

Shades of Black from the Pacific

"Shades of Black from the Pacific" By M. Robert Fisher

Note: This is the first short story I've written in about a year. I would like to cut it down possibly so any suggestions are welcome.

I didn't remember falling asleep in Lee's car the night before. I didn't know where we were or why my rib cage was hurting so badly. I stumbled out of the car after struggling to sit up for a few minutes and took a piss on the side of the closest apartment complex. It was still dark out but it wasn't black anymore, more of a pale and bitter navy swallowing up the world around us. After I finished I got back into Lee's car and went back to sleep.

Lee was shaking me. When I opened my eyes it was bright and golden, blinding me before it sent me spinning. I opened the passenger side door and rolled on to my side to vomit out of the car. I never vomited, typically. Lee began laughing.

"What the fuck happened last night?" I asked between spews.

"You got fucked up and made out with a lesbian," he said still laughing.

"A lesbian? Was she cute at least?"

"Yeah, I suppose."

"Nice," I said before vomiting again.

"Let's go get noodles for breakfast," Lee said starting the car.

"Noodles?"

"They are easier to puke up," he said as I closed the passenger side door and wiped my mouth.

"Are there even noodle places open this early?"

"Probably not. What do you want?"

"Chicken fried steak sounds good, yeah?"

"Sounds fucking awful," he said as he pulled out of the parking space and drove to the diner to get chicken fried steak.

As soon as we got into the diner Lee went to the bathroom. I took a seat in a booth and the waitress brought us two waters. I asked for two more waters and two cups of coffee. Everyone in there was dressed in lieu of the day. Long Shoreman, Secretaries, Cashiers, Janitors, Lawyers, IT Guys, Doctors, Councilmen, Zealots, and me. I'd decided before it was light out that I wasn't going in to work. I only had two days left and I'd been checked out for over a month by now. I was in the great beyond where the threat of termination no longer held any weight and therefor I did not care about my performance or even being present. Somewhere between the coast of complacency and the aisle of resentment is where you would find me, swimming against the current. After fifteen minutes of sitting in the booth Lee finally returned from the shitter and took a seat across from me.

"So, what the fuck happened last night?" I asked him again. His eyes were bloodshot and he was barely hanging in.

"What do you mean?" He asked.

"Woke up in your car this morning with what feels like a few cracked ribs."

"Oh, yeah, you were fucked up. You probably don't remember falling down."

"I vaguely remember falling down," I said

"Three times. All on the walk to the car, too. The third time you landed on the curb and refused to get up. So, I just laid down next to you for like twenty minutes until you could get up and get in the car."

I laughed.

"That was nice of you," I said taking a sip of coffee.

"By the time we got to your street you were knocked out so I just put the seat back for you and went to sleep."

"I'd already drank a pint of vodka before you called."

"What time do your roommates usually go to work?"

"Nine or so, why? You want to crash for a bit?"

"Yeah. I want to check their medicine cabinet for meds, too."

I laughed, again.

"I wish I started packing earlier this week," I said.

"Why?"

"Because I leave tomorrow and my ribs are fucking killing me."

He laughed and finally had a sip of his own coffee. He then grimaced and set the coffee back down.

"Yeah, that's not going to happen," he said as he pushed the coffee away, "I really need a Vicodin."

"Me too."

When we arrived back at my apartment the front door was open which meant that my roommates had not left for work yet. We walked in and were greeted by Brandt, with his hair still wet from the shower.

"Are you just getting home?" He asked.

"Drank too much and slept it off in his car, I guess. You remember Lee, right?"

"Yeah! How's it going man?" Brandt said as he extended his hand.

"I've been better," Lee said as he took a seat on the couch.

"Yeah, you guys don't look great."

"I'm gonna take a shit," I started and turned to Lee, "You OK?"

"Yeah, I'm cool," he said.

