
7:12 AM

Hardly awake, sitting in the back of class. A miasma of shrill voices buzzing around your head. It's too cold, too bright, too loud in here. A bag of hot cheetos crinkling open is a million shards of glass penetrating your ears.

You've never said a word to any of these "people". Still, you catch their eyes lingering on you, dissecting you. It's been a month since you've turned eighteen, but you still don't feel like an adult. Things have been getting too much in class lately. Smoking a bowl before school turns the days into a haze, but at least you're not there.

Trying to tune out all the petty bullshit drama, none of it matters. People are starting to turn around, fuck they're looking at you. What is it this time, what are you doing that's so interesting? Stop being a spectacle.

You take out your headphones and you hear it. They aren't looking at you, thank god. They're looking next to you, at two girls arguing. You can hardly make out what they're saying, just that one is calling the other a slut a lot. One of them stands and slams her hands on her desk, the other gets up in turn and closes the distance. People are taking their phones out. Get out of frame now.

Weed anxiety swirling in your head and burning in your throat, you attempt to get up as casually as possible and join the circle of spectators. The girls begin to shove each other, screaming now. Where's the teacher? One of them slaps the other, blood dotted where her acrylics tore skin. Hair is being pulled, your stomach is fluttering.

Fuck this is too much, the crowd is yelling. People are shoving past you to get a closer look. Hands pushing your shoulder and grabbing your side.

“Holy shit why are you breathing like that?” In your ear. You’re panting, you have to leave. Jeans pressing tightly against your crotch, escape. Wading against the masses, as you close in on the door a resource officer shoves you aside. Some forty year old cops barreling through the crowd, shouting as they reach the altercation. Doesn’t matter, you make it to the hall.

Students fleeing the scene, afraid of getting yelled at for not being in class. You’re going to the far restroom, you need to be alone. The corridors become empty and you calm your pace. Thoughts become more coherent and you realize how hard you are.

The bathroom is empty. Grabbing the damp porcelain of a sink, you sigh and breath deeply for a moment. Looking up into the smudged mirror, drooping bloodshot eyes stare back at you. Unshaven stubble, acne, long frizzy hair that barely conceals your fathers cheekbones. Stumbling to the nearest stall, you collapse onto the porcelain.

You’re such a fucking freak. You stare down at your cock, uncomfortably stiff. Look at your hair covered thighs, bulging stomach, hard as a rock because you can’t just sperg out like a normal autistic when you freak out. You’re a disgusting pervert, a mass of failed boyflesh in his navy blue prison cell. Disgusting.

Your hands were cold to the touch, flinching when you reached your cock. High and unthinking, you begin to masturbate. In and out of lucidity, mindlessly jerking off. In some dream, somewhere else that was softer than here.

You hear someone breathing above you. Stopping the cold rhythmic stroking. You look up and an Iphone stares down at you.

“Can I get thirty on pump six and two packs of Marlboro Light One Hundreds?”

She stood less than a foot in front of you, looking down to meet your gaze. Something about her was off, something you’ve extensively studied. Something off about the eyes, the length of her filtrum, the distance between her mouth and her chin. Years of reading /X/ has trained you for this, she's a skinwalker. You have to kill her maggie, only you can-

“Sorry sweetie I meant Golds,”

Sweetie? Her voice is a deep, midwestern accent, but undeniably feminine. How does she do that? Your chest flutters a moment. Fucking pervert.

“It feels like yesterday that they changed the name.”

She punctuates her sentence with a smile. You hate it when they treat you like a person. She’s just a tranny, like you. Kind of a passoid, despite how she’s dressed. Stained flannel and some larger military surplus pants. Oldshit normie who dresses like a guy and passes better than you.

“Sure.” You punch her command into the POS and grab two packs. You could end it here, give her the total and go back to your phone. But she’s kind of hot. Some narcissistic autoandrophylic desire to keep her in front of you burns your throat. She’s like you. Do it maggie, exercise the only power you have. Ask for her ID.

“Can I see your ID?”

Can you talk like a person? You sound like a fucking robot.

“Of course hon!”

