

# the road to either or

being a truthful tale that concerns itself with romance and  
the extra-legal defense of forests

Jimmy T. Hand

*The Road To Either Or* follows up on Jimmy T. Hand's first autobiographical novella, *In The Hall of the Mountain King*, which is available for free from Strangers In A Tangled Wilderness. Five years have transpired, however, and we fully believe that this zine stands on its own.

## INTRODUCTION

THE FIRST THING I SAW EVERY MORNING WHEN I OPENED MY EYES WAS MY breath. As my eyes cleared, I saw the canopy of trees above me. I suppose that sort of thing makes some people think that their lives are wonderful, but for me it just made me think that it was cold and that I was miles from the nearest hot shower.

It was August. It isn't supposed to be cold in August, in my opinion, but tell that to the mountains. Nature does what it wants. Strange, too, that nature is always presented in art as serene and peaceful. But nature is the embodiment of chaos.

What's more, besides the chill mountain air, we were at war. Sure, the only guns were holstered in the belts of the police or waved about by hunters, but we were in a conflict I can describe no other way.

On one side was Steinbeck's Monster, the giant machinery of bureaucracy that seemed intent on destroying the few scraps of wild forest left. On that side were police, the forest service, the timber industry, and millions of dollars.

On the other side were us—about a dozen direct action activists, a few leftist lawyers, and scores of concerned, impotent liberals. We were the perpetual underdogs. Activists make great underdogs, but as soon as they're on top... well, just look at history.

Don't worry, this isn't a story about some morally righteous cause, nor is it an attempt to sway you to the beauty of forests and mountains. I like the outdoors, certainly, and I think sustainability is paramount, but I'm a city kid and a cynic. I'm just setting the scene.

The forest, in away from the roads, looked healthy and alive. I, on the other hand, was haggard, filthy and tired. I might have enjoyed myself more if I hadn't been lovesick.

We notice ourselves the most in contrast; maybe that was why I felt so tired. Most of the other people around, about my own age, were bright-eyed and happy, finding a kind of joy in belonging, finding meaning in the passion of conflict and unity. They were also all hooking up with each other. In fact, they were all acting like I had been four or five years prior. I felt about as old as a twenty-year-old could feel.

I know a few other people who, despite their youth, feel old around other anarchists. Usually, they got involved while young like I did. They ask themselves the same questions, and come to different answers.

Most of the time, in that forest defense camp, I kept to myself. I volunteered for tasks that didn't require too much group involvement.

If I was at camp, I woke up with the sun and set about to eat breakfast and start the day's work, but most days I woke up along the road to Either Or, next to the beautiful Leda, our packs camouflaged under brush. Having stayed up late the night before, and afraid of discovery, we slept in well away from the road.

Either Or isn't the real name of the timber sale I was working on, but since I can't risk giving its actual name I will go with this alternative that I find pleasingly poetic.

We walked out onto the gravel road to Either Or as the sun first thought about getting down towards the skyline of trees and I stared ahead west under the last moment of sun. I then turned to look at my long, lovesick shadow that reached nearly to the embankment:

## PART ONE—APRIL-MAY

I FIRST MET SARAH STAINED-GLASS WHEN SHE PICKED ME UP HITCHHIKING. I fell in love with her shortly thereafter, for all the good it did me. And yes, she made stained glass.

I was hitchhiking alone in Alabama, which while reasonably fast is still rather ill-advised; I had just been dropped off at an onramp that looked suspiciously like the one I had just been picked up at.

That particular day in April I was wearing blue jeans without patches and an ugly red Patagonia jacket—my punk clothes were in my bag—and I was trying my nineteen-year-old hardest to look like I belonged in Alabama. My hair, partly dreaded and completely filthy, was hidden under a plain baseball cap and my face was nearly clean-shaven.

Whenever I hitchhike, ninety percent of the old men who pass me give me a cold stare, neither curious nor malicious. Old Man Stare.

Old Man Stare was out in force and pickup after pickup passed me by, their empty beds taunting me as the blinding sun reflected off the glossy paint on the shiny middle-class trucks. Rich rednecks never pick me up—hobos offend their work ethic. Poor rednecks, on the other hand, will usually give me a lift.

Needless to say, when a blue mini-van with a Bad Religion bumper sticker stopped ten feet past my outstretched thumb I was overjoyed. Settling my pack over one shoulder, I all but skipped to the passenger door that opened as I approached.

“Hey,” The driver leaned back into the her seat after she opened the door, “I’m not going too far, but I can at least leave you at a better spot.”

When a driver knows enough to think about what spots are good it usually means they have hitchhiked themselves. Nobody else really *shares* the ride, as if you were a friend that they had invited in the first place. It’s nice being picked up by people who’ve thumbed around.

The driver—pop-punk with eye-length red hair and a tiny septum ring, black tanktop and carhartt work pants—pulled her van back onto the road and introduced herself. “My name’s Sarah,” she said, “and I know a pretty good place where you can get to Birmingham no problem.”

“My name’s Jimmy. I know a lot of Sarah’s, how do I tell you apart? Sarah Alabama?”

She carried the game: “Are you Jimmy the Hitchhiker?”

“Jimmy The Hand.”—Me

“Pleasure. What are you doing in Alabama?”—Sarah

“I’m on my way to meet up with my friend King in Birmingham, and from there who knows.” Dropping King’s name would have meant something to some people, but nothing to most; it was a game I played, to see if our scenes overlapped.

“Hah, I know King. I just met him; he’s staying with a friend of mine.”

EVERY STORY I’VE read, autobiographical or not, has the dialogue written verbatim. Well, my memory isn’t exact, and I don’t carry around a tape recorder just in case a conversation is important enough to make it into my memoirs. I am paraphrasing, and I feel guilty putting words into her mouth. Autobiography is at least as fictional as any novel, but all the more deceptive because it claims to be truth.

MY FRIEND KING O’Beer was in Birmingham visiting his sister, Jen O’Beer, who had gone to high school with Sarah. Sarah tried to call Jen with her cell phone (while driving rather fast, if you ask me) but there was no answer.

“Oh well, I suppose you can stay with me until you get a hold of King.” I was relieved to realize that I wouldn’t be sleeping in the bushes somewhere along the highway and that I wouldn’t be saying goodbye to Sarah so soon.

When we reached her exit, Birmingham still a good hour away, Sarah told me that that was where she had thought to drop me off. It looked almost exactly like the onramp I had just left—complete with Citgo—and I started to question my “Sarah has hitchhiked before” hypothesis.

We drove up a winding road, the kind with branches forming a tunnel over it, while the sun set somewhere hidden by clouds. I thought of Faulkner; not being from the south, I had a tendency to be reminded of Faulkner books a lot when I was much past the mason-dixie. We pulled up a long paved driveway and came to a stop before an impressively large house. I was tempted to call it a manor.

“You live here?” I was incredulous.

“Yeah, well, my parents left it to me when they died.”

“Oh...” I didn’t know what to say to that. Mostly I felt awkward for having asked. I haven’t really met anyone for whom the death of his or her parents isn’t a bit of a sore issue.

I don’t really know how to properly describe architecture, but even from the outside the house was winding. There were no towers, yet it was no cube; there were screened in porches and side doors and extra stories juttied out from various parts of the sharply slanted roof.

Sarah had left a few lights on and I saw the finest feature of her house: over the front door a green serpent ate its tail against a yellow-stained window.

What few other windows I could see in the fading light were also stained glass, but the serpent stayed prominent in my mind.

On foot we circled the house away from the snake and entered through an unlocked side door. One thing I've always liked about punks, they usually leave their doors unlocked. Unless they're anticipating police, of course.

It seems to me that there are a few different types of hospitality. If someone invites me for dinner and actually waits on me, they are saying one thing. Aloud, they may say "make yourself at home," but I know I am to be a transitory guest. I'm not complaining, and I've certainly eaten more than my fair share of fine meals this way.

Yet, if someone invites me to stay and offers me free reign of the kitchen and couch, they won't wait on me and I can expect to be more of a peer. In that case, it's up to me to not just be a freeloader, to give back.

So when Sarah said "Make yourself at home... do you want anything to drink?" from the kitchen, I figured that I needed to respect that the space was completely hers and to not make myself too comfortable.

That night we drank whiskey sours with Maker's Mark. I remember because I had never seen Maker's Mark whiskey before; it comes in this neat glass bottle with a fake wax seal. All of my friends drank plastic bottle whiskey. Sarah apologized for not having any food in the house, but she needn't have; when I'm traveling my stomach tends to shrink, and the peanut butter sandwiches I had been eating by the side of the road had been enough for the day.

Of course, I got pretty drunk pretty quickly on my empty shrunken stomach.

We spoke of all kinds of things and the whiskey helped me out of my habitual introversion. I told her about how I ran away from home at 14, about how I had been on and off the road (and the streets) for five years, about how me and my parent's got along alright since they emancipated me. When I brought up my parents, I felt guilty and was suddenly quiet.

Sarah told me about her parents: "I was a daddy's girl, all growing up. He was irresponsible, my mother said... and he drank, but he taught me so much. He was a carpenter, a republican. My mom was the democrat, and yet I never seemed to have as much in common with her. And me as the anarchist..."

She seemed to be done for a moment so I chimed in: "It's weird how that seems to happen." I'm sure I had some relevant and tangential example of my own, but Sarah recovered her thoughts and continued.

"Anyway... I graduated high school, moved to Richmond to study craft in college. My dad got himself and my mom killed by drinking and driving, I moved back here to look after the house six months ago and I haven't left." At first I thought it strange how quickly she moved through the sequence of events without a trace of emotion in her voice, but looking at her after she stopped I saw the forehead wrinkles and down-turned mouth of someone who was making an effort to keep her voice even.

Often when there is nothing better to say than “I’m sorry,” I’ve found that I prefer to say nothing. I said nothing.

I had been expecting her to change the subject, but she didn’t. “I always wanted to do my own thing, to get out of Alabama, to leave my family behind. But when I saw them at the wake I realized how much I belong here. I’m the end of the family line.”

She laughed, not with the meek laughter of someone on the verge of tears, but with an honest laughter of forgetting. “I don’t even like my last name. I’m still going to change it.”

I couldn’t help but ask. “What’s your last name?”

She looked at me shrewdly. “What’s yours?”

“Can I get another whiskey sour?”

“Sure.”

I DIDN’T KNOW what color Sarah’s eyes were, but I spent a lot of time that night looking over my glass at her nose. I almost never notice anyone’s eyes. I don’t know what color my parent’s eyes are and I lived with *them* for fourteen years. Her nose though, was sharp, almost hooked, an arrow pointing to her simple, thin lips. I was drunkenly struggling not to objectify her, and certainly I didn’t want to be caught staring. Her face was gorgeous.

Sometime after two A.M. she offered me the couch and went to bed. I fell asleep rather quickly. Traveling wears me out and whiskey always finishes the job.

I WOKE UP to sounds in the kitchen and pretended to be embarrassed about how late I had slept. A lot of people, I eventually realized, don’t usually sleep in past 10. It was 11. When I’m actually trying to hitchhike I wake up much earlier.

I roused myself and walked into the kitchen, a clean and fancy affair with faux-marble countertops and everything. I was willing to bet there was a food disposal in the sink. I love food disposals—they make doing the dishes so much easier.

“You know, I was thinking about it, and I don’t mind your company. You can stay until you and King are ready to leave. You’ll have to stay on the couch though, my fiancé is coming into town tomorrow.”

“Oh.” I’m not very clever at 11 in the morning. Really, the whole AM period does me no good at all.

“I don’t have enough food to make lunch, so I’m going to the store and I’ll be right back.”

She walked out of the house through the back door and I heard the car start. Sometimes I hate it when people drop a huge line like ‘my fiancé’ on me nonchalantly, but I think I appreciated it that day. By not making a big deal of it, she offered *me* the chance to not make a big deal of it. I busied myself by



emotionally writing off Sarah Stained-Glass as a potential lover and set about to be her friend instead. I killed time changing into my usual punk clothes—a sleeveless black t-shirt, black patched workpants and my dirty baseball cap (complete, of course, with a few lighter clips on the brim, even though I don't smoke).

I was writing in my journal when she came home from the store with a paper bag of groceries under one arm. "Is there more?" I asked, offering to help.

"Yeah, and there's hummus, too." How did she know I loved hummus? I scurried out the door in search of her van and the hummus, my cap falling forward on my head as I bounded along the drive.

I found the side door to the minivan open and four bags inside. I took one under each arm, but as I leaned down the brim of my hat went so far as to cover my eyes. I stood up with every intention of navigating my path back to the house by staring at my feet rather than put down the bags.

Sarah came out behind me, took the remaining two bags under her arms, and kicked the sliding door shut. When I turned at the sound of her she laughed, the same earnest laugh she had laughed the night before. She came up close to me, and with the top of her head she nudged my cap back into place. We were, of course, then scant inches from each other, both the same height with eyes locked together. So why didn't I remember the color of her eyes?

It was one of those beautiful awkward moments where the need to kiss is telepathically communicated. But, of course, we couldn't and didn't. After a moment of watching her eyes dart between my eyes and my lips, she turned away and walked back into the house. Nothing more was said of the matter.

BY THE NEXT day I still hadn't reached King, and I was starting to worry.