As I was evacuating my bowels of a night of drinking aged Irish Whiskey and Vodka I could hear Lee and Brandt talking. I turned on the faucet because I figured if I could hear them then they could probably hear me in all of my bilious and dysenteric grandeur. When I exited the bathroom Brandt had his pink bins that had sat beneath the armoire since I'd moved in six months prior on the kitchen table and he was going through a prescription bottle.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"I'm buying a Percocet off of him," Lee said.

"This is the really strong, hardcore stuff," he said. He was about to cut the pill in half.

"Actually," Lee started, "I'll take it whole."

"You sure? It's strong."

"I'm cool," he said as Brandt handed him the pill.

"Mind if I get one too? I'm more than happy to pay," I said.

He handed me a pill and a glass of water.

"I think I cracked a few ribs last night," I said.

"Yeah, he fell over and landed directly on the curb."

Brandt chuckled.

"I don't understand why you have these though," I said.

"I had my jaw broken."

"How?" I asked.

"Some guy at a bar that I'd never seen before in my entire life walked up to me and punched me in the face and then walked off."

Lee started laughing hysterically. I raised my eye brows and acted surprised or maybe astonished by his tale of woe but the reality was I couldn't even remember why I'd even asked to begin with.

"Anyway, I gotta take off to work. I have someone coming by tonight to look at the room. Just a heads up."

"I'll be here," I said.

"It was nice seeing you again," Brandt said to Lee as he left for work.

"You too."

After Brandt left, Lee turned and looked at me. One of us was waiting for the other to say something.

"Guess it's a good thing I didn't find out those were there until the day before I left," I said.

"Right?! They've been here that whole time I bet too."

"If I'd known about them I likely wouldn't have drank all of his Blue Label."

"Yes, you would have," Lee said as he got up and walked directly over to the pink bins again.

"Yeah, I probably would have."

Lee got the pill bottle out and took three more for himself and threw me another pill.

"Fuck it, right?" He started, "You're leaving tomorrow."

"Can't believe they've just been sitting there this whole time," I said amused but also slightly annoyed with myself.

He put the bins back and gave me a hug before leaving. He asked me to stay in touch and I would have liked to but didn't know if I would. Both us knew there was a possibility we'd never see each other again. And there was a sadness in the air. It wafted around us like pesticide as I walked with him out to his car. We didn't talk about the possibility of never seeing each other again. He just kept asking me to stay in touch. He said because he feared he wouldn't have the energy to do so himself. By the next day I would be on the road and on my way to Berkley. I packed up my car in agony the following day but decided to steal five more Percocets for the road. I got to Ren's house in Berkley just after midnight on Saturday morning. And my ribs were getting worse, even with the pills.

When I got out of the car Ren was already outside in a robe. He ran up and gave me a huge hug which educed a searing and malcontent yawp out of me.

"I'm sorry!" He said.

"It's fine. Help me with my bag?"

"No problem," he said as he grabbed my bag and walked up the steps to his house. "How was the drive?"

"Not bad. I'm gonna have a smoke first, though."

"I'm gonna head inside. It's freezing out here."

"Really? Doesn't feel that cold," I said lighting my cigarette.

Ren shrugged and said "I'm so happy you're here man."

"Me too," I started, "Have you got anything to drink?"

"Yeah, I'll pour you one."

"Thanks," I said as I inhaled.

After I finished my cigarette, Ren had a scotch already poured for me when I got inside his house. It had a dank yet appealing atmosphere. Hardwood floors and very little clutter which for some reason made it feel warmer and more inviting than a home with too much furniture and walls lined with pictures frames full of shining faces and family members. His girlfriend came out and they smoked grass and laughed at the TV while I drank the free scotch and ate some left over curry chicken they had in their refrigerator. I fell asleep that night sitting up because it hurt too much for me to lay down, but even worse it hurt even more when I tried to get up from laying. The pain was getting worse with each passing day and I was now beginning to have trouble breathing. Come morning, I could hardly move until the drugs kicked in.

