

## OBTUSE

Ian is crutching up to Penny. She is seated on the bench seat of a picnic table, legs crossed, hands splayed behind her, wrists bent and supporting her torso. She is wearing jeans, a spotted sleeveless blouse, bug-eyed shades. It's like she's been wearing that same ensemble all summer. She's staring straight ahead. It's odd she's not crouched over her phone. Her body looks good not crouched over. Her dark hair is pulled back tightly. She is not smiling.

He slams one of his crutches onto the picnic table and she jumps. He eases himself down onto the bench next to her and she lightly slaps his arm.

"Don't be obnoxious," she says, "You scared me."

He dramatically groans and winces like she hurt him. He's an ass sometimes but he's hot and extroverted and she feels like she needs an extrovert to help her with her social anxiety. He has olive skin, green eyes, strong dark stubble and a military-style faded crop top. He's wearing his striped blue polo shirt and khaki shorts. He looks good in blue. He looks great in khaki. On his knee is the brace.

"I really can't stand peeing with these fucking things," he whines.

"Did you sit?"

"Sit to pee? Me? No fucking way."

"How did you pee?"

"Leaned on one crutch and did it."

"Oh. Seems like, I don't know. It'd be easier sitting, maybe."

He emits a sigh she can interpret. He is frustrated with his situation but not making things easier on himself, as one ought to while injured. He is letting it get to him. She has no desire to continue this conversation when the conversation continues anyway. She takes her phone out of her pocket, readying it.

"I'm not going to sit to pee. I am not giving up my manhood just because I'm injured. I can only take so much. I'm already in constant pain."

"You're on painkillers."

"Yeah. Because I'm in constant pain."

She sighs and turns on her phone, eyes the screen.

"Hey. Come on. Don't get on your fucking phone. This is not fun for me."

"So? Stand to pee. I really don't care."

"Great."

He removes his phone and touches it. He begins scrolling aggressively with his thumb. She feels comfortable now to immerse herself in her own screen. Before he arrived she was avoiding her phone, now she avoids him. They sit for fifteen minutes together not speaking, checking things out on their phones:

She hits the weather icon and looks at the rest of the day. There will be clouds later. She hits her mailbox and deletes three new messages from different companies selling objects and/or hope. She hits a magazine app and checks the latest news. Ryan Gosling is breaking up with his fiancé and Trump is traveling to Russia for talks. A fourteen year old blinded his teacher with a protractor after the

teacher told him the angle was obtuse, disregarding his opinion that it was true right. A white girl was shot and killed by three white men in Galveston and no one knows why but the men will not be arrested because it's their first offense against a woman. She wonders if she should mention this outrage to Ian but his brow is furrowed, gazing angrily at his phone. Next is Facebook and she scrolls through some status updates. Her best friend posted a picture of a newish baby sitting in some dirt and she thinks she wants to comment but just likes it instead. She checks her bank account, likes some photos on Instagram. That is everything she likes to check. She could move on to Candy Crush but thinks she will feel pathetic because she's out and wants to save her lives for watching TV later. She eyes Ian and he is still checking things, still looking upset. She goes back to Facebook and comments on her friend's baby pic using a barrage of emoticons.

He is texting a long list of people he knows in a group message telling them to come out. He doesn't want to sit here alone with Penny all day. After a few drinks everything will be tolerable and they'll be able to chat with intoxicated passion but in the moment he wants a different moment. He wants more people, people who sympathize with his injury and maybe some who haven't heard the story yet. He texts ten people and plays a game where he segregates colored objects to make them disappear to pass time before they respond. A news alert appears from CNN, interrupting his game and a simultaneous text response. The alert reads:

*Good guy shoots unarmed bad guy in Tulsa. One was white and the other black, officials aren't clear yet which was which but it's clear the bad guy is dead and that's good for America. The onlookers were white.*

Where they are is a restaurant more bar than restaurant. The back patio, a parking lot of picnic tables, is filling up now and they are each overhearing conversations and each of them is listening differently, picking up on different parts of these conversations than the other. She hears a feminist rant. He hears a person explaining their dog's quirky personality traits. People are smoking and drinking around them. She wonders where those e-cigarettes are everyone was getting into? He responds to texts and sends more texts, drowning out the dog person because he can't stand when people discuss their pets because he had a dog once for ten years and then got rid of her when he moved.

