a trivia card.

"It's a rubber ring or sealant used to connect two surfaces in an engine or piece of machinery," states Kyle with exactly zero hesitation. Shamir flips the card over to read the answer:

"A gasket is a shaped piece or rubber ring sealing the junction between two surfaces in an engine or other device." Shamir nods his head in amazement. I burst out laughing and say,

"That is the most grown-man description of a gasket I have ever heard." Shamir and I laugh in hysteria and Kyle kind of shrugs and smiles. They go on playing trivia and I become entirely invested in watching clips of, what is over four-hours, of Mikey and Juan telling gang stories in the lines of Disneyland.

"Fuck," I say. "Almost none of these shots are usable."

"Hahah bro, you said it was you're best work ever, you were so excited all day," Shamir teases.

"I know fuck. Ecstasy dude. That shit really changes your perception," I'm extremely disheartened. I find a good shot and show the guys. Shamir shakes his head,

"Nah dude, it's not that visual. Maybe use the sound."

"Trust me, there's stuff in here. There always is," I say, genuinely upset and vengeful—as if determined to make a meaningful piece of art to prove to the world depression and mania and all my mistakes are nothing but stepping stones into a trajectory of resilient artistry where I end up with a long-term, polyamorous girlfriend who has pink hair and makes sculptures.

"Let me get a Grizz dip," says Kyle. I hand him the can—he buries tobacco in his lip and we take turns spitting into a water bottle. Shamir lies on the floor, vaping, wrapped in a blanket with

only his head visible. The three of us talk for 20-minutes and things start to get serious, as they tend to do with the people you've known and loved for a decade plus.

“You might do better without your parent’s support though. Like I only got my shit together when I had to. I mean you can’t take on everything by yourself, but pressure goes a long way,” Kyle says to me.

“It’s not that simple Kyle. There are genuine levels of dysfunction and I’m pretty far on the fucking spectrum,” I retort. It’s an argument. And not a casual one.

“You keep saying that dude, but it’s only as true as you make it,” Shamir adds.

“Fuck that—you think I haven’t tried to get my shit together? AA, physical therapy, acupuncture, it does nothing for me. Like I told Kyle before, I’m genuinely happier when I party or get high. And you guys know I don’t ever take this many drugs. But like trust me, I cannot live sober in this much chronic pain, it’s impossible. I dare you to try it. ”

“Have you tried talking to some one?” asks Kyle. Shamir cuts in,

“Yeah man, after Lucas died I was feeling super lost, all fucked up, and just talking to a counselor made a world of difference,”

“Fuck guys. Are you kidding? I’ve done so much therapy. CBT, DBT, acceptance therapy. It’s not a solution. Talking to someone does not change physical pain or insomnia. And I refuse to hand over a co-pay and schedule my crisis into 40-minute chunks. Even if I wanted to, I can’t afford it,” I say. There’s a pause and I go on,

“I went to a psychologist, a pain specialist for six months, and the only thing she told me was chronic pain is permanent and I have to live with it.”

“Yeah that’s a terrible psychologist dude. You’ve gotta find the right one,” says Shamir aggressively. The conversation is too intense.

“Alright bro. I’ll just keep hunting down specialists on four hours of sleep until my insurance taps out. I don’t have the energy for it,” I say angrily.

“Well I worry about you dude. And I hope you don’t romanticize the whole suicide thing,” says Kyle.

“Oh I definitely romanticize death. That’s what you do when life becomes experientially unbearable. Sleepless fucking, non-stop agony. Like. Fuck dude. My life is not shit. Before Helen I hadn’t been touched in two years. I haven’t held a job down for longer than nine months. Not because I don’t want to, I fucking can’t. It’s nerve damage, that’s what it does. That’s why people sleep under bridges and kill themselves. They’re broken. And there’s nothing wrong with wanting to die. That shit is a human right.”

“You have no idea if you’re gonna heal, and killing yourself is so fucking selfish,” Kyle argues.

“No, a world that requires I suffer chronic disease, charges me for it, and makes me work full-time to survive, that’s fucking selfish. Fuck the world dude, really. I don’t give a shit about being here. The only reason I’m alive is to get high, hang out with you guys and write something until I decide it’s enough. Point blank.”

“That fucking attitude. You gotta grow up,” says Shamir.

“Whatever bro. I’ve put my time in being sober and optimistic. I’ve tried alright. And you don’t have to believe it. I know what the fuck I’ve done to survive. Exactly what I had to. America has no place for weakness. That’s what capitalism does, weeds people out. It’s Darwinian. That’s what our world is bro, fucking carnivorous.” I’m too high to articulate anything, but too angry to stop.

“Maybe that’s America, but not the world,” argues Kyle. “Go to Japan. There values are completely different. That’s a country that doesn’t throw out their weak and old.”

“Then tell me why Japan has the second highest suicide rate in the world. It’s because we’re in a global economy that straight doesn’t tolerate weakness,” I say.

“You’re wrong. The suicide rate does not change the fact Japan is a culture that values the old and sick. They have a whole different set of principles,” says Kyle.

“No the principle of Japan and all the first world is laissez-faire, free-market capitalism, which is fucking dog eat dog competition. It’s a problem bro. Capitalism is a fucking problem, even if you think it’s too abstract to talk about,” I say.

“Alright so I’ve lived in Japan but you’re telling me you know the culture better. That’s really fucking condescending. Japan is a country that has almost no retirement homes. They keep their sick.” Kyle shuts down a bit.

“That’s a fair point,” I say.

“Jake you go off into tangents and theory that have nothing to do with your situation,” says Shamir.

“So you think capitalism has nothing to do with my situation? With the commodification of illness? How our high school was filled with extremely addicting pharmaceuticals that I got hooked on at 15. Fucking Burger King and speed traps and girls that expect you to pay every date. That is exactly my situation.”

“There’s ways around all of that. Look harder,” says Shamir.

“Alright bro. I’ll look harder to find a way around \$300 insurance premiums so I can get bipolar meds,” I say.

“Fuck dude. Listen for once though. All you can do is try. Just try harder. That’s it, that’s all there is,” Shamir starts to get it.

