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Although it's not home to the kind of big movie stars anymore as is neighboring Bel Air, Beverly Hills was still the crown jewel in the cultural pomposity of Los Angeles. One time you were the car with some guys you used to play ball with and you're driving through on your way to a party some actor buddy of someone's is throwing. All the cars around you are Mercs or Porches or whatever, and in a white convertible in front of you there's this couple that looks like they just stepped out of the middle of GQ Magazine. The guy behind the wheel was just tooling around without a care in the world with

some fashion model looking chick spoon-feeding frozen yogurt to him while he's driving. Pretty much the life wouldn't you say?

You pull up behind him and you're just watching the show, totally jealous. You get to a red light and standing there is this homeless guy, all ragged and dirty and looking like the whole entire world had just chewed him up and spit him out right there on the corner of Wilshire and Doheny. Mr. And Mrs. Perfect were done with dessert and were more content to sit there making kissy-poo when this homeless guy comes up to the car looking for change. The guy in the Benz takes one look at this poor bastard and you know what he does? He hands him the unfinished cup of Haagen Daaz. It was probably only going to melt all over the leather seats anyway, right? It was the most arrogant thing you'd ever seen in your life. Anywhere else you would have been shocked

but in this zip code it shouldn't really have surprised you one bit.

So, in a bizarre way, Beverly Hills is to L.A. what Times Square is to New York—a cultural icon of extremely questionable integrity that scores a big meatball in the redeeming social value column. You're not too certain though if the peep shows and titty bars of Forty-Second street are any more obscene than a nine hundred dollar Gucci purse or a two thousand dollar dinner jacket at Barney's.

Rodeo Drive is as much a tourist trap as is Disneyworld. Every designer with a name worth a shit has a boutique and every boutique has a salesperson with an attitude that desperately makes you want to believe that they really don't want you to spend your money there. It's a bizarre world as foreign to most people as is fisting or bumper pool.

Go one block over to Beverly Drive and

you've given up Louis Vuitton and Tiffany's for Starbucks and The Gap. As a mortal, you are more likely to comprehend your surroundings and maybe even find something for sale that won't cost you a week's pay. On this street you'll find a deli and a Blockbuster and a restaurant with valet attendants that won't laugh at your car if it cost you less than sixty grand.

The weather is cloudy but warm and mild and, best of all, the traffic is light. You turn on KLOS and Zeppelin's "Misty Mountain Hop" comes on and you play all of John Bonham's drum fills note for note on the steering wheel. You sing most of it over to Nikko and he looks at you like this trip can't be over soon enough. Some people have no appreciation for music. Goddamn peasants.

You don't tell Nikko where you are going and he's getting impatient. Unlike yourself, Nikko goes to all of his classes and the thought

of maybe missing his next one, the lab with the cute co-ed T.A. he was always gabbing about, was making him nervous. You don't know why he even cares, he's too shy to ask her out anyway. Besides, she's probably sleeping with a prof which certainly happens a lot in your school for some reason. Whoever said T.A. meant Teaching Assistant?

“Hey,” you say to him. “Chill, okay. We're almost there.”

Nestled here is Koko's Chicken Kitchen. A nice little joint with great sandwiches, big salads and best of all, public bathrooms. The kind of bathroom you can just walk in off the street to use. As long as you don't look like a vagrant or a supermodel, no one will even notice.

After lucking into a great parking space a block down, you drop a buck-twenty-five into the meter—twelve lousy minutes per quarter. Street Parking is pretty scarce and the only

alternative is a six-dollar lot and you aren't about to do that. You have to save your money for important things like books and pizza and dope and bombs and shit like that.