"What are you doing?" she asks.

"Looking at my phone. Another American human killed. What's going on these days? Motherfuckers."

"Who are the mother fuckers?"

"The guys. The ones who kill."

"Who killed who?"

"Hold on, I'm trying to text."

"Who are you texting?"

"Marshall."

"Oh."

"I know. You don't like Marshall."

"It's not that I don't like him. I just get weird vibes."

"Yeah, that's why you don't like him."

“He makes me uncomfortable.”

“You’re always uncomfortable around black people.”

He is laughing at her.

“Maybe I’m just always uncomfortable. Shutup. What did that article say?”

“Article?”

“About the murder.”

He takes his time sighing. “Um. Umm. What’s with the slow ass connection in this place? Uhhh...Here we go. James Dent shot Clint Holmes in the face.”

“Who are they?”

“Random dudes. How should I know?”

“Because you’re reading the article!”

“I’m not, I’m texting. Trying to. Calm down. Uhhh. Jesus. I’m blowing up. I have to respond.”

“Just tell me what happened.”

“Look it up yourself.”

“All I see right now is an article about a white girl who was killed by her white brother and friends who won’t get anything but a slap on the wrist because it’s their first offense and it’s some kind of honor killing and we’re a fucked up country because we let this shit happen.”

“Isn’t that enough?”

“No. I want to hear your’s. Or talk about this one. I want to talk. Everything’s fucked. What’s yours say?”

“Mine? I didn’t write it. Look it up. I have real people to respond to.”

“The people in these articles aren’t real? I’m not real?”

“Oh my God.”

“Talk to me! Let’s have a conversation, dude!”

“Would you not talk so loud? You’re going to get us killed. Look it up. Look up James Dent and Clint Holmes.”

She sighs to mock his earlier sigh but he’s completely immersed in his texting, mouth moving silently as he taps. She looks up the article and learns that James was black and Clint was white. Oh no. Race war. She knew it. She knows it’s coming. All of the black people are so mad at them. Every time something like this happens she becomes more and more worried some kind of leash is going to snap and all of the blacks will take final revenge for centuries of getting fucked over in America. She shudders and prays Marshall doesn’t show up because she won’t know what to say. What if he’s angry at them?

“What if the race war’s starting?”

“Penny. People kill people. Everyday. It has nothing to do with race.”

“I don’t want to die.”

“You’re being racist.”

She is trembling a little, eyeing the people on the patio. They are all white. This place is perfect to shoot up if anyone wanted to shoot a bunch of white people. She tugs at Marshall’s sleeve and he rips his arm away irritably.

"I don't feel safe, Ian. Direct slavery and then segregated slavery and then prison slavery. What's next? Genocide? And whose genocide?! What if all of the races decide to annihilate the races who aren't themselves?"

"We're not doing that."

"We might as well be!"

"Can you shut the fuck up, please?"

Someone shows up, a blonde female he knows. She is introduced.

"Penny, this is Jenn. You're fast, girl. I just texted you."

"I know, I saw," she responds in a high-pitched, overly chipper voice, "I was just walking home from work and was like, whoa, Ian! What's up with that guy? I haven't seen him in a fucking coon's age."

Penny cringes at "coon," wants this dumb bitch to be careful what she says. She'd say something now but isn't sure if the phrase is racist or she's just racist for thinking it might be racist.

"Yeah, I know!" Ian responds, "It's so good to see you. Hey, you guys wanna grab that table over there? The smoke is getting to me."

