Thomas F. Deitz is a celebrated novelist and dedicated professor. His books have stirred the fires of imagination in many readers and his classroom inspires students to embrace literature. We at The Chestatee Review owe a great deal to Tom Deitz. Not only has his enthusiasm brought many projects to life, but Professor Deitz's willingness to assist in any capacity has endeared him to us and made his input invaluable. He has worked at our sides to bring literary events to the student body and, as an advisor to The Gainesville State College Writers' Group, has championed the importance of writing as only someone who truly loves the art can.

The staff of The Chestatee Review dedicates the 2009 edition to Professor Tom Deitz for his commitment to magazine and the Writers' Group. While advising both programs, Professor Deitz strove to bring the magazine, and the group of young writers who worked on it, closer to their full potential.

The 2009 edition of The Chestatee Review is a much-anticipated step in the life of the magazine. With the collaboration of both campuses, this issue displays the evolution of The Chestatee Review both as an organization and as a literary magazine.

Throughout the two years that I have served as a staff member of The Chestatee Review, I have learned much about the publication process and the intricacies that are involved. As Editor, I have learned that the most valuable part of this process is recognizing the importance of the staff and knowing how to delegate responsibilities to them. With that being said, I would like to specifically recognize a few people who have made this issue possible and who have persevered through the near impossible times. I would like to start with my Assistant Editor, Leah Perdue. Leah was the person to hold my head on my shoulders while it was spinning in fifty different directions, and she pulled through many times when I couldn't. Next, Professor and Head Advisor Dorothy Blais taught me more about the arts of literature and management in the past two years than any college course ever could. I can easily say that Professor Blais is one of the most influential educators that I have had in my entire career as a student. Finally, I would like to recognize Art Advisor John Amoss and Art Editor Rachel Reed. John and Rachel have been ever so patient this term and have pulled through to yet again create an amazing layout that gives an identity to the magazine.

The way I have viewed The Chestatee Review for the past two years is that it is a celebration of artistic self expression. As a young person living in a technology-based world, I have witnessed the unfortunate decrease of young authors, artists, and readers. I hope this issue of The Chestatee Review will motivate readers to make a change and accept the challenge of embracing creativity.

Brandon Carey
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Adolescence would be founded on the torrents of the South's arteries instead of the screaming fields of soccer moms, mini-vans, and Capri-Sun drenched half-times.

- Strainer by Hunter Orvis
Please, get me out of here, Jenni thought. The weight of her backpack pulled her down as she struggled to keep up with her family. Her mother was still going on about the unfair over-weight charge for their luggage, while her father slowly cooked to his boiling point. Helsinki-Vantaa International closed in on them, steely and grey, with people lounging on its chairs, rushing to or from its gates, biting into its greasy sandwiches. They all seemed calm compared to her family. I just want things to go back to normal.

"Jenni, keep moving," her father said in that tone of his, the one he always got while traveling. She could tell he was ready to explode. She glanced at her sister, Aino, who paced by her side, eyes glowing. Aino wore a Georgia Bulldogs baseball cap. Traitor, Jenni thought.

She looked at the time, which drew dangerously close to departure, and thought of her friends, all stuck in geography class, struggling to stay awake. What a wonderful place, she thought. She would give anything to sit there in her desk that was probably still empty and watch the minutes crawl forward at an excruciatingly slow pace while Mrs. Lahti droned on. But she was moving towards the great unknown, and nothing would get her out of it.

"Girls, there’s something we need to discuss," their mother had said one night a month ago, back in their little house in the country, which by now was being filled with strange furniture by the new owners. They were the words that had spelled out her doom, Jenni felt.

"We’re moving to America. Your dad just got an amazing offer, and we’re leaving in a month," her mother had said, giddy as a schoolgirl, as their father sat beside her at the dinner table, nodding solemnly. Both girls sat silent for a moment, as rebellion filled Jenni’s mind. Finally, Aino erupted in a "What?"

"I know it won’t be easy, but we’ll make it through. Think of it as a great opportunity, all the new things you’ll see," their mother said.

"I’m not going. My friends are here. My life is here. You can go wherever you want, but I’m staying here," Aino said, squeezing past her sister and thumping up the stairs. Their mother sighed.

"I agree with her," Jenni said. "What’s wrong with your job in Finland? I thought you guys were happy here."

"It’s not that simple, Jenni," her father said. "I’m tired of spending my days in commute, and all the jobs are in the city. We’ve already enrolled you two in the local high-school. Just trust me when I say we’ll be better off over there. It’s just going to take some adjustment."

And now, as they rushed towards gate A12, Aino’s eyes glowed like a child’s. Without warning, her protests had turned to excitement. Jenni felt miles away from her family, like an invisible barrier separated her from them. How effortlessly they seemed to leave behind the only place they’d ever called home. She had stayed still for sixteen years, and now, with her life packed in the back of a jet plane, she was being rushed towards uncertainty at a blinding speed.

They flew over dense green forests and yellow quilt-like fields, over glittering sea and cities that seemed to have sprung out of the earth like a puzzle with a million delicate pieces. A thick floor of cloud spread beneath them, and Jenni stayed with her hand stuck to the cold window, trembling with fear. Aino slept in the seat next to her, legs curled up and leaning heavily on Jenni’s shoulder, face covered with the Georgia Bulldogs baseball cap. Their parents sat behind them; she could hear her mother’s voice, strange and metallic, filtered through the pressurized air of the cabin and the constant roar of the engines. Jenni had never flown before. She had never left the country. She felt uneasy even walking through the front door, let alone seated hundreds and hundreds of miles away in an aluminum tube that carried her high above the clouds. Jenni had never flown before. She felt uneasy even walking through the front door, let alone seated hundreds and hundreds of miles away in an aluminum tube that carried her high above the clouds. She kept one hand on the window and squeezed the hand rest with the other, certain that the plane would plummet down if she relaxed for one moment.

She survived the trip and the long drawn out formalities that accompanied the arrival to the country. Soon after, they were packed inside a car and headed towards their house.

"How beautiful," Aino said, nose pressed against the window, staring at the impossibly tall buildings that pierced the grey sky. "It’s just like on TV."

Jenni looked reluctantly at the alien landscape spreading around her. Flyovers arched by, bizarre structures she had not seen even on TV, curving on all sides like an enormous piece of modern art. She thought of home, where nothing was taller than the trees. Here, there were no people, except in the cars. And the cars were everywhere: big cars, small cars, but mostly big. Enormous cars that looked more like tanks, cars twice the size of theirs with only one person in them. A motorcycle perhaps, but no bikes. Cars that zoomed forward on five lanes, each
lane wider than the only paved road in her home town. Cars plastered with stickers she couldn't understand.

"When can I get my learner's permit?" Aino asked, turning her head at the brightest and fastest of the cars.

"Learner's permit? Good lord," their mother said, laughing. "She's taking your car," she said to her husband.

"Soon," he said. "We need to get settled down, first." Aino leaned back in her seat. "You do, maybe. I'm settled."

"This is much smaller than our old home," Aino said as they walked in the already-furnished house for the first time.

"It's not our home," Jenni said. The furnishings were cozy and beige, a delicately unthreatening picture of suburban American life. The Swedish-made shelves had been stripped of family photos and the carpeted floors carefully scrubbed clean of any signs of life. Their mother was swooning with delight, fluttering from room to room, reveling in her dawning life as an American housewife. Jenni felt sick. This was not her home, nor would it ever be, she decided. It was nothing but a shelter from the suffocating heat that enveloped her the moment she exited the safe bubble of cool, conditioned air. Reluctantly, she filled her new closets with old clothes that still retained a hint of the smell of home. She hung her old drapes on her window and shut them carefully, sealing away the unfamiliar view. All through the following weeks of the family running around, trying to begin their lives again, she sprinkled memories of home all around the house. But it remained just that—a house. Never home, not for Jenni.

"You're her sister?" was a phrase Jenni would soon learn well. It hid many implications beyond its literal meaning, as Jenni soon found that the people of America, these smiling, tall, handsome and beautiful creatures in their impeccably picked outfits and carefully manicured nails, delighted in the secret world of meaning thinly veiled under the words. The soft, round words of the English language poured abundantly from their lips: a cheerfully bubbling stream of buttery R's and velvety G's they used to pronounce her name, of vowels sweet as bird song. Jenni tripped and stumbled over the sounds her mouth refused to mimic, sounds that her tongue rejected. She pictured her mouth a big, clumsy, square hole cut out of wood, through which it was impossible to fit the round peg of English. And the handsome and beautiful people complimented her fascinating accent. But more often, they said "You're her sister?"

Of course, it wasn't inconceivable to think that two sixteen-year-old girls from Finland who show up at the same high school at the same time are sisters. However, Jenni soon felt the differences between herself and her sister stronger than ever. Among the other kids, dressed in their skin-tight jeans and labels with unpronounceable names, Jenni stood out in her long skirts and plain blouses and knitted sweaters too hot for the weather but necessary for the air-conditioning that blasted her. Aino was quick to notice. Within days, she had transformed her wardrobe and now wore the uniform of the stylish American high school kid. Her hair had reacted badly to the humid climate, poofing up in a cloud of blonde frizz. Armed with combs and lotions and sprays, painstakingly picked from the mile-long aisle of the local supermarket, she had won the battle and coerced her hair into shiny, soft curls. Jenni watched her as she stood in her boots and tight jeans, flirting with some boys between classes. The boys were infinitely fascinated with Aino's exoticism, and she loved the attention. Her eyes were dark with mascara and her lips Perfectly Pink. Jenni hated makeup, couldn't care less about her own colorless hair.

"You've gotta bring out your good features," Aino had once said, poking towards her eyes with a stick of mascara. Jenni had studied her own face for a long time, searching her reflection for those redeeming qualities every girl was supposed to have and, through make-up, bring out. She couldn't find any. Her face was like a rough lump of dough—irregular, textured, with bones sticking out in all the wrong places, drawing shadows which only grew deeper under the lenses of her large, thick glasses. It wasn't uncommon for people to jokingly suggest she was Aino's mother rather than her sister. Jenni scoffed at Aino's swarm of fans. She didn't need that. She was floating, detached; nothing but a Scandinavian ghost, drifted too far from the ancient lakes and forests of home.

Ever since they had arrived in the country, Aino had talked of nothing more than driving lessons. She took every opportunity to bring it up, harassing their parents day and night over when they would sign her permit or when she could take their car for a spin.

"Jesus, Minna, you believe they let kids that young drive here?" their father said one morning to their mother, leaning on the kitchen counter and drinking coffee from a "World's Best Dad" mug.

"I'm starting to believe it. The distances here are ridiculous," their mother responded.
"Why don’t you take the bus, Aino? I don’t hear Jenni complaining," he said.

"Come on, dad. Nobody here takes the bus. You’re still stuck in Europe, I guess," Aino said, "And so is Jenni."

Jenni picked at her oversweet yogurt. "I wish."

"Wow, Jenni. You really need to start living in reality. People at school think you’re so weird, all you talk about is Finland."

"Well, what else am I supposed to talk about? It’s all they ask."

"How would you know? You hardly speak English," Aino said, smirking. "All I’m saying is you need to start accepting the fact that we’re here. I think driving lessons would do you good. Right, a few lessons after school, mom?"

"Is that your new approach? Alright, I suppose I could take you two for a few lessons after school," their mother said. Their father raised an eyebrow at her.

"It’s not like I have anything better to do," she said.

Their father’s car was a Ford Taurus, cherry red and American-made. Grinning, Aino skipped all the way from the front door to the car and eased herself into the driver’s seat.

"Wait a minute, I’m driving," their mother said, closing the front door behind her. Jenni got in the back.

"How am I supposed to learn to drive from the passenger seat?" Aino said, switching seats.

"I’m taking you to a safe area, then you can try."

"Mom, you’re no fun," said Aino.

Aino was first. In the empty parking lot, she stomped on the gas pedal and then the brake, sending the contents of their mother’s purse flying on the floor. Circling around the lot, she laughed and laughed and opened the window with the touch of a button and leaned her arm on the door. Jenni held on in the back, mumbling prayers and curses, shutting her eyes tight until the car finally jerked to a stop.

"It’s Jenni’s turn now."

"Already? Just one more time," Aino said, but their mother shook her head.

Jenni wasn’t sure which she would rather face: another round of Aino’s driving or sitting behind the wheel herself. Carefully, she slipped into the driver’s seat and buckled up the seatbelt.

"You ready? Switch it to D and step on the gas, simple as that," her mother said. Jenni applied pressure to the pedal, and the car jerked forward, just like before. Aino laughed from the back seat.

"I think I’m done, mom. I don’t care about driving," Jenni said, squeezing the brake down hard.

"Let’s try it one more time. Carefully," her mother said. Sighing, Jenni applied the lightest touch of pressure on the gas pedal, and the car rolled forward.

"There you go. You see, there’s nothing to it. Now, turn on the blinker and let’s take you to the road."

"She gets to drive on the road? How is this fair?" said Aino, leaning up between them.

"Easy does it. You’re doing fine. Let’s keep moving," their mother said. Jenni began to feel the strain on her muscles as she drove onto the road, squeezing the wheel with white knuckles. The sooner she went through with it, the sooner it’d be over. After this, nothing could convince her to get back behind the wheel.

Cars flew by them as she slowly drove along, her eyes fixed tightly ahead. Her mother told her where to turn, while Aino yelled “Faster!” from the back seat.

"Speed up, darling, we’re going on the highway!" her mother said as they approached the ramp.

"What, mom, are you insane? I can’t do this!" Jenni said, and the car slowed down.

"It’s too late to turn back now. Faster," her mother urged, and she sped up. "Congratulations, you’re on the highway," her mother said. The car moved at sixty miles an hour, and Jenni felt dizzy. The concrete had turned to blurry lines, and cars roared past her from all sides. The vents blasted her face with a chemical smell. Aino reached up to turn on the radio, and cheerful country music filled the air. So this is the soundtrack to our death, thought Jenni. Enormous trucks like houses passed her on both sides, casting her tiny vehicle in shadow. SUVs filled her rear view mirror, like hostile faces glaring at her. When they finally disappeared, she saw a string of yellow headlights to a backdrop of grey trailing off into the horizon behind them, like Christmas lights. Her car was cardboard, she felt. It was one of the tiny toy cars she saw as the plane was taking off, so easily crushed, light enough for the wind squealing outside to push it around. The road seemed to have shrunk, too: the edges of her lane seemed to disappear under her car, and she was certain she would soon crash into someone. She pictured the crumbling vehicles, screeching metal, and breaking glass, and held back the urge to scream. After the longest fifteen minutes of her life, she finally pulled up to their
driveway. She flung the door open and rushed to the house, never wanting to see another car in her life.

A few days later on a Saturday night, Jenni sat in her room, blaring a Finnish rock band on the stereo to drown out her parents’ bickering. Aino opened the door to her room and stood there staring.

“What?” Jenni said, turning down the volume.

“Want to go to the mall with us?” Aino asked.

“Who’s us?”

“Me and Dale. We could go see a movie.”

Dale was a senior whom Jenni often saw chatting with Aino at school. He was one of those guys who hardly spared a glance for Jenni, and one who definitely went “She’s her sister?” when he heard.

“Look, I know you’re going to say no, but just this time,” Aino said. “For me?”

“Fine,” said Jenni.

The mall was a sprawling maze, twice larger, thought Jenni, than her far-away home town. The stores beckoned with items she never knew she needed, but the signs in the windows pleaded otherwise. Men and women stood or sat in chairs next to their merchandise in the middle of the labyrinthine passages, calling out to them. The people walking by would boldly smile at her, or compliment on something, usually whatever she felt most insecure about. She suspected that in English, the veiled language, “I like your skirt” actually meant they found it strange. She felt conspicuous, too visible, like a fiery emergency flare against a black sky. She was an alien among the beautiful people, the honeyed tongues, the ones who expressed care over how another was doing and responded to a simple sneeze with a chorus of “bless you’s.”

Aino, too, was an alien, but she had disguised herself well. Jenni sat with her and Dale in the swarmed food court, brooding over her salad while the others chowed down burgers. Aino was going on about the love lives of two of her friends, leaning close to Dale and touching him frequently. Dale called her “Annie,” and she glowed. Jenni could hear the strain in her speech. It dripped with sweetness as she tried to mimic the softness of the American accent and conceal her own. She had taken a blade to the square chopped out of wood and was trying to carve it round for the American peg to fit through. She still knew more English than Jenni; she would explode into laughter over a pun exchanged with Dale while Jenni sat in silence.

“Why do you keep trying to sound American?” Jenni finally said, in Finnish.

“Shut up,” Aino said. When Dale asked what Jenni had said, Aino responded, “She’s just being my stupid sister.”

Soon after, Jenni found out the real reason Aino had asked her to come. After a few secretive moments of giddy excitement by Aino, they met up with a second young guy whom Jenni had never seen before.

“Jenni, I’d like you to meet Mark,” she said.

“I like your glasses,” said Mark.

“Have fun, guys,” Aino then said, grabbed Dale by the arm, and began to walk away.

“Where are you going?” Jenni asked, the realization of the set-up dawning on her.

“Dale’s place,” Aino replied. “Don’t worry. Mom’s coming to pick you up after the movie.” She hastened her steps and disappeared with Dale into the crowd. Jenni turned to the boy, her cheeks flushed with anger and embarrassment.

“So, it’s great to finally meet you, Jenni. I’ve heard a lot about you. You’re not at all like I expected,” Mark said, smiling. “There’s still time before the movie. Wanna go grab a cup of coffee?” Shocked numb by her emotions, all Jenni could do was nod. The two paced side by side in silence into a small, crowded coffee shop, while Jenni’s mind was busy at work trying to figure out how to get out of the situation. She could only steal quick glances at the boy while he wasn’t looking. His face was handsome with an endearing touch of awkwardness. Suddenly, he turned to her, catching her gaze, and smiled, shaking at something dusty and long forgotten inside Jenni’s heart.

“I’ll have a cappuccino,” he told the cashier.

“Uh, me too,” Jenni said, cursing herself soon after. She hated cappuccino. Jenni’s spoon clinked against the coffee cup, and each second of silence between them grew more and more painful. English words were escaping her brain, running down like the droplets of moisture on her cup.

“It’s not every day you meet two girls from Finland,” Mark finally said. “Here I was thinking you’d be just like Annie, but honestly, you two look nothing alike.”

“Do you mean Aino? Oh, yes, she’s very different,” Jenni struggled through her words, blushing deeper as she went. “I didn’t know that she left so
“Huh? You mean...”

“Not come in the movies with us.”

Mark stared at her blankly for a moment before his face melted into a look of surprise.

“She set you up with me, didn’t she? Ah man, your sister is mean. No wonder you looked so upset back there.”

“Yes, very mean.”

“Look, I’m sorry. I didn’t realize. I kind of put you on the spot, didn’t I? I understand if you want me to leave.”

“No, no need to leave,” said Jenni weakly, hoping Mark wouldn’t listen. She looked up at him. He wore the most miserable look on his face as he stared down into his cappuccino.

“It’s just... English. It’s hard for me,” she said, forcing half a smile.

“I understand. It’s hard for me too, and I’m a native speaker. I can’t even imagine moving to another country and having to learn their language.”

You can’t possibly understand, Jenni thought, but what she said was, “It’s very strange to be in America.”

“How so?” asked Mark.

“Language and people... I feel like...” Jenni waved her hand in a circle as if trying to catch the words in the air.

“The cultural differences, maybe?”

“Yes, difference... I feel like I’m outside.”

Mark nodded. “I guess everyone feels like an outsider from time to time.”

“It’s not the same,” Jenni said, frowning at the boy’s arrogance. How little he knew! She glanced at her cell phone. One way or the other, Aino would pay for this.

“Where do you think I heard about you in the first place? Believe it or not, but that girl actually looks up to you. She’s just trying to help, I guess,” Mark said, emptying his cup and wiping his mouth on his sleeve. Jenni sighed louder than she needed to.

“You are not expert of me and my sister. She forced me here. I came to see movie with her, not you,” she said, her voice cracking. Mark stared at her quietly before standing up. The screech of his chair against the hardwood floor carried over the noisy crowd.

