



## LATE PASS

by caron levis

Do I wanna pass?

Don't even bother to turn my head, cause Ms. Anders like one a those automated announcements in the subways nobody listen to less you a tourist or lost. And you know I no tourist to lateness in these halls. And I not lost. My direction been mapped out for me in permanent ink. Today's the day and none of her little late, bathroom, or hallway passes gonna do nothin for me.

She not pausin anyway. Her heels just keep on clickin. Been weeks since anybody bugged on me bout anything in this school. Nothin like a shot up dead brother to keep teachers off your back, right Ms. A?

Click, click.

Yeah, thas what I thought.

Head on into the stairwell and pull the c-bun outta my pocket. Same 99 cent shit I always do, but today this frosting lookin like pus, for real. Rip the plastic, and chomp this sweaty cinnamon

anyhow. Just gonna haveta deal with the fact that when you don't catch enough sleep your hunger hides on you and you start hearin the ghosts of bells hangin round.

Do I wanna pass. Please. Head up the down case two steps at a time.

I mean to go inta class but somehow I'm pausin at the door, lookin through the glass at how the colors on the girls sweaters is so bright today. Everything so bright today. Even dull-boy Angelo at the sharpener. And those shavings falling in slow-mo. Everything's slow-mo. Ms. Diamond scratchin on the board, Cherish pourin her gossip inta Monique's ear, Hector slappin Dwight on the head every time he turn around, Raz goin to town tagging up his desk, Shawanna, Daiquan, and Kendell sittin real serious as usual, and my girl Kiarra readin away and sucking on one a her cherry suckers with that cute, I-Concentrating, look. Everything same as same as.

Cept nothing same as.

Used to be we in the same video game but now it's like I'm watchin a movie from the very last seat. Outside the theater even.

Kiarra look up and mouths me a *mornin, baby*, then she go back to reading. But knowin that I watchin now, she sucking on that cherry sucker real sexy. Sliding it cross her lips. Wrapping her tongue round it all slow. Wouldn't mind getting sucked like that till I disappeared. Course, if I was a sucker I'd wanna be grape.

Tower was always sayin grape the best flava. Tellin me how ladies in Italy stomp on grapes under they feet to make wine. Said he learned that from some TV show and when he had the dough,

he was goin straight to Italy where you pound the food all day while the ladies with the big tits pour the wine and you drink and get mad drunk and just look at the stupid vines growin up to the sun. And then you play on the Playstation when all that gets old.

Maybe he with the grape ladies right now.

Ma likes to talk bout heaven. But you believe in heaven, you gotta believe in the other and I don't know how Ma fools that it's upward T going. But maybe Italy. Maybe he get that chlorophyll in him and turn into something like a vine that don't gotta do nothing but grow up to the sun. Maybe Mr. Fadden know somethin bout that. I'll ask him bout it in science. That's the only class worth comin in for. Even when nothing's making sense, things be making sense in science.

An science be soon I guess, cause everybody's jumpin, packin up they ELA shit now and headin out. Even in slow mo this day's moving fast. Bells. Guess I'm saved by them again.

Don't remember much about the funeral cept those bells. And lottsa black clothes. Ma yellin in the morning tryin to get my feet in some shinies not gettin that these the last sneaks on his feet and I'm gonna wear em till they fall off, a'ight? Then some words fallin out the preacher's mouth and some lady sayin that you can never read enough bible. Horns on the highway, one freak bird somewhere squawkin, and the noise coming outta my Ma—

That sound scrape out your insides. Pull the pulp outta you like you nothin but a pumpkin on Halloween. And ears don't got no off buttons so when they start chiming those bells I busy myself with findin the place where the sound ends and the silence begin. I'm not hearin ma's pain or nothing else that's goin down on the ground. Jus seein. How it's time now to go. Walk away. Leave

my brother here by himself. His boys, my boys, all walkin in they big glasses and big jackets, shakin heads, lookin at me like yeah, you know. And me knowin. What all I gotta do now. Dust for dust. Eye to eye. Ye now I walk.

