



Jessy Brodsky Vega

White Thoughts

White, perishable light flooded the bed side and penetrated the lids of my eyes. I sighed into the side of my arm. A few minutes passed and there were no sounds in the morning of my room. A glance at the clock told me that it was barely eight o'clock. I snapped the sheets away from my chest and rolled out of bed. Seemed like a Sunday. I looked about the room of disheveled clothing and peeling posters. No one with me.

The quiet resounding, heavy, I bent down and nudged the needle over a record in the player on the floor with its long cord linked to the wall, then left the room. The hallway was dark, wood creaking as I walked, and the bathroom to the side—glaring, gathered white. I peed with a sigh into the toilet.

"Yo," I heard from behind me.

"What is it?"

"Put some fucking clothes on. She doesn't want to see that," Freddy said, with his girlfriend sprawled across the couch. He pulled the blanket over his red curls and her light swept buttermilk-colored hair. They giggled and murmured under the blanket.

I left the toilet seat up, brushed myself off, and returned to the room to sit and close my eyes and recoil until the hour melted into something more reasonable.

He was so close to jumping on it. Just a few inches more. I was clenching my hands open and closed. "God damn it, James! Get on the skateboard before it rolls down the hill!" James let his skateboard tumble away. I threw my head into my hands and shuddered.

James had long dirty blond hair and as I stared at him now, hopefully in a menacing, threatening way, he began to tie it backwards with a hair band. He lit a Marlboro 27 from his golden pack of cigarettes and rubbed his rough, blond-speckled chin.

"What is your problem, Dylan?"

I sighed and tried to calm myself by breathing slow though my heart was hammering. I reached down and picked my beanie hat off the ground and smoothed it down over my head. James stared at me with his cigarette drawn to the side of his mouth, squinting and smiling.

"Get your damn skateboard and let's go. Can't even do a simple trick."

He laughed and stepped towards me, dragging his cigarette in and out of his mouth. He let the cigarette drop just a bit and blew a circle of smoke between my eyes.

"Shit," I seethed and pushed him back.

He stumbled backwards but the ends of his boots caught him and he laughed. I couldn't help smiling. The acrid smoke came into my lungs and gathered around my clothes, scenting me as it liked. I threw my fist at him and surprised, James fell back to his elbows on the ground. The cigarette still dangled innocently from his mouth. I stood as a shadow covering him.

James slowly got to his feet and his face was serious, the jaw set tight. He was several inches taller than me, above six feet, and much broader in the chest. He dropped the cigarette to the ground and crushed it under his boot. "I'm not going to go on with this because I would fuck you up much worse than you could me. But you're lucky that wimp fist of yours didn't actually hit me."

I laughed with an exuberant "Hah!", the only kind of laughter I seemed capable these days of compelling. "One day you should try me. I really hope to find out. It's my most sincere wish. A fair fight with the honest James."

James grimaced. "Fucking mad cat you are. Stop that clown laugh. I don't know if I can deal with it for another year."

I slapped him on the shoulder. "I wasn't really going to hit you."

James shrugged and began to walk ahead. I kicked my board down to the ground and rolled ahead of him.

Walking down Middle Path, I dug my hands into my pockets and stared toward my feet. I was kicking up neat little pebbles to the grass. At the end of the path stood historic dorms, stretching their buttresses as far into the clouds as they could.

I had told no one where I was going. My suitemates were asleep. It was probably seven-thirty in the morning. No one here would question if I'd spent the night in my bed or been in my room behind a locked doors for weeks. Boarding school had been a bit like that. I'd disappear and reappear and no one would notice and nothing would change whether I was around or not. At the boarding school, there were skinny black gates shooting several feet above your head in every direction. On the college campus, there were no gates. Fields stretched for miles. I couldn't see roads, but I could smell the pulsation of the open world. The tilled, nearby fields—the old, unadulterated clusters of trees outside the path, cleared away only in certain, intentional areas so as to suggest to the student that he or she had stumbled upon a secret enclosure.

"I... don't know. Just where I'm goin'," I sang, "but I gonna try... for the kingdom if I can..."

"Velvet Underground?"

I turned around, startled. A boy stood behind me with long, white blond hair tied back to the nape of his neck. His face was stark, pale and plain, pierced by large blue eyes.

"Ralphy!"

Ralphy smiled and it made his pale face seem wider and more impossible. He stretched his hand out, but I hugged him to my chest.

