

NIGHT AT THE DINER  
TWO

Jason grins across the table at her. “Tonight, Samantha, you order whatever you want. Pick of the house. It’s on me.”

“Great, thanks.” She turns to the waitress. “Coffee, no cream, apple pie, warmed up, with the ice cream.”

“How extravagant,” Jason says.

“What do you want? We’re at a place where the most extravagant thing you can get is Salisbury steak.”

“Point taken. Could I get the Appetizer Variety Platter, please, and a coffee, and could I upgrade to a bigger glass of water?”

“Uh huh,” says the waitress.

“Just a Coke for me,” says Caccian.

“Just a Coke?” Jason says, as the waitress gathers their menus and whisks off. “Just a Coke, my brother? But we are on the very lip of greatness here. We no longer need spend our late nights restricted to the shabby comforts of mere *beverages*. We are on the verge of our major label signing. We can seek post-midnight solace from a veritable *cornucopia* of diner fare. At last we can drink deep from the font of greasy foods. The fries, the mozzarella sticks, the chicken fingers, the

---

*Bombing Starbucks* : A Novel By Jeremy P. Bushnell : [jeremy@invisible-city.com](mailto:jeremy@invisible-city.com)

Night at the Diner : Two / 1

Copies of this document may be made freely by any individual for personal use, provided all copies retain this notice in its entirety. Non-commercial organizations may also reprint or excerpt this material freely, provided all usages retain this notice in its entirety, but the author requests, as a courtesy only, prior notification by e-mail and one copy of the document in which the material is reprinted.

For all other circumstances, this document is © 1999 Jeremy P. Bushnell.

Visit <http://www.invisible-city.com> for more work by this author

potato skins—all these are now within our reach. You need only to realize your gustatory whims and they shall be satisfied! We are scaling the heights, my brother, *we are scaling the heights!* A Valhalla of omelets anxiously awaits your approach, you need only step up to the door and rap your fist upon it and ye shall be permitted *glorious entry!*”

Jason brandishes his fork and knife dramatically. He knocks over the saltshaker. Other people are turned around in their booths, glaring.

“You’re even more excitable than usual tonight,” Samantha says. “What did those Geffen guys say to you, anyway?”

“Here’s the deal,” Jason says. He rights the saltshaker, holds onto its tip like he’s moving a chesspiece, and he places it squarely in front of him, brushing away the spilled salt with his other hand. “You spoke to them and convinced them to give us a listen.”

“Uh huh,” Samantha says. Jason releases the saltshaker, casts his eyes about the table, fixes upon the ashtray, which he seizes and moves it into position next to the shaker: two items in a sequence.

“*They* called up Fred Constantine, the guy who runs Student Activities at the U. That’s who they got our phone number from in the first place. I guess Fred told him what he could tell them, basically, yes, we are an actual real band; yes, we played at Wingz a bunch of times; yes, when we played it was usually crowded.”

He lets go of the ashtray and gets Caccian’s lighter; positions it in the row of objects.

“They figure, hmm, maybe you’re not bullshitting them, they ask Fred to give us a show. It’s summertime. Wingz is *closed*. The U.’s not going to have any shows in the summertime. But turns out that Fred’s planning this thing.”

“This quote unquote *rave*,” Caccian says.

“That’s right. A big rave. At school. During Orientation. On the quadrangle. Couldn’t you just *die*?”

“I’m dying already,” says Samantha.

“It’s like half counterculture simulation and half getting-to-know-you icebreaker,” Jason says. “It sounds absolutely fucking awful. And that’s not even the funniest thing. The funniest thing is that the whole awful deal is sponsored by Nike.”

“What?”

“Yeah, yeah, remember last spring when Nike and the U. cut that deal? Nike would provide all the equipment and uniforms for like all the athletic teams in exchange for, basically, free promotion?”

“Yeah, I remember all those anti-Nike protests. ‘Nike has unfair labor practices’ and the like.”

“Yeah, remember the Swoosh Burn on the quad right before Spring Break?”

