

**Today**  
is the  
**Best Day**  
of the  
**Rest**  
of  
**Your Life**

by  
Brett Paufler

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if it makes any sense  
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*...perhaps someday, I shall write more...*

# BEST DAY

###

*A fun nonsensical ride to nowhere.*

*Of course, if you're really going nowhere, it can hardly matter if the journey stops on a dime halfway there*

*But while it lasts, it truly is a thing of delight.*

*Welcome to my unfinished symphonies.*

###

Cliff, he hasn't heard that name in a while. He is dreaming. He is at the Country Club. It is his birthday.

For whatever reason, Natalie could not come, but she had made sure his cake was a bottle of whiskey, tap the keg, smooth and sweet, and he is on stage, singing again, his sister, Suzanne, smiling up at him from the audience. She looks good in that dress. She always looks good.

Later, walking home, arm in arm with his little sis, laughing, singing, drinking, they stop at the house on the corner.

The landscaping has been redone, gold tiles for grass, Bohemian New-Wave, flowers like glitter, Christmas lights in the trees for leaves, never taking them down.

Suzanne doesn't like it. But she is a he. The old Japanese gardener, angered by this abomination, he takes vengeance with his shovel, only sparing his friend.

But even he was gutted in the end.

Dreams don't always make sense... or even have a hidden meaning. Sometimes dreams are just dreams.

Sometimes.

And then, there are those other times.

###

The phone rings, Randy (Rad, Radcliff, Cliff) opens his eyes. He is with Natalie, her arms wrapped around him, holding him tight, making sure he doesn't disappear in the night, using his chest for a pillow. It takes her longer to stir, open her eyes, she doesn't want to let go.

The phone rings.

And the phone rings.

And the phone will continue to ring.

"I should get that."

"Don't. It's only bad news."

Still, the phone rings.

Pulling away, Natalie answers. It's a call from the coast, "It's for you."

"I'm not here."

Nonetheless, she hands him the phone. When he refuses, she places it on his chest, goes to the bathroom, comes back, sees that he hasn't moved, hasn't said a word to the voice squawking through.

"Hello! Radcliff?" And to someone else on the other side, "No. I'm still on hold. He's probably still sleeping, the drunken fool." And back into the phone, "Wake up, you miserable cretin!"

Crawling back into bed, Natalie holds the phone up to Rad's ear. He grabs it, moves it away from his ear and holds it limply to the side, while his sister, his only sister, the only one that is left, continues to rage. "I don't see why it's on me to tell him. I never liked the fucking bastard anyway."

"I love you too, my little angel."

"Don't call me that. I hate it when you call me that."

"Well, I hate it when you call me."

"You're a bastard."

"You're a cunt."

And with that he hangs up.

“What was that all about?”

“Suzanne is dead, brain’s smashed-in.” But perhaps, that doesn’t suffice. “I had a dream.” And when that still doesn’t suffice, “The last time Angela called was after the crash. She only calls with bad news. We don’t speak much otherwise. If not Suzanne, it’s someone else. With any luck, Harry OD’d”

“I didn’t know he used.”

“He doesn’t. That’s what would make it so lucky.”

###

Before long, I shall become bored.

Before long, I shall break the fourth wall.

Why not start early?

Why not start now?

###

Books often have dedications, places to give thanks. And at this juncture, Radcliff Nathaniel Stewart would like to formally thank his childhood tutor:

*I would like to dedicate this next chapter to Trixie Marie, without whose guidance, eye to detail, and extraordinary linguistic abilities, I would never have learned the meaning of:*

*Fellatio,*

*Ménage a Trois,*

*Cunnilingus,*

*Experienced the same,*

*Or gotten my first A in school... and for a subject I had been previously failing.*

*Oh, and I’d like to thank my father, at this time, as well, for hiring the saucy tart in the first place and not insisting we -- my father and I that is, not that saucy tart -- spend too much time together -- or any, in fact -- during our stay in Paris.*

*I can almost hear him, in that rough authoritative voice of his, commanding from the other side, "Right, like that. Teach him a little French and give him a taste for what money can buy. The misguided fool has a casual disrespect for the stuff."*

*"Oui, monsieur."*

*"Now, get your clothes back on. And remember, this is a business arrangement. I want you to behave professionally."*

*"Oui, monsieur."*

*"God, you got a nice ass. Someday, I hope he appreciates what I did for him."*

*Don't worry. He does.*

*To my Rad Dad -- my father, my mentor,*

*With love,*

*Radcliff Nathaniel Stewart*

*Old money, old sensibility, old taste*

###

Wide shot, set the view. Full sun, high in the sky, we overlook the ocean. It's the Caribbean. A lone yacht powers north, open sea all around.

Pulling in closer for scale, we see that it's a large vessel -- no boat, no day-trip pleasure cruiser -- but a large ship of serious tonnage, a private residence, a portable mansion, a home on the sea. Natalie owns it -- or rather, her father. She won its use in a game of poker.

"Enough with the M&M's, we should bet for real."

"Fine, little lady. I win this hand and you march right back to law school and finish your degree," full house, aces and eights.

"Maybe, someday. But first, I'm going to sail around the world in my new boat," sevens all the way.

And just his luck, Captain Carter was there to witness the bet; a man of honor, so as far as he was concerned, the ship was hers -- even had it rechristened the Lady Luck in her honor.

But that was then and this is now. Flashback over, we continue to pull in, the ship is large, huge, mammoth even, complete with radio beacons, emergency helicopter, and research equipment. Solid white, it's polished walls glistening in the sun, and a crew of two-score, go about their duties, scrubbing the deck, washing the windows, making sure the engine hums, while the cook serves coffee, breakfast in bed.

Covers thrown back, full length mirrors on the walls and ceiling, open curtains, Natalie straddles Rad, sucking him in, enjoying him, worshipping him, celebrating the new day; bacon in hand, champagne on her lips, she slowly rocking her hips, back and forth, this way and that, matching the sway of the ocean.

While Carl, Captain Carter, has seen it all before. These rich folks are a decadent lot and Natalie always was a bit spoiled -- sweet girl, but spoiled nonetheless. And not batting an eye, Carl -- they never call him Captain -- gives the morning report. Full speed ahead, "In two days, we'll be back," back home in port.

And then, she is arcing her back, holding on tight, silently gasping, sucking on air, morning -- turning to afternoon -- delight.

"If that will be all?"

"Skeet in an hour, Carl," Rad commands as he turns Natalie over, "Better make it two."

"Very good, sir."

And in three when they stir, half naked in towels, newly washed skin, guns in hand, antique Remington six-shooter, black powder musket that saw action in the revolutionary war - at Lexington and Concord, of course, and not one of these later day, also rans, 'Valley Forge, please' -- the breakfast dishes are launched into the air; the pair fires, misses, reloads, fires, misses, fires some more.

And it is here that we shall pull back into the air, lazy day, afternoon, setting sun sky, pleasure cruiser headed north, beeline for the coast, home sweet home, and the loving family that awaits.

"I wish I were a better shot."

“That’s fine china, Rad. You’re just showing your good taste and breeding by aiming wide.”

“Ah, Carl, cocktails, already? You’ll join us, of course. Tell us one of your stories about life on the bridge.”

And ahead on the open ocean as far as the eye can see, the forecast is for smooth sailing as always it will be.

###

“Enemies? No. Everyone loved Suzy. I loved Suzy.”

“No. No one wanted her dead. How could anyone want her dead? If you had known her, you wouldn’t even be asking. She was a delight, a dear sweet girl, happy to give you the coat off her back.”

“It’s just, the turn of phrase brought to mind... She’s been wearing that god awful Birkenstock for the past year. And it was so last season -- even last season, it was so last season. And she just wore it all the time, never took it off. It was just frightful going anywhere with her. I mean, I had to explain -- and one never wants to have to explain that sort of thing. But Radcliff had given it to her, bought it for her on some trip. And it was almost as if she was afraid to take it off.”

“Oh, she hasn’t seen him... for at least a year. Thick as thieves they had been, always had been growing up. And then, this last year, after that last ski trip, whenever he was in town, she would suddenly find an excuse to leave. Seriously, who goes to Aspen in the spring?”

“She was running scared. You could see it in her eyes. I thought it was drugs, that maybe he had given her a taste and she’d wanted more.”

“I’m sure I don’t know. Radcliff on the other hand does. He hangs with a wild sort, was a singer, you know, in one of those Rock and Roll bands; and what one hears about those musicians types. And then, of course, there is his conviction.”

“Some import/export manifest violation thing. But everyone knows it was drugs.”

“The intravenous needle one, I think.”

“Really? More than one? Oh, well. Shows what I know.”

“At the time, I thought maybe he was pressuring her to use and she was running away, you know, unable to say no, but at the same time, unable to say yes.”

“Nothing explicit. Nothing I could lay my hands on or point to as evidence, you know, give conviction to my beliefs... But I will tell you this, when I told Radcliff about Suzy -- and I'm the one who had to make the call, terrible burden that, to have to break the news to him, and I knew they were so close -- but when he heard, he was so happy, giddy with delight, like a little boy, all excited, everything going according to plan.”

“He was eager to hear news, that's what he was. It was shocking, really. But more than that, before I had said anything, he was telling me the news, literally filling in the details.”

“‘Sue's dead.’ He said it just like that, before I had said a word, all flat and unemotional, ‘Sue's dead.’ It sent chills down my spine the way he said it, cold and uncaring. And the way he went on, ‘Blow to the head, hit from behind.’ The only thing he didn't seem to know was the specifics of the murder weapon.”

“He made a big game of it, trying to guess. ‘Shovel? Hammer?’ He even went so far as to ask me what I thought I might prefer if I were to find myself in a similar situation. And let me tell you, hearing his voice on the other end, I felt more than a little threatened.”

“Oh, do I think he killed her? No. No. Rad's just a bit, morbid. Laughed all the way through our parent's funeral. I'm sure he was on drugs. But kill her, no. Not Radcliff. Not Rad. I mean, you don't think... What would he have done? Hire someone? He was out of town. One would think that would have given him the perfect alibi. But he's coming back and I'll be safe... but he's not here yet. I wonder if he's planning... Do you think I



should hire someone? But no, not Rad. No, he may be a bit rough around the edges, but he's still family. He's still family."

###

I know crap about skiing.

I've never been to Aspen.

But Radcliff has... and Suzanne. Flashback to a quiet trip alone, no family no friends, cutting it up on the slopes, black diamond, widow maker, downhill, and fast. And that snowboarding thing, both of them, as well, doing tricks and flips, laughing it up -- a snowball fight, building a snowman, and quiet nights in a private suite, luxury resort, walls of glass looking out onto a secluded forest glen, mountains, and hills, stars that fill the night sky, fine food and dining, lobster and steak, caviar spread thick, expensive champagne, and quality pharmaceuticals.

Suzanne loves Rad. Everyone loves Rad, but Suzanne really loves him, would follow him anywhere; you can see it in her eyes, the way she smiles, hangs on his word, follows his action, mimics his desire.

They are in the hot tub, sweating it up, on the snow filled expanse, rolling under the stars, shivering, wet, they race back to the fire, clinging together, holding each other close to stay warm, wrapped in a blanket, the fur on the floor, and they are kissing -- no mistake, no accident, the look in her eyes.

She would follow him anywhere -- here, there -- to do this, do that, with an eagerness to please, no sense of pride, but no shame, no remorse.

"Natalie's coming tomorrow."

And it breaks the spell.

She wants only him, him alone, no other, no one else. But he wants the stage, the adoration, the attention, two girls, three girls, and more: this place is too big for just the two of them; they should throw a party, invite all their friends.

And it breaks Suzanne's heart.

It breaks her heart.

“I’ve been meaning to tell you, I got a call,” from London, New York, a modeling gig, she has to go. And then, she’s off, cold turkey -- never again will she see him, be with him, no more.

But she can’t help thinking and dreaming and recalling his touch and that day that night when he was her world and she his... all he had ever wanted.

“I compare them all to you.”

But for her, “No one else compares,” and that perhaps says it all. The pain too great, better nothing than this, this pain, unbearable pain, broken heart, whenever he is with another, and there are countless others.

“Let’s just stay by ourselves tonight, Rad. Just you and me.”

“OK, not tonight, but tomorrow,” we’re going to have a party... only she got on a plane, private charter, on a flight far away, wherever the pilot wanted, cast to the wind: London, Barcelona, Moscow, Madrid.

