

Hazel - alt.punk excerpt

by Lavinia Ludlow

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It's been years since I've been in contact with either Teresa or Elizabeth. They catch me off-guard at the dinner table with an enthusiastic compliment on how good I look, as if they don't remember preying on me throughout high school. Either they've genuinely matured, or they've found new victims from which to suck self-esteem.

"Oh my God, I, like, totally hit a guy with my car today," Teresa says. "He, like, bounced over my hood, hit the windshield, and plopped off the side. It was freakin' hilarious. I could barely drive away 'cause I was laughing so hard."

"That's hilarious," Elizabeth says. "Was he all right?"

"Someone ran over to help him up, so I figured he was okay."

"You just drove off?" I ask, cranking my jaw back into place.

"He was fine."

"I know, but—"

"So are you still, like, gothic and depressed?" she asks. "I remember in high school you were always dressed like you were going to a funeral."

"I was never gothic, or depressed."

"Yeah, remember that one time Winnie came up to you and was, like,

'You'd be better off if you killed yourself?'" Elizabeth asks.

"I don't remember that," I say.

"You don't?"

"No." I break open my menu, hoping they'll drop the interrogation and open theirs.

"How can you not remember something like that?"

"I just don't." Or maybe I do, but fuck, enough shit goes down in a teenager's adolescence (the standard confusion over life, the misery brought on by parents' sadistic expectations to excel) in addition to

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whatever else went down in the '90s that could significantly warp an impressionable kid—the Gulf War, the Soviet Union collapse, the Oklahoma, Georgia, and Kaczynski bombings, not to mention Columbine—and I really want to know how uprooting any of this (especially the part where Winnie said that I should kill myself) could possibly do anyone any good when we're all still trying to get over how horrifying our twenties were, much less what went down in our teens.

"Twenty-two dollars for a salad?" I say, trying to change the subject.

"It better be garnished with diamonds."

"You don't remember her saying that?" Elizabeth asks.

"No, I remember now," Teresa says. "Winnie came up to us and was all, 'Hazel would be better off if she killed herself 'cause it would do the world a big favor.' She never said it to her face. Right?" She looks to me for confirmation.

"Oh," Elizabeth says. "Hey, but remember how she'd always ask you how the suicidal cult was doing? And she'd chase you around campus screaming, 'Drink the Kool-Aid!' and everyone would call you Hazel Nut Job."

This is why people go into work one day with a shotgun. This is why people turn to the masses and drink Kool-Aid. This is one of the reasons behind Chuck Palahnuik's conceptualization of Project Mayhem. I scratch at my neck, hoping the conversation has run its course.