Still smiling, still a syrupy voice coming out from her- wait, did you call you a hon? Something cringes throughout your entire body. She’s fucking with you, she knows you’re a

tranny and shes fucking with you. Of course she does, she can see the juxtaposition of your tits and your face, everyone can.

She leans forward and slides her ID across the counter, just inches away from you now. She smells like cigarettes, particulates from her clothes and breath and fur wafting towards you. Invisible cancers coating your olfactories and permeating into your cells.

Honestly you never really check the year on these. Security theatre, hold the ID for a few seconds and give it back in a socially acceptable allotment of time. But something lonely inside of you makes you want to check.

Ivy Krylova, born April 16th 1990. That's a pretty name. Pretty in a way that makes you hesitate handing it back. But you give it back, take her money, and the transaction ends. She walks away, removing you from her brain. At this you allow your gaze to linger on her as she escapes from your physical reality. Gone into the abyss of everything else.

Nice ass.

The college's student portal offered outdated design and dead links. However you did find a set of free practice tests. Clicking to its page, the "Free online practice tests" were really downloadable pdfs.

You have to print it out but don't own a printer. Wanting a quiet place to sit and study, you get dressed to go to a nearby library. Getting dressed was a matter of putting on some jeans from the floor, as you already have a hoodie on from yesterday. And the day before.

The bus smells bad and is nearly filled to the brim with npcs. Not that you aren't just as much of a philosophical zombie. You hold a pole near the driver. Touching the public surface

burns in discomfort. Other “people” have covered this in shit and mucus and bacteria, but don’t you deserve this? To be invaded by the disgusting germs of others? You deserve this, because of whatever's wrong with you.

You deserve everything that has happened, if you didn’t then maybe you wouldn’t be stuck at that gas station. Maybe you wouldn’t have jerked off at school. Divine punishment for being such a perverted fuck up. Maybe you should lick the pole. Does that thought excite you? You’re getting hard. Maybe you should jerk off here, and let the state label you a degenerate. But rotting would get you off too much wouldn’t it?

Twenty minutes pass and it’s your stop. Walking in it feels like she’s doing something wrong. Like someone's gonna figure out you don’t belong there. They’re gonna see that you’re obviously not a person and they’re gonna yell at you.

The vending machine is offering 8oz Redbulls for \$4.99 each. What a grift, good thing you stole some large ones from work. Attempting to print the guides yourself, you give up after ten minutes and have a librarian help you.

An hour and a half in, you struggle at the science section. Head getting buzzy and redbull still empty despite reflexively sipping it.

The customer is here. That one from the other day, Ivy. She’s browsing shelves near you. Put your hood on and keep your head down. You’re not ready to talk to a real person right now. She probably didn’t even remember you, just a faceless background character. Stop freaking out and don’t let her see you.

A few minutes of overthinking pass and you flinch as you notice that a figure is looming above you.

“You’re the cute girl from the gas station, aren’t you?” Ivy smiles, looking down at you.

Cute? Oh god she's flirting with you. Why is she flirting with you? What does she want?

“Sure.” Giving her a dismissive answer reflexively. Say something, anything else. Stop being such an incel. Fuck she has nice tits.

“You’re Ivy right?” Why did you say that? You learned that from checking her ID and chose to remember it. You're a creep.

“Woah you remembered my name?” Ivy says, surprised. “Must’ve made quite an impression then huh?” She grins and puts her hand down in front of you, leaning in and making eye contact.

You open your mouth to speak but fail to produce a coherent response. You manage to stutter out,

“My name's Magnolia,” It was odd giving your real name to a real person. She’s like you though, she’ll believe you.

“But people call me Maggie.” Your throat burns.

She stares at you, grinning.

“Like the tree!”

You blink at her. How are you supposed to respond to that?

“Sure?” You congratulate yourself for not calling her a slur or sharing what learning disability you mentally diagnosed her with.

“What are you working on?” Ivy stares at your paper excitedly. “Is this physics? I love science, do you need any help? I actually got my degree in engineering, what are you studying?”

Maggie looks away at the question. What does she care? You don’t want to be honest and admit your failure. That you couldn’t cut it. Something in you wants her to see that though, to confess.