“Did that actually happen? I remember seeing the posters for it but I never heard whether it happened.”

“Yeah. It wasn’t big. They had this little dinky pile of shirts and shoes smoldering away. They had to fight off kids who were trying to steal the shoes out of the pile when they were trying to get the fire lit.”

“I’d imagine athletic shoes don’t burn too well.”

“Yeah, and once they get on fire, they *stink*. It’s like some awful kind of scorched burglary smell.”

“Yuk.”

“Yeah, well, *anyway*, the deal went through, of course, duh, but the U. knew how much Nike wanted this deal, so they kept tacking on these extra fees that Nike would have to pay—\$100,000 for this, \$250,000 for that—and Nike—I mean they’ve just got this bottomless well of money—just keeps saying *yes yes yes*. So anyway, the University suckers Nike into paying like \$30,000 a year for the next, I don’t know, five years into—aha—Student Activities. Nike says okay. So Fred’s like a pig in shit on Christmas Day. He’s got all this money to play around with. He’s ready to start bringing in mid-range acts to play at the school. But Nike puts in this like stipulation that they want to know exactly which activities Student Activities are going to be using the Nike money for, and they want like a big banner with the Swoosh on it to be flown at those activities.”

“Oh my God, you’re kidding.”

“Fraid not. So Fred decides that that’s more trouble than it’s worth, really: I mean, you’re not going to get like the Beastie Boys to come play at our school if they have to play under a giant Swoosh. So he decides to funnel it all into just two big events and fund all the little acts with just the usual Student Activities money. And the one big thing is Spring Fling. And the other is this new event.”

“Fred’s brainchild,” Caccian says.

“This Nike-sponsored Orientation Rave.”

“Tripped-out lasers all night,” Caccian says.

“*Six* DJs.”

“Trancey grooves until dawn,” Caccian says.

“Brought to you by the labor of a hundred thousand underpaid Indonesians,” Samantha says.

“Right,” Jason says. “Opening with the dance/industrial sounds of—drum roll please—the YesMen.”

“What?” Samantha says.

Jason shrugs. “The Geffen guys wanted to see us play. They said to Fred ‘when’s the absolute earliest you could get them a slot?’ Fred thinks about it; he knows our sound; he says ‘they could open up for the rave.’”

“The Nike Rave?” Samantha asks.

Jason gestures at the saltshaker/ashtray/lighter triptych, as though the reasoning is right out there in front of her. “The very one,” he says. “The Geffen guys are going to see us play this thing; we’re going to light up the mind of a thousand little freshmen—”

“Are you experienced?” says Caccian, distorting the phonemes psychedelically.

“—and then that’s it, we’re hired. I read in *Variety* that Geffen is going to hire 200 new acts between now and the end of the year. You know, the Millenium and all. They’re going to bring all these new acts together for a New Year’s Eve event in Taos, New Mexico that they’re calling the New Millenium Celebration. This three-day-concert-type thing. Supposedly it’s one of those industry-wide invite-only jobs. They’re going to corner the new decade’s culture right off the bat; they’re going to flood the market with an entire exciting new repertory of emerging artists, and Caccian and I are going to be right there in the middle of it.”

“Good Lord,” Samantha says.

The waitress comes through with Samantha's pie a la mode and Jason's Appetizer Variety Platter. Glasses and mugs are shifted around to make room.

"Thanks," Samantha says. She cuts the triangular end off of her piece of pie and forks it into her mouth.

Jason looks around, scoping for something. "What the hell time is it?" he asks.

Caccian looks at his watch. "Quarter after one," he says.

"What time does Gregor get done with work?"

"Midnight, usually," Samantha says.

"Shouldn't he be here by now?"

"I don't know," Samantha says. "Has he started going back to work yet? I thought he had to take some time off to let his hand heal."

"Oh, right, the hand," Jason says. "You'd think he'd still come hang out with us, though, work or no work, right?"

"I don't know," Samantha says.

"Do you think it might have anything to do with your new boyfriend?" Jason asks.