A lonesome, middle-aged woman sitting feet from him pretends not to hear the comment as she takes long, easy drags and reads some old book made out of paper. Her eyebrows are raised defiantly, daring them without raising her eyes to them. He hates this woman instantly, wants to scream at her, "Go fucking home you want to sit and drink and smoke alone you fucking shitty bitch!" He gets so irritable on these drugs.

Jenn agrees to move. Penny glares at her. Jenn's yellow hair is down, medium-length and short. She is wearing a tight, white button down and blue jeans. Penny is always a little resentful of blondes even though she hates getting picked up on and blondes have it worst when it comes to pick-ups. There's something about being noticed, though. It's nice to be noticed, especially when you're an introvert.

Jen and Penny sit next to each other on the new picnic table bench and Ian sits across from them.

"Where do you work?" Penny asks.

"It's like this consulting firm. Today was a casual day, so that was nice. On casual days we just drink mimosas and hang out."

"Oh, cool. What do you do there when you're working?"

"Nothing really. Answer the phone. Chat with my bosses about their clients. Actually it's more like gossiping than chatting. I'll admit it. I love gossip. JK. But, you know, it's fun."

"Did you hear about the shooting today?"

"Hah? No, I set my phone to ignore that bad shit. It's just...it kills my spirit hearing about it. And by spirit I mean like the me who isn't like who I am but like what's underneath, you know? It's still happening all the time isn't it? The shootings? Like, everyday?"

"Yeah. A lot of killing. Are you scared? I'm, like, so scared."

Ian rolls his eyes as he texts.

“Look,” Jen gets real, “I refuse to live my life in fear. I ignore all that shit. This seems like a safe town and if I ignore what happens outside of it, everything’s fine. Nothing’s ever happened to me so why worry? Everything’s fine if you focus on yourself. I mean, I woke up, took a shower, went to work, came here. What’s the problem?”

Penny replies, “I’m really afraid there’s going to be a race war. How many black lives can be lost before they flip out and kill us all?”

Ian speaks, “Jesus, Penny, that’s racist. Don’t bring the party down. It only feels like an epidemic because you look that shit up all day long. Jenn’s right. There’s nothing to worry about. Focus on here, not there.” He points at her phone.

“I’m sorry. What party, exactly, am I bringing down?”

“Look,” he says, “We’re all trying to unwind and forget our troubles. That’s why we’re here drinking these drinks. Let’s talk about this later.”

“I agree,” Jenn says, “I’m exhausted from work and cannot think about that shit right now.”

“I just want to talk about something real,” Penny replies.

Ian shifts in his chair and rearranges his crutches.

“I’ve got something real to talk about,” Jenn announces, noticing Ian’s leg, “Ian, what the fuck happened to your knee?”

“Too much praying,” Penny says, shaking her head in mock sorrow.

Ian eyes Penny viciously. “That’s a mean fucking joke, Penny. Like, what the fuck are you talking about? Actually, Jenn, it’s a number of things. Too much moving. Excessively working out. I guess I’m supposed to slow down but, I’m a mover and a shaker, you know?”

“So, like, but what happened really?”

“He was a hero,” Penny says, ashamed of what she’d said before. No, not ashamed, *shamed* by what she said before. Shamed by her own *boyfriend*.

Ian half-smiles, looking from Jenn to Penny. Jenn is not smiling and staring at Ian with mock concern. Penny is frowning hard, an angry true frown.

“He really wants to tell you about it, I don’t know what he’s waiting for.”

“Tell me, Ian, you dick,” Jenn flirts.

“It was nothing. An Asian guy stole my car while I was in the liquor store and I had to chase him down.”

“Had to,” Penny rolls her eyes.