“It’s for my GED.” You answer in an uncertain combative tone. Ivy stares blankly for a moment, clearly contemplating, then pulls up a chair.

“This is the science portion right? It’s been a few years but I’ve tutored someone for their GED before!” She seemed nervous, breaking eye contact for a moment.

“Yeah, the english part was easy but I don’t really remember a lot of these formulas.”

Your resentment melts away, giving into socialization.

“It’s not too hard,” She moves her chair closer. Her shoulder bumps yours.

“I’ll show you.” Her hand grabs the sheet, inches from your own. She’s making so much eye contact. She smells like diesel and cigarettes and you try not to be weird about it.

“Thanks.” Eyes unmoving from the paper in front of you, drinking in every word.

She clearly loves the sound of her own voice. To be fair, if you had a voice like that you wouldn’t shut up either. Could you have a voice like that?

After nearly forty five minutes of studying, they finish the packet.

She was actually pretty helpful.

“Done!” She smiles at you.

“Thanks, again.” Looking up at her for the first time in over half an hour. Your brain is nothing but soup, fried in its entirety by bullshit academia.

“It’s no problem! You’re pretty smart so it wasn’t too tough. You’re probably ready to take the actual test.” Are you? You could probably pass the science portion now, english and social studies are no problem. The math section however. God you can’t even start to think about that. But, she thinks you’re good. Someone thinks you’re good. A hot girl called you smart. Is she wrong? The broth of your consciousness can’t handle that question, but you want to hear her say it again.

“You think?” Melting into her eyes, manipulating the conversation for her to praise you one more time. Hopefully it isn’t obvious, I wish you weren’t so depraved as to ask this of her. It’s why you don’t have any friends, it’s why you always text first. It’s why you’re here. Burnout piece of shi-

“Of course! You did most of these problems yourself after I explained them. You’re a good learner, sometimes people just need a guiding hand.” She puts her hand on your shoulder and rustles you. You can’t help but smile at this, Ivy breaks into a giggle.

“I had fun! Here's my number, if you need any more help at all just send me a text. I’d be happy to.” That would be really nice, maybe if she tutored you enough it could turn into real hangouts? Maybe she could find something in you besides a charity case? Keep her here, don’t let it end now. Ask her something. Make this about her, make talking to you worth it.

“Who did you tutor?” Words awkwardly falling out of your mouth.

“My little brother.” Ivy looks away and begins tapping her fingers on the wooden surface of the table. The confident mask slips from her face for a moment, revealing a person. As quick as her moment of dissociation started, she regained her unquestioning authority. Eyes fixating on Maggie like she’s prey.

“Do you like plants?” Ivy smiles, what kind of question is that? There was no indication of irony in her voice either. How autistic is she?

“Uhh sure? I guess they’re cool.” Why did she change the subject like that? You were prying, again.

“Come to First Memorial this Wednesday at Three PM, I run the gardening club there. I’d no love to have someone like you helping out.”

You exchange numbers and she walks away. This time not into any dark unreality, now she lives blue light. In LED behind glass, dancing in liquid crystal. She has escaped from fantasy and into solid memory. She exists this Wednesday as well, in plans to see her. You're checking out her ass in the past, present, and future.

Lingering on her again, she glances back at you. Shit did she see you looking at her ass? You give her a frantic wave and attempt to casually pack up your bag. Fucking loser, do better on wednesday.

It was a seventeen minute walk from the bus stop. Alone on a shittily paved road, the kind that looked like it was loosely painted onto the earth. Asphalt dripping from its sides mixing with weeds and dirt. A desire path made next to it, beyond being unending tall grass.

After a bend you could see the church coming up. A dirt parking lot spotted with vehicles. Mainly non descript shitty cars covered in faggy bumper stickers. Ivy's burnt orange truck closest to the entrance.

The church itself was old and wooden. Peeling paint, an oxidized bell waiting to collapse the church tower. This place looks fucking dead.

You hesitate at the door for a moment, reconsidering. You could just wait at the bus stop for another 20 minutes and get on the one heading back to the city.

"Wrong entrance." A hoarse and monotone voice said behind me.

