

New Ape Idea

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Part I

“This is the key to the problem, how much truth there is in solipsism.”
—Ludwig Wittgenstein

“It’s not about isolation. It’s about time.”
—Diarrhea Planet

1.1.0 — Hijack

The roar of takeoff doesn't sound as loud as what is coming out of the fat man next to Vreeman. The man sits in the adjacent seat and hogs both armrests for himself, his fleshy belly rising and falling with each snore. His chin tucked to his chest, the man looks to Vreeman like a large toddler. And despite the fact that his body is folded over like a question mark and it sounds like something truly awful is percolating in his sinuses, the man has a peaceful countenance. Like fitful, midday airplane sleep is the best rest he's had in a long while.

On Vreeman's Very Last Flight, takeoff seems to have a sedative effect on most of the plane's passengers. Though they left Newark at a hair past noon, a good amount of the cabin's passengers zonked out the moment the jet engines began rumbling. As the aircraft ascends to max altitude, nobody seems to stir much. There are no screaming babies on this flight, thank Jesus. Every one of Vreeman's practice flights contained at least one insufferable child that would wail and cry and wail and cry, defiant against the ineffective coos from her red-eyed parents.

Perhaps it's because he is flying first class for his Very Last Flight that Vreeman hears only the petulant snores of his neighbor and the whooshing of the plane hurtling through the troposphere. It's his first time too. No more coach and economy class seating like on the practice flights. It is a rare and happy harmony when a personal indulgence and a pragmatic course of action align so perfectly. He initially chose the first class aisle seat for its easy cockpit access. Though the extra legroom and complimentary drinks feel far more sinful than any other aspect of the Flight, which he has painstakingly planned over the past sixteen weeks.

Vreeman casts a glance over each of his shoulders and reaches below the seat in front of him. From his one allowed carry-on bag Vreeman extracts the false carabiner. Even the pads of his fingers seem to sweat, leaving crescents of grease on the fake chrome. He had stowed it in his backpack's front pocket, just like on every other practice flight. Never once did any of the fish-faced TSA agents spy it through their whirring full body scans. Metal detectors were never too problematic: the carabiner is plastic.

The fat man emits a cough and a snort, eliciting a nervous jump from Dennis Vreeman. Dennis wraps his fingers around the carabiner, hiding it in his palm. From the large gold belt buckle that digs into the man's corpulence, Vreeman can guess that the man is indigenous to the metro-Dallas area. The man's head falls from his headrest to Vreeman's shoulder. He sputters. A spindle of drool drips down from his maw onto Vreeman's breast. One would think that the airlines would allow a slightly greater degree of personal space for their first class customers.

"Shit," Vreeman says, his voice consumed by the plane's in-flight drone. Now he cannot even exit his seat and surreptitiously enter the cockpit. Not without waking the Texan, whose breath holds an alcoholic tinge. Vreeman has to wait. Alone with his thoughts, holding the weapon he may not use just yet. He reiterates The Plan in his mind over and over and over until it becomes a spinning ecclesiastical wheel, turning the piceous sky bright with its scorching inevitability.

The Plan

X	Book 1st class tix on midday flight departing from Newark EWR on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday to a destination at least 1500 miles away.
X	If nec. book several practice flights to familiarize self w/ routine.
X	Procure Loder XRG Climbing Carabiner w/ Whittling Knife Attachment

	(purchasable through “Outdoors” section Executive Traveler magazine).
X	Store Loder XRG Climbing Carabiner w/ Whittling Knife Attachment in carry-on luggage. (If TSA confiscates it, relinquish it and procure a new one.)
X	Board flight from Tues/Weds/Thurs Newark EWR to > 1500 miles away location w/ carry-on luggage.
X	Relax and enjoy flight until maximum altitude is reached.
X	Remove Loder XRG Climbing Carabiner w/ Whittling Knife Attachment from carry-on luggage.
X	Make sure flight attendants are in cabin’s rear.
	Enter Cockpit.
	Brandish Whittling Knife Attachment of Loder XRG Climbing carabiner.
	Assume control of in-flight PA from pilot.
	Announce to passengers and crew intention to commit hijacking.
	Await intervention from Air Marshall.
	Surrender self non-violently.
	Accept arrest by ground forces upon landing.
	Await media.
	Await fan mail, hate mail, and trial
	Plead guilty, no contest.
	Live rest of life.
	Suicide self if quality of life in jail is < quality of life out of jail AND/OR fan mail, hate mail, general media attention wanes significantly.
	Otherwise die content with identity eternally preserved via Wikipedia/AP databases and Homeland Sec. archives.

