

## Cray

We are crazy. We are Cray. C-R-A-Y, Cray. We are Conrad and Ray and Apollo and Yuri. We are four boys in one. Conrad is tall and Ray is short and Apollo is night and Yuri is day, but we move and think as one. We are never alone. We are never alone when we shoplift Airheads and hair dye and condoms we have yet to use. We are never alone when we skateboard or when we are bored. We are four HEs in one WE.

We got married when Apollo and Yuri were in the sixth grade and Ray was in the fifth and Conrad was in the seventh. We met after school in the park. We met in the big stormwater drain tunnel where all of us could still stand upright, except for Conrad who is so tall he had to duck, and we gathered in a circle and took out our penises, our *penii*—we call the plural of penis *penii* with two i's—and we stacked our *penii* the same way boys who play sports stack their hands before a game, ready to cheer. We stacked them just like that, but because most of our *penii* are still so small, we had to stand close together. We stood so close with our stacked *penii* that we could smell the stolen Airheads on each other's breath, and then we went around the circle and said, "Do you?" and each one of us had to say, "I Do!" This happened four times, because there are four of us in one, and when we had all said "I Do!" with authority, we brought our pants back up. We didn't kiss because that would be gay; instead, we zipped our pants in unison—*Zoop!*—and we were relieved, because we were finally married and at long last no longer alone.

On that day, we did not mention the other marriages we knew, because they were not good ones. Those marriages were between, or had been between, our mothers and our fathers, and we felt certain we were different. Those marriages were not good marriages, because those

people did not love each other, and we most certainly loved each other, even though we would never say such a thing out loud. So, we were married in the tunnel and Conrad and Ray and Apollo and Yuri became Cray. And we, Cray, pulled up our pants and walked out of the tunnel into the bright May sunlight and Apollo said, "It's like being born again," and we all agreed, but we did so silently and not out loud, because Apollo has a way of saying beautiful things that make it hard to respond without your voice sounding like you are about to cry. But he was right. It was like being born again, and we came out of the tunnel feeling safe for the first time in our lives and we waded through the knee-high grass on the hill, and we went up through the ragweed and chicory and Queen Anne's Lace—all that stuff that Yuri knows the name of—and a black-and-yellow butterfly landed on Ray, on one of his little ears, and we knew it was a blessing. We said did not say out loud that it was a sign. Instead, we said the butterfly had landed on Ray because he was so short and so blonde that the butterfly mistook him for goldenrod. And this made us laugh, long and hard. We needed the laugh after the wedding, because the wedding was such a big deal, and when our sides hurt from laughing, we simmered down into sighs and went on our honeymoon in the skate park. We set down our boards—one, two, three, four—at the top of the big ramp and we all went down together. We will all go down together.

We are Cray. We are too scared to smoke the pot that Conrad's dad smokes, because Conrad's dad has been questioned by the police twice this year and Conrad's dad talks to himself. He sees things that aren't there, like army tanks and Queen Elizabeth and bald eagles holding banners in their talons, banners that say *America is Dead* and *God is Dead*, so instead of smoking Conrad's dad's pot, we smoke Ray's mom's mullein. Ray's mom is a hippie. She makes us carob chip cookies and tells us to forgive our fathers. "The sooner you forgive your

fathers, the better men you'll be," she says. We know she is right, but how do good people forgive bad people? We know we will never understand forgiveness, just like we will never understand the Dewey Decimal System, but we know that, eventually, we will need forgiveness, unlike the Dewey Decimal System. So, we make a silent note to try forgiving at some point for the sake of Ray's mother, because Ray's mother is beautiful—her hair is the color of October—and in the meantime, we smoke her mullein, which is some sort of a flower or weed, but not THE weed.

We steal it from her bedside table where she keeps her hot pink dildo, and this embarrasses Ray more than his height, but still, we always talk about the dildo for a while because it's a dildo for God's sake, and when Ray looks like he might be sick, we stop talking and get back to business. We take some of the mullein for ourselves out of the wrinkled sandwich bag, and we smoke it down by the creek behind the apartment complex where Yuri lives and it makes us sleepy and it makes us talk about things we wouldn't normally talk about, like where people go when they die. Ray says when people die they just go in the ground and stop thinking and Apollo says he thinks that people go in the ground but they keep thinking forever and ever about the things they should have done and shouldn't have done. Yuri says he thinks that when we die, we all go to another dimension. That we are no longer humans or even souls, but some sort of code. That we become letters marching through some system that does something important, like an alphabet or something, being transmitted between one cosmic civilization and another. Yuri is really smart. He does good in school and he actually likes school, so when he says stuff, we believe him and this idea scares us all quiet for a good long time.

