

What about my life's work?

I walk right through my front door, shaky like a wet dog, peel off my raincoat and head for the credenza where I keep the emergency vase. It has a scene on it, a bird snatching a fish out of water. I stick my hand in there and grab a few Xanax, which I chew to a paste. It's nasty, but I need it to work quickly.

I take drugs. Good times or bad, it's all the same to me. It's nice to be out of the rain but before I can get settled – before the pills kick in – the phone rings.

“Hey man isn't that your car on TV?” I was just with Lee at the bar a few hours ago. I'm surprised by what he's saying, but also not at all.

“Uh. Plenty of people drive Green Mercedes SUVs,” I say, and my eyes water a little.

“I don't know, man. You were pretty drunk when you left.”

I feel claustrophobic, so I kick off my snakeskins and jimmy off my socks, laying my feet on the soft white plush of the carpet. This always makes me feel like a kid. “We were celebrating. A new gig. You were drinking, too.”

“So you did it?”

I don't answer right away. The Xanax washes my insides in a warm bath. I can smell the rain outside. I have that familiar heavy-headed feeling. Looking around, I notice a crooked picture on the wall. It's from a few years back, a photo of me playing guitar at a talent show at a biker bar. I can still remember the way they looked at me, like ‘this guy is going places.’ I get up to fix it, and, cradling the phone with my shoulder, use the bottom of my dragon print shirt to wipe it off. I love Paulina but I wish she would actually clean up sometimes.

“Dude,” Lee asks again. “Did you do it?”

I don't want to answer him. I pace the living room, following the pictures on the walls, all of me, all from the past. There's me at twelve, blown out hair and my first guitar, an Ibanez. There's me at my first gig, with my first band, holding a bottle of Jack. And there's me and Dad. RIP, pops. Next to the TV, there's a nice wooden case with my collection of wrestling action figures, still in their packaging. Hulk Hogan looks angry, or maybe it's just my mood. They're all scowling at me. How did I not notice that before? They seem like intruders, and I'm buzzed, but also scared, because who wouldn't be at a time like this?

“No,” I say.

“Oh, man, can you imagine running over two people and not stopping?” I hear noises in the background, a baby laughing.

“I can't, actually,” I say. And it's the truth. Or at least the truth I believe in this moment. Who can ever say anything with 100 percent certainty anyway? “If I was driving home in the rain,” I continue, “heavy rain, by the way, so much rain that I could barely see, and then I heard a loud thump on my car, and I looked in the rear view mirror and saw two people on the ground, bodies twisted in ways that human bodies shouldn't twist, of course I'd stop. I'm a good person. That's who I am. I don't care what you do in life, you have to stop.”

“So you didn't?” He's persistent. I need something stronger. “Yet you know it was two people?”

“Whatever, Lee. I'd stop, and I'd get out,” I say, pacing. I feel like I'm about to fall over. I tip some white powder out on a silver platter on the wet bar, next to the crystal decanter with a stylized “J” on it. My father got that for me when I turned 35. A decade ago. “I'm not a

monster,” I say, and I take the white powder into my face. When I lift up my head, edges are sharp again. Thank God.

“No one’s calling you a monster,” Lee says. “But, I mean. Those people. Holy shit.”

Easy for Lee to say. He’s Mr. Honesty, always does the right thing. He had a wild night with a prostitute on his 40th birthday, which I financed, by the way. She got pregnant and showed up at his door. The fucking guy married her. “I gotta do the right thing,” he said.

I’m at the mirror, tousling my blond bangs, which are cut on the diagonal. Making sure they fall over my eyes in the right way. Making sure they look intriguing.

“What are you saying, man? Because that really looks like your car.”

“I’m telling you a story. An *if* story. As in, if that happened, I would sprint to the spot. I’d yell for someone to call 911. I’d cradle the man, or woman, and talk to them, give them life affirming motivational aphorisms. Like, ‘don’t give up. Stay with me.’ I’d give CPR if I had to.”

“Do you even know CPR?”

“It can’t be that hard. Anyway, my point is, if I did something like that, I wouldn’t run.”

“Good,” he says. “Still looks like your car. Shit. The baby is crying, gotta go. I hope you have a good lawyer.” I resist the urge to tell him to go fuck himself. Before I can put the phone down it rings again.

