

## Untitled 2.0

On the final leg of our spring break road trip, we had a bit of a problem. My 2 friends and I were headed back to Rutgers from California (It was a rather stupid idea; we spent the whole break driving). Our car broke down in Ohio Friday night, on a deserted road with no lights out in the middle of nowhere.

"I hate your stupid car!" said Leslie, who, after being silent the whole ride so far, was beginning to freak the hell out. "What are we going to do now? Who is going to help us in the middle of goddamn nowhere? How are we getting home? I can't even see you guys in front of me! Why are u guys so quiet? Am I the only one concerned about our safety here?" "Maybe if you would shut up we wouldn't have to be so quiet." said J.C. "And I think we'll be ok--maybe some cute redneck with a mullet will come by in his pickup and hitch us a ride! Heehee!" I don't even know why that was supposed to be funny--of course J.C. had to be the pinnacle of corniness, even at a time like this. But even J.C.'s corny jokes couldn't distract me from the fact that we seemed to be in deep shit somewhere in Ohio.

Why is it that its not until one is isolated in a potentially dire situation that one realizes that her closest friends are experiments in futility; human treadmills, if you will. I decided get away from the brilliant philosophising going on around me and take a short walk around to look for some semblance of help. I got exactly two steps from where I had started when I watched one of my Doc Martens disappear completely in a sinkhole. I was pulling my newly tanned boot out when I heard the faint sound of sit-com canned laughter and noticed some lights glimmering off in the fog.

Lesile and J.C. walked over to me, as I hopelessly tried to clean off my boot by stamping it on the ground, hoping to shake off the mud. "Way to go, genius," joked J.C. with a sly grin on her face. Leslie retorted, "I know you wanted to get that mud-pack facial back at the hotel spa in Cali, but this is ridiculous!" "Ha ha ha, aren't you just so damn hilarious. Aaaanywho, I think I noticed some lights or something up ahead in that fog," I said. "Ohhh, maybe it's a truck filled with some hot rednecks, just like I wanted!" "J.C., I knew you were abnormally horny, but now you're just starting to scare me. No really, I think something's headed this way." Leslie replied, "If it's a car, maybe we can ask for directions and find a way out of this stinkhole." "Yeah, no kidding," I said as I looked down at the sinkhole and the dirty Doc Martens. A few moments passed by in silence, when suddenly, a sexy, red, and certainly high-powered convertible came in to view and started to slow down as it approached us. But thanks to the fog, I wasn't able to see who was in the car, and no one in my group knew what these people intended to say or do once they stopped, no doubt, right by us.

The sexy convertible came to a very slow stop, with the headlights pointed directly at us. The light played eerily off of the fog, and made it difficult to see the newcomers, even when they stepped from the car. There seemed to be two of them.

The man who emerged from the driver's side spoke first. "Hi, I'm Cletus. And this here's my brother Daryl," he said, pointing towards the passenger. "Howdy," said Daryl, before he cleared his throat and spit.

Something moved forward from the back of the car and we all jumped as the car's headlights were turned off and we were left with only the dim light of the car's interior. Surprisingly though, this light allowed us to take in our - heroes? Cletus, a short round man of thirty-something confronted us with a big old grin and vacant eyes. Darvl. on the other hand. towered over his brother and our group and had

strong chiseled features that were just a little too defined to be considered attractive. Unlike his brother, his eyes were cold and his gaze seemed to cut through anything that it came upon. Thus, when he looked at me, I could not help but turn my head as I muttered "hello" quietly and heard it trail off into the night air.

For a minute, I thought that I had walked onto the set of the cinematic masterpiece "Twins," but Daryl's accent was less "Arnold-ish," sounding more like a soundbyte from "Deliverance." Humming the Brian Adam's tune "Cuts Like a Knife," I scanned the red car and noticed a zippered suitcase with a fish-head jutting out of the side. It was then that I noticed a strange smell emanating from the vehicle. It was something decaying, but I wasn't completely sold that it was merely the fish-head.

"It's a bit of a pity that you's got stuck out here all alone." said Cletus. "Tell us about it" I replied. "Well, I guess me and my brother Daryl here could give ya a lift into town" Cletus added. "'I reckon that would be right fine" J.C. said imitating Cletus. I wasn't sure if I was the only one who saw fish-head, but I knew everyone was aware of the smell. "How's bout you all get in car, and we can head on out?" Daryl suggested. "I think things will be okay. It is just vaporlock, it should start up in no time" I said. I had to make up something, there was no way I was going to get in that car, I had seen one to many Texas Chainsaw Massacre movies.

"That would be awesome, thanks" sputtered J.C. before I could say anything. I elbowed her and was about to decline the offer but Leslie had already climbed into the back seat. J.C. and I did the same. The stench was way worse in the car, and I just prayed that a payphone or garage was somewhere nearby.

"So what're y'all girls doing out here?" Daryl growled, "and where are you from with them there fancy clothes o' yours?" This was J.C.'s cue to start pimping her job, as she always did when someone commented on her clothes. "Well I have this, like, totally awesome job at Abercrombie n' Fitch so I get great discounts on shirts n' stuff for me and my girls!" Cletus grunted noncommittally and switched gears.

As the ride continued I found myself in that mental state of unrest that always comes as a result of not being able to decide if you are incredibly excited or scared shitless. I noticed that I was doing my little nervous habit of scraping the side of my thumb with my pointer finger. I usually do this until it bleeds, but it really varies on the severity of the situation. As I tried to get lost in the soothing sound of my own flesh scraping against itself, my dermal symphony ended in a stinger comprised of Daryl's fist against J.C.'s face. The rest of us were frozen, watching as jaw splinters and blood cascaded like wet snow in our auto-universe.