###

So, yeah.

I know crap about skiing.

Do you know what else I know crap about?

I could fill a book...

###

I do believe it is time for a multiple-choice question

The Stewart’s Estate is located in:

A: Boston, real blue bloods, their people were there for The Party, you know, The Party, and while the other ‘Indians’ were tossing tea over the side, they were hauling it in. “Still got some, somewhere,” and in days of yore, that would be the cue for gramps to sneak off into his den and come back with a tin.

B: New York, overlooking central park, The East side, of course, top floor (the entire floor) penthouse suite, rooftop gardens in summer, snowballs in winter; and while in town, little Suzette liked to spend her days at the museum cafe.

C: Sailport, Maine, a quiet place, those mansions take up a lot of room; and this time of year, the boats are mostly gone from the harbor, off for the winter, Greece is the place of the moment, the hip destination, while old sailors sell lobster fresh off the dock; and in the dark corners of quiet taverns, you can share a sociable pint with a billionaire, or play pool with his old money, rambunctious, trust fund only a millionaire, grandson. "Give him time, he'll settle down, they all do. Eh, when I was his age," and money could buy anything, let me tell you a story...

###

Gramps was a partier, he went to Yale or Harvard -- one of the two, never Princeton. Fuck Princeton, stick it to them, not even worthy of the prank, getting drunk with the boys, old days, beaver coats, hadn't invented color photography, yet, sipping gin, whiskey, and rum out of silver flasks, prohibition was a quaint idea, good for the masses, roaring twenties, gangsters galore, went to school with the best of them, back in the day when they didn't even bother to put locks on the doors, so after they -- not us, they -- won the cup... and Princeton, at that! Princeton, they didn't deserve a cup, so late at night, nipping the brew, just walking through the front door, picking it up, and walking right out again, they brought that cup back where it belonged and had spent the prior three years. Of course, the fools at Princeton (I mean, we are talking about boys who only just made it), well, they blamed the lads at Brown, who had come in second and were notoriously poor sports... only, no one from Brown was man enough for a stunt like that, walk in, walk out, no costumes... or dressed as custodians, the story did change, but always with the cup carried high, car ride home, rumble seat whiskey, songs to the night, or in broad

daylight, no thought of recourse, it was the middle of classes mind you, so no one was about, sneaking it back, and being the good chaps that they were, they let the credit for the prank fall where it was due... on the shoulder of those Browns, only returning the gold the following year, the cup in the prow, rowing into last with style, as they had done year after year for the past three years, a clean sweep, because as you know, a gentleman always lets the ladies go first.

###

There once was a young lad named Rad  
Whose sister would have been glad  
To spend all her days in free loving ways  
Pity she fell in love with a cad.

###

From youngest to oldest:

Suzanne's remembers running through a field in spring, fresh flowers, morning dew, and Rad with the magic, a butterfly in hand, which he presented to her.

Rad remembers Angela gifting him with the same and he just passing it to the next like some kind of game.

Angela remembers -- quite clearly -- a spoiled Radcliff, ruining her fun, and stealing her prize.

While Harry remembers watching the others, a little older, a little distant, hoping none of the others would cry.

Angela always did.

Suzanne, never.

While one wonders if Rad ever learned how.

"Bu'fly away. Angel another!"

"For you to steal? No, this one is mine. You keep away."

“Keep ‘way! Keep ‘way! Angel play keep ‘way!” And little Rad swooping in, as quick as can be, “Keep ‘way. Keep ‘way. Rad play keep ‘way.”

And off he ran, while Angela burst into tears.

###

Angela hired Max as a bodyguard:

A: Because she feared for her life.

B: Because Max made her feel safe.

C: Because Max turned her on.

D: Because hiring Max turned her husband on.

###

“No, you don’t get a say.”

“On the couch. Speaking of which, you should take him some blankets.”

“Because it would be the Christian thing to do.”

“Oh, and remind him that we’re going to go shooting tomorrow.”

“Is tomorrow a holiday?”

“Well then, you’ll be at work, won’t you?”

“Won’t you?”

“Oh, did I mention I went shopping today?”

“Well, first I got Max a new suit. He looks very handsome in it: broad shoulders, strong arms...”

“Oh, don’t be like that. What I really wanted to tell you was that after I got Max cleaned up -- and he’s no happier about that than you are -- he helped me pick out a new pair of riding boots.”

“Who said they were for riding horses? Max has a motorcycle and if he knows what’s good for him, he’s going to teach me to ride.”

“Ride him? In these? He should be so lucky.”

“Now, enough of your petty jealousies. Go be a gracious host and tuck Max in. And when you get back, you can help me put these on. That is if you think you can do that without making a mess of everything?”

“Excellent. Now, go. I haven’t got all night...”

###

When the Lady Luck pulled into dock, Harry was there to greet it along as were a full score of Sailport’s finest.

“A state senator complete with honor guard, this is indeed a rare pleasure.”

“Just be quiet, Radcliff. And don’t say anything stupid.”

“That’s going to be hard for him,” Natalie surmises as she gives Harry a quick peck on the cheek before falling back into Rad’s arms, “especially since you brought the punch line to so many jokes along with you.”

###

Man in blue,  
Man in blue,  
How does that limerick go?

###

“Just answer the question, Radcliff”

“What was the question, again?”

“Where were you on the night of the 6<sup>th</sup>?”

“And what is today?”

“The 9<sup>th</sup>.”

“So, that’s been...”

“Three days, now, Radcliff.”

“Are you sure, doesn’t July have like 31 days in it.”

“It’s October, Radcliff. Just answer the question. ”

“Really, October already. I love when the leaves change color. I didn’t miss it, did I?”

###

“What did your brother want?”

“Usually to be loved... or at least, feel like he belonged.”

“I meant just now.”

“So did I, Natalie, so did I.”

###

Under suspicion...

Prime suspect...

May be wanted for additional questioning...

Don’t leave town...

###

When the police searched the Lady Luck, they found:

A: Radcliff secret stash of boy band memorabilia.

B: Captain Carl’s not so secret stash of boy band memorabilia.

C: Natalie’s extensive lingerie collection in complete disarray.

D: Captain Carl’s lingerie collection meticulously catalogued.

E: A shocking preponderance of prescription drugs.

F: A shocking preponderance of non-prescription pharmaceuticals.

G: Absolutely nothing. Captain Carl runs a tight ship. Anyone could see the police waiting on the dock a mile away. And Captain Carl has friends in the Guard who were more than happy to radio ahead.

###

“So, are you going to tell me? What were they searching for?”

“Evidence.”

“Could you be a little more specific?”

“I think they were hoping to find phone records, logs, maybe a recording -- or if not that, something written down, a journal or notes to a murder.”

“So, you’re a suspect for your sister’s murder.”

“Not a suspect, the suspect. And news like that calls for a drink.”

###

Natalie is hot -- one of those sleek, polished, fancy European models, only made in the good old US of A.

All the same, sometimes she likes to talk with a fake Slavic accent, wear high heels, real fur coats, and not much else.

And whenever she does, Rad likes to pretend that she’s his mail order bride.

###

Rad is showing Natasha around his hometown -- never mind that she grew up here, too -- looking for something to do until they can go back to the boat.

“And this is Gil’s bait and tackle. He’s got this great big tub of worms in back to dig through?”

“Natasha does not, how you say, Go Fish?”

“Really, because you look like a catch.”

“Rad is such the sweet talker. If Natasha is not careful, she may fall for him, hook line and sinker.”

“Sounds like a plan. Oh, here we go. What say we hop the fence and take a slow romantic walk down the old pier, maybe play a game of pirate booty while we’re there?”



“And gaze longingly across the ocean back to the old country. Natasha does not think so. Besides, Natasha does not do this ‘hopping of fences’ like the Rad, he thinks. Doors are opened willingly for Natasha or she does not walk through them at all.”

“Well, OK, then. The thrift store looks open, want to go shopping.

”This Radcliff of mine, he says he is rich, promising Natasha such plunder. But he has such pedestrian tastes, she is beginning to wonder.”

“I’m just looking for something to do. I doubt they’re going to let us back on the boat for a couple more hours and I don’t feel like heading up to the house...”

“My Radcliff said he wanted a drink. So, what is he waiting for? But Natasha a drink, take her dancing.”

“We’re almost at Gil’s. Though as to dancing, you just might have to hop on the bar to do that.”

“Natasha welcomes the opportunity to show her man what she can do.”

###

Gil’s Tavern is a small, smoke filled place, with a pool table in the corner and a few sunken booths along the back wall; sawdust covers the floor; the smell of old beer is pervasive, as is that of expensive perfume -- packed inside are fisherman, sailors, trust fund kids, and prostitutes, plenty of prostitutes, er I mean, good looking girls from the surrounding towns, hoping to get lucky and find a promising match, and in the midst of all this, Rad stands guard behind the bar, pouring with a liberal hand for the local drunks and visiting socialites alike.

“Now, I’ll grant you Pete, you look like a drunk and act like a drunk. In fact, I’ve seen you sleeping it off in the square on more than one occasion, so if I had to guess, I’d say you’re a drunk. And so, you might think you’ve got the edge in this here competition.

But put a fine scotch like this in front of ole Helton here and you'd be surprised how much he can put away."

"No one," slur, slip, hiccup, excuse me while I steady myself on the bar, to keep myself from falling, "drinks me under the table."

It's a well know fact that more than a few of the local drunks started life in the big houses... and more than one who started on the docks has found shelter up in a big house: there being plenty of sofas, boat houses, second homes, and cottages that need care taking... for anyone who can get it together just a little... or hasn't lost it completely, old friendships and all.

###

Slumming it. "I thought I'd find you here, Radcliff."

"Ethan! Let me buy you a drink. Helton, move over."

"Bet," slur, slip, stammer, "you can't keep up," Helton suggests hopefully as he picks up his drink and downs it whole before staggering past Pete's slumping figure, slowly making his way to an empty seat a few stools away.

"Pete never stood a chance," Rad observes as he sets a relatively clean glass in front of Ethan and proceeds to fill it -- and all the glasses in reach -- to the top, over the top, letting the extra pour onto the bar, carefree and wild. "Don't feel obligated to drink that, Pete. There's plenty more." But Pete is passed out cold, and Helton isn't listening, already slurping up all the extra he can reach, while making motor boat sounds.

"Look, Radcliff, I only came to ask you a favor. Don't come up to the house tonight, you're drunk..."

"Angela doesn't want me there."

"Well..." What can he say?

"Actually, it's sort of embarrassing..."

Ethan has to agree.

"I was going to ask you for a ride."

At which point Natalie slinks into view, throws her arms around Ethan, ravishing his neck with kisses, and requests, oh, so demurely, “Dance with me.”

“But I guess, since you’re my ride, if you don’t go home, neither can I,” Rad surmises, explaining the situation succinctly.

But Natalie does not care about any of that. “Dance with me, Ethan.”

“You heard the lady, dance with her.” And with that, Rad raises the glass he just poured in salute and downs it whole before turning away.

“You heard the man, dance with me, Ethan.”

And what’s a spineless worm of a -- I use the term loosely -- man to do but comply.

###

Max did not grow up poor. Nor did he grow up rich. He grew up in the middle... in of one of those suburban tract housing developments that only grew larger as he did -- like some sort of pretentious literary metaphor. You know, start the scene: and as a little boy, Max is riding his BMX through empty fields that as he grows older turn into newly bulldozed dirt fields, while at the same time his bicycle turns into a motorbike, that he uses to jump piles of dirt, using the worksites as his own personal racetrack; until the developers got sick of his antics (and fearing a lawsuit) install a security guard, whose main job is to keep Max and his friends away; but it doesn’t work, and in and around the half-built buildings they spend their nights learning to smoke, drinking warm beer, and try to convince girls to join them in their antics as they pursue their bliss -- otherwise known as the great American teenage dream.

###

At sixteen, Max got his first job caddying for golfers and rode his bicycle to work. At seventeen, he started doing freelance

landscaping and upgraded his ride to a sweet Suzuki -- one of those rice-burning imports with suicide bars. While at twenty, he turned to construction, majored in business at the local community college (SCC), let his hair grow long, and finally come into his own when he purchased the bike of his dreams -- a Harley pan-head Indian (whatever that might mean) complete with tattoos, leather jacket, and fake gang insignias.