“This is Jeffy.” I walk into the bedroom and collapse on my big bed. My comforter is thick down, very expensive. It’s still raining. The oak outside my window is leaking and dripping, like it’s praying.

“Jeffrey, cut the shit,” Mark says. He’s our family lawyer. He’s using that condescending tone he used when I was a kid. He was there when I was born, shit, 45 years ago? Whatever – he’s always been old. He handles all the family business, including my trust fund.

“You need to come down here,” he says.

“Can’t we talk now?”

“Not on the phone.”

“Should I drive my car?”

“Are you retarded?”

“That’s offensive. To everyone. And no.”

“That was a rhetorical question,” he says. “For God’s fucking sake, don’t drive the car. Don’t say anything to anyone. Not even that Russian hooker of yours.”

“She’s Ukranian.” He can say what he wants but not about Paulina.

“Jesus, Jeffrey. You may have, in one ignorant fuckswipe, obliterated all of your father’s hard work. His life’s work, and his name. You know what? Stay there. I’m coming to you.”

Rolling over on the bed, I put my hand on my heart and stare up at the ceiling. The gold crown molding makes me think of the bars on a metal cage. Time for more cocaine. I dump it out on the nightstand, press it down to smooth it out, using my thumb as a pestle. The coke sparkles under the lamplight. I un hinge a \$100 bill from the stack in my pocket and go to it. Everything tightens up again, and I wipe a wetness away from my eyes.

What about *my* life’s work?

Paulina walks into the bedroom, wet from the shower and wearing only a towel. Sweet Paulina. 5' 10". Blond, and smooth like fresh butter. There's nothing I want more than to lay my head on her soft little belly and let her stroke my hair.

"You look beautiful."

"You look like shit," she says, and drops the towel. "Why did you park in garage?"

I pull her to me and nestle my head between her breasts but she pushes me away. I know she's only with me for the money. But the thing is, who cares?

"I hit a deer on the way home. There's blood on the front of the car. Lots of blood. Mark says I shouldn't drive it for a while."

She pushes me away again when I try to kiss her, and starts to dress.

"I need to get ready, I am going out," she says. "I will take Porsche. I need some money."

"Can't you skip it?" I ask her. I need her right now. "I need you right now."

"Do not be selfish, Jeffy." She can see that I'm upset so she walks over and rubs my hair.

"You know our arrangement. I do what I want, you don't question. It is my life, no?"

"It is your life," I say. "Just a little kiss before you go?"

She holds out her hand.

I liberate a few hundreds. She looks at them and then at me. I liberate a few more, and she smiles and kisses me. My God, she is beautiful. Like a wax doll. My face leaks when she leaves.

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Mark comes in through the garage and tells me to sit the fuck down. I pour two scotches and push one toward him. He declines so I combine them.

“Mark,” I say, “it was a—” He raises a hand to silence me. I use the opportunity to drink.

“Jeffrey.” He pulls off his Versace glasses and caresses his temples. He takes a breath.

“This – *thing* – was an accident. Do you understand?”

“What thing?”

He looks at me, no crinkles in his face. “Jeffrey, don’t fuck with me. This is serious. I’m going to say this again: Shut the fuck up, and listen. It was an accident.”

I can tell by his tone it’ll be easier to just go along with him. Even though he wasn’t there. Even though it was probably a deer. “It was an accident,” I say.

Mark loosens his tie and lets his shoulders drop. “Now, listen to me. Listen to me very fucking carefully.” He’s always been liberal with his pointer finger. “You do not talk to anyone. You do not talk to police. You do not talk to friends. You do not even so much as whisper anything about this to the neighbor’s fucking cat. Do you understand?”

I nod. Man, he’s pissed. He goes into all the reasons this could fuck us all over. I wish he would chill. I’m an artist, man. A creative type. I don’t need the stress. This is worse than when I wrecked my first Ferrari.

“No one,” Mark says. It’s a threat. “And delete your social media accounts.”

“Are you kidding me? Some of my YouTube videos have over 1,000 views. No way.”

He looks mad. He shakes his head. I pull the rest of my wad out of my pocket and try to hand it to him.

“You know where that money comes from, right?” he says.

