

Spring 5-18-2024

Good Girls Don't

Tess Fresco
tfresco@skidmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://creativematter.skidmore.edu/eng_stu_schol



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Fiction Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fresco, Tess, "Good Girls Don't" (2024). *English Honors Theses*. 77.
https://creativematter.skidmore.edu/eng_stu_schol/77

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Creative Matter. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Creative Matter. For more information, please contact dseiler@skidmore.edu.

Good Girls Don't

For my parents;
Thank you.

Cathy is twenty years old in Southern California. Born in 1960, she is one product of a large boom of babies born after World War II in an attempt to repopulate the planet. She is an only child of two relatively absent but well-meaning parents; Neo-Liberals who supported the War in Vietnam and cried at the Kennedy assassinations (both in '63 and '68). Cathy loves Iggy Pop and the beach and she hates Ronald Reagan and Negrinis (among other things). She ignores her parents most of the time, especially when they tell her to cut out smoking, seeing boys on the weekends, and spending time with Heather Parson. Heather is older by one year. She is more sexually adventurous, wealthier, and prettier than Cathy, and they both know this.

It's Sunday night. The girls sit on Heather's futon, situated in the corner of her cream-sicle colored bedroom. It smells like leather and smoke.

"I had a dream about him again last night," Cathy says, taking a pull.

"No!" Heather gasps. Cathy nods sadly, ashing the joint on the window sill.

"Yeah. This time it wasn't in my bedroom. We were at the beach, you and I, and I left to go to work. But when I got there, there was nobody there. And when I went to put on my uniform, he was there, in the staff locker room. Waiting for me in the dark." Cathy shivers. Heather shakes her head.

"Goddamn," Heather reflects. "You know, this stuff is really getting creepy. Did you see they found another body? A girl, again, just like us. Our age, I mean."

“I know. I saw in the paper. I think they’ve given him a nickname now – the Sunset Boulevard Killer or something like that.”

“Slayer,” Heather coughs as a plume of smoke exits her mouth. “Sunset Strip Slayer. Or Hollywood Slasher, if you prefer that.”

“Stop it,” Cathy says, shuddering. “I don’t prefer either of them. I think it’s disgusting what he does to them.” There is silence for a while. Seals & Crofts filters through the record player on the floor. And then:

“Why does he have to be here? What made him want to come to this shitty city. Like California hasn’t suffered enough.” In the past ten years since 1970, Cathy and her friends have lived through the terror of the Zodiac, The Hillside Strangler, The Night Stalker, the Freeway Killer, and too many others. This can have an effect on a young girl.

Cathy is hard pressed to leave Sherman Oaks, and Southern California in general. Not just because of the rampant killings; she’s just plain bored. She wants to hit the open road, live in a small town in the mountains where the city is nothing but a memory. She wants to move to Europe or Asia or Australia, try new foods and meet new people. Heather, on the other hand, was born for Los Angeles. Her bronze skin is like a magnet for sunshine, her hair glossy and long, shiny legs that attract every male surfer leaving the water in Malibu. She looks like the kind of girl songs are written about. She used to wait outside The Forum in Inglewood for the bands to come out, all sweaty and horned-up after their shows. Legend has it she got to third

base with Joe Walsh after an Eagles show in '77. Heather still won't admit this to Cathy.

Heather spreads out on a towel every Sunday on the beach, rubbing herself down with suntan oil and playing rock music from her spunky new portable radio. Heather is always, almost immediately, surrounded by the young men they knew from high school who are there on the beach to do the same. Or, occasionally, sticky sunburned college guys who come down from UCLA on the weekends to surf and check out girls (most of them are horrible surfers; transplants from the Midwest, Cathy speculates). But no matter if they surf, skim board, sail, or just come to fry their pale skin on the Southern California beach, if they have two eyes and a male appendage, they love Heather.

Cathy, on the other hand, works at the Jack-in-the-Box on the corner of the pier and PCH. Because of her "mediocre face shape and unpleasant attitude", the manager decided she should, when it isn't too busy, climb into a giant Jack-in-the-Box mascot suit, transforming into a caricature of the Jack cartoon, lumbering around the restaurant in overly-sized clown shoes. This means she has to wear the scratchy brown polyester trousers and huge, creepy clown head. Occasionally, she takes orders from the window in the drive through, if she's feeling particularly chatty and amicable. In the Malibu summer heat, the heavy trousers and sensible shoes make her sweat like a Civil War soldier marching into the Battle of Bull Run.

She doesn't usually mind that kind of thing, but in the summer the surfers from across the street at the beach stop in occasionally for a post-surf burger and milkshake, wearing nothing but their swim trunks and dripping in

ocean water. She mentioned this to Heather one time. “God, what are you complaining about? You get to stare at half naked babes from under the guise of a clown suit. It’s actually kind of ideal – you can stare at them for hours. I bet they don’t even notice you in that suit.” That stung a bit, because they don’t notice her; whether she is in or out of the clown costume.

“You don’t get it,” Cathy countered. “I don’t care about the way they look,” (this was only partially true). The reality was Cathy, sweaty and sticky with bits of polyester clinging to her legs, would give anything to be able to be surfing or swimming in the ocean, to be the surfers with water dripping down them. It looked so refreshing, she could faint. “Never mind.”

She wishes she could be like Heather, and lie in the sand on the beach all day becoming brown and shiny, hair lightening and warming in the sun until she can’t take the heat; running into the ocean for a brief moment to cool off, only to walk out in slow-motion with the boys on the beach staring and hanging their tongues out of their mouths like thirsty dogs. She wishes that could be her but it isn’t.

“I don’t want to go to work tomorrow,” Cathy mumbles as she buries her head in one of the many pillows on Heather’s bed. She feels her friend brush her hair away from her neck.

“Then don’t,” Heather says. “Come chill at the beach with me. I think Mike and his friends might come,” she adds. Cathy shudders. Heather knows what she’s doing.

“Really?” Cathy sits up. Heather nods. “Is Jim gonna be there?” Heather nods again. Cathy goes back face down into the pillow.

On some level, she does care that the boys from the beach never notice her. It doesn't feel good, naturally. But there is only one boy that she really cares about. Jim Davis. Heather's twin brother Mike and his friends are some of the beach rats that often hang around in Malibu and occasionally at the Jack-in-the-Box. They are all the year above Cathy, and she already feels like an annoying little sister to Heather and Mike. But when Mike and his friends come into the restaurant, in all their 21-year old, home-from-college-for-Summer glory, Cathy wishes she could sink deeper into her clown head. Jim is like Christopher Reeves meets Andy Gibb, in a toned-down, generally more breathable sort of way.

Cathy says goodbye to her friend, promising to see her tomorrow after her shift, and leaves Heather's house around 11:45. Her curfew is midnight. Heather lives on Valley Vista, in a large house with a pool and a view of the valley from the roof. It's only a few minutes by car from Cathy's but it feels like a different world, a totally new neighborhood. Cathy leaves Heather's driveway, switches her headlights on and turns on the radio. As she pulls out of the driveway she notices a parked car across from Heather's house that isn't usually there. It's a nice shade of powder blue, a 1970 Ford Pinto. She shrugs it off.

It's only a few minutes later that she realizes the car is tailing her. It's high beams are on, which is strange because it's a clear night. Cathy turns the radio louder. She's put on an oldies station. A song plays that she doesn't recognize, and the creepy melody gives Cathy the chills. "Christ," she mutters, and flips the radio off. She has

reached the part of Valley Vista where there are no streetlights. The lights in all the houses are off, the cars parked and doors locked, and no one is awake. No one except Cathy, who drives faster now, twisting down the windy street, so busy and clogged with traffic in the day but so desolate and empty now. Cathy suddenly wishes it was daytime as she turns off Valley Vista and onto a side street, and the Ford follows. He's probably just going home, she thinks. I mean, Christ, multiple people live in this neighborhood. I'm not the only one. She tries to see the outline of a head in the driver's seat but his lights are too bright. She starts to sweat. Her anxious thoughts begin to take control. What are the odds that he was just sitting in his car and immediately started driving when I left Heather's? She thinks. "Oh, God," she groans, biting her lip. She glances in the rear view mirror every five seconds now, and the car still follows. She's almost home, but she doesn't want to get out of the car.

By the time she pulls up in front of her house, she's sweating. Images of girls' mutilated bodies splashed across the front page of the LA Times fill her head. And there's her, found buried in the Santa Monica mountains. Local Woman Slain; Suspect Still at Large. She shakes the headline and images out of her head and pulls over, parking a few doors down from her house, just in case. The blue Ford speeds up and passes, continuing and turning onto Ventura Boulevard. She sighs a breath of relief, and rests her head against the wheel. Shutting off the gas, Cathy walks into the house.

Monday morning comes, as it always does.

At work, Cathy walks into the employee locker room to hear two of her coworkers chatting. “Yeah, the 26th. Two days ago,” Helen says as she pops two ibuprofen and chases it with a soda.

“That’s sick. That’s totally fucking grody. I hope that fucker gets what’s coming to him,” says Bill, shutting his locker and pinning his nametag on his yellow shirt. Cathy shivers. She knows what they’re talking about; she heard mention of it on the radio this morning. Another body.

“Hey, guys,” she says, forcing a smile.

“Hey, Cath,” Helen says. Helen is her favorite coworker. They like to gossip together about their pervy boss whose eyes and hands linger for seconds too long, and they always make faces at each other when a customer complains. Once, Helen asked a middle-aged woman how she’d like her eggs prepared on her breakfast sandwich, and the woman was horrified.

“Excuse me?” she had said. She was mid-50s, blonde, fake tits; the classic Malibu housewife. “I already said, I’d like them fried.”

“Yeah, but we can do them over easy, over hard, over medium, sunny...” Helen offered. The woman scoffed as if she couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “I’m not doing this,” She had spun around and left the restaurant. Helen had looked horrified.

“You guys talking about the Sunset Strip guy?” Cathy asks, although she knows the answer.

“Yeah,” says Bill, leaning against the wall. “They found a body in Newhall, by some water towers.

Maintenance workers found her. They were investigating a rotting flesh smell. Turns out she was shot in the head, while she was giving him head. Pretty heavy.” Cathy feels sick. The fact that this is happening in her city, under her nose. To girls her age! And what can she do about it? Just sit back and wait for it to happen to her? At that moment, their boss walks in. Henry Milton (Mr. Milton to his employees) is an obtuse and brutish man, with a large chest hardly concealed by his too-tight silk button down shirts which his nipples poke through almost every time he gets angry. Cathy would add that he has a face too pimply for his age. He is about the age of Cathy’s father, but incredibly, he looks like he could be her grandfather. He speaks too loudly, spraying bits of saliva to his addressee as he does so, and his square glasses fog up when he eats his lunch. He barrels into the staff room in a huff, his orange and gray chevron shirt peaking into two little points on either side of his chest. Cathy looks away.

