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fuck

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...doesn't want your parents to think you became a **fuck**up here any more than you want your parents to...
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Page 15

...than you want your parents to think you're a **fuck**up." He blew a thin stream of smoke forcefully...
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"**Fuck** it. I'm not going anywhere with you," the...
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"The **fuck**ers flooded my room. They ruined like a hundred...
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...ve got your meal. You've got your cream. It's a **fuck**in' food pyramid."
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bottle but us not touching each other, and then she placed her hand on my leg.

Her hand just above my knee, the palm flat and soft against my jeans and her index finger making slow, lazy circles that crept toward the inside of my thigh, and with one layer between us, God I wanted her. And lying there, amid the tall, still grass and beneath the star-drunk sky, listening to the just-this-side-of-inaudible sound of her rhythmic breathing and the noisy silence of the bullfrogs, the grasshoppers, the distant cars rushing endlessly on I-65, I thought it might be a fine time to say the Three Little Words. And I steeled myself to say them as I stared up at that starriest night, convinced myself that she felt it, too, that her hand so alive and vivid against my leg was more than playful, and fuck Lara and fuck Jake because I do, Alaska Young, I do love you and what else matters but that and my lips parted to speak and before I could even begin to breathe out the words, she said, "It's not life or death, the labyrinth."

"Um, okay. So what is it?"

"Suffering," she said. "Doing wrong and having wrong things happen to you. That's the problem. Bolívar was talking about the pain, not about the living or dying. How do you get out of the labyrinth of suffering?"

"What's wrong?" I asked. And I felt the absence of her hand on me.

"Nothing's wrong. But there's always suffering, Pudge. Homework or malaria or having a boyfriend who lives far away when there's a good-looking boy lying next to you. Suffering is universal. It's the one thing Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims are all worried about."

I turned to her. "Oh, so maybe Dr. Hyde's class isn't total bullshit." And both of us lying on our sides, she smiled, our noses almost touching, my unblinking eyes on hers, her face blushing from the wine, and I opened my mouth again but this time not to speak, and she reached up and put a finger to my lips and said, "Shh. Shh. Don't ruin it."

fifty-one days before

THE NEXT MORNING, I didn't hear the knocking, if there was any.

I just heard, "UP! Do you know what time it is?!"

I looked at the clock and groggily muttered, "It's seven thirty-six."

"No, Pudge. It's party time! We've only got seven days left before everyone comes

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Before

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...she had a bottle of wine in her car, so she was **fucked**. And the Eagle took her into his house and...



Before

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...vivid against my leg was more than playful, and **fuck** Lara and **fuck** Jake because I do, Alaska Young, I do love you...



Before

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...couch, to wrap my arms around her and sleep. Not **fuck**, like in those movies. Not even have sex. Just...



Before

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..., you know. But I still ruin everything. I still **fuck** up."



Before

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"French, Feel, Finger, **Fuck**. It's like you skipped third grade," Alaska said.

bottle but us not touching each other, and then she placed her hand on my leg.

Her hand just above my knee, the palm flat and soft against my jeans and her index finger making slow, lazy circles that crept toward the inside of my thigh, and with one layer between us, God I wanted her. And lying there, amid the tall, still grass and beneath the star-drunk sky, listening to the just-this-side-of-inaudible sound of her rhythmic breathing and the noisy silence of the bullfrogs, the grasshoppers, the distant cars rushing endlessly on I-65, I thought it might be a fine time to say the Three Little Words. And I steeled myself to say them as I stared up at that starriest night, convinced myself that she felt it, too, that her hand so alive and vivid against my leg was more than playful, and fuck Lara and fuck Jake because I do, Alaska Young, I do love you and what else matters but that and my lips parted to speak and before I could even begin to breathe out the words, she said, "It's not life or death, the labyrinth."

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"We're the **fuck**ing Marines," he said.



Before

Page 107

"Because no one can catch the mother**fuck**ing fox."



Before

Page 108

...until I heard Takumi shout-whisper, "Go go go **fuck**ing go."