"Jesus, how long has it been?"

Ralphy shrugged. "Three years. Not since you graduated."

"Hah!" I bellowed and slapped him hard upon the back. "I'd forgotten... your mom called my mom. Told me you were going to go to school here."

"Yup."

I stepped back and crossed my arms and gave him another once over. "How funny. I was just thinking of our boarding school."

Ralphy's eyelids twitched. "Why?"

I smiled. "You grew up a bit. Have you picked your classes and everything?"

He nodded. "Course, man. I just picked random ones though. I don't know what I want to be or anything."

"Yeah me neither."

Ralphy frowned. His mouth was too wide, his face glowing in youth. "But you should already have a major..."

"Hah!" His dark pupils, stark, circled by such light irises, darted back and forth. I thought of my own eyes, unable to discern so plainly, tiny and dark as coal. My mother said they pressed into my head, literally and figuratively deep. But mothers always find ways to compliment flaws. "Yeah Ralphy, I have a major. I'm doing English."

"Oh, that's cool. Will you be a journalist or something?"

I turned away from the historic buildings, back to the little town and my little white house in the distance. "Maybe. What are you doing up so early, Ralphy?"

"I wake up early these days, but I got some last minute things to do too."

I looked at him from the corner of my eyes, wondering if he would smile again in that naive, simply way. He did and I laughed until my back buckled and I was slapping my hand across my knee.

"Man Dylan..."

"I wake up early too," I said.

Ralphy chuckled into his hand and looked me over. I let him and uncrossed my arms.

"Are you on crack right now or something?"

"Hah!" I started walking down the straight path. "I wish."

"Gonna miss this place, the coffee shop," Freddy said, settling back into his seat and stretching his arms back.

"Will you shut up, jack ass. You have a whole year here still. Trust me, you won't miss it by the end,"

James snorted.

"Well, not all of us can be super seniors," I said.

James punched me in the arm and I recoiled, a smile plastered to my face. I lifted up and walked away from the table to a counter and began reading a paper hanging on the wall about the local distribution of apples.

"You want to order?"

A freckled girl behind the counter was blinking her almond shaped eyes in my direction.

"Yeah, could I get green tea in a ceramic cup?"

She turned around and I went back to reading the paper on the wall. A woman, or rather—a girl stepped into my sight. The text upon the wall became a blur. She had brown hair which rested upon bare shoulders and a white hat pushing the hair further down. I stepped back and hit the napkin and milk stand behind me. The girl of dark hair glanced my way once and then turned away. She had a wide face though it narrowed towards the chin with a delicate, sloping nose and a full bottom lip. Her eyelashes brushed her cheek as she looked down at a menu. She glanced back at me and her mouth curled down in a sort of indignant frown. A white skirt flowed loosely around her thighs and she wore knee high socks.

"Hi," I said.

She looked up at me, her eyes steady. "Hey," she said quietly and returned to her menu.

"Green tea!" The freckled girl handed me my drink and I took it, retreating as slowly as I could.

I wanted to take the knee high socks girl with my tea and sit her down upon my lap at the table. But I kept her there. When I sat down Freddy kicked me in the shin.

"What?" I said.

"Stop staring at freshman girls, you fuck off."

"I thought I restrained myself," I said.

"What?" Freddy said.

James shook his head.

Right on the path, adjacent to the music hall, sat a bench older than the others. It tilted to the right and one of its peg legs was sinking into a hole. Every year that I'd come back it was more rugged and weathered,

more spent, but still allowed to sink and sink, buckle and wilt. When I sat upon it, the wood creaked and when I lay and arched my back, it bent with me. Across from it was an oak tree planted by some class a hundred years ago. Now the tree stretched way overhead, towering over the bench and forever shadowing it.

If I was a painter, I'd paint it. I'd note the colors of it and the bends and the ridges. But looking down at my hands, they weren't soft enough. The ends of them were bitten and flattened from stabbing typewriter keys. So, that was my affliction. But there was so much beauty in the tree. One medium couldn't possibly cover it—Oh, my dearest typewriter..! I needed to remember, remember.

Someone waved at me but I didn't notice who it was. The sun beat down and pounded into my chest. Class would be starting in a few minutes.

"Wait, wait! I'm in the rotation too! " Rachel stuck her tongue out and flattened her eyes.

"You look like a fish," I said.

James knocked into my shoulders.