The old ladies they say God have a plan.

Mr. Fadden say every action got a reaction.

The boys just come tap me on the shoulder and say—

“Let’s go, baby.”

Hands so tight around my neck almost lose my air. Kiarra pulling me outta my mind, quick kissing my face, tellin me, come on—then remembering how shit, she got to give something to somebody so, shoot, nevermind, she’ll see me in science. Gives me sticky cherry lips but before I can get my tongue in there she gone.

Everybody scurrying round the halls to get to class or somewhere good to cut. I just walk mad slow through all of it cause none of it matter. Kids given me a wave or just gettin out of my way, depending. Thing is I only seein them below the neck. Looking for that place where the heart’s sposed to be. Under those tight t-shirts with the bra’s edging through, under the hoodies, and the jackets. Got to be able to take aim no matter what’s on the outside. Lift my arm at this green parka covered spot to practice. Line it up right. Close my hand around this trigger made a air, give it a pull, and the invisible bullet it goes racing right through the hallway; past girls laughin and tuggin they

braids, past punks rappin, home work swappin, but nobody even twinge. Which is crazy. Cause you ever heard a gunshot up close?

Make all your cellular activity stop.

Open the door to science and see straightaway that Fadden not here. Some scrubstitute all up in my face asking me bout what's my name and where's my late pass and talking bout how even though she just fillin in there no reason not to be answerin her and the way she tryin to look me in the eyes, I see she don't know. She don't know. Everybody in the school know, but she new, so she don't know.

Kiarra up and pulls on her, whisperin some stuff in her ear and the way scrubstitute back off quick and let all the air outta her body, you can tell that she know now. And she will be leavin me be like the rest of the teachers been leavin me be. If Mr. Fadden was here like he sposed to be, he'd be leavin me be too, but he leave me be like I'm a man who need space, not like the rest of em leavin me be like I'm a bomb. I walk on to the back.

Fadden the only one still on me to graduate. Get to high school. But he's absent so guess we not coming up with that topic for my exit-project today. Not coming up with—

What the fuck all these tissues doin on my desk?

Raz. He over there sittin by the door crackin up his shit and slappin Hector some palm.

Cuppin his hands and yellin to me like I mad far away or deaf or somethin.

"Thas so you can wipe it off, son."

He did not just say that shit. Damn. Chicken-legged little sucker gettin too bold. Now I'm gonna have to do somethin bout it, cause thas what you do in this life. I straighten up justa remind him of my height. Raz, barely makin five feet himself.

"Shut the fuck up." I tell him.

"Whatchyu gonna do?" He push his chin up at me. "You gonna jump me or you gonna sit your ass thinkin on it for your lifetime?" He grinnin big now. A buncha *Awww shiiiiittttttsssss* risin up from the room. No he didn't.

I toss the desk over and *bam*—tissues fly all up in the air. Everybody look up like damn. I lookin right at Raz, but out the corners I see Kiarra lookin worried at me and scrubstitute froze like a popsicle. Tissues the only things in motion, comin down like giant snowflakes. Thas the power. When you can freeze time and people's breath you know you got it. For this second it's all mine. Not that I asked for it.

I just look Raz up and down. And watch the way he is scared. Maybe nobody else see it, but today my eyes like a close-up camera, and I can see how his breath is makin that cross on his shirt go up and down like it's trying to pop on up to heaven in a hurry. It's funny how we all dependin on something so invisible. Only time you notice breathin is when it—

Damn—Raz askin me whatchyu gonna do. Why don't he just quit it? Why can't nobody ever just quit it?

I kick the desk at him. Hard. Tell him he better get that fuckin smile off his face or I'm gonna have to smack it off. Let some words fly about him watchin himself and needin those hankies for his own ass and to quit playin me

Fuck Raz. If he'd been born my way stead that Dominican cocoa-powder, we might be runnin crews for the same gang like back when we was playin on that basketball team together. But, you know. Things the way they is, he on the other side a my fist, deservin the beating he bout to get, cause fuck him talkin like I'm not gonna do what I gotta do, fuck that. You know I'm not about to let this shit go down without the proper protocol. Please. He was my brother. I'm gonna do him my respect. Just been takin my time, thas all. Cause it's got to be done right. Want my brothers killer sweatin himself near to dehydration fore I come to put him out of his miserability. I do it when I'm good and ready.

