

# Fight Club

by Chuck Palahniuk

(Adapted book. Upper-Intermediate level)

## CHAPTER ONE

Tyler gets me a job as a waiter, and after that Tyler is pushing a gun into my mouth, saying, the first step to eternal life is to die.

But for a long time Tyler and I were best friends.

People are always asking me if I knew Tyler Durden.

The gun is in my mouth now, and Tyler says, "We won't really die."

With my tongue, I can feel the barrel of the gun.

"This isn't really death," Tyler says. "We'll be a legend. We won't grow old."

With my tongue, I move the gun barrel into my cheek and say, Tyler, we're not vampires.

The building we're standing on won't be here in ten minutes.

If you take nitric acid, add it to sulfuric acid, and then add glycerin - you get nitroglycerin. Mix the nitro with sawdust, and you have a nice plastic explosive.

I know this because Tyler knows this.

So Tyler and I are on top of the Parker-Morris Building with the gun in my mouth, and we hear glass breaking. This is the world's tallest building, and the wind is always cold here. It's a cloudy day. It's so quiet that you feel like one of those space monkeys, doing the little job you're trained to do. Pull a lever. Push a button. You don't understand anything, and then you just die.

You look down from the roof, and one hundred and ninety-one floors below on the street you can see a crowd of people, standing, looking up. The breaking glass is a window that blows out of the side of the building, and then out comes a big cabinet. It falls down, turning slowly and getting smaller, disappearing into the crowd below.

Somewhere in the one hundred and ninety-one floors under us, the space monkeys in the Mischief Committee of Project Mayhem are destroying every piece of history.

I remember that old saying, how you always kill the one you love, well, it works both ways. With a gun in your mouth, you can only talk in vowels.

We've got our last ten minutes.

Another window blows out of the building, and then a dark wooden desk pushed by the Mischief Committee comes from the gap and flies down until it is lost in the crowd, too.

The Parker-Morris Building won't be here in nine minutes. If you have enough explosives, you can blast any

building in the world. This practical stuff isn't in any of the history books.

The three ways to make napalm: one, you can mix gasoline and frozen orange juice concentrate. Two, you can mix gasoline and cola. Three, you can mix gasoline with cat litter.

Nine minutes.

The Parker-Morris Building will fall, all one hundred and ninety-one floors, slowly, like a tree falling in the forest.

Tyler and I are on the roof, the gun is in my mouth, and I'm wondering how clean the gun is. We forget about Tyler's murder-suicide thing while we watch another cabinet fall out of the side of the building, with papers flying in the air.

Eight minutes.

Then the smoke starts coming out of the broken windows. The demolition team will push the button in maybe eight minutes. They will blow the base, the columns will fall, and the photo of the Parker-Morris Building will go into all the history books.

The photo will show the tower, all one hundred and ninety-one floors, falling down on the national museum, which is Tyler's real target. "This is our world now," Tyler says, "and those ancient people are dead." If I knew how all this would end, I'd be more than happy to be dead right now.

Seven minutes.

Up on top of the Parker-Morris Building with Tyler's gun in my mouth, while desks and cabinets and computers are falling down on the crowd around the building, and smoke is coming from the broken windows, and three blocks down the street the demolition team is watching the clock, I know that all of this - the gun, the anarchy, the explosion - is really about Marla Singer.

Six minutes.

We have a triangle here, you see. I want Tyler. Tyler wants Maria. Marla wants me. I don't want Marla, and Tyler doesn't want me here anymore. This isn't about love. This is about property. Without Marla, Tyler would have nothing.

Five minutes.

Maybe we would become a legend, maybe not. No, I say, but wait.

Four minutes.

With my tongue, I move the gun barrel into my cheek and say, you want to be a legend, Tyler? Man, I'll make you a legend.

I've been here from the beginning. I remember everything. Three minutes.

## CHAPTER TWO

Bob's big arms are around me, and I'm pressed against Bob's big chest between his new tits. Going around the church basement full of men each night we met: this is Art, this is Paul, this is Bob.

"It will be all right," Bob says. "Maybe they got it early enough. Then you'll have almost a hundred percent survival rate."

I've been coming here every week for two years, and every week Bob puts his arms around me.

"You cry now," Bob says and sobs. "Go on and cry."

His big wet face is on top of my head, and I am lost inside his hug. This is when I cry. Crying feels good in the dark, inside someone else, when you see how everything you can ever achieve will be destroyed. Anything you're proud of will be lost. And I'm lost inside. This is as close as I can get to sleeping in almost a week.

This is how I met Marla Singer.

Bob cries because six months ago his testicles were removed. Then there was hormone therapy.

Bob has tits because his testosterone is too high. Raise the testosterone level too much, and your body raises the estrogen level. Too much estrogen - and you get tits. This is when I cry because now your life is nothing.

It's easy to cry when you realize that everyone you love will either reject you or die.

Bob loves me because he thinks that my testicles were removed, too. I look around from under Big Bob's arm. Around us in the church basement there are maybe twenty men and only one woman, all of them in pairs, most of them crying. The man with the only woman puts his crying face against her neck. The woman's face turns to one side as she lifts a cigarette.

"All my life," Bob cries. "Why I do anything, I don't know."

The only woman here at Remaining Men Together, the testicular cancer support group, smokes her cigarette, and her eyes meet mine.

Faker.

Faker.

Faker.

Short black hair, big eyes, in her dress with dark roses, very thin, this woman was also in my tuberculosis support group on Friday night. She was in my melanoma support group on Wednesday night. On Monday night, she was in my Firm Believers leukemia support group.

All these support groups have cheerful names. My Thursday evening group for blood parasites is called Free and Clear. The group I go to for brain parasites is called Above and Beyond.

And on Sunday afternoon at Remaining Men Together in the basement of the church, this woman is here, again. Worse than that, I can't cry when she's watching.

This is my favorite part - crying with Big Bob without hope. We all work so hard all the time. This is the only place I can really relax. This is my vacation.

I went to my first support group two years ago, after I'd gone to my doctor about my insomnia. Three weeks and I hadn't slept. Three weeks without sleep and everything becomes an out-of-body experience.

My doctor said, "Insomnia is just the symptom of something bigger. Find out what's actually wrong. Listen to your body."

I just wanted to sleep. I just wanted a little pill. My doctor told me to take valerian root and get more exercise. That was a real pain. My doctor said, if I wanted to see real pain, I should stop by the church on a Tuesday night. See the brain parasites. See the bone diseases. See the bowel cancer.

So I went.

The first group I went to, there were introductions: this is Alice, this is Brenda, this is Dover.

Everyone smiled with that invisible gun pointed to their head.

I never gave my real name at the support groups.

The little skeleton woman named Chloe told me that the worst thing about her brain parasites was that no one wanted to sleep with her. Here she was, so close to death, and all she wanted was to sleep with someone for the last time. It passed the time. *La petite mort*, the French called it.

We closed our eyes. This was Chloe's turn to lead us in guided meditation, and she talked about the garden of serenity. With our eyes closed, we imagined our pain as a ball of white healing light. Our chakras were opening. The heart chakra. The head chakra. Chloe talked about caves where we met our power animal. Mine was a penguin, and it said, slide. So we slid through tunnels and tunnels of the cave. Then it was time to hug. This was a therapeutic physical contact, Chloe said.

I didn't cry at my first support group, two years ago. I didn't cry at my second or my third support group, either. I didn't cry at blood parasites or cancer or brain dementia.

This is how it is with insomnia: everything is so far away, a copy of a copy of a copy.

The insomnia distance of everything: you can't touch anything and nothing can touch you.

Then there was Bob. The first time I went to testicular cancer, Bob hugged me in Remaining Men Together and started crying. He used to be a bodybuilder, Big Bob said. He owned his own gym. He'd been married three times. He'd done product advertising, hadn't I seen him on TV? Bob told me all about his hormone therapy, and showed me

a wallet photo of himself at some contest. It's a stupid life, Bob said, but when you're on stage and you hear, "Extend your right arm, flex and hold; extend your left arm, flex and hold" - it's better than the real life. Then, Bob said, there was the cancer and divorce. Then he was bankrupt. He had two grown kids who didn't return his calls.

This was all I remember because then Bob was hugging me with his arms. Then I was lost inside of him, and when I finally stepped away from his soft chest, the front of his shirt was wet.

That was two years ago, at my first night with Remaining Men Together. At almost every meeting since then, Big Bob has made me cry. I never went back to the doctor. I never took the valerian root. This was freedom. Losing all hope was freedom. If I didn't say anything, people in a group thought it was the worst. They cried harder - I cried harder.

Every evening I died, and every evening I was reborn. Resurrected. Walking home after a support group, I felt so alive! And I slept. Babies don't sleep that well.

Until tonight - two years of success until tonight - because I can't cry when this woman is watching me. I haven't slept in four days. Because with her watching, I'm a liar and I can't be saved.

She's the faker.

She's the liar.

At the introductions tonight, we introduced ourselves: I'm Bob, I'm Paul, I'm Terry, I'm David.

I never give my real name.

"This is cancer, right?" she said. "Well, hi, I'm Marla Singer."

Nobody told Marla what kind of cancer. Then we were all busy crying.

I watch her from between Bob's tits. With the man still crying against her neck, Marla lifts her cigarette again.

To Marla I'm a fake. Since the second night I saw her, I can't sleep. Still, I was the first fake, or maybe all these people are faking, even Big Bob. Just look at his styled blond hair.

Marla smokes and rolls her eyes now.

At this moment, Marla's lie reflects my lie, and all I can see are lies in the middle of all the truth. Everyone is hugging and sharing their worst fear that their death is coming, and the gun is in their mouths. Well, Marla is smoking and rolling her eyes, and suddenly I realize that even death and dying have become meaningless.

"Bob," I say, "you're crushing me."

I try to whisper, but then I don't.

"Bob," I'm yelling. "Bob, I have to go to the bathroom."

In the bathroom, I look at myself in the mirror. I'm sure I'll see Marla Singer at Above and Beyond, the brain dysfunction group. Maria will be there. Of course, Maria will be there, and I'll sit next to her. And after the introductions and the guided meditation, after the white healing ball of light, after opening our chakras, when it is time to hug, I'll grab the little bitch. With my lips pressed against her ear, I'll say, Maria, you big fake, get out. This is the one real thing in my life, and you're ruining it.

You big tourist.

The next time we meet, I'll say, Marla, I can't sleep with you here. I need this. Get out.

## CHAPTER THREE

'You wake up at Sky Harbor International.'

Every takeoff and landing, I prayed for a crash. That moment would cure my insomnia.

You wake up at O'Hare.

You wake up at LaGuardia.

You wake up at Logan.

This is how I met Tyler Durden.

Tyler worked part-time as a movie projectionist. Because of his nature, Tyler could only work night jobs. If a projectionist was sick, they called Tyler. Some people are night people. Some people are day people. I could only work a day job.

You wake up at Dulles.

Life insurance pays well if you die on a business trip. I prayed for a plane crash. I prayed for a bird flying into the turbines, for loose bolts, for ice on the wings.

Every takeoff, I prayed for a crash.

You wake up at Love Field.

In a projection booth, Tyler changed the reels if the theater was old enough. In this case, you have two projectors in the booth, and one projector is running.

I know this because Tyler knows this.

The second projector is set up with the next reel of film. Most movies are several small reels of film played in a certain order. In the new theaters, they put all the reels together into one big reel. This way, you don't have to run two projectors and change the reels: switch, reel one, switch, reel two on the other projector, switch, reel three on the first projector. Switch.

You wake up at SeaTac.

On the plane, I study the people on the laminated safety instructions card. A woman floats in the ocean, her eyes are wide open, but the woman doesn't smile or frown. In another picture, calm people reach toward the yellow oxygen masks hanging from the ceiling.

This must be an emergency. Oh. We've lost cabin pressure.

You wake up, and you're at Willow Run.

Old theater or new theater, to send a movie to the next theater, Tyler has to break the movie back into several reels.

Tyler's also a waiter, waiting tables at a hotel, downtown, and Tyler's a projectionist at night. I don't know how long Tyler had been working on all those nights that I couldn't sleep.

In the old theaters that run a movie with two projectors, a projectionist has to stand right there to change reels at the exact second, so the audience never sees the break when one reel starts and the other one ends. Look for

the white dots in the top right-hand corner of the screen. This is the warning. Watch the movie, and you'll see two dots at the end of a reel. "Cigarette bums," they're called. The first white dot is the two-minute warning to start the second projector. The second white dot is the five-second warning. Excitement! Count to five. Switch. The movie goes on. Nobody in the audience has any idea.

You wake up at Krissy Field.

Everywhere I go, the charm of traveling is the tiny life: tiny soap, tiny shampoos, tiny single-serving butter, tiny toothpaste and a tiny single-use toothbrush.

You wake up at Meigs Field.

Sometimes, Tyler wakes up in the dark, frightened that he's missed a reel change or the movie has broken. One thing a projectionist shouldn't do: Tyler makes slides out of the best frames from a movie, especially the nude scenes.

You wake up at Boeing Field.

You wake up at LAX.

We have an almost empty flight tonight. I set my watch two hours earlier or three hours later, Pacific, Mountain, Central, or Eastern time; lose an hour, get an hour. This is your life, and it's ending one minute at a time.

You wake up at Cleveland Hopkins.

You wake up at SeaTac, again.

You're a projectionist and you're tired and angry, but mostly you're bored. So you take a frame of pornography

collected by some other projectionist that is kept in the booth, and you add this frame into a movie. There's just a flash. Tyler does this. A frame in a movie is on the screen for one-sixtieth of a second. Divide a second into sixty parts. That's how long the frame is. The porn is there, but no one sees it.

You wake up at Logan, again.

This is a terrible way to travel. I go to meetings that my boss doesn't want to attend. I take notes. Wherever I'm going, I'll be there to use the formula. I'll keep the secret. It's simple arithmetic.

If a new car built by my company is traveling at 60 miles per hour, and the brakes lock up, and the car crashes and bums with everyone inside, does my company have to recall the cars?

You take the number of vehicles (A) and multiply it by the probability of failure (B), then multiply the result by the average cost of an out-of-court settlement (C). A times B times C equals X.

This is what it will cost if we don't recall the cars. If X is greater than the cost of a recall, we recall the cars and no one's hurt. If X is less than the cost of a recall, then we don't recall.

Everywhere I go, there's a burned car waiting for me. I know where all the skeletons are.

Hotel time, restaurant food. Everywhere I go, I make tiny friendships with the people - the single-serving friends - sitting next to me from Logan to Krissy to Willow Run.

You wake up at O'Hare, again.

Tyler added porn into everything after that, and people watched. Nobody complained. People ate and drank, but the evening wasn't the same. Children would feel sick or start to cry and not know why.

You wake up at JFK.

I melt at the moment of landing when the plane leans to one side. At this moment, nothing matters. Not your luggage. Not your bad breath. Nothing matters. You will never have to get another haircut. Look up into the stars and you're gone.

But not this time.

This is how long your moment lasted. And life goes on. And somehow, by accident, Tyler and I met. It was time for a vacation.

You wake up at LAX. Again.

I met Tyler when I went to the beach. This was the end of summer, and I was asleep.

Tyler had been around a long time before we met. He was making something on the wet sand. He'd already made a circle of five big logs.

You wake up at the beach.

We were the only people on the beach. With a stick, Tyler drew a straight line in the sand. I was the only person watching this. Tyler asked me, "Do you know what time it is?"

I always wear a watch.

"Do you know what time it is?"

I asked, where?

"Right here," Tyler said. "Right now."

It was 4:06 p.m.

After a while, Tyler sat in the shadow of the five logs. He sat for a few minutes, got up, went for a swim, then put on a T-shirt and pants, and started to leave. I had to ask. I had to know what Tyler was doing while I was asleep. I asked if Tyler was an artist.

If I could wake up in a different place, at a different time, could I wake up as a different person?

Tyler shrugged and showed me the five standing logs and the line he'd drawn in the sand. What Tyler had created was the shadow of a giant hand. Only now, the fingers were too short, but he said that at exactly 4:30 the hand was perfect. The giant shadow hand was perfect for one minute, and for one perfect minute, Tyler had sat in the palm of a perfection he'd created.

You wake up, and you're nowhere. Sometimes, you wake up and have to ask where you are.

One minute was enough, Tyler said, a person had to work hard for it. But a minute of perfection was worth it. You could only expect a moment of perfection, that's all.

You wake up, and that's enough.

His name was Tyler Durden, and he was a movie projectionist, and he was a banquet waiter at a hotel, downtown, and he gave me his phone number. And this is how we met.

All the usual brain parasites are here tonight. The introductions: hi everybody, this is Marla Singer, and this is her first time with us.

Hi, Marla.

