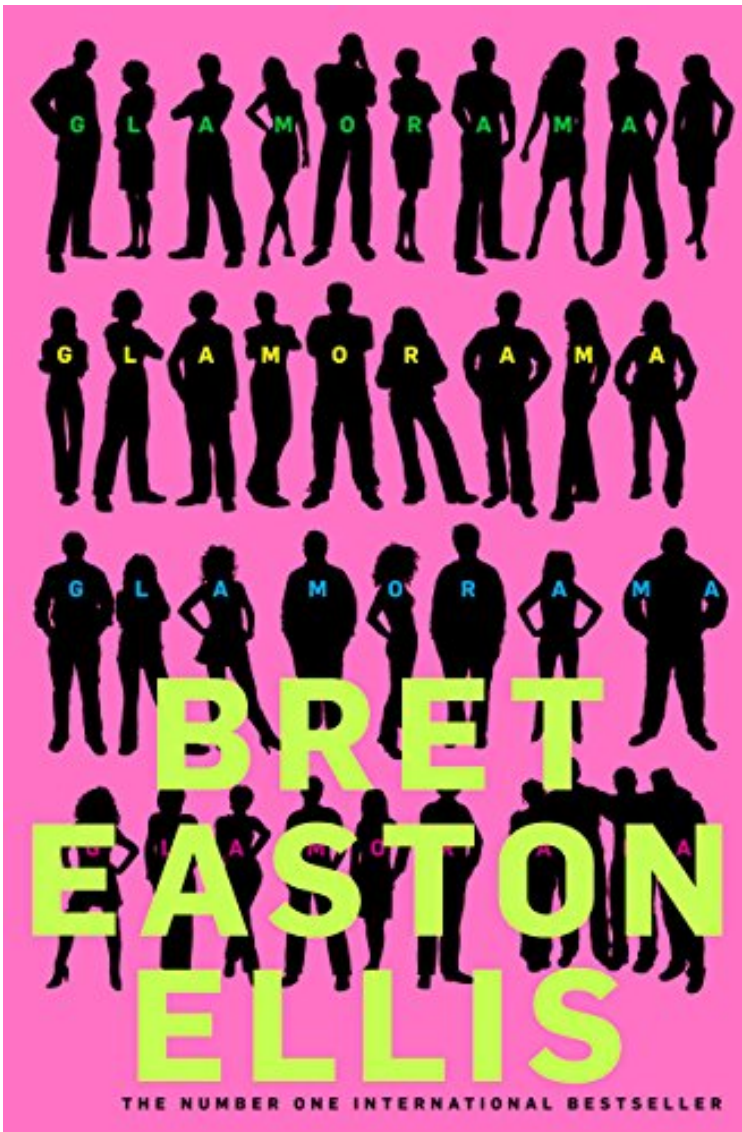


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Glamorama (English Edition)



Par Bret Easton Ellis
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[E-BOOK] Glamorama (English Edition)

Par Bret Easton Ellis : Glamorama (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Glamorama (English Edition):

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Description : Description du produitWe'll slide down the surface of things . . .From his first novel--Less Than Zero, published when he was still a college student--to his most recent--the fierce American PsychoBret Easton Ellis has been a powerful and original presence in contemporary literature, whether giving voice to a previously inchoate generation or provoking a controversy that raged throughout the culture. Now he takes a quantum leap forward: an awesome reckoning of the American Century at endgame. In Glamorama, a young man in what is recognizably fashion- and celebrity-obsessed Manhattan is gradually, imperceptibly drawn into a shadowy looking-glass of that society, there and in London and Paris, and then finds himself trapped on the other side, in a much darker place where fame and terrorism and family and politics are inextricably linked and sometimes indistinguishable. At once implicated and horror-stricken, his ways of escape blocked at every turn, he ultimately discovers--back on the other, familiar side--that there was no mirror, no escape, no world but this one in which hotels implode and planes fall from the sky. Time

and again, the novel confounds one's expectations of it, and Bret Ellis accomplishes the transitions from comic to surreal to horrific to humane with astonishing confidence. Matching ambition with artistic maturity, *Glamorama* is at once hilarious, savage in its worldly observation, and compassionate in its vision: a defining novel of our times.

