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Stream

The third alarm rings at 9:48. I originally set it for 9:45, but I decide to be generous. The morning ritual, having been fairly consistent for the two years prior to this day, goes as expected. Step one: roll out of my bed and expose myself to the window. Step two: engage in a staring contest with the empty cul-de-sac. Step three: deeply consider the context in which an adult's mindset gets shifted to a point where they consider a large suburban neo-eclectic style house a "dream home". Step four: brush my teeth, get absorbed in consulting the notifications I missed from the past night, and recognize I spent the tail-end of this entire experience switching between two molars. Step five: make the judgment call that my breath smells sanitary enough to not lower my mating potential for the day, throw the toothbrush aside and move back to bed. Sunday will always be the most pathetic day of the week.

After successfully hitting the threshold of good enough in the hygiene department and crawling into bed for some extra shut-eye, I notice a text from Louis. *Hey man, what's up?* Innocent enough. Louis and I went to the same camp as kids; he has remained a summer friend. Now that it is a couple weeks since school ended and the temperature has begun flirting with unbearably hot, he probably wants to do something outside. I blew off tinkering with my iPhone settings last week, and consequently my phone alerted him that I read the message. Now that the "sorry man, I didn't notice your text" route is unavailable I try to conjure a tactical evasion. I previously advertised today to my parents as one dedicated to "indexing companies", with the intent to apply to the selected companies as a source of disposable income and to appease the creators. Confident that this is the best way to envelop my plans of getting lost streaming Netflix

content from Louis, I start writing my message. Before I finish typing my phone screen is overtaken by a phone call. Motherfucker.

“Hey man” Louis greets me.

“Yo.”

“I’m about 15 minutes away.”

“I can’t hang, I’m looking for jobs.”

“Get out of your room, you’ve been looking for jobs for a week.”

“I seriously can’t, rents are about to get livid.”

“Whatever dude, I’ll be over soon.”

Louis is a pushy guy. But he puts in effort, which is more than I can say about most people. I never minded getting shoved around, as long as it is in the right direction. He was my first friend at camp and after a week our friendship evolved into one that communicated more with silence than words. Even now our verbal interactions evoke a mild sensation of discomfort, although we maintain a steady flow of expression with head nods and hesitations.

10 minutes of dedicated ceiling appreciation pass and then it is time to get ready. Figuring out clothes is easy enough. Jeans, I can always roll them up and if I need to roll them down I’ll be happy to have the option. Solid color tee shirt, because I’d look like an asshole in a graphic tee. Good boots, keeping my feet dry is important. Assembling the backpack is also fairly simple. Water bottle, placed in the appropriate compartment. Journal in the front, bundled with some snacks. Leave the main compartment empty, I never know what I’m going to find. I see his

car pull around the bend but wait until I hear the doorbell to make my way down. I open the door and he greets me with laughter before uttering his usual greeting.

“It is going to be a long night”

“Coffee?” I retort

Entering the kitchen Louis is confronted with a round of interview questions from my mother.

“Hey honey, how are you doing?” She asks.

“Very well, thanks for asking.”

“Excited that school is out?”

“You can’t even believe. Do you need help with anything?”

“Yeah, I need my ass kissed a little bit.” I interject.

“Where are you two headed?” She asks, acknowledging our backpacks.

“Just going to crash at Lewis’.” I tell her.

“Did you end up applying for any jobs?”

“I’m compiling a list of companies, I’ll apply to a few every day when it’s done”

“Okay, have fun boys”

We have another friend named Lewis, and we are actually intending on sleeping at his place tonight. Additionally my list of companies is no more than a blank word document with a title. My mother is not aware of these facts. I’m not claiming to be an honest person, but lying makes me uncomfortable. Ambiguity, on the other hand, is something I can definitely get behind. I’m

not planning on pursuing any delinquent behavior, but even so I find it is easier to let my parent's maintain simple illusions. Now that my mother's curiosities were satisfied we make our way to the door. On the way, filling our water bottles in the tap and grabbing a couple cigarettes from the carton my parents leave in the garage.

"One day I'm going to smoke with your parents" remarks Louis

"They will be overjoyed to share the experience with you, I'm certain"

The cul-de-sac is a curious place. A week of data collection revealed 84% of the traffic comes from cars entering and immediately exiting as they realize they made a wrong turn. They move like an asteroid coming under the influence of a large body. They move steadily towards the circuit, always accelerating in the thick of it, with no interest in being trapped by orbit.

Getting into the car we launch out of the cul-de-sac. I don't think we have to go twice the speed limit to achieve escape velocity, but the music is streaming and the air rapidly blowing in through the windows soothes. Speeding past tree lines, liquor stores, and neighborhood communities, the colors of suburbia blend as cohesively as a Jackson Pollock painting.

