The water was unsurprisingly still given that the wind was calm that early October morning. The pool water gently swayed, hardly impacting the wet leaves and debris that filled it. You could say that the in-ground pool had gotten quite used to being filthy and unkept over the last two weeks since it hadn’t been even remotely touched. Except on this particular morning the waters carried an unwelcome visitor amid the usual grime. A woman floated on her belly, face down below the dirty water. Her once ivory nightgown stuck tightly to her pruned skin; her dyed bleached-blonde hair clung to her frame like the fur on a wet dog. She’d have looked like an angel, save for the fact that she was surrounded by wet shit. At least that’s how Richard Malcolm saw it as he stood watching from above.

Richard stared, unaffected by the scene that played out before him. He stood almost regally over the pool, his slippers shifting slightly. His face remained blank, his heavy eyes weighed down by dark purple suitcases. He scratched his chin for a moment, still not used to the scraggly hairs that had grown far too long and unkempt over the past two weeks. He took a long sip from his ‘#1 DAD’ mug and licked the remaining coffee drippings off of his mustache. His eyes narrowed and shifted, scanning the remnants of his wife. Seconds passed, maybe
even minutes before he blinked. He crossed to the other side of the pool, his slippers making a harsh grating sound as he did. He leaned down to the water, allowing his bathrobe to open and reveal his white boxers, covered in printed hearts. He set down his mug and extended his hand into the water, allowing some of Lily's blonde hair to wade into his open hands. He rubbed his fingertips across the strands. To him, it felt like a doll's hair. It lacked the feeling of life.

A slight smirk formed on his face. Funny that the last time he touched her would be his first time doing so in weeks. As he watched her begin to float away from his grasp, a familiar feeling passed over him. Perhaps it was love. But Richard knew he hadn't felt any love for Lily since before they were married. Except for the day Ian was born, of course. He'd been happy then.

Richard stood up, wiping his wet fingers down the side of his bathrobe. He tied it tighter so as not to reveal his emerging gut. The damn thing hardly fit anymore. Lily had gotten it for him two Christmas's ago. It would now just become another relic in the useless collection of shit she had gotten him. Why was it that when you hit forty you no longer received anything worth getting? Every "Dad" received the same trivial gifts. Another tie, another belt. Richard figured he could hang himself from the Eiffel Tower with all the damn ties he'd received over the years. It then dawned on him that he would never again receive a hokey gift from his wife. His recently deceased wife. His now recently deceased Ex-wife.

Richard took another sip from his mug and closed the screen door behind him. He supposed that he should call the police to report Lily's suicide. He wondered if they would even come. He doubted that they would be so eager to return to the house of the devil. That's what they were calling it. They? Richard wondered who "they" were. He supposed it was everyone. Friends, family, "Normal people". The kind of people that he used to be like. Good-natured, god-fearing, taxpaying folk. People living their basic cookie-cutter lives. Getting ties for Christmas. Kissing their wives goodnight. Drinking their soy milk and eating their veggie bacon so they
could fit in their new bathrobes. Luckily for him, Lily wouldn’t be force-feeding him any more of that feng shui, “Clean out the colon” garbage.

Richard crossed to the sink, wishing to cleanse his palms from his transgression in the pool. He flicked on the sink and rubbed his hands through the water. His eyes shifted and narrowed at the sight of the drain. Some kind of raggedy item had been shoved into the garbage disposal. Richard had known what it was almost immediately. It was Bubby. Ian’s Bubby. The little blue bear that Lilian’s mother had given Ian when he was two. Ian had loved it. Too much, even. He never had gotten rid of the awful thing. He had always taken it everywhere. Richard hated the damn, dirty thing. It was old and withered, missing an ear and an eye, covered in stains and tears. Richard remembered when Ian had gotten the arm stuck in a door and it had gotten torn off. Oh, the screams that kid had made. Richard pulled the half-chewed up Bubby from the drain. He could still make out the bright blue stitching under the arm where Lilian had sown it back.