“I didn’t realize my company was that terrible. You really are very different from your sister. I’m sorry to have wasted your precious time,” he said, slid his hands into his pockets, and walked away. Jenni stared after him, heart pounding.

“Seriously. She’s always going on about you.”

“No, she isn’t.”

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On the nineteenth attempt, she reached her sister.

Jenni felt her face grow warm again. “I haven’t noticed.” Mark smirked.

“I suppose that’s why Annie set us up.”

“She set us up because she is mean.”

“I was just kidding. She loves you.” Jenni raised her eyebrow and slowly shook her head.

“Seriously. She’s always going on about you.”

“No, she isn’t.”

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Jenni stood outside the mall where nothing was like back home. Not the people, laughing and hollering, not the streets -- designed for cars, not humans -- not the smell of popcorn carrying over from the movie theater, not the bass thumping from cars passing by. Not the hot lick of air that plastered onto her skin even in the night, not the arrogantly tall pine trees and lush maples that looked nothing like the ones in her old back yard; not even the sky above. Standing there, she was the loneliest being on Earth, lonelier still than the moon, with nothing to keep her company but the heavy realization that come Monday, everyone would know what a rude, mean-spirited person she was. The stars above, dimmed by
the omnipresent lights, would not be seen back home, where day was already dawning.

Twenty minutes later, a cherry-red Ford Taurus jerked to a halt in front of her. The window rolled down, and she saw Aino in the driver’s seat, with their mother nowhere in sight.

“Get in,” she said.

“Where’s mom?” asked Jenni.

“She told me to come pick you up.”

“No she didn’t. I told you to ask her. You’re not allowed to drive.”

“Look, I left my date to come get you. Either get in or stay there, your choice.”

Jenni got in, and Aino made the wheels squeal.

“What the hell happened with Mark?” Aino asked, rounding the corner fast enough for Jenni to bump her head lightly on the window.

“How could you do something like that to me? I can’t believe you!”

“Something like what, try to introduce you to someone new? Oh, how horrible am I,” Aino said, stomping her stiletto boot down on the gas pedal.

“I never asked for it. I should never have trusted you.” Jenni leaned over and saw their speed approaching thirty over the limit. As she opened her mouth to protest, she caught the smell of alcohol on her sister’s breath.

“You’ve been drinking? Are you kidding me? You’re going to get us both killed,” she said.

“Relax. I had a few with Dale, no big deal.” The car zipped down a hill, accelerating as it went. Aino screamed and then laughed.

“I can’t believe how much you’ve changed. It’s like I left my sister back home,” Jenni said, holding tightly onto the door. “Can you please just slow down?” The car weaved past the other vehicles, narrowly avoiding impact. The headlights of the oncoming traffic floated in the dark beyond the median.

“Live a little, Jenni. Live! Do you know what that means? Maybe you should consider changing, too,” Aino said. “I think what you left back home was your personality. Have I even heard you laugh once after we came here?”

“What’s there to laugh about? We’re going to crash if you don’t slow down.”

Suddenly, Aino slammed the breaks, causing Jenni to double over. When she lifted her head, she saw a flash of blue between the trees ahead. Slowly, Aino rounded the corner. The police car sat on the side of the road, and Jenni’s heart raced. She looked carefully away from its black windshield, certain that the officer would soon peel out and arrest both of them and then subject her to the humiliation of facing her parents. Soon, however, the police car was nothing but a distant reflection in the side mirror.

“Even the cops aren’t as uptight as you,” Aino said, stepping on the gas once more. The two sat in silence as Aino raced through the streets. She flicked the radio on, and country music blared from the speakers.

“Can you just take me home? I can’t stand being around you right now,” Jenni said, turning the volume down.

“I try to do one nice thing for you and you act like a complete bitch,” Aino said. “I figured you’d feel lonely since you have no friends here, but I guess you’re perfectly fine in your own little world. Next time, I’ll just leave you in your room, start your own kingdom for all I care, United States of Jenni, population one.”

Jenni looked at her sister, illuminated by the waxing and waning streetlights, but she found no words. Aino stared at the road, with only the deepening furrow between her eyebrows indicating any emotion.

“Anything you say, Annie,” Jenni said quietly, as if the softness of her voice could protect them both from her venom. Soon, they arrived at their intersection, and Aino kept driving.

“Where are you going? That was our turn,” said Jenni, staring back into the dark. Aino stayed silent. “Just let me out; I’ll walk home.” Aino clicked the locks shut and kept driving. “You’re kidnapping me now?” Jenni asked. They left behind the brightly lit gas stations and convenience stores, and soon the streetlights ran out. The road outside the beam of their headlights was black, and an impenetrable wall of forest lined it. Jenni had given up trying to persuade her sister, and the silence between them was filled by the wailing voice of a country singer going on about the hopelessness of life to an upbeat tune. Another turn later, Aino finally stopped the car.

“Where the hell are we? Are you going to take me home?” Jenni asked, and Aino stepped out of the car. As Jenni followed, she saw they had arrived at a small clearing, with the treetops reaching high toward the hundreds of stars that insistently shone through the distant man-made light, while the forest, strangled by kudzu, made noise around them. The night wind had finally pushed away the suffocating heat of the Georgia summer, and goose bumps rose on her skin. She looked over and saw Aino slowly wading through the brush.
“Where are you going?” Jenni called, walking after her. Soon, the trees gave way to reveal an endless glittering sea of light; the living, breathing town spread beneath them, with the city rising towards the sky far away in the distance. Aino leaned on the trunk of a tree, her hands in the pockets of her tight jeans.

“It’s pretty, huh,” she said. Incredulously, Jenni stared at the city.

“Mom really did tell me to come get you,” Aino then said. “She’s being dramatic again. She didn’t care that I don’t have a license or that I’d had a few drinks. She trusts me, I think.”

Jenni looked at her sister. The lights of the city glowed on Aino’s skin, and there was a sad look in her eyes.

“She seems so unhappy lately. And you do, too. And dad is always working. Sometimes I wonder if it was a good idea to come here, after all.” She stepped closer to the edge of the cliff and peered down. Jenni grabbed the back of her sweater. Aino turned her face to Jenni and smiled.

“But look, America’s not that bad, really. It’s actually kind of beautiful.” She tossed her hands up in the air and yelled as loud as she could, her voice echoing in the night. She then allowed Jenni to pull her away from the edge. The two sisters stood with the forest behind them and the lights before them, and for the briefest of moments, Jenni was surprised to realize that she felt grateful to be sharing the view with Aino.

“Okay, let’s get back before a murderer gets us,” Aino said, smiling. Jenni grabbed her arm, still silent, as if to stop her from disappearing into the forest, and they headed to the car.

Once there, Aino flung the door open and stepped aside. “Drive us home.”

“No,” Aino grabbed her arm.

“No, it’s not you,” she said. “I mean, it’s not you.”

“Do it, or we’ll stay here.” Terrified by the idea of driving, let alone driving on the strange, dark streets, Jenni shook her head. She had driven enough.

“You’ll be okay,” Aino said. “We’ll make it, I promise.” Gently, she pushed her sister inside the car. The cool wind that rattled in the trees was icy on Jenni’s feverish skin.

“All you need to do is grab the wheel, Jenni,” Aino said, smiling.

“You know…”

Terry reasoned for a moment, took a few staccato pecks at his day’s last cigarette and strained to get out the words before releasing his smoky breath. “You can steal up to fourteen hundred ninety-nine dollars before it’s a felony.”

“Where’d you come across that information?” Jeremiah said, grinning at him with a skeptic’s squint.

“Uncle told me last week,” Terry said. “At the hunting club.” Terry sucked from the fragile, burning paper until his finger nerves screamed, drowning out his tobacco high. He stubbed out the cigarette on the wet sidewalk and occupied his jittery hands with the contents of his Bum Equipment sweatshirt pockets: ten bucks in tips, black mini Bic lighter, house key, lint, and loose tobacco debris.

“Yep,” he said, kicking a small pebble with his tennis shoe, “Said somebody stole some cash off a dead jogger’s body in the mountains, and the guy got away with just a misdemeanor because he only took 800 bucks.”

“Which uncle?” Jeremiah asked.

“Randy, my mom’s brother,” Terry said.

“Well, where did Uncle Randy hear this? I mean, sounds like just some hunting club story or something. You know they just make up stuff and shoot the shit when it’s raining and you’re all holed up down there.”

“No, no” Terry said, his widened eyes catching the moonlight. “He heard it on the news. Was in the papers too. It’s for real, man. I’m telling you.”

Terry and Jeremiah had been standing for about half an hour by the chain-link fence that bordered the campus. They’d worked the late, late shift at the Hawthorne Street Burrito Hut and begun their routine walk home at 2:00AM.

Both twenty-somethings lived across town in an income-sensitive neighborhood with rows of identical two bedroom, one bath, brown siding A-frame houses. Terry and his mother ended up there when his father left for upstate Mississippi, and they couldn’t afford their subdivision house on her city-bus-driving paycheck.

Terry had never heard his mother speak on the matter, but he’d overheard a busybody neighbor say about his father, “I heard he’s found another woman and moved in with her. A waitress at one of those truck stops or something. You know,
something new and exciting for a night. Eventually he'll get bored and move on to the next.” And while Terry hadn’t completely done away with the notion of unfinished business with his father, he mostly chose indifference, so much that his mother worried he would become indifferent altogether.

Quite contrastingly, Jeremiah lived with both his parents, his smothering parents, who were professors at Mississippi State. They’d moved from Chicago when Jeremiah was fourteen, and it only took them a couple weeks to completely alienate themselves from the rest of Dixie. Instead of buck heads and Country Home Interior, their tiny house was lined with old textbooks, dry-rotted educational posters, forgotten thesis manuscripts and half-finished intellectual endeavors.

Jeremiah had begged his parents for weeks to let him apply for the Burrito Hut job, and they eventually caved when he argued that the job would allow him to be well-rounded and not become bored with his studies. He was trying to get into the junior college in hopes of eventually transferring into the big university.

Terry, being of stout personality, had instantly pegged Jeremiah for a sheltered weakling and took him under his experienced wing, placing him behind the Burrito Hut counter two months ago, and the young men bonded over late shifts and walks home.

Tonight, the two had closed up as usual, rounded the corner of the Pizza Hut and turned down the Hawthorne Street sidewalk, beginning their twenty-minute stroll. Bordering them on the right was one of Jackson County’s nicer neighborhoods where mostly government officials and private business owners lived. To the left was the chain-link fence, and just on the other side was a row of freshly pruned Crepe Myrtles. One could see over the fence and into the vast North Quad of Mississippi State University, but the looming white oak canopy limited visibility, especially at this hour.

However, a fresh summer rain shower had passed through while Terry and Jeremiah were closing up shop, and the moonlight created a glistening effect on the soaked terrain allowing Terry to catch the twinkling glare off the young woman’s cell phone.

Of course, at first, the two stood stunned and silent for a few moments and then crept like reluctant cats up to the fence, gingerly curling each of their fingers around its own metal octagon.

The girl lay facing the fence with her head tilted downward toward her shoulder with a mass of honey blonde bangs shading her eyes and the bridge of her nose. A stream of dark crimson blood trickled from beneath her hair, and the bangs acted like rain gutters filtering it onto the cobblestone walkway beneath her. Her shoulders were splayed out evenly, each blade resting against the stones, but her hips twisted back towards the fence, her right leg overlapping the left in twisted contortion.

“She was approached from behind and swung around to catch a glimpse of her attacker just before she lost consciousness,” Terry had concluded earlier. And he’d done so quite confidently, attributing his forensics knowledge to 3:00AM reruns of Dragnet on the “TV Classics” channel.

In southern Mississippi, summer nights are curiously hotter than hazy afternoons. Fittingly, the young woman was clad in stone-washed jeans, a sea green knit halter tank with a pink daisy insignia over her left breast, and dingy, camel-colored flip flops. One of the flip flops had been lost, probably during the girl’s fall, and was laying face up a few feet away from her in a rogue moonbeam that had escaped the canopy’s web. Terry and Jeremiah could see each brown sweat circle her toes had painted after a whole spring semester’s worth of trekking.

The boys’ lungs struggled with the warm, heavy steam which made up the base note of the stagnant, post-rain air. Mixed in were notes of previously spilled beer and the pee it resulted in during ritualistic football victory parties. The boys didn’t pick up any particular scent of perfume on the girl, but their nose hairs caught wind of the sour, sweet stench of her sweat simmering atop her warm skin. The last and most subtle note was the bitter, metallic smell of fresh blood spilling from the girl’s crown.

“Well, I’d say it’s your stereotypical scenario,” Terry said. “I say she was walking home late from a party, had too much to drink, got annoyed, defensive, and swore to everybody she’d ‘walk her fucking self home,’ and she did, and then got herself attacked. I hate to make light of it—I really do—but she had to have known better. Couldn’t have been too sharp. Know what I mean?”

“I guess…” Jeremiah trailed off, turning to scan the girl’s petite, lifeless frame for the thousandth time.

“I mean, I’m not necessarily saying she deserved it.” Terry said, “but she kind of walked into it, don’t you think? To put it another way, you can’t sleep under a pine tree and expect to wake up without ticks.”

“But I totally understand Terry’s backwoods analogy.

Terry’s eyes traced every inch of the specimen, following the girl’s thin, tanned arm all the way down to her finger tips and onto a small, olive green canvas
purse lying mouth down a few inches away. Its flimsy material caved in on itself, and it appeared to be empty aside from the cell phone and a slick, plastic card that had been strewn almost all the way to the fence and gone unnoticed by the boys thus far.

"Hey, see that?" Terry said to Jeremiah pointing at the rectangular glare. "Maybe it's her I.D. See if you can grab it."

"Uh-uh," Jeremiah said in a voice much louder than the whispers they'd been exchanging, shaking his head "No" almost involuntarily, his freshly cut black mop swishing back and forth like a stallion's mane. "Shhh! Shut up!" Terry said, clenching Jeremiah's collar bone. "What's the fucking deal? Your hands and wrists are smaller. Just slide through and grab it. It'll fit."

Terry was right. Jeremiah was much smaller both in height and girth. Both boys wore the same camel khaki pants and bright yellow t-shirts that read 'BURRIT—OOOH YEAH!' in festive red and green lettering. But Jeremiah's boney hips and shoulders barely framed out his starched uniform, while Terry's soft paunch flopped over his weathered black-studded belt which was attached to an equally weathered, black leather wallet by way of a thick, silver chain. He liked to wear his hips and shoulders barely framed out his starched uniform, while Terry's soft paunch flopped over his weathered black-studded belt which was attached to an equally weathered, black leather wallet by way of a thick, silver chain. He liked to wear his weathered, black leather wallet by way of a thick, silver chain.

"Go on," Terry urged, shoving Jeremiah into the fence. "You know that old hobo will be making his rounds, searching the gutters just like every night. We've got to get it while no one's looking."

"It belongs to a dead girl, Terry," Jeremiah snapped. "It's for the cops to recover, not us. And you know I have exactly twenty minutes to get home. My folks already don't like me out this late."

"Jesus," Terry huffed and nudged Jeremiah over with a sturdy hip bump and knelt to reach the card. He shaped his stubby hand into a claw and with the help of residual fry grease, squeezed it through one of the bottommost octagons and pinned the slippery card between his middle and pointer fingers. Kneeling there pawing at the fence, Terry looked like a hungry bunny attempting to infiltrate a summer garden. It took a few drops and retries before he successfully breached the fence, but finally he secured the card and stood up, studying it under the moonlight.

Jeremiah, allowing his curiosity to overcome his heavy conscience, gravitated to Terry and peaked over his shoulder as he read aloud:

"To Natalie from Mom...This giftcard good for five hundred dollars and

zero cents."

"Where is it to?" Jeremiah interjected more excitedly than he'd meant or expected.

"Nowhere," Terry said. "It's a Mastercard giftcard. It's just money you can spend anywhere."

"Well, is there a pin number or anything? Does it say her name on it?"

Jeremiah asked.

"So we find a Mastercard, and all the sudden you're not Mr. Civil Servant anymore, huh?" Terry said, his lips parting in a patronizing grin. And then chuckling, he shook his head and sighed "All it ever took was a chance at a little free money for man's morals to fly out the kitchen window." Jeremiah took a step backwards and tilted his head, his irises staring back at Terry like two dark suns rising over his lash line of a horizon.

"First of all, I don't think the kitchen window was ever signified as the exact one the morals flew out. Really, Terry, I don't know where you come up with these absurd details. And second of all, you're one to talk about morals when you're the one who just grunted like a constipated wart hog while trying to finagle a dead girl's giftcard through a tiny fence hole."

"All right, fine. We're equally sleazy," Terry said. "Point is, this card's worth less than four hundred and ninety-nine dollars, so even if we're found out, it's only a misdemeanor, and nobody cares. But we won't be found out, so let's just say a customer left it at the Hut, and we never saw this one the morals flew out. Really, Terry, I don't think the kitchen window was ever signified as the exact one we can make that work to our benefit. So... what do you say? We can't just stand by and let 'em take this route home every night, Jeremiah?"

Terry said.

"You think the Jackson County cops keep tabs on the Burrito Hut boys' nightly routine, Jeremiah?"

Jeremiah felt uneasy about Terry's 'let's do it because we can' mentality, but remembering he was still somewhat afraid of Terry's impulsive and mischievous notions, he simply replied, "I guess we can't."
“There you go,” Terry said and slapped him with a firm hand on the back. “That’s the right frame of mind.” He pocketed the card, and the boys’ silhouettes grew smaller as they diminished down the wet, moonlit sidewalk.

A few days later after what was less of a “discussion” and more of Terry laying out how the day was going to go, the boys set out to expend the giftcard. A little here, a little there was their tactic. They thought somehow, although not specifically how, this methodology would serve as a catalyst to the tracing process if the card was ever sought out by the authorities. So, they began their day, a Saturday, indulging in the early bird special at the Waffle Shack: A meat (sausage or country ham), two eggs any way, butter grits and your choice of biscuits or toast for $5.99. Then it was to Valu-Mart where each replenished his gym sock and boxer inventory, just for the heck of it. Afterwards, each over-indulged on street racing video games and sporting goods accessories, Terry and Jeremiah respectively. Jeremiah wasn’t built for sports, but he liked to have the equipment anyway, partly for show and partly because he just liked sporting goods equipment. It was so crisp and new and smelled like synthetic materials and plastic packaging. He loved that.

Next, the boys stocked up on groceries for the week at the Food Giant, buying family packs of assorted mini cereals and individually bagged snack-sized chips, a 12-pack of frozen hamburgers, and a two liter of Mountain Mist Energy Rush. With the remaining one hundred and fifty, the boys purchased your standard house bottles of vodka, tequila, and rum, two pints of whiskey, and a couple cartons of discounted Camel Lights, none of which Jeremiah ever partook. They had planned to get in a few games at the West End Mall Arcade, but their eyes’ lust for the stores and their glittering shelves proved too powerful. It was better than any Christmas morning their blue-collar eyes had ever seen.

Although the giftcard was exhausted in less than two hours, Terry and Jeremiah felt comfortable enough with the inconspicuousness of their spending. They had no physical evidence of the early bird breakfast on their persons, besides the receipt, and they figured their mothers could have just as easily provided the groceries and undergarments as the boys were both still under thirty. The video games and sporting goods accessories were the only real physical evidence of the pair’s spiked income, but they’d decided Terry had a friend at Victory Video who occasionally loaned him games for free. And the sporting goods had been a lucky find for Jeremiah at a department store closeout sale in Birmingham when he was... um... there... once.

The two returned to work Monday evening at five o’clock, taking care to appear their normal drained, dull, barely-there selves. Word of the murdered young woman circulated around town for about two weeks which sparked another campus gathering devoted to the education, training and prevention of future crimes. The girl’s untimely death was plastered across newspaper covers for just as long, but Terry and Jeremiah both neglected to read any of the articles. They wanted to seem oblivious, nonexistent, and therefore, totally incapable of being involved in any such crime in any such way.