###

Angela met Max for the first time a few years later. Doing philanthropy work, she was chair on the committee overseeing community enrichment grants. She was thoroughly unimpressed with his unrefined look and casual presentation and had never cared about the lighthouse, herself. So it should be unsurprising that his proposal to refurbish the same was rejected without further consideration.

Next time they met, Angela was on jury duty; Max, her case. Open and shut, he was as guilty as sin: assault and battery... and battery... and battery -- gratuitous abuse, he pummeled that guy, kicked him when he was down, jumped on his chest, broke fifteen ribs. Convicted: a felon, jail for a year, two on parole. No remorse. He was defending a woman's honor. Another man had insulted her. And in that sort of situation, what else was a man -- a real man -- expected to do?

When he had served his time, he once approached the community enrichment board once again -- same project, same goal, proposing a complete reconstruction of the lighthouse. But this time, Angela championed his cause, got him the grant, took it upon herself to oversee his work, and make sure he knew exactly who to thank, down on his knees, begging for more, just "Do what I say."

Who could ask for anything more?

"I can make you. And I will break you."

But only Max could make her feel safe at night.

The things he would do for the one that he loved.

###

Radcliff and Natalie caught up with Ethan outside the bar:

A: It was three in the morning, the bar was closing, and he had offered them a ride.

B: He was trying to sneak away, but Natalie had spotted him.

C: Or rather, that is to say, Natalie spotted him across the street trying to start his car... which was difficult seeing as how he no longer had any keys.

###

“Shotgun!”

“What, no. Look, Radcliff. I just want to go home...”

“Excellent idea.”

And before you know it, Rad is in the car -- front seat, convertible, looks like a Jaguar; but then, I know about as much about expensive cars as I do about boats...

And Natalie is settling into Rad’s lap, purring like a kitten.

“I can’t take you back to the house, Angela would kill me.”

“Then I guess it’s time for a,” and here Rad and Natalie look at each other as they yell in unison, “Road Trip!”

“What? No.”

“Yes, Ethan. Yes,” as Rad tosses Ethan the keys.

###

The Countach Maserati 944SI is wasted on Ethan (he knowing as much about cars as I do). He drives like a girl. Well, maybe not, both Natalie and Angela would at least be doing the speed limit and Radcliff some multiple thereof.

“This car on this road: you should be doing at least a hundred.”

“Where are we going?”

“Pull over here.”

“Here?”

“Here!” Radcliff insists as he grabs the wheel and eases the car over.

Two small crosses sit by the side of the road next to a steep trail that leads down to the creek -- more like a mountain stream really, maybe a river, that ebb and flows with the tide, changing seasons, and state of current rainfall. Twenty years ago a car flipped over the side of the road, into the stream’s raging waters (at the time, anyhow, not now), and no one got out alive.

“This is where my parents died,” Rad explains. But both Ethan and Natalie already knew that.

###

Radcliff is skipping stones, but the creek is not quite big enough for that. It’s late at night, a cool breeze blows, perhaps a bit icy, as stars twinkle in the night sky -- nice and bright. It’s solitary here -- empty. There are no other cars on the road... and then, there is the one, coming from miles away, growing to a rumble, and then off into the night, while Radcliff, wonders out loud, letting his voice get carried off into the distance by the breeze, “Why is Angela being such a bitch?” And when that doesn’t seem to sum it up, “Why has Angela always been such a bitch?” And when even that doesn’t seem to cover it, Rad turns to Ethan and says, “She knows I didn’t kill Suzy... or have anything to do with it one way or another.” And then, thinking it over, “If I was going to kill anyone it would have been her... or someone she loves.” And with that said, what else is there to do but grab a hefty sort of rock, gauge it’s weight by giving it a few trial blows, and then saying, “Come on over here, Ethan, turn around, and let me bash your brains in -- right from behind, that’s how it’s done, probably won’t hurt at all.” And then, when Ethan doesn’t move, Radcliff shrugs, throws the rock away into the creek with a plunk,

and observes, “Not that she’d care. She doesn’t love you anyway, you know.”

A statement which hurts Ethan to the core -- more so because it is true.

###

“A bitch! He called me a bitch!”

“No! Don’t change the subject. Of course, Max slept in here with me. You know I can’t sleep alone. And for all I knew you were off, god knows where, busy getting killed by Radcliff. Only you weren’t, you were laughing your fool head off, joking about me behind my back, laughing along, playing along...”

“Shoot him! You could have shot him! Why do you think I gave you a gun in the first place?”

“Well, then, as you were walking back to the car to get the gun, you could have suddenly realized what a mistake it would be to kill him in cold blood like that and have driven away instead, leaving him stranded in the middle of nowhere. Maybe he’d catch pneumonia and die. Did you ever think of that? But no. Instead, you spent the rest of the night carousing around with Radcliff and that whore of his going who knows where, doing who knows what, having the time of your life, while I’m worried sick the entire time, thinking my sweet Ethan-Wethan is lying dead in a ditch somewhere.”

“Just hold me.”

###

But, back to the roadtrip.

Ethan-Wethan spent the rest of the night:

A: Skipping stones while Rad and Natasha -- that whore of his -- fornicated like rabbits on the forest floor and gave the hood of his car (I think it’s a Lamborghini Spider Roadster) a good polishing.

B: Driving them the rest of the way to Larry's Lobster Shack, only two short hours away, and home of the best lobster sandwiches in all of Maine (it's says so right on the door), handily open at 5am; and, oh, they serve beer -- ice cold or luke warm, however you prefer.

C: Watching the sunrise from a secluded break, wondering what his life would be like if Angela loved him half as much as Natalie so obviously loves Radcliff.

D: Sleeping next to Natalie in the front seat as Rad drove them home. "Yeah, driving drunk is bad, but my mom's just as dead and she was only a passenger." Deconstruct the logic if you will. For his part, Ethan was too tired to care.

###

"It's your hour, use it how you want, perhaps lie back on the couch and tell me why you're here."

Harry: I thought you'd want me to talk about my childhood first.

"We can do that if you'd like."

Harry: I wish I could. I never had a childhood. I was always being groomed for greatness... and looking after the rest of the family. The second has always come first. I don't know why Angela and Radcliff fight so much. Not that Radcliff, fights per se, but he provokes her...

###

"It's your hour..."

Angela: Shut up. You're just a two bit off screen extra. You don't get to talk over me. And just so we're all clear, I'm not a bitch. What is it that those revolutionary crybabies say, 'Sometimes you've got to steal just to get back what is rightfully your own.' Well, this story is rightfully mine. I started as the lead in another plotline, but did he ever write that? No! Instead that



dimwitted author starts writing a murder mystery on a lark, like he knows anything about murder mysteries. Has he ever killed anyone?

###

“It’s your hour..”

Angela: I’m not fucking through!

Radcliff: She can have my time, I don’t mind.

Angela: She can have my time, I don’t mind. Well, it’s not your time to give. And I don’t want to spend the time I have talking with or about Cliffee darling baby, mommy’s little favorite. What I want to know is why this fuck-head author always pairs me with castrated man-boys. Give me something to work with and I’ll show you what a bitch I can be.

###

Well, let me tell you, that didn’t go as planned.

###

“So, now it really is your hour..”

Radcliff, Rad, Cliff, Cliffee, Darling Baby: This is a really comfortable couch. And I like what you’ve done with the pictures on the wall. Nice place you’ve got here, doc. Oh, spider in the corner. Going to have to call housekeeping. But you probably, want to know about my childhood... or better yet, why Angela hates me so much. Actually, I don’t think its hate, but love unrequited -- if that’s the right word. I never was a one woman man. And I think she took it personally...

###

“Debbie! You’re going to the ball with Debbie! You couldn’t even let me have a best friend to myself without stealing her. When I get married, what are you going to do? Sleep with my husband?”

“In truth, I’d probably just make him watch.”

“Get out! Get out! Get out!”

###

Suzanne: Don’t I get an hour?

“Oh, right. Sorry, the dead body lying in the middle of the plot, as it were,” the author, he says.

Suzanne: My murder isn’t a mystery... or at least, it shouldn’t be. Just a simple home invasion robbery gone wrong.

“Don’t listen to her. She was sleeping, she doesn’t know. In the end, it was probably Angela dressed up like a ninja, sneaking through her open window in the dead of the night...”

Suzanne: Unlikely. If you really want to know, just like you, I was dreaming -- more like a nightmare really, same one, over and over again in which I die a horrible death -- so thanks for that -- giving me nightmares. But instead of giving in to the fear, I thought I would try something different, and rather than open my eyes and wake up screaming, I would try to sleep through it all, only this time I heard someone rattling around, so I did open my eyes. That was a big mistake, so I closed them...

“And never opened them again... or lived to tell the tale, I might add.”

Suzanne: I saw enough to know it wasn’t anyone I knew.

“So, Rad -- or Angela, and I got to admit, she’s looking like a front runner these days -- could have hired someone. Maybe Max.”

Suzanne: For the past year, Angela and I have been near constant companions and have never been closer. She actually enjoyed my estrangement from Rad.

“So, Rad, jealous from the betrayal...”

Suzanne: Shows how much you know your own characters. Rad doesn't get jealous, doesn't understand the concept. And he would never kill anyone out of malice -- maybe for a joke or on a lark -- but never malice.

"Which just leaves Harry..."

Suzanne: What? No! It wasn't anyone in my family. It was a stranger, a random break in.

"I'm sorry, but have you seen the autopsy? Massive trauma to the head, brains leaking out the side. I'm sorry, but a certain amount of crossed wires and delusional thinking just has to be a normal byproduct of that sort of injury.

Suzanne: That doesn't count. I'm a ghost.

"Which I don't believe in, so I'm going to have to cut this interview short. Besides, I think it's probably time for Harry to come in here and actually have a session with his psychiatrist. If you get lucky, maybe he'll get hypnotized and channel you."

Suzanne: I'm not that type of ghost.

"Eh, what do you know. Probably forgotten that you're a lesbian."

Suzanne: I'm not a lesbian!

"See! See what I mean."

###

At \$250 hour, psychoanalysis is a rich person's game.

"I feel like a failure, doc. I mean, more so than usual. I should feel happy, successful. I've got a wife, kids. I've got a successful law practice. And I'm a state senator. But my little sister is dead. And it feels like it happened on my watch. And Angela and Rad are using her death as just another excuse to fight and continue their endless feud."

Maybe we should try something different, today. Look into my eyes. You are growing sleepy.

###

It is thanksgiving.

Gramps is there.

Mom is there.

Dad is there.

Harry stands near the front of the table. He is his father's favorite, right hand, heir to the throne, carving knife in hand. All of the family is there. Rad showing up late, of course. But giving Angela a friendly peck on the cheek and sitting down next to her, accepting a glass of wine from her husband Ethan. "Let's get this show on the road," Rad calls out, in informal toast. And Harry starts to carve the bird, Suzette. Not much to go around, she always had such small breasts, and the family has never been that fond of dark meat.

###

The sun is rising. It's time for breakfast. And Harry is in Shreveport (or if that's not the capital of Maine, some other nearby town), reading the paper. "Nothing's happening today."

"Then put the paper down and help me with Beaumont," his wife Margaret says in regards to their son. And really, who names their son Beaumont? Come to think of it, who names their character's son Beaumont. But I digress...

"The problem is you're trying to feed him peas for breakfast."

"I think the problem is that you're eating all his food. He knows what to do with it. You don't have to show him."

And we could drag this scene out, enjoy this moment of domestic tranquility, perhaps join Harry as he changes the little tyke's diapers and asks of no one in particular, "Where does all this shit come from?"

But instead, Margaret steps up to the plate, and in an effort to move the scene along, asks, "Why aren't you under investigation?"

“What? No. Shush,” and he actually says shush over the more traditional shsh, “Don’t even ask such a question?”

But it is too late...

###

Suddenly, the morning light turns black and they are in an interrogation room. You know the drill, steel chairs, folding table, and the spotlight on Beaumont, who continues to (respectfully) decline to eat his peas, while an author who has taken up the habit just for this scene, smokes a cigarette while he paces in the background:

FACT: Harry benefits as much as any from Suzette’s death. The family trust is structured in a Last Man Standing, Winner Take All, fashion; and if the truth be known, out of the entire family, he’s the only one who understands the blessed thing... or smart enough to find a loophole in the document by way of knocking off the other beneficiaries.

