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## PART I. 2011

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1

MAY

EXT. THE ROYAL BRITISH ARMY BASE SOMEWHERE IN IRAQ, DAY

A man in his late 50s is sitting relaxed in front of a tent, two stars beneath a crown on his uniform, he's looking his age but well fit, his almost metallic white hair, medium on top, short sides, are carefully done with gel, he's wearing a suitably unimpressed face expression and expensive Tag Heuer watches on his wrist, a gift from a woman who's waiting him back in London and whom he's going to break up with on return, an index finger is missing on his hand.

I look down at my watches and calculate that it's only five hours before the plain arrives and then in approximately fifteen hours I'm back to London. The Tag Heuer reminds me that I have to tell her it's over and I haven't cooked any reasonable explanation yet, because the most reasonable explanation is that I'm bored with her perfume and our political fights as a foreplay. Semi-consciously I observe a couple of young soldiers passing by, each having a Belgian shepherds on a leash, the dogs wearing sun glasses, their mouths widely open with long tongues touching a bottom of heavy muzzles, saliva is dropping down, creating peculiar patterns on sand. Does Polaroid make special dog sun glasses? I brush off a mosquito from my shirt muttering bugger off softly not really knowing whom I mutter it to, to the annoying insect or to my much more annoying thoughts. I'm used to heat which I even learnt to enjoy and to boredom and to a smell of sweaty bodies combined with a sense of death, coming sooner or later. I'm not sure I'm going back home. In London everything is much more complicated, here the only task is to stay alive, everything else doesn't matter, everything else simply doesn't exist. An officer cadet approaches rendering a salute and I slowly switch my attention to him.

'Colonel, sir!' He voice is high and girlish and too emotionally loaded to this limbo we're living in.

'Careful.' I slightly bend my head to the left side and raise one eyebrow to point on a scorpion almost under his foot. They say scorpions are not dangerous here, so why the fuck I even bother. Rubbish.

'Oh, uh.' The cadet's face twists and he starts to really fuck me off.

'You were saying?' Not standing up I look straightly into his eyes to make him feel even more uncomfortable.

'Ah, er, sir, the plain is delayed, sir' He snaps out quickly as if frightened that I'm gonna blame him on it.

'Bollocks.' I remark unemotionally 'Is there a new schedule?'

'No, sir.' The cadet answers guiltily. Oh well, another victim from the birth, I bet he hasn't done anything wrong in his short miserable lifetime and presumedly would never do, must be an obedient and humble son, student, cadet, put in any sociable role here, trying to fit in and yet rejected by society and when he realises that the society doesn't give a fuck about his well-behaviour and his will to please it's gonna be too late and if he's lucky enough he gets himself killed in action and if not just ends up as a boozier. What a wanker. I remove my Polaroids, that definitely don't fit with Rolex, and rub off a few sand grains.

'What's in your pocket?' I ask with the same flat voice.

'Er, nothing, sir.' Oh c'mon, you tosser, a more self assured cadet or even a second lieutenant might have asked you to hold something for him, it happens now and then I really wish I would hit the mark at the moment.

'Wanna problems?'

'No, sir.'

'Then you'd better give me this shit.'

The cadet's cheeks flush purple while I put the Polaroids on and placidly take out a pack of Marlboros.

Then he quickly takes a tiny wrappage out of the pocket and hands it to me and immediately freezes and this change of velocity of his movements astonishes me a bit and I wonder how quick he would be running away from his life. *Run, rabbit, run, dig that hole, forget the sun, and when at last the work is done, don't sit down, it's time to dig another one.* I stand up harshly and our faces meet at a close distance and I hiss to him 'Bugger off' and he is happy to be ordered to flee. Crikey, it's so fucking boring.

INT. INSIDE THE TENT

I open up a shockproof laptop and while waiting for satellite connection wonder if anybody actually checked it's shockproof. I imagine shooting it down and try to fantasise the sound of a bullet hitting it and the marks it would left. Five unread messages in my Inbox.

FRANK, SHOULD I EXPECT YOU HOME TOMORROW? BISOUS.

Oh my fucking God, I detest her using French to sound more what? more sweet? I shudder and move the message to spam. You shouldn't expect me at all, honey.

DAD, BLAH-BLAH-BLAH, DAD, BLAH-BLAH-BLAH

I scroll down, Sean has never got learnt to express his statement or rather demands in one clear sentence. Anyway it's gonna be about money or solving his problems or both. Oh, here it is.

DAD, COULD YOU PLEASE LEND ME SOME MONEY? YOU KNOW, IT'S DIFFICULT TO START A BUSINESS AND WE FOUND AN AWESOME OLDTIMER, REALLY CHEAP AND IN A GREAT CONDITION, A CITROEN DS IN MARSEILLE, JUST A GRAND, GONNA RUN IT TO LONDON AND SELL.

Who we, you and your pals, so why don't they land you money, sweetheart? Are you asking to lend you a grand or it costs a grand and a grand in which currency? If it's cheap it's either not an oldtimer or it's not in a good condition. Blimey. I don't need the answers. It's no. Not bothering to answer I slam the laptop shut.

EXT. MILITARY BASE BACKSIDES, NIGHT

Frank approaching a shooting stand, removing his Tag Heuer, carefully loading a gun and shooting away the whole magazine into the watches. Then sitting behind the tent and smoking weed.

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2

MAY

EXT. DOG TRAINING CLUB SOMEWHERE NEAR LONDON, LATE EVENING

At a large field covered with green wet grass a man in a heavy training suit is running towards a dog which is racing straight to him, he is shouting and cutting the air with sharp noises of a whip.

Oh gosh, despite the fact that I'm training the Belgian shepherds daily I'm still afraid of them during the long attack, malinois are extremely fast and this particular one develops 40 mph velocity so only a couple of seconds remain until the dog bites me and my heart sinks when the mali jumps into my face and for a moment I think it will attack my chin but he corrects his direction and hangs on my arm and I try running sideways hitting it with a stick feeling his teeth even under a sleeve and he's fighting back pushing me with his long and muscular front legs and although I'm wearing boots my feet slide and I'm panting and when I finally stop the dog doesn't let my arm go until I nod to a handler who's standing still on the other side of the field and he shouts the out command. As we continue the exercise I glance at an old black E-class Mercedes sedan parking, must be a LHD, whom the fuck Sean gonna sell it to? I let the dog bite the sleeve again and remove it letting the beast to possess it.

'Good job' I tell the handler breathing hardly and he runs the dog now holding the sleeve and happily wagging its tail away.

'Hey, Mike!' Sean approaches me and we shake hands. 'The last dog for today?'

'Thankfully yes' I rub my arm considering that I need some ice to prevent the bruising. 'How's your car business is going?' I point to the Mercedes.

'Needs to much money and time investments' Sean grins 'And the worst is that you have to share with too many people'.

'Yeah, not the easiest money in the world' I agree and start furling a blind.

'And not the biggest. So why exactly am I here?'

'Oh, I wanna show you a new litter.' I put the blind on my shoulder and proceed to the next one. 'Would you help me with collecting the equipment first?'

Sean screws up his face in disgust and looks down on his probably not a very expensive but definitely new pair of brown leather shoes with a glossy finish already covered with grass and mud.

'I don't think I have a proper outfit, my apologies, Mike.'

'It's unusual to see you not in a uniform.' I point at his brown wool coat. 'C'mon, it'll take only half an hour.' I thrust the bling onto Sean's chest which he reluctantly takes.

'Why couldn't we just meet in a pub after your work is finished?'

'Oh, patience, Sean, a bit of patience and trust me, you will be surprised with new upcoming opportunities.' I wink and he rolls his eyes up, and its is exactly the same expression I had seen so many times at his younger brother's face. I sigh trying to get rid of the painful memories.

INT. DOG TRAINING CLUB, INSIDE A KENNEL CLUB HOUSE, LATE EVENING

A red dog with a black mask around its face is lying inside a warm crate surrounded by a dozen of puppies who get excited as we come inside. I open the crate and let the pups out, then sit on the floor, take out a tug and start playing with them, telling the bitch to stay inside.

'Oh bugger' A couple of pups are biting Sean's trousers and he is shaking his legs struggling to flip those little crocodiles.

'They're real monsters, check their grip!' I tell him laughing.

'They bite all right, I can feel it' Sean asks sadly and then yells in disgust: 'Oh blimey, it's taking a piss right here!'

'Yeah, it's a pup, Sean, not a big deal.' I stand up and get some paper towels and then clean the mess.

'Have a butcher's at those two, they're almost alike, huh? The colour I mean and their face expression.'