The plan is simple. An easy recipe for Vreeman to thrust himself into the mouths of the many-headed hydra that is today’s media. An elegant means to have one’s face emblazoned across the retinas of every smart-glasses wearing, screen-thumbing, net-surfing plebe of America.

The white-hotness of fame and the slow burn out of it.

The Loder XRG, once cool from the constant breeze of recycled pressurized air is now warm from Vreeman’s sticky palms. The air is fresh and alive and electric despite its staleness.

And glory of glories when the long smooth flight of the plane hits a caesura of turbulence! The cabin tremors. Pupils flicked upwards from smartphones and laptop screens and tablets and portable gaming devices to the headrests in front of them. The attendants in their ironed navy business suits remain unfazed, handing out canned spring water and scanning debit cards with their white bloodless fingers. Their mouths are open and their eyeballs are empty; not a hint of emotion of any valence on their faces. The turbulence, though small, through some providence of physics, is enough to roll the fat man from Dallas’ head along a 180° arc. His primary chin sloshes from Vreeman’s shoulder to the hard plastic shade of the window on the man’s other side. He does not seem to wake up.

Vreeman is unburdened. He slides out of his seat and stands in the aisle. His fellow passengers look asleep, their sense-holes plugged with digital stimuli.

The cockpit is open. Small planes like these are usually designed in this manner. It keeps the passengers feeling safe and secure as they may freely keep tabs on their pilots. Not any of that phylum of behavior going on now, thankfully for Vreeman. If any of the passengers had

shown even an iota of paranoia he probably would have marked this another practice flight and rebooked.

He locks eyes with a faraway stewardess in the coach seats. Her eyes say something but Vreeman can only feel his lips twitching and sphincter tightening and does not have cognitive resources to parse her gaze. He brings his palm to his stomach, obscuring the carabiner. His white cotton business shirt is dotted with perspiration. "Bathroom" he mouths. The flight attendant nods up at a *Fasten Seatbelts* display overhead and purses her lips. Vreeman doubles over, an attempt at beaming the image of painful diarrhea into her skull. The flight attendant shrugs like whatever and hands a seated passenger a 6 oz can of Pepsi.

Takeoff seems to have a sedative effect on the plane, stewardesses included. How else could she have missed Vreeman tiptoeing backwards into the cockpit?

The pilot turns his head as much as his stiff white collar will allow. Everything about the man is thick: jowls, eyebrows, and a salty unironic moustache. What looks like a recent crew cut is already dotted with follicle regrowth. Sausage fingers grip around the half-crescent wheel.

"You can't be in here," is all he says to Vreeman. Another Texan.

In the seat to his right dozes a wiry man. His Adam's apple shows itself with each of his slow turbulent snores.

"Does he usually do that?" Vreeman, somewhere between a murmur and a mumble.

"Christ," the pilot withdraws a hand from the wheel and wipes meaty fingers across a meaty brow. "You do this in plainclothes now?"

The carabiner is slick with sweat. Vreeman slips a thumb under the clip, his nail against the whittling blade.

"Sheeyit. Crane! Wake-up Crane!"

The skinny man rouses with a short quiet moan, as if he is unsure whether or not he was caught in a nightmare. He blinks several confused times as he studies Vreeman, who although rather confused himself, still manages to draw slight offense at the pilot's use of "plainclothes." The navy sport jacket and slacks he wears are about the nicest clothes he owns.

"Wha?"

"Don't what at me." The pilot's pupils dart between the man called Crane and the plane's windshield as he speaks. His moustache obscures a snarling upper lip. "Dee Oh Tee just witnessed you napping on the job."