Presentation de l'diteurThe centre of the world: 1990s Manhattan. Victor Ward, a model with perfect abs and all the right friends, is seen and photographed everywhere, even in places he hasn't been and with people he doesn't know. On the eve of opening the trendiest nightclub in New York history, he's living with one beautiful model and having an affair with another. Now it's time to move to the next stage. But the future he gets is not the one he had in mind. In *Glamorama*, Bret Easton Ellis shows us a shadowy looking-glass world, the juncture where fame and fashion, terror and mayhem meet and then begin to resemble the familiar surface of our lives. *Glamorama* is a satirical mass-murder opus more ambitious than Bret Easton Ellis's 1990 *American Psycho*. It starts as a spritz-of-consciousness romp about kid-club entrepreneur Victor Ward, "the It boy of the moment," an actor-model up for *Flatliners II*. Ellis has perfect pitch for glam-speak, and he gives nightlife the fizz, pace, and shimmer it lacks in drab reality. Anyone could cite the right celeb names and tunes, but like a rock-polishing machine, his prose gives literary sheen to fame-chasing air-kissers. He's coldly funny: when Victor's girl tries to argue him out of a breakup, she angrily snorts six bumps of coke, stops, mutters, "Wrong vial," snorts four corrective doses from whatever she has in her other fist, then objects to a rival at the party wearing the same dress she's wearing. You had to be there; Ellis makes you feel you are. But such satire is a very smart bomb targeting a very large barn. Models' status anxiety doesn't merit Ellis's Tom Wolfe-esque expertise. *Glamorama* gets better when Victor gets drafted into a mysterious group of model-terrorists who bomb 747s and the Ritz in Paris, wearing Kevlar-lined Armani suits. Oh, they still behave like shallow snobs, pronouncing "cool" as if it had 12 o's. But now when somebody swills Cristal, it's apt to be poisoned, to horrific effect, which Ellis expertly, affectlessly describes. His enfant-terrible debut, *Less Than Zero*, aped Joan Didion. Now Ellis has grown into a lesser Don DeLillo--and that's high praise. -- Tim AppeloExtraitWe'll slide down the surface of things . . . Old U2 on the stereo and gridlock jams the streets two blocks from the club and I'm not really hearing the things that are being said in the back of the limousine, just words--technobeat, slamming, moonscape, Semtex, nirvana, photogenic--and names of people I know--Jade Jagger, Iman, Andy Garcia, Patsy Kensit, the Goo-Goo Dolls, Galliano--and fleeting pieces of subjects I'm usually interested in--Doc Martens, Chapel Hill, the Kids in the Hall, alien abduction, trampolines--because right now I'm fidgeting with an unlit joint, looking up through the limo's sunroof, spacing on the sweeping patterns spotlights are making on the black buildings above and around us. Baxter and Lauren are sitting across from Chloe and me and I'm undergoing a slow-motion hidden freak-out, focusing on our excruciating progress toward the club while Chloe keeps trying to touch my hand, which I let her do for seconds at a time before I pull away to light one of Baxter's cigarettes or to rewind the U2 tape or to simply touch my forehead, specifically not looking in the direction of Lauren Hynde or how her legs are slightly spread or the way she's staring sadly back at her own reflection in the tinted windows. "We all live in a yellow limousine," Baxter sing-laugh. "A yellow limousine," Chloe sings too, giggling nervously, looking over at me for approval. I give it by nodding at Baxter, who's nodding back, and I'm shuddering. We'll slide down the surface of things . . . Finally we're at the curb in front of the club and the first thing I hear is someone yelling "Action!" and U2's "Even Better Than the Real Thing" starts playing somewhere out of the sky as the driver opens the door and Baxter's checking his hair in Chloe's compact and I toss him my cummerbund. "Just wrap this around your head and look dreamy," I mutter. "You'll be okay." "Victor," Chloe starts. A wave of cold wind sweeps over the crowd standing behind the barricades in front of the club and causes the confetti strewn over the plush purple-and-green carpet leading up to the entrance to dance and swirl around the legs of cops guarding the place and behind the velvet ropes stand three cool Irish guys Damien hired, each of them holding a walkie-talkie and a separate guest list, and on either side of the velvet ropes are huge gangs of photographers and then the head publicist--smiling warmly until she sees Chloe's dress--asks us to wait where we are because Alison, wearing the same Todd Oldham dress Chloe has on, and Damien in a Gucci tuxedo are making their entrance and posing for the paparazzi, but people in the crowd have already noticed Chloe and shout out her name in high, garbled voices. Damien appears unusually tense, his jaw clenching and unclenching itself, and Lauren suddenly grabs my hand and I'm also holding Chloe's and when I look over at Chloe I notice she's holding Baxter's. Damien turns around when he hears people shouting out Chloe's name and he nods at me, then smiles sadly at Lauren, who just mutters something

