

Chapter 13 of *The Debate*

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And by Friday evening Denise and I, and Collin and Allison were at Collin's house playing, of all things, the most juvenile of drinking games, Three Man—and by nine P.M. Collin's house was charging up for a party of his roommate's design. Moving around kegs, garbage cans of ice, beer, and cider, a strobe light, Christmas lights, black lights and blue lights. The Sick and Twisted show began at midnight. Until then we drank.

Collin, supercharged, drank until his eyes just about gave up and rolled out of his head. He wore blue jeans, tan hiking boots with duressed leather uppers, lug soles, and a micro-plaid flannel over white t-shirt. Paul Bunyan meets J. Crew. He draped himself over Allison's sport-tuned body. She wore an earthy ensemble, a button up the front suede miniskirt, dark tights and a men's style oxford lace-up shoe. A merino wool turtleneck crawled up her jutting chin like a rolling wave. A small bump rode the bridge of her nose, a conventional flaw in beauty that worked on her face as something of a provocative promise. Far from detracting, her nose accented other curves and swells all about her body. It was as if her nose did the most startlingly swoop, so absurdly sexy, and shockingly vulgar, you were constantly taken aback, and that feeling of being on your back, being put there by a forceful feminine was much like being swallowed whole. (I've been swallowed whole before and it's not what you'd expect. You continue to feel pain, long after you're dead. I've died many times, and you'd never guess how, because they always tell you the things that kill you the most can't kill you at all. It's a lie, but an effective one. By the time you figure it out, it's far too late. I may not be winning on the flow, but I'll win where it counts. I'm what's called a survivor, and for survivors the worst sort of horror lays in going forward,

dying again and again, and coming back, for no reason at all.)

Denise was much more traditionally girly. Her cheeks were curvier when she smiled, and her lips were plumper.

I compared Allison's angular sculpted calves to Denise's more smoothly gradual swells. Allison had slightly better legs, Denise, nicer tits. The girls crossed and re-crossed their legs in response to my attention.

A few people I had never seen before drifted into Collin's house. Rough, fruits and nuts, granola types, and sweater vested clear complexions, and all other generic Gap-sorts. Floaters. On dueling sofas, at the center of the hardwood floor, sat the four of us, drinking and swallowing, while Santana hummed like the setting sun.

Collin burst out suddenly, "We absolutely **must** play Questions!"

"And if we doooooon't?" Allison made an uneven arc with her glass.

Collin, exasperated, "Well, we just **must**!" He shot off into the kitchen, eyes gurgling, and popping, and came back with Goldschlager and one shot glass that read, "Mustang Ranch."

Collin asked, "Shall I start?"

"Yes . . ." bubbled Allison.

"Drink!" he said, "Questions, questions!"

Allison jut out a reddish lip and cocked her head like she'd been had. She shot the Goldschlager, tapped the glass and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, "Why did you do that?" smiling sweetly.

"Why does anyone do anything?" Collin like refined sugar.

"Doesn't it seem mean?" she twisted and recrossed her legs.

"Why do you think that?"

"Who said I think that, or anything else?"

"Doesn't it sound like she thinks that, Rich-Richard?" slathered Collin.

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“How could I doubt it?” I whined.

“How could anyone doubt what’s on the green earth, I say?” he swept toward Denise while she was playing with the knuckles on my left hand.

“I don’t know,” she answered.

“Drink,” he commanded.

She guiltily picked up the shot glass and manhandled the liquor. I concentrated on that two and a half inches of bare flesh above her stocking.

It was Denise’s turn. She asked me, “Doesn’t love conquer all?”

I drank more ale, “Why would you say that?”

“Doesn’t it seem that way?” grinning.

“What does seeming have to do with being?”

“What does being have to do with anything?”

“Then why do anything?”

“Doesn’t it seem like we should do something?”

“Why does that seem so, would you figure?”

“Do you suppose I know?” she smiled.

“Weren’t you the one suggesting we should do something?”

“Wanna fuck?”

“Uhhh . . .”

