

(Narrator - S)

A long time later, when Satan was older, and had children of their own, (Robin and Starling, after the birds they saw out of their windows at their birth) Satan would tell them the story of how they murdered their parents.

When the power went out, because of thunderstorms or rationing, the family would light candles and gather in the dining room and eat chips and read books, but sometimes the children, especially Robin, the youngest, would ask Satan to tell them the story again. "Tell us about when you were a kid again," and Starling would roll his eyes a little and turn a page in his book, but he would stay in the room as Satan would tell them this:

"Well, way back when, and a couple states to the left, there was a big house by the end of the highway with a gnome in the front yard. And in the house there lived three children named Alaistar and Evelyn and Helena, and there were two parents named Kranker and Grampus, and they were as mean as parents come, and even a little bit meaner than that.

"The oldest child was Alaistar, and he was strong and tall and his back was straight, but his brains were not the sharpest and his ears didn't work so well. The middle child was named Vivian, and she was small and mean and fast, with filed nails and teeth. She had a quick mind and a quicker tongue which was split in two like a snake. The youngest was named Helena, and she was kind and wise, and her body was broken and her legs were broken and her arms were broken and she couldn't leave her bed. Everyone in the family loved Helena the most."

And Satan's youngest child asks, "How mean were they?"

"Well, Robin, they were very very mean. Alaistar, the deaf oldest child, he couldn't hear because they poured bleach in his ear when he heard a bad word, a spell from a hairy old witch who lived in the forest, and repeated the bad word to his parents. And Vivian's quick tongue was split in two because one day she yelled Hello to the witch and asked her name. And Helena was broken in bed because one time when she was very young, she had said that she was going to leave to live with the witch in the forest, and her parents couldn't bear to see her leave. So they broke her bones, and kept breaking and stretching them every month. They would coo to her that they were making her tall and strong.

"Now the children hated their parents and wished often that they could leave with the strangers that would sometimes come to the door of the old house, which is why Kranker would always kill the strangers and cook them up and feed them to the family, so the children couldn't leave with them, and so they didn't have to pay so much for groceries. The only visitor that Kranker couldn't kill was the witch in the forest, who was a hideous old hag so covered in hair that you couldn't see her skin, and when she moved, her hair would flow in the wind and it looked like she was a tumbleweed floating over the lawn. She sometimes made the garden gnome move around the yard, or paint dirty words on its red hat, and that would make Grampus very angry

indeed, but because the witch was his mother, he could only gnash his teeth and couldn't kill her.

"Now, the first rebellion was Alaistar's rebellion. He decided that to save his sisters, he needed to kill his parents, as much as he didn't like the idea of killing anyone. And what he did was offer to do all the cooking, because he knew that Kranker was lazy and didn't much like feeding the children anyway. And he knew that Grampus was gluttonous, and would eat anything put in front of him. So he cooked up everything that there was in the house, all of the pigs and the whole cow and all three of the strangers that had come looking for directions at the big house, and he laced it all with poison that the old hairy witch had handed him at night through the ajar window of the little room the children shared. And he placed the massive pot of stew in front of his father, while his mother was snoring on the couch. And Grampus ate and ate and ate, but he didn't seem to get sick, and he didn't burst at the seams like Alaistar thought he would. He just grew larger and larger and larger until he filled the whole of the dining room and there was hardly space in there for poor Alaistar. And once Kranker woke up and saw what was happening and heard what Alaistar was thinking, she forced Alaistar to eat some of his own stew and he didn't want to but he had to, and he poisoned himself and died.

"Now, Kranker, without any food in the house, but hungry, and needing to feed her two remaining children and her enormous husband, cut up her son and fed him to the family. And because she loved Helena, she gave her the choicest cuts of meat, which happened to contain Alaistar's soul, which started to live and grow and change inside Helena, and lend strength to her broken, elongated frame, while Kranker sang a lullaby to her called "if you ever leave me I will die."

"The second rebellion was Vivian's rebellion. She was angry at her brother's death, and just wanted to hurt her parents as much as possible, as punishment for their crimes. But Kranker was so much stronger and smarter and more powerful than her, almost a god; and how do you kill a god? This is what she asked the witch of the woods, by leaving a note under the lawn gnome that she liked to move, and the witch responded by whispering through the window of their room at night: "stab them in their weakest spot." And Vivian understood that Kranker's weakest spot was Helena. And she looked at her sister, broken and mute and confined to her slings, and tried to imagine a happy life for her, under the care of their cruel mother and their grotesque father, and couldn't. And because she loved her sister, she decided to kill her, because maybe that would kill her parents as well, and she would save her sister from a lifetime of pain, and serve justice as well.

"But, as ruthless as she was, she had to take time to mull over her decision. And that was how Kranker overheard her thoughts about her plan, and when it came time for Vivian, with tears in her eyes, to stick a stolen knife in the heart of her sister (after whispering "I'm sorry; I love you"), Kranker confused her, and she accidentally put the knife in her own heart. And the blood poured over Helena, lanky and broken in her bed, and Vivian's soul fell into Helena's mouth with her blood. And filled Helena with her cunning and her violence.

“And it was that night that Helena launched the third rebellion. As Kranker was in the kitchen, cooking and salting the body of Vivian, and Grampus was still sleeping off the poison from the first rebellion, Helena lay in her bed and cried and wept for her siblings, even as she felt their souls move inside of her, knitting her bones together and filling her with strength and anger. And she moved her arms and legs for the first time and picked up the knife from the ground and took her first painful step in years, toward the door, to go stab her mother to death.

“But she could not kill Kranker. And killing Kranker would not cure her scars. And killing Kranker would surely mean her own death. And she looked around her room, and saw a lawn gnome in the corner of her room. Which had certainly never been there before. And the gnome smiled at her and she dropped the knife. And the gnome took a step to the left and revealed a hole in the floor. The hole was covered in hair, no doubt shed by the witch of the woods. And the hole went down and down and down. And Helena, with Alaistar and Vivian burning bright in her heart, jumped down the hole, and fell and fell and fell and fell, because the only future for them in this house was vengeance and blood. And outside of this house, there might be life. And they fell and fell.”

“Where did the hole end?” says Satan’s youngest.

“The hole ended in California, somewhere near their grandmother’s house. It was a very long hole. And when they popped out of the ground, in a gas station bathroom, the three siblings were named Satan.”

Satan’s eldest, who had been listening as though by accident, knew the answer well: “The greatest vengeance is to live a good life in spite of the pain, as though you had never been harmed in the first place.”

[note: pronounce every piece of punctuation except periods and commas. So (<3) would be "open parenthesis less than three close parenthesis"]

(Narrator - J)

This is the first email the girl named Margaux sent to Satan:

"You don't know who I am but you seem really cool, (hides under desk forever), sorry!!! <3<3<3"

Margaux's second message was longer.

"Omg I'm so flattered that you read my stupid fic I'm super embarrassed lol I wrote that when I was, like, a little baby. It's a piece of poop, like everything I make lol Thank you for saying nice things about it!"

From the sixth message:

"There's a party at the neighbor's house right now i guess but it's like 3am and 10 below freezing and they're all basically naked and sweaty and dancing and swimming in the pool, even though it's frozen. Their music is really loud, and the lyrics are literally just the word "Dance" over and over. I can see some of them making out behind the bushes in my yard. I hate them. I don't understand teenagers. (even though I am one) Why are they like this i just want to sleep."

And the seventh:

"That's such an insane story, oh my god. I didn't know that parties like that even existed in real life. Next time you go to "The Big Apple" lol or like literally any place other than my town, you should bring me with you, it shouldn't be too far to walk, right? I'm looking it up on Google Maps, it would just take a week or two lol."

And the 10th:

"I'm just angry at my dad. He's like a shitty dad, you know. Super shitty. He works like 100 hours a week for the Shadowy Guys Who Are Watching Us From Helicopters, but not even as a cool person, as like a boring pencil-pusher. And every time I see him he says that this weekend he'll have some days off, or tomorrow he'll be home to pick me up from school instead of me using the bus like a poop, and then it's always "Oh, well, Jimmy fell out of a helicopter so I have to

cover for him,” or whatever. When I was a little kid, I used to think that he was a Very Important Man, but now that I’m older, I think he just doesn’t like me very much. Also the other day at dinner I told him what demisexual meant and he laughed and said “I think that’s just being a woman,” so I hate him now.”