indifferent, and when he sees Chloe's dress he does a hideous double take and tries valiantly to smile back a humongous gag and then he hurriedly ushers Alison into the club even though she's in the middle of taking major advantage of the photo ops, obviously pissed at the interruption, and thankfully Chloe's already too blinded by the flashing cameras to have noticed Alison's dress and I'm making a significant mental note about what should happen once inside: dim all the lights, sweet darling, or the night will be over with. The photographers start shouting out all our names as we move toward the stairs leading up into the club and we linger for the appropriate amount of time--our faces masks, Chloe smiling wanly, Baxter smiling sullenly, Lauren genuinely smiling for the first time tonight, me sufficiently dazed--and above the door in giant '70s lettering is a warning from MTV ("This Event Is Being Videotaped. By Entering You Consent to the Cablecast and Other Exhibition of Your Name, Voice and Likeness") and then we're inside moving through the metal detectors and Chloe whispers something into my ear that I can't hear. We'll slide down the surface of things . . . And U2's "Even Better Than the Real Thing" bursts out as we enter the main room of the club and someone calls out "Action!" again and there are already hundreds of people here and immediately Chloe is pounced on by a new group of photographers and then the camera crews are pushing their way toward her and I let go of her hand, allowing myself to be repositioned by the crowd over to one of the bars, actively ignoring celebs and fans, Lauren following close behind, and I nab the bartender's attention and order a glass of Veuve Clicquot for Lauren and a Glenlivet for myself and we just stand there while I'm admiring Patrick Woodroffe's lighting design and how it plays off all the floor-to-ceiling black velvet and Lauren's thinking I don't-even-know-what as she downs the champagne and motions for another one and glancing over at her I finally have to say "Baby . . ." and then I lean in and nuzzle her cheek with my lips so briefly it wouldn't register to anyone except someone standing right behind me and I breathe in and close my eyes and when I open them I look to her for a reaction. She's gripping the champagne flute so tightly her knuckles are white and I'm afraid it will shatter and she's glaring past me at someone behind my back and when I turn around I almost drop my glass but with my other hand hold the bottom to keep it steady. Alison finishes a Stoli martini and asks the bartender for another without looking at him, waiting for a kiss from me. I grin boyishly while composing myself and kiss her lightly on the cheek but she's staring back at Lauren when I do this as if I were invisible, which tonight, for maybe the first time in my life, I sort of wish I was. Harry Connick, Jr., Bruce Hulse and Patrick Kelly jostle by. I look away, then down. "So-o-o . . . another Stoli?" I ask Alison. "I am now entering the stolar system," Alison says, staring at Lauren. Casually, to block her view, I lean into the bar. "Welcome to the state of relaxation," I say "jovially." "Er, enjoy your, um, stay." "You asshole," Alison mutters, rolling her eyes, then grabs the drink from the bartender and downs it in one gulp. Coughing lightly, she lifts my arm and uses my jacket sleeve to wipe her mouth. "Um . . . baby?" I start uncertainly. "Thank you, Victor," she says, too politely. "Um . . . you're welcome." A tap on the shoulder and I turn from Alison and lean in toward Lauren, who very sweetly asks, "What do you two see in that bitch?" "Let's redirect our conversation elsewhere, 'kay?" "Spare me, you loser," Lauren giggles. Luckily Ione Skye and Adam Horowitz push through the crowd toward me--an opening I seize upon. "Hey! What's new, pussycat?" I smile, arms outstretched. "Meow," Ione purrs, offering her cheek. "Excuse me while I kiss the Skye," I say, taking it. "Yuck," I hear Alison mutter behind me. Camera flashes explode from the middle of the room like short bursts from a damaged strobe light and Ione and Adam slip away into the churning crowd and I've lit a cigarette and am generally just fumbling around looking for an ashtray while Lauren and Alison stare at each other with mutual loathing. Damien spots me and extracts himself from Penelope Ann Miller and as he moves closer and sees who I'm standing between he stops, almost tripping over this really cool midget somebody brought. Shocked, I mouth Come here. He glances at Lauren mournfully but keeps blinking because of all the cameras flashing and then he's pushed forward by the crowd and now he's shaking my hand too formally, careful not to touch either girl, neither one responding to his presence anyway. Behind him Chloe and Baxter are answering questions in front of camera crews and Christy Turlington, John Woo, Sara Gilbert and Charles Barkley slide by. "We need to talk," Damien says, leaning in toward me. "It's crucial." "I, um, don't think that's such a good idea right . . . now, um, dude," I say with careful, deliberate phrasing. "For once you may have a point." He tries to smile through a scowl while nodding at Lauren and Alison. "I think I'm going to take Lauren over to the 'Entertainment Tonight' camera crew, okay?" I say. "I have got to talk to you now, Victor," Damien growls. Suddenly he reaches through the crowd and grabs Baxter, yanking him away from Chloe and the MTV camera crew, and then whispers something in Baxter's ear and U2 turns into the Dream Warriors' "My Definition of a Boombastic Jazz Style." Lauren and Alison have both lit cigarettes and are blowing smoke directly into each other's faces. Baxter's nodding intently and