Although you are almost too poor to even window shop, you and Jackie would come down to Rodeo every now and then. She liked to look at the clothes and you would sneak looks at the rich and beautiful women buying thousand dollar cocktail dresses the way you'd buy a bottle of Heineken at the Key Club on a Saturday night. Every now and then she'd see a suit or a shirt that she said would look good on you. Your sense of fashion ended with knowing to wear pants with cuffs that touched the tops of your shoes. You didn't know chic from shit. You were happy just buying your clothes at the Gap where everything just sort of goes with everything else like Garanimals for grown ups. You always had a feeling though the people who

could afford to shop on Rodeo generally weren't any happier or, more appropriately, less miserable than you.

On one of your little field trips, you discovered Koko's. The food was great and being able to say to her dopey friends that you had dinner in Beverly Hills was always fun for a laugh or two. They all had boyfriends whose idea of a romantic evening was a six-pack and a lot of groping in front of the TV before the game came on. It's not like those girls deserved any better though.

You buy two Teriyaki Chickwiches and two Cokes while Nikko goes to the bathroom. Grabbing a booth in the rear, you sit with your back to the wall. You count five people working here. A couple of them even look illegal. In this neighborhood? Don't even think twice that it couldn't happen.

The only thing funky about Koko's is that,

like a few places in L.A., the bathrooms aren't in the restaurant. You have to get a key from the register and go next door to a hallway that separates Koko's from a joint called The Bagelry in the same building. Most likely just the doings of some cheapskate landlord saving a few bucks by making them share with the place next door. Nikko gets the key for the Men's and disappears through the hallway door.

A few minutes later he comes back smiling. He pulls out a pen and starts making notes on a napkin. You don't say anything, just keep quiet and eat your Chickwich. Every couple of minutes or so, Nikko takes a huge bite of his and chews it slowly, even methodically, while making more nearly illegible scribbles. You can make out a rough sketch of the bathroom's layout but that soon is covered up by the storm of calculations rolling off of his pen.

You drain your soda and go back to the self-

serve fountain for a refill and that's when you notice a security camera high on the wall pointing right at the door. You look around and don't see any others. Most fast-food type places have something like this so that if someone robs the joint they'll be caught on tape coming and going.

Instead of saying something about it to Nikko when you go back to the table, you just watch him stuff the last giant bite of Chickwich into his mouth. That's Nikko's way of eating. Some people who are incredibly smart usually have weird personal idiosyncracies that make them a bit uncomfortable to be around sometimes. Take Bill Gates for example. The guy's some sort of wicked computer genius but for the life of him can't figure out how a comb works. Nikko eats with all of the subtlety of a steam-powered trash masher and frankly, it is kind of fucking disgusting.

“Let’s go,” he says with his mouth full of half-masticated chicken. “I have a three o’clock.”

You’re not sure if he even really cares about the class so much as he wants a good perch to stare at the T.A., who, in his words, has *the ass of a goddess*. If it were you, you’d probably fail that class for sure, too busy staring at her bucket the whole time. You don’t have the heart to tell him that the prof is probably nailing her.

You want to say something about his godawful eating habits but decide against it. When you have friends who play with sub-atomic particles for kicks you tend to let matters of etiquette slide sometimes. It occurs to you the only thing the two of you said to each other during lunch was him telling you that he wanted to leave. Eerily, this reminds you a bit too much of your last lunch with Jackie before she dropped you like third period French.

The meter says you have twenty-five minutes left which means it's shorting you by at least ten.

*That settles it, you think. This piece of shit town deserves an Nikko special.* You are already about to leave but then it hits you about the security camera. An idea comes and you tell Nikko to wait here for a minute while you run to Banana Republic. Once before with Jackie, she found this funky shirt that she wanted you to get but you told her it looked stupid and ended up hurting her feelings. Besides, it was sixty-five bucks, which was a hell of a lot more than you could spend. You couldn't believe that she'd get all bent over a stupid shirt.