What an ugly, pitiful thing. Richard wished Ian had thrown it out years ago. But, Ian loved that damn bear too hard, throwing a fit whenever it was gone. Why couldn’t he be a man and grow up? That’s what Ian’s problem had been. Too much of a baby. Too soft. A momma’s boy. If Richard had ever seen one. Ian was always taking that baby toy everywhere, hiding it in his backpack at school, no matter how many times Richard scolded him for it. Sixteen was disgustingly too old for such infantile nonsense. Richard turned the bear over in his hand; the side of Bubby’s face was ripped apart. Good. Richard smiled and forced the bear back into the drain. Ian wouldn’t be taking it with him now, not where he was going. Richard smiled at the macabre thought that Bubby was now joining his keeper.

“Fuck you.” Richard flipped on the switch and let the garbage disposal do its work, finishing what Lilian had started.
Richard strode through the hall, passing the darkened fitness room on his right. He didn't expect it would ever be used again. It wasn't like it had ever really been used anyway, just another worthless expense. Only Lilian used it, constantly doing her Zimbabwe dances, or whatever they were called. Richard had spent thousands on a customizable weight set for Ian, only for it to gather dust. Ian had preferred to remain a twig. Richard had tried to get him to bulk up. That's what Richard had done when he was sixteen. He had gotten big, tough. That's what a man did. Richard's son decided he'd rather get his ass kicked instead.

Although he complained, it wasn't like Richard ever used the room either. Richard stared down at his feet, running his hands under his gut and lifting it into the air. It dropped with a ripple like gelatin. Oh how Lilian had resented him for that gut. Luckily for Richard, he'd never have to endure it again. He would no longer be guilted for never using the treadmill she forced him to buy. Or the stair-stepper. Or for the bike rides they never took together. Perhaps that was her last gift to him. His freedom. Freedom from their loveless marriage. A chance to start over and salvage a wasted life.

Richard tried to recall the moment it when wrong. He didn't think it was before Ian was born. That was one of the happiest days of his life. He'd never loved her more than he did that day. Yet it wasn't raising Ian that caused them to hate each other. Hate each other? Hate was such a strong word. Richard wondered if he truly hated her as he walked into their bedroom, carefully running his fingers along the many decorative throw-pillows that lined the top of the excessively large queen-size bed. Their soft, frilly tassels danced across his fingertips as he flicked them with his nails. "No, they have to be Egyptian cotton!" she would say. Her nagging voice still echoed between his temples. Like Richard could even tell the difference between normal cotton and Egyptian cotton. It was just another waste of money. Because of course, Marshall's pillows were too tacky for Lilian. Lilian had to have the best money could buy. It all
had to fit with the ongoing Egyptian theme throughout the room. Or was it Persian? Something like that. Richard couldn’t remember, though Lily had always talked about it.

Richard was reminded of something their analyst had said. Something about him never truly listening to Lily. Or understanding her. Richard hated that. Absolutely hated it. Paying another man to tell him how to handle his wife. A ‘doctor’. Some youthful little shit who’d likely only slept with one or two girls. What did he know about being a husband? About having a marriage? That man could only know something a book said. Richard didn’t like those fucking “How-To” books. He and Lily had read so many when they had Ian. Look how well those worked out. No, that man knew nothing. It’s not like Richard even thought of himself as the perfect husband, but god damn, he wasn’t awful. He’d bought Lily everything she ever asked for. Spoiled her. But Dr....Rosenthal? Ruxen? Something with an R. This guy always told him that Lily only wanted things and spent so much time fixing up the house because she needed an emotionally available husband, which was lacking in her life. Suddenly, because he didn’t want to talk about every single thing he felt, that meant he was emotionally unavailable.

Richard threw himself onto the bed. His fingers slid across the nearby dresser until he found the bed’s remote. He pressed the “massage” option and immediately he could feel the swift and pressing motions of the vibrating gears beneath the mattress. It felt relaxing, in an artificial kind of way. It didn’t feel right. Nothing in the room did. It would only make sense that an artificial mattress would compliment an artificial marriage. The gears continued to pound and drive into his back. Ordinarily it would give Richard a sinking feeling. But this was so much better than the couch. He could finally sleep in a bed again.

