

Runway

Aaron is now sitting, bony asscheeks to sand on a bright, bright New Jersey beach, the water taking the bulk of the sun's luminary force and becomes a white mirror, interrupted only by brief flits of blue waves gliding at non-mirrored vectors. He didn't go straight from leather black cushion to granulated camel sand seat that's really not too soft, but after paying the twenty bucks (twenty bucks!) to a glisteningly tan alpha just to occupy space, his BMW he means, in the parking lot which was surrounded by used car dealership type blue, red, and white pennants strung around on string, he first went to a small little shop on a short beach boardwalk running perpendicular to the beach, looking for some swimwear. He has his feet tucked in as an 'x' under his knees. He grates his toes against each other as best he can to get as many sand grains as possible off and back into the beach where they belong. At first, Aaron feigns like he's stretching his back to look down the long stretching yellow-white property of beach, upon which there are trunked and bikini'ed bodies littered in a way that reminds him of Where's Waldo books. Upon each rotation of his head, he begins picking up further details and cognitively marks bikinis, first differentiating from trunked blurbs of skin, and then finds their covered butts in red or black or white nylon, and the strings tying tops into place over great bulbous and luscious breasts. He's appreciate, he thinks, a softer lighting. The sharp grains of sand individually spark in the light.

He'd browsed the little shop named Surf Shack, though the only boarders he'd seen all wore full wetsuits and there were non here on the shelves, passing through either brutally over-saturated palm lined horizons of sunsets or sunrises, pukingly pink usually, and nuclear green, and let's not even consider the ones a violently off-putting purple, or the absolutely basic bland blue, white, and red trunks the same shade as the pennants outside gently swaying like vultures around his BMW. The former variety were all labeled "boardshorts" meaning they fit baggy, probably covering the tops of his calves which Aaron always thought made one look classless and poor, and the latter all appeared as though they'd fit like a dad's swimtrunks who plays with his kids at the local Y. No thanks. He'd been foolishly hoping for a J. Crew-esque thigh-level striped blue trunk that made his gaunt stomach look like James Bond's from the right angle. He wears no shirt on the beach, hoping his skinniness comes off more like toned, and at least he isn't flabby. On his lower half are the navy dad-fitting trunks. He'd arrived at the end of the shelves realizing there was no third, upscale, desirable option here at the Surf Shack, so he selected a pair of blue ones in S and M, and headed for an open changing stall to try them on. When he closed it the meal hinges squeaked dissonantly and sharply.

At this point, Laurel Finnegan's flight began its initial descent, its rounded nose pointing downward and forward toward the Atlantic. In the swirling lowering descent that follows, Laurel holds Kyle's hand a bit more forcefully as her stomach feels like merry-go-round spinning and creaking, swiveling minutely up and down on a bent axis. She prays not to live, but to be comforted. Kyle squeezes her back and grins down at her, which she has to say she absolutely hates. The creaking frequency of innards accelerates. The nose is pointed to the land, and the cabin levels off mostly. She hears the heavy hum of the landing gear engaging.

The changing stall was one of a row of three changing stalls. There wasn't much room for movement of any kind. The door began at the floor and continued over his head to what he would guess was 6'1" high. Each of the four interior walls of the changing stall was fitted with a crystal clear mirror, and at their corners a curved piece of mirror seamlessly fitted to continue the

mirror optics through the entire field of vision. Aaron had stood there with the two blue swim trunks in his hands, mostly still and perplexed. Aaron feels like it's a little off topic, for him to be watching the girls and finding their most alluring traits, here at the beach, now as stops and starts digging his fingers into the sand like he did as a child. When he'd recovered from the adrenaline of the reckless exiting imbroglio, he's slid his sweaty hands around the leather steering wheel and felt guilt and overwhelmingly relaxed. He squinted out across the water and then looked back down, and did that back and forth for a time. He'd been transfixed on his mirror image, his multiple mirror images in the changing stall. On all sides surrounded so that raising his leg to pull off the leg of his tweed pants seemed to Aaron, as he stood motionless, untenable.