Rachel jerked her shoulders back and made a hmph sound. She laughed like a child princess and giggled when she wasn't laughing. She couldn't sit in silence. I wondered what she was doing in my house.

James moved behind her. He wrapped both legs around her waist and situated himself so his knees touched hers and his arms dangled from her shoulders.

"Hey!" she protested, beaming.

I passed the bowl to her and she had James light it for her.

"Blow harder, girl! Harder! Suck it in."

She coughed once the tip was removed from her mouth and shoved the bowl into James' hand. He sucked hard and passed it along.

The door opened and a buoyant "Hey" bounded through the room.

"Gretch!" Rachel jumped up from James' lap and hugged her friend.

She turned to all of us with a furred boa round her neck and lifted a foot well shrouded in animal hide to the table.

"Hey babe," she said.

Gretchen's blond hair was dried in an almost dread-locked style, though without all the products, it would have been completely straight, dead as straw. Her face was freckled but delicately, softly. She had green eyes and a wide cherry mouth which smiled at me now with all its feigned sweetness.

"Hey babe."

She moved past me and went to the kitchen to fix herself a drink. The bowl was passed to me and I lit it, swirling the end of the lighter around the ashes, and sucking the petals of smoke into my lungs.

When she returned a few minutes later, she carried a handle and some glasses before jumping in the rotation. I poured myself whiskey and sat back to drink. The group kept on talking, Gretchen as well. I watched them all as if they were part of a live portrait, singing to me. Gretchen's eyes trailed my way every once in a while and I focused only upon her. She had short eyelashes which could not well cover her green stone eyes. I wasn't sure if the conversation had finished, but the bowl was cashed and I had drunk the whiskey. I lifted up, snatched Gretchen's hand, and pulled her away from the group.

"Dylan!" she cried, though she understood me. We meandered into the hallway and I kissed her reddened lips. She pressed me into the wall and lifted my shirt up. I undid my belt and my pants slipped right down, always having been too big.

I knocked the door to my bedroom open and we collapsed inside.

Bright, white light again flooding my room. I never closed the curtains. No one ever walked by early enough to catch me sleeping.

It was very quiet. The sun moving achingly slow upon the twisted sheets. She was gone. On my back, I reached my hands up toward the ceiling fan, swirling as slowly as possible through the spaces between my fingers.

Gretchen never stayed the night. It had been two years and I could count on my fingers when I'd woken up and she was next to me.

A sudden pounding made a calamity against my door. I gripped the covers.

"Dylan? Dylan?"

I turned over on my side and reached my arms out to the center of the room.

"Dylan? What the hell. Open the door."

Then slithered off the bed and settled upon the floor in an indian style. After snapping my fingers back and stretching them out, I brought them to rest upon my typewriter, which sat upon a turned over plastic box.

"Dylan!?"

Inspiration. Inspiration. I looked out toward the dead early morning streets and the sunlight spreading across, illuminating the granite. My room was littered with clothes, just thrown everywhere, and I had a skateboard mounted to the wall above rows of posters I'd found or bought for cheap.

"Holy shit, man."

I began typing whatever came to my head.

"Oh now I can hear you typing."

It was a man talking. Probably James or Freddy. It didn't matter who. The sun had barely dulled to a yellow. It was still so bright and high in the sky. And I was alone in my room again.

A party was to be held in a house on the outskirts of campus, the only kind of scene in which the underage students could drink.

I knocked on Freddy's door after slipping on an army green jumpsuit and tying a bow tie around my neck. He didn't answer. I opened the door without waiting.

Freddy was crouched over his girlfriend. He had pants on but no shirt and she was naked below him, her blond hair spread about the dirtied floor, her own discarded clothes, and her bare shoulders.

"Freddy," I said. I kept my distance at the doorway, my hand steady upon the knob.

"What?"

"Let's go. To the liquor party," I demanded.

"Later man. Dana doesn't want to come."

Dana groaned beneath him and I caught one of her eyes, bare and wide.

"What! You are leaving... Freddy?" she inquired, breathless.

Freddy bumped her head against hers. He was either whispering in her ear or biting it.

I scanned the room, trailing past the knocked over lamp, its collapsed circle of yellow light, the clothes, the food, the lines on the table.

"Let me do a line?"

Freddy was still against her. She was making slight sounds. "Clothes, clothes, clothes..."