“I will,” I try and say earnestly but still sounding irreducibly stubborn, “I will try and do better at navigating a world that is built on death and slavery, and the death of all the gay or mentally ill weirdo poets that were just like me.”

“First of all, you’re not even gay, and again dude. Making weirdo art is a choice. That’s your decision,” says Kyle.

“It’s not a choice. Not at all. Art is an emotional and political reaction to a system that invades your psyche and way of life. The only reason I make art is because I have to. Out of excess. I’ve been doing it non-stop since 13. *That’s* real therapy. To write or draw instead of six-hour crying bouts or losing your mind to a week of Hypomania. You don’t write because you like it. You write because if you don’t you’ll end up in a psychward for the fifth time. And believe me bro, those visits costs thousands of dollars,” I catch my breath.

“You’ve got some points,” says Shamir.

“It’s not points though, it’s experience,” I say, heart pounding. “It costs a lot to be sick. Not just money. Everything. Time, girlfriends, sleep, all of it. You guys are all I have. Friends and art.”

“But help me get it dude. You make art to make the world a better place right?” asks Kyle.

“Not even. The only point of my art, at best, is to make people question their world. To stir shit up and buck the status quo. We’re not gonna get a ‘better’ world but maybe we can live in one that we understand. The main thing art should do is just show us how fucked up we are. No resolution. No narrative. Just some kind of reflective surface that reveals all the ways we haunt ourselves.”

“Damn,” says Shamir.

“But at a certain point it’s just hypocritical and condescending. You said that yourself. Who are you to tell people how fucked up they are? Like making all this anti-capitalist art then buying Nike clothes and driving a BMW to *The Standard*, I mean come on. I don’t get it.”

“Right. It is hypocritical. But human beings live in paradox. Kanye contradicts himself every sentence but he’s still a great musician. Or like you want to stay faithful to your wife, but you cheat on her. We have conflicting desires. I think the point is art can make us aware. All my riot poetry and fucking anti-capitalism is about making people look at themselves. Take inventory. Like stop and think about how brutal and marginalizing the world is. The more people scream and question themselves, the more understanding they’ll be. So it’s my job to yell,” I try and explain.

“I get that the whole point of art is to be loud and directive, but you’ve gotta realize other people don’t feel that way. The world is not always a terrible place. Everything you’re saying about Darwinism and industrial prisons. It’s not like that everywhere. Some people just don’t believe that.”

“Well then it’s a war of belief I guess. Like people also didn’t believe what MLK was saying—that black people are equal. But he still said it because he knew it was true, he didn’t need validation,” I argue.

“You can’t compare yourself to MLK.”

“I’m not. Listen. This is what I want to say about capitalism and why it’s wrong. The reason we can exist in a microcosm of yoga studios and shopping malls is because of colonization—a whole system of free-trade zones and factory labor, segregation—a fucking \$600 billion military budget. This country is a war machine. Point blank bro. Every one of our iPhones and vacations is directly bound to a political system that runs off the exploitation of others. It’s nauseating to me. To know that every decision I make results in economic suffering of the oppressed. Destruction of the planet.” It’s hard to convey, I do my best.

“That’s what you needed to say,” explains Shamir. “It took you an hour to get there, but that makes sense.”

“No bro I’ve been saying that for three years. Or probably since I started slam poetry at 16. Gotta tell the world to wake up.”

“Just keep trying to find the right words,” Shamir encourages. Kyle’s not convinced.

“But wake up to what though? If it’s admittedly hypocritical. Like buy the iPhone to make a movie that problematizes the iPhone. All I can think is its hypocritical,” Kyle is trying to understand, and seems genuinely confused. As am I, genuinely confused about being human and the pursuit of art.

“I have no answer to that. Intuition. Something tells me the world is fucked up and that I should question it and try to leave a small footprint.”

“How’s the footprint going?” laughs Shamir.

“Not the worst. Everything I own fits in a micro studio. I drive a gas car and drink Monster energy drinks but I don’t see any way around that. Some things just have to burn dude. For instance my liver,” I joke—but this is actually the most accurately ethical thing I’ve said all weekend. Something does, in fact, have to burn. The point is to chose as carefully as possible what that is. I’m personally invested in burning my identity, which is completely hollow, by using copious amounts of drugs and seriously entertaining the idea of suicide—these are also symptoms of Borderline Personality Disorder, but regardless I’m convinced self dissolution and assisted suicide is an entirely practical response to the human condition. Maybe the Buddhists would agree. That individuality is a fraudulent illusion and malignant disease. At the same time, in terms of individuality, I *was* killing my L.A. look all weekend. ‘It’s all a nauseating paradox’ I think. I rifle through my drug bag and pop a 1mg Klonopin.

“This is where I stand, hear me out, last thing” I’m still Adderalled out. “All of life is a senseless paradox. It’s a violent swamp that means both everything and nothing. And I know for a fact, living with a mood disorder for 26-years, that I am so thoroughly fucked. Fucking dead. No lover, no sleep, no career, nothing. Therefore, it’s my sincerest intention to recklessly enjoy my insanity. To fuck, get high, and find as much love as I can before dying young.”

“If that’s really what you want bro,” Shamir yawns. “We’ll support you.”

“It’s not what I want, but it’s the best I’m gonna get.”

“Don’t kill yourself yet Jake. We’re going to Austin soon,” says Kyle, in what I feel like, partially resolves a fundamental ethical tension or complex disagreement between two ever-shifting and flawed worldviews. I think Kyle knows poetry and ethics don’t mean shit to me compared to love, and friends, and dropping X on the roof of *The Standard* trying to find any girl cute enough to fuck, and chasing down transcendent freedom by means of loud rap music and chewing tobacco, which are, including the poetry and ethics, all the same thing—love and desire.

“I’m gonna try and live through my 30s, we’ll see,” I respond. For a moment, we sit around quietly.

“Wait so, before we stop arguing I’ve gotta know,” says Shamir. “Are you saying you’re not actually against capitalism, you just want people to question it?”

“No fuck capitalism, I am against it,” I say as a kind of violent reaction.

“So what are you then? What would you replace capitalism with?” Shamir presses.

