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"I have this problem," I say, "where I want to tell everyone I meet to kill themselves. Whenever I meet anyone, and I notice the way their voice squeaks when they pronounce vowels, or they talk about social issues in a way that implies they care more than I do, or whenever they're more or less intelligent than I am. I hate when people are full of themselves for no reason, or when they're pathetic. I hate when people are perfect and put-together in a way that reminds me of my own failures. I hate when people have morals."

Wyatt looks at me with their weird, blocky head and their big, curious bug-eyes that bloom out from under heavy brows, a praying mantis in glasses. They purse their lips. "That's really incredible, actually," they tell me. "It's fascinating. You've invented a reason to hate everyone on earth."

"I don't hate people. I just want to tell them to kill themselves. It's not like I want them to die, either. I have this urge to show people that society doesn't exist to coddle them. You know how most people are secretly afraid that everybody thinks they're weird?"

"As a therapist, yes."

"I want to validate that fear for people. I find it fun."

Wyatt takes off their glasses (blocky, orange, and so hideously current as to be embarrassing) and sticks the end of the frame in their mouth. I wonder if they know they're doing it— if it's a conscious performance, designed to reassure clients that Wyatt, too, is a freak, or if it's a genuine symptom of one of the classical media-induced failures of maturity: ADD, generalized anxiety.

"Let's circle back for a second. You find it difficult to stop yourself from telling people to commit suicide."

"Absolutely," I confirm. "I always have the urge. The phrase 'kill yourself' is

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like a baby tooth that my tongue reflexively tries to poke away from the root. It's almost a tic. It hurts to suppress."

"In what situations do you find that this is particularly a problem for you?"

I sit and think for a second. "Well," I say finally, "primarily when I'm with clients."

"I imagine that if my *psychiatrist* told me to kill myself I might go home and do it."

"Are you *that* fragile?"

They laugh. The sound produced could have been generated by an artificial intelligence, monotone and brassy. "If I were really that close to the edge, I don't think I'd tell *you* about it."

My relationship with Wyatt began a month ago. A colleague of mine suggested, in rather strong language, that I might benefit from regular counseling. I laughed. *Ha-ha*, I said, pronouncing each syllable, so that she would understand I found the idea funny. *Stop being a bitch*. But she said, *Jackson, there is something so deeply wrong with you that I don't even know where to begin*. I told her that made her a pretty shitty therapist, didn't it? She fumed silently, like a rotting pomegranate. I asked if she could recommend anyone. She told me the only people she knew who specialized in my particular issues worked in secure facilities.

I found Wyatt Lovering, LMHCA, on Psychology Today dot com. Their profile listed them as a genderless Wiccan. They went out of their way to identify themselves as a cat person. Apparently they liked the word "self-actualisation."

When I met Wyatt, I wanted very badly to tell them to kill themselves, but I bit my tongue hard. They had shaggy hair and an oversized floral dress shirt. They wore a stupid green bandana around their neck. I noticed the hard ridge of their

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collarbones bumping out beneath the thin fabric of the bandana. Sparse hairs speckled the triangle of smooth skin above the top button of their shirt. I wanted to stare and stare at that skin. I told them first thing that their attire was unprofessional. They asked me why I thought that. It infuriated me.

Our session ends, and I leave Wyatt to their borrowed office. They're still in their residency, which forces them to use the loaner, decorated with such rustic treasures as a canvas sign that says ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE...AND A HORSE. The office is shoved into the saddest, most abandoned corner of a sad, abandoned shopping center. I step out into the hall and follow the musty labyrinthian hallways out to the exit. The building is pink, and the globby stucco texture of its outer walls is maybe the subject of an obscure phobia.

Wyatt has given me homework. I am to identify myself on Jung's four triangles of the masculine psyche. The King, the Warrior, the Magician, the Lover. Wyatt thinks I'm insecure in my masculinity, one of my many alleged problems. If anyone was insecure about masculinity, I said, it was them. They only laughed their walled, robotic laugh, and I noticed the size of their biceps.

