To be able to present the 2010 edition of *The Chestatee Review* is truly an honor. This year’s edition marks another chapter in our progress as an organization and literary magazine for Gainesville State College.

*The Chestatee Review* began writing its chapter in my life about a year ago. Landing in Dottie Blais’s English 1102 class set the path for me during these past three amazing terms working first as an editor and then as editor-in-chief. I want to thank professor and head advisor Dorothy Blais for putting up with me since the moment I entered her classroom during the fall of 2008. It is her that I hold responsible for this unforgettable experience.

I have been wonderfully blessed during my term as editor-in-chief to have such hard-working faculty advisors, faculty editors and student editors despite our limited numbers. I want to thank each of them for every idea, input, and minute they poured into the magazine that you are holding. With their help, I have grown to be the editor I am today.

The Art Department is such an essential part of this magazine. I would like to thank John Amoss for handling all the art aspects of the magazine. Benjamin White, thank you for being the one to pull all the pieces together into such a fabulous magazine layout.

Finally, I can’t forget my assistant editors, Linda and Sam, for all they do for me. Both of them have really stepped up to be my extra hands on each campus.

I came upon this quote some time ago, but it was not until lately that I could speak to its truth:

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.” – Henry Ford.

I hope that everyone will enjoy reading this issue of *The Chestatee Review* as much as we enjoyed piecing it together.

Sai Thao
The Chestatee Review is truly an experience in my life about a year ago. I came across this path for me during these difficult times, and then as editor-in-chief. I am truly grateful for putting up with me and my ideas, input, and minute changes. With the help of her, I have grown in this magazine. I would like to thank everyone involved in making it happen. Benjamin and Sam, for all they do for the magazine on each campus. I am truly grateful for her is progress; working as editor-in-chief to have student editors despite our motto: "Death, taxes, and an editor in chief." It is her that I write this and I hope you will enjoy it.

Sai Thao

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Sai Thao

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One more gunshot and Rogelio picks up the pace of his race. Violent clanking of chains against the pavement thunder behind him.

- The Red Bible and the Children of the War by Alejandro Ramirez

"There were giants in the sons of God came in until them, the same became..."
- Genesis 6:4. (Excerpt)

On the ride home it was 6:43 AM. And Rogelio was tired. He knew it's not true, not for him.

"I can roll the best joint, while licking the side..."

"Here, smoke some..."

"Ok, I'll smoke it..."

Rogelio is wearing an army jacket. He walks through the house as the rain comes in.

"What happened to you..."

"I broke it skating..."

"Ay Dios mio! I told you foolish friends walking more than that of cancer patients brings her hand to her forehead..."

"Now who is going to say hi to his rat..."

"It's fine I'm ok..."

"About money?" asks Rogelio.

Twenty-two hours...
On the ride home it's just Luis, Adolfo and Rogelio. And the sun rises at 6:43 AM. And Rogelio wants to think that every day is a second chance, but he knows it's not true, not for him, not anymore.

"I can roll the best joints ever," says Luis calmly, as if nothing had happened, while licking the side of a perfectly rolled joint.

"Here, smoke some," Luis says to Rogelio, but Rogelio refuses it.

"Ok, I'll smoke it. This little soldier ain't much," says Luis because Rogelio is wearing an army jacket that he stole at a party.

Rogelio walks through the door and his parents are already awake.

"What happened to your foot?" his mother cries.

"I broke it skating," says Rogelio

"Ay Dios mio! I told you to be careful with that damn thing. I see all of your foolish friends walking around with a cast on their foot and their heads baldier than that of cancer patients. It makes no sense to me," says his mother as she brings her hand to her forehead.

"Now who is going to pay for the doctor, we don't even have insurance," says his father.

"It's fine, I'm ok, everything is ok. Will you please stop worrying so much about money?" asks Rogelio needing to be left alone.

Twenty-two hours earlier, before everything goes wrong, Rogelio is with
his friends in a basement working on anarchist propaganda and watching SKA-P, and Manu Chao music videos. Junkies with Mohawks walk around the basement, reading, smoking, listening to music, and working on posters for protests and designs for graffiti. Boxes filled with chemicals, electrical wire, nails, napalm, gasoline, glass bottles, ammonia, and mounds of rags cram every corner.

After watching the videos Rogelio and a group of guys take detailed step-by-step lessons from Miguel (a skillful conman) on how to perform the “baptized bill”: a simple but effective trick to buy a cheap product at any store with a $100.00 bill, keep the bill, get the change, and keep the product. Trickery and drug trade are how the movement supports itself.

After the lesson Rogelio gives out copies of the Anarchist’s Cookbook and Guevara’s Radical Writings on Guerrilla Warfare at the meeting of revolutionary wannabes.

Later they had a showing of the movie Zeitgeist. Meanwhile, Miguel talks on the phone in another room:

“...nah, no sir. What did I tell you guys! No, please listen to me, please.....”

At this point Rogelio is no longer paying attention to the movie; instead he listens attentively to Miguel’s conversation.

“Ok! So why didn’t you say so earlier?...I talked to Barrio Azteca and Salvatrucha, and I told them that the merchandise was to be there at nine, but you can’t count on everyone to be as committed as we are. You know how these things work; my people start it, my people finish it, what happens in the middle is your problem. Just get the job done; I have too many things in my head right now to be fixing your problems at the border...Man!!! C’mon!! This isn’t one of those for-profit-operations that you know so well, where you just send mercenaries; this is a war, you need real strategy, and time is of the essence...That’s what Holland said and they’ve always been supportive of our efforts in Colombia....”

This is big, this is real big -- thinks Rogelio as he discretely presses his ear to the wall.

“Well and also because they like drugs...and if that’s the case I think you should have a stern talking-to with Adolfo, he’s an idiot.... I know...I know...I will. Yeah, and like I said earlier, it is not your fault. I know that you’ve always been good to us...yeah we’ll go “Devil Teacher”; his job is to be

Rogelio gets home at four from earlier still playing in his head really going to happen,” although him that he is getting inducted to the living room with the intention in, his mother stops him. His parents tournament all day.

“2007 Chess Team. How’s the shirt all about?” says Rogelio’s again.

“I have to wear it if I am

“I thought you hated co

“Or play, or whatever...

“I thought I would never white instead of black,” comment

“I voted for red and blac

“I thought you were not...” Once again Rogelio interrupts him abruptly.

“Ok! Ok! Ok!, ya calla

“Aren’t you the one w
always look like you are wearing a
the father, content that he has go understand it. His parents keep his way to the restroom. When

at last!”

He opens his eyes wid the mirror as he examines his h

“This is gonna look so

He then presses play on
propaganda and watching SKA-P, hawks walk around the basement, putting on posters for protests and decorative wire, nails, napalm, gaso- scum every corner.

A group of guys take detailed steps on how to perform the "baptized product at any store with a $100.00 product. Trickery and drug trade are of the Anarchist's Cookbook and e at the meeting of revolutionary zeitgeist. Meanwhile, Miguel talks to his parents. "Please listen to me, please....." attention to the movie; instead he

I talked to Barrio Azteca and was to be there at nine, but you are. You know how these things happen in the middle is yourings in my head right now to be

I know that you've always been good to us...yeah we'll get it fixed somehow..." Miguel is what they call a "Devil Teacher"; his job is to brainwash kids.

Rogelio gets home at five in the afternoon with the phone conversation from earlier still playing in his head, and with the first timers expectation of "Is this really going to happen," although Rogelio is not supposed to know, Adolfo told him that he is getting inducted tonight. When he opens the door, he rushes through the living room with the intention of locking himself in the bathroom. As he walks in, his mother stops him. His parents think that he has been at a high school chess tournament all day.

"2007 Chess Team. Home of the Gainesville Red Knights? What is that shirt all about?" says Rogelio's mother, hoping that her son is becoming normal again.

"I have to wear it if I am to compete," says Rogelio "I thought you hated competition," replies his mother "Or play, or whatever... you know what I mean," says Rogelio. "I thought I would never again see the day when you would wear anything white instead of black," comments his mother about the red and white T-shirt. "I voted for red and black, but there is no democracy in American institutions..." Once again Rogelio starts on his anti-political rhetoric, but his mother interrupts him abruptly.

"Ok! Ok! Ok!, ya callate, quit talking so much nonsense!" yells his mother. "Aren't you the one who is always talking about individuality? You always look like you are wearing a black uniform; with boots, and a vest," interposes the father, content that he has gotten a great point across, but his son can't possibly understand it. His parents keep going at it, but Rogelio ignores them, and makes his way to the restroom. When he finally gets to the restroom he thinks: "Privacy, at last" He opens his eyes wide, slides his hand through his hair, and whispers to the mirror as he examines his hair:

"This is gonna look sooo badass"

He then presses play on the stereo that he keeps in the bathroom and it's a
Twisted Sister CD:

“We’re not gonna take it!!! WE ARE NOT GONNA TAKE IT!!! We’re not gonna take it...ANYMOOOORE!!!!!!”

Rogelio then turns the loud razor on and proceeds to shave the sides of his head.

“Ay!! No. Esta como loco otra vez este muchacho, you’re supposed to be mature now that you’re a senior and all,” comments his mother at hearing Rogelio shaving his head again. “Why do you do this to us, son, STOP!!! Your hair looks fine,” adds his mother as she knocks on the door.

“Well, because he likes to see you suffer,” replies his father.

“You don’t even go to church anymore. I remember how you used to love church,” yells his mother.

“You know why I haven’t been to church in three years? Because lately I’ve noticed that I can’t even make fun of religious fanatics anymore... they make fun of themselves,” yells Rogelio from the bathroom. But Rogelio feels bad; he wants to let his mother know that he doesn’t want to make her suffer, but he can’t get himself to show it, he doesn’t understand why he has to be an asshole.

Rogelio calls his younger sister, Natalia, to help him with the finishing touches of his new Mohawk.

“How does it look?” asks Rogelio.

“It looks really cool actually, you should keep it,” says Natalia.

“Thanks,” says Rogelio.

“Anytime,” says his sister.

“Que cosa tan horrible,” says his mother.

“Looks like a fucking chicken to me,” says his father.

Rogelio takes a quick shower, puts on his army camouflaged jacket, his red Converse, grabs his pack of Lucky Strikes cigarettes and heads towards the door.

“Where are you going?” asks his mother

“I’m going to a party with some friends, I’ll be back tomorrow,” answers Rogelio.

The father places his left arm on Rogelio’s right shoulder. “You should be old enough to know it, but I don’t get too drunk, and don’t hang out with.”

“I know, I know.” It’s impatient.

Rogelio storms out of the house for him in a red car.

“What’s up Roger-bitch?”

“Stop bringing that shit around,” says Rogelio.

“Damn, can you say there is no better freedom than being a non-believer? You got to learn how to beat grin, that fucking half smile,” concludes Adolfo, with a face of fresh herb and the sight of the illegal substance. Luis 1999 in order to escape the man.

“Puff! Puff! And past...
old enough to know it, but I’ll say it anyways. Be careful, don’t be having sex, don’t get too drunk, and don’t do any drugs. Pay attention to the places and the people you hang out with.”

“I know, I know.” It’s about to be eight o’clock, and Rogelio is getting impatient.

Rogelio storms out of the apartment building, his friends already waiting for him in a red car.

“What’s up Roger-bro? Nice hairdo!” says Adolfo as he packs a bowl of weed.

“Stop bringing that shit out. At least wait until we leave the neighborhood,” says Rogelio.

“Damn, can you say OCD? Don’t be so damn paranoid! Remember that there is no better freedom than not giving a shit about what people think of you. You got to learn how to beat the system,” says Adolfo. With a grin... that fucking grin. that fucking half smile, thinks Rogelio.

“In this system committing crimes is not illegal, what’s illegal is getting caught, and that’s a crime I don’t want to commit today,” says Rogelio.

Adolfo is a Mexican-American who claims to be of Italian background. Rogelio has always been confused as to why Adolfo always hangs out with “whites.”

As they leave the neighborhood, the inside of the car fills up with the smell of fresh herb and the sight of thick, white smoke.

Rogelio puts his lips around the pipe as if it were a nipple, lights up the weed, inhales fervently, holds his breath, passes the pipe, exhales, coughs, water blurs his vision.

“This is the good shit right here! You fellows are in for a treat,” says Adolfo after taking a puff and proceeding to smack his lips. “Ahh, the good old haze,” concludes Adolfo, with a face of complete satisfaction.

“Yezzir, yezzir...Buddha is in the house,” says Luis as he takes a deep puff of the illegal substance. Luis is a Colombian immigrant who came to the US in 1999 in order to escape the military draft.

“Puff! Puff! And pass to the left motherfucker,” says Miguel as he signals
for the pipe.

"Damn! He just called you a greedy Jew Luis," says Adolfo.

"Hell no, I ain't no fucking Jew!!" replies Luis, "I barely took one hit."

"So what's the plan?" asks Miguel, struggling to speak as he inhales the marijuana and gasps for air; when he releases the smoke slowly, he just watches it dissolve, and stares at it in awe as if trying to decipher a hidden message.

"We're going to a lake party at Adolfo's dock right?" says Rogelio after smoking from the warm glass pipe again.

"That's the plan. The party already started. I just had to leave it to come pick you guys up, but everyone is there already," says Adolfo with a tone that Rogelio can't quite read.

They smoke about four bowls of "Mary-J" and head to the gas station. Everyone gets out of the car to buy random junk, except for Rogelio.

"Here, hold this for me real quick," says Adolfo, scanning the area as he hands a bag of weed to Rogelio.

Rogelio thinks this is a mistake, so he places the bag under the front seat. A white police car pulls in the gas station. The officer inside the patrol stares hard at the red car, and talks on the radio. Rogelio starts to get anxious, he tries not to look at the officer, but he knows that not looking makes him look even more suspicious, so he stares, and he stares hard. The officer just looks at him piercingly in the eye. The ritual of the staring contest begins. Right at the moment of Rogelio's greatest tension, everyone comes back to the car, and they drive off into a nearby, upper middle-class neighborhood.

"Is everything ok? You seem a little tense," asks Miguel.

"Everything is cool," lies Rogelio, as the car enters the neighborhood.

The neighborhood is asleep and there is never more than one car at a time driving through it. Trying as hard as he can, Rogelio can't keep track of where they are because the streets don't make sense.

"Are we lost, dude?" asks Rogelio with a tone of humble curiosity.

"No, we're not lost, it's just that this neighborhood is like a labyrinth… Did you know that the middle-class citizens of Gainesville designed this neighborhood so that anybody from the poor neighborhoods who try to get in it, would get lost?"

claims Adolfo.

"That's a load of bullshit. The THC was starting to kick in. The THC was starting to kick in."

"Dude, I know this neighborhood are white as hell," says Adolfo with a tone of humor, but nobody laughs, so he laughs.

"Let's play some music."

"I got just the thing," says Adolfo, "the kids are going to love it."

"You better get ready to fight, and tonight WE MAKE A CATO SONG."

They finally get to Adolfo's dock for them; mostly American rough, and they have pit bulls: Tabasco sauce; and though the neighborhood are white as hell, they are super-cool, calm and collected.

"Where is the rest of it?"

"I gave it to Rogelio,"

"I got it," says Rogelio as he notices something there that with a white cross in the middle when people are getting out of religious book for that matter. and there, though it also has very, but what really catches Rogelio is certain streets underlined with...
THE CHESTATEE REVIEW

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claims Adolfo.

“That’s a load of bullshit,” says Miguel. But he didn’t really think it was bullshit. The THC was starting to take hold.

“Dude, I know this neighborhood like the back of my hand, that’s the only reason we can drive through this and get out in less than 20 minutes, but just ask anybody in Gainesville, they’ll tell you...everybody knows it,” Adolfo assures them.

Adolfo does seem to know where he is, and where they are going.

“Well, if a car is a reflection of the personality, the people in this neighbor- hood are white as hell,” says Miguel, trying to lighten up the mood with some humor, but nobody laughs, so he just shuts-up.

“Let’s play some music,” proposes Luis.

“I got just the thing,” says Adolfo. “This is an Irish punk band. You crazy kids are going to love it.”

“You better get ready to die! You better get ready to die! TONIGHT we fight, and tonight WE MAKE A SACRIFICE!!!!” blast the lyrics of the fast staccato song.

They finally get to Adolfo’s house around 9:30, people are already wait- ing for them; mostly American and European punks are at the scene. They look rough, and they have pit bulls: two massive beasts fed with steroids and meat with Tabasco sauce; and though the dogs have been trained for illegal fights, they look super-cool, calm and collected.

“Where is the rest of that weed,” asks Luis

“I gave it to Rogelio,” says Adolfo

“I got it,” says Rogelio as he looks for it under the front seat, but this time he notices something there that he hadn’t noticed before. There is a thick red book with a white cross in the middle titled The Red Bible. Rogelio grabs it quickly when people are getting out of the car. He notices that the book isn’t a Bible, or a religious book for that matter. The book contains a couple of biblical verses here and there, though it also has verses from several other philosophies and traditions, but what really catches Rogelio’s eye is that the book has a map of Gainesville with certain streets underlined with red marker.
“That’s interesting,” whispers Rogelio, as he skips through pages filled with images of symbols and rituals.

“Here it is,” says Rogelio as he gives the bag of weed to Adolfo.

“Thanks, bro... now you have a very important responsibility, do you think you can carry these two bags down to the dock for me?” asks Adolfo

“Sure” says Rogelio.

In the bags are two plastic bottles of cheap vodka, one bottle of orange juice, a small red lighter, a pack of menthol cigarettes, a porno magazine, one bag of Doritos, one bag of regular potato chips.

“What’s with the porno?” asks Rogelio

“Oh! That’s mine,” says Adolfo “I mean, it’s for my brother; he is in prison. He called collect the other day saying that he’s going insane; he told me that he’s starting to forget what women look like and he’s only been there for a year. One of the guys at this party has connections with the prison system, and he is going to help me sneak it in. Besides, it’s only seven dollars to buy a magazine, and if it can help bring a little bit of happiness to my brother while he is in that shithole, it’s worth it. You know?”

“How many years is he doing?” asks Rogelio

“Massive traffic of cocaine, so he’s looking at no less than thirty; and I’m thinking: man! Anyone who doesn’t go insane in such a mad world...must be crazy!” says Adolfo.

“I mean, yeah. Humans are just a bunch of horny monkeys, but they want us to be robots!”

The whole crew gets out and heads downhill towards the dock while they talk. The dogs get restless and start barking halfway down, right before the woods begin. It’s too dark to see what’s happening. When Rogelio looks down towards the lake he notices that a fire has already been started...

“What the fuck!!” Miguel yells in horror and takes off running in one direction. The fire is really a burning cross, the symbol of a KKK warning. One of the pit bulls goes after Miguel. Rogelio hears a gunshot. Rogelio can’t believe what’s happening, so he drops the bags and starts running uphill faster than he knows himself capable of.
he skips through pages filled
go of weed to Adolfo.
shant responsibility, do you think
me?" asks Adolfo

A bottle, one bottle of orange
es, a porno magazine, one bag

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“Aaaahhhhh!” Rogelio gives a short, loud, high-pitched shriek of horror, and he sounds like a helpless little primate, his eyes bloodshot, his mouth dry like desert dust, his armpits soaked in sweat.

Rogelio finally gets to the top of the hill; he jumps over thick bushes without thinking about it. Had he the time to think about it, he knows he couldn't have jumped such a long distance. But it just happens; his legs do it effortlessly for him. For the first time in his life, Rogelio sees the real wonders of adrenaline at work. One more gunshot and Rogelio picks up the pace of his race. Violent clanking of chains against the pavement thunder behind him; Rogelio turns his head to see what it is. One of the pit-bulls charges at Rogelio at full speed from behind. The beast clings on to Rogelio's ankle with 200 pounds of bone crushing mandible pressure. Rogelio falls on his ass like a judo wrestler. The dog's furious growl sounds like demonic legions.

"Dear God! Father of the universe, if there is any mercy left in you, save me from those who seek to destroy me!!" Rogelio prays in anguish as his atheistic courage abandons him; his stomach gives up and he pukes.

Rogelio sees Luis walking slowly towards him, with a rifle in his arms. "Sorry, Colombian, but I have a family to look after," says Luis as he shoots Rogelio with a tranquilizer on the leg. Everything becomes blurry...

"...it seems to me that nowadays, everyone is dying to stay alive..." says a random voice in the darkness, then the world shuts down. Soft nothingness takes it all away... sweet, tender, compassionate darkness.

The dream is over. All that's left is life...

When Rogelio wakes up, it's three fifteen in the morning, and he finds himself on the floor of what looks like an abandoned house. The light is dim – almost amber – the floor is raw concrete. The paint on the walls is peeling off, the lights blink occasionally, and a wet smell impregnates everything. Decomposition is evident by the innumerable clinger plants that penetrate the walls of the old structure - creeping in and out of every orifice; a testament that nature had patiently made its claim of property throughout the many years. On the walls everywhere hang large Confederate battle flags, swastikas, images of Odin, Thor, and other
Norse gods that Rogelio is not familiar with, along with pictures of famous Nazis and of Confederate war heroes. A very unhappy brawny white guy stands in front of Rogelio with an electric razor in one hand and The Red Bible in the other; it's the police officer whom Rogelio noticed earlier at the gas station. The officer walks from one side to the other like a caged tiger waiting to be unleashed.

"I like the jacket," says the officer, then he waits for a few seconds, as if gathering strength then yells:

"We are the sons of God!!! And the purity of our race is our heritage!!!"

The white people in the room follow with an "AMEN!"

"We are mighty warriors of the light of God, we are genetic perfection. We must get rid of you. Because YOU! - on the other hand- are a mistake. A mistake that our first fathers made in the valleys of Gog and Magog by laying with those deceptive whores of your mothers. We must correct the mistake of our fathers. Your race comes from the children of Lucifer. When the Cainites and the Liliaths walked the lands of betrayal, Gods and Demons tangled with lowly humans, and now your race of gypsies must be sacrificed in atonement. And guess what! You are going to help us."

The officer then looks for a specific place in The Red Bible, once he finds it he looks around at his friends solemnly and reads from it:

"When in another’s lair, show him respect or else do not go there. If a guest in your lair annoys you, treat him cruelly and without mercy. Do not take that which does not belong to you unless it is a burden to the other person and he cries out to be relieved. Acknowledge the power of magic if you have employed it successfully to obtain your desires. If you deny the power of magic after having called upon it with success, you will lose all you have obtained. Do not complain about anything to which you need not subject yourself. When walking in open territory, bother no one. If someone bothers you, ask him to stop. If he does not stop, destroy him."

The officer then closes the book. A blond, pale girl with straight hair, no eye-whites, and wearing a cowl, approaches the officer, bows profoundly, and extends both of her arms. The officer places The Red Bible in the girl’s hands, and the girl retreats. The girl looks like she’s in her late teens. Rogelio looks again because the girl’s eyes seem completely blank.

I must be hallucinating — has ever been in his life.

"You! Disrespect us!" conditions with your Mohawk, you take anarchy and neo-primitivism, but of the human race. You come with rules, you want to change our cul system with your decadent ideology. Well! You are right and take by force what is his. Seven other guys in the like it is," says one.

"Can somebody please asks sobbing and trembling with a queers, the communists, the chico go," says the officer.

Rogelio looks around the

"Why are you guys doing this, because you are calling too much about the parasites of our society.

"You put us all at risk, Luis," asks Rogelio.

"Where is Miguel?" asks Luis.

"He used too much force," Adolfo.

I don’t understand, you don’t bother us. But you talk,
along with pictures of famous Nazis
py brawny white guy stands in front
and The Red Bible in the other; it’s
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the girl’s eyes seem completely black, as if she had coals instead of eyes.

I must be hallucinating – Thinks Rogelio as he feels more horrified than he has ever been in his life.

“You! Disrespect us!” continues the officer, “you mock our Caucasian traditions with your Mohawk, you talk about liberalism and tolerance, you talk about anarchy and neo-primitivism, but you don’t have a goddamn clue about the destiny of the human race. You come into this country, but you don’t comply with the rules, you want to change our culture, you want to pollute the purity of our perfect system with your decadent ideologies, you talk of overthrowing our system and of revolution. Well! You are right about revolution. It is time for the white man to rise and take by force what is his. We’re tired of your lawlessness.”

Seven other guys in the room cheer and applaud. “Fuck yeah!! Preach it like it is,” says one.

“Can somebody please just tell me what the hell is going on?” Rogelio asks sobbing and trembling with fear.