Which I guess I am since, yesterday, Skillz, he call up sayin that today the day. Been long enough he said. This shit need be wrapped up. People startin to doubt. Gonna pick you up for the drive, he said. After dismissal, he told me, you be first one out that door. You. Be. There. And I said, yeah, fine by me. Cause I am good and—Raz don't know nothin bout nothin. He just got a big mouth and it's right here, in my sites, wide open for me to slam closed. I grab his collar. He put up his hands and I stomp on his foot. His face twist all up—so baby face, it's like we still on the playground with him cryin bout big kids stealin his hoodie—this hoodie thas slippin outta my hand, why's it slippin and and why my steppin back, and why my lettin him go? I'm the big kid, lettin him

go. Cause though I smash Raz's face a buncha times before this day, I'm tired, mad tired and I just don't wanna.

Hope to hell I didn't say that out loud.

Everybody in freezeframe—for a second—then Raz duck away, Shawanna giggle, somebody walk out the door, and it's over. Kiarra trying to get my attention, but I just sit back down in my chair wonderin what the fuck is wrong with me that I can't do the most regular things you supposed to do in a day like eat my breakfast and crush Raz's face.

Scrubstitute tryin to get back control. Leaning down to pick the tissues up offa the floor. When she come up she lookin at me and I see that curious kinda look on her face. Noticing the ink under my eye. The outline of my tear. Yeah, I could tell her, it's real. It's permanent. But she don't ask. She the skinny, blouse tucked in but always droppin pens type. Kind that just asking to get mowed. She not gonna do nothin. Nobody gonna do nothin. Fadden absent and he the only one and fuck Fadden. Fuck Fadden. He don't get it. This like ancient, old time shit now. Gang rules like the last remnants of the gallant ages. Somebody disrespect your family, the damsels, the treasure, then the knights step up. You step up. You do what you gotta. You can't just be absent. Fadden say it himself. Objects in motion stayin in motion.

"Would you hold up?"

Turn around and see the door shuttin right on scrubstitutes frownin face. Kiarra comin after me.

Let her grab my hand and slow me down.

"Where you going?" she wanna know.

Let her run her arms round my waist and up and down my back one time before I shrug her off and put my hands safe in my pockets. Her softness too contagious to take part in today.

"You a'right?" she asks.

You know how if you stare at somebody's eyes close enough you can see them seein you? I am lookin at the me in her eyes and he is so small, and far away, and lost lookin that if I didn't know who she was staring at I wouldn't know it was me. Couldn't pick myself outta a line up today.

"Tired," I say like it's the usual. Can't tell her. Not spose to tell nobody. Wonder what would happen if I didn't tell her at all and tomorrow I just come to school and she jump and hug me same way she doin today. Wonder if she could tell the difference. If touching me will feel different tomorrow. Maybe my hand'll be rougher to hold.

I take my hand out my pocket but it's kinda shakin so I put it back. Look up to her to see if I can tell her somethin without telling her.

"What is it 'Lique?"

She grab my arm and it's too much. My knees almost bring me down to the floor.

"Nothin," I say. Shouldn't tell her cause she might not let me go through with it. She might try to stop me somehow.

"What is it, 'Lique? For real? I do something?"

"No. Nah. Jus I can't do nothing after school today with you, thas it."

She smile and laugh a little. "That's it? I got practice anyways, so I not gonna cry for your absence, no need to worry. I'll be okay."

I nod. She not hearin me.

"Won't be able to answer the phone, either. Ima be on business."

"Well okay, fine. I'll be too busy to call you anyway." She tryin to be all sass. She don't like it when people say how she overboard for me.

"Might not be able to call for a while. Dependin...."