"--"

"I'm sorry, officer. I don't usually do this." The man speaks at a whisper, his lips varnished with a white film of dehydration.

"--"

"I can vouch for my copilot, he has never acted like this before."

"No sir I haven't."

Vreeman allows himself a breath to stare ahead. His guts are humming with stress; his arteries pump carbonated plasma. His Loder XRG is still hidden in his palm, pressed to his stomach. The flat black brims of the pilots' hats seemed to point forward into the ether beyond. The sky is not blue on Vreeman's last flight, but white. Endless, dimensionless white.

"I'm not with the Department of Transportation."

The Adam's apple of the man called Crane bobbed up and down. The pilot just shook his head like, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ.

And here Vreeman is struck by the indelible faultiness of his own planning. How does one announce a hijacking? Do they iterate their intentions to kill the pilots and drive and/or crash

the plane? “I am here to commit an act of terrorism,” sounds banal, trite. What if a “you motherfuckers!” is thrown in for dramatic effect? Still unsatisfactory. He had rehearsed *The Plan* countless times, and yet he failed to account for this essential moment.

“I’m not with the Department of Transportation,” he says again. A shitty opener, but perhaps a necessary one.

“Goddammit,” says the pilot. The co-pilot just keeps audibly swallowing.

Vreeman’s skin feels like paper. His whole body swishes with a happy nausea. “I’m here to—”

“We know,” says Crane. He sits up in his seat and places his hands on his half-wheel. His skin looks a size too small for his gaunt frame, his bones and veins seem to push out of his body with urgency.

“With all due respect, sir,” the pilot now, “this is second visit Homeland Sec has paid us this month.”

“What with the U Miami sophomore who tried to sneak kerosene in his Starbucks cup last October. They’re now saying it was a protest against the higher ed buyout?”

“Heightened security protocol. We understand.”

Vreeman turns around and peaks down the aisle. The man from Dallas still snoozes. A flight attendant a few dozen rows down catches his eye. What feels like several seconds pass by. Vreeman shrugs. Crane follows Vreeman’s gaze. The co-pilot gives the flight attendant an A-Okay hand gesture. Her eyebrows are thin and plucked and far away but Vreeman can still see they spell anger. She returns her gaze to a screen in front of her. Vreeman swallows and turns.

“May I use the intercom?”

The two pilots share a glance. Crane bites his lower lip and the pilot almost does so himself.

“I don’t see why not,” says the pilot.

Another gap in **The Plan**. Vreeman has no idea how to use the intercom.

“Hand it to me,” he says. “Please.”

Crane leans forward and picks the black receiver off of its handle on the underside of the console and holds it out to Vreeman, who quickly pockets the carabiner. The pilots look unfazed. Vreeman takes the intercom in one hand and runs his fingers down the microphone’s black spiraling chord. He does not speak.

“Uh, depress the button on the left and talk,” says Crane. He speaks with an urgent sweetness. Poor guy will probably get shamed out of his job when Vreeman’s testimonial is released to the public.

“Attention ladies and gentlemen.” Like most, Vreeman does not like the sound of his voice. The fuzziness of the intercom channel helps though. “My name is Dennis Vreeman and, I, uh.”

Crane stares ahead, miming flying the plane.

A clearing of the throat. “Sorry. My name is Dennis Vreeman and this is my Very Last Flight.”

Vreeman slouches as he stands. A bad habit he never could kick. At one time he worried that he might acquire scoliosis of the spine later in life. He tucks his chin down toward his chest. It gives a sort of fetal comfort. And how come all these planes have the same blue zigzag-pattern carpeting?

“It is my Very Last Flight because, I, uh. It is my Very Last Flight because we are all going to die. So it’s your Very Last Flight too.”

Both pilots pout their lips. Their affect is undeniably confused.

“Sorry about this,” Vreeman says. He scans the passengers. All seated. Placid. Even sluggish. A few sleepers dot the crowd, though most either stare straight ahead, earbuds in ear canals or fixate themselves toward a laptop screen.

“Is anyone even listening right now?”

