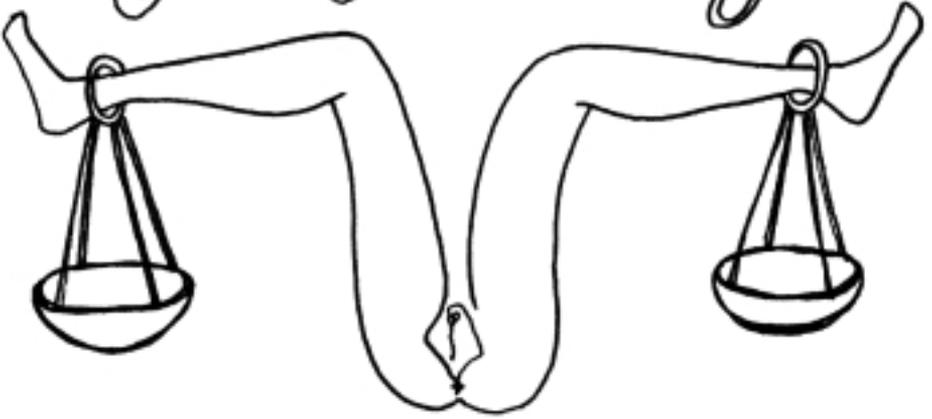


Jury Duty



by **Leslie Bull**

The Flags Everywhere

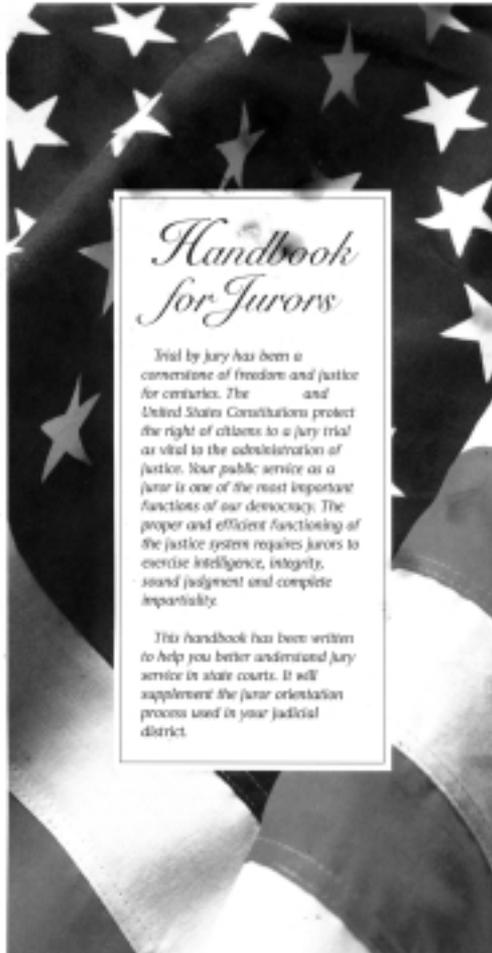
The flags are like
little squares of scab
peeled from my heart
leaving tattered ribbons
of red and white flesh,
leaving me blue.
My heart is scarred
by the flags
everywhere.

Leslie Bull
11/02

Jury Duty

by

Leslie Bull



Handbook for Jurors

Trial by jury has been a cornerstone of freedom and justice for centuries. The United States Constitution protects the right of citizens to a jury trial as vital to the administration of justice. Your public service as a juror is one of the most important functions of our democracy. The proper and efficient functioning of the justice system requires jurors to exercise intelligence, integrity, sound judgment and complete impartiality.

This handbook has been written to help you better understand jury service in state courts. It will supplement the juror orientation process used in your judicial district.

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1

Mommie's Memoir

She tries not to think a lot. Thinking hurts her head, makes her wish she was dead. But if she wishes that how come every time somebody tries to kill her she fights tooth and nail? She can't think about that. It doesn't fit with her motto to live or die in L.A., with most of the emphasis on the die part.

Mommie is blonde and small, just a hair under five foot four. At a hundred and twenty-five pounds she looks tiny, wears a size six, a size three even. She has always looked small for her weight. At one-forty-five people think she weighs one-twenty. At one-twenty-five people ask her if she weighs a hundred pounds. She is dense. Her shapely skull deceptively heavy beneath finely drawn red lips, pronounced cheekbones, and pretty "beady blues," as her mother likes to call Mommie's round, close set eyes. Strong Norwegian bones reside beneath her seemingly petite frame, somehow curvy, thick, femme, androgynous, and slight all at the same time. Her waist is narrow, back wide and beautifully formed, legs so fine she shows them off daily, grown accustomed to the power they command. She doesn't shave her legs, although she use to, to her regret, as the soft blonde hairs on her calves grew back slightly thicker, a shade darker. Still, her movie star legs are Mommie's best feature. Unless you look at her gorgeous, just pudgy enough heart shaped ass, or even better, glimpse the glistening, golden pink flower between her legs.

To her shame, Mommie's breasts are small and conical, set wide on an otherwise flat chest. She will not, until years later, learn to appreciate the creamy triangular beauty of her breasts, topped like they are so sensuously by large, pale pink areolas, two rosy nubs for nipples.

Mommie's smile is sexy. She smiles like she knows something. Like she has a special secret she is dying for you to know. Reddish orange lips against alabaster skin. Moist pink tongue running over slightly imperfect squares of white teeth. Men fall out at her smile, but she doesn't smile much anymore. Not for real anyway. Most men don't seem to notice. Don't seem to care if her smile continues all the way up to her eyes or whether it matches the energy she emanates. The energy by which she navigates.

Often, when she's working men ask Mommie, "Are you a boy or a girl?" and Mommie lifts her short skirts to reveal a shot of her sweet, naked money-maker, pretty as you please.

She dyes the hair on her pussy, along with the hair on her head, palest blonde, using Wella on the scalp bleach. Mommie wasn't one of the privileged tow-headed kids in the family to keep their light locks. Not like her cousin Cassie, possessor of thick, wavy, wheat blonde hair that forms a pony tail too large to grasp easily in one hand. Mommie's hair is only medium thick and stick straight, turned darker after each pregnancy, from golden blonde to dark and darker dishwater blonde, and then almost brown. The caustic smelling bleach always makes Mommie's scalp burn in the same quarter sized patch at the crown of her head, and she smears the runny white paste lightly across the top of her bush, careful not to scorch. Her pussy hair, like her eyebrows and the rest of her body hair, is mostly blonde anyway, the bleach just brings it up and makes it shine.

Get your golden blonde pussy here, nothing else like it, nothing more desirable on the street.

At work Mommie's white skin, pink pussy, and yellow hair glitter just like gold, mean more money. Just like smaller titties mean less money.

Mommie's shame about her body is deep and secret. She is aware that she is often thought of as beautiful and does nothing to dispel the notion, in fact, doing all she can to continue that version of reality. Determined to "use her best features to her advantage" like they taught her to do in the Cosmo magazines she and her friends poured over as girls, Mommie plays up her legs, ass, and smile while doing her best to hide her secret ugliness.

She considers her stomach her greatest shame. Not only does any spare ounce of fat on her body gravitate there, but it is wrinkled and shriveled in some places and pooched out in others. Her fish belly white belly marbled with bright purple turned red turned lavender and finally pale faded pink and white stretch marks, wide, thin, short, long, they come in all shapes and sizes and mark Mommie from her pubic hair up past her belly button and back around to her hips again. Being pregnant with twins did that. Took her tummy, which was never flat enough to suit her anyway, and turned it into a lonely expanse of flesh marred by ugly shame, which she religiously and cleverly hides, along with her eating disorder, and her mother's more obvious middle class trainings. To this day, long after she has learned to love her soft pointed boobs, Mommie struggles to accept her lumpy, neglected, love-starved tummy.

Mommie decided to leave L.A. after Leo was gone back to prison and she almost got killed during the riots. Papito was still there and she began fucking him.

Papi is more interesting in bed, but Leo always keeps the jobs and money going. Sex is nice, but money is more important than sex to Mommie. Leo knows that, and always finds ways to get money, and lots of it. Mommie likes his style. The way they fuck is cute too. Leo lying on top of her, bellies pressed together, and Mommie giving him infusions. Her energy flowing into him as he

fucks her, and her taking a sip from him too. He usually doesn't last long, but he loves trying. Trying is an exquisite pleasure he can enjoy whenever Mommie is there, whenever she lets him.

And she lets him.

He is kind to her. Beautiful in an unusual (to Mommie) sort of a way. Big hands, slender, dark, rosy body, and deeply intelligent eyes, his head is finely shaped and large for his body. Leo frequently smiles indulgently at Mommie, looking her up and down appreciatively and joking with his friends in English, "With this one we'll have trouble, huh?" He is a real calm person. Even when he robs people Leo is cool, calm, and collected.

Papi gently spans Mommie's bottom in bed and fucks her ravenously for hours. They really get off on each other, but Papi isn't too bright on the money making tip. He's loyal as hell, but with Leo gone he became my right hand man and my man all at once, and neither one of us could be Leo.

Leo and Papi spent ten years in a Texas immigration prison because Cuba wouldn't take them back. They both served short sentences for crimes they committed and were then held in limbo for ten years in an immigration prison as bad or worse than any of the more notorious amerikkan prisons like Attica or Leavenworth.

Leo told me the story of defending himself in his cell by throwing boiling water on a fellow inmate, and before she met Leo and Papi Mommie had no idea that people are imprisoned in the U.S. for no crime except their own country won't take them back.

Leo taught himself to read and write English in prison. He spent years writing letters to get him and Papito released, and he finally did. I guess that's why Papi was so loyal to him. I don't know if either of them had working papers. I never asked too much about their personal lives. I know Leo was married. He talked about his wife sometimes. She was Cuban and they were still together. He said he loved her very much.

I dressed up for Leo in short, tight, sexy backless dresses with silky black lingerie and thigh high stockings underneath, spike heels, hats slanted over one eye, bright pink or red lipstick, and jangly gold bracelets. Leo bought me those things and kept motel rooms for us to live in.

I came and went as I pleased. Leaving for days at a time to shoot cocaine and work the streets. I would return exhausted and tore up and Leo would run me a bath and put me to bed. We would spend the next few days shopping, eating, and fucking. Tummies pressed tight we would smooch our lips together in a sweet, childish way and Leo would laugh and ask playfully, "Why do we do that?"

Soon it would be time to do a job and Mommie, Papi, and Leo would plan things out. Leo had the contacts and came up with most of the jobs, but Mommie came up with some jobs too. Mommie could open doors. Everyone opened their doors to Mommie.

We ate out daily at Cuban restaurants. The food was lightly spiced, simple,

and delicious: fried plantains, sweet potatoes, grilled chicken, whole pinto beans, and rice, all garnished with lettuce, onion, tomato, and avocado. Leo and Papi were more relaxed when they ate Cuban food and I liked it too. Afterwards, we smoked weed and tobacco cigarettes and me and Leo would go back to the motel for a nap (sex) while Papi went out to do some of his own work slangin' rock.

The reason I needed so much money every day was to get crack and powder cocaine. I liked to smoke and shoot coke, and I tooted it too 'til my nose blew up inside. I loved it like nothing else in the world. The euphoria is intense, the waves of pleasure overwhelming, the forgetting all too easy, and the hold it takes lasts longer than you'll ever know. Long after the pleasure fades and the euphoria departs, the hold, the promise of what once was, clove itself like a single minded and desperate love in my heart.

Whatever jobs we did together we split the money three ways, everything was real fair like that with Leo and Papi, and until later, when I met some of their Cuban friends, I never knew anybody else like them on the street. I was amazed that they treated me as a respected equal in work matters, especially considering how a lot of men treat a junkie ho.

You looked at me, you talked to me, you fucked me, you're mine. I'll hold your money for ya and give ya a nice slap upside the head for the trouble.

Leo and Papi listened to me and saw me as a real asset to their work, always making sure I received my fair share, and never saying a word about how I spent my money. Once we got a whole bunch of jewelry, dozens of diamond rings, gold bracelets, pearl necklaces, and ruby earrings. It was fantastic. I stupidly gave most of mine to the wrong pimp and got took. The same pimp also took me for the last remaining pictures I had of my kids.

Leo never asked me what I did when we were apart and I never asked him either. I assumed he was with his wife, handling his business, or maybe he had other girls, like I said, we didn't always delve so deep into each other's lives. He knew I was a hooker and always joked around.

"I'll be your pimp," he would say, laughing.

"You are my love," I would tell him smiling, even though we both knew he paid me.

I liked Leo a lot and didn't charge him a fraction of my hourly rate, which was huge if you consider the fact that I usually liked to keep a forty to hundred dollar car date down to fifteen minutes or less from start to finish, including negotiation, finding the spot, getting paid, and getting the trick off.

Leo bought me clothes, food, and rent, gave me cash and drugs, and found jobs for us. He was a trick, a boyfriend, a coworker, a sugar daddy, and a friend. He stood up for me, like no one could really fuck with me when Leo was around. He also embraced my anger at a certain type of trick. Mr. Rich and Elite, always trying to show me my place.

Here, here is your place. Stupid, grateful, damaged, scheming, other. Somehow you are sexy as fuck. Can't get you outta my mind. I can save you. I can redeem you like a ten cents off coupon down at Safeways. You are here for me. I am polite, rude, demanding, brutal, and removed. I am rich. Able to offer you this bounty. These green sheaths of life. Just spread your legs a little wider. Pretend you don't notice the way I hold your head down too long, cum in your mouth after I said I wouldn't, the way I am so incredibly uninterested in you after I shoot to your little girl pain. After all, I have money.