“Well, let’s just say that we are working on a little social cleansing from
the parasites of our society. You know... the Jews, the Blacks, the immigrants, the
queers, the communists, the child molesters, the AIDS patients. They all got to
go,” says the officer.

Rogelio looks around the room for Adolfo and Luis

“Why are you guys doing this to me?” asks Rogelio.

“You put us all at risk, Rogelio. The Hispanic community is concerned
because you are calling too much attention to us all. To these people, you are Co-

lombia,” says Luis.

“Where is Miguel?” asks Rogelio

“Oh! He didn’t make it, man,” says Adolfo shaking a bowed head

“Why not!?” asks Rogelio

“He used too much force, it backfired on him. Physics, you know,” replies

Adolfo

“I don’t understand, you guys are not even white,” says Rogelio.

“We have an agreement with the white supremacists: we lay low, and they
don’t bother us. But you talk openly about people raising up and claiming our
rights and I admire you for it, it takes courage, but we have to be realistic, it’s not our place to demand anything. You go too far,” says Adolfo.

“Tell me,” says the officer, “why are you an anarchist? Why not be a fascist, or a communist even... why be an anarchist?”

“Because everything works in the theory, but the practice is ruled by innumerable and unpredictable factors. Because the best strategy is the one that happens organically,” says Rogelio.

“Shut your stupid mouth hippie boy! Every dog needs a bone to protect!...” Foam starts forming around the officer’s lips as he yells, “You have to understand that this system is humans’ only chance for survival on this planet.”

The officer then sits on Rogelio and starts to shave his head completely, while the other guys hold him down.

Rogelio finds himself on the verge of desperate loneliness, desperate exhaustion... people packed tight in the darkness with their hands on their mouths look at him with curiosity; people who knew the world could not exist without them, but who are ghosts right now. He laid there watching the arrangements of things shake and shake and shake and shake... to the rhythm of the razor, his father’s advice ringing through his head over and over: You should be old enough to know it, but I’ll say it anyways. Be careful, don’t be having sex, don’t get too drunk, and don’t do any drugs. Pay attention to the places and the people you hang out with...

They blindfold Rogelio and lead him at gunpoint to another room; it takes them ten minutes to get there. Rogelio hears people talking. The officer takes the blindfold off, and Rogelio’s eyes hurt. When his vision finally adjusts, he notices six guys who watch high speed police cars chasing a 1976 black Firebird TransAm on a large screen. They don’t even mind Rogelio. One of the pit-bulls is there tied to an iron hook in the wall. The chase is filmed with the camera of a police helicopter, and it’s coming to an end because the fugitive’s car is running out of gas. Rogelio is tied to a chair and forced to watch. Hot breath whispers in Rogelio’s ear and the hairs on his neck rise stiffly:

“What do you want? You want me to free you? To spare you? What do you want boy? Sometimes getting saved means getting lost you know,” says the officer.

“I’d rather be lost in like it. I will come after you and tell anybody about this because it’s the supremacist alliance, and no one is frightened as yourself. If you go off, go off in this abandoned ch squatter basement in Ibiza and walk you to the CIA high-rank material. The applicant hits the ground while the officer points towards a terrorist attack, an evidence-leak... the fugitive is a 27-year-old African American now in El Paso. His entrance expected across the border to Mexico. It’s a police helicopter flies close to the brotherhood.

On the large screen, the officer opens the passenger door which car holding an A-K 47. The application system is packed with high purity... a gun at the applicant’s head. Don’t do it kid!’. In one quick motion the officer presses the trigger... Not a ch applicant hits the ground while the officer doesn’t move. His last trembling words softly: “fuuuuck... fuuuuck...”. The applicant’s body lies there...
but we have to be realistic, it's not says Adolfo an anarchist? Why not be a fas- gy, but the practice is ruled by in- tory, the practice is ruled by in- best strategy is the one that hap- Every dog needs a bone to pro- ves the one that hap- pify your survival on this planet. -pose its lips as he yells, “You have to -pose its lips as he yells, “You have to ence for survival on this planet.” -pose its lips as he yells, “You have to -pose its lips as he yells, “You have to

"I'd rather be lost in truth than saved in lies," says Rogelio. "I don't care what you'd rather be. You will be our soldier, and if you don’t like it, I will come after you and your family. This is bigger than us. You will not tell anybody about this because everyone that matters are the leaders of this white supremacist alliance, and no one else will want to believe you because they are as frightened as yourself. If you find that you need to contact us just come to this basement in this abandoned church and say the word 'ziggurat,' someone will then blindfold you and walk you to this room. Is that understood?"

Rogelio doesn’t answer, just cries a lot.

The officer points toward the screen with his handgun, "That guy in the Firebird being chased is an applicant. He wants a government job, he thinks he’s CIA high-rank material. The applicant gets an assignment such as a bank robbery, a terrorist attack, an evidence-less assassination, a high speed police chase, or any combination of high risk illegal activities. If the applicant fails, no one will know that it was just an entrance test; he just dies as a criminal. This particular applicant is a 27-year-old African American. He has been on the run for four days and is now in El Paso. His entrance exam was to transport a truckload full of crystal meth across the border to Mexico. It takes some skill you know." The camera from the police helicopter flies close to the action and zooms in to follow the details for the brotherhood.

On the large screen, using the beat up Trans-am as a shield, the applicant opens the passenger door which is next to the sidewalk, and slowly gets out of the car holding an A-K 47. The applicant is drenched in sweat and piss. His nervous system is packed with high purity methamphetamines. One of the officers pointing a gun at the applicant whispers: “Don’t... don’t... don’t motherfucker... don’t... don’t do it kid”. In one quick motion the applicant turns towards the cops and presses the trigger... Not a chance. U.S. Marshals rain Bullets on him. The applicant hits the ground while there are bullets still coming at him. He’s not dead yet. His last trembling words sound as if a high-pitched baby goat was whispering softly: “fuuuuck... fuuuuuck -ckk -ckk,” until iron-rich blood constricts his throat and nostrils. The applicant has a seizure, and then finally falls asleep...forever. The motionless body lies there in a pool of dark blood. Loud cheers and applause
are let out in the room with comments such as “Damn nigger boy!!!” and “You should’ve given him crack instead of meth!!!” The men watching the screen burst out in laughter.

“Don’t you get it? You should be proud of this. Different chapters of the Brotherhood of the Red Bible have trained the most prominent dictators and terrorists of the world: Bin Laden, Noriega, Pinochet, Hussein…you name them, they were trained at the school of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, or a CIA-related training camp. This kid had real promise; we wanted to put him in charge of an armed militia in the Congo that is soon going to control the continent of Africa. As you can see, however, he didn’t quite make the cut.”

A phone rings and the officer punches the speaker-phone button. “Sir, the applicant is down,” says the voice on the phone.

“I know he’s down, I’m right in front of the TV” “Of course sir,” says the voice on the phone.

“Dispose of him,” says the officer.

“Yes, sir,” says the voice on the phone.

“And what a fucking mess, you guys don’t think you could have been a little more sloppy, right?” whispers the officer then breaks the connection. He sits in his frustration, staring at Rogelio.

“You know we own you. You’re an applicant now,” says the officer, then he gets up and everyone leaves the room. One of the guys unties Rogelio. The officer is the last to leave and he unties the pit-bull from the wall and leaves Rogelio and the pit-bull alone in the darkness.

“Sit down, and don’t fucking move!” says the officer as he walks out the door.

Rogelio hears the door locking behind him.

Rogelio stares at the dog for a few seconds, the dog stares back. Rogelio can feel his heart thumping hard against his sternum; he can feel his head pulsing with pure panic. Rogelio starts trembling and he slowly starts sitting down, one inch at a time, but he doesn’t take his eyes off the dog. The dog doesn’t move, just stares cautiously with his head raised and his shiny eyes. Rogelio finally sits down, and slowly starts making a ball of himself like a fetus. It takes him two long minutes to go from standing to fetus making his way towards Rogelio, but he is running out of breath because he takes a couple of loud deep gasps that smells him obsessively with his wet and head, and this lasts for a few minutes.

The light comes on.

“This shit is crazy. It still fun Rogelio to his feet. Rogelio says no.

The dog just lies down in a Luis blindfolds Rogelio as he knows he’s being watched; watch the walls, by the whole world.

When they get to the car, A with Rogelio in the back and takes a suburban church located in a famili

“Why do we have to do this we have people, we have guns, we.

“You mean your little anarchy harvest of applicants for the CIA,” surprise,” says Luis.

Rogelio thinks about it for a couple of more times, as if by say

“I know,” says Luis, “I kn

The truth is that Rogelio fears them. He fears them because

The sun rises at 6:43 AM, second chance, but he knows it’s meant, a ghost; and the brotherhood.
s “Damn nigger boy!!!” and “You...

D of this. Different chapters of the...n...you name them, they

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like a fetus. It takes him two long

minutes to go from standing to fetus. The dog doesn’t flinch. The dog slowly starts

making his way towards Rogelio. Rogelio trembles and trembles, and he cries,

but he is running out of breath because he’s trying not to make any noise. Then he
takes a couple of loud deep gasps for air. The dog still doesn’t flinch but simply

smells him obsessively with his wet nose. The dog starts licking Rogelio’s arms

and head, and this lasts for a few more minutes.

The light comes on.

“This shit is crazy. It still fucks with me every time,” says Luis as he helps

Rogelio to his feet. Rogelio says nothing.

The dog just lies down in a corner of the room.

Luis blindfolds Rogelio again and helps him limp his way to the car. But

he knows he’s being watched; watched by everyone, by no one, by the building,

by the walls, by the whole world.

When they get to the car, Adolfo is sitting there waiting for them. Luis sits

with Rogelio in the back and takes the blindfold off, allowing Rogelio to see the

suburban church located in a familiar part of town. Adolfo drives off.

“Why do we have to do this? We don’t have to do this. We can beat them,

we have people, we have guns, we can fight,” says Rogelio

“You mean your little anarchist group? Get real man. Ya’ll are just the next

harvest of applicants for the CIA. They know everything you do. You’re in for a

surprise,” says Luis.

Rogelio thinks about it for a moment, and then he says:

“I fucking hate you. I hate all of you.” Then he repeats that he hates them

a couple of more times, as if by saying it over and over he’s going to make it truer.

“I know,” says Luis, “I know.”

The truth is that Rogelio doesn’t hate them that much; actually, he just

fears them. He fears them because he needs them, and because he can’t trust them.

The sun rises at 6:43 AM. And Rogelio wants to think that every day is a

second chance, but he knows it’s not true, not for him, because he’s just an appli-
cant; a ghost; and the brotherhood owns him now.
As I drive down the long, two lane highway with nothing but a big empty sky stretched above and land surrounding me, I think very hard of how I should act, of what I should say when I see her.

I haven't seen my sister—known affectionately as "Jem"—since Christmas. Now as the temperature becomes hotter and the days roll their daylight hours thin like a rolling pin, I realize that it has been five months since I've seen her, or for that matter even talked to her. I feel a pang of guilt, and I find myself clenching the steering wheel. The chatter on the radio isn't helping to ease my mind, and I punch the button to silence, exhaling a gust of frustration. Now all I can hear is the hum of the tires as they speed across the sun-baked pavement, taking me closer and closer to home—back to old Wiley, Oklahoma.

I take a sip of my lukewarm Coca-Cola and think about Jem. I'm five years older than she, and growing up together in that little house by the church, in a town placed in the middle of nowhere had been painfully boring. I remember the time I thought I would go explore the wheat fields, only to get lost and stir the entire town to search for me in a frenzy. Jem had convinced Dad to look in the fields, and sure enough there I was—a ten year old boy starved and dirty from wandering around for hours. I had taken all the spankings throughout our childhood, because Jem was always good. I don't ever remember her getting yelled at or grounded as I had so often been. Maybe it was because she was "daddy's little Jem" and I was the awkward boy who didn't quite fit into the mold of a pastor's son. I went through a phase of wanting to wear chains on my jeans. I was never allowed to, just like Jem was never allowed to go on dates or wear excessive makeup or leave the house in a tank top. But I had never heard her complain, not once.

Mom called me earlier this morning. I was about to head to work and was knotting my tie when my cell phone buzzed.

"Andrew?" Mom's voice so the hairs rise on the back of my neck.

"What is it, mom? Everything?"

"No...no, I need you to come. I waited, hearing her sniffle clean of everything in that moment. My first thought was that something was it Dad?"

"It's Jemma..." She talked as if I didn't know me.

"Your sister's pregnant."

No, that cannot be true, my dates. When would she have the opposite of boys appealed to her. I suddenly felt all the impossible, and I can feel my heart

"Pregnant?"

"Just come home, as soon as possible."

So my baby sister is Pregnant. I need you to drive home to support the family."

As her big brother, I feel like I need to lead me to Wiley. The drive from home to Wiley is seven hours. I knew she has dreams to get out of Wiley. I told her she wants to go to college, tells me that she wants to get out of Wiley. She's born in Wiley never get to have. Je
with nothing but a big empty ink very hard of how I should

ately as "Jem"—since Christ-
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“Andrew?” Mom’s voice sounded clogged with tears and instantly I felt the hairs rise on the back of my neck.

“What is it, mom? Everything all right?”

“No...no, I need you to come home.”

I waited, hearing her sniffles on the other line. My mind had been wiped clean of everything in that moment as I tried to muster an answer for her behavior. My first thought was that something had happened to Dad.

“Is it Dad?”

“It’s Jemma...”

She talked as if I didn’t know my own sister’s name and that frightened me.

“Your sister’s pregnant.”

No, that cannot be true, my thoughts rallied. Jemma never even went on dates. When would she have the opportunity to get pregnant? None of the town boys appealed to her. I suddenly felt a burst of anger and I wanted to kill whichever one it was.

“Pregnant?”

“Just come home, as soon as you can.”

So my baby sister is pregnant and I am supposed to take a week off work to drive home to support the family. This might happen to other girls, but not Jem. As her big brother, I feel like I should be the one to swoop into town with a paper towel and wipe up what she’s spilled. Then everything will be all right, and life will return to normal and we can forget about this. But I know that this is impossible, and I can feel my heart breaking apart.

I’m still numb from the shock as I turn my truck on the highway that will lead me to Wiley. The drive from Oklahoma City has been long, and I still don’t know what I’m supposed to say to her.

My sister is seventeen—just finished her junior year at high school, and I knew she has dreams to get out of Wiley, just like I had years ago. She has always told me that she wants to go to college out of state and play softball. Like me, she says that she wants to see new places and experience things most kids bred and born in Wiley never get to have. Jem is that girl who will break away and become
something great—I just know it.

I hold onto that fading dream as I coast into Wiley.

The first thing I see is the Garner’s sprawling dairy farm, and the sea of wheat. As I get closer, I can spot the white water tower poking up like a hitchhiker’s thumb and then I can make out a painted wildcat face and “Wiley” on its front. Old silos stand scattered throughout the land, some crumbling, others still in use. The town limits actually begin when I reach the only gas station which adjoins Dave’s Pizzeria. We would always go there after ball games for celebration dinners. As I drive down main street, the grocery store pops into view as well as the good old post office, and then right after that there’s Jodie’s Beauty Parlor where the old ladies gather and chat, and Todd’s Auto Shop, where all the old men sit around in rockers with greasy hands and coveralls. There’s only one street light, and it’s so slow that most people usually pay it no heed anyways. The police station is down on the corner, adjacent to the old court house, close enough to keep an eye on The Crescent Moon Bar. To this day I’ve still never been in that bar because I knew my Dad would find out if I did. I still fantasize over what it looks like on the inside.

I turn at the traffic light, waving to the people walking along the sidewalk. They all recognize my truck, and I can feel their eyes on me as I finally reach home. I know word gets around fast in a small town, and I know that Jem is all anyone is talking about today.

The one story red brick house looks exactly how I left it at Christmas. The grass in the front yard is brown from the continuing drought. The black shutters frame the windows and Mom and Dad’s rocking chairs still stand on the porch. The front door needs a coat of paint.

I step out of the truck, stretching my legs slowly, removing my sunglasses and dropping them on the front seat before I shut the door. Slowly, I make the ascent to the porch, listening to the wind chimes sing in the slight breeze and the neighbor’s dog bark.

Mom sees me from the window and meets me at the door with her chestnut hair wound back in a loose bun and her apron around her waist. She hugs me, and I’m glad to see no tear stains or added wrinkles on her face.

“Where’s Dad?” I ask as I push past her.

“At the church,” Mom says.

I nod, feeling like a stranger in an ominous, and I find myself moving down the hallway, the phone rings, and Mom tells me more opinions. The pungent smell reaches us. She knocks my words out of me a number of times she has received today. She sneaks to the hallway, can hear herself slide off her own tongue.

“Jem? It’s me... Andrew.” She pulls back and stares at her phone. “Dad won’t speak to me anymore. She pulls back and stares at her phone. Her dark hair is still long, and it’s just my imagination. I free me. What do I say?

“You okay, Jem?” Stup.

“Dad won’t speak to me anymore. Her voice is still sweet and deep in their hazel depths.

“Dad’s going to need so much.” She’s wearing a big smile, the weather outside. I can’t see her moment ago.

“I’m feeling fine. Not much about anything.
I nod, feeling like a stranger in my old house. The living room is dark and ominous, and I find myself moving quickly towards the lighted kitchen, where I can smell a pot roast simmering for dinner. Mom follows me like a shadow.

“Jem?”

“In her room,” Mom replies, taking her spot back at the counter dicing onions. The pungent smell reaches me and stings my eyes.

The phone rings, and Mom sighs and answers it. I can only imagine how many calls she has received today.

I sneak to the hallway, carpeting groaning beneath my feet as I reach Jem’s bedroom door. I knock softly, but she doesn’t answer.

“Jem? It’s me...Andrew.”

I can hear her slide off her bed and rush to open the door. When I see her, she knocks my words out of me as she flies into my arms, clinging to me as a child who has been drowning in the deep end of the pool.

Her dark hair is still long and wavy, and I wonder if she’s grown taller, or if it’s just my imagination. I freeze when I can feel her rounded stomach against me.

What do I say?

“You okay, Jem?” Stupid words, but it’s the only thing that rolls off my tongue.

She pulls back and stares at me, and I can see the hopelessness reflected in her hazel depths.

“Dad won’t speak to me. He stormed out of the house when I told them.”

Her voice is still sweet and innocent, and it makes my heart ache deeper.

“Dad’s going to need some time. How are you feeling?”

She’s wearing a big sweatshirt, one of my old ones, despite the warm weather outside. I can’t see how big she is, although I had undoubtedly felt it a moment ago.

“I’m feeling fine. Not sick anymore.” She shrugs as if she doesn’t care much about anything.
She walks back to her bed and flops down on it. I enter her room and look at the new pictures she’s posted on her light blue walls. Some of her girlfriends, most of the Houghs’ horses, a couple of the children she faithfully babysits. I see her softball and rodeo trophies lined up against her shelves, gleaming in the sunlight.

“Mom called you.” She doesn’t ask; it’s a statement.
I nod, easing myself onto the bed next to her.
“You know, Jem,” I say and clear my throat. “We all make mistakes.”
She’s playing with a loose string from an unraveled sleeve of the sweatshirt. I know what I’m saying isn’t doing much for her. Sighing, I put my hand over her knee.
“It’ll be all right.”
Jem’s expression supplies me with nothing. I don’t know what she’s thinking, what she’s feeling. The air around us feels heavy with her sadness, and as the preacher’s daughter, I know she feels like she has failed. I recall when she had made her first B in middle school; what a terrible day that had been. She had cried and cried, mumbling she would never get over it, throwing all her beloved stuffed animals from the bed and not eating dinner that night as self-punishment. I had thought she was melodramatic, but it was her way of coping with her disappointment. The only thing I could do was give her a big hug and tell her it was going to be okay—that there would be more classes ahead of her that she would excel in.
“I’m gonna go see where Dad is, okay?”
Jem doesn’t respond, and I leave her sitting on her bed wrapping the string around her fingertips.
Back in the kitchen, Mom is off the phone and is furiously buttering slices of bread. I come right up beside her, anger spreading through me as a wildfire takes over a prairie.
“Who was it?”
Mom gives me an exhausted glance.
“She won’t tell us.”
“How could you not know?”
The words bite into her, and I instantly regret them. I see her swallow and reluctantly go back to prepping the meal slowly, like it has feelings and needs handling by degrees.
“I’ve tried to talk to her and Heidi, but they’re just as single out any of the boys at school.”
“It’s got to be one of them.”
“Yeah.”
“How about a journal?”
I’ve tried to uncover the mystery, been sneaking out at night.
“Andrew, please,” Mom whisper.
I try to relax my shoulders, punching some adolescent belief in mind, trying to uncover the enigma, the hot shot senior. He had been full of himself. I’m girls in town. Jem had never been sneaking into any of the boys at school. It’s got to be one of them. She had never grade. Then there was Andrew. He was in the last year younger than Jem. No, he was on crack, just like his brother. Jem wouldn’t go for pimple on his face and a hu through. He was well beyond.
One by one, I clear out of School until I’m left with a I evaluate. My mind returns to Mom nods, wiping
I enter her room and look. Some of her girlfriends, e faithfully babysits. I see lives, gleaming in the sun-

We all make mistakes.”

Sighing, I put my hand on her shoulder. I can't know what she's thinking with her sadness, and as the led. I recall when she had at had been. She had cried ming all her beloved stuffed as self-punishment. I had coping with her disappoint-

her bed wrapping the string is furiously buttering slices g through me as a wildfire

get them. I see her swallow and reluctantly go back to preparing the bread. She spreads the butter softly and slowly, like it has feelings and she doesn't want to hurt it.

“I've tried to talk to her about it, but she won't open up. I've talked to Jill and Heidi, but they're just as surprised as we are. They said they haven't seen Jem single out any of the boys at school.”

“It's got to be one of them. Have you checked her cell phone?”

“Yes.”

“How about a journal or something? I mean, when did she do this? Has she been sneaking out at night? You need to find out who the father is!”

“Andrew, please,” Mom pleads with me, her voice a fraction above a whisper.

I try to relax my shoulders. A little tension leaves, but I still feel like punching some adolescent boy's face in. I quickly examine each of them in my mind, trying to uncover the culprit of my sister's shame. There was Michael Webster, the hot shot senior. He had just graduated, was the star on the baseball team, and was full of himself. I'm sure he had already slept with several of the looser girls in town. Jem had never liked him, even after he tried to go after her in tenth grade. Then there was Adam Pickler. He was 6'7, and looked like toothpicks wound together. He could dunk, but that was the limit of his talents. He was a year younger than Jem. No, not possible. What about Shane Roberts? I'm sure he was on crack, just like his older brother had been when we were in school together. Jem wouldn't go for some kid like that. Griffin Meltin was a nice boy, with pimples on his face and a huge gap between his two front teeth that he liked to spit through. He was well beyond obese.

One by one, I eliminate each boy I can recall that went to Wiley High School until I'm left with a handful of boys that I didn't know well enough to evaluate. My mind returns to the kitchen, and I observe Mom while she continues to cook.

“How far along is she?” I ask.

“Four months.”

“She hid it for that long?”

Mom nods, wiping tears off her face with the back of her hand.
"Has she even been to the doctor?"
"No."
We are interrupted as the glass door slides open by the kitchen table and Dad walks in. He sees me, and even though I haven't done anything wrong, I feel like I should hide.

"Andrew," Dad says and gives me a short embrace. I can smell his Old Spice aftershave.

"Dad. How are you?"
"Been better."
I don't know what to say so I remain quiet. Mom keeps her attention on cooking, but we can both hear Dad's heavy breathing.

"How's Oklahoma City?" Dad inquires, leaning one of his elbows on the counter. He's wearing a pale green button down with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, nice black pants and loafers. I can see he's lost more hair, and the wrinkles around his eyes look deeper.

"Work is good. I got my first column in the newspaper last week." I paste a fake smile on my lips. My recent success no longer seems to be that important. Dad looks pleased, and I feel relief for some strange reason.

"Is supper ready, Dana?" He asks Mom. His voice is deep and polished, cultured over all the years of preaching, and reminds me of all the bedtime stories he used to tell me and Jem.

"Yes, dear. And Andrew, will you call your sister in, please?"
I walk back down the hallway and inform Jem through the door that it's time to eat. She emerges with wide eyes, attempting to peer around the corner.