The 20th:

“I think Dad just brought home a girlfriend! I’m going to go listen at his door and see if they’re having sex!”

The 21st:

“I couldn’t hear anything, but then I heard bedsprings. EEEEEWWWWW GROSS WHY DO I DO THIS TO MYSELF.”

The 25th:

“Oh, man, what’s New Orleans like? Do alligators really ride the buses? I heard that.”

The 30th:

“There’s another party in my neighbor’s house. At least this time the weather makes sense. But why are they all dressed up like prisoners? Is that a thing? Like a sex thing? This song is making my brain hurt. If someone says “dance” to me again in that voice I’m going to kill someone oh wait it happened again I guess I have to kill someone oh wait it’s just me I guess I have to kill myself fuck”

The 34th:

“Oh my god, what is wrong with teachers? What the heck do they think that we’re doing outside of class that they give us this much stupid homework, and then literally yell at us when we don’t do it exactly exactly like they want, like Mrs. Cariddi this morning was actually yelling about how our generation is lazy and stupid and entitled and worthless when she’s the one who’s worthless and actually made Tom cry in class. Thank god I’m graduating at the end of the year.”

Margaux was in fact 13 at the time of email #34, and not graduating for 5 more years. The 36th:

“Tell me a story about San Francisco, what was it like, I’m tired and angry and need a bedtime story.”

The 38th:

“My Dad has that girl over again. I don’t like her. She has a weird face and sometimes I can hear it when she’s making weird noises and she sounds like a gerbil. I don’t sound like a gerbil when I have sex, but I’ve never had sex, just masturbated, so maybe I would sound like a gerbil, but honestly I don’t think I would, and that makes me think that I might be better than her.”

The 40th:

“Idk, I guess tbh, like, i don’t know if i would ever really want to go all the way with anyone that seems like i’d be a slut i mean, maybe with someone I trusted who couldn’t get me pregnant because their junk was made out of rainbows or whatever, but I don’t know. I kind of just want to get, like, idk, like 50-shades-ed. Like put in a really dark cage for a week, and maybe sometimes someone comes and kisses me but I never see them. Maybe I want to go all the way. It seems slutty, so maybe just oral, but idk. Whatever I did, I would def do it better than my dad’s girlfriend though. Nbd.”

The 41st:

“No, it’s a dream I have a lot. I don’t know, they don’t really have a face. They definitely don’t have like a beard or anything, so they might be a girl maybe? I think it’s a girl. She smells like one. Does that make me a lesbian? Idk. I don’t think I’m a lesbian, but like I’ve never had, like, a real crush on a boy.”

The 45th:

“The partyers are back. I don’t know how that soundsystem works in the rain. It’s like even louder somehow. Just playing dance dance dance dance forever. I guess I’m not sleeping tomorrow so I guess I’m failing the math test so I guess I’m failing school so I guess I’m running away from home and coming to live with you, where are you now, are you anywhere near New Hampshire? I’ve got running shoes now, so I can definitely run. Can you hear this music where you are? It’s probably loud enough tbh”

46: Alaska, how the hell did you get to Alaska? HOW ARE YOU SO COOL

52: Dad broke up with The Gerbil. Thank God. He's all mopey around the house and it's not even fun and he got angry with me and yelled at me for no reason but then he felt bad so he bought me a new game and we played it all night and I feel like I won.

53: I kind of tried to tell my dad that I liked girls but like I was like "I think I might have a crush on someone" (i don't have a crush on someone, I was just trying to think of a way to say stuff), and he was like "who is he?" And then when I didn't respond he like talked for a while about how mean boys are at my age and that I probably shouldn't tell the boy unless I was sure because otherwise he might be mean to me or something, and anyway I hate him again.

60: Dance, dance, dance, dance, dance, dance, dance. I hate weekends.

65: I feel like after graduating from college I should kill myself. Like, I get that I'm working hard now so i can get into a good school, and doing college so i can get a good gpa so i can get a good job, but then what? More job? IDK feels like i should get a good job and then quit while I'm ahead, right? #winning

68: Maybe I should just kill myself as soon as I hear back from colleges. Get into a good college but then don't have to go #winning

75: Wait tell me about a time that you had sex, what was it like, did you guys, like, talk and stuff? What do people like, do? How does it actually, like, start? I'm so confused #virginthings.

76: Holy shit. Holy shit, that's the most like romantic fucking shit i've ever fucking heard **omgomg**. Like, I'm like tmi but like kind of wet right now (you didn't want to know that sorry), like, that's so hot please come have sex with me. Don't actually, like probably? Like, don't show up at my room and be like "remember that email!" Cause that would be creepy and stuff, but like, idk, i guess just, i could see it maybe sorry don't hate me idk.

78: I trust you.

80: Tell me another story of what sex is like.

84: They're back again, fucking lubed up teens swimming next door. Dance dance dance, can you come over here and do a quick curse on them for me or something like I know you don't actually do that anymore, but maybe this once? And then maybe sleep with me? Joking but not really **omg** i don't know what i'm doing why am i hitting send

88: Where are you right now?

90: Can you send me a picture?

91: I meant a picture of where you were but holy crap you're super beautiful **omg**.

92: *blush*

95: I don't actually think that we should have sex, except maybe like after we meet each other and like a while has passed, maybe then, but like, it's nice for me to think about if you're okay with me thinking about it.

100: Dance Dance Dance Dance Dance Dance Dance. I realized that I don't recognize any one of these kids from school. Where the fuck did they come from? How do they all know these dance moves? How are they not all pregnant? DO THEY EVER SLEEP?

102: I don't think my dad would believe me if I told him I was a lesbian. He said something about people being lesbians in college for political reasons and I hate him again now.

105: I like joke about it but maybe I should kill myself after finishing this paper, cause it's the best paper I've written so I think it would be a good high note #winning maybe?

108: NO. FUCK NO DAD GOT BACK TOGETHER WITH THE FUCKING GERBIL. WHAT THE FUCK. WHO THE FUCK IS THIS FUCKING WENCH. WHY DOES SHE SOUND LIKE THAT? I think that she's probably married and that's why they can't have sex at her house so they have to like invade my personal auditory bubble with their gross weird stuff. It's like, I can hear every noise and I'm not even trying that hard! I'm young and impressionable or something! I hate her.

112: Thanks for the picture. You look very manly! I don't know what I am anymore because I like you and you're not a girl but like w/e you're super pretty.

115: Maybe the next time she's over and they're having sex I should just, like, walk in on them. Just to see the looks on their faces.

116: And also to kill her.

117: And also maybe kill myself #winning.

121: Dad finally took me to the movies without the Gerbil. He's a better person when he's not near her, because she's a bitch, and she makes him into a bitch. I didn't tell him that I'm a lesbian, but maybe if he keeps not being a bitch I will. Idk I still hate him. He'd probably not believe me.

124: Fuck adults.

127: Where are you, send pictures?

136: dance dance dance dance dance dance I wish I was dead.

137: #winning

(Upbeat, rising dinging noise of an IM being received)

A few hours after #137, while Margaux ate dinner with her Dad, Satan responded with "how long do you want to be dead for?"

And Margaux responded with(#138): ?? maybe forever idk?

(Downbeat ding of IM being sent)

And Margaux waited for a reply.

And Satan explained:

"I first died when I was living in Los Angeles. I slept in the house of a fallen angel who was kind for as long as he could be, and then he was cruel. It was a city of warmth, the constant cars outside every window made my room sound like a womb. It was a city of space and light and trashcans overflowing with cakes and champagne, where the people were so beautiful they all hurt to look at. But I saw no beaches, met no beautiful shining youths, I took showers that lasted for days and days, until my host knocked on the door and told me not to waste water, because California was on fire.

"My host knew an old angel who still came to see him every once in a while, an old mentor from his younger days. She came by to catch up with him, to sell him drugs, to softly disapprove of his choices.

“And this old angel found me in my bathtub and saw my pain and offered to kill me, and I accepted. And she killed me, and then I came back and it was dark and it was four hours later and everything was different.”

And Margaux wrote back (#139), “omg what is your life?”