"Huh?" Turning around there was a girl slightly taller than you. Another tranny. Figures. She's a bit more masculine, maybe a little older than you. You can see the permastubble on her face. Still pretty, she wore a black sleeveless Aphex Twin t-shirt. Scrawny, long black hair,

serious expression. Very wojakable. Over compensating her masculinity by trying to be “punk”. Twinkhon.

“The greenhouse is around the side. Is this your first time?” Still a blank expression, but she tilts her head slightly. Autist.

“Sure.” Beginning the word with a disrespectful eyeroll, you stumble over the end and leave your mouth agape for a second too long making you look like a moron. Why the fuck did you say that. That doesn’t even make sense

“Okay?” Brick wall to brick wall communication. “Follow me.” She turns and starts walking. Fuck. Can’t back out now.

The greenhouse is larger than you expected, A short path connects it to a side door of the church. Pollen stained glass makes it hard to see through, with weeds growing along the sides and old rusted tools matching the shitty run down aesthetic of the other buildings. There's a faint orange glow emanating from every window. Warm and inviting, juxtaposing the grey overcast skies.

The autist opens the door, waiting impatiently for you to walk in. You brush past her, fuck her, who does she think she is? Walking in as nonchalantly as possible, you’re greeted with a deep earthy scent. Green is covering every open surface, semi cramped walkways sacrificed convenience for the square footage of foliage in the room. Humidity and pollen jamming their warm fingers up your nostrils.

The internal decor is something out of a pinterest board. Odd sculptures, most partially hidden by flowering plants. Vintage pots and lights hanging on the ceiling, separated by various trinkets and flowers in various stages of decay. An antique mall was robbed and you were staring at the criminals. Who were a bunch of tenderqueers.

Aside from the girl at the door, there are seven other trannies trying their best to mill about the cramped space, some more gracefully than others. They looked at you, hungrily. None of them were very attractive. All misshapen and loudly dressed, a fluoride look in their eyes.

The more you stared at their open pores, their sweat drenched clothes clinging to their unnatural forms, the damper the air became. One approaches you

“I just have some mild pollen allergies.” Severe, but I didn’t want to make a big deal.

-introduce all the club members and finish it out with maggie smoking too much weed and also dying from allergies and ivy has to drive her home

Pulling up to your apartment complex in a dreary haze of antihistamines and weed.

“Here?” She looks out the passenger window at the shitty complex. Being rightfully judgemental in her tone.

“Yeah here.” You mutter through a thick brainfog.

“This is some soviet shit Maggie.” A real concern is barely concealed under a joking tone.

“It works.” She’s right, it’s a jutting slab of concrete in an otherwise barren and shitty area.

“Actually Ivy, I don’t think the Soviets paid \$600 a month for their apartments, and at least they got food stamps. Chicago thinks I’m too rich for ‘em.” You mutter as you stumble out of her truck.

“Shit, \$600? That’s fucking criminal Maggie.” She gracefully steps out and holds your arm as you lead her through the maze to your door.

“Just wait till you see inside.” Fuck, you actually didn’t want her in your room. It’s a mess and your roommates would be pissed if they were home.

“Oh? I get to see inside? I feel so honored.” She laughs, clearly genuinely excited to see your home.

“Uhm- I-” Stuttering as you fumble for your keys.

“Here darling, let me help.” She unclips the carabiner from your jeans and unlocks your front door. Her hand lingered on your hip, you felt the denim move against your skin where her fingers searched for your keychain.

“This isn’t *that* bad Maggie. Which one is your room?” There’s only a few dishes in the sink and some beer bottles on the coffee table, but you weren’t talking about your living room. You point to your door, Ivy strides forward and enters before you. Filling you with a panic. Scrambling behind her, she looks in shock.

“Holy shit you live like this?”

Laundry strewn around the floor, cigarette butts collecting in an ashtray at your PC. LED screen showing /TTTT/. A stunning lack of sheets on your mattress with an equally appalling lack of bedframe. Filthy bong next to your pillows, along with fast food bags and snack wrappers.

“Magnolia.” She looks at you, a mixture of concern and frustration on her face.

“Uhm I just don’t spend a lot of time here-” Lie.

