

It's six PM and the snow is steadily falling at the same rate that it was twelve hours ago, when the dawn was new and the children were all asleep and in dreams. The dreams the kids had were not as pleasant as the vast snowscape past their windows, through the glass and the bug-screen— which is of course saying something negative about their dreams, which were really more like night terrors or night mares, and not saying anything positive about the monstrous storm outside, which had cancelled all engagements for the next week and managed to shut down every business in the town for some time past that.

There were horses stampeding, trotting down the cobbled road with malice in their eyes and hot steam blowing out of their nostrils. A fog of whiteness permeated this dream in vignette, the periphery of their visions constricted by it. Everything was tinted blue. The kids stood on the sidewalk, but each of them saw the horses head-on, from an angle slightly above, like an angel had flown them out and held them there, a dolly, a crane. They didn't know it, but the dream took place in that part of Manhattan where everything gets strangely antiquated, like the rich people of the area had manufactured some sort of treaty to keep everything pre-modern and in tip-top shape; the kids had never been to Manhattan (or even Jersey for that matter), so of course they were in the dark about the finer details of place.

The horses were brown and ridden by inane figures wearing black robes over their heads, sheets thoroughly stained with charcoal, and oval tatters for eye-holes. Nothing told the kids that they had to run, *per se*, but Tom got a good hint that something bad was coming, a guttural feeling in (where else but) his gut, and decided to scream it out: "Run!" Then the kids started to run, because they trusted Tom's paranormal instincts in the waking world; They went down alleyways, past excessively long dumpsters and comical, Sesame Street trash-bins. They kept running even when the horses were gone, and eventually Sylvie barreled through an unmarked door and they were in the Technical Institute.

There was no end to the trauma they endured in this dream, but it was all psychological, nothing physical— and, being a dream, was to be forgotten maybe ten to twenty seconds after it all commenced. Tom, being the oldest, was the only one that remembered *any* aspect of it *at all*, quietly remarking the erudite cowboy who led them into the lecture hall as he awoke. The only evidence was the sweat each child felt on their backs as they stumbled out from under the covers, sweat which they each quickly dismissed as being a symptom of the space heater and the radiator and the comforter and the three layers of sheets their mother insisted on them employing every night after October 20. She tucked them in threateningly, seriously denying Sylvie's mocking requests that she check them for fever.

Now, six PM, the kids are all indoors and under all of the sheets and the comforter feeling cold (relatively) as the space heater had broken some hours ago after a horrible incident involving a dying (but not quite dead) bird the cat had been apparently preserving, wings broken, behind a bookshelf in the living room for what must have been a few hours. Eventually the cat, meowing with Siamese sensibility, had dragged this bird into the kids' room and Edie, headstrong and actionable, had taken a broom and attempted to kill the damned thing, swinging the weapon all around and only managing to kill the machinery that had been so paternally helpful (or in some cases quite harmful) to them all. Tom was glad to have the heater gone, as it meant a bit less noise for his psychic experiments, but the other two were rather missing the thing, which was a kind of surrogate father figure what with its vent like a mouth and buttons like eyes and a nose.

"Where's mom?" Sylvie asks. She knows that their mother can't be far, as they are helplessly snowed in with no chance of escape, but their home is surprisingly large for the kind of household income that they took in. There is a master bedroom— where their mother sleeps— the kid's bedroom, then the guest bedroom— which is not to be so much as touched while not in the presence of company— the ghost room— which could be another bedroom if it did not allegedly contain the spirit of their grandfather— the "storage space"— an enormous place entirely filled with boxes— and the crafts room— which is the largest room in the house. Sometimes Sylvie would sleep in the crafts room, unbeknownst to her mother, slipping out after everyone had gone to bed and waking up early to tuck herself under the three layers of sheets and the comforter so that no one noticed her absence.