We started out on the I-580 which was supposed to eventually lead us to the I-5. I talked Ren into letting me take the first driving shift because I'd already taken my first dose and I had difficulty looking over my shoulder as it was. I figured I would switch around the time the drugs began to wear off. I decided to hide the drug use from Ren for a few reasons: One being, I didn't want to worry him. I didn't want him to think I was staring down the pit of despair again or maybe I just didn't feel like trying to convince him it was actually medicinal. The second thing was he was a former heroin addict that despite a few slip ups over the years and his ability to focus on pot and booze primarily, was still a recovering junkie in all of his infected glory. Lastly, I didn't want to share. I was floating on the opiate inflated wings of petulance.

Sometime just outside of the bay area, Ren and I began speaking about futures, and all the bullshit that comes with it. The things people talk about on long drives because they are the things rarely touched on. Men don't deliberate about their hopes and dreams typically unless they are trying to fuck each other, I'd imagined. We did for a lack of something better to say. Ren wanted to be a write public policy or be a city councilman or something. Something that neither appealed to me nor seemed to fit him. But he was an advocate for change. He had principles, which America deeply lacked at the time. They were inflexible, impenetrable. I admired that about him. The country needed people like him so I could continue to bathe in my sea of apathy and occasionally criticize from afar.

"What do you want to do? Have you considered going back to school?"

"Nah, I'm too poor," I said to him.

"So am I and I'm doing it."

"I don't want to be any poorer than I already am if I don't have to be. And school takes time and costs money. Something I have neither of in the long term."

"What are you going to do then? Drift from job to job until you die?"

"Well, if my employers would stop pissing me off I'd be happy to die after years of working the same job."

"But they never will. You know that, right?"

"I don't know anything other than what I know."

"What does that mean?" He asked.

"Pretentious way of me saying I can't tell the future," I said as I pulled out a cigarette.

"You don't have a dream or goal at all?"

"I write," I said rolling down the window.

"Yeah? When?"

"Jesus, when did you start caring so much about how I decide to waste away?" I asked as I lit the cigarette and inhaled.

"Why can't you write?"

"Not feeling it right now, I guess."

"That's stupid. If you want to be a writer, you write."

"It's not a fucking homework assignment. I don't have a deadline other than death. And who knows when that will happen?"

"That could be tomorrow."

"Why would I care about a deadline if I'm gonna be dead?"

"You know what I mean."

"I love ya buddy, but you have no idea what goes on inside my head. You have no idea what inspires me, what motivates me, what keeps me going. I'm not even the writer I want to be before my novel gets written. Let alone published. Nor am I in a state of mind where a blank page taunting me doesn't make me want to throw myself off a bridge."

"Just write."

"Jesus Christ," I said taking a drag and then throwing the cigarette out the window.

"It's that simple."

"You have no idea how wrong you are. I'm not even mad at you."

"Why would you be?"

"Because most people would get annoyed if someone kept putting their hand on someone's head and telling them they had a fever. I know myself better than you do."

"Alright, whatever."

There was a short silence so I looked down at the mileage. We had appeared to have gone too far.

"Hey, did we miss the five?"

"I don't think so."

"Check on your phone, I think we did."

He checked and it had turned out we went about four miles passed where we were supposed to be. When we exited to turn around I got some food and let him drive for a while. The meds weren't working and I was quickly learning I was just going to have to deal with it.

The first day of driving was exactly that. We had woken up and were on the road by nine in the morning and didn't stop until we got to Portland at around nine that night. Short of stopping for gas, cigarette breaks, pot breaks, to take a shit, and before the pass to find out if we needed to buy chains for my car. Ren ended up carrying the grunt of the driving because it hurt so badly for me to even look over my shoulder. We got a motel in Downtown Portland just down the street from a strip club so we could get drunk at the motel and walk. The rain had began just outside of Portland and was starting to come down heavily.