And Satan wrote back “I know, lol sorry, I get carried away, :P But if you want to, you can die for real for an hour or two. It’s real death, but temporary.” And then Satan wrote some other things, which Margaux didn’t exactly process.

And Margaux thought about the kind of person who would say they weren’t interested in doing that kind of thing, and then decided that she definitely didn’t want to be that person, and then she wrote back (#140) that she was totally interested definitely not even a question, let’s do this thing. And later that night, Satan wrote to say that they would be in New Hampshire in two weeks, staying with a friend of a friend of a friend who happened to live in her town (Margaux had told them earlier they couldn’t stay with her because of her Dad and the Gerbil), and that they would kill her then, but only for a little while.

And Margaux went to her room and hyperventilated and finished doing the 355th math problem that she’d done for homework that year, and read the 1243rd page of fiction she had read for school that year, and listened to the party in the neighbor’s yard for the 22nd time that year and heard the word “Dance” for the 270,000th time and masturbated *three* times while thinking of Satan and thinking that it might actually be possible for something interesting to happen in a life like hers.

(Narrator - N)

Dad sometimes felt as if he was not a real human. Like all Dads, he would make jokes to his daughter like “What am I, a human ATM?” And “Sure I’ll drive you to Eloise’s house, honey. It’s my biological function.” But they were only maybe 40% jokes. 60% of Dad hoped Margaux would tell him no, he was more than just that. But usually she just rolled her eyes instead, like he was supposed to know what that meant. He had it narrowed down to either “no you’re not, silly,” or “I am in complete agreement with you,” but he never figured out which.

Dad sometimes felt that by passing on his genomes and alleles and helixes--or whatever, he wasn’t a science person--that he had somehow made himself obsolete. His body was still here, but his soul was not important anymore--Margaux’s soul was. And he had become kind of a robot gardener whose job was to follow her around and make sure her soul was growing okay, and buy her medium-cool sneakers so she would get made fun of at school the absolute minimum possible amount.

But today Dad’s soul felt like it mattered a little bit, because he had a girlfriend. He hadn’t had a girlfriend last week, and last week had been pretty dreary. But this week was A-OK in his book. Dads are not supposed to have selfish feelings, not loud ones anyway, because it freaks daughters out. But Father was having trouble being patriarchal with the niceness of romance tingling in his brain.

“You’re like, literally glowing right now. What is it?” Margaux asked, not looking up from her phone, which father could not see under the table but which he knew was there, because he was not born yesterday.

“You’re misusing ‘literally,’” Father said, and gave himself a mental high-five.

“No I’m not. There is actually light coming off of your face. I can see it in my peripheral vision, even.”

Father frowned. He had to rescind his mental high-five.

“Just excited for the dance party this weekend. Woo!” He held up his arms and wiggled around in his chair. As he squirmed, the first thumping strains of dance music from next door started up. They were dependable, just like the falling dusk.

“The dance party is every weekend, and you don’t go.” Margaux looked up for a second, saw him wiggle-dancing, and rolled her eyes all the way up and then all the way back down to her phone. Then she glanced back at him suspiciously.

“Oh, I get it,” she said.

“Huh?” Said Dad.

“You’ve got--” she twisted up her face like she was smelling the mushroom stroganoff Dad now only made when she was at Eloise’s house, “--sex glow.”

Dad opened his mouth in surprise and then tried to remember what those cute little board books said to say to your children when they find out you have a sex life. “Margaux, when a man like-likes a woman...”

“EEEEWWWWW!” Margaux yelled, 80% angry and 20% gleeful, at Dad’s estimation.

“Margaux, I’m not just your Dad, I’m also a man with nee--”

“Ugh, EW, no. Who *needs* to listen to a gerbil squeaking all night?”

“A what?” Dad was lost, unless “gerbil” was the new hip word for fucking.

“*Her.*” Margaux’s face was flushed. Dad could tell she was as embarrassed as he was, but she wanted to make him feel bad. Maybe for not getting what demo-sexual was.

“Her name is Miranda,” Dad said, “she is not a gerbil. She’s a lovely woman.”

“I’d be happier if you were dating a gerbil,” Margaux said. Then she went back to typing carefully into her phone, concentrating like somebody applying for a very desirable job.

Dad was extra offended for a minute, but then he remembered that Margaux was not alive in the 1980s and was probably not referencing *that* kind of gerbil shenanigans. But he knew Margaux would not be happy even if he brought home an actual gerbil instead of Miranda. Margaux wanted him to stay purely Dad, and nothing else. He imagined an enormous Dad-shaped mushroom that had no personal life and used only spores to reproduce with other faraway mushrooms that he never met and who were very quiet. (Again, Dad was not a scientist so he wasn’t sure about the spores.) That was what Dads should be like. He was failing his biological function again.

But then he thought about when he and Miranda drove to the beach last week, their first date back together. They kissed on the boardwalk like a movie and Miranda said she had missed him and was glad they both came around, and her hair blew across her face and got in his mouth a little bit. And they laughed when he spit it out and had to pick pieces of hair off his tongue, but he almost didn’t want to because they tasted like cotton candy, and when Miranda laughed she had crow’s feet around her eyes a little bit, and Dad thought they were totally endearing. And it started raining, but they slapped their hands down on the weathered wooden rail and said “not it!” So the rain only fell on the people around them. And he saw her hand go to her pocket for a cigarette and then dance away again, because she knew smoke irritated his asthma. And he

was touched that she had adapted small parts of her life for him. He didn't have to give up on happy moments like that, just because they weren't about his daughter.

"Margaux, listen to me," he said. "I know this house is small and you're embarrassed that our family life and my love life overlap sometimes."

"Who cares?" Margaux said. "I don't. I've got a love life too. See? This is my boyfriend."

She shoved her phone at him from across the table, but wouldn't let him take it. Her fingers twitched and clutched at the device. He had to lean forward to see that on the small screen was a picture of a boy who was very attractive and much too old for Margaux.

"That's not your boyfriend," he said, "he is much too old for you, Margaux."

"Girls mature faster than boys, and I mature faster than girls," Margaux said. "And we met on tumblr, so he knows everything about me. More than you do."

Dad was getting tired of letting Margaux take potshots at him and staying calm all the time. "Boyfriends are in real life, Margaux, not on tumblr with all those made-up genders. And you are too young for a real-life boyfriend until you magically become mature enough to date on your sixteenth birthday." He tried to throw the last part in for humor, because he wasn't deep enough in Dad Denial that he thought rules made total sense. But Margaux was not seeing the joke.

"I'd rather be dead than wait that long," Margaux said. "And you and the gerbil can go to hell."

"SHE IS NOT A GERBIL!" Dad yelled, realizing he should have a better comeback, since he was a grownup. "And you are spoiled, Margaux," he added. "The fact that you'd talk about dying like that proves you don't know what suffering is."

Margaux's thumb sat still, pressed against the keypad of her phone. She was staring at the picture of the boy, and Dad imagined endless strings of G's or H's skittering across the screen under the boy's quirk of a smile.

(Narrator - J)

(Narrator - S)

Satan waits for Margaux in a park. There are no benches in the park, and there are two people walking with their dogs and conversing in low tones. Satan stands. There are no streetlights in the park, but there are luminescent moths in pale colors that shine and fly and chase each other, attracted to each others' light. And the brightest moths collect orbiting clumps of moths in floating fluttering balls, some 8 feet off the ground, and that gave off enough light to see by.

Satan takes out their phone and sees a text from the friend of a friend of a friend who is letting them sleep in their basement for two days in exchange for Satan blessing his wife's fetus and also fixing his shed. Satan ignores the text, which says that the party is beginning. They do not want to think about this friend of a friend of a friend who was only able to spare them two days. Satan looks through their contact list and their facebook feed, looking for any friend who can still spare them time, whose goodwill they have not yet burned. They still have a few left. Enough to get them through the next month at least. Not homeless yet. A thousand weak homes, all across the country. So not homeless yet.