The ghost room... I'm sure you are interested in it, but, to tell you the truth, it is not that interesting at all. The place is completely empty, both physically and spiritually, only occupied by a thin, peeling, grimy, yellow wall and trim. Tom had told his mother about the emptiness many years ago, but she did not believe him when he said that the ghost of his grandfather was *truly* in the master bathroom because she could not imagine him occupying such a warm and inviting place. The master bathroom was packed with makeup, packed high and with astonishing depth. There were granite steps on the left as you entered, waxy steps which led to the shiny marble toilet, a veritable throne on which Tom knew his grandfather sat at all times in the spiritual world. His grandfather's things were in cabinets up here, barely opened wooden drawers constructed against the walls. Back on the ground floor, the makeup threatened to fall; there were several marvels of engineering here, never before seen structures which, if studied, would earn Peg an honorary degree in architecture; the bridge over the sink made from paper-thin eyeshadow palettes would be deserving of a

master's at least, the leaning tower of mascara doctoral in nature. To the right, the closet.

The kids are lying in bed except for Tom, who is a mound underneath the sheets, sitting criss-cross applesauce trying to channel the spirit of Winter, who he does not yet know he has already met. Tom is focusing deeply on his breath and on some imagined symbols of Winter he holds in his head: the snowflake, which changes as it rotates into any number of different snowflakes; the Snowman, particularly Frosty, with his top hat; the candy cane, which is really some gnostic symbol for Jesus; and the humble Donkey, who carries on his back a Persian rug and, with tact, sparingly bleats, showing his support for all that is righteous.

Sylvie wants an answer to her question because she is hungry and a child, but Edie is too tired and guilty from earlier incidents to answer, and Tom doesn't offer anything, too deep in his astral world to even hear her. She's a little bit irritated in the kind of way she usually is. Edie getting tired at just six PM is typical, and as far as Sylvie sees it, Tom is not really so much a brother as a source of information, a television news channel which has less than informative (but often entertaining) reporting on obscure occultist knowledge about the locations of the galaxy's concentric spheres and the wild blowing of the wind.

Sylvie pulls the comforter off of her, and then the three sheets, and climbs off of the bed onto the hardwood floor, feeling how absolutely chilling it is for only a moment before hopping into two perfectly fluffy gray slippers with rabbit ears and eyeballs. Above the dresser, the poster of the temple at the outskirts of town is surrounded by two of N-SYNC, a boyband from America who neither Tom, nor Edie, nor Sylvie are particularly interested in.

She cracks open the door, which is solidly red against the blue paint which has been splattered without tact all around the kids' room, and enters the living room, unusually dark for this time of day, but of course it is winter lately. The living room has tapestries of all kinds hanging off of the walls; brown tapestries with green, forested patterns and orange tapestries which have red people on them. These beautifully knit things have been put up by their mother after being procured from Poland by their absent father. The cat lays on their brown L-shaped couch, plotting something out with her eyes. There is an ottoman which does not match anything in the room, plaid and upholstered with little care by Sylvie's late grandmother as a part of an introduction class to the art of furnishing. She was supposed to start with a small cushion but she, a stubborn old lady her whole life, instead decided to make what she was learning upholstery for without building up to it.

"Hera," Sylvie coos, approaching the cat. The cat meows and opens her eyes in mock surprise. Sylvie sticks her hand out and makes contact, slowly scratching the

cat's head. Her fur has been much softer since the fall. Hera meows again and stretches her paws out into the air, turning over onto her back.

Sylvie makes some silent reconciliation with Hera about not petting her any longer and trots her way down the hallway, looking through the empty doorframe of the crafts room on her way to her mother's. When she arrives at her mother's room, she knocks on the closed door and, after a nervous shuffle of items, is told to enter by a meek and irritated voice. She pushes the door open and sees her mother lying on the bed with a red icepack on her head and a thermometer in her hand, a warm yellow glow from the table-lamp setting a sickly aura.

"I'm so, sick," Peg says, trying to add some vocal fry for dramatic effect but sounding almost nothing like how a sick person would sound. "Look at this," she says, holding out the thermometer.

"Mom, this is a perfectly normal temperature," Sylvie says. Peg silently curses at herself. She had ran the thing under hot water, but she knew that with how cold it was outside there was no warming up the pipes enough to get it out right. "Ninety? That's even a bit low."

"I feel quite bad," Peg says, trying harder on the 'sick voice'.

"You have to make us food."