We slogged through the puddles and mud of the Portland streets to get to the strip club. It had a back door entrance and we actually walked passed it and went about four blocks too far before we'd realized we'd already gone too far. When we

finally entered, now four blocks wetter, I noticed a poker table and that they were serving drinks. Ren got us beers and I found us a seat in the middle with a view of the stage. The stage was small and had two women dancing on it, which neither of us had seen before. And they weren't beautiful, or even pretty, but there was something accessible about them, approachable even. Even me, in my curdled and grimy existence didn't feel beneath the two women on stage with their light cellulite, c-section scars, and the aura of desperation and hopelessness wafting around them like gun smoke. The sickest of comforts.

After a few drinks and a few different dancers, a black girl got on stage and put Ren under a spell. I was drifting back and forth between casual conversations with strippers priming me for lap dances and the Texas hold em table off to the right.

"That is the sexiest black girl I have ever seen," he said to me as I sipped at the beer. We'd drank half a bottle of Scotch before we'd even arrived.

"You want to get a dance from her?"

"I'd prefer to fuck her," he said.

"That's pretty standard," I said.

"Seriously, she is fucking gorgeous." And she was in a way. She had a taut, firm body, fake tits with small areolas and an ass you'd want to take a bite out of, but she also suffered the same affliction the first girls suffered: for lack of a better way to put it, she was trash. Accessible, but looked like someone with a yeast infection and a high tolerance for emotional abuse. And maybe she did, maybe she didn't, but the bloom around her felt weedy and soiled.

"She is not as beautiful as Tiff," I said.

"Fuck yes she is! She is perfect!" He said defensively. Like he'd mapped out an entire future with her in his head and was living there now and had no intention of ever leaving.

"You never even met Tiff," I said with a smile.

"Doesn't matter," he said.

Tiffany was possibly the only romantic hanger on I was leaving behind. The woman I'd slept with before her had apparently killed herself nearly 6 months after I'd last spoken to her. Walker wasn't convinced, however, as there was no record of her being in the cemetery her friends said she was in and no obituary to be heard of. No record of a funeral or legitimate memorial service, either. Walker was a cynic, but she was also the kind of person that would fake a suicide, as dreary and fucked up as it sounds.

Tiff and I had gone off and on for nearly two years before it finally came crashing down a few months before I left. She was beautiful: long legs; beautiful, soft, caramel skin; the face of an angel and body of a goddess. Her tits, hand crafted by God himself. But she was also impetuous, mercurial even. I had no way of getting inside her head because so many of her decisions seemed to have no rhyme or reason. And while it was exciting, our relationship was cracked from the start. A ticking bomb sitting on my face and faking orgasms despite herself.

I'd loaned her my car. And when she was a few hours late returning it to me and ignoring my phone calls, I told her friend to tell her I was going to call the police if she didn't return it promptly. She then suddenly called me back minutes later feigning drowsiness, telling me that she was asleep and then eventually screaming at me for not trusting her. Later that night, she eventually returned my car.

I was pissed but it was something I figured I'd get over. But as the week led on little clues began popping up that festered in me, multiplied and drove me mad. First, there was a big smudge of white paint on my front bumper, that could have very well been my doing in one of my less than lucid moments, but a friend pointed out that the area around the smudge was cleaner than the rest of the car, which meant she tried to buff it out. The other being that there was an address written on a receipt despite her telling me she was at her Mother's the whole weekend. Who doesn't know how to get to their own Mother's house? The idea of her using my car to go fuck somebody else was more than I could bare. I decided to never speak to her again after that for fear of what I would do to her. I didn't know what I was capable of, I still don't, and I still don't want to find out.

I went to the bar and brought back two shots of Jameson for each of us. When I sat back down the black dancer came up beside me, leaned over my lap, and licked my ear. I took a shot.

"You move quickly," I said.

"Why waste time, right?"

"You have a gung ho attitude," I said.

"You want a dance, sexy?" She said licking her lips.

"No, but my friend here has a very serious crush on you and I am sure can't wait to let you pilfer his money."

She looked him up and down and said, "I gotta go on stage but I'm going to be right back."