"We better get back in—"

"Damn girl, I'm tryin to say..."

"So, what are you tryin to say?" She roll her eyes at me.

"That I got somethin to do today."

She frown at me. Startin to get it.

I wait for her eyes to fill with those tears and start beggin me not to like she did when she first heard what I was meant to do. Maybe if she shed enough of em she could convince me. But all she do is take in one slow breath through that pretty nose of hers and say,

"Well, I'll leave my phone on loud. You do what you gotta do, and call me when you can."

Then she let go of my arm.

"I better get back to class, you coming?"

Shake my head.

She stick her finger in my face.

“You be careful. Hear? And then you call me.” She drop her finger on my chest. “Real, careful.” Then she turn and go.

Damn. Look at her handling it professional, just like I told her to. Told her I wouldn’t stand for no drama. Never thought she’d actually listen to me, though. Thought she’d keep cryin and beggin me not to do it. But there she goes. I watch her back-pockets weaving down the hall till they disappear, thinkin about how we never even did it yet. She keep sayin we will but always she got some excuse about why not. She a good girl. Studies. Got all these future dreams about shit. Maybe I’ll go off to jail and never do it with this girl. Damn. My stomach droppin like an elevator cut loose. Jet myself around the corner into the bathroom and make it to a stall to toss my breakfast.

Teacher bathroom may look cleaner than ours but it still smells like shit under all that rotten lemon ammonia crap. Rinse out my mouth and check out the mirror. First time I took off the gauze, and saw this drop inked under my eye, it was like seeing some birthmark I never knew I had. But still, I always gotta double glance like how you do when you forget you got a new haircut and you not yet knowin yourself. I look good in my brothers hoodie even if I don’t fill it in the shoulders like he did. Don’t know what’s wrong with me, gettin all sick like this. Cheap-ass bodega bun probably expired. Settle myself on the radiator by the window to chill for a sec. Last time I puked was that night after I got inked.

The boys’d been fillin me up with hard stuff taste like fire since we got outta my house away from the napkins, and the food, and the damn shames. Passed me the blunt saying I won’t feel a

thing. Won't feel a thing and laying me down on the table on that paper that crinkles like in a doctor's. Photos on the walls of people showin off they fresh tats. Some of them real nasty. And it's too late when I remember the reason I don't smoke much is cause it do the exact opposite of what they saying. Make me feel everything more. Feel my own liquids sloshing, my skin sweating, hair growing, I swear. So when that needle come down, my skin it scorches and that pain under my eye not dulled by nothing. Feel like lasers be slicing permanent holes for my everything to leak out of. And I am wishing that all my years be leaking out, bringin me back to before when I knew nothin bout how much this world isn't and how much I want and how much I won't.

"Keep your eyes closed, kid," they sayin. "Les a spark jump in."

So I do. And this tear's being etched into my face forever. For always. For Tower.

"Just the outline for now," they reminding the man giving me the pain, "He be comin back for fillin it in."

Fillin it in.

After I even things up for T, I come back and ink man be fillin it in.

Remember beach one time and Tower diggin the hole, to the Chinese, he say,

"All the way," he's grinnin and telling me, "look down in there and you can see it."

"See what?" I ask him.

"The other side," he says.

So I look down and it's cool on my face and then he shoving me in, crackin up, and pouring the sand in on top. And I am yelling I HATE YOU I HATE YOU.

And the louder I get the more he know I'm loving it. T never push me into a hole he couldn't lift me out of and his arms they are skinny but they are strong as I want my arms to be some day. So I start laughin and with two hands, he's tossin the piles of sand and keeps fillin it in, fillin it in till feels like a hug to tell the truth—and I hope that's what it feels like for Tower now he's down there in that ground. It'd be okay then. All those dirt clumps. Like a hug.

Who the hell's touchin me?

Open my eyes and some Mr. Idunno, shakin me and telling me this for faculty only. Nasty taste in my mouth. Itchy hot.

Get to class, teacher's sayin, you know what period it is?