"I don't have to do anything," clearly quite resentful now. For a woman with three children who are not triplets, she acts like the whole thing was one single mistake. "I'm coming down with a cold, or maybe even a flu or SARS. I had to shovel snow this morning, and I must have caught it then. I was so ill-prepared. I only wore a very small coat. Then, it turns out the snow is piling higher than it has ever piled before and I shoveled for nothing. Imagine how dumb I feel now that I'm coughing and spitting up bile," now trying out a very performative cough.

"At least you stockpiled," Sylvie says.

"What's that?"

"At least you stockpiled a lot of canned goods?"

"No, no," Peg says, realizing that she must have thought that someone else was responsible for this. Giving herself some slack: "Well, I did get some *green* beans."

"You mean we only have green beans for this whole week?" Sylvie asks, shifting her weight around from one foot to the other.

"We have the usual groceries, and then quite a lot of green beans. I was thinking I could make salt and pepper green beans like the Chinese restaurant on 30th does."

"But you go to the store every three days, and Tom says the snowstorm is gonna last a week. So we'll have to eat salt and pepper green beans for four days?"

“Well, yes,” Peg says, now forgetting to put on the sick voice because of a creeping, audible worry. “But it’s good for you to have vegetables anyways, and I’m sure Tom could always fast.”

“You have to make us food, mom,” Sylvie says, and shuts the door with a kind of disappointment usually reserved *by* mothers *for* daughters.

Tom had predicted this morning that the snowstorm would last exactly a week—well, not the snowstorm itself, but the entire process of it. The blizzard, the actual snowing, this will end on Monday, just three days from now; the Experience of the storm (the being snowed-in and feeling hopeless) would go until late Friday, and he sensed a kind-of storm ensuing in the hearts of his kin until late Sunday; but the way that this storm was to be internalized was not a part of his divination and could not be accurately predicted without the use of the yarrow root, which was out in the shed and out of the question to fetch. Presently nothing outdoors was even viewable through the inches of condensation and frost on every window, the heavy fog setting in as environmental feature.

No winter had ever been this bad before. Tom had seen all relevant prior winters in a series of visions and was sure of this, so the rest of the family was as well. You could scarcely see two feet outside of any window, and the ennui of the cold was creeping through every crevice in their home. Edie had earlier seen a lone crow shivering—imagine this, a crow in the yard shaking like a dog, frost creeping on its feathers, its wings stuck in the downpour. It managed to hide beneath an outcropping, and is still there now, hanging onto life. Edie wanted it dead, because at the time she hated birds.

“They have thin bones, which means they *should* die in the cold,” Edie said. “The spookiness of the whole thing, the sudden snowfall at an astronomical level, *should* send them into some sort of shock, a kind of *mental* frostbite if not physical...”

“But you forget about the resilience of birds. Their superhuman ability to keep going no matter what,” Peg said. “Out of this window, I’ve seen birds create nests from pieces of string. They barricade themselves against the wall. It’s amazing. They know where the boiler is, and they manage to hop into the house through various cracks in the foundation. Your grandfather tried to keep them out, but he couldn’t do anything. They are much smarter than any of us.”

“I’ve seen birds dead on the street, downtown,” Edie told her. “Their backs have been corroded away by the wind, leaving only bones. Their organs are already gone, eaten by rats. Or some other horrible carnivorous thing. They are usually surrounded by a splatter of blood, implying death from murder, but you can pretty easily get the sense that it was an accident. I don’t think they’re very smart at all. I think sometimes they kill

themselves while trying some high-flying stunt. Like Evel Knieval. I bet I could kill a bird with just a stick, or a broom.”

“Don’t talk that way,” her mom said.

This conversation was only hours before she tried, and failed, at killing a very maimed and innocent bird with a broom. Her mother mocked her relentlessly when she saw the bird still floundering on the ground near the broken space heater. “What happened to the serial bird killer I raised?” she taunted.

“No queen but Queen Lud,” Tom said, laughing. He looked at the pile of heater parts as if it were some strange new digital art experiment out of the Technical Institute, respecting the intentionality of each misplaced screw or fractured plastic rung. “Wow... I really love it Edie!”