Obviously I know Jung's archetypes. I am the King. Decisive. Honorable. Ruled by the wisdom of years, not the fickle whims of emotion. I circle it on the page.

My phone buzzes. I answer to Julia's voice: "How did your *kid* do today?"

"I don't understand what you mean."

"That little grad student you're playing pretend with."

"He isn't little. He's at least 26, and he's actually very large in the arms."

"And how does that make you feel?" she asks dryly.

"Ha-ha."

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"I hate when you do that, Jackson, it makes you sound like a fifth-grader."

"Oh, *kill yourself*," I say, and hang up. When I let it slip out, finally, I feel invigorated.

I drive to the north side of town and walk into a tea parlor. The place is rickety and squashed. Instead of ordering tea, I tell the college girl working the counter that her nose ring makes her look like a farm animal. Then I walk out.

The next week, I show Wyatt the triangles. "This is exactly what I expected you to circle," they say.

"Kill yourself."

They snap their head up to stare at me. Their lips curl up like a burning leaf. They giggle, and their chest shakes. Their cheeks push against their eyes. "Oh, look at *you*," they say, "you're going through puberty."

"I thought you might be proud of me. I'm making progress."

They take the paper out of my hands and attach it to their clipboard. With their stubby, gnawed-up pencil, they draw a new triangle after the other four. They write *THE BITCH* on top of it.

I speak again. "This is a fully-realized archetype, in your view?"

"If you want it to be. I think you're having fun."

"Is that what mental wellness is about? Having fun?"

Wyatt emits a constipated little sigh and starts chewing on the pencil. Oral fixation, the symbolic phallus, failure to exit the Oedipal stage, et cetera. They stare at the wall. "I think that— I'm trying to figure out how to phrase this. With the particular issues you're experiencing, my initial thought was that you're fundamentally self-loathing. But now I get the feeling... that the root of your issues is *repression*."

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"My God."

"With the triangles," Wyatt continues, "I was trying to get at the contrast between the archetype you feel, from a social-medical-academic standpoint, like you have to embody—" they point at *THE KING*— "and the archetype you want to embody, deep down." They point at *THE BITCH*. "It's an archetype you've seen maybe on TV or in films. Do you know who Regina George is?"

"I was 20 when that movie came out. I'm not ancient, Christ."

"You're familiar with the type of person I'm describing, then. She's powerful. Flamboyant. Women fear her. Men want her." Then: "I think you hate your ex-wife so much because she's everything you wish you were."

I let my head fall onto the back of the couch, and my eyes roll up to the popcorn ceiling. "Everything that comes out of your mouth is just horrible. Julia isn't my *ex*, by the way."

"I apologize for using the wrong terminology to describe the woman you are in the process of divorcing."

"I don't want women to fear me. I want their respect. And men *want* me regardless of my personality, lacking as some find it. Like flies to a fruit." I say.

"Actually, I have a word of advice for you."

"Hit me."

"Never fuck another therapist."

"I wouldn't in a million years," they smirk. "But Jackson—if my counseling style is so horrible to you, why do you keep booking sessions?"

I consider their square, Grecian face, cut in the smooth and mathematical shape of the Platonic warrior. Their eyes, alien and doggedly staring like a captain of many flies. Their hair, perfectly wavy and messed, brown-to-blonde, which they

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certainly never wash.

I respond. "I want to know what you're going to say next."

I'm back the next week, same time, to find out. I walk in to find Wyatt with their head tilted back, Adam's apple bobbing up and down as they gulp water from a metal hiking bottle covered with vinyl-cut stickers of wizards and mushrooms. They put the bottle down and wipe off their lips on their sleeve. I can see their abdominal muscles through their sweater. "That shirt is too small for you," I say, "and you look like a tart."

"Let's get into that. Does it bother you when a person is promiscuous?"

