

in the hall of the  
mountain king

being the adventures of a young run-away

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*This zine is dedicated to my paternal grandparents.  
May they rest in peace.*



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further thoughts on anarchy

okay, so in all honesty, most everyone who reads this is probably going to know this stuff already. but in case you don't... this story sort of skips over the practical 'how' of anarchy, particularly anarchism expressed on a larger scale.

might I suggest for further reading...

crimethinc.com – publishers of some fine books on the subject, most notably 'days of war, nights of love' for beginners, about anarchy here and now.

ageofdinosaurs.com – which is an awesome book, anarchy in the age of dinosaurs, an intermediate's guide to anarchy here and now

akpress.com – publishers of enough radical books to make your head spin.

infoshop.org – online news forum for anarchist related news

Feminazi – A derogatory term against feminists, claiming that feminists are fascist for enforcing women's rights. I really hate this word.

Food Not Bombs – FNB, An anarchistic group with chapters all over the world that serves free vegetarian food to all.

Free Box - A box often found at houses occupied by radicals, or sometimes churches and such, filled with free things. Usually they're mostly clothes.

Free Store - It's like a free box only bigger.

Patriarch – A man who uses the power granted to them in society as a man to be dominating and encourage patriarchal society in general. Or something like that. Basically a guy who dominates women.

PC Punk - "Politically Correct" punk. Used derogatively to describe politically focused punks, squatters, travelers etc, by people who often like to be against feminism, or sometimes by people who are just frustrated by people correcting their speech. (telling them not to call people bitches, or saying that they are hetero-sexist, or things like that).

Spange - The fine art of "spare changing" or to ask people for money.

Spikey Punk - The word I use to describe punks who have lots of spikes on their jackets and are usually more into punk rock than the promotion of anarchism. I aint got nothing against them though.

Squat - Illegal housing in unoccupied areas. Usually refers to a house or building, but basically means living/camping without permission.

Tri-Hawks - Like a mohawk only you got three of em. one in the middle and one on each side.

Vegan - A strict vegetarian diet and lifestyle where you don't consume any animal products at all (like eggs, milk, wool, leather, etc.)

VNV Nation - An industrial band that is pretty poppy. I like them though anyway. No other crusty squatters listen to them at all; it's a goth subculture thing.

Zine - A DIY published pamphlet or magazine.

I guess this starts with my parents. I don't know about you, but I never really liked my parents.

I've learned by now that it's easiest if I lie to people and tell them that I'm an orphan or something, but one thing I've always liked about zines is honesty.

My parents were upper-middle class. (That's another thing I've learned not to tell people). My dad was a mid-level manager and a real prick. He would come home late from work and brag about firing people and about backstabbing people to move up in the corporate hierarchy. When he walked in the door he would bellow about dinner and drink expensive wine.

My mom was a financial consultant and would just let my dad push her around. She worked just as hard as him at the office but bowed to his desire to have dinner cooked most every night.

My dad called me James. My mom called me Jim. My friends always called me Jimmy. Pretty fucking normal.

I suppose every teenager says their parents don't understand them, and it's become this big fucking joke in popular culture, teen angst and all of that. But my parents really, honestly, didn't understand me.

I was that social misfit type who liked books and poetry and VNV Nation and my dad used to try and get me to play sports. When he realized I didn't want to, he lost all interest in me. That was 2 or 3 years ago, when I was 12 or something.

My mom would clean my room while I was out and once painted over my walls in light blue, covering all the writing I had done on them. My two older siblings are screamingly, perfectly, pathologically normal. Off to good schools and good careers and good cars and good clothes and I'm certain their lives will be "good".

Everything I didn't like about myself I saw in my parents. I saw control and power in my father, a short temper and pettiness in my mother.

Everything I liked about myself I saw in my dead paternal grandmother. She was the only one who didn't care when I dyed my hair blue, and she secretly didn't really approve of my mother marrying my father.

I suppose none of this is actually important to what I want to write about.

Six months ago I ran away from home. Recently I started having my friends send postcards to my parents from other cities as a joke. I actually haven't yet left the city that I grew up in the outskirts of.

What's funny about the postcard thing though is that those kids don't have the same handwriting as me, or even as each other, for all my parents notice. Or care, maybe. I e-mail them occasionally with a mixture of truth and lies. I think though, that they have resigned themselves to my absence. I bet they've already mostly forgotten.

When I ran away, I came home from school, emptied my backpack of my school papers and put in some clothes, books, and paint. I hadn't really thought this through; I think I figured my parents would just find me somehow anyway... if I figured anything at all. I brought a book of Charles Bukowski poetry and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *Catcher in the Rye*, the last of which I hadn't read yet, and haven't still.

I had about fifteen dollars and a box of granola bars.

With this I was set to take on the world, a month before my 15<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The bus took me to the subway and the subway took me into the city, and I got off in a part of town I had sat around reading in the park in before.

I went into a coffeeshop and bought coffee and wrote some naïve stuff that I'd rather not reprint. I was more numb than excited, and I was really angry at my father. I've changed so much in the half year since.

In a coffeeshop, especially those shit starbucks knock-offs, no one will talk to strangers (except, of course, for men hitting on women, which women don't seem to be safe from anywhere). So for a few hours I watched the window, half expecting my parents or the police, half expecting some sort of opportunity or adventure to just come up, like it does in the books I read. I've since come to realize that most of the time nothing happens unless you make it happen, and that a lot more time is spent waiting around open to chance than is spent on crazy adventures. It's just that people write about the interesting stuff in detail and tend to skip over the time in between.

I suppose I should do that too, but this early stuff before I met Leda and her friends is pretty important to me.

As I sat around waiting for something to happen, writing bad poetry in my notebook (father you don't understand me, I can't be of your flesh. yadda yadda), the sun began to set and I started to worry.

I left the coffeeshop, found a deli and got a turkey sandwich. I walked around the area as the sun set fully and I found a park by a creek. I wandered along the water until the creek hit a bridge and I found a space on the rocks to lie down.

I lay awake for a long time, first thinking, and then just unable to get comfortable. I remember that I wasn't scared, but mostly I remember that because I remember when I learned to be afraid.

With faded green hair that had long dark roots, a plain white t-shirt and black jeans I lay in April weather outside, under that bridge. I am certain it was the longest night of my life. The cold came for me out of the ground and took all my warmth away. Every noise startled me awake.

If I lay on my side my hip would hurt, and if I lay on my back or belly I couldn't curl up as much and the cold was much worse.

I don't regret dropping out of school at all.

I don't regret dropping out of the middle class at all. Although some people would argue that you can't ever truly drop out of the middle class.

I almost never drink anymore.

Uh what else....

Thanks... I would of course thank my friends at The Hall, most of whom gave me permission to write about them. Neither Brian nor Susan gave me permission, so I changed their names. King O'Beer wants to thank Will Shetterly, author of the book *Elsewhere*, who had a character named King O'Beer that he adopted his name from. King also gave Leda and Florida their names from that book. He tried to name me out of the same book, but I wouldn't let him. Leda says props out to Godspeed You Black Emperor!, whose poem "The Dead Flag Blues" is written on her ceiling and quoted twice in this story.

appendix/glossary/whatever

ALF – The Animal Liberation Front... a militant underground group dedicated to freeing animals from the chains of factory farming, animal testing, etc. They are known for physically liberating animals, as well as starting fires (where no one has ever been hurt, its part of their code) that destroy animal abuser's property. Oh yeah they're terrorists and terrible people, all of them. What they do is completely immoral. It's wrong to alleviate the suffering of an animal at the expense of someone's property. Yeah. And voting solves problems.

Authoritarian - Someone who tries to have authority, or believes in the concept of authority. It's a fun thing to call anyone who tries to tell you common sense things.

Bike Library - A bike resource center where people can borrow bikes, donate bikes, or fix bikes.

Bougie - Short for Bourgeoisie. Pronounced boo-she, or boo-zhe maybe. It doesn't really spell out well in english. But basically it means something is rich, or is something that a rich person would do.

Crusty – An aesthetic/lifestyle. A crusty is someone who dresses crusty. Dressing crusty usually means patches and hoodies and utility-belts and being dirty and smelly.

DIY – Do It Yourself. More of a lifestyle than just a method.

It was interesting, because it wasn't the same kids, yet the feeling was the same. Well, Petrol was still there, and suddenly I felt like I had known him forever.

Wrench started playing in a band, and spent most days at the house the rest of the band lived at. He still came home at nights and I still felt like I was friends with him, fortunately.

When King came home I learned one of the nicest things about my new lifestyle: seeing friends again. King came in and wrapped me up like he was a bear. I have never been so happy to see anyone.

King re-introduced me to Florida even though Florida and I had been hanging out for a week or so. I guess he just felt enthused enough about both of us that he needed to try and encourage our friendship. That night as we all hung out in the common room, King and Florida made travel plans. They involved trains and the west coast. They looked at me and asked I wanted to go. I said yes.

That was last night, actually, and we're leaving tomorrow.

## Epilogue

And thus began what has now been a four year (as of 2003) foray into the world of anarchy, feminism, squatting, class-traitorism, travel and love. Four years have gone by since I wrote this (okay, I edit it from time to time for grammar and such) and my conviction has taken its own form. I see a lot of what I did back then as foolish, as I'm sure I'll see a lot of what I do now as foolish. But these things have made me who I am, in a way my suburban upbringing tried to keep me from.

I got emancipated from my parents and am on speaking terms with them again. My judgment of them was a little single-sided.

Leda and I are lovers when we're in the same city, and I appreciate that she put up with me when I was being difficult. We both see other people.

Petrol, King, Florida and I travel together (currently in a van... we siphon gas from rich neighborhoods). Wrench is a drummer in a band. Everything's all fucking happily-ever-after, really. Except that the government is getting a lot worse.

I haven't been traveling with Petrol and King and Florida exclusively, but re-uniting with them this most recent time is what reminded me to publish this story.

Petrol is the most dedicated and responsible activist of us. King is the flakey but charming one, and Florida and I are probably the most militant about revolution.

Fran and Fred ended up at The Hall more during the winter, and they're still there. They want to hold it long enough to legalize it.

Actually, now that it's fall this same problem still plagues me. Cardboard and more clothes help though, mostly.

Every time I opened my eyes I was hoping that it would be light out so I could pretend I had slept enough and end that ordeal.

At dawn I roused myself and pondered the miserable shape I was in. I remember reading half of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* that morning. In retrospect I'm really glad I didn't read the Bukowski book that day... who knows what I would have done.