Only after a while he can't help but extend his vision down either side of the beach. It's actually sometimes unpleasant though and stomach tossing, in the limp-fish queasy way you'd get from trying to count the pores on stelliform panelling, or each individual ink dot of a pointillism piece with no whole to speak of, except for that when he lands on an asscheek taking the sun's glow, a profoundly round and supple asscheek, the limp-fish queasy effect is at once lost, but when he glances away it resumes. It's something about trying to view all the bodies in total. It's like when he finds one delicious breast to salivate over, picture of pin-up beauties and Marolyn Monroe especially come to mind, and then from the wide angle, it's like a warehouse or frat-house orgy caught on a handheld device and uploaded to redtube. At least here the males, alphas and betas and omegas all of them have all but vacated the beach for a swim in shark infested waters, meaning: they are ominously and appreciatively missing, all but. In the mirror, his view had made a sort of slow zoom of a steady trolley inside the mirrored stall wall. The floor was white, producing the only color in the background of the slowly minimizing frame. He'd had a sneaking hopeful suspicion that there was meaning in life and it wasn't hiding under a surface. He was aware of each four depictions of his body, though not all were fully in sight. They appeared like displays, displays in which his self, his wills and desires all resides. Aaron takes longer, extended looks into the women, some laying on their stomachs and their asses in the air, or seated with their knees up and their arms wrapped over, or pinning their elbows into the sand and hanging their head and letting their hair fall without touching the sand, or standing like a soldier at attention to the sun, only horizontally, or with their hip jaunted back into the sand and their locked elbow holding a book up before their faces, the pages of the books buoyantly bending, then flapping wings when the wind picks up but never taking flight. A volleyball bounces up and down over shadows, animated on its own, looping up and down above the motionless women. Seagulls circle overhead, neither rising or descending. Just circling. The clouds are milky white and churned into the edge of the royal blue sky. The wind gently blows Aaron's hair back for him. The engine of a plane's buzzing behind him. On all sides, the women appear posed like rows of mannequins, tan skin wonderfully round and full as if it were high-pressure inflated. Aaron had a theory that the skimpier dressed the girl, the lower self esteem she has. He had always felt he had low self-worth. His PUA had told him it was more than a self-fucking-fulfilling prophesy. It was truth. Someone nearby is cooking Vienna sausages and vegetables, the kind of alluring rankness of onions cooking, sweet and smoky, and green peppers, and maybe the sticky smell of a pineapple mixed in there, and with the general murmurs of the beach, it seems like a crowded marketplace. When Aaron had stood in front of the mirror not caring of how long he was doing so, and if the alpha in the douche tank top with a football

insignia and the sides slit down to his hips behind the counter who was probably still rotating his muscles under the light, then who cared? he had lost all self doubt that had crippled him before. It was present, on its surface and looming, the vital thing of life. The smells are rushing high octane intensity now. The fire spits and coals pops inside it's black cauldron. Smoke escapes and he can smell its deep essence even as it wafts away, all the time overpowered by the smell of meat and vegetables, now intense in the way that you know they are dripping juices, the sausage's spurting out of its thin casing. The theory is why would they, the more revealing, provocatively dressed girls have to show more skin for male attention if they were content with their own estimation of their selves, instead of relying on others... Not that Aaron so much minds taking in their ideally rounded parts with more than an alert eye. Now, more warranted a heavy Bond-like stare...but to the point that why would any man respect her if that's how she respected her herself, how she regarded her own self worth? Plus, something about the way it puts it all out there, leaves nothing up to the imagination, as the saying goes. And still, Aaron is drawn in, wishing he could rip off synthetic cotton and nylon and tear spaghetti-thin straps and take in the pink or dark and rosy nipples and the goose-pimpled butts and feel the fatty, soft, and exhilarating substances he desires and therefore knows are just underneath, on the other side of that reality. In the mirror, he had suspended his knees just high enough to slide his pants off without touching the mirrored stall walls on any side, almost like they fit around him. He took off his shirt over his head and ran his hand through his hair. He slid his boxers to the floor. He looked on, not smiling, nor solemn, but solely focused, emotionlessly focused.

