



# up h c n p down

fan fiction



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## A Regular Day

I parked by the Methodist Church, like usual. I was on a high from my green smoothie and the forty-five to seventy minute work out I did most mornings, not because I had to, but because I wanted to. That morning, I'd had to pull myself from my computer to get to campus on time. The words were just flowing, I could hardly make them stop. I was always writing too much. I'd pluck away at my bluetooth keyboard like one of those gamers who's really, really good at *Guitar Hero*. I just couldn't stop.

I checked myself in the car mirror, mussed my hair up a little. It had dried a little too perfect: something in the Vegas water, I suppose. I checked the time on my expensive but understated wristwatch. It had been years since I'd carried a phone and I didn't even miss it. It wasn't that I'd lost my phone, either, because I hardly ever lost anything. It was a personal choice. I guess that made me better than most people, but I tried not to brag about it. According to the wristwatch, it was almost time for class. I made my way to RLL, shoulders high, a bounce in my step. The sun felt like a gentle kiss against my shoulders. I never sweated.

During the workshop, people said a lot of astoundingly thoughtful and undeniably accurate things about my work. Things like "masterful", and "genius", and "completely morally, ethically and politically good". My use of adverbs had brought one of my peers to tears.

Maile was waiting for me in the hallway after class.

"Doug sent me your story," she said. "I just—thank you."

She then said one or two sentences showing that she had truly understood the deeper meaning of the piece, the soul pulsing behind every word—no, letter—and I knew from her brief yet startlingly revealing interpretation that she knew me too, that I was seen and heard and understood.

"Hey," suddenly, our shared moment of vulnerability and wisdom was interrupted by a thick American accent calling out my name. I turned, startled, and saw a tall shirtless man in a white cowboy hat rushing down the RLL hallway towards me. Was it? No—it couldn't be.



"Are you circa-1991-Thelma-and-Louise-era Brad Pitt?" I ask. His six-pack glistened under RLL's fluorescent lights.

"I read your story in the Paris Review," he said. "I had to find you and thank you."

That year, I'd published several novels, a chapbook and a well-received book-length work of deeply reported yet stunningly personal creative nonfiction, the rights to which were currently being fought over in a competitive adaption negotiation between HBO and A24.

"Brad," I said. "That's sweet of you."

1991-Thelma-and-Louise-era Brad Pitt knelt down on one knee, removed his cowboy hat and held it against his firm and glistening chest.

"Your experimentation with structure probably saved my life," he said.

I felt a stab of pity throb through me. This happened to me a lot. I remember how Lady Gaga had camped outside my duplex for five days and four nights, wearing a theatrical yet edible gown. I was just a person, I tried to tell her. You mustn't idolize me so much.

I put a hand on Brad's shoulder, felt his muscles tremble under my touch. I pictured my own husband at home, probably mopping the floors or folding the laundry, or making tofu from scratch, waiting for me to come

home so that he could embrace me, listen to me talk about my day, feed me a Michelin-quality meal, then gently massage my shoulders as I read or wrote late into the night.

"I appreciate you, 1991-era Brad Pitt. But you need to live your own life."

He nodded, mournful but accepting. His abs glistened like belt buckles. He handed me a folded piece of paper with his phone number and personal email address written on it. In his email address, he'd dotted the i's in Pitt and Gmail with little hearts.

"I understand," he said. "But anytime you need anything—a six-pack to lean on, the greatest sexual pleasure of your life, someone to reach the high shelf when you can't be bothered moving a chair across the room—I'm here for you."

"Thank you, Brad," I said, and slipped his number into my pocket. My husband was open-minded about that kind of stuff. "I'll call you when I need to."

Circa-1991-Thelma-and-Louise-era Brad Pitt made a whistling sound with two fingers. A broad, white stallion turned the corner of RLL with a shimmering neigh, then trotted up to him. Brad swished his lithe, muscly body onto the horse, tipped his cowboy hat at me, then with a little kick and a high-ya, the horse galloped off, past the cubicles, around and away.