I sat in the sun in the park pretty much that entire day, and ate most of my granola bars. I'm not sure I spoke a word to anyone, and I was somehow really tired. I had this brief moment of excitement though, when I realized I was supposed to be in school.

This time after it got dark I didn't go to sleep. Instead I walked off the cold, walked straight through the night. I just couldn't imagine trying to go through what I had been forced to deal with the night before.

Everything was closed and I had walked almost to the outskirts of the city (which blended right into the suburbs). Nobody approached me. I just wanted the sun to come back so I could read in the park and be warm.

So the next day back in the same park I slept on the grass, but not very well. I was tired enough but every noise around me woke me up. I still hadn't taken off my shoes since I'd left my parents house.

A few days passed in this manner, three probably, before I basically ran out of money and food. I remember the third day a woman walked past me and offered me her leftovers, which I accepted wordlessly and ate. I wish I had thanked her.

In the park I would see other dirty kids, but they were smiling and would occasionally go off to eat. Some of them were punks, with mohawks and leather jackets and all of that, others were just dirty, but didn't look like hippies either. I remember thinking they were probably a few years older than me, and I was too shy to approach them. They looked very much like they were complete amongst themselves.

I watched one girl fairly often. She was usually in the company of a tall punk boy with a green mohawk. She moved like you would imagine a ghost to move. Most of the time she stayed still, until you turned away and looked back, and she would once again be still but in a different place. The few times I saw her in motion she seemed to float above the soil and grass of the park, as if she didn't want to hurt the grass.

She was a dirty punk and she was beautiful, although I didn't see her up close back then. I became self-conscious of the fact that I had been staring and began to avoid looking at her. I get so angry when I see men staring at women, and angrier at myself for doing it too.

My memory, unfortunately, becomes more specific and vivid on the third night. It was cloudy, and a bit colder than it had been. I began to walk once the sun started going down, randomly like I had been doing. I had a good sense of direction and never managed to get lost; also, I was finally starting to get a feel for the city.

It must have been a Friday or Saturday because the bars were full. People were looking at me more than they usually did, presumably because they were drunk. I started to leave the area, but a group of college boys were walking the same direction as me. When they saw me, they began to laugh, "Look at that faggot."

I kept walking.

I walked all the way to that creek and bridge and crawled underneath the bridge to get away from the prying eyes of the drunk boys who I thought I had left behind several blocks back.

As soon as I lay down I closed my eyes in sleep, but I woke up pinned to the ground. The same college boys, short hair and no necks the whole way around had me and to put it simply, they beat the shit out of me.

They were drunk and one of them decided to throw up on me. One of them pissed on me. They all took turns kicking me as I lay on the ground. I wasn't even pinned anymore, but all I could do was curl up fetal.

They left and I laid there unmoving. I laid there bleeding under a bridge crying.

Eventually I passed out.

I woke up numb, fortunately, and it was already well into the day. My body was sore and the way I smelled made me want to puke. So I puked... mostly just bile because I hadn't eaten much.

I washed off in the creek even though I knew the water in the city creek was as wretched as I was.

I was lying down in the park and fell asleep again. I guess my clothes were bloodstained and my exposed flesh bruised. It's funny... I'm not even trying to play like I was particularly hurt. I mean, it was one of the crappiest things that had ever happened to me, but it can't compare to stories I know from both men and women. To say nothing the conditions this fucking country puts the rest of the world under.

But anyhow, apparently my grotesque visage was enough to attract attention. I realized at some point that people were staring, and I started to worry. That worry was the first emotion I had felt since running away from home... I had been pretty much numb for days.

Finally an older woman approached me, concerned. She asked me if I was alright; I was pretty surly and told her I was. She asked me if I wanted to talk to the police. I didn't want to have anything to do with the police. I was a runaway, after all.

If August was lonely, September was something else. Whatever is worse than lonely. Dejected. Stupid as it was, life just didn't thrill me in the same way. I had reached this plateau of dispassion where I wasn't really depressed, just distinctly unenthused.

I read a lot.

I think that there just weren't enough of us to hold together a strong crew. And although I didn't completely avoid Leda and Wrench, I didn't really seek them out all the time either. Leda started staying in his room, saying she didn't want to kick me out of our room, but it wasn't the same so I started sleeping near the window in one of the big open rooms.

A few times Leda and I hung out and made out. I think she didn't want things to change drastically, that she wanted to still sleep next to me often and stay with me. But I just couldn't handle it. Even thinking about it now, my head swims and I get lost in convoluted thoughts I'd rather not try to figure out.

I thought about calling Kristen. I'm not sure why I didn't. I thought about going back to my parents. I didn't, and I don't think I will.

I wrote most of this manuscript.

Some travelers came through for a few days, and I hung out with them a lot. Francis and Dean. Both of them promised to write my parents postcards every now and then.

October came and as the season was changing so did my mood. A few new kids moved in to The Hall, and they were definitely interesting. Petrol found Mandy and Jenn (different Jenn than Leda's friend) digging through trashcans near our park and started talking to them. They were both 16. Mandy was a run-away and Jenn just had parents that didn't feel the need to keep track of her. I had a crush on both of them and felt like a jerk about it, so I kept it to myself.

Lynn, Matt and Florida were crusty travelers who stopped by, having been referred to us by King O'Beer. I begged them for information about him. They said he was doing well and was actually going to come back through here any day.

I was ecstatic.

Florida decided to stay and wait around for King to come back. She had been feeling a little bit like a third wheel to Lynn and Matt, since they were smooching.

Life returned to normal, then. Me, Mandy, Petrol, Jenn, and Florida went out and sat around in parks all day and some of them spanged and I shoplifted with Florida (whom I did not have a crush on) and we drank a lot and listened to punk.

I asked her how old she was. She was 19. I told her I was 15. She told me she had figured I was older, although she said it nonchalantly. She also told me that if I wanted I could spend the night, though she had class in the morning. I slept next to her in her bed and we didn't touch. I think she wanted to, but I was too confused.

In the morning she woke me up because she had to leave. She thanked me for posing, and gave me her phone number. She told me I could sleep in if I wanted, but to make sure the door was locked when I left. She told me that everybody was looking for something. I went back to sleep, woke up at noon and left. I realized it was quite a trusting thing to leave me, a squatter and a thief (we had discussed shoplifting the night prior), in her apartment by myself. I was good though, and I didn't take anything. I don't steal from people.

I never called her.

I went back to The Hall pretty much right away to collect myself. Nobody seemed home so I went up to the roof and took off my clothes (it was late August and still really hot). I sat on the couch and watched the city. I really did love watching the city from the roof.

After awhile, Leda and Wrench walked up to the roof, also naked (this was a fairly normal thing for us). They looked surprised to see me. Leda in particular flinched when she saw me sitting cross-legged on the couch. I knew that something was wrong. Well, not wrong, but something that I probably wasn't going to like. Hell, screw foreshadowing. I knew by looking at them, by the way they were interacting and the way that Leda flinched to see me that they had probably just finished having sex.

Leda sat on the couch, a person's width away from me, and Wrench squatted down in front of me, facing me. The truth was unspoken but understood between us.

"Are you mad?" – Wrench

"No." – Me

"I'm glad. I couldn't imagine you being angry." – Wrench.

"I'll leave you two alone" Wrench and I said this at the same time, but he got up and left and I stayed where I was.

"Jimmy, I want you to know that this doesn't change how I feel about you." – Leda

"Fine." – Me

"No, Jimmy, I really mean it. I think that Wrench and I... that it was a long time coming. I still care about you, I still want to be with you." – Leda

I was quiet for awhile. "Jimmy..." She kept saying my name and for some completely idiotic reason it started getting on my nerves.

"I believe you. I'm not angry. Can you leave me alone up here to think for awhile?" – Me

"Okay. If you want to talk to me about this later, please do." – Leda

I told her I was fine... and as she walked away uncertain she turned around to look at me more than once. Her head had been blocking the sun from my eyes and when she turned to look at me I was blinded. So I got up and walked away.

Those dirty punk kids were around the corner sitting in front of some store. I crossed the street away from them and sat on the pavement, against the wall of a different store. With my head between my knees, my pants bloody and my face bruised I sat there wondering what I wanted... part of me wanted the punks to come talk to me. Part of me wanted to be left alone and wished that they weren't there to see me. I was crying but I wasn't sobbing... tears were just running down my face so I felt I couldn't look up.

I didn't look up as I heard people go past. I didn't look up when I heard someone walk up to me. A girl's voice started talking to me, asking me if I was alright. At this point I began sobbing and I still didn't look up.

Her hand was on my shoulder and she was crouched down next to me and she told me that I was making a scene that would probably get the police called. She said she knew I didn't want that. I think her exact words were "nobody likes the pigs."

So I looked up at her, by tilting my head to the side. The sun was behind her but her head was positioned to block it. It was the girl from the park, the one I had been watching. She had a faded black hoodie and shoulder length hair, a septum ring and a lot of necklaces on.

When I had seen her in the park I had never seen her smile. Up close I realized her eyes were cold and hard. They were eyes that seemed to have nothing but hate for everything she saw.

I hadn't said a word to her yet but I was staring at her as she was talking to me. She stopped talking and she smiled. When she smiled her eyes melted from ice into eyes. I stopped crying.

"So come on, stand up," she said to me, and I obeyed. "Try not to stumble, it's okay if you do."

That last seemed so surreal to hear.

She walked me to the subway, where she did something to the card vending machines which gave her back her money but still gave her a card. She did it again and we got on the subway. I hadn't actually spoken to her yet.

"Where are we going?" - Me

"To our squat, the Hall of the Mountain King." - Her

"What's a squat?" - Me

"How long have you been on the streets?" - Her

"A few days." - Me

"What's your name?" – Her

"Jim." It was the first time I had told anyone my name in a week. For

some reason I found that interesting. Strangely, realizing that I found that interesting made me think I was doing better. Also, following this young woman made me feel better, even if her eyes made me uncomfortable when she wasn't smiling (which she hadn't done since that first time).

"My name is Leda." - Her

When we got off the subway we were in a part of town I had never been in before. It was mostly residential, rows of townhomes and the only taller buildings were parts of project housing. Leda stopped to roll a cigarette and offered me one, which I turned down (I didn't smoke then and still don't now). She shrugged with indifference and I suddenly almost wished I did smoke.