Peg crouched down and looked at the bird, which was rotating in a circle, pivoting on its leg, exhaling, and had very little agency left. It was a pigeon, which was strange. Pigeons were exceptionally rare here. “Why is this bird a pigeon?” Peg asked.

The bird was a pigeon, and a carrier pigeon at that. Its neck was ruffled; on first look gray and black alternating, on closer look black feathers against a gray skin. Its neck was also impeccably *long*. Its helpless eyes stormed about in their sockets. Its left wing was beautiful, long and elegant, and broken in a horrible backwards way at the elbow. Its foot was broken, too, orange toes bent unnaturally. No cooing could be heard but an occasional squawk unbecoming of the typical pigeon made its way out.

Tom instantly sensed something strange about its origin and launched into a sort of paranormal investigation, but was years from being skilled and insightful enough to realize that the pigeon had escaped from the morning’s collective New York dream (that he had forgotten almost entirely by that point anyways).

While Tom meditated uselessly in the other room, and Edie lay crying under the three sheets and the comforter, realizing how much colder it was about to be, Sylvie and Peg were burdened with figuring out exactly what to do with the pigeon. “It would be cruel to just throw it outside,” Sylvie said.

“I think that’s the most humane thing to do,” Peg said. She went to the kitchen, passing through the living room where Hera lay, ready to pounce if she saw the bird again but respecting her parent’s wishes for her to back off and let them handle the thing, if only because Edie made such a fuss about it.

“Why, I’m going to scream,” Sylvie said. “That’s the *easiest* thing to do, but not the most humane. We should crush its head or something. Edie had the right idea, she just missed the mark a few too many times.”

“If we crush its head we’ll have to clean up its brains. If birds even have brains.”

“Bird brains, that’s like, an idiom, mom. But we don’t really even have to aim for the head. We just have to drop a book on it or something.”

“What book do we have that’s even big enough to kill a bird that size?”

Sylvie ran to the big bookshelf to the right of the fireplace, which was against the wall with six shelves. Tom’s books were on the top two shelves, because he was about two feet taller than everyone in the household, even at just fourteen. Luckily, his books were all small-change fluff pieces about the names of angels and the lost colonies of Mu, and so Sylvie couldn’t produce any of these things as a murder weapon. On the bottom shelves were Edie’s books, and she was still at a fairly rudimentary reading level, mostly thin paperbacks about worms and dinosaurs. Sylvie sized up the big three-hundred page Search and Find as an option before deciding it wasn’t big enough. She looked over her mother’s books, but these were largely tiny self-help books aside for a few trade paperbacks on World War II. The last options were her *own* books, and while she wasn’t exactly excited about having to read a book that had killed something, she was ready to procure one if it meant a swift and painless death for this poor creature, which had now started hoarsely screeching. She was hoping for a book that she had *already* read so that she wouldn’t have to read it after she used it to cause a bird to die.

“Shoot,” Sylvie said. The most obvious choice was Anna Karenina, but it was a paperback, not ideal, and she hadn’t read it. Her eyes flitted around for something she had read as a child. A Lord of the Rings Boxed Set? No. Edie hadn’t read that yet and Sylvie had some idea that she would want to, so it was off-limits.

“Ah!” She had an epiphany: what if there was a book that would improve if it had killed something? She stopped her gaze at the Complete and Utter Tragedies of William Shakespeare and pulled it out of the shelf with a heave-ho, turning just in time to see her mother coming back with her broom. “No, no!”

“What?” Peg said, pulling the dustbin apart from the broom, about to head into the bedroom again. She saw the book. “You’re gonna smoosh it, then?”

“I was thinking you would, mom.”

“I don’t want to do it.”

“Well, neither do I,” Sylvie said, outstretching the book. “But you’re the old one here, so you have to do it.”

“Oh,” Peg groaned, belabored and dismayed. She looked through the door at the bird, which was floundering in pain but showed no signs of dying. “I’d ask Tom, but I know it would probably interfere with whatever karmic dye he’s always going on about.”

Edie burst from the doorframe, tears in neat streams on her cheeks. “Maybe we should keep it alive, just keep it alive, right?”

“The cat will kill it Edie,” Peg said.

“But, if the, cat’s gonna kill it anyway, then what’s so wrong about that?”