Satan lights a cigarette and waits for the girl who is in love with them to arrive. They smoke quickly, trying to finish before she shows up. A moth comes and lands on the cigarette and is burned alive and as it falls it burns brilliantly, and other moths come, and they die too and Satan's corner of the park is the brightest corner for only a little while. They crush the cigarette and the moths and they sigh and wish half that they were alone in their bed and wish half that this girl is perfect and that they'll kiss and laugh and never sleep and sign a 12-month lease. The wish comes out of their mouth as a smoke-ring of luminous gold, and the moths crowd around it for a minute before dispersing and leaving Satan alone.

Margaux appears under the mothlight at the other side of the park. They have a lot of time to watch each other as she approaches him.

(Silence)

M: Oh man.

S: Oh man?

M: (blurts out) You're even prettier in person. Sorry, was that, I mean, weird, I-

S: No, that's fine...

M: I need to lie down.

S: Are you okay?

M: I just feel light headed. A little too much too fast, I mean, I barely had any idea that you'd actually be here, and like be a real person and not like a kidnapper with like a fishing pole.

S: A fishing pole?

M: That's what I was all paranoid imagining, yeah, for some reason. Come on, lie down with me.

S: Can I look at you?

M: (shy) Umm... yeah, sure.

Satan lights a match. Moths collect around it and burn and die and light each other on fire. Satan stares at this girl. She looks different. She looks so very young.

M: So you're Satan. God, that's such a cool name. You're shorter than I imagined.

S: You too.

M: We're both so tiny. I was imagining you as like 7 feet tall or something, with like goat legs that went backwards and stuff. Or a tail.

S: Nope, no tail.

M: It's strange. You look like a person. Like a really cool and really beautiful person, but, like, just another person. Also.

S: You don't know that I'm not the literal Satan. Prince of Darkness, Lord of the Dead. I could be here to steal your soul and rip your heart out and lead you into a darkness you will never come out of. I could be the instrument of your trauma and death. I could be a great evil.

M: Nope. You're a person. Lie down here with me.

Satan sits near Margaux and she touches them without asking first, placing her hand on their thigh and her other hand near Satan's fingers. Satan does not object, but does not appreciate the silent assumption of their consent.

S (choosing words carefully, then carelessly, as though surprised by what's coming from their mouth): Unfortunately, I'm not a person. People are real, and I'm not. People have their own beliefs. They know who they are and where they fit in the world. They have real histories and real families and real homes. They have ambitions and desires beyond just getting to the next day. People have causes and convictions. People have souls, and untouchable truths. People are real. I'm a ghost. A flittering intangible thing trapped in the wrong world, wandering through a simulacrum of a life.

M: You seem real to me.

S: No... Unfortunately. Hence Satan.

Margaux squeezes Satan's thigh, as though testing its reality. It holds, but tenuously. Satan can feel her hand almost penetrating its edge.

S: Sorry for dumping. I usually have more self-control...

M: That's okay.

S: Dying for the first time helped a little. Coming back to this world, it finally felt like I was here to stay. But I'm still a foreigner. I still disappear from time to time. Leave this world for a couple of hours or days at a time. Float through to Faerie or some other world. Come back unexpectedly. The last time was for two months. Whoever I'm staying with comes home to an empty couch and thinks I've left without saying goodbye. And when I do come back, there's no place in that house for me and I have to move again, burning the bridge behind me.

M: God.

S: So no, not really a person.

M: A Satan.

S: An Adversary, yeah.

M: How many of you are there?

Satan misunderstands the question and answers "Three." Margaux's head is on Satan's lap. She still has not asked to touch them. They sit in silence and Satan half wants to touch her hair, but their arm is not moving.

M: Dad doesn't know I'm here. He'd freak out if he knew. I don't even know what he'd do, but I can't stop thinking about it. He forbade me from seeing you. But what's the worst that could happen? I get grounded, right? I should stop worrying about him and be here with you. He doesn't need me anyway. He's got her, that tramp Gerbil. Maybe I shouldn't come home and then he can go to her and cry and I wouldn't come back until they break up which would be soon because he'll be so sad I'm gone that she'll leave him because he doesn't want to have sex with her.

The last burning moth fizzles out on Satan's shoulder and the pain makes their shoulder real again for a moment, and then they are lit only by the distant glow of clumps of moths from across the park.

M: You know when we were younger, pretty soon after Mom left, we used to go on trips every weekend. He made the time and carved out a space for us to be together, and we'd go to the carnival or the Renaissance Fair or the aquarium, and even when we didn't have a trip we wanted, we'd still get takeout and watch movies together until we fell asleep. He used to call it our date night. We haven't gone on a trip together in like 2 years. Cause he like "got busy," or whatever, but last month, he actually left for two days to make a trip with her, and didn't take me. Now we just waste time away in the house and fight. I can't even really talk to him anymore. He just up and forgot about me. I used to be able to talk to him about anything, now I can't even tell him that I'm gay or whatever I am. Because you know he'll just say that it's a phase. Cause he's an old dick. He'll like love me forever or whatever, but he doesn't actually know who I am. No one does. Except you.

Satan thinks about Alaistar and Vivian and the house at the end of the highway. Margaux, looking up at their face, sees them fading slightly into the blackness of the sky. Their thigh is still solid where her head is lying, but the membrane is thin. She sits up, thinking she is losing them, and falls forward to kiss them. And Satan disappears entirely. Her head falls into the air where they once were, and there is nothing there for her to kiss. As her brain makes contact where their brain once was, she sees a succession of images:

A girl locking the room to her bedroom and turning on the stereo as loud as it went.

Two girls outside on a night like this, trading a bottle of vodka by the side of the road and coughing.

A dormitory of malnourished young women. One of them moves in her sleep, and the rest open their eyes to make sure she isn't running away. By every bed is a worn bible. On the wall hangs a paddle with a verse from scripture.

An ancient woman holds close a crying adolescent with close-cropped hair on the threshold of an old house, confusion in her eyes.

Margaux sits alone in the field and the two dog walkers finish walking their two dogs, get into two separate cars, and roar off in two separate directions into the dark.

(Narrator - J)

Margaux doesn't want to go home. She cannot breathe, and home is a bad place for someone who cannot breathe, because there isn't as much air inside a house as there is outside. So Margaux walks across the park and tries to continue to breathe. She has killed the only person who could ever love her. Blind with anger and sadness, trying not to look like a suicidal wreck, she stumbles into the forest. Will-o-the-wisp and faerie lights twinkle in the dark, a dryad steps from her tree to watch the passing girl, and the spirits of suicides hang close on her footsteps, but she is blind to all of them. She has let Satan slip through her fingers, and will therefore die alone.

Margaux, according to Margaux, is a stupid. Margaux is an ugly and a worthless. Margaux is an untouchable, an unlovable, and a pitiful. Margaux is a thoughtless and an alone. Margaux is a hopeless and an alone.

Margaux, according to the dryad, is merely a leaking child.

She finds herself at a bend in the river with a small beach and a circle of mushrooms. Margaux tries to hold back the guilt, but it floods from her eyes and from her navel in an uninterrupted stream, making the river swell and rise.

“Well, this is it,” Margaux says, “This is what #winning feels like.” And then, “I want to die.”

“No, it’s all right,” Satan says, “You just need to ask before touching me.”

They are sitting near her, most of their body under the sway of the water. Her throat clear, air roaring into her lungs, Margaux goes to embrace them, but stops herself.

M: Can I hug you?

S: No, not right now.

M (disappointed): Oh... Okay.

S: You’re a lot younger than you said you were.

M: No I’m not.

S: You’re 14.

M: I get that a lot, actually, cause I’m short. People still think I’m a little kid just cause I’m under 5 foot, but I’m 17.

S: You’re 14.

The water from the river runs normally again, creeping slowly past them. Faeries in the mushroom circle communicate with each other in ways Margaux would never understand, about things Margaux would never experience. The heavily immutable fact of her age hung from the branches over them.

M: So?

S: (sighs)

M: I'm 14, so what? I'm old. You like me. We've been talking for months. It's never mattered before.

S: I didn't know before. You lied.

M: So what? None of our stuff matters now? What, you can't take my soul unless I'm 18? Is that in the rules? You're Satan, since when do you care about rules? It's just a number.

S: It's important information! It absolutely changes what we can... it changes what our relationship looks like. I mean, your dad-

M: Fuck my dad. It doesn't matter what he thinks, you're never going to meet him.

S: But I want to.