"Nah, you shouldn't worry," Sarah reassured me on her way out the door, "his sister doesn't have a cell phone, and when have you known an O'Beer to stay around the house much when there's a world outside to see?" Clearly Sarah had met King—or King's sister was almost identical to him—because Sarah sounded like she was quoting him.

When Sarah came home from the airport I got to meet her fiancé, whose name I have conveniently forgotten. Since it's hard to write a story with a nameless character, I now dub him John. John is a perfectly good name for him, as would be Ed or Bill or some other completely American man's name.

I had readied myself to like this guy. After all, Sarah would have to have impeccable taste in men, I had reasoned. But John-Ed-Bill was a total square. I mean, I'm not *that* prejudiced against normal people, but this guy was the blandest of the bland. I set about to find out what that hidden thing was that interested Sarah.

He was an economics major who went to school in Wyoming. He talked about his car a lot (oh, excuse me, his *truck*). And I'm sure he would *never* have picked me up hitchhiking.

Apparently Sarah and John-Mike-Nick had grown up together, their parents being best friends. Sarah's father had intended for her to marry that guy, and with her parents dead, she was going to do it.

I just tried my best to be civil and called King's sister every hour or two.

We had a picnic that day out in the tree fort in her backyard. John-George-Bob was talking out his ass about having to finance changes to the house, and at one point talked about putting in storm windows. He obviously didn't know Sarah even the tiniest bit. And yes, I'm biased.

Anyway, he pointed out that one could see into Sarah's bedroom from where we were sitting. Suddenly the sickly concept of witnessing the two of them rapturously entwined came to mind and I excused myself to walk back into the house so as to be rid of the notion.

BY THE TIME King and Jen came over the next day I had my pack sitting by the front door.

"Damn, we haven't even figured out where we want to go yet!" King enjoyed giving me hell whenever we traveled together.

"King, uhm..." I started.

"Ah. You're leaving without me. It's okay, my friend. These are the winds that cast us together; these are the winds that cast us apart. They will cast as they please and we have naught but to follow." If there was one thing King enjoys more than giving me hell, it was drinking. And if there was anything King enjoyed more than drinking, it was quoting really obscure chaos-worship stuff at me. Usually, however, his chaos advice was sound.

"Thanks."

"Where are you going, then, and in such a hurry? I thought you hated hitchhiking alone." King thought for a moment. "You convinced Sarah to leave with you? I'm amazed!"

"No, I didn't invite Sarah to come with me. She's giving me a ride to the airport." When I said that King frowned; he doesn't think very highly of airplanes, for all his talk of riding the winds. "I called Leda yesterday, and she told me to come out to the west coast to help stop a timber sale. I needed somewhere to go, and she bought me a cheap ticket with campaign money. She says I now owe her at least a month."

FROM WHAT I hear, the term "geography" is used by addiction support groups to describe the reliance on moving to a different town to avoid your problems. But the thing is, I swear that it works. I mean, it doesn't really solve the problem, but it really can help to leave it behind. I have an ex-junkie friend who simply avoids the city where she was a junkie. As for me, like most of the traveler kids I know, I ran away from my heart.

MY PLANE LANDED in Portland, a town I had previously managed to avoid. There's never anything entertaining to say about planes; flying is the least interesting method of travel yet concocted by humanity. They get you where you are going too quickly.

Leda was in town visiting a lover and she had arranged for me to stay at that guy's house for a night before driving out the next morning to the woods.

Now, for those who haven't read my first zine, Leda is a lover of mine from way back. In fact, I lost my virginity to her in a squat on the east coast five years ago. The two of us are quite calmly in love; she is the foundation from which my heart can wander. So it might seem odd that I was quite comfortable staying on the couch at her lover's house while she slept in bed with him. But we had been through that, in one incarnation or another, far too often. I wasn't jealous of her anymore, if indeed I ever was.

So we rendezvoused at Food Not Bombs, a loose national network of anarchist public free meals. She had changed her hair, I noticed, since I had seen her last six months prior. It was ear-length and black, cut into a fierce chelsea that went with her stern green eyes quite well. One thing you needed to know about Leda, the thing that would pick her out of a crowd, was her opaque eyes that seem to hold nothing but condemnation for everything and everyone they saw. In reality, she was actually a rather pleasant young woman and you could even see that on the rare occasions when she smiled.

I could write about her for pages, I'm sure. I may owe this story to Sarah Stained-Glass, but I owe my heart to Leda.

She strode towards me as I walked up with my pack and quickly embraced me. Over her shoulder I could see a gangly hipster boy walking shyly towards us. I guessed that he was her lover, and I set about to put him at ease. I've certainly been the one awkwardly tagging behind someone before.

"Hey, you must be Ren," I said, offering him my hand.

"And you're Jimmy?" He shook my hand reasonably. I've got a thing against firm handshakes.

Introductions out of the way, Leda and I ducked off behind a brick pillar to kiss hello.

We bussed back to Ren's house in Southeast and I met an assortment of bike punks whose names escape me. Most of them, all men, wore short-brimmed caps. Messenger bags were piled in the living room near the large TV, under the Björk poster. It really just wasn't my scene and I set about to watching the evening disappear by reading a book while Leda said goodbye to Ren.

THE NEXT DAY we got in a beat-up pickup and drove out of town. I was glad to leave the place behind. The rest of the country resented Portland for stealing all of the DIY kids and then not really having anything to show for it.

In the car we had plenty of time to catch up.

“After I left you in St. Louis,” Leda started, “I met Ren and hitched out west with him. He was living in P-Town and I didn’t mind moving. I got my own place though, living in the basement of these kids I met at a protest. It was alright, but most of them were... in college, sorta liberal, and they all had parents and money and all of that.”

Leda had run away from home rather young, as had I, but she came from a broken home instead my suburban one. When I had met her she had been super-punk and tough as nails. She’s still punker and tougher than me, but she’s opened up a lot.

“Anyway, I kicked it for a couple of months, mostly just doing nothing. I sewed a lot and went to shows. I got involved with some forest defenders though, in spring, and decided to move out to [a small town we’ll call Badhaven].”

After I had left St. Louis I had hopped freight east to see my family, and then caught south to winter in North Carolina, working with anti-war groups there. I told her as much.

I HAD NEVER done forest defense before, but I was excited to try. I hadn’t spent much time in the pacific northwest, but the Earth First!ers of Oregon were, to many, the pride and joy of the anarchist movement. While we squandered our time at endless meetings and anti-war marches, these people actually succeeded in saving entire eco-systems from destruction.

Well, to read their press releases anyway.

WE STOPPED AT every promising exit to dumpster-dive, and by nightfall the back of the truck was filled with food: ripe and over-ripe produce, just-expired orange juice, damaged packages of candy bars, and a mysterious thirty pounds of cheese we couldn’t find anything wrong with. When you know why something was thrown away, you’ve got nothing to worry about. When you can’t figure it out, then maybe you should worry.

We drove through the night, dosing on caffeine every time we stopped. Sometime shortly before dawn we arrived at a small, puke-green house in a small, puke-green town where the activists had set up shop. Nobody was awake, so we took everything that needed to be refrigerated inside, made room in the covered bed of the truck and went to sleep. I held Leda for the first time in months, her familiar rusty smell of old sweat coaxing me to sleep.

IF WE HAD desired fanfare for our triumphant arrival then we ought to have been born groceries. A few short hours after the sun came up, someone had opened the fridge and found the orange juice. He immediately put on his cap and went outside, where he saw the truck and peered in through the windows. His bespectacled, bearded and pierced face was the first thing I saw. He didn’t look like a cop, so I tried to go back to sleep.

More crusty kids came out to the truck and they soon had everything except me loaded into the house. Even Leda begrudgingly roused herself to go say hi. Me, I had a pleasant dream about sunshine, coffee, and chocolate pudding.

Sometime around noon Leda returned and I woke up with her face scant inches in front of mine. “How long have you been doing that?” I said.

“Oh, long enough.” She pulled her face back and I got to see her beautiful, crooked-toothed smile. “Come inside and meet people, and if we’re lucky they won’t just think of you as my boyfriend.”

I knew what she meant, and I was a bit worried. Social interactions have never really been my strong suit, and the complicated interpersonal relationships involved in a paranoid, cliquish counter-culture are really quite aggravating sometimes. I already just wanted to be left alone, and I hadn’t even met anybody yet.

I went up the weathered wooden steps and in through a torn screen door that I remembered vaguely from our arrival the night before. The place was a single floor and basement, lent by a sympathetic, land-owning local. The concept of a landlord helping out anarchists intrigued me, but small-town politics were vastly different than in the east-coast sprawl that I was used to.

Inside, I could have been in any squat in any city in America. Backpacks littered the floor, sleeping bags and sleeping pads were at awkward angles and someone lay half-asleep on the couch that faced the door. Beer cans were piled in the corner. Only graffiti was conspicuously absent; it seemed to have been replaced by signs like “Anarchy means you clean up after yourself,” and “If you want a maid, join the bourgeoisie.” I decided that the place was the love child of a squat and an activist house, and dubbed it the Green Bastard Inn.

Leda waited for my eyes to adjust and pointed to the drowsy punk on the couch. “That’s Lettuce,” she told me. Actually, the name she told me was that of a completely different edible plant, but I have changed everyone’s names for security reasons. “And Lettuce, this is Jimmy.” Again, I went by a different name that day, but for clarity’s sake I’ll just use my name here, rather than making up a different funny name to replace the funny name I went by. Names get really confusing in anarchist circles, but it helps keep the Man off our backs. (I have to chuckle every time I write out “the Man”)

Lettuce grunted and I hadn’t really determined any particular characteristic to remember that person by. I hadn’t even gotten a solid guess as to their gender. Which was well enough, because I since learned that that person, like many people in the forest defense community, chose to avoid gender-specific pronouns.

[IN MANY CASES in this story, however, I have been a jerk and simply used traditional pronouns rather than attempt to offer a clear view of how non-gender-specific pronouns can be introduced into English literature. All non-gender-specific pronouns in English are recent inventions, and there is no

consensus as to which ones ought to be used. And there is no way that I am going to start using the grammatical sin that is the singular “they”. Rest assured that, in person, I referred to them in a gender-neutral format, but since now I have the advantage of writing, I feel like I can safely simplify matters this way. If this paragraph made absolutely no sense to you, I apologize, and you can keep reading as though it didn’t exist. If this paragraph offended you, take it up with me personally. Or shit-talk me behind my back, that’s fine too.]

WE WALKED INTO the kitchen where four people were busy preparing breakfast. The kitchen was clean, which I attributed an act of God until I was introduced to Rabbit, the older man (and by older I mean only 35) who unintentionally filled the role of housekeeper.

“Hey everyone, this is Jimmy. He’s a good kid, I can vouch for him 100%.”—Leda

“This is Turnip,” Leda said, indicating a young woman who was peeling her namesake over a compost bucket. She wore patched carhart overalls and her hair was shaved except for a long dreaded mullet. She looked up and nodded, but otherwise paid me no mind.

“This is Quinoa,” Leda indicated a man who was cutting rather large bad spots out of the eggplant we had brought. He looked at me and smiled, and I recognized him as the avid food-lover who had woken me earlier, when I was in the truck. His smile was something special, and I had a crush on him immediately.

“This is Fennel,” and Leda pointed out a gangly tranny-woman with a hook-shaped nose and beautiful eyes. She was busy frying tofu and didn’t even look my way.

“And this is Rabbit.” Rabbit was the only person in the room over 25 and the only one wearing clothes that could pass as normal. He had blue jeans, work-boots and a simple green earth-first! t-shirt with a wolf howling from the top of an over-turned bulldozer. He was the local who had started the whole campaign, and was pretty new to anarchist politics. But that morning, he was the only one who spared me a word.

“Morning,” Rabbit said. He put down the garlic-chopping knife, brushed his palms on his jeans, and offered his hand. Gentle. I was impressed. “Where’d you come from?”

Turnip peered over at him with a strange look. It’s not considered polite to ask someone where they’re from; some consider it a breach of security culture.

I answered him vaguely, but tried to still be warm. “I’m from the east coast. I just came out west a few days ago, actually, to come out here. Leda said it was a good campaign, and I’ve always been curious about forest work.”

I knew it was a slight faux pas to admit naivety to an issue, but I couldn’t really bring myself to care. It was true; I didn’t know the first thing about forest

defense, except that it involved a lot of planning, tree-sits, blockades, and maybe something more destructive.

“Ah, well, it’s good to have you. It’s a lot of work, but it’s important.” Rabbit went back to chopping garlic.

RABBIT WAS RIGHT, there was a lot of work to be done. As soon as everyone had eaten, Rabbit and Lettuce went back into the kitchen to clean up. Leda pawned me off onto Quinoa for orientation and then drove off with Fennel and Turnip.

Quinoa went over the basics of our campaign against the lumber company, explaining the legal and political situation, and he defined a framework that it was safe for us to work within. We, as a campaign, were committed to non-violence, but for political and strategic reasons rather than moral ones.

One thing I realized was that, rather than a rigid structure, what people had organized was more of a framework for people to work within. Without clearly defining what that should be done, they had defined the work that *could* be done, and provided the resources required by anyone who chose to take any action they wanted.

And this general air of anonymity was for good reasons. Destroying a logging road with a pickaxe, for example, carries a five-year sentence. Five years in jail just for digging a ditch in a logging road. Nobody, that I am aware of, has ever been successfully charged with that particular offense, but the police, and the feds, were certainly paying us very close attention.