Before

Page 109

"I'm the mother**fuck**ing fox," Takumi whispered, both to himself and...



Before

Page 111

Takumi picked thorns out of his leg. "The fox is **fuck**ing tired," he said, and laughed.



Before

Page 111

"Pudge, my friend, we are inde**fuck**ingstructible."

bottle but us not touching each other, and then she placed her hand on my leg.

Her hand just above my knee, the palm flat and soft against my jeans and her index finger making slow, lazy circles that crept toward the inside of my thigh, and with one layer between us, God I wanted her. And lying there, amid the tall, still grass and beneath the star-drunk sky, listening to the just-this-side-of-inaudible sound of her rhythmic breathing and the noisy silence of the bullfrogs, the grasshoppers, the distant cars rushing endlessly on I-65, I thought it might be a fine time to say the Three Little Words. And I steeled myself to say them as I stared up at that starriest night, convinced myself that she felt it, too, that her hand so alive and vivid against my leg was more than playful, and fuck Lara and fuck Jake because I do, Alaska Young, I do love you and what else matters but that and my lips parted to speak and before I could even begin to breathe out the words, she said, "It's not life or death, the labyrinth."

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... He tracked us back to the barn, I thought. We **fuck**ed everything up.



Before

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...that," Alaska went on, still fuming. "You know? **Fuck**ing blowup-doll rich kids."



Before

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...got slime / objectify women and it's **fuck**in' on / you'll be dead and gone like ancient...



Before

Page 117

..., unlike Pudge, I'm not super gawky / I'm the **fuck**in' fox and this is my crew / our freestyle's...



Before

Page 119

"**Fuck** you, dude."



Before

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..., I couldn't help but wonder: What's so

“That story ended up being a hell of a lot better than I thought it would be,” Alaska said, “but I’ve still got you beat.”

“Bring it on, baby,” I said. A breeze picked up, the tall grass outside the barn tilting away from it, and I pulled my sleeping bag over my shoulders to stay warm.

“Best day of my life was January 9, 1997. I was eight years old, and my mom and I went to the zoo on a class trip. I liked the bears. She liked the monkeys. Best day ever. End of story.”

“That’s it?!” the Colonel said. “That’s the best day of your whole life?!”

“Yup.”

“I liked eet,” Lara said. “I like the monkeys, too.”

“Lame,” said the Colonel. I didn’t think it was lame so much as more of Alaska’s intentional vagueness, another example of her furthering her own mysteriousness. But still, even though I knew it was intentional, I couldn’t help but wonder: *What’s so fucking great about the zoo?* But before I could ask, Lara spoke.

“Kay, my turn,” said Lara. “Eet’s easy. The day I came here. I knew Engleesh and my parents deedn’t, and we came off the airplane and my relatives were here, aunts and uncles I had not ever seen, in the airport, and my parents were so happy. I was twelve, and I had always been the leetle baby, but that was the first day that my parents needed me and treated me like a grown-up. Because they did not know the language, right? They need me to order food and to translate tax and immigration forms and everytheeng else, and that was the day they stopped treating me like a keed. Also, in Romania, we were poor. And here, we’re kinda reech.” She laughed.

“All right.” Takumi smiled, grabbing the bottle of wine. “I lose. Because the best day of my life was the day I lost my virginity. And if you think I’m going to tell you that story, you’re gonna have to get me drunker than this.”

“Not bad,” the Colonel said. “That’s not bad. Want to know my best day?”


“That’s the game, Chip,” Alaska said, clearly annoyed.

“Best day of my life hasn’t happened yet. But I know it. I see it every day. The best day of my life is the day I buy my mom a huge fucking house. And not just like out in the woods, but in the middle of Mountain Brook, with all the Weekday Warriors’ parents. With all y’all’s parents. And I’m not buying it with a mortgage either. I’m buying it with cash money, and I am driving my mom there, and I’m going to open her side of the car door and she’ll get out and look at this house—this house is like picket fence and two stories and everything, you know—and I’m going to hand her the keys to her house and I’ll say, ‘Thanks.’ Man, she helped fill out my application to this


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..., I couldn’t help but wonder: What’s so **fucking** great about the zoo? But before I could ask...