Even the flight attendants, blonde hair tied back in neat buns, thumbed the touchscreens of their smartphones. Vreeman removes the carabiner from his pocket.

The Loder XRG Stainless Steel Climbing Carabiner w/ Whittling Knife Attachment sets itself apart from all other *Skymall* outdoors paraphernalia due to its unique design. Though made of plastic, the knife attachment is laser-sharpened to cut as finely as a razor. Most Loder whittling knives do not exceed 7 cm in length. They are a perfectly fine size for simple woodcarvings, but unacceptable for attempted acts of terror. The XRG model though, is notable for its employment of what Loder hallmarks as “Cutting-Edge Blade Telescoping Technology”. The whittling knife attachment is—in essence—a blade within a blade within a blade. The threefold out of one another and may be locked into place turning the carabiner into a half-size Bowie knife.

“Is there even an Air Marshall on board?”

“Is this a drill?” the man called Crane says, almost frowning.

The blade’s unfolding and locking actions take no more than a half-second. He holds the blade up to the pilot’s face and drops the intercom the floor.

“This is so not a drill,” Vreeman says, his whole physiology awash in the cool minty tingle of self-acknowledged badassery.

“Motherfucker!” The pilot jams a button that glows lime green and hurls himself to his feet, the momentum of which causes him to stumble to his side, his legs falling over one another in a sloppy grapevine. He grabs his copilot, balancing himself on Crane’s shoulder and stands erect.

And the copilot Crane shrieks in a full castrato and makes a fist, punches down a round red button on the far right of the console. Vreeman turns to see the blonde-haired stewardess barreling down the aisle screaming “You Bastard! You Bastard! You Bastard!” with a silver fork in each hand. Behind her, one older man manages to look up from his computer screen. His fellow passengers do not. It is only half a second before they are cut off by the *thoomp* of a thick steel door slamming shut, sealing off the portal to the cockpit.

“Bill you shithead!” the pilot heaves.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry! Oh my God I’m so sorry!”

Vreeman hears the thumping of distressed stewardess fists on 3 inches of solid steel. Her knuckles likely bloodied pretty quickly. He can’t quite make out what she’s screaming, something animal and atavistic filtered to a low alto mumble through the thick metal. The rodent squealing of steel-fork-on-wall scratching comes through clearly though.

Large globules of sweat collect along Vreeman’s hairline and snake downwards to his eyes, nose, and lips. He brings a forearm to mop his face, his blade a silver narwhal’s tooth extending from his nose.

The pilot, maybe a linesman in his youth, throws his mass forward toward the hijacker who instinctively blocks his hand with his fists in fear. The pilot’s eyeball doesn’t make much noise when it pops from his head. Crimson on white starched collar and blue carpet. The optic nerve pulls apart like a glob of putty. The eye itself looks more like a gag gift or up-scale Halloween decoration than a human organ. The iris is turquoise, the milky retina shish-kabobed

on the Loder XRG pinkish around the entry and exit holes.

Should one find themselves sans eye, Vreeman thinks, wouldn't logic dictate that they keep their lone remaining eye open as much as possible? Sure, depth perception would be compromised but at least one could have some sense of vision. The pilot though, seems to have let all rational thought evaporate from his mind and squeezes both eyes shut, salmon-colored tears gooping out from his empty socket. He claws at his face and makes infantile shrieks and moans as he stumbles backwards and slumps by the co-pilot's chair.

Crane is still and whitening. He, too, is crying. Vreeman realizes that he can smell fear, and fear smells like urine. Vreeman jukes toward him, knife arm outstretched, the optic nerve of the eyeball dangling off the side. No reaction from Crane; the élan of the whole situation has triggered some infantile behavior primitive in his skull. The copilot continues to cry and blubber and wet himself without ceasing.

"Where do you wanna go?" Crane says. "Just tell me and I'll take you there. Please just don't hurt me."

Vreeman wipes his blade off on the headrest of the pilot's seat. "I don't know," he says.