lets Damien sandwich him at the bar--in a style I wish was slightly more subtle--between Alison and Lauren, filling the empty space where I used to stand. "Who's this?" Alison asks Damien dully. "This is Baxter Priestly, baby," Damien says. "He wants to say hi and, um, wish you well." "Yeah, yeah, you look really familiar," Alison says, totally bored, waving down the bartender, mouthing Another. "He's in the new Darren Star show," I say. "And he's in the band Hey That's My Shoe." "Who are you in the Darren Star show?" Alison asks, perking up. "He's the Wacky Guy," Lauren says, staring at the bartender. "Right, he's the Wacky Guy," I tell Alison as Damien pulls me away and uses my body as a barrier to push through the crowd and up the first flight of stairs to the deserted second floor, where he guides me toward a railing overlooking the party. We immediately light cigarettes. On this floor twenty tables have been set up for the dinner and really handsome busboys are lighting candles. On all the TV monitors: fashionable static. "What in the fuck?" Damien inhales deeply on the cigarette. "They're just, um, lighting the candles for dinner," I say, gesturing innocently at the busboys. Damien smacks me lightly on the side of the head. "Why in the fuck is Chloe's dress exactly like Alison's?" "Damien, I know they look alike but in actuality--" He pushes me toward the railing and points down. "What are you telling me, Victor?" "It's a--it's supposedly a, um, very popular dress this . . . y'know . . ." I trail off. Damien waits, wide-eyed. "Yes?" ". . . season?" I squeak out. Damien runs a hand over his face and stares over the railing to make sure Alison and Chloe haven't seen each other yet, but Alison's flirting with Baxter and Chloe's answering questions about how high the fabulous factor is tonight while a line of TV crews jostle for the perfect angle and Damien's muttering "Why isn't she wearing that hat you picked up?" and I'm making excuses ("Oribe said it was a no-no") and he keeps asking "Why isn't she wearing the goddamn hat you picked up?" and Lauren's talking to fucking Chris O'Donnell and Damien guzzles down a large glass of Scotch then sets it on the railing with a shaky hand and I'm kind of like infused with panic and so tired. "Damien, let's just try to have a cool--" "I don't think I care anymore about that," he says. "About what? About having a cool time?" I'm asking. "Don't say that." And then after a long patch of silence: "I really don't know how to respond to that." And then after a longer patch of silence: "You look really great tonight." "About her," he says. "About Alison. I don't think I care about that." I'm staring out over the crowd, my eyes involuntarily refocusing on the expressions Lauren's making while Chris O'Donnell chats her up, swigging from a bottle of Grolsch, Lauren seductively playing with the damp label, models everywhere. "Why . . . did you ever?" I hear myself ask, thinking, At least the press will be good. Damien turns to me and I look away but meet his gaze when he says, "Whose money do you think this all is?" "Pardon?" I ask, leaning away, my neck and forehead soaked with sweat. "Who do you think is bankrolling all of this?" he sighs. A long pause. "Various . . . orthodontists . . . from, um, Brentwood?" I ask, squinting, wiping my forehead. "Um, you. Aren't you like responsible for all of, um, this?" "It's hers," he shouts. "It's all Alison's." "But . . ." I stop, swaying. Damien waits, looking at me. "But . . . I don't know how to respond to . . . that." "Haven't you been paying attention?" he snaps. We'll slide down the surface of things . . . "They found Mica," Damien's saying. "Who?" I ask numbly, staring off. "The police, Victor," he says. "They found Mica." "Well, it's a little too late," I'm saying, trying to recover. "Right? Do not pass Go? Do not collect two million bucks, right? Junior's doing a great job and personally I always felt Mica was sort of--" "Victor, she's dead," Damien says tiredly. "She was found in a Dumpster in Hell's Kitchen. She was beaten with a hammer and . . . Jesus Christ"--he breathes in, waves down into the crowd at Elizabeth Berkley and Craig Bierko, then brings his hand to his mouth--"eviscerated." I'm taking this in with a large amount of extreme calm. "She OD'd?" "No," Damien says very carefully. "She was eviscerated, Victor." "Oh my god," I gasp, holding my head, and then, "What does eviscerated mean?" "It means she didn't die a peaceful death." "Well, yeah, but how do we know that?" "She was strangled with her own intestines." "Right, right." "I hope you realize this conversation is off the record." Below us I'm just looking down at Debi Mazar and Sophie B. Hawkins, who's with Ethan Hawke and Matthew Barney. Below us a photographer spots me and Damien standing by the railing and snaps three, four, eight shots in rapid succession before I can straighten my tie. "No one knows this yet," Damien sighs, lighting another cigarette. "Let's keep it this way. Let's just keep everyone smiling until tomorrow." "Yeah man, cool," I say, nodding. "I think I'm capable." "And please try to keep Alison and Lauren away from each other," he says, walking away. "Let's make a concerted effort to try and pull that off, okay?" "I think I'm capable, dude." We'll slide down the surface of things . . . Someone calls up to me and I move away from the railing and head downstairs back into the party and then Carmen, this Brazilian heiress, grabs my arm. Chris O'Donnell has moved away from Lauren, who spots me from across the room and just stares, and Baxter's still desperately keeping Alison occupied, even though it looks like she's losing interest, because she's rolling her eyes and making yapping gestures with her hands.