Ren had an amused smile on his face as he took a shot and she walked away.

"Didn't she just get off the stage?" I asked him.

"That wasn't the same girl..."

I looked back up at her on stage. She looked similar. She wasn't naked yet, though.

"Are you sure?"

"Positive," he started, "She's just black."

"Why do I suddenly feel racist?" I said laughing.

"Probably because you just were," he was also laughing.

"Shit. I'm gonna go to the poker table then."

"I'll tag along," he said finishing his shot.

"Why?"

"Because she's gonna come back thinking I want to spend money on her."

"Fair enough," I said.

And then the black began to creep in. In comes in slowly, unsuspecting. Losing fragments of time; specs of lights and memories fill the space between. You have an idea, but you don't know the full story.

"How does this work here?" I asked the dealer in regards to the poker.

The dealer gives an explanation that quells my concerns about gambling in a location that isn't an Indian reserve or Las Vegas. I don't remember what he said but in the moment I know it felt like it made sense.

"What are you playing?" I asked a stripper beside me playing a game with the dealer.

They try to explain but either it be my state of being or the fact they'd made the game up, I fail to understand. A lurch like gangly man walks back and forth in civilian clothes behind us as I make casual jokes with Ren and drink booze. I remember a stack of chips sitting in front of me. A stripper comes behind the dealer and wraps her arms around him. I then begin to feel paranoid. She tells us they live together and for some reason, and mainly because my only impression of the stripper next to me playing cards is a bitch, I begin to interrogate the stripper with the dealer.

"Oh yeah? What is your address?"

"What do you mean?"

"If you live together you'll have the same address?"

"What the fuck are you talking about?" She asks annoyed.

"He has a point," Ren says.

"We've been sitting here for twenty minutes and haven't played any cards yet," I say to the dealer.

"We were playing our game," the stripper sitting beside me says.

"Shut the fuck up," I say to her. "What the fuck are you up to?" I ask the dealer.

"What?" He says.

"What the fuck is your problem?" The stripper behind the dealer asks.

"What is your address?" Ren asks.

"Fuck you!" She says.

"Hold on," the dealer starts.

"Nah, man. I'm gonna close out. Something doesn't feel right," I say to the dealer.

We get up and leave the table with my chips in hand and it takes ten minutes before I get my money back. As we exit we can feel eyes on the back of our skulls. As soon as we get outside, Ren starts talking.

"I have half a pound of heroin and a pound of blow with me."

"What? Why?"

"Are you mad?"

"I'm confused," I say.

The next thing I know is that it is morning and I am waking up fully clothed in the motel room. My ribs were killing me and my phone had text messages from Ren telling me to be careful. But he was asleep in the bed next to mine. There were empty MacDonald's bags lining the floor and I had a barbecue sauce stain on my pants. I took my last pill and sat back down in bed. Just waiting for euphoria and relief to wash over me in repose. I only had four hours before I would be back in Seattle for good.

As we drove into Washington and the drugs took their hold over me I began to reflect on the night before. Ren had hardly said a word but was still willing to drive the final leg. I sink deeply into a chasm of introspection. I am caught up by the fact that I'd blacked out twice in less than a week. I would black out often, but only lose pieces of time, not hours worth. And they never happened so close to each other.

"Why did you text me last night?" I ask Ren.

"What?"

"You sent me a text last night asking me to be careful."

"I did?" He asks.

"Yeah, a little after midnight."

"Oh! Because you drove to get food and you were so drunk I was worried something bad might happen."

"I drove?" I ask completely astonished. Despite my self-destructive impulses and my nonchalance when staring down the pit of a slow death by alcoholism, I never would drink and drive. It went against some indiscernible and completely arbitrary code I'd conjured up years before I went to rehab for the first time. The most simple explanation was my problem drinking was only really a problem after my first DUI, I figured. No jaundice or paper meant I was making it work.

"Did you tell me you had heroin on you?"