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It's like there's a busted pipe behind my eyes, so I do more cocaine. The walls sweat. Do I know where that money comes from? What a dick. If Dad was still here, he'd put him in his place. Mark never talked to me like that when Dad was around. My dad, the rubber baron. Well, that's what I called him, anyway. He wasn't royalty or anything but he might as well have been. He was smart: He invented a type of self-healing rubber. Like, if you poked a hole in it the molecules or something went to work and covered the hole. It made him, and me by extension, very rich.

He died last year, and on his deathbed he told me he wanted me to be happy. He also told me to make something of myself. "You're a 44 year old man with Goldilocks hair. You play guitar fine but so could a hobo."

It's fine. I get it. True genius is never understood in its time. Which is why I had to disable the comments on all my YouTube videos.

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I'm in my armchair, watching my sixty-inch flat screen, and it's becoming increasingly clear that the police have a photo of my car leaving the scene. There's a tipline, even, asking for anyone with information about a green Mercedes with vanity license plate MJO RSN to call them. It was a very cool idea at the time, that license plate, but it is now probably fucking me.

My heart, the actual organ in my chest, is whiplashing its way through my body. I can barely roll a joint, my hands are shaking so much.

When I bought the Mercedes the guy at the dealership was definitely impressed with me. I told him I was a guitar player and he said he could tell by the way I dressed.

“I always wanted to be in a band,” he said, in his khakis. I felt bad for him. Forced to live in a prison like that. Fred, his name was.

“Yeah, I’m in a pretty good band right now. We’ve toured a bit and I get a lot of views on YouTube. You should come see us play,” I said, and squinted into the sunlight.

“Yeah, I might,” he said, surveying the concrete lot. “I was a police officer. Out on patrol one day, I pulled over a woman. I asked her out on a date, in exchange for not giving her a ticket. She didn’t like that, and they fired me. I actually make more money here, though. You see any of these you like?”

I closed my eyes and opened them. There was this green SUV and I said, “That one.” Like I was John Bonham, only I wasn’t going to drive it through a pane of glass.

Fred asked about financing. I told him I’d write him a check and he just stared at me with eyebrows raised, didn’t say anything. Like I said, super-impressed.

Back on the TV, they’ve cut to a vigil at the hospital. People are circled around piles of wreaths and teddy bears, holding candles, heads bowed. There’s singing. It’s happening live. My eyes are sweating again.

A man with a mustache is begging, right there on camera, and crying. “Please, if you know who did this to my parents, please come forward. I’m begging you. Anyone with

information, please come forward.” He’s bent over in his sorrow. He wipes his eyes with his crimson shirt. “What kind of person would do this?”

I do more cocaine. I feel like a husk. The camera pans out and a short, pear-shaped woman is singing “Amazing Grace.” It’s beautiful, but all I can think is what a break for her. She’s in so many living rooms right now. Living rooms like mine, all over the city.

That’s what I’m missing! I need a break like that. It just needs to happen once, someone seeing me play on TV. My talent will do the rest.

It’s hard. I’ve put in my time, done shit, forget 10,000, I’ve done *20,000* hours of guitar playing and singing. I feel like I’m right on the edge of something big. It’s hard, going around with the knowledge of my own talent without anyone else noticing. It’s been a long road.

When I was 20, I dropped out of college to start a band. Dad was pissed, especially since there was a building named after him on campus. I explained that I’d found the thing I’m supposed to do with my life. Isn’t that the purpose of this crazy ride? Lots of guys have some dumbass nine-to-five job they hate. They’re empty, and they’re cowards. Afraid to chase the golden ring.

I’m not empty. I’m a guitar player. I took a couple lessons but I didn’t need them. I’m mostly self taught. I’m basically a Pete Townsend, like, standard chords, but in a new way.

I know it takes a long time to be recognized. Still, I can’t help but feel that fame is inevitable for me. It’s one of those ‘walk the path’ and ‘see the path’ type deals. I just know.

The woman on TV finishes the song and I take a couple extra Trazodone and shuffle to the bedroom. I’m too tired to take off my clothes so I curl into a ball and stare out the window, listening to the rain and watching the dark. I blink and it’s light outside. Strange.

I blink again and it's noon and I turn on my phone and I have so many notifications. I Google my name and my face is everywhere. On the TV news I see my house. This is wild. I do a couple lines and find that I'm trending on Twitter. Shit, my views have skyrocketed. I hope everything works out for me, because this could be the start of something.