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...day of my life is the day I buy my mom a huge **fucking** house. And not just like out in the woods...

 Before
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...’s life. When she cried and told me that she **fucked** everything up, I knew what she meant now. And...

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Page 137

“I forgot! God, how many times can I **fuck** up?” she said. I didn’t even have time to wonder...

 Before
Page 137

“**Fuck**,” she said. “Just get rid of the Eagle for me...”

we knew her pretty well. So that's that."

I stood up and stared down at him sitting smugly, and he blew a thin stream of smoke at my face, and I'd had enough. "I'm tired of following orders, asshole! I'm not going to sit with you and discuss the finer points of her relationship with Jake, goddamn it. I can't say it any clearer: *I don't want to know* about them. I *already know* what she told me, and that's all I need to know, and you can be a condescending prick as long as you'd like, but I'm not going to sit around and chat with you about how goddamned much she loved Jake! Now give me my cigarettes." The Colonel threw the pack on the ground and was up in a flash, a fistful of my sweater in his hand, trying but failing to pull me down to his height.

"You don't even care about her!" he shouted. "All that matters is you and your precious **fuck**ing fantasy that you and Alaska had this goddamned secret love affair and she was going to leave Jake for you and you'd live happily ever after. But she kissed a lot of guys, Pudge. And if she were here, we both know that she would still be Jake's girlfriend and that there'd be nothing but drama between the two of you—not love, not sex, just you pining after her and her like, 'You're cute, Pudge, but I love Jake.' If she loved you so much, why did she leave you that night? And if you loved her so much, why'd you help her go? I was drunk. What's your excuse?"

The Colonel let go of my sweater, and I reached down and picked up the cigarettes. Not screaming, not through clenched teeth, not with the veins pulsing in my forehead, but calmly. Calmly. I looked down at the Colonel and said, "**Fuck** you."

—

The vein-pulsing screaming came later, after I had jogged across Highway 119 and through the dorm circle and across the soccer field and down the dirt road to the bridge, when I found myself at the Smoking Hole. I picked up a blue chair and threw it against the concrete wall, and the clang of plastic on concrete echoed beneath the bridge as the chair fell limply on its side, and then I lay on my back with my knees hanging over the precipice and screamed. I screamed because the Colonel was a self-satisfied, condescending bastard, and I screamed because he was right, for I did want to believe that I'd had a secret love affair with Alaska. Did she love me? Would she have left Jake for me? Or was it just another impulsive Alaska moment? It was not enough to be the last guy she kissed. I wanted to be the last one she loved. And I knew I wasn't. I knew it, and I hated her for it. I hated her for not caring about me. I hated

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.... "All that matters is you and your precious **fuck**ing fantasy that you and Alaska had this...



After

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...Calmly. I looked down at the Colonel and said, "**Fuck** you."



After

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"Right. **Fuck**ing Latin."



After

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...said, 'Let's play Truth or Dare' and then you **fuck**ed her."



After

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"Wait, you **fuck**ed her? In front of the Colonel?" Takumi cried.



After

Page 193

"I didn't **fuck** her."



After

...But there is so much to do: cigarettes to smoke, **sex** to have, swings to swing on. I'll have more time...

"He loves weed like Alaska loves **sex**," the Colonel said. "This is a man who once...

..., when she was clearly talking about having hot **sex** with you. Which is why you need me."

...good? Sure, and bufriedos are pretty good. **Sex** is pretty fun. The sun is pretty hot. Jesus, it...

Before

...a guy knelt in front of her, giving her oral **sex**. No time for dialogue, I suppose. By the time...

Before

...her righteous indignation. "They just don't make **sex** look fun for women. The girl is just an object...

Before

... Not fuck, like in those movies. Not even have **sex**. Just sleep together, in the most innocent sense...

...me not be mad at you anymore. God, rapping is **sexy**. Pudge, did you even know that you're in the...