By the third week, the issue of the girl’s death had lost steam and fallen to fresher news in the town. The boys’ adventure, too, was waning in their memories as the groceries had been eaten, the underwear worn, the racing games won six times over, and the sporting good never used. Although the town had all but forgotten about the girl, the county detectives had not and pressed forward in the case contacting relatives and close friends as to her daily routines and possible possessions on the night of her attack. When questioned one Thursday evening after dinner by an Officer Bogart, the girl’s mother recalled: “She tried not to carry more cash than would buy her a granola bar or fruit juice. But I had just given her a giftcard for her 22nd birthday. I doubt she even had the chance to use it.” Then she sighed, turned her gaze downward towards the Berber carpet and closed the door on him.

Officer Bogart, being the upstanding, textbook crime solver he was, immediately got on the wire with the Mastercard people and traced the card’s spending history, transaction by transaction. From there, he faced the simple matter of finding the owner of the hand that had signed the receipts, and that led him to the Burrito Hut. (Unfortunately for Terry, Dragnet was before the days of prepaid credit cards and advanced electronic tracking systems.) Officer Bogart’s technique of cornering suspects at their work place was based not only on the obvious favorable circumstances — daylight, in public, they would be trapped and surrounded — he also secretly found pleasure in the humiliation of townee deadbeats between the ages of twelve and thirty-five.

Upon arrival at the Hut, Bogart exited his gleaming patrol car, ascended the curb, swung open the smudgy glass door, and crossed the threshold in slow motion, planting his patent leather boots on the speckled cement floor with exaggerated stomping. Then he glided through the fast food cattle corral for what seemed to be an hour before he halted himself in a pyramidal stance just behind the cash register. His sweet, spiced aftershave preceded him, carving a current through the grease-coated humidity that filled the enclosed space. Neither Terry nor Jeremiah was unusually unnerved by Bogart. After all, they had all but forgotten about the giftcard incident,
and even Jeremiah, square that he was, had grown accustomed to what his generation referred to as the “douche bag” manner in which all the Jackson City policemen behaved.

Officer Bogart clipped his key chain to his black, rubber gun holster, drawing the boys’ attention to the potential life-ending apparatus. Then, as if terribly arthritic, he slowly and robotically removed his aviator’s sunglasses, tucking them between his t-shirt and starched, cardboard brown uniform. He popped light pink gum between his abnormally large and abnormally white teeth as he stood glancing back and forth between both Terry and Jeremiah.

“Can I help you, sir?” Terry said to the detective after allowing a more than respectful five minutes for his grand entrance.

“Well, son,” Bogart said shifting his gaze from the right row of windows, to the floor, to the left row of windows, “I hope you can help me.”

“All right,” Terry said. “Would you like to try one of our new burrito combos?” And without acknowledging Terry’s question, Bogart started up in a loud, oratorical voice:

“You boys recall that young woman got killed near here, just down off Hawthorne a few weeks ago?”

“Um, yeah,” Terry said stuffing his hands into his crumb-lined apron pockets. “I heard some coming and going customer chatter about it, but I never looked into it or anything.”

“Really?” Bogart said jerking his gaze from the floor, burning his pupils directly onto the surface of Terry’s. “A girl around your same age turns up murdered just around the corner, and you’re not interested at all?” Jeremiah had been obliviously shuffling a fresh batch of tortilla strips since Bogart’s occupation of the Hut, but he’d honed in on the suspicion in the detective’s tone just then. His hand instantly petrified itself against the fryer handle, and he stood paralyzed in the oily spatter. Luckily, the always quick-footed Terry retorted back to Bogart, “I guess I just like to think of my town as still a small town. I know all this crazy college mess goes on, but I don’t like to think about it. What I think it really is, Officer...” Terry planted his palms on the counter and sunk within intimate range of Bogart, “...is that I just turn a blind eye. But you know how that is, right?” he said, and then he reached to wipe an imaginary spot on the counter with his rag. Officer Bogart allowed Terry to fake busy for a few seconds before replying.

“No, son, I don’t know how that is,” he said. “You see, I’m an officer of this county, and I’m one of the few whose job it is to NOT turn a blind eye to this type of thing. So, I’ve been on it for a while, and in my research, I learned that the girl — Natalie was her name by the way...since you haven’t heard — was carrying a pretty valuable giftcard on her. One her mother gave her. Five hundred dollars it was for.”

“Lucky girl,” Terry said.

Jeremiah, scanning his mental cache for an excuse to disappear, grabbed a bottle of generic sanitizer and disappeared to the back of the kitchen.

“She was murdered, and you call her lucky?” Officer Bogart said to Terry placing his hands atop his holster and leaning over the cash register.

Terry struggled to dig himself out of the hole. “Not because she was murdered, but because her family made enough money and loved her enough to give her such a nice gift.”

“Uh-huh,” Bogart muttered, still puffed up but leaning back slightly. “Yes, it was a nice gift, but unfortunately she never got to spend it, and I’m sorry to spoil the image of your small town even more, but can you believe that some kids stole that giftcard off her murdered body and spent it on a bunch of good-for-nothing video games and junk food?”

Terry, trying his damndest not to falter, muscles out what he thought was a convincing, remorseful frown, but the bubbly amalgamation of fluids that had been simmering in his internal crock pot was approaching a boil. Terry’s conscience whispered to him Deep Breaths, Deep Breaths as he tried to stifle the outpouring of anxious sweat percolating in his glands. He hoped Bogart’s trained nose couldn’t pick up his putrid, guilty stink.

“You don’t...say,” Terry said beginning to lose function in his jaws and palate as his shame, like molten rock, oozed down his brain stem dissolving his bones.

“Yep,” Bogart said as he paced to the far end of the counter, craning his neck around the fry counter to try and spot the other boy who’d disappeared a moment ago.

“Great thing about those little deals,” he continued about the giftcard, “is they come with a serial number so that every single transaction can be recorded in case it’s ever stolen. Pretty amazing technology these days, eh?” he said making a turn back towards the cash register.

Terry could no longer manage a word, but his mind was busy working overtime, oscillating back and forth between total freak out and fantasies of kicking Jeremiah’s sorry ass for baling on him. Officer Bogart translated Terry’s silence as a successful breaching of the boy’s exterior. He thought his scare tactics so effective
that he swore he smelled a trace of excrement coming from Terry’s general direction. At the exact same time, Terry proved unable to stifle his sweat glands any longer and squirmed into a stance that adequately cradled the load he had, indeed, involuntarily deposited into his work khakis.

“And that brings me to what I think you can help me with,” Bogart said cutting the brief, not to mention pungent, silence. He reached for his gun holster, and Terry was sure that if he hadn’t already soiled his pants, he surely would’ve at that moment. Officer Bogart’s hand playfully idled above his gun for five tense seconds before he plunged it into his pants pocket and pulled out a crinkled receipt, slapping it on the counter in front of Terry. “That signature look familiar to you, boy?” Bogart said wrinkling his brow and contracting his lips inward so they resembled a jumbo, rose-colored raisin.

But Terry had transported to another world. A world where Officer Bogart’s existence was blurry and twisted and undistinguishable except for the blaring white chompers. As a matter of fact, the following four hours of downtown interrogation and booking occurred in the same dreamlike vacuum for Terry. He didn’t come down from it until his head hit his pillow that night and he felt safe at home after his mother forced his uncle Randy to put up the money to bail him out of the county jail. Had Uncle Randy had his way, Terry would’ve enjoyed an overnight stay in that county jail cell in hopes that it might “scare some goddamn sense into the boy.”

“For Christ’s sake, Judy,” Randy had said to his sister. “He’s twenty-one, not twelve. You treat him like a child which is probably why he still acts like one.”

Officer Bogart and posse tracked Jeremiah two miles down Hawthorne Street after escorting Terry downtown. Jeremiah shattered like a porcelain teapot fallen from the top shelf when they sat him in that cold, metal interrogation chair. His parents, being of a different breed than Terry’s, stood firm in their denial; surely their son had been influenced by that boy at the Burrito Hut and didn’t waste a moment in resigning his post for him and forbidding that he ever associate with that place or that boy again.

Officer Bogart slept soundly that night, secure in his good deed of ridding Jackson County of two more deadbeat townie kids. However, he did see to it that two strapping young lads replaced Terry’s and Jeremiah’s positions at the Burrito Hut. After all, it was one of the pillars of the town’s “entertainment district”. And as a man of routine, Bogart still had to have that spicy steak and egg breakfast burrito Monday and Wednesday mornings before patrol rounds.

Because of Terry’s mother’s forever bleeding heart, tirelessly hoping for him to turn out to be a good boy, he was finally forced to read the newspaper articles about that steamy night’s attack and how Natalie had been an Honors Student in the Mississippi State Social Work program. Contrary to his initial judgment, she was walking back to her graduate dorm from a late-night study group at a nearby, popular coffee house when she was mugged and killed by a blow to the back of the head.

And Terry wasn’t likely to ever steal off a dead body, or anybody, again because he didn’t desire to reenact the grown-man-shitting-himself scene that was forever engraved upon his most cave-dwelling, subconscious memory. Despite that, he locked himself in his room for two days, only emerging for bathroom breaks and mini bags of Doritos, after he read a reprint of an interview Natalie had given the college newspaper, The Satellite, when she was chosen as the September ’07 Spotlight Student.

It read:

S: Now, Natalie, in closing we always like to ask our Spotlight students a few fun, one-word answer questions. Do you mind?

N: No, not at all. [giggles] I was actually hoping you’d ask me.

S: Okay, first of all...favorite color?

N: Sea-green.

S: Favorite type of music?

N: Only one word?

S: One word.

N: Um...Soul.

S: Favorite ride at an amusement park?

N: Freefall.

S: Favorite article of clothing?

N: Flip-flops!

S: Reason you chose your major?

N: Children.

S: And lastly, favorite late night study craving?

N: Burrito Hut!
The kayak was candy-apple red and invoked in me a lust of the Paleolithic sense. Be it a sports car, potential mate, or something with equally desirable lines, conquest must take place. I was only eleven at the time but had just encountered one of the most powerful forces in the universe. Dad came home with the impulse purchase one weekend while I was away. Most of the time he was capable of living up to his thrifty, Scottish heritage, but sometimes the whimsical river rat of his younger years shined through. Mom argued that a creeping mid-life crisis claimed responsibility. Dad countered that his boys would cut their teeth in a world unknown to fellow suburbanites. Adolescence would be founded on the torrents of the South’s arteries instead of the screaming fields of soccer moms, mini-vans, and Capri-Sun drenched half-times.

From bow to stem, the Keowee was about thirteen and a half feet long, with a spacious cockpit for two. The seats slid up and down a center rail, which identified with the versatile needs of three growing boys. In reality, it was a pig good for neither whitewater nor lakes or oceans. All it needed to do was float while dad hauled a combination of three young boys, dog, or uneasy mom. The immense possibility of capsizing remained unspoken when we overloaded the craft. The wail of rocks gouging its soft underbelly often elicited moments of terror as the hull flirted with the waterline.

Putting it on the van was always a chance for my father’s creative expletives. For a while, his weakling oldest son was too short to offer assistance as he muscled the red manatee onto the roof rack. I did, however, always make sure that his knots were up to par and that the red bandanna tied to the stem for the safety of other motorists wasn’t going to fly off. Getting a ticket on the way to the put-in would have ensured an hour or two of my dad going Norman Bates on the water with his paddle’s blades.

I’m not positive what our first outing was, but I’m pretty sure it was on Lake Lanier. We lived only a short drive from Buford Dam, the first obstacle in the Chattahoochee River’s exodus from the Blue Ridge. Dad and I connected the myriad islands within easy distance of the shoreline, musing at the tiny pine isles that once served as shaded hilltops for grazing cattle. The lake didn’t allow for much skill building, as the only challenges came from shrieking jet-skis that swarmed us like carrion flies or bouncing bass boats doing their best to imitate a scene from Miami Vice. At the time, Dad still had the shocking, red afro of his youth and more freckles than pores. Unfortunately, two decades of desk-surfing were slowly adding insulation around his mid-section. Still, his shoulders propelled the boat forward without question, a feat that annoyed me to no end as my spindly arms only jerked it side-to-side.

I graduated to the Etowah and Chestatee, rivers of lowly stance in the hierarchy of southern white-water. Regardless of an absence of gaping holes or undercut rocks, I was enamored with my father’s control of such an inapt vehicle. While I sat in the bow and clumsily slapped at the frothing tongues of water, he willed it to perform past its scope of design. The Amicalola River proved memorable, as we launched over seven foot End of the World falls and posted near vertical in the boiling waves. I was immersed up to my shoulders in the icy water, with Dad comically suspended above me. We took on water like a trolling whale. Our stable grew to boast two kayaks, and they had their sanctuary at the back of the house. Their hulls proved a worthy place to collect spider webs and rat turds during periods of inactivity, which was whenever the old man deemed it too cold. High school angst blossomed, and my father’s three sons soon lost interest in floating with their supremely un-cool dad. When my mother died during my sophomore year, kayaking was the last thing on anyone’s mind. Reflecting on it now, time on the water might have dulled some of the pain. Instead, each of the Orvis men fought his own battles in a silent hell. If not for their plastic construction and bright bodies, the boats might have moldered into the landscape from several seasons of neglect.

The commencement of senior year coincided with my purchase of The White Stallion: an ’89 Ford Ranger that roared with the randomness of a senile lion (due to a punctured muffler) and only played music through its ancient speakers at specific barometric levels. Together, my beater truck and I resurrected boating in order to face new challenges. With the onset of testosterone, I found new use for the Keowee as an exotic vehicle for backcountry dates. An afternoon picnic on a wooded island in the middle of a raging river was an alien experience to most chicks. Aside from aquatic wooing, I used the kayak for training purposes once I began my obsession with adventure racing. I’d paddle upstream on the Chattahoochee for an hour or two and then halve my return time. At this point, I was the sole user of the Keowee and had an unspoken understanding with my father that it was mine. A year after I’d completed high school, he had remarried and just about eliminated
all of the activities that had once defined him. His sons were just about the only remaining relics of the life he'd shared with my deceased mother. I offered him the chance to regain footing on the world he had left behind, but his desire lay in building a fresh marital foundation. Boating was part of another lifetime.

When I finally met a woman who left me KO’d and completely defenseless, I began to understand my dad’s uncompromising attitude in allowing love to conquer all. Although my pursuit of adventure had always preceded the XX chromosome, sacrifices soon became commonplace. Everything flowed for the first six months, and then she moved back to Texas for grad school. I decided to do what any sap would do: I spent my waking hours trying to figure out how and when I’d see her next. Going back to school destroyed the disposable income that working retail full-time had afforded me. My basement brimming with outdoor clothing and equipment shrank to wads of cash so I could continue my lifestyle. Judas was standing in the corner when I sold my beloved mountain bike to purchase a suit for the wedding of her closest sorority sister. Huck Finn was getting a haircut and shopping at The Men’s Warehouse.

The day came when I looked at the Keowee and saw dollar signs. I needed dough for a trip with my girl to New Orleans. We were spending New Years' there and taking in the Sugar Bowl as well. The owners of a French Quarter B&B probably weren’t interested in swapping a guided climbing trip for a few nights at their 19th century home, so I needed the cash. I put the now faded plastic shell on the mini-van for the last time and drove to Atlanta. Onlookers in the morning traffic probably feigned envy, thinking I was headed to the Georgia coast or Florida. Instead, I was offering a legacy.

The Keowee fetched less than I was expecting, but the business I sold it to specialized in equipment consignment, so it had to be re-sold to someone else. My father still imagined that I was spending the early morning hours plying foggy riverbanks for fitness and that if he ever decided to find some tranquility of his own, a call is all it would take. It wouldn’t be hard to avoid a request for the boat since I was now living on my own and could stall him until he lost interest. Sitting askew in the front seat because of my bulging wallet, I glimpsed at my third sibling, carelessly leaned in the store’s corner window. Maybe she would bring happiness to another family and become part of their story. For now, ours was just a name.

She will make her dreams come true and only I will suffer, twisted by her unyielding will.

—Struggle No More by Leah Perdue
A little baby girl was born
one winter, cold and gray.
Her mama took her in her arms
and named her Lucy May.

She grew up sweet, she grew up pure
in Deerfort, Alabama.
Mom was in the factory
and daddy in the slammer.

It was one warm summer day,
sleepy, bright and lush
when Lucy gave her heart away.
She met a boy named Josh.

All her friends, they warned her so
"Lucy May, be careful.
He will break your gentle heart
and leave your poor soul fearful."

Then one day he called her up
and oh, his words were violence.
"It's not you, it's me," he said
and left her in the silence.

Heartbroken, sad, and lonesome too
Lucy booked her tickets
and early in the morning she
did leave the old home thickets.

Lucy in the great big world
tall buildings high above
swore, "I'll never hurt again.
I'll say goodbye to love."

But that sweet young Lucy May
soon found she had no luck.
For in a week for her did fall
a man who dealt in stock.

She kissed him once, she kissed him twice
three times they kissed with glee.
But two weeks from that day she said,
"it's not you, dear, it's me."

Lucy left the town behind
and met up with a farmer.
On the fields they walked all night
The farmer tried to charm her.

They dwelt together, til one day
the farmer heard her cries.
Lucy heard that her old flame
had jumped from his high-rise.

In the spring, the farmer said,
"Marry me, my dear."
Lucy's eyes grew wide and bright
that night she fled with fear.

Soon the news caught up with her,
the spiteful, evil prattle.
The farmer, bless his poor old soul,
was stomped to death by cattle.
Lucy cried, but so it went  
she fled, but love gave chase.  
She left not only broken hearts  
but death, too, in her place.

For instance, in suburbia  
she heard a man’s last breath:  
“Only for my Lucy May  
I worked myself to death.”

Whereas on the coastal line,  
all for Lucy Crowne,  
a fisherman far sailed his boat  
and in the sea he drowned.

“Enough!” said Lucy, “Let me be,  
love, cruel and hateful lie.  
Any man who falls for me  
is soon the man who dies.”

And inside dear Lucy’s heart  
tattered, worn and torn  
many tried to win her love  
but no love would be born.

Oh, how hard she blamed herself  
for those lives and losses.  
And on her own conscience stood  
those blooded, heavy crosses.

So Lucy Crowne, like her heart,  
locked herself away.  
Never would another man  
die for Lucy May.

Foolish boys and girls who all  
were wounded by love’s knives  
Squandered their own happiness  
and threw away their lives.

And after all this misery  
who was left to blame?  
The lovers, proud and vain and dead  
or sad old Lucy May?
I was homeless for a time
living in the soup kitchens of Denver.
or was it San Francisco?
during the Reagan administration.
I made myself useful
prophesying from atop overturned garbage cans
to passersby, warning each their pilot light was out.
I had a wife once.
Savannah. I was in Savannah.
Stirring thin stew over a range after a double shift,
She smelled like copper, lady liberty in miniature. And burnt liver.
I'm a custodian now
In a 500-story corporate building.
wiping writing from the toilet stalls.

like
falling on a glass floor,
and finding
with both relief and
disdain
that it was plastic
all along.
MORNING SHOWER IN AN APARTMENT COMPLEX

*By Patrick Gribbins*

From the shower head stream drops of water
Like thousands of baby seals
Diving
with
gracefully
arched
backs,
as if their button black noses
and white onesie footies
were hung from a backyard clothes line.
Sprinkler heads would pop up like clockwork gophers,
Soaking sheets and socks, undoing an afternoon's work of the Crayola yellow sun.

A toilet flushes,
mackerels smack me.

OFFERING

*By Amanda Batsoll*

Dingy, dirty, cold and damp
The children lie awake
Praying to their Lord above
Their tiny souls to take.

Day in, day out the sun burns down
With thick, hot rays of spite.
While the children wonder if they'll have
Some food to eat tonight.

On this particular dreary day
The children spot a man
Who begs and pleads to the storekeep
To feed him if he can.

One of the three small children
Squints his eyes tight.
"Me thinks we know this man.
Oh yes, me thinks we might."

The children gather round him
This tall, strange, gangly one.
The man's eyes in turn grow five-fold
As he gently cries, "My son!"

He begs of them forgiveness,
The sorry orphans three.
But the two eldest walk away
From the Infamous Hated He.
POETRY

But a tiny hand holds high
Her offering to spare.
While the others keep their hands closed tight,
She opens hers to share.