Paulina walks in looking radiantly ragged. She's with some short little bearded fellow in khakis. He's looking around at everything and scribbling furiously in a notebook. He tries to shake my hand but I'm like, "what the fuck man, get outta here," and I push him to the door. A swell of voices – I can't even pick one out, there's so many – greets me outside. Black boxes and lenses and lipstick and microphones. For a moment, I stand there and take it in, breathe it in - the news vans up and down the block, the neighbors in the streets. Then I remember Mark and close the door, putting my back on it.

"Did you do this thing they say?" Paulina asks me.

"Do what?"

"Don't play dumb. Did you do it?"

"I told you. Maybe I hit a deer, I don't know. It was raining." I can hardly pay attention to her because I've set up a Google alert on my phone and I keep getting new results.

"You are all over TV. What is MJO RSN?"

"Huh? Look at this." I've made a column of tweets. This is crazy. They're even using a good picture from my blog. I show her and she seems impressed. "Oh. It's Jim Morrison."

"Who?" She's cute when she's puzzled.

"Don't you worry your little head about it." I have an erection, a real full one. Something I haven't had for a while. I grab her hand to lead her into the bedroom, but she shakes me off.

“At least give me a handy,” I say, and she does.

When I get back to the TV, I see myself stepping out the door and back in. Someone is interviewing the bearded guy about the inside of my house. It’s surreal. I’m running low on coke but Paulina has some, of course she does, and my heart is softened by this. I flip through the news channels for a while. I feel so important. So meaningful.

One of the the two people they say was hit was a famous actor in Colombia. There are scenes of more vigils in places with tin-roofed houses and worn streets, mountains in the background. It’s sad, yes. But they also keep showing my face.

“You’re fucking famous,” Lee says on the phone later.

“Am I?” I don’t want to tell him this is one of the best days of my life, but it is. I aggressively sip a scotch and water.

“Yeah, man. Think about that. Everyone knows who the fuck you are. What does it feel like?”

“It feels like destiny.”

“Did you do it?”

“I’m not allowed to talk about it, per my lawyer.”

“Man, all you need to do is penetrate the media once and you’re on the radar. Now all you’ll have to do is an interview with someone. Come off sympathetic. Act remorseful. You’re the big story right now. I took some media classes in college. I can talk to people for you.”

He’s right. People are going to start trying to take advantage of me. That always happens.

“At some point I’m definitely going to have to figure these things out,” I say.

“How did it go down anyway? Why didn’t you stop?” He’s persistent on this one thing, and I wonder if I should answer.

“Stop asking. I’m innocent. No such thing as bad press, right?”

“Right.”

I finish my drink in one deep pull and I’m lighter. Paulina cuts me another line, and I blink, and then I hear my voice, and Lee’s, on TV. That motherfucker. He tried to play me. Fame is so cool. Even my friends are trying to get a piece of the action. I knew this would happen.

I blink again and it’s nighttime. Mark calls. “They’re coming for you. I’ll get you out as soon as I can. For the love of God, don’t tell them anything.”

His voice sobers me up, and not in a good way. I hang up and tell Paulina to hide all the drugs. Right on cue, blue and red lights flash through the closed blinds. There’s a pounding at the door and Paulina runs and I open it. Backlit by all the camera lights, the man at the door looks like he’s cut out of black construction paper.

“I don’t think you can come in here,” I say. He holds something up. I guess it’s a warrant.

“We’re going to impound your car. You are under arrest.” There’s other stuff but I can’t hear over the blood in my head.

“Can I get dressed and take a piss?”

The cop placates me. I run into the bathroom and pull the ceramic top off the toilet tank and go to China on the last of our emergency coke. When I lift my head I’m taller.

“Hurry up,” a voice says.

They handcuff me and take me out. I can't see for all the lights. It makes me feel warm, all the shouting, all the questions. I try to look mysterious, to keep my eyes slitted and sharp and confident. It's not hard.

I was born for this.

At the station, in a little room with a small table and popcorn ceilings, a fat detective asks me what happened. I stare at the belly protruding over the belt of his khakis.

"I promised my lawyer I wouldn't say anything." I can feel his disappointment. I answer every question with "lawyer." This fucker must think I've never seen "Law and Order" before.