'Face expression? Jeez, Mike, they're dogs, they don't have any face expression. They're noisy naughty animals.' I watch Sean's face twists in antipathy.

'But they do resemble each other, don't they?'

'They all look the same to me like the Chinese and the Japanese folks.'

'You're a racist, Sean. But we can make real money with those two pups.' I tell him seriously. And he glances at me intrigued and then kneels down, pets a pup and afterwards explores his coat for presence of red sharp hair.

'How about you drive me to a pub and we discuss business? The drinks are on me and you can show me how this German baby runs maybe I'll buy it for my wife'. Yeah, don't forget to mention the wife, to pretend I care about her.

INT. A PUB IN A SMALL TOWN, NIGHT

[Indistinct chatter]

'Isn't it too noisy here?' Sean asks observing a crowded bar.

'It's perfect.'

'No chance we will find a table.'

'Stop whining.' I point to a vacant table and elbow my way to it. As we wait for two pints of lager to be served I'm eyeing a young lad sitting at the next table in a big company, slim with blond hair wearing a leather jacket. Sean catches my glance.

'Who are you staring at?'

'A nice lassie.' I wink in the direction of a girl near the laddie.

'Aren't you married?'

'Is it a crime to admire the beauty?'

'Yeah, she's hot.' Sean agrees and when the girl turns around catching our gazes Sean smiles to her and she smiles back. 'So you were saying? The opportunities?' Sean make a sip of lager and I don't touch mine in case he will get drunk as fuck I will have to drive him home.

'Do you have weed?' I ask instead of giving him information.

'Hey hey I'm not going to share any until I know details, you made me curious.'

'But you do have weed.' I insist. 'And I'm pretty sure you had made some um necessary and inevitable connections during your military service in Afghanistan.'

'Maybe I had maybe I hadn't. What's your point?'

'You remember what exactly I'm doing at the customs?'

'Some dog stuff, checking luggage, or whatever. Why?' Sean begins feeling irritated and knowing him I decide it's better not to give him reasons for aggression.

'My point is that I'm taking a new pup who will become a sniffer, drug detection.' I finally meet the eyes of a blond laddie and his smile crawls down but he keeps staring at me, with no embarrassment, which is a good sign and I wonder whether I have a chance for a one night stand. I fucking well need it. It's been months since the last one.

'Huh?' Sean still doesn't follow me.

'Imagine that we know exactly when and what drugs are going through the customs office.' I low my voice. Sean turns his head to the girl again and I push his leg under the table probably too hard as he spills the remains of his lager.

'Shite!' Sean exclaims looking at me angrily and questionably. The girl laughs.

'What if we have two dogs, looking completely the same, but the first one will be trained for drug detection and the second won't be trained for that. The first dog, let me say the X, will be working on a regular schedule, will be passing all the tests, while the second dog, the Y, will never learn the drug scent, will never know it and though will never find any drugs if when they're present. And when the drugs we're to deal here will be imported we simply switch X to Y. Waiter!' I suddenly turn around and cry loudly. 'Two more pints, please!' When I look back at Sean his face is glittering but he still sounds doubtful.

'How do you make Y disappear from the kennel?'

'Oh, it's not a problem. You know, pups are vulnerable, they catch viruses easily and as their immune system isn't developed enough they can die. It's not uncommon.'

'Do you dye your hair?' I ask as the waitress approaches with lager.

'What? No, the hair is burnt down under the sun.' Sean appears to be insulted.

'The sun? In London? Oh, I'm sorry I've overheard you two.' The girl from the next table comments looking at Sean, smiling playfully.

'Nah, not in London, I've been overseas.' Sean replies looking semi-content semi-worried of the interruption.

'Oh, you must have a lot of stories to tell.'

'Well, yeah, how about I finish this boring business talk with my mate and then buy you a drink and tell you some truly interesting stories?' Now he's smiling confidently, softly rubbing his short stubble beard, his blue eyes glowing.

'Okay then, I'm gonna get some fresh air and you can join me later.' Sean watches the girl walk out of the pub and then turns to me.

'It's not a good idea to discuss this shite in such a crowded place.'

'That's the point, Sean, we're just two fellas having our regular Friday pints. Hide in plain sight.'

'Are all the pups stays at the kennel for training?'

'No, we'll sell some.'

'Isn't it better to sell Y, I mean, only on papers?'

'No, dead is dead. If Y is alive someone starts wondering what who his handler is. The K-9 is a very closed and tiny society, everyone knows everyone.'

'But you do have to sign some veterinary papers that Y is dead, don't you?'

'I can do it myself. We don't have a vet at the kennel, like you know, not enough financing, and since I'd had a vet course I do all these regular procedures.'

'What about a microchip implant or whatever this thing is called? They all have to have it now, pets. I mean the dog will be checked for it at the office.'

'No, it won't. It's just a bureaucracy, they'll scan the X's chip on the first day at the office to fill in the papers and then before the evaluation. No one will scan the chip every fucking day when you come to work with the dog. Anyway. Y has a broken chip. It can't be scanned. So even if you are asked to scan Y, nothing to worry about, and when he's dead I'll make him a new vet passport with the same chip number as X has. And who cares, scanners are old, chips are cheap, all of it can break out of a sudden.'

'What if someone will notice that it's not the same dog?'

'That's why I told you to have a look at their faces, they're the same, dogs from the same litter, they do resemble each other, it's simply a matter of genetics.' Sean doesn't reply, looking thoughtfully at his lager not drinking it.

I continue after a long pause.

'Look, I take care about the dogs, I have a small holding at the dead end of a village not far from the kennel. We'll switch X to Y and back from time to time so they both behave the same way at the office. That's my job. I will also train Y, teach him to sniff but some other scents you know explosives or currency, so he will search correctly and make a right impression. X and Y will have the same name, the same docs, your job is to find um partners um overseas and um partners or customers here. That's the first part. The second part of your job is to develop your business, it'll be smoke and mirrors. The third part is to take care of Y from time to time, feed him, walk him, that's all. I'm taking a technical part, the business part, connections, customers, suppliers, it's yours, you've great managing skills, Sean.'

'And what if we fuck up?' Sean scrutinises me with his eyes now turned to cold blue and I can't help but shiver.

'We won't. That's a perfect scheme.' I reply firmly. No way he refuses. Sean opens his mouth to say something but I don't give him that chance and spit out an uncomfortable and offensive question: "Oh, are you afraid that your old man will tear you a new one if he knows? Actually I'm quite surprised he hadn't done it yet after you participated in that gang bang in Iraq a couple of years ago. Does he think you're more under control here, in London?' Sean's hands become fists but he composes himself.

'Oh, I see you've done your home work, Michael, gathered some information, impressive.' And suddenly he smiles amicably: 'I'm in, Mike. You can count on me.'

'So now we have a deal! Cheers!' I raise my glass noticing with a corner of my eye that the blond lad stands up and I hope he's heading to a loo.

'But we'll need more people, Mike. Someone for delivery, that's for sure.'

'We've one year for all the necessary arrangements. After a year of training the dogs are ready to work. Well, I really need to piss after those pints and the girl waiting for you might be cold by now.' I give Sean a wink and follow the lad.

## EXT. OUTSIDE THE PUB, NIGHT

An extreme long shot of an almost empty street with a few people standing at the pub's door smoking and chatting, then a close up through the Mercedes window where the girl rides Sean on a backseat, the scenery is lit with dim yellow street lights and a neon pub sign.

## INT. THE PUB LOO, NIGHT

'Fuck off! It's not a fucking gay club, you know' The blond lad roars in anger and frustration and pushes me away so I hit a sink with my back and he walks out of the loo muttering 'fucking faggots'. I sluice my face with cold water and leaning on the sink look into a mirror my face coloured red with humiliation and fluorescent lighting. I can't go to a gay club what if someone sees me there. Should I start meeting men in the Internet? But what if my wife finds out? I wonder if she has any suspicions already. The only clue is that I'm not shagging her regularly, actually only being totally pissed, but I always tell her I have a rather physically demanding job. I don't lie about that, I think bitterly expecting the fresh bruises the dog had left on my left arm. But how long am I going to pretend? Can I do it for the entire life? And I consider yes, I surely fucking can, the only life goal is to pretend successfully, we're all playing our roles, claiming that we care about our career, our families, about the houses we live in, about the cars we drive, about the choices we make but it's all fucking bullshit, there're no reasons, no purpose, so what the fuck does it really matter, it's just plus one thing to pretend, it's easier to make an impression that I'm normal than to live openly, not with my job, they say there're open queers in military community nowadays, but dog trainers they are all sticks-in-the-mud, they will never ever accept a man who enjoys fucking other men. I glance down at my wrist watch and decide that Sean has had enough time for entertainment and now it's his turn to share with me some weed.