"I don't know," Samantha says. A beat. Another. Then: "Gregor told you?"

"I told you we were going to have to choose sides," Jason says, looking over at Caccian, who is sipping placidly at his Coke.

"You're not going to have to *choose sides*," Samantha says.

"We're here, aren't we? With you? And Gregor is off somewhere else, right? Possibly, potentially, maybe even *probably*, because he's still too upset to want to see you? My brother and I could be off being good friends to him right now. Comforting him. Soothing his ills. Instead

we're here with you, swilling coffee and Cokes. Doesn't it seem that some kind of choice has been made?"

Samantha takes another bite of pie to buy time. She keeps her expression absolutely calm.

"My relationships are my business," she says. "There's no need for them to become a matter of public dispute. Normally we're all at the diner. Tonight you're here at the diner, Caccian's here at the diner, I'm here at the diner. Gregor's not here. If anyone's made any kind of choice, it's him. I mean, Jason, don't even pretend that like even in a parallel universe you'd be over at Gregor's house *comforting* him. I love you, you know, but you're the last person I'd want to have in charge of comforting me. It'd be like throwing a crazed ferret into the crib with the crying baby."

Jason packs an entire mozzarella stick into his mouth.

"We don't even know that Gregor's not being here has anything to do with my 'new boyfriend'" —she crooks her fingers to indicate the quote marks— "which, if it's all the same to you, is a term I'd prefer you not use. Gregor's had a really shitty week in a lot of ways. His hand is probably still pretty fucked up—"

Jason grimaces, swallows. "Maybe he's negatively conditioned to hot coffee now."

"Could be," Samantha says. She eats some more pie. "Since when have you had this concern for Gregor's whereabouts, anyway?"

Jason shrugs. "I don't know. I haven't had a chance to tell him the good news about the Geffen deal."

"Are you sure that's a good idea?" She pushes a piece of crust around with her fork, sopping up some of the melted vanilla ice cream. "Are you sure that's not like me telling him the

'good news' about my new 'boyfriend?' He's pretty upset about not being able to play his bass right now. And he used to play with you guys a little: are you *sure* he's not going to react just a little bit sourly when you tell him you're planning to go to Taos to jam with the Culture Industry without him?"

"Oh, he'll be happy for us," Jason says. "It's a scientific fact that when somebody makes it, all of their friends eventually make it as well. We'll have Gregor come out to L.A. and play on the record."

"What about me?" says Samantha. "You're not going to have me come play on your record?"

"Sure," says Jason. "I'm sure we can find some room in our pounding electronic audio nightmare for an acoustic guitar! After all, you got us where we are today. We owe it all to you."

"Where exactly *are* we today?"

"What do you mean?"

"There's no guarantees of anything. We're all treating it as though you're already signed and you're not yet. I mean, these agents might not even *like* you."

"Well, yes. We've been taking that into consideration."

"What do you mean?"

Jason shrugs. "My brother and I have discussed making a few changes in our sound until the deal goes through. Strictly temporary, mind you. We're looking to present these guys from Geffen with a slightly more commercial version of the YesMen. Something a little leaner. Smoother around the edges."

“What are you *talking* about? I mean, do you *realize* what you’re talking about? You’re talking about *selling out*. I mean, this is what we *mean* when we talk about someone selling out. Isn’t it? Help me out here, Caccian.”

Caccian shrugs and looks down into his Coke.

“Samantha, Samantha, Samantha,” says Jason. “We’re not selling out. This is only *temporary*. We’ve just got to get our foot in the door here. Once we’re signed into the contractual obligation to produce an album, I promise you we’ll revert back to our old sound. We’re still the YesMen that everybody knows and loves.”

“But changing your sound? Even temporarily? I mean, Jesus, you’re supposed to be *musicians*—your style is supposed to be, I don’t know, I mean, your style is supposed to be your *purest personal expression*. Isn’t it? Isn’t that why we’re all musicians? To express ourselves through music? Your style is supposed to be like your *signature*.”