"Fine," he says, and lays photos of two very nice looking people on the table. "They died tonight."

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By the time they strip search me, I'm papier-mâché. My body dries out and flakes, except for my head, which is leaking again. That cool, famous feeling is still there, but I need more coke because these scary Holy-shit-feelings are elbowing in.

The guards walk me down a long hall, past huge iron doors, into an open, two-story room lined with cells. There are metal tables and a TV in the corner. The walls are clean, white. Lineless. They lock me in a cell on the first floor, and it's tiny, and I'm empty. There's a skinny kid on the top bunk, his legs hanging over. He jumps down and stares me right in the face. His arms are muscular, taut and thick-veined, and covered in tattoos of dragons and a topless angel. His eyes are sky blue.

“I know who you are,” he says, and steps closer.

“You don’t,” I say, and back away, toward the bars.

“I do.” He points at me and I flinch. “You killed those people. That actor. You’re all over the TV. People hate you.”

“People hate me?” I say, sinking to the floor.

“What’s the matter with you?” he says and fakes a punch. I cower.

“Are you serious?” he says.

I’m in the corner of the cell now, covering myself. He’s scary.

“Please don’t hurt me, man.” I can’t look in his eyes. I’m sweating so much and my hair is messed up.

“Jesus, dude, chill out,” he says, offering his hand, laughing. “It’s fine.”

I take the hand cautiously and let him pull me up. I try to walk past him but he won’t move. He’s like a playground bully, enjoying my discomfort. Crowding me.

“Excuse me,” I say, tilting my head low. He steps aside and I move toward the bottom bunk. His hand raises and clenches, and I see stars and feel this blinding pain in my mouth before I even see it move. I taste metal, spit blood. I go down hard.

I’ve never been punched before. I feel helpless and hollow at the same time. “Help,” I yell, and he kicks me under the jaw.

“Keep it down,” someone yells.

The guy kneels on top of me, and I feel the heat of his breath. It smells bad.

“Why’d you do that?” I say, making sure to avoid his eyes.

He laughs. “Because I can. You can’t act like such a little fuck-boy in here.”

When I can move, I climb onto the bed. My face is swollen and tender to touch. My knees knock together, the orange and white stripes of my cloth pants forming and breaking lines. My skeleton wants to climb out of my skin. I'm locked in a cage. I want to scream but I know now it won't make a difference. How did I get myself into this? I blink and the doors slide open and my cellmate jumps down. I want to ask him what's going on but I don't want him to hit me again.

"Social hour," he says, apparently reading my face. "We watch TV, play cards in the pod for a while."

I don't respond, even though he's being friendly. He just stands there.

"What? You're mad because I popped you? Relax, man. You need to chill out."

I look up and he's smiling and I don't see any hate in his face. As if nothing had happened.

"Look," he says. "My name is Jim. I'm waiting on a court date."

He seems genuine. Like he wants to talk. "I'm Jeffy. Well, Jeffrey," I say. I extend my hand, and he slaps it away quickly.

"See man? Stop doing that."

"I'm sorry," I say. "This is all a misunderstanding." It's hard to swallow. My eyes start to do that thing again.

"Listen, man. You don't seem like the type of guy who's gonna be here long but it doesn't take long for people to size you up. Keep your fucking head down."

I nod, grateful, despite his hitting me before. "What did you do?" I say. "To be in here, I mean."

“The cops say I pushed over an old guy and killed him. I say I never touched the guy. His head did pop open, but he fell on his own. Anyway, my public defender says I have a good chance of getting off, because the video was compromised or some shit. Whatever that means. Just a matter of time, chief.” He’s confident, like he knows what happens next and I don’t.

A thick, tall guy with tattoos on his face walks into our cell. He greets Jim like they’ve known each other for years.

“What up, C?” Jim says.

I don’t belong in a place like this. The new guy’s eyes fall on me and lock in.

“Oh shit,” he says. “I know you. I know you. You’re that dude who fucked up those two people. Straight fucked them and kept on driving. What the fuck happened to your face?”

I don’t know what to say, so I look away.

“He’s too fancy for this place, C,” Jim says. “I had to show him what’s up.” They laugh, and push each other and nod like old buds.

“So, what’re you gonna do?” C asks me.

“I don’t know.” I really don’t. I want more coke.