## Alberto Raptor III

By Karyn Panem

Alberto Raptor III was not your average dino. He was a raptor with ambition. He'd witnessed firsthand, how over the last millennia the age of the Dinosaurs crumbled and made way for a new apex predator: the tiny naked things which science now referred to as "Man." Alberto himself existed via resurrection — from DNA recovered from the belly of a flesh-eating slug preserved in amber, drilled open and reconstituted like astronaut asparagus by a portly gentleman whom smelled vaguely of fried chicken, and who, for the last 20 years would spend day and night devoted to raising the deadly lizard from egg.

Being reincarnated as yourself is a strange experience. For 'Bertie, it felt rather like his past life was a dream from which he'd been softly awoken.

And of course, since Alberto Raptor III was not your average Dino, not even close, the Bertie of today was, by no coincidence a decorated scientist- a paleontologist, no less.

Yes, he was quite the celebrity around the secret, underground facilities that lay beneath the Smithsonian. For obvious reasons Bertie was not allowed out, but for his eternal stay in, he was granted every possible luxury that money- that secret hush hush blank-check government money - could buy.

With not a moment to spare, Bertie slid his awkward Dino bod belly down across the hood of his Mustang, hooking his tiny arm around the mirror, swinging his raptor body into the front seat. An attendant gently placed his custom-made Bertie exclusive Ray Ban goggles on his Raptor eyes and with his big right foot, punched the gas pedal down.

The plastic vehicle whirled to life, streaking down the concrete hallway at a whopping 3 miles an hour. The attendant jogged silently behind the car. Bertie closed his eyes and felt the slight breeze tickling his leathery skin.

A sharp turn later, and they'd arrived.

This was it. Today was the day.

The most anticipated in all of Alberto Raptor III's long and short life on this strange earth: the day he would meet his soulmate.

Exiting the vehicle out the door the attendant politely held for him, Bertie cursed his small arms for not being able to sooth his anxious tick to smooth his nonexistent hair on his raptor head. He nervously made his way up to the lab door, reaching out and touching just a tip of his raptor claw out to push against it.

"Johnny! What are you doing?!?"

The young boy holding the toy raptor up to the pink door of the Barbie dream house dropped it at once, staring wide eyed and frozen at his older sister.

"What are you doing!" She demanded again, pushing him to the side to investigate the scene.

"Uh uh uh uh uh uh uh uh," was all the poor boy could say.

His sister's eyes whirled from the lab to the isle to the lace and flowers, growing more and more pissed the more she pieced together.

"You little turd..." she said in a low, dangerous voice.

"I didn't mean..." began Johnny.

"How many times.....did I tell you Johnny....."

"BARBIE WILL NEVER, EVER, IN A MILLION TRILLION YEARS..." her eyes were bloodshot. The left one twitched uncontrollably. In her trembling fist she held poor Bertie in a Vice grip, his lab coat and glasses all askew, his mouth open in a silent scream.

"MARRY ALBERTO RAPTORO III!!!!!"



# Three Poems About Don

By Jo Wallace

# After Don In The Library John

It was everywhere      Really, it was life:

Flickers between the stalls, objects

Whose scent      Is a synonym for girthy

And still there that scrawl      OLD ROMEO BLOW JOBS

THE TIME OF THE LORD IS AT HAND

Some chick is crossing her hands over her crotch

Afraid of particle travel

I called the fire department      I got a possey

I saw his profile between anthologies and put my thumb between two fingers and reached From  
my side and said GOT YOUR NOSE!      To protect him from his own smell

Was I in the wrong? A snitch      A nark?