"Okay... all right," Freddy said. He lifted off of her and began collecting her things. She haphazardly covered her breasts and started to shake. I didn't bother looking her over.

I swooped down to the table and used a rolled up dollar bill to snort through my nose. The powder flew up my nostril like a bullet and I tossed my head back, not because I needed to.

Freddy dressed Dana and she collapsed against his old clothes, smiling.

"I'm doing to try and sleep instead!" she said, too loudly.

"All right girl," Freddy said, standing up and looking down at me as I was hunched over the table. "Let's go then," he said, heading for the door.

We arrived at the party rather late and most of the alcohol was spent. My hands had started to shake and I lay myself gently against the wall as if it were a bed and had swirled around upright. I looked for stars on the ceiling.

"Hey!"

Drunken voices.

"Hey you! With the beanie hat!"

I rolled my head around and someone was looking at me. It was a girl with brown hair and glowing olive skin.

"I've seen you around. What's your name?"

Her cheeks were flushed, most likely from drinking. She had a cup in her hand and her eyes were slanting. I smiled at her and thought my own eyes might burst from my head. She was a gorgeous light, like a star in the darkness of the crowded, bustling hall.

"Dylan," I said. "Who are you?" She was wearing jeans instead of knee high socks.

"Oh, I'm Alice."

Someone snatched her arm and she was jerked away from my sight. Her head bobbed up once more in the sea of people and I was still smiling at her, a bit taken back.

"Well, see you around!" she yelled.

I watched her disappear into the crowd.

"God, the freshman are everywhere. Are they letting in more people than before?" James skated ahead of me and stopped suddenly, kicking his skateboard up. "I barely know the campus anymore." I threw my backpack on the ground and swerved past him and nearly tripped. "Jesus," he laughed. "Watch yourself."

I cursed and shrugged my shoulders back. The hat on my head had fallen off and hair was tangled to the tops of my shoulders. "Fuck off."

"Are you antsy or something?"

"Hah!" I stared at James until his look turned quizzical and then I pointed towards the sky in the manner of a gun, and lowered my hand to point at him. "No."

James laughed and shook his head.

I bent down and picked up my skateboard. "There are a lot of freshman. I like having the new faces around."

"Oh yeah?"

I placed my hat squarely back on my head and cracked my neck. "Yeah, yeah."

"We won't be seeing them for a very long time."

I dropped my skateboard back to the ground and slid down the hill. The wind whipped daggers past my face and tossed my beanie with it. "Shit," I murmured and flipped my head around. The skateboard tilted out and I went the other way, my feet sailing to the side. I hit the ground on my elbows and rolled a foot or two before stopping, splayed on the road as if left for dead.

James hadn't followed me. He must have stayed at the top of the hill. I lifted up and shook my head to forget the pain and the blood along my arms. It only tickled a little. Even the hairs on my arms were numb. Maybe I couldn't feel pain anymore. I could just toss myself down the hill, all the way down, and nothing would happen.

I stood up and was stretching when my shoulder was tapped and the shock of it sent more palpitations through my body than the fall. I tripped again and landed on my knees.

"Oh God. I'm sorry. I just caught your hat and—"

My hair was too dark, too long. I couldn't see anything. I stared and blinked and blinked, willing feeling to return to my body.

The person bent like a peasant girl, crushing her skirt with one wayward hand. She took my hat and placed it on my head, parting the hairs.

"Hey," I said. She looked back at me, a bit wide-eyed. "I know you." She didn't say anything, but her full lips began to spread. "You fascinate me."

Her eyes narrowed. "What?"

I reached out a hand to her. She brushed herself off and stared for a moment. Then she gave me her hand and lifted me upwards. Or rather, I lifted myself up by the warmth of her palm.

"You completely fascinate me."

"Hah! Do I? Are you a freshman?"

She cocked her hip out. She had another skirt on, a long one. Her shirt sloped loosely around her neck, the circular cup of a bone necklace lying upon the hard, flat expanse before the small swell of breasts, lower, hidden.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"Oh!" I said. I shook my shoulders out. My whole body tingled. "I think you're a freshman."

Her hip faded back to its usual line. "Aww, how did you know?"

I dragged my hand down my face to the stubble along my chin. "I knew... Alice?"

"Yes." Her skin was so rich in color. I couldn't place the color of her eyes. "Dylan. What grade are you in?"

"Oh... I'm a senior."