“Listen man,” he says. “You gotta come clean. This dude named Bronson, from my neighborhood, did something similar and he tried to lie and the judge leaned on him. It’s always better to come clean, and apologize. They eat that shit up. They love to see a redemption story. They want it. How you’ve changed and shit. I do that shit every time. ‘I’m a changed man, your honor. I don’t fuck with that anymore.’ Suckers.”

C whispers something to Jim, and Jim laughs and leaves the cell. I'm alone with C. I shrink a little when he sits next to me. He's so huge he has to hunch over to fit underneath the bunk. His knees touch mine and I try and slink away, but there's no where to slink to.

"You look like you need a little fix, man," he says. "I can hook you up. We got everything you need in here."

My insides somersault. "You got coke?"

He laughs and looks around. "Do I got coke? Bitch, I got *all* the coke." He pulls on the lining of his pants and shows me a piece of a clear plastic bag tied up like it's holding candy, along with a view of lots of squirrely black hairs. "I got coke for days."

My mouth waters. "I can't pay you right now, but I can pay you when I get out." Just a little bit and I'll be better. Just a taste, that's all I need.

"That's not how things work in here," he says, and waits.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean if you don't have money you have to work it out with me," he says, and now he's staring at me the way I stare at Paulina when she gets out of the shower.

"No fucking way," I say. "I'm not gay, sorry."

"Bitch, I'm not gay either. You wanna get punched again?"

"I won't." I shake my head adamantly.

It happens fast. He shoves my head against the wall behind the bunk. I feel bright pain from the pressure. He's squeezing my head like it's a zit he wants to pop.

"Please, man, please," I manage to force out.

He whispers in my ear. “Listen. There are two ways this goes down and only one of them ends up with you getting what you want.” He’s squeezing so hard I can’t breathe. He lets go and I’m crumpled. He lays back on the bunk and just waits. “You got ten seconds to decide,” he says.

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Later that night, after Jim has pleased himself on the bunk above me, shaking it violently while I wish for death, after the pod lights are out, things start to sink in. There’s a faint green light in the distance, way out in the pod, and it makes the bars look eerie, like I’m in a haunted house. Only this is much worse than any haunted house I’ve ever been to. I can hear the silence of the place. It cuts into me.

My head is a desert. I’ve only been in jail for half a day and I’m scarred. The “coke” I got earlier? I think it was aspirin. I’m in prison. For real. The mattress I’m on is rough like a burlap sack. The walls are knotted and chipping and filled with drawings of dicks and monsters.

It keeps coming back to me, especially with nothing to knock it away. The bodies. A thick thing, a sack of arms and legs, as it flew over my car in the rain. I didn’t even tap the brakes.

Above me, Jim snarls in his sleep. I’m not made for this place. I’m not like these people. I’m not a criminal. I’m not. I’m good. My father told me so, on his deathbed. I can see him now, ghostly white, tubed up, waiting to die. “You’re good, son,” he said. “I’ve found peace. Please try and do the same.”

I got to hold his hand as he passed. It was me and Dad for the duration, since my mother died so young. I got to hold his hand to my head, and I got to say goodbye. I cried a lot when he died. Thank God for cocaine. Life really sucks sometimes.

I am good. I know what I have to do.

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The next morning they stick us all in a van and take us to the courthouse. They put us in the jury box, and all the lawyers and various family members in the gallery. Everyone is dressed-up, and I'm in jail linens. A photographer keeps taking my picture. His camera whirrs and clicks. There are three TV cameras, and two reporters that keep looking my way.

I'm ready to confess. I'm ready to throw myself on the mercy of the court. The judge will see my sincerity and I'll be OK. I might get probation, or house arrest. But I can't lie. I'd be no better than Jim, and C, and the rest of my new neighbors.

I see Mark in the crowd, chatting with the other lawyers. I'm dirty. I have a bad feeling that everyone hates me. They don't understand. He sees me and walks over.

"Mark," I say. "This is a nightmare."

"Whisper," he says, leaning over the wooden railing.

"Mark, I'm going to apologize. I fucked up big time, man. I have to tell that guy, the son, that I'm sorry. I have to, Mark. I'm a good man. I'm not like these guys. I have to own up to this."

Mark looks around, trying to make sure no one heard me. His eyes get tight with the same serious look he gave me in the kitchen.

