Loose puddles and chaotic drips of water pepper the parking garage. Lightbulbs caked in spiderwebs and exhaust fumes make it harder to see the puddles. The drips you could hear when the roar of a bad muffler wasn't suffocating the plinking.

I keep my hand open so the ink doesn't smear as I walk.

This place is an anonymous place. Easy to get to, easy to get lost in, easy not to be found in. Drug deals behind chipped support beams. Sex for sale just around the puddles. It's like the whole garage is made of pealing paint.

The meet was scheduled here. The bank was just a few blocks north. Meet the team, do the job, out of town for a week and circle back to this garage for the final payment. It's a life, I guess.

We meet on the 5th floor. 1pm. Sticks of sunlight crack through, but mostly the dinginess matches the dimness. Time to meet the team,

A burly man with curly long hair got out of a Chevy. He nodded in acknowledgement to me as the slicked back hair guy is walking up on my right. I don't' know any of these people. We went to the black Santa Fe as were their instructions.

A woman slipped out of the driver's side door and flung it closed behind her stuffing her phone in her pocket with a subdued shake of her head.

The Slick Guy decides to make conversation with her, "That's a nice Hyundai. Is it new?"

"It's a Hyun-Day, like rhymes with Sunday. Not Hyun-Die. Are you stupid?"

The three of use just looked at each other for a moment.

"Until I clear each one of you, no one speaks of the job. After I clear you, we only talk about the job. And only the job. No baseball games, no Kardashian news, no favorite color. And no talk of the boss or anyone's names including your own miserable worthless name. No hometowns. No places you done time. We talk the job or we do not talk. You all fucking got it?"

A few yes ma'ams ricocheted around lightly.

"Okay, so you were each given a code word to be accepted on this job. It's time for that word."

Burly dude speaks up, "who goes first? Cause won't the others know the code word if we say it out loud in front of them?"

Feisty lady inhales deeply and rolls her eyes. She mimes putting a gun to her head and pulling the trigger doing her best JFK charade.

“Dude,” I tell him, “They didn’t give us the same code word.”

She points to me and nods emphatically.

“Okay curly top, let’s get it out of the way for you, what’s your code word?”

“It’s kinda . . . it’s like . . .”

“What?? No, it’s a word, one word. Simple. Your code word. What the fuck is it? Say it or go.”

Burly dudes shifts his weight and averts his eyes and mutters something.

“Jesus, I cannot hear you.”

“Steak Sauce. The code word is Steak Sauce.”

“Oh no. What? The code wor-D! is . . . two words? Really?

“No, no it’s one word. I just can’t-“

“Don’t tell me-“

“I can’t say it. It’s a hard word. But it’s like steak sauce so you know what I mean, right?”

“Fuck.” She spins around and puts her hands on the car. “How can you, how can you . . . ? Jesus.”

“But you know I know the word. It’s like steak sauce.”

The slick guy on my right, “You can’t say A-1?”

Burly dude and the feisty woman at the same time reply: “It’s not A-1!”

Burly dude looks relieved, “So you do know?”

She turns back to the car and sends a long text. She waits. And waits. Her phone vibrates and she looks at Burly Dude. “One fuckin time. Say the word, the actual word or you out bro.”

“If I say it wrong, can I try-“

“Now!”

“Worchestestersherry.”

We look at each other. Slick guy slaps his head, realizing it wasn't A-1.

"You out bro." The whipcrack of the revolver makes us jump as Burly Dude gets shot in the chest and slumps down.

She spins to Slick Guy. "give it to me."

"um . . . "

"Say it now or Sally gets a blowtorch."

"Who's Sally?"

"I am you complete moron."

"You said no names-"

She raises her gun to his head.

Eyes wide, Slick Guy sputters out, "Ok, I think it is like from pilgrims getting together"

"It's a word. I don't need the definition or the history or even how to spell it, what the fuck is it?"

"Colonial"

"What?"

"Colonial."

"How do you spell it?"

"C-O-L-O-N-E-L"

Now I inhale deeply.

She says, "What's that spell?" and she points to me.

"Colonel."

"That ain't right," he says, "there's no 'r' in it. That's an army word. This is a pilgrim word."

"I-I have to text the boss again, fucking hold on."

He whispers to me, "Co-Lo-Nee-El. I think I'm right. You're thinking of a different word."

“Bro you out.”

“Get me a dictionary, cause I think you two are thinking of the wrong-“

The boom of the gun is deafening.

“It’s a fucking code word. How hard can that be? We need a thesaurus to get everyone in the car. Why does he do this to me and send me idiots. You, yeah you, you’re up. And I swear to Christ I want one word and only one word, no definition, no hemming and hawing, I want one word and if you don’t pronounce it dead on, it’s open heart surgery on you here in this parking garage and my pistol will be my scalpel. Got it?”

“Yeah.”

I open my hand, and the letters are sloshed around a bit from the sweat, but I can still read my word. I look up to say it, then reconsider. I look back at my hand:

CARAMEL

I exhale slow.