"Victor! I just see the film Beauty and the Beast and I love it! I--love--it!" Carmen's shrieking, eyes wide, flailing her arms around. "Baby, you're cool," I say worriedly. "But it would be somewhat profitable if you chilled out a bit." Alison pats Baxter on the side of his face and starts to move away from the bar toward the center of the room, where the camera flashes are most intense, and Chloe, predictably, is now standing with Chris O'Donnell. "But Victor, you hear me?" Carmen's blocking my way. "I love it. I adore both the Beauty and the Beast. I love it. 'Be My Guest'--Oh my god!" "Baby, be my guest. You need a drink." Distressed, I snap at Beau while pointing at Carmen. "Beau--get this chick a Caipirinha." I push Carmen out of the way but it's too late. Tarsem and Vivienne Westwood grabbing each of my arms, I can only watch helplessly as Alison glides gaily, drunkenly toward Chloe, who's being interviewed with Chris O'Donnell for MTV, her expression becoming more confused the nearer she gets. Once she's behind Chloe, Alison sees the dress, immediately grabs a lighter out of Sean Penn's hand and, horror-struck, waves the flame so she can see Chloe better. Bijoux from MTV isn't looking at Chloe now and has lowered her microphone, and Chloe turns around, sees Alison, smiles, and in the middle of a tiny wave notices Alison's dress, grimaces, squints desperately, tries to take a closer look--Chris O'Donnell is pretending not to notice, which makes things better--and Bijoux leans in to ask a question and Chloe, dazed, turns hesitantly back to the camera to try and answer it, succeeds with a shrug. Lauren is standing next to me holding a giant glass filled with what I can only hope is not vodka and without saying a word clamps her free hand onto my ass. Alison starts heading toward us, purposefully grabbing a martini off a passing tray and getting about half of it in her mouth. "How did you get off the Xanax?" I'm murmuring to somebody quasi-famous. "You mean get the Xanax." "Yeah, yeah, get the Xanax, cool." "I was withdrawing from marijuana addiction and so I went to my mom's doctor and--hey Victor, you're not listening to me--" "Hey, don't freak, you're cool." Alison walks up to me, licks my cheek and, standing incredibly close, places her mouth on mine, desperately trying to push her tongue in, but my teeth are clenched and I'm nodding to the guy who's talking about Xanax and shrugging my shoulders, trying to casually carry on my part of the conversation, when Alison finally gives up, pulls back, leaving my mouth and chin slathered with a combo of saliva and vodka, smiles meanly and then stands next to me so that I'm flanked by her and Lauren. I'm watching Chloe, her interview over, squinting into the crowd trying to find me, Chris O'Donnell still nursing his Grolsch. I look away. Alison leans in and touches my ass, which I tense uselessly, causing her hand to creep across until it touches the back of Lauren's hand and freezes. I'm asking Juliette Lewis how her new dalmatian, Seymour, is doing and Juliette says "So-so" and moves on. I can feel Alison trying to push Lauren's hand off but Lauren's hand has clutched the left cheek and will not let go and I look at her nervously, spilling my drink on the cuff of the Comme des Garçons tuxedo, but she's talking to someone from the Nation of Islam and Traci Lords, her jaw set tightly, smiling and nodding, though Traci Lords senses something's wrong and tells me I looked great slouching in the seat next to Dennis Rodman at the Donna Karan show and leaves it at that. A curvy blonde staggers over with a girl in an African headdress and this Indian dude, and the curvy blonde kisses me on the mouth and stares dreamily into my face until I have to clear my throat and nod at her friends. "This is Yanni," the curvy blonde says, gesturing at the girl. "And this is Mudpie." "Hey Mudpie. Yanni?" I ask the black girl. "Really? What does Yanni mean?" "It means 'vagina,'" Yanni says in a very high voice, bowing. "Hey honey," I say to Alison, nudging her. "This is Mudpie and Yanni. Yanni means 'vagina.'" "Great," Alison says, touching her hair, really drunk. "That's really, really great." She hooks her arm through mine and starts pulling me away from Lauren, and Lauren, seeing Chloe approaching, lets go of my ass and finishes whatever she's drinking and Alison's tugging me away and I try to keep my footing to talk to Chloe, who grabs my other arm. "Victor, what's Alison doing?" Chloe calls out. "Why is she wearing that dress?" "I'm going to find that out now--" "Victor, why didn't you want me to wear this dress tonight?" Chloe's asking me. "Where are you going, goddamnit?" "Honey, I'm checking for specks," I tell her, shrugging