You find it on the same rack in the back where you had first seen it. Grabbing a medium you go to the register and pay for it with the Visa card your parents gave you for emergencies. They'll give you shit for this but you'll get out of

it somehow. You'll tell them that your jacket got stolen and you needed a new one or something. Did it even matter? They'll probably come out to see a home game at some point and ask to see the jacket and you'll play dumb and say "what jacket?" and they'll yell at you. It doesn't seem fair that life has to always be an endless raft of shit from your folks.

The skinny model-type at the register barely smiles at you as she rings it up. Why should she? It's not like you are Brad Pitt or anything. Though you are pretty sure if you were, you'd hardly even smile at her either.

The people who work in these stores amaze you, always acting like they rank up there with the Mother Teresas of the world on their own personal "love me" meter. Hey, cure cancer and you'll be impressed but ringing up purchases probably makes you just another bitter jackass with a bad headshot and no SAG card. You

watch as the clerk folds the shirt neatly and puts it into one of those shopping bags with handles on it. This is what you came for, the shirt is just a bonus.

Nikko leans up against your Civic and appears annoyed again. He looks at the bag and points.

“Don’t worry,” you tell him. “You’ll thank me later.”

The whole way back he can’t stop talking about what you need to do to get the bomb into Koko’s. It seems like a lot and you aren’t exactly getting it all but you are jazzed again. Scott Lorlon, secret agent, covert ops, reporting for duty. Now if you only had a secret compartment ring with a joint in it and a Ferrari to pick up some women with, you’d be the man for sure.

Back at your room you light up Hale’s bong by yourself and turn on the stereo. You leave your new shirt in the Banana Republic bag and

put both in the closet on the floor. The weather report calls for brief afternoon showers which isn't too unusual for February. A Ben Folds song you aren't quite sick of yet comes on and you turn it up louder. You take a toke and try to hold it in through an entire chorus.

Pot does strange things to you. After the bowl you pick up that Joyce book and plow through a large chunk of it. The weird thing is, not only does it all sink in but you even start to enjoy it a bit. Being stoned is probably the secret to understanding whatever the hell that man was trying to write. You think maybe next week you'll smoke some crack and try to read some Camus.

When Hale comes back you are asleep on your bed with your beat up copy of *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* open on your chest. You think you may have dreamed that you were Stephen Dedalus saying goodbye to everything

he held dear. You aren't sure if it was that dream and not the naked-picnic-with-Whoopi-Goldberg one you've been having lately.

“Scott.”

You open your eyes and Hale is standing by the open door, looking out into the hallway. When you get to your feet you can see that a lot of other people are milling around the hallway too. At Bo's door is a Marine in uniform.

Your first thought is that it's Bo back from the dead.

A creepy feeling comes over you, starting at your shoulders and going down to your asshole which is puckered so tight you think you might lose your balance. Gut instinct is a reflection of anxiety but pucker factor is evidence of pure fear.

The thought that they never found his body in the building because he had somehow gotten out flashes through your head. You are spooking

yourself for no reason. This guy isn't Major Dick. First of all, he's much bigger, taller. Second of all, when this guy turns around you can see he has a chest as wide as a picture covered with a rack of ribbons. This guy isn't Bo. He is Bo's commander. The star on his shoulder lets you know this guy isn't just any ordinary jarhead. This is the head jarhead.

The custodian at his side fumbles through a giant ring that looks like it holds every damn key to every damn lock in the world. Nervously, he tries to find the one that goes to Bo's room. He looks like some sort of ex-con to you and the thought he had possible access to your room doesn't instill any kind of sense of security. You remember You haven't seen your hiking boots in over two weeks and let it pass. You check out the custodian again. He looks familiar but you don't quite place the face until you see the name "Manny" on the patch on his workshirt.

You glance over your shoulder and there is the other Manny, Amanda.

“Nice hair,” she says, shooting you a wink.

*Wink.* She winked at you. You knew You should have winked at her last night. You’re such a complete dork when it comes to women. Some guys are real smooth and have all the moves and slick things to say. You? You’re just happy if you can carry a conversation with a girl without making her think you have some sort of head injury.