Actually, they called us terrorists.

There are serious social pitfalls to a culture based around security: Cliquishness, exclusiveness, and what can appear to be arrogance, but it really does help keep people safe.

I also learned about the campaign’s anti-oppression policy, which defined, in general terms, how to treat each other fairly and to work against sexism, racism, homophobia, etc. within the movement. The ideas were the same ones I was used to, but never had they been so clearly explored and defined before.

THAT EVENING TURNIP took me out to the practice tree in the backyard. “We’ve only got one harness here, so first I’m going to put it on and show you how to climb. Then you’ll go up a few feet and come back down.”

I used to love climbing trees when I was little, and at first I was a bit disappointed by how complex, slow, and cautious the rope-climbing method that Turnip taught me was. There were plenty of knots to master, and safety was stressed over speed. I always used to simply free-climb ropes, wrapping the line around my leg when I needed to rest. But this method, properly used, would allow me to safely work in a tree for hours, or so I learned.

“Quinoa went over our anti-oppression policy with you?” Turnip looked me in the eyes, probably for the first time. She didn’t look friendly.

“Yeah.”

“That’s good. It’s important that you know that we won’t tolerate any patriarchal shit here.” Her tone was far from casual, much closer to accusatory.

All kinds of responses floated through my head, most of them cautious agreements, a few of them defensive, but I couldn’t settle on anything to say. I said nothing.

DINNER WAS A feast courtesy of Rabbit, who made a fine vegan chef despite being a meat-eater like me. We had a red-sauce with eggplant and peppers over pasta, grilled tofu with kale, and a salad of the freshest of the vegetables we had scavenged.

Quinoa grumbled a bit to me during dinner. “We never get tofu out in the woods. Town keeps it all for themselves.”

Leda, on his other side, overheard. “How long do you think it will last out there? And besides, you get all of the packaged foods. I haven’t eaten a Luna bar since I’ve been here.”

Mildly appeased, Quinoa turned to her. “But you’re coming out with us tomorrow, right? Leaving the paperwork aside for the glory of waking up with sticks in your hair?”

“Hah. That’s right.”

AFTER DINNER, RABBIT and I went to go clean up in the kitchen. I tried to tell him that I could get it all done myself, but he insisted. Lettuce, Quinoa, Turnip and Fennel laid out to sleep in the living room, Rabbit went home, and Leda and I went to go sleep in the back of her truck.

“How was it, my dear?”—Leda

“Careful, don’t call me ‘my dear’. It’s reminiscent of patriarchal language.”—Me

“Turnip talked to you, huh?”—Leda

“Yeah, I don’t think she likes me much.”—Me

“She’s just protective of women, that’s all. She’ll warm up to you eventually, once she gets to know you like I know you.”—Leda

Leda kissed me once, chastely, and I worried that I might have erred in mocking her friend. I lay on my back and Leda cuddled up to my chest under my arm. We each thought our own thoughts.

“Me being with you here is cramping your style, isn’t it?”—Me

“Yeah. Well, not yet, but it might.”—Leda

“So I should take some distance from you, huh?”—Me

“Maybe that would be good. But not too much distance.” She stroked my scruffy neck with her dirty fingers. “Tell me about this girl who broke your heart.”

“Her name is Sarah Stained-Glass, and she didn’t break my heart. I only met her for a few days, and then I met her fiancé. I didn’t have time to get my heart broken.”—Me



“Okay. Well, I’m glad you came anyway, heart-broken or not.”—Leda

“Yeah.”—Me

We disappeared back into our own thoughts, our own dreams.

THE NEXT MORNING found me driving a pickup packed with food, gear and crusties out into the national forest. I had hoped Leda would drive but she said she really needed to avoid being ID’d by the police. I didn’t pry. She sat in the back with Lettuce and Turnip while Quinoa sat up front to direct me.

I parked on a gravel road and we unloaded the truck. As soon as everything was out, Lettuce drove it away, heading back for town. If I had wanted to get back, I would have had to wait for the next food run, which came once or twice a week, or I would have had to walk six miles to the highway and hitchhike.

I shouldered my pack and took a cardboard box full of food down a treacherous path, under a fallen log that blocked our way at about waist height, and up a steep hill. Someone had built ladders out of old wood and bike tubes that lay on the ground for some of the steeper parts. They looked a little bit janky, so I started to avoid one, but Leda stopped me.

“These are here to keep us from eroding the hill any further.”

“Oh.”

Going up the ladder, I learned a valuable skill that I would use every day in the woods—carrying heavy things up hills. About a quarter mile walk from the truck, we reached base camp.

IMAGINE A KITCHEN in the middle of the woods, built out of sticks, bike tubes and tarps, with a firepit for a stove and a strange plastic jug attached to a footpedal for a faucet. A lone crusty sat next to the firepit reading a book. When she heard us approach, she put the book down and took the box from my hands.

Quinoa gave me a tour that took most of the day, and we ended up hiking for miles along logging roads and train tracks. It was relaxing, though, rather than tiring, as I had spent far too much of the last week or so on planes or in cars.

The forest was beautiful, but in a more subdued way than I had always expected. Rather than simply taking my breath away at every turn, the wonders of the forest snuck up on me when I wasn’t expecting.

“We camp outside of the old-growth, in an area that was cut twenty years ago, so that we don’t do any more damage to the forest. It’s okay to pick plants, gather wood and lichens from the mono-culture, but we try have as little effect on the old growth as possible,” Quinoa told me.

We crossed a stream and were suddenly in the old growth, a change that was noticeable immediately. The forest floor was mostly clear, except for ferns, and of course the trees were taller.

More than that—and this from a jaded, suburban and urban east coast kid—the energy of the place was different. There was a very subtle air of... age?

Majesty? I don't know, something good. I felt peaceful in a way I never had in the woods before.

Quinoa showed me which lichens were poisonous and which were good toilet paper. He showed me a few edibles, and he warned me about yellow jackets. I assured him that I wasn't allergic and he was relieved.

He showed me the units we were defending. Timber sales are split into different smaller sections called units, which can be miles apart. Our work, apparently, was concentrated in the two closest to our camp. If we had the numbers we could do more, and the weakest point in their ability to log the other four was the single road that led to them. Quinoa said nothing more about it than that.

In the units that we were already set up in I saw two people harnessed to different trees constructing some kind of elaborate web of rope. "The point," Quinoa said, "is that if any of the eight trees fall, the treesit we are building will fall as well." I decided I didn't want to be a treesitter.

We made our way back to camp just as the sun was setting and Turnip and Leda were finishing dinner. Shortly into dusk, the other three people, whom I hadn't met, came back from the unit where they were working and we ate a rice, soymilk, tempeh and greens dinner.

"I love food runs," said the woman who had been sitting by the fire when we first arrived, "I haven't had tempeh in weeks."

Quinoa and I made eyes all throughout dinner, and afterwards I asked him to show me where I could sleep.

We moved a bit away from the fire, and I laid my sleeping bag under a low-slung tarp Quinoa had erected. Facing each other in the dark, we started the wonderful the inane chatter of new crushes exploring each other.

"What was your childhood like?" He asked me this as casually as someone might ask my age.

"Well..." I looked over to the silhouetted punks by the fire for a moment and looked back at him. "I guess I could explain it best with a story."

"Go ahead."—Quinoa

"BEFORE I RAN away, I lived in the suburbs. Most of the time, my parents ignored me, which suited me just fine. Once my older sister went off to college, though, they started to pay too much attention to me.

"Anyhow, within a few miles of my parents house were some pretty nice fields, and little patches of trees I used to call forests until I learned what a forest really is. When I was in fourth grade or so, I used to wander pretty far, exploring everything I thought to explore. Once, during the summer, I woke up early, packed food and supplies into my backpack, and wandered off for good, or so I presumed. I walked through all the groves and fields that I already knew about, but I bypassed the crawdad creeks and abandoned tree houses that day. I wanted to go further. I walked through a brand new

housing development I had never seen before and up to the top of a big hill.

“When I reached the top, I looked at my feet and saw an iron cellar door, there in the middle of nowhere. I tried to lift it up, but I couldn’t budge it more than the crack it was already open. I walked around until I found a long, stout stick and a big rock, a piece of granite that I had to lift up and roll into position. I wedged the stick under the door and—using the rock as a fulcrum—levered the door until the stick touched the ground. I needed a bigger fulcrum, but I couldn’t possibly move a bigger rock.

“Instead, I found a small piece of slate, and using it as a spade, I dug a good six inches out from behind the rock. Now, when I levered up the door, I got it far enough that its own weight carried it slamming onto the ground, open.

“A dark cement staircase went further than I could see. I was a bit of a pyro when I was younger, so I had lighter fluid, matches, and a candle with me. I lit the candle and started to descend.

“The stairs went deeper than any cellar, I realized. I had assumed that I was entering the ruins of some house, but after I had counted fifty stairs I started to wonder. The room that it finally opened into, 106 stairs down, was bigger than my entire house. I could only faintly see the other end in the candlelight. In the middle was a circular pit, and the walls were covered in graffiti. From somewhere, I heard a grumble, a rumble of metal and what sounded like slow and heavy footsteps.

“‘Who’s there!?’ To shout took all of my courage. When nobody answered, my mind dropped into panic. The heavy footsteps continued.

“‘Are you a dragon?’ I asked loudly, staring around the chamber as best as I could by candlelight.

“Laughter, a deep and resonating laughter, echoed up from the pit.

“‘Yes, I’m a dragon.’ The voice was low and crazy, coming from that hole in the center of the room.

“And, well, I flew blindly back up those steps, dropping my candle somewhere along the way. I came out of the cellar door at a full run and didn’t stop until I reached the housing development. Once I was there, I looked around and realized that nobody lived in any of the houses.

“I never found the place again. About six years later, I realized it was probably the first time I had ever spoken to a squatter.”

“Or a dragon,” Quinoa replied, winning a place in my heart.

Soon Quinoa was asleep, snoring loudly among the trees. I rolled him onto his side to quiet him down and went to bed myself, pleasantly exhausted.

“RISE AND SHINE! It’s time to stop the meglomachine! C’mon kids! The state ain’t just going to smash itself!”

Last I had checked, huddled inside my sleeping bag, it was barely dawn. I looked again and sure enough, I was right. It was barely dawn, and some asshole was wandering around waking everyone up.

I looked over at Quinoa, but he was unfazed. Apparently, that sort of anti-social behavior is tolerated, if not encouraged, in the woods. At least there was cowboy coffee ready for me already. Oatmeal was offered but I turned it down. I'm no morning person, as I mentioned, and I rarely eat anything before noon.

My rouser and the three others eventually introduced themselves to me, but I didn't see much more of them, so I won't bother coming up with new names for them now.

I spent the morning in the units fetching equipment back and forth for people in the trees while Quinoa watched the camp. We always had to have someone at camp. After lunch, that someone was I.

I had no idea what it was I was supposed to be doing at camp, or what to do (besides claim everything as my own) if police or rangers arrived. I was told by several people and signs that I wasn't to be slacking, however.

I ended up picking up a dungeons-and-dragons fiction book from a bucket (everything was stored in sealed 5-gallon buckets) and spent the afternoon alternately picking at my toes, trying to care about Sir Goodguy's valiant something-or-other, and wondering what the hell I was doing in the middle of nowhere with no way to be useful.

Turnip came back and lectured me about not having dinner started. "Look, every year we have forest defenders and forest pretenders. You need to contribute."

But I finally spoke up for myself. "I have years of protest experience, have been arrested on multiple occasions, have no fear of jail, have organized with literally dozens of groups. I've just never been in the woods before. I have no idea what is expected of me." I kept my voice calm and continued. "I'm not just Leda's partner, here to pass the time; I genuinely care about the state of the world and eco-system. But everything is in a 'do whatever you think will work' framework, and I have no experience with any of this at all. And now you're pissed off because I didn't have dinner started, which I had no idea was expected of me."

"Why are you so defensive about being with Leda?" I had accidentally struck a sour chord in her, but after a moment she processed the rest of my rant. "Look, I'll help you get dinner started. All you have to do when you watch camp is clean up and have dinner done by sunset, so when everyone comes back hungry they can eat and sleep."

For the next hour she helped me prepare vegetables, wash pots, and cook rice & beans. We barely spoke, and when we did we argued about how best to cook rice. I know how to cook, I enjoy cooking, and I don't need to be told what to do. But we put up with each other, and the silence helped.

AFTER DINNER LEDA took me aside. She looked tired but happy, and I realized that she was finally getting to get her hands dirty after months of paperwork and phone calls.

“How is it going?”—Leda

“Not well.” I knew she was asking for a longer response immediately, but I was grumpy and made her fish for it.

“Well? Out with it.”—Leda

“Quinoa is the only friendly person here; everyone else treats me like I’m useless. Besides that, I feel like I’m in the army or something.”—Me

“Well, you have to understand, these people are stressed out. What we’re trying to do is almost impossible, and we don’t have the resources for it. Half the locals, whose water supply we’re saving, hate us. Hunters take potshots at us, the police are after us, the Feds are after us, and tons of college kids seem to think it makes a pleasant vacation to come out here for a few days and pretend to help. It really sucks, but these people can’t be too trusting.”—Leda

“And aside from that, I have no idea how to be useful.”—Me

“Hrmm... I’ve been thinking the same thing actually. I’ve got some ideas.”