“We can’t even keep it alive, what do we have that could do that?”

“And we don’t even know *how* to keep birds alive,” Sylvie dog-piled. “Like, if it was a mouse, we’d just give it milk from a turkey baster, right? But how do you think we would we go about keeping a bird alive?”

Edie responded by sobbing and closing the door, and when Peg went to try and open it, she found great resistance. Edie, on the other side of the door, was looking at the bird and hoping that the poor thing knew what she was doing for it. “Say you won’t kill her,” Edie said.

“Open the door,” Peg lamented. “Come on, Edie.”

“I’m not opening the door until you say you won’t kill her.”

Tom emerged from whatever realm he was trying to occupy, probably just because the commotion broke his unworldly dissociation, and after a moment of looking at the material reality before him, he uncrossed his legs and told Edie: “The bird probably just came down from the North.”

“Do you know how to take care of a bird?” Edie asked.

“No,” Tom said. “I don’t think I do. But weren’t you wanting to kill it earlier?”

“I never realized how awful it must be to die until I killed the space heater and saw the bird flap around. I had only ever seen the effects of death on a body, but never the conditions that lead to it. Seeing the way that dad– I mean, the space heater– broke apart and flew into a million pieces, it makes me feel like there’s nothing worse in the world than destruction.”

“I’m sorry, Edie,” Tom said, sincere. “You mustn’t feel all too guilty about this bird fellow, though, anyway. His soul’s fixing to leave, and there’s nothing you can do about it. Hera killed him and he’s basically already dead, metaphysically.”

“Open the door!” Sylvie yelled.

“How can you say that?” Edie said, putting her head in her hands, unwillingly listening to the flutter of the pigeon’s bones against the wood. “She’s so full of life.”

“Physically sure, but once the soul’s in a situation it can’t get out of, it starts preparing. If you think of life like a hotel you get to stay in, the soul, it goes to the front desk right about now, but the luggage is still in the room.”

“So, there’s no way to save her?”

“Maybe there is, but none of us have any idea how to do it. I think you oughta let mom put him out of his misery.”

Edie sobbed some and, after a few more bangs on the door, watching the bird carefully to see if it wouldn’t miraculously spring up and start to fly about the room again, let Sylvie and her mother into the room.

Peg is chasing Sylvie down the hallway. “I had to kill that bird, so why can’t you cook dinner tonight?”

“I haven’t eaten all day,” Sylvie says. “This morning, you only made enough food for you and Edie. I’m twelve years old and every time I cook, I singe myself on the stove or cut my finger open with a long and sharp blade.”

“That’s not so much your age as much as your inexperience. You’ll have to cut yourself a certain amount of times before you’re good at cooking.”

“Why does Tom never have to cook?” Sylvie asks. This is a good question that she is pretty sure she knows the answer to: Tom is a boy.

“Because Tom doesn’t eat.” This is a fair explanation as well. Peg is now giving in, and Sylvie can sense it in the way that she has moved her shoulders back in a more upright position to in some way reflect how she feels morally. “But, I’ll cook some salt and pepper green beans for you, okay? And I’ll make a potato?”

“Alright,” Sylvie says, satisfied enough.

Tom has reached a conclusion in the other room. He feels as if he has already met the spirit of Winter, and he in *fact* feels that so has Edie and Sylvie, but he is not yet sure where. Did they meet the spirit of Winter at their last outing to the mall, wherein they bought mittens from the Gap and tried to go ice-skating? Did they meet the spirit of Winter, paradoxically, during the prior summer?

Of course, the spirit of Winter was the man in the dream, the man atop the Technical Institute’s second floor oratory balcony. The spirit of Winter was the old bearded man who had cordially greeted the kids after their escape from the horses of hell. “Greetings!” he said merrily, waving, sparkling eyes. He looked like a jolly Santa Claus, but any adept knows that deities just take on the culturally agreed upon form, and that he would have looked scarier had the kids been raised in ancient Greece or anywhere Germanic before globalization.

There was nothing to indicate that the dream was taking place during the winter besides the (correct) assumption that this guy had something to do with it. He gave a hand-motion that indicated to the children that they should enter the lecture hall, and they obliged, Tom noticing the cowboy behind them.