“What’s going on in here, guys?” He tries to act calm and cool, like one of the 20-somethings he bosses around every day. And yet, the vein twitching on his right temple begs him to explode in a fit of anger. “It’s 7:04. Your shifts started four minutes ago. We’ve got to open the front of the house.” Bill rolls his eyes, but Cathy and Helen just smile apologetically.

“Sorry, Mr. Milton. We were just discussing...the news,” says Helen.

“Yeah, another lady was killed and raped by that Sunset Strip guy,” adds Bill. “But let’s get back to slinging burger patties, lest the fine people of Malibu miss out on their ground cow shoulders this beautiful Monday

morning.” Bill saunters through the doorway and into the dining room. Milton scoffs. If any of the girls talked to him like that, there’d be hell to pay.

“Now, I know you ladies must be frightened, especially with this all hitting so close to home,” Milton says, reaching to rub the girls’ shoulders. “But if you ever want to talk about it, I’m always here. You know Mr. Milton is your friend, right, girls?” Cathy forces a smile.

“Yes, of course we do,” she spins out of his touch and turns to get her clown pants and shoes from her locker. She suddenly wishes they were on already, rather than the tight and revealing jean shorts that seemed like a good idea this morning.

“Okay, good. Because you know I want you ladies to think of me as more than a boss. Like a close friend.” Milton smiles, leaning his arm on the wall next to Helen. The girls share an uncomfortable glance, then Helen says,

“Trust us, Mr. Milton. You are definitely a silver bullet,” Helen says. Cathy almost chokes, stifling her laughter.

“Oh, is that like a silver fox?” Milton asks. Cathy and Helen nod frantically. “Very nice, thank you girls.” He looks pleased with himself and, thankfully, ambles into the next room to check on Bill, who has begun heating up the oil for fries. Once he’s out of earshot:

“God, what a sleaze. His B.O. smells like the tuna fish we feed my cat,” comes from Helen. Cathy laughs again.

“Silver bullet, huh? Good look, Helen.”

The day drags. Cathy watches from her spot at the cash register as the sun rises in the sky and the beach becomes more crowded every hour. Heather stops in at around 11 to announce to Cathy that she'll be at the beach for the rest of the day. Milton greets her with a "hiya, Sunshine," and a wink. Heather gives him a flirtatious wave, and picks up a coke from the soda fountain.

"In your dreams," she mumbles under her breath, for only Cathy to hear. "Oh, Cath, Mike and Jim are gonna come by later on. They're in the water right now catching a few waves."

"What?!" Cathy whines, and then looks around and lowers her voice. "Heather, I'm gonna have to put the head on in a few hours. I can't handle Jim seeing me like that."

"Mellow out, Cath. He won't care. Just take it off and give him a smile; you're a total fox and your jugs look killer in that top. You'll be fine." Cathy rolls her eyes. "I'm gonna head. Later!" Heather struts out of the restaurant in a whirlwind of perfume and sandals clapping on the ground, causing the few customers seated inside to turn her way. Cathy notices them notice her, and wonders if anyone has ever looked at her that way when she leaves a restaurant. Milton comes up behind Cathy and watches Heather leave.

"Geez, she is certainly a fox, that friend of yours." Cathy cringes.

Hours later, her Jack head is on. She takes orders in the window of the drive through for a while. A blue Ford Pinto rolls up at about 12:30 and her heart leaps. Her mouth grows dry and her hands clammy.

"H-hello, welcome to Jack-in-the-Box. What can I get for you today?" The voice coming from the Pinto is a

man. He orders a classic hamburger and fries with a coke, and pulls up to the window. Cathy can hardly breathe. Is it the same car from last night? She can't tell. The man in the driver's seat is young; handsome. He's got glowing blue eyes and ruffled black hair, and when he smiles at Cathy his teeth shine. She has to remind herself he can't see her behind Jack's head. She reads him his order back and collects his cash.

"Thanks, baby. Oh, and you got something in your teeth." With that he pulls away to the next window to receive his lunch. Cathy runs her tongue over her teeth before stopping herself, realizing he was messing with her; he can't see her teeth, and Jack's smile is white as ever, painted hugely across his round head. A woman drives by later and orders two chicken sandwiches and a coke, and when she pulls up to the window, Cathy charges her for two chicken sandwiches and a coke.

"I didn't want two," the woman says. "I wanted one sandwich and one beef hamburger." Cathy disputes this.

"Are you calling me a liar? You know what, I'd like the whole meal for free." Cathy sighs. She gets a lot of these types of customers, but today, with everything going on and feeling spooked from the blue Ford, Cathy decides today is the day to try talking back. "Ma'am, I'm sorry but you ordered two chicken sandwiches, I heard you."

"So you are calling me a liar!" the woman exclaims. Cathy is silent. She rolls her eyes, which the woman thankfully can't see. "I said I would like my money back."

"Ma'am," Cathy says, growing suddenly weary. "I can cancel the order for you, if you'd like, but I cannot give the whole thing to you for free because—"

“Okay, that's it. I don't appreciate backtalk, especially not from spoiled little brats like you,” Cathy does not know what about her standing there on a 85° day in heavy pants and a mascot head makes her seem spoiled. “I'd like to speak to your manager, please. Now.” Cathy rolls her eyes, and goes to fetch Mr. Milton, who explains to the customer that of course she isn't a liar, and of course she can have the meal for free, that it is, in all likelihood, Cathy's fault, and that she is new (a lie) and bad with customers (partially a lie). He fervently apologizes and ushers Cathy away to the back, where she cleans the employee bathrooms for an hour.

Milton has decided that her “drip personality is bumming out the customers,” and so after she is done with the bathrooms he places her in front-of-house assisting the cashier and not speaking. When it's slow, she wanders about the dining room, inadvertently scaring children. Around 1:00, the surfers begin to come in. And, just like always, they appear cool and refreshed, ready to get milkshake all over the booths and drip ocean water and sand on the floor, which Cathy will have to mop up later. She keeps the Jack head on, because it's just easier that way.

They line up, one by one, and glance up at the menu above her head, ordering variations of the same meals. It goes on like this for what feels like hours. Sweat blooms again on her upper lip and brow, and she can feel her underarms saturating her yellow uniform top. Every time she sees another beach bum enter, his hair wet and body glistening, she feels the uniform growing tighter and wetter around her body until she feels the need to rip it all off and

hide in the walk-in fridge. And then; all at once, her day is simultaneously made and ruined.

Mike Parson and his gaggle of hoodlums enter the restaurant. She takes off the Jack head, almost out of instinct, and searches for Jim as she runs her hands through her hair. He's bringing up the rear of the pack, classic Jim, and is the only one wearing shoes. Usually, the restaurant has a strict "no shirt, no shoes, no dice" policy, but she lets it slide, sometimes. And prays that Milton doesn't notice.

"Hey, Cath! Good look," Mike jeers as he saunters up to the counter. His buddies laugh. He reaches over the counter to ruffle Cathy's hair and she hates it; it makes her feel like a third grader. Mike is handsome; he always has been. He even took her to the Prom her junior year. But she's known from a very young age that he was off-limits; both because of Heather and because of his reputation as a lady-killer (metaphorically speaking, of course).

"Ha-ha. Buzz off, Mike. What do you want?"

"Well, I was hoping for some service, but I guess Helen isn't around...?" He exaggeratedly puts his hand up to his forehead, pretending to scan the horizon behind Cathy for her coworker. Cathy swats his hand away.

"Sit on it, Mike," Cathy says. Mike puts his hand up in mock surrender. "She's on break. So, the regular?"

"That would be ideal, thanks Cath." He pulls out a few dollar bills and throws them on the counter, then swaggers off to find a booth he and his gang can graffiti with Surf Nazi propaganda. The rest of them order without incident, and then, suddenly, like an angel dropped to earth, appears Jim.

"Hey, Cathy," he says, also scanning the menu.

“Hi, Jim! How’re you doing?” God, she thinks. I sound like such a fucking spaz. “I mean, how’s it hangin’?” She rolls her eyes at herself and drops her head.

“It’s, uh, hangin’,” he offers.

“How’s the swell today?” she asks, trying to sound like she knows what she’s talking about.

“Decent,” he says, still perusing the menu behind her as if he hasn’t come in here millions of times and ordered the exact same thing. Okay, well, that’s enough conversation, I guess. He finally, blessedly, makes eye contact with her, and her heart trips and expands. “Hey, uh, let me get that sandwich I usually get. With the chicken. And fries.” Cathy nods, accepts his cash, and turns to hand the order to the kitchen. “Oh, Cath,” he adds. She freezes. The world ceases to spin. Cath? Did Heather tell him to call her that? What has changed? What is happening? Is it really her jugs in the shirt? She centers herself for a moment, and takes a few breaths. Turning, she sees a blush on his cheeks. He looks almost bashful. Is that what he was feeling? Shyness? Maybe this whole time he wasn’t being rude, he was just being...virginal? He swallows, and she watches his Adam's apple bob. Heat runs through her body like a live wire.

“Yeah,” she spins around, trying to appear normal, hip. She doesn’t miss the quiver in her voice, and from his chuckle, neither does he. She plants her hands on the counter. Grounds herself. Seagulls caw in the distance and cars zip by on PCH outside. After an eternity, he speaks.

“If you’re not wiped out after work, and you’re around tonight, we should go out,” Cathy almost collapses to the floor. The sweat blooms again on her upper lip and

brow and she touches those spots with her fingers. Her hair, which she has pulled back into a smart ponytail suddenly feels greasy and heavy, her stomach she feels expanding and poking through the fabric of her shirt. Her breasts, suddenly feeling heavy and cumbersome, seem to sag in a way that makes her wish she had worn a bra. Of course, in reality, none of these things happen. What is happening is Cathy becoming acutely aware of her body through Jim's eyes. She glances behind him to the booth where Mike and their friends sit. Surely, they're watching, jeering? Surely, this is some sort of joke, a prank being pulled on her.

Before she can stop herself, Cathy asks:

“Are you yanking my chain?”

Jim laughs. “No, no, nothing like that. Jeez, you can just say no if you wouldn't like it.”

“No, just – sorry, just – are you being serious?”

“Hell yeah, I am,” he responds coolly. “I was thinking I could pick you up, and we could take my car up to Topanga or Mulholland. There are a few bitchin' spots where we can sit and watch the sunset.” Cathy knows what happens when you go up to a viewpoint with a boy in his car. There are certain expectations that guys have; expectations that she wants to live up to. It's not that she hasn't ever done it before; because she has. She spent a lot of the summer with Scott, a T.A. at the community college where she's taking general education courses. He's a little older, and he's sweaty and his hair is crunchy with gel, but he gets the job done. And more importantly, he gives Cathy what she needs and rarely gets: attention.

The next thing that crosses Cathy's mind are the murders. Should she really be going up to the hills with a

guy she hardly knows? Especially right now? Her parents would just lose it. That's all she needs right now, too; her parents getting on her case about going off with a boy at nighttime. But she knows Mike and Heather, and so do her parents, and Mike and Heather know Jim. Her parents don't necessarily like Mike and Heather, but that's beside the point. She knows them well enough to know that they wouldn't be friends with a murderer. And besides, the murders started when he was away at school, anyhow. And besides—

“Please just kill me now!” Mike shouts from the booth, and his friends laugh. Cathy glares at him.