The group isn't called Parasitic Brain Parasites. You'll never hear anyone say "parasite." No one will ever say parasite. They'll say - agent. They don't say cure. They'll say - treatment. Someone might say how the agent has spread into his spinal column, and now he has no control of his left hand.

The last time I was here, the woman named Chloe announced the only good news she had: she no longer had any fear of death. Tonight, after the introductions, a girl said that at two in the morning last Tuesday, Chloe finally died.

Oh, this is so sweet.

For two years, Chloe's been crying in my arms during hug time, and now she's dead, dead in the ground. One day

you're thinking and walking around, and the next - you're a fertilizer, a worm buffet. This is the miracle of death, and it should be so sweet, but Marla...

Marla's looking at me again.

Liar.

Faker.

Marla's the faker.

You're the faker.

It's all just a big act.

Guided meditation is not helping me tonight. Behind each of the seven doors is Marla. Marla stands there.

Liar.

In the guided meditation, my power animal is Marla. Smoking her cigarette, Marla, rolling her eyes, Marla.

Liar.

Black hair and puffy lips.

Faker.

You can't escape.

I imagine Chloe's death.

Prepare for death in ten, in nine, in eight seconds. Death will begin in seven, six...

The announcement: Prepare to evacuate soul in ten, in nine, eight...

Death will begin in five...

Four, three, two...

Death will begin in three, in two...

Moonlight shines through her open mouth.

Prepare for the last breath, now.

Evacuate. Now.

Soul clear of body. Now.

Death begins. Now.

Oh, this should be so sweet. But no, Marla is watching me.

In guided meditation, I see no white healing ball of light. Liar.

No chakras.

Liar.

My chakras stay closed.

When meditation ends, it's time for the therapeutic physical contact. For the hug, I cross the room to stand near Marla and wait for the signal to come.

Let's all hug someone near us.

I hug Marla.

Pick someone special to you, tonight.

Marla's cigarette hands cannot move.

Tell this someone how you feel.

Marla doesn't have testicular cancer. Marla doesn't have tuberculosis. She isn't dying. Okay, in a way, we're all dying. But Marla isn't dying the way Chloe was dying.

Share yourself. Share yourself completely.

So, Marla, how do you like it?

So, Marla, get out.

Get out.

Get out.

Cry now if you have to.

Marla looks at me. Her eyes are brown. Her lips are chapped.

"You're not dying either," Marla says.

Around us, couples stand sobbing.

"You tell on me," Marla says, "and I'll tell on you."

Then we can split the week, I say. Marla can have bone disease, brain parasites, and tuberculosis. I'll keep testicular cancer, blood parasites, and brain dementia.

Marla says, "What about bowel cancer?"

The girl has prepared for this!

We'll split bowel cancer. She gets it the first and third Sunday of every month.

"No," Marla says.

No, she wants it all. The cancers, the parasites. She never dreamed she could feel so marvelous. She actually

felt alive. Her skin was getting better. All her life, she never saw a dead person. There was no real sense of life because there was no contrast to it. Oh, but now there was dying and death and loss and grief. Now that she knows where we're all going, Marla feels every moment of her life. No, she wasn't leaving any group.

"I can't go back to the way life was before," Marla says. "I used to work in a funeral home to feel good about myself - because I was just breathing."

Then go back to your funeral home, I say.

"Funerals are nothing compared to this," Marla says. "Funerals are just a ceremony, and here you have a real experience of death."

Couples around us are drying their tears and letting go.

We can't both come, I tell her.

"Then don't come."

I need this.

"Then go to funerals."

Everyone's getting ready for the final prayer. I let Marla go. "How long have you been coming here?"

Two years.

"Two years?" Marla whispers.

Yes.

"Okay then," she says, "okay, okay, you can have testicular cancer."

Thanks.

"Don't mention it."

This is how I met Marla.

## CHAPTER FOUR

The security guy explained everything to me about a ticking suitcase. Modern bombs don't tick. But if a suitcase vibrates, they have to call the FBI.

I moved in with Tyler because most airlines have this policy about vibrating luggage. I had everything in that bag. When you travel a lot, you learn to pack the same stuff for every trip. The very minimum you need to survive alarm clock, electric razor, toothbrush, white shirts, black trousers, underwear, black socks.

So my suitcase was vibrating, according to the security guy, and the FBI took it. Everything was in that bag. My contact lenses. My favorite ties. A list of all these things used to hang on my bedroom door at home.

Home was a condo on the fifteenth floor of a high-rise, full of widows and young professionals. The advertisement promised thick concrete floors, ceilings, and walls between me and my neighbors. With all this concrete and air conditioning, you couldn't open the windows, and all your seventeen hundred square feet would smell like the last meal you cooked or your last trip to the bathroom. Still, a thick concrete wall is important when your next-door neighbor watches sports games at night. Or when a blast of burning gas blows what used to be your living-room out of your windows and leaves just your apartment - only yours - a black concrete hole in the side of the building.

These things happen.

Everything, including your handmade green glass dishes with the small bubbles and imperfections to prove that they were made by the honest, simple, hard-working people of somewhere. Well, these dishes are all destroyed by the blast.

From fifteen floors over the city, all your burning stuff falls down on everyone's car.

While I'm flying west on the plane, the FBI is bomb-checking my suitcase. Nine times out of ten, the security guy says, the vibration is an electric razor. This was my electric razor.

The security guy told me this at my destination, without my suitcase, where I was going to go home and find my burned stuff on the ground.

Imagine, the security guy says, telling a passenger upon arrival that something vibrating kept their luggage in the departure airport. Something activated itself, creating an emergency situation, so your luggage was evacuated.

Rain was falling when I woke up for my connection in Stapleton.

Rain was falling when I woke up on my way home.

An announcement told us to check around our seats for any personal things we might have left behind. Then the announcement said my name. Would I please meet with an airline representative waiting at the gate?

I set my watch back three hours, and it was still after midnight.

There was the airline representative at the gate, and there was the security guy to say that my electric razor kept my luggage at Dulles. Things could be worse, the guy told me; at least it wasn't a dildo. My luggage had been checked, he said, and would arrive the next day. The security guy asked my name and address and phone number. I took a taxi home on my last ten bucks.

The local police had been asking a lot of questions, too. My electric razor, which wasn't a bomb, was still three time zones behind me.

Something, which was a bomb, a big bomb, had blasted my yin-yang coffee tables.

Well, they were splinters, now.

And so was my sofa with the orange covers; it was trash, now.

I wasn't the only slave to IKEA. Lots of people sit in the bathroom with their furniture catalogue. We all have the same green striped armchair. Oh, I had to have that!

Mine fell fifteen stories, burning, into a fountain.

We all have the same paper lamps made from environmentally friendly paper.

Mine are confetti, now.

All that sitting in the bathroom. The street outside my high-rise was scattered with all this stuff. It took my whole

life to buy this stuff. You buy furniture. You tell yourself, this is the last sofa I will ever need in my life. Buy the sofa, then for a couple years you're happy. Then the right dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug. Then you're trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own - now they own you.

It used to be so - until I got home from the airport.

The doorman says, there's been an accident. The police were here and asked a lot of questions. The police think maybe it was the leaking gas. Maybe a burner was left on, and the gas rose to the ceiling, and the gas filled the apartment from ceiling to floor in every room. When the rooms were filled to the floor, the compressor of the refrigerator clicked on. Detonation. The huge windows went out, and the sofas and the lamps and dishes and sheets in flames, and the high school yearbooks and the diplomas and the telephone.

You could go up to the fifteenth floor, the doorman said, but nobody could go into the apartment.

Police orders. The police had been asking if I had an ex-girlfriend who'd want to do this or an enemy who had access to dynamite.

The next day, my suitcase would arrive with the very minimum.

I asked the doorman to use the phone.

"A lot of young people try to impress the world and buy too many things," he said.

I called Tyler.

The phone rang in Tyler's rented house on Paper Street.

Oh, Tyler, please save me.

And the phone rang.

The doorman put his hand on my shoulder and said, "A lot of young people don't know what they really want."

Oh, Tyler, please save me from my IKEA furniture.

And the phone rang.

"Young people think they want the whole world."

And the phone rang and Tyler answered.

"If you don't know what you want," the doorman said, "you'll have a lot that you don't want."

Save me, Tyler, from being perfect and complete.

Tyler and I agreed to meet at a bar. We met and drank a lot of beer, and Tyler said, yes, I could move in with him, but I would have to do him a favor. There, drunk in a bar where no one was watching and no one would care, I asked Tyler what he wanted me to do.

Tyler said, "I want you to hit me as hard as you can."

## CHAPTER FIVE

During my demo to Microsoft, I taste blood in my mouth. My boss doesn't know the material, but he won't let me run the demo with a black eye and a swollen face. My boss is making the presentation, and I'm running the overhead projector, so I'm in the dark.

My lips are sticky with blood, and when the lights are on, I will turn to the consultants from Microsoft and say, thank you for coming, with blood on my lips and between my teeth.

Fight club is tomorrow, and I'm not going to miss fight club.

Before the presentation, Walter from Microsoft smiles, shakes my hand, and says, "I wonder what happened to the other guy." I tell Walter that I fell. I did this to myself.

The first rule about fight club is you don't talk about fight club.

Before the presentation, my boss asks, "What do you get yourself into every weekend?"

I just don't want to die without a few scars, I say.

The second rule about fight club is you don't talk about fight club.

Maybe at lunch, the waiter comes to your table, and he has two panda black eyes from fight club last weekend when you saw him there. You don't say anything because

fight club exists only in the hours between when fight club starts and when fight club ends.

You see the kid who works in the copy center. A month ago you saw this kid who couldn't even remember to register an order, but this kid was a god for ten minutes when you saw him kick the hell out of an accountant until the kid had to stop.

That's the third rule about fight club, when someone says stop, the fight is over.

Every time you see this kid, you can't tell him what a great fight he had.

Only two guys to a fight.

One fight at a time.

They fight without shirts or shoes.

The fights go on as long as they have to.

Those are the other rules of fight club.

Who guys are in fight club is not who they are in the real world. Even if you see the kid in the copy center, you wouldn't see the same man. Who I am in fight club is not someone my boss knows.

After a night in fight club, everything in the real world becomes muffled. Nothing bothers you. In the real world, I'm a recall coordinator in a shirt and tie, sitting in the dark with blood in my mouth, changing slides while my boss is showing my demo to Microsoft.

The first fight club was just Tyler and I, punching each other.

When I came home angry and knowing that my life wasn't going well, I could clean my apartment or my car. It used to be enough. Someday I'd be dead without a scar and there would be a really nice apartment and a car. Really, really nice.

But nothing is permanent. Even the Mona Lisa is falling apart. Since fight club, half of my teeth are loose.

Maybe self-improvement isn't the answer.

Maybe self-destruction is the answer.

Tyler and I still go to fight club, together. Fight club is in the basement of a bar, after the bar closes on Saturday night, and every week you go and there're more guys there.

Tyler gets under the one light in the middle of the dark concrete basement, and he can see that light in a hundred pairs of eyes. First thing Tyler yells is, "The first rule about fight club is you don't talk about fight club."

Tyler never knew his father.

"The second rule about fight club," Tyler yells, "is you don't talk about fight club."

I knew my dad for about six years, but I don't remember anything. My dad started a new family in a new town about every six years. This isn't much like a family; it's more like a franchise.

What you see at fight club is a generation of men raised by women.

Tyler is standing under the one light in the darkness of the basement full of men. He repeats the other rules: two men per fight, one fight at a time, no shoes, no shirts, fights go on as long as they have to. "And the seventh rule is," Tyler yells, "if this is your first night at fight club, you have to fight."

Fight club is not football on television. After you've been to fight club, watching football on television is like watching pornography. Fight club is now your reason for going to the gym, keeping your haircut short, and cutting your nails. The gyms you go to are full of guys trying to look like men, as if being a man means looking the way an ancient sculptor says.

My father never went to college, so it was really important for me to go to college.

After college, I called him and asked, now what?

My dad didn't know.

When I got a job and turned twenty-five, I called him again and asked, now what?

My dad didn't know, so he said, get married.

I'm a thirty-year-old boy, and I'm wondering if another woman is really the answer I need.

What happens at fight club doesn't happen in words. Some guys need a fight every week. This week, Tyler says it's the first fifty guys in and that's it. No more.

Last week, I fought with a guy. This guy must've had a bad week. He jammed my face into the concrete floor, and after I said, stop, I got up and saw a bloody print of my face on the floor.

Tyler stands next to me, looking down, saying, "Cool." I shake the guy's hand and say, good fight.

This guy says, "How about next week?"

I try to smile, and I say, Look at me. How about next month?

You aren't alive anywhere as you're alive at fight club - when it's you and another guy under that one light in the middle of all those people watching. Fight club isn't about winning or losing fights. Fight club isn't about words. You see a guy who comes to fight club for the first time, and he is soft like a loaf of white bread. You see this same guy here six months later, and he looks carved out of wood. This guy can handle anything. There's noise at fight club like at the gym, but fight club isn't about looking good. It's more like a church, and when you wake up on Sunday afternoon, you feel saved.

After my last fight, I needed stitches on the cuts on my cheek, so I called my insurance about a visit to the emergency room. At the hospital, Tyler tells them I fell

down. Sometimes, Tyler speaks for me. I did this to myself. Outside, the sun was coming up.

You don't talk about fight club because except for five hours from two until seven on Sunday morning, fight club doesn't exist.

When we invented fight club, Tyler and I, neither of us had ever been in a fight before. If you've never been in a fight, you wonder about getting hurt, about what you can do against another man. I was the first guy Tyler ever asked that, and we were both drunk in a bar where no one would care, so Tyler said, "I want you to do me a favor. I want you to hit me as hard as you can." I didn't want to, but Tyler explained it all, about not wanting to die without any scars, about being tired of watching only professionals fight, and wanting to know more about himself. About self-destruction.

At that time, my life just seemed too complete, and maybe we have to break everything to make something better out of ourselves.

I looked around and said, okay, but outside in the parking lot.

So we went outside, and I asked if Tyler wanted it in the face or in the stomach.

Tyler said, "Surprise me."

I said I had never hit anybody.

Tyler said, "So go crazy, man."

I said, close your eyes.

Tyler said, "No."

Like every guy on his first night in fight club, I breathed in and sent my fist towards Tyler's jaw, but my fist connected with Tyler's neck.

I said, that didn't count. I want to try it again.

Tyler said, "Yeah, it counted," and hit me right in the middle of my chest. I fell back against a car. We both stood there, both of us knowing we'd gotten somewhere we'd never been before, but we were still alive and wanted to see how far we could take this thing and still be alive.

Tyler said, "Cool."

I said, hit me again.

Tyler said, "No, you hit me."

So I hit him, and Tyler pushed me back and kicked me in my stomach.

What happened next and after that didn't happen in words, but the bar closed and people came out and shouted around us in the parking lot.

Now I felt that finally I could handle everything in the world that didn't work: my dry-cleaned clothes that came back with the buttons broken, the bank that says I have an overdraft, my job where my boss messed up my computer, and Marla Singer, who took my support groups from me.

Nothing was solved when the fight was over, but nothing mattered.

The first night we fought was a Sunday night. When we were lying on our backs in the parking lot, looking up at one star in the sky, I asked Tyler what he'd been fighting. Tyler said, his father.

Maybe we didn't need a father to feel complete.

There's nothing personal about who you fight in fight club. You fight to fight. You're not supposed to talk about fight club, but we talked, and for the next couple of weeks, guys met in that parking lot after the bar had closed, and then another bar offered the basement where we meet now.

When fight club meets, Tyler gives the rules that he and I set. "Most of you," Tyler yells in the center of the basement full of men, "are here because someone broke the rules. Somebody told you about fight club."

Tyler says, "Well, you better stop talking or you'd better start another fight club because next week you put your name on a list when you get here, and only the first fifty names on the list get in. If you get in, you start your fight right away, if you want a fight. If you don't want a fight, there are guys who do, so maybe you should just stay home."

Most guys are at fight club because of something they're too scared to fight. After a few fights, you're not afraid.

"If this is your first night at fight club," Tyler yells, "you have to fight."

A lot of best friends meet for the first time at fight club. Now I go to meetings or conferences and see faces with broken noses and bandages or stitches above an eye. These are the quiet young men who listen until it's time to decide. We nod to each other. My boss asks me how I know so many of these guys.

The demo goes on. Walter from Microsoft looks at me. Here's a young guy with perfect teeth and clear skin. He's looking at my bruised face and the blood on my lips. And maybe Walter's thinking about a vegetarian lunch he went to last weekend, or the ozone layer, or the need to stop testing products on animals. But probably he's not.

## CHAPTER SIX

One morning, I find a used tampon in the bathroom.

This is how Tyler meets Marla.

All night long, I dreamed I was sleeping with Marla Singer.

Marla Singer, smoking her cigarette. Marla Singer, rolling her eyes.