“What good is expressing yourself if nobody’s listening? People need to be *listening* before your expressions are worth shit. Otherwise it’s just jerking off in the dark and pretending you’re God.” He takes a bite out of a potato skin, gives it three chews, and then uses his tongue to pack the whole half-masticated mass into the pouch of his cheek so he can keep speaking around it. “Now, all that jerking off can be fun, I’m not saying it’s never fun, but after a while you start looking for the real thing.”

“Are we still talking about music?” asks Samantha.

Jason swallows the wad of potato. “Look,” he says. “People are stupid. Okay? Can we work with this thesis just for sake of argument? That people are stupid?”

“Okay.”

“Record company agents, I think we can agree, are particularly stupid. And they’re the worst kind of stupid people: they’re stupid people who wield power. And everyone knows what you do when you want something from a stupid person who has the power to give it to you: you pander a little. You flatter them. You make yourself a little less threatening. You make their decision very uncomplicated.”

“You kiss ass,” Samantha says.

“It’s not so much that,” Jason says. “Of course there’s an ass-kissing component and I’m prepared to make that sacrifice. What it is, though, more than that, is that these agents aren’t good with dealing in abstracts. They think about everything in terms of rigidly-defined demographics. They can’t stand ambiguity; they can’t stand seeing something and not knowing exactly what segment of society it’s going to sell to. So what you do when you’re faced with these people is you streamline yourself. You package yourself. You make it very clear that you have a demonstrable appeal to a segment that they will recognize as a segment that’s going to buy a lot of records. That’s all.”

“I’m loath to ask,” says Samantha, swallowing her last bit of pie, “but what segment of the record-buying public *are* you planning to package yourself towards?”

“Glad you asked,” says Jason. He reaches out and grips the saltshaker, turns it in place. “The YesMen have always previously presented themselves as a ‘teen angst’ combo. Kids are angry. Kids are confused. Kids receive a lot of messages from sources of cultural authority—mom, dad, TV, the government, the church—and a lot of them contradict each other, which means *some of them are lies*. Kids begin to put this together—that people in power lie, and to no small degree they lie to gain control over your mind—at around the same time they begin to hit adolescence.

Couple cultural anxiety and paranoia with a new influx of confusing sexual feelings and a series of startling bodily metamorphoses and you end up with a nation full of young minds that don't know which way is up. The YesMen have always sought to capture that feeling."

"We've also sought," Caccian says, "to heighten the sense of cultural paranoia. By pointing out and publicizing examples of the contradictory messages that the mouthpieces of authority broadcast to a stunned and confused populace."

"Right, and I've always thought that was healthy," Samantha says. "A deep skepticism towards systems of authority never destroyed anyone. So I've always thought that your project had real merit. 'Noble Savage' is a fucking *rocking* song."

"Well, thanks," says Jason. "Of course we think the project has merit, duh. But think about how it looks—how it *must* look—from the perspective of the sentient tendrils of the David Geffen Company. Think about how it'll feel to our own local pair of waggly tentacles: Mr. Johnny Sax and Mr. L. McLeggs. They're going to look at the project and say 'who is going to buy this?'"

"But you just pointed out that the whole country is full of teenagers who your project resonates with and who the project is important for."

"Yes! But. Are these the kinds of teenagers who are buying records? Agents don't care whether the project 'resonates'; they don't care whether the project is 'important'; all they care about is *will it sell!* And will the YesMen sell? If I were David Geffen I would frankly be skeptical. Why should I instruct my entertainment conglomerate to print up a million copies of a record that basically is aimed at an audience who has a massive distrust of entertainment conglomerates? It's the wrong audience to aim at."

“So who is the right audience to aim for?”

Jason lets go of the saltshaker and grips the ashtray, providing a passable visual model of a conversational shift.

“Who buys records?” he asks. “Traditionally.”

“Teenagers,” Samantha says.

“Give the lady a cigar,” Jason says. “Traditionally, *why* do teenagers buy records?”

Samantha pours herself another cup of coffee. “I give up,” she says.

“I’ll give you three guesses,” says Jason. He waggles his empty mug at her and she refills it too.