“Bite me!” Cathy yells back. She hadn't realized how long she had taken to reply to Jim. He stands there waiting, his eyes wide and lips pursed. She tries to steady her voice before she says, “Yeah, Jim. That sounds excellent.”

Heather comes over to Cathy's house after her shift ends at 4:00, because Cathy's parents are still at work. The girls are lying in the sun, baking, the concrete and brick of the house acting as an oven. Cathy doesn't have a pool, so they just lie on the patch of grass in her yard. The radio plays.

“So, are you gonna go?” asks Heather. She's lying on her stomach, tanning her back. She's wearing the most ridiculous bathing suit that would just send Cathy's mother into an absolute spiral.

“Duh, I'm gonna go! Why wouldn't I? He's a fox.” Heather laughs at that.

“I dunno, Cath, I just want you to be careful!”

“Careful, how? He’s a cool guy, isn’t he?”

“Yeah, yeah of course. He’s totally awesome. It’s just...he’s probably gonna want...something.” Cathy rolls her eyes. “Look, Cath, I’ve spent a lot of time with him...and other guys like him. And I just don’t know if it’s gonna be the, like, Dion and the Belmonts, romantic date that you want it to be.”

“God, Heather, what do you think? I’m some cherry just waiting to be popped?” She opens a bottle of coke she brought out from the kitchen. “I’m not a total Joanie Cunningham; you know I’ve done that kinda stuff before.”

“I know, I know! I’m sorry, I – look, I’m sorry, okay! I just want you to be safe. I don’t know. I don’t know. He’s just very...smooth, you know? And he gets around a lot, which I don’t think I’ve told you. Did I tell you that? That he’s such a pimp. Like a Casanova. He gets a lot of girls, is what I’m trying to say,” Cathy has never seen Heather so flustered over her words before.

“Christ, Heather, if I didn’t know any better I would think you dig him for yourself,” Cathy laughs, but she is only half joking.

“Ew, no,” Heather responds quickly. “In his dreams,” Cathy sobers at that. Heather probably is the girl he gets in his dreams.

Heather decides it would be fun if she stays for a while to help Cathy get ready for her date. She puts curlers in Cathy’s hair and blows it dry with Cathy’s mother’s dryer (which she isn’t allowed to use). Using whatever makeup Cathy still has from the Prom, Heather makes her feel beautiful, and when Cathy is worried that nothing

looks good on her, Heather drives to her house and brings back an array of outfits for Cathy to choose from.

“Thanks for helping me out, Heather,” Cathy says later. The girls sit on Cathy’s bed and smoke with the window open. It’s hot, humid. Late August. The sun will set in a few hours, and Jim and Cathy will meet up before then. “And thanks for covering for me if my parents ask.”

“Of course!” Heather answers. She puts a new record on the turntable and begins to dance. “What are friends for, anyway?”

Cathy has Heather tell Mike to tell Jim to pick her up down the street at Dinah's so her parents won't get suspicious. She leaves the house around 6:30, calling to her mother that she's going to spend the night at Heather's. Before her mother can respond Cathy is out the door and walking down the street.

It's an odd crowd at Dinah's at 6:30 on a Monday. A couple is on a first date in one of the booths, some older men sit at the counter watching the news play on the television. A group of junior high girls sit around a table and gossip, and Cathy smiles to herself; she remembers when she would come here after school with her friends to do the very same. She isn't sure now what she should do. Maybe she shouldn't have come inside. Now, will Jim feel like he'll have to buy her something? But she can't just stand there and wait for him. She sits at the counter and orders a coke. Her mother tells her she drinks so much of them, they'll turn her teeth brown.

“Thanks,” she says to the guy at the counter as he places it in front of her.

“No problemo, Blondie.” he responds, and winks. She blushes. He is handsome, in a juvenile sort of way. “Your date late or somethin’?” he asks. She is about to explain to him it’s not really a date, and they aren’t really seeing each other, and he certainly isn’t gonna buy her a dinner at Dinah’s. But it’s too long of a story.

“Something like that.” She finishes her coke in record time.

When Jim does pull up outside Dinah's, the sun is already setting, but Cathy isn't about to mention it. She feels lucky to be on this date, with this absolute stud in his hip car. Guys in her high school class never looked at her, even when she started to wear strapless tops and mascara like all the other girls. And now, in her two-year college, the guys are either twice her age or potheads and burnouts. An opportunity like this, with a guy this cute, may not come around again for Cathy. She needs everything tonight to go perfectly.

She walks calmly outside, ignoring the fact that he didn't bother to get out of his car. She runs up to the passenger side window and leans in. The radio plays a band she likes, or at least pretends to like when she's around other people. “Hey,” she says casually.

“Hey yourself,” he responds. Cheesy line. She's not sure what to say after that, so she just looks at the dashboard for a bit. “So, are you gonna get in?” he asks.

“Yeah, duh,” she says. “Sweet ride,” she adds, climbing into his truly mediocre car.

“Thanks, it's my brother's. He lets me use it when I'm home for the summer,” Jim peels out of the Dinah's parking lot and heads towards the 101.

“So, are you stoked to head back to school soon?”
Cathy asks.

“Yep, just a few more weeks and then I’m going back East. It’s so rad up there. No parents telling you what to do all the time, high school airhead chicks. The girls in college are on another level,” Cathy cringes. Why did he mention that? He must notice her discomfort. “But, like the Beach Boys say, California does have the cutest girls in the world.” He puts his hand on her thigh. God! What a line! But, it works. Cathy relaxes into his touch and smiles. “You look totally bomb, by the way.” He adds. She melts a little.

“Aw, thanks. The shirt is Heather’s,” she adds, a bit bashfully.

“Yeah, that makes sense. That’s nice she helped you out,” he says. His eyes narrow ahead on the road and his lip twitches. Cathy watches him run a hand through his magnificent, chestnut hair. “He looks like a Bee Gee!” she had said to Heather earlier. And he sure does.

“Yeah. I mean, she is my best friend and everything.”

“Really?” he asks, looking over at her. His smirk has grown a little. “I guess I didn’t realize you two were that close. That’s pretty sweet.”

Something about that rubs Cathy the wrong way. She looks at him when she asks:

“Why is it sweet?” He looks at her and his smile gets smaller. It doesn’t go away, it just shrinks.

“Oh, just because, you know. Of her and I.” Cathy’s face heats and cools at the same time; she feels chills on her cheeks as they flush. Jim is signaling to turn onto the 101.

It is at this moment Cathy almost tells Jim he should be taking Topanga Canyon to get to Malibu instead, but she doesn't mention it.

“What—” she clears her throat, and focuses all her energy on sounding relaxed. “Oh, I didn't realize you two had...you know.” Her face feels hotter now, and she flips open her compact mirror to see if she got burnt sitting out today in the sun. She sees the face of a child looking back; baby fat, dull eyes, short lashes and a stubby nose. She lacks Heather's seductive full lips and naturally high cheekbones.

“Nah, I mean, we weren't going together or anything. We just got together a few times. Maybe, like, once or twice in high school and once after. Two years ago, maybe.” How can he be so casual about it all?! She thinks. And how could Heather not have told me this? She wants to scream. Of course Heather hadn't told her; she knows how Cathy gets. Cathy would've never gone for Jim in the first place if she knew Heather had already dipped her toe into that pond. Cathy is always going on about how Heather is so much cooler and prettier and smarter and has gone with more guys, cuter guys. Cathy would never even dare compete. She would never dream of going for a guy Heather had been with, lest he compare the two. And Heather knew this. That explains why she didn't tell Cathy: she just didn't want it to stop her from making her move. Right? Am I just giving her the benefit of the doubt? Cathy feels sick. She wants to turn the car around.

“But it really didn't mean anything. Honest,” he squeezes her thigh. She offers him a weak smile.

By the time they pull up to the lookout point in Malibu, she doesn't feel much like talking. The sun has set, but the remnants left in the sky are beautiful watercolor streaks that belong on a mural. Cathy accidentally sighs.

"Hey, is everything alright?" he asks, putting the car in park. He stretches his arm around the back of her seat and turns to face her. Again, she smiles, but it lacks conviction.

"Yeah, yeah. Sorry. Yes. I'm really happy to be here with you," she tries to sound convincing. And the truth is, she is happy to be there with him. She just wishes she wasn't imagining him and Heather together the whole time. And how she is going to confront Heather about it the next day. Jim reaches over to her.

Tucking a strand of hair behind her ear, he says, "So am I." He looks to her, and it's almost too much. His Glenn Frey facial structure and beautiful eyelashes framing green, marble eyes. The same eyes that watched Heather undress in front of him. Why is he here with me? Suddenly, she panics, and turns away from him, facing the view. The ocean, miles away, glistens with the reflections of the rising moon, and moves in purple swishes reflecting the sky. She can almost smell the beach from here. The radio continues to play, softer now, and she almost wants to ask him. Why me?

She continues watching the waves crash and the cars roll by on the highway below. The wildflowers are beginning to bloom on the side of the hill, and soon they will overtake the mountains in thick droves.

The next thing she knows, they are kissing. His lips, on hers in a second, are flat and dry. But she doesn't hate it.

No, she grabs onto his hand in a quest for something deeper (intimacy, maybe). He squeezes her back, and his hand is warm and hard, and after a second he lets go of it and puts it on her face. Then it's moving down her body, to her breasts which she feels pressed against her shirt like they were in Jack-in-the-Box. She is aware, again, of how he sees her. But this time of how he feels her, and how she feels next to him. Or rather, on him, as she has moved to straddle his thighs. We are about to have sex, she is thinking, and the windows are steaming up, and then there comes a banging, loud and desperate, on the driver's side window.

Cathy screams and jumps off of Jim, fixing her hair and straightening her shirt back down over her bra (when had it come up?). Jim adjusts his pants and looks annoyed.

A young girl, about Cathy's age, is standing at the door with tears running down her face. She has a small, pale face framed by too much black hair and a trembling pink mouth. She frightenedly slams her hands to the car window and tugs at her large knitted sweater. Jim flinches and immediately locks the door. The girl slaps the windows and tries the door handles. She yells,

“Help! Please help, let me in, please!”

“What the fuck...” Jim mumbles.

Cathy and Jim are frozen to their seats. Cathy experiences a rare moment, very few of which she has experienced before, where she cannot conceptualize what is happening or what to do next. The banging continues.

“Please!” the girl looks left and right, and then behind her as if there's someone coming. Cathy looks past the girl's shoulder and sees nothing but dry brush and

California wildflowers. “There’s somebody chasing me,” the girl yells shakily into the closed window. Cathy sees no one. She turns around to check behind her again. “He’s got a gun and he’s coming after me. You have to let me in,” Jim and Cathy are still frozen to their seats. Jim looks over at Cathy, and she stares back at him. His eyes are wide and his mouth is open a bit. She sees wetness where her lips were on his face and neck, and she flinches. Jim looks back to the girl. Cathy snaps to her senses, and is about to lean over Jim to unlock the doors when his fist lands, hard and secure, around her wrist, holding her in place.