I wake up alone in my bed, and the door to Tyler's room is closed.

The door to Tyler's room is never closed.

All night, it was raining. The roof is old and leaking, and the rain comes through and drips all over the room. When it's raining, we don't dare turn on the lights. We use candles.

The house that Tyler rents has three stories and a basement. The rain drips down through the house, and everything wooden rots, and the nails in everything wooden rust. Everywhere there are rusted nails, and there's only one bathroom in the house, and now there's a used tampon.

The house is waiting for something, probably a demolition. There's no lock on the front door. Our only neighbors are a closed garage and huge warehouses.

I asked Tyler how long he's been here, and he said about six weeks. I've been living with Tyler for about a month.

The night before last, Tyler sat alone, and now there's a used tampon in the bathroom.

How could I compete for Tyler's attention?

I'm furious now. I feel rejected.

What's worse, all this is my fault. After I went to sleep last night, Tyler tells me he came home from his shift as a banquet waiter, and Marla called again from the Regent Hotel.

This was it, Marla said. The tunnel, the light... The death experience was so cool, she said, that she took a lot of pills. Marla wanted me to hear her describe how her soul left her body and rose up. Maria didn't know if her spirit could use the telephone, but she wanted someone to hear her last breath at least.

But then Tyler answers the phone and misunderstands the whole situation. They've never met, so Tyler thinks it's a bad thing that Marla is dying.

It's nothing like that.

This is none of Tyler's business, but Tyler calls the police and Tyler runs to the Regent Hotel. Now Tyler is responsible for Marla, forever, because Tyler saved Marla's life.

If I had only wasted a couple of minutes and gone there to watch Marla die, then none of this would have happened.

Tyler tells me how Marla lives in room 8G, on the top floor of the Regent Hotel.

Tyler gets there and even before, he knocks on the door, a thin arm from behind the door of room 8G grabs him and pulls Tyler inside. At that moment, Tyler can hear the police sirens as cars stop in front of the Regent Hotel. Then Marla pushes Tyler out of the room back into the hallway. She locks the door to 8G, and they run toward the stairs. On the stairs, Tyler and Marla have to give way to the police and paramedics going up, asking which door will be 8G. Marla tells them the door is at the end of the hall. Marla shouts to the police that the girl who lives in 8G used to be a lovely girl, but now she is a monster. The girl is confused and afraid to commit to the wrong thing, so she won't commit to anything. Marla shouts, "Good luck." The police gather at the locked door to 8G, and Marla and Tyler run down the stairs to the lobby and into the street to get a taxi. In the taxi, Marla tells Tyler he has to keep her up all night. If Marla falls asleep, she'll die.

Tyler and Marla were up almost all night in the next room. When Tyler woke up, Marla had already gone back to the Regent Hotel.

Anyway, now Marla's ruining another part of my life.

I tell Tyler that Marla Singer doesn't need a lover, she needs a shrink.

Tyler says, "Don't call this love."

Ever since college, I make friends. They get married. I lose friends.

Fine, I say.

Tyler asks if this is a problem for me.

No, I say, it's fine.

Put a gun to my head and paint the wall with my brains.

Just great, I say. Really.

My boss sends me home because of the dried blood on my pants, and I am really happy. My face doesn't ever heal. I go to work, and my face is all swollen and black.

You give up all your possessions and go live in a rented house in the toxic waste part of town where late at night you can hear Marla and Tyler in his room.

Just by contrast, this makes me the calm little center of the world. Me, with my swollen face and dried blood on my pants, I'm saying HELLO to everybody at work. HELLO! Look at me. HELLO! I am so calm. This is BLOOD. This is NOTHING. Hello. Everything is nothing, and it's so cool to be like me.

My boss asked if the blood was my blood.

The blood, is it mine? Yeah, I say. Some of it.

This is a wrong answer.

Big deal! I have two pairs of black trousers. Six white shirts. Six pairs of underwear. The bare minimum. I go to fight club. These things happen.

"Go home," my boss, says. "Get changed."

I'm starting to wonder if Tyler and Marla are the same person. Tyler and Marla are never in the same room. I never see them together. Tyler just doesn't come out when Marla's around.

Tyler has to show me how to make soap to wash the pants. Tyler's upstairs and Marla's at the kitchen table. Tyler's upstairs in my bedroom, looking at his teeth in my mirror, saying he got me a part-time job as a banquet waiter.

"At the Pressman Hotel, if you can work in the evening," Tyler says.

Yeah, I say, whatever.

"You have to wear a black tie," Tyler says. "All you need to work there is a white shirt and black trousers."

Soap, Tyler. I say, we need soap. We need to make some soap. I need to wash my pants.

"To make soap, first we need some fat."

Tyler is full of useful information.

Marla and Tyler are never in the same room. If Tyler's around, Marla ignores him. This is familiar. My parents used to play this game for many years.

"Even if someone loves you enough to save your life, they still hurt you. I can't win you, can I?" Marla looks at me as if I'm the one sleeping with her. She goes out the back door, singing a song. I just stare at her going.

I turn around, and Tyler's appeared.

Tyler says, "Did you get rid of her?"

Not a sound, not a smell, Tyler's just appeared.

"First," Tyler says and walks up to the freezer. "First, we need to melt some fat."

Tyler takes out plastic bags of frozen white stuff and drops them in the sink.

I put a big pan on the stove and fill it with water. If there's too little water, the fat will darken.

"This fat," Tyler says, "has a lot of salt, so the more water, the better."

Put the fat in the water, and get the water boiling.

Tyler squeezes the white stuff from each bag into the water, and then puts the empty bags in the trash. Tyler says, "Use a little imagination. Remember all that they taught you in Boy Scouts."

One thing I could do about my boss, Tyler tells me, is to drive to my boss's house some night and pump industrial dye into his house plumbing. Red or blue or green, and wait to see how my boss looks the next day. Or, I could just pump and pump until the plumbing pressure gets too high. This way, when someone flushes a toilet, the toilet will

explode. And if someone turns on the shower, the water pressure will blow off the shower head, and the shower head will turn into a missile.

Tyler only says this to make me feel better. The truth is I like my boss. Besides, I'm the calm little center of the world now. You know, Buddha-style. Hari Rama, you know, Krishna, Krishna, you know.

As the fat melts, tallow begins to appear. I turn down the heat under the pan and stir the boiling water. More and more tallow will rise to the surface.

Use a big spoon to skim the tallow off, and set it aside.

So, I say, how is Marla?

Tyler says, "At least Marla's trying to hit bottom."

I stir the boiling water.

Keep skimming until no more tallow rises.

Tyler says I'm not even close to hitting bottom, yet. And if I don't fall all the way, I can't be saved. Jesus did it with his crucifixion. I shouldn't just leave money and property. This isn't enough. I should run from self-improvement, and I should be running toward disaster. Only after disaster can we be resurrected.

"It's only after you've lost everything," Tyler says, "that you're free to do anything."

So it's too early to call me the calm little center of the world. "And keep stirring," Tyler says.

When the fat's boiled enough and no more tallow rises, pour the boiling water out. Wash the pot and fill it with clean water.

I ask, am I not that close to hitting bottom?

"Where you're now," Tyler says, "you can't even imagine what bottom is like."

Boil the skimmed tallow in the water. Skim and keep skimming.

"The fat we're using has a lot of salt in it," Tyler says. "With too much salt your soap won't get solid."

Boil and skim.

Boil and skim.

Marla is back. The moment Marla opens the door, Tyler is gone, disappeared. Tyler's gone upstairs, or Tyler's gone downstairs to the basement.

Marla comes in with a canister of lye.

I take the canister of lye and put it on the table. I don't say anything.

"Can I stay here, tonight?" Marla says.

I don't answer.

Marla says, "What are you cooking?"

I say, go, just go, just get out. Okay? Don't you have enough of my life, yet?

Marla grabs me and holds me in one place for one second to kiss my cheek.

"Please call me," she says. "Please. We need to talk."

I say, yeah, yeah, yeah.

When Marla is gone, Tyler appears back in the room.

Boil and skim.

Boil and skim.

I boil and skim while Tyler empties the fridge.

Put the skimmed tallow into open milk cartons.

Tyler watches the tallow cool in the open fridge. As I fill the milk cartons with tallow, Tyler puts them in the fridge. I stand beside Tyler in front of the fridge, and Tyler takes my hands and shows them to me. The lifeline. The love line. The Venus and Mars.

"I need you to do me another favor," Tyler says.

This is about Marla, isn't it?

"Don't you ever talk to her about me. Don't talk about me behind my back. Do you promise?" Tyler says.

I promise.

Tyler says, "If you ever mention me to her, you'll never see me again."

I promise.

"Promise?"

I promise.

Tyler says, "Now remember, that was three times that you promised."

Something thick and clear appears on top of the tallow in the fridge.

"Don't worry," Tyler says. "It is glycerin. You can mix the glycerin back in when you make soap. Or, you can skim the glycerin off."

Tyler licks his lips, and turns my hands palm-down.

"You can mix the glycerin with nitric acid to make nitroglycerin," Tyler says.

I stand with my mouth open and then say, nitroglycerin.

With his wet lips, Tyler kisses the back of my hand.

"You can mix the nitroglycerin with sodium nitrate and sawdust to make dynamite," Tyler says.

Dynamite, I say.

Tyler opens the can of lye.

"You can blow up bridges," Tyler says. "You could blow up a building, easily."

Tyler holds the can of lye above the shining wet kiss on the back of my hand.

"This is a chemical bum," Tyler says, "and it will hurt worse than any bum."

The kiss shines on the back of my hand.

"You'll have a scar," Tyler says.

"With enough soap," Tyler says, "you could blow up the whole world. Now remember your promise."

And Tyler pours the lye.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The wet kiss on the back of my hand held the lye while it burned.

Lye only bums when you combine it with water.

"This is a chemical bum," Tyler said, "and it will hurt more than any other bum."

Close your eyes.

A mixture of lye and water can bum through an aluminum pan and dissolve a wooden spoon.

Lye bums into the back of my hand, and Tyler holds my hands, and Tyler says to pay attention because this is the greatest moment of my life.

"Because everything up to now is a story," Tyler says, "and everything after now is a story."

This is the greatest moment of our life.

The lye on my hand is at the end of a long, long road that I imagine, miles away from me.

Tyler tells me to come back and be with him. "Come back to the pain," Tyler says.

This is the kind of guided meditation they use at support groups. Don't even think of the word part. Guided meditation works for cancer, it can work for this.

"Look at your hand," Tyler says.

Don't look at your hand.

Don't think of the word pain.

Don't hear yourself cry.

Guided meditation. You're in Ireland. Close your eyes. You're in Ireland the summer after you left college, and you're drinking at a pub near a castle.

"Listen to me," Tyler says. "Open your eyes. Soap and human sacrifice go hand in hand'."

You're in Ireland.

"In ancient history," Tyler says, "human sacrifices were made on a hill above a river. Thousands of people. Listen to me. The sacrifices were made and the bodies were burned. Their ashes fell into the river, and people noticed that washing their clothes there was good. And that's how soap was invented."

You're in Ireland.

"Look at me," Tyler says. "You can go and pour water over your hand, but first you have to know that you're stupid and you will die. Someday, you will die, and until you know that, you're useless to me."

You're in Ireland.

"You can cry," Tyler says, "but every tear that falls in the lye on your skin will leave a small scar."

Guided meditation. You're in Ireland the summer after you left college.

Years before you met Tyler Durocn.

In Ireland.

"We can use vinegar," Tyler says, "to neutralize the burning, but first you have to give up."

First, you have to hit bottom.

You're in a castle in Ireland.

"This is the greatest moment of your life," Tyler says, "and you're off somewhere, missing it."

You're in Ireland.

"Jeez," Tyler says.

I'm pissing in my black trousers with the dried blood that my boss can't stand.

"This means something," Tyler says. "This is a sign."

There's the smell of vinegar, and the burning on your hand at the end of the long road stops. The back of your hand is swollen and red, in the exact shape of Tyler's kiss.

"Open your eyes," Tyler says. "Congratulations. You're a step closer to hitting bottom. You have to see how the first soap was made of heroes. Without their death, without their pain, without their sacrifice, we would have nothing."

I stop the elevator between floors while Tyler unzips his pants. Then Tyler takes the lids off the soup bowls in the buffet cart.

Tyler says, "Don't look at me, or I can't go."

It's a tomato soup, and nobody will smell anything else we put in.

I say, go already.

Tyler says, "I can't."

If the soup gets cold, they'll send it back.

The guests will often send something back to the kitchen for no reason at all. They just want to see you run around for their money. At dinner like this, people treat you like dirt. We don't really take anything back to the kitchen. Move the food around the plate a little, serve it to someone else, and it's fine.

Behind me, Tyler says, "Oh, yeah. Oh, I'm doing it. Oh, yeah. Yes."

Tyler and me, we're the guerrilla terrorists of the service industry.

Tyler did a dinner party one time. While Tyler's washing plates, the hostess comes in the kitchen holding a piece of paper, and her hand is shaking so much. Madam wants to know who wrote it and left it in her bedroom.

"We're not supposed to go in that part of the house," Tyler says.

The host comes into the kitchen behind his wife and takes the paper out of her shaking hand. "This will be all right," he says.

"How can I look at those people?" Madam says. "I need to know who did this."

The host says, "They are your guests, and this party is very important."

Then the host takes his wife back into the dining room. The note falls to the floor, near Tyler.

Another waiter asks, "What does it say?"

Tyler looks at him and says, without even looking at the note, "I have pissed into at least one of your many elegant perfumes."

"You pissed in her perfume?"

No, Tyler says. He just left the note between the bottles. She's got about a hundred bottles on a mirror in her bathroom.

"So you didn't, really?"

"No," Tyler says, "but she doesn't know that."

Tyler says how they kill whales to make that perfume that costs more than gold. Most people have never even seen a whale.

For the rest of the night Madam sat watching each of her guests, until suddenly Madam's place at the head of the table was empty. She was later found in her bathroom, with her hundred of perfume bottles broken to pieces and her hands bleeding.

Back in the hotel, in the elevator, which stopped between the kitchen and the banquet floors, Tyler zips up his pants. This is easier with cold soup. This is impossible

with that onion soup that has a crust of melted cheese on it. If I ever ate here, that's what I'd order.

We were running out of ideas, Tyler and me. Doing stuff to the food was becoming boring, almost part of the job description. Then I hear one of the doctors say how a hepatitis bug can live on steel instruments for six months. How long can it live on salmon, for example?

I asked the doctor where we could get some of these hepatitis bugs, and he's drunk enough to laugh. Everything goes to the medical waste dump, he says and laughs again. Everything.

The medical waste dump sounds like hitting bottom.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

"It could've been worse," Tyler says, "what we did with Marla's mother."

I say, shut up.

What's worse is I knew what Tyler had done to Marla's mother, but for the first time since I've known him, Tyler was making real money.

A major fashion store called and left an order for two hundred bars of Tyler's brown sugar soap before Christmas. At twenty bucks a bar, we had money to go out on Saturday night, money to fix the leaking roof, money to go dancing. Without money to worry about, maybe I could quit my job.

Tyler calls himself the Paper Street Soap Company. People are saying that it's the best soap ever.

"What would've been worse," Tyler says, "is if you had accidentally eaten Marla's mother."

I say to just shut up.

This Saturday night we are seating in the front seats of a huge old car parked in a used-car lot. Tyler and I are talking, drinking beer. We chose the biggest car because if we have to sleep in a car on Saturday night, this car has the biggest seats.

We're eating Chinese food because we can't go home. It was either sleep here, or stay up all night at a dance club. We don't go to dance clubs. Tyler says that the music is so loud there that it kills his biorhythm. The last time we went

out, Tyler said, the loud music made him constipated. Besides, the dance club is too loud to talk.

We're sleeping in a car tonight because Marla came to the house and threatened to call the police and have me arrested for cooking her mother, and then Marla ran around the house, screaming that I was a cannibal, and then I left her there.

After her unsuccessful sleeping pills suicide at the Regent Hotel, I can't imagine Marla calling the police, but Tyler thought it would be good to sleep out tonight. Just in case.

Just in case, Marla bums the house down.

Just in case, Marla goes out and finds a gun.

Just in case, Marla is still in the house.

Just in case.

Tyler says, "One more time. Tell me exactly what happened."

For weeks, I ignored what Tyler had planned. One time, I went with Tyler to send Marla's mother a telegram: TERRIBLY WRINKLED. PLEASE HELP ME.

Tyler signed it with Marla's name.

When we were leaving the office, Tyler said if I loved him, I'd trust him. This wasn't something I needed to know about, Tyler told me.

What really scared me wasn't the telegram - it was eating out with Tyler. Never, never had Tyler paid for anything. For clothes, Tyler goes to gyms and hotels and takes clothing out of the lost and found. This is better than Marla, who goes to Laundromats' to steal jeans out of the dryers and sell them at twelve dollars a pair.