My heart seemed to stop beating as bits of J.C.'s jaw and blood splattered across Leslie's and my face. With my mouth open in shock, I tasted the bitterness of blood and I held back the urge to throw up all over the backseat. "Who are you two? What are you going to do to us?" I managed to sputter as Leslie's nails dug into the skin of my arm.

"Now wouldn't that just spoil the whole mystery of this random occurrence?" Daryl's tone was half-serious. He broke into a grin. "Nah, I'm just fucking with you guys, we just thought you girls looked cute so we decided to pick you up. Your friend just needed some Immodium Anti-Dialogue. She had the skitters of the mouth, if you know what I mean. Like I give a shit where she gets her clothes. So what do you two ladies like to do for fun?" I pondered the impossibility of feeling any more uncomfortable.

J.C. sat there in shock with an incredulous look and tears in her eyes. She

couldn't say a word and fainted on Leslie's shoulder. Leslie shrieked and said, "Oh my God! I think she's dead! Nicole, look!" I looked at J.C.'s still figure and checked her pulse. "Les, she's not dead. Will you stop screaming?" Daryl looked back with a sinister grin and said, "Yeah, listen to your pretty little friend before I pop you one too." The car was gathering speed and the outside world was a big blur to Nicole. A little bit calmed down, she began to think of a plan...

Nicole began to furiously scrape her finger against her thumb, to the point of bleeding. "Ow, I just cut myself on something!" she exclaimed. Daryl mumbled something about being close to town and some doctor's house. With the smell beginning to be horrific, Nicole's interest with the suitcase actually increased. What was in it? Why is there a fishhead? She whispered something to Leslie about the suitcase. Leslie, looking back at the suitcase, seemed to have a look of astonishment and fear. Nicole turned around to see what she was looking at.

Nicole continued to ponder about the suitcase. That awful stench intrigued her mind to the point of severe insanity. "I wonder what the fuck is in that thing. I wonder what would happen if I attempted to pry it open. Would Daryl get mad at me." As she continued to think to herself, her curiosity controlled her hand as it reached for the case...

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WHAP! Daryl planted one across Nicole's face just as he had done to JC's. "That'll teach ya to mind your own business!" he remarked as Nicole shrank back and tried to massage her bruised face with both hands. Leslie began to scream once again. Cletus' only reaction to all this was to speed up.

[Switching back to original first person narration] Luckily, all of those years of my mom forcing me to take those martial arts classes paid off. Daryl's punch was a tad off-center, so it wasn't nearly as devastating as it could have been. That, and my defensive skills were more developed than the average female college student. I continued to massage my face, feigning pain. "Ohhhh...owwwie...that hurts...", I faked, hoping to distract the two hicks. "Shut yer trap. I told ya we're gonna git to town soon. I'll get ya an ice pack or sumthin' for that face," Daryl grumbled. "Golly gee, thanks. I don't know if I can ake the pain much longer," I replied, while motioning to Leslie to get the suitcase. Leslie, though, had no intention of touching the damn thing, as she sat there, staring at the suitcase looking horrified. What about that suitcase scared her so much? Well, if she's not going to do anything about it, I will.

"Cletus, I have to go to the bathroom. Like now." I whined as we sped along the road at almost 100mph. "I don't think I can wait till we get to town." Daryl turned around and grimaced. "Awww dammit, Cletus," he said, "stop the car already. I don't want it smelling any worse than it already does!" We all jerked forward as Cletus, angry at the interruption in his concentration, slammed on the brakes to stop right then and there. "Motherf-ckers, this better be quick!" he barked, turning around in the driver's seat.

[let's keep it in first-person people!!!]

Ol' Big Dumb and Horny ( aka Cletus ) put the car in park. Daryl fumbled with the lock on his door and opened it by hand. getting out surprisinalv aracefullv and

quickly. He then reached his hand through his open door around to unlock Leslie's door and roughly dragged her out before either of us could react, slamming his own door with a huge booted kick. "You kin' go right over there where we can see ya, and I'll just stay here with yer friend. We'll play a little game. I wait three minutes and if you aren't back, I get to punch out her pretty teeth one at a time. If yer still not back after she screams I don't think you'll ever be goin to the mall together again. " He laughed at this high wit as Leslie's eyes got even rounder. Daryl's ragged teeth and leer traveled up from her too-short shorts to her waist and then up her tight tee-shirt to her mouth. This was not exactly what I had in mind. Now if only I could remeber whether when I had last charged my cell phone.

Thinking quickly, I grabbed my bag on my way out of the car. Daryl and Cletus both started to object, but I simply uttered, "girly stuff," and they understood and backed off. I walked about twenty feet away, near some thick brush, and squatted down so that I was out of sight. As soon as I couldn't see their heads anymore, I reached into my bag to see if I had anything useful to help our escape. The first things I found were a tiny pink tin box and a pen. Then out came my note book. I scribbled a quick "help me" note, with all the information I could think of, put it in the tin box. I immediately stuffed that in my pocket and reached into my bag to find my cell phone. "Shit!" I exclaimed as I discovered that the battery had died. That was all I could do. I popped everything into my bag again, minus the box in my pocket, and I got up and went back to the car. We all got in without much ado, and then sped away. The outline of a town was beginning to become faintly visible in the horizon.

As we got closer to the town I began to wonder where they might be taking us. I guess it could be worse. At least there might hopefully be some people in the town. People were better than trees and wilderness and dirt roads. But where in the town were we headed?

"Last stop" Cletus called as he parked the car at a cheap motel near the outskirts of town. Dusk was approaching. Daryl got out of the car and walked into the lobby, and came out ten minutes later with a set of keys. "We sleep here tonight, girls, and then tomorrow we drive through town to the meeting." We all piled into the small room. That night the men shared one bed and us girls shared the other. In the morning, before the men woke up, I snuck out of bed and out the door, quietly closing it and then running over to the lobby. It was closed till 10, but the key return slot was just big enough for me to slip the tin box through, so I did. Then I quietly crept back into the room and back to bed.