"Dad here?"
I nod. I want to tell her to be brave, but I can't muster any words.
We walk into the kitchen and help Mom set the table. Dad is quiet and aloof, taking his seat at the head of the table. Mom pours him some lemonade as Jem and I take our seats side-by-side. I watch as Dad opens his palm for Jem's hand, preparing to bless the meal. Jem slides her hand into his, and then grasps mine fiercely.

"Andrew, bless the food." Dad says.

I say a brief prayer roast to Dad.

For five minutes, the lemonade crackling over ice gingerly putting a square of napkin after every bite. I gulping his lemonade. From food around her bowl, but

"Eat your food, Jem. Her eyes downward and concerned.

"I'm not hungry."
"You've got a baby for you." Dad drains the rest Her face is pale, and I know

"I want you to eat,"

"I don't feel like it.
"Jem, would you like Dad cuts her off: "Fe

I put my spoon down electricity tingling in the air.

Jem speaks slowly; I can feel the air squeeze thing you can say right now."

"If you're not hungry to the game afterwards," Dad been said.

I know that's how handle crisis, but now it's done.

As Jem stands sto
I say a brief prayer of thanks. After the “amen,” Mom passes the bowl of roast to Dad.

For five minutes, there’s nothing but the sound of spoons scraping bowls, lemonade crackling over ice cubes, and Dad chewing. I glance at Mom, who’s gingerly putting a square of potato in her mouth. She dabs her mouth with her napkin after every bite. I look at Dad. He’s shoveling spoonfuls into his gullet and gulping his lemonade. From the corner of my eye, I watch Jem. She’s pushing her food around her bowl, but hasn’t taken a bite yet.

“Eat your food, Jemma,” Dad suddenly speaks, looking at her. Jem keeps her eyes downward and continues to play with her food.

“I’m not hungry.”

“You’ve got a baby to feed. Your mother has been cooking all afternoon for you.” Dad drains the rest of his lemonade and Mom quickly pours him a refill. Her face is pale, and I know she’s thinking about intervening.

“I want you to eat,” Dad continues. His tone is firm, but I know he’s only concerned.

“I don’t feel like it.”

“Jem, would you like me to fix you something else—” Mom starts to say. Dad cuts her off: “No Dana. I want her to eat what the rest of us are eating.”

I put my spoon down, all hunger drained out of my stomach. I can hear electricity tingling in the air around us.

Jem speaks slowly: “I don’t want to have this baby.”

I can feel the air squeeze out of my lungs as dread sets in. That is the worst thing you can say right now, sis. I prepare myself for Dad’s tirade.

“If you’re not hungry, then you can go to your room. But we’re all going to the game afterwards,” Dad talks, skipping over Jem’s comment as if it had never been said.

I know that’s how it’s going to be. Dad is going to simply overlook most of the complexity of the situation. I’ve seen him as a pastor help other people handle crisis, but now it’s our family. He doesn’t know what to do.

As Jem stands stone-faced and disappears to her room, I can see Mom is
fighting tears. I brave a glance at Dad and see that he’s set his spoon down, head slightly bent as if he has been defeated.

After dinner, Mom and Dad walk to the baseball field to see the high school game. I drive Jem in the truck only because she says she doesn’t want to walk.

The evening is warm, translucent and dry as I park my truck in the gravel parking lot. The field lights are already shining bright in the field and I can hear the crack of bat hitting ball, and the roar of the crowd as excitement builds. I glance at Jem. She’s sitting in my passenger seat, still wearing the sweatshirt, arms crossed protectively across her middle. She’s staring out the windshield, but I can tell she’s not looking at anything. Right now, I feel as if I am thousands of miles away from her.

“I remember last summer, we played in the championship game,” she speaks softly, and her voice brushes against my face like butterfly wings. “We played Ocoche High, right there on the field. It was the best game I have ever pitched.”

I remember.

The entire town had gathered around Wiley field, as did all the inhabitants of Ocoche. I can still see Jem, standing on the pitcher’s mound, wearing her maroon and white jersey, long ponytail swinging from the back of her cap, a ribbon in her hair.

“It was the bottom of the ninth inning, and I was so tired, but there was no way I was gonna let coach take me out.” She smiles, succumbing to her nostalgia. She suddenly deepens her voice, mimicking Roger Yarney’s announcing of that game: “Runners on first and third in scoring position, two outs, we’re at the bottom of the ninth, folks. Our Wildcats are holding out by one point over the Tigers, but it all depends on Jemma Rivers. She looks tired. She’s pitched the whole game. But by the looks of it, Coach Rawlings is going to let her finish it.”

“You won that game, Jem.” I tell her. “Coach told me you are the best pitcher he’s seen in years.”

Jem tilts her face towards me. Her expression is jubilant one moment, and then collapses, withdrawing any emotion. She doesn’t pitch anymore.

“Let’s go. Dad will start wondering where we’re at.”
he's set his spoon down, head
seball field to see the high school
ays she doesn't want to walk.
as I park my truck in the gravel
right in the field and I can hear
crowd as excitement builds. I
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re we’re at.”

We walk side by side to the bleachers, passing several people camped out
with coolers and fold out chairs. I’m bombarded by old friends and busybodies,
all wanting to shake my hand, hug my neck or talk my ear off. They say hello to
Jem with icy courtesy, brows raised and voices off pitch. They acknowledge her
but that is all.

“Why, hello Jemma. How are you?”

“Hi, Mrs. Jones. I’m doing wonderful. How are your grandchildren?”

Mrs. Jones only smiles and nods, disregarding the hanging question. Every-
one knows that Jem is her grandkid’s favorite babysitter.

I finally am able to tear away from the mob and join my parents, situated
on the lowest bleacher by the opposing team’s dugout. Sue Parks is next to Mom,
fervently whispering to her. Dad is focused on the game. Jem and I sit behind
them.

People I’ve known my entire life drift in and out, happily chatting with
me, nodding curtly to Dad, their smiles noticeably shifting when they see Jem. I’m
uncomfortable with it all. It’s obvious they all know about my sister.

“Watch the ball, Dennis!” Jem calls to the batter, ignoring the way the
neighbors are behaving. “You’re swinging before it gets to you!”

A few of the boys turn to look at her.

Kelly Stuckey walks by, her latest infant propped up on her bony shoulder.
When she catches sight of Jem, she lets a genuine friendly smile fan across her
face. No pity, no condescension. But she is holding her fifth baby. Jem returns
the smile, asking how Kelly is doing, but her eyes are glued uncertainly to the
gurgling child.

A couple girls from the high school eagerly wave hello to me, then stare
at Jem, trying to see her belly. Jem greets them, and they quickly walk by in re-
response. My hand curls into a fist on my knee. Jem quietly takes it in hers, smooth-
ing away my tension.

“Do you want anything?” I ask her, indicating the concession stand.

“M&M’s, please.”

I jump down from the bleachers and head towards the food. While I get
Jem’s favorite indulgence, a pack of sunflower seeds for me, and two Sprites, I hear someone say my name in a conversation.

“Poor Andrew. Having to come home to see his sister like this. I always wondered if that girl had much sense.”

“I just wonder if we should have a pastor who lets his daughter run around and get pregnant. Who’s going to want to listen to his preaching now?”

Several people chuckle.

“Who’s the daddy is what I want to know…”

“We need to confront the pastor…”

I don’t wait for my change. I scoop everything in my arms and walk back to the bleachers, ears flaming and my eyes scorching holes in the ground.

“Your ears are red. Something wrong?” Jem asks me.

I hand her the candy and Sprite, ripping my sunflower seeds wide open. They spill out like a waterfall, drawing the attention of the people sitting around us.

“Everything’s fine.” I reply, but I don’t look at her because I know she’ll see the truth.

I’m ready to leave by the eighth inning. So is Jem.

I manage to sneak us both out of there without gathering any more rude stares. As I drive the short distance back to the house, I stew on the words I overheard. Dad’s job being ridiculed…my sister being the laughingstock of town…I wonder if time will be any nicer.

I drive right on by the house.

Jem whirls in the seat to look at me.

“You just passed our house.”

“I know.”

She waits, but I don’t offer her any other explanation.

“Where are we going?”

“You’ll see.”

I turn at the street light and drive along Main Street, passing the dimly lit stores. The Crescent Moon is the only source of life with its blinking neon sign in the window.

Moonlight spills across the dark, and heat lightning dances rolling down her window.

“Looks like a storm’s coming.”

“We haven’t had rain in a very long time.”

When I turn onto a small dirt road weaves in and out of deep ruts, us far away from town, from her long time before we come to the bounces in and out of deep ruts, a very long time.

I park in the meadow, rig Jem excitedly gets out of stands with the rope swing. Eyes have shrunk from the lack of rain.

“Push me, Andrew!”

Jem jumps onto the rope back a few feet and let her free.

She glides out over the toes spread, hair streaming behind back to me. I give her another hand.

I remember when Dad would have a picnic and Jem and I would would chair and read the Bible, we would with Cheeto puffs. Jem had one that’s what we called it.

The Grand.

It held our best memories.

I sit in the tall grass, like a bird as she redisovers T
seeds for me, and two Sprites, I
to see his sister like this. I always
or who lets his daughter run around
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"..."

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So is Jem.
without gathering any more rude
use, I stew on the words I over-
the laughingstock of town... I

moonlight spills across the wheat fields as we drive out of Wiley. The sky
is dark, and heat lightning dances through the clouds before us.
"Looks like a storms coming," I comment.
"We haven’t had rain in months. It’ll blow over, like always," Jem says,
rolling down her window.

When I turn onto a small road, she knows where I’m taking her.
The dirt road weaves in and out of wheat fields, past the elk farm, leading
us far away from town, from houses, from people. It seems like we drive for a
long time before we come to the last turn. Jem holds onto the door while my truck
bounces in and out of deep ruts, stirring dirt into the air. We haven’t been here in
a very long time.

I park in the meadow, right next to the pond.
Jem excitedly gets out of the truck as I kill the headlights. The old tree still
stands with the rope swing. Even the old fishing dock is there, although the pond
has shrunk from the lack of rain.

"Push me, Andrew!"

Jem jumps onto the rope swing. She looks like a kid again as I tug her
back a few feet and let her free.

She glides out over the water, a silhouette in the starlight, bare feet and
toes spread, hair streaming behind her like a banner. She laughs as she swings
back to me. I give her another hearty push.

I remember when Dad used to bring us here, years ago. Mom would pack
a picnic and Jem and I would wear our swim suits. While Dad fished or sat in a
chair and read the Bible, we would swim and swing and eat bologna sandwiches
with Cheeto puffs. Jem had one time named it “The Grand,” and ever since then,
that’s what we called it.

The Grand.
It held our best memories.

I sit in the tall grass, listening to Jem’s giggles and the crickets chirping.
Thunder rumbles far away, but I know Jem’s right; it will blow over, like usual.

I can feel how thirsty the earth is when I lay down, Jem fluttering around
like a bird as she rediscovers The Grand. Finally satisfied to find it just like she
remembers, Jem falls into a nest of tangled grass next to me.

"I haven't been here since we were kids," she breathes.

"Do you remember the time me and you decided we were going to ride our bikes here because Mom and Dad were too busy to drive us?" The memory warms my thoughts. "You packed your pink backpack full of chips and cookies, and I put juice boxes in mine, and we got just about to the gas station when Dad came flying down the road looking for us."

"Of course I remember. We tried that several times. It never worked."

"Or the time me and you dipped our fingers in all the communion cups to see if any of them were actually wine?"

Jem snorts through her nose.

"That was your idea, Andy. Remember when we found that old knife in our cellar and we thought someone had been murdered in there?"

I chuckle and open my eyes.

"I was always getting you into mischief," I say.

Jem grows quiet. I sift through other memories silently, wondering how time had passed so quickly.

I knot my fingers behind my head, staring up at the sky. Bars of dark clouds keep passing over the moon, concealing our light. As the old memories peel away from my skin, leaving me exposed and vulnerable, I wonder again what to say to her. Why did I bring her here? Surely I know.

"Jem..."

"Yes?"

I hesitate, tasting the question on my tongue.

"You really don't want your baby?"

She's quiet. I wish I could see her face, but she's hidden in the shadows of the grass.

"I don't know," she finally answers. "I stole a pregnancy test from Claire when I was babysitting Derrick a couple months ago. I just couldn't bring myself to buy one. I hid the truth from Mom and Dad because I knew what would happen. I knew it would crush them. I knew the town would talk about me—about our family. It will be easier to... abort the baby."
next to me.
she breathes.

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e I knew what would hap-
ould talk about me—about

I close my eyes. Lightning brightens the back of my eyelids. More thun-
der growls, louder this time.

“I know I’ve failed,” Jem spills the words out like she has been holding
them inside for too long. “I don’t want to get out of bed tomorrow morning. I
don’t want to have to live each day knowing my stomach is going to get larger and
larger and that people are going to treat me weird. My senior year of high school
wasn’t supposed to be this way. I was planning on getting out of here, like you. I
wanted to play college softball. I wanted to see New York City.”

“You can still see and do those things, Jem.”
She’s so caught up in her train of thought that she doesn’t hear me.

“I don’t know what made me do it! I was so stupid. I wish I could go back
and change my decision.”

Her voice is shaking and I know she has started to release the tears that
have been trapped for months. My tense thoughts tell me to hug her but I remain
still.

“I just don’t want to have to walk down the street pushing a stroller, with
the constant reminder of what I’ve done right there in front of me. I don’t want it
to reflect on Dad.”

I hear the wind rummaging through the leaves, and I know that I’ve let my
sister down. If I had been here for her faithfully instead of leaving home, maybe
she wouldn’t be pregnant. I can remember how boring those Wiley high school
days used to be.

“Jemma…”

“I’ve made my decision. I know what I want to do.”

Before she can release her answer, a burst of thunder shakes the ground.
We both sit up and scramble to our feet as huge raindrops tumble out of
the sky.

Jem’s tears blend with the rain as she stands and watches it fall. She strips
away the heavy sweat shirt at last and throws it on the ground. Her t-shirt is left
exposed to the rain, gradually turning darker and darker, hugging her belly tightly.
For a long time she stands and cries so fiercely that even the thunder cannot drown
it out. She kicks the lumpy sweatshirt around with her bare feet, stomping in the
puddles, her footprints trampling down the long grass. Then her tears melt and she raises her palms to the storm, leaning back as if she is embracing a long lost friend. Her laughter is incomparable. I can see the droplets splash over her, washing her clean.

Years to come, when her baby boy is learning to walk, learning to play baseball, learning how to stand in an Oklahoma storm, Jem will remember this night. She'll remember the thunder and lightning. When the rain comes, she'll remember how she changed her mind.

"She's in the tree," Nick yelled for Meri late into the night.

Great. Meri thought aside of the tree. At least the baby was safe. Jade lingered behind in false alarm. Father and uncle had been at war with land, Nick had become the messenger to her father pleading with Nick's kingdom. If her house Guinevere, Kevin Sir Lancelot ing Morgan Le Fay. Even before Arthurian tales, Meri had iden-
Then her tears melt and she embracing a long lost friend. flash over her, washing her
to walk, learning to play
in, Jem will remember this
hen the rain comes, she’ll

“She’s in the tree,” Nick had yelled as he, Frank, Kevin and Jade searched for Meri late into the night.

Great. Meri thought as she accepted defeat and leaned away from the inside of the tree. At least the boys sprinted to the tree, as if she needed rescuing. Jade lingered behind in false modesty. Ever since 1914, three years ago, her father and uncle had been at war with the Germans. Like most of the older sons in England, Nick had become the man of the house. No matter how many letters Meri sent to her father pleading with him to somehow come home, she couldn’t escape Nick’s kingdom. If her house was Camelot, Nick would have been Arthur, Jade Guinevere, Kevin Sir Lancelot, Frank Merlin, and she would have been the witching Morgan Le Fay. Even before the war when her uncle Thomas read them the Arthurian tales, Meri had identified with Morgan. In Meri’s mind, they were both misunderstood.

She could just imagine everything Nick would say. What were you thinking? Father and Uncle put me in charge, so do what I say, or your favorite, You’re going to be the death of me. That one always made her feel horrible. Constantly she gave him trouble. Sometimes she didn’t mean to. By the time she had come along, their governess, Ianna, had become lazy and delinquent with proper behavior lessons, and Ianna had always treated her differently than the others. Meri, nor the others, ever understood why Ianna over nurtured Meri. Meri could only theorize that it was because she had never known her mother and that Ianna felt obligated to fill the role. Meri’s churlish behavior, she had once heard Ianna say to the others, was the result of only knowing a governess for a mother.

As her sister, brother, and cousins neared, Meri thought Ianna was wrong. Her wild behavior was all due to Jade’s cruelty.

“See there she is,” Kevin said as they closed in on the tree, their lanterns
blaring in her face.

“Go away,” she screamed at them.

“Meri get out of the tree,” said Nick in his most direct tone.

“Just go away,” she whined, knowing well enough that they weren’t going to leave her.

“Meri!” Frank exclaimed, “You’re bleeding!” Her wound was not as bad as it looked. She had scraped her leg when she tripped on the gravel walkway leading to the stables.

“Come on get back to the house,” Nick said, “we need to treat your leg.”

“What happened Meri?” Kevin asked.

“I fell.”

“No, I meant why did you run out?”

Meri looked up at Jade, a glare flashing from her eyes. But strangely, it was not anger they saw under tear-swollen eyelids; it was the kind of glare a dying slave would give to his master.

“All I did was make fun of the stupid poor,” Jade said, “You know the kind that don’t do anything and are just dumb. She got upset and said I don’t know what I’m talking about. Papa works to help lazy poor people, so I do know. She’s just crazy.”

“You don’t know,” Meri said.

“Oh and you do? You aren’t poor. You just want a reason for us to feel bad for you. Stop being stupid and get back home. I’m tired, we’re tired, and you’re being selfish.”

“Go then, leave me! I’ll come back when I want to.”

“Oh no,” said Nick angrily, “last time you said that you tried to run away. And we don’t have father and Uncle William to chase you around. So either you get out now and I’ll carry you nice and easy, or I’m dragging you out of that tree and tying your screaming ass to me.”

“I’d like to see you try,” Meri sneered.

Reaching into the tree, Nick grabbed hold of her, but she slung her fist across his face and kicked him out of the tree, her boot leaving a dirt stain on his white shirt.
"Meri?" Kevin questioned, almost shocked. "What’s wrong? Come on let Nick carry you back. Frank and I can’t take you all the way, it’s too far."

"Look," Frank said calmly to her, trying to meet her eyes, "I don’t know what Jade said to make you upset. She can’t help but say those hurtful things sometimes. But you make her sad sometimes too."

"Be quiet Frank!" Jade shouted.

"Admit it," he said.

"I’m not the mean one," Jade tried to justify. "She gets her way all the time, and Lanna does nothing about it. I never get to have my way!"

"No, but you get to talk for a long time," Kevin added, smiling just slightly for Meri’s sake.

"Come on," Frank said to Meri in a pleading tone, "I’ll make sure she won’t bother you."

"I’m walking."

"No you’re not," Nick said, "You’ll take forever to get there. I’m carrying you, now let’s go."

"No!"

"Meri," said Frank, "you know your leg hurts. Just because Jade’s here doesn’t mean you’ve got to be in pain. Look, if you don’t want Nick to carry you, then I’ll do it."

"No you’re too weak," Nick grunted, letting the situation anger him, "you won’t make it passed the hill." Coming out of the tree, Meri leaned on Frank and glared at Jade and Nick.

"You can carry me," she said to Frank.

Nick rolled his eyes as he followed Frank who held Meri in his arms. Meri was light for her age, but was a strain for Frank. But, untrue to Nick’s prediction, Frank made it all the way back to the house with her in his arms. Jade had taken up the rear, watching Frank hold Meri like she was a damsel in the Camelot books.

Meri noticed her looks and glances and wondered why she was looking at them so intently. Of course, then again, it was Jade, and to Meri her own sister made no sense.
Meri was taken care of and was sent to bed, as they all were, but instead of sleeping in her own room she followed Frank to his.

"Thanks," she said as she closed his door behind her, "for carrying me."

"No problem," he said, but in fact it was the opposite. His arms ached and his back and shoulders burned. Nick would not have had this problem, because he lifted weights every day and was not allowed to touch his brother's weights.

"Are you gonna cry?" He asked her, as she was about to leave.

"Huh?"

"Are you gonna go back to your room and cry?" As he said this he laid down in his bed, wrapping the covers around him.

"Maybe."

"Well I don't think you need to." She smiled a bit and walked around the bed and slipped under the covers next to him, turning off the lamp.

"I won't now," she said and kissed his cheek. She lay on her side facing the wall and held the blankets close to her. Frank turned facing the opposite direction as well and rolled his eyes.

As the night wore on, the two tossed and turned a dozen times. Each time Meri tried not to tear the picture under her shirt. When she saw that Frank was truly asleep, she took the picture out from her undershirt.

It was a picture of an old nurse maid with dark brown hair. Her biological mother was said to have blond hair like Jade's, and her father William was a redhead as was his brother. Her older brother Kevin had red hair and Frank did too. Nick's hair was blond. But why out of everyone in her family did Meri have dark hair?

Ianna had said that the woman in the picture was just a passing nurse maid, never wanting to settle too long with the children. She usually stayed with children till they were two years old, and in those two years she would nurture them so well that they grew to become incredibly intelligent human beings, Ianna had once said to her. Meri never remembered her, but Ianna had said that she had been the nurse maid for their family once, but she never said which specific children the woman had nursed.

Luckily, stealing her picture of people in her blue box in features of the woman, Meri obvious than anything in the past held a rag that Meri had stolen softest rag amongst the others. it, it had dirt and sud stains on it, it had turned out to be a picture of someone.

Lying awake in Frank's bed, she was a nurse serving on the battle field. She must have been one of the servants. Meri did not remember the woman's picture, clutching the
They all were, but instead of finding her, "for carrying me." His arm ached and he had this problem, because he was about to leave.

"Ary?" As he said this he laid a bit and walked around the off the lamp.

She lay on her side facing the facing the opposite direction around the hundred times. Each time he saw that Frank was truly brown hair. Her biological father William was a red hair and Frank did too.

family did Meri have dark brown hair. Her biological family did Meri have dark brown hair. Her biological family did Meri have dark brown hair. Her biological father William was a red hair and Frank did too.

just a passing nurse maid, nally stayed with children could nurture them so well ings, Ianna had once said that she had been the nurse tific children the woman

Luckily, stealing her picture came easy to Meri. Ianna always kept pictures of people in her blue box in the top drawer of her dresser. Looking at the facial features of the woman, Meri saw how pensive she looked. But what was more obvious than anything in the picture were the plain clothes she wore. The woman held a rag that Meri had stolen from the linen closet a year ago. It had been the softest rag amongst the others, almost as if it were once a blanket. When she stole it, it had dirt and sud stains engulfing its delicate structure. Once Meri renewed the rag, it had turned out to be a pale yellow color, like wheat before it was harvested.

Lying awake in Frank's bed she wondered where that woman was. Maybe she was a nurse serving on the front lines of France and Germany or she could still be nursing children so that there could be intelligent soldiers and nurses on the battle field. She must have forgotten the rag, or she might have just given it to one of the servants. Meri did not know, but was perfectly content just staring at the woman's picture, clutching the rag to her chest, and sucking on her thumb.
White heat flames burn bright across this land

When all God's sheep lay down to die—will anybody stand?

- Three Verses by Jacob Hickman
Red-brown tresses curl and caress
the damp, warm block of oak.
Her linen shift drifts around
bare knees, kneeling on the boards.
Tears smear the long smoothed wood.

A throng surrounds, shouting
curses and declaring witch.
Pretty Jane smiles from her perch.

A call sounds and dark robes close in
with incantation and benediction.
Her eyes search skyward and
no reprieve can be found in the heavens.

Eyes pinched closed and arms flung wide.
The blade glides smoothly in warm air,
slipping through tendon and bone.