As we walked she asked me questions about my wounds, and I answered them all honestly. I felt no emotion when I spoke of what had happened to me the night before, and Leda was almost as emotionless about it herself. She didn't say "oh I'm so sorry" or say "you poor baby." Leda just nodded and I realized how much I wanted to know what was behind her cold eyes.

We stopped at a park and she dug through the trashcans and pulled out half-eaten sandwiches. She asked me if I ate meat, I said yes, and she offered me one with turkey on it. "I don't." She turned and kept walking.

I ate that trashcan turkey readily and greedily. I've found out since that this is a stumbling point for most people; most people don't want to eat half-eaten food out of trashcans. I guess I just never had that mental block. Mostly, I realized that I had been hungry for days for no reason, and I was wishing I had thought of digging through the trash myself.

We walked out of the residential area into an industrial section and starting walking along a river, away from the road. We walked past a few blocks of chainlink fence until we found a section of fence that didn't look particularly distinguishable from the rest. Leda pulled it back from the bottom corner and ushered me through.

We walked up to a huge warehouse with boarded up and broken out windows, right up to a door and walked in.

"Welcome to the Hall of the Mountain King. This is a squat." - Leda

It was dark inside. Huge open floors with small rooms up against the walls. Spray-painted slogans and murals and indecipherable scribbles decorated the walls. Junk lay about in heaps.

"Do you want to sleep?" - Leda

It was probably only two in the afternoon but I nodded. We walked to a room on the third floor (there were three floors that were almost identical in layout, although each had different junk and different graffiti), the sparsest room I had seen. It was just a large bare mattress on the floor with blankets on it and a bag in the corner.

"I just moved out of Brian's room, so there's not much to it. I'll be on the roof if you need." - Leda

them all back to the library. August was lonely. I thought occasionally about returning to my parent's house, but I thought about my parent's fighting with each other and decided I would rather avoid those careful mad wars.

King started sending my parents the postcards I mentioned.

One night I was sitting in the park by myself, reading, when a college aged woman came walking by and started talking to me. Her name was Kristen and she was an art student. She had seen me and asked if she could draw me. I agreed.

As she was drawing me I tried concentrating on my book but I couldn't. I was watching her stare at me, watching her study the folds of my clothes and the drape of my hair. She had short hair, longer in the front, a chelsea. Her black pants were patched, but obviously clean. Her blue shirt was worn thin and sewn together but also had been recently washed. Her eyes were bottomless and dark. She was thicker than Leda (no accomplishment, that) and more voluptuously built. I realized I was comparing her to Leda and tried harder to lose myself back in my book.

But she had known I was looking at her and she started talking to me, asking me about where I lived, etc. I told her I was a squatter and she sounded interested. She asked me if I was hungry and my training told me to say yes... Never turn down a free meal, Petrol had taught me. She offered to take me to her apartment, told me that I could shower and that she would feed me. She asked me if I drank, and I said yes. She told me she was trying to bribe me because she wanted to draw me nude. I don't think she knew how young I was.

I went home with her and she cooked me pasta with tomato sauce. We ate and she told me about going to school, and I told her about squatting. She asked me where my squat was and I was vague in answering her, as I had realized by now that I couldn't trust just anyone to know where we all lived illegally. After dinner she asked if I was willing to pose for her, and I said I was.

It was incredibly hot in her apartment, a one bedroom place she had to herself on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor of a building near her campus. I took a shower (I didn't use soap though) and when I came out I just walked out with only a towel on. It was nice to be naked and wet, air-drying, in August. For some reason I wasn't nervous.

Kristen drew me for an hour or so. I spent a good ten minutes trying to convince myself not to think about getting hard before I finally forgot about it and went on to think about different things. I thought about Kristen and I thought about whether or not I was going to sleep with her. I couldn't read her intentions. I couldn't understand my own.

We drank cheap red wine (thanks, Carlo Rossi) and she drew me again. This time she sat closer to me and touched my arm to position me, running her fingers along my upper arm.

lot, and for some reason her and I seemed more distant than before. I'm fairly certain that was mostly my doing, but I couldn't figure out *why* I was doing it.

The third floor of The Hall of the Mountain King, the floor we slept on, had an old standup piano sitting in the middle. There was a moat of a puddle around it where the roof leaked, so it was on an island of dry floor. It was missing the F# below middle C and the entire lowest octave was hideously out of tune, but it served. Leda was the only one who ever played it. Mostly she played Fur Elise, which I never tired to hear, although sometimes she played other things I didn't recognize. It was always beautiful, but now that we were starting to feel distant from one another, it was mournful.

One morning I woke up to Fur Elise and walked outside to see Leda sitting naked in front of the piano. "Sit with me," she said, "the day is early and my mind is stumbling."

I sat down next to her on the bench we had erected in front of the piano out of four milkcrates and two 2x4s. I looked at her and she looked sad.

"Look out the window," although window was a generous term for the holes in the wall, holes I was certain I would come to hate in the winter, "and look at the city. Nobody in this mindless chaos is ever truly happy. Nobody ever *will* be truly happy. We need to have pain and sadness in our lives so we can understand one another, and understand happiness. I don't think I'm making you happy, I don't think that anyone can make anyone else happy." – Leda

"But you do make me happy." – Me

"No, you make yourself happy and I'm glad to be around to help you. But recently I don't know if I'm helping. You're far away from me... you aren't present anymore even when we're fucking. I don't know why, and I'm not certain you do either. I hope it's just a phase. But come back to me when you can, I miss you." Leda was speaking about me as if I was gone, or at least as if we had broken up. "I've got no problem sleeping next to you, I still enjoy it, but I won't make love with you when you aren't making love... You're worth more to me than just getting off"

I went back into our room and swallowed tears. I stared up at the ceiling and read the poem written there. "You grabbed my hand and we fell into it, like a daydream... or a fever." She played piano still and I had come full circle from where I had started in this house.

I started spending days in the library, reading. I was suddenly escaping my escape. I enjoyed it desperately though, all of that reading. Almost every day I would sit and read both fiction and non-fiction. I read a lot about revolutionary struggle all over the world, and I read a lot of cheap old sci-fi books. I stole books sometimes, but I returned

And she left the room.

Everything about her was sparse, not just her room... she would say things briefly, ask simple questions and she didn't even answer all of mine. I realized she was more wounded than me, contrary to what you would guess by looking at my small bruised frame.

I wanted to think about this, about everything, more, but I didn't. Instead I fell asleep.

I went into a vague, half-conscious state. For several hours I drifted in and out. I don't know how much of it I dreamed and how much of it was real, but Leda came back into the room and sat down on the edge of the bed and spoke to me. Or to be more accurate, she spoke to the window that was letting in a soft light.

I feel like I learned a lot about her then, a sort of emotional portrait at least. She was sixteen, had been on the streets for almost a year, and had fallen for an older squatter punk boy. She had run away from a home life that made all of my problems inconsequential to be with him in a street life that didn't exactly shine in comparison. She was hard before she hit the streets, surviving a drunken violent mother, and only got tougher, surviving a drunken violent boyfriend. I felt then, in my dreaming stupor, that I wasn't hard enough for the streets.

I slept through a lot of important parts, although I don't think she went into much detail, and I think I dreamed a lot of the parts that didn't really make sense. I couldn't fathom that Leonard Cohen had actually intervened to save her from her mother, for example.

I heard music at one point when Leda wasn't there. An out of tune piano playing "Fur Elise" worked its way into my unconsciousness. When the sun began to set the light came into the room through the west facing window and I saw pieces of a poem illuminated on her ceiling: "we're all so many drunks with the radios on and the curtains drawn."

In retrospect, this has to be one of the most dramatic periods of my life. It's funny how that realization somehow removes a sense of legitimacy from my experiences... somehow makes them just seem cliché since they would be fitting in a movie. Just like how my hatred of my parents seems cliché. Just like how watching the sun set seems cliché. I don't know who to blame for this but when I find out I'm going to put a brick through their window.

And as cliché as it is, I fell in love with Leda and her opaque green eyes as I lay on her mattress and she spoke to west window.

I want someone to read this in the desert. I've never been there but I feel like it would be appropriate: an endless breadth of horizon, to give you both feelings of adventure and solitude. For some reason the city as seen from the roof of The Hall seems like a desert should seem. The

clouds aren't as interesting, perhaps, but the pollution gives the sunrises something unique.

I want my story to be interesting enough, evocative enough, to make you wish you were in the desert reading it.

That night I woke up alone and heard a lot of commotion from somewhere else in the squat. I lay still for a good while working up the courage to go out and join the noise before I actually managed. The sound led me to a common room where there was a single light on and a dozen or so dirty kids drinking.

I stood at the entrance to the room and looked around. A broken cabinet, several couches upholstered in filth, a lamp without a shade. A stereo crouching in the corner and two televisions with their screens broken out. The floor covered in beer bottles and cans. I was probably the youngest in the room, but not by much.

There was a boy who looked to be my age. His shaggy blonde hair seemed to have been cut by accident, and his pretty face was interrupted by a nose-ring in his nostril that wasn't healing well.

An older man, whom I guessed to be forty something (turns out he was only thirty-four), was standing in the doorway to a bedroom off to the side of the common room. He had a bottle of whisky in his hand but seemed immune to its effects. He looked at me as I came in and half-smiled before looking back to his bottle.

Situated two feet below his head was the head of a sitting woman, about 30, who was cradling a 40oz of malt liquor. When I first saw her I thought she was repulsive. She had the kind of body I'm tempted to describe as a sack of potatoes, the kind of body I would expect to see on a peasant woman who has borne too many children and toils in the fields every day. It turns out, that isn't so far off, and I really feel like a jerk for judging her. Eventually I started to see beauty in her fierce plainness. It was a plainness that had no desire to disguise itself in makeup or fine living.

A leather jacket with short dark hair sat facing away from me on a couch.

I walked in on an argument that I couldn't decipher. Two punk boys with mohawks who could have been twins were yelling at each other about something that might have had to do with beer. It was easy to tell them apart... one of them had green hair, the other blonde. They both wore black sleeveless T-shirts with white silk-screened designs. The blonde one wore black workpants; the green-haired one wore black pants that looked so tight you'd wonder how he got them on and off.

I'm not one to speak, but their faces were so pimply and acne scarred that it was hard to take them seriously as the tough guys they obviously thought that they were.