“Uhhh’ is not a question, hot shot.”

I sheepishly looked over the golden shot glass, happy to have been got. Collin and Allison laughed hysterically, like out of balance rotors. Others drifted through the tungsten while I shot the Goldschlager. When I shifted my gaze, static pictures jumped around like film ripped out of the sprocket. My mouth burned. A painful lust crept around.

I asked Collin, “What is truth?”

“Shouldn’t we ask about things we might know?”

“Shouldn’t we know about things that matter?”

“What matters to you?”

“Are you toying with me?” I asked

“Why would you think so?”

“Allison, doesn’t it seem as though there is a role he’s using?”

“A role? Is he using a role?”

“What would it matter?” asked Collin.

“Well,” I continued, hand on chin, “Might there not be secrets?”

“What if there were?”

“Wouldn’t that change everything?” I asked Allison, staring at her breasts.

“Like, don’t we all have secrets?” she asked Collin.

“How could we help it?”

“Well, couldn’t we just be quiet?” suggested Denise.

“Is not saying the same as lying?” asked Allison.

“No.” I said.

“Then drink.”

I shot and raised myself, swaying. I looked down. Indeed I was standing, or that was how it was supposed to seem. I walked backwards, swaying side to side, keeping my eyes on them and Allison asked, “Then why don’t we hang ourselves?”

And Collin, “With what?”

And Allison, “Don’t you have some rope?”

I entered the restroom, sat on the toilet and spaced out the silence. I listened to the high pitched ringing. The door shoved opened and shut. Denise stood in front of me with hands on hips, “Are you doing number two?”

“No.”

“Why are you sitting down, then?”

“Because it’s more comfortable.”

“Oh? I’ve always wanted to pee standing up.”

I finished and pulled up my pants. Before I could buckle my belt Denise wrapped her hands around my waist, and pulled me against her. I sunk in, and she pushed her lips against mine, glancing her tongue against my teeth and palate, like a shining glimmer, here and there, terribly hot, smelling of sharp alcoholic

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fumes—cheapened intoxication, protuberant, scarlet lips, seeping heated sludge. I groped for Denise’s pretty tits. She moaned and closed her eyes as I thumbed the nipples. Denise moved her hands slowly over the base of my neck, warm fingertips under my shirt. Her other hand rubbed my belly, rousing the hardness. A dull ache spread like a splash at the groin.

I spread hands over her thighs, stockings, and then fleshy, and upward. She stepped apart. Soft cream thighs. I groped and oozed higher, under her pliant skirt. I murmured between gasping kisses, “You’re not wearing . . .”

“Uh huh, uhh aaah,” she moaned, “Just like you said . . . aaahh.”

“Good girl.

“Ohhhh, Richard,” she licked my earlobe carefully and whispered ethereally. It was my name she said, not the truncated nick-name. She got down on her knees, unbuttoned my pants and wrapped her lips around my hard dick. She moved her head back and forth like a piston on a locomotive, and then sucked on the tip, and then shoved it down her throat, gagging. Her cheeks collapsed as she slurped on the head, and then again, tried to swallow the whole thing in a way that seemed studied—but not studied enough. More gagging and gasping.

“Heeeey! What’s goin’ on in there!” Collin called from outside, “**Heeeey**, I gotta use the john too, you know?”

“Denise is trying to deepthroat me,” I replied.

“Oh, come on!”

“Go away! Get your own blow-job!”

“You’re not getting a fucking blow-job. I need to use the bathroom!”

And Denise opened her mouth and shoved my cock down her throat again, slurping and gagging. “Don’t you have another bathroom?” I called out.

“Beer’s in the tub!”

“So kick them out!”

Denise looked up at me while stuffing her mouth and bobbing up and down, and then spinning her tongue around like cheerleader's pom-poms. "Pretty good," I said.

"There's too many people in there," Collin cried, "Just let me in! I really need to go."

"Why couldn't I be getting a blow-job?" I asked.

"Because first of all," Collin yelled, "Denise is out here. I can see her, over by the stereo, and second-

"Well, why couldn't I be getting a blow job from somebody else?"