“Jim,” she whispers. “Jim, I think maybe we should let her in.”

“No way,” he says, his eyes not leaving the window. The girl is now looking worriedly around again. Cathy notices her beautiful black hair again, which she’s grown long and blown out, the way Heather does. The girl turns back and peers at Cathy with desperate blue eyes. She tries one last knock at the window.

“Please!” The fear marring her face is breaking Cathy’s heart. She starts to think about if she were that girl, in her position. Frightened, alone on a mountaintop. After one last bang and a look behind her, the girl outside finally runs off.

“Jim, I really think we ought to go and help her. I mean, you heard what they’re saying on the radio! There are some freaks out there, and she could be in real trouble.”

“Yeah, Cath, or she could be one of the freaks.”

Cathy sits back against the passenger seat, looking straight ahead, and huffs, crossing her arms. She looks out her passenger seat window at the rest of the hillside, dark

now and painted with purple night. A breeze rustles the bushes and grass and she shivers. “Maybe we ought to go look for her, huh Jim? Maybe we should drive down the hill real slow and just look out, see if we can spot her. Just to ask her if she's okay, and if she needs help.”

“Just be quiet for a second, Cath. Let me think,” he says. She’s never heard him so serious, and he sounds annoyed. She is silent for about five seconds, and then:

“I just don’t understand why we couldn’t have helped her,” Cathy feels like a child who has just been reprimanded. Worse, she feels scared now, and sadness engulfs her when she thinks about the girl she just sent away. Horrified, she feels tears begin to well.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here,” he says, as he reverses out of their spot. He pulls back onto the main road and guns it down the hill so fast that Cathy puts her previously neglected seatbelt on. She stays silent, because she doesn’t know what to say, and tries to fight the tears that are coming. Finally, they reach the bottom of the hill, and pull into a parking lot of a closed laundromat. He shoves the car in park and turns to look at her.

“Look, didn’t you hear what they’re saying on the news? About the Sunset Strip killers? Apparently, there’s two of ‘em, a guy and a chick. He isn’t working alone.” Cathy sobers and looks at Jim. The tears thankfully retreat. “I think,” Jim continues, reaching his arm over the back of Cathy’s seat and looking behind him, “this creep is using the girl to lure people in. Gets the lady murderer to pretend she needs help, because ladies usually help other ladies. Then, when the chick has the trust of the victim, he comes out and...” Jim imitates a stabbing motion multiple times

by moving his clenched fist up and down, raising his eyebrows and thinning his mouth. Cathy sits back and feels sick.

“Oh,” is all she can say. She sighs. “Oh...oh shit.” She looks ahead and slumps back into the seat. She doesn’t know what to believe. Jim could be lying to get Cathy to forget about the girl and focus on him. But then again, he could be right. “Well then maybe we ought to go home? And call the cops?” she offers. Jim snorts rudely.

“Yeah, like the pigs can do anything about it now,” he says sarcastically. “It’s fine, Cath. She’s gone. Just let it go,” he fishes a joint out of his pocket and brings it to his lips, lighting it as he cranks down the window. Cathy sighs and turns up the radio. A Billy Joel song comes on, his new hit from his new album. Cathy rolls her eyes. I can’t stand this song, she thinks to herself.

“Sick. I dig this song,” Jim says, as if he knew what she was thinking.

How can Jim like his stuff? The guy is such a corn-dog. She wouldn’t be caught dead listening to him, especially not with someone whose music taste is (she thought) as rad as Jim’s.

She rolls her eyes and switches the station, and a new single by David Bowie is reaching its crescendo. The whole album will come out next month; “Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps),” a title that in this moment rubs Cathy the wrong way. She doesn’t want to listen to it, but she can’t turn it off – it’s Bowie. “The shrieking of nothing is killing, the shrieking of nothing is killing,” he sings, and from the base of the hill she searches the horizon for something, anything, maybe somebody walking out of the

darkness. But nothing appears. The shrieking of nothing. The girl must have already come down, or maybe she got off the hill a different way. Or maybe she's still up there. There is silence, and the song in the background, and then Jim looks over at her.

“Jeez, you look way bugged out,” Jim says, passing the joint to Cathy. She looks at it and shakes her head, crossing her arms protectively over herself. Suddenly, she snaps. Why can't he just believe her? Why doesn't he understand that she is scared? She rolls her eyes and turns to him, hot anger welling up in her chest and choking her like lava.

“Yeah, I guess I am a little bugged out, Jim. I guess I am just a little freaked out after that psycho just banged on your fucking car, because now that means we definitely either just narrowly avoided a murderer, or sent a poor girl to her death. But I'm real sorry if my silence upsets you,” she sighs. Jim throws his hands in the air in mock surrender.

“Ohhh-kay...” he says, taking another drag and looking out the window. Her mother would balk at her sarcasm, and to a man, no less. But Cathy is upset, and vulnerable, and this leads to anger. Jim takes a deep breath. He looks over at her, and she crosses her arms protectively.

“I don't know, Cath. Maybe we should split, maybe I should just take you home.” She can feel the disappointment in his exhale and the way his shoulders sag. She turns to him, her features soft.

“What? No, come on Jim. It's early. Look, I'm sorry. We don't have to talk about it anymore.” Don't fuck this up, she keeps telling herself. She is still uncomfortable

and scared, but this is a feeling she shoves down, actively trying to ignore it. She reminds herself of her feelings for Jim. Even since she met him, he has been The Guy, the one who really gets her attention. He alone can make her eyelids flutter and her heart pound an imprint into her chest like a Bugs Bunny cartoon. And now she has him in his car, and he wants her. Why should she throw this opportunity away because of a little fear? A little anxiety? She is perfectly safe, she tells herself. He won't let anything happen to her. She should just try to enjoy the moment while she can, before he gets over her and moves onto some beautiful college girl. One who actually puts out...

She reaches over and grabs his hand, putting it on her forearm. He rubs her shoulder and down her arm, and this helps to calm her down a little bit. She melts into his touch. Soon, his hand slides up her shoulder to her neck, and then it's cupping her cheek. Not a moment too soon, Jim leans in and kisses Cathy, and her mind goes blank. Quickly she moves on top of him again, trying to meld their two bodies into one, so that she might not be alone in hers anymore. He is warm and tastes like the joint he's just disposed of out the window; the smell of clean laundry and some sort of patchouli cologne waft into Cathy's nose and all through her body. His groping begins again, but she doesn't mind it. He is pawing at her breasts soon, under her shirt, and she likes it enough, at least enough to take her mind off of the setting for a while. His warmth feels good, the assuredness of his solid body, his firm desire for her that she can feel on her thigh. She wants this.

What she really wants is to leave this area, get away from this bumper hill and this bumper neighborhood with

killers stalking the mountains. She really wants to get away from this whole city, this whole burn-out state and all its sicko inhabitants. But she doesn't say anything. Instead, she lets Jim kiss her, but she keeps one eye looking out the back window the whole time. After a while, Cathy can't tell how long, the windows start to fog up again, and Jim begins to flatten his seat and pull Cathy beneath him. "Wait, Jim," she starts. "Did you lock the doors?" The trepidation creeps in. Did she think this through?

"Yup," he says, and smiles. A lock of his golden hair spills over his strong, sunburnt forehead and pale bushy eyebrows, and he smiles so boyishly and earnestly and she can't help but trust him. She smiles back and pushes his hair away.

"Okay. Well, okay then." She reaches for him and they continue to fumble about in the dark with the radio on. Soon he is filling her up, and his skin hums inside hers. He grunts and groans for a while and she lies on the seat with her eyes on the ceiling of the car. There is a Grateful Dead sticker up there, and she rolls her eyes. Jim's brother would like the Grateful Dead. He touches her in between her legs and she quivers around him, then closes her eyes and throws her head back, sighing into the feeling. He talks in her ear about how good she feels and how good she's making him feel, and she tries to ignore the way he's closing his eyes instead of looking at her. Is he thinking about somebody else? Soon her eyes drift to the window, and the parking lot outside. It is dark but for a flickering street light, and Cathy can't help but think about the girl banging on the window. She wonders where she is now, and she burns around him unpleasantly. Painfully. She

winces, but he mistakes it as a sign that he's doing something right; he can't read the pain on her face. He begins to thrust harder into her, and after he finishes he cleans her stomach off with the polyester of Heather's shirt which lies on the ground, discarded. She hopes that it won't stain.

Suddenly, Cathy is reminded of Heather, and of the fact that the same man has been inside them both. What did she feel like compared to Heather? Oh, God, she just lay there like a Mormon the whole time, letting him fuck her. She bets Heather was much more enthusiastic, much more experienced, probably on top the whole time, riding him with her tits out like a cowgirl on a mechanical bull. Cathy suddenly feels self conscious, and though Jim lies next to her on the seat catching his breath totally naked, Cathy begins to get dressed.

“I'd like to go home now.”

Late the next morning, while Cathy is eating cereal and picking her split ends at the breakfast table, the news comes on the television to announce that a girl has gone missing in Los Angeles. Cathy's eyes shoot to the TV set, and the photo plastered across the screen. The face of a girl, recognizable to Cathy. A girl filled with joy at her high school graduation. A small pale face. Her hair is the same, soft and feathery just like Heathers, long, beautiful black hair. A full pink mouth. Eyes large and filled with joy. The one who banged on Jim's window last night. The news anchor states it could be related to “the string of murders that police are now referring to as the Sunset Strip

killings...” Cathy doesn’t wait for the rest of the broadcast. She calls Jim immediately.

“Did you see what’s on the TV?” she asks, her voice shaking. She pushes her corn flakes away from her.

“No, what’s up?” he asks. He sounds like he was asleep. She can picture him rubbing his eyes and running a hand through his hair.

“Turn on the news, Jim. Now.”

“Okay, alright. Jeez. gimme a sec to wake up, will ya?”

“I mean it, Jim, this is...this is pretty bad.”

“Oh, shit,” comes Jim's voice from the other side of the telephone after a few moments of silence. She forgot he was still on the line. “Ah, fuck. Goddamn.” The newscaster reports that she has been missing for over 48 hours from her home in Hermosa Beach, and any person with information on her whereabouts should contact local authorities immediately. A phone number flashes at the bottom of the screen.

“Jim, you’d better get over here.” She can almost see his smirk through the phone, and wants to remind him this isn’t a social call; she would be happy not seeing him for a good long while, but this is important, and he’s the only other person who was there last night. Like it or not, they are in this together.