I awoke to a warm breathe on the back of my neck. "Don't say a word, honey pie, this will only take a minute." Leslie, J.C. and Cletus were gone, and I was alone in the room with Daryl. I could feel his hands move across my back. I reacted instinctually—my quick hard elbow met his soft stomach. I quickly rolled to face him, and I jabbed my knee as hard as I could into his groin. I jumped out of bed, and looked down at him. His face was purple, and he was writhing in pain. "Who the hell do you think you are?!" I screamed, as I noticed massive amounts of blood all over the pillows. "Where the fuck did all this blood come from?" I roared. "MMMfff uhhhhh It's ... [gasp] from you friend. Uhhh --- Cletus took both `em to ... hospital. Herrrrrr jaw was [gasp] worse `den we hhhuuuuuuuu thought. Told `em we'd ... uuhhh sleep in..." "I've had just about enough of you," I whispered as I smashed a lamp on his head. I dragged his unconsciousness body into the bathroom, sat him on the toilet, and tied him there with bed sheets, the shower curtain, and the tie from a complimentary bathrobe. It was about time I found J.C. and Leslie, and got the hell out of this town.

The first thing I needed was some money, and damned if I was going to spend my own for this little escapade. I searched Cletus' body for a wallet, and found one. He two hundreds and a wad of ten twenties. I pocketed the cash, and patted him on the face in mock affection. "See you later big boy," I whispered as I walked away. On a whim, I turned around, and with a running start, I gave him a great big soccer kick in the jewels. "Here's a little something to remember me by," I chuckled as I walked away, for good this time. I headed for the lobby to call a cab. The tin box was still sitting in the same key return slot by the door. I could tell the manager was a real hard worker. He was sitting at the front desk, one hand holding the paper up, the other scratching his ass. The date on the paper read 'Sunday, March 17, 2002'. "Ahemm" I cleared my throat to get the manager's attention. "No vacancies. Go away," he muttered, not even lowering his paper. I got angry. "Listen, asshole," I said...

"Who you call'n asshole?!" the motel manager asked as he lifted a sawed-off shotgun up from under the counter, and aimed it directly at my head. "Woah, sorry—man..." I stammered. "We don't take kind to strangers 'round here...especially with that meet'n go'n on today." Go figure, I thought – a motel that doesn't like out-of-towners. And what the hell was this meeting that people were talking about? I raised my hands, and said "I'm just gunna go, okay?" "That's right. You jus' be on yer way." I slowly backed out of the lobby, and onto the sidewalk. I glanced from side to side, the town was small—a few motels, dirty book stores, and strip clubs lined the dusty road. It seemed like the type of place were a trucker looking for some overnight action might spend the night. I glanced at a flyer that was stapled to the telephone pole in front of me. "Come to Cletus' Love Shack – Sample The Best And Most Experienced Ladies In All Of Ohio!!!" I sighed as my eyes trailed past the flier and across the street. There sat a shiny red convertible—exactly where we had left it the night before. Suddenly I had a sick feeling that Daryl--err--Cletus hadn't taken Leslie and J.C. to the hospital, after all. (note to self—Cletus is the short fat one with the Love Shack, Daryl is the one who's short \$200 and sitting on the toilet—I think I've been mixing up their names...)

...The air was thick with smoke and the smell of construction-worker urine. Muffled laughter in one corner of the club was giving the voluptuous pole dancer a case of "is there a booger hanging out of my nose" insecurity. I could have sworn I heard one of the sperm and egg junkyards in the corner mention Daryl's name. Then everything looked like glitter for an instant and fell into blackness.

I wasn't sure how much time had passed when I woke to find myself lying in a hospital bed. My clothes were gone, and I was covered only by a thin starchy standard hospital sheet. I opened my eyes, and for an instant, I was blinded by a bright examining lamp. When my eyes adjusted to the light, I realized that I was surrounded by the thick curtain partitions that are typical to hospital emergency rooms. My senses were dulled, probably from the intravenous drip that was attached to my hand. I reached up and felt my head, which was wrapped tightly in bandages. Suddenly I was aware of a sound. Clip, clap, clip, clap. I could see a pair fancy leather shoes pass by me, beyond the curtain. The shoes stopped just to my right, where I could also hear some muffled groans. "Welluuuh, doc...what's my sentence?" asked an all too familiar voice. "Well Daryl, you done popped a testicle!"

Before I could move to try to get out of the bed, the doctor pulled back the curtain and summoned a nurse. Per his orders he told the nurse that I was to be prepped for surgery and that my head must be completely shaven in order to make the incisions necessary to perform the lobotomy that he had ordered. With that he left the room leaving me with the nurse and the now sleeping Darvl. The nurse

wheeled over a tray containing an electric razor, shaving cream, and various straight razors. As she began to squirt shaving cream into her palm, I grabbed a razor and toppled the nurse onto the bed. With the razor pressed firmly to her jugular, I led her into the bathroom. "Take off your clothes", I said as the terrified nurse began to disrobe. I let her keep her undergarments and quickly stepped into the nurses uniform. It's a little tight I thought, but oh well at least I'm no longer naked. "Now I'm going to leave you. What is the quickest way out of the hospital?" I inquired. "Leave the room, make a left and follow the corridor to the end. At the end, take a right and the exit is straight ahead," she replied still nervously glancing at the razor clutched in my hand. With this information and the lipstick, twenty dollars, and pack of Virginia Slims that I found in the pocket of the uniform, I quickly ran down the corridor and to the safety of the street.