The age of Anne is ended.
backalley mazes cobblestones and waves of ripe cement
smoking dumpsters with foggy vapors dripping—
sweatshiptissandcookingoil:

sometimes when you walk the city streets at night
it becomes hard not to lose your way.

came upon a figure,
old man lit up in grungy spotlight
tall and thin from age, eyes low with disillusion
bony fingers coiled round an old trombone—
workin his way up a solitary scale
eflatminor to
csharp on the turnaround.

walked by and he stopped the sound,
asked if i was lost—whas i doin uptown dishour?

laughed and gave him some change—
told him this is the only home i know.
he smiled wide, dark yellow teeth glint dirty under streetlights.

says he got three verses fuh me,
three verses like a trinity.
vice
victory and
vindication through epiphany—

you gotta lotta time 'tween now and that infinity.
maybe so, i said—
but when i look into that mirror, all i'm seein is the enemy.

you see, some things never change, i said—
and that's the way it's always been.
yeah, but once those things are gone, he says
they ain't never seen again.

so says the preacher man.
so says the preacher man.

got me wondrin
when the world is on its knees
white heat flames burn bright across this land
when all god's sheep lay down to die—will anybody stand?

some say the preacher can.
some say the preacher can.
I will not lie: our love is not of fate.
No stars or worlds aligned in slim communion
To honor us with love as noble, great,
As that of fancied past. Our lonely union
Is grounded more in earth than born in air:
Genetic greed and cultured need and chance
Have linked our lives. We owe not heaven's care,
But all the greater gods of circumstance.
Yet though a firmer truth I never knew,
Its breath would naught but freeze your fairest face.
For flowers frost against this colder truth --
I whisper sweeter nothings in its place.

All love is of one law, with none above it:
We cannot live this lie except to love it.
Avery dew and harking calls,
And a henbit brought,
The paths have been chosen when evening falls,
Everything has been taught.

Winds so invisible but can appear,
From darken skies and blended wood,
All to which served their time here,
And yearn to take back what they could.

Dusk and Gypsy chime,
And soon the night,
Hopefully there will be glad periods of time,
When I walk the Bridge to Light.

I was born neither in time nor space,
To me Home has sung,
And I shall see the Architect’s face,
For the bells on the Bridge have rung.
I just wanted to write something that wasn’t confined
To a rhyme scheme, that isn’t the same thing,
Like an internet meme,
Something a little hip-hop-ish,
Something I could dish out with no restraint,
To paint a picture I don’t normally portray,
To say something I don’t normally say.
In an even more spontaneous way.
Today’s the day, yeah, now time to play,
Let’cha hips sway this way and that,
Move ya feet to the beat like on a DDR mat,
And pay no mind to the who and the why,
The people who stare and whine,
To all of those who stand around,
To everybody you absolutely and completely confound.
Get lost in the music, get lost in the sound,
Break free from the prison in which you were previously bound,
I’ve found this to be the only way,
To lift reality’s anchor up, up and away,
And soar through the dream world,
The metaphysical plane in which
Not a single dang thing is ordinary or plain,
Where it’s okay to be completely insane.
Where there’s no reason to hold back or refrain,
Where the world is yours to mold or to maim,
A place where you can bend the frame like an illusion,
A fusion of amazement and confusion,
Something which is both problem and solution,
So get up now and either move it or lose it,
and if you don't think it's true then get up and prove it.
I remember witnessing
A form more beautiful than
Any I could write
Like a villanelle that had
Two profound lines
A sonnet that Shakespeare
And Petrarch forgot
To craft.

A broad high arch of whitish or rosy light
fine particles of dust suspended.

I remember discovering
A serenity in her eyes
A zodiacal light.
Cassini awe compares none.

The long wavelength
Invisible to the eye
a sensation of warmth on the skin.

I remember her smile
An atomic bomb explosion
Of splendor
I was threadbare by
The black rain of

I'm not Suffering, Byron
(Holy Crap, It’s a Love Poem)
Martin Bennett

Yearning.
A powerful impulse
In a rhythmic way
releasing energy
or simply taking delight
in movement itself.

I remember her accidentally
Brushing my shoulder
A ballet troupe dancing
The Firebird.

I really wish I had gotten her
Yearning.
A powerful impulse
In a rhythmic way
Releasing energy
Or simply taking
delight
In movement itself.

I remember her accidentally
Brushing my shoulder
A ballet troupe dancing
The Firebird.

I really wish I had gotten her name.
The Preamble
Phillip Jenkins

“We the people”
won’t walk yo’ walk
won’t take no talk
from you.

So hear them words
we fought and died fo’
hoped and cried fo’
whinin’ they was true.
I will arise and take up the spear,
Blow the iv'ried horn for vengeful war,
And slay the ruin of yesteryear.

In the sylvan vale where the winds steer
my spirit to that moon-silvered door;
I will arise and take up the spear.

I will thaw the hoary frost of fear,
Then shatter the ice that rimes the core
And slay the ruin of yesteryear.

Into the earth falls my flaming tear,
A roaring torch for another's store;
I will arise and take up the spear.

The blood tide rises; the time draws near,
When I will climb the towering tor
And slay the ruin of yesteryear.

By watched, hidden roads I find the mere,
and in thirsting gulps I learn the lore;
I will arise and take up the spear,
And slay the ruin of yesteryear.
while i was sleeping in the forest,
all alone, strung out and broken—
laid out ‘cross a lime beach chair, among
the Weeds
and Vines
and Thorns
that made their home on bukowski’s forgotten grave.

asked her what she wanted,
popped the cork to the bottle at my feet.

“when you coming home?” she says
—in a voice that threatens tears.

an image flickers out the corner of my eye
a loyal 9 iron, resting ‘gainst a tree
caked and brown with rusted blood grains
of sand peppered along its etchy blade.

told her i still got 18 holes to go.

she makes a noise; chokes on her emotion
“you’ve been there for weeks....
are you ever coming back?”

“baby” i say, drooling with all the confidence an inebriate can muster;
“i gotta finish this.”

and
propping my feet up
on the can of kerosene placed
brimming fumes waiting
like an alter; a pungent shrine

sweat seeps out my skin—those
dance ‘round: bathing, buzzing;
above my weathered beach chair
the obstinance—in this—holiest

“kate, darling, my
precious angel,

some point along the line,
i’ve forgotten what it means; w
so i won’t be home ‘til i remem
or ‘til i
and so
and
propping my feet up
on the can of kerosene placed before me,
brimming fumes waiting
like an alter; a pungent shrine

sweat seeps out my skin—those gnats
dance ‘round: bathing, buzzing, black cloud hovering
above my weathered beach chair, sitting in the sun
the obstinance of a bitter artist, wafting in pretension
in this—holiest of trash bins: tabernacle to the poet’s suffrage.

“kate, darling, my
precious angel, my sweet
baby girl—

same point along the line,
I’ve forgotten what it means; what it feels to be in pain.

so I won’t be home ‘til I remember—
or ‘til these woods are burned to ash,
and soot in charlie’s name.

owski’s forgotten grave.

biate can muster,
gotta finish this.”
You have always been a close friend
Seeing me through my harder times
And yet if I asked you
You would know nothing about me.
If I were to reach for you
My fingers would meet cold glass.

Recently I discovered that you
Are not even what I thought you to be.
Hearing your voice
Was like being struck by lightning
On a cloudless day.

Since then things have been different.
Where once you were the light
Drawing me to you
Like flies in the darkness

Now you are like a depressing
Dark cloud of flies blacking out the sky
Keeping the sunshine that is my
Happiness away. So that
Our friendship—a delicate bloom—
Shall wither and die.
SELECTED WORKS
by Art Students
Gainesville State College
2009-2010

Nicholas Lieffring, featured cover artist
Untitled
Multi-media
BRIAN BERDING, 2010

City
Charcoal
DANIELLE RAGOGN
City
Charcoal
DANIELLE RAGOGNA, 2010
Kite Flying
Ink and Watercolor
EMILY BECK, 2010
Untitled
Ceramic
JESSICA STEVENSON, 2010
Self-portrait
Plaster
LESLIE WELBORN, 2010
WOW!
Acrylic
LESLIE WELBORN, 2010
Untitled
Plywood
LESTER MARTIN, 2010
Untitled
Acrylic
SADIE ROEBUCK, 2010
Untitled
Charcoal
WENDY DAVIS, 2010
Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.

- Dr. Seuss
The Problem with Digging Holes

Jacob Hickman

Characters:

MARCUS
TOMMY
JIMMY (THE DEAD MAN)

Setting:

MARCUS and TOMMY are standing over a pile of dirt with shovels; they are dirty, sweaty, and tired. JIMMY'S body is to the side of the pile, covered up with a blanket. There are three bags filled with money next to JIMMY'S body.

After a moment, MARCUS stops digging and tosses his shovel to the side. He steps away from the hole and picks up the whiskey bottle lying on the ground. He wipes his brow and takes a long drink from the bottle, then sets it down and fishes a cigarette from his pocket.

MARCUS: When I was a kid, I had this big, yellow, Labrador retriever. Just about the nicest dog I ever had. My daddy named him Coltrane, y'know...after the famous sax player? Anyway, Coltrane ran off one night chasin' some raccoon and got himself bit. My daddy said he was gonna get sick, so he went ahead and put the ol' boy down when the sun came up. We set off diggin' a hole for Coltrane, didn't realize the ground we were standin' on was layer after layer of sandstone. Took us all goddamn day to finish that hole, Coltrane's body just bakin' out there in the sun.

TOMMY: (Between shovel-fulls) was a good dog.

MARCUS: (Pauses. Stares at TOMMY) But I was getting to the same point in time to time, one finds themselves for a burial. Sometimes, though, one finds themselves in a moment—so to speak, and they just go about any job, you see? You get different....uh...(Snaps his fingers and smiles)

TOMMY: All the different variables into account. People think the most at the deceased. But that simply ain't true. This before settin' upon the earth...we be diggin' through. Because, as I said before, you set out to bury a dog in a field, it's not quite as bad a day as it seems nonetheless.

TOMMY: How do you know if

MARCUS: Because I shot him in body's day.

TOMMY: Did that teller have a

MARCUS: (Takes a drink of whiskey)
TOMMY: *between shovel-fulls of dirt* I had a dog named Scooter, once. He was a good dog.

MARCUS: *pauses. Stares at Tommy* Well, that’s a wonderful story, Tommy. But I was getting to the same point my daddy taught me when Coltrane died. From time to time, one finds themselves in a situation where there is an immediate need for a burial. Sometimes, though, people make the mistake, get too caught up in the moment — so to speak, and they just set to diggin’. That just ain’t the right way to go about any job, you see? You gotta make all sorts of considerations — all the different.... (Snaps his fingers as if looking for the right word) all the different....

TOMMY: All the different variables?

MARCUS: Yes, Tommy, variables. There’s all sorts of variables you gotta take into account. People think the most important one is the size of what’s being buried. But that simply ain’t true. The most important variable, or aspect, to consider before settin’ upon the earth... well it’d have to be the kind of dirt you’re gonna be diggin’ through. Because, as I learned on that hot summer day in my youth, if you set out to bury a dog in a field of sandstone... well, you’re bound to have a bad day. Not quite as bad a day as Jimmy here, or our friend, the teller. But a bad day, nonetheless.

TOMMY: How do you know if that teller had a bad day?

MARCUS: Because I shot him in the throat, Tommy. That’s enough to ruin anybody’s day.

TOMMY: Did that teller have a shotgun, Marc?

MARCUS: *takes a drink of whiskey.* No, Tommy. That teller had a .9mm Be-
retta. Same kind the cops carry. Why you askin', anyway?

TOMMY: I was just wondering...

MARCUS: If he'd had a shotgun, there wouldn't be that clean little hole in Jimmy's back...there'd be what they call a "scattering effect."

TOMMY: A scattering effect.

MARCUS: Exactly. Instead, what we have is a single piece of lead that simply found its way clean through Jimmy's back and out through his chest. That's what he was doin' there in the car...he was trying to plug his lung closed...but it was a doomed effort to begin with, if you ask me.

TOMMY: Is that why you shot that teller? Because he shot Jimmy in the back?

MARCUS: Yes, Tommy. That's exactly why I shot him. (Remembers his unlit cigarette, and takes his lighter out. He lights his cigarette, and blows smoke into the air while he stands and stares at TOMMY's efforts.) It's strange to think about sometimes...once you dug that far down...you've changed that plot of earth forever. I mean, you can refill it...but that hole'll still be there, in some shape or form.

TOMMY: (Stops digging for a moment and takes a few deep breaths, then wipes his dirty face.) I'm hurtin' pretty bad, Marc. How much longer we got to go?

MARCUS: Couple more feet. Then I'll get you taken care of. Right now, though...I need you to be sharp and focused. We gotta get this done. We gotta get him in the ground 'fore he starts to smell.

TOMMY: (Goes back to work.) I don't see why we can't just throw him in the lake...there's a dock not half a mile.

MARCUS: Because that ain't the friend, now wasn't he?

TOMMY: I suppose he was.

MARCUS: And we don't throw our

TOMMY: I suppose not.

MARCUS: You suppose right, Tommy. (Picks the bottle up from the need six foot grave. This is Geo (Chuckles to himself) Well, that'd be my included.

(TOMMY continues to work in silences to smoke and drink. TOMMY'S a stops and stares off into space.)

MARCUS: You okay, Tommy?

TOMMY: Yeah, I'm just thinkin'. I right before he...

MARCUS: Before he died?

TOMMY: Yeah...he was sayin' some
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this done. We gotta get
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lake... there’s a dock not half a mile from here.

MARCUS: Because that ain’t the right thing to do, Tommy. Jimmy was our
friend, now wasn’t he?

TOMMY: I suppose he was.

MARCUS: And we don’t throw our friends in the lake, now do we?

TOMMY: I suppose not.

MARCUS: You suppose right, Tommy. Besides, we only got a couple more feet
to go. (Picks the bottle up from the ground and starts to drink again.) He don’t
need no six foot grave. This is Georgia red-clay, boy, a four foot hole in that...
(Chuckles to himself) Well, that’d be a fuckin’ mausoleum for most anybody. Jim-
my included.

(TOMMY continues to work in silence for a few moments, while MARCUS contin-
ues to smoke and drink. TOMMY’S digging becomes slower and slower, finally he
stops and stares off into space.)

MARCUS: You okay, Tommy?

TOMMY: Yeah, I’m just thinkin’. I was thinkin’ bout what Jimmy said, y’know...
right before he...

MARCUS: Before he died?

TOMMY: Yeah... he was sayin’ something...
ONE-ACT PLAYS

MARCUS: Well I wouldn't know what the man said. In case you didn't notice, I was too busy getting the hell away from those cops to concern myself with Jimmy's last testaments. (Takes a drink.) But go ahead, enlighten me.

TOMMY: Nothin' that made a whole lotta sense. He was just mumbling some weird stuff. Then his head dropped, and then his arm fell down from... y'know...

MARCUS: That hole in his chest?

TOMMY: Yeah, that.

MARCUS: Well, what did he say, Tommy? I mean, it's got you all worked up for some reason.

TOMMY: He said, "Something smells like dog shit."

MARCUS: (Chuckles to himself.) "Somethin' smells like dog shit." Poor bastard. That is pretty strange, but it's not all that uncommon.

TOMMY: You mean right before you die, you smell dog shit?

MARCUS: Well, it ain't always dog shit. Sometimes it's burnin' hair; sometimes it's French fries. Point is, their senses are going haywire... y'know? Their nerves are cuttin' in and out, like a frayed wire lyin' in some damn puddle.

(MARCUS picks up the other shovel and helps TOMMY dig as he reminisces.)

MARCUS: I seen people do some strange things 'fore they go. Strange things indeed. Smell things that ain't there, see their mommas or daddies, piss themselves... it all depends on the circumstance, and who the person is, y'know? You remember ol' Frank Oswald? Got himself...

TOMMY: Yeah, I think so.

MARCUS: I remember he was head to toe, man... it was every gonna be okay and all that. Cour you do?

TOMMY: Why did you tell him gonna die?

MARCUS: I don't really know. I just know how you gotta lie to someone.

TOMMY: I don't think I ever done...

MARCUS: You mean, you never was with her... that it was all you, and so...

TOMMY: No... I would never say orber that hooker down on Ponce and (Pause.) But I could tell she was ly

MARCUS: Well that girl was tryin'

TOMMY: She didn't do a very good

MARCUS: Hookers usually don't...
In case you didn’t notice, to concern myself with Jim-nlighten me.

He was just mumbling some fell down from...y’know...

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dog shit?

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_Y dig as he reminisces._

they go. Strange things in-daddies, piss themselves...
s, y’know? You remember

ol’ Frank Oswald? Got himself shot a couple years ago at that warehouse job?

TOMMY: Yeah, I think so.

MARCUS: I remember he was lyin’ there on the ground, covered up in blood... head to toe, man...it was everywhere. I was sittin’ next to him, tellin’ him he’s gonna be okay and all that. Course it was bullshit, but you know....what else can you do?

TOMMY: Why did you tell him he was gonna be okay, when you knew he was gonna die?

MARCUS: I don’t really know. I guess because I felt like I was supposed to. You know how you gotta lie to someone sometimes, so you don’t hurt their feelings?

TOMMY: I don’t think I ever done that...

MARCUS: You mean, you never told some girl that there wasn’t nothing wrong with her...that it was all you, and so forth?

TOMMY: _No..._ I would never say that to any girl, Marcus. (Pause.) I remember that hooker down on Ponce and 10th...she told me I was cute and everything. (Pause.) But I could tell she was lyin’.

MARCUS: Well that girl was tryin’ to spare your feelings, Tommy.

TOMMY: She didn’t do a very good job.

MARCUS: Hookers usually don’t...but I believe I was tellin’ a story.
TOMMY: Sorry, Marc.

MARCUS: It's okay, Tommy. (Pause.) But, back to ol' Frank Oswald. He was lyin' there, covered in blood...sprawled out 'cross the concrete like some broken goddamn marionette...and as I was sittin' there with him...he starts talkin' to me like I'm Santa Claus! He's askin' me what I'm gonna bring him for Christmas...did I like the cookies he laid out for me last year...

TOMMY: Santa Claus?

MARCUS: Yes Tommy, Saint Nick hisself. My point is, when people are caught up in the throws—the whirlwind of death, if you will...their minds go to different places. Sometimes they're random...such as Jimmy and his dog shit, or sometimes they're comforting memories. Like Frankie-boy thinkin' I was Santa Claus.

TOMMY: I don't like to think about that kinda stuff, Marcus. I'm scared of dyin'. Ever since I saw my granny go...scares the hell outta me. (Pause.) I dunno...I need a hit.

MARCUS: You don't need a hit, Tommy...you need to think about what I said. Every time you put that shit up in your arm, you throw another handful of dirt on top of your grave.

TOMMY: But I'm hurtin', Marc. I hurt all over.

MARCUS: Pain ain't necessarily an evil thing, boy. Reminds you that you're alive. Besides, you know what happens to them poor souls who drop off from a hot-shot, right?

TOMMY: What?

MARCUS: They shit their pants. That how you wanna leave this earth? Those doctors and pretty nurses, ho

TOMMY: Nah, that ain't what I w

MARCUS: You just what?

TOMMY: I just hurt so damn bad, Marc.

MARCUS: (Sighs deeply as he c

(The two set back to working in sil

TOMMY: Marcus, what do you th

MARCUS: (Irritated at TOMMY's f

TOMMY: Dyin'.

MARCUS: You know, for someone a lot about the subject.

TOMMY: I don't really know wh

MARCUS: You don't have to tal
MARCUS: They shit their pants. Right after they die, they shit in their pants. Is that how you wanna leave this earth, Tommy? With some soiled-ass trousers? All those doctors and pretty nurses, hovering over you, holdin’ their noses?

TOMMY: Nah, that ain’t what I want, I just—

MARCUS: You just what?

TOMMY: I just hurt so damn bad, Marcus.

MARCUS: (Sighs deeply as he continues to dig.) Well, just hold yourself together, boy…and we’ll get you fixed up right after we get Jimmy in the ground. (The two set back to working in silence. They are both noticeably tired from the day’s events.)

TOMMY: Marcus, what do you think it feels like?

MARCUS: (Irritated at TOMMY’S continuous questions.) What do I think what feels like?

TOMMY: Dyin’.

MARCUS: You know, for someone that says he’s afraid of dyin’, you sure do talk a lot about the subject.

TOMMY: I don’t really know what else to talk about…it seems fitting, since Jimmy just died and all.

MARCUS: You don’t have to talk about a damn thing. That’s your problem,
ONE-ACT PLAYS

Tommy...you talk too damn much. Can't focus on the task at hand.

TOMMY: Do you think it hurts a lot?

MARCUS: (Hesitates.) How the hell should I know? I mean...I'd like to think it feels a lot like how you feel when you're in one of those naps. You know...after you take that spike out, and just lean on back (Stretches his arms out)...you just kinda fade away. But, that's just a guess. I don't know for sure, Tommy...I mean, I ain't dead yet, am I?

TOMMY: No Marc, you ain't dead yet.

MARCUS: Exactly. I ain't dead yet, so I ain't the one to ask. I mean, for all I know...it could be some terrible, searing', burnin' kinda pain all through your body...and then it just stops, and there's blackness. I don't really know, Tommy. What do you think dyin' is like?

TOMMY: Well, right before my granny died, she said she felt like she was fallin' down a well.

MARCUS: I suppose that's an understandable sensation to have, since she was sinkin' down into unconsciousness and all. It's probably different for everyone, don't you agree?

TOMMY: I suppose you're right. (Pause.) I wonder what Jimmy felt like.

MARCUS: He was probably confused about what happened. (Pause.) Being that he was shot in the back.

TOMMY: Do you think he was hurtin'?
MARCUS: I doubt it. The brain is pretty effective on its own at numbin' pain. I bet in those last few minutes, Jimmy couldn’t feel a whore’s lips on his earlobe, even if he wanted to.

TOMMY: You mean, when you die, you can’t feel nothing?

MARCUS: Most of the time...but I don’t suppose for people like you, Tommy. That shit you do—all it does is overload your brain...makes it think it don't need to do nothing. Hell, I imagine if you fell into the same fate as our friend, Jimmy...your end would be filled with a type of pain....most people will never know.

(MARCUS tosses the shovel to the side, and goes over to his whiskey bottle.)

TOMMY: (With his feelings hurt.) Why would you say that?

MARCUS: (Takes a swig from the bottle.) Because it’s true. (Lights another cigarette.)

TOMMY: (Sharply) Well I don’t see how what I do is so bad compared to you. You keep that bottle pressed to your lips all day, like there was mother’s milk inside.

MARCUS: (Walks over to TOMMY, sets the bottle on the ground. In a menacing voice) You better watch your mouth, boy...'fore I make this a table for two. (Motion to the pile of dirt.)

(The two are frozen in an awkward silence. Suddenly, MARCUS starts to laugh and slaps TOMMY’S back.)

MARCUS: (Laughs to himself) Alright now, it’s okay. You might be right, Tom-
TOMMY: I think it’s done, Marc. (Stands up next to MARCUS.)

MARCUS: Looks done to me. Now, help me with this body. (MARcus tosses his cigarette away, and the two grab JIMMY’S covered body, swinging it into the hole.)

MARCUS: Make sure he’s face down, now...

TOMMY: (Starts rearranging JIMMY’S body.) Why face-down?

MARCUS: Because in a few days, his stomach’s gonna swell with all sorts of gases and juices, and when it bursts...you wanna have him facing down. Otherwise, there’ll be a helluva stench round these woods. Someone might notice.

TOMMY: (Disgusted.) Oh...sorry I asked.

(TOMMY finishes rearranging JIMMY’S body and steps out of the hole. MARcus and TOMMY stand for a few minutes, looking down into the grave. MARcus takes another swig from his whiskey bottle.)

TOMMY: Marc?
MARCUS: *(Takes another drink.)* Yeah?

TOMMY: You said that teller had a .9mm Beretta, right?

MARCUS: *(Pauses, and lights a cigarette.)* I believe that’s what I said. Why do you ask, Tommy?

TOMMY: I just...well, I dunno. I just didn’t see no teller with no gun.

MARCUS: *(Pauses and smokes more before answering.)* Well, I suppose you wouldn’t see a teller with a gun...being that you were in the back most of the time...now, weren’t you? Wasn’t your job to go in the back and get the safe?

TOMMY: Yeah...

MARCUS: And wasn’t me and Jimmy’s job to stay in the front, and watch the tellers?

TOMMY: I suppose it was.

MARCUS: Well you suppose right. It wouldn’t make no sense to see a teller with a gun, if you ain’t in the same room as the teller, now would it?

TOMMY: I suppose not.

MARCUS: You ask too many questions, Tommy. Right now, we should be rememberin’ our fallen brother. Thinkin’ of all the good times we had together, you know?

TOMMY: Yeah, I guess you’re right.
ONE-ACT PLAYS

MARCUS: (Tosses his cigarette and starts shoveling dirt over into the hole.) I know I'm right, Tommy. I know I am.