Leo laughs at these tricks while Mommie takes 'em for everything she can get.

"You thought you'd fuck my girl?" Leo would shake his head and smile ruefully, acting jealous. And wasn't it true? Wasn't Leo only right in protecting his? If by your own rules prostitution makes me so much less, makes me bad enough to die, aren't you trying to kill me?

Papi was different. While Leo only acted jealous, Papito really was. Wanted to beat down anyone who looked too long, and later, in San Francisco, he risked his life protecting Mommie.

Throwing the ceramic coffee cup before she even thought about it.

Instant.

"That's the fucker who just tried to rape me in the delivery van," she tells Papito, the coffee cup crashing on the pavement, glasslike shards spraying Mommie's would be rapist, and him standing still, shocked for a moment, then exploding.

"Fuckin' bitch!"

A bunch of his friends are standing around out in front of the soup kitchen and he swivels around to face them, wild-eyed and livid.

"Git her!" he commands, and Papi sees five or six of 'em coming, all screaming at the top of their frothy, crack infested lungs.

"Skank white ho!"

"Run!" Papi shouts, and Mommie takes off running as if her life depends on it.

And it does.

She is fast, and the short, squat, muscular Papito is even faster, zigzagging behind Mommie, keeping the two or three men who can keep up off her. They race through the Tenderloin streets and just as Mommie's own cracked out lungs feel like bursting she slips somehow and falls, hands first grinding into asphalt, and one of them is on her, slashing with a straight razor as Papi roars and throws him away from her, smashing another one in the jaw as she gets back up and they start running again.

Just then Mommie sees a tall, thin, rumply looking white guy getting in his car, ready to pull away.

"Jump in!" she yells at Papi while opening the door, and they leap into the

man's car, slamming the door shut and pushing down the locks just as their assailants reach them.

"Go! Go! Drive the car!" Mommie wails and the man takes off, looking terrified.

"Don't be scared, we won't hurt you," Mommie reassures him breathlessly.

The man takes them down to 19th and Mission and lets them out near the doughnut shop where Mommie goes to the restroom to clean her hamburgered hands and knees. It is then she notices the deep cut slicing through the back of the thick leather biker jacket she is wearing. She comes out of the bathroom and slides into the booth beside Papi, adrenaline still pumping, hugging him tight.

"Thank you my Papito, thank you my love," she croons.

"No problem mi amore," he croons back as they kiss.

And when I ask him what he wants in bed Papi says he wants me to really cry when he spans me, not just whimper and pretend like I do.

I am excited and a little scared, yet he never forces me, never hurts me, always respects my unspoken boundaries. Later, after Papi goes back to jail, everybody talks about him, says he fell too hard for me, loved me too much, pussy whipped, and actin' a fool over some Amerikan white girl, a cracked out ho at that.

I let Papi down then. Too messed up to make his court dates or follow through on my promises to try to help him out of trouble with an alibi. It was a bogus case perpetrated by an old Cuban friend turned enemy, and Papi ended up going to prison for it. I doubt I could've done much to help him, but I wish I'd been there.

I only made it once. To his arraignment hearing. I slipped a note to his court appointed attorney saying I wanted to help, that he was with me the night of the so-called crime. Before I left, I gave Papi love with my eyes and mouthed goodbye. Alone on the street, strung out with no address and struggling to survive, it was the last time I ever saw him.

But that's jumping ahead too much. Let's go back now. Back to Mommie.

At thirty Mommie is lookin' real good, and she's experienced, if ya know what I mean. At thirty Mommie has seen some stuff, been through some shit.

Mommie and Papi left L.A. a few days after the riots in a large double cab truck Mommie stole from a trick. She is always stealing a car from some trick. Or more appropriately, "Taking a car without the owner's permission," a lesser charge than grand theft auto. It basically means something's up. It basically means, "He told me if I had sex with him I could drive his car, he gave me the keys," and while it might've stretched the truth a bit, it was Mommie's truth. It was Mommie's story and she was sticking to it.

Their first day in S.F., their first hour, the truck is staked out while they eat huge Mission Street burritos and when they return to drive away four or five undercover cops melt out from behind parked cars, guns drawn, insisting, "Lay on the ground and put your hands behind your heads."

Soon joined by a marked car, Mommie and Papi are both arrested for auto

theft.

Breath short and chest bruised from the cop's knee in her back, wrists aching from the too tight metal cuffs, Mommie is released after only a few hours when the trick is contacted and drops the charges (they always do) but all too predictably Papito is held for the full seventy-two hours allowed. All too predictably Papito is held for being Black, for being Cuban.

Alone for her first three days in that new place, Mommie has a hardcore introduction to the Mission. To Capp Street.

"Hey beautiful, wuz up?"

"Hey baby, look at you."

"C'mere bitch, whatchya doin' there."

"Hey now, where's yo man?"

"My man's upstairs."

"My man's up the corner there, I gotsta go now, gotsta go meet my man."

Slip away quick. Turnt a trick off the bat and tweekein' already. No room. No man. No connection. White girl alone strung out on the stroll is no joke.

Somebody like ta come along 'n gank yo skinny white ass.

Somebody like ta come along 'n take some pussy 'n some booty too.

Some pimp's gonna take it personal if you's tryin's ta work alone.

Mommie wings it. Finds somebody to take up for her over here and somebody else over there, don't get caught sleepin', turn your head for a minute and Mommie's already gone. She finds somebody to get her some dope and after she cops she hides out with some homeless folk under a tarp, smokin' everybody out. Homeless folk are often safe and welcoming, don't expect her to fling her sex around like so many carelessly strewn gold coins

She waits. Stays up three days smokin', steady turnin' tricks and dodgin' the po po's, the pimps, and the just plain scandalous. Finally, when she is just beginning to think about coming unstuck she sees Papito's short stocky silhouette way up the way on Mission, near the burrito shop where they got busted. Mommie screams with joy and runs to Papi, jumping on him and pulling her legs tight around his waist, her slender arms circling his smooth, thick neck. As they kiss he twirls her around and around, muscles bulging out his t-shirt.

"Now what you scandalous bitches," Mommie sings to herself, "Now what?"

After they lay up in a hotel and fuck around some and sleep Papito takes Mommie to meet his Cuban friends José and Doombo. José is tall with fine, shiny, wavy black hair, tan colored skin, and large, dark, bedroom eyes. Doombo is short, blue black, and muscular like Papi, with nappy close cropped hair and ears that stick straight out from the sides of his head. Doombo looks more like Papi, but acts more like Leo. He has money and an enormous amount of cocaine. We hit it off right away.

Later, when Papi went to jail, Doombo took me to Vegas, wanted me to

be his girl and live with him in his rooms at the Tenderloin residential hotel he ruled. I stayed with him off and on like I did Leo but could never stay put long. I wanted to get high too much and none of them did. Leo, Papi, Doombo, José, none of the Cuban men I knew did dope of any kind, just smoked some weed and drank a little beer.

Another major obstacle to me and Doombo was Melika. She was this beautiful, voluptuous, six foot tall, bleached blonde Puerto Rican chick that loved Doombo with all her heart, worked the streets, and paid him.

“I pay Doombo, he’s mine,” she would hiss at me as I jumped behind the nearest protection I could find. Getting in to see Doombo at the hotel was like running a gauntlet fraught with the ever present dangers of Melika. She would set upon me on sight, pulling my hair out by the handfuls, scratching, slapping, gouging, and shoving me down for even worse tortures, all the while screeching, “Stay away from my man!”

Melika was a sexy woman. Had famous baseball player tricks that would come stay in her room and give her a thousand dollars. She chose to pay Doombo, he didn’t demand it. She would cook for him, too, some special dish of smothered pork chops he loved.

Once I got to his room Doombo would always protect me, telling Melika to lay off, but she never listened. Half the time he would just laugh at us for “cat fighting” but lemme tell ya, Melika was no joke, twice my size, and able to hit like a man, I became wary and terrified of her, always making sure I brought protection with me when I navigated the treacherous lobby, elevator, and stairs that led to Doombo’s seventh floor room.

Doombo and José cooked Cuban food by day and sipped beer into the night while a crew of workers sold powder cocaine, rock, and tar for them around the clock in three shifts. They had several empty rooms throughout the hotel where the dope was kept, and the workers all had rooms too. Whenever there was going to be a so-called bust (they were all staged), Doombo and José would receive a call from their hotel people. Then we would hide all the dope, tell the workers to lay low, and head to Vegas. In a few days we would return and in no time Doombo would be back to sending the nine and twelve and fourteen thousand dollar money orders he mailed his family in Cuba every other day. I heard he never did get busted and eventually went back home. I hope it’s true.

Doombo liked girls and I would bring him girls I thought he might like so we could have threesomes. Me and the girl would mostly fake everything, putting our hand over each other’s pussies, pretending to eat each other out. He usually paid us well.

José was a great trick too, but one time he drugged me and took pictures of my pussy which ended up all over the Mission and the Tenderloin. I swear I would go up in some guy’s room and there was my pussy on the wall. I didn’t like José so well after that, although when I was desperate, in the end, after Papi was gone for good, and I was too strung out to stay inside much, I would turn a trick with José, who had fallen for me on the night he drugged me. I don’t

remember much but José says I acted like a sex crazed wildcat that night, and he was always happy to break me off a nice sized chunk of gooey black tar for a few minutes in his bed.

Being drugged causes Mommie to have flashbacks. Lots of things do. Her birthday. Thinking about turning thirty on that terrifying night during the riots and everything that led up to it. Her first time up in Greg's apartment, him a big ol' freak, got me and a couple other girls all sucking his dick and playing with ourselves for him. A middle ranking dopeman, he pays us with crack and I come back often. Lay up sucking his chubby, half-soft dick and hatin' it.

I like to walk around the city when I smoke, mostly alone, or with someone else who likes to walk. Staying inside is excruciating, yet I am lured in the by relative safety and high quality dope. Stuck like chuck, although god knows the last thing I wanna be doing is a long ol' freak session with some ego pumped, boundary pushing dopeman when I could make five times the money in the same amount of time on the street, but street also means fighting off beatings, rape, and police. Means ending up in a cold ass cell with a metal cot, no mattress and three skinny mystery meat burritos a day to live off. L.A. can keep you five days like that before they decide whether to move you into population or let you go.

So one day Mommie is up in Greg's apartment tweekin' and freakin' for a hit and in between, "Faster baby, tha's right," and "you got it, don' stop," he says, "Me and my girl's goin' on a trip ta Vegas 'n my brother Carl's comin' up from Texas ta handle my bizness."

Mommie's ears perk up.

She smells a job.

I knock on the door in the middle of the afternoon

"Who is it?"

Carl, who has never met me, looks through the peephole, and sees a white girl wearing a long dark brown wig with a black beret on top. My eyebrows are darkened in and a pair of black sunglasses obscure my face. The wig is high quality and appears real under the beret. Don't wanna look like I'm wearing a disguise. I smile big and he opens the door a crack.

"Hi, I'm Mona, a friend of Gregs, can I come in?"

I wiggle my boobs around some while lowering the sunglasses and giving him eyes. Carl looks to be in his late twenties, handsome, big, and light skinned like his brother. He looks at me warily. I crack another big smile.

"Greg said you could help me out."

This seems to decide him, and he relaxes his stance, opening the door wide enough to admit me. This is the moment Leo and Papito have been waiting for and as I enter they slide along the hallway wall, falling in quickly behind me, guns drawn, faces covered with ski masks, voices low.

"Get on your knees."

There is a brief moment when it seems Carl will react, try to flee deeper into the apartment and grab his own gun, but Leo and Papi have their pistols trained

on him good and cursing he gets to his knees and allows Papi to push him facedown on the floor. Papi reaches back and shuts and locks the door before crouching and putting his knee in Carl's back. He handcuffs and then blindfolds him while Leo scans the apartment for other occupants, gun held at arms length like you see on the cop shows. Bedroom, bath, and kitchen turn up empty. Carl is alone.

There is no more talking. Leo has taught us to be as silent as possible during a job. Papi binds Carl's feet with duct tape and also puts tape on his mouth. As usual, he and Leo are both very calm and unhurried, although their movements are focused and precise. We spend half an hour searching the small apartment, rounding up money, dope, jewelry, and guns. The bedroom closet is filled with beautiful, expensive clothing belonging to Greg's girl and since she is about my size I help myself to several outfits, including a tight, uniquely styled, black silk dress, a move I would later dearly regret.

In fact later Mommie would regret the entire incident very much, and not just because it almost got her killed. She regretted straying from her usual morals regarding jobs, regretted not sticking to rich assholes and corporations. Later Mommie would decide that robbing Greg was one of the lowest things she ever did, even if he was a jerk.

For the next little while Mommie went about her usual business, dopin', and hookin', and fuckin' around with Leo, and somehow she got all fucked up and gave the black silk dress to a hooker named Candy. Then she heard through the grapevine that Carl was gone and that Greg had returned home and didn't know who'd robbed him. Mommie decided it would look suspicious if she didn't show up and started goin' back to Greg's to score dope. The first two times she returned were uneventful, without the stomach to stay and turn a trick, she just copped and took off.

The third time Greg is just pulling up outside his apartment building as Mommie arrives and upon seeing her he smiles all big.

"Mommie, how ya doin' gorgeous?"

"I'm cool, how's you?"