He didn’t know how long he’d slept, but it was a long time. His hunger had finally awakened him. He hadn’t eaten that morning. He thought he’d had some toast the night before. Wheat bread with some of that vegan margarine. Something Lilian had read that was supposed
to help his cholesterol. She thought it was important to watch what they ate. Because whether or not the butter was vegan really mattered when you were floating dead in a pool.

Richard threw on his shitty lawn-mowing shirt. It was too small in nearly every region, proudly flaunting years of use, abuse, and trips through the dryer on high speed. It was the shirt he’d won from “Andy’s Antler’s”, a bar he frequently attended in his late twenties. “The Big Chili taste-off of ’95”. You could hardly read that now, it was so faded. You could only see the faint image of a big cartoon deer with a wide grin and a big frosty mug in its hoof. Richard always wondered if the deer was supposed to be Andy. He’d never met any Andy. The owner’s name was Mark. Regardless, it was Richard’s favorite shirt. The name “DICKY” stood boldly across the back in faded letters. That’s what he liked to be called then, before Lilian. There was something supremely rewarding about having a nickname. It was all his own. It was like his own legend and nobody could take it from him. He loved it. Lilian hated it. Maybe that’s why it was downgraded to a lawn-mowing shirt.

He threw his Cardinal’s cap on his head and left the room, heading quickly down the stairs. He stopped at the bottom, halting briefly to stare at Ian’s room. The door was open just a crack. He stepped forward and stared at it. He hadn’t been in the room for weeks. Neither had Lilian. The dust must be rampant. Ordinarily she would throw an absolute shit-fit. She normally kept it inhumanly tidy, forcing poor Ian to clean it up every day. Poor Ian? Richard snorted. The last thing anyone would say was “Poor Ian”.

He swung through the den and scooped up his keys, sliding them into his pocket. He took one last look out of the screen door at the late Lilian Malcolm. And with that he was out the front, his baggy grey sweatpants hanging low over his slippers and dragging across the porch as he walked. If Lilian could have seen what he was wearing now she’d have murdered him. She’d no doubt be very good at it. Ian had to have inherited it from somewhere.
He lowered his cap as protection from the blinding New Mexico sun and pressed the button on his keys, the car responded with the loud “chink-chink” of the doors unlocking. He paused and scanned his yard, the grass nearly undetectable under the barrage of signs and garbage. Some were messages such as “Devil Lovers” and some were invitations to “Go to Hell”. Ripped out Bible pages, burnt out memorial candles and Halloween skulls were welcome amongst the display. Richard laughed to himself. The antics of these people. Like he gave a shit if they told him to go to hell. They didn’t know what hell was. How could they?

Richard crossed the driveway to the car and opened the door, sliding himself into the driver’s seat. He stared ahead at the picture frame that rested on the windshield. He turned on the wipers, attempting to move it. The damn thing wouldn’t budge. He stepped out and slid around the car door, leaning across to grab the frame. He pulled it close. It was a picture of a little girl, maybe seven or eight. Richard remained still, transfixed on the image. He’d seen her face before. It was one of Ian’s kids. He bit his lower lip and clenched his other fist, the knuckles cracking as he did. He threw the picture down toward the end of the driveway and got back into the car. There he paused, resting his head against the steering wheel. He breathed shallowly and grasped the steering wheel with both hands, firmly. Breathing heavily; he raised his head. The garage door directly ahead revealed two spray painted words of graffiti spanning the entire door, filling his frame of vision:

“BABY KILLERS”

The Hybrid Sonata barreled into one of the many empty spots of the parking lot. Not many people seemed to be heading to the “The Tornado Burger” on a Tuesday. He himself maybe only went twice a year. It was never really a bustling place, but Richard loved it. The
burgers weren't amazing, but the place had charm to it. It was the only place you could drink a beer and eat a burger with any topping the heart desired. And now he could get it smothered with anything he wanted; he was a free man.