WE SET OFF that night, telling a few people that we would be back in a few days. Instead of packing a lot of water we packed a pump-filter and our nalgene water-bottles. We took two camo tarps, laminated map and compass, our multi-tools, warm wool clothes, our sleeping bags, canned food and not too much else.

With the sun fully set, we set off. I reached to turn on my headlamp but Leda stopped me. “Don’t,” she said, “let your eyes adjust.” I stumbled a bit until we reached the road, but once there the sky seemed positively bright. The world was black and blue, and the moon shone gibbous overhead, and the man in the moon bore a peculiar half-smile.

“Rules of the woods,” Leda started, “when I say ditch, we ditch. When you say ditch, we ditch. If you see headlights, hear footsteps, anything at all, we run up the embankment. If it’s too steep, we go down on the other side. But even if you’re not up to anything sketchy, never let them see you, never let anyone see you. We don’t want them to know how many of us there are... or in this case, aren’t.”

We walked for a few hours that night without seeing a single car, but we never let down our guard. We explored a good part of the timbersale roads, looking for sharp curves, steep embankments, good places to hide supplies, shallow culverts and running water. We spoke as little as necessary with a military precision, and I learned the hand signals we would use. It was fun, playing war.

Sometime well into the A.M. we marched off uphill into the trees to sleep. “Don’t walk the same way as me,” Leda advised, “or we’ll leave a path.”

The stars were out so we didn’t set up a tarp. We zipped our sleeping bags together and, exhausted already, made love.

THE SUN CAN be quite the devil when you sleep outside, but the thick canopy mostly spared us its sharp heat in the morning. Regardless, try as we might, we managed no more than 6 hours of sleep before we could sleep no more.

“Room temperature baked beans?” I asked Leda after she joined me outside of the sleeping bag, shivering from the morning air in her tanktop and boxers.

“I’d love some,” she responded, struggling into her patchwork pants while I slowly opened a can of beans with my multi-tool.

“So what’s on the agenda for today?”—Me

“Well, I was thinking today we could finish up our work mapping out this place, and then tomorrow we can hike up to that ridge because it’s probably fucking gorgeous up there and I haven’t seen you in months. Then, two days from now we can go back to camp and plan. The cutting starts in a week, after all.”—Leda

I sat cross-legged and she sprawled out against me while we ate the cold baked beans. “I tried to get some with ham in them for you,” she joked, “but Quinoa wouldn’t buy them with his foodstamps.”

I murmured my laughter and ran my hand familiarly down her shoulder when suddenly she tensed and placed a hand over my mouth. I looked and saw her pointing towards the road. A LEO (Law Enforcement Officer—forest service cops) was driving slowly down the road in his SUV, windows down. We doubted he could see us, but it dampened our joy nonetheless.

That day and well into the night we scouted the rest of the sale, concentrating on the sole road which led to the four units we weren’t defending yet. We found multiple camping spots and sentry points in case we decided to shift priorities later on; the two units we were defending were each larger than the other four combined, but they were also slated to be cut first. Fallback plans were looking more and more necessary as our court battle continued to flag.

We made camp earlier that night than the night before, but we were too exhausted to do more than eat sandwiches and sleep in our separate bags. We started off spooning, but shortly the hard ground moved me onto my back and Leda onto her stomach.

“EVERYWHERE I GO, I feel like I’m trying to be someone different.” The sun wasn’t out, and we feared rain, but we sat on a rocky ridge nonetheless. Leda continued: “I used to think that I ran away from people, from situations. But that’s not the case, really. I’m running away from myself.”

Leda found a pebble and felt its weight in her palm before placidly launching it off the cliff. A moment passed before it hit, and I was reminded of our old east coast squat when whole nights had been spent throwing bottles and bricks from our roof onto the empty pavement below.

I stayed quiet, waiting for her to finish her thought. After her pebble had skidded to a halt, she did. “I spend so little time in each incarnation, I don’t really know how to be each one. Four months ago I was a bike punk, today I’m a forest kid. Last week I was an experienced organizer, self-assured as I talked to redneck locals who wanted to tear out my hippy throat. I never would have guessed that anyone would ever call me a hippy in my life.”

“I know exactly what you mean,” I said, “about the re-inventing yourself thing anyway.”

“You know, Jimmy, you’re about the only thread that runs through everything. I love you, you know. You’re the only person I’ve ever said that to, even.” She laughed once and lightly tossed another stone. “Not to scare you or anything.”

“It’s okay.” But I wasn’t sure it was. I was scared.

We helped each other up and Leda began to walk back towards the treeline. I watched her stride, always so controlled, and near every bit of my being wanted to throw myself from the ridge. I was too afraid of losing her to hold her as closely as I often wanted, I knew, but I didn’t ever tell her that.

I tossed a stone instead of myself and then followed her.

THE REST OF the day was a wonder, however. The afternoon brought the sun with it and we found a grassy spot among some younger trees. We opened our sleeping bags onto the ground, one atop the other. Risking the chill mountain air, we stripped and found our casual fervor together.

Let no one ever trick you into thinking that outdoor sex is a miracle—there is something quite lovely about cushioning and warmth. But again, I’m a city kid.

We decided to walk no further that day and sat around reading to one another, passing her copy of Bill Ayer’s *Fugitive Days* back and forth, marveling at the escapades and follies of radicals before us.

That night, we risked the sore hips of the hard ground and stayed cuddled until dawn roused us. Even if I had known it was going to be our last night together for so long, I don’t know what more I could have done. Told her how I felt, most likely.

WE REACHED CAMP around noon the next day and found almost everyone—including Rabbit and some kids from town—in council by the unlit firepit.

Quinoa intercepted and debriefed us. “They’re not cutting next week. They’re cutting tomorrow.”

“What!” Leda tensed up. I knew she was suddenly resentful of our daylong vacation. “How? Why? Logging season hasn’t started!”

“I don’t know. Town came in and told us. We think that the court maybe allowed it.”—Quinoa

“Can they do that?”—Leda

“I don’t know.”—Quinoa

“What are we going to do?”—Leda

Quinoa gestured that we join the discussion in progress. We took seats and were soon lost in the ordered frenzy of a panicked action meeting. Turnip was facilitating, and doing an admirable job of keeping everyone focused without pushing her own agenda. She barely said a word; she was like the conductor of

passionate piece of classical music, waving her hands, moving the music along and balancing every tone. It was my first *real* glimpse of her, I think.

We overviewed what we already had in place. There were two tree-sits up, but both the current sitters wanted to be replaced before active logging; we kept the sits occupied so that the forest service couldn't just cut them down, but it was quite a different affair to be in one while lumberjacks roamed the forest below, threatening your life with chainsaw and axe. Okay, so I'm not sure they still use axes, but the image gets my point across.

Quinoa was going to occupy one during the logging; he had planned to do so from his first day at the camp.

We were going to block the road that led off from the highway with cement-filled barrels. The blockade would interfere with recreational visits to the forest, we knew, but for only a short while. A clear-cut with interfere with them forever.

I volunteered for scout duty, assuming Leda would do the same, but she said she wanted to run medic for the people who were locking down to the barrels. Instead, Turnip would join me in perching above the roadway.

The meeting concluded some hours later and I wished Quinoa luck. Someone broke out the energy bars and everyone went to work.

TURNIP AND I walked silently along the road, and there was a tinge of anxiety in the clear mountain air. We thought that the LEOs might raid our camp that night, expecting us to go into action. Our job was to give everyone fair warning of any traffic coming up the road. In the morning, we would help with coordination, our elevated vantage point allowing us to survey the scene. Town had also provided us with a janky old video camera to film the going-ons.

Climbing up the embankment, I showed Turnip to the spot that Leda and I had found. It was a well-foliaged ridge about a hundred feet uphill from the road, and she approved. I was relieved. There was a large fallen tree to hide ourselves behind, need be, but we could crawl forward a good ways without too much worry.

Being on watch is boring, and uncomfortable silences are more boring still. Eventually we got to talking, but it didn't start out politely.

"Why do you east coast crusty boys always have those clips on your caps?"

—Turnip

"Ah, I don't know. Habit I've had for years I guess. But it's not just the boys."—Me

Turnip harumphed slightly before she replied. "I guess. I just worry about metal flashing in the light, giving us away."

She must have realized how tactless she was being, so she backpedaled. "I mean, I guess it's not enough to matter."

We were silent for a while as the sun set somewhere outside of our field of vision.



“Last year, when I was out at a different sale, a woman was sexually assaulted in her treesit, by a man she thought she might take as a lover. And he was the kindest, fuzziest-bearded, most articulate man in camp.”—Turnip

“Oh.”—Me

“I’m not saying you would do it, I’m just saying it happens.”—Turnip

“Yeah. East coast circles aren’t free of it either. I was hoping you all had it better out here, with your explicitly defined guidelines and all.”—Me

“I think they help. And they certainly make it easier for us deal with afterwards; they help people feel empowered enough to come forward about it.”—Turnip

And suddenly I was on comfortable ground. I have spent a large portion of my adult life (okay, okay, teenage life) working on similar issues. I understood why Turnip was so focused on gender interactions, but it still put a thorn in my side to feel judged. At least we finally got to talk about it all.

We weren’t ever going to be friends, I was guessing, but it was nice to feel comfortable around someone you planned on defying federal law enforcement with in the morning.

“You know...” she said randomly, hours after our conversation had petered out to the level of ‘car comin?’ ‘nope.’ ‘just a car with brights on the highway?’ ‘yep.’

“You know...”—Me

“Anarchists have got it all wrong...”—Turnip

These were promising words to hear out of a fellow rebel. I was pretty sick of the dogma of some anarchists, despite still identifying as one.

“Anarchists have got it all wrong. They think they can build community with their friends and lovers. But even if that worked, which it usually doesn’t, what are their *kids* going to do? Sure, *we* get to choose our own tribe, but not the next generation, if we decentralized society in a tribal way like we always talk about.

“Now I don’t mean that we shouldn’t build community. Or that we can’t choose our friends. But community doesn’t need to be just of friends; it needs to be of people supporting each other, yes, but also leaving each other the fuck alone a lot of the time, ya know? The problem is that anarchists, like everyone else, are too caught up in ‘good guy’ ‘bad guy’ shit to realize that everyone is nuanced.

“I guess what I mean is that community is formed by neighbors, not friends. Allies, not lovers.”

I nodded in the cold air. I hadn’t thought of it that way, but she was absolutely right. Who the hell wants three hundred friends? Give me ten and leave the three hundred for “having my back when the cops are coming” duty.

EVENTUALLY, THE COPS *did* come, but not until well after dawn and well after the loggers. I had taken the first shift, so I was roughly roused by Turnip well before the sun was up.

The early morning light lit only fog and we could barely see the road a hundred feet away. The blockade was in place, three barrels stretched across the middle of the road at its narrowest point. Three people were locked to them by carabineers on chains, their arms disappearing into pipes imbedded in each. The barrels couldn't be moved without injuring the protesters, and that each person would have to be cut out, slowing the logging by hours at least. That was the idea, anyway.

About a dozen more people were mingling on the roadway. One person was assigned to talk to the loggers and the police, to try to keep everyone on both sides calm and to keep the people locking down safe. That person, a man from town, knew that he was going to be arrested as well. The cops would come in and declare the area off limits. Everyone would have to move back or be arrested.

Two videographers were down on the road, but they would be moved back too. We would be illegally nearby ourselves, but we hoped that they wouldn't notice us, or wouldn't bother clambering up after us.

So the loggers came at dawn, and although I heard a few shouts, they didn't even get out of their shiny middle-class pickups. I had expected beat-up old trucks, the sort that would pick me up hitchhiking. But nope, they were those cursed glossy beasts of which I've never seen the inside.

I commented on it to Turnip, who explained: "The locals around here, they may not all like us, but they won't cut this place down. The town's tourist income depends on it. See, all of the trucks down there have out-of-state plates."

Almost an hour later the first cop arrived. That first car called for the sheriff, who called for the LEOs. I'm guessing. That's the order they arrived in. I hope they all had to wake up early. I sure did.

It all happened pretty quickly. They closed off the area, everyone who didn't want to get arrested moved back. They arrested the support person, who stayed calm and articulated that the barrels could not be safely moved. I filmed him as he walked stoically to the paddy-wagon.

But then things stopped going according to our plans. A forklift arrived on the back of a large truck, and the loggers and cops moved the barrels with it. The first person whose barrel they moved screamed, her arms wrenched as she refused to let go.

Leda came running out from the crowd screaming as well. "You're hurting her! You can't do that!" and down she went, tackled by a man twice her weight. I nearly yelled out myself. But when they had her in cuffs she refused to stand, and they dragged her by her wrists behind her back. She looked fierce. But she looked up at me for one brief second and she smiled, a wild smile on a face I would only see behind glass for months to come. I watched that video over and over again while she was in jail.

The popo finished moving the first barrel to the side of the road and started on the second. The protestor unclipped her arms voluntarily. As did the third. They joined Leda in the paddy wagon, walking in shame.

The other protestors, two hundred feet back, screamed encouragement. The woman who hadn't unlocked sat forgotten by the roadside, her arms still inside the barrel. The police hadn't noticed Turnip and I.

As soon as the loggers began to drive past, Turnip stood and began to run along the hill towards the units. I chased her, struggling to keep up.