The broadcast will not take the photo off the television. It’s been minutes (she really can’t tell how long, but it feels like a long time) since she talked to Jim on the phone, the picture of the beautiful girl sits on the television screen and stares into Cathy. The telephone number continues to blink at the bottom of the screen. She opens

her notebook and scrawls it in. Cathy is shocked at how young the girl in the photo looks. Surely she was not so juvenile looking last night, when she banged on Jim's door? I mean, they certainly would have helped her if they knew she was so young – 16 or 17? And her face is so angelic looking, Cathy thinks. She's never been religious, but this girl looks like a Cherub seen on the walls of the church her grandparents forced her to a few times during Easter. How could someone ever want to hurt a girl like this? Cathy sits at her kitchen table glancing every so often at the television, where eventually, the photograph fades. She tries to force herself to finish her cereal, which has now turned soggy. She praises God Himself the moment Jim arrives – not because she is happy to see him, but because she has been thinking all morning, at home alone, and her mind is beginning to grow heavy and sore in her head.

Since Cathy's parents aren't home, Jim struts in through the front door. Cathy has been chewing worriedly on her lower lip since she called him, and it's beginning to swell. She stands when he walks in, and instead of feeling butterflies and her pounding heart, she just remembers his sweaty panting on top of her last night and feels a morsel of distaste. She migrates over to the television set and sits on the couch, where he joins her while a commercial break is advertising toothpaste.

“What are we going to do?” Cathy turns to him on the couch.

“I don't know. I don't think it's really as bad as all that...” he says, but trails off, thinking and rubbing his face.

“Jim, they said she’s been missing for 48 hours. She could be dead by now. If we had just gone home and called them...”

“Okay, Cath, but there’s no point in speculating. We didn’t call them, alright?” he interjects.

“Yeah, but if we did, Jim. She could be alive. Or maybe they coulda found her sooner. I don’t know, it’s just really upsetting to me.” Cathy looks back to the TV, where the news has returned. They have removed the photo of the girl’s face. Cathy gets up and crosses to the TV, turns the volume down on the set. She flops back down on the couch, sitting farther away from Jim than before. She crosses her arms over her chest, holding herself, and rests her head back on the couch pillows. Thinking.

“And are we sure that was the same girl from last night?” Jim clarifies, shifting to look at her.

“Yes, Jim!” Cathy is exasperated. “God, you saw the photograph, didn’t you?”

“Yeah, I guess I did.”

“So it was 100% her. I remember what she looked like, Jim. I remember her face.”

Jim explodes up off the couch and begins pacing. “Okay, so what do you want to do about it then, huh? What can we do? Some sick fuck has probably already blown her brains out all over Malibu canyon, and we can’t bring her back to life.”

“Ugh, don’t be such a creep, Jim. And don’t talk like that,” Cathy gets up as well. “We need to go to the cops. We can call that hotline. They’re asking for help, and we know where she was last seen. Alive. The least we could do is go to the station and tell them we saw her last

night. She could still be alive!” Jim is shaking his head before Cathy can even get the sentence out.

“Uh-uh. No. No way, Cath. No fucking way I’m turning myself in. I’m about to go back to school, I gotta whole life ahead of me—”

“Duh, and so do I!” Cathy is starting to realize this guy is dumber than she thought, and not all that valiant or kind. Sure, he’s cute, but how handsome does he have to be to make up for his lack of moral compass? Where are his principles? “It’s not about that. We won’t get in trouble,” she says, more assuredly than she feels. Truthfully, she doesn’t know what their role is in all this. “We didn’t kill the girl. We’re just witnesses.”

“Okay, but what if they question us? What if they ask us why we didn’t let her in?” Jim asks, sitting now. He’s wandered into her kitchen and is playing with the plastic fruit on the kitchen table that her mother thinks looks classy.

“Well, why didn’t we just let her in?” Cathy almost wants to add, if you had just listened to me, we could have helped her.

“I’m not gonna argue about that anymore, Cathy. I was trying to keep us both safe. Who knows if she was on drugs or had a knife or some shit. All I’m saying is, this is gonna look totally freaky to the cops.”

She sighs. “Look, if they ask us why we didn’t help her, then we just tell them the truth. They’re not gonna punish us for being scared, stupid kids who just wanted to...” Cathy trails off and her cheeks burn. They never actually discussed what they did last night. “Well, you

know.” Cathy finishes, lamely. Jim smiles wryly and Cathy rolls her eyes.

“Cath, I really don’t think telling the cops is gonna do anything. I mean, not to be a bummer, but the chick’s probably already dead. Isn’t that a fact, that after the first 48 hours of a person being missing, the likelihood of them being dead is a lot higher? Right?” He leans on the table and Cathy has to do her best to ignore his biceps flexing under his tight blue shirt and the way his strong hands clasp each other on the kitchen table. She can’t help but shudder and remember his hands on her last night. Pride, large and blooming, enters her chest when she remembers it; that this man, gorgeous as he is, is interested in her. Or, at least, was last night. And then, there is also the familiar feeling of sadness. That he is probably just doing it for a fuck. That he is going to go back to school in a few weeks, and she won’t see him again for a while, if ever.

Jim gets up and helps himself to a glass of water from her sink. If her parents knew she had a boy over right now, while they weren't here...if Heather knew! What would Heather say? Would she be proud? Cathy rubs her hands down her face and groans. She hasn’t even told Heather what happened last night, let alone the developments of this morning. She was most likely asleep last night by the time Cathy returned home. But why hasn’t she called her yet this morning, to check in?

“Maybe I should call Heather. Yeah, I think that’s what I’ll do. I think I’ll call Heather and see what she has to say about all this,” Cathy stands but Jim stops her with a hand on her wrist. His hands feel warm, and demanding like last night. But now they are clammy – he is nervous.

“No, don’t do that,” Jim says.

“Why not?”

“Because she’ll just flip her shit and freak out, which we don’t need. And besides, she doesn’t have anything to do with this,” Cathy doesn’t miss the way Jim nervously runs his hand through his hair and pulls on his T-shirt. “Look, I really think it’ll be okay. We should just go about our days, and leave it to the cops.” Cathy tries to look as unconvinced as she feels. She worries her lower lip again, this time so hard that Jim pulls it out from between her teeth with his thumb. It’s oddly intimate. “What would it help, anyway? It’s not like we saw where she went. We just know where she was, like, seven hours ago. So it’s not like we could help them out much.”

Cathy thinks of the girl. She thinks of her family. Her parents, her siblings, grandparents, her friends, boyfriends. Did she go to school? High school? College? What kind of music did she like – punk? Or folk? Was she one of those people who thought Bob Dylan should have never transitioned to rock music? Or maybe she was one of those conspiracy theorist crazies who believed Jim Morrison was still alive. Was she popular? Where was she from? How did she end up in LA? And how did she end up on the side of that hill in Malibu with the fear of death in her eyes?

And, what keeps crawling through Cathy’s subconscious like an invasive worm burrowing into her brain: what if it had been me?

“Okay,” she lies. “Okay, fine.”

“Yeah?” Jim asks, smiling at her.

“Yes, that’s fine. We’ll leave it alone. But I think you should leave.” Jim’s smile fades.

She can’t stand to be around him. For some reason, the awe she felt towards him just twenty-four hours ago has vanished, in its place a deep blue sadness. Shame, maybe. It is a shame, she thinks, that he is so different than she thought he’d be. She only knew him from seeing him over at Heather and Mike’s, and she’d never really spoken to him all that much. But this event brought them closer, for better or worse, and now she feels as if she has seen him – how he reacts in crisis, how he deals with stress – and she doesn’t like any of it. Jim leaves without an argument, and Cathy suddenly is left all alone and very afraid. She almost wishes he would come back, if just to have another person in the house with her. She doesn’t work until the afternoon, and her parents won’t be home for hours. Besides, it isn’t like she can talk to them about this. There’s only one person left to call and she really doesn’t want to talk to her after the information she learned yesterday.

Cathy wanders into her bedroom, and although the walk from the kitchen to her bedroom is one she’s done millions of times, this time feels different. As if she just finds herself floating down the hall and through her door, her body taking control of her. She lies on her bed, and for the first time in a long time, she thinks critically. The poster of Joe Strummer on the wall stares back at her, willing her to do the right thing. She groans and flips over. Here is what she knows to be true: she doesn’t feel right about leaving this to the cops alone, knowing she could possibly help them find the girl. Even though the news is already suspecting the Sunset Strip Killers, which Cathy believes to

be true, she knows the exact time she saw the girl, which can give them an estimate on where she is now. If she's still alive.

She realizes that her eyes have closed, and so for a while she lies on her bed and stares at the blackness behind her eyelids, willing something to happen. She gets up and smokes a bit of pot, then lies back down again and sometime later feels herself falling asleep. As she drifts off, she thinks of her parents. How if they knew she was sleeping in the middle of the day, they would be horrified. How lazy this generation has become, her father would say. You used to have so much drive, such ambition! And where has it gone? her mother would chide.

She jolts awake forty-five minutes later, her heart racing and her temples throbbing. She immediately sits up and places herself in her memory. Yes, she is in her room. She had gotten up earlier and fallen back asleep. And Jim had come over. Jim! She had him in her house and hadn't even invited him into her bedroom. She could have played her new Roxy Music record for him and everything. Cathy groans, trying to banish the dream she was having from her memory. In it she was being chased by a very angry Mr. Milton with a gun up a mountain. She places her feet on the ground and tries to feel the earth beneath the shag carpet on the hardwood floor, taking deep breaths. Her fists clutch the comforter on her bed.

"What the fuck. What the fuck. What the fuck," the events of the morning catch up to her. Suddenly, a wave of anxiety hits as she realizes she'll have to tell her parents what's happened. And what if her parents force her to go to the police? They can't do that, right? And what will the

police do? Is she complicit? Cathy, standing up, realizes almost as soon as her feet start moving that something is not right. She walks to the bathroom and vomits in the toilet. When the phone rings minutes later, she is sitting on her bathroom floor, and she has to force herself up and through the house. Picking up the receiver:

“Hello, this is Cathy speaking.”

“Cath? Are you alive?” Heather’s voice comes from the other side of the line. Cathy lets out a breath she didn’t realize she was holding.

“Oh. Yeah. Hey, Heather. Yeah, I’m alive. Sorry I didn’t call. I got home way late and then this morning got...distracted.” Cathy sits on the kitchen counter and twirls the phone cord around her fingers.

“Distracted, huh?” Heather says, and Cathy can hear the smug smile on her face.

“Yeah, why?”

“Oh, just because Mark Hansen came around to hang with Mike today, and you know your pad is on his way over to ours, and he said when he drove past yours he saw Jim’s big brother’s car parked in front of your house,” Cathy rolls her eyes. “So I just thought, you know, maybe last night went real well and there’s somethin’ you’re not telling me?”

“Ugh, God. No, Heather, it’s not like that. And please tell Mark Hansen he can mind his business.” She hears Mike hollering with laughter in the background. “And that whack-job brother of yours, too. They can both shove it. Jim came over this morning because I asked him to. For a different reason.”

“Oh,” Heather sounds disappointed.