“Anarchy. I’m an anarchist.”

“Yeah so your just suicidal and think the world should burn in chaos,” states Kyle.

“No, that’s not what anarchy is. Anarchy is an alternative to hierarchy. It’s a leaderless society, like a socially negotiated democracy. Self-governed state.”

“So that’s tribes,” states Shamir.

“Kind of, yeah,” I say.

“That would never work,” blurts Kyle. “You know how violent tribal society was? The medieval ages. Plus aren’t nations just tribes anyways?”

“Probably yeah. America is one big religious tribe.”

“It’s a terrorist organization,” Shamir adds. “Aleppo.”

“So you’d still chose anarchy over a functioning economy?” Kyle presses.

“Yes. Or maybe a form of socialist capitalism. There needs to be more state support,” I say.

“Bro that is the exact opposite of what you just said,” Kyle hollers.

“He’s got conflicting views man, two sides,” defends Shamir.

“Yeah first of all we’re strictly discussing alternatives to laissez-faire capitalism, of which I think we need an alternative before the planet melts. Also why you gotta act like belief is supposed to be fixed? Certainty is dogma. Come on man, you’ve read my book. It says, ‘I’m a Buddhist on Wednesday, Christian on Thursday, hedonist all weekend, and a nihilist on my birthday.’”

“Ok but think about how impractical it would be if Congress changed their belief systems every week,” argues Kyle.

“Maybe they’d get something done,” I say. “Ideas are placeholders not prophecy.”

“That’s ideas. But economies and government are based on collective need and supply and demand,” says Kyle.

“Governments are based on blood,” I fire back.

“You guys are now talking in circles,” says Shamir.

“Probably. But that’s the fun part, it’s a dance,” I try and explain. They’re over it—having not taken any Adderall. The three of us chat for another 10-minutes about women, alcoholic parents, the death of Lucas, music, everything that fills the cracks of our lives like an infinite dust. Kyle cuts the light and the boys are immediately asleep. Our plane leaves in 4 hours.

Instead of sleeping I pop a 15mg Temazepam and lay around for 90-minutes thinking nothing, but sensing my brain like an empty cargo ship rushing towards a waterfall made of static. Kyle’s alarm goes off. He flips the light on and we move around the basement, half-dead, kind of subconsciously re-enacting scenes from *Nosferatu the Vampyre*. Shamir, who is staying in Cali another

week, remains asleep on the floor, which is fortunate because he is, at this point, an immovable object. It takes us less than two-minutes to pack our bags. We leave without saying goodbye.

Outside the BMW I smoke, what I swear is, 'my last' Marl Light. The vacation is over, the nicotine-drug-frenzy straight up cannot continue. I will actually die at this rate, which seems fine too, but I want to find a Satanist girlfriend and fuck her with Kenneth Anger films playing in the background first.

"Lucifer Rising," I tell Kyle from shotgun. "Have you seen that?"

"What?" He says, using 100% of his brainpower on driving and GPS, instead of discussing Avant-garde experimental film on one hour of sleep on the way to L.A.X. For 20-minutes we drive in silence. I put a Grizz dip in my mouth and do absolutely nothing.

Using the Turo app and Google maps, Kyle drives the BMW to a ghost-like office building slash hotel where he parks the car under a white tent after missing the same turn twice and doing multiple illegal U-turns in a neighborhood we have never, and will never, see again. We enter the ominously robotic building and drop off the Beamer keys. In the lobby Kyle says nothing, whereas this is the highest I've been the entire trip—therefore, holding onto the last minutes of my allotted 'party window'—I continually replace my chewing tobacco with more chewing tobacco, swallow two 50mg Tramadol, a *Football*, and walk over to a water jug. To my surprise, and irrational amusement, the water jug is empty except for a massive pile of soggy lemons that soak in a mountain of their own liquid pulp. I tilt the water jug, pouring a stream of lemon pulp into a nearby plastic cup. Now with the cup of lemon water in my hand, I go to pick up my 'spit can' realizing I'm carrying around and spitting in a, mostly drunken, 22oz of Mike's Harder lemonade. I walk over to Kyle who is barely awake on a leather couch. He looks up at me like a dying child from a Unicef ad—hope, agony, pure confusion towards the mortal condition.

"Water? They have water?" he asks.

“No. This is the last glass,” I say. Then defeat, he falls into the couch. I hand him the lemon pulp, which he drinks in a single motion of what is the rawest demonstration of humanity I’ve ever seen. Pure thirst.

For the first time on the trip I genuinely blackout. Three days of benzodiazepines finally accumulate and snowball into an unconscious collapse of all cognition. I don’t remember shit. I think we took a shuttle to L.A.X. and Kyle picked me up off the ground in a T.S.A. line. That’s what he says later. I do, however, remember buying \$23 worth of Burger King before boarding our flight. The reason I remember this is because I have exactly \$170 for the rest of March and it is only the 6th. ‘I’ll figure it out,’ I think, stuffing hash browns into my mouth and mostly goatee.

At some point on the airplane, Kyle wakes me up saying, “Dude, we won.”

I look at him, shake my head no, and go back to sleep. Just minutes later Kyle and a flight attendant shove me awake again and say,

“You won. You won the lucky seat. This voucher will get you two round trip tickets to anywhere in America. Congratulations.” A 40-year-old woman flight attendant hands me some kind of yellow voucher. I take the voucher and stare at her saying absolutely nothing. Not even smiling. At this point, because of a massive dose of narcotics, I have zero concept of society and don’t know what the words ‘round trip’ or ‘voucher’ mean. The flight attendant walks off smiling and I shove the rest of a *King Croissant* into my face and fall asleep.

In Seattle, Kyle’s phone and external battery pack are dead. I have 10 percent battery on my iPhone and call a \$40 Lyft from Sea-Tac to Kyle’s house where my car is parked. I’m still blacked out. All I can remember about these situations is spending money I don’t have, winning a prize for

the first time in over 12-years, and eating lukewarm Burger King. Everything else is a kind of fractal blur where space moves in time-lapse panels on top of itself, creating mosaic-like patterns of memory where I can see Kyle texting and a Lyft driver pressing volume nobs.