She sips from her cup, sighs, rubs her temples. “Okay, okay,” she says. “Teenagers buy records because they identify with what the singers are singing about; they want to hear their concerns represented—”

“Remind me,” Jason says. “What planet are you from again?”

“I hate guessing,” Samantha says.

“Think Elvis. Think the Beatles.”

“I hate guessing.”

“Teenagers buy records—traditionally—because they’re *sexually attracted* to the stars who make those records. Male artists sell records to teenage girls who are hot for them. Then teenage boys buy the records because they want to associate themselves with the sexuality of the musicians: they either want to learn how to play the songs themselves so they can play them for the girls or they want to put them on mixtapes that they’ll give to the girls or they want to play it loud out of their dorm room so that girls will hear it or *whatever*—when a teenage boy buys a record, you

can guess that *somewhere* in his mind he's considering the possibility that he can impress a teenage girl with it."

"So you're thinking—?"

"That's right. When Caccian and I retool the YesMen we're going to play up our appeal to young women. We're going to construct ourselves as the new heartthrobs of the goth world."

"This means you're not going to play 'Pope Castration,' doesn't it? I can't believe you're going to play a show and you're not going to play 'Pope Castration.' 'Pope Castration' is like your *best* song."

"Remember that the breakthrough hit for Nine Inch Nails was that one where he said he wanted to fuck you like an animal."

"You know, when I think about this kind of stuff, I don't really think of the Beatles or Elvis at all. I think of the Monkees. I think of New Kids On The Block. I think of the Spice Girls. You can't *try* to bill yourself as heartthrobs. It's too calculated. Heartthrobbery just *happens*."

"Oh, Samantha. You don't really believe that, do you? All those bands are just examples of what I'm talking about being done *very crudely*; they're these simplistic corporate visions of what heartthrobs look like. They're cartoons; they're caricatures. That doesn't mean that the same thing isn't being done all over the place just *more subtly*, below the threshold of public awareness. If you're too blunt about it, you get caught. But lots of bands do it and get away with it."

"So you're going to aim at the teenage girl market."

"That's right. The beautiful thing about it is that if you corner the teenage girl market you also corner the teenage boy market *without any additional effort*. Once the girls start buying

something, the boys are going to buy it and by God they're going to at least *pretend* that they like it, because they want to get laid. You think David Geffen doesn't know this? Those Geffen tools are going to see us play and they're going to go 'every lonely goth girl in America is going to want to sleep with these guys.' And every lonely goth boy in America wants to sleep with the lonely goth girls. And lonely people buy a lot of records. That's it. We're in. Problem solved.

Q.E.D.”

The waitress comes by and collects plates.

“I don't know if I like any of this,” Samantha says.

“You never like anything,” Jason says.

“I don't like you two trying to reimagine yourselves as a pair of gaunt vampiric Fabios. I don't like All-Night Ravin' With the Athletic Shoe Manufacturers. I don't like the David Geffen Live at Tahoe Festival.”

“Live at Taos Festival.”

“Live at Taos Festival. Whatfucking*ever*. Where do your politics figure in to all of this? Didn't you used to have politics? Didn't you guys used to be angry? Weren't you once angry at something? I forget.”

“This is what I keep trying to tell you, Samantha—record labels don't like political songs.”

“So what kind of songs are you going to play?”

“Love songs.”

“*Love* songs?”

“Love songs. Really dark, moody, twisted love songs.”

“But with a subversive edge,” Caccian says.

“Yeah, a subversive edge,” says Jason. “Dark love songs with subversive messages.”

“Like *what?*” Samantha says.

“Like, like, like ‘treat your partner as an equal.’”

“That’s not exactly very dark *or* very subversive.”

“We’re working on a cover right now of ‘Walkin’ After Midnight.’”

“What?”

“You know: Patsy Cline? It’s like the perfect gothic love song. Someone goes out and prowls the streets searching for their loved one? *Total vampire.*” He takes a sip of coffee and croons across the table: “I go out walkin’ / after midnight / out in the moonlight / just hopin’ you may be / somewhere I’m walkin’ / after midnight / searchin’ for me.”