“You like it?” you kid her, running your hand through the new do. “If you want, I can recommend my stylist.”

“Barber,” she corrects.

“What’s the difference?”

“Oh, about ten bucks and a lot less staring at your ass when you leave the shop.”

“Isn’t there someone who will stare at my ass for less?” you kid.

There goes that smile again. It's enough to almost knock you off your feet. She stands there right in front of you, rocking back and forth on her heels with her hands in the pockets of a pair of faded jeans. Your mind once again falls into blankness.

“What’s going on?” she asks.

“Uh, not much. How about you?” you say. It isn’t what she was asking though.

“No, silly. What’s going on at Major Dick’s room?”

You laugh. Everyone called him that behind his back.

“Don’t know.” You are trying your best to be convincing. “Maybe he’s spying for the Cubans.”

“Maybe he was abducted by aliens,” she jokes.

Holy shit. That’d be a great one. Bo kidnapped by a UFO. They’d have a blast running tests on him. Maybe they’d even take

him back to their planet to mate. Oh man, like that wasn't a frightening thought—a race of Bo aliens. That's what you should tell everybody. That he left on a probe for Uranus.

“Jennifer said that nobody's seen him in days,” she adds.

Days? That's a bit of an overstatement but so be it. Let Manny's roommate and everybody else think Bo flew the coop a week ago for all you care. At least twice a year you hear about a kid dropping all of the sandwiches out of his or her basket. Most lose their shit entirely and have massive stress attacks from all of the pressure of school and dating and whatnot. Some try to kill themselves. Some succeed. Sometimes other people miss them when they're gone.

You watch the other Manny open the door to Bo's room. He and the Marine take a couple of minutes to look around before they come

back out and close it up again. The Head Jarhead thanks the custodian, and for a second, you think Manny (the custodian) might just salute him. He doesn't, at least not before the Marine leaves Stonehouse.

“Do you think that was Bo's commander?” Manny the fair asks.

“Who? General Knowledge there? Maybe he's investigating the abduction for the White House UFO committee,” you tell her.

“You're bad,” she says, putting her hand on your chest.

“You have no idea.” You wink at her.

You want to take her out tonight but she says it's a friend's birthday and they are all going scorpion bowling to celebrate. You laugh. Lest anyone think it involves poisonous arachnids and ten-pound balls, scorpion bowling is a hallowed tradition around here that one participates in on your twenty-first

birthday. Hong Kong Harbor is a polynesian restaurant and bar that has incredibly lousy food but first-rate mixed drinks. The most famous being a near-toxic concoction made up of eighty ounces of no less than a dozen different types of alcohol. It comes to your table in a gigantic half coconut shell full of fruit and paper umbrellas and ten straws. It's called a scorpion bowl but they might just as well call it *The Regurgitator*. Your guess is they make it with the runoff from the rubber mat the bartender pours all of the other drinks on.

Wishing her luck, you hope she'll be over her hangover in time to go to the party at Alpha Pi. Just as well, because tonight, you and the boys have a bomb scare to plan.

You go back to your room and Hale gives you that "you sly bastard" look. You caught him staring while you were flirting with Manny. The best part was you knew it was killing him how

you had picked her up without even really trying.

“Yeah, bite me,” you tell him.

“My brother! Back in the saddle!” He gives you a hug.

You turn on the TV and wait for the early evening news to come on. A rerun of *Friends* is on and you are forced to watch five excruciating minutes of it because Hale has left the remote on top of the set and neither of you are motivated enough to get up and get it. You could be six inches away from the set and still use the remote instead of reaching over.

A promo runs and you can tell the top story this hour is going to be about a chase on the 405 this morning. They have lots of helicopter footage and the money shot of the guy rolling his Datsun three times. Last week it was some disgruntled ex-city worker who stole a bus and

ended up plowing into the side of a house in Lynwood somewhere. You are pretty sick of the same old shit, you want the big story. The meat. The chewy center of the Tootsie-pop.