Now that I had left the hospital, I began to wonder where the other girls had gone. Were they still alive? I would have to find them and somehow get out of this town if I ever wanted to get back to New Jersey or for that matter live. Once on the street, I realized that the hospital's neighbors were just as seedy as the rest of town. Great I thought, I get to stroll around the porn capital of Ohio in a little nurse's uniform. Suddenly, a woman approached me and asked, "Are you on your way to audition for Cletus' Love Shack, Sugar." I quickly replied, "Why yes, but I forgot my shoes, do you know where I could get a pair?" "Oh honey, you could borrow a pair of mine." With that she led me to her beat up old Ford pick up truck and handed me a pair. Amazingly the white stilleto knee high boots that she lent me fit perfectly. "Well, I guess our next stop is Cletus', hop in", she said casually eyeing my chest which was of course bulging out of the top of the too tight nurse's outfit. On the ride over she told me that her name was Miss Kitty and that she had been dancing at Cletus' for some five years now. "You'll make shit money, get roughed up every now and then, and have to deal with the assholes that come to get off, but you'll find that working there has its perks", she casually admitted as her hand reached across and found a resting spot on my thigh. "Well here we are, I hope you're ready to strut your stuff, because the next audition begins in ten minutes, and Max the assistant manager is a very impatient man." I replied, "I'm as ready as I'll ever be. Max will never forget this show", I replied as I hid the razor inside my boot.

When we arrived at Cletus' Love Shack, Miss Kitty led me to the side door. I found myself in the backstage area, which was cluttered with makeup and discarded clothing. "I'll go find Max for you honey," Kitty said. After she left me there, I took a peek out into the audience, scanning the faces to find Cletus and possibly the other girls. My heart jumped as I saw Cletus sitting with a petrified Leslie next to the stage. J.C. was nowhere to be seen. I checked the razor in my boot and got ready to go and rescue Leslie.

As I pulled my hand out of my boot, my plans were quickly halted by a hand groping my ass. I turned around and simultaneously grabbed the razor out of my boot, preparing to dismantle the hand from my ass and quite possibly from its owner's body. I was not in the mood to be fucked with! But before I could make a complete turn around the man's hand was no longer groping me but was instead grabbing the razor out of my hand. I heard Miss Kitty say "She certainly is a feisty one, isn't she Max?"

Max snorted and chuckled and replied "She most certainly is! I like this girl Kitty baby, where'd you find this beautiful lady?" "Outside the hospital. I just come from visiting Daryl. Poor darlin', if I catch that polecat bitch what done him like that..." Max snorted again, this time with no chuckle. "Take it easy, baby. He'll be all right. Shoot. you know he's been through worse'n that! Remember that time he done gone

shot himself in the foot with his shotgun?" Max snorted again, and let out a loud guffaw. "Sheeit, he was limpin' for dang-odd-near two months. Doctors said they'd hafta amputate it. Daryl wouldn't have it. He just kept on limpin', while it just plum got blacker 'n blacker, and then, praise the Lord, it got better."

Max turned to me again. "So tell me babydarlin', what's yo' name? You one awful purdy girl!" "K.C." I replied, lying so he, and more importantly, Miss Kitty, wouldn't know who I really was. "K.C.! What's that stand for? Kansas City? Sheeit, forget it honeymama, how's about you forget about this audition and you an' me go back to my office. I'm sure me an' you could work out a deal so you could get that new spot no problem! I might even give you this razor back, if'n you promise to play nice!" He grabbed my breasts and squeezed playfully. Instinctively, the next moment, my fist was firmly shoved into his sternum. He's lucky i wasn't thinking with my feet. Max, doubled over in pain, started snorting again, multiple times, and that turned onto a coughing, and then a hacking, and then it died. He stood up straight. "I like it when you play rough, butterdumplin', so let's go back to my office. Here, have this, we might be able to find some use for it." He handed me a pair of handcuffs out of his back pocket, and grabbed my shoulder and pulled me away into his office. As the door closed I could hear Kitty shouting "See darlin', I told you he'd like you!"

J.C. had her once stylish Abercrombie shirt wrapped around the lower half of her face, much like a bandit. She was quite a spectacle, stumbling through town in her bra, with a bloody shirt covering her mouth and nose, but nobody seemed to notice; or care? Clouded and desperate, she managed to make her way to the local hospital. She hadn't slept at all since she had left the car, and has no recollection of how she escaped, or what happened to her friends. As is her prayers were answered, the automatic doors to the emergency room opened, and she began to plead for help. "Do you have insurance," the clerk asked her, oblivious to her injury. At this, J.C. removed the shirt from her mouth, revealing a flaccid jaw and a swollen, bloody tongue - littered with fragments of tooth and bone. "We can't treat nobody without no insurance, less than can afford it outta pocket, which most peopl..." and she was cutoff by an almost familiar voice. "Get this child to the E.R. immediately!" This town apparently was home to one compassionate soul, who happened to be an E.R. doctor. As the gurney was being rushed to E.R. 7, and the blood was rushing to J.C.'s head, as well as her throat, she saw someone who terrified her so intensely she overcame her injury for a few seconds and screamed, spraying blood onto walls, equipment, the floor ... and Daryl.

Daryl looked like shit as he stumbled into the hospital, and slung over his shoulder was a girl, unconscious. She looked familiar. It was... "THIIKOO!!!" J.C. shouted, Nicole's name muffled by all the gunk in her mouth. Light-headedness overcame her once again, and she lost consciousness. When she woke up, she was lying in a hospital bed, naked except for the paper pajamas hospitals seem to love torturing patients with. Her clothes were folded neatly on a chair next to her bed, and on a chair right next to that one, there was a pile of clothes that looked like Nicole's. J.C. remembered her friend and tried to sit upright, but all the tubes the nurses had plugged and inserted into her, combined with what felt like a heavy dosage of morphine, kept her down. She began to feel all warm and fuzzy as the adrenaline from her panic mingled with the drugs in her blood stream, and she slipped into a stupor as she watched all the trippy colors begin to dance in front of her eyes to the music of the heart monitor hooked up to her left finger. She didn't even notice, in her catatonic state, as the doctor from the ER slipped into the room with an old-fashioned surgeon's saw.