“But we did fool around last night,” Cathy adds hastily, immediately regretting it. Why does she feel the need to prove herself to Heather? Is it because of what she found out yesterday about Heather and Jim? The thought of that makes Cathy’s insides sour. She can’t confront Heather about it, she just can’t. It would be far too awkward, and what good would it do, anyway? It’s all already happened.

“Oh!” Heather adds, sounding more excited.

“Dish!”

“Well...” Cathy starts, and an unbelievable shyness overcomes her. It feels wrong to be talking about this in her parents house, at least over the phone. “Yeah, we...got horizontal.” God, I am such a spaz. Cathy moves the phone away from her ear so she doesn’t hear Heather wailing in amusement. “But look, Heather, I really need help with something.” She didn’t plan on asking Heather about this, or even telling her. But she is her best friend, and she does need her advice.

“Is everything okay?” There is still a hint of mirth in Heather’s voice, but she has settled down for the most part.

“Yeah, I just...I need your help. Can I come over?”

“Yeah, my parents are gone today and Mike and Mark are about to head up to Surfrider to catch a few. You can come whenever. Bring your swimsuit.”

“Thanks, Heather. I’ll see you soon.”

“Barf me out the door, man. You actually did it with Jim Davis?” comes Mike’s incredulous voice. “He is such a goon!” Cathy closes her eyes, flinching in embarrassment,

and turns around on Heather's bed. Mike has a look of amusement and shock on his face, leaning against the doorframe. "Damn, Cath. I didn't know you had it in you." He looks her up and down, smirking. Cathy shivers. She's known Mike for years, but after last night he seems different. More...predatorial.

"Get out, you creep!" Heather hurls a pillow at the door, which Mike easily catches. He takes it as an invitation, sauntering into the room. The girls sit on Heather's bed, where Cathy has been debriefing last night. She hasn't recapped the murder part of the evening yet.

"Just buzz off, Mike. It's not that big a deal," Cathy blushes and buries her face in Heather's pillows. She doesn't know why she feels suddenly embarrassed about it. As if Mike will think of her differently. But of course he thinks of her differently; she's not a teenager anymore.

"No, it's not that big a deal, but it is kind of a deal. Like, how was it?"

"Gross!"

"Mike! Get out!" Heather stands up and points to the door. Mike throws his hands up and begins to exit the room, tripping on Heather's bedpost and falling to the floor. Mark enters from the hallway. "Mark! Get out of my room. Mike, you too, idiot. We're trying to have a serious conversation, woman to woman."

"Whatever, dude," Mark responds. He kicks Mike, holding up some bud and Raw rolling papers.

"Oh, are we rolling?" Mike asks from the floor. Mark looks at the girls, and then back to Mike.

"You literally asked me to go get your papers, dude." Mike shrugs. Not remembering. He stands and the

boys go out to the living room to roll a joint. Heather throws her hands up in the air.

“They’re like children,” she says, exasperated. She crosses the room and closes her bedroom door as the sound of screeching Deep Purple wafts in from the living room record player.

“Children who smoke way too much pot and collect Playboy magazines,” Cathy adds, laughing. Heather laughs back.

“Ew! They’re dogs, they really are.” It feels good to laugh with Heather, Cathy realizes. When she’s away from her, she builds up this image of her in her head as a beautiful, sophisticated seductress, but when they’re just hanging out in Heather’s room like old times, they’re just two girls shooting the shit. She pushes out the reminder of last night in the car when she found out about Heather and Jim. She tells herself she’ll come back to it later, knowing she probably won’t.

“So, we had sex. And it was fine. But I need to tell you about what happened before that,” Cathy continues her story.

“Woah, woah, woah. Hold on. It was fine?” Heather wants to dive deeper. Cathy isn’t ready. She’s not ready to confront Heather yet about her indiscretion, but she doesn’t want to lie and pretend she doesn’t know.

“It was...I don’t know. I was in my head for a lot of it. But he was good. I guess. There was a lot of...grunting. And thrusting.”

Heather laughs, almost in understanding. Like she remembers.

“But that’s not what I want to talk to you about. Heather, someone knocked on our door.” Heather stops laughing.

“Like, while you guys were...”

“No, before. Some chick banged on his window when we were making out. She asked us to let her in.” Heather gasps.

“What did you do?!” she asks, sitting cross legged and hugging a pillow to her chest.

“We...well...we didn’t let her in. Jim kept talking and filling my head with all this shit about the killers that are out there right now – you know, the Sunset Strip freaks,” Heather nods, and Cathy continues. “And how one of them is a lady. And so he was saying all this shit about how this chick could be a murderer, and how we shouldn’t let her in, and—” Heather is shaking her head.

“Yeah, but that lady is old. Like, she’s in her forties or something. Same age as the dude. That’s what they think,” Heather adds. Cathy groans and covers her face with her hands. “What? Cath, what is it? I’m sure we can figure it out.”

“Heather, she’s missing! We turned her away, I turned her away because he told me to. But she’s been missing from home, and she could be in danger, and I know where she was last,” Heather’s eyes widen and eyebrows raise. She looks horrified. She goes to the record player and picks up the needle, stopping the track that had been playing The Mamas and the Papas: “Twelve Thirty.” The lyrics ring through the room. Young girls are coming to the canyon, and in the mornings, I can see them walking.

“She showed up on the news this morning. A picture of her. The same girl.”

“Oh, shit...” Heather responds.

“And Jim doesn’t want to go to the cops, but I think we should. I mean, I feel like we should tell them we saw her. It could help them, at least a little. Maybe to find where she went next,” Cathy explains. Heather is silent for a while. Thinking.

“I mean, you could. I don’t know how much it would help them. They’d just question you a whole bunch as a witness. And you might have to testify in court. It would just be a whole mess, really,” Heather pauses, and thinks, and shakes her head. “No, you should probably keep it to yourself. Just do what Jim says. I don’t know,” she goes to the window and looks outside.

“Why?” asks Cathy. It sounds so dumb coming out of her mouth, but she doesn’t know what else to say.

“I don’t know, Cath,” Heather sighs. She is tired, it seems. Or frustrated. “It’s just usually easier in these situations to let it go. If there’s anything I’ve learned over the years, it’s that you have to protect yourself.” Heather pauses. Why is she being so weird and cryptic about it? Cathy wonders. Heather turns around. “Just do what Jim wants to do. If he finds out you go to the authorities, he might be really mad. If you wanna see him again—”

“Who gives a fuck?” Cathy is surprised to hear herself saying. “Who gives a fuck if he’s mad? A girl is missing! She’s missing, maybe she’s even croaked, and I could help. Who cares if I see him again?!” Heather looks taken aback. “Look, I know this is hard for you to understand, Heather, but maybe I realized last night that

Jim isn't the hottest guy in the world. I mean, sure, he's a fox but he's also...I don't know. He can be kind of a creep. I mean, last night was really heavy and—”

“And what? What happened to the girl who wanted to come over every Wednesday after school because that's when Jim and Mike worked out in the backyard? What happened to that little dork, who memorized his schedule and stared at him on the beach and thought ‘You Make Loving Fun’ could have been written about him. That little dweeb who did anything she could to score with him?”

Cathy stands, embarrassed to be confronted with the follies and delusions of her teenagehood. “I grew up, Heather! I don't know, maybe...maybe last night I realized there's more to life than what Jim Davis thinks of me and how good I can make him feel. There's other people in the world too, and they deserve things too. Like, we all deserve respect. All women do. Not just because we're about to fuck a guy. That girl...it just doesn't feel right, to just leave her all alone. Even if she is already dead.”

Heather sighs and rests her chin on her hands. Her face is red and she keeps biting the inside of her cheek. “Okay, don't have a cow, Cathy. Jesus Christ, why did you come here? Why are you asking for my advice if you already know what you're going to do?” Heather barks back, anger heating the space behind her eyes. “If you're not gonna listen to me or Jim, you're just gonna do what you want like you always do anyway, then why even ask? I'm getting awful tired of you ragging on me all the time, acting all...self-righteous because you've taken a few community college classes. Like, just take a fucking chill pill, Cath. everything doesn't have to be the huge deal you

make it out to be. Sometimes I think you really are turning into your mother, Cath. I hate to say it, but I really do.” And then Cathy looks at Heather, really looks as if she's never looked at her before. She's smiling incredulously, but still angry, as if it's amusing how stupid this conversation is. Cathy notices the way her lips pull away from each other, and her too-white, too-sharp teeth that jut out almost too perfectly from her pink gums. Her cheeks are flushed and her nose twitches. A curly lock of hair rooted on the right side of her head has flipped over and is now lying over the left side of her hair, which she clearly doesn't notice, and Cathy can't help but realize something.

“You know, Heather, I feel sad for you sometimes. I really do! Because you live your life for other people! You do things, everything, or almost everything, for attention. Male attention! And you're so lost that you can't even give your best friend advice.” Heather looks at Cathy with disgust. “I wouldn't even want to take your advice anyway! I mean, God, is all you think about yourself? Or whoever you're going to fuck next? On some level, you're right. I do already know what's right, and it's going to the cops. Just a small part of me was hoping that you'd agree with me wholeheartedly, tell me I was right. Maybe even offer to go to the station with me.” The last bit comes out coated in the sadness Cathy feels. The sadness turns to bitterness not long after this feeling emerges. Heather still hasn't told Cathy about the fact that she slept with Jim, and now she's telling Cathy to just “do what Jim wants”? Cathy scoffs. She jumps on the opportunity to build a wall around herself, a wall of anger and hatred, and before she can think twice, she is saying: “There's only so far in life you'll get

by having a nice rack. You can't just expect everyone to fall at your feet and pretend to worship you because they know you'll suck and fuck them under the bleachers. The real world isn't like high school, okay?" Heather gasps, and Cathy can tell it was an accident.

"Woah, Cath," she takes a moment to gather herself, and Cathy's guilt seeps into her brain like a basement beginning to flood. Before she can apologize, Heather is standing. "That was, like, totally uncalled for," Cathy sees Heather's resolve harden, and her face fossilizes. The young girl Cathy once knew is gone, replaced by a venomous grown woman with a desire to wound. Heather runs her hand through her hair, steeling herself. "Okay, sorry I actually had fun and got some in high school. Sorry I wasn't a 'little miss straight-As virgin' who, by the way, nobody wanted to take to the prom." Cathy scoffs, remembering when she thought she wouldn't be able to go to the prom because she just couldn't fathom going alone and nobody had asked her. Until Mike showed up outside her house with flowers. "Yeah, I had to get my Mike to ask you. I practically begged him. I told him maybe you'd even put out, and I convinced him to take you. I knew it would be better than watching you sit on the side feeling sorry for yourself the whole night." This information, which Cathy already slightly suspected, hits her like a truck. Heather asked Mike to take her to the prom? She always just sort of thought Mike wanted to ask her because...well, she doesn't know. It's stupid. Cathy doesn't move for a few seconds. The smell of pot wafts in from the other room, and Cathy becomes lightheaded, and

an anxiety fills her, the anxiety that comes with absolute loneliness.

