

£, *flesh*

aaron barry

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first edition; mcbussy publishing.

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isbn 979-8-9997100-0-0

cover art by matt margolis: @exittstarr, mattmmargolis@gmail.com

edited by cat stewart.

to maddi, romina, and hilarie—for caring about me when i was a broke boi.

& a special thanks to cat, matt, and max.

style note:

this story uses all lowercase, a stripped-down format, and minimal punctuation. as well, some of the punctuation—in particular, commas—is used intuitively, to mimic varying speech and thought speeds. all choices in this regard are intentional.

“i had been right, i was still right, i was always right. i had lived my life one way and i could just as well have lived it another. i had done this and i hadn’t done that. i hadn’t done this thing but i had done another. and so?”

—— albert camus, *the stranger*

“ever since it became theoretically evident that our precious personal identities were just brand-tags for trading crumbs of labour-power on the libidino-economic junk circuit, the vestiges of authorial theatricality have been wearing thinner.”

—— nick land, *the thirst for annihilation: georges bataille and virulent nihilism*

“all right, then nobody can complain if we ask pregnant women to make parachute jumps.”

—— muammar gaddafi, *time*, 1975

“a revolution is not an apple that falls when it is ripe. you have to make it fall.”

—— che guevara, *intercontinental press*, 1965

I

i'm on my way to dev's and it's cold as shit out and raining a little and the bus is kinda fuckin' noisy. i've got a boomer beside me reading a kindle w/ size-gagillion font and a hoodrat yardman wannabe across from me playing old yung jeezy and new lil jigaboo tracks at full volume and i wanna smash their heads together or make them kiss deeply meltingly soulfully or whatever.

was supposed to be at h&m today selling more bangladeshi textile nightmare garments to the public but that place is mostly gay and lame and i make negative-\$/hr and the bpa in the receipts is probably turning me into a guy and then back into a girl again or is extra-girlying me or is melting my ovaries into pancake batter so who cares if i take another day off? besides liliana said she wanted to chill—said it was *mondo importante*. when she's got something on her mind she doesn't stop. so let's go, baby—let's ball.

it's ten more mins through the heart of kitsilano to get to dev's dorm.

the war between generations wages on. (boomer's choked he can't read. yardman really really wants to be heard. they might fight this one out. i'm usually calm when it comes to this stuff. i don't like to sweat much in public. but i should've taken an uber. it's always like this now.)

dev's got a double-wide sfubc dorm and mercifully no rando administration-allotted roommate who'd spy on us during hang-outs. his parents were gonna get him one of those exclusive residency townhouses all for himself but he told them it'd be too much space for one person so they insisted on getting him the next best thing: a dorm penthouse all for himself.

he lets me into said penthouse a little past three in the afternoon.

what took you so long, morrow? he asks, waving his arm toward the open space of the living room.

i've been waking up around 2:00 pm these days. can't sleep.

how do you still have a job?

dunno, bruv. guess they know i'm a real one. a true hitter. i keep skipping work and they keep scheduling me.

unreal.

dev's (aka devon's) setup is nice, real nice. whatever gene it is clean-cut asian twink's have that makes them extra tidy and great at interior decor dev has it too. he's got some *hygge-eclectic-refined-feng-shui* shit going on—layers, *chic*—*beveled* things, matching things, glittering things—fairy lights, *bespoke* lights—*bespoke cutlery*—a custom armoire. it's like

an ikea demo living room but without the robotic frigidity and dangling price tags. i hope the boys he brings over from his nursing program courses appreciate all the effort he puts in. never asked, oddly enough. probably should.

but spiffy as the place is dev still lets us eat and vape and spill stuff so this is our main meeting spot these days.

laufy's playing a mobile gacha game on the chaise lounge.

zzuh, morrow? he flicks his fingers in
acknowledgement without looking up.

you unlock the chick with the triple-d breasts yet?

naw, mang. but we grindin'. she'll come. jus' you
wait, mein nigga.

laufy (aka lauf), who's blacker than me, is an anime-obsessed (ironic?) uncle ruckus groyper (discord-channel/youtube-comment-section/fight-stream-chat reactionary) with a penchant for history. he wears his hair in a crew cut (he'd be a dread-head like one of the dudes i just saw on the bus otherwise) and most of the time he's dressed in *taxi driver*/*blade runner 2049*/*american history x* attire. that or combat fatigues. drives a beat-up vw jetta (for the brand) and probably owns hugo boss for the brand as well (not that he wears it around us—only for the asian women he's always trying to pick up).

he should be in class right now citing the red cross' wwii statistics—just a guess—but he's also chosen to skip his classes to see what liliana's so worked up over.

you know what this is about? i ask laufy as i sit down on one of the smaller upholstered chairs.

nah, dawg. i sent her a meme an hour ago about mexico slobbering argentina's knob but she hasn't looked at it yet.