"And second," he sung, as if agitated, "none of the faggots have showed up yet."

"For chrissakes," I murmured.

"So fuckin, open up! I really, really got to go."

"No you don't" I insisted, "you just want to ruin my perfectly good blow job."

"Perfectly good, what?"

"Perfectly good . . ." I ruminated softly and then yelled, "You selfish sonofabitch! Go pee in People's Park."

"It's not clean!" Collin cried, knocking on the door.

"God, I love sucking your cock," Denise murmured.

"Did they tell you to say that?" I asked.

"No, it's true!" Collin whined.

"No, not you!" I yelled.

"Are you going to let me in, or do I have to get the key?"

"Who would tell me to say that?" Denise stood up and wiped her mouth with a towel.

"I don't know. *Vogue*?"

Collin pounded on the door.

"*Vogue* doesn't write that stuff," she kissed me on the mouth so I would know what it tastes like to suck myself. Denise's gaze lingered on me while I washed my hands.

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Collin's roommates tended the emerging party. A band with a human hand on the bass drum reading "Gamalataki" set up, while Collin, the girls, and I left for the midnight showing. Past People's Park, to Telegraph Ave., a brightly lit carnival of adolescent run-aways, punks, and homeless. Denise climbed a tree that lined the Avenue. I looked up her skirt. Collin came to see. I told him to stay back or I would crush his gimpy knee. He said his knee was fine. Allison urged her to get down in-between shrieks and giddy hopping. Denise jumped down, kissed me on the mouth, and ran away. I started after her but bent up. She ran back and asked why I wasn't chasing her. I told her, "Crushed my leg for a toll."

"What? What did you say? You're slurring your words."

I grabbed her shoulders, "I think I'm falling in love with you." Denise's eyes went soft, and she cried, and pressed her cheek into my mouth. Then she grabbed Allison, and they ran off together.

Collin and I walked past Big Slice, on the opposite sidewalk.

"Richard," he said musically, "I liiiiike **you**. I really do! And I don't like too many people, you understand."

"I see' said the blind man."

"Richard, you're different. You're just as FUCKED UP AS I AM!" Then he belted out the most uncharitable howl, and a laughing mania took him over. He screeched at the sky like a hyena. Even the passing punks, pierced and haggard, walked a safe distance back, while Collin lost all his wind, and breathed as if there wasn't enough air in all of Berkeley; his head between his knees. Allison ran up and rubbed his back while Collin gasped merrily, "I'm okay, he he he" and it almost began again. I giggled, and then Denise, and Allison.

As we walked arm in arm, Collin reached down and grabbed my testicles, I tried to wrench free, but could not without extreme pain, so I reached down and grabbed his testicles as well, and that's how we advanced through the street hunched over like that.

We released each other at Anna Purna, where I bought everyone pretty, gold tipped cigarettes, and sweet scented cloves, except for Collin who demanded a beedie, a cigarette wrapped in grape leaf. He cautiously relit, as it extinguished itself periodically.

Up by the glass building with broken granite set in the ground—that used to be Rasputin’s and before that Berkeley Beach—a ten year old urchin with a ring in her belly button spare changed me. I said I didn’t have any change.

“How ’bout a clove?”

“Okay,” I pulled out a clove and held it in front of her like a carrot, “I’ll give you this clove, **or** if you flip heads four times in row, I’ll give you the whole pack. What do you want to do?”

“I’ll flip,” the girl grinned. I gave her a quarter and she flipped heads three times.

“Still not too late,” I said, “Walk away and I’ll give you this clove right now.”

“Don’t fuckin’ jack me!” she hissed.

“Fine.”

She flipped tails and I took my quarter back, “Too fuckin’ bad.” I dropped the fresh clove and ground it into the granite with a toe.

