

cheek. The second one busted my nose open. Blood fell down upon my chest. My chair rolled backward. I felt like white-hot light, proud and intense.

I could always get him to do whatever I wanted.

I cupped my hands beneath my face. I could feel them filling with blood. I could taste the metallic bite of the liquid in my mouth as I laughed.

It took me a while to catch my breath. Robbie just stood there.

"Remember the time I pissed on your face?" I asked. My sides ached from laughter. He lunged at me and kicked. It looked silly, but the force pushed my chair so severely that I fell out of the seat. My hands hit the cement. I could feel my flesh scraping against the rough surface. Then my chin hit. It felt warm.

"You're a piece of shit," Robbie said as I rolled on the ground. It sounded funny to hear him curse. "I'm fucking done with you."

But he wasn't done with me. Because I didn't want him to be.

My vision was blurring. My whole body ached. But I wanted the heat to take everything.

I could see his silhouette moving away. It was glowing like rainbows. Like a light in the rain.

"Hey, Robbie!" I yelled, and began laughing again. I was trying to push myself up on my elbows. "Hey, Robbie!" I yelled again.

He stopped. I could barely breathe.

"What?" he asked, without looking at me. I was bleeding, but it was hysterical. Everything felt graceful. The ache and the laughter and the blood.

"What?" he hollered again.

"I want you to do me a favour."

He didn't move.

"What's that?" he asked. He sounded winded. I spat blood on the ground.

"Tell me I'm the Lemonade Tycoon."

Then he turned and came back toward me.

GEORGE BOWERING

a scene from a 'novel' in progress

What was I supposed to do when Wendy let me take all her clothes off in my mother's cabin?

I don't want to tell about that quite yet. I don't even want to think about it. She was lying on the couch, white and smooth and fragrant.

Here is what did not happen. I was hiking with my dog in the hills back of the umbrella tree, looking for a pond I had found up there a couple years ago. There are not a lot of ponds up in the hills of our desert valley, but way back then, when there was one, there were no houses circling it. My pond was about the size of a baseball infield, and not much deeper than a standing teenager at its deepest part. It was in the middle of range land, so sometimes you might see some cow plops around the edge, and on the second time I had been there I saw a cow standing in the water.

On three sides it was rocky, with a little rock cliff on one side, over which water dripped into the shade. On the fourth side there were a few reeds and some smooth black stuff that was halfway between fine sand and mud. In my head there was an ongoing expedition, and there this pond was called Edgerock. I should have been a real estate advertising gent.

On the afternoon in question I walked out of a clump of red pines, and there was my pond, sparkling except in the shaded part. Standing in the pond, white and thin in the sunlight, water up to her kneecaps, was Wendy. On a dry and weather-greyled windfall tree was her skirt, shirt, and other things. I went straight to them.

"Go away," she suggested.

"I will give you back your clothes," I said, "after—"

"Just go away, George."

She had her arms over her chest, hands on opposite shoulders.

"—after you come out of the water and dance."

"For one thing, there is no music, Idiot, and—"

I began to sing.

They tried to tell us we're too young

Too young to really be in love—

Did she dance? Did we embrace? Did someone else, someone on a horse, discover us and call us by our names?

It never happened. That is not how I fell in love with Wendy. I never saw her entire nakedness until that afternoon in my mother's cabin. I was a mountain climbing boy and all I saw at the pond were hoofprints from two or three cows.

Being the boy I was, I began to pretend that I was a sheriff on the trail of rustlers. But I never saw a naked girl in a pond. I don't have the imagination to do re-creation.

I was a sheriff without a horse, a boy with an erection in his corduroy pants, staring at an infield of water.

ANNIE ZHU

THE HALL MONITOR

A prostitute lives on my floor. It took me a while to discover this, even though she worked from home. A different car would be in her parking space every time I pulled into the lot: from broken-down Honda Accords and modest Toyotas to shiny Ferraris and Porches—even a Hummer once. Some cars made repeat visits. I assumed that my neighbour didn't drive and had a spare parking space for the diverse group of friends she liked to entertain; and this, in a way, turned out to be true.

The apartment building itself was a drab cement structure on the east side of the city that mingled in nicely with the other humble homes in the Anerdale neighbourhood. Main Street was the official border that divided us from being a part of the Backen suburb: The Badlands, The Borough, The Ghettos. Crossing the street to buy milk literally meant being on the wrong side of the tracks. "*Better get Backen!*" was a running joke amongst the Anerdale community, trailed with nervous laughter. My run-down bachelorette pad on the tenth floor was the best I could afford, but I considered myself lucky that I was still technically living in Anerdale and not Backen.

I didn't hear any gunshots, witness any gang-related stabbings, hear the muffled cries of a rape victim, spot any chalk lines on cement or police tape circling shady premises; but the six o'clock news regularly announced that these things happened in the Backen slums and that I should be careful.

After a few weeks of living alone, I thought I was in the clear. I started to think that perhaps the news and my parents, who were still calling constantly to make sure I was still alive, were over-exaggerating the crime rate, that it really wasn't as bad as it seemed.

But when strange men started knocking on my door, I got this slippery feeling. Sometimes it happened twice or three times a day, and then I'd go weeks without hearing from anyone. When I answered the door, these unsavoury characters usually gave me the once-over, despite the fact that they could only see a sliver of my face and maybe a bit of elbow. I kept the door chain latched.

They all asked if I was The Queen. Some added that they were here for the Royal Treatment. I always said no and most of them turned away, disappointed. Some stuck around a bit longer, thinking I was pulling their legs, playing an arousing sort of mind game. Others would not take no for an answer.

"Are you the naughty princess then?" asked one thickly-mustached man only two weeks ago, wiggling his matching uni-brow up and down.

"You've got the wrong door."

"Okay, fine." He immediately dropped the flirtatious tone and rolled his eyes. "I didn't come all the way for nothing. Have you seen this chick around?"