Edward took a drag on his cigarette. “You’re gonna die from those things,” his girlfriend Willi said.

He was a girl named Willi. That’s what he told his parents growing up. He always spelled his name like that. He wanted a sex change from the time he was seven. He did all the research. He knew who to talk to. His parents took him to psychologists. The psychologists took him to sex specialists. They made him watch videos of people having sex, examined his body, told him, “Wouldn’t you rather play football?” and “You don’t really like dolls.” He didn’t listen to them—again and again, he didn’t listen to them. But he would cry in his room at night, cry and cry. When he got older, the kids teased him and hit him and hurt him. When he got older, he ran away. When he got older, his parents mourned him like he was dead.

When Carla won the lottery, she figured it would solve all of her problems. “Don’tcha think?” she asked her husband, Will. He grunted his assent.

“Bingo!” the old, gray-headed lady shouted. Some college-aged kid ran down the aisle, one of the volunteers, and called out her letters and numbers. The announcer congratulated her on a job well done, and there were grumbles and dissension all around.

“It’s all about passion, it’s all about the music. You’ve got to play your role—own your role,” Ed was shaking his kid’s shoulders. The kid, little girl with black hair just barely down to her shoulders, nodded dutifully. “You got it, kiddo?” She kept nodding.

“You fucking cheater!” Leslie said, slapping William across the face. A shout from off stage. She rubbed her hands against each other and sighed. “Again?”

She sat at her husband’s bedside, holding his forearm, pressing her fingers into him. The hospital TV overhead spun out news—the invasion, the war, the bombs, smoke billowing up into the night sky. She could choke on it. She put her hands over her ears. “No, no.”

They dragged him behind the pickup first—seventy-five, maybe a hundred feet. His body was mangled, but he wasn’t dead, so they tied him to a tree and beat him with baseball bats and golf clubs until he didn’t move, until blood poured from his ears, his nose, his mouth, his eyes, the open cuts and dirty wounds. “Fucking faggot,” they said, and they each spat in his face as they left.