

I.

MOTHER IS CLEANING THE SPOONS AGAIN. FROM WHERE I sit in the kitchen, I can see the reflection of her trippy-looking head: bulbous skull, stretched-down mouth, eyes that scoop away at the rest of her face. A droop-faced woman. Jeeez. Just look at her. She's rubbing the holy crap out of those spoons. Poor, silvery utensils.

That's what it felt like to be her kid, too.

I can see the inside out of this city from our lame kitchen window. Everything gray going to blue to black. Seattle streets running for all they are worth. Puny pedestrians. Sheets of rain. I can see the Space Needle. Possibly the dumbest thing ever. Rain life makes the scene out the high-rise condo seem like you are in a dream. I put my hand on the window and watch fog surround my fingers. I take my hand away. There I am. A trace. See-through girl. In a pink terry robe and two-day-old underwear. I want a cigarette.

MOTHER. I SIGH. She will rub the spoons until she wipes herself clean.

I rub my eyes. My face feels smeared.

You know what? Seventeen is no place to be. You want to get out, you want to shake off a self like old dead skin. You want to take how things are and chuck it like a rock. You pierce your face or you tattoo your skin – anything to feel something beyond the numb of home. You invent clothes other people think are

garbage. You get high. You meddle with sexuality. You stuff your ears with ear buds blasting music so loud it's beyond hearing; it's just the throb and heat and slam and pound and scream of bodies on the edge of adult. You text your head off. You guerilla film. We live through sound and light – through our technologies. With our parents' zombie life dope arsenal at our fingertips.

I'm not a criminal.

I'm just a daughter. I'm not sick.

I.

Just.

Need.

Out.

I walk into the living room. This room always reminds me of Mr. K. It even smells a little like him. When he first came on to me, Mr. K., the friend of my father's, he had a butterknife in his hand. Who knows why a butterknife. He just did. Just me and him in the living room. Just rain whispering like nuns against the pressure of the walls and windows. He had this butterknife in his hand, and he crossed the carpet to me. He trembled. He put his hand on my hip, then he put his other hand near my collarbone. I had a Pixies T-shirt on with safety pins decorating the neckline. He leaned in and sort of suck-nibbled my neck and he whimpered. He smelled like Old Spice and Altoids.

It was so retro. Like something out of a Lon Chaney movie. It should have been in black and white with dramatic and creepy music in the background. I'd have YouTubed it. What the fuck did he think he was doing? I pulled out my pocketknife. I flipped open the blade. He took a step back, thinking it might be for him, I guess. I held the little blade in the air between us. I menaced him. It cracked me up. Then I drew the blade to my own collarbone above the safety pins and Pixies to the very place he had trembled and whimpered. I held his gaze in mine. Without even looking, I made a little smile on my skin. I could hear him swallow.

I was fourteen.

After that I lost my voice. I knew where my voice was. But I wasn't saying. Though it happened years ago, I can still disappear my voice when I need to.

Somehow my father's gotten it into his head I need a shrink. It's all so perfectly Oedipal. Subconsciously he knows I'm onto him and Mrs. K. Who the fuck wouldn't be? He knows Mr. K.'s got his tent pitched for me, so I must be sick. Send the daughter to a shrink. Wash your hands. Straighten your father tie.

My name is Ida. Or used to be.

I have to pee.

I head for the bathroom. My mother barely notices. Or she does notice, but gives no sign. I go in. I lock the door. I sit down. The piss comes out in a gush; I held it a long time. When you hold it just the right amount of time? You can almost cum from peeing. I consider taking a shower, decide instead to cut my hair. I secure scissors from the drawer. I hold up a big wad; chop goes the hair. I hold up another wad, and another, clipping close to my head. I look hilarious. More and more like Sid Vicious. I make faces in the mirror.

"Ida?"

It's the mother calling my name. I must have been in here a while.

"Ida?" Closer. Who the hell names their kid Ida?

Christ. Knocking on the door.

It's then that my father's razor catches my eye - it's the old-fashioned kind for some reason. The kind you unscrew and put a REAL blade in. It's a goddamn antique, I tell you. From a Merchant Ivory movie or something. But it is cool looking. I'm pretty sure it's called a safety razor. Hilarious. I lock the bathroom door.

"Ida!"

I set to work. I feel like an artist. You must hold a razor like that very delicately. Like a paintbrush. The head is heavy. You must let it glide on surfaces so you don't make a mess of things. It takes thirty strokes. I mean to make a masterpiece. I count them. Blood has never bothered me. It's my favorite color, in fact.

Her little fist peppering the door like a motherpecker.
I'm almost done.

At the crescendo of her pecking I set down the razor and take a long and careful look. Admiring my work. Then I throw open the door shouting, "Voila!"