"No, but it bothers me when professional people dress like escorts."

"And when you see someone who doesn't dress to your standards, what do you think about?"

"Am I having a bad day in this scenario? When I'm already angry, I like to imagine popping undesirables in a hydraulic press."

They stop in the middle of a facial expression. "Describe that."

"What it sounds like. Putting someone in a hydraulic press, like an industrial hydraulic press, and crushing them until their body explodes out of its skin."

I expect Wyatt to tell me how I horrify them, and how the nature of my thoughts is so disturbing that I ought to be admitted immediately, just to keep society away from my threatening hands—a favorite sentiment of Julia's. But they say: "You have such a vivid imagination, Jackson. I wish you felt comfortable telling me more of these things. Anyways, I want to try something new with you today."

"There's nothing you can therapize at me that I will allow myself to believe is effective. My personal psychiatric philosophy is based entirely on pills."

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"What would you prescribe yourself, if you could?"

"Nothing. There's nothing wrong with me. As a matter of fact, most things in life are going right for me. I am here, as I have explained, as a mandatory condition of my amicable divorce proceedings."

"That's actually what I wanted to talk about." Wyatt does a little scoot-back-and-forth in their chair, like a woman putting on the seductive airs of jailbait. "I want you to imagine Julia is sitting in front of you."

"You're giving me the empty chair?" I ask.

"The chair's not empty. I'm Julia."

I stare deadily. "You can't bring forth even a fraction of the emotional asteroid impact that bitch provokes in me." I settle onto the couch and plant my knees wide apart. I cross my arms. "For one, Julia is sexy."

Wyatt gives the window a nervy glance, as though asking it for permission. They turn their face back to mine. Their stomach arches into the air as they reach back to the neck of their sweater, and, in one swift motion, whip it off over their head. Their exposed skin goosebumps in the cool air of the ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE...AND A HORSE office. They're wearing a bandana again, tied around their neck like a collar.

I press my crossed arms into my chest until I am hugging myself. I heat.

"Why do you keep calling me a bitch?" Wyatt asks.

"Because you're a bitch."

"You're such a goddamn misogynist. Every single woman is *this bitch, that bitch*—"

"How can I be a misogynist when I am *literally* gay?"

Wyatt leans forward and shakes their head, so their shaggy hair bounces

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over the tight muscle of their neck and collar. "Are you fucking serious— you're bisexual," they say.

"You can't tell me what my sexual orientation is."

"For all the times you have violated my body with your... disgusting... appendage..."

"You are my *exception*, Julie, but even then I view our sexual intimacy as a meeting of minds rather than a genuine expression of lust."

Wyatt fixes me with a hot stare—Julia never looks at me this way—and growls, "I used to make you *beg for it*." Their voice brutish and cigarette-black, their chest flushed.

I carefully cross my legs. "I don't beg. And you don't speak to me like that."

"Do you wish I did?"

"No." I look Wyatt in the eyes. This isn't working. I don't mean it, because I am not thinking about Julia right now.

"Why did you marry me, Jackson? If you aren't attracted to me, and you think I'm such a bitch, " they ask, "then why the hell did you even ask?"

I suck some air in me. I haven't been breathing enough. I picture Julia— tall, sharp, and liquid like the richest cup of coffee, bitter with a hint of smoky fruit. She wears clear lip gloss and steams her face every morning over a basin of piping hot water and fresh chamomile. She loves yelling, hissing and laughing. She loves diagnosing foster children with personality disorders. She loves to type, analyze, and catalog, and to de-stress she folds pieces of blank paper into the maximum possible number of sections.

"You impress me," I admit. "I admire you. I think we could've been friends if we weren't exactly the same, deep down."

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Wyatt grimaces. "We are *nothing* alike, you miserable little cumstain. You disgust me. You make me sick—"

—and I shoot my hand across the gap between us and yank them into me by the knot on their ridiculous bandana. Their lips smooth into a hard line. Their eyes seem to settle into opposite directions, avoiding, dull. They steady themselves with a hand on the back of the couch, thumb brushing my shoulder. They breathe onto my lips. I avoid smelling it, because I don't want to know.