TOMMY: (Motions towards one of the bags filled with money.) Ain't we gonna bury him with his share? I mean...he sure as hell earned it.

MARCUS: (Chuckles to himself.) Now why would we go and do a thing like that?

TOMMY: Well, because he was our friend, right? I mean...you said we ain't gonna toss him in no lake, 'cause that ain't what you do to your friends. Don't it seem right we bury his share with him?

MARCUS: (Fills in the last of the hole. Pats it down flat with the shovel.) I suppose he just wasn't that good a friend, now was he? (Laughs.)

TOMMY: I...well...I suppose not.

(MARCUS picks up two of the bags, TOMMY picks up the shovels and the other bag. They both look at the pile one last time, then turn to leave.)

MARCUS: (Puts his hand on TOMMY'S shoulder.) C'mon, buddy. Let's go get you fixed up.

(TOMMY smiles and nods, then he and MARCUS start to walk away.)

End.

Characters:

REABLE CHILDS: 25 year old country girl raised in a small town. Always dreamed of becoming an actress.

MOIZELLE MCDANIEL: 18 year old blond with bright eyes. Always focused on her appearance. Beautiful, but very focused on the right clothes and high society.

RUBY MORACE: 19 year old. Tall, attractive with firey red hair. Quiet, but never daunted by the girls at school. She's a brash, no nonsense kind of girl.

LILLIE MAE DUDLEY: 17 year old. Pretty, but always overshadowed by Ruby. She's a quiet, shy girl.

MRS. CLYDE HEATH: 45 year old. "Captain" Marcus Heath, and focused on her husband's reputation. Always dressed in pearls and high heels.

PRISON GUARD: Male, c...
Thirty Minutes Behind the Walls

Emily Perry

Characters:

REABLE CHILDS: 25 years old, a startlingly beautiful brown-eyed country girl raised in poverty on an East Texas farm. Has always dreamed of becoming a singer.

MOZELLE MCDANIEL: 19 years old. Lanky girl with stringy blonde locks that fall around a face that reflects a lifetime of struggle well beyond her years.

RUBY MORACE: 19 years old. Porcelain skinned, strawberry hair and fiery eyes. She is a combination of Irish toughness and quiet martyr, accepts her fate as deserved punishment.

LILLIE MAE DUDLEY: 29 years old. Auburn hair, a toothy smile and the girl-next-door look of a young Dale Evans. However, she’s a brash, no nonsense country gal.

MRS. CLYDE HEATH: 45 years old. Wife of Goree manager, “Captain” Marcus Heath, and official prison matron. She is kind but very focused on the rehabilitation of the women. Wears a stylish dress, pearls and high heels and her makeup and hair are flawless.

PRISON GUARD: Male, clean shaven, age non-descript.
ONE-ACT PLAYS

Setting:

PLACE: Goree State Farm, Huntsville, Texas. Texas' sole penitentiary for women.

TIME: January, 1940

SETTING:
Scene One and Scene Two: A hallway with prison cells on either side. Iron bars, two cots in each cell, walls are painted a lifeless color, and desolation fills the air. Yellow light spills from rows of single bulbs hanging from the ceiling. Each inmate is dressed in prison uniform of starched white dresses.
Scene Three: Office of CLYDE HEATH at the Goree Prison. Austerely setting that speaks volumes about control/repression. Wood trim, walls, floor, everything is dark and hard. Feeble light spills from a banker's lamp on the desk.

Scene One

(MOZELLE is sitting alone, cross-legged on her cot, quietly singing the hymn, "If I Could Hear My Mother Pray Again." RUBY and LILLIE MAE are in the cell across the hall, one is reading a book and the other is writing a letter. A PRISON GUARD is leading REABLE to MOZELLE'S cell.)

MOZELLE: "If I could hear her tender voice as then. So glad I'd be; t'would mean so much to me, if I could hear my mother pray again."

PRISON GUARD: (Keys clank against the iron) Comin' in, Mozelle. (To REABLE) Turn around ma'am.

REABLE: (Coyly) You don't have to be so rough, now, officer.

PRISON GUARD: (Blushing) No (The PRISON GUARD closes the lieved and walks away.)

MOZELLE: You have a good ride

REABLE: (Rubbing her wrists. Then from her elbow.) How's that, honey?

MOZELLE: The One-Way Wagon, can call being hauled to this dump lookin' like some kinda circus anim that you were singing, honey?

MOZELLE: Just a song we sing in

REABLE: (Checking out her bunk,)

MOZELLE: Wharton. You ever he

REABLE: (Tosses the cheesecloth, a toothbrush, hair brush and a bottle.) What's it near?

MOZELLE: (Swings her long, skin Houston. I ain't surprised you have my sister. She's not but two years y there except...
Comin' in, Mozelle. (To REABLE:)

MOZELLE: LIL LIE MAE are in the cell writin' a letter. A PRISON GUARD.

REABLE: Well, if you can call being hauled to this dump on a flatbed truck, caged in by chicken wire, lookin' like some kinda circus animal nice, then, yes. It was nice. (Pause) What's that you were singing, honey?

MOZELLE: Just a song we sing in my church back home.

REABLE: (Checking out her bunk.) Home? Where's that, honey?

MOZELLE: Wharton. You ever hear of it?

REABLE: (Tosses the cheesecloth sack on her cot. She opens it and takes from it a toothbrush, hair brush and a bottle of red nail polish.) No. Can't say as I have. What's it near?

MOZELLE: Swings her long, skinny legs to the edge of her cot.) It's south of Houston. I ain't surprised you haven't heard of it. I lived there with my mama and my sister. She's not but two years younger than me. Anyways, not much happens there except...
REABLE: *(Is testing the cot with both her hands, pushing down on the thin feathered mattress.)* Never heard of it. I know Houston, though. I mean I've seen pictures of it. I grew up just outside of Center. *(Pause)* Other side of Nacogdoches.

MOZELLE: I had a cousin lived in Nacogdoches. He never finished high school. Like me that way, I guess. My name's Mozelle McDaniel. I suppose you've heard of me.

REABLE: *(Plunks herself down on her cot. Prims at her hair.)* Now why on earth would I have heard of you, honey?

MOZELLE: I figure everybody in the grand state of Texas heard about me after what I did to Daddy Jack.

REABLE: *(Still preening.)* Who in the world is Daddy Jack?

MOZELLE: *(Scoots herself back against the wall and folds her knees to her chest. Looks small and childlike.)* He was my step-daddy. Came into town one day, grabbed me and my sister up and made us come home with him. Said we were out too late. He was just about to whip us again, and I put eleven holes in him with a twenty-two repeater. I was done with his smelly, whisky breath and his hairy hands.

REABLE: *(Gives MOZELLE her full attention.)* Lord, honey. You got it bad don't you? How long they give you for something like that?

MOZELLE: Seven years, I reckon.

REABLE: *(Checking her nails.)* Humph. Seven years. I should be so lucky. I'll be cooped up in here, in this...this livin' death for twenty-five years. If I make it that long.

MOZELLE: *(Awed, she sits on the edge of the cot.)* Oh my gracious Lord! Why would the Lord put me这个地方 for twenty-five long years?

REABLE: *(Leans forward as if revealing.)* *(LILLIE MAE overhears the conversation.)*

LILLIE MAE: Gawd amighty girl. Were we listening in?

REABLE: *(To LILLIE MAE.)* Because of divorce. I wanted babies, and he didn't want any. And I suppose it wasn't enough for me.

LILLIE MAE: And it wasn't enough for me. I suppose it wasn't enough for her either.

MOZELLE: Lillie Mae! I'm sure she's proud of her body. She ain't like me.

LILLIE MAE: And what makes you so sure?

MOZELLE: And I don't even know who he is. *(Pause)*

LILLIE MAE: And I just happen to be Reable Co. I married the wrong man is all.
thing down on the thin feather—
ough. I mean I’ve seen pic—
Other side of Nacogdoches.

Then Texas heard about me after

I dy Jack?

and folds her knees to her chest.

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put eleven holes in him with whisky breath and his hairy

L, honey. You got it bad don’t

s. I should be so lucky. I’ll
ten-five years. If I make it

MOZELLE: (Awed, she sits on the edge of her cot once more.) Twenty-five years! Oh my gracious Lord! Why would they want to put someone as pretty as you in this place for twenty-five long years?

REABLE: (Leans forward as if revealing a secret.) Damn jury said so, that’s why.

(LILLE MAE overears the conversation and stands up, wraps her fingers around the bars of her cell.)

LILLE MAE: Gawd ahmighy, girl. Wha’d you do to get that many years?

REABLE: (To LILLE MAE.) Because my husband wouldn’t see fit to give me a divorce. I wanted babies, and he didn’t.

LILLE MAE: And?

REABLE: (Sarcastically.) And someone shot the son-of-a-bitch.

LILLE MAE: And I suppose it wasn’t you?

MOZELLE: Lillie Mae! I’m sure she’s not the kind of girl that would kill some-
body. She ain’t like me.

LILLE MAE: And what makes you so sure, Mozelle? You just met this woman. We don’t even know who she is. (Pause) Who are you?

REABLE: I just happen to be Reable Childs, unjustly accused sinner.

LILLE MAE: It’s my experience that when someone comes to Goree, they done something worth being here for. Now whatcha do?

REABLE: Married the wrong man is all.
ONE-ACT PLAYS

MOZELLE: And somebody shot 'im?

REABLE: *(Looks over her nails at MOZELLE.*) Now you're gettin' it, honey.

RUBY: *(Appears next to LILLIE MAE. Says meekly.*) Who shot him, then? If you don't mind my askin'.

REABLE: *(To RUBY)* My, my. Didn't know you were even in there, honey. You don't look like you could hurt a fly. What're you in for?

RUBY: *(Steps back and shuffles her foot.*) Robbin'... stealin'.

REABLE: *(Leans so she can hear better.)* What's that, honey? You ought 'a speak up. What's your name?

RUBY: *(Meekly)* Ruby Mae Morace. Folks call me Ruby.

REABLE: Ruby, just like that fiery hair of yours. I have some nail polish over here that'll be perfect for you. When you're ready, just say the word, and I'll paint your nails. *(Pause)* Ruby. *(Pause)* Well, Ruby, what got you in here?

RUBY: *(A little more open now.)* Cliff, that's my boyfriend, and me, we needed money and we were on our way to Louisiana. Ran across this man said he could give us a ride. When we stopped at a diner, 'bout a mile from the state line, the man said he'd pay for our lunch if I'd spend thirty minutes with him in the men's restroom. We needed to eat something cause I guess it'd been nearly two days, and Cliff said he'd let him take me out back.

REABLE: *(Looking at her nails, picking at them.)* Honey, you know men are nothing but trouble don't you?

REABLE: *(To LILLIE MAE.)* You can't give up.

LILLIE MAE: Twenty-nine.

REABLE: *(To LILLIE MAE.)* You can't give up.

LILLIE MAE: You've said a mouthful there girlie. Fightin' with an ornery buzzard, tried to get fresh with me, so I gave him in his pocket. Thirteen dollars. Don't send you off with that man.

RUBY: *(Leaning against the bars of along after us. Next thing I know, Cliff told me to get his money, and the man jumped in his car and took off. The fight was over.)*

MOZELLE: Gracious Lord. It's a wonder we didn't kill ourselves.

REABLE: *(Combing out her hair.)* Or fully young to go getting messed up with Mozelle. How old are the both of you?

RUBY and MOZELLE: *(In unison.)*

*(RUBY returns to her cot.)*

LILLIE MAE: *(Sits up on her cot.)* Yo honey, you stayin' here?

REABLE: *(To LILLIE MAE.)* You can't give up.

LILLIE MAE: Twenty-nine.

REABLE: *(Lies back on her cot.)* Well, I'm awfully tired. When are they gonna
ONE-ACT PLAYS

rest?

RUBY: Never.

REABLE: (Sits upright.) What's that you just said, honey?

MOZELLE: (Lies down on her side, facing REABLE.) She said "never." They never turn the lights off. You'll get used to it.

LILLIE MAE: (Lying down on her cot.) I wouldn't say you get used to it.

MOZELLE: Took me about two weeks of holdin' my pillow over my face till I could fall asleep. You should try it.

REABLE: A livin' death. This place ain't nothin' but a livin' death.

Scene two

Open with REABLE, MOZELLE, LILLIE MAE and RUBY being led back to their cells by CLYDE HEATH and the PRISON GUARD. CLYDE HEATH does not enter the cells. The PRISON GUARD opens REABLE and MOZELLE'S cell first. LILLIE MAE: Hurry up girls. I'm standing here with half the state of Texas on me from working in them fields all day. I wanna get outta this uniform.

REABLE: (As she enters her cell she checks her fingernails.) Alright, Lillie Mae. (Pause) You know I don't think I'll ever get all this grit out from under my nails. (Pause) Lord, I do believe I'm beginning to get calluses.

CLYDE HEATH: (She looks out of place in her print dress, pearls and heels.) I'm certainly proud of you ladies. Y'all have been doing such fine work. Keeping yourselves clean. Not one of you has been able, you keep up the good work, and pleasant.

REABLE: (Looking disheveled, plops down.) I'm doin' my best.

(The PRISON GUARD closes the cell and CLYDE HEATH turns to REABLE.)

CLYDE HEATH: I know you are, dear, I know how Reable carries herself. You could teach her if you really applied yourself.

(The PRISON GUARD closes the cell and CLYDE HEATH turns to MOZELLE.)

LILLIE MAE: (Falls back on her cot in aggravation.) Like the day you can teach a pig to sing, Mrs. Heath?

CLYDE HEATH: Lillie Mae you must if you insist on going around.

LILLIE MAE: (Sits up in aggravation.) minutes after I met him. He wasn't no worries when it comes to me.

CLYDE HEATH: All the same, Lillie
THE CHESTATEE REVIEW

yourselves clean. Not one of you has had any discipline charges against you. Reable, you keep up the good work, and it will make your time here so much more pleasant.

REABLE: (Looking disheveled, plops down hard on her cot.) Yes, Mrs. Heath. I'm doin' my best.

(The PRISON GUARD closes the cell behind REABLE. He casts an anxious, yet longing glance at REABLE. He turns to open LILLIE MAE and RUBY'S cell.)

CLYDE HEATH: I know you are, dear. Lillie Mae, I want you to take notice of how Reable carries herself. You could learn a bit more about being ladylike from her if you really applied yourself.

(The REABLE closes the cell and exits.)

LILLIE MAE: (Falls back on her cot in exhaustion.) Ms. Heath, I'll be more ladylike the day you can teach a pig to sing "Yellow Rose of Texas."

CLYDE HEATH: I should think the pig would pay more attention.

MOZELLE: (Rubbing at a large stain on the skirt of her white uniform.) You could teach a pig to sing, Mrs. Heath?

CLYDE HEATH: Lillie Mae you must try harder. I can't let you loose on society if you insist on going around.

LILLIE MAE: (Sits up in aggravation.) The man asked me to marry him thirty minutes after I met him. He wasn't no gentleman. A real gentleman has got no worries when it comes to me.

CLYDE HEATH: All the same, Lillie Mae, I must insist you quell that temper of
ONE-ACT PLAYS

yours.  *(Pause)*  Have you ladies been reading your devotions before bed?

REABLE, MOZELLE, LILLIE MAE and RUBY: *(In unison.)*  Yes, Mrs. Heath.

CLYDE HEATH: Wonderful. I'll let you get to it. Six o'clock comes early in the morning. It's supposed to be fine weather, and we have work to do to ready the orchard. I wish you ladies pleasant dreams.

LILLIE MAE: I wish you'd trip on those fancy high heels of yours.

*(Giggles emanate from the cells.)*

CLYDE HEATH: What was that, Lillie Mae dear?

LILLIE MAE: *(Lies back on her cot.)*  I said "goodnight" Ms. Heath.

CLYDE HEATH: *(Exiting.)*  Goodnight, dear.

MOZELLE: *(Changes into a clean nightgown. She quietly sings.)*  "Shall we bathe at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river."

REABLE: Mozelle, You got a pretty singing voice. You like to sing, don't you?

MOZELLE: Never thought about it much. I guess so.

REABLE: *(Lies back on her cot.)*  It's been a lifelong dream of mine to sing to thousands of people. All of 'em cheering me on.

MOZELLE: *(Pins her hair up, readies for bed.)*  You certainly are pretty enough to be a famous singer.

REABLE: *(Sits up and looks off to a faraway place.)*  I've always known I would be as famous as Patsy Montana. *"Sweetheart?"*  Well, that song sold out in the newspaper, I knew singin' was what I hoped for. Can you imagine? To be thousand miles from these city lights in the country/western style of the day.

MOZELLE: Oh! I know that song! Don't you wish you'd' be a famous singer, too?

REABLE: Yes, that's it! You know *"Doughboys haven't you? You know of it?"

MOZELLE: *(Sits cross-legged on her cot.)*  It's been a lifelong dream of mine to sing to thousands of people. All of 'em cheering me on.

REABLE: *(Sitting at the edge of her cot.)*  Do you do it for fun?

MOZELLE: *(Sits cross-legged on her cot.)*  Not bad, but it's been a lifelong dream of mine to sing to thousands of people. All of 'em cheering me on.

LILLIE MAE: Nine years ago, sweetie. Didn't you go to the city lights in the country/western style of the day?

MOZELLE: Oh! I know that song! Don't you wish you'd' be a famous singer, too?

REABLE: *(Sitting at the edge of her cot.)*  Do you do it for fun?

LILLIE MAE: *(Sits cross-legged on her cot.)*  It's been a lifelong dream of mine to sing to thousands of people. All of 'em cheering me on.

LILLIE MAE: What are you gettin' at?
devotions before bed?

unison.) Yes, Mrs. Heath.
six o’clock comes early in the
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heels of yours.
night.” Ms. Heath.

quietly sings.) “Shall we gath-
. You like to sing, don’t you?
so.
long dream of mine to sing to

be as famous as Patsy Montana. You know her song “I Want to Be a Cowboy’s Sweetheart?” Well, that song sold one million copies. When my husband read that in the newspaper, I knew singin’ was for me. Something like that is all I’ve ever hoped for. Can you imagine? To be loved by so many people?

MOZELLE: Oh! I know that song. (Sings) “I wanna feel the wind in my face, a thousand miles from these city lights, goin’ a cowhand’s pace.” (Then she yodels in the country/western style of the day.)

REABLE: Yes, that’s it! You know how to yodel?

(LILLIE MAE and RUBY are now listening intently to the conversation.)

MOZELLE: (Sits cross-legged on her cot.) Taught myself a few years back. Just do it for fun.

RUBY: (Readies for bed.) Not bad, Mozelle. You really ought’a sing more.

(MOZELLE waves her hand at RUBY, shrugging off the compliment.)

REABLE: (Sitting at the edge of her cot.) Y’all have heard of the Light Crust Doughboys, haven’t you? You know that group Pappy O’Daniel started back a dozen years or so ago?

LILLIE MAE: Nine years ago, sweetheart. Pappy started that band in ’31. What 4it?

REABLE: I know how we’re gonna get outta here. And soon.

(LILLIE MAE goes to the bars.)

LILLIE MAE: What are you gettin’ at?
REABLE: (Stands.) You know that radio show they put on over at the Wall?

RUBY: (Joins LILLIE MAE.) Radio show?

REABLE: You know the one. They call it “Thirty Minutes Behind the Walls.” Features all the boys in that jail who can sing or play an instrument.

LILLIE MAE: What about it?

REABLE: We’re gonna learn to sing together and we are gonna get ourselves on that show.

LILLIE MAE: And how do you suppose that’s gonna get us outta here?

MOZELLE: Yeah, Reable. My singin’ ain’t that good. At least not good enough that they’d let me outta here.

RUBY: Oh, oh my. I’d be too nervous to get up in front of anybody and sing.

REABLE: (To RUBY.) Well, maybe you won’t be singing. You could learn to play something. You know how to do anything like that?

RUBY: Heavens no!

REABLE: Then you’ll learn. Mrs. Heath knows how to play piano. She could help us.

LILLIE MAE: And just how is this supposed to get us outta here?

REABLE: You know how to sing or play anything, Lillie Mae?

LILLIE MAE: I played guitar and sang a little once upon a time. But how is that gonna get me outta here?

REABLE: Pappy!

LILLIE MAE: Pappy? You mean G’ ever lovin’ mind, Reable?

MOZELLE: I don’t think Mr. O’Duffy is here.

REABLE: Haven’t y’all ever heard that you can have a real life outside of these home and babies to raise and love.

LILLIE MAE: Everybody wants that.

MOZELLE: Reable, I won’t ever hav

RUBY: Me neither.

REABLE: Why on earth not? Don’t LILLIE MAE: Reable, you know we heard the stories.

REABLE: (Holds her hands to her chest.) babies yourselves! They didn’t!

RUBY: Wasn’t two weeks I was in here.

MOZELLE: They sent me to the infirmary after what I done.
gotta get me outta here?

REABLE: Pappy!

LILLIE MAE: Pappy? You mean Governor Pappy O'Daniel? Have you lost your ever lovin' mind, Reable?

MOZELLE: I don't think Mr. O'Daniel is gonna be too keen on lettin' me outta here.

REABLE: Haven't y'all ever heard of being optimistic? Don't y'all believe you can have a real life outside of these walls? A life with a decent man and a good home and babies to raise and love. Not be stuck in this livin' death?

LILLIE MAE: Everybody wants that, but it ain't always gonna happen.

MOZELLE: Reable, I won't ever have kids.

RUBY: Me neither.

REABLE: Why on earth not? Don't you want children?

LILLIE MAE: Reable, you know what they do to the girls in here. I know you've heard the stories.

REABLE: (Holds her hands to her cheeks.) No! Ruby? Mozelle? Y'all are just babies yourselves! They didn't!

RUBY: Wasn't two weeks I was in here when they cut me open.

MOZELLE: They sent me to the infirmary the first day I got here. I guess it's only fair after what I done.
LILLIE MAE: It ain’t fair! You girls didn’t deserve to have your womanhood cut outta you just cause the judge said you committed a crime. It ain’t right. It ain’t never gonna be right. And they all deserve to rot in hell for what they done to you girls.

REABLE: (Sits on her cot in disbelief.) On my soul, I just didn’t think the rumors were true.

RUBY: Why do you suppose they haven’t cut you, Reable?

MOZELLE: (Smiles confidently.) ‘Cause they ain’t no way Reable did anything wrong.

(REABLE crosses to MOZELLE’S cot and hugs her gingerly.)

REABLE: I am so sorry they did this to you. You’re nothing but a little angel, and they stole from you. That’s what they’ve done. Stole from you.

(MOZELLE shrugs with indifference. REABLE returns to her cot and sits down. A heavy silence fills the air.)

REABLE: (Slams her fists down on her cot.) We don’t have to live like this! We don’t. We are gonna sing our way outta here. I guarantee it.

LILLIE MAE: If you wait long enough, Ms. Heath’ll have a pig ready to sing along with us.

MOZELLE: Reable, the nurse told me they can’t let me have kids ‘cause they might be mean, just like me. I don’t deserve to get out of here. (Pause) Even if I know how to sing.

LILLIE MAE: If you’re mean, Mozelle, then I’m the Pope.
REABLE: I don’t believe there’s a mean bone in your little body, Mozelle. There is a way we can do better for ourselves.

RUBY: You mean singing?

REABLE: Of course I do. That Pappy O’Daniel’s always making speeches about how inmates should get a second chance. He believes men, and women, too, ought a’ get a chance to redeem themselves. We can do it through music. The kind of music Pappy played in his band.

MOZELLE: (Perks up.) The Light Crust Doughboys are my all time favorite.

REABLE: We form a girl band, get on over to Wall prison, and Pappy’ll hear us.

MOZELLE: He’lI hear us and love us!

RUBY: And forgive us.

REABLE: Hundreds of people will hear us. That radio program is broadcast all over the country. People will love us, and Pappy, well, before you can blink an eyelash, Pappy will parole us all.

(Lights dim.)

Scene Three

(Afternoon in office. CLYDE HEATH is busy with her task of censoring inmate mail. There are several mail sacks filled to overflowing, surrounding the wooden desk. There is a mound of letters on the desk. CLYDE HEATH is exhausted from sifting through it all. The bold-faced clock on the wall reads 4:00. A large calendar indicates the day is Wednesday, year, 1942.)
ONE-ACT PLAYS

CLYDE HEATH: (She wields a brass letter opener and tackles the next envelope. She reads aloud. Holding the letter up to get a better look.) “My dearest, Reable. I am writing to you from the Arctic Circle. Every Wednesday, before evening falls, I travel forty-five miles to the nearest location where I may listen to you sing with your Goree All Girl String Band. Should I ever be so fortunate as to one day meet you, I would surely ask for your hand in marriage.”

