

The Palimpsest Review

Vol. 8

The Palimpsest Review



The Palimpsest Review is a publication of the Pennsylvania State University – an equal opportunity university.

The Palimpsest Review

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No. 8 2000

The Palimpsest Review is the student literary publication for the Pennsylvania State University campuses outside the University Park main campus. All the short stories and poems published herein are the products of students enrolled on those campuses during the academic year prior to the semester of publication.

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From the Editor's Desk

Welcome to the eighth edition of *The Palimpsest Review*. We hope that you will enjoy this edition as much as we have. The writing just keeps getting better.

Our reach has broadened, and we are now publishing the work of upper level students, which accounts in part for the improved level. Quite naturally, the more education and experience a writer has the better the work should be. Nevertheless a good many of our writers continue to be underclassmen. Here at *Palimpsest* we think the creative writing faculty across the state are doing a terrific job of helping students reach their potential. Keep up the good work, folks.

We'd like to encourage all of you to take a look at *Palimpsest onLine!* and let us know what you think. Our student writers often see their work here first.

The *Electronic Classics Series* continues to flourish. At this writing we have almost 500 electronic books available for download. We have learned that in Japan the site is being used to create translations and in India the site has become a part of graduate course syllabi.

A Note on Submissions:

We are soliciting short stories of 5000 words or less and up to six poems of 100 lines or less and short drama/screen plays of 30 minutes or less, each, from all Pennsylvania State University campuses except University Park and Altoona, for the ninth edition of *The Palimpsest Review*.

Prose should be double spaced. The author should submit a brief cover letter, identifying his or her campus affiliation at the time of the submission. Make sure an S.A.S.E. is enclosed.

Submit all manuscripts to

Jim Manis
Editor in Chief
The Palimpsest Review
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Hazleton, PA 18201-1291

Campus creative writing instructors are encouraged to assist student writers with manuscript format and the submission process.

A Message to Those Whose Work Was Not Accepted:

There is simply no way to express the importance of work submitted for publication when that work is not accepted, but believe me, it is.

You make the magazine better because you tried. And if you are serious about writing, you won't let our judgement about the relative merits of the work you sent us impede you from trying again. I, for one, truly do value your contributions, regardless of how intagible they may seem.

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Congratulations!

To L. C. Guthrie whose short story, “Currents,” won this year’s Best Short Story Award. Ms Guthrie’s story came from the York campus.

And to Luisa Berti whose poem, “Salt Water” won this year’s Best Poem Award.

Nothing pleases an editor more than to be able to turn over a check to a writer; we only wish we could do that for all of you.

Making Metaphor Work: Seeing, Feeling, Hearing the Poem

Len Roberts' take on his choice for best poem.

Luisa Berti's poem, "Salt Water," has a fine, sustained use of the literal with a metaphorical undertone that I find most appealing in a good poem. Although she rarely leaves the physical, literal setting, Ms. Berti, through diction and short phrases, makes the poem suggest much more than just what it purports to say.

The metaphorical level kicks in right at the start of the poem, with "In the almost Easter weather—/wet sticky days/when I'm climbing out of my skin..." Literal, yes, but the suggestion of "Easter," along with the idiomatic "climbing out of my skin," which may be direct statement but is also suggestive of a snake sloughing its skin (and thus possible rebirth) makes the poem run on two levels right from the outset. This metaphorical quality is one I love in certain favorite poets such as Robert Frost, James Dickey, and Philip Levine; Ms. Berti uses it well too.

Consider how the "hand-picked necklace" in line five works both literally as a piece of jewelry but also metaphorically as something which provides a "sweet familiar choke"—surely a reference to the speaker's sorrow for the giver's absence. And consider the "heavy-metal promise" of line 9, which also works on at least two levels, one being the necklace itself, with the other being the hope for a growing relationship. (Is she punning on "heavy-metal" here, too, suggesting that the lost one loved that music?)

But this poem runs on more than just metaphor: images, a good sense of line breaking, and word-music informs it throughout.

I *see* the necklace "sitting on her collarbone," I *feel* it "Rub against the muscles" of the wearer's throat, and I *hear* the "muffled click of clasp" it makes under her hair. Luisa Berti puts the reader in the poem with her images ("baths" and "miles run," "the soft beat of the necklace during sex"), so the poetry is experienced, not just retold.

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The lines find their way down the page in mostly enjambed phrasings, which makes the reader tumble a little from line to line, creating a suspense, a desire to know how all of this turns out. The prosody, or pacing of the lines is steady, even with some one-word lines, so I begin to trust the speaker, her rhythms, as much as I trust what she's saying. And when her lines do lengthen, they are usually end-stopped, creating a sense of finality, such as in line three, "...when I'm climbing out of my skin," or in line twelve, "...the way it did when days were good."

Last, but far from least, is her good ear, her sense of word-music in the poem. I delight in lines like "The muffled click of clasp/under my hair once more/tangled,/untangled..." (27-30) with its alliteration of hard "c" and repetition of the "l" sound, as well as in "Rub against the muscles/of my throat for so long,/through baths/and miles run..." with its repetition of the short u vowel sound.

Loss of a loved one, for whatever reason, is a difficult topic to write about, but Ms. Berti does it skillfully in "Salt Water," never saying too much, but instead letting the fine images, rhythms, and word-music; say it for her.

Len Roberts' work has appeared in many literary and other fine magazines, including *Poetry* and *The Literary Review*. He is the author of eight books of poetry, and his latest, ***Collected and New Poems*** is due out in early 2001 from the University of Illinois Press. This is the second time Len has served as poetry judge for *Palimpsest*, and we are truly honored by the association.

His first book of poetry, *Cohoes Theater*, is available from Penn State's Electronic Classics Series site, in PDF format, free of charge. Please avail yourself of this opportunity to read the work of one of America's finest living poets.

Salt Water

In the almost Easter weather-
wet sticky days
when I'm climbing out of my skin

the sweet familiar choke
of hand-picked necklace
you brought home for me
from Canada
hangs
heavy-metal promise
around my neck once again.
Sitting on my collarbone
the way it did when days were good.

I remember what smoothed it.
Rub against the muscles
of my throat for so long,
through baths
and miles run,
the soft beat of it during sex.

I wore it until it broke,
that frozen snap of time
it fell at my feet
like every promise
you ever made me.

The muffled click of clasp
under my hair once more
tangled,
untangled
the way this mixture of two lives
can never be boiled apart.

How familiar it is
these days
I find myself
wearing you both again.

Kari L. Strickler

I Stopped

I stopped
breathing.

I stopped
and heard his car come up the drive.

I stopped
I knew why he was home.

I stopped
and told the others to get out.

I stopped
turned off the TV and headed for the side door.

I stopped
dead.

I stopped
as the others ran past me.

I stopped
and felt his eyes burn holes into my back.

I stopped
because I knew that I'd been caught.

I stopped
and accepted my fate.

From that day on, I stopped
being Daddy's little girl.

Rebecca Werner

3 Days in Heaven/Hell

Cars congested, traffic unmoving.
Music blares, people shout their excitement.
Horns bleat, cars crawl towards the gates to Heaven and Hell.
Everyone emerges from vehicles, strapping their possessions to their backs.
The expanse of smooth concrete and the lack of buildings resemble a
concentration camp.
Tents crowd the landscape.
People mill aimlessly about.
Music erupts and bodies surge forward, like cattle going to slaughter.
Limbs flail, bodies dance.
The sun beats down with an oppressing heat
No shade, no relief.
The sun descends, the heat lessens.
Shadows dance throughout the night, music pulsates through the early morning.

The sky lightens, bringing heat.
Bodies, baking under a glowing orange ball, bounce to the rhythms.
Plastic bottles and empty pizza boxes cut through the thick air.
The disappearing sun reveals bodies slamming into each other.
Some emerge bruised and bloodied.
Tired limbs carry their cargo, making the trek back “home”.
Trash and filthy water overflow, littering the pathways and flooding those
unfortunate
enough to have settled nearby.
Voices erupt into spontaneous singing.
Songs, voices, and jokes delay heads from resting on pillows.
Voices fade, eyes drift close.

Stilling heat prevents longer slumber.
War cries and cheers pierce the peaceful quiet.
Splintering plywood and steel beams crash to the ground.
Creatures prance wickedly over the fallen barricade.

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Strains of melodies float across the complex.

Hurry to rejoin the dancing masses.

13Clouds darken, the wind gusts.

Cool wind brings shivers and goosebumps to sunburnt arms and legs.

Lightning flashes, but no thunder sounds.

The heavens do not unleash their power.

Music grinds as a rainbow appears for a fleeting second.

Bodies sprawl on the grass, the effects of the weekend beginning to take
their toll.

Dozing in and out of consciousness, too tired to focus on the musicmakers.

Final sunset of the weekend is streaked with purple, red and orange, like a
child playing

with crayons used the New York sky as his canvas.

Russ Chadwick

A Blue You

A long fall ride, solo.
Fingers on the grips
Turn—blue.

The denim wrapping
arms, torso, and legs
is—blue.

Clouds spewing
from exhausts
are—blue.

This Friday night feeling,
alone,
is—blue.

Through that door,
smoker's vapors
are—blue.

The first set,
unheard by you
is—blue

A drummer rides too,
upon seat and cymbal
he too is deep within
the—blues.

A Closer Look

OUR KITCHEN SMELLS like old take-out food and Joy dish detergent, however the Lemon Scent adds a nice touch. One thing I'll never forget about college, the trial and error of home economics. I finally figured out how to wash my clothes without turning them all the same color, or shrinking them down to toddler size. We got a nice TV though. Twenty-seven inches of mind-melting, vision wrecking screen that sits like an idol on our homemade plywood and cinder block "entertainment center."

You probably notice the use of "we" and "our" in the last few comments. I'm talking about me and my buddy Marc. Marc is my best friend and has been since high school. He stands about five-foot six and has blue eyes and blondish hair. If you see Marc in anything besides a tee shirt and jeans it's for one of two reasons: either he's going to funeral, or it's his funeral. Marc is in school for a degree in Art. Upon graduation he would prefer to work privately as opposed to commercially. He's good too, really can put down a picture on a page.

Like most best friends, Marc and I agree on many things, but still have enough diversity between us to get into huge psychological and physiological discussions. We almost never fight, almost.

Marc and I like Chinese food. Not all the time, because that stuff is so good, that you know that it's got to be bad for you, but once in a while. Last night Marc and I went to Chung Ngyuen Family Restaurant, and got ourselves some wonderful cuisene. The restaurant, for how remarkable the food is, is very unremarkable in appearance. Just six round tables with bright red tablecloths, arranged in two rows of three. The decor is very mild, there is just various pictures of pagodas and rice paddies on the walls. I would tell you what I had, but I really couldn't pronounce it without the menu to help me out. Marc had some chicken and grease based noodles, but he couldn't eat it all.

"Christ, this stuff is like a brick in my stomach, I can't eat anymore."

"It's a brick all right, a brick of lard and soy sauce that is going to make you spend a good forty-five minutes on the shitter tomorrow," I laughed.

"Don't remind me man, I know you get the horns when you mess with the Chinese Food bull, I just can't help not stuffing my face when I come here."

"I always wonder why it's like that with Chinese food. I bet they put some special herb from the back waters of the Orient in there that make your stomach seem fifty percent bigger than normal while eating it."

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The waiter wearing a black suit with elaborate dragons on the sleeves came over and grabbed our plates. I always wonder why the waiter's uniforms at this restaurant look like a combination of priest and samurai. Marc asked him if he could box up his food to take home and if we could get some fortune cookies.

"Nothing like a little good fortune to get the weekend off to a good start." Marc smiled as he tore into his cookie. "Wow. 'Your vision to the future is good. Luck will shine upon your soul'. Good stuff tonight, what's yours say?"

I grudgingly broke into my cookie. "It says: 'Tread carefully for the time being, you may run into barriers in the near future', Ha! Misfortune cookie if you ask me."

"Don't joke man, that is some serious advice your getting right there. I'd watch myself bro. These things are usually very accurate for me."

I looked up at Marc, expecting a sarcastic grin. He looked dead serious. I broke out laughing, "Dude, you got to be joking right? You look like some doctor just diagnosed me with brain cancer."

"No joke man, you just don't screw around with luck. It's like a wave you ride on. When it's up it's up, but when you come down, you crash hard and stay down for a while. Trust me on that one, I know."

I grabbed into my jacket and pulled out a Newport. The smoke was soon a gray halo around my head, gently obscuring the view of my friend across the table. "Marc, you're trying to tell me a goddam piece of paper in a greasy cookie is warning me about the future. Luck ain't nothing but an excuse bro. We create our own path. We decide what comes next, not luck."

Marc lit a smoke too. "Still don't believe in luck do you? Listen man, I aint no superstitious freak, but luck plays a big part in my life. Remember when I crashed my car, how everything just kind of spiraled down for me for a while."

I laughed, "You were the one who decided to run away from that cop bro. Luck had nothing to do with your foot pressing that accelerator down while going up that windy road. That was all you, not some force pushing you to do it."

The waiter came back with the boxed up food. It always amazed me how much food those little boxes could hold. The waiter looked at me, "Good fortune for you sir?"

I grinned, "Not looking too good man, according to the magic cookie, you probably won't be seeing me in here again. Frightening isn't it?" I laughed out loud.

The waiter stared at me, not laughing. He turned to Marc, "Good fortune for you sir?"

"No complaints on this side of the table. The food was awesome too."

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Marc grabbed for his wallet. It was beat up old leather bi-fold that he had since high school. Marc looked at me, “I’ll take care of the bill if you buy beer for us at the party at TKE tomorrow night, sound cool?”

“No problem on my part, that is, if I make it to the party.”

“What the hell do you mean by that?”

“You know, some sort of barrier may prevent me...” I chuckled.

“Real funny man, real goddamn funny. Let me tell you, I wasn’t laughing for the two weeks after my accident. Remember what the police report said about why I lost control off my car. ‘Gravel from an unknown source on road surface caused car to lose traction and careen into woods’. The cop said a construction truck must have spilled gravel on the road. I don’t even usually go home that way, I just missed my turn because I wasn’t paying attention. And look what happened, I passed a cop, saw the guy hit his red and blue’s, floored it to lose the bastard, lost control of my Jetta on that turn where the gravel was, got hit with a three-grand body shop bill, and lost my license for thirty-days with a reckless driving citation. All because I was looking for a CD to put in my player at the wrong time. Unlucky all right.”

I took a drag off my Newport. “Seems like you were just not paying attention. Nothing to do with four-leaf clovers and Leprechauns.”

“Remember though, the next day I found out that my insurance policy was changed the day of my accident to allow for a one hundred percent increase on the rate for drivers under 18 in a reckless driving accident, *the day of my accident*. However, if you were 18 or older, it would only be a ten percent hike.”

“So what? Insurance companies always nail young drivers to the wall with their fees. That’s not luck, that’s policy.”

“Yeah, but my 18th birthday was in two weeks!”

“Damn shame. Let’s go dude, this shit’s giving me a headache. Plus I need to get to bed, I want to stay late at TKE tomorrow.”

“Bad luck, that’s what that whole situation was. Believe it man.” Marc snubbed his smoke, and grabbed his plain white take-out box.

“You believe it.” I retorted, getting mad now. “Don’t try to force your screwed up reasoning on me man. Let’s go.”

And that was it. The first time in as long as I can remember that Marc and I had a disagreement large enough for me to get pissed at him. I just can’t deal with people trying to push superstitious crap down my throat. Shit, you can pin anything on bad luck, you just need a creative mind. I reached down to grab my

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beer and the door opened up. Marc came in and threw his bag down on the lawn chair. He was smiling like he just got laid.

“Good day huh?” I asked.

“You could say so, I just found out that I got a grant from an art society in Philly. My Prof said that it was very rare to get this grant if you weren’t a senior. It was over eight-hundred bucks man!”

“You lucky bastard!” I said with a smirk.

“Don’t be an asshole.” He grabbed a beer from the fridge and headed to his room. He left the door open a crack behind him.

“Yea that’s me, the unsuperstitious asshole,” I said to myself. “Anyways, we still going to TKE tonight?,” I said louder, so he could hear me.

From behind the door, Marc yelled an affirmative, and said that he just needed to grab a shower.

“Take your time man, it’s only the biggest party of the week.” I took a sip of my beer. It was a Yeungling Lager, in my opinion, one of the best beers ever invented.

I wonder if Marc really believes that fortune cookie from last night was true now that he got that grant. No doubt that it was surprising that he got it being only a junior, but he is an awesome artist. He earned it, I hope he knows that.

It took us about thirty minutes to walk from our apartment to the fraternity. Marc and I didn’t talk much along the way, but when he got there he livened up a bit.

“What a house!” Marc looked astounded.

“Well it is the only real Frat House on campus.” I replied, but was impressed myself. The house sat up on a hill overlooking the southern dormitories. It was an old Victorian three level, with porches around the entire front of the house and a weathervane on the roof. The parking lot was already packed with various kinds of cars, and a few resourceful students parked on the lawn, creating their own private parking lot. The rest of the yard was bare, with no real landscaping at all, and was encompassed by a white picket fence. The fence was brown in parts however, almost as if the owners of the property were repainting white to give the house a newer look.

When we got to the door we were immediately asked by a huge, steroid-enhanced human for money.

“Nine kegs, ten bucks. Pay up or get lost.” The brute said. He had the mark of a frat member on his white shirt.

I laughed as I gave him a twenty, “here you go big guy, it’s for both.”

He took the cash and handed us two red cups. I always wonder why every

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party you go to in college has the same damn cups. There has to be a conspiracy there, somewhere. I laughed again.