He thought that he must have looked like a regular bum as he walked in, or a criminal laying low from the law. Well, there was a body in his pool, so that part was sort of true. The bell on the door made a “ding” as he entered. He stepped through that little maze they had in front of the counter. It always felt so strange to do that when there was no line. The last time he was there, he had brought lan along, much to his distaste. lan hadn't been eating burgers anymore, something about him being a vegetarian. That was a phase Richard never understood. A sissy, “Save the Whales” campaign that was as useless as it was stupid. Richard knew lan only did it to seek attention. He was always doing that, wasn't he? Little schemes to get Lilian all worked up. He was always trying to insight a fuss. That's what he was good at.

Richard finally made it to the counter and slid his hands across it, bobbing back and forth. He whistled to himself; nothing special, just a little tune. Richard barely knew how to whistle. He peered his head into the back to see a young man texting in the corner. Richard whistled a bit louder until the teen raised his head and put his phone away. Richard gave a little wave as the young man came forward. He was chewing gum, letting his jaw drop low before smacking it right back up.

"Hi there," Richard said, nodding slightly.

The kid made a few taps on the register before meeting Richard's eyes.

"What can I get you?" He said, like a broken record.

Richard gazed up at the menu.

"Hmm. Can I get the...Bloomin’ Onion burger? Extra cheese. Extra Bacon. Extra BBQ sauce." He added, “And I'll take a Miller Light."
The kid typed the order in without a response before his head rose, his eyes blankly meeting Richard's.

"Sorry. We don't serve any alcohol before five. And I can't sell it to you anyways because I'm a minor. Company policy." He spoke as if he'd said it a thousand times. Richard closed his eyes and raised his head, biting the inside of his lip before returning his gaze to the worker.

"If you're a minor, then why do they let you work here?"

"Because it's before five. We don't sell any alcohol before five."

"And you don't work past five?"

"Nah, just till four-thirty."

Richard snorted. He scanned the kid up and down. A pimplly faced kid with long, curly brown hair hanging out from under his purple 'Tornado Burger' company hat. A picturesque, walking cliche of a teenage boy. He was like a dirty version of Ian.

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"That's my son's age. You go to Jamesville?"

The worker nodded and glanced more quizzically towards Richard.

"Yeah, who's your son?"

"Ian Malcolm."

The kid's eyes widened and his jaw stopped moving, the face of shock apparent.

"Actually, if I could just get a chocolate shake instead of the beer, that'd be great."

Richard said, smiling. "Extra whipped cream please."

* * *
Richard laid the napkins across his lap and removed the cheeseburger from its sleeve. He licked the barbecue sauce on the wrapper and took a bite. It was wonderful. That “this is bad for me and I love it” kind of awareness swept over him. He chewed slowly, taking in the music from the radio. It’s one of those premium channels that Lilian had him pay extra for. Because regular radio wasn’t customizable enough, apparently. It was set on the “oldies but goodies” channel. Richard thought about that for a moment. Wouldn’t “oldie but goodie” imply that most old things were bad, but here were some that are good? The song playing was a Huey Lewis. Richard knew it somewhat and nodded his head. He sang along a bit, completely off-tune.

“Doing it all for my baby, because she’s fine as can be. Doing it all for my baby, for everything she does for me”.

Richard pulled up slowly, bringing the car to a halt. He turned the radio off and waited, unsure whether to stay. He made up his mind and got out, throwing the crumpled wrapper from the Tornado Burger below the seat. He hadn’t been to see his son since they’d put him here. There he went with the “they” again. Richard shrugged it off and strode forth into the cemetery.

It didn’t take him long before he found Ian. You could hardly miss it, as it was the only grave covered in trash. Hateful signs and candles surrounded the stone. Richard wondered if young “punk” kids partied by his son’s grave, getting handjobs and praying to the devil, Ian Malcolm. That’s what they were calling him, “The Devil”. Ian “Hellfire” Malcolm. The little sh.t. He’d had to make a scene. Had to go and do something stupid. For what? Richard didn’t know. He barely cared.
He bent low until he was eye level with the grave. A scorched plastic doll lay before it. A cruel, macabre little token to remind him of what his son had done. Fuck him.