helplessly, Alison pulling my shoulder out of its socket. "I've seen none and am gratefully, er, relieved but there might be some upstairs--" "Victor, wait--" Chloe says, holding on to my other arm. " 'Allo, my leetle fashion plate." Andre Leon Talley and the massive-titted Glorinda greet Chloe with impossibly wettish airkisses, causing Chloe to let go of my arm, which causes me to collide with Alison, who, unfazed, just drags me up the stairs. We'll slide down the surface of things . . . Alison slams the bathroom door, locks it, then moves over to the toilet and lifts up her skirt, pulls her stockings down and falls onto the white porcelain seat, muttering to herself. "Baby, this is not a good idea," I'm saying, pacing back and forth in front of her. "Baby, this is definitely not a good idea." "Oh my god," she's moaning. "That tuna has been giving me total shark-eye all night. Did she actually come with you, Victor? How in the fuck did she weasel in here? Did you see the fucking look she gave me when I first

made eye contact?" Alison wipes herself and, still sitting there, immediately begins to rummage through a Prada handbag. "That bitch actually told Chris O'Donnell that I run a quote-unquote highly profitable fat-substitute emporium." "I think your meeting could definitely be construed as an uh-oh moment." "Why?" I shout out. "Does it bother you?" "Let's just say--" Alison starts coughing, her face crumples up and between huge sobs she wails, "it was mildly horrifying?" She immediately recovers, slaps my face, grabs my shoulders and screams, "You're not getting away with this!" "With what?" I shout, grabbing a vial away from her, scooping out two huge capfuls for myself. "What am I not getting away with?" Alison grabs the vial away from me and says, "No, that's, er, something else." She hands me the other vial. Already wired, I'm not capable of stopping myself from kissing her on the nose, an involuntary reaction to whatever I just snorted. "Oh hot," she sneers miserably. "How hot." Unable to move my mouth, I gurgle, "I'm speechless too." "That little conversation we had, Victor, upset me very much," Alison groans, fixing her hair, wiping her nose with Kleenex. She looks at my innocent face in the mirror, while I stand behind her doing a few more hits. "Oh please, Victor, don't do this--do not do this." "When?" I'm shouting out. "What in the hell--" "About ninety minutes ago? Stop acting like such an idiot. I know you're a guy who's not exactly on the ball, but please--even this could not get past you." I hand back the vial, wiping my nose, and then say very quietly, hoping to reassure her, "Baby, I don't know what you're talking about." "That's the problem, Victor," she screams. "You never know." "Baby, baby--" "Shut up, shut up, shut up," she screams, whirling away from her reflection. "You stand in front of me just ninety minutes ago outside my apartment and tell me it's all over--that you're in love with Lauren Hynde? That you're dumping Chloe for her? Remember that, you humongous idiot?" "Wait a minute," I say, holding up my hands, both of which she smacks at. "You're really coked up and you need a tranquilizer and you need to get your facts straight--" "Are you saying this didn't happen, Victor?" she shouts, grabbing at me. Holding her back, I look intently into her face and offer, "I'm not saying it didn't happen, Alison." I breathe in. "I'm just saying that I wasn't conscious when this occurred and I guess I'm saying that you weren't conscious either." "Are you telling me we didn't have this conversation?" she screams. "Are you telling me I hallucinated it?" I stare at her. "Well, in a nutshell, yeah." Someone starts knocking on the bathroom door, which provokes Alison into some kind of massive freak-out. I grab her by the shoulders and turn her around to face me. "Baby, I was doing my MTV 'House of Style' interview"--I check the watch I'm not wearing--"ninety minutes ago, so--" "Victor, it was you!" she shouts, pushing me away from her. "You were standing there outside my place telling me that--" "You're wasted!" I cry out. "I'm leaving and yeah, baby--it is all over. I'm outta here and of this I'm certain!" "If you think Damien's ever going to let you open a fucking door let alone a club after he finds out you're fucking his little girlfriend you're more pitifully deluded than I ever thought possible." "That"--I stop, look back at her questioningly--"doesn't really mean anything to me." I swing the door open, Alison standing motionless behind me. A whole group of people squeeze past me and though they probably despise Alison they decide to surround her and take notes while she sobs, her face a wreck. "You are not a player," is the last thing Alison ever screams