Once through the heavily guarded threshold of the house, we entered the heart of the action. Freshmen girls taking their shirts off, frat members flexing their muscles and asking everyone to “rush TKE”, and the hippies taking a pull off a bong in the living room. College life right? Got to love it.

The time flew by, I talked to some old friends, made a few new ones, and even got to make out with some girl as drunk as me in one of the upstairs bathrooms. I was about to grab another beer when Marc grabbed me. “Later man, I’m taking off.”

“What?, it’s early yet. Why you taking off on me?” I yelled into his ear to make sure he heard me through the music.

“I’m beat bro, you want to jet too?” Marc asked me.

I thought about it, “Screw it, I paid ten bucks to drink, and I’m going get my money’s worth. See you later man.” We shook hands and Marc left. I wondered why, but not for too long. I figured he had a project he was working on, besides, why worry about Marc, he’s fine.

About a half-hour later, I was heading downstairs to tap another beer off the keg when I heard the most dreaded yell of all underage, beer-drinking, college students.

“Cops! Out front on the lawn!” Big Guy at the door bellowed.

“Shit!” I slammed down my beer and headed out the back door. I tore open the door and took off at full sprint into the yard. I was getting away like the roadrunner from the coyote when a flashlight beam fell on my head.

“Stop right now!”

“Kiss my ass!” I turned and yelled back at the cop. I pivoted my head around to make sure where I wasn’t going to run into a tree, but before I got to center I felt like I

just got punched in the stomach. The ground rushed up to my face and I felt a sharp pain in my head.

I blinked my eyes, once, twice. My vision slowly cleared to notice an interesting piece of graffiti on a pock marked concrete wall.

PIGS SUCK

Not exactly Shakespeare, yet ultimately satisfying from my current position as I recalled the events of last night. What a headache though. I reached up and touched my head. There was gauze wrapped around my forehead, and as I touched the part right above my left eye, I winced in pain.

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“Good morning son. Officer Reedy, State Police,” A voice called from my left. I turned my head painfully to look at the cell door. A cop was standing there with a smile on his face. “Had a little trip last night?”

Funny guy this policeman, “Yeah, looks and feels like it.” I replied gingerly. “What the hell happened?”

“Well you see, the little party that you were at got some really good publicity, too good if you know what I mean, and we had to take care of it.”

“How many did you get?”

“Minors you mean? Well that’s a funny story. You see, the owners of the house were all of age, so all we ended up doing was giving them a warning to shut it down. But out of the people that ran from the scene, you were the only one who was detained. You see, in your haste to get away, you didn’t notice the fence around the house, and ran directly into it. You were running so fast that you toppled right over the fence and hit the ground with your head. We found you unconscious on the other side of the fence. An ambulance came to the scene, and after you were all checked out you were released into our custody.”

I sat up on my cot, slowly, and put my head in my hands. I needed an Advil or five right away. “So now what?”

Officer Reedy reached into his pocket and pulled out a key. He unlocked and slid open the cell doors and motioned for me to come out. As we walked to the front of the barracks, he produced a citation from his leather book. “This is a citation for public drunkenness. It is a minor fine compared to an underage drinking citation, which you should have gotten, and will not affect your driving record or license. However, if in the future you chose to consume alcohol at publicly announced parties while being under twenty-one, you may not be so lucky.”

I laughed quietly to myself, “I understand sir.”

“Something funny son?”

“No sir, just glad that you went easy on me.”

“Well I hope you learned your lesson,” Officer Reedy said as he handed me a clipboard to sign.

“I think I did. I definitely think I did.” I signed my name on the required line, and turned to walk out the door. The door swung open easily and I stepped outside to a beautiful day. I walked down the concrete steps, turned slowly onto the lush green lawn of the State Police Station and stopped. I rubbed my aching head and looked down at my feet. I was standing in a patch of clover. I laughed quietly and knelt down to take a closer look.

Laura M. Noah

For Better and For Worse

HER FEET BARELY even made a sound as she passed the bathroom which had his clothing piled in a corner with his towel from last night's shower, the spare bedroom, with her childhood bedroom suite in it. Lastly she came to their room. The bright blues and mauves that created an old country pattern were barely visible due to the tightly closed curtains, and window blinds that created a false darkness. She couldn't bear to wake him up, though; he looked too peaceful. Turning, she slowly eased the door shut again.

Silence, which was a rare commodity right now, was surrounding Morgan. Generally, the slow ballads by Garth Brooks, or Edwin McCain filled the house at this time, and a twosome could be seen dancing around the room in step to the beating of their hearts that synchronized with the music. Not this night, this time. She was alone, filled with nothing but thoughts, dreams, and worries. She had just reached the end of the hallway, the Oriental rug, silencing her footsteps when she decided she had to go back. Turning, she meandered down the dark, hardwood floor. The bedroom door was still propped slightly open letting a slim ray of light shine in, and spill across the bed like a rainbow in a cloudy sky. He was starting to stir.

"Tyler," She gently shook him awake. "Are you feeling better?"

"Hmm, not really."

She slipped him the glass of water, and the pill the doctor had prescribed. "Well, take this, and I'll come back and wake you in an hour or so for supper. I'll make some chicken soup. Sound good?"

"Actually it sounds like the perfect medicine."

In a matter of seconds he was asleep again, and breathing softly, his chest rising with each breath. Morgan gently laid her hand upon his warm forehead. His eyes, which usually were a bright sparkling green, were now dull, and dark. His face was red from whatever had him ill. His body, which usually was so strong, and could carry the world, was now weak, and damp with sweat. She laid a washcloth across his forehead; meanwhile, her other hand slowly, rhythmically rubbed over his back, like a mother soothing a child after a bad dream. Here, he was in his weakest stage, and finally she saw the real him. He was vulnerable, not the he-man she made him out to be. This was the man who held her heart, but from whom she was about to separate.

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He was given a list, by her, of what needed to change before she could stay with him: Listen first, then reply; Care about me too; Do not spend money on me, put it in the bank for the future; and lastly, Communicate with me. The list somehow seemed silly now. He, in return, had asked for two things: give me a second chance, and love me forever. Forever? How could she love him forever? At twenty-one years of age, he allowed his mother to still run his life, and was an elevator repairman!

They had met on the Internet a year and half ago, Phantom and Sweetie. What a pair. He was six foot two inches with dark hair and hazel eyes, and she complemented him with her height of five ten auburn hair and brown eyes. When they met the first time, she thought of what strong arms he had to hold her tight on cold nights, he thought of her fawn-like eyes staring at him as they kissed. Together they made the perfect couple.

Sweetie: Hello, how are you? I was just checking my email, and sent you one about this upcoming weekend I miss you.

Phantom: Hello yourself! I figured you'd still be upset.

Sweetie: I am, I still wish you would talk to me about Melissa.

Phantom: She is a friend, nothing major. I told you that before. We went out as friends and there was even another couple along.

Sweetie: That's right! Another COUPLE, you two weren't a couple, and I wish you'd see my point with that.

Phantom: If it had been you with a group of friends, you'd be fine with it. Tom and Shelly wanted to go out, and Melissa didn't want to be a third wheel. It was completely innocent.

Sweetie: It would have been innocent if it happened once. I'm not going to debate this issue anymore. You apparently don't see my point, and never will.

Phantom: Morgan, I love you, or else we wouldn't be going out for this long! I don't want Melissa as anything more than a friend. I know this distance is coming between us, but you just have to trust me.

Sweetie: I do.

Phantom: You do to a degree, after that you just are crossing your fingers. I know you Morgan. Well, I know you have class soon, we'll talk about this when I get up Friday. Ok? My bus comes in at 4:30 Friday, I love you, miss you and will see you soon.

Sweetie: Ok, I'll be there a little before then. Love you, miss you.

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As she looked down at him one more time, she watched his body relax, and knew he was finally asleep. She then, slowly, crept out of the room.

Slowly, she walked through the house, stopping at the end table. A variety of pictures covered the surface. The first time they went to church together. (Her pastor still referred to him as “her bodyguard”.) The next one was Easter Sunday. His dark suit, which had been borrowed from his father and her pale dress were perfect complements to the blossoming rosewood trees. The day would have been nice, if the ending wasn’t quite so bitter. That night wasn’t a memory she was fond of. It actually was one that had a huge influence in her decisions relating to the relationship...

Nathan sauntered into Tyler’s parents living room, “Hey Tyler, can I get a cigarette from you?”

“Sorry, I quit.” Looking from Tyler to his brother, Morgan wondered how it was that Nathan hadn’t known his brother quit. Unless, of course, Tyler had lied yet again. She turned and made a simple glance Tyler’s way, and knew his quitting was yet another lie. She walked out of his parents’ house and climbed onto the small wall that enclosed the large front porch, and watched the busy late night city life rush by. Tyler seemed to have a knack for lying this month. First she found the girl’s phone number scrawled on a piece of paper in his pants pocket. then the truth as to what really went on at “boys night out” every Friday. Tears were welling up behind her eyes as she heard the footsteps approach her.

“I’m sorry, I know how much you hated the fact I smoked. I couldn’t quit, and figured I’d save the hard feelings and just try and not do it around you.”

“How gracious of you, but it’s not just that. Who you are with, and what you are doing? Everything you tell me is lies! I can’t trust a simple phrase from your mouth anymore. If this is what our relationship has become, we’re through.”

The wind slamming the bedroom door shut snapped Morgan from her reminiscences. Looking to the table again she saw good times, camping trips, and concerts; Edwin McCain, and Better Than Ezra snap-shots and autographed tickets. Each fight had ended with the agreement they’d be honest with each other, and have a better line of communication, but she didn’t see any of that occurring yet. Her mother’s favorite words came into her mind; “When you love someone, it is for better and for worse.” She wanted to believe that, but right now she needed fresh air to clear her mind.

She opened the back screen door, and let her puppy run out ahead of her. She watched as the pup’s fur flowed in the air as she made lap after lap around the yard, then worked her way back to the patio to sit next to her master. “Sally, why is life so complicated?” A simple “bark!” was her answer. The sky was

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darkening, and the sun setting behind the trees on the mountain she remembered a night much like this one-month ago....

“Look at the stars! They are so bright,”

“There’s our star my love.” He was always making remarks that made her heart melt and a smile appear across her lips. He said he loved to see her dimples, and by making her smile they were quite evident.

“How was work today?”

“Oh, same old elevators breaking down, and same old people refusing to buy new ones.” His reply was always the same. He slowly pulled her closer, “See that star? That’s the one I made a wish on, and then suddenly **POOF** I had you. I guess someone up above knew you were the one for me.”

She adoringly gazed up at him. If it was any other guy who had said that line, she would have shrugged it off but coming from him back then, it meant the world.

“Some day I will be married, have four kids, a dog, and an old farm house with a beautiful wife in it.” Apparently he had been telling her exactly what he wished for; lucky for she was now part of his wish that had come true..

‘I will be working as a paramedic, and my wife will be doing whatever pleases her. Sounds pretty good right, Hun? I am just glad it’s slowly coming true.’ He finally finished his dreams, and looked at her. Apparently he wanted to hear her dreams in reply, what she wanted out of life, and whom she wanted to be with. Together they shared the same hopes, dreams, and life goals. He was the one for her, but instead she replied with something to lighten the mood a little

“Well, that would be great, but I am ready to trade you in for a newer model.”

His body slowly rocked as he started laughing. she knew what his reply would be, and this was a common joke between them. “Babe, the newer models are not as good as me,”

“Well then I will go for an older one, I wanted a taller and older guy.”

“You got the best of the two. Just because I am younger doesn’t mean I am not just as good. And I will be able to live longer.” This common joke was one they had shared since she first found out he was younger. His looks were not that of a man his age. He had a mustache and goatee, and if anyone had to guess they’d say he was at least two or three years older than he was. He told her of times when he was younger and used his looks to his advantage. That was the age he started smoking Luckily she finally broke him of a habit that would have someday killed him.

The silence had overtaken them as the sun’s last sliver slid behind the trees

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on the mountain. The night animals slowly awoke, the screech owl started, and the crickets joined in and then “BARK!”

She was once again reminded that it was not that night so long ago, it was today, and this was now. A quote from her friend told her made her half-smile; the past is history, the future a mystery, and today is a gift called the present. She opened the screen door, and followed the dog inside. Tightly bolting the back door, she worked her way upstairs to the room. He was still sleeping, but just the same she wanted to tell him how she felt. “I love you, and I always will. Forever sounds like a great idea. And changes, well they can be made together. What matters is what we do today, and how we treat what we have now.” He slowly rolled over, and his eyes opened just a crack. She heard him mumble something. She figured it was along the lines of “What?”

To Piss You Off

Oh, I'm sorry

I didn't mean to make you angry.

No, I didn't even know you were there.

It wasn't directed towards you.

It's not personal.

No, Really.

It doesn't have anything to do with you.

I'm sorry I interrupted you.

I was just trying to clean up.

Oh, were you comfortable there?

Yeah, you're comfortable there every day, aren't you?

You just want to relax, sit on your ass, watch

t.v., play video games.

Oh, no, no, no, no. I'll get that for you.

I was in your way?

Sorry, I'm really sorry.

I did not do it on purpose!

No I didn't!

Why would I do that on purpose?

Yeah, I guess you're right,

I did it just to piss you off!

My purpose in life is to piss you off!

Every move I make it meant to annoy you.

Yeah, go back to sleep.

Lisa Marie Black

Ironic Dreams

Characters

Harry

Sally

Dr. Sigmund, the Psychologist

Opening scene:

Dr. Sigmund's office. The office has painted white walls with a single picture frame of a dog chasing a cat chasing a mouse in an open field. Harry, one of Dr. Sigmund's patients, lays on his back staring at the cracks in the ceiling on a hunter green couch. Dr. Sigmund is seated next to the couch on a wooden rocking chair smoking a cigar and holding a piece of paper and a pen.

Dr. Sigmund: All dreams hold a significant meaning Harry. Our brain is communicating your subconscious into your conscious. Trust me on this one, I went to Harvard. I know all about these things. So, tell me about your dream you had last night and I shall interpret the significant meaning behind it.

Harry: Well, all right. This is all confidential though.. .right? If any of my friends knew I was having these dreams and seeing a psychologist.., oh god! The humility I would have to overcome. I would never be able to get a date with anyone. My friends would have a running pole on whether or not I was gay or something.

Dr. Sigmund: Harry, it doesn't matter about what your friend's say. You haven't dated anyone but your cousin yet. I think that if you share the feminine urges you might find more dates because you are acting like yourself.

Harry: Maybe your right. But every time I open myself up to anyone, guys are the only one's that hit on me. I just don't get it.

Dr. Sigmund: Well that's a huge problem. You should talk to someone about

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that then.

Harry: Uh that's why I'm here with you.

Dr. Sigmund: Oh, yeah! That's right! Well, get along with the dream and tell me everything.

He crosses his legs and puts his finger on his chin to act like he's ready to listen.

Harry: O.k. well, I went to bed last night probably around 11:30 or so.

Dr Sigmund: Did you have anything to eat before you went to bed?

Harry: No. The last time I ate dinner was around 6:30 that night.

Dr. Sigmund: Did you have chicken before you went to bed?

Harry: No, I didn't have anything before I went to bed.

Dr. Sigmund: Did you have beef before you went to bed?

Harry: NO!!! The only thing I might have had was toothpaste in my mouth before I went to bed because I brushed my teeth.

Dr. Sigmund: Ah, so you eat toothpaste!

Harry: No, I just brushed my teeth. For god's sake, can I just tell you about my dream? We only have an hour this time.

Dr. Sigmund: Ooh! Your testosterone level has heightened. You really are a man. Go on with your dream.

Harry: O.k. Like I said before. I went to bed around 11:30 and I didn't have anything to eat before I went to bed. I know I had several dreams but the one that stands out the most is the playground set dream. In the dream, I was the same as I am now. As a matter of a fact, everyone in the dream was the age they are now. Let's say around 25, 30 or 35 years old... but we were all in kindergarten. The teacher gave us a half-hour of recess and all of us ran to the

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playground set. Well, some kids about five or six of them circled around each other and kept looking at me and pointing. Some were giggling and other's just simply smiled like they were gonna do something to me. . . but each and every one of them were staring at me. And then a girl with long, thick blonde hair ran up to me and whispered in my ear that the Jones girl likes me. For some odd reason I began to turn all red in the face. My heart started to race and my palms got all sweaty. My friend asked me to walk over to her and give her a number one through ten rating on her looks. At this point, I am completely frozen in my tracks and unable to move or speak for that matter. I'm a five-year-old kid trapped in a 27-year-old body. The girl's friend walks up to me and says to meet my secret admirer underneath the slide connecting to the fisher price play ground set. I slowly walk over with some difficulties trying to remember the basics of right and left. Finally, I reach the playground set. I was so nervous because all of my classmates were staring at me with their big, child-like giggly eyes. I cautiously slide my way between the wooden boards that hold the play set together. I suddenly find myself crammed in this small confined spot. I was staring at this beautiful blond blue eyed little girl. Her name was Sally Jones. Her face was just as red as mine was because of all of the embarrassment we shared. All of a sudden the enormous crowd of kindergarten students outside our small confined space Sally and I shared started chanting, "kiss, kiss, kiss." I was completely appalled by the demands of the crowd. After all I'm 27 and I can make the moves on whomever I want and whenever I want. But even though I was 27, I still felt as if I was five years old. I had to kiss this girl; after all she wanted me too. So, I slowly leaned in, closed my eyes and puckered up. She did the same and I felt the fireworks fly in the air. The kiss only lasted a split second but it felt like an eternity. We quickly stepped back from each other and starred at each other with wild, audacious eyes. She smiled at me with the sweetest smile and then turned and quickly crawled out of our hiding space and ran away. I sat dumbfounded until the recess bell rang, which then woke me up and I soon came to the realization that the recess was actually my alarm clock going off I have to be honest with you... Sally Jones is unknown to me. I was never in kindergarten. . . I was taught in home schooling by my mother until 8th grade. I don't know what the dream means but I haven't been able to get it out of my head all day.