Just a streak not even worth a two-night stay

In the underpants?      A stain

Was I?      To be washed

When he was the one unclean      He who violates dignity

The interior as sensory onslaught      But the frame is beautiful

God lives on forever like the portrait of a man who shit righteously

I will steal it

Put it in my house      Yes! Just above the toilet

A precious artifact

If it was music it was brass

The shelves 'dust is damp      Golden age custodians are retiring From  
retirement You bad little boy

# Me, Don, and Rimbaud Go to the Movies

I am patiently stoned like a driveway in the wind system of  
some major city I shall be flown  
away in the gay little helicopter To a theatre  
Where I sit between them and dream of women Together (the  
women and I) We are far away  
We are nowhere and not near the ol' dinky standby Lonely in  
my drawer Don interrupts us  
With his lice I cannot pick them out in the theatre  
I am dreaming of women Anyway it's dark When  
Rimbaud braids Don's hair  
All the sadness tingles in the air like molecules  
After you look at the screen for too long

The film is *Buster Keator Rides Again* The spicier version  
We have the wrong dead poet here He asks us to push him To the  
bathroom The alive one is good enough  
Oh, we missed the bicycle Oh, the best part and

all the world takes a shit during it all  
the world gently insane

We are all the world it is me in love for the first time  
afraid of his face When I said *Rim Bowed?* Though Don was worse  
It was the women anyway the women of my dreams None of them looked like Don OrRimbaud  
I sat between them The screen wasn't silver but the bugs had a glow

## Taking Bucky the Barroom Cowboy to Get Right With God

bucky the barroom cowboy      wanted to  
repent      don sped dialed heaven      but no one  
paid the rent      all the bad angels  
used to spank him      into shame  
they never let feeble bucky      play any wranglin' games

then one kinky  
friday night                      jesus came to say

(Pst listen up kid            the dinosaurs are here  
donald's a VIP            with an access card            all he does is play  
some dipshit game of solitaire            like some dude waiting wifely  
he's so beautiful            I shit myself            you have to  
come along now

what words are there whispered by the watermark  
rings on a slot machine? what odors rage through las vegas  
and shovel themselves thru the highest ceiling there is will you lie  
here in front of me on the tile pray if you know how  
to make things stop?

yeah you! hold it right there

lemme hit your vape

and answers dump out in vases  
until the answering system is hung upside down  
to dry like an unhygienic boy's cumbucket all the way down there

and k. city bucky  
can take my hand from his minuscule hell

his snoring will quit                      waking John

                    after the tongues burst open into confetti  
the sky falling in hexagons      until the sky is gone  
after we lose our way in the throng              and the punk  
kids waving      their schlongs      the claw drunk flashing and  
smash      dragged in the last crass escape  
there really is no stairway              we were THERE kiddo  
now you have the gift                      don't lose it)

  oh bucky with your  
branded ass              won't you come with me to where things last? then how  
the angels loved him              as the signs  
keep going on              bucky and I in love  
The saloon      heaven all along!



# I Can Do All Things by Arel Wiederholt-Kassar

Usually, Steph Curry and his family spent the first two weeks of the summer traveling. This summer, though, Steph and Ayesha wanted to chill out at home. Steph was tired after another long season in which he and the Warriors won their fifth NBA championship. Ayesha was also feeling disenchanted with the fine dining world she'd become a fixture in, and wanted to spend some time exploring the Bay Area's more down-to-earth restaurants to get some inspiration for her next venture, a casual Jamaican-inspired takeaway spot to be called Curry Goat by Ayesha.

One night they decided to drive up to the city to go to a German restaurant in Hayes Valley. They left the kids at home. Little date night. When they got there they sat down in the back corner of the bar where they were quickly greeted by their server, a German-looking kid with a weird poofy ponytail. Steph and Ayesha could tell from the server's face that he was playing it cool, which they were grateful for. For all the bounties of fame, they often craved anonymity, and even when it was clearly staged, like this, they appreciated it.

Can I bring you some beers? the server said.

Ayesha punched Steph in the shoulder. This guy loves to drink Coronas, I want him to try some real good beer.

The server laughed. Then you're in the right place. What would you like?

Something Corona-like, Steph said.

Ayesha rolled her eyes and the three of them laughed.