M: Why? He's an ass-

S: Not him specifically. But... (sigh) Look. I thought this was a romantic thing. You did too, am I wrong? But maybe I wanted romance that is above the surface, not a buried forbidden thing. I don't get any thrill from breaking rules and sneaking around. I burned that out of my system back at St. Catherine's, and have no desire to repeat that. I want to meet my lover's father. I want to go to thanksgiving at his house. I want to update my Facebook relationship status. I want love in the light of the sun.

A train passed by on the other bank of the river. Close. Margaux had never seen a train here before. She didn't even know there were tracks here.

M: Can we still... kiss and do stuff maybe? I was hoping...

S: I don't know. I don't think so.

M: I wish I was dead.

S: I can still do that for you, if you want.

M: Yeah?

S: A promise is a promise. Yes, I can still show you death.

M: Oh. Okay.

Margaux and Satan talked by the riverside. Margaux proposed that they do a restart of the night and pretend that they'd decided to meet as friends. In her mind, she was thinking that maybe if they were friends for a while, Satan would be more likely to decide at the end of the night that they wanted Margaux to be their girlfriend. But she didn't tell Satan that. She just decided to act as mature and brave as she could, and then Satan would see she was an adult and kiss her, maybe to bring her back from the dead. That would be super romantic. Nearby, in the forest, a murderer walked along the path and thought about his past. He didn't see them, and they didn't see him, and he hadn't killed anyone in many years, but he thought about his murders and abuses and he changed the temperature of the air as he passed. It grew warmer, because his body was a human one.

After the river, they walked around Margaux's town. Their clothes were wet and hung to them and they shivered and Margaux asked if they would hold her and this time they said yes. They touched each other, Satan trying to communicate friendship and Margaux trying to communicate love. At odds, but the alternative was being cold. They walked to the 24-hour Walmart and Margaux said that it was her favorite place in the town, because you could get anything you needed there, food and clothes and guns and even mugwort and moonstones and dragon eggs and ecstasy, if you knew which employee to ask. You could live in the Walmart if you needed to, she said. Or just come there at night to steal what you need, and live in the forest. That's how she wanted to live, she said. Off the grid.

They walked through the aisles stacked with every object under the sun, and Margaux asked how she could prove that she was old and mature. She said that she'd steal new, not wet clothing for both of them. "That's not something a kid would do," she said, and Satan said "Yeah it is," but was smiling. Their friendship was a thin ice sheet of denial and pretend over a pool of desperation, resentment, and violent love, but they tried their best to skate.

They walked down the streets of her hometown and she pointed out houses where her teachers lived, and her classmates. And she told Satan which classmates had had sex yet, which ones were virgins, which ones did drugs, which ones were kind. She told Satan where the pizza places were, and which ones had the most interesting toppings. She grew more and more embarrassed of the tinyness of her town, but Satan seemed to find what she said interesting, so she kept talking. She shivered at one point, and Satan took off their coat and gave it to her, which she found extremely gallant. She wished that she had stolen a coat from Walmart to put on Satan, so they could both be gallant.

She asked Satan to tell her a story from their own life. Satan told her about the time their mother, Kranker, had given them away as a slave for a year to a cruel and powerful faerie, as collateral on a loan. They told her about the year they had spent as an abductee of the Fae, the indignities and punishments and cruelties of that world. They rolled up their shirt and showed Margaux their back, where the Faerie King had tried to graft wings onto their back, to make them like him. But the wings hadn't taken, had fallen off, so when Satan ran away, they ran

away naked, because the burlap shirt they were allowed to wear would have ripped open the wounds at a full sprint.

They passed near Margaux's street, and heard a party where the music was playing Dance Dance Dance and the beautiful teenagers were sweating and kissing and pretending with all their might that they would never die. Margaux said that her house was down that way, but they didn't have to go there if Satan didn't want, and frankly she didn't care if she ever saw it again. Satan looked down the street with a strange wistfulness in their eye and asked if the house a third from the end was Margaux's. Surprised, she said yes, and how did he know?

S: There are garden gnomes in the yard. Just like my childhood home. It was just a guess. But it seemed like you had a protector. And I'm glad to know you do.

Father woke up to the DVD title screen looping for the forty-third time. He was alone. Margaux wasn't there to steal back the blanket. Upstairs, Margaux's cat Squirrel was making feed-me sounds and throwing his fat little body against her door. Thump. Thump. Thump. Father made a *whoofing* sound, heaved himself off the couch, and went up all the stairs, 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 CREAK 11 12 13 14 15 16 17. He planted his hairy feet on either side of his daughter's cat and rapped on his daughter's door.

"Margaux?"

She didn't answer, not even grumpily. Since she was a light sleeper this meant she was a.) not inside or b.) lying dead on the floor in a pool of blood. Either way, Father felt justified opening the door.

It was not option b.). *Whew*, thought Father.

Her bed was made with Father's precise hospital tucks. Squirrel jumped onto it and made creases, staring at Father as if accusing him of vanishing Margaux with magic. Father and Margaux had sat down to watch the movie around seven PM, and it was now 10:30 and Margeaux was not in the living room or in her neat bed. Father opened Margaux's closet door. Only shirts and dresses, no Margeaux.

First Father fed squirrel, then he went looking for his other fiscal dependent. He checked all over the house, in places that did make sense—kitchen, basement, yard—and in places that did not: the top shelf of the pantry, up the chimney, under his bed. He felt like he was playing a game of hide-and-seek, but he was not having any fun.

Now Father was worried. A daughter who was not in or under a bed for a whole night is usually not doing something a Father would be proud or happy about. Margeaux had not even slept on the sofa, which was a slumber Father knew all too well.

Father called Margaux's mother in case she had kidnapped her. She had not. She still did not want to kidnap Margeaux even if Dad asked her to.

Father thought about checking Margeaux's school, but they locked the big blue doors as soon as the last kid left detention. He thought about checking the river, because Margeaux liked to take walks there, but knew she would have taken her blue jacket if she was going out. He thought about checking a friend's house, but he only knew her friends by their first names: Jenny, Tyler, Fatima, Eloise. Unfortunately for Father, families in the phone book are not listed by their teenagers' first names. Father wondered who you called to ask to change things like that.

But then Father remembered another place young folks gathered at night after everywhere else was quiet and closed.

(...fade to..)

Hi, welcome to Walmart, do you need any assist... (trails off, as though too bored to finish the sentence)

CUSTOMER SERVICE REP TO LAYAWAY, CUSTOMER SERVICE REP TO LAYAWAY.

What else do we need? We have enough kidney beans... ooh, *navy* beans.

A new flat screen tv?

Oh, shut up.

...to get out of here?

We're almost done.

Oh the weather outside is frightful...

Margaux?

CUSTOMER SERVICE TO LAYAWAY.

I don't know who needs this many kinds of toothpaste.

So just pick one, it doesn't matter.

But what if it *does*, though?

Margaux!

JANET TO LAYAWAY.

You can make a one-hitter out of an apple. You can kind of make one out of anything.

No way. What's it taste like?

Like apple, man, like apple.

That's fucked up.

D'you work here?

Yeah, what's up.

I'm looking for my daughter. She's 13, brown hair, this tall, boyish face?

Haven't seen her, sorry.

Thanks anyway.

Or out of like the valves at the ends of compressor hoses. Those work pretty good too.

No way.

JANET, YOU'RE NEEDED IN LAYAWAY, PLEASE COME TO LAYAWAY.

Margaux!

It's disgusting that you can still buy guns here.
Where would you rather people buy them? Drive-throughs?

Margaux, come on.

When we finally kiss goodnight, how I hate going out in the storm

JANET, SO HELP ME GOD...

What's that say, can you read that label?

A...P...P...L...E...J...A...C...K...S Applejacks?

Good!

All the way home I'll be warm

Margaux!

Jimmy's with God now.

No, he's not.

You don't know that. God forgives a lot of things, you know.

Not that.

Lot of people would disagree with you, Joanne. Not me, but a lot of people. So we could be wrong.

Where the fuck are you, Margaux.

CUSTOMER NEEDS SUPPORT IN LAYAWAY, JANET, AND SHE'S LOSING HER PATIENCE WITH BOTH OF US, SO GET OVER HERE.

I like the green ones better. They're sour.