It's the same emotionlessly focused expression resting in his face, later, when Aaron is back in his BMW cockpit, painted black and waxed weekly, every Wednesday of every week to be precise, bent forward on a road straight and seemingly unaware of the jutting dangerously close coast, and bent on New York, New York.

All of which he'd considered caput and done with back at the beach when he'd first seen a girl emerge from the ocean with the board beside her twice the size of her, appearing as one of the rarities of the female species, a kind of unicorn: a woman who can be fully formed from chin to limb to limb to toes and everywhere in between, and still be diminutive. For a second, the ocean was a solid white sheet, as if the sun's wattage had marvelously increased of the ocean had just flattened completely. From the safety at his keyboard and behind the screen, Aaron had ridiculed terms like "Snowflake," and also NAGALT, and but here she was. He made up a new acronym on the spot: TGWD: this girl was different. He couldn't even tell what color her hair was because it was wet in the way it could have been just easily a darkened blonde, or simply brunette, or even, though not probably, black hair just sparkling light in the sun's forceful shine. The wind had grown and now was so hard he could hear the pennants in the parking lot whipping at their own shapes, twisting, and folding on on themselves. Snowflake didn't mean any girl could be one, 'cause all snowflakes are different, funny enough. It meant that this one really was different and all the others are just cookie-cutters, and users across all sorts of Prosopon apps depicted Snowflakes, real or myth, as girls that weren't going to ride any carousel or get 'gina tingles and leave you for an alpha after collecting half your money in the divorce hearings, but who genuinely saw your life as important, like important in categorically different sort of way. She had an angelic aura surrounding her from the very first moment, and not just because he thought that she was saving his life.

Later, on the Brooklyn Bridge, as he centered Manhattan's beckoning sepia-golden glass skyscrapers that shone in the frame of his front windshield, the circular tube vision pulling him onward pulsed between the idea there was still just something just beyond vision, and the feeling of a fixed point destination. In the mirror, he'd arrived at one of his two pupils, like it was the vanishing point of everything. He felt a fullness for once in his life; not that the fullness was there, but that it was possible.

"Oh yeah, it was great of course. Really a terrific night. Ha-ha-ha what am I saying, it was fucking amazing. Pleasurable? Oh of course. It was nerve-wracking too, of course. I mean, you guys know how long I've been waiting for this. Literally all of my life. I've always felt like well, like a uh illegal alien--no, second class citizen. That's what I meant, ha-ha-ha. Don't know how I mixed them up, ha-ha-ha...I came so fast, ha-ha-ha...I mean, you guys did too your first times I bet, right? Yeah? Yeah. So don't give me shit...What? Yeah, quite a release. Quite. Really, it was finally putting it in her that was the release. Like I'd finally exhaled for the first time in all my life. But of course, we didn't stop there that night, no matter how short it was, she had to come back for more," the Kid says with a hooked and gruff eyebrow, as he leans his head into the pot of the conversation. Some more laughter from his friends. The Kid, as they call him, had failed, near the beginning of his story, to say he'd been coached in the arts of persuasion by a PUA out in lower LA. But a padewon at 30 years old, who can blame the Kid, right? "Yeah, we went at it again. I grabbed her hips like a jackhammer and I went bah-bah-bah! And then later, we went doggy style and I grabbed her by the ass and, bah-bah-bah!" His friends had rapid-fire clack of laughs like the Kid: ha-ha-ha.

The wind had slowly picked up and in the warmth of the beach, it'd gone unnoticed as it animated the beach-goers hair over their heads. Aaron only noted it when, in the parking lot, the metal clips clanged to the steal poles that held the stringed up pennants to the chain-link fence. The pennants rippled in the wind and sounded like were tearing with the kind of ripping of a jet rumbling in a distant vector of the sky. Then, they thumped like the window in or outside the car on the drive, preceding and following. They turned in on their shapes. One blue pennant was so wrapped together with its darker flip-side that it became a singular tube, manipulated to turn in on itself as a circle.