They went on like this for the whole evening. The banter grew stronger and stronger. Steph liked his beer, Ayesha loved her Riesling, and they ate everything. When they were totally stuffed, the server showed up with a plate of bread pudding. On the house, he said. Thanks for coming in tonight. Ayesha and Steph's faces flickered in the candlelight. To Steph, he said, you've brought me so much joy over the years. Then he nodded and made to walk away but was stopped by Steph's hand on his shoulder.

Wait up, he said. Thank you. You're a cool dude.

The server smiled. Thanks, he said.

What's your name? Steph said.

Shmarel, the server said.

Wow, what a gorgeous name, Ayesha said. And that ponytail, so hot!

For real, Steph said. So hot.

Shmarel was grateful for the dark bar, because his cheeks were on fire. Thanks, he stammered.

How long's your shift? Steph asked.

Shmarel looked at his phone. I get off at ten.

Steph looked at Ayesha and shrugged. Should we stay for another round? He looked back at Shmarel. If we stay till you leave, would you wanna come over to ours and hang out?



An hour later, Steph Curry, Ayesha Curry, and Shmarel Shmiederholt Shmashmar were flying down 280 in the Currys' black sprinter van. Next thing Shmarel knew, he was sitting on the biggest couch he'd seen in his life with a glass of Sweet July Cabernet.

Cheers, Ayesha said.

To Shmarel, Steph said.

To you guys, Shmarel said.

The three friends clinked their glasses.

The night went on swimmingly. They played virtual golf, went through two bottles of wine, and even took a soak in the hot tub outside. They were sitting in the bubbles when they started talking about hopes and dreams.

Ayesha: I want to change the restaurant world. I want to make good, authentic food, and sell it for cheap. I want people to have fun going out again.

Shmarel: I want to be a great poet. I want to be the next Shmo Shmallace. Steph: I've done everything. I'm the greatest point guard of all time. I want to chill. You know what I want to do? I want to go back. I want to feel like a kid again. I want to play spin the bottle.

Wow Stephen! Ayesha said, grinning. How much wine have you had!

Steph grinned back and shrugged. He picked up the bottle from the side of the jacuzzi, put it to his lips, and drank. Then he flipped it upside down. Only drops fell into the hot water. Perfect, he said. He put the empty bottle into the water, between the three of them. Who wants to go first!

Ayesha and Shmarel looked at each other, their eye contact cracking them up like they were in class. Steph's change in demeanor had been so quick and so ridiculous that there was nothing they could do but laugh.

At first, at least. Once the odd tension had broken, something crept into both of their minds saying maybe he was right. Maybe we should do this. Why not, Ayesha finally said. I'll go first.

And so she spun the bottle on the surface of the water. It stopped with one end facing her and the other facing her husband.

Come here, girl, Steph said.

And come here she did.

They made out for a while and then Steph handed the bottle to Shmarel.

Uh, okay, he said, and tossed it awkwardly in between them all, splashing everyone. When it settled, one end faced him and the other Ayesha. Shmarel looked at her. She was smiling. He looked at Steph, he was too. Are you guys sure? he said.

It's just a kiss, Steph said.

Come on, Ayesha said, though she was coming towards him. She put her arms over his shoulders and leaned in and gave him a kiss. Was that so bad? she whispered. No, Shmarel tried to say but couldn't for his breathlessness.

She gave him another peck and then went back to her corner of the jacuzzi. My turn! Steph sang, snatching the bottle.

Watching Steph Curry do something as simple as pick up a bottle and toss it spinning in the air was like watching poetry in motion. What happened next is just what you think it is, and

still, it's impossible to translate into prose what really occurred when the bottle, after being suspended in the air for what felt like millennia, landed butt side facing Shmarel, mouth side facing Steph. What I can say is that it became one of those moments of before and after for Shmarel. Pre Steph Kiss Shmarel was a fundamentally different person to Post Steph Kiss Shmarel. For him to look back on it now is to stare into the eyes of Medusa. It turns Shmarel still. It stiffens him. That's the kind of power—the charge of electricity—that surged between the two of them that night in the hot tub. It's not a coincidence that the South Bay Area experienced its largest ever power outage that night. It was a switch breaking kiss. A kiss brokered by God himself. A kiss of terrifying beauty.