"Jus' fine baby, jus' fine." Greg says all smooth like, leading Mommie through the lobby and into the stainless steel elevator. The doors close noisily as Greg reaches into his jacket, pulls out a heavy black pistol, and uses it to bludgeon Mommie in the head, just above her left ear.

"You's tha fuckin' bitch what robbed me," he growls.

Mommie, stunned by the blow, is deeply sickened by the cracking sound the pistol makes as it connects with her skull.

"No, no, it wasn't me!" she moans, raising her arms to protect herself as time slows way down, as she doubles, jumps outside herself, as the head that is still on her body fills with a cottony, faraway buzz.

Greg presses the stop button on the elevator and clubs Mommie in the face, arms, and head several more times, grunting from the effort of caving in her forehead, nose, and jaw. Blood begins spurting from the various openings

in Mommie's head, spilling from her mouth, squirting out her nostrils, and trickling from deep inside her ear. She becomes desperate, possibly more desperate than she has ever been, and in her desperation she becomes incredibly convincing.

"Please Greg it wasn't me, I swear on my mama it wasn't me!"

"You's a fuckin' lie. My homey seen Candy sportin' my girl's dress 'n she fingered you."

"I didn't do it, please it wasn't me!" Mommie begs, utterly sincere, and she heartens when she sees a flicker of doubt cross his eyes.

"Please, please, I'm telling you it wasn't me."

Greg grabs Mommie by the throat, choking her up against the wall.

"You's best be tellin' tha truth bitch, cause when Ah finds out Ah'll kills ya dead, hell Ah'd kills ya right now 'ceptin too many people seen us git in dis elevator."

He drops Mommie into a heap on the floor and presses the start button, using his expensive new B.K.'s to kick her out of the elevator on the third floor.

Mommie somehow morphs back into her body, gets to her feet, staggers her way to the end of the hall, and makes her way down the stairs, leaning heavily against the stairwell wall. The buzz in her head has become deafening, her throat is crushed, and her face is beginning to swell horribly. There is a lot of blood. It is dripping off her chin and onto the stairs, smearing all over the handrail. Woozy and nauseas, her head feels like a big, hot balloon, although most of the pain is still on hold from the shock. She gets on a bus and rides to the apartment where she and Leo occasionally stay with some of his Honduran friends. People stare and Mommie keeps her eyes down, trying not to vomit, spurred on by the revenge Leo will take on Greg. They will go straight to his apartment and shoot him to death.

When she arrives at the apartment Maria, the tiny, plump woman of the house, is shocked and concerned, and obviously frightened too.

"Leo go jail" she says tearfully, saving Mommie from murder.

"Noooo!" Mommie sobs, starting to cry for the first time since the beating.

Maria brings her a clean t-shirt, a towel, and some ice for her head.

Mommie holds the towel to her nose, tilting her head back to stop the red drip.

"Leo say stay," she urges, motioning toward the back bedroom, and Mommie is touched, but she knows that with Leo gone she cannot stay in this part of town anymore, she has to hide, and soon.

"Gracias, but I have to go," she tells Maria, "Do you know where Papito is?"

Mommie feels crushed as Maria shakes her head no, and she makes her way out, catching a bus to Hollywood where her friends Inky and Jake live.

"Good god girl what happened ta y'all?" Inky hollers when she sees Mommie.

"Trick got me," Mommie moans.

"Good god girl, I guess ya got yo'self in a mess."

Inky is tiny and ink black, hence her name. Her sight isn't too good, and she crinkles up her dark, almond shaped eyes, squinting at Mommie.

"Sit yo'self down girl, before you falls out."

"I'm hurt Inky and Leo's in jail, can I stay here a few days?"

Inky looks her up and down.

"I'll hafta ask Jake."

Jake is Inky's husband, as big and white as Inky is little and black. Both husband and wife have a love of rock and powder cocaine and when Mommie works in Hollywood she frequently stops by their apartment and gets them high in exchange for a (relatively) safe place to tweek. Mommie hopes the memories of all that free dope will spur Jake to say yes, although it is far from guaranteed, since Mommie certainly can't work or get any dope in her current condition.

Inky goes into the bedroom and Mommie can hear her and Jake murmuring and from the sound of it, Inky is for Mommie and Jake against, but when Inky comes out she motions toward the couch.

"You can stay."

Mommie goes into the bathroom and surveys the damage to her face. Greg's pistol has left a large dripping lump punctuated by a cut above her left eye, and her head is bumpy with similar oozy goose eggs. Mommie's throat is very, very sore and although (thank goodness!) the gun didn't hit it straight on, she wonders if her nose is broken.

"Hey Inky, if blood runs out your ears does it mean you have a concussion?" she calls into the living room.

"Hell if I know." Inky calls back.

Mommie lays up on the short, lumpy blue couch (not much more than a loveseat really) in the tiny apartment, which consists of a little square of living room with one window and three doors, one leading to the bathroom, one to the closet sized bedroom, and the other to the hall outside. Everything is tweekified: the edges of the filthy brown carpet permanently curled up and frayed by the rug pickers, the window (which faces a brick wall) covered with duct tape and brown paper sacks by the po po tweekers and the vampires, and the walls sprayed with original designs of dried reddish-brown blood. Old outfits, stuck with viscous black goo, or with their plungers missing altogether, their disease infected points jutting out to the side, slender, abandoned, bright orange needle caps, tiny, empty balloons, and burnt up matches litter the floor, and someone has scraped a fist sized hole in one wall with a spoon, leaving the carpet dusted with little chunks of plaster that drive the rug pickers into a frenzy. There is no kitchen, instead a table with a hotplate and a mini fridge suffice, although nothing much is ever cooked on the hot plate except rocks, and Mommie has never known the mini fridge to contain anything but baking soda and Cisco.

Mommie wraps herself into a cocoon with the dirty yellow quilt Inky gives her, resting herself while Inky, Jake, and a constant parade of visitors smoke and shoot dope pretty much around the clock. For the first couple of days Mommie sleeps fitfully, waking suddenly from nightmares, breathing too hard

and fighting tears, her head like a throbbing oven,

She is walking with her boys. There is a war going on and she is traveling down a long, rutted road with her three sons, Dmac, Tmac, and, Mizzle. The boys are babies, Dmac and Tmac about six months old and Mizzle about two and a half. There are lots of people walking with them on the road, many of them limping and wounded, heads bandaged and eyes deadened from shock and exhaustion. Mommie is carrying Dmac and Tmac, and Mizzle is struggling along behind, crying and falling down every few feet. Mommie knows she must continue down the road for to stop means death. Everyone on the road seems to know this and they are all making huge efforts to keep going amongst the bombed out buildings, scattered fires, and noxious looking gases that make up the landscape along the road.

“Please, please, will someone help me carry my little boy,” Mommie begs over and over again, and while a few people meet her gaze and look sorry, no one has the strength or the will to answer her. Most of her fellow travelers avert their eyes, desperately trudging toward their own dubious salvation.

“You have to keep up Mizzle, come on now little one, get up, we have to keep going,” Mommie cajoles, stopping to lay Tmac and Dmac down by the road so she can pick Mizzle up and comfort him for a moment. The dream goes on and on this way, with Mommie begging for help and Mizzle becoming unable to walk any further and Mommie trying to carry all three and falling down and injuring the babies. Finally, she lays the twins down by the side of the road and sits down to rest. The next thing she realizes she is walking down the road with only Mizzle. She freaks out, there is a big area of completely blank time and she has no idea how long she has been separated from the babies or where they are.

Existing in a twilight sleep of nightmare and reality she overhears someone saying, “Lookit how fast she’s healing, dat ho sho is healthy,” and later, “How long is that bitch gonna lay up moaning on our damn couch Inky?”

Another time she jerks awake, panting and delirious, only to see some skin picker, a white guy with scarlet colored sores dotting his round, pasty, green tinted face like some kind of ghoulish Christmas cookie, sitting in a chair jacking off.. His dick is remarkably large and also covered with glistening red sores. Mommie covers her head with the musty smelling quilt and drifts back to sleep. Floating in and out of consciousness she wonders if all the talk she hears about the city burning down is real or some figment of her pounding, fiery head.

At some point Inky makes her sit up and drink a package of red Jello she has dissolved in boiling water and cooled to room temperature. Mommie hears the sound of a loudspeaker outside in the street.

“Everyone stay calm and stay inside your homes, I repeat, stay inside your homes, there is a curfew and no one is allowed outdoors.”

Mommie staggers into the bathroom and takes a long piss. When she gets up she looks out the bathroom window and sees tanks and military trucks rolling

by. It is surreal. Like watching some foreign newscast outside your own front door. When she wakes again the ache in her skull has finally begun to subside. Her lips are cracked and her throat parched, but her head feels pretty clear as she sits up.

Jake is standing at the table over the hot plate, swirling a test tube in a pan of boiling water, cooking rock, he glances up at Mommie.

“Hey sleepy head, wanna hit?”

Mommie is instantly suspicious and looks around.

“Where’s Inky?” she asks.

“Gone to her mama’s to see if she’s okay with all this riot mess goin’ on, probably be gone all day,” and this is the first Mommie has heard about the Rodney King riots, which have been raging for days.

Jake’s eyes are once again trained on the test tube, whirling it around and around until the rock forms, clinking against the glass.

“It’s just about done, ya ready for that hit?” he jeers all too cheerfully.

Mommie delays answering him by going into the bathroom and drinking straight from the sink faucet for a long time. She would like a bath but the tub is filled with moldy towels and clothes, leftovers from one of Inky’s do the laundry in the tub tweeks. The stench of mildew is strong and Mommie breathes through her mouth, splashing water on her mangled face, and inspecting her wounds in the mirror. A bit Frankensteinish, but not too bad. The cuts are scabbing up, the swelling coming down, and the bruises changing color and starting to darken. She searches the flimsy cabinet above the sink and finds a mostly squeezed out mini tube of Crest gel. She rolls it up tightly, producing a blob of aqua colored goo, which she rubs on her teeth with her finger, rinsing the sour, metallic, blood taste from her mouth. Next she washes her tangled, blood-caked hair in the sink with a sliver of green and white striped soap she digs from the side of the tub. She takes off her t-shirt and uses it to dry her hair, patting and squeezing her lumpy head gently, and then putting the damp shirt back on. Finally, she takes a deep breath and returns to the living room in time to see Jake exhaling a huge plume of white smoke.

The sharp, distinct, chemical smell of the crack mixes with the rotting smell of Jake’s lungs and shoots straight into Mommie’s bowels, twisting her guts and filling her mouth with saliva. The craving is instant and all-encompassing, flooding her entire being with an intense longing. Her body jerks to attention and her hands begin to shake. Eyes ablaze Jake drops a chunk of sizzling white on the pipe and hands it to Mommie who, despite her misgivings about why he is being so nice to her, snatches it hungrily, lighting a match and inverting the pipe, delivering her own mega hit. After several days clean it really slams her hard, the rush instantly paralyzing her, and before she can even feel the rush of pleasure, she wants more, and by some miracle Jake delivers more, and doesn’t even try to fuck Mommie, like she thought he was gonna, and while this should’ve made her even more suspicious, she was so high she didn’t care why Jake kept loading those fat hits, as long as he didn’t stop.

Jake is a big man, a leather vested biker type with a bald, eagle tattooed head and a long red beard, who stands well over six feet tall and somehow manages to keep his beer belly as a crack addict. He keeps getting Mommie high for the next several hours as people drift in and out of the apartment smokin' and talkin' about the riots and bartering for dope with looted Nikes and Pumas, brightly colored women's cotton blouses, bra and panty sets, leather trenches, and boomboxes. The mounds of brand new merchandise sit in stark relief against the bleak landscape of the apartment which normally never contains anything new or valuable, besides dope.

"Dey's a curfew agin tonight, anybody caught outside's goin' straight ta jail," Inky announces as she opens the door to the little apartment

"You finally wake up?" she says to Mommie, leaning into Jake for a kiss and a hit.

One of Jake's biker pals, a pale, skinny rat-like white guy with long scraggly orange hair and three teardrops tattooed under his left eye, comes in the door.

"Who's got the yay, I got my check today."

Something clicks in Mommie's head.

"Hey, what's the date today anyways?" she asks, rushing like crazy.

"It's the fifth," rat man answers.

"May fifth?" Mommie inquires.

"Ya," he grunts back.

"Hey, today's my birthday, I'm thirty years old today!" Mommie cries, and just then there is a knock at the door and the room gets quiet and Mommie, for no reason she can fathom, suddenly becomes super paranoid and hyper alert. Jake goes to the door and looks through the peephole as Mommie stands up and edges toward the bathroom. Then, just before he opens the front door, Jake turns and looks at her.

"Happy Birthday Mommie," he says, grinning maliciously, and opening the door to reveal Greg and Carl standing in the hallway.

Mommie flies into the bathroom, slamming the door shut and locking it as the men lunge for her. The bathroom window is open and at the sound of a shoulder smashing against the bathroom door, Mommie propels herself through it and on to the fire escape outside. She frantically crawls up the ladder that leads to the upstairs neighbor's fire escape as the sound of cracking wood indicates the bathroom door has given way. She flings herself through the neighbors bathroom window, also thankfully open, and crashes to the floor, bringing the Latino occupants running.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" she gasps, running through the apartment and out the front door into the hallway.

She looks both ways and runs down the hall trying doors, hearing footsteps pounding on the stairs, and just when it seems she will be caught and shot down in the corridor, one of the doors opens and Mommie glides in. It is a janitors closet and Mommie shuts the door quietly, forcing her breathing to

be silent, violently shaking inside while amazingly motionless outside, senses excruciatingly alert, she listens intently, and hears Greg and Carl running to the upstairs neighbor's door.