"What are we doing?"—Me

"Cat and Mouse!"—Turnip

"What?!"—Me

"Cops are Cat, we're Mouse!"—Turnip

And so I learned a rather curious game. A logger cannot legally cut a tree when civilians are around. So you hang around the loggers. But then you get arrested. From afar.

See, a cop need only say, "you're arrested" to arrest you, legally speaking. Or something like that. So a Cat sees you, says "you are under arrest!" and then you run away. He starts to chase you, but another Mouse is bothering another logger, and the Cat has to track *that* one down. It's all very clever, in a "they always win and the forest always gets cut down" kind of way.

THE NIGHT AFTER the action, our food supply was as low as our morale. Only the four of us had been arrested, and we wouldn't starve, what with the 50lbs. bag of rice, but even our Bragg's soysauce was gone. Town had gone home and the five of us left sat around the fire eating rice with eggplant.

"You know what I miss? I miss kale." Turnip picked at her food with her spork. "I really don't like eggplant." Since she was the one who had cooked, nobody was insulted. Instead, we all nodded in agreement.

"I miss hummus," I said. I didn't mind eggplant, but it was true, I did miss hummus.

"Yeah, Portland is great for that."—Turnip

"I'm sorry?"—Me

"Oh, I figured you were talking about the hummus dumpster in Portland."—Turnip

"There's a hummus dumpster in Portland?"—Me

"Yeah, in Southeast. You have to climb a barbed-wire fence, but I've never met anybody who's been caught. Freshly expired hummus, almost every night of the week. Backpacks worth. Don't eat the sandwiches though."

"Wow. Portland, huh."—Me

I SPENT THE next couple of weeks in an exhausted blur. Everyone got out of jail but Leda—she refused to give her name and was going to be held until her case went to court. She was being accused of felony assault on an officer. I'm lucky that I was so busy; my lovesick was gone, and I barely had time to worry for Leda.

I turned twenty. I didn't tell anyone. Leda knew, of course, but she was in jail.

The two units were cut, with the exception of the trees protected by the sits. The court case was moving slowly, and I needed a break. On Turnip's advice, I moved to Portland.

## PART TWO—JUNE-JULY

SPENDING YOUR LIFE HOPPING ON FREIGHT TRAINS AND FIGHTING AGAINST environmental degradation is fulfilling, sure, and it looks great on paper, but it doesn't help you get (or want) a job. The issue of survival becomes of day-to-day significance and priorities get rearranged.

Invite me to a party, for example, and I probably won't come unless I can crash on your couch. I know, it sucks, but so does finding a good rooftop to sleep on when you're tired and sweaty. I don't go to so many parties anyhow.

I travel lighter than most of my friends, mostly because I don't play an instrument. When I moved to Portland, I had a sleeping bag, a change of clothes (my "normal" clothes), a notebook and a first aid kit. It all fit nicely into a student's daypack, which I took it with me everywhere.

I spent my first week or so in Portland exploring on foot and by bus. I sat on benches by the river, on benches by food co-ops, and on couches in "radical" cafes, but I didn't really make friends easily, and every night I slept alone in the woods of Forest Park (an aptly named place, indeed). I went to activist events—film screenings, book-readings, minor protests, a few open meetings and the like—and I spoke with dozens of people, but nothing really exciting came up. I wasn't bored, but the town didn't excite me, either.

That is, until I saw Sarah Stained-Glass at Food Not Bombs, sitting blithely in the park near a bicycle, by herself and away from the crowd.

My heart dropped down into my stomach when I noticed her picking at her yellowed tofu, smiling softly. I approached her, disbelieving, but when I got a closer look it really was my favorite hitchhiking ride of all time. Physically at least, she hadn't changed at all; her blood-red hair was cut the same, her septum ring still in place, and she was even wearing the same black tanktop and tan workpants she had been wearing when I had met her.

"Sarah?" I asked nervously, and she looked up. She looked confused for a moment, and then her smile returned.

"Jimmy?"—Sarah

"Sitting with anyone," I asked, barely managing a cool exterior.

"Yeah..."—Sarah

"Your fiancé?" I interrupted.

"Who? Richard?" She laughed. "No, no. I've no idea where he is. He's gone, I hope. King is here, he went off to find a bathroom."

I was stunned, so I simply stood still. The time in the park seemed to slow and I watched the trees shiver in the breeze. Sometimes my mind gets like that.

“Sit down, sit down, you’re making me nervous.”—Sarah

It never really occurs to me that other people might be as awkward as I am. I sat cross-legged across from her, though I had yet to go through the food line. I wasn’t hungry anymore.

“What are you doing here,” I asked.

“I’m moving here.” Sarah didn’t make much eye contact; she mostly looked at her food.

“Oh.”—Me

“What about you?”—Sarah

“I uh, I’m moving here too.” Our conversation was painfully sparse, and I suddenly wished I had food to play with. Instead, I took my hat off and put it back on several times while we spoke.

“How long you been here?”—Sarah

“A week, I suppose. You?”—Me

“Me and King came in two nights ago.”—Sarah

“Where you been staying?”—Me

“Oh, I’ve got a room I found on Craigslist. It’s pretty nice... my two housemates are a married couple, but they’re going to be gone for weeks at a time, touring with their band. It’s in Southeast, though King had to help me find it... it’s kinda far out, on 54<sup>th</sup>.” Downtown Portland is west of the river, and Food Not Bombs is served downtown. The higher the number a street has, the further away from the river it is.

“And you,” she asked,

“where are you staying?”

“Oh, I uh...” I paused to consider my words. If I told her the truth, I thought she might offer to let me stay with her. If I glossed over the question, however, I wouldn’t feel like I was tricking her into anything. *Was* I tricking her into anything? She would only offer a place to stay if she wanted to. But I hated those mind games.

“I’m staying in Forest Park. It’s really nice up there, you should come up sometime.” I hoped to imply stability and contentedness.

Sarah started to respond but we were distracted by the approach of King.

King is an imposing crusty punk. He looks like he’s been at it forever, and he carries himself proudly, with majesty that befits his name. His signature leather jacket bears a painting of a drag queen digging his high-heels into a jock. “Fags bash back,” it proclaims. He’s been wearing it for ten years. He’s in his late twenties, keeps a trim beard, never smells unduly, and confuses the hell out of every square who sees him. When he opens his mouth, he only confuses them further. I adore King O’Beer.

“Jimmy!” He bellowed, turning the heads of the punks who sat in the grass.

I stood and he bear-hugged me. I don't think King will ever see me as anything but the 14-year-old runaway he helped adopt five years ago. But then, I don't think I'll see him as anything other than a crazed spiritual advisor and sometimes bodyguard. So it works out.

We sat back down and the tension disappeared between Sarah and I. Soon the two of them were taking turns telling me about the many adventures of their cross-country minivan trek. Of the stories that are legally safe to repeat, I'll say that the best was how they stopped at the Grand Canyon and rescued a kitten they found walking near the edge.

"It was meant to be," King told me, "for where but at the great crevice of the world can a suitable companion be found for those who travel the cracks of the system? Indeed, he needed a human-tongue name and Eriss he shall be, and he continues to walk the edge of every precipice, may he never fall."

Not everything King says is so overwrought, of course, or no one would ever want to be in his company. But those choice phrases are certainly the most quotable.

Anyhow, I went to get some food finally and the three of us ate an enjoyable dinner. The sun was still high, so we walked down to the waterfront and sat on the grass. King went off and returned with a bottle of wine, which the three of us shared covertly by pouring into my dark Nalgene water bottle.

Sarah asked what I had been up to, and I told her briefly about the fight for Either Or. She listened with interest, and King nodded his best sage nod.

"You ever done forest defense before, King?" I asked, curious.

"Nah. Hear about it a lot."—King

"I'd like to try it," Sarah said, "after I get settled down a bit more."

I couldn't help but be excited.

"Leda still out there?"—King

"Leda got popped."—Me

"Oh" King looked suddenly forlorn. "That's bad. That's uh... really bad."

"Why?" I asked.

"Who's Leda?"—Sarah

"Leda, Leda's a partner of mine."—Me

"Oh."—Sarah

The mood was dying with the long twilight.

"Why is it *really* bad that Leda is in jail?" I asked again.

"Cause uh," King looked conspiratorially at Sarah and I, "cause she's got warrants, sorta. It hasn't come up?"

"No. She hasn't given her name, so they're holding her until trial."—Me

"That's good. Her case going to be dropped in court?"—King

"Should be." Most of the time, protestors got slap-on-the-wrist style sentences; the courts start off by charging them with felony this-and-that but drop it down to a misdemeanor or a violation when it goes to trial.

"Alright then."—King

Sarah stood up, her mood vague. “I think I’m going to get the bus home. King, you still on our couch tonight?”

“Yeah.”—King

We made plans to meet the next day, noon, back at Waterfront Park. King and Sarah walked off, and I sat with my head in turmoil. I was, without a doubt, still fantastically enamored of Sarah, in a way that I’m not used to in the slightest. But at the same time, I was suddenly much more worried about Leda; I had thought she was just being stubborn by not giving them her legal name (which is not Leda, by the way). Ah, polyamory.

I caught the bus up towards Forest Park and climbed up to my wooded ridge. I couldn’t see the stars, for the canopy above me, but I made a nice nest of leaves and went to bed quite early. Sleeping outside, you just end up sleeping with the sun.

I WOKE WITH the sun, as well, though I fought against waking for almost an hour, pulling the hood of my sleeping bag over my eyes. When I finally roused, I laced up my boots, prepared and ate a peanut-butter sandwich, and started the long walk back into town.

It was still three hours until noon, so I went to the library and read up on forest ecology. I was no expert on the subject, but I was suddenly expected—having worked at forest defense—to have all the facts and figures as to why it was unsustainable to clear-cut vast swathes of the national forests. Most people, of course, understand this intuitively, but others need statistical convincing.

When I left the library and went to the waterfront, King was waiting for me.

“Where’s Sarah?” I asked.

“She’s in the car, there’s no parking. C’mon, let’s go.”—King

And so we clambered aboard her mini-van, which seemed remarkably little the worse for wear despite its month-long cross-country venture.

“Where we going?”—Me

“The beach.”—Sarah

I love the Pacific Ocean. I feel like a traitor to my coast by saying it, but the Pacific has more raw, waves-against-cliffs, giant spiring islands, Goonies-style power than the Atlantic. Even though the Atlantic had more pirates.

“Got any plans for tomorrow?”—King

“Nope.”—Me

“Then we’re camping.”—King

“Excellent.”—Me

A BUM-JUG OF wine emerged from King’s frame-pack and we sat on the thin grass among the rocks on the edge of a cliff.

“Eriss ought to be here,” I murmured, gazing towards the water below.

“It’s true.”—King

The sun had gone down and we had the coast-side cliff to ourselves. We were about a mile's hike from the pay-to-camp campgrounds, and though our spot was illegal, we assumed we were far enough off the path that no one would notice us.

We were silent for a few passes of the jug, but soon King got to talking.

"You know why I love alcohol?" he began.

"Because you're a lush," I playfully answered.

"No. Well, yes, but that's not what I was getting at." King took a long swallow of Carlo Rossi. "We, our culture, we're obsessed with control. We take a long look at chaos, ponder it deeply, but then we back away, afraid.

"Yet it's the tumultuous ocean we're from, from the wild jungles we've emerged," King took a second swallow before passing the bottle to Sarah, who drank much more conservatively, "and it's to chaos we return when we relinquish control."

Sarah replied. "Sure, King, but it's not lucid. We're stumbling back into Eden, like the ingrate wino we are, returning from useless nights at the bar. We're like the lover who knocks at paradise's door at all hours of the morning, begging her to take us back."

I was impressed. King was too.

"Fine then. Stop drinking all the wine." King reached for the bottle, which she returned.

King grumbled, but not mean-spiritedly, and screwed the cap back onto the jug. He may be a lush, but he doesn't *need* the stuff. I've seen him go days without a drink when it was politic to do so.

"I'm going to go for a walk." King stood and walked off. I thought of his edge-walking kitten and hoped he was sober enough to return unscathed.

Sarah reclined back on her backpack, stretching her beautiful legs in front of her, and I did my usual 'try not to stare'.

"So what happened?" I asked, tactlessly.

"In Alabama?"—Sarah

"Yeah. With..."—Me

"He was a jerk. I always knew he was a jerk, too. But after you left, he asked questions about you. He didn't believe me that you and I hadn't... But, you know, I was forgiving him for that. What broke it... he let it slip that he was glad that my parents had died. He was excited about the house. About getting the goddamn house. God, what a fucker." Sarah's voice grew soft as she cursed him.

"I'm sorry," I replied.

"No you're not," she laughed.

"Okay, well I'm not sorry that you left him. I'm sorry that he was such a jerk to begin with."—Me

"That I'll buy." Sarah laid her pack on its side and used it as a pillow, looking up at the sky.



“So King was still at his sister’s—they get along better than any siblings I’ve ever met—and he suggested Portland to me. He said that in Portland the punks and artists actually got along.” Sarah laughed again, a sort of giggle I had yet to hear from her lips. “Portland, land of vegan milk and honey. So we packed up the mini-van and the two of us headed west.”

“And the house?”—Me

“It’s still there. It’ll be empty for a while. I couldn’t bring myself to rent it out to strangers, since I would have to put everything in storage. I won’t be here forever.”—Sarah

Visions of Sarah and I moving back into her grand southern manor, decorated with stained glass windows and anarchist literature, came unbidden into my mind. I hope I’m not the only one who gets *way* ahead of themselves when it comes to heady crushes.