Dr. Sigmund: May I ask what your cousin looks like? You know the one you dated in high school and then took to your prom.

Harry: She was short with dark brown hair, green eyes, a little chubby and she

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had six fingers on her right hand.

Dr. Sigmund: What does your mother look like?

Harry: She's about 5'7", 125 lbs., dark brown hair and blue eyes. Why?

Dr. Sigmund: Does she have all of her fingers?

Harry: Yes! Why are you talking about my mother like that? She's no freak... she's my mother!

Dr. Sigmund: No. I'm simply trying to reason out your dream. I think this Sally Jones creature symbolizes your mother. She is a beautiful blue eyed take charge kind of woman. Sally sought you out and was aggressive in kissing you just like your mother is.

Harry: Yeah! And she is more aggressive in kissing me. Sally took the initiative.

Dr. Sigmund: Have you ever had sex with your mother?

Harry: Nooo! Of course not! I'm not that sick.

Dr. Sigmund: Have you ever had sex with your cousin?

Harry: No! Listen, I didn't know she was my cousin until after our senior prom. I'm not an incest type of person. So don't make accusations that aren't true.

Dr. Sigmund: O.k. O.k., well, I think you're experiencing the Oedipus complex. Everyone goes through it. If you are a male, ever since birth, you love your mother. You fantasize about your mother subconsciously. You begin to hate your father because you are jealous that he gets intimate time with her. This happens in females also. They love their fathers and despise their mothers. It all comes down to sex and aggression. Those are our needs and wants.

Harry: That's disgusting! So what you're saying is that my dream meant that I wanted to have sex with my mother and kill my father.

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Dr. Sigmund: Yes, but don't worry...it's completely normal.

Harry: How much am I paying you, you insane psychotic!

Dr. Sigmund: \$150.00 an hour and don't call me psychotic. At least I didn't date my cousin and I'm not dreaming about having sex with my mother.

Harry: Take this and shove it up your...

Dr. Sigmund: Now Harry, there is no need for that kind of language.

Harry: Who the hell came up with you're whacked out theory. You're wrong about my dream! It has a completely different meaning from what you're saying or it has no meaning at all. I can't believe that I pay \$150.00 to listen to this crap. I feel stupider now that I just sat here an hour and listened to this shit. You can take your theories and stick them up.. wherever your screwy, frizzy, gray hared head desires. I'm out of here.

Harry stands up and heads for the door. When he opens it, Sigmund quickly rises up and shouts:

Dr. Sigmund: Good luck finding dates besides you're cousins.

Harry furious and embarrassed because the people in the lobby waiting for their own appointment with Dr. Sigmund could hear Dr. Sigmund's outlandish remark. Harry slams the door with rage.

Sitting patiently in a blue chair, a young woman of about 28 years looks up at the scene with amazement. She thinks to herself, wow, that guy is pretty good-looking! He can't find any dates! That's hard to believe. I hope I don't get on Dr. Sigmund's bad side. I wouldn't want him shouting out my secret problems to the world. Maybe I should pay him some more money.

As Harry passes through the waiting room he catches a glimpse at this attractive, dirty-blonde hared, blue eyes woman. They make eye contact and she gives him a sweet and sincere smile. He returns the gesture. Even though he can't explain why. Something about that smile reminded him of

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something, a little Dai las Vous perhaps! Quickly he opens his eyes and notices everyone else in the room smiling, giggling and even pointing at him. He quickly runs out of the building out of sheer embarrassment because he knows the watchful crowd knows his secret

Dr. Sigmund: Sally Jones?

Sally Rises up

Sally: Yes?

Dr. Sigmund: I can see you now.

The young attractive woman with dirty-blonde hair and blue eyes stands up and walks into Dr. Sigmund's office.

Dr. Sigmund: Please lay down and then we can proceed.

Sally: O.k.

Dr. Sigmund: How are things going? Are you still meditating with your cats?

Sally: Um, no! Dr. Sigmund, this is my first time here. A friend referred me to you.

Dr. Sigmund: Ah, yes! You just reminded me of someone else. I'm sorry. So, what can I do for you Ms. Sally Jones?

Sally: Well, I've been experiencing some difficulties lately. Do you mind if I just start from the beginning?

Dr. Sigmund: No, not at all. Go right ahead, but keep in mind that we only have an hour.

Sally: O.k., well, it all kind of started about 8 o'clock. Last night my friends and I were just hanging out at the local bar. Well, all four of my friends that I was with last night have a significant others. Don't get me wrong! I'm not a loser or anything, I mean, I've had lots of boyfriends over the years, but none of them have amounted to much so I feel like a loser. Well, anyway, there's this

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hot guy at the bar with ripped muscles, tan and a great smile and he walks over and starts talking to all my friends. And I felt like they were all excluding me. I mean I'm supposed to be the one flirting with him, I'm the single one. They all have husbands. Anyways, to make that long story short... I said I was getting tired, I had a long day and I will have another one tomorrow. So, I left to go home. I got back home around 11:30 and went to bed, but I had this bizarre dream. The setting was Reading, Pa in the late 1800's. My dream was totally wacky because there was no color. My dream was viewed in black and white. And I was riding a horse, until all of a sudden I heard this terrible cry for help. At first I was startled because the voice was a male voice and I couldn't seem to locate it. Without command or delay my horse dashed across the open fields and piles of hay. Then abruptly stopped short by the railroad tracks. There was a man tied to the railroad tracks desperately trying to free himself before a freight train started to barrel down the tracks. I quickly jumped off my horse and ran to the squirming man. As soon as I reach him I heard the evening 4 o'clock train racing around the bend of the tracks. I pulled out my knife from my back pocket and worked as fast as I could to untie the ropes that imprisoned the male victim. He kept looking up to judge the decreasing time I had left and the increasing distance the train quickly swallowed. The train was only 1000 feet away and all I had gotten free was the man's feet. I jumped on top of the man to quickly try to free his hands. The loud whistle of the train screeched on as if to tell us we didn't know there was a train heading straight for us. The train was only 500 feet now, but finally the rope that tied his hands snapped and we quickly sat up and jumped off the tracks only seconds before the huge ton of metal squished us like a pan cake. The man almost out of breath was lying on top of me with huge excited eyes. He quickly gave me a dozen kisses on every feature of my face chanting "thank you, thank you." He then asked me how he could repay me? We slowly got up and shook off our clothes from the dirt on the ground. He took my hand up to his mouth where he kissed it gently and said thank you for saving my life. My name is Harry Carry. I later asked him if he was trying to commit suicide and he said that he wasn't. He said he was sleeping one minute and the next minute he awoke tied to the railroad tracks. Unfortunately, before we could exchange a romantic kiss, my alarm clock woke me up. So, Doc, what do you think? Doc? Doc?

Meanwhile, Dr. Sigmund falls asleep and has a little dream of his own. He dreamt of a warm, clear-blue skied afternoon day and he was sitting in an open field attempting to write a poem about his view of nature. The day was calm and he was refreshed and collective from the fresh

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air. He begins to create this poem on paper...

*Humankind had not woven the web of life
We are but one thread within it. Whatever
We do to the web, we do to ourselves. All
Things bound together... all things connect.*

BLACK OUT!!! Just as Dr. Sigmund writes his last sentence a crane flies over his head and accidentally the tortoise in the bird's mouth slips and plummets in a downward spiral until it violently stopped short on his head. Dr. Sigmund is completely laid out. In that instance, Dr. Sigmund was dead.

Sally: Doc! Doc!

Dr. Sigmund: Ah, why yes! Continue.

Sally: Doc, I'm finished! I told you everything about my dream. What did you think?

Dr. Sigmund: Ah, well, I think you definitely have some issues to deal with young lady just like the rest of us. It's completely normal. You have what I like to call the Oedipus Complex. Ever since you were born you fantasize about your father with your mother. See it all comes down to sex and aggression. These are our drives so don't worry about it. I like to keep my patients and their problems confidential. I will tell you that a guy had seen me a little before you and he experienced the Oedipus Complex.

Sally: What are you saying? I was in love with my father and I hate my mother. There has got to be something wrong with you! I hate my father. I don't want anything to do with him because he left my family when I was seven. That son of a bitch.

Dr. Sigmund: Are you on the other side of the fence then?

Sally: Other side of what fence?

Dr. Sigmund: You know, are you a lesbian?

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Sally: Oh god no! Not even in my wildest dreams!

Dr. Sigmund: You've never had dreams of the same sex encounters?

Sally: Nope! Never!

Dr. Sigmund: Alrighty then.

Sally: So what do you get out of the dream being black and white?

Dr. Sigmund: I think you are a very black and white kind of person. I think that you are a very racist person inside.

Sally: Excuse me Sigmund, I don't have one racist bone in my body. My best friend is black and that doesn't even matter anyway because we are all made up of the same blood and bones. WE ARE ALL THE SAME!

Dr. Sigmund: But my child, you are racist.

Sally: I can't believe that I'm putting up with this shit you are feeding me. First of all, you demean you're patients by shouting out their secrets in front of the whole waiting lounge, you fall asleep while listening to me and now you falsely accuse me of being racist. There is no way I'm paying you \$150.00 for this session. My wall could do a better job of listening to me and psychoanalyzing my dreams. I'm out of here.

Sally storms out of the door. Meanwhile, Harry waits outside the building waiting for that mystery woman in Dr. Sigmund's waiting lounge. He thinks to himself, That Dr. Sigmund is a fraud. I'm not in love with my mother. I know that my dream means something else. I wonder who that blonde haired woman was? Her smile looked so familiar to me. I recognized it from somewhere. I'll wait until she comes out of that loony's office and then I'll talk to her.

At that instance, Sally storms out of the office and races down the staircase. In an outrage she flings open the door and hits Harry right in his face.

Sally: Oh my god. Sir, I'm so sorry! Are you all right?

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Harry: Yes, I'm fine. Just a little bump...but I'll be all right.

Sally: Again, I'm so sorry.

She pauses for a second

Hey! Hey! You're the guy who stormed out of Dr. Sigmund's office just a little bit ago.

Harry: Why yes I was! The man just infuriated me to no end. What is wrong with you? It looks like someone mad you a little bit upset yourself... I mean the way you threw that door open and all.

Sally: Yes! Dr. Sigmund made me highly ticked off. He analyzed my dream for me. He told me that I was in love with my father and that I hated my mother. He also tried to tell me that I was racist. All of the above is total bull shit.

Harry: I hear that. He told me I was in lust for my mother. Now how sick is that?

Sally: I know really.

She pauses again for a second

Well, listen again, I'm really sorry about that door. We started out on the wrong foot. Can we try again?

Harry: Sure thing. My name is Harry.

He reaches out his hand for her to shake it

Sally: Harry! I had a dream of a Harry!

Harry: Really? Did he have a last name?

Sally: Why yes he did. It was Harry... Harry.. Harry Carry. That's it Carry.

Harry: What did you say?

Stunned and turning a little pale in the face

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Sally: Carry.

A little puzzled, slowly says

Harry: Now that is too bizarre. Because my last name is Carry.

Sally: No way! I saved your life in my dream. You were tied down to the railroad tracks. Are you tied down now? I mean, are you involved in any relationship?

Harry: Except for my dog and I, no I'm not. And let me tell you something. I had a dream also that I revealed to Dr. Sigmund. I met a girl on the playground and I kissed her in front of everyone. If her name is the same as yours, well then I don't know what our dreams are trying to tell us. So, what is your name?

Sally: No, you tell me the name of the girl in your dream. Then I will tell you if it's correct or not.

Harry: Her name was Sally... Sally Jones.

Sally: Oh my god! That is too close and ironic. My name is Sally Bones.

Harry: Well, yes it is. Sally it is a pleasure to meet you. I believe that our dreams are trying to tell us something.

Sally: I guess so.. well, it's also a pleasure to finally meet you.

Harry: Do you have a piece of paper or a writing utensil of any type?

Sally: Yeah, I think so. Let me check my purse.

She digs frantically through her purse for any type of writing utensil. She finally comes across some lipstick.

This is all I have.

Harry: That will be fine. Could I have your phone number or would you like my phone number Sally?

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Sally: Here, I'll give you mine. It is (401) 285-9845. You can call me anytime you would like too.

Harry: This is the most ironic thing that has happened to me. Well I will definitely give you a call. Maybe we could go for dinner and a movie.

Sally: Or maybe we could go skiing?

Harry: Anything that you would like.

Sally: Well, I'll be looking forward to your call Harry. It was a pleasure to meet you.

Harry: Take care Sally. I'll talk to you soon.

Both Harry and Sally stare at each other as they embrace each other. Then they slowly walk away with big smiles across their faces.

Meanwhile, Dr. Sigmund mopes around in his office repeating to himself over and over again...

Dr. Sigmund: I'm not a psycho! I'm not a fraud. They'll come back. They always do.

Dr. Sigmund proceeds to pack up his things and closes his office door behind him. Dr. Sigmund takes his monotonous walk to the train stop that he takes everyday. A cool brisk wind dances around him as he walks down Field Street. Another gust wind entangles him as he loses a grip of his papers. He frantically jumps on top of the papers to save them from flying all over the place. Then all of a sudden he hears a woman's voice scream.

Woman's Voice: Watch out!

Dr. Sigmund looks up to see a young blonde woman screaming from the third floor apartment complex that he was standing near unfortunately. Well, the blonde woman wasn't all he saw. He saw a copper penny plummet at his head at warp speed falling from the 13th floor of the building. BLACK OUT! Dr. Sigmund is laid out on the sidewalk, dead from a copper penny.

William Zeruth

Basketball

Bounce, flick, swish, “what?”

Bounce, stutter, fake, flick, clang, “ahhhhhhh, get up!”

Slide, slide, jab foul, “what the hell?”

Slide, slide, jab, poke, steal, bounce, bounce, one, two, jump, “ahhhhhhhh, get off me!”

Sit, sweat, gulp, stretch, watch, “shit.”

Get up, go in, run, slide, sweat, “yeah dog.”

Look, feel, know, indulge, “I have game.

3, 2, 1, flick, rotate, splash, “who da man?”

Walk, talk, sit, “remember when...

Reminisce, stop playing, “no!”

Little Boys

Little boy blue is lost in the shadows,
trying to find his way out of the maze.
But every turn leads him to a dead end,
can't see through the misty halls.

Little boy blue is confused about the patterns of his life,
and why he can't seem to think clearly.

Little boy blue doesn't want to be the little blue boy anymore.
He wants to shake free of the shackles that keep him in the chaotic maze.

Little boy blue is looking for little boy red,
the boy that will lead him out of the maze.

He wants to embrace little boy red,
because little boy red has all of the answers that little boy blue needs.

But finding little boy red is like trying to find a needle in a haystack.
The clouds are rolling into the maze and every turn is frustratingly blind.

Little boy blue calls out for little boy red,
but he gets no reply.

The rumblings of confusion, rage, and frustration are too loud in his ears,
and he only hears the empty sound of loneliness.

But little boy blue knows he cannot give up.
He must find his little boy red.

Because once he finds little boy red,
little boy blue will be free.

And they will leave the maze together,
freed from their own thoughts.
Free to do as they please.

The Curse of Basuk

BALADILA IS A SMALL TOWN in the buckle of the Indian tribal belt, between Bilaspur and Jagdalpur, in the jungles of Bastar. I was chosen by my superiors at the Forestry Academy to oversee these tribal lands. I love the jungles here; there is so much peace and harmony. The Gond tribals keep pretty much to themselves, but they have come to respect me. The Gonds have their own language and religion. I thought it was all nonsense until I too came under their spell.

My friend Dr. Lalit Shukla is an avid birdwatcher. He teaches biology at the Government College in Nagpur. One spring day, as I was walking by the pristine Mahanadi River, I heard the cry of the Kasturi- high pitched with a sustained high sound followed by a short lower sound. Knowing that Lalit was fond of birds and was looking for this one, I cabled him to come as soon as he can. The next morning, as I was getting ready to drive to Raipur to pick him from the station, he walked into my bungalow.

“Lalit bhai, you’re here!” I was about to drive to Raipur to collect you,” I said suprisingly.

“Oh no, Ravi bhai,” he said, “the day I got your telegram I set off straight-away by train.”

“My goodness. All night by train and all day by jeep. You must be exhausted. Why don’t you get some rest and we’ll go after the Kasturi later on?”

“Are you out of your mind, Ravi? The Kasturi waits for no one. Let me change and we’ll be off.”

“All right Lalit, as you wish. Let me get my servant to take your bags to your room. Baldeo!” I hollered.

“Yes, Sahib?” Baldeo responded meekly as he came running. He was about five and a half feet tall, wearing a white loincloth and a blue waist length cotton shirt, and a small pale red turban.

“This is my friend Lalit from Nagpur. Take him and his things to the guest room.

“Namaste Sahib. Please come this way.

I went to my room to gather a few things: my binoculars, a notebook, and a pen. I waited in the dining room for Lalit, but he did not come out. So I went in

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to see what was keeping him, and found him talking with Baldeo.

“You cannot fight what the fates have ordained for you. You are correct,” Baldeo cryptically said to Lalit.

“Yes Baldeo, You can only live it out, not change it. I mean, look at me, fifty-five years old, and already on heart medicine. But, whatever the fates deem fit...”

“Lalit bhai, are you ready to go?”

“Yes, let’s go.”