“The fucking dipshit got stuck at the first light he came to so I dove in the driver’s side window just as the light changed. I grabbed the wheel as we’re rolling. There I am, my legs hanging out the window and the dude, I swear to you, bites me.” Ian rolls up a sleeve to reveal a tiny mark on his shoulder. Jenn touches it and gasps. “So, his maniac teeth are clenching down and I grab the parking brake and yank it up. The car grinds as the dude pushes the accelerator and the car speeds up. I take the shifter and not really knowing what the fuck I’m doing I yank at the shifter and the car starts grinding like crazy. That’s when I elbow his face and the car turns and smashes into a cinder block fence. Done. The dude shoves me out and I twisted my knee weird, tore my ACL. Cops showed up in no time and shot the fuck dead before he could get a block away, thank Jesus.”

Jenn's eyes are wide. "Oh my God, Ian, that's insane. You know you're insanely badass, right? I'm so sorry but I'm glad it wasn't worse. Does it hurt?"

"All of the time. I'm on painkillers now, thank God."

"Thank God."

Jenn and Ian chuckle and take sips. Penny glares at Ian, disgusted.

"What" he asks her, wincing his face and shaking it condescendingly, "What are you looking at me like that for?"

"I don't know."

He turns back to Jenn and holds out a prescription bottle. "You want one?" They gave me a ton with three refills. New Trumpcare thing. No patient left in pain."

"Sure, thanks!" Jenn takes the pill and downs it with her drink.

"Maybe you shouldn't have anymore to drink," Penny says, glaring at Ian.

"I'm not gonna drink that much. Relax."

"I am relaxed. You're the one drinking on painkillers."

Jenn is swiping at her phone now to avoid the tension. She is texting a friend to come have a drink, rescue her from a simmering feud.

"I'm fine," he says.

"Jenn," Penny asks, "why do you think people drink on painkillers?"

"Um, what? Why do people do anything? I don't know. Everyone does it. It's fun, it feels good."

"Yeah, but it's so stupid. So, why? It destroys your liver, your stomach lining? Since when has because other people are doing it been a good reason to do it?"

"I don't know if that's true about the stomach lining."

"Of course it's fucking true! It's always been true! They put warnings everywhere. Do you not read warning labels? Guess not, because the first thing it says is don't fucking drink on these pills."

"Alright, Penny baby, let's talk about something else," Ian cuts in.

"Why? This is like something true and real and worth talking about. Why are people okay with destroying themselves?"

"I don't fucking know, okay? Who cares. Let's please talk about something else. Jenn, what else have you been up to?"

"Um, you know. Hanging out. I got really drunk the other night at Benny's."

"Benny! How's Benny? I haven't seen that cat in a few months."

Penny takes out and stares at her phone. She can't decide what to click on. She imagines two protractors planted in each of Ian's eyes, blood running down his dumb, grinning face, oblivious because of the painkillers and booze, laughing demonically as Penny backs away, also laughing maniacally, watching his cheer turn to tears until he dies. And then she instagrams it #adishonorablemanbitesit.

"You know Benny. Still lit up every night. People are always over there drinking. His place smells like a hamster cage. It's pretty nasty."

"Haha. Benny is the best. We used to take ecstasy and go rock climbing together."

"Whoa. That must have been nuts. You guys are so nuts."

Penny receives a push notification and stops listening to the conversation. It's from Facebook. She hits the icon and waits for the app to open. She looks up at Ian as he chats and laughs. She turns her head sharply toward Jenn when Jenn emits a sharp chortle. Jenn looks at her, still chortling, and Penny gives her a wincing smile. She looks at her phone and reads a status update tagging Penny. Her sister's baby has stopped breathing and is being rushed to the hospital.

"Oh God."

"What is it, babe?" Ian asks, still laughing about something.

"I have to go call my sister. Jeanine is in the hospital." She climbs off of the bench and walks away with the phone to her ear.

"Uh-oh," says Jenn, "What's that all about?"

"Jeanine is her niece. A baby."