And so King treated the wound he had inflicted and Brian didn't do anything to try and stop him. It must have been humiliating. King cleaned out the wound by holding it open and squirting water as hard as he could into it, then cleaning it off with iodine, wiping that away with gauze, using antibiotic ointment, holding the wound shut with butterfly bandages, covering it with another gauze pad and wrapping his arm with medical tape. He also tested Brian's ability to feel with each of his fingers, and kept talking to him to try and keep him out of shock. It was crazy to see how much effort King was putting into repairing the damage he had done.

"Don't let this get dirty at all. If it does, wash it out immediately. Don't flex or strain this arm. This is going to take a long time to heal and if it gets infected you're pretty fucked." – King

After he finished bandaging Brian, King got up and walked towards the roof steps. He handed Wrench Brian's knife and walked up the steps. After a few moments Wrench mutely followed him. I looked over at Brian who was now sitting on the couch trying not to think about the pain. "What are you looking at?"

Petrol had left to go to his room. I went slowly up the steps to the roof.

As I walked towards the roof couch I heard them talking.

"You didn't need to do that, you know. You could have just disarmed him." – Wrench

"I know. Are you angry at me? I think I'm disappointed in myself." – King

"No, I suppose I'm not angry. If you had been less coordinated I would have understood more though. But it looked like a conscious choice to cut him." – Wrench

"It wasn't, actually, it was reflex. I can't say he didn't deserve it, but I'm not happy to have done it." – King

I walked around to where they could see me, so I wouldn't be eavesdropping.

"Hey, Jimmy. Sorry you had to see me at my worst." – King

I was silent; I just came and sat down next to them. The city didn't look like it had yesterday. The shadows between buildings were more pronounced than the lights. Suddenly what was familiar to me was dangerous.

"I'm going to leave, tomorrow. I'm going to hitch to that train town north of here and then head west. Either of you are free to join me if you want." – King

But neither of us did join him, and King left.

August was lonely. King was gone, Brian was gone with all of his friends, and we hadn't seen Fran and Fred in a month. Leda was gone a

After about a half an hour Leda left with her friends. They actually invited me to come with them, but I turned down the offer. I wonder how different things would have been if I had gone with them. I just didn't feel comfortable enough, although I had wanted to.

"I'm glad you didn't go with those fucking feminazis. God, they really fucking piss me off." – Brian

"Stop fucking calling them that, Brian." – Me

"No. You want to know why? I used to be friends with people here. We used to all hang out and I didn't feel excluded and it's because you've all become such fucking PC punks and you think you're fucking better than me. You know what? You're not. You especially. You're just a fucking spoiled rich brat from the suburbs." – Brian

I was sort of used to this by now. "Whatever, Brian."

King started laughing.

"And you, fucking 'King O'Beer', you're the worst of it. You think you really are king around here. You fucking turned her against me... you're like the snake who whispered in her ear. But you forget I'm a fucking anarchist, and I don't need a god damned king." Brian was drunk and sloppy and belligerent, and he pulled his knife and approached King.

"Well if it really bothers you, we could just start calling me 'O'Beer' and drop the 'King'. I just liked the name, I thought it was ironic." King confused me with how calmly he was handling Brian approaching him with a knife. What I didn't see was that King had already opened his knife, the one I had stolen for him, in his pocket. "As for Leda, you're right, I helped her realize what a fucking jerk of a patriarch you are. It's guys like you, Brian, that almost make me ashamed of sex."

Brian lunged in anger (it had been King's plan to make him reckless by taunting him, I realized later). King dodged out of the way, grabbed Brian's knife hand, twisted it behind Brian's back, and slashed Brian across the upper arm; King cut him deeply but not critically. It was beautiful and tragic to watch and I stood stunned as Brian dropped to the ground.

King stood on Brian's knife hand, disarmed his opponent, and immediately pulled a bandanna from his back pocket to apply pressure to the wound.

"Leave me alone, I don't need your help." Brian was sobbing.

"Shut up, stay still. Do you want a scar or do you want stitches?" – King

"I'm not going to the hospital." – Brian

"Scar it is." – King

"Jimmy, go to my room and find the small red drawstring bag. Bring me 4 or 5 butterfly bandages, gauze pads, iodine, antibiotic... oh hell, just bring me the bag. It should be in the milkcrate. Petrol, can you bring me a water bottle with a squeeze top?" – King

Sitting near the boy with the green mohawk, in the position I had seen Leda occupy in the park, was a 16 year old punk lady with trihawks. Behind her stood a bunch of kids who looked, to be rude, like non-descript punks. You know... they had spikey hair and stuff.

When I walked in, a lot of people looked at me and nodded. I nodded back, didn't really know what to say. They seemed very casual about seeing me appear, and I realized later that most of them had been seeing me sitting in that park for a few days now.

It struck me that there weren't a lot of women there. Leda wasn't around, and there were only the two other women present.

I didn't know how to feel, being there. I didn't feel any affinity for these people; I had no frame of reference at all. They didn't welcome me with open arms, but they didn't reject me either. I sat down on a couch next to the leather jacket with short dark hair and eventually the blonde mohawk boy turned to me and introduced himself as Wrench.

"Jim."

He offered me a can of Pabst Blue Ribbon and I took it. The green mohawk boy looked at me and sneered.

Other people introduced themselves to me. Fran was the older woman, Fred was the older man and her husband. Petrol was the cute boy by the door. Brian, the green mohawk, finally introduced himself and spoke for the girl with the trihawks, introducing her as Susan. King was sitting next to me on the couch now, a twenty something whose leather jacket proclaimed that "fags bash back" and had a drawing of a jock getting the shit beat out of him by a man in high heels. I didn't have any experience dealing with homosexuals, but after looking at the drawing I immediately felt a lot of kinship with King.

The kids with super spikey hair and jackets who were standing near Brian didn't bother to introduce themselves. It turns out most of them live in the suburbs, actually, and were just here hanging out. When this was explained to me as a point of ridicule I realized that I needed to keep my own origins to myself.

Leda came back into the room and seemed happy to see me, because she smiled at me for an instant. She sat down on the couch opposite of me, next to Wrench. And within a minute of her return Brian stood up and loudly told Susan that it was time to go to bed. The two of them walked off.

Leda's eyes went after them and Wrench put his hand on her shoulder in comfort. I suppose it wasn't the hardest situation to figure out.

My head had finally stopped spinning from all the new people and energy.

Wrench gave me another beer, and Petrol came and sat down on the other side of me.

I listened all night, even more intently as the beer incorporated with my system. My body was sore but my mind was glad to finally be interacting again. They talked about politics to get Leda's mind off of Brian. Mostly it was Leda and Wrench talking, with King and Petrol throwing things in. Fred and Fran were in their own little world and the spikey punks were just drinking hard liquor and yelling a lot.

I don't mean to simply write off the suburban kids like that, I just didn't have a very positive impression of the group of them. I recognize their right to be spikey punks and to get really drunk and to fight each other (and occasionally anyone else), but I knew pretty much right away they wouldn't be the crowd I chose to be around.

Late into the night we drank and talked about politics. Most of what they said was over my head, but I wished very much that it wouldn't be. I kept a mental list of questions to ask someone as soon as I felt like I could.

They talked about what a fucked job Clinton was doing, how he wrecked welfare and passed some terrible anti-environment stuff. I think it was the first conversation about Clinton I had heard in the past year that wasn't about his promiscuity. That endeared me to these people.

At one point Leda looked at me and asked me what I thought about something... something to do with our dependence on fossil fuels. I told her I didn't really know anything on the subject. I yawned as I said it and Leda laughed, which was the first time I heard her do that.

I decided I wanted to hear her do that more often.

Leda told me that if I wanted I could sleep in her bed until I made myself a room here. I thanked her and wandered off to sleep.

I slept the deep sleep of the first drunk, and woke up the next morning to see Leda, fully clothed, a good foot away from me on the bare mattress. I tried not to stare at the back of her neck (the only flesh available to my eyes) until she rolled over and told me what she had dreamed.

During the days we would go sit around in the park or in front of different stores until we got run off by the owners. Sometimes some of the kids would spange, or "spare change" the passerby, making a few dollars which we usually spent on beer. I felt kind of strange about that and never participated. The group laughed off most of my insecurities.

Fred and Fran didn't hang out with us during the day, most of the time. I figured out much later that they both worked construction jobs. Fred put most of that money towards child support to a previous lover and their two kids. Fran was saving for the two of them to be able to move into their own place and have their own child. She had had children before, but had put both of them up for adoption thanks to pressure from the shelters she had been staying in at the time.

knew it wasn't always true, but I realized that often those who drink feel judged by those who don't.

It was midsummer by then and the Hall was an inferno. Sweat dripped from our brows and our armpits and down our legs and we stunk like... like how a bunch of dirty squatters who never shower stink in the middle of summer. As we sat on the couch and drank cold beer it seemed worth it. People who live in air-conditioning don't know the true meaning of a cold beer in July.

That evening was wonderful. I realized that I hadn't met anyone new in months; that I had been pretty much just staying with my small clique of friends. These people were incredibly interesting, full of stories and advice. And they didn't even seem condescending about the whole me being a guy thing. I think they took to me better than they took to Wrench, who after awhile walked off to talk to Petrol. Colette was charming and I could see why Leda had fallen for her.

The only discomfort on the back of my mind was how to deal with the sleeping arrangements. I knew that Colette was Leda's lover, but I didn't relish the thought of being ousted from our room to sleep in another room, trying not to imagine them in the throes of passion. (Are there any other kind of throes? I've never even heard the word used except as 'the throes of passion' and I suppose I don't rightly know what the word means, but it seems to be a good word nonetheless. Okay, I just looked the word up. It means 'discomfort, struggle or pain.' I think our society has some weird ideas about sex.)

But we talked late into the night, and around the time I was ready to go pass out, they all got up to leave. I think the lack of air-conditioning and the enormity of the stench might have played factors in their decision, but I was glad that it saved me the awkwardness of trying to figure out where I got to sleep.

Later, in bed, Leda and I spoke about the evening, and she was glad that I thought so highly of her friends. I didn't tell her about my crush on Simon. Leda told me that she figured it would be best if she only slept with Colette elsewhere, because she recognized that this room had really become both of ours. She had only been in it a few days before I showed up, anyhow. I agreed and was happy.

The next time they came over, a few nights later, things didn't go so well. Brian came home with his friends, and Jenn took it upon herself to chastise him for how he was treating his girlfriend.

His girlfriend coddled him, telling him not to listen to "those feminazis." Brian stormed off in a fuss to the roof, taking his friends with him. We heard the sounds of breaking glass.

