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Excepts from "The Barn"

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

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By 1:30 we made it to the barn. Kevin of course took the ride with the rest of us. Six inches of snow had fallen since first period, and we all knew that he didn’t own a coat warm enough to allow him to walk. Like circus clowns, we piled out of the rusty, orange Pinto. I called to Jaime to toss me my backpack, which I had shoved under the driver’s seat to make room for my legs.

"Whadda ya wanna do?" Jaime finally asked, breaking the silence. None of us answered. I, for one, was secretly absorbed in Zeppelin’s Kashmir. He walked to the trash can, which we filled ice and used as a cooler to stash the beer his older brother was happy to supply. “Who wants a pounder? Mitchie, you want one?” He tossed it to me before I could say yes. Two more sailed across the chilly room to Kevin and Andy. I waited to see if theirs would explode before opening my own.

We emptied the trash can within an hour. Kevin began to experiment with the tunes, exchanging Zeppelin II for Guns and Roses and playing a mean air guitar for an imaginary audience. Andy was half asleep, sitting on the floor and resting his head against the hard, tattered wicker of one of the chairs. He called it ‘his’ chair, but he hadn’t lifted a finger to help move it into the barn. Then Jaime spied my backpack again and asked what the ten pounds of secret shit stuffed inside was. I looked around the room, and satisfied that we were the only two paying attention, I signaled him to come over to where I was sitting.

“We're goin' out back to shoot at cans. Mitch swiped his dad's pistol. Can you believe that?” Kevin looked at me with contempt. I could tell I had hurt his feelings by not including him voluntarily. “Wanna go with us?” Jaime asked him.

Kevin moved his gaze from me back to Jaime and grinned a grin
as if he were the cat who just caught the bird. He gripped the arm of the chair to steady himself. "Hell yes, I wanna go!" Once again, Kevin was quick to agree to anything, and my stomach did a flip-flop. He hurdles over the chair and grabbed my bag. "I'll carry it," he told us, rather than asked. He turned and headed for the door, jumping over Andy's legs, which were still sprawled out in front of him. At the same time, Andy lifted his head and immediately began to irritate all of us, especially Kevin.

"Watch where you're stepping, fat ass," he chided. Kevin stopped. He turned around slowly and looked at Andy sitting on the floor. His face and ears were bright red.

"What's with you two? You're always defending Kevin," Andy waved his arm as if to push us away. "Ah, you're just a couple of pussies anyway. I'm outta here." But he didn't leave. Instead, he fell back into 'his' wicker chair, leaned over the arm of it, and puked on the floor. When he finished heaving, he looked up, wiped his mouth on his sleeve, and said, "There. That's what I think of Kevin."

Before Jaime or I could react, we noticed Kevin standing in the doorway. Physically he was there with us, but his eyes suggested he was someplace else. Someplace far away. His voice was barely audible. I had to struggle to make out his words.

Jaime tried to help. "Come on, Kev. If you wanna fight with Andy, go outside and kick his ass, but leave that here."

"Now you wanna defend Andy? To hell with you and your games. To hell with feeling sorry for poor Kevin. You wanna play games? Let's play." Kevin spun the barrel around. The sound reminded me of three summers ago when I put a baseball card between the spokes of the tire of my bike. I wished I could be riding my bike right now.

"Okay, Mitch. It's your gun. You decide. Who should I aim at first?" Kevin asked. I was terrified. The crotch of my Levi's was suddenly warm and wet. I couldn't speak. "Time is running out, Mitch. I need to hear your decision." He seemed crazy. There was no remnant of the jolly Kevin who let things roll off his back. My mind was racing. I knew that this whole thing was my fault. I should have never taken the gun in the first place.

"At me," I said finally, almost in a whisper, but apparently loud
enough for the others to hear. Jaime yelled out for Kevin to stop. He didn’t listen. Click. Then nothing: complete silence. Then I threw up.

Kevin picked me up by the arm, then put his own arm around my neck as if we were old college buddies. “You won, Mitchie. How ’bout that!” You made it through the first round. Now, round two’s a little different. You get to spin the barrel yourself this time.” He held the pistol in front of me, forcing me to spin it. By now, tears were streaming down my cheeks. He played a game of Eenie Meenie Miney Moe with Jaime and Andy, drawing out his words to the point where we could all have died from fear and suspense. He picked Andy. He pulled the trigger again. Again, nothing. Then I noticed the wetness between Andy’s legs, as well.

Kevin laughed out loud. “Well, that’s just my luck, isn’t it? The biggest prize goes free. Maybe I should try that again. This time I’ll let you spin your own fate. Would you like that, Andy?” Kevin turned and walked over to where Andy had wet himself. Instinctively, I grabbed him from behind and tried to take the gun. We struggled for what seemed to be a very long time, but Kevin was much larger and stronger than I, and before I knew it, he was free of me. He backed up into the corner of the room where the stereo was. It had been on all this time, but I hadn’t heard it until now. Andy never changed the music, so Zeppelin’s Stairway to Heaven was playing. Now Kevin had begun to cry, his shoulders bobbing up and down from his sobs, and his face buried in the crook of his arm. I was relieved, hoping he had come around and was ready to stop this insanity.

Then, Kevin squeezed once again. It was louder this time, and left a ringing in my ears. When I turned my head, I saw Kevin, slumped over himself.

“Kevin? Kev?”

He didn’t answer me. He just lifted his head slowly, and looking at Andy said, “I won’t be needing a ride today.”

--Tina Bianchi