Tyler never ate in restaurants, and Marla wasn't wrinkled.

For no apparent reason, Tyler sent Marla's mother a huge box of chocolates.

Tyler was hiding tonight when this all started. Marla came to the house. Without even knocking, Marla walks through the front door and shouts, "Knock, knock."

I'm reading in the kitchen.

Marla yells, "Tyler. Can I come in? Are you home?"

I yell, Tyler's not home.

Marla yells, "Don't be mean!"

Now, I'm at the front door. Marla's standing there with a FedEx package, and says, "I need to put something in your freezer."

I say no.

No.

No.

No.

She is not going to keep her junk in this house.

"But honey," Marla says, "I don't have a freezer at the hotel, and you said I could."

No, I did not.

The last thing I want is Marla moving in, one piece of trash at a time.

Maria opens her FedEx package on the kitchen table and takes out something white.

"This is not trash," she says. "This is my mother you're talking about!"

What Marla lifts out of the package is one of those plastic bags of white stuff that Tyler melted for tallow to make soap.

"Things would've been worse," Tyler says, "if you'd accidentally eaten what was in one of those bags."

More than anything in the world, I didn't want Marla to open the freezer.

I asked, what was she going to do with the white stuff?

"To make my lips bigger," Marla, said. "As you get older, your lips get thinner. I'm saving for a collagen lip injection. I have almost thirty pounds of collagen in your freezer."

I asked, how big did she want her lips to be?

The stuff in the FedEx package, I tell Tyler in the car, was the same stuff we made soap out of.

Since silicone turned out to be dangerous, collagen has become the hot item to smooth the wrinkles or to puff up thin lips, Marla explained. Most cheap collagen you get is from cow fat that's been sterilized, but that cheap collagen doesn't last very long in your body. Six months later, you have thin lips, again. The best kind of collagen, Marla said, is your own fat, sucked out of your thighs, cleaned, and injected back into your lips, or wherever. This collagen will last.

This stuff in the fridge at home was Marla's collagen fund. Whenever her mom grew any extra fat, she had it sucked out and packaged, and sent the packages to Marla.

Marla never has any fat of her own.

It was right then, standing in the kitchen with Marla, that I knew what Tyler had done.

TERRIBLY WRINKLED.

And I knew why he sent chocolates to Marla's mother.

PLEASE HELP ME.

I say, Marla, you don't want to look in the freezer.

Marla says, "What?"

"That stuff," Tyler says in the car, "is making us a fortune. We paid the rent with that collagen."

I say, you should've told Marla. Now she thinks I did it.

"Listen," Tyler says. "We have a big order now. We'll send Marla's mom some more chocolates and probably some cakes."

I don't think that will work, anymore.

So Marla looked in the freezer. Okay, there was a little fight, at first. I try to stop her, and the bag she's holding drops and opens on the floor, and we both slip in the white stuff. I grab Marla, and I'm saying over and over again, it wasn't me.

It wasn't me.

I didn't do it.

"My mother! You've spilled my mother!"

We needed to make soap, I say. We needed to wash my pants, to pay the rent, to fix the leak in the roof.

It wasn't me.

It was Tyler.

Marla screams, "What are you talking about?"

She gets up and opens the freezer, and inside there's no collagen fund.

"Where is she?"

I'm still crawling on the floor. I don't want to see Marla's face when I tell her. The truth.

We made soap out of it. Of her. Of Marla's mother.

"Soap?"

Soap. You boil fat. You mix it with lye. You get soap.

When Marla screams, I get up and run.

I slip.

I run.

Around and around the first floor, Marla runs after me, slipping, falling, sliding, getting up, running, yelling, "You boiled my mother!"

Tyler boiled her mother.

Marla yelling, "You boiled my mother!"

Tyler boiled her mother.

The front door was still open. I ran out, and Marla was still screaming behind me.

I just kept running until I found Tyler or until Tyler found me, and I told him what happened.

With our beers, Tyler and I lie on the front and back seats of the old car. Even now, Marla's probably still in the house, screaming that I'm a monster, a bastard.

I ask Tyler, did we hit bottom, tonight?

## CHAPTER NINE

My boss stands close to my desk with his little smile.

I look up from writing the letter for a recall. This week the formula A times B times C was more than the cost of a recall. This week, it's the little plastic clip that holds the rubber thing on the windshield wipers. Only two hundred vehicles affected - it's nothing.

Last week was more typical. Last week it was some seat leather treated with some chemical substance - so strong that it could cause birth defects if a pregnant woman sat on it. Last week, nobody asked for a recall. But this week, we're doing a recall.

And this week the insomnia is back.

My boss is wearing his gray tie, so today must be a Tuesday.

My boss brings a sheet of paper to my desk and asks if I'm looking for it. This paper was left in the copy machine, he says, and begins to read: "The first rule of fight club is you don't talk about fight club."

I hear Tyler's words come out of my boss: "The second rule of fight club is you don't talk about fight club."

My boss looks at me, and he says: "I hope this isn't yours."

I am enraged. Tyler asked me to type the fight club rules and make him ten copies. Not nine, not eleven. Tyler

says, ten. Why does Tyler want ten copies of the fight club rules?

Still, I have the insomnia, and can't remember things. This must be the original I typed. I made ten copies, and forgot the original. The flash of the copy machine in my face. The insomnia distance of everything, a copy of a copy of a copy.

You can't touch anything, and nothing can touch you.

My boss reads: "The third rule of fight club is two men per fight."

I haven't slept in three days, or maybe I'm sleeping now.

My boss reads: "One fight at a time."

My boss shakes the paper under my nose. What about it, he says. Is this some little game I'm playing on company time? I'm paid for my full attention, not to waste time with little games. What about it? He shakes the paper under my nose again. What do I think, he asks, should he do with an employee who spends company time in some fantasy world? If I were him, what would I do?

What would I do?

My swollen face, the blue-black bruises around my eyes, and the red scar of Tyler's kiss on my hand, a copy of a copy of a copy.

What I would do, I say, is I'd be very careful who I talked to about this paper. I say, it sounds like some

dangerous psycho wrote this, and this psycho could probably go from office to office with an automatic gun at any moment in the working day. And he might start with his fat little boss who nags him with his stupid questions.

My boss just looks at me.

My boss takes the paper out from under my nose.

Go ahead, I say, read some more. No really, I say, it sounds fascinating. And I smile.

My boss just looks at me.

Let me help you, I say. I say, the fourth rule of fight club is one fight at a time.

My boss looks at the rules and then looks at me.

I say, the fifth rule is no shoes, no shirts in the fight.

My boss looks at the rules and looks at me.

Tyler's words coming out of my mouth. I used to be such a nice person.

I just look at my boss.

My boss just looks at me.

It's scary, I say. This is probably somebody you've known for years. Probably this guy knows all about you, where you live, and where your wife works, and your kids go to school.

And why does Tyler need ten copies of the fight club rules?

No, I say, the paper's not mine.

I take the paper between two fingers and pull it out of his hand. My boss just looks at me, eyes wide open.

I roll the paper into a ball and throw it into the trashcan next to my desk.

Maybe, I say, you shouldn't be bringing me every little piece of crap you pick up.

On Sunday night, I go to the cancer support group in the church basement, and it's almost empty. Just Big Bob, and I come with my insomnia.

All night long, you're thinking: Am I asleep? Have I slept?

I'm surprised to see Big Bob's arms which look so muscular and hard.

Big Bob smiles, he's so happy to see me. He thought I was dead. Yeah, I say, me too.

"Well," Big Bob says, "I've got good news."

Where is everybody?

"That's the good news," Big Bob says. "The group's cancelled. I only come here to tell any guys who might show up."

I don't understand.

"The good news," Big Bob says, "is there's a new group, but the first rule about this new group is you don't talk about it."

Oh.

Big Bob says, "And the second rule is you don't talk about it." Oh, really? I open my mouth.

"The group's called fight club," Big Bob says, "and it meets every Friday night in a closed garage across the town. On

Thursday nights, there's another fight club that meets at another garage."

I don't know these places.

"The first rule about fight club," Big Bob says, "is you don't talk about fight club."

Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday night, Tyler is a movie projectionist.

"The second rule about fight club," Big Bob says, "is you don't talk about fight club."

Saturday night, Tyler goes to fight club with me.

"Only two men per fight."

Sunday morning, we come home and sleep all afternoon. "Only one fight at a time," Big Bob says.

Sunday and Monday night, Tyler's working as a waiter.

"You fight without shirts or shoes."

Tuesday night, Tyler's at home, making soap. The Paper Street Soap Company.

"The fights," Big Bob says, "go on as long as they have to. Those are the rules invented by the guy who invented fight club. Do you know him? I've never seen him, myself, but the guy's name is Tyler Durden."

Do I know him? I don't know, I say. Maybe.

## CHAPTER TEN

When I get to the Regent Hotel, Marla's waiting for me in the lobby.

Marla called me at work and asked me to cancel whatever I had planned after work and come see her, instead.

Marla called because she hates me. She doesn't say anything about her collagen fund.

What Marla says is, would I do her a favor?

Marla was lying in bed this afternoon, and she looked down, and saw a lump on her breast, and the nodes under her arm near the lump were hard. She couldn't tell anyone she loves because she doesn't want to scare them, and she can't afford to see a doctor if this is nothing, but she needed to talk to someone and someone else needed to look.

Marla lives on the meals that 'Meals on Wheels' brings for her neighbors who are dead. Marla takes the meals and says they're asleep.

The color of Marla's scared eyes is brown.

Marla says she'll forgive the collagen thing if I help her look.

I think she doesn't call Tyler because she doesn't want to scare him, and I'm neutral for her.

We go upstairs to her room, and Marla lies down on her bed. She says that our culture has made death something wrong.

Marla's cold and sweating. With my hands still cold from outside, I am feeling Marla's cold skin a little at a time, rubbing a little of Marla between my fingers.

Marla looks at my hand and the scar from Tyler's kiss.

Marla laughs a little until she sees that my fingers have stopped. Like maybe, I've found something. Marla stops breathing, and her heart is beating fast. But no, I stopped because I'm talking, and I stopped because, for a minute, I was not in Marla's bedroom.

Once I also thought, I had cancer for about fifteen minutes. This was years and years ago. I have a birthmark on my foot that is shaped like Australia with New Zealand next to it. And once a doctor told me it could be a new kind of cancer. But in the end the doctor was wrong.

With cancer, it's often like that, I tell Marla.

There might be mistakes, and, anyway, so what if one little part goes bad?

Marla says, "Might."

Marla isn't laughing. I want to make her laugh, to warm her, to make her forgive me for the collagen, I want to tell Marla there's nothing for me to find. If she found anything this morning, it was a mistake. I want to make Marla laugh.

Marla also has the scar from Tyler's kiss on the back of her hand.

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There are a lot of things we don't want to know about the people we love.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

I loved the support groups so much because if people thought you were dying, they gave you their full attention. Since it might be the last time, they saw you - they really saw you. People listened instead of just waiting for their turn to speak. And when they spoke, they weren't telling you a story. When the two of you talked, you were building something, and then you were both different than before.

Marla had started going to the support groups after she found the first lump. Just before Marla and I met at Remaining Men Together, there was just one lump, and now there was a second lump, which we found the night before.

What you have to know is that Marla is still alive. Marla's philosophy of life, she told me, is that she can die at any moment. The tragedy of her life is that she doesn't.

When Marla found the first lump, she went to a Red Cross clinic. This is the only place to go if you don't have health insurance. Looking at all the sick and poor people there, Marla decides, no, if she was going to die, she didn't want to know about it.

Marla walked from the clinic to the nearest Laundromat and stole all the jeans out of the dryers, then walked to a dealer who gave her fifteen bucks a pair. Then Marla bought herself some really good pantyhose.

Marla started going to the support groups because everyone there has something wrong.

Nothing is static. Everything is falling apart.

I Marla started working at a mortuary. She sat there at her desk in the foyer with her dark hair, and her really good pantyhose, and breast lump, and doom.

Between the support groups and the clinic, Marla told me, she had met a lot of people who were dead. These people were dead and on the other side, and at night they called her on the telephone. Marla took the calls, but the line was dead.

At the time, she thought this was hitting bottom.

"When you're twenty-four," Marla says, "you have no idea how far you can really fall."

In the house on Paper Street, if the phone rang only once, and you picked it up, and the line was dead, you knew it was someone trying to talk to Marla.

This happened more often than you think.

In the house on Paper Street, a police detective started calling me about my condo explosion, and Tyler stood nearby, whispering into my ear while I talked, and the detective asked if I knew anyone who could make homemade dynamite.

"Disaster is a natural part of my evolution," Tyler whispered.

I told the detective that it was the refrigerator that blew up my condo.

"I'm breaking my attachment to possessions," Tyler whispered, "because only through destroying myself can I discover the greater power of my spirit."

The dynamite, the detective said, or the bomb, was most likely homemade.

I said I was in Washington, D.C., that night.

The detective on the phone explained how someone might have gotten in.

"The liberator who destroys my property," Tyler said, "is trying to save my spirit. He will free me."

The detective said whoever set the homemade dynamite could've turned on the gas, too.

"Tell him," Tyler whispered. "Yes, you did it. You blew it all up. That's what he wants to hear."

I tell the detective, no, I did not leave the gas on and then leave town. I loved my life. I loved that condo. I loved every piece of furniture there. That was my whole life. Everything, the lamps, the chairs, the rugs were me. The dishes were me. The plants were me. The television was me. It was me that exploded. Couldn't he see that?

The detective said not to leave town.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Mister President of the local projectionists and theater operators union just sat. Under and behind and inside everything the man had, something horrible had been growing.

Nothing is static. Everything is falling apart.

I know this because Tyler knows this.

For three years, Tyler had been working for a chain of movie houses. His job was to put the small reels together. After three years, seven theaters, new shows every week, Tyler had worked with hundreds of reels.

Too bad, but with newer projectors, the union didn't need Tyler anymore. Mister President had called Tyler for a talk.

The work was boring and the pay was small, so the president of the union said he was doing Tyler Durden a favor, "We appreciate your contribution to our success. Don't think of this as rejection. Think of it as downsizing."

Oh, that wasn't a problem, Tyler said, and smiled. As long as the union kept sending a paycheck, he'd keep his mouth shut. Tyler said, "Think of this as early retirement, with pension."

Tyler had worked with hundreds of reels. Tyler had added a lot of pornography to them. Tyler had nothing to lose. Tyler was everybody's trash.

This is what Tyler told me to say to the manager of the Pressman Hotel, too.

At Tyler's other job, at the Pressman Hotel, Tyler said he was nobody. Nobody cared if he lived or died. This is what Tyler told me to say in the hotel manager's office with security guards sitting outside the door.

After he'd gone to the projectionists union, Tyler made me go and talk to the manager of the Pressman Hotel.

Tyler and I were looking more and more like identical twins. My bruises were from fight club, and Tyler's face was punched by the president of the projectionists union.

I went to see the manager of the Pressman Hotel.

I sat there, in his office, like a Smirking Revenge.

The first thing the hotel manager said was that I had three minutes.

In the first thirty seconds, I told how I'd been spoiling their food, and now I wanted the hotel to send me a check every week plus tips. In return, I wouldn't come to work anymore, and I wouldn't go to the newspapers or the public health people with a confession. Of course, I said, I understand that I might go to prison. But the Pressman Hotel would always be known as the hotel where the richest people in the world ate crap.

Tyler's words coming out of my mouth. And I used to be such a nice person.

At the projectionist's union office, Tyler had laughed after the union president punched him.

The punch knocked Tyler out of his chair, and Tyler sat on the floor against the wall, laughing.

"Go ahead, you can't kill me," Tyler was laughing. "You idiot. Beat me, but you can't kill me."

You have too much to lose. I have nothing. You have everything. Go ahead. Punch me again, but send me those paychecks. And if you miss one week's pay, I'll go public, and you and your union will be sued by every theater owner and film distributor and mommy whose kid maybe saw something in Bambi.

"I am trash to you and this whole damn world," Tyler said. "You don't care where I live or how I feel, or what I eat or how I pay the doctor if I get sick, but I am still your responsibility."

Tyler was still laughing.

Sitting in the office at the Pressman Hotel, I said the same stuff Tyler said. I asked the hotel manager if I could use his phone, and I dialed the number of the city newspaper. With the hotel manager watching, I said: Hello, I've committed a terrible crime against humanity as part of a political protest. I am against the exploitation of workers in the service industry.

The manager of the Pressman Hotel very gently took the phone out of my hand.

The manager said he didn't want me working here anymore, not the way I looked now.

I'm standing at the manager's desk when I say, what? You don't like the idea?

And without warning, still looking at the manager, I send my fist right to my nose.