"I'm sorry," Mommie thinks to herself as she hears them pounding on the door. The neighbors don't open and Greg and Carl kick down the cheap door, the sound of wood splintering once again in Mommie's ears. She hears the baby of the house wailing and the people's voices saying, "Nada, nada."

It is quiet as they search the apartment and then their voices in the hall.

"Dat bitch ain't gonna git away agin."

"Sho'nuff tha's her, tha same bitch what ganked me."

"Ah'll kills dat ho."

Mommie hears the sound of their feet on the stairs and crouches in the closet afraid to move, and after what seems like hours and hours she finally peeks out of the closet and gets up and goes into the hall, sliding along the wall until she gets to the stairs where she stops to listen.

Nothing.

She makes her way down three flights to the main floor and peeks around the corner. It looks like the coast is clear and Mommie starts making her way toward the main entrance, she is almost there when Greg and Carl suddenly appear at the double glass doors. They both see Mommie at the same time and their faces light up with surprise. They try the door but luckily it is locked, visitors have to be buzzed in. Mommie is standing in front of the manager's apartment and begins to frantically bang at the door, and just as Greg and Carl finally get buzzed in the manager's door opens and she slips inside, quickly sliding the bolt lock as Greg and Carl begin to pound on the heavy metal door.

The manager looks Indian from India.

"You must go now miss," he says in British accented English, gesturing toward the door.

"If you open the door they'll kill us all, please, I'm begging you call the police!" Mommie whispers fiercely, frantically, and the manager points at the phone, eyes filled with fear. She dials 911 only to have the dispatcher tell her the cops can't come because they are too busy due to the riots.

"I'm sorry ma'am we have no officers available."

"You're kidding right? Somebody's trying to kill me here!"

Mommie holds the phone away from her ear incredulously as a recorded voice intones, "If you'd like to make a call please hang up and dial again..."

Greg and Carl are still banging on the door, shouting.

"Let us in!"

"I'm sorry miss, you must go now," the manager insists, pulling on Mommie's arm, trying to drag her through the stuffy, spicy smelling apartment toward the door.

"No! No!" Mommie cries, holding onto the furniture and exclaiming, "As soon as you open the door we're all dead!"

The manager looks skeptical, probably realizing that it is more likely the

men outside just want Mommie and will go away if he gives her to them.

“Please, please, we’ll all die! Call the police yourself, tell them you are the manager and they are shooting up the place,” Mommie begs desperately, handing the manager the phone and breathing a sigh of relief when he dials 911.

This time the police agree to come and after awhile the pounding on the door subsides. Mommie and the manager wait in tense silence for the endless forty-five minutes it takes for the cops to arrive. They finally knock at the door and escort Mommie from the building.

“We caught two suspects on our way in and we need you to i.d. them,” one of the cops says, leading Mommie to a patrol car parked around the corner, and sure enough Greg and Carl are seated in the back.

“Is that them?” the cop asks Mommie.

“Na, that ain’t them,” she answers, a violent shudder of relief wracking her thin, bruised body.

The cops tell Mommie she cannot be out on the street because of the curfew and ask her where she wants to go. She gives Maria’s address and they drop her off. She wearily climbs the stairs and knocks lightly at the door and when it opens Mommie falls into Papito’s open arms.

2

Jury Duty

Her goal is to be on a jury. The right kind of jury. Rape, domestic violence, and molestation are the wrong kind. Police brutality, drugs, and property crimes are the right kind. Gray areas might include robbery, murder, assault, and dui. In the event of a wrong jury she will get herself disqualified. In the event of a right jury she will do all she can to be selected. If a gray area occurs she will just have to wing it.

After calling to postpone and reschedule once, she fills out the jury summons, happy to note that she passes (barely) the test questions regarding convictions. Have you had a felony conviction within the last fifteen years or a misdemeanor conviction in the last three years? No and no.

“Ha ha fuck you.” Mommie thinks to herself.

She is to report on a Monday morning at the hellish hour of 7:30 a.m. The day rises hot and clear as her husband Boosey drops her off in front of the big gray stone courthouse downtown.

Nowadays Mommie calls herself a “mixed class” white girl. Now that she’s been in college long enough to use that kind of language. It basically means she had a middle class childhood, but has been dirt poor since the age of fifteen. These days she is the starving student brand of poor, much more elevated than some of her past brands, like teen welfare mom, minimum wage grunt, or homeless junkie ho, yet still equaling not enough money. Today Mommie is dressed as middle class as possible, which with her wardrobe is no easy task. At forty, her taste in clothes runs to slutty, just fashionable enough scores she and Boosey shoplift from the Goodwill.

Despite the day’s promise of heat she has dressed in black stretch jeans and a matching black three quarter sleeve blouse. A white scarf dotted with tiny black hearts adorns her head, covering the grow-out in her short, choppy, henna-red hair. It was the most conservative outfit she could find that morning that didn’t include an item that needed to be ironed, was missing a button, or maybe the ass was tore out. To top off her disguise Mommie wears white cotton socks and the ugly black shoes she has recently purchased in a desperate attempt to have an extremely comfortable pair of walking shoes. She usually only wears them when she walks to school, quick changing before class to some cute looking pair of heels she pulls from her pack.

After a tense and tearful early morning interaction with Boosey, and then making it through the lengthy courthouse security line while feeling paranoid about the half a joint in her pocket, Mommie is feeling less than okay. Even with her medical marijuana card making it legal for her to possess up to one ounce of medicine, she still feels triggered and afraid. Not enough sleep last night and then no yoga this morning. She and Boosey have been going 'round. Boosey wants to have a baby and Mommie doesn't want any more kids. Her back hurts and she feels exhausted. Besides, all the cops around the place are giving her the creeps.

She is fifteen minutes late as she boards the elevator to the third floor jury assembly room and remembers her purpose here today: to help and hopefully free a current/up and coming prisoner of the injustice system. To Mommie that's no joke. It's real, serious, important business. She collects herself, takes a deep breath. Pasting a corny and trusting smile on her face, she drops a veil of just eager enough ignorance over her eyes as she is ushered into a long room filled with two hundred mostly occupied black plastic chairs. Just inside the door there is a check-in desk and Mommie hands over the letter she received telling her when and where to report.

The girl behind the desk doesn't ask for i.d. She is beautiful in that way Seventeen magazine calls "fresh faced," young, all American, white, blonde, Barbie doll type wearing a tight black dress, and holding a computer wand. She takes Mommie's letter and uses the wand to zap a barcode printed on the bottom right corner. Next, she zaps a barcode on a credit card size white plastic id that reads JUROR, and hands it to Mommie, who hangs it around her neck by its soft blue plastic strap. With no further ado, Barbie hands Mommie a thin, American flag emblazoned pamphlet called *Handbook for Jurors* and smiles cheerfully.

"You're all checked in, just have a seat until orientation starts."

Mommie walks over to the chairs and takes an empty seat. A few minutes later another white lady, this one middle aged and square, the type that wears sweatshirts with cute puppies on them and pink tennis shoes, stands at the front of the chairs.

"It will be a few more minutes until orientation starts. There is a microwave in back and two phones along the wall for your use." she says, looking tired.

Mommie rushes to the free phones and dials home, hoping to catch Boosey before he leaves on his camping trip. Her heart lifts when he answers, she didn't want to part on a sour note.

"Hi honey , you okay?"

"No." Boosey's voice sounds thick with tears.

"Are you still going camping?"

"I don't think so, I don't think I'll go."

"Sweetheart, you should go, please, take care of yourself and go. I'm gonna be fine. This jury thing will probably only last a day, then I can stay home and write."

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too Boosey, have a nice trip, and I’ll see ya on Wednesday.”

“Okay Mommie, see ya wednesday.”

As she clicks the phone Mommie breaths a sigh of relief. Everything will work out in the end with her and Boosey like it always does, and now she has nothing immediate to distract her from her mission: subverting wall street’s newest member, the prison industrial complex.

Mommie has an ax to grind. In fact she’s got quite a few axes to grind and maybe a hatchet or two to bury as well. To list all the reasons she hates and fears the injustice system would be too time consuming and draining for Mommie. Impossible for the same reason it is impossible for her to count rapes.

In order to count rapes she must contain them all in her mind at more or less the same time, or at least be able to recount them in some sort of linear fashion. This she cannot do.

Mommie’s mind just doesn’t work like that. Just doesn’t work like that at all. Instances, memories come to her piecemeal and confused, bleeding into one another, becoming individual, sharp, and distinct, only to fold into the next scene.

kaleidoscope.

she is in the back of the delivery van, sick and robotic in her need for more
dope.

the taller one says,

get on your knees, i’m gonna fuck your ass.

fear and panic engulf mommie as she quietly complies, slowly, neutrally getting
on her hands and knees on the hard dusty floor of the van.

the shorter one takes out his pipe and loads a fat hit.

the sizzle as he melts the rock onto the screen sears mommie’s need

and her futile longing melds with the nauseating reality that she is being raped.

shit, i’ve never been raped up the ass before

mommie frets silently,

most of her gone already from this place

although her small stubborn body continues to kneel heavily, smelling the musty
innards of the big tan truck, painfully mute, shaking, but only on the inside,

outside she blankets the area with a thick, seeping dullness.

nothing exciting or new here.

no struggle

no screaming

no arguing or begging

no dick hardening, blood quickening attempts to save her virtue,

she feels no anger

only a sick fear and longing,
only the need to pretend nothing has happened, the need to communicate that
the situation can be reversed at any time without consequence.
he can't get his dick hard.
he keeps pushing it against mommie's bottom hole and it just bends and flops
off to the side,
oozing clear pre-cum.
shit, hold still bitch
he grunts
smearing his folded up dick all over mommie's ass,
and finally slapping himself against mommie as if he is doing something
a show for his friend, an attempt to save face,
or a last desperate attempt to get hard
mommie will never know
but she remembers when he let her go
git tha fuck outta here bitch
and mommie gliding from the van
no sudden movements until she is a block away
when she breaks into a run

hears the sound of her and papito's feet pounding the pavement in the alley,
jumping behind some old bedsprings against the wall, somehow making ragged
breath quiet, heart thudding in ears, still with panic. flashlights flash as cops
rush by, also breathing hard. they don't see us. never do find us...

lying up in a sleazy room at the aladin, high on escape (and in mommie's
case crack cocaine) doing heavy fucking. bodies slamming, papi on top holding
mommie's wrists above her head with his left hand, and cradling her ass with
his right, smashing her into him.
mommie puts on little girl eyes,
ooh. owie. (it hurts, but not really, if ya know what i mean, mommie is slick
and wet)
papi grunts and grinds mommie into him all the harder.
give to me or i spank, spread legs out.
and mommie whimpers, and spreads her legs out so far papi's wide really does
start to hurt her
(and she likes it)
he grabs mommie's arms and forces them behind her back so she is lying on
them and her small, cone shaped breasts arch in the air. he squeezes her nipples
with both hands, pulling the pinkness up, hurting mommie so much she lets
out a sharp cry,
and a moan of pleasure escapes papi's full lips, as he pulls harder, lusting for
the next cry.
and mommie gives it to him,

moaning and whimpering and crying and twisting, and papi getting rougher and pounding harder toward his third time cumming.

he loves it when mommie fights, and he gets harder and harder as the volume of her cries increase.

time to turn over nina

and he jerks mommie onto her tummy, gasping with pleasure at the sight of her round creamy cheeks, and tiny pink center,

and his thick black hand slaps down on her smooth white ass, bringing up a beautiful red welt, and papi entering her dripping from behind using two hands to cram mommie onto him.

she cries and wiggles, slathering honey all over papi's hard,

and he continues to hit mommie's ass raising handprints, and mommie screaming and crying and papi forcing it in mommie's tiny, moaning, and shooting hot salt

up her stretched pink,

sheets soaked,

lying in arms, smiling

we ain't got caught.

this time.

she is younger, eighteen years old, her brother jess is seventeen. the year before he died. jess and mommie's thirteen-year-old brother-in-law bert are spending the night at mommie's new apartment. bert and jess walk to the store, and jess buys beer with a fake i.d.

a couple a cops spot jess coming out the 7-11 carrying a half rack with no bag, and lookin' for all the world like a too young white boy, with who? an even younger lookin' dark skinned negro lookin' big tall boy?

cops in 1979 wilmington, washington, don't run across something like this every day, and they are on it like piranhas on a fresh cut.

the boys run, and the cops send a dog after them.

bert gets caught first.

jess makes it to my apartment just ahead of the dog and the cops who, before we can open it, kick the door down flat, rush in, big ol' dog barking and out of control, and my nine-month-old baby Mizzle wailing, and terrified, and in danger from the near rabid dog that is bounding about the tiny apartment acting like it is going to bite someone, and the police shouting, everybody get down on the ground,

and more cops arriving, and rick mcdaniels, my white first husband, and daddy to my three boys, getting out of bed in the little back room and hiding in the closet thinking they are there for him, and me freaking out, as the police grab jess, and smash him into the living room wall, and all i can see is a wide smear of red blood trailing his head down the wall as he falls, as they grab him again, roughly, i yell

hey what are you doing,
and step toward jess, and one cop flips out, and points his gun at me, hands
shaking, screaming,
lay on the ground, get on the ground,
and the dog barking, and mizzle wailing, and jess getting his ass kicked right
there in front of me, as i lay on the ground and scream along with mizzle, and
rick mcdaniels wondering what the fuck the cops are doing to his family, and
him emerging from the bedroom, and the cops flipping out, jerking their guns
around, screaming to the top of their lungs about
lay on the ground right now

right now.