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## 3

### JUNE

## INT. A DINING ROOM AT A PENTHOUSE APARTMENT AT KENSINGTON & CHELSEA, EVENING

'The steak is delicious, dear. Your cooking has certainly improved after those Michelin star culinary school. More wine?' I top up our glasses and look out through the window at Melbury Rd covered in darkness, then turn my gaze to a large TV wall panel showing BBC evening news on mute.

'Could you please switch it off? I'm a bit tired of news after spending the whole day at the editors office, you know'. She smiles to me and I consider she looks stunning in her new black tunic dress with a belt but I don't mention it. I stand up and remove the TV plug out of a socket.

'There's a remote, Frank.' She comments smiling.

'You keep telling me that I have to do 10 thousands steps a day.' I sit back on a chair and open a Perrier and drink straight from it ignoring a clean glass in front of me. 'You know, Celine, I think we should split up.'

'Very well then.' She seizes the bottle from my hand and finishes it.

Very well then? And that's all?'

'Oh it's not the first time we have this conversation, you will be back anyway when your son screws up again. Of course, you're that kind of man who doesn't need support and emotional comfort so let's pretend you will come back just for expensive wine and satisfying sex, shall we?' Celine looking pleased with her little speech takes dirty dishes from a table but I refuse to give her my plate.

'I still need this one.' I light a cigarette.

'Please don't use it as an ashtray.' She murmurs.

'There're no other ashtrays.' I take a deep drag leaning back. Celine goes out to a kitchen and I hear a coffee machine spluttering. She returns with two large mugs of strong black coffee and after a couple of sips and the second cigarette I feel relaxed. She sits on a large vintage black buttoned leather sofa which I find too arty farty so I fix my eyes on her bare feet and I would actually prefer to undress her right now but I know we haven't finished talking yet. I enjoy even just looking at her body, fit but not skinny. She's well off and almost 20 years younger than me. She catches my gaze.

'You're afraid to form relationships, Frank. Once you get close to someone you think it's time to run away. A pity the Op TELIC had ended. How much effort did you make to let your troop stay in Iraq until 2011? It was a cunning plan to wimp out, I must admit.' Narrowing her lids Celine turns on a stereo with a remote smiling mockingly. The 1970s French music which she's well aware I detest starts playing and even the sound is soft I can hear words clearly.

'So what's your interest in me may I ask?'

'Oh, I'm curious, there're a lot of skeletons in your closet.'

'So is it just another journalist investigation which has got more personal?'

'Oh do you believe I'm doing research on you behind your back? Of course not, it's too simple, I'm waiting when you will show all the aces yourself.' She smiles and raises up the volume.

'How's your divorcing process is going on?' I move myself to the sofa and embrace her fingering her brown medium cut sleek hair.

'Oh, gosh, I hate when you smell of cigarettes.' She notes but stays in my arms. 'The papers are to be ready by the end of the summer, Gwen stays with her father in France.'

'And how do you feel about it?'

'I'm not pleased with my daughter's decision but it's up to her.' Celine begins unbuttoning my shirt.

'She's fifteen, it's up to you.'

'I'm convinced that people at this age can choose for themselves whom of the parents to stay with.' She kisses me forcefully biting my lip.

'She's a fucking teenager, she only cares about shagging and smoking what the fuck does she know.'

'Says the man who at the age of 64 is smoking weed and is up to fuck his girlfriend, what an awful word by the way.' She laughs.

Cut to black.

#### INT. A PENTHOUSE BEDROOM

'You are not staying?' Celine asks watching me closely as I walk out from a bathroom and dress myself up.

'I'm afraid I can't'. She raises her eyebrows in a questionable manner. She's lying naked on a bed and it's probably the first thing I liked about her, that she's not shy. 'I've registered on that weird online service to offer the first floor of my house for rent.'

'Good Lord, I didn't expected you to need money so desperately.'

'It's not about money, I'm curious how these modern things work'. I fasten my belt with a loud metal clicking noise.

'I thought you hate youngsters.'

I ignore her last comment. 'So I need to be home tomorrow morning to give those Swedish or Icelandic or... whatever those Scandinavian tourists the keys.'

'They'll ruin your house, Frank.'

'How?'

'With tons of alcohol bottles, vomit, feces and sperm. I hope you have an insurance for that. How much do you ask for rent?'

'Two grands per week.'

'Two grands for this shithole!'

'It's not a shithole and the price covers cleaning up service in case of how did you put it? Bottles, vomit, what else? Ah, nevermind.'

'Why don't you sell the house and buy yourself something less big but more cozy and stylish?'

'Like a room in a road motel? Or a mobile home?' I open the window and search my pockets for a pack of Marlboro. Celine shiver because of the cold air getting inside and covers herself with a blanket giving me a disapproving look. 'If I sell my property I have to partly share money with Sean.'

'You don't want to share with your own son?' Casting her eyes up she emphasises the phrase 'your own son' and for a moment I think that she also suspects that I'm not Sean's biological father. Or am I?

'I can't entrust him such amount of money, he'll pissit it immediately like he did with the money he inherited from his mother. And I wouldn't give a fuck if he spend it on girls and cars but it's Sean, he'll find some dangerous monkey business to invest in and then we're both fucked up. Oh bollocks!' I snap my Zippo thrice but there's no flame coming out.

'Tu as raison. Mais tu es veu...'

'I'm not your French ex, Celine, and I detest you speaking French with this terrible pronunciation.' I interrupt suddenly feeling irritated.

'In twenty years or so Sean will get all of your money anyway unless of course your will says something else about it. Have you already made a will, Frank?' She mocks me.

'I gotta go.'

'Oh, you look so sweet when you're mad. Come here.' She slaps the bed.

'I'm too old to have to shags in a row.' I try to make a joke but my voice appears to sound bitter.

'I'm going to Paris for the next weekend, will you join me?'

'I hate Paris.'

'Me either. It's better to hate a place in a good company, don't you think?' She smiles, I sigh, kiss her and march away.

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4

JUNE

INT. A HOTEL ROOM IN PARIS, RIVE DROITE, PARIS. LATE MORNING

I insisted we stay at a 4 star hotel situated au 16ème arrondissement, Celine would prefer something more classy of course but I refused to accompany her unless I pay for that fucking voyage, though it's morning it's dreadfully fucking hot already and yet I usually relish the Middle East heat here it drives me nuts as my armpits get sweaty despite of a antiperspirant and I change a shirt again. Celine is out to pick up Gwen since we've agreed to have lunch together and I pretend to be reading a tourist guide my legs stretched wide on a table. Paris is synonymous with art, I think I'm gonna puke, Climb up to the viewing platform for spectacular panoramas over Paris, and throw out from it, See the towers, gargoyles, huge nave and ringing bells, may I please avoid all of it? Take a hope on hope off bus tour, let's proceed to the hop off part, shall we? Shopping is not to be missed and I imagine myself fucking about Boulevard Saint Germain or passages couverts holding large bags and nodding in a fake agreement which dress or shoes Celine or Gwen should choose. Bugger it, I'm not suitable for family vacations, the only attraction I don't mind to visit is far corners of Père Lachaise, probably the only place where the population of fussy tourists is less than 10 people per 1 sq m. The thought that Adriel would like Père Lachaise and on the contrary Sean would find it fucking boring and meaningless crosses my mind. And I make an effort to cram this reflection back into my subconscious endeavouring not to think of Adriel too much since I'm not able to deal with my own feeling of guilt. I switch my attention to an air conditioner trying to adjust its airflow with a remote but the device appears to be clapped-out and it more sneezes than provides cooling and ventilation and I reckon it's only good for providing residents with allergens. I'm toying with an idea to light a cigarette, probably the fire alarm system doesn't operate too but the sound of a text received interrupts me from making a small but so fucking desirable mischief. 'Come ASAP'. Oh well, dealing with problems is less boring than shopping and sightseeing.

INT. A STAIRCASE IN THE BUILDING, THEN A LIVING ROOM IN THE JACQUES' APARTMENT, Ile-de-France, RIVE GAUCHE. 15 MINUTES LATER. DAY

Marching up the apples I catch a sight of Le Pont Neuf through a large window and make a note that I've done the fucking sightseeing already. I knock the door and Jacques half-opens it scrutinizing me through a gap the chain not being pulled down.