My mother takes a step back and gasps. Her face goes white. From her free hand, a spoon falls to the floor, slow motion, head over end. My head dripping with blood appears briefly like a little cartoon of me in the falling spoon. The spoon makes a metal clatter when it hits the floor. Her mother gave her that silver set. And her mother before that. What's with all the silver? I stare at the idiotic spoon on the floor. Then I pick it up, admire my image, and suck it.

"Ida! What have you done?"

She's staring in horror at my head, completely shaved and nicked-up skull.

I take the spoon out of my mouth and hand it to her.

"I'm a baby bird!" I go. And head for a cigarette.

2.

HERE'S A TIP: WHEN YOU'VE HAD IT UP TO HERE WITH your parents, develop coughing fits. I'm serious. When they come at you with their haranguing or advice or expensive wine-mouthed moralities – start coughing. The more they try to say, the more you cough – shrug your shoulders and cough your face off and shake your head like there's nothing you can do about it.

Of course you are likely to get sent to one kind of doctor or another, but it's a small price to pay. And you'll no doubt run into the smoky cancer lecture. I think they all go to the same website to cook up a rant. One of those how to talk to your teenager about fill in the blank.

I'm in the batmobile with my father. He's taking me to the shrink. Dr. Sig – a nickname I have for my Doctor. Siggy for short. The batmobile is a custom made Lexus. Black exterior. Tan leather interior. Tinted windows. I stare at the back of his head. This is quality time for us, since I hardly ever see him. Dad the chauffeur. But I think he thinks of this time we share as something else.

My father doesn't want my mother to know he's been balling Mrs. K. for more than two years. He thinks Mother doesn't know. I think he's a moron. All you have to do is study her behavior. Mother brushes her hair in front of her vanity at night. Instead of the tubes and powders and brushes meant to paint a pretty face on a woman, her vanity is covered with small brown bottles, white bottles, little bitty bottles and bigger ones with lines

and lines of medical instructions that draw her down to them like blush and perfume and lipstick. Adderall and other speedies, Xanax, Vicodin, oxys, morphine, Dramamine, and tranquilizers. They're easy to thieve because she's rendered motherless by about nine p.m. every night. She makes her way through them one at a time in between brushing her hair, humming. It's really creepy. But also weirdly mesmerizing.

If I was a painter I'd paint her face melted with sedation and the ups and downs of a wife gone to zombie.

The batmobile stops at stoplights and makes its stealthy turns. The rain smears the windows and makes passing buildings and cars and people look blurry. The back of my father's head says, "Ida."

I can tell by the sound of his head voice he is going to say something lame. I start with a little "A-hem." A little, gosh, I perhaps have a slight tickle in my throat.

He says, "Ida, this is important. Your mother ... Ida, you've got to stop doing these ... these things to yourself. It's upsetting your mother, what you are doing."

Here he goes. He's revving up his story. He looks at me in the rear view mirror. I surmise he's talking about my new head. He strokes his head subconsciously with one hand. I've learned a lot lately about these little gestures - absentminded actions and facial tics and nervous habits. I stroke my head too. Mirror image. But I know what's coming. He's going to try to talk himself clean some more. He's going to talk right over my knowing, right over my role in his story like the smooth purr of a car engine lying about global warming.

"This thing with your head," his head says, and I let out a hack burst that jumps his shoulders.

"It's important that you take these visits seriously."

Cough.

"I paid a lot of money to get you the best help."

Cough cough.

"This doctor is the best money can buy."

Coughity cough cough.

“Ida, that’s enough—”

I start really wolfing them out now. I start coughing up phlegm and hacking away, drowning him out like I am choking on something – and get this – he starts talking louder. Using a bogus father authority voice.

“Ida,” he says all stern, as if using the fake father voice is somehow after all this time going to mean something. “This is no way to behave. You are too old to be acting out like this.”

I go to the full-blown tears in your eyes face turning red mode. If I’m too old to be acting out like this, what does that make him?

Coughingcoughingcoughingcoughingcoughing. If I wanted to, I could cough loud enough to shatter the Lexus windows, I could explode the fancy dashboard and eject him from his seat.

“IDA!” he yells.

“You’ve got to start taking responsibility for your behavior,” he yells out full fake dad volume, as we pull up in front of Dr. Sig’s office – only I’ve stopped coughing, so my father’s just yelling like an idiot into dead air – his words hanging there between us. He looks at me in the rear view mirror. I shrug. We stare at each other in the little reflective surface. He unlocks the automobile doors. I open the hermetically sealed father mobile – where his stories of himself glide along roads effortlessly – and exit into rain. As he drives away I close my eyes and put my face up to the sky. The rain is cool on my head and face.

Every Thursday my father delivers me like this.

So he can drive away from what he’s made.

3.