fast forward to thirty years old, and the mingled smells of leather, sweat,
and cologne on that cop mommie fought in his maroon colored, mid-eighties,
undercover ford ltd.

fresh out the shower, and two days of good rest, i look and feel good.
i ain't high yet (but starting to jones a bit) so i go up to the tenderloin instead
of down to capp (the junkie track).

he is the first to pull over and i jump in.

he is thirtyish white guy, too young to be truly desirable, but looks like average
white guy trick enough,
you workin'?

you a cop?

no.

touch my breasts.

and i open my blouse, and the cop gives my boobs a rub and a squeeze.

ya like it?

ya.

what ya lookin' for?

straight sex.

it's a hundred.

a hundred bucks for sex, alright.

and although it is unusual for a trick to agree so readily, my jones is coming on
hard so i don't notice and say,

okay.

you're under arrest,

he growls, producing no badge and calling into no radio, he reaches in the glove
box and pulls out a pair of black handcuffs, and since mommie ain't ever seen
no cop with no black handcuffs she decides right then and there he is trying
to kidnap her.

as he tries to fasten the cuffs on her she puts up a worthy fight, grappling with
that short, beefy, white guy with the dark curly hair, and the red, red lips,
mommie feels him turn vampire.

he is aroused by her struggle, and i turn too, and fight all the more viciously for my life in the front seat of that ltd parked on a tenderloin side street, screaming out a slit in the passenger side window for help.

i get so desperate i even scream for the police to help me, and the sweaty white guy with the long black hairs on his arms cursing me breathlessly, growling, he is the police.

mommie bites and gouges, uses elbows and knees, and more importantly, stops that vampire from getting those cuffs on me until a marked car finally hears my screams and arrives on the scene, convincing me that the thick, rapo-looking, glow-in-the-dark white guy is a cop.

mommie has never fought a cop before, and she decides it feels pretty alright. i am glad i got in some good licks, but the cop bruised mommie up real good too, put the cuffs on nice and tight and arrested her for solicitation, resisting arrest, and assaulting an officer.

somehow later the charges were dropped. i never did know how or why.

the cops hands were so insistent, so strong.

mommie's shame when the white shelter lady with the pendleton sweater and the birkenstocks told her it was her own fault james beat her, you shouldn't have gone to see him.

i didn't, he saw me at the store and tried to kidnap me, he beat me down and tried to drag me into his cousin's van.

we told you to stay away from him.

i did. he found me in the parking lot and nobody helped me, there was all kinds of people standing around and nobody called the cops or nuthin'...finally, his cousin made him stop...maybe i shouldn't have gone to the store...i didn't mean to do anything wrong...

and mommie's voice begins to shake and trail off, and she starts to think, they're right, i'll never get away.

and the domestic violence shelter staff person (who is a very distinct person from who i am—the client—the victim) shaking her head like she don't believe mommie.

you better go clean all that blood off yourself.

they took her babies.

dmac and tmac, her beloved twin sons, and shut them in prison for ten years each, and the boys so young when they locked them down and began to play games with their heads, cutting them off from family, trying like hell to bury them in hatred, shame, dependency, humiliation, and despair. dmac and tmac standing strong. mommie and the rest of the family doing our best to hang on. the stress, hardship, and expense of keeping up contact. the way they make it so hard.

mommie takes out her green notebook and reads a poem that is written on the first five pages, it says,

dedicated to dmac and tmac, i love you so...

p.o.w.

p.o.w.

includes stops

at y.o.p.

gulag.

get your

young, sick

scared ass

in line

you're in the

big time now

youthful

offender

program

otherwise known as

kids

in adult prison.

don't play with us

boy

we got ya

located up here

in the

inaccessible regions

of our war

yes, we bring

our enemy here

to perform

our punishments.

yesterday you were

fifteen, sixteen

seventeen years old

today

you come of age

as non-citizen

non-adult

non-child

far from family

and friend

we got
a state issue
television
and a bottle
of pills
with your name on it
offender
hate and isolation
and a limit
to how many
books you can
have in your cell.
the youngest p.o.w.'s
are sent
to the most
violent facility
in the state
thirty-two plus stabbings
in a year
my son
carried a
six-inch shank.
i pray he never
had to use it.
my boys fell
at seventeen
and they
been tryin'
to get my
oldest son
ever since.
2009
is a long time
to wait
to watch
my babies
step through
our kitchen door
hungry and
smiling and
huggin' on
their mama.
a long time
to be under

siege,
to feel the
eyes of hate.
ten years
in prison
for a crime where
no one was
physically harmed
or killed.
i woke up
for real
the day they
terminated
my parental rights
with no discussion
no hearing
no notice
no feeling.
instead they
“declined” my
children into
adult court
and i became
just an
annoying voice
on the phone,
“keep calling
and we’ll ship
your sons to
colorado”
the man on
the phone
told me,
the so-called
counselor.
my friend’s son
got ninety-nine years
at sixteen
ninety-nine years
for being black.
my sons are
white
and talk about
segregation,

about walking
a fine line.
don't believe
the hate
but gain the
required acceptance.
don't associate
with the hardcore
factions
but don't alienate
them either
because being
cast out
from your
racial group
means
terrible danger
and stress.
my boys
walk lines
fight to be
allowed to
read and write
exercise
and eat
they are amazing
survivors
their poetry
haunting and
healing
our family
works hard to
support
our boys.
twenty-two dollars
per call
for fifteen minutes
is too much.
they separated
twin brothers
out of spite
so i drive
long hours,
visit two

prisons now.
struggle to
decipher
two sets of
rules that
shift and change
slippery
they run
out the mouths
of the enlisted
and drool through
my fingers
slick mess
on the floor.
they bugged
our table
in the
visiting room
and investigated
my relationship
to my husband
who was,
by necessity,
listed as “aunt”
on the visitor
application.
they recorded
our conversations
and busted us
for being queer
and trans.
took our boys
aside
and said they had
“reason to believe”
my husband
is not their
“real aunt”
and they
threatened
and intimidated
our sons
and forced
my husband

to be removed
from one boy's
visiting list
made us choose,
because only "real"
"blood" relatives
and their
"legal" spouses
can appear
on more than
one inmate's
approved
visitor list.
and having a
queer old
ex hooker
for a mother
is a liability
in prison
so i stay
in the closet
censor my letters
we speak in code
code of honor
code of loyalty
code of love.

mommie

walking within the white lines, standing in the right places, hands running up
and down her body.
pull out your bra, stick out your tongue.
sit over here (so we can record your conversation)
don't put your hands in that position,
don't lay your head on the table, you might be passing drugs to your son out
your mouth.
tension so thick you can cut it with a knife.
the precious times when we almost forget, and actually do forget, for a moment,
laugh together, talk and eat chips and smile,
a short hug and kiss are allowed at the start and finish of each visit. dmac
hugging mommie,
the guards saying,
that's enough, let go right now,

that's enough.

The reel in Mommie's head, the frontwards, backwards, sideways, separate, and all at once movie of the cops, and the jailors, and the social workers, and the domestic violence programs, and the cult of the twelve steps, and the anti-prostitute services become one with the rapes, and the beatings, and the five o'clock news, all whirling around inside Mommie's head, filling her throat, shuddering down her spine, and balling up in her tummy. Mommie experiences things through her guts, her knowingness. She receives the bulk of her information about the world through feelings, sensations, and intuitions. A twinge in her spine, a twitch in her eye, an ache or a song in her heart, through smells, and sounds, and certainties that lie deep in her belly, all diced and spliced with random visual flashbacks, and in this way Mommie plays the cop movie, and Barbie becomes part of the movie.

"Can everyone please be seated, we are going to start the orientation now," she says in her syrupy sweet voice. "Next you will be addressed by Judge Eleanor Best, a circuit court judge for more than fifteen years." she continues as the really nice, reasonable, white, middle-class, middle-aged, female judge walks to the front of the room and begins to speak in a remarkably friendly and soothing manner.

Mommie stares at her in wonder. She has never seen a judge act like that. In fact she has never seen anyone at a courthouse act like that. Judges, cops, guards, lawyers, the whole dirty bunch of 'em have always been her clearly defined enemies. Instead of smiling at Mommie they usually do things like talk down to her and lock her up, and lock her children up too, for a long, long time. Vicious style. In fact, the whole time Mommie is on jury duty she is shocked again and again by everyone's behavior towards her. Stopping to pinch herself she feels in a dream, wearing the jury i.d. around her neck like a talisman, the cops, and judges, and guards, and lawyers all smile at her, and nod to her, and usher her here and there, and speak to her in the most respectable of tones.

The experience is surreal.

Excited by the possibility of helping someone, yet scared of being found out, Mommie does what she calls good acting. Watchful, tense, and fearful inside, she does her best to appear calm, mildly concerned, and not too terribly bright on the outside.

Mommie is doing good acting.

But that is jumping ahead, and for now Mommie is still at the orientation, watching the scary white lady judge's lips move and smile, and her head nod. It seems impossible for Mommie to retain anything she is saying. Her words become part of the white noise of fake kindness and concern in the background of the cop movie.

The judge fades away and is replaced by the head security guard at the courthouse. He stands near the television (which has been turned down but not off) and addresses the group of approximately two-hundred potential jurors.

Mommie scans the place and as far as she can see he is one of only three black people in the room, and one of perhaps fifteen people of color. She also notes that women outnumber men by about two to one, and that a good percentage of the room look to be what Mommie considers middle class, a few elite class, a few working class, and only one or two visibly poor.

“Hey,” Mommie thinks to herself, “this place totally sucks”.

The head security guard is short, slight, and dark skinned. His hair is buzzed close and he is dressed in a tan uniform. He speaks at length about all the bad things people try to smuggle into the courthouse every day.

“Why just last week we found a gun made to look like a cell phone,” he says grimly and everyone murmurs and shakes their heads as if they can’t believe it, and he reassures us, “Oh ya, you wouldn’t believe all the guns made to look like everyday stuff, tire gauges, key chains, you name it, not to mention all the crazy knives and sharp objects people try to bring in, and you know, we really are sorry about how long the security lines are, and about how we have to search everyone so thoroughly, but since 9-11 we’ve had to beef security way up to keep everybody safe.”

Mommie doesn’t feel safe.

Mommie is thinking about that time last February when she came to court with Mizzle and saw the courthouse security guards bust some poor frazzled looking white lady with a bruised cheek and a shell shocked look in her eyes. Mommie was standing near the elevators waiting for Mizzle when she noticed the cop behind the x-ray machine rifling through the lady’s bag and extracting a small metal pot pipe.

“What’s this?” he sneered.

“Oh shoot, I’m sorry, I forgot all about that!” the lady cried, “Look, I’m here to get a restraining order. I’m just so worried, my kids are in danger and so am I. I really need to get my order signed.”

“Just stand over here ma’am,” the cop said blank faced, placing his hand on her arm.

The small, plump lady with the wispy brown hair began to cry.

“Please I must get to my children!”

Finally two cops took her to the jail to be arrested, and afterwards, the four or five cops that were left standing around all high fived each other with big ol’ grins on their faces, and Mommie saw, and she was burning up inside, glaring at them disapprovingly and shaking her head, as if they cared.

After the head security guard, came the jury orientation movie about truth, justice, and the amerikkkan way with flags waving and pictures of the presidents, and the narrator telling us how Thomas Jefferson proclaimed the jury system to be the cornerstone of our democracy, and how each of us should listen to him and do our duty.

Mommie looks around at her fellow jurors faces, and wonders who else feels anxiety rising. Most everyone near her seems to just sit there, nodding and listening, as if Thomas Jefferson weren’t a slave holding rapo that raped a

fourteen year old slave girl named Sally Hemmings and first the government hid it under their official histories and denied it for the longest time, and when it finally emerged into mainstream they made a tv movie out of it and said it was a love affair. A love affair between a fourteen-year-old black slave girl and her captor, the president of the United States, a middle aged white man with a white wife and children.

Mommie knows America was founded by rapos.

She was founded by rapos.

She tries not to act upset, keeps her expression neutral. In order to do good acting Mommie looks attentiverather than appalled, nodding her head in vague agreement, and like the words of the rich white lady judge, the orientation movie is difficult for Mommie to comprehend. Whitewashed history.

Horrific persons paraded as heroes.

Lies presented as fact, as bland normalcy, as just the way it is.

Mommie knows this has been a big part of her life, has been her white story, too. The scary part is that she can't always tell where "they" leave off and she starts up. She is them and not them.

The square white lady goes back up front and answers all the major questions that potential jurors always ask.

"No, you may not leave the room unless it is time for a break."

"Yes, they will make the announcement immediately in the case that the jurors are excused early for any reason."

"No, you will not receive any money today. You will be mailed a check for ten dollars per day for the first two days you are here, and twenty five dollars for every additional day. If your address has changed be sure to notify us, you won't get your check without the correct address."

"Yes, the letters for your employers will be given to you on the day your service is completed..." and so on and on, and Mommie zones out momentarily, snapping back in time to hear, "...jurors will be called in groups as soon as a judge says you are needed."