"Papa?" she begs sadly,
As she holds up her small snack.
Through tears she gently whispers,
"You said that you'd come back."

PRELUDE

By Jacob Hickman

he can see those tracks—
broken, cracked;
a rotten staircase that spirals up her arm
leading nowhere, save for the inevitable.

he watches her—a caged animal, curled up and drifting,
swimming in a painful ocean, afloat in a sea of her creation.

asleep in a ship built of driftwood
and rotten staircases.

his head is down, slumped over that old piano;
covered in dust, crying in the corner of the room.
a drink sits atop the oak, unnoticed as
drops of water slide lazily down the glass—all the while
his fingers dance with frenetic grace,
gliding 'cross smooth ivory—twinkling bright
a stark and lonely melody.

he finds his chord and plunges in.
she takes the plunger from within.

the chords moan in disjointed harmony,
echoing a cracked progression,
another staircase.

his tie hangs loose round his wrinkled collar
covering a stain—bloody lipstick.
she's the most beautiful thing he's ever seen
lying there in a hazy cloud—breathing slow and steady.
his voice is hoarse, but he carries it well
one of these mornings, you’re gonna rise up singin’.
then we’ll spread our wings—take to the sky, oh yeah...

she can hear him, off in the distance, and
she barely feels him like a draft that’s light and breezy.
his voice grows dimmer with the passing notes,
just a whisper in her ear,
ooooh, summertime...baby,
and the livin’...ya know is easy.

Her Buddha serene face triggers
a sick miasma that rolls up.
Her marzipan intentions should crush
under the jackboot of my indifference.

She begins to understand, the light trickling
from a filth-covered bulb.
Tension fills the room like Pall-Mall tar
in my lungs. I begin to speak.

Her head tosses the words off
and they land on the floor, the carnage of our war.
She stares at me with tabula rasa face.
I feel my resistance buckle under her resolve.

Her arms beckon, the sweeping beam of a lighthouse,
I run myself aground.
Her eyes glint like chilies and spun sugar.
Intentions fulfilled she crushes me

In a hated relative’s embrace.
She will make her dreams come true and only I
will suffer, twisted by her unyielding will.
I break upon her shore.
I would, my soul, write away those fears that strain my capacity but nay;
I hold futile the false necessity that this terrestrial association would,
at its malevolent discretion, my own being inject.
Hope, damp and dying, still carries the flame that,
even if the moon retracted her brow from me,
would sustain my heart from the eyes of the shadow.
I presume it not beyond the weight of the world that,
were I to take leave before I could fulfill the promise of an hour,
that this hope, hope unabridged, would become a sentry against such a wicked
eternity.
Take then, weary sage, thy font of toxic salvation;
I suppose sufficiently my breast fit this day to blunt thus the arrows of destiny.
Vault still, my mortal frame, to that fleeting scene beyond this violent house of
apathy;
yonder plant the cross. Yonder, certain, to that distant hill I beseech this wounded
chariot
to mount, even then, when I am laid down.
Yea, summon unto thyself, oh my grave, the despair of Adam’s curse.
And soften thy sting with the blood of the forgotten.
I have scouted thy dreams, oh grave, and I have watched thy hands contract from
the edges of oblivion into the swirling fear of a dying soul.
But know, as I have been appointed to judge thy cause,
that thy windows will soon tremble with the sound of terror;
terror that none can claim but thee.
I feel lately myself drifting from myself.
I am sensing a forthcoming engagement that must employ my presence.
These walls are becoming palled, dark, weary and cold.
I am looking towards the horizon of a beckoning world:
somewhere, a world, beyond the vibrations of a chapel bell.
Oh dark grave, must I burden thee to draw thy sword so soon?
Untitled
Pastel
BRIAN LOOPER

Untitled
Digital Collage
ANGEL ALONSO
The Whistler's Girl
Acrylic
DEVIN WITHEROW

Untitled
Photograph Collage
CHRIS CARTER
Gourds
Acrylic
SARAH ZIMMER

Sweet William
Acrylic
DEVON WITHEROW
Peace and Serenity
Plaster Sculpture
MARJORY CLARK

Round II
Watercolor
BLAIN WATSON
Ribcage
Charcoal
JESSICA ESKEW

James Dean
Cardboard Puzzle
JOSHUA MCDONALD
The Kill
Manipulated Digital Image
DANIEL SCOTT

Untitled
Watercolor
LAURA SHARP
Would you please take heed of what I am saying? I am here because of your rather stupid decision to judge your work by another’s. You are insistent upon using Miss Jane Austen, dreadful woman by the way, as the standard of literary greatness.

-Prevailing Misconceptions by Leah Perdue
BETRAYAL
By John Mark Harris

Characters:

RICHARD
JOSEPH
DAVID

Setting:

RICHARD sits in an uncomfortable chair in an interrogation room. His hands are bound behind him. The room is extremely bright. Two FBI Agents (JOSEPH and DAVID) hover around him like vultures circling a carcass.

RICHARD: That was a pretty nice shot there, Chief.

JOSEPH: I thought so too, Richard. But I reckon that when I struck you in the jaw, I aimed a little too high.

RICHARD: (Catching another heavy blow to the neck.) You know, you can bang on me all you want. My guess is that you’re just trying to get something out of me that I don’t want to say. But the fact remains that you and Thing Two here haven’t really asked me a direct question yet. So, the way I see it, your method here is backwards. What is this, amateur hour? And one more thing, believe it or not, this isn’t my first go-around in an interrogation room. I have been in one of these things before, and this seems like it’s your first time doing this. So the funny thing is that I probably have more experience here than you do. (He laughs.)

A second or two passes. JOSEPH looks at DAVID. DAVID looks at RICHARD calmly.

DAVID: Richard, I am now going to ask you a series of direct questions. I expect direct answers. Now, can you try to cooperate here so that my partner doesn’t strike you anymore? It is an unpleasant situation for everyone. If you don’t cooperate, then rest assured, my partner here will make you unrecognizable. Are we crystal?

RICHARD: Yeah, I got it.

DAVID: Good. Now what were you doing last night?

RICHARD: Nothing spectacular. I went out on the town with my friends and had a few drinks. The bar is called Jimmy’s. I am a regular there and so are my friends. There were plenty of people that were there that could verify what I am saying, as well as the owner.

JOSEPH: What’s the owner’s name?

RICHARD: Well, you must be the brains of the operation. A bar called Jimmy’s. Now that’s “Jimmy” plus an apostrophe followed by an “s.” I’ve been wrong before, but where I come from that’s called a possessive, meaning that someone owns something else. So I am going to go with Jimmy. Jimmy is the owner of the bar. (Laughs condescendingly.)

DAVID: What did you do when you left?

RICHARD: Nothing, just went home and slept it all off. Had a very serious hangover the next day.

JOSEPH: Listen asshole. You’re only making this harder on yourself. (He grabs the DC phone book.) Since we’re all telling jokes, I have something funny to say. You should have killed that judge about 40 years ago. The problem is that everyone just loves DC. And over the past 40 years, a lot of people have moved here, which means that there are more people in the phone book. The more people that are in the book, the more pages there are. Not a good thing for you. (He swings the phone book at RICHARD, striking the side of his head.) If you don’t start playing ball, it’s gonna look like someone caught your face on fire and beat it out with a rake. Hell, it might just be a better look for you. Ugly prick.
RICHARD: You should learn to watch your temper. I think you’re overreacting. Oh, and just for the record: Did you memorize the FBI interrogation manual? That’s all such old material. “You’re only making this harder on yourself,” is like the oldest one in the book. Don’t you have anything original?

JOSEPH: It doesn’t matter what you say, Richard. You’re still gonna burn for what you did. You don’t just kill a judge and walk away from it. Not as long as I’m around. So you can sit there and act like you can take all the pain, but I know you can’t. You may be one tough son-of-a-bitch, but everyone has a breaking point, and everyone talks. Everyone. (Looks over at DAVID.)

DAVID: Richard, I am trying to help you out here. I am trying to do this in a civil manner and you aren’t taking the hint. I thought that I could be the voice of reason and moderation here, but it seems that you’re not receptive to either one of those methods. Have you ever heard of the basement that we have here? If you haven’t, I can assure that the basement will make the room you’re in look like a suite at the Ritz. (Looks over at JOSEPH and laughs slightly.)

RICHARD: What the hell is so funny about that?

JOSEPH: (Moving in front of RICHARD.) Private joke, asshole.

DAVID: Well, it looks like you aren’t comfortable here, Richard, so a move to the basement might be in order. (Looks over at JOSEPH and motions towards the door with his head.)

JOSEPH: Field trip!

Scene Two: The basement

RICHARD: Would you pull this asshole off of me?

DAVID: Just tell us what we want to hear, and maybe, I can help you out. I mean, Jesus Christ, man.
ONE-ACT PLAYS

DAVID: I can't promise you anything, but nothing can hurt you at this point.

RICHARD: You have to give me your word, David.

DAVID: Okay, okay. But whatever you have to say now isn't going to stay hidden forever.

RICHARD: A friend of mine from the State Department brought me some very sensitive information about a judge. My contact told me that this judge had issued illegal wiretaps on several senators who were plotting to allow certain terrorist cells to enter the United States. When the NSA got wind of this, they immediately wanted the judge brought in along with the recordings.

DAVID: And?

RICHARD: It seems that whoever these senators are, they have ears everywhere because I get knocked out and framed for the murder of the same judge they were after. Like you said, convenient.

DAVID: So you're suggesting that a group of senators is behind all of this? That they would want to let terrorist cells into the continental US? What in the hell for?

RICHARD: Well, I don't know that part.

DAVID: Who else knows about this?

RICHARD: Me, you, and my contact from State.

DAVID: Where is your contact now?

RICHARD: Someplace safe.

DAVID: Where's Rich?

RICHARD: I said someplace safe. Look, I'm not gonna tell anyone who he or she is until this whole thing is resolved.

DAVID: If your contact really knows who is behind this and is the only one that can clear your story, then why don't you let me bring him in and debrief him?

RICHARD: Because it seems that everyone who learns about this mess ends up with a tag on their toes, and I don't wanna see that happen to him.

DAVID: If you let me do it my way, then I can bring him in privately and safely so we can figure this whole thing out.

RICHARD: No way, David.

DAVID: So why you? Why did someone pick you out of the blue to frame?

RICHARD: Isn't it obvious?

DAVID: No, enlighten me.

RICHARD: The men responsible must have somehow found out about my knowing about this information and decided that it'd be better if I just disappeared.

DAVID: That's it?

RICHARD: No, that's not it. They also thought that they could kill two birds with one stone. They take out the judge and then frame me. Both of us out of the picture in the drop of a hat.

DAVID: How do you suppose they found out about you, Richard? You couldn't have been tailed, or they would know the location of your contact too.

RICHARD: That's what still bothers me about all of this. I don't know.

DAVID: That's bullshit, Richard!
RICHARD: What?!

DAVID: Who else did you tell about the judge? Was it Roberts?

RICHARD: Yeah, I told Roberts. Special Agent Roberts is like my brother, and I needed to tell someone that I could trust.

DAVID: Why didn't you tell me this earlier? I'm trying to help you out here, and you give me half of the story? I'm putting my ass on the line here by just listening to this bullshit. Meet halfway, man.

RICHARD: I'm putting my ass on the line too, you know. Every second that I stay here, I'm in more danger. I need to get out of here and get more information.

DAVID: Get out of here? How the hell do you think that you're gonna do that?

RICHARD: With your help.

DAVID: Now I know you've lost it.

RICHARD: Look, I need you to get me out of here and tell them that you're taking me over to Hoover to let the FBI debrief me. Tell them that you'll escort me.

DAVID: You know that the very fact that I'm listening to this could jeopardize my entire career? I want to help you, but what you're asking me to do is too hairy.

RICHARD: So you admit you think that something is going on?

DAVID: I always knew that you were crafty, but I don't think that you could come up with a bogus story like that all on your own. (He smiles at RICHARD.)

RICHARD: (Smiles back.) You're a funny guy.

DAVID: What do you intend to do? We'll have an hour tops before there are a thousand and five hundred spooks all looking for just me and you.

RICHARD: We can't get this done in an hour, David.

DAVID: So what are we gonna do then, smart guy?

RICHARD: We're not going to do anything. I'm going to retrieve my contact and gather more intel so that I can figure out what's going on.

DAVID: So after I bust you out of here, then what am I supposed to do? Walk right up to the Hoover building and wave a white flag with a grin on my face? Tell them I promise I won't do it again?

RICHARD: Don't be ridiculous, David. I want you to meet with Roberts to find out if he knows anything. Maybe even sweep his house for bugs. You never know these days.

DAVID: Okay. (Beat.) Holy shit, Richard. Do you think that Special Agent Roberts has anything to do with this?

RICHARD: Absolutely not.

DAVID: Are you sure?

RICHARD: Why do you think that I went to him?

DAVID: Okay, okay. (Beat.) Hold on, what time did you meet with him?

RICHARD: About nine-thirty last night.

DAVID: And what did you two talk about? I wanna know everything from top to bottom.

RICHARD: I went to his house and told him everything that I knew about the judge and the senators based on what my contact told me.

DAVID: And that's it?
RICHARD: No, that’s not it.

DAVID: What else?

RICHARD: He told me to type up a full report of everything I knew and then sign it. He said that he would take it over to the Justice Department with me tomorrow morning.

DAVID: And then you left his home?

RICHARD: Yeah.

DAVID: About what time?

RICHARD: Ten-thirty or eleven o’clock.

DAVID: Which?

RICHARD: Eleven o’clock.

DAVID: Richard, don’t you see?

RICHARD: (Beat.) You can’t trust anyone … Then why am I talking to you?

DAVID: We both know that sometimes you have to take a chance, and in your current situation, a shot in the dark is all you really have.

RICHARD: So what are you suggesting that we do?

DAVID: Well, based on what you’ve told me already, this information can go no further than it already has.

RICHARD: Yeah, no shit.

DAVID: I can get one of my boys from NSA to get all the phone calls made by all the senators for about a month prior to the fourteenth.

RICHARD: That’ll take time. We don’t have time for that. We need something else. Something quicker.

DAVID: Wait a second. Rewind this thing. When you went to Roberts’ house last night, was he with you the whole time?

RICHARD: Yeah. (Beat.) Wait, he left for about fifteen minutes while I wrote up the report.

DAVID: Richard, I hate to say it, but it sounds more and more like Roberts had the time and opportunity to sell you out and send someone to your house to frame you.

RICHARD: I don’t want to believe that.

DAVID: I don’t either, but it’s the most probable lead we have on this thing. I need to call my tech guy at NSA right now about this and get him to go ahead and start logging the phone records for Roberts. This is too much.

RICHARD: Who is this guy at NSA? If I don’t know him, how can I trust him?

DAVID: He’s one of my recruits. One of my first.
ONE-ACT PLAYS

RICHARD: Oh, really?

DAVID: Yeah, I bagged him a few years back for three counts of identity theft.

RICHARD: And?

DAVID: And I told him that he could either come work for us or go to prison. He's good, trust me.

RICHARD: So what do we do now?

DAVID: (Smiles.) Now we see how crazy we both really are.

End.

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THE DISPATCHER
By Bell Carmichell

Characters:

THOMAS: A Slave with a wife and two children.

JUNE: Thomas' wife.

JACKSON: A house slave.

MR. COLLINS: A slave owner

DEPUTY SHERIFF

RUNNER: An African-American, College educated, Federal Intelligence source

Setting:

PLACE: Georgia, U.S.A.

TIME: December, 1861

SETTING: Antebellum Plantation, Slave Shanties, and Rural Countryside.

A husband and wife wake up at 3:30 am in their shanty in Georgia on a very cold December morning. The shanty has no insulation from the outside and stars can be seen through the walls on clear nights. On this morning, the heavy bedding that covers the couple is damp from the evening's dew.

JUNE: (Sighs.) It's only 3:30 – when will you start to trust him? You always wake me when I am as comfortable as the center pup in a large litter. It's too cold to get out from under this pile of blankets!

THOMAS: (Whispers.) I know how to make that pup a bit warmer – come here.
JUNE: Not now Tom, the kids'll be up soon. And please don't lift the covers up and let that cold air in.

THOMAS: (Caressing JUNE.) C'mon girl, they ain't up yet. (Tickles JUNE.) And you wake the kids, not me.

JUNE: (Laughs.) This shack ain't big enough – It's a miracle that we got Mary after Michael was born. How many blankets did you put on them last night?

THOMAS: Four. I will try to get some more this morning from the barn. I ain't seen a winter start like this in all my 39 years. I'll get a fire started, so you can get the kids up – they have to pick those collards before lunch. (Kisses JUNE.)

JUNE: You goin' to get us some wood for tonight?

THOMAS: Yeah, after I check on Jackson.

JUNE: He gotta do good this time. I can't have him down here with us no more. That man been gawking down the hill at me for weeks. Us ladies don't have to watch our hind parts every time we bend over to pick or clean something. He always sneaking ...

THOMAS: I know! (Sighs deeply.) I am doing half his work to keep Mr. Collins happy. (Slides out of bed slowly to keep the cold air from getting to JUNE.)

JUNE: Damn ... the kids are stirring.

THOMAS: I'll get 'em after I start the fire. (Walks to window and opens shutter.) DAMN FOOL!! Ain't no fire in the house! (Hastily returns to JUNE.) I got to get the fire in the house started now. Get Michael and Mary up quick and dressed before the cold takes hold on them. We all have to be up at the house by 5.

JUNE: (Disappointing look.) Tom, it won't take long to start our fire. You do it so fast... it'll take me half an hour to get a fire good enough to boil water for grits and fry an egg for the kids.

THOMAS: Just do as I say woman! I'll be back as soon as I can - maybe I can get some meat for those grits and egg. Get the kids dressed fast – I'll be back as soon as I can. (Exits cabin and steps into a slushy ice puddle.)

MR. COLLINS: (Glares angrily out of his bedroom window as THOMAS steps into the puddle and mumbles.) I knew this wouldn't work. Look at him marching up here like Julius Caesar returning to Rome.

THOMAS: (Enters the basement of the house.) Jackson! Jackson!! (Kicks JACKSON's bunk and slaps him repeatedly.) You stupid fool! What have you done? Master Collins will make me move back into this hell-house because of you. Get yo' ass out of that bed!

JACKSON: (Covers his head and quietly cries out.) I'm sorry, Tom, I'm sorry, I'm sick with fever and tired. Mr. Collins kept me up all night with the new slaves...

THOMAS: This house is freezing! I knew you couldn't...

JACKSON: (Whimpering.) I had to get the bracelets on the new ones. I had to ...

THOMAS: Shut up! I took you in when you got here as a beaten scarred up boy. I took you as my son and you still ain't doin right by me. I ain't coming back to this house. You ain't looking out for me after all my years of looking out for you.

JACKSON: I know how much you want to be with June in the cabin. I know that you don't want to move back up here. I am just sick with fever.

THOMAS: If you are doing this to get near June again ...

JACKSON: NO! Thomas, I'm sick and been up with the new ones all night.

THOMAS: (Slumps.) Did you get the bracelets on all of 'em?

JACKSON: No, I have two more to get ready. I ain't use to that kind of work – I burnt the young one when I let that red-hot link touch him before I could get that
leather down. He screamed so loud I’m sure he woke up Mr. Collins. (Proud.) I beat him real good ‘til he quieted up.

THOMAS: (Shakes his head and sighs.) Ain’t nothing to be proud of beating a boy like you one of those overseers. I sure ain’t beat you when got here and Lord knows you needed a lot of beating. Get back in bed. I’ll try to find you a few extra blankets that ain’t so wet and smelly. It’s damp as a swamp down here. Any of the new ones torn up?

JACKSON: Yeah, there’s one man that looks like he been splashed with iron in a blacksmith’s shop. His sides all...

THOMAS: That ain’t it. Here, how them blankets feel? These ain’t so smelly and wet... I seen men and women marked up like that before you come here. I guess we kinda lucky with Mr. Collins, he don’t brand us like them other Masters do. I done seen children burnt all round their ribs by owners selling them year after year. One owner will have the child held down by the overseer and branded until the child pass out from pain. When the child is sold to another owner, the youngen has to have that old brand burnt over so there ain’t no mistaking who own that dog.

