

Bright Black

Open your eyes. Time doesn't exist. The cold metal of the trigger tight in your grip, your face covered is covered in sweat and blushing from the gawking presence of God and Satan themselves. Allow your vision to adjust from its blurry state. Once again, become acclimated to the darkness. Look around at the scene: drawn blinds with light breaking through the cracks to cast your broken shadow on the floor; a broken lamp lying on the ground, the shade dented and on one side of the room, the shattered bulb on the other side cooling. The room is quiet and the air tastes of unsettled dust. Feel your muscles returning to their previous tense state, vibrating to make you shiver—one second of passing cold, and then you'll return to normal. Look up.

Stare straight ahead at the mirror on the dresser. Recognize yourself on your bed. Disheveled, with dilated pupils and widened whiteness tinged with tears and teeming with vessels. Note one of two possibilities:

1) You truly are naked except for a dirty pair of boxers covered with hearts; tears streak across your paling thighs.

2) You are encompassed in a black smeared suit and dressed for your own funeral.

Your hand shakes, forcing you to remove your clench from the trigger and onto the grip. Wave it around, tilting your head upward to sob. Feel the ocean in your head trickle into your throat and burst. Gag. Wipe your mouth so that the barrel of the gun touches your eye, sending tears to meet the bullets. Hunch over the side of the bed, and let the gun ebb from your hand. Hear nothing except your own breathing. Somehow, your fate is on the ground. Taste two words on your tongue: sweet, bitter, salty.

Take a moment. Breathe. Say them:

Maybe tomorrow.

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Seawater permeates the nostrils. You lay on the beach, chest heaving up and down. A woman, Lorelei, lays beside you, motionless in her star set gaze toward the moon. Her hair becomes silver, humbling in the darkness. Gold glints around her left ring finger, flashing a lighthouse warning to those who might approach. Your finger bears a matching promise, but it does not glisten. Graffiti in the sand that before read “hey god” dissolved into a lesser “her 8mo.” Look to the ocean and believe the world is round. Perhaps you’re right. Perhaps you are deceived. The tide creeps in until it once again ascends off the earth to wash your feet. Farther up the shoreline, a dark silhouette flows from the water. Get up and start walking towards it while Lorelei rises to trail behind you. Take no notice.

Collect seashells on the way down the beach, keeping your eye on the silhouette. Press the shells into Lorelei’s hands as she says “Thank you” and throws them aside. Scowl. Attempt to cram the seashells down her throat and in her eye sockets. She will protest. Drop the shells and let it go.

Approach the silhouette. As you get closer, understand that it is a shark. A Great White. Try to drag it ashore. You. Must. Struggle. Lorena will try to stop you; try anyway. Cheer at your success. Kick the shark to show your dominance. The moon is now covered by clouds and the beach is dark. No one else is here. Kick sand in the shark’s face. Flinch as it flails. Work up some courage. Lay beside it. Feel the tide flow back down into the ocean, dragging sand across

your back and a crab onto your palm. Hear a scream of love that forms as high-pitched protestation. Look down to see the shark gone. Turn to see Lorelei and find nothing. She's gone.

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Close your eyes. Your brain and heart are cigarettes flickering smoke. Fixate the center of your mind on the circle of light—that eye of God implanted in the middle of your being. Transcend the shifting yellow waves and ride them into surrealism. There is no escape. Your peripherals grey. Feel the heady effect of your last drink-sugary and pungent. It's been half an hour. Perhaps more; maybe less? It doesn't really matter-you don't have more saltwater Schnapps or gilded memory martinis. Not even green margaritas. Let dizziness overtake you. Spin—become a whirlpool and foam at the mind.

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Touch the walls. Slippery stalagmites lined with white guano trace the outlines of a circular chamber. Yell these words in ritualistic blasphemy: Liar, Serenity, Fuck. Hear the reverberations. Taste the echoes on your tongue. This will let you know how big the room is—small. Scour the inside of the chamber for an escape route, avoiding the holes in the ground. Find nothing. Listen to the bats screeching and find the true meaning of words. Enjoy the damp earth; drink up the wetness while mist pricks your skin. Then complain, but don't move. Taste the hunger that you feel. You have nothing to satiate your appetite.

Hear water at the bottom of a hole. Know that it's the ocean. The echoes distract you and drown out the precise location of the escape hole. Wander in confusion for a while, making clicking noises. Stop. Shake your head and remember the definition of futility. Rub your head

soothingly. Skulk and try to figure out which one it is. Fail. Cry. Dry the tears by wiping your face with guano hands. Give up thinking. Pick a hole at random. Jump in headfirst. Pray.

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Close your eyes and observe the black rainbow of memory. Observe how the light that was drafting through the window blinds only moments before flits in fits of turquoise and silver. Every few seconds, your vision goes black and then glitters like the ocean only to revert to the deeper depths of darkness. Become acclimated to this state of being and feel your breathing idle. See the tiny circles as they form infinite diagonals, ever changing their size and length. This is the television static of your life. Hit yourself in the head to clear it, wince slightly from the hardness of metal. This is what guilt looks like: rainbow fingerprints and darkness meant to confuse.

Sense your muscles unclenching from their death grips that are currently holding you to reality. Allow this ocean state of mind to take you away. Reality is not fixed to a single point.

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Smell the smoke, thick and weaving a web of entrapment. Red and white light glides through the air, unable to penetrate the mass of filtered cigarettes. There are men cheering, you among them. Russet velvet booths line a circular room with a circus of women: some fat with piercings, some skinny with purple and green hair. Some with combinations of these women's features and rock-shaped noses rested on mossy thin lips. Watch them as they jump and flip, spinning on euphemistic poles. Choose a booth you like, a fresh drink in your hand. Wonder how you got here. Realize that you forgot. Shrug. Take a swig of vodka and brandy mixed in a peach-lime daiquiri. Throw one hundred dollars, then a few pennies, onto the girl nearest you. She is

short with hair the color of blended strawberries and a metal ladybug flying across her stomach. Don't touch. Watch as she moves outward from the smoke currents, laughs in your face with tears streaming down hers, then disappears and drowns.

A brunette woman across from you opens her pink purse, pulls out a dollar and smiles at you. She winks, mouths something to you-Bertram-walks across the room to a gentleman in a grey business suit, grabs his green tie and throws the dollar on him. Her clothes change from a white dress with lily patterns to a single pair of amethyst underwear, tight around her skin. You start to choke, but not from the smoke in the air. The strip-club announcer wails over the intercom, "Now, for your entertainment, Horned Angel proudly presents Lorelei!" Feel your heart contort in the same way that her body does. Strip your mind to the alcohol. Watch her dance until your eyes burn (also not from the smoke) and you no longer recognize her. The men that you were cheering with turn to her and cheer louder like Romans at the coliseum as a lion is finally killed. Her mouth twists in a circle and her smile becomes an image of pursed lips and wetted eyelashes. You take another drink. Everything goes black.

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Your head is like bagged amber sand. These crystals have leaked out of your eyes for nine months now, and eighteen years, every morning that you have woken up. Your heart is their tiny crunch in your mouth and your brain is sand on the banks of your ear canals. Let the sand and the heaviness build up into castles with spiraling staircases and guillotines and hanging yards.

Spit out the kernels. Now you know.