It was a nice day for a hike into the mountains. There was enough spring in the air not to feel the imminent summer heat. Lalit was wearing a red check shirt and khakis, and I was in my usual olive green uniform. The river was only mildly raging, so we crossed on the large gray step stones in it to the other side. After a few minutes of listening, we heard the call of the Kasturi. We walked up a small ridge and found the large, majestic sisal tree from which the melodious sound was emanating. In order to see the birds and the nest, Lalit climbed up the tree and I followed him, camera in hand. Once we climbed onto the nest’s branch, we saw that there were two eggs in the nest. Lalit was excited.

“Ravi, give me the camera.”

I strained to give it to him. Grabbing the camera, he turned and took some shots. Angling for a better view, Lalit shifted his weight. The branch jerked upward abruptly and then down forcefully, sending the eggs and the nest falling to the ground.

“Damn, I just destroyed those eggs. How could I have done such a stupid thing?” Lalit defeatedly said as we climbed down the tree. Suddenly, from behind, came a thin voice.

“O Basuk, Eternal Master, forgive, forgive.” The voice repeated this over and over.

“What’s the matter, Laggoo?” I asked. Laggoo was the high priest of Basuk, the chief deity of the Gonds. Laggoo was a diminutive character, not very tall, adorned with many charms around his neck and talismans tied to his arms.

“This is a great sin, a very grave sin.” Laggoo continued, “The Kasturi is the winged consort of Lord Basuk, and you have killed two of its children. Basuk will grieve. You must ask for forgiveness, Sahib.”

“If there was such a thing as a God to grant forgiveness, I would surely ask for it. But there is none; only man is God,” Lalit replied cynically.

“Come Lalit. You mustn’t say such things. Let’s go,” I said to him.

The next morning, depressed and defeated over his expedition, Lalit was ready to leave for home. As we were leaving, Laggoo appeared, carrying a talisman.

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“Sahib, wear this talisman on your arm. This should keep the curse of Basuk away from you. If ten days pass and nothing happens, then all will be well.”

Lalit turned to me and whispered, “I think all he wants is to get some money out of me.” Taking out his wallet, Lalit handed Laggoo a one hundred rupee note.

“Oh no, Sahib, I don’t need this.”

“I know you don’t, but I know Basuk does,” Lalit retorted.

As there are no paved roads to or from Baladila, I prepared to drive him to Raipur. As we were approaching the river, I suddenly stopped the car. There was an antelope carcass blocking the road. As I moved the dead animal to the other side of the road, I could hear the faint sounds of drums in the distance, and a man chanting. *They’re up to their stupid rituals again*, I thought. When I returned to the jeep, Lalit was violently convulsing in his seat. His eyeglasses had fallen off of his face and his eyes shut. His face twitched and his hands and feet shook so desperately and uncontrollably that his body was sideways on the seat. I frantically rushed him back to my bungalow and called for a doctor. Lalit had suffered a massive stroke. I telegraphed his wife Sita to come immediately.

Sita arrived the following morning. She is quite a beautiful woman. She’s a stable woman and used to taking charge of things, and this situation was no different. In she bolted completely composed, without as much as a shriek or a cry, assessing and preparing to take over the situation. In many ways, she reminded me of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi during the Emergency. Sita assumed full responsibility of her husband’s care, from washing him to giving him his medications. This went on for days, which rolled into weeks, and things just got worse. Growing impatient and sensing Sita’s weariness and increasing discouragement, I decided it was time to look elsewhere for treatment.

I found Laggoo in the jungle, plucking Bakawli flowers, Basuk’s flower of choice.

“Laggoo, you must come and help me; Lalit is very sick.”

“Why should I? This is the will of Basuk. No one can stop it,” He said resignedly.

“But you must!” I hastily ordered.

Looking straight at me, he angrily said, “You mocked me. You insulted Basuk! There is no God you say? Then why do you come to me? Go away, for you too will soon become loathsome to Basuk, and to me.”

“Please Laggoo, please help me,” I plead. “He will die if you don’t. Will a man’s death please Basuk?”

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“There is one way to save him,” Laggoo said hesitantly. “But you will have to do something, Ravi.”

“I’ll do anything.”

“You will have to take the curse of Basuk upon yourself.”

Thinking it to be nothing but a formality based on idle superstition, I readily agreed.

Three days later, Sita, Laggoo and I gathered around Lalit’s bed. He had become frail, unable to speak, and unable to move or hold anything without assistance. Laggoo and I donned *Shwetavastras*, white clothes symbolizing the sanctity of the ceremony. The drummers and chanters started their haunting and sharp music with cymbals and low moans. Laggoo threw a gray powder on the floor, which created smoke, symbolizing Basuk’s presence. He and I then sat on the floor and placed some berries and spices on a medium sized oblong banana leaf. Slowly getting up, we approached the bedside, where I kneeled. Laggoo put the lead into Lalit’s palsied hand, which was firmly supported by Sita’s hand.

“Now pass the leaf to Ravi,” Laggoo solemnly directed Lalit.

The leaf had not yet touched my hands when Baldeo bolted into the room.

“No Sahib, don’t do this! You don’t know what you’re doing. Ravi wants to take the curse on himself!”

“You fool!” I bellowed. “You’ve messed up everything! Get out of here!”

“No! I won’t go. Let go of me!” Baldeo shouted as I dragged him out of the room.

I took him out to the edge of the yard and gave him a good thrashing. When I returned to the courtyard, Sita ran out to me. There were tears streaming down her face and she hugged me tightly; two things I had never seen her do.

“Don’t worry, Sita. Everything will be all right,” I said, her head buried in my chest.

“No it won’t, Ravi,” she said between her sobs, “he’s dead”

I ran across the yard into Lalit’s room. The sight that greeted me was utterly grotesque: white, splinter shaped maggots had infested his body and had gnawed through his skin and were eating his flesh. A swarm of flies had gathered over the bloody sight. Ants were marching his every orifice, hollowing him out from within. Two shiny ebony cobras were slithering about his head, sucking blood from his neck, wrapped together in a sadistic, erotic embrace. With a bamboo shaft I beat them off Lalit’s body to the floor, where I crushed the head of one of them with the sole of my left boot.

We cremated what was left of his body (the head, internal organs, some skin and a foot) on the left bank of the mighty river. Sita said nothing. I held her

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tightly as we walked back to the house on the dirt path, which appeared to be on fire from the golden blazing sun that seemed to lay at the end of the path. When we reached the gate, Baldeo was scampering across the yard, face to the ground, with a stick clutched intensely in his left hand.

“Baldeo, what on earth are you doing?” I asked pointedly.

“I must find him. He’s out here. He’ll get one of us,” he muttered repetitively without stopping his seemingly frantic search.

“Baldeo, what are you talking about?” By now I had stopped him, and had my hands forcefully poised on his shoulders.”

“Sahib, you killed one of a pair of cobras. The other one is sure to avenge its mate’s killing.”

“You know, I really don’t care now. This is all nonsense and I want to get out of here as soon as possible. I hate this forest and the spirits and everything about it!” shouted Sita, her head turned up toward the heavens and her voice at the top of her lungs. I walked her in to her room.

The next morning, I woke up especially late, and noticed that Sita had not gotten up yet either. Thinking her to be justifiably sleeping in, I had breakfast alone. However, when she failed to come down by lunchtime, I began to worry. Upon entering her room, I was shocked by what I saw: there was a large black cobra wrapped around her neck steadily drinking from the veins in her neck. It saw me and slithered away, vanishing into the steamy fields beyond.

From that day on, I have never had cause to dismiss or even to understand the reality or magnitude of the power of the curse of Basuk.

Priceless

I WALK ALONE through the flea market, the dust from the dry, August earth swirling around my feet. This is my routine every Sunday morning. I have never been much for church, so while my husband, Tom, takes our daughter to worship God, I come here, to worship memories. I marvel at the toys that I played with in my youth, the old clothes so like those I once wore and the vinyl records that bears the smiling faces of Shaun Cassidy and Andy Gibb.

Today I am searching for Fiestaware. My grandmother had a huge collection from the forties and fifties, but when she died thirteen years ago, a well-meaning aunt had sold it all for twenty dollars. She had no idea of their real value. I became fascinated with collecting about five years ago, and have amassed quite a collection myself I have sixty-two pieces—chartreuse, rose, persimmon—every color I can find.

Off in the distance I spy a table with a stack of brightly colored dishes and quicken my step. I walk purposefully, but try not to be too obvious. I don't want to tip my hand too soon. Nearing the table, I am crestfallen. It is only Harlequin stoneware.

As I turn away, my eye is caught by a bright glint of sunlight. I stop, momentarily transfixed by what I see. It is a set of six beautifully etched water goblets. I carefully pick one up and am assaulted by memories.

My mother is handing me the goblets, one at a time, from the china closet. "Careful," she tells me, "these are special." We set the table for Christmas dinner, the goblets sparkling in the candlelight. Later, it is my parents' anniversary and I silently watch them through the spindles of the banister, sipping wine from the special goblets.

They had been a wedding gift from Grandmom. It was her daughter's special day and though she and my grandfather couldn't afford the fancy wedding Mom had dreamt of, she at least wanted to give her a most cherished gift. She gave her the four beautifully etched water goblets. There had been six when Grandpop gave them to Grandmom as a wedding gift, but two had broken over time.

My mother valued those glasses as though they were gold. They were her family heirlooms, only brought out for special occasions. She cried for two days when we moved from the old house and one was dropped. Later, my brother

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sealed his fate as the unfavored child when he fell into the china cabinet while wrestling with the dog. A Limoges teacup, a gift from my father, fell from its delicate metal stand and landed on the goblet. Both were smashed to pieces, but it was the goblet that my mother mourned.

That left two. They sit today in that same china cabinet, now in my own house, protected from dust and the curious hands of my four-year-old daughter. They are brought out only for the most special occasions. My husband has learned to respect the goblets and knows not to touch them without my consent.

“Eight dollars,” the man says, bringing me out of my reverie.

“What?”

“The glasses. Eight dollars.”

“Eight dollars?” I ask, incredulous. “For these?”

“O.K. Six. But I can’t go any lower. I know they’re not worth much, but I think that’s fair.”

“Not worth much, you say?”

“Nah. These suckers were so mass-produced back in the forties that anyone with two nickels could buy a set. I got four more cases back in my trailer. Some caterer said she might buy ‘em. I guess she thought they looked fancy enough for her “wanna-be” customers. So do you want ‘em or not?”

“Yeah, here,” I say, handing him the money. “Could you wrap them for me?”

He wraps the glasses in old newspaper and puts them into a Weis shopping bag. I carry the bag to my car and gingerly place it on the passenger side floor. I drive home slowly, careful not to jostle the bag.

I park my car in the garage of our large suburban home. As I carry the bag into the kitchen, I wonder what Grandmom would think if she could see all that I have. I look at the shelves that house much of my Fiesta ware. I paid seventy-five dollars for that cobalt blue vase. She bought it because it was cheap and durable.

I set my bag down next to the sink and slowly unwrapped each goblet. I carefully wash and dry each one, using a fresh towel from the drawer. I then carry the goblets to the dining room, one by one, and set them on the table.

Opening the china cabinet door, I make room for the new goblets. Just as I have set the last one in place, I hear the garage door open. My husband and daughter have returned. They find me in the dining room and give me hugs and kisses.

“Any luck today?” Tom asks.

I nod and point to the cabinet.

“Oh my gosh,” he exclaims. “I can’t believe you found the same glasses!” He pauses, then asks suspiciously, “How much?”

I smile to myself and respond, “You don’t want to know.”

Matt Mosley

Searching For It

THE DATE IS May 28, 1998. The time is 9:50PM. This will be my final journal entry. By 9:30 tomorrow morning, I will have committed two murders. First, the murder of a classmate, Timothy Rankin. Second, the murder of myself I want this to be clear; my decision to commit these murders is not a rash one. Over the past few months, I have spent the majority of my time submerged in self examination, late nights spent lying in the dark completely full of deep analytical thought. Sometimes I would be so engrossed that I would often go the night without sleep. What I found out about myself over these sleepless nights is not something that I am proud of. Nor do I think it is something I should try to hide. My introspection revealed my real thoughts, feelings and emotions. Those of death, hatred and revenge.

I have learned not to live in the past. The most useless thing in the world is that which is behind me. I've taught myself to look forward. . .to the future. The conclusion that I have come to is that my future is revenge. Only I can understand what it is I have become, and what it is I have to do. I have leaped over the fence line and onto the battlefield from which I will not return alive.

I write from my room tonight. The place which I once called "The Blossoming Museum of Life." I named it that because every year it grew with objects from my existence. My room used to be something that I embraced, something that I endlessly cherished, it was my way to time travel. I could touch that term paper in front of me, the one I wrote on the "Berlin Airlift" last year for Western World class, and instantly I'd be filled with its spirit, it would take me back to when I wrote it, the long nights spent at the library researching it, and even the puddle I stepped in walking home the day that I handed it in. My room was a representation of the people and experiences that meant so much to me.

I used to look at that Bon Jovi poster on my door and remember the times spent on my bed singing "Bad Medicine" using a toothbrush for a microphone. I could see that oak dresser in the corner, next to my closet, and I could see my Grandfather's hands as he was building it or me. If I put on that baseball glove in front of me, I can still feel the smack of the ball against my hand as I caught that home run in the championship game of '93'. My pillow still has the scent of my first girlfriend Alison's perfume. That sweet smell which kept me safe at

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night, as she snuck home through my window at 3:30 in the morning. As I see the six soccer trophies lined across the back of my desk, I still feel that winning pride running through my veins. The light from my lamp is glistening off of them now. It's hurting my eyes. I can barely see at the moment. I guess that's a good thing though.

I don't want to see the objects of my past anymore. I look around this room and I feel nothing. My skin is cold, and my heart is dark. I don't want to remember anymore. The past will never create the future! My parents are always telling me stories, saying, "Remember this... and remember that..." I just want to say to them, flick you, yea I remember! I remember the time we went sailing and our trip to Scotland. I remember the backyard barbecues, the Sunday football games and the old dog Buck. I also remember the station wagon, the time we watched "Spartacus" on cable, and the time the mail man tripped and broke his nose. I remember all of these things! The times of the happier past that everyone seems to be stuck in. Everyone but me! These memories are used up, used up like dish washing soap. There are only so many times you can remember before you finally just say, fuck it! My room no longer blossoms with the memories of old. It has now become "The Cemetery of Happiness." The happiness that once filled it has died, and it is never coming back.

The day the gleeful memories perished, and the dismal ones were created, is a day I'll never forget. It was six months ago, on November 14, 1997. It remains the darkest day of my life and the most vivid memory that I possess. I guess you could say that I died on that date, at least on the inside. My spirit and sense of self were shattered by one single event. It has taken until now for the death from the inside to reach the surface; tomorrow it will finally make itself known.

I was killed by a seventeen year old kid named Timothy Rankin. Before I go into detail on what he did, let me give you some history on this son of a bitch. To me, Timothy is one of those kids who you pass in the hall and don't even acknowledge is there, or vice versa in my case. My peer status at Soderbergh High School is middle class all the way. Timothy is one of those elite snobs who would rather shit his pants than look in your direction. Prior to November 14, that was the full extent of our relationship. We did not associate.

Timothy is a big deal at school. He is good looking, captain of the lacrosse team, an owner of a Jeep Wrangler and a resident of Chesterfield Estates. His days are spent lifting weights, playing lacrosse and trying to fuck every girl who walks his way. He doesn't study, or do homework, yet he receives straight "A's." Go figure.

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I know all of this shit about his pathetic, one dimensional existence because I share two classes with him, History and English. In both I sit in the front row, and he sits in the back with his cronies, Jeff Simonton and Jon D' Angelo (they're also lacrosse players). Every day it is the same loud bullshit which we're all forced to listen to. The constant bragging about penis size and the massive amounts of beer that he'll drink over the weekend. I should have killed that bastard for making everyone listen to that macho garbage. At the beginning of the year though, that is all I had against him. I disliked his moronic manliness and his upper crust mentality. I left it at that. What I would find out later though was that his state of being was a cover up. The Timothy Rankin that everyone knew was not Timothy Rankin at all. Unfortunately, I was forced past this image and into his soul. A soul from which I have never recovered.

The event which I am about to tell is true. I want this to be known to whoever may end up reading this journal. My account of the November 14th "locker room incident" involving Timothy Rankin and myself is factual, and will not be embellished upon in any way. I have never spoken or written of this event until now. I want my reason to be clear as to why I will murder this kid tomorrow. I don't want to create doubt in anyone's mind as to my motive. For I can say this, it is of pure revenge and hatred. He stripped me of my entire life within the matter of ten minutes. I plan to do the same to him within a matter of ten seconds.

On Tuesdays, during seventh period, I have gym class. Normally it is a time that I enjoy. A time to release the stresses that have developed over the past few days. Many classes are spent playing sports such as tennis, baseball or volleyball. These are games which don't involve a whole lot of physical exertion, so you don't sweat very much. I wish that it wasn't so cold out on November 14th. For if it were at least sixty degrees, I would probably not be writing this now. Unfortunately, we were stuck in the gym that day. We played team handball. A game in which a bunch of guys compete and work up a sweat together. My class had some fierce competition. Everyone put forth 100 percent in order to rack up the victory. As an incentive, Mr. Ringwald gave ten extra points to the winning teams. Another five points were given to the player with the most goals, which on this date was me. My three goals helped the red team defeat the blue team by a score of seven to six.

When the fifteen minute bell rang at 1:45PM, the class broke and headed for the locker room. It was at that point, Mr. Ringwald called me over. Ringwald is a stout bald man who walks bow legged from years of playing soccer. He once played professionally in Europe. He often calls me over to talk after class. If we weren't teacher and student, you could probably call us friends. Most of the time we chatted about soccer and baseball, but not today. This

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day, Mr. Ringwald just wanted to congratulate me on the hustle and effort that I put forth in class. We talked for about five minutes as he recorded my extra points for the day. Our conversation ended abruptly though; Julianne Walters burst through the double doors which connects the gym and the hallway. She was screaming about a fight which had broken out between Steve Mengel and Dan Cassidy. Mr. Ringwald said he'd talk to me later, and then he bolted out the doors.