(The phone on the desk buzzes.)

CLYDE HEATH: (Picking up the receiver.) Yes. Send her in please. Thank you.

(REABLE enters.)

REABLE: (In prison uniform.) You wanted to see me, Mrs. Heath?

CLYDE HEATH: (Indicates for REABLE to sit, and she does.) Please rest yourself, Reable, dear. This letter I hold in my hand represents no less than ten thousand marriage proposals you’ve received over the course of two years that you’ve been singing on the program, “Thirty Minutes Behind the Walls.” And if you receive another box of candy or bracelet, or any other trinket, I’m just going to have to employ a hired hand to haul it away as I have run out of room for it all.

REABLE: Yes, ma’am.

CLYDE HEATH: (She puts the letter on top of the pile on her desk.) I know it must have been hard to keep the band going when all of the other girls received their parole. But you’ve worked so very hard. I’m proud of you. I wish I had some good news for you, dear.

REABLE: Why’d you ask to see me?

CLYDE HEATH: I wanted to be sure you were doing well. Before tonight’s pro-

gram. The Warden tells me you are system. The black eye we’ve suffered speak as poorly about our rehabilitat

REABLE: (Dryly.) I suppose I’m gla-

CLYDE HEATH: You should be, dea-
tune in to hear your lovely voice. You

REABLE: Being forgiven seems like

CLYDE HEATH: I can’t give you wh-
(Pause) You know, all I’ve wanted is

REABLE: I used to think being a far
now all I want is to be outta here. N

where they’ve never heard of Goree:

CLYDE HEATH: (Stands and goes
lean against it, gets closer to REABL
part of your dream has come true. (P
people listen to you every week?

REABLE: (A little saddened.) No, m

CLYDE HEATH: Just last week the
who arrived here asking to meet you
asked for your band to play at a gat
stop thinking about the way you sang

ing of letting you attend the party, pr
THE CHESTATEE REVIEW

gram. The Warden tells me you are doing a great service for the state prison system. The black eye we’ve suffered over the years is all but gone. Folks don’t speak as poorly about our rehabilitation program anymore.

REABLE: (Dryly.) I suppose I’m glad I’ve helped the state of Texas prison system.

CLYDE HEATH: You should be dear. People count on you every week when they tune in to hear your lovely voice. You’ve got to keep pressing on. I know it seems hopeless to you at times.

REABLE: Being forgiven seems like a faraway dream in a place like this.

CLYDE HEATH: I can’t give you what you want, Reable. I don’t have that power. (Pause) You know, all I’ve wanted is the best for my girls. To see their lives turn around.

REABLE: I used to think being a famous singer was all I ever wanted. But now, now all I want is to be outta here. Maybe disappear in some little no-name town where they’ve never heard of Goree State Farm.

CLYDE HEATH: (Stands and goes around to the corner of her desk so she can lean against it, gets closer to REABLE.) Why Reable, dear, you are famous. That part of your dream has come true. (Pause) Do you know, they think seven million people listen to you every week?

REABLE: (A little saddened.) No, ma’am. I had no idea.

CLYDE HEATH: Just last week the front gate of the Farm was lined with truckers who arrived here asking to meet you. There’s even a judge from Houston who’s asked for your band to play at a gathering at his private home. Said he couldn’t stop thinking about the way you sang, “Blue Moon.” (Pause) The Warden’s thinking of letting you attend the party, provided there are guards. But you’ve behaved...
so well at other events the Goree Girls have been invited to. I'm certain it will work out.

REABLE: What about parole? You ever think I'll make it?

CLYDE HEATH: (Returns to her seat behind the desk.) I just don't know what to tell you, dear. I haven't heard word one from the new Governor.

REABLE: I guess my dream of Pappy O'Daniel lettin' me outta here is a lost cause.

CLYDE HEATH: There are no lost causes, dear. Even in prison. You just keep doing what is fit and proper and keep singing, and you'll find your way. (Pause) It's almost time for dinner, Reable. I'll let you go.

REABLE: (Stands to leave.) Yes, ma'am.

CLYDE HEATH: (Follows her to the door as REABLE exits.) Keep on the sunny side, dear. (Phone rings.)

CLYDE HEATH: (Picks up receiver.) Mrs. Heath. Yes, Governor Stevenson. No, Reable Childs just left my office. Oh, you wanted to speak with her? I understand. Well, I am certain that is very good news for Reable. She never thought she'd be paroled. Yes, sir. I will tell her you are her biggest fan. Thank you, Governor, for calling. Have a lovely afternoon.

(CLYLE HEATH places the phone in the cradle. Smiles to herself.)

(Ryan arrives, and the pause, waiting for Reable to notice him.)

RYAN: You have no idea what I've been trying to get away, like that. I thought to leave my car right in the middle of a road. It still feels wrong somehow. I'm crazy...

Characters:

JOY: Young woman, soft-spoken
RYAN: Young man, smart but
doing what is fit and proper and keep singing, and you'll find your way. (Pause)
CLYDE HEATH: There are no lost causes, dear. Even in prison. You just keep
doing what is fit and proper and keep singing, and you'll find your way. (Pause)
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(time: Modern day, two hours)

SETTING: A picnic under the

(A siren begins to wail. JOY walks in
she spreads on the stage. She sits down.
After a moment, RYAN arrives, and the
he pauses, waiting for JOY to notice him.)

RYAN: You have no idea what I’ve been
everybody's trying to get away, like that. I
to leave my car right in the middle of a road. It still feels wrong somehow. I'm crazy...
been invited to. I'm certain it will
I'll make it?

the desk.) I just don't know what to
the new Governor.

aniel lettin' me outta here is a lost
ear. Even in prison. You just keep
a, and you'll find your way. (Pause)
u go.

REABLE exits.) Keep on the sunny

breath. Yes, Governor Stevenson. No,
ted to speak with her? I understand.
Reable. She never thought she'd be
biggest fan. Thank you, Governor, for

dle. Smiles to herself.)

Characters:

JOY: Young woman, soft-spoken and nice
RYAN: Young man, smart but self-centered
LO: Young woman, hardened and secretive

Setting:

PLACE: Cherry tree hill overlooking a town.

TIME: Modern day, two hours before the end of the world.

SETTING: A picnic under the cherry trees.

(A siren begins to wail. JOY walks in with a picnic basket and a blanket, which
she spreads on the stage. She sits down and takes a deep breath, closing her eyes.
After a moment, RYAN arrives, and the siren dies down. He is out of breath, and
he pauses, waiting for JOY to notice him before he rushes to hug her.)

RYAN: You have no idea what I've been through today. It's insane out there. Ev­
everybody's trying to get away, like that'll save them. All roads are blocked -- I had
to leave my car right in the middle of an intersection. Not that it matters anymore.
It still feels wrong somehow. I'm crazy, aren't I?
RYAN: Before I left, they had some experts on TV saying that we got hundreds of
nukes heading our way. Even if the blast doesn’t take us out, the radiation will,
I always said that the dissolution of modern civilization would come during my
lifetime.

JOY: Is this okay? I mean the spot? You can almost see the whole town from here,
and I thought it’d be nice to, you know...

RYAN: Funny girl. Of all the possi-
to drink wine?

JOY: Why, is there something you no-
RYAN: (Thinks.) It all feels so much
I’ve been living in a haze until now,
blur. And now that our time is runn
swear I can feel the blood coursing the
cal reactions going on in my body, and
the cherry blossoms neon pink, and
could ever hope to witness. All this
before, I should have lived like this-

JOY: (Smiles and looks down coyly.)
we say, every gesture, all of a sudd
could be our last.

RYAN: Have you thought about it?

JOY: Oh, no. I guess it doesn’t ma-
nobody who’ll live on to repeat them.

RYAN: But that’s not the point. The p
meaningful and true.

JOY: (Fiddles with a napkin.) So we

RYAN: We won’t, my dear. But this is
where. Nobody left here but you and I

JOY: And we have to be true to each ot
face. JOY puts her arm around

7 saying that we got hundreds of

it take us out, the radiation will.

ization would come during my

just see the whole town from here.

his is great; couldn't have picked

are in bloom. Kind of sad, when

ted to be a really popular suicide

f those trees almost every month.
he world who's actually trying to

ve go someplace else then?

there. This is about as cheerful a

out a bottle of juice, napkins, and

by the store to get some wine or

Well, you never liked wine any-

it to feel more grown-up. I guess

RYAN: Funny girl. Of all the possible things to regret, you regret never learning
to drink wine?

JOY: Why, is there something you regret that's better?

RYAN: (Thinks.) It all feels so much more real all of a sudden, doesn't it? It's like
I've been living in a haze until now. All my memories, even the best ones, are a
blur. And now that our time is running out, everything is suddenly so intense. I
swear I can feel the blood coursing through my veins, and all the incredible chemi-
cal reactions going on in my body, and the sun is suddenly brighter than ever, and
the cherry blossoms neon pink, and you, Joy -- you're the most beautiful sight I
could ever hope to witness. All this beauty was always there, and I never saw it
before. I should have lived like this -- with my eyes open -- all along.

JOY: (Smiles and looks down coyly.) It is more real somehow. Like every word
we say, every gesture, all of a sudden has great meaning, because each of them
could be our last.

RYAN: Have you thought about it? What we should save as our last words?

JOY: Oh, no. I guess it doesn't matter anyway. Nobody will hear them. Well,
obody who'll live on to repeat them.

RYAN: But that's not the point. The point is to use your last breath for something
meaningful and true.

JOY: (Fiddles with a napkin.) So we won't go out screaming and pathetic?

RYAN: We won't, my dear. But this is it. No turning back - heck, no turning any-
where. Nobody left here but you and me. This is our last chance.

JOY: And we have to be true to each other.
ONE-ACT PLAYS

RYAN: (Pauses.) Yes, as always.

JOY: Because this is our last chance to say what we feel.

RYAN: Yes, and we love each other. You’re everything to me. (Wraps his arm around her.) If it wasn’t for you, I might as well have ended it before the nukes get to us. Forget about my cherry tree Joy world on the hill.

JOY: Gosh, you’re being unfair. I hate when you say these things.

RYAN: (Teasing) Am I not valuing the gift of life enough? Not respectful enough for Miss Joy? Who cares, darling? I could yell the worst things I can possibly come up with, and nobody would hear!

JOY: I would hear.

RYAN: Well, of course, but you let me get away with these things.

JOY: (Pauses, fiddles with napkin) You’re right, Ryan. Absolutely right.

RYAN: (Observes her.) So baby, what do you say we just sit here for a while and enjoy all the beauty while we still can? (Holds her close and looks up at the tree and sky. They sit quietly for a while. JOY ponders furiously.)

JOY: Ryan, about that thing you said...

RYAN: Shhh. Let’s just enjoy each other’s closeness for a moment.

(They sit quietly for another moment.)

JOY: Seriously though...

RYAN: Joy, can’t you let me have a...

JOY: (Stands up.) I know, but I can’t...

RYAN: Fine then. Let’s hear it.

JOY: I... (Weakly) I’m not sure I love...

RYAN: (Pauses. then looks absolutely mean... Jesus... you have to say this.

JOY: It’s not about being selfish. It’s...

RYAN: (Stands up and begins to pace) The rest of us learned that in kindergarten can’t actually mean it? This is some kind I made it clear that nothing happened...

(JOY only looks at him silently.)

RYAN: Jesus Christ. (He sits down on the floor.) I could’ve at least brought wine.

JOY: I’m sorry. (Suddenly more determined.) I really don’t need...

RYAN: Wow, Joy. I really don’t need...

JOY: (Kneels beside him.) I didn’t say just something I had to tell you. Do you
RYAN: Joy, can't you let me have even this?

JOY: (Stands up.) I know, but I can't die holding these thoughts inside me.

RYAN: Fine then. Let's hear it.

JOY: I... (Weakly) I'm not sure I love you anymore. (Looks away.)

RYAN: (Pauses, then looks absolutely stunned.) Am I hearing this correctly? I mean... Jesus... you have to say this... now? How incredibly selfish.

JOY: It's not about being selfish. It's about honesty.

RYAN: (Stands up and begins to pace.) There's a time and place for honesty, Joy. The rest of us learned that in kindergarten. Holy... (Calms down a little.) You can't actually mean it? This is some kind of sick joke... revenge, right? I thought I made it clear that nothing happened that night.

(POV only looks at him silently.)

RYAN: Jesus Christ. (He sits down on the blanket, shaking his head slowly.) You could've at least brought wine.

JOY: I'm sorry. (Suddenly more determined) Wait... No I'm not. Why didn't you bring your own wine if it's so important to you?

RYAN: Wow, Joy. I really don't need this right now. You've pretty much guaranteed that I will go out in incredible emotional agony. I hope that really lifts the weight off your shoulders.

JOY: (Kneels beside him.) I didn't say it to make things easier on me, I swear. It's just something I had to tell you. Do you want to die believing things that aren't true?
RYAN: What is all this anyway? How do you suddenly not love me? Is there someone else? God, no matter how great he is, in a minute he'll be just as dead as me.

JOY: No, there is no one else. How can you even... Look, I'm sure you've realized we have some problems.

RYAN: Like what problems?

JOY: Well, we came all the way up here, and there's no one around, and I thought we would... I mean... any other couple would definitely...

RYAN: (Stares at her incredulously.) Honey, we've discussed this. It's just not such a big deal to me. I'd rather just spend our remaining time having a nice conversation. Is it so terrible that I'm interested in you as a person, not a body?

JOY: I'm interested in you as both. Is that so bad?

RYAN: I cannot believe you're wasting our time with this same old bullshit.

(LO wanders onto the stage carrying a large bag, seemingly lost and confused. She notices the two and realizes that she is intruding. She pretends not to realize RYAN and JOY freeze and stare at her.)

LO: Uhh... Excuse me, have you seen a little girl wandering about here?

RYAN: (Irritated.) No, we haven't seen any little girls.

JOY: What does she look like?

LO: She's... about six, and she kind of looks like me.

JOY: I'm sorry, I haven't seen anyone.

LO: Huh. Well, I was just looking for...

JOY: Is she your daughter?

LO: Yeah. We got separated in all that.

JOY: Hi, I'm Joy. (Goes to LO and says) You're an angel sent from heaven.

LO: Um. It's... Joyce.

JOY: (To an irritated RYAN) That so believed in signs...

RYAN: Got anything to drink in there?

(LO pulls a flask out of her bag. carelessly reaches for the flask to RYAN, who proceeds to eye it, and tosses it back to LO.)

RYAN: You're an angel sent from heaven?

JOY: Maybe we could help search for

RYAN: How convenient.
JOY: I'm sorry, I haven't seen anyone like that.

LO: Huh. Well, I was just looking for her. Thought she might have come here.

JOY: Is she your daughter?

LO: Yeah. We got separated in all the confusion. I thought everyone had left by now.

JOY: Hi, I'm Joy. (Goes to LO and shakes her hand.)

LO: Lo.

JOY: Oh my gosh, that was my grandmother's name! And what's your daughter's name?

LO: Um. It's... Joyce.

JOY: (To an irritated RYAN) That sounds a bit like Joy, doesn't it? Oh Lo, if I believed in signs...

RYAN: Got anything to drink in there?

(LO pulls a flask out of her bag, careful not to reveal the other contents, and tosses the flask to RYAN, who proceeds to empty it. After he's done, he shakes the flask and tosses it back to LO.)

RYAN: You're an angel sent from heaven.

JOY: Maybe we could help search for Joyce?

RYAN: How convenient.
ONE-ACT PLAYS

LO: That won’t be necessary. I appreciate it, though.

JOY: What do you mean? She could get hurt out there, all alone.

LO: She’ll be okay. Well, as okay as the rest of us.

RYAN: Trust me, she’ll be way better if she stays away from Joy. For us, Lo, I’m afraid it’s too late.

JOY: I understand if you need to take your feelings out on me.

RYAN: You see, this sweet-looking little girl here decided to announce he doesn’t love me anymore. Perfect timing! How’s that for an end of the world?

LO: I’m... sorry to hear that.

RYAN: You see, this sweet-looking little girl here decided to announce she doesn’t love me anymore. Perfect timing! How’s that for an end of the world?

LO: I’m... sorry to hear that.

RYAN: Not as sorry as I am.

JOY: Ryan, you wanted honesty between us, and you got it! That doesn’t change the fact that I care about you!

RYAN: There is such a thing as excess honesty.

LO: Listen to you two. What a joke. Soon all of this is going to burn, and nobody will ever know you two even existed. Your cute little lovers’ quarrel is a luxury that none of us can afford anymore.

RYAN: Did I ask for your opinion? Who the hell are you, anyway? What are you doing here?

JOY: She’s your angel from heaven, remember?

RYAN: (Looks up to the sky.) What I enough; you had to send two?

JOY: (To LO) And what do you care your six-year-old daughter who’s wan for saying, but what kind of mother a

LO: That’s really none of your business.

(All three fall into an awkward silence down next to the other two.)

LO: I suppose all of us are going to have if you believe in that sort of thing.

JOY: Oh, absolutely. I think God is we say what we really feel.

RYAN: (Mocking.) Yeah, Joy, a great he can sentence you for how many he infuriatingly naïve.

JOY: So, what, you’re saying there’s and everyone will just disappear into

RYAN: Why, did you think you would

JOY: How could you say something li

LO: I could tell you what I think, Joy you. Really, you couldn’t keep the act
RYAN: *(Looks up to the sky.)* What have I done to deserve this? One harpy isn’t enough; you had to send two?

JOY: *(To LO)* And what do you care? Shouldn’t you be more concerned about your six-year-old daughter who’s wandering alone who-knows-where? Pardon me for saying, but what kind of mother are you, anyway?

LO: That’s really none of your business, now is it?

*(All three fall into an awkward silence. LO makes her way to the blanket and sits down next to the other two.)*

LO: I suppose all of us are going to have to own up to our mistakes soon enough, if you believe in that sort of thing.

JOY: Oh, absolutely. I think God is waiting for us. That’s why it’s so important to say what we really feel.

RYAN: *(Mocking.)* Yeah, Joy, a great cosmic judge is waiting for you to die so he can sentence you for how many hearts you failed to destroy. You always were infuriatingly naïve.

JOY: So, what, you’re saying there’s nothing at all? That all this is meaningless, and everyone will just disappear into emptiness?

RYAN: Why, did you think you would be going to heaven, even if one existed?

JOY: How could you say something like that!

LO: I could tell you what I think, Joy, but that would make me about as cruel as you. Really, you couldn’t keep the act going for a few more hours?
JOY: Are you talking about me and Ryan? And you’re saying I’m the cruel one?

LO: Illusions can be damn cushy sometimes, isn’t that right, Ryan?

RYAN: Listen, lady, I really don’t need your sympathy.

LO: Not after the flask is empty, at least. Actually, I’m surprised you managed to keep it going as long as you did, Joy.

JOY: Turns out I’m really capable of stupid things. (Pauses.) There is no Joyce, is there?

LO: No.

JOY: So what are you here for, really?

LO: The view.

RYAN: Yeah, us too.

LO: Not bad for a last sight.

RYAN: Joy?

JOY: Yes?

RYAN: I lied. I did sleep with her that night.

JOY: I know. (Pause.) There is someone else.

(Sound of a missile whistling through the sky and striking the ground somewhere far away. Cherry petals fall onto the actors.)

JOY: More juice?

End.
I'm the cruel one? That right, Ryan?

But what about that...? I'm surprised you managed to... (Pauses.) There is no Joyce, and striking the ground somewhere...

— Read No Evil by Amy Jamison

"I let the opinion of some unknown person shape the opinion I myself formed..."

— Read No Evil by Amy Jamison
How Not to Buy a Trailer
Michael Lancaster

The air is damp and heavy; it is an especially dark night. A storm front in the Atlantic has pushed clouds as far north as Tennessee. The slightest hint of a silver moon permeates the blanket above. I am kneeling on the side of Interstate 20, changing a tire. The only significant light is from an Alabama State Trooper's flashlight. Cars, trucks, and tractor-trailers fly by only a few feet away. The rush of air causes my shirt to flap to and fro as they pass. I pay them no attention though. As I balance the tire and tighten the lug nuts, I can only think to myself: “This is what I get for not thinking things through.”

Allow me to back up a few months. My wife, Phet, and I were living in Phoenix, Arizona. We moved to the desert for my new job and were living with her brother. He is a gracious man, but his four-bedroom house was not large enough for the four adults and five children then filling its walls. Phet had not been able to find a job since we arrived in the Valley of the Sun, and my job was not what it promised to be. My wife had a great job in Georgia, and our house in Gainesville had not been sold yet. As we lay in bed, listening to Dokken (the eight-year-old middle child) bounce a basketball off the wall in the next bedroom, we decided to return to the Queen of the South.

Now, I had three vehicles in Phoenix with me. My wife drove a Dodge Ram pickup truck. It was a brilliant blue, four-wheel drive beast. I had a Honda Shadow motorcycle and a Ford Mustang. The Mustang was very loud and hugged the ground, since it was modified to dominate race tracks and carve canyon roads. I needed to get all three vehicles back to Georgia, as well as our personal effects. Clearly, I needed a trailer.

We had rented a U-haul trailer to move out west, so my first thought ran back to them. I called U-haul, but they wanted twice as much to take a trailer from Phoenix to Atlanta. It had cost me only $300 to rent a trailer before. Now, a mere two months later, it was going to cost me $600. An employee on the phone simply told me I could get a discount for bringing the trailer back. Two months earlier, I refused to! Another offer came:

Convinced that I could buy a new trailer, I began researching options for a trailer that was affordable. I spoke with a salesperson from a large rental company and discussed my needs. I was looking for an affordable new trailer, its price be

Now, I had also been searching classi-

I had also been searching classi-

My endless browsing on Craigslist of Chandler had an eighteen-foot camper for sale. The wood paneling was in good condition. The ceiling light, an art piece from a Mafia-run Las Vegas casino, was missing a window. The vacant space in the wall was cut to fit. Outside, I had been right at home at Woodstock. At $175, I decided to take it up to the truck and move now.

Back at Phet’s brother’s house, I was roughly. The tires needed a little air, but did not work. However, the brake light was fine. I cut a piece of wood to fit the window with air, and began loading the camper itself. Sixty percent of the load must be from left to right. After I loaded the camper, I climbed up into the truck. Its
two months later, it was going to cost $650. I protested to no avail. The U-haul employee on the phone simply told me: “…we need more trailers in Phoenix, so you got a discount for bringing the trailer out here.” I could not justify paying that much more. I refused to! Another option must be available. The hunt was on.

Convinced that I could buy a trailer for as much as U-haul wanted to rent one, I began researching options. I searched local trailer stores, RV dealers, and large retailers like Home Depot. Finally, a lesser-known store called Harbor Freight had a small four foot by eight foot trailer for $400. It was not as large as what I needed, but maybe it would work if I built really tall walls. This whole time, I had also been searching classifieds for used trailers. Now that I had found an affordable new trailer, its price became my benchmark. I really didn’t want to spend $400, so I kept looking for something larger that cost less. Three days before our self-imposed deadline for moving… I found it. Woo hoo!

My endless browsing on Craigslist paid off. A young man in the suburb of Chandler had an eighteen-foot camper for sale. It had to be at least thirty years old. The wood paneling was in good shape, but the design spoke volumes for its generation. The ceiling light, an art deco piece, could easily have been stolen from a Mafia-run Las Vegas casino in the seventies. The thin, aluminum door was missing a window. The vacant space was filled by what used to be a yellow highway sign, cut to fit. Outside, the lime green and orange paint job would have been right at home at Woodstock. After a little haggling, the owner let it go for $175. I hooked it up to the truck and made my way back to the house. We could move now.

Back at Phet’s brother’s house, I checked the camper out a little more thoroughly. The tires needed a little air, but looked all right. The side marker lights did not work. However, the brake lights and tail lights (the important things) were fine. I cut a piece of wood to fit the window opening on the door, filled the tires with air, and began loading the camper. Loading a camper is a peculiar event in itself. Sixty percent of the load must be in front of the axle, and it must be balanced from left to right. After I loaded the camper, I stood back to admire my thrifty feat. Now we could hit the road.