"That was for anyone following us from the club," he said.

"I don't follow," I said as I put my seat back and closed my eyes.

"They were trying to scam us at the strip club last night. You caught it. I wanted anyone who had any ideas to know we weren't the type of people to be trifled with."

"Wouldn't they just want to beat us until we gave them the drugs that didn't even exist," I said.

"Nah man, people with that much product would have guns," he said.

"But we didn't," I laughed.

"I know," he said and that was the last of it.

When we got to Seattle I called my cousin and let him know we were going to stop by my Dad's to drop off a few things. Unfortunately, for no real reason, my stepmother didn't like me or my Dad or anyone for that matter. She didn't really want us around so we didn't have much time to catch up. We stayed for less than five minutes and then were back on the road.

"How old is your Dad?" Ren asked.

"Fifty-Two. Why?"

"Just funny," he said.

"What is?"

"That's what my best friend is going to like at fifty-two, but with shorter hair. You should grow it out."

"Make a right at Market," I said.

"Thought your Cousin's was the other way."

"Liquor store is this way."

At the liquor store Ren bought a bottle of Gin and a few airplane bottle of Scotch. I got a bottle of Tequila. I don't know why, really. I was tired of the brown. We still had a quarter bottle of Scotch in the trunk. Figured it was a enough booze to last us until the next day when Ren flew back to Oakland.

Seattle over the years had developed a terse and inspissated bicycling community. My cousin wasn't immune to it and just a little over a week before was hit by a car on his bicycle. Due to his concussion, it meant he couldn't drink, which meant Ren and I had a driver. As soon as we got there I had a shot of Tequila. It was still light out.

Ren had wanted to see the beautiful views of the city. So, before we got food, my cousin drove us on top of Queen Anne to see. Ren took video on his phone and my cousin described certain areas of the city and how we could see his apartment building from their. We then go get food and I order a vodka on the rocks.

I came to on a bridge in Eastlake and I was weeping. Ren was swaying back and forth and I realized he trying to stop me from jumping off of the bridge.

"I don't know that I want to live anymore," I said.

He doesn't say a word and sits me back down. I eventually calm down.

I then see cops in the distance and tell him to lose the bottle of Gin he was carrying with him.

"Can you cry again?" Ren asks me.

"Maybe, why?"

"I'm brown, they're dying to arrest me."

The cops pulled over and checked our ID's. I began weeping again and told them I was scared, and lost, and worried about my cousin who I was supposed to be taking care of. Ren asks and the cops drove us back to my cousin's apartment, not even in handcuffs.

I came to again and now I was outside of an apartment building and screaming Ren's name and he was nowhere to be found. My throat hurts so I imagine I'd been screaming it for a while. A new group of cops pulled up and checked my ID again and told me somebody had called the cops on me for making too much noise. I tell them I lost my friend and was worried about him but that I would keep it down. Again, I am not arrested but I had no idea where I was. I knew the address. I get out on to Eastlake Boulevard and there is a taxi on the street. I decided to jump in as dawn was beginning to rear its beautiful, pink head.

"Get out!" The cab driver said.

"I can pay! I just need to go down the street!"

"Get out!" He said again. He then got out and opened the back door and dragged me out.

What the fuck, I thought. I then started walking down Eastlake but quickly realized the numbers were getting smaller when I needed them to get bigger. I was about 8 blocks away from my cousin's.

I got to my cousin's and began dialing his buzzer, over and over, with no answer. Over and over. I was freezing and had no jacket. The sun was beginning to break. I sat with my back against the lobby entrance to my cousin's apartment and waited for somebody leaving to let me in.

I got to his door and started pounding on it and after a few minutes he finally opens it.

"What the fuck?" He says.

"I lost Ren," I say as I jump on his couch, shaking. He grabs a blanket and throws it over me and then goes back to sleep. When I wake up the next morning, it is ten in the morning, Ren is nowhere to be found, as is my phone with his number, as well as the keys to my car that has to be moved by four in the afternoon or it will be towed.