At this point, I noticed that my head was throbbing from the heat, and my gym shirt was soaked with sweat. I felt uncomfortable, so I started into the locker room. As I walked in, I looked at the clock, and it read 1:50PM. I only had ten minutes to shower and get to class. So I ran into "the cage" (the caged-in room which contains our lockers), undressed from my gym uniform, grabbed my blue towel and headed for the shower. The shower style is from an earlier time. Soderbergh High School was originally built in the 1950's. Everything in it is old, the rooms, the desks and the cafeteria; nothing is new. We don't even have air conditioning. The locker room is nothing different. The paint is chipped, the tile is wearing away, and the shower is of the old group style. It has lime green tile from floor to ceiling with two drains perfectly placed in the center. Eight shower heads line the three walls with a small doorway on the fourth.

Most of my classmates were showered and on their way to class by the time I was stepping in. Only three other guys besides myself remained, Oliver Gomez, Nick Stone and Timothy Rankin. I took the eighth shower head on the right hand side, my usual spot. This way I could hide myself in the corner, away from the rest of the guys.

I remember turning the water on kind of cold at first. I was so hot and just needed to cool down. Under that cold shower, I became very relaxed. I no longer worried about getting to class on time. I just let my mind wander a bit. My thoughts drifted from a poem, to plans for the weekend and then finally landed on lyrics from a song called "Here Comes My Baby" by Cat Stevens. it was one of my favorite songs and I often sung the lyrics in my head. This would be the last time that I would think about it. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Oliver and Nick grab their towels and leave. Soon after, I heard the door slam, and I knew that it was just Timothy and I alone. I guess I was standing there for about a minute. I had just turned the hot water up, and I remember it feeling so good as the water flowed down my cold cheeks. This would be the last feeling of pleasure though, after this, I would feel pain as I had never felt before.

Blood was rushing down my forehead and into my eyes. I can't recall what

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happened at that exact moment. All I know is that my head hit the wall and I couldn't see a thing. The blood had replaced the water on my cheeks. I was in a complete daze.

I was then quickly thrown down. I fell on my back, striking the tile floor. What brought me out of the daze was the back of my head smashing against the drain in the center of the shower room. I only wish that I had been knocked out by that, for then I would not remember the pain which would be inflicted on me next.

The blood had cleared away from my eyes when my head flung against the tile. I could now see Timothy Rankin standing over me. His box like head and his buzz cut dripping with water. It was while he was there, over me, that I was able to see into his eyes, and what I saw was blackness. There was no color, only pupil. A large black pupil was all that was there. It was then that I took my last living breaths. It was in the next instant, when this motherfucking faggot flipped me over, that my life ended... Timothy Rankin raped me on the floor of the men's shower at Soderbergh Senior High School.

I don't remember much about the actual rape, except that the pain was so unbearable. It hurt so bad that my mind went absolutely blank. I couldn't think. I couldn't see. All I could do was feel and hear. I felt pain throughout my entire body. I became paralyzed when my muscles decided to stop working.

I heard the bell ring for the eighth period class. I had history with Mr. Kane, but I would not be attending this day. I also heard the late bell three minutes later. All of this

in between the grunts and moans of a muscle bound closet case lying on my back with his dick up my ass. Not long after the bells rang, he finished.

My thought process instantly kicked back into gear as soon as he stopped. At that moment, I became troubled by a question. The question of, "What happens next?" The answer which I soon would find out is nothing. My mind became stuck on one thing, that he raped me. Timothy Rankin, the lacrosse star, raped me. He raped me. This flicker raped me and didn't say a word. In ten minutes, this fucking prick took everything away and didn't say a fucking thing to me. I thought of this as I laid there on the floor with the blood from my head running down the drain. How could someone commit such an act and have never uttered a word in my direction? I was totally perplexed, and it is a question which I have never been able to answer.

I was paralyzed for about five more minutes, when finally my muscles unlocked themselves. I stood up and walked out of the shower. I dressed my wounds with bandages from the medical kit in Mr. Ringwald's office. After that, it was over. I got dressed, walked to my car, and drove home.

Since that incident, Timothy Rankin and I don't even exist. We have never

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looked in each others direction. On the surface, I have acted as if none of this had happened. I go to school everyday, I get good grades, and I have even taken showers in gym class. Acting normal has been the hardest part. It is not easy to suppress feelings about something that consumes your every thought.

All I have thought about since November 14, 1997 is killing Timothy Rankin. It has taken six months for my life's ultimate goal to be reached. I have analyzed everything. I have taken every possible circumstance into account. My mind and body are ready for the showdown. All of my feelings and emotions are gone, except one, pleasure. The one that was taken from me, and the one that I will take back. I felt it coming to me earlier this evening. I realized when I thought about tomorrow, I became happy. It pleases me so much to know that Timothy Rankin has no idea that his life is going to end. Just how I felt the day that he decided to rape me. My revenge has begun already. By 9:30 A.M., I will have taken from him what he so viscosly took from me. At that moment, AT THAT MOMENT, I will have won. His life will be mine. His soul will be in my grasp, and when that happens I will finally have reached the control over my life that he had once possessed. I will take one last glance at this fucked up world before I complete my own evolution...and then there will be peace.

When I wake up at 7:30 A.M., my dream will begin. It will start like any other day. I will take a shower, get dressed in my blue jeans and white T-shirt, and eat breakfast. But before I walk out that door in the morning, I will grab my Dad's fully loaded Glock nine millimeter hand gun off my desk and stick it into my sock.

The ride to school will be simple. A quick smoke as I listen to Cat Stevens at full volume for the first time since November. As I park my '95 Dodge Neon in the parking spot farthest away from school, I will place this journal on the passenger seat. This will act as my suicide note.

I will not go to homeroom or to my first period class. When I walk into school, I will head straight for the locker room. On the way there, I will pass Timothy and his friends. As usual, they will be gathered in the hallway by the girls bathroom. I'll walk by and not even notice him, and he won't notice me either.

When I get to the locker room, I'll walk into the cage so I can change my clothes. I'll put on my gym uniform, the gray shirt with the dark blue shorts. After which, I'll have a seat in the shower, right where Timothy and I shared our little moment. My gun will be in my hand, and my backpack will be strapped on. I won't be worried, no one comes into the locker room in the morning. I'll be safe. So I'll sit. I'll sit through homeroom and first period. Who knows where my mind will take me. I'm going to let my thoughts run free.

Once the bell rings at 9:20AM, signifying the end of first period, I will stand up, put the gun in my shorts, and walk. I'll walk straight out of the locker room

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and down the hallway. On the right hand side, I'll pass my locker. Inside will be all of my books, a windbreaker and my umbrella. As I continue to walk, on my left I'll pass Principal Penn's office and then the cafeteria after that. I will turn right at the end of the hall and walk down the final stretch.

All of the students will be crowded in this hallway, chatting about God knows what, and waiting for second period to begin. No one will notice me as I walk by with a gun. Everyone will see me as they usually do. My eyes will be fixed on my objective, and my objective is room 114 at the end of the hall, Mr. Anderson's American History class. As I get closer, my stride will quicken and my heart will race faster. When I'm about 25 feet from the door, I'll reach around my waste band, and with my right hand, I'll pull out the Glock. I will not stop. I will not hesitate. I will be in complete control of my life as I make a left and walk through that classroom door.

As usual, Mr. Anderson will be seated at his desk across the room. Most of the kids will be seated at their assigned desks too. As I walk in, I'll pass the chalkboard, and then I'll walk right past the first five rows, past my desk, and then make that final left hand turn. By this time, my heart will be racing, beating as fast as a small bird's. I will be counting the desks, 1... 2 4 .5. .6... 7..., and then I will hit it, Timothy Rankin's desk. The eighth seat in the sixth row. The cronies will be sitting on either side of him, and Timothy will be casual with his feet up on the vacant desk in front of him. I will stand over him for a second and just stare into his eyes. I want him to see the blackness in my eyes; the blackness that I once saw in his, and then I will say nothing. I will keep our relationship wordless. I will communicate with my action, just as he did with me. I will raise my right hand and let my gun speak for me. BANG! One shot to the groin. BANG! One shot to the chest. At that moment, Timothy Rankin will be dead, and I will feel only pleasure running through my veins. I will stand there for a brief second and watch the blood make itself known as it seeps through his clothes. When I have soaked in as much atmosphere as I feel is needed, and I am pleased with my creation, I will end it all. One shot through my mouth is all that it will take. it will be 9:3 1AM on May 29, 1998.

I now see that this is what my life has been geared towards. it is my fate, and it is my destiny. I do not pretend to like what I have become, but I have accepted it. I have only accepted it in the sense that I know what I have to do. I am finally reaching the end of the dark tunnel that I began traveling on six months ago. The lights on the walls have all burned out now. I am in total darkness, except for my eyes. My eyes have seen me through to the end. The end which is so near. I can see it. I can feel it. I can even taste it. it looks like freedom, it feels like peace.

Melissa Fisher

Things That Break

MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER, who was a seamstress, taught me how to make *kolaces* and say a few words in *cesky*, the words all the elderly Bohemians in her town said to one another when they met in the grocery store, or the beauty parlor, or the five-and-dime. I still remember the word for “dog,” and words of greeting, but the rest I seem to have forgotten.

The summer my great-grandmother broke her hip I was eighteen, and after she got out of the hospital I went to stay with her, to cook for her and go upstairs for her and to move so that she wouldn't have to so much. It had been decided in family conference that I would be the one to look after her that summer, until other arrangements could be made. “Margaret isn't doing anything this summer so far as I can see, and she's always saying she wants to learn how to make dumplings the way Great-gram does,” my mother told my aunts and uncles over the telephone. Besides that, I'd been certified in first aide in my home economics class at school. My cousins had all been in college prep classes, rather than home economics, and were spending their summers working to save money for college. I took the home economics class, and shop, and literature classes. I wasn't sure yet if I wanted to go to the university or not, but in the meantime I thought I may as well learn how to cook, and to fix my car, and to read for myself

In the first days, despite her sore hip, she and I circled each other around the kitchen, making slow, subtle round motions, like hawks slowly spiraling on a billowy sky, while she watched to see how much salt I threw into a recipe, if I stirred enough or too little, if I forgot to let dough rise a second time. “Great-gram, sit down,” I would tell her. “I'm here so you don't have to do this.” But some old folks are feisty, and my great-grandmother was five years from one hundred that summer. When they get to be that age, I think the people who still want to stand up after a blow like a broken hip will keep standing up no matter what, and the people who only want to sit, sit down and die. Broken hips separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak. My great-grandmother was all wheat.

Her fingers had been knotted up with arthritis for years, but still upstairs in the room that was mine that summer she had her old dressmaker's dummy. It was hot in that room with the heat rising into it and the midwestern humidity

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pressing against everything. At night I put my sheet on the hardwood floor, which was cool where I lay for a moment or so until my sticky body warmed it up. I spent hot sleepless nights moving around on the floor, following the coolness, or leaning my forehead up against the screen on the window, hoping for motion in the sky, waiting for the heat to crack open and spill out thunder and lightning and rain. In that room, too, were pictures of my great-grandfather, who'd been dead for a decade or so, little pictures in small gilt frames of my great-grandfather as a young man, as an old man flanked in his hospital bed by my older sister and myself as children, weeks before he died. On nights that I gave up on sleep, when it was too hot to read, even, I tossed the books I'd brought aside and passed the time studying those pictures, considering my great-grandfather's face, standing bare and sweaty before the wavy old wardrobe mirror comparing my face to his. I had his hairline, his thick dark hair.

In the mornings Great-gram and I would putter in her garden. She shuffled around in the soil, stooped by age, telling me to pull weeds here or to pick these peas now. She had roses growing up a trellis on her back porch, making the porch into a shady bower, and after she had told me what to do she would go and sit in the shade, watching me, and when I was done sometimes she would push a rose into my hair, behind my ear. "It'll spend itself wherever it is, on the vine or in your hair, so it may as well be next to your fresh young face," she would say. "It's a pity young girls don't wear flowers in their hair anymore. When I was a gin we always did."

And I swept the kitchen floor, and I scrubbed the bathroom, and I dusted around the knick-knacks on the mantel, the glass bluebird of happiness, the family photographs, the get-well-soon cards she'd gotten while she was in the hospital. I snapped green beans into an old dented saucepan out on the back porch while my great-grandmother told me stories about how her parents had come to this country, about life before electricity, about how she and my great-grandfather had fallen in love. Her gnarled old hands with their swollen joints wrapped themselves around her knees. There had been a dance at the summer festival. She'd always known him, of course.

"In those days," she said, somewhat wistfully, "people didn't have to go to France to find someone to marry, they married whoever lived next door." My sister was married to a French man, and had just had a baby no one in our family had gotten to see yet.

Great-gram and all the girls went to the festival dressed in their bright traditional costumes, all white with small black vests and everything elaborately embroidered with vines and red roses, and they wore flowers and ribbons in their hair. They danced the polka. I don't know if I've seen a more joyful dance

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sheer exuberance. So the girls and boys danced together, and the girls were even more like flowers than usual. “Everything was brighter at the festival, the food even tasted better,” she said. And young people fell in love at the summer festival, breathless from dancing, suddenly alive to the charms of the girl from across the way, the boy from the next farm over. She said that my great-grandfather was impetuous, just like me. When they were engaged, my great-grandfather gave Great-gram the bluebird of happiness that I dusted every afternoon.

In the evenings, while my great-grandmother watched the news on television and fretted about what Saddam Hussein was up to in the Middle East, I rode my bicycle around the little town, trying to wear myself down enough so that I could sleep through the oppressive nights. I began to see flyers around town announcing that the summer festival in early August. I had been to the festivals before, as a child, when our mother brought my sister and I to visit in the summers before school started again. My sister and I ran back and forth from the Ferns wheel to the bumper cars while our mother sipped beers with friends she hadn’t seen since high school. Unlike the summer festivals when Great-gram was a girl, only the contestants for the title of Czech Queen wore the bright, bewitchingly archaic costumes. I remembered those girls as having a certain aura, moving through the crowds of people in their mundane jeans and tennis shoes, everyone mostly politely quiet while they sang or twirled batons. Even the fireflies seemed to cluster attentively around the contestants.

I had never been a contestant. Every other summer during high school, I had had some menial job, babysitting or mowing lawns or some such thing, and very little time for visiting Great-gram. But this summer, the summer after graduation, I found myself paralyzed, tottering on the precipice of my life, and I had no job, no idea which way to jump, onto fall. I began to spin tales in my head of myself as the Czech Queen, walking graciously through the festival carrying a load of roses in my arms, wearing the sparkling rhinestone crown on my dark hair, or riding in a convertible in a parade, smiling and waving slowly.

One morning in June, sitting on the porch with Great-gram, shelling peas into the old saucepan, I asked her what she thought of the idea. “Great-gram,” I said, “I’ve been thinking of being a queen contestant at the festival this summer. I’d need to make a costume, and I’d need some kind of talent to perform. Maybe I could recite a poem in *cesky*, if you’d teach me the words.”

So I brought the dressmaker’s dummy downstairs to what had been Great-gram’s workroom years before, and adjusted it to my measurements. We made the costume piece by piece, the petticoats and the skirt, the vest and the blouse with its puffed sleeves. The sewing didn’t take very long, with me hunched

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than the polka, or a more rollicking one. There are certainly more sultry dances, and more serious dances, but I've yet to see one that matches the polka for over Great-gram's old sewing machine and Great-gram pointing out this seam or that flounce, telling me to cut here or not cut there, and soon we had the dummy dressed, standing in the light coming through the workroom windows. It was the embroidery that took time, and in the evenings instead of riding my bicycle I sat with Great-gram, listening to the news, hearing that Saddam Hussein was threatening to invade Kuwait. I stitched the red flowers onto the white and black fabric of the costume, carefully following an old pattern I dug out of one of the trunks in my great-grandmother's workroom. After the news, Great-gram would click off the television and while I stitched, she would take me again and again through an old Czech poem she had liked as a girl, something pastoral about a boy and his dog. I mulled over the unfamiliar words with my tongue, tasting them, committing the sound of them to my memory.

And it was August, and the festival. The festival lasted a week, and every night that week Great-gram laced me into my costume and I was one of the girls with the aura that parted crowds. I was interviewed by the judges and by reporters for local newspapers. When they asked me what I, as Czech Queen, would hope for most, I said, "World peace." And I recited my poem, and modeled my costume.

It hadn't rained in a couple of weeks, and the grass was crisp and browned, the air tense with possibility. Every night that week before I left for the festival I sat with Great-gram and listened to the weather man forecast rain for the next evening, but every evening we were disappointed, the sky dry and occasionally lit by flashes of heat lightning. Every night the other queen contestants and I gathered together, blushing with adrenaline, refusing to wilt in the humidity, and flounced arm-in-arm down the midway of the carnival, bonded by our exotic dress. And groups of boys followed us, calling to us, running in front of us to flirt and grin and ask us to ride with them on the Ferris wheel. The boy I liked was tall and lanky and shy, with nervous, gentle hands. I had never seen him before, although I had seen many of the boys who followed us those nights at the carnival, at the store buying groceries for my great-grandmother, or at the swimming pool which I sometimes went to in the afternoon while Great-gram was napping, or when I was out on my bicycle. His eyes followed me and mine followed him, but there was always a crowd of kids around us. I was, as Great-gram had said, impetuous, but even so, we were too shy to talk to each other very much in front of them.