After awhile his forces regrouped and came back into the common room to be loud and drunk and obnoxious, completely ignoring us.

act. I knew she didn't need some knight in shining armor, but I figured she could also use a friend who had her back. I decided I would just go with whatever she chose to do, and help her if need be. How the hell I could possibly help her was beyond me though.

It's interesting that feminism is what started to bring out the warrior in me. Ironic, too. "Man solves problem with violence" won't make for a headline that surprises anyone. But I wanted to be someone that Leda could trust to have her back, not just stand around and talk about the class and gender issues involved in solving problems with violence.

With Leda gone a lot, me and Wrench started hanging out more. We sat down by the water and spoke of times behind us, of times before us. Wrench's dream was to play drums in an Anarcho-Punk band while becoming more of an activist. Not the most far-fetched of dreams for him to choose, really.

When we made it back to the Hall one July evening Leda was already there, with three of her friends from the Woman's Group. I had never considered Leda young, but in truth she was, and I realized it when I saw her sitting with her new friends who all seemed to be around King's age. She was no shorter than any of them, but Leda looked dwarfed by the women on either side of her. On her right were two women who looked so similar it was hard to tell them apart. Both of them had ear-length straight dark hair, parted on the side and crossing down over their faces. They looked so collected they were intimidating. The one sitting closest to Leda was noticeably larger than the other.

On Leda's left was the one who I recognized as Colette, Leda's lover. Her frame was as boyish as mine, although she was taller and thinner than me. She had particularly short dark hair, light green eyes and freckles. She was wearing a wife-beater (I need some other word to use for it, I realize) and her exposed skin was covered in dark birthmarks. She was awkward looking, like a crane, and strikingly beautiful.

Colette noticed I was staring and smiled at me. "Colette." She offered her hand.

"Jimmy." I shook it.

Leda introduced me to her two other friends; Jenn was the larger one sitting closest to her, and Simon was next to Jenn.

Simon had a deep voice that caught me by surprise when she said hello.

King pulled a case of PBR out of his backpack and I was relieved when all three of Leda's friends took a can. I have qualms about drinking, and respect those who don't, but there is something humanizing about sharing a vice with people. If any of them, particularly Colette, had turned down the offer of beer, I would have felt even more uncomfortable. I

I wrote a lot while we sat around, and never showed anyone. But I got better at it.

We would dig through trashcans during the day and then the dumpsters behind stores at night, procuring amazing quantities of edible food. The trash-picking wasn't as nice as dumpster-diving, when we would get boxes of bananas, or packaged lunch meat (which only me and King would eat), or pop-tarts and other random things, often unexpired.

They showed me where free boxes were, one outside of a hippy food store and the other at this one house filled with activists (activists of the type who think they are changing the world by bringing their own bags to the stores). I got a pair of cleaner, more normal looking clothes so I could fit in with the rest of the world if I needed to. And I got a black t-shirt to cut the sleeves off of.

Leda taught me how to steal. Before she did, she taught me her code for whom to steal from and told me it was important that I create my own code for myself. Leda would steal anything from corporate chain stores, often just to return it and get store credit. She would steal food from any store if she was hungry enough, but she mostly still just stole from the chain grocery stores. Sometimes she would get crackers or fruit or something from a corner store. I never saw her do it, but she said she would steal from the cars of rich folk when they came down to the city to drink at the bars.

Probably owing to the difference in our background, I kept my stealing a lot more limited in scope, although not in quantity. I decided I would only steal from corporate chain stores.

But steal I did, and often.

I got the name Jimmy the Hand for it, actually, and I was proud. We all ate better with me around, and I knew it.

Sometimes they would drink during the day, which made me fairly uncomfortable. I wasn't really down with drinking yet, and spanging during the day to buy a fifth of rum before it was even dark seemed dishonest to me somehow. I was usually happier when I was sober, but when I was sober and everyone else was drunk I wasn't any happier, so I would drink with them most of the time.

Brian stopped hanging out with us during the day after less than a week, and I was glad. He always gave me evil looks and never really spoke to me.

However, I averaged to be happier than I had ever been at any point in my life.

We drew a lot of attention to ourselves on the streets, whether through antics or dress or just our drunken smelly presence. The cops often told us to move along. Once a cop came up and thought Petrol was a run-away; they thought he was a specific run-away that he wasn't.

I got a little spooked at that and decided to change my appearance some more.

Leda attracted the most attention though. People often stared at her in different ways. Some people stared at her like I had: curiously and harmlessly, intrigued by a beautiful woman dressed so outlandishly in her tall combat boots, ripped stockings, cargo shorts and black hoodie. But often people leered. Or people cat-called, particularly when there was one or less boy walking with her. When people made sexual remarks to her, she dropped her head and her hair covered her face. She was ashamed, I realized, by the fact that she didn't yell insults and threats to the men who spoke openly of her body in public.

Leda and I would wander off together to go steal and talk. Almost every sunset we sat on the river's edge together, alone or with everyone else, and I would ask my naive questions as the sun went over the skyline.

I asked about anarchy, and why they thought it would work.

"Because it has already," said Leda, "We used to function without laws thousands of years ago. People treated each other with respect most of the time, simply because it was a better way for a tribe to get along [editing note – that last part isn't entirely true. Some tribes functioned without laws or hierarchy, but others did not. I think. I'm still no expert on this.]. Like us... none of us tells the other what to do and we do just fine. We share almost everything... you don't spange but you drink the beer we buy with that money. Petrol and King don't steal but you got them new knives."

"I think it really has to do with freedom," started Wrench, "about life without any subjugation. In an anarchist society, you have a choice and an opinion about every matter that affects you personally, but don't have so much of a say in things that don't affect you."

King's answer confused me the most, but seemed the most interesting. "It's about the difference between mechanical structuring and organic structuring, the difference between a tree and a mass manufactured chair. Not everything is so straight," and with this he winked at me, "but instead things go where they need to go, not where they are expected. Sometimes you'll hear people say that anarchy isn't just chaos, and I can understand trying to distance ourselves from the concept of just walking around fucking each other up. But anarchism hopefully wouldn't look at a map of some land mass and start drawing straight lines across it to separate areas. Accept the shades, the gradients, and the organic nature of life"

I asked about specifics, about manufacturing and crime, but their answers were over my head and different from each others.

"The keywords that people throw around all the time are 'mutual aid' and 'solidarity.'" - Petrol.

It wasn't amazing, either. Transformative, yes, but honestly I felt like I had done a much better job with my hands, although I did get better at it. She claimed she didn't mind.

Yet indescribably, I felt significantly closer to her for it. (What a horrible word to use, indescribably, especially because I'm going to try and describe it anyway. It's like an artist apologizing for her art at her opening.) Since then, I met someone who described how sex, whatever form it takes for two individuals, opens a psychic connection between people that cannot ever be fully closed. They said they believed that most people denied that connection, but that it was there. I believe it, I think. I don't exactly have enough data to draw a scientific conclusion, but I'm starting to realize that scientific conclusions don't have a monopoly on truth (thanks King).

I also realized I felt more vulnerable afterwards. It concreted my love for her and I knew that she could, and probably would, hurt me fairly badly. I didn't let that fear stop me of course. And I also felt foolish for needing sex, somehow, to realize the depths to which I had fallen for her.

She spent more nights at home with me once I decided I was ready to sleep with her. That fucked with my head a bit.

More time passed. King philosophized and dreamt of leaving, Petrol kept to himself, Wrench went to punkrock shows with Brian, Brian broke up with Susan to date whateverhername was and then broke up with her and started dating whatsherface. I think there was a bunch of overlap in there, but he didn't really let any of them know.

Leda became more of a feminist. It was beautiful to watch... She had always had anger and now that anger had direction. She started pointing out all the fucked up behaviors around us on the street.

How many times did we watch men order women around in public?

How often would a wife (presumably) walk in step with her husband, face to the ground almost in shame, as he strutted and openly stared at every woman who passed by?

Many things had gone unnoticed by me too. Around her, I started realizing all of the times that men would try and impress women with knowledge, often knowledge the women obviously had themselves.

"And look at that... that thing is a thing from that one time when our country did that stuff." - Guy

"Yes I know, it was after we..." - Lady

"And another thing... blah fucking blah I like the sound of my own voice, and I interrupt you constantly." - Guy

But for all of it, for all of her knowledge and newfound self-assured understanding of the world, Leda would still usually cast her eyes to the sidewalk when someone harassed her. I was confused as to how I should

experimentation held under his arm, ALF graffiti on the wall behind him. That was a better picture though. It would be particularly funny if he cut a slit in his ski-mask for his mohawk to stick out.

What else... what else important or interesting or developmental happened in that curious first month that I was with Leda...

I called my parents.

I called them from a payphone in a part of town we were never in, just in case. And because I didn't have 35 cents, I called them collect.

My mom started crying as soon as I said "James" to the operator, and my dad picked up the line too. I didn't cry until after I hung up. My tears weren't shed for having reached them again; my tears were shed for the fact that I was wholly separated from them emotionally.

I told them I was doing well and was staying with friends. My father told me to come home, that he wasn't mad and that he just wanted to see me. My mom stopped crying pretty quickly and told me I was a selfish brat for doing this to the family. My father yelled at my mother for yelling at me.

At that point I excused myself and told them that it was pointless to worry about me, and pointless to look for me, because I was doing well. I told them that if they wanted to reach me they could email me, and that I would start checking my email occasionally from public libraries.

I hung up and started crying softly. Wrench and Petrol had come with me and were around the corner spanging, so I composed myself before I went over to rejoin them.

The next day I turned 15. May 23rd. They got fancier beer than usual (no more PBR! I got to drink Guinness!) Brian and his friends weren't there. Wrench told me a story about his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday involving a clown and LSD. Petrol kissed me. Leda stole me away to bed early... She said she didn't want me too drunk to remember what she was going to do to me. Wrench protested, saying it wasn't fair because they wanted my company on my birthday too.

It was bliss. The only good birthday I've had. I felt like my friends cared about me.

So almost exactly a month passed from the time that I first kissed Leda to when I first had sex, properly defined, with her. What was interesting was how much it felt like a simple transition from what we had been doing. We had been getting each other off, we had been naked and writhing and sweaty and orgasmic. Only now there was a condom and a more direct penetration.

I can't bring myself to write down and publish all of the details of that first affair, or even the subsequent ones. I feel rude enough sharing what I have.