Peg is entering the kitchen, limping half-heartedly, and getting a can-opener from the drawer beside the stove. The kitchen is a marvel. There are things hanging all around, at least two and a half spice racks and five different open places for storing pots and pans. Then, behind cabinet doors, there are three other spice racks and another two places filled with pots. The same idea had independently gotten into the minds of almost every dying person in the family: “Peg needs my cookware and my spices.” If any in the family had actually been in contact with Peg, or their fellow dying aunts and uncles, they would know just how over-encumbered Peg truly was, and send her something more useful, like, apparently, bird medicine.

The first green bean can is resisting the opener. Peg twirls and twirls the crank, only digging the blade into the rim of the can. Why is it that the can opener can only attach itself to the lid of the can half of the time? Is the problem with the can, or the opener? She's trying to get it into some groove, but it is not co-operating. She's still doing this. It just punctured the lid, but as she starts to crank it, it pops out and starts running uselessly atop it. She gives up after a few more tries and focuses on the promised potato, which to tell the truth only takes about five seconds to make; stick it with a fork and then put it in the oven, no need to pre-heat or anything. Then she's back to the can, still resistant.

Pam gets a steak-knife and just juts it in the little hole that the opener made, then yanks it back in some attempt to cut the thing open, but it *is* made of metal, and so it resists quite a lot. She manages to get some rudimentary line in its exterior, working the circumference a bit with the flimsy knife, but the lid is so stubborn that the knife starts to bend. She then goes through this same process with the second can of green beans.

She is pre-heating the oven and thinking about that morning. She wore pajamas when she woke up, and then had to layer several tons of things over herself: red sweater, denim jeans, thick coat, itchy mittens, weed beanie. The weed beanie is from many years ago and belongs to a love long dead.

The assumption was that the snow needed shoveling, as no one had gotten word to the family that the whole town would be closing down and there would be no need for Peg at her job or the kids at their school. She went outside and started shoveling snow, half-hearted once she felt the kiss of frost on her chin. Her thighs felt very irritated, cold, and exposed. This was one of the the lowest levels of pain which could be felt, a level which irritated greatly but did not actively harm so long as you don't think about it.

The real pain was in the load she had to bear on the end of her spade, which was as flimsy as the knife. Tools in the house tend to be flimsy, as no one really uses them; if they got more use they would need to be in better shape. When the blade went down into the concrete, a scrape was audible all the way down to Jade Handle Hardware, the long-game con-job of a store where the spade was purchased, and a heaping of snow was collected, which Peg dumped onto the lawn. When she turned back around from this movement, she saw that absolutely nothing had changed. The snow was piling at the same rate that she scooped. She then decided to go inside.

When she got inside, Sylvie had just gotten up; at least, to Peg it looked as if she had. In truth, Sylvie had woken ten minutes before her mother and ran out of the craft room as to not let anyone know about the abnormal location she slept in when she was stressed.

“Mom!” Edie yells as Peg puts the just-forked potato into the oven. “Come here. Tom has reached the impetus of some demon possession...”

“Just a second, honey,” Peg says, grinding the last of the pink Himalayan salt onto the green beans in a final zesty torque. She rolls her eyes and puts the beans in the oven. Sylvie shuffles into the bedroom to attend the meeting.

Tom is lying on the bed, corpse pose, tabula rasa. His eyes are white. He has entered one of his trances. Peg walks in and takes a seat so that they can wait for his announcement, which even the extended family knows will come in lyric. Sylvie doesn’t want to play the lyre right now, but Tom preferred that it was there, so she had it in her arms.

Tom’s mouth falls agape, and air pushes from his throat, his vocal folds grinding against each other in an unpleasant, aggressive intercourse. The kids feel the heat; a swelter twice as powerful as the space heater had ever been at its highest setting. Peg considers the business savvy of renting this kind of divinatory summoning technique out to homes looking for space heating. She realizes however, that this surely could not be the spirit of Winter; Or wouldn’t it be cold?

“O Cowboy,
who walks alongside
the river

I admire you more
than I care to admit,” Tom begins. A cryptic look of recognition shoots across Edie’s face, a look which registers as performative to Sylvie.