Conrad says he doesn't know where people go but he wants it to be wherever his dead dog went after the car hit him because Conrad loved that dog even more than Natalie Portman and that is saying something. Conrad once had a life-size poster of Natalie Portman that he slept next to. And one time, when we were at his house and in his room, we saw. Near the middle of the poster was a ragged hole. A hole right where Natalie's real hole would have been. And we called him out on that. We said. "Hey, look! Conrad cut a hole in the poster. Conrad's been fucking Natalie Portman's paper hole." And we have never seen Conrad so mad. He went red and started crying the sort of crying where tears and snot and spit shoot out of a guy. The really ugly cry. "Don't talk about Natalie that way," he yelled. "Have some respect for Natalie!" He probably said that twenty or thirty times. Then he curled up in a ball on the floor of his bedroom and rocked around for a while and we just stood there and stared at him and then stared at each other and shrugged. We felt really bad, but we didn't do anything. We never do anything other than standing and waiting and shrugging when one of us is bad off. After a while, Conrad got up and rolled up the poster and put a rubber band around it, and he put it on the high shelf in his closet and wiped his face like nothing had happened. Then he said to us "Let's go steal some Twizzlers and shit." So, we went to the old Walgreens, not the renovated one, and we stole some Twizzlers and shit. The shit was hair dye. That was the day we all dyed our hair Electric Grape at Apollo's house and ruined the downstairs sink and left before we could see the look on his mother's face.

We are Cray. We are bored. We were born bored. We will die bored. Our whole lives always have been and always will be about trying to get out of boredom. We steal our sisters' tampons and soak them in cherry Kool-Aid and sling them up to the ceiling where they dry like

pink stalactites. We fart into jars and screw on the lids and dare one another to unscrew the lids and put our mouths over the jars and breathe in without breathing out. We call them “hits.” *Here, take a hit.* Yuri’s hits could kill a caribou. When we are tired of hits, we go to the food court and order tacos and Chinese noodles and French fries and we mix them together and eat them like it’s no big thing. We steal boxes of condoms and put the condoms inside our matching duct tape wallets and walk around like we are ready for anything life throws at us.

We are Cray. We climb the giant pine behind the school during summer vacation and find a pile of bones in its big knothole. Yuri says they’re raccoon bones, but Ray says that’s no fun, and Conrad says let’s pretend they’re the bones of a kidnapped kid and we throw them down from the tree and climb down into the meadow and we play crime scene. We play crime scene for four hours like we aren’t eleven and twelve and twelve and thirteen but six and seven and seven and eight. The sun is bright and everything seems like a dream and we are so glad we are married. When we are done with crime scene, we make a little stack of the bones and Apollo sings: *The sun is up, the sky is blue, it’s beautiful, and so are you.* Goddamn Apollo. He’s always trying to make us cry.

We are Cray. We don’t understand girls except for our mothers. Our mothers are our churches and we go to them for comfort. We sit at their feet. They are our crosses and altars. We bring them things we find, like offerings to a God. We bring them frogs and old bananas from our lunchbox and flowers that die the second they are picked. Our mothers are the only people we let touch us. They are the only things that give us faith. But we don’t talk about our mothers that much. We steal their mullein and eat their cookies and watch them drink their Diet Cokes.

We watch them fold our underwear. We worry about them, our mothers, our churches. People burn down churches, you know. We see how our mothers always smile at us, but we see how the smile wasn't there before they saw us, so we know they put the smile on their face just for us, which makes us feel special and sad. Which makes us feel like they are lying about something. Which makes us not want to grow up.

We are Cray. We eat nutmeg. It's Ray's idea. He says we will go on a vision quest. He brings the nutmeg and we all eat a tablespoon and then we don't feel anything, so we eat another tablespoon and then we are thirstier than we've ever been in our lives. And then Ray says he can see the end of the world in a cloud above the ballpark, like a spinning circle. Like a black hole. And then Conrad starts seeing army tanks like his dad and he curls up and cries like he did when we said he'd been fucking the Natalie Portman poster. And then Apollo starts laughing. He laughs for maybe four hours and Yuri does something with Apollo's sternum to make sure he will still get oxygen and not go brain dead. And then we go home and can't sleep, for that night or really the next, and when we meet to go skateboarding a few days later, we all just kind of sit on a bench. Something has changed. Something is changing.

We are Cry. Apollo is the first to quit showing up and without him, that's what we do: cry. We try to hide the crying by playing a game called *Let's Act Like Girls* and we imitate the girls in the lunchroom. We imitate their gossip. We talk about who unfriended us and who blocked us and then we say "Ohmygod! Stop! Stop it! You're making me cry!" And then we pretend to be girls crying at a lunch table when we are just boys on a bench crying for Apollo. Our night. Our knight.

We are Cy, because Ray leaves next. Ray is the youngest and the shortest and he says he just has different things to do in his different grade and that he can't see us for a while. But we know this is a lie. We wonder what is wrong, but we cannot bring ourselves to talk about it. So, we don't steal and we don't climb and we don't skate and we don't cry. We just sigh because that's what we are now: C-Y, Cy. We just walk in the tall grasses that Yuri knows the names of—the fescue and thistle and timothy and yarrow—and we sigh and sigh and sigh.

We are Y. Because now Conrad is gone. Conrad says it is because of his dad, that he has family stuff to handle, but Yuri is the smartest and Yuri knows that it is over, and we always believe Yuri, so we all know it is over. The marriage. Our marriage. Our marriage is dead, like all the other marriages we know, and where do dead things go? We don't want it down in the ground, not thinking at all or forever thinking about all the things we wish we had done and wish we hadn't done. We don't want it where Conrad's dog is, because we don't know where that is. But do we want it where Yuri says the dead go? Do we want it to be broken up and broken apart? Do we want it to be parts of an alphabet? Do we want it to be letters that spell nothing? That mean nothing? Do we want to be C and R and A and Y? Do we want to go down, but not go down together?

We were Cray. We were crazy. We were crazy to think it would last. We were crazy about each other.