I dlanced around Max's office. searchina for somethina I could use as a weapon.

but all I could see were porn magazines scattered on the desk and posters of women tacked to the walls. I doubted a series of papercuts would get me out of the situation. Plus, I really didn't want to touch those magazines. I glanced down at the handcuffs in my hand, wondering if I could fling them across his face or something, but before I could react, he had both my hands pinned behind me. I heard the clicking of the handcuffs, and felt the cold metal surround my wrists.

"Hey baby," Max wheezed. I thought about throwing in a corny line for effect, but decided on ramming my knee into his groin instead. "Thanks Mom," I whispered, in reference to the self-defense classes she convinced me to take before applying to college. Max looked stunned, and I almost felt pity for him as I swung my elbow into his nose, knocking him on the floor with a pit-stop resulting in a face/radiator combo...

"That looked painful" I snorted, before grabbing his keys and heading outside.

Daryl awoke to a loud buzz emitted by the television. He blinked a few times, coughed, and got up. He thought he recalled overhearing a nurse say he wouldn't be able to walk for a few weeks, yet felt strangely fine. He walked out of the hospital without a glance in his direction, and headed towards the rear parking lot. Daryl grabs his shotgun hidden in the trunk, and prays.

"Time for some fun, Girly-girl. How do you like it?" "Why don't you ask Daryl!" I replied, once again using my martial arts training to inflict pain. My foot swung under and behind me, surprising Max in between his legs. "Damn woman, you're starting to go overboard!" he snorted, doubled over, as I swung around him. "Let's try to be a little more gentle!" "Shut up," I said, using both hands, cuffed together, to place a strong, double-fisted whallop to his face. He flipped backwards with the force of the punch, and landed on his neck. It folded as I heard a disturbing "crack". He was dead, his neck snapped. I was horrified at first. I had never killed a person before. Was this my fault? It wasn't on purpose, I just wanted to hurt him! I quickly regained my composure, however, and I pulled his body behind his desk, making sure no limbs were poking out to incriminate me. I searched his body for a key, and finding it, uncuffed myself. No problem. Besides, he's probably partially responsible for J.C.'s disappearance. There's something really fucking twisted going on in this town, and I intend to find out what it is, and get both my friends and myself way the hell away from here. "Now, about Leslie..." I mumbled as I began to think of a way to get us out of here.

[PAUSE!!!! -- DO NOT SUBMIT UNTIL WE DISCUSS WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN CLASS ON TUESDAY]

The only way out seemed to be an extra door towards the back of the room. I took the two pairs of keys I somehow came across and ran out as fast as I could, yet still stumbling from the past events racing through my mind. Suddenly, a loud "THUD" was heard as I fell into the hands of a green leprechaun in the sex club set, knocking us both to the floor. "CUT! Jesus Christ, where the Hell did the leprechaun come from?!" screamed the director, jumping out of his chair. "Aye, I be lookin' for the commercial for me cereal, garrrrrr." Frank Wallace, the director, merely sighed and pointed towards the hallway. "Next set down, friend.." Nicole got up, herself, and walked off to her chair, demanding an iced tea from the interns. "God, this is easily the worst crew I've had the displeasure of working with," she muttered. "Cletus," better known as off-Broadway star Sir Francis Ruffus, came jogging along with a script in hand. "Er, excuse me my good fellows, but I do believe my script is not matching up with the one Nicole seems to be working from, that it seems, indeed," he mumbled in his articulate British accent. "Leslie." or Sandra Kartwrite. teen movie

actress, also came running along with her own script, demanding a huddle.

"OK, now, folks, let's take a look at what we have here," said Frank, walking over to the crew, now forming a large circle around each other. "Where did we all get our scripts from? Weren't they in our mailboxes last week?" he asked. Nicole answered, "I got mine in my mailbox, but there were a lot of scribbles all over it." Sandra said she had gotten hers out of the trash bucket in the green room, thinking she accidentally knocked it in there. Sir Francis exclaimed, "I downloaded it off of fakemoviescripts.f00, and it was only \$5! I was quite ecstatic, as "Miss Kitty" told me she had paid \$10! It was right there under the title 'When College Girls Go Wild: Neurotic Thriller Part Sex'." Katherine ("Miss Kitty") threw a coffee at him, yelling that she was only kidding about where she got it from. Nicole, getting up and taking the cigarette she had been puffing on all along out of her mouth, walked over to Frank, and stared him in the face for a good long minute. "OK, hot shot director, what are we going to do now?"

Frank Wallace groaned inwardly. "Why me?" he thought. "Did Coppola have these problems? My AD is incompetent, the cinematographer is colorblind, and my soundman has tinnitus! What else can go wrong?" In a segue seen only in the likes of Hollywood, the PA came running into the soundstage. "Mike's here," the young woman said, gasping for air. "He wants to see you. Now." Frank groaned again, but this time out loud. Mike Marshall was the executive producer. This couldn't be good.

"Mikey, old boy! Good to see you again!" Frank, who was a mediocre director at best, was failing miserably at acting. It was obvious to everyone present the last person he wanted see was Marshall. "We need to talk, Frank. We need to talk now." Mike Marshall, a stocky, jovial man in his late fifties was famous for being able to maintain his upbeat nature even under the gloomiest of circumstances. A classic Hollywood rags-to-riches story, he was a self-made man who started his career as a stagehand and rose through the ranks quickly to become one of the most successful producers in Tinseltown. He was paying back one of the numerous debts he acquired over the years by hiring Wallace, the son of a senator, to direct "Teenage Rampage," a project so safe even an idiot couldn't screw up. Three days into the shooting, he was beginning to doubt himself.