"Oh God. I hope she's okay. Poor baby."

"Who, Penny?"

Jenn snorts out a laugh. "Aw. Poor baby."

"She can be a baby."

"Oh, yeah, about the painkiller thing."

"Yeah. Like, I know what I'm doing. That and she always wants to have these, like, intense and uncomfortable conversations. It's like, lighten up, we're out at a bar, right?"

"Yeah, totally. It's like, yolo, dude. Hahaha. Yeah, you're fine. Getting fucked up is just a part of being a human. And with all the bad shit in the world we gotta get lit now and then. And we're still young, you know? We can quit when we're forty."

"Exactly. We don't have kids. I should be able to destroy my body the way I want to."

"And you can always get, like, a liver transplant or something."

"Exactly. And booze is so cheap now."

"I know, I love it. By the way, how's work?"

"Oh, I'm on leave until this thing heals. You know what really gets to me?"

"What?"

"The way she sits there on her phone. Like, you're a new person to get to know and she just ignores you basically?"

"She did give me a bad look. She seemed...antagonistic? Did I say that right?"

"See, what is that? I don't know. It's just like, I don't like rude people and I'm dating one? I don't know."

"Well, I mean...it's not like you're married. It's not like you have to be dating her."

"Right. Except we live together and it's such a pain in the ass to move. Especially now with these fucking crutches."

"So you do think about breaking up with her? There's a lot of girls I know who think you're hot. The whole mulatto thing. Sorry, can I say mulatto?"

"You can. No one else. I prefer to keep it quiet. I tell people I'm Greek."

Penny comes back and falls roughly into her seat. She picks up her drink and places the straw in her mouth. She is looking at her phone and sipping until the

drink is gone. She looks up at both of them and smiles quickly before turning her bug-eyed face to the phone.

“So?” Ian asks, incredulous, “Is she okay?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, what did she say?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, what do you know?”

“Um, I know my baby niece stopped breathing. I know she’s in the goddamned hospital.”

“Oh, the poor thing,” coos Jenn.

“Did she text you?” Ian asks.

“Facebook.”

“She Facebook messaged you?”

“She updated her status that she was rushing to the hospital because her baby had stopped breathing and she tagged me in it.”

“She updated her Facebook status? When, like, on the way to the hospital?”

“I don’t fucking know, Ian. Who the fuck cares about how the message was relayed? I’m just telling you what I know so far. I haven’t even met my niece and now she might die and that’s horrifying enough but my narcissistic sister is going to milk sympathy out of my family like we’re bred to feed her sympathy.”

Leigh approaches dressed business professional brown and heavily make-upped. Marshall comes up from behind and wraps his arms around her. Ian’s leg starts twitching when he sees Marshall. He feels good knowing they have some diversity at their table. He always feels some relief when Marshall’s around. Marshall is a head taller than Leigh, wearing a sideways red cap and a baggy t-shirt and jeans, grinning. Penny eyes him wearily and sees other people on the patio eyeing him. The middle-aged smoking woman glares at her book. Ian looks at Penny and gets angry, sensing her judgement and fear.

“Hey y’all! What’s up? Get off yo phones, we here to partay!” Leigh greets.

“Leigh!” Ian stands up and embraces her. “It’s been too long. Marshall, what’s up, my friend?” He holds his fist out to Marshall who dispassionately bumps it with his own.

Leigh responds, “I know, baby. I miss hanging out with you guys. Hi Jenn. Hi Penny! How are you?”

“Leigh!” Jenn cries as she stands and hugs her.

“Hi Leigh,” Penny says, “I’m freaking out. I just found out my niece is in the hospital.”

Ian lets out a sigh, says “It’s not all about you,” under his breath and Penny’s shades set on him.

“Oh my God,” Leigh decries, “That’s so fucked up. I’m so sorry, Penny. I didn’t even know you had a niece.”

“She’s a new baby.”

“Ohhhh.”