“You’re covering a country song from like 1959 as your dark subversive love song?”

“A lot of old country songs *are* both dark and subversive.”

“You guys are going to make yourselves the darlings of the alternative music scene by becoming a *country cover band?*”

“It’ll sound a lot better with Caccian’s guitar screaming over top of it, believe me.”

Caccian nods and looks back down at his empty Coke.

“Caccian,” Samantha says, turning to look at him. “I’d think *you*, at least, would approach this matter with *some* degree of sanity.”

“Well,” he says. “I think Jason’s right. I think his methods *will* help us to get signed faster.”

“Thank *you*,” says Jason.

“But,” Samantha sputters. “But, but, but—‘Pope Castration!’ I *know* you, Caccian. I know you want more than just to be masturbation fodder for a nation of sexually-repressed, pale-skinned, black-eyeliner-wearing bitches.”

“You’ve got to admit,” Jason says, “that that’s not the *worst* aspiration you’ve ever heard.”

“No, you’re right, Samantha,” Caccian says. “The political edge *is* really important to me. But if you build yourself as a political band you’re only going to sell to political people. You’re only going to get your message out to people who are predisposed to agree with it. It’s better to bill yourself as just this fun, spooky, sexy band; you get out to a wider audience. Once you’ve got that wide audience, *then* you provide the message. You slip it in. That’s the only way to wake up the whole world at once: you add some medicine to the sugar.”

“You’d better hope they can still *taste* the medicine through all the sugar you guys are thinking about adding.”

“How come you’ve always got to take this negative attitude towards everything?” Jason asks. “Why can’t you just be happy for us? Why, all of a sudden, are we *not allowed* to get what we want?”

“Don’t be petulant,” says Samantha. She drinks more coffee. “It’s not very becoming.”

“Tsk, tsk,” says Jason—he *literally tsks her*—“Nine out of ten successful rock bands contain at least some petulant element. Haven’t you been doing your research?”

“It’d be my guess that the only thing you’re going to learn from studying bad rock bands is how to *be* a bad rock band. That’s why rock music sucks so much now: you’ve got this endless supply of derivations on formulas that were only just barely interesting to begin with.”

“You study the bands who have made themselves successful and you learn what you need to do to become successful, that’s all.”

“Successful, huh? Can you articulate exactly what you mean by *successful*?”

“I mean bands that get listened to.”

“You mean bands that are popular.”

“I mean bands that are popular.”

“Christ almighty, it’s high school all over again. Popularity’s the most important thing. I thought I left that fucked-up social structure behind four years ago.”

“I don’t see any merit in toiling in obscurity.”

“Emily Dickinson? Vincent Van Gogh?”

“Hate to break it to you, Samantha, but slaving away quietly in your bedroom making art doesn’t *automatically insure* that you’re going to be recognized as like this brilliant visionary once you take the big dirtnap. Every frustrated artist in the world wants to believe that it does, but it doesn’t. More often than not it just insures that you’re making masturbatory self-absorbed garbage.”

“Franz Kafka?”

“Where’s the value in *setting out* to be unpopular? In starting out *choosing* to emulate someone who didn’t get heard until after they were dead? *All* those great posthumous successes lived pretty miserable and depressing lives, you know. Why *try* to achieve some particular form of greatness if you *know* you’re not going to be around to see whether you achieve it or not?”

“All right. All right. Have you considered this? Have you considered that the a *real* cultural critique, a cultural critique with some validity, will *never* be popular? Because it asks

people to challenge their ways of thinking? Which is something that most people don't like to do? That doesn't mean that the *existence* of those critiques aren't important. If you start putting popularity first—if this whole stupid *society* starts valuing popularity above all else—then those critiques are going to begin ceasing to exist.”

“I hate to break it to you, Samantha, but our society *does* value popularity above all else. Look at—for fuck's sake—look at *People* magazine.”

“You *are* the society, Jason. We all are. Just remember that.”