"Ah," she said, looking abashed and so I took her hand, and she swayed a little. "Well, it's nice to officially meet you."

I let her hand go; it seemed as light as a dandelion, and sat back down squarely upon the pavement.

She brushed hair from her eyes and glanced toward the granite where I'd fallen. The wind had begun rushing so fast that the trees were lurching around us. Alice kept her hands gathered in her skirt and lowered her head. I let the wind blow over me, wishing for nakedness or perhaps a softer ground.

"Here, give me another shot."

"Yeah," Freddy said, "me too."

James poured the liquor down so it cascaded over a row of glasses.

We each picked up our share and tapped glasses, smiling broadly, and tipped our heads back. Hard rushes and I shook my head as a chaser in the end.

The door opened and Gretchen and Rachel waltzed in. Gretchen wore a long brown coat with fur stiff and high at the neck. She tossed it on the couch to reveal a bright red-orange dress which had hiked up her thighs.

"Are you guys drinking?" Rachel cooed. She reached forward as if to swipe the handle from James and tripped into his lap. They both erupted in laughter.

"Are *you* drinking again?" Gretchen asked.

I turned to her and nodded. "Yes, Gretchen."

"How much have you had?"

"Eight shots?"

"Eight! You knew I was coming over though."

"So?"

She slapped me behind the head and I looked to Freddy who raised his eyebrows.

"Are you going to keep hitting me?"

"Are you going to get drunk every night?"

"Maybe. I only have one year left. You have two. You can take it slower."

She took the shot glass from my hand and slammed it on the table. "Well, I wanted to spend some time with you tonight!"

The room had gone silent. Everyone stared.

"Get drunk and we can spend some time together."

Gretchen was looking off toward the kitchen, her feminine jaw tensing.

"Let's go into the other room."

"You're sober as hell."

"Then, I'll sober you up!"

She dragged me away, not even to my room. We were in the hall. She knocked me down, straddled me, and then pulled me up so I'd kiss her.

"You taste of bitter, bitter alcohol," she hissed.

"Hah," I murmured, but there was no joy in it.

She pushed me down and bit my lip.

"I love you," she said.

"Yes?"

"I'll never let you go," she said.

I lay my head on its side. "Oh, no?"

"Dylan!"

"What?"

"Look at you, look at you." She brushed away softly the hair from my eyes and raked her hands down to the splatters of hair on my chest. "Such dark, brilliant hair. I can't look away from your face."

"I love your face too," I said. Her freckles seemed smudged tonight. She'd applied too much blush. Her cheeks were reddened dully.

"Will you kids come back over here?" James called.

"Pulleeeesssee darlings?" Rachel begged. "Before I drink everything. Hey James, I have my first test of the semester tomorrow!"

"You do?" he gasped, and they laughed, making sounds on the couches.

"Where's Dana?" Gretchen called from my lap.

"She's coming over," Freddy answered.

"Come on Gretch..." Rachel sighed.

Gretchen lifted up from me and left the hallway.

I lay there and gulped her spit and remnants of alcohol down my throat. The hall was so dark and my chest was so tight. The alcohol hadn't lifted anything.

"Come back babe!" I rolled over on my side and shuddered on the hard floor. "Come back!"

She appeared shadowed in the hallway, hands on her hips. "What?"

"Help me up, let's go to my bedroom."

"No," she said, lowering her head. "No."

"Does this path just keep going like this? I've never even been here," Freddy said.

"Well," I said, stretching out my fingers, "it circles the school. It's not straight like the path through campus, but it isn't a very difficult walk. I like it out here."

"And you come here early in the morning, don't you?" asked James, crossing his arms.

I nodded. "Sometimes."

"Why don't you take Gretchen instead?" Freddy asked.

The sun had waned, was gone behind the trees, and twilight overlapped us. The sky was rushing in lengths of purple. The clouds were puffs of smoke twisted and curled and buffed to such a degree that color seeped through their edges.

"I've never seen skies like this. Not anywhere. I've never seen anything so gorgeous," I sighed.

"None of this really matters. I should be doing a Chem paper right now," Freddy said, and coughed.

"Of course it matters," I snapped, turning on him. "The sky is always above us. There's got to be some intuition left in you that recognizes the sky as eternal, and laughing at us for all of our striving which couldn't be more absurd and meaningless."

"What a fucking nihilist," James said. "The sky is not eternal."

"It is as much as anything is."