“Yeah, I’ve gotta go Heather. I’ll...call you,” Cathy awkwardly stumbles across the room, her legs shaking like Jell-O. She almost falls pulling on her shoes and making her way to Heather’s door. Her vision is blurring already from tears. Who is this person? Who is Heather? And who is Cathy when she’s around Heather?

Someone she does not want to be.

In the living room, she rushes past Mike and Mark taking twenty second hits out of a bong that can only be described as a biohazard. A rolled joint, ready to take to the beach, lies on the carpet next to them along with Mike’s rolling papers. “Hey Cath, where are you going? You want a hit?” Mike sits on the floor, head resting on the crouching, holding out his glass bong filled with swamp-water. He notices she’s crying, and sobers. “Woah, are you chill? What did my bitch sister do this time?” He stands up and walks over to her. Cathy ignores everything he says, except:

“I’m all good for smoking. Thanks, though, Mike.”

Cathy leaves the house as her tears continue to fall. This is so dumb, she tells herself. Why am I crying? She furiously wipes at her face as she gets in her car and drives home. As she’s waiting to turn onto her street, an idiot rolls through the stop sign causing her to stop short, slamming the breaks. The car behind her lets out a wail on the horn. “Fuck!” she slaps the wheel with both her hands like a toddler having a tantrum. She rolls up the windows and screams as loud as she can. And then she puts the car into gear and keeps driving. I fucking hate this city. She wants

to go to a small town. She needs to get out of the city, and away from the psycho whack-jobs that live here. Maybe San Luis Obispo, or Pismo Beach, or even smaller, like Half Moon Bay. No, she needs to get out of the state. She wants to go somewhere a girl can come up to the window and bang on it and be let in, because everybody knows who she is and that she isn't a crazy person. She wants to be able to drive home and not worry that she's being followed. She wants to be able to go on a date with a cute guy without worrying about if he's a murderer or not.

When she gets home, she enters the house calm and composed, in case one of her parents is home. She can't have them knowing why she's all upset. But when she enters the warm glow of her bedroom, she can let her tears fall again, and her breath comes in huffs and puffs like an angry dragon. Like she expects fire to come from her mouth, but it doesn't. Opening her desk drawer, she pulls out her notebook without hesitation. She knows this is the right choice. Talking to Heather – seeing how misguided and sad she was, as if for the first time – gave Cathy all the reassurance she needed. She walks into the kitchen, and picking up the telephone, dials the number she scratched onto the paper frantically earlier that morning. But when the man on the other end answers and Cathy confesses she has information about the missing girl, she is met with a bone-chilling response.

“She ain't missing anymore.”

She has to go in. To the station. The police want to take Cathy's statement, to ask her what else she saw. In

case that helps to solve the case – which is now being classified as a murder case. At first, when the officer on the other end of the telephone told Cathy the girl was not missing, her heart soared. Did she make it out alive? She found her way off the mountain? But her stomach plummeted just as fast as she realized what the man meant. Her body has been found. Cathy has never gone to the police before, and has to wonder what it'll be like to give a statement. Scary? Empowering? Sad? And, of course: will I have to do it alone?

But, all that can wait. It is now 2:00 and time for Cathy's afternoon shift.

Jack-in-the-Box is crowded for a Tuesday, and she can practically see the heat radiating off of the sunburnt beach-goers as they walk in the door. Cathy sweats through her shirt, and is too hot to be embarrassed. Knowledge of her appointment at the Malibu County Sheriff's office at 6:00 that evening is weighing on her just as much as the oppressive summer heat. The day drags; Cathy can only think of the girl. What was her name? She can't remember. Did they even say on the news? Surely, she would have remembered. She thinks of the fastest route to get to the station after work. Her thoughts turn to Heather, and all the horrible things they said to each other. She feels physically ill thinking about it. And about how she knows she'll be the one who will have to go over to Heather's house in a few days, once they've cooled off, to apologize.

Cathy is roused from her thoughts by Helen.

"Hey, all good?" she asks, coming to stand next to Cathy at the cash register.

"Hey, yeah. Just spacey today." Helen nods.

“How’d your date go last night? With that guy you were telling me about?”

“Oh,” Cathy almost laughs. “Oh, yeah, it was fine,” she says. She’s trying so hard to sound convincing.

“Just fine?” Helen says. “What a bummer! You were so psyched about it.”

“Yeah, I mean...it was just...he was just kind of an asshole.”

Helen opens her mouth in mock surprise. “What?! The rich, handsome, Ivy League ‘rah-rah’ fraternity boy from Sherman Oaks was an asshole?”

“Okay, okay!” Cathy can’t help but laugh. “It wasn’t all bad,” she says, more for herself than for Helen. “I mean, it was nice to, like, be with him. That felt good.”

Helen thinks. “Hmm. Like, to be with him? Or just to be with someone?”

“Someone, I guess,” Cathy admits, ashamedly. Helen smiles sadly and raises her eyebrows.

“I mean, hey, I’ve been there. I get it. But don’t settle for an asshole just because you’re lonely. You’re never really alone, right?” Cathy smiles, nods, and then the weirdest thing happens; she begins to cry. Helen looks freaked: “Oh, shit. Shit, I’m sorry, Cathy. Damn, I didn’t mean to make you upset.”

“No, no. You’re right. I just— I guess I couldn’t really tell. About him, I mean. Especially now, with everything going on. It’s hard to tell how to protect yourself, keep yourself safe from all the freaks and psychos, but also still put yourself out there and have fun like a normal person. I kept telling myself, ‘he’s probably not a murderer, so you can go out with him.’ That doesn’t

mean he's a good guy." Helen nods. And Cathy gets an idea. She wipes her mascara from where she knows it's dripped under her eyes. "Hey, Helen. Will you do something with me after work? I have something to do and I don't wanna do it alone."

"Sure—" Helen begins. Suddenly:

"Catherine," comes the voice of her boss. Cathy flinches at her full name. Mr. Milton comes around the corner from the kitchens to Cathy's post at the cash register. He stands next to her, and she can smell french-fry grease radiating off of him. "It's looking rather slow today. Let's get you in that Jack costume."

The girls take separate cars and meet at the Malibu Sheriff's Office after their shift is over. Helen makes Cathy take some deep breaths outside so she doesn't pass out, and when she walks inside the man at the reception scrutinizes her like she's lost.

"Can we help you, ladies?" the man asks, looking at the girls.

"Yeah, uh.." Cathy starts, approaching the desk. "I need...well, I called earlier—" The man cuts her off.

"What's goin' on, sweetheart? Let me guess – forget to lock your car and somebody stole your purse?" he laughs and puts his boots up on the desk.

Cathy hears Helen scoff next to her.

"No..." Cathy starts. Suddenly, horrifyingly, for the second time today, she feels fluids rising to her face. Maybe vomit, definitely tears. On seeing this, Helen rubs

her back. The officer takes a deep breath and raises his eyebrows.

“Okay, okay. What? Come on, honey. I don’t got all day. You gotta talk to me,”

“Just give her a minute, God damn.” Helen says to the cop. He falls silent and looks at Cathy expectantly. Look at that, Cathy thinks, She stood up to a man, a real live man. She spoke back to him. She stood up for Cathy, and he stopped being an asshole. Nothing bad happened. Sure, he probably doesn’t like them all that much now. But, that won’t matter. In a few seconds, she’ll never have to see him again. His disappointment will mean nothing. Cathy takes a deep breath.

“Um, I called a tip hotline earlier about a missing girl. Well, she’s not missing, I guess. I saw her. Last night. Right here in Malibu.” Cathy spits it out like it’s the hardest thing she’s ever had to say. She can imagine Jim’s reaction at her telling; how horrified he’d be. How disappointed. But she doesn’t have time to care. The man sobers as he says, “follow me,” and takes the two girls back to speak with the sergeant.

“They found her body up in Malibu Canyon,” he is saying behind his shoulder as the girls follow him, and the world is growing fuzzy around Cathy. Her ears feel warm and it sounds like she’s underwater. Her vision is going in and out, and she has to grab onto Helen’s hand to keep from keeling over and vomiting as the sergeant is telling her, “we found a body up there earlier this morning,” and “we just need to ask you a few questions about what else you saw. If she was with anyone, where she was coming from, stuff like that.” Helen is asking questions, and the

sergeant is answering them, but all that Cathy can think about is the eyes and the trembling mouth, the small pale face of the girl who asked for her help last night. The girl she turned away because a boy told her to; because it was easier to do what he wanted.

“Is that okay, Cathy? Are you okay to do that?” Helen is asking, and before Cathy knows it, she is nodding. They sit down at the desk of the sergeant, and the condescending man walks back to his post at the front desk.

“Tell me in your own words what happened last night,” the man says. He has friendly eyes and a heavy mustache that reminds Cathy of her uncle. He is looking down, writing on a notepad. I can do this, she is telling herself. The words spill out of her surprisingly easily, and she manages to leave Jim out of it. Until: “And the young man you were with? In the car? We might need to contact him as well.”

Cathy almost wants to say, “oh, no, please, leave him out of this.” She realizes Jim will be angry if the police contact him. He’ll know it was her who contacted them. And yet, she finds herself saying, “Jim Davis.” The sergeant’s file for the missing Malibu girl is lying on his desk, and when he opens it to slip Cathy’s statement and Jim’s information inside, the envelope falls open and photographs splay out. Before the sergeant can realize and slide them back out of sight, Cathy realizes they are photos of the crime scene. The dead girl, her dead body, on the side of the mountain lying on dead California wild grass.

Cathy has never seen a dead body before. She has, of course, in movies and television programs, but a real one, in a photograph, never. She didn’t even see her

grandparents after they passed; they had been cremated. The first thing she sees is the face. A face which is obviously human, but looks nothing like who Cathy remembers seeing. She has the same hair, for sure, although it is matted and tangled and no longer flowing and soft like it was last night. The eyes? It's impossible to tell; something has been burrowing in the eye sockets and the mouth. Her face, so beautiful in Cathy's memory and on the television screen this morning, seems to be filled with water. As for the rest of her body, it looks bigger than it should. Swollen, almost. Cathy feels lightheaded.

The blisters on the skin (neck, shoulders) of the girl are beginning to pop and the skin beginning to sag away from her bones. How long was she out there for? Cathy has to wonder. One of the photos reveals a foot with toes missing. Cathy looks away. The sergeant tells her they are all done here.

Cathy runs to the toilet and, for the second time today, vomits.

When the girls leave the station, Cathy is walking on sea legs. "Hey, are you gonna be okay?" Helen asks. "Want me to give you a ride home?" Cathy shakes her head.

"No, no, that's alright. I'll be alright. Promise. I'm just gonna listen to the radio real loud and I'll be fine." Helen looks unconvinced. "Really, Helen, I'll be fine. I'll see you tomorrow at work, okay?"

"Alright, sounds good," Helen says. "Wait till we tell Bill what we did tonight. He'll shit his pants." She turns and begins to walk towards her car.