'Qu'est-ce que tu veux?' He inquires grinning being sure it's his territory and an outsider is not a danger for him. I long for smashing this tosser's face right away, what Celine had seen in that shit head?

'J'en ai marre de toi!' I answer with a hearty smile.

'Va te faire foutre! Décampe!'

I don't reply on this thinking that I've done with my French practice for today and I strike the door with my foot and it starts aching, I shouldn't have listen to Celine and wear regular ankle boots instead of Oxfords, the door swings wide open and gives Jacques a hard punch in the face, the fucking cunt falls on the floor as I pass by him rushing into a living room where Celine with a swollen lip and Gwen who has obviously been crying but not too much, just a reasonable amount of tears allowed for a strong young lady which she wants to become or probably already has are sitting on a sofa embracing each other. I ask if they are fine and they both hug me when Jacques lurches through a door way his white polo t-shirt covered with bright stains of fresh blood, I turn around and without any hesitation punch him in the face as hard as I can. The motherfucker fucking well deserves it. I observe him crawling on the floor scarcely noticing that Gwen makes a yelp, oh well well well, at least I haven't come to Paris in vain, I cock my foot to kick him in his ribs and suddenly freeze. Later I explain it to myself that I simply didn't want to scare Gwen, Jacques is her father after all, that wouldn't have been appropriate, you can't scotch a snake with violence (actually you can), blah-blah-blah, core principles ceased me. Lier. It was a flashback that stopped me, not the fucking principles. Double standards. You can't tolerate someone laying a hand on a woman but you are able to beat up an annoying teenager, and what's the big difference? He couldn't have strike back. And how am I better than Jacques? I defend someone's child having hurt my own, it's challenging and demanding to love your own offsprings, you put efforts to bring them up and you grow your own expectations of them while you don't really await anything from strangers, you don't give a shit about them and you don't want them to make the best out of their lives, they're already good enough from your distant point of view.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP TERRACE, Rue Lucien Sampaix. DAY

'Je ne veux plus rester avec papa' Gwen says to her mother while we're having fresh brewed coffee tasting like burnt wood shredding at a cafe terrace. But at least there's an ashtray on the table.

'Indeed, sweetheart, you could come back to London with us.'

'Are you two being serious?' Gwen swings her head to me readjusting her long hair.

'About what?' Celine inquires.

'About your relationship and stuff.'

'Relationship is the less serious thing in the world.' Immediately putting on my regular working polite poker face expression I make a comment answering her question and not answering it at the same time. Fucking diplomacy. Then I light a cigarette to occupy my mouth from more taking.

I feel Celine eyeing me but I pretend to be interested in a chopper riding along the street.

'I'd like to drive a bike someday.' Gwen certainly has followed my gaze.'

'Oh why not, when you get your licence.' Celine answers her and makes an excuse to go to a lady's room her lip now swollen badly. I wouldn't like my son to drive a bike, I think, wouldn't want him to crash down. And at the same time I wanted him to join military service and probably get killed and I used to consider myself a reasonable and logical person.

'I'd like to meet your son.' Gwen who has been usually avoiding to stay alone with me suddenly tells me.

'Sean is not a proper company for you, Gwen.'

'I'm not talking about Sean, what about the second one?' I meet her eyes flickering with excitement since she had found out something I was hiding from her and Celine. I remain silent sipping black slush that tastes even worse cold.

'Oh please, your second name is uncommon, sounding even artificial, it wasn't rocket science to figure out you're related, he also resembles you on the pictures I've seen on Facebook.' She continues. 'Are they siblings, Adriel and Sean?'

I sneer.

'I don't know that.' I tell her sincerely.

'Oh so it must be an adventurous love story with an unplanned child as a result?'

'Wrong guess.' And I'm pleased with her confusion.

'Does mom know about him?'

'I assume your mom can google better than you're since she's a journalist so I don't know what she knows but I didn't tell her if that what you were asking.'

'May I have a cigarette?' She cocks her head to the left shoulder looking at me.

'No, you're fifteen.'

'So fucking what? Do you seriously believe I don't smoke?'

'That's none of my business. But this is my Marlboro pack and it's up to me whether to share or not.'

'So you don't care about me?'

'No, I don't think I do.'

'You're such a cunt, Frank.'

'You're correct.' I nod with satisfaction.

'Why didn't you tell mom?'

'Because my experience tells me that the less information you provide about yourself the better.'

'So you don't trust anyone, hah.'

'And how your faith in people you thought you knew has changed today?' I give Gwen a wide smile and she mutters 'cunt' and then Celine comes back with a fresh make up asking if everything all right and we pretend this chat has never happened.

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## 5

ONE FRIDAY IN THE END OF JUNE

EXT & INT. MIKE'S HOUSE SOMEWHERE NOT FAR FROM LONDON. EVENING

I park my silver Ford Focus Hatch in front of our tiny one ground brick house surrounded by flowers that Jane has planted and as I lift up a rear door to get Y from a trunk I notice her coming from the back side of the cottage, the weather being dry and sunny obviously leading her to spend time in a tiny back yard with a green lawn. Jane waves her hand greeting me happily and I grin, it's not that she irritates me, it's just... I



don't know, she's not the right type of person for me, she's nice though a bit naive, but caring, pretty, even funny sometimes, but... well, it's good she had had a miscarriage two years ago.

'Sorry for being late again, hell a lot of work' I kiss her lips. Y jumps out and Jane begins playing with him, trying to chase him, that is not in a correct way, I told her you have to run from a dog, not after a dog, I sigh, whatever, some people are just not able to learn.

'He's adorable!' She exclaims. 'So it's final, it's your new working dog?'

'Yup, I've signed all the necessary papers today.' I reply as we enter the house and suddenly Top Gear, that's the puppy's name, well, the name of both puppies, it was Sean's idea, it was a T-litter and the name suits perfectly, suddenly Top Gear leaps back from a swap standing in a hall corner. I whistle to get his attention and offer him a ball and Jane observes that it's strange, the last time he was here, a couple of days ago, he wasn't afraid of the very same swap.

'When pups grow up they have a period of fears, it happens, probably he even didn't notice the scary thing the last time.' I smile and put Y in his crate. Yep, the last time it was X. I smile again.

We have dinner Jane watching TV and I'm grateful I don't need to make a conversation. TV is a family saving device. Suddenly Jane speaks out: 'Oh, by the way, Mike, I've been tidying up a wardrobe today and found a shoe box with some old photos.' Jane stands up and goes to the bedroom from where she returns with the box which I had completely forgotten about.

'I hope you don't mind that I took a glance?' She asks calmly.

'Not at all.' I reassure here trying to remember are there any compromising pictures or not. Probably not. I have always been very careful.

Jane takes out a few Polaroids.

'Those look old.' She offers me a photograph. I look at it.

'No, it's just a camera which is old, the photo has been taken two years ago or so.'

'I see. Is it Sean next to you?' I nod.

'And who's the other lad with you here?'

'Sean's younger brother.'

'Oh, I didn't know Sean has a brother. They don't resemble each other.' Jane bents over two Polaroids. 'He's handsome.'

What is she implying? Oh fuck, most likely nothing, most likely he was right, I am paranoid and Jane is simply teasing me, when was the last time I screwed her? Top Gear begins rustling in the crate and I use this opportunity to get out from the house before I get completely annoyed with Jane's questions about old photographs. I watch Top Gear running along a tiny green lane and I close my eyes and still see his face, the harder I try to forget him, the more I think of him, every fucking day since we broke up I think of him. I take out my mobile phone from a pocket of my jeans, I've changed into a clean pair this morning but the jeans smell of dogs already and I like it. I sit on my haunches and play tug with Top Gear a bit, the mobile phone left on the doorsteps. I look askew at it. I sit on the stairs the pup trying to catch my feet and taking the phone I find a number in a contact list and finally send a text, the first one in these long two years.

Hey. HRU? R u still lookin' for a malinois pup? I know a great one for sale.

I lay the phone aside and scratching Y, tired already, think if Darry even cares to answer or prefers to ignore the text.