"And it's easy to think nothing really matters here," James began, "when all you're encouraged to do is languish and think. You're not accountable for anything. You're young and strong. Not old and muttering over your regrets, or starving for that matter. You're just a fucking kid and you love it here. It's no wonder you don't want to leave."

"How do you mean I don't want to leave?" I asked, bewildered.

"Dylan, it's your fantasy to stay here forever. That's obvious," Freddy snorted, from the side. "When does this path end?"

"I do want to leave. Of course I want to leave. But I'm not so young and stupid to not realize we're in paradise here."

"Ah man, come on," Freddy said.

James smiled and bending his head lit a cigarette.

My head was splitting. The day had faded so quickly. First we were back in the house and it was night and Freddy or James had turned the lights on.

I sat down and I lay my head back and then I thought I was dreaming, but they had taken me out and it was close to midnight, after midnight. I couldn't see the stars anymore.

The room I was in was so hot that my skin was ready to peel straight off. I wondered where Gretchen had gone. I wondered where Freddy and James had gone off to.

People came up to me and I smiled at them and slapped them on their backs or they ran into me and spilled their drinks upon my feet. Apparently I was holding one as well because I remember it tipping and trailing down the side of my pants. Steady. The room pulsated. People were dancing everywhere.

I couldn't breathe. My throat felt constricted. I thought I smelled smoke and followed its scent to the door. Once, I bounded into it and again and again until it creaked open and I fell to the ground, soaking in fresh dirt and air.

People stood above me, dragging cigarettes from peach-kissed mouths. I lifted myself up.

"Who the hell—"

I pushed past one kid, tall and skinny in the dark, and walked up the wooded hill away from the party.

I must have had a jacket at one point though it seemed to have disappeared and I walked through the brisk night in nothing but a red polo and cargo shorts. I jerked my hands in my pockets and threw my head back.

Where were the stars?

More kids laughing up ahead. There were two of them. A girl and a boy. The boy walked with his head tilted toward the girl and his hands at his sides. The girl swayed back and forth and held a cigarette between thin fingers. She tried to hand it off to him but he refused.

I began walking faster, the cold biting at my skin and pushing me to start running. As I passed them, I heard my name delicately pronounced. In her white hat again, huddling under a coat too big for her tiny shoulders walked the girl who had worn the knee high socks.

"Hey," she said, sucking with pink lips from a barely lit cigarette. "I don't smoke, Dylan. Someone just gave this cigarette to me. Do you smoke?"

"No," I said and reached back and took it from her. I sucked in a line of smoke from its end and then tossed it to the ground and turned my back to keep walking.

At the edge of the woods, there was a drop down to a gravel road and across was a dry, twig lain field that stretched out before lower class dorms.

I could hear the crunch of boots in the leaves through the woods and I waited there for her.

"Goodnight Alice, I'll see you later," her companion said.

"Goodnight."

"Hey—" she said coming up beside me and I grabbed her at the waist and kissed her tobacco laced, vodka soaked mouth.

"Oh," she said.

"Where do you live? Over this hill—?"

"Yes..."

I took her hand and dragged her down to the road. She kept my pace a little behind as I headed across the field to the locked tight door of a red brick building.

"This your dorm?"

"Yeah," she said.

"I want to come home with you," I said.

"Okay," she said, her eyes—clearly blue now—lowering.

I picked up her chin and shoved my mouth against hers and with my eyes open, I saw her eyelashes flutter back.

"Inside," I said.

She turned the key and let us in upon a brightly lit, blue carpeted hallway. We wandered down to the end and she pushed upon a door to a room that had two twin beds on either side, desks between them. Her bed was the one shoved up beside the window with a dull green comforter and little lights strung around it.

"Turn these off," I said and she yanked the cord from the wall. "Down," I instructed.

And she lay herself down on the bed and then lifted up on her elbows. Her mouth was open and her eyes wide. I smiled in the dark and her eyes trailed down to my teeth. I took my pants off and my shirt and kneeled upon the bed. She rose up to kiss me and I took her clothes off of her.

"Let's get under these covers," I said.

Daylight had begun to break outside the window in a steel grey.

She made the sounds of a resisting animal yet completely yielded to me. I turned her around and had her that way and her hand dangled off from the bed.

In the quiet of the rising sun, which brightened as a whole in a glare, I brushed back the hair from her temples and ran my hand down her cheek along her chin.