JACKSON: (Coughs.) O’ Lord, we lucky Mr. Collins only put these iron bracelets on us. They rub us raw to the bone in the fields but I ain’t passed out from that yet.

THOMAS: Them other bastards just take a red-hot flat iron to that old brand until it burns through the meat. Then they burn the new mark – whole lot of screaming when the new ones arrive on them farms. The other masters in Smith County always saying Mr. Collins soft on his niggers, he letting his niggers see things too good for dogs to see.

JACKSON: (Dozing off.) I just hold my arm out when one of them deputy men or bounty hunters come at me when I’m in town. They always curse Mr. Collins but respect him ‘nough not to touch us.

THOMAS: (Shakes his head.) He may not burn us, but I seen him have a man beat to death for running. Then he sold that man’s wife and children to one of them state run farms somewhere deep in the delta swamps. A man escaped from there years ago, passing through here in the middle of the night for a bit of food before he continued up north. The man was ‘bout crazy from what he done seen and what been done to him on one of those State farms. He told us that from time to time them State Prison folks come ‘round and take children young as eight to the white prison so them prisoners can relieve themselves. They do that to keep the men from doing to each other what they do to them little boys and girls sent to them for a few days. The man says some of them youngens so torn up that they never come back.

JACKSON: (Stares blankly.) How these Christian men do these things?... How do the fathers do...?

THOMAS: I ain’t running – June and kids can’t go to the delta. I’ll work until I die with tobacco and cotton in my hands before I do something to get Mr. Collins mad ‘nough to send us there. I gotta throw some wood on that dying fire in the kitchen before Mr. Collins get up and feel the cold.

MR. COLLINS: Jackson! – You good for nothing-black nigger beast – I am freezing my ass off!

THOMAS: (Hastily throws wood into the kitchen stove and makes his way upstairs bearing firewood.) Mr. Collins, I have the fires going in the kitchen. I’ll get things warmed up here fast enough.

MR. COLLINS: Where the hell is Jackson! Fast enough ain’t shit when my house should have been warm all night long. Where the hell is Jackson... that lazy ass black devil?

THOMAS: (Cowering.) He sick as an ole’ hound dog that done ate a spoilit kill. I looked up here and run as soon as I seen no smoke coming from the stack. Foot ‘bout froze when I run through a ice puddle.

MR. COLLINS: Tom– I don’t give a good god damn about your foot. My house is cold and my new niggers don’t have my mark. This ain’t going to work, Tom – you have to come back up to run my house. I’m starting to think them other
owners are right – I need to be a bit harder or you beasts will run my farm into the ground. I know Jackson is always touching June but I need you here. If I don’t get this house in order fast – I’ll breed June and Jackson in the slave mess everyday until I get me another nigger or my house in order. You got me, Thomas. I’ll breed that bitch like a prized hog.

THOMAS: (Cowering.) Yes, Master, I’ll get things right.

MR. COLLINS: Now, I am gonna eat a bit of breakfast and get ready for Church. When I get back – I expect to see you in your downstairs quarters... Now, drag that lazy Jackson down the hill by his feet and throw him in the barn. I don’t want him making my maroons sick.

THOMAS: Yes, Sir, I’ll be off to gather firewood when you return. I’ll have June and the kids up here getting this place right. Jackson will be out of here right away.

THOMAS retrieves a horse and wagon from the barn. He is traveling on a county road in search of firewood. He is confronted by a Smith County DEPUTY SHERIFF patrolling on horseback for runaway slaves.

DEPUTY: Hold on there niggra! You keep your black ass right there. What are you doing out here?

THOMAS: (Looking down while holding out the bracelet on his left arm.) I’m just gathering wood for Master. No runner here, Boss, no runner here.

DEPUTY: (Scoffs in disgust.) O’ you one of those Collins’ mutts. Ain’t no way I’d let one of you water moccasin run around with only a band on your arm. I’d brand your black ass to the bone. You niggers got old man Collins fooled. The town is just waiting to see one of you run. If I’m the one that catches one of his runners, I’ll bring him back with his teeth all beat out and his cock cut and tied around his neck as I march him back behind my horse. Hope it ain’t so cold that I freeze to death before I get back.

THOMAS: (Cowering.) Yes, Sir.

THOMAS continues his travels until he hears a whisper coming from the woods.

RUNNER: Psst... pst.

THOMAS: Who there?

RUNNER: Jus’ looking for a little help and maybe food.

THOMAS: You stay in those woods. They looking for you. I want no parts of this. Just be on your way. Ain’t got no help and ain’t had food for awhile myself.

RUNNER: (Still hiding.) Sir, I got no dry clothes and ain’t ate for two days. I’m just trying to make it to Mississippi to be with my babies. My running done got them sent to one of them state run farms.

THOMAS: You runnin’ south! Don’t make no sense.

RUNNER: Mister – I got a 10-year old boy and 8-year old daughter down there. My wife didn’t make it off the farm. The overseers raped her so much for so long that she bled out. All I got now is my boy and girl... I got to get to my babies.

THOMAS: (Looks around and whispers.) Follow me up the road here. I got a place not too far where I gather wood. Help me gather wood and I’ll give you what clothes I can off my back. Hope it ain’t so cold that I freeze to death before I get back.

RUNNER: Thank you, Mister. My name is...

THOMAS: No. Don’t want to know your name. Just help me so I can get back to my family and you be on your way.

THOMAS and the RUNNER arrive at the gathering site. THOMAS looks down deep into the valley below at rows and rows of old growth fallen trees that have seasoned over years.
THOMAS: (Pleased.) Lord, we can cut and drag a few trees up this hill with the horse and be done by nightfall. (Steps down from the wagon.)

RUNNER: Mister, wait!

THOMAS: (Steps into an icy puddle.) Damn! My foot’s already froze to the bone. Damn!

RUNNER: You need to warm your feet, mister.

THOMAS: Stop calling me sir and mister! Tom or Thomas is fine. I ain’t nothing but a slave like you. Ain’t no mister here.

RUNNER: Yes... Tom. What is that thing on your wrist?

THOMAS: Lift your shirt up.

RUNNER: (Puzzled.) What... it’s cold.

THOMAS: Lift! Your shirt up.

RUNNER: Okay.

THOMAS: (Puzzled.) You ain’t got no brand – where you running from? (Holding his left arm out.) This is my brand. The pain from a brand ends. This thing can rub the skin off your arm down to the bone when it’s harvest time. Let’s get the chains, ax, and saw. We need to get down this hill and get to cutting and dragging. (THOMAS steps downward and falls down the hill.)

RUNNER: (Shocked.) Mister, mister! (Makes his way down the hill.)

THOMAS: (In pain and breathing heavy.) O’ Lord, my foot is so numb. (Whispers.) That was a long fall. I have to get through this day ... I am so cold and things have gone so bad. Let me catch me breath and we can get this done. (Sighs.) I am so cold.

RUNNER: Tom, you need to stay there. Look at me. You need to stay put.

THOMAS: Ain’t no staying put. I got to get back to my ...

RUNNER: (Shocked.) Your leg ain’t ...

THOMAS: (Tries to get up. Pain knocks him to the ground.) I have to...

RUNNER: Your bone done gone through your leg. I gotta get you buck up this hill.

THOMAS: (In pain.) Pull me up, so I can sit up and look at my leg.

RUNNER: Tom, that leg don’t look good. The bone is sticking out like a walking stick. I got to get you up the hill so someone can see you.

THOMAS: So someone can see me? No. You go tell my Master. He’ll send others to get me. Go on now. Just turn the horse around. He’ll show you the way.

RUNNER: Tom, I got to get to my babies. I can get you to the road but I can’t go nowhere on no horse. I did some things when they killed my wife. I can’t be seen by no one. I got to go get to my babies.

THOMAS: I got a wife and babies too. If you leave me here and Mr. Collins thinks that I done run, he will send my family to be with your babies. Please ... what is your name?

RUNNER: I can’t tell you that now. You may let that slip out when they find you. Tom, I ain’t gonna leave you here to die in this valley. We have to make a way to get you up this hill.

THOMAS: (Weakening.) Go ... get... my...

RUNNER: Let’s try and get that leg right.

THOMAS: (Begging.) Please get ... (Tortured scream.)
RUNNER: (Pulling THOMAS’ leg.) Shhh.

THOMAS: (Begging.) No... please...

RUNNER: Thomas, you can’t scream like that. They will find us. Here, bite on this stick while I finish with your leg.

THOMAS: (Breathing heavy.) I want them to find us. (Crying.) Please let them send someone to get me. I have to get back to my wife... and... babies.

RUNNER: (Angry.) I have done some things and I ain’t letting NO ONE see me. I will get you up the hill, on the wagon, and send your horse on its way. Or I will leave you down here to die. We can both get back to our babies. Now! Put the stick in your mouth!

THOMAS: (Stick in mouth, muffled screams.) God please help me.

RUNNER: That’s it – let’s sit here for a while until the pain goes down a bit. Just take deep breaths and get ready to get up the hill. I know I don’t seem right not going for help when you helped me. I will beg the Lord for forgiveness. I know we can both get...

THOMAS: (Whispers.) It’s getting late; you need to ... (Passes out.)

RUNNER: (Shaking THOMAS.) Need to what?

As the evening closes in, the horse’s instincts cause it to return to its barn for the evening meal. The horse and wagon can be heard fading away in the distance.

RUNNER: (Shaking THOMAS.) Tom, Tom.

THOMAS: (Shallow breathing and numb from shock.) You need to tie up the horse... he will go back to the barn without ... us. Hurry, hurry.

RUNNER: (Lowers his head.) He done gone. I thought someone was stealing him, so I hid down here until I could hear him no more. I ain’t never been round no horses.

THOMAS: You gonna let me die here – ain’t you?

RUNNER: (Sits next to THOMAS.) I never wanted things this way. I have stayed with you all day. I wanted to get you up this hill and on that wagon. I don’t mean you no harm. (Looking at THOMAS in his eyes.) I will pray for you and your family every day – please forgive me.

THOMAS: The night’s gonna get cold enough to kill us in a few hours. We need to start a fire and hunker down before the dew soaks us to the bone.

RUNNER: (Moving closer to THOMAS.) We can’t start no fire. That’ll draw too much attention to us down here. I’m a dispatcher and being this far south can get me hung.

THOMAS: You gonna let me die here - ain’t you? (Begging.) Please just get me to the road. I swear on the souls of my babies that I won’t tell anyone that I have seen you or any other man. Please, please...

RUNNER: (Shifts to face THOMAS and stares directly into his eyes then whispers.) I can’t have you yelling for help – so I ain’t gonna leave you here – alive... I don’t want to harm you because you reached out to me when I needed reaching. (Softening his voice.) I done killed a lot of men and women – white and black. I am working now and I ain’t wanting no man to know that a ... Just sit here – I’ll be back – if you make a noise louder than a cricket – I will look you in
your eyes as I slowly cut your throat ‘til your head comes half off.

THOMAS: (Staring back emotionless.) I ain’t trying to die out here. My leg bone done punched through my thigh and I know many men don’t live long with being hurt that bad. Mr. Collins’ blood runs through me, so I know he will get me fixed up and running his house with this bum leg. I might be able to see my June and youngens from time to time, so there won’t be no noise made ... I got to be back to my ... (Passes out.)

The RUNNER leaves to gather branches of Southern pines. He bundles the branches to make a lean-to. THOMAS begins to regain consciousness and is close to hypothermia in the 35-degree evening air.

RUNNER: I was getting ready to pull you under here. I sure wish you would have stayed out a bit longer - dragging you here would have been easier on you. You still got that stick to bite on?

THOMAS: (Shaking and weak.) O’ Lord - I can’t take no more of these bones rattling in my leg. I can feel ‘em clacking together with every breath ... I can’t ...

RUNNER: (Stern.) We gonna do this and you gonna get back to your family. So get that stick and let’s get it over.

THOMAS: (Biting stick. Muffled screaming so hard that his eyes are bulging out of their sockets.) No no - God help me - no ...

RUNNER: (Winded.) It’s over - just lay back and catch your breath while I close up the sides. This will keep the dew and cold off of us ’til morning - then I will get you up next to the road and be on my way.

THOMAS: (In pain and tired.) This ain’t no thing slaves down here know how to build - where’d you learn to do this ... you a “Inyun” or something?

RUNNER: Indian? - No, just a dispatcher working to get back home.

THOMAS: (Confused.) Dispatcher ... and you said you were trying to get to ... your babies. And what’s this killing of white and black people?

RUNNER: I work for Abe.

THOMAS: Abe – what is a Abe?

RUNNER: (Proud.) Abe – the President Abe Lincoln.

THOMAS: (Softly laughs.) Ain’t no niggers working for no Abe Lincoln less they cleaning his chamber pot or nursing his baby.

RUNNER: (Angry.) Ain’t no niggers ever been a dispatcher ... we been cut on, burned, and hung working to get y’all from down here. We all college graduates from Middlebury College. It took Mr. Douglas tugging on Abe’s ear for months to get us doing anything for y’all. We got to work on our owns cause them Army men always tell ‘em when they know one of us is traveling south - half of them Army people from down here.

THOMAS: You a free black man and ... (Bewildered.) You sneak your way down here? Why would you come down here killing folks for? Why you gonna go so far down to the deltas looking for one of those state farms? Why you ...

RUNNER: We tell the Army people what’s going on down here - they say they ain’t looking for a war down here but they getting militias ready for something. While I make my way down, I come across runaway slaves making their way to the North. After so many stories – something started to rot in me – I started ...

THOMAS: Why you killing for Abe? Don’t seem like they want you killing white people down here.

RUNNER: The stories I heard of white men beating slaves ‘til you can see their backbone from neck to ass. Men cutting off half a slave’s butt to keep him from running to be free. I heard stories of slaves raping children young as six and killing other slaves in worse ways than white men. Something happened to me – I wanted to do some killing myself. I had to...
THOMAS: We heard stories of a black man killing people down here – always thought it was just stories to keep us scared. Even heard a story ‘bout a slave woman hung from a tree and cut open so bad her inside draped ten-feet down to the dirt.

RUNNER: (Smiles.) Mary Howard ... that woman died too quick ... I needed another day with her but pulling her skin off by hand was taking too long. I would cut and tear a piece off and she would pass out for a hour – I had dispatch work to do and sending her to hell was taking too long.

THOMAS: (Attempts to slide away.) What can a black woman do that’s so bad that she has to die like that?

RUNNER: She was the black-widow nursemaid to the wives of slave owners and overseers that had babies with slaves. I heard she killed over 20 babies made by slaves and white men. She would nurse a baby once or twice, then the baby would scream for days until it died from having no food, water, or air. Mommas just helpless – ball up in a corner holding their babies ’til they finally rested – dead in their arms. Mary needed killing.

THOMAS: How’d you know she was killing them babies?

RUNNER: Them owner wives made it no secret ‘bout having Mary poison them babies made by their husbands. They always said them nigger whores always cocking their asses up at their men. They knew their men most likely raped them girls or fell in love with ‘em – no matter to the wives – they didn’t want their kids having half nigger babies runnin’ around being loved by their men.

THOMAS: (Labored breathing.) How many white men ... you kill?

RUNNER: No matter – you need to get some sleep – you startin’ to look bad from losing blood.

THOMAS: (Whisper.) Dispatcher ... huh – you think they gonna free us one day?

RUNNER: Don’t know – I just do my job swimming against a strong current both ways. Been as far south as Florida three times now. Don’t want to die down here – but more ... work needs to be done.

THOMAS: I’m not cold anymore – I am just tired. Oh my god, oh my god, my family, what will he do to my family? My wife June is a beautiful woman. I took her in when she was thirteen years old after her parents died of fever. I was thirty and she was the most beautiful thing that my eyes have ever seen. My son, Michael is ten, he is a handful everyday. He’s got a good mind, so he would have ended up as a house slave. My daughter, Mary, is eight; she is just as lovely as her mother. She ... WAIT.

RUNNER: (Leans forward.) What?

THOMAS: (Labored breathing.) We can still help each other... save my babies.

RUNNER: What can we do? I need something to let the lord forgive me if I have to leave you down here.

THOMAS: If I die in the night ... can you get my family up North? Mr. Collins will think I done runaway and send my family to one of them state farms. No matter that he done had his way with June and been looking at our daughter. He’ll send them to hell as easy as he eat supper.

RUNNER: I can’t take no family nowhere – it’s all I have just to get myself back home with all these folks looking for me. Don’t much matter; I’ll get you up that hill in the morning.

THOMAS: I am begging you to kill Mr. Collins. That man is so evil that he was born dead and without a soul. I have seen him breed brothers with the same wife to keep the stock going and the brothers from bonding. I have lived with him keeping man from wife for months while having her tend to and relieve the young field hands as a reward for working extra hard – as many as ten a day. He have them do this out in the fields while we work all ‘round her. I know no man that needs killing more that Mr. Collins.
RUNNER: These tales have rotted my soul so heavy that it won't have nowhere to go when I die. Won't be no heaven or hell for me - just wandering these hills hearing story after story... (Sigh) When is he alone?

THOMAS: First thing in the morning - he eat breakfast alone in the kitchen. He won't let us near him when he eats - he says we slobber like dogs.

RUNNER: Tell me how to get to the farm.

THOMAS: I need you to do ... two things.

RUNNER: You need to rest, if you gonna make it through the night.

THOMAS: Did you hear that Deputy talking to me this morning?

RUNNER: Yes, rather be killed than brought back cut up like that. (Stares at THOMAS.)

THOMAS: There's one more thing.

RUNNER: Last thing - get some sleep. I'll keep you warm through the night.

THOMAS: What's your name?

RUNNER: (Wraps his arms around THOMAS and whispers.) Malcolm.

THOMAS: Malcolm (Passes out.)

MR. COLLINS is eating breakfast in anger because THOMAS has not returned for two days.

MR. COLLINS: Who the hell is in here!? I am going to send the whole lot of you down south with Thomas' whore and kids.

RUNNER: (Grabs MR. COLLINS by the hair from behind and whispers.)
THE PREVAILING MISCONCEPTIONS
OF LITERARY GREATNESS AND LOVE
(AS SET FORTH BY JANE AUSTEN)

By Leah Perdue

Characters:

SOPHIE: Brandon, a young woman of about 23 years

ANNE: Wentworth, née Elliot

FANNY: Bertram, née Price

ELIZABETH: Darcy, née Bennett

Setting:

PLACE: Sophie's office

SETTING: A dimly lit stage with a desk and chair at one side and a couch at the other. A small desk lamp, a book, and writing implements adorn the desk. A throw lies across the back of the couch.

TIME: Present day, late afternoon

ANNE: (Enters from left, wearing period costume, calling over her shoulder to someone offstage.) Captain Wentworth, I believe Kellynch Hall wants some improvements. The drapes in the parlor look quite worn and the lane is looking... (Looks around, stunned.) Captain... Wentworth? (Looks at SOPHIE, startled.) Oh dear me! Another one.

SOPHIE: (Shocked.) Who...who are you? Where did you come from?

ANNE: I just can’t understand why a fairly... (With an extremely long look at SOPHIE.) young women such as yourself, with good circumstances insists on choosing writing as a profession. Can you imagine anything so dreary?

SOPHIE: (Finding her voice.) Do I know you? How did you get in here? What the hell are you doing in my apartment? GET OUT!

ANNE: Well, I am quite taken aback. While your circumstances show you to be a young lady of some breeding, your manners lack any such distinction. (Seats herself on the couch.) Well, since we lack any acquaintance to introduce us, let me do the honors. My name is Anne Wentworth, wife of Captain Frederick Wentworth. My former name was Anne Elliot of Kellynch.

SOPHIE: Anne...Elliot? Jane...Austen’s... Persuasion? You are Anne Elliot?

ANNE: Yes, now please do stop gaping at me. You are?

SOPHIE: I’m Sophie Brandon ...