Inside of Kyle's house I ask if I can sleep on the couch because 'I think it would be dangerous to drive.' He says of course. I sleep for 13 hours straight.

I open my eyes 4pm Tuesday on Kyle's couch, who is smiling and typing on a MacBook while watching Sports Center, violently craving a cigarette and thinking, 'there is no possible way I can exist without a cigarette right now.' Kyle smiles at me with his, now clear, round-black eyes saying,

"Dude, we won."

"Yeah, so what happened?" I yawn and pop my neck. Kyle says something re-iterating the fact of free airline miles, but my joints feel like petrified wood wrapped in razor wire so I don't hear anything. 'Fuck,' I think, feeling an irreconcilable wave of self-inflicted misery and hate. My plan was to get sober immediately after L.A. but the post-drug joint pain is too severe. I unclip my Dakine backpack and pop a 50mg Tramadol.

"...and Jake says nothing to her, no response, just stares at the flight attendant and immediately starts shoving Burger King in his mouth," Kyle is telling his roommate's girlfriend Lindsey.

"Let's go out for a cigarette," I say, uninterested in past mistakes.

It's 37 degrees and raining outside. Cars rush down Greenwood leaving a wake of puddles along the sidewalks. Seattle looks like it always does—endlessly dark and wet and full of all the

things I've come to love. Spruce trees and telephone wires hanging over highway 99. Aurora moans into Kyle's front yard.

Kyle pulls on his vaporizer. I smoke a Marb Light, which feels less enjoyable and more of bodily necessity that's slowly poisoning the few healthy white blood cells I have left. 'I've gotta fucking quit,' I think. I toss the cigarette and thank Kyle for bringing me on the trip. There's no language for the amount of euphoria and luck we just experienced. The ceaseless confusion of it all. Mostly terrible, but at least there're moments of reprieve. Best friends to hold you up from slipping in the T.S.A. lines of life. I trust that Kyle understands my gratitude.

"See you soon," I say, hopping into my 350z and starting the engine.

It's Thursday night and I've gone one day without a cigarette. Or drug. I'm at my part time campus job, scrolling down Facebook, when I see that Jessica Lee has invited me to a *Red Bull Thirsty Thursday* event at The Octopus. This is a great example of how millennial dating is, more than anything, a complex set of cultural codes mediated by digital apps, likes and notifications. Does she genuinely want to see me at the event, or was I invited in a pool of Facebook friends she doesn't give a fuck about? Does it matter? I just text her instead of overthinking the bullshit ritual of cyber courtship.

"It's my half-birthday so why not," she responds. "Coming?"

"I'm about it," I write, sending a half-dozen birthday confetti emojis.

At 9pm I pull up to The Octopus, fix my hair in the rearview mirror, decide that it's unfixable and walk in with, what I conceptualize as, a goofy but at least marginally charming smile. Jessica is standing in a group of ex-sorority sisters (or I guess they're all still sorority sisters because those clubs are, in fact, an eternal cult). It feels strange walking up to a group of post-grad sorority sisters with a flannel shirt, hoop earring and really bad hair-day. Jessica sees me and waves. A few of the girls scan me over. Little do they know I have both severe opiate withdrawals and a pending disability claim. Jokes on them. Or me? I'm not sure but this is where being genuinely suicidal pays off. I really don't give a fuck what happens.

"Good to see you," I tell Jessica.

"Yeah, thanks for coming, you can meet all my friends," she says.

'Let the examinations begin,' I think laughing in my head then actually chuckling.

"What's funny?" she asks.

"Nothing. It's just good to see you. Let's get weirdly drunk and caffeinated on Red Bulls."

"Can't wait," she says. "Here have this drink ticket," handing me an oval shaped coupon adorned in golden bulls.

"So you're the plug hugh?" I laugh.

"Of course. My friend Rasheed is putting on the event. Trying to bring back Thirsty Thursdays for post-grad life," she giggles nervously.

"That's extra necessary," I tell her, which it isn't but that's what I say.

"Here meet Rasheed," Jessica says pulling me by the shirtsleeve.

"Rasheed, this is the guy I was telling you about, Jake, he bought me Taco Bell on Valentines day," she says.

"That's a pro-move buddy. Good to meet you," Rasheed responds. I give him a dap and pound and he says,

“Jessica, do I have coke in my beard?” She grabs his cheeks and examines the perfectly kempt beard.

“No,” she says.

“Ok. Cause I feel like I have coke in my beard,” Rasheed is unconvinced. To my dismay, Rasheed makes eye contact with the DJ and walks off, negating any chance of snorting coke with Jessica in the bathroom. We stand in silence.

“I’m gonna get a drink,” I say. “What’d you want?”

“I’m good,” she blushes, holding up her mango-infused vodka Red Bull. We’re both nervous and generally have nothing to talk about.

“Are you sure you don’t want a tequila shot?” I yell at Jessica as the bartender takes my order.

“I’m sure.”

I order a mango-infused vodka Red Bull and shot of well tequila. The only way I’m going to finesse the Jessica situation is if I’m drunk on four or more liquor based beverages. I shoot the tequila and immediately feel lighter—more human.

“Human, all too human,” I say with strict confidence. Jessica smiles, says nothing. She and I toast, ‘good to see you,’ I repeat, trying my best to use words instead of pervasively hesitant body language, and walk over to her group of friends. Kylie’s there, who I know from high school and haven’t seen in three years, drinking vodka Red Bull and hugging me with a Chanel purse dangling from her arm.

“So good to see. Wow. You look good Jake,” says Kylie.

“Isn’t he cute?” Jessica says, patting the back of my head to fix my hair, then deciding it’s unfixable.

“Thank you, yeah. How you doing—working in P.R. right?”

“Uh, yeah,” Kylie groans. “But it’s good, at least I don’t gotta borrow money from parents you know?”

“Right,” I say. My ego dies.

“We’re going to Cabo on Friday,” Jessica tells me.

“Yeeah,” I lift up my drink, and sing a Drake lyric, “Doing well dog.” So far my social strategy is to vocalize a series of inside jokes with myself. ‘It’s working,’ I think. So long as I’m having fun.