It was the night of the dance that brought everything to a head. A thunderstorm was finally truly imminent, and the sky on the horizon was turning a little

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green, even as darkness was falling. People were excited by the charge in the atmosphere, the little hairs standing up on the backs of their necks. People were laughing a little too loudly, maybe with relief. The band began to play that polka beat, the dancers feeding off the energy of the coming storm. The couples whirled around the floor, a smooth rectangle of concrete bounded by a white pipe fence, the men hurling their partners in exuberant ovals, the women and men both flushed and breathing heavily between songs. And while the other queen contestants danced with the boys who pursued them, my shy boy and I took that moment when no one was looking and slipped away from the dance.

I didn't take much science in high school, but I do know that everything attracts everything else, and some things are more attractive than others. I also know that attraction doesn't have to last very long for something to happen. Like lightning reaching out to intersect the earth. That's how it was with this boy and me. We were shy and our fingers fumbled over each other and we still weren't talking, but I was riding high on the electricity in the air, and my place in the spotlight all that hot humid week, waiting for the storm. The next thing I knew, I was flat on my back in the burned-up grass. The boy was kissing my face, pushing my skirts and petticoats and more petticoats up and pulling my innocent white bloomers down, and I was helping him, and there we were, attracted, sizzling against each other for just that moment, as the thunder broke the sky above us and the rain began to fall. The flower Great-gram had tucked behind my ear before I'd left the house fell to the ground. In the back of my mind I could hear someone on the bandstand announcing who the new Czech Queen was, but it wasn't me.

Currents

I PLACE MY ARMS along the cool marble stone of the bridge, the *Pont Jacques-Cartier*, that spans the *Fleuve Saint-Laurent* (or the St. Lawrence River as my American friends would say). The river is moving swiftly, as it always does in April after the winter ice has melted. I watch it for a long while. The movement of the water amazes me. It always does. So swift—swirling, rushing, crashing, splashing. I would say it was living.

Cars rush by on their way into Montreal. I'm sure some of the drivers wonder if I'm preparing to jump. I'm sure they're thinking "poor sad girl with nothing better to do than stand over the water, musing"; but I don't care. Let them think what they will. This river will never take my life, replace my breath with its ice-cold waters. No, I will not fall victim to its cold currents like those before me.

But those before me, I will never forget. And for them I drop the two daffodils, the yellow flowers that mirror the sun, over the edge of the bridge into the rushing waters. Carry them to PortN4enier, I cry out in my mind. Carry them to the river-buried bodies of those before me, those who bore me, I, their only child. I rest my chin on the cool marble watching my amends, my sacrifices being swept away. And I muse, watching the water, to the distress of the drivers.

My grandmother (I always called her Mama though, since she raised me), she always placed daffodils in a pink Depression-ware vase on the wooden breakfast table in April. She said that the guests at the inn were more cheerful in April because of her daffodils. I, being young, always had the notion that it was because it was spring and school would soon be let out.

April. That's when he came when I was, oh, eighteen, I guess. I remember.



I remember sitting at the top of the steps, the smells of lavender cream and baked bread rising to greet me. I can hear Mama speaking of the times after the war when Michael came home and how he and Kay would spend nights out dancing and Sundays in church and other evenings, later, going to the store in town and buying fancy lace dresses for their tiny daughter. I wonder who she is speaking to; and I smell bacon and eggs cooking, and coffee.

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Mama doesn't drink coffee. There had been no one checked in last night when I went to bed. I sit at the top of the stairs wrapped in morning coldness. This morning was supposed to be our morning; the morning we'd place grapefruit and photo albums in her old straw hand-bag and then drive to the river and I'd have daffodils wrapped in white tissue paper delicately held in my hands. It was supposed to be a special day, a day for remembering!

I go downstairs. The morning is chilly and the floor is like ice. I wish I had put on socks because the coldness is rising through the floor, through my feet. It runs up through my veins, tingling. It makes my nipples hard and I shiver.

Mama is speaking to a man, middle-aged, I guess, from my view of the back of his head. I walk past him into the kitchen unashamed of my hard nipples, hoping they will be such an embarrassing sight that he will leave.

"Mama, who is this?" I ask without removing my cold morning eyes from him.

"Don't be so rude, Hannah!" she says, taken aback. "This is Mr. Lawrence LaFontaine, you know, your father's friend I was telling you about". And then to him, "This is Hannah, Michael's daughter, of course". Of course I am Michael's daughter. Doesn't that explain it all!

"When are we going to the river?" I ask ignoring the introduction to the strange man in my kitchen.

"Later in the day. That all right?" she questions out of courtesy, not expecting any opposition.

"I guess. I mean, I wanted to go this morning but that's all right." In fact it's not all right. I'm becoming more and more agitated.

"Do you want any bacon or eggs?" she asks grinning.

"No," I reply wondering why she is so cheery when this man has obviously spoiled our plans.

I direct my frustration towards him as I think aloud wanting to cause trouble, "Sorry. What's your name again? And how did *you* happen to know *my* father?"

"Lawrence LaFontaine, but call me Larry. I knew your father during the war," he replies before sipping his coffee.

"So *Monsieur* LaFontaine, please, tell me about my father," I say wanting him to convince me, of what exactly I am not sure.

"Well..." he pauses to collect his thoughts as I stare at him from across the table. "I only knew him during the war. We shared quarters aboard our ship, along with another fella, Jack but we called him Boomer. That guy was somethin' else, I'll tell ya. A real fire-cracker and he would, oh, but that's something else." He stops to sip his coffee. "Oh my! Your father, he, he was brave—but scared,

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we all were at some time or another. He, he could always remind me of better times. I was just tellin' your grandmother, here, about how when we would have some spare time, we would sit back at the aft of the ship and drink and talk. Boy that guy could make us laugh and he—”

“I don't think you knew him very well, then. He was more serious, like me.” I observe his mouth open slightly, as if he seemingly needs to stop and reweave his thoughts. Watching his mouth just barely open like that I realize he has nice lips, well-rounded arches that deliciously slope inward towards his mouth, surrounded by black stubble and I wonder how it would feel against my skin.

“Now listen here, Starlet,” he says finally, gesturing to me with his coffee mug, “Don't get me wrong or anything. Your father could be serious as hell. And I know bartenders in every port in Europe who would testify to that.”

“Hmmm. Really?” is my reply as I look away trying not to smile or take him too seriously. I am not ready to trust him just yet.

“Yeah. And he was smart as well. I remember once looking out over the deck at the waves crashing. We weren't on duty I guess. But maybe we were. Christ, maybe! But each of us were holding a bottle and I think I was smoking some cheap cigarettes I picked up in Portugal. But anyway, Michael, boy! He was deep.” He pauses, caught in his own thoughts. “We were standing there watching the waves and all and he was telling me about the latest book he read, *The Old Man and the Sea*, I think. You've read it?”

“Yes. A couple a years back.”

“Yeah? I guess that's a classic now, huh? Well he could just connect things into his own life, intertwine them like strands of a rug, you know? And I remember him saying how his life was like waves, always moving, always flowing.” He looks at me to see if I understand and I nod my head.

He goes *on*, “He was like that. He said he could live the life of any character in any book and I believed him. Boy, I really did. It's a shame you never heard him talk. Really.”

“Oh.” I am taken aback. This doesn't sound like the family-oriented man type of stories I had heard before. The puzzle pieces that had made up the picture of my father had been fitting in so smoothly before this *Monsieur LaFontaine* showed up. Now my perfect picture looks like it had been ravaged by Picasso.

“That doesn't sound like him,” I say quietly hoping Mama will bring my picture back into focus but she says nothing as she finishes up the dishes.

“Well, there are many sides to many men,” *Monsieur LaFontaine* replies.

I sit quiet for a while, then ask, “Did you come to pay respects? You know, since today was the day...”

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“Today was the day that what?”

“They...they died,” I say almost in a whisper feeling like a child.

“Oh, ohh. . . I knew it was in April, but...” he stammers.

“Then why are you here?” I could feel an anger rising up at his thoughtlessness.

“Your grandmother sent me a letter a while back saying if I was ever near Montreal...and well, I was doing a bit of travelin’ and thought I might look for work up here...”

I stand glaring at him. “That’s why you’re here? How could you not know?” I yell. I grab the daffodils out of the vase, their stems dripping a trail of water as I rush upstairs, hearing remnants of apologies being uttered by my grandmother.



Mama sternly pulled me aside later. “He’s just here out of respect for your father” is what she says. Some respect. He didn’t even know the date of his death. And now he’s been here for two months. Two months! For two months I’ve put up with him! He said maybe three he’d stay if there was no work. The old man probably thinks helping you *is* work. But we don’t need him.

As I walk up the dirt lane, coming home from school, I see him out on the front porch, smoking. It’s a beautiful June day and he’s out there smoking on *my* front porch. He’s spoiling the scenery with that face like a bull. *Monsieur Taureau* is what I should call him, but I refrain.

“*Monsieur LaFontaine*, where is Mama?”

“Sit here with me, Hannah. Do you smoke? No? Have one anyway. I have bad news.

I am anxious. He’s quiet. He wouldn’t let me smoke if Mama was here. He lights it for me and I hold it trying to imitate the stylish women I have seen in the city and I think he should be only so lucky to be sitting with me.

“She was taken to the hospital. A stroke they said.”

“Oh *mon dieu!*” I cough on the smoke and he pats my back. “Stop it. I’m fine, I’m fine. Take me to the hospital.”

“There’s nothing you can do. They said—”

“No! I have to go. She is like my mother. You don’t understand!” I say to him.

Everything moves so quickly—my words, his reassuring hands, the ride to St. Francis Memorial. It is all like a river; I am being swept down, down, catching glimpses of the shore, drowning in the rapids.

“Do you want me to stay with you?” he asks.

“No. I am fine. I’m spending the night. I’ll find a ride back tomorrow.” He

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doesn't leave the waiting room and I want to be by myself. I am strong. I am strong. I don't need him here. It would be too easy to hide in his arms and weep like a child. He sits in a chair across from me. His presence both tempts and frustrates me and I want him gone. I feel a fury inside rising like the winds of a tornado. I can't keep it inside much longer. He starts to pick up the newspaper to read. It's like a trigger. I can't keep my mouth closed, the demons are too strong, and words lash out like flames.

"If that's all you're going to do why don't you just leave!"

Exorcism and relief, but his face has changed. More of a basset hound than a bull and I am sorry for what I said. But I can't take it back because, because, because... it would make me hate him more.



If yesterday I was caught in the river, today I am stranded in the middle of the ocean—all alone, no island, no life preserver, not even a piece of driftwood. Just the rhythmic lapping sound like the doctor's voice when he was waking me, "Miss, Miss, Miss Rainier, Miss...", then "she's gone, she's gone, set sail in the night, passed away..." This cold sea has caused my skin to go numb. Maybe my mind, too. I cannot tell.

"Do you want me to walk you in?" the kind nurse who drove me home asks.

I'm fairly certain I shook my head "no" for she's backing up out of the driveway as I try to unlock the front entrance, but before I go in I look around. Good, no car. *Monsieur* LaFontaine is not here. I don't need him to see me like this.

I must do something. I must do something. This place is too silent, too still. Are these dishes clean or dirty? Had Mama washed them yesterday? There is a piece of dried chicken still stuck on this plate, but the rest look clean. I should wash them again, just in case. Oh! My mind is more muddled than this sink full of clouded water and half clean dishes. I am the tall cup, an island that can't be covered over by the water.

Dishes done. Stillness again. What to do, what to do? The inn is a mess: the living room needs to be swept, the downstairs dusted, the plants watered, the cooler cleaned out, the oven scrubbed. Lord! I could put clean sheets on his bed. Yes, I'll do that. He is a guest, my guest now after all.

These blue sheets are much more him. Yes, definitely. He'll like them. Tuck this in over here. .and make sure the sheet hangs evenly.. .and the pillows, they smell like aftershave.. .and. . .and the blanket. . .and.



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What a dream! It's so dark. Where am I? Oh *mon dieu!* I'm in his bed. Oh god! Maybe he's still not home yet.

I walk down the steps into the living room. I see the grandfather clock and radio stand but I still feel like I'm in the sea. Look at the different shades in the blue carpet running in parallel streaks, lapping along slowly but strongly if you stare long enough, as if the sweeper had been run.

The light's on in the kitchen. He must be home. Or did I leave that on? It's so bright. The light and the smell of Pine-sol. My eyes burn. I turn away. He's standing there near me in the foyer watching.

"You cleaned?" I ask.

"Yes. How are you?"

"I'm, I'm fine...I'm..." The waves begin to build and here comes the storm and they begin to break and I fall into his arms. Tears down my cheeks, and it continues to build and he holds me tight through my seizure of sobs. "Don't worry, Hannah. I'm here. I'm here."

We stand here in the dark after the storm has passed, until my legs begin to ache, but still we stand because I can't let it end. He strokes the back of my head and I press my face harder against his chest wanting to disappear into him and absorb everything he knows and feels about my father, about my past. Every experience. I believe he can solve the mystery. He is the key. He can make the picture clear. He is the only one left now.

My eyes are dry finally, but my mouth continues to run, mumbling laments into the warm flannel of his shirt. "Mama *was* my mother. That's why I never really felt a need to know about Kay, I guess. She was replaced almost. I already had a mother, a living one, Mama. But now she's gone and there are still so many things about him, Father, that, that I'll never know. And God what will I do?..."

He is silent.

I sigh remembering and I realize my hand has found his and I have been rubbing the top of his thumbnail with my fore-finger. And I remember the past, how when I was little I would take my parent's wedding photos and paste pictures of Mama's face over Kay's head. Mama had been so mad, but had joked about it as I got older. I laugh softly and am about to tell him about it but he interrupts my thoughts.

"You know, I'll help you out around here. You don't have to worry about that. Okay, Hannah?" he says squeezing my hand.

I nod. "Thank-you" I say. Then impulsively I place my hand on his shoulder along the base of his neck, rise up on my tiptoes, and kiss him on the cheek. There, though, I am frozen, with his face against mine. I feel the stubble, the tiny pricks

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against my skin. So this is what it feels like. I can feel his heart beat. The roughness of his skin on my lips, on my neck. I lose my self in him, letting him fill in the gaps of memory; I am retracing his past as I press the well-rounded arches of his lips to my own. And we are lost together in my sea, rolling, rolling, holding on to each other like the other was a piece of driftwood.



I open my eyes and it is light. I know I have to let go and I remember something *Monsieur LaFontaine* said about Michael. About how he could live the life of any character. And I realize I could as well. My life could go any way, could flow into which ever sea I wish. I rise, half dressed, half asleep.

He lifts his face off the mattress. “Where are you going?” he asks.

“To go get some coffee and call the paper. Put this place up for sale. You can stay until it sells, though, you know,” I say grinning. Then more serious, almost in a whisper add, “I think I understand now about him. I have to find my own life. I hope you understand.”

He nods with closed eyes. “Yeah, maybe I should do that, too. Find my own life,” he says with a laugh.



I muse for a while more about what he might have done as I watch the currents of the *Fleuve SaintLaurent* swirl like my onslaught of memories. My daffodils have been swept downstream, out of sight. I lift my chin off the cool stone flicking the butt of my cigarette into the river, thinking that in June it will be ten years since Mama died and I’ll have to visit her grave. But the memories there won’t be as strong since she’s in the ground and there are no currents, no rivers to carry back the past to me there. Oh, those before us! And with that I pick up the straw hand-bag, sagging from the weight of an uneaten grapefruit and a wedding album, and I head back towards the city.

Sally Banks

Shifting Power

JOHNNY DOESN'T CARE much for Buicks and today is no exception. Ever since Darla ran off last month with that realtor in a shiny red convertible, her hair flying every which way, her old blue Buick sits behind one of the sheds, its tail fins pointing at the kitchen window. Johnny's truck is in the shop and he needs cigarettes, so he reluctantly walks toward the shed in the searing noon sun.

"Why did she have to take the whole carton, for Christ's sake," he mumbles. He vaguely remembers being dropped off in the middle of the night after closing Howie's and his eyes pulse with a fierce hangover. He has slept in his clothes and his underwear is stiff. One of the mangy barn cats darts away through the dry weeds and disappears under a broken step. He spits in its direction.

Johnny had only started up the Buick once since she left. It was the second week without her when he had gotten the postcard from Dallas, 'Not coming back. Keep the car'. She hadn't even signed it, but he knew right away it was from her when he saw the corner of the postcard sticking out from all his bills. No one ever sent him postcards. It had a queer picture of a giant rabbit with horns. 'Greetings from Dallas! The Home of the Jackalope!' It made no sense to him at all. Her loopy writing in red ink took up the whole side of the card. He had stared at it and wondered if she licked the stamp or used one of those little sponges in the post office. Johnny went from the mailbox straight to the Buick that day and backed out the driveway. But as soon as he gunned her out of her spot, a tube of lipstick rolled out from under the passenger seat. Some fancy tube of color to cover up what was wrong. All her little tubes and jars that stunk to high heaven. Lie threw the Buick back into drive and parked it behind the shed out of sight. But from the kitchen window the tip of the red tail lights still squinted back at him. To hell with it, he had thought.

"C'mon, you old bitch." Johnny pulls on the driver's door which always sticks. On the third try with his foot against the jamb, the heavy door swings open almost knocking his thin frame into the dust. His head throbs and little shapes swirl in front of him as he steadies himself on the door. He falls into the driver's seat and clings to the top of the wheel, his head resting on the back of his hands. Rancid fumes shoot up his nose making his eyes water. Darla wasn't known for her neatness and her Buick is full of festered food and soda cans

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stuffed with cigarette butts. The lilac creme she bought on sale at the Dollar Store has burst in the back seat. The stench makes him want to puke. He probably would have, but he hadn't eaten in so long he didn't have much to throw up. His back sticks to the cracked vinyl seat.