ANNE: Lovely to meet you Miss Brandon. Please stop gawking. I feel as if I am conversing with someone who doesn’t have the benefit of your years and -- Child, you do realize that I am here because of your inclination towards the --

SOPHIE: Okay, who paid you? Was it Katie? Bet she got a kick out of it. Well, haha, fun’s over. Get out. Tell whoever it was I was thoroughly shocked and completely fell for it.
ANNE: What on earth are you going on about? I know no Kate and she has, certainly, never paid for my services for any reason. As I was telling you... (Pauses, with look at SOPHIE.)

SOPHIE: (Nods "go-ahead").

ANNE: Child, you do realize that I am here because of your inclination towards the --

SOPHIE: Look, lady, I really don't have the time for this.

ANNE: Would you please take heed of what I am saying? I am here because of your rather stupid decision to judge your work by another's. You are insistent upon using Miss Jane Austen, dreadful woman by the way, as the standard of literary greatness.

SOPHIE: Ah, I knew it! Katie's always knocking the Austen. (Mimics high-pitched voice.) "You know that stuff is outdated and unrealistic. Why are you so obsessed with her?" (Normal voice.) Okay, is she here? Watching all this? (Calls out.) Come out Katie, bet you had a good laugh. (Looks around.) Katie?

ANNE: Why do you persist in the ridiculous notion that I know anyone called Katie?

SOPHIE: Look, lady, I am really amazed that you kept it going for this long, but this is getting to be a distraction. I really need to get back to my writing. You did a pretty good job, but Anne Elliot isn't as haughty as you're playing her.

ANNE: Haughty?! Listen to me Miss Brandon. My name is Aline Wentworth. I was born Anne Elliot, daughter of Sir William Elliot. I've lived my entire life at Kellynch Hall. I married Captain Wentworth when I was twenty-seven years old. He purchased Kellynch Hall from my father and we have lived there since. I have had rather enough of your insinuations!

SOPHIE: (Sits down heavily.) You are... (Starts hyperventilating.) Anne...

ANNE: Oh goodness... Miss Brandon? (Rushes over to SOPHIE.) Are you ill? Shall I ring a servant? (Fans her with papers.) Do you need some sherry?

SOPHIE: No. No. I'm okay. I'll be fine. You really are Anne. But, that's impossible. You can't be. She was fictional, and would be dead. This is... This is a hallucination.

ANNE: Call it whatever you must. But it changes nothing at all. I am here because you refuse to relinquish the idea that Miss Austen wrote the respected standard for the novel. I am here to correct you of that notion.

SOPHIE: Well that's a little disloyal, isn't it? I mean, she created you. You are a product of her imagination.

ANNE: But my life is far from novel-worthy. In fact, I shall condescend to wonder exactly what Miss Austen thought she would be chronicling. My story is far from the stuff of high drama.

SOPHIE: What? You and the Captain, that's a beautiful, poignant story. The first time I read it I cried. When you're convinced he has designs on Louisa, it's just so heartbreaking.

ANNE: I'm afraid that you young women are far too sentimental and lack the discernment of those your elder in years. While I --

SOPHIE: Look, I'm twenty-three and far more together than most my friends. Will you please stop insinuating that I am some kind of immature child!

ANNE: Forgive me, but as I was saying...while I may have been impoverished and my family in rather poor circumstances, I still was a product of good breeding and far more accomplished than Miss Louisa. Also, my father's connections were most advantageous to the Captain.

SOPHIE: Well, it still was a beautiful story about love thought to be hopeless.

ANNE: Miss Brandon, you are missing the point. You put such great stock in the
stories that Miss Austen penned, but in fact they are simple and lack the merit of providing true insight into the relationships of real men and women.

SOPHIE: Lady, I don’t care who you are. Jane Austen was a literary goddess. Her work is relevant and wonderful.

ANNE: Miss Brandon, did you ever pay any thought to what happens to Miss Austen’s characters once the books were finished? What happens to their lives beyond the thrill of new love and their hasty marriage?

SOPHIE: Not really, that’s all happily ever after stuff.

ANNE: (Under breath.) Simpleton. (Normal volume.) You would do well to further consider what would have happened to everyone once the reader reached the end. It isn’t nearly as romantic when you consider the dreariness of everyday life paired with a person that you are most ill suited for.

SOPHIE: What do you mean ill suited? These are stories about people who are head over heels in love. What’s ill suited about that?

ANNE: Captain Wentworth and myself are far from like-minded. He is every bit the navy man. He lives and breathes for the occupation of the seas. While I am much more comfortable to stay at Kellynch and never be bothered by the world beyond its tidy borders.

SOPHIE: So?

ANNE: Well, can you fathom the disagreements we have had over this very topic? He wants to secure his interests in the Americas by traveling there and, even worse, taking me.

SOPHIE: That’s not huge. Every couple has little spats about something or the other.

ANNE: Well, I must also remind you of the Captain’s somewhat changeable nature. He felt great admiration and preference for me when we were young, then when circumstances made our marrying an impossibility, he blamed me for being inconstant.

SOPHIE: But you were led astray. You regretted it?

ANNE: Yes, of course, but he blamed me and in our next meeting treated me with great disdain and coolness. His perfunctory civility constantly weighed on me. Then later, he had decided that he loved me once again and we were to be married.

SOPHIE: But all worked out okay in the end.

ANNE: What I am trying to illustrate for you is that the end of those pages in which lives are contained is not merely the end. It is a falsehood to say that all would continue to be well for the Captain and I.

SOPHIE: How is it that you, who got your knight in shining armor, is a skeptic?

ANNE: I just wanted to give you some idea that perhaps you are thinking about Miss Austen’s novels in the wrong context. (Looks off-stage.) Well, I am afraid I must take my leave of you. Lovely to have made your acquaintance, Miss Brandon. (Rushes off stage.)

SOPHIE: What... What just happened? I’m going crazy. I probably have a brain tumor the size of a grapefruit. (Looks off-stage.) Mrs. Wentworth? Anne? (Shakes her head.) Yep, I’m nuts. I wonder... (Walks to bookcase and removes Persuasion, opens to a page and reads aloud.) “What wild imaginations one forms where dear self is concerned!” (Laughs, closes book and returns to writing.)

FANNY: (Enters, waving offstage.) Goodbye, Catherine! You must come see us again. (Without missing a beat, turns to SOPHIE) Darling girl. So sad about her mother though. It was a terrible disgrace --

SOPHIE: (Jumping from fright.) AHHHH! What the hell?! (Stares.) Who are you? Do you people not knock?
FANNY: I'm Mrs. Fanny Bertram, dear. And who, may I ask, are you?

SOPHIE: S--Sophie, Sophie Brandon.

FANNY: I believe I know a Brandon or two. Yes, there is a certain Sir Robert Brandon in Bath. Is he of any relation to you?

SOPHIE: (Slowly and stupidly.) I don't think so.

FANNY: (Brightly.) Well, no matter. I think I shall like you all the same. Where did you say you were from?

SOPHIE: Pittsburgh.

FANNY: (confused.) Well... Is Brandon your married name? Or are you still Miss?

SOPHIE: I'm not married. (Regaining senses,) I'm a writer.

FANNY: (dismisssively.) Oh, dreadful occupation, that. So you are not married? Why ever not? (Looks about the room, cheerfully.) The furnishings seem well appointed enough to insinuate that there might perhaps be some fortune. (As afterthought.) And you are rather fair.

SOPHIE: I'm sorry; who did you say you were?

FANNY: Fanny Bertram, wife of Edmund Bertram...of Mansfield Park.

SOPHIE: FANNY PRICE? No, I'm going crazy. It's a delusion, not real. (Shakes head.) I've got a brain tumor. I'm imagining it all. Not real.

FANNY: Oh dear me, are you quite all right?

SOPHIE: (Laughing madly.) Yes, I'm just great. Just a little psychotic, that's all.

FANNY: I have never met a young lady so given to fits of... absurdity as you, Miss Brandon.

SOPHIE: (Begins to mellow.) So you're Fanny Pr... Bertram. You seem different than I imagined.

FANNY: Yes, the years spent with Mr. Bertram have no doubt changed me for the better. I think it only appropriate that such a good deserving man should have the comforts of an accomplished and educated wife.

SOPHIE: (Stares at her mutely.)

FANNY: (Brightly.) Do you play?

SOPHIE: Huh?

FANNY: Play, my dear, play. The harp or pianoforte?

SOPHIE: Um, no. I took a few lessons when I was ten, but I --

FANNY: Well, that will never do. How do you expect to marry if you have no accomplishments to speak of?

SOPHIE: I hadn't really planned on that for a while. I was going to write and work for a bit, then think about --

FANNY: No, we must find you a husband at once. You are not as young as you once were. Indeed, you must be at least four and twenty.

SOPHIE: (Indignantly.) I just turned twenty-three.

FANNY: (With some embarrassment.) You must remember your bonnet in the garden and yards. The sun is most unkind.

SOPHIE: (Angrily.) Did you come here to insult me or do you have some great wisdom to impart too?

FANNY: The only reason that I can summon to mind is that I must be here in order to find you a husband. Are there any eligible bachelors in the neighborhood?
Preferably those possessing good prospects and contacts. Oh, what about a kind officer, a lieutenant or captain?

SOPHIE: (Very angrily.) I don’t want to get married! I’m not interested in kowtowing to some patriarchal concept that says I have to marry and breed!

FANNY: (Blushing.) Forgive my intrusion. It’s simply that I cannot imagine a young woman such as yourself with good prospects, (Quietly to herself,) though imperfect manners, (Normal voice.) so opposed to the most principle of institutions. It is God’s gift to both man and woman.

SOPHIE: (Apologetically.) Look, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you. I’m sorry I blew up like that. It’s just that you seem so different than the woman I read about. You were a fiercely independent and moral woman. You seemed to be a model of feminism.

FANNY: Well, I am most certain that I never aspired to that sort of praise. I merely loved Edmund and wished to make him my husband.

SOPHIE: Are you saying that all you wanted was to marry? That was your entire goal?

FANNY: (Laughing.) Yes, of course. I just wanted Edmund. Not for something as callous and unfeeling as his fortunes, but because I thought him to be an honorable and well-dispositioned man.

SOPHIE: (With a sigh.) Really? That was it? But what about your opposition to your Uncle’s slaves in Antigua?

FANNY: What about it? Surely I did oppose that barbaric practice, but I was in no position to enact any change.

SOPHIE: That can’t be it! You were so...so noble.

FANNY: I certainly can’t answer to any nobility, but I must suggest that while I may have protested of many offenses that occur on the morality of that great house, I was never in any position to change any of them. The only goal I was remotely able of pursuing was Edmund.

SOPHIE: It’s just that you were so strong, but it was all because of him, wasn’t it?

FANNY: (Nods.) I really must be on my way. I’m having our neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Yardley, to dinner this evening; our cook is always quite indelicate with the partridges. (Exits waving to SOPHIE.)

SOPHIE: (Calling after her.) Nice to meet you. (Cradles head in hands.) This is insane. I’m talking to an embittered Anne Elliot and a man-eater passing herself off as Fanny Price. This is some awful dream karmically delivered because I refused to read Hemingway’s A Farewell to Arms in high school.

ELIZABETH: (Staggering in.) Kitty, Kitty? Kitty, I can’t seem to find my way.

SOPHIE: Oh great, another one.

ELIZABETH: (To herself.) Kitty? Did Mr. Darcy put in a new garden?

SOPHIE: (Considers her for a moment.) Oh my god. You are Elizabeth--

ELIZABETH: (Hiccups loudly and slumps on couch.)

SOPHIE: Drunk! You, Elizabeth Bennett, are drunk!

ELIZABETH: Darcy, dear. Elizabeth Darcy.

SOPHIE: I can’t believe... It’s just that... When Anne showed up...

ELIZABETH: Dear, you must learn to complete a thought before barreling into the next.

SOPHIE: Well, forgive me my lack of eloquence when fictional characters keep showing up at my doorstep.
ELIZABETH: Certainly, dear. Certainly. (Starts.) Have we been introduced? For your name is eluding me.

SOPHIE: No, no. Sorry 'bout that. My name is Sophie Brandon.

ELIZABETH: Elizabeth Darcy of Pemberly. Lovely to meet you. Have you any tea?

SOPHIE: Ummm... no. I've got coffee, will that do?

ELIZABETH: Don't trouble yourself. I'll be fine. I have just now been taking a turn in the gardens at Pemberly. Kitty, my younger sister, was... she was...

SOPHIE: Helping you?

ELIZABETH: Yes, she was helping me. Whatever are you doing there?

SOPHIE: Writing. I'm a writer, sort of.

ELIZABETH: A writer, that's lovely. My oldest daughter Charlotte loves novels. Mr. Darcy says she reads far too many of them, but I see no harm in a young woman educating herself.

SOPHIE: (Enamored.) Oh, Mr. Darcy! I've read Pride and Prejudice so many times I feel like I know him.

ELIZABETH: (With some bitterness.) Oh, yes, Mr. Darcy IS quite the gentleman.

SOPHIE: (Clearly confused.) What? But Darcy is your soul mate! He is the other half of you. What made you say that?

ELIZABETH: (Dismissing her.) Why, it's nothing, dear. He is, in every respect, perfectly amiable. (Trying to change the subject.) Are you married, dear?

SOPHIE: No, I'm not. I haven't found my Darcy.

ELIZABETH: (Sighing.) I am rather flummoxed by the obsession with Mr. Darcy's character that so many young women seem to be prey to.

SOPHIE: Why? He is a romantic hero to rival Romeo or Heathcliff.

ELIZABETH: Forgive my forwardness but it seems that you know very little of love. In the case of Mr. Darcy and I, it was merely circumstance that brought us together. Two people were hardly more poorly suited for each other's company than we.

SOPHIE: (Incredulous.) Are you kidding? You and Darcy were perfect for one another. You mellowed his pride and he taught you to be more discerning.

ELIZABETH: Unfortunately, Mr. Darcy and I have adapted very little to each other's temperament. He has remained a prideful man and I am most sad to say that my character has done very little to meet the demands of his.

SOPHIE: But that's impossible! You were already overcoming that stuff at your engagement.

ELIZABETH: My dear, the blush of love causes promises to be made and changes in one's behavior that can only be temporary. One's nature simply does not change. I fear that Mr. and Mrs. Wickham and Lydia will have far more happiness than Mr. Darcy and I. They are both vain, silly creatures that will have little regard for anything but their own satisfaction.

SOPHIE: Elizabeth, that's crazy! They are doomed to unhappiness because of their tempers, don't you see?

ELIZABETH: (Reclining on couch.) I'm afraid that whatever notions you may hold, Pride and Prejudice are uncomfortable companions and will...(Yawns.) never find a happy peace. (Draws throw over her and falls asleep.)

SOPHIE: (With a heavy sigh looks at paper on desk, balls it up and throws it away. Sits behind desk and begins to write.) "It all began the day Elizabeth Darcy lay sleeping on my couch, stinking of brandy..."

End.
I can honestly say “Rock of Love” is absolutely the worst show I have ever loved.

- Embracing my Inner Fool: How I got seduced by a Rock Star by Faye Fleming
For a period of time last summer, people driving past the Alps Road branch of SunTrust Bank would have been treated to the very odd sight of several bankers clustered together by the back door of the bank. At first glance, we probably appeared to be engaged in some sort of illegal activity. Were we sorting counterfeit money to be distributed to innocent customers? Were we dealing crack or crystal meth from the drive-thru lane? No. Instead, we were engaged in an intense, heated discussion of the latest developments on our new favorite show, VH-1’s “Rock of Love.” Several of my coworkers and I had become hopelessly addicted to “Rock of Love,” and we were simply too embarrassed to discuss the show inside the bank, where we might be overheard by customers. I was blindsided by my immediate addiction to the show because I have never been the type of person to enjoy the sleazier variety of so-called reality shows.

For the most part, I consider myself to be an intelligent woman. I am mature, fairly sophisticated, and not easily taken advantage of. Other than reading People magazine, I don’t usually pay attention to the more sensational media that saturates our world. For example, most of the TV shows I watch can be divided into two categories. The first category is made up of the relatively clever, well-written, and well-acted popular series. Some examples of these shows are “Grey’s Anatomy,” “Lost,” “Ugly Betty,” and “Private Practice.” The second category is made up of the home improvement or home design shows found on HGTV and TLC. While I have not watched many of the so-called reality TV shows, I am aware of their growing popularity. According to Eric Deggans, “Reality TV, once considered the weird uncle of network programming, has found enough acceptance by young viewers and advertisers that it’s now an essential part of every network’s programming.” Whereas a few of the reality shows do offer a bit of quality, most simply seem to compete with each other to offer increasingly outrageous scenarios and an intensified “ick” factor. So, imagine my shock and surprise when I discovered I am just as susceptible as anyone else to the lure of trash TV. For some reason, I still cannot fathom, I tuned into Episode 1 of “Rock of Love” on VH-1. Unlike the big fish in all the stories, I was not the one that got away. Instead, I was caught fast: hook, line, and sinker. I can honestly say “Rock of Love” is absolutely the worst show I have ever loved, and I found my fascination with the show to be a bit disturbing. The realization that I could be entertained by a show whose central focus is the objectification and exploitation of women was very disconcerting.

I found nothing about “Rock of Love” to be admirable, thought-provoking or even slightly intelligent. The basic idea is that the lead singer of the glam-rock band Poison, Bret Michaels, is looking for love. He has been set up in a flashy bachelor pad in Hollywood, with twenty-five eager young ladies ready to compete for his attention and affection. The first problem with the premise is the choice of Bret Michaels as the intended object of desire. After all, Bret Michaels is an immature, washed-up, still-trying-to-live-out-his-fantasy, clueless has-been from whom a smart woman would run as fast as her legs would carry her. He appears to think his main contribution to a relationship should be flipping his long, stringy blond hair around while he gazes at a woman through his smudged eyeliner and grants her the opportunity to capture his interest. I had to ask myself: “What kind of a woman could possibly be attracted to him?” Well, therein lies the second problem—the women themselves. The “ladies” chosen to be on “Rock of Love” embody the most sexist and damaging stereotypes that intelligent women have been working to overcome for decades. As far as physical appearances go, everything about the women on the show is completely fake: from the silicone boobs, which would each fit neatly into a toilet plunger, to the puffy lips, huge hair and sprayed on, no-line tans. All of the ladies are decked out in the latest fashions from the clearance racks at Sluts ’R Us, and they each seem to be quite skilled at applying makeup with a garden trowel. When the women are on camera, they can be counted on to be drunk, profane, catty, and crude. Comparing the ladies of “Rock of Love” with the ladies from another VH-1 show, “Flavor of Love,” Lyndsey Parker observes that “some of the prospective Bret Michaels trophy girlfriends on this show were freaky-deaky enough to make even Flav girls Toastee and Pumkin look like Amish nuns.”

These ladies would go to any lengths, and I do mean any, to impress the supposedly lovelorn Bret Michaels. Fueled by seemingly limitless alcohol, the women performed spontaneous lap dances, pole-danced, exposed themselves for photographs, slapped, shoved and yelled at each other, tongue kissed each other, and they fondled each other with as much breathless enthusiasm as they
would summon up for a porn film audition. Astonishingly, almost every one of these activities happens in the very first episode. I laughed so hard I cried, and I wondered what in the world could possibly happen next. But even while laughing at the crazy behavior and contrived antics, I could sense my own uneasiness.

Many of the women on the show came across as genuinely dim-witted, not just silly. I felt almost ashamed of myself for laughing at them, in the same way I would be ashamed to laugh at a person with a physical handicap. A couple of the women display an almost manic, frenzied enthusiasm for humiliating both themselves and the other women. In her review of “Rock of Love” for the New York Times, Virginia Heffernan noted when discussing the ladies: “Many of them seem dangerously unwell, discolored, surgically altered, physically unbalanced and worryingly mood-disordered.”

I began to wonder what my enjoyment of “Rock of Love” said about the kind of person I am. I certainly do not share the values the show seems to convey. I know the worth of a woman is not measured in silicone and hair extensions. I am fortunate to know many women who are strong, smart, confident and wickedly funny; and also many men intelligent enough to find those qualities very sexy. I believe a successful relationship is based on trust, love and mutual respect, not on partying and instant sexual gratification. While most of us might not be as particular about the type of person we would find acceptable for an occasional hook-up, we tend to be much more specific about the qualities we want in a long-term partner. The type of woman exemplified by the women of “Rock of Love” really has no more to offer in a genuine relationship than the blow-up dolls sold in the back of porn magazines.