Jessica introduces me to a pack of four or five sorority sisters, none of whose names I remember but smile and make eye-contact and hug one of them who is the most drunk and seems to think we know each other.

“We do now,” I say, to which she stares closely at my face and walks away. The Octopus is packed with bodies, swarming the bar and self-consciously nodding to the DJ’s beat, which is a lot of Partynextdoor, 6lack, and Migos. It’s a good night on music alone.

I grab Jessica by the elbow and say, ‘come get a drink with me.’ The two of us find stools by the drink well and catch up.

“How was L.A.?” she asks.

“Too much fun. Kyle and I just drove around in a B.M.W. for two days. I force-fed him ecstasy at Disneyland,” I explain.

“Woow,” she laughs. “You guys are crazy.”

“You have no idea,” I say. “What’s up with you? How’s work?”

“Honestly, I’m exhausted today,” she says. “It’s tax season and I’m like coming down on Adderall super hard.”

“Wait. Wait,” I say grinning. “You take drugs?”

“Yes.”

“That’s so fucking hot,” I tell her. “What drugs?”

“Like just Adderall and coke sometimes.”

“We could have some fuun believe me,” I say, singing another Drake lyric. She laughs.

“Can you get Adderall?” I ask.

“Yeah. It’s so funny, my friend Gary has Adderall prescriptions from three different psychiatrists. He sells it to me.”

“That’s hilarious,” I say as a fact—not laughing but contemplating the political reality of licensed amphetamines and how I can immediately obtain some. Our conversation goes on for 10-minutes and really slows down and we repeat a ton of things we’ve said on the first three dates and I hold her hand softly, feeling a distance that has nothing to do with physical space, but is instead a social impasse between two people that are terrified to know each other. I order a Pacifico and shot of well tequila. Jessica stops drinking.

“Let’s go see what Kylie is up to yeah?” I say, trying to shake something I can’t name.

“Ok.”

After talking to her friends for five-minutes, I slip away to go find a cigarette. Outside I immediately bum a Camel Filter off this muscular guy and curvy dark-haired woman, who seem to be sharing a pack and laugh when I say,

“Camel Filter is a robust cigarette and I owe you two the favor of ten thousand good deeds.” I ask for a lighter, spark it, hand it back, look at my texts and feel guilty about smoking because, on top of trying to quit, I specifically told Jessica, ‘I don’t smoke cigarettes.’ I’m about to toss the Camel Filter when I catch the dark-haired girl giving me ‘a look.’ Every guy knows what this is. But to be clear ‘the look’ is a brief, usually one second or less, expression of facial and bodily interest that says, ‘You might, one day, in this life or the next, fuck the shit out of me.’ I grin back, toss my cigarette and go inside to find Jessica. I swear to god women only ever look at you when there is another girl

around. It has something to do with the cosmic principle of ‘supply and demand’ as Kyle would put it. He’s usually not wrong.

Inside, The Octopus is finally thinning out. Jessica looks exhausted and stands next to me without saying anything. A bunch of sorority sisters say goodbye and I start to feel the premature dread of being drunk and alone in a 150 square foot micro studio. I sip on a second Pacifico. Three minutes later, Kylie looks at Jessica and says, ‘ready?’ as if by telekinesis or some other divine feminine ability that only be described as ‘girl power.’

“Yeah,” she says.

“Dinner this week?” I ask.

“No, I’ve gotta catch up at work and get ready for Cabo.”

“Well take a shot for me down there,” I kiss her cheek.

“It’ll be more than a shot.”

Kylie hugs me on the way out and I’m standing alone with a full beer in my hand nodding to a Migos song.

Once the girls leave I immediately start filming strangers at the bar as part of my documentary about ‘capturing the spirit of freedom and youth.’ I’m five drinks deep and have no choice but to sober up and hang around. Luckily it’s a raging night. Even though the bar thinned out there are roughly 20, very dedicated, people who are all shouting and dancing to the live music. I go into a corner booth and sit down to rest my, I think, ‘agonized and unmanageably aching’ hips. I take a hard pull of Pacifico and close my eyes. After a few minutes *Crew Love* by Drake comes on and I think about last spring, about meeting Brett and Helen and buying a \$200 life-sized skeleton for a performance about death, I think about suicide, consuming 40-pain pills and a half-bottle of

Seagram's, I think about falling in love and fucking after oysters at the Fairmount hotel. Then I hit record on my iPhone and grin into the camera:

“I'm out alone at the bar, post date at The Octopus. They're playing my favorite song, *'They lovin the crew, they loving the crew,'*” I sing. “But it's crazy to be young, and lonely, and confused, and high, and excited all at the same time. I just want to document the moment and hold onto it because I know this shit won't last man, *'Smoking weed under the star projectors, I guess we'll never know where Harvard gets us,'*” I sing again into the camera. “It's beautiful man, I feel alright. As fucked up as I am. As much as I've put everybody through some shit. I feel all right man. I feel happy to be alive. And that's all I can fucking say about it.” I click stop on the iPhone and go find a seat at the bar.

A 30-something woman sits down next to me, who looks exactly like a cast member of *The Jersey Shore*. A bartender takes her order. ‘Vodka tonic.’ I open a Snapchat from Shamir who is blowing weed smoke into a pit bull's face on the patio of a house in San Francisco.

“What happened to your friends?” the woman asks me.

“I don't have friends,” I look up at her.

“Yeah, the little girls you were hanging out with.”

“Never heard of them,” I tease. “Who you here with?”

“Me, myself and I.”

“I see,” I'm considerably drunk.

“I know the bartenders and bouncer and shit. This is my spot,” she explains.

“What's your name?”

“Margie.”

“I'm Jake. Listen I'm making a documentary about youth. Can I record you talking about what that was like?” ‘Woops,’ I immediately think.

“What that was like?” she's furious. “Fuck you I'm not old.”

“Ok that’s not what I meant. Can I film you talking about being a young person?”

“No. Go away,” she demands. I do.

Outside I bum an American Spirit (yellow) from the bouncer Augustus, who is talking to the DJ, Smoke Jones.