"Cut the crap, Wallace," Mike demanded. "What's going on here?" Wallace looked nervously around the set, hoping for a distraction. When none was forthcoming he regarded the executive producer with trepidation. "Um, there seems to have been a mix-up with the scripts." A vein protruded from Marshall's forehead, illustrating his anger. "There's been a what?!"

"This is the first time I see this bastard without that stupid grin of his," thought the director. "Sure, Mikey, no problem. Take five everybody! We'll call you when we're ready for you!" the more Wallace tried to appear to be in control, the more pitiful he started to look. Marshall waited until the last trailer door closed behind a perplexed looking cast member. "Did you know whom she's been going out with lately?" "But Mikey, I don't...I don't know what you mean." stuttered Wallace. "Don't call me Mikey, asshole. To you the name is Mr. Marshall, you got that? And don't pretend to be more stupid than you already are: I didn't become what I am today by not knowing about what's going on on my sets, OK? Kartwrite, that's whom I'm talkin' about. You've been buffing the girlfriend of Joey 'the Blade' Vincenti, you dumb son of a bitch, you!"

Wallace anxiously tried to think of something he could say to alleviate Marshall's anger, but he knew whatever he said would be a long shot in achieving this. "Umm...You see...uhh-" Just then Nicole interrupted Mike's incoherent stuttering.

"Marshall, listen, sorry about the confusion, but I think I can explain. Wallace provided us all with the proper scrips, but some of us misplaced them and got them from less reliable sources."

Frank wondered to himself for a moment with an eyebrow raised, and then finally shot the question to Nicole: "Just out of curiosity, why didn't anyone say anything during filming, when you could obviously tell that your scripts weren't the same as the others?" Nicole smiled for a second, and replied, "Because the film's story seemed to be going so well, I guess none of us wanted to interrupt the flow of things!" Frank instantly shot up with a look of amazement, nearly falling over. "You thought the storyline was WHAT?!?" Marshall cleared his throat, demanding to see what had already been filmed, and shoed Nicole back to her trailer. He then turned his full attention back to Frank.

"So what do you think we should do now?" Frank asked the red faced executive. Marshall turned to him and said, "I want this film to stay on schedule. You have one week left, and if I don't have a coherent, stable, sellable movie by then, you can think about moving the decimal point in your salary a couple places to the left!" And with that, he stomped off the set. Frank called one of the assistants over and ordered the distribution of "official" scripts. "We're going to start shooting as soon as everybody gets the scripts. Make sure the cast knows." "Yes sir," the lackey said as he ran off to complete his tasks.

"Yes sir! Right away sir!" mumbled the lackey to himself. "He probably just thinks I'm some lackey. He probably doesn't even know my name. I can't believe that I took this job as lackey. I'll be a big Hollywood name one day, he'll see, they'll all see! I can see the headlines now: 'George Landow, former lackey, receives Oscar for best screenplay.'" As George continued his daydream, the idea finally came. Here was his opportunity to make it big. No one knew the real script, so if somehow a script, co-written by George Landow, former lackey, got passed out, he could finally get a movie made.

Nicole stormed back to the serenity of her trailer, away from the mumbling and yelling of the "bigwig film guys," as she liked to calm them in the privacy of her own mind. She sat down to check her email, something she could barely keep up with during film time. "What's this?" she thought as she opened an email titled "WARNING!" Her mouth dropped as she read the horrifying news inside...

It was a message from her mother. "I thought it was best to forward this to you, dear. I got it from your Aunt Sadie." Nicole began to read: "I didn't believe it myself, but then my friend, who is with the LAPD, verified that this is true. The MAFIA is running the Hollywood film industry, but with a more sinister motive than ruining the minds of fine American young people. They lure innocent young girls, mostly white, into the film business with promises of stardom. These young girls are then DUPED into becoming the concubines of opium DRUG lords in Taiwan! DON'T let this happen to someone you love! This white SLAVE ring cannot be stopped as the MAFIA are VERY powerful. The only thing you can do is be on your GUARD. DON'T go home with strange men wearing too much gold jewelry. DON'T believe men who flash business cards in your face, even if the company is a recognizable one. These people are very, very smart. DO NOT be fooled!

"Crap mom, I thought I told you to stop taking those chain letters seriously," Nicole sighed to herself as she promptly deleted her mail. After a moment's rest, the calm silence of Nicole's trailer was broken by the sound of Frank Wallace banging on the door. "Whaddya think you're doing taking a break in there, Nic?! Time to film the big dance number in the sex house!" "Oh. I take it we got a hold of some real scripts

now?" "..... yeah, if you wanna call it that. Our lackey, er... assistant, Landow, went and found them for us" "*\*Wonderful\**," Nicole said dryly. "So, what outfit do I need for this dance scene?" "The clothes should be all ready for everyone by the set inside" Unknown to Nicole and Mike was Landow lurking behind Nicole's trailer. "Hehehe, now they'll see what an awesome screenplay writer I am! The text in the next scene is so hyper, it will blow them away! No more lame lackey-man for me any more! Time for my big break," thought Landow as he dashed off back to the set to make the final preparations for the scene. Nicole and Frank walked back to the soundstage, and met up with all of the cast members. "I'll assume you've all read your revised scripts, so you should be ready for filming the next sequence," said Frank. "Um... yes, we did. But, I thought these scripts were new? They don't seem much improved over that last pile of garbage," wondered Sandra. "Huh, what do you mean?" Frank asked. "This dance scene seems a little...odd, and out of place." Just then, the lackey/assistant Landow approached the cast with their costumes for the dance number in the sex club: gorilla costumes.

"Wow, Mr. Wallace," stammered Landow. "This is the most impressive script I've ever seen. It's quite ingenious of the writer to highlight the animalistic, rhizomatic, nature of sexuality in modern film with these gorilla costumes." Sandra and Frank just ignored the lackey. "You're right, this is ridiculous—I've got to talk to the studio about this script. This is the worst thing I've read since *Dirty Dancing*" Frank said, to Sandra, as he went looking for another assistant with a telephone.