"You can't talk to me like that," I mutter. "Julia."

Wyatt calcifies for a second. I choose, for a moment, to let myself exist in their sun-hot orbit, right in front of the Christlike forbidding of ...AND A HORSE.

Then they say very stupidly: "I think BDSM would be very beneficial for you. You seem to enjoy degradation."

"Is that a service you offer?"

"No." Then they add, "Please let me go now."

I do, and they lean back and cross their arms, covering their nipples. They do this instead of putting their sweater back on, which I suppose would call attention to the fact that their sweater is off in the first place.

"Where did you pull *that* from?" I ask.

"I got a theatre minor in undergrad." The words come blank and quiet. "I think we can end the session now."

I collect my things and stand. "Will I be seeing you again next week?"

"Do you want to?"

I pause. "Of course. I think we're on the verge of a breakthrough." When I finally quit the room I swing my hips and let the door slam.

On the street, I call Julia. She answers immediately.

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"You would not believe the audacity of this bitch," I rush, giddy with sudden laughter.

"Who is it? What did she do?"

"The grad student, oh my God, Julia!" My feet fly down the street. I'm almost running, cutting the cold air in half like a burning Moses. "Oh my God, he wants to fuck me. He took his shirt off. He told me I would benefit from sexual humiliation."

She cackles. Feeling benevolent, I invite her for coffee at the place with the almond-flour donut products she likes. We schmooze. The meeting devolves into a screaming match when I tell her that her earrings are garish. We are asked to leave. Julia tells the unfortunate barista to drown himself in a vat of acid. Outside, I spit on the window.

She brings me back to her apartment. I hang my leather bag on the coat rack and fuck her on the couch. She pretends my name is Garrett. I know who Garrett is. The fantasy doesn't bother me because I have also slept with Garrett. I have sent Julia videos of myself sleeping with Garrett. Really, Garrett has been great for us.

Wyatt cancels our next appointment. I'm worried they'll drop me as a client entirely, but they reach out the week after and tell me to come in at the usual time. I wear a black button-down with a pair of slim-leg dress pants and heeled leather boots.

"Hello, Wyatt," I say when I enter the office. I pose against the doorframe, my arm over my head. "Do you know what I did with my wife last week?"

"No, I wasn't there." They're dressed in a quarter-zip and khakis like a normal, sensible person. The damn gnat. It annoys me.

"Sex."

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I sit down. Wyatt says, "Hoorah."

"It was normal sex. It wasn't BDSM sex. I don't have anywhere to go for that."

"You could try the Internet. There are groups. Sometimes people meet up for coffee."

"Oh, but Wyatt, that's so intimidating. If only someone I already knew—"

"Don't, Jackson. Please." They sigh. "I overstepped. I'm sorry. There are certain— I hold certain— *views* that are outside the scope of accepted therapeutic practice. I was extremely inappropriate, and I violated the boundaries of our relationship."

I release myself from the sensual doorframe tableau and slink to the couch. I lay down and stretch like a television character would in front of Freud, if some coked-out Hollywood producer decided to sexualize Freud. I look at them. "What are the boundaries of our relationship? Did we ever write down a list of taboos we aren't supposed to cross? I wasn't aware."

"It is unacceptable for a mental health professional to remove clothing in front of a client."

"But it helped."

"How?"

"I had a good day," I murmur. My fingers rub along the enamel edge of the top button on my shirt. Wyatt avoids my gaze disorderly. "Have you heard of ketamine therapy? If it's medically acceptable to destroy a person's reality with horse tranquilizers, I think you can flirt with me a little bit."

"I wasn't flirting with you, Jackson," they say, raising their voice a bit. "I was—"

I cut them off. "You seem terrified right now. Why is that?"