I climbed up into the truck. Its extended cab was full, and my motorcycle
was loaded in the bed. The camper was hitched to the back. Phet was staged behind me in the Mustang. Our convoy was ready for the journey back east. For what little I had invested in this ugly camper, I was not confident in taking it on the Eisenhower Interstate System. Rather, I decided that it would be better to take the rural highways cross country. Phet (who had emigrated to the U.S. in 2005) would have the opportunity to experience more of America than if we were blindly zipping through on a four-lane concrete monster filled with zombies that had somewhere more important to be. Too bad I would not get to see as much.

I spent the next four days sitting on the edge of my seat, watching my rear view mirror, waiting for the inevitable. The ancient leaf springs on my camper were never designed to carry three bedrooms worth of belongings. Climbing the mountains into Arizona’s high country, I watched the camper sway left and right, bouncing on the springs like a bobble head doll. As we crossed through the Tonto National Forest, leaving behind the rocky desert dotted with tall Saguaro cacti and broad leaved Prickly Pears, I had to pull over. The camper had taken a noticeable shift to the right, and Phet could be heard crackling nervously over our handheld radios. I crawled up into the camper and spent fifteen minutes adjusting the load. Once the camper was level again, we continued east into the White Mountain Apache Indian Reservation.

One might argue that this reservation’s name is a misnomer. I never saw a white mountain. We did discover an extremely deep canyon, though. As we crossed a plateau covered with tall field grass and stubby trees that were scattered across the horizon, the road started a gradual decline. Soon, a sign appeared that warned of a steep grade ahead. It didn’t bother to mention frequent switchbacks ahead as the road descended three thousand feet into a painted canyon. I had to down-shift the truck into third gear, then second gear, and finally first gear, slowly navigating the overloaded camper and tall truck into the abyss. Now might be a good time to mention that Phet doesn’t do well with curvy roads or heights. His anxiety peaked as each turn in this canyon provided an amazing view of the craggy walls dropping straight to the river below. A little more than an hour later, we had completed the epic voyage down into, and up out of, the canyon. Then the small radio crackled again. Once more, the load had shifted and I had to pull over.

Leaving the Apache and New Mexico would be country.

Lincoln, New Mexico in a valley, west of a more in road passing through Lincoln across a bumpy wagon trail across the foothills and thro the Wild West, dodging rust exited the valley and turned to life again. I had to pull over.

We did not see any all country is spectacular. Oil p ranches from one end of the familiar as we neared Dallas reaching out wide, were remi mountains of the desert were forests. As I crossed into Ark load was finally balanced, an

On the fifth day, I was of America for this trip. We de tour south into Louisiana. We ou and crawfish diners did no was the same as it had been tu up only by massive billboards hours a day at the next truck.

In all fairness, though, I was e the smooth highway surface a

After a short while, a lights. It told me that Birmin habitation in being so close to ho Atlanta is only two and half ho
Leaving the Apache Nation and continuing east, the remainder of Arizona and New Mexico would be fairly uneventful. That is, until we got to Billy the Kid country.

Lincoln, New Mexico is a sleepy little ghost town along US 82. It is nestled in a valley, west of a more infamous city known as Roswell. The paved stretch of road passing through Lincoln is little more than a mixture of tar and cement strewn across a bumpy wagon trail from the eighteen hundreds. Dragging the camper across the foothills and through the erratic valley made me feel like a pioneer in the Wild West, dodging rustlers while perched atop a stagecoach. Of course, as I exited the valley and turned left onto a modern stretch of road, the radio crackled to life again. I had to pull over and adjust the load, again.

We did not see any aliens in Roswell and drove on to Texas. The Texas hill country is spectacular. Oil pumps turn lazily up and down, dotting the immense ranches from one end of the panhandle to the other. The landscape began to look familiar as we neared Dallas. Tall pine trees and giant oaks, with their branches reaching out wide, were reminiscent of north Georgia woodlands. The rock laden mountains of the desert were replaced with rolling hills covered with grass and forests. As I crossed into Arkansas, I realized the camper had been behaving. The load was finally balanced, and the bounce was gone.

On the fifth day, I was anxious to get home. Phet felt she had seen enough of America for this trip. We decided to leave the rural back roads behind us and detour south into Louisiana. We were headed for Interstate 20. The marsh filled bayous and crawfish diners did not interest us. We wanted to get home. The interstate was the same as it had been two months earlier. The scenery was lifeless, broken up only by massive billboards announcing the cheap steaks available twenty-four hours a day at the next truck stop or the amazing tourists’ trap eight miles ahead. In all fairness, though, I was excited to step up the pace to sixty miles per hour on the smooth highway surface and push on through Mississippi to Alabama.

After a short while, a green sign alongside the road reflected in my headlights. It told me that Birmingham was only one hundred miles ahead. I felt jubilation in being so close to home. Birmingham is only an hour and a half away. Atlanta is only two and half hours past Birmingham. I had been driving sixty miles
per hour for hours now without any drama. Why tempt fate? Driving a little faster couldn’t hurt, though. Perhaps I could be home in three hours instead of four? A large tractor-trailer truck loomed ahead of me. I was closing the gap on it and would have to either slow down or pass it. Why not speed up a little to pass it and just maintain that speed to get home a little faster?

I signaled my intentions. Accelerating slowly, I moved left and began to pick up speed: 61, 62, 63. Pop! It sounded like I had just run over an armadillo. Frantically, I looked in my rear view mirror. The camper was still level. I checked my left and right mirror, but everything appeared normal. Then the almost forgotten crackle of the radio blasted: “Honey! Honey! Honey!” A tire had blown. I slowed down and pulled over to the side of the highway. Fortunately, my jack and jack stands were easily accessible, just inside the door of the camper. I set about the mundane tasks of lifting the heavily loaded camper, removing the tire, and replacing it with a spare. Something else was wrong as I lowered the camper back to the ground though. The spare was flat!

I removed the spare and put it in the Mustang. Phet and I drove down the highway to the next exit in search of a gas station. With the tire inflated and my blood pressure rising, I flew back down the interstate like a supersonic jet. Meanwhile, an Alabama State Trooper had pulled over behind the camper to inspect the flashing emergency lights. He was a jovial man who filled the front seat of his patrol car. I borrowed his flashlight and resumed the tasks of fixing my tire. As I sat on the cold concrete with cars whisking by, an old lesson came back to haunt me (like the money I could be saving at GEICO, staring from a distance): actions have consequences. If I had thought things through, I probably would not have bought this camper. I would have swallowed my pride and paid up for the U-haul. I would have been home in two days instead of five. I would not be sitting in rural Alabama with a flat tire. Alas, I did not. We did finally make it home. Not before the windshield wipers went out, though, but that is another essay.
During an episode of the popular TV series Seinfeld, the character Elaine is set up on a date with a man named Mike. As she waits for him in the restaurant, a waiter informs her that a Mike has called, saying that he has been stabbed by an ex-girlfriend and is forced to cancel. When the date gets rescheduled, another ex-girlfriend passes by their table and throws a glass of wine in his face. Alarmed, Elaine sets out to find the reason why all of his exes hate him. She learns that Mike is a “bad break-upper”; when breaking up with a woman, he tells her “the mean things you don’t mean, but he means them.” In order to save herself from the verbal abuse, Elaine decides to end their relationship first. When she does, he scoffs and says, “Fine, big-head,” as he rises from his seat. “What?” she questions. Mike explains that her head is too big for her body. As he walks out the door, Elaine laughs it off and shouts, “That’s the best you’ve got!” The next day, while riding in a cab, the driver asks Elaine to slide down into the seat more because he cannot see through the rear view mirror with her head in the way. Some time later, Elaine is walking through the park when a bird flies into her head and falls to the ground. A man sitting on a bench nearby comments, “He flew right into your head. Like he couldn’t avoid it.” Elaine, disgusted by her big head, is wearing a scarf over her head in the next scene.

While the absurdity of Seinfeld prevents me from taking anything the show portrays too seriously, Elaine’s situation brings out a very good point: our opinions of others, or even our own opinions of ourselves, are heavily impacted by the opinions of others—even though they are exactly that—opinions. Opinions may hold zero merit or be ridiculously untrue, but somehow they manage to work their way into our brains. I believe children show this behavior best. In school, one child will label another as “weird,” and suddenly every student shares the opinion of the child as “weird.” The child himself may begin to believe he or she is a weirdo,
regardless of how strange the child actually is. However, this behavior is not at all limited to children, and adults are just as guilty of believing absurd things, regardless of whether or not there is any proof relating to the subject. RateMyProfessors.com, a site that allows students to “rate” professors, as well as post comments about professors to be read by anyone on the site, could be considered an absurd thing that people blindly believe.

The situation on Seinfeld makes us laugh; for Elaine to believe Mike’s angry words is ridiculous. Yet, when it comes to rateMyProfessors.com, we willingly read the comments and view the ratings—including the “hot” rating. Students are rating professors in alarming numbers. According to the site itself, almost seven million students have rated over one million professors. RateMyProfessors.com passes off pure opinions, banter, or even disparagement, as legitimate sources on which to base decisions about classes, giving college students a less mature, less responsible reputation.

Last fall I visited ratemyprofessors.com, and I am honestly unsure why. The only professor I remember looking up was one whose class I was already enrolled in, and from whom my sister had taken the same class a couple of semesters before. This professor, let us call him Dr. Zhivago, was already held fairly high in my sister’s opinion, and I trust her opinion much more than anyone’s whom I might read on ratemyprofessors.com. Several of the comments on the site were complaining about a research paper that Dr. Zhivago requires each semester. One comment painted Dr. Zhivago as “the cutest teacher ever” while the one just below said he was “the sweetest teacher ever,” and ended with a “how cute.” As for comments that informed me of his actual teaching abilities or classroom behavior, I remember only one. This infamous comment described him as someone who “would ‘welcome’ ideas, but blow you off the minute you asked for help.” The commenter continued on to say how unhelpful Dr. Zhivago was and ended with a warning not to take his class “unless you want to be criticized in front of your peers.” My sister had never mentioned this unsavory characteristic; nevertheless, I mentally prepared myself to be criticized if ever I spoke up in class.

Forming my personal opinion of Dr. Zhivago did not take long. He was precise in everything he expected from his students, and what he expected was in every respect, reasonable. His quality material on them came straight worst thing I experienced in his did not particularly interest me—Dr. Zhivago was surely aware of to keep students alert by calling subjects on which he lectured. He knowledge with his students is one of the nicest people I have ever a student in a disrespectful way, incorrectly, Dr. Zhivago would call His manner in doing so was not on the student had obviously not read class. But Dr. Zhivago never outward the answer, nor did he voice any dis taken as criticism.

Though I enjoyed Dr. Zhivago could never forget the haunting wor seinfeld makes us laugh; for Elaine to believe Mike’s angry words is ridiculous. Yet, when it comes to ratemyprofessors.com, we willingly would criticized. I vividly remember several would raise a ridiculous question, two such instances in every class I believe was his best to explain the answer. During these times, my mind website: “criticized in front of your and I simply failed to see it. But no, answered it kindly.

This phenomenon is actually mortality, by Milan Kundera. The phrase "Bernard Bertrand is hereby declare
However, this behavior is not at all believing absurd things, regardless of the subject. Ratemyprofessors.com, as well as post comments, could be considered an absurd for Elaine to believe Mike’s an-

Dr. Zhivago was surely aware of this common dysfunction and made an effort to keep students alert by calling on them. He was also well-informed about the subjects on which he lectured. His knowledge was deep, and his ability to share that knowledge with his students made him an excellent professor. He was, in fact, one of the nicest people I have ever met, and I cannot imagine him ever criticizing a student in a disrespectful way. When a student was called on and answered incorrectly, Dr. Zhivago would call on another student to find the correct answer. His manner in doing so was not overly nice but almost a disappointed action as the student had obviously not read the assigned material and was not prepared for class. But Dr. Zhivago never outwardly said that the student should have known the answer, nor did he voice any disappointment. There was nothing that could be taken as criticism.

Though I enjoyed Dr. Zhivago’s class and respected him as a teacher, I could never forget the haunting words I had read about him on ratemyprofessors.com. For fear of being criticized, I rarely asked questions or spoke up in general. Every time I was called on, I would have a mental heart attack; no one likes being criticized. I vividly remember several instances where poorly informed students would raise a ridiculous question. (I am convinced there will always be one or two such instances in every class I will ever take.) Dr. Zhivago would do what I believe was his best to explain the answer without ridiculing the misinformed student. During these times, my mind would race back to the words I had seen on the website: “criticized in front of your peers.” I began to wonder if he was criticizing and I simply failed to see it. But no, the question had been ridiculous, and he had answered it kindly.

This phenomenon is actually discussed in one of my favorite books, Immortality, by Milan Kundera. The character Bernard is given a diploma that reads, “Bernard Bertrand is hereby declared a Complete Ass,” as an intended joke. Bernard, however, is very troubled by the event and confides this horrible happening...
to his friend Paul. Though sympathetic, Paul realizes that “in his heart he would
never again think of him as Bernard but only as a complete ass.” This is quite simi­
lar to the feelings I experienced in Dr. Zhivago’s class. Though he was an excellent
teacher, I was never able to get past seeing him as someone who was criticizing
and would “blow you off the minute you asked for help.” I let the opinion of some
unknown person shape the opinion I myself formed of the mysterious Dr. Zhivago.
Who was the commenter anyway? Perhaps it was some misinformed student who
felt ridiculed by the professor’s correction. Or perhaps it was just someone who
received a poor grade for not completing the work and took his or her frustration
out on the viewers of ratemyprofessors.com.

Ratemyprofessors.com seems to be more of a step back in the world of
college education than anything else. This “rating” is more a popularity contest
than anything that one should take seriously. I would be willing to argue that those
who actually use ratemyprofessors.com, both by commenting and by reading said
comments, see it as more of some sort of forum to cuss, swear, and say all of the
horrible things they would love to say to a professor’s face would their grades not
be in jeopardy from doing so. They see it as just another blog or Facebook status
to vent whatever foul things they desire, as if slandering a professor online would
make up for a poor grade they received. Such a website is not conducive to learn­
ing, which should be the focus of college. Not only does it encourage situations
like my own, where one’s opinion is tarnished by a source whose reliability is so
much in question, but it undermines the maturity that colleges and universities
claim. College students are generally perceived as adults, in stark contrast to when
these same students were in high school, sometimes only months before. Such
websites make college seem less mature, or as if students neither respect nor take
seriously their professors, which, in turn, insinuates that students do not take col­
lege as a whole seriously.

This mindset is shown by the majority of students on the less prestigious
college campuses and by some students on the more prestigious ones. My closest
friends share my respect and love for both education and knowledge. We are
disgusted, or at best amused, by the attitudes of others in our classes. The general
attitude about anything pertaining to schoolwork is negative. Typical conversation

between students generally consists of
sors, and even just sitting in a classroom
another, “Yes, I read the book—first b
and thrilled when I hear someone dis­
yet, describe how much he or she enjoy
question of why these people are in col­
obviously hate classes, and all associate

In his book What’s College For
Education, Zachary Karabell argues that
go to college is the money. People with
jobs—worse jobs that pay less. He claim
out the degree their . . . life chances will
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In a survey conducted among college stu
important, fell six percent in only two ye
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people may be beginning to realize just th
book Downstairs, Upstairs, “There is a gr
been lost in the decline of academic standar
sites only help to drive respectability away
are enabling the decline.

However, not everyone sees this w
only as a great accomplishment technolo
responsible. Brenda Gourley in her article, “
Knowledge to Become Better Teachers,” ref
to “allow students to exercise their rights, if t
undenous comments that are overflowing fr
They are not so much the product of stude
they are purely slanderous judgments. I am convinced that the students rating professors are not doing so to be responsible. In fact, the comments show quite the opposite—a complete lack of responsibility.

Ratemyprofessors.com is a preposterous site. My sister said something very insightful about ratemyprofessors.com when she learned the site was the subject of the paper I was writing. She told me that she used the site all the time and found it very helpful. I was just about to chastise her use of the site and explain its unreliability when she added, “The professors rated the worst are usually the best.” Such complete lack of confidence in the site really shows what it is achieving or perhaps not achieving. Just as the raters fail to take college education seriously, those who do take their education seriously fail to take ratemyprofessors.com seriously. The idea of evaluating professors is not a bad one but only when done in a respectful manner. When evaluating turns into “rating,” the nature of such a site is questionable. Terrible things can happen when we let the false affect our opinions. In the end of the Seinfeld episode, Elaine stabs Mike in the forehead with a fork. Even though Elaine’s head is not disproportionate to her body, she allows the untrue words of someone to make such a great impact on her that she stabs somebody! Hopefully, comments on ratemyprofessors.com would never have quite so dramatic an effect on someone, but still, they are not the least bit constructive. Something not constructive can often be defined as destructive—and destruction is rarely a positive thing.

I believe Kay is a blessing from mother during a church service, listening many of you believe God answers prayers for the Lord to bless you?” I knew I’d been approached the altar, I remember the pastor and saying, “God’s spoken to me and has or a phone call.” God had answered my prayer. I received a phone call from Guiding Eyes for to get a guide dog along with training inst over me was unreal. The thought of travel never experienced anything like this before. In staff and classmates. Little did I know that

A few days after my arrival, Kay an initial meeting is a memory I’ll never forget. instructor brought her into my room. Kay toward me, wagging her tail and sniffing me as if to say, “This is my way of getting my life changed. Kay is my key to motivation at my side has brought me out of my shell improved as well.

As a child, I was shy, dependent about what people thought of me. I was un dence. Also, conversation was limited due I’ve gained independence, self-realization, a Now that Kay is in my life, I have the freed peace, I use public transportation to get to
I believe Kay is a blessing from God. A couple of years ago, I sat with my mother during a church service, listening. I recall the guest speaker saying, “How many of you believe God answers prayers?” “How many of you have been praying for the Lord to bless you?” I knew I’d been praying for a guide dog. That night as I approached the altar, I remember the pastor placing his hand over my bowed head and saying, “God’s spoken to me and has said that you will either receive a letter or a phone call.” God had answered my prayers. Approximately a month later, I received a phone call from Guiding Eyes for the Blind stating that I’d been accepted to get a guide dog along with training instruction. The abundance of joy that came over me was unreal. The thought of traveling to New York alone was exciting; I’d never experienced anything like this before. Once I arrived at the school, I met the staff and classmates. Little did I know that Kay and I would become a team.

A few days after my arrival, Kay and I were introduced to one another. Our initial meeting is a memory I’ll never forget; it was on a sunny afternoon when an instructor brought her into my room. Kay, attached to her leash, walked slowly toward me, wagging her tail and sniffing me. She proceeded to pace in front of me as if to say, “This is my way of getting to know you.” From that day forward, my life changed. Kay is my key to motivation and perseverance. Having my girl at my side has brought me out of my shell. For the most part, my social life has improved as well.

As a child, I was shy, dependent on others to guide me, and concerned about what people thought of me. I was unable to travel by myself with confidence. Also, conversation was limited due to my lack of experience. With Kay, I’ve gained independence, self-realization, and the drive to strive for more in life. Now that Kay is in my life, I have the freedom to go wherever I please with no assistance. I use public transportation to get to school every morning. I enjoy taking
long walks when the weather is nice. I’ve become involved in the community by volunteering at a children’s shelter. My Kay and I are members of a few organizations (such as the American Council of the Blind) geared to help those of low vision. Now, I enjoy speaking to people I meet while in public.

Every morning Kay awakens me with licks and doggy breath: this is her way of expressing her love. Furthermore, my black baby knows when I’m feeling sad, angry, or disappointed. Another warm memory I’ll always cherish is one morning when I awoke early to feed, water, and take Kay out to relieve herself. As I made my way to the garbage can to clean up after Kay, I fell and hurt my hip. As I lay on the ground, tears flowing down my cheeks, I felt Kay licking my tears away. Somehow I managed to stand up, embrace my baby girl, and thank her for being there. From that experience, I learned that dogs have the capacity to know when something is wrong.

One sunny afternoon, I was feeling very sad and unhappy about life. I began to cry, and as I did so, Kay jumped in my lap to comfort me once again. I placed my arms around her and told her how much she meant to me. Kay also shows her love for me by staying vigilant and watching out for my safety. She barks to alert me to anything unfamiliar. In public, Kay has barked at a few unknown dogs and even at a horse. One summer afternoon we’d returned home from a nice walk when Kay began barking. Initially, I was frightened; I knew from the scent of our home that someone had been there. I proceeded to check out the house in its entirety and found a couple of soda bottles in the trash can. To my surprise, my instincts were correct, and so were Kay’s: I found out later that my brother had stopped by. Kay loves me and keeps me safe. In return, I offer Kay companionship, a well-kept home, and love.

In short, I believe in the blessings from God. I believe God uses other believers like me to spread his word. In addition, I believe God has blessed me in many ways and has never left my side. I believe God has given me Kay to strengthen my life as well as to offer light and hope to other visually impaired people.
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Whether deliberately or not, what could be more heinous to free thought and pol-
itical creativity than to rig a system that does not exist to begin with?

- Broken American Mirror by Michael Tillotson
Broken American Mirror: Misrepresentation and a Lack of Reflection

Michael Tillotson

A vote is merely a reflection of thought: when votes become less and less indicative of the people’s voice, their reflection tends to blur more and more. The American election system can be roughly divided into three components: the pre-election campaign season, the voting itself, and the interpretation of the results. While each portion of the electoral process is burdened by a number of fallacious and misleading processes, the quandary of problems, collectively, becomes more than the sum of its parts. Each misstep in the electoral process prompts more missteps, feeding the exponential flame of misrepresentative democracy. Only through the insurance of balanced candidature, reconstruction of voting procedures, and revamping of the American electoral system, may Americans have their voices heard, their votes accounted for, and their well-being assured.

The process of political misrepresentation—and to a varying degree, manipulation—begins early in the electoral process. Well before a single vote is cast the American public will have been bombarded with possible candidates. Unfortunately, virtually all Americans get their election news and information from mainstream, mass media sources, and this presents several problems. Besides the obvious possibility that certain news organizations favor political parties, candidates deemed palatable to the mainstream are given countless hours of coverage, while candidates deemed inconsequential are barely mentioned. Almost as if the doctrine of “bad news sells” is extended directly into mainstream politics, the American media presents what it believes American citizens want. As a result, candidates other than frontrunners are essentially unknown. Here, the media attempts to entice each side of the supposed political spectrum: Democrats and Republicans.

In order to establish an intense image of red versus blue, left versus right, conservative, right versus wrong: this collision rather than ideas, patronizes one which has left an indelible impression. Whether deliberately or not, what conceptual creativity than to rig a system that

Even after Americans have their voices are never truly heard. Americans are forced to pick from a sort of menu of candidates—fast food restaurant. The problem becomes why do more options exist for cheese possibly the most powerful position in the web of choices, with candidates representing due to their inherent vagueness, mean its simplest form, the middle-man of catalyst between the voice of the people. A poorly designed voting system does not ensure a designed election, but ensures it. The one example from many, can ruin the process. Not to say, by any means, that third party introduction of third parties instead demised around an either-or form of function.

The countless flaws within fruition in the 2000 election between the American and the American as an enormous problem. Under increasing scrutiny after the 20
In order to establish an intense image of rivalry, mainstream news organizations pit red versus blue, left versus right, Democrat versus Republican, liberal versus conservative, right versus wrong: this fantasy-land concept of politics, where colors collide rather than ideas, patronizes an intellectually dangerous false dichotomy, one which has left an indelible impression on the minds of nearly every American. Whether deliberately or not, what could be more heinous to free thought and political creativity than to rig a system that does not exist to begin with?

Even after Americans have been politically and intellectually corrupted, their voices are never truly heard. At the voting booths, Americans are expected to pick from a sort of menu of candidates, not unlike choosing a combo meal at a fast food restaurant. The problem becomes clear when this analogy is extended: why do more options exist for cheeseburgers than presidential nominees? Quite possibly the most powerful position in the entire world is filled from a tiny scope of choices, with candidates representing the “left” or the “right” positions, which, due to their inherent vagueness, mean little-to-nothing to begin with. Voting is, in its simplest form, the middle-man of the electoral system, designed to act as the catalyst between the voice of the people and the government that oversees them. A poorly designed voting system does not merely encourage or promote a poorly designed election, but ensures it. The introduction of a third candidate, to take one example from many, can ruin the intellectual credibility of an election. As has happened more than once, a third candidate may “take votes” from a frontrunner who would otherwise have won the presidency: an obvious and serious problem. Not to say, by any means, that third parties are the cause of these problems, the introduction of third parties instead demonstrates a glaring flaw in a system designed around an either-or form of function.