Landow, pushed aside by Frank as he left to look for another assistant, retreated to the shadows. "The worst thing I've read since *Dirty Dancing*?!" Landow fumed. "I'll show them all!" He pushed his glasses up farther on his nose and then reached into his tweed jacket to pull out a sawed off shotgun.

"No one's going to talk about me like that," muttered Landow to himself. "But is it worth it? If I do this there will be no chance of me getting my big break," he thought. "Oh fuck it. I'm tired of this bullshit and these guys are gonna pay!" Just then Nicole walked up behind Landow and took the shotgun out of his hand. "God this is ridiculous!" exclaimed Nicole. "What the hell were we supposed to do with gorilla suits and sawed off shotguns? I think this movie needs a new script, a new costume designer, and a new props crew!"

"That does it!" screamed the lackey as he charged Nicole. The glasses fell off the head of the short-statured man as he wrapped his arms around Nicole. She fell back, and George Landow landed on top of her, straddling the actress as he punched her gorilla mask-covered head. "'Worse than *Dirty Dancing*' . . . 'ridiculous. . .'" mumbled Landow as he threw punch after punch at the grinning gorilla beneath him.

Sir Francis Ruffus came running along, hearing the commotion of the fight. "Err, uh, I do believe... yes... oh, my.. my good man, I do believe this is quite a horrific way to react!" Sir Francis took a moment to himself, and watched the smack-down ensue. With each hit, he seemed to grow back more and more into part of his role as "Cletus," the cursing, bad-ass hick he had just been playing. Through his performance on this movie, he had grown attached to his cast-mates, and couldn't stand to watch Nicole be hit any more. Sir Francis let out a bloodcurdling scream, and pounced on top of Landow.

The three rolled around on the floor for about a minute before someone decided to intervene. Sir Francis ended up knocking Landow out. Nicole's gorilla head got stuck for a while afterwards and no one could get it off.

Luckily, after numerous attempts to remove the mask, the leprechaun accidentally walked in on this disaster of a crew and cast. tripped over a box on the

ground, and flew onto Nicole's neck causing enough pressure to pop off the gorilla mask. Nicole screamed with joy and hugged the leprechaun, thanking him for saving her life.

"Ok enough of this" cried Frank. "Oh God, I'm definitely going to lose my job after this," he thought. "And what the hell is a leprechaun doing on this set? Go back to the filming of Leprachaun 4 on set 14" said Frank as the leprachaun reluctantly walked away from Nicole's embrace.

The leprechaun muttered a faint, "Fuck you," that Frank luckily didn't hear. Nicole heard it, however, and chuckled softly. "What are you laughing at?" Frank demanded. "You think this is funny?" Nicole simply shrugged and walked back toward the set. "I wasn't done talking to you!" Frank yelled at her retreating back.

"Yeah well I'm done listening!" shot back Nicole. "I thought I would give this a shot, but I'm only wasting my time. This movie's just going to ruin my career, so I quit." Nicole walked out of the door as Frank yelled, "What! You know you can't do this to me and this movie! Oh forget it! I don't need you!" That was the last thing Nicole heard out of Frank's mouth as she walked out of the door. She then pulled out her cell phone and made a call. "Hey it's me," she said in an upbeat voice. "What's going on with you?" replied the voice at the other end of the line. "You sound happy. I'm guessing that shooting is going well," said the voice. "Actually, I quit," said Nicole waiting for a reply. "You're kidding me. No way. Are you ok? I mean you sound ok, but-" "I'm fine," interrupted Nicole. "Actually I'm happy. The whole thing was bullshit. We had the wrong scripts, the wrong costumes- Listen I'll be home in half an hour, and I'll tell you the whole story. I love you." "but-" interrupted Valerie but line was dead. Valerie sat back in her chair, and thought about the conversation she just had with her girlfriend. "I can't believe her. Well I guess her spontaneity is what I love about her," she thought. Valerie then turned back to her computer and anxiously resumed her work, knowing that she'd have to stop before Nicole got back.

Unfortunately, Frank knew that his film had now become only a fleeting dream and that his vision had been brutally destroyed and turned into a mockery or, if he was truly lucky, a cult classic. However, he also knew that he had to complete this film or else be viewed as an unreliable director forever. Thus, Frank decided to make an attempt at salvaging the script.

Frank pulled out his cell phone and walked to his office. He locked the door and shut out all of the chaos with the intention of tapping a few favors. "Where the hell is my address book?" he thought. There. He opened it up and flipped through. Applebury, Atwater...ahh the prize! Barrios, Barclay: 732 445 2106

Frank picked up the phone to dial Barclay's number, but realized the line was dead. "What the..." Furiously, he darted out of the room, colliding right into Landow, who had been trying to eavesdrop through the door.

"What the hell do you want?" Frank shouted. To his credit, Landow didn't even flinch. "Listen, I know a way to salvage this shoot," the other man said excitedly. "This script..." "This script is a lousy piece of crap," Frank interjected. "It has no storyline, no visuals, and absolutely no character development-" He stopped and thought for a moment. He'd just described almost every other movie that Hollywood was producing everyday. "Okay," he sighed. "What's your idea?" The lackey-writer smiled.

"I saw Jeff Bridges walking around set 12," continued Landow. "He's been pitching this idea for a sequel to that early 80's masterpiece TRON. Our studio has been talking to him, and I think that you and I can put together a great script."

Frank thought for a second. "I don't know if the world's ready for another TRON," he commented. "I've got an old friend who knows all about TRON. I'm going to visit him right now. Let's go!"