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INT & EXT. FRANK'S HOUSE, HARTLAND RD, LONDON. DAY

I proceed from the hall to the kitchen and then to the first floor and check the rooms, everything has been left clean and tidy, the beds are made, empty beer bottles are collected in the kitchen near a waste bag with a note that they didn't find a special litter bin for glass, those funny Scandinavian tourists, it's a shame we had had to linger in Paris and I hadn't had a chance to talk with those fellas on return. I march upstairs and unlock the door of my office room, the table is covered with papers, as usual, I move the papers unconsciously from one corner of the table to another, my head begins to ache and I blame the second hottest summer for it, I look down at the papers again, then pick up my letter of resignation, sign it, but not with my old Parker pen, but with a simple ball pen, fold the paper in half and put it into an inner pocket of my light slim-fit hazelnut suit. I go down again, open a fridge, take out a cold bottle of sparkling water, drink it whole in one large sip, and then walk outside to check a post box. A few bills, irrelevant advertisements printed on cheap thin sheets of paper, and a black envelope with no stamps with white letters on it 'To Frank H. Landberg' hand-written. My head ache worsens. Handwriting, it doesn't change significantly

during a life time of a person, I know who signed the envelope, semi-linked semi-blocked tiny letters falling slightly to the right, hard to read, I bite back the temptation to throw the envelope in a litter bin with the rest of spam, it's childish, to ignore his letter is childish, well, to send such a letter is childish, he could have sent an e-mail or a text or he could have given me a call, for sure he remembers my number, nonsense, I rub my nose bridge, lift my head from the black envelope to the house, it's one at the corner right behind to the bridge, and the bricks begin moving, it's like a broken TV screen or an old VHS tape, panning right, panning left, distorted picture, glitch, dead pixels, a fucking headache, a fucking heat, back in the kitchen I take out another bottle of water, walk to my bedroom, and start searching for ibuprofen pill or something. Not having found anything suitable I remove the suit and the white soaked in sweat shirt but leaving a pair of limited edition camouflage printed Converse shoes on me on which Gwen had commented that they are extremely up to date and collapse onto the bed. The vertigo stopped and I open the envelope and unfold a white glossy sheet of paper. The letter is hand-written and I wish I had had my reading glasses on, why couldn't he print the letter, childish, and well, sweet actually.

DEAR DAD

DAD

DEAR FRANK

FRANK

COLONEL FRANK HENRY LANDBERG

SIR

OH FOR FUCK'S SAKE!

Hi, I GUESS.

Frank smiles then makes a heavy sigh and presses his lips, his face is back to a normal sarcastic not-impressed expression.

I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHERE TO START BUT I WANT TO APOLOGIZE FOR BEING SUCH A JERK SIX YEARS AGO AND BEING SUCH A PAIN IN THE ARSE. I RECKON THAT YOU TRIED YOUR BEST BELIEVING YOU WERE DOING WHAT WAS THE BEST FOR ME AND I'M VERY SORRY I DIDN'T MEET ANY OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS. I'M GRATEFUL FOR ALL THOSE THINGS YOU'VE DONE FOR ME AND... I MISS YOU, ALL THOSE YEARS I'VE BEEN MISSING YOU AND I STILL DO. WE CAN'T CHANGE THE PAST BUT PROBABLY WE COULD JUST LEAVE THE PAST IN THE PAST, HUH? WELL, YOU KNOW, IF YOU LIKE TO UM GET IN TOUCH, SEND ME A TEXT OR GIVE ME A CALL OR WHATEVER, JUST LET ME KNOW.

A.

P.S. UM, I WILL UNDERSTAND IF YOU STILL DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANYTHING FROM ME AND IT'S OKAY IF YOU JUST THROW AWAY THIS LETTER.

P.P.S. I LOVE YOU, DAD.

Frank rereads the letter sever times then puts it on a nightstand next to the water bottle which has left some water drops on the wooden surface, the letter gets wet and the letters written in black ink begin running now resembling Rorschach images. Frank continues lying on the bed not moving his eyes open staring at the ceiling.

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INT. DARRY'S ONE ROOM APARTMENT, BROOKSTONE COURT, LONDON. EARLY MORNING

The Gmail app rings again. I cut the last letter on a large stencil poster I'm working at, lay it aside, the table is all covered with cut out letters, tiny scissoring, used blades, that I don't throw away immediately after changing, rough papers, Polaroids and books, and I raise my head to a bright screen and click the new mail to open.

We really like the last version, let's stick to this font, but could you please move letters to the right a bit like to stretch the text and maybe to make a tree a bit wider.

What? I rub my eyes, read again, read again, trying to understand what exactly should I do with the text, how many revisions have I already made? Well, definitely more than is listed in a contract, but it's fine, this

is a good loyal customer, who always pays and comes back, so I don't really give a fuck that it's a middle of a summer and I'm drawing a Christmas poster and I've been breaking my balls for the entire week to draw one fucking simple fucking vector tree. I open Photoshop and look for a Wacom tablet entombed under all the papers, the Wacom found, where's the fucking pen, oh gimme a break, I definitely need the third table here, in my home art studio, oh no, wait, what I actually need is to be more organized, but it's easier to buy a table in IKEA for certain than to put the Wacom pen onto the same place every fucking time. I stand up, go to the kitchen, make another large cup of Americano with ice, take some biscuits and return to the room, the balcony door is wide open, it's not that extremely hot yet and I miserably look out onto the street thinking that I want to smoke again but I calculate that if I smoke another one I'll run out of cigarettes before I get the job done and I don't like to be interrupted especially when it's myself who interrupts myself. I move the letters to the right and make the tree wider but now it doesn't fit the text or more likely the text doesn't fit the image, you see, when a customer ask you to change an appearance of just one letter or just one word in a text you have to change everything else too, now the tree is too bold and the text is too thin and in the previous version everything was perfectly adjusted, I enlarge the font size from 72 pt to 92 pt but that's not it, I switch the font from Medium to Bold, then play with kerning and line-spacing and after an hour when all the biscuits are gone and the coffee has already moved from the cup straight to my bladder I finally decide that I will insist on the first draft. That's hell of a job, to persuade a customer that your design solution was the best from the start, I mean it's not that hard to make a good poster but proving that it's good, that's the fucking craft. I write a large letter of explanation and send it attaching a new draft then take a glance at my old Casio watches, then open a calendar on my mobile phone, the to-do list is named 'Fucking Shite for Today', I'm meeting Sean who has finally returned to London in 3 hours, then I have a concert photo shoot starting at 6 pm, well, a concert manager told me to come an hour before a concert begins, but I know that concerts never start on time, so arriving at 8 pm would be just in time, one hour of delay, one hour of some ass-hole DJ playing and the concert will be at 9 pm all right, I still have time to buy an airy shirt to cover my arms, I haven't seen Sean literally for ages and he's the only person I don't want to hear any questions from, I look down at my right arm with a long 10 inch in length scar on it's inner side running from the wrist to the elbow.

The Gmail rings again but now it's a breeder whom I've contacted a couple of days ago asking about a pup. Am I ready? Am I responsible enough? Am I sane enough? Am I able to handle a malinois? I look through the letter but don't reply immediately feeling that my bladder would explode any second after 0.5 gallons of black coffee I've had already. I move myself to the bathroom and relieving myself make a mental note that I need to watch porn before going out. Back to the room (with some more coffee of course) I clean both of two tables I have, one for working on MacBook and cutting stencils, the second for painting. I collect all the trash including five empty cigarette packs into a large black bag and put books back on a shelf accidentally cutting my finger with 'Grid systems in graphic design'. A drop of blood falls onto my blue jeans and I curse loudly as now I have to change myself, I hate wearing dirty clothes even it's only one almost unnoticeable stain. A band aid on my finger, a clean pair of jeans put on, I google some new porn, well, vintage actually, I like the soft colours of the 1970s-1980s porn, the first video I'm watching, two guys are shagging in a boat, the boat is rocking, but not the waves on a background since the background is just a photo wall paper, wow, donkey years ago there wasn't even a green screen! I unzip my jeans trying to concentrate on the intercourse not on how the film was made, but I can't stop thinking about those still waves so I find another film but it's even funnier, the action is set in fields, green grass, haystacks, a fucking pastoral I tell you, and while one man is fucking hardly the second man a large fly sits on his arse and not being comfortable with a surface moving back and front back and front back and front the fly repositions itself to the guy's lower back. I wonder what lens was used for such an extreme close up. Zeiss? Had Zeiss ever imagined that his invention will be used to capture close ups of how one man sticks his dick into another man's hole? Gosh, why I am even thinking about it? I switch the porn off considering that I'm absolutely able to jerk off without additional help and having groped a condom in a table drawer I slap the ghost and after I finish myself the Google mail rings again and the customer informs me that the previous draft is good enough and I can proceed and make the final hand-made poster. Great! The day has just started great.

I smoke the last cigarette on the balcony and look down at an ashtray full of cigarette butts and before I send them into the black bag I take a Polaroid picture of the ashtray. A camera is a tool to get rid of the images in my head, there're so many of them, but once I draw something or take a photo of something I'm able to free my head for the next image.