“But I’m gonna let somebody else teach my kid to swim,” says Augustus.

“I feel you,” Smoke Jones responds.

“That’s a really important moment, forcing your kid to trust someone else. Like when I work with kids at Alki Beach, they’re terrified, they think there Mom’s the only person in the world that’s gonna protect them. I have to tell em 50-times, ‘I got you, I won’t let you drown.’ And then you should see it. When they swim, and see that I’m there and that they don’t need me, their fucking life changes like that,” Augustus snaps his fingers. “Epiphany.”

“That’s beautiful man,” nods Smoke Jones.

“That’s funny, for some reason I remember my swim teacher’s name. Sarah Goldman,” I say, remembering the taste of chlorine and Sarah’s long blonde hair dripping water between the concrete tiles of Aqua Club.

“It’s an important moment,” repeats Augustus.

“Yo the music tonight though,” I say slapping Smoke Jones’s hand.

“I see you gigging out there with the ladies,” he says.

“That’s on you,” I tell him.

“Hugh,” he drags his cigarette. “Don’t under estimate yourself.”

“Tell me Partynextdoor isn’t one of the best R&B artists of all time,” I say.

“O.V.O. man. They are music right now. Whole game,” he pauses, finishes his cigarette. “I got something for you inside.”

“Yeah,” says Augustus following Smoke into the bar. Before leaving Augustus turns to me and says, “Yo there’s an after party tonight kid, you should come.”

“Let’s do that,” I say. I poke the American Spirit and feel my alcohol buzz dwindle into a soft and dehydrating croon. ‘Still feels better than sobriety,’ I think. The dark-haired girl from before comes outside and lights a Camel Filter. Luckily I have the American Spirit, whose incredibly slow burn has now become my savior and excuse to stand around and attempt conversation. The girl looks exactly like Liv Tyler, specifically the elf princess in *Lord of the Rings I, The Fellowship of the Ring*, where she summons water spirits in a river to save Frodo from both poison and oncoming demons. ‘Please save me from the poison of my life,’ I think, staring at Instagram on my iPhone. I put the phone away and walk over to her.

“Enjoying another robust cigarette?” I ask sheepishly. She looks up and smiles at me like we share a long forgotten secret, some kind of antiquated knowledge from a time old as the caves, ‘the look’, she knows that I know and I know that she knows ‘a look’ is more often than not, a one-way street to nowhere, something that’s done as a playful gesture or response to boredom and untapped sexual prowess.

“Yeah. You need another one?” she asks.

“I’m good,” I say, lifting up the American Spirit that has now been burning for, what could honestly be, 15-minutes.

“Let me tell you a secret about life,” I say.

“What?” she says kind of sarcastically, leaning into me.

“Marb Lights are objectively the best cigarettes on earth and you should smoke them.”

“Are you fucking crazy? They taste like Virginia Slims or something. Like those are retired Mom cigarettes.”

“Do you have some kind of personal problem with retirement and motherhood?” I laugh. “I don’t get it.”

“You’re funny,” she says.

“No but I’m right.”

“Are you usually right then?”

“Only when I’m single. If I’m in a relationship I’m 100% of the time wrong.”

“Ok, that’s not funny,” she says, poking her cig.

“I told you I’m not funny, just honest.”

“What are you doing here?” She asks.

“What kind of question is that? I’m at a bar, I’m drinking. What are you doing?”

“Seeing a guy.”

“Well how’s it going?” I ask.

“He’s fine. Gotta lot of tattoos which is hot.”

“It if helps our situation, I have zero tattoos but plan to get this massive chest piece. You’re gonna love it, ok, an American Eagle, covered in missile launchers, and like, all these flaming dollar bills and snakes in the background.”

“You’re ridiculous,” she says.

“What?” I say, pretending to be shocked. “Is that not a good tattoo?”

“No, it’s a good tattoo.”

“Ok thank you. I came up with that idea,” I drag my smoke, “...by the way.”

“Are you gonna buy me a drink?” she asks.

“Why don’t you ask your boyfriend?”

“I didn’t say he was my boyfriend.”

“Interesting,” I pause. “What do you drink?”

At the bar top I order Erika (i.e. Liv Tyler doppelgänger) a gin martini which comes in a chilled rocks glass. Although I was just reaching the ‘good to drive’ window, I’m suddenly hyper-focused and horny and order a Jameson neat. But like all my decisions, this ends up being waste. Within 30-seconds Erika’s guy comes over who is, in fact, covered in tattoos. None of which are snakes or burning money. ‘Fuck this guy,’ I think.

“This is Terrance,” she says.

“Bro I know you,” I say.

“Do you?” he asks, clearly threatened—I did just buy his date a martini.

“You served in the military right? I remember you told me that somewhere,” I say.

“Ohh, you’re Spencer’s friend,” he says.

“Yes,” I say. “That’s right dude. We fucking hung out in December, yeah,” I shout having multiple revelations. “I threw that huge party at my ex-girl’s house when she was out of town. You remember? We did a fucking a eight ball together.”

“I didn’t do any coke,” Terrance says mostly to Erika.

“Yes you did dude. A lot.”

“How you know this guy Erika?”

“He just seemed like someone I should know,” she explains. At this point it’s an all out skirmish.

“So Spencer’s at Max’s wedding right now hugh? My brother’s there,” I’m yelling and generally bogarting the situation.

“Yeah that’s right,” Terrance says.

“Fuck why didn’t you go dude? You should be there.” At this point my strategy is ‘all in’ or ‘reckless abandon’ because it’s increasingly obvious that Erika and Terrance are together, and when

presented with the two choices in person, Erika will choose Terrance 9 out of 10 times, unless, of course, I ritualistically defeat him in conversation by, what is best described as, trolling the motherfucker.

“I have work. Why aren’t you there?” he fires back, mildly irritated.

“Oh I had to be here. I’m putting on the whole event for Red Bull you know? Are you guys enjoying it?”

“You’re lying,” says Sara.

“Yes, definitely.”

Erika rolls her eyes. It’s now clear the Red Bull comment was, effectively, verbal suicide. The skirmish is over. As always, I am my own worst enemy.