After the chase it's a gang shooting, then a bank robbery. You are probably next but you are dropping out of the public eye. You wait for your fire but the next story is about a truckload of livestock that overturned on the freeway down by John Wayne Airport. It's funny to you that Orange County named their airport after a dead movie cowboy. Looks like they could have used the old Duke today to ride around and rope all of those little porkers. There are pigs running free into traffic getting hit left and right.

Hale laughs. "Man, did you see that?"

Christ, what a goddamn mess. You turn away.

Finally, next comes your fire. It's the same old noise from the news last night. Nothing new

you didn't already know. No suspects, no witnesses, five crispy critters they're calling victims. Next.

You are kind of relieved but you are kind of miffed too. Bumped for an overturned truck full of pigs. That's bullshit. You are much more happening than dead pigs blocking traffic by the airport. What the hell are those news people thinking? You suppose if that dog had crawled back into that drainpipe again today, you'd have been bumped back even further.

There is a knock at the door and you open it. It's Dan and he is pissed.

"Fuckin' pigs. Do you believe that shit? Motherfuckin', goddamned pigs for Christ's sake."

He grins as wide as a house. It is pretty funny when you think about it.

The phone rings and you know who it has to be.

“Fucking pigs. Do you believe it?” Nikko says on the other end. “See you in a couple of minutes.”

You hang up the phone and turn to Hale and Dan.

“Hey, that was Bo’s agent. Paramount wants him to read for *Weekend at Bernies 3*.”

“Bullshit,” Dan says.

You give him a look he’s seen from you at least a million times before. It’s the raised eyebrow and squinty eyed *you must have just become mentally challenged* look.

“What?” he asks. It’s short for *What the hell is wrong with you?*

“You probably think that MCI is some kind of big rap star, don’t you?” Hale says grinning. Man, do you love ribbing Dan when the chance arrives, which is often.

“Fuck both of you. I mean it.” Dan folds his arms.

You laugh pretty hard and so does Hale. Dan knows it's all at his expense so he doesn't join you. There is a knock at the door and you figure Nikko must have ran all the way over to get here this fast. You open your yap at the same time you open the door.

"Hey killer," you say, catching yourself way too late. It isn't Nikko.

"Killer? Hey man, I don't even eat meat," says Mooch. He's looking at you kind of funny.

"Sorry man, in this light you kind of look like a young Jerry Lee Lewis," you tell him. You look over at Hale and he just kind of shrugs. Mooch looks more like Jerry Lewis, a red haired, Irish Nutty Professor.

"Hey, dudes, they're showing *The Wall* and *Heavy Metal* back to back at Willington tonight. Some of us are going to shroom and go," Mooch says.

Willington Pavilion is a student center on

the far side of campus and on weekend nights they usually show old movies for free. You and Jackie went a lot since neither of you really had much money to go out and do real stuff in the real world. Without a doubt it was always a pretty decent time and a good place to score some dope if you were looking. If you didn't have your terrorist's round table tonight with the boys you'd commit to going, although the thought of trying to watch *The Wall* on hallucinogens seems more frightening than exciting.

"Maybe we'll catch up with you later," says Hale. "We're trying to plan a surprise party for Nikko."

"Right on," replies Mooch. "Catch ya later."

"Later," you say

"Ad-yoze," he says, shooting you a peace sign in the process. You shut the door behind him.

You jerk your thumb at the door. “A *right on* and a peace sign,” you tell Hale. “That kid needs to go down to Long Beach and let some dockworkers kick the shit out of him for a while.”