Damn ringin in my ear, always got to be ringin. I shake this motherfucker off and tell him to fuck himself. Yeah, I know what time it is. I know.

But now I'm wonderin if it got to the end of the day already somehow, cause not even one ass is sitting in the hallway cuttin. Then I see it's cause security up here for a stroll and I flip quick to walk away, but hey, what I got to be worried bout security for?

"You got a pass?"

It's the dumpy one with the braids who don't even try to pretend he like us and who always eating some sandwich dripping with eggs.

"What for?"

"Get to class."

He eyeballin me toe to head. Cause he know me too. He know it all. Just nothin he can do bout it. I hear them sayin it. How even though they know shit's bound to go down, all they allowed to do is wait for it to happen.

"You kill somebody ever?" I ask just to mess with him. And cause I'd like to know.

He don't answer, just look me up and down, deciding how he want to take this shit today.

"Get to class," he says.

"I got to go to the nurse," I tell him.

He just grunt and let me go.

Even if he guessed what day today was he'd still have to let me go.

Might as well go to the nurse for real cause in fact my stomach still illin.

Watch my feet goin down, down, down the stairs in T's shoes. Try breathing through my mouth cause smells in here like kids who don't shower. Everything metal and dirty. Skillz joke that jail just like school cept you don't got to worry bout what to wear. Come out on the bottom floor and go over to the nurse. Line for a mile. Mostly fakers, probably, tryin to get outta a test or homework or somethin.

I'm just gonna get me an ice-pack to steady this hand and cool my head a bit.

See some sixth-grader baby up on the wall holding his knee. Got blood seepin through his jeans. Looks scared. Looks familiar maybe. Rest the kids mouthin bout who beatin who in what

game, and that girl said you not gonna believe what she said, and how wack ELA is, and I am seeing all these words they saying, like you see breaths in winter. What they talking bout sounding like fairytales. We might be in the same building but I in a whole other place.

This baby' tearing over his trickle of blood. Kid shoulda seen what come outta my brother's head. It didn't come out all pretty like in the movies neither. It thump out with this weird beat, like a cripple walkin down the block one raggedy spurt at a time. Wonder if NME's gonna bleed the same way. He best bleed the same way.

Malcolm. Somebody told me that. Skillz told me to forget it. He NME and thas that. He don't need no other name. He just a blurry motherfucker in my mind, but somebody told me it's Malcolm. Wonder where Malcolm spending his day. Last day. He don't know it. But he spending it. Hope he not wasting it in some nurse's line.

"Are you kidding?"

Nurse rollin her eyes at some kid telling him there's nothing wrong with him, but damn, you know there's something's wrong with me. Thinking like this. You got to keep your mind narrowed on NME just like your weapon, Skillz says, and don't let nothin distract. It ain't no thing. He says first time you fire that piece in your hand you feel a crown come down on your head like you King of the whole damn planet.

T told me about everything else—weed, sex, stealin, everything, but when he did his first blast and I asked what's it like? He just act like he didn't hear me. Which is kinda fucked up, since—damn. Nevermind. May he rest in peace, I love him my brother I do.

“Okay, people, we’re almost at the end of the day and I am out of ice-packs.” Nurse’s lookin mad tight. “So, unless you require actual, honest to goodness care—unless you are bleeding, or burning up, do yourself a favor and get back to class or I will write you up like you have never been written up before. I am tired of making excuses for you all. You are not excused.”

She sits back down. That kid hobblin to the front of the line, trying to show his knee. She glare at him and suck her teeth. “This is not what I was set on this earth for. Don’t know what it is, but lord knows it can’t be this.”

Can’t be this.

Look at the clock and wonder if it’s right. Cause if it’s right, then it’s 17 minutes till the end of the day. How’d that happen? 17 minutes. In 17 minutes you not allowed to be in the building less you got detention or on a team or something. I’m not bleeding and I don’t got a fever. Guess I don’t require honest to goodness care. Guess I don’t got no excuse.