“But Harry wouldn’t do that. He lives for this family,” Margaret insists, defending her husband.

FACT: Margaret has always been a little jealous -- more than a little jealous -- of the time Harry spends with his family, consoling Angela, cleaning up after Radcliff, babysitting Suzette.

“But that’s just it. I loved her. I would never do anything to hurt any her or any of them.”

FACT: I wasn’t accusing you.

“Then what are you doing?” only it’s Beaumont’s turn to talk, so it comes out more like, “Blather-babble, get those fucking peas out of my face.”

FACT: the baby is right! It wasn’t Harry. He has too much to lose... to do the deed himself, but maybe he made some sort of Double Indemnity plot twist political maneuvering exchange with some mobsters: he gets them the zoning permit that they need for that Indian Casino thing they’re working on; and in exchange for his help, they whacked his sister. What better way to ‘gift’ him,

what? \$120 million, his share of Suzettes no longer existent share of the trust.

“But Harry wouldn’t do that. And money just isn’t that important to him. Look how we live,” and then noting that they are still in the interrogation chamber, Margaret grabs the baby and walks across the stage back to the kitchen, where she sits down at the kitchen table, like nothing ever happened -- except for maybe missing a dose of her anti-psychotic medications. “I’m not crazy! You’re the one that’s crazy!”

Isn’t that what they all say?

“Whatever. My point is, Harry doesn’t care that much about money.”

FACT: He’s worth maybe a quarter-billion and they’re eating breakfast at, well, at a kitchen table that looks surprisingly like my own.

FACT: They’re slumming it.

FACT: They could be living so much better.

FACT: Margaret is pregnant with twins!

“Wait? What? No! I was going to surprise him. Honey, I was going to surprise you.”

FACT: Margaret has always been jealous of the time Harry spends with his family.

“Now, you’re just repeating yourself.”

FACT: Is that a fact! Well, Harry let me tell you something that you didn’t know then. Radcliff is supposed to be investigating the murder of his sister, on account of his being the number one murder suspect, but it’s not looking, like that’s going to happen, because he’s spending his time carousing around and getting drunk...

“That’s not my problem.”

FACT:

“Stop saying ‘Fact’.”

FACT: I’ll do what I want.

FACT: You’re going to be down at the police station later today and you’re going to discover some ‘evidence’.

“Why are you putting that word in quotes.”

FACT: ‘Evidence’, Harry. ‘Evidence’ -- if I might go so far as to quote myself, again -- that is going to make Suzette’s death look like a murder, perpetrated by Angela or Radcliff. And if you don’t, we are all going to learn that Miss Margaret was the last person who saw Suzette alive, that she’s always had a secret crush on Rad, was hoping to pin this murder on you, and live happily ever after on the Lady Luck with Radcliff and Natalie, while doing that sexy-time three-way thing.

“I’ve never heard anything so preposterous in all my life.”

FACT: Then I recommend you come up with something else -- more or less preposterous -- at that meeting you’re going to be having down at the police station later today or you’ll be the next (I mean, we need another murder in this story, don’t you think), your wife will take the fall, and Baby Beaumont will grow up under the protective guidance of Uncle Radcliff.

“What? No, he’s an idiot.”

Ah, ha! So, your true feelings come out. Or, er, I mean...

FACT: Radcliff is an idiot, so pinning a murder on him so I can write a fun little book and make gobs and gobs of money shouldn’t be such a hard thing to do.

FACT: Now, hop to!

FACT: You’re already late.

FACT: And while you’re out, you’re should really drop by the pharmacy and get your own anti-psychotics medication refilled.

###

FACT: I know crap about politics.

FACT: That won’t stop me from introducing another one of Harry’s political cronies in the next scene.

###

Harry doesn't know what to do. So, he's going to get some advice. And that means talking to Steve, his best friend in the legislature.

Handily, they share an office.

And when Harry arrives, Steve is just straightening his tie and the gal from the Lobster Consortium is smoothing down her dress. It's a nice dress (red, of course, low cut, tight fitting) and she fills it out nicely -- very nicely, maybe so nicely that the thing could have used a few extra inches of cloth...

All the same, after she leaves, Steve doesn't have any praise for her. "Man, she's got a lot to learn about giving a blow job. I mean, where do they get these bimbos from? Don't they teach them anything in college these days? And if they think I'm going to vote," for whatever, something that probably has absolutely nothing to do with lobsters (those Seafood PACS being a fishy lot -- yuck, yuck), "they've got another thing coming. Bisque?" Steve offers at the end of his rant, as he indicates the spread of food laid out in his office: 475 different uses for lobster, including a new keratinous-based resinous plastic... along with champagne and caviar (probably not lobster based, but they do feature happy lobsters on the labels, so who knows).

Ignoring the food (and life-sized lobster mannequin), Harry states simply (he's a simple one that Harry), "I need your help."

"It's going to cost you," Steve states even more simply (yes, he too is a simple one) as he unzips his pants.

"I'm... I'm not..."

"What? Hell, no! My balls are on fire. I think that cunt may have given me crabs. Lobster, my ass," Steve says by way of explanation as he dumps a bucket of ice down his pants. "Oh, that feels good." And then, into the intercom, "Tricia, make an appointment for me with Dr Davies." And to Harry, "Want anything?"

"What? No."

"It's 'Hell, no!' going to have to work on that Harry. And two coffee's Tricia."



A bit later, feet up, only scratching his balls occasionally, while Tricia takes dictation (god, I love a good pun and/or sexual innuendo), Steve finally turns his full, undivided (just going to have to take this one call, hold on a second) attention to Harry, “So, what can I do you for?”

Blah. Blah. Blah.

And then, as we all know, “That’s going to cost you.”

###

Have I mentioned that as the Lady Luck pulled into dock, Carl the Courteous Sea Captain with the Cute Deeri’ere (because it sounds so much better than butt... and a whole lot less gay) threw any and all (and there was a whole lot of it) incriminating evidence overboard?

I mention that at this juncture only because then that means there was nothing for the police to find in their search.

“I’m not getting it,” Harry has to admit.

“No phone records, no nothing,” Steve exclaims jubilantly as he gets off the phone. And when he still gets that blank look from Harry (that he so often does), Steve breaks it down for him a little further. “When they searched Radcliff’s boat, well, Natalie’s boat actually, but, the boat Radcliff road in on, nonetheless... I’m going to fuck you and the boat you road in on,” Steve says as an aside, trying the line out. “No, that doesn’t work. Maybe sink you and the ship your road in on. Well, I’ll work it out. Point is,” or rather, FACT: “if Radcliff wasn’t trying to hide something, why didn’t he record his phone conversations, keep a log, do that transcription thing. It’s a curious omission if you ask me.”

“Are you serious? No one keeps a running log of their phone conversations. Do you record your calls?”

“Hell, fucking, no! I’d be doing hard time if I did. And that’s how we know Radcliff is guilty as sin. The only question is, what’s he hiding? Now, skeedaddle. I’ve got morning wood.” And in response to Harry’s look, “What? No. Geez, don’t you

ever think about anything else. Saturday morning Forestry Commission meeting. Though, now that you mention it, the chair is built like a brick shit house. No, that doesn't work. How about, I'd really like to lay some lumber with her? Nail her to the deck? Timber me shivers? Or, I know, how do you say someone is not as flat as a board but has got tits like cordwood?" And once again, Harry is talking into his intercom, "Tricia get back in here. I need your oral skills to work on a particularly vexing linguistic conundrum. Bring a freshly ironed pair of slacks for me while you're at it, the ones I'm wearing are sort of stained."

###

"Now, that's an oak I'd like to poke," Steve says as sits back with a grin.

Sadly, it took longer than either Steve or I would like to admit to come up with that little gem of a rhyme, but sometimes, great literature is all about staying power, if you know what I mean.

Of course, an even better line is the one Steve lays on the cute little protestor, who is doing, what else, but protesting outside of the courthouse, "You, my darling, look like a tree hugger I'd like to bugger."

Or then, perhaps, if you like a bit more realism in your stories (Heavens knows why your reading this story if you do), maybe Steve simply suggests (for he is a simple, one track mind sort of guy, as I may have suggested), "I'd love to hear your side of the forestry debate," as he hands her his card and hopes the little trollop is as innocent as she looks.

###

True or False:

1: Harry hates his brother; and so, went along willingly with the plan to pin the murder on him.

2: Just to be sure they'd side with him, he brought a box of donuts along for the police.

3: And not just any donuts, mind you, but those expensive one's from Dolly's -- more like French pastries, really.

4: I like the chocolate filled croissants, the best.

5: Beaumont, the jelly filled.

6: Angela, the custard.

7: Oh, and just by-the-by, it also seems that Suzette wasn't killed at her home (as you, or at least I) sort of suspected (and/or imagined), but rather at one of those Buddhist Ashram places while on retreat. I hope you won't think me any less the writer for changing my mind on this.

###

"I was there. She was found dead in her own bed!"

"Look Harry," because your Honorable Mr. Stewart or whatever state legislators are supposed to be called would have sounded way too formal to both me and Officer Randy Ricardo (the detective in charge of the case) whilst sharing a donut (and/or delicious French pastry -- chocolate raspberry) with Harry, "this is an ongoing investigation, new pieces of evidence are bound to surface, sometimes in the most unlikely of places."

"So, you're just saying that instead being killed in her home," a small remote cottage, that is extremely unlikely to figure into the rest of the story, and which was really more like her home away from home than an actually home, "where we both saw the body, Suzette was killed miles away in an Ashram."

"Yep. Exactly. Happens all the time. I really should get my GPS unit looked at, but what are you going to do. Besides, it usually works out for the best. For example, as I remember it, I went fishing with my son this morning; but as it turns out, I was up all night working overtime on the case. In fact, I just finished up at the crime scene."

“Meaning, I’m not going to be able to check it out first hand myself for any lingering evidence.”

“No, need. Open and shut case.”

“Don’t tell me.”

“Sorry, but it’s my job. Rad did it.”

“How? Why?”

“That’s the beauty, the two sort of go together. At the retreat, they have all sorts of pagan idols, real sick shit, tacky and decadent; so, just Rad’s sort of thing.”

“That doesn’t prove anything.”

“Well, somebody, and for now, we’re just going to sort of pencil Radcliff Nathaniel Stewart in as the perp, but we’re open to suggestions... Maybe you’d like to confess, pin it on your wife, trade her in for a floozy, or nail your sister, though just between you and me, Angela pretty much owns this town, and I could get fired for even thinking such a thing much less saying it; so, no, it wasn’t Angela -- named after the angels above, so it couldn’t be her.”

“But why not some stranger? Why does it have to be a Stewart.”

“Oh, didn’t I say? Gold statue. Sort of like that Maltese Falcon, only instead it’s like this solid gold pagan idol statue of Maine, not really as catchy, but you get the idea.”

“And it’s gone missing. So we find the golden statue and we find the killer?”

“Oh, no. Sorry, forgot to mention. Whoever did the deed, left the murder weapon -- easily worth a cool million, probably more -- lying on the ground right next to your sister’s bashed in head. Of course, we’re still waiting on the autopsy report, so that could change -- maybe a gunshot wound, you never know. But the point is a million dollar gold statue just left lying about. Sorry, but that just has Stewart written all over it. The only folks in town that rich that they wouldn’t have cared about the money -- probably not worth the effort of bending over and picking it up for your lot --

would be a Stewart. And since it's not you or Angela? I mean, you didn't kill her, did you?"

"Of course not."

"Well, that leaves Rad. Guilty as sin. I always said he was a bad seed. And I'm a cop. I have a way of knowing these things."

"You know you're just being ridiculous."

And Harry probably would have gone on to explain how Rad was a thousand miles away at the time and all that, but you know, "These senseless murders are always the same in that they don't make any sense," the detective explains as simply as can be (so, I guess there are going to be a lot of simple characters in this story). "But I guess that's why we call them as senseless murders in the first place."

###

Radcliff has been arrested.

Natalie -- poor, poor, Natalie, his brainwashed accomplice -- has been arrested, as well.

Luckily, they share a jail cell.

Luckier still, they're both into bondage.

"This would be easier without the handcuffs."

"But not nearly so much fun."

"I was going to bail you out, but I could come back later," Angela suggests.