He turns the key and the engine wobbles, refusing to turn over.

"You can do it, baby. C'mon," he says through his teeth. The engine roars to life and idles so loudly the window rattles as Johnny cranks it down. The radio has no dials and is permanently caught between two stations at full volume adding to the noise. He had forgotten how loud this damn car is. When Darla would come home late from the Kit Kat Klub he could hear her coming up the hill a mile away.

Johnny and the Buick head toward the Powell farm on the dirt road, the muffler dragging. Dust swirls around him sticking to his arms and neck. It is too hot to put the windows up and the engine rants louder. A candy wrapper slaps at his ear.

"Shit! You piece of shit!" God, he needs a cigarette.

The Buick bucks and Johnny glowers at the dials.

"You have enough gas now, honey. C'mon, now. You're all I got. Now let's get over this little hill like a good girl. Then we'll be floatin' down the hill to Powell's and cross that little creek." Probably dried up to hot pebbles in this heat.

The Buick pulls him up the hill, her engine so loud the leaves on the low branches vibrate. Johnny clings to the wheel, his head pounding. The road levels out to open cornfields on both sides. He pats his pocket absently for a cigarette. His eyes water from the stink.

"I bet you think you was too good for me. You just don't know nothing now, do you?" he wheezes at the dashboard. He hadn't roughed her up that much and what was he supposed to do, keep her entertained all the time? She only worked three nights a week and slept the rest of the time. The Buick suddenly pulls hard to the right slamming Johnny hard against the door. She stops short of a ditch and lists toward the dry field. Johnny cuts the engine and struggles out of the car. Crows scatter.

"What in hell?" He walks around the tail fins. The right rear tire is flat.

"Bitch! How could you do this?" He holds his head.

Johnny fumbles with the keys trying to open the trunk. The hot metal sears his hand as he pushes the rusted hinges open. The spare and tire iron are under layers of Darla's remnants: shopping bags with little handles, a parking ticket, a flattened red bow, boxes of maps. It smells like rotted chicken. Johnny wrestles with the spare catching it on the edge of the trunk, wrenching his back. He

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screams holding his back with both hands as the pain shoots down the back of his legs. He used to tell the boys at the bar that he hurt it making love to his wildcat, but the truth is he slipped in cow shit on his uncle's farm, partially dislocating a disc five months ago. He hangs on the trunk rim pushing at the spare with his thumb. It is flat. The red tail lights sparkle in the sun. He reaches for the tire iron.

All those times he had to compliment her to make her do what he wanted. All that fuss over her only casserole. That casserole with the crumbs and shit on top. Sweat pours off his chin. That goddamn casserole with some gray mucus sauce in it. He spits on the dusty road and squeezes the tire iron. And those jokes she told. She never got them right. Messed up the punch line and he couldn't figure it out and she would tell it over and make fun of him because he didn't get it. She would act all uppity and say, 'Now you get it?'. That red dress with the low neck and white on all the edges. She was probably in some fancy restaurant with that fat realtor with shiny shoes just polished on the toes eatin' some special thing he couldn't pronounce. And she'd be talkin' about her special cakes and pies she made and all she ever did was buy them television dinners with cardboard pictures on the top that had a real brownie in it right in there with the dinner and all, what did she know anyway. She sittin' in that red dress with those red dagger nails. Cookin' those flat little hamburgs till they'd be black as old dog turds in the sun and actin like they's all special. That red dress he got her that was all tight and all and she was wearin' it with a realtor with a skinny mustache and bad skin lookin' at her in that red dress.

"You bitch. You lousy horrible cookin' red bitch!"

Johnny swings the tire iron at the side of the car making a small dent in the door. His reflection folds in, making him look small.

"You can't do that to me, you bitch!" He glowers with heat and rage and lifts the iron high in the air, bringing it down on the edge of the roof above the door with all his strength. It could have been the steel frame or the angle Johnny chose, or a combination of both, but the bar bounces back at him so fast he has no time to duck. He hears a crunch as it smashes his forehead snapping his head back with the force. Blood gushes into his eye and he swipes his head fiercely with his hand. He glares at his shaking red palm. Grabbing the iron with both hands, he flails at the front fender making little dents. He staggers toward the front of the dusty Buick, the huge metal grill gaping at him. He leans on the iron trying to breathe.

"You can't even cook a fuckin' brownie from a box!" he screams at the grill. He hoists the tire iron as high as he can and pulls it down on the hood with all his weight losing his balance in the dust. The iron clatters across the hood

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skidding into the ditch. Johnny gets to his hands and knees, his head stuck with dirt. He sways in front of the car, his nose inches from the bumper.

Not even a lousy brownie from a box.

Look at you with your tail wide open to the wind.

Look at you with those teeth.

Look at you laugh at me.

Look at you look.

You.

Johnny grabs the bumper and pulls himself up to the hood.. The Buick rests in the sun, one edge of her grill upturned in a crooked smile. Johnny turns and angles away, getting smaller in the waves of heat.

Bill Paterno

straightjackIT

He caller her
Three rings
Ring-ing-guh Ring-ing-guh Ring-ing-guh

IT answered
So

Impersonal

I am not home
Tell IT who you are...what you want
I will decide if you speak to me
I will decide if IT is so

Impersonal

Beep
Click
Heartache hinders another callback
As if she purposely planned
IT:

A cruel clone of herself
Void of emotions...of feelings
That thing... that

IT

IT cannot love!
IT cannot listen!
IT is merely a baby bird
thriving on her regurgitated worms
(but she *has* spoken to IT... more than you can say for yourself)
IT cannot think!
IT cannot speak!
He could talk to her
Perhaps over some tea?
No, that would be no good
Tea is so

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Impersonal

No matter...he will try again
If she answers, she will be powerless without IT
She could drop her script
Redial
beepbeepbeepbeepbeepbeepbeep
Three rings and a

IT answered again
(Perhaps you can negotiate with IT)
I will take the weekends
You can take the weekdays
IT isn't having it
IT will not budge
IT will not...
Beep
Click
Damn it!
Damn IT!
IT is over
IT is through
IT is so

Impersonal

Nicole M. Mayhue

Concrete Hate

I hate brussel sprouts on my dinner plate.
I despise celery sticks as apéritifs.
Eggplant parmesan, I would rather die.
Lobster tails from Maine aren't my cup of tea.
I think I'll pass on snowstorms in late March.
Rainstorms at the beach, I could do without.
Cold blankets in January? No thanks!
And the hour before the sun rises could disappear for all I care.
People who aren't as they seem piss me off.
Children screaming during movies. I don't think so.
Skinny girls in capri pants and sneaker sandals, where's my gun?
And sloppy kisses from spit-covered lips, I'd rather get none at all.
Sitting through American history twiddling my thumbs.
Watching *Pulp Fiction* for the hundredth time.
Red-and-white-swirled peppermints, ugh!
And black licorice flavored anything, save me!
The only thing I can't stand more than any of these,
Is the threat of losing everything that sickens me.

Life

Through the eyes of first grader

I forgot my name, but I know that one's mine.
The wrong answer was erased, and I
rewrote the same answer. That's how I know.

My brother, he had a twin brother,
he died in a fire. And my friend
tried to save her brother, and passed out on the floor.
My sister's boyfriend's brother told me
not to talk to my sister's boyfriend.

Melissa is my best friend.
It's my favorite toy she can't have it,
Even if caring rules say I should share.
I'm sorry I forgot her.
Because with a buddy, it's two, a square and a triangle.
Make sure and match the Opossum with the deer to get it right,
they are buddies.

I pinky swore, and that's serious. I didn't have
glue at home. I will glue it,
wanna see? I'll stick to my pinky promise Miss.

I'd give them money.
But they're strangers.

My dad, well he is in jail. Did you know that?

I won't be here Monday; my mom has a pointment,
and I get to go with. I'll see you Tuesday, won't I?

Wednesday Night T.V.

“There’s a new category in the Grammys this year.
The nominees - David Bowie, Mick Jagger, and David Crosby.
The category - Best Male Vocalist
with an old organ.”

“Melissa, Melissa, disclosing
a lot this year. By the way,
David Crosby’s backstage
handing out free samples...”

“We have a saying here in New Orleans -
‘Wait ‘till next year.’”
“I grew up in Chicago as a Cubs fan -
I understand.”

“Crazy Tom said to his psychiatrist:
‘There must be something wrong
with me. Every time I look
into the mirror, _____ is staring back at me.’”

“Who?
Who is Who?
I always wanted
to do that.”

Amy Graham

Josh the Great

Session 1 Begin Tape

Doctor: Let's begin the session for today. Why don't you tell me something from your past. Anything disturbing?

Josh: Well Doe, actually there is. It is kind of a long story, ya sure you want to hear it?

Doctor: Of course, just take your time and remember as much as you can.

Josh: Okay. When I was young I pretended that I was a magician. I can still remember the day my mother brought home a real magicians cape and wand for me. I ran through the house trying to make things disappear with these stupid words I thought were magic. Zimmity, zammaty, zoo, pretty lame huh Doe. It obviously never worked. That day you know, the disturbing day as you call it, I can remember sitting in the living room of my parent's house eating a sandwich. I was watching cartoons or something. It was a normal day, everything was great so far. I was observing everything around me. I remember my mother opening the front door of the house, the orange glow of the setting sun shining upon her face, she looked beautiful. I felt like the luckiest seven-year-old in the world. I got up from the couch to go and get my magician's cape. I always tried to do magic, but was never very successful. Doe I thought I was a natural. I was just a kid ya know. I came downstairs from my bedroom transformed into "Josh the Great".

That's what I called myself Everyone in my family thought I was crazy for thinking I could actually be a magician.

Doctor: Okay Josh, stay on track, go back to that day. What happened after you transformed into Josh the Great?

Josh: Sorry Doc, yeah that day. I remember my mothers cooking drew me right into the kitchen. She was giggling at my cape but I didn't mind. Things

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were frying and boiling on the stove. My mother always had to work hard to finish dinner before my father got home. He was never nice to her. If dinner wasn't ready when he got home from work he would turn into a monster. He would yell and scream at her. He never hit her, at least not in front of Jimmy and me. She would just stand there and cry. We could never figure out why he did that shit Doc. She didn't deserve it. He always got mad about stupid things like that. If it wasn't dinner it was something else. He just wouldn't leave her alone. Okay sorry I'm rambling again. Anyway I tried to help her with dinner that day, with magic of course. I could not see her cry anymore. So I tried to help. I really did try, I didn't want anything to happen. I loved my mother. Doc, hey Doc can we finish tomorrow. I'm tired.

Doctor: Yes Josh we will continue tomorrow. Session is over for today, get some rest.

Session 1 End Tape

Session 2 Begin Tape

Doctor: Good morning Josh, sleep well?

Josh: Yeah Doc slept great for here ya know.

Doctor: Well this is a safe place for you right now. Shall we begin. Do you remember where we left off?

Josh: Sure Doc, I ruined dinner. I just wanted to help her. I had my magic cape and I had my wand. I went over to the stove and tried to put a magic spell on the soup so it would be done in time. Somehow I dumped the pot. It went crashing to the ground. I almost burned my mom and me. The chicken she was frying in the pan burst into flames because she was cleaning the mess I made with the soup. She was pissed Doc, but she never yelled at me. She just told me everything would be okay and to leave her alone to clean. I knew that I wasn't in trouble, but she was. He would be home soon, my dad ya know. He was still at work. It was all my fault. I went up stairs to Jimmy's room. He had been doing his homework. I remember running into his room completely scared. He had no idea what was going on. I couldn't even speak. I knew what was about to happen. I remember Jimmy asking me what the hell was going on; I just stood there. He put his arms around me and said "dinner isn't ready is it?" He

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knew too, we both knew what was going to happen. I wish she would have just ran away before he got home Doc. He wouldn't have hurt my brother or me.

Doctor: Josh do you need to end for today? I know this is difficult.

Josh: No Doc, I have to remember eventually anyway. Just give me a minute.

Doctor: Take your time.

Josh: Okay, I remember my brother and me just sat in his room. Neither of us spoke one word. We just waited to hear the door open. My heart was pounding, I was drenched in sweat. I remember thinking how stupid it was that he was going to be upset about dinner. If his day went bad things could be real... well real bad Doc. My dad was a big guy. He worked construction. My mom could never defend herself There was nothing Jimmy or me could do either. I was only a scrawny seven-year-old and Jimmy was a small ten-year-old. Our family was in his hands. The door opened. My pounding heart interfered with my eavesdropping. I remember hearing light conversation. For a minute I thought things were going to be okay. Then it started. The yelling and the screaming. I heard things being thrown, I heard my mother sobbing uncontrollably. He just kept yelling. Jimmy and me were nonexistent in the situation. We huddled together in his room for what seemed like an eternity. We just cried Doc. We didn't do anything. Our eyes were tired. He was still yelling. Things were still being thrown through the house. We started to fall asleep Doc. With her still down there with him. I still had my magician's cape on and had the wand in my hands. My hands hurt cause I was holding on so tightly. I did the only thing my seven-year-old mind could think to do. I tried to cast a spell on him. Sounds dumb huh Doc. So before I fell asleep I wished that he would leave her alone. I wished that he would leave forever. I didn't even care if he died Doc. I know that sounds horrible, but he was a monster. After I made my wishes I said my magic words "zirnimity, zammity, zoo". I discreetly waved my wand so Jimmy wouldn't see me. My magic was done. I fell asleep that night with the yelling as my lullaby. Doc can we stop for a couple of minutes. I need to walk.

Doctor: Yes Josh we will continue in ten minutes.

Pause

Josh: Hey Doc I'm okay now. We can talk more.

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Doctor: So tell me what happened after you fell asleep. In the morning what happened?

Josh: This is where things get weird Doc. I woke up before Jimmy. I had my cape on still and my wand was on the floor. I went out into the hall. Everything was silent. I felt good for some strange reason though. Like a weight was lifted from my shoulders. I went over to my parent's door. I stood and listened for anything strange. It was quiet in there too. I opened the door and my mother was lying on her bed. I walked over to her. Her face was a little red and her lip was bloody. Yeah Doc, he hit her. But for some strange reason she looked peaceful, happy. I left her to see where my dad was. I figured he would be on the couch so I went down. The house was a wreck. He really had done a number on it this time. Lamps were broken, the walls had holes in them, believe me it was a mess. I went into the living room to see if he was still asleep but he wasn't there. I searched the house, he wasn't anywhere. Both cars were still in the driveway, his shoes were still by the door. I was freaked out Doc. My dad was just gone. That's when things got real weird. I ran to my parent's room and woke my mom to see where he had gone. She was as shocked as I was to find him no where. She told me that he yelled at her for hours and hit her a few times. She said she ended up huddling in the corner hoping that it was over, and he just fell asleep on the couch. She went to bed. Doc no one has any idea where he is. Yeah I made up some stupid magic but everyone knows that that's bullshit. Right Doc?

Doctor: Josh that is something no one knows. Your father has been missing for ten years now. We all want some answers. After your father's disappearance your mother couldn't handle things. As you know your not speaking was difficult for her. Jimmy needed to get away too. Boarding school was best for him and this was best for you.

Josh: Doc I'm not fuckin' crazy! I don't have the answers.

Doctor: Calm down. You are here because of what happened. You know your mother didn't want to see you hurt yourself

Josh: Yeah, yeah Doc. I didn't die right? It's not my fault my childhood was messed up.

Doctor: We all know that Josh. Why don't we end for today? Go to your

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room and rest.

Josh: You mean my cell. When do I get out of here anyway?

Doctor: Josh get some rest. We will talk tomorrow.

Josh: All you people are the same. I'm not the crazy one you know. Maybe I did make my dad disappear. Maybe I'll make all of you disappear. Yeah, all of you.

Doctor: If you think that is in your power then feel free. Go to your room now. I will see you tomorrow.

Josh: Huh, we'll see. Later Doc.

Doctor: (Note to self) Patient is showing no signs of recovery. Release is not in the near future or in the best interest of the patient at this time. Nothing has been accomplished with the disappearance of the boy's father. Josh, the seventeen-year-old patient still believes that he is a magician. He threatened to make "all of us" disappear. Although the boy says, in sessions, that as a child it was "stupid" of him to think he could be a magician he still shows signs that he continues to believe this. He still has a lot of work to accomplish. Josh will remain here until progress shows.

Session 2 End Tape

The Job

BILL SLIPPED the tiny tape recorder into his shirt pocket. He knew that soon he would be called into the office, and he wanted to be prepared. At the age of fifty, he was beginning to realize why there was so much recent workplace violence. There was so much unfairness, so much discontent. And now it seemed that the violence was increasing at an alarming rate. “Going Postal” had become a popular expression for violent behavior of any kind. The expression was born after several instances of postal employees being involved with murders of coworkers in post offices. Maybe workplace violence had not actually increased, Bill thought, but it had certainly become more deadly. And now he understood. He didn’t know if the tape recorder would be useful or not, but a person had to have an edge of some type. Corporate America had far deeper pockets than he did, and money spoke a powerful language.

Bill had worked for the same company for almost six years. He had become older and, he thought, wiser. His receding hairline had moved further back on his scalp, and the bald spot on his head had grown geometrically to become almost a line from front to back instead of a circle in the middle. Each year his glasses needed to become stronger. The dim warehouse lights were taking their toll. But he still worked harder and did more than anyone there, especially the “youngsters” as he always thought of them. All they worried about in the morning was getting over their hangover, and then later they all discussed where they were going drinking that night after work. Bill often wondered how companies could place such importance on a drug free work place and yet still tolerate such mental and physical alcohol abuse.