Mommie pulls out her green notebook and starts taking notes about the big jury room and all the white middle class housewife, office worker, straight looking management types that are filling up the hard plastic chairs. She studies everything without really knowing what she looks for. Mostly she is intent on figuring out what the system wants in a juror beyond the two most obvious things: being white and middle class. Along one side of the room are a bank of wood veneer desk cubicles that have been staked out by the lap top business set, and in the rear near the microwave there are several cushy green couches occupied mostly by older retired looking white men, already snoozing in an upright position. Mommie sits in the middle of the long bank of hard plastic chairs that take up most of the room and watches the housewives that have come prepared with their romance novels and crocheting, and the mixed age group whose chairs cluster around the big tv set that showed the orientation movie earlier, and is now droning the morning's network news, and Mommie begins to

have a sneaking suspicion that some of these people have done this before.

Next Barbie gets up front.

“I will now be reading off the names of the first group of jurors, thirty-five in all, if your name is called say here, and then go to the second floor courtroom of Judge R. Guldboy.” She begins to call off the names and when she is about half way through she calls, “Lula Taylor.”

“Here,” Mommie says quickly, excited to be in the first group. She takes the stairs down to the courtroom and goes inside, and all the guards and lawyers smile at her, and usher her in, and she pinches herself, and the bailiff calls off the jurors’ names again, and tells us to sit in a certain order starting with the twelve jury seats and then spilling over onto the wooden spectator benches. Mommie is seated in the second row of benches and not in the comfortable looking jury chairs that sit to the side of the room.

“All rise,” the bailiff announces and the judge comes in. Mommie looks around, watching everything very carefully. First she scrutinizes the judge. White male around sixty, a full head of silver hair with condescending eyes and the smug expression of a man use to getting his own way. Nothing new there, except that he actually smiles at Mommie, or at least in Mommies general direction.

“Thank you for being here, we will now start the voir dire,” he says, all patient and polite.

The bailiff is a young Asian man dressed in a shirt and tie.

“Raise your right hand and repeat after me, I swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me god.” he commands. Mommie mumbles the words incoherently, holding her right hand up and her left hand behind her back, fingers crossed.

“You may be seated,” the judge says, and Mommie quickly thumbs through the Handbook for Jurors. It says voir dire is French for speak the truth. Good. Mommie doesn’t have a problem with that. She knows there are truths, and other truths, and other truths still. Telling one of them shouldn’t be any trouble.

While the judge gives a lecture about the truth as if there were one, Mommie focuses her attention on the rest of the room. Between the judge sitting up all high and the spectators sitting down all low, a long table sits sideways, the D.A. at one end and the defendant and his attorney at the other, all three facing the judge.

The D.A., a pale, nervous looking Latino man, gets up and starts the voir dire.

“Hello I am Richard Perez, and it is my job to prove a case against the defendant Lamar Lee, who is charged with assault with a dangerous weapon,” and this is the first time Mommie has heard the name of the tall, slender black man sitting at the counsel table.

Mommie immediately pegs the D.A. as a weasel. She is real big on linking certain animals to certain people, and right away she decides Perez is a weasel. A sneaky one. He definitely looks it. Small and twitchy, he scrunches his nose

up as if he can't decide if he is smelling something or has constipation.

"The state will prove to you that on December 31, 2000, Mr. Lamar Lee did willfully cause harm to Mr. Rudy Ratchet by means of a dangerous weapon."

He goes on to tell all about the case from the state's point of view, about how Lamar Lee took a combination lock and put it inside a pink sock, and used it to beat Rudy Ratchet's face in while they were both residing in the county jail.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Rudy Ratchet is a known criminal, we aren't here to argue about that, we aren't here to dress Mr. Ratchet up to be anything but what he is, a convicted felon, and he will be coming to court in handcuffs and jail clothing."

"However, Mr. Ratchet's criminality is not what you will be called upon to decide during this trial. You will be asked to concern yourself with the facts, and the facts only. The only question here is did Lamar Lee break the law? Did he in fact, assault Rudy Ratchet with a lock in a sock? This is all you will be called upon to decide."

Mommie wonders which facts are factual, and knows immediately she wants this case.

If confronted with a rape case, or some other difficult case, she'd planned to decline. Too hard a dilemma. On one hand she wouldn't want to let a guilty rapist go, but on the other hand, she would refuse to send someone to a prison system that is a crime in itself. This is a good case. Two grown men, one of them a rat, and the law planning to give Lamar Lee what Mommie figures to be at least seven years. No, she wouldn't try to get disqualified from this case, although she did think it would be fun to try.

"And what is your occupation Ms. Taylor?"

"Who me? I'm a writer, a mother, and an ex street hooker."

Mommie grins just imagining the shock on their faces.

Next the defense attorney addresses the jurors and Mommie is instantly spelled by her. She is another white Barbie doll type, but undercover, toned down and slightly rumped. Nola Newberg is built like a brick shithouse under her boxy, mouse brown suit. Her slightly messy, shoulder length, ash brown hair framing gold green eyes, and wide sexy mouth. Her skin is pale, translucent beige and she looks the perfect stereotype of the proper school teacher by day who takes off her glasses and lets her hair down by night. The supposed ugly duckling from the Hollywood movie that ends up beautiful. As the voir dire progresses, Mommie even discovers Nola Newberg has some game, acts kinda like Columbo, the white detective guy from the old time tv Mommie watched as a kid. Columbo would always act like he wasn't too hip to shit, not too organized, just kinda bumbling along, askin' a question here and there, gettin' peoples guard down so he could solve the case.

Yep, that was Nola Newberg, a cross between a rumped up madonna/whore school teacher stereotype and Columbo, and from the moment Mommie sees her standing up there looking like she needs to be kissed real hard and hears

her determined and breathless speech, she falls for her. Mommie even feels Nola Newberg might have a bit of hooker in her heart.

And Mommie loves a hooker.

Next Nola Newberg introduces Lamar Lee, who is sitting at the counsel table with his back to the spectator benches.

“Ladies and gentlemen this is Mr. Lamar Lee, the defendant in this case,” and as he twists around she nudges him and says, “don’t forget to smile,” and he half turns in his seat and smiles and nods, and Mommie sees smooth dark skin and high cheekbones, glimpses expressive brown eyes, tilted up at the corners and looking wary, scared, intelligent, and strong all at the same time. He is tall, but how tall is hard to say because he is sitting, and he holds himself in, keeping his shoulders slightly hunched, as if he is trying to make himself smaller. His build is lithe and narrow, and his thick black hair is braided in neat corn rows. He wears an ill fitting blue dress shirt and necktie which somehow make him look vulnerable, at least to Mommie, and before she knows it she falls for Lamar Lee.

She falls hard for the both of them, for Nola Newberg’s mussy determination, and Lamar Lee’s grave air of vulnerability and strength. Her long, slender feet encased in sensible pumps, the large dark brown mole on his cheek. The curve of her breast, the line of his jaw. The way Lamar Lee’s sleeves are just a little too short. Suddenly they both seem so beautiful and tragic Mommie is filled to overflowing by them and has to hold back a tear.

Nola Newberg says, “This case is really about harassment, racism, and Mr. Ratchet’s lawsuit against the county. Rudy Ratchet harassed and tormented the defendant, Lamar Lee, for more than a month prior to the fistfight. Mr. Ratchet called Mr. Lee racial epithets including the hateful “n” word, and yes, after rich provocation, the two men did fight. With fists. The state cannot prove there was a lock in a sock, because there was no lock in a sock.”

Pausing off and on to look through her notes, flipping pages in an sexy, unorganized sort of a way and then zeroing in, just in the nick of time, on what it is she wanted to say, Nola Newberg tells all about how Mr. Ratchet, a current inmate with a long criminal record, is suing the county over this fight.

“Mr. Ratchet has everything to gain from a conviction in this case since his lawsuit revolves around the story of the lock in the sock, and the contention that the state is liable for his injuries because they provide inmates with metal combination locks. Rudy Ratchet has said himself that he hates Lamar Lee, he has every motivation to lie about this fight, and the defense plans to prove that he is, in fact lying.” Nola Newberg finishes, waving her sheath of papers in the air for emphasis.

“Thank you Ms. Newberg” the judge says, a bit exasperatedly, as if he doesn’t appreciate her acting skills. “If that is all you have for now it is time to break for lunch.” He turns and addresses the jury section.

“You have approximately one and a half hours. Don’t talk to anyone, including each other, about what you have seen or heard here today, and we will

reconvene at two o'clock sharp, please be on time."

Mommie runs up to the honkin' huge burrito cart and orders beans and rice, and is too scared to smoke and go back to the court room smelling like a deep pine forest, so she walks around and practices reading her poetry out loud, and as usual people stare at her strangely, and as usual she doesn't notice.

She returns to the courtroom at one fifty-five and takes her seat. At two o'clock the bailiff counts everyone to see if we are all there, and confirms to the judge that we are.

"Each of you will now answer ten questions," the judge informs us.

Perez walks over and flips the pages of a flip chart to reveal the handwritten questions, and Mommie thinks about what she is willing to do, about how far she is willing to go. She has already raised her hand and sworn them an oath which basically means: if we catch you in what we name a lie, we can prosecute you.

As the other jurors begin answering the questions one by one Mommie assesses the likelihood of being caught. Most of the questions don't pose a problem for her, name, occupation, place of birth, number of years of education, where you live, who you live with, and what their occupations are, and so on. Only the last question, have you ever been in a court proceeding before, poses a problem for Mommie. She listens to most of the jurors say, "No, I've never been in a court proceeding before," except the few who say "Yes, for an adoption," "divorce," or "traffic ticket."

Mommie listens to one neatly dressed, well groomed, formally educated and polite spoken, white, middle class potential juror after the next.

"Jack Smith, retired business consultant, born in Sacramento California."

"Susie Ross, six years of college, and choosing to stay at home with my baby,"

"Linda Jones, I own my own business,"

"Sarah Long, I live with my husband, a computer engineer," and on and on like this, with only the occasional gruff redneck lookin' white guy.

"Ernie Morris, been drivin' truck for more'n twenty years."

Or young brown skinned woman.

"Anna Manlunas, I was born in a small village in the Philippines and I attend P.U."

Or dressed sexy older Latina,

"Emma Cruz, I work as a cocktail waitress," to break the monotony, Mommie listens to middle aged white male.

"Ernie Richards, contractor, born in Chicago Illinois."

And thirty something white liberal type.

"Lisa Peters, I'm a grade school principal married to a retail manager and we live in Holbrook."

Then it is her turn, and Mommie decides to play the middle and that identifying as an ex junkie street ho turned activist writer slut with four years of women's studies will not win her any points.

“I’m an off and on again student, a housewife right now, living with my husband, a mathematician, and our children...” Mommie says brightly, taking a deep breath and looking all confident and matter of fact.

“Let’s see, yes, I have been to court before, for tickets and stuff.” she adds, batting her eyes and smiling with just the right amount of sweet sheepishness, and after a brief, heart stopping pause, there are smiles all around, and lo and behold no one asks her to elaborate on the “stuff.”

The two felony convictions (over fifteen years old now so she didn’t lie on the summons), the assault conviction and the numerous soliciting charges and convictions (all well over three years old now), the drug charge (dropped), the four or five charges (all later dropped) of taking a car without the owner’s permission, and all those times in court with Rick McDaniels, Mizzle, Dmac, and Tmac. Good acting and her white middle class connections pay off once again, and Mommie figures out what the court is looking for in a juror beyond being white and middle class, they want someone with no real life experience with the injustice system. People whose information comes from television and the movies, from the corporate papers, and the six o’clock news.

“What are your top three sources for news?” Nola Newberg asks, and most of the jurors say “CNN,” and “channel five news,” and all the most popular corporate mainstream television, computer, radio, and print news sources. When it is her turn Mommie tips off Nola Newberg by naming a local black newspaper she reads, and hopefully appeases Perez with two mainstream sources she rarely looks at.

Then Nola Newberg says something that makes Mommie very happy.

She says, “The rest of the questions will be asked to the group as a whole, and if a question applies to you raise your hand.”

Then the judge says something that makes Mommie very happy.

He says, “If you are asked any question or detail you are not comfortable answering you can pass.”

“Right on,” Mommie says to herself, “right fucking on,” and both Nola Newberg and Richard Perez ask quite a few questions that Mommie doesn’t feel comfortable answering, and each time she keeps her hand down and passes.

“Have you ever been to a prison, to visit, or tour, or for any other reason?”

Pass.

“Do you know anyone who has been convicted of assault?”

Pass.

“Do you have any law enforcement officers as family or close friends?”

What? Hell no. I mean no, keep hand down, don’t speak, shake head almost imperceptibly, tilt head slightly forward, just interested enough.

“Do you think you would have a hard time treating Rudy Ratchet fairly because he is an inmate?”

Pass.

“Do you think that it will be too hard for you to hear about racism or see gory photos?”

Pass.

“Has anyone ever treated you badly based on your race or anything else like that?”

A white middle-aged lady raises her hand and says, “I was discriminated against when I went to get a job and the interviewer saw where I was from and said, “oh you must be a redneck””.

Mommie sees this as a chance to break her silence and lifts her hand.

“I have been called a ‘b’ word and it was because I am a woman and it hurt my feelings,” Mommie reports.

“I notice you said ‘b’ word instead of saying the word itself, and I am guessing that is because of the amount of impact the word has, making it difficult to say out loud, is that true?” Nola Newberg inquires.

“Yes,” Mommie answers, and someone else says something, and Mommie decides to make one more comment, but when she raises her hand Nola Newberg acts like she can’t see her, and Mommie peeps she is telling her to be quiet, don’t draw no more attention to herself, and she doesn’t.

Lots of other people tell all on themselves, not only telling the “truth” but making it worse than it has to be. One young white girl says, “So one guy called the other guy a nigger and got his ass kicked. What’s the big deal?”