"Give us an hour," but after shifting a little and sizing up the situation a little more, Radcliff adds, "Maybe two. This is going to take longer than usual."

"Maybe I should just come back tomorrow."

"That would be good," Natalie agrees... and agrees... and agrees, "Yes, Rad! Yes! Yes! Yes! Oh, YES!!!"

###

I'm writing this story in the morning, first thing, before I eat breakfast, so maybe I'm just hungry. I mean that might account for the donuts -- random cop jokes aside -- and why the next scene takes place in a diner... if you want to call a swanky place like this a diner; it's more like a café, actually.

And Angela is sipping espresso, while half of a gooey chocolate croissant lies uneaten on her plate -- from which the observant reader might be able to discern:

FACT: Angela is on a diet -- you don't get that skinny by accident.

FACT: We are at Dolly's -- now a proud sponsor of this story, open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner... and all points in between. Dolly's: doing clandestine family meetings, the old fashioned way, since 1964.

FACT: Rather than espresso, Rad is on his third bloody Mary, Natalie her second mimosa.

FACT: He hasn't even started drinking, yet.

###

"I'm still not clear on why you bailed us out, Angela."

"Because we're family, Radcliff."

"Like I said, I'm still not clear on why you bailed us out, Angela."

Angela hisses. Yeah, I think hiss covers it. I mean, maybe she sucks her teeth a little, but it has more the look and feel to it of a snake, deciding whether to strike... and throw her espresso at her brother. Eh, probably not hot enough.

"I know we've had our differences..."

Rad can't help but laugh here, but after sucking on air again, Angela resumes, "I know we've had our differences..."

Yeah, Rad laughs again. "What? It's funny. 'Our differences.' Tell me Angela, are you the one that got me thrown into jail last time, as well?"

“You managed to do that just fine without me.” And with that, they are off and running, a short series of insults, incriminations, and hurt feelings that ends with, “Bitch.”

“Asshole.”

“Cunt.”

And great deal of sucking on air -- hissing, if you will -- on Angela’s part.

“I didn’t come here to fight.”

“Really, I thought you liked fighting.”

And with that, it is clear that I’m not going to get anywhere plot-wise if they keep on talking (civilized or not), so Angela stands up, throws down her napkin, takes one last look at that gooey chocolate croissant before her sitting all lonesome on that plate of hers, decides to take one last little bite (more of a nibble really), washes it down with a bit of espresso, picks up her napkin, dabs at her mouth, and then, **THROWS THAT NAPKIN DOWN AGAIN!** as she goes off into a scene stealing soliloquy. “I try to be friendly. I try to be nice. I go so far as to bail you out of jail even when I know you’re just as likely to be the murderer as anybody else. And this is the thanks I get. I should have known better. I don’t even know why I try.” Sniff. Sniff. Time to pick up that napkin again and dab at her eyes. “No. No. I’ll be alright,” a comment that is more than a little surreal as neither Radcliff nor Natalie have moved, raised a finger, or made the slighted pretext of trying to comfort Angela, she’s, um, a bit high strung and melodramatic at times. But Angela is undeterred, “I thought you could help, alright? You don’t know the pressures I’m under, playing the dramatic lead, evil stepsister, not even a mom. My fans, they adore me. They love me. But at this point, mostly they’re waiting -- on the edge of their seats -- and wondering, what *am I* going to do next? How *am I* going to save the day? You have no idea the pressure I’m under, Radcliff. And that author, don’t make ME laugh. He’s no help whatsoever. None at all.” Sniff. Sniff. And then, she does that thing girls do when they cry and

inhale a bit of snot and choke on the stuff (quite disgusting, if I do say so myself), followed by a few more, sniff, sniff, sniffs.

“And what do you want me to do about it, my sweet darling hapless sister?”

“Kill somebody, of course!” Angela blurts out, but then, that doesn’t paint a complete picture. “We’re in a murder mystery Radcliff. I’m the lead, an oft misunderstood, perhaps soon to be widowed, fan favorite. And you’re the comedic relief. But if you’d bothered to read the script, you’d know your main job is to investigate this stupid thing. So, investigate it. Find the murderer... before *one of us* of us is next.”

And with that sort of fourth wall busting outburst (meta-commentary, if you will), I do believe it is time for Angela to take her pills, the little blue ones. I’ve got a prescription, myself, that’s why I know they’re blue. Anyhow, shaking, spilling half the bottle on the table and across the floor, Radcliff pocketing those that fall nearby (for evidence’s sake), Angela tosses a few back, swallowing them down with a few liberal gulps from Natalie’s mimosa (so, maybe Natalie has not had as much to drink as both you and I had thought), before Angela is imploring once more, “I know you didn’t kill dear sweet Suzy, Rad. That’s why I bailed you out. I’m just so scared. Find the murderer, please,” capping it all off with, “I don’t want you to be next,” like the threat that it is.

And having said what she needed to say in order to win that Oscar (or at least get the nomination), Angela is out the door, whipping out her cell phone on the way. Time to get this show on the road.

###

“Bartholomew! Darling!”

“This is Angela.”

“Angela Stewart.”

“Yes, Radcliff’s sister.”

“He’s not doing well, not at all.”



“Ironically, that’s what I was calling you about. He was arrested last night along with your daughter.”

“They impounded the Lady Luck. Last I saw it, the police were swarming all over it.”

“Well, as much as I love my brother, he’s been through this sort of thing before, drug smuggling, I believe it was the last time. But now, it looks like he’s got himself wrapped up in some sort of murder mystery caper thing that’s going horribly -- horribly -- horribly wrong...”

###

Radcliff spins a blue pill, he bounces it off the table, flicks it about with a spoon, pretending it’s a hockey puck, before flicking it off into the distance.

“My family is crazy.”

Natalie smiles, “We should get crazy.”

“Good idea. Let’s go for a ride.”

###

You ever see that movie *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*? Well, Natalie owns a car like that -- maybe the one and only, only if she does, it’s been reworked a little: chrome painted over in polished black, red leather interior, a convertible, of course, and it tops out somewhere around 175mph.

Angela would love it.

I would love it.

And Radcliff most definitely loves it. He’s driving, while Natalie looks marvelous, simply marvelous, sitting beside him, one of those long scarves trailing behind, blowing in the wind; and then, she disappears from view, Radcliff settles back, relaxing, as he takes one hand off the wheel, and rests his arm on the seatback beside him.

Life is good.

Life is grand.

And over a hill, down a dale, and around a sharp hairpin curve while tires screech, Natalie moans, and all sorts of things commence to blow.

###

Middle of nowhere, vacation cottage, the roadster is parked on the side lawn, and from the upstairs second story window moans and groans are being emitted with wild abandon. Perhaps, Radcliff and Natalie are reenacting the murder, hoping to garner some clues?

No, peaking through the window, we see that Natalie is tied to Suzette four-post bed: arms overhead, Radcliff below, straining as it were, the sweat dripping off her glistening body a testament to her efforts and the magnitude of her ministrations.

While Radcliff below, lost in thought, muses quietly to himself, “They didn’t rape her. I would have raped her. Any sensible person would have raped her. So, why didn’t they rape her?”

And Natalie getting into the role, “What are you going to do to me when you’re done with me.”

“Oh, my darling, I’m not even close to being done with you.” And with that it is Radcliff’s turn to disappear below... or at least, be in no position to keep up his end of the conversation.

###

Robes, afternoon tea, setting sun, so for them, it might as well be time for breakfast with Natalie frying up some bacon, scrambling eggs, and Radcliff’s arms around her waist, “I didn’t know you could cook.”

“I can boil water, too. Want some coffee?”

And then, flip-switch flash-cut, and they are in the lake, an evening dip, under the stars, no clothes on to be sure, Radcliff

musings, “It would have been so easy to drown her... or get rid of the body in here,” and Natalie taking it as a sort of cue to dive under the water.

Another flash edit, and a little bit later, while crawling to shore, Radcliff is tugging at her heels, ‘capturing’ her in the garden, lying on top, kissing her neck, her face in the dirt, smelling the musk, whispering into her ear, “Why didn’t he just bury her out here, just plow her under.”

And what is a girl to say, but, “I like the sound of that.”

###

ESSAY QUESTION: Where else and/or how else can a girl get ‘murdered, but good’ in a country cottage? As you write your answer, please go into as much graphic detail as you like.

###

Horses, I like horses.

It would be nice if Suzette kept horses, as I feel like going for a ride...

And as I say that, I wonder whatever happened to Suzette’s dog?

Eh, I’ll worry about that later. For now, I wish to go for a ride.

###

Bartholomew Pierce is Natalie’s father.

Bartholomew Pierce is as rich as the Stewarts all put together... and being an only child he need not share his fortune with anyone... except for perhaps his seven ex-wives. “Blasted lawyers, can’t even get a simple pre-nup right.”

But I digress.

Bartholomew Pierce is riding a horse.

Bartholomew Pierce is a bit overweight.

Bartholomew Pierce paints a rather silly picture at the moment.

But he is rich. He is powerful. And if truth be told, Angela has always like him; but then, perhaps, just perhaps, that is because he has always liked her... in all the wrong ways... which sometimes, just sometimes, makes it all the right ways.

“I’m glad you called me.”

“It’s been too long.”

But personally, I care not about his conversation. Except for perhaps to say, Bartholomew Pierce has been thinking of renaming his boat (not Natalie’s mind you, but his, he’s the one the authorities called, he’s the rightful owner, and when the boat comes out of impound and is finally released, to wash off the taint, he’s thinking of renaming his boat) the “Sea Angel... or Sea Witch, whichever you prefer. I would so love to sail around the world with you,” and at a glance back to Ethan and Max, who tag along at a respectful twenty paces behind, “I don’t even mind if you want to bring along your lackeys,” which is perhaps only fair as it could be argued that the only reason Ethan and Max trail by such a wide margin is in order to keep Jeanette company -- a plastic, air-head of a blonde if ever there was one, rates negotiable, but diamond necklaces preferred. “Marry? Again? Well, now that you mention it, in the long run, it might just be cheaper...”

###

“Don’t you have servants for that?” Jeannette asks.

They are in the stables. Ethan is brushing down his horse. “I like doing it,” he replies. Think of your typical motor head waxing his car and you get the idea.

“I can’t believe they just drove off like that.” Oh, and since Max sits on a rail close by and both he and Ethan believe Angela would do something like that, know she would do something like

that, and are not surprised by her current behavior in the least, this last would be Jeannette talking again.

Which is to say, Max shrugs.

Ethan pours some oats.

While Jeannette decides to ask, “So, what do you want to do to pass the time?”

But Angela is not the sharing type. Neither of them is interested. And soon she is alone... and then, she is dead.

###

“Dead?”

“Dead.”

“And you didn’t do anything?” So, I guess this would be Angela talking.

“I went to work,” so I guess this would be Ethan talking.

“So, you left her alone? Deserting her?”

“I left her with Max.”

“How could you?”

And later, while talking to Max. “Some bodyguard you turn out to be.”

“Ethan left, so I left. It’s not like I don’t have things to do.”

“Things? Things? What things? What could possibly be more important than keeping someone alive? You’re supposed to be a bodyguard for Pete’s sake.”

And Bartholomew on the phone to his lawyer, “So, there’s no way she can claim we were married? I don’t have to worry about some nuisance lawsuit from her estate?” I suppose we all have our priorities. “What? Of course, I have an alibi.”

FLASHBACK: Bartholomew strapped in leathers, a rubber ball in his mouth, Angela in high heels and total dominatrix leathers...

“I might have to get back to you on that alibi.”

###

The coroner report will show that Jeannette was kicked in the head by a horse, broke her neck in the resulting fall, foul play was not suspected, and it her death was ruled an accident.

The coroner will be wrong.

It wasn't an accident.

And somebody 'helped' her fall after making sure she got kicked in the face.

But more importantly, if the police are going open an investigation every time I off a character (even an investigation that is blatantly as open and shut such as this), I'm going to have to start covering my tracks a bit more.

###

"Wow! You're an author! I always wanted to be in a book."

"Te-he. See? I can play a ditzy blonde."

"I don't get it. Why'd everyone leave?"

"Oh. Oh! Now, I understand!"

"Seriously, you just want me to hop on a horse and ride up to the house because it's too far to walk?"

"OK. Fine. Your loss. I only hope Bartholomew is kinkier than you. A girl has needs, too, you know. And I didn't just get these breast implants for looks."