I have never before been so engrossed in a TV show that made me feel so exasperated and disgusted. When one of the women, Brandi, presses her chest up against the chest of another woman and declares, “With our boobs pushed together, we can think better,” I can only groan at her utter stupidity. When another woman, Tiffany, is lurching around and drunkenly slurring something about her daughter, the realization that she is a mother adds an element of tragedy to the whole scenario. When the women were instructed to compete to see who could offer Bret the hottest phone sex, I thought I had surely reached the end of my rope. I just did not see how I could watch any more, but the next week I found myself right back in front of the TV. As it turned out, I was not alone in my helpless fascination with “Rock of Love.” On Sunday, September 16, 2007, “Rock of Love” became the highest-rated cable television show airing that day, with 3.5 million viewers. I wondered how many other viewers shared my dilemma; I knew the show was going to be awful and it would make my skin crawl, but I was powerless to stop watching. Despite all the drawbacks, “Rock of Love” is one of the funniest shows I have ever seen on television. I realized my addiction had grown too strong to be denied, so I attempted to stop focusing on the bigger picture and just enjoy the ride.

I know that many people might tell me not to take a TV show so seriously. After all, “Rock of Love,” like most TV shows, is only intended to provide entertainment, right? That is true, but shouldn’t a network also bear responsibility for content? VH-1 is a network created to appeal to young people, and all of the programming found on VH-1 is clearly aimed at the target audience. The ratings success of “Rock of Love” will encourage VH-1 to create even more shows that follow the same format. This programming trend was observed by Steven Zeitchik of Variety: “VH-1, meanwhile, continues to turn out so many ‘celeb-reality’ creations it could be pulling them from a clown car.” When we turn on our televisions and select a show to watch, we are making a choice about what we allow into our minds. A little snack of trash TV now and then won’t do any real damage, but a steady stream flowing into the brain will eventually cause our minds to become a flabby, mushy mess. On a regular basis, a small, but blessedly rational, part of my brain would pose the question, “Why are you watching this crap?” The rest of my brain, which was both in the majority and in the driver’s seat, apparently did not care about the answer. But in the same way that the human body cannot thrive on a steady diet of Twinkies and HoHos, the human mind cannot thrive on a steady diet of train-wreck TV. Input determines output, so if I start with junk, I end up with junk. Conversely, if I start with quality, I will end up with quality. This caveat could also be applied to Bret Michaels and his search for a quality woman. In order to find such a woman, Bret might have to consider looking beyond the human Twinkies and HoHos.

While I did watch and enjoy every episode, I was never able to feel comfortable about the amount of time I wasted on a TV show that was completely devoid of any discernable redeeming value. I wasted many hours actually watching the show, and then wasted even more time discussing the details with my unfortunate friends who were equally addicted. On the Sunday before the final episode aired, I wasted approximately nine solid hours watching the “Rock of Love” Marathon, when VH-1 re-aired all the episodes back to back. Undoubtedly, I could have found better ways to invest my time. There are many projects around my house I could have completed. Had I been able to resist being sucked into the vortex of sleaze...
that was “Rock of Love.” I might have organized my closets or remodeled my bathroom. I could have learned to cook something new, or spent more time with my non-“Rock of Love” obsessed friends. Quite frankly, even cleaning out the lint tray of my dryer would have been a better use of my time. Thankfully, I was never able to completely shut down the rational part of my brain. The small part that managed to remain sensible understood the big difference between something that is only funny and something that is also worthwhile. Now that I have experienced the powerful temptation of trash TV, I have newfound empathy for those who allow themselves to become ensnared. I also have to admit to a grudging respect for the network executives who choose this type of programming. After all, their job is to select a lineup of shows that will deliver high ratings and lots of advertising dollars. As long as trash TV is what viewers respond to, we will continue to have lots of trashy shows to choose from.

Was I foolish to squander my time on something so meaningless? Well, yes. But, most of us harbor a little bit of an inner fool, which doesn’t mean we’re bad people—just human. I have realized it is okay to indulge my inner fool occasionally. I can love her and let her out from time to time for a little fun, but in the future I will try to keep her from hogging the remote. I am grateful I can still tell the difference between quality programming and trash TV. If admitting that I got hooked on “Rock of Love,” even though I was aware it was a complete, brain-sucking waste of time makes me a bit of a hypocrite, I can live with the label. Fortunately, trash TV has not become a habit for me. I don’t know or care who loves New York at the moment, or who is in Celebrity Rehab. I am very proud to report I have actually managed to resist watching “Rock of Love 2.” My withdrawal symptoms were not quite as bad as I had anticipated, but that may be because the new season of “Lost” has started. Above all, whether I’m watching trash TV or the somewhat higher quality network fare, I am at peace with myself. Bret Michaels may have seduced me, but I managed to emerge from the encounter with a little bit of my dignity intact, which is more than most of his women can say.
You're tired. You're angry, Nick, burn the memories up. Feed. Devour. I felt his breath on my neck and his voice whispering in my ear. I looked him in the eyes. His hands gripped tighter around the wheel.

The rage of guilt and imprisoning addiction to sin had cultivated for months and now festered. In that engine burned fear, anger, resentment, shame, regret, and despair along with gasoline. With each striking piston, each heartbeat pounding in my eardrum, these demons blazed, the car raged over asphalt. Desperate voices of calm and reason were choked, drowned by my hand turning up the radio, blasting the intense soundtrack to the car’s movie-like speed. The white needle of the odometer jumped relentlessly as it ran through the gears in an intense rhythm, as did the pulse in my veins. My excitement fed off the needle. I was a junkie.

The glow of street lights flickered fleetingly into one constant, pale glow. The addition of red and blue was the slight difference of a sliver after-image at one hundred-forty miles per hour. The association to police hardly registered. I turned down the next street, tires squealing in conformity to my will. I had a split-second thought of parking my car in a dark parking lot and turning the lights out. They weren't behind me, so I kept going; why, I really don't know. A car turned onto the road ahead of me. I was going to go around him and through a red light, but images of cop chases on TV that ended in a crescent-shaped and tangled car made my foot push the brake. Red and blue flashed again. This time blindingly, bouncing off every surface in the car. A light was shined in my face. The handcuffs dug in between the joints of my wrists. Immediately I awoke to my senses. I sat in the back of the patrol car, my heart aching. Rhett smiled and laughed casually when the policeman asked him questions. He said that he was scared the whole time, that I scared him. He looked into the police car where I sat and smiled that smug grin - this time more playfully, to dismiss his sympathy and responsibility. I looked at the reflection of the window. My eyes stared back at me this time. Lucifer had left, smiling playfully. He had just wanted to go along for the ride. He left me there to feel violated, desecrated. Rhett went home with his father without further ado. The jail cell had seven green mats, and seven smug men lying on the cement floor. Surprising enough, I was calmer than I had been in months. I was forced to be. For six hours I lay, I sat, and I listened to the others' stories of similar hard-headed rebellions.

The hours ticked by, I watched the inmates get bailed out one by one, but not me. I sat and I lay. I reflected and I corrected.

God, that was so stupid! Why did I have to do that? I have all A’s and B’s in school, everything going for me . . . . That's the kind of story you'd see on the news - dead. What if I had hit that car that pulled out in front of me and killed myself, or the other kid?!

Soon I had the strong notion that my desire to pursue God and that Bible was the only thing that kept me from wrapping and entwining myself around a telephone pole or the backside of the sedan that I nearly smashed into. That God may have wanted me to discover Him before my time was up.

Despite my night spent in a concrete cage, despite my stubborn attitude that I was in control when in fact I was not, despite my submission to the temptation of the movie-like speed, I felt renewed, calmed, quieted. Humbled. Shortly after this self-inflicted experience, after the initial shock wore off, I picked up that Bible. This happened to be around the same time the pastor of my church was pushing people to actually read, annotate, mark up, and to digest the pages of their Bibles. I carried it to school, I read it when I woke up, and I drew pictures, arrows, and underlined verses that applied to me. Shortly after I completed Proverbs (one proverb a day for a month), it was my light. Eventually it became my armor. Lucifer would never again trick me without strong resistance.
Many people in my life that think I’m crazy and blind when I compare myself to others. They say I’m fine the way I am and I’m silly for wanting to change. I’ve come to realize that my years of disgust with my appearance and wasted effort keeping up with the “latest” were built upon a simple human characteristic: jealousy.

Jealousy is fueled by the “manipulating media,” whose goal is to acquire our valuable emotions, pride, and money. The media exists vicariously through our peers, or as America has affectionately labeled them, “The Joneses.” No matter how much we deny it, silent competition takes place. We’re always trying to keep up. Our friends, co-workers, classmates, and acquaintances provide the only source of energy for the fast-paced “Fashion America.” The boutiques, makeup counters, and shoe stores preach the relevance of conformity while cunningly beating down consciences until pride, in the form of thin glittering plastic, is in the impertinent hands of another sales associate. However, what we do not realize is that The Joneses only exist in our minds. “The Joneses” can be eliminated from our view: they can go on vacation, go inside and have dinner; they can even move—forever. We simply have to ignore the idea of competition between peers and place it out of everyday thought. As tough as ignoring the “family” we love to hate can be, it is feasible.

This competition is deeply rooted in our minds as young children. It began as a small seed that exponentially grew with maturity. As preschool children, we saw a bigger toy in the hands of a bubbly-nosed classmate and became aggressively acquisitive. In the midst of the “tween” stages, we experienced the mystery and delight of the opposite sex. The body welcomed drastic development and the mind new ideas and values. The familiar feeling of jealousy intruded when the rate of others’ changes exceeded our own: a girl may have a fuller figure than ours, a boy a deeper voice. This is the ultimate stage at which the jealousy root in me broke through the surface and invaded my entire being; I was consumed by it. “The Joneses” surrounded me; they were in my sixth grade math class, in the hallways during seventh grade, and in the back of the bus in eighth grade. They were outside knocking on my door and their smiling faces wouldn’t exit my mind.

Middle school represents a difficult time for most “tweeners” with self discovery and growth. I was the one girl that tried too hard. My mother told me that my shirts were too tight or my eyes were too heavily shaded. Even so, I kept up with those little “Joneses”. They had it all: mothers with glamorous SUV’s who would anxiously give in to any request, full wardrobes from Abercrombie (the store of my generation), even cell phones. I was jealous. My parents lived without “The Joneses” visible in their lives; therefore, “the Joneses” were magnified in mine. I wanted everything that I did not have and what I had was insignificant. Parents influenced by “The Joneses” produce children that become “The Joneses.” These children who are given every material possession they desire will be those who are consumed in their possessions throughout adulthood and parenthood. In turn, those who do not pay any attention to them have children that want to be The Joneses. The media produces this vicious cycle that practically began with time and will continue. All the while, “Fashion America” counts our money behind its Ethan Allen desk.

The executives of “Fashion America” enjoy continually making money from our low spirits and damaged psyches. They savor the thought that we gave in to their antics and that we are susceptible to their prized efforts. Of the countless target markets, high school girls are among the most dependable. Deep in the jungle that is high school, the wrath of jealousy intensified and controlled my life. The hallways were entangled with emotion and cluttered with hormones that clouded the judgment of its occupants. To the average teenaged girl, high school is the determining period of life; she will either be popular and happy or be desperate and jealous. High school is the place in which once innocent and curious eyes become catty, narrow and piercing. The transition from high school to college has left me puzzled in a mix of mentalities. I’ve been left with the aftermath of high school chaos, curiosity of growth and maturity, and still this endless preoccupation with jealousy. Girls and women who have what I want surround me, presenting themselves in the manner that I “should.”

We innocent victims of “Fashion America’s” dirty advertising tricks easily become confused. Our impulses to spend compulsively aren’t entirely our fault. The media, which has gracefully paired with “Fashion America” to alter our beliefs,
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sends us mixed, subliminal messages. As I matured while making the transition to college, I began to see what I'd been blind to before. Underlying messages are always being sent through commercials, public events, magazine articles and the like.-America has a campaign for everything. An ad campaign, that is. Whether an overly publicized celebrity adopts children from a third world country or an actress exploits her political views for all to see, someone is always there to focus completely on what one is wearing during such an act. Usually, one journalist will always place judgment on the weight of the celebrity, yet the importance of the action is quickly distorted in the public eye. Confusion among consumers tends to take place; therefore, instead of us becoming interested in actions that matter, we become infatuated with the maxi dress and sunglasses the new mother of these once starving children was so fabulously donning. In turn, this focus leads to the mimicry of styles and visage. Consequently, the beginnings to the cycle begin with media-related exploitation of celebrities.

Though it is difficult to understand fully, I have reviewed this cycle in retrospect. I've been slowly piecing it together, and I've learned that we certainly cannot go on living with "The Joneses" as our model; however, we can take things from them and "Fashion America" that we feel suit our personalities. We can be influenced, and we can be envious of certain material items. That is how the process of indulgence begins. Fashion-forward, meaningless, material possessions are good for us in moderation. I can now ignore underlying commands and instead possess the ability to say no. They say I'm crazy for wanting to change, yet truthfully, they're jealous, too.

Similar to some kind of drug reaction, my body tingled from head to toe as I experience a euphoric high.

- Gambling and Sports go Hand in Hand by Daniel Burnett
I took my voucher from my dad, and we walked to our seats in the old, dirty bleachers. I sat down, took a deep breath of the smoke that filled the air, and waited anxiously for the upcoming event. The bell sounded, and my heart started to pound as I watched with apprehension. The crowd sat eerily silent as they watched the spectacle unfold. Moments later, the crowd was standing and yelling, and some were snacking a newspaper to the side of their thighs. As my apprehension turned to hope, I too sprang to my feet and began to cheer. Similar to some kind of drug reaction, my body tingled from head to toe as I experienced a euphoric high. With a crescendo of cheers and boos, the race came to a climactic end, resulting in a photo finish. After a few minutes of waiting, the results were posted on the scoreboard, and I gazed at my voucher in disbelief. At age five, for the first time in my life, I had parlayed two dollars into ten with a wager on “Golden Banana” to win. I was hooked. From that day forth, I accompanied my dad to the racetrack as often as I could, and spent the nights before studying the racing form. I had always found the track entertaining, but it was a whole new experience with money on the line. It was now a thrill that could be duplicated from no other source, and it gave me a sense of satisfaction and pride with every winner I picked. The process used to pick the perfect winner is similar to the research done by a stockbroker who is trying to invest in the right stock, but investors may spend months waiting to see if they picked the right stock. At the track, you find out in less than two minutes.

Once I grew up, I found the same fulfillment handicapping other sports. I wagered on hockey, football, baseball, and even European soccer. In many cases, the only reason these sports were popular to me, and the only reason I watched them on TV, was because I was gambling on them. The popularity of sports and gambling has gone hand in hand for many centuries. One can look no further than the early history of football, and the NFL, was established, and much like baseball, the early history of football, and the NFL, was closely linked to gamblers and gambling. According to Nielsen Media Research, the 2007 Super Bowl was the highest rated television show of the year, attracting an estimated 93 million people (Nielsen). For that same game, the Nevada Gaming Control Board reported that the states sports books took in approximately $93 million dollars in bets, and Danny Sheridan, who is in charge of setting the lines for “USA Today,” estimated that, including illegal bets, $8 billion dollars had been wagered (“Factsheet”). With that much money on one game, it is hard to imagine sports without gambling. Perhaps some of those viewers only tuned in because they had money riding on the game. Horse racing is a sport that would not have existed if it weren’t for gambling, but it may be possible that the same thing could be said about other sports. To truly understand the effect that gambling has had on the popularity of sports, the history of sports and gambling must be explored.

America’s “National Pastime,” baseball, has gambling intertwined in the fabric of its history. Baseball was first organized in the 1840’s as a game for young gentlemen, and its references to card playing were quite evident. When a player scored, it was not called a “run,” like it is called today; it was called an “ace.” Likewise, a game’s half-inning at bat was previously referred to as a “hand” (Davies and Abram 18). Friendly wagers on these games were extremely common. By the time professional leagues were organized in the 1870’s, gambling in baseball had become an integral part of the game. Most of the fans that attended games at this time were well aware of the gambling taking place, and many of the gamblers would blatantly congregate under a sign that said “No Gambling.” Even baseball team owners were openly active gamblers, who consistently bet on their own clubs (Davies and Abram 19). Baseball had become the new hot ticket for gamblers because, as Eliot Asinof wrote, “It was more intriguing than a horse race, more civilized than a boxing match or a cock fight. It afforded a pleasant…” event to which a gentleman could take his lady – and bet” (Davies and Abram 19). Baseball offered gamblers a buffet of ways to gamble on games. People in attendance could not only bet on the outcome of the games, but also on the fate of each batter. Patrons could even bet on whether the next pitch would be a ball or a strike. Likewise, bookmakers, and their agents, began offering even more detailed and intricate ways to bet on games. Baseball pool cards were sold, which offered the buyer a chance to gamble on the whole week’s schedule. Fans could bet on which team would get the most wins, the most strikeouts, the most runs, and even the most homeruns. Newspapers tracked the game odds and standings of these weekly bets, and by the 1890’s, one pool was selling 165,000 cards per week (Davies and Abram 19). By 1917, the federal government shut down horse racing during the time of the Great War, and those that depended on the track as their primary source of income were forced to change gears and start gambling on baseball (Davies and Abram 21). In 1922 the National Football League was established, and much like baseball, the early history of football, and the NFL, was closely linked to gamblers and gambling...
Now in 2008, there are a handful of new scandals in professional sports. The NHL found, in 2006, that the Phoenix Coyotes’ head coach, and former player, Rick Tocchet, had organized a gambling ring in which a handful of NHL players bet on sports other than hockey. Allegedly, Wayne Gretzky’s wife was accused of placing bets as well (“Gretzky’s Wife”). Additionally, in 2007, NBA referee Tim Donaghy became the target of an FBI investigation after being accused of betting on NBA games, including games that he officiated (Watson). It is unknown how these scandals will affect the popularity of the game, but one thing is almost always certain. The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. As long as the economy stays stable, and the NBA and NHL do not go on strike, their popularity should stay the same. Perhaps it will even help them in the end.

In professional and college level sports, gambling is the ten-foot monster in the room. Some of these sports were built, in part, by gamblers, and gambling. Team owners were gamblers, players were gamblers, and they both wagered on their own teams. If sports ever allowed legal gambling, many would question the effects it would have on the integrity of sports, but the fact of the matter is that sports integrity has been questioned since its inception. Baseball is just an example of this fact, as rumors of bribed players and fixed games date back to the 1870’s (Davies and Abram 18). Gambling and sports have always been two peas in a pod, and it will do the sports industry no good if they continue ignoring this fact. Many sports fans are gamblers, and gambling will always take place. If legal gambling were allowed, sports would be able to monitor gambling trends effectively. It would be much more difficult for players, managers, owners, and referees to gamble on the sports, and the initial complaints about integrity would not affect popularity or ticket sales, as previously proven. Instead, the leagues could embrace a large part of their viewing audience and, of course, make a large profit on money that was previously untaxed. According to the Handbook on the Economics of Sport, between 5 and 10 percent of stakes are typically retained by the bookie (Andreff and Szymanski). Also, an estimated $380 billion dollars is spent each year on illegal and legal sports gambling (“Factsheet”). With these figures, the sports industry, and the government, would have an additional $38 billion dollars of taxable revenue. New Jersey is already on the right track as they try to legalize sports gambling in Atlantic City Casinos, but it must go further than that (“N.J. Pro Sports”). The sports industry could capitalize on gambling, instead of pretending it does not exist. Sports are, always were, and always will be gambled on, and scandals will continue to happen if the industry does not take matters into their own hands. Gambling is a permanent fixture, and has proven to be one of the driving forces in sports popularity. So, for the integrity and popularity of the game, gambling should be legalized.