"You shouldn't cover up your pimples with makeup. Just let them show," I said.

"All right," she breathed.

"You're very beautiful," I sighed into her hair. "I'm glad your roommate isn't home."

"She has a boyfriend."

"And you?"

"No. Do you have someone?"

I grazed my hand down to the small swelling of her hip and her soft belly. "No."

"Girls must often be letting you in their bedrooms."

"No," I said and laughed in a snort. I turned her over. "And you? Fucking many boys?"

She turned her head away. "No, I've only been having sex about a year," the girl said.

"Ah," I said. "Yeah, I can tell. You need to learn to relax and not think too much. I want to see all your unconscious movements."

She studied me with her large eyes and half-smiled.

For a while we slept and when the sun was bright and urgent and the sounds of people walking outside filled the room, I nudged her awake and rubbing her eyes, she rose. I walked with her to the cafeteria across from her building and we sat at a table before a window that was long and slick with sunshine and she ate a large plate of french toast with coffee. I ate plain buttered toast.

"You shouldn't drink coffee with milk. It'll turn your teeth yellow. Black coffee is better."

"Really?" she said. "But I do drink it black."

"I'm only telling you."

"You must never come over here to the freshman cafeteria," she said.

"No. Why should I?"

On a path which sunk down into a branch of the library and continued on through the little excuse for a town, she paused at the crest.

"Goodbye," I said, and raised a quick hand to her before returning it to my pocket, and I turned toward the little white house.

An arching room at the top of the school's most dated building, of wood paneled walls, thick rouge carpets, and stained glass windows was furnished with tables of the period made of sturdy, thin wood and carved legs. There was an open path in the middle between the rows of tables leading from one pinnacled entrance to the other and I saw Alice standing at the far end.

"You follow me around don't you?" I called out.

"No," she said.

I laughed loudly enough that the wood pushed my laughter back towards me. We were the only ones in this ancient study.

"Yes you do," I said and I walked towards her and her hands were stiff at her sides. I reached for her face and cupped her chin to which she raised her eyes and then I passed by her, down stairs that were narrow and would have been pitch dark if not for the blue sheen cast by a little window.

I walked out of the back of my house which faced the woods and the path toward the outer fields when I saw her pausing at the door in her running shorts and a tight sweater.

"You might as well come in," I said.

She did not move.

"I'm only running by—" she began though she made no move to leave.

I went up to her and took her frigid hand. "Come see my house."

She came inside and we passed by the living room where James and Rachel were quietly smoking and the stoned girl with the bowl in her hand raised her eyes to Alice as we passed in the hall.

"Here," I said and pulled open the wooden door to my room.

"Wow," she murmured and stepped over the clothes that lay upon the floor. She sat down upon the little bed. I picked up a shirt from the blue typewriter and tossed it to a pile.

"You write?" she asked.

"Yeah," I said and sat down next to her on the bed. I kissed her and she opened her mouth and I pressed into her and she fell back to the pillow. Her arms were limp at her sides like a watchful dolls'.

"I write too," she whispered.

"What do you write about?"

"I write stories," she said. "Though I haven't really figured out what I want to write about yet..."

"Oh no?"

I lifted her shirt off her head. She wore a bra which gaped a little at the breasts, was unevenly hooked.

I stood up and she watched me in thrown darkness, the dying sun at my back as I stripped off my clothing.

"What do you write about?" she asked.

"Reviews," I said. "Some poetry. Open," I demanded. "What kind of underwear is this?" I peeled them off of her, some stretchy, striped material.

"I don't know," she murmured and shut her eyes tight.

"I'm sorry—" and I brought my hand to her face. She opened her light, round eyes. "They're better taken off," I said and scooting them off of her feet, I gave her myself in one thrust and the sounds from her mouth were buried in my neck.

"What are you going to do when you graduate?" she said in the settled darkness of my room. The top of her head was pressed against my cheek.

"I think I'll go to London. I have a job waiting for me there."

"Doing what—"

"It's top secret."

"You can tell me."

"Spying for the government."

She started to laugh, a rolling, unconscious laughter and her hand played at the hair on my chest.

"At last I don't believe you."

I went in behind a short blond haired kid carrying his books in a sling backpack, down the blue carpeted hall, going by freshmen who took second glances at my passing back to the last door on the right. It was slightly ajar. I pushed into it upon the darkness of a well-heated, midnight room.

