

HIGH LIFE

(FICTION)

by evan reyes

Luke wakes up at 10:44 am. He gets out of bed and goes to the bathroom. The bathmat is pushed to one side toward the shower and he thinks “who did that, that’s rude.” He leaves the bathroom and puts on music on his iPod dock. He plays “Kid Klimax” by Atlas Sound. He turns the music off. He walks into the kitchen and sees a slice of toast on the counter. He takes a bite of the toast and thinks “roommate” and wonders where his roommate Troy is and thinks “Troy is with his girlfriend.”

Luke opens the refrigerator and takes out a head of lettuce, an avocado, and a bottle of organic raspberry vinaigrette. He takes three large leaves of lettuce and rinses them in the sink. He shakes the water off, tears the leaves into smaller pieces and puts the pieces in a bowl next to the sink. Luke slices the avocado into bite-size pieces and puts them in the bowl. He sees a small basket of cherry tomatoes on the counter and grabs a handful and puts them in the bowl. He pours organic raspberry vinaigrette over the salad and thinks “where are the walnuts, I should have bought walnuts, should I go to the co-op and buy walnuts.”

Luke takes the salad to the living room and sits on the couch and eats part of it. He notices a Vitamin Water on the table with a small amount of liquid in it. He opens the bottle and finishes the Vitamin Water. Andrea used to drink Vitamin Water, usually the yellow or the orange ones. Once when they were in the store a man behind them in line saw them buying four bottles of Vitamin Water and said that Vitamin Water was poisonous and could give you cancer. Luke looked at the man and said, “How can it be poisonous, it’s just water and vitamins.”

“Are vitamins poisonous, are you saying Flintstones vitamins are poisonous,” Andrea said.

Andrea used to drink Vitamin Water, usually the yellow or the orange ones.

“They can be chewable, I feel like nothing that is chewable can be poisonous,” Luke said. The man turned away and said words that Luke and Andrea could not hear.

Luke gets up from the couch and goes to his bedroom to check his phone but he does not have any texts. He checks his email but he does not have any new emails. It’s Sunday. He thinks “there is no mail on Sundays, there is no email on Sundays, I should email Andrea,” but doesn’t email Andrea.

On Monday Luke goes to class and the professor asks the class to get in small groups and talk about the reading. Luke didn’t do the reading and thinks “did I do the reading, I didn’t do the reading, I should have skipped class.” There are two girls in his small group and they talk about the reading for one minute and their other classes for eight minutes. Luke laughs at times he thinks it is appropriate to laugh but does not say anything else. Andrea always laughed at appropriate times. Luke would tell jokes that he knew were not funny to see if she would laugh. Andrea would sometimes laugh and sometimes not laugh. Luke wondered if she was laughing at him or at the content of the joke.

After class Luke lights a cigarette and sees Daniel. Daniel comes up to Luke.

“Hey man,” Daniel says.

“Hey what’s up,” Luke says.

“Nothing much, just got out of class. It’s bullshit, man,” Daniel says.

“Yeah,” Luke says.

“Well hey, there’s this party on Friday on Alabama Street, you should totally come,” Daniel says.

Luke laughs at times he thinks it is appropriate to laugh but does not say anything else.

"I might do that. Yeah, I can do that," Luke says.

"Yeah it's gonna be pretty huge I think. I don't think I have your number though, you should give it to me and I'll just text you on Friday," Daniel says.

Luke gives Daniel his number and Daniel enters it into his phone.

"Alright man, I gotta run but I'll let you know what's going on with that party," Daniel says.

"Sound good man," Luke says.

On Friday, Luke gets a text from Daniel that says "what up man, you still down for this party tonight." Luke replies and says "yeah im down, what time." Daniel replies and says "just meet up at my place at 8ish and we'll go from there."

At 8:00 pm Luke walks to the store and buys a six-pack of 16-ounce cans of Miller High Life, the champagne of beers, then walks to Daniel's apartment. Before Andrea left she only drank Coors Light. Luke told her that Coors Light was bad beer and that she should drink the kind of Coors that came in the gold can instead. She said, "You don't know what you're talking about, you drink High Life," and

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Luke stopped talking. Sometimes after they talked about beer Luke kissed Andrea.

