



i hold the button down with my thumb until the television zaps to black and jump toward the door. i bend down and grab my three year old adidas, stained with melted ,anhattan snow and 4 a.m. JMZ rides into bushwick, as my father's footsteps grow louder down the stairs.

i fling the door open and run out, shoes still in hand, into the los angeles morning that i have moved back to. i can't face him today, not today, not when the cable's been disconnected again, not when he doesn't know that i have failed at everything.

outside on the porch, i stop, freeze, watch the rain begin as the new puppy runs up with wet fur and wraps her front legs around my thigh, humping away the confusion in her body and i pet her on the head because i don't know how to explain to her that she's been fixed and she needs to stop desiring.

i drop my shoes and slip my feet in. it's gray. they said it wouldn't rain today. they said it wouldn't. last week, in the relentless rain, all the holes dug in the front yard by our hungry puppies got filled up with water.

my father was so upset about it. he declared that he wanted to start from scratch, pull out all the grass, dig up and throw away this dead soil that covers the space around our house. cement the whole damn thing except a few small areas filled with new good dirt that will let mom plant vegetables and flowers and stop shaking his head at him.

they asked me what shape these should be, these places to seed and sow, these places ready for mom's green thumbs, these places in our lives where breathing is possible in the cool shade of new leaves. stars. stars, i said, because i couldn't say what i meant.

they said it was gone. they lied. they lied about the rain and i think that it's already too late.

because inside, he is reaching for the remote and falling back into his black couch, a box of shredded wheats and a bottle of illegal chinese diabetes pills shaped like black ball bearings on the coffee table. he is turning on the television to look for his good friends, chuck norris and clark gable, for the rock or victor mature, and staring annoyed at the courteous message on the screen from the cable company telling him there will be no actors today, no plots or explosions, no fight to the death in an abandoned paper-mill, and in the message he is finding his son covering his face with trembling hands of shame, the right ring finger crooked from a flag-football injury, his son in white briefs always yellowed with piss, his son, this boy, passed out with his face on the rusted keys of a stolen 50 year old DWP typewriter, and my father is calling my name as i push the dog off my leg, take one more fast step toward the street, my hand going inside the pocket of my torn jeans and grabbing the keys, the new rain wetting my unwashed hair, the puppy ready to jump up on me again, and he, he is slamming down the remote between the tasteless crackers and the pills, pushing off the couch with a grunt, and i am looking up before the next step and smiling for a second because in that moment, i know what he is looking for each time he sits in front of the television.

tommy udo. it's always been tommy udo. tommy udo ready to kill the world.

it was *kiss of death*, sitting with my parents in the apartment on gramercy drive, drinking dr. pepper because dad hated it but didn't want to throw it away. that was the first time i saw that man. i asked my father who that was, the actor playing tommy udo, and he leaned back in his couch, a gray one then, crossed his right leg over his left, threw peanuts into his mouth and chewed as i waited for him to tell me and mom knit a little more of the afghan and turned her head a bit to the right, enough to see my father's face, enough to look at him in love and smile, and i asked again and again. who's that guy, dad?

that, he said, is richard widmark.

he didn't speak to me again that night, getting up and putting on his jacket and his shoes and leaving without a word, before i could thank him, for tommy udo, *for kiss of death*, before i could thank him for this actor with the smirk, before i could tell him that his jacket was inside out, before i could tell him that i too would be looking for richard widmark for the rest of my life, for this killer to come back, wipe everything away in a violent rain, and give us a chance to start again from scratch.