"What do we want?" - King

"A free association of co-operative autonomous groups for the purpose of mutual aid!" - Everyone

"When do we want it?" - King

"Now!" - Everyone

Everyone started laughing, the sun was almost down, and I looked around and smiled. I found the most convincing argument for anarchy was immediately around me, sitting by the water on a day lived free, laughing with these people I felt so close to after only a week.

Not everything was perfect laughing sunsets, of course, and certainly this life was rougher than the one I had lived before. King would say it's the difference between freedom from and freedom to. Suburban America is the land of freedom from. You are free from having to interact with people as humans in any situation that might make you uncomfortable. You're free from dealing with the poverty outside your door, from the need to walk places. We were free to. We could pick locks and we could go anywhere if we could figure out how. We had to deal with homeless crackheads, we couldn't roll up our car windows. We had to deal with each other.

I had never been in a fight, or at least I had never hit back. When I was growing up I was beat up a lot in school and just took it. I realize now I could do that because I could go home afterwards, and I knew that those people weren't going to kill me. In fact, they usually got bored of me because I didn't hit back.

But without police, without a state-held monopoly on violence, justice is only going to be found where it is made. And the poor can't always count on the police. When a person is living in a legally awkward situation (like an abandoned building, or addicted to drugs, for example), getting the police involved in interpersonal disagreements isn't the wisest course of action.

The hardest thing for some people, I've realized, is not becoming too tough, too closed and calloused. Hurting someone shouldn't ever be a source of pride.

Of course, I wasn't anywhere near the point where that would be the problem.

At night we would head back to the squat on the subway, and King would purchase the beer for us. It turns out he's 22 and his name is short for King o'Beer, which he was named cause he was the only one who could always purchase alcohol. I asked him about the name, and he said it was also the name of a character in a book he read. He had named Leda, too, from the same book.

Sometimes when we got back to the squat we would be the only ones there, and I have admit those were my favorite evenings. Weeknights all

the spikey punks (who never really did ever acquire names in my mind) stayed at their parent's houses in the suburbs. And sometimes Fran and Fred just didn't come in. They were pretty secretive and I never really asked about it.

We would get drunk and loud some nights and played loud punk rock on the stereo. I had never heard of any of the bands and mostly just looked blank when people assumed I knew whatever such and such band was. They were the kind of bands whose shirts were white silk-screened onto black. But I danced to the stuff anyway, as different as it was from what I had listened to back at my parent's house (even then I had stopped referring to my parent's house as "home", although it was a conscious effort on my part).

King was always the one who got me started dancing, the only one who would come up to me and invite me to join in. I was terrible at dancing and always had been, but finally, drunk, I enjoyed it anyway. No one except Brian and Susan ever said anything about my dancing, and the one time they did, Wrench heard and told them to shut up.

Some nights we got drunk and quiet. We would sit up on the roof and look out over the city and its lights. Petrol and Wrench threw bricks off into the yard, some 50 feet below, and I always worried about them falling off themselves, drunk as they were. They never did though.

I started to love the city tangibly for the first time, looking out over it like that. It was a wasteland, sure, one of the most dangerous in the country. Abandoned buildings were everywhere and junkies abounded.

I remember once, staring at it, thinking about the intro to the movie "Bladerunner", where the oil refinery buildings spit fire over the cityscape. I loved looking out over the skyline from the roof and thinking about how much it felt like I had reached the post-apocalypse scenarios I loved so much in movies.

I wished that the whole city was squatted, that property was non-existent, that the government was gone. I'd rather grow food in dug up empty lots and on rooftops and have to deal with the possibility of tribal warfare and violence.

I slept next to Leda, and she asked me the second night if it was okay if we cuddled. It was, of course, okay with me. We didn't speak much at night; we mostly just slept. We always fell asleep lying next to each other and woke up facing opposite directions, but I didn't mind.

I had never slept next to a woman before in my life. I was 14. I had had two girlfriends before, but was in almost every sense of the word a virgin. I sort of knew how to kiss, and caressing wasn't new to me. But I had never had sex; I had never slept next to anyone. I certainly had never had a relationship with someone I spent all of my time with. Not

was jealous because I realized that her new feminist group friends were helping her grow, and I wasn't allowed to join in cause I had a penis.

I wasn't very active in my jealousy though, and I wasn't angry about any of it. I didn't (usually) begrudge her the woman's only space. I felt no need to grumble, only the need to be kinda sad on the days when she didn't hang out with us, and sadder still on the nights when she didn't grace me with her company. I was actually quite happy for her, though, because she seemed to be opening up more in general. She started smiling more often, which always put me in a better mood.

She didn't ever become incredibly talkative, and I don't think she will ever become obnoxiously verbose like King (or me). But when she did speak to me and to the rest of us she wasn't as guarded. She wasn't as hurt. I realized later that it was because she was starting to heal.

We started being sexual in ways that didn't involve intercourse. I think we both got fairly good at it with each other. She told me what to do at first until it started making more sense to me. I'm not going to be more specific than that.

I spent about a week avoiding Petrol until I talked to him about it. We agreed we weren't trying to have any sort of ongoing physical relationship, although I think he was a little more saddened by that than I was.

One of the most dramatic differences was actually just one of perspective. Now that I no longer had a particularly strong tension with Brian, we started becoming friends of a sort. Friend is actually too strong of a word, but I can't quite say acquaintances or enemies either. Basically, we tolerated each other more, and occasionally I had glimpses of why everyone had been friends or lovers with him in the first place.

What I had never noticed about Brian was that he was passionate. Mostly he was a passionate jack-ass, but there were some things he cared about that I respected. It didn't occur to me as possible, but he was a die-hard vegan. His jacket was pleather, as were his boots, and he thought there were two possible outcomes to his life: either he would stay a squatter and begin militant animal liberation until he was caught and sentenced to life in prison, or he would eventually go back to school and become a veterinarian.

Brian the veterinarian. I just couldn't imagine it. He was just the punk-rock equivalent of the frat-kids-to-be that had gone to the high school I had dropped out of. And everyone knows that frat kids never do anything with their lives besides drink, date-rape women, and go on to be have of those careers that King had listed as completely useless – investors, bankers, cops, soldiers, landlords.

Brian the veterinarian. I just couldn't picture it. I had a hard enough time imagining him wearing a ski-mask, puppy saved from

I don't know why, but it felt better to me to steal things and sell them than to beg. I somehow felt more honest about it, as if I was working; as if I was somehow a productive member of society worth their due. King and I had an interesting conversation about that.

I was starting into a case of cheap beer he had bought with money from some CDs I had lifted and was beginning to feel its effects. I brought up how I hadn't we hadn't actually earned this. Sure, I had committed both misdemeanor (shoplifting) and felony (fencing stolen goods) offenses in the process, risking a great deal, but I hadn't contributed anything to society at large.

"Ah, how the great myth of capitalism rears its head in my progeny." King O'Beer started to explain in that quote unquote infinite wisdom of his. "You see, my son, my lamb, you've been raised to think that we have a society based on giving monetary credit to reward service done for the betterment of society as a whole. A farmer grows food, a shoemaker makes shoes... so they deserve all the benefits that society has to offer. But that's not what capitalism does.

"Capitalism is about capital. You know, already having things. What good is a landlord? Sure, a building super would be useful around here, but do we really need someone to own this building, control how it is used and stop us from living in it if we don't donate to him?"

"A soldier is paid to kill... er... protect people. A cop is paid to oppress... er I mean enforce the laws that somehow benefit us. An investor just uses capital to gain more capital. Now there's a real thief. You, on the other hand, risk your very liberty to get by without paying into a system you disapprove of. Rather than standing idly by and going along with society's consumer-death-machine, all the while grumbling that the whole thing is sorta a bad idea, you are refusing to help it and in fact are actively working against its further functioning.

"In essence, my friend, you are every bit a revolutionary. Which is, of course, pretentious claptrap to say, because we're not really risking life and limb, nor are we accomplishing all that much in the greater scheme of things."

I think he assuaged my worries a bit, although I certainly didn't feel like much of a revolutionary. I wasn't making targeted strikes against the system so as to bring it down (although the idea was appealing once I considered it); I was merely stealing its resources to fuel my existence and my friends' appreciation for wine. I wasn't Robin Hood, I was just a thief. I stole from the rich and gave to my friends.

Leda was gone more often with her new friends, and I was starting to get jealous. I don't think I was jealous about the sex part, probably because I knew I could choose to start having sex with her when I thought I was ready. I was jealous because she wasn't around as often, I

that we were in a relationship, or kissed. It was just what I thought about a lot when I was laying next to her, wishing we *were* kissing.

Leda confused the hell out of me, but for some reason it didn't get to me. Most of the time she made me happy just by being around. I didn't know how to hold her but I learned because she was very straightforward about it.

One night I was lying on my back, and her head was cuddled onto my shoulder with her arm draped over my belly. For some reason this was my favorite position to cuddle. I told her she made me happy.

She told me she was glad.

Brian was around some nights, and his hatred of me was tangible. You could feel it in the air whenever I walked in the room. Unless his punk friends from the suburbs were in town (including Susan), he usually wandered away pretty quickly after I walked in.

But with his friends around he would pick on me, and he was usually careful enough to do it in ways that wouldn't get a rise out of anyone else. He just made little snide comments often enough to ruin my stride whenever I started to feel comfortable.

One night I was alone with him and his friends. Leda and Wrench were on the roof talking and Petrol and King had both already crawled off to their respective beds.

"You know, Jimmy, you've got a lot to learn about living on the street." Brian informed me.

"Why's that?" - Me

"I heard about the night before we met you, about the way that you let those jocks walk all over you. I heard you let one of them piss on you and you didn't even fight back." A silence ensued because I didn't say anything. Once again I wasn't defending myself, even to verbal attack.

"I would rather die than let some fucking jock piss all over me. That's the difference between me and you. You wouldn't last a moment if we really did have anarchy." Those words stuck with me for a long time, a ghost to haunt my new idealism.

"I can't believe that someone like Leda would fall for a fucking hippy like you." He stopped talking and stood over me as I was sitting down on the couch. Susan held my arms against the couch, and I hadn't realized she was standing behind me.

"I bet your dick isn't even very big." Brian pulled my pants down to my knees. "I fucking knew it."

"And you know what? You're the kind of guy who will get ass-raped in jail. A fucking push-over. And you just fucking take it. Pussy."