I lay my own pack next to hers and reclined.

“Portland is okay for stars, as far as cities go. Beats Richmond, anyhow. But I miss sitting on my roof.” She turned towards me. “Here is nice, though, too.”

I rolled onto my side and smiled. The foot-wide gap between us remained, but we held eye contact for a bit before she turned back towards the sky.

“So you’re seeing Leda?”—Sarah

“Well, yeah. We’re polyamorous, though.”—Me

“And what does that mean, exactly?”—Sarah

“It means that we date other people. And not necessarily just flings on the side, or anything. But that we can have other partners.”—Me

“Do you have a lot of other partners?”—Sarah

“None right now, no.”

I was on dangerous ground. I didn’t want to lie to her, or deceive her with carefully selected truth. I *am* choosier than most of my fellow polyamorists, and all told I sleep with far fewer people than most *monogamists* I know. How do I explain that, without trying to sound all “you’re the only one for me, baby?”

“And it’s not weird for you?”—Sarah

“Not usually, no. I mean, sometimes I get jealous, but not usually, and not for very long.”—Me

“Cause I like you, Jimmy.”—Sarah

“Yeah.” I rolled back to face her, but her gaze remained heaven-bound. “I mean, I like you too.”

“King talked to me about it. About polyamory. Cause I asked about you. Anyhow, it made sense, in a King sort of way. But I needed to talk to you about it.” Sarah smiled a bit at the awkwardness. “I’m going to have to give this some thought, you know.”

We rambled about other things for a few minutes before King returned intact. We soon laid out sleeping bags and each slept alone, peaceful and thoughtful.

Well, we drove back to Portland and sure enough, Sarah and I began the kissing process within days. She had her reservations, and she talked about them, but after awhile she began to embrace the concept of polyamorous freedom herself; she didn't start dating anyone else, but she started to speak of crushes and said she was thankful for the freedom.

Sarah and I hung out pretty much every day, and King started shacking up with some fuzzy-bearded forest defender. Soon I was spending more than half my nights at Sarah's house, which we had taken to decorating quite elaborately:

"So you know how it's really punkrock to make stuff out of dumpstered materials, right?" Sarah started one night while we were deep-frying falafel in a saucepan at her house.

"Right,"—Me

"Well, that's like gathering. Now think of how much more punkrock it would be to make things out of *hunted* materials? Trophies of your kill."—Sarah

"Are you turning into a primitivist?" Primitivists, an offshoot of green-anarchist theory, often fetishize hunter/gatherer society. Not that I don't too, I suppose... no real work, just rivers choked with salmon and skies darkened by birds...

"No no no. I mean, the things *we* want to hunt. You know, bad things."

Visions of cop-vertebrate rattles and nazi-skull flagons came to mind, but I knew Sarah to be a pacifist.

"I need some glass for a project I'm working on, and I know where there's a lot of it."—Sarah

I grinned, the falafel came out perfect, and we set about to eat it with baba ganoush, dumpstered hummus (Turnip was right) and tahini.

WE WENT OUT without planning our getaway. I should have known better—I've a bit of experience in these matters—but I was rusty and I was smitten into invincibility.

We rode bikes and had green canvas backpacks. We approached the building (hint—corporate coffee chain) with crowbar and hammer, took out a few windows and started filling our packs with the bigger shards of glass that had letters on them.

We never saw the rent-a-cop, but he saw us. The police were there in a breathtakingly short period of time; they must have been on patrol nearby.

"Stop," or somesuch, spoke the police.

"Run!" was most likely my response.

But they got Sarah and I got away. I watched from a side street a few blocks down. They didn't hit her or anything, and she was cuffed and put into the back of the squad car without incident. If they had hit her, I don't know how I would have forgiven myself.

HERE'S AN INTERLUDE about smashy-smashy. It might only be of interest to anarchists, I'm sorry. Feel free to skip down till the next line break if you want. I don't think broken windows and slashed tires really accomplish much, honestly. I know that a lot of people might think that this makes me a bad anarchist and whatnot, but that's just the way it is, for me. I don't think that there's anything *wrong* with attacking the symbols of monstrosity, like banks and the grosser chain-stores, and sometimes the added chaos of property destruction can be just what a protest needs to get lively enough to shut down a globalization summit, but I would say it's probably neutral, at best.

Yes, I've heard all of the arguments about the propagandistic power of "visible signs of rebellion" and no, I don't think it's "violence" when living things aren't hurt. "Visible signs of rebellion" were what Malatesta and Stepniak and those 19<sup>th</sup> century anarchists were going for when they set about to start "propaganda by the deed". Propaganda by the deed led to some excellent regicides (die monarchy die!), but it also inspired Emile Henry and Luigi Galleani to implement terrorism, murder innocents, and drag anarchism's name into the mire. When you start hucking rocks, not everyone is going to know when to stop.

Okay, so then why did I go out with Sarah to break some windows? Because I thought it would be fun.

I WAS EAGER to let the forest air into my troubled lungs, but I went back to Sarah's house instead of the woods, in the end, because her house had a phone. I called the jail immediately. No, she hadn't been booked yet.

I fretted, walked down the street to an alley and hid the canvas bag behind a dumpster. Really original. I came back, called. She hadn't been booked. I took a shower, but survivor's guilt just wouldn't wash off. I busted out the Bronner's magic soap, but the fact that both my lovers were in jail (for crimes that I had been accomplice to) remained.

I called again; she had been booked. They were going to hold her overnight and she would go before a judge the next day. I went to bed, but I didn't sleep easily.

I woke up only a few hours later, shortly after dawn, and I made Sarah a "sorry you got popped and I got away" card. I briefly considered that I could make a brisk business selling that kind of greeting card to... me.

I shaved my scratchy, stubbly face, put on my normal clothes, and tried my hardest to not look like her accomplice, but I was still too nervous to go to court. Fortunately, King walked in at 8:30am and agreed to go in my stead. Apparently he had slept in Sarah's backyard, having found his way there while drunk.

The judge let Sarah out on her own recognizance, though her court-date for felony burglary was set. She wasn't mad at me for getting away.

“I WAS DOING some thinking, you know, in the clink.” Sarah was deep-frying falafel once more. She had excellent taste, for someone who didn’t eat meat.

“And well, this is good. You and me. Us, or whatever. This is good.”—Sarah

“SO WHY IS Leda in jail again?” Sarah asked one night.

“She was trying to protect someone from the pigs; she kind of lost her head a bit and rushed towards them.”—Me

“Oh. Yeah, I don’t know how well I would deal with watching my friends be abused.”—Sarah

“Which must be why I seem to have a thing for felons.” I smiled at her, but suddenly realized she wasn’t smiling back.

Later that night, she told me that she was uncomfortable being compared to Leda.

SARAH TAUGHT ME a bit about stained glass, and she tried to teach me to paint a few times, but the thing that stuck with me was bookbinding. I told her that I wrote, and I let her read *In The Hall of the Mountain King*—which she claimed to like, much to my relief.

I taught her some hand-stitching tricks, because she always sewed with a machine. Which she taught me how to use.

She took me out to restaurants a bit more often than I was comfortable with, but it occurred to me that she didn’t work either, and that I wasn’t mooching off of someone’s hard-earned income. Her parents had left her a good deal of money when they died. She said she was going to try and get settled into a craft career, rather than work some job and get distracted from what she really wanted to do.

June blurred into July, and it was reasonably close to bliss. Most every relationship has its honeymoon period, where every day is full of wonder, where everything seems like it could last forever, and this was ours. I didn’t forget Leda, however. I admit, every time I envisioned Sarah and I living happily in Alabama, I felt a pang of guilt for betraying the happily-ever-after fantasies I had for Leda and I.

On July 27<sup>th</sup> Leda got released from jail.

### PART THREE—EVERYTHING AFTER

SARAH WAS IN HER BEDROOM PAINTING. WOMEN IN BONNETS, IF I REMEMBER correctly. I was in the living room writing some nonsensical fiction about boats that bore windmills rather than sails.

“Uhm, Jimmy, the phone’s for you.” Sarah emerged from her bedroom, brush in one hand, cellphone in the other.

“Thanks,” I mumbled as I took the phone.

“Hello?”—Me

“Jimmy?” It was Leda.

“Hey! Are you out?”—Me

“I’m out. They dropped everything. One of the other defendants is suing for police misconduct, so they figured it would be politic to be as nice as they can.”—Leda

“All right!” I said, or something equally hokey.

“Listen, I’m on a house phone that charges for long distance. I want to get back to Portland ASAP, and I was wondering if you knew anyone with a vehicle, could try and arrange to pick me up?”—Leda

My mind jumbled and my stomach turned knots. “Uhm, I know a few people I could ask.” All of them were named Sarah Stained-Glass, unfortunately.

“Cool. Can you call me tomorrow and tell me if you’ve got anything?” Leda read off a phone number, which I wrote down with marker on my arm.

“And Jimmy, I know you’re on your partner’s phone, so I understand if you can’t say it back. I love you. I realized that all the more when I was in jail.”—Leda

I choked up. Leda couldn’t see my smile through the phone. “I understand,” I said, “and I’ll call you tomorrow.”

I went into Sarah’s room and gave her back her phone. She was staring blankly at her canvas, and I recognized the expression of someone whose mood no longer aligned with their project; she must have realized who had called.

“That was Leda?”—Sarah

“Yeah. She’s out of jail. They dropped everything.”—Me

“That’s good.” Sarah’s face betrayed her. She wasn’t so sure that it was good, but she kept her voice level. I knew that she *wanted* to think that it was good.

“She uh, she’s stuck in Badhaven. She asked me to try and figure out a ride for her back to Portland.”—Me

“Oh,” Sarah’s face became animated again, and she stood, walking to my side and placing a hand on the inside of my elbow. “We’ll go tomorrow!”

I looked at her, confused.

“I’m joking. But you can borrow my van.”—Sarah

“Really?”—Me

Sarah sighed. “Really.” She stood behind me and wrapped her arms around my belly, standing on her toes to place her chin on my shoulder. “I know that you miss her, and I suppose I got into this relationship knowing, on some level, that I was the other woman.”

I tried to interrupt her but she cut me off.

“No, I mean that. I know you believe in polyamory, and perhaps I do too. I don’t know yet. But you’ve been with Leda, on and off, for five years now. We’ve been together barely over a month.”—Sarah

She stood flat and turned me around to face her. “So go and pick up Leda in my van, and we’ll see how things will go when you return.”

“Thank you,” I whispered, overwhelmed.

THAT NIGHT, SARAH and I slept uncomfortably.

I called Leda shortly after sunrise to get directions, and off I went. I thought briefly of inviting King, but decided that I wanted to be alone. Just me and my Bauhaus tapes.

BEFORE I RAN away from home, I had no idea what I was going to do with my life. I had no political ambitions, few friends, and very little understanding of the world. I was remarkably certain of myself, and I was about as well-read a fourteen-year-old as you would be like to meet, but all my big words and self-esteem didn’t manifest in any direction.

I had listened to a lot of gothic music, mostly the poppier bands, like VNV Nation, The Cruxshadows, Depeche Mode and The Cure; I was no punk. The few punks at my school had just seemed hopelessly nihilistic and arrogant.

It was only once I started traveling that I discovered how goth and punk used to be intertwined. Bauhaus, The Misfits, Sisters of Mercy... my musical tastes opened up quite a bit. I learned that a lot of the old goth bands were politically active—KMFDM, Skinny Puppy, New Model Army, Consolidated, Ministry—each as potentially radicalizing as Crass or Propagandi. (Crass is better than Consolidated, however.)

I drove through forests and farmland for hours, past strip-malls and herds of deer, reflecting on where I had come from. I wondered, as I often did, what my life would be like if I had finished high school, attended college. I probably would have studied writing. Would I be a better writer? I probably wouldn’t need as much editing as I do now, I figure. But what the hell would I have written about? Comma splicing and middle-class ennui?

Experiences, life experiences, are what make a good writer, if you ask me. Practice is good too, of course.

I never would have met Leda. What would I have thought of her, if I had run across her now, at twenty? What would I have thought of street-kids if they hadn't adopted me?

I don't think that I would have liked the government much, regardless. But I'd be willing to bet that my activism wouldn't have gone further than a subscription to *Adbusters*, letters to the editor, and recycling.

Instead, I was driving my potentially-felon lover's minivan to pick up my just-out-of-jail lover from across state lines. I've been to almost every state (Alaska and Hawaii, I'll see you yet, I will). I've taken an active hand to fate and I've worked my ass off, risking quite a bit, trying to prevent the Iraq War, which I feel will be the definitive event of the era.

As the trees went past, I knew that I was looking at a thin 'beauty strip' left along the highways to keep people from worrying about the clear-cut forests, and I knew that American society itself was like that; a thin veneer so that people could go through life without witnessing the atrocities that their decadence cost the earth.

This isn't to say that dropping out of high school is the best decision for everyone to make. Just that it was probably the best decision that *I've* made. But who can know?

LEDA WAS ALREADY waiting outside the Green Bastard Inn, her bag at her side, looking little the worse for wear. Circles under her eyes betrayed her exhaustion, and she was as pale as winter despite the evening summer sun.

She met me at the driver's side door before I could even open it, and swallowed me up in her lanky arms before I could step down.

"Hello," I laughed, "you're in a great mood."