I KINDA WONDER IF THE SIG WATCHES HIS CLIENTS approach from his upper office window. Maybe grabbing at his crotch like a dirty old man. His office is on the second floor of a chic Seattle restoration, and it has a long thin window with creep-ola floor-length drapes. I swear I've seen his beady little peepers just beside the drapes before. It's hard to tell though from down on the street. Looking up. If he is looking down today, he's in for a treat. What with my new head and all. I give myself a head rub for luck.

I walk toward the entrance of the office building. I stop. I look up, smile and wave, blow a kiss just in case.

This is my seventh meeting with the Sig. I have learned a few things, boy howdy. If anyone ever tells you that going to see a shrink is therapy? Tell them to suck a fart out of your sweet asshole. It's not therapy. It's epic Greek drama. You gotta study up. You got to bring game.

Inside the office building, I push the button and the soft coo of elevator happens. I bet he listens for the coo. I bet he pictures my combat boots when I walk down the hall to his office. Who can resist red leather docs and teen girl calves?

Lemme lay out the stage for you – the inside of Sig's office, I mean. First of all, there are way too many Pottery Barn lamps. Trust me. The 'rents have our condo all decked out in PB and Restoration crap, so I recognize bouge hell when I see it. Now picture all those lamps with the lowest wattage bulbs in the

world. So that the room isn't really "well lit." It's just sort of endlessly brownish yellow, everywhere you look. What they call "warm" light. Probably meant to keep all the nutcases calm. More like swamp glow, if you ask me.

Then there is this gigantoid mahogany man-desk. Can we say over-compensating? If there's ever a second flood, the Sig's ready. That thing could carry lots of fucking animals. On the man-desk is an ashtray – so old school – so not PC in our smokeless, faux, eco-friendly workspaces. The Sig? Apparently he's a stogie man. I've seen a half-smoked brown stub.

I think the only place I have ever seen cigars being smoked is in black and white movies and old folks homes. Weird.

OF COURSE the office walls are lined with about a gazillion books, because we wouldn't want anyone to miss his über smarty-pantness or big-brained balloon head, now would we? Sometimes he saunters over to the books and – I shit you not – *strokes the spines*. Ew.

What else. Two absurdly expensive-looking Persian rugs, no doubt woven by terrorists, another little table with coffee-maker shit on it, a high camel-backed sofa chair that he sits in when we do our thang, and some bizzaro abstract painting of ... a forest? Hard to tell. The trees would only look like trees if you were tripping. "Art" for over the hill rich people.

But the pièce de résistance? The couch. Yep, you heard me. The Sigster has a giant couch. It stretches out for client nuts as the only option – all Italian brushed leather.

"Dude, what's up with the couch? I gotta sit on that thing?" was my first commentary. He went off on some crap about reflexology – some batshit theory about how people's sub-consciouses are more easily released when they are in reclined positions.

"Isn't it also easier to see up girl skirts?" I went.

"That is not the matter at hand," became his regular defense. Man if I had a Vicodin for every time he's said that to me ... I could fill one of my mom's prescription bottles.

You might say we set the rules in that first exchange. Like I say, I've learned a lot about our little dialogues since we began. Now I come prepared.

I never travel in the world defenseless. First off, I wear a Dora the Explorer purse everywhere I go. You know, from kid TV? It's pink and shiny and hangs across my chest on a long-frayed string. I got it as a kid, but I've made modifications since childhood. Two safety pins where my little cartoon chica's eyes used to be. And I gave her a blow-up doll's mouth with a red Sharpie. And I painted a little gun for a hand. Sweet, really. That dumbass little blue monkey that hangs around with her though - I had to make him into a death skeleton.

Inside my Dora purse I don't have mascara or lip gloss or gum. I don't have breath mints or tampons or a joint. I don't have candy or condoms. What I have, is my beloved Zoom H4n audio recorder. At all times. Everywhere.

Especially here.

I knock.

He opens the door.

"Ida," he goes.

"Sig," I go. How it's never occurred to these folks how AWKWARD the fake-o greetings are is beyond me. Hi. It's me. Your 4:00 nutter. Hello, won't you come in and let me explore your genitals by pretending to talk about your family origins. What a load of crap.

Once I'm in, I'm *in*. This place is mine. I'll tell you why later. It's me against him. The opening moves are important. I turn to look at him. I smile the smile of a girl on the cusp of things. Whad-dya got for me today, Siggy. Gimme your best shot.

He stares at me. "I see you've ... changed ... your hair," is all he's got. Christ. Child's play.

I twirl around with great drama. Then I stand extra upright. I whip my hand up to my head and jut my chin out. He looks alarmed. Like I might attack him. Instead, I violently salute him,

click my heels together, look slightly above his sad little pad of gray hair, and shout, “Herr Doktor!”

Fuckyeah.

Smoked him speechless.