Works Cited


One of the greatest qualities of poetry is the power of interpretation it gives to the reader. The poem “WarEve” delves into numerous ideas that focus on war, voyeurism and corruption. By examining these man-made horrors, the author hopes to expose the dark nature of humanity and bring it out into the light. The poem hopes to expose the dark nature of humanity and bring it out into the light. The author sets these ideas within a specific region of the world in the hours before an important, world-changing event, thus giving the reader a reference point. The author then parallels the reference point by placing biblical and geographical clues within the text for the reader to discover and interpret.

The first thing one might notice is the title of the work: “WarEve (Mid March).” The use of the word “Eve” is curious since it is usually used to signify the night before a holiday or a grand event. The word “Eve” is also the biblical name of the supposed first woman, according to the book of Genesis. The term “WarEve” brings to mind two striking images. The first is of a community or a country gripped with anticipation, suspended restlessly in the hours before the dawn of war. The second is of the original woman, flawlessly beautiful, yet armed to the teeth with weapons and armor. To bridge the gap between these two images, we must consider the placement of “(Mid March)” in the title. On March 20, 2003, or “(Mid March),” the United States invaded the sovereign nation of Iraq, using a bombardment technique described as “Shock and Awe” to signify the initial invasion. The night prior to the attack found many cameras from large news operations around the world filming the streets and skyline of Iraq’s capital city, Baghdad. The filmed images showed a city in fear. Many streets were empty as people fled to shelter in anticipation of what would soon come. One could argue that this situation is what the author of “WarEve” is referring to in the title: the abandoned streets, the people in fear, the intense foreboding of the country. One may associate the image of “WarEve” the well-armed woman with the impending might of the U.S. Military, a dangerous motive emerging from a beautiful place. Although the author never truly divulges the idea of pre-war Iraq as the major theme, the idea is supported greatly by references in the text.

The first four lines set the scene for the poem, and thus the argument: “It seems far off/on a hazy, pale horizon/the shimmering point/on the arid landscape.” The “It” in these lines refers to the “shimmering point.” The “shimmering point” may refer to the city of Baghdad, or to a more generalized presence of civilization. The author sets this point “on the arid landscape,” signifying the desert sands of Iraq or the Middle East in general. Most importantly for the setting, the author makes sure to note that the point “seems far off on a hazy, pale horizon.” By stating a great distance between the point and the observer, the author begins to hint at the identity of the individual who is describing the scene.

Line five is left open for great interpretation: “but through the hissing scopes.” The “hissing scopes” can be seen as an immediate reference to the hissing of a snake. The snake in Genesis entices Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Additionally, one may impose a more literal idea upon the “hissing scopes,” identifying them as the scopes of spy planes gathering information for the coming assault, the wind hissing violently as they fly overhead. This idea supports the image of “WarEve” as an embodiment of military strength. Additionally, one may see the “hissing scopes” as the camera crews who filmed Baghdad on the eve of the war, their images transmitted directly into the homes of the American people. The hissing may be seen as the news anchors whose excited words spur the march of death. By using this interpretation, one might argue that the individual making the observation is not a military strategist, but instead an American citizenry whose voyeuristic tendencies have led them to the images of a city in its last night of peace.

These proposed ideas find relevancy when explored along with lines six through eight: “she sees that it is indeed fruit,/still hanging in the once Fertile Firstland/where the four rivers split and wound out.” First, it is important to note the gender of the viewer as female. Here, “she” could refer to the well-armed “WarEve” as the invading force. Or, in another sense, “she” might refer to the citizenry of the United States. Although Americans are not all female, the idea of a feminine citizenry invites the idea of temptation in correlation with the Biblical references of the snake and Eve. We, the people of the United States, are Eve and the voyeuristic pleasure of watching destruction befall another country is the snake.

The image of “fruit,/still hanging in the once Fertile Firstland/where the four rivers split and wound out” serves as greater evidence of the setting of war. The fruit represents the people of the Middle East, specifically of Iraq. These people are “still hanging” onto the value of this land, although it is no longer fertile as it once was, ravaged for centuries by war and turmoil. The “once Fertile Firstland” refers to the Garden of Eden, which is thought by some biblical scholars to have been...
located somewhere in or around present-day Iraq. Eden had a great river that ran through the garden that split into four branches. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers that run through Iraq are believed to be two of these four branches. The scene is set, and now the speaker begins to tell the story.

The intentions of the poem's speaker are made clearer to the reader in lines nine and ten: "Still pleasing to the eye this ‘Knowledge of Good and Evil.’" The term "pleasing to the eye" refers to the forms of Adam and Eve in the Bible. The "Knowledge of Good and Evil" refers to life and death, right and wrong, black and white, the great dichotomy. If we take the point of view that the military is the observer, we may see these descriptions as the imposition of American values and ideas of right and wrong over people who do not share our beliefs. From the voyeur's point of view, we may see the conflict of war as an exciting example of Good versus Evil, even as we witness the death and destruction of a nation. These two notions are brought together in the final four lines of the poem.

Lines eleven through fourteen conclude the poem: "and the serpent in the sky/with his tongue/in her gardened home/flicking.” The serpent in the sky, whose gender is male, represents a couple of ideas. The first is obviously the biblical serpent who tempts Eve. The snake has been thought to be Satan, or the embodied forces of evil and corruption, whose flicking tongue seduces Eve into partaking of the forbidden fruit. The second interpretation of the serpent is represented by the military, whose planes ride in the night to rain destruction and chaos on the people of Baghdad. The flicking tongue in this case could represent the new guided missiles that were used in the bombardment of Baghdad. These missiles allow for pinpoint accuracy, which allowed the military enough precision to destroy a single home. Additionally, the flicking tongue could easily be seen as the corruption of the voyeur, who is drawn to violent images by the propaganda of government and the press. The serpent or the forces of the US government and military entice the American citizens to take part in this war, to forget the ways of love and peace and cheer as their flag is held in glory above bloodshed. One final interpretation offers a third option for the identity of the female perspective. In this interpretation, the female is the Iraqi people, who still hold life and fertility within their barren region. The flicking tongue can be seen from this stance as the inevitable destruction that approaches, invading the hearts and minds of all Iraqis as they prepare for the desecration of their culture.

Perhaps the author of “WarEve” is trying to tell humanity something about itself. The idea that the first humans were corrupted by some external force of evil is plausible, but it does not explain how easily humans were drawn to be corrupted in the first place. The voyeur seeks to witness war first-hand through the lens of a camera, the military seeks to perpetrate war for the motives of the government, and meanwhile those who oppose the destruction are left in suspense, not knowing when death will meet them at their doorstep to collect what is owed. By referencing the story of Eve and the forbidden fruit, the author encourages the reader to maintain hope and confidence in the resilience of humanity, even in the face of war and terror.
In January 2008, the American Dialect Society named “subprime” as Word of the Year. It seems discussions of the subprime mortgage crisis and its effect on families, communities, banks, Wall Street, the U.S. economy, and international markets are everywhere. From the White House to the water cooler, the subprime mortgage fall-out is a topic of concern. I began working in real estate law in 2001. Despite processing hundreds of mortgages, I did not begin to see non-traditional (non-prime loans), such as adjustable-rate mortgages (ARMs), no or low down payment loans, option ARMs, interest-only loans, or loans with balloon payments, until late 2001. I could not even begin to count the number of borrowers who balked at the closing-table at the adjustable-rate or balloon-payment terms of their loan and who were in turn told by their mortgage representative, “It’s okay, you can just refinance before the rate adjustment period/balloon payment term occurs.”

I am not sure if mortgage brokers, originators, processors, and officers understood or acknowledged exactly what the loan terms meant and the risks of those terms to the borrower. Origination fees, processing fees, underwriting fees, and the controversial Yield Spread Premium (a fee paid to a mortgage broker by the lender for arranging a loan that pays an above-market interest rate), among other fees, seemed to insure a “just get them to sign” mentality. The rapid decline in lending standards was and is self-evident. In a speech in May 2007, Chairman Ben Bernanke of the Federal Reserve referred to “loosened” and “weakening” underwriting standards as an important factor in subprime default rate.

A home is a foundation for families and a source of stability for communities. It serves as the foundation of many Americans’ financial security. Indeed, as of 2007, nearly seventy percent (70%) of all American families owned a home (Jackson, “Housing Concerns”). The rise in homeownership had obvious benefits to the economy. Alphonso Jackson, Secretary of The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in a speech in June of 2007, stated, “I believe the housing industry was a major component in keeping the economy afloat after 9/11,” (Homeownership). By the end of 2007, however, approximately 4.2 million mortgages were either past due or in foreclosure according to the Mortgage Bankers Association (Herszenhorn & Bajaj). Of those 4.2 million, over 2.2 million were actual foreclosure filings, which were up seventy-five percent (75%) from 2006 (1.2 million foreclosure filings in 2006; up 42% from 2005). In the highest number ever recorded, 900,000 households were in foreclosure in the fourth quarter of 2007 (Center for American Progress). An additional three million borrowers may default in the near future.

Despite the generally high default rates of subprime loans, the subprime market grew rapidly due to regulatory changes, increased desire for profits, technological advances, and liberalization in government mortgage support programs such as FHA (Gramlich). The increase in the availability of subprime loans allowed millions of borrowers, who would have previously been unable to obtain a mortgage, to realize the dream of homeownership. As evidenced by the subprime mortgage crisis, sometimes the costs associated with the dream of homeownership are high and can result in a nightmare (Bernanke).

The subprime market has made the dream of homeownership possible for many borrowers (Bernanke). Since homeownership can be a primary wealth builder, the two major benefits of subprime lending are an increase in the number of homeowners and a greater opportunity for those homeowners to build wealth (Chomisengphet & Pennington-Cross, 1). In the last decade or so, the subprime mortgage market has grown enormously. In 1995, the total subprime loan originations were $65 billion and by 2003 originations of subprime loans had grown to $332 billion (Chomisengphet & Pennington-Cross, 37). At the end of 2005, subprime lending had grown to a $665 billion business. In 2006, the subprime mortgage market had over $1.2 trillion of outstanding mortgages (Americans for Fairness in Lending).

After the stock market crash of 2000, many government officials relied on the housing boom to hold up the U.S. economy. The Federal Reserve helped the boom along by cutting key interest rates to historic lows from 2000 to 2004. These rate reductions dramatically reduced the cost of buying a home (Chomisengphet & Pennington-Cross, 41; Andrews). Meanwhile, foreign investors began pouring trillions into American securities, much of which went into mortgage backed securities that were used to finance subprime loans (Andrews). Home values also rose sixty-six percent from 2000 to 2006, causing many to refinance and others to tap equity (Jackson, “Homeownership;” Bernanke).

Edward M. Gramlich, a Federal Reserve governor who is now deceased,
warned nearly seven years ago that a growing breed of lenders were putting people into mortgages that they could not feasibly afford (Andrews). Mr. Gramlich urged federal examiners to investigate mortgage lenders affiliated with national banks, but his requests were denied by then Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan. Mr. Greenspan said in an interview that he remembers the conversation and remembered telling Mr. Gramlich to “be careful,” because if the Federal Reserve Banks gave the appearance that it was overseeing thousands of local institutions, which he said the Federal Reserve did not have the resources to do, “we’re going to end up with a situation that very well could be worse rather than better.” Mr. Greenspan was worried that if the Feds investigated, it would give the public a basic Federal seal of approval on these institutions. In 2001, a senior Treasury official, Sheila Bair (now Chairperson of the FDIC), tried unsuccessfully to get lenders to adopt a code of “best practices,” and allow outside monitors. However, few lenders would agree to monitors and many rejected the code itself.

In 2004, leaders of a housing advocacy group advised Mr. Greenspan that deceptions and unscrupulous practices were increasing. These three are the only people who seemed to want to question the long-term risks of such a subprime market (Andrews). In fact, before 2007, Federal officials seemed to only praise subprime lending as increasing homeownership (Bernanke; Jackson, “Homeownership”). In Mr. Greenspan’s memoir, The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World, he writes, “I was aware that the loosening of mortgage credit terms for subprime borrowers increased financial risk, but I believed then, as now, that the benefits of broadened homeownership are worth the risk” (qtd. in Andrews). While housing prices soared and foreclosures remained relatively low, not many people bothered to consider what would happen if housing prices fell, the economy experienced a down-turn, or if lending standards tightened.

Many reports suggest that subprime loans were targeted to minorities. According to a report by the Americans for Fairness in Lending, “As with any number or faulty or dangerous consumer products, vulnerable and less financially secure consumer have been principal targets for subprime loans,” (Neighborhood & Individual Impact). The numbers of subprime mortgages are above the national average in lower income neighborhoods, black neighborhoods, and in census tracts with predominantly minority populations (Gramlich). While these reports make it seem that only those with low incomes and credit scores were targeted by subprime lenders, an analysis of more than $2.5 trillion in subprime loans from 2000 forward shows that an increasing proportion went to people with credit scores high enough to qualify for conventional loans with much better terms. Fannie Mae chief economist David Berson recently wrote, “There is a surprisingly large share of subprime borrowers with FICO scores above 720 (a level consistent with a good credit score)” (Schoen).

Edward Gramlich asked in a speech he prepared in August of 2006 for the Federal symposium in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, “Why are the most risky loan products sold to the least sophisticated borrowers? The question answers itself: the least sophisticated borrowers are probably duped into taking these products” (Andrews). The belief of many Americans that their banker would not give them a loan they could not afford certainly seemed to be eradicated. The long-term effect of a lack of trust in financial institutions has yet to be seen and those who trusted verbal promises from someone, who was basically a salesman, are now facing foreclosure and eviction and are the ones who will learn the lesson “Buyer, beware” the most. The millions of families who will be essentially homeless with ruined credit will be the ones to suffer most. History has taught us that “credit crises” lead to regulations to protect consumers. It may be too little, too late for millions of American families. In the subprime mortgage gamble, the borrowers were betting the roof over their head, and most did not even know it.

Works Cited


Amanda Batson - English Major
I am twenty-one, love to write. I want to be a high school English teacher to teach kids not to sell themselves short when it comes to writing so they enjoy it. I plan to get my Masters of Education in English at Georgia State University.

Carmichell Bell - General Studies A.A.
As a young man, he attended the University of Miami on a football scholarship, enlisted in the Army and became a Criminal Investigator for the Military Police. After leaving the military, Carl worked as a Police Officer in Oregon. On 7-7-7, he married his childhood sweetheart. They currently reside in Flowery Branch, Georgia with Carl’s children, where he coaches football for Davis Middle and Flowery Branch High Schools. His passions are SCUBA diving and the Florida Keys. He is applying to UGA and Georgia State, English (Pre-Law).

Daniel Burnett - Business Major
I am a Canadian citizen, and I lived in the Niagara Falls most of my life. I came to GSC as an international student in November 2007. I graduated high school in 2002, and worked for several years before finally going to college here at GSC. I am a President of the Oconee Campus Spanish Club, a member of SOAR leaders, and a GSC Ambassador. I hope to transfer to UGA next fall, and pursue a career in finance. In the short-term, I hope to get a finance degree from UGA, and in the long run, I hope to get an MBA from a top college.

Faye Fleming - Sociology Major
Faye Fleming is a freshman at GSC, a non-traditional student in her mid 40’s. After spending 20 years in the corporate world, Faye decided to leave her job and return to school, because she believes that life is short and dreams should be pursued. Faye appreciates the luxury of attending school later in life and is grateful to her husband, Tony, for making it possible with his support, love and encouragement. Hopes to transfer to UGA next year.

Kate Fowler - Bachelor of Studio Arts, UGA
After graduating from UGA last summer I began working as a full-time Disability Specialist here at GSC. I enjoy interacting with students and would like to continue working with persons with disabilities in the future, possibly incorporating art and animal-assisted therapy. I enjoy long walks on the beach and dancing in the rain and am looking for someone who is --- Oh, wait...wrong bio. I love school.

Mark Green - History Major
There really is not much to say: all of my thoughts and habits are presented, in some way or another, in the writing that I submitted. Take each semester as it comes.

Patrick Gribbins
Patrick is a student attending Gainesville State College.

John Mark Harris
John currently attending The University of Georgia.

Jacob Hickman - Psychology Major
Grew up in downtown Atlanta, has traveled many places all over the world, and plans to move to an unknown location in Europe after completing education. Plans to transfer to Georgia State in the fall or spring of next year.

Nicholas Korn - Political Science Major
I grew up moving schools every year. This is where I believe my creative mind began to develop- being the new kid. Writing became my escape, my filter to observe and try to understand the world. I graduated from South Forsyth High School May, 2008. Two short days after, I went on a
CONTRIBUTORS

mission trip to Kenya. This is where I began the biggest life journey to date-Believing. I plan to go into the United States Air Force with goals to go into paralegal/Law field(s), and hopefully flight.

Stephanie Lord - Psychology Major
I am a twenty-six year old single mother of a wonderful seven-year old son. I graduated high school in 2001 and then worked in the real estate law field for almost seven years before making the leap to continue my education. I love to read and spend time with my son (which usually involves “adventures” to find dinosaurs!). I plan to transfer to Georgia State University in Fall of 2009 and major in Middle Grades Education and Psychology.

Hunter Orvis - English Major
On the verge of non-traditional student status, Hunter currently resides in Athens, GA, where he nibbles on English course work at Gainesville State College and adds legitimacy to local outfitters. Travel to the most inhospitable locales on earth (i.e. high mountains, war zones, and deserts) provides the muse for most of his writing. As an adventure racer and climber, the ability to run, bike, paddle, and scramble quickly has saved his bacon more than once. He plans to transfer to UGA to finish undergrad in Creative Writing or Journalism with graduate school somewhere out west or in New England (for the climbing).

Leah Perdue - Journalism Major
Leah Perdue is pursuing a career in journalism. Leah loves knitting, reading, writing and being an old lady before her time. She is married to her teenage sweetheart and lives in Hall County with her husband and two Boston Terriers. Leah is transferring to UGA in Fall.

Rachel Reed - Journalism Major
I enjoy creating and I’m not the best at being right brained. I feel that there is a place for me somewhere in this world, though it may only be to embellish and entertain and not so much as to inform or educate. I grew up as a cheerleader who loved everything pink and bright. I’m still trying to find out more about myself as a person and am discovering new things every day. I plan to end up with some type of nice degree that says, “Look, I’m not stupid!” I want to thrive in what I love and to live well. I am in pursuit of either a Journalism, Graphic Design, or Fashion Merchandising/Marketing degree.

Caley Ross - Sociology Major
Born at home in Watkinsville, GA on June 15, 1986. Lifelong resident of Athens, GA and currently employed at Evergreen Nursery, Inc. of Oconee County. Enjoys landscaping, horticulture, music and life. Plans to complete a four-year degree at an as-of-yet undecided school.

Helena Wahlstrom - English Major
I’m originally from Finland and came here to study in 2007. I plan to earn a Bachelor’s degree in English.
Gainesville State College
Writing Contest Winners

Formal Essays:
1st Place - “The Subprime Mortgage: Death of the American Dream” Stephanie Lord
2nd Place - “Our Gardened Home in Drought” Caley Ross
3rd Place - “Gambling and Sports Go Hand in Hand” Daniel Burnett

Informal Essays:
1st Place - “It’s Always Darkest Before the Dawn” Nicholas Kom
2nd Place - “Embracing my Inner Fool: How I got Seduced by a Rock Star” Faye Fleming
3rd Place - “The Depressing Life of an American (Jealous) Girl” Rachel Reed

Poetry:
1st Place - “Custodianship” Patrick Gribbins
2nd Place - “Ideals” Jacob Hickman
3rd Place - “Prelude” Jacob Hickman

One-Act Plays:
1st Place - “The Dispatcher” Carmichell Bell
2nd Place - “Prevailing Misconceptions” Leah Perdue
3rd Place - “Betrayal” John Mark Harris

Short Stories:
1st Place - “Indifference Happens” Kate Fowler
2nd Place - “American-Made” Helena Wahlstrom
3rd Place - “Strainer” Hunter Orvis
The Southern Literary Festival

Short Fiction:
“American-Made”
Helena Wahlstrom

The Southern Literary Festival

Formal Essay:
“The Subprime Mortgage: Death of the American Dream”
Stephanie Lord

The Southern Literary Festival

Honorable Mention:
“The Dispatcher”
Carmichell Bell