“Helen?” Cathy calls. She turns. “Would you wanna go see that new movie that came out earlier this month? The one that Electric Light Orchestra did. I still haven’t seen it, and it’s about to leave theaters. Maybe this weekend?”

Helen smiles warmly. “Yeah, I love E.L.O. That sounds great.” Cathy smiles and she steadies her legs, straightening them, planting her feet firmly on the ground.

“Thanks for coming with me, Helen. Thanks a lot.”

It takes a full few days to get the image of the girl out of Cathy’s head. For the most part, this is what has been taking up real estate in her mind. She decides to put the fight with Heather on the back burner until she can forget seeing pictures of the bloated carcass of a 17-year-old. By Friday, she is feeling alright about the whole thing. Not the dead girl, no, but the decision she made. It's the right one, and she doesn’t care what Jim thinks. Not that she’s going to see him again.

There’s a knock on the door as soon as Cathy finishes eating dinner with her parents, and she goes to answer. Surprisingly, Heather is standing outside in cutoffs and sandals. Heather rarely makes the first move to apologize after the girls get in a fight. Cathy’s heart drops, and anxiety, dread, nausea all fill her stomach.

“Hey,” Cathy says through the screen door.

“Hi,” Heather responds. She seems to be looking anywhere but Cathy’s eyes. She’s twirling a lock of silky blonde hair around her pointer finger. The ends have started to fray from sun and saltwater, and in a few months

Heather's hair will turn a beautiful light brown – it changes with the seasons. Of course it does. "Can I come in?"

"Oh," Cathy is surprised to have forgotten her manners. "Yeah. Duh. Sorry. I had a weird few days."

"Yeah. Same."

"I went to the cops," Cathy blurts out. She checks behind her to see if her parents are in the next room.

"Actually, let's go to my room."

"Cathy!" comes her mother's voice from the kitchen. "Who is it?"

"It's Heather, mother. We're just going to my room for a while."

"Well, okay. But not too late," her mother replies, softer this time. Cathy shoots two thumbs up in the direction of the kitchen, but her mother can't see her. She isn't even looking.

In Cathy's room, the lights are all on, and she plays an album on her record player that always makes her feel better.

"Really?" Heather laughs as she walks in the room. "The Knack?"

"Yeah. I don't know. I was missing this song."

"It's a good song," Heather responds. Things are awkward. They feel different. Not bad, but something has shifted. It's like Heather is watching what she says, almost. Heather sits on the bed. And then when Heather begins, "So listen—" but Cathy cuts her off. Cathy doesn't know why she does it, only that she's realized these past few days how small this, all of this, is. How silly it is to be jealous over a man (a boy, really), when you could end up dead on a mountain, with maggots burrowed into your eyes and

swollen cheeks. That girl had things left unsaid. Cathy doesn't want to leave anything unsaid.

“Heather, why didn't you tell me you slept with Jim?” She's tired of holding it in. “I mean, I know it was a long time ago, but I would've liked to know. Especially before I agreed to go out with him. I mean, God, that was embarrassing! For him to tell me that in the car, and I had no idea, I mean...yeah, that blew.” Cathy has moved closer, and after she speaks she sits on the bed next to Heather.

“Yeah,” is all Heather can come up with for the moment. “Yeah, that was really lame of me. I don't know, Cath. I really don't have an excuse. I guess I was embarrassed?” The confession lands hard on Cathy. She almost laughs in disbelief.

“You?! Heather, you've never once been embarrassed in your life.” Heather shrugs and looks down. “Embarrassed, how?”

“I dunno. Like, it's embarrassing! Like, Jim is just one more guy I fucked, I guess. And I knew you liked him, so it's even more humiliating. What kind of friend does that? I mean...look at all the guys I've gotten with. I barely have any girlfriends anymore besides you because of what all the girls say about me. All of Mike's friends just think I'm a slut. Of course Jim Davis put the moves on me; everyone has. He knew he'd score. It's embarrassing. But you? He actually liked you. Like, for your personality. Before even knowing if you were gonna put out.”

Cathy is silent. She is, at first, flattered. Heather is jealous of my personality? Can that be true? This whole time – her breasts in her Jack-in-the-Box uniform, her baby

fat and unremarkable eyes, how tan she was compared to Heather – did none of that matter? Cathy feels a sense of pride. It feels good, the idea that she could be wanted because of who she is, not what she looks like or how many guys she’s slept with. And then she is hit with a wave of guilt, for feeling superior over Heather, and so she says,

“How can you be embarrassed about that?

Your...experience is a good thing right? Heather, you got to third base with Joe fucking Walsh–”

“Mostly,” Heather interjects. “I mostly got to third base.”

“Whatever, he’s a fucking Eagle,” Cathy adds, exasperated. “The point is, you’re like, the raddest girl in our year–”

“What year?” Heather exclaims, laughing. She leans forward and grabs Cathy’s hands. “Cath, we’re not part of a ‘year’ anymore. We’ve graduated; class of ‘78, remember? It doesn’t matter what people thought about me in high school, or how many guys I fucked. Sure, that was cool back then, especially to the virginal sheltered girls at our high school. But now? I have nothing going for me besides my sex appeal,” Heather adds the last part sadly.

“What? That’s not true, Heather. You’re–”

“I’m what, Cath? Beautiful? Sexy? Got a pair of stems on me? Yeah, that’s what everyone says. But it doesn’t matter, don’t you see that? You said it yourself on Tuesday. A great pair of tits will only get me so far,” Heather looks down as she says this, and Cathy wants to crawl under her covers and hide. Her cheeks flush red as she remembers the horrible things she said to her best friend. And the horrible things her best friend said to her.

Heather continues, “I don’t wanna get a job based on how I look, or how many guys want to jump my bones. I want to figure out what the fuck I’m doing with the rest of my life, and I want it to be something I like. Something I’m good at. Anyways. That’s not the point.” The guilt, gnawing and chewing at Cathy’s insides, threatens to spill out. God, what a pair of friends we are. They tore each other down in a moment of rage and explosive hatred. And though it was arduous, Cathy feels somehow that it was also necessary. There is silence, save for the record spinning on Cathy’s turntable.

“It’s like this song. ‘Good girls don’t, but I do.’ I guess I’m not a ‘good girl.’” Heather looks so sad it shatters any image of the cold-hearted menace that Cathy remembered from Tuesday.

“I’m sorry about what I said. I don’t think it’s true. You have so much more to you than the way you look. And I’m sorry those assholes from high school made you feel otherwise. Fuck Mike’s friends. They’re all putzes, anyways.” Heather smiles at this, and nods in forgiveness. Cathy continues, “I just wish you had told me, Heather. About you and Jim. I wouldn’t have gone for him otherwise.”

“I know. I shouldn’t have slept with him in the first place, and I definitely shoulda told you. But you’ve had the hots for him forever, and I didn’t want you to hate me. I know that sounds so lame. I guess I just didn’t know what to do. I’m sorry,” Heather sounds sincere. And then she adds, “it wasn’t exactly great for me, anyway.”

Cathy laughs and says, “He isn’t totally killer at it, I guess.” She sobers, looking at her friend. “Still. I– I deserved to know.”

“Okay,” Heather nods. “I’m sorry.”

And Cathy hugs her.

“And Cath, just for the record, maybe you aren’t such a good girl either. Good girls don’t park in cars with guys,” she chides.

“Yeah, good girls also don’t turn other women away from their cars and send them off to their deaths. A good girl would’ve let her in. No matter what stupid Jim Davis said,” Cathy says bitterly, lying on her stomach.

“Cath, you made a mistake; it’s okay. It’s not your fault. It’s Jim’s, really, and it’s the sicko killer dude who’s terrorizing the city. It’s their fault. Maybe we ought to start blaming them, huh?”

Cathy suddenly wonders where the girl is now. Her body. Is it being moved? Does her family know yet? Has the body been identified? What does a body even look like this long after death? She looks as unconvinced as she feels.

“So, maybe you’re not a good girl, then,” Heather offers, cutting through the silence. She is lying on Cathy’s bed now, hair sprawled out behind her like a halo. It’s funny; right now, with no makeup, freshly washed hair and a button up blouse, she looks like the picture of innocence. “Maybe you’re not a good girl. Maybe we’re just not those girls.” Heather sounds sad, and Cathy wonders why.

“I think that’s okay,” Cathy says. “At least we have a song, now. Thanks to Doug Fieger.” There is more silence for a bit, and the song ends. Good girls don’t, good

girls don't, but I do. But I do. Cathy wonders for a moment if the song was written about girls like her, who try to impress boys by having sex with them, to feel some semblance of acceptance through giving away what they were taught to keep private. Girls like her and Heather, she is now realizing.

"I talked to Mike today," Heather adds, and Cathy freezes. As long as she's known the twins, they rarely discuss things seriously.

"Uh-oh. What about? You guys never talk." Cathy says.

"That's not true. We talk," Heather looks defensive. "Okay, well, when he's not being a chode, we talk. But, anyway, he just reminded me of how when we were younger, like your freshman year, and we showed you how to smoke pot for the first time. Or before that when I taught you how to kiss on my pillow and he walked in and gave us shit about it for weeks!" Cathy is laughing now. "Anyway, he just reminded me you're pretty special and I'd be smart not to make you hate me. And then he reminded me how hateable I can be."

"Heather, I don't hate you. I just wish--"

"You wished I had taken your side. And I should have. I'm sorry. Fuck Jim, okay? From now on, I'm on your side. Alright?"

Cathy nods. "Yeah, okay. Alright, Heather. That sounds good." And she feels awful, for the things she said to Heather, but she feels mostly awful because she knows those things, those awful insults she hurled at Heather in an attempt to protect herself, aren't Heather's fault. Just like what Cathy did (or didn't do) in Jim's car wasn't all

Cathy's fault. We are this way, Cathy begins to realize, because of the men who forced us to become this. The boys in high school. The Jim Davises of the world, or the Mr. Miltons, or the jackass cops at the front desk of the Malibu Sheriff's Station. And a fierce protectiveness begins to come over Cathy. A protectiveness over herself, and of Heather, and Helen, and the dead 17-year-old with dark hair and her brain blown in by a killer and her fingers and toes chewed off by coyotes, and all the girls who lie on the Malibu beach and park in cars with boys on the top of the hill to "watch the sunset". They all deserve better.

"Yeah, fuck Jim. And fuck all those guys," Cathy says, and she really means it. And then, despite the doubt and fear, she tells Heather something she never thought she would actually say. "I think I'm gonna spend some time on my own for a while, without guys. Well, except Mike. He doesn't count. And maybe I'll even talk to my parents about leaving. Like, really leaving. Applying for school in San Diego or even Colorado or something. Just getting out of here."

"Wow," responds Heather. "Like you always talked about. Good for you, Cath. I mean it. I think that will be really great for you."

"I think so, too." Cathy smiles, and despite the events of the week, a warmth fills her. It is a warmth of hope and excitement, of nostalgia and comfort.

And the record spins out in Cathy's bedroom as the girls talk, cars roll by on Ventura Boulevard, and the sun sets over the valley.