For no reason at all, I remember the night Tyler and I had our first fight.

I want you to hit me as hard as you can.

This isn't a hard punch. I punch myself, again. It just looks good, all the blood, but I throw myself back against the wall to make a terrible noise and break the painting that hangs on the wall. The broken glass and frame and the painting fall to the floor. Blood is on the carpet now, and I grab the hotel manager's desk with my bloody hands and say, please, help me, but I start to laugh. Help me, please. Please don't hit me, again.

I fall back to the floor and crawl across the carpet. The first word I'm going to say is please. So I keep my lips shut. The blood drips out of my nose. I crawl close enough to grab the manager of the Pressman Hotel around his ankle and say it. Please give me the money. And please don't hit me. Please. And I laugh, again.

Please. You have so much, and I have nothing.

I grab the manager's wrists with my bloody hands.

Please.

I smile a big smile.

There's a struggle as the manager screams and tries to get away from me and my blood. And right then, at the most excellent moment, the security guards walk in.

This is how Tyler was free to start a fight club every night of the week. After this there were seven fight clubs, and after that there were fifteen fight clubs, and after that, there were twenty-three fight clubs, and Tyler wanted more. There's always money coming in.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It's in the newspaper today how somebody broke into offices between the tenth and fifteenth floors of the Hein Tower, climbed out of the office windows, painted the side of the building with a huge smiling face, and set fires in the windows at the center of each eye. In the picture on the front page of the newspaper, the face looks like an angry pumpkin, a demon, a dragon in the sky.

What did it mean? And who would do this? And even after the fires were stopped, the face was still there, and it was even worse. The empty eyes seemed to watch everyone in the street, but at the same time, they were dead. This stuff appeared in the newspapers more and more.

Of course, you want to know if it was a part of Project Mayhem. Was it the Mischief Committee or the Arson Committee? The giant face was probably their homework assignment from last week.

Tyler would know, but the first rule about Project Mayhem is you don't ask questions about Project Mayhem.

In the Assault Committee of Project Mayhem, this week Tyler taught everyone to shoot a gun. They meet in the basement where fight club meets on Saturday night. Each committee meets on a different night: Arson meets on Monday; Assault on Tuesday; Mischief meets on Wednesday; Misinformation meets on Thursday. Organized chaos. The anarchy. Support groups. Sort of.

So on Tuesday night, the Assault Committee proposed events for the following week, and Tyler read the proposals and gave the committee its homework: by this time next week, each guy on the Assault Committee has to get into a fight and lose it. This is harder than it sounds. A man on the street will do anything not to fight. The idea is to take someone on the street who's never been in a fight and let him experience winning for the first time in his life.

"What we have to do, people," Tyler told the committee, "is to remind these guys what kind of power they still have."

This is Tyler's little talk. Then Tyler checks all the proposals and throws out any bad ideas.

For each idea he throws out, Tyler puts a blank paper into the box. Then everyone in the committee takes a paper out of the box. If somebody gets a blank paper, then he only has his homework to do that week. If you get a proposal, then you have to do other things.

If you get arrested, you're off the Assault Committee. If you laugh, you're off the committee.

Nobody knows who gets a proposal, and nobody except Tyler knows what all the proposals are. Later that week, you might read in the newspapers about some man stealing a Jaguar convertible and driving it into a fountain. And you wonder: was this a committee proposal? The next Tuesday night, you'll be looking around the Assault Committee meeting under the one light in the fight club

basement, and you'll be wondering who drove the Jaguar into the fountain.

Who painted the demon face on the Hein Tower?

It could be a team of clerks and accountants getting into offices where they sat, every day. Maybe at night they were swinging on ropes, risking their lives. The next morning, these same clerks and accountants would be in the crowd, listening to the people around them wonder, who would do this.

Tyler told me in secret that there're never more than four good proposals at a meeting so your chances of getting a real proposal and not just a blank are about four in ten. There are twenty-five guys on the Assault Committee. Everybody gets their homework: lose a fight in public.

This week, Tyler told them, "Go and buy a gun."

No two guys should go to the same place to buy it.

"This," Tyler said, and he took a gun out of his pocket, "this is a gun, and in two weeks, each of you should have a gun and bring it to the meeting. Better, pay for it with cash. Next meeting, you'll all exchange the guns and report the gun you bought as stolen."

Nobody asked anything. You don't ask questions is the first rule in Project Mayhem.

Tyler passed the gun around. Everyone wanted to ask if it was loaded, but the second rule of Project Mayhem is you don't ask questions. Maybe it was loaded, maybe not.

"A gun," Tyler said, "is simple and perfect."

The third rule in Project Mayhem is no excuses.

The fourth rule is no lies.

When Tyler invented Project Mayhem, he said the goal of Project Mayhem had nothing to do with other people. Tyler didn't care if other people got hurt or not. The goal was to teach each man in the project that he had the power to control history.

We, each of us, can take control of the world.

It was at fight club that Tyler invented Project Mayhem.

I fought a first-timer one night at fight club. That Saturday night, a young guy with an angel's face came to his first fight club, and I chose him for a fight. That's the rule. If it's your first night in fight club, you have to fight. I knew that so I chose him because the insomnia was back again, and I was in a mood to destroy something beautiful.

That night at fight club, I hit our first-timer and hammered his beautiful angel face. The kid was a mess. Tyler told me later that he'd never seen me destroy something so completely. That night, Tyler knew he had to take fight club further or shut it down.

Maybe I needed to move on to something bigger.

It was the next morning that Tyler invented Project Mayhem.

Tyler asked me what I was really fighting. I wanted to destroy everything beautiful I'd never have. Burn the Amazon rain forests. Destroy the ozone layer. Dump oil into the ocean. I wanted the whole world to hit bottom.

Hammering that kid, I really wanted to shoot every endangered animal on this planet.

Don't think of this as extinction. Think of this as downsizing.

For thousands of years, human beings had been destroying this planet, and now history expected me to clean up after everyone. I have to recycle plastic and cans. I have to pay for nuclear waste, dumped a generation before I was born.

I wanted to burn the Louvre wanted to breathe smoke.

This is my world, now. This is my world, my world, and those ancient people are dead.

It was at breakfast that morning that Tyler invented Project Mayhem.

We wanted to free the world of history.

We were eating breakfast in the house on Paper Street, and Tyler said, imagine yourself planting cabbages and potatoes on a forgotten golf course. You'll hunt in the forest around the ruins of Rockefeller Center. We'll paint the skyscrapers with huge totem faces.

"Recycling and speed limits are useless," Tyler said. "It's like quitting smoking on your deathbed."

It's Project Mayhem that's going to save the world.

A cultural Ice Age. The Dark Ages.

Project Mayhem will help the Earth to recover.

Project Mayhem will break the civilization, so we can make something better out of the world.

"Imagine," Tyler said, "you'll wear leather clothes, you'll walk through the forest, and the air will be so clean."

This was the goal of Project Mayhem, Tyler said, the complete destruction of civilization.

What comes next in Project Mayhem, nobody knows except Tyler. The second rule is you don't ask questions.

"Don't get any bullets," Tyler told the Assault Committee. "And don't worry about it, yes, you're going to kill someone."

No questions. No excuses. No lies.

The fifth rule about Project Mayhem is you have to trust Tyler.

Tyler gave me a handwritten list of notes and said to type it and make seventy-two copies.

Why so many?

"Because," Tyler said, "that's how many guys can sleep in the basement, if we put them in the bunk beds."

I asked, what about their stuff?

Tyler said, "They won't bring anything more than what's on the list."

The list my boss finds in the copy machine says:

"Bringing the required items does not guarantee admission to training, but no applicant will be considered unless he is equipped with the following items and five hundred dollars in cash for burial."

In addition, the applicant has to arrive with the following: two black shirts; two black pairs of trousers.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

My boss brings another sheet of paper to me and puts it on my desk.

I don't even wear a tie anymore.

My boss is wearing his blue tie, so it must be a Thursday.

The door to my boss's office is always closed now, and we haven't exchanged more than two words since he found the fight club rules in the copy machine, and I maybe said that I might shoot him.

Morning, I say.

He says, "Morning."

On my desk, there is another important secret document: One pair of heavy black shoes.

Two pairs of black socks and two pairs of plain underwear. One black coat.

One white towel.

One mattress.

One white plastic bowl.

With my boss still standing there, I pick up the original list and tell him, thanks.

My boss goes into his office, and I continue playing games on my computer.

After work, I give Tyler the copies, and days go by.

I go to work.

I come home.

I go to work.

I come home, and there's a guy standing on our front porch.

The guy's at the front door with his black shirts and pants, a white towel, a mattress, and a plastic bowl. From an upstairs window, Tyler and I look at the guy, and Tyler tells me to send the guy away.

"He's too young," Tyler says.

The guy on the porch is mister angel face whom I tried to destroy the night Tyler invented Project Mayhem. Mister angel just stands there at the front door, just looks straight ahead, with his hands at his sides, wearing black shoes, black shirt, black pair of trousers.

"Get rid of him," Tyler tells me. "He's too young."

I ask how young is too young?

"It doesn't matter," Tyler says. "If the applicant is young, we tell him he's too young. If he's fat, he's too fat. If he's old, he's too old. Thin, he's too thin. White, he's too white. Black, he's too black."

This is how Buddhist monasteries have tested applicants, Tyler says. You tell the applicant to go away, and if his wish is so strong that he waits at the door without food for three days, then and only then can he enter and begin the training.

So I tell mister angel he's too young, but at lunchtime he's still there. After lunch, I go out and beat mister angel with a broom and kick the guy's sack. From upstairs, Tyler watches me.

Go away, I'm screaming. Haven't you heard? You're too young. You'll never make it, I scream.

Come back in a couple of years. Just go. Just get off my porch.

The next day, the guy is still there, and Tyler tells him, "I'm sorry."

Tyler says he's sorry he told the guy about training, but the guy is really too young, and would he please just go.

Good cop. Bad cop.

I yell at the poor guy, again. Then, six hours later, Tyler goes out and says he's sorry, but no. The guy has to leave. Tyler says he's going to call the police if the guy won't leave.

And the guy stays.

And the guy stays.

On the third day, another applicant is at the front door. Mister angel is still there, and Tyler comes down and just tells mister angel, "Come in. Get your stuff and come in."

To the new guy, Tyler says, he's sorry but there's been a mistake. The new guy is too old to train here, and would he please leave.

I go to work every day.

I come home, and every day there's one or two guys waiting on the porch. These new guys don't make eye contact. I shut the door and leave them on the porch. This happens every day for a while, and sometimes the applicants will leave, but mostly they stay until the third day, until most of the seventy- two bunk beds Tyler and I bought and set up in the basement are full.

One day, Tyler gives me five hundred dollars in cash and tells me to keep it with me all the time.

My personal burial money. This is another old Buddhist monastery thing.

L come home from work now, and the house is filled with strangers that Tyler has accepted. All of them working. The whole first floor turns into a kitchen and a soap factory. The bathroom is never empty. Teams of men disappear for a few days and come home with bags of fat.

One night, Tyler comes upstairs to find me hiding in my room and says, "Don't bother them. They all know what to do. It's part of Project Mayhem. No one understands the whole plan, but everyone is trained to do one simple task perfectly."

The rule in Project Mayhem is you have to trust Tyler.

Then Tyler's gone.

Teams of Project Mayhem guys boil fat all day. I'm not sleeping. All night I hear other teams make soap, wrap and seal it with the Paper Street Soap Company label. Everyone except me seems to know what to do, and Tyler is never home.

I'm surrounded by silent men with the energy of trained space monkeys, cooking and working and sleeping in teams. Pull a lever. Push a button. A team of space monkeys cooks meals all day, and all day, teams of space monkeys are eating out of the plastic bowls they brought with them.

One morning I'm leaving for work, and Big Bob's on the porch, wearing black shoes, black shirt, black pants.

I ask, has he seen Tyler lately? Did Tyler send him here?

"The first rule about Project Mayhem," Big Bob says, with his feet together and his back straight, "is you don't ask questions about Project Mayhem."

So what dumb little task has Tyler given him, I ask.

There are guys whose job is to just boil rice all day or wash the eating bowls or clean the toilet. All day.

Big Bob doesn't say anything.

I go to work.

I come home, and Big Bob's still on the porch.

I don't sleep all night, and the next morning, Big Bob's working in the garden.

Before I leave for work, I ask Big Bob, who let him in? Who gave him this task? Did he see Tyler? Was Tyler here last night?

Big Bob says, "The first rule in Project Mayhem is you don't talk..."

I stop him. I say, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

And while I'm at work, teams of space monkeys dig up the lawn around the house. At any time of the day and night, space monkeys plant basil and thyme and lettuce and mint. And other teams go out at night and kill the slugs and snails. Yet another team of space monkeys picks only the most perfect leaves and berries to boil for a natural dye and to give soap a fresh smell.

Marla shows up. We talk about the plants. Marla and I walk through the garden, drinking and smoking. We talk about her breasts. We talk about everything except Tyler Durden.

And one day it's in the newspapers how a team of men wearing black had run through a posh neighborhood, destroying luxury cars with baseball bats.

At the Paper Street Soap Company, other teams pick the petals from roses and lavender for making soap with a flower smell.

Marla asks me about the plants. Every night, Marla and I walk in the garden until I'm sure that Tyler's not coming home that night. Right behind us is always a space monkey, following us to pick up a dropped cigarette butt. The space monkey rakes the path behind himself to erase our footprints.

And one night in a town park, another group of men poured gasoline around every tree and set a perfect little forest fire.

It was in the newspapers.

Tyler's rented house on Paper Street is a living thing. So many people are moving inside, the house moves.

Another night that Tyler didn't come home, someone was destroying ATMs and payphones. And Tyler was never at home, but after a month a few of the space monkeys had Tyler's kiss on the back of their hand. Then those space monkeys were gone, too, and new ones were waiting on the porch.

One evening, I hear Marla on the porch, telling a space monkey, "I'm here to see Tyler. Tyler Durden. He lives here. I'm his friend."

The space monkey says, "I'm sorry, but you're too young to train here."

Marla says, "Excuse me?"

"Besides," the space monkey says, "you haven't brought the required items: two black shirts, two pairs of black pants..."

Marla yells, "Tyler!"

"One pair of heavy black shoes."

"Tyler!"

"Two pairs of black socks and two pairs of plain underwear."

"Tyler!"

And I hear the front door shut.

Marla doesn't wait the three days.

Most days, after work, I come home and one space monkey is reading aloud to a group of space monkeys sitting on the kitchen floor. "You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same dying organic matter as everyone else, and we are all part of the same compost pile."

The space monkey continues, "Our culture has made us all the same. No one is truly white or black or rich, anymore. We all want the same. Individually, we are nothing."

The reader stops when I walk in to make a sandwich, and all the space monkeys sit silently as if I were alone.

I say, don't stop. I've already read it. I typed it.

Even my boss has probably read it.

Go ahead. Play your little game. Don't mind me.

The space monkeys wait quietly while I make my sandwich and take a bottle of vodka to my room upstairs. Behind me I hear, "You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake."

My heart is broken because Tyler's dumped me.

Because my father dumped me.

Oh, I could go on and on.

Some nights, after work, I go to a different fight club in the basement of a bar or garage, and I ask if anybody's seen Tyler Durden. In every new fight club, someone I've never met is standing in the center, under the one light, surrounded by men, and reading Tyler's words.

The first rule about fight club is you don't talk about fight club.

When the fights start, I ask the club leader if he's seen Tyler. I live with Tyler, I say, and he hasn't been home for a while.

The guy's eyes get bigger and he asks, do I really know Tyler Durden?

This happens in most of the new fight clubs.

Yes, I say, I'm best friends with Tyler.

Then, suddenly, everyone wants to shake my hand. These new guys stare at the scar on my cheek and the black, yellow, and green skin on my face, and they call me

sir. Yes, sir. No, sir. Nobody has ever met Tyler Durden. Sir. Friends of friends met Tyler Durden, and they founded this fight club, sir.

Then they wink at me.

Is it true, everyone asks, that Tyler Durden is building an army? Does Tyler Durden only sleep one hour a night? They say that Tyler's starting fight clubs all over the country. What's next, everybody wants to know.

The meetings for Project Mayhem have moved to bigger basements because each committee - Arson, Assault, Mischief, and Misinformation - gets bigger. Each committee has a leader, and even the leaders don't know where Tyler is. Tyler calls them every week on the phone.

Everybody on Project Mayhem wants to know what's next. Where are we going?

On Paper Street, Marla and I walk through the garden at night, smelling sage, and verbena, and geranium. Black shirts and black pants run around us with candles, killing snails or slugs.

Marla asks, what's going on here?

What do you mean?

Marla asks, "What are you going to do?"

What's going to happen next, I don't know, I tell Marla. It looks like we've both been dumped.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

This Friday night, I fall asleep at my desk at work. When I wake up, the telephone is ringing, and everyone else is gone. I answer the phone.