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They rest their forearms on their knees and drop their eyes to the floor. "I fucked up. I could lose my license over this."

"And what else could happen? You *could* get taken out in a drive-by. You *could* trip and break your neck on the mothy anti-Euclidean staircases this building harbors. But you won't." I prop myself up. "You're creating fantasy scenarios to justify your feelings of anxiety. You're afraid of your own imagination."

"You're a very volatile person, Jackson. It is entirely possible that you could decide you want to hurt me for some reason or other and reach out to my supervisors."

"Have you found yourself obsessing over this scenario?"

They pause and raise their head. "Obviously."

"Is this *obsession* making you restless? Irritable? Easily distracted?"

"I'm not in the best mood at the moment, no," they say, looking out the window now.

"Do you find it difficult to control?"

"It's all I can think about."

"Hard to sleep?"

Wyatt is silent. I swing myself upright and walk carefully behind their chair. I crack my knuckles and lay my palms on the meat of their shoulders. I squeeze.

"Your muscles are very tense as well," I state. "I'll write you a script for Xanax."

"You can't do that."

"But I could. And it would be very professionally indecent of me, I think. Then we would both have blackmail."

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They spin the chair to look at me, or rather, at a distant point on the wall behind me. "I don't think we should continue this relationship. And I think you should leave."

"You don't want to retain me as a client?"

Wyatt shakes their head, just barely so, as if to hide their denial of me.

I scan over their desk. There's a stack of rainbow index cards in front of the HORSE. I pluck a pink off the top of the stack, and with a thin-point Sharpie I write my phone number and address on it. I flip it over.

I draw a triangle. I write THE LOVER. I hand it to Wyatt.

"Then we are no longer bound by professional ethics. Come over sometime."

I'm sure they flush like a strawberry. I'm sure they bite their lip and shift in their seat, and fix me with their dark, blossoming eyes, and take a deep, beastly breath. I'm sure that they ache to stand and reach for me, touch me, anything to keep me from passing beyond the doorframe. But I don't get to see it, because I turn away immediately. I leave. And I feel like the most fascinating siren in the world.

When I make it to my house, Julia is there—*my* house, because the therapy lets me keep it. I guess she made a spare key. I call her a bitch. She says I'm ten times the bitch she could ever hope to be. I understand that this is sexual.

As the wintery darkness floats down to hide us, I start some pasta. Julia sits on the counter and drinks a mug of steaming bergamot and eats almond slivers out of a Ziploc bag.

"You know, in another life I think we could have been Kurt and Courtney," I say. I watch closely as the water boils. It's steaming my pores.

"I would shoot you in the head if I could."

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"You'd go to jail."

"No," she says, "I think I would get away with it."

I take the water off the burner so I can kiss her. We forget about our food and push each other to the bedroom. The side of the bed that used to be hers now holds my collection of laptops and tablets, which she shoves without concern to the floor.

She stuffs her hand into her bag and pulls out a pair of flimsy handcuffs and a pair of pink lace panties. She holds the panties out to me. "This is supposed to be freeing for you, right?"

"I'm not wearing your underwear."

"Come on now," she pouts. "Therapy. You agreed."

I put them on. She leaves the room and comes back with shots. I take two, three, four. We're both stumbling a little. I bend over and set my hands flat on the bed.

The doorbell rings. Julia makes a noise that sounds like a very hard effort at a word. To protect our visitor from her drunken idiocy, I reassure her that I'll get the door.

I walk through the living room. The carpet tickles my feet. The draught makes my nipples stick up. The doorbell rings again. I lean into the door and twist the handle.

Wyatt is standing on my porch. Their eyes are reddish and hard-set. They've changed into a more suitable outfit—a thin black turtleneck and the most hideous pair of plaid skinny pants in the world. They smell overwhelming—tequila, deodorant, fruit.

I remember that I am wearing nothing but women's underwear. Wyatt is

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staring at them.

"Oh, hello," I say. "We were just getting started."