I like you better, you're sour.

Shut up

Where the fuck did you go.

Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.

(Narrator - N)

Around 11:00pm, Margaux finally arrived at the house Satan was staying at. It looked almost exactly identical to her house, except without anything in the yard. Her house had a hammock and two garden gnomes and a reindeer that lit up during winter. The lights were on, because of the party that Satan had said was happening.

The party was nothing like Margaux thought it would be. There weren't any dancing sweating people at all! The music wasn't telling her to dance! No teenagers hooking up in the corner. She saw 3 people sitting around a table playing a board game and smoking a hookah. They passed the hookah round and round and round and she heard them make a joke about wood and sheep that she simply didn't find as funny as they all seemed to.

Margaux followed Satan into the kitchen, where four people, two of them old, sat on the floor and drank from cups that didn't match. There was something wrong with their faces, and the language they spoke didn't sound like any language Margaux had ever heard. Satan spoke to them in the same nonsensical language while Margaux shook and thought about what was about to happen.

Satan introduced these people, who had names so forgettable that Margaux lost track of them within seconds. She almost choked when it was her turn to introduce herself, and one of the butterflies in her stomach escaped through her mouth as she said "Margaux." It flew around the room, over the board game, and slipped through the keyhole to the door to the basement. Margaux watched it while Satan chatted, and she wondered how they would do it. Poison? An axe? Hanging? A spell, that would quietly put her to sleep? Would they have to have sex before the death? Maybe if they had sex, they could just stop there and not go through with it? Margaux hoped, while Satan extricated himself from casual conversation.

She followed Satan down to the basement, where their mattress and suitcase were, as well as a gerbil in a cage and a poster that said "Slayer Reign In Blood" that didn't seem like it belonged to Satan. She sat on their mattress and blushed and didn't quite watch as they changed out of their clothes, and into pajamas. She looked around at the walls and ceiling, expecting them to be splattered in blood, but there was only white paint and drop ceiling tiles.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Yeah."

"Cause it might be too much for you."

"I'm not a kid."

"It was too much for me when I was three years older than you."

“Well I’m braver than you maybe.”

(Laughs)

“I’m older than a lot of people who are older than me.”

“Hon, I need you to be serious for a moment.”

“I’m very serious.”

“Ok. Then you need to let me be serious for a moment.”

“I... Ok. Go ahead.”

“I’ve actually known you for a couple of hours at this point. You’re not ready for this. I wish you were. But you’re not.”

“I think I am-”

“No, I’m sorry, but no. Death is a gift. It is such an enormous thing. To experience, and to hold inside of yourself. **And you will hold this inside of yourself for the rest of your life, and never be the same. It will be there, like a tattoo on your brain and on the inside of your skin. This isn’t like a trip or a dream, where you can simply return to reality and forget. You are choosing to live your life as a different thing. Something beyond human. This is not something to be taken lightly.**”

(long silence)

“...Is it safe?”

“Nothing is safe.”

“Don’t be a dick.”

“No. It’s not safe. You might not come back.”

“Oh.”

“The only comfort is that if you don’t come back, it’s because you didn’t want to.”

(silence from Margaux as she thinks)

“If you want me to kill you, I will kill you. I will believe you when you say you want it. I trust you enough for that. But I refuse to do it because you want an adventure. That’s not fair to you, and it’s disrespectful to me, and what I do, and what I believe, and what I’ve been through. So, I suppose I’m saying, **why do you want this?**”

“Umm... Why did you want it? When you did it for the first time?”

“Because I didn’t know I could come back.”

Long pause

“I... I don’t know. It’s hard to talk about. I want... I’m gonna die someday, right? Like, forever. It’s gonna happen, and then there’s just nothing, right? And like, I don’t get to be anyone else. I just have to be stupid me with this stupid life. Being miserable on the internet and doing homework for hours and hours every day, and waiting for Dad to get home every night, and hoping we might do something fun this weekend. And maybe making a couple of friends to go to the movies with, but we’ll never really love each other enough for it to matter. Like, thinking about being an adult and doing stupid work for stupid people over and over forever without even getting to graduate to anything new. I guess it’s like, I need to know. I need to know if there’s a possibility that I’ll ever be like happy or something. If there’s a possibility that anything could even maybe mean shit. If that’s a possibility. You know?”

(Satan is silent)

“Sorry, didn’t mean to start crying.”

“That’s okay. Don’t apologize for feeling.”

“I just need to know if, like, I *can* live for real. If that’s even a thing.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Okay. Lie down, eat this.”

“Should I... Should I take off my clothes?”

“Only if you want to.”

“I don’t.”

“Then don’t.”

Margaux lay down in her clothing. Satan told her that the first time you died, it helped to think of a happy memory, and keep thinking about it as everything was happening. Otherwise you could get lost, and the whole thing would take a boringly long time.

Margeaux thought about being 4 years old and lost at Cedar Point amusement park, how she turned around and around in a sea of unfamiliar people, thousands and thousands of people, and cried until a middle-aged man who sold funnel cake found her and called someone who called someone who made an announcement over the loudspeaker for her father, and the funnel cake man let her wait in his little booth and showed her how to work the deep fryer and gave her free funnel cake. And when her father found her, she was laughing and covered in powdered sugar and he ate some of the funnel cake too.

And Satan set a timer for ten minutes, then strangled her to death on the cot in the basement while the boy in the red shirt won the board game upstairs by building a road that was very very long indeed.

(whispered) "Wait! Will it hurt?"

(half-whisper)"Only for a moment. It'll be over so quick, you'll barely even notice."

THEN THERE IS THE SOUND OF DEATH.

(Note, Margaux speaks very slowly for the rest of the scene)"Shit."

"Are you okay?"

"Shit."

"Did you shit yourself?"

"Shit... no."

"Does your head hurt? My first time my-"

"No. I have to pee."

"Me too, I'll help you."

(kind of a joke) "Oh no, only one toilet."

"I'll pee in the sink."

(Peeing for a long time.)

“Welcome back.”

“I’m hungry.”

“Do you want food?”

“Yeah.”

“What do you want, I’ll get it for you.”

“Umm... I don’t know.”

“What’s around here?”

“Umm... There’s a couple pizza places that deliver. Umm... Hot Tomatoes is a good place, I guess. You can get avocados on the pizza.”

“Do you want that?”

“No.”

“Ok.”

“Umm... There’s a Chinese place around the corner. They have good dumplings.”

“Do you want that?”

“...No.”

“I have food upstairs.”

“...What?”

“I’d have to look.”

“...I don’t know. I’m not hungry.”

“If you’re hungry, I can-”

“It’s too much work, I’m not hungry.”

(click lights off)

So Margaux lay on the floor of the basement, her head on Satan's lap.

"Satan."

"Yes?"

"You get to have a family."

(Narrator - N)

Dad was woken 20 minutes earlier than he would've liked by the cat, Squirrel. If Margaux didn't feed Squirrel by 7:30 sharp, he started squalling and throwing his fat tabby body against her door.

Dad swished down the hall in his almost-satin pajama pants and planted his hairy feet on either side of his daughter's cat and rapped on his daughter's door.

"Margaux?"

She made no answer, and since she was a light sleeper this meant she was a.) not inside or b.) lying dead on the floor in a pool of blood. Either way Dad felt justified opening the door.

It was not option b.). *Phew*, thought Dad.

Her bed was made with the precise hospital tucks Dad used to make a bed. Squirrel went and jumped on it and meowed at Dad and looked at him like "Find Margaux, nitwit."

Since Dad was a nurturing type he dumped some cat food in Squirrel's dish before setting off to find his other fiscal dependent.

Margaux had said "goodnight" to Dad around 9 PM last night, but she hadn't slept in her bed, which meant a.) she had slept somewhere else instead or b.) she had not slept at all.

He checked all over the house, in places that did make sense—kitchen, living room, under his bed (morning hide-and-seek?)—and in places that did not: the top shelf of the pantry, the linen closet, and up the chimney.

Now Dad was worried. A daughter who was not in or under a bed for a whole night is usually not doing something a Dad would be proud or happy about. Margaux had not even slept on the sofa, which was already one step down from a bed.

Dad called Margaux's mother in case she had kidnapped her. She had not. She still did not want to kidnap Margaux even if Dad asked her to.