"So, which horse."

"Oh, Satan's Curse, he looks nice. Aren't you the sweetest..."

BAM! Boot to the head.

"Ow! Thanks for the hand," that slips, pushing her, making sure she hits the conveniently placed rock, and now she is dead.

"Great. My first role and I'm dead in two scenes."

"Oh, but you're doing ghosts in this book, right?"

"No? But what about Suzette?"

"Well, then. How about if I had a sister? A reclusive librarian type, who arrives on the scene, smelling murder..."

###

You know how in those soap operas of old (do they still do soap operas?), every once in a while, they'd make an announcement at the beginning of the show that went something along the lines of: the role of so-and-such will now be played by X.

Well, this is the same thing... only different.

Jeannette will now be playing the role of Barbette.

It would be fun to say that Barbette is a bit of a bimbo (and so I just have), but it's not true.

Barbette is Jeanette's younger sister (if only by two minutes, they being identical twins and all).

And everyone knows younger sister's are hot.

This is probably because Barbette has that extra two inches (of height, in the heel of her shoe, or where it really counts -- being naturally endowed as she is).

I guess that explains why she has back problems.

I guess that explains why Bartholomew -- being the gallant gentleman that he is -- sees her struggling with her suitcase (at the bus stop, I'm thinking) and so offers to help.

"Really! I thought I saw a resemblance."

And then, they are off for coffee. And then, she is off.

"Wait! Where are you going?"

"I have a hunch, my sister's death was no accident."

And if no one else is going to investigate, she will. That's why she also packed walking shoes.

###

At about 4:36:27AM, by the blinking light on the bedside table, Radcliff became bored.

If he led a normal life, Natalie might be saying, "It's still early. Come back to bed." So, instead she is saying, "It's late, maybe we should go to sleep."

But that is not Radcliff's style.

Instead, he pokes around the house, looking for clues. He's supposed to be investigating the murder of his sister, after all. And there is the empty dog food bowl. Now there's something. And her car isn't here! Was it stolen? Didn't someone notice? Why wasn't that in the police report? Is there a police report? It would be nice to get his hands on that. But it would make for dry reading, so there's not much chance of that happening. Even he knows that.

Moving on, upstairs, the bed is a mess, looks like there was a struggle, sheets in disarray, blankets on the floor, leather straps hanging from the corners of the four-post bed. Oh, right, he and Natalie had a bit of fun. He forgot. He's getting tired.

Washing his face in the bathroom sink, catching his reflection in the mirror. Damn! No, seriously. Damn! But he looks good. From both sides even -- even the back.

"What are you doing?" Natalie asks.

But isn't it obvious, looking for clues... or drugs. Drugs would be nice around now. Don't you think.

But there is nothing in the medicine cabinet except for those blue pills his family is so fond of. Wonder what they do? Wonder what they're like? Wonder what the recommended pharma-co-logical dosage is? Wonder what the rest and relaxation dosage is?

He could do with a little R&R.

Heading downstairs, finding Natalie's pipe, a bong that more than once has served as a dildo -- if Rad only knew as he wraps his mouth around.

And then, on the tray, next to the weed, and the pink pills -- wonder what these do, might as well take two more -- Radcliff finds the brochure, event package, reservation, and suddenly remembers that the scene of the crime had been changed 'for artistic reasons' to the local Ashram across the way on the other side of the lake.

"So, next stop. Should we swim or drive?"



“You’re pretty high.”  
“Right, swimming it is.”

# # #

Swimming at night, early morning, turning to dawn as the sky slowly changes -- there is no chance of either of them drowning. Rad knows this -- knows it in his heart. And Natalie feels safe when she is with him, so she knows it, too.

The water is like glass. Morning fog rises off its surface. Swans (or maybe loons) honk in the distance.

# # #

Two red pills (OK, fine, pink) and two blue pills (at least two, but who’s counting): and Rad is skinny-dipping (we are talking about Rad, here, so it’s implied) with his favorite playmate (i.e. Natalie) as they make their way across the lake (slowly, for there are several islands that need investigating on the way with gently sloping shores, romantic coves, and sandy beaches) and I feel it’s time for a dream sequence... or at least, for all those pills to kick in.

You know the tune:

*Blue pills make you larger*

*Blue pills make you small*

*But the pink ones are for birth control*

*And so don’t do much of anything, at all*

*Go ask Rad*

*When it comes to pills, he knows it all...*

# # #

Mainly, because I’m a bit of a voyeur, I think Barbette should be into yoga (I dig those tight pants), exercise (one can never be too strong), and nice long refreshing swims in the wee hours of the morning...

“Whoa! Wait! What! Come on, we’ve got rules around here,” the author screams silently to himself. “If not skinny dipping, wearing a revealing bikini (string, preferably -- maybe a few sizes too small) is a must.”

But Babette is having none of it -- solid blue one piece, white swimmers cap, even nose plugs.

“I’ll just wait for you here,” Bartholomew says as he sits down on the dock. But after she dives into the water (such form, such beauty) and disappears from view, he heads off to his hotel (more of a swank bed and breakfast, really) and gets something to eat. “Breakfast waits for no man,” as he likes to say. And after that, perhaps a morning nap.

###

But I do believe I promised you a dream sequence. Perhaps, you’d care to write it. Or I know, some writers (not me, of course, but I hear tell some) like to complete little warm up exercises before writing a chapter, you know, to make sure everyone behaves, um, in character. So, with that thought in mind (and recalling that this is a dream sequence), perhaps these (very guiding) questions might help:

In dream, it turns out that Bartholomew decided to go swimming with Barbette. While resting on an island, they in turn:

A: Make hot passionate love.

B: Eh, gross. Besides, didn’t you say Barbette was a bit of a prude -- or at least, a prim and proper straight-laced sort of girl?

C: More importantly, after a swim like that, Bartholomew would be hungry (starving, famished), so he had arranged to have a fully catered breakfast waiting for them. And being sickly rich, along with the croissants and pastries, he likes his fully catered breakfasts to include a string quartet, private chef, and complimentary masseuse.

But then, perhaps that sort of question is a little more leading than guiding. Maybe the questions should be a little more open

ended. Something along the lines of: if Radcliff, Natalie, Bartholomew, and Barquette were to race across the lake, who would win and why?

Bartholomew: because he's the most buoyant of the lot.

Barquette: first off, there's little danger of her sinking, she's looking pretty buoyant herself (and in all the right places, to boot); and she's the only semi-professional swimmer in the lot.

Natalie: she's a lean, mean, swimming machine. Actually, I probably never mentioned this (not being big on descriptions, except for perhaps when it comes to Barquette's buoyancy), but Natalie works out, like a lot. Not because she's some fitness guru like Barquette, but because Rad told her to, and she does whatever Rad says, like, "Do me proud and show Barquette what you're made of," so clearly, she wins.

And as to Radcliff: "Race across the lake? Oh, I'm sorry, I thought it was a race to get where we were going. And I'm already there." Always have been, always will be.

###

Natalie is splashing in the shadows, while Radcliff (tripping his balls off, I might add, guess he found some tabs of acid amongst Suzette's stash) lazes on the beach. The horse galloping across the water sort of catches his eye, as does the naked blonde riding on top. That would be Jeannette in all her deathly glory. And this would be the dream sequence -- made all the more poignant and real by the liberal application of high-grade pharmaceuticals (not to mention cutting edge literary technique).

Anyhow, the horse is rearing, getting ready to trample poor Natalie (and seriously, at only a 100-mill in her trust account, she is sort of a poverty-stricken), while Jeannette (whose role is now being played by Barquette) says, threatens, and/or informs, "If you don't get off your ass and start investigating these murders, Others Will Die!!!"

And this is pretty much where the horses hooves come down on top of poor (nearly destitute) Natalie's head.

As Rad manages to stir out of his drug induced stupor to say, "What?"

And the man (with flowing blonde hair and one of those startling physiques that makes you wish you were into guys) in the motorboat (which the horse has become) repeats himself and says, once again, "You're on private property."

But Radcliff only waves this time, so Lex (the man in the boat) turns off the motor and once again repeats himself (third time's the charm), "You're on private property."

To which Rad, being Rad, merely lays back, digs his toes into the sand, and says, "I know."

While Natalie giggles from where she floats in the water, "He knows."

"You have to leave."

"Sir," Natalie says helpfully, but the guy (Lex, we're going to call him Lex) doesn't get it, so Natalie helps him out, "He knows this is private property, because he owns it. So, you probably work for him. And I'm thinking you should call him, sir. Isn't that right, Radcliff?"

"He's Radcliff Pierce?"

"I'm hungry. You didn't happen to bring a private chef, personal masseuse, and string quartet with you, did you?"

"No."

"Well, next time, see that you do."

And with that, it is time to end this chapter.

###

Someone needs to die. The narrative seems a bit disjointed, unorganized even. I find a good murder helps to focus my energies. But who? Who should I kill? Oh, I know I'll do one of those (fake) reader poll things and tally the results. After all, don't they say, if you can't make up your mind on something, toss a

coin, and the decision will come to you when the coin's in the air... or if not, just go with the flow and be like Rad and say, "Heads, good. Just what I was hoping for." And having mentioned his name, I say, let's put Rad at the top of the Kill List.

KILL RADCLIFF: the worthless playboy sicko. I bet someone got word of his affair with his sister and is setting things to right. As to Jeannette, one less bimbo in the world isn't going to matter.

NO! KILL NATALIE: Radcliff is sort of hot, and he's never going to take another woman seriously as long as that harlot is around.

NO! KILL ANGELA: talk about harlots, she's having an affair in front of her husband (maybe with her husband even) and trying hard to score with a third. The bitch must die -- preferably in a scene that involves bondage, cashews, and chickens.

BARTHOLOMEW: it's hard to fantasize about Barbettes Big Boobs with Bartholomew around, just saying. Besides with all that fat and blubber, we could live off him for weeks. It'd be like harpooning a whale.

BARBETTE: didn't we already kill this bimbo once? Come on, finish the job.

###

Or maybe, I'm going about this the wrong way. Perhaps I should not be deciding who should die, but who the murderer is, and let them decide who the next victim will be.

CAPTAIN CARL: back in my day, it was against the law to be queer. And Carl, hiding in the closet like that, the man is seriously repressed, who knows who he's willing to kill to keep his secret.

HARRY: not as straight laced as he appears, I'm thinking. And if he was having a clandestine affair with Carl, maybe he's killing off all those who have ever commanded Carl or told him

what to do. “Nobody pushes my sub around! Nobody!” Though, he’d probably have to kill himself if that was the case.

MAX & MARGARET: why have one killer when you can have two? Max and Margaret are having a secret affair. And after the rest of the family is gone, they’ll have riches galore. The only problem, what to do with baby Beaumont? Oh, no! He must be next! Run baby Beaumont! Run! Too bad he only can crawl.

###

Unfortunately, there is no affair. And Max is working alone.

“So, I’m the killer?”

Not exactly what I was thinking...

“Your going to kill me off? Why? I’m doing everything you asked?”

Really, you’re the hardcore biker scum I had penciled in for this role? You? No, sorry. You’re really not pulling it off.

“I can be tougher?”

Can you? Can you be tougher?

###

Angela is twisted. I mean, I like Angela. Don’t get me wrong. I like her, got a thing for her, call it a writer’s crush. And for this next scene she’s standing in full leathers, high heels, and a total bitchy attitude, I find is sexy. But she’s twisted.

“It’s time to put up or shut up, Max. Time to prove your love.”

“But murder?”

“Ethan killed Jeannette. You get to do Barbette. Or does Ethan love me more than you do. I would hate to think Ethan was more of a man than you.”

Um, and I probably should note somewhere (just so you don’t get the wrong idea), Angela is a lying bitch -- sexy, sizzling hot, and I fantasize about her digging her heels into my flesh on an

almost daily basis, but that doesn't mean she's not a lying bitch (actually, it probably means that she is). Whatever, no subterfuge here.

FACT: Ethan did not kill Jeannette.

But Max doesn't know this. What has he gotten himself involved in? Shaking, getting on his motorcycle, armed with his gifts: a full assortment of knives and guns -- more than enough to get the job done. Has she lost her mind? Crazy, that's what she is -- crazy hot... legs to die for. But come on, that's just hyperbole. And it's just supposed to be a game: bad biker dude, playful S&M. She's taking it too far. Sure, tie Ethan up, pretend to kidnap him, that's one thing. But murder? Actually killing someone? Max never signed up for this. And so, he's on his bike, time to go for a ride, get a little fresh air, think things through, maybe he'll never come back.