Ivy begins picking up trash and putting it in a plastic bag, filling you with dread. Embarrassment covers your face and weighs down your tongue as you start to plead.

“Nonono you don't have to clean sorry I-”

“This isn't healthy Maggie, let me pick up a bit.” Her stern voice melting you down.

She looks back and grabs your arm, leading you to your chair.

“Just sit here for a moment hon.” Smiling down at you, feeling like you've been put in the backseat of your moms car. She picks over your desk, looking at your monitor.

“Jesus Maggie, you shouldn't be on these sites.” She closes out of 4chan. You don't know what to say, you don't know if you can speak from how overwhelming this is. She picks up a pill bottle.

“Your name used to be [REDACTED]? That's so funny!” No. No, please don't say that. You never thought you'd hear that word in her voice. She chuckles, looking over at you. Her smile drops as you stutter.

“N-no I-. Please don't-” Throat burning, tears welling in your eyes. It's too much.

“Woah sorry Mags, I didn't know you were that sensitive about it.”

It's too late to recover. You're too weak to push anymore back. Esophagus burning and throat tightening. Your sympathetic nervous system reacts and you open the mouth you were so desperately trying to keep shut.

Tears stream down and fall into your slack mouth as you choke down sobs,

“Please don't say that.” Wiping your face with your sleeve, clear slime coating it after from your stuffy nose.

“Sorry- “ Ivy was wide eyed, stiff awkward fidgeting as she collected words. You manage to recover before she starts,

“It’s fine. I just don’t like hearing that name. I think I need to go to bed soon.” You weren’t that angry with Ivy, you just wanted to be stronger around her. At this point the brainfog has almost completely overtaken coherent thought.

“Yeah, sorry Maggie. Can I hug you?” This was fine, a show of forgiveness. A way to say without words that you still like her. Which you do, you really like her.”

“Sure.” You bring yourself out of the chair, she steps forward and embraces you. The both of you holding it for longer than a moment. She hugged good, arms tightly around your upper back. Pressing against your sensitive chest. Head nestled between her shoulder, breast, and armpit. You really wish that your nose wasn’t too stuffy to smell anything.

Giving her a squeeze of equal tightness in return, partially for how comfortable it is taking in her warmth and pushing against her flannel. Partially for the amount of pressure it puts on your tits. Mostly though, because it had been months since you’ve received a hug from anyone.

“I’ll see you soon Maggie, can I take you on a hike next week? I really want to show you the woods near my cabin.” Waking up from the trance she had put you in, you quickly nodded in affirmation.

“Yeah, sounds fun.” Releasing from each other's hold, you see her out.

“Great! It’s a date then.” Date? She closed the door behind her, leaving you hanging on that word. You smiled, the fluttering in your stomach leading to your bed and down your jeans.

There is a damp rot growing inside the walls of your temple, eating the columns holding the roof above you.

“I don’t know how to feel about it.”

“I don’t know, y’all are dating right?”

“Yeah for two weeks, I guess since it happened. I mean we talked about it and I’m not torn up about it or anything.” You are, but if you said it then it would be real.

“Well it sounds fine then? Y’all got over it and it seems like you’re happy?”

“Oh yeah, I mean, I know I’m happy.” Through gritted teeth.

“Then yeah! Nothing’s going to be entirely conventional in our community anyways. Besides, the whole thing sounds pretty hot. If you’re into that sort of thing.” She laughed.

-add more of an intro, maybe them driving to ivy’s place

Your throat burns hot. Only the orange of the filter is left of your cigarette.

Absent-mindedly, you toss the still smoking butt to the ground.

It lands on a weed.

“You shouldn’t do that Maggie.”

Ivy stops walking. She’s looking down at you, waiting for you to respond. She probably wants you to apologize, which is stupid.

“Why.” You mutter, looking away. Something crawls along your spine, wet along the back of your neck. Instinctive fear after questioning authority. “Why” was the worst thing you could say to an adult.

“Because you hurt it. They can feel too y’know.”

Her stare is boring into you. You can’t meet her gaze or it’ll drill through your eyes and into your prefrontal cortex. Fight her. You respect her and she’s being cringe so you should say something.