# Fanfic

In an alternative universe, Steph Curry never existed. And Arel Wiederholt-Kassar has been the star point guard for gsw for 5 years.

The year is 2023. Arel woke up with his phone stuck to his cheek. It was 2pm, and light was streaking through his blinds. On his wall-sized tv, He turned on his X, as in the social media, and started begrudgingly looking through his three thousand messages from fans. A day ago, ESPN reporter Wojnarowsky had reported that Arel had reached a verbal agreement to join the Houston rockets, the nemesis of gsw, after losing to the rockets 3-4 in the wcf last year. His x feed did not look friendly.

Some fans expressed disappointment about his performance. One said eloquently: get ready to learn Chinese buddy, it wont be long before you play point guard for the wang dong tigers, you trash ass mutherfucker, fuck outta my face with that bullshit. Others, esp. some of his latino fan base, voiced their concerns for his sudden change of career path with civility by including illustrations: in this photoshop image, arel crossed his arms above a large text, that said, the next chapter of my life, but his head is made into a snake, and there caption underneath to help illucidate the meaning, which reads: chingatumadre tu hideputa a la verga maldida sea pinche pendejo vete a la chingada.

Arel turned off his tv. His phone rang. He swiped up, it was kd, the Houston rocket starting sf, who slithered his way into arel's dm, the message reads: wanna play some balls? Arel was confused. What is little bro even saying? He thought. He sent back an emoji with a question mark. KD replied: sorry meant to say balz with a z. Arel wanted to reply, sure that makes it not weird. But he thought he should show respect, so he replied: say less.

At the training facility, arel was relieved that there were just actual basketballs and kd invited him to do some practice. After a few rounds of sweat soaked shooting, Arel stop to ask KD, "How did you do it?"

"Do what?" KD answered.

And arel said, "Well you defected from your own team to join the team that beat you, how do you remain such a mffucking heartless selfish douchebag and be fine with all the hate from social media?"

KD put the ball down and smile at him, said, "You really wanna know?" Arel said yes. KD said, "Well come to my place after practice, let me show you something." Seeing the hesitation in Arel's expression, KD added, "I promise there will be nothing related to balz with a z, a balls with an s round objects, or two round objects, I mean you get the picture."

Arel raised his hand to interrupt him, said, "No, you keep it. And see you there."

KD's place was luxurious. And just like he promised, no round objects. Kd led arel to a room in the back, and said: promise me you wont tell no one about my secret. Arel said, "I promise, Kevin". KD paused opening the door, and said: don't call me that. Arel thought, what is little bro's problem, but he thought he should show respect so he said in a ultra beta male voice, "Sorry senpai." KD invited Arel inside.

In the room there were about thousands of laptops, computers, and phones, all operating on different x accounts. "These" KD said, "are all my burner accounts."

"Wow" Arel said, "how many are there?"

"As many as you want" KD said. "With the help of chatGPT, now I can reply my haters with generic comebacks instantaneously, without repeating itself, simultaneously from thousands of accounts all at once."

KD put a hand on Arel's shoulder, and said "This, is why I was able to hold it together. I don't. I strike back every single time."

"Whoa," Arel said, motioned his hand over his head as if saying, this shit blows my muthafucking mind, "I think I know what I must do" he said. But then, he notice something on the desk, he ventured a look. He would regret that look, bcs that changed his life forever. It was a juicy, round shaped, steaming hot object, a pizza with banana toppings. Arel suddenly turned to look kd.

No! he shouted. I. am. Not. You! We are built different! I will never betray my hometown team for banana toppings. You and I we are not the same. KD's face grew red, he grabbed Arel's arm, and said, "Listen kid, it is not our choice that define who we are. But how much a whore you can be for money."