Inside the apartment are three guys and two girls. Luke recognizes all of them but only knows the names of the two girls, Shawna and Carrie. They are playing a drinking game with

playing cards. On the playing cards are explicit pictures of naked women. Luke sits on the couch next to Carrie. He smiles at Shawna and opens a can of Miller High Life. Everyone plays the drinking game. Luke is winning, or losing. He opens a second beer. He opens a third beer and thinks

"I am winning the drinking game." The song "Let the Cool Goddess Rust Away" by Clap Your Hands Say Yeah is on in the background. Luke thinks "2005" and takes a drink of Miller High Life. It is 10:22 pm. Luke has three beers left. They leave for the party.

"Dude, what's up, this party is legit," a guy named Kellen says to Luke. Kellen is very drunk. Luke and Kellen had a class together the semester before.

"Where's the beer," Luke says.

"I dunno man," Kellen says.

"I am going to break this squirrel's neck right now, so if you don't want to watch you can leave."

Luke takes Shawna by the hand and walks into the kitchen. He opens the refrigerator and takes out two 16-ounce cans of Keystone Light and hands one to Shawna. She says, "thank you" and they both say, "cheers, mate" and drink from the cans. There is music playing. The song "Low" by Flo Rida is playing and Luke sings along to it. Shawna comes up to Luke and they dance with their bodies close together. They dance to more songs, then leave the party.

They walk down a street. They see a squirrel dragging its back legs across the street. The squirrel looks injured. They are close to the squirrel. A guy runs up to them and kneels by the squirrel.

The guy says, "I am going to break this squirrel's neck right now, so if you don't want to watch you can leave."

Luke says, "Why are you going to kill it?"

The guy says, "It's either going to get killed by something else later or I can do this now. If you can't handle it then don't look."

Luke and Shawna stand and watch. The guy breaks the squirrel's neck and throws the body in a garbage can by a mailbox. The guy walks off.

Shawna says, "Do you think squirrels can feel pain?"

Luke says, "Do animals have free will?"

They are at Shawna's apartment. On the couch, Luke kisses Shawna while the album *XX* by The xx plays on her iPod dock. He touches her and she says, "Luke." They go into the bedroom and get into her bed. He leaves her apartment at 6:30 am.

It's Saturday. Luke has to work on Saturdays at 5:00 pm until 2:00 am at a donut shop. He wakes up at noon and sees an email from Andrea. The email says "Hey, I miss you. I was at an Urban Outfitters the other day and they were playing Bizarre Love Triangle. I thought of the time we were camping out and you put that song on. Ryan came up and started bitching about something like 'what is this 80s bullshit' and you told him New Order was awesome. I might be coming through next weekend, maybe we can get coffee or something. Would that be weird? I don't want it to be weird. Later, Andrea."

Luke re-reads the email and clicks reply. He types two sentences and thinks "no" and deletes the two sentences then deletes the entire email and closes his laptop. He reads from a textbook, a book of Ann Beattie short stories, a book of Kim Addonizio poems, and an issue of *The Economist* that his roommate left

out. He thinks "I should eat" and grabs a Clif bar from the cabinet. It's 5:00 pm and he goes to work.

When Luke gets to work his manager says, "We're low on sprinkles, can you go stock sprinkles." Luke says, "What kind," and his manager says, "All of them." Luke stocks the sprinkles. Throughout the night customers come in and order donuts. A guy customer asks Luke what is a good donut to order. Luke says, "Bear claw, probably. Maybe the cruller." The guy orders two plain cake donuts. Later, Luke's manager

...as the man stumbles back Luke punches him in the side of the head and connects with the man's ear.

takes him aside and tells him to suggest more expensive donuts next time and to ask if the customer wants coffee. Luke says, "Okay."

Luke gets off work and walks home. It is dark on the street between the donut shop and his house. There is a man on the street. The man walks by Luke then turns around and walks back to Luke and touches Luke's shoulder. Luke turns around and says, "What." The man says, "I think you dropped this," and shows Luke a knife. Luke thinks "dangerous" and "no insurance" and stands still. The man says, "Well?" and Luke says nothing. The man moves the knife closer to Luke and Luke says, "Do you want money," while reaching for his wallet.