“Well thats just retar-”

Before you can finish your slur she grabs your arm tight and shoves a burning cigarette onto the collar of your neck.

It doesn't hurt as much as you thought it would. Like a constant bee sting. Despite this, you squirm. You writhe uncontrollably, the only thing keeping you upright is Ivy's other hand gripping your side. Whines escaping from the back of your throat, stumbling forward and away breaking from her hold.

You reach for your neck, slicking your hand with sweat as it slides for the burn. Still stinging, you feel rough ash and tobacco at the site of trauma. The center of everything, throbbing and dirty. A halo of numb flesh surrounding it. Coughing, breathing, eyes welling. Head shooting to face Ivy, a grinning tower approaching you.

"What the fuck! What's wrong with you, you psycho! Why did you do that? Why'd you hurt me? You fucking idiot!" Vomiting emotion through sobs. Hand covering your neck, heat radiating to your palm and up your throat and out your eyes. leaving red splotches in its fiery wake, melting the flesh of your cheeks.

Ivy's smile drops, her gait hardens. Losing all warmth. Turning her radiance from a comforting fireplace to a smoking engine with you locked in the passenger. She grabs the wrist cradling your neck and spits down at you.

"Don't call me that." Eyes widening, knees locking. Her height had always made you feel smaller

"Let me see it, are you okay?" Her eyes switch with machine-like precision to your wound. The shape of them changed to become softer, her shoulders dropping. Unsure of whether to let your guard down or keep fighting. It'd be easier to give in, let things be normal again.

“I think? It hurts.” She rummages through her bag and quickly brings out a small first aid kit. She grabs two packets and a tube without thinking. Did she plan this?

“I’m going to take care of it now, it might sting a little. But you can handle that right?” Butterflies squirm in your stomach at that question. She couldn’t be flirting right now, that was a genuine question. It had to be.

“Yeah, I can handle it.” Your sentence ends in a whimper, as she brought an alcohol pad to your neck as soon as you gave the slightest affirmation.

“Good.” Her grin made you tense, but you didn’t want her to not touch you. Getting taken care of felt nice and disgusting in equal measure. Smiling out of shame and a want to appease her, and only a little genuinely.

She rubs a cream on your neck, and sticks on a bandaid.

“Do you want to keep going? It’s about to get really nice.” Not really, your adrenaline began to dump and your legs hurt and you wanted to lay down really badly.

“Sure.” You lied, making Ivy visibly excited. She squeezes your shoulder with her palm. You manage not to flinch externally, but some foundation laid within your soul just got weaker.

“Let’s keep going then!” She resumed her march forward and you fell in line behind her. If you died of exhaustion at least you’d die in her arms.

Other than references in anime and videogames, you knew nothing about tarot. It was Inez who initially offered. She saw you looking at the cards and asked if you’d ever had a reading done.

“Never.”

“Would you like one? I love doing spreads.”

“Sure.”

“Awesome! Did you have anything in mind?”

“Like, questions?”

“Yeah, or I could do a general spread.”

“General.”

“Got it! We’ll do a three card spread about the state of your past, present, and future.

She quickly got to work shuffling, spread out the cards on the table, and asked you to pick three.

“First, the past.” You flip over the card and see a man hanging by his foot from a tree, it was facing away from you though so it was hard to make out the title.

“The hanged man, reversed. Usually this one means like, enlightenment and wisdom? Usually through some sort of sacrifice. But it’s upside down, you maybe you paid a cost and lost wisdom.”

“Second, the present.” You flip it over and it’s upside down again, were you doing it wrong? It was some lady sitting in a chair with two pillars next to her, one black and one white.

“The high priestess! This one is generally about spiritual clarity, or just clarity in general. Kinda just truth with some mystical sprinkles. But it’s also reversed. Maybe the truth is foggy? You’re looking through opaque glass and can’t figure out what the shapes are.”

“Third, the future.” This time it was upright. The Tower, some action scene of a crumbling building.

“Oh geez, all downers. The Tower is collapse, chaos, and destruction without meaning. Maybe something bad is coming your way, at least some jarring change.”

“Is your neck okay?” She asked through a half smile, as if what she did was a joke. Was it?

