



DOLORES DOWNING once slept with her cousin, an older one, from Boston. She had been young and off her medication, but she didn't regret it. She had a genuine fear of WEREWOLVES and could only sleep with lots of bright lights on. Boyfriends continually disappointed her. But she found that lots of things don't matter so much if one has a lot of money. ART NORTNER only wore his pressed white suit, no matter the day, no matter the weather. He was obsessed with GROVER CLEVELAND and sent pitches daily to celebrity magazines for stories concerning the ex-president in some way. He wanted to revive his celebrity. He could no longer eat cheese, as overconsumption of it, and little else, had given him kidney stones. MARGO DECARAUX was editor of the local feminist rag, though she would object to it being called that, doubly. She had survived a childhood with an absent father, and a nearly-always-topless mother, and had come out the other end swinging. She liked motor-sports but not dykes, lace but not dresses, and death but not weapons.

ZERO was bartender at the *Snooty Fox*, as well as lighting technician for the low-end rock club SNOT BLOCKER. His line of work once got him punched so hard in the throat he fainted. But it also got him laid once. He had a gas mask collection to rival even the most fanatic NAZI memorabilia collectors. And he had been writing a punk rock mystery novel in his head for years.

JOLENE BAKERSFIELD wrote things on her hands all day while working at the Velveten Gallery. She used those same hands to masturbate violently and paint pictures of her cat, PuppySurprise. One time her boyfriend took her car to pick up a friend and crashed it, killing both himself and, metaphorically, the car. JOLENE was more upset about the car because it never cheated on her, farted under the covers, or laughed at her French shoes.

BRODY FRANKEN was a child prodigy until the age of thirteen when, having been caught shoplifting in Saudi Arabia while vacationing there with his parents, a righteous shopkeeper had cut both his thumbs off, ending his precocious thieving career. The incident also destroyed his dreams of becoming a photographer. However, thumbs were not necessary to squeeze tubes of frosting, and he had since become one of the top cake decorators in the region. He also liked camping.

VIVICA RICHARDSON was a darling sock collector. Both the socks and herself, darling. She would tone it down a bit to go watch underground street fighting matches, or spy on porno casting call lines. She worked at a coffee shop and didn't much care for anyone. JULY GREENBACK was a reformed prima donna. No less than three indie rock records had been dedicated to her. And then used to seduce her. After an accident at the cookie bakery where she worked singed her eyebrows off, she began her studies in humility and selflessness. Her girlfriends blanched as she threw out clothes, make-up, phone numbers. She stopped shaving her armpits and began to eat fast food on public transportation. She felt mostly blank these days. There were droplets in the cool night breeze, whether from the sky, or whisked from the canopy of leaves above, it was impossible to say. VIRGINIA passed out. The party was becoming boring...

JANUARY was into romance: distilled, plasticized, or sparkly. She obsessively collected gemmed or be-dazzled clothing, snow globes from around the globe, and used glow sticks from Halloweens long gone by. She played XYLOPHONE in an experimental all-metal new-thrash art band called *Tar the Shitfucker*. Her grandfather had an old WWII tattoo of tits on his bicep, pale and lonely green. She loved him but hated all his children. One of them gave her that awful name.

PAOLO MERCEDES' house was empty. It wasn't that he was too cheap to buy furniture or that he had some strictly minimalist aesthetic. It had just never happened. It was clean, though, and that encouraged his girlfriend to stay over often, even if his mattress was saggy and they spent all sweaty night long pressed together by gravity. He called her "TRUCKER" in private, and she did not know what exactly he did at work all day. She knew he was an 'assistant nurse' at the MUNSING HOSPITAL just down the road. But the secret was that he was on the elderly ward. Rooms full of impacted feces, bowel evaluations, diarrhea, constipation, phosphate enemas, bloody stool, and occasionally vomit. He spent his twelve-hour shifts gently wiping down wrinkled old thighs and buttocks.