"I just got mugged, well almost, I punched the guy and ran away. Andrea, I punched him. Well, I kicked him and punched him..."

Luke smells alcohol on the man's breath and thinks "superhero" and "I could take him." He kicks the man in the shin, and as the man stumbles back Luke punches him in the side of the head and connects with the man's ear. The man says, "fuck" and Luke runs in another direction. Luke runs fast and is soon in his own apartment. He calls Andrea. It is 2:45 am and he leaves her a voicemail. In the voicemail he says, "I just got mugged, well almost, I punched the guy and ran away. Andrea, I punched him. Well, I kicked him and punched him. I didn't know who to call so I called you. Goodnight."

It's Sunday again. Luke is writing an essay for class and sees a new email. The email is from Andrea. He opens the email and it says "Hey, I got your message. That's fucked, are you okay? Listen, I don't think I'm gonna come through town after all. I just don't think it's time to see each other yet. Don't be mad, please don't be mad at me. I think it's

better if I just stay here for a while. Bye.”

Luke thinks “fuck” and deletes the email. He goes to the trash and moves the email back into his inbox. He looks at his cigarettes and thinks “I can’t smoke in here” and takes a cigarette and thinks “fuck it” and lights the cigarette. He looks at the smoke alarm and thinks “fuck” and puts out the cigarette. There is a deck outside his apartment, and he goes outside to the balcony and lights the cigarette again. He thinks about Andrea and grabs the railing. His phone vibrates in his pocket. He takes it out and sees a text from Shawna that says “hey what are you up to today.” He closes his phone. He opens his phone and starts typing a response. He closes his phone and puts it in his pocket. He puts out his cigarette. He goes back inside.

Luke thinks “I like Shawna, Shawna is cool, what’s wrong with Shawna” and “I want to go to work, why don’t I work on Sundays.” He thinks “it’s okay, I’m okay, what am I worried about.”

“Why don’t you give that little guy a flick into the grass, give him a fighting chance.”

Luke’s roommate Troy walks through the front door and says, “What’s up, man.” Luke says, “Not much, just doing some homework.” Troy says, “Do you need to go grocery shopping? I’m gonna

go grocery shopping.” Luke says, “I think I’m good.” Troy leaves.

After Troy leaves, Luke goes for a walk. He walks down a residential street on a large hill near the college campus. He sees a beetle on its back with its legs moving in multiple directions, unable to turn itself over. Luke leans down and picks up a leaf and tries to flip the beetle over. The beetle’s back is too round and Luke cannot flip it over. Up the hill

there is an old man walking toward Luke. He is holding a plastic bag, picking up beer cans and putting them into the bag. Luke thinks “there goes the neighborhood.” The man gets close to Luke and says, “hello.” He looks at Luke then looks at the beetle.

Luke says, “Lots of garbage around here.”

The man says, “I try to do my part.”

Luke says, “Some people are very inconsiderate.”

The man smiles at Luke and says, “Why

don’t you give that little guy a flick into the grass, give him a fighting chance.” Luke looks at the man then looks at the beetle and flicks the beetle into the grass.

The old man smiles, nods, and walks away while Luke watches the beetle. Luke turns around and walks home. He reaches a street corner and stops. He waits for the sign to change from don’t walk to walk and crosses the street.

Inside the apartment, Troy is not back yet and Luke goes into the living room. He sits down on the couch. He stands up from the couch. Luke goes into his bedroom. He turns on music on his iPod dock and plays “Mickey Mouse” by Wavves. He plays “Blackberry Song” by Kurt Vile. The window is open and wind blows through the window. Luke feels the breeze on his skin and thinks “cool.” He thinks “pun” and smiles and lies down on the bed. He gets up and shuts the window and lies back down on the bed. The iPod is on shuffle and “You’re a Target” by No Age comes on. Luke looks at his desk and sees a box with one donut inside. The donut is stale and he drops the box into the garbage can. He lies down and falls asleep.

Luke feels the breeze on his skin and thinks “cool.” He thinks “pun” and smiles...