The stone merely said the boy’s name and the years of his life. No “beloved son”. Oh no, lan wouldn’t be getting that. The thing laying beneath his feet wasn’t his son. That wasn’t his little boy. Down there was the Devil. But if lan was the devil, then what did that make Richard? He wondered how Ted Bundy’s father coped. Or Papa Gacy. What was it like knowing you had brought the devil into the world?

Richard didn’t even know if lan was really down there. It was more like a token of him. They could barley separate his remains from the others. It pained Richard to think that pieces of lan could be out there somewhere, perhaps buried with the others, infecting them with his sickness. Richard rose up and leaned his hand against the grave. His thumb traced the edging. It was cold and smooth with sanded edges. That damn stone had cost more then he deserved. Richard would rather have just thrown the body in a dumpster; he didn’t care.

“You killed your mother, you know.” Richard said, scanning the grave. “She’s in the pool. She couldn’t take it. But you’re not getting me, you little shit. Not me.” He picked up the burned doll, looking it over.

“The cops found all that shit you had in your closet. People want that book of yours printed, said it’s be a bestseller. You won’t get the satisfaction. I won’t let you. Because that’s what you want, right? I won’t give it to you.” Richard spit at the grave. His hands began to shake, palms sweaty.

“Lot of reporters asking where you went wrong. Wondering whose fault it is. Your mother says it’s mine. Said I didn’t hug you enough or something. Maybe they’re right.”

Richard dropped the doll, wiping the ash down his sweatpants. He wondered what his old analyst would say. Old Dr. R would have some perfect explanation. He’d say that lan destroyed the childhood of others due to a feeling of self-hatred caused by an unavailable father
and an absence of his own childhood. An "emotionally unavailable" father. Something like that. Well, Dr. R, maybe he was just a fucked up kid. Then again, maybe they were right. It's not like Richard actually loved his son. He loved his son in a social "you have to love your kids" kind of way, but he didn't actually love him. He hadn't even liked him. They'd had nothing in common. They couldn't be alone in a room together. He was too quiet and introverted. Too busy thinking about killing kids.

But it couldn't have been that. It wasn't like Richard's father had loved him, because he certainly hadn't, and he'd turned out just fine. No, this new-age garbage about loving your kids was simply that, garbage. Richard wondered when he'd stopped loving his son. Maybe it was around the time he stopped loving Lilian. He didn't know how he could possibly pinpoint it. It wasn't an exact date. "Oh, January third, woke up and I didn't love my family." Richard thought to himself. He threw his head back and laughed. He wondered if Ian was below him, listening in. If that was even possible from Hell.

* * *

Back in his driveway, opening up a fresh new pack of cigarettes, Richard put one into his mouth and tipped his hat to the OL' familiar "BABY KILLERS" graffiti that was plastered directly ahead. The overhead garage lights lit up the words perfectly in the night. It looked like a movie theater. And now for the main attraction. "Baby Killers" coming to a theater near you.

Richard lit his cig as he exited the car. He opened the back seat, removing the six-pack of Miller Light and newly refilled gas can. He clenched them both in opposite hands and strode into the house. He set the goods onto the table and walked to the back porch, flicking on the light switch to see the pool. Lilly was still there, pruning away. If she'd had known he was
smoking in the house, she'd be furious. He turned the light switch off and headed up to Ian's room, the red can in tow.

He approached the familiar slightly cracked door and fully opened it. It was nearly empty, the cops having taken some of the more gruesome items. They had made sure to take Ian's little diary. He supposed that they needed to collect the new satanic bible to search for a motive. That's what everyone was always clamoring for, a motive. That's what they all had to have, all of the famous ones. If Ian wanted to join the ranks of the big boys, he had to have a motive. Richard assumed that it lay somewhere in the pages of Ian's most personal writings. He couldn't know, he'd never read it. He didn't want to know.