A vacuum cleaner is working somewhere. My boss has gone on vacation. He sent me an e-mail and then disappeared. I'm to prepare for a formal review in two weeks. Reserve a conference room. Get all my things in order. Update my resume. They're building a case against me.

Complete lack of surprise, that's what I feel.

I pick up the phone, and it's Tyler, and he says, "Go outside, there're some guys waiting for you in the parking lot."

I ask, who are they?

"They're all waiting," Tyler says.

I smell gasoline on my hands.

Tyler says, "Come on. They have a car, outside. They have a Cadillac."

I'm still asleep. I'm not sure if Tyler is my dream. Or if I am Tyler's dream.

I smell the gasoline on my hands again.

There's nobody else around, and I get up and walk out to the parking lot.

A guy from fight has parked a huge car at the curb, and all I can do is look at it, all black and golden, this huge car, ready to drive me somewhere. This guy, who is our fight club mechanic, gets out of the car and tells me not to worry, he exchanged the plates with another car. Three space monkeys are sitting in the back seat wearing their black shirts and black pants.

See no evil. Hear no evil. Speak no evil. I ask, so where's Tyler?

The fight club mechanic is holding the Cadillac open for me.

I ask, are we going to see Tyler?

Waiting for me in the middle of the front seat is a birthday cake with candles ready to be lit.

I get in. We start driving.

Even a week after fight club, you've got no problem driving on a highway. You're so cool. Other cars drive around you. Cars behind you blink their lights. You get the finger from other drivers. Total strangers hate you. It's absolutely nothing personal. After fight club, you're so relaxed, you just don't care. You don't even turn the radio on.

It's scar to see guys like our mechanic at fight club. Skinny guys never give up. They have to fight each other, these guys. They fight until they're burger. They never say stop. It's like they're all energy. As if the only choice they have is how they're going to die and they want to die in a

fight. Nobody else will choose them for a fight, and they can't choose anybody except another skinny guy, since nobody else will ever fight them. Guys who are watching don't even yell when guys like our mechanic fight with each other. All you hear is the fighters breathing, the fists hammer and hammer under the one light. Ten, fifteen minutes pass. Twenty minutes of fight club will pass. Finally, one guy will fall down. After a fight, the guys will stay together for the rest of the night, tired and smiling from fighting so hard.

Since fight club, this mechanic is always at the house on Paper Street.

Now, the mechanic says, "Did you see this cake I made for you? I made this."

It's not my birthday.

I ask, what's Tyler been planning?

The mechanic says, "Is this a test? Are you testing us?"

Where's Tyler?

"The first rule about fight club is you don't talk about fight club," the mechanic says. "And the last rule about Project Mayhem is you don't ask questions."

So what can you tell me?

He says, "What you have to understand is that your father was your model for God."

Behind us, my job and my office are smaller, smaller, smaller, gone.

I smell the gasoline on my hands.

The mechanic says, "If you're male, and you're Christian, and living in America, your father is your model for God. And if you never knew your father, what do you think about God?"

This is all Tyler Durden's philosophy. Written on bits of paper while I was asleep and given to me to type and copy at work. I've read it all. Even my boss has probably read it all.

"What you do," the mechanic says, "is you spend your life looking for a father and God. But what you have to consider, is the possibility that God doesn't like you. Could be, God hates us. This is not the worst thing that can happen."

Tyler thought that getting God's attention for being bad was better than getting no attention at all. Maybe it's because God's hate is better than His indifference. If you could be either God's worst enemy or nothing - which would you choose?

We are God's children with no special place in history and no special attention.

Which is worse, hell or nothing?

"Bum the Louvre," the mechanic says. "This way at least, God would know our names."

The lower you fall, the higher you'll fly. The farther you run, the more God wants you back. It's not enough to be like the grains of sand on the beach and the stars in the sky.

We are driving on the highway.

"Last week, we could've started four more fight clubs," the mechanic says. "Maybe Big Bob can run the next one if we find a bar."

So next week, he'll practice the rules with Big Bob and give him his own fight club.

Now, when a leader starts a fight club, when everyone is standing around the light in the center of the basement, waiting, the leader should walk around and around the crowd, in the dark.

I ask who made the new rules? Is it Tyler?

The mechanic smiles and says, "You know who makes the rules."

The new rule is that nobody should be the center of fight club, he says. Nobody's the center of fight club except the two men fighting. This is how it will be in all the fight clubs.

Finding a bar or a garage for a new fight club isn't difficult; they make their monthly rent in just one fight club on Saturday night.

According to the mechanic, another new fight club rule is that fight club will always be free. It will never cost

anything to get in. "We want you, not your money. As long as you're at fight club, you're not how much money you've got in the bank. You're not your job. You're not your family, and you're not who you tell yourself. You're not your name."

A space monkey in the back seat says: "You're not your problems. You're not your age."

Here, the mechanic swerves us into the opposite lane. One car and then another comes straight at us, beeping its horn, and the mechanic swerves just enough to miss each one.

More headlights, more horns, more swerving.

"You're not your hopes."

This time, the other car swerves just in time to save us. Another car comes on, headlights blinking, horn beeping.

"You will not be saved."

The mechanic doesn't swerve, but the other car swerves. "We are all going to die, someday."

This time, the other car swerves, but the mechanic swerves back into its path. The car swerves, and the mechanic swerves, again.

You melt at that moment. At that moment, nothing matters. Look up at the stars and you're gone. Not your luggage. Nothing matters. Not your bad breath. The windows are dark outside, and the horns are beeping

around you. The headlights are flashing in your face, and you will never have to go to work again. You will never have to get another haircut.

"Quick," the mechanic says.

The car swerves again, and the mechanic swerves back into its path.

"What," he says, "will you wish you'd done before you died?"

With the other car beeping its horn and the mechanic so cool, that he even looks at me beside him in the front seat, he says, "Ten seconds to impact."

"Nine."

"In eight."

"Seven."

"In six."

My job, I say. I wish I'd quit my job.

The car swerves and the mechanic doesn't swerve to hit it.

More lights are coming at us just ahead, and the mechanic turns to the three monkeys in the back seat. "Hey, space monkeys," he says, "you see how the game's played. Fasten your seat belts now or we're all dead."

The three space monkeys are quiet in the back seat.

The Mischief Committee is printing airline safety cards that show passengers fighting each other for oxygen

masks while their burning plane falls down toward the rocks at a thousand miles per hour. The Misinformation Committee is trying to develop a computer virus that will make the ATMs spit the money.

The mechanic tells me to light the candles on the birthday cake with the car cigarette lighter.

I light the candles.

"What will you wish you'd done before you died?" the mechanic says and swerves us into the path of a coming truck. The truck beeps the horn, and the truck's headlights are like a sunrise, becoming brighter and brighter.

"Make your wish, quick," the mechanic says and smiles. "We've got five seconds to oblivion."

"One."

"Two."

The truck is in front of us, bright and roaring.

"Three."

"Ride a horse," comes from the back seat.

"Build a house," comes another voice.

"Get a tattoo."

The mechanic says, "Believe in me and you shall die, forever."

Too late, the truck swerves and our Cadillac swerves, but the bumper of our car hits the end of the truck's bumper. I'm thrown first against the passenger door and

then against the birthday cake and the mechanic behind the steering wheel. In one perfect second, there's no light inside the car, and we shout, and we have no control, no choice, no direction, and no escape, and we're dead.

My wish right now is for me to die. I am nothing in the world compared to Tyler. I am helpless. I am stupid, and all I do is want and need things. My little life. My little job. My IKEA furniture. I never, no, never told anyone this, but before I met Tyler, I was planning to buy a dog.

This is how bad your life can get.

Kill me.

I grab the steering wheel and swerve us back into traffic. Now.

Prepare to evacuate soul.

Now.

The mechanic tries to control the steering wheel, and I try to finally die.

Now.

The amazing miracle of death, when one second you're walking and talking, and the next second, you're an object.

I am nothing.

I am not even that.

Cold.

Invisible.

I'm awake now. There's nothing, just the night air and the smell of smoke, and the stars, and the mechanic, smiling and driving.

I smell sweat. My seat belt is twisted around me, and when I try to sit up, I hit my head against the steering wheel. This hurts more than it should. I can see stars outside the driver's window.

The mechanic looks down. "Happy Birthday."

I smell smoke and remember the birthday cake.

"I almost broke the steering wheel with your head," he says. Where's the cake?

The mechanic says, "On the floor."

Just the night air and the smell of smoke.

Did I get my wish?

"Those birthday candles," he says, "they never go out."

In the starlight, now I can see smoke rising up from little fires all around us in the carpet.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

We still have something important to do tonight.

One thing I'll have to learn before the end of civilization is how to look at the stars and tell where I'm going. Things are quiet as if we're driving the Cadillac through space. We must be off the highway. The three guys in the back seat are asleep.

"You had a near-life experience," the mechanic says.

I ask, is tonight part of his homework for Project Mayhem?

"Part of it," he says. "I had to make four human sacrifices, and I have to pick up a load of fat."

Fat?

"For the soap."

What is Tyler planning?

The mechanic starts talking.

"I see the strongest and the smartest men who have ever lived," he says, "and these men are pumping gas and waiting tables. If only we could put these men in training camps and finish raising them. We have a class of strong young men and women, and they want to give their lives to something. Advertising makes, these people buy cars and clothes they don't need. Generations have been working in jobs they hate, so they can buy what they don't really need. We don't have a great war in our generation, or a great depression, but we do have a great war of the spirit. We

have a great revolution against the culture. The great depression is our lives. We have a spiritual depression. We have to show these men and women freedom by making them slaves, and show them courage by frightening them. Imagine, when we go on a strike, and everyone refuses to work until we share the wealth of the world. Imagine hunting in the forest around the ruins of Rockefeller Center."

It's all Tyler Durden.

"What you said about your job," the mechanic says, "did you really mean it?"

Yeah, I meant it.

"That's why we're on the road, tonight," he says.

We're going to the medical waste dump, and there among the trash we find more money than we can take away in one night, even if we were driving a truck.

"Fat," the mechanic says, "liposuctioned fat, sucked out of the richest thighs in America. The richest, fattest thighs in the world."

Our goal is the big bags of liposuctioned fat that we'll take back to Paper Street and melt and mix with lye and rosemary and sell back to the same people who paid to have it sucked out at twenty bucks a bar.

"The richest fat in the world, the fat of the land," he says. "While we're there, let's look for some of those hepatitis bugs, too."

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The tears were really coming now, rolling along the barrel of the gun.

This wasn't a cheap gun, by the way.

Raymond Hessel closed his eyes, and I pressed the gun against his temple, so he would always feel it right there, and I was beside him, and this was his life, and he could be dead at any moment.

Everything had been so easy, I was surprised. I'd done everything the mechanic said to do. This was why we needed to buy a gun. This was my homework. We had to bring Tyler twelve driver's licenses. This would prove we made twelve human sacrifices.

I parked tonight, and I waited around the corner for Raymond Hessel to finish his shift at the all-night mini-market, and around midnight he was waiting for a night bus when I finally walked up to him and said, hello.

Raymond Hessel didn't say anything. Probably he thought I was after his money, his minimum wage, the fourteen dollars in his wallet.

Oh, Raymond Hessel, all twenty-three years of you, when you started crying, with tears rolling down the barrel of my gun pressed to your temple, no, this wasn't about money. Not everything is about money.

You didn't even say, hello.

You're not your sad little wallet.

I said, nice night, cold but clear.

You didn't even say, hello.

I said, don't run, or I'll have to shoot you in the back. I was holding the gun, and I was wearing a latex glove so there'd be nothing on it except the dried tears of Raymond Hessel, aged twenty-three, very average.

Then I had your attention. Your eyes were big enough, and I could see that. You were moving backwards a little every time the gun touched your face. Until I said, don't step back, and then you let the gun touch you.

You gave me your wallet when I asked. Your name was Raymond K. Hessel on your driver's license. You live at 1320 SE Benning, apartment A. That must be a basement apartment. They usually give basement apartments letters instead of numbers.

Raymond K. Hessel, I was talking to you.

You said, yeah.

You said, yes, you lived in a basement.

You had some pictures in the wallet, too. There was your mother. This was difficult for you, you had to open your eyes to see the picture of Mom and Dad smiling, and see the gun at the same time, but you did, and then you started to cry.

You were going to die - the amazing miracle of death. One minute, you're a person, the next minute, you're an object. Mom and Dad had always expected so much more

from you and, no, life wasn't fair, and now it has come to this. Fourteen dollars.

This, I said, is this your mom?

Yeah.

You were crying, crying, crying.

Yeah.

Oh, you had a library card. You had a video rental card. A social security card. Fourteen dollars. An expired college student card.

I wanted to take the bus pass, but the mechanic said to only take the driver's license.

Oh, you used to study something. Now, what did you study? Where?

In college, I said. You have a student card.

Oh, biology.

Listen, now, you're going to die, Raymond K. Hessel, tonight. You might die in one second or in one hour, you decide.

Finally, you were listening.

So, what does Raymond Hessel want to be when he grows up?

Go home, you said you just wanted to go home, please.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I said. But after that, how did you want to spend your life? If you could do anything in the world.

You didn't know.

Then you're dead right now, I said, now turn your head.

Death will begin in ten, in nine, in eight...

A vet, you said? You want to be a vet? That means animals. You have to go to school for that.

It means too much school, you said.

You could be in school now, Raymond Hessel, or you could be dead. You choose.

I stuffed your wallet into the back pocket of your jeans.

So you really wanted to be an animal doctor? Is that what you've always wanted to be, Dr. Raymond K. Hessel, a veterinarian?

Yeah.

Really?

No. No, you meant, yeah. Yeah.

Okay, I said. So, I said, go back to school. If you wake up tomorrow morning, you'll find a way to get back into school. You could be dead right now, I said. I have your driver's license. I know who you are. I know where you live. And I'm going to check on you, mister Raymond

K. Hessel. In three months, and then in six months, and then in a year, and if you aren't back in school on your way to becoming a veterinarian, you will be dead.

You didn't say anything.

Get out of here, and live your little life, but remember I'm watching you, Raymond Hessel, and I'd rather kill you than see you working this job for just enough money to buy a burger.

This is what Tyler wants me to do.

These are Tyler's words coming out of my mouth.

I am Tyler's mouth.

I am Tyler's hands.

Everybody in Project Mayhem is a part of Tyler Durden.

Raymond K. Hessel, your dinner is going to taste better than any meal you've ever eaten, and tomorrow will be the most beautiful day of your whole life.

At the bar, they all want to buy me a beer. It's like I already know which bars are the fight club bars. I ask, have they seen a guy named Tyler Durden. It's stupid to ask if they know about fight club. The first rule is you don't talk about fight club. But have they seen Tyler Durden? They say, never heard of him, sir. But you might find him in Chicago, sir. And they wink.

You wake up at O'Hare and take a shuttle to Chicago. Set your watch an hour ahead.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

You wake up at Sky Harbor International and set your watch back two hours.

The shuttle takes me to downtown Phoenix, and in every bar, I go to, there are guys with stitches and bruises and broken noses. And when these guys at the bar see me with my bruised face and the scar on my cheek - we're an instant family.

Tyler hasn't been home for a while.

I do my little job.

I go from airport to airport to look at the cars that people died in.

The magic of travel. Tiny life. Tiny soaps. The tiny airline seats.

Everywhere I travel, I ask about Tyler. In case I find him, the driver's licenses of my twelve human sacrifices are in my pocket. Every bar I walk into, I see beaten guys.

If you can wake up in a different place, if you can wake up in a different time, why can't you wake up as a different person?

Every bar you go into, the guys want to buy you a beer. And no, sir, they've never met this Tyler Durden. And they wink. They've never heard the name before.

I ask about fight club. Is there a fight club around here, tonight?

No, sir.

The second rule of fight club is you don't talk about fight club.

The beaten guys at the bar shake their heads. Never heard of it. Sir. But you might find this fight club in Seattle, sir.

You wake up at Meigs Field and call Marla to see what's happening on Paper Street.

Marla says that now all the space monkeys are shaving their heads. The space monkeys are using lye to bum their fingerprints.

You wake up at SeaTac. Set your watch back two hours.

The shuttle takes you to downtown Seattle, and in the first bar, you go into, the bartender has a broken nose and smiles at you. The bar is empty, and the bartender says, "Welcome back, sir."

I've never been to this bar, ever, ever before.

I ask if he knows the name Tyler Durden.

The bartender smiles and asks, "Is this a test?"

Yeah, I say, it's a test. Has he ever met Tyler Durden?

"You stopped in last week, Mr. Durden," he says. "Don't you remember?"

Tyler was here?

"You were here, sir."

I've never been in here before tonight.