Roy Younger was the warehouse manager. He had managed this particular facility for only two months. He was a thin, quiet person, a young man in his mid-twenties. He had just recently been released from a company that had closed up. He had been there a year. Before that he had graduated from college. This was the extent of his experience in management. In his two months at this warehouse he had shown very little emotion. He never smiled, grinned, or joked. He spoke very little and avoided most of the employees as much as possible. He sat in his chair behind his desk in the office most of the day.

“Hey Bill!” Bill turned around and saw Don Hartung, the shift supervisor, walking toward him. “Roy wants to see you,” he said. Don was even younger

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than Roy. He was the wild, motorcycle type who insisted on taking off at the beginning of deer hunting season every year “no matter what.” Rumor around the warehouse was that he had not graduated from high school and that he had gotten the job as supervisor because of his relation to another manager and because of his ability to kiss the boss’s ass.

“He’s good at the three B’s,” someone had once said about him. “That means brown-nosing, bull-shitting, and brow-beating.” Everyone, for whatever reason, seemed to have a mutual disrespect for him. When the workers got together in their small gossip groups and talked about Don, the general concensus was that he had gained this disrespect the hard way.

“He earned it,” they would all jokingly say.

“Do you know why I’ve asked you in here?” Roy asked when Bill was seated across from him in his office.

“I can imagine,” Bill replied. “But why don’t you enlighten me anyway, just for the record.” He had started the tape recorder before he entered and spoke slowly and clearly.

“Well,” Roy said in his usual soft-spoken voice. “It seems that our new shipping manager has expressed concerns about your attitude.”

“My attitude!” Bill said not nearly as softly. “Let me tell you about my attitude. I have been here since this building opened six years ago. I am the only one that is still here from that time. My attendance is better than his, and I have the only quality service award ever issued here. I have more experience and more education in that particular job than he does. And yet, he has been given that position even though I have been doing that job for months!”

“I also believe,” Bill continued more calmly, “that he was only given that position because he is young. This companies advancement policies are clearly discriminatory.”

Roy’s lower lip began to shiver slightly and tightened up in an apparent sign of forced silence. When he spoke again, it was still in his soft voice, but it was more forceful and determined.

“Bill,” he said. “Let me tell you like it is. Here, I am the boss. I can promote anyone that I want to as long as the corporate office agrees. Your bad attitude will only interfere with the operation of the facility, and must be changed!”

Later that night, after returning home, Bill told Mary, his wife of twenty years, about the events of the day. When he explained the part about his confrontation with Roy, she frowned. Her thin face showed the expression of caring that she often exhibited with the children when they needed attention. Their two daughters were grown now, married having children of their own. It had become obvious, however, that children never really leave home, even

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after they move out. Children always needed guidance, always needed advice, always needed love. It had only been recently and that Bill had begun to realize just how important the love of a family could be in times of desperation and despair. He had, like most, squandered years of potential happiness on a drive to succeed that was so strong, so powerful, and so all-consuming as to be almost lethal. Fortunately, for them there had been no violence. They both seemed to understand that violence was rarely intentional. Violence was usually a desperate attempt at recognition, a feeble and misguided effort to be loved.

“What do you think he will do?” she asked solemnly.

“Who knows,” Bill answered. “I just know that this situation cannot continue as it is. It is wrong for any company to be able to do this to anyone without recourse.

“It’s very painful for you, isn’t it?” Mary asked sincerely.

“Sure it is,” Bill replied softly. “It hurts to work as long as I’ve worked and as hard as I’ve worked just to get passed over time and time again for a younger person. I have done everything I can possible do to prove my worth, and it’s like I’m not even there.”

“I know,” Mary replied. She knew the toll that this treatment was taking on her husband, on herself, and on their life together. She thought back on the many days of long hours that he had worked because others did not show up, on the days he drove the thirty miles to work in the blinding snow, and on the days he went to work sick with the flu and fever. It had always been like that. Earlier in their marriage, before she understood, this kind of loyalty had caused problems with Mary. There were times that she felt that he should be home. Home for the children. Home for her. But work had always come first. But she had dealt with it, and later she had learned to accept it. When she would ask him why, he would just say “because it is my job.”

She would just shake her head and reply, “It’s not worth it.”

The attorney listened to the tape and Bill’s description of the situation. “I have handled many of these cases,” he said. Then he proceeded to explain about the anti-discrimination laws, the legal process, and the fees. It all sounded so good, so simple.

The tape, because of strict state anti-wiretap laws, would probably not be admissable, the attorney explained, but it did provide a source of information, which could be used to keep the parties “honest.” It would take about two years before the case went to court, if at all.

“Most of these cases,” the attorney explained, “are settled out of court. In the meantime, you need to move on with your life.”

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Two weeks later, when Bill was called into the office again, he knew what would happen. He knew that the company had received the court papers by then and the attorney had told him that they would retaliate. Deep down he kept hoping that they would admit that they were wrong and offer him some type of position. Anything to show that they cared. Anything to stop the pain. It was difficult to imagine that any corporation, composed of supposedly educated, mature leaders, could actually be so callous as to face expensive, legal battles over issues that could be resolved so simply, so easily. Bill thought about how in many areas corporations, even though they were non-living entities, exhibited juvenile tendencies. Unlike children, however, there was no discipline that could be administered. No punishment meted out. They could run rampant without guidance or control. Bill thought amusingly about how there were no babysitters for corporations.

It was a grey, overcast afternoon in September when Bill left the building for the last time. He had come to grips with it a while ago. He knew the problems he now faced. Weeks of unemployment, then possible bankruptcy, relocating, and starting over. They had talked about it, Mary and him, and she had said that it was ok. She had said that money wasn't everything.

"It is far more important to be happy," she had said sincerely as she wrapped her arms around him in a warm hug.

Now, as he pulled out of the parking lot to go home, to leave that world behind, he wasn't so sure. He thought about her as he drove. And he thought of the children. Of how they had grown up, become educated, and matured. And he thought of how their love kept them together. And then, for the first time in a long time, he smiled.

I Can Tell You This

I COULDN'T BEGIN to say whether or not I wanted to kill the psychologist. He would have definitely thought I was crazy then. But what the hell was his problem? How did he think I got the goddamn marks on my head. Not to mention the fucking thing I had implanted in my stomach. But whatever, he only believed in the "hard facts" anyway. He couldn't possibly comprehend what I had experienced. I couldn't even understand all of it. I guess that's why at was at this damn place spending all of my hard-earned money.

I got up out of that god-awful leather couch, that made me want to puke every time I smelled it, and went to tell the doc that I didn't want to come hear his psycho-babble anymore. Well I didn't say it exactly like that but I got the point across. He understood and I wrote him a check and was on my way.

As I stepped into my car a sudden memory swept over me. I was in a lighted room that looked like a dentists dream room. There were prodding and prying instruments of every shape and size. And then I remember the pain I experienced. I would rather have shit out a basketball then have my head and stomach ripped open and explored by foreign objects. I couldn't move, yell, or breathe. All I could do is watch as aliens roamed my body for god knows what. Finally I yelled and found myself screaming in front of a old country store in Connecticut. The least those gray bastards could have done was put me back in my home state of PA.

The memory faded and I realized that I had lost track of time again. I was sitting in my car for the past twenty-five minutes. Nadine was probably getting worried. But I couldn't go home yet; I had to buy some food at the grocery store. If I was going to make sense of this I needed to do it on a full stomach.

After shopping around for the usual eggs and fruit snacks I arrived home to see my wife standing in the doorway. She greeted me with a kiss and informed me that my friend Carl called and wanted to meet me later at the Y. I guess he wanted me to beat him in a few games of basketball like I usually do. After dinner I got changed and went to meet Carl.

Carl was my best friend and the only one who knew about my little mishap, besides the psychologist. On the night of March 24, I called Carl and had him pick me up from that country store in Connecticut and not long after that I proceeded to tell him everything I could remember. Like a good friend he

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believed me and like a good friend he suggested that I see a psychologist. Which I shouldn't have went to in the first place. Goddamned people are thieves.

I got to the Y and saw an ambulance and a few cop cars scattered at random spots around the front of the building so I decided to go in the other way. As I approached the gym floor I noticed that it was empty. Something was wrong; Carl was always there before me. But this time I had a feeling that he wasn't showing up. I knew even before I went to check the front of the building. I walked out to the front and saw what looked like a body only it was decomposed beyond recognition. The only reason I knew it was Carl's body was because of the number 32 chain he wore around his neck. How in the hell did this happen? I asked the officer but he had no answers and neither did the medical staff on hand. Just then I felt a strong surge of heat run through my body. I had to get away from where I was and fast.

I jumped back into my car and drove to an old deserted basketball court in the middle of the country. I had to go relieve some stress and clear things up in my mind and I could think of a better place to do this than the place where I solved many problems and relieved unheard of amounts of tension.

The place hadn't changed since the last time I was here trying to resolve a serious dispute that my wife and me had a year back. We started falling behind in our bills and she wanted to get a second job. The only problem was I was to "macho" to let her do it and all hell broke loose. But I came here to think things through. It was a peaceful place. Actually it was this old broken down court that made me realize I was the one who was wrong. And after I apologized and smoothed things over, my marriage has been perfect; I couldn't be happier.

I stepped into the chain-linked fence and looked around. The metal on the fence and the basketball hoops seemed to give off a cold aura. I decided to shoot around like I usually do to start my thinking. After a few minutes of replaying that horrible sight in my head of my best friends' body I came to a conclusion that I didn't know what the fuck was going on. It was like he aged from twenty-five to eighty in a matter of days. I couldn't begin to comprehend that. And just then a surge of heat rushed through my body again. It was a disgusting feeling. Like diving into a pool of manure. But at the same time it was invigorating. My muscles felt energized and overwhelmed with power. I had no idea why I felt so good physically. I hadn't been working out or anything, just the occasional pick-up game of basketball. It was getting dark so I decided to go home.

On my way home I got thinking again. And although it didn't make sense, it all added up. All this weird shit (Carl dying and these repulsing yet invigorating

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heat flashes I had been experiencing) didn't hit until after those weird fucks dropped me off in Connecticut. I credited the heat flashes to the surgical techniques of the alien bastards, but Carl dying didn't make sense.

As I stepped in my house everything was quiet. I looked in my bedroom and saw that Nadine was sleeping already so I stayed down stairs so I didn't wake her. I began to go to the kitchen when another heat flash ran ramped throughout my body. That was three in one day. I couldn't figure it out. I mean I felt ten times stronger every time a flash occurred, but emotionally I felt like shit.

I returned to the living room to watch the news and eat my fruit snacks. I always liked the generic kind better. Not only are they cheaper but they taste a hell of a lot better too. The news was always boring I didn't even know why I was watching it in the first place. I was just about to turn it when I heard a familiar name mentioned. "Dr. Marcus Slater was found dead an hour ago in his car outside his office in Somerset, PA. As of right now police aren't sure how Slater died. The only thing they can say for sure is that he body was severely decomposed." My heart sunk to the floor. It seemed that Slater had died from the same thing that Carl did. What the hell was going on?

After watching the rest of that news clip I had to take a nap. I nodded off on the couch and fell into a horrible nightmare. I found myself walking on a giant grid of some sort and it was extremely hot. I saw everyone that I had ever known around me. They were all crying and pleading for me to stay away from them. I couldn't understand why, but I didn't want to disappoint them so I didn't go near them. Just then I saw an image of the earth up ahead and right before my eyes it exploded.

I woke up in a cold sweat finding myself disturbed by what just occurred in my dream. None of it made any sense but it really got to me. When I did come around to realizing I was in reality I noticed that it was around four in the morning, the television station wasn't showing anything, and I felt like I could bench press a car. I couldn't explain it but these flashes, I think, were making me stronger and even though it was four in the morning I had to go see if my strength had really increased.

I figured I would start with something simple so I went outside to my car and decided to position myself near the back end where the bumper was and put my back towards the car. I squatted down and grabbed the car with my hands and lifted up on it and to my surprise it came off the ground. I figured that I lifted my car up because of the strength I got from all of my years playing basketball and because I owned a little ford escort, however I did feel strong. After my car episode I proceeded to walk over to tree to try and pull it up by its roots. The

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weird thing was I did it. It was like pulling a toothpick out of the icing of a cake. I knew something was up now.

I figured that I should get some sleep before I woke up again and continued my newly found weird life so I crawled into bed with Nadine and was very careful not to wake her. Usually I do but this time I was extra careful.

When the morning arrived I slid out of bed the same way I slid into bed: quiet and undetected. I had to get out early to get away from it all and ponder some more about what was going on. When I got into my car it was almost noon, I definitely slept in this morning.

As I jumped into my car I realized something that I should have realized as soon as I woke up. Nadine was still sleeping. And as I started to drive, I figured that she was just waiting up all night for me and needed her sleep. Still it was better that way. She didn't need to be questioning me about where I had been or what I was doing.

I pulled up to a gas station to fill my tank, but when I started pumping to fill it I couldn't help but think about Nadine. I felt a sense of urgency fill my body. I needed to go back to the house and explain myself to her. I had to tell her everything.

As I pulled up to the house I was delighted to be alive (for once in the past few days). I opened the door and called for Nadine: no answer. I figured that I hadn't been gone that long so she was probably still sleeping. I knew just what to do. Running full speed, I dove on to her and ripped the blanket off of her ready to shower her with my love when I realized that it wasn't Nadine. For the love of god, it wasn't Nadine. Well it was but... It wasn't either. The dried up crisp of a carcass was Nadine and the only reason I knew was because I saw her close on her and her wedding ring.

Now I knew that aliens fucking with me messed my head up, a little bit at least, but now, some how, this was fucking with my whole life. I started to put the pieces together. My best friend, the psychologist, and now my beautiful wife, they all died. Jesus Christ, why. I also noticed that the heat flashes equaled the same amount of people that died. And all of those people were in contact with me before they died. I almost had a full understanding of what was happening. Who ever I came in contact with DIED. However, something didn't make sense. I was strong as hell. I could lift cars and uproot trees with out thinking about it. And I felt like a physical god. I couldn't figure it out. I also figured out my dream. No one wanted to be near me because they would die, but what about the world blowing up? I needed an explanation.

I went back to the basketball court to think about what to do. As I arrived there I noticed around 5 teenage kids playing basketball. Paying no attention to them I went to the other end of the court to shoot around and think about my

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situation. Not a second after my first shot I heard one of them suggest to the rest of them that they rob me. I turned around to see the five of them walking after me holding knives. In my state of depression I was glad that they were going to kill me, at least I would be at peace then. One of them grabbed me, he then pulled away quickly looking at his hand. He said something like, “the bastard is made of acid.” Before I knew it, the skin on his hand started to disappear. This continued through out his whole body until he was lying on the ground in a heap of guts and bones. The others ran in terror as any normal person would have done and I just stood there in awe of what I had done. I figured that the others died that way too. Although they didn’t touch me, they were exposed to me and probably died as a result. I was a walking epidemic.

I got back into my car and started to go to the sight where I was abducted. As I was traveling there a million things were running through my head. One specific was how was getting my life normal again, if there was such a thing anymore.

I pulled into the place where I recalled getting abducted. There was a few trees some rocks and a spot in the middle of a circle of trees that had an insignia on it. I couldn’t make it out from far away so I got closer. When I did finally see what it was I was horrified at the sight. Encompassed inside a big picture of the earth was my body and around me were what looked like millions of bodies. I touched the insignia and it began to move and show a miniature move. I was waling along and touching everyone killing them the way I killed that teenager at the court. Eventually I was the only one left on earth. A few seconds later the insignia showed a ship come down with a bunch of aliens getting out of it and I was put into a cage while they took over earth. I was pissed and terrified at the same time. However, before I could think about what was going on, I saw a bright light in the sky. I knew it was the aliens. I got up to go run to my car I began to realize what I had to do. I made it to my car and got my shotgun that I keep for protection, out of my back seat. I turned around to see them coming towards me and I yelled, “STOP.” There was a pause by all of them; there must have been about 20. I started to speak: “Before I go down fighting I want you to know that your plan isn’t going to work. I will not begin to kill all of human kind for you and your alien race to inhabit earth. What I will do is fight you to the death.” Just as they came towards me I raised the shotgun and put it in my mouth and pulled the trigger.

I found myself in a paralyzed state looking up at the aliens knowing I was going to die. They all gathered around me and all of them touched me at the same time. From that point on I don’t remember anything, but I can tell you this: Death is an unusual thing. I am not sure where I am, heaven or hell. I am assuming hell because I am living in my worst fear, with the aliens in a cage.

Krista Paul

A Christmas Surprise

On the eve before Christmas I lie in bed,
trying to hear reindeer footsteps overheard.
As I was about to close my eyes to dream,
I heard footsteps... or so it seemed.

So I ran downstairs into the living room
as Santa fell down the chimney and landed with a BOOM!
He cursed and he screamed as he wiped himself off
and I hid behind the couch and tried not to cough.

His words were slurred so I guess he was drunk,
he kept repeating “Brad Pitt ain’t such a hunk.”
He went to the stockings and then to the tree,
and peed on the presents for a minute or three.

I jumped up from behind the couch
and told him to stop, “Get out of my house!”
He turned around and fell over a chair
if he was hurt I really couldn’t care.

Then he yelled with all his might,
“You shilly sit I don’t want to fight,
go back upstairs into your little bed
or I’ll get out my shotgun and blow off your head!”

By then I was crying and couldn’t believe
that this beer-bellied Santa just wouldn’t leave.
He went to the kitchen and grabbed a six-pack of beer
and finally went back up the chimney for his reindeer.

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“On Dasher, on Elmer and the rest of yous guys...
let’s get out of here, let’s hit the skies”

I cleaned up the mess and went back to my bed
and pretended that night was all in my head.
No one ever found out what happened that night,
when me and a drunken Santa almost had us a fight.

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