I stood up, pulled up my pants and left the room. I walked to Leda's room and sat on the sill where the windowpane used to be.

It was like being in middle-school, running from class to class on my birthday hoping no one else would beat me up in celebration. Only there was no class to get to. I knew that I couldn't just ask other people to deal with this for me, but I also didn't feel like I needed to get in some stupid fight with Brian to prove anything.

I thought about it a lot, although I was too drunk to keep my thoughts together. Was he right? How could I last a day in anarchy? If I didn't want to sink to his level, would I have to accept the idea of police?

No answers came to me. I was afraid because I thought he might just be right.

I did the same thing I had been doing recently when trying to deal with emotional problems while I was drunk; I went to sleep.

I dreamt that night about a boy locked in a tower with his dog. The tower was furnished okay, but was high above the world. An angel came to the window and took the boy in one hand, the dog in the other, and flew off into the half-full moon.

In the morning Leda was next to me, closer than usual. I could see around her eyes that she had been crying, and it bothered me that I had no way to begin to ask her about it.

When we got to the park that day Wrench wasn't with us. I didn't ask why, though. My mind was caught up with trying to figure out how to talk to someone about last night, about Brian. He knew I was afraid of him.

I wondered whether it was something that would just blow over or not, and what would happen if I did nothing. I wanted to talk to Wrench about it since he dealt with Brian all the time, although I was intimidated somewhat by him, and he wasn't around in any case. I was too embarrassed about the specifics of what happened to talk to Leda about it, and King, well, I didn't really know what King would say or whether it would make any sense.

I didn't even think about Petrol, I'm not sure why. He was the closest thing I had to a peer in the group. He was just so quiet, I guess.

But Petrol asked me to accompany him to go scrounge up some food and bum some smokes. For some reason I didn't seem to have any problem bumming cigarettes off people, when I didn't smoke, and yet I couldn't bring myself to sponge. So we wandered away from the group and walked to a different park where the bougie's ate their lunch. As we were walking Petrol brought it up.

"I heard something happening in the common room last night." - Petrol

"Yeah." - Me

"Brian doesn't like you, he's possessive of Leda." - Petrol

"Yeah." - Me

said she understood how her leaving immediately probably hadn't make things easier for me to understand.

She said she was realizing that she needed to completely re-evaluate her sexual politics, or rather, realize the politics of sexuality. And she said she was really excited to think that I was a good person to do that with.

She said all of these things without actually checking to see if I was awake. I figured she just knew somehow. And she leaned over and kissed my cheek, my head turned to the side as I lay curled up (imagining myself in that hole I wanted to die in).

"I'm glad you're back." - Me

"Then open your eyes." - Leda

"Oh yeah." - Me

I opened my eyes and saw her and she was looking at me, not smiling but with a look I was starting to realize wasn't as cruel as it seemed. It really just was the way she looked.

"So..." I started awkwardly. She waited for me to continue.

"I got drunk and hooked up with Petrol last night, I'm pretty sure." - Me

"Well, that's alright. I had sex with one of the women I was hanging out with yesterday." - Leda

"I'm pretty hungry, I'll be right back." - still Leda

It's kinda fun to end these little sections of this story that I'm writing with "and I sat there more confused than before" or something like that, and I get to do that again. I really, really, obviously still had a lot to learn.

I waited longer than I thought would make sense for going to go get some food, but it was probably for the better because I had more time to try and collect myself.

Not that I succeeded at collecting myself.

After probably 20 minutes Leda came back into the room and sat down on the edge of the bed again.

"You should come lie down next to me" - Me

"Okay." - Leda

Leda came and lay down next to me, face to face and I asked her why it was okay that we had messed around with other people.

"Because you don't own me, and I don't own you." - Leda

That seemed like a simple enough answer. For some reason, it was enough of an answer for me for the time being. I didn't own Leda... that made sense. Though truth be told, I wasn't really thinking about anyone else.

This brings me up to about the end of the third week after I left my parents house. I won't go into every detail of what happened during the next few months because it mostly followed the pattern of what came before. We drank a lot and talked a lot. We stole a whole bunch of crap, most of which we didn't need and sold for beer money.

thinks, Brian is the one who wouldn't last a day if there were no laws. Some people are alive only because it's illegal to kill them. You're not one of those people."

We went back to the Hall, and since I was too drunk to steal we just ate food we had laying around from the past few days. Actually, I had wanted to go stealing anyway but King wouldn't let me. I called him an authoritarian and he started laughing and agreed with me.

We got drunker with another fifth of whiskey, and me and Petrol starting making out and then we ended up in his room and he went down on me and then I went down on him. I went back to Leda's room to sleep.

I say it that quickly and without detail because that's what my memory of it is. Now, half a year later, I have thought a lot about it. But at the time, I just woke up alone in Leda's bed and had no idea what to think. Emotionally, I was upset by the idea that I had cheated on Leda, and was afraid that she wouldn't want to be with me anymore.

With distance, I've got a lot more to say. First of all, if there's one thing I advocate strongly, now, it's that people shouldn't hook up for the first time drunk. Consent is blurred.

Second, I can realize that I had been attracted to men sexually for awhile, although I had repressed it subconsciously. Any time I would see a man and think he was cute, I would immediately come up with things that I respected or admired about him, and attributed my crush to that.

Third, the idea of virginity is flawed. I didn't think I had lost my virginity the next morning. A month or so later I decided that actually I *had* lost my virginity that night. A month after that I decided that virginity was an artificial construct used to keep the idea of sex a very limited one.

So I was lying half-awake in Leda's bed smelling like another man and feeling guilty when Leda walked in. She sat down on the edge of the bed and started talking to me by way of the window, much as she had when I first came into the Hall. That first day, all beat and hurt and lost.

Only this time Leda was apologizing to me. First, she apologized about not understanding that I didn't want to have sex. When she said that I was still half-dreaming and suddenly I could even visualize the hole I wanted to curl up into and die inside. She talked about how she had thought about it a lot, and had talked to some women she had met recently and hung out with the day before.

Then she apologized for taking off so quickly in the morning afterwards, but she had been late for a meeting with those people. She

We sat down on a park bench. I wasn't being very eloquent.

"You know, Brian is the one who introduced me to the squat, before I ran away. But I don't necessarily like him. He treats women like property. He's good to his friends, who are all guys, and for some reason all the girls fall for him. He's got that fuckin' twelve-inch mohawk and thinks he's got the biggest dick around. He might, even, but it's stupid that he thinks that that matters.

"I don't know how you should deal with him. He's never tried to hurt me or anything, but I don't know what I'd be able to do if he did. He's always got his friends around, and he can be really vengeful. Things are getting really weird around The Hall because of him. He's been fighting with Wrench, and they used to be best friends. I don't know. It might help if you resist him next time though. I feel like he respects that."

I thought about it for a moment, sitting on that bench with other people going about their business unconcerned, for a moment before I answered. "I'm not sure I even care about his respect. I don't think I respect him and his big-dick big-mohawk complex. But I don't think I can deal with him if he keeps doing this.

"I don't know." I finished.

We found some food, bummed some cigarettes and resumed our lounging in the sunlight of our park with everyone else.

The sunlight got the better of me and I let my worries disappear. Sometime an hour or two before sunset (none of us actually had any need for watches, we were lucky in that); Leda asked if I wanted to go a'stealin.

Of course I was game and I put my normal clothes on over my squatter clothes. I put on a hat that covered the length and color of my hair. Leda stayed dressed as she was, in her faded black hoodie and patched cargo shorts. For some reason it never seemed to matter for her. It was probably her youthful face and body, or maybe it was just luck. I also had this theory that sometimes people saw her steal, but when she looked at them with those vicious eyes of hers they decided not to do anything about it.

We walked into a supermarket and begin to forage. I filled my bag up with tofu dogs, soymilk and some soy ice cream (the vegan habits of my friends were starting to wear off on me, I admit) and I didn't catch what Leda was up to.

We met up by the exit and began to walk out, hand in hand (her idea, she felt it made us look less suspicious and cuter. I didn't know about that, I thought it made us look like a cute couple of thieves). As soon as we reached the alarm detectors they started beeping. Not particularly loud, but they were certainly audible. The steady beeping in my head reminded me of the Tell-Tale Heart... how could no one see that we were stealing?

“Just keep walking,” Leda murmured to me, “unless someone tries to stop us.”

No one did and we made it down the long exit corridor after a nice short eternity we walked out into the parking lot.

“Now run.” She said it so un-emphatically that it took me a moment to realize what she had said. We took off in broad daylight. No one seemed to be chasing us but we wanted to get around corners as soon as we could.

After a corner and two blocks we turned a final corner and started walking. There hadn't been much walking traffic around, and we were fairly certain we were in the clear but the adrenaline hadn't left my system.

We wandered to the waterfront, like we always did, as the sky began to change colors.

“What happened? - Me

“I guess something was tagged.” - Leda

We opened our packs and spilled out the contents. I had tofu dogs, soymilk and soy ice cream. She had dental floss, toothpaste, toothbrushes and condoms.

“I bet it was the condoms.” She began to search the package but didn't find an alarm tag. She opened it, past the manufacturer's plastic wrap, and on the inside of the cardboard box was an alarm tag. “Those bastards... no wonder I didn't see it.”

She started laughing and I sat there confused. In another one of those moments that seems almost too cheesy to write down, she looked at me, smiled, and took my hand in hers. We sat in silence for the first long moments of the sunset.

Eventually King and Petrol wandered over and found us, me with my head in Leda's lap. I didn't resent them for interrupting that moment, although I'll probably remember it forever. I didn't resent them because they were now some of my favorite people in the world (and, it seemed like, the only people in the world I knew), and because we were both excited to tell our story about setting off the alarm.

And getting to the throw in a part about how condom manufacturers were bastards because they knew poor kids were going to try and steal condoms so they could get laid safely, getting to throw that part in made us happy too.

It was a rare night when we didn't drink, but that night was among them. It was a Sunday, so Brian's gang wasn't around. Neither was Brian or Wrench, for that matter. We hadn't spanged at all so there was no beer to be had.

I realized that when we were sober and punk rock played on the stereo, we didn't dance. It kinda made me sad. I have mixed feelings about alcohol.

So I got really drunk in the middle of the day with everyone else and wandered off to the waterfront to think. I got bored with thinking pretty quickly, being drunk and all, and went and found Brian. Sure enough, he was sitting on the steps to the same punk store he was always sitting on the steps of, surrounded by his friends.