Leigh sits down on the bench next to Ian and messes with her hair. She looks back at Marshall and tickles a place on his jeans next to his crotch. Ian jumps up,



grabs a chair from a side table and sets it behind Marshall who raises his eyebrows and nods at Ian as a thank you. Leigh looks at everyone and smiles. Marshall sits quietly and lights a cigarette. A waitress comes around to take drink orders. Penny gets another one. Jenn orders a double. Leigh orders a double. Ian orders a double and orders a double for Marshall who is staring into space. The waitress tells them it's happy hour now so three for one. Everyone laughs quickly in mock shame. Marshall notices the middle-aged woman who remains reading and smoking.

"So, do we know anything else about the baby?" Leigh asks.

"Not yet," Penny says, not wanting to talk to a big group about this, wanting to leave but wanting to drink. She eyes Marshall who is grinning at her for some reason so she looks away. Does he know she knows about the murder? Has he heard? Is he secretly broiling inside, hating all whites?

"Ian," Leigh bubbles, "I heard about your ACL. Poor guy, how'd you do it?"

"Jenn, can you tell the tale for me? Penny, can I talk to you in private?"

"Excuse me?" Penny is off-guard, in her head, "No. Just talk to me here. What is it?"

Ian watches Jenn and Leigh crouch over their phones. Marshall watches closely the interaction between Penny and Ian, smoking and scratching chin stubble. He wonders if Marshall is stoned.

Jenn is looking at Facebook. Her ex looks happy.

Leigh is texting some friends to come rescue her from a "possible relationship fiasco."

Ian says quietly, "I just...maybe you should go home and try to call your sister. You know, like, maybe it's best you're not at a bar with all of this going on. Also, you haven't said hello to Marshall. Don't be rude."

"Fine, let's go. Hi, Marshall. I apologize, I just...I'm distracted."

Marshall shakes his head and shrugs.

"Well, I think I'm going to stay," Ian says.

"Oh. Yeah. Fine. I mean, you would."

"You want me to walk you out?"

Penny removes her sunglasses and Ian sees the grief in her swollen eyes. She's been crying. He hadn't noticed.

"I'm scared, Ian."

"I know. I'm sorry. Go home and call your parents. Don't try to hang out and socialize when you're having a family emergency, babe. You gotta take care of yourself right now."

"I didn't...I'm sorry to have ruined this. I'll go so everyone can chat and not feel guilty."

"It's not that, babe, come on."

"What do you mean it's not that? As soon as I leave it'll be like, who gives a shit about a pseudo-friend's dying niece? Let's talk about things that aren't sad and don't mean anything."

"No it won't. It won't be like that."

"You're full of shit, Ian!"

“Penny, hon,” Leigh says soothingly, “We love you, sweetie. Everyone here cares about you.”

“Why? Why do any of you care about me?”

“Because,” Ian says, irritated again, “You’re a human being. Jesus, you need to relax.”

Penny slides her bench back harshly and it tips back. Jenn falls into some dirt. The incident produces a patio-silencing clatter. Penny helps Jenn up, apologizing profusely.

“Penny, fucking sit down,” Ian says.

“Excuse me?”

“Sit down and relax. Breathe. Just...just fucking...I don’t know.”

The waitress brings out drinks. Ian passes three to Marshall.

“No, thanks, man. I don’t drink.”

“Really?” Ian asks, “Since when?”

“Not one drop. Ever. I smoke,” and he holds up the cigarette, “But I don’t drink. Makes brains retarded. Smoking just helps you die a little faster and I find it...pleasant.” He takes a drag and smiles, letting the smoke breathe out through his teeth.

“Baby, don’t say retarded,” Leigh says.

“It’s a word, baby.”

“I know, you’re right,” and Leigh kisses Marshall’s cheek.

“We’ve gotten drunk together,” Ian says to Marshall.