how about you? i ask dev as he takes some glasses out from the kitchen cupboard.

nope. didn't tell me either. i saw exactly what you guys saw in the chat. he opens the magnet-bedecked fridge (monaco, puerto vallarta, paris, etc.) you guys want some water? wine?

i'll take a juice, i say.

you got any pocari sweat? laufy asks.

sorry—only got kombucha, almond milk, and non-german lagers at the moment.

lauf: too bad.

dev: i might have some italian wine for you.

lauf: shieet. i'm good, mang.

dev was the last of us to turn nineteen just a month ago. since then he's been splurging on different liquors. he made us try pure vermouth, grenadine, absinthe with sugar cubes in it as if we were at some 1920s parisian cafe and he'd said *it's what gide and the gang used to drink—at le hanneton, la souris, le*

rat mort (that means dead rat). and i'd said *sure, whatever—that's cool* and watched the sugar cube plunk inside the glass and spark in the 70% elixir, fork and contort and give itself up to becoming a slow placid opaque diffusion. i'd used a see-through plastic *looney tunes* cup.

actually we've grown quite bored of drinking already (even though i'm an alberta pure/white lightning girl). seems like an old person hobby. just sitting around at ye olde waterin' hole, drinkin' warm buds, complainin' about bitch wife janice 'cause she accidentally stepped on the roomba again and broke it. the fuck? guzzling down maitai-xyz-bombs for \$40 each at fucking earls with the other bimbos after a long day of sending out memos. shit sucks. drugs are becoming gay now too. are we smoking weed like it's 2004? i don't think any of us have even bothered bringing up trying it. artisan gummies for \$100 each. lol. the real rage are anti-psychotics but they only keep you stable and they're already in the drinking water so you could really just drink that and get the same effect.

mostly we vape—relentlessly. in fact we're passing mine around right now (cherry rush) and looking for something that isn't *female gladiator* on netflix.

as i'm about to throw the vape at laufy liliana (lil) knocks quickly and lets herself in.

ayy, i boom. look who made it.

kombucha? dev asks.

no, she responds. you got any coffee?

nope. all out.

damn. well whatever. i can grab some from panacea later.

she sits down hard on the edge of dev's bed. i motion to huck her the vape but she shakes her head no.

ain't too dark out—just overcast—not dark enough to put on the fairy lights but not exactly bright either. so we're kinda sitting in the half dark with the glow of the netflix ads lighting us up every so often.

so whazzz this all about, mm? laufy asks, rolling for more 2d girl equipment. for whatever reason hath thou summoned'st us?

dev: yeah why'd you call this meeting like we're the—was it the justice league?—you guys seen any of those movies? am i thinking of the right thing?

me: nah.

lauf: capeshit sucks now, man. next they're gonna make black widow the actual black widow of a gangbanger. and she's gonna have massive acrylics and yell at poh-leece offic—

lil: guys.

lauf: like, yeah, maybe change one or two characters here and there but contemporary media is so inundated with trash nonsensical revisions like that.

that's the thing with *eastern* media—in that shit
you'd never see a—

me: imagine if they made naruto a retarded black
hamster. or made a crossover show with *hamtaro*. i
used to love watching that before schoo—

dev: oh hell nah.

lauf: yooo! don't give them any ideas. i can't have
them—

lil: guys! hey! she cuts in.

me: what?

lil: i've got something serious to talk to you about.
listen up. this affects all of you.

lil's always been this way. forthright. self-assured. maybe a
touch bossy. a true latina hottie/baddie wid a bootie, ya feel
me? even when the four of us were kids and would invent
games to play together in the old east hill townhouse complex
she'd be the one designating the pinecones as grenades in
the warfare games, the number of rocks you had to collect
and hold in your hands to be considered the winner of "rock
holdy." she's with it. a natural leader. makes sense she'd go
into bidniss at sfubc, wanna be a *#sheeo*, n' all that jazz.

lil: it's about that shit we were discussing last week.

lauf: the fate of the west?

dev: the difference between rod pocket and pinch pleat curtains?

me: jack harlow as a cia operative and secret gay frog?

lil: no, *cabrones*. not that stuff. you remember how i was warning you that life is going to get exponentially shittier from this point on?

me: yee.

lil: yeah well i was right. *we* were right. think about it—we've been outta high school for what? one year? little less? and this city's already forgotten about us. our *society's* already forgotten about us. it's already moved onto gen alpha.

me: don't be such a zenno, vro. i love those alpha bedwetters. they say funny things on gamgoogus. magogus.

lil: i'm serious. we're extinct now the second we leave high school. barely integrated into the late-capitalistic socio-political mechanism.

dev: someone's been studying.

lauf: you mean the budding technocratic globohomo mulatto underclass?

lil: whatever you wanna call it, yeah—unless you're dev and have rich parents you're essentially dee-oh-ay—your debut in adult society isn't even a

ceremonial mortgage—it's a ceremonial rental contract. i live with two roommates here and it *still* costs a sickening amount per month. lauf, you live with your parents but they're nowhere to be found right now and they'll kick you out eventually. tomorrow, you've got *five* fucking roommates and you're not even going to school.