"If you say so, sir," the bartender says, "but on Thursday night, you came in to ask how soon the police were planning to shut us down."

Last Thursday night, I was awake all night, with the insomnia, wondering if I was awake, or was I sleeping. I woke up late on Friday morning, tired and feeling I hadn't ever closed my eyes.

"Yes, sir," the bartender says, "Thursday night, you were standing right where you are now, and you were asking me about the police, and you were asking me about the Wednesday night fight club."

In every bar I've walked into this week, everybody's called me sir. In every bar, I go into, the beaten fight club guys all start to look alike. How can a stranger know who I am?

"You have a birthmark, Mr. Durden," the bartender says. "On your foot. It's shaped like Australia with New Zealand next to it."

Only Marla knows this. Marla and my father. Not even Tyler knows this.

"Everybody in Project Mayhem knows, Mr. Durden."

The bartender shows me his hand, the back of his hand, a kiss burned into the back of his hand.

My kiss?

Tyler's kiss.

"Everybody knows about the birthmark," the bartender says. "It's part of the legend. You're a legend, sir."

I call Marla from my Seattle motel room to ask if we've ever done it. You know.

Long distance, Marla says, "What?"

Slept together.

"What?"

Have I ever, you know, slept with you?

"Jeez!"

Well?

"Well?" she says.

Have we ever done it?

"You are such a bastard."

Have we done it?

"I could kill you!"

Is that a yes or a no?

"I knew this would happen," Marla says. "You're such a fake. You love me. You ignore me. You save my life. Then you cook my mother into soap."

I ask Marla how we met.

"In that testicle cancer thing," Marla says. "Then you saved my life."

I saved her life?

"You saved my life."

Tyler saved her life.

"You saved my life."

I pinch myself to wake me up.

Marla says, "You saved my life. The Regent Hotel. The suicide? Remember?"

Oh. We've just lost cabin pressure.

"That night," Marla says, "I said I wanted you to keep me up all night."

I ask Marla what my name is.

We're all going to die.

Marla says, "Tyler Durden. Your name is Tyler Durden. You live at Paper Street which is now full of your little space monkeys shaving their heads and burning their skin with lye."

I've got to get some sleep.

"You've got to get back here," Marla yells over the phone, "before they make soap out of me."

I've got to find Tyler.

The scar on her hand, I ask Marla, how did she get it? "You," Marla says. "You kissed my hand."

I've got to find Tyler.

I've got to sleep.

I've got to get some sleep.

I've got to go to sleep.

I tell Marla goodnight and hang up the phone.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

All night long, you're thinking: Am I sleeping? Have I slept at all? This is the insomnia.

Try to relax a little more with every breath, but your heart's still beating fast, and your thoughts are like a tornado in your head.

Nothing works. Not even guided meditation.

You're in Ireland.

Not even counting sheep.

You count the days, hours, minutes since you can remember falling asleep. Your doctor laughed. Nobody ever died from lack of sleep. The way your bruised face looks, you'd think you were dead.

After three o'clock in the morning in a motel in Seattle, it's too late for you to find a cancer support group. Too late to find sleeping pills. After three in the morning, you can't get into a fight club.

You've got to find Tyler.

You've got to get some sleep.

Then you're awake, and Tyler's standing in the dark next to the bed.

You wake up.

The moment you were falling asleep, Tyler was standing there saying, "Wake up. Wake up, we solved the problem with the police here in Seattle. Wake up."

The police commissioner wanted to shut down what he called the gang-type boxing clubs.

"But don't worry," Tyler says. "Mister police commissioner isn't a problem anymore."

I ask if Tyler's been following me.

"Funny," Tyler says, "I wanted to ask you the same thing. You talked about me to other people, you little bastard. You broke your promise."

Tyler was wondering when I'd figure him out.

"Every time you fall asleep," Tyler says, "I run off and do something wild, something completely crazy. Last Thursday, you fell asleep, and I took a plane to Seattle to see the fight club there. To check the numbers. To look for a new talent. We have Project Mayhem in Seattle, too. We have Project Mayhem in Los Angeles and Detroit, a big Project Mayhem in Washington, D.C., in New York. We have Project Mayhem in Chicago."

Tyler was in Seattle last week, and a bartender told him that the police commissioner was going to shut down the fight clubs.

Tyler says, "I can't believe you broke your promise. The first rule is you don't talk about fight club."

We are going to be shut down.

"But," Tyler says, "we have police who come to fight at fight club and really like it. We have newspaper reporters

and lawyers, and we know everything before it's going to happen."

I ask what did Tyler do about it.

"What did we do about it," Tyler says.

We called an Assault Committee meeting.

"There isn't a me and a you, anymore," Tyler says. "I think you've figured that out."

We both use the same body, but at different times.

"We gave them a special homework assignment," Tyler says. I'm not dreaming.

"Yes," Tyler says, "you are."

We sent a team of fourteen space monkeys, and five of these space monkeys were police, and we were every person in the park where his honor, police commissioner, walks his dog, tonight.

"Don't worry," Tyler says, "the dog is alright."

The whole attack took only six minutes. Five space monkeys were holding him down. Tyler's telling me this, but somehow, I already know it. One space monkey pulled down commissioner's pants. The dog is a spaniel, and it's just barking and barking. Another space monkey put a rubber band around commissioner's testicles.

"One monkey's between his legs with a knife," Tyler whispers into my ear. "And I'm whispering in the police

commissioner's ear that he should leave the fight clubs alone, or we'll tell the world that he has no balls."

Tyler whispers, "How far do you think you'll get, your honor? How far do you think you'll get in politics if the voters know you have no balls?"

The commissioner said, don't.

And Tyler said, "We have nothing to lose except fight club."

The commissioner had everything. And we were the trash of the world.

The commissioner said no.

And don't.

Stop.

Please.

Oh.

God.

Help.

Me.

Please.

And the space monkey used the knife only to cut the rubber band.

Six minutes, and we were done.

"Remember this," Tyler said. "We're everyone you depend on. We're the people who do your laundry and cook

your food and serve your dinner. We make your bed. We guard you while you're asleep. We drive the ambulances. We direct your calls. We are cooks and taxi drivers and we know everything about you. We do your insurance and your credit cards. We control every part of your life. We are the children of history, taught by television to believe that someday we'll be millionaires and movie stars and rock stars, but we won't. And we're just learning this fact. So don't mess with us."

Now, we didn't expect any more fight club shut downs.

"Every time we do these little homework assignments," Tyler says, "these fight club men with nothing to lose become a little more loyal to Project Mayhem."

I close my eyes, and Tyler takes my hand.

"I said that if you talked about me behind my back, you'd never see me again," Tyler said. "We're not two separate men. When you're awake, you have the control, and you can call yourself anything you want, but the moment you fall asleep, I take the control, and you become Tyler Durden."

But we fought, I say. The night we invented fight club.

"You weren't really fighting me," Tyler says. "You said so yourself. You were fighting everything you hate in your life."

But I can see you.

"You're asleep."

But you're renting a house. You had a job. Two jobs.

Tyler says, "Check it. I rented the house in your name." Tyler's been spending my money.

"And the jobs, well, why do you think you're always so tired. Jeez, it's not insomnia. As soon as you fall asleep, I take the control and go to work or fight club or whatever."

I say, but what about Marla?

"Marla loves you."

Marla loves you.

"Marla doesn't know the difference between you and me. You gave her a fake name the night you met. You never gave your real name at support groups. Since I saved her life, Marla thinks your name is Tyler Durden."

So, now that I know about Tyler, will he just disappear?

"No," Tyler says, still holding my hand, "I wouldn't be here if you didn't want me. I'll still live my life while you're asleep, but if you mess with me, if you tie yourself to the bed at night or take a lot of sleeping pills - then we'll be enemies. And I'll get you for it."

Oh, this is nonsense.

This is a dream.

Tyler is a dream.

He's a personality disorder.

Tyler Durden is my hallucination.

Tyler says. "Maybe you're my hallucination."

I was here first.

Tyler says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, well, let's see who's here last."

This isn't real. This is a dream, and I'll wake up.

"Then wake up."

And then the telephone's ringing, and Tyler's gone. Sun is shining through the curtains.

It's my 7 A.M. wake-up call, and when I pick up the phone, the line is dead.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

I fly back home to Marla and the Paper Street Soap Company.

Everything is still falling apart.

At home, I'm afraid to look into the fridge. I don't want to see dozens of little plastic bags with the names of the cities like Las Vegas and Chicago and Miami.

In one corner of the kitchen, a space monkey sits on the floor and looks at himself in a small mirror. "I am the trash of this world," the space monkey says into the mirror. "I am the toxic human waste, the byproduct of God's creation." Other space monkeys move around in the garden, picking things, killing things.

With one hand on the freezer door, I take a big breath.

The freezer's still closed when Marla looks over my shoulder and says, "What's for dinner?"

About a month ago, I was afraid to let Maria look in the fridge. Now I'm afraid to look in the fridge myself.

Full circle. Oh, God. Tyler.

Marla loves me.

Marla doesn't know the difference.

"I'm glad you're back," Marla says. "We have to talk."

Oh, yeah, I say. We have to talk.

I can't make myself open the freezer.

I tell Marla, don't touch anything in this freezer. Don't even open it.

The space monkey with the mirror is looking at us, so I tell Marla we have to leave.

We need to go somewhere else to talk.

Down the basement stairs, one space monkey is reading to the other space monkeys. "The three ways to make napalm. One, you can mix gasoline and frozen orange juice concentrate. Two, you can mix gasoline and cola. Three, you can mix gasoline with cat litter."

Marla and I go to a restaurant. Our waiter has a big bruise on his forehead and stands straight, like a soldier.

"Sir!" our waiter says. "Would you like to order now? Sir! Anything you order is free. Sir!"

Two coffees, please.

Marla asks, "Why is he giving us free food?"

The waiter thinks I'm Tyler Durden, I say.

Then Marla orders two salads and fish soup and fried chicken and potatoes and a chocolate cake.

I tell the waiter, give us clean food, please. Please, don't do anything to the food we order.

"Then, sir," our waiter says, "may I recommend the lady here not to order the fish soup."

Thank you. No soup.

Marla looks at me, and I tell her, trust me.

Marla says, "It's nice to be Tyler Durden."

I tell Marla that now she has to follow me everywhere at night, and write down everywhere I go. Who I see. What I do. That sort of thing.

I open my wallet and show Marla my driver's license with my real name.

It's not Tyler Durden.

"But everyone knows you're Tyler Durden," Marla says.

Nobody at work calls me Tyler Durden. My boss calls me by my real name. My parents know who I really am.

"So why," Marla asks, "are you Tyler Durden to some people but not to everybody?"

The first time I met Tyler, I was asleep.

I was tired and crazy, and every time I was on a plane, I wanted the plane to crash. I envied people with cancer. I hated my life. I hated single-serving butter. I was tired and bored with my job and my furniture, and I couldn't find a way to change things. Only end them.

I was too complete.

I was too perfect.

I wanted a way out of my tiny life.

I took a vacation. I fell asleep on the beach, and when I woke up, there was Tyler Durden.

Tyler was making a giant hand, and Tyler was sitting in the palm of a perfection he'd made himself. And a moment was the most you could expect from perfection.

Maybe I never really woke up on that beach.

Maybe all this started when I was in Ireland.

When I fall asleep, I don't really sleep.

At other tables in the restaurant, I see one, two, three, four, five guys with black eyes or bruises, smiling at me.

"No," Marla says, "you don't sleep."

Tyler Durden is a different personality I've created, and now he wants to take my real life.

Marla says, "This is so cool."

The problem is, I say, I fall asleep and Tyler takes my body and commits some crime. The next morning, I wake up tired and beaten, and I'm sure I haven't slept at all. Then the next night, I go to bed earlier. That next night, Tyler can use my body a little longer. Every night that I go to bed earlier and earlier, Tyler's using it longer and longer.

"But you are Tyler," Marla says.

No.

No, I'm not.

I love everything about Tyler Durden, his courage and his brain. Tyler is funny and charming and independent, and men look at him and expect him to change their world. Tyler is capable and free, and I am not.

I'm not Tyler Durden.

"But you are, Tyler," Marla says.

Tyler and I have the same body, and until now, I didn't know it. Whenever Tyler was sleeping with Marla, I was asleep. Tyler was walking and talking while I thought I was asleep. Everyone in light club and Project Mayhem knew me as Tyler Durden. And if I go to bed earlier every night and sleep later every morning, then I'll be gone, completely. I'll just go to sleep and never wake up. I will never wake up, and Tyler will take control.

The waiter brings the coffee.

I smell my coffee. It smells like coffee.

"So," Marla says, "even if I believe all this, what do you want from me?"

So Tyler can't take complete control, I need Marla to keep me awake. All the time.

Full circle. The night Tyler saved her life, Marla asked him to keep her awake all night.

As soon as I fall asleep, Tyler takes control and something terrible happens.

And if I fall asleep, Marla has to follow Tyler. Where he goes. What he does.

So maybe during the day, I can run around and undo the damage.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

His name is Robert Paulson and he is forty-eight years old.

His name is Robert Paulson, and Robert Paulson will be forty-eight years old, forever.

On a long time line, everyone's survival rate drops to zero.

Big Bob. He was on a homework assignment.

Homework is to build your nerve. Build your loyalty to Project Mayhem.

The police thought Big Bob was holding a gun, and they shot him. But it was only an electric drill. There was nothing to tie Big Bob to Project Mayhem or fight club or the soap. In his pocket was a wallet photo of himself at some bodybuilding contest. It's a stupid way to live, Bob said. You're blind and deaf on the stage, and then you hear, extend your right arm, flex and hold.

Put your hands where we can see them.

Extend your left arm, flex and hold.

Freeze.

Drop the weapon.

This was better than the real life.

On his hand was a scar from my kiss - from Tyler's kiss. Big Bob's blond hair had been shaved off, and his fingerprints had been burned with lye. And it was better to

get hurt than get arrested, because if you were arrested, you couldn't be in Project Mayhem, no more homework assignments.

One minute, Robert Paulson was alive and the next moment, Robert Paulson was an object.

After the police shot, there was the amazing miracle of death.

In every fight club, tonight, the leaders walk around the crowd of men in the darkness and yell:

"His name is Robert Paulson."

And the crowd yells, "His name is Robert Paulson."

The leaders yell, "He is forty-eight years old."

And the crowd yells, "He is forty-eight years old."

He is forty-eight years old, and he was part of fight club.

He is forty-eight years old, and he was part of Project Mayhem.

Only in death can we have our own names because only in death we become heroes.

And the crowds yell, "Robert Paulson."

And the crowds yell, "Robert Paulson."

And the crowds yell, "Robert Paulson."

I go to fight club tonight to shut it down. I stand in the one light in the center of the room. To everyone here, I'm

Tyler Durden. Smart. Powerful. Free. I say, why don't we all just go home, tonight, and forget about fight club. Project Mayhem is canceled. There's a good football game on TV tonight.

One hundred men just look at me.

A man is dead, I say. This game is over. It's not fun anymore.

Then, from the darkness comes the anonymous voice: "The first rule of fight club is you don't talk about fight club."

I yell, go home!

"The second rule of fight club is you don't talk about fight club."

Fight club is canceled! Project Mayhem is canceled!

"The third rule is only two guys to a fight."

I am Tyler Durden, I yell. And I'm ordering you to get out! And no one's looking at me.

Two men to a fight. No shirts. No shoes. The fight goes on and on and on as long as it has to.

The rules end, and I'm still standing in the center of the light.

"Begin fight number one," yells the voice out of the darkness. "Clear the center of the club."

I don't move.

"Clear the center of the club!"

I don't move.

The one light is reflected in one hundred pairs of eyes, all of them looking at me, waiting. I try to see each man the way Tyler would see him. Choose the best fighters for Project Mayhem.

"Clear the center of the club!"

After three requests, I will be evicted from the club. It's the rule.

But I'm Tyler Durden. I invented fight club. Fight club is mine. I wrote these rules. And I say it stops here!

"Prepare to evict the member in three, two, one."

The men are on top of me, and two hundred hands grab my arms and legs, and I'm lifted toward the light.

Prepare to evacuate soul in five, in four, three, two, one.

And I'm passed, from hand to hand, toward the door. I'm flying.

I'm yelling, fight club is mine. Project Mayhem was my idea. You can't evict me. I'm in control here. Go home. I'm not leaving. I'm not giving up. I'm in control here.

"Evict fight club member, now!"

Evacuate soul, now.

And I fly slowly out of the door and into the night with the stars in the sky and the cold air, and I hit the

parking lot concrete. All the men go back, and the door shuts and locks behind me.

In a hundred cities, fight club continues without me.

I've wanted to fall asleep for years. Now sleeping is the last thing I want to do.

I'm with Marla in room 8G at the Regent Hotel.