Arel broke free, and said, "Oh you have no idea how much of a whore I can be, but I am a whore with principles," and he went on to smashed the pizza, bang, he continue to smash the phones, bang bang he yelling, "I. will. Never. Switch. To. AT&T." and then the computers, shouting, "I will never upgrade to windows 11!" Smashing noise in KD's residence could be heard all night long, and it was not the sounds from super smash bros.

The next day, Wojnarowski broke another news. Arel Wiederholt-Kassar had revoked his verbal agreement with the rockets, and will instead sign a contract extension with the warriors. There also news reporting that Kevin Durant will be leaving the NBA for quote an indefinite period of time to cater to his own mental health; unquote. And the rest was history. Legend has that Arel retired a warrior and was select to the hall of fame.

by xiaoqi

# Mommy & Me by Jordan Forest

"Y/N!" Clement calls out to me as he, Arel, and Emma walk out onto the balcony for a cigarette break.

"Hey, how's it—" I start, but before I finish my sentence, I become distracted by Clement's arm. He's freshly inked from this summer. Lost some card game with his brother and got Bennet's face tattooed on his inner bicep.

But when I look at the tattoo this time, something in it shifts, changes. At first it doesn't seem possible. But then I hear it, hear that familiar sound, the one that has followed me since childhood.

"Settle an argument for us," Emma says, cutting off my thoughts. "Do you have a sweaty butt crack?" she asks me.

"Oh this again?" I mumble out. But I'm still distracted—the tattoo. It couldn't be but...

All of a sudden, my phone is ringing. My mom's caller ID appears on the screen.

"Sorry, I need to take this," I say, stepping away.

I try to make sense of my mom's frenzied story as best I can, but I'm disturbed. I can't stop thinking about the tattoo— how at first, it was Bennett, unblinking. And then it wasn't. And it was looking at me.

"Okay? Sounds good?" my mom says, and I realize she's been looking for a response from me.

"Right," I say, only having vaguely caught the gist of what she's been saying.

I'm about to hang up the phone when the hair stands up on the back of my neck. Clement turns away for just a moment from Arel and Emma's banter and dips his head toward his bicep. I would not have allowed myself to believe his small movement meant anything if it weren't for what I saw next. His lips, just barely, mouthed something, as if he were speaking. But he couldn't be. He couldn't...

"Love you, bug," my mom's voice cuts through.

"Love you, Mommy," I say, and Clement turns back to Emma and Arel, as if nothing at all has happened.

I walk up to where my friends pass a cig between them. Rumor has it, Emma's the hottest person in the program, and I can't help but gawk when I'm nearby. I can tell she misses her vape by the way she keeps reaching for her jeans pocket only to pull away empty handed. But the cigarette only makes her look even hotter, so no one's complaining (except for her occasionally).

By now, Arel has started jumping up on tables and is showing Clement something by squatting repeatedly.

"I used to shit like this. But then I got a tear from soccer so—"

"Hey," I spit out, not quite certain the right moment to interject. "It's my mom. She needs me to go help her catch a stray cat or something," I say as quickly as possible, not making eye contact with Clement.

"Y/N, tell your mom to answer my emails sometime, yeah?" Clement nudges me.



"Ha ha," I say, turning away from my bffs before I can be roped into another conversation about Arel's shit.

When I get home, I almost stumble over our tortoise sitting in the entry way.

"Excuse me," I say.

"Mom?" I call out. One of our four cats rubs against my leg. I pick her up while looking around for Mother.

Before going upstairs, I check the fridge for a snack. Just leftover vegetarian shit from last night.

"Mom?" I say again.

"Baby? I'm in here," I hear her call from her office. A cherished and sacred space in our home.

I open the door to stacks of books. Novels, journals, teaching materials. Her students ask when she does all the reading.

"The ghosts help me," she tells them.

I see Mom at her desk, bent over a notebook. Despite owning a nice Mac, Mom writes by hand. Swears by it. Tells the students in my cohort to write their novels that way too.