Laurel Finnegan assumes a relaxed position at the podium. There already is a white spotlight cutting through the dimly lit and crowded hall. It's hot, and she can feel the difference from her face and collarbone where it is lit, and its rounded edge at the sternum where it is unlit. She can hear the breath in the room. They all seem like exhales to her. She knows better than to clear her throat, and so she begins:

"Who knows if Louis Réard imagined that exposing the small hole, the tied-off absence of umbilical chord, the navel as a crater after an explosion. He did expect its reaction would be nuclear, though, and so he named it... 'the bikini,' after Bikini Atoll, the location of an atomic test site in France. And from this bomb having fell, and landed, we are all now living in its fallout. It might be hard to conceive now, but beaches weren't always the spectacle of skin that you see today. Women wore one pieces, or if they were two pieces, then they revealed little, and always covered the belly button. Before that, before two pieces, and bikinis, and micro-bikinis, there were bathing costumes and women rode a bath machine to bathe in ocean's water. Oh, what's that? What's a bath machine? You've never ridden one to the water on your trip to the beach?"

She pauses for laughter, and she receives it: ha-ha-ha. “The bath machinery, well, there wasn’t much machinery going on...it was just a wooden shack on wheels and was drawn by horses or strong men past the male bathers, down the extended portion of the beach and straight to the water so a woman could go in and out without being seen. This was customary before the turn of century before Réard changed beachwear and fashion, traditional standards and sexuality in one fell snip. Actually several, to be fair. Who? Who would ever wear such a thing, who? One reviewer at the time said it quote revealed everything about a girl except for her mother’s maiden name. But some girl’s did, but the beaches at that time were equipped with guards with rulers to measure the length of their suits and kicked out from the beach any offenders. But then the 60’s happened, and what was once a scandalous thing that only the most licentious of girls would wear, now was popularly accepted. Female sexuality was considered an empowerment and the bikini was its liberating symbol of power. It was hailed as the new power suit. But was it really the power of women, or the power of fashion, and the manipulation of marketing that deepened Réard’s impact? There are many arguments against the bikini as a power suit, but perhaps the strongest comes not from crime, or customs, or religion, but something upon which we can all agree: Psychology. The research evidences that when shown scantily clad women, the region of the brain associated with tools, for example the place where screwdrivers and hammers also light up, was what lit up, and not in the medial pre-frontal cortex, which is associated with pondering a person’s thoughts, feelings, and intentions. The research says quote it’s as if they’re reacting to these women as if they’re not fully human, as if they’re responding to objects, not people. Their thoughts turn to first person action verbs like I push, I grab, I handle. But with *modestly* dressed women it’s more likely that the woman will be thought in third person verbs, she pushes, she grabs, she handles. In short, the bikini makes girls objects to be used instead of persons with whom to connect. The bikini shuts down the man’s ability to see her as a person. The power of the bikini is a farce. It limits female autonomy. She loses control of how people see her, and she is not taken seriously. Power, though, is attainable at the beach, through dressing modestly. You can perceive the way people perceive you.”

The lights go down, and the circle around her face fades a bit, and in this darkness, only the yellow lights along runway really shine. The floor of the runway is glass and its glistening in neon black, like how a paved street looks after its just rained.

Her wetsuit was jet black. It’s zipper and velcro collar choked up high at the very top of the neck like the only thing uncovered was her face. She plodded tortured steps in the deep wet sand, a motion slowed further by the fact the tide was pulling at the same time so that the water sloshed aggressively. She stomped through like she’d barely make it. The last draw of the inward suction rinsed the tops of her feet. Aaron slowly traced with his eyes her body lines from the round yet firm cheek than gracefully glided down her jaw to the jet black collarbones, their oblong shapes protruding with white triangles of glint accentuating either side. The wetsuit was so tight it actually strapped down her breasts like a tape job, which typically would have discouraged Aaron. The very tips of her hips pointed upward and out of the rectangular body shape, but the black coloring produced no relief in dimension or depth. As she strode, her groin region was covered by an expanse of wetsuit material marking its true form indiscernible. And despite the hidden breasts and the indiscernible shape, Aaron’s eyes lingered at the dark mouth of

the cave that was her shape and felt as though from here he was filling her up. And that it somehow lingered right back at him.