“Dude, that wasn’t a peace sign,” Hale tells you. “That was a ‘V’ for Vicodin.” He is probably right. All you ever did was smoke a little weed. You look like like mamma’s boys next to Mooch and his roommate. Those guys have dropped acid more times than you’ve dropped your pants and yet they still manage to keep their grade point averages above Hale’s. It bugged him to no end. The Moocher did so much dope he made Woodstock look like an old ladies tea social and he still pulled a three point four.

“I think I got a contact high from him just stopping by,” says Hale.

Dan laughs and there is another knock at the door. You open it and it’s Nikko this time.

“Hey killer,” he says, walking past you to your desk.

“Killer?” you say to him. “Hey man, you don’t even beat your meat.”

Nikko doesn’t get it but Hale and Dan are laughing hysterically. You don’t think it was that funny. Perhaps it was your delivery.

“Allow me to explain what will be the most exciting moment yet of your pathetic drug addled lives,” Nikko kids. He reaches into his bag and pulls out some sketches. What a motivated little terrorist bastard he is. There are quick line drawings of the street, of the layout of Koko’s and the bathroom. He spent the better part of the afternoon storyboarding your bomb scare. You are impressed.

“Quite simple gentlemen,” he proceeds. “The bathroom is between the restaurant and the bagel shop. Hale goes in with Scott.”

“Why me?” you interrupt. You were hoping

for an easy task in this whole boondoggle.

“Because you know the layout,” Nikko says, impatiently. “Hale goes in and watches the door while Scott sets the detonator and dumps the carbide. You slap an “out of order” sign on the door and crazy glue the lock so that no one can open it. Bam. You’re out in sixty seconds.”

“Whoever gets the key is going to be seen by the security camera in Koko’s.”

“Don’t need it.” Nikko produces a key-shaped replica. You take it from him and examine it closely. It’s plastic.

“Lucite,” Nikko continues. “I traced the outline of the key onto a paper towel when I was in the can with it. I used it to make a dupe at my lab with a diamond headed cutting tool.”

You knew it. You really can find all the stuff you need to blow up anything at almost any college. You just have to know where to look or who to ask.

“So what the fuck do I do then?” asks Dan.

“Well, one of you guys has to drive. I think it should be Hale since his car is less conspicuous,” Nikko says. He is right. A black Camry would blend in a lot better in Beverly Hills than a beat up white chevy pickup. “That means Dan, you have to make the phone call to report it.”

“Not to 911,” Hale says. “They’ll record my voice. They record all of their calls.” A-ha. Now you’re positive Hale’s been watching “CSI”.

“How about a radio station?” you ask.

“I was thinking a newspaper but a radio station would be better,” Nikko says.

“Just not the college station,” Hale adds. “That’d be way too obvious.”

“Agreed,” says Nikko.

“And whatever you do, don’t call from your own phone. Radio stations have caller I.D. now to screen for cranks,” says Hale. “Besides, the

cops could find it if they run the MUD's."

"MUD's?"

"Message Unit Detail reports. Those are the records of every call that any phone receives. You can't get that information yourself but if the government wants to know who's been calling you they just check your MUD's."

You look at Hale. Fucking poser.

"What the fuck do I say?" Dan asks.

"I got it," you tell him. You put on your best deep and breathy voice. "There is a bomb at the Koko's in Beverly Hills like the one that killed the people in the slum building early Thursday morning."

"Add some crap about man being evil," Hale interjects. "You know? The whole apocalypse thing."

You go back to the voice. "Mankind is evil and will be punished by an angry God,"

"As Nostradamus has foretold," adds Nikko,

jumping in with his own fake deep voice.

“Until you change your wrongful ways,” you continue. “I, uh, I mean, The Doomsday Club will continue to cleanse the earth by fire. You have one hour to disarm the bomb.”

“Thank you, drive through,” jokes Hale.

“Wow, Scott,” Nikko says to you slapping you on the back. “James Earl Jones doesn’t have shit on you.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” says Dan sarcastically. “I laughed, I cried, it was better than Cats. Now which one of you fuckers is going to write that all down for me?”