I throw my old Polaroid, a 35mm cheap point-and-shoot camera and two film rolls into a backpack, take car keys and leave, the front door bangs shut.

EXT. FITTING ROOM IN A MASS MARKET STORE. MIDDAY

An extreme close up of LED lights hanging on a ceiling of a space that appears to be a fitting room in a mass market store, a medium close up of Darry's reflexion in a large three fold mirror, his bare bald chest with a visible rib cage, his skin is almost blue in LED lights, he's touching his lean left triceps, so narrow he's able to brace it with his right thumb and his index finger. A couple of white shirts are hanging in the fitting room, Darry's t-shirt tumbled on his black backpack on a floor. LED lights are reflecting on Darry's face making bruises under his eyes look harder and cheek-bones sharper, the camera then moves to Darry's arms, an extreme-close up of his tattoo sleeves, black work geometrical patterns with sharp angles, and thought the tattoos are large they don't cover all the scars, most of them are still visible and the longest widest scar on the inner arm is even emphasized by the black tattoo lines around it. The camera moves from the arms to the shoulder area and then to the back to reveal more scars on Darry's body, most of which had already whitened but some of them are still pinkish, they are all different, wide short horizontal scars and narrow long vertical scars, parallel scars, perpendicular scars, scars criss crossing each other. I touch the longest scar with my finger and this one feels different from the surrounding skin, it's arching, almost 3D, it's so ugly it's even beautiful. I look through the mirror into my brown eyes so dark I can't see the pupils. I bite my lip, try on the shirts, pick one and having payed for it march out to the Oxford street busy with traffic and crowds. Endeavouring not to get sensory overloaded too soon I put on the iPod and smoke three cigarettes in a row taking fast short drags and while I'm walking to my car and paying for the parking I chew my lips so hard they start bleeding.

#### INT. STREET. CENTRAL LONDON. DAY

A car alarm makes a beeping sound, I get in. Start the engine, put on spectacles, turn on music loud. Driving calms me down and hell I need to calm down, I don't know what to expect from a meeting with Sean and I'm nervous almost hyperventilating but driving also makes me feel more real not in the same way as pain does but driving demands staying focused, demands not letting your thoughts go elsewhere from the road, I like to feel pedals under my foot, I like to press them smooth, I enjoy the soft sound of tires squeezing up against hot asphalt.

As there's still some time left before the meeting I make a large circle and feel rather comfortable being stuck in traffic. Having eventually found a parking spot I'm trying to position straight my white seventh-generation Honda Civic sedan but I'm terrible at parallel parking on busy streets, always get jumpy that I'm doing it too slow and blocking a way and I'm so ashamed I'm learning so slowly, shit, why is it so hard for me to learn the things normal people are doing from scratch? Back to step one, anxious to hit neighbouring cars, I'm biting my lips, moving back slowly, slowly steering the wheel, slow, slow, I definitely need to read a self-help book 'How to stop being a retard in two easy steps written by a retard for retard'. I think about Homer Simpson and a monkey inside his brain but no, it's not a monkey in my head, it must be a pair of hissing cockroaches there. When I reckon I've finally succeeded I unfasten the belt, open the door, get out, consider whether it's okay or I need to re-park (it's fine, stop splitting hairs), I get inside again, stop the engine, light a cig accidentally burning the finger tip. If by accident it's painful, when on purpose, it's not. My shaven armpits are sweaty partly because I'm too nervous partly because I'm boiling in a shirt despite of an air conditioner turned on max.

#### EXT. CAFE OPEN TERRACE. CENTRAL LONDON. DAY

'I tell you, this is not a mojito, there must be white rum in a mojito, this is not rum, it tastes like cheap sparkling wine with piss, does this' - I take a green leaf with my fingers - 'does this even look like mint?' A fat young waitress not pretty and that's why I'm acting so cross and crabby asks what she could do for me and suggests that I choose another drink but I continue doing her head in: 'I don't like some other drink, miss, I'd like a mojito, a mojito with white rum and mint, and if you don't serve a mojito with white rum and mint I'd like to see a manager. Please.' I add sarcastically noticing that the waitress is about to cry, wow, I haven't expected such an effect, I must admit. My back turned to a street I'm watching the waitress and fling up my hands demanding an action from her but a voice suddenly interrupts me:

'Hey there.'

I turn back to face the street and here he is, blimey, I wouldn't recognize him in a crowd, I guess, he's taller, must be taller than me now, little fuck is taller than me now, I can't believe my eyes, thin, with the same short simple haircut, Polaroid sunglasses on, smiling uncertainly, his skin is smooth and clean, I wonder if he even need to shave, and I'm actually so fucking happy to see him I completely forget about the waitress and the mojito, I stand up and give him a hug.

Darry goes round a fence of the cafe terrace and there's an establishing shot of the street and the cafe and then Darry sits in front of Sean telling the waitress, very politely, that he'll have a diet coke with ice.  
APPROXIMATELY HALF AN HOUR LATER

SHOT REVERSE SHOT

SEAN (looking at Darry's hands, the only visible tattoos when Darry's wearing long sleeves)  
Nice tattoos.

DARRY (giving him a short smile)

SEAN  
How many more do you have?

DARRY  
Um, not many, arm sleeves

SEAN  
Um, curious. I guess have to get a tattoo done, too. I like how yours look.

DARRY  
Yup, a must-do, totally.

SEAN (CASUALLY)  
So you are what now? Doing tattoos?

DARRY (SHRUGGING HIS SHOULDERS)  
Er, not only. This and that, graphic design, posters, book covers, album covers, t-shirt prints, stickers, street art, sell original art works online, photography from time to time.

SEAN (SEMI-MOCKINGLY)  
Well, you're a true artist now, huh?

DARRY (UNCOMFORTABLY, TRYING TO TURN IT INTO A JOKE)  
Nah, I haven't cut my ear yet.

SEAN (PUZZLED)  
Huh?

DARRY (PUZZLED)  
Van Gogh?

SEAN  
Van what?

DARRY  
Never mind.

SEAN  
By the way, I have a great van for sale!

DARRY (EVEN MORE PUZZLED)  
Are you selling cars now?

SEAN (EXCITED)  
Yeah, that's a steady business, I tell you!

DARRY  
I'm surprised you've left military service, I thought you enjoyed it.

SEAN (PRETENDING HE DIDN'T HEAR THE LAST COMMENT)

I need a partner for my business, you know, it's growing and I can't do everything on my own, I have to delegate some authority to someone who's 1000% trustworthy, so... I believe you might be interested.

DARRY

Nah, I'm not.

SEAN

Oh c'mon, it's an interesting job, a lot of traveling, meeting new people, having nice lunches with them (raising his mojito up and pointing to it with his eyes), flexible hours, good money.

DARRY (AVOIDING TO LOOK AT HIS BROTHER DIRECTLY)

No, thank you for the offer, but no.

SEAN

Why the fuck not? Give me just one fucking reason.

Copy paste, copy paste, copy paste, I'd been through this conversation before, I think focusing my eyes on a bottle of coke, ctrl-v ctrl-c ctrl-v ctrl-c ctrl-v ctrl-c, I don't have to explain anything now, I'm a fucking adult, no is just no, setting personal borders is important, for sure it fucking is, I raise my head and take a glance at Sean.

'Look, I'm afraid I have to go.' I point to my Casio watches. 'I have a photo assignment in an hour.' I lie to him. It's still easier to lie than to tell the truth that no is no, end of discussion. I stand up leaving some coins on a table to pay for my bottle of coke. Sean examines my outfit.

'Where have you got this shirt?'

'H&M, why?'

'You accept my offer, you get your next shirt not even from GAP or Ralph Lauren or Lacoste but from Helmut Lang, I promise.' Sean raises his eyebrows and nods to his light blue polo with a small crocodile.

'Are those the very same pair of Adidas you'd been wearing five years ago?' Sean asks cynically.

'No, those are new, and I really need to go, see ya.'

'Hey, let me give you a lift.'

'I'm by car myself.'

'Oh! What car do you drive?'

'Honda Civic.'

'So... you're living in a flat which you had inherited from our aunt, you bought a car with money which you had inherited from our mom, do you even gain enough money to buy food because you look totally underfed, and still you refuse to even think about a new opportunity.'

'See ya, Sean.' I feel sweat running along my back down into the jeans.

'Think about it, Darry! Just... you don't have to give an answer now.' Sean winks and then adds. 'By the way, you look exactly like dad, you talk exactly like dad. Hey, do you even have money to pay for parking in the centre?' I turn away fighting the temptation to show him a middle finger but it's probably what he expects from me, so I just leave not looking back.