“Inspired by this idea, I set out to create a modern line of swimwear...” the first model walk on stage in a one piece in polka dots and protruding past the ‘o’ of her pelvic bone, a couple inches of nylon stretched onto her upper thigh whose long and thin but defined muscle flexed powerfully, “that wouldn’t make women feel like they were putting it all out there to bare...” and as the woman pivots, and turns, another woman struts on stage. Her hair is blonde and a quirky spout of gathered hair flops off to the right side, bouncing along as she walks, step by clicking step. She wears circle-lensed sunglasses with red rims. She wears bright red lipstick, “I wanted to make fashionable pieces for a woman with a...natural sense of modesty about her, remaining intact, and stripped away by today’s culture...” A third model has her black hair up in a bun, and her cheeks are speckled with dark freckles. She walks in an assurance of capability and in light blue suit with flaps of shoulder coverings, and only a thin sliver of skin showing, just above her belly button.

The girl in the all black wet suit tossed her head, and the hair, wrung and twirled together in indecipherably colored wet ringlets, shook and bounced. Aaron sat hunched over, though neither consciously nor unconsciously hiding the partial stiffie he popped, and focused in the details within his field of vision, so that even as she took meager steps at first, she loomed inside his frame. The water chopped a higher clip with the wind growing and lowering atmospherically onto the ocean’s surface, and bolts of blue matte water glanced and made transient patchworks checkered with the white mirror surface. Her wet suit too glistened, and then alternated white and black with each step. With his focus, it was like a flickering light. Light or dark, she was completely covered, and still a piece, a marginal piece of Aaron ogled what he knew was under that wet suit, the erect nipples that he would one day suck, and the hips that he would hold as they made love, and where he’d put his head at night when a man’s existential concerns seem to double.

Aaron knew then that he would get up from the crater in the sand he’d made without at all looking clumsy or godforbid childish and he would approach this girl in the wetsuit, and when he’d arrive, he’d know what to say so that now as he sat in confidence even with his unawareness, and afterwards, she would save him. She would save him from what he felt he had to do. As the girls in modest bikinis strut on stage, Aaron waits in the wings, strapped and ready to go. Behind the black cloth, he sees the shadow of figures that look like cranes as they put their bony arms out onto other sharp angled shoulders for support, tightening straps and clasps of their footwear, then replacing the lifted foot with the other, doing it again.

She encompassed his focus finally, now trotting up through the firmer sand, and Aaron was lost in that blackness that could have been her upper chest, or her breast, her stomach, or her neck. Aaron thought, I will take her as mine. I take her as my wife. In the mirror, he was pulled inward, even having met it, his destination, in the vanishing point of his pupil where nothing vanished but concentrated into absolute meaning.

He adjusts the strap of his semiautomatic and takes a deep breath. Aaron sees the model in a polka-dotted one piece and blonde hair and make up like Maralyn Monroe style make-up as she’s about to reach the end of the runway. She did so, popped her hip, and as she pivoted, Aaron walked out from behind the wings. With his semiautomatic held firm at around his chest, Aaron

took steps, bold and true and ordained since birth, down the runway. The photo-flashes flickered on his face. He looked straight ahead as the one piece polka dots passed by on his right side. At the end of the glassy runway, he stopped and stared off beyond the gathered crowd...

He was just about to get up and talk to her, he really was, before something struck him, something he could only later describe as his first and only truly transcendent experience of his life. The vision and reality coming together, not in existence, but in an alignment of action. If he, Aaron, were to stand up out of the sand and go to his snowflake and act as the natural he truly was about to, he would betray the vision. And nothing would ever change. He imagined a red eye in the middle of his forehead that straightened him out, and despite all her glory and perfection, Aaron without hesitation turned from her and walked the opposite direction to the parking lot.

Did Laurel specifically choose to ignore the point in her prized psychological study that explained that the severity of the tool imagery and brain activity, and first person action verbs were all varied highly depending on the male individual's pre-existing view of females, to the point that those with the healthiest perspectives did not shut down their faculties in perceiving them as humans with their own personal thoughts? And did Aaron have the safety on? Of course he did. Why would he, with ideological compatriots such as these, believing the autonomy and sentience of a woman is not proven unless inside the eye of the beholder, and not she?