...bitter. All I remember is that she had a lot of **sex**."

...her underwear for hidden bottles of liquor or **sex** toys or God knows what. I found nothing. And...

Loss of interest in **sex**, hobbies, and other activities previously enjoyed

After

..., and she sure as hell didn't lose interest in **sex**. One would have to like **sex** an awful lot to make out with your scrawny ass."

After

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...but drama between the two of you—not love, not **sex**, just you pining after her and her like, ‘You’re...

After

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...my dad’s” and a “preeminent scholar of deviant **sex**uality in adolescents,” be the junior class’s...

After

Page 208

...and an expert in adolescent understandings of **sex**uality.”

After

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..., and I’m a psychology professor, and—adolescent **sex**uality?”

After

Page 209

...down in Florida, and he studies adolescent **sex**uality.”

After

Page 209

..., uh, the way that adolescents’ understanding of **sex** is still changing and growing. I mean, he’s...

After

Page 209

...and growing. I mean, he’s opposed to premarital **sex**.”

After

Page 212

...onto campus who I presumed to be an expert on **sex**ual deviancy in adolescence and who turned out to...

After

Page 212

...adolescence and who turned out to be an actual **sex**ual deviant.

After

Page 214

... He is here today to talk about teenagers and **sex**uality, a topic I’m sure you’ll find considerably...

After

Page 214

...you about the fascinating subject of teenage **sex**uality. My research is in the field of **sex**ual linguistics, specifically the way that young...

Can you talk about the blow job scene?

The oral sex scene in *Looking for Alaska* between Lara and Pudge takes place immediately before a far less sexually intimate but far more emotionally intimate encounter between Pudge and Alaska.

The language in the oral sex scene is extremely clinical and distant and unsensual. The word “penis” is used rather than member or hot rod or whatever else you’ll find in romance novels. The adverbs and adjectives that appear in that scene include weird, nervous, and quizzically.

This is in very stark contrast to the scene where Pudge and Alaska kiss a few pages later: “Our tongues dancing back and forth in each other’s mouth until there was no her mouth and my mouth but only our mouths intertwined. She tasted like cigarettes and Mountain Dew and wine and ChapStick. Her hand came to my face and I felt her soft fingers tracing the line of my jaw.” There’s a lot of evoking of senses in that paragraph (some might argue too much), and it’s much more passionate than the language used to describe the blow job.

I wanted these two scenes to present a dramatic contrast, because I wanted it to be clear (1) that Pudge and Lara were curious about each other, and interested in exploring, but not really that passionate about each other, whereas (2) Alaska and Pudge were clearly very passionate and caring and attentive in the way they kiss, and most importantly that (3) physical intimacy isn’t and can never be an effective substitute for emotional intimacy.

It seemed to me pretty obvious that I was arguing against vapid sexual encounters in which no one has any fun and celebrating the underappreciated virtues of super-hot kissing in which everyone keeps their clothes on. (Some censors, clearly, feel otherwise, although most of them never read the blow job scene in context.)

Takumi shook his head. His open mouth gooey with mashed potatoes, he said, “Yuh ha’ to.” He swallowed. “Let me ask you a question, Pudge. When you’re old and gray and your grandchildren are sitting on your knee and look up at you and say, ‘Grandpappy, who gave you your first blow job?’ do you want to have to tell them it was some girl you spent the rest of high school ignoring? No!” He smiled. “You want to say, ‘My dear friend Lara Buterskaya. Lovely girl. Prettier than your grandma by a wide margin.’” I laughed. So yeah, okay. I had to talk to Lara.

I could live with that kind of weird. And then she wrapped her hand around it and put it into her mouth.

And waited.

We were both very still. She did not move a muscle in her body, and I did not move a muscle in mine. I knew that at this point something else was supposed to happen, but I wasn’t quite sure what.

She stayed still. I could feel her nervous breath. For minutes, for as long as it took the Bradys to steal the key and unlock themselves from the ghost-town jail, she lay there, stock-still with my penis in her mouth, and I sat there, waiting.