'Little shit.' Sean mumbles to himself and then glances down at an empty mojito glass and yells 'Hey, waitress!'

INT. DARRY'S CAR PARKED ON A STREET SOMEWHERE IN CENTRAL LONDON. 30 MIN LATER

An extreme long shot of Darry sitting in his car, the car door open, and Darry's is just perched on a corner of the seat, his knees bent, he's staring on a pavement, holding a cigarette, but not smoking, a close up of the cigarette pinched between his long fingers with short nails, then an extreme close up of the cig burning to ashes, ashes fallen down on Darry's shoes.

I look down at the cigarette still burning. I make an effort to hold myself from self-harm, cig burns are painful, I know it's just old neural connections have been activated. I don't want to hurt myself, I endeavour to persuade myself, though my brain wants to, because it's such an easy familiar strategy of calming down, oh what the hell it's only reactive aggression. I crush out the cigarette and bury my face into my palms. Well, Sean is... Sean. Fuck it.

The sound of the car being started, the sound of working engine, the soft sound of the car door being shut smoothly.

EXT. A FRONT ENTRANCE TO A NIGHT CLUB, UXBRIDGE RD, LONDON, EVENING

[Indistinct chatter]

Then an establishing shot of a large crowd of youngsters gathered behind a front door of a night club, then the scenery is slowly taken out of focus, so the wide-angle street view looks like an Impressionist painting, red brick buildings, grey pavement, store signs, red buses, sky and sun reflecting in shot windows, merging with colourful crowd, red, yellow, green, blue.

The only thing I've learnt from working as a photographer assistant in a shitty photo studio is how to get an access to almost every event you want to visit. As a photographer. That's not a rocket science, just takes a lot of e-mails to write with a clear presentation what you wanna do and what event managers gonna get from you. That's simple, huh, take pictures, send them pictures; no, wait, take good pictures, send them good pictures, and if there's anything which distinguishes you from the whole other million of good photographers, because everyone who's able to buy a DSLR is a photographer today, and it's almost impossible to take shitty photos with a good DSLR and a good lens, then you have a chance to be even invited to an even and get some money. Not much though. But it's not about money for me. Never has been about money.

I watch the crowd not coming too close. People are laughing, someone shouts 'I've read Nietzsche, the dude sucks!' and there come more laughs, people are drinking, smoking, kissing, drinking more, kissing more, pushing each other, beginning dancing before even being allowed inside the club, I reckon it is exactly what is called clubbing. I never take the a backstage pass. I light a cigarette continuing watching the crowd, ecstatically happy, what makes them so fucking cheerful? Pills? Cocaine? Boose? The only thing that makes me happy (or rather satisfied) is a finished art work with which I'm content, happens rarely, gives a lot of satisfaction, is satisfaction the same thing as happiness? Oh wait, a good art work of mine doesn't make me feel satisfied, it just makes me not depressed, is being not depressed the same as being happy?

Darry now wearing a white plain t-shirt remains standing at a distance with a poker face, relaxed but expressing zero emotions. An extreme close up of people outfit, fluorescent pink sleeves, glistening silver boots, a neon yellow hood, neck chains, large ear rings jingling, logotypes on tank tops, prints on t-shirts, skulls, mickey mouses, everything starts swirling, the camera is panning right and left up and down then going in circles, extreme close-ups of beer head coming from a bottle then beer spilled, empty beer cans in a litter bin, on the pavement, indistinct chatter grows louder, louder louder louder LOUDER LOUDER

**LOUDER LOUDER LOUDER LOUDER LOUDER LOUDER LOUDER.** Darry presses his hands to his ears and all the noises stops. Dead Air. Darry then elbows his way to the entrance asking out loud but still very politely to let him pass explaining that he's a photographer on tonight's concert holding his Polaroid camera up in the air in his outstretched arm. He knocks onto a heavy metal door and when there's no reaction from the inside he kicks the door with his foot, the door opens and a suspicious security head appears in a narrow door way to which Darry repeats the explanation and in the end is being let in, a paper by-pass band is now on his wrist.

A band which is playing a gig tonight are pals of pals of pals of pals of mine. Wow, do I really know so many people? Well, I've hanged out with them before so I'm not nervous, I hate meeting new people, never knowing what to say (hm, seriously, might be, basically, interesting! always work as answers), where to look (avoid staring into eyes, find a spot on a wall or on a floor or examine your hands). But there're also another simple solution. Occupy your hands. If you the only one in a company owning a car, drive, just fucking drive, tell everyone you're too concentrated on a road to talk, turn music loud. If you're not behind a wheel or the destination point has been reached already, take a camera. A camera is not just a tool, it's a weapon, a shield protecting me from meaningless small talks pointless conversations boring people, a transparent wall separating me from society without, I emphasize, breaking any society moral principles or whatever that shite is called.

INT. A CORNER OF A STAGE, NIGHT CLUB, NIGHT

Bright lights, epileptically blinking, on, off, on, off, the lights go off for a fracture of a second and the stage is all covered in darkness while music, techno, electro, whatever playing loud, the music is good, hell, the gig is perfect, the lights go on again and you can see the band, four man, two standing, circling, jumping with guitars, one on a sync, the last one at the back on drums, all for are watering sweat, it's not easy to take a portrait under such lighting conditions, but a built-in flash always burning a model's eyes is a baby, I smile to myself, considering whether it's appropriate to take off a t-shirt, my hair is wet and I'm wearing Polaroids to protect my own eyes, a set of wedge-shaped speakers I'm slightly leaning on sitting on my knees at the

left corner of the stage are pumping, and I can see a big vertical bank of speakers hanging high up over the stage moving to the music beats, I stand up, stretching my back, the lowers part has fallen asleep, and carefully reposition myself to the other side of the stage, trying not to tangle myself into snake cables scattered all over the stage floor, the crowd is yelling throwing hands in the air, a large chandelier on the ceiling is swinging, it's too bright even in Polaroids, spotlights, fog machine, strobes, lasers, cables, mixing desk, equalizer, power amplifiers, spotlights, spotlights, spotlights, bLiNkInG BliNKiNg BLinKing BLINKING BURNING MY FUCKING EYES fuck I close my eyes tightly and finally deciding that I've taken enough pictures I step off the stage and start moving through the crowd, girls giving me smiles.

#### INT. A CLUB TOILET, A DRESSING ROOM

An establishing shot of an almost empty toilet, a man taking a piss, dim neon lighting, white tile on walls and on a floor. I take off the sunglasses and wash my face, the 35mm point-and-shoot hanging on a strap going across my chest. I take a quick glance at my own reflection, the room stinks of piss, sweat, vomit and semen, that is exactly what a toilet in a club should smell of, I bend over a sink and put my head under a cold water jet, feels so fucking good, and afterwards instead of going back on the stage I take back stairs to a dressing room, show the wristband to a security before he asks and enter the room, only one man there which I've never met before. I give him a short nod with 'hey, I'm a photographer', he smiles commenting that he's already noticed that and I pretend to occupy myself with changing a film roll and looking through freshly developed polaroids. The dressing room is tiny, two large mirrors, two small coaches, a window, two doors, the one leading to a hall closed with signs 'do not disturb' and 'for band members only', the second wide open and a small bathroom with a shower is seen, in the middle of the room a table table is situated cluttered up with champaign and whiskey bottles, glasses, paper plates with cheese, cigarette packs, no ashtrays though, and an asthma puffer. All the corners of the room are choked up with musical instrument cases, wide open and empty, with cables, transmitters, mics, headphones. 'I'm Timothy, a sound engineer, working with the band' The guy interrupts me 'Would you like something to drink?'

'Nah, thanks, I'm driving' I don't lift my head from the camera.

'Is it a film camera?' He asks astonishingly.

'Yup.'

'Wow, may I have a look? Oh, I love analogue equipment.' He does really sound amused and I finally turn my head to him. He's a bit taller than me, around 6.1 feet, well-built, muscular and extremely hot looking, definitely older, thirty-something, with grey eyes and medium cut blond hair, wearing a striped blue and white shirt with sleeves rolled up, beige cotton knee length shorts and silver leather slippers.

'Why analogue?' He asks curiously twiddling my old Olympus mju ii in his hands. And when I'm about to answer my phone begins vibrating, I apologize, take it out and raise my eye brows: a text message from Michael Bennett. At the very same moment the front door opens and the band cheerfully walks in and I take backstage portraits.