Lots have cops in the family, an amazing number actually, and they smile all proud and big when they tell about their cop sons, and nephews, and husbands, looking so sure that they will be met with only the greatest approval. Mommie figures the defense will be out to disqualify them, and she sees they don’t realize it, acting the way they do, too eager, and talking all out their mouths.

The questioning goes on a while longer, and then the judge says, “Thank you, you will now leave the courtroom while the lawyers decide the jurors for this case, and none of you should feel bad if you aren’t chosen. No one knows why, but for some strange reason people want to be on juries, even if they are not the person for that jury. There are lots of reasons a person might not be right for a jury, and none of them have to do with a personal failing on your part. Thank you for your time, and if you are not selected for this trial please go back upstairs and wait to see if you will be chosen for another trial.”

There are too many of us to fit in one jury room and the group is split, herded into two rooms and left to wait. After a few minutes the bailiff comes into our room and introduces himself.

“I’m Jeffrey Chang. You can call me Jeffrey.” He says, showing us the little attached bathroom and the coffee machine, and then informing us, “You’re not allowed to leave.” When he walks out the room fills with a dense silence interrupted only by the shuffle of papers and throats clearing. Mommie, never very good at enduring dense silences.

“Isn’t this exciting? I’ve never been on a jury before.” she blurts out.

“This is my second time around.” an older white man reports.

“This is my third time,” a fortyish white lady announces, and a couple of others nod, as if to say they too have done this before, and Mommie’s

earlier suspicions of repeat jurors are confirmed. Mommie tries to keep up the conversation but people give her short answers and look annoyed so she takes out her notebook and begins to scribble.

After about an hour and a half, Jeffrey comes back in and tells us to return to the courtroom and we all file in and sit in our same seats and Mommie is on pins and needles waiting to find out if she got picked.

“This is worse than waiting to be picked for kick ball at recess in fourth grade,” Mommie thinks to herself. She figures she’s got about a fifty-fifty chance as long as she didn’t say the wrong thing without realizing it, and she feels keyed up and anxious and hopeful all at the same time. She tries using her trick of not becoming too attached to any particular outcome, because after all, there could be another case waiting downstairs that needs her even more than this one, but it is hard, and she twists her fingers in her lap the way she does when she is nervous, and stares at the judge’s pale, thin lips as he begins to read off the names of the jurors.

He reads off twelve names and none of them are Mommie’s name and her heart sinks, and then the judge says, “And the thirteenth juror is Lula Taylor, you are the alternate juror on this case,” and before Mommie can even wonder what the hell an alternate juror is, the judge continues, “everyone whose names weren’t called please go back upstairs, and the thirteen of you whose names were called please report here tomorrow morning at nine o’clock sharp so the trial can begin.”

Mommie is a juror.

3

mommie is me

i am mommie and not mommie, for anyone who cares to try and understand.
mommie is me, yet she watches me, too.

do ya get what i'm saying?

boosey is lots of people, and he tells mommie she is too, but i always laugh
and say it isn't true. not really.

i mean doesn't everybody talk to themselves in their head? i mean isn't that
called thinking?

i mean it's true that my grandmas, and great aunts, and great great grandmas,
and great great great aunts talk, and shout, and cry, and cajole in my head,
but doesn't everybody talk about hearing their mother's voice, or their father's
voice, or whatever?

i mean it's true that i haven't actually officially (like in this lifetime) met quite a
few of the relatives in my head, but maybe that's like splitting hairs, or atoms,
or maybe it doesn't matter when i met them,

because i am them.

and like mommie they are extremely vocal.

"now what have you gotten yourself into?"

"leave the girl alone, can't you see she's in trouble? for god's sake lula how did
you get yourself into this mess?"

"i don't know grandma, please, help me now grandma."

and she helps me, they all do.

even the old men, my maternal grandfather, and his father.

jolly men, never raised a hand that i ever knew about.

my maternal grandmother, grandma t, was meaner.

my mom always tells the story of how grandma t whipped her with a hanger
once for kicking down the screen door.

and grandma t's father whipped her with a belt when she was five years old
for going in a jew's house.

"don't stick that penny in your mouth it's been in an old chinaman's ear,"

she would always tell mommie.

grandpa t drank, just like grandma t's mama use to, and grandma t took her
anger out on him verbally,

"i got a lotto ticket today, and if i win it'll be the last you'll ever see of me,

won't it lula? me and lula will be long gone before ya know it.”
and i wouldn't say a word just squeeze all the closer to her small, round body,
and grandpa t, all tall and big belly, would walk over to her shaking his head
and saying,
“isn't she cute? this here's my girlfriend lula, we been together forty years now
and i still love her like the day we were married.”
and he would squeeze my grandma t and she would snap,
“shush up old fool,”
but not so harshly now.
and mommie never paid it any mind 'cause everybody knows grandma t loves
grandpa t to death, and won't let anybody else say a word against him, or she'll
jump ya quick,
“poor man never did anything but work his fingers to the bone to support this
family, and now look how he's treated.”
and grandma t helps mommie make pictures out of fall leaves placed between
sheets of waxed paper, and she lets her use the iron that seals the pictures
together, and cooks custard from scratch just specially for her precious oldest
grandchild, first girl born to the family in twenty years,
and mommie loves her grandma t only second to her own mama.
of course her father always does his best to separate mommie from her beloved
grandma and grandpa t, and her three uncles too. complains they smoke too
many cigarettes and talk terrible.
which is true.
no one ever said the word racism, but mommie remembers staring in wonder as
grandma t dropped two steaming bags of fast food into a trash can on the way
out of a restaurant because a black person handed her the food.
i know that was one of the first times mommie saw a black person up close, and
her daddy said to say negro and not the words grandma and grandpa t used.
and grandma t talked about her nephew charles m. jansen the fourth who
changed his name to leslie decarlo and is
“queer as a three dollar bill.”
and grandpa t built mommie a wooden card rack, and growled about
“the pope and the damn catholics,”
and taught her and jess to play double pinochle by the time they were eight
years old. the whole family loves to play cards.
and mommie loves to stay at grandma and grandpa t's,
even the nights when grandpa t doesn't come home and grandma t bundles lula
up in the middle of the night and takes her to make the rounds of the bars to
find grandpa t and drag him home. jolly and cheerful as ever, he follows along
obediently, grandma t castigating him the whole way.
“old drunken fool.”
and now that they don't live on the outside of me, and only on the inside of
me, things have changed.
somewhat.

no more of the painful awkward conversations i had with them in my twenties,
“grandma, that’s racism, that’s wrong grandma,”
and her tearful accusations,
“now you’re going to come here like your uncle henry did and tell us we’re bad
after we raised you and loved you all this time,”
and me saying,
“i love you grandma, i just don’t want the boys to hear those words.”
and me not bringing it up anymore, never did bring my black second husband
anthony around,
they never even knew we were married.
it’s much easier now.
now when they blurt out some virulent racist or homophobic comment in my
head i can calmly remind them that we’ve agreed not to talk that way anymore,
and i don’t worry about it too much because their stuff is so obvious and easy to
spot, it is the subtler stuff that concerns me far more
how to see it
name it
transform it
how to recognize it in the first place
the racism and the white privilege
mostly i just take for granted it’s there, whether i recognize what form it is
taking or not, and then do my best to listen and learn, keeping my eyes and
heart open.
not like when i was with anthony and called myself white liberal while secretly
believing i was more beautiful and desirable than any black woman.
the way the women in anthony’s family put me to shame down there in
granville, louisiana,
hot house flowers growin’ in open sewer ditches, gator ran up in the neighbors
yard back a year ago and took their dog, watch out they don’t take a baby
too, and the kids admonished not to play in the cane fields for the snakes,
and plug up all the holes around your house, too, snake’ll git in, huge flyin’
cockroaches, and swarms of mosquitos, and rain in the middle of a sunny
afternoon, pavement steaming, and mommie soaking up the heat like a grateful
reptile, kids playin’ in yards, and goin’ in the cane fields and strayin’ too close
to the ditches like they ain’t supposed to do, and the mouth watering smell
of food cookin’, and the sound of the boombox booming r&b oldies or the
blues, and mommie, the bountiful, beautiful white girl in their midst, getting
her proper comeuppance,
“white girl’s is nasty.”
“can’t cook.”
“can’t clean house ‘n don’ change dey draws.”
gina, anthony’s cousin, mimicking mommie’s dancing, and mommie so full of
herself it takes her the longest time to figure out she is being mocked by the
entire room.

hot shame.
i'm better,
not only is my skin bright, i'm white,
not only do i have good hair, i have naturally straight hair,
not only am i fine, i was born that way.
and mommie betraying mizzle, whipping him with a belt 'cause she felt so out
of it, wanted so badly to please anthony, to fit in.
and because it was child abuse when she did it, mommie judging the black
side of granville as child abusers for whipping their kids, even after anthony
told her he didn't "feel 'bused by no whippin's" and that all the kids around
granville got whippin's,
and mommie would shake her head and say,
"poor anthony, you don't even know when you're abused."
and although she doesn't have a name for it, mommie consciously recognizing
her white privilege for the first time, realizing that even if she was never going
to be accepted in granville, she could just leave, go back to seattle where old
white men at the supermarket make racist comments and mommie can't bring
anthony home to dinner, or pheonix, where young white men in trucks throw
beer cans screaming "nigger lover", or new orleans where all the good jobs
are reserved for whites, and lots and lots of other places, in fact damn near
the whole country where, by myself, i will be accepted with open arms on the
basis of my race,
being white.
i remember the pain and isolation of being the only white person to live on
the black side of granville, where i was not welcomed with open arms, but
where the black women often treated me better than i ever treated them with
my lady bountiful act.
ella mae, anthony's mama taught me how to fry the chicken golden brown, boil
the red beans and rice, stew the turkey necks, and lightly steam the fat pink
shrimps and the pale green cabbages in the salty, yellow butter.
and all the women in the family came down hard when anthony threatened
to hit me.
beatings is something that's not tolerated by the black women of granville.
it's common knowledge that if you hit your woman she's likely gonna come
back on you, and you better get your ass out of town for awhile.
lena mae, patrick's auntie, talked about ginia up the way and how she threw hot
grits on her man when he did her wrong.
and mommie is impressed.
the women in her family usually sit around wringing their hands silently when
their men beat them.
or worse, we protect them,
endlessly saving and fixing,
and making excuses about how tired he is from work and all the stresses of
being a man.

“you have to please that man,”
grandma o, my dad’s mom, would always say.
and mommie would always ask
“why?”
and grandma o would say,
“that’s just the way it is.”
never drove a car or held a paid job in her life my grandma o bore four children,
working from morning ‘til night cooking, and cleaning, and sewing, and quilt-
ing, and gardening, and growing those delicate purple and white african violets
in her kitchen windowsill,
she liked to see flowers.
canning pears, and peaches, and plums, and tomatoes, and green beans, and
baking bread and oatmeal cookies, and lefse. mommie would watch with big
eyes as grandma o dipped the heavy metal irons in the creamy white batter and
placed them in the big kettle of hot oil, deep frying the rosettes, taking them out,
dipping them in sugar, and placing one of the flower shaped confections, still
warm, in my small outstretched hand,
“it melts in my mouth grandma.”
she crocheted, and tatted, and embroidered pillowcases, tending to the young,
and the sick, reading her bible, and doing good works down at the messiah
lutheran church,
and in return she got accused of fucking the milkman and beat down hard and
regular by my,
“get me some salt woman, this food in’t cooked right,”
grandpa o,
one of thirteen shoeless immigrant children on a dirt farm in north dakota he
went to school through the third grade and thought the moon was bigger than
the sun because it looked that way in the sky. the same one who raped his
daughter, my aunt leann, and she ended up an alcoholic with agoraphobia,
and my grandma o would run around like edith bunker on *all in the family*,
getting the salt, fixing the food, and groveling,
for the same one who beat her claiming johnny, the baby, wasn’t his,
the same one who died an old man of a stroke while raping my fourteen year
old cousin cassie.
and mommie longed, ignorant and desperate, to be accepted by the powerful,
close knit women of granville.
of course being a hooker was a different story. mommie knew better than
to even dream of being accepted as a hooker and she never told anyone in
granville, especially not anthony, that she worked the streets off and on.
in fact mommie had financed the trip to granville by turning a few tricks.
mommie and anthony leaving six year old dmac and tmac with mommie’s father
up in bellingham (something mommie will regret all her life), and heading south
with eight year old mizzle.
the car broke down outside reno where they decided to take a detour and get

married,
and even though mommie hit her hunch on roulette the first night and they
ate at a fancy restaurant and got married at one of those quicky little wedding
chapel places,
standing up before strangers,
they ended up stranded and broke,
and when they didn't have money for another day at the motel mommie went
out "job hunting" and made seven hundred dollars in a day,
telling anthony,
"guess what? my mama wired us some money."
and i was damn lucky i didn't get caught down there in nevada 'cause they're
real hard on outlaw hookers bein's they wanna pimp ya themselves.
no, i never told a soul in granville about being a hooker, even after ella mae
schooled me on how it used to be a woman could lay down with a man and
come morning he'd give her twenty dollars, but that nowadays all the "mens
wants it fer nuthin 'n a woman can't hardly makes it no mo"
and patrick told mommie about ramona up the way, and how "she think she so
much," because she got "all dat big ol' booty" and a rich white man from the
city that gives her money, and mommie is amazed that ramona inspires jealousy
and gossip, but also grudging admiration, and having a fat ass is a good thing,
and getting paid is smart.
but mommie doesn't say a word,
she's learned the hard way that most men will use it against you if they know
you're a hooker,
and besides, mommie is mostly not doing that anymore,
she's trying to be "good,"
she's not strung out,
and what's more she's in love,
mommie can hide.