...and pivot, Aaron turns along the runway. His phantasmagoric shadow on the wall echoes bright with each snap of the camera flash. A girl in an all bright red one piece passes by on his right. Her brunette hair is curled and pinned up along her head on one side, very old fashioned. The runway was wide, wide enough to catch his whole reflection, upside-down and touching at the souls of his shoes.

The church is set up like an octagon, and the rows of filled chairs of men and woman dressed up in contemporary white culture clothing, many of the women with burnt orange scarves with tassels dangling, and the men with striped oxfords and chinos of dark brown, and blue and tan. There is the sharp smell of perfume and cologne mixing, not unpleasant but almost always overwhelming, despite the vents at each octagonal angled wall blowing out puffs of smoke-like vapors to condition and cleanse the air. On stage, Pastor Dave's face is large and animated as he paces around the circular stage and podium, empty steps ascending up to it that will later be filled by today's altar call.

"And it *feels* like we almost have it sometimes. Like we're about to touch God, and stay in presence forever. But what happens? Life, especially the way modernity is set up, tears at our precious time we have to be quiet, and just be with God, and enjoy him...What do we do? We turn God, the infinite being of all the universe, into a task. A checklist to check off of our daily to do list. A literal box. You've heard people how they always tell you to not put God in a box, well I'm telling you, most of the time, it's a time thing, it's a check box. To ex it or not to ex it and then you can just go on your day," his voice at this point both grows and becomes breathier, and he stands up straighter. "But the Kingdom of God is here!" Then, he slumps. Then, turns slightly. "And not yet. Like in Luke, we saw Jesus saying the Kingdom of God is here! It's accessible!..." then quieting again, "and yet, there is so much work still to be done in preparing the world for His return." Now, he breaks his voice intentionally, and his volume steadily rises, "Because we as people have a natural desire for God, and he keeps bringing us back to him. And if we don't spend that time with God, seeing his face, enjoying his character, then we feel its absence. But

humanity is fallen, and society pushes distractions on us like, what am I going to do to be happy? How am I going to pay the rent? Who am I going to spend the rest of my life with? What shirt am I going to wear to look cool, to attract that young man, or that young woman? And God is shouting No, no, no! My son, my daughter. Just be here with me. It's like the presence of God is always right there...and at the same time, always beyond reach. C.S. Lewis said something and like usual it cuts to the core of the matter. All of humanity's overwhelming longing, almost like nostalgia for memories that underneath their surface, are joy in their purest, and this, what he calls, 'inconsolable longing for we know not what,' proves in its absence the fulfillment of such a desire. The fact that no amount of wealth, or success, or drugs, or even love can fill. Something beyond this life. You can search around the world and never find something that will satisfy you. Or if it does, it will certainly fail to hold your interest. I see this in marriages all the time. Men and women devote their lives to each other, hoping their romance will give them the purpose they look for. But people, even your beautiful wife, or your handsome husband, are only human," he stops and breaths precisely. He speaks choppy, so matter of fact, in closing: "Only God provides our lives with purpose. Only service to him and enjoyment of his character will give you the richness to life. Let's pray."

At the end of his prayer, Pastor Dave says, with his eyes firmly closed, "If you died today, do you know you would go to heaven? Please join me at the altar and dedicate your life to Christ."

In the street, Aaron stands with his legs spread apart, and underneath his black leather jacket he unclicks the safety of his semiautomatic. His eyes are emotionlessly pursuing a focus, pulling him into a single pixel of reality. Though his steps will not be straight, he knows he will be on the right path the entire time. He can already feel the red third eye burning into his forehead. He hopes he will look good in the end. The air is circulating gently, and again, blowing his hair into place.

The church lobby is empty of people during the service. There's a tv in the corner on mute. There are a few cafe styled tables, the rings of coffee cups still shining. Outside, there's the gentlest of rumbles from some cars exiting off the winding ramp. In the static of the television, above the harmless buzz of the digital screen, the news relays the visuals of somethings somewhere else, less innocuous certainly, popping.