“Listen, we’re gonna go catch up with our friends,” Erika yells over the music.

“Tell everyone I say hi,” I grin at the couple.

From 1:30 to 2:00am The Octopus reaches a new level of rowdiness or, what I think of as, ‘a transcendental alignment to the primordial.’ The energy is on. Several girls are dancing on the bar top and Alexandra (who introduced herself by the water jug) continually flashes Laura, the owner. Apparently everyone here is a regular. I learn this through a series of abnormally welcoming conversations, all of which begin with me saying, ‘I love caffeine.’ At 2:05 the lights flickers on and off like a broken strobe light, slow and irregular.

“Get the fuck out. Get the fuck out. Get the fuck out,” screams Laura and her staff. I close my tab and sign without looking at the total, which is virtually impossible, and see that it’s \$40-something I don’t have.

“20% tip. Ok,” I say out loud, holding a blue pen and feeling as if I’ve signed the coroner’s report of my future self. I push my half-drunken Jameson toward the bartender. A D.U.I. is not gonna help the situation.

On the street roughly 12 people smoke, make phone calls and run around in circles screaming. Augustus gives me another American Spirit and we talk about The Royal, a bar in the U-District that shut down at the end of 2013.

“Still coming to the after party he asks?”

“Fuck yeah,” I say. I take out my iPhone and film Alexandra jumping on people’s backs and demanding cigarettes. Then Terrance and Erika stumble out of the bar and she looks at me to say,

“You’re still here.”

“Like I never left girl.”

“Hey. Have a good night man,” says Terrance. “Good seeing you again.”

“You too,” I say putting out my hand. He shakes it. A primal understanding.

“Well played,” I say. The couple walks up the glistening sidewalk and into a green Honda. I vaguely laugh to myself, thinking ‘this old life man.’

Now that I once again have nothing to lose, I run onto a nearby stump and yell,

“This is my stump and I dare anyone to challenge me!”

“Oh, you’re fucking gone,” screams Alexandra. She runs at me full speed, jumps into my arms and takes us both down onto the mud. I get up quickly and resume my post. Alexandra smacks my face with an open palm, pokes me between the ribs, and chases me around 45th saying things like,

“You will never take my stump,” and “I have been at this bar longer then you’ve been alive,” which is obviously not true because she’s like 22. After I concede the stump to Alexandra, who

might actually kill my fragile ass, I film three-minutes of a gender-neutral lover petting their 50-year-old partner's baldhead and saying,

"I got more bitches than you Daddy. Let's go. Come on Daddy. I want to listen to George Michael and Lenny Kravitz in the car." When I turn around with the iPhone, I catch two grown men, maybe mid 30s, debating the proper way to use a handgrip exercise machine.

"You're not supposed to do a full extension, watch," one man says, snatching the handgrip.

"Stop filming us," says the other man.

"Ok," I turn around. At 2:30am 45th looks so empty that it seems full, 'of what?' I wonder, maybe potential energy or the residue of memories no one can relive. I press stop on the iPhone and think about New Years when Helen and I drove around 45th on MDMA trying to find a friends house where we had crab and Champagne before watching the fireworks at Gasworks in a hail storm. I think about that night every time I drive down 45th. Which is a lot. Probably one day I won't think about it anymore.

"Yo, Jake, come with me," says Augustus.

"Yeah," I follow him and Alexandra across the street into a 1990s Camry. Augustus turns to the back seat and tells me,

"You know, you gotta support the good folks at Octopus, but it's important to have a car bar." He hands me a 5th of Svedka and Welch's Grape chaser. I pound the bottle, thinking it might prove something, and it does. Comradery, fearlessness, general misguidance. Augustus shakes his head in approval.

"Have some more," he says.

"I'm good."

Alexandra takes the bottle and drinks without cringing.

"Alright, ready for this after party?" asks Augustus.

“Hold on, let me just follow you in my car, I’m parked right there,” I point to the 350z.

“Nice car,” says Alexandra.

“You good to drive?”

“Probably not,” I say, jumping out the Camry.

I follow Augustus’s Camry through the backstreets of Wallingford and Fremont. We drive along 34th and under the Aurora Bridge and I stare across Lake Union into Seattle’s skyline which reminds me of so many nights that have all become a singular motion carrying me into an unknown after party with a group of strangers. I pull up behind Augustus in an empty parking garage. We get out of our cars and he hands me the Svedka, which I pound, wipe my mouth and say,

“I’m sorry bro we’re gonna have to share another American Spirit.”

“No problem.”

“Think of it as a sponsorship.”

“What am I sponsoring?” he asks.

“My addiction.” We laugh. Augustus spits on the ground, gives me my own cigarette and lights it in the 6-foot tall parking garage.

To my excitement, mostly because the situation directly feeds my pursuit of ‘seizing youth’, the after party is in a boxing gym, which seems elusive and rare and really something you could only ever find by word of mouth and genuine conversations about swimming lessons and street races.

“This is my place,” says Augustus, flipping on the lights. “It goes down at the after party.” Augustus hands Alexandra and I Bug Lights and goes to unlock his pit bull from a kennel. Within seconds, about 10 people from The Octopus arrive, all shouting and pouring across the white floor. The guys immediately jump into the boxing ring or shoots hoops in a corner. Alexandra runs to the

basketball hoop, snatches a rebound, and misses. I'm exhausted and don't know anybody here, which means I'm free to do 'whatever I want,' I think. I find a suede couch, sit down and sip the Bud Light. Margie, who two hours earlier told me to go away, sits next to me and immediately says,

"We should make out."

"Ok," I respond. She pulls me into her face and we tongue kiss for three-minutes before she stops, looks at me and says,

"You're hair looks dumb."

"Alright," I say, and drink the entire Bug Light in one motion. Augustus walks by and repeats,

"I told you it goes down at the after party."

"Confirmed," I say.

"Let me find us some beers," I tell Margie.

"Ok," she says in an irregularly high voice. I get up and take two Bud Lights from a 24 rack by the front door. When I come back there are four people sitting on the suede couch. I hand Margie an open Bud Light and vaguely think about fucking her in the bathroom. For the next 12-minutes I sit on the couch and talk to a guy named Malik about colonization and his assignment guidelines for a Keynote presentation on diplomacy.