“The blizzard
will move us
like how a pigeon
will stir from a branch
at the sound of footsteps.

Isolation, in its
stolid nature, can
refrain from effect.

But it means well,” Tom ends. He blinks a few times and the room returns to its regular temperature.

“I didn’t think that one was very good,” Edie criticizes.

“It’s not about if the poem is good,” Peg says, shutting her down. “I thought the second stanza was great.”

“The second stanza was the only part you could understand,” Edie says, giggling. “The first part is nonsense. Why did the spirit tell you to say something about a cowboy?”

“I’m not quite sure,” Tom says, his voice a bit blown out from having a spirit speaking through him. “Maybe the cowboy represents something?”

“The cowboy represents quite a lot.” Sylvie says. “The cowboy signals frontierism and furthermore our roles as white people in this continent. The cowboy is seen as a noble farmhand who takes revenge against— who else, the indigenous peoples of the land— for existing and demanding sovereignty...”

“It’s more like,” Edie cuts her off, “a huge badass...”

“Don’t cuss, Edie,” Sylvie scolds.

“A huge cool guy. Who says what we’re all thinking. Who takes on the responsibility of doing whatever no one else will do. And Tom’s daemon or whatever is saying we should be honest.”

“Look, to me, a cowboy just means I’m not gonna like the movie,” Peg says.

“What I was saying is a cowboy means industry,” Sylvie says.

“Probably something like that is true,” Tom says. “Maybe we won’t know til a few days from now.”

Peg takes her leave, the kids continuing to chatter about the trance. She heads down the hallway and goes to her room, turns left and into her bathroom. She has decided she needs to pee and ascends the steps up to its apex, the beautiful porcelain throne, in a trudging and arduous manner. This gives ample time for Grandpa Ben to move to the side, and he does, standing up from his hollow chair and shuffling onto the precipice as to not be disturbed by the experience of being inside of Peg’s intestines and body.

“Oh, Peg,” Grandpa Ben says, closing his eyes as his daughter begins the process of urinating. “I lament. For what could have been, and what is sure to come. My spirit cannot pass on because of my sordid lamentation. I only wish you could hear me. I only wish Tom could relay what I have told him in our wicker-flame conversations without fear of retaliation from the demiurge. I only wish I could tell Tom, you, anyone the truth; the truth that you shall pass away in exactly a year and a day, slipping on these very steps, on conditioner spilled from its flask; and that I know this unsettling truth because I was already there, and will be there again. The children, where will they go? Who will raise them? Alas, I am chained to this bluff; a dog to a post.”

Peg stands and puts her pants back on and goes down the steps. She washes her hands ducking underneath the eyeshadow bridge to see if she has anything on her face or in her teeth. Grandpa Ben sits back down on the toilet.

She goes out to the kitchen and, as she passes through the Bohemian living room, she hears the kids laughing. The green beans are ready.

Now that we have the foundation, let's get into the recipe.

Salt and Pepper Green Beans

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. green beans, canned or loose
- 2 tbsp. sesame oil
- 1 tbsp. low sodium soy sauce
- 1 tbsp. pepper, ground
- 1/2 tbsp. red chili flakes
- 2 tsp. fancy pink sea salt

Instructions:

1. Pre-heat oven to 400° F.
2. Put green beans in a large bowl, removing the water if canned. If these are not canned green beans, you will need to soak them for thirty minutes, then run them under water in a colander; this removes the pesticides and makes the beans much less bitter and chemical tasting.
3. Toss the green beans in the sesame oil. If you have washed your hands, feel free to move them around by hand and make sure that they are all lathered in oil. Add low sodium soy sauce, but don't touch this stuff with your hands because it's gross to get on there.
4. Grind all of the pepper onto the green beans. Then put the chili flakes on the green beans, and then grind all of the salt onto the green beans. The fancy pink sea salt is supposedly "Himalayan" and comes in a grinder for whatever arcane reason. Stir all of these ingredients together and make sure that they are evenly distributed.
5. Put this into some kind of pan and then cook it in the oven for about twenty minutes. Take it out when it's done and then eat it.