Denise and I crossed Bancroft in a flitty banter, coming across a huge sit-in. Placards read, “Affirmative Action is Here to Stay,” and a huge swastika over, “Zeig Heil to the Regents and Their Master Race.” Diane Feinstein, former Mayor of San Francisco, came to campus to speak on the subject. Her presence prompted a redoubled protest against the impending removal of over thirty years of Affirmative Action in California. Some were hunger striking, as part of a system-wide movement, that had originated at UCI earlier in the month.

A thin blue line encircled Sproul, floodlights turned up high, like a night game, while protesters took turns giving sermons to the converted. A band of three boys and two girls, marched like militant Panthers toward us and asked if we wanted to buy a ribbon to support their cause. And I cringed because I saw Collin holding on by his nails, eyes rolling toward the back of his skull,

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and a jerky convulsion, just short of a code blue arrest, as he was on them:

“You kind folks haven’t even bothered to question the assumptions behind your movement, have you?”

The tall black boy took the bait just as fast. He had come from wherever he’d come from, Los Angeles, San Diego, Eureka, or maybe even another state, Ohio, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, and came to Berkeley for just this. This is what he had imagined, this is what he had dreamed of, a confrontation with an overprimed, white bigot, upon the sacrosanct ground of Sproul Plaza, no less: “No, no, no, no, no,” said the black boy, veins bulging, “You haven’t stop to think beyond **your** narrow, little white world, where Mommy cooks dinner and everything is in its place, while Daddy has a **fine, fine** job at some exploitive corporation. And **fuck!** Those are **nice** shoes. Goddamn, those are some expensive boots! Did your Daddy buy those for you? I bet he did. I bet you say, ‘**Daddy! Daddy!** Can I have those fine shoes?’ You say, ‘Pleeeeeease!’ And he say, ‘Sure son, anything you want.’”

I looked at Collin’s shoes, expensive Timberland Hiking boots, \$150.00, maybe \$180.00 a pair. The girls faces were blank with apoplexy. Allison stood close to Collin, ready to break up the impending fight. But Collin didn’t look at his shoes, and for all the adjacent doom pressing him toward blood and pain, I saw a glint in Collin’s eye, and the side of his mouth curled upward, menacingly, but giddy too. His trademark smirk: his body broke out into a full belly laugh. And at that, the two other boys stepped back just a bit. You wouldn’t have noticed if you weren’t looking, but just a bit.

“Oh bro! Bro!” sung Collin, “That’s a sample of some of the worst logic I’ve ever heard!” *Haw! Haw! Haw!* “So if I have nice shoes therefore Affirmative Action is a good thing! **Wooooo-eeiiiiii**,” he howled like a confederate flag in the Dixie wind, “Boy, you sure are an example of the admissions process gone awry, aren’t you?” And the laugh! Billowing clouds of mania and loose brained jackal caterwauling, loud and poignant.

“You MUTHAFUCKER,” the black boy rankled through twitching lips, and unfocused eyes, and his friends laid hands on his shoulders and arms.

A brown skinned girl stepped forward. She was much calmer than the rest, “I don’t think you understand, without Affirmative Action, racial and sexual discrimination would return with a vengeance.”

“I’ve got news for you,” Collin’s eyes trundled and sparked, “They’re here, sister. They’re still here.”

The tempestuous black boy ripped harder against his friend’s grip, “You racist fuck! You’re a supremacist! You’re a white-mother-fucking-supremacist!”

“If you want to steal from me at least have the balls to steal from my face! Don’t go around taking my job, taking my law school slot, on **principle**.”

“**Stooooole!** Don’t talk to me about stealing. Everything you have was stolen, raped and abducted from the black man’s toil!”

“There is no principle involved. Affirmative Action is pure thievery by the unqualified.”

The UCPD swooped down. Three officers separated our clans while a fourth barked commands, “All right—chill out! Everyone relax. We’re gonna have a nice, peaceful protest, right? No name calling, no rock throwing, not on my watch.”

The black boy was unabated, “You best not sleep tonight, whitey! You best get the fuck out of here and never come back!”

“Alright Thomas, knock it off,” barked the blue man.

But Collin couldn’t resist the bait, “Keep your self-loathing to yourself, okay?”