A breaking noise came from Margaux's room. Dad ran up the stairs, expecting to see Margaux coming in through the window. But really all it was was that Squirrel had pushed everything off of Margaux's bedside table to express his displeasure at her unexplained absence.

Dad went back downstairs and leaned over the kitchen sink and cried into some dirty dishes for a bit. Then he stopped crying because he noticed that he was crying into two dirty bowls. If Margaux had gone away and left a dish, she'd come back to wash it. She was very good about that.

Dad washed his own dish but left Margaux's in the sink. Then he lay down on the sofa and started to read *Men's Health* magazine. Margaux would come back soon.

Then Dad remembered the boyfriend Margaux had pretended to have 2 weeks ago, and he sat up again and said "stupid" to himself and began to be very scared indeed because boyfriends, as a whole, are generally not a good thing for the daughters of protective Dads, and especially so when they are older, and especially especially so when they are internet boyfriends.

So Dad knocked on Margaux's room again (just in case), and went inside when there was no answer. Dad looked through her drawers to see if she'd written anything down, like a phone number or an address, then remembered that paper wasn't a thing for his daughter, which was how he found himself trying to guess Margaux's password. Squirrel sat on the desk beside him and meowed for more food. Then Dad remembered a conversation he had had with his daughter three months ago:

D: Hon, why can't I log into Netflix?

M: I had to reset the password.

D: What is it now?

M: Can you wait? I'll log you in, I used my everything password, and I can't tell you or you'll be able to get into all my stuff.

D: Come on, don't you trust me? I just need to watch Castle.

M: Fine, it's TheNSADoesGoodWork, because that would make hackers uncomfortable to type. Now I have to change my password everywhere, great, thanks.

D: Thanks, and you're welcome!

So Dad, betting that his daughter trusts him, typed in TheNSADoesGoodWork. The computer opened for him. There was a document on the desktop called "Hi Dad, Open Me" This is what it said:

"Hi Dad.

I didn't run away. Well, I did, like, sneak out, but I'm coming back real soon. I'm dead right now, how crazy is that? I'm having a hard time concentrating. I'll be fast.

I can see the future! And the past. It's hard to keep them straight. There aren't that many things that are true or real. A lot of stuff is just not real. Like cabinets! And houses! And grades. None of those things are real. And they don't matter. Neither do cars or parties or school. Rocks are real. As is food. And me. I'm real. As are you, as is my friend. Most things about us aren't real

though. It's hard. But we are. So's death. And I think love. I noticed that love seems like it was real when I was looking at the two of us. Love doesn't matter, but it's definitely real.

We're both gonna love a lot of people before we die openparentheses age 74, btw closeparentheses. We're not gonna like a lot of the people the other person loves, but that won't stop either of us. My friend's gonna love a lot more people, like so much more, cause their life is larger and more important than ours. They're gonna love hundreds of millions of people, and it's going to last long after they're dead. Pretty cool! We're just normals, though.

I'm having a hard time concentrating, but you should know that it turns out I'd be dead if it weren't for you! I'd have killed myself last year, apparently! Crazy. It wouldn't have mattered though. Literally nothing matters. But it seems like you'd want to know that, and even though love doesn't matter, I might as well keep acting like it does I guess.

Don't worry about me, I'll be home an hour after you read this, and I'm still a virgin and all that stuff (lol), just snuck out so I could die for a bit.

Xoxoxo
Love
Margaux"

Dad closed the computer, lay down on the couch, and waited with the cat on his lap for an hour, which is when the door opened, and his daughter came home.

(The sound of a car pulling into gravel. A door slams. A sigh. A choking back of tears.)

Father got home as the sun was coming up. He hadn't been out all night since sophomore year of college, that time he went to Germany and accidentally smoked something funny out of a beautiful glass instrument in a club. His adult body was not equipped for shenanigans anymore.

(Rustling keys. The keys are dropped.)

F: Shit.

(The keys are picked up. The door is unlocked and swung open.)

As an experiment, Father tiptoed up the stairs to Margaux's room, stepping very wide to avoid the creaky tenth stair, thinking maybe if she didn't hear him coming this time, she'd be there. "Aha!" he yelled as he threw open the door. But Margaux was not climbing in through the window, like he had pictured very convincingly in his head. She wasn't there at all. There was a little bit of cat vomit in the middle of the neat bed, though.

Father went to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. Margaux was not there. He stared into the bright light for a few minutes without blinking. When his eyes started hurting, he shook his head and removed a jug of sweet tea--he made it exactly like his grandmother told him, but it was never as good. He set it on the kitchen counter beside the sink.

Father opened the dishwasher to get a glass. Full and dirty. He opened the cabinet. Empty. He looked into the sink. Two glasses. Half-finished orange juice and a last little puddle of milk.

Father began crying. The whole evening he did not cry, not at Wal-Mart or by the river or in Margaux's room (either time). But now the tears were hurrying down his face, falling into the sink and loosening the glaze of old milk from Margaux's glass.

Margaux's glass. He realized that he was crying into two dirty glasses and two dirty bowls. If Margaux had gone away and left even a single dish, she'd have to come back to wash it. She was very good about that. And she had left not one, but two dirty dishes! No matter where she was, or what kinds of things she was doing that her father would not be happy or proud of, she would be back. He probably wouldn't even complain about the glass then. Father sniffled and his tears began to dry. He washed his own glass and dish but left Margaux's in the sink.

(The sound of tea being poured.)

Father returned to the living room. The DVD title screen still looped on the TV. He looked for the remote in the couch and found it in the first place he stuck his hand. He turned the TV off and got a copy of *Men's Health* magazine from the cubby by the couch.

Father was still wearing his silver windbreaker. He walked outside into the morning sunlight and stretched out on the hammock which hung from the porch. It was cold and bright out, and he knew he would not sleep, but that was okay.

Margaux would come back soon.

Margeaux and Satan walked along the river toward Margeaux's house. Margeaux hadn't said anything since she woke up, just nodding answers to yes/no questions that Satan asked. Satan didn't find this particularly surprising. Dying just has that effect on people. They hoped she would speak to them again before they reached her house. That's when they would part ways.

M: Do you ever miss home? The place you grew up?

Satan wished Margeaux had broken her silence any other way but that one.

(silence.)

S: Yes.

M: Even though it was the worst place in the whole world?

S: Yes.

M: Why?

And Satan was silent. They weren't sure how to answer that question. They thought it might have something to do with dying, and maybe if they had never died they would have answered the first question differently.

(silence.)

M: That's it. My house. My homestead. My stupid little corner of the world.

S: Nice.

M: Well?

S: Garden gnomes?

M: Father found them funny. They were Gramma's, she passed them on to him when she passed.

S: It's nice.

M: It's fine.

S: Smaller than the home I grew up in. Worse garden. I would have slept better here, though.

M: *(a small giggle.)* Yeah.

S: I would have been happier here.

M: *(a sharp intake of breath.)* Dad! Hide! *(a breath.)* He must be so angry with me. Ugh, he's gonna disown me. He's gonna kill me.

S: *(a small laugh)* Mmmhmm.

M: Shit, he definitely saw us, he's coming outside.

(a pause)

M: Or not?

(a pause)

M: The hammock? Who the fuck reads in a hammock when their daughter is fucking missing? Who the fuck? I could have died? I...I did die! How can you be so ignorant of your own daughter's life and death situation? Like, what the fuck?

S: Mmmm.

M: I...I thought he'd be out looking. Or pacing and crying or calling the police. I thought he would be so angry, so angry.

M: He looks so relaxed.

M: Did he want me to run away? To finally get some peace and quiet? Was he hoping I would...oh, God.

M: Oh, God, he doesn't love me at all, he doesn't even love me at all!

(a pause)

S: He stayed up.

S: He's still awake.

(a pause)

M: I want to go home.

S: I know.

M: I love you, Satan. Thanks for everything.

S: Here. Keep this for me.

S: I'll be back around here next July probably. You can return it to me then.

M: Thank you.

M: I'm sorry. For complaining so much.

S: (With equal bitterness, sincerity, and jealousy) Enjoy your home.

M: I'll see you soon.

(the sound of two people hugging. Then, the sound of wings unfurling.)