The floor shifts beneath their feet and Vreeman stumbles forward. He trips over the bloody toddler-like pilot and falls into Crane who embraces him. The whiteness outside the cockpit window has turned into a checkered brown and green and the two roll forward on top of the dashboard, arms still around one another. Crane does not disengage from the hug: limb control becomes difficult when one's spinal cord is nicked by a serrated knife.

The Plan, like an awkward leftover guest at a party, ushers itself out of Vreeman's head. It leaves in its wake a fresh mindfulness. The consuming amniotic hum of the plane in nosedive fills Vreeman's consciousness. That and the liquid warmth of Crane spasming around him.

And what a spectacular end to this, Vreeman's Very Last Flight, to become a bellowing pillar of hellfire on a metro-Memphis freeway along with all those smartphone zombies.

1.2.0 — Van

Takashi had several articles on display, primary sources detailing the New York City downtown scene from the 1980's. His gaze saccaded back and forth between the text and a cluster of four music videos playing on mute in his right-hand field of vision. His van's stereo system blasted some decade-old sludgewave as the vehicle wound itself off the parkway and into Teaneck. He blinked twice, closing off two of the music videos and summoned Shackled Uterus' homepage from his peripheral vision. Takashi extended an index finger and swiped at the air in front of his face, logging in to the site's admin area and tabbing down to analytics. No new visitors. There had only been thirteen in the past week.

He focused back in on the texts. Was Patti Smith someone he was expected to know? The whole van's interior shook with the deep bass riffage emanating from the subwoofers. He swiped away the article; a new notification on his media reader blinked in the corner. Tak squinted it open. It was a *Staph Infection* article regarding a management change of a venue space in Hoboken. He winked his left eye, bookmarking the zine piece for later, and opened up a command prompt, though whatever specific scripts he wanted to execute had escaped him.

The van's rumble of locomotion gracefully decrescendoeed as the vehicle came to a stop. Takashi tilted his head left then right, cracking his neck and murmured an "Oy vey." The van, perceiving human speech, lowered the music volume in suit.

A handful of children, younger than seven or eight played ball in the cul-de-sac ahead. They yelled and hooted as they milled about. One shebody snatched a ball, a purple rubbery sphere engineered for no particular sport, and hurled it to the pavement. It bounced off the pavement in a smooth hyperbola and onto the windshield of Tak's van. From there it ricocheted onto the perimeter of a nearby lawn, dislodging some mulch and sending a squirrel zipping up an adjacent oak. The kid took off after the ball while the others, seeming to follow some unsaid rule of the game, swirled in a fleet footed mosh; they screamed as they tagged one another, bearing gap-toothed smiles.

Takashi honked his horn. The van wouldn't move until it registered a child-free road ahead. And yet those little sphincters blocked him from reaching his desired coordinates: the other side of the cul-de-sac. He removed his Lazy Eyes and placed them in the glove compartment. He'd told Doug a year ago he didn't wear them, and it was a lie worth sticking to. Most punks he knew didn't wear them either.

The shebody with the long hair returned, purple ball in hand. He parked himself in front of the van and stuck its tongue out at Tak, who added a second honk, this one longer than the first. This brought the children to a halt. A small pond of stares directed at him. Takashi waved his hands. The shebody flipped her middle finger at him. Her friends squealed and laughed. Takashi returned the flipping-off by an order of two and attempted the meanest, sternest scowl he could. He crossed his eyes, his facial muscles burned with lactic acid from prolonged flexion. All in an effort to transmit the visage of one-who-will-not-be-fucked-with.

They laughed. He too was part of the game now.

Tak, pissed as ever, rolled down a window and leaned out. "Move, fuckers," was all he said. And they did.

The van drove itself through the center of the cul-de-sac to the destination Tak had tabbed in earlier with his bitten in fingernails. Tak ordered it to pull a k-turn, less out of necessity than to just delay the children from further resuming their game. After backing into the

driveway, Takashi pinched the collar of his shirt. His white tee shrank two sizes and blackened itself. The Waymo parked itself before he hopped out.

Takashi unlocked the back door of his van and approached the garage. He rapped his knuckles three times against the aluminum door.

“Delivery,” he said.