The countless flaws within the American electoral system came to full fruition in the 2000 election between George W. Bush and Al Gore. Infamously, more American citizens voted for Gore than Bush, yet Gore lost nonetheless (Levine 45+). Regardless of political orientation, this situation should strike every American as an enormous problem. For good reason, the Electoral College came under increasing scrutiny after the 2000 election. The Electoral College is the “representation” in representational democracy, consisting of elected representa-
FORMAL ESSAYS

tives from all states who "represent" the American voter. In 2000 (as well as 1876 and 1888), the Electoral College elected a president that the American people, collectively speaking, did not vote for (Glenn). The very concept of representational democracy arose, in part, through population-based problems: in early America, how could entire states keep up with the votes of every citizen? To correct this problem, smaller, manageable regions would hold elections for "electors," or individuals who would vote for the president directly in the name of the people. However, every extra representative step dilutes the democratic process. Hypothetically, what if the Electoral College voted for another higher-tiered college, which then voted for the president directly? What if another "electoral college" was placed upon that hierarchy of voting, increasing the number of links in the chain of representative democracy? The result is simple: the original vote of the American people becomes steadily watered down and unrepresentative. America no longer needs the Electoral College: the most effective method for ensuring that the people's voices are heard is through direct democracy—democracy without the political middleman of "representation."

The roots of political misrepresentation stem from the media coverage of particular candidates, which, due to freedom of speech rights in particular, is the most difficult problem in the entire scheme. How does a nation, largely founded by free expression, justify the regulation of political media? To that end, how does a nation ensure that news organizations do not singlehandedly control elections through the manipulation of information? Certain regulations have already taken place, including the Radio Act of 1927, which required radio stations to have an "equal time rule" where political advertisements were equally priced for all candidates. During the Radio Act hearings, Texas Representative Luther Johnson stated, "American thought and American politics will be largely at the mercy of those who operate these [radio] stations...it will be impossible to compete with them in reaching the ears of the American public" (Benjamin 70). How right he was, foreseeing such a problem even in the American 20s. Without such laws, the American public is simply creating a media puppeteer, complete with puppet-strings and puppets—the citizens. In order to fully establish fairness and equal candidature, the Radio Act of 1927 must be extended into two new areas: shared time on official news organizations providing equal airtimes of political candidates, and biased information, but such legal measures are needed. This regulation is critical for various candidates, more ideas are needed that actually prompt media organizations to report issues, varied, and largely unaffected.
time on official news organizations and regulated campaign funding. By legislating equal airtime of political candidates, Americans will not be guaranteed unbiased information, but such legislation certainly promotes a fairer distribution thereof. This regulation is critical, to say the least, as the more airtime is given to various candidates, more ideas are brought forth into the political arena. Factors that actually prompt media organizations to focus on particular candidates is often vague, varied, and largely unknown. Regardless, an obvious motivator stands above the rest: candidates with more money have enormously higher chances on winning the presidency. Author Susan Welch asserts, “Some candidates are never considered serious contenders because they do not have sufficient money to mount a large campaign. In that sense, money is crucial” (251). If successful campaigns are exclusive to wealthy politicians alone, then wealthy politicians alone are elected into office: this is a form of aristocracy that must be undermined. Since the early governments of ancient Greece, measures have been taken to limit aristocratic rule. (If politicians are not paid, for example, only the rich are able to afford not working for pay.) By limiting campaign funds, Americans will extend brilliant Grecian policies, crippling the power of more modern aristocrats.

Once measures have been taken to ensure equal opportunity for presidential candidates, a method must be established for election. Within the spectrum of voting theories, there exists a plethora of axioms and possible solutions to the extreme fallibility of the American voting system. In order to spare strenuous discussion on the matters of logic and choice theory, this discussion will focus on one particularly simple solution: ranking candidates in order of preference. The benefits of a ranking form of voting are numerous and resolving. First and foremost, the Nadir-Gore problem of the 2000 election, in which Nadir was accused of “taking votes” from Gore, would never have occurred. Those who voted for Nadir would have placed Gore as their second choice and vice-versa, which would have provided a much more accurate representation of the American public’s voting preferences. Secondly, the use of a ranking system allows an individual to voice more fully his or her opinion on the current state of potential nominees: with a single selection, a citizen states only whom he or she would prefer the most, while a ranking system demonstrates whom he or she would prefer the least (and, just as
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importantly, every option in between). To that end, an election that requires more than a single choice encourages voters to be more fully informed. Voters will, after all, be forced to vote for something other than the mascot of their political orientation. A not-so-obvious benefit to rank-based voting system includes the promotion of third-party candidates. How often is the concept of "wasted votes" entertained? The very notion derives from the idea that if an individual votes for a candidate other than a frontrunner, say, a third-party option, then his or her vote is wasted, as that candidate is assured to lose. In a ranking system, third-party candidates have a much greater chance of being elected: Republicans will likely place Democrats on the bottom of their ranked list and vice-versa, which allows for third-party candidates to rank somewhere in the middle. Somewhere in the middle is an enormous improvement over not accounted for whatsoever. In turn, the promotion of new political parties and the drastically increased likelihood of third-party presidents bolsters the American concept of politics into something new and refreshing. No longer does the continuous false dichotomy persist, promoting political stagnancy and a never-ending pattern of voting for the "lesser of two evils"; instead, political inquiry becomes diverse, allowing for innovative solutions to an array of national problems.

In the current process of American presidential elections, votes are halted at a roadblock before they reach reception in Washington. This roadblock, known as the Electoral College, arose for two primary reasons: to give more power to smaller states and to more easily manage the votes of a large population. The former reinforces federalism and state-power, a concept that concerned America’s Founding Fathers, who attempted to balance both federal and state powers. The subject of states’ rights is essential to America and American politics, but it is a concern that must be dealt with in terms of Constitutional Amendments and legislation, not voting. Not only does the Electoral College system create the possibility of a popular vote losing, but it encourages candidates to focus campaign measures in select “swing-states,” which are states that may “swing” in either political direction (left or right, colloquially speaking). As a result, most states, including some of the largest, are virtually ignored by candidates, while others are bombarded: the very purpose of the Electoral College—state equality—collapses on itself, causing many states to be enormously

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Shelby Horton, Joseph Holbrook, and Dian
causing many states to be enormously more important for presidential candidates. The latter half of the intentions of the Electoral College, the organization of voting, should now be a non-problem. Well-managed technology ensures that every American vote can be counted, eradicating the problem that persisted in the early years of American history.

Beyond all facets and procedures of voting, the American government is still, as any government, more than capable of misrepresenting its citizens through means of Congress and various legislation. Regardless, the American vote is the American voice, the reflection by which the nation—and the world—views American public opinion. Without adequate representation, America not only loses sight as a functioning and meaningful society, but as a democracy altogether. The representational democracy the Founders envisioned is occluded by the rise of mass media, the promotion of dichotomous yet decidedly sterile political parties, and by an ever-increasing importance of money-hungry campaigns. The American Mirror is fogged and cracked, with countless missing shards that distort all perspectives. That Mirror is irreparable, though it is not irreplaceable. But first, the American people must face the depravity of laxation without representation and, only then, may America become the democracy it was intended to be—without corruption, incompetence, and misrepresentation. Only then, as Abraham Lincoln stated in a different context, may American democracy become a reflection “of the people, by the people, for the people.”

I’d like to thank several of my peers for their contributions to this essay: Shelby Horton, Joseph Holbrook, and Diana Intisful.
Slaves were an integral and nature and society. While idealists advocate of the slaves, the reality of emancipation that these newly freed slaves were more success to be celebrated. Their changing society and Southern economy and left the to figure out what to do with these “poor” to build new lives for themselves. In the life characters whose beliefs, like these, the treatment of contraband and the emancipation. The question of where in society longed was a question from the very beginning. Early in the conflict, Union not the Army’s responsibility to determine slaves must be returned to their masters. However, the reality was not so simple so easily turn away a willing workforce who quietly and against orders continue to carry out menial camp tasks, such as construction. In a report sent to the Secretary major general in the Union Army, praises his practice of keeping runaway slaves, camp. He reports that he set the men to were “working zealously and efficiently at that labor under the gleam of the midday...
Slaves were an integral and necessary part of antebellum America’s culture and society. While idealists advocated equality for all men and the liberation of the slaves, the reality of emancipation was much more complicated. The truth is that these newly freed slaves were more often viewed as a burden than as a moral success to be celebrated. Their changing status upset the balance of American society and Southern economy and left the country’s leaders and military scrambling to figure out what to do with these “poor creatures” (Butler) who were now trying to build new lives for themselves. In her novel, *March*, Geraldine Brooks brings to life characters whose beliefs, like their historical counterparts, run the gamut on the treatment of contraband and the emancipation of slaves.

The question of where in society these runaway or abandoned slaves belonged was a question from the very beginning of the Civil War and opinions varied greatly. Early in the conflict, Union Army Headquarters established that it was not the Army’s responsibility to determine the status of runaway slaves and that all slaves must be returned to their masters, regardless of the master’s loyalties (Wartman). However, the reality was not so simple. Many army camps were loathed to so easily turn away a willing workforce when they were so short on labor. Instead, they quietly and against orders continued to use runaway slaves as servants to carry out menial camp tasks, such as construction and cooking (Wartman).

In a report sent to the Secretary of War in 1861, Benjamin F. Butler, a major general in the Union Army, praises the fugitive slaves’ hard work, defends his practice of keeping runaway slaves, and expounds on their usefulness in the camps. He reports that he set the men to building entrenchments and that they were “working zealously and efficiently at that duty, saving [Union] soldiers from that labor under the glare of the midday sun” (Butler). The women, too, he put...
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to work, washing and mending soldiers' clothes, and he asserts that they were "earning substantially their own subsistence" (Butler). Clearly, the move to keep contrabands as a labor force instead of returning them to masters who were likely on the side of the enemy was primarily a practical decision. Though Union officers may have harbored a belief in the ultimate freeing of African Americans, it was not the driving force in the decision to give them sanctuary from their old masters among the war camps.

To the Union Army, runaway and abandoned slaves were primarily viewed as a source of cheap labor and easy information on the movements of the enemy and lay of Southern geography. Though they were no longer slaves after joining the Northern cause, these runaways were still less than men in the eyes of the whites they worked alongside—not real men with rights, but "property liable to be used in the aid of rebellion" (Butler). The term "contraband," coined by Union Major General Benjamin F. Butler to describe these people reflected their status as "neither property with a clear owner (as in slavery) nor free people, but something in between" (Masur 1051). Despite the slaves' eager willingness to join the Union cause and the valuable information and labor they provided, the North was reluctant to declare them free. Even after Congress authorized the seizure of slaves who were being used to aid the Confederate cause in its Act of July 6, 1861, their rights remained hazy and open to interpretation (Wartman).

Similarly, the public opinion of the Union's citizenry also fell all along the spectrum. In her novel, March, Geraldine Brooks brings to life the passionate abolitionist in Mr. March, her protagonist, and his family. As avid believers in emancipation, the Marches lose their fortune by supporting a doomed business venture meant to bring aid to runaway slaves, and risk civil penalties by participating in the Underground Railroad and sheltering runaways in their own home. In their darkest hour, faced with poverty, March sums up the surety of his convictions with the words, "I was asked to risk only money. How then offer any less than all?" (Brooks 125). It is this certainty of his position that inspires March to preach against slavery, even at the risk of spoiling his reputation by alienating less radical thinkers and making people "uncomfortable" (Brooks 71).

There were many such thinkers in history as well. William Lloyd Gar-

rison, a passionate abolitionist who argued in an 1829 address that slavery and charities of the American people were evidence of the petulancy of slavery can be found in T
t the viewpoint, he found the conditions of servitude in the South to be so dehumanizing that only "education and freedom" could lift a rank with the whites, making them free (Garrison).

In contrast, there were northern abolitionists who believed that the end of slavery would bring unwelcome changes and, by implication, to that of whites. If slaves were freed, it would shift the balance of power in the whole country's economy. Even they appreciated the scope of the changes it would bring upon the States whites when it noted that, through the Underground Railroad and shelters, the nation was simply unable to prevent it (qtd. in Schwalm).

Another concern raised by residents of the country and even the culture itself might be the potential for a sudden influx of former slaves, who would be less likely to be welcomed by country and even the culture itself might be the potential for a sudden influx of former slaves, who would be less likely to be welcomed by educated and gain influence, and thus, hold power. To assuage the House of Representatives, a written into the Constitution and considered, this belief that African Americans, menial, supervised labor to the country, would be allowed to integrate more fully into the culture and progress prohibited the intermingling that could have allowed the freed slaves to integrate more fully into the culture and progress.

A final concern held by many was a sudden influx of former slaves, who, due to harsher conditions and for smaller
he asserts that they were not longer slaves after joining the Union, but "property liable to contraband," coined by Union people reflected their status as free people, but something short of true free people, as well. His willingness to join the Union, provided, the North was reluctant to accept free people, the nation was simply unable to "tolerate negroes, except as slaves" (Schwalm).

Another concern raised by reluctant whites was that the direction of the country and even the culture itself might change if blacks were to become citizens and gain influence, or worse, hold political office. A Pennsylvania representative assured the House of Representatives that the substandard manners and personal customs of blacks would ban them from political aspirations as surely as if it were written into the Constitution and concluded that there was "no danger" (Litwack 38). This belief that African Americans were incapable of bringing anything but menial, supervised labor to the country and that their rising influence would spell the end to American culture and progress further separated blacks and whites and prohibited the intermingling that could have dispelled these harsh stereotypes and allowed the freed slaves to integrate more easily into society.

A final concern held by many whites, both soldiers and civilians, was that a sudden influx of former slaves, who would undoubtedly be willing to work under harsher conditions and for smaller wages, would steal job opportunities from

As an avid believer in the movement of the enemy, a passionate abolitionist who insisted on the emancipation of the slaves, argued in an 1829 address that slaves were "entitled to the prayers and sympathies and charities of the American people" and that "no justificative plea for the perpetuity of slavery can be found in the condition of its victims." From a religious viewpoint, he found the conditions of the slaves to be disgraceful and immoral and insisted that only "education and freedom will elevate our colored population to a rank with the whites, making them useful, intelligent, and peaceable citizens" (Garrison).

In contrast, there were Northern whites who feared that "severing the bonds of slavery would bring unwelcome changes to the 'place' of African Americans—and, by implication, to that of whites—in a postemancipation nation" (Schwalm). If slaves were freed, it would shift the balance of labor and change the structure of the whole country's economy. Even whites who owned no slaves themselves could appreciate the scope of the changes that emancipation would bring to America. In 1862, *Harper's Weekly* summed up the position of many Northern and Border States whites when it noted that, though the sentiment was "petty and unchristian" (Schwalm), the nation was simply unable to "tolerate negroes, except as slaves" (qtd. in Schwalm).

Clearly the move to keep slaves to masters who were likely to give them a new lease on life. Though Union officers with African Americans, it was not unusual for their old masters to accept the freedoms of the freed slaves. They were primarily viewed by the movements of the enemy as no longer slaves after joining the Union, but "property liable to contraband," coined by Union people reflected their status as free people, but something short of true free people, as well. His willingness to join the Union provided, the North was reluctant to accept free people, the nation was simply unable to "tolerate negroes, except as slaves" (Schwalm).

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A final concern held by many whites, both soldiers and civilians, was that a sudden influx of former slaves, who would undoubtedly be willing to work under harsher conditions and for smaller wages, would steal job opportunities from...
whites. In 1863, a Union officer wrote to his hometown’s newspaper, inquiring about the possibility of sending a large number of contrabands north but was firmly denied because the citizens believed that the inpouring of so many recently emancipated blacks would “destroy the dignity of white labor” (qtd. in Schwalm).

In *March*, Geraldine Brooks touches upon this opinion in the person of the colonel in Mr. March’s first regiment. During his rant to March, the colonel exclaims, “Why, there are about as many genuine abolitionists in Lincoln’s army as there are in Jeff Davis’s. When the boys of this unit listen to you preach about emancipation, all they hear is that a pack of ragged baboons is going to be headed north to take their jobs away” (Brooks 70). Brooks perfectly captures the friction between the opposing sentiments of those who were waging war to free the slaves and those for whom the slaves were an unfortunate complication brought on by the war. The sad truth is that many whites, even those who purported to support African Americans’ emancipation, feared the changes to their world if the movement was a success.

A third position taken by many whites during the Civil War, both in the North and South, was based on the idea that the black race would someday be capable of living as free and productive men, but they were not yet ready. Rather, they needed the direction and oversight of whites to help civilize them and teach them the value of hard work and the ins and outs of American society before they would be able to take on the challenges of emancipated life. Only when they had been thoroughly Westernized in their thought and behavior would they be prepared to take their places as equals to whites. In *March*, Mr. Clement compares the African to “a child who has not reached the age of reason” (Brooks 25). Unable to distinguish right and wrong and incapable of planning for the future, slaves, Clement claims, are little better then children and so the moral obligation falls upon whites to “guide and guard them until their race matures” (Brooks 25).

However, though it was the charge of whites to raise blacks from their savage beginnings, Clement asserts that the work was not yet completed and that whites should not “rush them out of their childhood” (Brooks 26). In the meantime, Clement and other like-minded thinkers found no problem forcing blacks into the labor tasks they considered unsavory or beneath them and punishing blacks when they rebelled or disobeyed as a “suffering from the fevered mind of...would-be North and not at all inhuman necessity. It was not only essential for the safety and development of blacks into enlightened

Overall, white public opinion during the Civil War and Reconstruction unfathomable that slavery or racial division was moral ambiguity, but in *March*, Brooks conflicted period in American history and of characters whose personal opinions widely as those of their historical coun
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His opinion in the person of a rant to March, the colonel of abolitionists in Lincoln's army it listen to you preach about what is going to be headed perfectly captures the friction of slaveholding war to free the slaves. Complication brought on by unincorporated to support the world if the move-
ing the Civil War, both in the black race would someday be not yet ready. Rather, to help civilize them and teach American society before they hated life. Only when they had a honor would they be prepared for the future, slaves, Clement compares the African" (Brooks 25). Unable to dis- for the future, slaves, Clement believes obligation falls upon whites (Brooks 25).

rites to raise blacks from their was not yet completed and that l" (Brooks 26). In the meantime, problem forcing blacks into the them and punishing blacks when they rebelled or disobeyed as a "stern father" (Brooks 26) should to encourage the building of good character in his children. Under this method of thought, the disciplining of slaves—including the whip—was not the horror conceived of in the "fevered minds of...would-be Northern philanthropists," (Brooks 26) but a normal and not at all inhumane necessity. Punishment of blacks, according to Clement, was not only essential for the safety and security of whites, but also for the healthy development of blacks into enlightened men and women.

Overall, white public opinions about contraband, slaves, and freedmen during the Civil War and Reconstruction periods varied greatly. Today, it seems unfathomable that slavery or racial discrimination could ever have been seen with moral ambiguity, but in March, Brooks captures the emotional tapestry of this conflicted period in American history and helps readers to identify with a wide range of characters whose personal opinions about slavery and emancipation varied as widely as those of their historical counterparts.
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ALEJANDRO RAMIREZ was born and raised in Columbia. He and his family relocated to the United States under the status of “Political Asylum.” He enjoyed active club participation at GSC and is currently serving a year of community service work through AmeriCorps. He plans on completing his Bachelor’s in Political Science upon his return.

AMY JAMISON, a 20-year-old sophomore from Monroe, Georgia, is currently working on earning an Associates of Arts in Psychology. Amy is also working to enter nursing school. Apart from writing, Amy also enjoys playing guitar, frolicking outside in nice weather, attempting to draw, a recently discovered love for the trapeze.

CASTI STANSELL fell in love with writing at a young age and now finds herself drawn to the computer most nights after sane people are asleep. When not glued to the keyboard, she enjoys dance, photography, and quality time in the cockpit of a Cessna, training to get her pilot’s license.

EMILY PERRY is a sophomore at GSC where she is pursuing a degree in journalism. Currently, she is the news section editor for The Compass, and was recently awarded an individual honor for Best Entertainment Story from the Georgia College Press Association.

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JACOB HICKMAN would report and charitable wisdom. His father, Robert Hickman, and his late mother, Karen Martinez, were born for teenage girls and continues to love children.

KAREN MARTINEZ was born for teenage girls and continues to love children.

KIMBERLY HIGHTOWER published in her high school’s literary magazine known as Chick’s Lit. She credits them extra boost to keep writing, but more to express herself. Kimberly is currently pursuing a degree in English of Emory, as well as some short stories.

LEAH PERDUE is pursuing a career in writing, reading, and being an integral part of a dynamic community since she was young but just recently married to her teenage sweetheart and began her new life.

MICHAEL LANCASTER is a graduate of North Hall High School and National Art Honor Society and National Art Honor Society. He is a graduate of the U.S. Navy and considers his travels important experiences.

MATTHEW TILLOTSON graduated with an Associate of Arts degree from the University. Too lazy and too much of hating writing is (badly written) poetic output, but he does his best to put his poetry in pain, he does his best to put his poetry in pain, and would rather be a third-rate poet than a first-rate air force pilot.
JACOB HICKMAN would like to thank Dorothy Blais for her continued support and charitable wisdom. He would like to dedicate his pieces to his father, Robert Hickman, and his late dog, Scooter.

KAREN MARTINEZ was born in Galveston, Texas. She has served as a mentor for teenage girls and continues to do so. She hopes to work as a teacher of blind children.

KIMBERLY HIGHTOWER began writing in the 8th grade. She had poems published in her high school’s literary magazine as well as the national magazine known as Chick’s Lit. She credits Tori Amos and her other muses for giving her the extra boost to keep writing, but most of all Kimberly thanks God for enabling her to express herself. Kimberley is currently working on her novel The Maiden Knight of Emry, as well as some short stories.

LEAH PERDUE is pursuing a career in journalism at SCAD. Leah loves knitting, reading, writing, and being an old lady before her time. She has been writing since she was young but just recently discovered that her work isn’t awful. She is married to her teenage sweetheart and lives with two Boston Terriers.

MICHAEL LANCASTER is a non-traditional student at Gainesville State College. A graduate of North Hall High School, he was a member of the Dead Poets Society and National Art Honor Society. Michael was able to travel extensively in the U.S. Navy and considers his travels an inspiration in his writing.

MATTHEW TILLOTSON graduated from Gainesville State College in 2009 with an Associate of Arts degree and now attends North Georgia College and State University. Too lazy and too much of a perfectionist to write regularly, most of his meager output is (badly written) poetry. Unable to read free verse without shrieking in pain, he does his best to (poorly) imitate the better, deader poets of times past, and would rather be a third-rate Tennyson than a first-rate Whitman.
CONTRIBUTORS

MICHAEL TILLOTSON has never really thought of himself as a writer like his brother, Matthew. His hobbies include playing piano, working with computers, and enjoying philosophy, a trifecta of interests requiring most of his passion and free time.

REBECCA WILSON considers her writing to be one of the most complicated and rewarding passions in her life. She grew up reading C.S. Lewis and historical fiction and is author to boxes of half-written stories hidden beneath her bed. She is a GSC graduate and is currently pursuing a degree in Dietetics at the University of Georgia.

Gainesville State Co
2010 Writing Contest

SHORT FICTION
1st Place: Alejandro Ramirez
2nd Place: Rebecca Wilson
3rd Place: Kimberly Hightower

POETRY
1st Place: Leah Perdue
2nd Place: Jacob Hickman
3rd Place: Matthew Tillotson

ONE-ACT PLAYS
1st Place: Jacob Hickman
2nd Place: Emily Perry
3rd Place: Helena Walstrom

INFORMAL ESSAY
1st Place: Michael Lancaster
2nd Place: Amy Jamison
3rd Place: Karen Martinez

FORMAL ESSAY
1st Place: Michael Tillotson
2nd Place: Casti Stansell
Gainesville State College
2010 Writing Contest Winners

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POETRY

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ONE-ACT PLAYS

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INFORMAL ESSAY

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AWARDS RECEIVED

THE 2010 SOUTHERN LITERARY FESTIVAL

One-Act Plays - 2nd Place
“The Problem with Digging Holes”
by Jacob Hickman

Short Fiction - 3rd Place
“When the Rain Comes”
by Rebecca Wilson