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## 6

#### A FEW DAYS LATER, BEGINNING OF JULY

#### INT. A SMALL RECORDING STUDIO. DAY

'Hey, Roger! I've done some loops' I bump into the band's bass guitarist in a hall.

'Oh, that's awesome, Tim, I'll check them a bit later.' There's a pause while I'm still staring at Roger.

'Anything else?' He asks casually.

'Nah, um, actually yes' I begin using the opportunity to ask a question when there're no other people around. 'Had that guy, a photographer, already sent photos from the last gig?'

'I don't know, I'm not a manager here' Rog smiles 'But most likely he had, he always works very fast and never fucks up a deadline, so ask David or Susan'.

'Um, what's his name?'

'Photographer's? Darry, you can find him in my friends list.' Roger squints his eyes in a cunning way smiling with a corner of his lips.

'Does he have a girlfriend?'

'I have no fucking idea, Tim, I don't know much about him, he tends to appear at a gig or a party, take photos, then disappear for half a year, but great pictures, great art works, a nice lad, doesn't talk much



thought, always with a camera but always a pleasure to work with him, so when you text him ask whether he wants to do a cover for our next album.'

'What? I am not your manager, Rog, I'm a sound engineer.'

'I'm quite aware of it, Timothy' Roger nods agreeably 'but I had an impression that you need a reason to start a convo with him.' There's another pause and Rog adds 'He doesn't look queer to me' He winks and we split up.

No, he doesn't, I think to myself, but my gay radar has never failed me before.

I sit at my mixing desk and open Facebook on my Macbook and having found him I check his photos, only pictures he had taken, no selfies, no lifestyle pics, no posts, no comments and a weird hand-drawn dog on his avatar, I press 'add to friends' button. I then scroll down my own Facebook page, all right, if he's not a queer, he wouldn't agree to have a coffee with me, I mean there're a few shots of me french kissing with men. But to my pleasure and my surprise after a rather short small talk he agreed.

EXT. SOHO, EVENING

We meet at the corner of Lexington str and since I have no idea how to figure out if he's a gay I suggest we just hang out, Darry's dressed the same, light blue jeans, white Adidas with black stripes, plain t-shirt, Polaroids, although the sun is setting, large metallic Casio across his narrow wrist, and I can feel he's tensed so I begin having the jitters myself as we enter a vinyl shop.

Tim and Darry moving through the vinyl shop from one shelf to another picking up vinyls, eyeing them and then putting back to pick the other one. Darry avoids to look straightly at Tim and relieved to have something else to examine, and Tim on the contrary is glad he has a chance to sneak on Darry.

TIM

So why analogue? You didn't answer in the dressing room.

DARRY

I don't like digital, it's too sharp, we don't see the world in pixels, analogue is more... real, you know.

TIM (EXCITEDLY)

Hah! Exactly! Did you know that analogue sound is different from digital? A trained ear can hear this difference, it's all about electrons speed.

DARRY (CALMLY)

I've read something like that before but I know zilch about how music works or how it's made, I just like to listen to it.

TIM

Oh, the history of music is amazing, honestly I believe that nowadays it's all about technology and luck, I mean Beatles would never had such a success if not a power amp which was invented right in time to give them a chance to perform for a large audience, you know.

DARRY

Yeah, Beatles are highly overrated, the politics is also involved, not only the amp. I mean if you're killed after making make peace/love/blah-blah-blah not war statements, um, it's... it's a promotion after all.

TIM (AFTER A PAUSE)

I've never thought of it in that way, actually. You are not bored here, are you? (LOOKING AROUND THE SHOP)

DARRY

No no, I enjoy vinyl covers, some of them are a great inspiration.

TIM (PICKING UP A COVER WITH A SKULL SURROUNDED BY WORMS AND FLIES)

Like that one?

DARRY (SMILING)

It's awful.

TIM (SMILING)

Well, unfortunately a great cover doesn't necessary lead to great music.

DARRY

So fucking true, take the Pixies for example, a lot of brilliant amazing album covers and just one song to listen to.

Tim still smiling and feeling more easy approaches a salesman asking if there's a record of the album named 9 Knights and a Bullet. The salesman begins lurking through a digital database shaking his head in an apologetic node.

'Oh, probably it's called 9 Nights and a Bullet. Oh wait, 8 Nights and a Bullet, or 9 Knights and a Bullet, no? Nothing? Such a shame.' I reply rather seriously.

'There's no such a record, correct?' Darry wonders with a smile, his Polaroids are now taken off and it's the first time he gives me a short but eye to eye look, oh gosh, he's so hot.

'No' I laugh and judging by his relaxed relaxed face I consider that he enjoyed this little joke too. 'So what music do you listen to?'

'Pink Floyd mostly, you?'

'Hah, indie, alternative and well silence after a long day at the record studio, you know?'

'Yeah, I can imagine that.'

'Pink Floyd is not a very common choice by someone your age. How old are you?'

'Twenty three almost. Well, shall we have some coffee?'

'A couple of pints maybe or you're driving again?'

'Yeah, I'm driving.'

'To the city centre, why? It's madness!'

'I get overloaded by people and public transport'. He rubs his eyes and put Polaroids back on. There's a half a minute silence while we walking to the exit and while I'm trying to decide is it appropriate to invite him for a coffee to my place.

'Look, er, my flat is not far from here, there's a coffee machine and I can show you my analogue equipment um there's a turntable also and a Pink Floyd vinyl record...'

'Ah, which one?'

'Wish you were here' And for a moment I think that he'll refuse but he nods and just says 'Great, sure, let's go.'

EXT. SOHO, LATE EVENING

'That's quite luxury to live in Soho.' I comment when we enter a building and march up the apples. Tim unlocks a front door and switch on the lights and I'm speechless as his flat is so minimalistic, clean and stylish. 'Wow.' I say.

'Yeah, come in.' I leave the backpack near the front door, okay, a man invites me to his place, well, he can't mean that we just listen to music and have coffee, right? Or can he? Jeez, what if it's just hanging out, how do you tell, I follow Tim to a large white kitchen with large windows facing a bright lit street and I watch how he makes coffee answering unconsciously if I need milk or sugar, I stare at his arse dressed in light grey carrot fit trousers, then move my gaze to his bare feet and then back to his waist and shoulders and I thank myself that I haven't chosen skinny jeans, I look around the flat trying to find a bathroom but then turn my head to Tim who's telling me that the coffee is ready and makes a step on my direction and usually I'd take a step back, usually I'd look directly into eyes of a person I scarcely know, but this time I do and we start french kissing, frantically, biting each other's lips and tongues and I place my hands on his arse and press his body to mine and it seems he doesn't mind that, his hands on my neck, and I move my hands to the front and unzip his trousers and then unzip mine and then we're down on the floor, our trousers and pants dangled around our ankles as we don't even care to undress ourselves completely and we don't stop kissing, I don't close my eyes, I never do, watching turns me on, my back pressed to the floor, my own bones hurt my skin but I almost don't notice it, I put my left hand on Tim's arse and my right hand is on his cock, and though there's always a Durex in a back pocket of my jeans I don't mention anything about it only growl 'c'mon fuck me hard' and so he does, without a lube, without a condom, without a foreplay, his dick is inside me and I repeat fuck yeah and I stick my nails into his waist leaving red marks on his skin and then feeling his cock pulsating I push him away saying 'don't come inside me' and he replies 'I wouldn't' and I add 'I want you to come into my mouth' and he moves forward so that his cock is sticking straight into my face and I raise myself on elbows my back is all bruised by now and I begin to deep throating him chocking a little at the start but adjusting very soon and once he comes I swallow without a hesitation and it tastes well nice and he finishes me with his hand and after I shoot onto my chest, the t-shirt is still on, we just lie down on the floor silently only heavy panting is heard.

Tim is the first one to stand up.

'Um, the bathroom is on the left' He point somewhere in the opposite direction looking a bit lost. 'Er, I usually don't...'

'Yeah, me neither' I interrupt him and we both smile.

'Um, you still wanna listen to some music?'

'I believe that was the plan.'

But on that meeting we didn't listen to music, I stayed and we talked the whole night through.

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7

TEXT MESSAGES BETWEEN SEAN AND MIKE. THE BEGINNING OF AUGUST

SEAN

Why the fuck have you sold a pup to my brother?!

MIKE

And what's wrong with it?

SEAN

He'll meet you on trainings, meet THE PUPS, sniff something out, he's a fucking smart arse

MIKE

There's a chance of an accident meeting on a training anyway if he gets any pup. Stop freaking out. And never ever text anything about it, Sean, delete this fucking convo right now. PERIOD