And with that the garage door lifted up and receded into some hidden chasm in its ceiling.

“You’re late,” said Doug.

Isa, perched atop her amp, fingered the tuning key for her B-string.

“I’ll need your help with this, boyo,” said Tak as he patted the side of the Waymo.

“Did you pick up the cables?” said Doug.

“Cables?”

“Courtney Christ, Takashi, Isa’s old one’s burned out. I messaged you about this a week ago. Did you even order them?” Doug pursed his lips and flared his nostrils. “And what’d you do to your hair?”

“Pretty rogue, yeah?” said Takashi. His normal half-Semitic nappiness had been greased and smoothed into a column of liberty spikes. A single devilock, shiny with hair gel, curled along the front of his face, obscuring one eye. “I modded it, should make it harder for facial recognition software to ID me.”

Doug’s own copper-colored mane was tied up into a tight top-bun, bound with a rubber band. “The fuck Tak. You’ll have to go back to Musician’s Warehouse and pick them up. Hopefully they won’t mind that we didn’t preorder them.”

“I don’t think I will be going back to Musician’s Warehouse any time soon,” said Takashi.

Doug approached the van. His collar had already begun to darken with perspiration. And it was only March. “I’m coming with you,” he said. “If this is a money thing—which I know it isn’t—I can find a way to spot you the fifteen K,” he said. “But we can’t practice without cables.”

“Whatever you say boyo.” Tak turned to wink at Isa. Her face seemed blank. This usually meant she was immersed in her Lazy Eyes.

“Stop saying ‘boyo,’” said Doug.

“I like it. I got it from Joe Strummer.”

“Who?”

“British indie rocker from the 90’s. I can’t believe you’ve never heard of him.”

Isa waved her fingers out in front, as if playing an invisible keyboard suspended mid-air. Likely thumbing through endless browser tabs.

Tak rapped his knuckles against the side of his van. “I bet Isa’s squeeze in Hoboken would know.”

Isa murmured something. Both Tak and Doug paused. She wasn’t talking to them.

“You did go to Musician’s Warehouse though?” said Doug.

“I did. Last night.”

“Today is Monday.”

“And yet I’m up before sunrise.”

“So yesterday was Sunday.”

“That makes sense,” said Tak.

“You couldn’t have gone to Musician’s Warehouse yesterday. Blue laws, everything in

the county was closed.”

“And yet I did go,” said Tak, reaching in through the driver’s side window. The synchronized popping of all the locks cut through the suburban air. “Everything’s taken care of.”

“How’d you get in?” Doug, shirt slowly saturating with sweat, allowed himself a few quick tugs at his collar to circulate cool air along his torso.

“A brick,” said Takashi before retreating into his van.

“Excuse me?”

Takashi emerged from the van sporting a Cheshire grin, a slender box of crash cymbals tucked in each armpit. “Help me move these into the garage, Isa.”

Isa rose from her seat, stepping carefully over her guitar. Her face, placid and monk-like, remained unchanging as she approached Takashi and took the two cymbal boxes from him.

“Rides are still in the car, let me get ‘em,” Tak said. “Could you stack those by the drum set, Isa?”

Isa brushed past Doug on her way back into the garage.

“Happy Ramadan, boyo.” Takashi emerged from the van, ride cymbals in hand.

“Ramadan isn’t until June.”

He returned back into the van. “And by the way, I remembered the cables.” He popped out again and tossed Doug four different coils of varying lengths supplemented by a second wink before retreating back into the vehicle.

“I don’t get this, Tak. Did you steal someone’s social security pin again?”

“It’s not theft if it’s from your relatives, Doug,” Tak replied. “And no, I’ve matured far beyond that.”

“Then how—“

“And don’t think I’ve forgotten you, Ms. Spines. I know you’re a Gibson acolyte, but wait till you see this Fender I got for you.”

From the van Takashi unsheathed it: a powder blue Jazzmaster. Like some Templar of yore, brandishing a sword of hyperbolic power Tak raised the guitar above his head in triumph, the sunlight ricocheting off its finish.