(couldn't be bothered—degrees are sorta useless these days—knew i'd skip class and wander around dreaming of baked apples and flowers and pinks and purples.)

netflix is recommending us a program on real housewives disguising themselves as construction workers in new jersey.

me: my parents send me screenshots of prez choice coupons through text so i'm good, fam. speak fer yerself.

lauf: my parents are still "finding themselves" with that free-love cult in bali so i get nothing but disgustingly erotic postcards from them.

dev: my parents don't actually give me anything. you already know none of this is mine until i agree to marry a nice traditional christian korean girl. mom still thinks gay people like me are sent to earth to test the faith of believers. i won't get a red cent in the end after i come out—if i ever do.

me: but you're a self-hating gay. that's gotta count for somethin'. can't they toss you a few scraps? a few bones here and there?

dev: i wish.

lil: if things are this fucked up and we've gotta beg for scraps despite having multiple jobs and living in an era of immeasurable production and excess and access then what future do we have? i can't escape the feeling we're irrevocably fucked and that lots of us are gonna die soon as a result.

lauf: guess that's a bad thing—depending on *who* dies.

i can see he's itching to spin the wheel on his game again but lil shoots him a look to put it away.

lil: right now it's everyone here who dies but dev unless he comes out of the well-stocked closet.

me: shieeet.

lil: i don't know about you but that ain't gonna be me. i've got things i wanna do in this titfuck of a life.

me: bbls for everyone! tit jobs and touch-ups for life!

i motion again to throw her the vape which i've just taken an ungodly drag off of but she shakes no again. she looks tense. she slaps her knees and starts to her feet.

lil: you guys are my best friends. i want the best for you and i already see we're sliding. i'm not gonna sit around and watch you all fall into the debt trap, get

addicted to fent, kill yourselves—any of that shit.
think of something you want—right now.

me: right now?

lil: yes.

me: uhhhhhhhhmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm
mmmmmmmm uhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh fuckiiiiiiiiin”””””
uhhhhhhhhhhh i’ll getttt uhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

laufy: i’d like a pure snowbunny wife, an aryan
german beauty who likes lolis and gaming and would
do streams with me and let me taint her bloodline
but i wouldn’t even wanna taint her bloodline and
bring her shame so that’s not gonna happen. besides
i’m already rizzing saki from 20th century history. the
girl who posts asuka cosplay on her ig. i’ll introduce
her to you guys real soon. just you wait.

me: a fuuuuuuuckinnnnnn””” uhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.....

dev: i dunno, lil. happiness? freedom? sanity for the
whole?

lil: less abstract.

dev: a villa in italy with attached farmland and two
cats i can make *non-cosplay* ig accounts for.

lil: bingo. now we're getting somewhere. we can get the fuck out of here and start again elsewhere together. romania with the vampire hotties morrow likes. germany with the deranged axis vibes for laufy's chud ass. the heart of sicily with an adjacent gay club for dev. we've gotta go before the proverbial ship sails. or sinks. our gen will be one of expats and reverse-emigres. we've gotta go. we've *got* to go.

weeeow!

me: sounds tight. one problem: we're all destitute, lil. well, everyone but dev as we've established.

dev: my parents aren't gonna buy us a villa to start a commune on. soooooo?

lauf: you want us to start a crypto scam on pump. fun? rug-pull some chumps with villaitalcumcoin?

me: we could do it old-school and rob a bank or one of those stupid bitcoin atms i see at metrotown mall.

dev: i could become a high-level sugarbaby for sexuality-questioning men.

me: i'd pay for your services, vro.

lauf: same.

lil: keep thinking. but take this seriously. we *need* a way out. i'll come up with a few later tonight. i've gotta go to a job interview for my *third* gig—data

entry. wowie. wish i had some fucking time to study
like a normal student...

she takes a swig of water from the tap in the kitchen and
refuses one last vape offer.

laufy's resumed gacha-ing.

dev's fiddling with a photo frame.

i mean it, lil says as she's putting her shoes back on.
we're living. we're fucking living.

love you, i say as she lets herself out.

yeah love you too.

just the three of us now. i've got a nicotine headache.

she's got a bee in her bonnet as my grandma used to
say, laufy offers.

i don't think i've ever seen her this worked up, dev
adds. normally she can lighten up and joke a bit.

ahh she'll come around, i soothe. and you know
what the buddhists say—don't covet doritos and
other earthly desires. besides even if we stay life in
vancouver ain't too bad, is it?