“You’re not going to do that, you idiot,” he whispers. “You’re going to keep your mouth shut. You’re going to let me do the talking.”

“Mark, no. It’s enough.” I expect him to get angry, but he keeps his cool.

“Jeffrey,” he says. “Do you like being in jail?”

“No way. Oh, man, Mark, you wouldn’t believe how bad....”

“Shut up and listen. Say anything to the judge and you will go to jail for murder. Do you understand? Murder. You think jail is bad, imagine the federal penitentiary. And you could go there for life. Do you want to spend the rest of your life in prison?” He whispers all of this while he looks around the room. It’s like he’s memorized the whole thing.

“Mark, no. I’ll be honest, and the judge will take pity on me.” He does that thing with his temples again. He smiles but it’s like there are invisible strings pulling up his lips.

“Jeffrey. I’m the lawyer. If your father’s reputation wasn’t tied up in this, I would leave you to rot. You have to decide right now if you want to go home or you want to be locked up for the rest of your life. It’s that simple.”

I shudder just thinking about what happened yesterday. Fuck it. Fuck it all. “I want to go home,” I say. He smiles, this time without the strings.

“Shut your mouth and you’ll be out in time for dinner.”

....

Mark speaks to a scrum of reporters as we're leaving. "The truth will come out," he tells them.

Paulina has a nice, fat line waiting for me when I get home. "You poor little man," she says, and she actually kisses me with tongue. I can see that she'll let me do what I want to her in bed tonight, but all I want is to lay there and forget.

When I get there, everything else feels like a dream. I can't believe I thought about giving this all up. I can't believe I was so weak. I get fucked up and put on my favorite pair of snakeskins and sneak out the back so the reporters don't follow me. The night is cool and sparse, and it's like I'm outside for the first time, ever. I go to the club and the strippers recognize me, talk to each other about me, give me dances. I tell them to check out my YouTube videos.

By the time the trial comes around I'm so rehearsed and bored that I can't wait for it to be over. Especially since we're trying to decide which big name interviewer I want to do my first post-trial appearance with. I'm thinking I want it to be someone special.

"Can I do Nancy Grace?" I say. "She's one of my favorites."

"She will eat you alive," Mark says while I sip scotch. The crying spells are gone, and I can see to the end of this whole ordeal. Now I can start a Facebook fan page.

I know exactly what to say to all of the questions I'll be asked, should I have to take the stand. Paulina helped me pick out new Armani suits, fourteen of them, one for each day in court.

I haven't played guitar since I went to jail, but it doesn't matter. I have things to worry about.

“I want us controlling the narrative,” Mark says, and “This will end up being good for us, and for the rubber brand,” because my name recognition is so high. He’s hired PR experts, and I keep reminding them I want to do a reality show. About redemption or something.

The trial itself is atrociously boring. At the first break, I walk into the bathroom, the handicap stall, and do some cocaine on the sink. They only check for weapons at the front, not for drugs. How many people do cocaine in a courthouse? I really am a badass. When I get that old familiar sharpness, I can easily see to the end of this thing. All I have to do is remember to look remorseful for the jury.

In between the breaks, Mark argues that I was under duress after my father’s death, that I’m the victim. He explains that the couple was jaywalking. My team digs up an old child molestation charge on the actor, and I swear the jury almost gasps. The son admits his parents liked to drink.

“God is fickle,” Mark says in his closing arguments. “He takes us in his own time. We are not stewards of our own destiny. We can only row the boat, we cannot steer. My client is an innocent party in an unfortunate circumstance. He has cried and he has suffered. Just today, he told me he wants to build an orphanage in the name of those who perished. If that’s not benevolence, I don’t know what is.”

While we wait for the jury to deliberate, I go into the bathroom again. I can’t wait for the not-guilty verdict.

I’ll feel so alive, so electric, Mr. Mojo Risin’ in the flesh. I think I’ll ask Paulina to be my wife.

I'll walk out of the courtroom, down the stately, tiled hall, toward the glass doors of freedom, underneath a large cold marble statue of Lady Justice. Everyone will be impressed with how I handle myself. I'll be able to put this whole experience behind me and use it for my craft. I'll write *at least* an album's worth of new music.

People will nod as I pass. They'll recognize me. There will be a line of bright lights just waiting for me outside the doors.