“It’s vintage,” said Takashi. “From the last millennium.”

“I don’t know what to say,” said Isa.

“You never do,” said Tak as he crossed the driveway and handed her the guitar.

“Where is this from?”

“I told you, Musician’s Warehouse.”

“And how did you get it?”

“As I said, with a brick.”

Several southbound geese flew overhead, their biological clocks out of sync with the New Jersey warmth.

“Fuck, Takashi.”

“By the way Isa, the Jazzmaster is only part of your gift. I’ve got a stack in the back. One hundred fifty watts. Pure tube-age.”

“You stole this?” Tak could see Doug fight the urge to point at him in condemnation.

“And effects, too.” Takashi returned once again to the van. “Let’s see. I’ve got three different fuzz pedals. Distortion, overdrive, analogue delay, digital delay, phaser, wah, auto-wah, sustain, flange, tube distortion, chorus, echo, reverb, another fuzz pedal, and a few I’m not sure about. No labels on ‘em.”

“How can you be so nonchalant?”

“Oh, and a ring modulator too.” Tak could see Doug begin to wilt in the early-spring sunlight. “Hey Spines, come over here,” he said as Doug Lamarck-Ganoush retreated into the cool shade of the garage.

Isa approached the van’s thorax where Tak gestured toward the bounty of pedals.

“Do you mind if I tweak some of these?”

Isa shook her head.

“I’m thinking of swapping out the capacitors in some of these distortion pedals. We’ll get a wider breadth of tones that way.”

“..”

Tak could see her pupils bouncing back and forth. She was either inspecting the pedals or swapping between apps on her Lazies.

“Did you see the article in *Staph Infection*? You know that shebody in charge of Rule 30, yeah?”

Isa picked up a half-size red Epiphone and weighed it in her hands.

“I got a bunch of those cheapo starter guitars,” Tak called toward Doug. “I saw this Sonic Youth show in Brooklyn. They took all these shitty guitars and tuned ‘em to open chords, I guess. They plugged ‘em in and laid them against their amps for some extra feedback “I figure we could do something similar.”

“How could you? Sonic Youth broke up when you were in your mother’s ovaries.” Doug was seated at his throne holding his stomach. A crescent of fat peaked out under his t-shirt and lapped over the waistband of his jeans.

“I didn’t say I saw them *live*. I saw a video of them. Y’know, that internet thing?”

Doug closed his eyes and took a deep inhale, which quickly morphed into a brief spasm of coughs. “Listen Tak, I’m not mad. Know that,” he said. “I’m just, well, concerned that you seem so confident in this. You don’t think anybody could’ve seen you or caught you on camera or something?”

“I’ve been scoping the place out for months now. Only two cameras, but they won’t recognize me.” Tak twirled the devil-lock with his index finger.

“An alarm didn’t go off when you broke the window?”

“I’m sure if I broke through the front windows something would’ve sounded, yeah. But they store all their stuff on the second floor above shipping and receiving. The window I went through was definitely not armed.”

“I just can’t help but feel you’re being reckless.”

“Of *course* I’m being reckless, Ganoush,” Takashi ran a confident palm through his thick hair, flattening his spikes and letting them spring up again. “But recklessness does not always equate with thoughtlessness. Besides, I have a plan.” Another palm bifurcated his mane.

“Okay.”

“So I haven’t crunched any numbers yet, but I assume we have somewhere in the neighborhood of two or three billion dollars’ worth of equipment in my van, right?”

Doug swallowed audibly. “Right.”

“I figure I’ll take some of this stuff, spend some quality time with my soldering iron and give all the electronics an upgrade.”

“This doesn’t seem like much of a plan, Tak.”

A metal stompbox in each hand, Takashi leapt down to the driveway, landing with more of a pat than a thud. “It’s all basic stuff. I can handle it,” he said

“That’s not what I meant.”

“I figure these effects, coupled with our musical expertise, could give us a really interesting noisy-shoegaze kinda sound.”

“Still not a plan.”

“It’s a rogue fucking plan, Lamarck-Ganoush! When did the last good shoegaze album come out? Nineteen-ninety-something? We’re breathing life into a dead genre, all the while assembling a new, cutting-edge style. The zines will love it.”