Walk the hall, bang, bang, bang, my knuckles on every locker. Pass by the dean’s door and door’s closed. Must be he got Other Matters. Thas how he put it when the teachers complaining about him doing nothin. I give a good slam on his door. See if his Other Matters get shaken up. Nothing. Slam one more time. What I’m here for.

Door jerks open, Dean Lowell bout to shout at whoever—till he see whoever is me. He pucker his face instead and glaze over his eyes.

“Malique, why aren’t you in class?”

I tell him I don’t know what class I got.

He don’t say nothing.

Tell him I don’t know where I’m sposed to be. Tell him maybe I not even here, maybe I’m absent.

“Fine,” he says, “I don’t have time for this. Bell rings in a few minutes. Just quit the banging till then, and you’re free to go do whatever you want.”

Whatever I want.

He start to shut the door, I stick in my foot.

“Don’t start,” he says.

“I not *starting* nothing,” I remind him.

He pausing now. Deciding if he gonna fess up to knowing what I’m talking bout. Cause he knows it. But then he’d have to let me in that office and all those Other Matters of his would be piling up to the sky and his day never be over.

“Just get back to class, Malique, and finish the day, okay?”

Finish the day.

“If I don’t, you gonna give me detention or something?”

“Detention’s filled to the brim. Six-oh-four decided to have a brawl.” He rubbing his hand over his face. “I can’t ask any more teachers to stay today.”

How the hell you sposed to get to the top of his pile a Matters?

“Cause you know I already throw a desk at Raz’s face. Maybe I go back and finish that. Should I do that?”

He just sigh. “You want me to put in a call to your mother?”

My mother.

Everybody always like to talk about my mother like she the answer to the problem of me. Please. They been trying to get her to come to the phone for years. That counselor tried to be all sneaky by sending that slip she wanted signed inside a pretty condolence card with blue glitter flowers. My ma even looked kinda pleased about that card till she saw the slip the counselor wanted her to sign so I could go to see her steada class sometimes. Ma cracked up then. “Counselor?” she says, “what the hell you need a counselor for?”

My mother.

That night they got me inked, by the time they drop me off I mad drunk and can’t believe we in the same day we started in. Don’t know how I made it up the stairs. Walk in and there platters and napkins all over, but only a few women left, cleaning. And ma. Ma over on the couch alone. And sorrow not a bird, like T once fuckin wrote up on a test. That’s a sparrow. Sorrow somethin else and ma don’t got no wings. I am illin big time now. All that booze crashing round my insides. This

burning skin under my eye, and everything spinning but there's my ma and I am thinking maybe she can make the spinning stop. Like when she used to stop the fever by pressing that damp rag on the sides of my head and saying, ah baby, baby, baby, ah baby.

Fall over the carpet on my way over there and end up on the floor with her looking into my face and I am waiting for her to fill my hole up with sand but she just takes in the mess under my eye which of course she know what it means. After all she been in this thing longer than me or T. She nods. And she go away. Come back with that damp rag in her hand that's going to wipe the fever tears away, make all the spinning stop.

"Keep it clean, son." She reach out like she gonna start dabbin, but she stop. She don't touch nothing on my face. She just toss me the cloth and sigh.

"Maybe it gonna hurt less when you fill it in."

I throw up all over the pillow and the spinning never did stop.

"Call *your* mother, you fucker." I tell Lowell and walk away. Hear him sigh and close his door. Go back to his Other Matters. School day almost done.

11 minutes. Skillz probly waiting outside. I walk on down the hall toward the front doors. First floor security getting ready to let everybody out so they can go home. End of the day. Less the bells just don't go off and we stuck here like in some kinda frozen state like what Fadden say happened in the Ice Age.

Who in charge of the bell anyway? I poke my head in the front office.

She don't even see me comin in. Busy scribblin at some papers. All alone at her desk there, doin whatever it is she do that I don't know what it is other than sign the late passes, mark people absent, give em a tissue for their gum when she catch them smackin it. Confiscate stuff. I don't really know. Maybe there's something else to it. I just don't know.