“That’s enough blondie,” the blue man clutched his truncheon.

A terrible silence spread out while the protesters beamed bitterly at each of us in turn. Deep ebony foreheads damp and glossy Sproul’s midnight floods. Hearts of darkness beat as if from a horror not spoken. (Life under the nine bridges knew these secrets but could not speak. Those who spoke, did not know. I know the assumptions, where they sleep, how they sink, what they must do, and I will win this debate. It is a certainty.)

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At the blue man's behest, we left. Collin and I trotted off to Wheeler. Collin put his arm over my shoulder, and took a shot of Goldschlager from a small pocket bottle. I did the same. "Aaahhh!" he huffed, "Nothing like a little strife to remind you you're alive." The girls walked quickly ahead, in reticent murmur, rushing to the ticket line.

Collin and I found Allison and Denise in a short line. We swallowed gold leaf shots like lizards. I had hit a plateau. Allison leaned up against Collin in lost exhaustion. His tall body took her. He blinked behind round glasses.

Denise looked at me with fresh eyes, in shock. I stared into them and became momentarily lost in her dilation, "That wasn't very nice, what Collin did," hot breath teased my ear.

"Yes, I fear you are right, once again," I exhaled heavily. I scanned around. Others avoided my gaze. They knew. I crouched, all alone, mind you, not bothering anyone, all fours, like an obedient hyena, and gnawed on Denise's thigh, hungrily, until a shriek pierced my head. I fell backwards, miserably.

"What are you doing?" Denise, looked side to side like a crossing guard.

I growled, "You **know** what I'm doing for chrissakes!"

Allison tried to give me a shocked-as-hell stare, but gave up doubling-over, laughing.

Denise helped me up and then helped up her stocking. I didn't stand so well. My face was filled with the scent of Denise's thigh. Nutrogena, or something.

"Why won't you just behave, Richard?" asked Denise. She wrapped arms around herself, misstepped, then caught herself.

"What for?"

"What if everyone did that?"

"If everyone did that to you, or to their own girlfriend?"

"Their own," she replied, shocked.

"I could make the maxim a universal law. There's no internal contradiction."

“What are you talking about?”

“I don’t know. What are you talking about?”

“Richard!” she wrapped arms around me and pressed her mouth to mine. When she let go, I watched her features move here and there, bewitching me, like beautiful witches dancing around a cauldron. She asked me a question. I held onto her hand and wouldn’t let go.

Through the door, the ushers handed me a mock vomit-bag. The bag chronicled different phases of vomit: the technicolor yawn, driving the porcelain bus, spilling the oats, laughing at the ground. In the Wheeler Auditorium, cartoons were in progress. I couldn’t find four seats together, so we stood at the back. Applause. The next cartoon was *Lupo the Butcher*, a festival favorite. The plot essentially revolved around a cussing Italian butcher who spit and chopped meat on a butcher block. Chop, “Whe-yo-som-gonna-freekie, goomp!” *Chop! Chop!* He accidentally chopped off his fingers and vivid red spurt everywhere, yelping: “Ferken! Sononfan!” and then he chopped off the rest of his arm, and the other arm fell off, and his head rolled off, and blood sprayed endlessly. Wild applause broke out upon credits, “Wooooooooooo!” Collin screamed.

The next cartoon involved a small dog prancing on a happy home owner’s freshly shorn lawn. Twitching and seizing, the dog pushed out a terrific brick of shit, many times the size of the animal. Allison screamed, “Did you see the size of that turd?”

Quiet Please, an all time Festival favorite featured a protagonist committing infanticide, molesting women, and lancing acne. Other cartoons portrayed oversized phalluses and pixies, graphic portrayals of forcible sodomy against the aged, and the meaningless murder of frogs with baseball bats.

Denise laughed ravenously. I felt embarrassed to watch these things with her. (You will think I’m a prude, but I am not. Some things are not to be enjoyed publicly. Cross apply the value criteria here.) “I’m not into this,” I said and motioned for her to follow me out. She held up a vomit-bag. I sauntered out.