The first bed by the door side was empty and the second, along the window, contained a stirring female under its covers. I saw the harsh light of the hallway framing her face as she rose to look upon he who was only a body of shadow and then recognizing me, she lay back down.

I came in and shut the door.

"I wanted to see you," I said.

"Yes," she said.

I came over by the bed where she had started to kick the covers off.

"Stay in bed like that, it's fine." I reached down and shoved off my pants and tore off my coat and shirt.
"Don't follow me anymore. I know where you are and I will come and find you when I want you."

"When? How often?"

"When I can or when I want to." I kissed her lip hard and bit her. "Or maybe this will be the last time."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it should be. Get on top of me."

She rose up from the bed and drew from her shoulders a long night shirt. Her nipples were very dark in the moonlight, new and subtle and dark. She straddled me and began to rock slowly.

"You don't know how to have sex."

She sighed and began to detach.

"No. I'll try...and teach you. Just—be slow and don't think," I said and leaned my head back and sighed.
"That's fine... that's good."

The nearing of Christmas brought the pronouncement of white lights upon the trees that overlooked Middle Path and out my window was the pale granite under gaze of the moon and the darkness of uninhabited woods behind.

My door was thrown open as I hit a key on the typewriter. I drew a paper from its metal reel.

"Hey Gretch—"

"Well who the fuck is she?" she asked in the doorway. "Are you telling me we're through?"

"I'm through with everybody." I turned to her. She was in her long brown coat and had her hair matted to the sides of her face. "Look at you," I murmured.

She stamped forward and ripped the paper from my hands and tore it up and began kicking my clothing and throwing it and bent to grab the heavy type writer and I shouldered her down to the strewn about clothes, to the hardly seen or felt wooden floor.

"Stop it," I said. "Stop it. Behave. Stop."

She was crying unseen tears that had left her cheeks run in black lines.

"Go home. Just go home. You'll see me again. Don't be so drastic."

Gretchen rose when I released her and left the room without looking back.

I stood for a while with the fan starting to whir above me, its string having been pulled suddenly in the thrashing. Then I bent and lifted the typewriter and brought it to the top shelf of the closet. I began to pick up the clothes.

"Man, you want a hit?" James asked, his face disfigured behind smoke.

"No," I said walking through the living room as I shrugged on my coat and opened the door to the cold.

"You sure?" Rachel's thin, high voice followed.

I stepped outside and began walking towards Middle Path where the trees were sighing in the wind and to the dully lit pathway and its small pebbles, passing its rooted benches and rushing people, their heads down, their cheeks cold. Then I turned off the path abruptly and slid down a hill with my knees bent, the leaves crumbling and spinning as I descended to the hard ground of a parking lot.

Ralphy was there leaning against a black car.

"Hey," he said and pulled open the door.

"Hey." I sat down on the passenger side.

"Well where do you want me to drop you off?" he asked.

"By the train station."

Ralphy looked at me with his boyish, bright eyes. "Really, man? What about graduating?"

I brought out a hunk of cash from my pocket and spread it in my fingers.

"I'll come back."

He took me to the lonely track, perched on top of a hill, the sliver slip of a moon yellow and star flanked. A flat roof reached over the platform, a dangling orange bulb hanging from its expanse.

"You want anything? A joint?" Ralphy asked.

"No. Thanks," I said and handed him a twenty. "For the gas."

"Okay. Hit me up when you come back."

"Sure," I said. "Take care Ralphy."

I got out of the car and walked up to the platform. Ralphy's black car backed up and I watched its red taillights shimmying up the road.

The wind whistled through the darkness of the woods and shook the tops of the clinging on leaves. I leaned against the brick of the station and crossed my arms and closed my eyes. The train came swiftly by and sighed in its stopping, a narrow door jutting open. The inside was lit in stark yellow against the backdrop of night. The warm red cheeks of strangers and their spread open newspapers, closed bags, and whispering children awaited me to join their slowly moving procession. I came forward and handed the man holding open the door my ticket.

"To the big city," I said and smiled wide.

"Be there by morning," the man with a long mustache answered gruffly.

I climbed the steps, sat my bag down by a window, and the the train gave a lurch. The platform upon which I had stood and its single orange light became a shrinking square in the night with the inky sky above and the silent, undriven road beside that meandered through the small towns and then the light flattened and was gone as the popping of thin filament in a fragile bulb.