“It’s fine.” You said too dryly. She probably wanted you to giggle back at her, maybe whine in faux pain. Is that what she wants? Maybe you’re projecting.

“Sorry Mags, I was just messing with you. Plus you shouldn’t say that word.” Her voice came casually and sweetly. It impresses you even now how much you can taste her tone. Contrasting with your deep phlegmy monotone inflection.

“Sorry.” Avoiding eye contact, feeling your bandage. It was perverse, some fantasy you used to read about. It was normal, joking between two friends. Close friends.

“Can I use your shower before we head back?” You feel unclean. You want these damp clothes off of your skin, you want to wash every crevice of your being.

“Of course! Here let me get you a towel, actually, did you want to stay here tonight? It’s getting a bit late.” That sounded nice. You didn’t want to not be around Ivy, and this way you can keep hanging out. But you didn’t have any clothes that weren’t hiked in.

“Great! I’ll grab you a towel and a change of clothes.” She spun around on her heel dramatically and head further into her cabin, clearly excited. Oh, okay that solves that then. She must’ve been planning to ask this for a while. You walk towards the bathroom, clutter on the sink and an old towel on the floor. Clean in the ways that matter though.

Ivy walks in behind you with a pile of clothes in her arms, which she shoves in a little cubby.

“Clean towel and some clean clothes, I’m assuming were the same shirt size and my sweatpants are stretchy.” She smiles and begins to walk out before adding.

“Oh yeah you can use whatever soap and stuff that you want.” You look into her shower and see very little, there was an unused bar of Inez’s tallow, a half used jug of castile soap, a washcloth that could have doubled as a hand towel and a razor. That was it.

“Wheres your shampoo and conditioner?” You ask, trying to think of any alternative explanation than the obvious. Fear rising as she starts to speak,

-rabbit scene,

-completely revise

I was sitting against a planter, she was opposite me criss cross applesauce. Despite everything it still felt like any other time I’d linger after meetings, until everyone else left. Her eyes were tired and relaxed. It was just her and I in the greenhouse after all. For a moment it was any other meeting, I was nervously enjoying her attention, and everyone was still alive. The taste of blood took me out of the dream though, and I realized how tight my lungs were.

My cheeks were hot and the back of my palms were burning with hives. Panic and bile rose along my throat. Looking down my flesh was spotty and red, heat coming in waves. I felt a squirming in my chest. There was a twisting bulge at the center of the irritation. I looked up at her in terror. I don’t know what I was looking for, reassurance? I wanted her to hold me again. I

wanted her comforting gaze to meet mine. To forgive her, to be one for a moment. Far beyond anyone else.

Instead she was fixated on my breast. She put her palms on the ground and crawled a little closer to me, smiling. Like we were at a sleepover. I instinctively smiled back at her, though opening my mouth was a mistake. Bloody saliva drooled out of my mouth. I tried to put a hand over my mouth in shame, not knowing how lethargic I was. My arm dropped in my lap and I was brought out of the dream again. I tried to apologize but my tongue was too swollen.

“Mmthorry-” I rasped through phlegm. A coughing fit took me, making more drool spill out. She brought her hand to mine, looking at me with a mix of pity and fascination.

“You don’t have to say anything.” She was using that voice again. How does she do that? It’s so nice and girly and smooth without a hint of effort. Was she born with a feminine voice? You could still hear her midwestern accent, it was still deep and full of life trained speech patterns. But it was unmistakably a girl’s voice. Could I have sounded like that if I tried harder? Does she hear a man? It doesn’t matter, she said I didn’t have to talk so I won’t.

The squirming in my chest grew, pushing against my epidermis, writhing along my ribs like tongues across sensitive teeth. Broken from the dream again. She released her hand from mine, sending a crawling fear along my arm that I’d never feel her again. All that was left in my palm was a throbbing itch.

The sudden absence of her touch jolted me, the reality of my situation setting in. My vision is blurred, my throat is swelling, my skin is burning. The words “allergic reaction” and all of its associations take root in my brain. I need to find a solution, though fighting through my discordant thought processes is hard. Maybe I don’t need to think it through. Animal desires to run come over me, to get out of this danger.