So, I close the door and walk myself over, even though students not sposed to go behind the main desk, cause I got this question. And she look up ask me what can she do for me?

But I know you don't mean it, Ms. Anders, I know what you meaning is step back and get lost. So maybe you shoulda said that. Cause look what happens when you don't say what you mean and somebody takes you serious and tries to give you an answer for real.

I wanna pass.

Don't say what, you heard me.

You telling me it's too late in the day for passes. You say the dismissal bell's going to ring any second. Well, what if it don't?

That comes outta my mouth meaner than I mean it to and now I see how you registerin who I am. Gettin scared. You a teacher and I'm a kid and here you are scared a me. But I'm just tryin to tell you. What you can do for me.

Let's make an experiment.

No, don't ask me what class am I supposed to be in. Let's see what happens if it don't go off, like a test. You not sure what I askin, but aren't you in charga the bell? I just wanna see what happen if we stop it. Cause I don't know what I'm set for and I just need a little more time to figure it out on

this earth and would you quit mumbling and makin me haveta come all close up just to hear what you saying.

Whatchyu mean it's on automatic? On a program. Unstoppable.

Now you lookin at the door, and how I closed it, and being more scared, but I'm tellin you not to be scared, don't be scared, nothing to be scared about, cause see I'm not tryin to scare you. It's for my Exit project. Newton's laws, you know. Objects in motion, right? They stay in motion....less something gets in the way, see? So, like this parta the day—the school part—it's in motion right now. Till the bell rings. So if the bell don't ring, then maybe it just keeps goin. Maybe we stretch out time.

Yeah. That makes some sense to me. Think I just found a project Fadden might like for real. So, you and me, we gonna stop the bell. Freeze time. Ice age this place.

No, don't stand up, don't tell me I need to get back to class, no, you don't get it, we got to fix this bell. Quit shakin your head. You not cooperating. Don't you want me to do an exit project? Don't you wanna see me go graduate? If Fadden was here maybe he'd get you to understand this important. This about science. And even though maybe I'm not makin any sense right now, science make sense, and I was gettin good at science, so maybe I'm set for that. But Fadden not here and you tryin to come around from behind your desk like you wanna leave so I have to put you back in the chair. And all these papers fly up and you gaspin. Tryin to get up. I hold you down and now I got my hands clamped on your mouth to keep it shut, cause what you gonna do, scream?

If I take my hands off, is that what you gonna do? Cause this not what I come in here for, you know that right? Not to get your red lipshit all on my hands, Ms. Anders. You feel me? Don't move. I just came in here for, I don't know what I came in here for, I came in here for, damn, quit it, just let me figure this out, a'ight? Cause we got 4 minutes—damn, now 3 minutes—to figure this shit out. Quit screamin. I feel you tryin, but nobody hearin you and you spittin all over my palm. Feels like I'm drowning.

Which is funny cause when I was a kid I used to think about the Olympics. Yeah. Don't know why. Wanted to be a swimmer. But you haveta know how to swim for that and I never learned and anyway that was a long time ago but sometimes, lately, I have these dreams about it. My arms pumping through water and bringing me to the edge and Tower there with a silver medal for me. Mine always silver in the dream cause his is gold for sure. He's my older brother. Everything happens to him first. T only let me join up once he tested the life out. Said, so long as we stuck together, it'd be a'right. We'd make some bills to do life how we want. I never make it to the end of that dream. Somethin always—

DAMN—

What the fuck you biting—let go, LET GO—DAMN—

Fine, go, GO. I let go, see. Go. Go scream your head off. Out the door. Fuck it. Forget it.

Forget you. You go on. You go.

You keep resting in your peace.

I'll be here.

Waitin for security—or Skillz, whoever comes first cause anyway it's too late for the experiment, right? You hear that, right?

I do.

I'm listening. I'm listening real close cause maybe, if I listen closer than anybody ever listened to nothing before, I'll find that place where the loudness stop and the quiet begin and meet you there in that spot where sound goes when it's gone, cause you hear that?

That's the bell.