Maybe? Oh, there's no maybe about it. He's not coming back. That's one thing I can tell you for sure. Somebody's messed with his clutch, loosened his breaks, unscrewed some bolt, and what between the wind and the rain and the speed and the tight hairpin turns on the mountain road and the semi changing lanes that cuts him off...

He never stood a chance.

Foul play was not suspected. Body lying on the rocks at the bottom of the cliff, waves lapping at the wheels of his bike, turning surreally, the knife Angela gave him, sticking through his heart (for metaphorical effect, it's the bike's breaks -- or lack thereof -- that did him in), "Must have stabbed himself on the way down," Sergeant Ricardo surmises. "See it all the time. Double suicide. Just wanted to make sure."

###

And with Max gone, now it is Angela's turn to shake. Drink in hand, I like to imagine she's down at Gil's Tavern, but she doesn't associate with mere commoners. So instead, she's up at

the big house, in the library, the smoking den, pouring another drink, splashing most of it the floor, shaking so violently the gin spills over the side of her glass as she brings it to her lips, using both hands so as to steady herself as Ethan walks in the room, calling her name, "There you are."

"AAHH!" and her screaming bloody murder, startled, scared of her voice.

"Are you alright?"

But she is not. "Why? Why? Why Max?" Why did you kill Max? But she knows why, "You were jealous?"

"No more than anyone else," Ethan admits with eerie calm. Which means? Did he? Could he?

"Of course I was jealous. I love you," Ethan goes on to explain.

Yes, of course. He loves her, always has. But would he kill for her? Didn't he know it was only a game? No, of course not. For him, it wasn't a game -- the simple fool. "Promise me, you'll never," she can't even say kill, "do that again."

Do that? What? But he doesn't need to know. And after years of practice, he is good at the game, "I'm sorry my dear, but over the years, I've promised you so many things. And if I said I would, how can I go against that now?" Answer me that, my Mistress. Answer me that?

And at the thought, she is down on her knees, at his knees, collapsing, sobbing, terrified, afraid, begging, the words coming out wrong, but he understands. Solid Ethan, upright Ethan, boring Ethan, he understands. Taking her hand, rising her up, kissing her lips, taking advantage of the moment to extract from her the only promise he's ever wanted.

"Yes. Of course, Ethan. I'll do whatever you say."

But some are doms and some are subs and I have found that one is happier in this world if they know which that they are. Ethan knows. "All I want is for you to tell me what to do next."

"But no more killing." And if he was a dom and she his sub, he probably punish her for this bit of restraint, this mental hold out,



just beat it the fuck out of her. 'If I tell you to kill, you will kill. And if I tell you to tell me to kill, you will tell me to kill.' But he's not a dom, he's a sub, and he never wanted to kill anyone anyhow. All he's ever wanted was for the world to make sense and someone to tell him what to do.

"OK, my love. No more killing, ever again."

"Thank you Ethan."

And here, they climb into bed, cuddle together, nice and cozy, safe and warm, it is perhaps the scene to which many might aspire -- dreams of domestic tranquility.

But Angela is Angela and having awoken on the wrong side of the bed the next morning... like she does every morning... really should turn that bed around... not much reason to it... but...

"Quit that yammering. Do I need a reason? No. Don't answer that. My hair is a mess from your pawing. And what's this? You held me close and drooled on me through the night. What the fuck kind of sick pervert are you? No. Stand up. Put out your hands," and repeat after me...

"Yes, Mistress."

"Of course, Mistress."

"Whatever you say, Mistress."

Yes, she'd pulled herself around. Things were back to normal.

"Bartholomew may be a fat fuck, but he always liked me, and he's got a shit load of money..."

Yes, things were most definitely back to normal.

"But." Slap! "Listen to me!" Slap! "That doesn't mean I want you to kill him!" Slap! "It's just a figure of speech." Slap! "Oh, great. Now I've gone and excited you. Well, I guess you've earned it. You may kiss me if you must." Slap! "What? Not on my lips, worm. Kneel!" Slap! "I said, kneel!"

"Yes, Mistress. My love."

Slap! "Do not use that word with me. You have to earn it, my sniveling worm. You have to earn it. I'm out one playmate because of you. You're going to help get me another."

“Yes, Mistress.”

“Stop smiling. Did I say, you could smile.”

###

FACT: Max is dead.

“Aw, man. This sucks.”

FACT: He shares the ghostly realm with a bimbo and a known incestuous lover.

“Oh, well. When you put it like that.”

FACT: Ethan did not kill Max.

“Who? Him? Guy needs someone to cut his food up for him into little pieces. He couldn’t hurt a fly.”

FACT: Angela did not kill Max.

“Of course not. You did, author dude.”

FACT: This isn’t going to be one of those stupid stories...

“Um, yeah, you see, there’s where I’m going to have to differ.”

FACT: I don’t have a problem with ghosts walking around in perpetual torment with a knife sticking out their chest making it hard to breath for all eternity. Capiche?

FACT: That shut him up.

FACT: This isn’t going to be one of those stupid stories where it is revealed at the end that the author was the one who killed off all of his characters just so he could write a book. I may be chronicling the events...

BUT FACT: Someone else is pulling the proverbial trigger.

FACT: I could go for one of those gooey chocolate croissants right about now.

“So, go have one. No one is stopping you.”

FACT: You’ve just been promoted to my personal lackey. Hop to. And go fetch.

“So, this is what you meant by perpetual torment?”

FACT: I know what Angela, Ethan, and you were up to. And I know which part of it you liked the best.

“I get the feeling I’m not going to like this afterlife, gig.  
FACT!!!

# # #

They say on stormy nights like tonight, you can hear the roar of Max’s motorcycle, roaring like thunder as it echoes through these canyon walls -- always in the distance, always one turn ahead. They say he’s headed off to Dolly’s on a late night donut run. They say the chocolate croissants are especially good. They say once you go black, you never go back. I like to think they’re talking about the coffee...

# # #

Rad is in an ashram doing meditation. It’s a boring scene. Natalie sits ahead of him, slightly to the side, perfect view, showing off. She does her meditation in the yoga position known as the “Flying Monk”. All of her muscles are tense. She’s not really relaxing. She might be doing it wrong... or perhaps, she has taken a different route to Nirvana... one through Rad... for Rad... of Rad.

Soon, Rad is no longer pretending to meditate.  
And Natalie is contemplating his navel.

# # #

The problem with Christianity is Christ.  
The problem with Buddhism is Buddha.  
While the problem with Judaism is, of course, the...  
Folks squirm when I tell that joke.  
Personally, I think it’s more than a little insightful.

# # #

Rad stands arms raised, victory stance, in front of the golden statue of Buddha that stands two stories high at the center of the ashram. If you think about it, Rad is sort of like the Buddha himself: rich, powerful, the golden boy, born into wealth, perpetually happy, not a care in the world, living for the moment... which is perfectly understandably as Natalie kneels before him, worshipping him, her Buddha, her savior, her God.

###

Long ago, Lex fell asleep, mid “O-o-o-hm!”  
As morning comes, the early risers trickle into the temple, only to find that those that came before have already taken up their positions, ignoring Radcliff and Natalie, saying their prayers, offering their blessings, until the room is full, the gong is sounded, Radcliff explodes, and Lex awakens.

What a sight to behold!

###

Pain is suffering.  
Suffering is desire.  
So to end pain,  
On must eliminate desire...  
Or fulfill it.

The back door to Nirvana (or any locale for that matter) often leads through the, well, the back door. Seriously, just ask any S&M disciple.

###

Backroom, boathouse, center stage of the ashram temple for all to see, witness before god, whatever; here, there, everywhere, from the look in his eye, I’d say that Lex has found his true desire.

###

The preceding was self-indulgent dribble and/or contained misleading factual errors, because:

A: Come on, look who wrote it. Of course it's self-indulgent dribble and contains misleading factual errors.

B: In classic Buddhism, there are Four Pillars of Truth, so if we're going to have an early morning sex scene, we need a few more guys...

C: Radcliff isn't the religious type.

D. Lex isn't the religious type.

D: Radcliff and Lex were merely having a discussion vis a vie Radcliff's likeness to the Buddha. They are, after all, both made out of money and searching for something more. And after a while, Radcliff stood up to stretch and having horrible eye-sight and don't ask me why he's always sitting on the edge of the action (i.e. far in the distance), anyhow, let's just say, the author misconstrued the events -- just like he always does.

###

Harry and Steve, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G.

"Why are we doing this again?"

"You've seen the knockers on that environmentalist,"

Veronica, the aforementioned, tree hugger I'd like to bugger.

"Well, I mean, who hasn't? She doesn't wear a bra most of the time and those jugs of hers are as big as softballs; no melons; no, that gives the wrong idea; bowling balls sounds too hard; they're like throw pillows; no, too soft. I wish Tricia was here. She'd know the right way to phrase it. She has a way with words, that girl; very talented."

"Why isn't she here?"

"Family time, vacation, who knows, maybe she's on sick leave. Last I heard, she was going on and on, something about it

being Sunday morning and she hadn't been able to sleep in her own bed all week."

"No dedication to the cause?"

"Good government never sleeps, that's what I always say."

###

Steve and Harry are sitting in a tree. Something about old growth forest, last surviving habitat of an endangered spotted leopard tortoise, or something like that. Obviously, very important. Neither one of them has a clue. You would have to talk to Veronica, if you wanted the details, so that's what all the reporters are doing.

Meanwhile, Steve and Harry are sitting in the tree, stopping the bulldozers from doing their thing.

"Called it wrong. Should have stayed on the ground. That's where all the action is."

"Veronica, leastwise."

"Same thing. Oh, well, nothing to do, but wait, now." And with that, Steve brushes at the branch with his hand so as to clean the place up a little, sending one of those spotted leopard tortoise things crashing to the ground as he does.

###

Of all the characters, I find Angelica to be the sexiest of the lot. However, I wouldn't really want to have sex with her. I think it would be painful.

Natalie would probably be a lot of fun, but she'd only do it if Radcliff asked her to. And he has (shared her with another). It's the type of thing *He* would do. But that's not really my turn on.

Rad himself probably gives a mean blowjob -- plenty of attention to detail. When you get right down to it, he's quite needy -- despite all appearances to the contrary, he needs to please. But I'm not into guys.

So I guess, if I was going to have a little fun with one of the characters this morning (and by fun, I mean a little extra-curricular sexy-fun time), I'd probably have to introduce someone new into the plot... assuming that what we've got going you're willing to call a plot.

###

Her name is Amber. She hates the name. She calls herself Dark Amber... or better yet, Anti-Matter... Auntie Matter.

She has dark hair like Angelica... only she has dyed hers burgundy-purple, streaks here and there. Very stylish. Very expensive... as are the designer clothes she wears: Dark Elf Wannabe / Boarding School Drop Out -- plaid skirt, tights, too much flesh, not enough, ripped shirt, tattoo on the neck, rising phoenix, winged dragon, silver earrings, jewelry, and rings. She could afford more, but what she really wants is less.

She is riding the train. The tracks go clickety-click. She is staring out the window. She is pretending that she is Hermione of Harry Potter fame on her way to Hogwarts for the first time. A man that could pass for Professor Snapes sits down next to her. She knows the man. But she ignores him, the coffee he sets down, the hand on her knee, riding up, exposed flesh.

Empty car, private booth, he pulls her away from the window, grasping hair, in control, not taking no. She doesn't fight. She doesn't resist. Sometimes, she wishes she were dead.

And then, she snaps out of it. Fantasy over, riding alone, clothes not quite so cool, scarf covering her face, ignoring the man in the aisle, wishing he would sit, but knowing he'll probably just walk on.

"Ticket, ma'am. I need to see your ticket, ma'am."

And she hands him the stub, not once looking up.

###

Auntie Matter was the second child from a second wife. Her older brother -- almost an uncle -- would abuse her. That's what they call it -- hurting her, teasing her. Making bets, she knew she would lose, wanting to lose, forced to pay the price, pants down, quick. He'd spank her: school master. He'd whip her: father. He'd do what he wanted: brother.

She liked it.

She hated that she like it.