"I wrote a perfect short story in one go once," she told me recently. "But I can't find the damn notebook I wrote it in."

As a kid, I used to spend hours thumbing through her notebooks, hoping to find treasures. Mostly I would look for my name. My name, wrapped in strange stories of the presence we felt in our home. The one who has stayed nearby us for these many years. We tried not to talk about it though. Tried not to talk about him.

But when I sit in Mom's hauntology classes, I know who she's talking about. I know why she has studied so hard and why she knows this subject so well.

"Sorry, baby. I called you home sooner than maybe I should have. I started listening to this podcast and had this idea related to one of Freud's dream theories. It's a little Kafkaesque. Here, pull up a chair while I finish this up. I dog-eared a story in OMNI I was looking at this morning that I think you'll like. It made me think of what we were talking about the other night at dinner with how time stretches in dream spaces."

She reaches for an OMNI magazine at the top of one of her many stacks of papers and hands it over to me.

When I open the magazine where she's dog-eared it, I notice my name written in black pen.

"For y/n."

I try to start the story, but I can't. Clement's tattoo... the way it just changed. The face it changed to. The way it looked at me, as though it were... trapped. I hate interrupting Mother while she's writing, but the weight of this morning won't let go of my chest.

"Mom?" I whisper.

"Yes, bug," she says, looking up from her notebook. I know how important her ideas and her words are to her. How they consume her for weeks and months. How even her email can't turn her away from the page. But she will always look up if I call her name.

"You know Clement, right?"

"Sure. Submitted nonfiction to my fiction workshop."

"Yeah, that one. Well, um, something strange happened today. I think I saw Clement talking to himself."

She smiles lightly.

"Oh NO," she says with an exaggerated eyebrow raise.

"No, like, to himself. Like to his arm."

She keeps quiet, and I know this is where I'm supposed to keep going.

"He got a new tattoo over the summer and he says it's just a drawing of his brother, but when I looked at it this morning... it began to change."

"Change how?" she says, putting down her pencil.

"Like... I don't know how to explain this. Like it began to look like someone else."

"Who does it start to look like?"

I bite my lip.

"Timmy."

Mom tucks a strand of hair behind her ear.

"Timmy," I say again, hoping repeating my brother's name will make it less scary to me. "It's Timothy, mom. It's really him. I found him. He's on Clement's arm."

"Don't give me false hope, Y/N Chalamet-Chapman. As a child, you spoke to Timothy so often in your sleep— I spent so many nights trying to capture his spirit. In a shoe, in a bottle, anything. I gave up that hope a long time ago."

"Mom, please."

"Don't—"

I think she's starting to cry, tears forming at the edges of her eyes, the same way she does when looking over the newspaper clippings from that year — "Timothy Chalamet, 5 years old, Disappeared." Mom has been trying to get Timothy back since our home renovation decades ago. Five years old, he wanted to be an actor one day. Maybe in a feature film for one of his favorite books like *Dune* or *Little Women*. Mom told him in order to play the lead in *Dune*, he would have to get big and strong. And so he thought it was just a stone he was lifting from the foundation of our home that day. And then he was gone. But how could we mark "do not touch" centuries into the future? This question, the thing that has kept Mom transfixed at the university. The reason we have never left Vegas, the reason we have studied language and Yucca Mountain.

"Mom, I know it's him."

"How do you know? And why Clement, huh? It doesn't even seem plausible."

"Clement's been working with Dr. Katie Walker on magic stuff for a year, Mom. Larping. Going to Magic Club on Wednesday's. It was only a matter of time before he felt Timothy's presence. Timothy is always lingering nearby me."

Mom shakes her head.

"Mom, the first time I saw Clement's new tattoo, I thought I heard something."

She didn't say anything, didn't ask what I had heard. She knew. She had heard the sound every night since Timmy had disappeared.

The sound of her own name, called as if through a tunnel.

"Maile."