“Zines? Who reads zines these days, The Neo-!Kung? Who the fuck even *says* the word ‘zine’ anymore?”

“People totally still read zines, and I’m simming pretty soon they’ll read about Shackled Uterus.” Takashi clicked the overdrive stompbox in his right hand with each word of the band’s name.

“I thought we agreed that name was just a placeholder,” said Doug.

“We’ll see.” Tak lobbed each of the pedals onto Doug’s lawn. “Courtney Christ, these vintage stompboxes are pretty durable.”

A yawn came from Isa, who laid supine on the garage floor. All ten of her fingers were extended and wriggling about as she touch-typed on air.

“You fail to see what I’m simming Doug, I’m—”

“When I said ‘plan’ Takashi, I meant a thought-out model for how you plan to keep billions of dollars of stolen goods and avoid arrest.”

Isa clapped once. A hard reboot of some app.

“Simple. I dye my hair blonde. No one will recognize me, not that any cameras did in the first place.”

“What about the van, Tak? Someone could have gotten a look at it.”

Takashi screwed up his eyes in contemplation. “We’ll give it a paintjob, strip off those bumper stickers and keep it off the streets for a couple months.” Takashi paused. From over Doug’s shoulder, he could see the screaming children in the street, tagging one another, running this way and that. “Fuck,” he said, his voice suddenly flattened.

“What Tak?”

“My van,” said Takashi. “I can’t just leave a wanted vehicle out on the street.”

“You haven’t drawn issue with that for the past fifteen minutes.

“Well I didn’t realize they might have tagged my license! There were cams in the parking lot.”

“This never occurred to you?” said Doug, his voice rising in pitch.

“It did. I was going to run my plate numbers through a police scanner I scripted,” said Takashi before nodding toward the children playing in the cul-de-sac. “But those little cunts distracted me.”

“So take the van home!”

“And drive forty-five minutes to South Orange? Not happening.”

“Well you drove it up,” said Doug. He looked toward Isa. “A little support here?”

“..”

Takashi swallowed, a look of consternation darkening his face. “Let me store it in your garage. Just for a month.”

“Not gonna happen, Tak.”

Takashi let a brief look of worry flash across his face. A quick downturn of the lips, no more than a half second. “I’m sorry about this Doug. I’m really sorry.”

“Tak, it’s not my garage. It’s my mother’s.”

“Barbara doesn’t use it. She lets us practice in it, I doubt she’ll even notice.”

Doug turned toward Takashi, who slumped his shoulders along a calculated trajectory.

“You have one month,” said Doug. “By April, I want the van painted, reliscenced and gone.”

A playful scream in the distance. The kid in the overalls beaned another playmate with the rubber ball.

“Deal.” Takashi extended his hand. Doug took it.

“I don’t think the van will fit with the equipment,” Isa said.

“We’ll need a new practice space,” said Doug.

Takashi thumbed his nose. “Already simmed that,” he said. “Did Isa tell you what happened to the shebody she used to schtupp in school? The one from UZ?”

“What about her?” replied Doug. He glanced at Isa, who still lay on her back occupied by her Lazy Eyes.

“She’s managing a space in Hoboken. You know Rule 30?”

Doug nodded.

“Isa told me the two of them are on good terms. Right, Isa?”

Isa sat up, her greasy hair was matted up on the back of her head.

“You think she’ll grant us a favor?” Doug said.

“Honestly,” said Takashi, “That depends on Isa, not us.”

“Hey Isa!” Doug called into the garage, “When was the last time you F2F’d with this shebody?”

“__“

“You know F2F’s aren’t exactly her forte, DLG,” said Takashi. “But I wouldn’t be surprised if they’re still sleeping together.”

“I always considered it more akin to masturbation,” said Isa.

“This does not bode well.” Doug removed his glasses and began to massage the bridge of his nose.

“Let’s pay her a visit,” said Tak. “And what happens, happens.”

Isa sighed. Even Tak knew she had little patience for tautologies.