But she liked it.

The body doesn't lie.

She hates her body, the body that betrayed her.

###

Staring out the window, another stop, passengers board, a few get off. "Is this seat taken?" Staring out the window, no need to reply. He sits down, briefcase in hand. He's probably married. He's probably looking for an affair. She could. She would. If he'd just make her. No questions. No small talk. Excited, shaking, embarrassed by thought, she cedes the view and squeezes past him into the aisle.

###

Her brother is drinking in the dining car. She stops at the door. Too late, he sees her. Turning back, he follows. Running, a chase, down the train, passengers, looking back, from one end to the other. Finally, at their sleeping car, he corners her. Cropped hair, body builder piercings, he takes what he wants, pulling her hair, pushing her down, brutal, savage, not a care in the world.

And when it is over, she is distant, silent, smiling inside.

"I need a drink."

Excellent! He gets demanding when he's drunk.

But it still doesn't stop her from getting off on the next stop.



###

Auntie Matters gets off the train in Sailport. Freshly bruised, she feels alive. As the train pulls away, she smiles. She laughs. She screams at the receding form. She curses the people who dare to watch, to judge her antics. She wonders how long it will take him to figure out she got off. She wonders how long it will take him to find her. She wonders if he will bother.

He grabs her from behind.

She screams... or would. Leather gloves cover her face, biting, she plays hard. But inside she smiles as he drags her away, seedy corner, dark light, Gil's Tavern, away from the crowd, and makes her buy him a drink.

"Slave doesn't even begin to cover it. You're mine. When are you going to get that through that thick head of yours? You're mine. End of story. Now go get me refill. My glass is empty."

And on the way to the counter, she's walking on air.

###

"What the fuck?"

"Dear... Sweetie..."

"Don't Dear-Sweetie me! Fucking author doesn't know how to handle a real woman, so he invites another harlot onto the set..."

"I'm sure..."

"I'm sure you better shut the fuck up, Ethan. I'm trying to think. Nobody steals my spotlight, nobody."

###

They could really use Max now. He was strong. He would know how to do this properly... instead of this farce.

Bag over the head, wrapped in a blanket, loose, struggling, comical, needing her legs to walk she's so heavy, not really, they're so weak, Max would have done this right, her walking the wrong

way, down the street, blind, trying to get away as Ethan let go to open the door.

“Get her. She’s running away.”

“In the trunk. No. Not the backseat. In the trunk.”

And Amber calling out, asking, “Angelica, is that you?”

“Yes, my dear. Though, from now on, you may call me Mistress.”

And we shall fade out as Amber is foolish enough to call Angelica by her given name once again, causing the angelic lass to punch her in the stomach -- not hard, Angelica cannot punch very hard -- but hard enough.

But underneath it all, Auntie Matter is smiling.

###

Auntie Matter is tied to a four-post bed up at the big house. Ethan is carrying in breakfast on a silver tray -- all the good stuff: jams and jellies, toasts, croissants (decadent things), hot chocolate, espresso, scrambled eggs, sausage, and bacon.

“You’ll have to feed her, Ethan.”

After removing the gag, the prisoner immediately demands to know, “Why?” her outburst earning her a smack on her toes.

“Why, Mistress,” Angelica corrects.

“Why are you holding me hostage?” Amber repeats defiantly.

But there is no explanation, only pain. Someone bought a new riding crop just for the occasion.

Later...

Much later...

“Why... Mistress?”

“Because we want you to know that you are loved. Checking into a hotel like that when you’re always welcome here. Nearly broke my heart.”

“Mistress, what about Ted,” Teddy, Theodore, Amber’s brother, always close at hand.

“I think someone may have slipped him a Mickey.”

Amber only smiles. “It’s been too long, Angelica,” catching herself, “Mistress Angelica, far too long.”

And as the sun rises, early morning dew all around, dock workers passing him by, paying no mind, and he drunk, passed out cold with a bottle in hand, wallet nearby stripped of it’s cash, sprawled on a park bench in front of Gil’s, Theodore sleeps off his libations... and/or whatever else was slipped into his drink the night before.

I think I’m going to have fun beating up on these two.

###

“I hear your uncle is in town for the funeral.”

“Really?” Harry asks, barely able to keep the excitement out of his voice. He hasn’t seen Grant in what? Years.

But it is a case of mistaken identity.

“Oh, Theodore? Drunk again, huh? Figures. But he’s not my uncle.”

###

Flashback, summer of ’62, give or take a decade (can’t say I feel like doing the math or settling on a year) and young Teddy, who really isn’t so young, is sitting on Harry’s chest, feeding him clods of dirt.

“Say it! Say it”

“Uncle. Uncle.”

And there you have it. Only Theodore is not their uncle nor is Amber (a.k.a. Auntie Matter) their aunt.

“Well, whatever. He’s in town, dead drunk by all accounts, sleeping off a bender in the park.”

“Sounds like Teddy. Any word on Uncle Grant?”

Which at this point can only elicit a, “Who?”

###

“What do you mean?”

“I have as much right as anyone else?”

“They’re my flesh and blood.”

“Only family they have left.”

Let’s just say, the courts did not see it that way, despite the best lawyers to be found.

“I should at least get a stipend.”

“Fucking lawyers.”

And yes, this would be Uncle Grant talking some ten years earlier, during the custody battle. He hasn’t been seen much since then.

###

Speaking of which, we need a red herring: a potential murderer, so obviously the culprit... that in the end, they obviously can’t be the culprit, because that would be too dang obvious.

So, let’s line up the usual suspects -- or at least, the front-runners. But then, that isn’t really very accurate. So instead, let’s just list off the first three candidates that come to mind as being suitable pigeons on which to pin these crimes... if for no other reason, their appearance late on the scene (and therefore) without suitable alibis for the prior murders.

Uncle Grant -- a one Forest Whitaker Grant -- related to the Stewart children by marriage, his wife died during childbirth, perhaps that might explain Amber’s weird personality, though the smart money is on the abusive relationship she has with both her brother and father -- like father, like son, don’t you know. But I seem to be wandering far a field. So getting back to what’s important, Grant is a bit of a jerk (if we want to use such strong language, I mean, he did only have an incestuous relationship with both of his children, so jerk-off might be a bit harsh). Anyhow, he’s a bit strapped for cash (always has been) and more than one cheesy murder mystery novel has been written wherein the killer is

some distant uncle (if only through marriage) intent on offing everyone between him and his rightful inheritance.

Amber -- Auntie Matter -- is more than capable of murder, especially if someone told her to (i.e. ordered her to) do it. She's an obedient one, that Amber.

Theodore, on the other hand, is anything but obedient -- a loose cannon is what he is, a loaded gun to be sure, a stick of dynamite just waiting to go off. He's into that violent sex shit -- like violent, blood, bruises, edge of death asphyxiation, sex shit. So in truth, if I was looking for a murder, I'd probably want to talk to him first...

###

"Dead? What do you mean, dead?"

"No, I'm not stupid."

"But Teddy was out having a night on the town last night, drinking, full of life..."

"Oh, Mickey's."

"In his drink..."

"O.D.'d, did he?"

"No, thank you. I'll tell the rest of the family Officer Ricardo... or should I be calling you Randy, might as well get on a first name basis if we're going to keep chatting like this?"

"No, of course, Officer Ricardo, that would be unprofessional. But you will come up for drinks later and repeat the story in person?"

"Excellent, I'll have Hodgson fry up some steaks."

###

"Teddy is dead!"

"Dead?"

"Yes, dead. And don't repeat everything I say, it makes you sound stupid." And then, I suppose the conversation drifts off into

some sort of question and answer period in which Angelica quizzes Ethan on how many Mickey's he gave Theodore.

“Are you sure? Because that's not what Randy, I mean, Officer Ricardo said.”

“You like him, don't you, Officer Ricardo?”

“Don't change the subject. We're discussing your inability to properly dose someone with knock-out drugs.

But Ethan dosed him correctly, or at least he's pretty sure he did. Could he have made the mistake? That would be bad?

“Of course, you dosed him incorrectly. What? You think he's the one that did it? Slipped a few more in his drink because yours weren't kicking in, is that it?”

While meanwhile, in the other room, only overhearing bits and pieces of the conversation, Auntie Matter is remarkably cheerful upon hearing the demise of her brother. Rat bastard that he was... not that she would have ever had the guts to kill him, but if her Mickey's mixed with Ethan's Mickey's were enough to kill the fuck, well, the more's the merrier. And then, calling out to the other room, tied up as she is, “Is there any more of this bacon.” Yes, indeed. Life was good.

###

So, there you go. I'm sure we could pin all these murders on Theodore... and the cops (if no one else) would buy it (stupid cops), but that's only if we can restrain ourselves from killing anymore helpless victims (which seems unlikely).

Oh, and don't even try to blame these murders on me. Sure, I know in those stupid books, it's usually the author. But in these incredibly idiotic books (so much more than just stupid), it's usually the readers. So, I'm just saying, stay on my good side, or you just might find yourself doing hard time, because as fun, convenient, and/or pointless as it would be to peg these murders on Dear Sweet Teddy, the bottom line is the thug is dead -- and I've

got a hunch another off screen extra is about to be axed... like literally, axed.

###

I believe her name was Veronica -- the tree hugger you, I, and the entire reading public would like to bugger. Protesting, she had tied herself to a tree and I guess someone really wanted to chop down that tree... or just thought she'd look better without any arms or legs... or a head.

“Still, will you look at those jugs... like moss covered speckled boulders”

“You're being indecent, Steve.”

“I wonder how much I'd have to bribe the coroner to be able to spend an hour of quality time with the deceased. Now, there's a corpse I'd like to... borpse? A stiffy that gives me a stiff? A slab I'd like to grab?”

“I'm leaving, Steve.”

###

It doesn't have to be one murderer, it could be a team.

Angelica and Ethan (she comes first, don't you know): obviously, he'll do whatever she says.

Harry and Margaret (I had to look up her name): so, maybe not. Besides, Harry is too straight laced. But maybe, her and somebody else? She could be looking for a bigger slice of the pie, a little more to life, a bit of the limelight, if you know what I mean. A thought to which she replies, “I could have an affair with Steve. What? He's cute. And I happen to think he's funny.”

So, maybe they will have an affair. I can just hear Steve working on his lines in the background even as we speak, “Now, there's a ball and chain I'd like to restrain. A MILF I'd like to PILF,” or the ever popular, “Mother want another?”

And before you know it, the two of them are meeting at the grocery store, doing it in the backseat of the sedan in the parking lot, and making plans for another clandestine meeting in a few chapters. And though Steve might be happy enough to knock off a few taxpayers to get his ratings up, that's not Margaret's style. So we're still looking for a murdering duo.

Perhaps Radcliff and Natalie. She's as obedient as Ethan. And let's face it, Radcliff is the law enforcement community's number one suspect and they're never wrong. And so, it would work, it could work, if only...

###

Radcliff is at the Ashram.

He is alone, meditating in the room where Suzy died.

He would like to be alone boffing Natalie in the room where Suzy died, perhaps play acting, a little strangulation foreplay, whatever, but she has wandered off.

Or that is to say, meditation never came easily to Rad and it's even harder when the girl that you love (did he just think that?) is in the next room moaning her fool head off, crying out in ecstasy.

###

Suzette had a friend at the Ashram.

Suzette had a girlfriend at the Ashram.

Suzette had a girlfriend at the Ashram who is quite the looker and who is giving Natalie the what-for, a thorough licking from head to two, with probably more than a little fisting action thrown in for good measure and because it sounds like what a pair of lesbos might do.

Whatever.

I don't know the details.

Radcliff doesn't know the details.



But with all that, “Yes! Yes! Yes! Oh, God, Yes!” moaning and groaning and crying out in ecstasy and crap, both Radcliff and the author are having a hard time concentrating on anything else.

“How do they do it?”

“Do they use their fists? Their toes?”

“I bet you they rub their tits together.”

Well, that’s not really how one meditates, now is it?

Masturbates? Maybe.

Meditates? No.

# # #

*And perhaps for obvious reasons, this is where I left off.*

*Oh, and if you’re wondering.*

*Grant did it.*

*Not me.*

*Not the author.*

*Never the author.*

*This is a work of fiction, all resemblance, coincidence, and yabba-jabba, standard disclaimer insert here, and all the rest.*

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*...because you never know, you just never know...*