M: You'll... be on Gchat, right?

S: Yes.

M: You'll chat with me? Or Skype?

S: Of course.

(The sound of wings beating the air, massive and powerful)

S: Sir! Sir, I found your daughter!

(The sound of a winged takeoff)

//Margeaux and Dad some amount of time later
//searching for Margeaux, but finds hundred of boys everywhere (velvet doublets?)
//finally finds Margeaux sewing herself to herself

“Margaux! Lunch is almost ready!”

Lately, Margaux always disappeared around mealtimes. She hardly ever wanted to cook with Dad anymore. Their matching blue aprons were clean, folded, and dusty in the pantry. Dad’s said “kiss the cook,” with lip prints; and Margaux’s said “Pulverize the patriarchy,” with an illustration of a meat tenderizer. Dad had decided to not take this sentiment personally.

Dad had to do a lot of not taking things personally these days. Lately it seemed like Margaux only had three moods: animated, angry, and secretive. It was like living with three different stereotypes of teenagerhood.

A big pot sat on the stovetop, hissing steam. Summer soup, Dad called it, because the science column in *Men’s Health Magazine* said recently that eating hot things when it’s hot outside will make you feel cooler. There were certainly some mind-blowing revelations in that publication. Dad reached into the spice rack for the bottle of bay leaves, and shook a few into the soup. Then he realized that the pale slips were not bay leaves at all--they were tiny love notes. “Not *again*,” he growled, scooping them out with the ladle. Through the orangey stains he saw phrases like “Margaux, my heart flutters madly” and “the bottomless pools of your darkling eyes...”

Dad was becoming accustomed to surprise love tokens around the house, and to Margaux’s new strangeness, but he was also becoming annoyed. He didn’t like his peppers to get too squashy.

“Margaux!” Dad called, louder. Then he heard something rattle under the sink. He bent down to the cupboard underneath it. Margaux was not down there, he said to himself calmly and rationally, but it rattled again, and then he wasn’t sure anymore. He wasn’t sure about a lot of things when it came to his daughter.

“Margaux?” Dad whispered, and slowly opened one cupboard door...

“Good day, sir!”

A strapping young lad in tights and a purple doublet was curled up under the sink. His shining eyes were bright and innocent, and he was clutching a sweaty bruised rose. Dad grabbed the boy by the back of his tights and dragged him to the front door. “I don’t know why Margaux puts up with you, or why you keep getting lost in dark caves,” Father said, throwing the boy onto the lawn.

“I have a propensity for danger, especially if it means laying eyes on the gallant Margaux...”

“Go home, Jeffrey, or whatever your name is,” Dad said firmly.

Margaux’s newest habit had not been mentioned in any of Dad’s parenting books. Every night, she would sneak out of windows, the chimney, or broken drains to go questing after boys in distress. She would rescue them from deadly perils, from fiery dragons or angry pit bulls or fathers who kept telling them to “man up” and learn to shoot rifles at possible home invaders.

Dad turned to go back inside. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw two more lads run out of the bushes and into the woods, their velvet doublets and high-pitched *whoops* flying behind them.

“Margaux! I found your boys!” Dad’s hands began to sweat as he ran through the house, chasing the shadow of a daughter who left no trace but a trail of lovestruck youths. Dad hated the feel of velvet on his fingertips, and wanted to tell Margaux once and for all that she was the only child who was allowed to live in his house. He also wanted to know just how a young girl who needs her rest even *managed* to rescue *at least six* boys per week. (There was usually a lull on Sunday, when Margaux had to finish up all her math homework). If Dad hadn’t worked for the EPA, and known all about how radiation poisoning really works, he would have guessed that Margaux had been bitten by an irradiated spider. One way or another, though, his daughter had become a hero, and it was both annoying and alienating.

Dad climbed the wooden stairs with his heavy adult man feet. Over the creaks and groans of the old stairs, he could hear human noises from the floor above.

“Margaux?” Dad called again as he turned the knob of her door. It caught on the fluffy blue rug, but he shoved it hard. The door pushed inward and rolled back the corner of the blue carpet. No one was in there. Margaux’s bed wasn’t made with Dad’s precise hospital tucks; it was tossed up into peaks like a stormy ocean. The whole room smelled like sweaty, afraid animals. Dad did not want to smell that smell, so he grabbed some matches and lit a stick of incense that was lying on Margaux’s bedside table.

“That smells jolly good, sir!” Piped a boy from behind the bed. “Is it ‘sensuous patchouli,’ perchance?”

“GO AWAY!” Roared Dad. The boy scurried out of the room on his hands and knees.

Dad listened hard. He could still hear the human noises a little, but they sounded like they were coming from all around him. It sounded like there were Margauxs in the walls, floor, and ceiling. Dad heard a loud meow and jumped so high his head hit the ceiling. Squirrel was sitting in the doorway, watching him. Dad massaged his neck and watched Squirrel back. Squirrel was looking at him in a familiar way. “Find Margaux, nitwit.”

Dad went over to pick up Squirrel. Maybe cats were like dowsing rods for daughters, he thought hopefully. But when he reached his big hands out for Squirrel, the cat squirmed through them and flopped down by the curled-back rug. Suddenly, Dad saw that there was a seam in the fake wood floor. Squirrel's eyes were squinty and his tail flicked so hard his butt jerked back and forth. Dad understood this to mean "Finally. Dumbass."

Dad pushed the cat back from the trapdoor and heaved it open. He was looking down into a pit that was very very deep indeed, and at the very bottom were two Margauxs, naked on a pile of pillows. They were tangled together and one was on top, but they were trying to force themselves even closer, struggling like two positive magnets. They held each other's hands, pushing their palms together. The four hands fused for a second into two. Then the skin bounced apart again like their flesh was made of the same stuff as superballs. Yelps of frustration and maybe also laughter floated up to him, along with the animalish smell of sweat and fear. Dad knew he should not be looking at this, but children growing up is as riveting to watch as a slow-motion car crash. There is fear and disbelief and wonder and there is also loss.

"Dad?" Said a voice behind him. He grabbed the cat for some reason, and turned around with Squirrel's claws punching through his shoulder. A third Margaux was standing in the doorway, holding a paper shopping bag. "You aren't supposed to snoop around in my room," she said tiredly, like she couldn't even remember caring enough to make that rule. "I know. Sorry, hon," said Dad. He could not meet her eyes, so instead he stared so hard at her shopping bag that the bottom fell out. Onto the floor clattered a roll of duct tape, a travel sewing kit, command strips, craft magnets, a tube of Krazy Glue, a jar of epoxy, medical tape, scissors, velcro strips, a hot glue gun, roofing nails, wooden pegs, a tube of rubber cement, a coil of rope, a box of thumbtacks, a box of staples, and a big staple gun.

"Walmart, huh?" Said Dad, feeling very stupid but having absolutely nothing else to say.

"Yup."

"You're... you have a... big project?"

"The biggest."

Dad nodded like he understood, then opened his mouth to complain about the amorous boys who forever lay in wait for Margaux in his cupboards and hedges. He was going to ask Margaux to stop rescuing them and winning their hearts, just for a few weeks--hadn't she saved the neighborhood enough times? But Margaux's eyes looked so deep and so tired, he suddenly knew that the boys were not important. They were a mundane problem he could fix by upgrading to a better window alarm system. Margaux had much bigger things on her mind.

[HAVE MARGAUX TALK ABOUT THE BOYS?? HOW DOES SHE FEEL?]

“I’ll put lunch in the fridge,” Dad said, “and leave you alone for a bit.”

“Right,” said Margaux, with a very lopsided smile.

Dad stood in the doorway until Margaux had to gently shut the door in his face. Then she picked up every one of her Wal-mart purchases, and walked to the edge of the pit in the floor. She had a lot of work to do.

(The end?)

Had to save this I need it to exist so I can feel laughter and joy

“The boys seemed to multiply like rabbits. Father went to pee and one boy was sitting on the toilet reading his copy of Men’s Health. “What’s arthritis?” he asked, and then took a huge fart.

Father had had enough of young boys running all over his property and farting on things. He hated the feel of velvet on his fingertips, and wanted Margaux to know immediately how uncomfortable he was with increased level of pubescent testosterone in the house.

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