When my cousin woke up the air was tension filled. He took a seat in the chair across from me and we pothered in the silence for moment. Finally, he asks "What the fuck happened last night?"

"I honestly don't know," I replied.

"Do you remember anything?"

"I remember going to Emmer and Rye," I told him.

"Holy shit, that was at six in the evening," he started, "I know you told me you were concerned about your drinking but last night what I saw you doing didn't look like problem drinking. It looked like maintenance."

"It wasn't," I said trying to quell his concern or disappointment. I couldn't tell which. Might have been both.

"You said something about going back to AA a while back."

"That's unlikely," I started, "AA only seems like a good idea when I am really drunk or the morning after. But that's a big reason I am here."

"What is exactly?"

"Need to get my act together and I didn't want to die in Los Angeles."

"What do you mean?" He asked with a confused wrinkle in his brow.

"I haven't went a day without drinking in well over a year and I don't know what is going to happen if I take a break and I didn't want to find out down there," I tell him.

"Do you need to go to rehab?"

"No, you're not understanding me."

"Explain then," he sternly said.

"I'm not worried about dying. I'm okay with being sick even. I just didn't want to do it a thousand miles away from the

people I care about."

He lets the moment sink in and then as if snapping out of some reverie he said "You really pissed me off last night."

He went on to tell me that after dinner Ren and I wanted to go to a strip club. However, because I didn't actually want to be there I was simply surly and unpleasant the whole time and that all I was doing was asking strippers if they had pain killers for my ribs. After the strip club we drove back to his place but I wanted food and he didn't feel like driving anymore so I got petulant and threatened to hit him in his broken nose if he didn't give me my car keys. In spite of that, he still said no until Ren asked for the keys so he could get his phone out of the car. The next time he saw me was banging on his door at five thirty in the morning.

We checked to make sure Ren hadn't been arrested the night before and then started looking in to see how much it would cost to have a new key made for my car. At around noon, the door finally opened, with Ren standing in the doorway unsure if he was welcome inside.

"Is it okay if I come in?" He asked.

"Where the fuck have you been?" I asked.

"Can I come in?"

"Yeah, I'm just glad you're okay," I said.

"Where were you?" My cousin asked.

"I'm not really sure," he started, "

"Do you have my car keys?" I asked.

"Yeah, they are right here," he said pulling them out of his pocket.

"I kept calling you," he started, "but you weren't answering. I thought I pissed you off."

"No," I said, "he's a little annoyed but he'll get over it. My phone was in my car all night."

"I guess I got that stripper's phone number last night but apparently I called her a cunt and she threatened to get a restraining order against me."

"Where were you?" My cousin asked again.

He told us that he came to from his own black out walking down the street somewhere in Seattle. He had no address and no idea where he was supposed to go so he went to a FedEx store and bought a charger for his phone and charged it inside of a Starbucks. He fell asleep while his phone charged and said he must have looked pathetic because someone had left a ten dollar bill across his coffee cup while he was out. When his phone charged up he tried calling and then called our friend Blaire, concerned that he'd angered me and that I disowned him. He then found out where he was, which turned out to be six miles from my cousin's apartment.

After calling me for the thirtieth time, he looked through his phone and found the video he took the day before and began showing it to strangers and asking them if they knew what area my cousin lived in because you could hear him pointing out his apartment complex from the top of Queen Anne. That was how he found his way back.

"That's like shit from a movie," I said to him.

He just sat down beside me, withered and broken. We ordered a pizza and watched movies until I had to drive him to the airport. The ebullience in my cousin's livingroom remained strained and tense. We didn't say much of anything. We were all hurting in one way or another.

After I dropped Ren off at the airport I drove back and parked at my cousin's apartment and walked back to the bridge from the night before. I looked out over Lake Union and the rural lighting, lining the flush hills of the city. I stared out over infinity knowing this would be first night in over a year I didn't drink, waiting for whatever was going to come next.