The waitress comes by and places the check face down on the table. Exasperated, Samantha drops out of the conversation, flips the check up into her hand, and concentrates on deciphering the pale green slip's strange poem. She examines the system of abbreviations and numbers written hastily across the check's carefully-spaced gridlines, scrutinizes the loops and slants of *2 cof* and *app var* and *cof* which have been penned without regard for the neat borders of the check's pre-printed compartments. Scrawled across the bottom of the check are the words *Thanks! Rosalee*.

“I just don't want to be doing tempwork for the rest of my life,” Jason says, after a minute. “I just want something better.”

“Oh, yeah,” Samantha says, detecting a change in subject, and pulling herself out of the untidy world of the check slip. “How's the tempwork treating you, anyway?”

“We've been bad,” both of them say simultaneously.

“Quit it,” says Samantha. “You know it bugs me when you guys act telepathic.”

Jason drinks some coffee and shrugs. “I did data entry last week and made up a bunch of addresses. I made up a whole *city*. There’s like a thousand customer surveys going out to this place called Atlantis, Hawaii. Doesn’t exist.”

“I’ve got one,” Caccian says. “The company I was working for had this big proposal due. They needed like five hundred collated copies of this report made up. I just unplugged the copier and put the ‘Out Of Order’ sign on it. The copier was fine, but my supervisor just saw the sign and he went apeshit. Nobody *thought* to see whether the thing was actually broken. He sent me out to Kinko’s to get the copies made there. I dropped the whole thing off with the clerk there and went out for lunch, then out to the park; I spent the whole afternoon reading a book. I went to Kinko’s at 4:30, picked up the brochures, and brought them back to the office. I told them Kinko’s was really backed up but that I thought I should stay there so that I could pick up the job as soon as it was done.”

“I made appointments with six different interior design firms one day when the managers were out of town for some dumb-ass conference,” says Jason. “I was supposed to be answering phones and instead I’m walking around the office letting people talk to me about like curtains and modular sofas. At the end of the day I just erased all the messages that had piled up on the machine. On Monday all the execs were like ‘did so-and-so call?’ ‘did such-and-such a person call?’ and I’m just going ‘no, no, nope.’ Not one of them had the nerve to call me a liar.”

“I took all the tins of butter cookies that they use for the meetings out of the office kitchen and gave them to homeless people,” says Caccian.

“The place I’m at now they’ve got me opening the office mail,” Jason says. “All the execs have these corporate expense credit cards. All the statements come into the office and get

dumped on my desk. I've been Xeroxing them, stockpiling them. In like six months I'm going to trade all the numbers to this hacker BBS in exchange for I don't know what yet."

"I don't know, Jason," Samantha says. She's changing the subject back to the old one; she knows it; she can't help it; the opportunity is just there and too good. "You're a lot more revolutionary as a temp than you're going to be as a rock star."

"That's what it all comes down to for you, isn't it? My revolution is more authentic than your revolution?"

"Never mind. I'm sorry. Let's stop talking about this. I don't want to fight with you guys. All I'm saying is that you and Patsy Cline make quite a fetching pair of radicals."

"At least people know who Patsy Cline *is*. At least she had the opportunity to present her worldview to an *audience*."

"Agreed. All I'm wondering is *precisely how much* a complicated and critical worldview needs to be dumbed down before it can reach an audience of, say, the size of Patsy Cline's."

"Well. We'll find out, won't we?"

"Yes," says Samantha. "Yes, I expect we will."

They drink more coffee. They talk about other things. Jason asks her about the riot at the mall; after she's done telling him the story he says it sounds "cool," and that pretty much ends discussion of that topic. They talk about the Lost Dog Reward show tomorrow night. (Samantha more or less keeps quiet; she knows she's not going, what with her and Dmitrovitch having sort of reconciled and all; she knows tomorrow night she'll be in the warehouse, but she doesn't tell the boys that.) They ask Samantha what she's doing with her life once Laura gets back and she says she doesn't know.

It gets late.

Gregor never shows up.