"See I'm good at math, that's my thing. Put any equation on that board," he points to a wall with the image of Arnold Schwarzenegger. "Any equation. I can solve it, boom." Malik tells me this three or four times, always pointing to the wall with Arnold and saying, 'I can solve it, boom.' During our conversation I suggest he adds his ideas of racist policy into the Keynote presentation.

"Are you some kind of racist double agent?" he asks.

"No," I say. "I hope not."

"Alright cause if you were. I don't know. I trust you."

For the next 20-minutes I film with my iPhone, drink Captain Morgan, and weirdly don't speak to Margie. At 4am everyone kind of collectively goes outside to smoke and get in their cars, as if following a mutual tide of behavior and exhaustion. On the sidewalk Malik gives me a Camel Crush and I tell him, 'good luck on the presentation, treat it like algebra.'

"Hey if it was math. Trust me. Boom," he grins. Before leaving I find Augustus, who adds me on Facebook and offers me one last American Spirit.

"No," I say. "I gotta quit anyways."

"Hey. So does everybody else," he says, handing me the cigarette.

On an Instagram thread with Kyle and Shamir, Kyle types, 'what's been good with you Jake?'

"Nothing. Working on 'grad stuff' lol. You know how that goes," I respond, not mentioning the two-day migraine or insomnia that has rendered me a Xerox copy or pixelated version of a self.

"Cool. Shamir when you back from Cali?" Kyle types. Shamir doesn't respond. On an iMac I toggle between Gmail and Facebook tabs, listening to *Hollywood Interlude* by Belly and thinking nothing expect maybe the subconscious stress of not working and being utterly alone besides an Instagram thread that has suddenly paused. It's 1am and I'm at Odegaard library dead sober, craving a cigarette and scrolling through text messages while jotting notes on *The Theatre and Its Double*. The library is packed for a Wednesday at 1. Obviously this is cause it's finals week and everyone is cramming for some test or paper they more or less don't care about, so are subsequently chatting and texting their friends across the room. 'How many kids are on Adderall right now?' I wonder, 'And where is it?' This inquiry is an internal joke in which I conceptualize myself as a zany P.I.

whose constant mission is to penetrate drug culture, document the experiences and dictate reports on the political conditions that facilitate it all. ‘Then again,’ I think, ‘that’s an incredibly accurate description of what I did all winter.’ Clearly.

For what is probably 90-minutes I sit around and accidently stare at Facebook on both iPhone and iMac, catching myself and immediately Xing out of the app and Chrome window maybe six times. Eventually I get some decent notes on Artaud, scribbling the quote,

“We can now say that all true freedom is dark, and infallibly identified with sexual freedom and self-induced cruelty, although we don’t know precisely why.” I think about the quote for five-minutes coming up with nothing but feeling that within its language is buried a sentiment I’ve known all my life, that existence is a dark rollercoaster to nowhere and the best we can do is hold on and scream. I haven’t smoked a cigarette in almost a week but reading Artaud and listening to Belly isn’t helping. Neither are the constant thoughts of Helen and *The Standard* and student loans, which are all a kind of simultaneous accumulation. A single sweeping moment. Where all life rolls and unwinds into a prayer wheel of experience. Each second individually unknown, but totalized by a free fall into the present.

My iPhone vibrates and I see a text message from my Dad.

“You just got a \$230 speeding ticket for doing 30 in a school zone.”

“Are you fucking kidding?” I type.

“No,” he responds. “We need to talk about getting you a second job.”

“Sure,” I type back. “We’ll talk.”

“Soon,” he says.

“After finals,” I write. I press the lock button on my iPhone and the screen blacks out.

Something in my body clicks shut and I feel my muscles tighten and, almost audibly, creak. I log out

of the iMac and go outside to find a cigarette. It's 41 degrees and raining tonight. I stand in the cold and wait three-minutes before a couple comes outside and lights two Marb 27s.

“Hey can you two do me the biggest favor? I just quit smoking a few days ago, but I'm in real need of a cig. Finals you know?”

“No problem man,” says the guy, handing me a smoke.

“Oh shit,” I say. “This is perfect man. Thank you.” He lights my cigarette and I crouch under an awning to avoid the rain. I drag the cigarette in total silence, soak up the nicotine buzz, and feel my body escape gravity for the first time in six days.

The next night at Odegaard, almost every computer is taken and I walk around two floors searching for a spot. Eventually I find a PC in the middle of an isle. I log in, pull up Facebook and see that the link to my newest rap song has another like. *Shamir*. I click the link and listen to the first 30-seconds of my song, thinking about our conversation at Rex's. About how contradictory it is for me to make rap songs about getting money. How broke I actually am. How I've spent all winter dating and drinking and trying to find a way to articulate that being young and sick means one thing. You find love or you fall apart. Point blank. The only way to make it through this life is support. Without it you're dead. That's why Lucas died. My best friend from 2nd grade. He had no family in the end. And I really think he ODeD because nobody loved him.

I mean there's no point in doing any of this if you can't share it with someone. And I feel lucky to have the friends I do. Kyle, Shamir, my Mom and Dad, Brett, a whole lot of others, like Tony and Sam who took me to an open mic two weeks before L.A. The last three years have not been easy. But I think we've all had a lot of fun. Conversations and memories that don't add up.

Debt and hospital visits. It's a total shit show. And the only reason I mention any of this is to say that I am a hypocrite and fuckup and maybe even unlovable on a long-term intimate level, but I have lived, fought, survived, and found the beauty in every fucked up and crippling situation that has come my way.

That's the thing about bipolar, about migraines from neck pain, about arguments and insomnia, suicide attempts and all the other fucked up things that come with having a disease that can't be named—medical bills and the fact you'll fall apart without constant help. All of that shit. It means nothing to me. As in fuck the pain. The only thing that means anything is friends and love and all the ways I've survived between the cracks and endless episodes of total dysfunction. Fuck the universe. Fuck heartbreak and fuck depression. All that it ever is, that it ever will be, is more reasons to celebrate.