Frank was unsure as to what he was getting himself into but he also knew that he had no choice but to follow Landow. Even if this Tron sequel turned out to be a big flop, it would be impossible for it to be any worse than his current script. "Besides" he thought, "nobody ever expects a sequel to be as good as the first film and in the case of Tron, that leaves plenty of room for failure."

On the other hand, Nicole arrived home and found Valerie staring blatantly at the television screen. It seemed as if she didn't even notice that Nicole was back from the set. "Val? VAL~!" "Wha~ what? Or you're home." Valerie looked very disheveled and confused about where she was. Nicole went over to hug her friend but Valerie shriveled up and shuttered at Nicole's touch.

"Oh my God! What's the matter. Are you ok?" asked Nicole. Valerie suddenly came back to a state of normalcy and replied "Oh I'm fine. I'm just a little out of it. I've been doing a lot of work on the computer." Nicole knew nothing about Valerie's current computer project and just figured that Val was chatting online. "Oh good, you gave me a scare." Nicole then went on to talk about her day at the studio, but all Val could think about was the email she received from her hacker colleague Barclay Barrios.

Val knew that she would be unable to keep the true nature of her work a secret much longer. Sooner or later Nicole would start asking the wrong questions, or maybe the right questions, and Valerie would have no choice but to confess. Or maybe she'd just have to run away like she'd been doing all along. Valerie shook the thoughts from her head. There were more important matters at hand. She still hadn't given Barclay an answer. "...and you're not listening to a word I've said," Nicole said, breaking through Valerie's thoughts.

"Of course I was listening," replied Valerie. "Oh really? Then tell me what the last thing I said was." "Umm, you said 'you're not listening to a word I've said'" "Funny" replied Nicole dryly. "Really though, are you ok, Val? You've been acting weird ever since I got home."

Valerie sighed. "Really, I'm fine," she lied. "I've just got a lot of work to do." Valerie was amazed at how easily she could lie to the woman she loved. If only Nicole would get out of the damn acting business, then she would be safe, everything really *would* be okay. As it was, the Russian mafia meant business, and if anything happened to Nicole, Valerie knew that even Barclay wouldn't be able to help...

Frank and Landow arrived at Lucy Stone Hall at Rutgers University to find the door to Barclay Barrios' office locked. "I have to find out what he thinks of Tron 2," said Frank. Landow, just full of great ideas, decided that he could help. "Alright, Frank," the lackey shouted. "Stand back, we're going in!" Landow then kicked down the door.

Frank looked in atonishment at what Landow had done. "What the hell were you thin-" said Frank until he noticed that Barclay was in the office staring at computer screen. Barclay hadn't flinched when the door was kicked open, he just continued to gaze hypnotically at the email that Valerie had just sent him.

The words on the screen were falling onto his stunned consciousness like acid rain from the Chiba sky: "Dear Barclay, please forgive me for what I've done to you... I knew you would find out sooner or later. When I was diagnosed with

multiple-personality disorder two years ago, my shrink told me to turn to the cyberworld for help. Yes, I created Evehead, I am Tiffy, Cocky Bastard and I was behind the whole Kaycee Nicole mess. I didn't mean for you to get caught in this matrix of characters that exist only in my head, and I certainly didn't know you would teach this to all those kids..."

"What else could this girl Valerie know? I hope that she does not find out about me stealing the work of Stephen King online. Judge, I swear it was only to give my cyberlit class some intellectual growth. There seems to be a leak in the matrix." Barclay thought to himself.

"What else could this girl Valerie know? I hope that she does not find out about me stealing the work of Stephen King online. Judge, I swear it was only to give my cyberlit class some intellectual growth. There seems to be a leak in the matrix." Barclay thought to himself.

As Barclay continued to stare blankly at the computer screen, Landow walked up behind him. "Hey old buddy!" Landow exclaimed as he gave Barclay a loving slap on the back. Finally Barclay turned around to speak.

"I hear you has one of your former students appear as a guest speaker in your cyberlit class." said Landow. "Yes, that is true...but...but" replied Barclay nervously. "But what, you did not think I had the resources to find out when my genius was getting exploited! I should kill you."

"I worship your great writings on hypertext," replied Barclay. "I wish I could have written a book as enlightening as yours. Please don't hurt me. Teach me to be like you."

"Did you show them my wonderful website as well?" asked Landow. "I hope that these students have seen my greatness. I used my own students well. Little did they know...hahahahaha..." Landow's evil laugh pierced Barclay's brain.

The sound of the Landow's laughter crackled in Barclay's ears like it was coming from a blown pair of speakers. Barclay blinked a few times. The image he saw between blinks seemed pixilated and slow to refresh. Landow and Frank disappeared as the walls of Barclay's office turned into a pulsing pattern of green symbols. Barclay tried to scream, but realized that his mouth was gone. He looked down at his hands—just as they melted away into the pulsing green characters. In just a few seconds, Barclay was transformed into nothing more than a pulsing green line of code.

As most the class sat watching Tron in a dazed, half-conscious state, Barclay slept quietly. But as the random one-liner, "I wonder how you'd take to working in a pocket calculator..." boomed overhead, Barclay awoke. "Wow, this sound is really screwed up," he mumbled while scanning the room to see if anyone had noticed his nap. No one showed any sign of noticing, so he figured he was safe. What a stupid dream, he thought. It started with a three stranded spring breakers, which turned into a movie, and then he was suddenly having a conversation with perhaps the most boring person on the planet, George P. Landow, until he was sucked into the code from The Matrix. Would this semester ever end? He really needed a vacation. Maybe he's visit London this summer -he had heard that a really good Nathans had just opened up there. Barclay glanced towards the window as a raven gracefully flew by. Barclay shut his eyes, yawned, and then reopened them - just in time to see an identical bird fly past the window. "Woah...dèjà vu..." he whispered.

"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," said Barclay, "art sure no craven, Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nighthly shore--Tell me what thy

lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!" Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."