“No, man, we haven’t. I’ve seen your ass drunk plenty of times, in fact, every time I’ve seen you you’ve either been drunk or on your way there.”

“Bullshit,” retorts Ian.

“That’s why I always figured you for a retard, I guess. Haha. I’m kidding. I like you, man, I hope you find your way out. Shit’s a disease.”

No one says anything. Ian is blushing. It’s hard for other people to tell when he blushes but Penny can tell and she’s staring right at him or her stupid sunglasses are pointed toward him...as she pulls on strands of hair and frowns that frown. He really doesn’t like her frown. Why is he with her? She’s sad all of the time unless they’re drunk, or maybe he doesn’t notice how sad she is when he’s drunk. Bad stuff is always happening to her and she just sulks about it. Lighten up, Penny. Why live to be sad? And now she’s acting all racist. Marshall is not scary. Look at him. He’s quiet and he smiles. He listens. He judges but we all judge. Still. Do the quiet ones judge more?

Jenn sulks and swipes at her phone, looking at nothing, trying to look busy. Poor Ian. He already has an injury and now he’s being called a retard which is not a cool thing to call people. Sure, she used to call people retards when she was in grade school but she didn’t know any better and Marshall should know better as an adult. Who is Marshall to judge Ian? Marshall should be lucky to be hanging out with them. He should feel lucky he doesn’t live in a less progressive town where he might get shot walking down the street.

Leigh has never felt happier. She's already finished one double and asks her new man for a smoke. She kisses him and sits on his lap. She doesn't know why but she feels special today. She smiles at everyone. A good crew.

Marshall is sitting with a bunch of psychotic white people again. He wishes he was at home reading but Leigh was stressed and wanted him there. He makes her feel special. It's fine. It's safe. He won't get too bothered if he's surrounding himself with these white body shields. Not that that's come close to happening before but the fear has always been there, will always be there. The fear is bad. Hell, it's kind of fun watching these white people try to be especially nice to him, try to be extra not racist. He wishes Leigh had friends who he could relate to. Look at them, crouched over their phones, avoiding each other. Avoiding him. Avoiding. He feels frustrated.

"Anybody read anything good lately?" Marshall asks.

All of these heads pop up, look at him, all at once. He wants to go home and read. And then the moans begin:

"Umm..."

"Hmm..."

"Well...uhh...not good really."

"Just the news."

"Oh?" he asks a blushing Penny, grinning, "Anything interesting in the news?" He likes Penny. She tries to get it.

"Yeah. More shootings."

"Oh yeah? Who's shooting who?"

"Individuals are shooting other individuals."

"Individuals?"

Ian, shaking his head and wincing at his girlfriend, says, "A white guy killed a black guy in Texas. A group of white dudes killed some white girl somewhere else. She freaks out about this shit. It drives her up the fucking wall."

Marshall says, "It doesn't bother you, Ian?"

"Yeah, it bothers me like any death outside of my community. Not that much. Because...I don't know them and I don't live near them and I don't...know them. Sorry."

"What are you apologizing for?" Jenn asks, "What are we supposed to do about that shit?"

Penny says, "I think we should talk about it. Understand it. Fix it. We can't fix it if we don't talk about it. I'm so sick of avoiding everything. I feel like all we do is avoid and make excuses. Nothing's real. Nothing's real anymore. Bury your head in your phone, it's the same as burying it in the sand. We might as well be fucking dead already. We're all fucking retarded."

She is flush and her heart is beating because she thinks she just let something out. She just doesn't like this Jenn girl agreeing with everything Ian says. She's glad Jenn fell earlier. She looks at Jenn who is sucking down a drink, avoiding Penny's gaze or having to say anything by drinking.

Marshall watches them drink. He takes a drag and smiles. He pats Leigh on the butt and she gets up with a squeal. He stands and walks over to the older

woman reading and smoking a few tables away. He sits across from her, lights a cigarette and asks her what she's reading.