"I'm not in jail. The air here? Not recycled."—Leda

"Should I come in for awhile? What do you want to do?"—Me

"Leave, now. Sick of this place."—Leda

"Well, alright." I had hoped a bit to get to wander around; I missed the countryside.

"Let's drive an hour or so and find a campground. Even if we have to pay for it."—Leda

She kissed me hard on the mouth for a short moment and then pulled back to look me in the eyes. She ran her finger across the stubble on my upper lip. "Growing a beard?" she asked.

Before I could answer she kissed me again and walked around to the passenger door. "You're driving tonight, if that's alright. I don't think the cops around here like me much."

WE FOUND A state-park campground and paid ten bucks or something for the right to sleep on the ground. It was bizarre, but Leda insisted, wanting to have as little to do with police as possible. I've talked my way out of trouble for not paying at a campground a few times, but I conceded to paying. I wasn't the one who had just been released from jail.

We set up a tent and laid out open sleeping bags to serve as a mattress.

"I love you," I told her, as we lay, fully clothed.

"Good, good." Leda had been giddy all day. "How's Sarah?"

"Uhm..." I was taken off guard. "She's good."

"Do you love her?"—Leda

"Not yet."—Me

SARAH WAS HAPPY to see her van, and she politely met Leda. The tension was palpable, and Leda and I went off to sleep in Forest Park.

"Call me tomorrow," Sarah managed to get out, "I'd like to see you."

"Yeah. Yeah, I will."—Me

Not every polyamorous relationship has so much tension. But it was particularly hard for Sarah, having no experience with open relationships, falling for me, a boy who had been in love with someone for years.

Leda and I hiked up in the dark, past the occasional late-night bicyclist and found my favorite spot on the ridge to sleep.

"What are you going to do tomorrow?" I asked Leda while we set out our sleeping bags.

"Tomorrow? I'm going to find King and get remarkably drunk."—Leda

"Sounds good." I smiled a half-smile and tried to be sincere. I hoped she wouldn't get into too much trouble.

"And I'm going to get laid."—Leda

We lay in silence for a long time. Just when I had assumed that she had fallen asleep, Leda turned to me.

"I'm sorry I said that." She reached out and put her index finger on my bottom lip. "I don't know why I said that."

"Because it's probably true."—Me

"Yeah, but I shouldn't have said it. I'm sorry."—Leda

Eventually we slept.

SOME SIXTEEN HOURS later I was at Food Not Bombs with Leda and King. They were both drunk. I wasn't. I was heart-achy. King was laughing and Leda threw a piece of yellowed tofu at him.

"Get laid?" I asked, impolitely.

"No. Decided I don't like that bikepunk boy anymore." While she spoke, Leda stood up and walked behind the still laughing King. She put her hands on his head and knocked him onto his back. "You know what he said to me?"

"What?"—Me



“He said that I was stupid for getting myself arrested over something so useless. What a spineless hipster brat.” Leda was alternately tickling King’s armpits and punching him on the arm. King lay on his back laughing.

“We got drunk and he tried to sleep with me, after telling me that I was throwing my life away. But I showed him. I’ve got his stupid short-brimmed bike-hipster hat that he paid too much money for.” She procured his messenger cap from a back pocket of her stitched-together black pants.

I laughed unevenly and ate some more vegetable mush. “You going to give it back to him?”

“Yeah, probably. Say, did *you* get laid?”—Leda

“No. Sarah broke up with me.”—Me

King stopped laughing and sat up quite suddenly. Leda sat back down at his side. They were both staring with raptness that only the intoxicated can manage.

“She says that she still likes me, but that it’s too hard, sharing me.”—Me

“She ask you to go monogamous?”—King

“No. She just ended it.”—Me

“That’s good.” Leda and King were a chorus.

“What’re you going to do now?” King asked.

“Get drunk and write about it.”—Me

“Sounds good.”—King

It’s A STRANGE thing. It would seem like, by being in *two* relationships, that you would be cushioning yourself against heartbreak. After all, an inexperienced polyamorist might reason, if one lover breaks it off, one would still have the other. But actually, it still hurts just as bad as it does when they are your only partner. So really, by being polyamorous, you are just *increasing* your chances of getting your heart all beat-up.

For two weeks I hung out by the waterfront with King, Leda, and a couple other crusty anarcho-kids who came through town. We talked about freight trains and hitchhiking and protests... war stories, you know. I drank more than was in character. We played silly games like Drunk Rover—“drunk rover, drunk rover, send King on over!” And the always popular, always punk Yell Obnoxious Things At Drunk Yuppies—“Hey! Rich guy! Why you gotta be so rich?! Huh? Rich-o!”

Leda and I spent a lot of time in the library, every morning before our friends were even awake. We told each other ghost stories in whispered voices between the isles, we snuck kisses and sometimes a bit more in the bathrooms, but mostly we read and did research.

I told myself that I didn’t miss Sarah, but I did. By unspoken truce, Food Not Bombs was mine, and she didn’t go there. But she got the Red & Black Cafe, an anarchist-run coffeeshop in Southeast. I thought I saw her in most every red-haired stranger who walked down waterfront. I don’t know what it

was about her; I really hadn't known her well, but I was hooked on her. Every time I thought about sewing something, she came to mind. Every time I cooked on a stove, she came to mind. Far too often, when I fantasized, she came to mind.

Leda... Leda was a dream of mine, of a life of courage and defiance, and that dream was within my grasp. But Sarah Stained-Glass was another dream of mine, of expression and warmth. Why couldn't I have both? Why did I need to define my future through the women I dated?

At the end of two weeks, Leda and I hitchhiked back out to Either Or, back to the Green Bastard Inn. The other units were going to be logged soon.

I SPEND A lot of my time disparaging my anarchist fellows, and certainly I don't approve of the dogmatic group-think that can arise from time to time. And yes, I'm remarkably jaded for a twenty-year old. But I hope it doesn't come across that I think that activism is a waste of time. Because it's not.

Everyone has tangible effects on the world around them, one way or another, and I think people need to realize that. Every time a beagle is snuck out of a laboratory, that beagle's suffering has ended. When we win forest battles against the logging companies, we save thousands of trees and acres of beauty and wildlife. So the Iraq War began, despite our sometimes-valiant efforts, but we helped the nation realize that the government was not listening to them. I hate to quote punk rock, but I feel I must do so now: "Just because I can't change everything doesn't mean I can't change anything." –1905 (it's a band name, not a year).

THE GREEN BASTARD Inn welcomed us back with open arms. I had made a few friends, despite my general grumpiness, and I admit that I was happy to see them.

Leda was treated as a returning hero, though most everyone tried to talk her out of returning to Either Or. They told her how effective she could be from town, organizing, driving food runs, and talking with locals. She had done it before so well, everyone told her. There was no need for her to put herself at risk.

They were probably right, but there was no dissuading her. There never can be.

It was Rabbit, the older local, who affirmed her choice in the matter: "You think my life will ever go back to normal, once you kids leave? I've thrown my lot in with you all. I've got neighbors that come by my house with guns, threaten me, tell me that I'm on the wrong side, hanging out with you all. They say 'loggers need jobs.' I look them in the eye. I tell them 'These weird-ass kids, no offense, 'these weird-ass kids are the only ones willing to stand up for our heritage forests.' No, my life will never be the same. So the girl wants to go back out to the woods. I say I love her for it. If they send her back to jail, we'll just

keep on the pressure until she gets out again. They send her to prison, we bust her out.”

Most everyone shut up. There’s really nothing like an angry, intelligent, under-educated small-towner to put us in our place.

SO WE WENT out to the new base camp, this one closer to the remaining units. It broke my heart a little bit to be back in those woods. Everything was quieter; the logging had scared away all the wildlife.

Quinoa was gone. The few trees he had saved were still standing, but they were in a wasteland of brush. It’s funny... the forest service calls logging “fuels reduction” and talks about how well it suppresses fire, but all I saw in every direction around Quinoa’s trees was tinder. Cut and fallen branches, too small to sell, were left around to dry in the now-exposed sun. And even those trees that were left—those four or five per acre that kept the clear-cut from being labeled as a clear-cut—wouldn’t survive the next real storm; they lacked the wind breaking protection that a full forest provides.

Quinoa had come down from his treesit, after the loggers were gone, and he had packed his backpack and left. No one knew where he went. I hope he reads this one day, though. I want to tell him that he did what he could.

Leda and I pitched in around camp. We both have a lot of experience in organizing direct action, and I was giving tree-climbing and knot-tying workshops when Turnip was busy. A new batch of kids had come in, mostly people off on their first summer traveling; eighteen, bright-eyed, new to anarchism and ready to change the world. I envied them.

But I couldn’t always be around it.

“HELP ME WITH this one,” I asked of Leda, standing behind a rock the size of a large dog. She came over with a pry-bar, a nearly six-foot pole that was as tall as she was. Together we got it under the back edge of the rock and it tumbled down onto the road below with a loud thud.

Most of the forest road curved along the edge of the mountain, with a steep drop-off on one side and a fairly sharp embankment up the other, and any rocks or logs we tumbled onto the roadway could be rolled down the mountain far too easily. But that night we were at a stretch where the road was enclosed by hills on both sides.

It was a harassment tactic, purely. We camped during the day, well away from the road, while the loggers logged. At night we woke up and blocked the roadway with whatever was available. In the morning, it took the loggers an extra hour to get to work, because they had to stop every hundred feet or so to move debris out of the roadway.

Once someone, I’ve no idea who, dug a trench into the middle of the roadway. They had to bring a gravel truck up to fill it before the loggers could get to work. But that right there is a felony.

We just tumbled rocks. It was fun. Our lawyers were in court, fighting to prove that the forest service had broken their own rules when they planned and executed the sale. We were out to make sure that there was still a forest left when our lawyers won.

Leda called me over and I helped her with a fallen log several hundred feet above the road. We looped rope under it to form handles, and on the count of three we lifted it slightly and shoved it several feet forward. We found our rhythm and ten minutes later we watched it fall down the embankment to lie across the roadway. We retrieved our rope handles and scampered back up the rocky hill.

We were at work on a particularly stubborn boulder when we heard shouting. We turned and saw headlights below us.

Cursing commenced and we heard two car doors slam. Clearly, someone was at our barricade, and they weren't happy.

We dropped prone, facing downhill, paralyzed with fear. Leda had her hand on the small of my back. The cursing continued for some time. I caught "fucking hippies" and "goddamned tofu-eaters" among other expletives. It was probably locals, maybe hunters, and not the LEOs. But that didn't make us feel any safer.

Eventually they got back into their car and drove back the way they came.

"What if they call the cops?" Leda whispered to me.

"They won't come out here at night to scour the woods. We're fine." I stood up and went back to work on the rock, but I looked down and realized Leda had yet to stand up. I crouched beside her.

"It's okay. If the cops come, they won't be able to drive past that log without us hearing them move it. We'll have plenty of time to get away."—Me

"I think I need to stop for the night."—Leda

"Okay." I had never seen Leda scared into inaction before. I was honestly baffled.

We began the long hike back to our current campsite, which consisted of a low-strung tarp that covered our packs and sleeping mats.

Leda sat cross-legged, back up against a tree trunk, and I sat to face her. I put my hands on her shins and listened to her.

"If I get caught again, I'm not going to get out for a long time."—Leda

"I know."—Me

"I want to do what I can though." Leda was crying slightly. She didn't speak any further about it, but I think I know her well enough to know what was in her head. She hated to be scared, but she hated even more to have fear paralyze her. She had left an abusive family, and she had left abusive partners. She needed to have control over herself.

I gazed at her sadly. If I had tried to hold her, she would have thrown me off, so I massaged her lower legs gently.

We stayed up most of the night, as our nocturnal schedule demanded, and fell asleep shortly before dawn.

I slept troubled, waking with every forest sound, convinced we had been caught. I had half-awake nightmares of Leda's arrest.

THE NEXT EVENING we went down to spy on the loggers as they finished up for the night. A line of fancy-pants pick-ups paraded slowly by, each driven by men determined to eke their livelihoods by indiscriminate cutting.

I've got friends who are loggers. But my friends work for companies that cut sustainably, from managed areas, and care deeply about the land that they work. They wouldn't dream of cutting from old-growth forests. Enough has already been taken; there is no need to take more.

"You up for it?" I asked Leda. "We can go back to camp if you want."

"I'm fine."—Leda

We went to work.

"YOU LOOK DISTRACTED," Leda told me. "What's wrong?"

I was haphazardly positioning rocks on the road, and Leda was right, I wasn't putting my heart into the work.

"I don't know," I started. "I miss Sarah, honestly. What's so hard about polyamory? She didn't even give it a chance."

"It's not for everyone, you know." Leda added another rock to the little pyramid she was building in the roadway. "What's so great about Sarah anyhow?"

I know she didn't mean to offend, but offend she did. "She may seem like just an art-kid, but she's pretty cool. She cares about the world too, about community."

"Yeah, sure. She just kind of struck me as a rich kid. She's got *two* houses. No one else lives in either one."—Leda

"Her parents died and left her that house."—Me

"Yeah, whatever."—Leda

The moon illuminated our tired, unhappy forms as we kicked rocks into place, both in our own worlds.

"I'm just sick of being someone you crawl back to, that's all. I don't just exist to make you feel better when everything goes wrong." Leda spoke softly, almost inwardly, but her voice carried in the still air.