“Hey Brian, I want to talk to you!” I kinda yelled it, I'm pretty sure, even though I was close to him.

“Yeah, that's the problem, isn't it kid?” - Brian

“Yeah cause I want to talk my problems out instead of beating people up.” I said that first part harshly, but then my mind started drifting off drunkenly. “I mean, I was figuring it was because of the difference in our backgrounds, you know? I didn't really have to grow up fighting back like you probably did.”

Brian was laughing and hit me on the shoulder, hard.

“No see, that's exactly my point. See, I was figuring if I learned how to fight, but still mostly just talked things through, that would make a better society anyway and...” I was really on a drunken roll by now.

Brian was still laughing and hit me on the same shoulder again. People on the street were pointedly ignoring us, as always.

As I embarrassingly tried to explain why it was okay that he resorted to violence against me, he was resorting to violence against me. I couldn't figure out why I wasn't getting angry.

Finally I said “ah, whatever... fuck it, fuck you.” And I turned my back on him. I swear I wasn't going for the higher moral ground or anything. I just couldn't really seem to bring myself to want to fight him.

What's weird is that Brian left me alone after that. I mostly avoided him, too, but it wasn't out of fear.

It seemed like kind of a let-down, an anti-climactic resolution. I'm not trying to say I dealt with the problem correctly; I just sorta dealt with it. Hell, maybe I didn't deal with it. But it seems like King was right, that really I just needed to stop avoiding the issue, stop asking people about it and soliciting advice and actually just do whatever it was I was feeling.

I don't advocate for pacifism, either. If I could have, I think it would have been grand to beat the crap out of Brian. But I wasn't angry, and I didn't really know how to fight. It probably wouldn't have been fun to have the crap beaten out of me by Brian, which is what I had been expecting to happen after I left the waterfront drunk in search of him. And pacifism as a way of life seems foolish; I feel like letting people walk all over you is ridiculous and strategically unsound. Well, I say that now.

King started talking to me when I came back. And what he said removed that ghost that haunted my mind. “Regardless of what he

"I hate the way he treats her, and sometimes I think he's right about how I shouldn't have left my mom, because I think my mom needs me to protect her from him. But I was 16 and getting into fights with him every day when he tried to order her around. It didn't help anything, my mom never learned anything from it and finally my step-dad called the cops after I broke his leg by pushing him down the stairs and I took off. I've only been back three times."

Wrench thought for a moment while I just looked over the edge, and then he continued. "I never hit him first. I would just stand up for my mom and he would scream at me, and I would stand my ground and he would hit me. And I would hit him back. And he used to always win. But not since that time I broke his leg."

"But no, Brian didn't give me these. I don't think he would. I'm not sure anymore though... You know, I think I'm the only one of the five of us who doesn't hate him."

"Brian and I got into punk rock together. We grew up together. It's really hard to see him turning into this. Or maybe he always was this and I'm the one who changed. I'm not sure."

We were quiet there on the roof for a fairly long space of time, long enough for both our minds to wander. I was pretty sure he invited me up there to talk because he needed someone to run ideas off of, and I didn't mind.

I started realizing my intimidation by him was completely unfounded, and that I had essentially judged him as someone who wouldn't bother having time for a new kid like me. He really seemed to have it together, but in truth that was as much an act as anyone's. After I started thinking about that, he went on talking about his family:

"I was angry at Jim for telling my mom what to do and I wanted her to stand up for herself, but instead I kept trying to play the hero for her. It's the typical man's solution to the oppression of others, I'm pretty sure. I've been talking to Leda about this a lot recently. Me and her, we're both macho as shit. I think it's okay sometimes though..." Wrench never finished this thought, but trailed back into the silence he had just departed from.

The whole of the way into the city that I day I pondered his words and his bruises. I questioned what I was doing there, amongst so many proud and hurt people. I felt spoiled and soft. My father never hit me, he just never understood me. I don't know whether or not he ever loved me.

I sat next to King on the subway and started to ask him about violence and Brian and all of that, but he cut me off.

"Oh no you don't. You're just doing the rounds and asking each of us. Look, you need to decide how to deal with this yourself. It's probably going to suck no matter how you deal with it. The world is chaos, just go with whatever you're feeling."

King and Leda started talking about Brian. I had never heard Leda talking about Brian before, except maybe that first day when I was half-awake.

"I told you before, trusting a squatter who thinks that feminism is a bunch of PC punk bullshit is a bad idea." - King - "He's a fucking homophobe too. I can't believe how he treated Petrol. The only reason he leaves me alone is cause I've never touched his fucking penis, and he knows that there's a chance I'll knife him, regardless of how many of his kids are around."

When I heard King talk like that I thought at first that he was posing. Trying to sound tough; I mean, who says "I'll knife him, regardless of how many of his kids are around" who isn't trying to sound tough? But I figured it out later that there's a reason that I never heard King talk tough before, and that there's a reason that he wears a "fags bash back" leather jacket. My friends are hurt people. Life was beautiful, but it wasn't easy.

Leda thought a moment before she said anything. "Most of the time, when you all spend your time dissing him, I'm just quiet. I know it's true, but I still don't want to hear it."

"You know, at first when I saw him with Susan I thought I was jealous. Jealous of her, maybe, for having him. Or jealous of him, for being able to move on so easily. But a few days later I realized I wasn't jealous at all... I was feeling protective of Susan, that's why it hurt to see them together. He doesn't treat lovers right, and Susan isn't treating herself right, being with him. I don't want her to make that mistake."

Petrol spoke up, more vehemently than I had would have expected. "What do we do about it? I'm sick of this, I'm sick of him. His fucking pattern is bullshit."

Everyone was silent for a long moment before Leda spoke. "It's Fran and Fred's call, because they founded this place. To kick him out might cause trouble."

"Maybe we need to start looking for our own place," suggested Petrol, "get away from this bullshit and actually start building something. We always talk about bike libraries and freestores and cooking Food Not Bombs but we never do it."

King spoke up sarcastically. "What do you mean? Are you implying that we're usually too drunk to get anything done?"

After that the conversation turned to lighter matters: shoplifting. Then King started talking about how he wanted to go traveling again. He spoke in his poetic fashion about sleeping in boxcars and I started thinking about sleep.

I announced my intentions to crash and Leda chimed in with the same opinion. King looked at us funny and then turned to Petrol, trying to convince him on the wonders of train hopping.

“Petrol told me that Brian was fucking with you last night.” - Leda

“Yeah.” - Me

There was a pause as Leda waited for me to elaborate, but I didn't. So Leda continued to question me. “What did he say to you?”

I answered her, going into what he did to me as well, and it seemed like the same thing as when I told her about the jocks. She nodded but didn't offer up any cooing or nurturing.

“The part that fucked with my head, really, was when he told me I wouldn't last a day in anarchy. I feel like he's right, but I don't know what that means to me.” - Me

“Ah, that's just his fucking punk-rock anarchy, where friends pick on friends and get into drunken fights all the time. I mean, yes, you would have to deal with pricks like him occasionally, but if you don't hang out with kids like that, you wouldn't have to deal with it too often.” - Leda

She continued when I didn't say anything; “I used to think that that was the way I had to be. Opaque. I still am, really. But I don't want to be, not completely. Recently I've been able to just sort of be, without always defending myself to everything and everyone.” She looked up at me in the candlelight that illuminated her room. “Around you, really.” She smiled.

“You're doing that thing, again.” - Me

“What thing?” - Her

“You know, when you smile and your face melts for a moment.” - Me  
Leda smiled subconsciously. “Ah, fuck you”

And then she kissed me. I kissed her back and we made out for awhile. She took off her shirt, I took off mine. It was sexier than I'm describing it. After awhile she pulled a condom from her pants pocket and I struggled to explain to her that I didn't want to have sex with her that night, that I was too overwhelmed as it was. I tried to turn it into a cheesy compliment, but I don't think she completely understood. Mostly I think that because she said

“I don't understand you.”

So I tried again to explain about how I liked her a lot and had had a crush on her since she came and rescued me but I was a virgin and confused. And then we just went back to making out and it was awesome.

When we were starting to settle toward sleep, I remembered about our conversation about Brian. I asked Leda if I should just avoid him, or whatever.

“Personally, I think it would be awesome if you beat the shit out of him.” Leda spoke sleepily.

Which, of course, only confused me further.

“I mean, not that I really honestly think you could, no offense. And I'm not telling you to go champion me or anything. I just think that

he deserves to be fucked up by someone he picks on. I don't want to pressure you into fighting him though.”

She kissed me again and she started to fall asleep while holding me. I lay awake wishing I was drunk so that I could just pass out while trying to figure things out like I usually did. Instead, I lay awake and my head swam for hours.

There's this thing when people do when they're first starting to fall asleep where they twitch. I remember it really freaked me out because I had never experienced anyone doing that before.

That night I dreamt about two armies marching through a mountain pass to get to one other. Halfway they met and faced off. They started trying to taunt each other. A giant man, the mountain king, emerged from the rocks and announced that whoever threw the first stone would get a fucking boulder dropped on them. “Let he who hath no fear of wrath and retaliation throw the first stone. You should not disturb my peace.”

Right after I woke up, Leda took off, without telling me where she was going. She didn't take her bag - I checked. If she had I probably would have been torn apart emotionally. As it was, I was just further confused.

But when I walked down to the common room, Wrench was back. Wrench was a little worse for wear, with bruises down his arms.

“Hey Jimmy. I was just about to go up to the roof, care to join me?” - Wrench

There was no one else around, so I shrugged and we walked up the fire escape that led to the roof and sat down on the couch that through some miracle contrary to physics was sitting up there. At the top of a fire escape on a huge warehouse. Its presence was a mystery; apparently it predated any of the current bunch of squatters moving in.

The sun was almost fully overhead, as it usually was before we were all up in the morning. The city was moving, as it always was. I felt a little more grounded sitting up there, for some reason. I wanted to start a conversation, but I didn't know what questions to ask, what questions would be okay to ask. I wanted to talk about Leda and I wanted to talk about Brian and I wanted to talk about Wrench and I wanted to talk about me.

“Did Brian give you those bruises?” - Me

“No, my step-dad did. I went to see my mom yesterday.” - Wrench

“Oh.” - Me

“It's okay, this happens every time. My mom is an amazing woman but my step-dad always tells her what's what. She said she was glad to see me, but Jim, my step-dad, interrupted her to say that no, she wasn't happy to see me because I was a terrible excuse for a son to have left her.