at me. I slam the door shut. We'll slide down the surface of things . . . Lauren stands with Jason London and Elle Macpherson exchanging recipe tips for smart drinks even though someone shockingly famous's penis exploded when his smart drink was mixed with "the wrong elements" and everyone goes "oooh" but Lauren's not really listening because she's watching Damien schmoozing a group that includes Demi Moore, Veronica Webb and Paulina Porizkova, and when Elle kisses me on the cheek and compliments my stubble Lauren abruptly looks away from Damien and just stares at me blankly--a replicant--and I wipe my nose and move toward her, suddenly in a very huggy mood. "Have you heard?" she asks, lighting a cigarette. "That I'm in dire need of a crisis-management team? Yes." "Giorgio Armani couldn't make it because he's in rehearsals for 'Saturday Night Live,' which he's hosting." "Dig it," I murmur. "What did Alison want to show you?" she asks. "The third claw growing out of her ass?" I grab a martini from a passing waiter. "No." "Oh damnit, Victor," she groans. "Just live up to it." Chloe stands in the middle of the room chatting with Winona Ryder and Billy Norwich, and Baxter Priestly is perched nearby drinking a tiny white-wine spritzer and people squeezing past us block the view from where Chloe and Damien stand of my hand clutching Lauren's while Lauren keeps staring at Damien, who's touching the black fabric of Veronica Webb's dress and saying things like "Love the dress but it's a tad Dracula-y, baby," and the girls laugh and Veronica grabs his hand playfully and Lauren's hand squeezes mine tightly. "I really wouldn't call that flirting, baby," I tell her. "Don't get ruffled." Lauren's nodding slowly as Damien, swigging a martini, shouts out, "Why don't you titillate me literally, baby," and the girls explode with laughter, fawning over him, and the entire room is humming around us and the lights of cameras are flashing behind every corner.

"I know you have a keen sense of the way people behave," Lauren says. "It's okay, Victor." She tosses back what's left of her jumbo-sized drink. "Do you want to talk about it?" "About what?" she asks. "Your Bravery-in-the-Face-of-Doom nomination?" "I'd be thrilled if you moved on to soda pop, baby." "Do you love Chloe?" she asks. All I can say is, "You look very Uma-ish tonight." In the interim Damien moves over to us and Lauren lets my hand drop from hers and while I light a cigarette Alison spots Damien and excuses herself from Heather Locklear and Eddie Veder and prowls over, hyperventilating, and hooks her arm through Damien's before he can say anything to Lauren, refusing to look at me, and then she plays with his hair and in a panic Damien pushes her hand away and in the background the "cute" magician performs card tricks for James Iha, Teri Hatcher, Liv Tyler, Kelly Slater and someone dressed disconcertingly like Willie Wonka and I'm trying to be cool but my fists are totally clenched and the back of my neck and my forehead are soaked with sweat. "Well," Damien says hollowly. "Well, well . . . well." "Loved you in Bitch Troop, darling," Alison gushes at Lauren. "Oh shit," Damien mutters under his breath. "Nice dress," Lauren says, staring at Alison. "What?" Alison asks, shocked. Lauren looks directly at Alison and, enunciating very clearly, nodding appreciatively, says, "I said nice dress." Damien holds Alison back as JD and Beau walk up to Damien and they're with some white-blond surfer wearing nylon snowboarding pants and a faux-fur motorcycle jacket. "Hey Alison, Lauren," I say. "This is JD and Beau. They're the stars of Bill and Ted's Homosexual Adventure." "It's, um, time for dinner," JD says tentatively, trying not to notice Alison vibrating with rage, emitting low rumbling sounds. She finally looks over at Damien's falsely placid face and sneers, dropping her cigarette into his glass. Damien makes a strangled noise, then averts his eyes from the martini. We'll slide down the surface of things . . . How it got to be eleven so suddenly is confusing to us all, not that it really means anything, and conversation revolves around how Mark Vanderloo "accidentally" ate an onion-