"Here," Marla says giving me wake-up pills. "I used to date a guy who had terrible nightmares. He hated to sleep too."

What happened to the guy she was dating?

"Oh, he died. Overdose," Marla says.

Thanks for sharing.

When we walked into the hotel, the guy at the reception desk greeted me. The old people, watching TV in the lobby, all turned to see who I was when the guy at the desk called me sir.

"Good evening, sir."

Right now, he might be calling some Project Mayhem leaders to report my location.

They're spying on me.

Where are we going to go?

"Bowling. It's open all night, and you won't sleep there."

Everywhere we go, I say, guys on the street think I'm Tyler Durden.

"Is that why the bus driver let us ride for free?"

Yeah. And that's why the two guys on the bus gave us their seats.

"So what's your plan?"

I don't think that hiding is enough. We have to do something, to get rid of Tyler.

I ask what time is it?

"Four A.M."

In three hours, I have to be at work.

"Take your pills," Marla says. "They'll probably let us play for free because you're Tyler Durden. Hey, before we get rid of Tyler, can we go shopping? We could get a nice car. Some clothes. Or other free stuff."

Marla!

"Okay, okay, forget it."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

That old saying, about how you always kill the one you love, well, it works both ways.

This morning I went to work and there were the police standing between the building and the parking lot, taking statements from the people I work with.

I didn't even get off the bus.

From the bus, I can see that the windows on the third floor of my office building are blown out, and inside there are firemen. A smoking desk comes out of the broken window, pushed by two firemen. Then the desk falls the three stories down to the sidewalk.

I freeze.

It's my desk. And I know that my boss is dead.

There are three ways to make napalm.

I knew Tyler was going to kill my boss. When I smelled gasoline on my hands, when I said I wanted out of my job, I was giving him permission. Kill my boss.

Oh, Tyler.

I know this because Tyler knows this.

I don't want to know this, but all the space monkeys know this. I typed Tyler's notes. There's a light bulb bomb, where you drill a hole in a light bulb and fill it with gasoline. Fill it with any explosive. Homemade napalm is good. Gasoline or gasoline mixed with frozen orange juice

concentrate or cat litter. Seal the hole with wax or silicone, then put the bulb back, and let someone walk into the room and turn the light on.

Just understand, if there's a spark, you're dead.

The problem is, I liked my boss.

If you're male, and you're Christian, and living in America, your father is your model for God.

And sometimes you find your father in your career.

But Tyler didn't like my boss.

The police will be looking for me. I was the last person out of the building last Friday night.

I woke up at my desk, and Tyler was on the telephone, telling me, "Go outside. We have a car."

We have a Cadillac.

The gasoline was still on my hands.

The fight club mechanic asked, what will you wish you'd done before you died?

I wanted out of my job. I was giving Tyler permission. Kill my boss.

From my exploded office, I ride the bus to the end of the line. I'm trying to think where I can go that the cops won't be looking for me. From the back of the bus, I can see maybe twenty people sitting between me and the driver.

I count the heads.

Shaved heads.

The driver takes out his lunch and a thermos and looks me in his mirror. Then he turns around in his seat and says to me, "Mr. Durden, sir, I really admire what you're doing."

I've never seen him before.

"You have to forgive me for this," the driver says. "The committee says this is your own idea, sir."

The shaved heads turn around, one after another. Then one by one, they stand up. One's got a knife. The one with the knife is the fight club mechanic.

"You're a brave man," the bus driver says, "to make yourself our homework assignment."

The fight club mechanic says, "You know the rules, Mr. Durden. You said it yourself. You said, if anyone tries to shut down the club, even you, then we have to castrate him. You know it's useless to fight us."

The bus driver eats his sandwich and watches us in the mirror.

A police siren is coming closer.

"This isn't just a threat, this time, Mr. Durden. This time, we have to cut them."

The bus driver says, "It's cops."

The siren stops somewhere at the front of the bus.

And I'm saved. Maybe.

I can tell the cops about Tyler. I'll tell them everything about fight club, and maybe I'll go to prison, and then Project Mayhem will be their problem to solve.

The cops come up the bus steps, the first cop saying, "You cut him yet?"

The second cop says, "Do it quickly, then we need to arrest him."

Then he takes off his hat, and to me he says, "Nothing personal, Mr. Durden. It's a pleasure to finally meet you."

I say, you all are making a big mistake.

The mechanic says, "You told us you'd probably say that."

I'm not Tyler Durden.

"You told us you'd say that, too."

I'm changing the rules. You can still have fight club, but we're not going to castrate anyone, anymore.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," the mechanic says. "You said you would definitely say that."

Okay, so I'm Tyler Durden. I am. I'm Tyler Durden, and I make the rules, and I say, put the knife away.

The mechanic just laughs, and the cops laugh too.

I dash for the open window.

My stomach hits the metal windowsill. Behind me, someone grabs my feet and pulls. I'm yelling, hanging upside down. I pull myself out a little, but hands around my

feet pull me back in. The windowsill is hot from the sun.  
Everything is a million miles away.

"Don't hurt him," someone says.

The hands around my feet are a million miles away.

Guided meditation.

You're in Ireland.

You're in fight club.

You're at work.

You're anywhere but here.

Somebody far away yells, "You know the speech, Mr. Durden. Don't mess with fight club."

The cold knife.

The therapeutic physical contact.

Then nothing, less than nothing.

Oblivion.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I wake up on the concrete floor of my burned condo. There used to be paintings on the walls before the explosion. There used to be Swedish furniture. Before Tyler.

I'm dressed. I feel myself. I'm whole.

Go to what used to be the windows, fifteen stories above the parking lot, and look at the city lights and the stars, and you're gone. It's all so beyond us. Up here, in the miles of night between the stars and the Earth, I feel just like one of those space animals. Monkeys. You just do your little job. Pull a lever. Push a button. You don't really understand any of it.

The world is going crazy. My boss is dead. My home is gone. My job is gone.

And I'm responsible for it all.

There's nothing left.

No money.

The police are looking for me.

What else is there?

There's Marla.

There's Marla, and she's in the middle of everything and doesn't know it.

And she loves you.

She loves Tyler.

She doesn't know the difference.

Somebody has to tell her. Get out. Get out. Get out.  
Save yourself.

The doorman downstairs smiles at you and says, "Good evening, Mr. Durden. Can I get you a taxi? Are you feeling all right? Do you want to use the phone?"

You call Marla at the Regent Hotel.

The clerk at the Regent says, "Right away, Mr. Durden."

Then Marla answers.

The doorman is listening over your shoulder. The clerk at the Regent is probably listening, too.

You say, Marla, we have to talk. She might be in danger, you say. She has to know what's going on. She has to meet you. You have to talk.

"Where?"

She should go to the first place we ever met. Remember. Think. The white healing ball of light. The palace of seven doors.

"I see," she says. "I can be there in twenty minutes."

Be there.

You hang up, and the doorman says, "I can get you a taxi, Mr. Durden. Free, to anywhere you want."

The fight club boys are watching you.

No, you say, it's such a nice night, I think I'll walk.

It's Saturday night, the cancer night in the basement of the church, and Marla is there when you arrive.

Marla Singer, smoking her cigarette. Marla Singer, rolling her eyes.

Marla Singer is staring at you with a black eye.

You close your eyes and meditate to the palace of the seven doors, and you can still feel Marla's stare.

Then it's time to hug.

Open your eyes.

We should all choose a partner.

Marla crosses the room in three quick steps and slaps me across the face.

Share yourself, completely.

"You bastard," Marla says.

Marla shows her black eye to me. "Just because you and your little disciples like fighting, you touch me ever again, and you're dead."

Around us, everyone is staring.

Then Marla's beating me.

"You killed someone," she's yelling. "I called the police, and they will be here any minute."

I grab her and say, maybe the police will come, but probably they won't.

Marla says she saw me kill somebody today.

If she means my boss, I say, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, the police know, everyone's looking for me already, but it was Tyler who killed my boss. Tyler and I just have the same fingerprints, but no one understands.

"I saw you shoot a man tonight," Marla says.

No, it was a bomb, I say, and it happened this morning.

All the people with real cancer are standing around us, watching this.

"No," Marla says. "I followed you to the Pressman Hotel, and you were a waiter at one of those murder mystery parties."

For the murder mystery parties, rich people come to the hotel for a big dinner party, and take part in a sort of Agatha Christie story. The lights would be turned off for a minute, and someone would pretend being killed. The rest of the evening, the guests would get drunk and try to find out who among them was a killer. It's supposed to be a fun sort of death.

Marla yells, "You shot the mayor's assistant!"

Tyler shot the mayor's assistant.

Marla says, "And you don't even have cancer!"

It happens so fast. Everyone's looking.

I yell, you don't have cancer either!

"He's been coming here for two years," Marla yells, "and he doesn't have anything!"

I'm trying to save your life!

"What? Why do you need to save my life?"

Because you followed me tonight, because you saw Tyler Durden kill someone, and Tyler will kill anybody who messes with Project Mayhem.

Everybody in the room looks interested.

I say to the crowd, I'm sorry. We should go. We should talk about this outside.

Everybody yells, "No! Stay! What else?"

I didn't kill anybody, I say. I'm not Tyler Durden. He's the other side of my personality.

Marla says, "So who's going to kill me?"

Tyler.

"You?"

Tyler, I say, but I can take care of Tyler. You just stay away from the members of Project Mayhem.

"Why should I believe you?"

It happens so fast.

I say, because I think I like you.

Marla says, "Not love?"

This is a difficult moment, I say. Don't push it.

Everyone smiles.

I have to go. I have to get out of here. I say, stay away from the guys with shaved heads or black eyes. Broken noses. That sort of thing.

And Marla says, "So where are you going?"

I have to take care of Tyler Durden.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

His name was Patrick Madden, and he was the mayor's special assistant.

His name was Patrick Madden, and he was an enemy of Project Mayhem.

Patrick Madden was making a list of bars where fight clubs met.

I walk into the night, and it's all coming back to me. All the things that Tyler knows are all coming back to me. Suddenly, I know how to run a movie projector. I know how to break locks, and how Tyler had rented the house on Paper Street just before he met me on the beach.

I know why Tyler had come.

Tyler loved Marla. From the first night, I met her, Tyler or some part of me had wanted to be with Marla, somehow. It doesn't matter. Not now. But all the details are coming back to me as I walk through the night to the nearest fight club.

There's a fight club in the basement of the nearest bar on Saturday nights. You can probably find it on the list Patrick Madden was making, poor dead Patrick Madden. Tonight, I go to the bar and the crowd parts when I walk in. To everybody there, I am Tyler Durden. God and father.

All around me I hear, "Good evening, sir."

"Welcome to fight club, sir."

"Thank you for coming, sir."

My monster face is just beginning to heal. I frown. Because I'm Tyler Durden, I register to fight every guy in the club that night. Fifty fights. One fight at a time. No shoes. No shirts. The fights go on as long as they have to.

And if Tyler loves Marla, I love Marla.

And what happens doesn't happen in words.

After the first fight, I want to bum the Louvre. I want to hunt in the forest around Rockefeller Center.

After the second fight, I can remember Patrick Madden now, dead on the floor, and his little wife, laughing and trying to pour champagne between her dead husband's lips. The wife said the fake blood was too red. Mrs. Madden put her fingers in the blood and then in her mouth. Mrs. Madden tasted the blood.

I remember being there at the murder mystery party with the space monkey waiters standing around me. Marla in her dress with dark roses watched us from the other side of the room.

I wake up and it's time for fight number three.

There are no more names in fight club.

You aren't your name.

You aren't your family.

Number three beats me until I'm crying.

How everything you ever love will reject you or die.

Everything you ever create will be thrown away.

Everything you're proud of will be trash.

I am the king of kings.

The little Mrs. Madden knelt on the floor next to the body of her husband, with the other rich people standing around her, drunk and laughing.

The wife says, "Patrick?"

The blood is spreading wider and wider until it touches her skirt.

She says, "Patrick, that's enough, stop being dead."

The blood gets onto her skirt. Then Mrs. Madden is screaming.

Around me, the men of Project Mayhem are screaming. And in the basement of the bar, Tyler Durden falls to the floor. Tyler Durden the great, who was perfect for one moment, and who said that a moment is the most you could ever expect from perfection.

And the fight goes on and on because I want to be dead. Because only in death we have our own names.

Only in death, we are no longer part of Project Mayhem.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Tyler is standing there, perfectly handsome like an angel.

My will to live amazes me.

I'm a bloody tissue sample, lying on a mattress in my room at the Paper Street Soap Company.

Everything in my room is gone.

Tyler says, "Get up."

Everything has fallen apart. The space monkeys are out. Everything is gone: the liposuction fat, the bunk beds, the money. Only the garden is left, and the rented house.

Tyler says, "The last thing we have to do is your big death thing."

Oh, Tyler, it hurts. Just kill me here.

"Get up."

Kill me, already. Kill me. Kill me. Kill me. Kill me.

"It has to be big," Tyler says. "Imagine this: you're on top of the world's tallest building; the whole building's taken by Project Mayhem. Smoke's coming out of the windows. Desks are falling into the crowd on the street. That's what you're going to get."

I say, no. You've used me enough.

"If you don't cooperate, we'll get Marla."

I say, I will cooperate.

"Now get out of bed," Tyler said, "and get into the car."

So Tyler and I are up on top of the Parker-Morris Building with the gun in my mouth.

We've got our last ten minutes.

The Parker-Morris Building won't be here in ten minutes.

I know this because Tyler knows this.

With the barrel of the gun in my mouth, Tyler says, "We won't really die."

With my tongue, I move the gun barrel into my cheek and say, Tyler, we're not vampires.

We've got our last eight minutes.

To God, this looks like one man is holding a gun in his own mouth, but it's Tyler holding the gun, and it's my life.

Seven minutes.

If you take nitric acid, add it to sulfuric acid, and then add glycerin - you get nitroglycerin. Mix the nitro with sawdust, and you have a nice plastic explosive. Some monkeys use paraffin mixed with nitro. Paraffin has never, ever worked for me.

Four minutes.

Tyler and I are at the edge of the roof, the gun is in my mouth, and I'm wondering how clean this gun is.

Three minutes.

Then somebody yells, "Wait!"

It's Marla coming toward us.

Marla's coming toward me, just me, because Tyler's gone. Poor Tyler's my hallucination, not hers. Tyler's disappeared. And now I'm just one man holding a gun in my mouth.

"We followed you," Marla yells. "With all the people from the cancer support groups. You don't have to do this. Put the gun down."

Behind Marla, all the cancers the brain parasites, the tuberculosis people are walking toward me.

They're saying, "Wait."

Their voices are saying, "Stop."

And, "We can help you."

"Let us help you."

I yell, go. Get out of here. This building is going to explode. Marla yells, "We know."

This is my moment.

I'm not killing myself, I yell. I'm killing Tyler.

I remember everything.

"It's not love or anything," Marla yells, "but I think I like you, too."

One minute.

Marla likes Tyler.

"No, I like you," Marla yells. "I know the difference."

And nothing.

Nothing explodes.

With the barrel of the gun in my cheek, I say, Tyler, you mixed the nitro with paraffin, didn't you? Paraffin never works.

I have to do this.

And I pull the trigger.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Of course, when I pulled the trigger, I died.

Liar.

And Tyler died.

With Marla and all the support groups people who couldn't save themselves, but all of them were trying to save me, I had to pull the trigger. This was better than real life. And your one perfect moment won't last forever.

Everything in heaven is white.

Faker.

Everything in heaven is quiet. I can sleep in heaven.

People write to me in heaven and tell me that I'm remembered. That I'm their hero.

I'll get better. The angels here work in shifts. They bring me meals and meds.

I've met God at his long wooden desk with his diplomas hanging on the wall behind him, and God asks me, "Why?"

Why did I cause so much pain?

Didn't I realize that each of us is a unique snowflake?

Can't I see how we're all loved?

I look at God behind his desk, taking notes, but God's wrong.

We are not special.

We are not trash, either.

We just are.

We just are, and what happens just happens.

And God says, "No, that's not right."

Yeah. Well. Whatever. You can't teach God anything.

God asks me what I remember.

I remember everything.

The bullet out of Tyler's gun went through my cheek.

Marla's still on Earth, and she writes to me. Someday, she says, they'll bring me back.

And if there were a telephone in heaven, I would call Marla from heaven, and when she said, "Hello," I wouldn't hang up. I'd say, "Hi. What's happening? Tell me every little thing."

But I don't want to go back.

Not yet.

Just because sometimes somebody brings me my lunch and my meds, and he has a black eye or stitches, and he says: "We miss you, Mr. Durden."

Or somebody with a broken nose mops the floor around me and whispers: "Everything's going according to the plan."

Whispers, "We're going to end this civilization, so we can make something better out of the world."

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Whispers, "We're waiting for you to come back."

- THE END -

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