"Where to?" I ask

"They re-opened the nature trail down Pine, apparently it has a river with a couch in it."

We pass the nicer parts of town, entry level corvettes full of exit-aged executives. Getting to the more lush parts of our residential paradise road kill begins to line the streets that interrupt the forests. I like to think of it as unnatural selection, ensuring that only the most able rodents survive. Louis turns down the music and breaks the silence.

"I felt like I was in a Quentin Tarantino movie yesterday"

“Were you the righteous man or the shepherd?”

“I’m being serious”

“How did that sentiment come about?”

“I was eating Mexican last night --”

“Manny’s or Fronteras?”

“It doesn’t matter dude, listen. So I was devouring some Carnitas and all of a sudden a woodsman enters the building.”

“I’m fairly sure woodsman is not a real descriptor”

“Man of the trees, forest dweller, whatever. What I’m trying to say is this is not a man who fits.”

“Bearded?”

“Have you seen Cast Away?”

“No.”

“Kill Bill volume 1 or 2?”

“No.”

“Hagrid?”

“I only read the books.”

“Do you know what Santa Claus looks like?”

“Forsure...did he look like that?”

“Not at all, but he did have an excellent beard.”

Inching off the gas for the first time since the ride began he eases into the story.

“Apparently he was trying to re-integrate himself back into society. He didn’t cut out to be one of those Thoreau types.”

We turn into the trail and follow the signs leading to a 7 car parking lot.

“You think this is good?” asks Louis

“I’d say so”

“I don’t actually know where this river is, to be honest”

“That’s fine, if we keep decreasing elevation we should eventually hit it”

We grab our bags and head into the brush. The trail is thin, it hasn’t been cleared this year yet. Ducking under branches, stepping over logs, the trek is both methodical and graceful; our progress is steady. I find that being reactive like this is the best way to approach the forest. The trees have been rooted in the ground for quite a few more years than I have been around, it’s only right for me to be the one to adjust. As the trek continues our pace quickens as we start to hear the sound of water. Within a few minutes we are virtually running downhill past grand elderly trees. Hopping over trees that have already fallen, rushing past the forest canopy, the sunlight penetrates in only thin rays between the leaves, giving the scene a kaleidoscopic effect. As soon as I lose myself in my surroundings I feel something pulling me back. Before I can react I’m crashing down onto the vegetation, narrowly rotating my shoulder to prevent a complete face plant. I untangle my shoelace from the perpetrator, a rotten log.

“Nice.”

“Thanks.”

“You good?”

“Yup.”

We exchange smirks and take a moment to relax. I feel a stabbing sensation piercing my leg and notice a pretty serious scrape. I grab my water and wash away the blood to access the damage. Louis has stopped walking and I see him fumbling around in his bag. He ambles over and hands me a band-aid, much too small to cover the surface area of the damage. An absurd gesture, but I have to admit after putting it on I stopped feeling any discomfort.

By now the sound of the river is loud, it has to be close. Full of mud and panting, I light up my cigarette. Louis follows suit. Looking around the forest, it is clear that we have no real conception of how far we have gone, but we haven't lost the trail. Louis catches me gazing at a small clearing 5 meters off the trail and directs us to it. Taking a seat encircled by massive hardwood trees we begin checking out our surroundings. Things are as they should be, squirrels running through trees, birds trying to fuck each other, the plants photosynthesizing. A couple seconds of observation and I notice something pink in a dense brush. Upon further inspection it was clear there was only one thing it could be: Panties.

“It feels like no matter how deep you've gone there is always a pair of panties that has gone one step farther.” I point them out to Louis.

Just past the panties we see the river. It looks more like a creek. We take off our socks and shoes, I roll my jeans up, Louis is wearing shorts. We begin walking down the current, our maneuvers markedly more careful with each step. The creek bed is full of rocks, completely smooth due to centuries of weathering and erosion. The water dances through my toes, at first

chilly, but my feet quickly numb. The more we walk the wider and deeper the creek becomes. Weaving downstream, knee-deep, we see the couch.

“Who the hell even put that couch there?” I ask.

“I’m not sure, it is blocking a lot of water though”

Louis steps onto the couch and offers me an arm, I take it. We stand on the cushions and see the streamlet’s full size. As the current picks up past the couch, what was previously a creek grows wider. This river is just one of the many feeding into a bigger system. Louis grabs one of the arms of the sofa and tugs. I consider begging him to stop, but I decide to tug too. I put my phone and wallet in my bag and we dislodge the couch. Surfing is better than streaming.