And now look at Mommie.

Mommie is a juror.

And this whole jury duty fiasco is just the type of thing Mommie always
gets us into! Does she ever stop to think about the consequences of her actions?
Sure she means well, but so did Mother Theresa. Personally, I'd just as soon
stay home and write myself, but I suppose if Mommie didn't get us into this
stuff I wouldn't have much to write about.

And there's Mommie, taking the train home from downtown after her first
day on jury duty, head buried in J.T. Leroy's *Sarah*, scanning the lines quickly,
pink tongue flickering over orangish-red lips, funky punk hairstyle threatening
to escape her scarf, curves bulging out of her middle class disguise.

That's Mommie, always got her nose buried in some book or scribbling on
some paper, forty years old and still looking sexy as hell, dressed like a slut,
reading her poetry out loud on the street, and sometimes attracting an audience.

which she loves. Why just the other day Mommie was walking down the street reciting her poetry when two young men stopped her.

"Excuse me, what's that you're reading?" one of the boy's asked, the shorter one with the thick glasses.

"It's my new poem called *Why Is It Okay to Hate A Ho*, ya wanna hear it?" Mommie replied.

"Sure" the boys answered in unison and Mommie began reading to them and an older lady stopped to listen too.

Why is it okay to hate a ho?

Have you ever asked yourself this fundamental question?

I don't want to be another one of those dead girls by the freeway,
those dead hookers.

"Well what can you expect?"

"A prostitute."

Hate speech

is hate crime.

Don't perpetrate on me.

Existing within cruel dualities,

false moralities abound.

Don't make me the bitch

to your good girl

'cause you ain't no better than me

at least not based on my status

as a prostitute

a slut

a ho

or any other name

you use to discredit me

lower me

raise your own hopes.

Existing within cruel hierarchies

I ask myself,

how do I participate?

Who do I hate?

Who is it justified to hate?

And why is it okay?

Because god said so?

Because the georges decreed it?

stole it,

desecrated it.

Rape an every day reality.

Who are you in bed with?

Whose ideas do you share?

Are they the same ones who hate on you?
For you to be virtuous
for you to be precious
for you to be wife
cannot depend
on my subjugation.
Don't make me the dirt to your cleanliness,
the bad to your good,
the other,
against which
decent women,
women worthy of love,
of security, of life itself
can be measured.
Don't make me the crumpled up body
at the bottom of your trash heap.
Judgment and hate
are toxic to all.
Be yourself.
Live up to your own expectations.
Have the courage to do it
without the obligatory other—
the dirty, trashy ho
that's me

When Mommie finished reading her poem the boys looked a bit taken aback but the older lady patted her arm and said, "That's real good honey, real good."

Hell ya, hanging out with Mommie can be embarrassing as hell, but guaranteed to be interesting.

Not that she always feels so strong.

Watching herself on the train, closing *Sarah*, shutting her eyes, and taking a deep breath, struggling to understand everything that has happened that day. The smiling cops, scary in the way of evil clowns, and the judge sitting up all high. Nola Newberg's fetching ways, Richard Perez's twitchy nose, and the back of Lamar Lee's beautifully shaped head lined in straight, thick, cornrows.

Alternate juror. What the fuck does that mean? Mommie is pretty sure she knows. She is a substitute, only there in the case another juror falls ill. It's maddening! Here Mommie is trying so hard to be all slick and what happens? She is placed in a position where her hands are tied! The judge said the trial will last up to three days, and now Mommie will not be staying at home writing, nor is she likely to be allowed to vote on the verdict for the case.

Her hands are tied and Mommie is furious.

Fuming along, she walks the forty five minutes from the train station to her friend Ashley's house where she stops to water her plants. She has been keeping

them in Ashley's yard since the weather turned so hot. There are too many to water inside every day. Mommie tells Ashley and her housemate Nell all about her day, about being "lucky" (ya right) thirteen, the alternate.

"Can you believe it? It just sucks so bad!" Mommie gets all stressed out and keyed up, and finally goes out in the yard and waters her plants. She starts to calm down among the hearty green and yellow philodendrons, the elegant dark green mauna loa's blooming their tall white flowers, and the big fat round jade tree Boosey gave her for their anniversary. Mommie starts to feel better, but then doesn't let herself. She feels a big jab of resentment as she bends over to water her wandering Jew, and her mother-in-law's tongue stabs her smack in the eye.

Mommie feels a sharp pain as the long, pointed leaf goes into her eye at an angle, shoving itself up under her eyelid, but thankfully over to the side toward her ear, away from her iris and pupil. Mommie's eyelid has been flipped inside out, and she smears it back down with her palm. The pain is blinding. Mommie presses her eye with the heel of her hand, snot running out of her nose like crazy, eye watering like mad, and the pain more intense when she lets the pressure off her eye. She hops around, groaning and moaning "shit" and "fuck," and wondering how bad it is.

She wets a cloth with the hose, holds it to her eye, and makes her way home, feeling miserable and sorry for herself, and hoping against hope that somehow Boosey is back already, that she has come home early. Aching to see the truck, her hopes rise and fall as she rounds corner and finds the driveway empty. Mommie goes inside and brushes her teeth, climbing the stairs to her and Boosey's room with a heavy heart and a throbbing eye she flops onto the bed and falls into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Mommie is real big on finding the so-called reasons for things.

She uses her own system which involves dreams, the metaphysical causations for illness, and conversations with her grandmas, along with a feeling she gets that cannot be pinpointed to any one spot in her anatomy. Upon waking, Mommie tries to remember her dreams, and coming up with none activates the rest of her system.

An injury has occurred and a reason must be found.

The first part is easy, she has been poked in the eye, she is supposed to see something.

The second part is more difficult. What is she supposed to see? The obvious thing is something to do with the jury duty situation, a little less obvious could have to do with Boosey, or any one of her five children, or something else entirely. Has she been slack in showing her respect to the ancestors? Has she behaved ungratefully? Is there danger here? Does the pain mean guilt, or is it a stop sign?

The situation is further complicated by the fact that Mommie was injured in her right eye by a similar plant approximately twenty years ago. Last time the plant lacerated her iris and pupil and she had to go to the eye doctor and wear

an eye patch and to this day her right eye aches when she is too tired. This time the pain is gone by morning, although the whole left side of her eye is almost solid blood red, and while there are important differences, having the same type of obscure injury twice has happened to Mommie before and she always gives the fact that it is the second time around great credence.

But what does it mean?

Mommie starts to stress out a little, and then remembers that stressed out was her frame of mind when she lowered her eyeball onto the sharp leaf, so she lights a joint of sweet organic homegrown of the type that is lime green and coated with sparkly white crystals, and asks the grandmas the meaning of her injury, but as is often true, they don't answer her directly. grandma Helena suggests trying the letting go trick, and Mommie decides to open her heart and mind to the important message she is meant to receive. She sits with that idea for a minute and then gets dressed.

Today Mommie dresses a little more like her usual self in her new sleeveless thrift shop Tommy Hillfucker jean dress that hugs her still kickin' figure in all the right places and has the snaps that get Boosey so excited all up and down the front. She slips into her pretty black and gold sandals and ties a pale blue scarf over her unruly hair as she gazes at her reflection in the mirror, assessing once again the damage to her crimson colored left eye. Mommie decides that the reason or reasons for her injury will be revealed all in good time, and that she needs to remain open and alert.

As she boards the number nine bus to downtown, Mommie glances at the watch of the man sitting next to her, and notes with satisfaction that she is actually on time, and since everyone always says that Mommie will be late to her own funeral it is obvious she is taking the whole jury duty thing real serious.

Mommie arrives at the courthouse fifteen minutes early making it through the security checkpoint and up to the jury room with five minutes to spare. Most of the other jurors have already arrived and Jeffrey directs Mommie to a jury room adjacent to the courtroom.

"Excuse me, Jeffrey" Mommie says before entering the room, "what exactly does it mean to be an alternate juror?"

"Well, it means you will take the place of anyone who falls ill. You will attend the trial in it's entirety, just as if you were going to deliberate, but as long as none of the other jurors fall ill or have an emergency you will leave before the actual deliberations start."

"Great." Mommie mumbles to herself as she enters the small room which is dominated by a large square table with chairs all around. She sits down, sighing heavily and scrutinizes her fellow jurors.

Two middle aged, middle class, white women are striking up a conversation.

"I'm on a low carb diet called *The Carbohydrate Addicts Guide to Sanity*."

"I'm on the blood type diet. I'm an O, so it's meat, vegetables, and fruit for my blood type."

“I’ve lost thirty five pounds.”

“I’m down twenty and still losing.”

The women are absolutely shivering with joy now that they have found someone to talk diets with, and Mommie, who was raised on such fare, tries to join in.

“I’m interested in finding out about the blood type diet.”

The women turn and look at her, and the more social worker looking one doesn’t seem as repulsed by Mommie as the more manager looking type, although they both register a reaction.

Kind of like they are afraid something dirty might touch them. Their excitement abruptly cooled, they look constipated by the dubious social pressures of needing to include Mommie.

I guess my slut was showing. After all, I’d already been picked and there was no need to keep dressing ugly. It wasn’t like I went all overboard or something, but my dark blue jean dress does cling nicely to my curves, and the front slit does come half way up my bare thighs when I sit down, and my black and gold sandals are, after all, Italian made, and awfully pretty for a \$4.99 Goodwill score.

I think I even paid for them.

Mommie looks at the women inquiringly, as if she doesn’t notice their rude behavior, and says, all sweet and smiling, “Hi. I’m Lula Taylor, the alternate, and you are?”

“Liz Green,” the social worker type that turned out to be a travel agent says with a fakey lookin’ smile.

“And I’m Dorris Glink,” the one that turns out to be a retail manager intones frostily, no smile from her as she turns pointedly back to her new diet buddy, her voice becoming once again chatty and familiar.

“Like I was saying, I’m a carbohydrate addict...”

Mommie turns the other direction, looking for friendlier waters and encounters a beautiful spring. She wades in.

“Hi, I’m Lula.”

“Hi, I’m Juliette.” and Mommie remembers the shy voice from the voir dire, and that the possessor of the voice is a college student.

“Hey, how are you this morning?”

“I’m okay, and you?”

“Oh I’m a little tired, you know.”

We smile at one another shyly.

“Don’t you go to college?”

“Ya, I go to P.U.”

“Me too!”

There doesn’t seem to be much to say after that and Mommie listens to snatches of various conversations around the room.

“Oh I would never diet. I have hollow legs. Got laid off from my office job, and now I run a machine down at Nabisco, eat cookies all day long and

never gain a pound...”

“My blood pressure has been through the roof lately. I already survived a major heart attack and the medicine they give me just doesn’t seem to help...”

“...two sons and a daughter. I write inspirational articles for online magazines, I’ve been published in *Jesus Today*...”

“I’m former medical personnel but I stay home now...”

Mommie surveys the room. There are three older white men sitting in a row across the room from Mommie, along with two white women, one stout, silent, and silver haired, probably in her sixties or seventies, and the other mousy and mid thirties, who stares at the floor a lot. Then Mommie realizes that most of the jurors in the room were the ones who didn’t say much during the voir dire. She adds this to her repertoire of information about what the court wants in a juror: somebody who doesn’t say much.

Along the short wall to Mommie’s right is Ms. Former Medical Personnel, a white heavy set brunette with a big blob of nose pasted above her weak chin and small, dissatisfied eyes. She is seated next to another white middle aged woman. It is only Juliette and I along our wall and to our left are the diet queens, along with the inspirational writer, a very slender women with gobs of black hair and three distinct shades of eye shadow.

Mommie feels the conversation in the room lacks direction and tries to help things along.

“Well now, what do you guys think about the long sentences being given out these days?”

One of the white guys, the tall one with the big hands and hollow legs that runs a machine down at Nabisco answers her.

“I wish somebody would give me a bed and three free meals a day, har, har, har.” he says, guffawing as if he has said something funny.

“I’m not sure you would say that if you knew what prison is like,” Mommie retorts quickly, maybe a little too quickly. “I mean... uh... I studied it at school, ya know? I’ve read a lot about it and it’s not a nice place. Prison is no joke.” and Mommie begins to see that she may have a big role here even if she is only the alternate, and suddenly she feels sure that this is what she is supposed to see. Instead of being resentful she is supposed to spend her time trying to help Lamar Lee by educating her fellow jurors.

An uncomfortable silence follows, which is broken by Mr. High Blood Pressure.

“We’ll have to pick a foreman.”

“They don’t call it foreman anymore, its called foreperson now.” Hollow Legs reports proudly, looking around for approval for being p.c.

Instead Blob Nose snorts loudly.

“I liked it better when it was *foreman*.” she says, looking at Mommie pointedly.

“It’ll always be Grant Avenue to me.” Mr. High Blood Pressure announces to no one in particular, and Mommie bristles, realizing he means the street that

was renamed for Martin Luther King.

Not finding any support for being p.c. Hollow Legs changes tracks and nods solemnly.

“We just have to realize there are some things we don’t want to change. It’ll always be Grant Avenue to you, and foreman to you.” he says, gesturing expansively at Blob Nose and Bad Heart, and before a simmering Mommie can even formulate a retort, Jeffrey opens the door.

“Sorry for the wait, the trial is starting and the judge is ready for you now.”

To be continued...

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