and-felt sandwich the other night while viewing the Rob Lowe sex tapes, which Mark found "disappointing"; the best clubs in New Zealand; the injuries someone sustained at a Metallica concert in Pismo Beach; how Hurley Thompson disappeared from a movie set in Phoenix (I have to bite my tongue); what sumo wrestlers actually do; a gruesome movie Jonathan just finished shooting, based on a starfish one of the producers found behind a fence in Nepal; a threesome someone fell into with Paul Schrader and Bruce Wagner; spinning lettuce; the proper pronunciation of "ooh la la." At our table Lauren's on one side of me, Chloe's on the other along with Baxter Priestly, Johnathon Schaech, Carolyn Murphy, Brandon Lee, Chandra North, Shalom Harlow, John Leguizamo, Kirsty Hume, Mark Vanderloo, JFK Jr., Brad Pitt, Gwyneth Paltrow, Patsy Kensit, Noel Gallagher, Alicia Silverstone and someone who I'm fairly sure is Beck or looks like Beck and it seems like everyone's wearing very expensive pantsuits. Earlier in the day I was upset that Chloe and I weren't seated at Damien's table (because there were things I had to say to David Geffen and an apology I had to make to Calvin) but right now, watching Alison slumped against Damien while trying to light a joint the size of a very long roll of film, everyone very buzzed, people knocking into each other as table-hopping on a very massive scale resumes while cappuccino's served, everything sliding in and out of focus, it's okay. I'm trying to light a cigarette someone's spilled San Pellegrino on and Lauren's talking to a kneeling Woody Harrelson about hemp production and so I tap in to Chloe, interrupting what I'm sure is a stunning conversation with Baxter, and she turns reluctantly to me, finishing another Cosmopolitan, her face taut with misery, and then she simply asks, "What is it?" "Um, baby, what's the story with Damien and Lauren?" I inquire gingerly. "I am so bored with you, Victor, that I don't even know how to answer that," she says. "What are you talking about?" "How long have you known about Damien and your so-called best friend Lauren?" I ask again, lowering my voice, glancing over at Lauren and Woody. "Why is my so-called boyfriend asking someone he actually thinks supposedly cares?" she sighs, looking away. "Honey," I whisper patiently, "they're having an affair." "Who told you this?" she asks, recoiling. "Where did you read this? Oh god, I'm so tired." "What are you so tired of?" I ask patiently. She looks down glassy-eyed at the scoops of sorbet melting into a puddle on her plate. "You're a big help," I sigh. "Why do you even care? What do you want me to say? You wanna fuck her? You wanna fuck him? You--" "Shhh. Hey baby, why would you think that?" "You're whining, Victor." She waves a hand in front of my face tiredly, dismissing me. "Alison and Damien are engaged--did you know that?" I ask. "I'm not interested in the lives of other people, Victor," Chloe says. "Not now. Not tonight. Not when we're in serious trouble." "I think you definitely need a toke off that major joint Alison's smoking." "Why?" She snaps out of something. "Why, Victor? Why do you think I need to do drugs?" "Because I have a feeling we're on the verge of having that conversation again about how lost and fat you were at fourteen." "Why did you ask me last night not to wear this dress?" she asks, suddenly alert, arms crossed. Pause. "Because . . . you'd resemble . . . Pocahontas, but

really, baby, you look smashing and--" I'm just glancing around, smiling gently over at Beck, fidgeting with a Marlboro, searching for Chap Stick, smiling gently over at Beck again. "No, no, no." She's shaking her head. "Because you don't care about things like that. You don't care about things that don't have anything to do with you." "You have something to do with me." "Only in an increasingly superficial way," she says. "Only because we're in this movie together." "You think you know everything, Chloe." "I know a fuck of a lot more than you do, Victor," she says. "Everyone knows a fuck of a lot more than you do and it's not cute." "So you don't have any lip balm?" I ask carefully, glancing around to see if anyone heard her. Silence, then, "How did you know Alison was going to wear that dress?" she suddenly asks. "I've been thinking about that all night. How did you know Alison was going to be wearing the same dress? And you did know, didn't you?" "Baby," I say, semi-exasperated. "The way you look at things is so hard--" "No, no, Victor," she says, sitting up. "It's very simple. It's actually very, very simple." "Baby, you're very, very cool." "I am so tired of looking at that empty expanse that's supposed to be your face--" "Alfonse." I raise my hand at a passing busboy, making a pouring motion. "Mineral water for the table. Con gas?" "And why does Damien keep asking me why I'm not wearing a hat?" she asks. "Is everyone demented or something?" Chloe zones out on her reflection in a mirror situated across the room while Brad Pitt and Gwyneth Paltrow celebrate her choice of fingernail polish and gradually we drift away from one another and those who aren't doing drugs light up cigars so I grab one too and somewhere above us, gazing down, the ghosts of River Phoenix and Kurt Cobain and my mother are totally, utterly bored.