All that was left was the bedding and several knickknacks on Ian's desk. His lure-maker was still there. The faded fish, still swimming on the walls. Richard was going to be painting over them this winter, per Lillian's demands. She had a whole new color palette planned for Ian's room. All sparked because Richard said the kid was getting too old for a wall full of "fishies". Richard didn't even know if Ian really liked fishing. He seemed to like it. Ian had always been making his dad take him on fishing trips. But it wasn't like they ever talked about anything. Not really. His interest in girls and his grades were about as deep as it got. Ian didn't like sports and Richard didn't like Ian. Father and son bonding time.

Richard crossed to the closet, pushing the clothes to both sides. He could get a clear view of the things Ian had carved into the walls. The morose little messages to himself that Ian had written. Richard had assumed it was a kill list or something. He couldn't know, he wouldn't read it. Richard dropped to his knees, his fingers trailing along the small feathers strewn across the rug. Little remainders of Ian's collection. Lillian's beloved baby boy kept his neat little collection of dead birds in the closet. Richard wasn't sure if Ian had killed them or not, but it was all the same to him. More victims of Ian Malcolm's quest for personal fulfillment.
Richard opened the gas can. He threw a splash of it on the walls and the floor. He backed up, making sure to cover the bed and the desk. He splashed it across the walls, almost as if he attempted to drown those fucking fish. He covered the entire room and backed up into the hall. Why stop there? He went to the bedroom and coated Lilian's precious Egyptian pillows. They soaked up the gasoline almost gladly, no doubt not wanting to continue existing without Lilian to care for them. He covered the study and the bathrooms. He doused the workout room and the lounge with the can's contents. He wondered how Ian had felt on that bus. Richard wondered how Ian felt as the fire of his creation encircled him. Did he scream like his victims? Or did he welcome it with open arms? Richard covered a chair with the gas. He imagined that he was Ian and that a chair was one of the children. Like father like son, he supposed. He crossed back into the den and emptied the can on the couch where he'd spent many nights over the past few weeks. The bed of a lonely man. The place where Lilian had banished him because she refused to sleep in the same bed as the devil's father. Much less speak to him.

Richard threw the empty can down the hall. He paused by the kitchen counter, spotting a picture frame. He picked it up and brought it close. It was a photo of the family at Disney World a few years back. Lilian looked beautiful and tan. Ian, smiling with his braces and Mickey Mouse hat. Richard didn't have his gut or his double chin. A smiling, happy family. Lilian wasn't lying dead in a pool. Ian hadn't burned a bus full of elementary schoolers. No, here was a happy family spending time on vacation. A beautiful, happy family. Richard grabbed his six-pack, the photo, and dropped his cigarette.

* * * *

Richard cracked open a beer, leaning back in the lawn chair. He looked back behind him towards the pool. The water and Lilian were still. He could see the towering flames burning in
the reflection in the water. He stood up and moved the chair back; the fire was getting too hot. He set the photo down and closed his eyes. He could hear the chirping of crickets and the crackling of his family home incinerating in the flames. Like a Phoenix, he would rise from the ashes. He had finally gotten his dream. Whenever Lilian had threatened him with divorce, he'd always fantasized about leaving. About starting over. Falling in love again. Having another child; a girl this time. He wouldn't be making that mistake again.

But, maybe Richard Malcolm wasn't a family man. Maybe he wasn't meant to have a family. Look how well this one turned out. He gave it a shot, and it hadn't worked. The crickets grew softer now, failing to compete with the growing sounds of sirens in the distance. All the king's horses and all the king's men were coming to save the Malcolm family home. Richard wondered if, when they realized what house it was, they would just let it burn. After all, it was only fitting that the house of the devil would go down in flames. Richard spit out his beer at this thought. He laughed wildly, throwing his head back toward the sky. He ceased his laughter and returned his gaze to the pyre. He began to revisit Huey, his foot lightly tapping along.

"Doing it all for my baby, because she's fine as can be. Doing it all for my baby, for everything she does for me". The now approaching sirens served as his instrumentals.

The roof of the house caved in dramatically and the structure began to tumble inward on itself. Richard Malcolm, in his baggy grey sweats, his "Andy's Antler's" T-shirt and his Cardinal's cap stared into the abyss of fire and laughed. He laughed until his throat was sore.