I dropped the rock I was holding and walked over to her.

"Don't fucking coddle me about it, Jimmy."—Leda

I stopped a few feet from her. She turned to look at me, her eyes cold and hard, angry rather than sad.

After a long moment she looked to her rock formation and spoke again. "Ah, I don't mean it. I'm just jealous, is all. She's got everything I don't. Easy life."

I felt guiltier still about every settled, comfortable happily-ever-after dream I'd had about Sarah. Suddenly they seemed so uselessly decadent, so utterly bourgeoisie.

“You know what I dream about, Jimmy?”—Leda

“What?”—Me

“A warehouse somewhere, a huge squat. Legal, if necessary. You and I settled there, running a free store. We’d let travelers and runaways stay there. And you can write books and I can have a piano again. We won’t need to work, but we won’t need to steal or beg, either. We could dumpster what we need. That’s what I dream about.”—Leda

Now I was crying, ever so slightly.

“But it wouldn’t last. If it were squatted, they would evict us. If it were legal, we would need to work, promote the economy, pay taxes. And even if we came up with a way to hold onto it, like if you sold your books and we sold clothes we made, it wouldn’t last, because these... these fuckers are destroying the world, and we can’t just let them.”—Leda

Leda walked over to me and gripped my head in her hands. She wiped the tears from eyes with her thumbs and kissed me on the mouth.

“So instead? Instead we have us, now. We have this forest, until it’s logged, and we have tonight.”—Leda

THE NEXT DAY we won in court. We didn’t notice until nighttime, when we came down to the road and saw our previous night’s work still in place. Confused, we hiked back to base camp, arriving in the middle of the night.

Turnip met us with a smile and hug. She told us the news. It took us two days to break camp completely, and then we retired to the Green Bastard Inn for a two-day celebration.

Rabbit was a blubbing mess of joy and sadness. He knew we were all going to leave, and he told us often how much he loved us, how much he hoped we would come back to visit.

Leda decided to head east. King and our friend Petrol were driving to Maine and Leda thought to join them. I wanted to go, and perhaps I should have gone, but I was afraid.

Turnip offered me a room in the house she was going to rent in Portland. She said that she could get me an under-the-table, part-time job doing construction. She said, rightly, that our job wasn’t done. Sure, we had saved less than half of Either Or, but the Forest Service was still auctioning off ancient forests to timber companies.

AS A SIDE note, the whole thing is a scam. See, the lumber is actually worth less than the cost to harvest it... it’s all just taxpayer subsidies. And it’s that way because of the timber lobby. Government and Corporation, hand in hand, as always. Taxpayers, forest lovers and forest critters pay the price.

SO I MOVED back to Portland and spent a few hours a week building things that I don’t approve of with Turnip. The rest of the time I spent in meetings. I like to think that forest activism is what drew me back, but, well...

I saw Sarah at Food Not Bombs, sitting in the spot that we always sat. I started to look for another place to sit, but she called me over.

“Hey,” I said, feigning nonchalance.

“Hey Jimmy,” Sarah looked up to me and smiled, “it’s been a minute, huh?”

“Yeah.” I sat.

“How was it?”—Sarah

“It went better this time. We won in court.”—Me

“Oh, that’s good, right?”—Sarah

“Yeah. Except it just means it’s off the chopping block for a few years. I’m sure it will be up for auction again.”—Me

“It’s not going to stop until the government comes down, is it?”—Sarah

“Nope.”—Me

“Fuck.”—Sarah

We picked at our food as thoughts tumbled through our minds.

“Want to come back to my place after we eat?”—Me

“Sure.”—Sarah

THAT NIGHT WE kissed, but that was all. The basic problem, that I was a polyamorous traveler, remained.

For a month or so I was constantly busy; between work and activism I hadn’t a moment to myself, and I went on chaste dates with Sarah about once a week. I didn’t know whether I was happy or not. I got a lot done, and since I look back on those months with such fondness, I suppose I must have been doing alright.

One night I was up late (well, late for me) working on a press release about Boise-Cascade, a timber company. The words weren’t coming to me, but everyone had decided that I, the writer of fiction, would be the word-spinner for our activism as well. I steadfastly wrote several drafts, all of which were crap, when Sarah called on our house phone.

“Are you free?” She asked.

“I could use a break, yeah.”

“Then come over. I’ve got something I want to talk to you about.”

I fretted as I put my hoodie on and went to my bike.

WHAT FOLLOWS IS a fairly graphic description of sex. I consider it important or I wouldn’t have included it. What’s more, I talked to Sarah at length about including it in this zine; she was actually quite supportive and felt that it was too important to leave out. It turns out that not everybody has the same hang-ups about sex that I do.

IT WAS RAINING outside when I bicycled to Sarah’s house. Now, that it was raining in the Portland in October should go unsaid. But it was really coming down. Within ten seconds I was soaked and the bike ride up to her place was about as one might expect.

I walked in her back door, after leaving my bike in her yard, and knocked on the door of her room. Her roommates were absent, as always, and Counting Crows (the first album, the only one either of us likes) was playing quietly from within.

She bid me to open the door and inside her room was the usual mess of clothes and scraps of paper. She sat in the armless chair before her easel, but held no brush. She was staring at a canvas that I couldn't see from where I was.

I was nervous around her at this point, and I didn't know how to interact with her anymore. Our dates had been growing increasingly tense, increasingly sad. "You said I had to come over?" I asked this while still standing by the door. I wasn't trying to be standoffish, I just didn't want to seem too forward.

"Yeah." When she didn't say anything else, my brain—which often is too slow to catch these things—realized that she was nervous as well, that she wasn't ready to talk about what she was going to talk about, and that my standing in the doorway dripping onto her carpet wasn't helping things.

"Do you mind if I take off some of my wet clothes?" I was fiercely cold now that I had caught my breath from the hill up to her house.

"No, that's fine. You can wear some of my clothes if you want, and we can throw yours into the dryer."

"Thanks," I mumbled, "Do you mind if I take a shower?" It was funny, I actually had a shower at my own house, but it had become such a habit for me to take showers at other people's places that I usually only thought of bathing at friend's houses.

"No, I don't mind. Leave your clothes outside the bathroom door."

I took a shower and pondered the situation. I had thought she was going to call me over to call it off, but I knew once I saw her look at me that she still wanted to be with me. I managed to banish my confusion by focusing on whether or not to use the Dr. Bronner's soap. I opted to stay soap-free.

I put on the skirt, a hippy skirt with a ton of material, nice and loose, with an elastic band. I was seriously starting to consider skirts as the optimal article of clothing when function wasn't important. I walked back to her room and she was back in front of the easel, brushless and contemplative.

I sat on the edge of her bed and looked at her.

"I was thinking about painting you. That's why I called."

I beamed. I like posing for people who paint, or draw, or any of those arts that are so far beyond me.

"But I want to paint you fucking me." She said, and I knew she must have wanted to say it since I first walked through the door, but she had had to steady her nerve.

For some reason this didn't even catch me off guard. I'm not sure why, honestly. I just took it in stride. "Okay?"

"Well, the thing is, I've been drinking, although I had this idea before, and I was hoping you would want to drink some brandy with me beforehand. I know



you don't usually like the uncertainty of drunken sex, and I know we haven't slept together in awhile, but I thought this out last night, sober and alone."

Sarah knew me well enough to know my uncertainties, and that helped dissuade them. Also, I really wanted to sleep with her. I was afraid of the painting more than anything else, but I decided to go through with it anyway.

Counting Crows was over and we were listening to something else. A woman singing over what sounded like dark new wave. I never caught what band it was.

I love brandy, I love being brandy drunk. Brandy and cheap 40s are the only two alcohols that make me horny, as a matter of fact.

We shared from one glass and we talked more openly than we had for weeks. Alcohol, obviously, is like that. I wish I were better at communicating when I was sober, but everyone else would have to be better at it too for it to make any sense.

She took off her clothes first.

I want to describe that the room was candlelit, which feels so cliché. The thing is, her room was usually candlelit at night. So was mine, actually. So are most of my friends. Most of my friends have altars and candles and listen to atmospheric music when the mood is right. And you know what? I don't care that it sounds cliché. It's fucking beautiful, and living in this world earnestly is more interesting to me than post-modern irony.

So it was candlelit, although Sarah doesn't have an altar in her room. There were square blue candles on the windowsill, on the cabinets, and most importantly, on the desk next to her easel.

I took off my clothes and she kissed me.

"How are we going to do this?" I asked.

"Well, I'm going to be in charge. I'm not going to dominate you, and you can say no anytime. I won't be hurt. But I have something specific in mind."

On her direction, I sat in the chair in front of the canvas she had been staring at. It was a painted sketch of the window next to us as seen from where I sat. She stood over me and kissed me on the mouth, open but soft. She pulled back and ran her tongue across my lower lip. When I opened my eyes, hers were staring full into mine. With open eyes she ran her tongue across my upper teeth and put her hands onto my back, her arms beneath mine. I was hard. She opened a condom, put it on me, then sat on my lap.

"This is going to be slow. Don't fuck me." I was inside of her, but as commanded I stayed still. She tried to move her leg over me so she could rotate to face away from me, but she had to sit up and sit back down to manage it. Now she faced the easel and all I could see was her back. I put my hands on the tops of her hips unbidden.

"Just massage me." I kneaded her waist, hips and the tops of her thighs, all I could reach of her, slowly. For being so passive, it was insanely erotic. I worried about the uncovered window until I realized it faced her fenced in

backyard. While worrying about the window I caught her eye in our reflection, and suddenly it occurred to me that it was our reflection she was painting.

I'm not certain how long it went on, but it was a pretty long time, and occasionally I became lost in thought. Yet just when my mind began to wander, she moved ever so slightly, or reached back and stroked my thigh. I was riveted. Slowly, I realized, she was beginning to ride me.

She told me to do things with my hands, and I did them; I felt her mouth, her lips, her teeth, and I put my hand on the front of her cunt.

When she was moving fast enough, I started to move in time with her. Her hand reached back to squeeze my thigh, she met my eyes in the window, and told me "Not yet."

Finally, she told me to fuck her. I was excited by that point, and I told her that I wouldn't last very much longer.

"It's okay," she told me, "just make sure you tell me, and make sure you make eye contact with me in the window when you come."

A short while later I came, and she was practically yelling at me to keep my eyes open, to look at her.

When I was done we sat there awhile longer and she painted in a fervor. When it began to hurt I asked her to let me up, which she did promptly.

After putting her brushes in turpentine she took my hand and led me over to the bed, bid me lay down with her. I was still shaking, and she kept firm hands on my chest.

I wish I would never say such things, because apologizing after sex is a terrible thing, but I said I was sorry she didn't come.

"Oh honey, but I did." I hate that I doubt her. And when she reads this she will probably... well hopefully she will understand.

"Have you ever painted this way before?" Her fantasy had been so specific, so thought out, that it occurred to me to ask.

"Don't ask me something like that."

"I'm sorry." I'm usually a fool, but I'm three times the fool when I'm a little drunk and I'm coming down from orgasm. Why was I asking these things?

"It was amazing." This, at least, wasn't a question. I had recovered a little and had resorted to saying trite post-coital things.

"The brandy helps, doesn't it?"

I hadn't thought about it, but I realized then that it had. "Yeah, although I think it's also the reason I'm saying so many dumb things."

"No, you're saying that because of what just happened. I saw it in your eyes."

I hadn't even thought to look at the painting, I realized. It was clearly too late though, because lying prone was about all I intended to do for the next hour or two.

I DON'T USUALLY write about sex explicitly, or certainly not in detail, as anyone who has read my other writing knows. Yet writing that night down is my love

letter to Sarah; I think I wanted to mirror that painting somehow. She displays it sometimes, in her shows, and it's not for sale. After we talked about me writing the night into this zine, she re-titled the piece to "me fucking jimmy". It makes me laugh. I still don't know if she's done that with anyone else.

### EPILOGUE

OUR RELATIONSHIP NEVER REALLY DID RECOVER, ALTHOUGH IT FLICKERED in and out for a few months before we finally stopped kissing. She's found a boy to be monogamous with her, and he's not a jerk, so I suppose that's alright.

Government and capitalism are still destroying what's left of the organic world. In fact, the rate of their destruction is only growing faster. A lot more needs to be done. *A lot* more.

You know, when I started writing this, I promised that it wouldn't try to sway you to some cause. But I feel like, by the end, I spoke a lot about how important environmental work can be. I was just trying to be honest about myself, about my life. This is, after all, *my* memoir.

And my thinking often goes in such cycles; I'll spend months, even a year sometimes, thoroughly disillusioned. I was, for example, when I started setting down the events I described above. And yet, while going over that summer in my head, I realized that I *was* doing the right thing by fighting for Either Or. By transcribing this part of my life, I came to understand this.

**THANKS TO EVERYONE** in this story, but in particular, thank you: **Sarah, Leda, Turnip, and Rabbit.** Thanks to our **lawyers**, who won the case for Either Or. Thanks to the **wild birds** who sung to me on the mountains. Thanks to the Portland public library. Thanks to everyone who distributes this zine. Thanks to Strangers In A Tangled Wilderness for editing and publishing it. No thanks to big timber companies, to the national forest timber sale system, the forest service, the lumber mills who handle old-growth trees, the paper companies that use old-growth, and the corporations who don't bother to see what it is that they're consuming. Actually, no thanks to *any* of the corporations.

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